

# Psycho-Social Predictors of Eating Disorders Among Female Students of Higher Institutions in Makurdi Metropolis Benue State-Nigeria

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**Abstract-** This study investigated on the psycho-social predictors of eating disorder among female students of higher Institutions in Makurdi metropolis. The study employed ex-post factor cross sectional survey method where 382 students consisting of 257(67.3%) students from Benue State University Makurdi and 125(32.7%) students from University of Agriculture Makurdi were randomly drawn through purposive sampling method: Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and Eating attitude test (EAT-26) (Garner, Olmstead, Bohr and Garfinkel, 1982) were used for data collection. Findings showed that self-esteem ( $\beta=-.42, p<.001$ ), age ( $\beta=-.01, p>.05$ ), socio-economic status ( $\beta=-.5, p>.05$ ), ethnicity ( $\beta=-.17, p<.001$ ) and place of residence ( $\beta=-.03, p>.05$ ) significantly predicted eating disorder, whereas independently, only self-esteem and ethnicity significantly predicted eating disorder among female undergraduate students. Finally, no significant difference was found between Benue State University students and University of Agriculture Makurdi ( $t(380, df)=1.64, p>.05$ ). It was therefore recommended that mental health studies be included in Primary and post primary school curriculum to create awareness on eating disorders and other variables that affect normal functioning in daily life. It was also recommended that further researches be conducted on eating disorders using larger population to enhance generalization of research findings.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In a society that continues to prize thinness even as people tend to become heavier than ever before, almost everyone worries about their weight at least occasionally. People with eating disorder take such concerns to extremes. developing abnormal eating habit that threatens their wellbeing and possibly their lives. Eating disorders primarily affects girls and women (National Institute of Mental Health,2007).

Eating disorders are psychological illness defined by abnormal eating habit that may involve either

insufficient or excess food intake to detriment of an individual's physical and mental health (Hudson, 2007). Eating disorders are serious and complex emotional and physical addictions, without treatment it leads to mood swing, physical problems and potential death. Eating disorders include a range of conditions that involve an obsession with food, weight and appearance to the degree that a person's health, relationships and daily activities are adversely affected.

Despite, eating disorders widespread and impact on people of all ages and sexes, it is estimated that 10 million women in the United States suffer from it and the statistics are growing (Gorgan, 1999). Whether a person restricts food intake, binge eat, binges and purges, abuses laxatives, compulsively overeats or excessively exercises. These behaviors often are symptoms and not the problem. They often develop as a way of coping with emotional pain, conflicts related to separation. low self-esteem, depression, stress or trauma. Eating disorders are characterized by severe disturbances in eating behavior. The practice of an eating disorder can be viewed as a survival mechanism, just as an alcoholic uses alcohol to cope, a person with an eating disorder can use eating, purging or restricting to deal with their problems.

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by binge eating and purging (self-induced vomiting, over exercise and usage of diuretics, enemas and laxatives). Anorexia nervosa on the other hand is characterized by extreme food restriction to the point of self-starvation and excessive weight loss, the extreme weight loss often causes women and girls who have begun menstruation to stop having menstrual period, a condition known as amenorrhea, although some women who meet the other DSM-5 criteria for anorexia nervosa still report some

menstrual activity. The DSM-5 currently specifies two subtypes of anorexia nervosa "the restricting and binge/purge type. Those suffering from the restricting type of anorexia nervosa lose weight by restricting food intake and sometimes by over exercise, whereas those suffering from the binge/purge type overeat and compensate through some method of purging. Although eating disorders are increasing all over the world, there is evidence to suggest that it is women in the western world who are at the highest risk of developing them and the degree of westernization increases the risk (Cummins & Lehman,2007).

The precise cause of eating disorder is not entirely understood, but there is evidence that it may be linked to some medical conditions, cultural idealization of thinness and youthfulness has contributed to eating disorders affecting diverse population. One study showed that girls with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder "ADHD" have a greater chance of getting an eating disorder than those not affected, (Biederman, Ball, Moniteaux, Surman, Johnson & Zeitlin, 2007).

Another study suggests that women with post-traumatic stress disorders "PTSD", especially due to sexually related trauma are more likely to develop anorexia nervosa (Reyes, Von Holle & Ulman, 2011; Brown, Testa & Messman,2009; Chen, Murad, Paras & Colbenson, 2010). One study shows that foster girls are more likely to develop bulimia nervosa. Some think that peer pressure and idealized body-type are also a factor, some research show that for certain people there are genetic reasons why they may be prone to develop an eating disorder (Bloomfield, 2006). Recent studies have found evidence of a correlate between patients with bulimia nervosa and substance use disorders. In addition, anxiety disorders and personality disorders are common occurrences with clients of eating disorders. People with eating disorders may have a dysfunctional hunger cognitive module which causes various feelings of distress to make them feel hungry.

Numerous psycho-social factors contribute to eating disorders, ranging from self-esteem, depression, anger, anxiety, difficulty expressing emotional feelings, socio-economic status, media and narrowed definition of beauty based on specific body weight. Self-esteem has constantly been shown to predict eating disorder and it reflects a person's overall emotional evaluation of their worth, it is a judgement

of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. It encompasses beliefs of competence and worth (Hewith, 2009). Smith and Mackie (2007) define it by saying "The self-concept is what we think about the self, self-esteem is the positive or negative evaluation of the self as in how we feel about it". One's self esteem is also closely associated with self-consciousness; it is a disposition that a person has which represents their judgement of their own worthiness.

Self-esteem is an important issue in eating disorders. It has been known that self-esteem and self-worth seem to be related to dietary habit and eating disorders. but researchers have wanted to understand the relationship more clearly, comprehending the degree to which they interact with each other. Many researchers have wanted to understand the relationship more clearly, comprehending the degree to which they interact with each other. Many researchers have presented the idea that those who suffer from an eating disorder are more likely to have lower self-esteem than those who do not have an eating disorder (De la et al., 2005).

Socio-economic status is one of the factors responsible for an eating disorder. Socio-economic status is the total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education and occupation. When analyzing a family's socio-economic status, the household income, earner's education and occupation are examined, as well as combined income, versus with an individual, when their own attributes are assessed (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Socio-economic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It's often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation.

Many people wrongly believe that eating disorders are more prevalent in the higher socio-economic status groups. Studies conducted in the 1960s and 70s corroborate this statement, however their methods may have biased the results. Recent studies using health questionnaires distributed to large heterogeneous population have shown that eating disorders equally affect all people, regardless of socio-economic status. These studies have also demonstrated that females of the lower socio-economic status group report higher rates of disorder

relating behavior (voting, use of diet pills and laxatives as a means to lose weight). Girls that exhibit disordered eating behavior are more likely to develop eating disorders later in life (Gibbon & Pat, 2001).

Self-esteem and socio-economic status of an individual influence their eating habit. An eating disorder in any individual will have been caused by a complex mixture of biological, behavioral, psychological and social factors (Bulik et al., 2011). People with negative body image have a greater likelihood of developing an eating disorder and are more likely to suffer from feeling of depression, isolation, low self-esteem and obsession with weight loss. Eating disorders are not just about food and weigh, they are an attempt to use food intake and weight control to manage emotional conflict that actually have little or nothing to do with food or weight. Eating disorders do not occur in an otherwise satisfied, productive and emotionally healthy person. People with eating disorder are struggling with a number of emotional problems. Many people with eating disorders appear to be functioning at a high level, such as enjoying success with school or work. Often, the only problem appears to be with eating. However, healthier eating habits or stronger will power are not the missing ingredients that will make the problem disappear. An eating disorder is an external solution to inner turmoil.

In summary, the present study sets out to investigate the psycho-social predictors of eating disorder among female students of higher institutions in Makurdi metropolis.

## II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Eating disorder is not just a state of thinner or obese, but are potential lives threatening conditions that affects a person's emotional and physical health. In anorexia nervosa's cycle the body is denied the essential nutrients it needs to function normally which causes abnormally slow heart rate and low blood pressure, reduction in bone density, weakness, fainting, severe dehydration and growth of a downy layer of hair called lanugo on the body in an effort to keep it warm. While purging and binge cycle in bulimia nervosa can affect the entire digestive system leading to electrolyte imbalance leading to irregular heartbeat, inflammation of the esophagus from frequent vomiting, tooth decay or stain, peptic ulcer, chronic irregular bowel movement and constipation

as a result of laxative abuse (O'Brien & Stapleton, 2001; Garfinkel & Newman, 2001). Eating disorder is an issue that needs great attention as it affects ladies the most sometimes leading to menorrhoea or even infertility and probably an attempt of suicide.

Eating disorder resulted in about 7,000 deaths a year as of 2010, making them the mental illness with the highest mortality rate (Lazano, Naghavi, Foreman, Lim, Shibuya, Aboyans, Abraham & Adair, 2012).

Literature reveals a strong inverse relationship that those who suffer eating disorders are low on self-esteem and socio-economic status (Story, O'Dea & Caputie, 1995; de la Rie, 2005). In line with this, the researcher is motivated to investigate the psycho-social predictors of eating disorder among female students of higher institutions in Makurdi metropolis.

The purpose of this study is to further investigate the psycho-social predictors of eating disorder. To fulfill this purpose, the following objectives are set out:

- i. To find out if self-esteem, socio-economic status, age, ethnicity and place of residence will independently and jointly predict eating disorders among female students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture Makurdi.
- ii. To find out if there will be significant difference in eating disorders between Benue State University and University of Agriculture Makurdi.

## Research Questions

This research seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. Will self-esteem, socio-economic status, age, ethnicity and place of residence independently and jointly predict eating disorders among female students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture Makurdi?
- ii. Will there be a significant difference in eating disorders between the students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture Makurdi?

## Significance of the Study

Considering the impact eating disorder has on the psychological development of an individual, any research aimed at examining the outcome and nature of other variables on eating disorder is a step towards saving a life.

Most often teachers and parents find it difficult to help the children with psychological illness "especially eating disorders". This study is of relevance as it will be useful to teachers and parents knowing that a person's self-esteem and socio-economic states can trigger an eating disorder will enlighten them to aid the children manage it.

Also, this study is relevant to clinician and psychotherapist. The task of helping a patient recover from an eating disorder can be demanding, as most people feel ashamed, uncomfortable and have a distorted perception of their shape which needs to be changed by the clinician and psychotherapist in order for them to appreciate and understand that natural body shape and physical appearance says very little about their character and values as a person.

Furthermore, in organizations, performance of workers is often associated with their psychological wellbeing. Eating disorders which leads to anxiety and depression can impairs functioning and reduce productivity. Effective treatment of eating disorder will enhance performance and lead to productivity. Thus, this study is also significant to organizations.

This study is significant as it will increase the body of literature on the psycho-social predicts of eating disorder. This study will also serve as a reference for academic purpose. Also, information generated for this study will be published for public use and knowledge.

#### Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the psycho-social Predictors of eating disorder among female of higher institutions in Makurdi metropolis. Female students from two selected tertiary institutions in Makurdi metropolis will be sampled. These institutions are Benue State University and Federal University of Agriculture

#### Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method to obtain data for the study. The independent variables in the study are Self-esteem and socio-economic status. The dependent variable is eating disorder.

#### Setting

The research was carried in two higher Institutions in Makurdi metropolis, they include, Benue State

University Makurdi, located at the South Bank of Makurdi along Gboko road and University of Agriculture, located at the North Bank of Makurdi. The research was carried out between 2015 and 2016.

#### Participants

Participants for the study were 382 female students from Benue State University and University of Agriculture, all in Makurdi. Their ages ranged from 17-31 with the mean age of 23.05 (SD=3.48). Among the participants, 112(29.3%) were Tiv, 102 (26.7%) were Idoma, 70(18.3%) were Ibo,48(12.6%) Igede, while 50 (13.1%) belonged to other ethnic groups. As for father's occupation,66(17.3%) were professionals, 152 (39.8%) served as civil servants, 27 (7.1%) were practicing farmers, 84(22.0%) were in trading, while 53 (13.9%) belong to other occupations. In terms of mother's occupation, 55 (14.4%) were professionals, 120 (31.4%) were civil servants, 59 (15.4%) were farmers, 63 (16.5%) were into trading, while 85(22.3%) belong to other occupations. As for the Institutions, 257 (67.3%) were from Benue State University and 125 (32.7%) were from University of Agriculture. As for their place of residence 271 (70.9%) were on campus and 111(29.1%) Off campus.

#### Sampling

Purposive sampling technique was used for the study. Purposive sampling is the procedure in which the investigator identifies individuals who are considered to be typical of the population and selects them as the sample (Akinsola, 2005). For example, in order to obtain participants for the study, only female students from both institutions were used for the study.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using Multiple regression and independent t-test. The Multiple regression was used to analyze the independent and joint contribution of self-esteem, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and place of residence on eating disorder among female students in Benue State University and University of Agriculture, Makurdi. On the other hand, independent t-test served to analyze data on the difference in eating disorder between students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture, Makurdi.

This section presents the results obtained from the analysis of data. The results are presented in the

tables below according to the hypotheses tested in this study.

#### IV. RESULT

Hypothesis 1: The hypothesis stated that self-esteem, socioeconomic status (parents' occupation), age,

ethnicity and place of residence will independently and jointly predict eating disorder among female students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture Makurdi. This hypothesis was tested using Multiple regression and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Multiple regression showing independent and joint influence of self-esteem, socio-economic status, age, ethnicity and place of residence on eating disorder among female students

Predictor variables	R	R2	F	$\beta$	T	P
Constant	.446	.199	15.52		10.88	.000
Self-esteem				-.42	-8.75	.000
Age				-.01	-.24	.81
Socioeconomic status				-.05	-.85	.40
Ethnicity				.17	3.63	.000
Place of residence				-.03	-.62	.54

DV: Eating disorder

The result presented in Table 1 revealed that there is a significant joint prediction of eating disorder by self-esteem, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and place of residence  $F(6,375) = 15.516, p < .01$ . This shows that the variables jointly accounted for 19.9% of the variance in eating behavior among female students. Independently, the result revealed that self-esteem made a significant negative influence on eating disorder ( $\beta = -.42, p < .001$ ) with ethnicity also having significant influence ( $\beta = -.17, p < .001$ ) However, age ( $\beta = -.01, p > .05$ ), socio-economic status

(parents' occupation) ( $\beta = -.05, p > .05$ ) and place of residence 52

( $\beta = -.03, p > .05$ ) did not make any significant influence respectively. The hypothesis was therefore confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis stated that there will be a significant difference in eating disorder between students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture Makurdi. Independent t-test was used in testing the hypothesis and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Independent t-test showing difference in eating behavior between students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture, Makurdi

Name of institution	N	Mean	SD	df	T	P
Benue State University	257	56.46				.50
Uni. Agric., Makurdi	125	53.26	18.05	380	1.64	

DV: Eating Disorder

The result presented in Table 2 showed that there is no significant difference in eating disorder between students of Benue State University and University of Agriculture, Makurdi  $t(380) = 1.64, p > .05$ . Based on this finding, hypothesis two was not confirmed.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated psycho-social predictors of eating disorders among female students of higher institutions in Makurdi metropolis. From the study it was concluded that there was a significant joint influence of eating disorder by self-esteem, age,

socio-economic status, ethnicity and place of residence. Also, self-esteem and ethnicity independently predicted eating disorder. However, age, socio-economic status and place of residence did not independently predict eating disorder. No differences existed between Benue State University students and students of University of Agriculture in eating disorder.

#### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore recommended that:

- i. Mental health studies should be included in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. This will create awareness on eating disorder and other mental health variables that affect a person's functioning in daily life.
- ii. Parents and caregivers should acknowledge the reality of eating disorder as it is influenced by self-esteem and help young children build a higher level of self-esteem to prevent the onset of an eating disorder.
- iii. Further researches should be conducted on eating disorder using larger population that will enhance generalization of research findings with a culturally developed questionnaire used in our society.
- iv. Finally, students should respect and admire themselves as well as think positive and love themselves.

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