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Attitude towards menstruation among tribal females of Kargil

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Abstract

Women's attitudes toward menstruation are very complicated. Often, women's attitudes predict menstrual events to be worse than they actually are once the event is experienced (Koff & Rierdan, 1996). These negative attitudes may be due, in part, to society's messages about menstruation. Attitudes toward menstruation also stem from education that women have received on the topic; more education is associated with more positive views of menstruation (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1982; Golub & Catalano, 1983). In view of the importance of attitudes towards menstruation, the present study was undertaken in Kargil District with an aim to assess the attitude of female adolescents, mothers and grandmothers towards menstruation. The sample for the study consisted of 320 adolescents girls in the age group of 14 to 18 years studying in class 9th to 12th currently enrolled at Govt Middle, High and High Secondary schools, 100 mothers and 100 grandmothers, which were selected equally from Purig tribe and Balti tribe of Kargil district, J&K state. Multistage sampling technique was used to select the sample females. A standardized scale on Adolescent Menstruation Attitude Questionnaire (AMAQ) developed by Morse, Kieren and Bottorff in 1993 was used to assess their attitude. The scale includes 58 items involving six subscale; Positive feelings; Negative feelings; Living with menstruation; Openness about menstruation; Acceptance of menarche; and Menstrual symptoms.

The results of the study reveal that majority of the respondents held highly negative attitude towards menstruation these females were not happy and excited during menstruation nor were they pleased, proud or felt special while having their periods. Majority of females across the three generations held moderately positive to highly negative attitude towards this phenomenon. Most respondents had negative attitude on two other dimensions namely, living with menstruation and acceptance of menarche. Even though this is an important physiological process, yet the results highlights that females had problems in accepting and living with it. There moderately positive to negative attitude towards openness about menstruation and also towards menstrual symptoms, this highlight that even today there is a culture of silence associated with it and also find it inconvenient to discuss and accept menstrual symptoms. It was also found that across the three generation, younger females (adolescent girls) showed more negativism than the mothers and grandmothers. However comparatively older generation showed more acceptances, less negativism and were more openness towards menstruation than the younger generation.

Keywords: Attitude, Menarche, Menstruation, Females, Generation.

Introduction

Menarche and menstruation is an issue that every girl and woman has to deal with once she enters adolescence around the average age of 12 and until she reaches the menopause somewhere in her 40's (UNICEF India, 2008) [17]. Though Menstruation is a normal physiological process, Menstruation is not a rare or even unusual experience; however it is a topic that is often not discussed openly in our society. Some women, even in the developed countries, considered menstruation to be inconvenient or embarrassing (Abrahams, *et al* 1985) [1]. Menstruation is literally unmentionable in many culture, it is a private and largely hidden one because there were no words in the man- made language which could be used to describe the experience politely. Similarly, Lovering, (1995) has found that adolescents have nothing to say about menstruation itself. The only discourses which they can use to describe their experience are medical one which describes pain, distress and untidiness. Unless these girls have period pain, or difficulties obtaining sanitary towel, they have nothing to say (Walker, 1997) [19]. Girls explain that Menarche is a taboo subject even within their own families. There is an unspoken 'culture of silence' with regard to their menstruation (Jamadar, 2012) [9]. In some cultures, the symbolic polluting power of menstruation is considered the basis for

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negative feelings toward female bodies and the oppression of women, while other cultures emphasize the symbolic enhancement of life forces by menstrual blood in rituals (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988) [4]. According to (Costos, 2002) [6], "menstruation is experienced by all healthy women yet it is a topic cloaked in secrecy, taboo, and negativity". Myths and misinformation regarding menarche and menstruation are very common almost in all societies. It is also considered taboo to discuss menstruation, particularly for girls to discuss it with members of the opposite sex (Kissling, 1996, Williams, 1983) [11]. Because of social pressure, the menstruating girl feels required to maintain the taboos placed upon communication about her experience (Kissling, 1996) [12]. Nevertheless, girls have questions and concerns regarding their own menstruation, and find the need to discuss this topic with friends. The social prohibition upon discussion of menstruation with others often causes parents to avoid discussing menstruation with their daughters, leaving the girls feeling unprepared for menarche (Kissling, 1996) [12]. Girls who are aware of how to deal with menstruation tend to cope with it much better than those who are caught unaware. Preparedness gives girls the power to handle it in a mature way and also feel confident that there would be no embarrassment resulting from these intensely private moments.

Methodology

The sample for the study consisted of 320 adolescents girls in the age group of 14 to 18 years studying in class 9th to 12th currently enrolled at Govt Middle, High and High Secondary schools, 100 mothers and 100 grandmothers, which were selected equally from Purig tribe and Balti tribe of Kargil district, J&K state. Multistage sampling technique was used to select the sample females. A standardized scale on Adolescent Menstrual Attitude Questionnaire (AMAQ) developed by Morse, Kieren and Bottorff in 1993 was used to assess their attitude. The scale includes 58 items involving six subscale; Positive feelings; Negative feelings; Living with menstruation; Openness about menstruation; Acceptance of menarche; and Menstrual symptoms. Higher scores indicate high attitude towards particular dimensions.

Results and Discussion

1. Positive attitude towards menstruation

Categories	Ado. Girls N=320	Mothers N=100	Grand mothers N=100
positive			
Moderately positive	39 (12.1%)	42 (42%)	13 (13%)
Negative	281 (87.8%)	58 (58%)	87 (87%)
Highly negative			
Total	320(100%)	100(100%)	100(100%)
Chi-sq between three generation =47.8 p=0.001** *indicating significant difference, ** indicating highly significant difference			

Data contained in the table no 1 depicts respondents level of positive attitude towards menstruation. Not surprisingly majority of the respondents(87.8% adolescent girls, 58% mothers and 87.8% grandmothers) held highly negative attitude towards menstruation, while the remaining (12% adolescent girls, 42% mothers and 13% grandmothers) respondents held negative attitude towards it. This clearly shows that all the respondents were not happy and excited about menstruation nor they were pleased, proud or felt special

while having their periods. Comparatively almost equal number of adolescent girls (87.8%) and grandmothers (87%) showed highly negative attitude towards menstruation. Those adolescent girls, who held highly negative attitude, did so, probably because this was a new phenomenon for them and they were still adjusting with this monthly physiological change. However highly negative attitude of grandmother could be because during their time neither there was any concept of wearing under garments nor any availability of readymade sanitary napkins in market, they faced many hardships because of prevalent socio-cultural taboos. In a study of Chinese adolescent girls emotional responses to menarche, Tang *et al* (2004) [15] concluded that negative menstrual attitudes were positively correlated with perceptions of menstruation as a negative event and feelings of inadequate preparation for menarche. Statistical calculation of chi-square also reveals highly significant difference among the three generation on their positive response (p=0.000**).

2. Negative attitudes towards menstruation

Categories	Ado. Girls N=320	Mothers N=100	Grandmothers N=100
Highly negative	88(27.5%)	15(15%)	14(14%)
Negative	218(68.1%)	73(73%)	86(86%)
Moderately positive	14(4.3%)	12(12%)	-
positive			
Total	320 (100%)	100 (100%)	100 (100%)
Chi-sq between three generation =325.8 p=0.000** *indicating significant difference, ** indicating highly significant difference			

Data in table no 2 show that majority (68.1% of adolescent’s girls, 73% of mothers and 86% of grandmothers) of the respondents across the three generation held negative attitudes towards menstruation. Apart from them 27.5% adolescent’s girls, 15% mothers and 14% grandmother’s respondents held highly negative attitude towards menstruation as they found menstruation, as “scary and uncomfortable”. Many females reported that they were bothered about buying pads from male shopkeepers, embarrassed to ask questions about periods and did not consider it appropriate to discuss about periods with males. Some were also worried as periods started unexpectedly and blood could leak through clothes. Walker (1997) [19] reported “Menstruation as predictably unpredictable and one never know exactly when it’s going to happen/come, and some time it completely surprises you”. Statistically highly significant difference was found among the three generation as p value is <0.0005. Comparatively more adolescent’s girls held highly negative attitude (27%) than mothers (15%) and grandmothers (14%) this could be probably because of the complication related to menstruation they faced every month, during which they found their self-sick, grumpy, grouchy, moody. They did not find that coping with period an easy task leading to development of negative attitude towards menstruation. These findings were also similar with the anticipated assumption that, females would have unfavourable attitude towards menstruation due to number of physical and psychological causes (Agarwala *et al*, 1991) [3]. Findings were also similar to Published report of The Dawn Media Group (2009) [16] where they found that around 90% of women in Pakistan experience pain during menstruation and major cause for negative attitude towards menstruation were lack of information regarding menstruation and about dealing with the pain.

On the other hand more sample mothers and grandmothers showed lesser highly negative attitude towards menstruation probably because they knew the importance of menstruation in women's life. They also reported that a woman with menstruation is normal but it is not a sign of good health if a woman does not menstruate every month. This thought helped them to grow less negative towards this process.

3. Living with menstruation

Categories	Ado. Girls N=320	Mothers N=100	Grand mothers N=100
Highly negative			
Negative	217(67.8%)	69 (69%)	86 (86%)
Moderately positive	103 (32.1%)	31 (31%)	14 (14%)
positive			
Total	320 (100%)	100(100%)	100 (100%)
Chi-sq between three generation =12.77 p=0.001** indicating significant difference ** indicating highly significant difference			

With respect to the living with menstruation dimension, it was found that majority the of female respondents across the three generations (67.8% adolescent girls, 69% mothers and 86% grandmothers) held negative attitude towards living with menstruation. Negative attitude towards living with menstruation indicates the complexity in adjusting to menstruation. These results highlight that menstruation though a normal physiological process for reproductively fertile females requires certain degree of adjustments and accommodation from those experiencing it. For the sample tribal females, menstruation was not an easily acceptable process as most show negative attitude towards it. The remaining respondents of the three generation (32.1% adolescent girls, 31% mothers and 14% grandmothers) were in the moderate positive category. For the group holding moderately positive attitude was of the idea that, it is normal for girl to menstruate and those who got cramps with their periods should not worry. Statistical analysis of data shows that there is a significant difference between three generations (p=0.001**) on the dimension. Adolescent girls and mothers showed similar viewpoint on living with menstruation dimension compares to older generation of grandmothers.

4. Openness towards menstruation

Categories	Ado. Girls N=320	Mothers N=100	Grand mothers N=100
Highly negative			
Negative	130 (40.6%)	20 (20%)	11 (11%)
Moderately positive	166 (51.8%)	68 (68%)	89 (89%)
positive	24 (7.5%)	12 (12%)	-
Total	320 (100%)	100 (100%)	100 (100%)
Chi-sq between three generation = 51.089 p=0.000** df=4 *indicating significant difference, ** indicating highly significant difference			

Perusal of the data contained in table no 4 depicts the respondents level of attitude towards menstruation openness

towards menstruation. It was found that majority of adolescent's girls showed moderately positive (51.8%) attitude regarding openness towards menstruation, where as (40.6%) girls showed negative attitude regarding openness towards menstruation. Only in (7.5%) cases showed positive attitude regarding openness towards it. For the mothers (68.8%) and grandmothers (89%), most held moderately positive on openness. Interestingly none of the grandmothers showed positive attitude regarding openness towards menstruation. The results point to the fact that there still exists a 'culture of silence' among females themselves about this crucial physiological process.

Across the three generation the level of openness tend to become less negative as one moves from grandmother to mothers and girls. Probably the younger females were more hesitate to discuss and talk about menstruation owing to the various socio cultural barriers. Older women probably due to their experience of dealing with menstruation were more self-assured and confident about discussing it. These results confirm the belief that till date most culture doesn't allow any open discussion on this important female bodily change. Various studies have proved that menstruation is a matter that the social order does not let people to talk about openly because society considers it a forbidden. According to Costos *et al* (2002) [6], "menstruation is experienced by all healthy women yet it is a topic cloaked in secrecy, taboo, and negativity". In most developing countries, menstruation, though a natural process, has been, and still is, dealt with in secrecy (Warenius, Pettersson, Nissen, Hojer, Chishima & Faxelid, 2007; Patkar & Bharadwaj, 2004; Mahon & Fernandes 2010) [18, 14]. Statistically highly significant difference (p=0.000**) was also found regarding openness towards menstruation between the three generation.

5. Acceptance of menarche

Categories	Ado. Girls N=320	Mothers N=100	Grand mothers N=100
Highly negative	88 (27.5%)	10 (10%)	6 (6%)
Negative	222(69.3%)	84 (84%)	94 (94%)
Moderately positive	10 (3.12%)	6 (6%)	-
positive			
Total	320 (100%)	100(100%)	100 (100%)
Chi-sq between three generation = 32.74 p=0.000** df=4. * indicating significant difference ** indicating highly significant difference			

When the respondents acceptance about menstruation was analyzed it was found that majority of the females across the three generations (94% grandmothers, 84% mothers and 69%adolescent's girls) had negative attitude towards acceptance of menarche. Some (27% adolescent girls, 10% mothers and 6% grandmothers) respondents however showed highly negative attitude on acceptance of menarche. This shows that although menstruation is a normal event of life but most females face problems in accepting it. These females reported of feeling ugly and gross during their periods and did not find it easy to cope with menstruation. These were the reason that they do not accept the menstruation in a usual manner and felt different than usual when they menstruate. Moderately positive on acceptance was noted only in 3.12% adolescent girls and 6% mothers. Statistically chi square value shows that highly significant difference in the acceptance of menarche among the three generations (p=0.000**).

6. Attitude towards menstrual Symptoms

Categories	Ado. Girls N=320	Mothers N=100	Grand mothers N=100
Highly negative			
Negative	100(31.2%)	13 (13%)	5 (5%)
Moderately positive	211(65.9%)	87 (87%)	95 (95%)
positive	9 (2.81%)	-	-
Total	320 (100%)	100 (100%)	100 (100%)
Chi-sq between three generation = 44.53 p=0.000** df=4 *indicating significant difference ** indicating highly significant difference			

Data in the table no 6 shows the respondent's attitudes towards premenstrual symptom and the results reveal that majority (95% grandmothers, 87% mothers and 65%adolescent's girls) of respondents showed moderate positive attitudes towards premenstrual symptom, which indicate that these females consent menstrual symptoms as normal part of their life and does not take premenstrual symptom as serious health problem. While the rest (5% grandmothers, 13% mothers and 31% adolescent girls) showed negative attitudes towards premenstrual symptom. A study conducted by Dickson and Wood, 1995 also concluded that those girls who had difficult menstrual experiences (e.g. severe pain) had more negative attitude as compared to those who had positive menstrual experiences. The results highlight that most females felt uncomfortable owing to the changes associated with it. Many reported getting really fell sick, grumpy, gouache, moody during their periods and got severe backache and painful cramps during period. Highly significant difference ($p=0.000^{**}$) was also found between the three generations. With regard to there attitude towards menstrual symptoms more adolescent girls than mothers and grandmothers held lesser positive attitude probably because this was a comparatively a new phenomenon for then

Conclusion and Recommendation

Education about menstruation should start at an early age before girls reach puberty, Girls should be well-informed about the facts of menstruation, physiological implications, importance of menstruation, and proper hygienic practices during menstruation when educated beforehand, girls would be better prepared emotionally and psychologically for the experience of menstruation and will have fewer negative reaction, they would be able to better care for themselves during menstruation, especially learning about hygiene practices. It is also necessary to bring them out of traditional beliefs, taboos, misconceptions, and restrictions. This can be achieved with the help of awareness camps or trainings programmes, power point presentations in school curriculum on girl's puberty, and focused group discussions. All mothers should be encouraged to break their inhibition about discussing with their daughters regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene.

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