

A systematic review on reproductive health problems and health seeking behaviour among adolescent girls

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review on reproductive health problems and health seeking behaviour among adolescent girls in India. Literature search was conducted by pubmed, scholar and google search. A total of 407 articles were searched through data bases at the first stage, and 11 articles met the eligibility criteria were selected and analyzed. The findings of the study showed that reproductive health problems such as menstrual problems and reproductive tract infections are common among adolescent girls and the related health seeking behaviour was not satisfactory.

Keywords: Reproductive health seeking behavior, reproductive health problems, treatment seeking for reproductive health problems, adolescence and adolescent girls.

Adolescence is the period between 10 and 19 years of age. It is a continuum of physical, cognitive, behavioural and psychosocial change that is characterized by increasing levels of individual autonomy, a growing sense of identity and self esteem and progressive independence from adults¹.

Adolescents constitute about 20% of the total world population. In India, adolescent population is around 23.6 million and which constitute 19.6% of India's population². Adolescent reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system of people between the ages of 10 and 19. Reproductive health is an important area of concern in adolescence especially in girls and is a sensitive issue in Indian society³. Reproductive health problems including menstrual concerns and RTIs (reproductive tract infections) are very common among girls in this age group⁴.

Adolescents are in rapid growing stage with poor awareness about their physical, psychological changes and the ill health affecting them. Although an outsized number of adolescents suffer from reproductive health problems,

majority do not seek healthcare⁵. The present systematic review attempts to find the reproductive health problems and health seeking behaviour among adolescent girls in India.

Materials and methods

A systematic search was done using pubmed, scholar and google search. Only articles in English language were searched. The search was done on articles published from 2010 January to 2020 November. The studies reporting the health seeking behavior of adolescent girls for menstrual problems and symptoms of reproductive tract infections were included. The key words used were reproductive health seeking behavior, health seeking for reproductive health problems, treatment seeking for reproductive health problems and adolescence, adolescent girls.

Out of total search of articles on health seeking behavior of adolescent girls for reproductive health problems, only descriptive cross sectional studies were included. The studies with mixed age populations and among married adolescents were not included in the review. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were prepared and presented in table1. The principal investigator was involved in retrieving, analyzing and

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evaluation of articles and it was sorted out then.

| Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria | |
|--|---|
| Inclusion criteria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles only in English language Articles which are fully available / retrievable Studies conducted in India Descriptive cross sectional studies. |
| Exclusion criteria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies on married adolescent girls Articles with mixed age group Articles with only abstracts Web news. |

Data Extraction: Data extraction was done by the principal investigator. In search of health seeking behavior of adolescent girls for reproductive health problems, the investigator included the studies which focused on menstrual problems and signs and symptoms of reproductive tract infections and related health care utilization. All the articles were analyzed and the data were extracted by using eligibility (inclusion and exclusion criteria) criteria. A total of 407 articles were searched through data bases at the first stage, and 11 articles that met the eligibility criteria were selected after finally reviewing the full text of the articles. The information about the studies included in the systematic review is given as a PRISMA flow chart in figure 1.

Results

In order to find out the health seeking behaviour for reproductive health problems among adolescent girls, the present review has included 11 papers which reported prevalence of either menstrual problems or signs and symptoms of RTIs or both. The results of search strategies are presented in a table which states the characteristics identified in the study and analysis of various studies employed in the systematic review. Table 2 describes the analysis of various studies employed in the present systematic review. Majority of the studies have used appropriate technique of sample size calculation with exception in studies (study-1,8,9,10). The sample size of included studies were ranged from 100-664 with an average of 100 or more in every studies.

Among the 11 studies included, 5 studies (study - 1,3,6,9,10,11) reported menstrual problems and health seeking behavior, 4 studies(study - 5,7,8) reported health seeking behavior for both menstrual problems and signs and symptoms of RTI and 2 studies (study - 2,4) were about RTI

symptoms and health seeking behavior. The most commonly reported problem was dysmenorrhea (study - 11,10, 8, 7, 6, 5,1) ranged from (21.8%) to (72%). Prevalence of irregular cycles ranged from (11.16 %) to (46.3%) reported in 6 studies (study - 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10). Abnormal whitish vaginal discharge was the most common RTI specific symptom reported in studies (study - 2,4,5,7,8) ranged from (5.35%) to (41.53%).

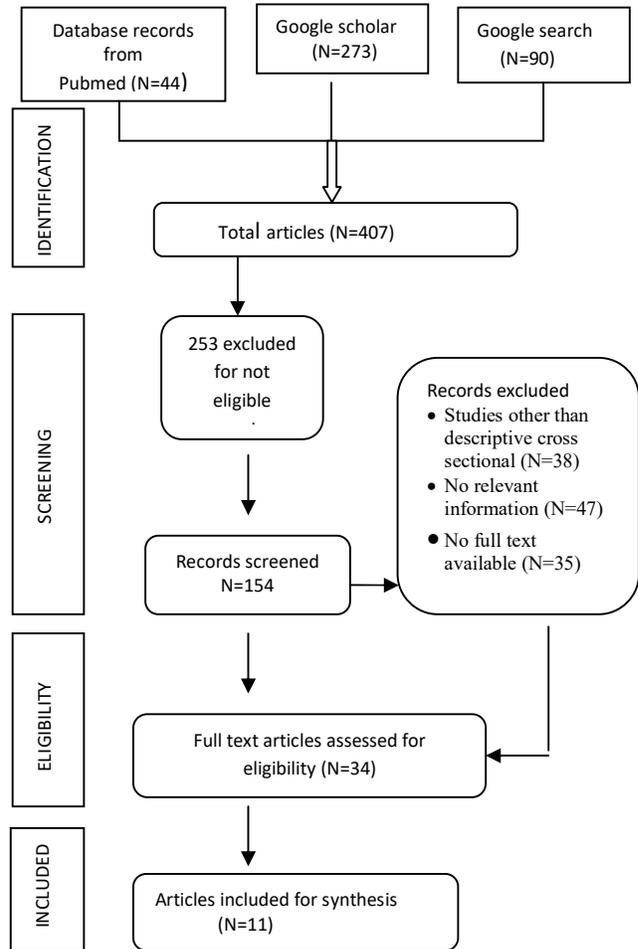


Figure 1: Prisma flow chart of study methodology

Among the reviewed studies, health seeking behavior was reported from (11.5%) to (55.5%) of sample except in one study (study - 4) which was (>55%). In one study (study - 5) reported positive, negative and neutral health seeking behaviour by considering the menstrual hygiene practices and health care utilization and among them only (11.8%) had positive health seeking behaviour. Self treatment was

Table 2: Summary of studies included in the review depicting prevalence of reproductive health problems and health seeking behavior among adolescent girls in India.

| Study number and authors | Year | Sample size | Setting | Study outcome Prevalence (%) | Health seeking behavior (%) |
|---|------|-------------|-------------|--|---|
| 1. Radhiga A, Aswathy Panicker, Anandhil S ⁶ | 2016 | 100 | Tamil Nadu | Dysmenorrhea – 40 Oligomenorrhea – 20 Nauseated syndrome during menstruation – 77 Menorrhagia – 10 Anxiety during menstrual period - 33 | Self treatment - 28 |
| 2. Mansi G chauhan, Harshad patel, Harsha Solanki ⁷ | 2016 | 532 | Bhavnagar | One or more symptoms of RTI – 36.65 Vaginal discharge – 41.5 Genital itching -32.3 Burning micturation – 25.1 Genital ulcer – 0.5 Lower abdominal pain – 0.5 | Sought treatment – 12.83 |
| 3. Mouna HS, Hamsa L, Ranganath T S, Viswanath N. ⁸ | 2019 | 150 | Bengaluru | Dysmenorrhea – 72 Generalized weakness - 63.3 Irregular menses – 31.3 Excessive bleeding 27.3 Nausea and vertigo – 14.4 | Sought treatment – 30 Approached traditional healers – 22 Self medication – 7.3 |
| 4. Ipsa mohapatra, Krishna Mishra, Amritha Kumari & Alakta S Das. ⁹ | 2017 | 120 | Odisha | Itching in the genital area – 13.3 Thick white vaginal discharge – 10 Backache – 5 Lower abdominal pain not related menstruation – 3.3 Ulcers in the vulva -1.66 | Sought treatment – 55.5 |
| 5. Swetha pavithran, Yashoda S, Sangeetha Priyadharshini, Baby S Nayak. ¹⁰ | 2015 | 400 | Uduppi | Dysmenorrhea – 21.8 Irregular menstrual cycle – 46.3 Excessive vaginal discharge – 17.2 Lower back pain – 12.8 Bleeding for > 8 days – 2.3 Bleeding < 3 days – 16.4 Itching in the genital region – 7.7 Pain while urination – 6.9 Expulsion of clot during menstruation - 4 | Positive health seeking behavior – 11.5 |
| 6. Veena G. Rahatgaonkar, Anuradha H. Wakankar, Gauri A. Oka, Sonal V. Kamble ¹¹ | 2018 | 592 | Pune | Dysmenorrhea – 66.6 Heavy bleeding – 46.3 Irregular cycle – 21.9 Bleeding > 6 days – 8.9 Back ache – 39.5 | Sought treatment - 26.7 |
| 7. Meenal V Kulkarni, PM Durge. ¹² | 2011 | 224 | Nagpur | One or more reproductive morbidity – 65.18 Dysmenorrhea – 53.6 Back ache during menstruation -41.52 Menorrhagia – 16.07 Irregular cycle – 11.6 Excessive white discharge – 5.35 | Sought treatment – 37.67 |
| 8. Chandana Deka, A C Baishya, Jutika Ojah. ¹³ | 2015 | 309 | Assam | Dysmenorrhea – 42.1 Excessive white discharge per vagina – 23.1 Menorrhagia – 18.5 Oligomenorrhea – 16.3 | Sought treatment – 33.5 |
| 9. Dinesh Kumar, Naveen K. Goel, Munesh K. Sharma, Gurleen Kaur. ¹⁴ | 2016 | 655 | Chandigarh | At least one problem with menstruation – 64.6 Back ache – 42.6 Leg cramps – 37.8 PMS symptoms – 18.5 Irregular cycle – 14 Excessive menstrual flow – 10.4 | Sought treatment – 25.3 |
| 10. Smitha MC, Narayana Murthy, Srinivas B M, Renuka M. ¹⁵ | 2016 | 664 | Mysore | One or other symptoms of menstrual problems – 72 Dysmenorrhea – 37.5 Irregular menstruation – 32.6 Premenstrual syndrome – 28.9 Polymenorrhea – 6.3 Oligomenorrhea – 8 Menorrhagia – 2.4 | Sought treatment – 39.8 |
| 11. Mohite R V, Mohite V R, Kumbhar SM, Ganganahalli P ¹⁶ | 2013 | 237 | Maharashtra | Oligomenorrhea – 16.08 Menorrhagia ⁶ - 17.82 Scanty bleeding – 59.56 Dysmenorrhea – 49.13 Metrorrhagia – 27.39 Premenstrual symptoms – 46.56 | Sought treatment – 25.73 |

reported in two studies (study - 1 and 3) ranged between (7.3%) to (28%).

Discussion

The review identified literature which investigated the health seeking behaviour of adolescent girls for menstrual problems and reproductive tract infections. The findings of the review showed that the most prevalent reproductive health problem was dysmenorrhea which ranged between (28%) to (72%). Similar finding was reported (33%) in a study conducted among 510 school going adolescent girls in Thiruvananthapuram¹⁷. The findings of the study was also supported by the findings in another study conducted among (N=400) adolescent girls between 10-19 years of age to assess the menstrual health, hygiene practices and health seeking behaviour. The study reported that out of 400 girls, 309 attained menarche and among them (91.3%) were used old clothes during their menstrual period, (42%) had dysmenorrhea and only (33.48%) preferred seeking treatment for dysmenorrhea¹³.

Among the reviewed studies, health seeking behavior was ranged from (11.5%) to (55.5%). Similar findings were observed in a study conducted among mixed age population including adolescents and young women up to 24 years of age in Chennai. The study was to assess the reproductive and menstrual morbidities and related health seeking behaviour. Reported menstrual morbidity was among (95%) of sample and only (49%) sought treatment¹⁸.

Among the reviewed articles, the most common symptom of reproductive tract infection was excessive whitish vaginal discharge, which was supported by the findings of another study conducted among 422 adolescent girls of Kashmir valley reported that the most prevalent symptom of RTIs (87.11%) among study subjects were excess whitish vaginal discharge¹⁹.

Conclusion

Menstrual problems and reproductive tract infections are the most prevalent reproductive health problems among adolescent girls. In India, reproductive health issues are considered a taboo subject and this type of societal attitude badly influence the health seeking behaviour for reproductive health problems. This is true among the vulnerable group like adolescent girls. Hence it is essential to raise awareness and access to appropriate services for treating reproductive health problems to prevent future co morbidities associated with reproductive health.

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