

## **Dissertation**

### **The risk associated with beautifying the body in the perception of students of cosmetology. Recommendations for vocational training**

## **Abstract**

Desire of people to be beautiful and attractive is not a new phenomenon, but in recent years it has grown significantly. Nowadays, one can observe socio-behavioural trends appreciating beauty of the human body more than other values. Media in particular promotes a lifestyle in which the external appearance is perceived as the key to personal and professional success. Consent to modification of what nature has endowed humans with is included. This became the basis for development of a powerful "beauty corrections" industry. This in turn led to the development of scientific disciplines related to beauty treatments, such as cosmetology or medical aesthetology. Cosmetologists, dermatologists or aesthetic surgeons give a chance for a younger, more attractive appearance. Therefore, these professions play a significant role in the life of millions, especially the younger generation. Young people are very susceptible to the current cult of beauty glorification in media. To cope with the social pressure of being beautiful, they undertake a lot of risky behaviours associated with improving attractiveness of the body. For example, they use strict diets, overly tan or undergo invasive aesthetic treatments.

The problem of the risks associated with beauty treatments is often underestimated in theoretical and empirical deliberations in the areas of pedagogy of health, public health, health education, medicine and cosmetology. Many researchers and practitioners express opinion that beautification of the body is safe and the benefits outweigh the risks. However, any interference with the body, beauty treatments included, carries a risk of side effects and other health complications of various categories; these may present themselves upon completion of the treatment or at a distance.

Therefore, it is important to build rational attitudes towards beautifying the body, attitudes minimizing risky behaviour, promoting healthy lifestyles and enhancing the health potential to improve physical attractiveness.

Health promotion and health education are no longer reserved for teachers and medical professionals like doctors or nurses. Cosmetologists are also trained for the role of health educators, particularly in the context of caring for the body.

How the significance of the risks associated with beautifying is perceived is important for the treatments, as well as the advice delivered by cosmetologists. Understanding the importance of the risk, may encourage cosmetologists to promote rational, prudent and responsible attitude towards beauty treatments.

The aim of the study was to answer the following three questions:

1. How cosmetology students perceive the significance of the risks associated with beauty treatments?
2. What is the relationship between the perceptions of risk associated with beauty treatments and selected factors that may influence this perception?
3. What is the assessment of existing educational activities of the institutions in terms of the risks associated with beautifying the body and what are the needs and expectations of students of cosmetology in this area?

Qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to answer these questions. Eight groups of six undergraduate students of cosmetology were examined in the qualitative study. The method for focus group was the interview. Knowledge acquired during focus groups was the basis for conducting and analysing the results of quantitative research. The quantitative study examined 827 students of first level studies of three private universities educating cosmetologists in Mazovia, Pomerania and Silesia. The study involved students of the first and last semester intramural and extramural programs. The method of the survey questionnaire used the author's own questionnaire.

#### Important results

Based on the results of quantitative and qualitative research, it was found that the increase in invasiveness of beautification treatment implies an increase in the perception of the associated with it risk. This means that inherently less invasive beauty treatments are seen as safer in all categories of risk in comparison to treatments from the area of medical aesthetics.

It was found that there is a correlation between the perception of the risk and a variety of factors. The greatest impact on risk perception has knowledge. Knowledge of students is

shaped by personal and professional experience as well as by the educational activities delivered by university. Together with the increase in the level of knowledge of students, their perception of risk increases. However, only 0.8% of students presented high level of knowledge in the area of risks associated with beautifying the body. Increase of knowledge during the course of education in the cosmetology universities was noticed.

Only 8.8% of students rated educational activities of universities in the area of risk at a sufficient level. This result was much lower than the evaluation of educational activities in the field of beautifying the body. Students felt underprepared in the areas of theoretical information, practical skills and social competence. They are particularly lacking in psychopedagogical preparation which is necessary to design and implement tasks related to informing customers about the risks and to promote healthy lifestyle associated with body beautification.

Students also emphasized the shortcomings in the preparation of educational staff to teach about the risks, as well as a very limited number of scientific studies on the risks associated with beautifying the body. Most of the students build their knowledge on risk using non-scientific sources, including media. 77.4% of students identified the need to acquire knowledge about the risks associated with beautifying the body, as very high or quite high. 60.0% would expect changes in the educational programs to cover the area of risks more thoroughly.

#### Conclusions and recommendations

The results indicate the need to improve quality of cosmetologists' education on the risks associated with beautifying the body. It is necessary to raise the level of information provided, as well as practical skills and social competences. More attention should be paid to the preparation of teaching staff, including stressing the importance of the risks of beauty treatments. It is very important to indicate to students reliable and credible sources of information about risks associated with body beautification and develop standards of cooperation between universities and partners in the field of apprenticeships.

Higher education institutions should strive to develop a consistent curriculum in the area of risks associated with body beautification in order to promote rational attitude to beauty treatments, which avoids unnecessary risks. The implementation of that curriculum would in turn increase the knowledge of students and patients in this area.

Recommendations for training of cosmetologists created on the basis of the results of the research can help colleges and universities to construct a curriculum covering the area of risks associated with body beautification. They can also become the basis for training of

cosmetologists to the role of educators in the field of health and beauty, who are aware of the risks. Recommendations can also be utilized for the purpose of training other professionals associated with health education.