

World Congress on Public Health and Nutrition

March 10-12, 2016 Madrid, Spain

Eating disorders prevalence and determents in Sharjah high school among Emirati young females

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Objective: To assess the prevalence of disordered eating attitude (DEA), and to investigate the cultural determinants of eating disorders in a representative sample of Emirati young females.

Methods: A cross sectional study of a sample of 508 adolescent females were chosen through a stratified randomization technique; where one section from each of the grade 10, 11 and 12 was chosen from each public school (n=6) located in Sharjah in the UAE. All consenting students in the selected classes filled the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) and Body Figure Rating Scale (BFR). From the latter, body dissatisfaction score was calculated. From the students who scored 20 or above on EAT 26 (cut off point for eating disorder) and high on body dissatisfaction, a small sample was selected (n=52) and were included into one to one interviews for further investigation on determinants of DEA.

Results: From the study sample, 37.8% scored at least 20 on EAT-26, and 65.2% had body dissatisfaction. Significant relationships were seen between the following pairs: EAT-26 and body dissatisfaction, BMI and body dissatisfaction and occurrence of vomiting and EAT-26. After the in-depth interviews, the following factors were noted as pre-detriments of eating disorders: family has negatively influenced 76.9% of the adolescent by emphasizing on thinness, verbal insults, and non-satisfaction with girls shapes and appearances; media has negatively influenced 73.1% adolescents (western view of women, models, and celebrates); bullying at either home or school, because of either shape or weight negatively influenced 71% of the participants.

Conclusion: The study shows a high prevalence of eating disorder and body dissatisfaction among schools girls in Sharjah. Additionally, interviews showed that the major leading factors to these conditions are family, media, and bullying. Finally, future studies should start prioritizing educational campaigns in schools and within families targeting eating disorders to prevent further deterioration in health of the young generation in UAE.

Biography

Alla Mansour has completed her Master's degree in Public Health from Hamdan Bin Mohamed University in Dubai, UAE. She is currently working in Health Promotion Department in Supreme Council for Family Affaires in Sharjah. Her research interests are in nutrition and public health.

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