

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM): AN IMPORTANT PART OF EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is the most important physiological occurrence in adolescent girls. It ensures the physiological maturity in their lives. Once arrived, it then becomes the most frequent guest to visit them every month till they achieve menopause. Though it is merely a physiological process, simply put, is blood and tissue sloughed from the endometrium, or lining of the uterus (**Bhardwaj & Patkar, 2004**). However in India, it is attached with so many taboos, social and cultural conditions and also the silence attached with it sometimes takes the toll of adolescent's health in present and coming future. Thus, proper menstrual hygiene information is necessary for any adolescent or becoming one soon to prepare before occurrence of menarche to curtail the risk of future infections like Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) or any other major health issue.

The Water, sanitation And Hygiene (WASH) sector had long ignored menstruation, treating it as a taboo subject like many other, but the issue (MHM) is now the topic of concerns for various nations esp. the low income countries (including India). As a result, to mark the importance of MHM, In 2014, 28 May was declared as the Menstrual Hygiene Day. It was an attempt to break the silence and raise awareness regarding the importance of MHM (**Joshi et al., 2009**).

The Global community since long had been calling for the narrowing of the gender gaps in

education in low income countries (**Sommer, 2013**). Despite this continues calls for the importance to girl's education, schools in low income countries continue to lack basic water and sanitation related facilities required for any adolescent girl, who on a monthly basis has to manage her personal menstrual hygiene needs.

MHM is a problem for adolescent girls esp. in low and middle income countries (including India), particularly when attending school (**Sahin & Sommer, 2013**). Poor water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools, lack of MHM items, and inadequate puberty education cause adolescents to experience menstruation as uncomfortable and shameful (**McMohan et al., 2011**). Hence present study is an attempt to throw some light on the importance of this important subject. The study purely based on secondary data.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Few studies based on qualitative data, reported girl's fear and humiliation from leaking of blood which lead menstruating girls to be absent from school during menstruation days (**Adukia, 2014; Bodat et al., 2013**). The taboos associated with Menstruation add to further difficulties for adolescents, preventing them from seeking help, if needed (**Chothe et al., 2014; Narayan et al., 2001**). And the taboos not only restrict the adolescent's physical activities but also restrict them from consuming specific foods (**Das et al., 2015; Sumpter, 2013**).

Improper MHM knowledge may also result in medical condition such as RTIs or urinary and genital tract infections etc (Anand & Unisa, 2015). Recent international concern for MHM internationally, WASH in schools got to get improved, has now focusing on the need for dignity and privacy, breaking the silence, towards making MHM absorbents accessible, and also to improve the school WASH environment which include separate toilets for girls, cleansing material and safe disposal of soiled material (Sommer, 2013; Alexander et al., 2014).

India is a country of diversified cultures, with extreme poverty and wealth and gender related disparities. Out of the 113 million adolescents girls, only 68 million attend the schools with poor MHM education provided and thus it affects their school attendance (Thakur et al., 2014). Recognising the importance of MHM internationally, the Government of India initiated number of programmes and policies implemented at state level (Muralidharan et al., 2015).

RESULTS

PREMANARCHE AWARENESS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Maximum studies reported to pooled poor MHM knowledge before menarche which if given properly would have lessened the fear among adolescents regarding menstruation. The studies also revealed the In India, awareness regarding MHM found to be more in the East and West of India than to the North. And also Mothers found to be the main informant of adolescents.

KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF MENSTRUATION AND KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

Only the quarter of studies revealed that the adolescents had the knowledge about uterus is the source of bleeding during menstruation rest didn't

know the exact place. Mothers found out to be the most common information source and so the friends and relatives in few whereas teachers, media and health workers remained at the least in the list of informants.

TYPE OF MENSTRUAL ABSORBENT USED

While in most the studies, girls living in urban areas reported commercial pads to be the more common used absorbent during menstruation, rural girls reported to use cloth more. None of the study of India reported the usage of menstrual cups. Economic considerations found to be the main component if using cloth instead of commercial pads.

DISPOSAL OF ABSORBENTS

Disposal in urban settings found to be mainly through burning of napkins and throwing it directly in waste bins while in rural settings, burying and throwing the cloth in public places found to be common.

HYGIENE DURING MENSTRUATION

Daily baths during menstruation found to be less in most studies comparing to other non menstruating days. Other studies reported the bathing restrictions imposed upon for girls during menstruation due to fear of problematic pregnancies in future.

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM

Most of the studies reported on school absenteeism associated with menstruation reasons reported were physical discomfort, lack of water, hygiene and disposal facilities in the school toilets, fear of staining clothes, and restrictions imposed by the society.

RESTRICTIONS

Restrictions during menstruation found to be common in maximum studies. Most common one was the restriction in visiting places of worship, and touching items of praying, other reported were food restrictions, restriction in cooking, bathing, exercise and attending social function were also found in few.

CONCLUSION

Overall the review found that numerous studies report girls being caught unaware by menarche, and to the information related to it. While the importance of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) was internationally recognized the question of who should educate the girls about it is debated in our country. Mothers being the main informant reported should be educated at first about the subject so as to deliver the appropriate knowledge. Therefore a MHM package needs to be strengthened in every school (public or private) and the girls should be supported, given the right environment they deserve to be grown equally like men.

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