



# Ideal Body Shapes Desired by Women in Surat City

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** In contemporary time women's body shapes are seen as crucial to their existence and self esteem and obesity is becoming an international epidemic. This study conducted to explore notions and perceptions of women relating to their desired body shapes.

**Methodology:** The study was undertaken in Surat city of Gujarat among 107 women aged 18 years and above till 45 years. The respondents were administered a pre-tested and structured questionnaire prepared with the inputs of the participants and the agreement of the key stakeholders. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents in the form of Google forms.

**Results:** The ideal body shapes as desired by the majority of the women was slim, athletic, size zero and curvaceous. Almost all women deemed body shapes as crucial to their existence. Nearly 80% women responded that body figure is important for self confidence.

**Conclusion:** The ideal body shapes desired by the majority of the women was slim, athletic, size zero and curvaceous which reflect their earlier preconceived notions<sup>8</sup> and as per Indian norms. Body shapes were indeed a crucial point in the life of a woman.

**Keywords:** Body shape, women's perception, body image

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times women's body shapes are seen as crucial to their existence and self esteem and obesity is becoming an international epidemic.<sup>1,2</sup> Women are increasingly perceiving the need for maintenance of their body shapes as an important issue throughout their life span and more so while they are teenager and college studies or while searching for a groom<sup>3,4</sup>. Women feel that their partner loses interest in them if they are getting heavier<sup>5</sup>. This is gradually increasing in various groups with affluence<sup>6</sup>.

Women try to decrease their body weight or had tried to decrease their weight in the past. The instances of women successfully changing their behaviour is gradually beginning to add up. Though there could be many failures but yet they keep up their trials. The various means include performing

regular exercises, daily walks, household chores, yoga, dieting, taking nutrition supplements and controlling their diet.

Though women acknowledge that it is not easy to maintain weight, they express various means of remaining lean. They also acknowledge its difficulty given the Indian cultural affinity to eating.

This study conducted to explore notions and perceptions of women relating to their desired body shapes.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The study was undertaken in the city of Surat of Gujarat among 107 women aged 18 years and above till 45 years to explore their notions and perceptions relating to their desired body shapes. The respondents comprised of the women as described

earlier who were administered a pre-tested and structured questionnaire prepared with the inputs of the participants and the agreement of the key stakeholders. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents in the Google form of our survey instrument i.e. the form was available on online platforms. Submission of online form denote consent to participate in the study.

This study also determined as to whether the issue of desired body shapes is central to the very existence of these women and whether it determines their consequent remedial actions. It also examines the respondent's awareness of the resultant dieting and exercise regimens which follow their desired body shapes and whether this process is supervised by a medical practitioner, nutritionist, dietician and a nutritionist. The study also attempts to assess whether their desired goal was attained. The study also examines various hindrances which hamper their behavioural change. The study finally concludes with recommendations facilitate which the respondents feel might facilitate their transition into their newer habits.

## OBSERVATIONS

The ideal body shapes as in Table 1 as desired by the majority of the women was slim, athletic, size zero and curvaceous. It was seen that in only two instances this issue was not of much concern.

On being quizzed as to whether their body shapes were deemed as crucial to their existence there was almost consensus (Table 2).

Table 3 shows various reasons cited by women when we asked the importance of their body figure. Nearly 80% women responded that body figure is important for self confidence. Other important reasons were important in certain careers like modelling, hospitality etc, important for getting married, making friends, for Standing out in a group or noticed etc.

## DISCUSSION:

The ideal body shapes desired by the majority of the women was slim, athletic, size zero and curvaceous. This is as reflected in the studies worldwide.<sup>2-4,7</sup> It needs to be brought out that their perception invariably combined these four attributes together as per their earlier preconceived notions<sup>8</sup> and as per Indian norms.

On being quizzed as to whether their body shapes were deemed as crucial to their existence there was almost consensus that this indeed a crucial point in the life of a women<sup>2-5</sup>.

**Table 1: Desired body shapes**

Desired body shape	Women (N=107) (%)
Slim	67 (62.6)
Athletic	54 (50.5)
Size zero	53 (49.5)
Fuller chest	39 (36.4)
Curvaceous	19 (17.8)
As per Indian norms	20 (18.7)
Not of much concern	2 (1.9)

**Table 2: Women's body shapes are crucial to their existence**

Important	Women (N=107) (%)
Crucial	104 (97.2)
Partially important	2 (1.9)
Not important	1 (0.9)

**Table 3: Importance of body figure (N=107)**

Importance of body figure	Women (%)
Self confidence/ self esteem	85 (79.4)
Very important in certain careers like modelling, hospitality etc	74 (69.2)
Important for getting married	68 (63.6)
Making friendship	49 (45.8)
Standing out in a group or noticed	56 (52.3)
Negative comments if overweight	44 (41.1)
Keeping husband's interests alive	41 (38.3)
Important for keeping sex alive	40 (37.4)
Keeping diseases away	29 (27.1)
Important for getting a job	13 (12.1)
Important for dating	11 (10.3)
Keeping acne away	3 (2.8)

When asked as to the importance of their body figure, the reasons given by the respondents mainly relate to their self confidence/ self esteem<sup>2-4</sup> or were in context to their perceived need<sup>8</sup> as being very important in certain careers like modelling, hospitality etc or important for getting married or making friends or for Standing out in a group or noticed. This brings home another fact that these are perceptions of the respondents and they can be different from social perceptions<sup>4,5,8</sup> i.e. perceived reasons may be different from reasons which could hold true and thereby giving us an entry point namely a lack of uniformly accepted body shape.

In case of whether it was weight modification by dieting or whether it was by means of a work out the respondents opined that with context to adequate supervision by a medical practitioners, nutritionist, dietician and a nutritionist they felt that this part was neglected part and needed urgent attention. They felt that this could immensely benefit the women in case a centre is established whereby this issue could be dealt in detail and which could help guide them or could act like a skills laboratory. 82 respondents had engaged in weight modification or had done dieting in the past also but

largely they were not successful 61 or were presently carrying out the activity 21.

The experiences of the respondents attaining of the goal by means of gymnasium, various clubs and yoga classes was good with 61 reporting better results and 36 still undergoing this activity as compared to dieting alone as in 34 instances as reported in other studies<sup>9</sup>. The various major hindrances which hamper their behavioural change ranged from their busy schedule (67); relapses into their past behaviour (51); heavy workout & muscular pains/ joint pains and aches (28); relatives/guests (08); menstrual cycle (07). Only a miniscule had expressed (08) being tired of the whole exercise of trying to control their body shapes and 105 had adjudged themselves as being overweight and aspired for attaining a smaller body size as brought out in earlier studies<sup>3</sup>.

### CONCLUSION:

The ideal body shapes desired by the majority of the women was slim, athletic, size zero and curvaceous which reflect their earlier preconceived notions<sup>8</sup> and as per Indian norms. Body shapes were indeed a crucial point in the life of a woman. Most perceived that their body figure important for their self confidence/ self esteem. Most of the respondent had engaged in weight modification attempt, but largely failed.

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