

ABSTRACT

A sense of self-inadequacy and body image disturbance have been implicated in the development of eating disorders. The present study examined the utility of these psychological attributes in identifying young girls who may be at risk for eating pathology. It was hypothesized that girls who display a profile of extremely poor sense of self and disturbed body image will report more eating and mood problems than girls who do not. Adolescent girls ($N = 2,325$) of age 12 to 18 completed measures assessing personality, self-esteem, eating patterns, and mood. Results provided empirical support for the utility of the risk model of self-inadequacy and body image disturbance. Different combinations of the two components of self- and body image deficits were associated with specific profiles of eating and mood symptoms. Findings from risk groups analysis revealed that the constellation of self and body image attributes defines a distinct profile which predisposes adolescent girls to eating pathologies. Hierarchical multiple regression illustrated that these two constructs contribute to the development of pathological eating behaviors. Further analysis among regular binge eaters revealed a more prominent and consistent pattern. The strongest predictor variables for eating pathologies were drive for thinness, ineffectiveness and interpersonal distrust. The possible diathesis of personality factors in the development of eating disorders was discussed, highlighting the unique features and cultural considerations observed in Chinese girls in Hong Kong. Results were also discussed in terms of the potential usefulness of the identified constructs for assessing risk status among young girls. Implications for future research were also considered.