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HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF SKIN BLEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the rationale behind skin bleaching and its health implications on the society and the world at large. This paper explains detrimental health effects of skin bleaching, its harmful chemicals contained in bleaching creams and reasons for skin bleaching. This paper reveals that women engage in skin lightening because light skin is associated with higher status, privilege, and beauty, thus, women feel the need to bleach their skin to look beautiful and attract high-status mates, with men and children inclusive. In the entertainment industry, music videos project white skin ladies more than the black ones. Thus, corporations manipulate audiences through advertising, making people believe that with lighter skin, they have more chances to succeed. This paper also suggests possible recommendations like public health agencies and professionals should develop campaign strategies that will continually create awareness of the dangers of skin bleaching to discourage this practice. Misinformation regarding the efficacy and effects of skin bleaching products should be countered through advocacy for policies aimed at regulating the advertisements of these products and their plausible false contents and concluded with the need to put an abrupt end to skin bleaching. Increasing local and diaspora anti-colorism campaigns to expand discussions on beauty and self-esteem can help reinforce public health messaging. And additional research on the psychology of complexion might serve as a springboard for the development of health models to encourage the embracement of an individual's natural skin tone.

Keywords: Skin Bleaching, Skin Lightening, Health Effects, Advocacy

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Introduction

It is important to acknowledge the sharp rise in skin bleaching usage in recent years, as it has become common among Black people who feel unsatisfied with their skin, which is a gift from God. Between 25 and 80 percent of women use skin-whitening creams on a daily basis in some African countries. This percentage hovers around 40% throughout Asia. According to the World Health Organization (2011), more than half of skin care products are offered in India expressly to whiten skin. Additionally, according to WHO data, 77 percent of Nigerian women reported using skin-whitening creams, the highest percentage in Africa when compared to 59 percent in Togo, 35 percent in South Africa, and 27 percent of women in Pakistan, where skin-lightening products are widely used.

In many parts of the world, skin tone is associated with elegance, beauty, and high social standing; this view drives people, particularly women, to use skin-lightening cosmetics. Many skin-lightening creams

contain harmful ingredients like hydroquinone, kojic acid, and mercury. Ferreira (2018). As hydroquinone lessens the amount of melanin produced by the skin, which is what gives skin its color, it is regarded as a major topical agent for reducing melanin formation. (Briggs, 2010) But in an effort to lower the risk of skin cancer, hydroquinone has been outlawed in certain nations due to its carcinogenic properties. Adegboyega (2022) asserts that there are numerous motivations for skin bleaching, such as self-identity, self-esteem, and the desire to feel more attractive.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the use of skin-whitening creams and other related therapies is rising, with potentially serious side effects. Innovative research and policy initiatives are required to comprehend the motivations behind skin bleaching practices and provide practical measures to deter them. (Atadokpede et al., 2015) came to the conclusion that skin bleaching need to be viewed as a public health issue, with implications for policymakers and the general public for the kinds of interventions that will be required to buck the trend. According to (Mahe, 2014), skin bleaching has caused consumers to have major health concerns; the frequency of these issues may have gone unreported. The fundamental values have suffered as a result of the confusion that has arisen from the bleaching of black skin.

Skin whiteners typically range widely in pricing; Olumide attributes this to the desire to portray whitening as financially accessible to all. These products are marketed to both men and women, though studies indicate that, in Africa, women use skin bleachers more than men do. A study by Lester David's and his colleagues indicated that nations in Africa present high rates of usage for skin bleachers. Though many products have been banned due to toxic chemical compositions, David's found that regulating policies are often not strictly enforced. As of 2013, the global market for skin lighteners was projected to reach $19.8 billion by 2018 based on sales growth primarily in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Bleaching is a false that is jeopardizing your health because being light or dark complexioned does not give you fortune: what you do with your minds, creativity and hands is what fetches you something to build fortune in life, (Oladipo, 2016).

Africans continue to bleach their skin in spite of the well-known risk of negative side effects. According to reports, skin bleaching for cosmetic purposes is most widespread and prevalent in African women. Between 25 and 80 percent of women in African nations regularly use skin-whitening cosmetics (Adamu, 2019). In the modern world, bleaching is now done with injections and pills rather than lotions. This multibillion dollar global business is made up of both local retailers and multinational cosmetic corporations. The items' pricing also differ significantly, which makes the less expensive ones accessible to a wider audience. Africans make up a large portion of these products' customer base. This is demonstrated by the fact that several African locales, in particular, have phrases in their vernacular that describe bleaching and its effects.

Meaning Of Skin and Skin Bleaching

About 15% of the human body weight is made up of the skin, the biggest organ in the body, and topical medications may have an impact on its health (Seyyed (2015). Protection, stopping the body from losing too much water, and thermoregulation are among the skin's essential roles. In an attempt to lighten or produce an even skin tone by lowering the skin's melanin concentration, skin

whitening, also referred to as skin lightening and skin bleaching, is the application of chemicals to the skin. There is evidence that a number of chemicals can effectively lighten skin, while some substances have been demonstrated to be hazardous or have dubious safety records. Mercury-containing substances, which can lead to neurological issues, are among them.

Examples of Harmful Chemicals Contained in Bleaching Creams

Some examples of chemical contained in bleaching creams are listed below. They are namely;

a) Hydroquinone
b) Kojic Acid
c) Alpha hydroxy acid
d) Mercury
e) Tretinoin
f) Gluthatione
g) Tranexamic Acid
h) Corticosteroids

Hydroquinone is a commonly used agent in skin whiteners, though the European Union banned it from cosmetics in 2000. It works by decreasing melanin production. (Tse, 2010).

Kojic acid on the other hand, known as Koji in Japan, is a fungal metabolic product which has the advantage of not being oxidized in skin lotions. (Alsaleh, 2010) It is a chelation agent that is produced by several fungi including *Aspergillus oryzae*. It inhibits and prevents the formation of tyrosine and it contains some antimicrobial properties against several common bacterial strains even in small dilutions. It has been found to be an effective lightener in some studies, and is also allowed to be used in cosmetics. Side effects, however, include redness and eczema. (Desmerdt, 2016).

Alpha hydroxy acid (AHA) is also used as a skin bleacher, but its biochemical mechanism is unclear. Side effects may include sun sensitivity, skin redness, thickening, or itching. Low concentrations may be used in cosmetics.

Mercury, Prolonged usage of mercury-based products can ultimately discolor the skin, as mercury will accumulate within the dermis. Mercury toxicity can cause acute symptoms such as pneumonitis and gastric irritation. (Olumide et al, 2008). However, according to a study by Antoine Mahé and his colleagues, mercurial compounds can also contribute to long-term renal and neurological complications, the latter of which includes insomnia, memory loss, and irritability.

Tretinoin, also known as all-trans retizoic acid, may be used to whiten specific areas. It may be used in combination with steroids and hydroquinone. (Desmerdt, 2016).

Glutathione is the most common agent taken by mouth in an attempt to whiten the skin. It may also be used as a cream. It is an antioxidant normally made by the body (Malathi, 2013). Whether or not it actually works is unclear as of 2019. Due to side effects that may result with intravenous use.

Tranexamic acid According to a 2017 literature review Trusted Source, tranexamic acid is another promising oral therapy for melasma. This acid is a synthetic derivative of the amino acid lysine.

Reasons for Skin Bleaching

Colorism: Colorism is a form of discrimination, typically within a racial or ethnic group, favoring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin. This pernicious form of discrimination is often

overshadowed in discussions about racism, but it affects a broad swath of people across multiple populations. In 2018, the Ghana's Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), disclosed that some pregnant women went as far as taking some banned products just so the babies in their womb will have a light skin, this practice poses a danger to the health of the unborn babies.

Low self-esteem/inferiority complex: Women who have dark skin tend to have lower self-esteem, thus they bleach their skin to feel they are beautiful, which raises their self-esteem (Fokuo, 2009). This implies that a lot of media artist bleach their skin and encourages their fans to do so thereby making them copy their stars.

Influence of the media on skin bleaching: Skin toning has become a common technique among women. Youth women rub several skin tone creams since they desire to look fair and lovely. The psychological preference of women for beauty creams has been impacted by the spread of these advertisements. The majority of social media advertisements for skin toning highlight the benefits of the procedure while ignoring its drawbacks, which encourages women to engage in skin toning or bleaching, depending on the situation.

Although bleaching was first documented among adult members of the public, a shift is taking place that affects a greater number of people, particularly in the female adolescent demographic. (Verma, 2010) asserts that companies control audiences

Health Implications of Skin Bleaching

Bleaching is, in fact, a process in which the hair on the skin is bleached to match with the actual skin tone. However, the side effects include:

1) **Body Odour**: According to a study conducted by African researchers in 2008, body odour is one of the common complications of skin bleaching. The study revealed that prolonged application of skin bleaching creams will over time give the body a distinctive bad odour, resembling the smell of rotten fish.
2) **Nephrotic syndrome** is a kidney illness caused by damage to the blood vessels that filter waste and excess water in your kidneys. It makes your body expel an excessive amount of protein in your urine. Mercury-containing skin whitening cosmetics have been linked to nephrotic syndrome. Swollen feet and ankles, frothy urine, loss of appetite, and exhaustion are some of the symptoms.
3) **Steroid acne** can be caused by skin bleaching products that contain corticosteroids. With long-term usage of corticosteroids, steroid acne typically affects the chest, although it can also appear on the back, arms, and other regions of the body. Whiteheads and blackheads, little red pimples, huge, painful red lumps, and acne scars are all possible symptoms.
4) **Exogenous ochronosis (EO)** is a skin condition that results in blue-black pigmentation. It commonly happens as a side effect of using hydroquinone-based skin bleaching treatments for a long time. People who use it on a wide scale or on their entire body are more prone to acquire EO.
5) **Contact dermatitis** has been connected to the use of skin bleaching products in case studies and reports. This is a type of skin inflammation brought on by interaction with certain chemicals. Skin redness, blisters, skin ulcers, hives, dry, scaly skin, swelling, itching, burning, and tenderness are

all symptoms that can range from mild to severe.

6) Kidney Disease

Damage to the kidney's blood vessels, which are in charge of filtering waste and extra water, is frequently the cause of this. Urine becomes too protein-excreted as a result of it. Mercury-containing skin-lightening lotions have been linked to nephrotic syndrome. This might cause symptoms like weariness, swelling feet and ankles, loss of appetite, and frothy urine.

The following is a list of additional adverse consequences of skin bleaching: dark grey patches, Skin thinning, skin swelliness, and skin cancer The accumulation of fat in the face, chest, upper back, and stomach due to cataracts, Osteoporosis, harm to the kidneys and nervous system brought on by the lotions' high mercury content, severe birth abnormalities and liver damage. Several of these adverse effects were visible. Images of bleached skin are below:



Conclusion

The main thrust of this paper is to demonstrate through a narrative review the reasons behind skin bleaching, and the detrimental health effect of using or applying bleaching product. Hence the need to put an abrupt end to it, to save the society from severe health issues and even death.

Recommendations

1) Public health agencies and professionals should develop broad strategies that will continually create awareness of the dangers of skin bleaching to discourage this practice. The strategies involved should consider cultural and socioeconomic motivations for skin bleaching for effectiveness.
2) Misinformation regarding the efficacy and effects of skin bleaching products should be countered through advocacy for policies aimed at regulating the advertisements of these products and their plausible false contents.
3) Supporting developments and enforcements of the availability and use of skin bleaching products by an informed public might not be

difficult and is a step further in curbing this practice.

4) Increasing local and diaspora anti-colorism campaigns to expand discussions on beauty and self-esteem can help reinforce public health messaging.
5) Additional research on the psychology of complexion might serve as a springboard for the development of health models to encourage the embracement of an individual's natural skin tone.
6) Using chemical bleaches for whitening and bleaching skin can cause harm to your skin in the long run. Therefore, it is essential to use natural remedies for having clear and flawless skin.

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