

# Assessment of Selfie Syndrome among the Professional Students of a Cosmopolitan City of Central India: A Cross-sectional Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** A selfie is a self-portrait photograph typically taken with a digital camera or camera phone held in the hand or supported by a selfie stick. Studies suggest that there is a relationship between selfie-posting behavior and narcissism. The objectives were to assess the prevalence of selfitis or selfie syndrome in young adults aged 19-26 years and to analyze their traits and behavior regarding selfies to detect possible self-objectification, narcissism, and need for approval.

**Methodology:** It is an observational study of study duration of 3 months done in 100 students of two colleges of Indore city. Semi-structured open questionnaire is used as a study tool.

**Results:** Around 11% people accepted that they take selfies daily, 3% said they take selfies for attention, 31% said they had other reasons for taking selfies, self-objectification and narcissism. Overall 29% people have done something crazy to look nice for a selfie, 16% of people had negative experience with posting selfies on social media.

**Conclusion:** The study indicated that 11% people take selfies every day, they may or may not post it on any social media, either way they are suffering from selfitis, and this is a small but significant number. 24% said they get satisfaction after posting selfies – this may indicate narcissism among people. 7% people feel insecure after taking selfies. 16% have had a negative experience with posting selfies – this indicates the objectification and narcissism. Almost half of the people included in research feel like taking selfies might become an addiction.

**Key words:** Addiction, Narcissism, Selfie, Selfitis

## INTRODUCTION

A selfie is a self-portrait photograph typically taken with a digital camera or camera phone held in the hand or supported by a selfie stick. Selfies are often shared on social networking services such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Initially, popular with young people, selfies gained wider popularity overtime. By the end of 2012, time magazine considered selfie one of the “top 10 buzzwords” of that year. According to 2013 survey, commissioned by Smartphone and camera maker Samsung found that selfies make up 30% of the photos taken by people aged 18-24 years.<sup>1</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

It is an observational study done in 3 months of study period of Indore city. Two professional colleges (MGMMC and IPS) were taken in study out of which 100 students were interviewed. Semi-structured open questionnaire was used as study tool. Questions are related to their overview about selfie, use of social media, frequencies of selfies, and there physiological aspects related to selfies. Age group of 19-26 years was taken in the study. People who did not make the cut-off for this age group were excluded from the study. Verbal consent was taken from every individual before filling the questionnaire. All

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the participants were informed about right to quit at any time without need for any explanation. Data collected and entered in Microsoft Excel sheet. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20; frequencies were measured for all the questions.

## RESULTS

All the people included in the research were aware of selfies. 69% people said selfies are alright; 30% said they loved selfies; however, 1% expressed their hatred toward selfies. 68% people said they take and post selfies on social media. 32% either did not take selfies or if they did, it was not posted on social media frequently. 11% people accepted that they take selfies daily. 10% said they take 1-3 selfies daily. While just 3% take 7-10 selfies a day, 3% said the number of selfies taken by the every day is 4-6. On being asked with whom or what did people like to take selfies with 20% responded with family, 68% said with friends, 1% with buildings, 4% with animals, 2% with cars, and 5% responded none of the above.

When asked about where they most often take selfies, 30% said they prefer to take selfies at home alone, 59% said they prefer to take them in public, 3% said at work, 1% at school/college, whereas 7% said they prefer selfies in the bathroom (Table 1).

Around 15% people said they took selfies mainly to send them to a friend. 14% to put on social media, 13% because they were bored, 3% to show people they have friends, 21% take selfies to share their current lifestyle with their family. 3% said they take selfies for attention, whereas 31% said they had other reasons for taking selfies (Figure 1).

Around 25% people under study were using selfie stick; 75% people were not using it. Overall 34% of people under study agreed to the point that they get some satisfaction from posting selfies on the social network; 66% of people disagreed. Overall 36% of people under study think that others care about selfies they post, 64% of people do not think so. Overall 31% people under study feel pressure to look good in their selfies, 69% of people do not feel any such pressure. Overall 37% of people under study agree that the number of likes on their picture give them good feelings about themselves. 63% of people disagree to this. Overall 29% of people under study have done something crazy to look nice for a selfie; 71% of people have never done such thing.

Overall 7% of people under study always feel insecure after taking selfie, whereas 8% of people feel such sometimes. However, 85% of people do not get any such insecurity (Figure 2).

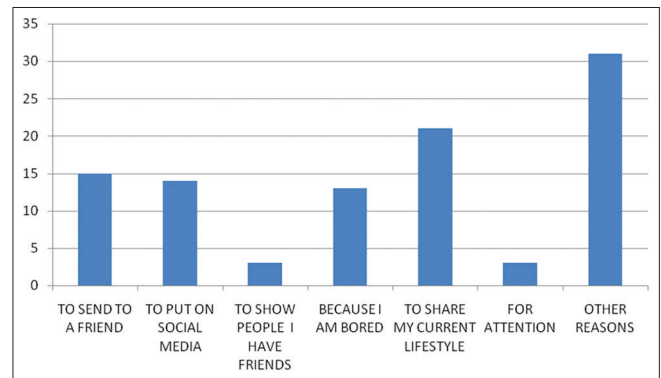
Overall 16% of people under study had a negative experience with posting selfies on social media, whereas 84% of people did not have any such experience. 49% of study subjects considered taking selfies as an addiction, however 51% did not consider it as an addiction. Overall 21% of people under study delete selfies if does not get any likes. However, 79% do not bother about likes.

## DISCUSSION

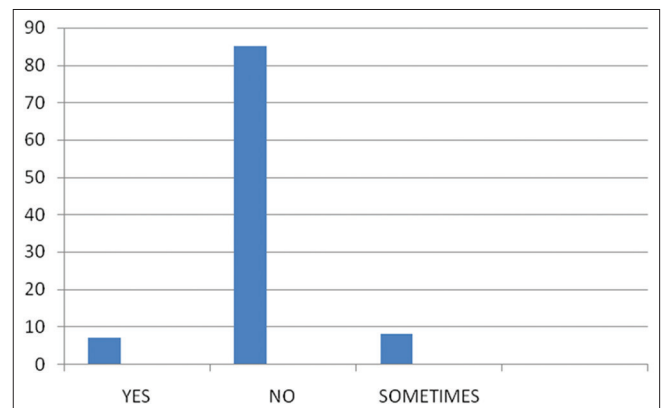
The word selfie was proclaimed as being the “word of the year” by the Oxford English Dictionaries in November 2013; the word “selfie” was mentioned update over 3,68,000 times during a 1-week period in October 2013.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1:** Places where most often selfies are taken

Places where most often selfies are taken	Total (%)
Alone/home	30 (30)
In public	59 (59)
At work	3 (3)
At school	1 (1)
In the bathroom	7 (7)



**Figure 1:** Main reason behind taking selfies



**Figure 2:** Insecurity after taking selfie

Various studies have shown that:

- Psychological studies conducted in 2015 suggest that there is a relationship between selfie-posting behavior and narcissism, this link was stronger among men than women.
- Narcissists more frequently update their status and selfies, which was motivated by their need for attention and validation from the Facebook community.
- People with low self-esteem more frequently posted selfies with their romantic partners.
- A new study appearing in “personality and individual differences” shows the relationship between selfie posting, photo-editing, and personality. In this study, authors examined self-objectification along with 3 traits known as “the dark triad” narcissism, psychopathy, and machiavellianism.<sup>2</sup>

Social media is also said to bring on many different psychiatric problems such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder,

narcissistic personality disorder, hypochondriasis, schizoaffective and schizotypal disorder, body dysmorphia, voyeurism, and addiction.<sup>3</sup>

The Washington post report alleges that India is the selfie death capital of the world accounting for about 50% of the 27 selfie-related deaths around the world in 2015. It reports that the incidents include selfie-takers who were hit by an oncoming train, on a boat that tipped over at a picnic, standing on a cliff that gave way and fell into a 60-foot ravine, and fell the steps at the Taj Majal.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the Bandra tragedy, India, declared more than 12 places in Mumbai as no-selfie zones. Indians' love for selfies is not surprising considering that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a known selfie-taker. However, then other global leaders too, such as US President Barack Obama is also into selfies, while Pope Francis willingly joins groupies often taken by youth followers. Selfitis is defined as the obsessive compulsive desire to take photos of one's self and post them on social media as a way to make up for the lack of self-esteem and to fill a gap in intimacy.<sup>5-7</sup>

A Sion Hospital study among school students on selfie obsession showed that a majority of selfie addicts are girls. Dr. Yusuf Matcheswala, Head of the Department at PD Hinduja Hospital, said that teenagers spending a lot of time on social networking sites are a problem that is on rise. "Dr. Harish Shetty, psychiatrist from Dr. LH Hiranandani Hospital, said that clicking selfie is a magnified way of seeing oneself in the mirror." Teenagers are more concerned about how they look and how others perceive them. In general, individual selfie clickers are seeking identity and meaning in the world.<sup>8</sup> Taking too many selfies is a mental disorder.<sup>8-10</sup> Although selfitis is not in the DSM-5, but there are plenty of real mental disorders that need and deserve treatment.<sup>11</sup>

In this study, 11% people accepted that they take selfies daily – indicates self-absorption maybe narcissism. Narcissistic people report higher rates of interpersonal transgressions in their daily lives.<sup>12</sup> Participants higher in narcissism significantly reduced the closeness of their relationships after a threat but did not reduce the relevance of competitiveness to their self-worth.<sup>13</sup> 3% said they take 7-10 selfies a day – indicates obsession with selfies. 15% people said they took selfies mainly to send them to a friend. Narcissistic individuals' self-ratings were extremely positive and more favorable than friends' ratings of them.<sup>14</sup> Individuals high in pathological narcissism had some awareness of how peers would rate them (meta-perception) but believed that others would rate them similarly to how they rated themselves.<sup>15</sup>

About 14% people to put on social media, strangers who viewed the Web pages judged more narcissistic.<sup>16</sup> 13% because they were bored, 3% to show people they have friends, 21% take selfies to share their current lifestyle with their family. 3% said they take selfies for attention, whereas 31% said they had other reasons for taking selfies – these data indicate craving for validation, self-objectification, and narcissism. Overall 29% people under study have done something crazy to look nice for a selfie.

Overall 21% of people under study delete selfies if it does not get any likes – this indicates the self-approval people seek in the form of likes on their selfies. Insight into how one is viewed

by others can moderate negative impressions fostered by personality development traits.<sup>17</sup>

Overall 16% of people under study had negative experience with posting selfies on social media. Narcissists' quest for the status and recognition they so intensely desire is thwarted, in part, by their lack of the self-control necessary to achieve that goals.<sup>18</sup>

The study indicated that 11% people take selfies every day; they may or may not post it on any social media, either way they are suffering from selfitis. This is a small but significant number. People seem to have some genuine insight into their reputation and do not achieve meta-accuracy only by capitalizing on the fact that others see them similarly to how they see themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Around 10% people said they take 1-3 selfies, 3% said 4-6 selfies, and 3% - 7-10 selfies before they are happy with the end results; this kind of data indicate the tendency of self-objectification and validation from others. Analysis of the variance shared between self and peer leads to results that are more in keeping with hypothetical relationships between avoidant traits and interpersonal problems.<sup>20</sup> For people taking 7-10 selfies, it may indicate the road toward body dysmorphic disorder. 24% said they get satisfaction after posting selfies – this may indicate narcissism among people. In addition to narcissism, we found that psychopathy predicted posting selfies although it did not predict editing them. Psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity and a lack of self-control, which may explain why psychopaths do not edit photos of themselves despite posting more selfies.<sup>21</sup> 31% people said they feel the pressure to look good all the time in their selfies – this indicates the pressure of society's approval and deep-seated insecurities about one's appearance. Culture could influence the function of narcissism.<sup>22</sup> Participants rating narcissistic targets reported significantly more interpersonal problems with the target and more avoidant and revenge behaviors directed toward them than did participants rating authentic self-esteem or control targets. Authentic high self-esteem was associated with positive social relationships.<sup>20</sup>

Around 7% people feel insecure after taking selfies – this is a significant number. Self-esteem was also lower among older than among younger girls.<sup>23,24</sup> Hypersensitivity to exclusion in narcissists may be a function of hypersensitivity in brain systems associated with distress and suggests a potential pathway that connects narcissism to negative consequences for longer-term physical and mental health findings not apparent with self-report alone.<sup>25</sup> 16% have had a negative experience with posting selfies – this indicates the objectification and narcissism. Individuals have to follow a few safe selfie rules while capturing pictures.<sup>26</sup> Almost half of the people included in research feel like taking selfies might become an addiction. The findings disclosed that there are positive impacts of selfie for both genders whereby respondents believe that selfie can increase one's perception and confidence. It is also found that negative impact for both genders in the areas of wasting time and editing photos before posting to social media.<sup>27</sup>

Takers of selfie photographs have fallen to their deaths while losing their balance in a precarious position.<sup>27</sup> A 2015 study showed that 20% of young Britons had taken selfies while driving a car,<sup>28,29</sup> and others have been wounded or killed while posing with handguns which have accidentally fired.<sup>30,31</sup> In 2016, the behavior of an Argentinian crowd seeking a selfie with a La Plata dolphin was held responsible for its death.<sup>32</sup>

Through this study, it is recommended that Pamphlets and posters may help in making people aware about selfie syndrome. Mass-media and other communication sourced could also help a lot in intervening people and encouraging people to deal with their psychological issues may help, that may be the deep-seated reasons behind them suffering from selfie syndrome. Inclusion of specific elements in the intervention that directly addressed body image and self-esteem issues may have reduced the risk for negative psychological effects.

As far as limitations are concerned, the study is conducted over a small group in the entire category, which cannot represent the whole population of Indore city. The basis of choice and the number of subjects for this study was feasibility and relative ease of their availability. With a larger sample size spread across the entire city, we might have arrived at the results with different percentages of population suffering from selfie syndrome.

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