

Young people with eating disorders speak out

With constant media attention on issues such as obesity and healthy eating, Headliners reporters Dowa Ojarikre, 18, and Bisi Fashesin, 18, spoke to a group of courageous young people in an online chat room for teenagers with eating disorders to find out how problems with food can affect the lives of young people.

Nowadays eating disorders are a major issue amongst the general population and it is reflected by the many programmes on TV focussing on issues such as anorexia and obesity. A show that caught our attention was 'Supersize Vs Superskinny' on Channel 4. Each episode consisted of an overweight contestant swapping diets with an underweight contestant and then comparing the results at the end of two weeks. We realised that for the first time the issue of being underweight was really emphasised as a health hazard for our generation, this gave us the idea to research and find out more about eating disorders.



We caught up with some young people on a chat room for teenagers with eating disorders. For this article we have used their chat room nicknames. A few of the girls we spoke to told us about how they had experienced denial about their condition. Elsewhere said: "I didn't deal with it at first; I pretended it wasn't happening." Elsewhere also spoke of how the illness altered her personality: "I used to be happy 24/7, bubbly and confident in everything I did, now I isolate myself. My self-esteem and confidence is none existent."

This change in personality effected her social life: "My relationship with friends has suffered greatly but now I'm a lot more open about it. ...they don't understand 100% and get frustrated a lot but they know when I'm having a sh*t day and help me through." Talking to Elsewhere allowed us to understand the bigger picture that young people suffering from eating disorders have to contend with.

Our own research suggested that eating disorders can be genetically inherited. Lexy07 gave us her take on this: "My mum has always had issues with her weight, and has been on many diets throughout her life, often gaining all the weight that she had previously lost. I know that my nan has also had issues with food throughout her life, only eating one meal a day for many years now."

We also interviewed Jane Smith, the Parent and Carers Coordinator at a Christian Charity known as ABC. ABC was created to support eating disorder sufferers and their families. Jane touched on how families can be affected by the illness: "The parents and carers, sisters, brothers, godparents, aunts and uncles...they often need a lot of encouragement and some advice as well...they're often upset as well and need someone to offload to."

It is often said that "Size 0" celebrities are to blame for bad eating habits amongst girls who want to be slim. We asked the girls whether they thought celebrities portrayed an image that young girls aspired to look like. Lexy07 said: "Personally I don't think that celebrities influenced my eating in any way. I think I realised that I was using food as a comfort and wanted help. There was also a lot going on in my life at the time I developed my eating disorder and this was one area I had control of."

Jane from ABC also told us that according to "national statistics about 1 in 8 cases of anorexia nervosa is a result of sexual abuse". Jane talked about other factors that might cause eating disorders, these included bereavment, a serious illness of someone close to them and someone suffering from cancer or a life threatening illness. According to Jane, family circumstances were the key issue for sufferers rather than celebrities and the media.

What we found striking though was the lack of males associated with eating disorders. Maybe it's because of the way society works, but we found that males were under-represented in eating disorders statistics and even though there may not be many males who suffer from eating disorders, there are some who do and this goes unrecognised.

None of the sufferers online were male but some had male friends who had problems.

Butterfly_88 said: "Guys I know with eating disorders handle it in different ways because they are treated differently. Unfortunately, I found one boy in particular was not given enough treatment from nursing staff when I was in a unit dealing with ED's, this was a shame but he wasn't given the same support as us."

Occasional_thinker agreed: "It's much harder for guys to admit to themselves and to other people that they have ED's. The ones I know are a lot more open about their eating habits but they don't seem to see that they might have an eating disorder because 'guys don't suffer from eating disorders.'"

Returning to the experiences of the girls, Lexy07 told us: "Eventually I want to become a child psychologist. I am hoping to go onto uni and study psychology." This is proof that although people suffering from eating disorders may be considered to act abnormally they have very much the same goals as most people in life despite struggles with their weight and image.

About this article

This story was written by Bisi Fashesin, 18 and Dowa Ojarikre, 18.

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i think people with eating disorders - no matter what size they are to begin with - think that they are fat, anorexia and bulimia is very common amongst young girls and this is not always about wanting to look good - maybe they are afraid of becoming fat or sometimes they could be afraid of food things like bulimia is, i think, the hardest - imagine wanting - needing - to throw up. my brothers girlfriend had that and the relationship was effected, i think - after she had an accident where she drank too much on an empty stomach i think her poor head must have cleared because the relationship was great and she was all he could ever talk about - but it was such a scare and after a while they parted.

i don't entirely blame people in magazines, or even the people who edited it for probably making the model look thinner than he/she actually is. mostly people do become anorexic because of that or maybe something had been said to or about them which they had taken badly.

i think ED's are mostly among younger people - notice how i say people and not women - because they are vulnerable and insecure and conscious - very conscious - about how they look saying this, i think young people need to speak up more for the people who suffer from this, and also for people who just don't like the way they look and are maybe a bit too self-conscious.

very good article!

sarah from 15, 30 December 1899 00:00

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