

The effect of stimulants and gender on the relationship between disordered eating and mental health in young people

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Introduction and Aims: *Comorbid disordered eating and substance use is linked to poor mental health, with stimulants often used as an appetite-suppressant to control weight. This study examined relationships between disordered eating (DE) and mental health in young people who use substances, and the moderating effects of gender and stimulant use.*

Design and Methods: *Participants were 450 young people aged 17 to 25 years who reported lifetime use of substances. The online survey included a DE screener and the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS). Regression analysis with moderated moderation was conducted.*

Key Findings: *DE was 32.5% for females, 13.1% males, and associated with higher anxiety, depression and stress. The moderating effect of stimulants on the relationship between DE and anxiety was moderated by gender, and significant for males only. Males with DE who used stimulants had higher anxiety compared to those without stimulant use. The moderating effect of stimulants on the relationship between DE and depression was moderated by gender. For males with DE, depression was higher among those with stimulant use versus no stimulant use. Conversely, for females with DE, depression was lower among those with stimulant use versus no stimulant use.*

Discussions and Conclusions: *Males who engage in DE and stimulant use have higher anxiety and depression than those who do not engage in DE. This was not evident in females. The results suggest a need to screen for DE in young males who use stimulants due to increased risk of poor mental health.*

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