

# Concern over skin whitener marketing

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A study led by a James Cook University marketing expert has raised concerns over the ethics of the marketing of skin-whitening products, widely available in Australia.

Professor Lynne Eagle said demand for the product was growing, with more than 60 percent of Indian women reportedly using one of the more than 240 brands of [skin](#) lightener available in that country.

Professor Eagle said the product was also easy to find in Australia. "I brought it from two different shops in Townsville within ten minutes' drive of my office," she said.

She said [social scientists](#) and marketers had long-known that every culture seemed to value paler skin over darker, but the reasons why were not clear-cut.

"It's not just a hang-over from colonialism. In India and China lighter skin was always associated with a higher caste. Even in Europe, until Coco Chanel successfully promoted suntans, having a darker skin was associated with being a manual worker and low status."

But she said ads unequivocally linking social and professional success with lighter skin tone presented a moral problem. "In one example, the daughter is told by her father that she is too dark-skinned to ever get a good job and be able to support him. So she buys some skin-lightener and gets a dream job."

She said that while manufacturers did not create the prejudices that underpin the demand for the product, critics claim the product's marketing helps to sustain the prejudices. "That's the main issue, the ethics of perpetuating stereotypes of white skin as beautiful."

Professor Eagle said even health concerns didn't stop people using the products. She said some contained substances such as mercury that were so harmful their sale was banned in the country where they were manufactured. But they were able to be exported to developing countries, and then simply smuggled from their homelands by immigrant populations.

Provided by James Cook University

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