

Eating Disorders in Singapore: A Review

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Abstract

Introduction: Anorexia nervosa, bulimia and binge-eating disorder are the three best recognised eating disorders. Eating disorders have been reported to affect some 1 to 3% of adolescent females in the West. Increasing reports from Asia suggest that it is no longer possible to view these illnesses as 'Western' diseases. Eating disorders are the third most common serious medical disorder in female adolescents, after asthma and depression. It poses a tremendous burden for individuals, families and society. Historical and current studies on eating disorders in Singapore are reviewed, and discussed in the light of available regional and worldwide research. **Methods:** Studies on anorexia nervosa and bulimia in Singapore were identified through a MEDLINE search (from 1979). Information from these studies were supplemented with relevant local monographs on eating disorders. **Results:** Reports of eating disorders have increased over recent years in the local literature. The psychopathology of eating disorders in Singapore is very similar to that described in the Western literature, and in the two main current classification systems. Body dissatisfaction is prevalent among Singaporean Chinese schoolgirls and female undergraduates, with rates not dissimilar to the West. There is a link between 'Westernisation' (based on English being spoken as the main language at home) and body dissatisfaction.

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