

RISK FACTORS FOR EATING DISORDERS

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Abstract

Objective: The author evaluated the contribution of personal, environmental, dieting and other additional risk factors with eating disorders (ED). **Method:** It was used a case-control design involving the comparison of 51 (47 female and 4 male) subjects with DSM-IV diagnostic of ED with 1,492 healthy control subjects. All subjects were 12 to 21 y.o. students. A broad range of risk factors was assessed by questionnaire. **Results:** ED subjects and healthy controls differed in their exposure to the following risk factors: Self-esteem and body (body, weight and shape) satisfaction both were greater in healthy subjects ($p < 0.001$). Current dieting and impulsiveness as well as current and pre-morbid overweight, consume of drugs, abusing of alcohol and psychological disorder were greater among subjects with ED ($p < 0.001$). Parental domination, abandonment and criticism; and parental psychological disorder and abuse of alcohol were also significantly greater ($p < 0.001$) among ED subjects. **Discussion:** The findings support the hypothesis that ED result from the exposure to general risk factors for other psychiatric disorders as well as to specific risk factors for dieting.

Introduction

In the last three decades numerous epidemiological studies in the field of Eating Disorders (ED), including risk factors have been done in North America and Europe. In Spain, the earliest epidemiological studies on ED were published in the first half of the 90's. Given the importance of knowing the factors leading to these disorders among the general population, in order to be able to plan and to provide the necessary mental health resources in a rational and effective way, trustworthy and precise ED epidemiological studies are needed.

Literature (e.g. Fairburn et al., 1997, 1999) suggests that the occurrence of ED are influenced by individual (e.g. low self-esteem, dieting, dissatisfaction with body weight, premorbid overweight), family-related (e.g. critical parents, abuse of alcohol and drugs by parents) and socio-cultural factors (e.g. social pressure of mass media and interpersonal relationships, towards achieving a thin-ideal body, a difficult goal to accomplish by many adolescents and young people).

This survey collects a wide range of risk factors considered in the literature (e.g. self-esteem, current dieting, body satisfaction, influence of the family, peer pressure to be thin, etc.) and studying its association with the presence of ED among adolescents and young people schooled in the Community of Madrid.

References

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Method

Participants

The sample was made up of 1,543 (randomly selected) 12-21-year-old girls (916) and boys ($M = 15.73$, $SD = 2.34$) registered during the 2000-2001 academic year in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th course of Secondary Obligatory Education; 1st and 2nd course of High School and 1st course of University in 12 schools, Institutes and Universities pertaining to the region of Madrid (Spain).

Measures

Instruments

✓The Spanish adaptation (Raich et al., 2000) of the Eating Disorders Examination (EDE) interview, 12th Edition (Fairburn & Cooper, 1993). This version has four subscales: Restraint, Eating Concern, Shape Concern, and Weight Concern; and achieved a good internal consistency (.80 to .90 across the subscales), adequate short-term (5-14 days) test-retest reliability for objective bulimic episodes (.79), and acceptable test-retest reliability for the subscales (.67 to .90) (Grilo et al., 2005).

✓Questionnaire of general socio-demographic data. Designed ad hoc.

✓Questionnaire of Risk Factors. Designed ad hoc, based on the factors indicated by Fairburn et al., 1997, and Fairburn et al., 1999.

Design

Case-control design, comparing 51 participants with ED DSM-IV-TR criteria with 1492 control participants.

Results

VARIABLE	T	P
Low self-esteem	3.666	< 0.001
Body dissatisfaction	8.079	< 0.001
Weight and shape dissatisfaction	7.867	< 0.001
Dieting	-9.078	< 0.001
VARIABLE	Chi2	P
To receive teasing for weight	35.691	< 0.001
Impulsiveness	24.510	< 0.001
Overweight	31.574	< 0.001
Overweight in the past	25.734	< 0.001
Consume of drugs	30.750	< 0.001
Consume of drugs in the past	21.352	< 0.001
Abusing of alcohol	14.769	< 0.001
Abusing of alcohol in the past	20.400	< 0.001
Psychological disorder	87.929	< 0.001
Psychological disorder in the past	85.876	< 0.001
Relationship between father and mother	39.066	< 0.001
Parental domination	18.741	< 0.001
Critical parents	17.052	< 0.001
Feeling abandonment of the parents	30.149	< 0.001
Divorced parents	16.672	< 0.001
Abuse of alcohol (father and/or mother)	16.655	< 0.001
Psychological disorder (father and/or mother)	16.040	< 0.001

Conclusion

Results show that participants with ED (DSM-IV-TR) diagnosis, compared with control participants, were significantly more exposed to risk factors for dieting (e.g. body dissatisfaction, weight and shape dissatisfaction, to receive teasing for weight, current overweight, overweight in the past) and to general risk factors for other psychiatric disorders (e.g. consume of drugs, abusing of alcohol, impulsiveness, family management of conflicts and emotions, presence of psychological disorders and abuse of substances by father and/or mother).

These results suggest that prevention programs focused on improving self-esteem and body satisfaction, reducing impulsivity and substance addictions, and providing adolescents and young adults with appropriate coping mechanisms could help decrease these pathologies.