ABSTRACT

Different aspects of self have been examined in the etiological model of disordered eating behaviors. Most conceptualizations of self-esteem focus on the implications of possessing high versus low self-esteem (i.e. level of self-esteem). Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Ineffectiveness Subscale of Eating Disorder Inventory were the most commonly used measures in past studies. In recent studies, researchers suggested that stability of self-esteem, other than its level, is more important in predicting different kinds of psychiatric symptoms. The present study examined the construct validity and value of labile self-esteem in predicting disordered eating behaviors among 1095 nonclinical adolescent girls in Hong Kong (aged from 11 to 20). Participants completed a package of self-report questionnaires which assessed their self-concept, body mass index, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness and disordered eating behaviors. Results indicated that labile self esteem was a valid self-esteem dimension which could capture self-concept deficits. Besides, it significantly predicted disordered eating behaviors. It remained as significant predictor even when the effects of general level of self-esteem had been controlled. Individuals with extremely high labile self-esteem reported significantly greater body dissatisfaction, stronger drive for thinness and more disordered eating behaviors. Findings of the present study suggest that stability of self-esteem is an important component of self-esteem and the contribution of labile self-esteem in the development of eating disorders should be further investigated.