

on Cosmetic surgery and women's health

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Overview

It is unknown exactly how much cosmetic surgery is being performed in Australia. This is due partly to the fact that most cosmetic surgery is elective, and as such these procedures are not covered by Medicare.¹ The other contributing factor is that so many different practitioners perform cosmetic surgery, ranging from Specialist Plastic Surgeons to General Practitioners (GPs), dermatologists and beauticians.¹ Common forms of cosmetic surgery include breast augmentation, rhinoplasty, labiaplasty, and dermal fillers (facial injectables). Cosmetic surgery has become a billion-dollar industry in Australia.²

Many factors have been cited as driving increased uptake of cosmetic surgery in Australia such as an ageing population, cosmetic surgery for weight management, the rise of 'injectables' such as botox™, increased exposure to social media (especially Instagram), appearance concerns and psychological and emotional distress,³ and the marketing of cosmetic surgery as preventative (rather than corrective). This has correlated with a rise in uptake from younger women in particular.

Cosmetic surgery is often seen as an individual choice. However, this disregards the collective pressure that women in particular are under to meet unrealistic beauty standards. In a society where young women report being valued more highly for their looks than for their brains or their ability,⁴ cosmetic surgery may appear to be an reasonable investment for many women – despite the potential risks and costs involved, particularly when things go wrong.

While boys and men are affected by body image dissatisfaction, girls and women tend to be disproportionately affected for a range of reasons including that women's social capital is often intertwined with their appearance and perceived attractiveness.⁵ Demand for certain forms of cosmetic surgery such as eyelid surgery and 'Brazilian butt-lifts' also seem to reflect values related to racism and whiteness.

Much of the existing critique of the cosmetic surgery sector comes from Specialist Plastic Surgeons, the government and regulators and tends to focus on the need to regulate 'dodgy providers' rather than taking a broader look at the drivers of cosmetic surgery and its meaning and impacts for women and the wider community. In 2017 Australia's health ministers unanimously agreed to tighten regulations for cosmetic surgery targeting practitioners who call themselves 'cosmetic surgeons' without specialised accreditation.⁶ They have referred the matter to the Medical Board of Australia who are currently investigating the most appropriate ways to safeguard consumers at the national level.

More research and data is needed in regard to how cosmetic surgery is marketed to women and by whom; women's experiences and satisfaction post-surgery; and how cosmetic surgery is used to express, police and shape beauty expectations and gender norms in contemporary Australia.

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WHV thanks the following expert reviewer for their input:

- Dr Merle Spriggs, Senior Research Fellow, Children's Bioethics Centre / School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne

Recent news

[Lessons from a three-day cosmetic surgery conference \[Opinion\]](#) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2018

[‘Boob factory’: dark side of cosmetic surgery](#) *Gladstone Observer*, 2018

[More patients seek help for dodgy overseas cosmetic surgery](#) *Perth Now*, 2018

Driving demand

[Cosmetic surgery and the workplace beauty premium](#) *Pursuit (University of Melbourne)*, 2017

[Mutton cut up as lamb: mothers, daughter and cosmetic surgery](#) *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 2004

[Materialism, self-objectification, and capitalization of sexual attractiveness increase young Chinese women’s willingness to consider cosmetic surgery \[China\]](#) *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2018

[Why are fewer and fewer Americans fixing their noses?](#) *The Conversation*, 2017

Marketing of cosmetic surgery

[An analysis of the content and clinical implications of online advertisements for female genital cosmetic surgery \[U.S.\]](#) *BMJ Open*, 2012

[Patients' perceptions of cosmetic surgery at a time of globalization, medical consumerism, and mass media culture: a French experience](#) *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, 2013

[Credit to spend on your choice of cosmetic surgery](#) *Scoopon.com.au*, 2018 – *commercial content*

[Cosmetic surgery \[repayment calculator\]](#) *MediPay Financial Services*, 2018 – *commercial content*

[NSW Parliamentary inquiry into cosmetic surgery clinic advertising ‘boob jobs for cost of a coffee a day’](#) *News.com.au*, 2018

Body dissatisfaction and mental health

[Part of the problem or part of the solution? plastic surgeons and body dissatisfaction](#) *Australasian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, 2018

[Cosmetic surgery and body dysmorphic disorder: an update](#) *International Journal of Women's Dermatology*, 2018

[Body dysmorphic disorder and cosmetic surgery: are surgeons too quick to nip and tuck?](#) *The Conversation*, 2017

[Cosmetic labiaplasty: defining "normality" is not the issue \[Letter to Editor\] 'An ethical analysis of labiaplasty must consider the effects of having surgery with the effect of being refused surgery'](#) *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, 2017

['I don't see that as a medical problem': clinicians' attitudes and responses to requests for cosmetic genital surgery by adolescents](#) *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 2018

Resources for health professionals

[Female genital cosmetic surgery: a resource for general practitioners and other health professionals](#) Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2015

[Welcoming diversity in plastic surgery \[Editorial\]](#) *Australasian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, 2018

[2017 Plastic surgery statistics report](#) American College of Plastic Surgeons, 2018

[Guidelines for registered medical practitioners who perform cosmetic medical and surgical procedures](#) Medical Board of Australia, 2017

Resources for consumers

[Anaesthesia and cosmetic surgery \[Factsheet\]](#) Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, 2018

[The Labia Library \[Website\]](#) Women's Health Victoria

Regulation

[Board consults on cosmetic procedures \[Media Release\]](#) Medical Board of Australia, 2015

[Call yourself a cosmetic surgeon? new guidelines fix only half the problem](#) *The Conversation*, 2016

[Cosmetic health service complaints in New South Wales](#) New South Wales. Parliament. Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission, 2018

[Changes to further regulate cosmetic surgery procedures approved \[Media Release\]](#) Queensland. Minister for Health, 20 October 2017

[Cosmetic breast augmentation in Australia: a cost of complication study](#) *Australasian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, 2018

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4. IPSOS Australia (2016) [Everyday Sexism: girls' and young women's views on gender inequality in Australia](#) Plan International Australia and Our Watch, Melbourne.
5. Rumsay NJ, Diedrichs P (2018), [Part of the problem or part of the solution? plastic surgeons and body image dissatisfaction](#) *Australian Journal of Plastic Surgeons*, 1(2), p. 75.
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