Video Calling May Be Damaging to Mental Health

Younger women were particularly susceptible to developing long-term body image dissatisfaction fueled by videoconferencing.

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With the recent uptick in video calling, many people have experienced heightened concerns about their appearance and what others who see them will think. Recent study findings published in the International Journal of Women's Dermatology show that this has led to an increase in stress and anxiety, with most individuals surveyed worried about their appearance, reports the NYPost.com.

For the study, researchers posted a poll online that included questions about changes in people's self-perception and any anxiety linked with reengaging with others in person. (The survey was developed to focus on the possible mental health effects of videoconferencing, social media and the use of filters to improve one's appearance during video calls.) The survey netted a total of 7,295 responses nationwide from a cross-section of people ages 18 to older than 75.

Of participants who were resuming in-person activities, 70.6% revealed that they felt anxious or stressed out about doing so. In addition, almost 64% of respondents disclosed seeking mental health support services; nearly 30% of those surveyed said they planned to improve their looks due to anxiety about their appearance; and more than 30% committed to changing their appearance. The most common concerns cited included weight gain (37.1%); discolored or scarred skin (32.4%) and wrinkles (24.5%).

Scientists also noted that the pandemic-related rise in time spent on videoconferencing, social media use and the application of filters on these virtual communications platforms led to worsened body image and mental health, particularly among women ages 18 to 24.

"It seemed that at a time like that [the pandemic] other matters would be top of mind, but a lot of people were really concerned with feeling that they looked much worse than usual," dermatologist Arianne Shadi Kourosh, MD, MPH, one of the study's authors, told Wired UK. "A lot of people are suffering from the negative mental health impacts quietly."

Researchers urged families to be aware that as teen and college-aged kids prepare to socialize in real life once again, their escalated use of social media and filters could boost anxiety.

“As we reenter a life of socializing, aesthetic physicians and the medical community at large should be aware of the effects of increased videoconferencing related to worsening mental health and self-perceptions in order to better serve our patients,” researchers concluded.

To learn more about body image and its mental health effects on women, read “Social Media and Faking One’s Looks Online” and “Reflections of You.”

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