



# The Impact of Body Shaming on Female High School Students in China

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**Abstract.** Body shaming has become a major public concern in recent years. This paper aims to consider the adverse effects that follow the criticism of female bodies while they are attending high school. This paper analyzed 11 papers from Google Scholar. By organizing and reviewing these previous investigations which were focused on the female body, this paper concluded that there were three major consequences that followed from this body-shaming: increasing rates of self-harm, heightened eating disorders, and increased rates of anxiety.

**Keywords:** Body shaming · Self-harms · Depression · Anxiety · Eating disorders

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, more and more female high school students are facing the serious problem of body shaming. Hence, the focus of this paper is the negative impact that body shaming can have on female high school students, both mentally and physically. This paper aims to deepen the shallow academic understanding of this issue by providing discoveries that can inspire further work on the subject since extant scholarship has overlooked studies into the physiological and psychological effects of mocking a Chinese female high school student's appearance, size, and shape. Such a concentrated study is important because although such research is lacking—in particular among sociologists, psychologists, educators, and principles of different schools—body shaming has caused significant harm to female high school students already. Plus, the popularity of social media and the beauty of extremes is crucial.

To aid current academics in this way, this paper uses “Body Shaming”, “Female High School Students” and “Self-harms” as keywords to search articles on Google Scholar. After screening, a total of 11 articles were included in the analysis scope of this paper. Through analyzing these articles, this paper points out the three negative impacts that can result from body shaming: increasing rates of self-harm, increasing rates of depression and anxiety, and heightened eating disorders.

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**Table 1.** Analysis of 11 papers containing the phrase “body shaming” (in an electronic search of the full text papers)

No. of papers	Context of “body shaming” usage	References
3	Impact of the body shaming on self-harm rates of female high school students	[1–3]
4	Impact of the body shaming on depression and anxiety of female high school students	[4–7]
4	Impact of body shaming on eating disorders of female high school students in China	[8–11]

## 2 Main Body

The focus of this paper is the negative impact that body shaming could have on female high school students. These papers could be divided into three categories: the impact of body shaming on self-harm rates of female high school students, impact of the body shaming on depression and anxiety of female high school students and impact of body shaming on eating disorders of female high school students in China. All three of these parts are based on existing studies and research. The specific classification can be seen in Table 1.

### 2.1 Impact of the Body Shaming on Self-harm Rates of Female High School Students

Over the past decades, the influence of typical body image on Chinese female high school students has been a great concern in society, both legally and ideologically. Based on the previous research and studies, it can be inferred and suggested that there is an inevitable relationship between body shaming and the increasing suicide rates of female high school students in China. This paragraph aimed to examine the impact of body shaming on the increasing self-harm rates of female high school students.

According to one of the studies, it was discovered that the number of studies contributing to the meta-analyses was insufficient to support statistical testing of moderating variables [1]. Although it is worth mentioning that a lesser effect is observed in a study about women with borderline personality disorder (BPD). It’s likely that as the prevalence of body shaming among people diagnosed with BPD has increased, the following link to suicide conduct has decreased [2]. Two studies also discovered a correlation between body shaming and the frequency of suicide attempts, finding tiny but substantial positive relationships between shaming of the character, body, performance, attractiveness, and relationships. In conclusion, there is some evidence of a minor link between certain forms of body shaming and suicidal conduct, but the data is limited, and more research is needed.

Furthermore, the findings of Kate’s study show that higher levels of body shaming are linked to self-harm behavior. Because the research is observational and correlational, it is impossible to establish that self-harm is actively driven or maintained by sentiments

of body shame. The findings are in line with emotion-regulation oriented models of self-harm, which see self-harm as a possible response to body shaming, as well as people's self-reported reasons for self-harm, which most typically involve coping with negative internal states, such as shame. Body shaming, on the other hand, could be a result of self-harm according to Bachtelle and Pepper's study in 2015 or an epiphenomenon linked to other processes that drive self-harm [3]. According to qualitative studies, body shaming can be both an antecedent and a consequence of self-harm [3]. It's also crucial to remember that self-harm has a wide range of functions, and that different emotions may play a larger or smaller part in different people.

## **2.2 Impact of the Body Shaming on Depression and Anxiety of Female High School Students**

In today's society, the psychological impact of body shaming on Chinese female high school students has been a major concern. On the basis of previous studies, it can be inferred and suggested that body shame plays a vital role in prompting depression and anxiety. This paragraph aimed to illustrate the impact of body shame on speeding up depression and anxiety.

Prior to puberty, the difference in depression was minimal. Nevertheless, once adolescence begins, female depression skyrockets and lasts the rest of her life. According to Braun's findings, weight prejudice and guilt may play a key part in BSC's psychological health, and self-compassion, a trainable affect-regulation method, may be a protective factor that confers some resiliency [4].

What's more, Grabe's results also indicated that adolescent girls reported higher levels of self-objectification, body shame, rumination, and depression than boys [5]. The findings support a model in which body shame and rumination mediate a direct relationship between self-objectification and depression among girls; developmentally, the gender difference in self-objectification appears before the gender differences in rumination and depression.

According to the findings of Gary's study, there is a clear relationship between body image and weight classification [6]. Obese youth were more dissatisfied with their bodies than overweight youth, and overweight youth were more dissatisfied with their bodies than normal-weight youth. These effects were not affected by age or gender. Eating abstinence was also linked to obesity, with higher abstinence scores being associated with higher levels of obesity. Similarly, obese adolescents reported more severe depressive symptoms, such as anhedonia, low self-esteem, and higher overall depression scores, when compared to overweight and normal-weight adolescents. It is also suggested that obese youth in the community may be more likely than overweight or normal-weight youth to develop body dissatisfaction, dietary restraint, and depressive symptoms.

Furthermore, Thomas' research revealed that the corporealizing effects of exhaustion, injury or illness, clumsiness, and the gaze of the other in situations of self-exposure, shame, and others interact [7]. A heavy, awkward, or damaged body does not conform to what is appropriate or expected in a given context, making it particularly vulnerable to the gaze of others. Loss of world coherence manifests physiologically as a change in blood circulation (blushing), trembling, or a loss of motor coordination. As previously

stated, the humiliated person's attention is drawn to his body as a result of this disorganization, resulting in a vicious cycle of corporealization and self-consciousness. As a result, his future movements and behaviors become "willed" and purposeful, rather than spontaneous and instinctive. As a result, the gaze of the other not only gives the bodiliness an outer appearance, but it also breaks through the immediacy of one's bodily being.

### **2.3 Impact of Body Shaming on Eating Disorders of Female High School Students in China**

Body shaming as a direct cause of body image and beauty standards in a specific social environment differs based on cultural and social background. Based on the previous research and study, a direct correlation could be inferred and analyzed between the eating disorder and body shaming towards Chinese female high school students. This paragraph will contain the analysis of this correlation through breaking it down into three perspectives: eating disorders and body shaming in China.

According to the study conducted by Mara in 2016, it recruited a certain number of high school students by controlling other factors [8]. It tested the direct connection between body shaming and the eating disorder. The investigation into the eating disorder used the Eating Disorder Risk Composite (EDRC) scale from the Eating Disorders Inventory-3 as the data collection, which improved the accuracy and credibility of the result. The findings clearly demonstrated that body shaming, as a critical factor in an individual's self-esteem, increases the risk of developing an eating disorder. This connection could be explained by the fact that individuals, especially teenagers, are likely to be affected by others' negative comments and make a change based on these comments. One example of the change is the diet, which could lead to an eating disorder among certain people. As has been mentioned above, body shaming is one important factor that could lead to eating disorders among teenagers. Plus, several studies have been conducted under a certain regional background, which is China. One systematic analysis collected the data from 1999 to 2019 and discussed several variables, including two essential ones for this topic: age and gender [9]. According to its results, the prevalence of AN peaked at 15–19 years old and the rate of AN among females was higher than among males, which suggested the impact of eating disorders is a crucial problem among Chinese female high-school students [9]. Apart from age and gender, a study conducted by Ivana in 2020 investigated the negative effect brought by different body images by comparing the data among Chinese and Croatian women [10]. The conclusion indicated that Chinese female high school students suffered from body image issues and were affected.

What is worth mentioning is that the cultural background and family factors also affect the body shame towards teenagers. This leads to an eating disorder. According to the study conducted by Haworth-Hoepfner, in the context of a critical family environment, routine weight talk was a central organizing principle in the family dynamic, which could be referred to as a dominating encounter (predisposes members to value thinness) [11]. The salient feature in this case is the specific configuration of family characteristics. For example, in a critical family environment, combined with casual remarks about weight, does not have negative consequences for the development of eating disorders,

but it does when combined with a main discourse on weight. When such talk occurs in a critical environment, it creates a “context of believability” that emphasizes the value and importance of thinness for family members. In these circumstances, the pursuit of thinness becomes a legitimate goal [11]. This is significant in that the process takes place within the family, the most influential group in the development of self-image.

Furthermore, within the family, a common viewpoint on the inherent value of being thin serves as a “defining” mechanism for the creation of collective identity. Internalizing this mindset as a way to mark membership in the family group, maintaining the boundaries between insider and outsider status, is a part of being in the family [11]. Therefore, in a stressful family setting, a major discussion about weight might have negative implications and raise the likelihood of female members developing anorexia or bulimia.

Based on the analysis of previous studies and papers, a direct correlation could be concluded between body image in China and the increasing risk of eating disorders among Chinese female high school students through analyzing the body shaming felt by these students and the rate of eating disorders. This body shaming comes from different social groups that the teenage girls belonged to, including peers, classmates, family members, and strangers on social media.

### 3 Conclusion

This paper has argued that the body shaming as a severe issue in China has had a serious impact on several perspectives. This paper examined three types of impacts: the impact of body shaming on eating disorders; the impact of body shaming on depression and anxiety; and the impact of body shaming on the rate of suicide. Through analyzing the existing papers about this aspect and combining the statistics in China, it can be concluded that all of these three effects existed as a result of the body shaming among female high school students in China. What is worth mentioning is that the extent of the impact among female high school students in China is more serious than in other groups, especially with regard to the eating disorder.

This problem should be raised and taken seriously since it is harmful to both mental and physical health. Furthermore, social media and China’s unique body image, both of which are major contributors to these effects, should be modified. The normal body image in China expresses that skinny is beautiful, which puts stress on female high school students. Thus, the effect caused by body shaming and body image among Chinese female high school students should be raised as an important topic. For further research, researchers are suggested to link the data of relevant patients in China and the current body shaming caused by body image in real-life situations and on social media. Additionally, the mental diseases, including anxiety, eating disorders, and depression caused by body image among female high school students should be a focus in the future.

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