



ASSOCIATION BETWEEN MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT AND LOWER REPRODUCTIVE TRACT INFECTIONS AMONG WOMEN OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE PRESENTING AT SELECTED FAMILY HEALTH CENTERS IN KARACHI

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a global health concern affecting approximately 500 million women, leading to societal challenges and stigmas. In Pakistan, where 42 million school-age girls lack sufficient access to sanitary napkins, MHM practices face financial and sociocultural constraints, contributing to Period Poverty.

Poverty in Pakistan is a true and bitter reality that needs to be addressed through research, evidence, and a robust national-level policy on making sanitary napkins available for free or at a minimum cost with 100% tax exemption. Menstrual Health and Hygiene comes under Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The public and private health sectors can break myths and misconceptions about periods through Behavior Change Communication, advocacy, and Life-skill based education in schools. In an article, relating to the Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) confirmed that a lack of knowledge about MHM practices and using cloth or cotton led to vaginal infections⁽¹⁵⁾. Another study on postpartum women in Karachi also concluded that malpractice amongst married women and unhygienic cloth for staunch lochia during postpartum pregnancy causes severe RTIs

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES / QUESTIONS

The study aimed to determine the association between MHM practices and Lower Reproductive Tract Infections (LTIs) among women aged 15-49, using either sanitary pads or cloth, at selected Family Health Centers in Karachi.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The study, was conducted among 487 women aged 15-49, from October 2022 to June 2023. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data on demographics, MHM practices, and LTI symptoms. Statistical analyses, including chi-square tests and odds ratios, were performed using SPSS version 21.

RESULTS

- ▶ Descriptive analysis showed socio-demographic disparities; 30.2% of women aged 26-30 used cloth, while 26.3% used sanitary pads. Married women had higher sanitary pad use (91.8%) than cloth use (87.3%).
- ▶ Sanitary pad users exhibited lower odds of LTIs, including foul smell (OR=0.668, 95% CI=0.481-0.985, P=0.041) and painful micturition (OR=0.667, 95% CI=0.467-0.954, P=0.026). Women using >3 sanitary products had lower odds of LTIs (OR=0.365, 95% CI=0.249-0.535, P=0.001).
- ▶ Changing products in >8 hours was associated with higher LTI odds (OR=2.003, 95% CI=1.335-3.005, P=0.001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Causal Relationship Between Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and Lower Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs):
Investigate existing studies to establish a direct link between MHM practices, including the use of cloth vs. sanitary pads, and the prevalence of Lower RTIs in women.
Examine the impact of hygiene practices on reproductive health outcomes to better understand the association.
Patterns of MHM Among Married and Single Women:
Explore the influence of income, lifestyle choices, presence of children, and occupation on MHM practices among both married and single women.
Analyse how these factors interact with and shape menstrual hygiene behaviours in different contexts, such as workplaces or Family Health Centres.
Integration of Life Skill Based Education (LSBE):
Evaluate the feasibility and impact of integrating LSBE, with a focus on MHM, into mainstream curricula.
Examine the potential long-term benefits of incorporating life skills related to reproductive health.
Policy Recommendations for Reproductive Health:
Analyze existing policies related to menstrual hygiene and reproductive health at national and provincial levels.
Propose policy improvements, including education campaigns, training initiatives, and capacity-building programs, targeting individuals from a young age.
Addressing Period Poverty:
Facilitate a dialogue among community influencers, private sector representatives, and government stakeholders to address period poverty.
Propose sustainable solutions for improving access to affordable menstrual hygiene products, emphasizing collaboration and continuous support.
Advocate for the dissolution of the 12% tax on sanitary products through government collaboration.
Encourage engagement with donors and funding agencies to provide free-of-cost hygienic products for women, particularly those in need.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the need for accessible, safe, and affordable menstrual hygiene products. Positive correlations between MHM practices and LTIs highlight the importance of robust policies addressing reproductive health challenges through education and capacity-building. Future research should causal relationships between MHM, LTIs, and contributing factors.

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