

Professor urges public to take survey seeking views on cosmetic procedures

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A leading academic in appearance research is encouraging people to take part in an [online survey](#) on the ethical and social questions raised by the growing use of cosmetic procedures.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics is seeking public views on cosmetic surgery (e.g. breast enlargement or reduction, face-lifts, tummy tucks, etc.) and non-surgical procedures (e.g. chemical peels, injections to remove wrinkles, skin lightening procedures, etc.).

Professor Nichola Rumsey OBE, co-director of the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), is member of the Council's working party on cosmetic procedures.

She said, "Recent years have seen a huge increase in demand for cosmetic surgery. The need for regulation of private providers has been a hot topic for the past decade. Despite repeated calls for steps to safeguard vulnerable prospective patients, progress has been negligible. The deliberations of the influential Nuffield Council on Bioethics on this topic are particularly welcome. In producing their influential reports, the Council places a high premium on the views of the public on its chosen topics - so please complete the brief survey if you can spare the time."

Demand for cosmetic procedures is growing, both in the UK and internationally. Around 90 per cent of those undergoing procedures are women and breast augmentation and liposuction are amongst the most

popular procedures. Existing research into what motivates [people](#) to undertake cosmetic procedures has highlighted both societal factors such as the pressure to look young and attractive, media and celebrity influences, and personal factors such as [body dissatisfaction](#), self-esteem, teasing, and the experiences of family and friends. The Council wants to find out more about what influences people's attitudes to cosmetic procedures and their decisions to seek and undergo treatments.

Jeanette Edwards, chairwoman of the Council's [working party on cosmetic procedures](#) and Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, said, "For many people the decision to undertake a cosmetic procedure is a personal choice - they point out that we should be free to do whatever we want to our bodies and that we should have access to treatments and procedures that make us happy. Others are concerned about the possible risks of treatments, either to the individuals undergoing these procedures or to society at large – some, for example, are concerned about the kind of societal expectations that are being created about appearance and attractiveness. If people are starting to think of cosmetic procedures as trivial, normal or even essential ways of changing their appearance, should we be concerned?"

"We are interested in why increasing numbers of people are choosing to have cosmetic procedures, and what they hope to achieve. Is it to 'enhance', or to 'normalise', or to 'fix' their bodies? Do people think that they will be happier after having a cosmetic procedure, or that it will change their life for the better? Why do people choose not to use cosmetic procedures?"

Speaking on the subject on BBC Radio 4, Council member and medical sociologist Dr Tom Shakespeare highlighted the issue of body dissatisfaction. He said, "Surveys show that young people in Britain are increasingly dissatisfied with their bodies. For example, a 2013 survey of girl guides attitudes suggested that a third of 11 to 21 year olds were

unhappy with the way they looked, and more than a quarter would consider cosmetic surgery. If someone feels unhappy with her body image, should we offer her a surgical fix, or should we help her address her anxieties? My anxiety is about the society that first generates body dissatisfaction and then provides surgery as the solution to that cultural problem."

The survey is being conducted as part of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics' project exploring ethical questions raised by cosmetic procedures, such as: the acceptability of different types of cosmetic procedures (for example female genital [cosmetic surgery](#)); whether there are any circumstances in which it would be unethical to offer people cosmetic procedures; and the responsibilities of those who develop, offer, promote and regulate cosmetic procedures.

The survey will run until 18 March 2016. In addition to this public survey, the Working Party is also running an open call for evidence seeking more in depth information and insights from people and organisations with an interest in [cosmetic procedures](#). The survey and the call for evidence are open to everyone and the responses will help to inform the development of a report and recommendations due to be published in spring 2017.

Provided by University of the West of England

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