

# The Myth of Toilet Disease: an Impediment to the Control of Sexually Transmitted Infection among Young Females

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## ABSTRACT

Sexually transmitted disease has been on the increase globally with prevalence approaching epidemic proportion especially in young adults.<sup>1,2</sup> Toilet disease is a vague term used for similar symptoms to STI perceived to be from dirty toilet seat use.<sup>3</sup> The Global strategy of WHO for STI control includes methods to promote healthy sexual behaviour, protective barrier methods, effective and accessible care for STIs, and emphasis on STI control programmes. Despite STI being linked with sexual behaviour, these young people have managed to separate both by devising a term 'Toilet disease' devoid of the stigma associated with sexual activity and disease.

A self-administered pre-seminar questionnaire was distributed out to a group of young females attending a talk on 'Toilet Disease' to document their perception of the term, its perceived symptoms and prevention. Ninety one percent (91%) of the 99 respondents, ages 16 to 30 years believed vaginal infection is from dirty public toilet use.

The misconception and confusion of Toilet disease and STI is a cause for concern in young people. There is need to dissociate STI from stigma as well as step up aggressive health education campaign to correct the wrong perception and allow for health seeking behaviour and prevention of STI.

**Keywords:** Toilet disease, vaginal discharge, STI

## INTRODUCTION

'Toilet disease' is a vaguely defined entity comprising of a constellation of symptoms and signs such as vaginal discharge, lower abdominal pain, difficulty and painful micturition.<sup>3</sup> It is erroneously believed among young people in Nigeria to be acquired from toilet. While patients present to health facilities claiming to have toilet disease, they are often diagnosed to have some form of sexually transmitted disease such as trichomoniasis, chlamydia infection, gonococci infections, and herpes infections.<sup>1</sup>

Non-sexually transmitted diseases such as candidiasis, bacterial vaginosis are commonly diagnosed in patient presenting with presumed 'toilet disease'.

Sexually transmitted disease has been on the increase globally with prevalence approaching epidemic proportion.<sup>2</sup> The global annual incidence of STI was reported to be greater than 340 million.<sup>2</sup> An estimated annual incidence of 19million cases of sexually transmitted disease was reported among American youth with half of this figures occurring in young adults between the ages of 15 and 24years.<sup>4</sup> Factors perpetrating the transmission of sexually transmitted infections are biological, social, economic and behavioural factors. Biological factors includes asymptomatic nature of sexually transmitted disease, female gender as well as younger age.<sup>5,6</sup> In adolescents

and young adulthood, increased susceptibility of vaginal columnar epithelium to chlamydial and gonococcus infections accounts for the associated risk.<sup>7</sup> Social and economic factors such as racial and ethnic disparities, poverty and access to health care will also enhance the transmission of sexually transmitted infections.<sup>8,9</sup>

Behavioural factors which are reflected in attitudes and practices are informed by knowledge of the individual concerned. While information dissemination remains a strong tool in combating the spread of sexually transmitted disease, dissemination of adequate and correct information aimed at behaviour modification may be strongly hampered by false belief and myths such as the presumed 'toilet disease'.

This study therefore aimed to examine the perception of toilet disease among young adults, and evaluate the risk of sexually transmitted infection in them.

Vaginal discharge refers to the passage of mucus and fluid from the vagina. It is a common presentation among women and informs their presentation to the physician. The causes of vaginal discharge are numerous ranging from physiologic causes, sexually transmitted infections and non-sexually transmitted infections.

Vaginal discharge which varies in consistency during the patient's menstrual cycle may be physiologic in nature.

Non-sexually transmitted infectious causes of vaginal discharge include bacterial vaginosis and candidal infection. Sexually transmitted infections which are associated with vaginal discharge include Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, and trichomonas vaginalis.

The prevention of transmission of sexually transmitted infections requires that factors perpetrating its spread should be addressed. Population level prevention strategy for sexually transmitted infections includes primary education in form of sexual and health education awareness campaigns and community level programs.<sup>10,11</sup>

Sexual education has been reported as a key component of a compressive strategy for HIV and sexually transmitted infections prevention.<sup>12,13</sup> knowing the truth about the presumed (Toilet disease) would help young people adopt the right behaviour, attitudes, and practices for prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study is a study conducted among young females between 15years and 30years old who attended a seminar on 'Toilet disease'. The required information was obtained by the use of structured self-administered questionnaires. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire before the start of the seminar.

The toilet description is a flush toilet which disposes human waste by using water to flush the waste through connected pipes into the septic tank or sewage system. It is either the sitting (water closet, WC) or squat type.

The sample size utilized for the study was ninety nine.

Information was collated and analysed with a view to answer the study objectives.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: Age of respondents on perception of toilet disease**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	42	42.4%
21-25	45	45.5%
26-30	12	12.1%
Total	99	100%

**Table 2: Religion of Respondents**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
MUSLIM	9	9%
CHRISTIAN	90	91%
Total	99	100%

**Table 3: Respondents who believe the vaginal discharge is from toilet**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	90	91%
No	9	9%
Total	99	100%

**Table 4: Respondent who believes vaginal discharge can also be from STI**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	12%
No	87	88%
Total	99	100%

**Table 5: Symptoms associated with 'toilet disease' by respondents**

Response	Vaginal Discharge		Abdominal Pain		Painful Micturition	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	99	100%	59	60%	52	53%
No	0	0%	40	40%	47	47%
Total	99	100%	99	100%	99	100%

## DISCUSSION

Young adults have increased susceptibility of acquiring sexually transmitted infection. Higher rate of sexual activity and change of sexual partners are among the factors perpetrating STI within young adults.<sup>14</sup> Forty two percent of the respondents were between 15 and 20years old while age 21-25years constitutes the largest portion with 45 percent of the respondents.

'Toilet disease' was acknowledged and defined by the entire respondents as vaginal discharge which may or may not be associated with other symptoms such as lower abdominal pain, difficulty and painful micturition. However, almost all the respondents (91%) believe that it is acquire from the toilet while similarly high proportion (88%) of respondents also believe it is not STI related or transmitted sexually.

It is particularly precarious that such a high proportion of young adult could be deluded by such a myth as 'toilet disease' and thereby affecting their attitude toward prevention of sexually transmitted infections. The knowledge that a proportion of patients with presumed 'toilet disease' may actually be infected with sexually transmitted infection will reinforce the act of abstinence, condom use, and need for contact tracing as well as treatment of partners.

A surveillance report of the total cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea shows that the largest proportion of these infections were found among young adults between the age of 15years and 24years where chlamydia constitute 73% while gonorrhea constitute 42%.<sup>15</sup>

In giving consideration to the burden of STI in this age group, and also to facilitate some the WHO global strategy for STI prevention such as adequate management of STI in sexual partners, syndromic approach for the management of abnormal vaginal discharge and raising awareness on STI. Removing the impediment caused by false perception of vaginal discharge will help to reduce the burden of STI.

## CONCLUSION

Sexually transmitted infections may be more common than actually reported as patients may erroneously feign it as toilet disease. This also will hinder relevant behavioral adaptation necessary to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Public awareness campaign is therefore suggested to enable young adults to know more about sexually transmitted infections and dispel the myths of "toilet disease" so as to reduce the prevalence and morbidity associated with it.

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