

Study reveals global breast size dissatisfaction

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A new global study has found that the majority of women are unhappy with the size of their breasts—a finding that has important public health implications.

The Breast Size Satisfaction Survey (BSSS), led by Professor Viren Swami of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), brought together over 100 international experts to conduct surveys with 18,541 [women](#) in 40 countries, making it the largest cross-cultural study to examine [body image](#) ever undertaken.

Published in the journal *Body Image*, the research discovered that 48% of women who participated wanted larger breasts than they currently have, 23% of women wanted smaller breasts, and only 29% of women were satisfied with the size of their breasts. The average (mean) age of the women taking part in the study was 34.

Women who were dissatisfied with their breast size admitted they were less likely to practice breast self-examination and were less confident about detecting changes with their breasts, which are important self-care practices for the early detection of breast cancer.

The study also found that breast size [dissatisfaction](#) is associated with poorer psychological well-being—including lower levels of self-esteem and happiness—and that women with breast size dissatisfaction were more likely to be dissatisfied with their weight and overall appearance.

Women in Brazil, Japan, China, Egypt, and the UK have the greatest breast size dissatisfaction—the difference between their current breast size and their ideal breast size. Women in India, Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon, and the UK have the largest ideal breast size, while women in Japan, the Philippines, Germany, Austria, and Malaysia reported the smallest ideal breast size.

Lead researcher Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said: "Our findings are important because they indicate that the majority of women worldwide may be dissatisfied with the size of their breasts. This is a serious public health concern because it has significant implications for the physical and psychological well-being of women.

"Breast cancer is the leading cause of female cancer-related deaths worldwide and poor survival rates are associated with poorer breast awareness. Breast size dissatisfaction may result in avoidance behaviours that reduce breast awareness, particularly if a woman's breasts trigger feelings of anxiety, shame, or embarrassment.

"Our study found a direct link between greater breast size dissatisfaction and poorer breast awareness, as seen through lower frequency of breast self-examination and lower confidence in detecting changes in the breasts, and this requires urgent public health intervention.

"We also found that despite historical differences across nations, breast size ideals are now similar across the 40 nations we surveyed. This suggests that the objectification of medium-to-large breasts is now a global phenomenon.

"Another key finding is that breast size dissatisfaction decreases with age. It is possible that older women experience less pressure to attain [breast](#) size ideals or that motherhood and breastfeeding encourages

women to focus on the functional purposes of breasts rather than seeing them purely in aesthetic terms."

More information: Viren Swami et al, The Breast Size Satisfaction Survey (BSSS): Breast size dissatisfaction and its antecedents and outcomes in women from 40 nations, *Body Image* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.01.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.01.006)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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