

Introduction and Aim

War is a harrowing and tumultuous period in human history, marked by violence, destruction. While much attention has been rightfully devoted to the immediate physical and psychological tolls of conflict, there exists a lesser-known but equally insidious enemy that often lurks in the shadows during these times: eating disorders. Eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder, are mental health conditions that affect millions of individuals worldwide, transcending gender, age, and cultural boundaries. The confluence of factors during wartime – scarcity of resources, heightened stress levels, disrupted social structures, and traumatic experiences – creates an environment ripe for the development and exacerbation of eating disorders. This paper aims to shed light on the often-overlooked intersection of eating disorders and wartime experiences.

Methods and Materials

Relevant publications from the PubMed database were selected and analysed. The search terms MeSH "Feeding and Eating Disorders" and "War" were used. Also google scholar with same search terms was applied. Both civilians and military servant populations were included.

Results

Eating disorders are complex mental health conditions that can be exacerbated by various external factors and stressors. In times of global uncertainty, such as during wars and armed conflicts, individuals are particularly vulnerable to the development and exacerbation of eating disorders due to a combination of psychological, social, and environmental factors.

By reviewing relevant to the topic publications few key points of eating disorder in time of global uncertainty problem were selected:

- 1. War stress.** Experiencing war is among the most stressful events in life and has been associated with an increased incidence of different psychopathologies as well as eating disorders in military and civilian populations. Some individuals may use disordered eating as a coping mechanism to regain a sense of control in a chaotic environment.
- 2. Disrupted social structures.** Wartime can disrupt social support networks and traditional social structures. The lack of support and social uncertainty can isolate individuals and make it difficult for them to seek help or access and continue treatment for their eating disorder. Social isolation can also exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression, which are often associated with eating disorders.
- 3. Traumatic experiences.** War often exposes individuals to various traumatic events which can trigger or worsen eating disorders, as individuals may use food-related behaviours to numb or distract themselves from emotional pain. Also Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has a high prevalence of co - occurring with eating disorders, most commonly with bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and anorexia nervosa accordingly.
- 4. Lack of food.** During times of war, there is often a scarcity of food resources. People may experience food shortages, rationing, and etc., which can lead to irregular eating patterns and malnutrition. Situation like this can increase individual's risk of developing eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa or restrictive eating behaviours.
- 5. Lack of healthcare resources.** In unstable war time healthcare system accessibility also might be rocky. Doctor visits, medicaments, psychotherapy may not be always available and that can cause exacerbation of eating disorders or on-time diagnosis and intervention.



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War stress

Disrupted social structures

Traumatic experiences

Lack of food

Lack of healthcare resources

KEY POINTS

Discussion

The effects of war and global uncertainty can manifest differently in individuals, undoubtedly impacting their mental health. Eating disorders are no exception to this phenomenon. This poster highlights only a few key aspects of this complex issue as there are a lot more difficult known and unknown pathways of eating disorders psychopathology.

As previously mentioned, eating disorders have a significant connection with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There have been a few publications discussing the prevalence of PTSD among Ukrainian and few other countries civilians and military personnel in the ongoing war or active conflicts. It potentially could serve as a predictor for the occurrence of eating disorders, it's important to acknowledge that we cannot arrive at precise numbers until further research is conducted.

Conclusions

In conclusion, eating disorders are complex mental health conditions that are profoundly influenced by variety external and internal factors and stressors. During periods of global uncertainty, such as wars and armed conflicts, individuals become more susceptible to the development and exacerbation of eating disorders due to a complex role of psychological, social, and environmental factors.

It is vital to recognize relationship between mentioned factors and eating disorders. Addressing the mental health needs of individuals in such challenging circumstances requires a multifaceted approach that include psychological support, social reconnection, trauma care, and efforts to ensure consistent access to healthcare resources as much as it is possible. By acknowledging and addressing these complexities, we can better support individuals who are particularly vulnerable to the devastating impact of eating disorders during times of global instability.

Keywords

Eating disorders, war, traumatic experiences, war stress.

References

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