



Short Communication

Menstrual Hygiene Knowledge and Practice among Adolescent School Girls of Urban Slum of Chetla, Kolkata

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Abstract:

Background: Many girls face challenges with managing their menstruation safely due to lack of knowledge. A study by UNICEF revealed that 1 out of 3 girls in South Asia knew nothing about menstruation prior to getting it. **Objective:** To study the knowledge and Practice regarding Menstrual Hygiene among school girls. **Methods:** The study was conducted in a school of slum area of Chetla, Kolkata in the month of Feb, 2016. All the 50 girls were included in the study. Data were collected by using structured Schedule. **Results:** 42% girls had no knowledge about menstruation before menarche and almost half (47%) were unaware of the cause of menstruation. 68% of girls did not know from where bleeding occurs. 61.5% of girls used Sanitary Pad during menstruation **Conclusion:** The girls should be educated about the causes of menstruation, selection of a sanitary menstrual absorbent and its proper disposal.

Key words: Menstruation, Menstrual Hygiene, Knowledge, Practice

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Introduction

Adolescent girls constitute a vulnerable group not only with respect to their social status but also in relation to their health. In this regard, menstruation is regarded unclean or dirty in society.¹The issue of menstrual hygiene is inadequately acknowledged and has not received proper attention.²Good hygienic practices, such as use of sanitary pads and adequate washing of the genital areas, are essential during menstruation period. Women and girls of reproductive age need access to clean and soft absorbent sanitary products which in the long run protect their health from various infections.³

Most of the school going and pre-university girls are not aware of the fundamental facts about menstruation and puberty and very little attention is paid to the reproductive health of those girls.⁴In India menstruation is surrounded with a long list of Do's and Don'ts with women. Most girls are ignorant about the physiology of menstruation and therefore the first experience of menstruation is of fear, shame and disgust. Due to these reasons girl's attitude and expectations about menstruation have become negative and this may result in poor menstrual hygiene which is associated with high prevalence of Reproductive Tract Infections (RTI's).⁵

A study conducted in Delhi revealed that majority (86%) of the girls lack scientific knowledge about menstruation and puberty.⁶Similarly a study in Tamil Nadu reported that Hygienic practices were found to be not so satisfactory. Only 53.0% of girls mentioned having taken bath every day and 38.2 % girls on alternate days during their last menstruation. More than two third of the girls (68.5 percent) were ignorant about the use of sanitary pads during menstruation.⁷

In the view of above the present study was conducted with the objective to assess the knowledge and practice regarding menstruation and hygiene among the school girls of an urban slum of Chetla area, Kolkata.

Methodology:

The study was conducted at Shri ArbindoVidyapitha (Girls' High school), Chetla, Kolkata, West Bengal. It is situated in the slum areas of Chetla. Majority of the students attending the school resides in the slum. The study was conducted in the month of

Feb, 2106. All the 50 girls studying in class 5 to 10 were included in the study. Necessary permissions were obtained from the School administration prior to the study. Data collection was done by using pre-structured and pre-tested schedule. Students were interviewed in the class rooms maintaining privacy. The schedule contained information regarding scocio-demographic factors, knowledge and practice regarding menstrual hygiene. Statistical analysis was done by Microsoft excel office 2013 and proportions were calculated.

Results:

Majority of the girls were in the age group of 10-12 yrs, belonged to Hindu religion and General by caste and their mothers were primary educated or illiterate. Almost half of their mothers worked as domestic help. 64% of girls had Pucca house and 62% had sanitary latrine facility. (Table-1)

Table – 1: Distribution of Socio demographic characteristics among the girls

Characteristic	No. of Girls n=50	Percentage (%)	
Age in Yrs.	10-12	27	54.0
	13-15	20	40.0
	16-18	03	6.0
Religion	Hindu	43	86.0
	Muslim	07	14.0
Caste	General	34	68.0
	ST	03	6.0
	SC	05	10.0
	OBC	04	8.0
	Others	04	8.0
Mothers education	Illiterate	18	36.0
	Primary	23	46.0
	Secondary	07	14.0
	H.S	02	4.0
Mothers Occupation	House Wife	22	44.0
	Domestic helper	24	48.0
	Service & Other	4	8.0
Monthly Per Capita Income₹	<1000	23	46.0
	1000-2000	21	42.0
	>2000	06	12.0
Type Of house	Pucca	32	64.0
	Kachha	13	26.0
	Mix	05	10.0
Sanitary latrine	Present	31	62.0

42% girls had no knowledge about menstruation before menarche and almost half (46%) were unaware of the cause of menstruation. 72% of girls were aware that sanitary pad should be used during menstruation and most of them got information regarding menstrual hygiene from family members and only 10% from health personnel. (Table-2)

Table-2: Knowledge regarding Menstruation & Menstrual hygiene among the girls.

Knowledge regarding Menstruation & Menstrual hygiene	No. of Girls N=50	Percentage (%)
Knowledge of menstruation before Menarche		
Had knowledge	29	58.0
No knowledge	21	42.0
Knowledge Regarding Cause Of Menstruation		
Physiological	16	32.0
God Given	3	6.0
Don't Know	23	46.0
Other (Natural/Weight Gain/Disease)	8	16.0
Knowledge Regarding Organ From Where Bleeding Occurs		
Uterus	7	14.0
Bladder	3	6.0
Don't Know	34	68.0
Other (Kidney/Stomach)	6	12.0
Knowledge Regarding Protective Material To Be Used During menstruation		
Sanitary Pads	36	72.0
Old Washed Cloth	7	14.0
Pad+ Old Washed Cloth	2	4.0
Pad+ New Cloth	5	10.0
Knowledge Regarding Time Interval Of Changing Sanitary Pad/Cloth		
Every 3hrs	8	16.0
Every 4hrs	11	22.0
Every 5hrs	8	16.0
Every 6hrs	7	14.0
Others (8/12 hrs)	16	32.0
Knowledge Regarding Methods Of Disposal Of used Material During Menstruation		
Wrap & dispose into open	6	12.0
Wrap & dispose into a closed waste bin	28	56.0
Dispose into pond	3	6.0
Drains	2	4.0
Stagnant water	1	2.0
Others (Wash the cloth and reuse)	10	20.0
Knowledge Regarding Cleaning Of Genital Area During Menstruation		
Plain water	22	44.0
Luke warm water	2	4.0

Soap and water	23	46.0
Others	03	6.0
Sources of information		
Family member	25	50.0
Friend	13	26.0
School teacher	6	12.0
Health personnel	5	10.0
Other (T.V)	1	2.0

61.5% of girls were using Sanitary Pad during menstruation .42.2% of girls were cleansing the genital area with soap followed by 3.9% with antiseptics. 73% of girls observed the taboo of restriction in moving freely and entering kitchen. (Table-3)

Table-3: Practice regarding menstrual hygiene among the girls

Practice regarding Menstruation & Menstrual hygiene	No. of Girls N=26	Percentage (%)
Practice regarding protective material to be used during menstruation		
Sanitary Pads	16	61.5
New cloth	2	7.7
Old Washed Cloth	4	15.4
Pad+ Old Washed Cloth	1	3.8
Pad+ New Cloth	3	11.6
Practice regarding time interval of changing sanitary pad/cloth		
Every 3hrs	7	26.9
Every 4hrs	5	19.3
Every 5hrs	3	11.6
Every 6hrs	11	42.2
Practice regarding methods of disposal of used material during menstruation		
Wrap & dispose into open	2	7.7
Wrap & dispose into a closed waste bin	17	65.4
Dispose into pond	2	7.7
Drains	1	3.8
Stagnant water	4	15.4
Practice regarding cleaning of genital area during menstruation		
Plain water	13	50.0
Luke warm water	1	3.9
Soap and water	11	42.2
Antiseptics	1	3.9
Practice of following taboos		
Yes	19	73.0
No	7	27.0

Discussion:

Majority of the girls were in the age group of 10-12 yrs, belonged to Hindu religion and were general by caste. A study conducted by Jothy K et.al. among the school girls of Cuddalore district Tamil Nadu found that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 11-19 years, maximum (87.9 %) of girls were between 13 and 15 years of age group and (96.1 %) girls were Hindus⁷

Most of the participant's mothers were primary educated (46%) followed by illiterate (36%), Secondary educated (14%) and Higher secondary (4%). Similar results were reported by Neginhal, V. S. that majority of the mothers of research participants have attained primary education (40.3%) followed by secondary education (26.4%), illiterate (21.5%) and so on.⁹ Other similar study conducted in Nigeria in 2006 reported that majority of the mothers of adolescent girls have attained tertiary education (47.5%) followed by secondary (30.7%), primary (14.9 %).¹⁰ Study conducted in Sokoto, Nigeria also revealed that majority of the mothers have attained tertiary level of education (47%) followed by secondary education (28%), primary education (3%) and so on.¹¹

Most of the girls (88%) belonged to families having per capita monthly income of < Rs-1000 Almost half of their mothers worked as domestic help. 64% of girls had Pucca house and 62% had sanitary latrine facility. Similarly, Jothy K et. al. reported in their study that majority of the respondents` (82.5%) monthly household income was below Rs.2000/-. The average monthly household income was Rs.940/-. 67.3 percent of the respondents were residing in Huts thatched roof house.⁷

In this study 58% girls had knowledge about menstruation before menarche. Similar to this, a study conducted in West Bengal reported that 67.5% girls were aware about menstruation prior to attainment of menarche.¹ Similarly, study conducted in Uttarakhand also reported that 64.5% adolescent girls were aware about menstruation prior to the attainment of menarche.¹² A study performed among adolescent school girls in (Nagpur) Maharashtra by Thakre SB et al 2011 revealed only 36.95% of the girls were aware of menstruation before menarche¹³ About 72% urban girls and 39% rural girls were found to have pre-menarcheal knowledge regarding menstruation. ¹⁴A study by UNICEF revealed that 1 out of 3 girls in South Asia knew nothing about

menstruation prior to getting it. (Water Aid 2013), while 48% of girls in Iran and 10% of girls in India believe that menstruation is a disease (Water Aid 2013, Menstrual Hygiene Matters).¹⁵

It was observed that almost half (47%) were unaware of the cause of menstruation. 68% of girls did not know from where bleeding occurs and other 18 % had incorrect knowledge who reported that bleeding occurs from bladder/kidney/stomach. In a similar study it was found that the knowledge on cause of menstruation was poor among participants i.e. only 52.1% of them knew that menstruation is normal physiological process. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in Zagazig City.¹⁶ Another study conducted among the rural adolescent girls of Nepal, 25.3 per cent of the girls reported uterus as the organ of bleeding during menstruation whereas 32 per cent, 26.7 per cent and 16 per cent said the fallopian tube, vagina and urinary bladder respectively.¹⁷

In the present study 50 % of girls got information regarding menstrual hygiene from family members (Mother/Sister) and 26 % from friends, only 10% from health personnel. Previous studies revealed that mothers of the girls were the major source of information i.e. 70.7 % followed by friends 18.6% and teacher 10.6%. Consequent to our study, a study conducted in South India reported that mother were the main source of information i.e. 54.0% followed by friends 35.3% and so on.¹⁸ Similarly study conducted in Gujarat reported that the major source of information was the mother 60.7% followed by older sisters 15.8 %, however teachers and others played a small role in it.¹⁹ Katiyar K. et al 2013 documented that 66.9% of urban adolescent females of Meerut learned about menstrual practices from mothers.²⁰

61.5% of girls were using Sanitary Pad during menstruation followed by 15.4% old washed cloth, 11.3% pad +new cloth, 7.7% new cloth and 3.8% pad + old washed cloth. Likewise a study by Pokhrel S. et.al reported that, of 303 girls, 56.4% used sanitary pad, 28.7% used new cloth, 13.2% used old cloth and 1.7% used tampon as absorbent during menstruation.²¹ In a study by Datta A et. al found that 73.5% of urban participants and 45.9% rural respondents used only sanitary napkin during menstruation. Most of the respondents (76.5% in urban area and 90.8% in rural area) changed absorbent two to four times a day.¹⁴ 58.8% of girls were changing Sanitary

Pad /cloth within 5 hours (ranging from 3 hours to 5 hours). Similarly Pokhrel S et.al. reported 47.2% girls change the pad only twice a day.²¹

In this study it was observed that 65.4% of girls wrapped and disposed of the used materials during menstruation in a closed container. Study by Pokhrel S et.al. revealed that 66.7% girls threw it in the dustbin, 19.8% girls burnt it, 10.2% girls drained it and remaining of them threw it by the roads.²¹ Such menstrual practices were also reported in another study among adolescent school girls in Nepal where regarding final disposal of the menstrual materials, 43 per cent of the girls buried their absorbent materials followed by 35 per cent threw with other wastes and 19 per cent burnt the materials.²²

Regarding cleaning of genitalia 42.2% of girls was cleansing the genital area with soap followed by 3.9% with antiseptics. A study by Pokhrel S et. al reported that only 24.8% girls reported of cleaning genitalia.²¹

73% of girls observed the taboo of restriction in moving freely and entering kitchen. Similar results were reported by Jothy K. et. al that 74.5% girls did not attend any religious ceremonies, 64.25% were forbidden from playing, 55.2% girls were not allowed to attend social functions like marriage. 60.3% girls were not allowed even to move freely in the house. ⁷

Conclusion:

This study has highlighted the needs of the adolescents to have accurate, appropriate and adequate information about menstruation and its appropriate management. The girls should be educated about the causes of menstruation, selection of a sanitary menstrual absorbent and its proper disposal.

As mothers and elder sisters were the first line of informant about menstruation among 50 percent of the girls in the study area, it is utmost important that the mothers be equipped with correct and appropriate information on reproductive health.

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