

# Media influence on anorexia in adolescent girls



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- Katrina Cooper

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Rationale

A literature review is needed to analyse the reasons there is an increase in adolescent girls developing Anorexia Nervosa. A high number of girls are feeling pressured to diet to manage their weight. Social influences are affecting girls from believing the idea that women in fashion magazines, models and the media have the perfect body. This ideology can cause extreme dieting which can therefore develop into an eating disorder such as anorexia. Adolescent girls are being made to feel insecure about their bodies

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because of the way in which the media portrays underweight women with the image of the ideal body. Anorexia is a major concern for adolescent girls, with pressures from school, home and peers to remain at a healthy weight. It is difficult for girls to remain in control of their lives and can then lead on to extreme outcomes such as mortality or long term health problems.

#### Aims and objectives

- To discuss in what ways the media influences girls into the idea of the ‘perfect body shape’.

#### To discuss:

- Magazines
- Fashion
- Social media and internet access (Pro Anna website)

#### Methodology

A literature review on the impact of social influences and the media has on adolescent girls of engaging in extreme dieting which can then lead to an eating disorder such as Anorexia Nervosa. Multiple studies agree that the media has an influence on adolescent girls. However; there is not enough research to declare social influences as the prime cause for young girls for developing anorexia. Numerous studies agree with the media being a cause for concern but research suggests that there are numerous other factors to take into consideration such as biological, developmental, behavioural and sociocultural. It is crucial to consider ethical considerations when taking part in research for a literature review to ensure all the information is accurately

interpreted. If the research is not interpreted correctly it can create an unfair literature review.

## Context

Anorexia Nervosa is a mental disorder which starts with an individual dieting and then leads on to unhealthy psychological thoughts about their bodies and weight. This can cause extreme weight loss and the irrational belief that the person is overweight. Individuals diagnosed with Anorexia have obsessive thoughts on restricting food, their calorie intake and food recipes. Studies suggest adolescents are most likely to develop an eating disorder because they struggle to deal with the developmental process that takes place just before or after puberty. Individuals concentrate on becoming thin for their own belief it will help with their personal identity.

Studies have found that over the past 50 years there has been an increase in adolescent girls who have developed an eating disorder. The prevalence rate for young girls from ages 15-19 year olds who have developed anorexia nervosa has increased by 0.48%. There's little information on the reasons adolescent girls have concerns about their weight and body issues. However, many researchers suggest the main reason is the media and the role it plays in portraying an ideal weight regarding pressures on young girls to remain thin. According to York (2012) there was an increase in people being admitted to hospital with an eating disorder. The admissions increased from 16% from the year before resulting in 2,228 in patients being treated for an eating disorder. The most major increase was from 10 to 15 year old girls,

the prevalence rate increased from the year before by 69%. Similarly, it was recorded that 1 in 10 of all hospital admissions was girls aged 15 years old.

How are adolescent girls being affected by fashion models and the media?

Fashion models promote an unhealthy weight, The study of Katzmarzyk and Davis (1978 and 1998) studied models for two decades, results found models decreased their body weight. The study found that 70% of models were underweight, while 75% of women models were less than 85% of their ideal body weight. Similarly, Tiggemann studied 16 year old girls to find out the reasons for young girls concerns on weight and body dissatisfaction.

Tiggemann found that the biggest reason that influences girls to lose weight is the media. However, he explained that the 16 year old girls are increasingly aware of the media influences and the self-image portrayal.

The media such as magazines, television advertisements, music videos emphasise that female's appearance is thoroughly important. This encourages adolescents to believe that self-worth is connected with appearance. Underweight fashion models create a negative impact upon themselves by looking unhealthy, stretched and physically disordered. Airbrushing in the media further emphasises impractical unrealistic expectations on young adolescent girls in society. In western society, young girl's self-esteem deteriorates significantly during the adolescent stage. This increases the risk of young girls being extremely vulnerable and to feel dissatisfied with their weight. A study in the UK analysed 136 participant girls aged 11 to 16 year olds to find out if magazine images of underweight models or average weight models caused insecurities in young girls self-

esteem. All of the young girls agreed it did cause insecurities and self-esteem issues. A study has confirmed 50% of young girls read fashion magazines between the ages of 11- 15 year old.

Additionally, adolescents are being affected by the media because young girls see fashion models as a body to aspire for and admire them as a role model. This influences young girls to diet; in some cases this could have a negative impact on an adolescent girl and her association with her body. Medical researchers are disturbed how the thin body from fashion models are becoming a stimulant to anorexia in adolescent girls. The fashion models bodies are being used as an influential cultural icon in society and fashion models are dangerously thin. Fashion models have an immense impact on young girls and how they begin to view their bodies in a negative way. The fashion models body creates a risk and danger to young girls because young girls think it is effective to aim to imitate the fashion model. This influences the behaviour habits associated with anorexia such as reducing eating habits and exercising more.

Similarly, the university of west of England organised a survey involving 810 young participants. The survey concentrated on the media and images in magazine that promote ' the perfect body'. Over half of the adolescent girls knew of other girls in their school who presently have body troubles. Apparently 25. 4% of young girls compare their bodies to celebrities or people in the media and 35. 2% of young girls want to look similar to models in magazines. Half of adolescent girls have been on a diet to lose weight and 15% of young girls would take diet pills if they were willing to lose weight.

## The age groups for individuals with anorexia

In western society, people are taught that diets make them more content in their life. The media sends out messages that to be happy in life you have to be thin and there is comparison between realistic views on the body to thin models, average and underweight celebrities. Society wants individuals to look a certain way and being overweight has become unacceptable in western society.

In addition, adolescent girls can attempt suicide because of the psychological effects of trying to achieve the ideal body promoted by fashion models. Recovering from anorexia can be difficult and may produce long term effects. Anorexia can have great effects on a young girls life with long term unemployment, parenting, fertility and relationship problems. It is not uncommon for young girls to be depressed with Anorexia. An individual's eating disorder can have an impact in all aspects of the young girl's life, in particular the family. Members of the family may find it difficult to approach and support someone with an eating disorder.

## Influence of Pro-Anorexia Websites

The Pro- anorexia websites started appearing on the internet in 1994 and was initially created for individuals with Anorexia. The websites were used as a forum in which other people with the eating disorder could give online support to one another. However, research suggests individuals with the eating disorder are using the website as a way to stay thin, with groups of individuals encouraging one another to stay thin or lose more weight. There

is a great concern for adolescents using anti recovery techniques on the Pro Anna website forum.

Almost 49% of young adults internationally have access to the internet, exposing young people to damaging websites. The pro Anna website is described for promoting an eating disorder as a lifestyle choice and not as a medical condition. The content on such websites are influencing and giving adolescents ideas on starving themselves. There is a big concern on adolescents being able to access these websites and medical professionals should be aware of the harmful content on the Pro Anna website. Patients should be advised to seek accurate advice and support if willing to view information from the internet. However, more research is needed to be able to stop adolescents from accessing these dangerous websites.

On the other hand, there are some positive roles for the Pro Anna website it can strengthen values for individuals and feel they are able to belong in a group. If the forum is used correctly by people with anorexia nervosa, individuals could share similar experiences, can give one another support and encourage each other to eat. The forum does encourage people with Anorexia to tell family, friends and doctors about their eating disorder. However, individuals on the website suggest that others with anorexia should not reveal too much too families and others as they believe people who do not have the eating disorder do not understand.

A study of the Pro Anna websites reported that out of 182 families only 27% of parents discussed the Pro Anna website subject with their children. Similarly, only 52% of parents encountered and were aware of the Pro Anna



websites. On the other hand, 35% of patients admitted using the Pro Anna websites, on average for at least 2.8 hours a week, with some patients using the website for up to 20 hours a week. The media has increasingly become aware of the effects of the Pro Anna website and are emphasising the necessary precautions parents should pursue in order to prevent their children from visiting the Pro Anna websites. However, the websites should not be unnecessarily advertised or promoted to children. Children should not be aware of the Pro Anna websites existence as this may cause unnecessary harm. In addition, children should be educated to critically analyse images in the media in case children do come across harmful content while accessing the internet.

## Conclusion

The media has a great impact on adolescent girls from developing anorexia. The media is promoting unhealthy thin models and adolescents witness these images as adolescent girls read magazines regularly. This then causes self-esteem issues because adolescents are at a vulnerable age. It then can lead on to serious weight loss and dramatic outcomes. The age has decreased in adolescent girls at one point it was 16-19 year olds, but now it is affecting 11 to 16 year olds. The concern is high for adolescent girls gaining the opportunity of internet access to damaging websites which could further damage a person's health. However, more research is needed to determine if social influences are the main cause for adolescent girls developing anorexia. Individuals should be aware there are many other causes other than social influences such as behaviour and biology. There are a number of factors that are necessary to take into consideration when

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diagnosing an adolescent girl with anorexia nervosa. There is not enough research to use one issue to be the responsibility of the eating disorder.

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