

18th Global Dermatology Congress

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Skin bleaching: a neglected form of injury and threat to public health

The objective of the data collated in this survey research is to: Call to action the public health crisis that is skin bleaching and discuss more compatible forms of intervention. Skin bleaching is the use of chemical agents such as creams, ointments, gels or soap to lighten the skin. Skin bleaching, as a public health crisis is a peculiarly understudied area of public health and efforts to prevent injuries to the skin or skin safety has received little or no attention despite the increasing number of casualties? While exposure to solar radiation accounts for a larger proportion of skin traumas in the form of cancer among vulnerable population, skin damage resulting from skin bleaching is one of the most common forms of potentially harmful body modification practices worldwide and comparatively, has been given little research attention. Obtaining prevalent rates on skin bleaching is challenging particularly in Nigeria where there is an unspoken precedent towards bleaching with an existential reality to how lighter skin is socially perceived and rewarded. For the purpose of this survey research, the focus is on the Nigerian market analysis conducted on women who bleach or have used bleaching products in the past. References to other countries faced with the same conundrum such as: Jamaica, India, Japan, Tanzania will be inferred. Results showed that 80% of women who use bleaching products had no knowledge to the harmful ingredients contained in the products or the extent to it's effects on general health and skin health. 70% of users from the sample do not use sunscreen consistently or at all and 58% of users would like to stop but either does not wish to get darker or are sensitive to societal pressure and obscenities. These contemporary motivations are linked to cultural contributions in society (i.e. westernization) and psychological contributions. Personal motivation was largely based on societal perception of beauty. Key factors in the survey included:

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- Age, Marital Status, Educational Level
- Awareness of side effects or ingredients contained in products
- The use of sunscreen
- Monthly expenditure on products
- Duration of use
- Personal motivation for use and efforts to stop.

Bleaching agents contain active ingredients such as hydroquinone, mercury, or corticosteroids, which reduce or inhibit the synthesis of melanin (Olumide et al. 2008). Repeated exposures of the skin to the bleaching agents inhibit the activity of the enzyme tyrosinase. This results in reduction in the quantity of melanin in the skin. Eventually, the skin colour becomes lightened. Since the epidermal turnover period is approximately 28 days, there is a need for recurrent usage of the bleaching agents on the skin and uniformity of skin color. This causes the skin to become fragile and irritable, putting bleachers at high risk for serious skin conditions that pose both aesthetic and medical complications, including Skin lesions, hyperpigmentation, ochronosis, eczema, and severe acne (Faye et al. 2005; Ly et al. 2007). The long-term use of skin-bleaching creams is also linked to a higher risk of developing cancers, hypertension, liver and kidney disease or failure, and infertility (Pitche et al. 2005; Ramsay et al. 2003). In fact, research in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that skin bleaching is a major contributor to the high incidence of skin cancer and leukemia in Africa and among the four leading malignancies in Africa (Amir et al. 1992). Despite these great risks, skin bleaching is still prevalent on the African continent.

Biography

Dr. Ugo Onyeka is a graduate of University of Debrecen where she also worked as a researcher at the University of Debrecen Clinical Laboratory. She is passionate about Dermatology and developed a deeper sense of engagement towards the specialty while working in Nigeria. She continues to advocate the need for education, intervention and public awareness on good skin practices.

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