RUTGERS HEALTH
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Man! I Feel Like a Woman in Medicine: Analyzing Menstrual Pain, Training Stressors, and Quality of Life Among Female-Identifying Medical Students

Christina McGinnis BS[1], Alexandria Raab BS[1], Naiya Patel BA[2], Stephanie Shiau PhD MPH[2], Alopi Patel MD[1]
[1] Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, NJ; [2] Rutgers School of Public Health, Piscataway, NJ

Background

- Women make up the majority of medical school applicants (57.2%), matriculants (55.0%), and total enrollment (55.0%) [1]
- Menstrual pain is a common yet underrecognized chronic pain condition that many women face silently.
- Little is known about how the cumulative burden of menstrual pain, associated symptoms, chronic gynecologic conditions, and medical training stressors (financial debt, specialty selection, family planning).

Methods

- **Participants:**
  - Recruited medical student from RWJMS and NJMS via email.
- **Survey Questionnaire:**
  - 5 part survey:
    - Identifying female-identifying medical students
    - Demographics
    - Menstrual pain and associated symptoms
    - Reproductive health and family planning
    - WHO-5 Well-being Index (scores range 0 - 25) [2]
- **Statistical Analysis**:
  - WHO-5 scores were categorized as poor (<13) vs. good (⩾13).
  - χ^2 or Fisher's exact tests were used as appropriate.
  - Analyses performed in SAS 9.4.

Results

- 135 students (mean age 26.1) had a mean WHO-5 well-being score of 14.94 ± 4.59.
- 133 students (98.5%) currently/previously have a menstrual cycle.
  - 121 (91%) reported pain with their menstrual cycle.
  - 58 (43.6%) reported their menstrual pain impacts their ability to perform as a medical student.
- Menstrual pain level did not differ significantly by WHO score, financial debt, intended medical specialty, or relationship status.

	Litte to no menstrual pain	Moderate to severe menstrual pain	p-value
Experience pain with menstruation (N = 121)	***58 (47.9%)***	***63 (52.1%)***	***<0.001***
Pain impacts ability to preform as a medical student (N = 58)	***14 (24.1%)***	***44 (75.9%)***	***<0.001***
Associated Menstrual Symptoms:			
Mood Changes	46 (43.8%)	59 (56.2%)	0.9281
Fatigued/Tired	39 (39.4%)	60 (60.6%)	0.0944
Breast Pain	28 (43.1%)	37 (56.9%)	0.9037
Headache	***16 (32%)***	***34 (68%)***	***0.0361***
Sleep Changes	***8 (25.5%)***	***26 (76.5%)***	***0.0062***
Skin Changes	26 (47.3%)	46 (52.7%)	0.4743
GI symptoms	***37 (37.7%)***	***61 (62.2%)***	***0.0227***
Back Pain	21 (38.9%)	33 (61.1%)	0.3641
Stress	***16 (32%)***	***34 (68%)***	***0.0361***

Table 1: Distribution of menstrual pain level by impact on responsibilities as a medical student and associated menstrual symptoms.

Discussion

- Menstrual pain was highly prevalent among female-identifying medical students, over half reported moderate-to-severe menstrual pain.
- Greater pain severity was associated with impaired ability to perform medical student responsibilities and increased associated symptoms.
- Findings highlight the burden of menstrual pain and the need for greater recognition and support to achieve more equitable participation in medical education.

Future Direction

- Expand to additional medical schools as well as residents and fellows in advanced years of medical training to address small sample size and generalizability .
- Evaluate menstruation, chronic pain, and reproductive health policies to identify effective institutional interventions.

References

1. https://www.aamc.org/news/press-releases/new-aamc-data-medical-school-applicants-and-enrollment-2024
2. CW, Ostergaard SD, Sondergaard S, Bech P. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: a systematic review of the literature. Psychother Psychosom. 2015;84(3):167-176. doi:10.1159/000376585.