



Knowledge About Menstruation and Menstrual Hygiene Among Muslim Female Adolescents And Mothers of RAMBAN District, J&K

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ABSTRACT

The present research was carried with the aim to assess the knowledge about menarche and menstruation among Muslim females of Banihal, Ramban District, Jammu and Kashmir. Apart from this the menstrual hygiene practices of the adolescent girls and their mothers was also noted. The sample for the study comprised of two groups namely adolescent girls (n= 100, 13-19 years) and mothers (n= 50, 35-45 years) having at least one adolescent daughter. The sample was selected through a combination of random and purposive sampling technique. Self devised interview schedule was used for data collection. Results reveal that most females were unaware about menarche. Those who knew about it referred to it as signaling of the menstrual process. However, comparatively more respondents were aware about menstruation. More adolescent girls were aware about menstruation prior to its occurrence than the mothers. They reported that menstruation refer to either regular periods or uterus bleeding. On the occurrence of menstruation most girls showed incomplete knowledge as most of them felt that it occurred only in unmarried adolescent girls or in all women without any age restriction. According to most girls menstruation is either a physiological process or a curse of God. Majority mothers did not give any knowledge to their daughters regarding menarche and menstruation. There was widespread misconception about important aspects of menstruation among the females. Most adolescent girls changed their sanitary protective material regularly. Mothers also influenced the choice of protective material and its usage among their daughters. Even today, many adolescent girls were advised by their mothers to make use of clothes (sometimes old and sometimes new) as an absorbent during menstruation; but at the same time more girls than the mothers used readymade sanitary pads as protective material during their periods. The findings highlight existence of a culture of silence towards this crucial physiological process among the selected Muslim community.

KEYWORDS

Menarche, Menstruation, Adolescents, Mothers, Muslims, Menstrual Hygiene

INTRODUCTION:

Menstruation is an issue that every girl and woman has to deal with once she enters adolescence around the age of 12 and until she reaches the menopause somewhere in her 40's. Overall, a woman spends approximately 2,100 days menstruating. It is a monthly occurrence that requires access to appropriate material and facilities without which females suffer from poor menstrual hygiene which restricts their movement and self confidence (UNICEF India, 2008). Onset of menstruation is one of the most important changes occurring among girls during the adolescent years. Although menstruation is a natural process but is regarded as unclean or dirty. It is linked with several misconceptions and practices in Indian society which sometimes results into adverse health outcomes (Omidvar and Begum, 2010).

Adolescence brings with it a variety of new experiences that not only confuse adolescents, but also leave behind traumatic memories (Gupta and Gupta, 2001). Menstruation also has a long history of strict religious taboos across India which includes seclusion and removal from domestic duties. Girls who are aware of how to deal with menstruation tend to cope with it much better than those who are caught unaware. Preparedness gives girls the power to handle it in a mature way and also feel confident that there would be no embarrassment resulting from these intensely private moments. The setting of menarche is often celebrated in many cultures and during this period there is a tradition of preparing and giving food rich in iron and protein content. Modernization has seen the cessation of this practice of celebration to a certain extent but many households still follow the practice of providing the nutritional supplementation during menarche. Girls explain that menarche is a taboo subject even within their own families. There is an unspoken 'culture of silence' with regard to

their menstruation (Jamadar, 2012).

The importance of hygiene is paramount during menstruation, as during this time females are most vulnerable to infections. Usage of unhygienic protective material can not only make this cyclic process uncomfortable but also dangerous for the females. Many researches in Indian context have revealed that menstrual hygiene is far from satisfactory among a large proportion of the adolescents while ignorance, false perceptions, unsafe practices regarding menstruation and reluctance of the mother to educate her child are also quite common among them (Dasgupta and Sarkar, 2008).

The present research focuses on the knowledge about menarche and menstruation among adolescent girls of muslim community of Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, India. This is one of the most underdeveloped area mostly owing to its difficult mountainous terrain. Many of the muslim community's beliefs and practices have continued to exist without much alteration. In this context it would be interesting to note the young adolescent girls knowledge related to an important physiological process and also assess their hygiene during this crucial period. Mothers have also been included as part of the sample group to obtain their perspective as well.

METHODOLOGY:

Sample Description: The core sample for the study comprised of 100 adolescent girls in the age group of 13-19 years and 50 mothers having at least one adolescent daughter from Banihal, District Ramban. All the sample girls and mothers belonged to muslim community.

Locale of the study: The sample of adolescent girls was selected from different high schools and girls Higher Second-

ary School namely Girls Higher Secondary School, Govt High School Chareel, Govt High School Tethar, Govt High School Kaskoot, Govt High School Nowgam, Govt High School Dooligam. The sample of mothers was selected from different villages of Banihal namely Dershipura, Chareel, Tethar, Nowgam, Kaskoot.

Sampling Technique: Random sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample of adolescent girls. After a survey of Banihal Tehsil it was found that there were 05 Govt. High Schools and 01 Girls Higher Secondary School in the area. Adolescent girls were selected randomly from all these schools through lottery method. 15 girls each were selected from each Govt High Schools where as 25 girls were selected from the lone higher Secondary School. There are 50 notified villages of Banihal Block, out of these 05 villages were selected again by lottery method. The selected villages were namely Dershipura, Chareel, Tethar, Nowgam, and Kaskoot. Meetings with the members of the village representatives were held and with their support 10 women per village were selected purposively.

Tools for Data Collection: An interview schedule was used to gather information from the respondents. The schedule sections focused on background variables, knowledge about menarche and menstruation and physical hygiene practices during menstruation.

2. Awareness about Menarche

Table 2
Awareness about Menarche

Awareness about menarche	Early adolescents n (%)	Late adolescents n (%)	Adolescent girls n (%)	Early adults n (%)	Late adults n (%)	Mothers n (%)	Grand total n (%)
Yes	19 (21.34%)	1 (9.09%)	20 (20%)	1 (3.03%)	4 (23.52%)	5 (10%)	25 (16.66%)
No	70 (78.65%)	10 (90.90%)	80 (80%)	32 (96.9%)	13 (76.4%)	45 (90%)	125 (83.33%)
Total	89 100%	11 100%	100 100%	33 100%	17 100%	50 100%	150 100%

Chi -square=2.4, df=2, table value= 5.99, insignificant

Table 2 indicates that majority of sample females (83.33%) were not aware about menarche. 80% of the adolescent girls and 90% mothers were unaware of it. 78.65% early adolescents and 90.90% of late adolescents were not aware about menarche. Similarly 96.96% of early adulthood mothers and 76.47% late adulthood mothers were not aware about menarche. This result highlights that even today most females that is, the young girls as well as their mothers continue to be unaware of menarche.

3. Meaning of Menarche

Table 3
Meaning of Menarche

Meaning of menarche	Early adolescents n (%)	Late adolescents n (%)	Adolescent girls n (%)	Early adults n (%)	Late adults n (%)	Mothers n (%)	Grand total n (%)
Starting phase of menstrual cycle	19 (21.34%)	1 (9.09%)	20 (20%)	1 (3.03%)	4 (23.52%)	5 (10%)	25 (16.66%)
No awareness	70 (78.65%)	10 (90.90%)	80 (80%)	32 (96.9%)	13 (76.4%)	45 (90%)	125 (83.33%)
Total	89 100%	11 100%	100 100%	33 100%	17 100%	50 100%	150 100%

Chi square=2.4, df=2, table value= 5.99, insignificant

Table 3 reveals that majority of sample females (83.33%) did not know the meaning of menarche. This trend continued for both the girls (80.00%) as well as their mothers (90.00%). Comparatively more adolescent girls (20%) than mothers (10%) reported that it refers to the starting phase of menstrual cycle. Also, more early adolescents (21.34%) referred to it as the starting phase of menstrual cycle as compared to the late adolescents (9.09%)

Data Analysis: The data was chiefly analyzed qualitatively using some statistical measures. Percentage of respondents falling in various categories were derived and Chi squares were calculated. But predominantly content analysis of the responses was carried out to derive the major results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The results obtained was presented and discussed as follows:

1. Age of Sample Females

Table 1
Age of Sample females

Age (in years)	Respondents n	%
13-17	89	59.33
17-19	11	7.33
35-45	33	22
45-55	17	11.33
Total	150	100

Table 1 reveals that most (89) sample adolescents were in the age group of 13-17 years and 11 were in the age group of 17-19 years. In case of mothers their age ranged from 35-55 years. 33 of them belonged to the age group of 35-45 years and the rest 17 belonged to the age group of 45-55 years.

4. Awareness about Menstruation

Table 4
Awareness about Menstruation

Awareness about menstruation	Early adolescents N (%)	Late adolescents n (%)	Adolescent girls n (%)	Early adults n (%)	Late adults n (%)	Mothers n (%)	Grand total n (%)
Yes	70 (78.65%)	10 (90.90%)	80 (80%)	6 (18.18%)	10 (58.82%)	16 (32%)	96 (64%)
No	19 (21.34%)	1 (9.09%)	20 (20%)	27 (81.81%)	7 (41.17%)	34 (68%)	54 (36%)
Total	89 100%	11 100%	100 100%	33 100%	17 100%	50 100%	150 100%

Chi square=33.33*, df=2, table value=5.99,*significant at 1%

Table 4 reveals that majority of sample females (64%) were aware about menstruation. Statistically significant differences were noted between awareness of adolescent girls and mothers related to menstruation. 80% girls as compared to just 32% reported knowing about menstruation and its related concepts.

5. Meaning of Menstruation

Table 5
Meaning of Menstruation

Meaning of menstruation	Early adolescents n (%)	Late adolescents n (%)	Adolescents girls n (%)	Early adults n (%)	Late adults n (%)	Mothers n (%)	Grand total n (%)
Monthly cycle	1 (1.12%)	2 (18.18%)	3 (3%)	1 (3.03%)	1 (5.88%)	2 (4%)	5 (3.33%)
Regular periods	26 (29.21%)	1 (9.09%)	27 (27%)	2 (6.06%)	3 (17.64%)	5 (10%)	32 (21.33%)
Uterus bleeding	24 (26.96%)	2 (18.18%)	26 (26%)	1 (3.03%)	5 (29.41%)	6 (12%)	32 (21.33%)
Bleeding after 28 days	19 (21.34%)	5 (45.45%)	24 (24%)	2 (6.06%)	1 (5.88%)	3 (6%)	27 (18%)
No awareness	19 (21.34%)	1 (9.09%)	20 (20%)	27 (81.81%)	7 (41.17%)	34 (68%)	54 (36%)
Total	89 100%	11 100%	100 100%	33 100%	17 100%	50 100%	150 100%

Chi square=35.01*, df=8, table value=15.51, *significant at 1%

Table 5 reveals that most of the respondents on the whole said that menstruation means regular periods (21.33%) or bleeding from uterus (21.33%). More mothers (68%) showed unawareness about the meaning of menstruation than the girls (20%). This difference was statistically significant as found by calculation of chi-square value. Almost equal number of girls reported that it means regular period, uterus bleeding, bleeding after every 28 days. Most mothers on the other hand attributed it to uterus bleeding and regular periods.

6. Occurrence of Menstruation

Table 6
Occurrence of Menstruation

Occurrence of menstruation	Early adolescents		Late adolescents		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unmarried adolescent girls	60	(67.41%)	5	(45.45%)	65	65
Married women only	3	(3.37%)	2	(18.18%)	5	5
Old women	-	-	-	-	-	-
All women	26	(29.21%)	4	(36.36%)	30	30
Total	89	100	11	100	100	100

Chi square=5.18, df=4, table value=7.78, insignificant

Table 6 reveals that majority of the sample adolescents (65%) reported that menstruation occurs in unmarried adolescent girls. While 30% said that it occurs in all women without any age restriction.

7. Normal age for Menstruation to Begin

Table 7
Normal age for Menstruation to Begin

Normal age for menstruation	Early adolescents		Late adolescents		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
12 years	30	(33.70%)	3	(27.27%)	33	33
13 years	44	(49.43%)	5	(45.45%)	49	49
14 years	10	(11.23%)	3	(27.27%)	13	13
15 years	5	(5.61%)	-	-	5	5
Total	89	100	11	100	100	100

Chi square=2.70, df=6, table value=10.6, insignificant

The data in table 7 reveals that most adolescent girls said that menstruation usually begins at the age of 13 years (49%) or 12 years (33%). None of the girls mentioned that menarche occurs beyond 15 years of age.

8. Interval between two Menstrual Cycles

Table 8
Interval between two Menstrual Cycles

Interval between two menstrual cycles	Early adolescents		Late adolescents		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
>21 days	4	(4.49%)	1	(9.09%)	5	5
26-30 days	85	(95.95%)	10	(90.90%)	95	95
Total	89	100	11	100	100	100

Chi square=0.43, df= 2, table value=4.61, insignificant

Findings reveal that majority of the sample girls (95%) reported that the interval between two menstrual cycles is 26-30 days. Out of these 95.50% early adolescents and 90.90% late adolescents reported this interval.

9. Physical Hygiene Practices

Table 9

Physical Hygiene Practices

Physical hygiene Practices	Early adolescents n (%)	Late adolescents n (%)	Adolescent Girls n (%)	Early adults n (%)	Late adults n (%)	Mothers n (%)	Grand total n (%)
Change pads Regularly	26 (29.21%)	3 (27.27%)	29 (29%)	26 (78.78%)	10 (58.82%)	36 (72%)	65 (46.33%)
Only Bathing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both	63 (70.78%)	8 (72.72%)	71 (71%)	7 (21.21%)	7 (41.17%)	14 (28%)	85 (56.66%)
Total	89 100%	11 100%	100 100%	33 100%	17 100%	50 100%	150 100%

Chi square for physical hygiene practices=25.1*, df=2, table value=5.99, *significant

It was found that majority of the sample females (56.66%) followed bathing and changed pad daily for physical hygiene. Overall 71% adolescent girls and 28% mothers followed both bathing and changing of pad daily for physical hygiene. No special menstrual hygiene related practices were noted among the sample females.

10. Nature of Absorbent to be used

Table 10

Nature of Absorbent to be used

Nature of absorbent to be used	Early adolescents n (%)	Late adolescents n (%)	Adolescent girls n (%)	Early adults N (%)	Late adults n (%)	Mothers n (%)	Grand total n (%)
Sanitary pad	80 (89.88%)	7 (63.63%)	87 (87%)	13 (39.39%)	7 (41.17%)	20 (40%)	107 (71.33%)
Reused cloth	3 (3.37%)	2 (18.18%)	5 (5%)	6 (18.18%)	3 (17.64%)	9 (18%)	14 (9.33%)
New cloth	1 (1.12%)	1 (9.09%)	2 (2%)	1 (3.03%)	2 (11.76%)	3 (6%)	5 (3.33%)
Alternate Use of above all	5 (5.61%)	1 (9.09%)	6 (6%)	13 (39.39%)	5 (29.41%)	18 (36%)	24 (16%)
Total	89 100%	11 100%	100 100%	33 100%	17 100%	50 100%	150 100%

Chi square=36.70*, df=6,table value= 12.59,* significant at 1%

Table 10 indicates that majority i.e. 71.33% of the respondents used commercially available sanitary pads during their periods. Out of whom 89.88% were early adolescent, 63.63% were late adolescents, 39.39% were early adults and 41.17% were late adults. Followed by them were 16% who reported that they used sanitary napkins, old used cloth and new cloth alternatively. 5.61% early adolescents, 9.09% late adolescents, 39.39% early adults and 21.41% late adults practiced this. Only, 9.33% of the respondents were using old used cloth during their menstruation. Out of whom 3.37% were early adolescents, 18.18% were late adolescents, 18.18% were early adults and 17.64% were late adults. Comparatively, statistically also more adolescent girls (87%) used sanitary pad as compared to mothers 40%. This points that the current generation youngsters were more oriented towards usage of sanitary pads as a protective material during periods.

Data reveals that majority of sample girls (51%) were changing pads twice a day. Out of these 56.17% early adolescents and 9.09% late adolescents changed pads twice a day. Followed by these were 41% who were using pads 3 times in a day. 34.83% early adolescents and 90.90% late adolescents were changing pads 3 times a day.

CONCLUSION:

Menstruation is a crucial physiological process, the importance of which in a females life cannot be discounted. Menarche signals reproductive maturity for a young adolescent girl. This process is often defined by the socio cultural context of the women experiencing it. The findings of the present research highlight that there is a culture of silence associated with female menstruation. In the given geographic locale it was noted that mothers hardly provided any prior information to their daughters about its occurrence. There is a high rate of ignorance not only among the adolescent girls about the meaning and causation of this reproductive process but also among the sample mothers. This indicates that even after undergoing this process for years together they failed to understand its mechanism and progression. Earlier researches have also indicated that most girls associate menstruation with unclean blood (Nagar and Aimol, 2010) or visualize it as a disease (Goel and Kundan, 2011). The results also pinpoint that most females do not consider this as a normal physiological process. Tiwari et al (2006) has also made similar observations.

The physical hygiene maintenance during the occurrence of menstruation was all the more dissatisfactory among the sample females. The protective material used during periods

11. Frequency of changing Absorbent

Table 11

Frequency of changing Absorbent

Frequency of changing Absorbent	Early adolescents		Late adolescents		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Twice a day	50	(56.17%)	1	(9.09%)	51	51
3 times	31	(34.83%)	10	(90.90%)	41	41
4 times	8	(8.98%)	-	-	8	8
Total	89	100	11	100	100	100

Chi square=12.75*, df=4,table value=7.78, *significant

had shown the acceptability of the ready made sanitary pads, however, the use of cloth continued especially for the older generation. There was less than then the desired change of absorbent / protective material during the days of menstruation. In a study carried out by Garg et al. 2001 in various parts of Delhi, it was mentioned that even school going girls do not maintain adequate hygiene during their monthly periods and this could be related to increased susceptibility to infections and diseases.

There is an urgent need to educate the adolescent girls about the process of menstruation. They need to be mentally prepared for the occurrence of this fundamental physiological process and its contribution to their reproductive well being. It is of paramount importance that they be motivated to use hygienic and safe absorbent material during their monthly cycle. The myths and misconceptions related to this process need to be busted and overcome. The mothers need to be involved actively for bringing about a sustainable change. Most earlier studies have noted that mothers are the primary source of information related to menarche and menstruation for their daughters. During the course of the present study it was found that most mothers themselves had partial knowledge related to menstruation and further, they did not actively disseminate this knowledge to their daughters. It is imperative that this culture of silence be broken and the shame associated with this process be replaced with acceptability and awareness.

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