

## Destigmatization of Menstrual Hygiene Products through Mindfulness

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### ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the pervasive issue of stigmatization surrounding menstrual hygiene products and aims to address this challenge by proposing strategies for promoting consumption through the routes of mindfulness. A systematic literature review (SLR) is conducted to examine the existing body of knowledge on menstrual hygiene product stigmatization, its implications, and potential avenues for promoting mindful consumer behaviors. Findings are elevated towards mindfulness as a key mediator for mitigating the stigma associated with menstrual hygiene products. Three key determinants of social support, self-compassion and identity were extracted using the SLR method.

**Keywords:** *Stigma, Mindfulness, Consumption, Menstruation, Hygiene, Destigmatization*

*“Mindfulness is the root of all the methods that tame the mind”*

**-Lord Buddha**

The stigma associated with menstrual hygiene products has long been a barrier to open discussions and sustainable practices surrounding menstrual health. This paper seeks to explore the existing literature on menstrual hygiene product stigmatization and propose strategies that leverage mindfulness to foster a more sustainable and accepting consumer culture. Many women in the marginalized areas are unable to afford menstrual products because of which they commonly start using pieces of cloth, cotton wool, toilet paper, and even sections of mattresses. Moreover, this notion of their self-consciousness of using such materials, which is non-absorbent or having poor absorbency, leads to stained clothes and embarrassment (Oruko et al., 2015). It is often found that menstrual hygiene products had been identified in a stigmatized category which often considered as "embarrassing, distressing, unpleasant, or provocative to specific segment of the society" (Prevel Katsanis, 1994, p. 8). Furthermore, there is a notion prevalent about these products which were conveyed as "disgusting" (Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007). Menstrual cups are designed as bell-shaped receptacles to collect menstrual flow, that provides a reusable alternative to tampons, which lasts up to 10 years. Being cost-effective, eco-friendly, safer, and more comfortable option as compared to other disposable menstrual products. (Howard et al., 2017).

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### **Mindful consumption: a tool for destigmatizing menstrual hygiene products.**

For the study, we elaborate on mindfulness in the context of consumption which can help destigmatizing menstrual hygiene products. Moreover, mindfulness is an unbiased awareness that emerges through continuously paying consideration to the momentary experience with an open, accepting, generous, and empathetic attitude" (Böhme, Geiger, Grossman, Stanzus, & Schrader, 2016, p. 6). This definition aimed to capture the affluence of mindfulness, surrounding various aspects of awareness that includes paying close consideration to both internal and external stimuli and becoming mindful in our daily actions. Moreover, various attributes of mindfulness also include recognizing the relativity of experiences, acceptance, and equanimity.

Furthermore, practicing mindfulness often develops compassionate orientation and sustained awareness of one's own experiences (Grossman, 2015). Additionally, the positive impact of mindfulness tends to encompass the neurocognitive functions (Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015), attention restoration (Lindberg, & Hartig, 2018), pro-social behaviors and compassion (Condon, 2017) and mental and physical well-being.

This study is focused on cultivating mindfulness in the context of stigma which might lead to changes in their consumption behavior.

### ***Research gap***

Previous research primarily focused on connecting mindfulness with environmental sustainability, overlooking the broader spectrum of sustainability that includes social aspects like stigma. Researchers have tended to concentrate on this specific link, leaving other dimensions of sustainability which remain unexplored. (Geiger, S. M., Fischer, D., Schrader, U., & Grossman, P., 2020)

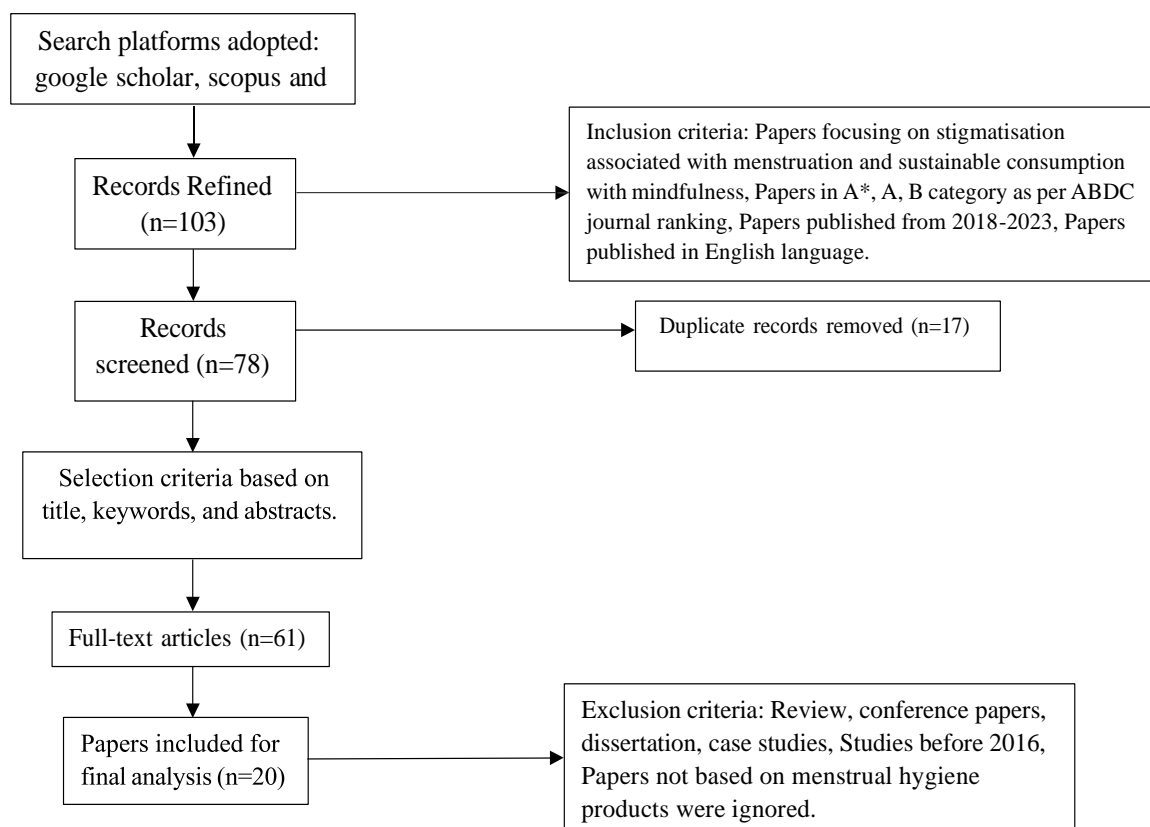
Conversely, consumption decisions and experiences are impacted by stigma, with consumer research focusing extensively on stigmatized identities and the ensuing disparate treatment in the marketplace for those with such identities. Despite this emphasis, there has been comparatively less exploration of consumer experiences in adopting stigmatized products (Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L., 2021).

### ***Objectives***

- To examine the present literature on social stigma in relation to menstrual hygiene products.
- To identify the key determinants in mitigating the social stigma of menstrual hygiene products.

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**Fig 1:** Sequential procedure used in SLR.



## METHODOLOGY

The authors adopted the systematic literature review to explore the extant literature based on sustainable consumption with the help of mindfulness. The main objective of the research is to synthesize the stigmatized associated products and how it can be curbed using sustainable mindful consumption. The merits of using SLR approach are that it has high credibility over other conventional approaches as well as synthesizes the literature in a transparent, systematic, and reproducible manner. Moreover, prior studies upheld that SLR is the most effective approach which reduces biases in the research.

### *Procedure*

#### **Selection Criteria:**

The criteria adopted for the selection of the paper includes the titles, abstracts, and keywords. The stigmatized used are “controlling stigma for consumption,” “stigmatization of menstrual products,” “stigmatized product consumption,” and “consumption with mindfulness.” There was a total of 103 research papers which were retrieved from Google Scholar, Scopus, and Emerald. After removing the duplicate papers and applying the selection criteria we were finally able to reach 61 papers. Moreover, we further excluded case studies, manuscripts, interview transcriptions, conference papers, and dissertations from these papers and finally reached 20 research papers for the purpose of our study.

#### **Inclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria of the research include papers that were published between 2015-2023, focusing mainly on mindfulness and stigmatized product consumption.

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Moreover, the selection also included A\*, A, B categories journals as per the ABDC ranking and, which were in English language.

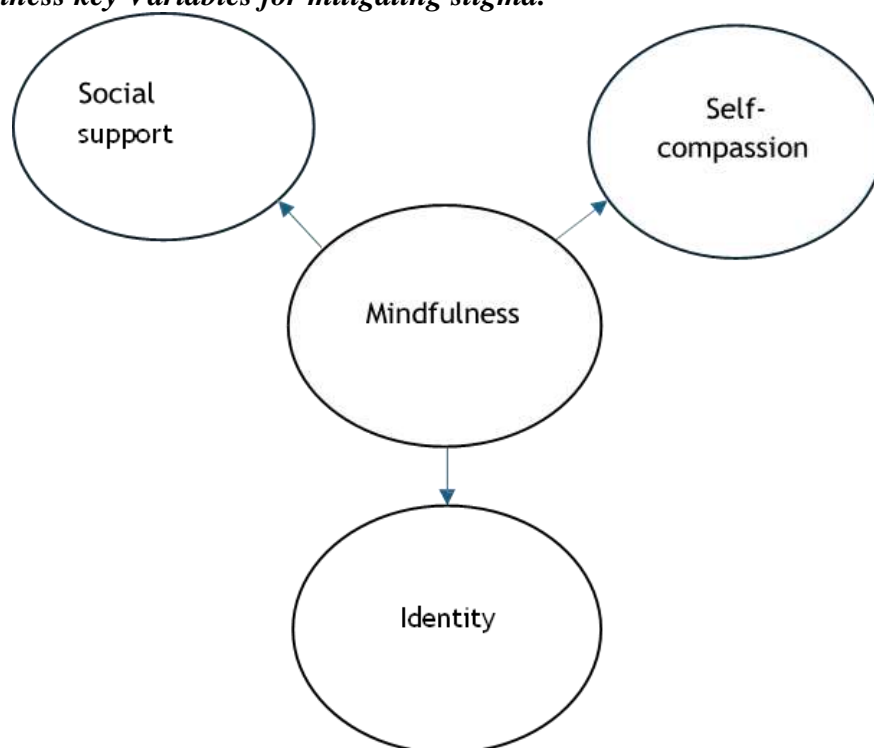
### Exclusion criteria

The research has excluded the review, conference papers, dissertation, case studies, and theses, which did not stigmatize product consumption and were conducted before 2016.

*The SLR has gauged the following key variables of mindfulness that may help to mitigate the stigma around stigmatized products.*

## RESULTS

*Fig 2. Mindfulness key Variables for mitigating stigma.*



### 1. Social support

Individuals that possess higher levels of mindfulness traits tend to demonstrate better behavioral and emotional self-regulation, as depicted by Brown and Ryan (2003) and Feldman et al. in 2007 (Manchanda, P., Arora, N., Nazir, O., & Islam, J. U., 2023). As evidenced by Baer, Lykins, and Peters (2012), availability of paramount literature related to mindfulness has assisted researchers to understand the crucial aspects of psychological well-being. Additionally, Feeney and Collins (2014a) found the social support linked with high emotion regulation, high positive affect, and low negative affect. Also, social support builds acceptance with operational coping mechanisms which makes stressors manageable and appear temporarily when faced with stressors. This factor of social support is closely paralleled with mindfulness which maintains a present moment focused view, avoiding isolation and mitigating worries about the past or future. Accordingly, mindfulness could be a link between perceived social support and psychological well-being. Other well-established studies revealed the same, positive connections between mindfulness and social support. (Wilson et al., 2020).

When it comes to stigma, Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L. (2021) found that having social support to share intimate experiences mitigates the harmful effects of stigma risks. This

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enhances positive acceptance and usage of stigma associated products, particularly menstrual hygiene products.

### 2. Self-compassion

Self-compassion according to the researchers have been found to be an active mediator between mindfulness and acceptance of stigmatized products. This variable is emerging out of the recent trends in marketing campaigns (Gurrieri, Previte, & Brace-Govan, 2013) aligns with non-realistic body types where mainstream fashion marketplaces marginalizes women with certain body types ,therefore , showing these type of women's body as uncommon and non-accepting (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013).Therefore ,increase in self- compassion can regulate the stigma by maintaining the psychological wellbeing, empathy with decline in distress, in turn feeling acknowledged and accepting the stigma products which is a part of their identity. (Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L. ,2021)

Birnie, K., Speca, M., & Carlson, L. E., 2010 studied self-compassion as well as closely related variable of empathy. They used mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) as an intervention. Here, they wanted to understand the impact of this intervention technique on certain components like self-compassion, empathy, stress symptoms, mood disturbances, and spirituality on a community sample. The results showed significant decline in mood and disturbing symptoms, along with increased levels of mindfulness, spirituality, self-compassion in the intervention. Empathy, particularly perspective taking, confirmed a noteworthy growth, while empathy concern remained stagnant. A substantial decrease was found in personal distress. Remarkably, modifications in mindfulness were able predict the changes in self-compassion. This research highlighted a strong association between self-compassion, empathy, and psychological wellbeing (Jiménez-Gómez, L., Yela, J. R., Crego, A., Melero-Ventola, A. R., & Gómez-Martínez, M. Á. ,2022).

### 3. Identity

Identity was found to be a possible predictor of mitigating the stigma positively linked to mindfulness by researchers. Therefore, a maintained identity can restrain the impact of stigma which can be achieved by mindfulness. The studies have explored connections between identity, stigma and mindfulness.

Contributing research proposed by Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L. in 2021 analyzed the narratives about the visibility of the menstruating status of the students of Kenya, they found a major concern regarding the visibility status of menstruation and taking big measures to maintain discretion. This need for concealing the menstruating status aligned with the stigmatized perception of menstruation as a bodily abomination and blood staining as a harm to the personal identity (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Subsequently, probable limitations or logistical issues with the menstrual products portray a huge inconvenience also accelerate the psychosocial risks with revealing women to the stigma aspect of their identity. Likewise, Haslam and colleagues (2018) state that meaning of identity is understood by power. (Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L. ,2021) Social identities are also enveloped within identity, if they are stigmatized it impacts the individuals where they dissociate from the stigma group to regain their self-esteem and gain a social standing.

A study demonstrated by Adarves-Yorno et al., 2020 showed a close connection between the idea of mindful leader and the essence of mindfulness in the concept of prisoners. Here, it was found that adopting a fresh identity was dependent on mindfulness leadership that also a key variable for enhancing their wellbeing as emphasized by Thompson (2018).

### DISCUSSION

The findings reflect the consistent relationship among the key variables like mindfulness and curbing the stigma associated with menstrual products. Mindfulness is a key antecedent in the mitigating the stigma associated menstrual hygiene, therefore, illuminating the importance of social support, self-compassion, and identity. This will in turn support the stigma free adoption of contemporary menstrual hygiene products.

The first key mediator is found to be social support, which facilitates emotional and behavioral regulation (Brown and Ryan ,2003 and Feldman et al. ,2007). A body of research establishes the connection between improved psychological wellbeing and mindfulness. (Baer, Lykins, and Peters, 2012 and Brown and Ryan, 2003). With the findings from Feeney and Collins (2014a), social supports reinforce the superior emotional regulation, high positive affect, and deteriorated negative affect. Moreover, in the face of stressors social support enables the individual to handle the challenges and problems, making them manageable and temporary (Feeney & Collins, 2014a). These routes to social support are in line with characteristics associated with mindfulness. A strong social support enables the person to communicate and share their intimate personal experiences. This helps the person to pierce through stigma related risks and better understand them which enhances the acceptance of stigma associated products. (Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L. ,2021)

The second variable of self-compassion is emerging out of the recent trends in marketing campaigns (Gurrieri, Previte, & Brace-Govan, 2013) aligns with non-realistic body types where mainstream fashion marketplaces marginalize women with certain body types, therefore, showing these type of women's body as uncommon and non-accepting (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013).Therefore ,increase in self-compassion can regulate the stigma by maintaining the psychological wellbeing, empathy with decline in distress, in turn feeling acknowledged and accepting the stigma products which is a part of their identity. (Ndichu, E. G., & Rittenburg, T. L. ,2021)

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Third key factor of identity plays a major role in stigma, a maintained identity can restrain the impact of stigma which can be achieved by mindfulness. The studies have explored connections between identity, stigma, and mindfulness.

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### ***The theory of Planned Behavior***

Furthermore, we can explain these three key factors with the help of theory of planned (TPB) behavior by Ajzen in 1991 which is known for descriptive potential concerning the people's intentions to involve in particular behavior. (Aboelmaged, M., 2021). It has three determinants:

1. *The individual's attitude* or the evaluation of intended behavior as favorable or unfavorable. With the TPB framework increased self-compassion can positively influence the perception or attitude of the menstrual hygiene products and think of them as natural self-caring process.
2. Intertwining with this framework social support can determine the *subjective norms* by shaping the stigmatized menstrual products attitude or views of one's own social group (family, friends, etc).

Likewise, a theory instituted by Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell (1987) called the social identity approach which posits that individual's self-perception, self-worth and behavior (perceived behavioral control) are intrinsically connected with the societal groups they belong to. The social identity born out of these societal influences how people perceive their own selves, emotional experiences and how others see and evaluate them. If there are positive influences emerged from social identities, it will enhance self-esteem and wellbeing (Jetten et al., 2017).

3. *Perceived behavioral control* is the perceived difficulty or ease to perform the behavior (Kumar, 2019). This factor can be moderated by the psychosocial risks associated with revealing the fairer sex to the stigma facets of their own identity (van Veelen, R., Veldman, J., Van Laar, C., & Derks, B., 2020). If there's no perceived control over these aspects it may negate the intention of to adopt contemporary menstrual hygiene products. (Aboelmaged, M., 2021).

### ***Future Scope***

As discussed, the qualitative outlook of the study calls for an in-depth look with mixed method analysis. Also, interesting links were found but further studies can advance the comprehension of dissemination of stigma across cultures but the inclusion of large geographical data across cultures especially eastern needs to be investigated.

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A plethora of research are performed around stigmatization but very less literature is available around mitigating the impact of stigmatized products which needs to be filled with extensive body of research. Researchers can identify more mindful intervening variables about stigmatized products that can be used to improve the contemporary marketing campaigns, which is a crucial need in the rural areas.

### *Limitations*

Due to time constraints a limited literature was analyzed and only three determinants could be studied. There is limited research on menstrual stigma which are available. A mixed method design can be employed to better explain the relationship between the extracted variables.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main concern here is the implication of strategies to curb the stigma as addressing these variables does not guarantee the continued acceptance of the stigmatized products. Additionally, marketers may face difficulty in creating mindfulness acceptance of strongly stigmatized products which have been there for ages.

In conclusion mindfulness is found to be positively linked with controlling the stigma built around menstrual hygiene products. So, a robust understanding of stigma product consumption experiences will generate important insight for market researchers.

This study has important implication with market researchers who are trying to promote innovative product consumption with the stigmatized products.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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