



## A Cross-Sectional Study to Assess the Difficulties Faced by Menstruating Female due to Various Myths, Norms and Practices Regarding Menstruation in Indore City

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** *There are various taboos present in Indian society related to menstruation. These taboos ultimately lead to poor menstrual hygiene. Various UTI, RTI, fungal infections and PID can be precipitated due to poor menstrual hygiene. Some neuropsychiatric disorders like PMS and depression are also common in menstruating women. The major objective of this research is To assess the prevalence of various taboos and norms present in various age groups and socio-economic groups of women. And to determine its effects on female health and hygiene.*

**Method:** *The study comprised of 400 randomly selected menstruating women of Indore city. The study included school girls, housewives as well as working women. Pre-designed semi-structured questionnaire were administered to the study subjects to assess their knowledge, attitude and practice during menstruation. Data was entered into Microsoft Excel spread sheet and analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Software.*

**Result:** *This study showed that only 36% women knew the correct reason of menstruation and 40% of the women faced social isolation, religious restrictions were imposed on 79% of the women. sanitary pad is used by only 63% of woman. As per this study 65% of the women suffer with PMS and more than half (57%) of the women prefer to rest and sleep as a remedy.*

**Conclusion:** *There are misbeliefs and lack of knowledge related to menstruation among women of all age groups. Proper knowledge about nutrition and sanitation facilities, emotional disturbances and management of pain during menstruation needs to be provided to women of reproductive age group.*

**Keywords:** *Urban slum, Indore city, Menstruation, Sanitation, Low socioeconomic group female.*

### Introduction

Menstrual hygiene is an issue that is insufficiently acknowledged and has not received adequate

attention in the reproductive health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors in developing countries including India and its

relationship with and impact on achieving many Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is rarely. There are various taboos present in Indian society related to menstruation. These taboos are trans-cultural in nature, represented along a continuum that ranges widely from mild uneasiness and distress of menstrual fluid to menstruating women, to elaborate complexes of restrictions, and ultimately to complete seclusion during the menstrual period. These taboos ultimately lead to poor menstrual hygiene. Various UTI, RTI, fungal infections and PID can be precipitated due to poor menstrual hygiene. Some neuropsychiatric disorders like PMS and depression are also common in menstruating women.

The various groups of taboos are as follows:

1. Generalized belief that menstrual fluid is unpleasant, contaminating or dangerous.
2. Personal restrictions are imposed upon the menstruants such as food taboos, restriction of movement, talking etc.
3. Restrictions are imposed upon contact made by menstruants with men's things that is personal articles, weapons implements used in agriculture and fishing, craft tools and religious emblems and shrines, where men are guardians.
4. Menstruants cannot cook and cannot touch drinking water

### Material and Methods

This study was a community based, descriptive, cross-sectional study conducted among 400 women of Indore city to assess the prevalence of various taboos and norms present in various age groups and socio-economic groups of women. To know the perspective of people on it. To determine its effects on female health and hygiene. To compare the changing perspective among different age groups.

Present study was conducted in Mahatma Gandhi Medical College Indore. This study was conducted for a period of 3 months on 400 menstruating women of Indore city. The females randomly selected were in their reproductive age

group. The study included school girls, housewives as well as working women. Majority of women were primary educated. All women were of low socioeconomic status. An attempt was made to assess difficulties faced by them due to myths, norms and practices regarding menstruation. Pre-designed semi-structured questionnaire were administered to the study subjects having various questions regarding knowledge attitude and practice during menstruation. Data was entered into Microsoft Excel spread sheet and was analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Software. Appropriate statistical tests were applied according to necessity.

### Results

This study showed that only 36% women knew the correct reason of menstruation and only 39% of the women had knowledge about menstruation prior to menarche. Source of knowledge about menstruation was mother in 69% subjects.

This study shows that sanitary pad is used by 63% of the females followed by cloth 35% and other substances like paper and ash by 2%. 34% of the women change sanitary napkin in more than 12 hours and only 15% are aware about the policies under which free sanitary pads are provided.

Majority (92%) of the women take bath regularly during menstruation.

According to our study 79% of the women face restriction to enter all parts of the house, 65% are not allowed to touch the source of water during menstruation and 39% face dietary restrictions.

This study shows that 40% of the women faced social isolation. This study shows that 48% of the women were satisfied with the sanitation facilities at the work place. This study shows that 65% of the women suffer with PMS and more than half (57%) of the women prefer to rest and sleep as a remedy.

According to this study 40% of the women manage menstrual pain by home remedy like hot water bags, drinking warm milk etc. Maximum expenditure on sanitary pads in one month was rs

101-120 by 18% of the women and minimum expenditure on cloth and sanitary pads was 0-20 Rs by 28% of the women. According to our study

51% of the women find these myths and taboos related to menstruation not genuine.

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents according to their Knowledge about menstruation

(n=147)

| Attributes   | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
|  | Number | Percentage |
| Knew about menstruation Before menarche                                |        |            |
| Yes  | 156    | 39         |
| No   | 244    | 61         |
| Source of knowledge of menstrual cycle before menarche                 |        |            |
| Mother   | 276    | 69         |
| Elder Sister   | 56     | 14         |
| Teacher  | 12     | 03         |
| Other  | 56     | 14         |
| Knowledge of correct reason of menarche                                |        |            |
| Yes  | 144    | 36         |
| No   | 256    | 64         |
| Knowledge about nutrition and hygiene during menstruation given before |        |            |
| Yes  | 240    | 60         |
| No   | 160    | 40         |

**Table 2:** Distribution of respondents according to different restriction during menstruation

(n=147)

|   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| Allowed to enter every part of house                        |     |    |
| Yes   | 84  | 21 |
| No  | 316 | 79 |
| Allowed to touch water source                               |     |    |
| Yes   | 140 | 35 |
| No  | 260 | 65 |
| Restriction on any food item during periods                 |     |    |
| Yes   | 156 | 39 |
| No  | 244 | 61 |
| Should you exercise during periods                          |     |    |
| Yes   | 84  | 21 |
| No  | 316 | 79 |
| Women feel themselves socially isolated during menstruation |     |    |
| Yes   | 196 | 49 |
| No  | 204 | 51 |

| Reason for following these rules regarding periods | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| Not known  | 164    | 41         |
| Stereotype   | 72     | 18         |
| rest   | 24     | 6          |
| Family pressure                                    | 28     | 7          |
| hygiene  | 40     | 10         |
| religious  | 72     | 18         |

**Table 3:** Distribution of respondents according to their hygienic practices during menstruation

| Attributes  | Number | Percentage |
|---|--------|------------|
| Type of absorbent (n = 147)   |        |            |
| Sanitary pads   | 252    | 63         |
| cloth   | 140    | 35         |
| other   | 08     | 02         |
| Duration after which women change the material used during menstruation |        |            |
| 4-5 hrs   | 112    | 28         |
| 6-7 hrs   | 152    | 38         |
| 10-12 hrs   | 124    | 31         |
| 24 hrs  | 12     | 3          |
| Daily bath  |        |            |
| Yes   | 368    | 92         |
| No  | 32     | 08         |
| <b>Money expenditure on sanitary pad in one month</b>                   |        |            |
| 0-20  | 112    | 28         |
| 21-40   | 08     | 2          |
| 41-60   | 100    | 25         |
| 61-80   | 24     | 6          |
| 81-100  | 52     | 13         |
| 101-120   | 72     | 18         |
| >121  | 32     | 8          |

\*\* (multiple responses)

**Table 4**

| Facilities during menstruation                                     | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| Effect of periods on school or work                                |        |            |
| Leave for few days   | 123    | 30.75      |
| Quit school  |        | 5.33       |
| No effect  |        | 64         |
| School /workplace clean washroom available(n=292)                  |        |            |
| Yes  | 196    | 67.12      |
| No   | 96     | 32.87      |
| In emergency sanitary napkins provided in school workplace (n=292) |        |            |
| Yes  | 116    | 40         |
| No   | 176    | 60         |
| Knowledge about free sanitary napkins                              |        |            |
| Yes  | 60     | 15         |

|   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| No  | 340 | 85 |
| measures used for relieve of pain during menstruation                             |     |    |
| Home remedy   | 160 | 40 |
| Consult doctor  | 80  | 20 |
| Just ignore   | 160 | 40 |
| . Measures used for remedy of mood swings<br>Women experiences(n=260)             |     |    |
| Rest and sleep  | 148 | 57 |
| Isolate themselves  | 31  | 12 |
| Ignore  | 81  | 31 |
| Women experiences the mood swings during the days just<br>before the menstruation |     |    |
| Yes   | 260 | 65 |
| No  | 140 | 35 |

\*Regular: hand washing every time after visit to the toilet during menstruation;

\*\*Regular: Frequency of cleaning of external genitalia is  $\geq 2$ /day;

## Discussion

This study showed that only 36% women knew the correct reason of menstruation while according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016, 50.7% knew the correct reason<sup>1</sup> This study shows that only 39% of the women had knowledge about menstruation prior to menarche but according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016, 56.4% had prior knowledge about menarche. Several research studies have also revealed this gap and showed that there is low level of awareness about menstruation among girls when they first experience it.<sup>2,3,4</sup> This study shows that the source of knowledge about menstruation was mother for 69% that is majority, elder sister for 14%, teacher for 3% and other people like friends or other relatives for 14% and according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016, knowledge was imparted by their mother to 60.7%, followed by friends 31.8%.

This study shows that sanitary pad is used by 63% of the females followed by cloth 35% and other substances like paper and ash by 2% of the females and according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016, 90.5% girls used sanitary pad<sup>1</sup>, similar findings were in the study done by Kamakhya kumar et al<sup>5</sup>

Whereas the study done by Sangeetha Balamurgan revealed lower usage of sanitary 52% of women used cloth as menstrual absorbent, 35% of women used pad<sup>6</sup>. 34% of the women change sanitary napkin in more than 12 hours and only 15% are aware about the policies under which free sanitary pads are provided.

34% of the women change sanitary napkin in more than 12 hours and only 15% are aware about the policies under which free sanitary pads are provided. This study shows that religious restrictions were imposed on 79% of the women, and according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016 69.7% of the women faced religious restrictions. Several other studies have also reported restrictions in daily activities such as, not being allowed to take bath, change clothes, comb hair and enter holy places. compelled to sleep on floor during menstruation.<sup>7,8,9</sup> This study shows that 40% of the women faced social isolation while according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016, 22.3% faced social restrictions. This study shows that 48% of the women were satisfied with the sanitation facilities at the work place while according to a study done in urban slums of western Maharashtra in 2016, none of the women was satisfied with the the

strong bondage with the traditional beliefs, taboos and misconceptions during menstruation has led to much serious health and behavior problems.<sup>15,16</sup> Women having better knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene and safe practices are less vulnerable to reproductive tract infections and its consequences<sup>10</sup> Inaccurate and incomplete information provided to the girls through limited sources can lead to health problems and complications sanitation facilities. According to our study 79% of the women face restriction to enter all parts of the house, 65% are not allowed to touch the source of water during menstruation and 39% face dietary restrictions.

### Conclusion

There are misbeliefs and lack of knowledge related to menstruation among women of all age groups. This study was conducted to ascertain menstrual hygiene among female of reproductive age group. The study revealed that menstrual hygiene was far from satisfactory among a large proportion of the woman. Lack of appropriate and sufficient information about menstrual hygiene can be attributed to cultural and religious beliefs and taboos. Thus, the above findings reinforce the need to encourage safe and hygienic practices among woman and bring them out of traditional beliefs, misconceptions and restrictions regarding menstruation. General awareness about cause, organs involved in menstruation was to be improved. Use of sanitary napkins to be enhanced by social marketing. For using old washed cloth, proper hygiene has to be maintained. Incorrect restrictions, myths and beliefs associated with menstruation can be removed by proper knowledge sharing and involvement of NGOs and social workers. Following suggestions are here to improve menstrual hygiene

- Proper knowledge about nutrition and sanitation facilities during menstruation needs to be provided especially in school going girls.
- There should be proper counseling of the women in reproductive age group about

various emotional disturbances and management of pain during menstruation.

- Women need to be educated about various policies providing free sanitary napkins.
- Awareness should be spread among women in menstruating age group for avoiding myths and taboos that cause discomfort.

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