

## Abstract

# Gender and Health Inequality in Korea: Focusing on Body Obsession and Aesthetic Plastic Surgery

Dong-Sik Kim  
Youngtaek Kim  
Cheyon Tong  
Da-Eun Jung  
Sook-Yi Kim

As one of the large areas of gender equality in Korean society, this study has looked at the status of body obsession and aesthetic plastic surgery from a gender perspective and examined its impact on health behaviors and health status.

This study has confirmed that body obsession and body distortion are significantly affected by not only gender unequal structures and gendered bodies in Korean society. As a result, Korean women are forced to manage their body regardless of their will. The problem with appearance and body management is that it is not a healthy way like exercise. Many Korean people have chosen extreme dietary controls, taking diuretics and diarrhea or transforming

themselves through cosmetic surgery. This phenomenon is often observed in women, especially in young generation. As this phenomenon continues and intensifies, it has also confirmed that it leads to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, as well as daily depression and suicidal thoughts.

For young women, more than half of them have experienced aesthetic plastic surgery, which has also been confirmed to be at a very risk situation. For example, women patients has not been given prior notice and explanation or consent for medical methods and side effects of surgery in many medical sites. Such a medical situation violates the patients' right to know, self-determination and health rights. In Korean society, women's appearance and body have been sexually targeted and used as a means of discrimination against women. Below are the policy tasks based on the findings of this study.

The first is about a positive perception of appearance and body, and the transition to a society of respect for various bodies. The detailed tasks have included enhancing positive perception of appearance and body, strengthening public campaigns and promotion to root out disgust and biases for appearance and body that deviates from social (gender) norms, and enhancing the internalization of body image education for young generation.

The second is about respecting appearance and body diversities in the relevant industries and creating a gender equality environment. In communication and publishing and printing fields, strengthening regulations on broadcast programs that create sexist and gendered body images, reinforcing the education in respect of various bodies for the participants and producers of broadcasting services, and prohibiting sexual objectification of women's bodies in various publications and prints by public institutions and development and

distribution of guidelines for gender equal publication and printing are strongly needed. In fashion and clothing industries, manufacturing and displaying mannequins of various body shapes, production and sale of various sizes of clothing, and strengthening legal regulations on the provision of biased and distorted appearance and body-related information through the enactment of the 'Photoshop Act' should be needed. In medical fields(particularly aesthetic plastic surgery), strict regulations on false and over-the-counter advertising, mandatory notice and consent of plastic surgery methods and side effects, and constructing statistics on side effect and actively utilizing them for improvement purposes should be needed. In labor industry field, mandatory use of standard resume form for identification of appearance and prohibition of evaluation when recruiting and reinforcement of management and supervision to identify discrimination in appearance in relation to employment and work should be needed.

The final is about strengthening integrated research on body, gender and health, and setting up national health policy agendas.

**Keywords:** Gender, Body, Appearance, Health, Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, inequality