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Prevalence & predictors of awareness of cervical cancer and its prevention among women in north Delhi

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Abstract
Cervical carcinoma is the only preventable cancer but still ranks as the second most common cancer in the reproductive age group, A study was undertaken to know the prevalence and predictors of awareness cervical cancer and its screening among women residing in north Delhi. A cross sectional prospective study was carried out in randomly selected 401 women, attending tertiary care hospital in north Delhi, over three months. Structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. Only 31.92% of women had heard about cervical cancer and 20%of these were aware that cervical cancer was preventable. 8.5% had heard about pap smear and 1.5% had heard about HPV vaccine. Age and working status were positive determinants for awareness about cervical cancer. Age and Education status were considered as positive determinant for awareness of prevention of cervical cancer. There is still a need to educate and motivate women about cervical cancer and its prevention.

Keywords: cervical cancer, HPV vaccine, Pap smear

Introduction
Cervical carcinoma, the second most common cancer in the reproductive age group, with an incidence of 30.0-44.9 cases per 100, 000 women in India [1] In fact, India bears about one-fifth (20%) of the world's cervical cancer burden [2]. In the light of India's rapidly growing population, the overall burden of incidence and mortality of cervical cancer in India is projected to increase by 68 and 78%, respectively, by the year 2030 [3] Within India, the age-adjusted incidence rate of 19.5/100,000 of cervical cancer was reported among women in Delhi [4].
Having a definite detectable precancerous lesion makes cervical cancer a perfect candidate for screening thereby providing a golden opportunity of decreasing the burden of this deadly disease. The Papanicolaou (Pap) test has been proved to be a very useful and effective tool to reduce mortality through early diagnosis [5, 6] In addition, the Pap test is relatively easy, cheap/free of cost and reliable. In a meta nalysis, a sensitivity of 30-87% and specificity of 86-100% for the Pap smear test has been reported [7] It is well known that easy availability, low cost, health professional and proper rendering of services are important in the success of any screening program. However, the awareness and attitude of women at the receiving end plays a crucial role in successful screening.
Despite its effectiveness as a method of controlling the incidence of cervical cancer, there is significant underutilization of Pap test. Availability of Pap smear facility for early detection of cervical cancer is not by itself sufficient for reducing the mortality by this type of cancer among women. The impact of the test depends upon its proper utilization by the target population. Interestingly, the cervical cancer screening coverage in India is only 3.1%.
It was with these facts in mind that this study was conducted with an aim to study prevalence of awareness about cervical cancer and its screening and to study the predictors of awareness and practice of pap smear among women residing in north Delhi.

Materials and Methods
A questionnaire based cross sectional observational study was conducted on women visiting tertiary care hospital in north Delhi from over three months (July to September 2017). A total of 401 women in the age group of 18-65 years, who were willing to participate in the study were explained the nature and purpose of the study. The data was collected using a pre- designed and pre- tested questionnaire seeking information regarding basic socio-demographic profile, awareness about cervical cancer, its prevention, Pap test and HPV

vaccine and the source of awareness. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 15. Basic subject characteristics were expressed as proportions in appropriate tables. Student's independent 't'test was used to know if there was any difference in awareness and practice across demographic categories like age, education and employment status .A p value < 0.05 was considered to be significant

Results

The mean age of the participants in our study was 28.6±12years .Seventy five percent (n = 401) of women in the study were in the age group of 18-35 years. One third of study group was illiterate and nearly 40% had education less than class tenth. Majority were married (99.3%), nonworking (85.3%) and Hindu (99.3%) by religion as shown in Table I.

Table I: Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (n=401)

Demographic Characteristics		Number (n)	Percent (%)
Age in years	18-25	181	45.1%
	26-35	118	29.4%
	36-45	81	20.2%
	46-55	11	2.7%
	56-65	10	2.5%
Education	Illiterate	136	33.9%
	<10th	158	39.4%
	10th- 12th	17	22.4%
	Graduate /Post Graduate	17	4.2%
Marital Status	Married	398	99.3%
	Unmarried	3	0.75%
Employment Status	Working	59	14.7%
	Not Working	342	85.3%
Religion	Hindu	382	99.25%
	Muslim	19	4.74%

As seen in table II awareness about cervical cancer was poor and only 128 out of 401 women were aware about cervical cancer and only 20% of them (n-128) knew that cervical cancer was preventable. Only 1.5% (6 of 401) had heard about HPV vaccine.

Table II: Awareness about cervical cancer and its screening

Parameters	Response	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Heard Of Cervical Cancer (n=401)	Yes	128	31.9%
	No	273	68.1%
Is Cervical Cancer Preventable (n=128)	Yes	26	20.3%
	No	102	79.6%
Heard of Paps Smear (n=401)	Yes	34	8.5%
	No	367	91.5%
Heard of HPV Vaccine (n=401)	Yes	6	1.5%
	No	395	98.5%

The chief source of this awareness was health professionals followed by media and the internet. (Figure I)

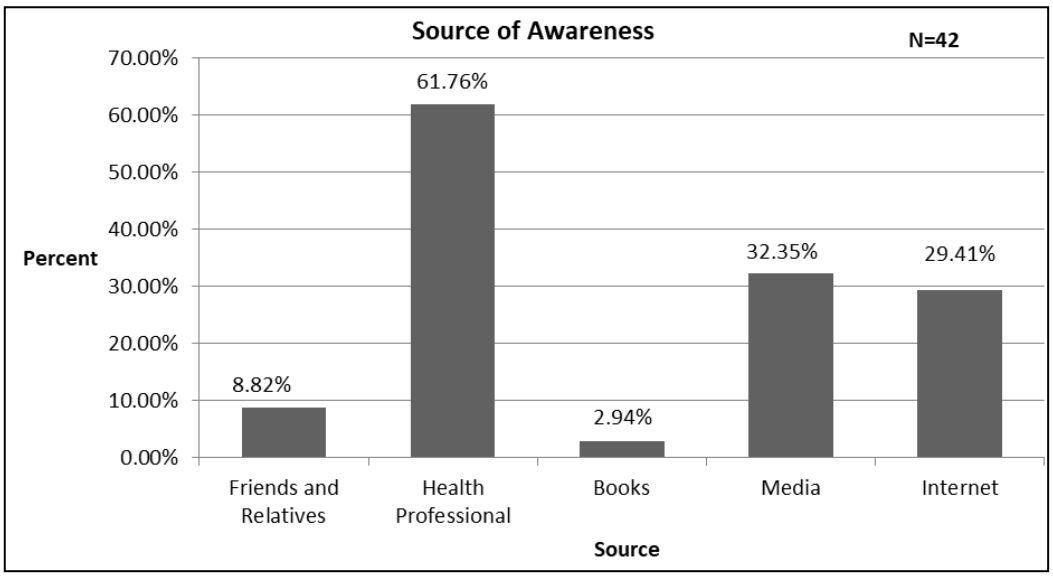

Fig I: Bar diagram depicting source of awareness for cervical cancer and its prevention

Awareness of cervical cancer as well as pap smear was more in the age group of 56-65 years. Additionally, even though approximately one third of the women in age group 18-25 years and 25-35 years age group were aware about cervical cancer, the awareness of pap smear in this age group was low to the tune of 7.2% and 5.9% respectively.

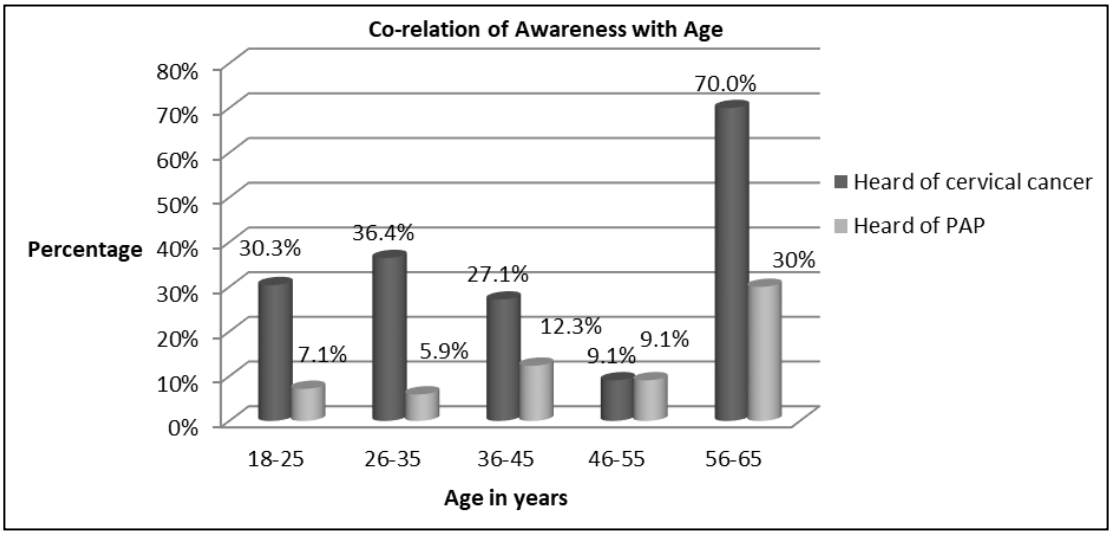

Fig II: Bar diagram showing co-relation of awareness of cervical cancer and PAP smear with age

Age was found to be a statistically significant factor for awareness about cervical cancer and pap smear (p value 0.022 and 0.049 respectively). (Figure II)

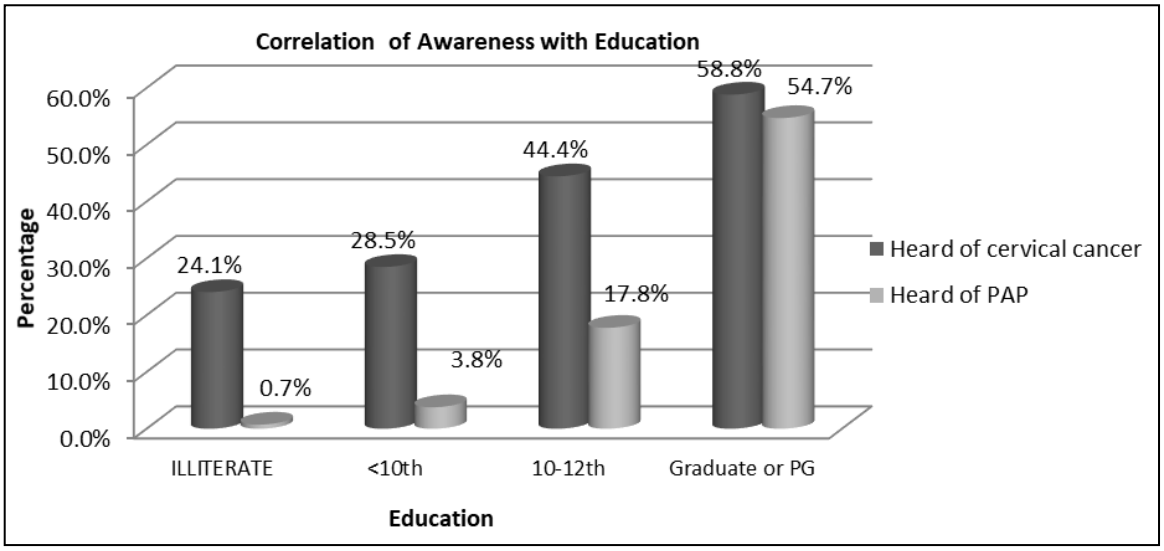

Fig III: Bar Diagram showing correlation of awareness of cervical cancer and Pap smear with Education

Awareness about cervical cancer and Pap smear was observed to increase with increase in educational status. However, though education was found to be a significant predictor of awareness of pap smear (p value0.04), it was not a statistically significant predictor for awareness about cervical cancer (p=0.5). (Figure III).

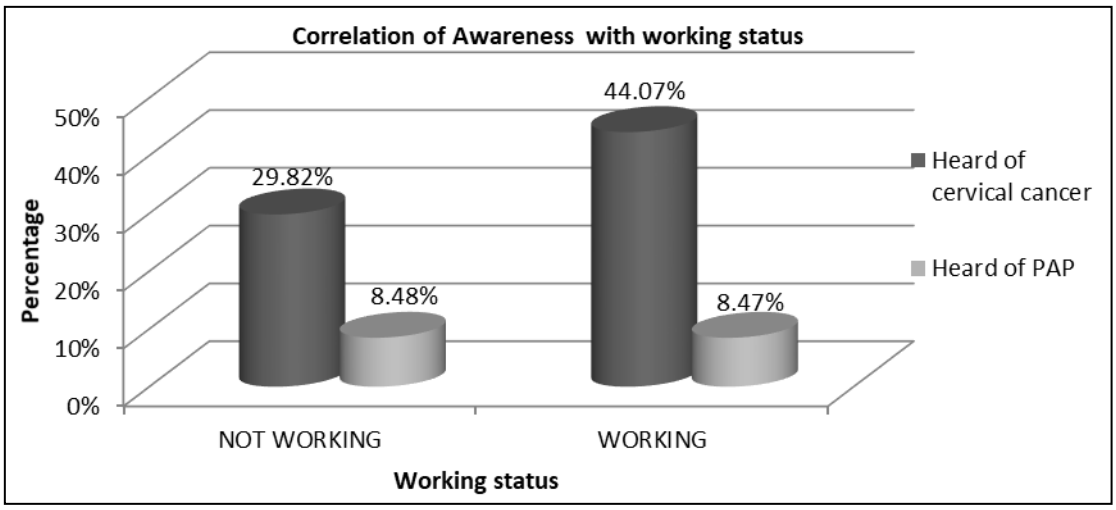

Fig IV: Bar Diagram showing correlation of awareness of cervical cancer and awareness and practice of pap smear with working status

Awareness of cervical cancer was statistically significant (p=0.03) in working women However, the awareness of pap smear was nearly same in both groups. (Figure IV).

Discussion

Early detection is the cornerstone for secondary prevention of cervical cancer. The main key to early detection is screening. However, it is important that women are aware of cervical cancer and its screening and also motivated enough to undergo regular pap test.

The mean age of the participants in our study was 28.6 years. This was comparable to studies from Saudi Arabia [5]. Puducherry, [6] and Nepal in which the mean age of participants was 31 years,40 years and 29.9 years respectively.

The awareness about cervical cancer, pap smear and HPV vaccine in our study was found to be 31.9%, 8.5% and 1.5% respectively. Another study conducted in Delhi showed an awareness of 40.2% for cervical cancer and awareness of Pap smear to be 6.3% [8] Similarly, in a study done in Mangalore, the awareness of cervical cancer was 45.8% while that of pap smear was 3.2%. [9] Studies done in Pondicherry and Bhopal showed an awareness of cervical cancer to be 56.2% and 23.8% respectively [10, 11]

Our Study identified age as a positive predictor for awareness of cervical cancer and pap smear. This was consistent with similar studies done in other parts of the world. Increase in awareness about cervical cancer and pap smear with increasing age can be explained by the fact that young tend to be healthier and thus do not seek medical advice or have less contact with the health care providers.

The increase in awareness of cervical cancer and its screening in educated women may indicate that women with better education have better communication skills, access to media, clear their queries and ability to absorb knowledge. Significant correlation with education was also noted in similar studies done in Brazil [12], America [13] and Argentina [14].

As seen in various studies our study also show greater proportion of awareness of cervical cancer in working women as compared to non working women [12, 13] This may be explained by the fact that working women have increased interaction with people who act as source of knowledge.

Major source of awareness about cervical cancer in our study were health professionals (46%).However the role of media and internet accounting for approximately 44% cannot be underestimated. Similar findings were seen in other studies .[12,14,15] This not only calls upon need of support system from healthcare professionals to make the patients aware and motivate about cervical cancer screening, but also the need to strengthen the communication through electronic and print media.

Conclusion

Cervical cancer, a leading cause of female mortality in India, can be curbed with early detection by pap smear which in itself is inexpensive and reliable method of cervical cancer screening. However, the impact of the test depends upon its proper utilization by the target population. Awareness and motivation to undergo screening by the target group is the first and most important parameter to determine the success of cervical cancer prevention. The study showed that the awareness of cervical cancer and pap smear is low in women of North Delhi. Age, education level and working status of women are important predictors of awareness about cervical cancer and its screening. Commitment at National Level is essential to facilitate awareness and motivation of women about cervical cancer and its prevention. Health professionals and media can play a pivotal role in achieving this.

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