

Original Research Article

Social Restrictions during Menstruation among College Going Unmarried Girls in Chandigarh, India

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Abstract: Menstruation is a vital part of the reproductive health of a woman. There is evident neglect of problems related to menstruation especially in young girls and they are lacking scientific knowledge regarding menstruation. The study was undertaken with the objective to assess the social restrictions faced by college going unmarried girls of Chandigarh. A stratified multistage random sampling design was adopted for selection of participants from the selected colleges of Chandigarh. A total of 1000 girls who had attained menarche were selected. Information was collected through personal interviews conducted in privacy using semi-structured survey schedule. Respondents were asked about restrictions imposed during menstrual cycle and whether they think those restrictions as right. 58.6% of respondents practice restrictions during their menses. Among these, majority of the respondents 81.39% avoided visit holy places, followed by 46.24 % avoided eating some food items, 26.28 % restricted physical activity, 9.89% restricted bathing, 8.87% restricted interaction with boys , 6.48% absence from college, 5.11% didn't attend social activities/ gathering, 4.26% didn't enter kitchen/ cooking & serving foods, 3.58% didn't traveling alone, 3.24% used separate bed and 1.53% practiced isolation . No reaction was reported 16.72% respondents while 67.91% accepted restrictions normally. There were 15.5% respondents who accept these restrictions with pressure from family while 3.58% accepted these with anger and 4.43% feel bored /disgusted on such restrictions. The study revealed that there was an inappropriate knowledge and hygiene practice due to various misconceptions, beliefs and taboos among college girls regarding menstruation. Efforts should be made to reduce such restrictions, taboos, myths and various undesired practices for better reproductive health related outcomes.

Keywords: Menstruation, Restriction, Misconceptions, Beliefs and Taboo

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a natural physiological phenomenon unique to females that begins in adolescence [1]. Overall, a woman spends approximately 2,100 days menstruating which is equivalent to almost six years of her life [2]. The profile of the woman's reproductive health is greatly influenced by the girl's reaction to, her Menstruation, beliefs and attitude towards menstruation, and more important her behaviour during it [3]. Although menstruation is a natural process linked with several misconceptions, ignorance and practices among young girls, sometimes results in adverse reproductive health outcomes [4].

In social contexts where these issues are not openly discussed or where there is stigma and/or taboos surrounding menstruation, girls may have very little understanding of what is happening to them and their bodies. Social prohibitions and negative attitude of parents in discussing the related issues openly has blocked the access of adolescent girls to right kind of information [5].

Taboos surrounding menstruation exclude women and girls from many aspects of social and cultural life as well as menstrual hygiene services [6]. Cultural, religious and traditional beliefs lead to a range of restrictions being placed on women [7]. Many young

girls in our country may lack appropriate and sufficient information regarding menstrual hygiene, causing incorrect unhealthy behavior during their menstrual period [8].

Considerable number of menstrual problems can be prevented by creating awareness and by improving/modifying factors like lifestyle, environment, and practices during menstruation, dietary habits, psycho-social conditions, and cultural norms etc [9].

Chandigarh, the most economically advanced Union Territory (UT) of India is characterized by high population growth due to increasing migratory population and rapidly changing life style. Keeping the above trends in the mind, the present study was undertaken among college going unmarried girls of of Chandigarh with the objectives to study social restrictions faced by girls during menstruation period.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Results of present study are based on a cross sectional survey conducted among unmarried girls studying in selected colleges of UT Chandigarh during September 2014 to August 2015.

Study design

Cross sectional Survey was conducted among first year unmarried college girls in randomly selected 10 (5 government and 5 private) colleges in Chandigarh.

Sampling design

A stratified multistage random sampling was adopted. Stratification was done on the basis of type of college. There were two strata, consisting of government and private colleges of Chandigarh. Within each stratum, list of colleges was prepared along with their respective sanctioned strength of students studying in first year. Sampling frame of sampling units at each stage of selection was prepared. At the first stage of selection, a sample of 10 colleges including five Government and five Private colleges were selected at random as first stage units. Within each selected first stage units, a second stage sample of students of different streams of first year of an optimum size (100 in each college) with proportional allocation was selected as study units.

Sample size

Power analysis was done to calculate optimum sample size for the study. Sample size was calculated

by using the following formula with approximation for large population:

$$N_{opt} = \frac{Z^2_{1-\alpha/2} P (100-P)}{\epsilon^2}$$

where,

P = Anticipated population proportion
1 - α = Confidence Coefficient

ϵ = Relative precision, and

Z = is the value of standard normal variate (1.96).

Sample size of 1024 girls was optimum based on 60% anticipated prevalence of menstrual problems (based on previous studies) [10-13], 95% confidence coefficient and 5% relative precision. Taking the round off, we surveyed 1000 college going unmarried girls of Union Territory of Chandigarh

Information collected

Participants were interviewed in privacy using pretested semi-structured interview schedules to collect information including socio-demographic characteristics: age, literacy status of their parents, religion, type of family, occupation of parents and social restrictions faced by girls during menstruation period.

Only those unmarried girls who had already attained menarche and were willing to participate were interviewed provided their parents also gave consents. A well-trained team of female investigators and medical social workers were involved in data collection

STATISTICAL METHODS

The statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20). All the quantitative variables were estimated using simple frequencies & percentages, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation.

Ethical issues

In the data collection process, steps were taken to ensure privacy of participants, confidentiality of responses and freedom to respond truthfully. Prior approval from Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), Chandigarh was taken. Before starting the data collection, permissions were taken from the Director Higher Education (DHE) Chandigarh and the respective Principals of colleges.

RESULTS

The present study included 1000 College going unmarried girls who had attained menarche in the age

group of 16-24 year in the ten colleges of Chandigarh. Table 1 presents a detailed account of the socio-demographic characteristics of all the girls surveyed. The mean age of respondents was 18.41years. Only 248 (24.8%) were belongs to joint families. 75% girls were from Hindu community followed by 22.7% belonging to Sikh community. Fathers of 99.1 % girls and mothers of 98.3 % girls were literate. Overall, fathers of 97.5 % girls were in service or employed anywhere whereas mothers of 87.3 % girls were housewives.

Table 2 showed that 58.6% of respondents practice restrictions during their menses. Among these, majority of the respondents 81.39% avoided visit holy places, followed by 46.24 % avoided eating some food items ,26.28 % restricted physical activity, 9.89% restricted bathing, 8.87% restricted interaction with boys , 6.48% absence from college, 5.11% didn't attend social activities/ gathering, 4.26% didn't enter kitchen/ cooking & serving foods, 3.58% didn't traveling alone,3.24% used separate bed and 1.53% practiced

isolation.

In the present study, 271 respondents (46.24%) avoided certain food during menstruation as they believed that hot and cold food influences menses (Table 3). 39.5% of these respondents avoided curd during their periods followed by cold drinks 38%, 30.3% pickle, 21.4% dry fruits, 12.2% rice, 8.9% citrus fruits, 5.5% ice cream, 5.2% milk, 4.1% spicy food, 3.3% coffee, 2.2% sauce, cucumber and raw onion (1.5% each), banana and lassi (0.7% each) and 0.4% avoided non-veg.

Reactions of respondents on restrictions practiced are shown in table 4. No reaction was reported by 98 (16.72%) respondents while 398 (67.91%) accepted restrictions normally. There were 90 (15.5%) respondents who accepted these restrictions with pressure from family, 21 (3.58%) accepted these with anger and 26(4.43%) feel bored /disgusted on such restrictions.

Table -1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Age (N=1000)		
16-18	442	44.2%
19-21	436	43.6%
21-25	122	12.2%
Mean age	18.41±.98 Years	
Type of family(N=1000)		
Joint	248	24.8%
Extended	752	75.2%
Religion(N=1000)		
Hindu	750	75.0%
Sikh	227	22.7%
Muslim	3	0.3%
Christian	6	0.6%
Buddhist	14	1.4%
Education status of father(N=1000)		
Illiterate	09	0.9%
Literate	991	99.1%
Education status of mother(N=1000)		
Illiterate	17	1.7%
Literate	983	98.3%
Occupation of father(N=1000)		
Unemployed	25	2.5%
Govt. job/private Job/business/others	975	97.5%
Occupation of father mother(N=1000)		
House wife	873	87.3%
Govt. job/private Job/business/ farmer/others	121	12.1%

Table-2: Social restrictions practiced during menstruation by participants

Characteristic	Response	Percentage
Restrictions practiced (N=1000)		
Yes	586	58.6%
No	414	41.4%
Total	1000	100.0%
Restrictions practiced during menstruation (N=586)		
Physical activity	154	26.28%
Separate bed	19	3.24%
Visit holy places/ Worship/religious activity	477	81.39%
Avoid some Food items	271	46.24%
Enter Kitchen/cooking & serving foods	25	4.26%
Social activities/ gathering	30	5.11%
Practice isolation	9	1.53%
Restrict bathing	58	9.89%
Absence from college	38	6.48%
restrict Interacting with boys	52	8.87%
Traveling alone	21	3.58%

Table-3: Restrictions on foods avoided practiced during menstruation by participants

Characteristic	Response	Percentage
Foods avoided during menstruation (N=271)		
Pickle	82	30.3%
Dry fruits	58	21.4%
Rice	33	12.2%
Curd	107	39.5%
Cold drinks	103	38.0%
Milk	14	5.2%
Citrus fruits	24	8.9%
Coffee	9	3.3%
Cucumber	4	1.5%
Raw onion	4	1.5%
Ice-cream	15	5.5%
Banana	2	0.7%
Sauce	6	2.2%
Spicy food	11	4.1%
Lassi	2	0.7%
Non-veg	1	0.4%

Table-4: Reactions on the restrictions spracticed during menstruation by Respondents

Characteristic	Response	Percentage
Reactions (N=586)		
No reaction	98	16.72%
Accept Normally	398	67.91%
Accept with Pressure from family	43	7.33%
Accept with anger	21	3.58%
Feel Bored / Disgusted	26	4.43%

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted on 1000 college girls to assess the knowledge, source of information, and hygiene practices regarding menstruation. In the present study mean age of menarche was 13.89 ± 1.244 years which has been found to be similar to the study conducted in Nagpur district in 2011, with their mean age of menarche 13.82 ± 0.832 years, age ranged from 12-17 years [14].

In the present study, almost three-fifth (58.6%) of respondents practice restrictions during their menses. Majority of these respondents 81.39% avoided visit holy places, followed by 26.28% restricted physical activity, 9.89% restricted bathing, 8.87% restrict Interacting with boys, 6.48% Absence from college, 5.11% did not attend social activities/gathering, 4.26% didn't enter kitchen /cooking & serving foods, 3.58% didn't traveling alone, 3.24% used separate bed and 1.53% practiced isolation.

When compared with the study done by Kumar *et al.* [11] in school going girls in Chandigarh showed that the most common restriction was on taking bath (50.8%) followed by drying clothes in open (50%), physical activity (48.9%) and the restrictions like worship/religious activity (39.5%). A study conducted in Delhi in by Salve *et al.* [15] showed that 66.36 percent girls practiced different restrictions during menstruations. 62.95% girls did not pray, 66.36% girls didn't visit religious places or temples, 15% girls were not allowed to cook or work in kitchen, 42.73% girls were not allowed to eat certain foods, 5.23% girls were not allowed to attend school, 21.82% girls were not allowed to do routine household work and 26.36% girls were not allowed to play or exercise during menstruation.

In the present study only 38 participants (6.84%) missed college during menstruations which were much less than the study in West Bengal in which school absenteeism was seen in 45.6% girls mainly due to pain in abdomen and excessive bleeding [16]. 58 participants (9.89%) in present study restrict bathing during menstruation which was similar to the study conducted Datta *et al.* [17] in which 85.7 percent participants had daily bath. Others felt bathing should be restricted in the first two days of menstruation as bathing increases the menstrual flow [17].

In the present study, 271 respondents (46.24%) avoided certain food during menstruation as they believed that hot and cold food influences menses.

Similar result was found in the study conducted in Pulpralhadpur, New Delhi where 42.73 percent girls were not allowed to eat certain food [15].

No reaction was reported by 98 (16.72%) respondents while 398 (67.91%) accepted restrictions normally in the present study when asked about the reactions while practicing these restrictions. There were 90 (15.5%) respondents who accept these restrictions with pressure from family, 21 (3.58%) accept these with anger and feel bored /disgusted on such restrictions. Restriction on religious activities during menstruation were practiced by most of the respondents by their own as they were of the opinion that such type of restrictions are correct and there is no harm in following those restrictions. Respondents have easily accepted restrictions entry into kitchen, touching food items, physical activity, etc. but they could not follow restrictions to that extent on components like social gathering, even some restrictions like consuming some food items in excess, were followed by the participants under pressure by their parents.

CONCLUSION

Study concludes that. Menstrual practices have been still clouded by socio-cultural restrictions resulting in adolescent girls remaining ignorant of the scientific facts and hygienic health practices girls in colleges of Chandigarh. There is an urgent need to create awareness of menstrual problems and safe menstrual practices among girls as well as mothers. The findings reinforced the need to encourage safe and hygienic practices among the girls and bring them out of traditional beliefs, misconceptions and restrictions regarding menstruation.

Recommendations

Incorrect restrictions, myths and beliefs associated with menstruation could be removed by the help of teachers, parents and educating girls about the scientific facts of menstruation so that they could lead to a healthy life. This can be achieved through educational programs, so that they wipe away the old wrong ideas and make her free to discuss menstrual matters without any inhibitions.

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