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The Relationship Between Food Preoccupation Habits and Characteristics of Orthorexia Nervosa Among College Students

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OBJECTIVE

To identify the relationship between food preoccupation habits and characteristics of orthorexia nervosa among college students at a Private Division II University. The study was approved by the University's HSRB Committee.

DESIGN and SETTING:

The study was a cross-sectional study of students enrolled at the Institution. Participants were required to be between the ages of 18-25.

PARTICIPANTS

A convenience sample of 86 females and 65 males participated. Individuals were asked to participate during meal times at the University Dining Hall and Recreation Center.

INTERVENTION

Surveys were available for participants to complete at the Recreation Center and The Convocation Center. An incentive was given to participants. Participants signed an informed consent form and could stop at any time.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

The ORTO 15 was used to assess orthorexia nervosa characteristics and food attitudes. Although this tool has limited evidence and is no longer validated, it was chosen for its use as it is the only tool designed to assess orthorexia nervosa. The Food Preoccupation Questionnaire was used to assess the negative, positive, and neutral emotional valence associated with food,

along with frequency of food thoughts. This questionnaire was chosen because it assesses multiple emotional aspects towards food. Students were recruited beginning on October 18, 2016 in the Recreational Center. The questionnaires were distributed at a table in the Recreational Center for four days and distributed at the Convocation Center one day.

RESULTS

Female participants' mean ORTO 15 score was 38.46, and male participants' mean score was 37.31. Of the participants, 32.5% scored above 40 on the ORTO 15. As the BMI of the participants decreased, the ORTO 15 scores increased. The mean ORTO 15 score for non-athletes was 37.73 and the mean ORTO 15 score for athletes was 38.38. There was a correlation between BMI and the extent to which thoughts had a negative emotional valence. $p < .05$. As BMI increased, the extent to which thoughts had a negative emotional valence increased. There was a correlation between BMI and extent to which thoughts had a positive emotional valence. $p < .05$. As BMI increased, the extent to which thoughts had a positive emotional valence decreased.

CONCLUSION

No correlation was found between the Food Preoccupation Questionnaire scores and the ORTO 15 scores among college students ages 18-25.

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KEY WORDS: *orthorexia nervosa, emotional valence, BMI, food preoccupation*