

Proportion and Factors Associated with Using Whitening Agents Among Female Undergraduates in University of Moratuwa

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Introduction - The use of skin whitening agents has become increasingly prevalent among young women in Sri Lanka, influenced by cultural ideals, media portrayals, and societal perceptions that associate fair skin with beauty, success, and social status. Despite growing awareness about their potential health risks, these products remain widely used, particularly among university students.

Objectives - To assess the proportion of female undergraduates using skin whitening agents at the University of Moratuwa and to identify the socio-demographic, product-related, and environmental factors associated with their usage.

Methods - A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 405 female undergraduates from randomly selected faculties at the University of Moratuwa using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, and Chi-square tests ($p < 0.05$) were applied to examine associations between variables.

Results - Of the 405 respondents, 41.7% reported previous use of skin whitening agents, while 25.5% were current users. Creams were the most commonly used product. The main motivation for use was to enhance skin glow (16.3%). Significant associations were observed between usage and variables such as age ($p = 0.05$), reasons for use ($p = 0.004$), monthly income fraction spent ($p = 0.000$) and reported side effects ($p = 0.004$). However, no significant associations were found with race, year of study, or family income.

Conclusion - Skin whitening product use is widespread among female undergraduates, driven largely by personal preferences and cultural perceptions. Despite reported side effects, many continue usage, often influenced by societal expectations. Targeted awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and stricter regulation of harmful cosmetic ingredients are recommended to promote informed choices and safer skincare practices.

Keywords - Skin whitening agents, undergraduates, socio-cultural influences, usage patterns, University of Moratuwa