A Study of Knowledge about Reproductive Health in High School Girls in Chennai

Dr Renuka Balasubramaniyan¹, Dr Saraswathi.K ²
Asst Professor ¹, Professor and HOD ²

Department Of OBG, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Chennai, India

Correspondence Author: Dr Renuka Balasubramaniyan, Department Of OBG, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Chennai, India

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Abstract
WHO defines adolescence as the age between 10-19 years. In India it is 10-18 years of age which constitute about 1/5 th of the population- 200 million. 20% of the world’s population constitute adolescence among which 85% of them live in developing countries.

Adolescent problems constitute a bulk of morbidity which is greatly unrecognised and uncared of- mainly because in countries like India it’s still a taboo to talk about reproductive health problems. A large variety of morbidity like- nutritional deficiency, menstrual disorders, RTI’s, HIV/AIDS are serious problems which complicate the existing problems like teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortions.

Teenage pregnancies- 10-15% of the total pregnancies, and illegal abortion rate is alarmingly increasing.

Keywords: Reproductive Health, School Girls

Introduction
Urban teenage pregnancy- 8.7%, rural teenage pregnancy-19%, in chennai city- 16% therefore it is very important for implementing new programs to increase reproductive health knowledge among the adolescence.

Within the framework of the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health , which states that complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, reproductive health is a very important factor.

One interpretation of this implies that men and women ought to be informed of and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of birth control.

Therefore every women has the right to have all the knowledge about this period from the time of her pubertal changes and the consequences of his or her actions, which unfortunately is not the case in India.

This study is to know the knowledge of puberty , menstruation among the students and to promote the need of sex education in our academics.

Objective
A) To study the knowledge about reproductive health among 8,9,10 girls in chennai selected schools.
B) To implement this knowledge for formulating effective sex education programs in schools and colleges.

Material and Method
This is a cross sectional study done in the month of March and April of 2017. All the high schools were listed and 3 were randomly selected. All the students who were present on the day of the study- 8,9,10 th standard girls are included in this study

The data was collected in the month of March and April of 2017 using a pre designed, pre structured and self
administered questionnaires. Totally 280 girls participated in this study.
After taking permission from the school authorities - the class teachers and the students were explained about the objective of this study, confidentiality of the answers and informed consent was taken.
All the responses were entered in microsoft excel and analysed.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (N=280)</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STANDARD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPE OF FAMILY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUCLEAR</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOINT</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd GENERATION</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTHER’S EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILLITERATE</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

79.2% of the students didn’t answer or answered about what is puberty.

| GENERAL QUESTIONS                                                                 |
|----------------------------------|--------|------------|
| KNOWLEDGE ABOUT                  | YES    | NO         |
| REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS              | 50     | 230 (82.3%) |
| AGE OF MARRIAGE IN GIRLS (18-23 YEARS) | 274 (97.8%) | 6 (2.2%) |
| NUMBER OF CHILDREN A COUPLE CAN HAVE ACCORDING TO FAMILY WELFARE PROGRAM (2) | 211 (75.3%) | 69 (24.6%) |
| NUMBER OF YEARS OF GAP BETWEEN TWO CHILDREN (3 YEARS) | 170 (60.7%) | 110 (39.3%) |

71.4% had the right knowledge about the physical changes in girls during the puberty. Among the 8, 9, 10th students 8th students had the least knowledge of it.
Nearly 55% of the students didn’t want to mention about the psychological changes during puberty.

65% of them thought the due to childhood developmental problems, no proper guidance about the pubertal changes, forced into inappropriate sexual activities being causes from them to not to be able to deal with the pubertal changes.

Nearly 86.4% of the students had no right knowledge about the menstruation before menarche.
**DOES MENSTRUAL CYCLE INTERFERE WITH YOUR ROUTINE ACTIVITY LIKE ATTENDING TO SCHOOL?**

- **YES**: 215 (76.7%)
- **NO**: 54 (19.2%)

**IF YES THE FOLLOWING WERE THE MOST COMMON ANSWERS**

- **SEVERE LOWER ABDOMEN PAIN**: 98
- **HEAVY FLOW**: 50
- **SEVERE BACK PAIN AND WHITE DISCHARGE PER VAGINA**: 67

**CAN AIDS BE PREVENTED?**

- **YES**: 132 (47.1%)
- **NO**: 94 (33.5%)
- **I DON'T KNOW**: 54 (19.8%)

**WHAT IS THE MATERIAL YOU USE DURING THE MENSTRUAL CYCLES**

- **CLOTH**: 165 (58.9%)
- **PAD**: 115 (41.07%)

**WHERE DO YOU GET ALL THE ABOVE INFORMATION FROM?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWSPAPER</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOVIES</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENTS</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHERS/FRIENDS/DOCTORS</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO ANSWER</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KNOWLEDGE ABOUT STD’S**

- Nearly 76% of students had severe lower abdominal pain, WDPV, heavy menstrual flow during the cycles.

- In this 21st century nearly 58.9% of students are using cloth during menstrual cycles.

- **47.1%** of students have the knowledge that AIDS can be prevented. In that many say it can be if they are given good sex education.

- The above information on STD’s are got by the students mainly by parents 33.5% their source of information also being TV, movies, newspapers, friends, doctors.

- **35%** of students didn’t know how AIDS spread. **19.6%** thought cough, touching and sharing food can spread AIDS.
72.5% of the students discuss their puberty and menstrual problems with their parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WITH WHOM DO YOU DISCUSS YOUR PROBLEMS DURING PUBERTY AND MENSTRUATION WITH?</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) PARENTS</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) SIBLINGS</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) FRIENDS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) TEACHERS/DOCTERS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) NOBODY</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51.7%- want sex education to be added in their academic course

Discussion

Around 60-80% of the students knew the answers for questions like marriageable age for girls, gap between the children, number of children a couple can have according to Indian government but only 17% answered about whether they knew what the reproductive organs were. Government of India has put forth lots of advertisements in TV, radio and newspapers about family welfare but failed to talk about basics like the reproductive organs.

Though 71% of girls has heard about puberty and menstruation only 20.5% of them have the right knowledge about it- according to another study in bangalore city 80% had heard about menstruation but 45% of them had the right knowledge.

When questioned about the psychological changes during puberty nearly 55% of the girls didn’t want to answer about it because of the stigma attached to it. They would have all thought that speaking openly about them could cause problems in their life.

And later when questioned about why they had problems in dealing with pubertal changes nearly 65% of them said that they had childhood developmental problems, no proper guidance from the family members about the changes and they being forced into inappropriate sexual activities very early in life due to which they lack confidence and develop extreme fear.

According to a study in bangalore city 57.9% of adolescents in their study had prior knowledge of menstruation, but in our study only 8.9% of the students had the knowledge.. which is significantly different.. may be because of the type of schools. We took only the government schools whereas in the Bangalore city study in included even convents where sex education already is the part of syllabus.

About 76.7% of girls say that menstruation interfere with their routine activity like attending school- almost 40% complain of WDPV, which is a sign of RTI.- this result is comparable with the other studies. They have no knowledge about the tablets available for the treatments of the menstrual problems (88%)

The sanitary pad usage in the bangalore city study only 44.1% whereas in this study it is 41.07% comparable.
We got answers like usage of ashes(2), mud (1) for menstruation.

72.5% of the girls discuss their menstrual problems with their mothers and 33.5% say that they get all the information on reproductive health from their mother.

The literacy rate among mothers is only 11.7%.

When questioned about STD’s nearly 35% of the students thought malaria, dengue were STD’s. Nearly 19.6% of students thought that AIDS spread by coughing, touching, sharing of food. This tells us the level of the knowledge in their society and teaches us the depth into which we need to enter for them to understand correctly about reproductive health.

Although the teachers in the school can make a lot of difference in these percentages- they are unable to break the brick of hesitation. Students are still asked to read the chapters on reproductive health by themselves in the house.

Nealy 51% of students want sex education to be added in their syllabus and 19% of students are not able to give an opinion on it. This is the state of our society.

One of the popular argument against sex education is – early sexual activity

In 1999- WHO did a study on sex education in 5 countries- found that there was no early sexual activity among adolescents.

It was also proven that many youngsters postponed their first sexual intercourse and the ones already involved in sexual activity- decrease in sexual partners and had safe sex.

Conclusions

The findings in this study in force the need to implement effective reproductive health programs in which the parents should also be a part of, to bring the girls out to understand the natural phenomenon of menstruation and pubertal changes. More advertisements about reproductive organs, STD’s should be proposed by the Indian government.

Movie makers and TV show makers being responsible citizens should stop sexualizing the women which can prevent many problems like rape, unsafe abortions in our society.

Sex education- is a very effective tool, can definitely bring about lots of changes when implemented strongly and by the right person. the right persons being teachers and doctors.

References


