

Suicidality in People With Eating Disorders and Body Dissatisfaction

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Introduction: Previous research has shown significant relationships between eating disordered behavior and suicidality (Crow, Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, 2008). In previous research, both suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts have been predicted by the presence of an eating disorder (Fennig & Hadas, 2010). The current study explores the relationship between self-identified eating disorders, presence of body dissatisfaction, or eating disordered behavior as indicated by high scores on the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI) and suicidal thoughts or attempts. The researchers hypothesized that both body dissatisfaction and presence of an eating disorder would be independently positively correlated with suicidal thoughts. The researchers also hypothesized that both body dissatisfaction and presence of an eating disorder would be independently positively correlated with suicide attempts. The researchers further hypothesized that subscales of the Eating Disorder Inventory would be positively correlated with both suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Methods: This study included 868 undergraduate students attending a private, northeastern liberal arts college. Data was collected using a Qualtrics-based survey that anonymously assessed mental health using a variety of survey questions and scales. These scales included the Eating Disorder Inventory, a single item from the Zung Depression scale, a question assessing satisfaction with body shape/physique, a question assessing presence of an eating disorder and two questions assessing frequency of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. The current study specifically used the Drive for Thinness, Interoceptive Awareness, Body Dissatisfaction and Perfectionism subscales of the Eating Disorder Inventory. The research was reviewed and approved by the college's Institutional Review Board.

Results: As hypothesized, the researchers found that there was a significant difference between frequency of suicidal thoughts in those with eating disorders compared to those without eating disorders. Also, a significant difference in endorsement of the statement "I feel others would be better off if I were dead" was found between those with eating disorders and those without. Furthermore, a Chi Square revealed significant differences between those with eating disorders and those without in suicide attempts in the last year. The researchers also found a significant relationship between eating disorders and endorsement of the statement "I feel others would be better off if I were dead." A significant negative correlation was found between body shape/physique satisfaction without the presence of an eating disorder and suicidal thoughts ($r(740) = -.26, p < .05$), as well as a significant negative correlation between body shape/physique satisfaction without the presence of an eating disorder and endorsement of the statement "I feel others would be better off if I were dead" ($r(722) = -.24, p < .05$). The subscales of the EDI were also explored.

Discussion: As shown in previous research, this sample has demonstrated that the presence of an eating disorder has a strong relationship with both suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. This outcome was in accordance with the researchers' hypotheses. Body dissatisfaction also was found to have a strong relationship with suicidal thoughts, in accordance with the researchers'

hypotheses. Eating disordered behavior and body dissatisfaction may be highly correlated with suicidality due to comorbid depression. The researchers found that body dissatisfaction was not strongly correlated with suicide attempts, perhaps because of the low number of participants in the study who attempted suicide but perhaps because of the less severe effects body dissatisfaction may have.

Future research would benefit from larger and more diverse samples as the generalizability of results is limited by the homogenous characteristics of the college sample (in race, ethnicity, age, gender and sexual orientation). In this study, the presence of an eating disorder was based on self-report. Future research may benefit from looking at actual diagnosed eating disorders. Furthermore, this study did not use the full Eating Disorder Inventory but rather four subscales of the EDI. Further research may benefit from looking fully at the EDI. Further research may also benefit from a broader analysis of suicidal thoughts and attempts as there are only two questions to assess these behaviors and both are limited to the last year. The questions are also qualitatively limited in that the question does not ask what kind of suicidal thoughts the participant had or what kind of suicide attempt was made. Further research may benefit from a more in depth analysis of these variables.

References

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