

Written Evidence submitted by Plymouth Young People Group (BYC041)

Young people's views surrounding Body Image in Plymouth and how we could start making changes, the elected members of youth parliament, along with youth workers worked with young people in various youth groups across Plymouth. This report is an evaluation of those responses and was completed by UKYP group in Plymouth – Typed up via Jenny Way lead worker

Questions asked:

1. Are particular groups of young people particularly prone to poor body image, or less likely to be offered or seek help with poor body image? What causes these trends?

Young females are prone to poor body image There is a lot of pressure from media and models to have that 'perfect look' when in reality there isn't one.

One person young person reported that friend developed an eating disorder and would continuously compare her to models and go on about unreal problems like the thigh gap and became obsessed with her weight it was sad to see a friend go through this all because of what she saw and was expected to look like.

People from ethnic minority groups and religious groups both are affected, especially young people. We had who report of how in some cases people of colour have attempted to change the colour of their skin with chemicals. People are often judged on their appearance's and clothing they wear due to religious beliefs they get mocked and attacked because people are afraid and don't understand.

Young men are increasingly under pressure to "look good". The increasingly popular "gym lad" culture makes young men who aren't muscular feel insecure and we have seen it lead to depression.

A young person reported he felt under pressure to lose weight and become more muscular, of course I want to do this for myself but with increased peer pressure we feel young men are increasingly losing weight to try and please others.

But also young men without an adequate male role model within the family as often its embarrassing asking your mum for advice regarding body and health, a lot of young men with eating disorders suggested talking to your mum was way to embarrassing and often young men felt they didn't want to worry her with questions or concerns.

LGBT groups of young people and their community, especially the young people, who struggle to comes to terms with their identity and are afraid to seek help and support because they fear being judged or suffer abuse or get shunned by family member's.

But also young people with mental health issues such as body dysmorphia, bulimia, anorexia which their isn't a huge amount of support due to cuts in services and young people are often afraid to seek the right help and support.

Also young people with disabilities as people are afraid to talk openly without being judged or ridiculed for their appearance's or disregarded and therefore struggle to openly discuss their issues or seek correct help.

We think there are lots of 'trends' as well which encourage young people (both male and female) to think about how they look for example hairstyles and the type of clothes that they wear. There is often 'Cool kids/ popular kids' at school which start trends and people often follow these because they want to be seen as cool and trendy. It can lead to a lack of self-esteem and other issues.

Overall I feel the issue is becoming worse and beyond TV and online campaigns I don't feel there is a lot of support for young people to help them tackle this issue. I think that in school sessions on this issue would be beneficial and help highlight how common the problem is.

2. In relation to young men and boys, minority ethnic groups, and those who self-identify as transgender: what are the specific challenges facing young people in these groups? How effective is existing support?

Services have been cut and are still being pushed to their limits, which has an impact on young people getting help and support. Society gives the impression young men and boys shouldn't have mental health or confidential issues that they should be tough and lead by example and that means that they are less likely to seek support which can lead to mental health issues. There needs to be more work around stigma's about masculinity – young men often have issues body issues but no one listens.

Young people who Identify as LGBT issues often face stereotyping and judgements from other people who have a lot to say about how they should conform. Young people who are trying to make life choices often have to undergo lots of appointments, consultation's, treatments and live the way they intend to for a year before any treatments are offered, those young people that require binders for their chests then have to find £50 to buy one as funding is not available to assist that's a huge amount of money and a lot to go through to be taken seriously.

Effective support is available but it is limited and hard to access, a lot of young people struggle to be taken seriously and get the appropriate support from other agencies and within local communities. This often leads to wider impacting concerns such as young people developing mental health issues, turning to alcohol or drugs or at times self-harm as a way to escape the pain and stress of what's actually happening and how they feel.

3. Do existing campaigns and initiatives to promote positive body images sufficiently take into account the different challenges faced by young people with particular characteristics?

No of course they don't, often they cause more harm than good, Young people in Plymouth feel that campaigns often targeted around body image often focus on everyone and society as a whole rather than the issues that each group with specific characteristics faces.

The internet, social media and messaging often promote the size 4-6 sized models that are beautiful and glamorous and young people often aspire to be the same, with risks to their health

and wellbeing. If they focused on campaigns that show people with disabilities, fuller figures, trans/gay young people and people from different cultural backgrounds and actually showed the reality of life it would be more of a fair playing field and help young people accept that everyone is different.

4. Has the growing use of social media and communications platforms amongst young people encouraged practices and attitudes that entrench poor body image? What is the link between "sexting" and body dissatisfaction?

We think that social media and communications has entrenched poor body image. You can easily send a photo to someone to ask for their opinion on certain things to ensure that you look the best that you can. There seems to be a craze that some young people get a 'kick' out of sexting and this can help improve their body satisfaction as they would get compliments such as 'nice XYZ' which improves their confidence in themselves.

Instead it under represents and often portrays negative body characteristics, by body shopping pictures of celebrities it gives the wrong impression. Also it's easy for people to hide behind their computer and make negative comments about other people because you're not there to say it to someone. If people raised more awareness we wouldn't have warped ideas on what's acceptable and not, if we challenge the messages we challenge the idea and people would learn to love themselves for who they are?

5. Can the internet and social media be used as a tool to promote positive self-image? What examples are there of this happening?

I think videos of people who don't fit 'society's norm' who talk about how they love their bodies and have overcome things such as bullying and how that has made them stronger are often inspiring. Tips to make you love yourself regardless of anything often are quite helpful as well. A lot more could and should be done to promote positive self-image and how we should all learn to love some part of ourselves regardless of any differences we have.

If people did more on this topic and challenged the notions less people would have mental health issues as it stands those with body image issues don't always meet the criteria to get help and support from mental health services

6. Do internet companies, social media platforms or other platforms have a responsibility to tackle trends which entrench poor body image? What are they already doing in this area? What more should they be doing?

Yes of course they should, they caused some of the issues and should put money in to assisting in developing a way to promote better internet companies and social media platforms often hold a huge responsibility to tackle the negative trends. If someone uploads a photo and it goes viral with people shaming that person for whatever reason we feel that that platform has a role to play to cut out the shaming. Young people feel they are doing a lot in this area and could be doing a lot more such as running social media campaigns to promote positive self-image and having a report section where pages are shaming people for who they are/what they look like.

7. Does the Government have a responsibility to discourage the use of social media, the internet and communications platforms in ways which promote poor body image? What should it be doing in this regard?

Young people feel that the Government does have a responsibility to discourage the use of any media that promotes poor body image and that there should be guidelines around what they should be promoting and helping to do to promote positive body image. However, the idea of 'poor body image, can sometimes be self-defining and what can be seen as 'good' to one person can be 'bad' to another. The government are the people that set the guideline's and policies and make national decision's if they realised the impact that some sites had on young people than maybe they would be governed more approximately and support offered to those that need it. Instead the sites are not monitored approximately and often sites like facebook's claim the things that get reported don't meet their guidelines, they are meant to act as publishers and should therefore protect their members from harmful content. Some of the ways they could do this is to stop showing adverts that promote negative body images and prevent advertisers using photoshopped image. Magazines, papers and the TV has given us a false sense of body image which does more harm than good in today's society

The increased impact of the Internet and social media does contribute to unrealistic body images. The photoshopped models and endless "flawless" selfies can make others feel insignificant and lower their self-image. Young people agreed that it has led to a self-shaming culture in which perfectly normal looking people feel the need to go on about their flaws in posts. This only attracts cyber bullies for some people and can make them feel worse about themselves.

However, it can be used to combat the issue like the "bear" face campaigns ran by makeup companies really do make young girls feel better about themselves. We feel in general there are more positive campaigns for young women than men and so young men can feel that their issue is under represented and that people don't care about them as much.

Unfortunately some of the most damaging content though comes from peers and this is a serious concern, it means that it then falls to schools to promote appropriate use of social media and body confidence and does that happen enough in today's society?? Overall there needs to be more positive body image promotion online and positive messaging around body image.

8. What examples are there of schools integrating the promotion of positive body image into school subjects across the curriculum, particularly physical education? How successful have these been? How can success best be measured?

We feel it generally depends on what school young people attend, each has a different way of teaching young people and some did so much more to promote positive body image than other schools friends attend.

Sometimes it can be because in a mixed school they have a lesson to focus on the issues that both male and female young people have to face whereas in a single sex school they only have

to focus on certain issues. Success can be measured by the happiness that people find in themselves and how much they feel the need to conform to society's needs and norms.

Should be taught in schools to all students throughout the years that way challenge the issues and learn along the way, Changes need to be implemented into the National curriculum so the topic is covered more and on a wider note as young people feel its touched upon but briefly and that if they made changes and ensure its covered more fully we could break down barriers and tackle the myths

Better lessons, assemblies, more understanding of issues people face, real life experiences, workshops in youth clubs, cultural awareness/workshops, and events. Better programme needs devising to educate young people and rolled out across all schools.

Some young people felt at school PSHE lessons offered the most basic talks on body image but that it wasn't satisfactory and more should be done, . It was a productive session however there was never any real follow up. There has been other issues around this come up in PSHE in particular dealing with peer pressure, these skills are transferable when it comes to dealing with cyber bullying and body image so one way to improve would be to have sessions which bring these issues together rather than trying to deal with them separately.

More needs to be done to raise awareness on body images, particularly the effects of negative body image especially with regards to people's mental health, PSHE lessons should be compulsory and schools should consider assemblies on the subject to ensure the topic is openly discussed and raised amongst as many young people as possible.

9. What examples are there of youth organisations and peer education programmes outside of schools promoting positive body image? Are there examples of programmes focusing on different groups of young people? Are they focusing on different aspects of body image? How effective are these? How should they be evaluated?

Girl guiding ran a campaign on body image which someone thinks was quite successful and that they launched a campaign to make media companies more responsible in creating a positive body image which is a really important campaign. They also did the Girls' attitudes survey which looked at the issues effecting how girls see themselves.

Youth clubs had sessions for young men and young women and also LGBT group in Plymouth and have raised the topics and done work to ensure young people had wider understanding and had support and could make referral's or offer us other ways to get support such as Kooth.com online counselling, or locally Plymouth Options self-referral to services should we need it.

Work also needs to happen with young people that have Health implications, mental health, eating disorders, and body dysmorphia in order to make things normal and ensure people are more accepting of people.

10. To what extent is dissatisfaction with body image contributing to the increase in mental health problems amongst children and young people?

MASSIVELY – it's a major factor

As a lot of young people suffer with body image problems we would say that this massively impacts people's mental health issues. You often feel as if you're not good enough and you should be doing more to fit society's norms and this often impacts on how you feel your friends view you and just how random strangers view you and this can massively impact on how you view yourself which can be really negative for your mental health.

LGBT young people have the added stress and upset of what happens if they are unsupported by their family and could face being shunned by those meant to help and support you, this causes all sorts of other issues that impact mental health and wellbeing.

11. Does the NHS have sufficient resources and expertise to manage mental health issues associated with poor body image? How have changes in education funding impacted on the ability of schools to provide in house mental health services?

The NHS is not sufficiently resourced to manage with any mental health problem including those associated with poor body image. It's had major cuts in every department and it's still faces massive challenges for the future.

We think more needs to be done to promote positive body image and that mental health services should be funded more. Body image and insecurities around it can have some really bad mental and physical health implications. Lots of young people had friends who have suffered depression and developed eating disorders because of their body image insecurities. As well as noting that although some friends don't have serious issues but have undergone slight personality changes, in terms of being more shy and less willing to go out particularly in situations where they feel vulnerable e.g. Swimming.

Some young people had friends who have become obsessive over gym and dieting. As well as young people who become regular online posters about their bodies either to promote self-hate or in some cases bullying others to make themselves feel better about them.

It does cause serious health issues including anorexia and dysmorphia. It can also cause people to change and become more anxious and insecure which can hold them back in life. IN schools in Plymouth we have a mental health worker and school nurse available but often there is a waiting list and they are not based full time at the school so how can they meet the demands of everyone that needs help and support and who decides whose need is greater??

12. Are schools sufficiently linked with health professionals? What more could be done in this regard?"

No sadly they are not linked with enough health professionals sufficiently. We think that once you're in school you are sort of secluded from outside professionals unless you're mental health is very bad and there needs to be an intervention. Some schools offer youth work services but

that depends on a waiting list and staff availability as in Plymouth the service has been cut massively and so everybody has waiting lists for the services.

Schools need more funding in order to have more joined up approach and for everyone to be informed and offer support and compassion in dealing with mental health, body image and health issues, it's not just about promoting teenage pregnancies and learning how to put a condom on we need to be taught how to love ourselves, that's its ok for people to be different and more forward and learn how to be comfortable in our own skin support our friends and sustain healthy relationships with other people in everyday life.

More needs to be done to raise awareness on body images, particularly the effects of negative body image especially with regards to people's mental health. Bullying connected to body image should be challenged and reduced and we need to learn that sexting or making inappropriate comments about other people whilst hiding behind our computers is not appropriate or healthy.

People need to understand you don't need to be a size 6 to be beautiful, Young People need empowering and negative images should be challenged!!

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