

## Exploring the Intersection of Lifestyle-Induced Practices and Women's Sexual Health: A Mini-Review

Solomon Wireko\*, Mina Ofosu

Department of Laboratory Technology, Kumasi Technical University, Kumasi, Ghana

### ABSTRACT

Vaginal hygiene practices among young women have long been a subject of interest due to their potential implications for reproductive health. This mini-review delves into recent research developments and discussions surrounding these practices, their motivations and potential impacts on women's sexual health outcomes. It examines the evolving understanding of vaginal hygiene, the motivations behind these practices and their potential impact on women's health. By synthesizing current literature, this review aims to shed light on the complex interplay between vaginal hygiene practices and women's health outcomes.

**Keywords:** Vaginal hygiene; Women's health; Reproductive health; Microbial ecology

### INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle-induced practices related to feminine hygiene and cleanliness, have garnered significant attention within public health research due to their potential impact on women's reproductive health. The vaginal microbiome, a complex ecosystem, hosts a diverse array of microorganisms that play a crucial role in maintaining its health and functionality. Recent advancements in microbial ecology have deepened our understanding of the intricate balance within the vaginal microbiome, particularly the dominance of lactobacilli species and their role in preventing infections and maintaining pH balance [1].

Despite this knowledge, certain cultural and societal norms perpetuate the misconception that vaginal cleanliness requires external intervention, such as douching. This practice involves the rinsing or flushing of the vagina with fluids, often containing chemicals or additives, under the guise of promoting hygiene and freshness. However, emerging evidence suggests that douching disrupts the delicate balance of the vaginal microbiome, leading to an increased susceptibility to infections, including bacterial vaginosis and sexually transmitted infections [2].

Moreover, the motivations driving douching practices are multifaceted and influenced by various sociocultural factors. Pressures to conform to unrealistic standards of cleanliness, as

well as societal taboos surrounding discussions of vaginal health, contribute to the perpetuation of harmful hygiene practices. Understanding these complex dynamics is essential in developing effective interventions to promote evidence-based vaginal hygiene practices and improve women's reproductive health outcomes.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research has underscored the detrimental effects of lifestyle-induced practices on the vaginal microbiome and women's sexual health. For instance, a study by Brotman et al., found that frequent use of certain feminine hygiene products was associated with alterations in the vaginal microbiota composition, increasing the risk of Bacterial Vaginosis (BV). Similarly, research by Ahmed et al., demonstrated an elevated risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) among women who reported regular use of these products [3].

Moreover, societal pressures and cultural norms contribute to the perpetuation of harmful feminine hygiene practices. A qualitative study by revealed that misconceptions about cleanliness and odor drive women to engage in these practices despite their known risks [4]. Education and outreach efforts aimed at dispelling myths about vaginal hygiene and promoting evidence-based practices are essential in addressing these misconceptions.

**Correspondence to:** Solomon Wireko, Department of Laboratory Technology, Kumasi Technical University, Kumasi, Ghana; E-mail: excellence521@gmail.com

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Recent research also underscores the potential risks associated with other vaginal hygiene practices, such as the use of scented products and feminine hygiene sprays. These products, often marketed as promoting cleanliness and freshness, can disrupt the vaginal microbiome and increase the risk of adverse health outcomes [5]. Additionally, the stigma surrounding discussions of vaginal health may deter women from seeking accurate information and appropriate healthcare services, further exacerbating the impact of harmful hygiene practices on women's reproductive health.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion surrounding vaginal hygiene practices extends beyond douching to encompass a spectrum of behaviors and products that women may use in pursuit of perceived cleanliness and freshness. Among these are scented products, including soaps, wipes and feminine hygiene sprays, which are often marketed as essential for maintaining vaginal cleanliness and odor control.

While these products may seem harmless and even beneficial on the surface, they can disrupt the delicate balance of the vaginal microbiome. Many scented products contain chemicals and fragrances that can irritate the sensitive vaginal tissues and alter the pH balance, creating an environment conducive to the growth of harmful bacteria. This disruption can increase the risk of infections such as bacterial vaginosis, yeast infections and urinary tract infections.

Moreover, the use of scented products and feminine hygiene sprays may perpetuate harmful misconceptions about vaginal health and hygiene [6]. Advertising campaigns often promote the idea that vaginas should have a certain scent or be completely odorless, leading women to believe that any natural vaginal odor is abnormal or undesirable. This can contribute to feelings of shame or embarrassment surrounding vaginal health and deter women from seeking necessary healthcare services.

Additionally, the stigma surrounding discussions of vaginal health can further compound these issues. Many women feel uncomfortable talking openly about their vaginal health concerns due to societal taboos and a lack of accessible, judgment-free spaces for discussion [7]. This can prevent women from seeking accurate information about proper vaginal hygiene practices and accessing appropriate healthcare services when needed.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves education, destigmatization and promoting evidence-based practices. Healthcare providers play a crucial role in providing accurate information about vaginal health and

hygiene during routine check-ups and gynecological exams. Community-based initiatives can also help create safe spaces for women to discuss their concerns and access reliable resources.

Furthermore, regulatory measures may be necessary to ensure that advertising for feminine hygiene products accurately reflects their potential risks and benefits [8]. By promoting transparency and informed decision-making, women can make choices that prioritize their health and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

Recent research underscores the importance of reevaluating societal norms surrounding vaginal hygiene and promoting evidence-based practices that prioritize women's health. Efforts to raise awareness about the potential risks of douching and other harmful hygiene practices are crucial in empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. Moving forward, interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers, healthcare providers and community organizations are essential in addressing the complex factors influencing vaginal hygiene practices and promoting positive health outcomes for women.

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