



# A study of common cultural practices, restrictions and preparedness regarding menstruation among school going adolescent girls in a rural block of Haryana

Garima Sangwan<sup>\*1</sup>, B.M Vashisht<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

### Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined adolescence as the age group of 10-19 years. Adolescence is a transition phase through which a child becomes an adult. It is characterized by rapid growth and development; physiologically, psychologically and socially. Adolescence in girls has been recognized as a special period in their life cycle that requires due attention.

### Objectives

To study common cultural practices, restrictions and preparedness regarding menstruation among rural school going adolescent girls.

### Methods

There were 18 government high and senior secondary schools in block Lakhanmajra. Out of these 5 were exclusively girls' schools, 10 were co-ed schools and 3 were exclusively boys' schools. All the 5 schools meant exclusively for girls were included in the study. All girls studying in 6th to 12th classes from these schools, after applying the exclusion criteria were included in the study.

### Statistical Analysis performed

Percentages and proportions.

### Results

Around 95% of the girls had restrictions during menstruation. 38.0% of the girls reported that they were unprepared for menstruation after menarche.

### Conclusion

If girls do not understand or are inadequately informed about the process of menstruation, they are not prepared for their first menstruation.

**Keywords:** Menstruation, Cultural Practices, Restrictions

## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined adolescence as the age group of 10-19 years.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescence is a transition phase through which a child becomes an adult. It is characterized by rapid growth and development; physiologically, psychologically and socially. Adolescence in girls has

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<sup>1</sup>PG Resident, Department of Community Medicine, PGIMS, Rohtak

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Community Medicine, PGIMS, Rohtak

\*Corresponding Author:

Garima Sangwan

PG Resident, Department of Community Medicine, PGIMS, Rohtak

[sangwan.garimago@gmail.com](mailto:sangwan.garimago@gmail.com)

Telephone No. 9416530404

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been recognized as a special period in their life cycle that requires due attention. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in India and the reaction to menstruation depends upon awareness and knowledge about the subject. The manner in which a girl learns about menstruation and its associated changes may have an impact on her response to the event of menarche. Although menstruation is a natural process, it is linked with several misconceptions and practices, which sometimes result into adverse health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Menstruation is still a taboo in India and it is common for people across society to feel uncomfortable about the subject. Coupled with it, is the fact that there is lack of information on the process of menstruation, and proper requirements for managing menstruation. The taboos surrounding this issue in the society prevent girls and women from articulating their needs and the problems of poor menstrual hygiene management have been largely ignored or misunderstood. Good menstrual hygiene is crucial for the health, education, and dignity of girls and women. Equipping adolescent girls with adequate information and skills on menstrual hygiene and its management helps in empowering them with knowledge which enhances their self-esteem and positively impacts academic performance.

## OBJECTIVE

To study the common cultural practices and restrictions during menstruation among rural school going adolescent girls.

## METHODS

### Material and Methods

The study was carried out in community development block Lakhan Majra which is a rural field practice area attached to Department of Community Medicine, PGIMS, Rohtak.

### Study population

There were 18 government high and senior secondary schools in block Lakhan Majra. Out of these 5 were exclusively girls' schools, 10 were co-ed schools and 3 were exclusively boys' schools. All the 5 schools meant exclusively for girls were included in the study. All girls studying in 6th to 12th classes

from these schools, after applying the exclusion criteria were included in the study.

## Sampling procedure

### Sample size

Assuming the prevalence of menstrual problems in adolescent girls to be 40%<sup>3</sup> and allowable error of 10% at 95 % level of significance the sample size was calculated by using the formula  $n = \frac{4pq}{l^2}$  as follows :  
Where, p is prevalence of menstrual problems (40%)  
q is (1-p)

l is the allowable error i.e. 10% of p

So,  $n = \frac{4 \times 0.4 \times 0.6}{(10/100 \times 0.4)^2}$ .

Using this formula, the sample size came out to be 600 but for the purpose of present study all the girls studying in 6th to 12th classes from these schools were included after applying the exclusion criteria mentioned below:

### Exclusion criteria

- 1) Those who were not willing to participate.
- 2) Those who were absent till the day investigator was working in the school.
- 3) Those who had not attained menarche.

In all 800 girls were included in the study.

## Study design

The study was a community based observational study with cross-sectional design.

## Study period

The study spanned over a period of one year beginning from July 2015.

## Data collection

The investigator contacted the District Education Officer, Block Education Officer and Principals of the schools. The objectives and nature of the study were explained and a verbal consent/assent was sought to carry out the study in the schools. The students were interviewed one by one separately by the interviewer. A pre-designed and pre-tested interview schedule was administered and responses were noted by the investigator herself. The data was analysed using percentages and proportions.



## RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 73.4% respondents did not have prior knowledge about menstruation before the onset of menarche. Around 62% girls reported that they were never taught about menstruation in

school. Around 75% girls reported that they have discussed their experience at menarche with someone and around 80% of them were satisfied with the discussion.

**Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by Beforehand Knowledge about Menstruation**

Parameter	Number	Percentage
<b>Beforehand knowledge</b>		
Yes	213/800	26.6
<b>Ever taught about menstruation in school</b>		
Yes	303/800	37.9
<b>Whether discussed the experience at menarche with someone</b>		
Yes	601/800	75.1
<b>Whether satisfied with the discussion</b>		
Yes	492/601	81.9

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by their experience with subsequent menses after menarche. 38.0% of the girls reported that they were unprepared. 37.3% girls reported a satisfactory

experience. Around 21% girls considered it undesirable and 3.5% of the girls reported the experience was undesirable and they were unprepared for it.

**Table 2 Distribution of Respondents by their Experiences with Subsequent Menses**

Response	Number	Percentage
Undesirable	170	21.3
Unprepared	304	38.0
Satisfactory	298	37.3
Undesirable and unprepared	28	3.5
Total	800	100

Table 3 shows that the most common source of prior information about menstruation amongst the girls who had prior information (n=213) were the mothers

(40%), followed by sisters (33.3%), friends (17.4%), print and electronic media (7.0%) and teachers (2.3%).

**Table 3 Distribution of Respondents by Source of Prior Information about Menstruation (n=213)**

Source of Information	Number	Percentage
Mother	85	40.0
Sister	71	33.3
Print and electronic media	15	7.0
Teachers	5	2.3
Friends	37	17.4
Total respondents with prior information about menstruation	213	100

Table 4 shows that 95% of the girls had restrictions during menstruation. 83.8% of the girls had a restriction on working in the kitchen, 86% were

restricted from serving guests, 66.9% were restricted from drawing out pickle from the jar and 93.8% had a restriction on visiting temple during menstruation.



**Table 4 Distribution of Respondents based on Sociocultural Restrictions during Menstruation**

Any restriction during menstruation	Number	Percentage
Yes	760	95.0
No	40	5.0
<b>Any Dietary restriction</b>		
Yes	255	31.9
No	545	68.1
<b>Restriction on working in kitchen</b>		
Yes	670	83.8
No	130	16.2
<b>Restriction on serving Guests</b>		
Yes	688	86.0
No	112	14.0
<b>Restriction on drawing out pickle from jar</b>		
Yes	535	66.9
No	265	33.1
<b>Restriction on taking bath</b>		
Yes	11	1.4
No	789	98.6
<b>Restriction on visiting temple</b>		
Yes	750	93.8
No	50	6.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5 shows that majority of the girls (84.6%) were not considered dirty during menstruation. Table 6 shows that 64.6% of the girls did not report any

effect of menstruation on their social life. 20.6% of the girls reported not involving in sports activities.

**Table 5 Distribution based on whether Respondents are Considered Dirty during Menstruation**

Whether considered dirty during menstruation	Number	Percentage
Yes	118	14.8
No	677	84.6
Don't know	5	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 6 Distribution of Respondents by Effect of Menstruation on Social Life**

Effect on social life	Number	Percentage
No effect	517	64.6
No domestic duties	63	7.9
No sports	165	20.6
No domestic duties and no sports	55	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>100</b>



## DISCUSSION

There are various cultural beliefs and restrictions in different societies during menstruation. In the present study, 95% of the girls had some restriction during menstruation out of which 83.8% of the girls had a restriction on working in the kitchen, 86% were restricted from serving guests, 66.9% were restricted from drawing out pickle from the jar and 93.8% had a restriction on visiting temple during menstruation. This is in agreement with the studies done in Gujarat by Tiwari et al<sup>4</sup> and in Malaysia by Lee et al<sup>5</sup>. A main finding is that when girls are menstruating their mobility and behaviour is restricted or controlled, due to myths, misconceptions, superstitions and taboos. Channawar and Prasad<sup>6</sup> reported that 82.5% girls did not attend any religious activity or visit temples, 17.4% girls were not allowed to do the household work, 17.4% girls were not allowed to sleep on the routine bed, 1.5% girls were not allowed to play outside, 1.9% girls were not allowed to attend marriages during menstruation while 5.3% had restrictions on eating certain food items during menstruation. Jogdand et al<sup>7</sup> conducted a community based cross sectional study in Guntur and reported that 78.99% girls were restricted to attend religious occasions during menstruation which is similar to the results of the present study. Such high prevalence of menstruation related restrictions can possibly be due to the different rituals in their communities. The same rituals have been practiced by their mothers or other elderly females in the family for a very long time due to their ignorance and false perceptions about menstruation. In our study the most common source of prior information about menstruation amongst the girls were the mothers (40%), followed by sisters (33.3%), friends (17.4%), print and electronic media (7.0%) and teachers (2.3%). In a cross sectional study conducted by Kanotra et al<sup>8</sup> in Maharashtra, the major source of information about menstruation and related problems were mothers in 94.4%, friends in 4.6%, teachers in 0.6% and books in 0.3% of the subjects. This signifies the role of educated mother for better understanding of menstruation and hygienic menstrual practices. Gultie et al<sup>9</sup> (2014) in Ethiopia found that the main sources of information about menstrual hygiene management were teachers for 43.1% of the girls. If girls do not understand or are inadequately informed

about the process of menstruation, they are not prepared for their first menstruation. This was exactly what most of the girls who participated in our study revealed: prior to menarche, they were not adequately informed about menstruation, the reason might be cultural norms associated with menstruation.

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