**BEYOND THE STEREOTYPE**

**Rising number of middle-aged women are ‘battling anorexia and bulimia’, new figures warn**

**BY LIZZIE PARRY, DIGITAL HEALTH EDITOR**

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One in 28 women aged 40 to 50 are living with an active eating disorder, a new study has revealed

**A RISING number of middle-aged women are battling eating disorders – typically thought of as “teenage illnesses”, experts today warned.**

One in 28 women aged 40 to 50 are thought to be living with illnesses like anorexia or bulimia.

A “surprising” number of middle-aged women are battling eating disorders, experts have warned

Experts have warned the health service is failing these women, while leading charity Beat said the figure reflects the calls they are seeing to their helpline – noting 15 per cent of callers are over 40.

The study, published in the journal BMC Medicine, examined more than 5,000 British women.

It revealed 15.3 per cent reported having had an eating disorder at some point in their lives.

Meanwhile, 3.6 per cent said they had an eating disorder in the last year.

But, less than one in three of these women sought help to combat the disorders, the findings show.

Both anorexia and bulimia are typically associated with teenage girls.

But, the eating disorders charity Beat said these stereotypes can be damaging – stopping people who don’t fall into the so-called “norm” getting help.

The charity’s Tom Quinn, said: “Stereotypically, the world sees people with eating disorders as young.

“When we reinforce stereotypes, we also add  to the stigma of these serious mental health illnesses and this stigma can prevent individuals coming forward to seek help – a dangerous path to take when the chance of full recovery is vastly improved when treatment is found quickly.”

And Dr Agnes Ayton, vice chair of the faculty of eating disorders at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, echoed Mr Quinn’s concerns.

While anorexia and bulimia are typically seen as a teenage problem, new figures show one in 28 women aged 40 to 50 are living with an eating disorder

“It demonstrates that the rates of eating disorders among middle-age women are higher than it was thought, and that significant proportions of these people are unknown to services – so there is a large unmet need,” she said.

“The numbers are surprising, as most of the research has focused on adolescents and younger adults.

“However, they are not entirely unpredictable, as previous population-based studies have also shown that a large proportion of patients with eating disorders don’t seek help.”

Dr Nadia Micali, a psychiatrist at University College London,who led the new research, said the findings show eating disorders “are not just confined to earlier decades of life”.