

Impacts of Plastic Surgery on Adolescents

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Abstract

As time passes and the medical industry develops, plastic surgery grows worldwide as it expands further among all genders, races, and even ages. Plastic surgery is no longer a medical operation for adults but is also taken very commonly by adolescents, as statistics prove. However, as plastic surgery can bring irreversible impacts to a patient, like any other medical procedure, it is essential for the public to be aware of the results that the surgery may get, including both merits and demerits. Particularly for adolescents who are not fully grown up, the abundance of knowledge about the impacts plastic surgery may bring to one's physical and psychological body can improve their mindful decisions on the surgery. To discover its influences on adolescents, this research looks into the categories, current situations, motivations, advantages, disadvantages, and dangers of plastic surgery.

Keywords: Adolescent plastic surgery, Merits and demerits, Physical and psychological impacts

Introduction

"Plastic surgery," interchangeably written as "cosmetic surgery," is a type of operation that is taken to repair injured skin or enhance one's appearance ("plastic surgery"). Nowadays, the idea of plastic surgery is leaning more towards beauty purposes because the majority of those who receive plastic surgery do so solely for their desire to become pretty. The age range of these patients is rapidly getting diverse, and it has settled as a pervasive operation. Young adolescents show more preference and interest in plastic surgery and cosmetics. This is because society implicitly imposes on the need to improve one's appearance. "Lookism," defined as discrimination and mistreatment depending on physical appearance, has become a severe social issue due to the frequent exposure of it in media and its emphasis on aesthetic values (Park et al.). Adolescents are starting to set a single standard of beauty that they are pressured to reach, as they feel disadvantaged if they do not. At a young age, when people should focus more on growing their self-esteem and internal beauty, adolescents' focus is heading towards a different gear today. However, the reality is that plastic surgery is nothing easy or safe, as there are numerous side effects and risks. These side effects include pneumonia, infection, nerve damage, abnormal scarring, death, and more ("Cosmetic surgery"). Despite these negative aspects, plastic surgery's benefits, such as popularity or confidence, are still more appealing to adolescents. According to the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, a total of around 230 thousands of plastic surgeries were performed in 2020. And, 140 thousand, meaning over half of the total amount, were done on teenagers between 13 and 19

(WebMD Editorial Contributors). People prioritize one's physical beauty before their health despite acknowledging the dangers of surgical operations. Hence, it is essential to raise awareness of the risks of plastic surgery, especially for adolescents who fall especially vulnerable to its side effects.

Overview

In this essay, I will explore how adolescent plastic surgery is dangerous and its significance to adolescents. I will introduce the definition of cosmetic surgeries and identify the major side effects of medical operations that impact young adults mentally and physically. This reveals the correlation between the rate of plastic surgery and death or complication rates and the implication of age. The ultimate goal is to raise awareness of cosmetic surgery's merits and demerits for adolescents to make wiser and safer decisions before they receive cosmetic surgery, as the irreversible consequences may always follow with any medical operation.

Common types of plastic surgery

Adolescents most often receive plastic surgery for reconstructive or corrective purposes (Zuckerman 253-254). Reconstructive purposes refer to plastic surgery that is more for medical purposes due to defects that patients are either born with or due to injuries rather than for cosmetics ("Reconstructive Surgery"). On the other hand, corrective purposes speak of plastic surgeries that patients retake after their first attempts for cosmetic purposes ("Corrective Plastic Surgery"). The two most common types of teenage cosmetic surgery are Rhinoplasty and Liposuction. Rhinoplasty is a medical operation that reforms one's nose shape. This is one of the

most famous types of cosmetic surgery because the facial areas, in general, are what teenagers care most about. The minimum age required for this nose surgery is around 13,14 at the earliest because the shape of the nose must be mostly grown or fixed before they take the surgery (Bermant 257-258). Liposuction is a type of surgery that involves the removal of fat cells in one's body, which enables the patients to have the same effect of losing weight (Bermant 259). The main reason why people take Liposuction is because they can lose weight over a very short period without having to put in lots of effort, such as exercising or going on a diet. Based on research from 2003, over 223 thousand plastic surgeries were performed on adolescents aged 18 or under. And among those, around 39 thousand them included Liposuction and more (Zuckerman 253).

Current trends

There is an increasing trend of adolescents taking cosmetic surgery as annual data shows that among the total number of cosmetic surgery patients, the portion of patients under the age of 20 is getting larger. There were a total of more than 12.7 million plastic surgeries operated in the U.S in 2015. Among all of those, around 1.9% operated on teenagers under the age of 18. In 2015 alone, more than 36000 operations that those under 19 received for cosmetic purposes. The number of medical procedures that are not surgeries but are done for the same purposes was around 175,000 cases (Yeslev et al. 1052).

Contributory factors to adolescent's decision to receive cosmetic surgery

The factors contributing to adolescents receiving cosmetic surgery can be categorized into external and internal factors. Social media is The first-factor stimulating adolescents' desire to receive cosmetic surgery. The growing social media industry exposes "perfect" body images to young audiences and sets fixed beauty standards for them. When teenagers see idealistic body images of the celebrities they praise, they seek the same. The more teenagers look at this content, such as TV shows, movies, or even posts on social media, the more the students try to fit their bodies into the specific aesthetic frame (Ashikali et al. 141). For example, when receiving Rhinoplasty, lots of young patients often bring images of celebrities and ask for an imitation of that specific nose shape. Adolescents must be aware of realistic and idealistic expectations (Bermant 257-258). Studies have proven that if female adolescents look at media that mention cosmetic surgeries or expose an idealistic body image that sets beauty standards, this causes teenagers to have a lower

satisfaction rate with their bodies. This consequence is especially evident when dealing with weight (Ashikali et al. 146). Indeed, TV shows or exposure to "perfect" body images for young females are not always the absolute factor that impacts teenagers' satisfaction and self-confidence. However, they show a directly proportional relationship (Ashikali et al. 149).

The second factor is peer pressure in their community. Peer pressure can be categorized into overt peer pressure and those that come in more subtle ways. Overt pressure is when peers force others to do certain things despite their refusal. The type of pressure that comes subtly is when one fears that if they do not act a certain way, they will be excluded from their peers. Teenagers need to be a part of a group of peers and desire to get approved or recognized by others. This is why teenagers try to be liked by others to continue their friendship (Reed and Rountree 147-148).

On the other hand, some internal factors include low self-esteem and lack of confidence. Simis, Koot, and Verhulst identified that one's subjective perception of bodily image - dissatisfaction about their physical appearance - is attributed to the adolescents' decision to get plastic surgery (Simis et al. 669-678). Hence, to soothe one's emotional or mental struggles, adolescents receive cosmetic surgery even without any external pressures.

Through the observation of these factors, an irony is noticeable. Even though the factors that lead adolescents to have cosmetic surgery are purely psychological, rather than receiving psychological or mental treatments, the patients decide to pursue physical surgery. Adolescents commonly have such a misbelief that a change in physical appearance will also bring a difference in their mentality.

Merits and Demerits of Cosmetic Surgery

The main merit of cosmetic surgeries is that people can gain self-confidence and have a more positive attitude towards themselves. Having self-love and a brighter view towards one's appearance is necessary for someone to know how to love others, as the philosopher Thomas Aquinas has expressed that what becomes the basis of showing love to another is showing love to oneself (Gallagher 29-30). One's dissatisfaction with body image is becoming a more serious issue. It is even becoming a leading cause of adolescent suicide as people fear others' judgments of their physical appearance. In fact, a study done on Korean public high school students from both genders has proven this result (Kim 297). Therefore, if there is a way for people to enhance their mentality with the help of medication, an increasing population

of people are claiming that it is worth the risks in the long term. For example, a study shows that many of their research participants stated people are willing to take cosmetic surgeries even though they know the side effects. Participant 4 stated, "I think desperate people will undergo surgery even though they know about the side effects. Those around me who wanted to do it went for it. They even slept while sitting to reduce the swelling after blepharoplasty. They were determined" (Chung and Kim 3). On the other hand, one of cosmetic surgery's most apparent but common demerits is the physical side effects. Significantly, as adolescents' bodies and faces are still growing, unlike adults, there is caution that the additive materials they have embedded inside one's body during plastic surgery would start distorting as time passes and the patient's body changes. In fact, data shows that most females who receive plastic surgery experience serious complications and side effects at least once every three years. For example, some of these may include hematomas, infection, and hypertrophic scarring (Zuckerman 253).

Dangers of cosmetic surgery for adolescents

Physical

Cosmetic surgery poses a great risk of physical side effects for patients. Research reveals a complication or side effect in 42.72% of the 447 cosmetic surgery patients who participated in the survey (Khunger). In another study, researchers have proven that female patients who get plastic surgery for cosmetic purposes encounter a deadly complication at least once in three years. Some side effects that may occur are hematomas, infection, and hypertrophic scarring (Zuckerman 253). Hematomas are blood clotting on a specific part of the body or tissue. This causes a bruise-like mark on the skin of that area with the blood clotting. These are often caused as a side effect of surgery when a blood vessel is accidentally damaged. This side effect can occur on almost any body part and is especially dangerous if it forms in the brain or the facial areas ("hematoma").

On the other hand, hypertrophic scarring is a side effect when a wound does not heal well, so a thick scar/red rash is raised on the skin. This side effect often occurs in surgeries due to the open wounds on the skin from surgical knives, burns, etc. Although this type of scar is not fatal most of the time, it is very painful and can limit one's motion if created on a joint or bone area. People also try to remove this scar for cosmetic purposes ("Hypertrophic Scar").

Due to these risks of side effects, adolescents who are still growing must take cosmetic surgeries, especially nose surgery named Rhinoplasty, once the shape of their nose and the overall structure is mostly fixed. Research states this is around the age of 13 to 14 at the earliest (Bermant 257-258). This is important because if the nose surgery is operated on when the patient's nose is still growing and changing, there are greater hazards that any additional substances embedded under the patient's skin may disform or get misplaced due to the continuous movement and change.

Psychological

The number of patients getting plastic surgery for cosmetic purposes has increased by 34% between 2005 and 2006. However, there are indeed lots of people who are not aware of the psychological issues behind these surgeries. The 2 major psychological issues that often occur after the patients receive cosmetic surgery are the fact that there is an increased population of female patients who received breast augmentation surgery, suicidal attempts, and Body Dysmorphic Disorder, which is often abbreviated as BDD. The National Library of Medicine research found that the suicide mortality rate for patients who have undergone the procedure increases following the years of surgery. However, the clear reason for such results is still unknown. Some of the most likely assumptions researchers are making are that the women population who decide to get breast augmentation surgery in the first place are often those with skinner bodies, higher tendency to smoke, lower education, etc. Body Dysmorphic Disorder is also likely to occur after cosmetic surgery, a type of mental disorder where people start to intensely see themselves in a deformed appearance that is not their true selves. Among the entire population, the number of patients with BDD is only around 1%. However, among the patients planning to receive plastic surgery or have received it, the portion with this disorder was around 7-15% (Sansone).

Other researchers also observed the psychological conflicts that led the patients to get cosmetic surgery. Among all this research's participants, 71 out of 78 revealed that they faced psychological issues before deciding to get cosmetic surgery. This includes anxiety, depression, suicidal or self-harming attempts, and drug usage. Results also show that after these patients had the surgery, their depression worsened, they faced more eating disorders, and they became alcoholics more easily. Hence, getting cosmetic surgeries cannot solve individuals' psychological issues because cosmetic surgeries can solely improve one's appearance, not directly one's mentality (Soest et al.).

Social

When considering the impacts of cosmetic surgery on adolescents, there are many other aspects than the medical component. One of the major ones is the social aspect and society's perception of the surgery. A long time ago, when cosmetic surgeries were not as common as today, people's perception of cosmetic surgeries may have been negative, serious, and judgmental. However, now the population undergoing cosmetic surgeries has become massive, with business on plastic surgeries earning \$10.1 billion annually solely in the U.S.A. Hence, this is causing people's perception of cosmetic surgery to become more accepting. This is why researchers and professionals in surgical operations are increasingly concerned that people are paying less attention to the potential risks that cosmetic surgeries can bring, like any other medical operation. The chief of plastic surgery at the University of California, Anne Wallace, even stated in an interview, "People think it's like going out to lunch. Like any surgery, it needs to be taken seriously". People say that the cause of a massively increasing population of cosmetic surgery patients is the ideal of perfectionism in society. This is why numerous young women have the average weight and are still getting Liposuction surgeries, where they trim out parts of their fat through surgical operations rather than going on a diet. Also, breast surgery is the most common procedure for young women (Goudreau).

Implication

This paper aims to explore the potential ramifications of cosmetic surgery on adolescents who desire to get plastic surgery for cosmetic purposes and the improvement of their appearance. While the qualitative research of other previously certified medical research has been conducted, the research on which the paper is based often suffers from confirmation bias. The data excludes adolescents with major health illnesses or injuries for which surgeries can be worth the side effects. Although, indeed, the portion of adolescents seeking plastic surgery is heavily weighing on aesthetic reasons, a number of them undergo procedures to rectify the bodily deformations affecting the quality of their lives. For instance, these types of plastic surgeries that can be crucial include burns for covering massive burnt skin injuries or hand surgeries for congenital disabilities and missing features ("Medical Reasons for"). However, no matter one's purpose for getting plastic surgery, the significance of patients thoroughly considering all hazards and effects does not change. As adolescents are the future generations, they are practically the most essential population responsible for

carrying on society in the next ten and hundreds of years. This is not only for the current young generations but also for the ones to follow. Thus, before making immature decisions, adolescents must reckon with the ramifications and implications of plastic surgery.

Conclusion

One of the major findings from this study reveals that the desire for cosmetic surgeries, in general, purely starts from psychological issues. Though cosmetic surgeons are the wrong people to search for when hoping to improve their mental and psychological challenges, people still opt for physical changes rather than pursuing body positivity and self-esteem from other values in life, not through physical changes. As adolescents are at a young growing stage where their mentality can more easily be manipulated, nothing as big as plastic surgery may even be required to improve their perceptions towards themselves. In conclusion, this study raises awareness of the risks and effects of cosmetic surgery for diverse aspects of the life of adolescents. Through analyzing the trends, types, merits, demerits, dangers, and motivations for cosmetic surgery, adolescents do not necessarily build a negative perception but rather make their view of this surgery more realistic and cautious to take care of themselves. The ultimate purpose is to inform adolescents on at least the most basic aspects they should consider before deciding to get plastic surgery, as it can bring irreversible changes in their prolonged lives, whether good or bad. As much as the law of any nation protects minors from making self-decisions on such medical operations, it is not only the adolescents themselves but society's responsibility to guide teenagers onto the right path. Like how this study heavily focused its findings on the impact and aftermath of it, plastic surgery is a powerful and cautious operation that can completely change one's life. All crucial decisions follow with responsibility.

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