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PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF HAIRDRESSING: THE IMPACT OF HAIRSTYLES ON SELF-ESTEEM AND MENTAL HEALTH

Summary. *Introduction.* In the context of increasing attention to the psychosocial determinants of health, the role of hairstyle and hair condition is considered as an important factor shaping self-esteem, emotional well-being, and social adaptation. Hair functions not only as an aesthetic element but also as a symbol of personal and cultural identity, directly influencing the perception of attractiveness, self-confidence, and quality of interpersonal communication.

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to analyze the psychosocial dimensions of hairdressing, to identify the impact of hairstyles on self-esteem and mental health, and to determine the role of the hairdresser-stylist as a mediator between individual characteristics and social expectations.

Materials and methods. The methodological basis of the study combines approaches of social psychology, cultural studies, and clinical psychology. The analysis integrates scientometric data, clinical research on alopecia and hair disorders, and sociocultural studies of beauty norms. Comparative and logical analysis, synthesis of interdisciplinary findings, and the interpretation of empirical studies were applied to examine the psychosocial significance of hairstyle.

Results. The study revealed that hairstyle is closely connected with self-identification, confidence, and social inclusion. Satisfaction with hair condition enhances body image and resilience, while alopecia and hair loss are associated

with increased risks of depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Adaptive strategies such as wigs, volumizing haircuts, coloring techniques, and camouflaging methods mitigate psychoemotional discomfort and restore a sense of control over appearance. The role of the hairdresser-stylist extends beyond aesthetic services, encompassing empathetic communication and support that strengthen client self-esteem. Salons and barbershops were identified as informal spaces of psychological support, facilitating social ties and fostering community integration.

Further research in this area. Future studies should focus on developing structured models for integrating psychological support into the practice of hairdressers and barbers, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of these models in preventing emotional disorders and enhancing clients’ psychological resilience.

Key words: *hairstyle, self-esteem, alopecia, emotional well-being, hairdresser-stylist, social support, identity, mental health.*

Introduction. Within the hairdressing industry, a hairstyle is understood as part of one’s outward image and a significant psychosocial marker that affects self-esteem, perceived attractiveness, and psychological well-being [6]. Hair functions as a symbol of identity, cultural affiliation, and individual self-presentation; its shape, color, and texture can bolster an internal sense of confidence or, conversely, trigger a feeling of social vulnerability. In this context, the professional activity of the hairdresser-stylist entails working with the client’s deep layers of self-relation, touching on domains of personal and social experience.

Research indicates that a hairstyle can serve as a means of restoring control over the “self-image” in situations of crisis, loss, or discrimination [7]. A change in style or color often becomes a symbolic act reflecting life transitions, the overcoming of traumatic events, or the desire to mark a new stage in life [2]. At

the same time, negative social attitudes and bias toward certain hair types—from ethnically determined textures to signs of hair loss or alopecia—can generate persistent stress, leading to reduced self-esteem, social withdrawal, and a diminished quality of life [5].

From the standpoint of psychosocial dynamics, the choice of hairstyle and others’ reactions to it are connected with processes of identification, self-assertion, and adaptation to social norms [1]. Under pressure from dominant beauty standards, clients may vacillate internally between self-expression and the need to conform to an expected image, giving rise to ambivalence and anxiety [6]. Especially vulnerable are groups whose cultural or biological hair characteristics do not fit prevailing aesthetic norms, which requires the hairdresser-stylist to demonstrate heightened sensitivity to diversity and inclusion [7].

The aim of this article is to analyze the psychosocial dimensions of hairdressing, to identify the impact of hairstyles on self-esteem and mental health, and to define the role of the hairdresser-stylist as a mediator between the client’s individual characteristics and social expectations.

Materials and Methods. The methodological framework of this study lies at the intersection of social psychology, cultural studies, and clinical psychology, with an emphasis on psychosocial factors that determine the influence of hairstyles on self-esteem and mental health. The topic’s interdisciplinary nature necessitates integrating data that capture the clinical consequences of hair disorders and the sociocultural mechanisms shaping the perception of appearance.

In Daniels G. [3], hair is emphasized as an element of personal and social identity, particularly in older adults, for whom changing a hairstyle becomes a way to sustain self-respect and emotional resilience. Clarke-Jeffers P. [1] examines the experience of women living with alopecia through the lens of social support, showing that psychological well-being largely depends on acknowledgment and empathy from one’s environment. Nkimheng M. [7]

demonstrates how hair-based discrimination affects physical and mental health, which permits interpreting hairdressing practice as a potential form of social protection and client advocacy. Hwang H. W. [5] studies the psychosocial consequences of female-pattern hair loss, highlighting reduced quality of life and heightened anxiety. Gupta A. K. [4], drawing on Global Burden of Disease Study data, quantifies the population-level impact of alopecia areata as a factor influencing mental health. The systematic review by van Dalen M. [9] and the cross-sectional study by Yildiz H. [10] complement these findings, demonstrating associations between alopecia and anxiety/depressive symptoms across age groups and sociocultural contexts. Courtney A. [2] discusses the use of wigs as a strategy for compensating hair loss, including economic and emotional considerations.

Integrating these results supports viewing hairdressing as a potential mediator between individual self-experience and social expectations. This approach enables an analytical model in which the hairstyle functions simultaneously as a means of self-expression, a therapeutic resource, and a vehicle of cultural communication.

Results. The psychosocial role of hairstyle in the structure of self-perception is complex and multilayered, forming at the junction of cultural, social, and personal factors. Daniels G. [3] underscores that hair, as one of the most visible aspects of appearance, performs the function of symbolic self-representation, reflecting inner identity and cultural belonging. This symbolic weight confers emotional significance on hairstyle, granting it the status of both an aesthetic and psychological resource.

A key mechanism by which hairstyle influences self-esteem is its linkage to the inner “self-image.” As Keigan J. [6] notes, satisfaction with one’s hair correlates with a positive body image and a stable sense of attractiveness, whereas negative perceptions can elicit feelings of incongruence, intensify self-criticism, and erode self-confidence. The influence of cultural norms and ethnic background

on hair perception is a critical facet of psychosocial dynamics. Nkimbeng M. [7] indicates that dominant beauty standards can exert substantial pressure on members of ethnic groups whose natural hair textures and forms diverge from prevailing aesthetic canons.

The emotional impact of comments about hairstyle plays an important role in shaping psychoemotional states. Daniels G. [3] showed that positive feedback can enhance perceived attractiveness and foster emotional resilience, whereas negative remarks—especially those reflecting hair-type bias—may provoke anxiety, social isolation, and a sense of non-acceptance. Table 1 presents key psychosocial effects of hairstyle together with practical recommendations for hairdresser-stylists aimed at maintaining and strengthening client self-esteem.

Table 1

Psychosocial effects of hairstyle and recommendations for hairdresser-stylists

Psychosocial aspect	Manifestation in research	Recommendations for hairdresser-stylist
Self-identification	Hair as part of personal and cultural identity, especially in ethnic groups	Consider the client's cultural and personal preferences when selecting a style
Self-esteem	Hair satisfaction increases confidence, dissatisfaction reduces it	Suggest styles that emphasize strengths of the appearance
Discrimination	Hair bias may cause anxiety and reduce confidence	Avoid evaluative judgments about hair “quality”, use neutral language

Source: compiled by the author based on sources: [3; 6; 7]

Loss of hair or marked changes in hair structure present both dermatological and psychosocial challenges that strongly affect emotional well-being. Clarke-Jeffers P. [1] found that alopecia—especially in its active phase—often co-occurs with depressive symptoms, anxiety disorders, and a reduced overall quality of life. This effect occurs in both women and men, but is more acute among women, which is linked to the higher cultural salience of hair in

constructing the “self-image.” Courtney A. [2] emphasizes that using wigs and alternative styles becomes, for many patients, a way to compensate for psychological discomfort and to restore a sense of control over appearance. Such solutions do not address the medical cause of hair loss but can alleviate its psychoemotional consequences, minimize social withdrawal, and support a positive image. In a meta-analysis, van Dalen M. [9] concluded that alopecia areata is associated with higher rates of depression and anxiety than in the general population, and Yildiz H. [10] adds that symptom severity correlates with disease duration and the extent of hair loss.

For hairdresser-stylists working with clients experiencing hair loss, it is important to offer technically competent solutions while taking the client’s psychological context into account. In practice, adaptive strategies—including selection of wigs, gentle care techniques, and haircuts and coloring that visually increase volume—can improve appearance and strengthen client self-esteem and social engagement. Table 2 outlines major medical conditions associated with hair loss or alteration, their psychological consequences, and possible stylist solutions based on clinical and psychosocial research.

Table 2

Psychological consequences of alopecia and adaptive strategies

Condition	Psychological impact	Possible stylist solutions
Alopecia areata	High levels of depression and anxiety, reduced quality of life	Selection of wigs, consultations on gentle hair care techniques
Diffuse hair loss	Low self-confidence, avoidance of social interactions	Suggesting hairstyles that mask thinning areas
Female pattern hair loss	Prolonged stress, alteration of self-image	Creating voluminous cuts and coloring to visually thicken hair

Source: compiled by the author based on sources: [1; 2; 5; 9]

The analysis confirms that, in such cases, the role of the hairdresser-stylist extends beyond purely aesthetic functions. The practitioner acts as an intermediary between the client’s medical reality and social adaptation, helping to overcome psychological barriers and restore harmony between the internal image and external perception. This approach is especially effective when combined with respect for the client’s individual experience and a deliberate avoidance of language that could amplify emotional vulnerability.

Discussion. The hairdresser-stylist is often the first professional consulted when appearance changes arise from natural processes as well as medical or stress-related factors. Ogborn G. [8] shows that even within brief interactions—such as those typical of barbershops—the stylist mediates between the client’s inner state and visual self-presentation.

Empathy and sensitive communication are foundational to effective practice in psychoemotionally vulnerable situations. As Daniels G. [3] notes, style selection in such contexts exceeds a purely aesthetic task. The stylist becomes a kind of emotional “container,” absorbing the client’s experiences, normalizing them, and helping to transform negative experience into a more positive self-perception. Supportive interaction can attenuate acute emotional reactions provoked by negative comments or by a client’s own critical view of appearance. Clarke-Jeffers P. [1] emphasizes that, when working with clients facing hair loss or pronounced hairstyle changes, creating a safe communicative environment is particularly important.

Contemporary hair salons and barbershops serve functions well beyond hair care and aesthetic transformation. As Ogborn G. [8] indicates, these venues often become sites of informal psychological support, especially for men, who traditionally are less inclined to seek professional psychotherapy. The salon setting—characterized by trusting, often extended conversation—creates conditions for durable social ties and reduced feelings of isolation. The social role of such spaces manifests in their capacity to bolster client self-esteem. The study

by Daniels G. [7] showed that involving clients in choosing a style and openly demonstrating possible options enhance the sense of personal involvement and control over the “self-image.” Positive reinforcement—expressed through compliments and recognition of individual features—builds a supportive emotional background that persists beyond the salon visit. Table 3 presents key social functions of salons and barbershops.

Table 3

Social functions of salons and barbershops for clients’ psychological well-being

Function	Manifestations in studies	Application in practice
Social support	Reduction of isolation, especially among men during stress periods	Creating a friendly atmosphere and a safe space
Self-esteem enhancement	Compliments, client involvement in style choice	Interactive consultations with demonstrations of possible styles
Psychoeducational role	Ability to gently guide clients to mental health specialists	Training staff in basic psychological communication skills

Source: compiled by the author based on sources: [8; 7]

Thus, the social function of hair salons and barbershops extends beyond the common view of them as places solely for appearance care. They emerge as important elements of local social infrastructure that can exert a gentle yet meaningful influence on clients’ emotional state and psychological resilience. To realize this potential, it is necessary to purposefully integrate elements of emotional support and psychoeducational practices into the day-to-day work of hairdressers and barbershop professionals.

Conclusion. This study identified key psychosocial mechanisms by which hairstyle and hair condition affect self-esteem, emotional state, and social inclusion. Hair perception proved to be an integral component of personal and cultural identity, capable of enhancing a sense of self-worth or, conversely,

provoking inner insecurity and social withdrawal. The analysis showed that positive changes in outward image can reinforce the “self-image” and stimulate proactive social engagement, whereas hair loss or abrupt transformation is often accompanied by depressive and anxious states that call for sensitive psychological support.

The role of the hairdresser-stylist as the first point of contact during appearance changes is of particular importance. A professional with empathy, tactful communication skills, and cultural understanding can turn style selection into a form of gentle psychoemotional intervention. Such interaction strengthens client self-esteem and helps lower stress levels, especially when working with clients facing crisis-related changes in appearance.

The social function of hair salons and barbershops is evident in their capacity to serve as spaces of informal psychological support and prevention of emotional distress. Creating an atmosphere of trust, involving the client in style choice, and incorporating psychoeducational elements establish a new level of interaction between practitioner and client, where the aesthetic service becomes an instrument for supporting psychological well-being.

The presented data suggest that the most effective approach to preventing psychoemotional stress associated with hair changes is to integrate aesthetic, emotional, and educational functions into everyday practice among hairdressers and barbershop professionals. Hairdressing thus appears not only as a sphere of aesthetic services but also as a significant element of psychosocial support capable of influencing client self-esteem, emotional state, and social adaptation. Future research should focus on developing structured models for integrating psychological dimensions into salon and barbershop work and on evaluating the effectiveness of such models in preventing emotional disorders and strengthening clients’ psychological resilience.

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