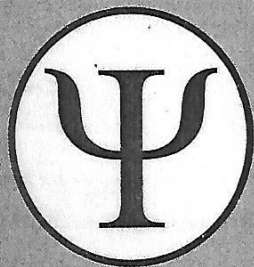


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Characteristics of Menstrual Syndrome among Female Undergraduates of a Nigerian University

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Abstract

This study was carried out among female undergraduates of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted and a simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting 284 female students. The t-test statistics was used in testing the hypotheses raised in the study at 0.05 alpha level. The results showed that there were no significant differences in the respondents' characteristics of menstrual syndrome on the basis of their position in the family, age and mothers' educational level. Based on the findings, it was recommended that school counsellors should provide psychological support for undergraduate females experiencing menstrual syndrome and enlighten them on strategies of coping with menstrual challenges.

Keywords: Menstrual Syndrome, Undergraduates and Nigerian Universities

Introduction

Menstrual syndromes are the physical and emotional symptoms experienced by women during the menstrual cycle. Most women of child bearing age reported to have experienced physical symptoms related to normal ovulatory function such as irritability,

tension, mood swings and insomnia. Johnson (2008) reported that these symptoms are present for at least one week between the onset of menses and ovulation.

The symptoms of menstruation may range from irritability, tiredness, mood swings and dysmenorrhea to psychological problems. Dysmenorrhea is a severe uterine pain caused by the onset of menstruation. Symptoms of dysmenorrhea may become debilitating in some women and it is unknown why it occurs in some women and not in others. Severe symptoms of dysmenorrhea may also include pain spreading to the hips, lower back and thighs, nausea and frequent diarrhoea or constipation. Santosh and Prabha (2007) noted that menstruation is one of the most important things a woman must experience but this is always accompanied by various premenstrual, inter-menstrual and menstrual tensions. Menstrual tension syndrome includes a large group of recurrent physical, psychological and behavioural symptoms. These symptoms appear regularly and predictably during the onset of menstruation. Shipra (2010) while studying on menstrual syndrome problems discovered that 96% of the 220 women sampled for menstrual syndrome problem indicated that their menstrual related mood disturbance was their most incapacitating and upsetting problem during the menstrual flow. He also reported that certain incidents such as child abuse, accidents, crimes and suicide attempts have been reported to occur with high frequency during the premenstrual period.

Due to ignorance, adolescent females are often confused about the changes in their bodies at puberty, especially the sudden appearance of menstruation without formal warning. Parents, especially mothers, do not usually give their female children the necessary attention and preparation towards the onset of menstruation. In connection with the above observation, Olaniyan (1992) observed that a girl who tells her mother about the flow of blood is likely to have her anxiety unexplained satisfactorily. Quite often, responses like "this will happen once a month...." is the usual explanation. Lack of satisfactory explanation on the occurrence of menstrual onset increases fear.

Another major problem is the psychological impact of menstrual cycle which includes depression, tension, mood swing and mental confusion. Dean *et al* (2006) affirmed that menstrual psychosis episodes could be triggered up at the onset of menstruation, especially for those women who are susceptible. According to Kathleen (2000), 14% percent of students regularly miss school because of severe menstrual symptom. Shipra (2010) also identified that 97% of female students who filled the questionnaire had lower abdominal pain while 89% complained of backache problems. The female undergraduate students need to be properly counselled to enable them to adjust to the menstrual syndrome problem that accompanies menstruation, as these can have a negative effect on their emotions and academics.

Statement of the Problem

Menstrual syndrome is a major source of concern among women, especially the youths. The syndrome has caused psychological and health concerns among women and little or no study has been conducted on the syndrome as related to female undergraduates in Nigeria. The focus of this study, therefore, is to examine the menstrual syndrome as experienced by female undergraduates in a selected Nigerian university.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of their position in the family?
2. Is there difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of age?
3. Is there difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of mother's educational level?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of their position in the family.
2. There is no difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of age.
3. There is no difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of mother's educational level.

Methodology

A sample of study was drawn from the University of Ilorin. The university is unique because it is located in the transition zone between the South and North, also a confluence of cultures of Nigeria. A sample of 284 was taken from the population. The age range were 16, 31 years and above. Two faculties were randomly selected out of the thirteen (13) faculties in the university, using the dip-hart method. The faculties include Faculties of Education and Business and Social Sciences. One hundred and forty two (142) respondents were randomly selected from each faculty, which makes a total of 284

undergraduate female students of the university.

The instrument used in collecting data for this study was titled "Menstrual Syndrome Questionnaire" (MSQ). The psychometric property of the instrument was established by the researchers. The items on this instrument were derived through interactions with the female students of the University of Ilorin and also from the review of related literature. The questionnaire was divided into four sections.

Section A contained the demographic data such as age, level, parents' educational level and position in the family, while section B was designed to elicit information on menstrual duration. Section C consists of items on menstrual syndrome experienced by young female students. The four-point Likert type response format was adopted for use in Section D as follows: AT-All the Time; MT-Most of the Time; ST-Sometimes; and NT-Not all the Time. The researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics for the data analysis. The t-test statistics was employed to test the research hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis 1: *There is no difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin on the basis of their position in the family.*

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value on the characteristics of menstrual cycle among female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of their position in the family

Position	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
1st Born	110	88.84	27.96	282	0.61	1.96
Last Born	174	86.21	81.18			

Table 1 shows a calculated t-value of 0.61 which is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. As such, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced between the first and the last born.

Hypothesis 2: *There is no difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin on the basis of age.*

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value on the characteristics menstrual cycle among female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of age

Age	No.	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
16-25 years	217	87.73	25.86	282	0.75	1.96
26-31 years	67	86.55	28.79			

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value (0.75) is less than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduates in the University of Ilorin on the basis of age.

Hypothesis 3: *There is no difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin on the basis of their mothers' educational level.*

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value on the characteristics of menstrual cycle among female undergraduates in University of Ilorin on the basis of mother's educational level

Mother's Educational Level	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Low Educational Level	113	86.71	26.61	282	0.70	1.96
High Educational Level	171	87.94	26.55			

Table 3 shows a calculated t-value of 0.70 which is less than the critical t-value 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduate adolescents in the University of Ilorin on the basis of mothers' educational level.

Discussion

The findings showed that there is no significant difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female Undergraduates of the University of Ilorin on the basis of their position in the family. According to Shipra (2010), a similar significant association was found between menstrual characteristic syndrome and ordinal position

of the respondents in the family. In other words, irrespective of their position in the family, they all have the similar characteristics of menstrual syndrome.

The findings also revealed that there is no significant difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin on the basis of age. The hypothesis was accepted. This shows that irrespective of the ages of females, the onset of menstruation elicits some pain. This finding agrees with Amy and Stephanie (2007) which observed that painful menstruation is prevalent among adolescents of all ages. In the same vein, *Encyclopedia Americana* affirmed that painful menstruation is a common complaint among young women that have not given birth to children and that the pain can be sometimes severe as to interfere with daily occupations. All the age groups considered in this study reported that they normally experience menstrual syndrome. The most common symptom includes headaches, stomach ache, painful breast, lower abdominal pain, depression, irritability, decreased appetite, increased frequency of urine, anxiety, etc.

Santosh and Prabha (2010) affirmed that menstrual symptoms can occur at any age but it is more common among those between 30 and 40 years. Also, Karen *et al* (2004) reported that the number and the intensity of symptoms vary from one cycle to another and that a period of several months with severe cyclic episodes of menstrual problems may alternate. Another finding in the study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the menstrual syndrome experienced by female undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin on the basis of mothers' educational level. The mothers' educational level is irrelevant in determining the menstrual symptoms observed during menstrual cycle. This is supported by Olaniyan (1992) who stated that most women experience severe menstrual syndrome irrespective of their mothers' educational level or attainment. Amy and Stephanie (2007) reported that only a few teenagers obtain information about menstruation from their mothers and that mothers are usually unable to give satisfactory explanation to their daughters about menstrual syndrome. Most females, therefore, tend to obtain information from friends, school mates and teachers.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study and discussion that followed, the following conclusion was drawn: there was no significant difference in the characteristics of menstrual syndrome experienced among the undergraduate students in the University of Ilorin on the basis of the student's position in the family, age and mother's educational qualification.

Recommendations

Professional counsellors should not concern themselves only with career development but should also provide all-round information to the undergraduate students. Counsellors should assist in inculcating the right attitudes and values towards menstrual syndrome since it is a natural occurrence that the female students must all pass through. This can be done by providing necessary information to the students through organising programmes like health talks and seminars. Sex education should be introduced in the secondary school curriculum in order to give correct, adequate and factual information to the growing child as early as possible. Knowledge of some coping strategies will be beneficial to the female students, especially when they are experiencing menstrual syndrome. The school authority should provide counselling offices in the female hostels where students could be helped to deal with psychological problems associated with menstrual syndrome.

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