

PW09-04

DO STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS PREDICT EATING DISORDER RELAPSE?: SIX-YEAR OUTCOMES FROM THE COLLABORATIVE PERSONALITY DISORDERS STUDY

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Aims: To examine the natural course of eating disorders (ED) prospectively over 6 years and to examine link between stressful life events (SLEs) and ED relapse among women with personality-disorders (PDs).

Method: Subjects were 132 female patients with bulimia nervosa (N=40) or EDNOS (N=92) in the Collaborative Longitudinal Personality Disorders Study. EDs were assessed with the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis-I, and monitored with the Longitudinal Interval Follow-up Evaluation during follow-up. PDs were assessed with the Diagnostic Interview for DSM-IV PD (DIPD-IV), and monitored with the Follow-Along version of the DIPD-IV during follow-up. SLEs were assessed with the Life Events Assessment (LEA). Follow-up assessments were conducted at 6- and 12-months and then yearly through 72 months. Proportional hazard regression analyses were performed to examine the link between time-varying levels of SLEs and ED relapse. Cox regressions controlled for the same covariates used in prior work: duration of ED, number of co-morbid psychiatric disorders, and time-varying status of PDs.

Results: Of the 132 patients, 59% had remissions from ED, 68% of whom subsequently relapsed over the course of 6 years (BN and EDNOS did not differ in relapse). Total number of negative SLEs reported by ED patients significantly predicted subsequent ED relapse (HazardRatio=1.5, $p < .05$). The types of SLEs that predicted ED relapse were elevated work stressors (HazardRatio=3.0, $p < .01$) and elevated recreation stressors (HazardRatio=3.1, $p < .05$).

Conclusion: Higher work stress and higher recreation stress represent significant warning signs for triggering relapse for women in remission from BN and EDNOS.