Psychological Research on Breastfeeding and Eating Disorders Earn Two Scientists Federal Award at APS Annual Convention

October 25, 2023

The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) awarded two poster presenters at the 2023 APS Annual Convention with the Building Bridges Award. These awards are meant to forge connections between research in psychological science and dental, oral, and craniofacial health. Their research highlights the growing ways in which psychological science and dental, oral, and craniofacial research intersect. Below are their statements about receiving the awards.

Kimberly D. Brown, Ball State University
First, thank you to the NIDCR for their participation with the 2023 APS Annual Convention. I am an APS member and a doctoral student studying breastfeeding in marginalized populations. Breastfeeding literature shows that social support is a pivotal factor in a mother’s decision to initiate and maintain breastfeeding and that support for breastfeeding is largely driven by breastfeeding knowledge. As breastfeeding rates vary dramatically by race, men’s knowledge of breastfeeding may help to explain this disparity. The purpose of my work was to explore racial differences in men’s understanding and attitudes about breastfeeding. This project contributes to the literature by providing a multi–racial representation of men’s knowledge of breastfeeding in general and subsequent attitude towards infant feeding methods.

Breastfeeding, as many know, is more than infant nutrition. Breastfeeding has multiple physical and psychological health implications, including dental and craniofacial health. Breastfed babies have reduced incidence of tooth decay and are less likely to need braces or reconstructive dental services later in life. In 2011, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a national call to action to support breastfeeding that included all health professionals. The dietary and oral healthcare information that a nursing family receives from dental practitioners is a vital link to professional and community support for breastfeeding.

I was absolutely delighted to win the NIDCR Building Bridges Award at the APS Annual Convention. Understanding and promoting the benefits of the breastfeeding relationship of mothers and infants has been my career focus. The NIDCR recognition of the cross-discipline connection between breastfeeding and oral health is validating. The Building Bridges Award exemplifies the commitment of the NIDCR to glean expertise from multiple disciplines.

Ava (Zahra) Nazarimehrvarani, Florida International University
Understanding the effect of emotion regulation (ER) and orthorexia nervosa (ON) on disordered eating (DE) may reduce the risks for developing eating disorders (EDs). Though previous studies have demonstrated the associations of ER with DE and EDs, there is little research examining how ON relates to these factors and how creates potential coactive pathways of risk for EDs. Examining these linkages has important theoretical, empirical, and clinical implications for the reduction of risks. To address this gap, the current study investigated the potential differential pathways among ER, ON, and DE in a large sample of college students (N = 1028). Christopher Clifford, Leslie D. Frazier, and I hypothesized that ER would directly affect ON and DE, and that ON would mediate the association between ER and DE. We used structural equation modeling to assess the direct and indirect pathways.

The results demonstrated the “lack of clarity” and “no strategies” subscales of ER and all ON subscales directly affected the “food-preoccupation” and “desire to be thin” subscales of DE. The results also showed the “difficulties with goals,” the “non-acceptance of emotions,” the “lack of awareness,” and the “difficulties controlling impulses” subscales of ER had significant indirect effects on the “food-preoccupation” and “desire to be thin” subscales of DE through all ON subscales. More precisely, the subscales of ON mediated the association between several subscales of ER and DE. These patterns of associations provide differential transdiagnostic pathways that are useful for prevention/intervention in risk for EDs.

Read all of the articles from the November/December Observer.

This study falls under the umbrella of human subject research and is compatible with NIDCR-specific award policies. We are grateful for being recognized with the award and hope our results inspire other researchers to investigate the causal pathways between orthorexia and other risks factors through longitudinal studies.

This research continues to highlight how psychological science informs public health. Please visit the NIDCR website to learn more about behavioral and social science research being conducted at the
institute. Stay tuned for upcoming APS Conventions or learn more about past conventions here.

Feedback on this article? Email apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org or login to comment. Interested in writing for us? Read our contributor guidelines.