

A call to regulate starvation of 'Paris thin' models

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Prohibiting runway models from participating in fashion shows or photo shoots if they are dangerously thin would go a long way toward preventing serious health problems among young women—including anorexia nervosa and death from starvation—according to experts from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

In an editorial that will be published online December 21, 2015 in the *American Journal of Public Health*, S. Bryn Austin, director of the Harvard Chan School's Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders (STRIPED) and professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Katherine Record, also with STRIPED and an instructor in health policy and management, called for the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to set regulations that would prohibit the hiring of models below a given [body mass index](#), such as BMI

The authors noted that the average runway model's BMI is typically below the World Health Organization's threshold for medically dangerous thinness for adults, BMI

International models are often referred to as "Paris thin" because France is so prominent in the [fashion industry](#). But last April, the French National Assembly passed a law that would ban the hiring of excessively thin models.

While attempting to regulate the U.S. fashion industry would meet with

resistance, the authors offered rebuttals to likely arguments that would arise. For instance, the industry might argue that BMI is an arbitrary metric. But, wrote Record and Austin, "given the prevalence of starvation in the modeling industry...and the health harms that models suffer as a consequence, BMI is a necessary indicator of being dangerously underweight. Indeed, when it comes to extremes, the deficiencies associated with BMI as a metric dwindle."

They noted that if the U.S. joins France in regulating the hiring of dangerously thin models, it "would shake the fashion industry, even if enforcement dollars were few and far between. Designers would be hard pressed to maintain a presence in the fashion industry without participating in the New York City and Paris Fashion Weeks."

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Provided by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

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