The relationship between body weight and body image, an objective and subjective measure of body shape, respectively, has long been a recurrent concern in the area of medical sociology and health–related studies. This concern stems from the argument and findings in the literature indicating that the two are not necessarily likely to be strongly correlated due mostly to the fact that one’s own idea or conception about his/her body shape could be pretty different from one’s actual shape. This study tries to empirically address the two issues based on the analysis of a national sample survey data in Korea: to what extent body weight and body image are correlated with or deviated from each other, on the one hand, and what factors help to account for the relationship between the two, on the other. The latest (2010) national sample data of KGSS (Korean General Social Survey) is used to evaluate the issues.

Results of data analysis demonstrate that body weight and image have a moderate amount of correlation, and that the correlation tends to vary to a large extent depending on a few major socio–demographic and socio–economic characteristics. Most important, the risk factor analysis attempted in this study could identify several salient risk factors, which include gender, age, chronic diseases, smoking, physical exercises, and medical checkup. To be precise, those who may be best characterized as particularly risky to weight gains are females, who are in their 20’s, who have

* The National Research Foundation of Korea supported the work reported here through its grant, KRF–2008–322–B00009, titled “The 6th, 7th, and 8th Korean General Social Surveys and Their Exemplary Studies.” An earlier version of this paper was presented in the EASS (East Asian Social Survey) annual conference and meetings in Osaka, Japan, May 19, 2011 and the author would like to express special thanks to the participants there for their helpful comments on the earlier draft. Direct all correspondence to Sang–Wook Kim, Department of Sociology, Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, 110–745, Korea(Phone: +82–2–760–0412).

** Professor, Department of Sociology, Sungkyunkwan University.

E–mail: swkim@skku.edu
chronic diseases, non-smokers, who exercise regularly, and who conduct medical checkups on a regular basis. To extrapolate, the findings suggest that the most typically risky kinds of individuals in Korea are “young women who care very much for their health.” The findings are interpreted and discussed with suggesting a recommendation for further studies.

**key words:** body weight, body image, objective and subjective measures of body shape, KGSS, risk factors

---

## 1. Research Question

Obesity is becoming an increasingly serious public health problem in Korea as in other countries. In spite of the much smaller proportion of Koreans who are classified as obese when compared to other advanced countries, of major concern is the steady increase in prevalence and the sharp increment rate in recent years. A latest report of the National Institute of Health(2011) in Korea, for instance, indicates that the proportion is increasing fast for the last few decades especially among the youngsters. Obesity or overweight, as an objective measure of body shape, however, tends to have a further far-fetching impact when it comes to a substantial amount of alleged discrepancies between the actual body weight and the perceived body image(Friedman et al. 2002; Paeratakul et al. 2002; Schwatz and Brownell 2004). Body image, a subjective measure, literally refers to one’s own idea or conception about his/her body shape(Cash and Prunzinsky 1990), and hardly is the relationship between the two measures of body shape known to be consistent or compatible. Simply put, ample possibility and evidence exist that an obese person may not regard his/her body shape as it is and, in a similar vein, a slim person may not regard

---

1) OECD survey(2006–8) indicates that obesity rate, evaluated by the BMI(body mass index) of 30 or higher, is highest in the U.S.(34.3%), followed by, to list a few, Mexico(30%), New Zealand(25%), Switzerland(7.7%), Japan(3.9%), and Korea(3.5%).