

Information Sources of Menstruation Hygiene among School and College Girls in Sindh, Pakistan

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Abstract

Menstruation is a physiological phenomenon in females. However, its socio-cultural and psychological interpretations vary in different societies. Whereas in Pakistan, discussion about menstruation is a taboo. Women are prohibited to talk about it in public gatherings. In this context, this study identifies the sources of menstruation hygiene awareness among adolescent girls of Dadu district of Sindh province, Pakistan. The present study applies a survey method; it is coupled up with the close-ended questionnaire, which was distributed among the 100 adolescent girls selected randomly from schools and colleges in the above-mentioned district. The findings revealed that most of the respondents do not understand the basis of menstrual blood. However, a low proportion who were aware of menstruation, they got information from their mothers. The results revealed that most of the respondents were afraid at the first time bleeding of menstruation, and half of them avoided taking a bath during periods. In a nutshell, results showed that mothers are the primary information sources for girls about menstruation hygiene and the majority of the girl students are less aware of its hygienic practices.

Keyword: Information Sources, Girls, Menstruation, Menstrual Hygiene Pakistan

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Introduction

Menstruation is a physiological process in women, although, in many countries, it is considered as a taboo (Kamath, Ghosh, Lena, & Chandrasekaran, 2013). In that context, various societies have a different perspective on this physiological process in women. In some societies, people have misconceptions about these physiological phenomena. Ramathuba (2015) explains that menstruation carries various meanings in diverse cultures. It is rarely discussed amongst families and communities. In some countries, it is a prohibited topic, and it is never discussed publicly. Generally, women are taught to view it as a topic of disgrace, whereas, in some countries, menstruation is considered as an unclean thing. Therefore, women are taught to stay away from their family members, even from their husbands. They cannot touch even the food because they are considered impure. According to Thakre et al. (2011), menstruation is generally perceived as impure in India. Usually, family isolates, restricts and keeps undesirable attitudes towards females who are

experiencing menstruating. Kamath et al. (2013) conclude in their study that the provision of menstruation awareness is necessary for females to expose them towards a healthy reproductive system and save them from infectious diseases.

According to the World Health Organization (2005), the practice of menstrual hygiene is poor in developing countries. Similarly, in Pakistan, it is also considered as a taboo. Thus the majority of females lack knowledge related to hygienic practices, and experience discomforts, misunderstandings related to nutrition, as well as menstruation cycle (Rizvi & Ali, 2016). According to Ali and Rizvi (2010), the majority of the females in Pakistan practice unhygienic methods, and they have misunderstandings about menstruation. The country lacks regulations for the implementation of the proper menstrual hygiene management. According to Ilo, Nwimo, and Onwunaka (2016), the menstrual hygiene practices among the girls are not encouraging. In that context, scholars revealed that mothers, teachers, and friends are the primary sources of information related to menstrual awareness for adolescent girls (Aniebue, Aniebue, & Nwankwo, 2009; El-Gilany, Khalil, & Shady, 2004; Lee, Chen, Lee, & Kaur, 2006).

In Pakistan, there is no proper research on menstruation hygiene focusing on girls' schools and colleges. Therefore, it is necessary to know about the sources of menstruation hygiene information and its practice among adolescent girls of schools and colleges. Presently, in Pakistan culturally, it is taboo to discuss menstruation and its safety practices. Thus, the purpose of this study identifies the information sources of menstruation hygiene and menstrual practices awareness among adolescent girls of Sindh, Pakistan. Therefore, the objectives of the study are; (i) To know awareness level about menstruation hygiene among schoolgirls of one of the rural districts in Sindh province, Pakistan and (ii) To determine the sources of information about menstruation hygiene and its practice among school and college girls of the district Dadu in Sindh province, Pakistan. Following the research objectives, the research hypotheses of this study are; (H₁) School and college level girl students in rural Sindh are less aware of menstruation hygiene practices and (H₂) Parents and family are the only primary source of information for menstruation hygiene practice among school and college level girl students of rural Sindh.

Literature Review

Menstruation is a physiological process in which blood discharges from the vagina (a reproductive part of females) regularly on monthly intervals throughout the active reproductive age. (Critchley, 1986; Jadhav, Bansod, & Diwanji, 2014). The phenomenon of menarche precise to the female happens among young girls after puberty level. It varies in all girls to occur in different ages (Kirk & Sommer, 2006). Most of the times, the first menstruation (menarche) takes place between 11 years to 15 years, with an average of 13 years. According to studies, normal menstruation cycle of a woman is 3,000 days (Ilo et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, menstruation may be perceived either positively or negatively in different societies (Ali & Rizvi, 2010). Positive perceptions of menstruation might be via thinking about it as a signal of femininity, fertility, children, or purification of the frame. The negative perception includes linkage to being prone and susceptible to different contamination or creating emotions of disgust and disgrace. Ali and Rizvi (2010) and Kamath et al. (2013) put to the socio-cultural reasons for the lack of awareness among adolescent girls. However, Kirk and Sommer (2006) associate it with many cultural myths and taboos, such as the need to abstain from having sex or being

forbidden to prepare food. In a few societies, these terrible perceptions set some cultural basis, like putting regulations through religious, social, and cultural practices. Thus females are bared to take some home activities during menstruation. However, about Asian countries, Ali and Rizvi (2010) reported different cultural beliefs and practices linked to menstruation. Some of these beliefs and practices are associated with sanitary materials, altered bathing, changed nutritional intake, and restriction on women's social mobility and be part of religious activities. Resultantly, these myths and taboos about menstruation make women shy and create embarrassment for them to discuss it. In result, their lives are affected, and it also affects their well-being (Kamath et al., 2013).

Further scholars argue that underprivileged menstrual hygiene comes within the overall goal to attain the several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It includes the link of increasing absenteeism or drop-out from schools (MDG2) and menstruating. Thus, menstrual hygiene and Reproductive Tract Infection is closely associated with the gender inequality and degradation of women's empowerment (MDG3) (Santina, Wehbe, Ziade, & Nehme, 2013; Sudeshna & Aparajita, 2012).

In earlier days, sanitary pads for menstrual management were not available. Therefore, women had to follow household techniques like using old clothes for cleaning and stopping the blood during periods (Krenz & Strulik, 2019). Such type of method was very much harmful and injurious for their health; it caused many diseases and allergies among women. Later, the rise of health issues related to unhygienic menstruation gave birth to the invention of sanitary pads (Hennegan, Shannon, Rubli, Schwab, & Melendez-Torres, 2019).

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is needed to improve the health of women. It means they are required to use a standard menstrual control material to soak up and accumulate blood. Therefore, spreading attention concerning sanitary usage and hygiene is crucial. The awareness of sparing girls from critical genetical infections would also reduce the chances of infertility. Therefore, it is essential to sensitize young women, change agents may be family members, teachers, and peers, and at a broader level, society and media also could play the role (Sychareun, Chaleunvong, Essink, Phommavongsa, & Durham, 2020).

The context-induced that the females need adequate information, resources, and conducive environment to practice the menstruation hygiene (Mahon & Fernandes, 2010). According to studies, first, hygienic menstruation information comes by family (Kamath et al., 2013). When daughters arrive at the age of puberty and get first periods, the girls feel it horrible and get panic. So, parents or elder sisters give knowledge to young girls that if you suffer from menstruation do not get panic and use sanitary pads. Thus, the families are the primary source of information for girls about hygienic menstruation. However, the second source is friends. Usually, girls feel comfortable to discuss it with their friends. In peer groups, many girls express their physical problems. Then friends suggest some hygienic methods. Whereas, the third source is media. Most of the times, sanitary pad ads or awareness sessions are run by media. It creates awareness among girls about the hygienic methods about menstruation. Fourth, girls learn many things in schools and colleges from their teachers. So, school is also a source of information for girls about hygienic menstruation. Fifth, these days, internet and social media also create awareness among girls. Like last year, in the Bollywood film industry, a superhit movie titled 'Padman' was produced about the issue of unhygienic menstruation (Ramachandra, Gilyaru, Eregowda, Yathiraja, & Ramachandra, 2016).

Generally, in Pakistani culture, the majority of girls are either ignorant about the handling of menstruation hygienically, or they are failed to manage it with modern-day menstrual substances (e.g., commercial sanitary pads). Nowadays, women trust that pads are the best option in comparison to rags. However, the majority could not afford to buy these sanitary pads (Fikree, Ali, Durocher, & Rahbar, 2005). Thus, due to sanitary, poverty pads are seldom bought. On the contrary, homemade pads are also considered satisfactorily, subject to meeting the hygiene requirements (Fikree et al., 2005). However, it was also mentioned that affordability of sanitary pads for some of the participants was not an issue. They mentioned that pads proved to be uncomfortable and caused infection or rashes. Some ladies used new garments and towels throughout menstruation, which are usually washed and reused. However, in Pakistan discussion about menstruation and its safety practices is considered taboo. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the information sources of menstruation hygiene and menstrual practices awareness for adolescent girls of Sindh, Pakistan.

Data Collection Methods and Materials

The researchers used quantitative survey method; it is an approach used for accumulating data from a pre-described group of respondents to get insights upon the selected research problem. The researchers selected the participants were from Pilot Government Girls College, Garibabad, Dadu, Sindh, Pilot Government Girls' Schools, Army Public School & College Dadu, (Private) and OPF School Dadu (Private). All these schools and colleges are in the urban center of district Dadu. However, students from rural areas are also enrolled. The researchers randomly selected 25 students having an age limit from 11 years to 16 years. According to scholars, this is the puberty of girls when the menstruation cycle starts. The researchers took formal permission from the heads of the schools and colleges. Finally, a survey of one hundred adolescent girl students was conducted. Moreover, following the research objectives of this study such as (i) To know awareness level about menstruation hygiene among school and college girls of district Dadu in Sindh province, Pakistan and (ii) To determine the sources of information about menstruation hygiene and its practice among school and college girls district Dadu, in Sindh province, Pakistan. Following the research objectives, the research hypotheses of this study are; (H1) School and college level girl students in rural Sindh are less aware of menstruation hygiene practices and (H2) Parents and family are the only primary source of information for menstruation hygiene practice among school and college level girl students of rural Sindh, the researchers used a pre-structured questionnaire for the data collection. For analyzing hypotheses the questionnaire comprised four components: a) demographic profile of the respondents, b) information sources of menstruation, c) menstrual period activities and feelings, and d) hygiene practice. Finally, the data has been analyzed and presented with simple descriptive statistics.

As this study is conducted in only four schools and colleges of the Dadu district of Sindh province of Pakistan, the findings of the study could be generalized on the same population.

Findings

Table 1:

Demographic profile of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age categories		
11 to 13	39	(39.0%)
14 to 16	61	(61.0%)
Education level		
9 th class High school	25	(25.0)
10 th class High school	25	(25.0)
First-year college	25	(25.0)
Intermediate college	25	(25.0)
Total	100	(100)
Education background of the parents		
Uneducated	15	(15.0%)
Primary	20	(20.0%)
Secondary	20	(20.0%)
Above secondary	45	(45.0%)
Total	100	(100)
Yearly income		
Above 5 lacs	35	(35.0%)
Up to 5 lacs	65	(65.0%)
Total	100	(100)

Table 1 presents data about the demographic characteristics of the respondents who were surveyed in this study. The age categories of the respondents show that the proportion of almost two fifths (39.0%) of the surveyed respondents belonged to the age category of 11 years to 13 years. However, the remaining proportion of the respondents is more than three fifths (61.0%); its age category falls into a bracket of 14 years to 16 years. In brief, most of the respondents were from 14 years to 16 years old.

Regarding the education level of the respondents, it was seen that a quarter (25.0%) of the respondents was studying in class 9th. Similarly, the second proportion, one fourth (25.0%) of the respondents, was studying in 10th class. Additionally, in the age group, it was found that the third quarter (25.0%) of the respondents was studying in the first year of college. However, the last remaining proportion of one-fourth of the respondents (25.0%) was students of intermediate in college. In totality, it was observed that fifty percent of the respondents were high school students, and the other fifty percent were college students. Likewise, the education background of the parents of the respondents it was seen that more than one-tenth (15.0%) of the respondents expressed that their parents were uneducated whereas one-fifth of the respondents (20.0%) said that their parents' education was primary.

Similarly, one fifth (20.0%) of the respondents mentioned that their parents' education was the secondary school level. However, more than two fifths (45.0%) of the respondents told that their parents' education was above the secondary school level. Hence, it was deduced that the highest number of the respondents' parents was above the secondary school level education.

Fourth, regarding yearly income, it was mentioned in table 1 that the more than one third (35.0%) of the respondents revealed that the yearly income of their parents was above than five lacs PK rupees. However, almost two-thirds (65.0%) of the respondents told their parents' yearly income was up to 5 lac PK rupees. Thus, it was found that the majority of the respondents' parents had yearly income up to 5 lac PK rupees.

Table 2:

Information sources of menstruation hygiene

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Information about Menarche		
Mother	57	(57.0)
Elder sister	15	(15.0)
Friend	6	(6.0)
Teacher	2	(2.0)
Media (social and electronic)	20	(20.0)
Total	100	100%
Sources of information about menstruation hygiene		
Mother	39	(39.0)
Elder sister	9	(9.0)
Friend	7	(7.0)
Teacher	2	(2.0)
Media (social and electronic)	43	(43.0)
Total	100	100%
Menarche age		
Before 11 years	7	(7.0)
12 to 14 years	57	(57.0)
15 to 16 years	23	(23.0)
Do not remember	13	(13.0)
Total	100	100%
Understanding of menstruation		
Monthly bleeding	17	(17.0)
Strange feelings	8	(8.0)
Natural phenomenon	39	(39.0)
Sign of adulthood	31	(31.0)
Other	5	(5.0)
Total	100	100%

See Table.2 that presents data about the information sources of menstruation hygiene for the respondents in this study. Regarding information about menarche, it was observed that almost three fifths (57.0%) of the respondents told that they sought information about menarche from their mothers. Likewise, one fifth (20.0%) of the respondents said that their source of information about menarche was media (both electronic and social). Whereas, (15.0%) of the respondents told that their elder sisters were source about the menarche, while (6.0%) respondents told that their friends were the source, and (2.0%) told that their teachers were their source about menarche. Thus, it was found that for most of the respondents, the source for the menarche information was their mothers. Second, in the context of the source of information about menstruation hygiene, it was observed that more than two fifths (43.0%) of the respondents mentioned that their source of information for menstruation hygiene was media (both electronic and social). However, almost two fifths (39.0%) of the respondents said that their source of information regarding menstruation hygiene was their mothers. Moreover, for the remaining number of the respondents, their sources of information for menstruation hygiene were their elder sisters (9.0%), friends (7.0%), and teachers (2.0%). Thus, it was found that for most of the surveyed respondents of this study, the information source of menstruation hygiene were media and mother.

Third, regarding the menarche age of the respondents, it was seen that almost three fifths (57.0%) of the respondents told that their age of menarche was from 12 to 14 years. Moreover, more than one-fifth of the respondents (23.0%) menarche age was from 15 to 16 years. However, for the remaining number of respondents' age was before 11 years (7.0%). Whereas 13.0% of the respondents told that they did not remember their age of menarche. Hence, it was deduced that for most of the respondents' menarche age was 12 years to 14 years.

Fourth regarding the understanding of the respondents about menstruation, it was observed that the two fifths (39.0%) of the respondents expressed that for them, menstruation is a natural phenomenon. Moreover, over the quarter (31.0%) of the respondents mentioned that they conceptualized menstruation as a sign of adulthood. Whereas almost one fifth (17.0%) of the respondents answered that for them, menstruation is just monthly bleeding. However, 5.0% of the respondents had 'other' understanding regarding menstruation than the ones mentioned above. Hence, the study revealed that to most of the respondents, the understanding of the menstruation was a natural phenomenon and monthly bleeding.

Table.3:

Menstrual Period Activities and Feelings

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Take bathing during menstruation?		
Yes	53	(53.0)
No	47	(47.0)
Total	100	100%
Alteration in diet during menstruation		
Eat less	36	(36.0)
Eat more	32	(32.0)
Eat some amount of food	32	(32.0)
Total	100	100%
Feeling type at first menarche		
Fear	7	(7.0)
Normal	32	(32.0)
Worry	29	(29.0)
Anxiety (pain, felt terrible, cry)	32	(32.0)
Total	100	100%
Have a clear concept about menstruation?		
Yes	33	(33.0)
No	67	(67.0)
Total	100	100%

See Table.3 that has data regarding menstrual period activities and feelings. It was observed that more than fifty percent (53.0%) of the surveyed respondents expressed that they took a bath during the menstruation period. Whereas less than fifty percent (47.0%) of the respondents mentioned that they did not take a bath during the menstruation period. Hence, it was found that most of the respondents took a bath during the menstruation period.

Second subject to alteration in diet during the menstruation period it was seen that more than one-third of the respondents (36.0%) said that they eat less during the menstruation period. Moreover, about one third (32.0%) of the respondents mentioned that they rather eat more during the menstruation period. However, one third (32.0%) of the surveyed respondents told that they eat the same amount of food during the menstruation period, which they eat during the non-menstruation period. Thus, it surfaced that the highest portion of the surveyed respondents eats less during the menstruation period compared to what they eat during the non-menstruation period.

Third, regarding feelings during the menstruation period, it was observed that almost one third (32.0%) of the respondents said that they feel anxiety during the menstruation period. Whereas a similar number (32.0%) of the respondents expressed it as a normal. However, the third more than quarter (29.0%) showed that they felt worried during the menstruation period. Moreover, less than one-tenth (7.0%) said that they go through the feeling of fear during the menstruation period. Thus, it was deduced that most of the respondents go through the feelings of anxiety, worry, and fear during the menstruation period.

Lastly, in the context of having a clear concept and understanding of the menstruation, it was seen that one third (33.0%) of the respondents said that their concept was clear about the menstruation. However, two thirds (67.0%) of the respondents expressed that they have not yet clear concept regarding the menstruation. Hence, the finding concludes that most of the surveyed respondents were still in need of more knowledge and awareness regarding menstruation cycle.

Table 4:

Hygiene Practice

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Type of sanitary napkins to be used		
Home-made pads	53	(53.0)
Ready-made sanitary napkins	47	(47.0)
Total	100	100%
Frequently of changing Napkins		
Once a day	15	(15.0)
Twice a day	38	(38.0)
More than twice a day	47	(47.0)
Total	100	100%
Using hygienic material		
Yes	68	(68.0)
No	32	(32.0)
Total	100	100%

Table 4 presents data about hygiene practice. Regarding the types and usage of sanitary napkins by the surveyed participants, it was told by more than fifty percent (53.0%) that they use home-made napkins during their menstruation period. However, in contrast, more than two fifths (47.0%) said that they used ready-made sanitary napkins. Thus, it was deduced that most of the respondents used home-made pads during menstruation period.

Second, about the frequency of changing hygiene napkins, it was observed that less than fifty percent (47.0%) of the respondents told that they change menstruation pads more than twice a day. Whereas the second-highest proportion of almost two fifths (38.0%) of the survey participants expressed that they change their hygiene napkins twice a day. Additionally, more than one-tenth (15.0%) revealed that they change hygiene pads just once a day. Thus, it was found that the highest proportion of almost fifty percent changed their hygiene napkins more than twice a day.

Third, regarding the hygiene material, the surveyed respondents more than two thirds (68.0%) of the respondents answered that they used hygiene material during menstruation period. However, against it, nearly one third (32.0%) of the respondents said that they did not use hygiene material during the menstruation period. Hence, it was deduced that most of the respondents surveyed in this study used hygiene material during their menstruation period.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of conducting this study was to identify the awareness level of menstruation hygiene and to determine the sources of information about the menstruation hygiene and its practice among school and college girls in Sindh, province, Pakistan. In this connection, it was hypothesized that the

school and college girls, particularly in a rural part of Sindh, are less aware regarding menstruation hygiene practices and the primary source of information about menstruation hygiene practices among them were their parents and families.

However, regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents sampled in this study, it revealed that most of them were from 14 to 16 years old. Whereas fifty percent of them were studying in high schools, and the remaining fifty percent of them were college students. About the education background and level of their parents it was observed that more than two-fifths of the parents had above than secondary level education; added just 15.0% parents of the respondents in this study were uneducated. Finally, it was known that most of the respondents expressed that their yearly income was up to 5 lac Pakistani rupees.

Moreover, regarding the information sources of menstruation hygiene, it was found that for most of the respondents, the primary source of information about menarche was their mothers. It is in support of previous studies (Aniebue, Aniebue, & Nwankwo, 2009; El-Gilany, Khalil, & Shady, 2004; Lee, Chen, Lee, & Kaur, 2006). Whereas, about the sources of menstruation hygiene, it was observed that most of the respondents got menstruation hygiene information from media (both electronic and social) and then mothers. Further, most of the respondents expressed menarche age is from 12 to 14 years. However, in the context of an understanding of the respondents regarding menstruation, it was seen that most of them understood that menstruation is a natural phenomenon and a sign of adulthood.

Whereas, regarding the menstrual period, activities, and feeling, it was observed that most of the respondents expressed that they bath during the menstrual period. However, a considerate number of respondents revealed that during menstruation, they eat less; however, one-third of the respondents told that they eat more during the menstrual period. Although, regarding feelings during the first menarche, the highest number of respondents mentioned that they felt anxiety. On the contrary, the second-highest number of respondents mentioned that they felt normal during the first menarche. The majority mentioned that they had not yet clear concept regarding menstruation. Finally, in the perspective of hygiene practices, it was observed that most of the respondents mentioned that they used home-made sanitary napkins. Moreover, related to this, either home-made or ready-made, almost fifty percent of respondents expressed that they changed their pads more than twice a day. Lastly, most of the respondents also told that they used hygienic material.

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