

Original Article / Orijinal Araştırma

Pubic hair removal practices in Muslim women

Müslüman kadınlarda pubik kıl alma pratiği

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Abstract

Aim. Pubic hair removal has been common since the ancient times. In the Middle East, removal of the female pubic hair has been considered as a tradition of hygiene for many centuries, and it is recommended by Islam. However, development of new technologies such as lasers or home-use depilatory devices may have changed the trends and methods. Although pubic hair removal is known to be very common, there is very few data about the pubic hair removal features of the women in eastern Mediterranean area and Islamic population. The aim of this study is to evaluate the recent trends, demographic, social, and sexual features of pubic hair removal activities among Turkish Cypriot women in North Cyprus. **Methods.** This study was conducted as a cross-sectional study. Self-administered questionnaires were given to volunteered female subjects applied to our outpatient services. **Results.** The results of our study revealed that a vast majority of Turkish Cypriot women applies regular pubic hair removal and the most common method is waxing. Initialization of pubic hair removal is at the age of menarche and the source of knowledge is the mother. **Conclusion.** the reasons of pubic hair removal were mostly feeling comfortable, and prevention of odor rather than sexual image or religious reasons.

Keywords: Pubic hair removal, Cyprus, laser, waxing, shaving, Islam.

Özet

Amaç. Pubik kılların temizlenmesi eski çağlardan beri yaygın olmuştur. Orta Doğu'da, kadınlarda pubik kılların temizlenmesi yüzyıllar boyunca hijyenik bir gelenek olarak kabul edilmiştir ve İslam dini tarafından tavsiye edilmektedir. Ancak, lazerler veya ev kullanımı için epilasyon cihazları gibi yeni teknolojilerin gelişmesi eğilimleri ve yöntemleri değiştirmiş olabilir. Pubik kılların temizlenmesinin çok yaygın olduğu bilinmesine rağmen, Doğu Akdeniz bölgesinde ve İslam popülasyonunda kadınların pubik

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epilasyon özellikleri hakkında çok az veri vardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta Kıbrıslı Türk kadınlar arasında pubik kılların temizlenmesindeki en son eğilimleri, demografik, sosyal ve cinsel özelliklerini değerlendirmektir. **Yöntem.** Bu çalışma kesitsel bir çalışma olarak yürütülmüştür. Anketler, polikliniğe başvuran gönüllü kadınlara uygulanmış ve kendileri tarafından gizli olarak doldurulmuştur. **Bulgular.** Çalışmamızın sonucundaki bulgular Kıbrıslı Türk kadınların büyük çoğunluğunun düzenli pubik epilasyon uyguladığını ve en sık kullanılan yöntemin ağda olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Pubik epilasyonun başlangıç yaşı menarş yaşı ve esas bilgi kaynağı anne olarak tespit edilmiştir. **Sonuç.** Pubik epilasyonun uygulama nedeni cinsel imaj ve dini nedenlerden çok, rahat hissetmek ve koku oluşumunun önlenmesidir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Pubik kılların temizlenmesi, Kıbrıs, lazer, ağda, traş, İslam

Introduction

Pubic hair has remarkable impact on female sexuality. Development and widespread use of new technological depilatory devices have changed pubic hair grooming practices with the dominating effect of fashion and media. The gynecologist should be aware of the pubic hair removal practices and trends while dealing with female sexual health and guiding the public health. The knowledge of behaviors and tendencies related with the pubic hair removal may also help to clarify and understand the associated factors while determining the female sexual health in the middle east, especially by means of sexually transmitted diseases.

Pubic hair removal has been common since the ancient times. The oldest findings on epilation date back to the neolithic age. The Köşkhöyük (6500 BC) obsidian razor in the Museum of Nigde- Turkey and the other obsidian razor exhibited in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara-Turkey are the oldest known examples for Anatolian experience of epilation. Uzel emphasizes the craftsmanship superiority of the razors that indisputably raises the impression that they have been manufactured for use on humans. In addition, Aristophanes (445-386 BC) and Juvenal (MS60) have always reported pubic hair removal in their works. Prosper Albinus who visited Egypt in the 16th century also gives detailed information about the pubic epilation traditions and ceremonies of Egyptian women while explaining the nature of medicine [1]. In Europe, nude women in the renaissance paintings mostly have no pubic hair. Nowadays, inter-communal relations have increased by facilitation of travel opportunities causing changes in the life styles, as well. Changes of life styles, fashion (e.g., the popularization of bikinis), and movements of freedom in sexuality may have influenced the traditional methods. Development of new technologies such as lasers or home-use depilatory devices has also changed the traditional trends and practices [2, 3]. A recent study showed that, pubic hair grooming practices are in a diverse range in United States [4]. In the Middle East, removal of the female body hair has been considered for proper hygiene, tradition for many centuries and recommended by Islam [(5)]. Nevertheless, even though pubic hair removal is known to be very common, there is very few data about the pubic hair removal features of the women in Eastern Mediterranean area and Islamic population. Turkish Cypriot women share many similarities of life styles (such as open dress code and wearing bikini) with other Cypriots and European countries because of the multicultural history

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and British period in the island. However, they are Muslim in religion and have many similarities with Turkish women by means of tradition and partnership [6]. The aim of this study is to evaluate the trends, demographic, social, and sexual features of pubic hair removal activities among women in North Cyprus.

Material and Methods

This study was planned as a cross sectional study. Self-administered questionnaires were given to volunteered female subjects admitted to the outpatient clinic.

Main Outcome Measures

Demographic features (age, education, race, religion, relationship status), personal health status (menarche age, medications used), preferred genital hair removal methods, frequency, and factors related to genital hair removal, were included in the survey.

Results

A total of 61 women between ages 17 -55 years (mean 30.3±9.9 years) completed the questionnaires. The mean menarche ages were 13±1.35 years. Features of participants are shown in Table 1. The vast majority of the study participants reported regular pubic hair removal (90.2%), whereas 4.9% were applying irregular hair removal and 4.9 % had never removed pubic hair. The group that never removed their pubic hair, were single, ages 20, 24, 46 and menarche age were 11, 13, 14 respectively (mean 12.6). Pubic hair removal during last 1-month period was performed by 95.1% of all the participants.

Initial hair removal methods were waxing: 47.5 %, shaving: 41%, depilatory cream: 6.6%, laser 3.3%, electrical epilatory device: 1.6% recently. All of the participants declared usage of more than one hair removal methods in their daily life. Recently preferred pubic hair removal methods are shown in Table 2.

Pubic hair removal frequencies were found to be monthly (39.3 %), weekly (34.4 %), at irregular intervals (13.1%), once in three months (8.2%) and daily (4.9%).

The most common source of knowledge for hair removal was the mother as reported by 70.5 % of the participants. Other reported sources were other women from the family (8.2%), friend (8.2%), and beauty salon (1.6%). A percentage of 11.5 % reported own determination.

The most common reasons for pubic hair removal were feeling comfortable (48%) and prevention of odor (33%) and the least reported reasons were for sexual image (14%) and religious issues (8%), as shown in Table 3. In addition, the reasons for method preference in pubic hair removal are shown in Table 4.

Discussion

There are numerous methods and products of hair removal. These include shaving, trimming, chemical depilatories, waxing/sugaring, laser modalities/photoepilation, and electrolysis. Shaving, trimming, chemical depilatories, waxing and electrical home

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epilation devices are simple to apply and inexpensive methods for home use. The other hair removal methods such as lasers, photoepilation (IPL) and electrolysis are usually more expensive and potentially time-consuming methods used by paraprofessionals, nurses, and/or physicians [2,3].

In our study, the most common (always plus frequently used) method was found to be waxing used by 42.6% of the patients. Waxing of the genital area is called "Brazilian wax" in western societies and in the middle east, ancient to nowadays, "the wax" is prepared with sugar, water, and lemon juice to remove the hair follicle from the root [7, 8]. There are many commercial forms of this sugar wax in the market as well as instant homemade pastes. Most of the patients preferring waxing reported its long lasting effect up to 6 weeks, cost and privacy during application at home as a reason of their preference. This may be related with the finding that the most common initial hair removal method was waxing (47.5 %) and the main source of knowledge was the mother. Our findings suggest that, Turkish Cypriot women still prefer traditional methods for pubic hair removal. One study of 235 female undergraduate students in Australia found that approximately 22% were currently in the practice of removing all of their pubic hair and that total removers were more likely to use waxing which is similar to our findings [9].

Results of our study revealed that the fundamental reasons of pubic hair removal were mostly for feeling comfortable, prevention of occurrence of odor and gynecologic healthcare, whereas sexual image or religious reasons were reported less. Contrary to our study, Tiggemann and Hodgson [2008] found that sexual attractiveness, femininity, and self-enhancement were related rather than social norms [9]. However, total pubic hair removal was associated with more positive genital self-image and sexual function in United States [4]. Herbenick et al. (2007) in USA also found that total pubic hair removal was associated with younger age and being partnered. As similar to that study, a study from United Kingdom found the removal of pubic hair to be more common among women who were 50 years of age or younger [10].

Shaving was found to be the second preferred method and the reasons of preference were reported as for the application being instant, easy, and painless. Although shaving with a razor is a very old, easy, and instant method, it may also have some disadvantages like cutting injuries, bleeding, or spread of infection [7]. Glass et al (2012) reported that mostly "women" were effected among patients who presented to U.S. emergency departments with an injury related pubic hair grooming. In addition, they reported that shaving razors were implicated in 83% of the injuries and the most common site of injury was the external female genitalia [11]. The genital injuries in females due to razor shaving were dermatitis, folliculitis, cellulitis, abrasion, burns, and bleeding. The injuries were reported to occur despite the proper and intended use of shaving razor suggested by the manufacturer [11]. In our study, none of our patients reported genital injuries with shaving. The reasons of preference were also reported as "being easy to apply" and "painless" by our patients.

The third preferred method was laser hair removal reported approximately by the 18% of the patients. Kutlubay et al [2009] reported that laser hair removal for bikini /pubic area was preferred by 16.8% of his patients in a large series of Turkish patients [12]. This low rate of preference may be related with the presence of alternative methods that could be

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performed be done by themselves, privacy, the cost of the laser hair removal or the fear of the side effects.

Chemical depilatories are simple and painless to use, readily available, and can give results that last up to 2 weeks. However, chemical depilatory agents that do not produce irritant reaction elsewhere on the skin may produce skin reactions or burns in genital areas [13]. In our study, a great majority of the patients (approximately 80%) had never used chemical depilatories and the rare preferring ones reported this usage due to being easy and practical.

In our study, patients reported the main source of information about pubic hair removal as mother (70.5%) or another female from the family (8.2%). However, 11% of the patients had not received information from anyone. This finding also suggests that Turkish Cypriot young females still find the elder ones reliable and they are tied to traditions rather than other informative sources or trends.

Interestingly there were three cases whom pubic hair were untouched. Although the eldest female declared only shortening of pubic hair 2 or 3 times in her life, she refused to define it as hair removal. All of the three were dressed in Islamic covered code and reported the absence of hair removal because of being single and un-partnered. Our finding correlates with a study from North America in which not being sexually active was indicated as a reason for stopping grooming [14].

We found that initial pubic hair removal age was almost the same as the first menstruation time. This synchronization may be again related with traditions, mother's attitudes, or our findings of that feeling comfortable and prevention of odor. We also found that the reasons of pubic hair removal were mostly feeling comfortable, and prevention of odor rather than sexual image or religious reasons.

The results of our study reveal that a vast majority of Turkish Cypriot women are still very traditional for pubic hair removal, by means of preferred methods and source of knowledge. This finding might be indicating that they prefer the experienced and safe methods rather than the popular ones without any impact of religion or sexual image.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no scientific and/or financial conflicts of interest.

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