

DISTURBED EATING ATTITUDE AND SELF-ESTEEM IN UNDERGRADUATES OF KARACHI

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

To see the relationship between self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude among the undergraduates of Karachi.

STUDY DESIGN

Correlational survey design

PLACE AND DURATION OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in different universities of Karachi, Pakistan from January to May 2018.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The research participants comprised of 200 male and 200 female students from different universities of Karachi, Pakistan. Their age ranged from 20 to 28 years ($M=24.5 \pm SD=3.81$). Participants after verbal and written consent were asked to fill the demographic form, followed by Eating Attitude Test, and Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, correlation and linear regression analysis were applied which revealed a significant inverse relationship between self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude. Further self-esteem was also identified as a significant predictor of disturbed eating attitude among the undergrads of Karachi. With regards to the additional analysis of study, female university students were found to have more disturbed eating attitudes than male students.

CONCLUSION

Research findings cleared a significant relationship of self-esteem with disturbed attitude of eating among the undergrads of Karachi.

KEY WORDS

Eating attitude, Self-esteem, University students, Male and Female.

INTRODUCTION

Eating attitude can be described as one's emotions, opinions, and association with foodstuff¹, however disturbed eating attitude is considered as an eating attempt that is less intense and more frequently occur than labeled eating disorders. Healthful eating approaches help in living healthy life.² There are numerous factors that ascertain eating attitudes. Self-esteem is appeared to be one of the essential factors.³ Low self-esteem in more recent researches has been identified to anticipate disturbed eating attitude.⁴

A review on young adults indicated self-esteem at noticeably lower level in them due to many factors like peer, family and social pressures on their weight and eating attitudes. It also drops gradually from premature to mature teenage years.⁵ Another study revealed self-esteem and liability to pathological eating in young female adults. The study further brought into knowledge that low self-esteem plays a role in worry related to developing fat in body and other psychological worries. More considerably, the study found that young female adults with low self-esteem are at high risk of developing faulty eating behaviors, and being diagnosed as eating disorder in later life, because females are more concerned about their body shapes and weight. They are also highly involved in bingeing, vomiting, and dieting. The lack of self-control of this group in dieting and other weight loss tactics is related to budding risk of disordered eating.⁶

More researches on self-esteem and unhealthy eating attitude found that their association is not necessarily being generalized. Such relations can be observed in societies where physical appearance is more emphasized. Western cultures in this direction are found to associate attractiveness with being thin.⁷ According to recent survey in India, it was observed that youth of South Asian countries are following the similar ideals of eating to look attractive as that of youth in Western culture is carrying. High exposure to Western mass media has further improved the occurrence of faulty eating, in fear of being fat.⁸

A high incidence of disturbed eating attitude is found to be present in both male and female of Pakistan, Singapore, and Indonesia.^{9,10} Likewise western researches identified problematic eating attitude in 85% female undergraduates.^{11,12}

Previous documented researches, however on self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude are yet limited in the populace of Karachi, Pakistan. Evaluation in this area may help in working on its precursors and treatment strategies. Therefore current study with a sample of university students aimed to examine the relationship of self-esteem with disturbed eating attitude in the undergraduates of Karachi, Pakistan. For which following hypotheses were formed:

- H1) There would be a significant inverse correlation between self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude scores.
- H2) Self-esteem would be predicting disturbed eating attitude of university students in Karachi.
- H3) Female university students would be having more disturbed eating attitudes in contrast to male students.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Participants

The sample of this research consisted of 400 participants (200 male and 200 female). Convenient sampling technique was applied for the selection of participants. Participants of the study were taken from the University of Karachi, NED and Muhammad Ali Jinnah University. Their age ranged from 20 to 28 years ($M=24.5 \pm SD=3.81$). The inclusion criterion was: (a) age range between 20-28 (b) Residents of Karachi, Pakistan (c) Pursuing for graduation degree. However those research participants were excluded who did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Instruments

Participant's demographic information covered gender, age, socio-economic status, relationship status, family system and birth order, while other scales included the following.

Eating Attitude Test (EAT-26)¹³:

EAT-26 is used as a screening tool to assess the signs of faulty eating approaches. It has a likert scale where always=3, usually =2, often= 1, sometimes, rarely and never = 0, however it has reverse scoring only for the test item number 26 (never = 3, rarely =2, sometimes=1, often, usually and always=0). Its scores range from 0 to 78. Scores of 20 and above point the presence of disturbed eating attitude, and lower than 20 indicates absence of disturbed eating attitude. Its construct validity is 0.92, and cronbach alpha reliability coefficient is 0.76.

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES)¹⁴:

It is a 10-item self-reported scale based on four point Likert scale. It ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree, where (strongly agree=3, agree=2, disagree=1, strongly disagree=0). The item numbers 1,3,4,7,10 are positive statements whereas items numbers 2, 5,6,8,9 are negative statements and are scored reverse. The minimum and maximum scores range from 0-30. The scores between 25-30 are within higher range, 15-25 are considered as normal range, and scores 15 or below are taken in low range. Its test-retest reliability is 0.82 to 0.85 and criterion validity is 0.55.

Procedure

At start, a proper written permission was taken from the concerned university authorities and then from all participants written informed consent was obtained. Participants who gave consent for partaking in research were then told to fill the demographic information form followed by EAT-26 and RSES questionnaires. Study data was then evaluated on SPSS.

RESULTS

Sample of present study comprised of 400 university students and were distributed as 50% males ($n= 200$) and 50% females ($n=200$). Results showed that majority of them were unmarried, first born, belonged to middle socio-economic status, lived in a nuclear family system and were 23 years old (see table 1 for details).

Results further showed a significant inverse correlation between scores on self-esteem and eating attitude test scores of university students, $r= -0.462$, $p < 0.05$ (see table 2 for details), as higher score on RSES indicated high self esteem and high score on EAT-26 indicated disturbed eating attitude hence a negative correlation assumes that students with high self esteem have less disturbed eating attitudes. Moreover linear regression analysis was used to test if the self-esteem significantly predicted disturbed eating attitude in university students. The results of regression indicated that self-esteem significantly predicted disturbed eating attitude in students $\beta = -0.478$, $p = 0.002$ (see table 3). It was further found that predictor (self-esteem) explained 36% of the variance in eating attitudes, $R^2 = 0.36$, $F(1,398) = 4.89$, $p = 0.002$. Table 4 set up statistically significant discrepancy of disturbed eating attitude on gender basis, $t(398) = 4.10$, $p = 0.02$, where EAT-26 mean score of female students ($M=17.10$, $SD=13.10$) was found more than male students ($M=14.13$, $SD=12.43$). It means that female undergrads carry more disturbed eating attitude than males.

Table 1
Demographic variables of the sample (N=400)

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	200	50%
Female	200	50%
Relationship status		
Single	360	90%
Engaged	30	7.5%
Married	10	2.5%
Birth order		
First born	225	56.25%
Middle born	110	27.5%
Last born	65	16.25%
Socio economic status		
Upper	60	15%
Middle	320	80%
Lower	20	5%
Family structure		
Nuclear	237	59.2%
Joint	163	40.7%
Age		
20	31	7.7%
21	30	7.5%
22	41	10.2%
23	103	25.75%
24	44	11.0%
25	82	20.5%
26	69	17.2%
27	0	0%
28	0	0%

Table 2

Bivariate correlation between self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude scores of university students

Study Variables	Self-esteem (RSES)	Eating Disorder (EAT-26)
Self-esteem(RSES)	—	-0.462*
Disturbed Eating Attitude (EAT-26)	-0.462*	—

Note: * p -value < 0.05 = level of significance

Table 3

Summary of linear regression analysis for variable predicting disturbed eating attitude of university students (N = 400)

Disturbed eating attitude					
Predictor variable	R ²	β	df	f	p
Self esteem	0.364	-0.478	1398	4.89	0.002*

Note: * p -value < 0.00 = level of significance

Table 4

Differences between the mean scores of disturbed eating attitudes of male and female undergraduates

Study Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Disturbed Eating Attitude (EAT-26)						
Female	200	17.10	13.10	4.10	398	0.02*
Male	200	14.13	12.43			

Note: * p < 0.05 = level of significance

DISCUSSION

Present exploration was objected to see the relationship of self-esteem with disturbed eating attitude among the university students of Karachi. For that it was first expected that there would be a significant inverse correlation between scores on disturbed eating attitude and scores on self-esteem of university students of Karachi. Results also showed a significant inverse correlation between self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude scores. This finding is plausible with previous literature that found that university students with low self-esteem may endorse a disturbed attitude of eating.¹⁵ A study conducted by Ross and Wade¹⁶ also specified a significant inverse link between self-esteem and eating attitude of European university students. Similarly other studies also revealed a high prevalence of disturbed eating attitude in the students who believed that they are unimportant and had low self-esteem.^{17,18,19} With regards to study second hypothesis it was expected that self esteem would be predicting the disturbed eating attitude of university students. Result also showed self-esteem as significant predictor of disturbed eating attitude. It further highlighted that disturbed eating attitude was inversely predicted by self esteem which means disturbed eating attitude was more in those students who had low self-esteem and less in those students who had high self-esteem. A study on Scotland undergraduates' revealed that average students exhibited more disturbed attitude of eating, and poor academic attentiveness compared with undergraduates having high self-esteem.²⁰ Other previous researches also highlighted self-esteem as an important factor in the development of disturbed attitude of eating among student population, importantly.^{21,22,23} Further it was additionally hypothesized that female university students would be carrying more disturbed eating attitude than males which was proved statistically significant. A study in Lahore identified disturbed attitudes of eating, and urge to look perfect in female university

students.²⁴ An observation on New Delhi female undergraduates showed (66%) of them were heavily involved in unhealthy eating behaviors.²⁵ Additional researches on disturbed eating behaviors with BMI on gender differences revealed a significant interplay with each other.²⁶

Hence results of current research aided and delivered the understanding of substantial interaction between self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The study findings cannot be generalized, as it was only limited to four hundred participants.
- Geographical and cultural impacts on eating approaches of study participants were not considered in the current study.
- Proper diagnostic tests must have been employed for well understanding of disturbed eating attitude of research participants.


CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Thus it can be concluded from the result of current study that self-esteem and disturbed eating attitude showed a significant interaction, and self-esteem was found to be a significant predictor of disturbed eating attitude in university students of Karachi. Further disturbed eating attitude was more dominating in female university students than males. Research findings can assist the professional counselors, common men, apprentices, parents and academic institutes, in controlling the disturbed eating attitude among student population through a work up on self esteem. Awareness campaigns, workshops, seminars, parental, and student counseling about healthy eating ways and self-esteem are therefore recommended.

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