



Vaginal Cancer: Suspected to Increase due to Lockdown

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Abstract

The increased rate of vaginal cancer in the USA and Europe has attracted researchers to find out medicine and better chemotherapy for this disease. The worldwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic influences the downfall of the economy of most countries. This recession forced to increase unemployment irrespective of sex. In this scenario, there is a high chance of an increase in prostitution all over the world which may lead to an increase in the number of vaginal cancer patients. Present research article registers and analyzes this situation.

Keywords: Vaginal Cancer; Chemotherapy; Unemployment; COVID-19; Lockdown; Prostitution

Introduction

The vagina is the opening of a woman through which menstrual blood leaves from the body. It is also the canal that is connected to the cervix which is the opening of the uterus or womb, and to the vulva, which are folds of skin around the vaginal opening. It is one of the most sensitive parts of a woman's body. A number of diseases may spread through this part, particularly sex diseases. In this respect, taking care of it is extremely important for women's health.

Usually, the vagina is in a collapsed position with its walls touching to the other side due to many folds that allow the vagina to open and expand during sexual intercourse and vaginal childbirth. The vaginal lining is kept moist by mucus released from glands in the cervix. The vaginal walls contain squamous epithelial cells. Underneath the epithelium, the vaginal wall is made up of connective tissue, involuntary muscle tissue, lymph vessels, and nerves.

Vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia (VaIN), which is also called vaginal dysplasia [1], is a condition in which abnormal cells in the vagina are observed and may lead to become cancer in some people. Often, this may found in the case of cervical dysplasia or cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) which is a precancerous lesion of the cervix. These lesions may arise due to human papillomavirus (HPV) [2,3] which in general, get transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. Out of 100 HPV, more than 40 may pass through sexual contact.

The present COVID-19 pandemic has disclosed the discrimination of social identity and economic stability. People near the poverty level are living in high impoverishment. The situation for the sex workers is worst because they are excluded from government relief and protection programs as well as health services. In this scenario, it is very important that proper health care packages and alternative ways of earnings should be planned. Unfortunately, in most countries, there is very little response to this demand from

the government, though sex worker communities and charitable organizations are trying to develop response strategies. In the avenues of the health care programs dissemination of present health risks and probable remedies should be included. In this respect, awareness regarding vaginal cancer among the sex workers is very important. In the present article, possible threats and treatment of this disease are described.

Chance of increase of vaginal cancer patients due to lockdown

Vaginal cancer [4-6] is rare. In the present year (2021) the estimated number of vaginal cancer patients is 8,180 in the United States. About 75% of vaginal cancers are caused by human papillomavirus or HPV as mentioned earlier. But, the risk of vaginal cancer increases due to coitarche at a younger age, greater number of lifetime sexual partners, smoking, in utero diethylstilbestrol (DES) [7] exposure, and human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. The worldwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 [8,9] pandemic which has started in January 2020 and still continuing, influenced the downfall of the economy of more than 200 countries. This has caused crores of unemployment irrespective of sex. As a result, the number of sex workers is increasing day by day, particularly in underdeveloped countries. The situation is not good enough in the developed countries also. It is observed that sex workers of developed countries are also desperate to continue their job taking the help of technology ignoring social distancing to avoid COVID-19. This is tremendously shocking. It is expected that the situation will be worst in the near future. The effect of economic fall may influence the workers to work without taking appropriate precautions which may lead to an increase in the number of vaginal cancer patients in the future.

Types of vaginal cancer

Vaginal cancer begins in form of a tumor. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can grow and spread to other parts of the body. In case of about 85% of the total vaginal cancer patients, the cancer actually spread from other parts of the body, and about half of these are from the cervix or uterus. There are five primary types of vaginal cancer which are given below.

Type-1: Squamous cell carcinoma

This type of cancer can develop in the cells lining of the vagina, most often in the area closest to the cervix. Squamous cell carcinoma

contribute about 85% of the total vaginal cancer patients. It develops slowly through the precancerous condition called vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia or VaIN, described above.

Type-2: Adenocarcinoma

This type of vaginal cancer begins in the vaginal gland tissue. Its contribution is about 5% to 10% of vaginal cancers.

Type-3: Clear cell adenocarcinoma

This cancer is an effect of the use of DES. It occurs in women whose mothers took the drug during their pregnancy. The DES drug was used between the late 1940s and 1970. It is estimated that 1 woman out of 1,000 women exposed to DES will may develop vaginal cancer.

Type-4: Melanoma

This type of vaginal cancer is rare. Melanoma can begin in the vagina due to abnormal sexual behaviour, particularly, the use of artificial sex instruments in vagina. Melanomas are usually found on skin of the body which is commonly exposed to the extreme sun. There is very little chance of development of it where there is no sun exposure. Melanoma often appears as a dark colored lesion with irregular borders.

Type-5: Sarcomas

Sarcomas are various types of rare tumors that can arise in the vagina and transform to vaginal cancer.

Treatment of vaginal cancer

Invasive vaginal cancer is generally treated with surgery and radiation therapy. Though, chemotherapy is also available for the treatment. Chemotherapy is used along with radiation therapy in case of an advanced stage of this disease.

Types of treatment at different stages of the disease

Stages I and II

At the stage of I and II, Surgical removal of the tumor is suggested. The removal may include a part or all of the vagina and possible removal of pelvic lymph nodes. In case of some selected patients, surgery is followed by radiation therapy with or without low-dose chemotherapy.

Stages III and IVA

In an advanced stage of this cancer i.e., at stage III and stage IVA, a combination of internal radiation therapy and external-beam radiation therapy is used, often with concurrent low-dose chemotherapy.

Stage IVB

At this stage Radiation therapy and Systemic chemotherapy are used. At this stage the chance of survival is very less.

What to do?

Organizations and government should join their hands at this evil time to protect the sex workers, particularly migrant sex workers who have thrown themselves in the destiny of risks in order to survive. Regular medical check-ups and proper propaganda are extremely needful. Migrant sex workers often face extra layers of oppression and exclusion. They also suffer from xenophobia, language barriers, racism, precarious immigration status as well [10-12]. There is the risk of deportation too.

Due to the criminalization of sex work, loss of income and increased discrimination and harassment are observed [13-15]. But, they have no right to avail of labor protection as in most countries sex industry is not recognized as a form of small business ownership. As a result of lockdown and night curfew sex workers are also experiencing punitive crackdowns such as raids on their homes and workplaces with increased surveillance, arrests, fines and violence [16-18].

The NSWP and UNAIDS have stepped into a joint project to protect the rights of all sex workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. They call for immediate and critical action. Sex workers and sex worker organizations everywhere 'are calling for equal protection under the law and access to income support and health care' [17,19]. Following demands would be helpful to protect the sex workers:

- Access to national protection and relief funds
- Emergency financial support
- Information sharing between health services and other respective authorities

- Halting raids on sex workers' workplaces and homes
- Ending the use of criminal law to enforce COVID-19-related restrictions
- Extending visas and support for detainees.

Conclusions

During the global economic fall, everyone has a role to save our society. It is discussed here that due to the economic crisis, there is a chance of an increase in the number of sex workers which will promote several sex diseases, like, AIDS, vaginal cancer, etc. To avoid this unwanted situation, we have to come to gather to reform our economic structure and distribution. We have to focus on women's empowerment in the proper way as prescribed in an earlier article [20].

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