

Muscle dysmorphia common in male adolescents and young adults

January 17 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

With the current emphasis on leanness and muscularity as today's body ideal, many young boys and men are engaging in risky behaviors and activities—from muscle-building exercises to anabolic-androgenic steroid use—to fit in these current norms. This may lead to a

pathological pursuit of muscularity, otherwise known as muscle dysmorphia.

Prior research on muscle dysmorphia has been conducted among specific groups, such as bodybuilders, while less research has been conducted across diverse, community-based populations. A new study published in *Body Image* is one of the few studies that investigates the potential risk factors for muscle dysmorphia symptoms in adolescents and [young adults](#) across Canada.

Analyzing over 2,000 participants, from the Canadian Study of Adolescent Health Behaviors, researchers found that [adolescent boys](#) and young adult men had many muscle dysmorphia symptoms, and one in four were at clinical risk for muscle dysmorphia.

"Consistent with prior research, we found that boys and men presented with greater symptoms and behaviors of muscle dysmorphia," says lead author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "This finding continues to emphasize that boys and men are influenced by and are striving for a muscular body and experiencing psychological and social distress as a result."

Moreover, muscle dysmorphia symptoms were more common in those who reported anabolic-androgenic steroid use, which are highly effective, yet dangerous, illicit substances that can increase muscle mass and tone.

The study also highlighted unique disparities across sexual identities and racial/ethnic groups. Compared to participants who identified as White, those who identified as South Asian or Middle Eastern were more likely to have greater muscle dysmorphia symptoms. Additionally, participants who identified as a [sexual minority](#) (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.),

compared to heterosexual participants, were more likely to experience greater muscle dysmorphia symptoms.

"Overall, our findings emphasize that many [young people](#) are striving for muscularity, resulting in significant levels of distress, which counters popular narratives that only thinness-oriented [body image](#) concerns and behaviors are problematic," says Ganson. "We need to incorporate muscle dysmorphia symptoms into future conversations around body image and eating disorders, particularly given the likely rise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The authors highlight the critical nature of greater knowledge and awareness of muscle dysmorphia among healthcare professionals to improve assessment and treatment. Additionally, public health awareness and prevention campaigns related to eating disorders and body image need to include content related to [muscle dysmorphia](#).

More information: Kyle T. Ganson et al, Muscle dysmorphia symptomatology among a national sample of Canadian adolescents and young adults, *Body Image* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.01.001)

Provided by University of Toronto

Citation: Muscle dysmorphia common in male adolescents and young adults (2023, January 17) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-01-muscle-dysmorphia-common-male-adolescents.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.