

IS SELFIE TAKING BEHAVIOR BENEFICIAL FOR THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF YOUNG ADULTS?

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether selfie taking behavior is beneficial for the mental well-being of young adults and to investigate the difference in psychological issues among people who like to take selfies and those who don't. Two hundred participants were recruited in this study following convenience sampling technique. The Depression scale, Bangla version of the Self-Esteem scale, and Bangla version of the General Health Questionnaire -12 were used as instruments in this study. This study used t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation for analyzing data. Results showed that selfie taking behavior is negatively correlated with depression score which means more selfie taking leads to fewer depressive symptoms. It was also found that people who like to take selfies and post selfies more on social media have shown less depressive symptoms, better self-esteem and less psychological distress than the people who don't like to take and post selfies. The results can be taken to indicate that people who like to take or post selfies more exhibit a better state of mental well-being and less psychological issues.

Introduction

Selfies have become popular now-a-days. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English selfie is defined as a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and usually shared via social media⁽¹⁾. This phenomenon of selfie taking was so growing that they considered the term as the "word of 2013"⁽²⁾. Taking selfies is common in college-going adolescents and young adults^(3,4). The "selfie phenomenon" has generated a great deal of controversy. Some people view it as a form of narcissism, while others see it as a useful tool for social connection and personal documentation⁽⁵⁾. A study was conducted with the adolescents of Punjab, India, it was found that taking more selfies can create more mental health issues⁽⁶⁾. The Thai Mental Health Department has warned those obsessed with this trend, it may have a negative impact on their life and work, as reported in Bangkok Post⁽⁷⁾. Depression, self-concept, psychological well-being, stress, anxiety are considered as the components of mental health and wellness. People with depression may feel a lack of interest that may hamper their daily functioning⁽⁸⁾. The

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main characteristic of depression is the feeling of sadness will be persistent⁽⁹⁾. In a review of selfie taking and mental health related study, the researchers concluded that selfie addiction was most associated with low self-esteem, narcissism, loneliness and depression⁽¹⁰⁾. On the other hand, another study found selfie taking behavior promotes happiness and increases positive feelings⁽¹¹⁾. In a specific study on women, the researcher reveals that selfie taking is responsible for increasing depression and anxiety in women aged 16 to 24 years⁽¹²⁾. Therefore, it can be specifically detrimental for young ladies' mental health.

Self-esteem can be defined as a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards self⁽¹³⁾. Self-esteem refers to an individual sense of his or her worth or the extent to which he approves, appreciates, and likes him or herself⁽¹⁴⁾. It was found in a study with the participants in Poland that selfie posting behavior was unrelated with self-esteem and women post more of their own, partner and group selfie⁽¹⁵⁾. The gratifications of selfie taking depend on the personality of the individual and also on the self-esteem levels of the individuals⁽¹⁶⁾. Selfies have become the cause of many fatal incidents⁽¹⁷⁾. A study regarding social networking websites confirmed about 78 percent of the sample received positive feedback from other users of social networking sites, and that positive feedback increased self-esteem significantly⁽¹⁸⁾. Posting selfies reflects high self-esteem levels, and it increases one's self-esteem because such photos emphasize one's ideal and controlled image⁽¹⁹⁾. According to WHO, mental health is characterized by the state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community⁽²⁰⁾. Definition of mental health has its association with empirical findings indicating that the contribution of selfie clicking and posting may be an empowering activity and also helps youths to improve their mental well-being⁽²¹⁾. Many psychologists have also ascertained the fact that, selfies, when used in moderation are healthy, which helps to reduce depression and maintain better mental health condition⁽²²⁾. In contrast, a Bangladeshi study with adolescents found that more selfie taking behavior leads to more psychological distress like self handicapping and self concealment⁽²³⁾. In this current study researchers have found out some inconsistencies between the results of previous studies. As we can see from a study, Indian individuals with different personalities use selfies differently to fulfill their inner psychological needs like attention seeking, communication, archiving and entertainment⁽²⁴⁾. Another study says that selfie taking emphasizes the importance of physical attractiveness for Chinese students and American students view selfies as a way of communication and life recording⁽²⁵⁾. Therefore, we can say the possible reasons for varying findings among studies may be personality type and factors, psychological needs and cultural differences^(24,25) and small sample size as methodological flaws in which researchers used only 9 Chinese students and 7 American students⁽²⁵⁾. These all are important moderating factors for the inconsistencies between results.

The present study is aimed to investigate if selfie taking behavior is beneficial for the mental well-being of the young adults. The rationale of the study was that selfie taking is the latest trend in the field of social networking and online technology. As it is a relatively new concept, not much work has been conducted to see its effect on mental well-being in

our cultural context. The underlying causes behind taking selfies can be assumed from the result of this study. Whether selfie taking behavior is helpful for our mental well-being or creating mental health issues can also be concluded from the result of the study. Moreover, it is supposed to be an interesting topic to deal with a daily life fun activity. For therapists and researchers it will be helpful to understand youths and the relationship between their selfie taking behavior and different psychological issues. Above all this study will help us to get a clear picture of mental well-being conditions relating to selfie taking behavior in the context of our culture.

The objectives of this study were to find out:

- i) The difference in mental well-being among people who like to take selfies and who don't in terms of depression, self-esteem and psychological distress;
- ii) The correlation between selfie taking behavior and psychological issues; and
- iii) Whether people posting selfies in social media have better mental condition than others or not.

Materials and Methods

Cross sectional survey design was used here. A total of 200 Bangladeshi participants were conveniently recruited for this study. The age range of the participants were 17 to 34 years old (mean age is 24.72) with 97 male (48.5%) and 103 female (51.5%). For data collection a demographic and personal information questionnaire was used including age, sex, socio economic and relationship status, questions related to selfie taking, and so on.

Depression Scale: Depression scale was developed by Uddin and Rahman⁽²⁶⁾ to measure depression of Bangladeshi people. It was a 5-point rating scale consisting of 30 items. All items were scored in a positive direction. Higher scores indicate higher levels of depression. The split-half and test-retest reliability coefficients of the scale were 0.76 and 0.59 respectively. The scale had high levels of content, concurrent and construct validity. Depending on the total score, the scale indicated the level of depression by 4 categories: scoring range 30 – 100 categorized as “minimal”, 101 – 114 as “mild”, 115 – 123 as “moderate”, and 124 – 150 as having “severe” depression. For screening norms, the score of 94 or more should be designated as “depressed.”

Self-Esteem Scale: The scale was originally developed to measure adolescents' feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance⁽¹³⁾. It was a 10-item Likert type scale in Bangla, developed by Ilyas⁽²⁷⁾. The items were answered in a four point response format (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree that covers 4,3,2,1 respectively). Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 were reverse scored. Scores ranged from 10-40 with higher scores representing higher self-esteem. Significant correlation of English and Bangla versions ($r = 0.87$, $p < 0.0005$) indicated translation reliability of the Bangla version of the scale. High Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.87$) of the Bangla version further indicated strong internal consistency of the scale⁽²⁷⁾.

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12): The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12 item version) was originally developed by Goldberg⁽²⁸⁾. The Bangla version of GHQ-12 developed by Ilyas & Ayesha⁽²⁹⁾ was used to measure mental health of the participants. GHQ is a self-administered screening test designed for detecting psychological distress of an individual for the last few weeks⁽²⁸⁾. Internal consistencies of the Bangla version of GHQ-12 were measured by test-retest of a two weeks interval ($r = 0.57$) and alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.81$). Each item has four options with 0-0-1-1 method of scoring. The scores were summed up by adding all the items on a scale of 0 to 12. Higher scores denoted more psychological distress.

At first the ethical permission was taken from the Ethical Approval Committee of the Educational and Counselling Psychology Department, University of Dhaka. Standard data collection procedure was followed. The consent form was given and their personal information was collected with confidentiality. Then they were asked to check their smartphones to write down the total number of selfies they have taken for the last one month. Then the depression scale, self-esteem scale and GHQ-12 scale was provided to collect information about their mental health aspects. Their task was to give a tick mark to the option that suits them most. It took almost 30-40 minutes to complete the task. At the end, each participant was given thanks by the researchers.

Results and Discussion

This study was conducted to see if selfie taking behavior is beneficial for the mental well-being of young adults. It was also investigated to see the difference between two groups who like to take selfies and who don't in terms of depression, self-esteem and psychological distress. Statistical analysis was done after collecting data. Descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis, t- test were applied to determine the differences. From the collected data, it was seen that 52.5% of the total sample likes to take selfies, 47.5% don't like to take selfies which is 105 and 95 people respectively among 200 participants. Among 200 participants, their total number of selfies were calculated. It was seen that maximum number of selfies taken was 1500, minimum was 0, mean was 40.34 and Standard Deviation was 120.02.

Is there any difference in mental well-being among people who like to take selfies and those who don't?

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and difference in terms of depression, self-esteem and psychological distress between two groups

Variables	likes to take selfie		t	df	P
	yes (n = 105)	no (n=95)			
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Depression	60.78 (19.189)	91.81 (25.94)	-9.675	198	.000
Self-esteem	30.39 (4.34)	26.52 (4.998)	5.867	198	.000
Psychological distress	2.23 (2.725)	3.71 (2.555)	-3.94	198	.000

From Table 1, it can be said the mean depression score for the group who don't like to take selfies is higher than the other group who likes. There is a highly significant difference between the two groups. The mean self-esteem score for the selfie liking group is higher than the mean self-esteem score of the selfies not liking group, it is also highly significant. The mean score of the psychological distress of the selfie liking group is less than the group that don't like to take selfies, it is a highly significant difference. The result is consistent with some previous research. Individuals engage in social comparison and resulting selfie taking not because of their dissatisfaction with appearance, but because of the desire for more ideal online self-presentation⁽³⁰⁾. Selfies reflect high self-esteem levels, and it increases one's self-esteem because such photos emphasize one's ideal and controlled image⁽¹⁹⁾. Another study also found that selfies are one of the powerful tools that help a person to feel good about him or her indicating that selfies are helpful for a good mental state⁽³¹⁾. As our first objective of the study was to see the difference in mental well-being between two groups. We can see that there is a significant difference in mental well-being aspects between two groups and people who like to take selfies have shown less depression score, better self esteem score and less psychological distress score. It means people who like to take selfies tend to exhibit better mental well-being aspects than others who don't.

What is the relationship between selfie taking behavior and psychological issues?

Table 2. Correlation between number of selfies and Depression (1), Self-esteem (2) and Psychological distress (3)

Measures	1	2	3	p.
Total number of selfies taken for the last one month	-.179	--	-	.01
	-	.120	-	.09
	-	-	-.127	.07

From Table 2 we can see that the correlation coefficient between the total number of selfies taken in the last one month and depression is $-.179$, it is significant at $.01$ level. It means the relationship is negative and a weak one but it is significant. It means the higher the number of selfies taken, the lower the score of depression. The correlation coefficient between the number of selfies and self-esteem is $.120$, it is not significant. The relationship is positive but not significant. The correlation coefficient between the number of selfies taken and psychological distress is $-.127$. It is a weak negative but not significant correlation between selfie taking and psychological distress. If we go through some of the previous research, we can see that selfie taking may also help to better cope with emotional problems, feeling less aroused⁽¹¹⁾. We found selfie taking has a negative correlation with depression score. It indicates that people who take more selfies show fewer depressive symptoms. Self presentation may be a key factor for selfie taking behavior⁽³²⁾. People seek self-verification to feel better about themselves⁽³³⁾. When anyone gets self-verifying feedback within a group, he feels acceptance and valued by others within the group which increases worth-based self-esteem⁽³⁴⁾. Some people report that they take selfies as confidence boosters⁽³⁵⁾. But as the correlation is not statistically significant, there may be other factors like intention for taking a selfie, other mental health issues that act as mediating variables here. As the second objective of the study was to find out the relationship between selfie taking behavior and mental health aspects or psychological issues, we can see selfie taking is significantly negatively correlated with depression score. The higher the number of selfies taken, the lower the symptoms of depression. In fact selfie taking may be a way to cope up with the level of depression, if anyone finds it as a source of entertainment, fun or enhancing social connection.

Whether People posting selfies in social media tend to exhibit better mental well-being than others or not?

Participants were also asked about their habit of posting selfies on social media. Among 200 participants 124 individuals post selfies on social media and 76 individuals don't post, which covers 62% and 38% of the sample respectively.

Table 3. Mean, SD and t test results of the groups posting selfies on social media

Variables	Posting on social media		t	df	p.
	yes (n = 124)	no (n = 76)			
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Depression	63.36 (17.28)	95.36 (26.27)	-9.706	198	.000
Self-esteem	30.15 (3.29)	25.95 (4.10)	6.238	198	.000
Psychological distress	2.47 (2.01)	3.68 (2.25)	-3.112	198	.002

From Table 3, it has been found that the mean depression score of the group who don't post selfies on social media is higher than the group posting selfies on social media and it is significant. Therefore, there is a difference in depression score between these two groups. Mean self-esteem score of the group not posting selfies on social media is lower than the other group's mean self-esteem score, it is significant. Therefore, there is a significant difference in self-esteem between these two groups. Mean GHQ score of the group not posting selfies on social media is higher than the selfie posting group's mean GHQ score and it is significant. Therefore, the group which doesn't post selfies on social media possess comparatively worse mental conditions than the group which post selfies on social media. The third objective of the study was to see if the mental well-being aspects differ between the groups based on sharing photos on social media. We have seen people posting selfies on social media have better mental condition, the severity of psychological issues is less than others. Considering above all findings it can be said that selfie liking behavior is helpful for maintaining better mental health. Selfie-posting was positively related to Chinese young adult women's self-esteem⁽³⁶⁾. It was found in another study that people with high self-esteem can use social media as a platform for self expression⁽³⁷⁾. From our study we have seen that selfie taking or posting and better mental condition is associated so selfie may be helpful for creating a positive self-image. According to the uses and gratification theory emphasizes the uses and gratification of media⁽³⁸⁾. According to a study, individuals need gratification and selfie is a medium to attain it⁽³⁹⁾. So when their need is being gratified by the use of social media with selfie posting, it will certainly be helpful for individuals. The looking glass theory proposed that "believing is becoming"⁽⁴⁰⁾. It means when people take a selfie they use it as a mirror or looking glass. They want to express themselves the way they believe, or they want others to see them like they think. This study has found selfie taking helpful strategy, it can be related with this looking glass theory. According to self-verification theory people usually feel better when they receive verification for their self views⁽³³⁾. When selfies are being posted in social media people get likes, comments in it. By doing so they are affirming their beliefs and views about themselves. It certainly gives them a feeling of security that leads to better mental health. According to Albert Bandura's self-reinforcement theory, the individual strives to meet personal standards and does not depend on the reactions of others⁽⁴¹⁾. The trend of selfie taking can also be related to this

theory. Individuals taking selfies can be seen as a self reinforcement through which he or she is reinforcing himself or herself without depending on others. Posting more selfies is helpful because it emphasizes one's ideal and controlled image⁽¹⁹⁾. A study found that communication appeared as the main driver of selfie-posting behavior⁽⁴²⁾. Another study found selfies as a practice of freedom, or self-therapeutic and awareness-raising habits⁽⁴³⁾. The majority of the factors described are related to the subjective well-being of the person, although models of internal and external sides of the process of achieving well-being are still awaiting development⁽⁴⁴⁾.

The present study has some limitations. It only covered a specific age range focusing on youths. Further studies can be conducted with a vast age range to see the effects of these variables. We have found participants facing problems with options in the Bangla version of the GHQ scale. They reported them to be confusing and ambivalent. This study did not investigate the effect of personality pattern, factors and motivation on selfie taking behavior. It may have an effect on mental health. So, further studies can be conducted considering the above factors.

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