

Anorexia nervosa

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to this international seminar on body dysmorphic disorders where I'll be giving a very brief, general overview of one of the most common and more familiar illnesses associated with body dysmorphia, anorexia nervosa.

Just to give you a little bit of background history, anorexia nervosa is a serious mental illness first recorded in the 17th century, although it was not widely accepted by the medical profession until the late 19th century, with widespread public awareness of the condition beginning in the late 20th century.

As I'm sure you'll know, anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by excessive food restriction and an irrational fear of gaining weight, involving a distorted body image, with people suffering from anorexia seeing themselves as too fat even when they are already underweight.

In severe cases, anorexia nervosa can lead to death, due mainly to heart or kidney failure as well as suicide, with the highest rate of mortality of any psychological disorder, with between 5% and 20% of people diagnosed with the disorder dying from anorexia-related causes.

While anorexia nervosa can affect both men and women of any age, race, and socioeconomic background, it most often has its onset in adolescence and occurs much more frequently in women than men, with adolescent women aged between 15 and 19 making up 40% of all cases, and approximately 75% of people with anorexia are female.

As far as the causes are concerned, studies have highlighted the role of cultural factors, such as the promotion of thinness as the ideal female body form in Western industrialized nations, particularly through the media. This explains why anorexia is rare in developing countries and much more common in developed countries, particularly where obesity is also common.

There is also a high rate of reported child sexual abuse in people diagnosed with anorexia, with women with a history of eating disorders, including anorexia, twice as likely to have reported childhood sexual abuse.

Finally, regarding treatment, although restoring the person's weight is the primary aim of any treatment, optimal treatment also includes behavioural change in order to deal with the psychological disorders related to the illness.

The overall prognosis is favourable, with a full recovery rate of 75%-90% for adolescent anorexia nervosa. However, recovery is slow and can take as long as 79 months, with several relapses along the way.

Unfortunately, not all patients recover completely, and approximately 20% develop anorexia nervosa as a chronic disorder.

Thank you for your attention and I'll be pleased to answer any questions you may have.