



ResearchPaper

Knowledge, Attitude, Practices towards Menstrual Health amongst Young Women in Rajasthan

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Abstract

Introduction: Lack of awareness about menstrual health among young women may result in making them more susceptible to infections of the reproductive tract, pelvic inflammatory disease, and other health issues. **Aim:** to assess the knowledge, attitude, practices toward menstrual health amongst young women seeking health care at Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at JLN Medical College, Ajmer. **Methods:** This hospital-based study was conducted in the outpatient department (OPD) and Wards of Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at JLN Medical College, Ajmer. The study was conducted over a period of one year from Oct 2020-Sep 2021 on 1000 young women between 15-25 years of age were administered a pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire after obtaining their consent. **Results:** 31.8% participants had awareness about menstruation prior to menarche, mothers (55.4%) were the more common sources of information. Eighty-one percent were unaware that menstruation was the result of hormonal changes, while 64% were unaware of the organ of menstruation. 48% of girls were comfortable to talk about menstruation while 52% felt ashamed to discuss about menstruation. The varied reactions to menstruation may have depended upon the extent to which the girls have been prepared regarding the same. Over half, i.e., 55% of the young woman duly recorded their periods. Majority i.e., 73% reported using sanitary pads during menses. The minority that used cloth instead of sanitary pad, felt that pads were either unaffordable or uncomfortable. **Conclusion:** The present study participants are well aware about the best menstrual hygiene practices, and it may be attributed to the fact that most of them have been educated by their mother or school authorities.

Key words: Young women, Knowledge, attitude, menstrual practices

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I. Introduction

When it comes to a woman's overall well-being and the well-being of her family and community, menstrual health is critical. Many women still do not have access to menstrual health care due to cultural, religious, and institutional biases, especially in developing countries. Menstrual hygiene is still a difficult problem to solve in today's world.

For many girls, menstruation coincides with the onset of puberty, and this marks the beginning of a new phase of life marked by new social rules, restrictions, and isolation. As a result of changing attitudes toward girls, women's mindsets have been profoundly impacted by restrictions on women's self-expression, education, mobility, and freedom.

There are still taboos and restrictions on menstruation and menstrual practices in India, so many girls are unaware of the scientific facts about menses and hygienic menstrual practices. This has a negative impact on the girls' health, making them more susceptible to infections of the reproductive tract, pelvic inflammatory disease, and other health issues.

The present study was conducted to assess the knowledge, attitude, practices toward menstrual health amongst young women seeking health care at Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at JLN Medical College, Ajmer.

II. Materials And Methods

This hospital-based study was conducted in the outpatient department (OPD) and Wards of Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at JLN Medical College, Ajmer. The study was conducted over a period of one year from Oct 2020-Sep 2021. Young women between 15-25 years of age reporting to the OPD or admitted or kept under observation in the above wards of Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at JLN Medical College, Ajmer were administered a pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire after obtaining their consent. Anyone admitted for treatment for a serious illness, or anyone who refuses to participate in the study because they are unwilling to consent., were excluded

Data was entered into Microsoft® excel 2019 and analyzed using SPSS v21.0 (IBM, USA) and results were presented in tabular forms and graphs.

III. Results

A total number of 1000 girls participated in the study including those who visited the routine OPD or were admitted in the five wards of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at JLN Medical College, Ajmer.

Baseline characteristics

Fifty seven percent were from urban areas and 43% from rural areas. These girls were in the age group of 18-25 years; with maximum number (37%) in the range of 22-24 years. Thirty nine percent were educated between class 5 to class 9, with only 4% being illiterate.

Majority i.e. 57% were Hindus by religion whereas 36% were Muslims and 7% were Christians. Forty five percent of the fathers and 58% mothers of the participants were illiterate. Most fathers of the participants were daily wage workers (56%), while mothers were housewives (79%).

Menstruation pattern

Of the 1000 participants in the study, 58.4% had attained menarche between 12-14 years of age, 61.8% had regular 28-32 days cycles and 66.7% had normal menstrual flow (Table 1). The most associated morbidity reported by the participants was pain (60.2%).

Knowledge about menstruation

It was observed that only 31.8% participants had awareness about menstruation prior to menarche, mothers (55.4%) were the more common sources of information (Table 2). Eighty-one percent were unaware that menstruation was the result of hormonal changes, while 64% were unaware of the organ of menstruation.

Attitude towards menstruation

Our study showed that 48% of girls were comfortable to talk about menstruation while 52% felt ashamed to discuss about menstruation (Table 3). The varied reactions to menstruation may have depended upon the extent to which the girls have been prepared regarding the same.

Menstruation practices

Over half, i.e., 55% of the young woman duly recorded their periods. Majority i.e., 73% reported using sanitary pads during menses (Table 4). The minority that used cloth instead of sanitary pad, felt that pads were either unaffordable or uncomfortable.

IV. Discussion

Our study was conducted among 1000 young women aged 15 to 25 years. Maximum participants were of 22-23 years of age. Most other studies evaluated adolescent aged girls hence it was evident that the mean age of the study subjects were 13.82 ± 0.832 years.¹ A majority of the subjects (62.27%) belonged to urban areas and 37.73% resided in rural areas almost comparable to our study where 57% were from urban areas and 43% were residents of rural areas.

The age of menarche of study participants ranged between 12- 14 years. Our findings were similar to other studies for e.g., age of menarche ranged between 11-15 years in a study by Ramachandra et al, 13.2 years in a study by Khanna A et al and 13.6 year in a study by Jain et al.^{2,3}

The present study had 68.2% girls having no prior awareness. Similar findings were observed by other researches like Mathiyalagen et al, where only 48.3% of the study population had knowledge regarding menstruation before menarche which was almost corroborative with the findings by Verma et al where 58.3% girls had reported having prior knowledge about menstruation.^{4,5} Only one third i.e. 31% knew menstruation occurred from the uterus, while a majority (64%) had no idea which organ was involved. This was similar to the study by Mathiyalagen et al where 71.5% were unaware of the cause and 61.2% were unaware of the source of menstrual bleeding.⁴

Menarche is a very important event during adolescence and ideally, mothers should be the main informants at this tender age enabling trust and better information like in our present study, where 55.4% were informed about menstruation by their mothers. Similar findings are noted in a study by Thakre et al, where mothers were the first informants for 71.33%.¹ Other similar studies reported that the first informant was the mother in 40.67% and 37.5% of the subjects.⁶⁻¹⁰ Other sources of information were friends, teacher and relatives of the girls.

An Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) study and research carried out by Dasgupta A and Sarkar M, Omidvar S and Begum K et al, and other researchers also reported similar findings.^{6,8} In a study by Angel Rajakumari G et al, majority of the girls (88.3%) had previous knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene and the main source of their information was health personnel.¹¹

An important finding reported in the study by Ramachandra K et al² is that teachers were considered neither as a good source of information nor were they preferred to provide education regarding these matters. During the informal interaction session of the study, the participants opined that they did not feel comfortable broaching the subject of reproductive health with their teachers. Also, when the teachers were approached, they expressed being embarrassed and hesitant in discussing these issues with their students.

Majority of participants expressed negative reactions towards menstruation.^{12,13} These negative feelings associated with menstruation could be because of participants not being psychologically prepared for attaining menarche which is an important milestone in their life. This could also be a reflection of the culture and taboos in the society regarding menstruation. The unawareness of girls about menstruation might be the cause for the 48% girls in the present study to feel embarrassed, anxious or scared at onset.

The girls who participated in the present study were aware about good menstrual hygiene practices. Most of them (73%) used sanitary pads as absorbents while the rest (27%) preferred cloth; the reasons for not using sanitary pads being unaffordability and feeling of discomfort. Thakre et al study revealed that most of the rural girls used old clothes as menstrual pads which they reused after washing with soap and water and discarded in few months by burning. Very few girls from the rural areas used sanitary pads, possibly due to their low socioeconomic status, lesser availability of the pads at the rural areas and lack of awareness. Other researchers also reported that more than three fourth of the girls used cotton clothes and reused them after washing them.¹⁶

Ramchandra et al study, it was observed that use of sanitary napkin is higher in the urban area (75.9%) compared to rural area.² Similar findings were also reported in a study conducted by Ray S et al.⁹

The probable reason for the girls not changing the pads could be ignorance and lack of facilities.⁸ Based on his study, Narayana et al suggested that urban girls had better awareness about menstrual hygienic practices than their rural counterparts.¹⁷

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study participants are well aware about the best menstrual hygiene practices, and it may be attributed to the fact that most of them have been educated by their mother or school authorities. The availability and usage of sanitary pads, appropriate disposal and personal hygiene during menstruation are indicators of good awareness created by health professionals and teachers. An awareness program for adolescent girls about menarche and the physiology of menstruation should be scheduled as part of the school health plan at all the schools in rural and urban areas. Updating the mothers on their visits to the OPD at the doctor about good practices and follow up in case of symptoms of any infection should be adequately emphasized upon.

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Table 1: Menstruation pattern (n=1000)

Variable	Number of Participants (%)	
Age at Menarche	<12years	198 (19.8%)
	12-14years	584 (58.4%)
	>14years	218 (21.8%)
Duration of Flow	<2days	130 (13%)
	2–5days	624 (62.4%)
	5days	246 (24.6%)
Length of Cycles	<28days	153 (15.3%)
	28-32days	618 (61.8%)
	>32days	229 (22.9%)
Quantity of Flow	Normal	667 (66.7%)
	Excessive	190 (19%)
	Scanty	143 (14.3%)
Morbidities	Pain	602 (60.2%)
	Increasedflow	78 (7.8%)
	Irregularity	133 (13.3%)
	Notapplicable	187 (18.7%)

Table 2: Knowledge about menstruation(n=1000)

Variables	Number of Participants (%)	
Awareness	Yes	318 (31.8%)
	No	682 (68.2%)
Source of information	Mother	554 (55.4%)
	Teacher	116 (11.6%)
	Relatives	88 (8.8%)
	Friends	102 (10.2%)
Organ of menstruation	Correct response(Uterus)	220 (22%)
	Incorrectresponse	159 (15.9%)
	Don'tKnow	621 (62.1%)
Reason formenses	Correct response(Hormonalchanges)	192 (19.2%)
	Incorrectresponse	160 (16%)
	Don'tknow	648 (64.8%)

Table 3: Attitude towards menstruation(n=1000)

Variables	No of Participants (%)	
Comforttotalkaboutmenses	Yes	480 (48%)
	No	520 (52%)
Shame	Yes	456 (45.6%)
	No	544 (54.4%)

Table 4: Menstruation practices

Parameters	No of Participants (%)
Absorbent Used	Sanitary Pad 730 (73%)
	Cloth 270 (27%)
Reason for Not Using Pad	Uncomfortable 130 (13%)
	Difficult to discard 80 (8%)
	Costly 150 (15%)
	Not applicable 640 (64%)
Pads/ Cloths Changed	=4 times 286 (28.6%)
	2-3 times 598 (59.8%)
	<2 times 116 (11.6%)
Disposal of absorbent	Dustbin 456 (45.6%)
	Toilet 89 (8.9%)
	Burn 286 (28.6%)
	Throwout 169 (16.9%)
Cleaning method of private parts	Water/soap 442 (44.2%)
	Only water 430 (43%)
	Don't clean 128 (12.8%)