



MELANIN FOUNDATION
REVEALING THE DANGERS OF SKIN BLEACHING

AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST
ABUSIVE SKIN-BLEACHING PRODUCTS
PROMOTING SKIN HEALTH PROGRAMS.

*“ To stand by and not act, is to witness
a crime against humanity... ”*

SKIN WHITENING AND ITS HEALTH IMPACTS

Voluntary skin whitening, commonly referred to as skin-bleaching¹ covers a variety of cosmetic methods and procedures used to whiten the skin. A common practice in Africa, Asia the Caribbean and among mixed and black populations in Europe, this practice is one that affects mostly women and that is extremely harmful for the health. Though research on this subject has been sparse, studies have shown more than half of women in countries such as Senegal, and Togo bleach their skin and the ramifications have been described by the research hospitals following this issue as catastrophic. The prevalence of this practice is equally high in other countries globally and the impacts as severe but these are largely ignored because of an ignorance on the subject fueled by the denial by users and a lack of education on this issue of general populations and even specialized medical staff.

The most common form of skin whitening consist in the application of crèmes and soaps that contain dangerous substances, such as mercury, hydroquinone, cortisones, vitamin A (which when used in excess is toxic), and dermo-corticoids. These products can be broken down into two categories: medicines such as cortisone and vitamin A – which are misused because of their known skin whitening side effects and beauty products developed specifically for skin lightening. The use of products from both categories can be equally dangerous. African populations suffer from a higher health risk from the use of these products since in order to whiten their darker skin many women resort to the mixing of different products enhancing their bleaching power and making them all the more dangerous.

Skin bleaching has strong impacts on the communities in which it is practiced. High in cost, the practice requires the constant purchase of these sometimes addictive products, thereby reducing the disposable income available to families in which it is practiced. The practice also shapes gendered norms of physical appearance that becomes destructive for young girls. This effect can be seen in the fact that adolescents and younger women have higher rates of skin bleaching than other age groups.

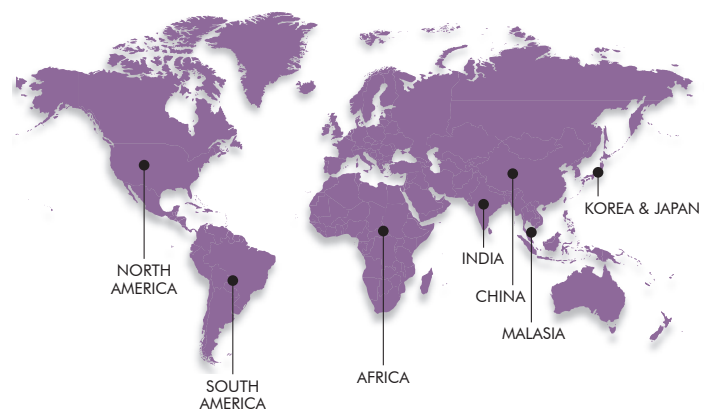
The most devastating impacts of skin bleaching however, are those that relate to the health of the women who use it their children.

Prolonged use of these above mentioned products for purposes of skin bleaching has been proven to result in the prevalence of the following disorders among users:

- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Skin and liver cancers
- Kidney failure
- Depression
- Blindness
- Obesity

When used by pregnant women, these products also result in:

- Stillbirths
- High rates of neonatal infection
- Low birth weight.



Prolonged use skin bleaching products also has severe dermatological ramifications, stemming from acne and scarring to severe hyper-pigmentation, infections and irritations.

The prevalence of skin bleaching and its impact on women and children across the globe render it a public health hazard.

¹ Used interchangeably

MELANIN FOUNDATION

Melanin Foundation is a non-governmental organization that was established to combat the spread of skin bleaching. The NGO, which is based in Geneva aims to reduce the prevalence and impact of skin whitening through:

- Widespread education on the damaging physical, psychological and social effects of skin-bleaching products
- Advocacy to key international, regional and national decision makers for the development of policies required to control the manufacturing and commercialization of these products and to discourage their use

Having already conducted advocacy campaigns in Geneva, Dakar, Accra, Abidjan and Lome, Melanin Foundation seeks to scale up its activities in order to better fulfill its objective. Activities planned in the first phase include:

- **Advocating for the uptake of sensitization programs on skin bleaching by educational bodies** in affected countries. It is crucial for populations to be educated from the youngest age about the health impacts of skin bleaching. Educational facilities must play a leading role in this sensitization exercise.
- **Promoting research** to better understand the trends in various countries and better inform strategies for the reduction of skin bleaching
- **Developing advocacy materials** that can be used to 1) inform populations about the health risks associated with bleaching and 2) inform policy makers about the importance of investing in this health issue
- **Advocating** to the World Health Organization (WHO) to recognize skin whitening as a public health hazard.
- **Advocating** for a widespread uptake of skin bleaching as to a key health issue by relevant government and development partners

HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE CAUSE

Melanin Foundation requires the support of all in order to achieve its objectives. Contributions are most welcome and can take the form of financial support or in kind (staff time, research time etc...). In order to find out more about how you can help please contact:

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Your contribution will be most appreciated.