



# SMILE Body Project: Protocol for a Randomized Controlled Trial of an Online Eating Disorder Prevention Program in Young Women with Body Dissatisfaction (with and without psychiatric illness)

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**Introduction:** Eating disorders (ED) are common among young women and are associated with substantial psychological and physical morbidity. Risk is particularly elevated among individuals with psychiatric illness, yet preventive interventions have rarely been evaluated across both clinical and non-clinical populations. The Body Project, a dissonance-based intervention, has demonstrated robust effects in reducing ED risk factors and onset, but its applicability in populations with varying levels of psychiatric vulnerability remains unclear.

**Aims:** This study describes the protocol for the SMILE Body Project, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluating an adapted, online ED prevention program in young women with and without psychiatric illness. The primary outcome is onset of ED at 2-year follow-up, assessed using a structured diagnostic interview. Secondary outcomes include changes in ED symptoms, body dissatisfaction, psychiatric symptoms, quality of life, and potential moderators such as psychiatric status and social media use.

**Methods:** This ongoing RCT aims to recruit 300 women aged 15–30 years with body dissatisfaction, including individuals with a diagnosed psychiatric disorder and those without. Participants are randomized (1:1) to either a virtually delivered, peer-led Body Project intervention or an active control condition based on expressive writing. The intervention consists of four structured group sessions targeting

thin-ideal internalization through cognitive dissonance-based exercises and has been adapted to increase relevance for participants with psychiatric vulnerability, including a greater focus on social media influences.

**Results:** We hypothesize that the SMILE Body Project will reduce ED onset and symptomatology compared to controls, with potential variation in effect depending on psychiatric status.

**Discussion:** This trial will provide novel evidence on the effectiveness and scalability of an online, peer-led ED prevention program across risk groups. If effective, the intervention may support implementation of accessible, low-cost prevention strategies for young women both with and without psychiatric illness.