

Impact of Literacy on Contraceptive Practices in Perimenopausal Women – A Study From North India.

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Abstract

Background: Perimenopausal contraception is an important issue because women during perimenopause are still fertile and need effective contraception. Educated women can learn about the use of contraception more effectively than uneducated and can make informed decisions, thus reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies.

Material and Methods: This questionnaire based study was undertaken on 250 perimenopausal women attending gynaecology OPD of The White Medical College & Hospital, Bungal, Punjab, to find the contraceptive practices in perimenopausal women and to compare between perimenopausal women educated less than 12th standard (group A), and perimenopausal women who had completed 12th standard and more (group B).

Results: Mean parity of group A was 2.96 as compared to group B (2.16). Effect of literacy on parity was statistically highly significant ($p < 0.0001$) and was inversely related to it. Barrier methods of contraception were preferred more by more educated women ($p < 0.0001$) and lesser educated women preferred natural methods and permanent methods. Awareness about emergency contraception was limited more so in lesser educated class which was highly significant.

Keywords: Literacy, Perimenopause, Contraception.

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I. Introduction

Perimenopause is a transition from ovulation to anovulation and ultimately leading to permanent loss of ovarian function¹. Perimenopausal women are still fertile and termination of unwanted pregnancy is attended with increased maternal morbidity and mortality. Contraception is as important in the perimenopausal age group as in reproductive age group. However, this fact has not been given the importance it deserves. The decreased fertility rate among perimenopausal women allows more latitude and contraceptive methods with suboptimal efficacies are selected. Various contraceptive options may be offered to perimenopausal women including oral contraceptives, tubal ligation, IUCDs, barrier methods, hormonal injectables and implants. Education has an impact on women's reproductive desires and behavior. Literate women can learn about the use of contraceptives more effectively than illiterate, thus reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies. This study was undertaken to study the contraceptive practices in perimenopausal women and to compare between perimenopausal women, who are educated less than 12th standard and those who are educated more than 12th standard.

II. Material & Methods

A questionnaire based study was carried out on 250 perimenopausal women of 40-50 years attending gynaecology OPD of The White Medical College and Hospital, Punjab India, from January 2022 to December 2022, regarding their choice of contraception. These women were divided into two groups:

Group A: Perimenopausal women who have education level less than 12th standard.

Group B: Perimenopausal women who have education more than 12th standard.

The data collected was analyzed for distribution according to parity, socio-economic status, contraceptive use, awareness about emergency contraceptives, and compared between two groups. Statistical analysis using “t” test and “chi” square test was done.

III. Results

Age of the women varied from 40-50 years with mean age being 43 years in both the groups. In group A, 29.28% of women were Para 4 and above and 70.72% were Para 3 and below, whereas all women in group B were Para 3 and below. Forty percent women in group A were illiterate, 48% had completed 8th standard and 12% had passed 10th standard. In Group B, 21.8% were graduates and 78.18% had completed 12th standard. In group A, 95% of women belonged to middle and low socioeconomic status and 5% to high socioeconomic status. In group B 70% belonged to middle socioeconomic status, 25% to high and only 5% belonged to low socioeconomic status.

Table 1: Distribution of study group according to parity

	Group A Educated < 12 th standard n=140	Group B Educated > 12 th standard n=110
0	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)
1	4 (2.8%)	19 (9.09%)
2	38 (27.14%)	70 (63.63%)
3	57 (40.71%)	29 (26.36%)
>4	41 (29.28%)	0 (0%)

Mean parity of group A was more (2.96) as compared to group B (2.16). The difference was statistically highly significant (p<0.0001)

Table 2: Distribution of study group according to contraceptive used

Method used	Group A n=140	Group B n=110	P value
Barrier	11 (15.4%)	38(34.54%)	<0.0001
IUCD	11 (7.85%)	16(14.54%)	N.S
OCPs	0	8 (7.27%)	N.S
Natural	72(51.42%)	28(25.45%)	<0.001
Ligation	27(19.28%)	11 (10%)	N.S
None	23(16.42%)	9 (8.1%)	N.S
Awareness about emergency contraceptives	0 (0%)	12(10.90%)	<0.0001

Barrier method was more preferred (34.5%) contraceptive in group B women. IUCD method was opted by 14.54% women in group B and 7.85% in group A. 7.27% women in group B were using OCPs as contraceptive method while none of women in group A opted for OCPs as contraception. Use of permanent method of contraception was more in group A (19.28%) compared to group B (10%). Only 10.90% women in group B were aware of emergency contraceptives while none of the women in group A were aware of emergency contraceptives which was found to be highly significant (p<0.0001).

IV. Discussion

Perimenopausal contraception is an important issue because women during perimenopause still need effective contraception. In our study, mean parity among women who were educated more than 12th standard when compared to lesser educated women, the difference was found to be highly significant. Study by Rubina et al also concluded that higher education level is associated with higher use of contraceptives and lesser number of children.² Rajiv Kumar et al in their study found that literate respondents were using contraceptives more than their illiterate counterparts and this association of contraceptive usage with literacy was found to be statistically significant³. As the women’s education increased, the usage of contraceptive methods also increased^{4,5}. It may be personal choice as far as the method is concerned but as per the present study Indian women don’t prefer oral contraceptives though 11% of the western women between 40-50 years and 4% of the women above 45 years still use OCPs⁶. Use of OCPs should be encouraged in this age group as a strategy not only to improve perimenopausal symptoms, effective contraception and reduced long term health risks but also to enhance the quality of life for such women⁷. Barrier method was preferred method by educated class in our study. This may be more appealing to perimenopausal women with infrequent sexual exposure. This reflects that the intellectual status and literacy level has a definite role in handling the temporary methods of contraception more effectively. IUCD is found to be quite an acceptable method of contraception among Indian women. In present study, sterilization was preferred more by lesser educated perimenopausal women. Most of the women are still using natural methods for contraception. Study from south India revealed significantly higher usage of contraception among literates when compared with illiterates. The literates are able to understand the pros of contraceptive usage which could have

brought the behavioral change⁸. Awareness about emergency contraceptives is very limited, more so in lesser educated class. Musarrat Jabin in a study from Pakistan found very low use of emergency contraceptives (0.2%) in reproductive age group women which reflect abysmal knowledge regarding this method⁹. The association of literacy levels on the awareness of contraceptive methods was found to be statistically significant in a study by Murli V from Telangana¹⁰. Emergency contraception is particularly suitable for perimenopausal women because of their pattern of sexual behavior and contraceptive use. Awareness about contraception can be achieved through medical practitioners and mass media. Study by Ghosh et al also provides evidence supporting the use of mass media to promote and increase awareness of voluntary contraceptive use in India¹¹.

V. Conclusion

The use of various contraceptive methods during perimenopause holds special benefits and risks that should be carefully balanced after a thorough consultation and according each woman's contraceptive needs. Educated women preferred temporary methods over sterilization which was opted more by lesser educated women. Awareness about contraception during perimenopause can be achieved through health professionals and mass media.

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