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WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE AND FACTORS OF NOT ADHERENCE TO THE PAP SMEAR EXAMINATION

CONHECIMENTO DAS MULHERES E FATORES DA NÃO ADESAO ACERCA DO EXAME PAPANICOLAU

CONOCIMIENTO DE LAS MUJERES Y FACTORES DE LA NO ADHERENCIA ACERCA DEL EXAMEN PAPANICOLAU

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to find out the women's knowledge about the Pap smear examination. **Method:** this is a quantitative, descriptive and exploratory study of 40 women. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The quantitative data were analyzed from the statistics and the qualitative data by the Discourse of the Collective Subject (DCS). The results are expressed in tables and figures. **Results:** All women are aware of the Pap smear exam, but not all of them know about their main function. The main factor for not doing it is shame and lack of guidance, most of them do it annually and most of them do not receive guidance from the nurse. **Conclusion:** Not all women knew the Pap smear examination as well as did not know the main function. This study provides the academic community with new information that enables appropriate strategies for these people to increase coverage of the Pap smear exam. **Descriptors:** Cervical Cancer; Papanicolau Exam; Women Health; Papillomaviridae; Nursing; Primary Health Care.

RESUMO

Objetivo: averiguar o conhecimento das mulheres sobre o Papanicolau. **Método:** estudo quantiquantitativo, descritivo e exploratório com 40 mulheres. O instrumento utilizado para a coleta de dados foi um questionário. Os dados quantitativos foram analisados a partir da estatística e os qualitativos pelo Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo (DSC). Os resultados estão expressos em tabelas e figura. **Resultados:** todas as mulheres conhecem o exame Papanicolau, mas nem todas sabem de sua principal função. O principal fator para não o realizarem é vergonha e falta de orientação, a maior parte o realiza anualmente e a maioria não recebe orientações da enfermeira. **Conclusão:** nem todas as mulheres conheciam o exame Papanicolau, bem como não sabiam a principal função. Este estudo proporciona à comunidade acadêmica novas informações que possibilitam estratégias adequadas a este público para aumentar a cobertura do Papanicolau. **Descritores:** Câncer de Colo de Útero; Exame Papanicolau; Saúde da Mulher; HPV; Enfermagem; Atenção Primária à Saúde.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: averiguar el conocimiento de las mujeres sobre el Papanicolau. **Método:** estudio cuantitativo y cualitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio, con 40 mujeres. El instrumento utilizado para recolección de datos fue un cuestionario. Los datos cuantitativos fueron analizados a partir de la estadística y los cualitativos por el Discurso del Sujeto Colectivo (DSC). Los resultados están expresados en tablas y figura. **Resultados:** todas las mujeres conocen el examen Papanicolau, pero ni todas saben de su principal función. El principal factor para no realizar es vergüenza y falta de orientación, la mayor parte lo realiza anualmente y la mayoría no reciben orientaciones de la enfermera. **Conclusión:** ni todas las mujeres conocen el examen Papanicolau, así como no sabían la principal función. Este estudio proporciona a la comunidad académica nuevas informaciones que posibilitan estrategias adecuadas a este público para aumentar la cobertura del Papanicolau. **Descriptor:** Cáncer de Cuello de Útero; Examen Papanicolau; Salud de la Mujer; Papillomaviridae; Enfermería; Atención Primaria de Salud.

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INTRODUCTION

Cervical cancer is the third most malignant type of cancer in women in Brazil and in developing countries. It has lower prevalence rates when compared to skin and breast cancer. About 520 thousand new cases are reported with this disease annually and approximately 270 thousand women die because of this neoplasia. In Brazil, there is an average of 18,000 new cases each year.¹

This cancer is characterized by the replication of the epithelium that lines the uterus compromising the underlying tissues, which may or may not reach organs and structures in the region. There are two types of invasive carcinomas that vary according to the origin of the compromised epithelium, in this class, there are: squamous cell carcinoma, occurs with more incidence and reaches the squamous epithelium. This is responsible for 80% of cases, since adenocarcinoma occurs in a way rarer, reaching the glandular epithelium and accounts for 10% of cases. This pathology develops slowly and it initially can cause symptoms and evolve to vaginal bleeding after intercourse, abnormal leucorrhea, intense abdominal pains and urinary complaints.²

The cause of cervical cancer is through human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, an estimated nine million people worldwide are infected with this virus, and every year 700,000 new cases are reported. The authors justify the high incidence of this pathology due to the population's low knowledge of HPV.³

For the screening of cervical cancer, Brazil adopts the technique of pathological examination (Papanicolau), which is offered in the public and private service the women who have active sexual life, also those who are in menopause, those who underwent partial hysterectomy, pregnant women, virgins with symptoms and women who do not have an active sex life.⁴

The Pap smear examination is indicated by the Ministry of Health, where the priority is to assist women between 25 and 64 years old. This test ensures an effective result, it is presented as the best option for the screening and prevention of cervical cancer. This examination has a low cost when compared to its effectiveness.

The Pap smear exam is better when it is shorter in the interval between cytology collections. This is demonstrated by reducing the cumulative incidence of invasive cancer in 95% of cases if the collection is performed annually.¹

When we identified the high incidence rates of cervical cancer and the high rates of HPV infection, the following question was raised: What is the women's knowledge about the Pap smear exam? And, what factors contribute to not performing the exam?

The subject was chosen based on the need to discuss this subject, and the need to understand the perception of women about the performance of this exam. Thus, this study will collaborate with the academy bringing relevant results on the subject, enabling to identify the difficulties of women using these results to instruct the female population and to remove their doubts that are necessary.

OBJECTIVE

- To find out the women's knowledge about the Pap smear examination.
- To show the factors that contribute to the Pap smear exam.
- To identify nursing guidance on the Pap smear exam.

METHOD

This is a quantitative, descriptive and exploratory study. The research was carried out in the Basic Health Unit called Dr. Edino Jales, in the city of Messias Targino Rio Grande do Norte, BR, Brazil. Exploratory research has the main purpose of developing, clarifying and modifying concepts and ideas to formulate more precise problems or searchable hypotheses for later studies.⁵

The study population consisted of 100% of the women enrolled in the ESF Dr. Edino Jales, in the city of Messias Targino-RN, and the sample consisted of 40 women who accepted to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria of the research were: Women who had follow-up by the nurse in consultation in the women's health program; and, the exclusion criteria were those under the 18 years old and who refused to participate in the survey. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, as well as

the one committed to the confidentiality of the information provided at the time of the interview, to participate in the study, signed the Informed Consent Term - TCLE.

The instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire previously elaborated by the authors, containing objective and subjective questions. It was composed of socioeconomic and demographic data, in the first part, and in the second the data referring to the objective of the study.

The research project was approved by the ethics and research committee of the Faculdades Integradas de Patos and it is registered in the platform with the CAEE number: 64156217.8.0000.5181. It is supported by ethical aspects of research involving human beings, as described in Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council, which regulates research involving human beings.⁶

The data collection was performed in April 2017, through an individual

interview, with an estimated time of approximately 15 minutes, in a quiet place, in the place of attendance, where there will be an explanation about the research. The quantitative data were submitted to descriptive statistical analysis and available through tables with the help of the Excel Office 2007 program. Qualitative data were analyzed by the Collective Subject Discourse (DSC)⁷, where the subjects' speeches were collected by writing the questionnaire and distributed in charts respecting the trustworthiness of the answers given. All data were discussed based on the scientific literature, described through the distribution of variables.

RESULTS

Table 1. Sample characterization for: Demographic data. Women (n= 40). Messias Targino (RN), Brazil, 2017.

Variables	n	%
Age group		
From 18 to 20 years old	2	5
Between 21 and 30 years old	13	32.5
Between 31 and 40 years old	11	27.5
41 years and over	14	35
Marital status		
Single	13	32.5
Married	13	32.5
Other: (stable union/widow)	14	35
Level of education		
Complete elementary education	7	17.5
Incomplete elementary school	17	42.5
Complete high school	11	27.5
Incomplete high school	3	7.5
Complete Higher Education	1	2.5
Incomplete higher education	1	2.5
Salary income		
1 minimum wage	18	45
Less than 1 wage	15	37.5
2 to 3 wages	3	7.5
3 to 4 wages	2	5
More than 4 minimum wages	2	5
Total	40	100

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic data for the study data. It was identified that according to age, the largest population is in women aged 41 years or older, referred to 14 (35%) of women participants. In the marital status variable, the results were similar, in which 13 (32.5%) were single, 13 (32.5%) were married and 14 (35%) had other

types of relationships, such as stable union or widows. Regarding the education level, it was shown that most of them, 17 (42.5%) have incomplete elementary education and 11 (27.5%) have completed high school. In the wage income variable, it is noticed that 18 (45%) have an income of 1 minimum wage, 15 (37.5%) have income less than 1 minimum wage.

Regarding marital status, this study did not show a significant difference in the results, in which only by a difference of a woman, most had a stable union or widows.

There were 7 (17.5%) participants with completed elementary education, 17 (42.5%) had incomplete elementary school, 11 (27.5%) had finished high

school, 3 (7.5%) did not complete high school, only 1 (2.5%) completed higher education and 1 (2.5%) did not complete higher education. In the family income, it was found that 18 (45%) have only 1 minimum wage as income, 15 (37.5%) earn less than 1 minimum wage, emphasizing that most of the interviewees are low income.

Table 2. Characterization of the sample regarding Functions of the Pap smear examination. (n= 40). Messias Targino (RN), Brazil, 2017.

Variables	n	%
Tracking cervical cancer.	21	52.5
Diagnosing sexually transmitted infections (STIs).	3	7.5
For women's health and to prevent diseases.	11	27.5
Tracking cervical cancer and diagnosing sexually transmitted infections (STIs).	1	12.5
Total	40	100

In Table 2, the results on the function of the Pap examination were obtained and 21 (52.5%) responded that the function of the exam is to track cervical cancer. There were 3 (7.5%) stating that the function is to identify sexually transmitted infections (STIs), 11 (27.5%) said that the exam is for women's health and to prevent diseases, while another 5 (12.5%)

answered that it is to help to track cervical cancer and to diagnose STIs. Thus, it can be identified that besides all knowledge of the existence of the examination, most of them understand that the main function is focused on the diagnosis of cervical cancer, but also emphasize its importance in the diagnosis of STI.

Table 3. Characterization of the sample regarding Pap Smear exam. (n= 40). Messias Targino (RN), Brazil, 2017.

Variables	n	%
Only once.	5	12.5
Twice.	5	12.5
I cannot remember how many times.	11	27.5
Annually.	14	35
They never performed it.	5	12.5
Total	40	100

In table 3, the data described is about the number of times the interviewees have already undergone the exam, 5 (12.5%) answered that they only performed it once, 5 (12.5%) twice, 11

(27.5%) reported not remembering the number of times they had performed it, 14 (35%) performed it annually, and 5 (12.5%) never performed the exam.

Table 4. Characterization of the sample regarding the Factors that prevented the Pap Smear test (n= 40). Messias Targino (RN), Brazil, 2017.

Variables	n	%
Shame.	20	50
Little information.	3	7.5
Lack of guidance.	2	5
They did not answer.	4	10
No factor made it impossible, they always did.	10	25
Delay in returning results.	1	2.5
Total	40	100

According to the results of Table 4, the interviewees were asked about what is the problem to perform the Pap test and 20 (50%) answered that shame is the main factor not to perform the test, 3 (7.5%) said they have little information about the

exam, 2 (5%) answered that there is a lack of orientation, so they do not understand the importance of the exam. There were 4 (10%) of them who did not respond, another 10 (25%) said that no factor hindered and they always performed it, 1

(2.5%) answered that the delay in the return of the result is big, thus not

performing in the correct period.

Central Ideas	Women's reports on information provided by nurses.
He explained the procedure and feeling of calm for women	"... that is good for health, to be able to prevent diseases from causing embarrassment, asked to lie down and relax that it would collect the liquid from the cervix, and distribute on the sheet, that it was a simple procedure, that sometimes it bothered, it hurt in some women, it could even bleed..." (8 women).
He showed safety and calm for women	"... asked not to be nervous that she would see if she had something to worry about ..." (3 women).
He explained the exam procedure and for whatever it is.	"... asked not to be ashamed to put the vaginal speculum, which is disposable, it will not hurt, it will open only to collect the liquid from the cervix so she can take the exam and know if something has changed..." (4 women).

Figure 1. Nurse information for women on the Pap smear test. (N=15). Messias Targino (RN), Brazil, 2017.

There were 8 of the 15 women who reported that the nurse explained about the exam showing that she explained the procedure and allowed a feeling of calm for the women, 3 responded that the nurse showed safety and calm for the women and 4 reported that the explanation of the examination procedure and its purpose were explained.

DISCUSSION

In one study, it was identified that most women undergoing the Pap test are between 36 and 45 years old. These data agree with our survey, where most of the sample is between 31 and 41 years old or more. The authors justify that, in the present day, the search for health maintenance by women has been increasing the demand, knowing that the most serious lesions are more frequent in mature women, and therefore, it is of fundamental importance to perform this examination periodically.⁸

A survey looked at the knowledge of 18- to 50-year-old women about the importance of the Pap smear. In the results, 42% said they were married, 38% were single, 15% were widows, and only 5% had a stable union.⁹ Single women have an increased predisposition to the development of cervical cancer because they have multiple sexual partners.¹⁰

The level of education and the financial income, influence the adherence to the Pap test as well as its results. Women who have a higher degree of study tend to seek more for the service knowing their importance. However, it is associated with

the fact that the poorest do not have a higher level of education, making the search diminished by influencing the early detection of the disease, leading to the identification of women with low educational level and low family income who become ill.⁹

This test is one of the main tools in the screening and prevention of cervical cancer. Research on this theme emphasizes that the early diagnosis or visualization of precancerous cells reduces complications of the pathology and elevates the rates of cure chances.¹¹

In a survey, it was shown that even with the ease of access to the examination that is available in the basic healthcare network of the Ministry of Health through the SUS, the coverage is still not satisfactory, there are barriers that compromise the women's search to perform.¹²

The Ministry of Health recommends that the preventive examination should be done annually, but after two consecutive years with negative results, it can be done every three years. However, there is still a difficulty in understanding what the Ministry says, because it does not refer to the patient has an active sex life or not. Health services for women's well-being are widely available and accessible, and women's adherence to prevention programs are important.¹³

A survey similar to this, found that most of the interviewees reported that they did not perform the test due to the absence of gynecological problems, in the same vein, agreeing with this research, other women

reported that shame is still one of the main factors of not adherence to the test.¹⁴

The main causes of non-adherence to this test are fear, lack of time or habit, low knowledge of women about the need and importance of the test beyond fear and embarrassment. For this author, adherence to this exam in Brazil is still low. According to some surveys, millions of women have never taken the test; also, approximately 40% of those who take the test do not seek the result. If it was performed in the indicated period and followed the necessary steps, many deaths could be avoided, since it would allow an early treatment when the disease is identified, preventing it from evolving to malignancy and causing death as a consequence.¹⁵

It is essential the explanation to the women about the importance of the test for the maintenance of their health because it is an invasive test and important for the health of the woman. It is up to the nurse to act in the promotion of health, guiding them about every procedure so they can reflect on the needs to prevent diseases that the examination can diagnose early. The nurse is the professional who has direct contact with the community in the primary care, this is the main idealizer of actions aimed at the health of women. Thus, the nurse professional is configured as fundamental in the accomplishment of educational actions, aiming to maintain women about their health care initiatives that can provide them with a better quality of life.¹⁶

Performing the Pap smear requires professional posture in the context of preserving the patient's image, enabling a comfortable position, informing each step of the procedure she is being submitted not to constrain her in this situation. The moment of the nursing consultation should be used to provide information where the professional guides and explains every procedure, including the materials used. These actions strengthen the link between patient and professional.¹⁷

It is evidenced the importance of the nursing guidelines on the Pap smear test for the women who seek the services of basic care. In this study, it was observed a

significant number of women who were instructed by nurses to perform this test. Thus, it is fundamental the importance of nurses acting to promote health and guiding women about the importance of health.¹⁴ There is a need for continuous education in health so the necessary recommendations are followed, guiding the women who take the test when to initiate sexual life, especially in women aged 25 to 64.¹⁸

Another factor to be pointed out is the importance of guiding the use of the HPV vaccine in early adolescence as advocated by the Ministry of Health. Some studies indicate that the HPV vaccine is effective in protecting against oncogenic subtypes of this sexually transmitted disease and, consequently, it is a preventive factor for uterine neoplasia provided since the doses are administered at the correct time.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Even with so many advances in the modern world, women's knowledge of Pap smears is still low, and several factors cause them to fail to perform with a lower chance of cure if the diagnosis is positive.

When compared to other articles in the literature, it has been possible to identify that women feel constrained because it is a procedure that exposes their privacy. In this scenario, it emphasizes the importance of nursing in the promotion of health, allowing the necessary information to serve to reduce the rates of non-adherence to the test, as shown, the nursing actions aimed at performing the Pap smear are still not efficient.

Thus, this study can contribute to the scientific community, promoting information for new health actions to be made, allowing the decline of death rates for cervical cancer.

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