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Councils will be given powers to crack down on cut-price deals

NEW WAR ON CHEAP ALCOHOL

By Sean Poulter and James Chapman

LOCAL authorities will be given powers to crack down on cheap alcohol as experts warn young people are getting drunk for a few pence.

A major report today lays bare the easy availability of cut-price booze that is wrecking the nation's health and fuelling violence and anti-social behaviour.

Experts found strong cider can be bought for as little as 10p per unit, while lager is on sale at just 26p a pint.

Ministers want to allow councils to block alcohol offers at supermarkets and off licences if they are dramatically undercutting prices charged at pubs.

The Coalition aims to rip up competition law and tell supermarkets to reach agreement on a ban on 'bargain basement' drink deals.

The big four supermarkets - Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons - say they will support efforts to end cut-price promotions. David Cameron has already voiced his support for stopping stores selling what he described as '20 tins of Stella for a fiver'.

Several shops use alcohol as a 'loss-leader', selling at a loss to encourage shoppers into the store to buy other products.

Mr Cameron is backing plans by ten councils in the North West to create a by-law making it illegal to sell alcohol for less than 50p a unit. 'I think the idea of the councils coming together on this is a good one and we will certainly look at it very sympathetically,' he said.

Giving councils such powers is likely to require a change in the law, because current competition regulations do not allow

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The secret behind Flexible Felicity's splits - at 64!



Pure passion: Actress Felicity Kendal with dance partner Vincent Simone SEE PAGE 17

Now Osborne plans to scrap child benefit from age 16

By James Chapman Political Editor

GEORGE OSBORNE will axe child benefit for over-16s, leaving two million families worse off, Coalition sources say.

Despite opposition from Lib Dem MPs, the move will come as the Chancellor squeezes Britain's bloated welfare budget in the most painful cuts since the Second World War.

He has already frozen child benefit for three years and prompted fierce controversy by announcing it will be scrapped for higher rate taxpayers from 2013, raising more than £1billion a year.

Reducing the maximum age at which child benefit can be claimed from 18 to 16 would raise more than £2billion extra.

As 35 leading businessmen, including Marks & Spencer chairman Sir Stuart Rose and BT chief executive Ian Livingston, backed the need for immediate cuts, Mr Osborne insisted there would be no retreat from the Government's £83billion deficit reduction programme, which will mean four years of austerity.

He declared: 'We have to see this Turn to Page 6

by Dr Aric Sigman

JUTTING collar bones, twiglet legs and razor-sharp cheek bones. It wasn't so long ago that these were unenviable signs that a woman had lost too much weight or, worse, was suffering from an eating disorder.

Now, however, it's hard to think of a female celebrity who isn't that thin — not just models and actresses, but newsreaders and children's TV presenters. So much so that women and children not only view skeletal frames as normal, but as something they wish to emulate.

There has been an 80 per cent rise in young girls being hospitalised with anorexia in the past ten years. And body dissatisfaction is affecting younger and younger children. In a recent study published in the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, almost half of the three to six-year-old girls surveyed said they worried about being fat.

Yet any serious correlation between visual media and the rise of eating disorders has largely been dismissed. Until now, so-called 'body politics' has been a cultural and psychological debate, owned by feminists and eating-disorder therapists. They dismissed blaming the visual media as too simplistic.

However, new research shows there is a much stronger link between visual media and eating disorders. Repeated exposure to images of thin women affects brain function and increases our propensity to develop eating disorders. Even more interesting is the fact that while these neurological changes occur in women, they do not in men.

This week, I am publishing a paper on the topic in the *Biologist* — the journal of the Society of Biology. What triggered my research was hearing both the teenage girls I lecture and the rational, intelligent women I know, talk about their body hang-ups. As a father, I also have concerns about the role models offered up to my children.

I've collated global research and travelled to remote cultures, including North Korea, Bhutan, West Papua, Burma and Burkina Faso, to observe the influence of electronic media, speaking to doctors, nurses, teachers, parents and children.

It all leads to the same conclusion: the prevalence of thin women on television is a public-health issue requiring urgent action.

Many studies have already confirmed the psychological effect such images have on women. But now we can see the biological effects. Scientists have identified sudden, unexpected changes in the brain function of healthy, body-confident women when they view certain female figures.

In a recent study at Brigham Young University in Utah, healthy women looked at images of models in skimpy bikinis.

SOME of the models were overweight, some thin. On viewing each image, the women were told to imagine that someone else was saying the model looked like her.

When they were presented with the overweight images, the brain area called the medial prefrontal cortex (the front part of the brain linked with strong emotions such as unhappiness) showed increased activation in all of the women.

Merely imagining that they might be overweight seemed to lead women to question their sense of self. When the test was carried out on men, it had no such effect.

On the other side of the world, Hiroshima University found that when you show a woman her body on a screen and adjust the width, brain areas involved in emotional reactions such as fear and anxiety were 'significantly activated'. Even printed words such as 'obesity' or 'heavy' elicit similar neurological reactions — but, again, only in women.

Further evidence of the impact of visual media comes from Harvard Medical School. In a landmark study, scientists visited Fiji to evaluate the effect of the introduction of television on body satisfaction and disordered eating in adolescent girls. In Fiji, until recently, the ideal female form was full-figured and dieting was rare.

In 1995, television arrived and within three years the percentage of girls demonstrating body dissatisfaction rose from 12.7 per cent to 29.2 per cent. Dieting among teenagers who watched TV increased dramatically to two in every three girls and the rate of self-induced vomiting leapt from zero to 11.3 per cent.

Molecular biologists at Harvard Medical



Thispiration: From left, Cheryl Cole, Tess Daly and Cat Deeley

How super skinny TV stars are harming our health

School now believe that external stimuli may activate major psychiatric disorders by changing how our genes function. Childhood distress does precisely this and it is conceivable that early or prolonged body dissatisfaction may also disturb DNA, triggering eating disorders in susceptible girls.

But how does this affect women and not men? It may be that it is evolutionary — a way of women 'keeping up with the Bonases'.

An abundance of skinny women on screen makes viewers question their own attractiveness or 'mating value'. Not to be left behind, women compete by losing weight themselves. Modern life has hijacked an ancient survival mechanism.

A decade ago, the British Medical Association's Board of Science and Education demanded 'a more responsible editorial attitude towards the depiction of extremely thin women as role models'. Yet matters have since worsened.

While it's easy to blame extreme catwalk models, it's everyday images on television — those of children's TV hosts, newsreaders

and talent-show judges who are deeply unrepresentative of most British women — that are dangerous to girls.

Surely this is discrimination? The BBC, for instance, is 'committed to reflecting the diversity of the UK audience' in terms of race and gender. Why isn't female physique considered an aspect of 'diversity'? Why aren't size 16s — the average dress size of British females — allowed to read the news or be a CBeebies presenter?

Fortunately, more and more scientists and prominent medical bodies are beginning to view the media as playing a major role in eating disorders. The Royal College of Psychiatrists recently issued a statement saying the media propagates 'unobtainable body ideals' and that airbrushed images should carry a kite mark.

So it appears that while men eat food, women have a relationship with food. This relationship has grown increasingly dysfunctional. Forty years after the debut of body politics, biology is explaining more precisely why fat is indeed a feminine issue. And it's one that requires urgent action.

■ DR ARIC SIGMAN is a Fellow of the Society of Biology. His paper *A Source Of Thispiration? The Biological Landscape Of Media, Body Image And Dieting* is published in the *Biologist*.

COOL TEES

FOR the trendiest T-shirts, look no further than Worn Free, the LA-based brand who scour photo archives for inspiration. The label unearths iconic images from the world of music which they then recreate. They've done versions of tees worn by celebs like John Lennon and Debbie Harry. Fans include Jennifer Aniston and Naomi Campbell.



STITCH IN TIME



HIGH Street favourite Warehouse has launched a brilliant capsule collection of knitwear for your autumn wardrobe. The Warehouse Definitives offer perfect seasonal basics available in three styles — the crew, polo and cardie — in a neutral palette of navy, grey, camel, oatmeal and black. The gold buttons and slinky knits give the range an expensive feel.

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By KATE MELHUISH