

A Public Health Concern: The Effect of Culture on Eating Disorders *Remaining Mindful in General Medicine / Family Practice*

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Preface

What about eating disorders? According to the National Institute of Health (2016) article, *Eating Disorders*: “Eating disorders are actually serious and often fatal illnesses that cause severe disturbances to a person’s eating behaviors. Obsessions with food, body weight, and shape may also signal an eating disorder. Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder” [1]. Eating disorders can lead to secondary and, sometimes, serious health problems.

Discussion

Eating disorders do not discriminate based on race, color, creed, sex or socioeconomic status. One of the major factors influencing the growing prevalence of certain eating disorders is the desire to acculturate or the pressure to acculturate to contemporary society. This desire is influenced by what is perceived as being attractive and desirable and what is depicted in the media as being attractive and desirable; the aforementioned being orchestrated mostly by the formidable financial backing of the fashion, cosmetic, and entertainment industries. However, eating disorders are not solely a social phenomenon or due to low self esteem. Referring again to the NIH article: “Researchers are finding that eating disorders are caused by a complex interaction of genetic, biological, behavioral, psychological, and social factors”.

Conclusion

General Practice and Family Medicine physicians and other healthcare providers should be aware and remain vigilant that a patient (female or male) may be experiencing an eating disorder, and that eating disorders can manifest in people of any race, color, creed, sex or socioeconomic status; eating disorders are not limited to Caucasian females as was considered the case in the past. Primary care physicians and other healthcare providers should stay current on the medical options and support mechanisms for the treatment of these consequential eating disorders.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that this paper was written in the absence of any commercial or financial relationship that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Reference

1. The National Institute of Mental Health. (2016). Eating Disorders. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>