Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction and Emotional Distress

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Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction and Emotional Distress

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ABSTRACT

METHODS

RESULTS

CONCLUSION

Sample
- Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey, 2009-2010; sample of 5,110 girls aged 11 to 16 in the U.S.
- Methods
  - Independent variable: composite index measuring emotional distress
  - Independent variables (see Table 1)
    - Self-Image Variables: body dissatisfaction, self-esteem
    - Parent and School Variables: close friends, time with friends, relationships with fellow students, peer victimization, school performance, school enjoyment
    - Family Variables: monitoring by father and by mother, satisfaction with family relationships
  - Control Variables: race, age, family structure, socioeconomic status
  - Estimation
    - Model estimated using least squares regression

INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues in adolescence are an increasingly prevalent problem. Approximately 1.4 million adolescent girls undergo a major depressive episode every year, and these episodes are three times as likely in girls as in boys (sambha.gov). Research has established a link between body dissatisfaction and emotional distress (Almeida et al., 2012). Overweight and obese youth not only experience greater body stress, they also report more frequent depressive symptoms and more negative self-esteem (Goldfield et al., 2012). While many studies have examined this relationship, few have considered it in the context of peer and family relationships. This study identifies a number of variables contributing to emotional distress, thereby identifying potential interventions.

DEPENDENT variables (see Table 1)
- Self-Image Variables: body dissatisfaction, self-esteem
- Peer and School Variables: close friends, time with friends, relationships with fellow students, peer victimization, school performance, school enjoyment
- Family Variables: monitoring by father and by mother, satisfaction with family relationships
- Control Variables: race, age, family structure, socioeconomic status

RESULTS

- Participants reported fairly low average emotional distress.
  - On average, respondents reported moderate body dissatisfaction.
  - Adolescents reported having about 5 close friends, and spending time with them an average of two or three times per week.
  - Most participants reported that they hadn’t been bullied in the past couple of months.
  - On average, respondents reported good school performance and positive feelings about school.
  - Mothers’ monitoring of participants on average was moderately higher than fathers’.
  - The greatest percentage of adolescents reported very good family relationships.

- About 55% of the sample was White, 15% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 18% Other.

CONCLUSION

Body dissatisfaction is associated with emotional distress independent of peer, school, and family factors. Adolescent girls at greatest risk for mental health problems are dissatisfied with their bodies, have poor self-esteem, spent little time with friends, are bullied, don’t enjoy school, and have poor family relationships. This data provides potential targets for interventions in troubled youth. By increasing positive self-image, particularly positive body image, as well as promoting supportive family and peer relationships, emotional distress risk factors can be significantly decreased.