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Health Education Implication: Personal Hygiene As An Indicator To Quality Of Life

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ABSTRACT

Poor personal hygiene significantly impacts quality of life, influencing health, social interactions, and economic productivity. This opinion paper examines the extensive effects of inadequate hygiene and emphasizes the critical role of health education in addressing this issue. Poor hygiene practices increase the risk of infections, chronic diseases, and mental health issues, diminishing overall well-being. Socially, individuals with poor hygiene face stigma and isolation, exacerbating mental health challenges. Economically, preventable diseases due to poor hygiene result in higher healthcare costs and reduced productivity. Current health education efforts are insufficient, especially in low-income and rural areas. This paper advocates for robust, inclusive hygiene education integrated into school curricula and community-based programs, utilizing modern technology for broader reach. Personal experiences highlight successes and challenges in health education, emphasizing culturally sensitive approaches. Coordinated efforts by governments and health organizations are essential to prioritize hygiene education, ensuring better health outcomes, social well-being, and economic stability.

Keywords: Personal Hygiene, Health Education, Quality of Life, Disease prevention

INTRODUCTION

Practicing good personal hygiene is essential for promoting health and preventing disease. Imagine a world where the simple act of washing hands could save lives and transform communities. However, poor personal hygiene practices often hinder this potential. Personal hygiene refers to the practices individuals undertake to maintain cleanliness and promote health, such as bathing, hand washing, oral care, and grooming (Taylor, 2024). These practices are fundamental not only for personal well-being but also for preventing the spread of infections and diseases. According to Smith, (2020), good personal hygiene is a cornerstone of public health, directly influencing the quality of life and overall health outcomes. Quality of life encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being, all of which are significantly influenced by personal hygiene. Maintaining good hygiene is foundational to preventing disease, promoting mental health, and fostering social acceptance and integration.

In observing diverse communities, it is evident that poor personal hygiene is still prevailing globally, particularly in areas with limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities (Brown, 2021). Poor adherence to personal hygiene principles causes, four percent of all deaths and five point four of disability worldwide (Singh et al., 2023). Also the prevention of infectious diseases caused by poor hygiene has become one of the major challenges facing developing countries all over the world, as well as Nigeria. The impact of this neglect is multifaceted, affecting physical health, mental well-being, social

interactions, and economic productivity. Therefore, addressing these hygiene challenges through robust health education programs is crucial for enhancing individuals' quality of life.

According to World Health Organization (2024) quality of Life is an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. The most frequent diseases caused by poor hygiene and unhealthy habits can obstruct ones quality of life thereby putting a stop to ones enjoyable existence, which ranges from fungal infections to bacterial invasions and parasite diseases. For instance poor hygiene like unpleasant body odor, bad breath, or visible signs of dirt, people may also consider rashes, oily skin, or other preventable or treatable appearance flaws as examples of poor hygiene which may affect individual quality of life. Meanwhile, it is pertinent to note that good personal hygiene is the best way to protect against preventable illnesses like athlete foot, body lice, chronic diarrhea, tooth decay, gum disease, pin worm, scabies, urinary tract infection, and ringworm (Usmani, 2023).

This paper aims to highlight the health education implications of poor personal hygiene and argue why improving personal hygiene is essential for enhancing quality of life. By examining the health, social, and economic impacts of poor hygiene, and the role of health education, this paper seeks to advocate for more comprehensive and effective hygiene education initiatives.

The Conceptualization of Hygiene

Hygiene is a multifaceted concept encompassing practices and behaviors that promote health and prevent disease. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2024), hygiene refers to the conditions and practices that help maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases. Similarly, Bloomfield et al. (2017) define hygiene as activities and behaviors, such as hand washing, that reduce the spread of infectious agents and protect individuals and communities. Ames (2020) broadens this perspective by describing hygiene as a collection of personal, environmental, and societal practices aimed at preserving health and enhancing quality of life.

The conceptual evolution of hygiene traces its roots to ancient civilizations. In ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, hygiene practices were associated with religious rituals and cleanliness (Bloomfield et al., 2017). The Greeks and Romans expanded hygiene practices, emphasizing public baths and sanitation systems. The Enlightenment era witnessed the scientific understanding of hygiene's role in disease prevention, particularly during the Industrial Revolution, when public health reforms targeted unsanitary living conditions. Modern hygiene practices have since evolved to encompass personal, environmental, and public health measures, underscoring their significance in contemporary health systems (United Nations Children Fund, 2023).

However, with regard to personal hygiene which is the crux of this paper, the evolutionary conceptual shifts gave birth to various components of personal hygiene as can be seen in figure 1.

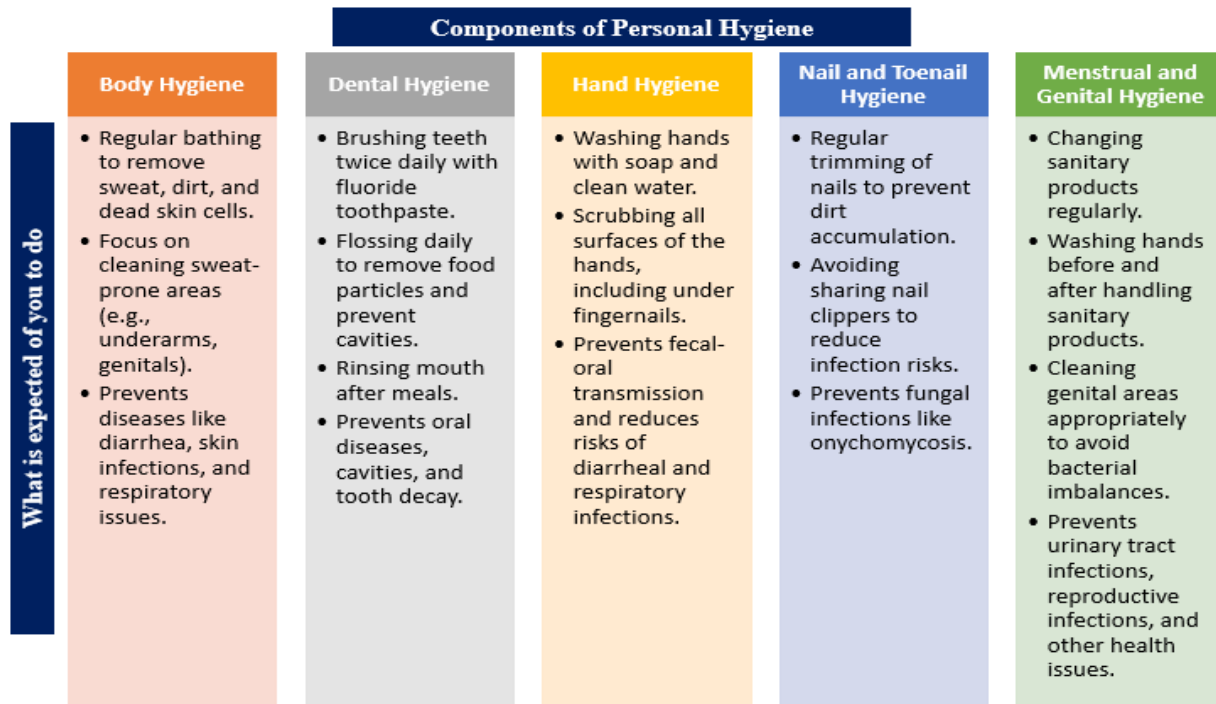


Figure 1: components of personal hygiene

Body hygiene: The body has nearly two million sweat glands. Moistened and dried sweat and dead skin cells all together make dirt that sticks on to the skin and the surface of underclothes. Do not wait up to feel the dried sweat in your body to feel the urge to take shower, make it a routine, you have the choice to either take them before you head to work or after the long day or even before you head to sleep, whichever one suits your routine. Make sure to rinse your body thoroughly, especially the genitals and underarms as they produce more sweat and are more prone to fungal activities. poor body hygiene is associated to numerous health implications including diarrhea diseases, skin infections and respiratory issues. Diarrhea diseases alone are responsible for over two hundred and seventy-three thousand death annually in children under five in addition, in 2022, two billion people lacked basic hygiene services, which include access to soap and water for body washing. This figure highlights significant global challenges in maintaining adequate hygiene (De Wit, Luseka, Bradley, Brown, Bhagwan, Evans, Freeman, Howard, Ray, Ross, Simiyu, Cumming, & Chandler, 2024).

Dental hygiene: Dental hygiene involves more than just having white teeth. The mouth is the area of the body most prone to collecting harmful bacteria and generating infections. Our mouth mechanically breaks food into pieces. This process leaves food particles (food debris) that stick to the surface of our gums and teeth. Our mouth cavity is full of bacteria and is a good environment for bacterial growth hence, mouth cleaning following these recommended practices is necessary;

1. Rinse the mouth after each meal.
2. Brush your teeth with a fluoride-containing toothpaste twice a day – before breakfast and before you go to bed. Cleaning the mouth with twigs is possible if done carefully.
3. During the day, fill your mouth with water and swish it around to get rid of anything sticking to your teeth.
4. In addition to regular brushing, it is advisable to floss your teeth at least once a day, usually before you go to bed.

Evidently, more than ninety percent of adults greater than twenty percent have experienced cavities, and fifty-five percent of adolescents (ages twelve to nineteen) have had at least one cavity in their permanent teeth. Among children aged six to eight, fifty-two percent have had cavities in their baby teeth. Around twenty-five percent of adults aged twenty to sixty-four have at least one untreated cavity (Centre for Disease Control, 2020). Globally, dental caries affect nearly two point five billion people, with older adults experiencing a forty-nine percent prevalence rate. Untreated decay is also a leading cause of tooth loss worldwide (CDC, 2020). Preventive measures such as regular brushing, flossing, fluoride use, and dental checkups are vital for reducing these rates and improving overall oral health outcomes.

Hand hygiene: The cleanliness of our hands is very important in all our daily activities. In our normal activities our hands frequently get dirty. There are many situations in which microorganisms are likely to attach to our hands along with the dirt. There are many communicable diseases that follow the route of faecal-oral transmission. Hand hygiene plays a critically important role in preventing this transmission. Hand washing involves the mechanical removal of microorganisms from contaminated hand surfaces using soap or detergent. Hand washing should involve more than a quick rinse under running water. The following hand washing technique ensures that the hands are properly washed and it doesn't take long to complete it include:

1. First wet your hands with clean water and lather with a bar of soap.
2. Next rub your hands together vigorously and scrub all surfaces up to your wrists.
3. Clean under your fingernails.
4. Continue for fifteen to thirty seconds. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.
5. Rinse your hands well with clean running water (pour from a jug or tap).
6. Dry your hands in the air to avoid recontamination on a dirty towel, do not touch anything until your hands are dry.

Hand hygiene is central to preventing the spread of infectious diseases in home and everyday life settings, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends washing hands for at least twenty seconds before and after certain activities (Bloomfield, Aiello, Cookson, O'Boyle, & Larson, 2017). Each year, an estimated one point four million people, including nearly four hundred thousand children under five, die from preventable diseases attributable to inadequate WASH, such as diarrhea and acute respiratory infections. Unsafe hand hygiene alone is responsible for three hundred and ninety-four thousand deaths from diarrhea and three hundred and fifty-six thousand deaths from acute respiratory infections annually (United Nations Children Funds, 2023).

Similarly, the overall prevalence of hand hygiene before eating is approximately fifty-five percent and after using the toilet, it is about eighty-four percent. These rates vary based on factors such as age, education, and access to facilities (Hareesh et al., 2024).

Nail and Toenail Hygiene: A nail is hard tissue that constantly grows. Keeping nails trimmed and in good shape weekly is important in maintaining good health. Clip nails short along their shape but do not cut them so close that it damages the skin. Razor blades and fingernail cutters or scissors are used to cut nails. Nail cutters should not be shared with others. Long fingernails tend to accumulate or trap dirt on the underside. The dirt could be as a result of defecation or touching infected and contaminated surfaces.

The prevalence of nail and toenail hygiene issues, particularly fungal infections like onychomycosis, varies widely across populations and regions. Globally, onychomycosis, a common fungal infection of the nails, affects approximately five point five percent of the population, with higher prevalence rates in specific regions such as Europe (up to twenty-five point one percent) compared to North America (up to thirteen point eight percent). The condition is more common in older adults, particularly males, and is often associated with underlying conditions like diabetes and other comorbidities. This infection is typically chronic and can lead to complications such as pain, gait issues, and psychological distress if untreated (El Abbassi et al., 2020). In a recent study from Morocco analyzing cases between 2016 and

2020, the prevalence of onychomycosis among patients with nail disorders was seventy-eight point six percent, with women being more affected than men. The highest prevalence was observed in individuals aged fort-one to sixty years. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing nail hygiene as a health concern beyond mere cosmetic appearance, especially in at-risk populations

Menstrual and genital hygiene: It is important to change sanitary products regularly and to wash the hands before and after changing tampons, pads, or any other sanitary products. As vaginas are self-cleaning, using soap to clean the vagina can cause an imbalance of its natural bacteria and lead to infections. The vulva (the external part of the vagina) should only need cleaning once a day using water. People with an uncircumcised penis can clean it by gently pulling back the foreskin and washing underneath it with warm water or soap. It is worthy to note that Poor menstrual hygiene, however, can pose serious health risks, like reproductive and urinary tract infections which can result in future infertility and birth complications. Neglecting to wash hands after changing menstrual products can spread infections, such as hepatitis B and thrush. Studies have found that giving out sanitary pads to girls leads to a significant reduction in sexually transmitted infections and bacterial vaginosis (Benshaul-Tolonen et al. 2019; Phillips-Howard et al. 2016).

Link between Poor Personal Hygiene and Quality of Life

Health Consequences of Poor Personal Hygiene: poor personal hygiene significantly increases susceptibility to a range of infections and diseases. For instance, inadequate hand washing can lead to the spread of gastrointestinal infections, respiratory infections, and skin conditions. According to Jones (2021), regular hand hygiene is a critical measure in preventing the transmission of pathogens, yet it is often neglected. is crucial in halting the spread of illnesses like diarrhea, respiratory infections, cholera, Ebola, COVID-19, and other neglected tropical diseases, according to UNICEF (2023) these deteriorate the quality of life.

Moreover, poor oral hygiene is associated with dental caries, periodontal disease, and systemic conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes (Lee, 2022). These health issues can severely compromise an individual's quality of life by causing pain, discomfort, and long-term health complications.

Mental health impacts of poor personal hygiene are profound. Individuals with inadequate hygiene often face social stigma and isolation, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Garcia, 2023). This social exclusion exacerbates their mental health challenges, creating a vicious cycle of poor hygiene and deteriorating mental health. According to Williams (2022), the psychological burden of being ostracized or ridiculed for poor hygiene can be overwhelming, particularly for adolescents and young adults.

Social and Psychological Effects: the social and psychological effects of poor personal hygiene are profound. Individuals with poor hygiene may face social stigma, leading to isolation and exclusion. This social rejection can adversely affect mental health, contributing to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Garcia, 2023). For example, adolescents with poor hygiene may experience bullying and ostracism at school, which can have lasting impacts on their psychological well-being. This social isolation can hinder their ability to form and maintain relationships, further impacting their mental health and social well-being. The stigma associated with poor hygiene can be particularly severe in school and workplace settings, where social interactions are crucial for personal and professional development (Miller, 2023).

Community Health: on a broader scale, poor personal hygiene poses a significant risk to community health. The spread of infectious diseases within communities is often exacerbated by inadequate hygiene practices (Jones, 2021). For example, during outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and COVID-19, poor hygiene can accelerate the transmission of pathogens, overwhelming healthcare systems and endangering public health (Parker, 2023). Effective hygiene practices are essential for preventing outbreaks and maintaining community health, particularly in densely populated areas.

Economic Implications: the economic implications of poor personal hygiene are substantial. Poor hygiene practices can lead to increased healthcare costs due to the treatment of preventable diseases and infections. According to Martinez, (2021) treating preventable diseases resulting from inadequate hygiene practices places a significant burden on healthcare systems. Increased healthcare costs for managing infections, chronic diseases, and mental health issues drain resources that could be used for other critical health services. For example, the economic burden of dental diseases alone, attributable to poor oral hygiene, is estimated to cost billions of dollars annually in healthcare expenditures and lost productivity (Lee, 2022). Additionally, individuals suffering from hygiene-related illnesses may experience reduced productivity and lost income due to absenteeism (Brown, 2021). Workers who suffer from poor health are less productive and more likely to miss work, affecting both their personal income and the overall economy. Employers may also incur higher costs due to increased sick leave and lower workplace efficiency.

Table 1: Snapshot of the link between poor personal hygiene and quality of health

Aspect	Impacts	Key References
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Social stigma and isolation lead to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. ✓ Adolescents and young adults are particularly affected by bullying and ostracism. ✓ A vicious cycle forms as poor hygiene exacerbates mental health issues, which in turn hinders hygiene improvement. 	Garcia (2023), Williams (2022)
Social and Psychological Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Social rejection and exclusion in schools and workplaces hinder personal and professional growth. ✓ Adolescents face bullying, affecting their relationships and psychological well-being. ✓ Stigma impacts development in both educational and professional settings. 	Garcia (2023), Miller (2023)
Community Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Poor hygiene accelerates the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera and COVID-19. ✓ Overwhelms healthcare systems, especially in densely populated areas. ✓ Effective hygiene practices are critical for preventing outbreaks and maintaining public health. 	Jones (2021), Parker (2023)
Economic Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased healthcare costs for preventable diseases drain resources. ✓ Dental diseases alone cost billions annually in healthcare expenditures and lost productivity. ✓ Poor hygiene reduces individual productivity and increases absenteeism, impacting income and workplace efficiency. 	Martinez (2021), Lee (2022), Brown (2021)

Role of Health Education in Promoting Personal Hygiene

Current Health Education Practices: health education plays a vital role in promoting personal hygiene. Current hygiene education practices primarily focus on teaching basic hygiene behaviors such as handwashing, oral care, and sanitation practices. These programs are typically implemented in schools, healthcare settings, and community centers with the aim of instilling lifelong habits that promote health and prevent disease (Johnson, 2020). For instance, school-based programs often incorporate interactive

sessions and demonstrations to educate children on the importance of hand washing before meals and after using the restroom (Taylor, 2024).

Community health initiatives provide workshops and outreach activities to raise awareness about hygiene practices and their impact on individual and community health (Wilson, 2021). However, while these programs have shown success, their reach and consistency vary widely. Many communities still lack access to comprehensive hygiene education, particularly in low-income and rural areas (Miller, 2023).

Gaps in Health Education: there are several gaps in current health education efforts. One major gap is the lack of comprehensive personal hygiene education that addresses all aspects of hygiene, including oral care, skin care, and menstrual hygiene management. Another gap is access to clean water and sanitation facilities remains a critical barrier in many low-income regions, hindering the practice of basic hygiene behaviors (Martinez, 2021). Moreover, cultural beliefs and socioeconomic factors can influence attitudes towards hygiene, necessitating tailored approaches that respect and address local contexts and many programs fail to consider that these factors can influence hygiene practices (Williams, 2022).

For example, certain cultural beliefs may hinder the adoption of specific hygiene practices due to entrenched cultural norms or lack of understanding about the benefits of improved hygiene (Miller, 2023) and these must be addressed within education programs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, poor personal hygiene poses significant challenges to individual and public health, social well-being, and economic stability. Effective hygiene education is essential for addressing these challenges and promoting healthier communities. By addressing gaps in current education strategies, adopting innovative approaches, and fostering community engagement, societies can empower individuals to adopt and maintain good hygiene practices. A comprehensive and inclusive approach to hygiene education is crucial for achieving sustainable improvements in quality of life and reducing the burden of preventable diseases.

SUGGESTIONS

The followings were made:

1. **Policy Implementation and Support:** Governments and policymakers should prioritize hygiene education by integrating it into national education and public health strategies. This includes providing adequate funding and resources to support comprehensive hygiene education programs, particularly in underserved and low-income communities. Legislation should mandate hygiene education in schools and community centers to ensure widespread and consistent dissemination of information.
2. **Comprehensive Educational Curricula:** Educational institutions should develop and implement comprehensive hygiene education curricula that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive. These curricula should cover a broad range of hygiene practices, including handwashing, oral care, and sanitation, and emphasize their importance for health and well-being. Interactive and practical sessions can help students understand and adopt these practices effectively.
3. **Community-Based Initiatives:** Engaging local communities through participatory programs can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of hygiene education initiatives. Community leaders and healthcare providers should be involved in designing and delivering these programs to ensure they are tailored to the specific needs and cultural contexts of the community. Workshops, outreach activities, and local campaigns can help raise awareness and promote behavior change.
4. **Leveraging Technology:** Utilizing technology platforms such as mobile applications, online resources, and social media can extend the reach of hygiene education programs. Interactive digital tools can provide accessible and engaging content that reinforces hygiene messages and encourages behavior change. Virtual training sessions and webinars can also be used to educate communities, especially in remote or hard-to-reach areas.

5. Capacity Building and Training: Investing in the training of educators, healthcare workers, and community volunteers is crucial for the sustainability and impact of hygiene education programs. Capacity-building efforts should focus on equipping these stakeholders with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to effectively deliver hygiene education and support behavior change. Regular training sessions and workshops can help keep them updated on best practices and new developments.
6. Public Awareness Campaigns: Public awareness campaigns should utilize diverse communication channels, including traditional media, digital platforms, and community outreach activities, to promote hygiene practices and raise awareness about their health benefits. Campaigns should be culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate to effectively reach diverse populations. They can highlight success stories and personal testimonials to encourage widespread adoption of good hygiene practices.
7. Continuous Research and Evaluation: Ongoing research and evaluation are essential for identifying best practices, assessing the effectiveness of hygiene education programs, and informing programmatic improvements. Rigorous evaluation methodologies should be employed to measure behavioral outcomes, health impacts, and cost-effectiveness of hygiene education interventions. Findings from research can help refine and enhance existing programs to better meet the needs of the target populations.

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