



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



The Awareness of the Impact of Body Shaming among Youth

Mimi Sofiah Ahmad Mustafa, Ida Rahayu Mahat, Mohd Ab Malek Md Shah, Nor Aishah Mohd. Ali, Rosilawati Sultan Mohideen, Sulaiman Mahzan

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i4/13197> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i4/13197

Received: 11 February 2022, **Revised:** 13 March 2022, **Accepted:** 29 March 2022

Published Online: 15 April 2022

In-Text Citation: (Mustafa et al., 2022)

To Cite this Article: Mustafa, M. S. A., Mahat, I. R., Shah, M. A. M. M., Ali, N. A. M., Mohideen, R. S., & Mahzan, S. (2022). The Awareness of the Impact of Body Shaming among Youth. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(4), 1096–1110.

Copyright: © 2022 The Author(s)

Published by Human Resource Management Academic Research Society (www.hrmars.com)

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Vol. 12, No. 4, 2022, Pg. 1096 – 1110

<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/IJARBSS>

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
<http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/publication-ethics>



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



www.hrmars.com

ISSN: 2222-6990

The Awareness of the Impact of Body Shaming among Youth

Mimi Sofiah Ahmad Mustafa¹, Ida Rahayu Mahat², Mohd Ab Malek Md Shah³, Nor Aishah Mohd. Ali⁴, Rosilawati Sultan Mohideen⁵, Sulaiman Mahzan⁶

^{1,2,3}Law Department, ⁴Faculty of Accountancy, ⁵Faculty of Communication & Multimedia Studies, ⁶Faculty of Science, Computer & Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka Branch, Malaysia

Abstract

The United Nation defines youth as those between 15 to 24 years of age, without prejudice as to those defined by its Member States. By the end of 2021, the age limit will be reduced to 30 years old among Malaysian youth. Body shaming is nothing new compared to cyber bullying as it has negative impacts on the victims. The rapidity of technological advances today is welcomed in a lot of perspectives and the youth are the class that utilise them the most, however statistics show that body shaming is rampant among the youth throughout the social media. This scenario can be seen as a hindrance to achieve what the United Nation proposed in their 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015 for a better and more sustainable future for all in relation to good health and well-being (number 3) and also to peace, justice and strong institutions (number 16). This paper focused on youth's awareness of the impact of one of the social illnesses pertaining to body shaming that needs attention from all relevant parties. Hence, this paper aimed to identify whether the youth have grasped the consequences of such an ill manner in the society. This study is doctrinal in nature extracting its data through library research and internet resources; together with the distribution of questionnaires through online surveys. The outcome of this paper may alert the legislature, policy makers and enforcement parties on the seriousness of the impact of body shaming among youths.

Keywords: Body Shaming, Awareness, Youth, Legislation

Introduction

Numerous studies have been performed on the impact of physical appearance to individuals. Reinten (2014) totally agreed that physical appearance is essential to one because it opens doors, minds and opportunities. But she did mention that it is not all that matters because people could still be appealing even though they are not physically attractive. This study is concurred by a recent study by Davis (2021) who opined that physical appearance is significant in a community because it could boost self-confidence and self-esteem, arguing that, when people are attractive, they would feel safe and comfortable as other people would easily associate with them, including admiring them.

Everyone has his or her own understanding of what is meant by a normal look or a beautiful and acceptable look of a person. But that does not give anyone a licence to make a reference to another person's look or appearance in a manner that could downgrade his or her feeling about themselves or cause embarrassment to themselves. On this note, Svindseth & Crawford (2019) disclosed that humiliation could occur if a person does not fall into what the society perceives him or her to be. According to them, our society identifies people who do not fit the coping behaviour of the lifestyle that the society rewards as those who are prone to experience humiliations. A much earlier study by Shwartz et.al (2006) has observed that we live in a society where people rather lose a limb than being fat. In another perspective, Agarwal & Banerjee (2018) found that there was a positive relationship between social anxiety and body shaming. Ko (2010) believed that people with low self-esteem resulting from eating disorders will tend to suffer from shame, which subsequently causes them to have social anxiety. It was also found that individuals who were significantly concerned about how they appeared to others contributed to the relationship between eating disorders and social anxiety. As reiterated by Dixit & Luqman (2018), an individual will only be accepted in a society if they have an 'ideal' body shape and this perception is related to low body satisfaction. They further determined that there was a significant correlation between body image concern and social anxiety. To sum up, Hanson (2020) concluded that *"....the feeling of body shame is therefore in conversation with societal expectations of how a body should be or look, arising when people consider their body as lying outside the constructed definition of the acceptable body."*

Body shaming is a situation where a person is being made to understand, think and feel that he or she is "not normal" to live in a community where everyone else or most of everyone looks acceptable and appropriate and hence welcomed to be regarded as a member of any particular community. Damanik (2018) stated that body shame is that shame feeling which appears when someone's judgment does not meet the individual's expectation where an ideal physical appearance is concerned. The extent of acceptance of any individual's state of appearance by any community seems to vary depending on the understanding of the implication of such a body shaming.

Body shaming is not new (Hannah, 2019). Dettmar (2016) mentioned that body shaming could also have some ancient origins from popular superstitions such as prejudice against red hair people. This paper explored the awareness of youth regarding body shaming. This is vital to be ascertained because it could help policy makers or legislative bodies to come up with guidelines and laws to prevent body shaming from occurring. A research carried out by the United Kingdom government in 2013 found out that children as young as five were deemed to be unhappy because of their appearance (Burrowes, 2013). Hence, it had been said that body shaming could occur at any stage of one's life (Tomiyaama, 2014).

As this paper focuses on the awareness of the youth on the body shaming issue, some facts on awareness are necessary to be mentioned. One is in a state of awareness when one is able to be in a state of understanding about the matter. According to Devanur & Fortnow (2009), as a basic principle you cannot be aware of what you are unaware of. Loevstrand (1991) mentioned that the availability of awareness support improves the effectiveness of how information is spread in communities and positively influences social interactions taking place in those communities.

Reinhart et.al (2012), on the other hand, listed down types of awareness in their paper namely activity awareness, cultural awareness, social awareness, workplace awareness, location awareness and knowledge awareness. Of all the types, social awareness is the most

relevant to this writing since it describes the things people become conscious of in a social context. This includes information about the attentiveness of others, gestures and facial expressions that mirror the emotional state of a person as well as clues about a person's interest in a topic. CORE (California Office to Reform Organisation) further described social awareness as the ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and support. Hence, since this paper wanted to find out whether the youth were aware of the impact of body shaming, in the social perspective, we were looking at how youth perceived and understood the issue of body shaming socially such as whether they felt that such an issue must be addressed in a proper immediate manner or that it was just something that was so normal and customary that everyone in the society has accepted it as it is.

Types of Body Shaming

Fauzia et al. (2019) categorized body shaming to four which are fat shaming, thin, hair shaming and skin tone shaming. The most popular body shaming is body shaming where negative comments instigated to obese or plus size individuals. Opposite to fat shaming, thin shaming tends to target girls or women with thin or too thin body structure. Having a hairy body can also be the victim for body shaming especially with excess hair on their bodies especially to the girls. A too dull and dark skin can also be subjected to skin shaming.

Literature Review

Previous studies found that body shaming led to low self-esteem, low body dissatisfaction and symptoms of depression and poor psychological health (Puhl and Leudicke, 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2003, Grabe et al., 2007) A cross sectional study over 800 school-going adolescents in Lucknow, India by Gam et al (2020) revealed that at least 44.9% respondents have been body shamed at least once in the past one year, with maximum among the boys in the co-ed schools and the least among a single gender all girls' school. These findings of prevalence of body shaming are higher than the findings by Buchianeri et al (2014); Eisenberg et al (2013), who found the prevalence of the appearance-based disturbances to be 38.2% and 30% respectively. Not much variation was reported in terms of total reports by gender (Gam et al., 2020; Lind, 2016). Nevertheless, body shaming victims reported to have experienced occasional victimization. This situation is reduced by having a much larger circle of close friends or maintaining peer relationships in the campus environment for universities' students that also act as the protective measurement against body shamers (Brewis et al).

A study performed in Indonesia by Fauzia et al (2019) using the Theory of Socialized Anxiety and Theory of Social Phenomenology explored the experience of body shaming over four adolescent girls from the qualitative stance. Results of their study indicated that body shaming practice is common to the participants since their middle school age and inclined to be done by their peers. The degree of body shaming rises with age and awareness of the physical appearance. The phenomenology study also elaborates that the shape of body shaming is subjugated by skin colour, body shape and size in the form of verbal communication up to physical violence. For instance, body shaming by a male classmate in the form of comments on the unattractive body or face of the informants in a crowded place leaves them with such pressure and shame. Even though the body shaming victims took the effort to avoid the same treatment to recur by involving in body treatment, among others

such dieting, exercising and learning how to groom themselves, they still feel insecure. Another study in Indonesia of over 50 Social Science undergraduates revealed that body shaming treatments were also received in the form of insults, mockery and insinuation leading to the students being stressed, embarrassed, insecurity and downgrading their confidence level (Trisna, 2019).

WCNC Charlotte (2017) declared that one study found 94 percent of all teenage girls, and 64 percent of teenage boys have been shamed for the way their body looks. This certainly is a shocking fact taking into consideration that everyone, young and old, is now easily exposed to the internet to be reminded all the time of good moral values and what is right and acceptable as norms in treating others.

Factors Leading to Body Shaming

Peer Pressure

This aspect of youth is well known. Being pressured by peers is mandatory in any stage of a youth's life in whatever ways or shapes. It could be positive where it could help boost the youth's self-esteem or it could unfortunately be a negative one that could lead to unwanted and uncalled impacts such as smoking, taking risks or breaking rules. It is indeed inevitable. Youth, especially teens, may have felt that they have "grown-up" but in actual fact, their brain is not fully developed (Scripps, 2021). As to why youth are subjected to peer pressure is quite apparent. An online magazine HealthyFamiliesBC (2019) disclosed that "*...Peer pressure is about being influenced and choosing to do something you wouldn't otherwise do, in the hope of feeling accepted and valued by others. It isn't just about doing something against your will...*" What difference it makes is how the youth handle such pressure.

Peer pressure is amongst the most significant factors as to why youth keep on body shaming others. For one, to conform to the traditional beauty standard stigma that only certain shapes or colours of people would be accepted by society. Secondly, youth would do anything to fit in the circle of their friends and to be socially accepted. Hence, if body shaming is employed by others, it would mean the rest of the members of the group are expected to do the same. Thus, we can say that even though youth are aware of the impact of body shaming, they still do it to comply with the basic rule of peer-pressure, namely to fit in.

Past Experiences as Body Shaming Victims

Doll (2019) shared that our positive and negative memories depend on what we were feeling at the most extreme (peak) point and how the feeling ended. This peak-end theory was first created by Dr. Daniel Kahneman where people remember experiences essentially based on how they feel at its peak and its end, rather than their experience overall. Applying this theory to the existing issue, it is possible that those youth that had had bad experiences being body shamed before would probably find body shaming someone else would be something normal because the feeling of being body shamed would be at the most extreme point that allowed them to remember vividly the negative experiences. To the youth, there could be nothing wrong in "sharing" such a feeling and therefore the decision to body shame others as well.

Lack of Love and Attention from the Family

Not having sufficient love and attention from the family seems to be the most rational and logical justification for a lot of negative outcomes of events. Inflicting anything bad and hurtful to others is probably one of the ways this group of people manage their so called

“shortcoming”. Davis (2021) explained that children who lack parental affection would probably grow up into aggressive, hostile and antisocial adults. Cikanavičius (2019) mentioned that children that lack love in their childhood would believe that love is associated with pain. They would not know what a healthy love looks like and would end up hurting someone else just like what they had experienced in their childhood. Another submission is that people who lack love and attention have no accountability and responsibility for their wrongdoings (Lindstrom, 2021).

Adding up all the above mentioned points, youth subjected to body shame are probably lacking in parental love and attention. When body shaming is something they love to do on a regular basis, they could be categorised as having aggressive and hostile tendencies. Making others feel bad about their bodies would not have any impact on them as they do not feel accountable and responsible for their actions (TeensHealth, 2018)

Lack of Education

This fact is apparent. Knowledge is crucial. One is lacking education if one is below the average level of common understanding of the basic things required in their daily life, leading to lack of senses of respect to others and feeling insecurity. In relation to this, most of the youth tend to suffer self-objection whereby they might look at themselves as an ‘object’ for the purpose of self-evaluation based on their appearance. As a result, they would feel ashamed or anxious of themselves if they, being intimidated, could not reach the standard as ‘demanded’ by their fellow peers in public. In addition, they also would feel demotivated and inferior to their inner-self of their ‘imperfect’ physical body or image. In fact, most of the victims, particularly females, would feel ‘insecure’ towards the negative remarks against them rather than for the sake of their own desire to look good. Campbell (2019) declared that almost a third of British teenagers felt ashamed of their body, with imagery of “idealised” bodies on social media driving their insecurity. Cruz Rosa (2020) reiterated that teenagers failed to realise that their body has not fully developed and that it is ridiculous for them to think that it is crucial to have the so-called “perfect body” when realistically, their body is still developing. To make it worse, they are comparing themselves with bodies of people who are much older than them, like models who are trained to look slim or muscular since it is their job to do so.

Insecurity

Taking the above perspective into account, youth that body shame others would probably do that because they themselves are insecure with their own body triggering them to body shame others before others can say bad things about themselves. By body shaming other people, these youth feel that they could protect themselves from being hurt when they are actually being shamed by others.

The Existing Law on Body Shaming in Malaysia

Bodies come in different shapes, sizes, and colours. Learning to accept all the differences among us is the first step to put an end to the destructive practice of body shaming. It is interesting to explore and measure the impact of body shaming on social and legal perspectives. From the number of different definitions of body shaming, it is also evident that there is no clear concept of initiating a legal action and how it should be addressed among the society. The existing legal framework is mainly relying on defamation law and other civil actions. However, there is no specific legislation or policy to regulate body shaming issues.

Inspector-General of Police, Abdul Hamid Bador affirmed that any act of body shaming by insulting and disparaging someone's body is a crime that can be punished under Section 233(1)(a)(b) of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998, Section 509 of the Penal Code and Section 14 of the Minor Offences Act 1955. (Sinar Harian, 20 September 2020). To some extent, Malaysian law perceives the act of body shaming as putting someone into a mental health issue. According to the Ministry of Health Malaysia, body shaming is an act of cyber bullying whereby it may mark a negative effect towards the victims such as emotional stress, loss of self-confidence, loss of appetite, depression and worse, and it may lead to suicidal thoughts (Yeap, 2019). Body shaming offenders can be charged under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 for the offences within the ambit of Section 233 (1) (b) which refers to 'any comment, request, suggestion or communication' that is 'obscene, indecent, false, menacing or offensive', made for the purpose of 'annoying, abusing, threatening or harassing a person online.' There is no specific offence as body shaming mentioned in the said Act but the nature of demeaning one's reputation does fit the description of the offence. The punishment involves being subjected to a fine up to RM 50,000 or a maximum one-year jail term, or both. Not to mention an additional RM 1,000 for every day the offence is continued after conviction.

Cyberbullying cases often go unreported with victims putting up with the derogatory comments because of the lengthy legal process to seek redress. Defamation is a process of seeking compensation through a legal process. It is unpopular and it must be proven defamatory in nature. There are many instances whereby people condemn others due to their physical appearances. For instance, Zaihani Zain, a well-known Malaysian fashion critic once body shamed someone for making her feel uncomfortable during a catwalk show she attended (Petter, 2018). She mentioned in her statement on Twitter that whoever weighs more than 60kg should not attend any fashion show event as their thighs are spilling over and disturbed the comfort of people sitting next to them. However, she received a huge backlash from Malaysians as well as other fashion critics for her insensitive comments.

Another unanticipated incident happened on social media in the eight-minute video, between Noorazira Pissal or also known as to Eira Aziera and Suharnizan Md Sidek on 18 August 2020. Eira was seen using derogatory remarks against Suharnizan while showing pictures of her and her children during the live stream. The victim filed a suit against the accused and her lawyer, Mohd Rasheed Hassan said the compensation was for the trauma that Eira has caused to the victim and her action of body shaming his client during a live Facebook stream on Aug 18. (The Star, 15 September 2020). This action may become a good precedent to other victims once it is called for hearing. It has merit and a good platform to end cyberbullies. (Mohd Rasheed Hassan, Advocate & Solicitor).

Section 509, Penal Code (Act 574) states that " *Whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any person, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen by such person, or intrudes upon the privacy of such person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years or with fine or with both*". Therefore, a victim of a body shaming case may invoke this section to initiate a legal suit against the offender.

Section 14 of the Minor Offences Act 1955 also laid out the following offence as " *Any person who uses any indecent, threatening, abusive or insulting words, or behaves in a threatening or insulting manner, or posts up or affixes or exhibits any indecent, threatening, abusive or insulting written paper or drawing with intent to provoke a breach of the peace, or*

whereby a breach of the peace is likely to be occasioned, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred ringgit”.

In summary, these are the available laws to secure the victim however little cases are reported and no serious action yet to be taken against the offender. Since body shaming is part of cyberbullying, The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 has become the most popular platform for countering the issue of body shaming.

Research Methodology

The objective of this study is to determine the awareness of body shaming among youth in Malaysia apart from describing the existing available laws relating to body shaming. To do so, a mixed method was adopted where data were collected through online surveys and interviews. This study applied the non-probability sampling where the samples were selected through purposive and judgmental sampling. Data collection involved semi-structured written questions distributed to 496 respondents aging from 15 years old and above using Google Form. Considering the pandemic of Covid-19 that requires people to stay at home to avoid it from spreading, interviews were performed through telephone calls to some legal practitioners, officers of the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and counselors from schools and higher learning institutions. To be specific, WhatsApp and personal messages were applied to get the information while Google Form was used to extract information from the abovementioned youth. Apart from this, the secondary data were in the form of descriptions from online published journals, online bulletins and textbooks.

Finding and Discussions

From the online survey that we conducted, 497 youths aging from fifteen years and above gave their responses where 404 youths were females and 93 were males. 358 respondents were from the age range of 20 to 24 years old and 78 people were between 15 to 19 years old. The rest of the respondents were between the age ranges of 25-29 years old (10pax) , 30-34 years old (12 pax), 35-40 years old (19 pax) and 41 years old and above (20 pax). Most respondents lived in Selangor (115 pax) whereas 77 pax were from Melaka, 75 from Johor, 63 from Negeri Sembilan and the rest were scattered from all over Malaysia. 431 of the respondents were students and the balance of 66 people were not.

The survey asked the respondents to choose from several statements as to what could be referred to as body shaming and most of the respondents answered correctly.

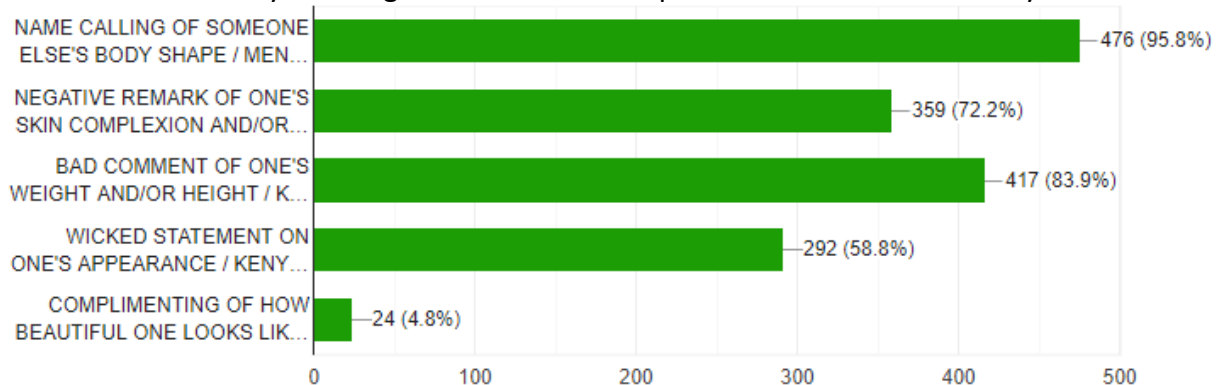


Diagram 1: What can be referred to as body shaming?

There were only 24 people who selected the last statement as a body shaming statement. The above chart shows that generally youth could understand statements that body shame others.

When asked as to how they felt if they heard or read about body shaming comments, most respondents (339 pax) admitted that they would feel angry, sad or frustrated about it. The question required the respondents to answer using the linear scale where number 1 referred to "being receptive" to the situation and number 5 referred to "being angry/sad/frustrated". The majority answered at number 5, 116 pax answered at number 4 and 33 pax at number 3.

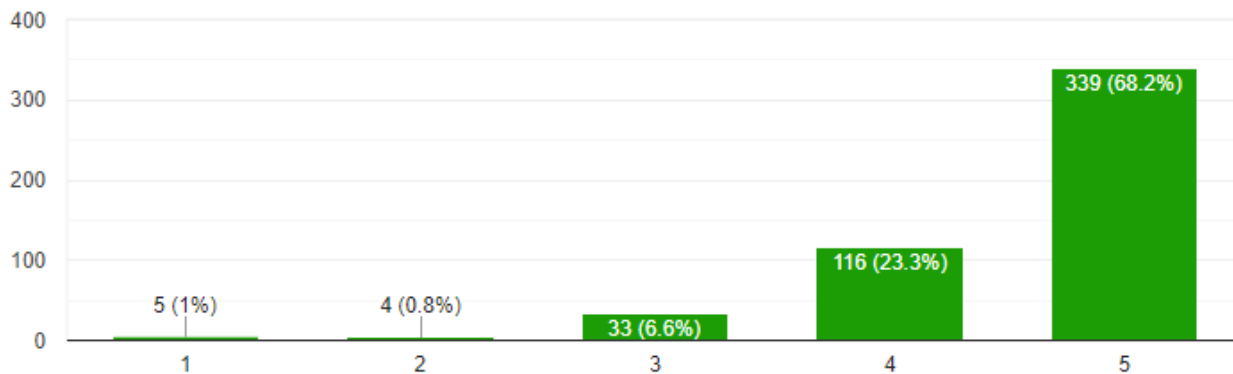


Diagram 2: Reaction towards body shaming statement

We can conclude that body shaming statements could generate negative feelings among youth. This is a normal reaction by reasonable people who encounter or face something bad and unacceptable such as bad comments about other people's physical appearance. This goes to show that there is still empathy in our society and the fact that the youth show such consideration is admirable because they are the future generation that is going to lead the country. However, from the above graph, it can be seen that there were five people who chose number 1 in the scale which displays that they were able to accept body shaming statements. Although the number is small, we need to be vigilant as to the impact it could cause to society especially when peer pressure is symmetrical with youth.

The survey also asked the youth's opinion as to whether they knew of the impact of body shaming. They had to choose from several impacts given in the question and were allowed to select more than one answer. The choices of impact stated in the question were as follows namely; smiling all the time, depression, eating disorder, talkative, always unwell, low self-esteem, not in anxiety, mental disorder and having body dysmorphia. The respondents could select more than one impact.

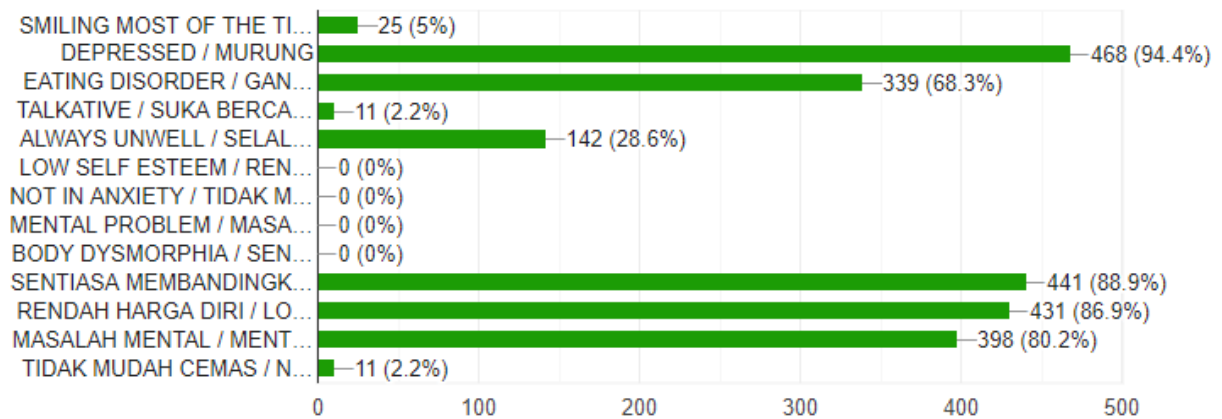


Diagram 3: Impact of body shaming.

Out of the nine choices of answer, 468 pax chose depression as the most apparent impact of body shaming followed by body dysmorphia (441 pax), low self-esteem (431 pax), mental problem (398 pax) and always being unwell (142 pax). The other three choices seemed to be less apparent because they would clearly not be the impacts of body shaming although there were some selections made to them. It can be argued from the outcome of this question as per Diagram 3 above, the youth are well aware of the impact of body shaming because from the literature review and introduction mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, studies have displayed that people that have been exposed to body shaming tend to suffer from among others, depression, anxiety, mental illness and body dysmorphia.

The next question asked in the survey was whether the respondents thought that body shaming could lead to suicidal thoughts among its victims

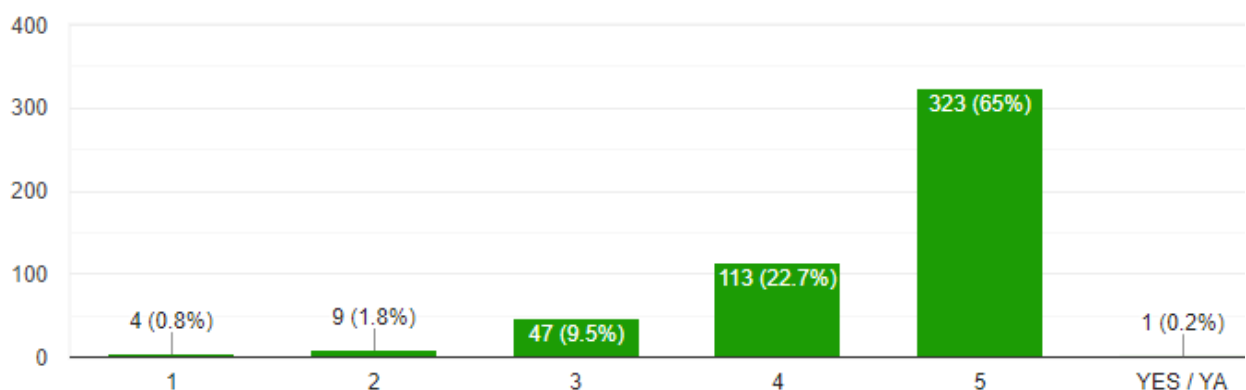


Diagram 4: Possibility of Suicide in Body Shaming Victims.

From the above diagram, it can be deduced that most of the youth agreed that body shaming can lead to its victims committing suicide if not tackled in an appropriate manner. It is not difficult to imagine what a victim of body shaming would do in the event of having been called in a negative way by somebody else. Apart from having to feel sad and frustrated, the victims would probably feel that it is not worth living anymore with the physical look and appearance they have that they thought were not acceptable by people around them. If the victims do not have anyone or any platform to share their frustration and sadness, it certainly is not difficult for suicidal thoughts to cross their mind. In severe cases, especially with the

existence of technological advances today, it is not impossible that the execution of such suicidal thoughts would be realized.

On another question as to whether the penalty for body shaming should be a heavy one, 295 respondents answered in the affirmative whereas 177 youth answered “maybe” and 25 persons felt that there should not be a heavy penalty for body shaming. This displays that a heavy punishment is preferred, probably because of the seriousness of the impact of body shaming on the victims. The penalty should be exemplary to everyone and conveys as a message of deterrence to prevent body shaming from occurring in our society.

Surprisingly, the last question asked in the survey where the respondents must choose between three options of the type of punishment to be imposed to the perpetrator of body shaming namely, imprisonment for more than a year, a heavy fine and extensive community service, the highest choice is the last option. 330 respondents agreed that extensive community service should be the best punishment in body shaming cases, whereas 113 people believed in more than one-year imprisonment and only 53 opted for a heavy fine. It is proposed that the choice for community service was as such because the respondents believed that the perpetrator cannot just be fined because to some people, money is not a problem. But, having to go through community service could be challenging or even gruelling. Some examples of community service in Malaysia are the beautification and cleaning of schools, old people’s homes, orphanages, graves, public toilets and others. Many studies concluded that taking part in community services could enhance one’s personality and self-development. Turner (2021) listed down five reasons why community service or volunteering is good for anyone, namely, longer life, better cognition and general mental health, overall better health, better social relationships and life satisfaction. Wilson et al (2020) disclosed that volunteering could help boost positive effects on earnings.

The people interviewed had also given their opinions regarding this issue. Tuan Haji Mohd Rasheed Haji Hassan, the lawyer who is acting on behalf of a woman who was defamed and body shamed by an influencer on social media, said it is high time that Malaysia has one specific law on body shaming or that the existing defamation laws are expanded to include body shaming so that it is easier for victims to claim against the perpetrator. Apart from saving time and cost, the client will be seen to have received honest expert advice and could make other plans for his/her claim. Tuan Haji Mohd Rasheed further admitted that he would try to base his argument on a prima facie tort (tort is a civil wrong where a person can claim unliquidated damages against another for a violation of civil right). He reiterated that although defamation is the main ground for his client’s claim, that branch of law possibly has a defence of justification or fair comment when it involves body shaming which may eventually reduce the amount of damages granted by the judges. When asked whether it was possible to include body shaming as a criminal offence under the Penal Code or the Criminal Act if the victim commits suicide, Tuan Haji Mohd Rasheed affirmed it saying that it would be the Parliament’s job but mentioned that the next of kin of the victim may still be able to claim under the civil law for dependency claims such as those in accident cases but proofing such a claim may be tricky. Even though body shaming is an offence under s.233(1)(b) of the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998, the police report lodged by Tuan Haji Mohd Rasheed’s client since last year has not been acted upon by the relevant authorities. Also, there are still no civil body shaming cases in Malaysia and he is hopeful that the case he is representing would be the precedent for many more cases to come.

Counsellors from various institutions were also approached by the authors. One of them was a teacher from Sekolah Menengah Dato’ Dol Said, Alor Gajah Melaka, Madam

Dhavamanogary Ayappan shared that there were several previous cases on body shaming in the school but they were not serious. The victims also took them as jokes from their friends. The comments would be treated as serious when the pupils touched on sexual matters and they were usually made by the male pupils to the female ones. The school did carry out certain surveys to determine pupils who suffered from depression generally but not specifically on body shaming or bullying. Pupils with high scores were instructed to have consultations with the school counsellor. Madam Dhavamanogary also mentioned that the school also applies the SSDM (*Sistem Sahsiah Diri Murid*) or Student's Personality System to monitor pupils' discipline and the school will refer to this system before deciding to take any actions against the pupils.

Another person interviewed was Encik Haris Murad Imran Nurginias, a Master in Medical Psychology student from the University of Putra Malaysia, believes that we should start to instil a sense of respect and empathy to the youth. In addition to that, it is necessary to educate the youth that it is wrong to body shame. After all that has been carried out but to no avail, then only punish the youth for violating the moral value of not body shaming the others.

Puan Eyerin Nasir a Social Science Graduate from the University of New England, Australia opined the same saying that before a law is passed, we need to educate the youth and motivate them on self-confidence. According to Puan Eyerin, such acts can be guided. She also believes a specific Anti-Bullying law can solve this problem of body shaming.

The Deputy Director of Melaka Malaysian Multimedia and Communications Commission (MCMC), Encik Mohd Arif Haron, disclosed that it is too bad that such a crucial issue is not always highlighted by the media. The police are also in a dilemma whether to investigate the complaint or pass it over to the MCMC because it is still not certain as to whether they (the police) should carry out the investigation or whether the MCMC should initiate it first when it involves body shaming on social media. In any event when a victim comes to the police station to lodge a complaint, the police will pass the case to the MCMC for further action. However, the MCMC does not have any jurisdiction to file the case in court if it is evidential that the victim has suffered because of the act of body shaming. In any case, the police or the public prosecutor is the party to file the case if it involves a criminal element. Encik Arif feels that a specific law with clear specific guidelines would be advantageous for everyone.

Suggestions and Conclusion

From our research, we conclude that youth in Malaysia are aware of the impact of body shaming. Nonetheless, some suggestions are inevitable to be mentioned in this writing so that the issue of body shaming in Malaysia today can perhaps be reduced if not totally eliminated.

First, besides the role of several ministries in tackling this issue such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Telecommunication and Multimedia, it is also important to develop a government strategy to combat and prevent cyberbullying. Among preventive measures to adopt are to develop an education-specific law and policy framework to address cyberbullying, specifically body shaming incidents among youth and cyber users. This is in line with one of our objectives, that is, to propose legislation that could assist prevent body shaming in Malaysia. When education-specific law is to be developed, it means that it has to go through the parliamentary law making process for it to become enforceable. The content of such a law must include specific provisions as to school's curricular which must incorporate

knowledge and education on body shaming at all levels especially to primary school pupils and also to parents. This shall compel all schools to design lessons and class activities that would achieve the objective of the legislation. Students could also contribute ideas as to how those activities should be carried out to suit their creativity and understanding. It would probably not be an uphill task since youth in Malaysia are aware of the impact of body shaming.

Apart from the school's own curricular on body shaming, schools must also organise regular talks and programmes on the impacts of body shaming to the students. The same goes to the higher learning institutions. Once in a while, students must be exposed to the impact of body shaming through exhibitions and field trips to various agencies that tackle issues on body shaming such as the MCMC or courts or even to the Parliament to expose them to the law-making procedure. These varieties of activities would offer students with idea generation skills to prevent body shaming from occurring.

Next, it is suggested that a specific law on body shaming with hefty punishment and longer imprisonment be passed. This is inevitable since the existence of such law is one of the objectives of this paper. A piece of legislation with specific provisions on body shaming to tackle the issues and offers clear unambiguous guidelines as to how it should be handled including specific suitable punishments is definitely saluted. Where punishments are concerned, it is proposed that they be heavier and more severe to convey the message to everyone as to the seriousness of the legislator with regard to this issue. A heavy fine is necessary to indicate the punitive nature of such a punishment and so is a longer imprisonment. Exemplary damages can be imposed to set examples to all as to the impact of indulging into body shaming. Exemplary damages are damages granted by courts in civil cases where the amount of compensation is a lot higher than the injury or damage suffered by the victim. Judges seem to readily grant such compensation in defamation cases. Since body shaming can be related to defamation by looking at its nature, it is perhaps a celebrated step to include exemplary damages in this proposed legislation so that it would be easier for judges to decide for body shaming cases to give examples to the public to prevent it from occurring.

While we are still proposing a specific legislation for body shaming, it is also essential to suggest that the law on defamation be further extended to include body shaming as one type of defamation. This could be specifically included in the Defamation Act 1957 to give effect to the act of body shaming and avoid uncertainties in bringing claims for body shaming acts. Since body shaming can be reasonably related to defamation, the availability of such a provision under the 1957 Act is appropriate and inevitably required.

Our final suggestion is for a longer and more effective community service for perpetrators. From the survey that we conducted, most respondents preferred this type of punishment compared to heavy fines and longer imprisonment for convicted offenders. Studies have shown community services have many positive impacts including developing empathy and caring attitudes between the participants and the community. This can prevent any destructive and undesirable activities such as body shaming.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the passing of a specific legislation on body shaming will reduce if not prevent such an act among the public. Such legislation would provide for all matters relating to body shaming and would facilitate everyone to understand the offence and the penalties available if anyone is found guilty for the offence.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge our utmost appreciation to the Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka for providing a grant for this study. The grant reference is No: 600-IRMI (GDT2021/1-18). Our special thanks goes to all the respondents who shared their experiences, thoughts and suggestions with us whilst conducting interviews with them using the surveys we distributed online, over the phone and through the WhatsApp's application. We are also indebted to the committee of International Conference on Social Science, Technology, Educational and Management Society (ICSTEM 2021) who facilitated us in the publication of this article.

Corresponding Author

Mimi Sofiah Ahmad Mustafa

MARA University of Technology Melaka Branch, Malaysia

Email: mimi@uitm.edu.my

References

- Brewis, A., & Bruening, M. (2018). Weight Shame, Social Connection, and Depressive Symptoms in Late Adolescence. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 15(5). 891.
- Bucchianeri, M. M, Eisenberg, M. E., Wall, M. M., Piran, N., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2014). Multiple types of harassment: Associations with emotional well-being and unhealthy behaviors in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 54(6). 724-9.
- Bucchianeri, M. M., Eisenberg, M. E., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2013). Weightism, racism, classism, and sexism: Shared forms of harassment in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 53(1), 47-53.
- Cikanavicius, D. (2019). <https://psychcentral.com/blog/psychology-self/2019/09/trauma-lack-of-love#1> – retrieved 21/09/2021
- Davis, B. (2021). How do you deal with lack of parental love? <https://www.mvorganizing.org/how-do-you-deal-with-lack-of-parental-love/> - retrieved 21/09/2021
- Dettmar, E. K. (2016). *Revising identification: fairy tales that transform tradition from within*. Diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
- Eisenberg, M. E., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Story, M. (2003). Associations of weight-based teasing and emotional well-being among adolescents. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 157(8), 733-738.
- Febrianti. (2020). The Relationship between Body Shaming Treatment and Self-esteem in Adolescents in SMA Negeri 1 Babat Supat. Master thesis. Faculty of Medicine, Sriwijaya University.
- Gam, R. T., Singh, S. K., Manar, M., Kumar K. S. & Gupta, A. (2020). Body shaming among school-going adolescents: prevalence and predictors. *International Journal of Community Medical Public Health*, 7(4). 1324-1328.
- Grabe, S., Hyde, J. S., & Lindberg, S. M. (2007). Body objectification and depression in adolescents: The role of gender, shame, and rumination. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31(2), 164-175.
- Lövstrand, L. (1991). Being selectively aware with the Khronika system. *In Proceedings of the Second European Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work ECSCW'91* (pp. 265-277). Springer, Dordrecht.

- Lind, E. (2016). Is body shaming predicting poor physical health and is there a gender difference? Body Shame, Physical Illness Self-Reported Physical Health. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/>. retrieved 21/09/2021
- Lindstrom, B. (2021). <https://www.yourtango.com/experts/brittney-lindstrom/10-signs-person-incapable-loving-someone>. – retrieved 21/09/2021
- Lyness, D. (2018). <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/body-image.html> -retrieved 18/09/2021
- Puhl R. M., & Luedicke, J. (2012). Weight-Based Victimization Among Adolescents in the School Setting: Emotional Reactions and Coping Behaviors. *Journal Youth Adolescent*. 41(1). 27-40.
- Tomiyama, A. J. (2014). Weight stigma is stressful. A review of evidence for the Cyclic Obesity/Weight-Based Stigma model. *Appetite*, 82, 8-15.
- Fauzia, T. F., & Rahmijati, L. R. (2019). Memahami pengalaman body shaming pada remaja perempuan. *Interaksi Online*, 7(3), 238-248.
- Trisna, S. (2019). The influence of body shaming toward FISIP Airlangga University Students Behaviour Pattern. *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences*. 11 (2). 16-24.
- Turner, J. (2021). <https://www.trustbridgeglobal.com/blog/2021/1/25/5-reasons-volunteering-is-good-for-you?> – retrieved 19/10/2021
- Wilson, J., Mantovan, N., & Sauer, R. M. (2020). The economic benefits of volunteering and social class. *Social Science Research*, 85, 102368.
- Zainal, A. B. Is Body Shaming a Crime?. <https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/625/pdfs/-> retrieved 10/10/2021