

Link Between Subclinical Eating Disorder And Mental Health Among Female Students Of Panjab University Chandigarh &b>&b>: Reg No: 159

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ABSTRACT

Background: Subclinical eating disorders refer to disordered eating attitudes and behaviors that do not meet full diagnostic criteria but still cause significant psychological distress and functional impairment. Young women transitioning to university life are particularly vulnerable due to social comparison, lifestyle changes, altered eating habits, academic pressure, and increased independence. These factors may contribute to anxiety, stress, depression, and body image concerns. Early identification is important to prevent progression to clinical eating disorders. **Aim:** To determine the association between subclinical eating disorders and mental health among female students of Panjab University. **OBJECTIVES:** 1) To assess the prevalence of subclinical eating disorders. 2) To investigate the association between subclinical eating disorders and mental health status. 3) To examine the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI) and subclinical eating disorders. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 229 female students aged 18–35 years at Panjab University using purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21). Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 31. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests were applied to determine associations. **Results:** Among participants, 34.5% (n=79) scored ≥ 20 on EAT-26, indicating risk of subclinical eating disorders. Significant associations were observed between elevated EAT-26 scores and depression ($p=0.006$), anxiety ($p=0.035$), and stress ($p=0.001$). A statistically significant relationship was also found between BMI and eating disorder risk ($p=0.007$), with higher prevalence among overweight participants. **Conclusion:** Subclinical eating disorder risk is prevalent among female university students and is significantly associated with psychological distress and BMI. Early screening, mental health support, and body image interventions within university settings are recommended to prevent progression to clinical disorders.

KEYWORDS