

BODY IMAGE ASSESSMENT AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS EATING DISORDERS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT THE EVANGELICAL UNIVERSITY OF GOIÁS

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ABSTRACT

Eating disorders (EDs) are characterized by constant fear of weight gain, excessive concern with body shape, and changes in eating patterns. Given the increased incidence of EDs and their repercussions, it is essential to develop research that establishes correlations between their development and etiology. The present study aims to evaluate the relationship between sociodemographic profile and the degree of dissatisfaction with body image, as well as attitudes related to EDs in university students enrolled in Pharmacy, Medicine, Nutrition, and Aesthetics and Cosmetics Technology courses at the Evangelical University of Goiás. This is a descriptive, analytical, cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach. Data were collected through validated questionnaires, such as the *Eating Attitudes Test* (EAT-26) and the *Body Shape Questionnaire* (BSQ), as well as sociodemographic and anthropometric questionnaires. This study was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP/UniEVANGÉLICA), in accordance with Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS). Statistical analysis of the BSQ and EAT-26 data revealed a significant association between the course ($p < 0.001$) and gender ($p < 0.001$), especially among female students in the Aesthetics and Cosmetics Technology course, who reported greater body dissatisfaction and increased risk for eating disorders. These findings highlight the importance of identifying attitudes related to eating disorders among university students, understanding the prevalence and impact of these conditions, and promoting interventions aimed at improving the health of the study population.

Keywords: Body dissatisfaction; Eating disorders; University students; Sociodemographic factors.

INTRODUCTION

Eating disorders (EDs) are conditions characterized by a constant fear of weight gain, excessive concern with body shape, intentional restriction of food intake with progressive weight loss, which may be accompanied by uncontrolled food intake followed by induced vomiting and risky use of medications. They are serious disorders with limited estimates, causing high mortality rates, reduced life s, and physical, emotional, and social limitations (OLIVEIRA; HUTZ, 2010).

Based on this definition, the concept of eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction can be correlated with the lifestyle patterns established in modern society, which associates body, beauty, and image with success (IDA; DA SILVA, 2007). Studies indicate a higher prevalence of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression in university students, and when not identified and treated appropriately, they result in behavioral, emotional, and academic changes (JANSEN, 2016; SOUZA; ALVARENGA, 2016). With a biologically unattainable beauty prototype established, especially for young women, body dissatisfaction and an increase in the prevalence of eating disorders have become common (NUNES et al., 2017).

In this context, there is a clear need to identify risk behaviors for eating disorders in university students at an early stage, to understand the prevalence and impact of these conditions, and to investigate specific risk factors in order to develop data for the development of policies and programs aimed at the prevention, detection, and treatment of these disorders in the population in question.

METHOD

This is a descriptive, cross-sectional, analytical study with a convenience sample conducted with students from the Medicine, Nutrition, Physical Education, and Aesthetics and Cosmetics courses at the Evangelical University of Goiás, in Anápolis. After approval by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Evangelical University of Goiás – UniEvangélica, data collection was authorized by the course coordinators and involved the application of two tests (EAT26 and BSQ), in addition to a questionnaire on sociodemographic and anthropometric data prepared by the authors themselves.

The study included students over 18 years of age who were enrolled in up to the 8th semester of the medical course and all semesters of other courses, with their acceptance and subsequent signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE). Participation in this study presented risks of identification and embarrassment for the participants. However, the confidentiality and privacy of the information provided was certified by omitting any data that could

identify the participants and by storing the completed questionnaires in a secure location for the next five years.

At the end of the questionnaires, all participants received an informative booklet on eating disorders, what the risk behaviors are, how to avoid them, and where to seek help, prepared by the authors themselves. The data were initially transcribed into a spreadsheet in MS Excel Office XP® and then analyzed using *the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) version 16.0. Statistical analysis was performed considering a significance criterion of $p < 0.05$ for the chi-square test.

RESULTS

The survey involved 350 academics, of whom 38.9% were medical students, 28% were nutrition students, 24.6% were physical education students, and 8.6% were aesthetics and cosmetics students. With regard to gender, the majority of participants were female, totaling 64.3%, and 35.7% were male. In terms of age, more than 90% of the sample group was between 18 and 29 years old, and about 7.2% were between 30 and 60 years old.

Regarding ethnicity and racial declaration, 57% declared themselves white, 36.8% brown, and 4.8% black, with 1.2% of the population not identifying themselves or not answering the question. Based on the data collected, weight and height were assessed to calculate and classify body mass index (BMI), with 63.7% of the study population classified as eutrophic, 5.7% classified as underweight, 21.7% overweight, 5.4% obese grade I, and 1.1% obese grade II, with 2.3% choosing not to respond.

Based on the results suggested by the BSQ, 77.8% of participants did not report body dissatisfaction and 22% reported some degree of body dissatisfaction, with 13.4% reporting mild dissatisfaction, 6.3% moderate dissatisfaction, and 2.3% severe dissatisfaction, demonstrating the importance of this research in the academic setting. When analyzing the results related to the application of the EAT-26, 86% presented normal eating patterns with no symptoms of anorexia nervosa or abnormal eating patterns. In this context, it is noteworthy that 13.7% of participants presented altered eating patterns, showing that the EAT-26 scores correlated with those obtained in the BSQ.

After analyzing the tabulated data, cross-tabulation with a chi-square test was performed to analyze whether socioeconomic determinants such as course, gender, race, income, working conditions, and number of people living in the household influence the BSQ results. Thus, it was concluded that the variables analyzed that interfere with the BSQ results are: course ($p < 0.001$), in which 22% of participants in the courses analyzed presented some degree of body dissatisfaction, mainly in the Aesthetics and Cosmetics Technology course, in which this proportion reached 50% among the students surveyed, and in relation to gender ($p < 0.001$), 64.1% of participants were female. This perspective is in agreement with the study by Appolinário and Claudino (2000), which showed a higher frequency of eating disorders in females, with rates of 0.28% and lifetime prevalence rates of 0.3% and 3.7%.

When analyzing the BSQ in relation to variables such as income ($p=0.127$), working conditions ($p=0.908$), skin color ($p=0.262$), and degree of body dissatisfaction, it can be concluded that there is insufficient evidence to confirm that the data analyzed are statistically relevant.

After analyzing the BSQ, we looked at how gender, course, and color related to the EAT-26. Gender and course were significant ($p < 0.001$), showing that there's a big difference in eating disorder behavior patterns. With regard to color ($p=0.935$), work ($p=0.237$), income ($p=0.451$), and number of people in the household ($p=0.059$), there was no statistical interference in the EAT-26 results.

These findings demonstrate the relevance of addressing these issues in the academic community, as well as the possible effects that socioeconomic conditions, in parallel with behaviors and attitudes toward eating disorders, may have on student performance.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is clear that it is important to identify risk attitudes for eating disorders in university students, to know the prevalence and understand the impact of these conditions, to analyze risk factors, and to inform about possible interventions aimed at promoting health among university students. In addition, it is hoped that the data highlighted in this study will serve to develop policies at the

University aimed at the prevention, detection, and treatment of these disorders in the study population.

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