



Tattoos, piercings go 'mainstream'.(NATION)

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Byline: Joyce Howard Price, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Approximately a quarter of Americans ages 18 to 50 equally divided between the sexes sport tattoos, as this form of body art has "become mainstream," especially among young adults, new research shows.

A national telephone survey of the prevalence of tattoos and body piercings by researchers at Northwestern University showed that an estimated 14 percent of Americans in the age group polled had undergone body piercings in places other than the earlobe, while 24 percent had one or more tattoos some had as many as 60.

Among respondents ages 21 to 29 in the survey, 36 percent said they bore tattoos, said Dr. Anne E. Laumann, associate professor of dermatology at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine, who presented the findings Saturday at a health conference in Washington.

The 65th annual meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology ended yesterday. In a report published in December in the academy's journal, Dr. Laumann and co-author Dr. Amy J. Derick discussed their survey, in which more than 19,300 calls were made in an effort to complete 500 interviews.

"Overall, 65 percent of those with a tattoo had obtained their first tattoo by 24 years of age," the authors found. Likewise, 30 percent of those who reported having been pierced said they "had it done before age 18," Dr. Laumann said yesterday in a telephone interview.

The authors said that "in the past" tattoos were largely the domain of men and body piercings were "mainly in the soft ear lobes of women" wishing to wear pierced earrings.

In the 1940s, they said, military personnel often had tattoos with patriotic designs, together with hearts and the names of sweethearts. After World War II, they said, tattoos became

emblems of "marginalized groups," such as carnival or circus workers, members of motorcycle gangs and ex-convicts. But in recent years "the practice has become mainstream," the researchers said.

Dr. Laumann said the piercing of body parts besides the ears has "really taken off in the past 16 to 18 years" and continues to grow. Three-quarters of Americans who undergo body piercing are women, the study finds.

Researchers found that women who are Democrats are twice as likely as female Republicans to be pierced (16 percent to 8 percent), but women who identify as political independents are most likely (19 percent) to have body piercings.

The likelihood of being tattooed is associated with a lower level of education, prior jail incarceration, drinking too much and illicit drug use.

Dr. Laumann said body piercing is "much more of a problem" than tattooing in terms of medical complications.

"Medical problems were few related to the tattoos; however, more than 18 percent of those pierced reported redness, swelling, tenderness, and weeping and 27 percent of those with mouth jewelry said they suffered broken teeth or allergic reactions to the metals in jewelry," the authors said in a report summary.

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