

PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS AND OUTCOMES OF LABIAPLASTY: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Sharp G¹, Mattiske, J¹, Vale KI¹

¹ School of Psychology, Flinders University

Introduction: The demand for labiaplasty has increased rapidly over recent years; however, very little is known about the experiences women have undergoing this surgery or the subsequent effects it has on their well-being. Thus, the current study aimed to examine these issues using an exploratory qualitative approach.

Methods: One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 Australian women aged 23 to 59 years who had undergone a labiaplasty procedure between 5 and 16 months prior to interview. The women were asked about their reasons for having labiaplasty, the processes of accessing and undergoing surgery, and how various aspects of their lives were influenced after having surgery. The interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis owing to the exploratory nature of the study.

Results: Themes reflecting “media influence”, “negative commentary”, “physical versus appearance reasons”, “satisfaction with surgery”, and “sexual well-being” emerged from the analyses. Online media representations of labial appearance, and negative past experiences, primarily sexual in nature, contributed to women’s concerns about their labial appearance. Issues of physical discomfort were also common and were sometimes emphasised to potentially legitimise women’s requests for surgery. Most women were generally very satisfied with their surgical results, although some noted that their labia were not as small and/or symmetrical as they had expected. Most women reported significant improvements in their sexual well-being after surgery, however, some noted that their emotional discomfort around sexual intercourse had not improved.

Conclusion: These new insights into why women seek labiaplasty, their experiences and outcomes may assist clinicians in enhancing their communication with prospective patients. A thorough understanding of the motivations and expectations of prospective labiaplasty patients will facilitate better decision making by patients and clinicians.

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