

Men and women eating disorders

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Modern society's inclination to appreciate thin people has led to a significant increase in the incidence of eating disorders. While eating disorders are highly associated with women, the condition is not gender oriented and as such, can inflict both sexes. This paper discusses eating disorders that occur to both men and women.

What is an Eating Disorder?

Eating disorder is a condition where victims generally make use of food to achieve physical or emotional objective. This means that people with eating disorders may deprive themselves of food so they will become thin, or use starvation as a means to deal with unwanted feelings or emotions. Eating disorder is popularly associated with two conditions, the anorexia nervosa and bulimia, both of which, can be generally defined as the extreme concern to body weight and image although such other conditions as rumination disorder and pica, which primarily occur among infants are also considered as eating disorders. Another form of eating disorder is binge eating which is most common among people who are on a diet.

Psychologist Kelly Bemis described anorexia nervosa as " a complex physical, emotional, and behavioral changes occurring in individuals who starve themselves because of an aversion to food or weight gain" (Lucas, 2004). Those who suffer from anorexia nervosa are characterized by a false perception about their body size. This perception leads to self inflicted starvation or refusal to eat and which consequently results in severe weight loss that has devastating health and mental implications. Other weight loss strategies include vomiting several times in a day, using laxatives and over exercising.

People who suffer from bulimia, on the other hand, are also characterized by the same extreme weight and image consciousness but they have a craving for food, which causes them to go for binge eating. Bulimics generally feel guilty when they overeat and to prevent themselves from gaining weight, use risky weight loss strategies similarly employed by anorexics.

People inflicted with bulimia and anorexia are both characterized with feelings of depression and anxiety.

Unlike bulimia where victims overeat and purge themselves after by vomiting or using laxatives, people with binge eating conditions eat large amounts of food but do not purge themselves. They do not use laxatives nor vomit habitually but merely abstain themselves from eating or they go on a diet. A recent study conducted in Harvard Medical School showed that binge eating is now more prevalent than anorexia and bulimia (Stein, 2007).

Among the symptoms of eating disorders include extreme weight loss; starvation or refusal to eat; frequent vomiting; obsession with exercise; and depression. Eating disorder is both a physiological and psychological condition, victims of which, do not only lose weight but also suffer from other psychological conditions such as depression.

Eating Disorder among Women

The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD) (1995) reported that ninety percent of the people who are inflicted with anorexia and bulimia are women. Eating disorder among women is reported to begin during the teen years, which when left untreated, can persist through adulthood. The onset of eating disorders among some girls

are said to follow after traumatic and stressful life experiences such as leaving home or death of a loved one.

In the case of anorexia, women are usually within the range of 90 percent of ideal body weight before they develop the illness (Blinder, 2001). Eating disorders are also most prevalent among teen-age girls. The National Women's Health Report (1995) accounted that girls who are at risk of developing eating disorders are highly successful individuals who have feelings of insecurity and who may resort to controlling their food intake and weight to make them feel powerful. Eating disorder among women is highly attributed to the society's preferential treatment to slim women.

One distinct symptom of eating disorder among women is the loss of monthly menstrual cycle, which is the result of being extremely undernourished causing impairment of normal bodily functions such as that of the reproductive organs.

Eating Disorder among Men

The reason why eating disorders have been greatly associated with women is because more women suffer from the disease than men. For this reason, eating disorders, such as anorexia in men may become under-diagnosed because most people, even anorexics, are generally unaware that eating disorders can occur to both men and women (Blinder. 2001). Eating disorders, however, are not gender biased conditions and as such, there are also cases of men suffering from eating disorders. It is, in fact, estimated that ten percent of the eight million people in the United States who suffer from eating disorders are men (" Issues for Men", 2006).

While symptoms, conditions and implications of eating disorder among men and women are generally almost similar, there are aspects that vary between men and women. For example, eating disorders are more likely to occur in girls who are achievers. In men, most likely sufferers are those who come from lower socioeconomic groups; those who feared competition, and those who were not successful in their academics and in their profession (Blinder. 2001).

If culture dictates that men should be big and strong, why is it that eating disorders occur in some men? According to Blinder (2001), males with eating disorders experience "sexual isolation, sexual inactivity and conflicted homosexuality". Gays, who are also pressured in becoming physically and professionally successful, are thus most likely victims of eating disorder.

As such, eating disorders is prevalent among male homosexuals. This, however, does not mean that heterosexual males do not develop eating disorders because they do. Male runners and jockeys, for example, who are involved in activities that necessitate low weight and who suffer from too much stress and pressure can develop eating disorders ("Issues for Men", 2006). Unlike women who develop the condition because they perceive themselves to be fat, most men who develop the disease are actually overweight prior to being inflicted with the condition.

Conclusion

While eating disorders have always been associated with women, a number of men also suffer from the condition. There are general similarities in eating disorders between men and women, both sexes primarily use food to lose

weight and to deal with emotions. There is however some discrepancy in the characteristics of victims; physical perception and weight prior to illness; and symptoms such that girls lose their menstrual cycles as an effect of starvation. Because the condition is highly associated with women, treatment of males with eating disorders has been difficult. Some male bulimics and anorexics do not realize they suffer from eating disorders because they are not aware that the illness can strike both men and women.

References

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