

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**The Current Practices of New Zealand Plastic Surgeons with
respect to the Psychological Well-being of Patients Seeking
Elective Aesthetic Procedures**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Albany,

New Zealand.

Mindy Min-Yu Hung

2013

Abstract

The prevalence of psychopathology in patients seeking elective aesthetic surgery has been suggested to be higher compared to the general population, and adverse psychological outcomes appear to be more common than physical complications, particularly for patients with existing psychiatric problems. Although elective aesthetic surgery incorporates standard protocols to examine medical and anaesthetic risks, there seem to be no protocols for preoperative psychological evaluation. This study examines current practice among New Zealand plastic surgeons, their experience and management of their patients' psychological well-being, and it compares data from New Zealand and USA. The participants were 25 surgeons in New Zealand eligible to perform elective aesthetic surgery who responded to an online survey. Statistical analysis was used to determine significant differences and relationships between variables. The majority of the surgeons in the sample relied mostly on their personal experience, intuition and clinical judgement for psychological evaluation. All the surgeons had at least some experience with patients presenting with psychological disorders, and some have had patients with adverse psychological outcomes after the surgery. Most of the surgeons refer patients with psychological issues to mental health care, however, a small number of surgeons found access to mental health care difficult. The preoperative consultation time was an important variable that was statistically related to the surgeon's practice backgrounds and their experience of patients with psychopathology. In general, New Zealand data is consistent with those from USA in terms of the surgeons' experience and practice. The findings suggest a need for preoperative psychological evaluation for elective aesthetic surgery in New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Angela McNaught, who provided inspiration and assisted me with developing the topic of my thesis, and was very patient and supportive throughout the research process. Thank you for your generous guidance.

Thank you to all the participants in my research, who have provided their valuable perspectives and comments, I would not have completed this thesis without you.

I was very fortunate to have support from Dr Hillel Ephros, who generously provided data and information from the study he and his colleagues conducted in the USA, allowing me to complete the second aim of the research - thank you.

I would also like to thank the secretaries of several organisations, including the New Zealand Association of Plastic Surgeons (NZAPS), the New Zealand Dermatological Society (NZDS), the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO), the New Zealand Society of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery (NZSOHNS), and the Australian and New Zealand Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons (ANZAOMS), for their kindness and assistance in distributing my survey to their members.

I would especially like to thank the executive officer of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Celia Stanyon, who has been very kind and supportive, and patiently answered all my questions and requests.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to all my friends and family, particularly Karen Hielkema and Victoria Howard, who encouraged me at my weary times, and assisted me in every way they could, so I had the possibility to complete my thesis.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Appendices	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Surgeries, Patient Characteristics, and the Surgeons	4
Elective Aesthetic Surgeries	4
Seekers of Elective Aesthetic Surgery	5
Surgeons Qualified to Perform Elective Aesthetic Surgery	6
Chapter 3: The Role of Psychology in the Practice of Elective Aesthetic Surgery	8
The Psychology of the Presenting Patients	8
The psychological characteristics of the patients	8
The association between specific procedures and psychopathology	14
The psychological benefits for elective aesthetic surgery patients	17
The Psychology of Surgical Practice	21
Psychology in the decision to seek surgery	21
Psychological contraindications in elective aesthetic surgery	25
Psychology in surgical outcomes	26
Chapter 4: The Surgeons' Attitudes, Practices, and Management	33
The Current Study	43
Rationale	43

Aims	43
Chapter 5: Method.....	44
Chapter 6: Results.....	50
New Zealand data	50
New Zealand vs. USA	59
Chapter 7: Discussion.....	61
Plastic Surgeons in New Zealand	61
New Zealand Surgeons and USA Surgeons.....	73
Strengths and Limitations	75
Recommendations for Future Research	77
Conclusions	79
References	80
Appendices.....	93

List of Tables

Table 1. Significance Ratings of Various Patient Factors	54
Table 2. Percentages of Observed Psychological Symptoms among Patients	55
Table 3. Percentages of Observed Psychological Disorders among Patients	56
Table 4. Percentages of Management Method used by Participants	57
Table 5. Percentage of Participants Reporting Importance of Psychology in Various Outcomes	58
Table 6. Percentage of Participants Reporting Various Benefits of the Surgery	59

List of Appendices

Appendix A. Survey of the Psychological Practices of Surgeons who perform Elective Aesthetic Plastic Surgery	93
Appendix B. The Information Sheet Example.....	101