

Research Title Gender and Health Inequality in Korea(III): Focusing on Body Obsession and Aesthetic Plastic Surgery
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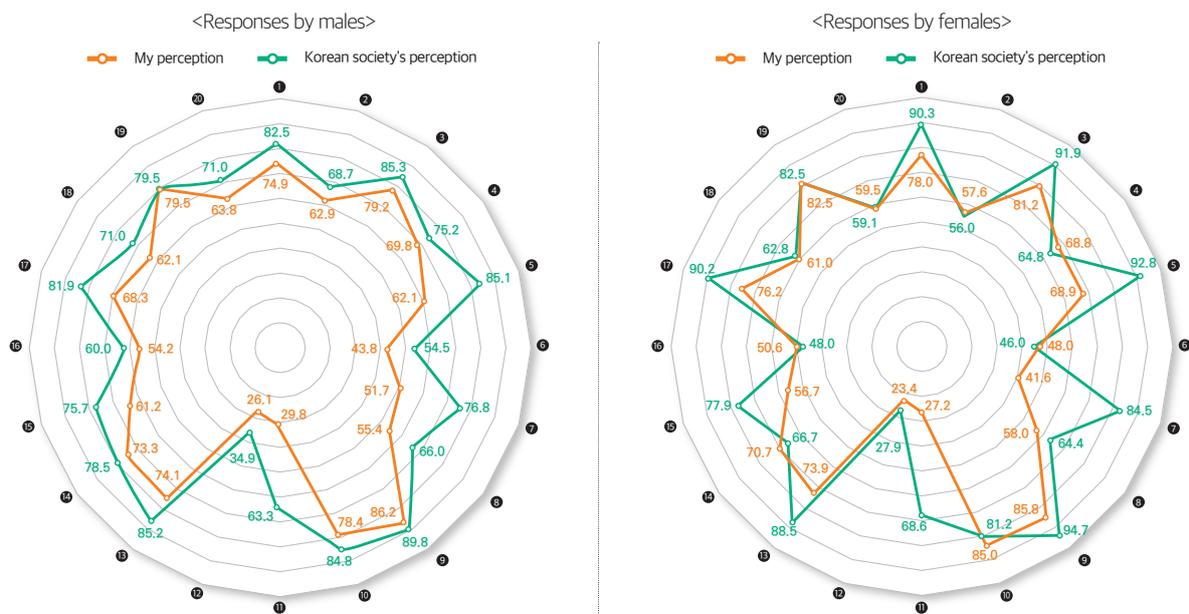
Current Status of Stereotypes about Gendered Bodies and Body Obsession in Korean Society

Abstract

- Body obsession is a common phenomenon observed across women of all age groups in Korean society, ranging from adolescents and young adult women to middle-aged women. Body obsession can lead to distorted thoughts about the bodies of oneself and others, and can also threaten women's rights to health by triggering eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, or depression, suicidal thoughts etc. that are severe enough to require professional counseling.
- So far, the Korean government policies have been showing little interest in addressing stereotypes about gendered bodies, body obsession, and subsequent health problems in Korean society. The researchers conducted the present study to investigate the current status of these issues, and confirmed that: Korean society suffers harsh stereotypes about gendered bodies; the bodies of a particular gender are sexually objectified and used as a means of discrimination; and women's rights to happiness and health are being violated as a consequence.

Stereotypes about the bodies of women and men in Korean society

(Unit: %)

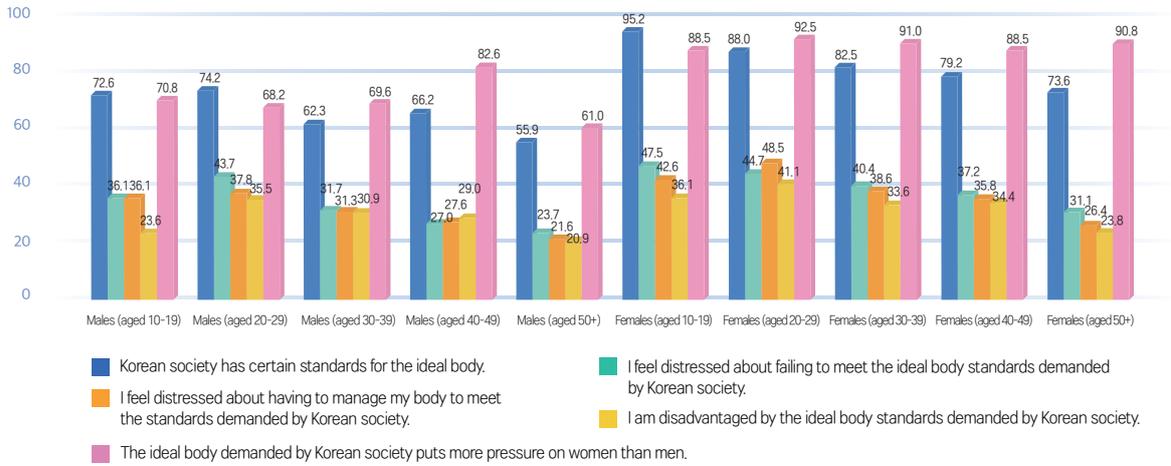


- 1 For women, their bodies are important for social success.
- 2 For men, their bodies are important for social success.
- 3 For women, body management is important for social success.
- 4 For men, body management is important for social success.
- 5 Women should be slim to look attractive.
- 6 Men should be slim to look attractive.
- 7 Overweight women are not attractive.
- 8 Overweight men are not attractive.
- 9 For women, their bodies are important in creating a favorable first impression.
- 10 For men, their bodies are important in creating a favorable first impression.
- 11 For women, their bodies are more important than their capabilities.
- 12 For men, their bodies are more important than their capabilities.
- 13 Women's bodies matter when it comes to dating.
- 14 Women's bodies matter when it comes to marriage.
- 15 Women's bodies matter when it comes to getting jobs.
- 16 Men's bodies matter when it comes to getting jobs.
- 17 Women's bodies matter in interpersonal relationships.
- 18 Men's bodies matter in interpersonal relationships.

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.

Perception of body standards in Korean society

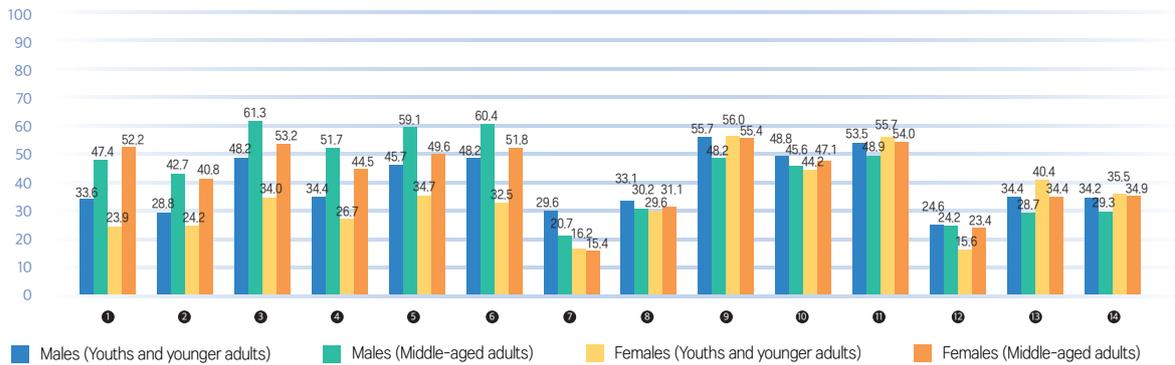
(Unit: %)



Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.

Perceptions of the feminine body

(Unit: %)



- 1 Women with broad shoulders are not feminine.
- 2 Muscular women are not feminine.
- 3 Women with square-shaped faces are not feminine.
- 4 Women with short necks are not feminine.
- 5 Women with no waistslines are not feminine.
- 6 Women who have rough skin are not feminine.
- 7 Women with short hair are not feminine.
- 8 Women with armpit hair are not feminine.
- 9 Men with narrow shoulders are not masculine.
- 10 Men who lack muscles are not masculine.
- 11 Skinny men are not masculine.
- 12 Men with no armpit hair are not masculine.
- 13 Short men are not masculine.
- 14 Men with long hair are not masculine.

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.

1. Background and issues

- ✔ Korean society is seeing an increasing number of individuals persistently investing time and money to look young and beautiful.
- ✔ Especially for women, their bodies have long been regarded as important physical capitals and thus have been subject to constant management and evaluation.
 - ▶ Women tend to experience severe levels of evaluations and discriminations based on their bodies especially in the job market and the marriage market.
 - ▶ Dieting has become part of women's daily routines, and an increasing number of women are now attempting to change their bodies through aesthetic plastic surgeries.
- ✔ This study surveyed men and women, ranging from those in middle and high schools to those who are middle-aged, to examine the current status of stereotypes about gendered appearance (body) in Korean society, and analyzed their effects on body obsession and subsequent health problems.

2. Results and analyses

Survey participants and methodologies

- ▶ Among the population aged 15-64 (as of July 2019), the samples were allocated to proportionally match the demographic compositions by gender, age, and region.
- ▶ The final sample included 2,585 participants for the survey.

Results

Internalization of body stereotypes, self-consciousness, and weight concerns

- ▶ Through relevant questionnaire items, the survey examined the extent to which the participants internalized body stereotypes.
 - At least 80 % of the participants agreed that, "Clothes look better when worn by people with nice body shapes", while at least 60 % agreed that, "When I see someone with a nice body on TV or in a movie, I wish that my body looked like that", which suggested that many participants internalized the stereotypes about the ideal body and body shape.
- ▶ The survey explored the extent to which the participants were self-conscious about their bodies.
 - Roughly 60-70% of the participants reported experiencing concerns about how other people would view their bodies "before going out", "in class or gathering", or "at a meeting", which indicated that the participants were self-conscious of their bodies and body shapes when it came to meeting others and working with others in their daily lives.
- ▶ The survey also looked into the extent to which the participants were concerned about their weights (body shapes).
 - At least half of the participants agreed with the statement "I try to take care of my weight in order to prevent weight gain". At least 30% agreed with the statements "I start dieting as soon as I gain any weight" and "I weigh myself everyday", while about 20% agreed with the statement "I refrain myself from eating fattening food" or "I care about calories when I eat food".
- ▶ The results identified above were more pronounced among female participants compared to male participants, and among younger participants compared to middle-aged participants.
 - The results for female participants were at least 10%p higher compared to those for male participants, with younger female participants showing the highest agreement rates. In other words, younger female participants were more likely to internalize body stereotypes, feel self-conscious about their bodies and body shapes, and worry about weight management compared to other groups. These results imply that younger women tend to experience heightened demands and evaluations associated with their bodies and body shapes compared to other demographic groups.

<Table 1> Body stereotype internalization, self-consciousness, and weight concerns (Unit: %, number of persons)

Category		Body stereotype internalization			Self-consciousness			Weight concerns					Total
		①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	
Gender	Males	17.2	53.6	80.6	56.0	55.7	62.8	42.2	19.0	23.9	20.7	19.9	1,321
	Females	29.8	69.8	85.4	70.9	72.1	82.1	63.5	36.9	36.4	32.2	30.6	1,264
	X ² (p)	57.3 (***)	70.9 (***)	10.5 (***)	62.3 (***)	75.7 (***)	120.2 (***)	117.4 (***)	103.4 (***)	48.2 (***)	44.6 (***)	39.1 (***)	
Age group	Youths and adults	28.6	69.3	83.6	68.3	70.1	74.7	49.4	28.6	28.4	21.3	24.5	1,158
	Middle-aged adults	19.1	55.3	82.3	59.3	58.7	70.2	55.2	27.1	31.4	30.4	25.6	1,427
	X ² (p)	31.8 (***)	52.9 (***)	0.8	22.3 (***)	36.3 (***)	6.25 (***)	8.59 (***)	0.72	2.71	27.6 (***)	0.44	
Gender x Age group	Males (Youths and younger adults)	20.7	61.5	80.3	62.2	63.9	68.4	40.1	22.1	21.9	19.6	24.1	600
	Males (Middle-aged adults)	14.2	47.1	80.8	50.8	49.0	58.1	43.9	16.4	25.6	21.5	16.4	721
	Females (Youths and younger adults)	37.3	77.6	87.3	74.9	76.9	81.5	59.6	35.5	35.3	23.1	24.9	558
	Females (Middle-aged adults)	24.1	63.7	83.9	67.9	68.4	82.6	66.6	38.0	37.3	39.3	34.9	706
	X ² (p)	95.7 (***)	125.3 (***)	13.1 (**)	87.1 (***)	115.9 (***)	137.6 (***)	125.7 (***)	109.6 (***)	50.9 (***)	87.2 (***)	65.8 (***)	
Total		23.3	61.5	82.9	63.3	63.8	72.2	52.6	27.7	30.0	26.3	25.1	2,585

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The percentages (%) specified in the cells represent the shares of positive responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.
 ① I often compare my body with that of a model or a celebrity.
 ② When I see someone with a nice body on TV or in a movie, I wish that my body looked like that.
 ③ Clothes look better when worn by people with nice body shapes.
 ④ Before I go out, I always feel concerned about how I look to others.
 ⑤ I tend to care about how others view my body.
 ⑥ I tend to pay extra attention to my body when I have classes, gatherings, or meetings to attend.
 ⑦ I try to take care of my weight in order to prevent weight gain.
 ⑧ I start dieting as soon as I gain any weight.
 ⑨ I weigh myself every day.
 ⑩ I refrain myself from eating fattening food even if I like the food.
 ⑪ I care about calories when I eat food.

- Compared to other groups, those who perceived themselves as underweight or were actually underweight in terms of Body Mass Index (BMI) were found to be more likely to have: more severely distorted perceptions of their own body shapes (weights); higher overall dissatisfaction with their own bodies; stronger internalization of body stereotypes; higher self-consciousness about their own bodies; and higher concerns about their own weights.

<Table 2> Average body stereotype internalization, self-consciousness, and weight concerns in terms of the objective and subjective evaluations of bodies (Unit: score, number of persons)

Category		Males (n=1,321)						Females (n=1,264)					
		Body stereotype internalization		Self-consciousness		Weight concerns		Body stereotype internalization		Self-consciousness		Weight concerns	
		Mean (standard deviation)	t/F (p)	Mean (standard deviation)	t/F (p)	Mean (standard deviation)	t/F (p)	Mean (standard deviation)	t/F (p)	Mean (standard deviation)	t/F (p)	Mean (standard deviation)	t/F (p)
Body Mass Index (BMI)	Underweight	7.62 (1.60)	0.96	8.03 (2.22)	3.41 (*)	7.45 (3.25)	23.72	8.53 (1.71)	7.15 (***)	8.76 (1.90)	0.29	9.73 (3.68)	7.15 (***)
	Normal weight	7.42 (1.81)		7.96 (1.97)		9.68 (3.00)		8.14 (1.75)		8.66 (1.74)		11.60 (3.26)	
	Overweight/Obese	7.31 (1.69)		7.68 (1.89)		10.49 (2.84)		7.82 (1.82)		8.61 (1.77)		11.21 (2.95)	
Body Weight Perception (BWP)	Underweight	7.44 (1.77)	0.4	8.06 (2.03)	3.23 (*)	8.26 (3.01)	48.42	8.24 (1.71)	1.21	8.77 (1.79)	3.16 (*)	9.72 (3.64)	25.35 (***)
	Normal weight	7.44 (1.77)		7.95 (1.94)		10.08 (2.98)		8.00 (1.78)		8.46 (1.83)		11.58 (3.36)	
	Overweight	7.35 (1.75)		7.73 (1.91)		10.43 (2.80)		8.12 (1.78)		8.72 (1.71)		11.64 (3.02)	
Body Image Distortion (BID)	No body image distortion	7.39 (1.72)	0.03	7.84 (1.94)	0.41	10.16 (2.95)	21.29	7.94 (1.78)	7.34 (***)	8.55 (1.79)	3.13 (*)	11.16 (3.29)	11.63 (***)
	Body image distortion - overestimation	7.41 (1.81)		7.78 (1.95)		10.37 (2.75)		8.34 (1.73)		8.80 (1.70)		11.84 (3.06)	
	Body image distortion - underestimation	7.37 (1.85)		7.94 (1.98)		8.81 (3.12)		8.08 (1.75)		8.79 (1.78)		10.24 (3.70)	
Body satisfaction	Satisfied	7.26 (1.73)	-3.20 (**)	7.84 (1.93)	-0.15	9.81 (2.99)	-2.37	7.87 (1.74)	-5.26 (***)	8.60 (1.74)	-1.19	11.24 (3.36)	-1.26
	Dissatisfied	7.58 (1.77)		7.86 (1.97)		10.20 (2.97)		8.39 (1.77)		8.72 (1.79)		11.48 (3.15)	
Total		7.39 (1.75)		7.85 (1.95)		9.96 (2.99)		8.10 (1.77)		8.66 (1.76)		11.35 (3.27)	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The scores for body stereotype internalization range from 3 to 12, with higher scores representing higher levels of body stereotype internalization.

The scores for self-consciousness range from 3 to 12, with higher scores representing higher levels of self-consciousness.

The scores for weight concern range from 5 to 20, with higher scores representing higher levels of weight concerns.



Social conventions regarding bodies

- ▶ The survey asked the participants about how women's bodies and men's bodies are perceived at personal and societal levels.
 - The results showed that both male and female participants generally agreed that women's bodies and body management practices are important for women's social successes; women should be slim; overweight women are not attractive; women's bodies are more important than their capabilities; and women's bodies matter when it comes to dating, marriage, and interpersonal relationships. In particular, the agreement rates regarding women's bodies and body management were higher for male participants compared to female participants.
 - The agreement rates at the personal levels, as described above, were lower than those at the societal levels. In other words, most participants agreed that women's bodies and body management practices played crucial roles in women's social successes and their social relationship formations. This suggests that women's bodies and body management practices are major social factors influencing women's lives.

<Table 3> Perception of women's bodies at 'personal' levels and 'societal' levels

(Unit: %)

Category	'Personal' levels			'Societal' levels		
	Males	Females	X ² (p)	Males	Females	X ² (p)
For women, their bodies are important for social success.	74.9	78.0	3.45	82.5	90.3	33.26(***)
For women, body management is important for social success.	79.2	81.2	1.69	85.3	91.9	27.74(***)
Women should be slim to look attractive.	62.1	68.9	13.13(***)	85.1	92.8	38.65(***)
Overweight women are not attractive.	51.7	41.6	26.85(***)	76.8	84.5	24.46(***)
For women, their bodies are important in creating a favorable first impression.	86.2	85.8	0.06	89.8	94.7	21.59(***)
For women, their bodies are more important than their capabilities.	29.8	27.2	2.09	63.3	68.6	7.93(*)
Women's bodies matter when it comes to dating.	74.1	73.9	0.02	85.2	88.5	6.05(*)
Women's bodies matter when it comes to marriage.	61.2	56.7	5.42(*)	75.7	77.9	1.74
Women's bodies matter when it comes to getting jobs.	68.3	76.2	20.29(***)	81.9	90.2	36.52(***)
Women's bodies matter in interpersonal relationships.	79.5	82.5	3.78	79.5	82.5	3.78

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.

- However, the shares of responses agreeing with the importance of men's bodies and body management for men's social successes and social relationships were higher at the societal levels compared to those at the personal levels, but were lower compared to the shares of responses agreeing with the importance of women's bodies and body management mentioned earlier. Also, male participants reported higher agreement rates involving men's bodies and body management compared to female participants. This implies that men, as well as women, experience pressure regarding their bodies and body management,

and are exposed to the societal demands to accomplish the ideal male body (image). Nevertheless, the results suggested that women may disagree with the assertion that men experience such pressures, as women experience stricter body standards demanded by Korean society compared to men. These findings confirmed that social conventions and standards in Korea put clear distinctions between women's bodies and men's bodies.

<Table 4> Perception of men's bodies at 'personal' levels and 'societal' levels

(Unit: %)

Category	'Personal' levels			'Societal' levels		
	Males	Females	X ² (p)	Males	Females	X ² (p)
For men, their bodies are important for social success.	62.9	57.6	7.57(**)	68.7	56.0	44.48(***)
For men, body management is important for social success.	69.8	68.8	0.31	75.2	64.8	33.48(***)
Men should be slim to look attractive.	43.8	48.0	4.55(*)	54.5	46.0	18.50(***)
Overweight men are not attractive.	55.4	58.0	1.76	66.0	64.4	0.72
For men, their bodies are important in creating a favorable first impression.	78.4	85.0	18.76(***)	84.8	81.2	5.82(***)
For men, their bodies are more important than their capabilities.	26.1	23.4	2.60	34.9	27.9	14.69(***)
Men's bodies matter when it comes to dating.	73.3	70.7	2.16	78.5	66.7	45.73(***)
Men's bodies matter when it comes to marriage.	54.2	50.6	3.44	60.0	48.0	37.48(***)
Men's bodies matter when it comes to getting jobs.	62.1	61.0	0.35	71.0	62.8	19.47(***)
Men's bodies matter when it comes to interpersonal relationships.	63.8	59.1	6.02(*)	71.0	59.5	37.68(***)

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.



Perception of body standards in Korean society and body anxiety

- ▶ The survey asked the participants if there were certain body standards in Korean society.
 - A considerable number of participants reported that Korean society had certain standards for the ideal body. Many participants especially reported that they struggled to manage their bodies in order to meet the standards, and that they felt disadvantaged in case they failed to meet the standards.
 - Such responses were more pronounced among female participants, especially younger female participants, compared to male participants. In fact, a detailed analysis showed that the shares of those agreeing with the statement "The ideal body demanded by Korean society puts more pressure on women than men" were the highest for younger female participants (91.5%). A large portion of male participants (at least 70%) also agreed that Korean society puts more pressure on women than men.
 - The results revealed that women applied such body standards even for pregnancies, as demonstrated by the majority of female participants agreeing with the statements such as "Women should manage their weights and bodies (body shapes) even in pregnancies." and "Women should manage their weights and bodies (body shapes) to return to the bodies (body shapes) they had before pregnancies". The shares

of those agreeing with the statements above were similar between younger and middle-aged female participants. Male participants also reported high agreement rates regarding the need for women's body management practices during pregnancies.

<Table 5> Perception of body standards in Korean society

(Unit: %, number of persons)

Category		Body standards and body obsession in Korean society				Body standards for women and body obsession among pregnant women in Korean society			Total
		①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	
Gender	Males	64.4	30.9	29.0	27.8	75.9	27.0	55.7	1,321
	Females	80.7	37.8	36.0	32.2	90.7	39.2	67.0	1,264
	X ² (p)	85.86(***)	13.37(***)	14.35(***)	6.14(*)	99.7(***)	43.42(***)	34.80(***)	
Age group	Youths and younger adults	77.8	40.7	39.3	34.8	79.9	30.3	49.9	1,158
	Middle-aged adults	68.0	29.2	27.0	26.1	85.7	35.1	70.3	1,427
	X ² (p)	30.62(***)	37.13(***)	43.93(***)	23.26(***)	15.61(***)	6.73(**)	111.58(***)	
Gender x Age group	Males (Youths and younger adults)	69.4	38.3	35.1	32.3	69.1	25.6	45.7	600
	Males (Middle-aged adults)	60.1	25.0	24.0	24.0	81.6	28.2	64.0	721
	Females (Youths and younger adults)	86.7	43.3	43.8	37.6	91.5	35.5	54.5	558
	Females (Middle-aged adults)	76.0	33.5	30.0	28.1	89.9	42.1	76.7	706
	X ² (p)	118.56(***)	51.85(***)	59.69(***)	30.34(***)	135.8(***)	50.58(***)	145.80(***)	
Total		72.3	34.3	32.5	30.0	83.1	33.0	61.2	2,585

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.
 ① Korean society has certain standards for the ideal body.
 ② I feel distressed about failing to meet the ideal body standards demanded by Korean society.
 ③ I feel distressed about having to manage my body to meet the standards demanded by Korean society.
 ④ I am disadvantaged by the ideal body standards demanded by Korean society.
 ⑤ The ideal body demanded by Korean society puts more pressure on women than men.
 ⑥ Women should manage their weights and bodies (body shapes) even in pregnancies.
 ⑦ Women should manage their weights and bodies (body shapes) to return to the bodies (body shapes) they had before pregnancies.

- The survey explored if participants felt anxious about their bodies due to the Korean society's body standards, with the statements including "I often feel anxious about not meeting the body standards set by other people", "I feel anxious about being disliked by others based on my body", and "I feel anxious about missing good opportunities because of my body."
- The results showed high agreement rates among both male and female participants, and also among younger participants. In particular, younger female participants reported the highest agreement rates among all groups.

<Table 6> Body anxiety

(Unit: %, number of persons)

Category		I often feel anxious about not meeting the body standards set by other people.	I feel anxious about being disliked by others based on my body.	I feel anxious about missing good opportunities because of my body.	Total
Gender	Males	28.6	27.0	30.1	1,321
	Females	37.2	30.1	34.8	1,264
	X ² (p)	21.77(***)	3.01	6.39(***)	
Age group	Youths and younger adults	42.9	38.2	42.2	1,158
	Middle-aged adults	24.8	20.7	24.4	1,427
	X ² (p)	94.67(***)	95.92(***)	92.63(***)	
Gender x Age group	Males (Youths and younger adults)	40.3	37.5	40.8	600
	Males (Middle-aged adults)	18.9	18.4	21.3	721
	Females (Youths and younger adults)	45.8	39.1	43.8	558
	Females (Middle-aged adults)	30.6	23.1	27.8	706
	X ² (p)	122.40(***)	100.30(***)	99.97(***)	
Total		32.8	28.5	32.4	2,585

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.
 Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.

- The levels of body anxiety were significantly higher among the participants whose BMIs (BMI is a measurement used to indicate actual body fatness) were underweight or overweight/obese (cf. normal weight); among those who perceived their body shapes as underweight or overweight (cf. normal weight); and among those who were dissatisfied with their own bodies, compared to other groups. These trends were particularly pronounced among younger female participants.

<Table 7> Body anxiety based on the objective and subjective evaluations of bodies (Unit: scores, number of persons)

Category		Males			Females		
		Mean (standard deviation)	Total	X ² (p)	Mean (standard deviation)	Total	X ² (p)
Body Mass Index (BMI)	Underweight	7.17(2.25)	32	9.63(***)	6.50(2.25)	110	13.07(***)
	Normal weight	5.87(2.25)	740		6.30(2.20)	870	
	Overweight/Obese	6.31(2.31)	549		7.08(2.27)	284	
Body Weight Perception (BWP)	Underweight	6.67(2.27)	224	4.93(**)	6.22(2.24)	171	12.27(***)
	Normal weight	5.77(2.29)	371		6.09(2.20)	367	
	Overweight	6.22(2.28)	726		6.76(2.27)	726	
Body Image Distortion (BID)	No body image distortion	6.18(2.34)	883	2.56	6.44(2.31)	709	1.21
	Body image distortion - overestimation	5.86(2.16)	213		6.61(2.19)	467	
	Body image distortion - underestimation	5.89(2.20)	225		6.25(2.32)	88	
Overall body satisfaction	Satisfied	5.59(2.21)	798	99.36(***)	5.90(2.11)	707	118.63(***)
	Dissatisfied	6.83(2.21)	523		7.24(2.25)	557	
Total		6.09(2.29)	1,321		6.49(2.27)	1,264	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The number indicated in each cell of the table above represents the mean (standard deviation) score for the following items.

- ① I often feel anxious about not meeting the body standards set by other people.
- ② I feel anxious about being disliked by others based on my body.
- ③ I feel anxious about missing good opportunities because of my body.

- The survey also explored the levels of anxiety associated with the changes in bodies due to "aging" and found higher anxiety levels among middle-aged participants compared to younger participants, with middle-aged female participants especially showing higher levels of body anxiety compared to middle-aged male participants. These results suggest that women experience higher levels of body anxiety associated with "aging" compared to men. Notably, the levels of body anxiety associated with "aging" were far from low among younger female participants. This finding confirms that "aging" itself signifies a deviation from

the body standards set (demanded) by the society and can thus prompt heightened demands for body management practices among women regardless of their ages.

<Table 8> Anxieties about aging in terms of the objective and subjective evaluations of bodies (Unit: scores, number of persons)

Category		Mean (standard deviation)	t/F(p)	Total
Gender	Males	8.93(3.12)	-10.05(***)	1,321
	Females	10.20(3.21)		1,264
Age group	Youths and younger adults	9.38(3.42)	-2.37(*)	1,158
	Middle-aged adults	9.69(3.13)		1,427
Gender x Age group	Males (Youths and younger adults)	8.89(3.37)	36.57(***)	600
	Males (Middle-aged adults)	8.96(2.99)		721
	Females (Youths and younger adults)	9.91(3.53)		558
	Females (Middle-aged adults)	10.42(3.10)		706
Total		9.55(3.28)		2,585

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The number indicated in each cell of the table above represents the mean (standard deviation) score for the following items.

- ④ I feel afraid when I imagine myself getting older.
- ⑤ I feel afraid when I imagine my older self looking at my gray hair in the mirror or seeing my hairs fall out (I feel distressed when I actually see them).
- ⑥ I feel afraid when I imagine my older self seeing wrinkles on my skin in the mirror (I feel distressed when I actually see them).
- ⑦ I feel afraid when I imagine my older self seeing my skin become darker or develop age spots in the mirror (I feel distressed when I actually see them).



Perceptions of gendered bodies in Korean society which puts emphasis on femininity and masculinity

- ▶ The survey asked the participants several questions to examine how the ideal feminine body and the ideal masculine body are embedded and defined in Korean society.
 - The survey found that both male and female participants were highly likely to perceive women with the following body features as not feminine: broad shoulders; muscular bodies; square-shaped faces; short necks; no waistlines; or rough skin. An analysis by gender revealed that the results were more pronounced for female participants than male participants. However, most male participants were also highly likely to agree with these feminine body ideals.
 - Both male and female participants were highly likely to perceive men with the following body features as not masculine: narrow shoulders; lack of muscles; skinny body shapes; or short statures. The results were more pronounced for middle-aged male participants compared to other groups. However, female participants were also highly likely to agree with these masculine body ideals.

- The results confirms that Korean society prescribes gendered body ideals, such as feminine-looking bodies and masculine-looking bodies.

<Table 9> Perception of feminine and masculine bodies

(Unit: %)

Category		Agree (%)				X ² (p)
		Males (Youths and younger adults)	Males (Middle-aged adults)	Females (Youths and younger adults)	Females (Middle-aged adults)	
Feminine aspects	Women with broad shoulders are not feminine.	33.6	47.4	23.9	52.2	74.41(***)
	Muscular women are not feminine.	28.8	42.7	24.2	40.8	67.87(***)
	Women with square-shaped faces are not feminine.	48.2	61.3	34.0	53.2	97.07(***)
	Women with short necks are not feminine.	34.4	51.7	26.7	44.5	94.5(***)
	Women with no waistlines are not feminine.	45.7	59.1	34.7	49.6	76.69(***)
	Women who have rough skin are not feminine.	48.2	60.4	32.5	51.8	99.22(***)
	Women with short hair are not feminine.	29.6	20.7	16.2	15.4	48.18(***)
	Women with armpit hair are not feminine.	33.1	30.2	29.6	31.1	1.62
Masculine aspects	Men with narrow shoulders are not masculine.	55.7	48.2	56.0	55.4	11.72(***)
	Men who lack muscles are not masculine.	48.8	45.6	44.2	47.1	2.85
	Skinny men are not masculine.	53.5	48.9	55.7	54.0	6.97
	Men with no armpit hair are not masculine.	24.6	24.2	15.6	23.4	17.90(***)
	Short men are not masculine.	34.4	28.7	40.4	34.4	48.95(***)
		Men with long hair are not masculine.	34.2	29.3	35.5	34.9

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.
 Note: The percentages (%) specified above represent the shares of responses to 'Agree (somewhat agree + extremely agree)'.



Prejudice against obese women and obese men

- ▶ The survey examined levels of social prejudice against obese people and any gender difference in prejudice.
 - Male participants and middle-aged participants, compared to female participants and younger participants respectively, reported higher levels of prejudice against obese women (The scores were 13.23 for male participants; 12.65 for female participants / 12.68 for younger participants; 13.15 for middle-aged participants).
 - However, the survey found no significant difference in gender, age, or gender/age for prejudice against obese men, suggesting that obese people experience different levels of prejudice depending on their gender. The results also confirmed that men's prejudice against obese women were more serious compared to women's prejudice against obese men.

✔ Experience of receiving any comments about the importance of bodies or a need for body management practices from families, friends, or colleagues

▶ In general, younger male participants were more likely than other groups to receive comments from family members, friends, or colleagues about the importance of bodies and the need for body management practices (the scores were: 8.17 for younger male participants; 7.40 for middle-aged male participants; 7.30 for younger female participants; and 6.92 for middle-aged female participants). Also, younger female participants were highly likely to receive comments from family members (experience of receiving comments about body management: 33.3% for younger male participants; 20.3% for middle-aged male participants; 32.2% for younger female participants; and 18.4% for middle-aged female participants / comments about the importance of bodies: 27.1% for younger male participants; 18.5% for middle-aged male participants; 26.4% for younger female participants; and 15.3% for middle-aged female participants).

✔ Experience of receiving or making any derogatory or hateful comments about bodies

▶ About 10~30% of the participants reported that they received derogatory or hateful comments about their own bodies from people they know, such as family members, friends, or colleagues, with female participants reporting significantly higher rates of experiencing such comments. About 5~20% of the participants, mostly males, reported making derogatory or hateful comments about other peoples' bodies.

✔ Mental health

▶ Mental health risk factors, including depression and suicidal thoughts

- Participants were likely to report depression and suicidal thoughts if: their BMIs (BMIs indicate actual body shapes) were underweight or overweight/obese; they subjectively perceived that their body shapes were underweight or overweight; or they were dissatisfied with their own bodies (body shapes) overall.
- Also, participants were likely to experience depression and suicidal thoughts if they: engaged in harmful behaviors to manage their bodies (body shapes); underwent aesthetic plastic surgeries; or suffered side effects from aesthetic plastic surgeries.
- In addition, participants were highly likely to report those risk factors if they: reported high levels of body stereotype internalization, self-consciousness, weight concerns, social conventions regarding female/male bodies, and prejudice against obese people; perceived that there were certain body standards in Korean society; felt high levels of anxiety about their bodies based on such standards; received frequent comments about their bodies from parents, friends, or colleagues; or were exposed to the many risk of experiencing eating disorders.
- These findings regarding the association between mental health and body features were observed differently across gender and age groups, confirming that mental health risk factors for women, especially younger women, were strongly linked to their body features.

3. Policy recommendations

- ✔ **Make a transition into becoming a society that promotes positive perceptions of bodies and respects diversity.**
 - ▶ Strengthen public campaigns and promotions to raise positive perceptions of bodies and to eradicate hateful/stereotypical views on bodies that deviate from societal norms.
 - ▶ Reinforce the active practice and efficacy of educations on appearance/body diversity and body image for developing children and adolescents.

- ✔ **Actively create a gender equal environment by encouraging the industries related to appearance/body to respect diversity in appearance/body.**
 - ▶ Broadcasting and communications, publications, and printing industries
 - Strengthen the regulations on broadcast programs that encourage uniform and gendered appearance/body ideals.
 - Reinforce educations on gender sensitivity and respect for body diversity targeting those involved, including broadcast actors/actresses, producers, etc.
 - Prohibit the sexual objectification of women's appearances/bodies in various publications/prints made from public institutions, and develop/distribute relevant guidelines.
 - ▶ Fashion and clothing industries
 - Produce and display mannequins of various body shapes.
 - Manufacture and sell various sizes of clothing.
 - Enact the 'Photoshop Act' to tighten the regulations on biased and distorted appearance/body-related information provided by the fashion industry.
 - ▶ Aesthetic plastic surgery industries
 - Strictly regulate false/exaggerated advertising on aesthetic plastic surgeries.
 - Mandate prior notice/consent regarding the dangers and associated risks of aesthetic plastic surgeries.
 - Establish the statistics on the side effects of aesthetic plastic surgeries and make active use of them in order to improve relevant statistics.
 - ▶ Labor industries
 - Mandate the use of the standard resume format to prohibit the identification or evaluation of candidates' bodies in hiring processes.
 - Strengthen the management and supervision to prevent body-related discriminations involved in hiring and tasks at labor sites.



Reinforce integrated studies on appearance (body), gender, and health, and promote the studies as the country's health policy agenda.

- ▶ Regularly conduct integrated research on appearance (body), gender, and health.
- ▶ Establish and promote topics on body diversity and health as the national health policy.
 - Reinforce surveys on appearance (body) and body image in nationally approved statistics.
 - Include appearance/body image indicators as health determinants in the Health Plan and promote relevant policies.

Supervising ministry: Division of Health Policy / Division of Health Promotion, The Ministry of Health and Welfare

Relevant ministries: Women's Policy Division / Youth Policy Division, The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family; Student Health Policy Division, The Ministry of Education