Bullying or fat shaming? The risk factors of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) in teenage girls

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Abstract

This study is intended to provide an overview of fat shaming as a risk factor for teenage girls who experienced Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). The method used in this study is qualitative research with a casuistic approach, while the respondents in this study were teenage girls who experienced body dysmorphic disorder, which the first screening of informants was carried out by establishing a diagnosis of symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder in informants based on DSM V symptoms. Further, the data analysis in this study used holistic analysis of Yin. The results of this study delineate that all respondents undergo unpleasant experiences related to specific bullying of their weight or fat shaming from the surrounding especially from family and peers (schoolmates and playmates). The respondents that consistently encounter fat shaming impacted on their confidence, pride, self-acceptance, self-conception, social interaction, eating disorders, camouflage and body dysmorphic disorder.

Keywords: BDD, Bullying, Fat Shaming, Teenage Girls

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian people nowadays portray beautiful women as having slim bodies, white skin, shiny black hair, sensual red lips, and oval faces. In contrast to the perception of the traditional people, beautiful women were women who had fertile bodies, black skin and long black hair (Savitri, 2012; Wanninayake, 2016). Further, Savitri (2012) explained that the positive connotations related to the beauty standards developed from its denotative meaning will form a metaphor of beautiful women’s images and accepted by the community will form the myth of beautiful women, so that myths turn into ideologies about beautiful women accepted by society at large. Because of this shift in beauty standards women who are overweight are no longer considered beautiful but instead have negative perceptions.

Negative perceptions related to being overweight in terms of health are at high risk of experiencing health problems and in terms of appearance that is not attractive, therefore someone who has excess body weight is considered not in accordance with the standards of beauty in Indonesia and has a high risk of experiencing body shaming or more specifically fat shaming. It is reinforced by Lestari (2018a) stated that teenage girls experience body shaming by 46% and teenage boys by 33.5% with the number of respondents as many as 1000 teenagers of junior and senior high school students in Malang, it means that women have a higher risk of experiencing body shaming compared to men. This was confirmed by an explanation from Huffingtonpost.com, CNN.com, and Vice.com stated that 95% of teenage girls had experienced body shaming and only 65% teenage boys experienced it.

Teenagers who have excess body weight and experience body shaming or more specifically on fat shaming are at risk of experiencing anxiety, secession from the social environment and not confident. This is supported by the result of study from the Center for Advancing Health explained that high school-age teenagers who have excess body weight have the risk of experiencing depression and suicidal tendencies compared to friends who

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have normal weight. The study also shows fat-shaming behavior actually makes people tend easier to gain weight. It was reinforced by Puhl, a deputy director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut, explaining that obese people try to lose weight with diet and exercise, but their efforts are always unsuccessful, which is why they need support from the environment to live healthy and not be humiliated by weight or fat shaming. Gariel Gavin, a neurologist, in his article published in Psychology Today added that fat shaming can increase the risk of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating and other mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, secession from the social environment and the like (Hestianingsih, 2017; Inraksa, Sungkhapong, & Pochana, 2017).

Theory

Phillips (2009) explained that BDD is a preoccupation with an imagined body defect, with an excessive response or a significant distortion of a minimal, small or even non-existent preoccupation. In DSM IV there are three symptoms that must be upheld to diagnose a person experiencing BDD, whereas in DSM V there are four symptoms that must be enforced to diagnose individuals experiencing BDD. In this study the guidelines used were DSM V (Quilty, Ayearst, Chmielewski, Pollock, & Bagby, 2013).

Fat shaming was originally carried out to provide motivation to obesity in order to have the motivation to lose weight, but they did not lose weight instead they experienced an increase in food consumption in their bodies (Hasan, 2016). Fat shaming is a negative comment on someone who has excess weight, fat or plus size (Big Indonesian Dictionary). Furthermore Yin (2014) stated that fat shaming is a mocking behavior or stigmatization of one’s excess weight and forces someone to meet the standards of body perfection.

Fat shaming is a part of body shaming, where fat shaming is more specifically a humiliated body part, insulted or ridiculed, while body shaming is a negative behavior as a form of negative emotional response to appearance, body shape and or body part in yourself and others (Lamont, 2015). Body shaming occurs as a form of negative evaluation of individuals because they are not able to achieve the idealistic standards of beauty that develop in society (Mackay & Fredrickson, 1997).

Furthermore, in Lestari (2018b) explained that some of the effects of teenagers experiencing body shaming are having low self-esteem, feeling embarrassed, worried, anxious, eating disorders and avoiding the social environment. This was confirmed by Gariel Gavin, a neurologist, in his writings published in Psychology Today, adding that fat-shaming can increase the risk of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating and other mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, secession from the social environment, and the like (Hestianingsih, 2017).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative research method with a case study approach, the number of informants in this study were 3 teenage girls who experienced BDD with diagnosis enforcement based on DSM V, data collection technique used semi-structured interviews and observation (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). The data analysis used was (Yin, 2014) holistic analysis consists of 3 stages, namely pattern matching, explanation making and time series analysis.

RESULT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Age (Now)</th>
<th>Age (When Experiencing Fat Shaming)</th>
<th>BDD Diagnosis Result Based on DSM V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NANA</td>
<td>20 y.o</td>
<td>9 y.o (4th grade of Elementary School)</td>
<td>1. Preoccupation with a shadow of appearance defect, if a small body anomaly is found, the person’s concerns are overtly real. The informant has ‘I’m fat, my sibling and my friends said that I am like pig”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Informants description
Based on the table above, it can be seen that the three informants experienced BDD and fulfilled the four criteria for symptoms of BDD based on DSM V in the three informants experiencing fat shaming from the age of primary school until adolescence or present.

NANA often experienced fat shaming from the surrounding environment namely their peers, family, espe-
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especially her older sibling. NANA scolded by her sibling like "you are fat like a pig" and her peers said the same thing, so at that time NANA was convinced that she was fat, ugly and do not deserve to befriend them. As a result, she locked herself at home and was reluctant to leave the house because she was afraid of being scolded and ridiculed by her friends. The same happened at home, she felt uncomfortable if her sibling was at home because she would be commented on her weight.

Yes, I am comfortable at home when my sibling is not here. My sibling always scolded my appearance, especially my weight ... NANA12072018.

I was scolded like a pig by my sibling and friends ... NANA12072018.

Since experiencing fat shaming NANA tried to lose weight by dieting to control eating and over exercise, after graduating from elementary school NANA was no longer fat and normal, but she felt that she still has excess weight so she always felt worried when she comes out her home, her friends would mock her body and so did her sibling. This condition makes NANA to be very sensitive and give more attention to her body appearance, especially her weight. This condition lasted until now, NANA's weight was below average but she still maintained her diet.

Likewise, NANI experienced fat shaming since the age of 10 from her friends, she was said a "pigsty" because according to her friends her weight exceeded their standard weight. Initially, NANI ignored her friends’ comments on her weight, but over time she thought and felt anxious, worried and embarrassed when meeting her friends. Since then she tried to diet with exercise and reduce milk consumption. After dieting, her weight is normal like her other friends, she never did exercise and ate as much as she could. As a result, her weight gains, and that is why she feels need to go on a diet to maintain her weight stability and general appearance. NANI is being more sensitive to her personal appearance and others since experiencing fat shaming, she also compares her weight with other people as well as er appearance.

My friends say that I am fat like a pigsty ... and I am ridiculed every time I play with them ... NANI14072018.

NANI was anxious and worried when eating foods that she thought with high carbohydrates and calories would increase her weight, so she had only consumed vegetables without the carbohydrate content. She feels comfortable eating the vegetables even though her body’s nutritional needs were not fulfilled.

In contrast to NANUs case, she was born with a big high posture, from childhood she had an unpleasant experiences to be called as "bongsor" by friends and family. It did not become a problem at first, but over time she thought that her parents were not as big as her and it triggered a thought that she was not the biological child of her parents. The thought was conveyed to her parents until her parents said that her posture was similar to her grandmother and grandfather. NANU cannot receive being born with a bigger body posture than her peers, she tried to go on a diet by taking part in various sports in her school so that her weight was not excessive, until she suffered injuries while attending sports. Since then, her parents and doctors forbade NANU to do sports except run. Every day she is still doing activities as usual but she always wears dark-colored clothes to give the slimmer impression of her body, until now she has never worn striking colored clothes even at a party. Since I was born, I was told "bongsor"Maam, I don’t know why ... NANU20082018.

My friends body are good, slim, I am jealous with their mediocre posture, Maam... not like me, I have a huge body NANU20082018.

"Bongsor" Ma’am, I already diet, Maam, but I don’t know why I still "bongsor" NANU20082018. I use dark clothes ... NANU20082018. Almost all of my clothes are black ... NANU20082018.

Once I use the brown pants, I feel my thighs and hips are really big and my friends will comment "you are getting bigger, see your hips and your thighs ... NANU20082018.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the research stated that fat shaming has the risk of experiencing BDD in teenagers if the condition consistently occurs. This is in line with Lestari (2018b) research which stated that the cause of BDD in emerging adulthood are the psychological factors, unpleasant experiences, related to their body condition, more specifically the presence of body shaming generally, and specially fat shaming. Further, NCBI respondents, victims of fat shaming actually made them unable to control themselves to control their diet and most of them
experienced depression, stress and self-esteem dropped. Like a study conducted by Sutin involving 6,157 respondents stated that teenagers who do not have excess body weight but experience fat shaming have a risk of being obese. This means that the impact of fat shaming is dangerous for the victims (Hasan, 2016).

This study was reinforced by Savitri (2012) research involved 73 female respondents who were overweight (obese), some of them were shown videos containing fat shaming and others were shown videos that did not have fat shaming content. As a result the group that was shown videos without fat shaming content consumed food that had 89 calories afterwards, while the group given treatment watching videos with fat shaming content consumed food with 302 calories afterwards. Thus, it can be concluded that fat shaming will provide stimulation for victims to consume foods that are high in calories and unable to control the desire to eat (Hasan, 2016).

CLOSING

Conclusion

The conclusions in this study are:

a. The three informants experienced fat shaming since childhood and the impact was felt until now, the three informants experienced BDD and were very sensitive to the appearance of themselves and others.

b. Fat shaming has a negative impact on its victims, namely experiencing anxiety, worry and secession from the social environment and experiencing body dysmorphic disorder.

Suggestions

a. Society should learn to respect their body shape and appearance as well as others.

b. Accept the condition of oneself and others without comparing themselves with other people or existing standards.

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