

ABSTRACT

The present study examined the role of social anxiety in the development of eating pathology among adolescent girls in Hong Kong. It was hypothesized that young girls with higher level of social anxiety displayed more body image disturbance and disordered eating behaviors than girls with lower level of social anxiety. Moreover, social anxiety was expected to be a useful psychological construct in predicting level of eating pathology. A community sample of 1,331 high school girls between age 11 to 20 completed a questionnaire measuring their fear of negative evaluation, public self-consciousness, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness and eating related problems. The results demonstrated that social anxiety was able to predict disordered eating behaviors, and the effect was mainly mediated by body image disturbance. The findings also supported a biopsychosocial model. Under societal pressure to pursue thinness, individual's level of social anxiety (psychological vulnerability) interacted with biological predisposition (body mass index) to predict body image disturbance, which in turn predicted disordered eating behaviors. Implications for assessment, treatment and future research directions were discussed.