

## Dieting Beliefs among Adolescent Girls

Amina Muazzam

Department of Applied Psychology  
Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan

Tabindah Waheed, Samina Ahmed & Sahira Muzaffar

Department of Clinical Psychology  
Lahore School of Management, University of the Lahore

The core objective of this study stays in determining dieting beliefs of adolescent girls. How body image is influenced by dieting beliefs; what role does media and societal pressure play in forming dieting beliefs in adolescent girls and how the eating habits of adolescent girls are influenced as a result of the formed dieting beliefs. Qualitative research design was used in order to get in-depth information related to dieting beliefs of adolescent girls. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six adolescent girls aged between 15-19 years. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the responses given by the participants. The study revealed that dieting beliefs are highly influenced by body image. Societal pressure and media plays a significant role in modifying dieting habits of girls. In addition, dieting beliefs are also influenced by eating habits of adolescent girls.  
*Keywords.* dieting beliefs, body image, societal pressure, media.

Dieting can be defined as a practice of attempting to attain or maintain a certain body weight. These dieting choices are often influenced by a variety of factors that could be ethical or religious beliefs, medical need or personal desire to lose weight. But all diets cannot be regarded as healthy. Some people follow diets which are unhealthy through habits rather through a witting choice to consume healthy foods. It applies to eating “junk food” and western diet (Maloney, McGuire, Daniels, & Specker, 1989).

People have different belief systems regarding health practices. These beliefs systems may include attitudes toward particular foods, liking and disliking any specific food, attitudes toward exercise and avoiding certain food items. Adolescents have become very conscious about side effects of food items. Weight control practices can be associated with different dieting beliefs such as alterations in eating habits and/or exercise frequency (Zhen, Ma, Zhao, Yang, & Wen, 2018).

Dieting beliefs may shape the self- perceptions and attitudes of adolescents that may contribute to body dissatisfaction and its related behaviors intended at changing their body shape and size. Many young women desire to be perfect when it comes to their body shape and they depict their ideal body figure as tall, smart, thin and beautiful. To attain this ideal figure, women follow some dieting beliefs and put a real physical effort to attain it (Ng, et al., 2014).

An individual’s diet, physical health and body image perception is influenced by his knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about health practices. Generally, appearance and specifically, body image have become very important conceptions in today’s societies. This prominence is abundantly displayed on billboard, shop windows,

magazines, in ordinary conversation of individuals and in form of money, time and effort put in attaining and maintaining beauty through clothes, hair, dieting and other everyday practices (Yanovski, 2015).

In pursuit of idealized beauty, greater female body shape and other factors, women have to compete with other women, primarily through the exhibiting signs of health and fertility. These experiences might lead women to some dieting beliefs: a strategy to adapt in order to maximize fitness by focusing on their appearance and trying to exhibit signs of health and youthfulness (Sánchez-Carracedo et al., 2013). Electronic, print media and social pressure promotes the ideal-thin body and this has widespread contribution to dieting beliefs systems among women. A related message by media and social pressure is that people have control over their diet as suggested through magazines and diet books, and that they can achieve what they want to look like. Thus, these messages not only display that how one should look like but also suggest that ideal body figure can be attained with small effort (Sánchez-Carracedo et al., 2013).

The media not just emphasizes that self-worth and dignity of females should be based on appearance, but also displays a powerful cultural ideal of female beauty that is becoming almost unreachable (Richins, 1991). Moreover, after a busy working day, we are faced with temptations like drinking a cola or eating a delicious cake. In such situations, immediate desire to indulge in pleasant behavior like drinking a cola can interfere with our long term goals like, being healthy or losing weight (Yanovski, 2015).

Motivational conflict or cognitive dissonance occurs when human’s desire about perfect health status interacts with the health goals (Festinger, 1957). In this situation, people use or employ Compensatory Health Beliefs (CHB) one possible strategy to decrease this struggle. CHBs are the beliefs that negative consequences of an unhealthy yet pleasurable behavior can be covered by carrying out a healthy behavior (Rabiau, 2006). To resolve cognitive dissonance, people tend to convince themselves that eating the cake or drinking a cola will not harm them because they exercise the whole day. Women with compensatory behaviors remain unsuccessful in commitment to their dieting beliefs (Festinger, 1957).

## Theoretical Framework

**Socio-cultural model of body image.** The socio-culture model of body image has proposed that there are socio-culture ideals of beauty that are inherited via variety of socio-culture channels. Individuals, eventually and unconsciously, internalize such ideals and they work towards meeting that set ideals and function accordingly (Rainer & NEAGU, 2015).

**Health Belief Model.** Theories from health psychology and social psychology aimed to explain the relation among knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, skills and environmental influences. For example, the Health Belief Model (HBM) tries to explain and anticipate health behaviors by emphasizing on the attitudes and beliefs of individual. The HBM was proposed in 1950s to in order to explicate why medical programs offered by U.S Public Health Services were mostly unsuccessful (Hochbaum, 1958). The following four perceptions are regarded as the main concepts of model:

**Perceived seriousness.** This concept explains the seriousness and severity of a disease perceived by individuals. It not only comes from medical information or knowledge about that disease but also from a person's beliefs about the effects and difficulties of that disease that comes along.

**Perceived susceptibility.** Personal risk or susceptibility is one of the mighty perceptions involved in encouraging people to adopt healthier behaviors. People who perceive the risk more are more likely to engage in healthier behaviors. It is only coherent when people believe that they are at risk for a disease, they will be more on the verge to do something to prevent its occurrence.

**Perceived benefits.** The concept of perceived benefits is opinion of a person in the value or usefulness of a new behavior in decreasing the chance of developing a disease. It is the believed effectiveness of strategies designed to minimize the warning of disease.

**Perceived barriers.** The last construct of HBM model addresses the issue of perceived barrier to change. This is the assessment of an individual of the obstacles in the way of their acquiring a new behavior. These are the negative results that might happen potentially and may be a result of adopting particular health actions whether of physical, psychological and financial nature.

**Cues to action.** In addition to above mentioned four beliefs, the HBM suggest that cues to action also influence behavior. Cues to action include certain events, people or things that make people to change their behavior. Example includes a family member suffering from an illness, media reports, advice from others etc.

**Self-efficacy.** In 1988 self-efficacy was also added to the original four beliefs of HBM. It is the belief that represents one's own ability to act upon something (Bandura, 1977). People generally do not attempt to do something new unless they think that they can do it. If someone believes a new behavior is beneficial (perceived benefit) but does not think they are able to do it (perceived barriers) probability is that it will not be attempted.

Many studies over the decades have probed the ways in which people's beliefs about their control over their body weight are associated to their weight-control efforts. For instance, in majority of cases, people with belief system about regulating their weights falls under two categories, those who exhibits external locus of control i.e., they follow pattern of controlling it through dieting and weight loss program and secondly, those people who have external locus of control while considering fate or chance as a determinant of present weight. (Saltzer, 1982). Interestingly, people with external locus are more focused towards actively managing their

weight and are much likely to get successful about shedding desirable weight. (Scotland & Zuroff, 1990).

In the same line, Lapointe, et al., (2015) conducted a study to identify women's salient beliefs about health and eating blogs with female internet user living in Quebec, Canada. It was a qualitative study conducted to identify the women's salient beliefs about healthy eating blogs written by dieticians. Results revealed interesting findings that the women in this study valued the credibility of healthy eating blogs written by dieticians and the contact with dieticians they provided. Identifying salient beliefs underlying women's perceptions of using such blogs provides an empirically supported basis for the design of knowledge translation interventions to help prevent chronic diseases.

Similarly, Sedibe et al., (2014) conducted a qualitative study in rural South Africa sub-district through semi-structured "duo-interviews" with 11 pairs of adolescent female friends aged between 16-19 years. The results highlighted the need to preserve the knowledge and practice of consuming locally grown and traditional food items in a population that is undergoing nutrition transition, with limited access and food availability as barriers to healthy eating practices. School feeding programs need to be strengthened and improved as a facilitator to healthy eating, and breakfast eating should be considered as part of the feeding program. Walking to school, cultural dance, and extramural activities can be encouraged and employed as useful facilitators to improving physical activity among rural adolescent girls. It will be a good remedy where the prevalence of overweight and obesity is on the increase.

Mallick, Ray and Mukhopadhyay (2014) conducted a systematic literature review on adolescents eating behaviors and food choices and probable factors implying in it. This review found that eating behaviors like dieting, fasting, skipping meals, and eating fast food are found to be high among adolescent girls both from western and non-western countries. Adolescents from western countries follow more interrupted eating behavior and get more worried over their body weight as compared to adolescents from non-western countries. This review identified a good number of factors influencing the body weight concern and eating behaviour of adolescent girls. Studies also identified that mass media, peer pressure, and culture were the main contributors among all.

Mukharjee, Underwood, Stewart, Ivey and Kanya (2013) conducted a research on the views of Asian Indians regarding diet and health in United States. This research was the part of a larger study of older Asian Indians and their risk of acquiring obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. This study revealed that inequality in providing health facilities due to race and ethnicity were an increasing public health concern in the United States. For Asian Indians, behavioral risks were especially important to understand the given dissimilar proportions of burdens of cardiovascular conditions, diabetes and metabolic disorders.

Leske, Strodl and Xiang-Yu-Hou, (2012) conducted semi structured interviews with (21) overweight/obese adults for finding out the determinants of dieting and non-dieting approaches in overweight/obese Australian adults. Analysis showed several categories which differentiated between acquiring a dieting or non-dieting approach. Included categories showed the significance of each approach such as weight, health behavior and body image. Categories also exhibited external and internal factors about success, failure and attitudes established about dieting programs and personal freedom. Most significant categories emerged were perceived body image, identity associated with changing time as major factors behind dieting and non-dieting perspectives.

Ludwig, Cox and Ellahi, (2011) guided a qualitative study to probe the health perceptions, diet and social construction of obesity and how this involves the installation and maintenance of a healthier diet in Pakistani women in UK. Pakistani women in Great Manchester took part in focus group and one-to-one discussions. Semi-structured interviews employing fabricated sketch and body shape images were used to determine the participants' beliefs regarding diet, overweight and risk of type 2 diabetes. The fifty-five participants did not have the motivation to address weight gain and were unaware of the relation between weight gain and type II diabetes

A study was conducted on body mass index, perception of dieting pattern among prepubertal female students and menarche. Sample comprised of 51 students from local schools and questionnaire was conducted over them comprising of questions related to eating behaviors, weight control and overall health status and menstrual cycle patterns. It was concluded that female students post menstrual cycles had increased Body mass index as compared to female students who were not into menstrual pattern, yet which eventually led to conclusion that dieting is important for female students with increased BMI and reported to exhibit following weight loss programs including exercise regime (Abraham and O'Dea, 2001).

Rasheed, Al-Kunji, Al-Saffar, Al-Abdul-Karim and Al-Thawadi, (1999) conducted a qualitative research on Arab women living in hostels about their healthy diet. Students from college, residing in hostels with dietary history were taken as target sample. Questionnaire was conducted over them for a time span of one week. The study resulted that to decrease the chance of malnutrition among young college women, there is a need to educate them about nutrition and adoption of healthy eating habits within the context of a healthy lifestyle.

Body image satisfaction and weight loss beliefs and behaviors were evaluated in 341 girls and 221 boys. Nearly two-thirds of girls and boys believed being slimmer would have an effect on their lives, but the majority of girls believed this would be positive while the majority of boys believed this would be negative (Paxton et al., 1991).

All these studies described above illustrate how dieting beliefs and dietary habits affect people specifically adolescent girls, their body image and how dieting beliefs get affected by social pressure including family and peer pressure; and media. Finding from this former research function as an impulse for present study. The objective of present study is to explore the dieting beliefs of adolescents which are usually influenced by media and social pressure and also related with gaining of ideal body figure as suggested by previous literature. The focus of this study would be to explore the kind of dieting beliefs adolescents possess currently. Qualitative research design would be used to explore the reasons and impacts of dieting beliefs among adolescents in an in-depth manner (Stotland & Zuroff, 1990). The present study would explore these dieting beliefs in order to understand what actually these dieting beliefs are and how do they affect the overall health of adolescents.

## Objectives

As women, researchers can highly identify with this particular issue as most of the girls these days are sacrificing their basic health and nutrient values for the sake of getting acceptable according to the societal measures and standards. Moreover, it focuses on the psychosocial aspects of dietary habits and beliefs in adolescent

girls, which can help society at large by spreading the awareness about the reasons and impact of certain dieting beliefs of adolescents and how are those beliefs influencing the health and lifestyle of the youth at massive level. In Pakistan, the phenomenon of dieting beliefs has not much been studied so this study would be a valuable addition in to the literature.

## Research Questions

1. What are the dieting beliefs of adolescent girls?
2. What role dieting beliefs play in maintaining body image?
3. What is the role of media in promoting different dieting beliefs in adolescent girls?
4. What is the impact of social pressure on dieting beliefs of adolescent girls?

## Method

### Sample

Sample consisted of 6 adolescent girls aged between 15-19 years. The sample was taken from a public college in Lahore using purposive sampling technique.

### Instrument

Semi-structured interview guide was prepared based on objectives and research questions of the study. Attaining demographic information was part of guide. Questions were kept open-ended in order to attain maximum information out of respondents.

### Procedure

Verbal consent was taken from each participant. Participants were debriefed about the topic and objective of the study and also provided the chance to ask any question that they had in their mind. Each participant was encouraged to give correct responses. It was promised that the results would be kept confidential, with no direct benefit to those participants and no adverse effects to those who did not. Pseudo names were given to the study participants.

During Thematic Analysis data collection process familiarization with data was developed. Preliminary codes were assigned to data in order to describe the content. Patterns/themes were searched in codes across the different interviews. Themes were reviewed and defined and appropriate names were given to them.

## Results

Four Major themes emerged out of data while keeping the dietary beliefs under consideration. Every Major theme consisted of various sub-themes which are explained briefly within every major theme.

Table 1  
*Verbatim of the Participants and Initial Codes*

Participants	Verbatim	Initial Codes
Humaira	<i>'I'm not satisfied with my current figure, I want to be smart. Therefore I do some dieting practices such as eating less, light breakfast, minus out fast food and</i>	(Figure, Dieting practices) Body Image and Eating

	<i>fried oily edibles. I do exercise not excessive but do a walk after every meal.'</i>	Behaviour
Maha	<i>Obese people should do diet, as dieting makes a person satisfied with wanted figure because less you eat less you gain weight.</i>	(Dieting, Wanted figure) Eating Behavior and Body Image
Aneesha	<i>"Dieting has a great effect on body, but someone does not believe that dieting is a healthy thing. By taking healthy meals or diet one can maintain her body figure."</i>	(Dieting, Body Figure) Body Image and Eating Behavior
Asma	<i>"Media change my perception of figure. As I am much in touch with magazines and hollywood movies, the models in media influence me to gain slim figure."</i>	(Media, Perception of figure, magazine and hollywood movies) Media & Body Image
Rabia	<i>Now-a- days, everybody wants to be smart and attractive. Because overweight or underweight people have to face some kind of criticism. As for as my concern I want to be look physically attractive and smart.</i>	(Facing Criticism, Attractive and smart) Societal Pressure& Body Image
Ayesha	<i>Media pressurized that girls should be look slim, smart and thin. Because different fashion shows and dramas portray very smart and thin girls. Young girls influenced by these T.V models to be looked like them."</i>	Fashion shows, Dramas, T.V models) Media

Table 2  
Major Theme & Sub-themes Dieting Beliefs of Adolescent Girls.

Major theme	Sub-themes
Body image	Negative, not satisfied, need perfection
Media	Very influencing, role of favorite actors, celebs gym out of fashion, expectations of boy/fiancés
Societal pressure	Role of families and friends, trend of having slim figure, marriages dependent upon it
Eating behaviors	Don't like eating much, smaller meals, cutting off sugar and heavy food, following various diet plans

An individual's diet, physical health and body image perception is influenced by ones' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about health practices. There are some underlying beliefs in adolescent girls regarding to weight, shape, eating habits. These beliefs have certain effects at high level on adolescent's health and life style.

Most of girls showed almost same kind of concern and responses accordig to their experiences and knowledge. All the interviewed girls agreed that there should be an eating schedule. According to the participants eating schedule can benefit in various ways as eating on proper time makes a person physically fit. One thing which is most important to be noted is that all participants gave same response that unsuccessful dieting is due to lack of effort, there is no role of fate in physical figure of anyone. So, all types of dieting depend on individual effort and their beliefs regarding to health practices.

**Body Image**

The first major-theme which arises out of data is essential in significance. Appearance, generally and body image, specifically, have become very important concepts in today's societies. Image of the body is most significant to adolescent girls' definition of self, because they use to be pressurized to believe that general look is an important basis for self-valuation and for valuation by others. All respondent showed the same concern that they are not satisfied with their present figure. So they do some dieting practices to attain ideal figure. As Humaira reported that,

*'I'm not satisfied with my current figure, I want to be smart. Therefore, do some dieting practices such as eating less, light breakfast, minus out fast food and fried oily edibles. I do exercise not excessive but do a walk after every meal.'*

For Humaira, her figure should be somewhat smart. Such concerns motivate adolescent girls to do some dieting practices. Similarly Maha stated that

*Obese people do dieting, as dieting makes a person satisfied with wanted figure because less you eat less you gain weight.*

For Maha, obesity is controllable issue. She thinks that it is in the hand of a person to control his weight. Such kind of belief helps the over-weighted people to lose their weight with their own efforts. On the other side Aneesha stated her response that

*"Dieting has a great effect on body, but someone does not believe that dieting is a healthy thing. By taking healthy meals or diet one can maintain her body figure."*

For Aneesha, one has to be conscious about dieting practices. Because it not necessary that dieting is a healthy practice. Within dieting some women lose important energy by missing out healthy food.

**Media**

Electronic, print media promotes the ideal-thin body and this contributes widespread to dieting beliefs systems among women. The media plays an important role in defining the body image that is considered ideal among adolescents. Fashion magazines, toys, TV commercials, clothes all depict an image for girls. Media, no doubt create awareness in adolescents relating to diet, but it also plays negative role in one's life. The depiction of idealized women in media has a negative effect among adolescent girls who perceive their figure. This can lead to some disturbed eating behaviors. Asma reported that,

*"Media changed my perception of figure. As I am much in touch with magazines and hollywood movies, the models in media influence me to gain slim figure."*

For Asma, print and electronic media has great impact on women's perception of figure. Pakistani women spend much time of

the day watching morning shows and weight control programs. These T.V shows motivate the women to do dieting practices.

Similarly, Rabia stated that,

*Now-a- days, everybody wants to be smart and attractive. Because overweight or underweight people have to face some kind of criticism. As for as my self-concerns, I want to be look physically attractive and smart.*

For Rabia, media emphasizes very much on the women's self-worth and beauty based only on physical appearance.

Ayesha reported,

*"Media pressurizes that girls should be look slim, smart and thin. Because different fashion shows and dramas portray very smart and thin girls, young girls influenced by these T.V models to be looked like them."*

For Ayesha, media exaggerates the slim-body image in T.V programs. Due to media, adolescents do not realize that images shown in commercials are often not real.

Maha stated her response that,

*There is a common issue now days that people who searching out a girl for his son for marriage. They also like slim and smart girl. And also gents dislike overweight women. So people liking or disliking have much influenced by media*

For Maha, men also like smart women, which makes girls to be more conscious about their figure.

#### **Societal Pressure**

Expectations which are unrealistic in nature from the peers, and society contributes to make adolescents to believe that they must follow through any obstacles to make themselves appear what the media wants them to look like and not what they already are. Peer and parental criticism is the first factor which develops dissatisfaction with the body image and eating habits. Direct comments of parents especially mother on her daughter's weight or figure make young girls more conscious and anxious. But on the other side, parents and peers group also play positive role. They encourage their daughters to look smart through different ways. As Ayesha reported that,

*My mama pressurizes me to lose some weight. She restrains me from eating fast food all the time. My grandmother also criticizes me as overweight.*

Similarly, Asma stated that,

*Family members, especially my cousins make fun of my figure. They call me as "moti"(fat) and ask me to eat less. Their comments embarrass me a lot.*

For Asma, comments on physical appearance always make the girls conscious about their dieting. Peer's comments make them to concern about weight and body shape leading them to dieting.

#### **Eating Behaviors**

Adolescent and preadolescent girls usually want to lose weight, even though they are of normal weight according to their age. To gain an ideal body image, adolescent girls engage in different kinds of eating behavior. Dieting beliefs may exercise an impact on perceptions about one's self and attitudes of adolescents/people that contribute to dissatisfaction about body image and subsequent behaviors directed at changing their body shape and size. One thing that is common to be noted in all interviewed girls, they all like fast food and hoteling meals. They all are currently dieting to control their weight.

Rabia reported that,

*Before dieting, I eat much fast food and fried items. But when I became overweight facing criticism by family members and friends. I started dieting and excessive exercise*

For Asma, fast food and fried meals is the major cause of being overweight. It is also noted that Asma start excessive exercise that can acute effects on her physical health.

Similarly, Aneesa state her response that,

*I like hoteling and fast food. I eat fast food more than twice in a day. With this I also do some exercises. Actually I have no control to restrain fast food. I also know that these things make me fat.*

Aneesa's problem is very common in adolescent girls. Mostly girls go to restaurant with their friends and family members where they can lose their dieting plans.

### **Discussion**

The current study has revealed that among adolescent girls, there are different dieting beliefs and the factors which influence those beliefs are body image, social pressure and media.

Dieting is basically a practice which maintains figure and weight. There are lot of reasons for indulging in dietary customs and settings the dieting plan according to that custom. Mostly researchers suggest that dietary habits develop in the childhood or in the age of 15 and become a habit for the life span (Sweeting & Anderson, 1994; Birch, 1999). Adolescence is a time span to develop a certain eating habit (Nelson & Walsh, 2010). It has been debated that the adolescence is a time frame in which young people meet an urge to express themselves and this expression mostly affects their eating habits. In contrast to the children, teenagers indulge in unhealthy food choices (Lytle, 2002).

Regarding food and health, every individual has his/her own beliefs. These beliefs consist of different food choices as well as the exercise and eating routines etc. Many people now days indulge in weight loss behaviors to maintain certain figure and body image or in other words to remain healthy and fit for certain reasons (Shin et al., 2015) Many teenage girls get worried toward their body image and the specific weight gain. Even though many adolescences love to consume the unhealthy food like the junk food, food full of oil and calories, some girls are highly concerned about their body image and busy in different health care practices. For teenage girl, perfect body or ideal body image is most important thing. (Cash & Muth 1997).

Body image is basically the most important concept for the teenagers because they believe that social image of a person is central to them which matters for creating influence on others (Heinberg, Thompson, Tantleff-Dunn & Altabe, 1999). Dieting, eating habits and weight loss dilemma performs a significant part in enhancement of body image. The beliefs regarding dieting are also important because they affect an individual's beliefs regarding food. Mostly the thin body shape is idealized (Wolf, 1990 and Pearce, 1993).

It is valued that approximately 1 percent teenager girls will get an eating disorder and even a greater number of girls are obsessed with their body image (Clarke, 2000). Women need to satisfy their body image with the belief that it is totally natural and genetically influenced (Kay, 1996). However, media has also influence on the dietary beliefs and habits of the teenagers. Research has established the phenomenon that media influenced teenager's dieting beliefs (Berry, 1999). According to Anderson, the women magazines contain 10 times more of the weight loss advertisement and article as compared to men's magazines, which happens to be the same sex ratio for the eating disorder (Anderson, 1992). Those women magazines mostly come with the cover that offer training for the weight loss (Berg, 1997). For the adolescent, the message is mostly

the thin figure and to avoid fat food for the wonderful life (Pipher, 1994). This type of media influence cannot be undermined and its effects are clearly evident in society which are supported by the verbatim of study interviewees,

The effect of the magazines which includes advertisement, cover and articles give the inspiration of fashion diet for the teenagers (Berry, 1999). Weight loss comparisons happen to be the most stressful dilemma now a day on the television (Anderson, 1992). Studies also indicate that dieting beliefs are largely effected by the peer and family pressure. The societies challenge the dieting beliefs and friends and family pressurizes for the ideal body image. Resultantly, girls admire and want to achieve a thin figure for themselves. Adolescent mostly decide by themselves that how they will handle the friend pressure for ideal body image (Pipher, 1994). Studies reveal the need to understand what is important for girls in each custom, may be the value of media and friends as compared to family and society (Berg, 1997). Friend's criticism for weight and their involvement in different dieting plans are also linked with adolescent dieting (Thompson & Cattarin, 1994). Girls incline to resemble with one another in term of physical characteristics and level of attraction (Smlock, Levine, Moodey, Hessen & Shuman, 1994). It is important to understand and consider all the above mentioned factor while interpreting the dieting beliefs of adolescent girls.

### Limitations and Suggestions

There are restrictions in this study that might alter the outcomes shown by this study. All the results reported in this study is based on interview data, which is a self-report measure. Participants might either over report or under report their dieting beliefs influenced by media and social pressure. The sample contains only adolescent girls so using only one specific group limits the generalizability of the results to other groups of people. Also, the sample size was restricted to a single city college. Sample could have been taken from different cities. Participants of the study should be aware of the importance of the study so that they take real interest in the study and respond in a proper way. This study will promote adoption of healthy eating behavior and not for just maintaining ideal body image but for remaining healthy.

### Implications

Implications include for normal and overweight adolescent girls to encourage eating according to standard dietary guidelines. Discourage fad diets, fasting, skipping meals and dietary supplements to achieve weight loss. Advise adolescent girls to be wary of any weight loss scheme that tries to sell them anything, such as pills, vitamin shots or meal replacements. Rather they should be encouraged for age-appropriate physical activity. Given the high prevalence of dieting behaviours in adolescent girls, screening should be included as part of routine health care. Girls who are concerned about weight or shape should be educated about the difference between 'healthy weight' and 'cosmetically desirable weight'. Clinicians should be aware that many weight loss attempts in teenagers are not required or justified on the basis of improved health and may reflect other issues in the adolescent's life, such as low self-esteem, being teased about weight, family pressure to achieve a certain ideal or a serious psychiatric illness such as an eating disorder. For many dieting teenagers, the behaviour is not really about their weight. For teenagers engaging in more severe

weight loss practices, screening for eating disorders should be done promptly and early referral should be made for assessment.

### Conclusion

This research concludes that dieting beliefs of adolescent girls vary from person to person according to the influence of societal pressure, media, eating habits; and body image of an adolescent girl. Dieting is frequent in adolescents of Pakistan. Behaviours to control weight are very common and exist on a spectrum from healthy to potentially dangerous. The most important risk factors for unhealthy weight control behaviours are dissatisfaction with weight, obesity and low self-esteem. Mostly dieting in adolescents is not associated with negative consequences but we must consider the physical and psychological sequelae, including eating disorders, binge eating and low self-esteem. Girls who diet are at risk of excess weight gain over time.

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