

The impacts of COVID-19 on eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours: Education Provider Perspective

What we already know

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has negatively impacted the mental health of many around the world, but particularly those with pre-existing mental health issues such as eating disorders. Changes to living situations, social distancing mandates, and increased stress and uncertainty associated with the pandemic are thought to be a trigger for eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours.

What we did

In this study, we were interested in assessing the collective impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours. We conducted a literature search for studies on the topic, revealing a total of 72 studies whose results were collated.

What we found

We found an increase in eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours, like binge eating and food restriction, associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, two groups were most negatively impacted: those with a diagnosed eating disorder and children and adolescents.

We found people used eating disorder behaviours to self-manage heightened psychological distress associated with the pandemic.

What this means for schools, educators, and general community

Results from our study show children and adolescents are at a higher risk for being impacted negatively by the pandemic so if you work with these age groups in any setting, such as a school or sporting group, it may be useful to monitor the young people in your care during this time. You may notice an increase in eating disorder behaviours such as signs of body dissatisfaction, driven exercise, changes in mood, social engagement, motivation, or eating patterns.

If you have concerns about a young person's eating behaviours or attitudes towards their bodies and want to speak to someone, reach out to the Butterfly National Helpline. The Butterfly Helpline is available from 8am to midnight, 7 days a week via phone, online chat, and email. More information on our Helpline can be found [here](#).

If you would like to learn about prevention of body image concerns and eating disorders or tailored education programs that you can bring to your school or organisation, check out Butterfly's resources [here](#). For example, we offer Body Bright, a strength-based, evidence-informed program designed to promote positive body image in primary school children. Learn more about this important program [here](#).

Reference

McLean, C. P., Utpala, R., & Sharp, G. (2021, November 13). The impacts of COVID-19 on eating disorders and disordered eating: A mixed studies systematic review and implications for healthcare professionals, carers, and self. Retrieved from www.psyarxiv.com/f27y8.