Eating Disorders in Male Athletes

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Etiology & Psychopathology

- Muscularity-focused body image (Parent, 2013)
- Sports with weight classes
- Mental health & self esteem
- Interpersonal difficulties (Shanmugam, Jowett, & Myer, 2013)
Etiological Trends in Males

Males with EDs are more likely to have psychiatric comorbidities and a history of being overweight or obese when compared to women (Murray et al., 2017).

According to Stanford & Lemberg (2012):

- Males with EDs are more likely to be single and still living with their family.
- History of bullying on account of being overweight
- Participation in weight-restricted sports: wrestling, gymnastics, bodybuilding, etc.
- May have a parent (especially a father) was overweight, instilling fear of weight-related complications
- Higher prevalence of EDs among men who are gay or bisexual
Types of Eating Disorders in Males

- EDNOS: Most prevalent among males
- Bulimia nervosa: Less prevalent than EDNOS among males
- Anorexia Nervosa: Least common eating disorder among males
- Eating disorders in general are commonly occurring among athletes
- Activity disorder can commonly occur with men with ED.
  - Highly correlated to Muscle Dysmorphic Disorder (Devrim, A., Bilde, R. S. Hensey, N. 2018)
Pathophysiology

- Symptoms of hypogonadism can occur in men and boys with eating disorders. (Waterhous, T., & Jacob, M. 2014)

- High anxiety levels are prevalent in men with eating disorders.

- Chronic thought suppression is a symptom of an eating disorder in suppression of emotion. (Lavender, J., Anderson, D., & Gratz, K. 2012)
  - In athleticism, only strength is expected, leaving no room to express emotion or vulnerability.
MLB Star Overcomes ED

Former Seattle Mariners catcher Mike Marjama announced in a letter this month he was retiring to focus on supporting people battling eating disorders. It's an issue Marjama struggled with himself. Jamie Yuccas spoke to him about his big decision.
Social Impact

- High levels of social anxiety are prevalent in men with eating disorders.
  ○ Constantly comparing themselves with others, and isolating themselves from society.
- Stigma behind a male with an eating disorder
  ○ Reinforces the misconception and stereotype of masculinity.
Diagnosis

- DSM-V removed sex-specific criteria (amenorrhea) for diagnosing AN
- Males who may have an ED are often unaware that their behaviors are characteristic of an ED. (Maccaughelty, Wagner, & Rufino, 2016).
- Men may be more likely to conceal EDs and avoid or delay treatment due to social stigma (Raisanen & Hunt, 2014).
- Traditional ED assessments may neglect ED symptoms that are more likely to appear in men, such as muscle dysmorphia or anorexia athletica (Smith et al., 2017).
- Men with EDs may appear healthy when compared to women, making it difficult for a clinician to diagnose (Stanford & Lemberg, 2012).
Treatment and Intervention

- According to Limbers, Cohen, & Gray (2018), male-specific treatment for EDs could include:
  - Improving interpersonal interactions
  - Collaborative therapy
  - Client perception of expertise, caring, trustworthiness; lack of judgement from therapist
  - Male-only treatment groups
References


