

The Rub In J&J's Stress Lotion? It Doesn't Work, Suit Says

By **Mike Curley**

Law360 (May 14, 2019, 4:30 PM EDT) -- A New York woman is claiming that Johnson & Johnson has duped buyers of their scented stress relief lotions and body washes, saying in a proposed class action their so-called "relaxing scents" are no more effective than placebos.

Yajaira Sullivan told the Eastern District of New York on Monday that while Johnson & Johnson's Aveeno Stress Relief moisturizing lotion and body wash refer to "clinical studies" and the "calming effects" of the products, no reliable studies back up the company's claims.

"Every sound and reliable study has demonstrated that aromatherapy with lavender, chamomile and ylang ylang are no better than a placebo at providing stress relief," Sullivan wrote in the suit.

She said she and others have relied on Johnson & Johnson's advertising in choosing to buy the essential oil-infused products, and would not have bought them if they knew they'd be useless.

According to the complaint, Johnson & Johnson promotes the products to cash in on the lucrative essential oils market, which generated \$3.8 billion in sales in 2018 worldwide, with creams and washes like the Aveeno products making up more than 40% of the global market.

This growing market is a "perfect storm" for companies like Johnson & Johnson to mislead customers about their products, according to the complaint, despite the lack of supporting studies to back up claims that the essential oils and aromatherapy-based products provide stress relief.

The complaint cites several studies dating to 2007 that Sullivan says show aromatherapy scents like lavender and ylang ylang don't work to relieve stress.

While some studies suggest lavender can have an effect on stress levels, Sullivan argued they all have issues that make them unreliable, like failing to randomize or blind the experiment. For example, some studies had the oils administered with a breathing mask rather than a topical cream like the lotion, making the findings inapplicable to Johnson & Johnson's products.

In addition, she said, those studies used pure oils, while the scents in the Aveeno line of products are synthesized fragrances with more than a dozen chemicals as ingredients.

In the suit, Sullivan is seeking unspecified monetary and punitive damages, and an injunction against Johnson & Johnson to stop them from advertising the products as stress relievers.

A spokesperson for Johnson & Johnson declined to comment.

An attorney for Sullivan declined to comment.

Sullivan is represented by Joseph Lipari of The Sultz Law Group PC.

Counsel information for Johnson & Johnson was not available.

The case is Sullivan v. Johnson & Johnson Consumer Companies Inc., case number 1:19-cv-02803, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

--Editing by Amy Rowe.

