

Causal Explanations and Risk-Taking Associated with Voluntary Skin Depigmentation in Cameroon



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ABSTRACT: For individuals, conforming to beauty standards sometimes requires body transformations such as voluntary skin depigmentation. Voluntary skin depigmentation is a growing phenomenon in society. The reasons given in the literature vary from country to country. The health, economic and social consequences have been reported in the literature. Although the harmfulness of this practice is well known, people continue to use it, even though they are sometimes well informed and aware of it, despite the fact that it is a behaviour that is considered risky for their health. To understand this risky behaviour, individuals put forward reasons that may explain it, thus providing a means of analysis. This study uses the semi-directive interview method. It is made up of men and women aged between 18 and 50 from the town of Foubot, recruited using purposive sampling. The study shows that the reasons given for this practice are either internal or external to the individual. The results show that most of the respondents have a good knowledge of voluntary skin depigmentation and the meaning they give to it. This study shows that voluntary skin depigmentation is not only practised by women, even men use lightening products. Individuals would therefore do well to accept themselves as they are (self-acceptance), as this practice has health, economic and social consequences.

KEYWORDS : beauty criteria, voluntary skin depigmentation, risk behaviour, Foubot, lightening products.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, one of the practices used to enhance beauty is voluntary skin depigmentation (VD). This has become increasingly widespread worldwide. Meeting beauty standards that value fair skin leads individuals to adopt the risky behaviours associated with the use of lightening products, despite the short, medium and long term health consequences. The use of depigmenting cosmetic products has become a health problem, particularly in many sub-Saharan African countries, as indicated by certain studies (Del Guidice et al., 2003). This study examines the psychosocial determinants that may provide an insight into individual motivations and the behavioural dynamics underlying this choice of behaviour, through the respondents' discourse. According to the French Health Products Safety Agency (AFSAAP, 2011), the extent of this phenomenon in today's society began in the 1960s and 1970s. Skin lightening was first seen as a physical practice, then a medical dimension was added.

The dangerousness of these products was recognised very early on, as early as the 16th century, but it was not until two centuries later that medical discourse made itself heard, leading to a ban on the use of certain whitening products (Lanoë, 2008). Because of hydroquinone's mutagenic potential in animals, Europe has banned the use of this lightening agent in cosmetic products (Mahé, 2010). We often think that only dark-skinned people use lightening products to whiten their skin. However, many articles mention Asians, Indians and Mexicans (Nakano, 2008) as also using this practice. Lightening products are sold in the form of soap, milk, cream, lotion or as an acne serum (Emeriau, 2009). Depigmenting agents come from both natural and chemical sources. The most commonly used active depigmenting agents are dermocorticoids and hydroquinone, used alone or, more often, in combination (Del Guidice and Pinier, 2002; Mahé et al., 1993; Pitche et al., 1998). Mercurial derivatives are also used in the form of soap (Kass, 2009).

Moreover, this practice has a significant economic impact, since large and small companies manipulate individuals to persuade them to buy their products through the media, which have a great influence on the public (Nakano, 2008). It should be noted that both men and women use depigmenting cosmetics (Didillon and Bounsama, 1986). In fact, although the harmfulness

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of this practice is known, individuals, even though they are sometimes well informed and aware of it, continue to use it despite the fact that it is a behaviour considered risky for their health. However, in the Cameroonian context, very few studies have attempted to explore the causes (external and internal) that lead to the propensity of this phenomenon, which is associated with risk-taking with health consequences (illnesses, skin infections, etc.), on the basis of what respondents have said. However, this information could provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of skin VD. Thus, it seems interesting to us to know: what are the causal explanations of VD provided from the discourse of the respondents in the Cameroonian context?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design is based on a qualitative approach. This is based on the comprehensive paradigm and involves the use of individual semi-directive interviews. This method enables the researcher to give meaning to the data. The research took place in Cameroon, in the town of Foumbot. The study involved men and women aged between 18 and 50. Our choice was made in a reasoned manner to select the respondents who were to take part in the individual interview. Finally, we had a sample size of $n = 08$, including 04 women and 04 men. The sample size was delimited and determined by the criterion of empirical saturation of information, given that from the 9th informant onwards we no longer received any new information. In order to preserve the representativeness of the sample, we took two main criteria into account:

Inclusion criteria:

The inclusion criteria for participating in this study were as follows:

- To be a person living in the town of Foumbot;
- To have used or not used depigmenting products;
- To be aged 18-50 years;
- Be male or female;
- Agree to the interview

Exclusion criteria:

The exclusion criteria for not participating in this study were as follows:

- Being under 18 years of age
- Refusing to take part in the interview;
- Not living in the town of Foumbot.

Once we had made contact with the respondents, we agreed on an appointment (place and time). In most cases, the meeting took place at the respondent's home. The average length of each interview was 40 minutes. With the respondents' permission, the interviews were recorded, and we then transcribed the speeches. The transcriptions were made in order to carry out a good thematic content analysis, which made it possible to analyse the data from the field in order to extract the meaning that the respondents gave to the phenomenon of VD by paying attention to the participants' knowledge of the practice of VD; the internal and external causes; its consequences and the means of fighting against VD. In order to identify the respondents to the individual interviews in the text, we used the following codes: F= female; H= male with F#1 corresponding to interview #1, F#2 corresponding to interview #2, F#3 corresponding to interview #3, F#4 corresponding to interview #4, H#5 corresponding to interview #5, H#6 corresponding to interview #6, H#7 corresponding to interview #7, H#8 corresponding to interview #8.

RESULTS

The results indicate a number of reasons why VD is practised. The results also give an account of the participants' knowledge of VD and the harmfulness of this practice, as well as avenues of prevention to fight this phenomenon.

1. Respondents' general knowledge of voluntary skin depigmentation

Knowledge about the practice of skin VD concerns the information that respondents have about this practice. This knowledge mainly concerns the aesthetic aspects. One participant (F#1) felt that VD "is the fact that black skin turns into a light complexion through the use of lightening products". Another stressed that "stripping is the fact of adding 'the cube' to the beauty milk to make yourself more presentable so that, even if you're wearing a worthless loincloth, you shine more than the one with the rich basin in any case, I'm not joking about going to docta" F#3. This extract shows that lightening products for some in this locality are likened to "cube", which is a product used to season food to enhance its taste. "The use of lightening products is to remove stains such as pimples after shaving" H#8; so VD has a therapeutic purpose.

For H#7 "VD is when you voluntarily change the colour of your skin to have a fair complexion that corresponds to today's ideal of beauty". H#6 believes that "the use of lightening products is to cleanse the skin and become fresher or more beautiful". This suggests that the skin is dirty and to make it clean, you have to use stripping products to purify it. We had expected all the

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respondents to give a definition to the concept of VD, but this was not the case: "I know that when a woman is fair-skinned, she is naturally fair-skinned. I don't know the difference between a woman who is naturally brown and one who is not natural" (F#4). This participant's comments show that, unlike the others, she does not have a good knowledge of the practice of VD.

In the light of these statements, we can say that the participants have a fairly good definition of VD because this harmful phenomenon is not sufficiently publicised, which does not attract their attention. It is important to inform and educate people about this practice.

2. Causal explanations put forward to justify skin VD

The explanations put forward to understand the use of VD are cognitive activities that enable individuals to look for the causes of events. Heider (1958, p.82) says that "the result of an action is seen to depend on two sets of conditions, namely factors inherent in the individual and factors inherent in the environment". These causes may be internal or external to the individual.

2.1. External causes linked to VD

External causes relate to situations or the context of the environment. The best known are: imitation through conformism or following, the influence of close relations, advertising, the desire to seduce, social pressure, a bad climate, colonial heritage, self-medication, aesthetic concerns, family or religious events, and social recognition.

Imitation, family influence and advertising

This phenomenon can be explained by the various influences of family and friends, fashion, models and advertising, since people who change their skin colour do so by asking friends and family, salespeople or through advertising. One respondent said that "when I was walking with my girlfriend, she attracted more attention because she has fair skin, so she recommended her cosmetics to me to clean my skin" (F#2). The audiovisual media feature advertisements for skin-lightening products. They show images of fair-skinned people praising these products. Influenced by these advertising, many people use these products to look like the models. This is reflected in the comments made by respondents: "It's when a product is advertised in the media that I also buy it to try it out because the women in the advertising have a luminous complexion" (F#2). "It's through the stars who lighten their skin that we watch on TV and in magazines that some people strip to identify with them" (H#8). One respondent also said that: "People do the djansan (VD in Cameroonian jargon) because most of the stars and models featured in the media and especially on television are those with fair skin" (H#5).

Women do it out of competition and rivalry. The respondents' comments reveal that "my mother is in a polygamous household. In this climate of rivalry, women and children have to compete in terms of beauty and dress. The co-wives try to hold the husband's attention, while the children try to hold the attention of potential suitors who want to leave the house. So make-up is used to catch the husband's eye" (F#2). Moreover, the arrival of a potential rival encourages them to take care of their bodies, since: "when the husband wants to take another wife, you have to prepare yourself accordingly so that the new arrival doesn't turn you off" (F#3).

Beauty and seduction

For some people, having fair skin is a sign of beauty and cleanliness. In fact, a fair complexion is a seductive asset and a woman who practices VD is more attractive and therefore more courted. Here's what some respondents had to say: "What's astonishing is that even fair-skinned people do the djansan to be seen. This desire to become like white people will send them to the grave" (H#7); "Many people do it to become beautiful and fresh. I have to be like them too" (H#6); "Nowadays, people think that the lighter your skin, the more attractive you are considered to be" (F#4); "My husband often buys me lightening products to show my family and friends that he takes good care of me. I have to look after my complexion to always be beautiful" (F#3); "A friend told me that she lightens her skin to look fresh and pretty" (H#5); "I use lightening products to be more presentable, to please because a fair complexion is a beauty criterion nowadays. It's the complexion of the moment, the commercial complexion" (F#2). The commercial complexion means, in a way, the complexion that is expensive or the one that has more value in society.

Looking for a job

Many women are convinced that they will be more beautiful and attractive with fair skin and that this will guarantee them finding or keeping a job. Some employers have a preference for a fair complexion in their employees, as this respondent points out:

I applied for a job at a local business, but the boss told me he couldn't take me on because my skin isn't fair. So to get a job in a certain structure, you have to be fair-skinned naturally or not (F#1). This point of view emerges from the words of one of the interviewees who said: "When I was younger, I worked in a perfume shop and my boss asked me to clean my skin because a fair complexion would attract customers" (F#4). So, to attract customers, employees must be fair-skinned in certain structures.

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Social pressure

Pressure from their partner pushes women to use lightening products, and sometimes it is their partner who pushes them to depigment. Saving the relationship then becomes reason enough to lighten the skin. This opinion emerged from the interview, one of whom remarked that:

Among us Bamouns (one cameroonian tribe), a fair-skinned woman has a better chance of getting married than a black woman, in my opinion. It's the men who encourage their wives to wear make-up; when a woman doesn't lighten her skin, the man looks at the lighter woman outside and even gives her money to buy the products. The woman has to save money to buy good cleansing milk, otherwise the man will look for another woman who will meet his expectations. Men encourage women to lighten their skin because they think that light-skinned women are the best (F#3).

The data also show that "mockery and derogatory remarks linked to a dark complexion through certain expressions such as being as black as one's heart; black as night; having a dirty complexion drive people to use lightening products" (F#3). An interviewee said: "My cousin had a complex because she was black and her sisters were fair-skinned, so she decided to scratch her skin" (H#8).

The bad climate

According to the people interviewed, the bad climate pushes people to use lightening products. Let's listen to what the respondents have to say: "I'm a motorbike taxi driver and you know that the sun spoils the skin. To keep a bit of freshness for outings with friends or my wife, I have to use products that cleanse the skin" (H#6). Another said, "The West has a bad climate because of the cold. To maintain my complexion, I always have to ask doctors what I can use so I don't fall over. I get good advice" (F#3). "The climate in the west doesn't help people's skin, it actually damages it. To look presentable, I had to use serums and essential oils" (F#3).

Colonial heritage

The lightening phenomenon "is the consequence of prejudices which believe that a fair or white complexion is valued in society" (H#5). This opinion is in line with that of a respondent who stated that:

This practice can be seen as a consequence of colonisation because the colonists made the colonised people believe that white people were superior to black people in every way. The blacks, believing themselves to be inferior, put this into their heads. If we arrive somewhere these days with a white person, he will be served first or will get everyone's attention. So we have to change this mentality where everything is based on white people. Some people will say: "I do like a white person; I live like a white person; I eat like a white person". Slavery also diminished black people (H#7). So the superiority of the colour white during colonisation to subjugate black people has left its mark in such a way that everything they do is to get closer to white.

Self-medication

Other people resort to self-medication to get rid of pimples, as this respondent attests: "I have pimples on my body. I use lotion to get rid of them even though it makes me lighter, the main thing is to have smooth skin" (F#2). Another added that "some people use djansan to get rid of spots" (H#8). So for some, the practice of VD is therapeutic.

Family or religious events

The practice of VD is sometimes linked to family or religious events, as one respondent pointed out: "When I went on the pilgrimage to Mecca, I used lightening products to make myself more beautiful. I continued to use them in Mecca, and when I came back I looked like a 12-year-old girl (laughs). My skin was well cleansed" (F#3). That's why, "When a girl is preparing for her wedding, she has to use these products to look beautiful. As the climate damages the skin, my sister had to go to Douala for a fortnight to use the products, and when she came back a few days before the wedding everyone admired her complexion (F#2).

Social recognition

Skin VD is linked to social appearance. Discussions with respondents reveal this point of view in the following terms: When you light your skin and it works, you go everywhere and people see you. Some people say that you have money and they respect you because it's not who wants it but who can. You have to put in a lot of money if you want to make a success of your "Nyanga" (F#2). Sheet metal work or djansan is a way of showing that one's social status has changed, like getting married, finding a job or earning a lot of money. Through the colour of their skin, these people want to be seen as having more value (F#1). Some men, to show that they can afford it, buy their wives or girlfriends paint strippers. Appearing with a fair-skinned woman in public shows that you're a capable man (H#7).

Looking for a partner

It is important to note that some women who are looking for a partner use lightening products, as this respondent said: I'm interested in everything you can do to make yourself beautiful and attract attention, like putting on nails, false eyelashes and why not use lightening products to clean your skin, especially when you want to find a partner (F#2).

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2.2 Internal causes

Internal causes concern the individual's internal dispositions. They include low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority and feelings of invulnerability.

Low self-esteem

Because of a negative attitude towards themselves, some people lighten their skin in order to feel good about themselves. One respondent said: "Body disaffection drives people to turn to this practice" (H#8). The words of one respondent support this view. "I cleaned my skin because my complexion wasn't shiny and I didn't like it at all" (F#3).

Feeling of inferiority

In addition, "The feeling of inferiority compared to white people has something to do with it. Black people think that the colour black is synonymous with a curse and inferiority. So you have to change that skin. If you're light-skinned, they call you 'white', and if you're dark-skinned, they call you 'waxed black'" (F#4).

Feeling of invulnerability

People who lighten their skin feel that they have mastered the practice and are capable of doing so. One respondent argued that "you have to be capable when you start using lightening products" (F#3). Some people overestimate their state of health even after using lightening products, as the interviewees stated: "I can't have health problems because docta gives me the good products. What's more, I use expensive products" (F#3); "when you're in good health, you're not afraid to use lightening products. As far as I'm concerned, I don't have any health problems when I use these products. If I find that a product doesn't lighten my skin properly, I change" (F#2). "It's because people use lightening products incorrectly that it affects their health. I mix the products myself. So I can't worry about the consequences because I control the dosage" (F#2). These comments are in line with those of a respondent (F#1) who said that: "When it comes to make-up, people think it can't affect their health. My sister, for example, thinks that health problems that happen to other people can't happen to her because she uses the good products".

Others think: "Djansan is less dangerous than hepatitis. If you use these products in moderation, you risk nothing" (F#3). Those who use djansan think that the negative effects only happen to others. They don't take precautions" (F#4). Because "Everything that happens is God's will. Even those who don't use lightening products die or get sick. I believe in God, I'm not afraid of anything. I don't care what people say or think about me" (F#3). One respondent pointed out that:

When you decide to do your own thing, you mustn't be ashamed of other people's opinions. I don't like it when people talk about me. I wear my trousers and they're what they're for! To each his own choices and his own life. There's an adage that says "nothing ventured, nothing gained". I'm not worried about falling ill, I don't exaggerate when I use lightening products. So nothing can happen to me. If it does, I'll deal with it (laughs) (F#6). People who wear make-up feel that nothing serious can happen to them if they strip because if a person is aware of the health problems that make-up causes, they will stop using lightening products. The feeling of invulnerability can lead individuals not to take precautions when using lightening products. Individuals who feel invulnerable are under the illusion that they are in control of the situation when they use lightening products, which leads them to adopt risky behaviours that mean they are taking a health risk.

3. Knowledge of the consequences of voluntary skin depigmentation

The consequences of skin lightening are physical, social and economic.

3.1 Physical consequences

The physical consequences include skin fragility, the appearance of stretch marks, skin diseases, uneven skin tone, facial hyperpilosity and so on. These consequences are expressed in the words of respondents: "The 'djansan' destroys the skin's cellular structure, which encourages thinning, leading to skin diseases (H#7). The complexion becomes uneven, like face fanta, foot coca as they say. Generally, these lightening products cause nauseating body odour, especially when it's hot (F#1). "I have large stretch marks on my arms" (F#3). Another argues that "I've read about the diseases that djansan causes: diabetes, pimples, blood and skin cancer" (F#4). Practising VD thins the skin. One respondent said: "Recently my aunt died after a surgical operation because her fragile skin couldn't take the stitches. The wounds don't heal quickly" (H#7). "My neighbour has a beard like a man, it's not a pretty sight" (H#5). "Some lightening products give you pimples on your face and sometimes all over your body" (F#3).

3.2 Social consequences

The social consequences are linked to mockery and stigmatisation of skin lightening practitioners. The extracts from the speeches underline them in these terms: "sometimes when a woman has done the djansan, in passing, people shout sheet metal, it's called sheet metal when the make-up fails and the person forces and ends up looking like a toy...the skin colour becomes weird" (H#7). Another argues that: "People who take off their make-up become yellow like a taxi, like rotten papaya" (F#1). "People with multi-coloured skin make fun of them by saying 'face fanta- foot coca' because their complexion isn't uniform. It's often said that these people have dual nationality because of their multicoloured complexion" (H#5).

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3.3 Economic consequences

The economic consequence relates to the cost of VD. The respondents emphasised this in the following terms: To avoid darkening. You have to apply these products every day all over your body. These products are getting more and more expensive. Sometimes you ration the woman instead of giving priority to nutrition, she prefers to go to the market and save money to buy lightening products (H#7). The products are getting more and more expensive, but you make do. Hmmm, I prefer to go without eating and buy my products because if there's a shortage, my complexion will fade and it will be difficult to get it back (F#3). The products my older sister uses are expensive. She can spend around 25,000 CFA francs a month on serums, complexion correctors, lightening essential oils and lotions (F#1).

In addition to these consequences, there is a psychological consequence related to dependence on lightening products. One respondent stated that: It's difficult to stop buying lightening products because you have to look after your skin so that it doesn't go downhill and get darker. I want to have clearer, more even skin. That's why I often change lightening products to find one that works, even if it's not good for my health, as people say (F#3). Another argues that: "To maintain your complexion, you have to apply lightening products repeatedly every day. Wet is wet". (F#2).

4. Knowledge of prevention of voluntary skin depigmentation

In their speeches, the respondents advocated preventive measures to fight against VD. We have selected individual and collective prevention.

4.1. Individual prevention

This prevention involves encouraging the use of non-lightening cosmetic products and the preservation of the skin's natural colour. We have selected a number of statements made by respondents on this subject: women should keep their natural skin colour. VD is a bad practice that has short, medium and long term health consequences. Beauty is internal, not external as some people think. To remain natural, use non-lightening soaps (H#5). Some women claim to use these products to treat pimples on their face, but that's no reason to strip themselves. I had pimples on my face and I didn't strip. To remove them, I rubbed my face with the aloe vera serve, which removed the pimples. Natural products are very effective in treating skin diseases and don't put our health at risk (F#4).

4.2. Collective prevention

This refers to collective action. Education from an early age is important in that: If we start teaching the importance of keeping one's natural skin colour from nursery school onwards, there is a good chance that, knowing the harmful effects of stripping, the new generation will refrain from practising it (H#7). One respondent made this point clear in her speech: for example, we need to include a lesson in the science curriculum at primary and secondary school that talks about the consequences of skin lightening, emphasising the importance of keeping the skin natural (F#4).

In the light of these data, it is important, as the interviewees attest, to think about education in schools, which is the place by excellence for changing risky behaviour in favour of healthy behaviour.

Advertising on television, radio, social networks and in magazines seems to encourage the use of these products. However, they can also be effective means of raising public awareness of the harmfulness of lightening products. This opinion emerges from the comments made by the interviewees, one of whom stated that: "even if it's in the media that we discover stripping products, we must use these same media to raise public awareness of the dangers of this practice" (F#1).

It also appears from the comments of the interviewees that raising awareness at local level would be best. Some women do stripping because they don't know that it has serious consequences. I say to myself that if we inform them by raising awareness in markets, neighbourhoods, schools, mosques and churches about these consequences, the majority will give up and those who wanted to start will give up (H#7). What's more: "Some people don't watch TV or listen to the radio (...) Others can't read or write. So being close to the public to inform them is a good thing" (F#4). It would therefore be wise to run national information campaigns on the dangers of using these products, encouraging information in mother tongues so that even illiterate people can be informed about this practice. It is important to raise awareness in religious circles: even in churches and mosques, men of God need to raise awareness about make-up, stressing the need to keep skin natural. When you take off your clothes, it's as if God had created you ugly and others beautiful, but God doesn't discriminate between his children. Each child has his or her own assets. You have to keep your natural complexion (F#4).

Respondents also mentioned that: "The Ministry of Public Health should share leaflets showing the harmful effects of skin lightening to discourage women and men from this practice" (H#5). In addition, "institute a national or even international day to fight against VD" (H#4). Another respondent suggested that: "the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family and the Ministry of Social Affairs should set up awareness-raising caravans" (F#1). In addition, "Awareness-raising must start in families" (H#7). The data also indicate interventions such as: banning or regulating the import of cosmetic products, seizing and destroying

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dangerous and illegal cosmetic products. Respondents believe that: "the government must regulate the entry of cosmetic products into Cameroon" (F#4). We urgently need to ban advertising for lightening products. Individuals who put people's lives at risk in order to make money from the products they themselves prepare should be sent to prison (F#1). Ask the people in charge of TV channels to stop showing adverts for skin-lightening products. If they persist, they will pay the fines set by the government for non-compliance. Only advertisements that promote women with natural skin and that enhance the value of the African woman should be retained (H#5). Sometimes counterfeit medicines are burnt. The government should do the same for cosmetic products that enter the country any old how (F#5).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to identify the causes (external and internal) that individuals put forward to explain their recourse to VD, based on what the respondents had to say.

The results show that most of the respondents have a good knowledge of VD and the meaning they give to it refers to the definition given by Petit (2005) since the aim of VD is to reduce or eliminate melanin from the skin in order to obtain fair skin. One respondent was unable to define the concept of VD, hence the need to inform the population about this phenomenon (Douzima, 2009; Mahe et al., 1994). This study indicates that VD is not only a female practice, even men use lightening products. This finding corroborates those of some researchers (Kouotou et al., 2019; Nyiragasigwa, 2021). With regard to the causes of VD use, our result can be interpreted with reference to the theory of causal attributions (Heider, 1958). The latter postulates that individuals have a strong need to predict and control their environment and more particularly the behaviour of others. "In common-sense psychology (as in scientific psychology), the result of an action is seen as dependent on two sets of conditions, namely factors inherent in the individual and factors inherent in the environment" (Heider, 1958). Thus, the causes of a phenomenon may be external or internal to the individual. This explains the external and internal causes of the use of VD mentioned in the study.

The causes that drive individuals to resort to the practice of VD are many and varied based on multiple social interactions (Mayoughouo, 2014; Mayoughouo and Wamba, 2017). Our results show that individuals who lighten their skin do so because of various influences from those around them, through advertising, following fashion or imitation, since in this city, having a fair complexion has become something of a social norm of beauty. This reflects the influence of those around her, which emerges in the words of one respondent who said "when I was walking with my girlfriend, she attracted more attention because she has fair skin, so she recommended her cosmetics to me to clean my skin" (F#2). Petit (2006) also mentions "[...] imitation or advice from a friend or cousins, a request from a romantic partner, the desire to seduce, preparation for a big party (christening, wedding, etc.)". The media and advertising, as well as popular and fashion personalities, also have a strong influence on the desire to lighten the skin (Emeriau, 2009). Our results also reveal these motives. We also note in this study that for some people VD is practised for therapeutic purposes. These results are in line with those of Asumah et al. (2022).

Spousal pressure encourages the use of VD. In other words, some men like fair-skinned women and for this reason they buy the lightening products for their wives themselves. The results also show that social appearance plays a role in the practice of VD, since having a fair complexion attracts attention in society. Vigarello (2008) states that having beautiful fair skin means 'shining in society', possessing the 'prestige of luminous beauty'. The seduction of men appears in this study to be one of the reasons for resorting to VD. This desire to seduce men is sometimes synonymous with looking for a husband. This finding is echoed in the study by Raynaud (2001), who estimates that the age of women who practice VD is generally during adolescence and adulthood, because women express a desire to marry. This finding suggests that, in the locality where we conducted our study, the notion of marriage is paramount, since it is not appropriate for a woman to remain with her parents without getting married at a certain age. This would push women to resort to VD in order to be desired by men. In a study carried out in Dakar, 7% of women who used depigmenting products said that their husbands encouraged them to use them or that they did so to prepare for marriage (M'rabet Hanen, 2016). Some of the women interviewed practised depigmentation because they were in a polygamous household where there was rivalry (Mahe et al., 1994), with co-wives competing to be the husband's favourite. M'rabet Hanen (2016) goes in the same direction, pointing out that many black women initiate or radicalise the practice when their husband marries a second or even third wife.

The results of this study show that some men resort to this practice in order to be presentable and to please. These results are in line with those of M'bemba-Ndoumba (2004), who reveals that: "I depigment to be more beautiful and therefore less black"; "to seduce, because a fair complexion is a criterion of beauty for us Congolese". We note from this study that some people depigment their skin because of body disaffection in order to "get rid of what causes shame, the loss of self-esteem leading to self-hatred" (Kouassi, 2016). The respondents stressed that this practice can be seen as one of the consequences of colonisation, since the colonists had led the colonised peoples to believe that whites were superior to blacks in every way. For this reason, many

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blacks sought a fair complexion. Beauty is associated with whiteness, so having fair skin is a kind of ideal beauty. Thus, white superiority leads to black inferiority (Fanon, 1952).

Furthermore, Mahé et al. (1993) consider that "cosmetic depigmentation [is not] the expression of a complex linked to a devaluing perception of black skin in reference to a Western racial typology", since some studies show that the main motivation of the actors is aesthetic (Mahé et al., 1993; Ly et al., 2007). The results of this study indicate that despite the harmfulness of this practice, many people continue to resort to it because of the feeling of invulnerability that leads individuals not to adopt self-protection behaviours by using lightening products. In addition, the individual feels invulnerable and has the illusion of being in control of the situation when using lightening products. Mbaye and Kouabenan (2013) point out that when people feel invulnerable to risks, they are not motivated to take precautions to protect themselves.

With regard to the consequences of VD and the means of fighting it, we can say that the respondents in this study have a fairly good knowledge of the subject. Analysis of the data shows that the side effects mentioned in the data are skin brittleness (AFSAAP, 2011), non-uniform skin colour, stretch marks (Morand et al., 2007), skin cancer (Petit, 2006) and the fact that the skin gives off a bad smell (Mihamle, 2010). However, general consequences such as diabetes, arterial hypertension, adrenal insufficiency and intoxication of the newborn during breastfeeding, and low birth weight of the baby (AFSAAP, 2011) have not been mentioned, hence the need to raise awareness of the harmfulness of this practice to limit or even discourage those who aspire to take up the practice. The results also point to the need for preventive measures such as banning or regulating the import of cosmetic products and destroying dangerous and illegal cosmetic products.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to evaluate, on the basis of the respondents' speeches, the elements that might make it possible to identify the causes that individuals put forward to explain their recourse to VD. From the content analysis, we were able to identify the respondents' level of knowledge about VD in order to ascertain whether or not it was a phenomenon that was unknown to them; to determine the causes that the respondents put forward to justify their recourse to VD; to determine the consequences of VD and to identify the strategies for preventing VD from the respondents' discourse.

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