



## The Impact of Social Networks on The Development of Eating Disorders in Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Eating Disorders are considered to have a high and increasing morbidity and mortality rate.

**Objective:** To describe the impact of social networks on the development of eating disorders (Bulimia-Anorexia) in adolescents.

**Methodology:** integrative review, developed in the following stages: formulation of the problem, delimitation of objective, setting of search parameters scientific productions, bibliographic search in different databases, in a time limit of 2012-2021.

**Results:** After the search, 50% corresponded to quantitative studies and 50% to qualitative studies, while the percentage by database indicated: Scielo 20%, PubMed 20%, Dialnet 30%, Clinical Key 20%, Sciece Direct 10%; Instagram and Facebook were identified as the most influential networks in the appearance of bulimia and anorexia.

**Conclusion:** Social networks have had a significant influence on people's lives, awakening curiosity and new gestures of wanting to receive attention, love and understanding; however, their misuse has led to an increase in eating disorders, with 9 out of 10 women showing bulimia and anorexia.

**Keywords:** *Social networks, eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia*

## INTRODUCTION

Eating Disorders (ED) in accordance with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5) (1) are considered as Eating and Food Intake Disorders with a high and increasing morbidity and mortality rate (2,3). Internationally, their prevalence is between 1 and 3% in adolescents (4). In Latin America 9 out of 10 people who present eating disorders are women, with Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina topping the list of indicators related to eating disorders associated with anorexia due to low self-esteem because they do not accept themselves as they are; given this, they are never satisfied with their physical appearance (5). In the current digital era, social networks are a piece of the lives of young people and have become a factor associated with ED (6) and a means of social pressure that creates a stereotype of beauty that highlights extreme thinness; although it is recognized as a viable tool to disseminate information that could support and generate changes in behavior in terms of healthy food intake and physical activity for healthy lifestyles (7). Among the social networks most used by young people are: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp (8).

Murray et al., They found that 44.3 % of female adolescents were at high risk of developing bulimia, presenting alterations in their emotional state such as anxiety in 59.7 %, depression in 68.6 % and dissatisfaction with their body image in 92.1 % (9). Another research reported that 98 % always think about dieting because of their figure, 100 % express fear of becoming fat; 73 % feel bad about their figure and have cried about it and 86 % affirm that they contrast their figure with that of others, they perceive themselves unfavorable to themselves (5).

Similarly, in Colombia, the prevalence of ED in university students ranges between 18.9% and 39.7%, with bulimia nervosa being more frequent than anorexia nervosa among adolescent women and young adults (5). Eating Disorders (ED) are a group of diseases of multicausal origin (10), creating great complexity. They are defined as Eating and Food Intake Disorders because they are very serious diseases, associated with significant morbidity and mortality (11), so much so that they are considered the third most common chronic disease among adolescents;

they are ranked by the WHO among the priority mental illnesses for adolescents, given the health risk involved (12). It is generally known to be on the rise in developing countries (13).

Studies carried out on Colombian women, regarding their body image, indicate great overestimation of body weight, due to eating disorders, based on the consumption of junk food and sugary drinks. In the Atlántico, this overestimation of body image in women is high, because they recognize the need for good eating and physical activity to feel good, opting for a healthy lifestyle. However, because it is a long-term alternative, they resort to easier and shorter alternatives, which imply surgical risks and the consumption of nutritional supplements that are used as a replacement of the daily balanced diet (5).

On the other hand, in order to understand and address the aspects related to TAC, it is necessary to take into account the role of transnational migration, modernization and westernization, which are socio-cultural factors that have been shown to have a high risk of eating disorders in vulnerable subpopulations. However, other social factors such as the bad influence they receive from their "friends", teasing and media harassment are not left aside. Also, there are physical health problems including digestive problems and psychological health problems such as low self-esteem and anxiety disorders (13).

Therefore, the purpose of this review was: The objective of the research was to describe The impact of social networks in the development of eating disorders (Bulimia-Anorexia) in adolescents reported by scientific evidence.

## METODOLOGY

The integrative review (IR) was used as a research method characterized by an analysis, classification, and planning of different materials chosen, according to criteria established in accordance with the purpose of the review, it shows the findings reported by other studies derived from a research process or from bibliographic reviews of the object of study. The information gathered and analyzed allows the formulation of general conclusions on the object of research.

It is a review of the scientific and academic literature accompanied by a rigorous and structured analysis that leads to the identification of theoretical gaps related to the problem addressed and suggestions for future research to be developed, and also contributes to the recognition of theoretical and conceptual corpus of the subject studied (14, 15, 16).

In the present integrative review, the following stages were developed: formulation of the problem, delimitation of the objective, establishment of the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the scientific productions, exhaustive search of scientific articles in the different databases, analysis of the studies, selection of the studies according to the pre-established inclusion criteria, rigorous evaluation of the studies and analysis of the data.

Inclusion criteria: scientific articles published in journals indexed in SciELO, Dialnet, PubMed, ScienceDirect, ClinicalKey and MDPI, time window from January 01, 2011 to August 31, 2021; with the descriptors in English and Spanish: Social networks, eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia ; use of social networks, eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia in the title (one or two words), abstract, presenting social networks and eating disorders as the main topic study, and that were full texts. The search was done through Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT). Among the exclusion criteria: scientific articles in a period of time published before 2011, studies that are not published in the different databases mentioned above and graduate theses.

The selection began with the identification of articles based on the title (30 articles); to be chosen it had to have at least two of the keywords or descriptors mentioned above; 6 duplicate articles were excluded. Then, the abstract of 24 articles was read to identify relevant information related to the scope of investigation. After that, each article was read, and the methodological coherence, credibility of the results and relevance of the research (usefulness in practice) were evaluated, leaving 10 articles that met the inclusion criteria.

Statement on ethical aspects: The review took into account the provisions of the Resolution 8430 of 1993 of the Colombian Ministry of Health, since the research was classified as research without risk to human beings; the information used for the research consisted of published secondary sources, which exonerates any violation of the aforementioned standards.

### RESULTS

After the selection of the 10 final articles following the integrative search, 50% corresponded to quantitative studies and 50% to qualitative studies, while the percentage by database indicated Scielo 20%, PubMed 20%, Dialnet 30%, Clinicalkey 20%, Scencedirect 10%. (Table 1).

In the present integrative review, we found one article published in 2011, one in 2012, one in 2015, one in 2017, one in 2018, three in 2020, and two in 2021 (Table 1)

**TABLE 1.** Analyzed documents file

Code	Article Title	Year Of Publication	Focus	Database
A1	e-Ana and e-Mía: A Content Analysis of Pro-Eating Disorder Web Sites	2011	Qualitative	PubMed
A2	Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa: virtual dissemination of the disease as a lifestyle	2017	Qualitative	Scielo
A3	Use of the Internet by adolescents in the search for health information	2018	Qualitative	ClinicalKey
A4	Influence of Instagram use on eating behavior and emotional disorders. Systematic review	2020	Qualitative	Dialnet
A5	Risk of eating disorders and use of social networks in gym users in the city of Medellin, Colombia.	2020	Qualitative	ClinicalKey
A6	Psychological Impact of Pro-Anorexia and Pro-Eating Disorder Websites on Adolescent Females: A Systematic Review	2021	Qualitative	PubMed

Code	Article Title	Year Of Publication	Focus	Database
A7	Perception and use of social networks by adolescents.	2020	Quantitative	Dialnet
A8	Impact of social networks and the Internet on adolescence: positive and negative aspects.	2015	Quantitative	ScienceDirect
A9	Risk of eating disorders and use of social networks in gym users in the city of Medellin, Colombia.	2021	Quantitative	Scielo
A10	Family and social networks in contemporary adolescent eating disorders	2012	Quantitative	Dialnet

source: own elaboration

Most of the studies analyzed revealed that many young people are currently exposed to social networks because they do not make good use of them, losing their self-esteem and having a poor self-image; taking the option of not eating to be thin, which leads them to present ACT, but these behaviors are also encouraged from home, since family support is important to face the stage of adolescence, where being the attraction of everyone and maintaining a beautiful body is almost normal. Social networks have advanced a

lot; receiving a "like" through a photo is already considered as a sign of love. The review showed that Facebook and Twitter are the most used networks by children, but observing the context and the economy, it is very clear that Facebook beats Twitter and Instagram for offering free and limited rates. The articles reviewed report that self-esteem, values and principles are instilled from home, but the population encompasses their world in occupations, not giving priority to such valuable attitudes that later bring many problems.

**TABLE 2.** Summary of identified social networks and TCAs

Social Network	TCA	Findings
<b>Instagram</b>	Bulimia nervosa, anorexia nervosa, emotion disorders.	The frequent use of this network is in close correspondence with the imaginary or perception that one has of one's own physical image and of the eating behaviors that one assumes; scientific evidence speaks of the incidence or prevalence of emotional disturbances; They are also related to the development of bulimia, anorexia, mood disorders.
<b>Facebook</b>	Anorexia nervosa, emotion and self-image disorders.	It was found a significant association between the use of this and self-esteem in college students as many express feeling good about themselves by the number of likes they receive daily. Facebook influences our psychological well-being, controlling how we feel and leading to unhealthy addictive behaviors that end in the search for perfection and non-acceptance.

Source: own elaboration.

## DISCUSSION

Eating disorders (EDs) are a major problem in the lives of adolescents, as this topic has been recurrently included in social networks, significantly influencing their daily lives (17,18,19). In other words, it does not affect everyone in the same way, since some use it responsibly; however, a large number of adolescents are affected by current ideology or stereotypes (this is known as "the perfect or porcelain body"), as a result of which they adopt bad lifestyle habits.

Therefore, it could be said that the predisposing factors are closely related to each other, as reflected in the high percentage of worldwide viewing and use of the Facebook application (20,21). Most adolescents express their likes, beliefs, abilities, self-image, communication and even their feelings; in such a way that the number of "likes" they receive on their photos when posting them is the amount of love or acceptance they give themselves; that is, if the publication has many "likes or I love it", it is equivalent to the amount of love or liking for themselves (22).

Studies reveal that 9 out of every 10 adolescent women worldwide suffer from ED and 6 out of every 10 girls do not like their bodies because of their weight or other condition (23). It is worrying because this situation is present since childhood, but it is more prevalent in adolescence and one of the causes is the lack of personal acceptance ("fat talk" body dissatisfaction (24)). However, Garcia (25) in his study pointed out that Instagram is the most used network after Facebook, it is the one that has caused more damage from the adolescent to the adult population, i.e. from 12 to 35 years old approximately; another study showed that 17.5% of women who used it, were at risk for the diagnosis of ACT; However, there is a greater predominance of young people suffering from depression, anxiety, cyberbullying in 30% and orthorexia nervosa, which is defined as that obsession with eating healthy food (26); In addition, scientific evidence reports the increase of websites that play an important role as an etiological factor of anorexia and bulimia (27, 28, 29, 30); anorexia is a disorder more frequent in female adolescents than in males (31). However, Dina et al, in their study found that cases of ACT are caused by bad information and the most used browser is Google, this being an unreliable

source, since the information is not written by experts (32).

Abjaude et al., Casado and Carbonell (33, 34) found that narcissism and Facebook use are related to displaying diet and exercise gains. They state that this behavior reflects the desire to show off to others; moreover, people who make their gym activity public do so not only to stand out, but to make a point about the value they place on beauty and fitness. The interest for physical image and the yearning to be the center of attention are characteristics of the narcissist, it was also found that narcissism is a predictor of the number of "likes" and comments when social networks have an effect on the emotions of young people, they influence psychosocial aspects of this population scientific evidence reports that 66.7% of young people report that their sentimental life has improved little or not at all. Women express their discomfort or discomfort with the comments made on the network in a higher proportion than men ( $p=0.01$ ). 83.9% report having restricted access to their profile. In addition, 65.5% reported that their parents have little or no control over their use of the networks (35). The study by Monteiro et al. (36) showed similar results with the use of Instagram; narcissists use more this network, post more photos and attach great relevance to comments; the degree of importance was higher among narcissists with low self-esteem. Social networks are used by people as a vehicle for self-promotion and in which some nuances of narcissistic personality are revealed.(37).

On the other hand, Ojeda-Martín et al, (6) Wilksch et al, (39) among the findings of their study highlight that there is a close association between the frequency of use of social networks and the possibility suffering from ED and eating disorder symptoms; who indicate that adolescent users of Instagram or Facebook, were significantly more likely to perform strict physical exercise and to skip meals, than those who did not have accounts on these social networks. Likewise, other studies reinforce these findings by pointing out evidence about the close relationship of Instagram with body image and the time spent on this network with the risk of developing eating disorders (40,41,42,43); in addition, social networks encourage the use of diet and excessive physical exercise to maintain an image in accordance with the prototype of beauty exhibited on the network (44,45,46).

It is of utmost importance then an adequate follow-up by the competent authorities and/or health professionals to highlight positive and negative aspects in order to highlight prevention programs against this scourge (47,48, 49, 50).

Finally, the limitation of this study refers to the number of international and national publications retrieved related to the descriptors used.

### CONCLUSION

Social networks have significantly influenced people's lives, awakening curiosity and new gestures of wanting to receive attention, love and understanding; however, the misuse of these has generated various behaviors in young people who day after day lose interest in certain daily activities from exercising to eating healthy, this has led to an increase in eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia.

In the scientific evidence analyzed, a narcissistic component was identified in the users of the networks, especially in people with low self-esteem, whose motivation to use them is to show themselves to others and reinforce the idea of standing out and highlighting the value they place on beauty and physical conditioning. Social networks have advantages related to the fact that they facilitate communication and provide education to their users, but misuse of them can lead to health problems in the adolescent population, such as ADD.

Among the most used networks in the world, Facebook was found in first place, followed by Instagram. Facebook generates free content through an imaginary world full of stereotypes that society governs, actions as simple as a "like" to the publication of a content could mean a great impact of acceptance in this study group and Instagram is the space where sociocultural expressions are imitated by its users to the point of wanting to achieve the same goals at a personal level not identifying their own skills and forgetting their strengths, It is very recurrent that from these behaviors appear the TCA in a higher percentage bulimia and anorexia being a consequence of the different cognitions reflected in the environment.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest

### Contribution

First and Second author: Research idea, literature search, construction of methods, analysis of results, drafting, revising and editing the manuscript.

Third, author: literature search, review of articles and editing the manuscript.

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