THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

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YEAR 11

PDHPE
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**Introduction**

Body image is a significant issue for young people within Australia. Body image disturbances are becoming increasing prevalent for both males and females and is an important problem for the health and welfare of many Australians. Certain protective and risk behaviours are associated with body image disturbances and can either foster or inhibit healthy body image, as will be addressed in the following report.

**Outline the nature of the health issue**

Body image is the way a person physically identifies themselves and the way others perceive them. These perceptions can be influenced by individual and environmental factors including self-worth and influences that can affect a person such as social media. These factors can have a positive or a detrimental effect on the individual, which can result in psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression, as well as bulimia or anorexia nervosa.

**Describe the prevalence and trends of the health behaviours**

Body image is a major problem for young people with only 20% of Australians feeling confident with their body image (News.com.au, 2016). A study conducted by Dove Women illustrated that unhealthy dieting habits has an extensive effect on women and girls, with 9 in 10 women and 8 in 10 girls stopping themselves from eating due to their perceived body image. It can also cause emotional distress which can provoke depression and anxiety along with low self-esteem. These ideas about body image are mostly created by the individual as seen in Figure 1.1, illustrating that the greatest amount of negative influences on body image come from the individual, for all ages. A way that people tend to cope with these issues is through alcohol and drug use, as this creates an escape from the everyday struggles that they face. This, however, creates additional components to the vicious cycle that they are already in as they are not actually addressing their original issues (Eating Disorder Hope 2005 - 2017).

According to Headspace, body image disturbances are becoming more and more common with 76% of Australian high school women wishing they were thinner. The pursuit of thinness can have devastating consequences as the risk of premature death in Australian women with anorexia nervosa is 6 to 12 times higher than the general population. A major factor that is contributing to the prevalence of these body image disturbances is social media. Viewing
images from social media sites that show thin, tanned and attractive women as well as muscular men has a damaging effect on the individual leading contributing to body dissatisfaction. Figure 1.1 also indicates that individuals between 18 - 29 years, including young adults, are most at risk to have a negative outlook on their body as a result of social media.

Headspace (2017) indicated that society is starting to recognise body image issues within young men and while this has not always been focused on, 1 in 5 men are struggling with the way they perceive themselves. A way that these young men may try and cope with their body image is with drugs, for example, steroids. This is demonstrated within the show Massive Obsession (SBS on demand, 2017) which displays young men and how they have been affected by the pressure to be muscular. As a result, young men are exercising to a point where it becomes unhealthy as well as replacing meals with supplement powders and shakes. This is also reported in fit vs fiction where it illustrates that there is a 0.002% chance that men will become a doctor, but more than a 50% chance that they will think they need steroids to attain the ideal body shape. These expectations are also a result of media influences and expectations that can rarely be upheld.

Figure 1.1

Who has the most NEGATIVE influence on you in terms of how you think about your weight?

- Myself
- Celebrities or the media
- My parents

- 18-29
- 30-64
- 65+
Outline the protective and risk behaviours
The way a person acts upon or thinks about a certain situation can determine positive or negative outcomes. Protective behaviours relating to body image can prepare the individual to rationalise how they feel about the way they look and how others perceive them. This could be writing the top 10 things that you like about yourself or being surrounded by positive people (NEDA, 2016). Alternatively, risky behaviours include unhealthy diets, compulsive exercising and making unrealistic comparisons to photoshopped images in the media. Overall, the way a person reacts to a situation affects the behaviours they undertake and the overall outcome.

Evaluate, using evidence the accuracy of societal perceptions of the health behaviours of young people
Body image is a serious problem within young men and women throughout Australia. It is an issue that is becoming increasingly common throughout the population as a result of the prevalence of social media, with 23% of people aged 18-29 being negatively affected by celebrities or the media. Consequently, adolescents are presented with a false ideal of the perfect body image or shape that is unrealistic. Due to this 20% of Australians are feeling less confident with the way they appear to others and themselves provoking mental and physical illnesses, such as depression and anorexia. This then leads to unhealthy coping methods like the consumption of drugs and alcohol. This is demonstrated through the tv show Massive Obsession as it displays the increasing pressures that young men face in society today to have the ideal body and as a result take replacement supplements as well as steroids.

Conclusion
As seen throughout this report, body image in young Australians is an issue that is becoming increasingly prevalent within today’s society. Occurring in both males and females, body issues can have various detrimental effects on an individual’s health as certain protective and risk behaviours additionally influence positive or pessimistic perceptions on their individual appearance.

Reference list


