

Eating Disorders Among Alexandria University Medical Students: Prevalence And Associated Factors, 2024

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Introduction

Eating disorders (EDs) are psychiatric conditions that significantly impair physical and psychological well-being. Medical students are particularly vulnerable due to academic stress and lifestyle factors. Based on DSM-5 and ICD-11, EDs include Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder, Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder, and Unspecified Feeding or Eating Disorder. Globally, EDs are on the rise, with risk factors such as young age, female gender, sociocultural influences, and psychological traits like anxiety and perfectionism. EDs often co-occur with psychiatric disorders and can lead to severe medical complications and high mortality. Early detection among medical students is essential.

Aim of the Work

To assess the prevalence of eating disorders among medical students at Alexandria University and explore the associated demographic, psychological, and behavioral factors contributing to ED risk.

Subjects and Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted on 372 medical students (2024–2025) using stratified random sampling. Three tools were used:

1. A structured self-administered questionnaire covering socio-demographics, behaviors, medical & family history as well as self-reported BMI.
- 2.EAT-26 scale to assess EDs symptoms and behaviors (cutoff score: 20).
- 3.DASS-21 to measure depression, anxiety, and stress levels.

Results

- Prevalence: 21.8% of students scored above the EAT-26 threshold.
- Significant associations: female gender, clinical years, financial stress, living alone, smoking, drug use, family history of psychological disorders, previous nutrition therapy, and high DASS-21 scores.

Table 1: Factors significantly associated with EDs among medical students at Alexandria University (n=372).

Independent Variables	EAT-26	Normal (score<20)		Abnormal (score≥20)		Test of significance (p value)
		(n=291)	(%)	(n=81)	(%)	
Socio-demographic characteristics						
Gender						
Male		146	84.4	27	15.6	P=0.007**
Female		145	72.9	54	27.1	
Academic year						
Preclinical		181	81.9	40	18.1	P=0.03*
Clinical		110	72.8	41	27.2	
Living Arrangement						
Alone		13	52	12	48	P=0.01**
With Family		194	80.8	46	19.2	
With relatives		11	84.6	2	15.4	
Campus		73	77.7	21	22.3	
Family income						
Not enough / Barely enough		135	73.4	49	26.6	P= 0.02*
Enough and saving		156	83	32	17	
Lifestyle characteristics						
Smoking history(n=372)						
Non-smoker		284	79.3	74	20.7	P=0.006**
Ex-smoker		2	100	0	0	
Currently smoker		5	41.7	7	58.3	
Drug and alcohol abuse (n=372)						
no		290	79.2	76	20.8	P=0.001**
previously abused		1	20	4	80	
currently abuse		0	0	1	1	
Psychological Disorders history						
History of psychiatric disorders (n=372)						
No		149	86.6	23	13.4	P= 0.001**
Yes, in the past		41	71.9	16	28.1	
Yes, currently		101	70.6	42	29.4	
Weight management history						
History of seeking nutritional therapy for weight/eating problem (n=372)						
No		220	83	45	17	P < 0.001*
Yes		71	66.4	36	33.6	
DASS-21 scores						
Depression (n=372)						
Normal		101	92.7	8	7.3	P < 0.001**
Abnormal		187	71.4	76	28.6	
Anxiety (n=372)						
Normal		115	92	10	8	P < 0.001**
Abnormal		190	76.9	57	23.1	
Stress (n=372)						
Normal		146	90.1	16	9.9	P < 0.001**
Abnormal		140	66.7	70	33.3	

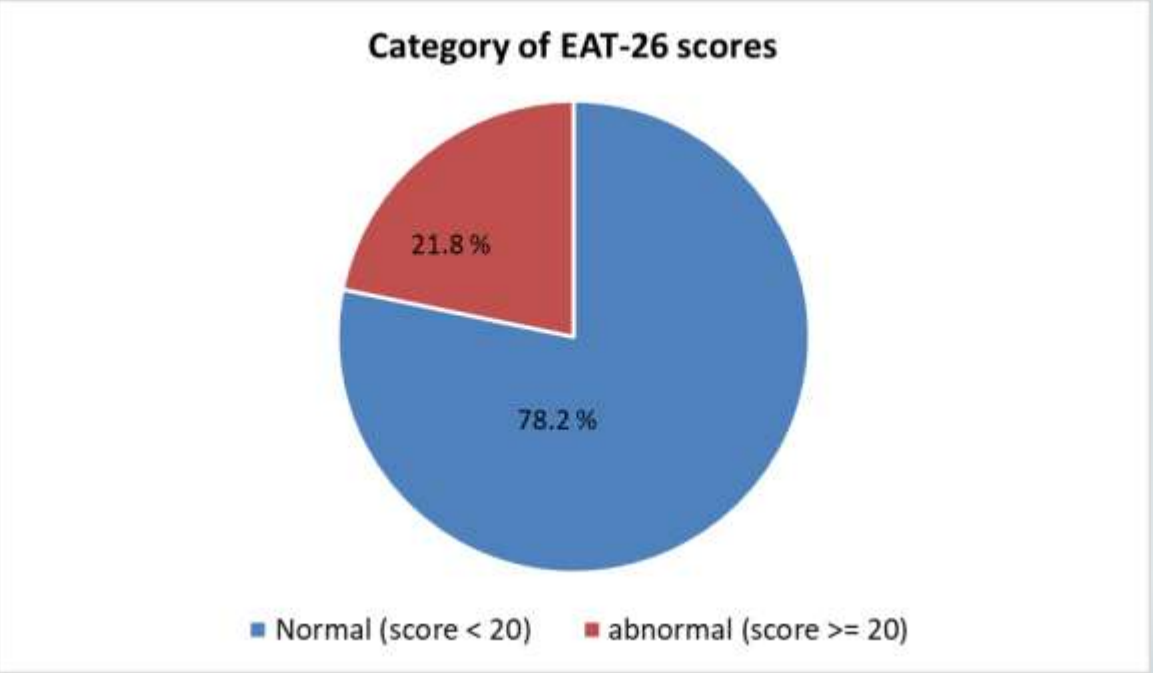


Figure 1: Prevalence of EDs among medical students at Alexandria University (n=372).

Conclusion

This study revealed a notable prevalence of eating disorders among Alexandria University medical students, indicating the need for institutional awareness and support. Integrating nutritional education, psychological screening, and stress management programs into medical curricula can reduce ED risk and improve student well-being.