



Prevalence of Eating Disorders among Adolescents in Kottayam District of Kerala

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Abstract

Lot of changes happens during the period of adolescence in terms of eating patterns. It leads them to gain or lose weight. Many studies on eating disorders have been done on medical grounds by highlighting the after effects of eating disorders and mainly among students and adults. Seldom studies have been focused on eating disorders among early adolescence. So, it was curious to know about the presence of eating disorders among various adolescence groups and its prevalence on the basis of their age and gender. The result shows that most of the early adolescent category is underweight when compared to middle and late adolescents. It was also found that there exist differences in anorexia among boys and girls whereas such a difference does not exist in bulimia.

Keywords: Eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia, adolescents.

1. Introduction

Eating disorders are complex illnesses that affect individuals by disturbed eating habits. It may cause due to genetics, brain biology, personality traits and cultural ideals. Common types of eating disorders are Anorexia nervosa, Bulimia nervosa, Binge, Pica, Rumination, Avoidant or Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), Purging and Night eating syndrome.

Among these, Anorexia and Bulimia were commonly found among individuals. People with Anorexia Nervosa may limit their food intake and they have a fear of gaining weight, even they are underweight. Individuals with Bulimia frequently eat large amounts of food in a short time period. They show purging behaviours such as forced vomiting, enemas, laxatives and excessive exercise for reducing the calories and to get rid of gut discomfort. Even if it affect regardless of an individual's age, the initial stages of this disorder happen in the adolescence period. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) revealed that 95 per cent of those having eating disorders belong to the age between 12 and 25 years. Among high school students, females intend to lose weight than males (Smolak, 2011). Teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviours than girls (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005). The literatures also revealed that there exist a trend among adolescents to be conscious about their physique and this consciousness may lead to eating disorders as many of the fitness diet become less healthy without proper guidance. As, at that period of adolescence, an individual may follow diet or skip food to imitate the celebrities rather than concern of having healthy habits. Thus, apart from being physically fit, they admire skeletal structure to become gorgeous or handsome. So, the influence of advertisements on adolescents is omnipresent due to media exposure.

This paper intends to understand the presence of eating disorders among various adolescence groups in middle income families and to identify the prevalence of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa among boys and girls. This study focuses to address a small group of school and college students in two taluks of Kottayam district and to identify whether they have symptoms of anorexia and bulimia by considering their Body Mass Index (BMI) as the base.

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2. Literature Review

Studies related to eating disorders of adolescents have focused on the fact that they are highly concern about their weight and body shape. Yiou Fan et al. (2010) have done a study to identify whether the relation between body mass index and eating disorders have a mediating effect on weight control concerns and behaviours. They found that concerns on weight and behaviours were not only the indicator of eating disorder symptoms. This creates an insight to know the influence of media on eating disorder of adolescents. As in the pilot study, no much response has been reverted on the influence of advertisement on eating disorder in Kottayam district, it is decided to exclude it from this study. Meghan Rose (2013) has done a study on *The Anorexic Brain: Neuroimaging improves understanding of eating disorder* and it is mentioned that 15 to 19 years considered as the peak age of anorexia. The annual death rate of young women with anorexia found to be more than for young women in the general population. In this article, more focus was given on treatment side of eating disorders. It is discussed that the anorexics found it difficult to identify pains and the feelings like hunger. This happens due to the impairment of individual's brain to detect the signals properly. Thus, this article discusses more on critical medical issues that may happen to an individual who suffer from anorexia nervosa disorder. Elaine Yudkovitz (1983) has published a paper on *Bulimia: Growing awareness of an eating disorder*. The author highlighted on the fact that Bulimia including binge eating and purging appears more in young women. She described the symptoms, etiological factors, treatment consideration and approaches towards the disorder. Allison F. Wagner, Emily C. Stephano, David C. Cicero, Janet D. Latner and Jonathan M. Mond (2016) published an article on the role of gender in eating disorders features and quality of life. The study examined whether gender moderates the association between eating disorder features and quality of life impairment among a sample of undergraduate students. The findings revealed that the gender does not have a moderate relationship among eating disorder features and suggested to include both men and women for future studies. Likewise, changes might happen during the period of adolescence in terms of eating patterns due to various reasons. It leads them to gain or lose weight. Usually, BMI is considered as a base to measure the person's disproportionateness in weight. That means it shows whether the weight is healthy or not. While analyzing the literatures, least preference has been given to identify the eating disorder in the early age of adolescence and a couple of studies have been done purely on medical grounds. So, it was curious to know the presence and prevalence of anorexia and bulimia disorders among various categories of adolescents namely, early, middle and late on the basis of their BMI.

H1: Age and BMI of adolescents are associated

H2: BMI of the boys on average is greater than that of the girls

H3: Eating disorders namely, anorexia and bulimia prevail among boys and girls

3. Research methodology

3.1. Method

The study was conducted among three categories of adolescents namely, early (10-14 years), middle (15-17 years) and late (18-21 years) adolescents among boys and girls group. It was done among selected 62 adolescents (31 boys and 31 girls) belonging to middle income families from two taluks, namely Kottayam and Changanacherry in Kottayam district of Kerala.

In the study data, as normality is .001 (less than .05), non-parametric test has been used. Tables on BMI classification on the basis of age group of adolescents, mean scores of anorexia and bulimia have been found out.

3.2. Study participants and procedures

The participants were consists of school and college students belonging to middle income families from two taluks, namely Kottayam and Changanacherry in Kottayam districts of Kerala. Questions were asked after giving information regarding the intention of this study. Data were collected from 62 students consisting of 31 boys and 31 girls in early, middle and late adolescent groups.

3.3. Independent variables

Two independent variables namely, age group and gender were considered for the study.

3.4. Dependent variables

BMI and Eating disorder have been observed as the dependent variables for the study. The symptoms of anorexia and bulimia have been converted to statements and asked to respond to 5-point scale that ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The participants were asked 12 and 9 statements to identify the presence of anorexia and bulimia respectively. The statements intending to identify the presence of anorexia includes “I avoid eating even if I am hungry”, “I skip meals to avoid gaining weight” etc. and bulimia includes “I eat large amounts of food in a brief period of time”, “I continue to eat even after I feel full” etc.

4. Results and Discussions

It was found that age group and BMI of adolescents were associated ($\chi^2(4)=3.906$, $p=.001$, $p<.05$). So, the first hypothesis has been empirically supported. Secondly, no significant difference in the BMI for boys ($M=1.26$, $SD=.575$) and girls ($M=1.45$, $SD=.624$), $t(60)=-1.270$, $p=.209$ were found. This reveals that the second hypothesis was not empirically proved. Thirdly, it is found that there exists differences of anorexia symptoms among boys ($M=35.42$) and girls ($M=27.58$), $U=359$, $p=.039$. Whereas, there does not exist any differences of bulimia symptoms among boys ($M=32.00$) and girls ($M=31.00$), $U=465$, $p=.801$. So, the third hypothesis has been partially proved.

5. Conclusion

Among adolescents, majority were underweight. Out of these, more than 80% of them were belonging to the age group of 10-14 years. Age group and BMI of adolescents were associated and no significant difference in the BMI for boys and girls were evident. The study reveals that the presence of anorexia nervosa is evident among the adolescents than bulimia nervosa. So, it is to be noted that adolescents belonging to middle income group were not too much concern about their diet plans and not prone to extreme weight losing techniques. The difference in the intensity of anorexia among boys and girls denotes an alarming sign that they try to avoid food for body loss as they were attracted to slim body shapes of models in advertisements. Further studies can be done to identify the intensity of advertisement to influence the adolescents and the role of marketing analyst to reduce the influence of advertisement on eating disorders of adolescents.

6. References

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