

UK: Ban Underage, Not Underweight Models

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[Lindsay Toler, AP Writer](#)

LONDON — Banning ultra-thin models from the runways might be the next fashion trend, but it's one that the fashion industry in London is in no hurry to follow.

The Model Health Inquiry — a panel of British fashion industry workers and an eating disorder specialist — made no recommendation on ultra-thin models in an interim report released Wednesday. It did recommend banning models under age 16 from the Fashion Week catwalk shows, saying the youngest were particularly vulnerable to eating disorders and sexual exploitation.

The British Fashion Council, a consortium of fashion retailers and publishers that oversees Fashion Week, formed the panel in January to promote healthy fashion models during the Fashion Weeks in September and February. Fashion bosses in Paris and New York have also declined to ban ultra-skinny models from their catwalks.

However, in Rome on Wednesday, designer Raffaella Curiel barred 15 models from her show because they were too skinny, complying with a fashion code signed by the Italian industry last year to combat anorexia, Italian news reports said.

The fashion industry has drawn criticism for hyping the super-thin look, which critics say promotes eating disorders among young women. In the past year, the Uruguayan sisters Eliana and Luisel Ramos, both models, each reportedly died of anorexia-linked heart attacks. Anorexia was also blamed for the death of Brazilian model Ana Carolina Reston last year.

The Madrid fashion show bans women whose body mass-to-height ratio is below 18, while Milan bans models below 18.5. The London panel said the body mass formula, known as the Body Mass Index, is not a foolproof way to identify eating disorders.

Dee Doocey, the culture, fashion and tourism spokeswoman on London's city council, described the interim report as a "huge disappointment" and called for a ban on models with a BMI of less than 18.5.

"I accept that BMI bans may not be the panacea, but it would be a principled start and send a strong signal to the industry that practices that put young women's health at risk will not be tolerated," she said.

The report focuses on developing a healthy "backstage environment" for models, including protection from unhealthy eating or drug habits. It does not recommend any definite actions.

"Banning weight and banning size is not going to help us," said Adrienne Key, an eating disorders expert and

the panel's health industry representative.

Denise Kingsmill, the panel's chairwoman, acknowledged that there were not many models under 16.

"But there shouldn't be any. I cannot think of another group of workers who are as young, vulnerable, or as underrepresented as these girls," she said.

The British Fashion Council has not said it will implement its panel's recommendations. But Hilary Riva, the council's chief executive, said the report's recommendations "are consistent with and support the BFC's already well-established policy."

The final report will be prepared in September and the council is expected to implement it.

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It's about time. The essence of the matter is not about banning one category of model over another but rather changing the message sent to the individuals who admire and emulate fashion models – girls and women.

Making it fashionable to be a skeleton with skin greatly influences the ever growing prevalence of eating disorders among females in the general population. The fashion industry needs to take responsibility because these models have literally become the role models for females.

What kind of role model would you want your sister, mother or daughter to have? A healthy, well balanced and beautiful role model? Or a super skinny, malnourished and wan 'idol' on the verge of death?

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