



A new report suggests that female college students in warm climates may be more concerned about their bodies and more likely to have eating disorders than women living in colder areas. In a study of female college students, women at a Florida university weighed less and engaged in more eating-disorder behaviors like bingeing and purging and worried more about their bodies than women at a Pennsylvania university.

Nineteen percent of the Florida women had a body mass index (BMI) that was below average, compared with only 1% of Pennsylvania students. Women in Florida were also more likely to show signs of bulimia, and eating disorder characterized by binge-eating and self-induced vomiting. Twenty percent of Florida students scored high on a scale used to evaluate bulimia compared with just 5% of Pennsylvania students.

Though climate differences may account for the differences between the two groups of women, the researchers suggest that there are other possible explanations, such as differences between the individual university communities in how much priority is placed on appearance and body shape.

The study is not the first to examine the relationship between eating disorders and climate. One study found that symptoms of bulimia intensified during cold months in some women but during warm weather in others.

It is possible that bulimia that worsens during the winter is more likely to have a biological cause. In contrast, for those whose bulimia gets worse during the summer, she notes that problems with body image may stem from the need to wear revealing clothing.

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