

## **DPhil Research Project: Developing an Understanding and Psychological Treatment for Trichotillomania in Adolescents**

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### **Description of Project**

Trichotillomania is a body-focussed repetitive behaviour (BFRB) which involves uncontrollable urges to repeatedly pull out one's hair, resulting in hair loss. It often begins in childhood or early adolescence (Ricketts et al., 2022, Grant & Chamberlain, 2021) and becomes chronic throughout adulthood, causing significant distress and functional impairment (Woods et al, 2006). Young people with trichotillomania commonly experience other mental health difficulties such as generalised anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder and depression (Ricketts et al., 2022).

In general, there is a lack of evidence around mechanisms that underlie the onset and maintenance of trichotillomania and other BFRB's. There is some emerging evidence that there are significantly higher levels of impulsivity and distress tolerance in young people with a range of body-focused repetitive behaviours (Ricketts et. all, 2022).

This DPhil will use a range of methodologies to further our understanding of trichotillomania in adolescence. This knowledge will inform an original model, from which an evidence-based treatment will be developed. The programme of work is likely to include:

- A systematic review/meta-analysis examining the relationship between trichotillomania in adolescents and potential maintenance mechanisms (e.g., shame).
- A qualitative study interviewing adolescents about their lived experiences of trichotillomania to further investigate potential causal and maintaining mechanisms. Purposive sampling will be used to include young people who are neurodivergent (who may be elevated risk of developing trichotillomania).
- Testing hypothesised maintaining factors in experimental studies.
- Development of a co-designed specialised psychological treatment which aims to reverse the empirically validated maintaining factors and piloting of the treatment.

We are committed to patient and public involvement and engagement in our research. Prof Clare Mackay, one of the supervisors of this project has personal experience of trichotillomania (e.g., [www.psych.ox.ac.uk/news/trichotillomania-emerging-from-under-the-cloak-of-shame](http://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/news/trichotillomania-emerging-from-under-the-cloak-of-shame), and listen to recent Radio 4 Woman's Hour interview <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001ngqj>). The DPhil will involve engaging with young people with lived experience throughout to ensure the project is meaningful to potential beneficiaries and is conducted in ways that involve them and are acceptable to them.