

Demographic Influences and the Prominence of Orthorexia Nervosa Among the General Population

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ABSTRACT

Background. Orthorexia nervosa can be defined as “an unhealthy obsession with eating healthy food” (1). It is not recognized as a clinical diagnosis in the DSM-5. However, it is considered an disordered eating behavior.

Objective. To gain a better understanding of the presence and the demographic influences such as age, gender, location, education, and employment status that contribute to orthorexia nervosa.

Design. An established nutrition assessment questionnaire referred to as ORTO-15 was used to identify orthorexia among the general population. The survey was electronically distributed over a one-month period. Data was analyzed to determine whether the participants were likely to be orthorexic.

Results. Of the 602 participants surveyed, 70.6% were associated with a tendency towards ON. The average ORTO-15 score among participants was found to be 37; a score greater than or equal to 40 is defined as ON. When comparing participants scores to demographics it was determined that age, income, as well as highest degree earned were all significantly associated with orthorexia nervosa. Of the 543 female surveyors, 71% have a tendency towards ON and of the 58 male surveyors, 64% have a tendency towards ON.

Conclusion. Orthorexic tendencies were found to be higher in young adults, people with at least a bachelor’s degree, and those earning a salary between \$35,000-\$74,000. Further studies should be conducted, which include a significantly equal number of men and women. Additionally, an assessment of eating habits, career choice, and any past diagnosis of eating disorders, anxiety, and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder should be considered.