

Knowledge and practices regarding menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls of rural Nepal

Parajuli P¹, Paudel N², Shrestha S³

¹Puspa Parajuli, Lecturer; ²Narayani Paudel, Assistant Professor; ³Santoshi Shrestha, Assistant Professor, B.Sc. Nursing Department, Kathmandu Medical College, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract

Background: Adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adult life during which pubertal development and sexual maturation takes place, thus adolescents have to face physiological development challenges. Adolescent girls often lack knowledge regarding reproductive health including menstrual hygiene which can be due to socio-cultural barriers in which they are grown up.

Objective: To assess the knowledge and practices regarding menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls.

Methods: A descriptive study was done among one hundred and two adolescent girls of Shree Jansewa Higher Secondary School, Bayarban-8, Morang, where data was collected from the adolescent girls meeting the inclusion criteria.

Results: It was found that majority (83.3%) of girls knew that menstruation is a physiological process, 52% knew that it is caused by hormone. More than half of the respondents (53.9%) were taught about menstruation by their mother. Only 33.3% of the respondents used sanitary pad during menstruation. Adolescent girls still have different type of restrictions during menstruation like not being allowed to cook food, not being allowed to visit holy places and sleep in own house during menarche.

Conclusion: Socio-cultural restrictions regarding menstruation still persist and knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls was found to be unsatisfactory. So, the girls should be educated about the process of menstruation, use of proper pads for absorbents and its proper disposal. This can be achieved by giving them proper training and health education by teachers, family members, health educators, and media so that there won't be any misconception to the adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene.

Key words: Adolescent girls, Knowledge, Menstrual hygiene, Practice

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is defined as the period from the onset of puberty to the termination of physical growth and attainment of final adult height and characteristics. It is characterized by rapid physical growth, significant emotional, psychological and spiritual changes. It is also a period of greatly enhanced awareness and attention to physical status and well being. Adolescence is characterized by appearance of secondary sex characteristics, sexual and reproductive maturity, development of mental process and adult identity. It is period of transition from childhood to adulthood¹.

Adolescence is a significant period in the life of a woman. Adolescent girls often lack knowledge regarding reproductive health including menstruation which can be due to socio-cultural barriers in which they grow up. These barriers create various problems for the adolescent girls. The present need of the girls is to have proper information, education and favorable environment to cope with menstruation issues².

The hygiene-related practices of girls in the adolescent period related to menstruation can have effects on their health². The event of menarche may be associated with taboos and myths existing in our traditional society which has a negative implication for women's health, particularly their menstrual hygiene³.

In our society, parents do not communicate about sexual characteristics with their growing girls. The taboos surrounding this issue prevent girls and women from

Address for correspondence

Puspa Parajuli
Lecturer, B. Sc. Nursing Department
Kathmandu Medical College
Sinamangal, Kathmandu, Nepal
E-mail: pusparajulidahal@gmail.com

communicating their needs and problems; which is the main reason for adopting unhygienic practices during menstruation. It is an important issue which needs free and open discussions. Before bringing any change in menstrual practices, they should be educated about the facts of menstruation and its physiological implications. The girls should be educated about the significance of menstruation and development of secondary sexual characteristics, selection of a suitable sanitary absorbent and its proper disposal⁴.

Menstruation and its practices are still clouded by taboos and socio-cultural restrictions resulting in ignorance of the scientific facts and hygienic health practices in adolescent girls, which sometimes result in adverse health outcomes⁵. Attitude of parents and society about discussing the related issues are barriers to the right kind of information, especially in the rural areas. Menstruation is thus construed to be a matter of embarrassment in most of the cultures. It was therefore decided to conduct a study to explore the knowledge and practices regarding menstrual hygiene among the adolescent girls of rural areas of Bayarban-8, Morang and to recommend interventions for improving health among adolescent girls.

METHODS

Descriptive cross sectional study was done. The study was conducted in Shree Jansewa Higher Secondary School of Bayarban Village Development Committee, Morang District. This is a government school having access to most of the students of the village. Total 102 adolescent girls from the age group 13 to 17 years and those who already had menarche were included in the study. Census sampling method was applied to meet the objectives of the study.

Data were collected from the students who were available at the time of data collection. Predesigned, pretested structured, self administered questionnaires were used for data collection. For ethical consideration, research proposal was approved from the institutional review committee of Kathmandu Medical College. Approval for data collection was obtained from the concerned authority of school, and verbal consent was obtained from each respondent of the study. Data was collected by principal researcher herself from November 13, 2015 to December 15, 2015. Confidentiality of the obtained information was maintained by using code numbers instead of respondent's names in the instrument. Data was edited, coded and analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 16. Descriptive statistics like frequency, mean, standard deviation and

percentage were used.

RESULTS

The study showed that age of the respondents (N=102) varied from 13-17 years. The overall mean age of the respondents was 15.098 years and standard deviation was 0.980 years. Majority (53.9%) belonged to class ten. Most of the respondents (78.4%) were Hindus followed by Christian 3.9%. All father & mother of respondents were reported literate. Service was the occupation of father of 32.4% respondents and most of the mothers of the respondents were house workers (35.3%) (Table 1).

Regarding knowledge of menstrual hygiene, majority (83.3%) of the respondents stated that menstruation is physiological bleeding from the uterus. Majority (68.6%) of the respondents stated that normal menstrual flow is 3- 5 days. Two thirds (66.7%) of the respondents knew that the normal menstrual cycle is 26 -30 days and 43.1% of the respondents stated that normal age at menarche is 12 years. More than half (52%) of the respondents knew that causes of menstruation is hormone. Only 35.3% of the respondents correctly answered that the source of the bleeding in menstruation is from uterus. Majority (42.2%) of respondents stated that pad should be burnt (Table 2).

Majority (87.3%) of the respondents stated that perineal hygiene is necessary during menstruation. Among 89 respondents, 43.9% stated that it is necessary to have knowledge about perineal hygiene to prevent from infection and disease and only 21.3% did not know the exact reason. Majority (86.3%) of the respondents stated that it is necessary to have knowledge about menstruation prior to menarche whereas only 13.6% stated that there is no need of knowledge. Among 88 of the respondents, 46.7% stated that it will make them easier in future. Majority (50.9%) of the respondents stated that their mother was the main source of information regarding menstruation (Table 3).

More than half (55.9%) of the respondents slept in their own house during menarche. Majority (91.2%) of the respondents went to school during period. Majority (73.5%) of the respondents reported that menstruating girls were not allowed cooking food. Majority (94.1%) of the respondents do not visit holy places during period. Only 33.3% of the respondents used sanitary pad during menstruation. Majority (65.7%) of the respondents did not reuse the pads. Majority (72.5%) of the respondents reported that they were aware to clean perineal area during menstruation. More than half of the respondents are taught about menstruation by their mother (Table 4).

Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of respondents (n=102)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age in years	13	4	3.9
	14	26	25.5
	15	34	33.3
	16	32	31.4
	17	6	5.9
Class	9	47	47.1
	10	55	53.9
Religion	Hindu	80	78.4
	Buddhist	18	17.6
	Christian	4	3.9
Father's occupation	Agriculture	30	29.4
	Service	33	32.4
	Labour	18	17.6
	Business	21	20.6
	House work	36	35.3
Mother's occupation	Agriculture	25	24.5
	Service	17	16.6
	Labour	20	19.6
	Business	4	3.9
	House work	36	35.3

Table 2: Knowledge regarding Mensuration

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Knowledge regarding menstruation	Physiological	85	83.3
Normal menstrual flow	3 - 5 days	70	68.6
	5 - 7 days	32	31.4
Normal menstrual cycle	26 - 30days	68	66.7
	30- 35days	34	33.3
Normal age of menarche	12 years	44	43.1
	13 years	31	30.4
	14 years	26	25.5
	15 years	1	1.0
Causes of menstruation	Hormone	53	52
	Maturity	49	48
Source of menstrual bleeding	Uterus	36	35.3
	Vagina	60	58.8
	Bladder	5	4.9
	Fallopian tube	1	1
Material used as absorbent	Sanitary pads	39	38.2
	Pieces of clothes	30	29.4
	Both (sanitary pads & pieces of clothes)	33	32.4
Disposal of pads	Dustbin	10	9.8
	Mud	36	35.3
	Burn	43	42.2
	Keep packing	13	12.7

Table 3: Knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene(n=102)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Necessity of perineal hygiene	Yes	89	87.3
	No	13	12.7
Reasons			
To prevent from infection		39	43.9
To be healthy		31	34.8
Don't know		19	21.3
Necessity of knowledge about menstruation prior to menarche	Yes	88	86.3
	No	14	13.7
Reasons:			
To be healthy		27	30.7
So that it will be easier in future		41	46.7
For ease of child birth		8	9
Don't know		12	13.6
Source of information regarding menstruation	Course book	9	8.9
	Teacher	20	19.6
	Mother	52	50.9
	Sister	6	5.9
	Friend	15	14.7

Table 4: Practice regarding menstruation hygiene (n=102)

Variables	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Sleeping in own house during menarche	57	55.9	45	44.1
Going to school during period	93	91.2	9	8.8
Cooking food during period	27	26.5	75	73.5
Visiting holy place during period	6	5.9	96	94.1
Using pads during periods	99	97.1	3	2.9
What is the material used in pad?				
-Sanitary pads	34	33.3		
-Piece of Clothes	41	40.2		
-Both	27	26.5		
Reusing of pads	35	34.3	67	65.7
Hand washing after changing pads	58	56.9	44	43.1
Clean perineal area for menstrual purpose	74	72.5	28	27.5
Mother teaching about menstrual hygiene	55	53.9	47	46.1

DISCUSSION

This study shows that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 13 to 17 years with maximum number of girls between 15 and 16 years of age. Similar study conducted by Gupta et al⁶ reported that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 14 to 17 years with maximum number of girls between 14 and 15 years of age.

Finding of the study showed that majority (83.3%) of the respondents considered menstruation as a normal physiological process which is consistent with study by Dasgupta et al⁶ where 86.25% girls believed it as a physiological process. In contrast, with the study by Adhikari et al only 6% of girls were reporting that menstruation is a normal physiological process⁴.

The findings of the study revealed that more than half (52%) of the respondent correctly answered hormone is the cause of menstruation, whereas in a similar study conducted by Adhikari et al⁴. Only 36.7% knew that the cause is hormone.

This study showed that majority of the girls used old piece of clothes rather than sanitary pads as menstrual absorbent. Only 33.3% girls used sanitary pads during menstruation. Study conducted in Gujarat by Ninama et al. 60% girls used sanitary pads⁷.

The main source of knowledge regarding menstruation was mother (50.9%). Study conducted by Ninama reported that the mother (83%) was the main source of knowledge⁷.

In accordance to the findings from this study, 43.9% knew that proper hygiene helps to prevent infection, which is consistent with the findings from other study⁸.

In this study, it is found that majority of the respondents were not allowed to cook food and visit religious places which is similar to the findings in the study conducted in Gujarat⁴.

Different restrictions were practiced by most of the girls in the present study, possibly due to their ignorance and socio cultural restriction regarding menstruation.

Before bringing any change in menstrual practices, the girls should be educated about the facts of menstruation, physiological implications, significance of menstruation, development of secondary sexual characteristics, and about proper hygienic practices with selection of disposable sanitary menstrual absorbent. The proper menstrual hygiene, correct perceptions and beliefs may lower the risk of suffering from reproductive tract infections in the future.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that knowledge and practice regarding menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls was not satisfactory. The ignorance, false perceptions, unsafe practices regarding menstruation are found to be quite common problems. There is a need to provide proper education to prepare them with skills regarding safe and hygienic practices during menstruation and to enable them to lead towards healthy reproductive life.

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