

Eating disorders often associated with reproductive health problems

October 8 2013

Women with eating disorders are less likely to have children than others in the same age group, indicates a study conducted at the University of Helsinki, Finland. The likelihood for miscarriage was more than triple for binge-eating disorder (BED) sufferers and the likelihood of abortion more than double for bulimics than others in the same age group.

According to a Finnish study, women with [eating disorders](#) are less likely to have children than others in their age group. The discrepancy is the most apparent in anorexia sufferers. In this group, the number of pregnancies was less than half of that of the control group.

The likelihood of abortion was more than double for bulimics than for others in the same age group. Meanwhile, the likelihood for [miscarriage](#) was more than triple for binge-eating disorder (BED) sufferers. For women who had been in treatment for BED, nearly half of their pregnancies ended in miscarriage.

"Early recognition, effective care and sufficiently long follow-up periods for eating disorders are crucial in the prevention of reproductive health problems," states researcher Milla Linna from the University of Helsinki, Hjelt Institute.

Eating disorders are common in Western countries, particularly among girls and [young women](#). It has been estimated that 5–10% of all young women in developed countries suffer from an eating disorder at some point in their lives.

Conducted jointly by the University of Helsinki and the National Institute for Health and Welfare, the 15-year register-based study examined the reproductive health of patients treated at the eating disorder clinic of the Helsinki University Central Hospital in 1995–2010 and a control group. Members of the control group were of the same age and gender and from the same region as the patients. More than 11,000 women participated in the study, of which 2,257 were patients of the eating disorder clinic and 9,028 were [control group](#) members.

"This study does not provide an explanation for the reproductive health problems observed in women with eating disorders. Based on previous research, however, it seems likely that the problems can at least partially be attributed to the eating disorder. Both being underweight and obese are known to be associated with the increased risk of infertility and miscarriage. Eating disorders also often involve menstrual irregularities or the absence of menstruation, which may lead to neglecting contraception and ultimately to unwanted pregnancies," hypothesises Linna.

A follow-up study is currently underway, focusing on the course of the pregnancies and deliveries of [women](#) who have had eating disorders.

The study was published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*.

More information: Linna, M. et al. Reproductive health outcomes in eating disorders, *Int J Eat Disord*. 2013 Sep 2.

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23996114

Provided by University of Helsinki

Citation: Eating disorders often associated with reproductive health problems (2013, October 8)

retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-disorders-reproductive-health-problems.html>

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