

# Having visible tattoos gives psychologists more cred

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USask doctoral student Shannah Dutrisac pictured without a tattoo, with a “neutral” flower tattoo, and with a “provocative” skull tattoo. Dutrisac’s face was blurred out in the versions shown to peer reviewers. Credit: University of Saskatchewan

New University of Saskatchewan (USask) research suggests that to

potential clients, psychologists with visible, provocative tattoos seem more confident, interesting, likable, less lazy, and more competent than psychologists with no tattoos or with less provocative ink.

"Having visible tattoos may signal greater originality and authenticity to clients," said Dr. Alexandra Zidenberg (Ph.D.), former USask doctoral student and lead author on the study.

The study just published in the journal *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, is the first to explore the impact of psychologists' tattoos on the perceptions of [potential clients](#). Previous studies have focused mainly on the self-perception of psychologists with tattoos, and on perceptions of other psychologists.

The [research](#) team, supervised by USask professor and registered doctoral psychologist Dr. Mark Olver (Ph.D.), and including doctoral student Shannah Dutrisac, surveyed 534 participants online about their perceptions of a fictitious psychologist's profile.

While the profile text describing the psychologist was identical, participants saw a slightly different photo: a young woman with a prominent flower tattooed on her arm, with a skull, or without a tattoo.

"Having a neutral tattoo seems to be statistically equivalent to having no tattoo, and having a provocative tattoo appears to have a mildly [positive effect](#) on how people rate the psychologist," said Zidenberg.

Participants did see the psychologist without tattoos as more "professional," but that did not translate into negative feelings or an unwillingness to seek care from her, said Zidenberg.

The results of the USask study run counter to previous research findings and popular direction to conceal tattoos and other personal

characteristics.

"Really surprising was that participants without tattoos seemed to have a more positive view of the psychologist with a provocative [tattoo](#)," said Zidenberg.

"Psychology is pretty unique," said Zidenberg. "Tattoos may signal authenticity in a way that's more appreciated than in other health-care fields."

The initial study participants were mostly women, heterosexual, Caucasian, urban, university-educated, and young, with an average age of 23 years old.

The research team next intends to look at an expanded group of participants and extend the study using photos of [psychologists](#) that are more diverse in gender presentation and skin color.

**More information:** Alexandra M. Zidenberg et al, "No regrets": Public perceptions of tattooed mental health professionals., *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.1037/pro0000441](https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000441)

Provided by University of Saskatchewan

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