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Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor Health

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**Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor
Health**

A Doctoral Experiential Capstone Project Final Report
Presented to the Faculty of Western New England University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Entry-Level Doctorate
in
Occupational Therapy

by
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July 2024

**Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor
Health**

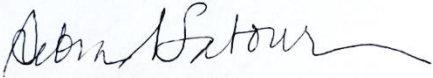
A Doctoral Experiential Capstone Project Final Report

By

Ivy Rivers OT/s

July 2024

APPROVED BY:

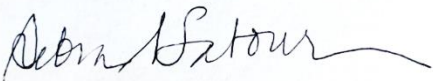


Debra Latour, OT, PP-OTD, M.Ed., OTR, FAOTA
Faculty Mentor

8/1/2024

Date

APPROVED BY:



Debra Latour, OT, PP-OTD, M.Ed., OTR, FAOTA
Doctoral Experiential Coordinator

8/1/2024

Date

Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor Health

Abstract:

Objective-To assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the community toward pelvic floor health.

Methods- Flyers were distributed throughout Western MA that included a quick response (QR) code. Participants scanned the QR code and were directed to an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was a mix of open response and Likert style questions that assessed the knowledge, practices, awareness, and attitudes surrounding pelvic floor health.

Results- A total of 110 women completed the online questionnaire. The findings of the questionnaire underscore a concerning trend: a significant portion of Springfield and the surrounding communities lack basic knowledge about pelvic floor health. Many participants admitted to having pelvic floor disorders (PFD), having little knowledge on the subject, having no known community resources, or not knowing of any preventative measures for pelvic floor health. Many participants expressed their frustration over the scarcity of accessible information, especially following childbirth.

Conclusion- Pelvic floor disorders (PFD) develop when the pelvic floor (muscles that support organs in the pelvis) becomes damaged or weakened. PFD includes lacerations, urinary/anal incontinence, prolapse, persistent pain, and pain with intercourse. The lack of education presented to women regarding available treatment and rehabilitation options for PFD has been identified as a neglected public health issue (Burkhart et al., 2020).

Keywords-pelvic floor health, postpartum, Kegels, pelvic floor.

Introduction:

Pelvic floor disorders (PFD) represent a prevalent yet often overlooked health concern among women, stemming from damage or weakening of the pelvic floor muscles that support vital organs within the pelvis. These disorders encompass a range of conditions including lacerations, urinary and anal incontinence, prolapse, persistent pain, and discomfort during intercourse. Despite their significant impact on quality of life, PFDs remain underreported and stigmatized, hindering access to appropriate care and support (Burkhart et al. 2020).

Dr. Deepali Maheshwari's line of work as a urogynecologist sheds light on the repercussions of PFDs, particularly in the postpartum period. In her online webinar at Baystate Health in Springfield, Massachusetts, she revealed alarming statistics, indicating that approximately 60% of patients experience one or more pelvic floor disorders following childbirth. Moreover, a substantial proportion, ranging from 8% to 25%, continue to endure persistent symptoms for a year or more after delivery (Maheshwari 2022).

This research underscores the need to address the inadequate education and awareness surrounding PFDs, as highlighted by Burkhart et al. (2020). The lack of readily available information on treatment and rehabilitation options for affected women exacerbates the public health implications of this neglected issue. As occupational therapy students, it is imperative to delve into this topic, recognizing the pivotal role of occupational therapy in promoting holistic wellness and enhancing the quality of life for individuals grappling with pelvic floor disorders. Occupational therapists can supervise and train clients in pelvic floor health, unfortunately there is a shortage of pelvic floor occupational therapists in the Springfield, MA area. While there are numerous studies that support the use of preventative exercise such as pelvic floor muscle training,

there are no educational or informational resources given to women until a problem arises. Women typically end up either waiting too long to speak to a provider about their issues or lack the knowledge needed to make informed decisions, they wind up spending thousands of dollars on surgical operations that may have been otherwise avoided. Through continued research and advocacy efforts, we aim to contribute to the advancement of education and support services tailored to the needs of women navigating the complexities of pelvic floor health.

Doctorial experiential overview:

Research

There was an initial collaboration between Dr. Deepali Maheshwari of Baystate Wesson Women's Clinic and Western New England. Baystate Health is the largest healthcare organization in western Massachusetts. Baystate Health is a not-for-profit, integrated healthcare system serving over 800,000 people throughout western New England (Baystatehealth.org, n.d.). This partnership allowed the researcher access to postpartum patients at Baystate Wesson Women's Clinic. Participants were seen at their post-partum visit with their obstetric provider. The Pelvic Floor Distress Inventory (PFDI-20) was used to assess the presence and impact of pelvic floor problems. The Pelvic Floor Impact Questionnaire-Short form 7 was used to assess how bladder, bowel, or vaginal symptoms affect participants' activities, relationships, and feelings. Unfortunately, there was a very low participation rate in this study. The researcher had to pivot and create a new but related study that included the online questionnaire that is mentioned previously. The questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding attitudes, practices, and knowledge surrounding pelvic floor health. A pamphlet was created with data from the study to distribute to women in Springfield MA and surrounding communities.

Purpose

The project sought to assess the knowledge, attitude, and practices of the community towards pelvic floor health. It also helped to assess how pelvic floor symptoms affect daily life, pain, and function. We hope to provide women within the greater Springfield MA area and surrounding communities with knowledge, resources, and awareness to empower them to play an active role in disease prevention. We aim to change attitudes and behaviors surrounding pelvic floor health and wellness by arming women with education and supports to reduce stigma and risks associated with pelvic floor dysfunction. The data helps discern what educational material could be created that includes community resources and information on common pelvic floor symptoms and information regarding pelvic floor health. Another possible avenue from this study could be a program creation and implementation for postpartum women.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out from May to July 2024 (Appendix A). Inclusion criteria were: Must be at least 18-45 years of age. Must have had at least 1 vaginal or C-section delivery, must be assigned female at birth, must speak English. Exclusion criteria were, Persons assigned male at birth, women under 18 years of age or over the age of 45. The study was publicized in places that women frequented such as women's health centers, shopping centers and transportation hubs. The study was also posted using online platforms such as community forums and women's health groups. The flyers included information about the study and a QR code (Appendix B). Participants scanned the QR code and were directed to an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was a mix of open response and Likert style questions that assessed the knowledge, practices, awareness, and attitudes surrounding pelvic floor health (Appendix C).

Results

A total of 110 women participated. This research has been selected for presentation elsewhere. Please reference submission number nr.15212 at the International Society for Sexual Medicine for full results section (Appendix F).

Implications for the population

This study was able to highlight the needs of women in the area of pelvic floor health. Women are lacking in education, knowledge and resources provided to them following the birth of their child. There is a severe need to create programs and raise awareness about pelvic floor health so women can make knowledgeable health decisions concerning pelvic floor health.

Implications for Occupational Therapy (OT)

Implications from this study include the need for interprofessional collaborations with health care professionals to ensure a continuum of care. Ots are also needed to spread awareness that occupational therapists can assist patients with pelvic floor health. This research highlights the need for OTs to provide community outreach programs and provide education and training in Springfield and surrounding communities.

Discussion

The findings of the research echo the findings of the initial literature review. Women need more education and resources for pelvic floor health. A high number of women reported they had no knowledge or very little knowledge of pelvic floor health. Furthermore, roughly more than half of women reported they felt they were not confident at all about making informed decisions about pelvic floor health. A large percentage of participants stated that it was either very important or important to learn about pelvic floor health. Many of the participants revealed

they have had experienced a range of pelvic floor symptoms following childbirth that negatively affected the roles and routines of their daily life, citing difficulty holding urine and leaking urine as the top symptoms reported in the questionnaire.

Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) such as cleaning and exercising were reported to be disrupted by these symptoms and activities of daily living (ADLs) such as sex and sleep were stopped or interrupted until symptoms were resolved. Many women indicated their awareness of Kegels, an exercise that is used to help strengthen the pelvic floor, but failed to recognize they were able to continue completing Kegels following childbirth to aid with incontinence symptoms. A theme arose that Kegels were done to help the mother push the baby out during delivery, this information appeared to be passed from mother to child according to the participants responses. Cho and Kim (2020) report on a common problem encountered when teaching pelvic floor muscle exercises (including Kegels) is muscle isolation. More than one-third of women in their study report not feeling confident about their ability to do a pelvic floor muscle contraction correctly, highlighting a need for proper instruction by a medical professional.

Some participants were able to identify resources in their community that addressed pelvic floor disorders but only two participants listed occupational therapy as one of those options. While occupational therapists are able to address pelvic floor disorders, there are few in the Western MA area. This may be due to the additional time and money required to become certified in pelvic floor disorders, as traditional schooling for occupational therapists does not include this in the entry level curriculum. Awareness and education about the field and scope of OT continues to require advocacy in the community as well as with medical professionals.

Some possible limitations include the use of the questionnaire for data collection, while not validated it did provide valuable insight into the needs of the community. We recommend limiting the amount of free-text responses as the data became difficult to sort. We had a limited sample size which may not have reflected the demographics of Springfield and surrounding communities. While we do know the age range of participants is 18 to 45, we do not collect any other demographic information. More research is needed in pelvic floor health in the future.

Conclusions

Pelvic floor disorders (PFD) develop when the pelvic floor (muscles that support organs in the pelvis) becomes damaged or weakened. PFD includes lacerations, urinary/anal incontinence, prolapse, persistent pain, and pain with intercourse. Women would like to learn more about pelvic floor health but lack awareness, knowledge and resources.

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Appendices

Appendix A IRB Approval Form

Subgroup of the IRB & Human Subjects Committee
FWA00010736 Approval Form*

Responsible Director: Dr. Levine

Title of Project: Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor Health.

College Proposal Number: COP-IRB#229

 This research proposal is exempt under Federal Regulation 45 CFR 46.104.d.3.i

It is deemed acceptable according to the Belmont Principles and the American Psychological Association’s Ethical Guidelines for the Use of Human Participants for a period of one year.*

X This research proposal has undergone an expedited review under Federal Regulation . It is deemed acceptable according to the Belmont Principles and the American Psychological Association’s Ethical Guidelines for the Use of Human Participants for a period of one year.*

 This research does not qualify for exemption or expedited review and will need to be reviewed by the entire board.

Signature Menna Levine
 Date 5/13/2024

Renewal requests due before 5/13/2025

* Note: Authority to approve exempt or expedited research originating within the College of Pharmacy.

* Note: It is your responsibility to notify the IRB of any adverse events that occur during your research. You must also request an additional review before you introduce changes to the proposed protocol. Maintain a copy of your original application, any requested changes, and this signed approval form. You will need to submit these if you apply for a renewal.

Appendix B Flyer

Volunteers Needed for Research!

**Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community
Regarding Pelvic Floor Health**



*This is a Western New England University College of Pharmacy and Health
Sciences Internal Review Board
Approved **RESEARCH** Study:*

Primary Investigator: Dr. Debra Latour

Email: Debra.latour@wne.edu

Principal Investigator: Ivy Rivers OT/s

Email: ivy_rivers@wne.edu

Your time commitment: 10-30 minutes

Location: Online

Participation will involve:

- An anonymous online questionnaire about pelvic floor health

***This research will help improve our understanding of the current education, attitudes,
and awareness surrounding pelvic floor health and wellness for the women within the
Springfield MA community.**

Interested?

Scan here to begin!



Requirements: You are older than 18 years of age and younger than 45 years of age. You have been assigned female at birth and have had at least one baby either by vaginal or cesarean delivery(C-section). You speak English.

Western New England University IRB Contact Information:

WNEU Institutional Review Board Chair Jessica Outhouse: 413-796-2325, jessica.outhouse@wne.edu; Dr. Minna Levine: Minna.levine@wne.edu

Appendix C Consent form

Western New England University
College of Pharmacy / Health Sciences
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor Health

Primary Investigator/Institution: Dr. Debra Latour and Ivy Rivers of Western New England University.

Introduction

We are inviting you to participate in a research study. This study has been approved by the institutional review board (IRB) at Western New England University (WNEU). You were invited by Ivy Rivers to participate because you are a women who has had a baby. This research consent form explains why this research study is being done, what is involved in participating, the possible risks and benefits of participation, and your rights as a participant in this study. This study will take place from April to July 2024 online at the Occupational Therapy Division of College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences at Western New England University. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions that you may have.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to understand the knowledge, attitude, and practices of the community towards pelvic floor health, to increase awareness and education provided to women on pelvic floor health and to assess how pelvic floor symptoms affect quality of life, pain, and function of post partum women.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you are eligible and agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form. After you scan the QR code on the flyer you will be directed to a link that requires you to electronically agree to the consent form before beginning the questionnaire. The participants will be asked to complete one questionnaire that will evaluate awareness, practices and knowledge surrounding pelvic floor. The questionnaire consists of multiple choice, short answer and paragraph style questions. questionnaire about pelvic floor health will be emailed to you. The survey is six questions with a check box and short answer format. The questionnaire is seven questions in open response/ short answer format. The total time estimated for all survey and questionnaire should range between 10-30 minutes in length.

Risks or Discomforts of the Study

There are risks to participating in any research study. It is unlikely that you will be at risk for any physical or psychological harm as a result of your participation in this study. You may find the survey or questionnaire questions to cause distress and/or fatigue. You may decline to answer any questions and you may voice concerns to the investigators at any time.

Benefits of Being in the Study

The expected benefit of the study is to gather information for the development of educational

**Western New England University
College of Pharmacy / Health Sciences
Informed Consent Form**

material to further education, resources and awareness to the Springfield community regarding pelvic floor health. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You may be provided with educational materials gathered from the results of this study at your request.

Costs of Being in the Study

There will be no cost to you for participating in the study.

Confidentiality

Research studies have a risk for some loss of privacy. To help prevent the loss of privacy, your name will not be recorded on any study documents. All records will be kept strictly confidential. Electronic files will be password-protected and hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet for six years. None of the data that we may publish or present in any reports, presentations, or papers will include any information that can identify you as a participant in this study.

The results of this research study may be published in a medical book or journal, or used to teach others. However, your name or other identifiable information will not be used for these purposes without your specific permission. None of the information that we may publish or present in any reports, presentations, or papers will include information that can identify you as a participant in this study. Your survey answers will be sent to a link at Google Forms where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format.

Google Forms does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. If participants wish to provide their provide contact information to receive educational material created from this study in the future. If you choose to provide contact information such as your phone number or email address, your survey responses may no longer be anonymous to the researcher. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to this survey will remain anonymous.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to choose not to digitally sign this form. You can stop being in the study at any time. Tell the research investigator immediately if you are thinking about stopping or decide to stop.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study before, during, or after the research. If you have any questions about the study at any time, please contact Ivy Rivers at Ivy.rivers@wne.edu or Dr. Debra Latour at debra.latour@wne.edu.

If you wish to speak to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), then please contact Dr. Jessica Carlson, Professor of Psychology and Chair of the WNEU IRB, Jessica.outhouse@wne.edu or via telephone at 413-796-2325 or Dr. Minna Levine, College of Pharmacy / Health Sciences,

Western New England University
College of Pharmacy / Health Sciences
Informed Consent Form

Member of the IRB at minna.levine@wne.edu. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Western New England University Institutional Review Board.

Statement of Consent

Your electronic signature indicates that you understand this form and you have decided to volunteer for this study. It also indicates you have read and understood the information provided here. You have had a chance to ask any questions you had. You are older than 18 years of age and younger than 45 years of age. You have been assigned female at birth and have had at least one baby either by vaginal or cesarean delivery(C-section). You speak English.

You will be able to print a copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators. The online consent form will be kept on a password protected device for a minimum of six years.

Agree

| Disagree

Appendix D Questionnaire

1. How would you rate your knowledge on pelvic floor health?

No knowledge

Minimal knowledge

Basic knowledge

Adequate knowledge

Superior knowledge

2. How confident are you that you have the tools to make informed decisions about pelvic floor health?

Not confident at all

Slightly confident

Somewhat confident

Fairly confident

Completely confident

3. Please indicate which community resources you are aware of that address pelvic floor symptoms.

4. What exercises are you aware of that strengthen pelvic floor muscles?

5. What would you like to learn about the pelvic floor?

6. How important to you is learning about the pelvic floor?

Very unimportant

Unimportant

Neutral

Important

Very Important

Tell me what you know about the pelvic floor.(open response questions)|

Who was the first person who explained pelvic floor health to you. What was your impression? What did they say?

What concerns do you have regarding pelvic floor health?

What do you know about any educational or preventative programs for pelvic floor disorders in the surrounding communities?

What are some ways that you can protect pelvic floor muscles during and after pregnancy?

What pelvic floor symptoms, if any, are you experiencing or have experienced following delivery? (Examples of symptoms include vaginal pain, trouble holding urine, leaking urine when sneezing/coughing or laughing, pain with intercourse) How do they affect your daily life?

What is your preferred method for receiving pelvic floor education?

Community Resources

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Baystate Urogynecology(Spfd MA)
- HMC Core Rehab(Holyoke MA)
- Bear Paw Center WNE (Spfld MA)
- Mercy Hospital(Spfd MA)
- Renew pelvic health(E.Longmeadow MA)
- Cooley Dickinson Rehab services (Northampton MA)



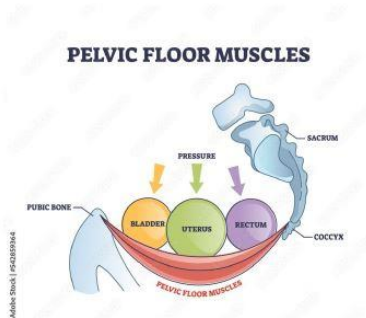
Scan for more info



Pelvic Floor Health



The Pelvic Floor



The Pelvic floor(PF)is a band of muscles that go from your pubic bone to your coccyx. The PF helps to:

- Support organs
- Aid with vaginal childbirth
- Help to pee, poop and pass gas by squeezing or contracting
- Sexual functions for blood flow and orgasm

Pelvic floor symptoms/ Disorders



Trouble holding urine/Leaking urine

Peeing or dripping or feeling the urge to pee and cannot hold it.

Trouble pooping

When you struggle to control bowel movements



Prolapse

When organs bulge into your vagina.



Pain

Lower back pain and pain with sex may occur



Exercises for pelvic floor

- Kegels
- Squats
- Bridge pose
- Diaphragmatic breathing



Appendix F Acceptance Email

25th World Meeting on Sexual Medicine - Your abstract nr. 15212

Inbox x



ISSM Executive Office info@wmsm.org via [secure-platform.com](#)

Mon, Jul 1, 6:29 AM



to me ▾

Dear Ivy Rivers,

We are pleased to inform you that your abstract entitled "Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor Health" (receipt # 15212) has been selected as a **Discussed E-poster Presentation** at the 25th World Meeting on Sexual Medicine, which will take place on September 26-29, 2024 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Your abstract is scheduled in the following session:

Session: 'E-poster Session 1 - Female Sexual (Dys)function'

Date/time: Friday, September 27, 2024; 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM