

## **Debra Westall**

### Researching coverage of childhood obesity in the Spanish press

Over the past two decades, researchers have examined how print media reports on overweight and obesity, being noteworthy the pioneering work by Lawrence (2004) for the USA and recent studies by Hilbert and Ried (2009) for Germany and Malterud and Ulriksen (2010) for Norway, among others. These studies all seem to confirm what health discourse specialists have long believed about media reporting and health news, the words of Evans et al. (2003: 215) summing it up nicely: “‘the body’ (our bodies) are being constructed, defined, regulated and pathologised by contemporary health discourse.” To date, however, little attention has been given to the case of Spain, despite the alarming rise in Spanish school-age overweight and obesity rates (Serra-Majem et al., 2006; Sánchez-Cruz et al. 2013), the widespread concern for the future health of these children, both physical and otherwise (Puhl and Heuer, 2009) and the influence media can have on public perception and prevention (Boyce, 2007). In the case of Spain and according to the Spanish expert in nutrition, Félix Lobo “[...] los medios de comunicación en la sociedad moderna son un canal fundamental para la obtención de información y el cambio de comportamientos por los ciudadanos” (2007: 439). This research aims to show how Spanish newspaper reporting about overweight and obesity, especially that involving children and adolescents, can be analyzed from different perspectives: quantitative and qualitative analyses, lexical analysis of language used in the headlines, content and discourse patterns in coverage. The first set of studies involved a specific corpus compiled with 231 articles published in 2008 (ABC, El Mundo and El País), all containing the key search expressions *obesidad infantil* or *sobrepeso* and *infantil*. These studies revealed the tendencies in coverage, namely, from a scientific perspective (lifestyle factors, health consequences) and from a social perspective (prevention programs, celebrities) (Westall, 2011). Further research focused on extracting American English contributions to Spanish obesogenic discourse, particularly those loanwords related to foods, pop culture, health and medical terminology (Westall, 2013 and 2015a). The second set of studies involved another specific corpus compiled with 75 news articles published in 2013 in El País, these containing the key search expression *obesidad infantil*. This small corpus study highlighted the thematic coverage over a six-month period (January to June), and conclusions centered on describing the technical characteristics of the sample, the key headline words, and the results obtained from the content analysis (Westall, 2015b and 2015c).

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