

Press Release

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## Uncovering the emotional scars: Study reveals significant stigma associated with female adult acne

(Thursday, 12 October 2023, Berlin, Germany) New research reveals that acne significantly influences how individuals are perceived in social settings. Faces with acne are seen as less attractive, trustworthy, confident, successful, dominant and happy, with adult female acne having the strongest negative effect.<sup>1</sup>

This ground-breaking research, presented today at the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (EADV) Congress 2023, assessed the effect of different anatomical variants of acne on natural gaze patterns and social perception.<sup>1</sup>

The researchers tracked the eye movements of 245 participants (mean age: 31.63 years; SD: 10.63) who viewed neutral and emotional faces of females with both clear skin and clinically relevant anatomical variants of acne (emotions included 'happy', 'angry' and 'neutral').<sup>1</sup> Images were rated for acne-related visual disturbance while emotional faces were rated for valence intensity.<sup>1</sup> Separately, a group of 205 online survey respondents (mean age: 35.08 years; SD: 11.48) were asked to rate the personality traits of the individuals depicted in the images.<sup>1</sup>

The survey found that faces with acne were perceived as significantly less attractive (difference: 1.1593; 95% CI: 1.0191–1.2995), less trustworthy (difference: 0.3549; 95% CI: 0.2260–0.4838), less successful (difference: 0.6220; 95% CI: 0.4994–0.7445) less confident (difference: 0.9573; 95% CI: 0.7853–1.1293) and less dominant (difference: 0.9086; 95% CI: 0.7495–1.0675).<sup>1</sup>

Notably, the results showed that adult female acne concentrated around the 'U-zone' (around the jawline, mouth and chin) received the lowest scores for attractiveness and was considered the most visually disturbing.<sup>1,2</sup> Happy faces with female adult acne were also rated as less happy than clear-skin faces.<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decade, there has been a 10% increase in adult acne among women worldwide, which commonly affects the jawline and chin but can appear on any part of the face.<sup>3,4</sup> In adults, this condition is known to have serious consequences, including a psychological impact, low self-esteem, social isolation and depression.<sup>3</sup> While genetics represent the most prominent risk factor, other influences such as stress, hormones and diet can heighten an individual's risk of developing acne.<sup>3,4</sup>

Multiple studies have previously shown how the perception of pejorative physical characteristics can lead to social distress, including social isolation, higher biologic stress and even poorer health.<sup>5</sup> Appearance has been shown to play a role in job

competitiveness and has been shown to determine whether an applicant is hired or not.<sup>6</sup>

Discussing the study's findings, Dr Marek Jankowski, the lead author of the study, states, "With over a decade of experience in the field, I've consistently seen that adult female acne leads to more social challenges compared to adolescent acne. The findings therefore reaffirm this. However, what was truly surprising was images depicting generalised acne, covering a larger area with more lesions, received more positive ratings than images featuring adult female acne occurring in the 'U-zone'."

Dr Jankowski underscores the implications of these findings, commenting, "Treatment needs to focus on improving the quality of life of patients, not just reducing the surface area impacted by the acne. Unfortunately, this is not currently a goal when treating acne, with therapeutic guidelines still advocating for certain treatment modalities based on the number of lesions, irrespective of their location. Unsurprisingly, acne severity scores do not correlate with quality-of-life scores in patients with acne."

"These results clearly emphasise the emotional and psychological burden experienced by individuals with acne", Dr Jankowski adds.

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#### Note to editors:

A reference to the EADV Congress 2023 must be included in all coverage and/or articles associated with this study.

For more information or to arrange an expert interview, please contact Phoebe May at [phoebe.may@emotiveagency.com](mailto:phoebe.may@emotiveagency.com) or [press@eadv.org](mailto:press@eadv.org).

#### About the study author:

Dr Marek Jankowski is currently Assistant Professor of Dermatology at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun and managing editor in *Advances in Dermatology and Allergology*. Dr Jankowski graduated from NCU's Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences (Msc in Biotechnology) and Faculty of Medicine (MD) in 2007. After completing internships at Max-Planck-Institute fur Immunbiologie and Charite Berlin, he took interest in gene therapy, resulting in a PhD thesis on cancer gene therapy in 2012. His subsequent work has been in the field of immunology, focusing on the biology of interleukin-27. Dr Jankowski's current research interests include the effects of skin diseases on visual perception and patients' social functioning.

#### About EADV:

Founded in 1987, EADV is a non-profit organisation with a vision to form a premier European Dermatology-Venereology Society. The Academy counts over 9000 members from 120 countries, providing a valuable service for every type of dermatologist-venereologist professional. The EADV is dedicated to advancing patient care, education and research by providing a unique platform to bring people together and share ideas.

This year, the EADV Congress will take place in Berlin, Germany, and online from 11–14 October 2023.

Find out more via the EADV website: <https://www.eadv.org/>

### References:

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3. Dermatology Times. A look at the rise in adult acne in women. October 2022. Available at: <https://www.dermatologytimes.com/view/a-look-at-the-rise-in-adult-acne-in-women> (Accessed: September 2023).
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5. Geiger AM, Sabik NJ, Lupis SB, Rene KM, Wolf JM. Perceived appearance judgments moderate the biological stress effects of social exchanges. *Biol Psychol.* 2014 Dec;103:297-304.
6. The Impact of Physical Appearance on Employment Competitiveness Shihui Pan. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 631