

New approach needed in way Tourette's syndrome is portrayed, research shows

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Media stereotypes of people with Tourette's Syndrome (TS) are leading to the stigmatising of adolescents with the condition by their peers.

That's one of the key findings of a new study on how adolescents perceive other [young people](#) with TS, carried out by researchers at the Tizard Centre at the University of Kent.

The study, which involved English-speaking participants aged 14-15 years old from co-educational, multi-cultural comprehensive secondary schools in South East England, was aimed at gaining insight and new data into how TS is viewed by adolescents who do not have the condition.

Researchers Melina Malli and Professor Rachel Forrester-Jones found that the media - and other various forms of popular culture - forms the primary source of information for adolescents on TS. This resulted in 'skewed and inadequate knowledge about the condition'.

Even adolescents who reported having relatives with TS acquired their knowledge from TV and endorsed 'commonly held stereotypes' about the condition.

The study found that in [popular culture](#) portrayals 'the accuracy of symptomology has been wilfully abandoned and extreme cases of TS have prevailed over the typical ones'.

People with TS were perceived as 'powerless, fragile, and vulnerable', with the study finding that it was a condition to which 'people react with kindness' but simultaneously akin to 'how parents treat their children'.

This pity results in a 'paternalistic form of prejudice', the researchers suggest, which is in contrast to direct forms of discrimination but is 'masked by seemingly positive behaviour towards the recipient'.

The [researchers](#) conclude that, since the media is the primary source of information for adolescents, it could potentially be used to educate them on the true nature of the condition.

They also recommend work to augment [adolescents'](#) 'willingness to help individuals with TS but without perpetuating the image of helplessness'.

More information: Melina Aikaterini Malli et al, "I'm not being rude, I'd want somebody normal": Adolescents' Perception of their Peers with Tourette's Syndrome: an Exploratory Study, *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s10882-016-9524-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-016-9524-y)

Provided by University of Kent

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