

BODY IMAGE DISSATISFACTION AND EATING ATTITUDES IN **ADOLESCENTS**

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Adolescence is a period of life marked by pronounced physical, psychological, emotional, and social changes. The physical changes that characterize this stage have been implicated as a trigger for body image problems in both males and females. During this phase, beyond physical changes, body image is also influenced by several psychological and socio-cultural factors. The media may play a central role in the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction in this particularly population by creating a beauty standard of a slender shape for girls and a lean and muscular body for boys (Frederick, Fessler, & Haselton, 2005), which determines values and norms that influence attitudes and behaviors related to body size, appearance and weight (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006). The frequent discrepancy between the actual and the ideal weight, coupled with the need to adapt to the society, can lead to symptoms of inappropriate practices of weight control and eating disorders from dissatisfaction with the appearance (Dunker, Fernandes, & Carreira Filho, 2009). The few descriptive studies on eating attitudes and body satisfaction among Brazilian adolescents have led researchers to undertake epidemiological studies on the subject (Dunker et al., 2009). Considering the importance of investigating these relations in the early recognition of populations at risk of developing eating disorders, to provide more appropriate interventions of health professionals, this study aimed to evaluate the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and eating attitudes in adolescents, verifying the possible existence of differences related to gender. Study participants were 278 adolescents (172 girls and 106 boys) between 14 and 18 years old randomly selected from two private and two public schools of São Simão – SP city. Anthropometry was performed by Body Mass Index (BMI), which expresses the ratio of weight divided by height squared ($BMI=kg/m^2$)

and nutritional status was defined by the age- and sex-specific percentile based on Ministry of Health (Brazil, 2007) parameters. Body image dissatisfaction was assessed by the Figure Rating Scale developed and validated for Brazilian adolescents by Kakeshita, Silva, Zanatta and Almeida (2009). This scale assesses satisfaction with appearance, considered one of the components that form the attitudinal dimension of body image (Campana & Tavares, 2009). The instrument consists of 15 individual cards, ranging in BMI from 12.5 to 47.5 kg/m², with constant difference of 2.5 kg/m². The scale is presented in ascending order and the participant must choose the figure which best represents his/her current body and the figure representing the body that he/she would like to have and dissatisfaction is measured by the discrepancy between these measures. Eating attitudes were assessed using the Eating Attitudes Test, originally developed by Garner and Garfinkel (1979) as a test for diagnosing anorexia nervosa which quickly became the most applied test to eating disorders in general. Although the instrument has not been shown effectiveness in diagnosing the disease, has shown efficacy in the detection of clinical cases at risk populations and identifying individuals with abnormal eating and weight related concerns. The Brazilian version was translated and validated by Bighetti, Santos, Santos and Ribeiro (2004) and the cutoff was set at 21. Each of the 26 questions has six response options, ranging from never to always and for each chosen alternative are awarded points ranging from 0 to 3 (always=3, often=2, sometimes=1, seldom=0; almost never=0, and never=0). This project was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee (Process UNAERP n^o148/08) and data collection was carried out in rooms provided by the schools, comprising the application of the Figure Rating Scale, weight and height measures and self-administration of the Eating Attitudes Test. A descriptive statistics (percentages and mean; ± standard error of mean), the Student t test, the Pearson correlation test and an Analysis of Variance, followed by post-hoc Newman-Keuls test when applicable were used. The level of statistical significance was set at p<.05. The anthropometric results showed in boys and girls, respectively, a prevalence of normal weight (73.6% and 77.9%), followed by the overweight category (17.9% and 11.6%). The Figure Rating Scale showed that the discrepancy between the silhouettes pointed as current and desired was -0.6 kg/m² (±0.56) for boys and -2.1 kg/m² (±0.45) for girls and this difference was considered statistically significant (p<.05). The results of the Eating Attitudes Test showed that the mean score was 4.7 (±0.47) for boys and 9.3 (±0.74) for girls and this difference was considered statistically significant (p<.001). Regarding the

relationship between eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction between boys and girls, the Analysis of Variance showed no gender effect or interaction between factors ($p > .05$) but showed an effect of eating attitudes [$F_{(1,274)} = 7.20, p < .01$], with the group classified as EAT+ (above 21 points) reporting more dissatisfaction ($-5.9 \text{ kg/m}^2; \pm 1.4$) compared to the group classified as EAT- ($-1.0 \text{ kg/m}^2; \pm 0.4$). The Pearson's correlation analysis performed between these variables showed a weak negative correlation, but significant ($r = -0.25, p < .05$), indicating that dissatisfaction with appearance tend to increase with increasing scores on the test in both sexes. The results of this study corroborate other national surveys that also found that girls are more dissatisfied with appearance (Branco, Hilário & Cintra, 2006; Adami, Frainer, Santos, Fernandes, & De-Oliveira, 2008) and more concerned about food than boys (Souza-Kaneshima, França, Kneube, & Kaneshima, 2006; Pontieri, Lopes, & Eça, 2007). Importantly, the majority of investigations that use the Eating Attitudes Test are dedicated to the study of risk behaviors in females, and the decision to include the gender variable in this study was mainly due to this fact. The relationship between eating behavior and body dissatisfaction, observed in this study, although it has not been found by other authors (Gonçalves, Barbosa, Rosa, & Rodrigues, 2008), suggests that people dissatisfied with their body image have abnormal concerns related with food and weight, regardless of gender (Oliveira, 2009) and this fact becomes worrisome since effects on physical and cognitive development can be evidenced in adolescents who share inappropriate eating behaviors from their body dissatisfaction (Triches & Giugliani, 2007). Thus, it appears that girls are more dissatisfied with their appearance and have more concerns about food. However, in both sexes, dissatisfaction with appearance is related to abnormal eating behaviors. Since it is during adolescence that the risks of inappropriate behavior are more evident and this age offers a unique opportunity to positively influence the adoption of healthy habits that can be sustained for life, stands out the need to direct individual and collective actions assistance to this specific population.

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