

Menstrual Hygiene Practices and its Management among Female Students

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ABSTRACT: The objective of the present paper was to investigate the menstrual hygiene practices and its management among female Students in Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. A sample of 403 female students from different colleges was selected for the present study. An online questionnaire was circulated among the students with different subsections. The responses revealed that half of the students are aware about the menstruation and its management practices. Ignorance, misconceptions, unsafe practices, and illiteracy of the mother and child regarding menstruation are the root causes of many problems. The students have shifted from traditional to modern practices in managing menstrual blood. there is a need to intervene and educate the female students about menstruation hygiene in Degree Colleges of Jammu and Kashmir. It was revealed education will play a pivotal role.

Keywords: Menstruation, Sanitation, Hygiene, Awareness, Sanitary pads.

INTRODUCTION

Apart from the gestational and puerperal periods, it refers to the regular monthly bleeding from the endometrium that occurs throughout a female's reproductive lifespan. Menstruation is a vital female reproductive process that is intimately tied to female health. At the same time, a woman's ability to manage with menstruation is complicated. Menstruation is a topic that is frequently taboo in many cultures and as such remains hidden (Akiho, 2019; Mason *et al.*, 2013). It may not be a cultural taboo in some nations, but the social environment makes them uncomfortable or timid about discussing menstruation. Menstruation is a phenomenon specific to women, hence it is hidden from men in particular, resulting in men having insufficient understanding about it (Ishikawa and Sugiura 2011; Rajak, 2015). Some claim that this is why menstrual issues have been pushed out of the spotlight in international development (Tilley *et al.*, 2013).

Menstrual management drew the attention of International organizations because studies showed that menstruation was causing female pupils to miss school (Sahin, 2015; Sommer and Sahin 2013).

More than 75% of the female students missed their college due to menstruation (Grant *et al.*, 2013). Similarly in Northern Ethiopia indicated more than 50% of female students have skipped college during this phase (Tegegne and Sisay 2014). Further, one study

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reported that 20% girls never returned to their school due to fear of blood stains to their clothes during menstruation (Miir *et al.*, 2018). Hence, it is argued that proper hygiene and sanitation facilities are very important in colleges and schools across the world. It is advocated that students have missed less number of school days in colleges where hygiene and sanitation facilities are adequate (Alam *et al.*, 2017). The sanitation facilities and student ratio are key factors in this regard Oduor 2015).

Awareness of menstruation among adolescent girls has been found very low by various researchers. Shah *et al.* (2013) indicated that 60.3 percent of girls learned menstruation for at menarche only. Similar observations were made by Coast *et al.* (2019).

These findings appear to point to the necessity for Menstruation Hygiene Management (MHM), with improvements in school sanitation leading to an increase in female attendance rates (Water Aid and Tear fund 2002). When a teacher or a educator teaches MHM to the students, not only did students understanding of menstruation, but the percentage of absent students in the class reduced (Hennegan and Montgomery 2016). It has also been hypothesized that premenstrual education may have an impact on adolescent dysmenorrhea (Chhabra *et al.*, 2017).

There is a wide Variety of absorbents used in different culture used for managing the flow, in addition to more

current goods such as produced disposable pads, reusable pads, and menstruation cups. Some are conventional, while others are made up of whatever materials are available. Used clothing, cottonseed, felt, banana stem fibers, papyrus fibers, plant leaves or ears, tissue paper, newspaper, notebook scraps, or sponge from bed mattresses are among the materials included. Perceptions of menstruation and menstrual blood, as well as economic availability, influence how those materials are used or destroyed.

The argument is that while introducing an intervention and evaluating the potential negative impact, it is critical to understand the local context and cultural traditions linked with these items. This could lead to the development of an absorbent or sanitation facility that is suitable for the culture, environment, and health of the people. The third issue concerns menstrual education. Only 48% of female students knew about menstruation before reaching menarche at the time of the study. Given the high rate of primary school pupils in Uganda (and many other countries) needing to repeat classes, implementing menstrual education in Year Six may be too late.

It has been pointed out that this education should be incorporated at very early age among girls. The theoretical knowledge will not only serve the purpose, there must be some sort of practical demonstrations to handle the menstrual bleeding, menstrual cramps, irregular menstruation to the adolescent girls. The menstrual taboos in the society are the hurdles in far flung areas need to be eliminated by educating the female students. Keeping all the above facts into consideration, the objective of this study was to investigate the menstrual hygiene practices and its management among female students studying in different undergraduate colleges in Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

METHODOLOGY

A. Study Group/Area and sample size

A cohort of 403 female students of undergraduate colleges of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir was chosen for the present study. The age group of the students was between 14-36. This group was purposively selected to describe the experiences and perceptions of young adolescent girls due to their preliminary anticipated knowledge about the menstruation. Besides this, the menstrual hygienic practices are not well understood and have not received proper attention among this group.

B. Method

The respondents were selected through simple random sampling method irrespective of any socio-cultural and economic differences but the gender criterion was taken into consideration and only females constituted the sample.

C. Tools/instrument of data collection:

For the present study mixed methods were employed. A pre-tested questionnaire was circulated online by using Google Forms link <https://forms.gle/VRzg9AkzvXSeSG5i7> among the in-

charge teachers of selected colleges recruited for the study who were properly instructed by the lead author about the filling of questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated in Kashmiri and Urdu languages to the respondents by the in-charge teachers before circulating and executing the same. The students were assured that their personal information will not be shared and the information will be used only for the researcher purposes. In addition to Questionnaire, an interview of 30 respondents was conducted using interview schedule. Besides questionnaire and interview 15 FGDs were also conducted.

The Menstrual Hygiene Questionnaire/Schedule consists of the different subsections: a. Socio-demographic and economic characteristics of high school girls; b. Knowledge and awareness regarding menstruation; c. Source of information and communication about menstruation; d. Practices of menstrual hygiene; e. Water and Hygiene. The students were required to answer all the questions.

D. Statistical Analysis

Results of all the experiments were analyzed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Duncan's multiple range tests for comparison of the significance level (P) between the mean values of different seasons. A $P \leq 0.05$ values was considered a significant difference between the values compared.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socio demographic data revealed that most of the participants (69.47%) in our study was in the age group of 18-21 years followed by 22-25 years (17.86%). This indicated that the respondents were studying in the undergraduate courses of different colleges of Jammu & Kashmir, hence this study became very important as students might have heard about menstruation from their school teachers as it is a part of school curriculum in their preceding classes. About 89.3% of the participants were Muslims and only 9.6% and 0.9% of them were Hindus and Sikhs, respectively. Since women remain in islam pardah (veil) most of the time and usually highly conservative and revealing menstruation to their kits and kins became a challenging factor for them. Most of them 74.6% were rural and 25.3% were from urban areas. Majority (92%) of the participants were living with their parents and almost half of the parents have received high school education and majority (93.79%) of the mothers were housewives. More than half (63.77) of the participants were living with parents having the monthly income above 10,000/- The background of these female students from rural areas, low level of education of their parents, low income may also be the different bottle necks for management of menstruation hygiene (Table 1). A significant difference ($P \leq 0.05$) in materials used for washing reusable pads, reasons for not using commercial pads, money for buying pads, sources, duration, cause, process and communication of menstruation was observed in the study. However, no significant difference ($P \leq 0.05$) was observed in other questions raised to participants.

Almost 93% of the participants were unmarried and only 6.69% of them were married and 76.92 % of them were receiving pocket money from their parents. Our study revealed that most of the girls are dependent on parents for their pocket money, it may be a factor for them to ask parents for sanitary pads before menstruation. Almost everyone (89.92%) in our study group have heard about menstruation and 55% of them related it with physiological process and still 22.8% think it is a curse from God. The female students have completed senior secondary and still few of them see it a curse from God that indicates they have not been educated well about menstruation in their preceding class which may be addressed to manage the menstruation hygiene in the Union Territory. 64% of the female students were in opinion that the source of menstruation blood is uterus and 30% of them think that its source is vagina. Most of participants have the knowledge about the source of blood which may be regarded a healthy sign for managing the blood during this phase. Few students reported that their monthly period occurs after 21 days and most of them said that they have periods after every 28 days (Table 1). Students in these colleges are made aware by the concerned faculty members about menstruation hygiene as 50.86 reported that they have heard about menstruation hygiene in their colleges. About Half (47.6%) of the students reported that they have had foul during menstruation and 47.89% think that menstruation blood is unhygienic. 50% of the participants have learned about menstruation from their mothers, although some have reported that they have learned about menstruation from internet, newspapers, friends, TV and relatives as well. The educated girls have different mechanism to learn about the process which indicates that education will play an important role in its management. Almost three half (76.43%) of the participants have discussed this process with their friends as well and have debated on menstruation hygiene as well with their peers. Still female students in our study group have fear to discuss menstruation with their parents as reported by 31.26% of the respondents and majority of them think that it is a thing to keep it secret. This is an indication that female students evolving from a conservative society to modern society in Jammu and Kashmir to discuss the things with their peers, which were earlier thought taboos and nobody was discussing these things with their lose ones and were dying silently. Most (74.93%) of the respondents are using commercially made sanitary pads and 12.9 % are using homemade sanitary pads. Some (50.86) of them use reusable pads and wash them with soap and water and 32.75% respondents wash them only with water. This trend has completely changed and shifting from home made to commercially made sanitary pads may is a safe and hygiene method for management of menstruation blood (Table 1). The frequency of changing sanitary pads is two and three times equally among the participants and half of the participants clean genitals with soap as well as with

water only during menstruation. The sanitary pads are being disposed in wrapped papers, pits and open fields as reported by 58.8%, 37.71%, 3.47%, respectively. 65.52 % of the participants ask parents for money to buy sanitary pads and most of them (71.7%) have a tendency to get the money from their mothers, although few of them may get the money from father, sister, and brother as well. 60.79% of the female students attend college during menstruation and most (91.32%) of them feel pain during menstruation. 87.59% of the respondents reported that poor hygiene during this process may cause them different diseases and almost 43.67 students remain absent from college during menstruation, although majority (89.1% of the colleges have separate bathroom facility with good source of water supply (Table 1).

Many colleges throughout Jammu and Kashmir still don't have adequate systems in place for disposing of spent menstruation products. Due to the lack of menstrual management practises, the majority of respondents dispose of their sanitary pads and other menstrual products in college solid waste or garbage cans, which eventually become a part of solid wastes. The majority of countries have developed techniques to manage their faecal and urinary wastes. but bins for the disposal of sanitary pads is still lacking everywhere. In colleges of Jammu and Kashmir, due to lack of sanitary facilities, girls throw their pads in toilets.

Teachers in Colleges of Jammu and Kashmir need to be knowledgeable about menstruation and menstrual hygiene management in order to support students by providing a private and safe atmosphere during this phase. They need to provide sanitary napkins, soap, water, and restroom facilities in colleges so that girls can manage their periods comfortably and safely, a committee of instructors should be formed that includes both male and female educators.

For the disposal of menstrual waste, the committee should also offer separate bins. In Colleges, separate restrooms for males and girls should be constructed, complete with locks and proper doors. Girls should learn from their teachers how to manage their periods and how it affects their overall health. Girls should be taught how to properly dispose of their menstrual products at home and at school, as well as the dangers of flushing or tossing them in the open. To educate students, schools should arrange open conversations about puberty, sex education, menstruation, and other topics in every class.

Female students should be provided with accurate information about menstruation, this will answer their unanswered questions, encourage social engagement, and help them build trusting relationships with their friends and teachers. The school management committee should create health policies to protect female students from bullying and sexual harassment, and must guarantee that there are appropriate water and sanitation facilities for management of menstrual hygiene.

Table 1: Socio Demographic, Economic and awareness towards menstruation and menstruation hygiene among the participants.

Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics				
1. Age Group	Yes	No	May be	p ≤ 0.05
14-17	5.7	94.3		
18-21	69.47	30.53		
22-25	17.86	82.14		
26-29	4.46	95.54		
30-36	2.48	97.52		
2. Religion				
Muslim	89.3	10.7		
Hindu	9.6	90.4		
Sikh	0.9	99.1		
3. Residence				
Rural	74.6	25.4		
Urban	25.3	74.7		
4. Living Arrangement				
Both Parents	92	8		
Father	2.7	97.3		
Mother	2.97	97.03		
Relatives	2.23	97.77		
5. Fathers Education				
Illiterate	31	69		
High School	46	54		
Graduate	13	87		
Above	9.6	90.4		
6. Mothers Education				
High School	37.4	62.6		
Literate	42.4	57.6		
Graduate	5.95	94.05		
Above	14.1	85.9		
7. Mothers Occupation				
House Wife	93.79	6.21		
Embroidery	0.24	99.76		
Medical Shop	0.24	99.76		
Social Worker	0.49	99.51		
Anganwadi helper	0.24	99.76		
Teacher	1.98	98.02		
Orderly	0.24	99.76		
Govt. Employee	1.24	98.76		
Asha Worker	0.24	99.76		
cook in pry. School	0.24	99.76		
health supervisor	0.24	99.76		
horticulture employee	0.24	99.76		
Rtd. Govt employee	0.24	99.76		
business	0.24	99.76		
8. Fathers Income				
Below 10K	63.77	36.23		p< 0.1993
Above 10K – 20K	21.58	78.42		
more than 30K	14.6	85.4		
9. Marital Status				
Single	93	7		p< 0.7430
Married	6.69	93.31		
Divorced	0.24	99.76		
10. Received Pocket Money From Family				
	76.92	23		
Knowledge and awareness regarding menstruation				
11. Heard about Menstruation				
	89.82	3.98	6.2	
12. Menstruation is What				
Physiological Process	55	45		p< 0.0155
Pathological Process	6.2	93.8		
Curse from God	22.8	77.2		
Do not Know	15.88	84.12		
13. Source of Menstruation Blood				
Uterus	64	36		p< 0.0502

Other	4.21	95.79		
Vagina	30	70		
Abdomen	0.49	99.51		
Bladder	1.24	98.76		
14. Duration of menstruation blood				
21 Days	24.56	75.44		p< 0.0290
28 Days	59.5	40.5		
Do Not Know	13.89	86.11		
35 Days	1.98	98.03		
15. Learned about menstruation hygiene in college				
16. Foul odour during menstruation				
17. Menstruation blood is unhygienic				
18. Poor hygiene during menstruation reduces pain				
<i>Source of information and communication about menstruation</i>				
19. Source of information about menarche				
Parents	11.9	88.1		p< 0.0001
Mother	50	50		
Internet	17.6	82.4		
Newspaper	0.99	99.01		
Friends	16.87	83.13		
TV	14.88	85.12		
Relatives	0.99	99.01		
20. Ever discussed menstruation hygiene with friends				
21. Communication about menstruation hygiene with friends				
22. Reason for not sharing about menstruation with parents				
It is to be kept secret	40	60		
All	32.25	67.75		
It is shameful	10	90		
I have fear	17.36	82.64		
23. Ever communicated menstruation with your teacher				
<i>Practices of menstrual hygiene</i>				
24. Using absorbent material during menstruation				
25. Absorbent material used during last 6 Months				
Commercially made sanitary pad	74.93	25.07		p< 0.0789
Water only	6.2	93.8		
Homemade absorbent	12.9	87.1		
Soap and water	5.95	94.05		
26. Material used for washing reusable pad				
Soap and water	50.86	49.14		p< 0.0151
Drying of usable absorbent	7.44	92.56		
Water only	32.75	67.25		
Indoors	5.45	94.55		
Sunlight	3.47	96.53		
27. Frequency of changing sanitary pads in a day				
Thrice	40.69	59.31		p< 0.8697
Twice	46.65	53.35		
Once	12.65	87.35		
28. Cleaning genitals during menstruation				
29. Material used for cleaning genitals				
Soap and water	53.59	46.41		p< 0.6676
Water only	46.4	53.6		
30. Shower/bath during menstruation				
31. Material used for bath				
Soap & water	93.3	6.7		p< 0.9999
Water only	6.69	93.31		
32. Disposal of used sanitary pads				
Wrapped in paper	58.8	41.2		p< 0.2174
Pits	37.71	62.29		
Open field	3.47	96.53		
33. Reasons for not using commercial sanitary pads				
Costly	42.9	57.1		p< 0.0014
All	24.56	75.44		
Not available	14.88	85.12		
Shyness	17.6	82.4		
34. Do you ask parents/family for money to buy sanitary pads				
35. Whom you get money from for buying pads				

Mother	71.7	28.3		p< 0.0559
Father	16.37	83.63		
Sister	9.67	90.33		
Friends	2.23	97.77		
Brother	0	100		
36. Attending college during menstruation	60.79	27.55	11.66	
37. Pain during periods	91.32	8.68		
38. Cause of Menstruation				
Don't Know	12.9	87.1		p< 0.0048
Curse from God	18.6	81.4		
Hormones	62.28	37.72		
Other	4.46	95.54		
Cause of a disease	1.73	98.27		
39. Poor hygiene predisposes to infection	87.59	12.41		
40. Frequent communication with				
Mother	62.28	37.72		p< 0.0391
Any other	10.66	89.34		
Sister	26	74		
Father	0.99	99.01		
Water and hygiene				
41. Water source functionality in the college				
5-7 days per week	67.74	32.26		p< 0.2431
Few than two days per week	14.39	85.61		
2-4 days per Week	17.86	82.14		
42. Pads wrapped in paper before disposal	86.8	13.2		
43. Separate toilet/bathroom facility in college	89.1	10.9		
44. Absentee in college due to menstruation	43.67	37.2	19.13	

CONCLUSIONS

- All the girls have basic information about menstruation and believed it to be a physiological process. They believed that it is a normal process for women and if it will not happen, it means woman is abnormal. Most of the respondents have shared the first experience of menstruation either with sisters, or friends of mothers. No one has shared it with the male relatives or male friends.
- Majority opined that the source of menstrual blood is uterus but a good number also said that the source is vagina. Majority of respondents have 28 days of duration of menstrual blood with bleeding phase of 3-7 days with foul odour for which they would often feel embarrassed. However, half of the respondents believed that menstrual blood is unhygienic and other half said it is not unhygienic.
- None of the respondents has learned anything about the menstruation in college or in school. All the respondents hold the opinion that poor or good hygiene during menstruation has no relation with menstrual pain. Half of the respondents would share menstrual hygiene with close friends like what to eat and what not, how to reduce pain and whether to take a bath or not.
- Those who were reluctant in sharing menstrual related issues with fathers had multiple opinions like it needs to be kept secret, fear factor, it is shameful. But fathers do take care of it and then few ignore or few get extra eatables for daughters during the days of periods. All the girls share this process with mothers. All the interviewees didn't shared menstruation related things with teachers. But if the bleeding happened all of a sudden in the school or in college, then they would ask for sanitary pads to teachers.

- All the respondents were using commercially made absorbent material/sanitary pads with popular brands like Wispher and Khatoon and soap and water. Though they felt that those pads are very costly but we have to manage it. None of the respondents used reusable pads. Only three respondents reported that they would use cotton cloth in addition to commercially made sanitary pad just for the safety purpose and they will make it dry indoors in a private place.
- Respondents were changing pads once or twice and thrice. But majority were in 2-3 times. Majority of the respondents would clean their genitals during menstruation using both soap and water. Only 4 respondents were using only water. No respondent was taking bath during menstruation believing that it will cause pain or negatively affect the reproductive health or it will make the bleeding intense or recur. After the menstruation is over all used to take a mandatory bath using soap and water that had ritual significance also to restore the purity? Half of the respondents used to dispose used sanitary pads in open pits available in the villages at public places usually after wrapping in polythene. Other half would put in dustbins after wrapping in polythene which is later thrown in some far off open field.
- All the respondents were asking their fathers for money when they had to purchase sanitary pads but respondents would not let their fathers know that they have to purchase pads but would give some another excuse. Some respondents said that they would come to college during menstruation but majority would skip the school during first 2 days because of pain, heavy flow, no gender specific private toilets in college, afraid of staining and no proper disposal system. All the respondents reported that periods are painful especially the first 2 days.

Ethics approval

Proper ethical guidelines as recommended by Centre for Media Studies-Institutional Review Board (CMS-IRB) New Delhi, India were followed.

Consent to participate. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Consent for publication. All participants were informed about the use of the data and consented to it.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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