

The Impact of Integrative Therapeutic Approaches (CBT and Positive Psychology) on Reducing the Tendency for Unnecessary Cosmetic Surgeries: A Cross-Cultural Analysis and Psychological Mechanisms

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Abstract

Unnecessary cosmetic surgeries, driven by unrealistic beauty standards and social pressures, have become a global challenge. This systematic review analyzes the effectiveness of integrative interventions combining Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Positive Psychology in reducing body dissatisfaction and the tendency for cosmetic surgeries. The study synthesizes findings from multiple empirical studies (2020–2023) sourced from reputable databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Results indicate that the combination of cognitive restructuring (CBT) and self-compassion exercises from Positive Psychology significantly reduces social anxiety and social comparison, as measured by Cohen's d effect size.

Cross-cultural analysis conducted in Iran, South Korea, and the United States revealed that media influences—such as cosmetic surgery advertisements on Instagram in Iran and Korean television programs—act as mediating factors in reducing intervention effectiveness. In Iran, 67% of women perceive rhinoplasty as a means of improving social opportunities, whereas in South Korea, 90% of female actors consider eyelid surgery an essential part of professional development. In the United States, the contradiction between body positivity movements and influencer-driven beauty advertisements has led to cognitive dissonance in 40% of women.

This research suggests that integrative interventions should adopt a culture-sensitive approach and be incorporated into public health policies.

Keywords : Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Positive Psychology, Unnecessary Cosmetic Surgery, Body Image, Cross-Cultural Analysis

Introduction

Over the past decade, the significant increase in unnecessary cosmetic surgeries, particularly in countries such as Iran, South Korea, and the United States, has raised serious concerns regarding their psychological and social consequences. According to the DSM-5-TR (APA, 2022), Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is recognized as one of the primary factors influencing decisions to undergo cosmetic procedures, with 76% of individuals diagnosed with BDD having undergone at least one cosmetic surgery.

Cultural and social factors, including media advertisements, the entertainment industry, and gender norms, also play a crucial role in shaping beauty standards. The present study aims to analyze the psychological mechanisms underlying integrative interventions of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Positive Psychology, while also examining the influence of cultural factors on the effectiveness of these interventions.

Methodology

Study Design

This research follows a systematic review approach based on PRISMA guidelines.

Databases and Keywords

The study retrieved data from Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and PubMed using the following keywords:

English:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy AND Positive Psychology AND Cosmetic Surgery
Body Image Dissatisfaction AND Cross-Cultural Analysis

Persian:

"جراحی زیبایی غیر ضروری", "اختلال تصویر بدنی",
"روانشناسی مثبت نگر"

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: Empirical studies (2020–2023) focusing on CBT, Positive Psychology, and cosmetic surgery.

Exclusion Criteria: Qualitative studies, theoretical articles, and research lacking quantitative data.

Country Selection

Iran, South Korea, and the United States were chosen based on:

High prevalence of cosmetic surgeries (e.g., Iran: 1.2 million rhinoplasty procedures annually).

Cultural norm differences :

Iran: The contrast between tradition and modernity.

South Korea: The concept of beauty as social capital.

United States: Body positivity contradictions.

Measurement Tools

Body Esteem Scale (BES) – Measures body dissatisfaction.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) – Assesses self-kindness and self-judgment.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder-Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale (BDD-YBOCS)
-Evaluates obsessive-compulsive tendencies related to body image.

Statistical Analysis Methods

Effect size analysis – To compare the effectiveness of interventions.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) – To examine cross-cultural differences.

Multivariate regression – To identify key predictive factors.

Psychological Analysis

- CBT Mechanisms
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Targeting cognitive distortions such as :
- Mind reading ("Everyone is judging my appearance")
- Catastrophizing ("If I don't get surgery, my life will be ruined")
- Wilhelm et al. (2021) found that cognitive restructuring explains 45% of the variance in reducing cosmetic surgery desire ($\beta = -0.065$, $p < 0.01$).

Reduction of Avoidance Behaviors

Gradual exposure to anxiety-provoking situations (e.g., social presence without undergoing surgery) led to a 32% reduction in avoidance behaviors.

Positive Psychology Interventions

Self-Compassion

Writing self-supportive letters reduces anxiety related to perceived physical flaws ($\beta = 0.712$)

Self-Efficacy

Strengthening beliefs in one's ability to handle social criticism without surgery ($F(1,67) = 8.9$, $p < 0.00$)

Cultural Analysis

Iran: The Clash Between Tradition and Modernity

Social Media Influence: 60% of popular Persian-language Instagram pages promote rhinoplasty.

Identity Conflict: 72% of Iranian women perceive cosmetic surgery as a means of overcoming social restrictions (Azmoon et al., 2023).

South Korea: Beauty as Social Capital

Television Programs: Shows like Let Me In portray dramatic surgical transformations as a "human right".

Entertainment Industry: 90% of female K-pop idols have admitted to undergoing eyelid surgery (Park, 2021).

United States: Body Positivity Contradictions

Influencer Paradox: Kim Kardashian simultaneously promotes body positivity and weight-loss products.

Race and Beauty: Black women experience three times more pressure than white women to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals (Spitzer & Sarwer, 2022).

Alternative Interventions

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Can reduce body dissatisfaction by 35% (Hayes et al., 2021)
- Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBI)
- Promote non-judgmental body awareness, reducing social comparison (Kabat-Zinn, 2020)

Findings

This study demonstrates that integrative interventions combining CBT and Positive Psychology can reduce the desire for unnecessary cosmetic surgeries by:

- Reducing cognitive distortions
- Enhancing self-efficacy

However, cultural differences significantly influence the effectiveness of these interventions:

Iran: Social pressures stemming from the conflict between tradition and modernity may limit participation in psychotherapy.

South Korea: The institutionalization of cosmetic surgery in media may weaken the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.

United States: The contradiction between body positivity movements and consumerist advertising highlights the need for culturally tailored therapeutic approaches.

Additionally, individual factors such as low self-esteem and childhood experiences should be considered in future interventions.

Limitations

Time constraints: The study includes research from 2020–2023 only.

Lack of long-term assessment: The effects of interventions were not evaluated beyond six months.

Country selection bias: Countries like Brazil were not included.

Self-reported data: Potential risk of response bias affecting the accuracy of results.

Discussion & Conclusion

This study highlights that integrating CBT and Positive Psychology can be effective in reducing the desire for unnecessary cosmetic surgeries. By targeting cognitive distortions and enhancing self-efficacy, these interventions significantly reduce body dissatisfaction and social anxiety.

Findings indicate that the interaction between individual and cultural factors plays a crucial role in intervention effectiveness:

Iran: Social and cultural pressures, particularly regarding tradition vs. modernity, reduce intervention efficacy.

South Korea: Cosmetic surgery as a professional necessity lowers public acceptance of psychological interventions.

United States: The tension between body positivity movements and media advertising creates complex effects on intervention success.

Recommendations

Therapeutic interventions should be culturally tailored to each country's unique social context.

Training programs for therapists should emphasize media influence and gender norms to improve intervention effectiveness.

Prioritizing preventive measures and reducing social pressures through effective policy-making in the field of cosmetic surgery advertising is essential. To this end, policymakers should establish restrictive regulations for the advertising of cosmetic surgeries in order to reduce the societal pressure to undergo unnecessary surgeries.

Ultimately, future research should focus on longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of these interventions. Additionally, integrating digital technologies with traditional therapies could lead to the development of more comprehensive and effective treatment approaches, which would have a greater impact on reducing body image-related issues and the anxieties associated with them.

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