

Research Suggests That Eating Disorders Are More Common Than Previously Thought

Eating Disorder Awareness Week: February 1 - 7, 2015

January 26, 2015 (Toronto, ON) – In Canada, it is estimated that as many as 600,000 to 990,000 individuals are diagnosed with an eating disorder, at any given time. However, according to a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC), one in two (50%) Canadians reported knowing someone (including themselves) who has or has had an eating disorder.

“This reinforces the fact that eating disorders are more prevalent than people think,” says Marbella Carlos, Outreach and Education Co-ordinator at NEDIC. “Eating disorders do not discriminate – they affect men and women of all ages, children as young as 10, visible minority groups and members of the LGBTQ community.”

While most (89%) believe eating disorders are preventable, one in three (35%) admit they wouldn’t be able to recognize the warning signs.

“Early identification of symptoms is important for getting support, diagnosis and treatment,” says Marbella. “But awareness and education may help prevent many eating disorders before they develop.”

Other Research Highlights and Facts

- **40% of Canadians mistakenly believe eating disorders are a choice.**
Fact: *An eating disorder is not a choice and is a serious mental health condition that is often accompanied by other issues such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder or substance abuse.*
- **Only 2% of Canadians surveyed believe that children ages 6 to 18 struggle with eating disorders.**
Fact: *Twice as many girls struggle with eating disorders than with obesity. Some studies show that children would rather lose an arm, be hit by a truck or have a parent die of cancer, than be fat.¹*
- **Most (91%) of Canadians believe that the media pressures to have ‘the perfect body’ drive individuals to develop eating disorders.**
Fact: *Images of beauty portrayed in the media are unrealistic. This societal pressure to be thin is having a negative affect on young girls - 61% of Canadian girls in grades 7 and 8 are trying to*

¹ Dr. Leora Pinhas, Psychiatrist, Hospital for Sick Children, in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women Report on Eating Disorders Among Girls and Women in Canada, 2014

*lose weight.*² Dieting is generally the first behavioural step towards developing an eating disorder.

- **95% consider eating disorders to be potentially life threatening**

Fact: Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. It is estimated that 1,000 to 1,500 Canadians die every year from anorexia or bulimia. And many others die as a result of medical complications, organ failure, heart failure, or suicide.

“There are a lot of myths and misconceptions about eating disorders,” says Marbella. “Eating Disorder Awareness Week is an opportunity to lift the veil of silence, stigma and shame and encourage people to talk openly about their body and weight preoccupation in the hopes of helping to prevent eating disorders.”

Eating Disorder Awareness Week (EDAW) is February 1st through 7th, 2015 and will include municipal proclamations and [events](#) in dozens of cities across Canada. Purple lights will also be illuminating various public venues including the CN Tower, Niagara Falls, the Peace Bridge and the B.C. Place Stadium in recognition of the cause.

For more information on eating disorders and EDAW events, go to www.nedic.ca, call toll-free 1-866-NEDIC-20 (416-340-4156) or follow @theNEDIC on Twitter.

About the Research

Ipsos Reid poll was conducted on behalf of NEDIC between November 17 and 21, 2014 among a sample of 1,005 Canadians. The poll is accurate to within +/-3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadian adults been polled.

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For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

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² McVey, G., Pepler, D., Davis, R., Flett, G.L., & Abdonell, M. (2002). Risk and protective factors associated with disordered eating during early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*. 22(1), 75-79.