

## Body image education in the Global South

### Background

Lower-income communities around the globe are experiencing rapid and accelerating increases in access to visual media via mobile internet and satellite television alongside substantial changes in diet, which creates ever increasing risk of body dissatisfaction and broader negative outcomes of appearance pressure. There is only limited evidence regarding the best means of preventing the mental health impacts of these pressures becoming entrenched in the Global South.

As part of the international 'BIRES' (Body image resilience) project, our team has worked collaboratively with communities in rural Nicaragua, urban Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, to develop an educational program (Soy Como Soy; I Am Who I Am) which teaches teenagers media literacy and supports them in understanding and confronting appearance pressures, while developing a strong sense of their unique value as a person.

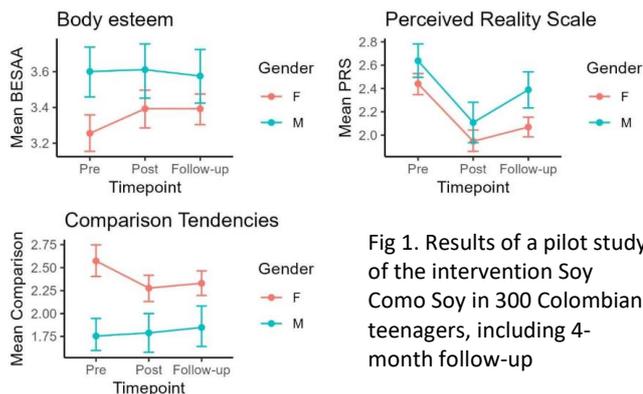


Fig 1. Results of a pilot study of the intervention Soy Como Soy in 300 Colombian teenagers, including 4-month follow-up

### Aims and Methods

The intervention is being tested in Colombia, Mexico and Honduras, with new trials planned for Peru, Kenya and Zimbabwe (see Fig 2). In order to understand what does and does not generalise across cultural contexts, however, more locations are needed. For instance, in other parts of Africa and in Asia.

**Potential project 1 (lead: Boothroyd) would follow a process of cultural adaptation of the intervention in another country, or in a very different context within an existing partner country (e.g. extending to northern and urban areas of Mexico.)**

A second strand of the BIRES project is focused on how parents of teenagers can be supported to promote body esteem and self confidence in their children. Early stage development activities are taking place in Colombia and Honduras. **Potential project 2 (lead: Thornborrow) would build on this, co-developing materials and**

**testing them with parents in a relevant cultural context.**

In both cases, it would be an advantage for the candidate to have direct or indirect connection to the cultural context or community with whom they propose to work. This ensures culturally sensitive and situated research. The potential supervisors are happy to work with international applicants applying for scholarships from their own government.

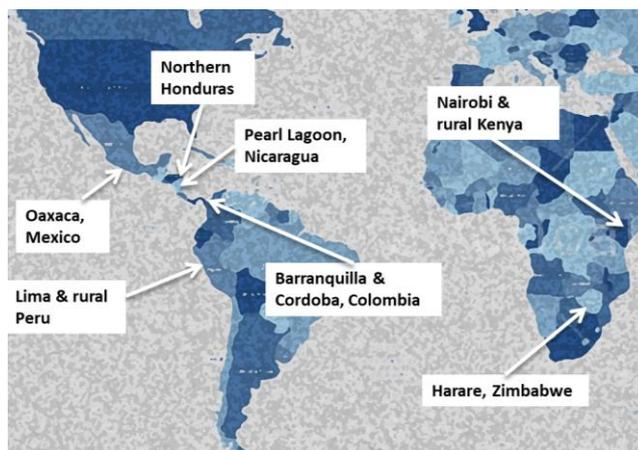


Fig 2. Existing locations in the BIRES project.

### Relevance

The project brings together cross-cultural psychology, health psychology, education studies and anthropology.

### Training

The candidate will be based in the Department of Psychology in Durham with extensive fieldwork. Besides training in general research skills, the candidate will develop a deeper understanding of intervention science and participatory and cross-cultural methods. The candidate will receive advanced training in multivariate statistics and mediation analysis, and qualitative approaches.

**Suitable for PhD and MSc by Research students.**

### References and Further Reading

Andres et al. (2025) [Pilot trial assessing acceptability, feasibility, and preliminary effects of a body image intervention for adolescents in rural Nicaragua](#). *Body Image*, 55, Article 101970.

Andres, et al. (2024). [Relationships between media influence, body image and sociocultural appearance ideals in Latin America: A systematic literature review](#). *Body Image*, 51, Article 101774.

<https://l Boothroyd.webspace.durham.ac.uk/bires/>