

Prevalence and severity of dysmenorrhoea and associated menstrual characteristics among A/L students in girls' schools of the Jaffna Education Division

Aathithya K¹, Silva MSA¹, Kumar R², Bavani G³, Coonghe PAD²

¹Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

²Department of Community and Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

³Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

Introduction: Dysmenorrhoea refers to crampy pelvic pain beginning shortly before or at the onset of menstruation, and lasting 1-3 days. It can occur before the onset or throughout menstruation. There is wide variation in the prevalence of dysmenorrhoea across the world with reports ranging between 28% and 71.7%. In the Western Province of Sri Lanka, prevalence has been estimated to be 84% among A/L students. Little is known about the prevalence and severity of dysmenorrhoea among adolescents in northern Sri Lanka. Objective: To determine the prevalence and assess the severity of dysmenorrhoea and associated menstrual characteristics among A/L school girls in Jaffna Education Division.

Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 230 A/L students between 18-19 years of age attending girls' schools in Jaffna. Details of menstrual characteristics were collected by a self-administered questionnaire. Students who reported pain during menstruation with abdominal/lower back pain lasting at least two days during a menstrual period for at least six months were considered positive for dysmenorrhoea. Menstrual severity was assessed using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS) and graded by a Multidimensional Scoring System (MSS). The influence of menstrual characteristics on the presence of dysmenorrhoea was assessed using the Chi Square test.

Results: Although 81.7% (n=187) of students reported pain during menstruation on direct questioning, and >90% indicated they experienced menstrual pain on VAS, the prevalence of dysmenorrhoea based on the study criteria was 18.3% (n=42). Among the latter, 50% (n=21) had mild dysmenorrhoea, while 33.3% (n=14) and 16.7% (n=7) had moderate and severe dysmenorrhoea. Presence of clots (p≤0.003), using >3 pads/day (p≤0.001), and positive family history of pain during menstruation (p≤0.006) were significantly associated with the presence of dysmenorrhoea.

Conclusion: As has been found in the Western Province, pain during menstruation is common among A/L students in Jaffna. However, the prevalence of clinically significant dysmenorrhoea is much lower, suggesting that pain during menstruation may not impact the day-to-day functioning of a majority of A/L students. Larger-scale population-based studies are needed to identify risk factors associated with dysmenorrhoea in Sri Lanka to guide early detection and management.

Key words: dysmenorrhoea, prevalence, severity, adolescents, Jaffna