

AB028. Community study of reproductive tract infection among females of adult age group living in subdivided units in Hong Kong

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Background: Reproductive tract infections (RTIs), the infection of the reproductive system, could indicate endogenous infections, iatrogenic infection and sexually transmitted infection (STIs). In Hong Kong, the prevalence of STIs was 1.2% for men and 2.5% for women locally. Although sexual health is recognized as a major part of reproductive health. However, genital hygiene including menstrual hygiene will also determine reproductive health. Currently, there is no previous study investigating RTIs and reproductive health in Hong Kong. Previous studies have shown that the environment such as cleaning and drying menstrual product indoor could be factors negatively affecting menstrual hygiene among females. In Hong Kong, subdivided units exhibit characteristics susceptible to factors compromising residents' menstrual health management. There was an increase in the proportion of women living in subdivided units (SDUs) in Hong Kong between 2016 and 2021. Females residing in SDUs could be prone to impaired reproductive health. This study focuses on RTIs of females in reproductive ages living in SDUs in Hong Kong.

Methods: Females living in SDUs in Hong Kong were recruited in a community-based screening program in our study through convenient sampling with non-profit

organizations. Informed consents of participants were collected. Demographic information and menstrual health questionnaires of the participants was collected through face-to-face interviews.

Results: From July 2021 to January 2023, 413 adult females aged 21 to 64 years living in SDUs were recruited and underwent questionnaires about RTIs in a community project in Kwai Tsing and Kowloon City district. These districts were selected for the project due to their moderate populations inhabiting SDUs. In total, a third of our participants reported that they have signs and symptoms in the perineal area in the previous year. Of which, only one in five sought medical advice. Notably, for those who have sought medical care, 60% were diagnosed with candidiasis or vaginitis. Considering the high percentage of participants reporting a diagnosis, we further explore the cause of the diseases. Stratified by sexual behaviour within 12 months, the incidence of perineal signs and symptoms were similar between sexually-active (40.2%) and non-sexually active individuals(39.8%).The findings identified sexual transmission as playing a minor role in the incidence of perineal signs and symptoms in this population. While female SDU residents maintain optimal menstrual health management practice in general, other causes of perineal sign and symptoms may have been implicated.

Conclusions: This is the first study about RTIs in Hong Kong and this could be a beginning for other larger scale studies. This study also provides insight on the health education on RTIs because only a small proportion of participants sought help when they encountered perineal symptoms. Additional health promotions activities on reproductive health especially on when to seek medical help could be further held in the community. Research on the taboos or embarrassment about reproductive health could be further explored to have a better understanding about reproductive health belief of this population.

Keywords: reproductive tract infections, menstrual health management, subdivided units

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Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: All authors have completed the

ICMJE uniform disclosure form (available at <https://jphe.amegroups.com/article/view/10.21037/jphe-2023-apru-ab028/coif>). The authors reported that this project received the donation (No. 2021-0274) from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. The authors have no other conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethical Statement: The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (as revised in 2013). Informed consent of participants was collected. This study was approved by the Joint Chinese University of Hong Kong - New Territories East Cluster Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (No.2021.313).

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