



Eating disorders in Eastern Europe: An epidemiological review

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Introduction and Aim

Eating disorders are becoming global in the last few decades. Eastern Europe can be considered a unique region with a strong sociocultural impact of four decades of socialist dictatorship. In this review the most important epidemiological data from this region are summarized.

Methods and Materials

A systematic review was performed. We have included countries from the former Yugoslavia and Baltic regions, as well as those recognised as Eastern Europe in the WorldAtlas (2022), i.e.: Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Results

Several studies have found higher rates of occurrence in Eastern Europe than in Western societies. Some data showed an increase in the frequency of the disease over time, which may be related to the changing socioeconomic environment.

Newly described eating disorder types in the last three decades, such as binge eating disorder, muscle dysmorphia, or orthorexia nervosa, are only featured in a few studies.

Discussion

Epidemiological data show significant differences. One explanation for the differences is methodological: surveys were conducted using different methods, often using non-representative and relatively small samples.

Another explanation is the cultural background of the region. Eating disorders are generally well known in Eastern Europe, and data from many countries correlate well with Western data.

The region's countries have assimilated Western cultural ideals. Cultural differences related to human beauty ideals in Europe seem to be decreasing.

Conclusions

The East-West dichotomy in the frequency of eating disorders is now oversimplified. Further representative and long-term studies are needed in the general population of Eastern European countries.

Reference:

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Keywords

epidemiology, eating disorders, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, Eastern Europe