

Limited positive childhood experiences linked to higher binge-eating risk in college

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New findings from the University of Houston Department of Health and Human Performance reveal a significant association between a lower number of positive childhood experiences and a higher prevalence of

binge-eating disorder characteristics, as well as lower scores for intuitive eating.

Binge eating, which includes consuming a substantial amount of food within a brief timeframe and experiencing a loss of control, is linked to adverse weight-related health effects and challenges in mental well-being. Intuitive eating, which includes listening to the body's hunger signals and trusting them to guide decisions about what, when, and how much to eat, as well as when to stop eating, is linked with better physical and mental health and well-being.

"Although childhood experiences encompass both positive and [adverse experiences](#), most studies have primarily focused on [adverse childhood experiences](#), which has resulted in less known of the positive childhood experiences in relation to eating behaviors," reports HHP Assistant Professor Cynthia Y. Yoon in the journal [Appetite](#).

"While most research on positive childhood experiences has concentrated on their links to [mental health](#), we expand the existing knowledge base by examining their association with characteristics of binge-eating disorders and intuitive eating."

Yoon collected data from 828 [college students](#) in Texas to examine their positive childhood experiences including positive interactions with parents and caregivers, feelings of relational and internal safety, enjoyment of pleasurable and predictable quality of life, and support from sources outside the family.

"Our study revealed a significant association between a lower number of positive childhood experiences and a higher prevalence of binge-eating disorder characteristics, as well as lower scores for intuitive eating," said Yoon.

"Specifically, when comparing college students who reported having 9-10 positive childhood experiences to those with 0-4 positive childhood experiences, the latter group had 37% to 92% higher prevalence of binge-eating disordered eating behaviors and had 3.89 points lower score on intuitive eating, emphasizing the importance of promoting positive childhood experiences."

Notably, among the ten positive childhood experiences examined, intrapersonal positive childhood experiences (e.g., feeling comfortable with oneself) emerged as a factor that was consistently associated with less prevalence of [binge-eating](#) disorder characteristics and higher score of intuitive eating among college students.

"These findings imply the importance of early interventions and the need to foster supportive environments to promote healthier well-being," said Craig Johnston, associate professor and department chair, HHP.

"Achieving a comprehensive understanding of these intricate relationships holds the potential to shed light on the precise mechanisms through which [childhood experiences](#) shape eating behaviors."

More information: Cynthia Yoon et al, Associations of positive childhood experiences with binge-eating disorder characteristics and intuitive eating among college students, *Appetite* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2023.107073](#)

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