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Disordered eating and body image issues and their associated factors among adolescents in urban secondary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract: Eating disorders are common health issues among the adolescents. The objective of this study was to determine the prevalence of eating disorders and their relationship with body mass index, body part satisfaction and perception on body weight among urban secondary school children. It was a cross-sectional study conducted in Kuching, Sarawak. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire that consist of the Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26), perception on body part satisfaction and body weight, and anthropometric measurement. Data was entered and analysed using SPSS version 22. A total of 329 respondents participated in this study with 59% females and 60.5% Malays. There were 14.3% of the respondents overweight and obese, with higher percentage among males (19.3%). About 18.5% of the respondents were found to be at risk of eating disorders with higher prevalence among males (19.3%). More females reported to have higher prevalence of body part dissatisfaction (46.9%) and body weight (37.6%) compared to males (40%, 28.1%). The statistical results indicated there were significant associations between EAT-26 and body mass index (BMI) ($p=0.039$), body part satisfaction ($p=0.004$), and perception of body weight ($p=0.038$). Eating disorders are becoming more prevalent amongst adolescents, particularly among males. As eating disorder are strongly associated with adolescent mental and physical health, intervention programme on their developmental

challenges and issues for both males and females should be in place particularly in the school education syllabus.

Keywords: adolescents; anthropometric measurement; EAT-26; eating disorder.

Introduction

Adolescence is a growing stage where boys or girls are conscious about their weight and appearance. They often compare their looks and bodies with culturally defined ideal physiques, particularly Western cultures that idealize thinness for women (1). This idealism not only affects the Western countries but also the Asian countries like Japan, Taiwan and Korea. Factors such as socioeconomic development, change of the role of women, view of the society and a shift in eating patterns have been found to have an effect on promoting eating disorders among young adults (2). There are several types of eating disorders – anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa which are diagnosed based on ICD-10 criteria (International Classification of Disease). Binge-eating disorder on the other hand is diagnosed based on Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (3). These eating disorders if not controlled, can pose serious health problems related to body image disturbance amongst young adults (4).

In Western countries, the prevalence of anorexia nervosa among young females was reported to be 0.3% and bulimia nervosa was 1% (5). In Japan, the rate of anorexia nervosa was reported to be lower at 0.2% but higher for bulimia nervosa, 2.9% (6). Studies conducted in the non-clinical setting indicated that eating disorder symptoms were prevalent among Japanese female adolescents, ranging from 5 to 10% (7). Many of these studies used self-administered questionnaire such as the eating attitude test-26 (EAT-26) for non-clinical setting in order to gain a clearer understanding of eating disorder issue, particularly among the school-based samples. In Malaysia, using EAT-26 among young adults indicated that about one in five respondents were at risk of eating disorders

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