

Dangerous dieting to fuel debate on weight

By CAROLINE MARCUS

MORE than half of Australian women have taken diet pills, while 88 per cent regularly skip meals to try to lose weight.

And close to 20 per cent starve themselves for a day, figures from a new survey show. About 15 per cent admitted to vomiting after eating.

The statistics came from an online survey by *Famous* magazine which polled 1000 Australian women aged between 18 and 35. The results, to be published in the magazine tomorrow, reveal 56 per cent of respondents had used slimming tablets, 37 per cent smoked to suppress their appetite and 17 per cent went for more than a day without eating.

Most women believed that slimmer women were more successful with the opposite sex (79 per cent) and in their careers (64 per cent).

The magazine's executive editor, Ali Wick, said she was "really shocked" by the results, particularly as most respondents identified themselves as a size 10 (23 per cent) or 12 (24 per cent).

"Obviously, it is pretty shocking that over half of people have tried diet pills - that's crazy," she said.

It was surprising that three-quarters of the women would prefer to be a size six than size 16, she said.

"As much as people rant and rave about how tiny Victoria Beckham is, most [women] would rather look like her than have curves."

Eating Disorder Foundation foun-

der Amanda Jordan was not surprised by the figures, which she said reflected national research.

"It's known that 13 per cent of Australian women are regularly purging," she said. "If you take an age group that is 18 to 35, you're taking an age group that is most at risk."

Dr Jordan quoted University of Sydney research last year, which found that, of 9000 Australian schoolgirls aged 12 to 18, 11 per cent vomited to lose weight. The number was up from 3.4 per cent in 2000.

"This really highlights the absolute tyranny of image and how women are being seduced into dangerous and unhelpful behaviour," she said.

Dr Jordan said that magazines such as *Famous* were partly to blame. Although simply looking at photographs of very thin women could not cause mental illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia, the images could have a damaging effect on those already vulnerable.

The general manager of eating disorders organisation the Butterfly Foundation, Julie Thomson, said more funding was needed for further research. "We know that disordered eating in particular is on the rise."

Ms Wick defended the magazine industry against criticism.

"If you're going to blame magazines, then you are also going to have to blame TV, internet and advertising. Everyone carries the same stories."

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