

# NEDC e-Bulletin

## Issue 26 | November 2014



### Introduction

Welcome to the twenty-sixth edition of the NEDC e-Bulletin. In this month's edition we are exploring safe and appropriate communication around eating disorders.

If you are interested in getting more involved in the NEDC we encourage you to join the collaboration and [become an NEDC member](#).

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# Glamorisation & Reporting On Eating Disorders in the Media



When communicating about eating disorders, it is critical to construct coverage in a way that minimises accidental harm and promotes positive outcomes.

If due caution is not exercised – that is, if the behaviours, symptoms or effects of eating disorders are highlighted or a key focus of the editorial – reports can increase the prevalence of the disorder the greater population (Mindframe 2012).

To avoid causing harm, all media coverage of eating disorders should follow the guidelines set out by Mindframe. They should also avoid trivialising or glamorising disordered eating behaviour or treating eating disorders as entertainment.(Mindframe 2012).

Items that do not conform to reporting guidelines and focus on ‘thinness’ and the ‘body ideal’ also pose a greater risk to those concerned with their physical appearance and create more negative impact in such individuals (Boyce et al., 2013). In this way, the media can potentially contribute to the development of eating disorders in these individuals, and others in the population.

Issues around glamorisation can further be exaggerated when reporting on celebrities, with links shown between the exposure of underweight celebrities in the media to at-risk groups and the development of disordered eating.

This is particularly relevant for females and adolescents, who tend to use celebrities as social comparison targets and thereby engage in disordered eating behaviour with the intention of closing the gap between their own self-image and what they perceive is a standard exemplified by the celebrity (Shorter et al., 2008).

A 2014 study demonstrated the correlation between the media depiction of celebrities perceived to be underweight and online queries related to anorexic behaviours. It was discovered that coverage of popular figures perceived to have anorexia nervosa triggered a 33% increase in online searches associated with

disordered eating practices and the desire for thinness (Yom-Tov & Boyd, 2014).

Yet the same study also showed that when the media used the language of anorexia nervosa in their coverage, there was little increase in anorexia-related searches. In comparison, media reports on underweight celebrities that emphasise their eating-related behaviour have much more potential to do harm than reports that simply focus on the perceived illness (Yom-Tov & Boyd, 2014).

Caution should still be exercised when using language associated with eating disorders in the media, as the incorrect use of language can glamorise or normalise the issue” (Mindframe 2012)

A 2013 study on restrained eaters also indicated that exposure to certain media images resulted in higher weight dissatisfaction and negative moods (although it did not significantly or immediately affect food intake). This correlation was also shown to extend to other females who share commonalities with restrained eaters (Boyce et al., 2013).

The implication here is that vulnerable women (and others in the population) react negatively to certain media images and that such reactions can impact their individual body image and weight satisfaction, and place them further at risk of developing an eating disorder.

Mindframe also provides guidelines around the use of images of people with extreme body weights or shapes, which can lead to adverse effects and motivate some people to try to achieve an unrealistic size/shape (Mindframe 2012). Instead, editors should aim to include a diversity of images of people (with various shapes and sizes) in all coverage of eating disorders.

The stigmatisation of mental illness by the media overall can also negatively affect help seeking in individuals at risk. Researchers suggest that multi-level media approaches and programs are needed that positively influence the perception of mental illness. Addressing and including information on individual-level strategies (e.g. focusing on the mastery of personal crises, rather than behaviours or destructive activities) is also required to help confront the stigma of eating disorders and encourage help seeking (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2014).

To promote help seeking in all eating disorder public communication, Mindframe further advises:

- Emphasising that positive outcomes and recovery is possible
- Including practical help seeking information in reports
- Highlighting messages on the importance of help seeking

For more information on how to portray eating disorders in the media visit our [Communicating About Eating Disorders page](#)

Or for specific information on eating disorder messages, images and language, download the [MindFrame Guidelines](#).

## References

[Boyce, J.A., Kuijer, R.G., Gleaves, D.H. Positive fantasies or negative contrasts: The effect of media body ideals on restrained eaters' mood, weight satisfaction, and food intake \(2013\). Body image: 2013.](#)

[Mindframe National Media Initiative. Reporting and Portrayal of Eating Disorders \(2012\).](#)

[Niederkrötenhaler, T., Reidenberg, D.J., Benedikt, T., Gould, M.S. Increasing Help-Seeking and Referrals for Individuals at Risk for Suicide by Decreasing Stigma: The Role of Mass Media \(2014\). American Journal of Preventive Medicine: 2014;47\(3S2\):S235-S243.](#)

[Shorter L., Brown, S.L., Quinton, S.J., Hinton, L. Relationships Between Body-Shape Discrepancies With Favored Celebrities and Disordered Eating in Young Women \(2008\). Journal of Applied Social Psychology: 38, 5, pp1364-1377.](#)

[Yom-Tov E., Boyd, D. M. On the Link between Media Coverage of Anorexia and Pro-anorexic Practices on the Web \(2014\). International Journal of Eating Disorders: 47:2, 196-202, 2014.](#)

# The role of media when reporting mental illness



By Tegan Cotterill

The earlier a person experiencing a mental illness seeks help, the better the prognosis. Yet many people do not reach out for support.

One of the most significant barriers to early intervention for mental illness is stigma.

The Mindframe National Media Initiative (Mindframe) helps to inform the Australian media and sectors that work with the media about mental illness and the issue of stigma.

Mindframe Program Manager Marc Bryant said “Mental illness is common, with one in five Australians affected in any 12-month period and many more impacted as family and friends.

“The media is a major source of information for the community about mental illness. However, if reports are inaccurate, unbalanced or sensationalist it can reinforce common myths and impact significantly on people experiencing mental illness, making them less likely to seek help when they need it.

“If positively framed, stories about mental illness can inform the community and be a powerful tool in addressing misconceptions and stigma associated with mental illness.

The good news is that the Australian media is getting better at destigmatising mental illness by producing more balanced stories that provide insight into the realities of mental illness.

“Most people working in the media are conscious of using appropriate language and we’ve come a long way since the introduction of the Mindframe training

and education program 12 years ago. There has also been significant work to destigmatise mental illness by other health organisations such as SANE Australia, beyondblue and the Butterfly Foundation.

However, there are still stories produced both here and overseas that contribute to the stigma associated with mental illness by reinforcing common myths and stereotypes.

“Certain language can stigmatise people living with mental illness as well as present inaccuracies about mental illness or mental health care, and the media need to be mindful of this,” he said.

Studies have also revealed that certain disorders tend to attract greater stigma and prejudice than others.

In one study, a significant number of respondents reported that they believed people with severe depression should simply “pull themselves together”.

Negative stereotypes can prevent people from acknowledging early signs of mental health problems and this leads to people not seeking help until symptoms are causing considerable disruption to their lives.

Mindframe provides media professionals with access to accurate information that conveys the complexity of mental illness and asks journalists to be aware of their own values and assumptions so that reporting is not unintentionally reinforcing negative stereotypes.

**Tegan Cotterill is the Projects Coordinator of the Mindframe National Media Initiative, managed by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health.**

*The Australian Government’s Mindframe National Media Initiative aims to encourage responsible, accurate and sensitive representation of mental illness and suicide in the Australian mass media. The initiative involves building a collaborative relationship with the media and other sectors that influence the media (such as key sources for news stories).*

*Funded by the Australian Government’s Department of Health under the National Suicide Prevention Program, the Mindframe Education and Training program is managed by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health. Program activities include national leadership, resource development and national dissemination, and ongoing contribution to the evidence base in this area.*

# Opportunities to get involved



## Australian Research Studies

*There are a number of exciting research studies on eating disorders currently taking place in Australia. Many of these researchers are actively looking for participants.*

*To foster collaboration and research participation we maintain a [directory of ethically approved Australian research projects on our website](#). If you are interested in participating, or know someone who might be interested, check out our research directory.*

*If you have a current research study that you would like us to include in our listings, or you would like some help recruiting study participants, contact us at [info@nedc.com.au](mailto:info@nedc.com.au).*

## Eating Disorders Prevention Trial: Promoting Positive Body Image Online

**About:** PPbiO is an Australian and New Zealand-wide research trial of 3 online programs that can be accessed on computers, tablets and smartphone devices. Researchers are looking for women volunteers aged 18-25 years who have concerns about their body weight or shape and would like to improve their body image.

**Participation involves:** Completing a confidential brief online survey to determine suitability for the trial (taking about 25 minutes) Being randomly allocated (as in a lucky dip) to one of the 3 free programs. Two of the programs will run over 9 weeks while the third program provides tips on improving body image. Completing the survey on 3 extra occasions: after the program finishes, 6-months later, and 12-months later. Participants who complete the survey on all 4 occasions will receive a \$50 iTunes voucher for their time

More info

## Pregnancy and post-partum depression and anxiety in a longitudinal general population cohort: the effect of eating disorders and past depression.

This study investigated the effect of past depression, past and current eating disorders (ED) on perinatal anxiety and depression in a large general population cohort of pregnant women, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC).

[Find out more](#)

## A comparison of stigma toward eating disorders versus depression.

This study found that stigma toward individuals with eating disorders is greater than stigma toward depression and includes unique features such as attitudes of envy. Implications of these results for the understanding of mental disorder stigma and eating disorders are discussed.

[Find out more](#)

[Find more eating disorders research.](#)

# NEDC Resource Highlight



Young people go through periods of great change biologically, physically and psychologically. These changes can be stressful and can lead to feelings of insecurity or self-consciousness, which can increase the risk of developing an eating disorder. Although the onset of an eating disorder can occur at any age, it is most common in young people.

**8 Tips for Dealing With an Eating Disorder** provides young people with some helpful tips about dealing with eating disorders and promotes the importance of help seeking.

[Download 8 Tips for Dealing With an Eating Disorder](#)

[Find other information and resources for young people.](#)