

Psycho-Social Dimensions of Stigmatisation of Albinos in Rivers State and the Challenges of Learning among Students with Albinism (Swa)

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DOI: [10.36348/jaep.2020.v04i04.003](https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2020.v04i04.003)

| Received: 17.03.2020 | Accepted: 24.03.2020 | Published: 11.04.2020

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Abstract

This study x-rayed the psychosocial dimensions of stigmatisation of albinos in Rivers state, with its implicit learning problems among students with albinism. It adopted the descriptive survey design and the instrument for collection of data is named "Dimensions of Stigmatisation Scale (DSS)". The population for the study consists of all albinos in Rivers State who are registered with the Albino Foundation of the state. Accidental sampling technique was then employed in selecting a sample of 392 respondents. Data were analyzed using mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD) for the research questions, while hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. From the results, it was discovered among others that there is a significant difference in the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender. Recommendations were made based on the findings, among which is that society should be thoroughly sensitised on the true causes of albinism since superstition is a major cause of stigmatisation.

Keywords: Psycho-social, Albinism, Stigmatization, Students with albinism (SWA), learning.

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INTRODUCTION

One of society's severest ways of stigmatizing persons with albinism is by dehumanizing them, which invariably forms the basis for several other horrendous attacks on them. The unimaginable rate at which albinos are unjustly treated tends to have created an atmosphere of panic for these 'at-risk' persons, making them live in an unbridled state of fear. Apart from their distinctive appearance, total ignorance about albinism seems to have led to serious ill-treatment against them. Yet, this talk about albinos being stigmatised and maltreated in parts of Nigeria sounds like a fable to many. The painful part is that it appears so unnoticed making the problem even more pathetic. However, the evidence tends to show that being an albino in Nigeria is often linked with a deep feeling of hopelessness, worthlessness and insignificance just like some other forms of disabilities.

The existence of albinos is not peculiar to any particular society; that is, they may be found anywhere. But they are more predominant in some societies than others. Cruz-Inigo, Ladizinsk and Seth [1] acknowledged this and so declared that albinism is more rampant in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria; likely as a result of consanguinity; and both parents who themselves might not necessarily be albinos have

to carry the gene for it to be transferred to their offspring.

In some Southern parts of Nigeria, including Rivers State, albinos are treated differently from other people; oftentimes with disgust. This has the tendency to instil intense trauma and anxiety in the albinos themselves and their lives already loaded with the tension of their circumstance, creating continuous feelings of inferiority complex and uneasiness. The major spur to these dehumanising acts against them may be attributed to unfounded superstitious beliefs and ignorance which now pose a severe threat to their lives.

Social stigmatisation of PLWA is very prevalent and prominent in Nigeria that Oriji [2] declared that, apart from the effects of albinism on people living with albinism, they equally face social discrimination. Mission Lights [3] noted likewise that this appears thus because people living with albinism (in Nigeria) have to put up with scapegoat activities, ridicules or suspicions from their peers. The attitude of society towards albinism as pointed out by Dlamini [4] is most times related to those experienced by other disabled and minority group.

Economically, albinos equally face serious challenges as a result of stigmatisation. Loss of self-esteem, for instance, makes them feel inferior, and when this happens, it becomes difficult for them to move out and search for a living. This degenerates into cyclical suffering for them. The situation is even so pathetic that Richard Kelani, leader of The Albino Network Association (TANA) lamented that many albinos have lost their jobs due to high rate of discrimination, while others who are eligible to be employed were deprived of such opportunities just because of their skin colour.

Psychological stigmatisation faced by albinos also causes severe trauma and stress. Certain unfriendly attitudes towards them make them feel inferior and worthless. According to the UNICEF Report [5], such degrading remarks as taunting, shunning and name-calling, are the major forms of unfairness to which albinos are exposed, and which bears lots of psychological torture. For instance, they are being given such names like Afin (Yoruba), Anyali, (Igbo), Mbakara-Obot-Ikot (Efik), Eyaen (Bini), Ugobu (Idoma), Zebia (Hausa) [6]. These acts transcend different locations, gender or age. Emotional response to albinism may likely occur all through life because of the many frustration and challenges which the condition presents [4].

The word Albinism is derived from the Latin expression "*albus*" implying white. In technical terms, it is called hypomelanism or hypomelanosis; referring to an inherited abnormality, marked by a lack of melanin pigment in the eyes, skin and hair, on rare situations, only the eyes [7]. Albinism develops from the inheritance of recessive genes and has also been acknowledged to affect other lower animals like birds, reptiles, mammals, fish, and amphibians. The concept 'albino' is a frequently used terminology for describing the organism that has albinism.

Albinism is an uncommon, non-transmittable, genetically inherited condition which occurs universally irrespective of gender or ethnicity. However, there is a grave misunderstanding, and as a result, misinterpretation of what albinism or who an albino is. The bodily looks of an albino usually elicit mistaken ideas which continue to promote stigmatisation and social segregation of albinistic persons. Wrong ideas and superstitious beliefs about albinism greatly endanger the lives and existence of persons with albinism.

Stigma, as noted by Goffman, cited in Major and O'Brien [8] is a quality that widely damages one's reputation, bringing the individual down from a complete and normal human being to a tainted, worthless individual.

Statement of the Problem

For some time now, revelations are showing that albinos in some Southern parts of Nigeria tend to have endured very serious, but unpronounced stigmatisation, inhuman practices and cruelty meted out to them by the society. They experience lots of social, economic, cultural, physical, and psychological violence. There are widespread ignorance and apprehension regarding albinism. The painful part is that in Nigeria, unlike some other countries, there is apparently no empirical proof or data-based evidence documented on the sufferings of albinos. Also, these callous treatments against albinos are not so pronounced, but they are that bad and are gradually eating deep into, and therefore threaten the very fabric of their existence, calling for urgent attention if they must continue to exist as humans.

Despite all these, it is worrisome that stigmatisation of albinos comes in various forms but uncategorised. Based on the foregoing, the problem of this study is to determine the psychosocial aspects of stigmatisation of albinos.

Aim and Objectives of the study

This study aims to determine some psychosocial dimensions to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Find out the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.
2. Determine the economic dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos with respect to gender.
3. Examine the psychological dimension of the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the social dimensions to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender?
2. What is the gender difference to the stigmatisation of albinos based on economic dimensions?
3. What are the psychological dimensions to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender?

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level to guide the conduct of the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the economic dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.
3. Psychological dimensions to the stigmatisation of albinos do not significantly differ based on gender.

Albinism and the challenges of learning among students with albinism (SWA)

The existence of a student with albinism among other students with dark skin is usually fraught with assorted kinds of feelings; at first, as migrants and then as weird beings. An albino or even a white person seen among any black neighbourhood often generates questions that are most times not answered without prejudice [9]. Therefore, for albinos who are in school, several explanations abound regarding this purported abnormality and in most cases; such explanations are justified by folklores and myths [10, 11].

Discrimination of albinistic children continues to perpetuate their social and educational exclusion, and very sadly, this hinders their ability to access proper education that would have been necessary for their growth and development. Every child has the basic right of being educated which is essential for their overall growth- psychologically, socially, culturally, economically and physically. Education provides the requisite knowledge and skills children need to integrate and contribute to their societies. On a wider level, education is critical to tackling poverty, reducing inequality and empowering marginalised groups. However, children with albinism face multiple forms of discrimination which tend to lead to their exclusion in schools and society. Attitudes of schools and school authorities can compound the challenges they face in accessing proper education.

According to Chalotte [12], there is no particular academic or cognitive learning disability connected with albinism. This implies that children with albinism can perform as well as any other child in school, given adequate attention, particularly with their visual problem. Visual impairment of persons with albinism is an indication that even though they attend school, their needs are not properly taken care of in the classroom and school in general. This will definitely make them repeatedly pass through serious trauma associated with stigmatisation, including bullying or neglect. This will in no small way, have an adverse effect on their ability to learn effectively and develop a positive sense of personal identity, Baker [11].

There are certain adjustments that teachers and the school as a whole can make, which may help children with albinism grow, learn and achieve their full potential in life and adjust properly. As role models to these children, teachers can eradicate some physical barriers to learning, for instance, by making some simple modifications in the classroom to accommodate the individual learning needs of each student, including those with albinism. According to Charlotte [13], this can be in the form of simple changes like allowing such a child with albinism seat in such a way that they are not in direct sunlight; also allowing them to wear a hat or sun shades indoors to protect their eyes from the direct rays of sunlight, and also letting them move close

to the board and making classroom tasks and materials handy to them.

Teachers and school authorities can also help the children cope with the fact that they have skins that are sensitive to sunlight. In this regard, they can reorganize the school timetable such that outdoor extracurricular activities take place early mornings or later in the when the sun has gone down in other to protect the child from exposure to sunlight. They can also contribute to building up an understanding of children with albinism. They can help end taunts and the use of some universal but offensive labels and eradicate mistaken belief. Effectively integrating children with albinism into mainstream schools has the prospect of shaping their attitudes for the better.

STUDY DESIGN

This study is a descriptive survey which Nwankwo [14] explains as that study in which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population, describing some attributes of the sample the way they are at the time of the study and to which the researcher is interested to study, though, without manipulating any independent variables of the study.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument for collection of data for this study is named “Dimensions of Stigmatisation Scale (DSS)”. It is divided into two sections: A and B. Section A elicits information on the respondent’s demographic profile (gender), while section B contains three parts of items logically developed by the researcher containing items on social, economic and psychological stigmatisation of albinos.

Population and Sample for the Study

The population for this study consists of all the albinos in Rivers State who are registered with the Albino Foundation of the state. Accidental sampling technique was employed in constituting the sample for the study. In doing this, the researcher visited the albino foundations of the state under study, during their meetings. The instrument was then administered to the subjects on the spot until the required sample of 392 was arrived at.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected for this study were analyzed using mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD) for the research questions. While all the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What are the social dimensions to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender?

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on

gender.

Table-1: z- test summary of the difference between the mean scores of male and female albinos on the social dimension

Gender	N	x	SD	t cal	t crit.	df	Alpha level	Result
Males	232	98.93	13.333	4.359	1.960	390	0.05	Significant
Females	160	104.09	8.171					

From table 1 above, hypothesis testing of the male and female albinos' mean responses revealed that the calculated t value is 4.359; this value is more than the critical t value of 1.960 at 390 degrees of freedom. Hence, the decision to reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender. Rather we accept the alternate hypothesis, which states that there is a significant difference in the

social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.

Research Question Two: What are the economic dimensions to the stigmatisation of male and female albinos?

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the economic dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.

Table-2: z- test summary of the difference between the mean scores of albinos with respect to their gender on the economic dimension

Gender	N	x	SD	t cal	t crit.	df	Alpha level	Result
Male	302	99.44	12.541	5.067	1.960	390	0.05	Significant
Female	90	106.39	6.278					

From Table 2 above, hypothesis testing of the difference between the mean scores of albinos with respect to their gender on economic dimension showed that the calculated t-value of 5.067 was more than the table t-value of 1.960 at 390 degrees of freedom. Hence we reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the economic dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender and accepts the alternate hypothesis of a significant

difference in the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.

Research Question 3: What are the psychological dimensions to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender?

HO₃: There is no significant difference in the Psychological dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.

Table-3: z- test summary of the difference between the mean scores of albinos with respect to their gender on the psychological dimension

Gender	N	X	SD	t cal	t crit.	df	Alpha level	Result
Male	305	99.43	12.452	5.236	1.960	390	0.05	Significant
Female	87	106.68	6.384					

From Table 3, hypothesis testing of the mean responses of the albinos with respect to their gender as it relates to the psychological dimensions to stigmatizations revealed that the calculated t value of 5.236 was more than the critical t value of 1.960, thus the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the psychological dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender is rejected and the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant difference in the psychological dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on age is accepted.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results of the study are summarised as follows:

1. There is a significant difference in the social dimension to the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.
2. There is a significant difference in the economic dimension of the stigmatisation of albinos based on gender.
3. There is a significant difference in the psychological dimension of the stigmatisation of albinos based on age is accepted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that

1. The government at all levels should implement policies that will make it a criminal case for anyone to stigmatise persons living with albinism
2. Employers of labour should base their employment on merit, rather than on skin colour.
3. Adequate provision should be made for persons living with albinism to make life easier for them.
4. Society needs to be thoroughly sensitised on the true causes of albinism since superstition is a major cause of stigmatisation of albinos.

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