

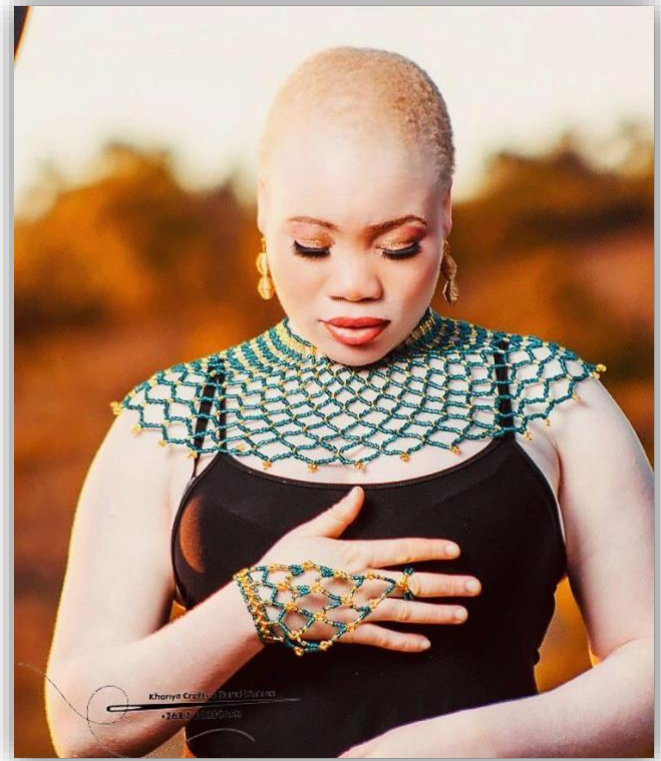


Myths, misconceptions, discrimination and cultural beliefs on Albinism.

Albinism is a genetic condition whereby one lacks melanin and this generally affects the skin, hair and eyes has been couched in most African countries. Growing up with the condition is often hard due to myths and misconceptions that make people with albinism social

outcasts. As a young woman born with the condition, I was often discriminated at school and in the community. Some children didn't want to associate with me as they believed that the condition is somehow contagious. School children would often touch their uniform buttons when they saw me as they believed that apparently "it would save them from getting a child with my condition in future." Other times I had people continually trying to touch my skin as it somehow intrigued them. On some occasions I was asked the most weirdest questions ever.

Being born a woman always puts you in a disadvantaged position and being a woman with a condition like albinism makes life even harder. Growing up, I often had to put in thrice the work that my age mates put in simply because people often doubted my abilities because of my condition. I feel as though the moment people see a person with albinism they immediately assume that they have low self-esteem or





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just aren't capable of completing some tasks. They look down upon you in simpler terms. Because of that, I had to work extra hard and put maximum effort just so that I get recognized.

Another stumbling block as I grew up was the name calling. There were a set of derogatory terms that included inkawu/musope that they'd often call me with. That made me question a lot of things including my self-worth during that time but as I grew older I somehow developed this thick skin and the name calling no longer bothered me all that much. It took a lot from me to become this strong, confident and assertive woman who I am today and it's been a roller coaster ride with its ups and downs.

As people with albinism we are often victims of societal ignorance which ultimately leads to discrimination. In our African society, this condition is often associated with a wide range of ridiculous myths. Some believe that if a person has albinism then it means that the mother engaged in sexual intercourse with a white man or it comes about due to a lack of sun. In some instances, people with albinism are then forced by their families to be out in the sun as often as possible so that they regain the melanin they lost. This thus puts them at risk of skin cancer which is one of the leading causes of death that affects people with albinism.

People with albinism's body parts are believed to have superpowers. Ultimately, this leads to ritual killings as witch doctors hunt down people with albinism then dismember them to make concoctions and spiritual charms that are believed to make one wealthy and prosperous! In some countries fishermen use nets woven from albino hair with the belief that they'll catch more fish. It is also believed that they often have a short life span. The most common one is that once they die, they disappear.

Another popular myth is that if an HIV positive man or woman engages in sexual intercourse with a woman or man with albinism he/she gets



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cured. Due to the popularity of such a myth women and men with albinism are often sexually abused and placed at risk of acquiring HIV. It even makes them unsure of men or women who show romantic interest in them as they wouldn't know if they're genuine or not.

Furthermore, the fact that albinism is often viewed as a curse heightens the levels of discrimination. You often find people shying away from interacting with people with albinism because of this. They struggle a lot in their daily life as they somehow try to make ends meet whilst dodging all the stigma and discrimination associated with the condition.

As a society, we should make sure that we do away with such myths and move forward progressively. We should ensure that we give people with albinism a safe space to grow, bloom and blossom. As we continue to fight against these issues, let's keep on demystifying such myths. Let's continue with the advocacy. Change doesn't happen overnight but it sure does happen overtime and it begins with me and you.

By Chidadiso F Mbazo