The Buffet Challenge: A Behavioral Assessment of Eating Behavior in Adolescents with An Eating Disorder

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Eating disorders are characterized by disturbances in nutritional intake and abnormal mealtime behaviors. Laboratory eating paradigms offer a unique opportunity to accurately measure dietary intake and eating behaviors, however, these studies have predominantly occurred in adults. This paper describes the development and preliminary psychometric examination of the Buffet Challenge, a laboratory-based meal task for youths with an eating disorder. We recruited and assessed 56 participants as part of a randomized controlled trial of Family-Based Treatment for adolescents with anorexia nervosa. Adolescents completed the Buffet Challenge at baseline, midway through treatment (~ week 16 of a 6 months course), and end of treatment. Participants and their parents also reported eating disorder symptomatology and treatment related variables of interest were recorded. All adolescents were willing to complete the Buffet Challenge at all time points, although one refused to give up their cellphone, and there were no significant adverse events recorded. Preliminary results are presented. Our initial pilot of this task in adolescents with anorexia nervosa demonstrates its acceptability, although investigation of our hypotheses was hindered by significant missing data due to COVID-related research shutdowns. Future studies should replicate procedures in a larger sample to ensure analyses are adequately powered.

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