

A Comparative Study on Menstrual Hygiene among Urban and Rural College Girls of Assam

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Abstract:

Menstruation is a physiological change in girls. It is the beginning of reproductive life. Though it is a universal process among the women, some societies consider it as an unclean phenomenon. There are many studies on this issue world wide, but a very few have been done in Assam. This study aims to explore the knowledge, attitude, and practices about menstrual hygiene of urban and rural college girls of Sivasagar and Dhubri districts of Assam. The required data for the study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. In the case of generation of primary data, we have adopted a non-probability sampling method instead of a probability sampling method.

Key Words: Menstruation, Hygiene, College Girls, Assam

1. Introduction

Menstruation is a physiological change in girls. It is the beginning of reproductive life. Though it is a universal process among the women, some societies consider it as an unclean phenomenon. Indian society always shows due respect to women, but when it comes to menstruation we see a different attitude among the members of the society. Menstruation, or period, is normal vaginal bleeding that occurs as part of a woman's monthly cycle. Every month, your body prepares for pregnancy. If no pregnancy occurs, the uterus, or womb, sheds its lining. The menstrual blood is partly blood and partly tissue from inside the uterus. It passes out of the body through the vagina. Periods usually start between age 11 and 14 and continue until *menopause* at about age 51. Insufficient, incorrect information regarding menstruation is often a cause of unnecessary restrictions in the daily normal activities of the menstruating girls creating various psychological issues.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Adinma and Adinma (2008) conducted a study on perceptions and practices on menstruation amongst Nigerian secondary school girls to determine their perceptions, problems, and practices on menstruation¹. A majority of the students, (75.6%), were aged 15-17 years. Only 39.3% perceived menstruation to be physiological. Abdominal pain discomfort, (66.2%), was the commonest medical problem encountered by the respondents, although 45.8% had multiple problems. Medical problems were most commonly discussed with the mother, 53 (47.1%), and least commonly discussed with the teachers (0.4%). Unsanitary menstrual absorbents were used by 55.7% of the respondents. The perceptions on menstruation were poor, and practices were often incorrect. Paria et al. A study conducted by Patle et al. (2014) in Nagpur and found that girls in urban areas were well aware of menstruation before menarche as compared to rural girls². Mathiyalagen et al. (2017) conducted a study in Pondichary and found that Proper menstrual hygiene practices which could be imparted through appropriate interventions at earlier stages of life can prevent the girls and women from suffering reproductive morbidities³. Evans Paul Kwame Ameade and Helene Akpene Garti (2016) conducted a study and found that although the majority of respondents (73.4%) were aware of menstruation before menarche, most of them experienced fear and panic when it occurred⁴. Mothers were the first to be informed when menstruation occurred, although teachers first provided them knowledge on menstruation. In the study conducted by Zelalem Belayneh & Birhanie Mekuriaw (2019) concluded that majority of adolescent school girls had poor knowledge regarding menstruation and their hygienic practices are incorrect⁵. This demonstrates a need to design acceptable awareness creation and advocacy programs to improve the knowledge and promote safe hygienic practice of adolescent school girls during menstruation.

3. Objectives

This study aims to explore the knowledge, attitude, and practices about menstrual hygiene of urban and rural college girls of Sivasagar and Dhubri districts of Assam.

4. Methodology

The required data for the study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. In the case of generation of primary data, we have adopted a non-probability sampling method instead of a probability sampling method. Though the probability sampling method gives better accuracy in terms of confidence level of the inferences of the study, there are many practical

difficulties in fully executing probability sampling methods. For example, while drawing a sample using probability sampling methods, say, random sampling technique, the frequency of occurrence of a particular category over others may frustrate the objective of the study. Keeping this issue in mind, the judgment sampling or non-probability sampling method has been followed.

Secondary data was collected from different government publications, books, journals, e-journals, publications of semi government organizations and institutions, universities, research institutions, World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and NGOs reports.

Before commencement of the survey a general meeting was conducted with the population and the female associate/assistant professors where the purpose of the study was explained and the guideline was also discussed. Students are requested to fill the questionnaire within two hours and submit. SPSS package were used for data analysis.

To generate the primary data for the study two districts of Assam namely Sivasagar and Dhubri are selected for the study. Sivasagar is one of the highest literacy rate districts among the districts of Assam, on the other hand Dhubri district has the lowest literacy rate among the districts of Assam. The study conducted was conducted from July 2019 to December 2019. The urban college is situated in Municipal cooperation on the other hand rural college is situated in

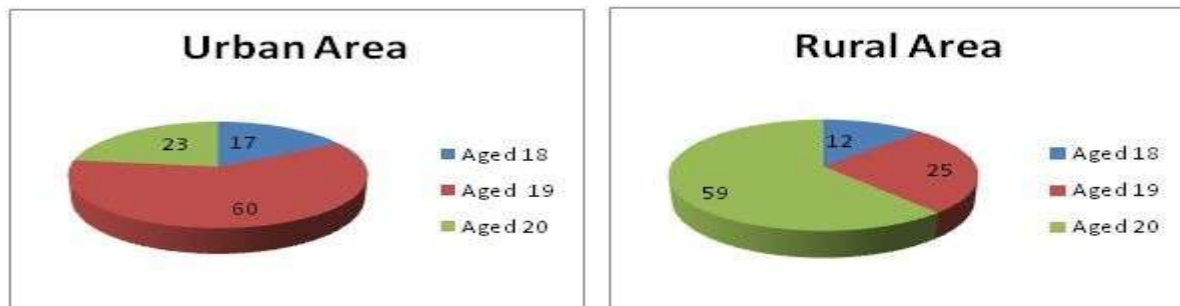
⁵ "Knowledge and menstrual hygiene practice among " 29 Nov. 2019,

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-019-7973-9>.

Panchayat area. Due permission was taken from the college authority to conduct the study. For urban, we collected the data from Amguri College, Amguri district Sivasagar, Assam and for rural, we college the data from Ratnapith College, Bahalpur Panchat, district Dhubri Assam.

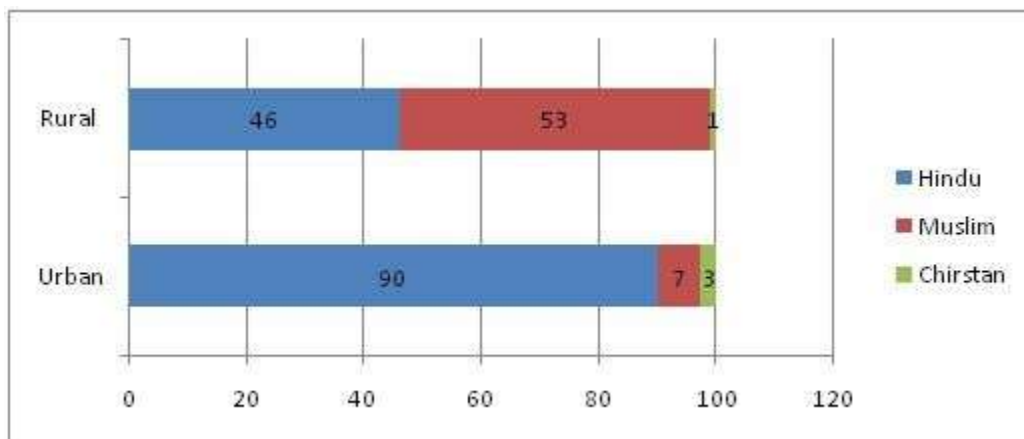
Depending on the objective of the study a questionnaire with both close and open ended questions was prepared in the local language which is Assamese. We have selected 150 sample students from 1st semester from both the colleges i.e the total sample was 300 female students. The age group of the sample students is 18-20.

Figure No. 1: Age of the sample Students (in %)



Source: Field Study

Figure No. 2: Religion wise representative of the Sample Students (in %)



Source: Field Study

5. Discussion and findings

5.1 Main source of Awareness on Menstruation

All the sample students reported that they were aware about the menstruation before menarche, both the urban as well as the rural students. When we tried to analyze the data from where they became aware about menstruation, very interesting things came up. About 75 per cent students of rural areas get the basic knowledge about menstruation from their mother followed by friends. But it was reported that about 42 per cent of urban students got the basic knowledge from the internet and social media followed by mothers. For the rural students, mother was the main source of information about menstruation. On the other hand for urban students, internet/social media was the main source of information.

Table No. 1: Main source of information of Menstruation

Source	Urban	Rural
Mother	35%	75%
Siblings	3%	5%
Friends	12%	10%
Book/magazine	5%	2%
Social media/internet	42%	5%
Other	3%	1%
Total (in %)	100	100

Source: Field Study

5.2 Menstruation is Physiological phenomena or Burden

This study observed that 56 per cent of rural and 70 per cent of urban students believed that menstruation as a physiological process whereas 8 per cent students of urban areas considered it as a natural burden and 10 percent rural students considered the same. Less number of students of rural areas considered menstruation as a physiological process might be due to poor educational status of the mothers as well as lack of health services. The students who considered it as a burden may be due to the troubles they have faced in the menstruation period. Further research may be taken in this direction.

Table No. 2: Menstruation is Physiological phenomena or Burden

Source	Urban	Rural
Physiological Process	70%	56%
Natural Burden	8%	10%
No response	22%	34%
Total (in %)	100	100

Source: Field Study

5.3 Hygiene practices during Menstruation

Good hygiene, such as use of sanitary pads and adequate washing of the genital area, is essential during menstruation. Young girls' need access to clean and soft absorbent sanitary products, which in the long run protect their health. The study tried to collect the information regarding the hygiene practices among the young girls. This study finds that 27 per cent of urban areas and 43 per cent of rural areas used homemade cloth pads during menstruation. On the other hand, 73 per cent of urban area and 57 per cent of rural area used sanitary napkins during menstruation. So from these figures, we can say that there is a clear difference between the rural and urban girls students as per the use of sanitary napkins which are treated more safe and

hygienic. A large portion of the rural students use homemade pads. Our study also reveals that both rural and urban girls reused their pad during menstruation (25 per cent in urban and 42 per cent in rural area). This finding of our study is very important as despite their high years of schooling/education, they still reused the pad even knowing the fact that it may infect their health. When we tried to find out the relation between socio-economic aspects with this fact, we found that the socio-economic condition of the student is highly associated with the reused pads and homemade pads as menstrual absorbent.

Table No. 3: Hygiene Practices during Menstruation

Details	Urban	Rural
Use of sanitary pad		
Homemade cloths	27	43
Sanitary napkins	73	57
Total	100%	100%
Reuse of pad		
Yes	25	42
No	75	58
Total	100%	100%

Source: Field survey

5.4 Social and family restriction of menstruation

All participating girls expressed that menstrual blood and menstruating women and girls

as 'dirty' and 'unclean' (97 per cent). As a consequence of this belief, women and girls were prevented from household tasks such as food preparation, cooking and housework while menstruating. It was reported that some communities have the beliefs that menstrual blood bringing bad luck to men and boys (70 percent), hence, food prepared or cooked by menstruating women is harmful to men and boys, causing them to age faster or making them sick.

It was reported that women/ girls are not allowed to entire Holy place (like Namghoor, Mandir, Dargha, Majar) or attend any religious ceremonies during the menstruating (99 percent) because they were 'dirty', but they are not happy with this imposed these restrictions upon themselves.

All the participants reported that their community has the belief menstruation girls/women cannot move freely and thus that puts restriction in mobility. They are not allowed to attend social ceremonies like marriage, birthday parties and any other ceremony as they are considered as dirty and unclean.

Some participants (27 per cent) reported that they were not being allowed to pick fruit from plants because the plants would die (community belief). They are also advised to take good and boil foods.

It is reported by the participants that they are not allowed to open their clothes in the common place with the other members of the family. They are directed to place their clothseparately.

Our study found that attitudes and beliefs around menstruation contribute to behavioural restrictions due to social and cultural norms. It is observed that some restrictions are common in both urban and rural areas while rural communities follow more restrictions than urban.

The study reveals that participants dried their menstrual clothes in the shade. Not being able to hygienically dry reusable menstrual hygiene products in direct sunlight may increase the risk of reproductive tract infections.

The restrictions on cooking, preparing food and performing household works were common both in urban and rural areas. These restrictions may be positive and negative depending on individual circumstances.

Some societies belief that menstruation is 'dirty' and that menstruating women and girls bring bad luck to men and boys has impacts on the social lives of female participants whichhelps in gender discrimination in society.

The shame and stigma associated with menstruation led to women and girls choosing to withdraw from community life while menstruating.

Our study finds that negative attitudes and beliefs around menstruation contribute to feelings of shame and embarrassment that can impact on participation in college as such as low attendance led to poor performance in tests/exam.

6. New initiatives for the Govt. of India/Assam

The scheme was initially implemented in 2011 in 107 selected districts in 17 States wherein a pack of six sanitary napkins called “Freedays” was provided to rural adolescent girls for Rs. 6. From 2014 onwards, funds are now being provided to States/UTs under National Health Mission for decentralized procurement of sanitary napkins packs for provision to rural adolescent girls at a subsidized rate of Rs 6 for a pack of 6 napkins. The ASHA workers will continue to be responsible for distribution, receiving an incentive @ Rs 1 per pack sold and a free pack of napkins every month for her own personal use.

On March 12th, 2018 Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma tabled a Rs. 2,149.04 crore deficit budget that focused on various aspects including health and hygiene of girls between 12 to 20 years of age. To ensure easy access to hygienic menstrual products, the government has earmarked a sum of Rs. 30 crore and has planned to reach out to 5 lakh girls in the session 2018-2019. Since then, the government is allotting a handsome amount for the hygienic menstrual products specially for school going girls.

7. Limitations

Our study has several limitations. This research only took place in two areas of Assam namely Sivasagar and Dhubri, moreover the study only selected the girls students of Amguri College and Ratnapith College. Due to the specific nature of the research aims, we were limited in our ability to comprehensively explore all menstruation-related cultural and social norms and taboos.

8. Conclusion

Participants reported that social, cultural and religious beliefs and attitudes that contribute to behavioral restrictions for menstruating women and girls. These restrictions impact on their ability to manage menstruation effectively and with dignity, and fully participate in college work and broader community life. While some restrictions may be desirable or self-imposed, others are unwanted which are imposed by communities. The negative impacts of restrictive practices include exacerbation of shame and stigmatization, prevention from participating in religious activities, and potentially absenteeism from College. Further research is needed on menstruation-related restrictive practices, with a particular focus on the physical and psychological health and gender equality impacts. Discriminatory attitudes and beliefs towards menstruation could be addressed through strengthening education programs in Schools, College

and communities more broadly. Women and girls must be central to the design and implementation of all menstruation-related interventions, to ensure that solutions are appropriate, acceptable and supportive of human rights. It is interesting to observed that compared to the Hindu communities, Muslim and Christen communities have less restriction on menstruation women/girls despite of their parents less educational status. So, from that findings we can say that parents' educational level do not have any positive correlation with restriction. Social beliefs and religious belief are more stronger factors than education as per the menstruation is concerned.

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