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Patient empowerment in vaginal infections treatment: a room for improvement

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INTRODUCTION

Infectious cervicovaginitis causes inflammation and infection of the vagina and cervical uterine. It's a major public health concern due to serious complications, including gynaecological and obstetrical disorders, leading to hopelessness among affected women. Various risk factors have been identified, such as multiple sexual partners, hygiene products, smoking, pregnancy, antibiotic use, and immunodeficiency, disrupting the vaginal ecosystem. Genetic predisposition, low socioeconomic status, and poverty are also linked to infection. Effective management requires patient participation in adopting proper hygiene practices.

The researchers noted a deficiency in the dissemination of adequate information to patients concerning the importance of maintaining hygiene and sanitation of reproductive organs, proper handwashing techniques, and the timing of handwashing to prevent the progression of recurrent vulvovaginitis to a chronic state. Our preliminary study found that among 30 individuals affected by chronic vulvovaginitis, it was observed that only 2 individuals followed all 6 recommended steps for thorough handwashing. Additionally, just one individual practiced handwashing before cleansing the reproductive organs, while the rest performed handwashing after the cleansing process. Furthermore, only 5 patients cleaned the reproductive organs in the correct direction, where only three patients dried using tissue or clean clothes.

AIM

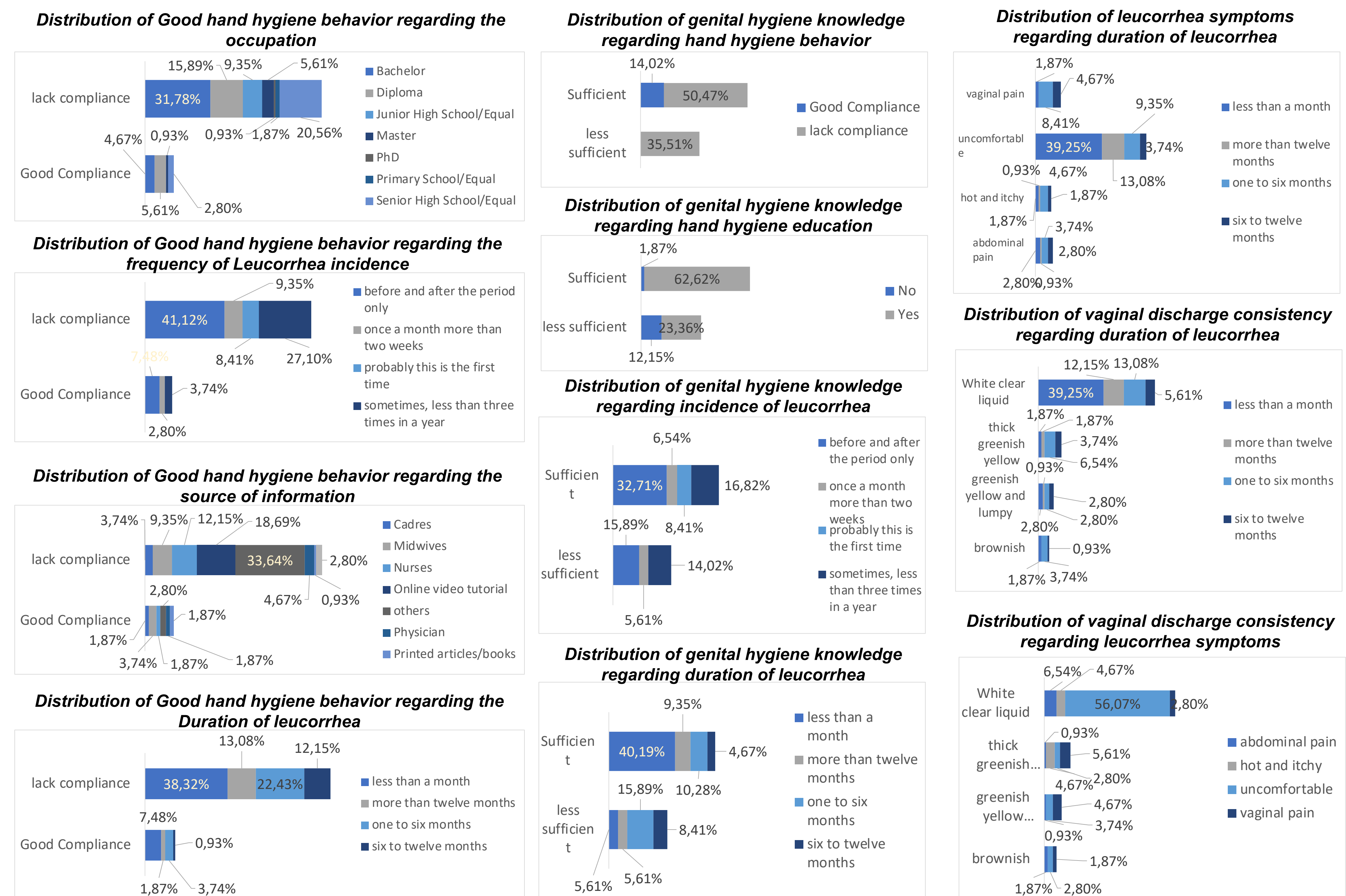
We aimed to investigate the current situation of hand hygiene behavior and knowledge among female patients in our hospital. The findings are expected to provide insight on how to improve of effectiveness of tailored educational interventions in improving hygiene behaviors among women with varying levels of knowledge about vaginal health. Expected key findings including the knowledge-behavior gap, the influence of education level on health knowledge, and the potential of digital interventions, while also pushing forward the understanding of how to effectively empower patients in managing their vaginal health.

METHOD

- This cross-sectional observational study involved women aged 18 and above with a history of vaginal discharge (Leucorrhea).
- The research was carried out from July to December 2023 at Aisiyiah Islamic Hospital Malang, East Java, Indonesia.
- We developed questionnaire regarding knowledge of vaginal health and hygiene and hygiene behaviors. We used 15-item knowledge and 12-item behavior questionnaire .
- Each item was provided in multiple choice questions. The correct answer was worth 1, the wrong answers are worth 0. The correct answers, then were divided by total score of possible correct answer for each questionnaire to categorize the level of knowledge and behavior, whether knowledge is "Sufficient" or "Insufficient", and behavior is "Good Compliance" or "Less Compliance".
- Data were analyzed descriptively and presented in bar graph.

RESULTS

A total of 107 female patients were participated in the study. Most of participants have Bachelor degree (36,45%), Senior High School/Equal (23,36%), Diploma (21,50%), Junior High School/Equal (9,35%), Master (6,54%), Doctoral degree (1,87%), and Primary School/Equal (0,93%). Among them, 11,21% are Civil Servant, 38,32% are Employees, 8,41% are Entrepreneurs, 18,69% are Housewives, 18,69% are Students, and the rest are other than those. We found that only 14,02% were compliance with good hand hygiene practice, despite 64,49% have sufficient knowledge regarding vaginal hygiene.



- There appears to be a positive correlation between genital hygiene knowledge and hand hygiene behavior. Among those with sufficient knowledge, a higher percentage showed good compliance with hand hygiene practices. However, While about half of the participants had sufficient genital hygiene knowledge, this did not directly translate to good hand hygiene behavior for all. This suggests that knowledge alone may not be sufficient to change behavior, aligning with health behavior theories that emphasize multiple factors influencing practice.
- Participants experiencing leucorrhea for shorter durations (less than a month) tended to have better genital hygiene knowledge. The inverse relationship between leucorrhea duration and knowledge levels suggests that better-informed women may seek treatment earlier or manage symptoms more effectively.
- Those who obtained information from healthcare professionals (physicians, nurses, midwives) and printed materials demonstrated better genital hygiene knowledge. The significant role of healthcare professionals and printed materials in providing knowledge emphasizes the importance of reliable information sources. This suggests that strengthening these channels could be effective in improving women's reproductive health knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the complex relationship between knowledge, behavior, and health outcomes in women's reproductive health. Key findings include a significant knowledge-behavior gap in genital hygiene practices, the importance of education and reliable information sources in promoting better health practices, and the potential of symptom awareness in motivating improved self-care behaviors.

Future research could explore the effectiveness of different educational interventions in bridging the knowledge-behavior gap, investigate the role of cultural and social factors in shaping hygiene practices, and examine long-term health outcomes associated with improved genital hygiene knowledge and practices. Educational interventions may include interactive workshops, peer programs, or mobile health. Behavior change communication (BCC) campaigns also important. Implementing targeted campaigns that address not just knowledge, but also attitudes, social norms, and self-efficacy related to hygiene practices.

In conclusion, while there is room for improvement in women's reproductive health knowledge and practices, this study provides valuable insights for developing more effective patient empowerment strategies. By addressing the identified gaps and leveraging the noted correlations, healthcare providers and public health officials can work towards improving women's reproductive health outcomes and overall quality of life.

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