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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DISORDERED EATING BEHAVIOURS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN YOUNG ADULTS A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Background: Disordered eating behaviours (DEB) have increased significantly in recent times, especially among young adults. These behaviours are the result of several variables, including conventional beauty ideals. Social media plays a significant role by popularizing unrealistic beauty standards. The correlation between DEB and the use of social media has not been adequately explored in young adults.

Methodology: Data from engineering students ($n = 690$; mean age = 19.5) was collected. Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) was used to determine DEB and social media disorder (SMD) scale was used to determine disordered social media usage. Chi-square test was applied to find the association between DEB and problematic usage of social media.

Results: Out of 690 sample size, 53.6 % of the sample were female and 46.4% were male. DEB were reported by 44.2% of which 15.2% were female and 29.0% were male with dieting being the most common disordered eating behavior. A total of 31.9% reported problematic or disordered social media usage of which 15.2% were female and 16.7% were male. A Significant association was found between DEB and disordered social media usage with p value=0.000 and χ^2 value= 15.06. A Significant association was also found between DEB and male sex with p value=0.000 and χ^2 value= 16.2.

Conclusion: The results of this study point to a correlation between DEB and problematic usage of social media in young adults.

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Introduction:-

Research on the psychological effects of being exposed to social media (SM) is an area gaining importance due to the rise in mental illnesses associated to its use.¹ In relation to that, Disordered eating behaviours (DEB) have increased significantly in recent times. These behaviours are the result of variables such as conventional beauty ideals, body dissatisfaction and low self esteem. Social media plays a significant role by popularizing unrealistic beauty standards.² Although SM is intended to foster social engagement and connection, many users passively consume content, leading to social comparison and isolation.

Need for the study: Males were underrepresented in previous studies, which made it challenging to generalize the findings. The majority of studies have been conducted on adolescents, with paucity of studies on young adults (YAs)³. Given that this age group's behaviour patterns and identity development differ from those of adolescents, SM may have a different impact on them. Studies in Asian countries have shown that food attitudes and levels of

body dissatisfaction are equivalent to or even worse than those reported in Western countries. ¹The majority of earlier studies examined the influence of conventional media, but the content offered on the internet includes newer aspects, such as user interaction and the capacity to produce their own content. ⁴

Aims And Objectives:-

1. To estimate disordered eating behaviours and social media disorder in young adults.
2. To determine the association between the disordered eating behaviours and social media disorder in the same study population.

Materials & Methods:-

1. Source of data: 690 undergraduate students of BIET engineering college, Davangere, Karnataka, India.
2. Sample size: 690 participants
3. Sampling method : Convenience sampling

Inclusion criteria:

1. Age : 18 to 22 years
2. Either gender: Males & females

Exclusion criteria:

1. Participants with comorbid psychiatric illness
2. Not willing to give informed consent

Methodology:-

Participants satisfying the inclusion and exclusion criteria were recruited for the study. They were informed about the study aim and protocol, and once they voluntarily agreed to participate, online survey was conducted using survey administration software, google forms. Survey consisted of informed consent, history of any psychiatric illness, demographic details and questionnaires related to the study.

Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26)⁵ was used to determine DEB and social media disorder (SMD)⁶ scale was used to determine disordered social media usage.

Statistical Analysis

Qualitative data expressed as frequencies and percentages. Quantitative data expressed as mean and standard deviation. Chi-square test was applied to find the association and level of significance was fixed at 5%. Software used was SPSS 20.0 version.

Results:-

Sex distribution :

Total of 690 participants were recruited in the study. 53.6 % (370) of the sample were female and 46.4% (320) were male.

Table 1:- Sex Distribution.

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Female	370	53.6
Male	320	46.4
Total	690	100.0

Descriptive statistics: Table 2 shows mean age of the sample population was 19.5 ± 0.665 , with mean weight and height being 54.96 ± 12.162 kg and 163.60 ± 11.24 cm respectively. Mean score of EAT 26 scale and SMD scale was 12.93 ± 10.288 and 2.99 ± 2.672 respectively.

Table 2:- Descriptive statistics.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	690	19.50	0.665
Current weight	690	54.96	12.162

DEB Score	690	12.93	10.288
SMD Score	690	2.99	2.672
Highest weight	650	61.95	15.222
Lowest weight	630	43.37	15.204
Height	690	163.60	11.24
BMI	690	20.60	4.056

Association between DEB and SMD :

Table 3 shows that 150 participants had both DEB and Social media disorder(SMD).155 participants had only DEB in which dieting was the most common DEB (80% /120) and 70 participants had only SMD .Chi square test was applied to find the association between DEB and SMD. There was a significant association between two with χ^2 value of 15.06 and p value 0.000(sig).

Table 3:- Association between DEB and SMD.

DEB	SMD		Total
	Positive	Negative	
Positive	150	155	305
	21.7%	22.5%	44.2%
Negative	70	315	385
	10.1%	45.7%	55.8%
Total	220	470	690
	31.9%	68.1%	100.0%

Association between DEB and Sex:Table 4 shows most of the participants that had DEB were male (29%) with a significant association between DEB and male sex with chi square value of 16.2 and p value of 0.000. About 15.2 % females had DEB.

Table 4:- Association between DEB and Sex.

DEB	Sex		Total
	Female	Male	
Positive	105	200	305
	15.2%	29.0%	44.2%
Negative	265	120	385
	38.4%	17.4%	55.8%

Association between SMD and Sex :Table 5 shows 16.7% male participants and 15.2% female participants had social media disorder with no significant association between SMD and sex.

Table 5:-Association between SMD and Sex.

SMD	Sex		Total
	Female	Male	
Positive	105	115	220
	15.2%	16.7%	31.9%
Negative	265	205	470
	38.4%	29.7%	68.1%
Total	370	320	690
	53.6%	46.4%	100.0%

Discussion:-

There was a significant association between DEB and SMD in this study.Study done by Santarossa et al and others showed similar results.³ In our study, there was also a significant association between male sex and DEB.These findings in terms of gender differences were similar to the study done by Burnette et al in which DEB was significant in men.⁷Current literature has continued to reinforce the notion that eating disorders predominately affect females by excluding males from research, thereby adding to the void in men centered knowledge and targeted clinical care.⁸Our study is unique in terms of it's study population allowing generalizability of results. This

study lacked the effect of social media on body image and self esteem which can be considered as scope for further research.

Limitations of the study: It was a cross sectional study leading to no evidence of a temporal relationship between social media usage and disordered eating behaviours which is one of the limitations of the study. Our sample was made up of students in the educational system in Davangere and most of them had family with middle to high income, so the results may not be generalizable. Finally, we did not measure other factors (e.g. depression, anxiety, poor coping mechanisms) which might be related with inappropriate eating attitudes/behaviours and body image satisfaction. Further study should include these factors in the analysis.

Conclusion:-

The results of this study point to a correlation between DEB and social media disorder in young adults. Disordered eating behaviours were seen more in male participants. By understanding this association, mental health professionals can identify unhealthy behaviours of social media usage that advocate unrealistic beauty ideals and thereby decreasing the prevalence of DEB. To find out if educating undergraduate students about more adaptive social media usage, decreases DEB in this high-risk demographic, intervention research is required. To determine how SM affects the development of EDs over time, more longitudinal experimental research is needed. Our study emphasizes the significance of addressing DEB in males, which were originally thought to be uncommon, as there is substantial data demonstrating that they are an emerging problem for men's health.⁸

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