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Iranian Women Sexual Health Assessment in the West of Iran: Findings of Iranian Women Health Project (SABA)

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Abstract: Sexual health plays an important role in health promotion; the importance of the issue, the present study aims to investigate reproductive health among middle age women in Ravansar city, the west of Iran. In this cross-sectional study, conducted in Kermanshah County, the west of Iran, a total of 500 profiles of documenting Iranian women health, were randomly selected to participate in the study. Data were analyzed by SPSS Version 21. The mean age of respondents was 44.94 years (95% CI: 44.21, 45.67), ranged from 30-60 year. The mean age of first pregnancy among respondents was 20.74 years (SD: 5.01). The history of stillbirth was reported among 1.2% of respondents. Furthermore, 1.8% of participants had infertility. In addition, history of sexual dysfunction was reported among 2.2% of respondents. Also, perineal wound, abnormal vaginal discharge, cervical lesions and abnormalities of the uterus examinations were respectively observed among 1.6, 11.4, 3.4 and 6.4% of participants. Based on our findings, it seems essential to train women on reproductive health and taking regular Pap smear tests. In addition, perineal wound, abnormal vaginal discharge, cervical lesions and abnormalities of the uterus examinations were, respectively observed among 1.6, 11.4, 3.4 and 6.4% of participants.

Key words: Sexual health, women, lesions, abnormal vaginal discharge, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Sexual health plays an important role in health promotion; sexual health has been defined as a part of mental health and sexual disorders could affect physical and mental health. On the other hand, due to the important role of sexual health in family and community health, few studies were devoted to evaluate sexual issues and the reason could be the shame or bad feelings resulted from talking about sex (Julien *et al*., 2010). Sexually transmitted diseases are one of the two major health problems in many countries. There were only two sexually transmitted diseases known in 1960 but the number has increased to 25 in recent years (McIlhaney, 2000). Over 15 million Americans are affected by sexually transmitted diseases each year. Complications from these diseases among women include infertility, birth of children with mental and physical retardation, chronic pelvic pain, cervical cancer and mortality (Rorie *et al*., 1996). One of the effective factors to reproductive health is the existence of microorganisms living in female reproductive system especially cervical canal, which make implantation conditions unfavorable through infecting uterus and may even cause sterility (Salim *et al*., 2002). Cervicovaginal infections are very common in clinical medicine, which affect 5-10 million people around the world each year; almost 95% of cases of vaginitis are caused by one of the three organisms Candida Albicans, Gardenella vaginalis and Trichomonas vaginalis and the symptoms include vaginal discharge, itching, abnormal odor and vaginal discomfort. Although such infections do not threaten human life, they cause side effects and waste their time and money on treatments; besides it is necessary to screen the entire human population and healthy population (Quan, 1990). In this regard, Cervical Cytology is suggested as the most effective and the least expensive solution to screen cervix cancer. It is accomplished through practicing Pap smear test to help early detection

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of disease at its primary steps which reduces th risk of aggressive disease and mortality up to 90% (Jalilian and Emdadi, 2011). The most common age at diagnosis of invasive is 35-65 and the beat age for non-invasive diagnosis is usually 10-15 years earlier. In America, it is suggested to practice Pap smear test at the age of 21 while it is 31 in Europe at intervals of 3-5 years (Sasieni and Castanon, 2006). Considering the facts mentioned, it seems essential to plan and develop reproductive health interventions. However, a prerequisite for any kind of planning is analysis of the conditions and accordingly, experts suggest epidemiologic reviews as the primary step to design interventions (Ataee *et al*., 2014; Jalilian *et al*., 2015; Alavijeh *et al*., 2015). Recognizing the conditions could help improve receiving sexual health services through using relative determinants (Eldredge *et al*., 2016; Kok, 2014; Meyer *et al*., 2000). Considering the importance of the issue, the present study aims to investigate reproductive health among middle age women in Ravansar city, in the west of Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a descriptive study using data taken from profiles submitted to SABA program in Ravansar, Iran, during spring 2016. Iranian Women Health program (SABA) aims to improve health among middle age women (30-60). It also aims to increasing the knowledge and skills of health service providers to middle-aged women (30-60 years old), increasing health service coverage to middle-aged women (30-60 years old) and increase the knowledge of the target group of middle-aged women (30-60 years old) on health problems and how to deal with them. Proper implementation of this program could be essential to women to plan a healthy life. The required data were gathered from submitted profiles in SABA program in Ravansar, Iran. Total 500 profiles were selected randomly and the needed data on reproductive health were extracted. Form 1 of Iranian Women Health identity was used to gather the data. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences (KUMS.REC.1394.449).

Part 1: Includes background and demographic information. It includes 5 items and checks for participant's age, (year), education (elementary school, guidance school, high school, college degrees), marital status (single, married, widow, divorced), occupation, having health care insurance (yes, no).

Part 2: This section included five question; included, perineal wound (yes, no), abnormal vaginal discharge (yes, no), cervical lesions (yes, no), abnormalities uterus examinations (yes, no) and undergoing pap smear test (yes, no). The information gathered were analyzed using SPSS Software Version 21.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean age of respondents was 44.94 years (95% CI: 44.21, 45.67), ranged from 30-60 years. More details of demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

The mean age of first pregnancy among respondents was 20.74 years (SD: 5.01). The history of stillbirth was reported among 1.2% of respondents. Furthermore, 1.8% of participants had infertility. In addition, history of sexual dysfunction was reported among 2.2% of respondents. Also, perineal wound, abnormal vaginal discharge, cervical lesions and abnormalities of the uterus examinations were respectively observed among 1.6, 11.4, 3.4 and 6.4% of participants (Table 2). Almost, 26.2% of the participants undergoing Pap smear test.

Table 1: Distribution of the demographic characteristics among the participants

Variables	Number	Percent
Age group (year)		
30-39	155	31
40-49	176	35.3
50-60	168	33.6
Missing	1	0.2
Education level		
Illiterate	213	42.6
Elementary school	184	36.8
Secondary school	56	11.2
High school	31	6.2
Academic	15	3
Missing	1	0.2
Occupation		
Housewife	499	98.8
Working	1	0.2
Insurance		
Yes	500	100
No	0	0

Table 2: Distribution of the gynecological exams among the participants

Variables	Number	Percent
Perineal wound		
Yes	8	1.6
No	481	96.2
Missing	11	2.2
Abnormal vaginal discharge		
Yes	57	11.4
No	431	86.2
Missing	12	2.4
Cervical lesions		
Yes	17	3.4
No	472	94.4
Missing	11	2.2
Abnormalities uterus examinations		
Yes	32	6.4
No	457	91.4
Missing	11	2.2

Results from the present study showed that perineal wound, abnormal vaginal discharge, cervical lesions and abnormalities of the uterus examinations were respectively observed among 1.6, 11.4, 3.4 and 6.4% of women under study. Studies on the field suggested more attention to sexual health issues and problems among women. On the other hand, studies reported women low knowledge about reproductive health and sexual relationships (Benner *et al*., 2010; Egmond *et al*., 2004). Hazarik also focused on the need to improve reproductive health services in Muslim societies (Hazarika, 2010). Furthermore, Shirpak *et al*. (2008) suggested designing sexual health programs to address the needs of women. Provide, maintain and promote women's health, as one of the vulnerable groups of society, is considered important among health care services. Health care providers, who offer health care services to women, are required to determine risk factors to reproductive health and train women about the issues.

Based on our findings, 26.2% of the participants undergoing Pap smear test. In this regards, Jalilian and Emdadi (2011) carried out a research on women aged 20-70 years old who referring to health centers in Hamadan County and reported 28.3% of the participants had stated regular Pap smear test. Jalalvandi stated that 17.5% of women who referring to health centers in Arack County had taken Pap smear test (Jalalvandi and Khodadostan, 2005). Yu and Rymer (1998) in London and Tung *et al*. (2008) among Vietnamese-American women reported that 71.5% and 46.3% of participants had undergone regular Pap smear tests, respectively.

Comparing the results from the present study and several other studies suggested that in comparison to other countries, Iranian women rarely practice the Pap smear test. These results strongly warn the health care authorities in Iran to distinguish and omit the obstacles to take a Pap smear test by Iranian women. Recognizing the barriers could help researchers and health care planners develop proper strategies to take regular Pap smear tests.

CONCLUSION

Health care providers are required to recognize various effective factors on preventive behaviors and improving health to plan and execute helpful programs. Considering the results from the present study, it seems essential to train women on reproductive health and taking regular Pap smear tests.

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