Cosmetic Labiaplasty

Sir John Dewhurst Memorial Lecture 2015

Paul Louis Wood
MD FRCOG

Disclosure/Conflict of Interest

Nil
Content:

• Labial anatomy and development
• Diversity in vulval appearance
• Distortions in popular culture
• Measures for managing labial discomfort
• The importance of a psychological assessment where distress is significant
• Surgical techniques
• Unknowns about labiaplasty

Anatomy – Structure and Function!

Structure

Function
Structure

• The vestibule is bordered laterally by the genital folds, which become the labia minora
• Not just redundant urethral folds!!
• “Normality” has not been defined or agreed on an objective basis.
• Limit of normality arbitrarily referred to as labia minor >4 cm width (some 30 years ago)
• No definitions based on measurements in the normal population. (Lloyd et al, 2005 – range 7-50mm, n=50)
• A degree of asymmetry is within normal limits and can correct itself often taking up to three years

Development

• Labial growth and development is part of the pubertal process
• May not be completed until early adulthood
• Genital anatomy changes throughout life span

• In July 1993, James Heathcote measured the ears of a randomly selected group of 206 of their patients over the age of 30, and calculated that ears increased by an average of 0.22mm per year – a centimetre over 50 years.
Function

• Labia minora are highly innervated along all its free edge
• Contain vascular and lymphatic plexuses
  - Both contribute to labial sensitivity
• Women have self-rated the labia minora as being second only to the clitoris in terms of sensation and sensitivity
• Protective to infection
• Retention of vaginal moisture


REVIEW…………………..……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………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The labia minora remain as mucosal skin, and prior to the onset of puberty are small and flat, often developing asymmetrically.

Female Genital Appearance: What is normal?
Information for patients
Published November 2012

www.britspag.org

Female genitalia in the media
Although female nudity is now common in the media democratising pornography,internet, and entertainment, images of female genitalia are rare.

Changing habits such as shaving and waxing pubic hair can irritate sensitive skin and also make the labia more visible.

What to do if you think your vulva is abnormal

See your GP who should examine you. He or she is most likely to reassure you that you are normal. If you continue to be concerned, the GP may refer you to a gynaecologist for an assessment. Most women are reassured of their normality and that no treatment is needed.

Variation in the appearance of labia minora

Great Wall of Vagina
Jamie McCarthy, Sculptor
www.greatwallofvagina.co.uk
The Labia Library – An initiative of Women’s Health Victoria, Australia
• Although considerable variation in the appearance of labia minora among women has been documented (Blank, 1993; Lloyd, Crouch, Minto, Liao, & Creighton, 2005), a highly restricted range of labia minora appearances was found in the images presented by Playboy Magazine... (Vanessa R Schick et al. Evaluation: The Portrayal of Women's External Genitalia and Physique......)

Content analysis of online advertisements for female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS)
Liao, Taghinejad & Creighton, BMJ Open 2012

CONCLUSIONS:
• FGCS procedures were presented on all of the 10 provider websites as an effective therapy for genital appearance concerns.
• No explanations for the presenting clinical complaints were found.
• There were scanty references to appearance diversity.
• There was minimal scientific information on outcomes or risks.
• No mention of potential alternative ways for managing appearance concerns or body dissatisfaction.
• The quality and quantity of clinical information in FGCS provider sites is poor, with erroneous information in some instances.
• Visual inspection
  • Sensitive
  • Skilful

If labial disease or a structural anomaly is identified refer to PAG specialist providing a dedicated service

Simple measures to manage symptoms include:-
  • Simple soaps
  • Avoid scented/shower gels or harsh soaps in genital areas
  • Advise emollients
  • Comfortable underwear
  • Explain the effects of depilation

• But – labiaplasty is the expected outcome in the main

Summary of measurements and observations

| 'Female genital appearance: Normality unfolds'...
| --- |
| ‘Female genital appearance: Normality unfolds’...

‘Female genital appearance: Normality unfolds’...
Reasons for request:-

- Subjective concerns over appearances
- Subjective concerns over physical discomfort, often with spurious symptoms
- Once established the concerns are difficult to eradicate
- Related psychological complaints
- Sensitisation towards all vulval sensations with resultant negative meanings
- BUT – on examination the vulva is usually normal – and what about the men?

Significant Psychological Distress

- Refer with family to a paediatric clinical psychologist
- Assess psychosocial, school, family and mental health problems
MALE GENITALIA as:-

PRESENT
PENDULOUS
EXTERNAL

FEMALE GENITALIA as:-

ABSENT / LACK
RECESSIVE
INTERNAL

A woman who had had labiaplasty-

"It's all on the inside now. Not pulling tongues any more. Nice."

Branwell et al BJOG 2007

“It’s so, it’s so, so, so external…”

17 year old woman seeking labia reduction

Genital protrusion as gender demarcation

Stoicism in the face of discomfort arising from genital protrusion?

Root causes:

• No increase in recognisable disease processes
• A need to conform to some “ideal”
• Accessibility of unrealistically narrow representations of vulval appearance in popular culture
• Inaccessibility of realistically wide variations in typical female genital vulval appearance
• Increased visibility of and irritation to the vulva with pubic hair removal
• Intensive marketing of labiaplasty as an unproblematic life-style choice
Prevalence:

UK National Health Service

• **FIVE-FOLD INCREASE IN NUMBER OF LABIAPLASTY PROCEDURES – 1998-2005**

• Between 2008-2012 there were 267 labial reduction procedures <14 years for unknown reasons with unknown consequences

• Being included in restriction lists by clinical commissioning groups as a cosmetic procedure

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**Labial reduction operations in the NHS**

NB. A proportion of episodes were on girls 14 and under

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**Excision excess labial tissue – NHS UK 2012-13**
NB. a proportion of episodes were on girls 14 and under

“This invitation by FIGO is unquestionably the highest recognition of the cosmetic-plastic gynecologic field...FIGO by its invitation... has continued elevating the level of recognition of the cosmetic-plastic gynecologic field”.

• OUTCRY!!

• “When a woman makes a request, you have to do something”

• NOTHING is an option
At the present time, the field of female cosmetic genital surgery is like the old 'Wild West': wide open and unregulated.

Goodman, O&G 2009

Often referred to as the fastest growth area in the cosmetic surgery industry...

Labial reduction: >2,700,000 results
Mainly advertising
Techniques:

- Available surgical data is limited
- No evidence base for any one surgical procedure
- No attempt to audit episodes and outcomes
- No research to document long term impact of labiaplasty
Complications

- Infection/bleeding/pain
- Wound dehiscence rates of up to 30%
- Revision/dissatisfaction rates in up to 7%
- Cosmetic result not permanent
- The younger the labiaplasty trajectory the more operations over time
- Loss of sensitivity – not quantified
- Scarring

Outcome Data

- Private sector
- A booming business

Beware not to build on insecurities, especially of the very young
• No controlled evaluation data of short and long term clinical effectiveness in the literature
• Most data claiming a high rate of short term use satisfaction are carried out unsystematically by care providers

• Significant barriers to quality outcome data exist
  • Patient secretiveness
  • Unlikely to want attention linked to research or attend for long term follow-up
  • Change of provider if dissatisfied
  • Absence of negative feedback can result in an overestimation of effectiveness and satisfaction

How should health and social care professionals and policy makers respond?

• Innovative sex education for girls
• Innovative professional education for doctors, nurses, midwives, psychological and psychosexual therapists...
• Support community-based action
• Develop clinical/ethical guidelines with professional governance bodies
• Do more research
• Find better questions to guide inter-disciplinary research
• Work with advertising agencies?
FEMALE GENITAL COSMETIC SURGERY TOOLKIT

• Appendices
  • Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Gynaecological Examinations and Procedures
  • Appendix 2 – Peak Body Statements
  • Appendix 3 – Psychosexual History
  • Appendix 4 – How FGM legislation applies to cosmetic procedures
  • Appendix 5 – Media Code of Conduct

BritSPAG Position Statement

LABIAL REDUCTION SURGERY (LABIAPLASTY) ON ADOLESCENTS

October 2013

BritSPAG Position – endorsed by FIGIJ

Labiaplasty should not be performed on girls under the age of 18 years
Outlaw 'designer vagina' surgery on girls, say MPs

Richard Ford Home Correspondent

Cosmetic surgery to create so-called 'designer vaginas' would be outlawed under new proposals to crack down on the practice, which has been blamed for sexual assault and forced marriage.

The call comes after police told MPs they were aware of the practice but could not act on it.

The Home Office is considering legislation that would make it illegal to have cosmetic surgery on a girl under 18.

The proposals were announced by Lord Willis, who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on female genital mutilation.

He said: "We are pushing at the boundaries of science," he said.

There are more than national pride at stake, however. "We have never seen a crisis of this kind before," he said.

The Times of London 14 March 2015

Thank you