

Labiaplasty and Its Potential Role in Normalizing Pedophilic Ideals

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To the editor

Labiaplasty, a prevalent cosmetic genital surgery, has seen a significant global increase over the last decade. In 2024, approximately 210,633 procedures were performed worldwide, a 48.2% rise since 2020, with Iran reporting 1,363 procedures and a 26.2% growth compared to 2023 (1). According to this growing trend, the natural diversity of female genital anatomy may gradually be disappeared, as media representations and surgical marketing increasingly promote a uniform ideal of genital appearance (2-3). Labiaplasty carries risks including infection, scarring, and altered sexual sensation. Limited evidence on its safety and effectiveness warrants caution, as current data does not broadly support these procedures (3).

This trend is largely influenced by cultural factors, particularly unrealistic media portrayals of female genitalia and the pervasive spread of pornography. These create skewed perceptions of "normal" anatomy and beauty standards (2).

The promotion of a narrow, uniform ideal of genital appearance—often a "minimal" or "Barbie-like" vulva resembling a prepubescent state—risks diminishing the natural diversity of female anatomy (2, 4). Such idealized standards

can inadvertently reinforce harmful perceptions, normalizing a childlike ideal and potentially contributing to the sexualization of immature features. While individuals and surgeons may not have pedophilic intentions, these aesthetic trends can indirectly align with and legitimize perceptions linked to pedophilic ideals by valorizing immature characteristics (4, 5).

Marketing and some practitioners wrongly portray the wide variety of natural vulvar appearances as abnormal, implying that non-prepubescent ideals lead to discomfort or sexual dysfunction. This is problematic as those redefining "natural" often stand to profit (5).

While labiaplasty might offer relief for some, its broader societal impact, including the shaping of societal perceptions of women's bodies and beauty standards and the promotion of consumerism, must be considered (2-4).

To mitigate the negative effects of this trend, education and awareness about the natural diversity of women's genitals should be prioritized. Promoting body acceptance and helping women embrace their bodies as they are, rather than conforming it to constructed aesthetic standards, can reduce the psychological and social concerns associated with these procedures (4).

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Surgeons including gynecologists should carefully consider both the ethical implications and potential clinical outcomes of labiaplasty, acknowledging that patient motivations, psychosocial factors, and realistic expectations are critical to responsible practice (5). The ethical considerations of this procedure, including issues of informed consent, patient autonomy, potential for coercion must be thoroughly addressed (3).

Healthcare providers, particularly midwives, play an integral role in these strategies by offering education, and support to women, thereby correcting misinformation and promoting comprehensive sexual health literacy. Awareness campaigns can be strengthened through collaboration with healthcare organizations, integration of educational programs in schools, the development of ethical and clinical guidelines, and the creation of supportive environments. These interventions can empower women to make informed decisions regarding their bodies, while addressing societal pressures and promoting evidence-based understanding of female sexual and reproductive health. Further studies on the consequences of promoting these procedures are recommended.

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