

A Study on Menstrual Hygiene Awareness and Related Myths in Reproductive Age Group Women at Govt. Maternity Hospital, Tirupati

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Abstract: *Background:* Menstruation is a regular physiological process every woman faces. But in our country many myths, taboos, norms restrict and limit freedom of women in reproductive age group. Awareness of health care needs and requirements during menstruation among women has to be evaluated and correct knowledge and proper menstrual hygiene practices have to be recommended. *Methods:* Women were asked about their menstruation knowledge, awareness of menstrual hygiene and their perception of the myths and taboos followed during menstruation. A structured knowledge questionnaire is developed focusing on menstrual hygiene and myths regarding menstruation. Data collection was done through person to person interview of study subjects by single female investigator. *Results:* out of 100 women 37% aged between 26-30 years, 84% attained menarche at 12 years of age, 59% completed their primary schooling and 94% knew about menstruation before menarche which is from their mothers in 76%. 71 believed menstruation as a routine process, 15 women did not know the cause, 11 women found it to be hormonal related and 2 women still regard it as a curse of God. 63% had dysmenorrhoea as abdominal cramps and 83% used sanitary napkins and disposed in waste bins, 17% had a habit of reusing cloths after washing. All of the women practiced some or other kind of restrictions during menstruation. Only 86% of the women take a bath every day, but 14% take a bath only after completion of their menses. 49 women had health problems during menstruation, but only 23 consulted a doctor. 90% of the women felt less confident during their menstrual period than their usual time. *Conclusions:* Restrictions due to menstruation were very highly imposed. Menstrual hygiene is a vital part of health education. Knowledge regarding menstruation is satisfactory but there is a need for proper professional counselling to clarify misconceptions and education about reproductive health and menstrual hygiene among reproductive age group women to maintain proper health.

Keywords: menstrual hygiene, knowledge and awareness, myths and restrictions, practices, reproductive age group women

1. Introduction

Menstruation is a natural biological process still, a taboo subject to whisper and so, more difficult to discuss the hygiene, practices, perception and myths associated with it. Menstruation is a key sign of reproductive health, yet in many cultures, it is treated as negative, shameful or dirty. Many myths, social and religious norms, taboos restrict women's participation in society making their daily activities difficult and limiting their freedom.¹

Menarche is a milestone in woman's life that denotes the beginning of reproductive capacity. Menarche occurs between 11-15 years². Menstruation is the visible manifestation of cyclic physiological uterine bleeding because of uterine endometrial shedding. Individual health care needs and requirements of women during the monthly cycle of menstruation collectively given the term "Menstrual Hygiene".³

The United Nations defines menstrual hygiene management as "women and adolescent girls using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials."

Menstrual hygiene day is an annual awareness day on May 28th to highlight the importance of good menstrual hygiene

management. It was selected as 28th to acknowledge that 28 days as the average length of menstrual cycle.

Aim

To assess the awareness, source of information, and problems regarding menstrual hygiene and its related myths

Objectives

- 1) To assess knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene
- 2) To study cultural practices associated with menstrual hygiene
- 3) To assess the restrictions practised during menstruation

Type of Study: Cross sectional study

Subjects: Women of reproductive age group coming to OPD of Government Maternity Hospital, Department of OBG, Tirupati.

Sample Size: 100

Inclusion Criteria:

- 1) Women of reproductive age group between 15-45 years
- 2) Women who are willing to participate in this study

Exclusion Criteria:

Incompletely filled questionnaires at the time of study are excluded.

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2. Methodology

Verbal consent of the women was obtained. Women were asked about their menstruation knowledge, awareness of menstrual hygiene and their perception of the myths and taboos followed during menstruation. A structured knowledge questionnaire is developed focusing on menstrual hygiene and myths regarding menstruation. Data collection was done through person to person interview of study subjects by single female investigator.

Women were told about physiology of menstruation and menstrual morbidities. The advice was given about proper menstrual hygiene. Treatment was advised for anemia and menstrual morbidities and advised to seek medical advice whenever needed.

Questionnaire

- 1) Age of the person participating in the study:
- 2) Age at the time of attainment of menarche:
- 3) Education:
- 4) Mother education:
- 5) Awareness on menstruation before menarche: Yes No
- 6) Source of awareness: Mother Sister Friends Teacher Media
- 7) Exposure to advertisements promoting the use of sanitary pads: Yes No
- 8) Cause of menstruation: Hormone Don't know Disease Curse
- 9) Origin of blood: Don't know Uterus Urinary bladder Vagina
- 10) Awareness on premenstrual symptoms like cramps, mood irritability, cravings, anxiety, and heaviness in breasts, etc.,
- 11) Attitude towards pain during menstruation: Physiological infertile curse/sin bad sign
- 12) Which of these products have you heard of: Sanitary pads Tampons Menstrual cup Reusable pad
- 13) Which of these products you use? Sanitary pads Tampons Menstrual cup Reusable pad cloth
- 14) How do you dispose of it? Throw it in routine waste Bury Flush Reuse of cloth after washing
- 15) Do you follow restrictions? Yes No
- 16) Attitude towards restrictions: By your wish By force of family members
- 17) Restrictions during menstruation: Regarding diet Yes No To holy places Yes No Going outside Yes No Should not touch others
- 18) Participating in sex during menstruation Yes No
- 19) Sleep disturbances during menstruation: Excess sleep Lack of sleep No change in sleeping habits
- 20) Washing of genitalia during menstruation: Every time during bath Every time during changing pad Every time during toilet
- 21) Infrequent washing of genitalia due to: Intermittent supply of water Common toilets Lack of awareness
- 22) The material used for cleaning genitalia: Water Water and soap Water and antiseptics
- 23) Do you take a bath during menses? Yes No
- 24) Ever faced any health problems during menstruation? Yes No
- 25) Consult a doctor regarding health problems during menstruation: Yes No
- 26) Reasons for not taking consultation: Feels shy Felt no need Fear of adverse effect of a medicine unaware
- 27) Do you feel less confident during menstruation? Yes No
- 28) Awareness on menstrual irregularities Yes No
- 29) Attitude towards menstrual irregularities Leads to infertility Sign of ill health Curse/sin Boon in disguise
- 30) Use of medicine for pain during menstruation Yes No

3. Results

A total of 121 women were interviewed in this study but 21 were excluded due to incompletely filled or answered, making the study conducted on 100 women.

The present study included reproductive age group women with 20% between 15-20years, 41% in 21-25 years range, 37% in 25-30years range and 1% each in 31-35years and 35-40years. The majority belonging to the active reproductive age group between 21-30 years (78%)

Age group	Number (%)
15-20yrs	20
21-25yrs	41
26-30yrs	37
31-35yrs	1
35-40yrs	1

Age of menarche varied from 12-15 years.84% of the women attained menarche at 12 years. The commonest age of attaining menarche was 12 years (84%). The mean age of attaining menarche was 12.15years.

Age at menarche	Number (%)
12yrs	84
13yrs	8
14yrs	5
15yrs	3

In the present study 5% were uneducated, 59% had primary schooling, 26% had secondary schooling and 10% had finished graduation.

Education status	Number (%)
Uneducated	05
Primary schooling	59
Secondary schooling	26
Graduation	10

In the present study most of the mothers had primary schooling n=48.

Educational status	Number (%)
Uneducated	41
Primary	48
Secondary	11

In the present study out of 100 women, 94 women knew about menstruation before menarche and source of information being their mother i.e.76%, from teacher was 11%, from friends 6%, from media 4% and sister 3%. Out of 100 women, 86% had exposure to advertisements on the use of sanitary pads.

Knowledge before menarche	Percentage
Yes	94
No	6
Source of prior knowledge about menstruation	
Mother	76
Teacher	11
Sister	3
Friends	6
Media	4
Exposure to advertisements	
Yes	86
No	14
Cause of menstruation	
Hormone	11
Don't know	15
Disease	1
Curse	2
Routine	71
Origin of blood	
Uterus	47
Urethra	9
Vagina	37
Anus	0
Don't know	37
Premenstrual symptoms	
Abdominal cramps	63
Food cravings	11
Mood irritability	26
Anxiety	9
Breast heaviness	41
Attitude towards dysmenorrhoea	
Common	63
Sign of Infertility	30
Curse/sin	7
Products heard of	
Sanitary pad	100
Tampon	1
Menstrual cup	1
Reusable pad	1
Product used	
Clothes	17
Sanitary pads	83
Tampons	0
Menstrual cup	0
Reusable pad	0
Mode of disposal	
Throw it in routine waste	83
Bury	0
Flush	4
Reuse of cloth after washing	13
Do you follow restrictions	
Yes	100
No	0
Attitude towards restriction	

Own wish	87
Due to force of family members	13
Restrictions during menstruation	
Diet	94
Holy places	100
Going outside	16
Not touch others	4
Sex during menses	
Yes	10
No	90
Sleep disturbances	
Excess sleep	60
Sleeplessness	34
No change	16
Cleaning habits of genitalia	
During bathing	100
Every time with toilet	53
Every time during changing pad	63
Material used for cleaning	
Water	100
Water with soap	53
Water with antiseptics	17
Do you take bath during menses	
Yes	86
No	14
Ever faced any health problem during menstruation	
Yes	49
No	51
Aware of menstrual irregularities	
Yes	84
No	16
Attitude towards menstrual irregularities	
Leads to infertility	33
Lead to ill-health	30
Curse/sin	28
Boon in disguise	9
Ever consulted doctor for menstrual problems	
Yes	23
No	77
Reasons for not taking consultation	
Shyness	39
Felt no need	49
Fear of adverse effects of medicine	9
Unawareness	13
Do you feel less confident during menstruation	
Yes	90
No	10
Use of medicine during menstruation for pain	
Yes	74
No	26

Out of 100 women, 71 believed menstruation as a routine process, 15 women did not know the cause, 11 women found it to be hormonal related and 2 women still regard it as a curse of God. Out of 100 women, 47 women knew the source of bleeding being the uterus, 37 women thought it was from vagina, 9 thought it from the urethra and 7 still don't know the source of bleeding.

In the present study, premenstrual symptoms observed were abdominal cramps in 63%, food cravings in 11%, mood irritability in 26%, anxiety in 9%, and breast heaviness in 41%. This study showed that 63% women believed dysmenorrhoea as a physiological symptom, but 30% felt it as a sign of infertility and as a curse in 7%. All the women participated in the study knew about disposable sanitary

pads, of which only 83% of them used sanitary pads and remaining 17% used clothes. Nobody used tampons, reusable cloths, menstrual cups even though they are aware of their availability. 83 women disposed sanitary pads in the routine waste bin and 13% had the habit of reusing the cloth after washing, 4% found to dispose of them in flush.

All of the women who participated followed restrictions. Most of them (87%) followed restrictions on their wish, which were previously impacted in their minds by the family. All of the women who participated in the study avoided going to holy places like temples and 94% followed diet restrictions like avoiding curd. 16% avoided going outside being restricted to a room preferably, and 4% don't touch others during their menstruation due to their religious belief that menstruation is sacred uncleanliness. All these taboos were due to the cultural environment at home. 90% of women don't participate in sex during menses because of various reasons like clumsiness, discomfort, some felt it as a sin.

It was observed that 60% of women had an excess sleep, 34% had sleeplessness and 16% had no change in sleeping patterns. It was observed that most of the women used to clean their genitalia during bathing and less frequently after changing pad or after going to the toilet, which was due to lack of sufficient water supply and lack of separate toilets and lack of disposal provisions. Only 86% of the women take a bath everyday, but 14% take a bath only after completion of their menses. 49 women had health problems during menstruation, but only 23 consulted a doctor. The reason for not taking consultation was because of shyness in 39%, 49% felt it unnecessary and 9% were afraid of medication's adverse effects.

84 women were aware of menstrual irregularities. 33% women believed that it leads to infertility, 30% thought that can lead to ill-health, 9% women thought it as a boon in disguise, and 28% women still feel menstrual irregularities as a curse. 90% of the women felt less confident during their menstrual period than their usual time.

4. Discussion

In the present study, majority of women 84(84%) attained menarche at the age of 12 years, followed by 8 (8%) at the age of 13 years and 5 (5%) at the age of 14 and 3 at the age of 15 years. The mean age of menarche among reproductive age group women was 12.15 years.

Similarly, a study by Kamaljit et al. found that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 10 to 15 years with maximum number of girls falling between 12 and 15 years of age, and the mean age of menarche of the respondents has been observed as 12.5 years.⁴ A similar study conducted by Deo et al.⁵ reported that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 12 to 17 years, with maximum number of girls between 13 to 15 years of age, whereas in a study carried out in Rajasthan by Khanna et al.,⁶ the mean age at menarche was found to be 13.2 years.

In the present study, out of 100 women, 71 (71%) knew the cause of menstruation as physiological, 15 (15%) didn't

know the cause, 2 (2%) women still believe it as curse of God.

DipanwitaPandit et al found that correct knowledge was found among 370(85.05%) girls, while 15.04% associated it with disease or God's curse. 315(72.41%) girls had knew about menstruation before menarche.⁷

In the present study, out of 100 women, 47 (47%) women knew the source of bleeding during menstruation as the uterus, 37 (37%) women thought it as vagina while 9 (9%) thought it as the urethra.

DipanwitaPandit et al., found that 178 (40.94%) girls had the right knowledge that uterus was the source of menstrual blood, while others said that it is urinary bladder (8.27%), vagina (45.74%) or abdomen (5.05%). 222(51.03%) girls knew that pregnancy is the cause of missed period and 20 (4.59%) girls did not know the cause.⁷

Our study shows that 83% of the women preferred sanitary pads as menstrual absorbent. Only 17% women used clothes during menstruation. It was observed that the usual practice was washing the cloth with soap after use and keep it at some secret place till the next menstrual period. Similarly, a study regarding menstrual hygiene practices by Kamaljit et al.⁴ found that 68.7% girls used sanitary pads and 30 (10.0%) respondents practicing any cloth or rag/cotton during menstruation. This study is similar to the present study, where most of the subjects used sanitary pads. P. Mary Moses et al., found that 78% of the respondents use sanitary napkins, 22% use cloth. Cleaning of external genitalia during menstruation was present in all of the respondents⁸ which is similar to the present study.

In a study conducted in Rajasthan by Khanna et al.⁶ 75% of the girls used old cloth during their periods and only one-fifth reported using readymade sanitary pads. This study varies with the present study because the study population were rural people whereas the present study was conducted in Govt. maternity hospital, Tirupathi, where the study subjects belong to both rural and urban backgrounds.

A study by Ray Sudeshna et al.⁹ found good menstrual hygiene was more among girls with literate mothers, girls studying in more than grade 10 in school, having prior knowledge about menstruation before menarche, usage of proper sanitary latrine at home, and exposure to advertisements promoting the usage of sanitary towels in mass media which is similar to the present study.

A study by Shamima Yasmin et al.¹⁰ found that out of 147 respondents, Washing of private parts were regular among 76.9% but 74.1% used only water no soap, there is significant relationship between hygienic practices followed and presence of continuous supply of water and presence of private toilet of their family which correlates with the present study.

In a study conducted by Veena et al.¹¹ 96% girls avoid going to temple, 68% girls restrict their daily activities, 56% girls avoid going to functions, 50% girls avoid going to kitchen, 50% girls avoid going to kitchen while 45% girls avoid

touching things at home which is similar to the present study.

The current study observed that Premenstrual symptoms (PMS) were present among participants. Abdominal pain was the leading PMS in nearly three fourth of participants. Other symptoms like Joint pain, acne, constipation, fever, and bodyache were also seen. While Sohail et al study showed that backache was the chief complaint as PMS among study participants.¹²

Abdominal pain was found in most of the participants during menstruation in our study. Similar finding were seen in the study from Puducherry.¹³ In our study, for relieving of abdominal pain, three fourth participants had taken medicine. Kheda district study reported that nearly 50% of participants had to complain of abdominal pain during menstruation. And nearly 80% had medicine for that.¹⁴

In Our study, most of the women though faced problems during menstruation, don't consult a doctor for various reasons like shyness, fear of adverse effects with medicines, and lack of awareness for consultation.

5. Conclusion

Reproductive tract infection, which has become a silent epidemic that devastates women's life, is closely interrelated with poor menstrual hygiene. Correct knowledge and proper menstrual hygienic practices can protect the women from this suffering. Unhygienic practices and social taboos followed during menstruation are issues need to be addressed at all levels. Efforts such as improving the female literacy and health education on the various risk factors should be made by the policymakers to increase menstrual hygiene among the rural population. All mothers should be taught to break inhibitions about discussing with their daughters on menstruation before menarche. Young girls must be educated about the importance of maintaining hygiene during menstruation to prevent the risk of reproductive tract infections. A healthy discussion should remove taboos. Focused care and counselling of these young patients by conducting camps would be an excellent investment for their and their families' future health and the society and nation as a large. Promoting positive attitudes towards management of menstruation and related problems among the reproductive age group women is the need of the hour.

6. Recommendations

A separate National health policy concentrating on improvement of menstrual hygiene, thereby prevention of reproductive tract infections, is needed along with continued health education to measure the success of interventions aimed at improving the menstrual hygiene practices among women.

7. Limitations

This study was conducted in a small-sized sample in short period.

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