EL PAÍS COVERAGE OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN 2013

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ABSTRACT
This research examines Spanish newspaper reporting about overweight and obesity in 2013, especially that involving children and adolescents. A specific corpus was complied with 183 news items, all published between 01/01/2013 and 31/12/2013 by the largest circulating Spanish national daily El País. *The articles, reports, opinions and other news items were extracted from the online archives using the search expression "obesidad infantil". This small corpus study will focus on the thematic coverage over the year based on the 69 most relevant items selected from the sample, highlighting the technical characteristics, the key headline words, and the results obtained from the content analysis.*

Keywords: corpus design, newspaper article, content analysis, pediatric health, childhood overweight and obesity.

RESUMEN
En esta investigación, examinamos las noticias periodísticas en España relativas al sobrepeso y la obesidad, centrándonos en noticias referentes a los niños y los adolescentes. Un corpus específico se constituyó con 183 noticias publicadas en el diario nacional de más tirada entre el 01/01/2013 y el 31/12/2013 y extraídas de la hemeroteca digital de El País. *Para este estudio, se analizaron las 69 noticias publicadas durante los doce meses, con el fin de determinar los temas predominantes de la cobertura. Se describen los datos técnicos de la muestra, las palabras clave de los titulares y los resultados obtenidos del análisis del contenido realizado.*

Palabras clave: diseño de corpus, noticia periodística, análisis de contenido, salud pediátrica, sobrepeso y obesidad infantil.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, researchers have examined how print media reports on obesity, being noteworthy the pioneering work by Lawrence (2004) for the USA. Recent studies by Hilbert and Ried (2009) as well as Malterud and Ulriksen (2010) have also shed light on newspaper framing of obesity in Germany and Norway, respectively. Health discourse specialists have long believed that while media reporting and health news can shape public understanding of obesity and thus contribute to its prevention (Boyce, 2007; Lobo, 2007), the media are also known to reinforce societal stigmatization of the obese (Puhl and Heuer, 2009) and hence influence how we perceive ourselves, as reported by Evans et al. (2003:15): "'the body' (our bodies) are being constructed, defined, regulated and pathologised by contemporary health discourse".

This study builds on previous work examining Spanish newspaper reporting about obesity (Westall, 2011a and 2011b). Given that school-age overweight and obesity rates continue to rise in Spain (Sánchez-Cruz et al., 2013), this small corpus analysis will focus on news articles published in 2013 to identify current trends and topics in the coverage of overweight and obesity among youngsters. To this end, this study presents findings from the content analysis conducted using a sample of 69 *El País* newspaper articles. In the following, I will describe the materials and method used to compile the corpus as well as the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the headlines mentioning obesity in 2013.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

A specific corpus was initially complied with 183 news items, all published by the largest circulating national daily *El País* between 01/01/2013 and 31/12/2013. These were first identified in the digital edition of the paper using the search expression "obesidad infantil" and then the articles considered most relevant were extracted from the newspaper's online archive in September of 2014.

The initial search returned some 102 articles, reports, opinion and brief pieces, corresponding to the first six months (January to June, 2013) and another 81, corresponding to the last six months (July to December, 2013). After filtering each for general relevance, the complete articles were copied into a working database, in electronic format and with the necessary technical data (URL, date, section, author, images, captions, etc.). Eliminated were any articles in which the references to obesity or overweight were not directly related in the discourse to children or adolescents. For example, "Las becas L'Oréal-Unesco facilitan la vida de cinco científicas españolas" (18/11) was eliminated because it only referred in one part of the report to research into "tumores cerebrales infantiles" and in another part to techniques to eliminate an "exceso de grasa en la obesidad". Another article excluded from the final sample was "Aquí no se tira nada" (11/11), where references were made to "tratamiento del sobrepeso y la obesidad" but the terms "familias" and "hijos" were only mentioned vaguely and in passing.

The 69 *El País* news items were then subjected to further scrutiny, each being examined for relevant key words and expressions, predominate frames and prevailing contents. The results are described in the next section, highlighting the technical characteristics of the sample and illustrating the thematic coverage over the year, based on the content analysis of the ten articles whose headlines featured the key word obesity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this small corpus study was to evaluate *El País* coverage of childhood obesity over a one-year period (2013). The initial sample contained thirty-five news items pertaining to the first six months of 2013. These were the news items that contained a specific reference to "obesidad infantil" (12) or mentioned one of the three key words ("obesidad", "obeso(s)", "sobrepeso") together with "niño/a/os/as" (16). Finally, seven other news articles were directly related to the topic at hand with the key words being used in combination with references to children: "adolescentes", "bebés", "chicas", "hija", "jóvenes", "menores", "pubertad". This 35-item sample contained 32,288 words (average length, 922 words/text); the longest text had 2591 words; nine others had more than 1000 words, and the shortest piece had 181 words (Carta al director).

The second sample contained thirty-four news items published in the last six months of 2013. Of these, specific reference was made to "obesidad infantil" in only five articles, while the key words ("obesidad", "obeso(s)", "sobrepeso") were found together with "niño/a/os/as" in 15 articles, and these key words were related in another 11 articles with reference to "jóvenes", "menores", "chicos", "adolescentes" or with descriptive phrases such as "los más pequeños", "los pequeños consumidores" or "la población más jóven". Lastly, three articles also related "obesidad" with "escuelas" and "estudios primarios", and were also included in the sample for their relevance. This 34-item sample was somewhat smaller, containing 27,263 words (average length, 801 words/text); the longest article had 3820 words; only six had more than 1000 words, and the shortest had just 53 words/text (Cultural Agenda).

The total number of news articles concerning childhood obesity in 2013 was similar to those published in 2008 by *El País* (Westall, 2011b), as illustrated in Table 1. The two aforementioned six-month samples in the 2013 corpus contained a total of 59,511 words, and the average length was 862 words per text. Ten news items were published in both April and October while only one was found for August.

Month (date consulted)	*El País* 2008 *obesidad infantil* articles (09/2009)	Search hits for 2013 *obesidad infantil* (09/2014)	Relevant *El País* articles for 2013 (10/2014)
January	7	17	6
February	5	11	3
March	3	20	7
April	6	20	10
May	7	18	5
June	3	16	4
July	9	12	5
August	5	5	1
September	5	19	8
October	2	23	10
November	9	13	4
December	4	9	6
Total for year	65	183	69

Table 1. *El País* articles returned with search expression "obesidad infantil" for 2008 (Westall, 2011b) and 2013 (present study).

The qualitative content analysis of the 69 articles comprising the corpus began with a closer examination of the ten *El País* headlines that featured the key word *obesidad*. The analysis of these headlines reveals three topics predominant in the *El País* coverage of childhood obesity during the year. First is the creation of a special "antiobesity" tax on sodas and sugary beverages in Spain, the USA and Mexico ("Coca-Cola aborda por primera vez la obesidad en sus anuncios", 15/01; "EEUU presiona a Mas contra la tasa antiobesidad a las bebidas azucaradas", 05/03; "MÉXICO SALUD. El impuesto a refrescos para combatir obesidad y diabetes divide a México", 20/10). The second major topic is related to the results of obesity research ("La lucha contra la obesidad encalla en el tratamiento psicológico", 06/05; "La obesidad ya es una enfermedad en Estados Unidos", 19/06; "La carrera americana de la obesidad no tiene ganadores", 14/07; "A menor nivel educativo, más obesidad", 13/12). The third predominate theme revolves around obesity prevention programs initiated in Spain and the USA ("El Gobierno aprueba la creación del Observatorio de la Obesidad", 22/01; "Platos más pequeños para combatir la obesidad infantil en EEUU", 08/04c; "EEUU SALUD. Michelle Obama ficha a personajes de Barrio Sésamo para combatir la obesidad", 31/10a). These ten headlines not only represent the type of obesity news covered by *El País* in 2013, but they also reveal the predominant features characterizing the discourse, namely, the almost exclusive framing of obesity and dietary choices (foods and beverages) and the different expressions of obesity prevalence among children.

The analysis clearly revealed the tendency in *El País* to relate obesity with diet and nutrition. In fact, the headlines of 29 articles contain references to foods (*pan, hamburguesas, espinacas, snacks*, etc.), diets, dieting, nutrition, hunger, malnutrition, and the like. In Spain, in fact, obesity prevention is also designed from a nutritional perspective, as revealed in the headline mentioning the 'obesity observatory', where nutrition and children are the focus:

- El Gobierno ha dado luz verde a la creación del Observatorio de la Nutrición y de Estudio de la Obesidad, un órgano que estará presidido por el cardiólogo Valentín Fuster y que tendrá como objetivo prevenir el sobrepeso, especialmente en la población infantil. (22/01)

In the sample, evidence associating childhood obesity in Spain with soft drink and soda consumption is found in five articles, and blame is expressed in statements like the following:

- La oposición de las firmas no es tanto por la cantidad a pagar, sino por no abrir la espita de asumir que los refrescos azucarados son responsables de la obesidad infantil. (05/03)

News about obesity prevention in the USA highlights diet as well, particularly regarding what children consume at school:

- En los últimos meses, la Administración de Barack Obama ha centrado también su atención en las escuelas como forma de mejorar la dieta de los niños y su conducta hacia la comida. En los próximos meses, las escuelas estadounidenses no contarán con máquinas expendedoras que ofrezcan snacks o aperitivos con alto contenido graso. (14/07)

Two prevention programs cited in the news are described in terms of foods and the culture in which a child grows up, being noteworthy the reference to "all you can eat" restaurants in the USA:

- En un país donde los restaurantes de comer todo lo que puedas están

a la orden de día, los expertos confían en que erradicar esta costumbre desde la infancia es parte de la solución para acabar con la obesidad y el sobrepeso en EE UU. (08/04c)

Likewise, references are found to allude to the social norms determining body perception and 'fatness' in Spain:

- Hay otros casos, en cambio, en que las familias piensan que si el niño no está gordo no está bien alimentado. (06/05)

The analysis also revealed the tendency of *El País* news reports to feature quantitative expressions related to the prevalence of childhood obesity in Spain, ranging from rather subtle indications to the direct quotation of government statistics:

- La combinación de sedentarismo y exceso de calorías está llevando a España a escalar puestos en uno de los peores indicadores de salud, el de obesidad infantil (08/04b)
- La niñez es especialmente sensible: el 45% de los niños españoles padece exceso de peso, según el Ministerio de Sanidad. (06/05)

Quantitative expressions are created with comparative statements and descriptions of trends in obesity, in one case, among female university students, with no mention of statistics for males:

- El informe muestra que las universitarias la padecen cuatro veces menos. […] La prevalencia ha aumentado un 3,8% en una década en España. (13/12)

In the USA, obesity prevalence is cited in the news articles through percentages, most often as seen in earlier examples, but there are also ratios and total number of obese, as illustrated in these examples:

- En EEUU, casi el 36% de los adultos y el 17% de los menores padecen esta enfermedad, según el Centro de Control y Prevención de Enfermedades. (15/01)
- Uno de cada tres niños sufre sobrepeso en Estados Unidos y el

número de casos crece cada día. (08/04c)

- En EEUU más de 78 millones de adultos y más de 12 millones de niños la padecen. (19/06)

Finally, it is worth mentioning the expressions of prevalence for the case of Mexico, which is compared to its northern neighbor in two reports:

- El dudoso mérito de tener el mayor porcentaje de ciudadanos con sobrepeso se disputa entre México y Estados Unidos. (14/07)
- México es el segundo país con el mayor número de adultos con obesidad, detrás de Estados Unidos, y el primero en sobrepeso infantil, según la OCDE. (20/10)

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to build a corpus for more comprehensive study of obesogenic discourse and to better understand obesity coverage by the Spanish press over time. To this end, the corpus compiled for this study contained a similar number of articles related to "obesidad infantil" and the contents continue to focus on the effects of diet and nutrition on childhood overweight. These results confirm the 'chronic' and 'continuous' presence of obesity news in *El País* in 2013. These results agree with those reported in *Quiral Salud*, namely "la epidemiología de la obesidad y sus efectos, especialmente en la población infantil" is a major theme and that "la obesidad ha pasado a ser la protagonista periodística del tópico dietética y nutrición" (2005: 4).

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