



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Body Image and Eating Behaviour in Adolescents Loving Korean Wave Culture

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### Abstract

The Korean wave has developed into a popular culture in the global community, especially adolescents in the last two decades. Cultural programs that include idols/bands, movies, dramas, variety shows, and webtoons are in great demand. The image of Korean women can influence adolescents' perceptions of ideal body shapes and eating behaviors. This study aims to analyze correlations between Korean culture viewing habits with body image and eating behavior among adolescents in West Java. This research is a cross-sectional study, conducted in West Java during April 2023 using the online structured questionnaire. The total subjects of this research were 467 adolescents. The results of the study stated that the subjects in this study were women (81.2%), college students (66.6%), Korean show enthusiasts (66.6%), Kpop enthusiasts (68.3%), Kdrama enthusiasts (77.5%), and webtoon enthusiasts (50.3%). Most of them thought that Korean idols were attractive (96.4%), and sometimes they want their body shape as their idols (46.5%). There were differences in body image and eating behavior among K-show ( $p=0.046$  &  $p=0.039$ ), Kpop ( $p=0.048$ ,  $p=0.027$ ,  $p=0.024$ , &  $p=0.000$ ), and Kdrama enthusiasts ( $p=0.026$ ) but there were no differences between enthusiasts of webtoon. Our findings show the Korean wave culture is one of the causes of adolescents experiencing body dissatisfaction, which is an important predictor of eating problems. Awareness of the importance of positive body image and healthy weight control behavior concepts is necessary.

### Keywords

Adolescents, Body Image, Eating Disorder, Korean Wave, Kpop

## INTRODUCTION

South Korean culture, known as the “Korean Wave” has developed into a popular culture that is very popular with the global community (Kim, 2023). Enthusiasts of K-pop idols abroad, including Indonesia, usually follow their artist's daily life through their artist's official social media to know what their idols are doing or wearing (Novita, 2024). For the example, Field et al., (2001) said in their research that the image of Korean women in magazines influences the perception of female adolescents reaching 69% about the ideal body shape, and 47% are said to be able to make teenagers go on a diet to achieve the ideal body shape. But the media set various information about

this ideal body shape in the underweight range (Veggie et al., 2004).

Body shape and people judgment are one of the main issues in adolescence. The viewpoint that someone and/or others have about their body shape is called body image (Tort et al., 2021; Knezevic et al., 2024). Female adolescents are more concerned about body image than male ones (Wu et al., 2022). Female adolescents frequently practice unhealthy eating behavior in order to maintain their diet incorrectly by reducing meal portions, meal frequency, and resist hunger Kim et al., (2023). Recent studies have discovered a significant correlation between body image and eating behavior among adolescents. Autonomous motivations (eg, for pleasure, health, wellbeing)

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and health-focused exercise were associated with positive body image and healthy eating habits/behaviours, whereas exercising for appearance-related and body image perceptions were inversely related to both outcomes (Panao and Carraca, 2019).

Nutritional status is a state in which the body consumes food and utilizes the nutrients contained in the food. There are several ways to determine the nutritional status of adolescents, one of which is by determining body mass index for age (BMI/U). This nutritional status assessment is considered appropriate for assessing the nutritional status of adolescents, because adolescents are still in their infancy. Food can directly affect a person's nutritional status. The food and lifestyle that is usually consumed daily can affect a person's nutritional status. Unbalanced adolescent's body weight also affects adolescent's eating habits. Body weight that is not ideal is caused by the number of calories the body receives does not match the number of calories needed (Almatsier et al., 2011). The implementation of adolescent nutrition must be considered, many adolescents need special nutrition, such as teenagers who are active in sports and to carry out other physical activities (Stielke, 2024).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Ethical Clearance*

This research was carried out in April 2024. Ethical approval by Ethical committee of Gadjah Mada University No. KE/FK/1199/EC/2023. Participant provided informed consent, with the volunteer form covering research details, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and participant rights. The research strictly adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, prioritizing participant's rights and well-being in design, procedures, and confidentiality measures.

### *Participants*

This study used a cross-sectional study design. Participants were recruited online through WhatsApp, facebook, and instagram. A total of 467 respondents aged 17-23 years old in West Java Province were taken as subjects using snowball and consecutive sampling. The study held in April 2023. The respondents taken were those who completed the answers until April 30, 2023. Participation was voluntary and the participants were not compensated.

### *Data Collection Tools*

Participants were asked to answer a set of questions regarding socio-demographic variables such as their age, biological sex, level of education, fandom of Korean waves (program/ variety show, K-Pop/ singer idol, K-drama, K-webtoon), perception about the body of Korean artists and idols, and whether the participants wants to have a body like the artists. In addition, participants were also asked to fill out the body image scale for Youth (BISY) and Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26).

### *Body Image Scale for Youth (BISY)*

Body image scale assessed by The Body Image Scale for Youth (BISY) questionnaire, was adopted from the study of Farahani, et.al (2022). The BISY consists of ten themes that were identified 1) emotions and behaviors (15 items), 2) body evaluation (6 items), 3) personal characteristics and strategies (6 items), 4) appearance importance in the future (4 items), 5) social models (5 items), 6) perceived social support (4 items), 7) priority of health and spirituality (4 items), 8) appearance importance in social interactions (3 items), 9) perceived cultural values (3 items), and 8) empowerment (2 questions). The part of these findings with a focus on the psychological aspects. A higher score of BISY indicates a higher confident level of their body.

### *Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26)*

Eating behaviour was taken from Garner, et.al (1982) and validated by Mandiri (2015) in Indonesian version. The EAT-26 questionnaire is a 26-item scale encompassing three subscales including (1) dieting (13 items), (2) bulimia and food preoccupation (6 items), and (3) oral control (7 items). A higher score of EAT-26 indicates a higher risk for the development of eating disorders. For all subscales, a five-point Likert scale from one to five was used for scoring answers for each item, where the choice of an answer for "completely agree" was given a five-point and "completely disagree" was given one point for items. Some questions are in negative statements, so the score are the opposite.

### *Statistical Analysis*

First, descriptive statistics were compiled to describe the participant demographics eg, sex, education background, fandom of Korean waves (program/ variety show, K-Pop/ singer idol, K-drama, K-webtoon), perception about the body of Korean artists and idols, and are they want to have

body shape as their idols sometimes. Second, using the chi-square test, all variables were associated to Korean waves fandom (program, drama, idol, and webtoon). Chi-square test were then utilised to analyse for differences between groups, because the data were abnormal (non-parametric, p-value of normality test  $\leq 0.05$ , using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). A significance level of  $p \leq 0.05$  was set for all analysis.

## RESULTS

A total of 467 participants filled out the questionnaire. Most participants were girls ages 19-25 years old (81.2%), while the boys were 18.8%. Most of them were college students (66.6%). As many 66.6% liked Korean programs, 68.3% liked K-drama, 77.5 % were K-idol fandom, and the half of participants (50.3%) liked webtoon. Most of them though that Korean artists and idols were attractive, and sometimes they want the same body shape as their idols (Table I).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants

Variables	Characteristics	N=467 (n,%)
Sex	Boys	88 (18.8)
	Girls	379 (81.2)
Education	High School	63 (66.6)
	College Student	369 (79)
	Labor	35 (7.5)
Do you like Korean program?	Like	311 (66.6)
	Dislike	156 (33.4)
Do you like KPop?	Like	362 (77.5)
	Dislike	105 (22.5)
Do you like Korean webtoon?	Like	237 (50.7)
	Dislike	230 (49.3)
Do you think Korean Idol looks attractive?	Yes	434 (92.9)
	No	33 (7.1)
Do you want to have a body and appearance like a Korean Idol?	Yes	163 (34.9)
	No	91 (19.5)
	Sometimes	213 (45.6)
Do you think Korean artist/actors looks attractive?	Yes	450 (96.4)
	No	17 (3.6)
Do you want to have a body and appearance like a Korean artists/actor?	Yes	179 (38.3)
	No	71 (15.2)
	Sometimes	217 (46.5)
Do you want to have the appearance like character in the webtoon you read?	Yes	71 (15.2)
	No	284 (60.8)
	Sometimes	112 (24)

Table 2 describe the comparison of body image dan eating attitude between Korean program enthusiasts and not. Based on the analysis ( $p \leq$

0.05), social models ( $p=0.046$ ) and dieting ( $p=0.039$ ) are significantly associated with Korean program enthusiasts.

**Table 2.** Like/ Dislike of Korean programs differences in body image and eating behaviour

Variables	Korean Program	Mean	SD	P-value
Emotion and behaviour	Like	55.44	11.92	0.452
	Dislike	57.62	10.92	
Body evaluation	Like	19.97	4.37	0.139
	Dislike	20.80	4.38	
Personal characteristics and strategies	Like	20.03	4.22	0.672
	Dislike	20.16	4.39	
Appearance importance in the future	Like	10.59	3.58	0.624
	Dislike	10.21	3.72	
Social models	Like	15.39	3.46	<b>0.046</b>
	Dislike	16.75	3.64	
Perceived social support	Like	12.36	3.36	0.302
	Dislike	12.44	3.41	
Priority of health and spirituality	Like	17.05	2.78	0.772
	Dislike	17.13	2.91	
Appearance importance in social interactions	Like	7.92	2.74	0.532
	Dislike	7.62	2.89	
Perceived cultural values	Like	9.54	2.25	0.180
	Dislike	9.95	2.09	
Empowerment	Like	4.51	1.6	0.869
	Dislike	4.47	1.49	
Dieting	Like	16.29	3.98	<b>0.039</b>
	Dislike	15.29	3.65	
Bulimia and food preoccupation	Like	3.11	1.99	0.668
	Dislike	2.86	1.69	
Oral control	Like	5.54	2.74	0.968
	Dislike	5.80	2.89	

**Table 3.** Like/ Dislike of Korean Pop (Idol) differences in body image and eating behaviour

Variables	Korean Pop	Mean	SD	P-value
Emotion and behaviour	Like	55.00	11.96	<b>0.048</b>
	Dislike	58.68	10.48	
Body evaluation	Like	19.87	4.30	<b>0.027</b>
	Dislike	21.07	4.46	
Personal characteristics and strategies	Like	20.05	4.34	0.756
	Dislike	20.12	4.14	
Appearance importance in the future	Like	10.51	10.36	0.769
	Dislike	3.53	3.82	
Social models	Like	15.35	3.47	<b>0.024</b>
	Dislike	16.9	3.59	
Perceived social support	Like	12.35	3.47	0.542
	Dislike	12.45	3.16	
Priority of health and spirituality	Like	16.98	2.85	0.341
	Dislike	17.29	2.73	
Appearance importance in social interactions	Like	7.82	2.73	0.677
	Dislike	7.82	2.94	
Perceived cultural values	Like	9.57	2.21	0.677
	Dislike	9.92	2.19	
Empowerment	Like	4.42	1.62	0.296
	Dislike	4.68	1.42	
Dieting	Like	16.42	3.94	<b>0.000</b>
	Dislike	14.96	3.62	
Bulimia and food preoccupation	Like	3.03	1.99	0.415
	Dislike	3.00	1.70	
Oral control	Like	5.57	2.76	0.906
	Dislike	5.74	2.87	

Based on table 3 represents the comparison of body image and eating behaviour between Korean pop fandom and not, there are four indicators

associated with. Emotion and behavior (p=0.048), body evaluation (p=0.027), social models (p=0.024), and dieting (p=0.000) are

significantly associated with Korean idol fandoms.

**Table 4.** Like/ Dislike of korean drama differences in body image and eating behaviour

Variables	Korean drama	Mean	SD	P-value
Emotion and behaviour	Like	55.94	11.73	0.651
	Dislike	56.95	11.31	
Body evaluation	Like	20.25	4.42	0.444
	Dislike	20.23	4.28	
Personal characteristics and strategies	Like	20.00	4.28	0.474
	Dislike	20.32	4.26	
Appearance importance in the future	Like	10.43	3.62	0.356
	Dislike	10.57	3.65	
Social models	Like	15.56	3.52	0.309
	Dislike	16.82	3.61	
Perceived social support	Like	12.45	3.38	0.674
	Dislike	12.15	3.32	
Priority of health and spirituality	Like	17.11	2.76	0.691
	Dislike	16.96	3.01	
Appearance importance in social interactions	Like	7.88	2.78	0.659
	Dislike	7.62	2.85	
Perceived cultural values	Like	9.56	2.26	<b>0.026</b>
	Dislike	10.09	1.98	
Empowerment	Like	4.53	1.61	0.086
	Dislike	4.4	1.39	
Dieting	Like	16.13	4.03	0.096
	Dislike	15.36	3.34	
Bulimia and food preoccupation	Like	3.09	1.97	0.184
	Dislike	2.79	1.63	
Oral control	Like	5.60	2.85	0.869
	Dislike	5.70	2.59	

Only one indicator related to Korean drama enthusiasts, namely the perceived cultural values (p=0.026) based on table 4 that present the

comparison of body image and eating behaviour between enthusiasts and who dislike the Korean dramas.

**Table 5.** Like/ Dislike of korean webtoon differences in body image and eating behaviour

Variables	Korean Webtoon	Mean	SD	P-value
Emotion and behaviour	Like	55.5	12.19	0.149
	Dislike	56.86	10.99	
Body evaluation	Like	20.26	4.56	0.305
	Dislike	20.23	4.21	
Personal characteristics and strategies	Like	20.29	4.39	0.915
	Dislike	19.85	4.14	
Appearance importance in the future	Like	10.53	10.39	0.961
	Dislike	3.82	3.42	
Social models	Like	15.92	3.66	0.129
	Dislike	15.76	3.49	
Perceived social support	Like	12.58	3.52	0.869
	Dislike	12.18	3.2	
Priority of health and spirituality	Like	17.27	2.77	0.132
	Dislike	16.87	2.85	
Appearance importance in social interactions	Like	7.89	2.91	0.319
	Dislike	7.76	2.67	
Perceived cultural values	Like	9.59	2.33	0.906
	Dislike	9.77	2.07	
Empowerment	Like	4.46	1.62	0.542
	Dislike	4.54	1.51	
Dieting	Like	16.23	4.12	0.250
	Dislike	15.67	3.64	
Bulimia and food preoccupation	Like	3.08	2.06	0.906
	Dislike	2.97	1.72	
Oral control	Like	5.7	2.81	0.911
	Dislike	5.55	2.78	

## DISCUSSION

In general, nearly half of the respondents were less satisfied with their body shape. Respondents' reflection of how attractive Korean artists/idols (96.4% and 92.9%); most perceived their wants to have a body and appearance same as Korean artists/idols (45.6% and 46.5%) (see table 1). The rapid spread of South Korean culture (Hallyu) has led fans to idolize their favorite celebrities as role models for ideal body shapes and beauty standards. This aligns with a study that found women in Southeast Asia desire tall and slim bodies, similar to those of most Korean celebrities (Natalia & Agustina, 2021). Everyone has opinion about their own body, but sometimes others reveal their appearance as well which can be positive or negative. Female adolescents are highly concerned about their appearance (Dumas and Desroches, 2019). Research shows that women tend to compare their appearance or abilities with others more frequently (Naseem and Afzaal, 2024). One driving factor that plays a role in forming body image is the influence of media which frequently presents people with ideal body shapes as the gold beauty standard (Loeber et al, 2016). If someone's physical appearance does not fit the standards, it will cause body dissatisfaction and wish to reduce their weight (Jiotsa et al, 2021). Furthermore, with limited knowledge and understanding, they might try unhealthy diets. Besides their own opinion, adolescents have a need for others' appreciation in their adolescent development (Jeevarathinam, 2023). The social environments of their inner family (father, mother, or sister) and peers are sources of body judgement (Story et. al., 2002). In 2021 based on a study by Jang et. al., (2021), the Korean wave influenced the lifestyle including the eating habits of *Hallyu* products among Vietnamese. Several manifestations of the Korean Wave that have permeated and become accessible to the public include Korean television programs, Korean pop music (K-POP), Korean dramas, and Korean webtoons (Akilli & Kim, 2024).

Based on table 2, the comparison between like and dislike Korean programs, social models ( $p=0.046$ ) and dieting ( $p=0.039$ ) are significantly associated with Korean program enthusiasts. Social models of health find its roots in the social model of disability and as such is a reaction to the medical model. In this model various factors that play an important role in health, like, social, political,

economical, cultural and even environmental are taken in to consideration. This model can be termed as a community based approach where the focus is on prevention of the illnesses/ diseases. Thus, relevance is given to the awareness programmes and policies related to health so as to modify the lifestyle and health related behaviour of the individuals so as to promote their health and wellbeing. The main characteristics of this model are as follows (Yuill et. al., 2010): 1) Social context in which the individual exists has a significant influence on the health related experiences, choices and behaviour of the individual. The social context includes class, ethnicity, gender and so on, 2) The human body is social, psychological and biological simultaneously, 3) Cultural variations exist in the way health and illness are perceived, 4) Though, biomedicine and medicine are relevant in the context of health, 5) Health and social determinants of health are influences by political decisions, 6) The opinions of persons from non-medical background are relevant as they may provide a different perspective on health. Dietary patterns have been shown to significantly influence the interest in Korean programs ( $p=0.039$ ). Korean programs frequently feature scenes depicting traditional Korean foods such as tteokbokki, bibimbap, ramyeon, bulgogi, and kimchi (Estoque, 2022). The portrayal of these visually appealing and appetizing foods can heighten viewers' desire to try and consume them (Jang et al, 2021). Consequently, these Korean programs can have an impact on the dietary habits of their audience.

Based on table 3, the comparison of body image and eating behaviour between like and dislike Korean pop, there are four indicators associated with as follows; emotion and behavior ( $p=0.048$ ), body evaluation ( $p=0.027$ ), social models ( $p=0.024$ ), and dieting ( $p=0.000$ ) are significantly associated with Korean idol enthusiasts. Emotion and behavior closely related with dietary habit. Watching K-Pop/singer idol, K-drama, K-webtoon can be a way to relieve stress for some of adolescent and this is related to emotion and eating habits. In previous study the result shows the focus should be moved somehow from emotional eating and the consumption of unhealthy food to healthy lifestyle (Ljubicic M et. al., 2023).

In other words, by having a positive body image, someone is 2.21 times more likely to practice good eating behavior. Eating behavior in this study was not gradually recalled within 24

hours and seven days a week with detailed information of what and how much participants ate for every single meal. Dieting are significantly associated with Korean program and Kpop enthusiasts. Based on research, adolescents often skip their breakfast commonly occurs, 21.0% of females often and 10.8% always skip breakfast, compared to 15.0 and 8.1% among males, respectively (Sincovich et al., 2022). Some reasons are intention to diet, school rules of eating fast food, a lack of appetite, and late night meal consumption (Bohara et al., 2021) that affecting the nutritional status. The study also found that 38% of participants indicated abnormal body mass index (under or overweight). The Indonesian Ministry of Health Regulation Number 41 about balanced nutrition guide for 10-19-year-old adolescents suggest eating a variety of food that contains energy, protein, and micronutrients, e.g., green vegetables and colored fruits (Kemenkes, 2014; Toptaş Demirci & Lourenço, 2024) and consume about 34 bowls (/75 grams each) of vegetables and eight glasses of mineral water a day. The Joint FAO recommends fruits and vegetables containing fiber, protein, and micronutrients. A minimum consumption of 400 grams a day will help prevent chronic diseases, including obesity (WHO-FAO, 2004).

Body evaluation or self-perception of the body image among adolescents does not coincide with the body desire. Two different tendencies emerged: while girls aim for a longer, slimmer body shape, boys, in general apart from having at some time felt overweight like their female peers, admit also to feeling too thin. This apparent contradiction can be explained by the fact that boys would like to have a lean body while at the same time desiring a more robust and muscular constitution (and therefore fatter). This discomfort with one's own body perception can not have anything but obvious repercussions in life. This phenomenon has already been well described in many researches.

Only one indicator related to Korean drama enthusiasts, namely the perceived cultural values ( $p=0.026$ ) based on table 4 that present the comparison of body image and eating behaviour between people who like and dislike of Korean dramas. Perceived cultural values came from the results of human thought. Culture describes the habits of human life, such as ways of thinking, daily interactions, art, religion, entertainment, and matters related to meeting the needs of human life. Korean dramas have played a significant role in

introducing the Korean Wave to Indonesia. Their compelling narratives and the visually appealing performances of the actors contribute to their popularity among Indonesian audiences (Halim and Kiatkawsin, 2021). The heightened interest in Korean dramas has prompted a shift in cultural values among viewers. This phenomenon implicate The Korean government using the Korean Wave as both a domestic and foreign policy tool to strengthen its economic diversification, export profile, and cultural and public diplomacy outcomes through linguistic styles, fashion, and food (Lee, 2022), the Korean Wave popular culture in the digital social media age, representation, circulation and consumption in a global context as a distinctive and complex form of soft power. As a pronounced example of the crossover of culture, economy and politics, the Korean Wave is seen to be an integral resource for the creation of a dynamic image of the nation become global popular culture (Kim, 2021). In recent years, South Korean culture has developed into a popular culture that is very popular and attract the attention of the world community, which ultimately causes the body image of adolescents to also be affected by this Korean Wave.

Following the widespread popularity of K-POP and K-Drama in Indonesia, Korea has strategically utilized the Line WEBTOON platform to promote manhwa, or Korean comics, as an element of its cultural diplomacy. Although, its development is not as big as Japanese manga or American comics (Jaehyeon, 2020). Digital webtoon and webnovel platforms are rapidly becoming energizing vehicles for transmedia intellectual property (IP) – referring to a network of interconnected media, popular culture and merchandise emanating from a single creative source. Free accessibility and the provision of comics in multiple languages beyond Korean, which facilitates international readers become fans. The active fans, otherwise known as 'cultural intermediaries', have moved to the forefront of creative industry transformations while building trust among their followers and demonstrating loyalty with the platforms on which they circulate their user-created content Shim et al., (2020). Despite the notable interest in Korean webtoons among Indonesians, this study revealed no significant differences in body image and eating behaviors between individuals who are fans of

Korean webtoons and those who are not, as indicated in Table 5.

## Conclusion

Based on this study, most female adolescents who liked Korean programs, K-drama, K-pop, and K-webtoon though that Korean artists and idols were attractive, and sometimes they want the same body shape as their idols. Whereas, by having a positive body image, female adolescents are more likely to engage in good eating behavior than those with a negative one. Intervention for the cognitive an affective areas, which construct body image, should be addressed to initiate behavioral changes in eating behavior. Consistent with the existing findings, an incongruency between perceived body image and body ideal was indicative of body dissatisfaction, as well as body image distortion.

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## Conflict of Interest

There is no personal or financial conflict of interest within the scope of the study.

## Ethical Statement

Ethics Committee approved the study protocol (Ethical committee of Gadjah Mada University No. KE/FK/1199/EC/2023).

## Author Contributions

Conception and design of the study: AMS, IK; Data Collection: AMS, IK; Analysis and Interpretation: AMS, IK; Draft manuscript preparation: AMS, IK, WA, AR; Final Approval of the version to be published: AMS, IK, WA, AR; All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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