

“Let’s Talk about Menstruation”: Voices of Adolescents’ from the City of Chandigarh

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is an integral part of human life, indeed of human existence, and menstrual hygiene is fundamental to the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls. It is the very important to have correct and complete information about it and especially during the adolescent period. Keeping this into account a study to gauge the knowledge, awareness and prevalent practices among adolescents was conducted in five different Govt. schools in Union Territory of Chandigarh. 432 students participated in the study and besides taking the demographic details; information was generated on the following aspects when menstruation was first heard, reaction on having first period, the different absorbents used during the menstrual flow etc. Data was also collected on the issues related to menstruation perceived by boys and girls differently and in comparison. The present paper indicated that exact and appropriate information about menstrual hygiene management at the young age can help in saving precious lives and help in avoiding certain reproductive and urinary tract infections.

Key Words : Adolescents, Menstruation, Menstrual hygiene Management (MHM)

INTRODUCTION

Every girl and women goes through a normal physiological phenomenon every month called as “Menstruation”. A lot of taboos are associated with the process of Menstruation in our country due lack of scientific awareness. These myths and misconceptions linked with it adversely affect the physical, mental and social health of these girls and women. There are enough studies available which prove this as true in our country. It is estimated that, 52% of the female population is of reproductive age and are likely to menstruate every month; menstruation has often been overlooked in research and in policy (House *et al.*, 2012). The UN has also stated that: Menstruation is an integral and normal part of human life, indeed of human existence, and menstrual hygiene is fundamental right for every female. It is the most important part of the to have the basic hygiene, cleanliness and accessible reproductive health

services for every women (House *et al.*, 2012). It is also important to see that effective and hygiene management of menstruation are the key issues to make female healthy, safe and clean. So, the WHO states that “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 the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management material” (UNICEF and WHO, 2014).

Effective Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is essential to meet the basic human rights of women and girls around the world yet it remains a taboo topic in many contexts and is often associated with behaviour restrictions. There are several social outcomes have been associated with poor MHM practices at the school level; these include school absenteeism or drop-out from school and cultural implications such as taboos around discussing

about it and exclusion from daily activities during menstrual days in various contexts. Health related outcomes that are believed to be linked with poor MHM may include reproductive tract and urinary tract infections. Reports are widespread of the use of unsanitary absorbents and poor practices around washing and drying reusable absorbents (Sumpter and Torondel, 2013). There is an evidence which suggests that girls' participation in education has an impact on health outcomes suggesting that there are social and economic benefits for imparting education to girls (Sperling and Herz, 2004).

Objectives :

The present study was conducted among the adolescents (age group between 10-16) studying at different Government schools in the Union Territory of Chandigarh, with the aim to assess:

- Knowledge, awareness and practices prevalent regarding menstruation and its hygiene management among these students.
- Compare the levels of knowledge and awareness among these girls and boys regarding MHM.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted among the adolescents studying between the Class 7th to 11th in five different schools of Union Territory of Chandigarh. All these schools have been selected by purposive sampling. There were 432 students who participated in the said study but only 397 students (276 girls and 121 boys) have completely filled-up their questionnaire and hence only these were included in the study. Subsequently, the data analysis was done for them.

Limitations of the study:

There were certain limitations of the present study, as purposive sampling was used for the selection of the schools. The sample size was less, so it can't be generalized and might not be representative of the general population. The present study has also low respondents as boys and there were few girls, who had yet to have menarche.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative survey was used to compare the knowledge, awareness between males and females students on menstruation and its hygiene practices. In

the current study it was observed that 35% of the total students who participated were studying in the 9th class followed by 32 % of the 10th and 15% of the 11th class. The majority of students 64 % were between the age group of 14 to 16 years. As far as the proportion of gender is concerned 30 % males and 70% females participated in it and majority of 64 % respondents belonged to Hindu religion (Table 1).

Table 1 : Demographic profile of the students participated in the study

Factor	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Class studying		
7	52	12.97
8	20	4.99
9	139	34.66
10	130	32.42
11	60	14.96
Age		
11-13	37	9.23
14-16	258	64.34
16-19	91	22.69
20 and above	15	3.75
Sex		
Male	121	30.17
Female	276	68.83
No response	4	1.00
Religion		
Christian	2	0.50
Hindu	258	64.34
Muslim	23	5.74
Sikh	16	3.99
Others	8	2.00

In the current study, it was observed that 89% of the students were aware about menstruation. Majority of the female students (31%) who participated were not able to elaborate their first reaction on attaining menstruation. Whereas, Fifty eight (21%) reported that they consulted someone after attaining menstruation and 22% agreed with mixed responses i.e. scared embarrassed, stressed etc. Many (11%), of the respondents were struck by fear and shock on seeing blood flowing from their genitals on attaining menstruation. A small percentage of 2.5% girl students expressed that they were embarrassed on attaining menstruation.

Table 3 showed a statistically significant difference between the knowledge on male and female students on parameters like who goes through periods ($p=0.03$) and

Table 2 : Knowledge among students about menstruation

Characteristics	Female N(%)
Heard about the word Menstruation	
Yes	246(89.13)
No	14(5.07)
Don't know	7(2.54)
No response	9(3.26)
First reaction on attaining menstruation	
Scared and Shocked	30(10.87)
Embarrassed	7(2.54)
Consulted someone	58(21.01)
Stressed	11(3.99)
Confused	11(3.99)
All of above	62(22.46)
None of the above	85(30.80)
No response	12(4.35)

the source of menstrual bleeding (p=0.005). Approximately 81% of the females reported that they knew that only girls go through periods as compared to 75% boys. Strangely, 74% of the boys were aware about the organ from which menstrual blood flows as compared to 54% of the girls.

Table 4 showed that females who participated in the study had better knowledge on menstrual hygiene management as compared to boys (p=0.0). Approximately, 41% of the girls reported that change of sanitary napkin depends on the flow of the menstruation followed by 37 % of the girls who reported change of the same every 4-6 hours of the interval.

Univariable analysis has shown that determinants for MHM practices were age (p=0.0) and education provided by teachers (p=0.0). Education on menstruation

Table 3 : Comparison of knowledge between male and female students on menstruation

Parameters	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	p-value
First Menstrual period called as menarche			
Yes	16(13.22)	62(22.46)	0.2905
No	20(16.53)	56(20.29)	
No response	85(70.25)	158(57.25)	
Who go through periods			
Girls only	91(75.21)	221(80.70)	0.0336
Girls and boys	6(4.96)	9(3.26)	
Blind or visually impaired Females	0	3(1.09)	
Deaf and Dumb Females	0	2(0.72)	
Mentally challenged Males	1(0.83)	1(0.36)	
All of the above	16(13.22)	37(13.41)	
	7(5.79)	3(1.09)	
Organ –blood comes through			
Yes	90(74.38)	146(53.90)	0.0054
No	7(5.79)	4(1.45)	
No response	24(19.83)	126(45.65)	
Blood			
100 ml	4(3.31)	8(2.90)	0.2025
50 ml	5(4.13)	17(6.16)	
Few tablespoons	8(6.61)	14(5.07)	
Don't know	102(84.30)	226(81.88)	
No response	2(1.65)	11(3.99)	
Normal for a girl to have irregular periods			
Yes	11(9.09)	28(10.14)	0.4806
No	45(37.19)	157(56.88)	
Sometimes	19(15.70)	49(17.75)	
Don't know	44(36.36)	34(12.32)	
No response	2(1.65)	8(2.90)	

Table 4 : Comparison of the knowledge on Menstrual Hygiene management among boys and girls who participated in the study

Parameters	Male N(%)	Female N(%)	p-value
Absorbent can be used			
Sanitary Pad only	89(73.55)	235(85.14)	
Cotton cloth pad	14(11.57)	11(3.99)	
Any old/waste cloth	8(6.61)	0	
Cloth pad filled with ashes/Sand/Dried leaves	0	0	0.9145
Tampons	0	3(1.09)	
She cups	0	2(0.72)	
All of the above	4(3.31)	21(7.61)	
Others	3(2.48)	1(0.36)	
No response	3(2.48)	3(1.09)	
Hours girl change napkin			
72 hrs or 3 days	0	1(0.36)	
48 hrs or 2 days	0	0	
24 hrs or once in a day	8(6.61)	7(2.54)	
8 hrs	12(9.92)	25(9.06)	0.000
4-6 hrs	3(2.48)	102(36.96)	
Depends on the flow	52(42.98)	112(40.58)	
Not sure about the time duration	38(31.40)	22(7.97)	
No response	8(6.61)	7(2.54)	
Bathe			
Once in a day	31(25.62)	98(35.51)	
Once in two days	15(12.40)	67(24.28)	0.9517
Twice in a day	23(19.01)	94(34.06)	
Avoid taking bath	14(11.57)	3(1.09)	
No response	38(31.40)	14(5.07)	

in the schools ($p=0.001$) were significantly associated with good MHM practices. There was no difference in the religion influencing the MHM practices among the participants here.

Besides all this, some other information was also generated during the study, which states that out of the total females who participated in the study 68% reported that they wrapped the pad in the newspaper and disposed it in the dustbin whereas 7% wrapped it in black polythene bags. This is the simple dustbin which is available either in the toilet at their school or the at their home. It indicates that only 5% reported that incinerators are being used by them and 6 % gave no response to it. Out of the total females who participated in the study 28% reported that they wash the cotton pad with detergent and sun dried it whereas 17 % said that pads are sun dried after hiding it under the clothes whereas 55% gave no response to it.

Conclusion:

If we really want to empower our younger

generation, whether boys, girls or the third gender studying in schools, then correct and complete information about all such issues related to Menstruation and it's hygiene should be provided to all of them at their schools. It should be given at the onset of puberty. It was revealed that 11% girls even never ever heard the word Menstruation and 40 % of them felt scared, shocked, embarrassed, confused and stressed during menarche. It is quite evident that if all these associated issues are addressed well in advance, then it be would a more comfortable position to handle these young people. Only 13 % boys and 23% girls were aware that the first period is called as menarche. It was also seen during the study that both boys and girls were not aware about the different products available in the market for menstrual hygiene like she-cups and tampons besides sanitary pads. Only 2% boys and 37% girls suggested that it is necessary to change a sanitary pad after 4 to 6 hours during menstrual days. Hence all this information generated out of this study is enough to say that, if we want Swachh Vidyalaya under Swachh

Table 5 : Determinants of Menstrual hygiene management among boys and girls			
Characteristics	X ²	OR(95%CI)	P value
Age			
11-13	16.07	0.000	0.00
13 and above			
14-16	17.37	0.3873(0.25-0.6)	0.00
And others			
17-19	53.04	6.0308(3.64-9.97)	0.000
And others			
20 and above	0.311	0.6365(0.22-1.82)	0.576
And others			
Religion			
Christian	0.025	0.000	0.873
And others			
Hindu	0.285	0.864(0.55-1.34)	0.593
And others			
Muslim	2.590	0.330(0.096-1.13)	0.107
And others			
Sikh	0.139	1.408(0.500-3.967)	0.7087
And others			
Taught by teacher about basics of reproduction			
Yes	20.20	0.34(0.21-0.54)	0.000
And others			
Yes, but not properly	34.99	3.92(2.48-6.20)	0.000
And others			
No	2.520	1.8(0.91-3.7)	0.112
And others			

Bharat, then it is the right time to act and engage with young people to empower them in the real manner. MHM impacts the dignity and wellbeing of every female.

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