

# Study: Four in five psychologists overlook dissociation, a common trauma response among patients seeking therapy

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New research has found that 4 in 5 Australian psychologists have gaps in their knowledge on dissociation—a common psychobiological response

to trauma that can disrupt memory, emotion, and identity—and cannot accurately identify dissociation symptoms. The paper is [published](#) in the journal *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*.

Among the 280 Australian psychologists surveyed, 99% reported treating trauma-exposed clients, but only 60% reported formal [trauma](#) training during their psychology qualification; only 41% reported training on dissociation.

Dr. Jessica Mackelprang, the senior author on the study, is a clinical and health psychologist at Swinburne. She says if clinicians are unable to recognize dissociation, the symptoms are likely to go untreated, which may negatively impact outcomes of therapy.

She adds, "Dissociation is commonly overlooked in both training and [clinical practice](#). The symptoms can be debilitating and are transdiagnostic, meaning that they occur in many different psychological disorders."

Prior research has shown that symptoms of dissociation often go unrecognized in mental health care. The team, including Niclés Bestel, a [clinical psychologist](#) who graduated from Swinburne's postgraduate course, are calling for training on dissociation to be incorporated into psychology curricula at the postgraduate level and for accessible and cost-effective professional development on the topic to be made accessible globally.

Swinburne researchers are working toward developing resources on dissociation that will be made available to psychologists and psychiatrists, as well as to clinicians in [training](#).

The research adds, "Psychologists who are more confident in treating dissociation are more accurate in identifying symptoms of dissociation."

It's imperative that clinicians are confident and capable to support clients who experience these common but under-recognized symptoms.

"Dissociation [symptoms](#) can have a real impact on people's lives and make it more difficult to make progress in therapy. We have a responsibility to do better to ensure clinicians have the skills to support these individuals."

**More information:** Niclés S. A. Bestel et al, Dissociation training and symptom identification accuracy among Australian psychologists., *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/tra0001717](https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001717)

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