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Emotional Eating as a Behavioral Marker of Dysregulated Dietary Patterns: A Mediation Analysis of Loss-of-Control Pathways in University Students**Mohammed Abdullah Al Mutairi**

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Background: Emotional eating is a form of dysregulated dietary behavior associated with maladaptive patterns and eating disorder (ED) psychopathology. However, whether it acts as an independent predictor or reflects broader behavioral dysregulation remains unclear. This study examined its association with self-perceived ED and the mediating role of loss of control (LOC) over eating.

Methods: A secondary cross-sectional analysis was conducted using data from 695 university students. Emotional eating was measured using a 14-item composite score ($\alpha = 0.92$). Self-perceived ED served as the binary outcome. Analyses included Welch's t-tests, logistic regression, and mediation modeling.

Results: Emotional eating scores were significantly higher in participants with self-perceived ED ($p = 0.019$; $d = 0.19$). While associated with higher odds of perceived ED in crude models ($OR = 1.26$; $p = 0.020$), the association attenuated after adjustment ($adj\ OR = 1.11$; $p = 0.312$). Mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect via LOC ($p < 0.001$),

accounting for 43.8% of the total effect.

Conclusions: We concluded that emotional eating appears to operate through loss of control mechanisms rather than just acting as a sole independent predictor of self-perceived ED.

Biography

Mohammed Abdullah Al Mutairi is a highly motivated medical student at Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia, currently pursuing his MBBS degree and expected to graduate in 2028. He has demonstrated outstanding academic performance, maintaining a GPA of 4.7/5 and ranking first in his class. Alongside his medical studies, Mohammed is actively engaged in research, with a strong interest in psychiatry, eating disorders, neurogenetics, neuromodulation, and public health. He serves as the first author on several ongoing research projects, including studies on migraine awareness, autism spectrum disorder bioinformatics, sleep outcomes, and psychiatric research. He has also contributed to research on GERD, obstructive sleep apnea, meningitis, and encephalitis. Mohammed holds certifications in research bioethics, good clinical practice, depression management, and basic life support. In addition, he has completed more than 135 volunteer hours through mental health awareness and community health initiatives. He is a member of both the American Psychiatric Association and the Saudi Psychiatric Association.