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(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

AWARENESS ABOUT THE ROLE OF PHYSIOTHERAPY MANAGEMENT DURING LABOUR AMONG WOMEN OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE GROUP IN MUMBAI: A CROSS – SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Labour is a physically and emotionally demanding experience for women. Physiotherapy can provide supportive, non-pharmacological strategies such as breathing and relaxation techniques, exercise, and appropriate positioning to help women cope during labour. However, awareness of the role of physiotherapy during childbirth may be limited. This study assessed awareness of physiotherapy management during labour among women of reproductive age in Mumbai.

Aim and Objectives: To assess awareness regarding the role of physiotherapy management during labour among women of reproductive age using a validated questionnaire.

Materials and Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 172 women aged 18–45 years selected through convenience sampling. After obtaining informed consent, data were collected using an 18-item validated, interview-based questionnaire comprising two-point, three-point, and multiple-choice questions. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses.

Results: The mean age of participants was 26.38 ± 6.30 years. Of the 172 participants, 104 (59.0%) were aware that physiotherapy has a role during labour, while 36 (21.0%) were unsure and 32 (19.0%) were unaware. Only 63 (36.6%) were aware of specific physiotherapy approaches, and 27 (15.7%) knew that physiotherapists could teach labour positions. Only 21 (12.2%) had attended a session related to physiotherapy during labour. However, 83 (48.3%) were willing to attend such a session in the future, and 160 (93.0%) would recommend physiotherapy support during labour to friends or family.

Conclusion: Although general awareness of physiotherapy during labour was fairly good, understanding of specific techniques and their practical application remained limited. Strengthening antenatal education and increasing the

involvement of physiotherapists in maternal healthcare may improve women's awareness and access to supportive care during childbirth.

Keywords: Antenatal care; Awareness; Childbirth; Labour; Physiotherapy; Women

1 INTRODUCTION

Labour is a physically and emotionally demanding experience that may involve pain, fatigue, anxiety, and musculoskeletal discomfort. Although these experiences are a normal part of childbirth, appropriate supportive care can help women cope with the physical and emotional demands of labour. Physiotherapy offers several non-pharmacological approaches that may support women during this period, including breathing and relaxation techniques, therapeutic exercise, appropriate positioning, massage, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, and the use of a birth ball.[3,7]

Despite the potential role of physiotherapy in supporting women during labour, awareness of these services may not be adequate. Women may be familiar with physiotherapy for general musculoskeletal problems but may have limited understanding of its role in maternal and childbirth care. This gap in awareness may prevent women from seeking appropriate information or considering physiotherapy as part of their childbirth preparation and support.[2,6]

In India, awareness related to labour pain and its management has been explored; however, information specifically addressing women's awareness of physiotherapy during labour remains limited. Improving awareness is important because informed women may be more likely to discuss available options with healthcare professionals and make appropriate use of supportive services during childbirth. Increasing communication between women, physiotherapists, and other maternal healthcare professionals may further improve access to such care.

Therefore, the present study was undertaken to assess awareness regarding the role of physiotherapy management during labour among women of reproductive age in Mumbai. It was hypothesized that awareness of physiotherapy during labour may be present but that understanding of its specific techniques and practical applications would remain limited.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Study Type

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out.

2.1.1 Study Population

The study included women of reproductive age. The study protocol specified an eligible age range of 18–45 years.

2.1.2 Study Area And Duration

The study was conducted in a community setting in Mumbai over a 6 month period.

2.1.3 Size Sample Calculation

A sample size of 172 was calculated using a 95% confidence level, a population size of 10,000, an anticipated outcome frequency of 20.57%, a 6% confidence limit, and a design effect of 1.

2.1.4 Sampling And Recruitment

Convenience sampling was adopted. Women meeting the eligibility criteria were approached, given information about the study, and enrolled after providing informed consent.

2.1.5 Inclusion Criteria

Women aged 18–45 years who were willing to provide informed consent.

2.1.6 Exclusion Criteria

Women who had previously received physiotherapy support during labour; women with cognitive impairment; and medical college students who were already familiar with physiotherapy support during labour.

2.2 Study Tool

Data was collected using an 18-item interview-based, self-made validated questionnaire. The questionnaire included eight two-point response questions, eight three-point response questions, and two multiple-choice questions. Face validity was established by an expert panel of physiotherapists.

2.3 Data Collection

Following Institutional Research Board approval and questionnaire face validation, eligible participants were recruited and data were collected through interviews.

2.4 Ethical Approval And Consent

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Board of K. J. Somaiya College of Physiotherapy. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before participation in the study.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data was entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using Excel/SPSS. Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages, whereas age was summarized using mean and standard deviation. The chi-square test was used to assess associations between categorial variables. A p-value <0.5 was considered statistically significant.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Participant characteristics (n = 172)

It summarizes the participants' demographic characteristics. The mean age was 26.38 ± 6.30 years, with most being graduates (52.3%) and students (51.7%). Most participants (85.5%) had no previous labour experience.

Table 1: General awareness of physiotherapy during labour

Question	Response	n	%
Aware that physiotherapy has a role during labour	Yes	104	59.0
	Not sure	36	21.0
	No	32	19.0
Family member aware of physiotherapy support	Yes	81	47.0
	No	91	53.0
Aware of possible labour complications	Yes	132	76.7
	No	40	23.3
Aware physiotherapy can reduce certain complications	Yes	96	55.8
	Not sure	46	26.7
	No	30	17.4
Aware of physiotherapy approaches/support during labour	Yes	63	36.6
	No	44	25.6
	I don't know	65	37.8

It shows general awareness of physiotherapy during labour. Overall, 59.0% were aware of its role, while 21.0% were unsure and 19.0% were unaware. About 55.8% knew that physiotherapy may help reduce certain complications.

Table 2: Exposure to physiotherapy information and services

Question	Response	n	%
Attended a session/class on physiotherapy during labour	Yes	21	12.2
	No	151	87.8
Aware of women taking physiotherapy during pregnancy	Yes	53	30.8
	No	70	40.7
	I don't know	49	28.5
Informed about physiotherapy during labour during pregnancy	Yes	3	1.7
	No	42	24.4
	Not applicable	127	73.8
Consulted a physiotherapist during pregnancy	Yes	6	3.5
	No	40	23.3
	Not applicable	126	73.3

It highlights limited exposure to physiotherapy services. Only 12.2% had attended a relevant session and 3.5% had consulted a physiotherapist during pregnancy.

3.2 Willingness to Attend Physiotherapy Sessions

Almost half of the participants (48.3%) said they would be willing to attend a physiotherapy session for labour management in the future. Another 43.6% were unsure, while only 8.1% were unwilling. This is encouraging, as most women appear open to learning more about physiotherapy.

4 DISCUSSION

This cross-sectional study found that 59.0% of the participants were aware that physiotherapy has a role during labour. This shows that some general awareness exists, although it is not yet complete. However, the lower awareness of specific physiotherapy approaches suggests that knowing about the role of physiotherapy does not necessarily mean that women understand how physiotherapists can support them during labour.

The findings are in agreement with previous literature reporting gaps in women's understanding of physiotherapy as part of maternal care. Kingau and Dagala reported limited knowledge of physiotherapy among antenatal mothers and highlighted the need for educational programs to provide women with appropriate information.[2] In the present study, only 36.6% of participants were aware of physiotherapy approaches or support during labour, while 37.8% were unaware of any such approaches. This indicates that awareness programs should go beyond simply introducing physiotherapy and should provide women with practical information about the different ways physiotherapy may be used during labour.

Breathing exercises were the most commonly recognized physiotherapy technique (37.8%), followed by pelvic floor exercises and labour positions. This suggests that participants had some familiarity with commonly discussed techniques, although awareness of other approaches was limited. Recent evidence describes a variety of physiotherapy resources that may be used to support women and manage pain during labour.[3] A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2025 also reported maternal benefits associated with physiotherapy assistance during labour.[1] However, the present study assessed awareness and perceptions rather than clinical outcomes. Therefore, it cannot determine whether greater awareness or use of physiotherapy would lead to improved labour outcomes.[3,1]

Only 12.2% of participants had attended a session or class related to physiotherapy during labour, and only 3.5% reported consulting a physiotherapist during pregnancy. This limited direct exposure may partly explain the lower awareness of specific physiotherapy techniques. It also highlights the importance of involving physiotherapists in antenatal care so that women can receive appropriate information and guidance before labour. Better communication between physiotherapists and other antenatal-care providers may help make physiotherapy more familiar and accessible to women.[5,6]

Despite the limited practical awareness, participants showed a positive response towards physiotherapy. Nearly half were willing to attend a future physiotherapy session, while 93.0% said they would recommend physiotherapy support during labour to their friends or family. These findings suggest that limited information and exposure may be a greater barrier than a lack of acceptance. Providing information through antenatal classes, community-based programs, and routine interactions with healthcare professionals may therefore be useful in improving awareness and encouraging women to consider physiotherapy during pregnancy and labour.[4,6]

The study has several strengths, including a defined community-based population, a sample size of 172 participants, and the use of an interview-based questionnaire that underwent face validation. However, some limitations should be considered. Convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly to women from different geographical and sociodemographic backgrounds. The cross-sectional design also provides information at a single point in time and does not allow changes in awareness to be assessed over time. In addition, the questionnaire measured reported awareness, which may not fully represent the participants actual understanding of individual physiotherapy techniques.

5 CONCLUSION

Women of reproductive age in Mumbai showed a moderate level of general awareness regarding the role of physiotherapy during labour. However, their awareness of specific techniques, labour positions, and the practical role of physiotherapy was limited. Direct exposure to physiotherapy education and consultation during pregnancy was also uncommon. Despite this, participants showed a willingness to learn about physiotherapy and to recommend its use to others. Including physiotherapy information in antenatal education and encouraging closer collaboration between physiotherapists and other maternity-care providers may help improve awareness and access to supportive care during labour.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interests.

Statement of ethical approval

The study was conducted after obtaining approval from K. J. Somaiya College of Physiotherapy, Mumbai , Maharashtra, India.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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