

PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE OF FASHION TREND ON SKIN BLEACHING AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE

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Abstract

The common practice of skin bleaching nowadays is a fashion trend of body beautification among the younger generation. The study examined the psychology, social and economic factors of fashion trend on the practice of skin bleaching among adolescents in Abeokuta township of Ogun state. Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population for the study was 200 respondents selected from four (4) Local Governments in Abeokuta. Purposive random sampling technique was used to select 50 adolescent from each of the four local governments. A well structured questionnaire was employed to collect data and the data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed beauty and attraction especially to opposite sex, peer group compliance, social relevance and civilisation as psychosocial factors while financial gains, cheap and accessible treatment of skin pigmentation, growth and development of cosmetics were economic factors. Health hazards of skin bleaching identified include; hypersensitivity to sunrays, skin problems and delay of leprosy diagnosis. Possible constraints revealed include; employment and social opportunities, ignorance and illiteracy. The study concludes that although skin bleaching is trendy it is not beneficial to human health thus; individuals should accept and celebrate the natural skin knowing full well that melanin is not a curse but a gift. It is recommended that government should prohibit the production and sales of skin bleaching products to reduce the trend and Physicians (like doctors, dermatologist etc.) should publish journals and sponsor advertisement programmes on the damages of skin bleaching.

Keywords: Skin Bleaching, Fashion, Cosmetics, Adolescents, Beautification, Body.

Introduction

Skin bleaching refers to continuous usage of local cosmetics or dermatological products to eliminate melanin from the skin. This act refers to as toning or lightening of the skin can be equally achieved by whitening the skin professionally by a dermatologist, or by non-doctors. Some practice skin bleaching for special events, others as a mere everyday practice. Some individuals bleach the skin or specific parts of their bodies and some their faces alone (Blay, 2019). Skin bleaching is due to one of several reasons: when dark skin is undesirable to people and light skin is more preferable because it is seen as beautiful; the act is fashionable, modern and facilitates social mobility; a response to influence; and to attract potential spouses (Jablonski, 2016). Skin bleaching can be considered to be means of permanent or temporary altering of the outer (upper most layer) of the skin, otherwise known as epidermis. Andrew and Adeleye (2017) referred to it be as a means of permanent and purposeful skin lightening, commonly found among the younger generations. Skin bleaching creams consists of hydroquinone and ammoniated mercury. According to Andrew (2017) regardless of the purpose for skin bleaching, doubtlessly the dire effects of skin bleaching in some cases overwhelm the benefits.

Adolescence is a lifetime between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It is a notable phase of human developmental growth and a unique phase for laying the foundations of good health. It is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally existing during the period from puberty to adulthood (typically corresponding to the age of majority). World Health Organization definition officially designates an adolescent as someone between the ages of 10 and 19 (World Health Organization, 2012).

Adebayo (2018) affirmed high practice of skin bleaching among adolescents. However, the major concern is the unfavorable long term consequences of skin bleaching on these young individuals all in the name of socialization. The World Health Organization (2012) released a report of the danger of mercury in skin lightening soaps and creams and the agenda of each fashion trend is to enhance the look and feel of customers.

Statement of the Problem

The act of beautification and beauty contest is an age long practice since olden days where local and natural items of beautification such as tiroo, powder, bracelets and so on, are employed to adorn the body. Others are fashionable hair dressing, facial and general body adornment objects (Adebayo, 2012). However, the rate of attention given to skin beautification especially skin bleaching calls for a special concern. The act of body beautification among the younger generation of different ages has taken a new turn from merely maintaining one's natural complexion to absolute skin bleaching. Olumide (2016) stated that skin bleaching has taken pre-eminence among all other patterns of the body beautification. Irrespective of the method applied in carrying out the (skin) bleaching, the part of the body affected usually becomes unnecessarily exposed to infections. This is because there is exposure of inner parts of the skin to infection. Naturally, the uppermost part (surface) of the skin is potentially protective because it is resistant to foreign attack. The bleached portion of the body becomes very light, fragile and tears easily. Unfortunately, skin bleaching is known to have serious hazardous consequences. Thus, this study is to examine the psychological, social and economic influence of fashion trend on skin bleaching among adolescents in the study area.

Objectives of the Study

- i. Examine psycho-social influence of fashion trend on skin bleaching on the adolescents in Abeokuta township.
- ii. Assess economic influence of fashion trend on skin bleaching
- iii. Identify possible health hazards of skin bleaching.
- iv. Examine possible constraints to curbing the act of skin bleaching among the adolescents in the study area.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the course of the study.

- i. What are the psycho-social influences of fashion trend on skin bleaching in study area?
- ii. What are the economic influences of fashion trend on skin bleaching among adolescents in Abeokuta township?
- iii. What are the possible health hazards of skin bleaching in the study area?
- iv. What are the possible constraints to curbing the practice of skin bleaching in the study area?

A. Causes of Skin Bleaching

There are so many factors contributing to skin bleaching which includes:

1. **Racial Discrimination:** Adeleye (2017) opined that "black" has always been associated with inefficiency, counterfeit, adulteration, second class, low quality and evil. In order to

eliminate these impressions, overcome the complex it might generate and be able to compete favorably with their white counterparts, the blacks proffers solution of skin bleaching. They hope such practices would aid easy approval and general acceptability of the black race into the global society.

2. **Comodification:** Adeleye (2017) affirmed that in the 19th century, the West African women employed fashionable clothing to adorn their bodies as valuable means of developing social capital especially within the gold coast area. Beginning from the 1940's, and continuing to the present day, women created similar form of social capital and material wealth by bleaching their skin (Buah, 2012).
3. **Prostitution:** Commercial sex workers often employ skin bleaching as a major strategy for the purpose of making their body attractive to their prospective customers to earn their livelihood.
4. **Fashion:** This is an element of body beautification. It has close relation to other factors discussed earlier. Buah (2012) stated that bleaching is arguably in the arena within which the waves of consumerism are fervently endorsed as constituting a way of life. Hence, Adeleke (2016) asserted that the main purpose of skin bleaching is to build heterosexual/relationship and become public figure. Skin bleaching could be seen as part of the process of the bodily commodification through fashion. (Adeleye 2017)

B. Samples of Skin Bleaching

Skin bleaching which results to artificial elimination of the upper layer of the skin could be done in different areas of the body depending on the individual's aim

1. **Facial Bleaching:** Act of removing topmost skin layer of the face region until the skin changes colour to the extent of becoming lighter (Akerere, 2016).
2. **Upper Parts Bleaching:** Act of applying bleaching creams to the upper parts of the body; among which are the face, neck, arms, chest and the stomach. The act is intended at lightening the upper portion of the body than the lower portion thereby beautifying half of the body (Adeleye, 2017).
3. **Lower Parts Bleaching:** This is the removal of the upper layer skin of the lower parts of the body among which are the legs, waist and the feet. However, it has been established by Adeleye (2017) that those indulged in lower parts bleaching equally include some other upper parts of the body.
4. **Private Parts Bleaching:** This is the application of bleaching agent on the sexually sensitive areas of the body such as the breast, pennies, the buttock and the thigh. Private parts bleaching are usually intended for sexual attraction of the opposite sex which is a common act of commercial sex workers.
5. **Bleaching of the Entire Body:** Some people prefer to completely bleach the whole body parts, not exempting any region. One may adduce the reason as being an attempt to attract the public based on their job and some may be for attraction to the opposite sex (Andrew, 2017 and Akerere, 2016).

C. Psychosocial Reasons for Bleaching the Skin

Possessing light skin is believed to carry many privileges (Hunter, 2012). Lewis et al. (2011) offered some factors motivating people's indulgence in skin bleaching. The themes are as follows:

1. **To Be White, Beautiful and European Looking:** Dlova et al. (2014) opined that skin of a lighter tone increased self-esteem and that lighter skin tone is considered to be more

beautiful. This is not surprising given the media preference for either White or Black models and celebrities who possess Eurocentric ideals of beauty to run adverts on television and magazines (Hunter, 2012 and Lewis et al., 2011)

2. ***To Satisfy One's Partner/Attract Opposite Sex*** : People are motivated to bleach their skin because of power that light skin has on attracting and securing a romantic relationship (Hunter, 2012) .According to Durosaro et al. (2012) both gender are driven to engage in body beautifying practices, amongst them is skin bleaching. The hope is to succeed in attracting their partners and to maintain these relationships.
3. ***To Satisfy and Impress Peers***: Most people practice the act because they are conforming to pressure and because they see other people using these products. They envy to acquire the same privileges of having a lighter skin tone, which includes, but is not limited to, admiration, social class and beauty (Charles, 2019).
4. ***To Have Soft Skin***: Lewis et al. (2011) found that some people bleached their skin to obtain a smooth and softer skin texture. In fact some believed that the more one used skin bleaching creams, the softer the skin became.
5. ***Removal of Adverse Effects of Extended Skin Bleaching on the Body*** Most skin bleachers tend to overuse skin bleaching products, therefore, they sometimes experience non pleasurable side effects (Lewis et al., 2011), as such, people continue usage of bleaching agents to treat certain skin conditions such as post-inflammatory hyper pigmentation and acne (Dlova et al., 2012) because they fear that if they stop using the bleaching creams the condition would worsen.
6. ***Removal of Pimples, Rashes and Skin Diseases***: Most women are in pursuit of a radiant skin (de Souza, 218). Mpengesi and Nzuzza (2014) reported that people often bleach because they want to remove facial blemishes so as to appear more beautiful affirming that the most trending motivation for skin bleaching was the need to have a blemish free face. Ajose (2015) established that using skin bleaching creams is to even out skin tone in order to have a perfect complexion. Having a smooth skin is part of the advantage of bleaching because an “even toned, blemish free skin is everyone’s dream” (de Souza, 2018).

D. Economic Factors of Bleaching the Skin

The economic influence and motivation for skin bleaching can be attributed to several factors.

1. **Societal beauty standards**: Many societies have ingrained beauty standards that associate lighter skin with attractiveness, success, and social acceptance. Individuals may be compelled to conform to these ideals to improve their chances of finding employment, marriage prospects, or social standing. (Blay, 2019).
2. **Employment and social opportunities**: In some societies, individuals with lighter skin may be perceived as more attractive and successful, leading to potential economic advantages in aspects like modeling, entertainment, and hospitality industries. This perception can create a demand for skin-lightening products and treatments (Agbodeka, 2015).
3. **Marketing and cosmetics industry**: The beauty and cosmetic industry can heavily influence consumer behavior through marketing strategies that promote skin-lightening products as a solution to various perceived flaws or insecurities. Companies may capitalize on people's desires to live up to the beauty standard generally acceptable to the

society and offer products that promise lighter skin as a means of achieving success and happiness (Andrew, 2017).

4. **Low self-esteem and social pressure:** In societies where lighter skin is prized, darker skin individuals may face discrimination or experience lower self-esteem due to their skin color. As a result, they may resort to skin bleaching as a means of fitting in or feeling more accepted in their communities (Dorman, 2011).

E. Health Hazards of Skin Bleaching

Skin bleaching is used to treat discoloration of the skin. Creams used to alter skin pigmentation can have ingredients that are compatible with skin tone and also have side effects. Bleaching off the outer skin layer exposes the inner parts of the skin to infections. Naturally, the uppermost part (surface) of the skin is potentially protective because it is resistant to foreign attacks. The body part that has been bleached becomes very light, fragile, and tears easily. A bleached skin would have spot left on it when scratched or hard hit by an object which can make the body surface appear undesirable and unattractive. Hydroquinone and mercury are main ingredients found in the bleaching creams and are considered toxic chemicals. So also is the toxic shock syndrome (TSS), according to Olumide (2016) it is a recently discovered illness common among people that are exposed to extensive use of skin bleaching creams.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey method. The population for the study was all adolescents in Ogun state. Abeokuta was selected being the state capital. The four (4) major local government in the township were selected.. Three major areas were purposively selected from each local government as follows. They are:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Odeda Local Government | - | Obantoko, Camp and Osiele |
| 2. Abeokuta South Local Government | - | Adatan, Itoku and Kuto |
| 3. Abeokuta North Local Government | - | Elega, Lafenwa and Rounda |
| 4. Obafemi Owode Local Government | - | Kolobo, Panseke and Adigbe |

Purposive random sampling was employed to select Fifty (50) respondents from each Local Government to make a total of Two Hundred (200) respondents. Instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire of Four Likert scale ratings as follows; Strongly Agreed (SA) - 4, Agreed (A) -3, Disagreed (D) -2, Strongly Disagreed – 1. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The decision mean is 2.50

Results

RQ 1: What are the Psychosocial Influences of Fashion Trend on Skin Bleaching?

Table 1: Psychosocial Influence of Fashion Trend on Skin Bleaching in the Study Area

S/N	ITEMS	x	x-x	(x-x) ²
1.	Peer group compliance.	2.84	0.07	0.005
2.	Beauty and attraction.	3.03	0.26	0.065
3.	Undue superiority beauty complex over dark skinned.	2.84	0.07	0.005
4.	Sense and feeling of social prestige.	2.61	-0.16	0.026
5.	Social relevance, acceptability and private value.	2.64	-0.13	0.017
6.	Trendy – fashion trend compliance.	2.97	0.2	0.04

7.	Celebration of special events.	3.03	0.26	0.065
8.	Civilization/Modernization	2.61	-0.16	0.026
9.	Marriage sustenance	2.72	-0.05	0.003
10.	Job creation	2.97	0.2	0.04

Decision rule = 2.50 **N=200** **Grand mean = 2.77**

The grand mean of 2.77 of table 1 indicated that act of skin bleaching among the younger generation in the study area is influenced by psycho-social factors of fashion trend.

RQ 2: What Are The Economic Influences of Fashion Trend on Skin Bleaching?

Table 3: Economic Influences of Fashion Trend on Skin Bleaching Among Adolescents.

S/N	ITEM	x	x-x	(x-x) ²
1.	Financial gains	2.56	-	0.073
			0.27	
2.	Sources of employment.	2.93	0.1	0.01
3.	Sources of cheap and accessible treatment of high skin pigmentation.	2.72	-	0.012
			0.11	
4.	Growth and development of cosmetics industries.	2.81	-	0.0004
			0.02	
5.	Economical means of attaining fresh, fair and neat skin layer.	3.15	0.32	0.102

Decision rule = 2.50 **N=200** **Grand mean = 2.83**

The grand mean of 2.83 of table 2 portrayed the economic influence of fashion trend on skin bleaching.

RQ 3: What are the Possible Health Hazards of Skin Bleaching?

Table 3: Possible Health Hazards of Skin Bleaching

S/N	ITEM	x	x-x	(x-x) ²
1.	Neurological problems.	3.15	-0.15	0.022
2.	Skin problems such as cancer of the skin.	3.75	0.45	0.203
3.	3.Allergic reactions	2.81	-0.02	0.004
4.	Other medical problems.	3.25	-0.05	0.002
5.	Lactating problems.	3.35	0.05	0.002
6.	Possible delay of leprosy diagnosis.	3.00	-0.30	0.09

Decision rule = 2.50 **N=200** **Grand mean = 3.21**

A grand mean of 3.21 of table 3 established the stated items of health hazards of skin bleaching.

RQ4: What are the possible constraints to curbing the practice of skin bleaching?

Table 4: Possible Constraints to Curbing the Practice of Skin Bleaching in the Study Area

S/N	ITEM	x	x-x	(x-x) ²
1.	Parental compliant of skin bleaching.	3.55	0.62	0.384
2.	Social media influence.	2.80	-	0.017
			0.13	
3.	Financial constraints.	3.00	0.07	0.005
4.	People in public eye and high places such as celebrities and politicians.	2.50	-	0.185
			0.43	
5.	Ignorance and illiteracy.	2.81	-	0.014
			0.12	
6.	Employment and social opportunities.	2.97	0.2	0.04
7.	Type of profession/ schedule of duty.	2.84	0.07	0.005
8.	Socio-economic status.	3.25	-	0.002
			0.05	
9.	Peer group compliance	3.03	0.26	0.065
Decision rule = 2.50		N=200		Grand mean = 2.97

Discussion

The study revealed peer group influence, beauty and attraction, social relevance and marriage sustenance as some of the psychosocial factors of fashion trend on skin bleaching. Charles (2019) in agreement with this suggested peer pressure as a motivating factor for skin bleaching while Durosaro et al. (2012) opined that skin bleaching is to beautify the body as well as for attraction and sustain relationships. Employment opportunities, cheap skin treatment, development of cosmetics industries are some of the identified economic influence of skin bleaching. Affirming this finding Agbodeka (2015) claimed that skin bleaching may enhance potential economic advantage in aspects of modeling, entertainment and hospitality industries. Lewis et al. (2011) also reported that skin bleaching is adopted to treat skin condition such as acne and hyper pigmentation. Neurological problem in form of hyper sensitivity to sun rays, cancer of the skin, other medical problems such as birth defects problems are some health hazards related to skin bleaching revealed in the study. This agreed with Mahe et al. (2017) that skin bleachers had high rate of birth defects caused by mercury (a bleaching cream ingredient) exposure. Walvin (2011), supported claiming that hydroquinone in bleaching cream degenerates the skin thereby causing tearing especially during surgical operation. Social media influence, ignorance and literacy, social economic status, parental compliance, profession and schedule of duty are identified as possible constraints to curbing skin bleaching. This finding agreed with Blay (2019) opinion that social standing and employment are part of the pressure for conforming to skin bleaching despite its health adverse effect.

Conclusion

Adolescents should grow up to appreciate their naturally endowed complexion and beautifying their body must not be at the expense of their health as in the case of skin bleaching, after all 'black is beautiful' says a slogan. It is worth mentioning that sometimes dermatologists

recommend some skin lightening cream in treating some skin diseases such as psoriasis. Also, skin depigmentation is sometimes used in the treatment of vitiligo (a condition that causes pale patches on the skin) but they must be taken under the supervision of a skin specialist.

Recommendation

1. Parents should be model of appropriate and healthy body beautification as well as inculcate same in their adolescents
2. Government should prohibit the production and sales of bleaching creams to reduce the trend.
3. Physicians such as doctors and dermatologist should inform general public through social media and periodic journals on the negative impact of skin bleaching
4. Educators and counselors should assist to entrench the concept of healthy practice of body beautification into school curriculum and help to enhance positive self-concept.

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