

## THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON BODY MODIFICATION PRACTICES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES.

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### ABSTRACT

*Body modification practices has become increasingly visible among young people globally, yet its practices and implications in African university settings remain underexplored. This study examined body modification practices among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria. It identified the prevalence and types of body modification, examined the socio-cultural factors influencing youth engagement, and explored the implications of these practices. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population of the study consist of undergraduates with body modifications. Using purposive sampling, 80 undergraduates aged 18–30 years across faculties were selected. Data were collected through a structured interview covering demographics, prevalence, motivations, and socio-cultural implications. Findings revealed that piercings (Mean = 3.13) and tattoos (Mean = 3.10) were most common, while scarification declined (Mean = 2.44). Influencing factors included celebrity culture (Mean = 3.08), peer pressure (Mean = 3.05), cultural beliefs (Mean = 2.96), and media exposure (Mean = 2.91). Body modification was seen as enhancing identity and cultural pride but also carried stigma, moral judgment, and professional barriers. Chi-square analysis showed no significant association between gender and prevalence ( $\chi^2 = 0.334$ ,  $p = 0.563$ ). However, females ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) were significantly more influenced by peer pressure than males ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ),  $t = -4.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Body modification among Nigerian undergraduates is highly prevalent and shaped by globalized aesthetics, peer dynamics, and cultural traditions. The need for educational interventions and broader dialogue on the cultural and social dimensions of youth body practices in Nigeria are therefore recommended.*

**Keywords:** Body modification; Undergraduates; Prevalence; Motivations; Socio-cultural implications

### BACKGROUND

Body modification, encompassing tattoos, piercings, scarification, branding, hair dyeing, cosmetic surgery, and more extreme forms such as subdermal implants, has long been embedded within human culture as a marker of identity, spirituality, and social belonging. Across different epochs and regions, the practice has served symbolic, aesthetic, and ritualistic functions. In many Indigenous African societies, scarification symbolized courage, maturity, or tribal identity, while in Polynesian cultures, tattoos communicated genealogy and spiritual devotion (Atkinson, 2003; Rees, 2021). These practices highlight how the human body has historically

functioned as a “canvas of culture,” where modification embodies narratives of ancestry, transition, and belonging.

In contemporary society, however, body modification has shifted dramatically in meaning. Rather than being confined to rites of passage or communal traditions, it is now predominantly practiced as an expression of individuality, personal aesthetics, and lifestyle choice (Blackman, 2021; Blackman, 2008). Tattoos and piercings, once stigmatized and associated with deviance in many societies, have become normalized through the influence of fashion, media, and celebrity culture (Wohlrab et al., 2007). This shift has been particularly pronounced among youth, who embrace body modification as a means of negotiating identity, resisting social conformity, and participating in globalized cultural flows.

The digital revolution, particularly the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, has played a decisive role in the global spread and normalization of body modification. These platforms curate and amplify aesthetic trends, creating online communities where modified bodies are celebrated and replicated. (Braunberger, 2021). Influencers and celebrities often serve as visual role models, showcasing tattoos, piercings, and other body alterations as aspirational markers of self-expression. For Nigerian youth, increased access to global digital culture has intensified exposure to such practices, aligning local body modification trends with global currents (Obinwanne & Ojochegebe, 2025; Demaria, et al., 2024). Yet, this global diffusion has also intersected with local cultural frameworks. In Nigeria, scarification and tribal markings which were once common symbols of heritage are declining among urban youth, often viewed as outdated or stigmatizing. In contrast, Western-influenced practices such as tattoos, dreadlocks, and piercings have gained popularity in cities and universities, reflecting cultural hybridity and generational redefinitions of beauty and identity (Garve et al., 2017; Vaughan, 2007; Roman, 2016). This juxtaposition highlights the negotiation between tradition and modernity in Nigerian body modification culture.

Despite its normalization, body modification remains contested. In professional settings, visible tattoos or unconventional piercings may still hinder employment prospects, particularly in conservative industries such as finance, law, and education (Timming, 2014; Chai, 2023). In Nigeria, where religious and cultural norms exert strong influence, young people with visible modifications may encounter stigma, moral judgment, or exclusion (Lim, et al., 2013; Zhao, 2020; Broussard & Harton, 2017). Health concerns also remain central: unsafe tattooing and piercing practices expose individuals to risks of infections, allergic reactions, and blood-borne diseases (Whitehead & Thomas, 2013; Rivardo & Keelan, 2009). These concerns are amplified in contexts where unregulated or informal modification practices are common.

Psychological debates further complicate the narrative. While some scholars argue that body modification enhances self-esteem and fosters empowerment (Halliwell et al., 2015), others link it to impulsivity, risk-taking, or regret (Kluger, et al., 2024; Mitwalli & Alfurayh, 2024). These contradictions underscore the complexity of motivations underlying youth engagement in modification practices.

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation, is experiencing rapid cultural and technological transformation. With over 60% of its population under 25 years,

Nigerian youth are increasingly exposed to global trends through social media, migration, and transnational networks (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Universities, as spaces of cultural experimentation and identity negotiation, have become focal points for body modification practices. Students often adopt tattoos, piercings, or fashion-driven hairstyles to assert individuality, align with peer cultures, or resist conservative expectations (Koch et al., 2025). However, unlike in Western contexts where body modification is widely normalized, Nigerian youth navigate a more ambivalent cultural landscape where generational openness collides with entrenched religious and moral conservatism.

The global scholarship on body modification has expanded considerably, but the research focusing on African and specifically Nigerian youth remains limited. Most empirical studies on tattoos and piercings are concentrated in Western contexts (Kosut, 2000; Brown & Berndt, 2023; Kosut, 2015; Blackman, 2021), with relatively few cross-cultural comparisons or African-centered analyses. Existing Nigerian studies often emphasize traditional practices such as scarification but rarely examine contemporary trends shaped by digital media and globalization. Moreover, little is known about how Nigerian undergraduates negotiate the competing pressures of cultural heritage, peer influence, social stigma, and self-expression in their modification practices.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Against this backdrop, this study investigates evolving practices of body modifications among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the prevalence and types of body modifications among undergraduates.
2. examine the social, cultural, and psychological factors influencing undergraduate practice of body modification.
3. explore the socio-cultural implications of body modifications practices among undergraduates.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested:

H<sub>01</sub> - There is no significant association between gender and body modification among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Osun State.

H<sub>02</sub> - There is no significant difference between gender and peer pressure influences on body modification among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Osun State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the prevalence, motivations, and socio-cultural implications of body modification among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The survey approach was selected because it enables systematic collection of quantitative data from a defined population, allowing for the exploration of patterns and relationships across variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) is a federal university located in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. Established in 1961, the institution currently enrolls over 35,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students across 13 faculties, including Arts, Education, Law, Sciences, Social Sciences, Medicine, Technology, and Agriculture. OAU is widely regarded as one of Nigeria's leading universities, known for its diverse student body and vibrant campus culture.

The choice of OAU as the study site was informed by its large student population, cultural diversity, and strong representation of Nigerian youth. Universities in Nigeria function as hubs of social experimentation, making OAU an appropriate site for exploring contemporary youth practices such as body modification.

### **Target Population and Sampling**

The target population comprised undergraduate students aged 18–30 years who are involved in body modification practices OAU. This age group was chosen because it reflects the peak of youth identity formation, experimentation, and engagement with global cultural practices (Suzuki & Okubo, 2025; Matos, 2018; Rodgers et al., 2016). The specific population is unknown.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who met the inclusion criteria: (i) currently enrolled as undergraduate students, and (ii) engaged in or knowledgeable about body modification practices. A total of 80 students were sampled, representing different faculties and academic levels (100–500).

### **Data Collection Instrument**

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both closed- and open-ended items, divided into five sections:

1. Demographic Characteristics (age, gender, faculty, marital status, religion).
2. Prevalence and Types of Body Modifications (tattoos, piercings, scarification, hair dyeing, temporary modifications).
3. Factors Influencing Body Modification (peer influence, media exposure, cultural beliefs, self-expression, rebellion).
4. Socio-Cultural Implications (perceptions of stigma, discrimination, cultural identity, professional implications).
5. Open-Ended Questions to capture personal views, motivations, and cultural interpretations.

The instrument used a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) for attitudinal items.

### Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were self-administered, with respondents completing them anonymously to encourage honest disclosure. Prior to participation, students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. Data collection occurred on campus over a four-week period in early 2025.

### Data Analysis

Completed questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed:

- **Descriptive statistics** (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) summarized demographic data, prevalence of body modification, and attitudinal responses.
- **Inferential statistics** were applied to test hypotheses:
  - *Chi-square tests* assessed associations between categorical variables (e.g., gender and body modification status).
  - *Independent samples t-tests* compared mean differences between male and female respondents (e.g., peer pressure influence).
  - *One-way ANOVA* examined differences in attitudes across educational levels.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were followed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity was guaranteed, as no identifying details were recorded. Students were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Given the sensitivity of body modification in Nigerian cultural and religious contexts, questions were framed neutrally to minimize discomfort or judgment.

### LIMITATIONS

The study acknowledges several limitations. First, the use of purposive sampling and a relatively small sample size ( $n = 80$ ) limits the generalisability of findings to the broader Nigerian youth population. Second, reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, particularly given the stigma surrounding tattoos and piercings in some Nigerian communities. Third, the study focused on undergraduates within a single university, and future research should include multi-site or cross-regional samples for broader representation. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into contemporary practices of body modification among Nigerian undergraduates and situates these within global youth culture trends.

## FINDINGS

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic distribution of the respondents as presented in Table 1 revealed that the majority of respondents (60%) were within age 21–25 years, females (52.5%) in their 300-level of study (30%). The majority of the respondents were single (92.5%) and practiced Christianity (77.5%). More than half (62.5%) of the respondents reported having at least one form of body modification.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 80)**

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	16–20	14	17.5
	21–25	48	60.0
	26–30	18	22.5
Gender	Male	38	47.5
	Female	42	52.5
Level of Study	100	12	15.0
	200	20	25.0
	300	21	30.0
	400	18	22.5
	500	6	7.5
Marital Status	Single	74	92.5
	Married	6	.5
Religion	Christianity	58	77.5
	Islam	18	22.5
Body Modification	Yes	50	62.5
	No	30	37.5

### Prevalence and Types of Body Modification among Undergraduates

On the prevalence of body modification among the respondents, undergraduates, a majority of respondents reported some engagement with body modification (Mean = 2.96). Similarly, respondents acknowledged that body modification was widespread among peers (Mean = 2.93). Perceptions of body modification as predominantly urban were strong (Mean = 3.06) among the respondents. Respondents also agreed that women were more likely to engage in body modification than men (Mean = 2.78). On the specific types of body modification practiced by respondents, the most frequently reported were piercings (Mean = 3.13) and tattoos (Mean = 3.10), both of which were considered common among peers. Temporary or semi-permanent practices such as cosmetic alterations (including cutting styles and body-enhancing surgery) also scored highly (Mean = 3.10).

**Table 2: Prevalence and Types of Body Modification (n = 80)**

Variable	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	±SD
I have at least one form of body modification (e.g., tattoo, piercing).	28	22	20	10	2.96	1.03
Tattoos are a common form of body modification among youth.	32	30	12	6	3.10	0.90
Piercings (ears, nose, lips, etc.) are popular among my peers.	36	26	10	8	3.13	0.95
Scarification or branding is practiced as a cultural or personal choice.	18	20	22	20	2.44	1.07
Cutting styles and cosmetic surgery are forms of body modification.	30	28	14	8	3.00	0.95
Most youths I know have at least one form of body modification.	26	32	12	10	2.93	0.96
Body modification is more common among urban youth than rural youth.	34	26	10	10	3.06	0.98
Men engage more in body modification than women.	14	18	28	20	2.33	1.01
Women engage more in body modification than men.	22	30	16	12	2.78	0.98
Temporary body modifications are popular.	30	34	10	6	3.10	0.89

### **Social, Cultural, and Psychological Factors Influencing Undergraduate Practice of Body Modification**

**Table 3** presents key drivers of youth participation in body modification. Celebrity culture (Mean = 3.08), peer influence (Mean = 3.05), cultural/traditional beliefs (Mean = 2.96) as well as Media exposure (Mean = 2.91) were the leading factors reported by the respondents as responsible for their engagement in body modification.

**Table 3: Social, Cultural, and Psychological Factors Influencing Undergraduate Practice of Body Modification**

Variables	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	±SD
Peer pressure influences youths to engage in body modification.	11	19	26	24	2.79	1.03
Media and social networks promote body modification trends.	7	18	30	25	2.91	0.94
Personal identity/self-expression motivate youths.	9	17	35	19	2.80	0.93
Cultural/traditional beliefs encourage body modification.	10	11	31	28	2.96	1.00
Body modification improves self-esteem and confidence.	12	11	33	24	2.86	1.02
Youths engage in body modification to gain social acceptance.	14	10	27	29	2.89	1.09
Celebrity influence motivates youths.	6	11	34	29	3.08	0.90
Some youths modify their bodies to rebel	8	24	32	16	2.70	0.91

against societal norms.

Low self-image or insecurity leads to modification. 5 24 33 18 2.80 0.86

Youths are influenced by friends who already have modifications. 3 17 33 27 3.05 0.84

### Socio-Cultural Implications of Body Modification

The broader consequences of body modification were also assessed (Table 4). The socio-cultural implications of body modification prioritized by the respondents included its influence on the societal perceptions of youths (Mean = 3.04), a generational trend toward greater acceptance (Mean = 3.00) as well as the role of cultural heritage in the acceptance of body modifications (Mean = 2.99) and the viewpoint of body modification as immoral or unacceptable by some communities (Mean = 2.99). The use of body modification as a rite of passage by some cultural groups (Mean = 2.94) and discrimination against people with body modifications (2.94) were also acknowledged by the respondents

**Table 4: Socio-Cultural Implications of Body Modification Practices**

Variable	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	±SD
Body modification affects how society perceives youths.	5	12	38	25	3.04	0.78
People with body modifications face discrimination in some communities.	7	14	36	23	2.94	0.83
Cultural heritage plays a role in the acceptance of body modifications.	8	10	37	25	2.99	0.86
Body modification creates a sense of belonging to a social/cultural group.	6	15	38	21	2.92	0.82
Youths with body modifications may have difficulty securing certain jobs.	9	13	35	23	2.90	0.87
Some communities view body modification as immoral or unacceptable.	8	12	34	26	2.99	0.85
Body modification can lead to stigma within religious settings.	10	16	33	21	2.81	0.89
Some cultural groups use body modification as a rite of passage.	6	14	39	21	2.94	0.81
Body modification enhances cultural identity and pride.	5	17	37	21	2.92	0.79
There's growing societal acceptance of body modification among youths.	7	12	35	26	3.00	0.84

### Gender and Body Modification (Chi-Square Test)

Table 5 presents the cross-tabulation of gender and body modification. The test indicated that gender and body modification status were not significantly associated at  $p < 0.05$ , the hypothesis was therefore not rejected.



**Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Gender and Body Modification (n = 80)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Body Modification</b>		<b>Total</b>	$\chi^2$	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>				
Male	22	16	38	0.33	1	0.563
Female	28	14	42	4		
<b>Total</b>	50	30	80			

Not significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

### **Peer Pressure and Gender (t-test)**

Table 6 presents the t-test of gender and the peer pressure score. Females were significantly more influenced by peer pressure than males ( $t = -3.052$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). Female undergraduates reported statistically significant greater susceptibility to peer influence compared to male undergraduates ( $t = -4.78$ ,  $p = < 0.001$ ) indicating that peer pressure play a stronger role in shaping body modification practices among female students. The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

**Table 6. Independent Samples t-test on Gender and Peer Pressure Influence**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Male	38	2.21	0.96	-4.78	78	<0.001*
Female	42	3.19	0.86			

\*significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

## **DISCUSSION**

The study revealed that 62.5% of respondents reported having at least one form of body modification, suggesting high prevalence within the undergraduate population. The most common practices were piercings, tattoos, and temporary modifications such as hair dyeing and henna, while scarification and branding were less frequent. This mirrors global patterns. In Western societies, surveys indicate that nearly 40–50% of young adults have at least one tattoo or piercing (Kosut, 2000; Kosut, 2015; Brown & Berndt, 2023; Wohlrab et al., 2007). In the U.S., Pew Research (2021) found that 41% of adults under 30 had tattoos, a proportion comparable to the OAU sample when piercings are also considered. Similarly, European studies show tattoos and piercings are now normalized symbols of youth culture, integrated into mainstream fashion rather than restricted to subcultural groups (Koch et al., 2025). In contrast, traditional African practices such as scarification are declining among urban youth (Garve et al., 2017; Vaughn, 2007; Roman, 2016). This study's finding that scarification scored lowest in popularity reflects a generational shift: while older Nigerians often carry tribal marks as ethnic identifiers, contemporary students view them as outdated or stigmatizing. This aligns with Schildkrout's (2004) observation that modernization and globalization are eroding the social legitimacy of scarification across Africa. Thus, the prevalence of tattoos and piercings among OAU students situates them within global youth culture, while the decline of scarification underscores local cultural transformation.

Respondents identified self-expression, celebrity culture, peer influence, and social media exposure as primary motivations for engaging in body modification. Celebrity influence had the highest mean score (3.08), closely followed by peer validation (3.05). These findings align with international scholarship emphasizing the role of digital culture in shaping aesthetic practices (Obinwanne & Ojochegebe, 2025; Demaria et al., 2024; Putra & Afrilian, 2025; Hortigüela-Alcalá, 2025). Globally, body modification is increasingly understood as a form of identity performance in digitally networked societies. Instagram and TikTok, for example, amplify tattoo and piercing trends, making them aspirational lifestyle markers (Ghigi, 2018; Ouellete, 2012). Nigerian youth, like their global peers, navigate these platforms daily, encountering curated images of modified bodies that reinforce desirability. Peer influence also emerged as a powerful motivator. The t-test confirmed that female students experienced greater peer pressure than males in adopting body modifications. This resonates with research in both Nigeria and Western contexts, where female youth are often more susceptible to social validation pressures related to appearance (Suzuki & Okubo, 2025; Rodgers et al., 2016; Crawley & Green, 2021). Nigerian female students, in particular, may face heightened scrutiny around beauty standards, which drives engagement in modifications like piercings, hair dye, and nail artistry. At the same time, cultural heritage still plays a role (Mean = 2.96). While scarification is declining, symbolic connections to identity and tradition persist. This suggests that body modification in Nigeria is not merely imported Western fashion but a negotiation between globalized trends and localized meanings.

The findings highlight a paradox: while body modification is increasingly normalized among Nigerian undergraduates, it still carries stigma in professional, religious, and conservative settings. Respondents agreed that modifications affect societal perception and can result in discrimination and employment challenges (Mean = 2.90). This tension is not unique to Nigeria. Timming (2014) demonstrated that job applicants with visible tattoos were 30% less likely to be hired in corporate contexts in the UK. Chai (2023) confirmed similar patterns in the U.S., especially in formal industries such as finance and law. However, in creative sectors, modifications are more tolerated or even valorized. In Nigeria, the stigma is intensified by strong religious and cultural conservatism. Christianity and Islam, the dominant religions, often discourage body modification as defilement of the body (Schildkrout, 2004). Thus, Nigerian youth with visible tattoos or piercings may experience moral condemnation in addition to professional bias. Yet, there is evidence of growing acceptance among younger generations. Respondents noted that body modification enhances cultural pride and identity, and that more peers are embracing tattoos and piercings without attaching negative connotations. This reflects a generational divide: for older Nigerians, modifications may symbolize deviance, while for younger cohorts, they represent empowerment and individuality.

The Chi-square test found no significant association between gender and the prevalence of body modification, suggesting that Nigerian undergraduates of both sexes engage in tattoos and piercings at comparable rates. This reflects a global trend toward gender-neutral adoption of body modification (Nathanson et al., 2006). However, gender differences were observed in motivations. The t-test showed that female students are more influenced by peer pressure than males. This aligns with studies showing that women's aesthetic choices are more heavily shaped by peer and media validation (Suzuki & Okubo, 2025; Rodgers et al., 2016; Matos, 2018).

Nigerian women, in particular, navigate complex cultural expectations balancing beauty ideals, modesty norms, and globalized fashion.

While motivations emphasized aesthetics and identity, health risks were acknowledged by respondents and remain a central concern in the literature. Improper tattooing and piercing practices are linked to infections, allergic reactions, and transmission of diseases such as hepatitis and HIV (Whitehead & Thomas, 2013; Rivardo & Keelan, 2009; Griffith & Tegnah, 2005). The rise of DIY tattooing, often performed in informal or unregulated settings, exacerbates these risks (Rivera, 2024; Dukes, 2016). In Nigeria, where regulation of tattoo parlors and piercing studios is weak, youth are particularly vulnerable. Respondents recognized these risks but were not significantly deterred by them, prioritizing aesthetics and social belonging instead. This finding mirrors global studies that document how the symbolic and emotional value of body modification often outweighs perceived medical dangers (Crompton, 2020; Martin, 2025).

One of the most striking findings of this study is the decline of scarification alongside the rise of tattoos, piercings, and temporary modifications. This reflects broader shifts in African societies where modern youth reject traditional practices while simultaneously embracing new forms of embodied expression (Garve et al., 2017; Vaughn, 2007; Roman, 2016). This negotiation between tradition and modernity illustrates how Nigerian youth construct hybrid identities. While scarification may be rejected as “backward,” Afrocentric hairstyles, tribal-inspired tattoos, or locally meaningful piercings may still be adopted in ways that affirm cultural identity. This is consistent with global trends in cultural hybridization, where youth remix traditional and modern aesthetics to create new symbolic vocabularies (Nguyen & Strohl, 2023).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings underscore several implications:

1. **Public Health:** Awareness campaigns are needed to address risks of unregulated tattooing and piercing. University health centers could collaborate with certified practitioners to promote safe practices.
2. **Education:** Incorporating cultural discussions on body modification into campus forums may reduce stigma and foster mutual understanding between youth and older generations.
3. **Employment Policy:** Dialogue between employers and youth advocates is needed to balance professional standards with evolving cultural norms.
4. **Further Research:** Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies could track how Nigerian youth navigate modifications over time and in relation to global trends.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights that body modification is widespread among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, with tattoos, piercings, and temporary alterations dominating, while scarification continues to decline. The practice reflects a hybrid cultural space where Nigerian youth negotiate global influences that are shaped by self-expression, peer networks, celebrity culture, and social media alongside lingering ties to tradition. Although body modification enhances cultural pride and individuality,

students also encounter stigma, moral judgment, and professional discrimination, especially in conservative contexts. Gender differences emerged in susceptibility to peer pressure, with females more influenced, and education correlated with greater acceptance of body modification. Comparisons with global youth trends reveal both convergence, through widespread normalization of tattoos and piercings, and divergence, due to Nigeria's strong religious conservatism and the legacy of tribal marks. Overall, body modification among Nigerian youth is more than an aesthetic choice; it represents a dynamic site where identity, modernity, tradition, and globalization intersect.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for policy, practice, and research:

- 1) **Health Education and Safe Practices:** Universities should partner with public health agencies and certified practitioners to organize workshops on safe tattooing and piercing. Health education campaigns should emphasize risks of unregulated modification practices, such as infections and blood-borne diseases.
- 2) **Cultural and Social Dialogue:** Student unions, cultural associations, and academic departments should host forums and debates on body modification. Such dialogues can reduce stigma, promote tolerance, and bridge the generational gap between youth and older Nigerians. Religious and community leaders should be engaged in awareness programs to foster more nuanced perspectives that balance moral teachings with youth identity needs.
- 3) **Employment and Policy Considerations:** Employers and policymakers should revisit workplace dress codes to balance professional standards with evolving cultural norms. Sectors such as creative industries, media, and technology may benefit from embracing body modification as part of youth-driven innovation and diversity.
- 4) **Counselling and Youth Support Services:** University counselling centers should address issues of peer pressure, self-esteem, and identity among students who engage in body modification. Psychosocial support services can help youth navigate pressures from peers, family, and society, encouraging informed decision-making.

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