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Review Article

Recurrent acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women: an epidemiological review of incidence, pathogenesis and psychological burden

Chetan Sabharwal[1]*, Uman Rashid Bhat[1], Keshav Jindal[2], Muneeb Ahmad Bhat[1], Danish Nabi Bhat[1]

[1]Department of Pharmacy Practice, Adesh, Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, Adesh University, Bathinda, Punjab, India
[2]Department of Pharmaceutics, Adesh Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, Adesh University, Bathinda, Punjab, India

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***Correspondence:**
Dr. Chetan Sabharwal,
E-mail: chetanworkofficial@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Recurrent acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women pose a serious health issue on the global agenda due to their high prevalence, high occurrence rate of recurrence, and dramatic clinical and psychosocial implications. Though recurrent urinary tract infections are historically viewed as harmless, they impose significant financial burden on health-service providers and significantly reduce the quality of life. Most of the episodes can be traced to uropathogenic *Escherichia coli*, the recurrence of which is caused by multifactorial interactions including host susceptibility, bacterial virulence factors, behavioural determinants, and increased antimicrobial resistance. Recent studies have highlighted the significance of the intracellular bacterial reservoirs, biofilm formation, and dysbiosis of urinary and vaginal microbiota as a factor in the maintenance of recurrence. Other than these biological processes, women with recurrent acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections suffer considerable psychological distress including anxiety, fear of recurrence, stigma and social restrictions that are often underacknowledged in a normal clinical practice. To this end, this review summarizes the modern facts about the epidemiology, pathogenesis, determinants of risk, and psychological burden of recurrent urinary tract infections in women. It advocates the use of multidisciplinary and patient-centred therapeutic models that combine antimicrobial treatment with preventive, behavioural, and mental-health interventions in order to reduce recurrence and improve the long-term outcomes.

Keywords: Recurrent urinary tract infections, Women, Epidemiology, Antimicrobial resistance, Risk factors, Psychological burden, Quality of life

INTRODUCTION

Acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections (rUTIs) in women represent a significant public health issue as they are present in millions of women across the globe and have a significant impact on the use of healthcare resources. Despite often being viewed as minor pathological events, rUTIs cause a considerable burden due to the high rate of occurrence, the discomfort that goes hand in hand with them, and the resulting psychosocial consequences that they bring.[1] Etiology is mostly associated with uropathogenic Escherichia coli (UPEC) and such infections are seen in anatomically and physiologically healthy persons who do not undergo structural and functional urinary tract anomalies. The high recurrence rate is quite significant, which underscores the complexity

of the interaction between host-pathogen interactions, risk determinants of behaviour, and the changing trend of antimicrobial resistance.[2] The latest epidemiological studies, which are supplemented by new data on the perturbation of the urinary and gut microbiome, have enlarged the existing knowledge of the biological sectors, that underlie recurrence. In addition to the clinical presentation, rUTIs have a significant influence on the psychological health, causing anxiety, poor quality of life, and social limitations.[3]

Despite these serious negative effects, the modern clinical practice is still significantly focused on antimicrobial treatment, as the stress on prevention methods, behavioural counselling, and incorporation of mental health support occurs rather inadequately. This review incorporates the existing evidence about epidemiology, pathogenesis, and psychological burden of rUTIs among women highlighting the necessity of multidisciplinary interventions and the need to develop patient-based management strategies.[4]

Definition and clinical criteria of recurrent acute uncomplicated UTIs

Recurrent acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections (rUTIs) are symptomatic events of cystitis in otherwise normal women without congenital or functional defects of the urinary tract. RUTIs are clinically diagnosed in women with two or more symptomatic infections during six months or three or more during eleven months with typical presentations of dysuria, urinary frequency, urgency, and suprapubic pain. The urine culture confirming that there are at least 10 3 CFU/ml of a uropathogen, most often.[5] Escherichia coli should ideally confirm the episode. By definition, uncomplicated UTIs include only cases not accompanied by pregnancy, complications of diabetes, immunosuppression, renal failure, or urinary obstruction.

The recurrence could be in the form of relapse that is infection by the same organism within two weeks of treatment owing to bacterial persistence or reinfection whereby a new strain or a previously eradicated strain infects one after proper treatment.[6] The significance of drawing the line between the two has some strategic consequences in management. Also, clinical diagnostic criteria focus on the lack of fever, pains in the flank, or general symptoms thus distinguishing between uncomplicated cystitis and pyelonephritis. Knowledge of these diagnostic limits is critical to diagnose the epidemiological situation correctly, prevent overtreatment and prescribe prevention measures.[7]

Epidemiological significance

Recurrent uncomplicated urinary tract infections (rUTIs) is a common bacterial malady affecting women, and epidemiological evidence suggests that nearly 50-60% of all people will develop at least one infection in their lifetime, and one out of every thirty people will have a recurrent infection. The burden of illness is adjusted by a complex of factors such as age, sexual activity, hormonal milieu, contraceptive and comorbid conditions such as postmenopausal oestrogen deficiency.[8] Younger, sexually active women show the highest rates of primary infections but, as peri- and postmenopausal groups, the recurrence rates are more intense with changes in the microbiota of the vagina and mucosal immunity. Globally, the rUTIs cause millions of outpatient appointments, and bring a substantial economic burden due to direct medical costs, being less productive, and regular antibiotic use.[9] Notably, the past years have witnessed a significant increase in the rates of antimicrobial resistance in uropathogens, which makes recurrence patterns more difficult and limits the therapeutic choice.

There is also emerging evidence that shows the role of social determinants such as hygiene practices, socioeconomic status, and health seeking behaviour in determining incidence trends across the regions.[10] Although they fall under the category of uncomplicated, rUTIs are placing unfair burdens on health-care systems and the day-to-day lives of patients because of their predictability and unpredictability, pain, and psychosocial effects. The full picture of such epidemiological patterns is essential in clarifying prevention measures, improving clinical practices, and incorporating holistic measures that go beyond the single use of antimicrobial therapy.[11]

Rationale and scope of the review

The growing incidence of rUTIs in women and the growing problem of antimicrobial resistance and increasing awareness of related psychological outcomes demonstrate a pressing need to synthesize available evidence. Although there are multiple clinical guidelines that outline the diagnostic and treatment regimens, relatively lower systematic reviews question a convergence of the epidemiological tendencies, pathophysiological processes, and psychological well-being.[12] The pathogenesis of rUTIs is now more complex than simple bacterial reinfection, with host immunological processes, urothelial immunodefenses, intracellular bacterial reservoirs, and dysbiosis of the urinary microbiome all having a role in the pathogenesis of rUTIs.

Simultaneously, patient-self-reported data indicate that emotional distress and fear of recurrence and limitations of lifestyle activities are high; however, the importance of mental health issues is limited in the normal practice of clinical settings.[13] This review attempts to address these gaps by presenting a multidimensional investigation of rUTIs in women. It involves the assessment of epidemiological trends, the determination of the relevant risk factors, the study of the mechanism related to pathogenesis, and the analysis of the psychological and quality-of-life impact.[14]

Furthermore, the review outlines knowledge gaps that are currently existing in the management strategies and

emphasizes the need to present integrative medical and psychosocial interventions. The review attempts to inform the direction of future research, and help develop more holistic, patient-centred rUTI care models, by synthesising the results of clinical, biological, and behavioural studies.[15]

Objectives of the review

The main goal of the review is to perform a thorough evaluation of the epidemiological trends, risk factors, and pathogenesis of rUTI in women. The review aims at explaining the contribution of demographic factors, behavioural factors, and microbial features to recurrence by synthesizing the evidence collected through population-based studies, clinical research studies and microbial research studies.

One of the keys aims of the review is to understand the psychological load of women with rUTIs including the impact on emotional health, social performance, intimate relationships, and general life quality. A large number of women complain of a high level of anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of recurrence; however, these aspects are underrepresented in clinical discussion and guideline formulation. The review therefore highlights the urgency of incorporating the mental aspect of health into the normal management of UTI. Lastly, the review has a goal of filling in the gaps in the available literature, highlighting the limitations of available therapeutic methods, and providing the direction of future research that can cover both the biomedical and psychosocial aspects. The objectives of the review will be to offer a beneficial framework to clinicians, researchers, and policy makers, thus contributing to the improvement of patient-centred care and the creation of more comprehensive interventions.

EPIDEMIOLOGY OF RECURRENT UTIs IN WOMEN

Recurrent urinary tract infections (rUTIs) in women represent a severe epidemiological issue with a large scale of influence on various age groups and a substantial healthcare costs burden. Epidemiological data suggest that about 50-60 percent of females get at least one urinary tract infection (UTI) over their lifetime, 20-30 percent acquire recurrent infections and a smaller proportion get frequent infection.[16] Many interdependent factors affect the incidence of rUTIs, and they include demographic heterogeneity, sexual and hormonal determinants, socioeconomic status, and lifestyle habits. The rUTIs burden is increasing internationally, largely due to the growing number of recurrence as well as the growing prevalence of antimicrobial resistance that complicates treatment choices and increases the risk of relapses.[17] Besides, epidemiological studies demonstrate strong geographical differences, with elevated rates observed in areas with better healthcare opportunities and diagnostic facilities, and underreporting is still common in the low- and middle-income contexts. Such inequalities are influenced by the hygiene, cultural practices, and unequal access to health-care facilities. The sound understanding of these epidemiological trends is essential in the detection of high-risk groups, the development of specific prevention interventions, and the improvement of clinical management of women who are at risk of developing recurring UTIs.[18]

Global incidence and prevalence trends

UTIs remain one of the most common types of bacterial infections among women in the world, with a lifetime incidence of about 60 percent. UTIs are particularly a huge burden on morbidity, and approximately 25 to 30 percent of women requiring at least one recurrence 6 months after the first UTI. International epidemiological data shows significant sequential differences in the region, which seems to depend on the differences in the diagnostic methods, access to healthcare, and demographics of people.[19] The incidence rates are reported as higher in the high-income countries, which is partially explained by the enhanced healthcare-seeking behaviour and the stricter laboratory confirmation processes. On the other hand, the underreporting can affect low- and middle-income nations, despite the possible increase in the prevalence of the infections due to poor sanitation and insufficient healthcare facilities. The problem of antimicrobial resistance in uropathogens is escalating across the world since failure in the treatment due to the emergence of resistance helps to increase the frequency of recurrence.[20] Escherichia coli is still the most common pathogen on the planet, although there is a growing number of reports about non-E. coli uropathogens pointing to changing microbial trends. Other factors that have led to global changes include urbanization, population density and sexual behaviour changes. In sum, the available information all over the world helps to understand that the need is to obtain better surveillance and standard definitions and integrated prevention strategies that will help to monitor and reduce the growing burden of recurrent UTIs.[21]

Age-related and demographic variations

Age is a very significant epidemiological factor that influences the occurrence of UTIs and their recurrence among women. The first instances of UTI are most prevalent among women in the productive phase of life, particularly, sexually active people due to the biological vulnerability of the anatomy, sexual behaviour patterns and increased vulnerability to uropathogenic agents. Recurrence among this cohort is often attributed to reinfection due to persistence in having sex and use of spermicidal birth control methods.[22] The use of epidemiological studies of uncomplicated UTIs is usually focused on non-pregnant women despite the paradigm that physiological changes in urinary dynamics can increase susceptibility during the reproductive time frame. The lack of estrogen in peri- and postmenopausal women disrupts the lactobacilli flora of the vagina, thus providing the

opportunity to uropathogen to adhere and causing recurrent infections. The risks are aggravated by age-related dysfunction of the bladder, reduced innate immune system and comorbid conditions like diabetes.[23] Recurrence differences among racial and ethnic categories are also identified through epidemiological factors that are mediated by genetic factors, cultural habits and inequalities in access to healthcare. Other demographic determinants, including marital status, patterns of sexual behaviour, and urban-rural place of residence moderate risks of exposure. Age-specific and demographic differences are imperative to understand in devising specific prevention and risk strategies, risk-based interventions, and effective patient-centred management of recurring UTIs.[24]

Socioeconomic and lifestyle determinants

Socioeconomic and lifestyle factors play a central role in the epidemiology of UTIs in women as they have a direct effect on exposure risk and clinical outcomes. Women born in less wealthy socioeconomic layers are often faced with limited access to sanitation, inadequate hygiene systems, overcrowded houses, and delayed medical services, among other fostering factors, which increase the likelihood of recurrence. Education also defines the level of awareness and uptake of preventive measures such as good hygiene of the perineal area, good hydration and safer sexual practices.[25] Sexual practices, use of contraceptives and voiding patterns as behavioural determinants play a large role in recurrence dynamics. High sexual activity, use of spermicidal and absence of postcoital voiding are well documented behavioural risk factors. Furthermore, poor fluid balance and unhealthy eating habits are associated with an increased rate of UTI. Modern studies suggest that the immune competence might be impaired by psychosocial stress, lack of sleep and sedentary lifestyles, thus increasing vulnerability.[26] Examples of occupational factors that lead to delayed voiding and promote bacterial growth include inadequate access to toilets (Figure 1). Overall, socioeconomic inequalities and lifestyle habits create a complex risk environment, which highlights the need to implement preventive measures in the form of holistic and equity-based solutions (Table 1).[27] Socioeconomic disparities and lifestyle behaviours collectively shape the risk of recurrent urinary tract infections in women. Factors such as poor hygiene, limited healthcare access, sexual practices, hydration, stress, and delayed voiding increase susceptibility. Addressing these interconnected determinants is essential for equitable and comprehensive UTI prevention strategies.

Table 1: Epidemiological and risk factors associated with recurrent acute uncomplicated UTIs in women.

Sr. No.	Category	Factor	Impact on recurrence	Key explanation	References
1.	Demographic	Age (reproductive)	High initial incidence	Sexual activity and anatomical susceptibility	(28)
2.	Demographic	Peri-/post menopause	Increased recurrence	Estrogen deficiency reduces vaginal lactobacilli	(29)
3.	Behavioural	Sexual activity	Strong risk factor	Facilitates bacterial ascent into urinary tract	(30)
4.	Behavioural	Spermicidal use	Increased risk	Disrupts protective vaginal microbiota	(31)
5.	Lifestyle	Poor hydration	Moderate risk	Reduces bacterial clearance via urine flow	(32)
6.	Host-related	Genetic susceptibility	Persistent recurrence	Altered innate immune response	(33)
7.	Microbial	UPEC virulence factors	High recurrence	Adhesins, biofilms, intracellular reservoirs	(34)
8.	Treatment-related	Repeated antibiotics	Resistance-driven relapse	Promotes dysbiosis and antimicrobial resistance	(35)

Health system burden and recurrence patterns

Repeat of urinary tract infection is a significant burden to the health-care systems with millions of outpatient visits, diagnostic tests and antibiotic prescriptions each year. Repeat infections result in a higher number of visits to the clinic, increased usage of laboratories, and high financial expenditure of both patients and health-care providers. In the high-income countries, the direct medical costs associated with rUTIs include physician care, urine culture tests, radiography as necessary, and antibiotics. The burden is often underestimated in lower- and middle-income settings due to inadequate reporting systems and reduced health-care access despite it being possible that the prevalence of the infections is greater. The AMR is one of the significant contributors to the burden of this system.[36] Increasing resistance to uropathogenic strains of Escherichia coli, such as extended-spectrum-beta-lactamase (ESBL) strains, leads to an increase in the rate of treatment failures, longer symptomatic duration, and a higher rate of rates of recurrence. These interactions provoke consecutive rounds of antibiotics, which, in turn,

lead to subsequent resistance and sets the stage of constant infection.[37] The patterns of recurrence also play a role in health-care planning since many women need prophylaxis therapy, patient education, or referral to specialists when the episodes become frequent or complicated. Also, recurrence has indirect cost in terms of absenteeism, loss of productivity and quality of life, which further increases the burden on society. To reduce these effects, health-care systems need to invest in the area of patient education, antimicrobial stewardship, and preventive measures - such as non-antibiotic prophylaxis. As a result, the overall patterns of recurrence and related health-care needs should be known in order to develop sustainable approaches that will minimize the clinical and economical effects.[38]

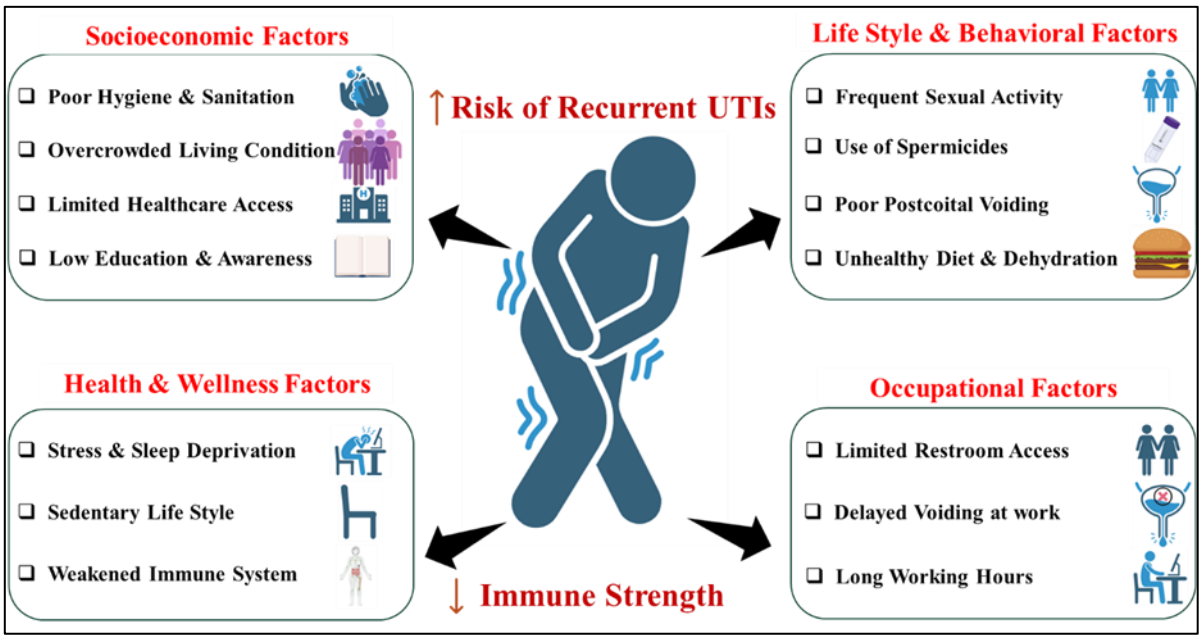

Figure 1: Factors contributing to recurrent UTIs in women.

RISK DETERMINANTS AND PREDISPOSING FACTORS

A complicated interaction of host factors, microbial determinants, behavioural patterns and antimicrobial exposure leads to UTIs in women. Unlike isolated infections, recurrence is an indication of persistent vulnerability as opposed to individual exposure incidences. The epidemiological and clinical studies have shown that some women have biologic predispositions to recurrent episodes because of the anatomical structures, hormonal environment, and mucosal immunity.[39]

The host-related susceptibilities are further enhanced by virulence factors of the pathogens that promote colonization, persistence, and host defence evasion. Exposure risk is also modulated by behavioural and hygienic practices, and repeatedly taking antibiotics alters the microbial ecology and encourages the emergence of resistance thus reinfection and relapse are more likely to happen.

Notably, most of these determinants of risk are preventable which highlights the importance of preventive measures alongside therapeutic measures.[40] It is necessary to have a detailed analysis on the proportionality of these factors in order to come up with individualized management strategies that reduce recurrence rates and curb the overuse of antimicrobials. In that respect, the given section reviewsthe key host, microbiological, behavioural, and treatment-related risk factors that cause recurrent UTIs in women.[41]

Host-related factors

Host-related factors form critical axis in predisposing female patients to repeated urinary tract infection. The anatomical tendencies, namely a relatively shortened urethra, and the close anatomical proximity to the anorectal area, contribute to the bacteria ascending to the urinary tract.[42] Genetic susceptibility has been also suggested, and single-nucleotide polymorphisms of loci of innate immune activity, urothelial receptors expression, and inflammatory signalling pathways have been observed to control susceptibility to recurrent infections. Hereditary element exists by the fact that the occurrence of urinary tract infections is family-related.[43] Recurrence patterns are under strong influence of hormonal dynamics. Transient changes in hormones in premenopausal women can also cause vaginal microflora, in postmenopausal women, estrogen depletion causes attrition of protective lactobacilli, vaginal PH rise, and uropathogen colonization rise. Estrogen also regulates the integrity of the urethra and immunologic defences, and this affects the general susceptibility. Sexual activity is also one of the strongest predictors of recurrence since the intercourse facilitates bacteria movement into the urinary tract.[29] Risk factors

include behavioural variables that include frequent sexual activity, new partner acquisition, and the use of spermicides or diaphragms that disrupt the vaginal microbiota and therefore increase the risk of cervical cancer. All these host-related factors create a biologically friendly environment that leads to recurrent urinary tract infections.[44]

Microbiological and pathogen-related factors

Both the development of UTIs and their maintenance occur in the presence of microbiological determinants. The uropathogenic strain of the Escherichia coli (UPEC) represents the major causative agent in recurrent disease and this is because it has numerous specific virulence factors that enable it to adhere, invade and survive within the urinary tract. The most important virulence factors include type 1 and P fimbriae, the ones that attach to urothelial cells, and other toxins and siderophores that increase the resilience of bacteria.[6]

More specifically, UPEC is also capable of creating intracellular bacterial communities in the bladder epithelial cells, which consequently allows the pathogen to bypass the host immune mechanisms and antibiotic therapy, which ultimately leads to relapse. The development of biofilm on the urothelial surfaces also enhances the adhesion of bacteria and resistance to antimicrobial agents.[2]

The non-E. coli pathogens such as Klebsiella, Proteus and Enterococcus spp. are starting to be associated with recurrent infections particularly with a background of previous antibiotic exposure. In addition, the vaginal and urinary microbiota changes, e.g. the loss of protective lactobacilli, contribute to the colonization of pathogenic organisms. These disease-induced processes underscore the complexity of recurrence and are a big challenge to the traditional paradigms of therapeutic strategies which simply focus on elimination.[45]

Modifiable behavioural and hygiene-related risks

A number of behavioural and hygiene-based activities have a great impact on the risk of frequent UTIs and therefore, are salient targets of preventive measures. Poor hydration reduces the flow of the urine thus decreasing the mechanical removal of bacteria in the urinary tract. The long voiding habits, which are often caused by occupational activities, allow the bacteria to grow long in the bladder. Poor perineal hygiene, specifically use of inappropriate methods of wiping, enhances the likelihood of urethral region fecal bacterial contamination.[42]

Similar practices that mediate the recurrence risk are sexual hygiene practices. The inability to void immediately after intercourse and irritation of the mucosal defences due to the use of irritant personal hygiene products could destabilize the urogenital microbiome. Besides, the use of spermicides and vaginal douche is also associated with increased uropathogen colonization, which is likely through upheaval of protective lactobacilli. The choice of garments e.g. tight or non-breathable clothing can create humid micro environments that can support bacterial growth. Since these factors are mostly amenable, patient education and behavioural counselling play important roles in risk reduction and become supplementary to the pharmacologic actions.[46]

Antibiotic exposure and resistance-associated risks

Repeated exposure to antimicrobial agents is another important element involved in the pathogenesis of recurrent UTIs and the problem has increasingly acquired clinical significance.[47] Repeated or prolonged use of antibiotics alters the natural microbiota of the vagina and gastrointestinal tract, in turn, reducing the colonization resistance and leading to the growth of uropathogenic microbes. This type of dysbiosis increases the likelihood of recurrence and leads to the rise of the multidrug-resistant strains. It has been reported to be resistant to regularly prescribed antibiotics, such as trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, ampicillin, amoxicillin-clavulanate, the fluoroquinolones, ciprofloxacin and norfloxacin.[35]

Special attention should be paid to the fact that the prevalence of extended-spectrum β-lactamase (ESBL)-producing Escherichia coli is growing, making it resistant to third-generation cephalosporins, including ceftriaxone and ceftazidime, and thus triggering the development of treatment failures and multiple relapses.

Unverified and empirical antibiotic therapy also increases resistance by exposing pathogens to inappropriate choice of drugs.[48] Although the prophylaxis treatment of antibiotic (e.g., nitrofurantoin or low-dose fluoroquinolones) can reduce the short-term recurrence, it also drives the resistance in the future. Therefore, the culture-based treatment, antimicrobial stewardship, and the avoidance of the unnecessary antibiotic exposure are essential to maintaining the antibiotic efficacy and improving the long-term outcomes among women with recurrent UTIs.[49]

PATHOGENESIS AND MECHANISMS OF RECURRENCE

The socioeconomic and lifestyle factors have a central role in influencing the epidemiology of recurrent urinary tract infections in women as they alter the state of exposure risk and health outcomes. Lower stratum women often face limited access to toilets, poor hygiene, congested living situations and access to healthcare services late, and all this fact increases the possibility of recurrence.

Education also affects awareness and preventive practices such as appropriate perineal hygiene, hydration and safe sex.[36] The lifestyle determinants, i.e. sexual behaviour, use of contraceptives, and voiding habits are considerably contributory to recurring. Behavioural risk factors are well

documented; high sexual frequency, use of spermicides and poor postcoital voiding. Furthermore, the lack of hydration and unhealthy food intake is also linked to the higher rate of UTI.

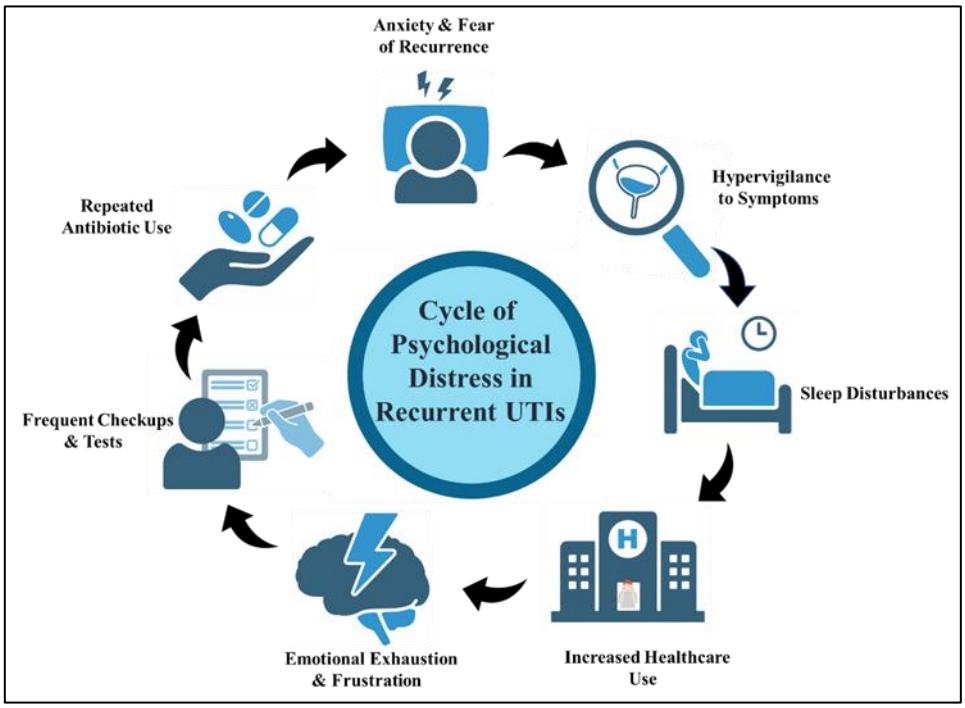

Figure 2: Cycle of psychological distress in recurrent UTIs.

Recent studies can indicate that the lack of immune strength is a possible consequence of stress, sleep deprivation, and sedentary lifestyle, which only exacerbates vulnerability (Figure 2).[50]

The factors that may cause delayed voiding and growth of bacteria are occupational factors, such as limited access to restroom facilities. Together, as a complex system, the socioeconomic differences and lifestyle habits create a complex risk environment in which there is a need to implement very comprehensive and equity-based prevention measures.[51] Recurrent UTIs trigger anxiety, hypervigilance to urinary symptoms, and sleep disturbance, leading to emotional exhaustion. Repeated healthcare visits and antibiotic use reinforce fear of recurrence, perpetuating a self-sustaining cycle of distress.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BURDEN AND QUALITY-OF-LIFE IMPACT

Emotional stress, anxiety, and fear of recurrence

Acute simple UTI recurrence in women is usually followed by a significant degree of psychological stress. The recurrent infection can often lead to the prolonged emotional stress and anxiety, which is mainly triggered by the fear of reoccurrence and the lack of predictability of the onset of the symptoms. Much higher rates of hypervigilance to urinary symptoms, including dysuria, frequency increase, or pelvic pain, result in intractable health-related fear.[11] This persistent anxiety might disrupt sleep, reduce concentration and deteriorate the overall health-related quality of life. The frequent checkups, repetitive diagnostic measures, and the use of antibiotics also contribute to the further strengthening of the perceptions of insecurity and loss of bodily agency. Emotional exhaustion, frustration, and a sense of helplessness might develop over time, especially when the infections come about even after preventive measures have been followed. Notably, this mental load may negatively affect the adherence to treatment, cause an increase in the use of health care services, and alter health-seeking behaviour, which results in a chain of repeat and suffering.[52]

Stigma and mental health consequences

The stigma in relation to frequent recurring urinary tract infection in women is a major cause of psychological morbidity and social isolation. The personal character of urinary symptoms often causes feelings of embarrassment, shame, or fear of negative evaluation, which subsequently drives the secretive nature of the condition to the family members, peers, or even the workplace. This kind of social withdrawal lowers the chances of receiving emotional support and heightens the feelings of being lonely. Prolonged stigma has also been attributed to a low self-esteem, increased anxiety, and depressive symptoms, especially in women with repeated episodes.[53] The extreme manifestations could trigger deleterious coping behaviours and a postponement in the seeking of healthcare, thus worsening poor clinical effects (Table 2).

By implication, alleviation of stigma by means of specialized patient education, understanding clinician-patient interaction, and thorough psychosocial care are invaluable in promoting the mental well-being and general health condition in the group of women with recurrent UTI.[54]

Table 2: Psychological burden and quality-of-life impact of recurrent UTIs in women.

Sr. No.	Psychological domain	Manifestation	Clinical impact	Consequences	References
1.	Emotional health	Anxiety and fear of recurrence	Persistent stress	Reduced quality of life	(55)
2.	Cognitive effects	Hypervigilance to symptoms	Health-related rumination	Increased healthcare utilization	(56)
3.	Social impact	Stigma and embarrassment	Social withdrawal	Reduced emotional support	(57)
4.	Mental health	Depression	Emotional exhaustion	Poor coping mechanisms	(58)
5.	Behavioural outcomes	Poor treatment adherence	Increased recurrence	Incomplete management	(59)
6.	Sexual health	Avoidance of intimacy	Relationship strain	Psychological distress	(60)
7.	Occupational impact	Absenteeism	Reduced productivity	Economic burden	(61)
8.	Overall well-being	Reduced life satisfaction	Chronic stress	Long-term psychosocial morbidity	(62)

CURRENT APPROACHES TO PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Recurrent acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women are the issues that are being more and more actively prevented and controlled by the creation of pharmacological interventions with psychological support. The psychological variables, which are stress, anxiety, and depression, have an impact on immunological competence, perception of symptoms, compliance to treatment protocols, and risk. The sole emphasis on the infectious pathology can, thus, produce less than ideal long-term results. Standardized screening procedures and frequent monitoring assist in the early identification of psychological distress with the help of integrated care models.[11] Multidisciplinary partnership between the urologists, pharmacists, and mental-health specialists brings in complete management channels. Such therapeutic modalities as cognitive-behavioural therapy, stress-management interventions, and counselling supplement the coping styles of patients and emotional resilience. Combined with patient education and shared decision-making, this integrated care will increase the adherence rates, decrease the recurrence rates, increase the quality of life, and enable the long-term management of recurrence UTIs in women.[63]

DISCUSSION

The repeated acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women are the complex of the epidemiological, pathogenetic, and psychosocial factors interacting. The existing evidence shows that the process of recurrence is driven not only by biological factors such as the presence of uropathogenic persistence, host vulnerability, and hormonal regulation but also by behavioural and demographic factors.[11] Notably, recurrent episodes of UTIs have a significant psychological cost, including anxiety, fear of recurrence, and emotional distress, which have a significant negative impact, as they reduce the quality of life. Psychological strain can also adversely affect immune responsiveness, symptom perception, and treatment adherence, which will contribute to the development of a self-perpetuating cycle of recurrence.[64] The current literature highlights the strong connection between common infections and poor mental health; however, most studies focus more on clinical or microbiological factors, and there is little integration of psychosocial factors. Inconsistencies in methodology design, population attributes, and the outcome measures also restrict the applicability of the results.[65] Considering the public health perspective, recurrent UTIs are associated with a multifaceted approach of managing the problem that combines the synergistic use of infection control, behavioural change, and psychological assistance. Increased education of patients, access to care, and institutionalization of mental health services into routine management guidelines can mitigate the effects of recurrence and increase general well-being.[11]

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The next steps in the research on recurrent acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women are expected to fill the gaps in the insight on host–pathogen interactions, psychosocial determinants, and long-term

consequences. Existing evidence is sparse in combination of epidemiological information with mental health and quality-of-life outcomes, and longitudinal and multidisciplinary research is required. Recurrence and outcome measures should also have standardized definitions so that comparability between studies can become better. Urological, infectious disease, and mental health care must be integrated to form strong models of care to be able to focus on the comprehensive and patient-centered management. Regular psychological assessment, behavioural counselling, and education led by pharmacists could help to improve adherence and minimize recurrence. Policy and public health-wise, there is the need to increase the access to preventive measures, socioeconomic inequalities, and awareness of recurrent UTIs. Hygiene education, rational use of antibiotics, and early intervention measures should be the focus of the public health efforts. The evidence-based formulation of guidelines including psychological support and preventive counselling will allow achieving sustainable management and enhancing the quality of life of affected women.

CONCLUSION

Acute uncomplicated urinary tract infections are recurrent and seen to be the results of an interplay of factors: epidemiological, biological, behavioural, and psychosocial. In addition to microbial persistence and host predisposition, demographic and lifestyle, and recurrence are highly likely to occur due to repeated drug exposure to antibiotics. Notably, the psychological impact of the frequent infections, such as anxiety, stigma, and poor quality of life, is not an acknowledged issue in clinical practice. The existing literature highlights the shortcomings of the treatment options that put their emphasis on antimicrobial therapy. Integrated, patient-centred interventions, comprising of infection control, behavioural modification, antimicrobial stewardship and psychological support are required to effectively manage the disease in the long term. Socioeconomic inequalities, increased patient education, and the inclusion of mental health care into the regular management process can help to decrease the recurrence rates and reach better outcomes. Awareness in future studies should focus on holistic care models in order to attain sustainable prevention and improved well-being.

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