

Overview of Menarche, Menstruation and Menstrual Hygiene

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Abstract

Each child undergoes many changes when the growth and development take place over a period of time. These development changes are common among both girls and boys; one of such physiological changes among girl is attaining menarche. It makes beginning of a multiple of physical, physiological, and psychological changes in the lives of the adolescent girls. In general, menarche indicates the girl's maturity and the readiness for marriage and sexual activity. Puberty is a period of rapid physical and personality growth. A girl has entered puberty when she begins to menstruate (Menarche). Puberty for girls is the period for her sexual maturity. There is very little awareness about menstruation among girls when they first experience it. Social prohibitions and negative attitude of elders in discussing the related issues openly have blocked the access of adolescent girls to the right kind of information especially in rural, urban, and tribal community. In first period, more importance must be given to starting of menstruation in women life. To highlight the menstrual hygiene awareness among girls, May 28, is observed as menstrual hygiene day, which aims to break taboos and raise awareness about the importance of good menstrual hygiene management for women and adolescent girls worldwide. Thus, menstrual hygiene practices are greatly emphasized among school girls to promote the reproductive health, which also improves the girl's self-image and promote their attitude toward good reproductive health. It also avoids the embarrassment of staining their cloth and promote their self-respect among their friends. Good menstrual hygiene enhances their confidence and promote the regular school attendance and prevent environmental pollution. In this review, we will discuss about menarche, menstruation, menstrual hygiene, and knowledge, attitude, and practice about menstruation

Keywords: Menstruation, Menstrual Hygiene, Menarche

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is generally considered as unclean leading to isolation of the menstruating girls and restrictions imposed on them in the family. These practices have reinforced negative attitude toward menstruation in girls. The center for social research in 1990 has reported restrictions in daily activities not being allowed to take bath, change cloths, comb hair, and enter holy places apart from there dietary restrictions (taboo on consumption of food like rice, curd milk, lassi, onion sugarcane, etc.).^[1]

Adolescent girls constitute vulnerable group particularly in India where female child is neglected one. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean (or) dirty in Indian society. The reaction to menstruation depends on awareness and knowledge about subject.^[2]

Adolescent girls often lack knowledge regarding reproductive health including menstruation hygiene which can be due to sociocultural barriers in which they grow up. The objectives are to explore the knowledge, practices, and sources of information regarding menstruation and hygiene among adolescent girls.^[3]

MENSTRUATION, MENSTRUAL HYGIENE, AND NEWER CONCEPT OF MENSTRUATION

A cross-sectional study conducted on knowledge, attitude, and practices of menstrual hygiene among medical students in North India. Aims and objectives: To assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of menstrual hygiene among 1st-year

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medical students in North India. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 50 girls of 1st-year MBBS of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences, Indore. A pre-formed pre-tested questionnaire was used. Data were analyzed statistically by simple proportions. The study finding revealed that the most of the girls ($n = 89$, 50.56%) were in the age group of 18–20 years. Surprisingly, 32.38% (57) girls were ignorant about menstruation before menarche. Mean age of attaining menarche was 13 ranges were 9–17. We found that in 35.22% ($n = 62$) of students, menstrual habits were inculcated by their mothers. One hundred and fifty-two girls (86.36%) were using sanitary napkins as absorbent material during their menstrual cycle. About 42% (73 girls) were doing vaginal wash daily. About 57% ($n = 100$) of girls were having regular menses. About 82% ($n = 144$) of girls were reported to experience premenstrual symptoms. About 12% of girls were having knowledge of different types of myths about menstruation. About 34% ($n = 59$) of girls were forced to practice restrictions during menses. At the end, researcher concluded that the girls should be educated about the significance of menstruation and development of secondary sexual characteristics, selection of a sanitary menstrual absorbent, and its proper disposal. This can be achieved through educational television programs, compulsory sex education in school curriculum, and knowledgeable parents, so that she does not develop psychological upset and the received education would indirectly wipe away the age old wrong ideas and make her to feel free to discuss menstrual matters without any inhibitions.^[4]

A study to evaluate impact of pre-menarcheal training on menstrual practices and hygiene among Nigerian school girls. A cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey of randomly selected post-menarcheal school girls using a pre-tested and semi-structured questionnaire was done. The mean age of the school girls was 14.9 ± 1.7 years. Pre-menarcheal training was given to 273 (55.2%) of them. Mothers (74.7%) were the more common source of information. Inappropriate experience of menarche, adverse effect of menstruation on schooling and social life, and the use of unhygienic menstrual absorbents were common in girls who had no pre-menarcheal training than those who did. The study concluded that lack of timely information results in inappropriate menstrual experiences and poor menstrual hygiene practices. Ways to promote menstrual education and hygiene practices are suggested.^[5]

A descriptive and cross-sectional study was conducted among 160 adolescent girls of a secondary school situated in the field practice area of Rural Health Unit and Training Center, Singur, West Bengal, with the help of a pre-designed and pre-tested questionnaire. Data were analyzed statistically by simple proportions. Finding of the study revealed that out of 160 respondents, 108 (67.5%) girls were aware about menstruation before attainment of menarche. Mother was the first informant regarding menstruation in case of 60 (37.5%) girls. One hundred and thirty-eight (86.25%) girls believed it as a physiological process. Seventy-eight (48.75%) girls knew the use of sanitary pad during menstruation. Regarding practices,

only 18 (11.25%) girls used sanitary pads during menstruation. For cleaning purpose, 156 (97.5%) girls used both soap and water. Regarding restrictions practiced, 136 (85%) girls practiced different restrictions during menstruation. At the end, researcher concluded that menstrual hygiene, a very important risk factor for reproductive tract infections, is a vital aspect of health education for adolescent girls. Educational television programs, trained school nurses/health personnel, motivated school teachers, and knowledgeable parents can play a very important role in transmitting the vital message of correct menstrual hygiene to the adolescent girl of today.^[6]

A study conducted on The Effect of Community-Based Health Education Intervention on Management of Menstrual Hygiene among Rural Indian Adolescent Girls. A participatory-action study was undertaken in Primary Health Centres in 23 villages in Anji, in the Wardha district of Maharashtra state. The study subjects were unmarried rural adolescent girls (12–19 years). We conducted a needs assessment for health messages with this target audience, using a triangulated research design of quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group discussions) methods. Program for Appropriate Technology for Health (PATH) guidelines were used to develop a pre-tested and handmade flip book containing needs-based key messages about the management of menstrual hygiene. The messages were delivered at monthly meetings of village-based groups of adolescent girls, called Kishori Panchayat. After 3 years, the effect of the messages was assessed using a combination of quantitative (survey) and qualitative (trend analysis) methods. After 3 years, significantly more adolescent girls (55%) were aware of menstruation before its initiation compared with baseline (35%). The practice of using ready-made pads increased significantly from 5% to 25% and reuse of cloth declined from 85% to 57%. The present community health education intervention strategy could bring significant changes in the awareness and behavior of rural adolescent girls regarding management of their menstrual hygiene.^[7]

An integrated qualitative and quantitative study on reproductive health of Indian women was conducted in two primary health center areas of rural north India. The present study reports on the perceptions of 1205 women regarding various aspects of menstruation. The result major source of information about menarche/menstruation was friends/relatives (72%). Mean age at menarche was 15 years. Very few women (0.4%) used sanitary napkins. The majority of women had strong beliefs about effect of diet on menstruation. Most of them considered menstruation a dirty act and indulged in various taboo behaviors. Initial reaction was of fear/apprehension at menarche in majority of girls. At the end, researcher concluded that Women in rural North India still hold traditional beliefs regarding menstruation. Provision of a balanced and healthy family health education package to all girls is recommended.^[8]

A cross-sectional study was conducted to explore the menstrual practices among 1275 female adolescents of urban Karachi, Pakistan from April to October 2006 using interviews. Data

were entered and analyzed in Epi Info Version 9 and SPSS Version 10. Descriptive findings showed that 50% of the girls lacked an understanding of the origin of menstrual blood and those with a prior knowledge of menarche had gained it primarily through conversations with their mothers. Many reported having fear at the first experience of bleeding. Nearly 50% of the participants reported that they did not take baths during menstruation. In univariate analysis, factors of using unhygienic material, using washcloths, and not drying under sun were found to be significant in the Chi-square test among those going and not going to schools. This study concludes that there are unhygienic practices and misconceptions among girls requiring action by health-care professionals.^[9]

A study conducted on Indigenous practices of Saudi girls in Riyadh during their menstrual period. The objective of this study was to identify the indigenous menstrual hygiene practice of Saudi girls in Riyadh. A total of 600 girls aged from 11 years to 18 years were selected from outpatient clinics at three different hospitals in Riyadh. Data were collected using a structured interview. The results revealed that nearly two-thirds of the girls avoided certain foods, drinks, and activities, including showering and performing perineal care, and practiced several indigenous rituals during the period. Mother, religious books, and sisters were the main sources of the girls' information. The study suggests that nurses and health-care providers should use all available opportunities to educate young girls about menstruation.^[10]

KNOWLEDGE (MOTHER AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS) ON MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

A study conducted on knowledge and practice regarding menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls in Schools of Patan, Gujarat. This was a cross-sectioned study. The present study included adolescent girls of urban areas as well as rural areas. Two hundred and fifteen of the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th standard were selected for the study. A pre-designed, pre-tested, and structured questionnaire was used in the study. The most of adolescents (68%) were have no idea regarding the menstruation. About 83% of adolescent girls got primary knowledge from their mother. Most of the adolescent girls (41%) undergone first menstruation in 13th year. About 66% adolescent were using sanitary pads during menstruation. The most of the adolescent girls (61%) were cleaning the external genital area by washing with water and soap. Usually adolescent girls are guided by their mother, elder sister, or other family members regarding menstrual hygiene practices. Hence, it is also necessary to assess the knowledge and beliefs of mother as well as other female family members regarding the menstrual hygiene. School curriculum should include health education on reproductive health.^[11]

A study was conducted on Menstrual Hygiene: How Hygienic is the Adolescent Girl. A descriptive and cross-sectional study was conducted among 160 adolescent girls of a secondary school situated in the field practice area of Rural Health Unit

and Training Center, Singur, West Bengal, with the help of a pre-designed and pre-tested questionnaire. Data were analyzed statistically by simple proportions. Result shows out of 160 respondents, 108 (67.5%) girls were aware about menstruation prior to attainment of menarche. Mother was the first informant regarding menstruation in case of 60 (37.5%) girls. One hundred and thirty-eight (86.25%) girls believed it as a physiological process. Seventy-eight (48.75%) girls knew the use of sanitary pad during menstruation. Regarding practices, only 18 (11.25%) girls used sanitary pads during menstruation. For cleaning purpose, 156 (97.5%) girls used both soap and water. Regarding restrictions practiced, 136 (85%) girls practiced different restrictions during menstruation. Researcher concluded that menstrual hygiene, a very important risk factor for reproductive tract infections, is a vital aspect of health education for adolescent girls. Educational television programs, trained school nurses/health personnel, motivated school teachers, and knowledgeable parents can play a very important role in transmitting the vital message of correct menstrual hygiene to the adolescent girl of today.^[6]

The study was conducted on knowledge assessment regarding puberty and menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls of district Varanasi U.P. from 10 to 19 years of age. Total sample size was 504. The study concluded that more than half of the girls did not know that during menstruation blood come from uterus/vagina, 84.9% stated that it is the dangerous to swim and run during periods. Misconception included information regarding use of sanitary napkins, psychological effect on menstruation and weakness during periods. Out of 462 girls who had attained the menarche, 64.9% stated that their first sources of information related to menstruation was their mother.^[12]

A study conducted on knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about menarche of adolescent girls in Anand district, Gujarat. Nine hundred schoolgirls aged 11–17 years, only 38.5% felt comfortable about menarche and only 31.0% believed that menstruation was a normal physiological process. Many (37.2%) had not been informed about menarche before its onset and 48.2% felt they were not mentally prepared. The major sources of information were the mother (60.7%) or an elder sister (15.8%); teachers and others relatives played a small role.^[13]

A study conducted on menstruation, menstrual protection, and menstrual cycle problems. The knowledge, attitudes, and practices of young Australian women. A survey of 1377 young Australian women aged 14–19 years, conducted to determine their attitudes, state of knowledge and practices with regard to menstruation, are presented. The young women, as a group, lacked sufficient information about menstruation, about the time of ovulation, about menstrual discharge, and about the use of tampons. A high proportion (80%) considered menstruation to be inconvenient or embarrassing.^[14]

CONCLUSION

Girls need to know about menstruation well before “menarche” occurs (the first menstrual period) occurs. We need to get them

ready and help them through this time in their lives. The fathers can help best their daughters in understanding about menarche and in adjusting well to the nature's divine gift to womanhood. Information Booklet acts as guiding key for father to improve knowledge and aware themes self about daughter menstruation.

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