

A Study of Investigating the Menstrual Hygiene Awareness amongst the Teenage Population of Underprivileged Families

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ABSTRACT

Menstrual hygiene is a crucial health concern that demands open discussion within the members of the family, especially within the Indian community. The topic is of great concern and it is a vital necessity that the current generation adapts and acknowledges the relevance of menstrual hygiene. India, as a community, has continued to downgrade those who do not restrict themselves to talk about their periods. This has resulted in lack of knowledge, sanitation and has led to large scale health issues that impact the life expectancy or death rate of the country. Furthermore, it has been observed that girls of underprivileged families are very close minded about discussing their period problems with other members of the community. It is very crucial that this division between girls and the other members of the community is eradicated. It is highly necessary that especially the male sections of the society take up more initiative and understand menstruation in more detail. They must support and assist the girls in their time of need to establish a society with equality. Since India is a part of the UN, it has also adapted to the sustainable development goals. Sustainable development goal 3 (good health and well being), goal 4 (quality education) and goal 5 (gender inequality) are not achievable if the adolescent teenagers do not acknowledge the need of menstrual hygiene and why periods occur every month. Good health will be achieved only if women can openly discuss their problems and understand why that problem is occurring. Moreover, without a proper introduction to menstrual hygiene, the Indian population will not become highly educated in this regard. This phenomenon occurs almost every month which is why it should be given more attention. Finally, it is also important that men voluntarily take it upon themselves to support the women in this time of need and make them feel like a more active member of the community. To conclude, the value of menstrual hygiene is not yet recognised in the Indian community and it should be a priority to reverse this ideology for the growth and development of India.

Keywords: menstrual hygiene, self-awareness, open communication, source credibility, quality education, good health and well being

Subject: Biology

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is the release of blood from a girl's uterus. It is a woman's body indicating the release of tissues that are no longer needed. This cycle is repeated every month as a sign that the woman is getting close to the end of puberty. Periods happen primarily because of the changes in hormones. Our ovaries release the female hormones estrogen and progesterone. These hormones then get attached to the uterus and start to build up. The thickening allows the body to prepare for nurturing a fertilized egg. An egg is released and is ready to be fertilized and get nurtured in the lining of your uterus. When the egg is not fertilized, it begins to disappear which causes the thick lining of the tissues to break down and release in the form of blood. The cycle of the build up and breakdown of the tissues can take upto one month which is why most girls and women get their periods once a month. Now, it is important to highlight that this phenomenon is a huge part of a woman's life cycle. It helps their body to prepare for carrying an offspring and achieve motherhood. Since the periods are a major concern in most communities, it is also important to highlight the science behind the process. It is also worth mentioning that it should become a priority for both ladies and gents to assimilate the process of menstruation in order to determine when one may need help.

India is a developing nation that has continued to improve its political, social and economical status with the prime motive to be established as a fully developed country. In 2015, India adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth, SDGs) with the aim to strive for a better future. India has developed significantly in the past decade, yet we still have barriers of communication specially regarding menstrual hygiene. Families of the underprivileged population have little to no idea about the process of menstruation and do not ask for help with the continuous fear of being shut down or judged for speaking about their personal body problems. While continuous actions have been taken by the government of India such as the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare introducing a set of schemes for promotion of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls in the age group of 10-19 year in rural areas, we continue to live amongst millions of uneducated teenagers about an issue of such great importance.

According to Know India (<Year>), our population currently holds a literacy rate of 74.04 per cent, 82.14 for males and 65.46 for females. Therefore, we can deduce that 34.54% of women and 25.96% of men are still relatively unaware about the significance of periods and how one must obtain adequate hygiene to ensure that their health is not being impacted. Another revolution is that underprivileged families belonging to a government school are also unaware about the science behind menstruation and are unable to recognise the different health conditions that arise as a result of improper care. Keeping these factors in mind, the initial phases of research branched out to investigate past experiments regarding the awareness of menstrual hygiene.

While reviewing past studies conducted, there was a pattern of incomplete knowledge about the process of menstruation and the significance of maintaining hygiene. Girls have less knowledge about the health aspects associated with usage of dirty clothes or living in a dirty environment. These adolescents are unaware about simple thyroid problems, skin conditions, bleeding disorders, etc that can result from poor living standards during periods. Accessibility has also been a major obstacle that has led to underprivileged teenagers not knowing about the sanitary products that can be utilized in such harsh conditions. Furthermore, due to lack of unawareness, health cases are escalating resulting in higher demand for medical care or directly impacting the death rate of the country by a minute but significant number. Moreover, if the issue is not addressed effectively immediately, it may lead to a higher number of deaths that can troll the standard of living in india. Another noticeable factor is that the lack of knowledge leads to improper disposal of sanitary napkins causing health hazards to arise in the surrounding communities.

It is necessary that awareness is increased for the variety of issues that are a direct result of lack of awareness of menstrual hygiene. It is important to study the lack of awareness and utilize the data to come up with effective solutions that can assist in slowly eradicating the lack of understanding as a whole. For example: waste can be reduced by implementing modern techniques such as incineration, less awareness can be targeted by implementation of multiple campaigns/workshops, schools should dedicate a good amount of time discussing menstrual hygiene for both genders. Therefore, to analyze the amount of awareness regarding menstrual hygiene the research question is: To what extent does the adolescent population understand the significance of menstrual hygiene?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Search strategies

The sources utilized for research purposes were found by the means of accredited academic databases such as pubmed, google scholar, etc. Furthermore, peer review of all articles was considered to ensure that all data present is credible and consists of valuable information. Keywords used while researching include: menstrual hygiene awareness, men initiative during menstrual hygiene and quality education (with postulates)

Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in India

A study investigating menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls was conducted in India where it was established that “Strengthening of MHM programmes in India is needed. Education on awareness, access to hygienic absorbents and disposal of MHM items need to be addressed.” The article was published in March, 2016 and was widely appreciated due to the thorough and precise details present. Therefore, due to higher traffic, the information has been peer reviewed and all facts have been thoroughly checked. +Furthermore, it was found necessary to highlight that the study refers to why menstrual hygiene management is an important cause and why it is in the greater interest that a viable solution is found to ensure that teenagers are aware of this natural process. The quotation “Menstruating girls experienced many restrictions, especially for religious activities” must be highlighted and it should be discussed how these restrictions can have a direct impact on the health of these young minded girls. Furthermore, this statement can also branch out to show why there are communication barriers when it comes to the open discussion of menstrual hygiene between boys and girls. It is crucial that this barrier between the 2 genders is completely dissolved and that the population takes equal initiative for the betterment of India and for the sake of our coming generation to not undergo the lack of awareness about health problems

associated with menstrual hygiene. To conclude, one must study the lack of awareness trends amongst teenage population in complete detail in order to analyze the impact of these trends can be on our local community.

Gap in knowledge

While the pre-existing research talks in detail about the lack of awareness of menstrual hygiene, it has been a noted pattern that girls are always the one being investigated. I wanted to break free of the stereotype that only girls should be well aware of menstrual hygiene and brought attention to how the boys must also take equal initiative to learn about this natural process and support their friends in the time of need. Furthermore, it was highly disappointing to see that the pre-existing research shows a very negative correlation of the adolescent teenagers having very little to no knowledge about basic sanitation measures as well as standard of living. This showcased that the agenda is not given the prime attention that it deserves and hence should be addressed by the community to abolish the negative effects of lack of awareness. Moreover, we must also bring our attention to the fact that our teenage population is still restricted to act as an active member of our community by social norms that take away their right to communicate freely and voice out their concern to those amongst them. To see the large-scale impact of social restrictions, one should interview locals to collect data.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study analyzes the awareness of menstrual hygiene within the young population of India. The goal of this study is to generate results that could help raise a concern about the lack of awareness regarding periods and menstruation and highlight how large scale impact this problem can cause. The reason this topic is of such great importance is because it talks about a body process that takes place every month and is an important asset of a woman's life. It also showcases the linkage of different global crises that can be associated with the lack of awareness about menstruation. It is important that we bring our attention to promoting menstruation to both males and females to ensure that India continues to develop and grow as a nation where citizens are not restricted to discuss their health problems because of "social norms."

Selection of research methodology

The purpose of this study is to address the gap in knowledge about menstrual hygiene and discuss its impact on the community we live in. This method is a systematic approach to studying the state of knowledge, ability, interest or attitude of a targeted audience involving a particular topic of interest. In "Menstrual Hygiene Management in Resource-Poor Countries" author Anne Sebert Kuhlmann, Ph.D., is a professor and researcher in the Master of Public Health programs at Saint Louis University, stated that "Adequate management of menstrual hygiene is taken for granted in affluent countries; however, inadequate menstrual hygiene is a major problem for girls and women in resource-poor countries, which adversely affects the health and development of adolescent girls." The literature suggests that the community needs to ensure that menstrual hygiene is thoroughly discussed for the development of adolescent girls and to reduce the health concern in all nations. Furthermore, it can be enlisted that the method selected compiles enough data to predict the awareness teenagers have about menstrual hygiene. Therefore, the medium of research will be done on the basis of interviews. Conducted at NGOs, slumps and government schools around me and further, providing me with the relevant data required to conclude my findings on the awareness status of India.

Participants

In order to analyze the awareness of menstrual hygiene in the underprivileged adolescent teenagers, data from the original n=30 participants from the NGOs of Janakpuri were interviewed, the ratio of females to men were 21:10 within the confined age group of (9-18 years old). The client's data will be revealed in the form of serial numbers to obtain confidentiality. Hence, the clients will be referred to as Client No.(0<n<31). Furthermore, to differentiate the genders, all boys will be classified by XClient and girls will be referred to as Yclient. It was challenging to appeal to a larger audience as clients were very restricted to open up about their health choices and personal well being. As a result of which the data obtained was from a limited number of people. All participants belonged to 2 NGOs (Aradhana care foundation and sab sambhav NGO). They all had access to educational facilities and elders mentoring them in every way possible. The study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of ethical codes with written consent from all subjects. All subjects were told to give written informed consent and the protocol was approved by Lancers International School.

Procedure

The experimental procedure featured an interview with the subjects asking them about their awareness about menstrual hygiene. The subjects were asked a set of questions with the aim to seek what all basic knowledge they have regarding the agenda. It was identical to the work of many researchers that focused on menstrual hygiene factors such as the study of accessibility for menstrual hygiene resources. Participants first gave a basic introduction stating their full name, gender, age. In terms of girls, one question asked was whether they have already experienced their periods, this question was asked

to highlight how many girls undergoing their menstruation cycle are unaware about the effects or consequences of not obtaining proper menstrual hygiene.

Interview section (girls): The participants were initially asked about what all they have heard about menstrual hygiene. This included usage of pads, period cycles, why they happen and why it is necessary for the human body. Furthermore, once they were able to give a brief account about their knowledge, they were asked about the health problems associated with unhealthy lifestyle during menstrual hygiene. Next, the participants were asked about their comfort level when discussing their periods and whether they felt secure to discuss their needs with people of the opposing sex. They were then questioned on how comfortable they would be assisting those in need and to give a basic explanation about how they would help their friends and family in that time period. Lastly, the participants were asked to associate lack of awareness with quality education, health security and gender inequality. They were questioned directly on whether India can progress as a country unless they address periods as a topic of great concern and make it a priority to speak up when they need assistance.

Interview section (boys): To start off, I wanted to investigate their basic knowledge and utilized this to my advantage by questioning the guys about different sanitary products that girls require during their periods. Basic questions such as how and why periods happened were then discussed and the boys were asked to state what all things associated with periods have they heard about. Moreover, we then brought our attention to providing a comfort zone and the boys were questioned on how they would assist a girl in different situations such as period cramps, mood swings, and etc. Furthermore, the boys were also asked about how girls around them are treated during this time and whether that encourages a healthy support system or not. Lastly, the participants were asked to associate lack of awareness with quality education, health security and gender inequality. They were questioned directly on whether India can progress as a country unless they address periods as a topic of great concern and make it a priority to assist those in need.

RESULTS

Out of 30 subjects, the ratio of females to males was 2:1. Each section has been analyzed by the usage of percentage ratio and further broken down into categories depending on the depth of the question.

What are periods and why do they happen: This question was addressed to both females and males and 42.86% of the female population was able to give a detailed brief about the menstrual cycle and why our body undergoes this process. 57.14% of the girl population was able to showcase a certain level of understanding but did not know much about why our body undergoes the menstrual cycle. Lastly, 46.2% of the girl population had no understanding about periods and were blank about its importance in our daily life. In the men population, almost 73.7% of the sample was completely clueless about periods and did not know anything except that “women tend to bleed” in this time duration and that it was necessary for better health.

What health problems are associated with periods: This question was addressed to both male and female samples and a total of 14 subjects were able to show some understanding associated with the usage of dirty clothes during menstrual cycle and a certain knowledge about irregular cycles and how they impact our body in an excruciating way. Therefore, about 46.67% showed a meaningful understanding about the health problems that arise when menstrual hygiene is not taken care of.

How comfortable are you discussing your periods with your family and friends? Would you have trouble communicating about your needs to someone of the opposite sex: This question was female specific. About 23.73% of the group was uncomfortable discussing their periods with those closely related to them and they were told to keep information about their periods private because it is “personal” and “inappropriate.” The remaining 76.27% had no problem disclosing their needs and did not fear voicing out their concerns because they were raised in a relatively lenient environment where discussing health issues was not a topic of concern. This showed that at least teenagers are not scared to ask for help but there is still a huge percentage that is afraid to express their needs because of stereotypes or restrictive mindset.

How comfortable they would be assisting those in need: All of the girl population was comfortable in helping those in need. Since they are a large group of girls that live together there have been multiple times where they assisted each other in terms of how to wear the pads or calming the patient when required. They have also taught their younger siblings how to deal with periods but due to their lack of knowledge, not much detailed information is being shared with these youngsters making them vulnerable to multiple challenges as they do not understand the necessity of sanitation during the menstrual cycle.

How do you support a girl in her time of need: This question was addressed to the male sample where only 20% of the boys were able to come up with logical answers when put on spot. Simple questions such as “how do you emotionally appeal to

a girl?” or “what resources do they require while they are on their periods?” were not taught to these young teenagers. It showed a huge gap in understanding which was extremely disappointing to observe.

Can India progress until periods are normalized: This question was addressed to both the genders to see whether they can establish a connection between periods and the SDGs. Most of the answers lacked proper reasoning but about 78.85% of the population agreed that unless periods are normalized India will continue to live under unfortunate circumstances where girls are restricted to completely express themselves. Moreover, 13 out of the 31 stated that without girls being able to voice out their needs, health rates can be trolled as improper sanitation can result in medical concerns such as skin rashes, irregular cycles, dysmenorrhea, and etc. Furthermore, when questioned, they were able to interlink lack of awareness with gaps in the educational sector. Hence, covering all of my main 3 objectives behind the process.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it was excruciating to see that girls undergoing their periods are also not aware about the necessity of it and why exactly it takes place. The investigation showcased how much India still needs to progress to be able to achieve the title of a “developed country.” Furthermore, the investigation highlighted that adolescent boys are also not much aware about periods and do not know how to properly support a woman in her time of need. Therefore, it is essential that we take these samples into consideration and come up with innovative solutions that help eradicate these communication and knowledge barriers.

Tables and figures:

Awareness about health issues

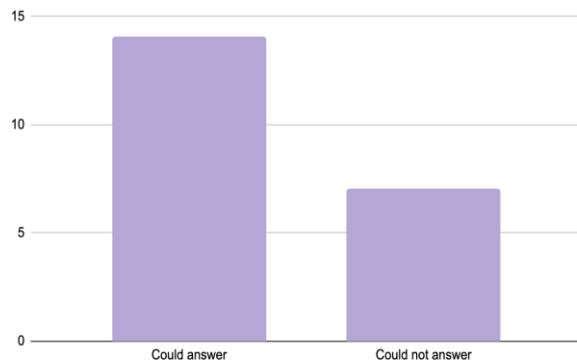


Table 1: Ratio of adolescent teenagers that were aware about menstrual hygiene health issues

Awareness in adolescent teenagers

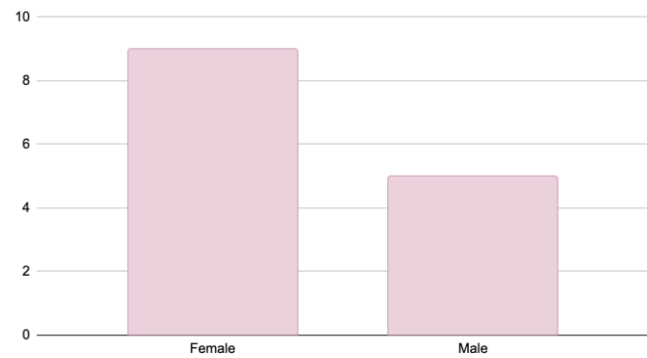


Table 2: ratio of females and males that knew about menstrual hygiene to a certain extend.

Comfort level of discussing menstrual hygiene (females)

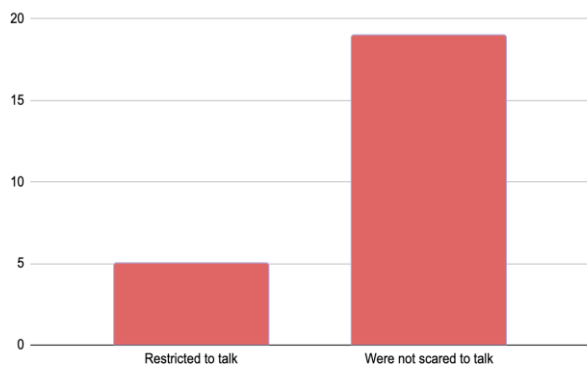


Table 3: Comfort level when asked to discuss Menstrual hygiene (females)

Supporting girls in their time of need (male specific)

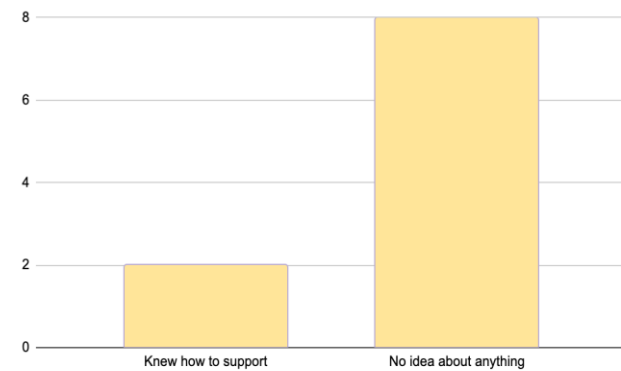


Table 4: bar chart representing number of guys who assisted females in their time of need.

What sectors of development can be impacted by lack of awareness about menstrual hygiene?

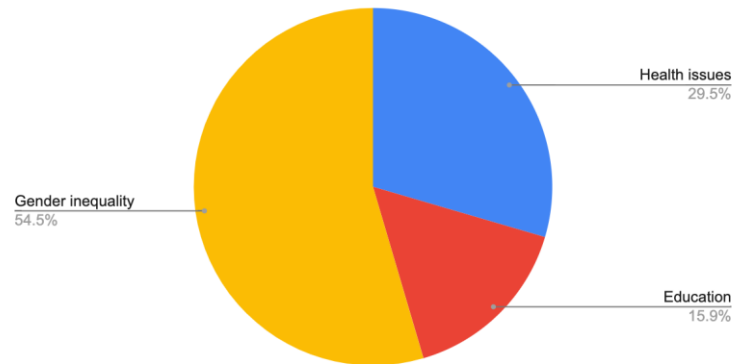


Table 5: pie chart about different sdfs affected by lack of awareness regarding menstrual hygiene.

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