

# Sociocultural and Psychological Factors Influencing Eating Disorder among Female Students in Federal College of Education Oyo

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## Abstract

*The study investigated sociocultural and psychological factors influencing eating disorder among female students in Federal College of Education Oyo. This is a cross-sectional descriptive survey study. Purposive random sampling was used to select second year female undergraduates' students. A total of 50 female undergraduates were sampled for the study. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Results show that societal pressure on body image contributes significantly to disordered eating behaviours among female undergraduate students. Findings further reveal the complex interplay of psychological elements in the emergence of eating disorders in this population. The study recommended among others that awareness campaign be conducted about eating disorders among female undergraduate students with emphasis on the importance of body positivity, self-acceptance, and the need to seek help for mental health concerns.*

**Keywords:** Sociocultural, psychological factors, Eating disorder, Female students.

## Introduction

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions characterized by unhealthy eating habits that can have severe consequences on an individual's physical and emotional well-being (Griffiths et al., 2015).

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Eating disorders refers to abnormal eating habits which are characterized by inadequate or excessive food intakes (Bailer, 2020). They include a range of conditions such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. These disorders often involve an obsession with food, body weight, and body shape, leading to harmful eating behaviors and habits.

Although for many decades it has been assumed that eating disorders occur primarily in Western cultures, particularly among adolescents in middle or upper socio-economic groups but there is growing evidence suggesting otherwise. In the past it was believed that non-western cultures are 'immune' to disordered eating attitudes. They tend to embrace plumpness and the larger figure which was rewarded with respect as it symbolizes beauty, wealth, fertility and femininity, as well as health and strength. But this is contrary to Western cultures that tend to overvalue thinness. Community-based samples conducted in some African countries during the 1980s and 1990s. Winters (2019) suggested that Western' epidemic of eating disorders has arrived on the African continent. It has been argued that these developments can largely be attributed to the process of acculturation. Many aspects of self-identity are modified to accommodate information on and experiences within the new culture (Winters, 2019).

Recent studies have demonstrated a high rate of comorbidity of eating disorders and diabetes with resultant rise in morbidity linked to poor glycemic control as a key causative factor for individuals with this co-occurrence.

Socio-economic factors, such as socioeconomic status, access to resources, and cultural attitudes toward food and body image, influence the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students (Levine and Murnen, 2019).

Psychological factors, such as low self-esteem, perfectionism, anxiety, and depression, contribute to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students. Negative body image and distorted perceptions of weight and shape play a central role in the onset and maintenance of disordered eating behaviors (Toselli et al., 2017). Psychological factors play a significant role in the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students. These factors encompass societal norms, cultural values, and interpersonal dynamics that shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors related to food, body image, and weight (Bakare and Munir, 2011).

Economic disparities may impact access to healthcare, nutritious food options, and supportive environments, thereby contributing to disparities in the prevalence and treatment of eating disorders. Moreover, eating disorders are a major source of physical and psychosocial morbidity among young women. It is therefore, imperative to detect those at risk of developing an eating disorder, with the view of preventing the disorder or initiating prompt treatment in those affected. This is because clinical experience and research evidence have indicated that eating disorders commonly begin with behaviour that resembles normal dieting, young women who are dieting constitute an important high-risk group, although only a small minority will develop an eating disorder (Toselli et al., 2017). Many whose body weights do not predispose to health problems seem to be weight conscious, primarily for cosmetic reasons. Their goal is to achieve a body size and shape that meets society's standards of perfection (Okoli, 2021).

Different studies exist in the literature on eating disorder among undergraduate women. Stice (2022) conducted a study and found that approximately 20% of female college students reported symptoms consistent with clinically significant eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

Research has also shown that exposure to thin-ideal media images, societal emphasis on thinness, and peer pressure to conform to beauty standards contribute to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors among college women (Grabe et al., 2020; Tiggemann and Slater, 2022).

Eating disorders among female undergraduate students can lead to a range of physical, psychological, and academic health issues that require comprehensive assessment, intervention, and support (Toselli et al., 2017). Addressing these health issues requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates medical care, psychological therapy, nutritional support, and academic accommodations to promote holistic recovery and well-being. Universities and colleges play a crucial role in creating supportive campus environments that prioritize mental health, provide access to resources and services, and raise awareness about eating disorders and their associated health risks. By addressing the complex interplay of physical, psychological, and academic health issues, universities can support the holistic well-being of female undergraduate students affected by eating disorders and promote a culture of health, resilience, and academic success on campus (Keel and Forney, 2013). To this end, sociocultural and psychological factors influencing eating disorder among female students in Federal College of Education Oyo is presented.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the socio-cultural factors contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo?
2. What are the psychological factors contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study connected to the influential dietary restraint theory proposed by Herman and Mack (Herman and Mack, 1975) emphasizes the role of dieting as a precipitating factor in the maintenance of binge eating, suggesting that restricting intake to the point of becoming chronically hungry made people more susceptible to overeating. The theory further emphasizes that people who engaged in restricted eating were then cognitively regulating their eating (as they were no longer relying on the physiological cues to eat). These individuals tended to engage in a 'black-and-white' thinking style in relation to food and eating whereby strict rules were applied dictating what foods were able to be eaten, in what quantities, and when. The theory is relevant to the study because it provides the connection between sociocultural and psychological factors thereby delineating their influence on eating disorder among women as examined in the present study.

## Research Method

Descriptive survey design was used in this study. The population of the study comprises fifty (50) respondents from Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. The instrument used for data collection was a structured 10-item questionnaire where the respondents were required to respond on four point scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree respectively. The respondents represented their view by ticking the appropriate column on the questionnaire sheet provided. The research instrument was subjected to the scrutiny of experts in different population other than the one used for the research, precisely, the students of Lagos State University in affiliated with Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. Using a test –retest method, the reliability of the instrument was determined. The reliability co-efficient of 0.81 was obtained.

The data collected was analyzed using a descriptive statistic of frequency counts and percentage for demographic data of respondents while research questions was analyzed using the mean as a statistical tools. Any items with mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) of 2.00 and above is regarded as accepted while any items with mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) less than 2.00 is regarded as rejected.

## Results and Discussion

**Research Question 1.** What are the socio-cultural factors contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo?

**Table 1.** socio-cultural factors

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN ( $\bar{X}$ )	DECISION
1.	Feel guilty after eating especially in group	88	69	04	03	164	3.28	<b>Accepted</b>
2.	Feel terrified about over weight.	92	69	02	03	166	3.32	<b>Accepted</b>
3.	Suffer social alienation due to over eating.	84	51	08	08	151	3.02	<b>Accepted</b>
4.	Like my clothes to fit tightly.	64	69	10	05	148	2.96	<b>Accepted</b>
5.	Other people think that I am too thin	56	69	06	10	141	2.82	<b>Accepted</b>

6	Eat secretly.	60	69	06	09	144	2.88	<b>Accepted</b>
7	Like eating with other people.	39	36	10	20	105	2.10	<b>Accepted</b>
8	Prepare food for others but do not eat the food I cook.	64	66	06	10	146	2.92	<b>Accepted</b>
9	Becoming anxious prior to eating.	60	66	06	10	142	2.84	<b>Accepted</b>
10	Eat faster than other people.	44	21	44	10	119	2.38	<b>Accepted</b>

The findings in Table 1 reveal various socio-cultural factors contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students at the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. A significant number of respondents expressed feelings of guilt after eating in groups (mean = 3.28) and a fear of becoming overweight (mean = 3.32), emphasizing the influence of societal pressures on body image. Social alienation due to overeating (mean = 3.02) and anxiety before eating (mean = 2.84) were also notable contributors. Additionally, secretive eating habits (mean = 2.88) and a preference for preparing food for others without eating it (mean = 2.92) reflect behavioural patterns linked to disordered eating. Although eating with others was less common (mean = 2.10), these socio-cultural factors collectively highlight the significant impact of social perceptions and behaviours on eating disorder prevalence.

**Research Question 2.** What are the psychological factors contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo?

**Table 2.** Psychological factors contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN ( $\bar{X}$ )	DECISION
1.	Psychological factors such as low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and perfectionism strongly contribute to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in	80	30	28	06	144	2.88	<b>Accepted</b>

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	Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.								
2.	Negative body image and societal pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards are significant psychological factors influencing the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.	80	60	20	05	165	3.3	<b>Accepted</b>	
3.	Psychological factors alone may not fully explain the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, as individual experiences and coping mechanisms vary widely.	104	45	10	04	163	3.26	<b>Accepted</b>	
4.	Psychological factors have minimal or no role in contributing to the development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, with other factors such as genetics or cultural influences playing a more significant role.	80	30	20	10	133	2.66	<b>Accepted</b>	
5.	The relationship between psychological factors and the	69	42	20	03	157	3.14	<b>Accepted</b>	

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development of eating disorders among female undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo may vary depending on individual circumstances and experiences, requiring further research to fully understand.

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Table 2 highlights the psychological factors contributing to eating disorders among female undergraduate students at the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. Key findings reveal that low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and perfectionism are significant contributors (mean = 2.88). Negative body image and societal pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards emerged as critical psychological influences (mean = 3.30). However, it is recognized that psychological factors alone may not fully explain the development of eating disorders, as individual experiences and coping mechanisms vary widely (mean = 3.26). While some respondents acknowledged the minimal role of psychological factors compared to genetics or cultural influences (mean = 2.66), others emphasized the need for further research to understand the varying impacts of these factors (mean = 3.14). Overall, the findings underscore the complex interplay of psychological elements in the emergence of eating disorders in this population.

### Discussion of Findings

The socio-cultural factors identified in Table 1 resonate with studies by Grabe et al. (2008), which found that societal pressure on body image significantly contributes to disordered eating behaviours. The fear of becoming overweight and social alienation due to overeating, as highlighted in the findings, are consistent with the work of Tiggemann and Slater (2013), who discussed the role of media and societal standards in shaping body dissatisfaction. Secretive eating habits and anxiety before eating, noted in the data, are comparable to observations by Levine and Murnen (2009), who linked these behaviours to cultural norms and peer influences. This study reinforces the call for community-based interventions, as emphasized by Rodgers *et al* (2018), to mitigate the socio-cultural contributors to eating disorders.

In Table 2, the psychological contributors identified align with theories proposed by Polivy and Herman (2002), who highlighted body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and perfectionism as core psychological factors in eating disorder development. The significant role of societal pressure and negative body image reflects findings by Stice (2002), who linked unrealistic beauty standards to increased vulnerability to eating disorders. The recognition that psychological factors interact with cultural and genetic influences supports

multifactorial models like those proposed by Jacobi *et al.* (2004), emphasizing the complexity of eating disorder aetiology. These findings reiterate the importance of a holistic approach in interventions, combining psychological support with socio-cultural awareness, as suggested by (Hay et al., 2008).

## Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be inferred that societal pressure on body image significantly contributes to disordered eating behaviours. Furthermore, findings reveal the complex interplay of psychological elements in the emergence of eating disorders in this population. Based on these results, it was therefore recommended among others that educational campaigns and workshops should be conducted to raise awareness about eating disorders among female undergraduate students, emphasizing the importance of body positivity, self-acceptance, and seeking help for mental health concerns.

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