

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

MENSTRUAL PRACTICES IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN THE THAR DESERT

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of transition from girlhood to womanhood. Menstruation is considered unclean in Indian society leading to isolation of girls in family and restricting them from certain day to day activities creating a negative attitude towards menstruation [1]. Due to various factors especially the lack of knowledge about this natural physiological event, several girls become psychologically distressed when they first experience it. Most adolescent girl had incomplete and inaccurate knowledge regarding menstrual physiology and hygiene and prevailing social mores make this subject taboo for public discussion [2]. This makes the transition from girlhood to womanhood traumatic for the adolescent girl.

Menstrual hygiene, is another important aspect of adolescence that is largely ignored. It deals with special health care needs and requirement of women during monthly menstrual cycle. Various type of infections due to lack of proper hygiene have been reported in various studies [2,3,4]. Good hygienic practices such as the use of sanitary pads and adequate washing of the genital area are essential during menstruation. A key priority for women and girls is to have the necessary knowledge, facilities and the cultural environment to manage menstruation hygienically and with dignity. An adolescent girl should be made aware of the phenomenon of menstruation at least a little ahead of its occurrence, so as to enable her to accept it as a normal developmental process and manage it appropriately.

This study was undertaken to primarily assess the KAP about menstruation in urban and rural settings in the Thar desert region of Rajasthan, India. The secondary aim was to find out what type of menstrual disorders experienced by adolescents.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.To assess the knowledge and the practices of menstrual hygiene among urban and rural adolescent girls.

- 2.To assess the restrictions which were practiced by adolescent during menstruation.
- 3.To find out menstrual disorders experienced by adolescent

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This questionnaire based study was conducted in 100 girls of adolescent age group who presented in the Outpatient department of our hospital for their health related problems. The data collection technique was a personal interview of the study subjects. A rapport was built up with the girls and verbal consent obtained. A questionnaire was designed with questions meant to evaluate the awareness about menstruation, source of information regarding menstruation, hygienic practices during menstruation, age of menarche. The menstrual hygiene questions included queries about type of absorbent which was used, and the use of napkins, and the method of disposal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The age of the 100 study subjects ranged from 12 to 19 years. The maximum numbers of study subjects were above 16 years of age [Table 1]. Among all these girls, 72 % were Hindus, and 28 % were muslims. A majority of them [61 %] belonged to a rural background and 39 % resided in urban areas. The percentage of the girls who came from families living above the poverty line was 49 % and those living below the poverty line were 51 %. Table 2 shows the literacy level of the tested group and it was determined that 4 % of the adolescent girls were illiterate and 6 % had left school. The rest had had some school or college education.

Table 1 – Age Distribution

Age in years	No.	Percent
12	2	2%
13	7	7%
14	23	23%
15	9	9%
≥16	59	59%

Table 2 – Literacy status

Education of girls	No	Percent
Illiterate	4	4%
Left school	6	6%
Middle	10	10%
Secondary school	21	21%
Higher secondary	10	10%
Undergratuates	19	19%

Table 3 – Age of Menarche

Age of menarche(years)	No	Percent
≤11	8	8%
12	22	22%
13	31	31%
14	24	24%
≥15	15	15%

The mean age of menarche in the study population [table 3] was 13.5 years and the largest numbers were in the 13 years age group.

Table 4 – Prior knowledge about Menstruation

Awareness about menstruation before menarche	No	Percent
Yes	47	47%
No	53	53%

Table 5 – Source of information about menstrual cycle

Source of information	No	Percent
Mother	58	58%
Teacher	17	17%
Friend	12	12%
Freind	8	8%
other	5	5%

Table 4 shows the prior awareness of the adolescent subjects. A majority [53 %] of girls had never heard about menstruation before they first experienced it and 47 % knowledge about it prior to its onset. One of them thought that some boil gets rupture which causes bleeding. In the study, the mother was found to be the main source of information for 58 % girls followed by school teachers for 17 % , Relatives 17 % [table 5] . Many other studies have reported mother as the source of information [8].

Table 6 - Sanitary method used

Sanitary protection used during menses	No	Percent
Sanitary napkin	56	56%
Cloth	32	32%
Both cloth & napkins	8	8%

Table 7 – Method of disposal

Method of disposal	No	Percent
Throw into routine waste	53	53%
Wash and reuse	30	30%
Wash and dispose	17	17%

Table 8 - Restrictions followed during menstruation

Restrictions followed during menstruation	No	Percent
Related to prayers/ religious practices/namaz	98	98%
Touching or cooking food	48	48%
No restriction	2	2%

Table 9 – Gynaecological problems in adolescent girls

Health related problems experienced by adolescent girls	No	Percent
Irregular cycles	50	50%
Pain abdomen	17	17%
Amenorrhea	15	15%
Discharge/itching	8	8%
Dysmenorrhea	7	7%
Others	3	3%

In the present study 56 % girls used readymade sanitary pads during menses while 32 % girls used a cloth rag to stem the flow. A large number of girls [30 %] used old cloth pieces and only 17 % used new pieces of cloth each time. In urban girls, the use of sanitary pads was higher [49 %] and in rural girls it was 16%. The use of old clothes was 18% in the rural girls and 48% in the urban girls. Despite the fact that Government of India has started a scheme for promoting menstrual hygiene amongst adolescent girls by providing adequate supply of sanitary napkins [6] most of the girls esp from rural area are not availing this facility and still resort to old methods of clothes which can be reused.

In this study 70% girls disposed of used sanitary materials and 30% girls reused the cloth after washing them. Das Gupta et al [5] reported that 73.75% girls reused cloth pieces and proper disposal of used material was seen in 57.5% girls.

98% girls had restrictions imposed due to different rituals in their communities like forbidden to enter the temple, kitchen or reading namaz. This practice was followed in their family by mothers and grandmothers due to false perception and stigmas associated with menstruation.

Irregular cycles were the most common complaint in the present study which affects their quality of life. 50% girls gave history of Irregular cycles. 17% girls present with complain of pain abdomen whereas Dysmenorrhea was seen only in 7% of girls1 of them present with complain of lump abdomen. On the contrary Dysmenorrhea was the common complaint in other studies [7].

CONCLUSION

It can be said that among the adolescent girls in both the urban and rural areas of the Thar Desert region, the knowledge on menstruation is poor and the practices are often not optimal for proper hygiene. Girls should be made aware of the phenomenon of menstruation at least a little ahead of its occurrence, so as to prepare them for the life changing event and enable them to her to accept it as a normal developmental physiological process and manage it appropriately by use of proper pads and its proper disposal. There is a need for improving access to sanitary pads. At the same time girl during menstruation is considered to be untouchable in various communities and this belief in society needs to be changed for betterment at social level.

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