

NEWS FOR YOUTHS

More S'pore teens getting plastic surgery, reveals surgeon

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She's only 12 years old but this Singaporean girl has had a nose job and liposuction done.

All paid for by her parents. Jane (not her real name) may be the youngest to do this here but plastic surgeons tell The New Paper on

Sunday that more teenagers aged between 15 and 18 are opting for plastic surgery.

Recently, photos of 15-year-old Chinese girl Li Enxi, who had gone for a full-body plastic surgery makeover, went viral.

Netizens raged about how much older she looks after going under the knife.

Jane, on the other hand, looked too mature and was physically over-developed for her age, like a curvy and busty 17-year-old. At about 165cm and 65kg, she towered over her classmates.

Perceived as being unattractive, she was teased in school and that hurt her self-esteem.

Plastic surgeon Martin Huang, who performed the operation about five years ago, recalls:

"She had grown unusually faster than her peers.

"We live in a world where being slim is valued. She felt that there was too much fat around the tummy area and that she had a flat nose."

Dr Huang, who practises at The Cosmetic Surgery Clinic, says it was "clear that the patient herself genuinely wanted to undergo the procedures to improve her physical appearance" after careful consideration and several discussions.

"Her parents were very supportive. They sympathised with her because she lacked self-esteem and she was very conscious of her looks."

LIPOSUCTION

Jane, who comes from a middle-class family and lives in a condominium, underwent a rhinoplasty and liposuction of her abdomen, after she had completed her Primary School Leaving Examination.

She did the operations, which cost about \$15,000, under general anaesthesia. It took her about two weeks to recover.

"Her outcome was highly positive, with a significant improvement in her self-esteem," says Dr Huang, who also notes that Jane's parents were "happy when her self-esteem improved".

In Singapore, those below 21 need to seek parental consent to have plastic surgery done.

Dr Huang says:

"The annual increase in cosmetic surgery among teens has been 10 to 20 per cent. Girls predominate by a ratio of 9 to 1."

Plastic surgeon JJ Chua of JJ Chua Rejuvenative Cosmetic & Laser Surgery has seen a 10 per cent year-on-year growth.

Youth under 21 make up 10 per cent of his clients, with the gender ratio close to parity. Dr Leo Kah Woon of Dr Leo Aesthetic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery says he has seen an increase in demand of 10 to 15 per cent, comprising mainly girls in their late teens.

The most common types of plastic surgery requested by teens are the double-eyelid operation, rhinoplasty and breast augmentation.

Dr Leo notes that social media has fuelled this demand as "more people are increasingly critical of their own looks because selfies and photo postings on Facebook and Instagram are prevalent".

"Hence there is immense pressure to look 'perfect' all the time."

The prevalence of information available freely online also catalysed the trend, with peers sharing information among themselves.

"They are no longer shy talking about it," says Dr Chua, adding that parents too are becoming more receptive and supportive.

"The parents see their friends do it and are very happy with it. Or they themselves have done it."

Dr Chua shares an anecdote about a teen, who was going for breast augmentation, and had chosen a particular breast size.

But her parents said it was not big enough and pushed for a bigger size.

Plastic surgeon Woffles Wu of Woffles Wu Aesthetic Surgery & Laser Centre says he sees one or two cases each year of parents giving their daughters a breast augmentation as a 16th birthday present.

He says:

"There are some very practical fathers out there. They come in with their daughters and say, 'My daughter is very flat. She's not going to get a boyfriend. You better fix her.'"

Some people believe that the earlier they do the plastic surgery, the more natural they look as they grow into the features.

But senior consultant plastic surgeon Rexon Ngim of Aesthetic Plastic Reconstructive Surgery cautions that these operations must be done after the patients are physically mature.

He says:

"Because they are still growing, they might need revision later."

PUBERTY

Dr Leo will consider operating only on patients over 18 as "we must be sure that they have completed puberty and their facial skeletal growth is complete".

They will also have the emotional maturity to understand the risks and benefits of the procedures.

He says:

"The body parts will still age with time normally. Some (procedures) like breast augmentation require 'maintenance' surgery every 10 to 15 years as the implants harden with time.

"So if they undergo breast augmentation early in their lives, they may require more sessions of revision as they age, to maintain their looks."

Dr Carol Balhetchet, senior director for youth services at the Singapore Children's Society, warns that cosmetic surgery may make the outside package better but not the inside.

She says:

"Confidence is how you feel inside. A person who looks average can also have confidence. You don't have to look good to have confidence.

"But teens think their looks are attached to their self-esteem and confidence. They are very ego-centric, they think the whole world is judging them."

Because of that, cosmetic plastic surgery can be a double-edged sword, she says. "It helps them have a bit more confidence but it can become like an addiction.

"When they look better, people comment positively and they think it is because of their looks, so they want more.

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