



Social media is to blame for the rise in under-18s going under the knife

More must be done to regulate cosmetic surgery for young people, study says

Social media use has once again been linked to a rise in cosmetic surgery as more and more young people feel the pressure to look 'perfect'. A study conducted by Nuffield Council on Bioethics has argued that the government needs to do more to protect people from this unregulated industry, the BBC reports.

The study mentions the increasing levels of anxiety around appearance that young people face as a result of social media. Youngsters are exposed to airbrushed photos of supposedly perfect lives on a daily basis thanks to celebrities and influencers. As well as this, they are at risk of facing negative comments and online bullying with relation to the pictures they choose to share - encouraging the feeling that they are not good enough.

A separate study of 2,000 patients, undertaken by the Harley Street cosmetic surgeon Dr Julian de Silva has also found that the average age of women undergoing procedures has dropped to below the age of 40

for the first time (down to 39 from 42). More millennials - women under 35 - are going under the knife than ever before. "There is no doubt that Instagram culture is having an effect on some younger patients," said Dr de Silva. "Filtering provides an instant appearance improvement and I guess that does plant a seed in some patients' minds."

Besides Instagram, the Nuffield Council report singled out cosmetic-surgery games and apps aimed at children – in which you can play around with your appearance – for exploiting this anxiety.

"We've been shocked by some of the evidence we've seen, including make-over apps and cosmetic surgery 'games' that target girls as young as nine," Professor Jeanette Edwards from the University of Manchester said. "There is a daily bombardment from advertising and through social-media channels like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat that relentlessly promote unrealistic and often discriminatory messages of how people, especially girls and women, 'should' look."

Games including Plastic Surgery Princess, Little Skin Doctor and Pimp My Face were named as contributing to mental-health problems in young people.

The report concluded that there needs to be more regulations and legal age limits in place for plastic surgery: "Under-18s should not be able to just walk in off the street and have a cosmetic procedure. There are legal limits for having tattoos or using sun beds. Invasive cosmetic procedures should be regulated in a similar way."

A certification system has been put in place by the General Medical Council to help ensure that cosmetic procedures are done in an ethical and safe environment. A government spokesperson also said action had been taken to improve regulation, however there are still no set rules in place specifically for youngsters.

"This report highlights once again that we live in a world where young people are under immense pressure on a daily basis about how they should look – it is ethically wrong for companies to exploit this and offer unnecessary cosmetic procedures to under-18s," the government spokesperson said.