

Dubai's Plastic Surgery Market & Its Growing Threat to Young Girls



By Hannah Erdogan

From makeup to snapchat filters, women are eager to achieve perfection in today's high standards of beauty—and some seek vanity through plastic surgery. While destinations such as Beverly Hills, Brazil, and Beirut used to be the most popular destinations for plastic surgery, Dubai has recently taken the lead in the industry. With 50 surgeons to every one million residents, Dubai has had the highest ratio of plastic surgeons per capita in the world since 2015 according to the Dubai Health Authority. As Dubai has grown in popularity as a destination for vacation and business trips, the city has capitalized on its ability to offer aesthetic treatments. But what message does this send to young women?

Dubai is ranked seventh in the world for cosmetic expenditures.¹ Although beauty trends have changed significantly over time in Dubai, “the pressure for women to be beautiful seems constant, as idealized beauty is equated with success in life,”² University of Arizona graduate student Sarah Trainer said in her dissertation.

Obesity is another reason why people choose plastic surgery. In 2015, the obesity rate in Dubai was double the world average and considered a “national crisis” by Abu Dhabi newspaper *The National*. According to Dubai-based plastic surgeon Dr. Luiz Toledo, liposuction is one of the most popular forms of plastic surgery in Dubai.

“Image-conscious Dubai residents are choosing to lie down on a table and [get their fat] sucked out of them,” Dr. Toledo said, adding that 87 percent of his plastic surgery patients are female.³

Dubai currently has a significant population of overweight girls and teenagers who are living in a culture obsessed with the ideal female figure. Female college students at Zayed University in Dubai and the UAE University said that weight is a common topic in conversations with family and friends.

“They all want to talk about dieting, even when they're thin,”⁴ one female student said.

This overwhelming focus on weight has led many women in Dubai to choose plastic surgery to resolve their body image insecurities.

Girls as young as 13 are seeking plastic surgery at alarming rates. In 2018, approximately 15 percent of the plastic surgery patients in Dubai were under the age of 23.⁴ Social media plays a major role in influencing this younger demographic. In fact, the UAE ranks second in the world for highest internet penetration and is one of the world's leading nations in social media growth and usage.⁵

With the overwhelming celebrity presence on social media, the perception of the ideal female body in Dubai relies heavily on images from the United States. Common cosmetic surgery treatments among ado-

lescent females in Dubai include breast and buttock augmentation, liposuction, ear correction, rhinoplasty, and facial fillers; however, these procedures are subject to change to follow trends teens observe in American celebrities.⁶ Teens in Dubai are requesting various procedures to resemble Kim Kardashian, Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Jennifer Lopez, Angelina Jolie, and Miley Cyrus. Plastic surgeons have received so many requests for enhanced buttocks and breasts implants from teens that they have named the powerful trend the “Kardashian” effect.⁷ With the generation of Instagram and Snapchat users, plastic surgeons have observed that “selfies are driving millennials to plastic surgery in an attempt to boost their image on social media sites.”⁸

Consequently, girls are developing serious body image issues. One of the reasons why teens as young as 13 seek out plastic surgery is due to body image anxiety or body dysmorphic disorder (BDD).⁹ BDD is a mental health disorder characterized by the idea that one's body is severely flawed and warrants corrective surgery.¹⁰ Among this very young group, rhinoplasties (surgical reshaping of the nose), otoplasties (surgical reshaping of the outer ear), and minor body contouring procedures are especially popular. These young girls turn to plastic surgery as an immediate solution to achieving outward perfection. Trends reveal that after one cosmetic procedure, a woman is over 50 percent more likely to schedule at least one more procedure.¹¹ Adolescent females are already clinically more susceptible to depression and body image-related mental illness.²

Recent substantial growth in the plastic surgery market has earned Dubai the title of “the world's plastic surgery hub.”⁴ Due to idolization of Western celebrities, social media addictions, and unrealistically high cultural beauty expectations, plastic surgery in Dubai has gained popularity among the younger generation of women. This surprising yet dangerous trend creates an unhealthy environment for girls growing up in the city's appearance-focused society. If nothing changes, Dubai's infatuation with body image and cosmetic surgery threatens to inflict severe, long-term emotional damage upon the young women who call it home.

“With 50 surgeons to every one million residents, Dubai has had the highest ratio of plastic surgeons per capita in the world since 2015, according to the Dubai Health Authority.”