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*RISK FACTORS FOR EATING DISORDERS AMONG UAE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF FAMILY
DYSFUNCTION AND ATTACHMENT STYLES*

by

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Abstract

A topic that is highly researched nowadays in the UAE is eating disorders (EDs). They are characterized by a persistent disturbance of eating-related behaviors that can result in altered consumption of food. Literature has suggested that there are several factors that can make an individual vulnerable to EDs, including family dynamics and attachment styles. This thesis is an attempt to examine the impact of family dynamics and early attachment on mental health wellbeing. The main objective is to examine how family dysfunctional concepts (rigid, chaotic, enmeshed, and disengaged) and attachment styles (close, dependent, and anxious) can be potential risk factors for EDs in university students in the UAE. Using a cross-sectional design with convenient sampling, a survey was distributed to 375 university students at two universities in Al Ain, UAE. The survey encompassed demographic information, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation-IV (FACES-IV) to examine the family dysfunctional type, the Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26) to measure the risk of developing EDs, and the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) to examine the attachment style. For family dysfunctional concepts, multiple regression analyses indicated a relationship between chaotic and rigid family dysfunctional styles with the risk of EDs development. Specifically, results revealed a relationship between rigid and chaotic dysfunctional styles with dieting behaviors and bulimia, and food preoccupation behaviors. In addition, a relationship between rigid family dysfunctional style with oral control behaviors was also revealed. For attachment styles, multiple regression analyses revealed a relationship between anxious and close attachment styles with the risk of EDs development. Specifically, there was a relationship between anxious attachment style with dieting and oral control behaviors. Moreover, there was a relationship between close and anxious attachment styles with bulimia and food preoccupation behaviors. This study highlighted the multifaceted nature of EDs, emphasizing the central role that family dysfunction and attachment styles play in their development.

Keywords: Eating disorders, family dysfunction, rigid, chaotic, disengaged, enmeshed, attachment styles, close, anxious, dependent