

Vulvar condition causing painful sex strikes twice as many Hispanic women

January 22 2014

Hispanic women surveyed in the metro Detroit area were twice as likely as white women to be affected by vulvodynia, unexplained vulvar pain that can make sex, tampon use or even sitting excruciating. Meanwhile, the condition affected half as many black women, new University of Michigan research shows.

In all ethnic groups, the prevalence and incidence rates were substantial.

Younger [women](#), those who experienced painful sex or vulvar pain over the last six months and women with pre-existing sleep problems, depression and chronic pain disorders were also more likely to develop vulvodynia, according to the study that appears in *Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

The chronic condition affects between 8 and 10 million women at any one time. Researchers followed women whose symptoms did not previously indicate vulvodynia over three years and found that each year roughly 4 out of every 100 who previously did not have the diagnosis had an onset of new symptoms consistent with vulvodynia.

"We had a good idea of what the prevalence of vulvodynia was but this data gives us a better understanding of how often new cases develop and the potential risk factors that may be involved," says lead author Barbara D. Reed, M.D., M.S.P.H., professor of family medicine at the U-M Medical School.

"We found the most striking and unexplainable differences between ethnic and racial groups. Other predictors included younger age, sleep dysfunction, comorbid pain conditions, genital symptoms not yet meeting diagnostic criteria, and psychological distress."

Authors used data from follow-up surveys every six months in the Michigan Woman to Woman Health study, a population-based cohort of 2,542 adult women in Southeastern Michigan.

Vulvodynia is characterized by a burning, irritation, or sharp pain near the opening of the vagina. The location, constancy and severity of the pain vary among women. For some, vulvar pain may be caused by activities like biking, tampon use, or intercourse, and for others it can be a lingering, spontaneous [pain](#).

"One of the major problems with vulvodynia is physicians tend not to recognize it, diagnose it or treat it, so many women suffer without knowing their symptoms have a name and that treatment is possible," says Reed. "The more physicians become aware of how often this happens and who the condition affects, the more likely they are to teach patients about vulvodynia and treat them or refer them for care."

More information: "Factors Associated with Vulvodynia Incidence," *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, Vol.12, No.2, Part 2, February, 2014

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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