

## **Research Article**

### **Knowledge and Practice Regarding Menstrual Hygiene among Adolescent Girls in Schools of Patan, Gujarat**

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**Abstract:** The menstrual period is a physiological process that occurs throughout the reproductive years of every woman. Menstruation can also predispose women to life threatening RTI (Reproductive Tract Infection) if hygiene is not maintained throughout menstruation. Issue of Menstrual Hygiene begins with adolescent age. The practices, knowledge and attitude which develop at this age, are usually followed by them throughout their life and also passed on to their next generation. Therefore any faulty beliefs or practices pertaining to menstruation will affect health of large number of women in reproductive age group. This was a cross sectioned study. Present study included adolescent girls of urban areas as well as rural areas. Two hundred and fifteen girls of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard were selected for the study. A predesigned pretested and structured questionnaire was used in the study. Most of adolescents (68%) were have no idea regarding the menstruation. 83% of adolescent girls got primary knowledge from their mother. Most of the adolescent girls (41%) undergone first menstruation in 13<sup>th</sup> year. 66% adolescent were using sanitary pads during menstruation. Most of the adolescent girls (61%) were cleaning the external genital area by washing with water and soap. Usually adolescent girls are guided by their mother, elder sister or other family members regarding menstrual hygiene practices. So it is also necessary to assess the knowledge and beliefs of mother as well as other female family members regarding the menstrual hygiene. School curriculum should include health education on reproductive health.

**Keywords:** RTI, STI, Physiological, adolescent.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Globally about 52% of the female population is of reproductive age, meaning menstruation is part of their normal life and menstrual hygiene is therefore an essential part of basic hygienic practices. In most developing countries including India, cultural taboos related to sexuality and reproductive health which demonstrates poor knowledge and information about reproductive functions and reproductive health and associated problems amongst adolescents.

The menstrual period is a physiological process that occurs throughout the reproductive years of every woman [1, 2]. This process is associated with various mental as well as physical morbidities like premenstrual syndrome. Menstruation can also predispose women to life threatening RTI (Reproductive Tract Infection) if hygiene is not maintained throughout menstruation. Issue of Menstrual Hygiene begins with adolescent age. The practices, knowledge and attitude which develop at this age, are usually followed by them throughout their life and also

passed on to their next generation. Therefore any faulty beliefs or practices pertaining to menstruation will affect health of large number of women in reproductive age group. Usually adolescent girls are guided by their mother, elder sister or other family members regarding menstrual hygiene practices. So it is also necessary to assess the knowledge and beliefs of mother as well as other female family members regarding the menstrual hygiene. Menstrual hygiene practices also vary in rural and urban areas. In Indian culture, talking about reproductive function of body is considered taboo. Young females have poor knowledge and lack of awareness about physical and physiological changes associated with the onset and presence of adolescence. They hardly get any chance to learn about menstruation. Various myths and social beliefs are also prevailing to menstruation. Most girls are unaware about proper menstrual practices at the age of menarche [3].

Use of unhygienic cloths may lead to development of infection of reproductive tract which may seriously hamper the reproductive capacity or even

life of female. Several research studies have revealed gap between facts and beliefs of adolescent girls and showed that there is low level of awareness about menstruation among girls when they first experience it [3]. Therefore there is a need for implement appropriate public health measures at various levels of prevention.

Following identification of need in this area, Government of Gujarat has started “Menstrual hygiene promotion scheme” under the umbrella of NRHM as a pilot project in six districts in Gujarat. Sanitary napkins are provided at subsidized rates under this scheme and in terms adolescents girls are encouraged to use sanitary napkin for hygienic practice of menstruation.

Adolescence is understood as a stage in the lives of females, which indicates their transition from girlhood to womanhood. This also constitutes an important milestone, which is marked by the onset of menarche. From this stage onwards until menopause, reproductive health and menstrual hygiene are important aspects in the lives of females. In a worst case scenario, the latter may include unwanted pregnancies, urinary tract infections (UTI) and pelvic inflammatory diseases. Important aspects of reproductive health services, which include information dissemination, guidance and support, are challenging responsibilities for the health care and education systems. Menstrual hygiene, which refers to the effective management of menstrual bleeding by women and girls, is an important aspect of reproductive health which if not handled appropriately can cause infections of the urinary tract, pelvic inflammatory diseases and vaginal thrush, as well as bad odor, soiled garments and ultimately shame, leading to infringement on the girls dignity.

The present study is aimed to find the general beliefs and practices followed by adolescent girls during menstruation in Patan city.

#### Objectives

1. To assess the knowledge about menstruation among school going adolescent girls.
2. To assess the practices followed during menstruation among school going adolescent girls.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Study design:** - Communities based cross sectioned study

**Study setting:**-Present study included adolescent girls of urban areas as well as rural areas. Study was

conducted in LORD KRISHNA SCHOOL, PIONEER SCHOOL, and EKLAVYA SCHOOL.

**Sample size:**-Two hundred and fifteen girls from the above mentioned school of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard were selected for the study.

**Study Period:** January 2015 to June 2015.

**Study tools and techniques:**-A predesigned pretested and structured questionnaire was used in the study which is given below.

**Analysis:** - Data was analysed by Microsoft excel and presented in percentages.

#### Methodology

After taking permission from school authorities, the class teachers of 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> std. were explained the purpose of study. The purpose of the study and the nature of the information to be collected is clearly explained in local language. A repo was build up with the girl students and their consents were obtained. The name and other details were not asked so anonymity was maintained.

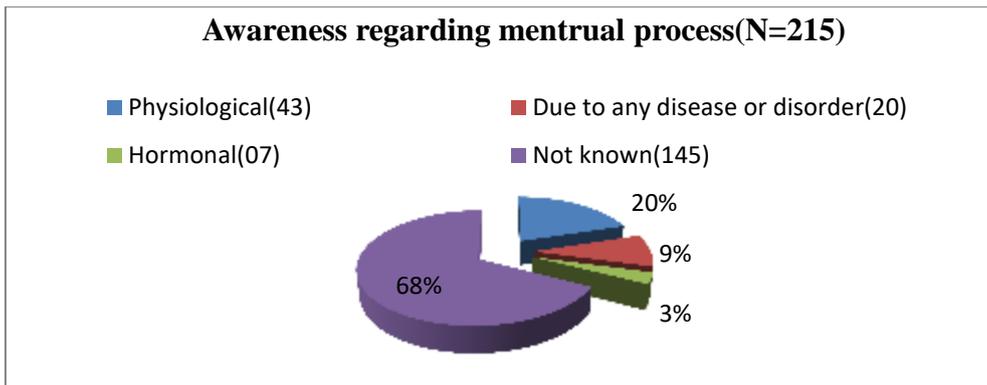
These predesigned, pretested and standard questions included which were related to the awareness about menstruation and its related hygiene. The demographic introduction including occupation, housing condition, house type, toilet facilities and water supply in the toilet were enquired and then documented. The menstrual hygiene questions about the washing and cleaning methods, absorbent material and facilities etc. are included.

#### OBSERVATIONS

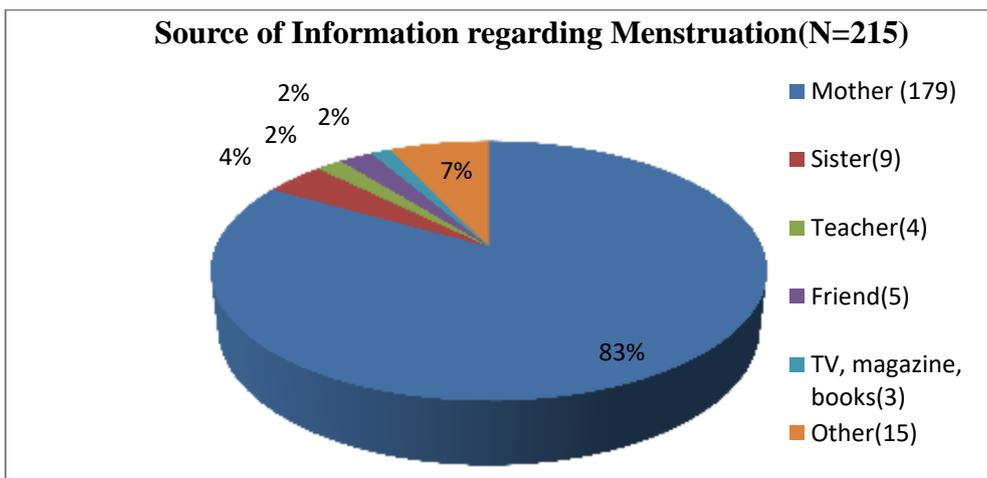
Menstruation is a physiological process and only 20% (figure 1) of girls were aware of that. Most of adolescents (68%) were have no idea regarding the menstruation.

Figure 2 show that 83% of adolescent girls got primary knowledge from their mother. Some adolescents got knowledge regarding menstrual cycle gradually from various sources which they don't remember. Only 3 adolescent girls got knowledge from media.

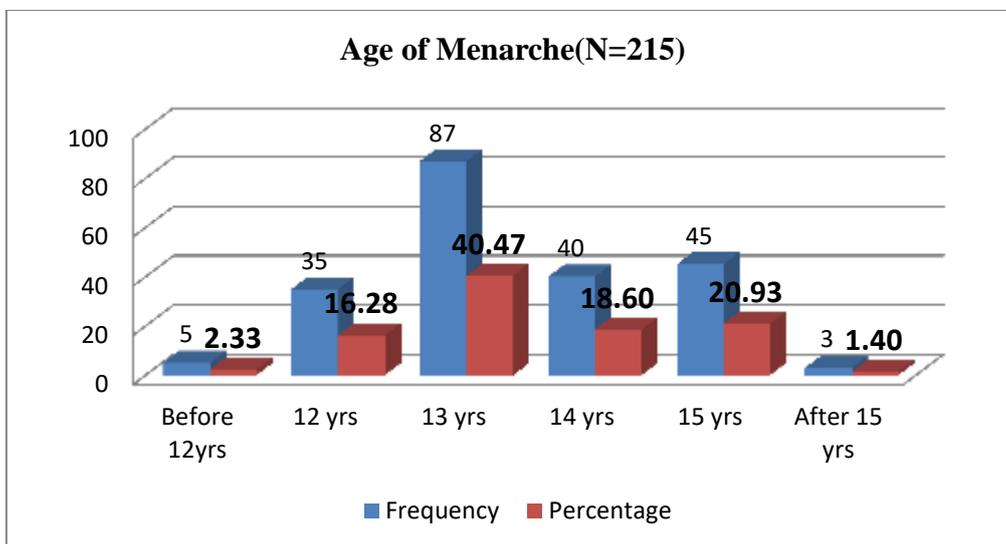
Most of the adolescent girls (41%) (Figure 3) undergone first menstruation in 13<sup>th</sup> year. Figure 3 show that 96% of adolescent girls got menarche between 12 to 15 yrs.



**Fig-1: Awareness regarding process of menstruation**



**Fig-2: Source of Information regarding Menstruation**



**Fig-3: Age at which menstruation started**

During menstruation there are many cultural factors and taboos come into play which can adversely affect the mental and social condition of adolescent girls. Table 1 show that 89% of girls are avoiding religious work during menstruation. Many Adolescents

(88%) believe that certain foods should be avoided during menstruation. Mainly fried and spicy foods should be avoided according to 88% of adolescent's girls. Playing, exercise and household work is avoided because of weakness.

**Table1: Type of work avoided during menstruation**

Type of work	Participants(n=215)	Percentage
House hold work	4	1.86
Religious work	190	88.37
Sleep separately	100	46.51
Playing and exercise	50	23.26
Avoid to go school	30	13.95
Certain foods	189	87.91

Menstruation affects the girls mentally and socially but physically it affects the most. Table 3 shows that 97% adolescent girls experience severe pain in lower abdomen. Acne and weakness was experienced

by 87% of girls. Surprisingly 5 % girls face no symptoms. In present study 88% adolescent were not taking any medication for lower abdominal pain during menstruation.

**Table 2: Type of food avoided during menstruation.**

Type of Food	Participants(n=215)	Percentage
Fried and spicy	189	87.90
Cool things	3	1.39
Fruits	23	10.69
None of above	0	0

**Table 3: Problems faced during menstruation.**

Type of problem	Participants(N=215)	Percentage
Weakness	190	88.37
Itching in Vaginal Region	40	18.60
Pain in Breast	33	15.35
Pain in abdomen and pelvis	209	97.21
Abdominal fullness	80	37.21
Acne	187	86.98
Joint and limb pain	57	26.51
Sleep disturbances	48	22.33
Dairrhoea	09	4.19
Headache	38	17.67
No symptoms	10	4.65

**Table 4: Use of absorbent during menstrual bleeding.**

Type of Absorbent	Participants(N=215)	Percentage
Sanitary pad	143	66.51
Piece of cloth (new each time)	21	09.76
Piece of cloth (old, used)	14	06.51
All of above	37	17.20
<b>Reasons for non usage of sanitary pad(N=72)</b>		
Difficulty in disposal	38	52.77
Expensive	2	02.77
Allergy	25	34.72
Discomfort and irritation	1	01.38
No reason	6	08.33
<b>Disposal of used Absorbent(n=215)</b>		
With other garbage	137	63.72
Burning	73	33.95
Indiscriminate throwing	5	02.32

Exclusively Sanitary pads during menstruation were used by 66% of adolescents as shown in table no 4. 17% were using piece of cloth(old or new) as absorbent. Among non users of sanitary pads the major barrier for non use was found to be sanitary pads

disposal(53%). 34% of adolescent girls were complaining of allergy while sanitary pad use. 63% of adolescent girls said that they were disposing the used pads with usual home garbage. 33% were use to burn it.

**Table 5: Cleaning of external genital area during menstruation**

Method	Participant(215)	Percentage
With only water	36	16.74
with soap and water	131	60.93
Washing and antiseptic use	48	22.32

Most of the adolescent girls (61%) were cleaning the external genital area by washing with water and soap.

**DISCUSSION**

Most of the adolescent girls (68%) were unaware regarding the reason for menstruation; this might be because nobody talks much about the menstruation. There is gap in educational system where reproductive health is not taught because either considered non important or unsocial. It is assumed that knowledge regarding menstruation will come gradually by its own. Similar studies also revealed similar findings like Khan *et al.*; [4] (72%), Thakre *et al.*; [5] (80%) and Gosavi *et al.*; [6] (75%). The main source of knowledge regarding menstruation was mother (83%). Daughter do not feel shy asking regarding menstruation in front of mother and mother mostly keep eyes on the changes in her child so she is one who give knowledge during menarche. Mudey *et al.*; [7] , Sreedhar *et al.*; [8] and Bharatalakshmi *et al.*; [9] also shown that mother was the main source of knowledge. Maximum no of adolescent girls had menarche between 12to 15 yrs with maximum in 13<sup>th</sup> year which is comparable to Thakre *et al.*; [5] and juyal *et al.*; [10] More than 85% adolescent reported that they were refrained from religious work which was found in other studies like Thakre *et al.*; [5] Gosavi *et al.*; [6] and Mudey *et al.*; [7]. Cleanliness especially during menstruation and even after is very important for prevention of STI and RTI. Sanitary pads are once used are disposed off so it is one of the best method for prevention of reproductive tract infections. In present study more than 60% are using sanitary pads. More than 90% adolscents girls are either throwing used pad in garbage or burning which is comparable to the results of Thakre *et al.*; [5] study. Cleanliness of external genitalia is also playing major role in prevention of RTI. In present study 61% adolescent were using soap and water to clean external genitalia as comparable to found by Thakre *et al.*; [5] (58%) and Shanbhag *et al.*; [11] (56.8%).

**CONCLUSION**

Most of the adolescent are unaware of normal physiology of menstruation. As mother plays vital role

as a teacher for imparting primary knowledge regarding menstrual cycle to adolescent. So mother need to be armed with proper and complete knowledge via formal and informal communications. Use of sanitary pads should be promoted by making its availability free of cost or at nominal price. Adolescents should be taught regarding the reproductive infection and its prevention in schools.

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