

Original Article

Reproductive Health Problems in Adolescent Female Garment Workers of Dhaka City

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Abstract:

This cross sectional study was carried out at a selected garment industry in Dhaka city during the period from July 2010 to December, 2010. The study was conducted to find out the pattern of reproductive health problems among the adolescent female garment workers. A total of 100 adolescent female workers were included in the study purposively. Data was collected by using a semi-structured questionnaire. Majority respondents were in between 16 -18 years of age group and 80% of them were illiterate and up to primary level with equal proportion. Most of the female adolescents were unmarried and Muslim by religion. Majority of the adolescents (68%) suffered from menstruation problems like dysmenorrhoea (42%), menorrhoea (11%), irregular bleeding (8%) and oligomenorrhoea (7%). More than one third (39%) of the workers had genital tract problems and majority (61%) had no problems. Majority of them (65%) were practicing hygienic measures during menstruation. The study findings recommended for wide scale survey to identify common reproductive health problems among the female adolescent garment workers. It also suggests for formulation and implementation of necessary measures to improve reproductive health status of adolescent female workers in Dhaka city as well as in Bangladesh.

Key words: Reproductive health, adolescent garment workers.

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Introduction:

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines in 1996, adolescence as the period of life between ages 10 and 19 years. International conference on population and development (ICPD) defines Reproductive Health as "Complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease and infirmity, in all matters related to reproductive systems, functions and disease".¹

The Adolescent is a distinct group in the society, clearly different from the children and the adults. This stage almost always develops without proper attention, especially in the developing countries. ICPD held in Cairo in 1994, recognized the fact that the adolescent is a particular vulnerable group and need special health care as care of the reproductive organs lays the foundation for the world's demographic future. United Nations estimated in 1995 that among 914 million adolescents in the developing world, about one-fifth of the total population of which 19% live in Asia. Bangladesh has nearly 27 million adolescents among which 13.7 million are girls.²

Adolescent girls are vulnerable to reproductive health problems like spasmodic dysmenorrhoea, heavy menstrual bleeding, scanty menstruation, amenorrhoea, irregular menstruation, leucorrhoea, vaginal candidiasis, pruritus vulvae, etc. as they have very little access to information and health care. Consequently they face health risk in their future lives.³

This study was an attempt to assess reproductive health problems among the adolescent females in a selected garment industry of Dhaka city which may help to plan and implement more effective reproductive health services that could have a positive impact on the reproductive health status of adolescent females of low socioeconomic status group of our country.

Materials and Methods:

A cross sectional study was conducted from July 2010 to December, 2010 in the department of Community Medicine, Sir Salimullah Medical College, Dhaka. This study was conducted among the adolescent female workers of age 13 -18 years of the Naz Apperal Exports Ltd., Mirpur, Dhaka. The industry was selected purposively and one hundred (100) study subjects were selected by purposive sampling method from garment attendant registers. A semi structured questionnaire was used to get the relevant data and the data were analyzed using statistical formulae.

Results:

This cross-sectional study was carried out among 100 adolescent female workers working at a selected garment industry in Dhaka city with a view to find out the socio-demographic characteristics of adolescent female workers, to identify the pattern of reproductive health problems prevailing among the adolescent female workers aged 13-18 years.

Table 1: Demographic variables (n = 100)

Variables	Group	Number	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	13 - 15	28	28
	16 - 18	72	72
Educational status	Illiterate	40	40
	Up to Primary	40	40
	Up to SSC	15	15
	Up to HSC	05	05
Religion	Muslim	95	95
	Hindu	5	5
Marital status	Unmarried	90	90
	Married	10	10
Occupation of the mothers of the respondents	House wife	85	85
	Service holder	10	10
	Business	03	03
	Others	02	02
	Monthly family income	Up to 7000	65
	> 7000	35	35
Residing place	Home	81	81
	Mess	19	19
Type of their residing place	Pacca	70	70
	Semi-pacca	28	28
	Kacha	02	02

A total number of 100 respondents were interviewed. Table 1 shows the studied demographic variables. Majority of the respondents were between 16-18 years of age group (72%) with age range of 13 - 18 years. Regarding their education level 40% of each was in illiterate and up to primary level, 15% were up to SSC level and 5% were up to HSC level. Majority of the respondents were Muslim (95%). Regarding marital status 90% were unmarried. Mothers of 85 respondents (85%) were house wife, 10 (10%) were service holder, 03 (3%) were doing business and mothers of the rest were occupied in other occupation. Family income level of 65% respondents was within 7000 Tk., 35% respondents were > 7000 Tk. Eighty one percent of the respondents reside in their homes and rest in mess. Most of the respondents (70%) live in pacca place, 28% live in semi- pacca and 2% live in kacha place.

Table 2: Practices of protective measures adopted by the respondents during menstruation (n = 100)

Practices	Number	Percentage (%)	
Protective measure	Sanitary napkins	45	45
	Old cloth	35	35
	Cotton	20	20
Process of cleaning	Soap with water	26	26
	Soap, savlon and water	64	64
	others	10	10
	Time of preservation of sanitary napkin / cloth / others		
	One month	20	20
	Two months	16	16
	Three months	50	50
	More than three months	14	14

Table 2 shows different practices regarding protective measures adopted during menstruation by the girls. Forty five percent of them used sanitary napkin, 35% used old cloth and 20% used cotton. During reuse of sanitary napkin / cloth / others 64% girls cleaned with soap, savlon and water, 26% cleaned by soap with water and rest of them cleaned using others methods. Majority of the respondents (50%) used the same sanitary napkin /cloth up to 3 months, 20% used up to 1 month, 16% for 2 months and 14 % used more than 3 months.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' menstrual problems and problems in genital area (n = 100)

Problems	Number	Percentage (%)	
Menstrual problems	Scanty bleeding	07	7
	Excessive bleeding	11	11
	Painful bleeding	42	42
	Irregular Bleeding	08	8
	No problems	32	32
	Problems in genital area		
	Whitish discharge	35	35
	Vulval itching	04	4
	No problem	61	61

Table 3 shows 42% respondents had painful bleeding, 11% had excessive bleeding, 8% mentioned about irregular bleeding, 7% suffered from scanty bleeding and 32% had no menstrual problems. On the other hand regarding problems in genital area majority (61%) had no problems where as 35 % and only 4 % suffered from whitish discharge and vulval itching respectively.

Discussion:

This cross-sectional study was carried out among 100 adolescent females aged 13 to 18 years in one selected garment industry in Dhaka city to find out the pattern of reproductive health problems.

The highest and lowest variation of age was 18 and 13 years respectively. Most of the adolescent female workers (72%) had 16-18 years of age, and less than one third (28%) had 13-15 years of age. Similar findings were found in a study done by Afrin et al. which was on adolescent school girls.⁴

Female workers were the followers of two definite religion and this study results revealed that 95(95%) were Muslims & 5(5%) were Hindus. These findings are similar to the national data where Muslims are 90% & rests are in other religion.⁵

Information on occupation of mothers of adolescent females revealed that mothers of 85 respondents (85%) were house wife, 10 (10 %) were service holder and rest of the mothers were doing business. These findings are consistent with the study of Hasseen F , where housewives were 90.6% & rest 9.4% were service holders. It reflects that the respondents whose mothers were housewife had more scope to remain in close contact with their mother for most of the time and had more scope to share their problems and views.⁶

Regarding economic status of the respondents, family income level of 65% of them was up to 7000 Tk. and rest was above 7000 Tk. The Minimum and Maximum variation of their family income was Tk.5000 and Tk. 10000 respectively with mean of Tk. 6867.00. This finding is not similar of the study done by Majumder & Begum as because the salary structure was different in different factories at that time.⁷

Regarding protective measures taken during menstruation, 65 (65%) girls used sanitary and cotton pad that was hygienic practice and 35 (35%) used old cloths which was an unhygienic practice. But this result does not correlate with the study conducted by ICDDR,B which showed that 60.33% adolescent girls used old cloths & only 8% used sanitary/cotton pads during menstruation. These variations may be due to conducting study in both urban and rural areas whereas this study was conducted only in urban area. Though subjects are workers of garment, now a days sanitary pads are available and relatively not so costly. More over urban adolescents are more conscious about sanitary measures during menstruation.⁸

Regarding menstrual problems, during menstruation, total 68 (68%) had reproductive health problems. Among them 42 (42%) had painful bleeding, 11 (11%) had excessive bleeding, 8 (8 %) mentioned about irregular bleeding and 7% suffered from scanty bleeding. The rest 32 (32%) respondents mentioned about having no menstrual problems. This observation is in line with BIRPERHT study where it was showed that over 65 (65%) adolescent girls reported having similar menstrual problems.⁹

In this study it was found that majority 61 (61%) had no problems in genital area while 35 (35%) and 4 (4%) suffered from whitish discharge and itching respectively. A study conducted by BRAC showed that most of the adolescent girls complained of white discharge accompanied by severe abdominal pain which may be due to improper drying of reused sanitary napkin / cloth that become a vector for fungal infection and ultimately leads to vaginal discharge.¹⁰

Conclusion:

The study was conducted to assess the pattern of reproductive health problems among the adolescent female workers. Majority of them belonged to low economic status. Among the female workers majority suffered from menstrual problems. The Common reasons behind this may be the shyness to disclose their problems, lack of proper knowledge and awareness regarding reproductive health problems, inadequate health care facilities, ignorance and socio-economic status etc. Among the adolescent female workers, near about half suffered from other problems in genital tract. The main reason behind it was the unhygienic protective measures. Further comprehensive study in this field may play a crucial role for the improvement of reproductive health of adolescent female garment workers in the country.

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