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Self-Care Strategies Used by Taiwanese Adolescents for the Management of Dysmenorrhea

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Background: Many adolescent girls experience dysmenorrhea and seek self-care strategies to manage their menstrual discomfort. The purpose of the study was to gain knowledge about self-care strategies used by Taiwanese adolescents for the management of dysmenorrhea.

Method: This study was conducted at three secondary high schools and one junior college in Taiwan with approval from Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee. One-hundred and thirty-six adolescent girls were used for analyses (mean = 17.43, SD = \pm 0.74 years; range, 15-18 years). All participants were Taiwanese adolescent students with an average pain score of 40 or more. The outcome measures included the demographic questionnaire, the Chinese language version of the Menstrual Distress Questionnaire short form (CMDQ-S), and the Self-Care Scale for Dysmenorrhic Adolescents (ADSCS). Questionnaire packages were distributed to potential participants to be completed at home. We used descriptive statistics to describe demographic and menstrual distress symptoms as well as self-care strategies. Exploratory analyses of possible associations between self-care strategies and dysmenorrhea severity using chi-square and independent-sample Student t-tests were performed.

Results: The mean score of period pain was 66.18 (SD = 16.14). Cramps, fatigue, mood swings, backache, and irritability were the most common symptoms of menstrual distress. Participants who sought medical help for their menstrual pain, 18% consulted a western medical doctor, 15% consulted a Chinese medical doctor, and 13% consulted both. Mother was the most important person that the Taiwanese adolescent girls turned to for answers regarding methods for dealing with dysmenorrhoea (68%). The top five priority self-care strategies used were “avoid doing intensive exercise”, “know clearly which of the uncomfortable areas would occur”, “take herbal remedies”, “tell my family about my experience of period cramp pain”, and “frown and tell others that I am not feeling well”. The methods perceived as the most effective methods in relieving period pain by 72% of the participants were heat application, pain medication, rest, drinking special drinks, and positioning. There were 28% of the participants did not report any methods which they perceived as effective for their period pain.

Conclusions: Self-care strategies used by Taiwanese adolescents were unsatisfactory as indicated by monthly recurrent dysmenorrhea. Cultural factors play a role in self-care of dysmenorrhea among Taiwanese adolescents. Our participants widely used traditional Chinese herbal remedies to manage dysmenorrhea, many with unknown efficacy. The findings of this study highlight the need to develop culturally appropriate and effective health education materials on dysmenorrhea management for Taiwanese adolescents.