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Research Article

EVALUATION OF FACTORS LEADING TO SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM DURING MENSTRUATION IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS ATTENDING TERTIARY CARE HOSPITAL IN GHAZIABAD

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ABSTRACT

Onset of menarche is a special period when adolescent girls undergo various social emotional and physiological changes. They often lack knowledge regarding reproductive health which can be due to socio-cultural barriers in which they grow up leading to various misconceptions among girls especially in developing countries. With focus on the school girls, this study aimed to examine the knowledge about menstruation, determinants of menstrual health management and its influence on school-attendance in Ghaziabad.

Methods: It was cross sectional study conducted over a period of 3 months from September 2019 to December 2019. All adolescent school going girls (ranging from 10-19 years) who presented in the Gynaecology OPD in Santosh Medical College & Hospital, Ghaziabad, were recruited in the study. They were interviewed after their informed consent using a pretested structured questionnaire which focused on socio-demographic factors, parental factors, knowledge, social restrictions, menstrual health practices and school attendance. Data was analyzed and p value of <0.05 was taken significant.

Results: A total of 210 adolescent girls participated in the study with mean age of 13.17±1.67 years (ranging from 10-19 years). About two thirds of girls 130 (61.9%) had knowledge about menstruation and its management. Inadequate social support and presence of taboos can lead to psychosocial consequences like shame, fear, anxiety and distraction from studies which contribute to school absenteeism. About 128 (61%) girls were reported to have been absent from school during their menstruation period.

Conclusion: Increasing mothers' awareness and educating the girls regarding menstrual hygiene may help in improving school attendance

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INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is an important milestone in an adolescent's life which marks the beginning of reproductive life. Most of the time they are unprepared in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for managing the menstrual cycle[1]. Inadequate water and sanitation facilities is a major barrier in maintaining menstrual hygiene which has catastrophic effect on the health and development of adolescent girls [2]. More than half the schools in low-income countries either lack sufficient toilets for girls or they are unhygienic [3] Lack of access to effective absorbents, inadequate facilities to change and lack of access to soap and water are the major factors causing drop in school attendance[4-8]. With focus on the school girls, this study examined knowledge about menstruation, determinants of menstrual management and its influence on school-attendance among adolescents.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was an observational cross sectional study conducted over a period of 3 months from January 2019 to

March 2019. The sample size consisted of 210 adolescent girls who came to Gynaecology OPD in a Tertiary health care Hospital in Ghaziabad. Informed consent was taken and the purpose of the study was explained to them. A pretested structured questionnaire which was divided in four parts was administered to them. The first part focused on socio-demographic factors which included age, age at menarche, mothers' education, socioeconomic status, residence, type of family and employment status of mother. The second part discussed the knowledge, reaction, myths and restrictions during menstruation. The third section consisted of menstrual health management and attitude towards hygiene with special reference to toilet facilities, water supply and waste disposal, and the last section included problems associated with menstrual health management and their correlation with school absenteeism. Ethical clearance was obtained from Ethical committee of the Institution.

Statistical Analysis: The data was collected and tabulated. The observations were described in terms of percentages and proportions. Data was compiled and statistically analysed

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using chi square test, students t test where applicable. $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

A Total of 210 adolescent girls participated in the study with age ranging from 10 to 18 years with mean age of 13.17 ± 1.67 years. The Sociodemographic profile of the subjects is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Sociodemographic Factors of the Adolescent Girls (n=210)

Variable		N=210	%
Age (years)	10-13	54	25.7
	14-16	126	60
	≥ 17	30	14.2
Socioeconomic Status	LSES	112	53.3
	MSES	84	40
	USES	14	6.66
Age at menarche(years)	< 10	24	11.4
	11-15	109	51.9
	≥ 16	77	36.6
Religion	Hindu	90	42.8
	Muslim	78	37.1
	Others	42	20
Class	≤ 6	9	4.2
	7-9	114	54.2
	≥ 10	87	41.4
Education of mother	Educated	61	29.1
	Uneducated	149	70.9
Residence	Rural	99	47.1
	Urban	111	52.8

Majority of the girls 122(58%) had heard about menses before menarche. Friends were the leading source of information 53 (25.2%), Not more than third 70 (33.3%) were aware that menstruation is a physiological process. About two thirds had no knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene and its management 134 (63.8%). (Table 2)

Table 2 Knowledge about Menses (N=210)

Variable	Response	n	%
Heard about menses before menarche	Yes	122	58
	No	88	42
Source of information	Mother	36	17.1
	Friends	53	25.2
	School	5	2.3
	Media	38	18.1
Comfortable to talk about menses	Yes	78	37.1
	No	32	15.2
Aware that menses is a physiological process	Yes	178	84.7
	No	70	33.3
Knowledge about Menstrual hygiene	No idea	140	66.6
	Mother	42	20
	Friends	12	5.7
	School	14	6.6
Knowledge about absorbents	Media	8	3.8
	No idea	134	63.8
	Yes	139	66.1
	No	71	33.9

In this study most girls felt embarrassed (41%), scared (36.08%), upset (23.7%) and disgusted (2.8%).(Chart 1). Such responses result in lack of communication which leads to various misconceptions and myths regarding the condition. (Chart 2)

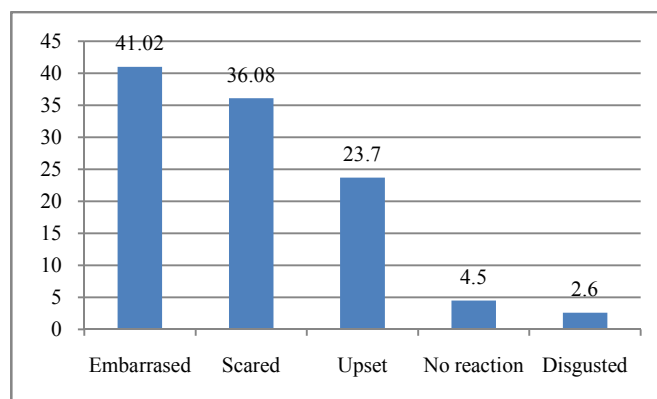


Chart 1 Responses to Menstruation (N=210)

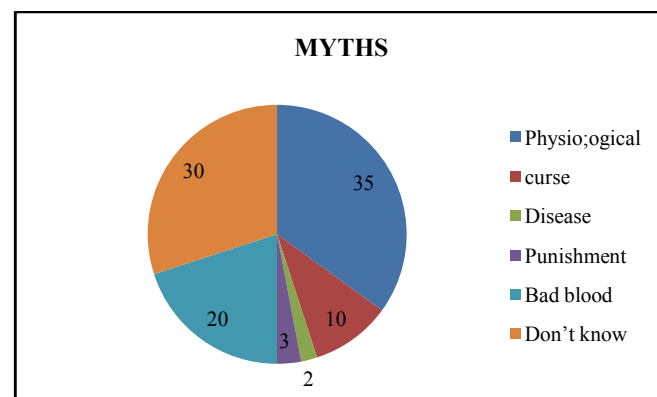


Chart 2 Myths Regarding Menses Prevailing In the Families of the Girls

In our society menses is seen as throwing out of dirty blood. Hence the girls who are having menses face many social restrictions as shown in Chart 3

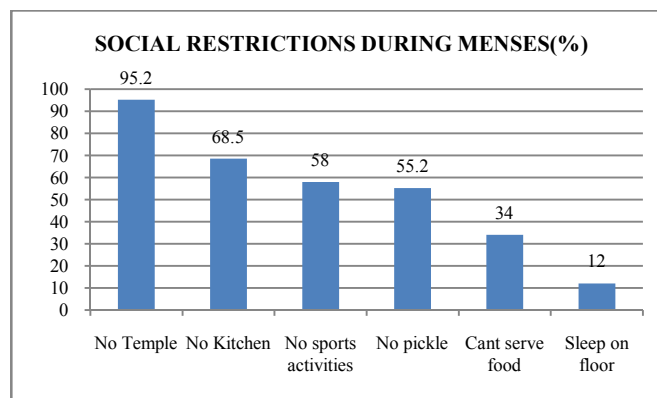


Chart 3 Social Restrictions Faced By The Adolescent Girls During Menses

Only 61(29%) of girls used sanitary pads as absorbents. Rest of them either used old cloth or discarded clothes as absorbents. The main reason for not using sanitary pad was lack of affordability 86 (67.4%). (Table 3). In our study we observed that girls who came from urban area, middle socioeconomic status and educated mothers were more likely to use sanitary pads .

Table 3 Reasons for Not Using Sanitary PAD (N=149)
*more than one response

REASON	n*	%
Lack of Knowledge	16	10.3
Cost factor	86	67.4
Non availability	34	26.5
Disposal issues	85	66.2
Tradition of using cloth	32	25.4

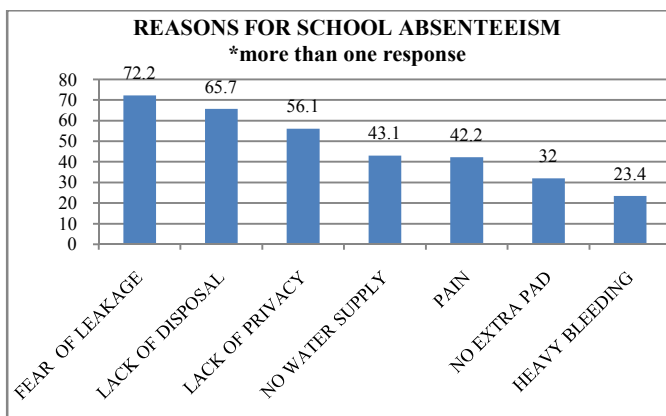


Chart 4 Reasons for School Absenteeism (n=128)

The Chart 4 depicts the reasons for absence from school. In the present study, 128(60.9%) girls refrained from going to school mainly due to fear of leakage and staining of clothes leading to shame and embarrassment they would have to face. The mean days of absenteeism were 2.87 ±1.07days. Rather than facing teasing and humiliation by classmates, they preferred staying back at home.

Table 4 Multivariate Analysis of School Absenteeism with Menstrual Health Practices

Serial no.	Factors	School Absenteeism		p value	OR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)
		YES	NO			
1	Mother's Education				6.49	6.79
	Uneducated	84	65	0.0006	(2.25-18.8)	(2.55-19.0)
2	Low Socioeconomic Status				32.5	32.6
	Yes	104	12	<0.0001	(13.8-76.8)	(13.9-77.8)
3	Sanitary pad use				0.1	0.2
	Yes	13	48	<0.0001	(0.04-0.20)	(0.05-0.40)
4	Facilities				0.36	0.39
	Yes	21	25	0.004	(0.19-0.72)	(0.22-0.76)
5	Restrictions on playing				7.48	7.50
	Yes	95	20	<0.0001	(3.90-14.31)	(4.02-14.55)

Girls who belonged to low socioeconomic status, with uneducated mothers, who did not use sanitary napkins, who were restricted from playing and who did not have proper toilet facilities were more prone for school absenteeism

DISCUSSION

Management of menstruation is challenging among school going girls in low income countries, and involves psychosocial and physical challenges. The age of menarche in this study was 13.67±1.17 years which was comparable with many studies [6,8,9].

In the present study the main informants about menses and menstrual hygiene were friends and media. This was in contrast to various studies where in around 85%, the major source of information about menstruation were the school teachers [9,10]. Large number of girls are mostly ignorant and unprepared.

The present study showed that the majority of the girls had experienced different negative reactions to menstruation like embarrassment and disgust which showcases different prejudices in society about menstruation.[9,10]. Social

restrictions like going to temple or working in kitchen is completely prohibited. [2].

Only 29% of girls used sanitary pads as absorbents. The main reasons for not using sanitary pad was non affordability (67.4%) followed by lack of disposal facilities (66.2%) amongst other causes. This was comparable to other studies which showed that financial constraint was the Girls who belonged to low socioeconomic status, with uneducated mothers, who did not use sanitary napkins, who were restricted from playing and who did not have proper toilet facilities were more prone for school absenteeism

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Only 29% of girls used sanitary pads as absorbents. The main reasons for not using sanitary pad was non affordability (67.4%) followed by lack of disposal facilities(66.2%) amongst other causes. This was comparable to other studies which showed that financial constraint was the most important factor which led to less use of sanitary pad as absorbents.[9,10].Such poor personal sanitary practices during menstruation have been associated with serious ill-health ranging from genital tract infections, urinary tract infections, and bad odour.

Incidence of school absenteeism in our study was 61% . The mean days of absenteeism were 2.87 ±1.07days.This was similar to various studies [8,9,10]. Our study showed that 115 (58%) avoided participation in sports activities at school during menses, out of which 95(74%)girls were absent from school. [9]

Providing education in the school to the girls prior to menarche will have a positive impact on improving school attendance. So the school teachers should be especially trained for puberty education.

The limitation of the study was the authentication of the information which was iprovided by the adolescent subjects.It was mainly self-reported and their perception of the barriers in menstrual hygiene management in school and reasons quoted for absenteeism could be biased.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that more than half of adolescent girls remain absent from school during menses. The main cause for this is lack of awareness and practices which are often not optimal for

menstrual health management .Lack of affordable sanitary pads and proper toilet facilities are the main culprits behind the high incidence of school absenteeism. Increasing mothers' awareness and educating the girls regarding menstrual hygiene may help in improving school attendance and improving their academic performance.

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