

# New study explores healthcare experiences of people with body dysmorphic disorder

May 25 2021

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Researchers from Swinburne's Center for Mental Health have launched a survey to better understand the healthcare experiences of individuals with body dysmorphic disorder in Australia.

The anonymous online survey is open until November 2021. It is targeted at Australians aged 18 and over who are living in Australia and have been diagnosed with body dysmorphic disorder.

It will assess the respondent's personal medical history with body dysmorphic disorder, their quality of life and their experience with health services.

## **Barriers to seeking help**

Body dysmorphic disorder is a [mental disorder](#) that involves a distressing preoccupation with a perceived defect in the individual's physical appearance.

"Through our research on the disorder, we have noticed a recurring theme: Australians with body dysmorphic disorder very often do not receive timely diagnoses or treatment of their symptoms. This often leads to severe or [chronic illnesses](#), including high rates of disability and suicidal behavior," explains lead researcher and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the center, Dr. Amy Malcolm.

"International studies have identified feelings of shame, a low perceived need for treatment and preference for cosmetic or surgical treatments as some factors that act as barriers for these individuals to seek out [mental health](#) treatment," she adds.

In Australia, recent data confirms there are significant barriers for patients accessing body dysmorphic disorder specialized psychotherapy, including lack of affordability and geographical barriers.

"However, there is no Australian data on barriers related to broader care, such as those related to psychiatrist or GP management, or the problematic replacement of mental health care with cosmetic

interventions' says Dr. Malcolm.

## Filling the gaps

Through the study, the research team hopes to identify existing gaps in these individuals' healthcare experiences.

"Information gathered from this survey will be essential in helping us identify problems that negatively affect the diagnosis and treatment of body dysmorphic disorder in Australia. We plan to use this information to develop national clinical management guidelines for doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health workers, which will help them better recognize body dysmorphic disorder and choose the appropriate treatment," says Dr. Malcolm.

Additionally, [survey results](#) could also signal a need to ramp up public awareness of body dysmorphic disorder to help people and their loved ones recognize symptoms of the disorder and seek appropriate help.

Anyone diagnosed with [body](#) dysmorphic disorder wanting to participate in the survey can register their interest at the [survey website](#).

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

Citation: New study explores healthcare experiences of people with body dysmorphic disorder (2021, May 25) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-05-explores-healthcare-people-body-dysmorphic.html>

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