



BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AS PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH BEHAVIOR: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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Article info	ABSTRACT
<p>Corresponding Author:</p> <p>Siska Putri Belangi siskaputribelangi72@gmail.com Universitas Nurul Hasanah Kutacane</p>	<p>Women's reproductive health behavior is influenced not only by biological and social factors but also by psychological determinants such as body image and self-esteem. This study aimed to synthesize scientific evidence on the role of body image and self-esteem as psychological determinants of women's reproductive health behavior. A narrative review design was used, with a literature search conducted in PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar for articles published between 2014 and 2025. Studies were selected based on predefined criteria, including those involving women of reproductive age and examining the relationship between body image and/or self-esteem and reproductive or sexual health outcomes. The findings consistently indicated that positive body image and higher self-esteem were associated with better sexual function, greater sexual satisfaction, improved reproductive well-being, and healthier reproductive decision-making. Conversely, negative body image was linked to poorer psychological and sexual well-being. These results highlight the importance of integrating psychosocial interventions into reproductive health promotion to support women's overall reproductive health outcomes.</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Body Image; Self-Esteem; Reproductive Health Behavior</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Biological and social factors are not the only factors influencing women's reproductive health behavior; psychological determinants also influence their health practices, decision-making, and perceptions. Self-esteem and body image are among the most significant determinants that influence the way in which women perceive their reproductive health requirements, sexuality, and bodies. An individual's perception and assessment of their physical appearance is referred to as body image, whereas self-esteem reflects their overall sense of self-worth. The disruption of these psychological constructs has been linked to emotional distress, diminished health-seeking behavior, and maladaptive coping patterns

that may have a detrimental impact on reproductive health outcomes (Achak et al., 2025; Merino et al., 2024).

Previous research has consistently shown a robust correlation between self-esteem and body image in women of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Adolescents and young women are particularly susceptible to body dissatisfaction, which has become more prevalent globally due to sociocultural pressures, social media exposure, and prevailing beauty standards. A considerable number of women and adolescents worldwide are affected by mental health issues, such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, according to reports from the World Health Organization. These conditions have a substantial impact on health-related behaviors and well-being (Hewitt & Murray, 2024; Manoe et al., 2025).

National mental health surveys in Indonesia have similarly reported an increase in psychological distress among adolescents and young women, including concerns regarding self-perception that may influence health decision-making. Positive body image is linked to higher self-esteem, better psychological adjustment, and healthier behavioral patterns, while body dissatisfaction is associated with low self-esteem and greater psychological vulnerability (Aufa et al., 2024; Munandar & Nabilla, 2023; Singh, 2024; Virk & Singh, 2020). Meta-analytic findings further confirm that body image and self-esteem are closely interconnected components of women's psychological functioning. However, sociocultural influences, particularly social comparison and the internalization of beauty ideals, continue to shape women's perceptions of their bodies and self-evaluations (Della & Yudianto, 2021; Merino et al., 2024).

Recent research indicates that body image and self-esteem have a significant impact on critical outcomes, including reproductive well-being, sexual satisfaction, and sexual function, in the context of reproductive and sexual health. Cihan & Cihan (2023), Hewitt & Murray (2024), and María (2026) have all reported that women who have a positive body image and higher self-esteem experience better sexual functioning and greater sexual satisfaction, while those who have a negative body image and self-objectification experience poorer sexual well-being and psychological distress. Specific populations, such as pregnant women and women who have undergone hysterectomy, have reported comparable findings, in which body perception substantially influenced their sexual and reproductive experiences (Ghamri et al., 2024; Gokce & Karakas, 2024).

Existing research is largely fragmented and concentrates on specific populations or isolated outcomes, despite the expanding corpus of research. This does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how body image and self-esteem function as psychological determinants of women's reproductive health behavior. al. (2025), Özbay et al. (2025), and Izzaty (2025) conducted studies separately examining adolescents, university students, or clinical groups. However, there is a scarcity of research that synthesizes the evidence across various contexts and reproductive health domains. This lacuna underscores the need for an integrative review that consolidates existing findings and identifies common patterns and research implications. Therefore, this study aims to synthesize current

evidence on the role of body image and self-esteem as psychological factors influencing women's reproductive health behavior.

METHOD

Study Design and Search Strategy

This study used a narrative review design to synthesize existing evidence on the role of body image and self-esteem as psychological determinants of women's reproductive health behavior. This study aims to synthesize current evidence on the role of body image and self-esteem as psychological factors influencing women's reproductive health behavior. A comprehensive literature search was conducted in four electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Articles published between 2014 and 2025 were included. The search used the following keywords and Boolean operators: ("body image" OR "body perception") AND ("self-esteem" OR "self-worth") AND ("reproductive health behavior" OR "sexual behavior" OR "contraceptive use" OR "reproductive health practices") AND ("women" OR "female"). The search strategy was adapted for each database, and the reference lists of selected articles were manually screened to identify additional relevant studies.

Eligibility Criteria and Study Selection

The following studies were incorporated: 1) original research or review articles; 2) studies that investigated the relationship between body image and/or self-esteem and reproductive or sexual health outcomes; and 3) studies that involved women of reproductive age. We only considered peer-reviewed articles that were published in English and available in full text. Studies that were not directly related to reproductive or sexual health behavior, were conference abstracts, editorials, commentaries, dissertations, or duplicate publications, or focused solely on severe psychiatric populations, were excluded. Titles and abstracts were screened, and the ultimate eligibility was determined through a full-text assessment.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

A structured form was employed to extract data from the selected studies. This form included variables related to body image and self-esteem, reproductive health outcomes, significant findings, and the author and year, country, study design, and sample. The results were subsequently analyzed and synthesized narratively to identify patterns and themes that pertain to the impact of body image and self-esteem on the reproductive health behavior of women.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies on Body Image, Self-Esteem, and Women’s Reproductive Health Behavior

Author (Year)	Country	Design & Sample	Variables Measured	Reproductive Health Outcome	Key Findings
Cihan & Cihan (2023)	Singapore	Short communication: women with sexual dysfunction	Self-esteem, positive body image	Female sexual function	Higher self-esteem and positive body image contributed to improved sexual function and recovery from dysfunction.
Hewitt & Murray(2024)	United Kingdom	Cross-sectional; adult women	Negative body image, self-objectification, and mental health literacy	Indirect sexual well-being	Negative body image and self-objectification were associated with poorer psychological and sexual well-being.
Izzaty (2025)	Indonesia	Cross-sectional; adolescent girls	Self-esteem, social comparison, body image	Potential future reproductive health behavior	Higher self-esteem predicted more positive body image, which may support healthier future reproductive decisions.
Mahmoudi (2026)	Multicountry (FGM-affected populations)	Intervention study; adult women	Self-esteem, body image satisfaction	Sexual and reproductive well-being	Positive psychology interventions improved self-esteem and body image, thereby enhancing sexual and reproductive well-being.

María (2026)	Multicountry	Systematic review	Self-esteem, body image	Sexual satisfaction	Self-esteem and positive body image were consistent predictors of higher sexual satisfaction across studies.
Singh (2024)	India	Cross-sectional; young women	Body esteem, psychological well-being	Indirect reproductive health behavior	Positive body esteem was associated with better psychological well-being, supporting healthier sexual decision-making.
Virk & Singh (2020)	India	Cross-sectional; medical students (female subgroup)	Body image, self-esteem	Indirect reproductive health behavior	Positive body image was significantly associated with higher self-esteem, a factor linked to healthier personal and sexual behaviors.

Table 1 illustrates the attributes of the studies incorporated and the relationship between women's reproductive health behaviors and body image and self-esteem. The selected studies were conducted in a variety of geographical contexts, such as Singapore, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, India, and multicountry populations. This suggests a comprehensive global interest in the psychological determinants of women's reproductive health. The majority of the studies utilized cross-sectional designs, with one intervention study and one systematic review. These studies focused on adult women, young women, and adolescent females. Female sexual function, sexual satisfaction, sexual and reproductive well-being, and indicators of psychological readiness for healthy reproductive decision-making were the reproductive health outcomes, while body image, body esteem, self-esteem, self-objectification, and related psychological constructs were the primary variables measured.

Overall, the results consistently demonstrated that improved reproductive and sexual health outcomes were associated with positive body image and elevated self-esteem.

Positive self-perceptions were reported by women as improved sexual function, increased sexual satisfaction, and improved reproductive well-being. On the other hand, low psychological health and diminished sexual well-being were associated with negative body image and self-objectification. Numerous studies have also demonstrated that reproductive health is indirectly influenced by body image and self-esteem through psychological pathways, including enhanced emotional well-being, confidence, and decision-making capacity. These findings emphasize the critical role of psychological factors as foundational determinants that promote healthy sexual and reproductive behaviors among women and underscore the necessity of incorporating body image and self-esteem interventions into reproductive health promotion strategies.

DISCUSSION

The results of this review suggest that reproductive health outcomes, such as enhanced sexual function, higher sexual satisfaction, and healthier reproductive decision-making, are consistently associated with positive body image and higher self-esteem. However, negative body image and self-objectification were associated with diminished sexual health and a decline in psychological well-being. These findings are consistent with empirical evidence demonstrating a robust positive correlation between self-esteem and body image across a variety of age groups and populations (Aufa et al., 2024; Munandar & Nabilla, 2023; Virk & Singh, 2020). Meta-analytic findings further affirm that body image and self-esteem are psychological constructs closely interconnected and that they affect women's overall adjustment and health-related behavior (Della & Yudiarso, 2021). Additionally, research conducted in specific reproductive contexts, such as pregnancy and post-hysterectomy conditions, has shown that women's sexual satisfaction and reproductive well-being are substantially influenced by their body image perception (Ghamri et al., 2024; Gokce & Karakas, 2024).

These results can be attributed to sociocultural theory and objectification theory, which suggest that women internalize cultural standards of beauty and external evaluations of their bodies, thereby affecting their psychological functioning and self-worth. Media exposure and socially constructed body ideals have been demonstrated to influence body perceptions and self-evaluations, thereby impacting mental health and health behavior (Merino et al., 2024). According to Islami et al (2022) and Singh (2024) psychological resilience, emotional stability, and confidence are indispensable for reproductive decision-making and healthy sexual expression. In addition, positive body image contributes to these qualities. Furthermore, self-esteem functions as a psychological resource that promotes positive health behavior and adaptive coping, thereby reinforcing the mediating role of self-concept in reproductive health outcomes (Achak et al., 2025; Izzaty, 2025).

The integration of findings indicates that body image and self-esteem should be considered as fundamental psychological determinants within the reproductive health frameworks of women. Women with a positive self-image are more likely to actively participate in reproductive health services, communicate their needs, and feel at ease in intimate relationships. Conversely, body dissatisfaction may result in avoidance behaviors,

anxiety, and humiliation, which in turn impede sexual well-being and healthcare utilization. Additionally, intervention studies suggest that enhancing sexual and reproductive well-being, particularly among vulnerable populations, can be achieved through psychological interventions that improve body image and self-esteem (Mahmoudi, 2026). Consequently, enhancing one's positive self-perception may be a viable approach to enhancing reproductive health outcomes.

The results have significant practical implications for public health and nursing practice. To improve women's self-esteem and body confidence, reproductive health programs should include psychosocial interventions such as body acceptance education, counseling, and media literacy. These methods are applicable to women of all ages, including adolescents, expectant women, and those with chronic health conditions (Idris et al., 2024; Özbay et al., 2025). Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize certain constraints. The heterogeneity of populations and measurement instruments may affect comparability, and the majority of the included studies employed cross-sectional designs, which restricts causal interpretation. To elucidate causal pathways and investigate the mediating or moderating roles of cultural, social, and digital influences, future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs. Furthermore, to fortify the global evidence base and facilitate the development of culturally sensitive interventions, additional research is required across diverse cultural and low- and middle-income settings.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review concludes that body image and self-esteem are significant psychological determinants that influence the reproductive health behavior of women. In contrast, negative body perception and low self-esteem may contribute to psychological distress and reduced reproductive health outcomes, while positive body image and higher self-esteem are consistently associated with better sexual function, greater sexual satisfaction, improved psychological well-being, and healthier reproductive decision-making. The results underscore the fundamental role of psychological factors in shaping women's preparedness, confidence, and engagement in reproductive health practices. Consequently, it is imperative to incorporate body image and self-esteem enhancement strategies into reproductive health education, counseling, and nursing interventions in order to foster comprehensive and enduring enhancements in the reproductive health of women throughout their lives.

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