

# Skin Bleaching and Its Negative Effect on the Physical Appearance of the Black Skin

## (A Case Study of Youthful Ladies and Women in the Ho Municipality in Ghana)

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### Abstract

Many women and youthful ladies in Ghana attach much passion to beauty than any other thing. In view of this fact, many chemicals, soaps, herbs and other unhealthy concoctions are being used by these fashionable youthful ladies and women in Ghana to bleach their skins giving them a face lift. In the process of bleaching, the skin colour changes from black to fair. The intension of these women is that, beauty is associated with lighter or fair skin. This has driven most of them into the craze of skin bleaching without recourse to the dangerous side effects that the practice can expose them to in the near future. The researchers therefore thought it necessary to solicit vital information from these youthful ladies and women to ascertain their awareness about the hazardous nature of skin bleaching and why they should put an end to the practice. In an attempt to achieve good results for the research, structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from one-hundred (100) Ghanaian women and youthful ladies residing in Ho municipality in the Volta Region in Ghana using purposive sampling technique. In addition to that, illiterates among the target group were interviewed to draw first hand information from them. Results from the research indicated that ignorance, craze for fashion and anxiety to look more beautiful are the issues that propel Ghanaian youthful ladies and women to engage in the practice of skin bleaching.

**Keywords:** Skin Bleaching, Youthful Ladies and Women, Physical appearance, Black skin

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Skin bleaching is the changing of the skin colour of the human being from dark to fair with the use of items like chemicals, soaps, herbs, fade creams and any other substance that is strong enough to cause a quick change of the skin colour.

Ghana is a tropical country where the weather is very warm. People living in Ghana are mostly dark in complexion. The darkness of the skin, according to Wniyard (1994) is due to the existence of melanin, which is a substance in the skin that causes dark coloration. Melanin, according to Jackson (1988) prepares the black person's skin to be strong enough for life in a tropical climate.

Beauty to most Ghanaian women is not fully achieved if the skin still remains dark as such; they will go all out to change their God given natural dark skin colour to a fair one by the use of chemicals, soaps, creams and other additives to bleach it. Jackson (1988) supported the fact above by mentioning that fade creams commonly known as bleach creams used by black women to bleach their skin contains approximately 2% hydroquinone which works by inhibiting the production of melanin when placed on the skin. She also said that it evens out complexion to make the face more receptive to cosmetics making it look beautiful, but it should not be worn in the sun, meaning that, it is not good for those living in the tropics.

Deikuma (2016) also mentioned that the dark skin becomes susceptible to skin cancer as a result of skin bleaching because the action leads to the removal of the surface skin or epidermis that contains melanin which is good for the dark skin in terms of protection of the skin. The bleached skin is therefore exposed to the direct sun ray which poses a lot of problems for the skin and the body at large. This leads to the fact that in an attempt to promote beauty in the tropics, care must be taken when choosing items to use on the skin to enhance the beauty because some of such practices can affect the skin negatively.

The aim of this research is to delve deep into the dangers of skin bleaching and its negative effect on the physical appearance of the black skin.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The practice of skin bleaching among youthful ladies and women in Ghana has become very rampant. The researchers therefore want to find out the causes of it and to ascertain whether those involved in the practice are aware of the dangerous effects on their skin and the need to put a stop to it.

#### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the causes for skin bleaching among Ghanaian youthful ladies and women.
- To ascertain the dangers of skin bleaching.
- To recommend massive education among youthful Ghanaian ladies and women on the dangers of skin bleaching and the need to put an end to the practice.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This aspect of the research deals with the contribution from different writers in relation to the topic at hand. The literature review is sub-divided into the following topics:

- The structure of the skin
- Functions of the skin
- Different skin types and colours
- Effect of skin bleaching on the black skin

### 2.1 Structure of the Skin

Describing the structure of the skin, Simmons (1989) said the skin is composed of two layers which are the epidermis and the dermis. The epidermis according to him is the outer layer forming the frontier to the outside world and is a fraction of a millimeter thick, as such a slight scratch on it reaches to the blood vessels of the dermis and bleeding occurs. This supports the fact that any strong chemical or cream applied to the epidermis, which is the outer layer of the skin can bleach, by changing the colour and eventually damage it if care is not taken because that layer is very thin.

He also said that the epidermis of the sole and the palm is thicker, which is several millimeters thick. Simmons (1989) explained that there are four layers of the epidermis. The stratum corneum or the horny layer which is a dead cell that protects the living cell within the body, stratum granulosum or the granular layer which contains a lot of keratin and later takes the place of a new innermost layer of the horny layer, stratum spinosum or the prickle cell layer which allows rapid transfer of materials from cell to cell and stratum germinativum or the basal layer which is always involved in cell division to help the thickness of the horny layer to remain constant.

He further said that the horny layer which is the stratum corneum is greatly involved in protecting the body against the ultraviolet rays of the sun, which in excess can be deadly to the living cells of the body. This also emphasizes the fact that taking off the outer skin by the practice of bleaching exposes the skin to excess exposure to ultraviolet rays which is lethal to the cells of the skin.

The second layer of the skin, which is the dermis has been described by Simmons (1998) as tough layer which can protect the body against bumps and knocks. It is also elastic so that the skin will always fit. It is only during old age when the elasticity of the skin weakens that it begins to drop or hang. The dermis contains the nerve endings that perform the skin's sensory function. It contains the blood supply which nourishes both itself and the epidermis and helps to control body temperature.

### 2.2 Functions of the Skin

According to Simmons (1989) the skin does not only wrap the body, but also forms a busy frontier between the body and the environment. It controls the loss of valuable water from the body, protects the body from harmful radiations of the sun, controls the entry of foreign materials, prevents the entry of harmful micro organisms, cushions the body against mechanical shocks from bumps and knocks, regulates the loss of heat from the body, receives information from the environment and relay it to the brain and by its colour texture and odour, transmit social and sexual signals to others.

Gallant etel (2001) added that the skin helps in the production of vitamin D which is responsible for strong bones and teeth in the body. This shows that the skin is an important organ in the body as such any harm done to it can harm the body.

Winyard (1994) also said that the skin is made up of muscles, connective tissues, blood capillaries, lymphatic and epithelial cells. She further said that some factors do have a temporary or lasting effect on the skin. Some of which are beneficial whilst others are detrimental. According to her nutritious diet, water and sleep help to maintain a good skin. From her view, skin colour varies in different parts of the body and from body to body. Melanocytes which is a melanin forming cells are formed in the germinating layer of the epidermis to give colour to the skin and absorb harmful ultra violet rays. She also said that heredity plays an important role in determining the colour of the skin.

### 2.3 Different Skin Types and Colours

The human skin comes in different types and colours. Winyard (1994) listed the types to be normal skin, dry skin, greasy skin, oily skin and combination of skin type whilst Simmons (1998) described the colours to be dark and

white. In addition to that, he mentioned other skin colours as brown, pink and yellow.

#### **2.4 Effect of Skin Bleaching on the Black Skin**

Winyard (1994) quipped that there are a number of creams containing bleaching agents. The most popular is hydroquinone used by clients to lighten their skin. She stressed that large quantities of such substances can endanger the skin by destroying melanosomes in the skin completely resulting in patchy depigmentation. She warned that the use of creams and soaps that contain such substances in large quantities should be discontinued by the user if she notices changes in the skin colour.

According to her, the skin being an external covering of the body is liable to more forms of dangers and irritations. Due to this fact, it is very dangerous for youthful ladies and women to use harsh substances on the skin to bleach it because it can damage it.

Principal (1984) buttresses the above fact that in choosing creams for the skin, one must make it a habit to read the label which tells the whole story of the cream. By reading the label one can be knowledgeable about the content so that the wrong cream will not be used to bleach or destroy the skin. She said the ingredients used in manufacturing the products are listed in order of highest content first and the least last. According to her, contents of creams with collagen listed among the first three ingredients used in its manufacture should be used, but those with fragrance first and collagen last should be avoided because it can be dangerous to the skin.

Principal (1984) also noted that in selecting creams and items used for the skin, the labels on the product must have certain ingredients on top of the list of ingredients used in its manufacture: They are aloe juice, collagen and elastin which are natural protein that keeps the skin resilient and prevent skin damage. She also said that products with high content of mineral oil or lanolin stays on top of the skin, they don't nourish it; they protect the skin from absorbing moisture from the air which is dangerous to the skin. From her point of view, users of creams for the skin should not be scared by long names like Ppropylparaben or Methylparaben preservatives that are in most creams because they are there to preserve them.

Unfortunately, most Ghanaian women are illiterate, as such they cannot read and write so they pick any cream or soap given to them by friends and apply on their skin only to realize that it is not good for their skin by which time it would have already bleached and damaged their skin.

**INSERT PLATE 1 HERE**

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This chapter of the research will try to explain the methods used for the research proceedings as such areas like research design, location of the research, target population, sample and sample size, sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis will be discussed.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design was a qualitative one as such; it was involved in description, narrative event and interpretation that give in-depth understanding. This type of research reveals an accurate profile of a person, event or situations and provides the opportunity to elaborate and tap diverse views of respondents. The research approach adopted, being a case study, enabled the researchers to achieve the full aim of the study by gaining the enablement to acquire a full understanding of the context of the research. The good thing about the approach was that it enabled the researcher to understand the case in detail recognizing its context to the fullest.

#### **3.2 Location**

The research was done at Ho in the Volta Region in Ghana. Ho being the regional capital of the Volta Region controls over eighteen (18) municipal district assemblies in Ghana. It is also a metropolitan city as such, it is dominated by a lot of youth and adult men and women coming from the villages in Ghana to do all sort of jobs, trade and engage in different types of social devices.

#### **3.3 Target Population and Sample**

The target population consisted of a group or individuals having the desired characteristics needed for the research. They were the youthful ladies and women in the Ho metropolis. An accessible population was identified since it was difficult to reach all participants in the population. One-hundred (100) respondents were chosen as a sample and contacted.

#### **3.4 Sampling Procedure**

Purposive sampling method was the sampling procedure adopted. This method allows a range of methods that enables one to reduce the amount of data one needs to collect by considering only data from a subgroup rather than all possible cases or elements. Purposive sampling also considers cases that are particularly informative. It is reliable, convenient and suitable to take care of small population such as the one at hand, making it the most

suitable one for the research.

### 3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire which was mainly used for the educated respondents. On few occasions, structured interviews were conducted to gather information from illiterate women who could not read and write. The questions were done in both close and open form to give the respondents the opportunity to give adequate answers. On the whole, one-hundred (100) questionnaire copies were administered and exactly one hundred (100) was retrieved.

### 4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study used a qualitative approach to analyze the data. Data analyzed using a qualitative approach can enrich in –depth understanding of a problem or circumstances. Hence the choice to provide the researcher an appropriate means to study the phenomenon and arrive at a reliable and gripping conclusion. The statistical approach was employed to enable the researcher explore, present, describe and examine relationships and trends within the data collected through the use of tables graphs and statistical instruments.

#### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Under 18 years	5	5
18-30	50	50
31-45	30	30
Above 46	15	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Research survey, 2016**

The table above indicates the ages of the various respondents. It is very clear from the table that the youth forms the majority of the respondents making a total of 50. This was followed by the adult who fall within the age range of 30-45years whilst those under 18years form the minority of the respondents indicating a good representation of the target group.

**Table 2: Educational Background**

Educational Level	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
JHS Level	4	4
SHS Level	6	6
O Level	5	5
A Level	5	5
Middle School Leaving Certificate	30	30
Tertiary	20	20
Others	0	0
Not Educated	30	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Research Survey, 2016**

Describing the contents in the table, it could be seen that majority of the respondents fall within the uneducated and semi educated range. This could have influenced their behaviour towards skin bleaching. In Ghana Middle School leaving certificate and JHS Level is the lowest level of education. People with such low level of education only depend on what they hear from friends and act. The uneducated who are not able to read and write use any soap and cream upon recommendation from friends without reading labels just to achieve their aim of bleaching and looking beautiful because they have seen their friends do that.

**Table 3: Skin Colour**

Skin Colour	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Black	100	100
White	0	0
Brown	0	0
Any other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Research Survey, 2016**

Table 3 above indicates that all respondents are blacks. This enabled the researcher to get good information about the respondents since the topic is dealing with the black skin.

**Table 4: Skin Type**

Skin Type	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Normal	15	15
Sensitive	20	20
Oily and Normal	10	10
Dry	10	10
Oily	15	15
Have no idea of the skin type	30	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Research Survey, 2016**

The table above shows that 30% of the respondents have no idea about their skin type. The 30% represent those uneducated respondents as such they have no idea as to how to identify their skin type. The rest which forms 70% are aware of their skin type.

**Table 5: Functions and Structure of the Skin**

Knowledge about the Functions of the Skin	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	20
No	80	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
Knowledge about the Structure of the Skin	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	25	25
No	75	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Research Survey, 2016**

The table above indicates respondents' knowledge about the functions and structure of the skin. From the table it is clear that majority of respondents have no clue about the functions and structure of the skin. Whilst 80 out of the 100 respondents are very ignorant about the functions of the skin, 75 out of the 100 respondents know nothing about the structure of the skin. This could have been the reason why most of the respondents take interest in bleaching their skin because they have no idea about how the skin is composed, the various roles the skin plays to help maintain the body and any dangerous effect that can show on the skin as a result of bad handling.

**Table 6: Number of Respondents who have bleached their Skin and those who have not**

Respondents who have Bleached their Skin	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Those who Have bleached their Skin	90	80
Those who have not bleached	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

The table reveals the number of respondents who have bleached their skin. It is very clear that majority of respondents (90%) have ever bleached their skins whilst a minimal number of the respondents forming only 10% have never bleached their skin.

**Table 7: Parts of the Skin that have been Bleached**

Parts of the Body that have been Bleached	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Face	70	77.8
Whole Body	20	22.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

It is very clear from the table that majority of the respondents indicating 70 out of the 90 who have ever bleached their skin are interested in bleaching only their faces leaving the rest of the body untouched. This might be due to the fact that they are interested in beautifying only their faces since that is the first part of the body noticed by people before taking a closer look at the rest of the body.

**Table 8: Reasons for bleaching the Skin**

Reasons for bleaching the Skin	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
To follow fashion	5	5
To smoothen the skin	5	5
To make me look fairer brighter and beautiful	70	70
To remove pimples	20	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

From the table above, it is very clear that most Ghanaian youthful ladies and women forming 70% bleach their skin because they want to look fairer, brighter and beautiful. The assumed mentality of the target group that presupposes that fairer ladies are more beautiful than black ones is confirmed from the response seen in the table. Few women and youthful ladies according to the table bleach because they want to get rid of pimples, smoothen their skin, and follow fashion. A lot of Ghanaian ladies and women interviewed also confirmed that fairer women and ladies are more beautiful than the dark ones and that, most Ghanaian men prefer them to the dark ones.

**Table 9: Some Items used to Bleach the Skin**

Items Used by Respondents to bleach the Skin	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Dove soap and Easy white cream	20	22.3
Tura soap and Body white cream	50	55.5
Asepsop soap and Pure white cream	10	11.1
Mixture of Alata soap with bleaching and High Tone cream	10	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

Some bleaching soaps and creams used by Ghanaian youthful ladies and women for bleaching their skin have been listed in table 9 above. Out of the ninety (90) respondents who have been bleaching, (55.5%) respondents have been using tura soap and body white cream to bleach. (22.3%) respondents have been using dove soap and body white cream to bleach, (11.1%) respondents have been using asepsop soap and pure white cream, and (11.1%) respondents have been using a mixture of alata soap (local Ghanaian soap) with bleaching soap and high tone cream to bleach. According to the respondents, the soap alone does not give a good effect in bleaching so they always use the soap and the cream together to come out with a fair skin. Some of the women interviewed, who were mostly illiterate confirmed that they don't read labels on the creams and soaps before using because they cannot read and write. Some who can read and write said they know those items have dangerous side effects on the skin but they don't care and that they are only concerned about how to make their skin look fair and beautiful.

**Table: 10 Dangerous effects of Skin bleaching**

Some Dangerous Effects of Skin bleaching	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Cancer of the skin	11	11
Causes the areas that have been bleached to darken	25	25
Wounds on Skin that have been bleached does not heal fast	14	14
Difficulty in stitching the skin during operation.	30	30
Not aware of any dangerous effect of skin bleaching.	20	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2016**

Looking at table 10 above, it is very obvious that all the respondents with the exception of 20 of them, were aware of some dangerous effects of skin bleaching which are; skin cancer, depigmentation of the skin, wounds on bleached skin not healing fast, and difficulty in stitching bleached skin during operation. Despite the fact that most of them are aware of the dangers of skin bleaching, it is surprising to note that they still go ahead to bleach as the table is implying.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The research came out with the following findings and conclusions:

- Skin bleaching is very rampant in Ghana which is a tropical country with a very warm weather.
- People involved in skin bleaching in Ghana are mostly youthful ladies and middle aged women.
- Reasons why they bleach their skin are; to change the colour of their skin from black to fair thereby making them look more beautiful. The reason is because to them, the fairer ladies look more beautiful than dark ladies.
- To clear their skin from pimples, and to make the skin look smooth.
- In most cases, the face is bleached leaving the rest of the body dark.
- On few cases the whole body is bleached.
- Items used in bleaching are; dove soap with easy white, cream, tura soap and body white cream, asepsop soap and pure white creams, mixture of alata soap ( local Ghanaian soap) and bleaching soap with high tone cream.
- It was noticed that all the soaps and creams mentioned contained high amounts of hydroquinone that can bleach the skin.
- Dangerous effects of skin bleaching include: Skin cancer, dark patches on the skin called depigmentation, wounds on bleached skin not healing fast, difficulty in stitching the skin during



operation.

### Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions reached earlier on, the following recommendations were given:

- Bleached creams and soaps must be banned from being sold in Ghana.
- Massive education must go on in schools, churches, on televisions, radios and other social gatherings about the dangers of skin bleaching.
- Ghanaians must be encouraged to appreciate their God given black skin as a beautiful one.

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Plate 1: some effects of skin bleaching