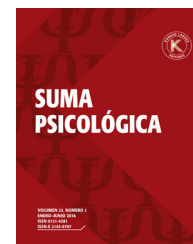




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Dietary restraint, life satisfaction and self-discrepancy by gender in university students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to characterize dieting and non-dieting university students by gender, based on their satisfaction with life and their food-related life, self-discrepancy, food behavior and health-related aspects. A non-probabilistic sample of 305 students from five Chilean state universities responded a questionnaire that included the Revised Restraint Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Satisfaction with Food-related Life Scale, the Health-related Quality of Life Index, the Nutrition Interest Scale and the Self-Discrepancy Index. Socio-demographic characteristics, food behavior, and approximate weight and height were also enquired. Chronic dieters and non-dieters were distinguished according to the median score of the Revised Restraint Scale. 51.1% of women and 55.5% of men classified as chronic dieters, sharing characteristics such as nutrition concern, mental health problems, higher body mass index, and physical and economic self-discrepancy. Women dieters reported lower life satisfaction and satisfaction with food-related life, more health problems and health-related restriction of food, while men dieters showed higher social and emotional self-discrepancy.

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Restricción alimentaria, satisfacción con la vida y discrepancia del yo en estudiantes universitarios de distinto género

R E S U M E N

Palabras clave:

Restricción alimentaria
Satisfacción vital
Teoría de la auto-discrepancia
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El objetivo de este estudio fue caracterizar a estudiantes universitarios dietantes y no dietantes de distinto género, según su satisfacción con la vida y con la alimentación, discrepancia del yo, comportamiento alimentario y aspectos relacionados con la salud. Se aplicó un cuestionario a una muestra no probabilística de 305 estudiantes de cinco universidades estatales de Chile. El cuestionario incluyó la Escala Revisada de Restricción Alimentaria, la Escala de Satisfacción con la Vida, la Escala de Satisfacción con la Alimentación, el Índice de Calidad de Vida relativo a la Salud, la Escala de Interés por la Nutrición y la Escala de Discrepancia del Yo. Se consultaron características sociodemográficas, comportamiento alimentario y el peso y estatura aproximados. Con base en la mediana de la Escala Revisada de Restricción Alimentaria se distinguieron dietantes crónicos y no dietantes. El 51.1% de las mujeres y el 55.5% de los hombres fueron clasificados como dietantes crónicos, quienes comparten características como la preocupación por la nutrición, problemas de salud mental, mayor índice de masa corporal, y discrepancia del yo en los ámbitos físico y económico. Las mujeres dietantes estuvieron menos satisfechas con su vida y con su alimentación, reportaron más problemas de salud y superior restricción de alimentos por motivos de salud. Los hombres dietantes mostraron mayor discrepancia del yo en los ámbitos social y emocional.

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The transition from high school to university entails high levels of stress and significant changes in life demands, expectations and conditions. Changes also occur in dietary behaviors, since eating habits developed and maintained in childhood and adolescence tend to change as the person enters university and is challenged to manage healthful weight and lifestyle (Deliens, Clarys, Van Hecke, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Deforche, 2013; Michelini, Acuña, & Godoy, 2016). However, some studies report that many university students do not follow healthy diets, which causes an increase in weight, fat and body mass index (BMI) (Deliens et al., 2013). Although a certain amount of weight gain can be expected at this stage in life, students who gain weight – particularly large amounts – may experience this as a significant stressor and resort to unhealthy weight control behaviors to cope with it. In this regard, the youth are at a particularly high risk for disturbed eating behaviors or abnormal practices (e.g. restraint, emotional or disinhibited binge eating) associated with eating disorders (Quick & Byrd-Bredbenner, 2013).

Dietary intake, eating behaviors and their consequences tend to vary by gender (Orellana, Sepúlveda, & Denegri, 2013). Nevertheless, most research has focused only on women populations; therefore, the factors associated with eating disorders among men are poorly understood (Darcy et al., 2012). Moreover, evidence from recent epidemiological studies indicates that the prevalence of eating disorder is increasing in both men and women (Cain, Epler, Steinley, & Sher, 2012).

Some authors (Bentley, Gratwick-Srall, Harrison, & Mond, 2015) suggest that dietary restriction remains more common in women than men, though the gap may be narrowing. Dietary restraint refers to intentional and sustained restriction of food intake in order to maintain or lose weight (van Strien, Herman, & Verheijden, 2012). However, self-reported

restrained eaters, or chronic dieters, do not eat less than their unrestrained counterparts and, in fact, are even more likely to have a higher BMI than non-dieters (Silva, 2010) and be overweight (Provencher et al., 2009; van der Laan & Smeets, 2015). A chronic tendency to restrict food intake comes, paradoxically, with episodes of binge eating (Herman & Polivy, 1980), and, even after weight loss, concerns with body shape and size persist (Vieira et al., 2013). In this regard, Vartanian (2012) explains that individuals compare one self-state to another self-state and when there is discrepancy between them, negative internal states arise. This is known as the Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), which proposes a link between discrepancies in self-concept and both physical and emotional well-being, indicating that discrepancies within the individual's self-concept cause negative emotions (e.g. anxiety), cognitions (e.g. body dissatisfaction) and behaviors (e.g. disordered eating) (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2006). The implications of body-related self-discrepancies for individuals' psychological well-being are well established (Polivy & Pliner, 2015; Vartanian, 2012), and satisfaction with physical appearance may be highly influential among both women and men (Matthews, Zullig, Ward, Horn, & Huebner, 2012). In a sample of women adolescents, Ting, Huang, Tu, and Chien (2012) found that depressive symptoms were caused by the women's attempt to diet or failure to lose weight by dieting, rather than by their weight status. Likewise, studies have revealed that body dissatisfaction in men is associated with negative psychological consequences, including depression and low self-esteem (Bergeron & Tylka, 2007).

Research shows that eating disorders in youth are related with poor psychological health (Bentley et al., 2015; Gomez, Gonçalves, & Costa, 2015; Ting et al., 2012), and lower levels of life satisfaction (Remick, Pliner, & McLean, 2009; Schnettler

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