



## Public Stigma and Social Stress: The Lived Experiences of Persons with Albinism in Lagos, Nigeria

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### Abstract

The prevalence of albinism in Nigeria is among the world's highest, it is estimated that two million individuals are with albinism in Nigeria, unfortunately, the condition is largely misunderstood particularly among the local people of Nigerian communities, consequently, persons with albinism are stigmatized and marginalized, the present study profiles the psychological experiences of persons with albinism in Lagos by focusing on their perception of public stigma and how this induces social stress and other associated psychological conditions. Further, the study examines the cultural beliefs underlying stigma, as well as the sociocultural nomenclatures for the disability that reinforce the negative attitudes among the Yoruba ethnic group. Guided by a phenomenological approach, the data for the study was collected from 16 purposively selected samples of individuals who met a set of criteria of inclusion. They were engaged in in-depth interviews on experiences of family life, work life and social life in their community. The result of the study reveals the struggles of persons with albinism with social stress. This study is a contribution to the call to pay more attention to supporting the group with the necessary care, awareness/education, public amenities, economic opportunities, etc., and ending all forms of negative nomenclatures that reinforce negative attitudes and stereotypes.

**Keywords:** Albinism, stigma, stress, negative attitudes.

### Introduction

Persons with albinism constitute one of the most socially disadvantaged groups in Nigeria; their condition is complicated by the notion that persons with albinism are not with disabilities and, thus, receive little or no psycho-social support in society, they are nonetheless subjected to social stigma, social exclusion, and persecution



usually experienced by other individuals or groups who are recognized as living with disabilities, people with albinism can be categorized as a people with disability going by the social relational definition of disability, which views disability as 'a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially endangered undermining their psycho-emotional wellbeing (Thomas 1999; Thomas 2003). Albinism is a condition that people are born with and is caused by a lack of pigmentation in the body which makes the people with the condition have a physical appearance that makes them look different from the majority of others, particularly among black Africans, It was first described clinically back in the 1893 by G.M Gould. Albinism is still largely misunderstood, socially and medically, therefore, the physical appearance of persons with albinism is often the object of erroneous beliefs and myths influenced by superstition which perpetuates the negative disposition of many people against them. This shows in various forms of prejudices and discrimination. They are usually subjected to open castigation and rejection, both in private and public spaces For example, In Yoruba land some still hold the false belief that the ancestors of persons with albinism must have committed a taboo and that the condition is a punishment for committing the taboo, furthermore, some people also hold the false belief that interacting regularly with a person with albinism may result to giving birth to a child with albinism, this may account for some extreme behaviors towards them including violence and killing (Addo, 2024). This case is also common in other communities of sub-Saharan African countries where albinism is shrouded in myths and dangerous and erroneous beliefs.

There have been hundreds of cases of attacks and killings of persons with albinism reported in 28 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in the past decades (WHO, 2024). To forestall the unjust treatment of persons with albinism, the Federal Government of Nigeria came up with a national policy on People with Albinism; this is against the backdrop that socio-cultural system with its inherent myths and beliefs has caused People living with albinism to suffer marginalization and stigmatization. The policy



document acknowledged that People living with albinism experience psychological challenges due to stigmatization, discrimination and segregation. The policy therefore aimed to guarantee equal access to education, social, health, economic, and political opportunities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). Unfortunately, like many policies, implementation has remained a big issue, as there are functional lapses in the legislation implementation framework for persons with disabilities in many African countries including Nigeria, for example, some of these policies have been criticized as inadequate for tangible and sustainable effectiveness (Amucheazi & Nwankwo 2020; Arimoro 2019; Etieyibo & Omiegbe 2021).. Therefore, there is a need still to address the fundamental causes of multiple disadvantages that individuals living with albinism experience in Nigeria.

#### Objectives

- To profile the psychological experiences of persons with albinism by focusing on their perception of public stigma and how this induces social stress and other associated psychological conditions.
- To examine the socio-cultural beliefs underlying the social stigma and what this means to persons with albinism.
- To examine the negative sociocultural nomenclature for disabilities that sustains stigma among Yoruba ethnic group and how this could be eradicated or minimized.

#### Literature Review

Albinism, originated from the Latin word *albus*, and it simply means "white," it is a condition associated with decreased or absent of melanin most notably in the skin, hair, and eyes (Federico & Krishnamurthy, 2023). Albinism has two main types: ocular albinism (OA), which primarily affects the eyes, and oculocutaneous albinism (OCA), which affects the skin and the hair. Albinism affects males and females evenly, and all ethnic groups and races are susceptible. In Sub Sahara Africa, its prevalence is



in 1 in every 2,000 to 5,000 whereas the prevalence is as high as 1 in 1,000 in Europe and the rate in the United States, is 1 in 17,000 to 20,000. (Medical News, 2021) Albinism is not found to be associated with any disease or death and so people with it may live normal healthy lives, although there are some extremely rare cases where people have albinism and other health problems. Examples are Hermansky Pudlak syndrome, Chediak Higashi syndrome and Griscelli syndrome. There have been advocacies and agitations for respecting the rights of persons with disabilities, several international and national non-governmental organizations have proposed strategic plans and normative frameworks to initiate or support the policies that promote the health and well-being of marginalized groups, particularly people with disabilities equitably with a long-term strategic collaboration between the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO). Some scholarly studies led the way in providing an impetus to some of these agitations, a notable model in this regard is the one offered in the 70s and 80s by scholars with disabilities (Oliver, 1996; Pfeiffer, 2002). The scholars (which included Michael Oliver, Richard Reiser and Micheline Mason) proposed what is referred to as the social conception model. They asserted that the primary problem for people with disabilities was socially constructed; they argue that persons with disabilities are only disabled by the barriers erected by society (Ghosal, 2019) and not necessarily by their condition, this social conception became a formidable force for developing a disability consciousness; it strengthened the disability movement by recognizing the need for an improved lifestyle for people with disabilities. The social conception emphasized the relevance of legislation, awareness campaigns, education, environment, and access for persons with disabilities instead of subjecting them to a social stigma. The social conception also focused on the environmental barriers that individuals with disabilities encounter (Marks, 1997). These barriers may include a lack of accessible facilities that may affect navigation. These barriers appear through: marginalizing and segregating disabled people in all aspects of social life; denying access to and participation in organizations and prohibiting equal rights.

**Stigma: An overview**

Stigma is a concept used to describe experiences of exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation that are due to unreasonable perceptions and feelings towards a person or group of persons whom others have an adverse social judgment (Scambler, 2009). It was originally devised by Goffman (1963), but the concept is still widely adopted to describe the nomenclatures that socially categorize and exclude individuals with 'undesirable' features. Due to the criticisms surrounding its individualistic undertones, theoretical reworking has sought to locate processes of stigmatization within unequal power relations in society. Link and Phelan (2001) made a very robust contribution in this regard by pointing to the intersectionality of stigma and the co-occurrence of processes of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination, while emphasizing stigma's contingency on social, political and economic power. Stigma is a multi-layered construct that includes the feelings, attitudes and actions that individuals show toward a person considered to be different from others (Overton & Medina, 2008; Gaebel et al., 2017). The negative disposition is usually due to a lack of understanding, knowledge and fears around people who deviate from the norm in terms of physical or intellectual abilities, (Girma et al., 2013) however, knowledgeable people can still show negative attitudes towards people with disabilities including people with albinism, for example, care providers, despite their medical expertise, who work with people with Intellectual disabilities could hold stigmatizing attitudes toward them (e.g. having same concerns for the vulnerability of people the general public do). This is also true of other disabilities.

Two fundamental features of stigma have been highlighted in literature, they include: (i) an awareness of an existing difference and, (ii) a devaluation that is associated with the difference (Bos et al., 2013). Link and Phelan (2014) in their contribution to the study of stigma, made a distinction between different means through which stigmatization is achieved, they are as follows: (i) Self-stigma It is experienced by a person who has a feature that may not be commonly found in others and is thus



stigmatized, such as albinism, consequently, the individual concerned may accept the devaluation placed on him or her by internalizing the negative stereotypes attached to the feature (Pescosolido, 2015; Vogel et al., 2013; Gaebel et al., 2017). Self-stigma has many psychological and social implications which include lowered self-esteem as well as decreased self-efficacy (Bos et al., 2013; Vogel et al., 2013). Individuals with self-stigma could give up on engaging in social and economic activities that could worsen their economic conditions, and can even make such people resolve to beg for alms. (ii) Stigma by Association can be referred to as the negative reactions directed to persons related or connected to a stigmatized individual (Bos et al., 2013). In this form of stigma, these individuals do not have the devalued feature but may be close in one way or another to a stigmatized person, such a person could be a relative, caregiver, or friend, they are thought as contributing in some way to the behavior that is stigmatized (Pescosolido, 2015). (ii) Public Stigma refers to the stereotypes beliefs and ideas and negative affect which is usually manifested in discriminatory action toward people with albinism in the general public (e.g. Corrigan & Watson 2002, Link & Phelan 2001). Public stigma also involves various sociocultural processes, which result in a community assigning preconceived values to a labeled individual which devalues them and leads to these individuals being discriminated against (Corrigan & Rao, 2012; Gaebel et al., 2017; Michaels et al., 2012). Community attitudes towards persons with albinism contribute significantly and can play a vital role in promoting health-seeking behavior (Girma et al., 2013). Public stigma relates to the perception held by the general public around specific stigmas associated with an individual seeking care services as being socially unacceptable (Vogel et al., 2013). Public stigma can be seen as consisting of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (Michaels et al., 2012). Therefore it can pose a significant problem as societally held negative perceptions toward a specific group of people which can result in these individuals being discriminated against (Vogel et al., 2013). (iii) Structural Stigma: This is when there are in place social norms and policies that (un)intentionally restrict opportunities for individuals with albinism (i.e. structural stigma) (Corrigan et al. 2004). For example, staff members may support social norms (e.g. the action



that people with albinism should be segregated. Structural stigma expands the negative reactions from an individual level to a wider organizational or institutional level (Bos et al., 2013; Pescosolido, 2015; Gaebel et al., 2017). Corrigan et al. (2004), explain that in this form of stigma, certain policies put forth by organizations, governments and/or institutions result in intentional as well as unintentional consequences and restrictions towards stigmatized individuals.

### Perceived Stress

Perceived stress is a concept that addresses human affect and/or thoughts regarding a stressor at a particular point or over some time. It also involves the feelings and thoughts one holds about a stressful situation an individual faces (Phillips, 2015) Individuals are likely to appraise the effect and/or severity of stressful life events differently due to factors, such as personality, coping strategies, resources and support. Stress can be an outcome of one's appraisal of a prevailing environment, for example, a person with albinism may appraise a hostile environment or a resentful person as threatening or as something with the potential to impact his/her well-being negatively. Perceived stress has been reported to have a significant positive relationship with depression (Huh et al., 2021). However, this could be moderated by variables such as social support, and adaptive coping strategies. (Pangtey et al., 2020) Further, socio-demographic factors like educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood characteristics, and gender, as well as behavioral risk factors like smoking and alcohol consumption, is known to be associated with variations in perceived stress levels. According to a report by (Zhu et al., 2022), perceived stress can enhance or limit cognitive performance, depending on the severity of the situation. Mild stress improves cognitive performance in low-load memory tasks where high cognitive functioning is not required.

### Research question

1. How do the subjective experiences of persons with albinism affect their level of social stress?

2. What are the sociocultural variables that reinforce people's negative attitudes towards persons with albinism among Yoruba ethnic group?
3. How can the negative sociocultural nomenclature for disabilities that cause stigma among Yoruba ethnic group be minimized or stopped?

### **Method**

The study adopts a qualitative research design using the interview method to collect data. 16 persons with albinism volunteered willingly to participate in the study, they were interviewed in the city of Lagos, Nigeria. The participants shared their experiences with perceived stress in everyday living including family life, community life, work life and social life. Responses from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and collated and themes emerging from the analyzed data were interpreted. The qualitative approach adopted in the study was based on a critical realist perspective and an experiential-based reflexive thematic analysis. One of the fundamental assumptions of a critical realist approach is that participants' responses are reflections of their realities which are influenced by their own culture, language, and social context (see Maxwell, 2012; Willig, 2013). In the current study, a critical realist approach allowed us to explore the lived experiences of people living with albinism, expecting to elicit responses that reflected their socio-cultural engagements and reality. We were guided primarily in our inquiry by the basic question of what is the experience like living with albinism in a hostile environment to their conditions (see Ramsook, 2018). The interviewing session was face-to-face and took place both online and offline depending on the preference of the participant. Each interview session with the participant took an average of 40 minutes. This process was within 3 weeks for all 16 research participants.

### **Procedure**

Participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study before the interview. Interviews were conducted in locations most convenient for the



participants whether offline or online as the participants might prefer. Participants were first informed about their consent and permission to withdraw at any time. Interviews were then scheduled at convenient times for each participant. Sample questions asked during the interview included: “What are your experiences as a person living with albinism?” “What is the nature of the stigma you face during social engagement?”, “What is the nature of the stigma towards you in your family, community and place of work? Do you suffer discrimination or prejudice from people generally?” Do you experience stress as a result of the way you were treated? “How do you cope with the stigma? e. t. c., Each interview lasted for between 30-40 minutes. The interviewer took notes of nonverbal cues and contextual information. Interviews were recorded via voice notes for remote participants and recordings were transcribed before analyzing results.

Interview materials:

Recording device, Pen and notebook (writing materials), Interview guide (consisted of four main questions about stigmatization on psychosocial and health well-being of people living with albinism).

### **Ethical considerations.**

All participants gave informed consent before participation, they were all assured of anonymity, i.e., no one would be able to link their responses in the study to their names or identity, moreover, any information provided for the study would be used only for research purposes and would never be shared with a third party without the participant’s consent.

### **Data Analysis**

To interpret the participants’ responses objectively, we systematically analyzed the collected data by moving through the three different stages recommended by Ricoeur (1976) which included: the naive understanding, the structural analysis, and then the comprehensive understanding. Firstly, we carefully put into writing all the

important information of the recorded interview data (which was raw) from the voice recorder to a text format. Secondly, we proceeded from the transcription of the data to listening to the recorded data repeatedly for some time; this was to enable us to become very familiar with the data and also to make a sense of the interpretations assigned by the participants to the phenomenon under inquiry. At the third stage which is the final stage, the categorization of the content was undertaken; we created the categories by condensing the extended meaning units. This was done to scale back the number of words without losing the content of the unit, during this process, themes and categories were identified which usually form the basis for the analysis of a theme-centered investigation. (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

## **Results**

### Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	9	56.3
	Female	7	43.7
	Total		100
Age	18-24	4	25.0
	25-30	12	75.0
	Total		100
Ethnicity	Yoruba	16	100
Employment status	Unemployed	6	37.5
	Self-employed	2	12.5

### **The themes of the data collected:**

#### **Stereotypic statements and labeling are perceived as stressors**

The result of this study indicates that negative attitudes which underlie discriminatory behaviors are pervasive and deeply rooted. It reflected in the use of derogatory terms to describe people with albinism, these terms connote weakness, inferiority and rejection and therefore can constitute stressors for people with



persons with albinism; this is confirmed to be the case as most participants found this to be a great concern to them and constitute a source of stress, as exemplified in the statements below:

*“People think of us as outclassed humans, inferior to other people due to what they consider as our unusual complexion, thinking over these comments sometimes makes one feel overwhelmed with stress”.* Adekunmi

*“There were days during my apprenticeship that I would hear my boss’s customer saying he doesn’t want fun fun” This raises my heart rate each time I have such experience”* Joan

*“There was a time I was contemplating suicide so badly because of becoming depressed due to the level of stress regarding comments and attitudes”* David

### **Wrong perception of albinism.**

Some negative opinions from members of society about people living with albinism which they know to be untrue, while some are unbothered about these views about them, some feel embarrassed by the constant expression of these incorrect views about them, according to those who feel bothered they believe these wrong perceptions compound their sense of alienation, they are stressors, and therefore harmful to their psychological wellbeing..

*“People look at me and doubt my capacity to walk alone without any support but I can see well in the afternoon. It bothers me so much to be so denigrated and for people to always undermine my human capabilities”* Kike

*“An individual resorted to mocking me with sign language to ask if my eyes were functioning” which is not true but because that has been what the society has believed for the longest time it has become the norm and the stereotypical view of albinos.* Tade

### **Stress associated with Fear of moving about freely**



People with albinism are also sometimes believed to possess mystical qualities, making them susceptible to ritual attacks by diabolical individuals. This constant fear of a possible attack is a source of stress for people with albinism. Participants shared stories of always walking in the fear of being hunted for fetish purposes due to myths that their body parts bring wealth.

*"In my village, they believe that my hair can make them rich. I feel unsafe even in my community. You can imagine the feelings of not feeling safe among your own people, it is disheartening and stressful"* Olu

*"I cannot go out any time after 7 pm alone, doing so can be risky because, I could be abducted by evil men with get-rich-quick syndrome, imagine living in such fear almost all of your life"* Tundun

*Anytime I read news about kidnapping, I feel so scared as though I am the next person to get kidnapped.* Funmi

*The thought that I could be attacked sometimes keeps me away from some notorious areas of Lagos, particularly in the evening. Nothing can be more stressful than the thought of being unsafe among people.* Tony

#### *Stress associated with Exclusion Experiences in Social institutions*

Educational systems are considered to be a safe space for all learners, unfortunately, people with albinism do not consider learning institutions as a place that is safe for them, and this is because the educational institutions sometimes fail to accommodate the physical impairments commonly associated with albinism. Teachers and peers may misunderstand their needs, leading to reduced academic performance and further marginalization and segregation from their peers. The experience appears similar at the workplace:



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*“A major experience of stigmatization in school was when a teacher prevented me from carrying out a particular task because he believed I was partially blind due to my albinism” Kike*

*I look like a nuisance during classes when I have to move closer to the writing board to see what the teacher writes on the board. I usually leave school each day feeling more stressed than any other student Tayo*

*“The schools seemed to be built without any plan for people with one impairment or the other like us. It irritates me that I have to walk up and down all the time to see what the teacher writes on the chalkboard” Tope.*

Similarly, in the workplace, albinos are often discriminated against and sometimes encounter biases that prevent them from securing or retaining employment. Getting employment is very difficult at this time due to the economic situation of the country; however, it is more difficult for individuals with any trace of disability to get a job. It is therefore not surprising that all persons with albinism experience discrimination in the job market, thus statements below exemplify the struggles of persons with albinism in getting and retaining jobs.

*“Getting a job as a person with albinism is very tough and keeping it is perhaps more difficult”.*

Doyin

*I believe strongly that the major reason I was among very few that was relieved during retrenchment in my organization was due to my albinism, ever since I got fired for no reason, I have not secured any other job. Tade*

### **Seclusion and Social Isolation**

The stigma of albinism results in social exclusion, pushing individuals into isolation. This theme reflects the lack of social interaction and poor sense of belonging experienced by people with albinism. This occurs due to the avoidance of public



spaces due to fear of judgment or harassment, limited social networks and difficulty forming relationships, or loneliness and withdrawal from community activities. Life is life with others, but quite unfortunately, there appear to be fewer persons to do life with as a person with albinism and this is found to be worrisome for this group of people.

*" I do not particularly have a social side, I like being alone, but whenever there is a social gathering that I cannot wave off, I tend to sit by myself and not meet up with anyone because growing up, most of our family members do not even want me to play with their children when we were little. So whenever we have a family party, if I go, I tend to just sit in a place where no one will look at me with a bad eye or say something that will upset me. Kike*

*"I didn't enjoy childhood experiences. I was always kept indoors because I couldn't withstand the heat of the sun. This prevented me from learning the basics of keeping enduring and lasting relationships since I was always secluded and in isolation."*  
Ibidun

Seclusion can perpetuate feelings of alienation and reinforce stigma's psychological toll.

Low Self-Esteem/ Negative self- Image/ Inferiority complex

Stigmatization erodes self-worth, leading to pervasive feelings of inadequacy. This theme depicts how stigma damages the confidence and self-respect of individuals with albinism. It can be in the form of doubting personal abilities or worth due to societal attitudes, or avoiding opportunities or challenges out of fear of rejection.

*"I was seen as incapacitated, harmful, a ghost, and someone without brains." Kike*



*"This stigmatization of my condition affected my confidence as a person because I shied away from things I loved because of comments like "You'll get hurt, don't you know your skin is fragile?." David*

### **Coping strategies**

To navigate the difficulties arising from stigmatization and the associated stress, many people living with albinism adopt various coping strategies to build resilience. One of the good ways they navigate some of the challenges that come with the stigma of albinism is learning about the condition, this helps individuals understand and accept their unique characteristics; this includes reading books or articles on albinism to build one's self-awareness.

*"the only thing that has kept me going and helped me cope with the stigma is the fact that I learned about my skin condition regularly. I learnt that I could love it" Doyin*

*Another said "I know that people speak from a standpoint of ignorance so I am not bothered or moved by what they do.... I have positive self-identity and self-image" Tade*

Unfortunately, some of the participants use negative tactics which include social withdrawal, alcohol and substance abuse among others to cope with the stress associated with their situations

*"I keep away from others many times to avoid the embarrassment of being abused."*  
Tolu

*"I sit over alcoholic drinks many times to get my mind off the stress of being treated negatively because I look different from others". David*

### **Family and friends' support helps deal with the stress**

Supportive family members play a critical role in fostering confidence and security and lessening of stress associated with public stigma suffered by people with albinism. They provide several forms of emotional support when dealing with social



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stigmas. Families provide warm space, and reassurance and treat the individual with unconditional love and acceptance.

*“Supportive family is the only thing that helps me cope with stigmatization, Tolu*

*“If the family system is supportive there would be no problem, you would go home and feel safe but if they are not then it’s going to be tough” Tundun*

*“ I was bullied but I overcame that because I had very protective friends in school” It is important to feel safe with family and friends because they make sure their loved ones with this disability feel less alone, they help advocate for them in schools, healthcare and social settings to ensure fairness and equality Tade*

*“I have a few fellow albino friends and follow some on social media because I see myself in them”. Tundun*

It is imperative to note that maintaining a positive self-image and relying on family and social support are foundational strategies for individuals with albinism. These approaches empower them to navigate societal challenges while fostering a sense of self-worth and community. Encouraging open dialogue and promoting awareness can further help create an inclusive environment for all.

## **Discussion**

The result of this study reveals the psychological struggles of persons with albinism with stress, and other associated social-psychological issues. It is clear from the result of this study that people with albinism have difficulties trying to fit into a supposedly all-black community. Individuals living with Albinism have to conceal their feelings, desires and talents and remain aloof from the rest of the humans in their communities. Analysis of the result shows that stigmatization is a stressor that significantly influences the psychological well-being of people living with albinism in Nigeria. This result is consistent with the finding of Ijioma et al. (2023) in a neighboring state to Lagos in which he reported that people with albinism showed a



significantly low satisfaction on measuring mental health, the participants also gave a significantly higher self-report of feelings of sadness, anxiety, and depression due to societal perceptions and verbal abuses regularly experienced.

Further, previous studies confirm our findings on feelings of uneasiness and insecurity of persons with albinism, (e.g., Uromi, 2013; Schuller, 2014). Our results indicate like these previous studies that people with albinism often live in fear and stress in their communities and are usually scared of walking, traveling or staying alone because of possible attacks. As a vulnerable minority group, persons with albinism therefore need social and legal protection to enjoy the full spectrum of fundamental rights. The safety and security of persons with albinism need an immediate attention, (Mswela, 2017)

In several African countries, especially in Burundi, Tanzania and Malawi, there have been results of studies which are consistent with our study's findings that there still exists harmful beliefs about albinism such as having magical powers that make people living with albinism remain a target of diabolical attacks (Masanja et al., 2014). These beliefs and the associated practices undermine their dignity and infringe on their right to life. Feelings of dehumanization and rejection would therefore persist in such an environment where dangerous beliefs are still held about albinism, Moreover, a recent study reported that infants born with the inherited condition of albinism are vulnerable in some African countries because they are potential victims of witchcraft-related violence targeted for their body parts for use in 'lucky' charms which is believed to bring good luck. (Taylor, et al., 2019). In some cultures, children with albinism were killed right at birth to prevent causing shame for families. Addressing these dangerous beliefs is necessary to guarantee that People Living With Albinism live peacefully in their communities and with less stress. The result of this study also confirms previous research that individuals with albinism often experience anxiety and fear due to the risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The trauma and stress resulting from these experiences can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and



anxiety disorders (Under the Same Sun, 2019). Additionally, body-shaming can increase the unnecessary pressure to conform to societal beauty standards thereby leading to body dissatisfaction and negative self-image (Albinism Fellowship, 2020).

There are studies also that profile the negative life experiences of people with albinism in educational institutions, experiences such as exclusion from learning activities, punishment for not completing lesson notes, peer and teacher bullying, and lack of educational support at schools (Njoku & Madi 2020; Nwosu et al. 2019), similar situations were also reported in Zambia (Kanyungo and Penda 2021; Mtonga et al. 2021), Zimbabwe (Machingambi 2023), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Meddeb 2016).

Furthermore, the negative sociocultural nomenclature for living with albinism was reported in a recent similar study among the same Yoruba group that we studied, which reinforced experiences of societal discrimination, exclusion and, in some cases, bodily assault (Olaitan, 2023). Moreover, Ololajulo and Omotoso (2023) also reported the negative experiences of women with albinism in Ibadan at their workplace, a Yoruba-speaking city, these experiences were considered as a 'double jeopardy' by the authors. Unfortunately, people who face psychological distress arising from public stigma may turn to substances to 'escape their challenge as exemplified in our result. Disabilities generally can result in physical and mental distress (Arise, 2024), thus, some persons with albinism may turn to drugs or alcohol for temporary relief, only to find that they become hooked on the substances they abuse.

Moreover, Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma also provides a robust theoretical framework to explain the complexities of life as a person with albinism in Nigeria. Goffman defined stigma as an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting which could be a visible physical attribute such as albinism, or a hidden attribute such as mental illness or even a criminal record. Albinism falls into the abominations of the body's stigma group (Goffman 1963, 4). Stigma against people with albinism appears to be a



result of other people's fears. These fears are formed by a lack of awareness and information about albinism (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2018; Ikuomola 2015b; Lynch, Lund, & Massah 2014; Miles 2011). Therefore, society makes erroneous assumptions, constructing stereotypes to marginalize persons with albinism from exercising their rights to full participation in society. The multiple disadvantages experienced by persons with albinism in Nigeria have significant implications for social justice.

### **Conclusion**

Many African countries are not as productive as they should be; one possible reason for this is the exclusion of too many people from social and economic activities which include people with albinism and other people with disabilities. Their talents, skills and other human endowments could not be engaged in productive activities compared to other climes where there are more social inclusions of persons in this category. This reality aside from implying the quality of lives of people with albinism, also constitutes a great deal of stress to them. It is therefore not only in the best interest of people with albinism to be freed from all social restrictions imposed by social constructions based on false beliefs resulting in all the negative attitudes and behaviors that people may have against them, it is also in the interest of the state for everyone to be fully engaged to reduce the stress associated with the stigma against all the excluded people due to their albinism. This study is therefore a contribution to the call to pay more attention to supporting the person with albinism with the necessary care, awareness/education, public amenities, economic opportunities, etc., and ending all forms of negative nomenclatures that reinforce negative attitudes and stereotypes.

People with albinism in Nigeria need all the support that could lead to the eradication of all forms of hostilities in the environment which induce stress. All social institutions should be "re-designed" in a way that makes people with albinism feel accepted. A deliberate plan which involves proper documentation of these groups of people is highly required, although Nigeria now has a national policy on



Albinism (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019) which is a welcome development and worthy of emulation by other African countries, there is need to improve the implementation process of this national policy to make it effective and achieve its intended objectives. Tanzania as a country seems to be doing well in terms of the implementation of national policy on albinism. As a country with the highest incidence of violence against persons with albinism in Africa, (Mswela, 2017), the country successfully put in place effective mechanisms for dealing with violent crimes against persons with albinism by strengthening the existing security structures in communities, particularly in schools.

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