

# The impact of body shame on girls' physical health and quality of life in China

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**Abstract:** *In this era, when being thin is considered beautiful, figure anxiety seems to have become a fashion, and everyone hopes to have an attractive figure. Impacted by such a social atmosphere, people have become accustomed to talking about body shame after dinner. However, this phenomenon not only affects people's health but also brings them a lot of unnecessary troubles. Then the impact of body anxiety on health and quality of life will be described in this article based on the conclusions of the social orientation survey and the method of data collection. Therefore, we may have the chance to alleviate or deal with this psychological problem.*

**Keywords:** *Body anxiety, health, quality of life*

## 1. Introduction

With the development of society, people's definition of beauty has also changed a lot. Being thin is no longer the only criterion for measuring a woman's beauty, and more and more people are beginning to pursue their "ideal body." However, the excessive pursuit of beauty has also led to "body anxiety (body shaming)," a phenomenon that has occurred in society frequently in recent years. Girls believe that "If you are not thin, you are not beautiful enough." "No matter what method I take, I must lose weight." There are various voices and actions filling in every corner of our lives, and many of us are troubled by this. So what exactly is body anxiety? How does it affect our lives? Moreover, in the face of body image anxiety, what should we do?

## 2. Body shaming

Body shaming is the act of negatively referring to someone's body<sup>[1]</sup>. To be specific, it remains a social and psychological state in which individuals are dissatisfied with their weight, body shape, appearance, body characteristics, and all of these will result in a series of negative emotions. Body anxiety, an emotional response to one's dissatisfaction with her appearance or body shape, has been associated with mental illness.

## 3. Questionnaire about body shaming

### 3.1. Research Question

- 1) How many women suffer from body image anxiety?
- 2) What steps do women with body image anxiety take to regulate their body image anxiety in China?
- 3) What are the main causes of women's body image anxiety in China?

### 3.2. Instrument

A questionnaire is developed based on the purpose and the questions of the study, as well as the designated population to fill it out.

### 3.3. How old are you? & Do you have body anxiety?

We are targeting Chinese women of all ages. There are a total of 207 girls filling in our survey. We

can conclude that most women have body shame according to the following table 1. In the first group, there is 78.26% of them troubled by body shaming. Then, from 18 to 20 years old, 84.09% have body shaming. Between 20 and 30 years old, there are 89.09% of girls experience it. After that, there are 96.88% of women suffering from it between 30 to 40 years old, the percentage is 80% for 40 to 50-year-old ladies, and 50-year-old above have a share of 100% in the Figure 1.

Table 1: Cross analysis diagram with age and body anxiety

Year-old\Status	Yes	No	Total
18years old below	18(78.26%)	5(21.74%)	23
18 to 20 years old	74(84.09%)	14(15.91%)	88
20 to 30 years old	49(89.09%)	6(10.91%)	55
30 to 40 years old	31(96.88%)	1(3.13%)	32
40 to 50 years old	8(80%)	2(20%)	10
50 years old and above	2(100%)	0(0.00%)	2
Total			207

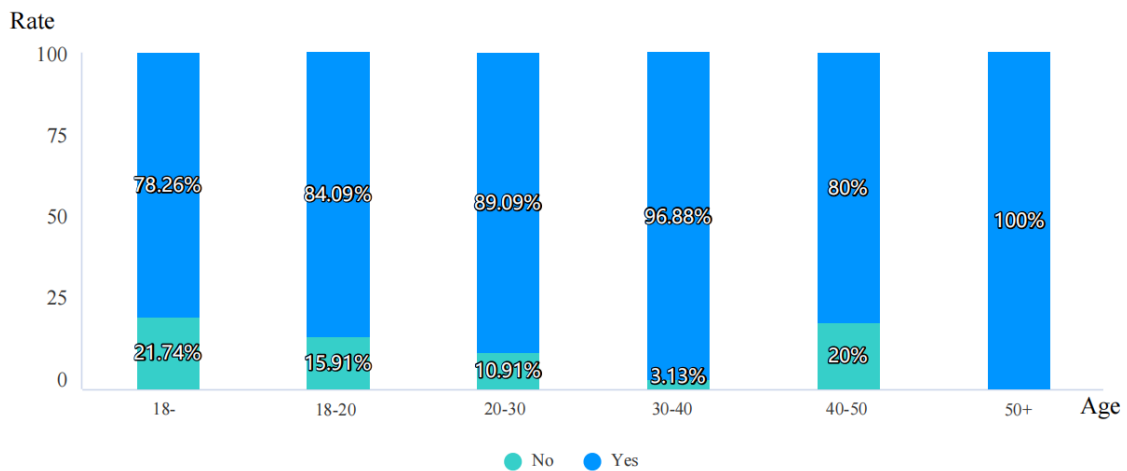


Figure 1: Cross analysis of two question in table 1

### 3.4. Split-half reliability analysis

Table 2: Spearman-Brown coefficient.

Spearman-Brown coefficient	Equilong	-3.777
	Unequal length	0.793

From Table 1 and Figure 1, it can be seen that for the analysis of whether you have body image anxiety, the Spearman-Brown coefficient is 0.793, which is greater than 0.7. It indicates that the reliability of the data is good. In summary, the value of the fold-and-half reliability coefficient of the study data is higher than 0.7, demonstrating the high quality of the data reliability Table 2.

### 3.5. Which part of your body do you care about?

The Figure 2 We can clearly see in the pie chart that the girls who care about their waist, appearance, and legs account for the most share with 48.05%, 46.93%, and 37.99%, respectively. Influenced by the current trend of social fashion, such as "A4 waist," "comic legs," and "white skin," women aim to go after these extreme requirements. However, each person's body is not consistent. It is impossible for everyone to be content with this, so there will be girls who get anxious about their own bodies in the Figure 3.

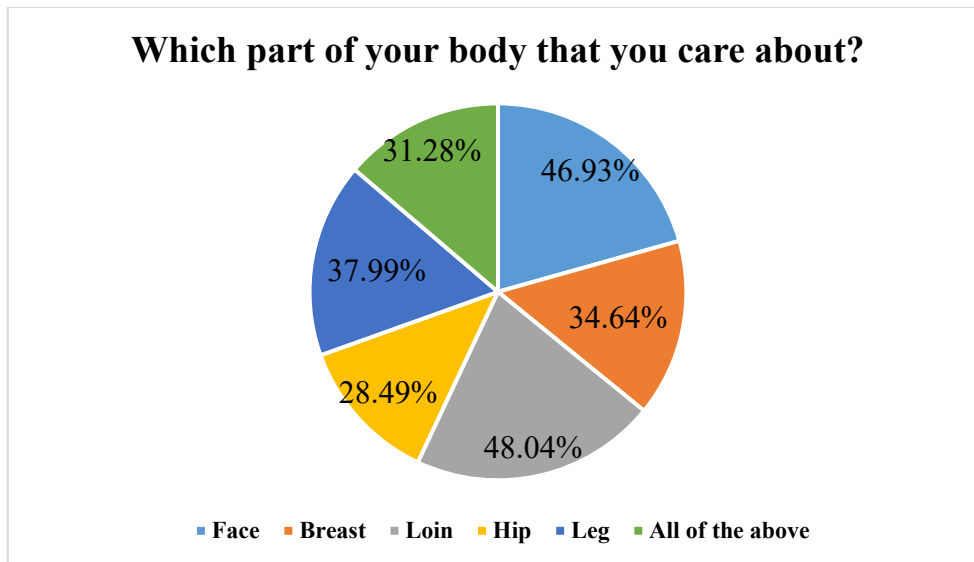


Figure 2: Pie chart, Which part of your body you care about?

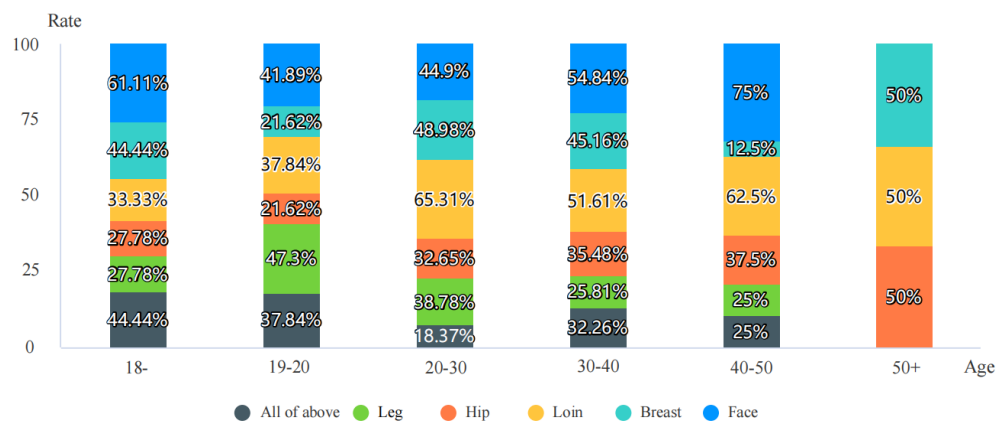


Figure 3: Cross-analysis age and caring which part of the body?

### 3.6. Have you ever taken steps to change your body shape?

According to Table 3 and Table 4, There are lots of Chinese girls caring about their bodies, and 87.15% have taken steps to change their bodies. For example, most of them will exercise and be on a diet to keep fit. And girls who take diet products contain 33.97% of them. Although dieting and using weight loss products are not always healthy for our bodies, women actually account for so much using this method.

Table 3: Table chart-Have you ever taken steps to change your body shape?

Option	Subtotal	Rate
Yes	156	87.15%
No	23	12.85%
Total	179	

Table 4: What measures have you taken?

Option	Subtotal	Rate
Diet	107	68.59%
Exercise	132	84.62%
Take diet products	53	33.97%
Others	9	5.77%
Total	156	

#### 4. Body anxiety and health

When people see that other people's bodies are better than their own, they will have the feeling like "others are becoming beautiful, but I have not changed," which leads to anxiety, depression, and other emotions. They might resort to different methods to lose weight, but some of them are not right, such as dieting or using some medicine.

According to our research Table 5, Chinese women's body image anxiety can lead to physical and psychological problems, mental depletion, unhealthy social and career life, and even anorexia.

*Table 5: What negative effects do you think body anxiety has on you?*

Option	Subtotal	Rate
Psychological problems	85	47.49%
Anorexia	41	22.91%
Mental exhaustion, damage and pain	113	63.13%
Social life	92	51.4%
Career	29	16.2%
Total	179	

##### 4.1. The danger of excessive dieting to lose weight

A great number of people believe that the less they eat, the easier it is to lose weight. Therefore, people will appear to refuse dinner and fruit or do other similar behaviors. This behavior is an excessive concern for their own bodies. But in reality, it is unhealthy to take this approach to diet. In accordance with the research from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, "Eating disorders, psychological disorders, morbidity, and mortality have been linked to dieting and weight cycling. These include obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and bone fractures."<sup>[2]</sup>

Racheal Farrokh is a 37-year-old actress in California who is 170 centimeters tall but only 36 kilograms heavy, with a body mass index (BMI) of more than 12.4. She was found to have a mental disorder, a chronic illness because of weight loss. She had a depressed abdomen and minimal subcutaneous fat throughout her body. Emergency department tests and examinations revealed that she had electrolyte disorders and impaired heart and liver function<sup>[3]</sup>.

##### 4.1.1. Malnutrition

People who lose weight because of dieting can suffer from malnutrition. When we diet excessively, our body will produce a substance called hunger hormone that will make us feel a strong sense of hunger in order to increase the desire for food. That's the reason why we will be hungry when dieting excessively. Then, the dieting people will lower their basal metabolic rate, resulting in reduced daily energy requirements. Specifically, if women don't eat, they won't be able to absorb nutrients, which leads to metabolic imbalance and post-diet weight gain<sup>[4]</sup>. Chronic malnutrition can be the cause of adverse symptoms in the body, such as hair loss, weakness, and decreased immunity.

##### 4.1.2. Nutritional imbalances

Dieters can suffer from nutritional imbalances as a result of losing weight. All of us need to consume balanced nutrition, teenagers and children especially. Their bodies are developing with the need for nutrition to support their healthy growth. However, if they diet excessively for a long period of time, their body will lack nutrients and cause nutritional imbalance. In fact, there are many ways can consume balanced nutrition. However, many people only remember to solve this problem by over-dieting since they are not aware of it.

If you want to maintain a healthy and slim body, you must make sure that you consume enough protein, fat, carbohydrates, and vitamins. Only then can we stay healthy and have a strong body. Otherwise, you will become weak.

##### 4.1.3. Endocrine dysphasia

Prolonged dieting can be the reason for a change in hormone levels, which can cause weight gain and health loss. To lose weight, it is best to follow basic principles and put in some effort to succeed. Eating too little and consuming too much energy may cause endocrine disorders. Thus people with endocrine dysphasia may experience guilt and self-doubt, irritability, anxiety, and depression, which may make it difficult for them to concentrate, but experience fatigue at work.

#### 4.1.4. Anorexia

To add insult to injury, if you eat too little, it can make you more likely to develop anorexia, a mental illness that can result in serious health problems. It can make you feel so depressed that you may even lose hope in life. That's why we don't include so much statistical data because this is the most serious situation.

We can conclude that taking a diet to lose weight does not bring them benefits but a series of bad effects instead.

#### 4.1.5. Mental health problems

Dieting can lead to mental health problems, including depression, violent mood swings, sensitivity, and irritability. According to a Minnesota hunger experiment, during the semi-starvation phase, "people experience dramatic changes in strength, endurance, body temperature, heart rate, and libido, as well as psychological effects such as obsession with food, fatigue, irritability, depression, and apathy."<sup>[5]</sup> "

### 4.2. The disadvantages of dieting to lose weight in our daily life

#### 4.2.1. Sleep problem

Most people have problems sleeping during a diet. This is because their bodies are trying to maintain a caloric balance. However, people may have feelings of hunger and cravings. They will feel hungry all the time, which means they are constantly struggling with food. It is not hard to imagine that it naturally causes sleep problems.

#### 4.2.2. Social and sexual changing

After going on a diet to lose weight, you become reluctant to interact with people, the sense of humor you bring with you generally disappears, and your desire for sex decreases significantly. The body's sexual fantasies and urges are less frequent. So it's fair to say that body anxiety can reduce the quality of work and learning.

## 5. Causes of the Problem and Solutions

### 5.1. Why do girls have body anxiety?

According to Table 6, we can conclude that self-disapproval, the media, and comments from others are the main causes of body image anxiety among Chinese women. This makes them feel that their body is not good enough, so they need to lose weight in order to achieve that standard, which is the symbol of "beauty." They will feel anxious about their own body and worry about their own body.

Table 6: Which reason makes you have body anxiety?

Option	Subtotal	Rate
Media	60	33.52%
Self-denial	126	70.39%
His/her comments	86	48.04%
All of the above	41	22.91%
Total	179	

Body anxiety is extremely common in this fast-paced modern life. Many people use social media to show off themselves and attract attention. They put their own beauty extremely thin, a sense that is not the normal proportion of the human body at all. There are some European and American actresses filling their breasts and hips with objects so as to make their bodies the so-called "S" type. In fact, this can lead to feelings of anxiety when seeing their good-looking photos or videos. Body image anxiety can have an impact not only on an individual's image but also on his mental health and quality of life.

### 5.2. Lack of self-confidence

Lack of confidence is the main reason why girls have body anxiety. If they had self-confidence, they would not be afraid of the media and other people's comments. It is always believed that people who have confidence are often the most beautiful, and confident people know that they can definitely do well in everything. But some girls do not have self-confidence, so they choose to diet and lose

weight to make themselves fit into the public eye. Dieting to lose weight can make them feel inferior to others, thus making them feel even more inferior. As a matter of fact, if you are not confident in yourself, it will be difficult to be confident in anything you do.

Even if you are successful in losing weight, you may go back to your former weight again for various reasons. Since you have previously developed bad habits, if you want to lose weight successfully, you will have to change these bad habits. But the fact is that it is very difficult for you to change it again. And as soon as you get back to your original weight again, there is a high possibility that you will bounce back.

### **5.3. Solution**

#### **5.3.1. Be confident**

I consider all the Chinese girls that you need to bring up confidence. When you think, "Oh my god, I am the most beautiful girl in the world," "I am better than they look," or "I am the unique one," you will become better. Do not care about what others think because others are not you, you need to be yourself. Instead of trying to satisfy others or being at the mercy of others, you should be who you are. You are yourself. You need to be yourself. You cannot be defined by others. Self-confidence is what matters. Define beauty by yourself, not have your beauty defined by others.

#### **5.3.2. Accept yourself**

We need to accept our bodies. As long as we accept our bodies, we will find more joy and freedom in our lives. When we do what we want to do, we will feel better and have more choices when it comes to our bodies. Don't judge yourself by the standards of others. The first thing many people do when they become anxious about their bodies is to compare themselves with others, but the truth is that everyone is unique. Everyone has his own characteristics, strengths, and unique beauty. Even twins can't exactly replicate each other, let alone a person. So stop using other people's standards to evaluate yourself. What we need to do is to find our own unique beauty rather than allow other people to sway us.

#### **5.3.3. Changing**

People who have body anxiety need to change their perceptions of body image. You need to sink your heart down, take a good look at yourself, and understand yourself through communicating and reconciling with your own body. As soon as you really understand your figure, you will find it not really that bad or unpleasant. You can imagine your figure as a balloon that has both a large and small size. However, the size of the balloon does not affect its own beauty and meaning. If you are unhappy with your body shape, you are supposed to go and try to make it better. In contrast, as long as you are satisfied with your body, you will be able to relax properly. In fact, each of us is not perfect in real life, but what we need is to show the best side of ourselves to others. For instance, we can choose the clothes and accessories that suit us better to enhance our temperament and image.

#### **5.3.4. Doing exercise**

Promoting emotional tolerance with exercise interventions is able to help individuals with other symptoms of depression<sup>[6]</sup>. Exercise is important for both physical health and mental health. It can improve your body and your mind and assist you in managing your weight better. Exercise can reduce anxiety levels because it improves cardiovascular health and helps to improve one's mood and overall well-being. Studies have displayed that exercise can help us prevent or relieve physical pain, thereby reducing anxiety about our bodies.

It is also found that exercise is associated with lower levels of anxiety. In addition, it can promote our mental health. Studies have shown that exercise can help people relieve stress and improve mood. Besides, exercise can upgrade sleep and increase overall well-being. While there is nothing wrong with being in shape, we are able to strive to be healthier, happier, and more productive. Achieving these goals through exercise may allow us to get rid of body image anxiety.

#### **5.3.5. Get a good night's sleep**

Get a good sleep instead of staying up all night. It is known to all that staying up late can cause great harm to the body. People who stay up late often will be involved in the trouble of rough and dull skin, dark circles under the eyes, and low body metabolism. So women who want to lose weight must not stay up late.

Sleep and depression are related to each other<sup>[7]</sup>. Sleep deprivation may increase the risk of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. Lack of sleep may result in stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty concentrating, and other problems. While a good night's sleep may help us regain energy and relieve anxiety and stress. Try to improve the quality of your sleep by relaxing yourself at night before going to bed (Figure 4).

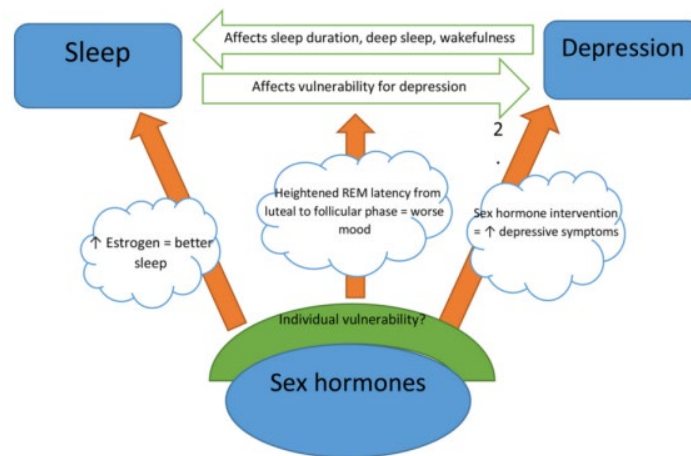


Figure 4: Sleep problems and depression

### 5.3.6. Learn to release stress

Faced with body anxiety, we'd better learn to release our stress since the appropriate stress can promote physical health. But when there is too much stress, our body will produce a huge amount of cortisol, a substance that can make people involved in the symptoms of obesity. That is to say that we'd better learn to release our stress when feeling too much stress.

We can take a walk, listen to music or utilize other ways to relax ourselves. Besides, we are also supposed to talk to others about our thoughts and feelings. As a result, others may have the channel to help us relieve our anxiety and release our stress.

What is obvious is that changing the body's anxiety is not an easy thing to do since it requires us to stick with it for a long time before seeing results. Because body image anxiety can produce many negative effects on the body, you'll have to start your daily life by keeping yourself away from negative emotions as long as you want to change this condition.

### 5.3.7. Government

The Chinese government also needs to act in the face of body image anxiety among Chinese girls, which is all too common among women in China. The government needs to change this body image anxiety created by the media and the body image anxiety that Chinese celebrities bring to the average Chinese girl. The government needs to ban all kinds of dieting and all kinds of negative, inappropriate weight loss behaviors that some celebrities and the media promote.

## 6. Conclusion

Anxiety about body image is a sense of self-doubt. Body anxiety can lead to a series of problems, including psychological problems and health problems, which affect not only their personal lives but also their careers. Don't worry if you feel you're not perfect. It seems that everyone has moments like this from time to time. Whereas girls need to change the way they see themselves by building a new perception and learning to accept themselves. If you have body anxiety, you are supposed to relax and do well for yourself rather than listen to what others say so as to become the most beautiful girl. The government needs to make politics about the media and celebrities. I hope every girl can become confident, accept herself and live up to herself. And my advice is to go to bed early instead of staying up late, exercise more, and watch drama less often.

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