

Public Perceptions and Misconceptions of Plastic Surgery in Morocco: Analysis and Implications

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Plastic surgery is garnering increasing interest in Morocco, yet it remains surrounded by numerous stereotypes and misconceptions. This article explores the misconceptions and stereotypes about plastic surgery in Morocco, based on data collected from the local population with diverse social backgrounds. A total of 200 individuals were invited to participate in the survey, and 165 of them (82.5%) completed the questionnaire. Among the participants, 82.4% were women, and 17.6% were men, with a predominance of the 25-35 age group (65.5%). Our findings reveal that 52.1% of respondents had a vague understanding of plastic surgery, while 43% claimed to have a clear knowledge of the concept. The most well-known procedures included skin grafting (40%), injectable treatments such as Botox (39.3%), and breast augmentation (38.2%). Finally, a majority of 63.8% of participants perceived plastic surgery as accessible only to wealthy individuals. This study highlights the urgent need for awareness campaigns tailored to the Moroccan context to promote a better understanding of the benefits of plastic surgery, whether reconstructive or aesthetic.

Keywords: Plastic Surgery, Perception, Stereotypes.

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INTRODUCTION

Plastic surgery has become an essential medical speciality, providing both aesthetic and reconstructive solutions. However, in Morocco, this discipline is often misunderstood and elicits mixed reactions, frequently linked to negative stereotypes such as superficiality, waste, or even cultural Westernization. This stigma hinders the understanding of the medical and psychological benefits it can offer. This article aims to analyze the main misconceptions about plastic surgery within the Moroccan population and propose strategies for raising awareness, promoting a more objective and informed perspective.

PATIENTS ET METHODS

This is a descriptive and cross-sectional study conducted among the Moroccan population. The objective of this study was to assess and explore, in a declarative and anonymous manner, the misconceptions and stereotypes related to plastic surgery among Moroccans. The study was carried out over a two-month period, from November 2024 to January 2025, targeting both men and women of Moroccan nationality, whether residing in Morocco or abroad. Individuals who did not

complete the questionnaire or who filled it out incorrectly were excluded from the sample.

Our study aimed to evaluate the misconceptions and stereotypes within the Moroccan population, who were surveyed on the following aspects: General knowledge and perception of plastic surgery; Attitudes and judgments; Accessibility and cost; Misconceptions and the influence of media and social networks. To achieve this, we developed a questionnaire consisting of 30 questions, 28 of which were closed-ended and 2 open-ended. The closed-ended questions provided single or multiple response options, while some were formulated with graded responses based on a Likert scale. The design of the questionnaire was carried out in two stages: first, an initial bibliographic review, followed by the development and drafting of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was created using the "Google Forms" platform, which allowed for the collection of results in the form of Excel tables and graphs, with data presented in numbers and percentages. The study was conducted in compliance with Moroccan laws and the guidelines set forth by the Declaration of Helsinki, which aim to protect the rights of individuals participating in medical research. Before answering the questionnaire, all participants were informed about the study's objectives, and their consent was obtained. Throughout the study

period, we ensured the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of their data.

RESULTS

Epidemiological and professional profile:

A total of 200 individuals were invited to participate in the survey. Of these, 165 (82.5%) agreed to complete the questionnaire (Figure 1). In our study, we recorded 136 (82.4%) females and 29 (17.6%) males, reflecting a female predominance with a female-to-male

ratio of 4.7. The predominant age group in our study was between 25 and 35 years (65.5%), followed by those under 25 years (23.6%), 7.9% were aged between 36 and 45 years, and 3% were over 46 years of age. The results showed that 83.1% (n=138) of the participants had a medium socio-economic status, 13.3% (n=22) had a high socio-economic status, and 3.5% (n=6) had a low socio-economic status. Among the respondents, 65% had a university-level education, and 33% held a high school diploma.

Table 1. Demographic Data About Respondents

Sex	
Female	82,4%
Male	17,6%
Age, y	
<25	23,6%
25–35	65,5%
36–45	7,9%
46–55	0,6%
>55	2,4%
Socio-economic level	
High	13,3%
Medium	83,1%
Low	3,6%

General knowledge of plastic surgery:

Our results indicate that 52.1% (n=86) of respondents had a rather vague understanding of reconstructive and aesthetic surgery, while 43% (n=71) claimed to have a clear understanding of the concept, and 4.8% (n=8) had no knowledge on the subject (Fig. 2). Skin grafting (40%), Botox injections (39.3%), and

breast augmentation (38.2%) were the most recognized procedures within our sample. Furthermore, 54.5% (n=90) of the participants reported being aware of the reconstructive aspect of plastic surgery, specifically the management of congenital malformations, major burns, and tumor-related conditions. In contrast, 45.5% (n=75) were unaware of these reconstructive interventions.

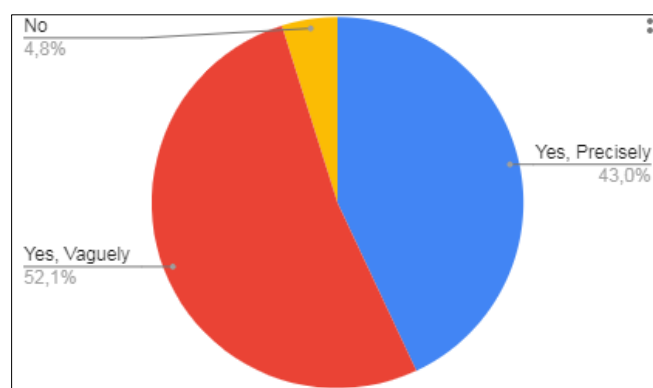


Fig. 2: General public awareness of plastic surgery

Personal intention and experience:

In our study, 81.2% of respondents had never considered plastic surgery, 11.5% had undergone it for aesthetic reasons, and 7.3% for reconstructive and reparative purposes. Among the 165 participants, 55.1% (n=92) reported that no one in their circle had undergone a plastic surgery procedure, while 44.9% (n=75) knew at least one person who had.

Identification of stereotypes:

Among the terms most spontaneously associated with plastic surgery by our participants were, in order: wellness and luxury surgery (61.2%), necessary (20%), and superficial (18.8%).

Superficiality of Motivations:

A majority of 46.1% believe that plastic surgery is expensive, 35.2% of participants perceived it as a superficial whim aimed solely at enhancing appearance,

while 18.7% regarded it as necessary like any other surgery. Meanwhile, 55.9% of participants think that people turn to plastic surgery for personal reasons, while 45.2% believed the main motivation is low self-esteem and/or the desire to gain approval from others.

Financial Inaccessibility:

In our study, 63.8% of participants believe that plastic surgery is only accessible to financially well-off individuals, 18.4% think it is reserved for the wealthy elite and celebrities, while only 17.8% believe that everyone can benefit from it (Fig. 3). Moreover, 61.4% think that various plastic surgery procedures are not covered by health insurance.

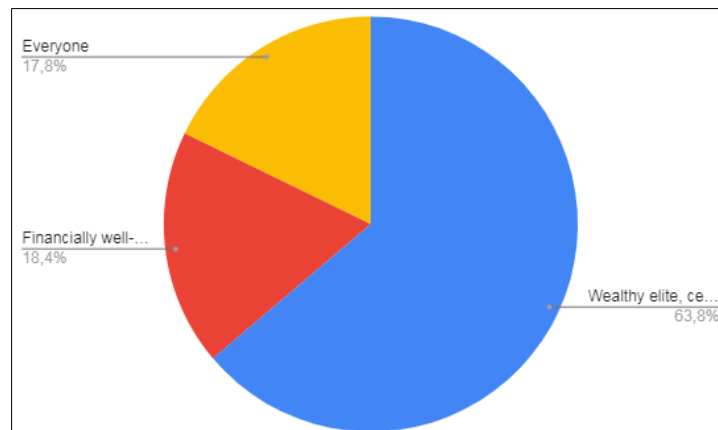


Fig. 3: Perception of the financial inaccessibility of cosmetic surgery

Influence:

In our study, the sources that influence opinions on plastic surgery were, in order: the media (social networks and television) at 55.8%, followed by personal or close acquaintance experience at 31%, and finally, the influence of local culture and traditions at 13.2% (Fig. 4). Additionally, 47.6% believed that social media positively influences the perception of plastic

Risks and Dangers:

There is a widespread mistrust regarding perceived risks, often fueled by widely publicized cases of complications. In our study, 75.3% associate plastic surgery with significant risks, including post-operative complications (67.7%) and the risk of unnatural results (32.3%). Specifically, 72.8% (n=126) of the cases believe that the results of reconstructive or aesthetic surgery vary depending on the surgeon, 19.7% (n=34) believe the results are artificial regardless of the surgeon, while 7.5% (n=13) considered the results to be natural. Among other risks, a majority of 65.9% believe that cosmetic surgery can lead to addiction (multiple successive procedures), while only 34.1% disagree. The risk of social judgment: 40.2% believe that a person who has undergone cosmetic surgery may be negatively judged in society, 39.3% think they are not, and 20.5% consider the judgment to be positive.

surgery, 42.4% judged this influence to be negative, and 10% felt that social media had no influence. Lastly, 68.5% of participants in our study considered that influencers or celebrities are not transparent regarding their potential experiences and plastic surgery procedures, while 31.5% of participants believed that the majority are transparent.

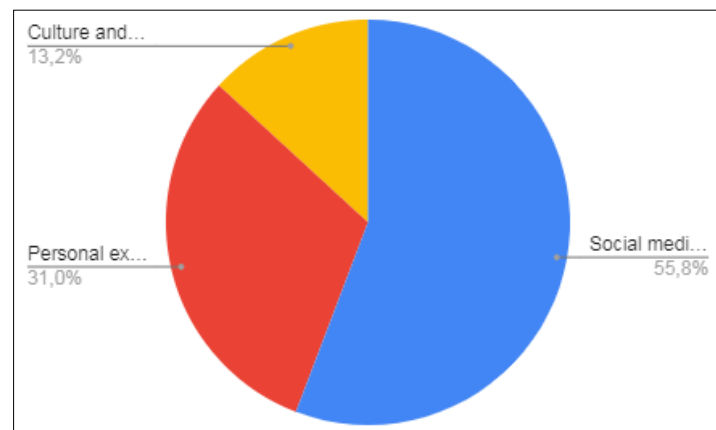


Fig. 4: Influential factors shaping the perception of Plastic surgery

DISCUSSION

Several studies have assessed the general public's perception of plastic and reconstructive surgery in various countries. However, none of these studies have been conducted in Maghreb countries. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the Moroccan public's perception of plastic and reconstructive surgery through a survey.

In a Saudi study by Almarghoub A, 73.3% of respondents were women [1], which is similar to the high proportion of women in our study (82.4%). However, the predominant age group in that study (20-30 years, 40.4%) is slightly younger than that in our study (25-35 years, 65.5%). This may reflect cultural or methodological variations in participant recruitment.

Our results indicate that the Moroccan public has a limited understanding of plastic and reconstructive surgery, with more than half of the participants (52.1%, n=86) having only a vague understanding. However, our data also show that the surveyed sample is generally well-educated, with 65% having a university-level education. Participants tend to view plastic surgeons as primarily focusing on aesthetic procedures. These findings align with the study by Sinno S., which found that 67% of respondents considered plastic surgeons to be most frequently chosen for procedures such as rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, facelift, Botox injections, breast augmentation, and breast reconstruction [2]. Similarly, in the study by Almarghoub A., respondents identified plastic surgeons as experts for procedures like liposuction and facelifts [1], which is consistent with the results of the study by Blacam *et al.*, [3]. In contrast, our study is distinguished by the relatively high recognition of reconstructive procedures (54.5% of participants). This may reflect a growing awareness in the Moroccan context, although it remains insufficient.

Several studies have also assessed the perception of plastic surgery among healthcare professionals, including nurses, medical students, and general practitioners. All of these studies revealed widespread misconceptions about plastic surgery, similar to those observed in the general population [4-7].

Regarding motivations, 35.2% of Moroccan respondents perceive plastic surgery as a superficial and unnecessary indulgence. These results align with those of Blacam C. [3] in Ireland, where plastic surgery was ranked lower than all other hospital specialties in terms of its importance in patient care.

The results of our study reveal perceptions predominantly influenced by biases and external sources, such as the media. These findings are consistent with observations from several international studies, which emphasize that public opinions on plastic surgery are often shaped by superficial and negative portrayals. For instance, a study conducted by Chopan M. [8] showed

that tweets containing the term "plastic surgery" tended to convey a negative connotation, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the higher frequency of unfavorable associated terms such as "fake," "ugly," and "bad." This perception mirrors the findings in our study, where 42.4% of participants viewed the influence of social media negatively.

Furthermore, statistics published by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2020) indicate that in just one year, over 20 million people in the United States underwent plastic surgery procedures. This includes aesthetic surgeries, such as breast augmentation, and reconstructive surgeries, such as scar revision [9]. This figure highlights the growing normalization of these practices on an international scale, yet contrasts with the Moroccan perception identified in our study, where a large proportion of participants (82.2%) consider plastic surgery financially inaccessible or reserved for an elite, which may be linked to the lack of coverage by health insurance. This underscores the importance of improving economic accessibility through appropriate public policies.

The results of our study align with some global observations regarding how the media influence the perception of plastic surgery. A study conducted between December 2018 and August 2020 on Instagram content related to plastic surgery by Sterling E. [10] revealed an enormous global reach, with over 2 million posts and 6 billions views. Our data show a similar influence, with 55.8% of Moroccan participants acknowledging the impact of social media on their opinions. However, 42.4% of respondents perceive this influence as negative, citing concerns about the veracity of information and the lack of effective verification mechanisms, similar to the challenges identified in the global study, where only 1.4% of posts came from verified sources. Regarding content, the study by Sterling E. [10] highlighted a significant contribution from healthcare providers (40% of posts), particularly plastic surgeons (28%). These data emphasize a strong professional presence, contrasting with our study, where a portion of respondents (45.5%) were still unaware of the reconstructive role of plastic surgery. This divergence highlights the need for increased local awareness and professional engagement in Moroccan media.

Finally, the study by Sterling E. highlighted the textual similarity between plastic surgeons and non-plastic surgeons, making it difficult to differentiate the sources of information [10]. This also reflects concerns expressed by 75.3% of our Moroccan participants regarding the risks and unnatural outcomes, which may be exacerbated by potential misinformation. However, the results of our study highlight an important local factor: social judgment. Forty percent (40.2%) of participants believe that undergoing a procedure could lead to societal criticism, an aspect that is rarely addressed in international studies.

These data indicate that, although our findings are in line with certain international trends, they also reveal specific Moroccan nuances, particularly the impact of social judgment and the limited influence of awareness regarding reconstructive aspects, which require a tailored approach. Targeted education and culturally adapted awareness campaigns could play a crucial role in reducing biases and enhancing public understanding of plastic surgery.

Proposals for Deconstructing Stereotypes

1. Awareness Campaigns: Implement initiatives aimed at educating the public on the various aspects of plastic surgery, with a focus on its reconstructive role.
2. Involvement of Healthcare Professionals: Encourage medical professionals to communicate pedagogically about this discipline.
3. Use of Media and Social Networks: Share patient testimonials to humanize the practice and counteract prejudices.
4. Collaboration with Religious Leaders: Establish a dialogue with religious figures to clarify the ethical and religious aspects of procedures.

CONCLUSION

Deconstructing stereotypes about plastic surgery in Morocco requires collaboration among healthcare professionals, the media, and educators to present a more accurate and inclusive perspective on this discipline, which should be recognized for its potential to transform patients' lives well beyond aesthetic enhancement. By dispelling misconceptions, it will be possible to foster a more nuanced and positive view of plastic surgery.

Conflicts of Interest:

Declaration of competing interests: The authors declare that they have no financial interests or personal

relationships that could have influenced the work presented in this article.

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