



ISSN: 2456-0057
IJPNPE 2018; 3(1): 1617-1620
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www.journalofsports.com
Received: 28-11-2017
Accepted: 29-12-2017

Sudha Tiwari
Research Scholar, Dept of Food
& Nutrition, RDVV, Jabalpur,
Madhya Pradesh, India

Anita Joshi
CDPO ICDS Urban-1 Project,
WCD Indore, Madhya Pradesh,
India

VN Rathore
Assistant Director, Women &
Child Development Department,
Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

Menstrual hygiene practices among slum adolescent girls of urban Indore

Sudha Tiwari, Anita Joshi and VN Rathore

Abstract

To assess menstrual hygiene practices and imposed restriction during menstruation, a total of 170 adolescent girls (12-18 year) from aaganwadi centers of urban slum Indore area were selected. Data collected by questionnaire method. Results showed that only 36.19% girls were aware regarding menarche. Majority (68%) of adolescent were using sanitary pad. Higher percentage (52.6%) of girls was using 2 pads/day. Cloth using girls were also practising the re-use (44 out of 52) of same cloth after washing with or without detergent and antiseptic for a period of 1 to several months. Various disposal methods have been used by girls including throwing in dust bin (84%), flushing (13%) and burning (3%). The main underlying causes of using old cloth was money issue among slum girls. It was found that about 10% of the slum adolescent girls were not attending school during their menstruation. Out of 94% girls getting iron folic acid tablet only 64% of the girls were consuming it. Also, majority (99.1%) of the study population following various types of restriction during their menstrual periods. Above finding shows prevalent religious beliefs and taboos of society need to be removed that creates significant barrier to dignified experience with menstrual hygiene management.

Keywords: Menstrual hygiene practice, slum adolescent girls, absorbent material, Aaganwadi Center (AWC)

1. Introduction

Menstruation has been a taboo until date in Indian society and considered as something unclean or dirty ^[1] that creates significant barrier to dignified experience with menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls. However, scientifically, it is known that menstruation is the ovulation followed by missed chance of pregnancy that results in bleeding ^[2]. The first menstruation is often horrifying and traumatic to an adolescent girl because it usually occurs without her knowing about it ^[3]. Adolescent girls generally unaware about physiological changes associated with the onset of puberty. They hardly get any opportunity to learn about menstruation. Good hygiene, such as use of sanitary pads and adequate washing of the genital area, is necessary during menstruation. Unavailability of facilities for menstrual hygiene like sanitary napkins, toilets in schools, availability of water, privacy and safe disposal restrain school attendance and leads to infections during period. The kind of absorbent used during menstruation is the key subject. The issue of disposal of napkins/ absorbent material in slums poses a big environmental hazard where the living conditions are usually unhealthy ^[5]. This study assessed the experiences of adolescent girls from the perspective of their practices regarding menstrual hygiene. The findings could be beneficial for planning a program for improving the awareness level and promoting slum adolescent girls quality of life. Hence, the present study was carried out with the objective to assess the practices followed during menstruation among adolescent girls and to analyse the restrictions imposed to adolescent girls during menstruation.

2. Subjects and Methods

Total 170 adolescent girls (12-18 year) of aaganwadi centers of Indore urban slum were present in the study area. After obtaining informed consent, information regarding menstrual hygiene was recorded in predesigned, pre-tested and structured questionnaire in the study. The menstrual hygiene questionnaire included queries about the type of absorbent which was used,

Correspondence
Sudha Tiwari
Research Scholar, Dept of Food
& Nutrition, RDVV, Jabalpur,
Madhya Pradesh, India

the use of napkins/ cotton fabric, frequencies of changing, washing and cleaning methods, and toilet facilities in schools are included. The information about personal hygiene included washing and bathing during menses, iron tablet consumption etc. The MS office excel was used for data analysis and processing.

3. Results & Discussion

A total of 170 adolescent girls approached in present study of 12 to 19 years age group. Out of 170 adolescent girls 11 girls were found out to be school dropout. Table 1 depicts that only 36.19% girls were aware regarding menstruation prior to the attainment of menarche. This may be due to ignorance and low level of education among mothers of adolescent girls. It was observed that 100% adolescent girls in slum were aware of sanitary pad availability in the market.

Table 1: Knowledge and Pattern regarding menstruation of respondents

Knowledge regarding menstruation	Percentage (%)
knowledge of menarche(n=170)	
Yes	36%
No	64%
knowledge of availability of sanitary pads(n=170)	
Yes	100%
No	Nil
Source of information of sanitary pads availability	
Family	41%
Aganwadi centers	35%
Media advertisement	16%
school	8%
Point of purchase of sanitary pads	
Market	55%
Aaganwadi center	42%
school	3%

It was found that 55 % adolescent slums girls were purchasing sanitary pads from the local market while 42% girls from their aaganwadi center and only 3% from their school. In present study 41.29% girls reported family as a first source of information regarding sanitary pads availability (table no. 1). Close relation and better communication between female family members and adolescent girl may be the reason for above finding while 35% slum girl's source of information were aaganwadi workers and 16% girls got the information of sanitary pad from media and 6% from their school.

According to table 2, it is evident that out of total 170 interviewed girls, 68% were using sanitary napkins as absorbent during menstruation; however, 32% were using

household cotton cloth materials. The type of absorbent material used during menses is of primary concern since reusable material could be a source of infection if improperly cleaned. Higher percentage of girls, 52.6% were using 2 pads/day, 37% girls 3 times and 11% girls were changing their pads more than 3 times a day during their menstrual period. The reuse of cloth material was practiced by only 83% (44) girls and of which only 40 girls were using soap (detergent) to clean the cloth material. Also, it was analysed cloth using girls were drying it in sunlight and that small percent of girls in hidden way which can be potential infectious.

Table 2: Hygienic practices of slum adolescent girls during menstruation

Hygienic Practices	Frequency (%)	Hygienic Practices	Frequency (%)
Material used		Re-use of cotton cloth	
Sanitary napkins	117(68%)	Yes	44
cotton cloth	53(32%)	No	9
No. of pads / day		Washed with material	
2	52%	Water and detergent	40
3	37%	Water only	4
+3	11%	antiseptic	nil
Drying of cotton cloth		Bath during Menstrual period	
Outside house in sunlight	41	Yes	100%
Hiding within other cloths	12	No	Nil
Duration of using cotton after washing(n=170)		Cleaning material of external genital	
1 month	21	Soap	71%
2 month	14	Water only	21%
More than 2 month	18	antiseptic	8%
Wrapping of pad from paper before disposal		Disposal of pads / clothes	
Yes	86%	Throw in public dust bin	84%
No	14%	Flush it	13%
		Burn it	3%

The practices of personal hygiene including bath during menstruation and cleaning of external genital parts were followed by 100% and 79.2% girls respectively. Only about 71% of the girls had the habit of washing their external

genitalia with soap and water during their periods and 21 % were using only water for cleaning. During menstruation girl needs to practice a high level of personal hygiene during her menstrual periods

Higher percentages (86%) of girls were practiced sanitary method of disposal of materials i.e. they wrapped the sanitary pad/cloth with paper before disposal. Various disposal methods have been used by girls including throwing in dust bin (84%), flushing (13%) and burning (3%). If the absorbents are not properly disposed off, animals often dig it out which serves as a reservoir of infection and pollutant for

environment.

Table 3 presented shows major causes of choosing old cloth as absorbent material over sanitary pad is money issue in 57% girls and 29% girls informed to be unreadiness or out of stock at the time of menstruation and the rest of the girls still feeling shame in purchasing sanitary pads.

Table 3: Reasons of choosing type of absorbent material during menstruation

Reasons of choosing Pad/ Cloth during menstruation (n=13/170)	Percentage (%)
Reasons of using cotton cloth(13/150)	
Money constrain	57 %
Out of stock of sanitary pads at the time of menstruation	29%
Shame in purchasing sanitary pads	14%
Reasons of using sanitary pad(137/150)	
Easy to use	40 %
More comfortable than cloth	33%
Long lasting	8%
More hygienic	7%
More dryness	5%
No spotting	5%
No rashes	2%

However, a large number of the adolescent girls preferred sanitary pads over cloth life during menstruation due to its numerous quality like easiness of use, comfortableness, long lasting more hygienic, better absorbency than cloth etc.

Other patters during menstruation like of school going and iron tablet consumption by adolescent girls is illustrated in table 4. It was found that about 10% of the girls were not attending school during their menstruation. It might be due pain, uncomfortable or lack of toilet facility in the school

campus. Also, 4% girls don't have toilets in their school and 19% school toilets didn't have dustbin or the disposal of sanitary pads.

Iron folic acid tablets are being to the adolescent girls by ICDS and schools as well out of which majority of the girls (94%) are getting IFA tablet from the aaganwadi center and 6% from the school. However, only 64% of the girls are using the IFA tablets. This shows the lack of health awareness among adolescent in slum areas.

Table 4: School and IIFA tablet consumption of adolescent girls

School and IIFA tablet consumption of adolescent girls	Percentage (%)
Attend school during menstruation	
Yes	90%
no	10%
Toilet facility in school	
Yes	96%
no	4%
Dustbin in school toilet	
Yes	81%
No	19%
Regular consumption of IFA tablet	
Yes	64%
no	46%
Source of IFA tablet collection (96/150)	
Aaganwadi center	94%
school	6%

Table 5 illustrates various restrictions still in practice during menstruation. Majority of the study population (99.1%) avoided religious places and about (58.6%) of adolescent girls

restricted the use of certain type of food (sour) during their menstrual periods

Table 5: Restrictions practiced during menstruation among adolescent girls

Restriction practiced during menstruation	Number (%)
Religious occasions	99%
Certain types of foods	58%
Routine household work	43%
Entering into kitchen	39%
Playing	17%
Attending school	3%
Sleeping on bed	12%
Touching other family members	nil

Restriction from doing routine household work was observed in 43% girls and 39% girls restricted into entering kitchen. Girls restricted from playing and sleeping on bed noted in 17% and 12% respectively. To tackle these deep rooted social belief, roles of male members is pertinent, they should understand about it and raise their voice against these unhealthy practices. Awareness camp by Aaganwadi workers, school teachers and primary health care center (PHC) physician can be an effective strategy in menstrual hygiene practices and taboos dismissal.

4. Conclusion

This study was conducted to ascertain menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls. It can be concluded that average population of the girls had good practices of menstrual hygiene in urban slum area. Although, lack of appropriate and sufficient information about menstrual hygiene and health can be attributed to religious beliefs and taboos which can be removed by the help of aaganwadi workers and teachers. Also, each and every girl child should be aware about menstruation, a mother should be the main informant at this tender age.

5. Recommendation

- Every girl child should be aware about menstruation prior to menarche, ideally by mother
- Mothers and other old female family members of the girls should be involved for encouraging the hygiene practice use of sanitary pads over old cloth.
- Awareness campaign of menstrual hygiene should be organized in schools and Aaganwaadi to break the stigma and changing the mindset of the girls.
- Toilet and dustbin should be ensured in all school for maintaining the good hygiene practice in school.

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