

Eating disorders are an increasingly common form of chronic mental disorder that can lead to severe and life-threatening health effects. Hospitalization and mortality rates associated with eating disorders are especially high for men, even though eating disorders are perceived as a “female issue”. Therefore, men, their families and health professionals may have trouble recognizing men’s symptoms as a manifestation of eating disorders, considering other less “female” explanations. This is also supported by research on eating disorders which are conducted mainly or exclusively among women, using tools designed to measure symptoms specific to women, not to men who, unlike women, want to be more muscular, not thinner. Additionally, most of the psychoeducational materials are aimed at women, and eating disorders treatment facilities often target women with the décor (e.g., colors) stereotypically considered feminine. Therefore, measuring the specificity of eating disorders symptoms among men and creating men-specific prevention and treatment methods may be of great importance in helping men to correctly recognize their symptoms and seek help.

The development and maintenance of eating disorder symptoms depends on many cognitive and behavioral factors. The transdiagnostic model of eating disorders indicates that people preoccupied with their own body image and food are also less satisfied with their bodies, which may lead to an excessive focus on losing weight and using behaviors characteristic for various eating disorders (e.g. restricting food, overeating and purging, excessive exercising). This in turn causes even more preoccupation with appearance and food. There is, therefore, a specific causal chain of effects that creates a vicious cycle of eating disorders symptoms. However, alternative starting points for this vicious circle (other than the one indicated in the model), which may be more specific to men, have not been tested so far.

Thus, the proposed project aims to create a men-specific model of eating disorders (with specific symptoms, sequence of symptoms and starting points). This aim will be realized in the longitudinal Study 1 (3 measurement points over a 12-month time span), which will enroll 500 men from the general population. Another aim of the project is to create a short psychoeducational intervention that will be based on the model developed in Study 1 and to test its effects in improving the intention to seek help among men. This aim will be realized in the experimental Study 2 (3 measurements points over a 3-month time span), in which 200 men at increased risk of eating disorders will participate in standard psychoeducation on eating disorders or men-specific psychoeducation on eating disorders. According to the results of previous research, we assume that the presentation of eating disorders as also a male issue will increase the intention to seek help among men. Moreover, a website aimed at men on EDs and their mental health will be created.

Therefore, the proposed project may provide not only new knowledge on men-specific risk factors for eating disorders but also tools to help men correctly recognize their symptoms and decide to seek help.