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ОТНОШЕНИЕ К МЕНСТРУАЦИИ И ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЮ ТАМПОНОВ В РОССИИ

Аннотация: в данной статье представлены обобщенные результаты интервью с врачами-гинекологами на тему знаний женщин о менструации и использовании тампонов, а также анализ современного состояния проблемы в обществе.

Ключевые слова: гигиена женщины, менструация, тампоны.

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PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MENSTRUATION AND TAMPON USAGE IN RUSSIA

Abstract: this article summarizes the results of interviews with gynecologists on women's knowledge about menstruation and tampon usage, as well as the analysis of the current state of the problem in modern society.

Keywords: female hygiene, menstruation, tampons.

Introduction.

There are different historical accounts of women's hygiene products. Women used to employ various material for designing hygiene products, such as wool, vegetable fibers, rolls of grass, pieces of cloth, etc. During World War I nurses began to make hygiene products from surgical dressings materials. Such concept was later adopted for commercial production which started in 1920. In the 1930s Dr. Earle Haas from Denver invented tampons in the form in which they are known today, giving women an alternative for hygiene products, and allowing them a more active social life [1]. However, there are a lot of different myths about the usage of tampons. Thus the aim of this study was to identify the most common myths among women and to find out general knowledge about menstruation and tampons.

Scope of Research.

The research included open source investigation of various social media networks and public forums, academic data bases research, and phone interviews with medical professionals.

Demographic Areas.

The research specifically focused on a variety of regions in order to gain a fuller perspective on the issue. The phone interviews were conducted with medical professionals (gynecologists, obstetrician/gynecologists) from the following areas: Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Sakhalin Territory, Republic of Yakutia, Krasnoyarsk Territory, Republic of Komi, Crimea, Stavropol Territory, Republic of Tatarstan, the Chechen Republic, Republic of Dagestan, and Kamchatka Territory. The areas were chosen to represent the ethnic and religious diversity of the Russian population in order to establish key discrepancies in public perception on menstruation and tampon usage.

Perception on Menstruation.

The topic of menstruation presents itself as a socially non-favorable, i.e. something not often discussed in public. The online search suggests that women over 25 predominantly learnt about menstruation, how to count their period cycle and how to use pads from their female family members. Women under 25 receive most of such information from online sources. There are multiple tutorials on YouTube, discussion forums and blogs, where girls mostly aged 10–16 ask questions about menstruation. It is important to mention, that most such forums and blogs are led by non-medical professionals and just enthusiasts. Doctors, in particular obstetrician/gynecologists, were identified as the main decision makers when it comes to women's health choices [3]. Moreover, menstruation was identified as a topic discussed only among female family members in Muslim communities.

Perception on Tampons.

Tampons are seen as a go-to solution for such cases as swimming, heavy periods, and need of double protection, active sport activities. Tampons are at the same time seen as something dangerous, the use of which can result in serious complications. It was also revealed that women over 45 do not usually use tampons. Most women think

that pads are better since they do not «block» natural discharge; and therefore tampons should be used only in cases of swimming or wearing tight-hugging clothes.

Tampons and Religion.

Many religious forums as well as gynecologists working in predominantly Muslim areas emphasized the incompatibility of tampons with Islam. The research suggests that more conservative followers choose not to use tampons because it goes against their religious beliefs. All Muslim forums and official recommendations given by Mullah state that tampons cannot be used throughout the month of Ramadhan since during that time women are not allowed to «insert anything into their vaginal cavity». In Orthodox Christianity insertion of tampons can be viewed as an act of masturbation. Such opinion is only predominant among conservative followers. A small number of online sources (not statistically enough to be counted as a trend) suggests that the use of tampons spiritually deflowers a woman.

Generally-speaking, there are a lot of misconceptions on tampon usage, such as the use of tampons can cause infertility; tampons can get «lost» inside; tampons negatively impact vaginal mucus secretion; tampons cannot be used when hymen is intact; the higher the absorbability of a tampon, the longer it can be worn and much more.

At the same time a lot of women face a number of questions, concerning tampon usage:

1. What is the appropriate age to start using tampons?
2. Can tampons rupture a hymen?
3. Will tampons cause any damage to vaginal walls?

Most women choose to discuss these topics with their gynecologists. To assess the level of discussions the questionnaire with medical professionals was held in order to find out the knowledge of professionals and their view on the issue. The interviews were held according to the ethical principles; the rule of confidentiality was observed [2]. Over 20 medical professionals participated in the survey. Each chosen demographic area had at least two representatives.

The typical answers were analyzed.

1. None of the professional received any formal education on tampon usage since during their time of education tampons were not commonly used.

2. Most doctors do not talk about tampon usage with their patients unless directly asked.

3. Most doctors show negative personal opinion about tampons usage indicating that tampons can be used only in emergency situations (social functions, swimming, etc.). Moreover, all of the interviewed agreed with the statement that «tampons are poisonous».

4. Doctors know that women with intact hymen can use tampons.

5. Doctors do not believe that women need to get education on tampons versus pads usage during their visits.

6. Gynecologists believe that tampons cause micro traumas to vaginal walls and make them susceptible to viruses, such as HIV, genital herpes, etc.

7. Doctors were also asked about the reason of lack of studies dedicated to the use of tampons. The most common answer was: «The topic is irrelevant. There are tampons and pads, there is nothing to research».

Conclusion.

The conducted research discovered most common myths on the tampon usage among Russian women. The findings show that tampons are not favored as hygiene products and the preference is given to pads. However, such discrepancy is due to the lack of actual knowledge about tampons and potential side effects. In addition, religious beliefs play an important role on the choice of tampon usage in predominantly Muslim areas in Russia.

Lack of formal education on this subject shows that the topic is not seen as important among the medical community, as well as society at large. Moreover, the doctors do not initiate the discussion on this topic during their patients visits even though they are able to provide them with crucial information. Since women hygiene products discussion is so blatantly overlooked, women keep their prejudiced opinions and pass them onto their children thus causing a generational myth on tampons.

An intervention by the medical personnel can potentially change the situation and enlighten women on their choices, however for that to happen a formal instruction course at medical schools should be introduced in addition to a section of patient's visit being dedicated to this discussion.

At last, a formal online tutorial on women hygiene products and specifically tampons, should be made available for younger generation of women to refer to.

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