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Eating Disorder Diagnoses and Treatments: An Educational Symposium

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Introduction

Eating Disorders (EDs) can be categorized as follows: Anorexia Nervosa (when an individual engages in starvation to achieve weight loss), Bulimia Nervosa (when an individual engages in binge eating and subsequent self-induced vomiting to achieve weight-loss) and Binge Eating Disorder (when an individual engages in persistent over eating) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

According to the International Journal of Eating Disorders, 40% of newly identified cases of anorexia are diagnosed in women between the ages of 15 and 19, a finding that has critical implications for college-aged students. Distressingly, only one-third of individuals with anorexia and 6% of individuals with bulimia receive any type of mental health care (Hoek & van Hoeken, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of “Eating Disorder Diagnoses and Treatments: An Educational Symposium,” a one-day event that was held at the University of Dayton (UD) on November 3, 2012. The goals of this symposium were to increase the attendees’ knowledge about EDs and their treatments. Attendees chose the specific presentations they wanted to attend throughout the day.

Method

Design: Single group, pre-post survey
Participants: 47 individuals who voluntarily attended the symposium to learn more about EDs and their related treatments:

- Students and professionals from the fields of Psychology, Music Therapy, Health and Sports Sciences, Dietetics, and Art Therapy.
- Individuals who previously had or currently have a diagnosed ED.
- Individuals who have a relative or friend with a previous or current ED diagnosis.
- Attendees chose the specific presentations they wanted to attend throughout the day.

Survey Questions

Attendees answered the following questions using a 5-point Likert-type scale.

1. How much do you currently know about the diagnostic/general information about eating disorders?
2. How much do you currently know about eating disorders treatments/treatments?

For questions 3-5:

Please rate your present attitudes toward individuals with eating disorders.

3. Judgmental—Nonjudgmental
4. Apathetic—Concerned
5. Unsympathetic—Sympathetic

Research Questions

1. What percentage of respondents will report an overall increase in knowledge about ED diagnoses and treatments?
2. What percentage of respondents will report overall positive changes in attitude toward individuals with EDs?

Procedures

1. Upon arrival to the symposium attendees were instructed to complete the first 5 questions on the survey.
2. Attendees completed the second (post-session) side of the survey when they left the symposium.
3. Survey completion was anonymous.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- This one-day educational symposium was effective in increasing attendees’ knowledge about EDs and their related treatments; it was effective in improving some attendees’ attitudes toward individuals with EDs; other attendees’ attitudes were reported unchanged.
- No respondents reported a decrease in positive attitude related to EDs and their treatments after attending the symposium.
- No respondents reported a decrease in positive attitude on all three attitudinal dimensions.
- Due to high pre-symposium attitudinal scores, reported changes in attitude were minimal.
- Results in the desired direction combined with participant feedback indicate the importance and value of collaborative symposia for future clinicians in a variety of health and mental health care professions.

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References