



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Self-esteem and body image in the context of aesthetic interventions: Insights from Kosovo

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Abstract

The global increase in cosmetic procedures, including a notable rise in Kosovo, underscores the growing societal emphasis on physical appearance. This study investigates the relationship between self-esteem and body image concerns among individuals with and without prior experience with cosmetic procedures in Kosovo. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, 171 participants were surveyed, with 39.8% reporting previous cosmetic interventions. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Cosmetic Procedures Screening Questionnaire (COPS) were employed to assess psychological outcomes. Results revealed no significant difference in self-esteem between those with and without cosmetic procedure experience. However, a significant negative correlation was found between body image concerns and self-esteem, particularly stronger among those who had undergone cosmetic procedures ($r = -.389, p = .001$). This suggests that cosmetic procedures may not alleviate underlying self-esteem issues and could potentially exacerbate body image concerns. The study highlights the need for psychological support before and after cosmetic interventions, especially in low- and middle-income contexts like Kosovo. These findings contribute to understanding the complex psychological effects of cosmetic procedures and suggest that motivations for such interventions should be carefully evaluated to ensure positive psychological outcomes.

Keywords: Aesthetic; Self-Esteem; Interventions; Kosovo-Insights

1. Introduction

Recently there is a significant increase in cosmetic procedures globally including in Europe and Kosovo. Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS, 2023) indicated a 41.3% increase in aesthetic procedures globally within the last 4 years. In 2022 alone, Europe witnessed a substantial increase in surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures, reflecting a growing societal focus and importance on physical appearance.

The psychological impact of these trends is profound. Studies have shown that individuals who undergo cosmetic procedures often do so in an attempt to improve their self-esteem and body image (Sarwer & Cash, 2004). However, the outcomes are not always linear. While some individuals experience improved self-esteem post-procedure, others may continue to struggle with body image issues or develop new psychological concerns, such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD).

Some evidence shows that surgical or aesthetic interventions improve the confidence, self-esteem, and quality of life of patients who undergo these interventions (Sadick, 2008). Other studies show that often patients who undergo minimally invasive cosmetic procedures seek to improve physical and psychological well-being as the main motivating factors (Waldman et al., 2019). Studies have shown that treatment with injectable aesthetic intervention improves patients' psychological and social functioning and reduction of appearance-related distress (McKeown, 2021). Body

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image and self-esteem appear to be important factors in motivating patients to undertake aesthetic interventions. According to Sarwer et al., 1998 review of literature there are two perspectives on why individuals seek cosmetic surgery: 1) Appearance-Driven Self-Esteem, Some researchers (Napoleon and Lewis, 1989; Edgerton and Langman, 1982) argue that patients' self-esteem is closely tied to their appearance. When their self-esteem drops due to dissatisfaction with their looks, they pursue surgical interventions as a way to regain confidence; and 2) Healthy Motivators which claims that (Goin and Goin, 1987) believe that these individuals are psychologically healthy and motivated to improve their appearance, accepting the risks and costs of surgery as part of their commitment to self-enhancement. The perspectives on why individuals seek cosmetic surgery—whether driven by appearance-related self-esteem issues or as psychologically healthy individuals motivated by self-improvement—directly relate to the current study. This study aims to explore how self-esteem and body image concerns differ between those who have undergone cosmetic procedures and those who have not. We expect the results to proceed in two directions, one in which those who have undergone procedures may report different levels of self-esteem and body image concerns compared to those who have not and secondly, differences in self-esteem and body image concerns between those who have and have not undergone cosmetic procedures may be less pronounced, or that any differences could be attributed to other factors, such as a proactive approach to personal enhancement.

The current study contributes to the body of knowledge in exploring the relation of psychological factors, especially by focusing on those who have undergone aesthetic interventions versus those who have not especially in low and middle-income countries such as Kosovo from which countries we have scarce data.

2. Methodology

The current study employs a cross-sectional quantitative design to address specific research questions.

2.1. Sample

In total 171 respondents filled out the questionnaire, the majority were women 91.8 % (157) and 8.2% (14) were men. The study sample shows a diverse educational background, with the majority of participants being well-educated. While only 1.2% completed primary school and 17.5% finished high school, 42.1% hold a bachelor's degree, 19.3% have a master's degree, and 3.5% possess a doctorate. This indicates that over 77% of respondents have at least a bachelor's degree, reflecting a highly educated participant group. The marital status distribution of the study participants shows that nearly half (47.4%) are single, and a slightly higher percentage (49.7%) are married. Only a small fraction of the participants are divorced (0.6%) or widowed (2.3%). This indicates that the majority of the respondents are either single or married, with very few identifying as divorced or widowed. The distribution of monthly household income among participants shows that the largest group (29.8%) earns between €500 and €1000, followed by 21.1% earning €200 to €500, and 17% earning €1000 to €2000. Smaller percentages earn between €2000 and €4000 (8.8%), with very few earning over €4000. Additionally, 20.5% preferred not to disclose their income. This indicates a diverse economic background within the sample. The majority of participants 60.2% (103) reported having no prior experience with cosmetic procedures, while 39.8% (68) indicated that they had undergone such procedures. The majority of participants, 64.7% (44), reported having their first cosmetic procedure 1 to 2 years ago. Additionally, 16.2% (11) had their first procedure 2 to 3 years ago. Smaller percentages reported their first procedure 3 to 4 years ago 4.4%, (3) and more than 4 years ago 4.4% (3). Lastly, 10.3% (7) of participants had their first cosmetic procedure within the past year.

2.2. Measures

For the current study, the measure had three main sections. The first section contained demographic information.

A Rosenberg Self-Esteem questionnaire with 10 items was used (Rosenberg, 1965). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a widely used psychological assessment tool designed to measure an individual's self-esteem. Developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965, the scale consists of 10 statements related to self-worth and self-acceptance. Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The RSES provides a single score that reflects overall self-esteem, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The measure has been used in the Albanian language in previous studies (Mustafa et al, 2015). The Cronbach Alpha with 171 participants in the current study resulted in coefficients of .73.

The Cosmetic Procedures Screening Questionnaire (COPS) is a tool designed to assess body image concerns and the potential presence of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) among individuals considering or having undergone cosmetic procedures (Veale et al., 2012). The COPS questionnaire helps identify the psychological impact that certain physical features may have on an individual, including the frequency of checking one's appearance, the distress caused by perceived unattractiveness, and the extent to which these concerns interfere with daily life, relationships, and social

activities. Higher scores on the Cosmetic Procedures Screening Questionnaire (COPS) indicate greater levels of concern or distress related to body image and a higher likelihood of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). Specifically, higher scores reflect an increased frequency of checking one's appearance, greater distress over perceived flaws, and more significant interference in daily life, relationships, work, and social activities due to concerns about physical appearance. The Cronbach Alpha with 171 participants in the current study for COPS resulted in coefficients of .76.

2.3. Data collection

Participants were recruited from five different private practices in Kosovo using convenience sampling. Potential respondents were informed about the study's purpose and were sent the questionnaire via email for completion.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis will include descriptive statistics to summarize key variables, with frequency distributions used to highlight the sample characteristics. An independent sample t-test will compare mean scores of self-esteem and body image concerns between those who have and have not undergone cosmetic procedures. Pearson correlation coefficients will then be calculated to examine the relationship between self-esteem and body image concerns both for the entire sample and separately for the two groups. This approach will provide a clear understanding of the associations and differences related to cosmetic interventions.

3. Results

The majority of participants 60.2% (103) reported having no prior experience with cosmetic procedures, while 39.8% (68) indicated that they had undergone such procedures. The majority of participants, 64.7% (44), reported having their first cosmetic procedure 1 to 2 years ago. Additionally, 16.2% (11) had their first procedure 2 to 3 years ago. Smaller percentages reported their first procedure 3 to 4 years ago 4.4%,(3), and more than 4 years ago 4.4% (3). Lastly, 10.3% (7) of participants had their first cosmetic procedure within the past year. The majority of those who have done interventions did so to improve their appearance.

Table 1 Aesthetic intervention-related frequencies

Outcome	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Do you have previous experience with cosmetic procedures?				
No	103	60.2	60.2	60.2
Yes	68	39.8	39.8	100.0
Total	171	100.0	100.0	
If yes, when was the first time?				
1 year	44	25.7	64.7	64.7
2 year	11	6.4	16.2	80.9
3 year	3	1.8	4.4	85.3
4 year	3	1.8	4.4	89.7
5 year	7	4.1	10.3	100.0
Total	68	39.8	100.0	
Missing: System	103	60.2		
Total	171	100.0		
If yes, motivation for considering/undertaking cosmetic procedures				
Improvement of appearance	52	30.4	30.4	90.6
Boost in self-esteem	10	5.8	5.8	96.5
Professional reasons	5	2.9	2.9	99.4

Social reasons	1	0.6	0.6	100.0
Total	171	100.0	100.0	
If yes, which treatments have you undergone?				
Botox	12	7.0	17.6	17.6
Filler	56	32.7	82.4	100.0
Total	68	39.8	100.0	
Missing: System	103	60.2		
Total	171	100.0		

A comparison of COPS ($M = 17.87$, $SD = 4.94$) and RSES ($M = 31.78$, $SD = 3.69$) scores for individuals without previous experience in cosmetic procedures ($N = 103$) and those with prior experience ($M = 19.12$, $SD = 5.41$ for self-image; $M = 31.29$, $SD = 3.33$ for self-esteem; $N = 68$) was conducted using independent samples t-tests. For COPS, Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equal variances was not violated, $F(1,168) = 2.57$, $p = .111$. The t-test for equality of means showed that there was no significant difference in self-image scores between the two groups, $t(168) = -1.55$, $p = .124$. The mean difference was -1.25 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -2.84 to 0.34 . Similarly, for self-esteem, Levene's test indicated equal variances, $F(1,169) = 1.45$, $p = .231$. The t-test revealed no significant difference in self-esteem scores between individuals with and without previous cosmetic procedure experience, $t(169) = 0.87$, $p = .386$. The mean difference was 0.48 , with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.61 to 1.58 . These results suggest that previous experience with cosmetic procedures does not have a significant impact on either self-image or self-esteem.

A Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between self-image, measured by the Cosmetic Procedures Screening Questionnaire (COPS), and self-esteem, measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Results showed a significant negative correlation, $r(170) = -.304$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher body image concerns are associated with lower self-esteem. The RSES, a widely used measure of self-esteem, demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .73) in this study of 171 participants. Similarly, the COPS, which assesses body image concerns and COPS, showed good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .76). These findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of body image concerns tend to have lower self-esteem, emphasizing the link between body image issues and self-worth.

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between self-image and self-esteem in two groups: individuals with no previous experience with cosmetic procedures ($N = 103$) and those with prior experience ($N = 67$). For the group with no experience, there was a significant negative correlation between self-image and self-esteem, $r(103) = -.242$, $p = .014$, indicating that higher self-image concerns are associated with lower self-esteem in this group. In the group with previous experience, the negative correlation between self-image and self-esteem was stronger, $r(67) = -.389$, $p = .001$, suggesting a more pronounced link between higher self-image concerns and lower self-esteem among those who have undergone cosmetic procedures. These results highlight that while self-image concerns are negatively related to self-esteem in both groups, the relationship is more substantial for individuals who have had cosmetic procedures see Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Between Self-Image and Self-Esteem by Experience with Cosmetic Procedures

Experience with Cosmetic Procedures	Measure	vetelmazhi_total	vetevleresimi_total
No (N = 103)	COPS	1	-.242*
	RSES	-.242*	1
Yes (N = 67)	COPS	1	-.389**
	RSES	-.389**	1

4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer insights into the psychological impacts of cosmetic procedures on self-esteem and body image among individuals in Kosovo, a context where research on this topic is limited. The anticipated differences in self-esteem and body image between those with and without such experiences were not statistically significant. This suggests that cosmetic procedures alone may not necessarily result in improved self-esteem or reduced body image concerns, aligning with previous research that highlights the complex and non-linear psychological outcomes of aesthetic interventions (Sarwer & Cash, 2004).

The results indicated that self-image concerns, as measured by the Cosmetic Procedures Screening Questionnaire (COPS), were negatively correlated with self-esteem across both groups—those with and without experience in cosmetic procedures. However, this relationship was more pronounced among individuals who had undergone cosmetic procedures ($r = -.389, p = .001$) compared to those who had not ($r = -.242, p = .014$). This finding suggests that individuals who seek cosmetic procedures may already have lower self-esteem, which might drive their decision to undergo such procedures. However, the persistence of a strong negative correlation even after the procedures suggests that the underlying body image issues might not be fully resolved by cosmetic interventions alone. This supports the notion that cosmetic procedures might address surface-level concerns without necessarily alleviating deeper psychological issues related to self-worth and body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) (Veale et al., 2012).

While previous studies have suggested that cosmetic procedures can lead to improvements in confidence and psychological well-being (Sadick, 2008; McKeown, 2021), the current findings indicate that such benefits may not be universal. It is possible that individuals who opt for cosmetic procedures may have other psychological factors, such as a proactive approach to self-enhancement, that contribute to their post-procedure well-being, rather than the procedures themselves being the primary factor.

The context of Kosovo, as a low- and middle-income country, may also play a role in these findings. The increasing trend of cosmetic procedures, as reflected in global data (ISAPS, 2023), may be influenced by societal pressures and the growing importance of physical appearance. However, the psychological outcomes of these procedures may differ from those in higher-income countries, where access to psychological support and post-procedure care might be more readily available. This highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches to both cosmetic surgery and the psychological support that may be required before and after such procedures.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationship between cosmetic procedures, self-esteem, and body image. Additionally, the sample was recruited from private practices, which may not fully represent the broader population of individuals undergoing cosmetic procedures in Kosovo. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to better understand the long-term psychological impacts of cosmetic procedures and should aim to include more diverse samples.

Furthermore, qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into the personal motivations and psychological experiences of individuals undergoing cosmetic procedures.

5. Conclusion

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on the psychological impacts of cosmetic procedures, particularly within the context of a low- and middle-income country like Kosovo. While cosmetic procedures are often sought to enhance self-esteem and body image, the findings suggest that these outcomes are not guaranteed and that underlying psychological concerns may persist. The study underscores the importance of considering the psychological health of individuals seeking cosmetic procedures and highlights the need for comprehensive pre- and post-procedure psychological support.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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