

SUMMARY

Over the years, a human rights-based approach to reproductive health has evolved which emphasizes the rights to health, to have children by choice, and to have a safe and satisfying sex life. It is based on international human rights standards, and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It includes reproductive health services that protect a woman's general health and well-being, that allow for well-informed decisions, and are respectful of individual choices. A women consciousness of the proper gestation hygiene and self-care simplifies to avoid the risk of fetal development disorders. Because of this, the health care providers, including nurses, are obligated to promote good concepts, and self-care behaviors adequate for that period. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore rural women concept of self-care to promote their reproductive health.

A cross-sectional descriptive design was used in carrying out the study. It was done on a convenience sample of 300 pregnant women attending the outpatient clinics at Benha university hospitals. The data were collected using a structured interview questionnaire form and an attitude scale. These tools were pilot tested for finalization. The field work was carried out during the period from March 2006 through August 2006.

The study has revealed the following findings:

- Women's mean age was 25.5 ± 3.6 years, 40.7% were illiterate, and the majority (92.3%) were housewives. The duration of marriage was mostly less than five years (47.3%).
 - The majority of the women were gravida 2 to 4 (89.3%), and their parity ranged between 1 and 6.
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- Women's concepts of self-care related to reproductive health were highest as regards baby care (79.7%), and puerperium (57.0%).
 - Conversely, the percentages of adequate concepts were very low regarding FGM (13.0%), breast care during pregnancy, and personal hygiene during menstruation (29.7% each).
 - In total, only slightly less than one third of the women (31.7%) had adequate concepts regarding self-care related to reproductive health.
 - Concerning women's attitudes towards self-care related to reproductive health, high percentages of positive attitude were revealed towards personal hygiene during menstruation (76.7%), and pregnancy (75.0%).
 - Conversely, positive attitudes towards self-care during labor and puerperium and towards general reproductive health issues were very low, 3.7% and 2.7%, respectively.
 - In total, only 17.3% of the women had positive attitudes regarding self-care related to reproductive health.
 - As regards reproductive health problems reported by women during pregnancy and puerperium, nipple problems were the most common, in the form of retraction (76.0%) and cracks (45.0%). Most women treated these problems using traditional heals, 74.8% and 68.9%, respectively.
 - Also, about two-fifth of the women had problems taking bath during pregnancy (42.0%), and 55.7% of them had sexual problems during pregnancy, mostly in the form of dyspareunia (70.7%).
 - Statistically significant associations were demonstrated between women's concepts towards self-care in reproductive health and their education ($p=0.049$), job status ($p=0.03$), and husband education ($p=0.003$). Higher education and working status were associated with higher percentages of adequate concepts.
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- No statistically significant associations could be revealed between women's attitudes and any of their socio-demographic and obstetric characteristics.
- Although more women with positive attitude had adequate concepts (34.6%), than those with negative attitudes (31.0%), the difference could not reach statistical significance ($p>0.05$).

In conclusion, only less than one third of them had adequate concepts regarding self-care related to reproductive health. Also, only less than one-fifth of them had positive attitudes regarding self-care related to reproductive health. Better concepts of self-care were directly related to higher education of the woman and husband and working status of the woman.

It is recommended that outreach programs address women's concepts of self-care, with emphasis on areas of high inadequacy and misconceptions such as FGM, breast care during pregnancy, and personal hygiene during menstruation. Educational programs should be particularly addressed to illiterate women and housewives. Nurses have the prime responsibility of improving women's concepts of self-care and their attitude, and to fulfill this role, they need more training in self-care related to reproductive health, as well as in counseling skills. Further research is needed to assess the impact of self-care promotive programs on the knowledge, attitudes, and misconceptions related to reproductive health among rural and urban women.
