

Body piercing placement and its impact in the employment setting

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Medical Studies 2026; 42 (1): 60–65

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5114/ms.2026.160449>

Key words: body piercing, professional environment, work, employment.

Abstract

Introduction: While body piercing has become a popular form of self-expression among young adults, the decision to undergo such procedures often overlooks the potential social impact on future employability, as perceptions of professionalism can be significantly influenced by the location and visibility of body modifications.

Aim of the research: The study explored the views of young adults with and without body piercings on the social acceptability of body modifications in professional settings.

Material and methods: The study comprised a total of 1000 individuals aged 20–23 years. The sample group contained 500 individuals having at least one body piercing, with men qualifying by having any piercing, and women by having a piercing outside the auricle area. The control group of equal size was comprised of individuals without any body piercings and women with piercings located only in the earlobes.

Results and conclusions: Recruiters tended to perceive body piercings in job candidates as negatively affecting hiring decisions ($\chi^2 = 28.2$; $p < 0.001$), even those having body piercing themselves. From the candidates' perspective, individuals without body modifications were significantly more likely than those with to consider piercings as a disqualifying factor in employment prospects ($\chi^2 = 11.3$; $p < 0.01$). Both the study and control groups identified facial piercings as the most likely to be viewed negatively in a professional context. Additionally, both groups consistently agreed that visible body piercings should be avoided by individuals holding public trust positions ($\chi^2 = 85.3$; $p < 0.001$). However, this belief would not correspond to perceptions of such employees as less trustworthy or competent ($\chi^2 = 11.7$; $p < 0.001$).

Introduction

In contemporary “consumer-driven” culture, the human body is increasingly becoming a canvass for self-expression, reflecting and constructing an individual's identity. Despite societal scrutiny and possible judgment [1], there is a growing trend toward body modification procedures, which individuals often perceive as enhancing their aesthetic appeal and self-image [2, 3]. Regardless of a growing awareness of potential post-procedure health complications [4, 5], body piercing, alongside tattooing, continues to gain popularity. The social perception of symmetrical earlobe piercing has evolved to the point where it no longer generates social controversy [6, 7], to the extent that it is often excluded from studies on body modifications [8]. Although earlobe piercings are generally considered safe from a medical standpoint, body modifications in other areas can lead to a range of health complications [9, 10]. While young adults declare their awareness regarding the possible medical risks of body modifications [11, 12], they nonetheless pursue such procedures as a means of expressing their identity, individuality, and to enhance their physical attractiveness [13–17]. However, the decision to undergo body

modifications often overlooks the potential long-term consequences for professional advancement. Depending on the type of employment sought, physical appearance may significantly impact hiring decisions, potentially limiting career opportunities.

Although employment is one of the central aspects of human life, the impact of visible body modifications on hiring prospects has been relatively understudied. Only with the increasing competitiveness of the job market and the subsequent tightening of recruitment processes has this issue gained significant scholarly attention [18]. Previous research has demonstrated that physical appearance may greatly influence employment decisions, with employers using it as a criterion for hiring [19, 20], and it can impact the customer's perception of service quality [21, 22]. Existing research on the relationship between body modifications and employment perspectives has primarily focused on tattoos [23–25], whereas body piercings – despite their growing popularity – receive comparatively less attention.

Aim of the research

This study aimed to investigate the perception of young adults with and without body piercings

Table 1. Acceptance of body piercing, perceptions of employers ($n = 136$) and potential employees ($n = 1000$)

From an employer’s perspective, would you consider body piercing a disqualifying factor for a job candidate?				
Variable	Respondents participating in hiring new employees (n = 136)		χ^2	P-value
Yes	54%		28.2	< 0.001
Difficult to say	18%			
No	28%			
From an employee’s perspective, would you consider body piercing a disqualifying factor for a job candidate?				
Variable	Study group (n = 500)	Control group (n = 500)	χ^2	P-value
Yes	39%	47.4	11.3	< 0.01
No	61%	52.6%		

Source: own study.

regarding the acceptability of body modifications in professional settings.

Material and methods

The study involved a sample of 1000 participants aged 20–23 years, who completed the authorial questionnaire, containing both close-ended and semi-open questions. The respondents were divided into two equal groups – a study group and a control group – each consisting of 500 participants. Given the highly common occurrence of symmetrical earlobe piercing in women, the study employed different inclusion criteria for male and female participants regarding the study and control groups. The former comprised men with any body piercing and women with a piercing other than in the earlobes. The eligibility criteria for the control group were the absence of any piercing for either gender, with the exception that women could have earlobe piercing, provided it appeared as a single piercing spot. The presence of any additional piercing in either one or both earlobes was sufficient for a female participant to be assigned to the study group. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential, in accordance with the Act on the Protection of Personal Data of 1997 (Journal of Laws No. 133, item 883). Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Bioethics Committee (No. 7/2013).

Results

Body piercing was significantly more prevalent among women than men ($\chi^2 = 93.7$; $p < 0.001$). In fact, only 2.8% of male participants reported having any type of body piercing. In the study group, 5.4% had one piercing modification located in a non-standard area, 2% had two piercing modifications, 41.3% reported three, 27% reported four, 13.6% reported five, 5.2% reported six, and 5.6% reported seven or more piercing items. The highest number of piercings reported by an individual study participant was 33. The most com-

mon piercing locations were the earlobes (91.2%), followed by the auricular cartilage (46.2%), navel (26.4%), tongue (8.6%), nose (7.2%), eyebrow (4.4%), lips (2.6%), intimate areas (1.8%), and chin (0.8%).

The study sample comprised primarily full-time college students (97.6%). In terms of employment status, there was a slight difference in employment rates between the study and control groups, with 37.2% and 41.4%, respectively, reporting being employed. Of the employed respondents, 12% of the study group ($n = 60$) and 15.2% of the control group ($n = 76$) reported that they were involved in conducting a recruitment process within their workplace. Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of the perceptions of employers and potential employees regarding the impact of body piercings on the course of job interviews.

Within the group of the respondents engaged in hiring new employees ($n = 136$), body piercing was found to potentially negatively influence the decision to offer job ($\chi^2 = 28.2$; $p < 0.001$). Recruiters without body modifications were only slightly more inclined to reject candidates with visible piercings than recruiters having such modifications themselves (study group: 51.7%, control group: 55.2%).

Considering the job candidates, a significant discrepancy between the groups was observed in the perceived impact of body modifications on employment. While 39% of the candidates with body modifications believed visible piercing to be an employment barrier, this perception was considerably higher in the group having no body modifications, reaching 47.4% ($\chi^2 = 11.3$; $p < 0.01$).

Figure 1 below presents piercing locations most likely to negatively impact employment prospects.

The study found that both study and control groups regarded facial piercings as the most likely to negatively impact employment opportunities. This shared perspective is further supported by the absence of statistically significant differences between the groups. Paradoxically, individuals with body

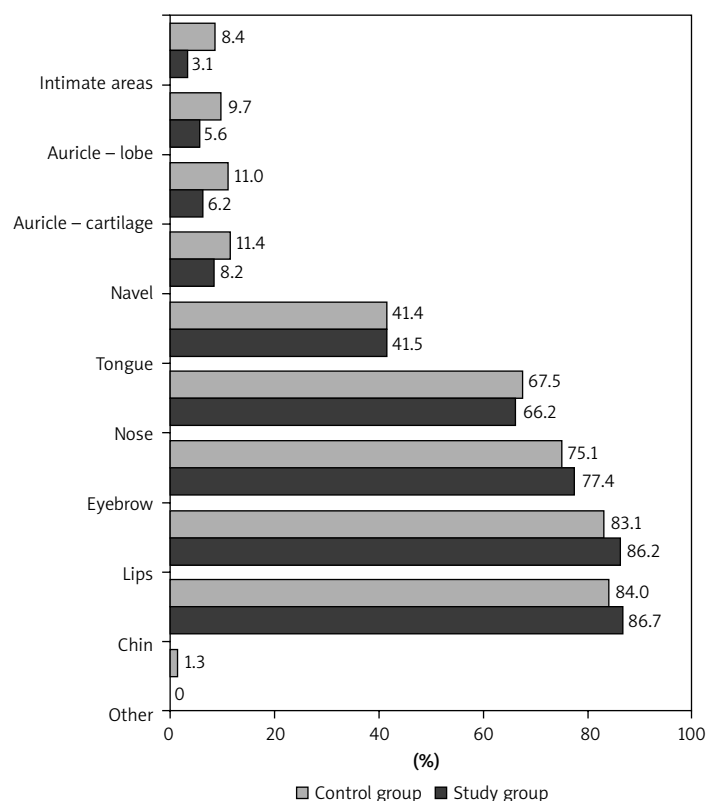


Figure 1. Body piercing location that could potentially results in rejecting a candidate. Source: own study

Table 2. The impact of body piercing on the perception of professional competences in individuals holding positions of public trust ($n = 1000$)

Should body piercing be allowed for individuals in positions of public trust?				
Group	Yes	No	χ^2	P-value
Study group (n = 500)	72.8%	27.2%	28.7	< 0.001
Control group (n = 500)	56.4%	43.6%		
Should persons holding positions of public trust be allowed to wear visible piercings?				
All respondents (n = 1000)	35.4%	64.6%	85.3	< 0.001
Do visible body modifications, such as piercings, negatively impact perceptions of professional competence in individuals holding positions of public trust?				
All respondents (n = 1000)	44.6%	55.4%	11.7	< 0.001

Source: own study.

modifications were more likely to express disapproval of certain piercing locations. Facial piercings, particularly those located in the chin, lips, and eyebrows, were most frequently considered as barriers to employment by both groups. Nose and tongue piercings were also viewed negatively (nearly half of the respondents), although to a slightly lesser extent.

Table 2 presents the relationship between body piercings in individuals holding positions of public trust and the perception of their professional competences.

The study found that body modifications in public trust professions received a higher acceptance in the study group (72.8%), whereas this percentage was significantly lower in the control group 56.4% ($\chi^2 = 28.7$; $p < 0.001$). However, given the entire sample ($n = 1000$), visible body modifications were generally considered inappropriate for individuals in positions of public trust ($\chi^2 = 85.3$; $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, despite differences in personal experiences with body modifications, both groups demonstrated a high degree of consensus regarding the negative implications

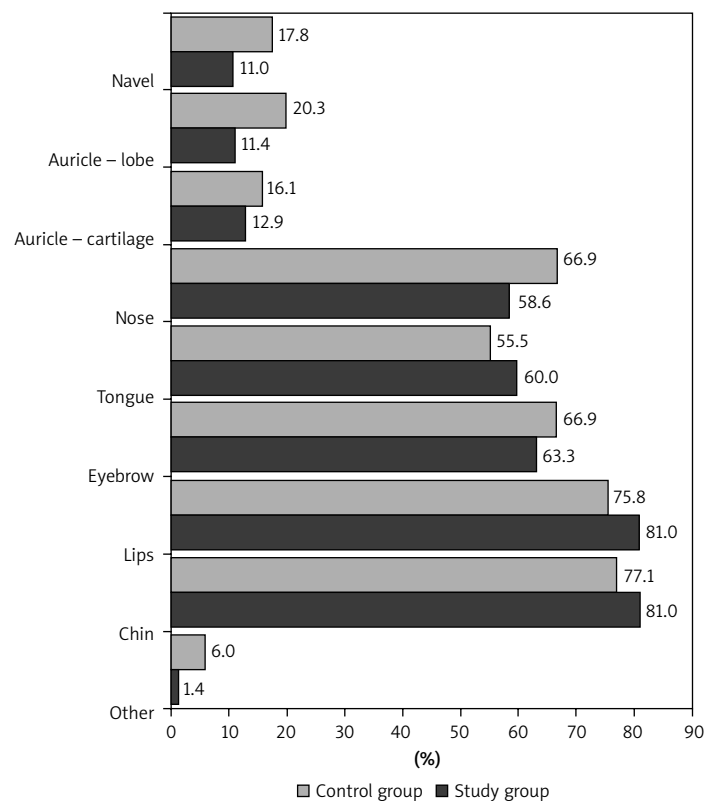


Figure 2. Piercing location that would undermine trust to individuals holding public trust positions. Source: own study

of certain piercings for individuals in public trust professions, with statistical analysis revealing no significant differences between the two groups. Nonetheless, respondents in both groups acknowledged that facial piercings would not necessarily undermine the perceived competence of individuals holding positions of public trust ($\chi^2 = 11.7$; $p < 0.001$). The chin, lips, eyebrows, tongue, and nose were identified as the most controversial piercing locations.

Figure 2 illustrates piercing locations that would be considered as having the largest negative impact upon perceived competences in the individuals holding public trust positions.

Discussion

The relationship between non-standard body piercing and employment prospects is still an under-explored area of research. Given the increasing prevalence of such body modifications and the changing social landscape, there is a clear need for further investigation into how these modifications are perceived in professional settings.

The relationship between body modifications and employment outcomes was explored by Tetteh, Annor, and Abdul-Nasiru [18] in a sample of 240 MBA students holding different managerial positions. The study found that individuals with visible body modifications

were significantly less likely to be hired compared to those without. The authors attributed this bias to fundamental attribution errors, suggesting that individuals with non-normative appearances were viewed as having lower professional competence and a greater propensity for behaviours deviating from traditional norms, particularly regarding men. The negative impact of body modifications on employment outcomes was less pronounced only in roles that did not require direct contact with customers. Similar findings were presented by Miller *et al.* [26] based upon experimental research. In customer-facing roles, visible body piercing was not accepted and could even become grounds for rejecting a potential employee. In addition, Adisa *et al.* [27] demonstrated that individuals with visible body modifications may experience stigmatisation and discriminatory treatment in professional settings. The authors argue that visible body piercings can serve as a barrier to employment, potentially leading to job rejection regardless of the applicant's qualifications, or to a considerably increased risk of employment termination for existing employees acquiring such modification. Employers, prioritising organisational interest, are less likely to hire candidates with visible body piercing [28, 29], often regarding them as less conscientious and trustworthy [30].

The aim of the study was to assess views of young adults with and without body piercings on the social

acceptability of body modifications in professional settings. It has been found that despite the increasing popularity of body modifications, the stigma surrounding piercings in professional contexts remains persistent. Even the individuals with body modifications were found to express reservations about hiring pierced candidates. Regardless of their own body modifications or lack thereof, the respondents in the group engaged in hiring candidates perceived visible piercings as a hindrance to job prospects ($\chi^2 = 28.2$; $p < 0.001$). The respondents from the control group shared a similar view in that regard. On the other hand, the individuals from the study group were more optimistic, claiming that body piercing should not constitute grounds for being rejected in the job recruitment process ($\chi^2 = 11.3$; $p < 0.01$). Participants from both groups were consistent in highlighting piercings in the chin, lips, and eyebrows as the most likely to negatively influence employment outcomes. Both study and control group participants expressed disapproval of body piercings in professions of public trust ($\chi^2 = 85.3$; $p < 0.001$). However, paradoxically, neither group deemed these modifications to undermine trust in or competence of individuals in such roles ($\chi^2 = 11.7$; $p < 0.001$).

Conclusions

Body piercing may constitute a prerequisite to disqualify a candidate in a job recruitment process even if recruiters have such body modifications themselves. Individuals with body piercings often underestimate the potential negative impact of these modifications on their employment prospects. Overall, visible facial piercing in individuals holding public trust positions are not accepted. Nonetheless, such modifications are not considered to undermine the perceived professional skills and competence of such individuals.

Funding

The study was carried out as part of a research project funded by Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Bioethics Committee (No. 7/2013).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Received: 6.03.2025

Accepted: 25.05.2025

Online publication: 16.03.2026