Perceptions and Practices during Menstruation among Adolescent girls in and around Bangalore city

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To elucidate attitudes, thoughts and feelings of adolescent girls' towards Menstruation and assess the standard of hygiene practiced by them during that period.
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ABSTRACT

Research question: To elucidate attitudes, thoughts and feelings of adolescent girls' towards Menstruation and assess the standard of hygiene practiced by them during that period.

Setting: Rural area abounding Doddabalapura (Bangalore Rural District) and slum areas around Chamarajpet in Bangalore Urban District.

Study design: Cross-sectional study

Participants: 240 girls in the age group 12 to 18 years equally representing school and non school going in urban and rural areas.

Results: The results revealed that only 23% took menstruation as a natural event. Most of the rural and non-school going adolescent girls still lacked prior knowledge about menstruation and also followed poor hygienic practices during menstruation. So, there is a strong need to have ongoing awareness programmes related to menstruation especially in areas inhabited by people from low socio economic class.

KEY WORDS: Adolescence, menstruation, hygiene, sanitary pad.
INTRODUCTION

Menarche is one of the most significant physical and psychological events in the life of an adolescent girl. For many an adolescent girl, it brings in a great deal of anxiety, physical discomfort and emotional upheaval. Lack of preparedness prior to the onset of menarche adds to the turmoil. Reaction to menstruation seems to profoundly affect their psychological development and the quality of response to womanhood in general. In many pockets of India, even the mere mention of the word has been a taboo in the past in many a locale and continues to be so, even to this day, despite the advancement in varied areas of life and health care. The present study was undertaken in this backdrop to investigate the responses of menarcheal age females to the event of menarche. The aim was to elucidate attitudes, thoughts and feelings of adolescent girls’ towards menstruation and to assess their standard of hygiene during menstruation.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study area: The research purported to study the difference between urban and rural girls and school going and non-school going girls with regard to this situation. It was felt that slum areas provided a better option for comparison with rural areas in the proximity of a city because of the existence of similar socioeconomic conditions prevailing therein. It was with this view that rural area abounding Doddabalapura (Bangalore rural district) and slum areas around Chamrajpet in Bangalore urban district were selected for the study.

Study population included 240 girls in the age group 12 to 18 years equally representing urban and rural areas and also equally representing school and non-school going in each of the areas.

Method of study:

Sample: Sample was selected as follows.

Adolescent Girls

Rural (120)

School Going (60) Non School Going (60)

Urban (120)

School Going (60) Non School Going (60)

Instrument: Using a pretested questionnaire (ascertained for its reliability), data collection was carried out on one to one basis in the local environment. Sufficient time was invested in rapport formation to create a friendly and trustworthy atmosphere during the interaction. This was followed by a focus group discussion.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean age at menarche of the sample was 13.44yrs (SD = 1.17). Half the adolescent girls were noted to have attained menarche by the age of 13yrs. There was no significant difference between urban and rural girls and also between school going and non-school going.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Rural (%)</th>
<th>Urban (%)</th>
<th>Non School Going (%)</th>
<th>School going (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>10.8*</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*p< 0.01)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Rural (%)</th>
<th>Urban (%)</th>
<th>Non School Going (%)</th>
<th>School going (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>84.2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in 2 days</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>7.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in 3 days</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(**p<0.01,*p<0.05)

Feelings at the onset of menarche were elicited from the respondents. More than half the sample of the study (55.8%) reported to be scared and unhappy at the onset of menarche (Table I) while only a little more than one-fifth of them (23%) accepted it as a natural phenomenon. The negative reaction could have been a reflection of taboos and prejudices prevalent in the society in connection with menstruation. It emerged that a sizable number of girls were negatively oriented towards menstruation mainly due to the lack of prior knowledge on the issue. Srinivas has also reported similar finding. However, it was surprising to note that 12.5% of them felt happy at the onset of menstruation.

Significantly greater number of rural girls took menarche as a natural phenomenon than their urban counterpart (CR 3.97). School going activity did not seem to affect the way the girls felt at the time of attaining menarche. Thus it will be worthwhile for the social systems to create a comforting ambience for the girls to celebrate womanhood. It is also important
for persons in variegated roles of parenting to provide necessary, accurate and requisite information to the growing girls on this delicate process in a befitting manner.

Table III: PLACE OF DRYING THE SANITARY CLOTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside the house</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the fence</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the terrace</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the backyard</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the bathroom</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside house</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 58% of the respondents had prior knowledge of menstruation before it came to be part of their lives. In the study by Dasgupta and Sarkar, only 32.5% of the girls were ignorant about menstruation before menarche. Deo and Ghattargi reported that 40 (42.5%) urban and 41 (55.4%) rural girls were aware about menstruation prior to attainment of menarche. As expected, significantly greater number of rural girls (CR value 7.69) and significantly more number of non-school going girls (CR value 2.36) were ignorant about menstruation. Of the ones who were equipped with the information before the onset, 70% of them had got it from friends and relatives viz. their mothers, friends, sisters and female relatives. Mothers and friends were the major source of information for urban girls than rural girls. This difference was found to be significant at 0.01 and 0.05 levels of confidence with CR values of 4.34 and 2.31 respectively for mothers and friends. For only 5% of the sample, teachers were the informants about this significant event in life. One girl responded that her teacher sent her back from school as her skirt was stained. But she did not go home for fear of being scolded by her mother instead went to her friend’s house and her friend’s mother explained to her about menstruation. Some of them revealed that they felt shy to discuss such matters with their mothers. Similar findings were noted by Dasgupta and Sarkar, Deo and Ghattargi, Prasad and Sharma, and Vivekanand.

The onset of menarche is celebrated with much fanfare in South India much to the embarrassment of adolescent girls. The sample was asked about the performance of cultural rituals and their approval of it. Rituals were conducted in 57.5% of the cases. However, when it came to approving the conduct, it was found that the opinion was critically divided. Approximately one third of the group agreed to its relevance as they believed it to be a signal for readiness for marriage i.e. for the society to know about the existence of an eligible bride in that house. The other one third of the group disagreed to it and the rest of the one-third withheld their opinion on the issue. There was no location wise or activity wise divide so far as conduct of rituals was concerned. However, rural girls significantly differed from their urban counterpart in disagreeing with the rituals conducted.
This could probably be owing to more elaborate pattern of rituals adhered to in the rural areas than the urban areas.

When data on pre-menstrual complaints was elicited, 17% reported a feeling of anger prior to onset of menstruation, 12.4% felt tensed and 8% said that they were irritable. These feelings were significantly more in rural girls with CR value of 3.89(at 0.01 level) for irritability and CR value of 2.29(at 0.05 level) for anger. School going activity did not significantly affect it. This could be due to the greater societal constraints and greater social sanction for introversion among rural girls.

Information on Menstrual hygiene revealed the following:

While 41.3% said they took bath every day, an almost equal number of them stated that they took bath only twice or thrice a week. The urban and the school going girls outnumbered the rural and non school going in taking bath daily which was significant at 0.01 level and 0.05 level (CR value 2.99 for locale and CR value 2.08 for school going activity). When it came to bathing during menstruation (Table II), only 79.7% of them had a daily bath which was significantly more among school going (CR value of 2.63 at 0.01 level of significance) and 6.9% of them even reported that they bathed only once in three days. There was no significant difference between urban and rural girls with respect to this issue.

When asked about the frequency of changing undergarments, only 40% reported that they changed it every day. This was also significantly more among urban (CR value 2.38 at 0.05 level) and school goers (CR value 3.45 at 0.01 level). It was shocking to note that 5% of them changed them only once in a week. As regards the sanitary product used during menstruation, 79% of the respondents used old clothes as sanitary napkins. Most of them (65.1%) changed it every 2-3 months and 3.6% even used it for more than 7 months. Dasgupta and Sarkar, Deo and Ghattargi also noted that majority of both urban and rural girls preferred cloth pieces to the sanitary pads to deal with the menstrual flow. The proactive role of schools in this regard is a potential area of intervention.

Almost 17% of the girls just rinsed the sanitary cloth used during menstruation without using soap and reused it again. With regards to the place of drying the sanitary cloth after washing, more than one-fifth (22.5%) did not dry it in the open under direct sunshine. A few girls mentioned the belief prevalent in the area that in the event of a crow’s shadow falling on that piece of sanitary cloth when drying in the open, it was believed that it would bring misfortune to the family. It was noted that 10% of the sample even dried it in the bathroom itself (Table III). These could definitely be termed as harmful practices. Similar findings were observed by Dasgupta and Sarkar.

An exercise on body mapping was also carried out on the sample to explore their comfort levels with their physical being. The group of respondents was asked to mark the developmental changes during adolescence on the outline of a girl’s body provided to them during discussion. Analysis of the responses permit the conclusion that majority of them did not reflect comfort in the physical changes ushered during adolescence. A little more than a half (55%) of the group felt inhibited even in naming the private parts of the body. This is a clear indication of the status of affairs of their understanding on issues related to their body and sexuality which comprise a major development issue in the adolescent years.
CONCLUSION

The study of adolescents has enamored many a researchers. This study too was an enlightening experience, especially in terms of giving insight into the minds and bodies of growing young girls and working out strategies to build stronger generations of the future. The study reveals that even to this day, the numerous ongoing programmes are unable to bridge the gap between ignorance and knowledge regarding menstruation. It is time we start looking at these basic concerns seriously with innovative approaches to tackle these issues. Fulfillment of these needs would contribute immensely to the holistic development of adolescent girls. There is a strong need to have ongoing awareness programmes utilizing variegated medium like electric, electronic, folk and print media and roping in the brigade of development workers from all related sectors like Health, Nutrition, Education, Rural Development, Women and Child Development etc. in the service of this growing girl who would eventually impact the quality of next generation.

REFERENCES


