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Eating Disorders And Body Dissatisfaction Is Double In Muslim Teenagers Than In Christian

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The incidence of eating disorders was found to be 2.3-fold higher among Muslim adolescents than among their Christian classmates. Similarly, body dissatisfaction was 1.8-fold higher in the former group. Finally, as a general conclusion, an average of one in four adolescents suffers some type of eating disorder, and 15% suffers body dissatisfaction. These were the conclusions drawn of a research conducted at the University of Granada.

The sample was taken from a Spanish multicultural city, Ceuta, where different religious groups have co-existed for centuries –Christian, Muslim, Jews–, and where about 30% of the total population is Muslim. The goal of this study was to assess the incidence of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction in a non-clinical sample of adolescents belonging to different religious groups, and assess the relationship between religious affiliation and health disorders.

To carry out this research, the authors examined a sample of 493 students aged between 12 and 20 years from three public schools in Ceuta, including secondary school.

Pioneer Study

The author of this study, Francisco Javier Ramón Jarne, belongs to the Institute of Neuroscience "Federico Olóriz" of the University of Granada. This research "addresses a subject that has never been studied in Spain before: the relationship between religious affiliation, eating disorders and body image perception. As regards other international studies, this is one of the few comparative studies ever made by religious affiliation (Christian and Muslim) and gender". So far, only one similar study had been developed in Israel with a sample of Christian, Muslim and Jew adolescent girls.

The recent massive migratory movements –mainly from countries of the Maghrib– experienced in Spain have transformed the religious affiliation of its population. "This makes the results of this study very interesting from the point of view of preventive medicine and public health", Francisco Javier Ramón Jarne states.

The University of Granada researcher pointed out that "affiliation to the Islamic religion taken as a socio-cultural factor can also be associated to these disorders, even although the thin ideal is not associated to the Islamic culture".

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