

## Psychotherapeutic Responses to Comorbidity of Eating Disorders and Substance Abuse: a Pilot Study



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**BACKGROUND:** Research into eating disorders concurring with substance abuse is gaining increasing significance because of the growing prevalence of this comorbidity in clinical practice. Drug dependency and eating disorders have a similar aetiology and are often closely related. **AIMS:** The main aim of this exploratory study was to assess women with eating disorders (in a specialised facility for the treatment of these disorders) for any concurrent substance abuse. Another objective was to look for any differences between the various types of eating disorders and drugs of choice, as well as identifying which specific eating disorder has the strongest association with alcohol use. **METHODS:** A test battery consisting of EAT-26, AUDIT, and the Maudsley Addiction Profile (short version) was used. The second source of data comprised an interview with, and a case study of, a client with a history of

comorbidity of psychogenic overeating and polydrug use. The third source of information on the issue was a focus group. **SAMPLE:** 35 respondents participated in the questionnaire survey. The focus group was attended by four patients and an interview was conducted with one. In terms of diagnosis, the sample comprised 20 girls with anorexia nervosa, 12 with bulimia, and three with psychogenic overeating. **RESULTS:** Two respondents confirmed that they had used methamphetamine. Eight respondents had used marijuana. Thirteen respondents reported using laxatives, with the majority of them taking excessive daily doses. The study demonstrated that patients with bulimia were more likely to abuse alcohol. **CONCLUSIONS:** The sample showed a high rate of substance abuse. The study met its goals by ascertaining the prevalence of patients with drug use comorbidity receiving treatment in a specialised facility.

**KEY WORDS:** COMORBIDITY – EATING DISORDERS – ANOREXIA NERVOSA – BULIMIA – PSYCHOGENIC OVEREATING – SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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