

# Body dysmorphia affects many teens, especially girls

March 22 2024, by Dennis Thompson

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Many teens—especially girls—are affected by body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), a condition in which they become obsessed with perceived flaws in their personal appearance, a new study shows.

BDD affects about two in every 100 teens (1.9%), according to a report published March 17 in the [Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#).

The disorder is six times more common in girls than in boys, affecting 1.8% of girls compared to 0.3% of boys, the researchers said.

These numbers show it's important for doctors to keep an eye out for signs of the disorder, said lead researcher Georgina Krebs, an associate professor of psychology with University College London.

"Since [young people](#) with BDD tend not to spontaneously disclose their symptoms unless directly asked, it is crucial that clinicians utilize [BDD screening](#) tools and ask young people directly about appearance concerns," Krebs said in a university news release.

For the study, researchers analyzed data from more than 7,600 kids and teens who participated in the 2017 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey.

The survey included a question about whether the child is ever concerned with how he or she looks. Those who answered "a little" or "a lot" underwent further screening for BDD.

Nearly 70% of young people with BDD also met the [diagnostic criteria](#) for at least one other [psychological disorder](#), researchers found.

The most common mental health problems occurring alongside BDD were [anxiety](#) disorders (59%) and depression (32%), results show.

What's more, nearly half (46%) of young people with BDD report self-harm or [suicide attempts](#), compared to 8% of those without the disorder.

"Screening for BDD in young people with [anxiety disorders](#) and depression, the most common co-morbidities, is likely to improve detection," Krebs said.

Researchers found that teens who were excessively preoccupied with their appearance, but did not meet the diagnostic standard for BDD, also showed similar patterns of co-existing mood problems.

"Appearance preoccupation is a significant clinical phenomenon in its own right," the researchers concluded. "Efforts are needed to raise awareness of BDD, improve screening practices and reduce barriers to evidence-based treatment."

**More information:** The Cleveland Clinic has more about [body dysmorphic disorder](#).

Georgina Krebs et al, Epidemiology of Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Appearance Preoccupation in Youth: Prevalence, Comorbidity and Psychosocial Impairment, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2024.01.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2024.01.017)

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