

# SKIN LIGHTENERS

## BANNED AT LAST!

Community organisations in some parts of the country have been fighting together with concerned skin doctors to stop the sale of skin lightening creams. They have won at last. The government has passed a law to ban the sale of skin lightening creams. This law has been passed because skin lightening creams have hydroquinone in them. Hydroquinone is very dangerous. It is good that this law has been passed because these creams have destroyed the skins of many black people.

The new law was passed on 22nd May 1987. It says that firms must stop making these dangerous creams by the end of August 1987. Shopkeepers must sell what they have by May 1988. This means that a person who carries on selling skin lighteners after 22nd May 1988 will be breaking the law. This law came after long battles of trying to force the government to do something about skin lightening creams that are destroying people's skins.

People need to know about this law. It is a pity that many people who use these



Photograph by Learn and Teach

Skin lightening creams, lotions and soaps that have hydroquinone in them cause damage to our skins.

creams cannot even read. In fact, it is interesting to note that laws that say what we can and cannot read about in newspapers and hear about over the radio are made known everyday. Yet nobody worries to make sure that we know what is not good for our skins.

### PERMANENT DAMAGE

Many women and some men use these dangerous creams on their faces and necks. The hydroquinone in the cream makes the skin whiter than other parts of the body. After going in the sun, the skin on the face and neck starts to get dark and sometimes swells. It takes about 3 to 4 years before this happens.

Because it takes so long for the black patches to show, most people do not believe that they are from using creams. This is why most people do not believe that the dark patches are from using these creams. That is why some of them continue to use these creams. They hope that they will look whiter again.



The neck of a woman who has been using skin lightening creams

It is very difficult for a person to accept that she has to live with those dark marks forever. Women often ask for help from doctors or chemists. Some doctors usually give cortisone cream to make black marks and swelling better.

But cortisone creams cause more harm. Pimples develop, stretch-marks and bleeding under the skin. A skin doctor we spoke to said she sees people everyday coming for help. "Women come to me wanting something to remove black marks. They do not believe me when I say the skin has been damaged forever. They become very discouraged. You can see that they can even commit suicide."

### WHY PEOPLE USE CREAMS

People sometimes use creams for other reasons either than lightening their skins. Some use them to soften their skins. Others use them to treat bad skins. Most people use skin lighteners not knowing that they are dangerous and they cause permanent skin damage. One woman we spoke to feels that people who use skin lighteners should not be blamed. "Most people do not have money to have their skins treated. You also wait the whole day at the hospital to get advice about your skin problem," she



~~Trust these products~~

said. These creams are much cheaper than going to see a doctor. They can also be found at the nearest supermarket. That is why people buy them.

### WHEN DID IT START?

Skin lightening creams were first sold in the 1960s. It was not known then that they would cause such damage. A few years later, people who had been using these creams started to have patches on the face and neck. Skin doctors found that it was the hydroquinone that caused problems. The industry was told to reduce hydroquinone from 7% to 3%. People continued to develop black patches even with less hydroquinone. They now walk around with bad looking faces that they can do nothing about.

### MAKING MONEY OUT OF US

The firms that make these creams have made a lot of money. And they have caused a lot of damage to many people, especially women. These creams are sold through advertising. Women are used in

these adverts to try and show how successful they can be if they look fair. People are made to believe that a woman is only worth something if she is beautiful. In fact, women are made to believe that a person is beautiful if she uses a cream to make her skin fair.

### LET PEOPLE KNOW

We need to fight these ideas about beauty in our organisations and in our communities. Women should be made aware of being used by advertisers. In the end we suffer for having allowed ourselves to be used this way. We need to tell other people about this new law banning skin lighteners. It is important that everybody knows about it. People who sell these creams can only be happy if the community does not know about this law.

Most adverts say that we must trust these creams for a beautiful skin. But, we must only trust ourselves not to use anything our skin that has hydroquinone.



*Trust yourself! Look out for this warning on creams lotions and soaps*

**WARNING** | Contains Hydroquinone | Avoid contact with eyes. Do not use to dye eyelashes or eyebrows. Rinse eyes immediately if product comes in contact with them. If skin irritation develops, use of this product should be discontinued or a physician consulted. Not recommended for children under 12 years of age. If no lightening is seen after two months of treatment, use of this product should be discontinued. Depigmentation (lightening effect) may not be noticeable when used on a very dark skin. This product is intended to lighten skin and not to prevent sunburn. Avoid prolonged exposure to sun in order to prevent darkening reoccurring