



MEDIA RELEASE

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Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria welcomes renewed focus on body image

The Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria (EDFV) today welcomed the release of the Mission Australia 2007 Youth Survey that revealed that close to 30% of young people expressed concern about body image.

According to Kirsty Greenwood, Executive Officer of the Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria, the Mission Australia Youth Survey confirmed that concern about body image among young people is widespread.

“For many years there has been a disparity between the media’s portrayal of the ideal body and what the typical Australian actually looks like,” said Ms Greenwood.

In 2004, the typical Australian woman was size 14, 165cm tall, had an 88cm waist and 109cm hips. However, the standard fashion media’s image of women is typically a size 8, close to 180cm tall and well below the expected normal healthy body weight for this height.

Body image dissatisfaction is one of the known risk factors for developing an eating disorder.

“Unfortunately, eating disorders in young people are extremely common,” said Ms Greenwood. “Anorexia is the third most common chronic illness for adolescent girls in Australia (after obesity and asthma).

“The incidence of bulimia nervosa in the Australian population is five in 100. At least two studies have indicated that only about one tenth of the cases of bulimia in the community are detected,” she added.

“The true incidence is estimated to be as high as one in five in the student population and the prevalence of binge eating disorder in the general population is estimated to be 4%.

“One in 20 Australian women admitted to having suffered from an eating disorder while one in four individuals know someone who has an eating disorder,” Ms Greenwood added.

With the onset of anorexia generally in adolescence, the Mission Australia survey highlights the vulnerability of the teenage years.

Why diets don’t work

“The ‘skinny’ body type seems to be revered in our community and unfortunately it is feeding Australia’s obsession with dieting - which is the greatest risk factor for developing an eating disorder,” said Ms Greenwood.

Adolescent girls, who diet only moderately, are five times more likely to develop an eating disorder than those who don’t diet, and those who diet severely are 18 times more likely to develop an eating disorder.

According to Ms Greenwood, "dieting to control weight in adolescence is not only ineffective; it may actually promote weight gain.

"A study of adolescents showed that after 3 years of follow-up, regular adolescent dieters gained more weight than non-dieters.

Australians spend about \$1 million a day on weight loss attempts with little success.

Community standards need to change

In the wake of the Mission Australia 2007 Youth Survey, the EDFV renewed its calls for community standards on body image to change.

"We can hardly be surprised by the outcome of this survey and others like it, that say to us that young people are concerned about body image," said Ms Greenwood.

"The media and fashion industry present unrealistic, idealised female and male figures and then present solutions which are no solution at all.

"We continue to be bombarded with images of skinny models and women's magazines are constantly telling us how to slim down for summer.

"It's important that the fashion ideals in Australia aren't of someone who is dangerously thin.

"Not only is it time for the media, diet and fashion industries to take the lead and change the way body image is portrayed, we need parents to set a good example.

Parents need to show discretion on the purchases they make on behalf of their children, the television they watch and magazines they read in the presence of their kids.

"We know that the fashion industry and media will be slow to change their ways on the issue of body image, but if consumers change their buying habits on behalf of their children, marketers may be a little more likely to take notice," Ms Greenwood said.

"As a community we are quick to call for the ban of toys that are found to cause physical harm, but we are reluctant to take action about toys and images that cause harm to mental health by portraying unrealistic body image," she said.

About the EDFV

The Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria is the primary source of support, information, community education and advocacy for people with eating disorders and their families in Victoria.

Services are free and confidential and include a telephone Helpline (03 9885 0318), on-line Chat Room and Message Board and confidential support groups.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: For interviews with the EDFV, please phone (03) 9885 6563 or 0409 948049; email edfv@eatingdisorders.org.au or visit www.eatingdisorders.org.au