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Psychological and anthropometrical risk factors in the appearance of eating disorders in 11 years old children in the prefecture of Ioannina, Greece

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Background

Eating disorders in children and adolescents are characterized by a serious disturbance in eating, such as restriction of intake or bingeing, as well as distress or excessive concern about body shape or body weight. In addition to their effects on psychological well-being, they have a potentially devastating effect on health through the physiologic squeal of altered nutritional status or purging. The aim of the study was to determine the associations between eating disorders, obesity and psychological factors in Greek primary schoolchildren.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional study of primary schoolchildren aged 11 years old from rural and urban population of the prefecture Ioannina, Epirus, Greece. Demographic information, anthropometric measurements, Eating disorders (Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26)), Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter's SPPC) and body image (Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-34)) were obtained from 312 children (19 primary schools in the Prefecture of Ioannina Greece).

Results

There were positive correlations between eating disorders (Eating Attitudes Test/EAT-26) and Body Mass Index (BMI) (Pearson's correlation coefficient, $r = 0.16$, $p = 0.004$), waist circumference ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.002$), hips circumference ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.003$), left triceps skinfold thickness ($r = 0.15$, $p = 0.007$), subscapular skinfold thickness ($r = 0.13$, $p = 0.01$), sum skinfold thickness ($r = 0.12$, $p = 0.042$) and percentage of body fat ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$).

Eating disorders (Eating Attitudes Test/EAT-26) correlated with body image (Body Shape Questionnaire/BSQ-34) ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, there were a negative correlation between eating disorders (EAT-26) and the urban region ($r = -0.19$, $p = 0.03$) and with physical appearance (Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC)) ($r = -0.13$, $p = 0.01$).

Discussion

The schoolchildren present eating disorders at a significant percentage even in non-industrialized regions of Greece. This finding may be partly explained by the effect of Westernized life-style changes. The negative body shape image and low physical appearance associated with eating attitudes may well be a start motivation for the prevention by educational programs.

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