Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Bruce Gulland. And I’m Liz Waid. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live. Gina had beautiful dark brown skin. But she thought her skin was too dark. Gina did not like her skin. The Guardian newspaper told Gina’s story. She felt that to be successful and good-looking, her skin needed to be lighter. Gina bought some skin whitening cream. It promised to make her skin lighter. She used it two times each day. After a few days her skin did look lighter. She began to use it six or seven times each day. However, after several months, she noticed dark marks on her legs and the side of her face. The chemicals had burned and marked her skin permanently. The skin whitening cream also made Gina’s blood pressure very high. And her body stopped producing a chemical necessary for life. Gina almost died trying to have lighter skin. Other people have also had similar experiences. So why do people keep using these products? Today’s Spotlight is on skin whitening. Skin whitening is a multi-billion dollar market. Skin whiteners can be rubbed on the skin as a cream or lotion. They can be injected into the body with a needle. And these products are popular all over the world. In India, skin whitening has almost become an accepted part of culture. Lighter skin is supposed to help a person get a rich, good-looking, more intelligent husband or wife. Vinod Kumar is a dark skinned 18-year-old. He uses whiteners each month. He told the Washington Post: “I want to be rich and light-skinned like my film hero. To be light-skinned would make me be so smart.” Skin whiteners do have a medical purpose. For example, they can help people who have marks from a medical operation. When skin heals, sometimes it leaves scars. The scars are darker than the surrounding skin. People can feel embarrassed and shamed by these scars. Skin whiteners can make the scars lighter. These people only use the whiteners on the affected area for a limited time. But for people who use whiteners on large areas of their bodies, there are great risks. There are many different chemicals in skin whiteners. Some of these chemicals can cause wounds, burns, and even marks on the skin. They can cause blood cancer or diseases. In severe cases, a person’s kidneys will stop working. Many whiteners contain mercury, a substance that is poisonous to humans. High mercury levels are linked to blindness, hearing loss and shaking people cannot control. Whiteners can also change your personality. People using skin whiteners may worry more. They may not be able to sleep or they may forget things. But even when they know these risks, people are still willing to whiten their skin. People even use skin whiteners on their children. This can cause even more harm to a child’s developing body. What makes people want to change the colour of their skin? One reason is advertising - how skin whiteners are sold. In these advertisements the lighter your skin, the happier you are. For example, in one Indian television advertisement, there is a man who has no luck with girls. He has darker skin than his friends. Suddenly, an Indian film star appears and hands him whitening cream. Soon, the young man’s skin has become lighter. As he walks down the road, girls run to him and call him good looking. Another reason for the popularity of whiteners may be that in the past, many countries have been taken over by people with light skin. Over time, white skin became connected with wealth and success. People noticed that people with lighter skin got better treatment. They got better jobs. But, even when these countries became independent again, the ideas about skin colour remained. But some people are holding on to their natural beauty. Nikki Duggal is an Indian artist. She is fighting against skin whitening. She believes that Indians have accepted false messages about light skin. This is because Indians were under British rule for many years. She explains the problem to the Washington Post: “White meant wealth. White was someone rich enough to never work in the sun. It is all around in India, the message that light-skinned means more success in life. There is a very sad message that if you are dark, you will never have success.” This is another reason skin whiteners are popular. In 2018, the Guardian newspaper reported that some people do benefit from lighter skin. They reported on a study from 2011. This study looked at the amount of time women in the US were sent to prison. Lighter-skinned black women were given less time in prison than darker-skinned black women. Other studies showed similar results. Lighter-skinned people often get better jobs. They have an advantage over darker-skinned people. But this does not have to be the truth forever. Another person against skin whitening is Anusha Bisaal. She runs the Mrs India South Africa beauty contest. She told South African news organization IOL: “It is understandable that most women want to have beautiful, clear skin. But when they want to change how they look, that becomes a problem. Over time, the use of skin whitening creams damages skin and makes a person darker. I would be careful even with skin whiteners that claim to be ‘totally natural’ because they may contain a small amount of chemicals.” And even some governments are beginning to recognize the dangers of skin whiteners. In 2019, the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, directed health workers to ban skin whiteners. However, women in the country were not happy. They believe it is their right to use skin whiteners. And this is happening all around the world. Many countries have made the substances in skin whiteners illegal. People know the dangers to their bodies and health, but many people still use skin whiteners. What about you? Do you use skin whiteners? Do you think they should be illegal? Tell us what you think. You can leave a comment on our website. Or email us at radio@radioenglish.net. You can also comment on Facebook at Facebook.com/spotlightradio. The writer of this program was Adam Navis. The producer was Michio Ozaki. The voices you heard were from the United Kingdom and the United States. All quotes were adapted for this program and voiced by Spotlight. You can listen to this program again, and read it, on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called, ‘Skin Whitening’. Visit our website to download our free official app for Android or Apple devices. We hope you can join us again for the next Spotlight program. Goodbye.