

# Acne stigma linked to lower overall quality of life, study finds

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A study by Dr Aisling O'Donnell and Jamie Davern, both of University of Limerick, Ireland, has revealed that acne sufferers' negative perceptions of how society views their appearance is associated with higher psychological distress levels and further physical symptoms. Credit: TrueMedia

Many people with acne are negatively impacted by perceived social

stigma around the skin condition, a new study from University of Limerick (UL), Ireland, has found.

A survey of 271 [acne](#) sufferers has revealed that their own negative perceptions of how society views their appearance is associated with higher psychological distress levels and further physical symptoms such as sleep disturbance, headaches and gastrointestinal problems.

Females in the study reported greater impairment of life quality and more symptoms than males. Acne severity was significantly correlated with health-related quality of life and psychological distress.

UL researchers Dr. Aisling O'Donnell and Jamie Davern conducted the study to investigate whether acne sufferers' perceptions of stigmatisation significantly predicts psychological and physical health outcomes; specifically health-related quality of life, psychological distress, and somatic symptoms.

"We know from previous research that many acne sufferers experience negative feelings about their condition, but we have never before been able to draw such a direct link between quality of life and perception of social stigma around acne," said Dr. O'Donnell of the Department of Psychology and Centre for Social Issues Research at UL.

Survey respondents who perceived high levels of acne stigma also reported higher levels of psychological distress, anxiety and depression as well as somatic [conditions](#) such as respiratory illness.

"The findings of this study echo previous research showing that individuals with visible physical distinctions, which are viewed negatively by society, can experience impaired psychological and physical well-being as a result," Dr. O'Donnell continued.

According to the article's lead author, Ph.D. student Jamie Davern, a lack of representation of people with acne in popular culture can increase the perceived stigma around the condition.

"Like many physical attributes that are stigmatised, acne is not well represented in popular culture, advertising or social media. This can lead people with acne to feel that they are 'not normal' and therefore negatively viewed by others. Online campaigns like #freethepimple and the recent 'acne-positive' movement emerging on social media is an encouraging development for people of all ages that are affected by acne," he explained.

Although adolescents are most commonly afflicted by acne, the condition has been reported to affect 10.8% of children between the ages of 5-13 years and 12.7% of adults aged over 59.

"Importantly, the findings provide further support for the comparatively limited amount of studies investigating physical health problems experienced by acne sufferers. This is important information for clinicians dealing with acne conditions. It's also useful for those who are close to acne sufferers. The wider negative impacts some acne sufferers experience are very challenging and require sensitivity and support," Mr Davern concluded.

The article, "Stigma predicts health-related quality of life impairment, [psychological distress](#) and somatic symptoms in acne sufferers," is published online by *PLOS ONE*, on September 28, 2018.

**More information:** *PLOS ONE*, [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0205009](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205009)

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