

## Eating disorder prevention program promising

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By Joene Hendry

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - An eating disorder prevention program aimed at elementary school girls has shown promise in early testing. A group of fifth-grade girls appeared to be less dissatisfied with their bodies, less likely to think about and engage in uncontrolled eating, and reported greater social self-confidence after completing the program.

"Any program that decreases body dissatisfaction is valuable," Dr. Melinda Scime told Reuters Health. "Decreased body dissatisfaction among program participants is especially promising in light of the increased body dissatisfaction we noted among non-participants."

"Body dissatisfaction is the most robust risk factor associated with eating disordered behavior," noted Scime, of the University of Buffalo's Center for Children and Families, in New York.

Scime and colleagues measured eating disorder risk factors among 75 participants, and a similar number of non-participants, of a 10-week eating disorder prevention program for fifth-grade girls.

The weekly 90-minute sessions addressed risky and protective behaviors associated with eating disorders, how media encourages thinness, and promoted self-esteem, coping, and competence, the investigators explain in the International Journal of Eating Disorders.

While Scime's group noted some benefits to program participation, including less body dissatisfaction, they did not find a lessening in the intention to strive for thinness, nor did they see significant improvements in self-competence or coping skills among participants versus non-participants.

"One of the challenges of completing primary prevention research is that we are working with individuals that are not necessarily manifesting risk factors associated with the disorder we are trying to prevent," Scime said. This dynamic may partially explain the program's mixed results.

This study, Scime said, represents preliminary findings on an innovative prevention program. Research should continue to explore effective methods for reducing eating disorder risk factors, she and colleagues report.

"We need to discredit and fight the extensive prevalence of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among women in society today, and the social and cultural forces, like popular media that contribute to these issues" Scime said.

**SOURCE:** International Journal of Eating Disorders, March 2008.

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