

Is pedal melanoma among a Nigerian ethnic group preventable?

Abstract

The characteristic pigmentation of the melanoma lightened the problem of its diagnosis from the 19th century. No wonder that museums illumined their stature in pathology. Nowadays, epidemiological papers point to the selection of the foot as the premier site of melanoma in the tropics. A preliminary paper by the author concerning the Igbo ethnic group in South-Eastern Nigeria suggested the pedal origin of most melanomas. Therefore, this paper aims to verify this presumption with a larger cohort. The highlights in 124 cases were

- Equal male/female ratio
- 61-70 group preponderance
- The sole as the most frequently attacked pedal site
- Submission of specimens from 20 towns other than Enugu, the erstwhile Capital City of the Regional Government.

Keywords: melanoma, age, sex, site, sole, towns, igbos, nigeria

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Introduction

During the 19th century, the study of melanoma was relatively easy on account of its intrinsic melanin pigmentation. Remarkably, as I have documented, there was not much difficulty in respect of such primarily attacked organs as the breast,¹ kidney,² bone,³ adrenal glands,⁴ and liver.⁵ Indeed, museums illumined them.⁶ Nowadays, epidemiologic papers on the foot as the organ of site of origin are being promoted.⁷⁻¹¹ Therefore, the present paper documents the findings from my Nigerian personal experience.

Materials and methods

Following the suggestion of a Birmingham (UK) group that the establishment of a histopathology data pool helps in epidemiological analysis,¹² this paper is hinged on the findings obtained from 1970 onwards regarding the Igbo ethnic group¹³ with reference to the author's experience in a regional such data pool. To it, did several doctors submit biopsy specimens accompanied by clinical data on locally diagnosed melanomas? In particular, the author's personal findings on such materials are deemed worthy of documentation and publication.

Results

It is apparent that the male/female ratio of 64/60 is almost equal. Moreover, the 61-70 age groups predominated in both sexes (Table 1). As to the sites of origin, the sole preponderated (Table 2). Incidentally, the 23 cases sent under "Foot" would have swelled the "Sole" cases if more care in site identification had been taken by the clinicians who had submitted them.

The melanoma scenery may be summed up, as did Houghton & Viola,¹⁴ as follows: "melanoma in darker races tends to occur on the foot and mucous membranes." However, as regards my above study among the Igbos, the mucous membranes are so scarce as to require future individual case reports, e.g., on anus, and vulva.

Table 1 Age-sex distribution pattern of patients

Age (yr)	M	F	Total
< 30	1	2	3
31 – 40	2	3	5
41 – 50	8	14	22
51 – 60	20	15	35
61 – 70	28	22	50
71+	5	4	9
Total	64	60	124

Table 2 Number in sites of observed origins

Site	No.
Sole	72
Foot	23
Heel	17
Toe	8
Border	4
Total	124

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was surmised long ago that the role of the heat of the hot soils of Africa should be investigated with regard to the causation of pedal melanoma.¹⁵ My recent attempt at personal calculations with the local data did not confirm this hypothesis.¹⁶ Perhaps, the series is not yet long enough!

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Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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