

2019-12-15

Pakistan's beauty dilemma

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Recommended Citation

Azhar, F. (2019). *Pakistan's beauty dilemma* (Unpublished graduate research project). Institute of Business Administration, Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://ir.iba.edu.pk/research-projects-msj/31>

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PAKISTAN'S "BEAUTY" DILEMMA

A presentation by Fatima Azhar

OVERVIEW

One-Line Summary: Pakistani's perception of beauty as fair skin and how the media helps in propagating these toxic ideals; causing more harm than imaginable.

What we covered:

- Perception of beauty
- Media
- Recent trend of whitening injections
- Adverse effects of whitening creams
- Religious aspect
- Affect on society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND REPORTING PROCESS

Qualitative research, focusing on concepts of beauty and perception, abstract impacts and potential hazards.

Sources:

Journal of Pakistan Medical Association.

Journal of Pakistan Association of Dermatologists.

News Articles.

Picked ads, songs and morning show clips.

Handpicked experts

- Physical aspect (two doctors – skin/plastic)
- Academic aspect (gender studies expert)
- Mental health aspect (psychologist)
- Societal/social aspect (matchmaker)
- Religious aspect (religious scholar)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND REPORTING PROCESS

- A Number of visits/ conversations with each expert to get them to speak openly.
- A list of questions ready at all time.
- Questions and Reasons
 - What are the standards of beauty in Pakistan?
 - What are whitening injections and how do they work?
 - What are the possible harmful effects of whitening injections?
 - What are the harmful effects of skin whitening creams?
 - What impact does media have on the perception of beauty?
 - How does our mental health get affected by all of this?
 - What does Islam say about changing your skin color?

KEY FINDINGS

- Whitening injections can cause nervous, kidney, liver and fertility issues.
- The main ingredient of whitening injections is glutathione which is not FDA approved for skin-whitening.
- Not more than 1 ppm (Part per million) of mercury is allowed in whitening creams worldwide but in Pakistan, in spite of a ban, many famous brands continue to sell as much as 44,292 ppm which shows a lack of regulation.

KEY FINDINGS

- The ever-changing template of beauty leads to everyday pressures in marriage, jobs and careers, playing at the insecurities of people and making them feel unworthy, hence, increasing beauty industry sales.
- Social media is flooded with beauty and skin lightening tips. There is no sense of gate-keeping or awareness around these hazardous practices.
- The religion of Islam gives you limited authority to modify your body and this permission is also conditional.

CHALLENGES

- People were not willing to allow to shoot procedures of skin-whitening and this barrier got more difficult to cross due to COVID precautions.
- Victims who have suffered at the hands of society and later these treatments were not willing to come forward and talk about their struggles.
- Practitioners weren't willing to talk about the adverse effects of injections.
- Everyone was trying to portray themselves in the best light and selling their own professions.
- Extremely varied lighting conditions.