



Eating Disorder and Its Causes

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Abstract. People might think eating disorders are far away from them. However, eating disorders are second only to opioid addiction among the deadliest mental disorders, leading to approximately 10, 200 deaths each year. Facing such crazy data, people must pay attention to eating disorders. One of their friends might have such conditions, or even they might get eating disorders in the future. Here comes the problem: Why have eating disorders been rising recently? Carrying with such curiosity, four of us decided to write this article to figure out the cause of eating disorders. We found four factors, including sexism, abuse, social media, and discrimination, by doing research. In the following paragraphs, we will use certain logic and connections between each factor to expand the article. At the end of the article, we will discuss the future implications of our research to shed light on the psychological understanding of eating disorders and their reasons.

Keywords: Sexism, Abuse, Social Media Discrimination.

1 Introduction

As high-intelligence animals, human beings have highly developed brains. Mental health, as a product of people's brains, becomes a problem that needs people to focus on; in the modern society of the United States, 1 in 25 Americans lives with a severe mental illness, which is the reason why more and more people pay attention to mental health problems, such as anxiety disorders, eating disorders, personality disorders and so on. According to ANAND, 28.8 million Americans, 9% of the American population, will have an eating disorder. Such a significant and crazy statistic motivates us to research why so many people would have an eating disorder in their lifetime. Disturbed or abnormal eating habits or behaviors, such as anorexia nervosa, refer to a range of psychological disorders. Eating disorders could harm a person's body, lead to drug abuse, and even cause people to suicide. This paper would expand the content around four social factors, including social media, abuse, discrimination, and sexism, to explore such dangerous disorders. This paper will help people have a further understanding of eating disorders.

2 Literature review

2.1 Connotation

2.1.1. Definition

Eating disorders are classified in DSM-5 as continuous irregular eating-related actions that cause a change in consuming food that harms people's psychological health [1]. Eating disorders have been valued as crucial psychological disease sets, including rumination disorder, avoiding food intake disorder, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. Eating disorders happen worldwide and affect at least 9% of the population [2]. In addition, the threats of the eating disorder should be recognized and emphasized. Other data supports this claim that eating disorders are among the deadliest mental illnesses, second only to opioid overdose, and About 26% of people with eating disorders attempt suicide [2]. Providing these data and observations, the fact is that eating disorders are becoming more and more severe in modern societies and happens in our daily life. And the influencing factors for eating disorders could be multiple and include social and physical aspects.

2.1.2. General Situation

For the groups of people, women seem to be more vulnerable to eating disorders compared with men. According to data from the research: "at any given point in time between 0.3%-0.4% of young women and 0.1% of young men will suffer from anorexia nervosa" [3]. And another study in 2007 showed that 9,282 Americans were surveyed about mental health, including eating disorders. It turns out that 3.5% of women and 2.0% of men had binge eating disorders during their life [4]. With all these data from research articles, we could observe that the prevalence of eating disorders seemed higher than that of men. There exists an apparent statistical difference between men and women.

Moreover, different ages of women also play a role in causing eating disorders. The research presents that when the team following a group of 496 teenage girls for eight years finds 5.2% of the girls met the criteria for DSM5 anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder, and if the nonspecific symptoms are included in the requirements, the statistics will increase to 13.2% [5]. This data proves that the age difference among women will cause eating disorders problems to become more severe at a young age and teenage girls are more vulnerable.

With so much information provided through these researches and academic articles, we could see that people are suffering from these eating disorders. These mental disorders present a trend and preference for women and young girls. It displays that eating disorders should be much more deeply discussed and focused on academic and clinical aspects to figure out the situations of eating disorders in the world. We could better locate the target groups of the mental disorders and pay more attention to them to prevent the diseases from happening among these vulnerable people or from getting severe and causing unexpected results.

2.2 Cause

2.2.1. Social Media

Multiple researchers have found that patients' attention to the display of body imagery on social media plays a significant role in leading to the will or idea of an altered diet plan, thus triggering long-term mishandling of nutrients and energy intake [6]. Several issues and consequences are caused by long-term attention to the imagery or videos showing body imagery. Firstly, the overwhelming frequency of the information can gradually alter individuals' perception of worthiness and aesthetics, making them pursue an unrealistic sense of beauty that does not belong to them [7]. This is worsened by the manipulation of artificial intelligence and algorithms by the creators of social media to constantly recommend the type of content that demonstrates the most ideal, aesthetically pleasing imagery considered by most people nowadays. In the process, individuals start to objectify their body, alleviating the sense of physical requirement of nutrients and energy, lowering the feelings and perception of pain and suffering by decreasing body energy and vigor to pursue the unrealistic body shape. Similar effects are also created by the prevalence of photoshopping and photo filters online to make a false sense of aesthetic value [8]. However, patients who could satisfy the diagnostic criteria above would instead start to display the emotions of inferiority and feelings of being underachieved when overwhelming amounts of such information appear in their daily feed, seducing them to immerse in the false perception that the properties of physical attractiveness are an omniscient phenomenon rather than a rare occurrence on a tiny part of the community. Therefore, this incorrect interpretation prompts them to take immediate action to satisfy their urgent need for mental comfort by the feeling that the individuals can, in a sense, be parallel to the ideal pictures and imagery online. Subsequently, the immediate action results in an enormous contrast and fluctuation in their daily nutrition and energy intake, triggering an eating disorder.

Moreover, according to the social comparison theory, individuals have an instinct to find an accurate self-evaluation by comparing themselves, which frequently occurring as models and celebrities on social media demonstrate their body imagery. This means of self-exploration helps them deny or confirm their sense of identity [9]. However, as mentioned, due to the massiveness of the materials demonstrating ideal aspects of physical beauty, individuals will naturally be inclined to reject the majority of their physicality and start to deem themselves intrinsically as unacceptable, unwanted, and undesirable, triggering irreversible impacts on self-esteem, lowering or ignoring their requirements of nutrition and energy, resulting in an eating disorder.

2.2.2. Discrimination

Eating disorders can happen in different kinds of groups. Discrimination might connect to higher eating disorders and psychopathology among specific individuals. The experience of discrimination may be a vital point for explaining the risk for eating disorders [10]. First, it is necessary to notice the discrimination against marginalized groups, including gay, transgender individuals, racial minorities, lesbians, bisexuals, and individuals with obesity. Others will more easily discriminate against these groups since many people don't recognize them. Discrimination would have adverse effects

and make them under tremendous pressure [11]. According to the research, negative affective states have been shown to promote eating disorder behaviors.

Moreover, weight discrimination plays an essential role in the associations between eating disorders and discrimination. Weight discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of people purely related to their weight. They may get negative attitudes from others, but not include negative actions. One of the eating disorders experiments suggests that individuals might have an eating disorder to escape from opposing views or negative comments from others. Thus, experiencing weight discrimination may cause people to consider eating disorders as a coping mechanism, which could help them deal with aversive self-awareness. People who have experienced past discrimination might think having eating disorder behaviors might help them reduce future bias. In western culture, the appearance standards are thin for women and vital for men, which is hard to achieve. Some people may feel that if they can meet these appearance standards that exist in Western society, they will have less chance of experiencing discrimination. This thought finally results in eating disorders.

Finally, Intersectionality research argues that experiencing multiple types of discrimination is more hurtful to mental health than only experiencing one kind of discrimination [12, 13]. That means single bias might not contribute to eating disorder behaviors, but many people who share multiple forms of discrimination might have a higher chance of getting eating disorders.

2.2.3. Abuse

First, there are three broad types of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Most abuse victims experience an eating disorder after experiencing abuse, with females and children making up the majority. Especially in childhood, any abuse during this time can be problematic because children think and process differently than adults. Children are developing their sense of self and core beliefs about how the world around them works. For example, when children constantly receive messages that they are not loved or that something is wrong with them, they isolate themselves from their emotions rather than learn how to deal with them appropriately. Eventually, they begin to believe it and adopt it as their identity. Childhood traumatic experiences are associated with eating disorders, and there is only a tiny probability that eating disorders will occur during childhood. However, it permanently impacts the emergence of psychological disorders in adulthood. Although the experiences of one's childhood fade with time, they are latent in the subconscious and constantly influence one's life. It can be considered an essential predictor of several psychological problems, hurts self-esteem, and is directly related to low self-esteem and feelings of helplessness. Of the three types of abuse, sexual abuse is the most significant hidden risk for eating disorders in women. In "Sexual Abuse and Eating Disorders. The Eating Disorders of Women with Sexual Abuse," author Mary Anne Cohen notes that "abuse violates the boundaries of the self to the point that one's inner feelings of hunger, fatigue, or sexual desire often become unrecognizable." [14]. These women who have experienced sexual abuse and are unable to heal themselves suffer this abuse over time, using food to relieve various tensions and eventually becoming victims of eating disorders. Emotional abuse can lead to negative beliefs about oneself and result in adverse reactions. People who have experienced

emotional abuse may struggle emotionally, leading to confusing and impulsive behaviors most often associated with bulimia. Alternatively, they may become detached and limit their emotions, which is more commonly associated with anorexia nervosa.

3 Future Implication

With the research above, a series of future directions and targets of the study above can be conceptualized. Firstly, it can be identified that there is an increasing range of issues and factors that act as causes for the happening of an eating disorder. For instance, the sudden emergence of social media at the start of the 21st century quickly widens the pathway where patients might be exposed to harmful materials leading to the eating disorder; The increasing awareness, respect, and social support for the LGBTQ group makes them less vulnerable and impressionable in the modern society, decreasing the rate of eating disorder happening in the community. In essence, the focus of psychiatric and psychotherapeutic research should be carefully aware of the rapid evolution of the possible social factors and causes of various mental illnesses. It has gradually become an unfeasible pathway to neglect the social development of the mentality of modern individuals and stay unchanged in the systematic approach to psychiatric diagnosis. Therefore, an enormous amount of comparative research based on contemporary causes of mental illnesses should be conducted to supply sufficient information and material for finding general patterns and correlations. However, it is recognized that current global statistics are still poorly defined, understood, and measured. We know there is still a long way until experts can comprehensively understand the modern influences on different mental illnesses, mainly eating disorders. Nevertheless, we could still be optimistic about future research as mental health, and mental illnesses have been gaining an exponential amount of social attention and recognition, which play a tremendous role in speeding up the process of the broadening of psychiatric research.

In terms of the future development of psychotherapy, it is necessary to adopt modern methods and techniques that are not fully included and recognized by DSM-5. For instance, considering the current social situation, the manipulation of online psychotherapy has become increasingly popular. However, psychiatrists should continually research the psychological differences and influences that can be brought upon patients if comparative methods are manifested.

4 Conclusion

Finally, they were eating disorders, a psychological problem that cannot be ignored. We attributed this problem to four social factors: social media, abuse, discrimination, and sexism. Furthermore, women and teenagers have the most prevalence under these four factors. The reason behind this may be due to differences in thinking and differences in personality traits. External factors easily influence adolescents because of their immature thinking. At the same time, women are easily affected by these four social factors because of their appearance, differences in thought, and characteristics. In addition, we found that about 9% of the population in the United States suffers from an

eating disorder, and the incidence is twice as high in women as in men. Approximately 6% of these patients are medically diagnosed as "underweight." About 26% of patients attempt suicide, and even 10,200 people die from eating disorders yearly. This group of people in their lives can easily lead them to more mental illnesses and even diseases due to eating disorders. We believe these disorders have more to do with social influences than physical problems. Therefore, we think people should pay more attention to the social aspects of eating disorders and trace the origin of these symptoms. In addition, new effective treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy, family therapy, and interpersonal therapy should be developed. We believe that there will be better and more effective ways to treat this mental illness in the future.

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