

BBC

NEWS SPORT WEATHER WORLD SERVICE A-Z INDEX

SEARCH

Go

BBC NEWS WORLD EDITION



News Front Page



Africa
Americas
Asia-Pacific
Europe
Middle East
South Asia
UK
Business
Entertainment
Science/Nature
Technology
Health

Talking Point

Country Profiles
In Depth

Programmes

BBC SPORT

BBC WEATHER

SERVICES
Daily E-mail
News Ticker
Mobile/PDAs

Text Only
Feedback
Help

LANGUAGES
SOMALI
SWAHILI
FRANÇAIS
GREAT LAKES
HAUSA
PORTUGUÊS

EDITIONS
Change to UK

You are in: Africa

Tuesday, 14 January, 2003, 10:49 GMT

Albinos hit by Zimbabwe's race divide

By Lewis Machipisa
BBC, Harare

At a time when race relations are strained in Zimbabwe, one group of people is finding itself shunned by both whites and blacks.

These are the more than 15,000 blacks with albinism, a hereditary condition that causes lack of pigmentation and leaves their skin white.

But now, besides being treated like lepers, albino women have increasingly been the victims of rape - a practice fuelled by myths that if an HIV infected man sleeps with an albino woman, he will be cured.

Outcasts

Treated like outcasts from birth, albinos are shunned by society and unable to find jobs, according to Felicity Mwamuka, the welfare officer of the Zimbabwe Albino Association.

Albino women have great difficulty finding husbands because people believe that an albino woman will have albino children, she says.

"Most albino women are single parents."

"There is this traditional belief that if you sleep with an albino woman, you are cured of HIV," she says.

For Albino women who drop out of school at a young age selling vegetables at a street corner appears an easy option.



Finding and keeping a job is difficult

Zimbabwe:
Nation divided



Key stories

Undercover report
2002: bleak year
Mugabe's victory
Black land victims
Hunger stalks the land
Cricket crisis
Reporters stand firm
Economic fears

IN DEPTH

The land question

CLICKABLE GUIDE

Food crisis by region

TALKING POINT

Should Mugabe be allowed to travel?

AUDIO VIDEO

Zimbabwe upheaval

FORUM

Your questions to the BBC's Mike Donkin

See also:

13 Jan 03 | Africa
Mugabe exit plan 'wishful thinking'
06 Jan 03 | Africa
Zimbabwe food riots spread
23 Dec 02 | Africa
Bleak Christmas in Zimbabwe
28 Nov 02 | Africa
Zimbabwe food crisis warning
22 Nov 02 | Africa
Party test for Zimbabwe civil servants

Internet links:

Zimbabwe Government

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

Top Africa stories now:

But even that is not easy, as people will not buy from albinos.

Children

Albino children also have trouble fitting in at school.

Gertrude Sumairi and her husband are both black, but 10 years ago, they had an albino child. "At first people laughed and I was shy to walk with my son. I had to stay in the house," she says. While Gertrude's husband accepted their son, many fathers of children with albinism suspect their partners of being unfaithful, resulting in divorce.



Albinos struggle to pay for sunscreens and glasses

In the worst cases, people with albinism are regarded as a curse from God or a sign that ancestors are unhappy.

Appeal

To erase the stigma associated with albinism, the Zimbabwe Albino Association (Zimas) is trying to educate people about the condition.

Members of Zimbabwe's Albino community say they have received little support for their trust, set up in 1996.

When a donor sends aid, the association has difficulty obtaining it because of the high customs duties charged on imports into Zimbabwe.

To start with, the association wants the government to declare albinism a disability.

Albinos have problems with their eyes and many albino children drop out of school since their parents cannot afford to buy spectacles for them.

According to Zimas, life expectancy for albinos is 43 years compared to 57 years for darker Zimbabweans.

[Ebola outbreak confirmed in Congo](#)
[Malawi minister reveals Aids trauma](#)
[Kenyan president opens parliament](#)
[DR Congo rebels go on trial](#)
[Nigerian ID scheme kicks off](#)
[Tunisian internet crackdown](#)
[Wild pigs threaten Somali peace talks](#)
[Anti-French protests in Ivory Coast](#)

Links to more Africa stories are at the foot of the page.

This is largely because of the high rates of skin cancer among albinos because of their sensitive skins.

Zimas also urges the government to cut duty on sun screen, so more albinos can afford it.

 [E-mail this story to a friend](#)

Links to more Africa stories

In This Section



[^^ Back to top](#)

[News Front Page](#) | [Africa](#) | [Americas](#) | [Asia-Pacific](#) | [Europe](#) | [Middle East](#) | [South Asia](#) | [UK](#) | [Business](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Science/Nature](#) | [Technology](#) | [Health](#) | [Talking Point](#) | [Country Profiles](#) | [In Depth](#) | [Programmes](#)

[To BBC Sport>>](#) | [To BBC Weather>>](#) | [To BBC World Service>>](#)

© MMIII | [News Sources](#) | [Privacy](#)