

## **Emotional and behavioral impairment and comorbid eating disorder symptoms in adolescents with obesity: a cross-sectional study.**

A. Guerrini Usubini, M. Bottacchi, A. Bondesan, F. Frigerio, N. Marazzi, G. Castelnuovo, A. Sartorio

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Background: The current study aims to assess the psychological conditions of Italian adolescents with obesity seeking an in-hospital multidisciplinary body weight reduction program, by exploring their psychological adjustment, emotional states, and co-occurring eating disorder symptoms.

Methods: The study involved ninety-two consecutive Italian adolescents with obesity (31 males, 61 females), with a mean age  $\pm$  SD: 16.4  $\pm$  1.1 years and body mass index (BMI): 38.3  $\pm$  6.04 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), and Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26) were used for the evaluations. Differences between genders, degrees of obesity (Group 1 = BMI SDS 2-2.99 and Group 2: BMI SDS > 3), and those with or without eating disorder symptoms (Group 1: EAT-26  $\leq$  20 and Group 2: EAT-26 > 20) were explored.

Results: The results showed that females reported higher scores on the Emotional Symptoms, Prosocial Behaviors, Total Difficulties, and Total Impact subscales of the SDQ, the BDI, both subscales of the STAI, and the Bulimia subscales of the EAT-26 than males, independently from the degrees of obesity. Participants with eating disorder symptoms (Group 2: EAT-26 > 20) showed higher scores on the Emotional Symptoms and Total Difficulties subscales of the SDQ, the BDI, and both subscales of the STAI than those of Group 1 (EAT-26  $\leq$  20).

Conclusions: The study explores the psychological conditions of adolescents with obesity. The results can inform appropriate treatment approaches for the management of obesity in developmental age groups, which not only take into account the medical and physical aspects of obesity, but also the behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties expressed by adolescents, in addition to specific eating disorder symptoms.

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