

Complications of skin lighteners in the southern population of Morocco

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Introduction:

The use of skin lightening products represents a social phenomenon in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Exposure to chemicals in bleaching products, notably mercury, hydroquinone and steroids, has been associated with a variety of adverse health effects such as exogenous ochronosis, acne... The objective of our study was to examine the skin lightening practices of Moroccan women living in the South of Morocco.

Results & Discussion:

The average age was 25 years, the average duration of skin lightening practice was 3 years, the products used were topical corticosteroids (100%), hydroquinone (60%), phytotherapy mask (chickpeas) (42%). The motivations for using these products were the search for beauty (31%), self-esteem (17%) and search for a husband (52%). These women obtained their products mainly from the markets but also from the Canary Islands. The main complications were: acne 75%, worsening of melasma 25%, combination of acne and melasma were found in 41.6%, tinea corporis 16%, stretch marks 25% and skin atrophy in 25%. 15% of patients reported taking concomitant dexamethasone 0.5 mg and antihistamine in order to gain weight (obesity considered as a beauty criterion). Our approach was to decrease the dose of corticosteroid, to raise awareness of the systemic side effects of corticosteroids, and hydroquinone, to advise the use of sunscreen, to follow a suitable diet low in lipids. Patients with metabolic syndrome were referred to endocrinology consultation for follow-up.

The use of Skin lightening cosmetics is a common habit in Morocco especially in phototype IV and V, and affects more women. The skin complications are closely related to: (1) the active ingredients in these cosmetic products (hydroquinone, mercury, kojic acid, retinol, steroids) but also the pigmentary enhancers or additives (alpha hydroxyl acid, lemon extract...), (2) the long time duration (many months to years), (3) area of application (more side effects if applied on large body surface area), (4) the amount or the quantity used. Many cutaneous adverse effects have been reported such as: skin atrophy, acne vulgaris, melasma, ochronosis, perioral dermatitis, steroid-induced rosacea, squamous cell carcinoma, infectious disease (erysipelas), but also serious systemic effect: mainly Cushing syndrome, glaucoma, cataract, hypertension and hypertrichosis in case of steroids intake [1].

Materials & Methods:

Within the National Initiative for Human Development, the Mohamed V Foundation for Solidarity organized a medical caravan on November 2019 in Laayoune (southern Morocco). 100 women benefited from dermatological consultations of whom 60 women confessed the use of skin bleaching products. Data include age of the patient, products use for bleaching habits, main duration of skin lightening products, number of products applied, the dermatological underlying condition if exist.

Conclusions:

Despite the alert launched in 2010 by the Cosmetovigilance Center regarding the non-regulatory use of cosmetics containing mercury, hydroquinone and steroids, this practice is far from having disappeared, buying over-the-counter topical corticosteroids is worsening the situation in Morocco.



Figure 1: 25-year-old female patient with inflammatory hyper pigmented acne after using lemon and chickpeas mask and a cream containing: cortisone and lemon extract.



Figure 2 :skin bleaching products illegally sold in a store (Medina of Rabat, Morocco)

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References:

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