

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Menstrual Hygiene Practices Among Adolescent Girls and Women In India—A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT Menstruation, a very natural biological process unique to every female, but still there is very little awareness regarding menstrual health and hygiene when girls first experience it. Social prohibitions, negative attitude of parents and teachers to discuss about menstruation related issues openly has limited the access of adolescent girls to right kind of information regarding menstruation specially in rural and tribal areas. Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is of considerable importance as it has a health impact in terms of increased vulnerability to urinary and genital infections and female morbidity. MHM means the practice of being knowledgeable about menstruation, its cause, maintenance of good hygiene during menstruation, use of clean absorbents, the scope of changing absorbents privately and hygienically, including safe and hygienic disposal of absorbents. Lack of water and hygienic toilet facilities in schools compel the girls to experience menstruation as shameful and uncomfortable. Also, lack of puberty education and hygienic MHM items (absorbents), fear and shame of leaking of blood and body odour lead menstruating girls to absent themselves from school. Social taboos and cultural prohibitions prevent the girls from seeking health and restrict them on taking healthy diet and participating in social activities when menstruating.

Keywords: MHM, Menstruation, Hygiene, Adolescent girls

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INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is very natural biological process, unique to females. It's onset brings a profound change in a young woman's life. It has strong religious and socio-cultural connotations in several parts of developing world, including India. Menarche is the onset of first period that typically occurs around the age of twelve. A myriad of misconception and superstitions are associated with menstruation and these form the basis for poor menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls and women.^[1]

Menstrual hygiene means using clean materials to absorb menstrual blood, having accessibility to water and soap, ability to change absorbent in privacy and to dispose off used absorbent.^[2]

Though menstruation is a normal physiological process but still in Indian society it is chiefly considered as an unclean, dirty phenomenon. Insufficient knowledge regarding menstruation is the basis for the unnecessary restriction in

the daily normal activities of menstruating girls, creating various physiological issues and poor personal hygienic practices during menstruation, leading to many reproductive tract related problems.^[3]

Menstrual hygiene is predominantly influenced by socio-economic, educational and cultural status of the family as well as by the school curriculum.^[4]

Poor menstrual hygiene is related to increased vulnerability to Reproductive Tract Infections (RTI). Knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene from adolescence reduces the risk of suffering millions of women.^[5]

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a problem among adolescents and women in low and middle income groups in India. MHM means the practice of being knowledgeable about menstruation, its cause, maintenance of good hygiene

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