Eating and weight problems in a community cohort of adolescents

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Objectives: To calculate and compare the prevalence of purging behaviours (i.e., vomiting, inappropriate use of laxatives, enemas, water pills) among 16 years old in three community-based cohorts and to investigate comorbid conditions.

Methods: Prevalence of purging behaviours and their comorbidity was analysed and compared in three community-based cohorts at age 16: Growing Up Today Study [GUTS] (USA); Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children [ALSPAC] (UK) and North Finland Birth Cohort [NFBC85/86] (Finland).

Results: In ALSPAC 6.3% reported purging. In GUTS, 4% of girls and 0.3% of boys reported purging monthly and 2.3% and 0.2%, respectively, weekly. In NFBC 1.6% reported vomiting occasionally and 0.3% often; 0.6% reported vomiting, inappropriate use of laxatives, enemas, water pills among 16-year-olds.

Conclusions: These preliminary results show a higher prevalence of purging behaviours in the ALSPAC/GUTS cohorts than in NFBC. Possible reasons for these differences, including socio-cultural factors, will be discussed.