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Research Article

An Exploratory Study to Assess the Myths Related to Menstruation Among Students in a Selected University of Delhi

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A B S T R A C T

Background: Menstruation is a natural biological process unique to girls. In India, it has always been surrounded by some baseless, untrue, and unscientific myths and taboos that have immense negative impact on the emotional, socio-cultural, educational, lifestyle, and physical health of girls and women. Limited knowledge and understanding about menstruation are the main obstructions to addressing those taboos and misconceptions.

Methodology: The research approach adopted for the study was a quantitative approach with an exploratory research design. The tool developed for the data collection was a structured checklist. The sample consisted of 200 undergraduate students from the Schools of Law and Biotechnology at Jamia Hamdard. Samples were selected by convenient sampling.

Results: The maximum number of students, i.e., 48%, were in the age group between 17 and 19 years; regarding religion, 44% were Hindu and Muslim each; 72% were from nuclear families, and the majority got the first-time information about menstruation from social media. The majority of the students, i.e., 92%, supported the myth that a missed menstruation is always a sign of pregnancy; 89% believed that one can't touch plants during menstruation and, doing so, plants will die, whereas 65% believed that intercourse during the menstrual cycle will cause infection in partners, and two women who spend time together sync their period dates.

Conclusion: The majority of subjects were aware of the myths related to menstruation. Further, educational and awareness programs could be conducted to improve menstrual health and dispel myths and misconceptions related to menstruation.

Keywords: Menstruation, Myths, Students

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Introduction

The natural process by which blood leaves the uterus through the vagina is called menstruation. It starts in girls often belonging to the age group of 11–14 years and is one of the signs that indicate the initiation of puberty. In many communities, this phenomenon has long been shrouded in mystery and secrecy, even though it is specific to girls. Women and girls are unable to participate in various things due to taboos associated with them. While some of these are beneficial, others may have negative effects. Earlier, it was considered taboo to even bring up any discussion related to it in India, and the societal and cultural pressures still seem to be impeding the increase in awareness on the subject. It is still viewed as filthy and unclean in many sections of India. The tale of this phenomenon being considered to be impure and dirty has its roots in the Vedic era. Additionally, it is forbidden in Hinduism for women to engage in various daily activities during menstruation.[1]

The objective of the study was to assess the myths related to menstruation among students in a selected university of Delhi. The study design used under the study was a descriptive research design using a quantitative research approach. The study was conducted for undergraduate students of the School of Law and School of Biotechnology, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, from May to July 2024. A convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 200 undergraduate students from the School of Law and the School of Biotechnology from Jamia Hamdard. Formal written permission was obtained from the administrative heads of the schools before initiating data collection. The data collection period for the study was from 5th May 2024 to 10th July 2024. The purpose of the study was explained to the students. Confidentiality was assured to all the subjects to get cooperation, and informed consent was taken. The investigator established a good rapport and took consent from each participant. A self-structured questionnaire was formed to assess the sociodemographic data of the samples. A structured checklist consisting of 23 items was administered to 200 students to assess the myths related to menstruation among the samples. The average time taken for completing the checklist was 10-15 minutes. Socio-demographic variables and myths related to menstruation were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency, and percentage.

Results

SECTION I: - Finding related to the demographic data of the subjects.

Table 1 describes demographic data of the subjects on age, religion, program of study, year of study, first source of information about menstruation. Age wise distribution of the students revealed that out of 200 students, 96 (48%) of students were in the age group between 17-19 years, 88 (44%) of students were in the age group between 20-22 years , 14(7%) were in the age group between 23-25 years and 2(1%) were above 25 years of age. Regarding religion; 88 (44%) were Hindu, 88 (44%) were Muslim, 20 (10%) were Christian and 4 (2%) were Buddhist. As per type of family; 28% lived in joint family while 72% in nuclear family. In relation to year of study; maximum of students, 84 (42%) were in first year of study followed by 76(38%) in second year of study followed by 40(20%) of students in third year of study. Regarding source of information for first time about menstruation, majority of the students i.e. 120 (60%) got the information from social media followed by 30 (15%) from siblings and teachers each and 20 (10%) got from parents.

Table 1.Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Sample Characteristics of University Undergraduate Students

n=200

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years): (a) 17-19 (b) 20-22 (c) 23-25 (d) >25	 96 88 14 2	 48 44 07 1
Religion: (a) Hinduism (b) Islam (c) Christianity (d) Buddhism (e) Others	 88 88 20 04 0	 44 44 10 02 0
Type of family a) Nuclear b) Joint	 144 56	 72 28

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Program of study: (a) Bachelors of Law (b) Bachelors of food technology	128 72	64 36
Year of study: (a) First year (b) Second year (c) Third Year	84 76 40	42 38 20
Source of information for first time about menstruation a) Parents b) Teachers c) Siblings/ friends d) Social Media e) Any other	20 30 30 120 0	10 15 15 60 0

Table 2.Frequency & Percentage Distribution of Myths Related to Menstruation Among Students

n=200

S.No	Items	Yes– Frequency (f)	Yes– Percentage (%)	No– Frequency (f)	No– Percentage (%)
1	Eating pickles has a negative impact on menstruation	66	33%	134	67%
2	Hot water bag eases menstrual pain	186	93%	14	7%
3	Milk and dairy products delay menstruation	30	15%	170	85%
4	Pain killers can be taken for severe menstrual pain	146	73%	54	27%
5	Drinking hot beverages is helpful in relieving pain during menstruation	154	77%	46	23%
6	Consumption of sour fruits like gooseberries, lemon, orange, etc. can cause early menstruation	60	30%	140	70%
7	Blood released during menstruation is impure	100	50%	100	50%
8	Menstruation should occur exactly after 28 days	60	30%	140	70%
9	Menarche indicates readiness for marriage and intercourse	40	20%	160	80%
10	Menstruation should not be discussed publicly	22	11%	178	89%
11	Mood swings are normal during menstruation	190	95%	10	5%
12	A missed menstruation is always a sign of pregnancy	184	92%	16	8%
13	Intercourse during menstrual cycle will cause infection in partners	130	65%	70	35%
14	Two women who spend time together sync their period dates	130	65%	70	35%

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15	Women should not enter temple/ religious places during periods as they are considered impure	60	30%	140	70%
16	Touch of menstruating women can spoil food	20	10%	180	90%
17	Girls during menstruation should sleep in a separate room	12	6%	188	94%
18	You cannot exercise during your period	32	16%	168	84%
19	During menstruation sports are to be avoided	32	16%	168	84%
20	Washing of hair should not be done during menstruation	56	28%	136	68%
21	Having sex during menstruation can cause pregnancy	136	68%	64	32%
22	You can't touch plants during menstruation and by doing so plants will die	178	89%	22	11%
23	Women can't cradle/handle babies during menstruation as babies will get sick	20	10%	180	90%

SECTION II: - Finding related to myths related to menstruation

Table 2 shows the description of myths related to menstruation among students. The majority of the students, i.e., 184 (92%), supported the myth that a missed menstruation is always a sign of pregnancy, and 178 (89%) believed that one can't touch plants during menstruation and by doing so plants will die. A similar number of students, i.e., 130 (65%), believed that intercourse during the menstrual cycle will cause infection in partners, and two women who spend time together sync their period dates. 100 (50%) students believed that blood released during menstruation is impure. 66 (33%) students believed that eating pickles has a negative impact on menstruation. A similar number of students, i.e., 60 (30%), believed that consumption of sour fruits like gooseberries, lemons, oranges, etc. can cause early menstruation and menstruation should occur exactly after 28 days. 64 (28%) students believed that washing of hair should not be done during menstruation. 54 (27%) of students believed that painkillers cannot be taken for severe menstrual pain. A total of 46 (23%) students believed drinking hot beverages is not helpful in relieving pain during menstruation. 40 (20%) students believed that menarche indicates readiness for marriage and intercourse. A similar number of students, i.e., 32 (16%), believed that one cannot exercise during periods and sports are to be avoided. 30 (15%) students believed that milk and dairy products delay your menstruation. 22(11%) believed that menstruation should not be discussed publicly. 20 (10%) students believed that menstruating women can spoil food by touch, and 20 (10%) students felt that women can't cradle/handle babies during menstruation, as babies will get sick. 12 (6%) of students believe that girls during menstruation should sleep in a separate room. 10 (5%) students didn't believe that mood swings are normal during menstruation.

Discussion

The major findings of the study show that 184 (92%) supported the myth that a missed menstruation is always a sign of pregnancy and 178 (89%) believed that you can't touch plants during menstruation; if you do, they will die. A similar number of students, i.e., 130 (65%), believed that intercourse during the menstrual cycle will cause infection in partners, and two women who spend time together sync their period dates. 100 (50%) students believed that blood released during menstruation is impure. These findings are similar to a study conducted by Patil R. et al. on household women, where it was found that approximately two-thirds of the participants (65.4%) believed that menstruating blood is dirty and women should take a bath after menstruation in order to purify themselves. Approximately 97% of illiterate and 90% of literate participants agreed that certain activities should not be allowed for menstruating women. Prohibition of entry into a temple was mentioned by almost all (100%) of the respondents.[2]

Another study by Sabiya A et al. on menstrual myths among tribal females supported the present study findings, where

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the author reported that the tribal women believed that menstrual blood is dirty blood that does not come out of the body when one misses her period, eating hot food during menstruation helps in early cleansing or expelling of the menstrual blood, menstruation is a symbol of psychological and physical maturity among females, bathing during menstruation causes cessation/stoppage of menstrual blood, bathing during menstruation leads to impurity or contamination of body, women must hide menstrual protection product/material because ones whose blood-stained clothes are seen by others is a great sinner, Sex during menstruation is a great sin, Disposal of used sanitary materials by burning leads to infertility.[3]

Recommendations

A similar study can be conducted on a large sample with a different research design and approach. Menstrual hygiene should be taught to all students of all disciplines at school as well as at the undergraduate level to promote the overall health of females through knowledge of healthy practices.

Conclusion

On the basis of findings of the study, the most common myth among the students was that a missed menstruation is always a sign of pregnancy, followed by one can't touch plants during menstruation; if they do, plants will die. Taking into account India's technological development and social changes, it is time to change our mindset and bust the irrational beliefs and myths related to menstruation.

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