

## **Prevalencia del comer emocional e insatisfacción con la imagen corporal en jóvenes universitarios: el papel de la alimentación consciente.**

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*TFG Psicología 2018/2019*

La población universitaria es un colectivo especialmente vulnerable a nivel nutricional por las características de la época universitaria (vivir fuera de casa, horarios, etc.). La práctica de la alimentación consciente es una estrategia clave para modificar comportamientos alimentarios problemáticos como el comer emocional o los malos hábitos relacionados con la insatisfacción con la imagen corporal. Los objetivos del presente estudio fueron evaluar la prevalencia del comer emocional e insatisfacción con la imagen corporal, su relación con la alimentación consciente y la influencia del género. Participaron 322 universitarios (196 mujeres y 126 hombres) con una edad media de 22,27 años (DT=3,54) que cumplieron el Mindful Eating Questionnaire (Framson, et al., 2009), el Emotional Eater Questionnaire (Garaulet, et al., 2012) y el Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper, et al., 1987) a través de la plataforma Qualtrics. Los resultados mostraron porcentajes elevados de comer emocional (47,9%) e insatisfacción con la imagen corporal (32,3%). Se observaron diferencias estadísticamente significativas en Desinhibición ( $p=0,009$ ), Darse cuenta ( $p=0,020$ ), Respuesta emocional ( $p\leq 0,001$ ) y Distracción ( $p\leq 0,001$ ) entre grupos clasificados por comer emocional, siendo los comedores no emocionales los que presentan mayores niveles de alimentación consciente; y en Darse cuenta ( $p=0,016$ ), Respuesta emocional ( $p=0,004$ ) y Distracción ( $p=0,002$ ) entre grupos clasificados por insatisfacción con la imagen corporal, siendo los no preocupados por la imagen corporal los que presentan mayores niveles de alimentación consciente. Las mujeres obtienen puntuaciones medias más elevadas en Desinhibición ( $p\leq 0,001$ ) y los hombres en Respuesta emocional ( $p\leq 0,001$ ) y Distracción ( $p=0,037$ ). Aparecen más relaciones estadísticamente significativas entre alimentación consciente, comer emocional e insatisfacción con la imagen corporal en las mujeres. Resulta relevante la detección precoz de personas que presentan autoevaluaciones negativas o que utilizan la alimentación para autorregularse para aplicar intervenciones psicológicas preventivas que atiendan a la perspectiva de género.

Palabras clave: alimentación consciente, comer emocional, imagen corporal, estudiantes universitarios, diferencias de género.

## **Prevalence of emotional eating and body image dissatisfaction among university students: the role of mindful eating.**

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The university population is a particularly vulnerable group at the nutritional level due to the characteristics of the university period (living away from home, working hours, etc.). The practice of mindful eating is being a key strategy for modifying problematic eating behaviour such as emotional eating or bad habits related to body image dissatisfaction. The aims of the present study were to evaluate the prevalence of emotional eating and body image dissatisfaction, its relationship with mindful eating and the influence of gender. Three hundred and twenty two university students (196 females and 126 males) with an average age of 22.27 years (SD=3.54) completed the Mindful Eating Questionnaire (Framson, et al., 2009), the Emotional Eating Questionnaire (Garaulet, et al., 2012) and the Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper, et al., 1987), through Qualtrics platform. The results showed high percentages of emotional eating (47.9%) and body image dissatisfaction (32.3%). On the other hand, statistically significant differences were observed in Desinhibition ( $p=0.009$ ), Awareness ( $p=0.020$ ), Emotional Response ( $p\leq 0.001$ ) and Distraction ( $p\leq 0.001$ ) between groups classified by emotional eating, non-emotional eaters showed the highest levels of mindful eating. Regarding to body image dissatisfaction, statistically significant differences were found between groups in Awareness ( $p=0.016$ ), Emotional Response ( $p=0.004$ ) and Distraction ( $p=0.002$ ), non-concerned about body image showed the highest levels of mindful eating. Finally, women obtained higher mean scores in Desinhibition ( $p\leq 0.001$ ) and men in Emotional Response ( $p\leq 0.001$ ) and distraction ( $p=0.037$ ). Statistically significant relationships were found between mindful eating, emotional eating and dissatisfaction with body image among women. It is emphasize the early detection of people with negative self-evaluations or who use food to self-regulate in order to apply preventive psychological interventions that take into account the gender perspective.

Key words: mindful eating, emotional eating, body image, university students, gender differences.



# PREVALENCE OF EMOTIONAL EATING AND BODY IMAGE DISSATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF MINDFUL EATING

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## INTRODUCTION

The university population have unhealthy eating patterns (González et al., 2017) and problems with emotional regulation (Sánchez & Pontes, 2012), especially in women. The emotional eating has been related to body image dissatisfaction (Hildebrandt et al., 2015). The practice of mindful eating has been shown effective in the reduction of emotional eating (Warren, Smith & Ashwell, 2017). The aims of the present study were to evaluate the prevalence of emotional eating and dissatisfaction with body image, its relationship with mindful eating and the influence of gender.

## RESULTS

**HYPOTHESIS 1.** A high percentage of university students will be emotional eaters and will present intermediate levels of dissatisfaction with body image.

✓ 47,9% of university students are emotional eaters and 32,3 % are concerned about their body image.

**HYPOTHESIS 2.** Higher scores in mindful eating factors will be related to lower emotional eating and lower body image dissatisfaction.

- Non-emotional eaters show the highest levels of mindful eating.
- Non-concerned about body image show the highest levels of mindful eating.

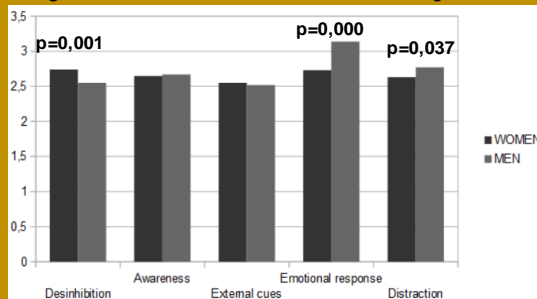
**HYPOTHESIS 3.** Women will have higher scores in emotional eating and body image dissatisfaction than men. A greater influence of mindful eating on these variables will find in women.

- Statistically significant relationships appear between mindful eating, emotional eating and dissatisfaction with body image, specially in women.

**Table 1.** Relationship between mindful eating, emotional eating and body image dissatisfaction

ANOVA	Emotional eating (Qualitative variable)	Body image dissatisfaction (Qualitative variable)
Desinhibition	1,956 (0,009)	0,856 (0,643)
Awareness	1,846 (0,020)	1,890 (0,016)
External cues	0,616 (0,815)	1,100 (0,361)
Emotional Response	22,691 (0,000)	2,576 (0,004)
Distraction	4,024 (0,000)	2,949 (0,002)

**Figure 1.** Gender differences in mindful eating



## METHOD

322 STUDENTS

196 WOMEN  
126 MEN

AGE  
M= 22,7  
ST=3,54

CV= 48,4%

41,9%

**Mindful Eating Questionnaire** (Framson, et al., 2009): desinhibition, awareness, external cues, emotional response and distraction. Cronbach Alpha of 0,681.

**Emotional Eater Questionnaire** (Garaulet, et al., 2012): total score. Cronbach Alpha of 0,832.

**Body Shape Questionnaire** (Cooper, et al., 1987): total score. Cronbach Alpha of 0,976

The collection of the sample was done using the Qualtrics platform and its dissemination was done through social networks. We make sure the study complied with the provisions of the Code of Ethics and the Organic Law of Data Protection.

## DISCUSSION

A large percentage of university students are emotional eaters, probably for the appearance of new responsibilities and new potential stressors (Moreno and Rodríguez, 2005). The variability in terms of body image dissatisfaction may be due to the joint analysis of men and women. Therefore, we would expect more dissatisfaction in women, supporting by Martínez, Salvador, Gil, Castro and Ballester (2018). The influence of mindful eating in emotional eating and body image dissatisfaction, would be supporting the role of mindfulness in the improvement of emotional management and self-esteem (Brown, Ryan, and Craswel 2007). Attending to gender differences and agreeing with Sala (2017), men use less food to self-regulate negative emotions. In addition, emotional eating in women is much more associated with internal regulation and in men with an external one.

## CONCLUSION

The influence of mindful eating to improve emotional eating is clear. Therefore, in terms of primary prevention, the implementation of programs in which mindful eating is worked in the university context is suggested. In women this technique should emphasize the awareness of internal signals and in men, the external ones. Regarding the body image, secondary prevention programs will be helpful in order to detect an extreme body image dissatisfaction and promote self-esteem in university students.

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