

# **The Mind-Body Dilemma: Rethinking the Complex Issue of Body Image and Mental Health**

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Body image dissatisfaction has been recognised as a key concern of Australian women, with longitudinal studies indicating that between 40% and 82% of women are unhappy with their body. Further, depression is the number one burden of disease among women and depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation represent a significant cost to both individual and community. There is a paucity of research regarding psychological outcomes for women with elevated levels of body image disturbance and disordered eating; however it is likely that the risk of depression and diagnosable eating disorders is increased in this population.

The formation of the National Body Image Advisory group has been a major step forward in the Australian mental health landscape; addressing the cultural relationship between media and body image concerns. To make substantive change to mental health outcomes associated with the body image concerns of young women it must be considered that media exposure is only part of the equation. The complexity of body image and the implications of poor body image on everyday mental health functioning must also be considered. Cognitive behavioural models for conceptualising and treating depression and anxiety have been commonplace in psychology for some time now. It is only recently that such models have been applied to body image disturbance. The current paper will present a cognitive behavioural model of body image and depressive symptoms that offers important treatment implications for recovery and early intervention.

## **Key Words**

Body Image, Women's Mental Health, Depression, Disordered Eating