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Family Influence on Disordered Eating Behaviour

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Abstract

Appearance-focused family culture (Kluck, 2010) and weight-related teasing and comments (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010) have emerged as a contributing factor in disordered eating in daughters. This study has been conducted to examine the relation between parental modelling of eating behaviour and attitudes toward weight, parent weight related teasing and criticism and disordered eating behaviour. A survey of 393 Kosovo female undergraduate students was conducted. Participants completed the Eating Attitude Test-26, Family influence scale and a series of items about their parents' comments about their weight/size. Regression analysis revealed that family modelling, mother and father pressure predicted significantly disordered eating behaviours, accounting for 28.9% of variance. Findings indicate that family attitudes towards appearance were the strongest predictor in problematic weight-related outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Early etiological investigations suggested that the family (Kluck, 2008), particularly the perceived pressure from parents (Rodgers, Paxton, & Chabrol, 2009), media and peers as important sociocultural sources of influence on eating disorders (Marcos, Sebastia'n, Aupalat, Ausina & Treasure, 2013). Even though family factors received moderate attention in academia (Garner & Newman, 2001); the yielded results on influence of the family so far have been inconsistent (Kluck, 2008). Moreover, a large body of research has found that disordered eating come into view either in highly developed economies or in countries which are undergoing fast market transformation and their linked impact on the status of women (Nasser et al., 2001), predominantly in countries which have been

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exposed to Western values (Marcos et al., 2013). It has been postulated that social reinforcement, such as criticism regarding weight, encouragement to diet and family modelling of disordered eating behaviours promotes and perpetuates the thin ideal body image, resulting in eating pathology (Stice, 2001). Although a number of studies have found no influence of family in eating pathology (Garcia de Amusquibar & De Simone, 2003), other studies have pointed out that parents who are more critical of physical appearance and tease their daughters appearance (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010) for female university students (Baker, Whisman, & Brownell, 2000) and encourage dieting are associated with increased disordered eating (Kluck, 2008). In fact, not only negative comments about appearance, but also overtly positive feedback may lead to negative consequences (Calogero, Herbozo & Thompson, 2009). However no particular parental comment came out as a superior predictor of eating pathology (Kluck, 2010). Furthermore, encouragement to diet have been found to be predictive of unhealthy weight control behaviours and weight gain (Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Story & Van Den Berg, 2008). Additionally, females developed unhealthy eating behaviours in comparison to their peers when their mothers where appearance focused (Hill, & Franklin, 1998), but was less consistently associated with their fathers (Vincent & McCabe, 2000). A contributing factor to disordered eating is also the tendency of certain families to admire thinness in others (Davis, Shuster, Blackmore, & Fox, 2004), and appraisal of potential positive regard from thinness (Jones, 2001). Nonetheless, the differences regarding findings for family influence in eating pathology can be as a consequence of the methodology used in different studies (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010). Hence, the following study investigates the familial weight-related environment, and relation with university female students' eating disordered behavior, including the examination of both maternal and paternal influence. In addition the following study contributes to literature by shedding light on outcomes in a different culture, with an underrepresented population of diverse upbringing, since up to date there is not much research on the subject of disordered eating in Kosovo (Kadriu, Kelpi & Kalyva, 2013), a country which is going through cultural transition. Therefore this study has been conducted to examine the relation between parental modelling of eating behaviour and attitudes toward weight and parent weight related teasing and criticism and disordered eating behaviour. Accordingly, the following is the hypothesis: Participants who scored higher in family influence scale and on items about items about their parents' comments about their weight/size, would report increased eating disordered behaviours.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The sample of this study consisted of undergraduate female students from three universities in Kosovo. Three hundred and ninety-three (393) students took part in the screening procedure. The age range was 18-25 years old ($M=20.84$ years; $SD=1.52$). Moreover, the sample consisted of participants coming from different places of Kosovo, including the main cities (Prishtina, Gjilan, Peja, Prizren, Gjakova, Mitrovica and Ferizaj). Nonetheless, the sample was convenient.

2.2. Measures

The Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26) (Garner, Olmsted, Bohr & Garfinkel, 1982) has been utilized in this study to assess eating disordered behaviours. The EAT-26 is a 6 point Likert scale with 26 items. The internal consistencies for multi-ethnic sample is $\alpha=.86$ (Welch, Miller, Ghaderi & Vaillancourt, 2009). Whereas, the test-retest reliability is $r=.91$ (Phan & Tylka, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha in this study is calculated .83. The Family Influence Scale (Young, Clopton, & Bleckly, 2004) is a 5 point Likert scale with 12-item assessing family attitudes toward appearance or family focus on appearance and attractiveness. The scale has been adapted from Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) developed by Stice, Nemeroff, and Shaw (1996). The internal consistency value is .89 (Young et al., 2004). In the present study Cronbach alpha coefficient is .84. A set of six items specifically related to negative parental comments developed by Kluck, (2006, 2008) were used in the present study. Participants reported the frequency of criticism, teasing and encouragement for weight control by each parent using a 5 point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha is .82. Kluck et al., (2009). In this study the Cronbach's alpha is .78.

2.3 Procedure

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