

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

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COUNTERING THE FASHION MODEL CULTURE

In March 2007 The British Fashion Council asked Baroness Denise Kingsmill to chair an independent inquiry into the health of fashion models and make recommendations on practical action. (www.modelhealthinquiry.com)

This inquiry was prompted by growing concerns about unhealthily thin models showcasing designer fashions on the catwalks of the major international fashion weeks held in London, among other places. The deaths, following eating disorders, of two South American models, had highlighted a growing problem.

Making representation to the inquiry were more than 200 individuals or organisations, not just those involved in the industry, but also those expert in eating disorders.

The report highlighted a number of concerns, including the use of girls under 16. This will be banned. The pre-pubescent look of a girl under 16 is unachievable by an older woman without strict dieting.

Another concern, which came outside the scope of the inquiry, was the digital manipulation of body-shape. Many also referred to the role of the media in photographing ultra-thin celebrities enjoying a wonderful life-style which young girls will seek to emulate.

Among the recommendations to be implemented from September 2008 will be a system of medical health checks and certificates from doctors with expertise in eating disorders.

The broader issue of eating disorders is of concern to many beyond the fashion industry. In April 2007 the Department of Health awarded £2 million to fund research into the causes of eating disorders and the identification and development of appropriate early intervention strategies.

What can churches do?

- Challenge media stereotypes in our children and young people's programmes.
- Encourage parents to take time to talk to teenagers. There is no simple cause of eating disorders. Millions of women between the ages of 15-25 are affected from all walks of life, and increasingly a number of young men. Sometimes an eating disorder can be the way the sufferer deals with stress or distress. In this case talking is a more healthy way of dealing with troubling emotions.
- Be aware of organisations which provide information and help:
 - The Eating Disorders Association www.b-eat.co.uk
 - The National Centre for Eating Disorders www.eating-disorders.org.uk
 - Anorexia and Bulimia Care (a Christian organisation) www.anorexiabulimiare.co.ukCourses for adults are run at the Christian Retreat Centre, Nicholaston House, Swansea www.nicholastonhouse.org

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Salt and Light Papers is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues of social concern. It is published online by the Affinity Social Issues Team. Its purpose is to help Christians to think through questions of relevance to our place in the world around us. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Social Issues Team.

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