



KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AMONG SCHOOL GOING ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN A RURAL AREA OF TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT, TAMILNADU – A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

Community Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Background: Proper menstrual hygiene is essential for health, empowerment, education and for maintaining the dignity of women. Assessing the knowledge and filling the gap is essential for equipping the adolescent women with adequate skills for menstrual hygiene management.

Materials and methods: A school based cross-sectional study conducted among 200 adolescent girls in the 14-16 years age group in a selected school in a rural area of Tirunelveli district, Tamilnadu, South India

Results: Among the 200 study participants, 34% were having irregularities in menstrual cycle and 90% had dysmenorrhea. Out of 200, 70 were using clothes as menstrual absorbent and 20 were using both clothes and sanitary napkins. Only 30 (15%) were aware regarding the need to change sanitary napkins and only 3% were aware of the relationship between nutritional status and menstrual irregularities.

Conclusion: Knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene are found to be inadequate among the adolescent girls in the current study. Appropriate actions have to be taken to identify the barriers preventing the girls from getting the knowledge and have to be minimized through proper health education sessions at schools and at health facilities.

KEYWORDS

Menstrual hygiene, adolescent girls, dysmenorrhea, knowledge

Introduction:

Menstruation is a normal biological process experienced by all women from onset of their puberty till menopause, except during the period of pregnancy. Adequate and essential information regarding menstrual hygiene and management was observed to be inadequate because of cultural and community barriers as still it is considered to be a taboo in the country. Proper menstrual hygiene is essential for health, empowerment, education and for maintaining the dignity of women. Assessing the knowledge and filling the gap is essential for equipping the adolescent women with adequate skills for menstrual hygiene management.

Worldwide various studies have assessed the knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls^{1,2,4}. There is paucity of evidence regarding this aspect in the current geographic region. So the current study is planned to assess the knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene among school going adolescent girls in a selected rural area of Tirunelveli district.

Materials and methods:

Study type: School based cross-sectional study

Study population: 200 school going adolescent girls in a selected school in a rural area of Tirunelveli district, Tamilnadu, South India was selected based on convenience sampling.

Study setting and Procedure: Study was conducted in the classroom of the selected school after obtaining permission from the school management and study was conducted during the leisure time of students. Data was collected using a predesigned, pre-tested questionnaire. Questionnaires were self-administered after obtaining informed consent from the students and their parents. Confidentiality was assured and privacy was maintained during data collection.

Data entry and analysis: Collected data were entered in Microsoft excel sheet 2013 and analysed using SPSS software version 21. Descriptive analysis was done and results were expressed in prevalence percentages.

Results:

All the 200 study participants were undergoing high school level education and fall within 14-16 years age group. Among the 200 study subjects, 68 (34%) were having irregular menstrual cycles.

Table.1. Knowledge and practices of menstrual hygiene among study participants (n=200)

Study variables	Number	Percentage
Days of menstrual flow		
> 5 days	71	35.5%
3-5 days	110	55%
<3 days	19	9.5%
Presence of Dysmenorrhea		
Present	180	90%
Absent	20	10%
Menstrual absorbent used		
Used sanitary napkins	110	55%
Used clothes	70	35%
Used both clothes and sanitary napkins	20	10%
Knowledge regarding frequency of change in sanitary napkins		
Aware	30	15%
Not aware	170	85%
Awareness about relationship of nutritional status with menstrual irregularities		
Aware	6	3%
Not aware	194	97%

Among the study participants, dysmenorrhea was present in 90% of girls. Out of 200, 70 were using clothes as menstrual absorbent and 20 were using both clothes and sanitary napkins. Only 30 (15%) were aware regarding the need to change sanitary napkins. Among 200, only 3% were aware of the relationship between nutritional status and menstrual irregularities.

Discussion

In the current study, 34% were having irregularities in menstrual cycle and 90% had dysmenorrhea, which has affected their academic performance and school attendance. Study by Sinha S et al¹ in Uttar Pradesh, India found that 23.2% of adolescent girls were having menstrual cycle irregularities and overall 73.9% had dysmenorrhea (74.4 % of girls in urban schools & 72.7 % of girls in rural schools). This is less when compared with the present study.

Some girls may experience pain during menstruation, it can make them feel uncomfortable and severe pain prevents them from attending schools, affect their routine life activities and affect their education every month. So the adolescent girls need to be educated regarding the ways to deal with pain during menses. As per the training material provided by NRHM for training of ASHA on menstrual hygiene, the

following were suggested to deal with pain during menses of adolescent girls, massaging the abdomen, hot water filled plastic bottle to be wrapped in a towel and placed in abdomen and intake of local remedies like ginger tea.²

Study by Ramachandra K et al³ in Bangalore showed that overall 69% of study subjects were using sanitary napkins and 6% were using both sanitary napkins and cloth as menstrual absorbent. This is high when compared with the present study in which only 55% were using sanitary napkins and 10% were still using clothes as menstrual absorbent.

Study by Subarna Maji⁴ in West Bengal showed that 66 % of study population was using sanitary pads and 34% were still using old cloths. Among them, only 22% change sanitary napkins twice daily and remaining change only once every twenty four hours or as per situation. In the current study, only 15% were aware of need to change the napkins frequently. Prolonged use of a napkin can lead to irritation on inner side of thighs and may lead to infections. UNICEF⁵ advises frequent change of sanitary napkins every few hours even if heavy menstrual discharge is not observed.

Enabling easy access and availability of sanitary napkins to adolescent girls is essential to increase the use of sanitary napkins among them. As per Govt guidelines, monthly meetings organized in health facilities can be used to supply the sanitary napkins to the girls. Adequate home visits should be conducted regularly to ensure supply to those missed during monthly meetings. Other essential facilities like separate toilet for boys and girls, basic water and sanitation facilities and safe disposal of menstrual absorbents should be ensured in all the schools to maintain privacy for girls and prevent them missing the schools during menstruation.

Conclusion

Knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene are found to be inadequate among the adolescent girls in the current study. So it is the responsibility of families, teachers, health care providers and community as a whole to impart knowledge among the adolescent girls to manage their menstruation at home and at school. Appropriate actions have to be taken to identify the barriers preventing the girls from getting the knowledge and have to be minimized through proper health education sessions at schools and at health facilities.

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