

## Woman's Mental Health

"I used to think I had to be somebody else to be liked, but now I know being myself is my greatest strength."— Emma Watson.

In a world that praises perfection but punishes imperfection, women are often expected to wear strength like armour while quietly battling storms beneath the surface. In this day and age, young women are taught to perform for society to meet unrealistic standards, often set by influencer culture that creates social expectations that severely affect women's mental health.

Now what is mental health? World Health Organization defines that, "Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, learn and work well, and contribute to their community." While mental health looks different on everyone, these standards of behaviour set by social media can lead to numerous amounts of mental disorders such as anxiety, anorexia, body dysmorphia.

Today, social media has become both a mirror and a magnifying glass, it reflects distorted images of success, beauty and wellbeing. The digital world, while connecting more than ever, has also pressured women into feeling disconnected from their authentic self.

Many factors affect the mental health of growing young women, while already struggling the independency of young adulthood, the added pressure to look a certain way, to be someone they're not and to project a specific body image is not ideal. The female experience becomes a balancing act between authenticity and comparison. These constraints are worsened by societal expectations, the image of "perfection" and "normality" created by social media, and rigid body image ideals. These influencers are deeply connected as social expectations and media portrayals often create unrealistic beauty standards that distort self-image and self-worth.

To begin, women are conditioned from an early age to live up to social norms that specify not just how they should appear but also how they should act, feel, and live. These expectations have a significant impact while frequently being subtle and ingrained in daily interactions, advertisements, and cultural messages. Girls are urged to put the comfort of others before their own needs and wants and are trained to be kind and understanding. Although these teachings may appear harmless at first glance, they plant the seeds of self-doubt, teaching women that their value is dependent on how closely they conform to an idealised model of femininity.

The burden of these expectations increases as girls enter adolescence and early adulthood, particularly as social comparison and peer pressure intensify cultural norms. One in two Australian women still suffer from mental health problems, and in half of the instances examined, poor self-esteem is listed as the primary trigger,

according to a 2025 research study conducted by the Liptember Foundation. Friends and social networks have the power to either uphold negative norms or provide genuine support that promotes self-acceptance, meaningful connections, and healthy behaviours. However, when obedience and comparison take over, even well-meaning friends may unintentionally add to stress, Brené Brown captures the tension between identity and expectations in her statement, "You don't have to be perfect to be worthy". This internalisation skews identity, making it difficult to accept one's true self, and has a long-lasting effect on mental health. Addressing the larger issues women confront today and establishing setting where authenticity and self-worth are valued over perfection require an understanding of the pervasive influence of social standards, peer pressure and lifestyle demands.

Now, in this world, body image, which is intertwined with the burden of social expectations, is one of the most personal and excruciating issues that young women face. From the magazines on store shelves to the casual comments made by friends, these ideas are present in every part of life. For many women, their sense of worth is conditioned by their reflection in the mirror rather than their inner strength, and what begins as a desire to "fit in" quickly transforms into self-scrutiny. A 2024 Butterfly Foundation report revealed that four in five Australian women feel dissatisfied with their bodies, and over 50% say these feelings negatively affect their mental health. The numbers are more than statistics, they represent millions of silent struggles fought daily in front of mirrors, in dressing rooms, and behind screens.

Peer pressure makes this inner conflict even worse. Even friends who mean well and tell you to eat "healthy" or praise being thin can make you feel bad about yourself and compare yourself to others. This culture of quiet competition makes it hard to tell the difference between wellness and obsession. When self-esteem goes down, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders often follow. These are signs of a society that has made perfection a requirement for acceptance.

Naomi Wolf previously stated, "A culture that is fixated with women being thin is not obsessed with beauty; it is obsessed with obedience." Her words still hold true today. The constant search for an unattainable ideal takes away joy, confidence, and a sense of self, making self-love an act of rebellion. Women need to take back control of their bodies in order to heal. True mental health can only begin to grow when society stops evaluating women by their external look.

Now we must find the base of such issues. If social norms make up the framework and body image makes up the mirror, then social media is the spotlight that shows every flaw, comparison, and insecurity. Young women use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat to show off their identities and get people to like them. Every post, like, and filtered photo adds to the unspoken idea that beauty, popularity, and success are all ways to measure worth. What used to be a place to connect has turned into a digital

battleground for approval. Headspace Australia (2023) says that more than 70% of young Australian women say social media makes their mental health worse. Many of them say that after scrolling online, they feel more anxious, have lower self-esteem, and are unhappy with their bodies. The never-ending stream of "perfect" lives serves as a continual reminder of their shortcomings, such as their inability to be sufficiently successful, thin, or successful.

The notion that happiness is performative is an even more perilous illusion that exists behind the screens. Edits and filters distort reality to the point where authenticity is no longer enough. The constant need to be noticed, liked, and validated takes the place of the distinction between self-expression and self-presentation. Young women unconsciously adopt unrealistic standards that measure their value against manufactured ideals due to the carefully manicured perfection of influencers and celebrities. The emotional toll is real even if they are aware that the photos have been altered. Comparison fatigue, a silent decline in confidence that erodes mental health, is encouraged by this digital distortion.

"How you feel in your own skin is more important than how you look," Emma Watson famously said. However, social media frequently deprives women of this inner tranquillity in favour of an algorithmic quest for approval. The same demands that exist offline are mirrored and intensified by the pressure on sustaining an ideal online persona. Social media will keep promoting a culture of comparison until women can reclaim these areas as platforms for reality rather than perfection, endangering not just their sense of worth but also the fundamental basis of mental health.

In a world that profits from women doubting themselves, selecting self-acceptance becomes the most drastic action of all in a society that benefits from women's self-doubt. Every filtered photo, every whispered comparison, and every social expectation serves as an indicator of how society has subtly taught women to assess their value based on what other people think of them. Young women's expectations of themselves and how they think others should perceive them are shaped by a trio of factors that penetrate the mind: the expectations of social approval, their obsession with appearance, and the constant accessibility of social media. Beneath this burden, however, lies an empowering reality: women have always had the capacity to rewrite history.

The first step on the road to recovery is awareness is recognizing that mental health is a mirror reflecting the price of unattainable ideals rather than a sign of weakness. Women regain their power and their peace of mind when they defy the expectations placed on them and choose authenticity over approval. Once a battlefield, body image can now be a place of pride and acceptance. When women stop apologizing for who they are and instead embrace it as authentic, unapologetic, and unquestionably real, change starts.

"The truest, most beautiful life never promises to be an easy one," as author Glennon Doyle famously stated. The lie that it is supposed to must be abandoned. Women's mental health is worthy of change, not just pity. Empathy, education, and a shared resolve to destroy the culture that encourages women to shrink are the first steps on the path to that change. And in that growth, the future is characterized by unwavering strength, connection, and hope rather than silent endurance.

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