



Original Research Paper

Beauty Business in Iran: Does Beauty Make You Healthy?

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ABSTRACT

The beauty industry in Iran has seen remarkable growth in recent years, fueled by deep-rooted cultural ideals surrounding physical appearance. Many Iranians, as idealists, strive to meet high standards of beauty, a pursuit that has led to the booming of various beauty industries, including cosmetics, skincare, and plastic surgery. While the desire to look beautiful is often associated with social acceptance and personal confidence, the pursuit of beauty in Iran also has significant health consequences. Drawing on a review of existing literature, industry reports, and cultural studies, the study explores how beauty standards in Iran influence individual health, both physically and psychologically. Our results show that the pressures to conform to societal beauty standards can lead to an obsession with appearance, which, in turn, may result in mental health challenges such as anxiety, body dysmorphia, and depression. This article argues that while the beauty business thrives on society's idealistic vision of attractiveness, it comes at a cost. The commodification of beauty has not only reshaped cultural values but also introduced health risks that must be critically assessed.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the beauty industry in Iran has experienced unprecedented growth, becoming one of the most rapidly expanding markets in the world. According to statistics, the average age of cosmetic and personal care product users worldwide is 25, but in Iran, this age is decreasing every day. In fact, the age for using these cosmetic products has dropped to 14 years and even younger, reaching childhood. The

use of cosmetics in Iran has increased four to five times compared to 20 years ago. Studies have shown that, over a five-year period, the cost of purchasing cosmetics in each household (for women over 15 living in urban areas) has risen by 22 percent (Asriran, 2024).

This trend is deeply intertwined with longstanding cultural values that elevate physical appearance as a marker of personal and social

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identity (Hassani, et al., 2015). The role of media in shaping Iranian societal perceptions is particularly significant, with research showing how international media outlets can frame and influence public discourse about Iranian society and its institutions (Kharazmi & Mohammadi, 2020). Beauty ideals in Iranian society are characterized by a significant emphasis on specific aesthetic traits (Shahghasemi & Tafazzoli, 2013), driving many individuals to engage in diverse beauty practices and, in some cases, pursue cosmetic surgery to achieve societal standards. This shift in societal perception and behavior raises critical questions about the impact of such practices on individual well-being and public health.

As the beauty industry flourishes, an increasing number of Iranians invest in cosmetics, skincare, and more invasive procedures such as rhinoplasty, which has become especially popular. Many view these practices as a means of achieving social acceptance and self-confidence, embodying ideals that are consistently promoted in Iranian media and reinforced through societal expectations (Zojaji et al., 2018; Shahghasemi, 2021; Mohammadshahi et al., 2014; Ebrahimi et al., 2016). Yet, the physical and psychological costs associated with adhering to these ideals are becoming apparent. From the frequent use of unregulated products to the potential psychological toll of conforming to unrealistic standards, the pursuit of beauty in Iran is accompanied with many risks. These range from bodily harm caused by inadequate regulations in the beauty sector to mental health challenges, including body dysmorphia, anxiety, depression, and the emergence of a new phenomenon named cosmetic surgery monsters.

The term "cosmetic surgery monsters" refers to individuals who have undergone excessive or extreme cosmetic surgeries, resulting in dramatically altered appearances that may no longer look natural. While cosmetic surgery can offer positive changes, enhance confidence, and correct physical insecurities, the pursuit of "perfection" sometimes leads to repeated, often risky procedures. Overuse of cosmetic surgery can lead to distorted features, loss of facial expressions, and even health complications. This phenomenon is increasingly visible in the Iranian social media and celebrity culture, where high beauty standards and body image pressures

encourage the use of cosmetic alterations. The term "monsters" reflects society's judgment of those who exceed conventional beauty norms to the point of becoming unrecognizable or exaggerated. Furthermore, as we mentioned before the cosmetic surgery industry, driven by profits, overlook mental health concerns, offering risky procedures to individuals who may already struggle with body image. No independent study on this phenomenon has been done yet but this is a phenomenon that is increasingly visible (Lee & Campus, 2016).

The existing body of research on beauty standards and health implications provides valuable insights into the complexities of beauty culture, particularly in societies like Iran with strong aesthetic norms. Studies from various cultural contexts highlight a common theme: societies that place a high premium on physical appearance often see corresponding trends in mental health issues, such as body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and increased prevalence of cosmetic procedures (Cash, 2012; Frederick et al., 2007). Iran, with its unique combination of cultural ideals and societal pressures, offers a distinctive case for examining the psychological and physical impacts of beauty standards.

The emphasis on beauty in Iranian culture is deeply rooted, with historical and social influences shaping ideals that continue to hold significant sway. Historically, beauty has been associated with grace, social standing, and moral virtues, reflecting values that extend beyond physical appearance. Iranian classical poets held beauty in high regard, often integrating it as a core theme in their works. For them, beauty wasn't solely a physical trait but a reflection of divine elegance, moral virtues, and emotional depth. This appreciation of beauty was intertwined with spirituality, love, and humanity, reflecting a special understanding of aesthetics that transcended mere physical appearances. The poetry of figures like Hafez, Rumi, Saadi, and Ferdowsi reveals their profound admiration for beauty as an essential element of existence, a notion that remains influential in Persian culture today.

Hafez of Shiraz is perhaps one of the most revered poets in Persian literature, renowned for his celebration of love, wine, and beauty. In his poetry, beauty is an embodiment of divine presence, a window into the world of the eternal. Hafez's use of

the beloved's physical attributes, like the face, eyes, or hair, is often symbolic, representing deeper philosophical concepts. For instance, the beauty of a beloved's face may symbolize divine light, while their hair or eyes represent the mystery of the universe. This metaphorical portrayal allows Hafez to convey that physical beauty is merely a reflection of inner virtues and an indication of divine splendor (Lewisohn, 1999).

Similarly, Rumi, another towering figure in Iranian poetry, expressed admiration for beauty but often associated it with spiritual awakening. For Rumi, beauty is a divine attribute that draws humans closer to God. His poetry frequently reflects the idea that the soul is perpetually in search of beauty, both as an aesthetic experience and as a spiritual journey. In *Masnavi*, he describes this quest as a path toward unity with the divine, suggesting that true beauty lies beyond the material world. Rumi's admiration for beauty transcends earthly matters, illustrating it as a powerful force that can break the chains of worldly attachments and lead to spiritual fulfillment (Lewis, 2000).

Saadi, known for his works *Gulistan* and *Bustan*, took a more pragmatic approach to beauty. His poetry often emphasizes the moral and ethical dimensions associated with beauty, suggesting that true beauty involves kindness, compassion, and wisdom. In his view, a beautiful face is enhanced by good character, and external attractiveness is incomplete without inner virtues. Saadi's admiration for beauty is thus nuanced; he appreciates physical allure but values moral beauty even more. This holistic understanding is evident in his didactic poems, where he encourages readers to cultivate inner beauty through acts of charity, humility, and empathy.

Ferdowsi, the author of *Shahnameh*, the Persian epic, also admired beauty but often linked it to the valor and nobility of his characters. In *Shahnameh*, beauty often appears in the descriptions of heroic figures and noblewomen, whose outer beauty mirrors their courage, honor, and loyalty. Ferdowsi's admiration for beauty is closely tied to the virtues of his characters, emphasizing the notion that external appearance should reflect inner strength and moral values. For him, beauty and heroism are inseparable, as they together create the ideal Persian hero or heroine.

Iranian classical poets, therefore, saw beauty as a concept with both aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. While physical beauty captivated them, they viewed it as incomplete without the presence of moral or spiritual qualities. For poets like Hafez, Rumi, Saadi, and Ferdowsi, beauty was more than mere appearance; it was a pathway to understanding divine mysteries, achieving moral excellence, and embodying human virtues. The legacy of these poets continues to influence Iranian culture, where beauty is celebrated as a multifaceted ideal that inspires, uplifts, and connects humanity to the divine.

Modern-day Iran, however, has witnessed an evolution in beauty ideals, influenced by global trends and local media representation. Studies have shown that Iranian women, in particular, experience high levels of societal pressure to conform to specific physical standards, often leading to significant investments in beauty products and procedures (Rahimi, 2015).

Research indicates that the pursuit of beauty in societies with stringent physical standards can lead to various health issues, both physical and psychological. For instance, cosmetic procedures, while increasingly normalized, come with inherent risks, especially in settings where regulatory oversight may be limited. In Iran, the popularity of procedures like rhinoplasty and skin treatments has been linked to cases of medical complications, with some studies citing a need for stricter regulation of beauty practices to protect consumer safety (Zamani, 2020).

Moreover, the psychological impact of adhering to beauty standards can be profound. Body image dissatisfaction, often exacerbated by media portrayals and social expectations, has been associated with mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphia (Tiggemann, 2014). In Iran, where idealized beauty is pervasive, many individuals may face added psychological pressure, impacting their quality of life and mental well-being. The literature suggests a clear link between beauty standards and mental health challenges, emphasizing the need for awareness and intervention to address these issues effectively.

As we mentioned, the beauty industry's rapid growth in Iran has led to a proliferation of beauty products, some of which lack adequate regulatory oversight. Studies have reported cases where the use

of unregulated skincare and cosmetic products has resulted in adverse reactions, including skin irritation, allergic responses, and in severe cases, toxic effects (Alnuqaydan, 2024). The demand for beauty products, combined with insufficient regulation, creates an environment where consumers may be at risk.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore Iranian consumers' use of cosmetics and the cultural, psychological, industry and health implications tied to beauty standards within the country. By examining secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and library resources, this research aims to provide a comprehensive view of the factors influencing the extensive use of beauty products and services in Iran, along with the societal expectations that shape these behaviors.

2. Data Collection

Data for this study will be gathered primarily from two types of sources:

Academic Literature: A range of peer-reviewed articles from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and public health were reviewed to understand the social and mental health consequences associated with beauty standards in Iran. Sources included studies on body image dissatisfaction, cosmetic surgery trends, and mental health impacts of societal beauty ideals, all contextualized within the Iranian cultural framework.

Industry and Market Reports: Recent reports from credible market research sources and governmental databases provided insights into the economic scale and trends of the beauty industry in Iran, including cosmetic product sales, growth of cosmetic surgery, and demographic factors influencing these trends. Reports also provided information on regulatory frameworks governing beauty products and procedures, crucial to understanding the public health risks associated with unregulated products and practices.

3. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes regarding cosmetic use and the societal standards of beauty in Iran. Data from literature sources were coded to extract themes such as societal beauty expectations, psychological impacts, and health risks. Market reports were analyzed to identify economic factors and demographic trends that contribute to the expansion of Iran's beauty industry and market.

4. Ethical Considerations

Since this study relies on secondary data, direct interactions with human subjects did not happen, minimizing ethical concerns regarding personal privacy or informed consent. However, ethical responsibility was exercised by critically evaluating the reliability of all sources and acknowledging the potential limitations associated with using secondary data in research.

5. Limitations

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which may not capture the most recent shifts in societal attitudes or regulatory changes affecting the increasingly changing beauty industry in Iran. Additionally, available data may lack insights into more complex or localized consumer perspectives, which could be addressed in future studies through primary data collection methods such as surveys or interviews.

FINDINGS

The rapid expansion of Iran's beauty industry and market has introduced a variety of health risks, both physical and psychological, to consumers. This section examines the primary health concerns associated with beauty practices in Iran, including risks linked to cosmetic procedures, the use of unregulated beauty products, and the psychological impacts of conforming to societal beauty standards.

Physical Health Risks: Cosmetic Procedures and Unregulated Products

Iran has one of the highest rates of cosmetic surgery in the world, with rhinoplasty being especially popular among both men and women. While many surgeries are performed in certified medical facilities by trained professionals, a growing number of procedures are conducted by unlicensed

practitioners in unregulated environments, resulting in complications such as infections, scarring, and, in severe cases, permanent disfigurement. The high demand for cosmetic procedures has outpaced the regulatory framework needed to ensure consumer safety, leaving many individuals vulnerable to health complications from improperly performed surgeries.

Additionally, the widespread use of unregulated skincare and cosmetic products poses another set of physical health risks. These products, often imported or produced without adequate oversight, may contain harmful ingredients such as mercury, lead, or other toxic chemicals that can cause allergic reactions, skin damage, or long-term health issues. Studies have shown that some beauty products sold in Iran do not meet international safety standards, leading to a rise in health issues among frequent users. The lack of regulatory enforcement in the beauty sector exacerbates these risks, as consumers may be unaware of the potential dangers associated with certain products.

These risks are inherent to both surgical and non-surgical procedures, and their incidence varies based on factors such as surgical skill, patient health status, and post-operative care.

Infection is one of the most common complications associated with cosmetic surgeries, particularly those involving invasive techniques. Studies indicate that surgical site infections (SSIs) occur in about 1-5% of all surgeries, but this rate can be significantly higher in cosmetic procedures due to the extensive handling of tissues and the patient's recovery environment. Liposuction, for example, requires multiple incisions and can result in severe infections when not properly managed. In a study on liposuction-related infections, approximately 3% of patients experienced postoperative infections, with cases occasionally leading to sepsis.

Infections not only slow recovery but can lead to systemic issues if not promptly addressed. The use of unsterile instruments, inadequate post-operative care, or patients failing to adhere to post-operative guidelines are common contributors to these complications. Research also suggests that antibiotic-resistant bacteria, such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, present further risks in cosmetic procedures, especially in facilities that may lack rigorous infection-control protocols. In Iran, Amir Houshang Ehsani, a dermatologist and board member of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, describes two

categories of complications for piercing procedure: "First, we should mention infections that enter the subcutaneous space, often accompanied by wounds. Another issue is the allergic reactions caused by this minor procedure, which can lead to considerable challenges. Infections can range from mild types like impetigo and herpes to more serious infections such as HBS (hepatitis) and HIV (AIDS), though these are rare. The second category of complications involves localized allergic reactions. These reactions, which can appear both at and away from the contact site, can worsen with scratching" (Vista, 2024).

Hematoma, a localized collection of blood outside the blood vessels, is a frequent complication after cosmetic surgeries, with incidences reported between 1-10% in procedures such as facelifts and breast augmentation. The accumulation of blood can cause significant swelling, discoloration, and pain. Additionally, hematomas increase the risk of infection due to the trapped blood serving as a medium for bacterial growth.

Seromas, on the other hand, involve the accumulation of serous fluid rather than blood. These are particularly common in procedures like abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) and can lead to chronic inflammation or fibrosis if untreated. Both hematomas and seromas often require further surgical intervention for drainage, prolonging recovery time and increasing the risk of other complications. Although drains are sometimes inserted post-surgery to mitigate these risks, their use itself can introduce infection if not managed under sterile conditions. As a result of dangerous complications, it was reported in fall 2023 that in a matter of weeks, three women died during cosmetic surgeries in Iran (Javan, 2023).

Nerve damage is a well-documented risk associated with various cosmetic procedures, notably facelifts, rhinoplasty, and breast augmentation. Temporary numbness is common, as nerves are often severed or irritated during surgery; however, in some cases, the damage may be permanent. Facial nerve damage, for instance, can result in asymmetrical facial expressions, which can profoundly affect a patient's quality of life.

In breast augmentation, nerve damage can affect sensation in the nipples and breasts, with estimates suggesting that between 10-15% of patients may experience lasting sensory alterations. Loss of sensation in specific body parts can affect

individuals' mental well-being and physical functionality, as well as hinder their sense of body autonomy and comfort, posing long-term issues that may require nerve repair surgeries, which are often complex and not always successful.

One of the most severe and potentially fatal risks associated with cosmetic surgery is the development of blood clots, particularly deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE). DVT occurs when a blood clot forms in a deep vein, commonly in the legs, and can lead to PE if the clot travels to the lungs, blocking blood flow. Prolonged immobility during surgery, combined with postoperative recovery periods, contributes to the risk of clot formation. Studies indicate that cosmetic procedures involving extensive body reshaping, such as tummy tucks or multiple simultaneous procedures, significantly increase the risk of thromboembolic events.

The incidence of DVT and PE in cosmetic surgery patients ranges from 0.1% to 0.8%, with a higher prevalence in patients undergoing multiple surgeries at once. These conditions are often sudden and can lead to respiratory distress, shock, or even death if not treated immediately. Preventative measures, such as the use of compression stockings, anticoagulants, and encouraging early mobilization post-surgery, are employed to minimize this risk, though they do not eliminate it entirely.

Anesthesia is an integral component of many cosmetic procedures, particularly invasive surgeries. However, it introduces risks that can have severe health implications. Local anesthesia carries lower risk, but general anesthesia, often used in longer or more complex procedures, has been associated with respiratory complications, cardiovascular issues, and, in rare cases, anesthesia awareness, where patients regain consciousness during surgery but are unable to move or communicate.

One of the greatest risks of anesthesia in cosmetic surgery is its impact on the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, which can lead to cardiac arrest, particularly in patients with underlying health conditions. Anesthesia-induced respiratory distress or airway obstruction is particularly concerning in cosmetic procedures involving the face or neck, where surgical adjustments may inadvertently compromise the airway (Butterworth et al., 2018). Despite preoperative assessments, patients

sometimes experience unforeseen reactions to anesthesia, which can result in extended recovery times or, in extreme cases, fatality.

While cosmetic surgery aims to enhance physical appearance, it can paradoxically lead to scarring or disfigurement, especially when complications arise. Keloid and hypertrophic scars are common issues post-surgery, often forming at the incision site and becoming more pronounced over time. Certain procedures, such as facelifts, carry a risk of visible scarring that can detract from the aesthetic outcome and potentially require revision surgery (Most et al., 2019).

Disfigurement occurs in cases where the body does not heal as anticipated, or if surgical techniques result in asymmetry, tissue loss, or deformity. In procedures like rhinoplasty, a poorly executed surgery can lead to nasal deformities, which not only affect appearance but can also impair nasal functionality. Reconstructive surgeries to correct disfigurements are typically complex and may not fully restore the desired appearance, leaving patients with permanent physical and emotional repercussions.

For individuals opting for implants, such as breast or gluteal implants, there are additional risks of complications. Breast implants, in particular, have been associated with implant rupture, leakage, and capsular contracture, a condition where scar tissue forms around the implant, causing hardness and deformity. Capsular contracture affects approximately 10-15% of breast augmentation patients and often necessitates further surgery for implant replacement or removal.

Recent studies also indicate a connection between certain types of breast implants and anaplastic large-cell lymphoma (ALCL), a rare type of cancer that develops in the scar tissue surrounding the implant. This association has led to increased scrutiny of implant safety and regulatory actions to mitigate cancer risks, though the long-term effects remain uncertain. Perhaps, some of these complications are due to illegal cosmetic procedures by Iranian doctors who work in a profession different from which they have been trained for. A report says in Iran some cardiologists have entered the field of Botox injections, as it offers higher income, and some heart surgeons are performing mammoplasties. Some specialists have

left their treatment fields and turned to hair transplants and Botox injections (Mehr, 2024).

Liposuction, a common cosmetic procedure, carries the unique risk of fat embolism syndrome (FES), a potentially fatal complication. FES occurs when fat particles enter the bloodstream, typically during large-volume liposuction or gluteal fat transfer (Buttock augmentation), and lodge in the lungs, brain, or heart. Symptoms of FES include respiratory distress, confusion, and, in severe cases, multi-organ failure. Given the growing popularity of liposuction and buttock augmentation procedures, awareness of this risk is critical, as FES can occur suddenly and may be challenging to treat effectively. In 2018, Hassan Norouzi, spokesperson for the Parliamentary Judicial and Legal Commission, announced penalties of up to two months in prison and 74 lashes under Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code for individuals seeking procedures like "cat-eye" and "donkey-ear" surgeries, as well as for doctors facilitating such actions. Norouzi confirmed that emerging cosmetic surgeries, such as altering eye color and ear shape, are not considered legally permissible (Ishragh, 2018).

The study by Ahmadifar and Jafari Tosi (2018) explores the legal responsibilities of cosmetic surgeons under Islamic penal laws, emphasizing how failure to meet these responsibilities can lead to criminal charges. According to their analysis, many issues in cosmetic surgery arise from non-compliance with conditions necessary to avoid penal responsibility. Article 4 of the relevant laws mandates that surgeons must, first and foremost, assess and communicate the necessity and associated risks of a procedure. Additionally, they are required to secure the patient's informed consent and demonstrate expertise in their specialized field. In cases where a surgery is deemed unnecessary, surgeons are legally obligated to utilize the maximum available facilities and tools. Even when avoidance might seem appropriate, the failure to prove adherence to these duties (such as informing the patient and following technical standards) could be sufficient grounds for legal culpability. Thus, surgeons must be able to demonstrate a thorough risk-benefit analysis, proper patient notification, and adherence to technical and scientific standards in their practice, to protect against accusations of negligence or misconduct (Ahmadifar & Jafari Tosi, 2018).

1. Unauthorized Cosmetics

Besides risks of cosmetic surgery, the use of unauthorized cosmetic products poses significant risks to skin health and overall bodily functions, as they often lack proper regulatory oversight and safety testing. These products, commonly sold in informal markets or online, can contain harmful chemicals, toxic heavy metals, or allergens that compromise skin integrity and systemic health. Such products are particularly concerning as they attract consumers seeking inexpensive beauty solutions, unaware of the potential dangers involved. The risks associated with unauthorized cosmetics range from skin irritation to serious, sometimes irreversible, health complications, underscoring the need for consumer awareness and regulatory intervention. In October 2024, the Iranian Food and Drug Administration announced a list of unauthorized cosmetic and personal care products in a statement (IRNA, 2024).

Unauthorized cosmetics may contain high levels of unregulated chemicals that can cause acute or chronic skin reactions. Ingredients such as hydroquinone, corticosteroids, and tretinoin, commonly found in unauthorized skin-lightening products, are often present in concentrations higher than medically recommended, posing risks of skin thinning, irritation, and photosensitivity. Long-term use of hydroquinone, for example, can lead to a condition called ochronosis, where the skin becomes darkened and discolored, defeating the purpose of the product and creating lasting damage.

Additionally, unauthorized products may contain preservatives such as parabens and formaldehyde releasers, which can cause allergic reactions and dermatitis upon skin contact. Research shows that prolonged exposure to parabens, often used as preservatives in cosmetics, may disrupt endocrine function, as these chemicals can mimic estrogen activity in the body, potentially leading to hormonal imbalances and an increased risk of breast cancer (Darbre & Harvey, 2014). Formaldehyde, a known carcinogen, is particularly dangerous when absorbed through the skin over time, increasing the risk of skin cancer and allergic contact dermatitis. These chemical contaminants, often undisclosed in unauthorized products, illustrate the health hazards posed by cosmetics lacking proper formulation standards. In June 2024, The Public Relations Office

of the Food and Drug Administration has announced the names of several unauthorized cosmetic brands.

According to this report, various skincare products under the brand names Clean & Clear, Neutrogena, and Aveeno have been classified as unauthorized (Khabaronline, 2024).

Heavy metals such as lead, mercury, arsenic, and cadmium are frequently detected in unauthorized cosmetics, especially in certain lipsticks, eyeliners, and skin-lightening creams. These metals, while sometimes naturally present in trace amounts, are strictly regulated in approved cosmetics due to their toxicity. Lead, for example, has no safe exposure level and is associated with neurological, developmental, and reproductive toxicity, especially when absorbed through the lips or skin in regular doses (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

Mercury, often present in unauthorized skin-lightening products, poses significant risks to skin and systemic health. When applied to the skin, mercury can accumulate in the body, leading to kidney damage and neurological impairment. Additionally, studies have shown that mercury exposure through cosmetics can lead to skin rashes, peeling, and irritation, with more severe health effects resulting from prolonged use. Consumers often remain unaware of mercury's presence, as unauthorized products rarely disclose it, heightening the risk of mercury poisoning through unintentional use (Gbetoh & Amyot, 2016). Iranian health experts have warned that the use of non-standard and smuggled products, which often contain high levels of heavy metals such as lead, arsenic, and mercury, poses significant health risks. These compounds are frequently used as pigments in these products due to their coloring properties, leading to the accumulation of these pollutants in soft tissues. This accumulation can result in serious and irreversible effects on the body (ISNA, 2024).

Cadmium and arsenic are similarly hazardous, with both linked to cancer and immune suppression. When included in cosmetics, these metals penetrate the skin, where they can cause DNA damage, increasing the risk of cancer over time. The presence of heavy metals in unauthorized cosmetics not only damages the skin but also poses long-term risks to organs, underscoring the necessity of stringent regulations to prevent toxic exposure through beauty products.

Unauthorized cosmetics, often produced in unsanitary conditions, are prone to bacterial contamination. Such products may contain harmful microorganisms like *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Escherichia coli*, which can cause severe skin infections and complications, particularly in individuals with sensitive or damaged skin barriers. Contamination usually results from improper storage, handling, or production practices that do not adhere to hygiene standards. Once applied, these contaminated products can lead to skin rashes, pustules, or in severe cases, cellulitis or abscesses that require medical intervention.

Microbial contamination is not limited to the skin. Eye cosmetics, for instance, can lead to conjunctivitis and other infections if bacteria-laden products come into contact with the eyes. This risk is especially concerning with unauthorized mascara, eyeliner, and eyeshadow products, where close proximity to the eyes increases the likelihood of introducing pathogens to the delicate ocular region. Given that microbial contamination can spread to other parts of the body and cause systemic infections, the health risks of using contaminated, unauthorized cosmetics are substantial and far-reaching. In 2020, Iranian news agencies started to warn that various types of bacteria are found in counterfeit cosmetics. These bacteria can cause poisoning, skin inflammation, and allergic reactions. One type of bacteria commonly found in these products is *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), which can lead to severe diarrhea, kidney problems, and anemia (Borna News, 2020).

Unauthorized cosmetics often contain unregulated fragrances and dyes that can trigger allergic reactions and skin sensitization. Fragrances are one of the leading causes of allergic contact dermatitis, with symptoms ranging from redness and swelling to blisters and severe itching (Johansen et al., 2015). Unauthorized products frequently contain synthetic fragrances and colorants not permitted in regulated cosmetics, making allergic reactions more likely.

Allergic reactions are not limited to immediate skin responses but can lead to long-term sensitization. Continuous use of these allergens can cause sensitization, meaning that the individual may become hypersensitive to the substance, developing

more severe reactions upon future exposure (Farage et al., 2019). Sensitization to allergens in unauthorized cosmetics not only affects users' quality of life but also restricts their future cosmetic choices, as certain ingredients may need to be avoided permanently.

The skin, while primarily serving as a protective barrier, can absorb chemicals from topical applications, allowing these substances to enter the bloodstream. Unauthorized cosmetics, especially those containing steroids or hormone-like substances, pose a risk for systemic absorption, which can lead to internal organ damage, hormonal disruptions, and other health problems. Corticosteroids, for example, are sometimes illegally added to skin-lightening products due to their ability to lighten skin quickly. However, their prolonged use can lead to skin thinning, delayed wound healing, and adrenal suppression, as well as systemic effects such as high blood pressure and increased susceptibility to infections.

Additionally, studies have indicated that prolonged use of cosmetics containing endocrine-disrupting chemicals, such as phthalates and parabens, can have widespread health effects. These chemicals mimic hormones, potentially leading to reproductive issues, developmental problems, and increased cancer risk (Diamanti-Kandarakis et al., 2009). Because unauthorized products are unregulated, the concentrations of these chemicals may far exceed safe limits, intensifying their harmful effects on users over time.

2. Psychological Health Risks: Body Image and Mental Health Challenges

The psychological impact of adhering to beauty standards in Iran is substantial. Social media and local celebrities continuously promote an idealized version of beauty, creating a cultural environment where appearance is heavily emphasized. This pressure to conform can result in mental health issues such as anxiety, body dysmorphia, and low self-esteem, particularly among younger generations who are more susceptible to societal influences. Research has shown that when faced with complex decisions, even highly educated individuals tend to make choices without sufficient knowledge rather than admitting uncertainty about their choices (Sabbar et al., 2019). This tendency becomes particularly concerning in the context of beauty

procedures, where uninformed decisions can have lasting consequences.

Research has found that young Iranians who actively engage with social media platforms are at a higher risk of developing body dissatisfaction and related mental health issues due to constant exposure to idealized images (Shahyad et al., 2018). The pursuit of societal approval through physical appearance can lead to obsessive behaviors, where individuals repeatedly seek cosmetic interventions to attain or maintain the idealized standard of beauty. This pursuit often leads to a cyclical pattern of dissatisfaction, as achieving the "perfect" appearance is an elusive and ever-changing goal influenced by shifting beauty trends.

The normalization of cosmetic enhancements, coupled with the societal glorification of certain physical traits, reinforces a culture where self-worth is closely tied to appearance. For many, this can lead to chronic stress and psychological strain, impacting overall well-being and creating barriers to a positive self-image. The interplay between societal expectations and personal identity in Iran thus represents a complex psychological challenge, one that warrants further investigation and potential intervention.

The study by Norouzishadehi, Maleki Pirbazari, and Salehi (2020) investigates how cyberspace contributes to the prevalence of cosmetic surgeries among women. This research employed a descriptive and causal-comparative design, targeting women over 18 who visited cosmetic surgery clinics in Lahijan and underwent procedures in the year 1398 AH (Islamic calendar). Through available sampling, the researchers selected 30 women who had cosmetic surgeries and a comparison group of 30 women who had not. Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire called the Pathological Use of Cyberspace. Statistical analyses, including independent t-tests and chi-square tests, revealed differences in pathological cyberspace usage between the two groups, although no significant difference was found concerning education level and surgery decisions. The study concludes that cyberspace influences cosmetic surgery rates, regardless of educational background. The authors suggest that these findings could be applied in cosmetic clinics to identify and offer guidance to women pursuing surgery due to excessive and problematic use of cyberspace.

The study by Shirmohammadi, Hosseini, and Amiri (2020) investigates the relationship between psychopathology and attachment styles among women seeking cosmetic surgery in Kermanshah, Iran, with a focus on the mediating role of basic psychological needs. Using a descriptive, correlational design, the researchers sampled 300 women applying for cosmetic procedures at specialized surgery centers in Kermanshah. Data were collected via questionnaires measuring attachment styles, basic psychological needs, and psychopathology, and analyzed using SPSS (v. 22) and LISREL (v. 8.8). The study concludes that attachment styles and basic psychological needs may be important for the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of psychological issues, as well as for promoting mental health among women interested in cosmetic surgery. The findings suggest that understanding these variables could improve mental health interventions for this demographic, especially in light of growing environmental concerns impacting skin health, such as UV radiation, air pollution, tobacco smoke, and exposure to other toxins.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of Iran's beauty industry reveals a dichotomy between cultural aspirations and health implications. On one hand, the pursuit of beauty is rooted in longstanding cultural values that celebrate physical grace and refinement. On the other hand, the industry's rapid growth and the intense pressures it places on individuals have introduced significant health risks that warrant critical examination.

The societal pressures associated with beauty standards are not unique to Iran, yet the specific cultural context magnifies their impact. Iranian society's emphasis on physical appearance as a measure of social acceptance places individuals in a vulnerable position, where nonconformity can lead to social exclusion or diminished self-esteem. This cultural imperative to achieve a particular look has been fueled by the beauty industry, which capitalizes on these ideals by promoting products and procedures that promise societal approval and personal satisfaction.

The psychological and physical health risks linked to the beauty industry highlight a need for

increased public awareness and regulatory reform. Implementing stricter regulations on cosmetic procedures and beauty products could help protect consumers from harmful practices, while public health campaigns could educate individuals on the potential risks of certain beauty practices. Addressing the psychological impact of beauty standards, however, may require broader societal change. Shifting the cultural narrative around appearance could help reduce the mental health burden associated with beauty ideals, fostering a healthier relationship with physical appearance.

Moreover, this analysis underscores the importance of further research into the long-term effects of beauty practices on both physical and mental health. By adopting a more holistic approach that considers cultural, psychological, and physical health factors, policymakers and health advocates can work toward creating a safer and more supportive environment for individuals navigating societal beauty expectations in Iran.

CONCLUSION

While the pursuit of beauty is deeply rooted in Iranian culture, the intensifying pressures to conform to specific aesthetic ideals have introduced significant risks to both physical and mental well-being. As individuals strive to meet societal expectations, many turn to cosmetic procedures and beauty products that, in the absence of proper regulation, may lead to harmful physical effects. Concurrently, the psychological toll of maintaining these ideals is profound, with body image dissatisfaction, anxiety, and low self-esteem becoming increasingly common among Iranians who face constant social scrutiny regarding their appearance.

This article underscores the need for increased public awareness about the health implications of beauty practices. Education campaigns led by health professionals and government entities could provide individuals with a clearer understanding of the risks associated with unregulated products and cosmetic procedures. Furthermore, by promoting a broader and more inclusive view of beauty, Iranian society could reduce the social pressures that contribute to mental health challenges and enable individuals to develop a healthier self-image.

Policy interventions are equally essential in addressing these issues. Strengthening regulatory oversight of beauty products and cosmetic procedures would ensure that consumers are protected from unsafe practices. For instance, enforcing quality control measures on beauty products and requiring licensing for cosmetic practitioners could mitigate many of the health risks currently facing consumers in Iran. Ultimately, balancing cultural beauty ideals with a commitment to health and safety will require collective action from policymakers, health advocates, and the beauty industry itself.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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