



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Examination of Eating Attitudes in Terms of Interpersonal Relationships and Life Satisfaction in Late Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to analyze the relationship between eating attitudes and interpersonal relationship and life satisfaction by late adolescents. A total of 511 students, 362 females and 149 males, studying in different departments of Faculty of Educations, Recep Tayyip Erdogan University, On Dokuz Mayis University, Karadeniz Technical University and Ahi Evran University, participated. Sociodemographic Form, Eating Attitude Test, Interpersonal Relations Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale and were used as instruments. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 23.00 software. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, Multilinear Regression analysis and the independent groups t-test were used. Findings revealed that a significant positive correlation was determined between eating attitudes and nourishing and inhibitory relationship styles. No statistically significant correlation was determined between eating attitudes and life satisfaction. Besides, interpersonal relationship account for 3% of total variance. Eating attitudes not differed according to gender is among the study results. The research reached the conclusion that interpersonal relationship styles contributed to the explanation of eating attitudes, while life satisfaction had no contribution to the explanation of eating attitude. Additionally another result of the research is that there was no difference between eating attitudes of males and females.

Keywords: Eating attitudes, interpersonal relationships, life satisfaction, adolescent

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the transition stage from childhood to adulthood and is a period when body perception of the individual alters, together with rapid physical changes experienced (1). Unattractive changes, such as disproportionate limbs and stature, adolescent acnes and rapid weight gain, may cause adolescents to develop negative perceptions about their bodies. Considering the situation that peer acceptance and social approval is important, problems encountered in adolescents might

include rejection by friends, mocked and not being included in groups based on their appearances. In addition to these problems, behavioral issues exist which may end up in psychopathological problems in adolescents such as depression (2), substance and alcohol use (3), smoking cigarettes (4) and excessive internet use (5), risky behaviors (6), and eating disorders (7). It is probable that eating attitudes will vary according to the changes in perception of the body.

The determinant concept of eating disorders is eating attitude (8). Characteristics of eating attitudes like unconscious nutrition, unbalanced eating habits, and wrong food choices may cause many problems that may reach the level of eating disorders. Therefore, eating attitudes are considered to be undoubtedly important for human life (9). Especially with the change in lifestyle of adolescents beginning college education, there are

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parallel changes in eating attitudes (10). College students are independent of family control, have a fast and social life which plays a role in changing eating attitudes (11-13). Additionally, the importance given to beauty and esthetic appearance by many youths in the adolescent period, especially in young girls where "being thin" is perceived as equivalent to "being beautiful", leads to irregular eating habits, skipping meals and harmful diets which might lay the foundation for eating behavior disorders (14-16). In situations where eating attitude and body perception become disorders, the individual may display behaviors like finding themselves as fat or out of shape, eating very limited food, vomiting or purging after eating, using laxatives, and excessive exercise (17).

There are many research studies on the causes of unhealthy eating attitudes, with a focus on individual, environmental, and social factors playing a role in the development of these disorders (18). In first place among factors affecting eating attitude are gender and developmental periods (19). When the effect of gender is evaluated, as young girls especially attach more importance to body image and esthetics they might appear to have a greater tendency toward eating disorders (20-23). Research findings related to lifetime prevalence in female and male adolescents found ratios of 17.9% in girls and 6.5% in boys (24). Though it is more common in girls, currently it is known that the incidence in males is rising (25,26). When evaluated in terms of age, eating disorders are observed more commonly in adolescent period youths (27). There is little information on the prevalence in Turkey, though it was identified to be more common in 12-18 year old adolescents (28).

Research has shown correlations between eating attitudes and many psychological variables in addition to social determinant factors. Among these variables are interpersonal schemes (29), body perception (30), anger (31), self-esteem (15), depression (32), and internet addiction (33). In this present study, we aimed to examine eating attitudes in terms of interpersonal relationship styles and life satisfaction in order to explain different

dimensions of eating attitudes. Interpersonal relationships occur as emotional, cognitive and behavioral styles within the relationships of the individual with other people (34). For youths newly beginning university life and in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, newly formed friendships and social relationships are important. At this point, the results of the nutritional or inhibitory relationship that forms will affect the behavior of young people and their psychological status. Another relevant question was whether there was a correlation between healthy or unhealthy interpersonal relationships and satisfaction with life in the college environment with eating attitudes. With this aim, this presents study aimed to answer the following questions:

- (a) Is there a significant correlation between eating attitudes of college students in the late adolescence period with interpersonal relationship styles and life satisfaction?
- (b) Do interpersonal relationship styles and life satisfaction predict eating attitudes of college students in the later adolescence period?
- (c) Do eating habits of college students in the late adolescence period differ depending on gender?

METHODS

Study Participants

The study participants comprised of 362 females (70.8%) and 149 males (29.2%) for a total of 511 first year college students attending the School of Education in several universities in Turkey. The participants ages ranged from 17 to 21 years, with a mean age of 18.78 (SD=0.99). The demographic information relating to participants is presented in Table 1.

Instruments

Sociodemographic Form: The sociodemographic form prepared by the researchers included questions relating to the gender, age, university and departments of participants.

Table 1: Distribution of Variables in the Research Group

Variables	Categories	N	%	Mean	SD
Sex	1. Female	362	70.8		
	2. Male	149	29.2		
	Total	511	100		
University	1. KTU	136	26.6		
	2. RTEU	140	27.5		
	3. OMU	105	20.5		
	4. AHU	130	25.4		
	Total	511	100		
Department	1. Mathematics	44	8.6		
	2. Science	41	8		
	3. Counseling and Guidance	331	64.8		
	4. Computer Teaching	23	4.5		
	5. German	21	4.1		
	6. Turkish	51	10		
	Total	511	100		
Age				18.78	0.99

KTU: Karadeniz Technical University, RTEU: Recep Tayyip Erdogan University, OMU: Ondokuz Mayıs University, AHU: Ahi Evran University

Eating Attitudes Test (EAT): Developed by Garner and Garfinkel (35) to assess patients with eating disorder, the EAT is a 40 item self-evaluation scale answered on a 6-point Likert scale with questions applicable to individuals from 11 to 70 years of age. The reliability and validity studies for Turkey were completed by Savaşır and Erol (36) with test-retest reliability of 0.65, with reliability coefficient of 0.70 for the EAT-40. The cut-off point for the scale is 30 points, with 30 points and above indicating risk of eating disorder. For total points the minimum value is 0 while the maximum value is 120. There is a direct correlation between scores and eating disorder pathology. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this present study was 0.62.

Interpersonal Relationships Scale (IRS): The scale was developed by Şahin, Durak and Yasak (37) with the aim of assessing interpersonal relationship styles. The IRS is a 4-point Likert type scale (0-Completely disagree, 4-completely agree) self-report style 31-item scale. The scale comprises two subscales. While higher scores obtained for the subscale of nourishing relationship styles indicates a positive relationship, scores obtained for the inhibiting relationship style indicates negative relationship style. Additionally, total scores may be

obtained for the scale. Şahin et al. found the internal consistency coefficient as 0.79 with split-half reliability as 0.63. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this present study was 0.71.

Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS): The LSS was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (38) and adapted into Turkish by Köker (39) and Yetim (40). It consists of five items evaluated over a Likert Scale of seven degrees. Each item is scored from 1 to 7, and the total score varies between 1 and 35. Higher scores represent a high level of life satisfaction. Inter-item correlation coefficients vary between 0.80 and 0.89. The test-retest coefficient was 0.85 and item test-retest correlation coefficients were between 0.71 and 0.80. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this present study was 0.83.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The data was collected simultaneously from four different universities after receiving necessary permission from the local administrative offices. Before administering the measurement tools, necessary explanations on how to fill in the forms were made. The data were collected concurrently over a period of 15 days. Among 550 forms, 39 incomplete or erroneous forms were removed and

the data was prepared for analysis in the computer environment. Before analyzing the data obtained within the scope of the research, a range of statistical checks like lost value analysis, end value analysis and normal distribution were performed. The Shapiro-Wilks test revealed that the data displayed normal distribution. After the necessary checks of the data set, data analysis was begun in line with the aims of the research. All statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS Version 23 for Windows program (IBM Corp.; Armonk, NY). The Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient, multiple linear regression analysis and independent group student t-test were conducted.

RESULTS

Initially the correlations between the variables were examined. To examine the correlations between eating attitudes, interpersonal relationship styles and life satisfaction, the results of the Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient analysis revealed a positive significant correlation between eating attitudes and nourishing ($r=0.09, p<0.05$) and inhibiting ($r=0.13, p<0.01$)

relationship styles, while there were no significant correlations between eating attitudes and life satisfaction ($r=-0.05, p>0.05$). The results are presented in Table 2.

For the next step, multiple linear regression analysis was completed to identify whether interpersonal relationship styles predicted eating habits or not. As shown in Table 3, nourishing and inhibiting relationship styles explained 3% of the total variance in eating attitudes ($F_{(2,508)} = 8.67, p<0.05$). The contributions of nourishing ($\beta=0.12, p<0.05$) and inhibiting ($\beta=0.15, p<0.05$) relationship styles to the model were significant.

Finally to determine whether eating attitudes varied based on gender, the independent group student t-test was performed. It was revealed that there was no significant difference based on gender ($t=1.33, p>0.05$). The results are presented in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

This present study revealed a positive significant correlation between eating attitudes and nourishing and inhibiting relationship styles. This finding shows that as eating attitudes become healthier, nourishing and

Table 2: Correlations Between the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Eating Attitudes (EA)	1			
2. Nourishing relationship style (NRS)	0.09*	1		
3. Inhibiting relationship style (IRS)	0.13**	-0.25**	1	
4. Life Satisfaction (LS)	-0.05	0.22**	-0.07	1
Mean	11.06	46.03	26.60	21.33
SD	5.97	6.91	6.36	6.97

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Table 3: Predictive Variables for Eating Attitudes

Variabes	B	β	t	p	R	R ²	ΔR^2	F
Fixed	1.71		0.73	0.47	0.18	0.03	0.03	8.67
NRS	0.12	0.14	2.98	0.003				
IRS	0.15	0.16	3.56	0.000				

Table 4: Gender-Based Differences in Eating Attitudes

	Sex	N	Mean	SD	t	p
EA	Female	362	11.29	6.25	1.33	0.183
	Male	149	10.51	5.20		

$p<0.05$

inhibiting relationship styles scores would increase. Additionally when interpersonal relationship styles are entered in a regression equation to explain eating attitudes, nourishing and inhibiting relationship styles were observed to predict eating attitudes. When evaluated in light of the conceptual knowledge, these findings produce contradictory results. Nourishing and inhibiting relationship styles have completely opposite characteristics; however, development of both relationship styles lead to unhealthy eating attitudes. While research has proposed a significant correlation between inhibiting relationship styles with eating disorders (41-43) no study found a correlation between nourishing relationship style and eating attitudes.

Inhibiting relationship style is an interpersonal relationship situation characterized by negative properties. Individuals use mainly negative methods to reach the aims expected from the relationship. This relationship style includes interactions with individuals involving situations like ignoring, disdainfulness, intimidation or humiliation (44). Adolescents newly starting college life and attempting to create relationships, probably experience problems and do not form trusting relationships. Due to feelings of threats, loss of relationships or loneliness, adolescents who obsess about internal reactions to others, may be directed towards excessive eating behavior as a form of self-comfort (45). Overeating behavior may play a role as a restorative defense mechanism to avoid subconscious feelings of loneliness and feelings of abandonment (46).

Interactions with individuals with nourishing relationship style involve protection or development of self-esteem, honored with open and respectful communication (47). Forming a positive relationship may not provide satisfaction and may be uncomfortable for some individuals in the adolescence period (48). In this situation satisfaction may be ensured by directing the person toward excessive eating behavior.

Another finding was that there were no significant correlations between eating attitudes and life satisfaction. When studies on this topic are reviewed, there is no finding to support our research findings. In general, there

are studies showing a correlation between eating attitudes or eating disorders and low life satisfaction (49,50). Grant et al. (51) reported that healthy eating attitudes and healthy diet positively affected life satisfaction in college students from different countries. Students newly attending college have left their family and the regular family lifestyle and are becoming independent with full responsibility for their own lives (10). This situation may affect the change in eating attitudes. The faster lifestyle brought about by academic and social variables in college environment might direct the youth toward consumption of fast food and sodas. These foods when consumed late and rapidly may lead to a range of psychological problems as well as weight and health problems (52). As eating attitudes become unhealthier, it may lead to negative results in terms of life satisfaction. This study did not find such a result. As the sample group data were collected from was attending a faculty in a small county with limited access to fast food outlets, students were forced to eat healthy food in the faculty dining halls. Additionally as many students stay in dormitories, and dormitories provide healthy breakfasts, lunch and evening meals, students may have continued to have regular eating attitudes as in the family environment. As there was no negative change in eating attitudes, there was no correlation revealed between eating attitudes and life satisfaction.

The last finding of the research determined there was no difference in eating attitudes based on gender. In other words, there was no difference observed in the eating habits of males and females in the sampling group. There is a common view that in many societies eating disorders are observed more in women compared to men (53-56), as men are known to be more satisfied with their bodies and appearances compared to women (57). On social media, the ideal weight and body measurements assumed for women cause women to strive to be thin and negatively perceive their bodies. This situation may prepare the base for changes in eating to become popular, men have begun to feel social pressure. The result of this is that men may perform excessive exercise and display attitudes causing eating

disorders (58). Research has shown that men are displaying pathologic eating disorders at higher rates than in the past (24). This has ensured a balance in the prevalence rates for eating disorders in men and women (26,59). This is considered to be the reason for the close correlation between the eating attitude points for men (10.51) and women (11.29) found in this research.

Our study has certain limitations. The study group comprises first year college students in the young adolescence period, therefore the age range of students is limited. The limited age variance reduces the strength of correlations. In addition, there might be response bias and desirability bias linked to the self-report nature of the data collection tools.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it was revealed that interpersonal relationships played a role in unhealthy eating attitudes. As negative changes in eating attitudes are an important factor in the occurrence of eating disorders, this makes

the study important as a preliminary study. It is recommended that this topic be dealt with as a comparison between the relationship styles of individuals with eating disorder diagnosis and individuals with unhealthy eating attitudes. Additionally the study revealed that nourishing relationship style is an explanatory variable for eating attitude. To explain this finding in a more detailed fashion in terms of causes, it is thought that variables like subjective well-being, life satisfaction, self-perception, and perfectionism may have a mediatory role. In this research there were no correlations found between life satisfaction and eating attitudes. Life satisfaction is known to be a cognitive dimension of subjective well-being. In parallel, it may be said that there are some negativities in cognitive structure in the occurrence of eating disorders. Future studies examining life satisfaction in terms of eating disorders may provide different results.

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