



EPIDEMIOLOGY

AN EPIDEMIOLOGIC STUDY OF THE MISUSE OF TOPICAL CORTICOSTEROIDS AS DEPIGMENTING AGENTS IN INDIA

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background: Fairness craze in India, fanned by advertisements whereby people with lighter skin have been depicted as being at an advantage over people with darker skin, has developed into a social menace. Cosmetic companies have milked this obsession by marketing depigmenting agents as fairness creams. However these creams are costly. One of principal side-effects of the use of Topical Corticosteroids on the thin facial skin is hypopigmentation which may be wrongly construed as fairness. Hence, TCs have emerged as cheaper alternatives to fairness creams.

Aim: The present study was conducted in the OPD of a tertiary hospital in the metro city of Kolkata, India to assess the socio-economic background of the misuse of Topical Corticosteroids as depigmenting agents.

Materials and methods: A total of 50 patients who were applying Topical Corticosteroids on the face for a period of 15 or more days continuously to attain fairness of the face and presenting with the side-effects of TC were included in the study. Patients applying any other depigmenting agent (separately or in combination with topical corticosteroid) were excluded from the study

Results: Most patients belonged to the 20-30 year age group (mean age 26.23). TC usage was more in females (86.66%). 86 percent were literate. Most of them (65%) lived in semi-urban areas. The Topical Corticosteroids used varied from potent like Clobetasone (18%), mid-potent like Betamethosone and Mometasone (67%) and least potent like Desonide (15%). The creams were either illegally obtained directly from the chemists as OTC products (76%) or were prescribed by quacks or non-dermatologists. The most common adverse effects noted were erythema (45%) and monomorphic acne (34%).

Conclusion: As revealed in this study, TC misuse in India as fairness creams is developing into a major social menace and needs to be combated on a war footing.

