



Barbie Doll Effect

Pratosh Chatterjee

Amity University Kolkata

Background:

“Doll makers are the one pulling strings of beauty standards in the society.”

Teen age girls have been playing with Barbies for a long time now, they dress them as they want, pamper them in those exotic barbie houses and pair them with those charming Ken dolls. But this child’s play gets escalated when these girls are in their growing phase, and they aspire to become as beautiful and attractive as their dolls. As from early age they were socially moulded in a way that they felt that barbies have the perfect body proportions, and all the girls should look like them.

If we imagine a real-life barbie, we then will come across a girl whose height would be 5’9”, weighing around 50 kilos with F-cup breasts and limbs as thin as sticks that wouldn’t be able to even hold the weight of such a body. As impossible as it may sound to attain such a body proportion, on the contrary that many girls aspire to look like these dolls.

When these girls grow up, we then witness instances of them getting prone to acute or chronic eating disorders or else possessing low self-esteem that can stay with them until womanhood due to this a large population of women in the world is seriously underweight.

Methodology:

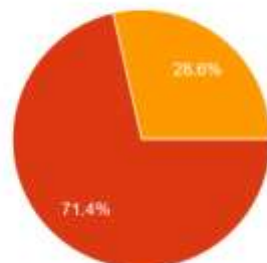
This paper Qualitatively and Descriptively analysed the trends and patterns observed in patients of Anorexia Nervosa who fall prey to this disorder because of the Barbie doll effect, we studied about what is Anorexia Nervosa, what are its causes, symptoms and etc.

The data that has been used in this assignment was quoted from certain eBooks, websites and scholarly papers present on the internet; hence the data that has been used in this assignment are Secondary by nature. Also, research method of Survey and Questionnaire were also employed while the process of collecting data’s that could be utilized in the assignment. Not only had these been used but also thematic analysis and content analysis was also imbibed during the assignment for easier analysing of the data’s that has been used. This helped us in attaining a better understanding of the topic that we had chosen for the paper.

Data Analysis:

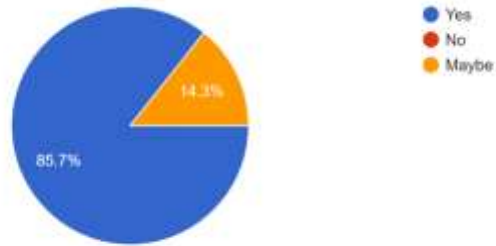
what is your age ?

7 responses



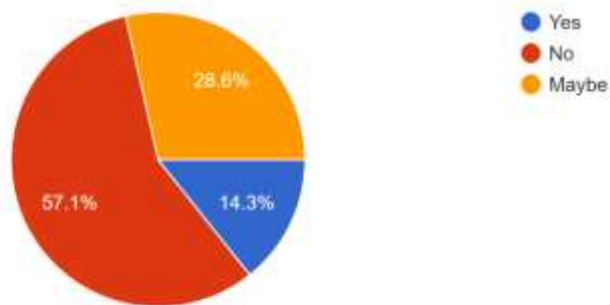
Did you play with dolls in your childhood ?

7 responses



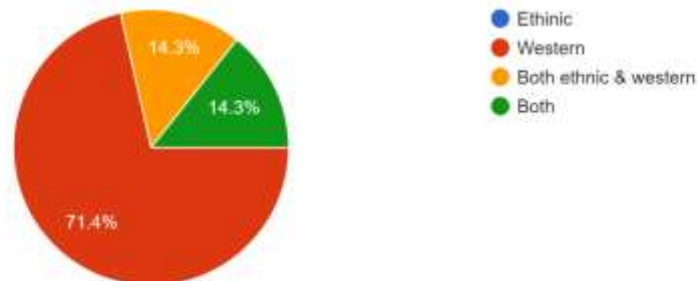
Did you aspire to look like them when you grew up ?

7 responses



what kind of attire do you like to wear ?

7 responses



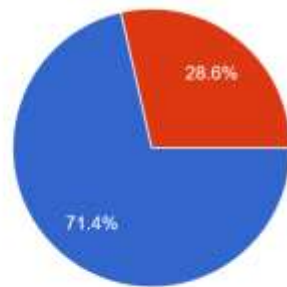
Do you feel confident in Western wear ?

7 responses



where do you like to have your meals ?

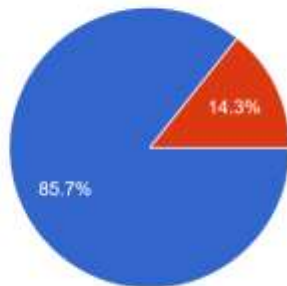
7 responses



- In public places, like restaurants, weddings and etc.
- In private places like home.
- In seclusion.

Do you like to look at mirrors ?

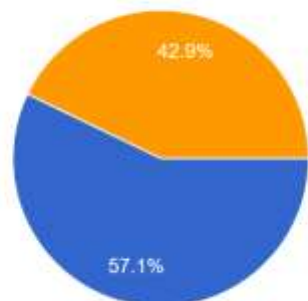
7 responses



- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Are you happy with your body shape ?

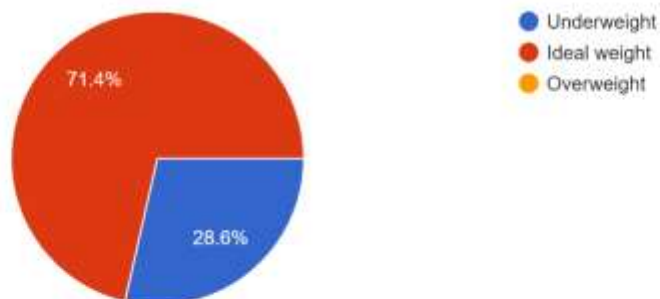
7 responses



- Yes
- No
- Maybe

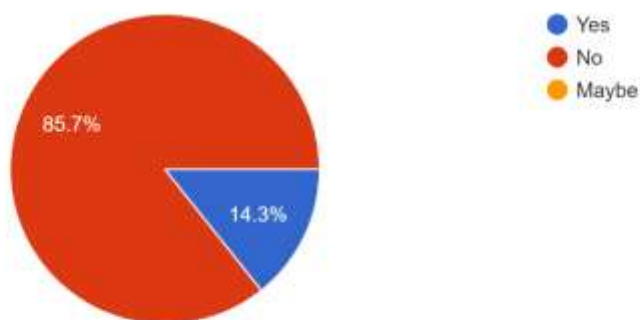
what is your body weight type ?

7 responses



Are you under a diet or gyming ?

7 responses



Analysis:

This survey had 7 subjects, all of them were girls. 71.4% of them belonged to 15-20 age group. A majority of these girls played with a doll in their childhood, and around 40% of these girls aspired to look like one of these Barbies. Nearly 70% of our subjects like to wear western attire and all out of these 7 girls feel confident wearing a western attire, hence these people carry themselves confidently around the society and hence avoid looking awkward. Nearly 2 girls prefer eating their meals at their home, where no one can pass comments on their appetite and eating habits. Nearly 6 of these girls like looking at themselves as they love themselves and are confident about their looks. Some confused or hesitant to share but nearly all are satisfied by their body shape. 2 of the girls are underweight and even after this 1 girl is under a diet or is gyming.

We can see that all the girls used to play with dolls, but luckily they had adverse effect on the psyche of a single underweight girl. And healthy or slim these girls love themselves and this is a sign of a healthy and sound minded society.

Anorexia Nervosa:

Anorexia Nervosa or simply just known as Anorexia is an eating disorder, and excessive loss of weight to extents of abnormality is a common symptom of this disorder and in most of the cases this does not happen due to poverty or lack of resources, but victims of this disorder could also come from the creamy layer of the society as the victims most commonly suppress or lose their appetite for food for attaining what supposedly means an ideal body shape or type. Such similar craze for a beautiful body rose when, in a 2008 film "Tashan" Kareena Kapoor Khan flaunted her what they call "zero figure" in the complete movie. And this time not only her male fans went crazy over her look but also did the girls went crazy behind that look and even today when girls are asked by their dietician or their gym instructor as to what is their body type goal most respond by saying as "zero figure".

Studies suggest that Anorexia was never about food or irregularity in its intake but it's basically a toxic and unhealthy way of coping up societal and emotional problems and insecurities and these steps or ways are so fierce that it keeps the life or well-being of the victim at stake. As an Anorexic girl usually associates thinness and loss in weight with their self-worth. And in extreme cases, this inversely proportional relation of weight and self-worth costs these people their life.

If we dwell deeper into the various symptoms that can be easily noticed in a victim of Anorexia, we can observe that the patient will most commonly show signs of starvation, Abnormalities in the blood count, Fatigue, Insomnia, Absence of Menstruation etc. but sometimes it may also be really difficult to notice various signs and symptoms as what might be considered as a low body weight by us in a particular person can be perceived differently by others. And some people due to lack of height might also not be looking as extremely thin too.

We can also witness several behavioural or emotional symptoms in these victims too. Such as severely reducing daily food intake by means of dieting or fasting, or else excessively doing exercises, these are some behavioural actions that victims of anorexia take. Some of the emotional actions can be like these where people would be cooking elaborate meals for others whereas they won't eat it themselves, not wanting to eat in public, frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws, alienation from the society etc. if we witness such symptoms in a person, we should visit a nearby doctor or psychiatrist as soon as possible.

Causes:

For disorders like these exact causes are usually unknown and this can also be seen with many other such diseases. They usually are a cumulative result of various factors like biological, psychological or environmental factors. More specifically if we point out at certain causes they would be as follows:

- ❖ Genetics: Research suggests that nearly 50 – 80% of the risk that a person can develop an eating disorder arises due to their genetics and in most of the cases these disorders get traced down to the patient from their parents or siblings (first-degree relatives).
- ❖ Trauma: sometimes a severe loss of weight witnessed in the victim could be not attained by them willingly, but it is a result of loss of appetite and the will to eat due to some serious trauma caused by reasons like physical abuse or sexual assault. After such violent incidents the victim is in shock for a while and a result of this, they distance themselves from the society, lose the will to live, eat and etc.
- ❖ Environment and Culture: popular culture and images in media and advertising nowadays links a desirable shape of person to popularity, fame, and happiness. Cultures like these idealize thin bodies, which asserts unnecessary pressure on people as they proceed to achieve unrealistic body standards and end up endangering themselves.

Complexities:

An illness like Anorexia can cause numerous complications on the victim's body. This disorder is so serious that fatalities like death can occur to a victim at any instant, even when the victim is not seemingly underweight, and this would happen due to imbalance in electrolytes like potassium, sodium, etc or irregular heart rhythms this phenomenon is otherwise known as Arrhythmias.

There could many other complexities too like Anaemia, increased risk of fractures due to Osteoporosis, lapse of periods in female and decreased testosterone in males and etc. in certain cases a person's body could get so seriously malnourished that it could leave irreversible damages in the brain, heart or kidneys of the victim.

Solution:

Largest doll manufacturers, Mattel has finally underwent a change in company policies, when they finally realised that toys and dolls are tools to shape the psyche of children and due to the negative effect that their company dolls were having on children they witnessed a sharp fall in company sales. The company has also started to work on a new range of dolls, code named: "Project Dawn", these new range of Barbie dolls would be first of its kind as they will be celebrating different and diverse body types. In fact, on event of this Women's Day, they launched the Role model barbie series, that featured personalities from various fields, from artists like Frida Kahlo, NASA Mathematician Katherine Johnson, and pilot Amelia Earhart.

We can see that the toy manufacturing giant took nearly half a century to change its way of approaching the global toy market. And they have to go a long way in dissolving the unhealthy and unrealistic sub-standards that their dolls created on the child's psyche. But on the positive note, every big change that occurs happens from that first positive step. And let's hope this positive approach changes the playtime of our children for good and not scar their future or childhood.

References:

- 1) Vitamins Tree, on Nov 26, 2018. "The Barbie Effect – Dolls, Beauty Standards, and Body Image Issues". Accessed September 7, 2022: <https://vitaminstree.medium.com/the-barbie-effect-dolls-beauty-standards-and-body-image-issues-172044af336f>
- 2) The Effects of playing with thin dolls on body image and food intake in young girls. By SpringerLink, on 22 August 2010: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-010-9871-6>

-
- 3) Anorexia Nervosa. By Mayo Clinic, on 20 Feb 2018: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anorexia-nervosa/symptoms-causes/syc-20353591>
 - 4) Anorexia Nervosa. By Santripty, Consultant Dr Parveen: <https://santripty.com/mental-health/anorexia-nervosa/>