

Poster presentation

Assessment of high-risk eating behaviours among an adolescent female sample: prevalence and cultural aspect of the body shape

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Background

Eating disorders are frequent among women and usually begin during adolescence. Many studies have shown the tight link between these disorders and body shape concerns, particularly the current aesthetic body shape model concern. The aim of this study is to determine high-risk eating behaviour frequency among a sample of adolescent females. It also aims at pooling their opinions concerning the ideal image of woman's body.

Materials and methods

This study has been held in the city of Sousse, in Tunisia. The sample included 614 representative girls of all adolescent females attending secondary schools in Sousse.

The high-risk eating behaviours were assessed by administering the 40 items version of the Eating Attitude Test (EAT40) translated in Arabic. Participants completed too, a self-administered questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic items and questions about their opinions concerning the ideal image of woman's body.

Results

Adolescents were 12 to 20 years old, with a mean age of 15,8. 28,5% (n=177) of the sample have scored more than 32 in the EAT40 and were considered as being at high-risk for eating disorders. 82,5% (n=507) of the sample desired a moderate body size and 59% (n=362) preferred a body shape without curves. Thinness was significantly more desired by the high risk group of eating disorders ($P < 0,01$). Concerning the sample opinion about the society image of woman's body shape, 22,7%

think that society encourages thinness and 40,7% think that it discourages the curvy body. Finally, the high-risk adolescents think, more than the others, that society encourages thinness ($P = 0,048$).

Conclusions

These findings suggest that the prevalence of abnormal eating attitudes is as common among Tunisian schoolgirls as occidental adolescents. The high prevalence found in our study may be related to the cultural transition witnessed by Tunisian society this last decade. In fact, in our study adolescent females seem to be attracted by an occidental woman's body image, particularly adolescents with high risk for eating disorders. These findings reinforce the notion that eating disorders are culture-reactive rather than culture-bound phenomena and provide insight into the extent of eating-related problems and body image issues in developing societies.

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