

# The psychological impact of hirsutism

December 13 2013

---

Women with excess hair growth in the face and on the chest, abdomen and thighs are suffering in silence. They are embarrassed, they blame themselves for their hairiness and would do anything to keep it a secret. Women, who after all have plucked up the courage to seek medical help, tell stories of how they have felt brushed aside and even ridiculed, according to new research presented today at Örebro University, Sweden.

"Women tell us how they have been told by doctors to go home, lose weight and shave. That is not OK. Excessive hair growth, also known as hirsutism, is a condition, not a cosmetic problem, and there are treatments that can improve quality of life for those who are affected," says Maria Palmetun Ekbäck.

Maria Palmetun Ekbäck took an interest in hirsutism, meaning shaggy or hairy in Latin, after a patient came to her for help. Hirsutism affects at least five per cent of the female population and it means that women develop hair on parts of their bodies where men normally grow hair – in the face, on the abdomen and on the thighs. The most common cause of the hair growth is what is known as polycystic ovary syndrome, a condition where a high number of cysts are formed on the ovaries.

"Despite the fact that the syndrome, from my perspective as a physician, may give rise to other serious conditions such as [high blood pressure](#), cardio-vascular diseases, high lipid levels in the bloodstream, diabetes, difficulties conceiving and overweight, the women with [polycystic ovary syndrome](#) rate the excess hair as the second most difficult thing to live

with. Second to difficulties conceiving," says Ekbäck.

She is describing how women she has met plan their life so that it enables them to hide their bodies. She is telling the story of a woman who enjoys swimming, but who would go to another town to avoid bumping into someone she knows at the pool. They are putting all their effort into keeping it secret and many suffer from anxiety and depression. The research showed that problems in the form of anxiety and depression increased with the amount of excess hair growth.

"These women describe their bodies as a yoke, a monstrosity. They feel their bodies are a source of disgrace, becoming a prison of sorts," says Ekbäck.

These women do not seek help until they feel that they have come to the end of the road. Unfortunately, Maria Palmetun Ekbäck's research shows that seeing the doctor not seldom has the effect that they feel brushed aside and even ridiculed.

"If we are to ease the burden of blame and shame that these women are under, they need to be greeted and treated with respect. They need to be diagnosed and be told about possible treatments available. They need confirmation that they are not to blame and they need to be given social support.

"Women who on the other hand felt that seeing the doctor was a positive experience relate the most simple and obvious things. They had been listened to, felt that they had been acknowledged and believed in, and they had been offered some kind of treatment. These seemingly simple things made all the difference," says Ekbäck.

"As doctors, looking at the whole picture, we most likely often view the [hair growth](#) as trivial. But if these [women](#) are to find the strength to

cope, follow dietary and exercise advice, and go under medication, there must be a sense of empowerment in the way that they are approached and treated by healthcare staff. We need to provide adequate information and lift the stigma brought about by this condition."

Provided by Örebro Universitet

Citation: The psychological impact of hirsutism (2013, December 13) retrieved 8 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-psychological-impact-hirsutism.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.