

Can 'body beautiful' socials cause serious body image disorders?

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It's often said that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' yet for many young women, the perception of beauty is influenced by what they see and hear on social media.

Now, new research from the Universitas Surabaya and the University of

South Australia shows that while social media may compound [negative body image](#) issues, it's only through a lens of perfectionism that it can affect a significant body issue—body dysmorphic disorder (BDD).

BDD is a [mental illness](#) characterized by constant worrying over a perceived or slight defect in appearance. People with this disorder constantly worry about how they look and may believe an inconspicuous or non-existent physical attribute is a serious personal defect. BDD affects men and women almost equally, with one in 50 people suffering from the condition.

In this study, researchers examined how dimensions of perfectionism—[high standards](#), order, and discrepancy—can mediate the relationship between social media pressure and BDD.

Women who struggle with 'discrepancy'—a dysfunctional dimension of perfectionism characterized by feelings of extreme dissatisfaction caused by unrealistic self-standards—had similar characteristics to people with a tendency towards BDD. They also emphasized unrealistic ideals of appearance, making them feel anxious about minor physical flaws.

UniSA researcher Dr. Nada Ibrahim says understanding how social media can affect [mental health](#) and negative body image is important for protecting young women from developing body issues.

"Social media is rife with content that perpetuates stereotypes of the body ideal," Dr. Ibrahim says.

"It may seem that body image stereotypes on social media are responsible for serious body image conditions such as BDD, but this research shows that social media alone cannot cause such serious issues. Instead, it plays an indirect role in predicting BDD."

"Knowing that women who struggle with negative aspects of perfectionism—that is, thinking and feeling that they are not good enough against any measure, are more at risk of BDD. And social media pressures can heighten this."

"But we must remember that BDD is a chronic mental disorder. If we only look at the risks of BDD from the perspective of social media, or think that only socio-cultural factors are to blame, then we could easily overlook correct diagnoses."

The researchers say that programs to promote media literacy and positive body images could help [young women](#) using [social media](#) to better filter content and prevent body image issues.

The findings are published in the journal *Psikohumaniora: Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*.

More information: Putri Talitha Salsabila Sulistyو et al, Social media pressure and the body dysmorphic disorder tendency in women: The mediating role of perfectionism, *Psikohumaniora: Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi* (2022). [DOI: 10.21580/pjpp.v7i2.10637](https://doi.org/10.21580/pjpp.v7i2.10637)

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