

New report reveals lack of mental health support for skin disease patients

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Human skin structure. Credit: Wikipedia

The vast majority of skin disease patients feel their condition affects their mental health and many struggle to access appropriate treatment, a new report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Skin has found.

Five hundred patients with a range of skin conditions were surveyed in

March and April of this year, along with 100 clinicians and 16 organizations in the field of dermatology.

The research found 98% of respondents felt their condition affected their emotional and psychological wellbeing—and yet only 18% had received psychological support.

Of those surveyed, more than half (54%) did not realize that specialist psychodermatology services were available for skin patients. And all of the organizations surveyed felt that NHS [mental health](#) provision for skin patients was "poor" (80%) or "very poor" (20%).

Consultant [clinical psychologist](#) and honorary professor at Cardiff University, Andrew Thompson, an NHS advisor to the group's expert committee, said: "Skin conditions are incredibly common and for many people there is an impact on wellbeing—significant symptoms of anxiety and depression are reported by some patients. The findings around lack of mental health support are particularly worrying since the COVID-19 pandemic will have exacerbated mental health issues among people who were already suffering. This report draws on both existing research and new data collected by the group to provide politicians, commissioners, and NHS providers with a clear set of recommendations for addressing the woeful level of service provision in this area."

Among the other key findings:

- 93% reported a negative impact on their self-esteem and 87% said it had a negative impact on their [social life](#) or ability to do sporting activities;
- 73% reported a negative impact on [intimate relationships](#) and 69% said it had a [negative impact](#) on their work or education;
- 5% reported having [suicidal thoughts](#);
- 100% of the 27 children who responded to the survey indicated

that their skin condition affected their psychological wellbeing, and 85% felt they had [low self-esteem](#);

- Of the children with low [self-esteem](#), 85% reported this being particularly in relation to engaging with peers at school

One survey respondent said: "When I turned 19 it [the eczema] became so bad that I couldn't participate in normal life anymore due to the pain... I had to give up my job as I am always too unwell. My skin is often too painful to have intimate relations or to even hug or kiss my partner. I had to postpone my wedding as I can't cope with the idea of a flare up on my wedding day. My eczema has caused me to develop anxiety and depression. I have been in hospital twice for a week because of my eczema and in 2019 I had to visit A&E six times as a result of a facial eczema outbreak. I have had 36 courses of antibiotics for my [skin](#) in the last two years. My eczema has ruined my life."

Recommendations made in the report include mandatory psychodermatology training, an increase in dermatology training numbers, and comprehensive dedicated psychodermatology services in each region of the UK.

More information: Mental Health and Skin Disease report (2020). [www.appgs.co.uk/mental-health- ... disease-report-2020/](http://www.appgs.co.uk/mental-health-...-disease-report-2020/)

Provided by Cardiff University

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