

Teen eating disorders increase suicide risk

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Is binge eating a tell-tale sign of suicidal thoughts? According to a new study of African American girls, by Dr. Rashelle Musci and colleagues from the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University in the US, those who experience depressive and anxious symptoms are often dissatisfied with their bodies and more likely to display binge eating behaviors. These behaviors put them at higher risk for turning their emotions inward, in other words, displaying internalizing symptoms such as suicide. The study is published online in Springer's journal, *Prevention Science*.

With the focus on appearance in Western culture, it is not uncommon for many girls and women to have eating behavior problems. The most frequently occurring problem eating behaviors are binge eating, or eating large amounts of food in a short period of time and feeling out of control while eating. This behavior leads to shame, embarrassment, distress and an attempt to conceal it.

Musci and team investigated how depressive and anxious symptoms may be precursors to binge eating behaviors and suicidal outcomes in 313 [black females](#) followed for 11 years, from the ages of approximately 6-17 years old. Teacher, parent, and child interviews were carried out, examining levels of anxiety, depression, satisfaction with physical appearance, and eating behaviors, particularly binge eating. The researchers also noted who had reported a suicide attempt during the study period.

The African American females demonstrated dissatisfaction with their

physical appearance, which predicted the development of depressive and anxious symptoms in adolescence. These, in turn, predicted binge eating behaviors. Adolescent girls with more binge eating behaviors also reported more [suicide attempts](#).

The authors conclude: "The relationships found in this study offer prevention scientists a unique opportunity to target individuals at high risk of [psychiatric problems](#) by intervening in the case of binge eating problems. Our results also support the importance of developing prevention programs that are culturally relevant to individuals."

More information: *Prevention Science*; [DOI 10.1007/s11121-013-0411-9](#)

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