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Eating Behaviors



Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders: The Catalan public policy initiative

David Sánchez-Carracedo ^{a,*}, Cristina Carretero ^b, Alfons Conesa ^c

^a Research Unit on Eating and Weight-related Behaviors, Department of Clinical and Health Psychology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 08193, Cerdanyola del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain

^b Association Against Anorexia and Bulimia (ACAB), Mallorca 198, pral. 2^a, 08036 Barcelona, Spain

^c Catalan Consumer Agency (ACC), Pamplona 113, 08018 Barcelona, Spain

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ABSTRACT

The field of prevention of body image problems and eating disorders has made major advances in recent years, particularly in the development and evaluation of prevention programmes. However, few programmes achieve good long-term results because, among other reasons, the sociocultural influences affecting the development of these problems do not stop. Moreover, accelerating progress in this field is required, transferring their impact onto a larger scale. These reasons justify the need to progress in the development of public policy interventions. This paper describes a recent Catalan initiative in this sphere: the Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders, made up of different public and private sectors of Catalan society. It specifically details the main actions carried out, such as: media campaigns to reduce weight-related teasing and encouraging self-esteem, encouraging family meals and promoting help-seeking among those affected; the creation of a new informative website about these matters in the Department of Health; the production of a Decalogue of Best Practices for the promotion of self-esteem and positive body image in social media and advertising; and actions to prevent the promotion of eating disorders on the Internet. The Roundtable is the most comprehensive Catalan (and Spanish) public policy activity undertaken until now for the prevention of eating disorders.

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1. Introduction

The problem of body image and eating disorders is a major concern of public health. Their high prevalence and tendency towards chronicity, high comorbidity with other disorders, their association with serious physical and psychological consequences, as well as their resistance to available treatments, are important reasons to justify an increase in public, social and health care aimed at their prevention (Stice, Becker, & Yokum, 2013).

Interest in the prevention of these problems has increased in recent years, especially by educators, professionals and researchers, and major advances have been made in this field (Ciao, Loth, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014; Yager, Diedrichs, Ricciardelli, & Halliwell, 2013; Stice et al., 2013). Some preventive programmes for these problems have shown their efficacy when they have been developed and administered with the Catalan population (López-Guimerà, Sánchez-Carracedo, Fauquet, Portell, & Raich, 2011; Sánchez-Carracedo et al., 2016).

However, there are still major limitations. Few programmes achieve maintenance long-term changes because, among other reasons, the

sociocultural influences affecting the development of these problems do not stop (López-Guimerà, Sánchez-Carracedo, & Fauquet, 2011). The programmes are focussed on providing the resources and empowering the participants so that they are less vulnerable to socio-cultural pressures, but these pressures are unceasing and may to a large extent cancel out the effects of the interventions. Furthermore, these actions have a local impact, and it is necessary to accelerate the progress in this field, transferring their impact onto a larger scale (Austin, 2015).

Therefore another complementary preventive pathway is required that consists of developing public policy actions. Until now a small series of actions have been carried out internationally and in Spain including changes in legislation, the use of codes of behaviour and self-regulation by industries, social marketing, and governmental support to undertake prevention in schools (Paxton, 2012; Sánchez-Carracedo, Neumark-Sztainer, & López-Guimerà, 2012).

Catalonia has shown great sensitivity towards this problem. It is one of the autonomous regions with most specialised treatment units for eating disorders (12) within the Spanish public health system. It was here in 1992, that the first association for families affected by eating disorders was founded, the Association Against Anorexia and Bulimia (ACAB). This association was the promoter of the current *Spanish Federation of Support and Fight against Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa*

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: david.sanchez@uab.es (D. Sánchez-Carracedo).

(FEACAB for its acronym in Spanish). The Department of Health of the Generalitat de Catalunya (autonomous government) together with the Spanish Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs promoted the development of the Clinical Practice Guideline for Eating Disorders (*Working Group of the Clinical Practice Guideline for Eating Disorders, 2009*).

In relation to public health policy, in May 2012 the *Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders* (herein the *Roundtable*) was founded, boosted by the ACAB and the Catalan Consumer Agency (ACC) to watch over and intervene in those social and consumerism factors that have a bearing on the proliferation of these problems (*Generalitat de Catalunya, 2012*). This article details the constitution of the Roundtable, its members, functioning and the main actions carried out.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Origins and objectives

The Roundtable was founded at the request of the ACAB to the ACC. As the main aim of the ACC is to defend consumers and the first rights people have are those of health and safety, the ACC responded positively to this request, promoting and coordinating the creation of the Roundtable since May 2012. The Roundtable has three goals: (1) Build in all sectors a positive and healthy body image by promoting a body ideal based on health and wellbeing, and not on appearance. (2) Coordinated work between the different sectors (health, education, business, media) to design realistic strategies for the prevention of these illnesses; and (3) Transfer the debate to society at large in order to raise awareness about the importance and seriousness of the problem of eating disorders and weight-related disorders in general.

2.2. Participants (members)

The Roundtable is chaired by the wife of the current President of the Generalitat, Helena Rakosnik, and coordinated by the current director of the ACC, Alfons Conesa. At present it has representatives from a total of 21 different institutions, including different departments of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona City Council, the business sector, sport, media, private foundations that promote health and from the scientific and academic world.

These institutions are (Spanish and Catalan original acronyms): Generalitat de Catalunya, Association against Anorexia and Bulimia (ACAB), Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC), Barcelona City Council, Blanquerna-Ramon Llull University, Catalan Association of Dietitians-Nutritionists (ACDN), Catalan Sports Council (ESPORTCAT), Catalan Women's Institute, Centre of Prevention and Treatment of Anorexia and Bulimia (Centro ABB), Confederation of the Textile Industry (TEXFOR), Information Security Center of Catalonia (CESICAT), FC Barcelona Foundation, Foundation-Institute of Eating Disorders (FITA), Hospital Clinic of Barcelona, Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau of Barcelona, Image and Self-esteem Foundation (IMA), Mango, Sant Joan de Déu-Barcelona Children's Hospital, Specialised Service in Eating Disorders (SETCA), Televisió de Catalunya (TV3), and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB).

2.3. Procedure (organisation and functioning)

In order to achieve the goals of the Roundtable, four working commissions were set up specialising in four different spheres: (1) Body image and fashion; (2) Protection of childhood and security on the Internet; (3) Healthy eating and habits; and (4) Sociocultural and media factors. These commissions meet at least once a year. Approximately every year a plenary session open to the media is held, where the work undertaken during the year and the next year's goals are presented. Moreover, there is an executive committee made up of different members of the Roundtable that sets the goals for each year in accordance with the road map and approves the different lines of work.

Finally, any member of the Roundtable may be invited, for their expertise, to form part of the thematic working groups to develop specific projects.

3. Results (main actions undertaken)

The description, press releases and material of the actions undertaken by the Roundtable can be found on its webpage (*Generalitat de Catalunya, 2012*). Table 1 shows a chronology of the main actions undertaken. At the end of 2012 the first plenary meeting of the Roundtable took place. Introductory reports about eating disorders and its prevention and the road map with the actions to be realised in the coming years were presented.

In June 2013, the Generalitat de Catalunya, through the Attention to Public and Diffusion Office, along with the Roundtable, undertook a communication campaign to influence in promoting healthy habits and self-esteem of children and adolescents. Under the slogan of "Our children's health depends on us", the campaign revolved around two informative capsules with a format for radio and TV, and a graphic advertisement for dissemination in the printed media. The campaign focused on avoiding negative comments about the body among adolescents and on promoting messages of acceptance about body diversity and self-esteem, and on the recommendation of having at least one family meal per day to reduce the risk of the development of an eating disorder.

Together with the Department of Health, at the end of 2013 a new web portal of an informative nature about eating disorders was set up to raise awareness among the public of the importance of encouraging healthy eating habits and promoting the acceptance of body image in children and adolescents.

Then in 2014, it organised the "Anorexia and Advertising" Roundtable. This Roundtable addressed the advertising sector to make it aware of the negative impact that promoting certain types of bodies and ideals of beauty can have. The goal of the Roundtable was to debate the importance of ensuring the presence of more realistic models and promote health and body diversity in the media and advertising.

This Roundtable led to an intensive and in-depth dialogue between the health, advertising and social sectors involved, which culminated at the end on 2014 in the presentation of the "Decalogue of Best Practices for the promotion of self-esteem and positive body image in social media and advertising" (*Roundtable of Prevention on Eating Disorders & Generalitat de Catalunya, 2014*). The Decalogue was originally published in 2010 by the Image and Self-esteem Foundation with the support of the *Television Academy*, and with the added support in 2012 of the Association of Catalan Journalists. From the joint work promoted by the Roundtable, the Decalogue has been revised, updated and improved, and its major achievement is the subscription of the advertising sector. Table 2 shows a synthesis of the ten points that promote greater respect for body diversity and a more positive body image in the media and advertising. Work is under way in order to present the Decalogue in the Faculty of Information Sciences to evaluate its introduction into the academic curriculum of future professionals.

Table 1

Chronology of the main actions undertaken by the Roundtable.

May 2012	Formation of the Roundtable
December 2012	1st plenary session
June 2013	Double campaign: (1) Self-esteem; (2) Family meals
December 2013	New ED web portal of the Department of Health
June 2014	"Anorexia and Advertising" Roundtable
December 2014	Presentation of the "Decalogue of Best Practices for the promotion of self-esteem and positive body image in social media and advertising"
December 2014	"Anorexia is no-one's fault" campaign
January 2015	2nd plenary session
In progress 2015	Prevention of the promotion of eating disorders on the Internet

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