

**MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AWARENESS AMONG RURAL UNMARRIED GIRLS**Jain Akanksha<sup>1</sup>, Aswar N. R<sup>2</sup>, Dimple V. K<sup>3</sup>, Doibale Mohan K<sup>4</sup>, Barure Balaji S<sup>5</sup>**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

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**ABSTRACT: INTRODUCTION:** Poor menstrual hygiene in developing countries has been an insufficiently acknowledged problem. Lack of menstrual hygiene was found to result in adverse outcomes like reproductive tract infections. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** A community based cross-sectional study was done among rural unmarried girls of age group 18-25 years. Data collection was done by semi structured predesigned questionnaire. Data was entered in Microsoft excel and analyzed for frequency and percentage. **RESULTS:** 24.33% of rural unmarried girls knew that normal age of menstruation was 14 years, 83.33% of them knew normal days of menstrual flow to be 3-5 days, most them knew that normal days between two cycles is 28-35 days while only 50% of them knew that the cause of menstruation is hormonal. All of them use pad during menstruation, however only 40% of them use sanitary napkin while 45% of them use old cloth. Among them 23.33% use both soap and water for washing genitalia while 60% of them used only water. **CONCLUSION:** Knowledge regarding menstruation is unsatisfactory among the rural. So, the girls should be educated about the process of menstruation and also about the menstrual hygiene to maintain their proper health. They should also be clarified with their misconceptions.

**KEYWORDS:** Menstrual hygiene, rural, unmarried girls.

**INTRODUCTION:** A woman goes through several developmental milestones that greatly influence her reproductive health. Menarche, that is the establishment of menstruation, is one of these milestones and a natural phenomenon unique to females<sup>1</sup>. It starts when girls become sexually mature at the time of puberty<sup>2</sup>. It is most important phenomenon that occurs among the girls during the adolescence period. Adolescent girls constitute a vulnerable group particularly in India where menstruation is still regarded as something dirty and messy. The menstruation is generally associated with shame, fear, anxiety and depression. Even to this date in India mere mention of the topic has been a taboo. The cultural and social influences appear to be hurdle for advancement of knowledge of the subject. Awareness about menstruation prior to menarche was found to be low among both urban and rural adolescents in Maharashtra state.<sup>3</sup>The limited knowledge available was passed down informally from mothers, who were themselves lacking in knowledge of reproductive health and hygiene due to low literacy levels and socioeconomic status.<sup>4</sup>

Lack of menstrual hygiene was found to result in adverse outcomes like reproductive tract infections<sup>5</sup>. Today millions of women are sufferers of RTI and its complications and often the infection is transmitted to the offspring of the pregnant mother. Women having better knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene and safe practices are less vulnerable to RTI and its consequences.<sup>4</sup> Poor menstrual hygiene in developing countries has been an insufficiently acknowledged problem.

Learning about hygiene during menstruation is a vital aspect of health education for adolescent girls, as patterns that are developed in adolescence are likely to persist into adult life.

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Thus this study was conducted to know the level of knowledge of rural unmarried girls about menstrual hygiene so that health education can be planned as per their knowledge.

**OBJECTIVE:** To determine the awareness about menstruation and menstrual hygiene in unmarried girls in rural area.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** Present cross-sectional community based study was carried out in the village Limbgaon, District Nanded which is one of the training center under Rural health training center of Dr. Shankarrao Chavan Government Medical College, Nanded. Limbgaon has population of around 4500. All unmarried girls aged 18 years and above from the village were enumerated by house to house survey. There were 164 unmarried girls who were above 18 years of age and unmarried at the time of survey. Out of 164 girls, 22 girls were excluded due to their non-cooperation (12) and absent at the time of survey (10). Thus, total 142 girls were interviewed. Verbal consent was obtained from them after explaining the purpose of study. A questionnaire was designed to assess the awareness of rural unmarried girls about the menstrual cycle and hygienic practices during menstruation. Anonymity was maintained in the questionnaire to ensure correct elicitation of the knowledge level during interview.

Data was analyzed after entering the data in excel sheet for frequency and percentage.

### RESULTS:

**Socio-demographic profile of study population:** In this study conducted among young unmarried girls above 18 years of age. Most of the girls i.e. 83(58.45%) belongs to age group of 18-19 years, 32(22.53%) belongs to the age group 20-21 years and 27(19.02%) belongs to the age group 22-23 years. Among them 76(53.52%) were Hindu, 26(18.31%) were Muslim and 40(28.17%) were Buddhist. Most of the girls i.e. 78(54.93%) belongs to joint family while 64(45.07%) used to live in nuclear family. 28(19.71%) girls were educated up to primary schooling, 83(58.45%) girls had education up to secondary schooling, and 12(8.45%) had education up to higher secondary schooling. 19(13.39%) were illiterate.

**Knowledge about menstruation:** Regarding knowledge about menstruation 41(28.33%) of them said that the menstruation starts at the age of 14years while 35 (25%) had knowledge of normal age of menstruation of 13 years. Most of them i.e. 118(83.33%) and 137(96.67%) were aware of the normal flow of menstruation to be 2-5 days and that next cycle comes after 28-35 days respectively. 66(28%) of them thought that the cause of menstruation is hormonal change and 62(26%) of them thought it to be due to aging. (Table 1)

Mother 35(24.64%) was the most common source of information about menstruation among girls followed by teachers 23(16.57%), friends 15(10.45%) and relatives 5(3.34%), however 64(45.00%) did not have any prior knowledge about menstruation. (Table 2)

**Taboos observed by study subjects during menstruation:** When information was obtained about various taboos during menstruation, most of them i.e. 109(76.67) thought that during menstruation girls can go to school and 101(71.67) said they can go at work but 100% of them were not in favor of going to temple. 80(56.67%) of them said they used to sleep at same place during menstruation

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where they sleep daily while 62(43.33%) used to sleep at separate place during menstruation. When asked for bathing habit during menstruation 142(100%) said they used to bath daily. About food consumption 137(96.67%) said that they consume routine food while 5(3.33%) of them said they used to have special food. (Table 3)

**Practices regarding menstrual hygiene:** When information regarding practices during menstruation and menstrual hygiene was obtained, it was found that all of them 142(100%) were using pad during menstruation. However 57(40.14%) of them use sanitary napkin while 65(45.77%) of them use old cloth as a pad and 20(14.09%) use cotton pad during menstruation. When asked whether they reuse the pad 78(55%) of them said yes. When asked about the disposal of pads 33(23.33%) girls said they throw them in dustbin while 38(26.67%) of them used to burn them. (Table 4)

When information regarding cleanliness had been obtained it was found that 86(60%) of them used to clean genitalia 2 times a day during menstruation, 37(26.67%) used to clean once a day while very few of them i.e. 14(10%) and 5(3.33%) used to wash 3 times or 4 times a day during menstruation respectively. Most of them i.e. 87(61.28%) used to genitalia alone with water while 33(23.33%) of them used soap along with water. (Table4)

Most of them i.e. 78(51.67%) said that they do not take rest during menstruation. When asked how they felt during first menstruation most of them i. e. 78(55%) said they were feeling apprehensive while 54(38.44%) were upset and 10 (6.67%) were feeling untidy.

**Complaints during menstruation and approach:** Most of them 104(73.33%) have complaints of abdominal pain during menstruation while 10(6.67%) feel uneasy and 7(5%) used to have backache during menstruation, 21(15%) of them do not have any complaints during menstruation. Among those who have complaints 23(16.67%) approach to doctors while 7(5%) used to take medicine given by the private medical store however 112(78.33%) do not take any treatment.

**DISCUSSION:** Menstruation is a phenomenon unique to the females. The onset of menstruation is one of the most important changes occurring among the girls during the adolescent years. The first menstruation (menarche) occurs between 11 and 15 years with a mean of 13 years. Adolescent girls constitute a vulnerable group, particularly in India where female child is neglected one. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in Indian society. The reaction to menstruation depends upon awareness and knowledge about the subject. The manner in which a girl learns about menstruation and its associated changes may have an impact on her response to the event of menarche. Although menstruation is a natural process, it is linked with several misconceptions and practices, which sometimes result into adverse health outcomes.

In the present study the knowledge of rural unmarried girls regarding the average flow and duration of cycle seems to be adequate. In a study conducted by Adhikari P et al. on rural adolescent girls they found that 78% of girls were aware of normal age of menstruation to be 12 years and 82.70% said that normal flow is 3-5 days.<sup>2</sup>

In this study 43.33% of the girls stated that they used to sleep at separate place during menstruation. In the similar study conducted by Shah SP et al on adolescent tribal girls of rural Gujarat it was observed that almost half the girls had to sit separately during menses.<sup>6</sup>

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In this study it was found that 23.33 % of the girls said that during menstruation girls shouldn't go to school, all of them said not to go to temple while 28.33 said that girls should not go to work. In a similar study conducted by Adhikari P et al. on rural adolescent girls of Nepal it was found that 70.7% girls do not go to schools during period.<sup>2</sup> However Bassiouny R et al mentioned in their study that, 87.6% of girls reported that they don't visit the holy places during menstruation.<sup>1</sup> VRS Kavitha, in her study on adolescent girls stated that 54.16% of the respondents would restrict their activities like pilgrimage, cooking and sports, and touching others and stored food, worship and social occasions.<sup>7</sup> Moawed S in his study on young girls showed that 65.6% of girls limit their physical activity during menstruation for fear of pain.<sup>8</sup>

46.67% of the girls in this study stated that menstruation is due to hormones while 43.33% said it's due to aging. Adhikari P et al. in their study mentioned that only 36.67% of girls said the cause to be hormonal.<sup>2</sup>

About 83.33% of the girls agreed it to be a physiological process. Dasgupta and Sarkar in their study on adolescent girls observed the similar results.<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge regarding menstruation was given mostly (24.67%) by mother. Bassiouny R et al studied that more half of girls (58.3%) reported that their elder sisters informed them about menarche before its occurrence, followed by social workers (21.5%) in their school on the other hand, the sources of knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene as reported by the studied sample were 41.2% from their friends, 30.9% from mass- media as T.V. internet and magazines, followed by mothers and grandmothers were 18.6% and school staff, nurse, doctors, social workers as reported by 9.3% of girls.<sup>1</sup> VRS Kavitha in her study observed that 56.25% of them have received information from their mothers, 18.75% of them has got information from their friends, the source of information for 6.94% of the respondents was from their relatives or neighbours.<sup>7</sup>

In this study it was found that all of the girls used pad among which 40% use sanitary napkin, 45.77% use cloth and 14.08% use cotton pad. In a study conducted by Shah SP et al. on adolescent tribal girls of rural Gujarat it was found that 148 of the 164 girls were using old cloths, 15 were using falalin cloths and only one was using sanitary pads.<sup>6</sup> In a study conducted in Rajasthan by Khanna et al. it was found that three-fourths of the girls used old cloth during their periods and only one-fifth reported using readymade sanitary pads.<sup>9</sup>

In this study it was found that only 23.33% of rural girls clean their genitalia with soap and water however 76.67% used to clean genitalia with water only. In a study conducted by Adhikari P. et al. it was found that only 18.0% of girls clean their genitalia for menstrual purpose while only 11.3% use soap while cleaning.<sup>2</sup>

73.33% of the girls complaint of abdominal pain during menstruation while only 16.67% approach to doctor as per the present study. In a similar study of Bassiouny R et al it was mentioned by the studied sample that more than half of them have complaints of dysmenorrheal pain and back-ache during their menstrual period.<sup>1</sup> However, Poureslami and Osati-Ashtian observed that 67% of students with dysmenorrhea self-medicated with over-the-counter medications and only 18% consulted a healthcare provider.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding disposal of pad it was found 50% of the girls do not dispose off the pad and reuse it while 23.33% dispose them off in dustbin and 26.67% burn them. Dasgupta and Sarkar observed that regarding the method of disposal of the used material, 73.75% girls reused cloth pieces and 57.5% girls properly disposed the cloth pieces or sanitary pads used, i.e. they wrap the used cloth piece or

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sanitary pad in a paper bag and disposed in a place used for solid waste disposal.<sup>4</sup> While in the study done by VRS Kavitha it was found that three-fourth (76.38%) of the girls have the habit of disposing their napkins into the dustbin while, 13.88% of them burn it, 9.02% of the girls bury it and only one of the respondent follow the traditional method of washing it in the cold water to reuse the same in the future.<sup>7</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Knowledge regarding menstruation is unsatisfactory among the rural unmarried girls. So, the girls should be educated about the process of menstruation and also about the menstrual hygiene to maintain their proper health. They should also be clarified with their misconceptions.

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	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Normal age of menstruation</b> 12 yrs.	19	13.33
	13 yrs.	25.00
	14yrs	28.33
	15 yrs.	23.34
	16 yrs.	10.00
<b>Normal days of flow in one cycle</b> 2-5 days	118	83.33
	24	16.67

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<b>Days between two cycles</b> 28-35 days	137	96.67
	35-45 days	03.33
<b>Cause</b> Hormones	66	46.67
Aging	62	43.33
Don't know	14	10.00

**Table 1: Knowledge about menstruation among rural unmarried girls (n-142)**

<b>Who taught about menstruation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teacher	23	16.57
Mother	35	24.64
Friends	15	10.45
Relatives	5	03.34
None	64	45.00

**Table 2: Source of prior knowledge about menstruation in study subjects (n=142)**

<b>Taboos</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Forbidden to go to school	33	23.33
Forbidden to go to temple	142	100.0
Forbidden to go to work	41	28.33
Sleep at separate place	62	43.33
Bath daily	142	100.0
Consume special food	5	03.33

**Table 3: Taboos observed by study subjects during menstruation (n-142)**

<b>Practices</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>Material used as pad</b> Sanitary napkin	57	40.14	
	Cotton	20	14.09
	Old cloth	65	45.77
<b>Reuse pad</b> Yes	60	42.25	
	No	82	57.75
<b>Where you dispose of the pad</b> Dustbin	33	23.33	
	Burn	38	26.67
	Do not dispose	71	50.00
<b>How they clean genitalia?</b> Water	87	61.28	
	Soap and water	33	23.33
	Do not clean	22	15.39
<b>How frequently clean genitalia?</b> 1	37	26.67	
	2	86	60.00
	3	14	10.00
	4	5	03.33

**Table 4: Practices during menstruation (n-142)**

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