

**Research Article**

## **AN INVESTIGATION ON THE REASONS OF THE IRANIAN WOMEN'S TENDENCY TO COSMETIC SURGERY- A MASHHAD CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The ever-increasing tendency of Iranian women to take care of their appearance has caused cosmetic surgery to become the first category of operations performed in Iran. According to statistics, nose jobs and liposuction are the most popular surgeries in Iran. Concepts such as social and cultural capital as well as religious beliefs among Iranian women have to be taken into account for analyzing more deeply the reasons of increase of those surgeries. Certainly, in all societies, humans display a part of their existence through their bodies and this concept has reflected in different cultures in various ways. Women in Iranian society are mostly Muslim and face more restriction in showing their appearance in comparison to other communities. They can display only their complexions; perhaps, this is the reason why they do their best to beautify their faces through surgery and cosmetic products. Muslim woman is restricted; therefore, maybe, the same restriction in society is one of the factors of their pathological tendency to change. As noted by Mary Douglas, the body can act as a symbol of the society and is a model that indicates a specific social system. Therefore, the social system of Iran should be studied more deeply for analyzing the tendency of the Iranian women to undergo cosmetic surgery. Dress code, religious beliefs, the patriarchal system, semi-modern structure of the Iranian society, and mass media has brought about a special situation for increasing cosmetic surgeries. The research context of this paper is Mashhad City, which are the most important religious city and the second largest metropolitan city in Iran. 50 women of the ages 20-45 were interviewed comprehensively. The dependent variable, i.e., tendency to cosmetic surgery was measured by specialized questionnaires. Beauty standards in the under-study society were associated with the prevalence of mass media especially satellite and internet, air commercials, having more cultural capital, men's attention to them, and their religious beliefs. Plastic surgery on women should be considered as a cultural process in which ideals embedded in the patriarchal system are reflected as an exploitation phenomenon that leads women to undergo this hazardous operation.

**Keywords:** *Cosmetic Surgery, Iranian Women, Muslim Women*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### ***Introduction and the Presentation of the Problem***

Human body is very much like a piece of cloth which can be used as a basis for the guessing a person's social class, sex and personal tendencies. Human being has been able to find a good amount of control over his body due to the development in technology.

Specifically, women in the contemporary world regard their bodies as an asset through which they can gain popularity and the beauty technologies can increase this asset; and because of this, the number of beauty surgeries is increasing daily. This number in Iran is estimated as to be several times more than other countries; regarding nose plastic surgery this is up to seven times more than other countries. In the last decade there has appeared more than 83% increase in some plastic surgeries such as nose plastic surgery in Iran (<http://www.sharghnews.com>).

In regard with these kinds of surgeries which have to be investigated in relation to the cultural and social context of the society, there have not been many scientific and quality studies done. In the present study, some social factors such as the social capital and social positions of the persons and religious believes as the factors affecting on the women's tendency to beauty surgeries to reach a better understanding of the cultural and social factors affecting on such tendencies.

## **Research Article**

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to ethnographers body movements are classified under cultural activities and show its relationship to the culture and they relate the person's status to his social position and class. Also regard the human body to acquire status, social position, and other distinctions (Frank, 1991).

Especially in modern societies where there is no clear cut boundary between different social classes, the members of each social layer try to imitate the life style of an upper social class and try to beautify their appearance (Turner, 2003).

In order to reach a comprehensive model which is able to express important factors affecting on the tendency to plastic surgery, we have considered ethnographical views of Mary Douglas and the Feministic views which have important internal and external effects regarding harmony with beauty standards in women's tendency to beauty surgeries (Frank, 2006).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Methodology**

The sample of this research was 50 women who have referred to one of the biggest beauty clinics (Abnus) and Sina hospital have undergone a beauty surgery. Most of these surgeries have been related to the nose, liposuction and momoplasty .the age of sample were between 20 up to50. The interview has been in the form of regular questions and in case of need some secondary questions were asked in order to get more related data. In this statistical group of interviewee 32.5% were single and 67.5% were married women and the education level has been from high school diploma to Ph.D.

### **The Findings of the Study**

The independent variables which have affected the women's tendency to the beauty surgery have been as:

#### **Consumption**

In the questions asked from the women, three dimensions from the view point of consumption were under consideration: the consumption of beauty materials, removing defects facilities, and weight losing tools which were under questions with issues like the consumption of pedicure, manicure, colored lenses, and tattoo, and the use of fatness and slimness drugs. Something about 37.5% of the examined women consume beauty material daily and all the subjects have at least one time used the fitness tools on the last year and 31% of them have experienced weight loss drugs (Katzmman *et al.*, 1997).

#### **Normative Pressure**

Normative pressure refers to the other important people toward the studied subject. It means how important people regard us and how they evaluate us in the society. Every person under some circumstance has to behave in a certain way to follow some norms which have the root in the normative pressure. This pressure can be external or internal. The external pressure can be like that coming from the husband or partner, the media, social conditions, and defined beauty definitions which force the person to find a tendency toward beauty surgery. The internal pressure is like the interior tendency to follow the beauty norms (Stieger *et al.*, 2007).

Most studied women stressed on the external normative pressure to reach a betterment of their physical appearance, because of their peers look especially their husbands or partners. This was something felt more serious for the married women. More than 50% of married women between the ages of 30 to 45 mentioned the greatest factor affecting their tendency to beauty surgeries as attracting their husbands' attention, and having a better relation with their partners. For the girls under 25 years of age, to be more beautiful was important because of a mere internal pressure. After husband, satellite programs, and internet have also been other factors which created motivations among such a group. But because of social limitations in the journalistic publications of such photos in journals in Iran, journals cannot be a factor in this regard.

#### **Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital can be one other factor which effects on the women's tendency to beauty surgeries; we have studied cultural capital from two aspects of subjective and objective. In the subjective perspective, some behaviors like reading poems and love stories and psychology books and in objective perspective

### **Research Article**

some art works like history and cinema are good examples. Frothy seven percent of the women who have undertaken beauty surgeries have interests in reading love stories and psychology books; they expressed that they have read at least 3 books in a year and they have interests in cinema. Women who are more interested in cultural capital goods and read more books are more informed about cultural events of the society. According to pierre bourdieu they use their information, education, and skills along with their symbolic capital (their bodies) to improve their position in the society. According to Anthony giddens they exert a more forceful supervision over their body and face (Petersen, 2007).

### **Social Relations**

Social relations should be taken into account regarding the structure of a network of relations with other members with whom they make relations like friends, neighbors, colleagues with whom they have numerous contacts. In this study the number of daily contacts with their friends was studied and questions like how many times in a day do they have contact with their friends were asked. Most of the interviewees were among the people who had strong social networks. They often participate in women gatherings like parties with their own sex mates. They regarded one of the factors as temptations coming from their friends. An example was Firoozeh who considered success in her friend in her breast beauty surgery as a factor to make her interested in going through the same process. She was hopeful by getting the same success to get more attention on the part of her husband.

### **Social Status**

Iranian women have different personal and internal reasons for their interest in the beauty surgeries which is up to a great degree under the effect of the social structure. Stable social sex relations dominant over the society which has been designed around the domination of male sex exerts a cultural and social force on the women to change their appearance in those relations.

The fear from being ignored by their partner pushes them through the dangerous process of a beauty surgery. The women who are dependent on men for different reasons their lives are not almost possible without the support of men are among such group of women. The most important reason for women's dependence on men is their lack of economic independence. Although the number of women students is higher in Iran, only 14 % of them are regarded as employed part of the society. This position has made them passive in the society and put them under male dominance. Therefore the women tolerate danger and pain to compensate their lack of social incapability in the family. Shabnam a 42 years old woman is a good example who has referred to a clinic for the liposuction surgery. She has already undergone nose beauty surgery, together with jelly injection to her cheeks and lips. Her apparent face shows the effect of surgery and she is a mother of two 15 and 9 years old children. I asked her reason for her presence in the clinic. She answers that she feels that she has lost her beauty and attraction to her husband. In other words her husband has lost his attention to her. She believes that she can postpone the aging process through this technology. She prefers to take a risk and get rid of the worry.

It is interesting that about 12 persons who had been interviewed considered themselves belonging to low or average social class who were ready to pay huge amounts of money even by taking loans and borrowing from others.

Marziyeh a 25 years old girl who had undergone a beauty surgery to make her nose smaller believed that she did not receive enough attention from the men because of her big nose. She is hopeful to be able to find a good partner. She has obtained the expense by taking a loan from his work place which is going to be paid back through 3 years' time. Single girls belonging to lower social classes refer to beauty plastic surgeries to be able to get social positions and attention. This lower class reference to plastic surgery was previously more popular with the rich people in the community.

### **Body Assumption**

The picture each woman has about her body depends on different factor, one of which is the socialization process. Zohreh referring to the sex pattern in families in relation to children expressed that whenever she quarreled with her brother, he pointed to one defect on her face. He used to say it was important for the boys to be ugly (she remembered the sentences clearly). When such socialization comes together with all different kinds of pressures and harmonizing with beauty standards, the women grow a kind of perception

### **Research Article**

about their bodies and feel dissatisfied with them. There is natural tendency to beauty and escape from any kind of defect in every human being; every person will grow a tendency to beauty if she finds a defective perception regarding her beauty.

### **Religiousness**

The result show that almost all the women who have taken part in the interview were not very much devoted to Islamic performances and Islamic covering (Hijab). Only Nafiseh, 28 years old, who lived in a very religious family and being single could get permission from her family for the beauty surgery. In Islam torturing the body in any form is strongly prohibited and this belief is in contrast with the contemporary trend. Today the body paid attention to a great degree and it is considered even as an asset.

### **Conclusion**

The factors affecting on the beauty surgery like the bodily perception, social relations, cultural capital, economic and social status, and religiousness were asked about in regular interviews and the following conclusions were drawn: the most important factor affecting on the tendency to beauty surgery was the pressure from social value. The women being active in the society are increasing in number every day and they are being influenced by the media, social conditions, and internal pressures. Their bodies are subject to power and social and cultural suppression. Such pressure force them to harmonies with beauty standards and the feeling of dissatisfaction toward their bodies will make them feel a low self-confidence. For the Iranian woman, her body is an asset which a position for her as it is the case for all the women in the world. It should be mentioned that Islamic covering (Hijab) increases a tendency to wearing makeup and nose surgery, because Iranian women are forced to beautify the face while hiding the hair and other parts of the body in the form of Islamic covering (Hijab). The effect of satellite programs as a great factor in their decision to undergo a beauty surgery is very considerable to make them inclined to take the risk as an external pressure axis. Watching Turkish and south American TV series today has a place in almost all Iranian households and define beauty standards. Iranian women who are mostly housewives and spent much of their time at home, they are very much under such advertisement broadcast on TV.

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