





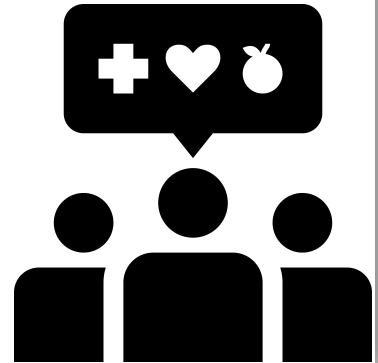
Case Study: Female Athletes and the Negative Effects of Eating Disorders



Tayla O'Leary
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Health Behavior

- Directly affects health outcomes.
- Healthy behaviors contribute to a healthy body and mind.
- Unhealthy behaviors such as poor diet, irregular exercising, sedentary lifestyles, and inadequate sleep can result in mental, emotional, and physical health issues.



Mental Health Issues



- Mental illness, also known as mental disorders, can affect mood, thinking, and behavior (Mayo Clinic, 2022).
- Mental health disorders include depression, anxiety disorders, addictive behaviors, PTSD, eating disorders, and more.

For this case study, female athletes who suffer from an eating disorder will be discussed. This issue is very relevant in today's society, and more athletes will continue to suffer from this mental health disorder without the proper care, health behaviors, and awareness.

Female Athletes & Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are very dangerous health issues and can be very harmful on the body. Typically, they are “used in a misguided attempt to lose weight or maintain a lower than normal body weight” (Taylor, 2022).

- Many misconceptions about female athletes include:
 - They are not self conscious about their bodies
 - They are not unhealthy because they are physically active
 - They do not have any eating disorders
- Female athletes are becoming more susceptible to eating disorders to enhance performance (Lawson et al., 2006) which then creates more health issues such as anxiety and depression.



“Female athletes may follow special diets for various reasons including socio cultural practices, environmental concerns, or health and weight-management benefits” (de Bora et al., 2021). These practices put female athletes in harm's way of developing an eating disorder which can develop at any age.

- Eating disorders for female athletes can result in low energy and poorer performances when competing.
- It is crucial to remain healthy even when following a diet.
- In a recent study, it was found that female athletes that follow a strict or no carb diet are more at risk for developing an eating disorder over female athletes that do not have restrictions. (de Bora et al., 2021)

Psychosocial Impact

- Self-Image
 - The need to look the most fit
 - The fear of becoming too “big” or overweight
 - Inability to compete to their fullest potential
 - Fear of rejection from others
 - Development of other mental health issues
- Self image is contributing to this athlete not following a safe and healthy diet. The misconception that all athletes should look the same and follow the same diet is also contributing to her self image as well as causing stress and anxiety.

Social Cognition Impact

- Female athletes notice other athletes following strict diets, therefore they believe they should be doing the same in order to compete with them.
- Female athletes attend the gym and see others doing longer, strenuous workouts. After observation, female athletes then believe they should be doing harder workouts as well, putting more strain on their bodies.

Following the actions of others causes stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Female athletes suffer from eating disorders and other mental health issues due to poor health behaviors such as following the diets of others, working out too strenuously, and not doing things that benefit them positively.

Relationships

- **Positive Relationships:**

- Promote healthy and safe diets
- Provide helpful resources for those suffering with a mental disorder
- Monitor and check on female athletes in and out of competition

- **Negative Relationships:**

- Are aware of negative situations and ignore them
- Contribute to poor diet and lifestyle choices
- Avoid uncomfortable situations
- Agree with societal expectations of unrealistic body types

Role of the Educator

- Bringing awareness to the issue is important to help those who have an eating disorder, as well as educate young female athletes of the harm it can cause.
- Health educators should:
 - Bring awareness to the issue
 - Provide helpful techniques and strategies for avoiding unhealthy eating habits
 - Provide resources for those who are suffering from an eating disorder
 - Educate young athletes on the risks and harms that may come from unhealthy behaviors

References

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