

College on wheels

Gyanodaya Express

Aim- Assessing Practices and
Challenges regarding Menstruation

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a phenomenon unique to the females. The onset of menstruation is one of the most important changes occurring among the girls during the adolescent years. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in Indian society. The reaction to menstruation depends upon awareness and knowledge about the subject. This study aims to assess the practises and challenges regarding menstruation among girls of age above 18. This study used descriptive design with the use of survey as data collection method. The sample size is 187 and was selected through convenience sampling. The data was collected through questionnaire which consists of 20 closed and open-ended questions. The data was analysed using google analytics and was shown in pie charts and graphs. The study shows the adequate awareness among girls. Low percentage of girls who do not know about menstruation prior to menarche. Mothers and teacher are the major source of information about menstruation. Many have fear of urinary tract infections from using public washrooms. Restrictions are still imposed like not going to temple, not going in kitchen, no touching, sitting separately etc. Many faced challenges in train journey during menstruation like unclean washrooms, lack of water, disposal of waste, congested space etc. So, many suggested to improve the conditions of toilets in train through various ways. Overall, the experience of train journey in context of cleanliness and hygiene is not good for majority of respondents. This study majorly highlights the problems faced by females in train journey that should be kept in mind by the authorities for future improvements.

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a phenomenon unique to the females. The onset of menstruation is one of the most important changes occurring among the girls during the adolescent years. The first menstruation (menarche) occurs between 11 and 15 years with a mean of 13 years. Adolescent girls constitute a vulnerable group, particularly in India where female child is neglected one. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in Indian society. The reaction to menstruation depends upon awareness and knowledge about the subject. The manner in which a girl learns about menstruation and its associated changes may have an impact on her response to the event of menarche. Although menstruation is a natural process, it is linked with several misconceptions and practices, which sometimes result into adverse health outcomes.

Most women of reproductive age have some physical discomfort or dysphasia in the weeks before menstruation. Symptoms are often mild, but can be severe enough to substantially affect daily activities. About 5–8% of women thus suffer from severe premenstrual syndrome (PMS) Mood and behavioural symptoms, including irritability, tension, depressed mood, tearfulness, and mood swings, are the most distressing, but somatic complaints, such as breast tenderness and bloating, can also be problematic.

Besides, the lack of knowledge and awareness also lead to some poor personal hygienic practices during menstruation leading to many reproductive tract infections. Menstrual hygiene depends upon the educational, socioeconomic, and cultural statuses of family. School curriculum also has some role in menstrual health. Therefore, increased knowledge about menstruation from adolescent period help in decreased suffering of millions of women. Various studies indicate that a huge information gap exists among rural and urban adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene.

Hygiene-related practices during menstruation have a health impact in terms of increased vulnerability to reproductive tract infections (RTI). Women having better knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene and safe practices are less vulnerable to RTI and its consequences. Therefore, increased knowledge about menstruation right from childhood may escalate safe practices and may help in mitigating the suffering of millions of women. Most of the school health programs do include education on menstruation and hygiene practices. However, it is not included in programs for community water and sanitation, school sanitation and hygiene promotion. It is not incorporated into infrastructure design for toilets and environmental waste disposal or policies, training manuals or guidelines, including those for health workers, engineers, or gender mainstreaming.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Menstrual hygiene is an issue that is insufficiently acknowledged. Lack of adequate privacy and sanitation of toilets for school girls; make them vulnerable to mental, emotional, and physical problem especially during their menstruating days. This study was conducted to identify the issues and challenges of menstruation faced by the adolescent girls, to determine the factors behind the existing practices of menstrual hygiene and to find out the proportion of the study population complaining of symptoms related to genitourinary tract and related health care seeking behaviour. This is a descriptive, cross-sectional study and was conducted among 190 adolescent girls of a rural secondary school of West Bengal. Out of 190 respondents, 80(42%) girls were aware about menstruation prior to attainment of menarche. After bivariate analysis, the significant risk factors of good menstrual hygiene were entered into the multivariate model. It revealed that good menstrual hygiene was more among those whose mothers were literate [AOR 2.3 (1.06-5.01)], girls studying in more than grade X in school [AOR 2.71(1.16-6.35)], having prior knowledge about menstruation before menarche [AOR 2.97(1.29-6.85)], usage of proper sanitary latrine at home [AOR 3.14(1.42-6.00)] and exposure to advertisements promoting usage of sanitary towels in mass media [AOR-2.52(1.10-5.70)]. Adoption of high quality menstrual hygiene will play an important role in prevention of RTI and Cancer of cervix among the women population. Therefore, promoting positive attitudes towards management of menstruation and related problems among the adolescent girls is the need of the hour. (Sudeshna & Aparajita,2012)

This study was done in the adolescent girls to evaluate the knowledge and practice on different aspects of menstrual hygiene. One hundred and fifty adolescent girls of age 13-15 years from 3 schools of Shivanagar and Patihani village development committees of Chitwan district, Nepal were involved in this study. Altogether 27 questions were asked to each of them. During our study, we found that they were not properly maintaining the menstrual hygiene. Only 6.0% of girls knew that menstruation is a physiologic process, 36.7% knew that it is caused by hormones. Ninety-four percentages of them use the pads during the period but only 11.3% dispose it. Overall knowledge and practice were 40.6% and 12.9% respectively. Although knowledge was better than practice, both were not satisfactory. So, the girls should be educated about the process and significance of menstruation, use of proper pads or absorbents and its proper disposal. This can be achieved by giving them proper training and health education (by teachers, family members, health educators, and media) so that there will not be any misconception to the adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene. (Adhikari et al., 2008)

This article sheds light on some important issues related to menstrual practices and its association with reproductive morbidity among girls. The study indicates that a significantly large proportion of girls were not aware of menstruation when they first experienced it. Mothers, sisters, and friends were found to be the major source of information. Much of this information imparted to a young girl is in the form of restrictions on her movements and behaviour. More than three-fourths reported using old cloth during menstruation, and a large proportion of them were reusing the same during subsequent periods. Regression analysis in this study identified schooling, residential status, occupation of father, caste, and exposure to media to be the major predictors of safe menstrual practices among adolescent girls in Rajasthan. Importantly, this study found a significantly strong relationship between practices during menstruation and prevalence (reported symptoms) of RTIs. The prevalence of RTIs was more than three times higher among girls having unsafe menstrual practices. The article makes a strong case that ignorance, false perceptions and unsafe practices regarding menstruation are not uncommon among adolescents in the study area, having serious implications for reproductive and sexual health. Further, the study demonstrates that among the determinants for reproductive morbidity, practices during menstruation appear to be the most dominant factor. These findings reinforce the need to bring them out of traditional beliefs, misconceptions, and restrictions, and encourage safe and hygienic practices. (Khanna et al., 2005)

There are vast disparities of information gap between urban and rural adolescent girls in India, which do have an impact on the practices during menstruation. To assess and compare the knowledge, perceptions, and practices of adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene in rural and urban areas of Jodhpur. It was a cross-sectional study, which was conducted on school going adolescent girls in urban and rural schools of Jodhpur. The sample size for the study was 450, which was divided into rural and urban adolescent girls. A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analysed using SPSS v. 16. Inferences were drawn using Chi-square test. The mean age of menarche was 13.41 ± 1.07 years. A significantly more number of girls from an urban area (56.2%) were using sanitary napkins during menstruation. Only around one-fourth of the girls in study area had ever been counselled for menstrual hygiene. Awareness about adolescent health clinic was significantly more among urban girls. This study reveals that significant differences were observed among urban and rural adolescent girls in terms of knowledge, perception, and practices related to menstrual hygiene. The findings are comparable to other parts of the country. Ignorance, false perceptions, and unhygienic practices were also prevailing among adolescent girls. This indicated an urgent need for health promotion interventions in the form of regular awareness sessions and counselling for menstrual hygiene management at primary care level. (Choudhary & Gupta, 2019)

METHODOLOGY

Research methods may be understood as all those methods/ techniques that are used for conduction of research (Kothari,2019). In other words, research methods are the strategies, processes or techniques utilised in the collection of data or evidence for analysis to uncover new information or create better understanding of a topic.

RESEARCH DESIGN- Research design is the specific procedure involved in the research process: data collection, data analysis, and report writing. (Creswell,2014). This study used descriptive design with the use of survey as data collection method.

SAMPLING - In this study we have used convenient sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling to collect data from the participants who are with us in our train journey. We collected the data only from Females. In our questionnaire we received a total of 187 responses. Most of the respondents were students from the age group 18 -25. Most of students are from Jammu and Kashmir belonging from different regions.

DATA COLLECTION- To fulfil the purpose of the study we have used the tool of Questionnaire to collect the data from the participants. The questionnaire was conducted online through Google forms. It consists of 20 open and closed ended questions. which included questions related to practise, restrictions, challenges related to menstruation. We used this method as it is convenient to collect the data from a large sample.

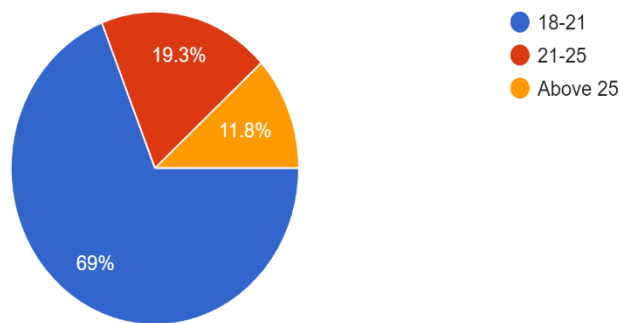
DATA ANALYSIS - On the basis of our questionnaire, we did our findings and interpretation of many aspects regarding the practises and challenges. The Data we analysed was shown in pie charts and graphs.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS - Confidentiality of the participant's data was maintained. Participants were told about the objectives and purpose of the study. The participant was assured that the participation is voluntary and they can withdraw their participation at any point of time. Before the conduction of the interview, the participants have ensured confidentiality of the data provided by them and where it would be used.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

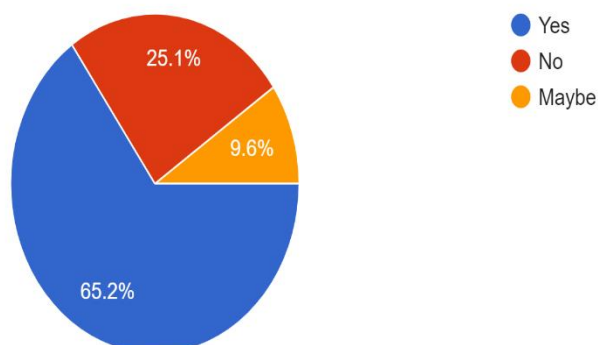
1. *Age group* - 129 responses were from age 18-21, 36 were from 21-25, and 22 were above 25.

Age
187 responses

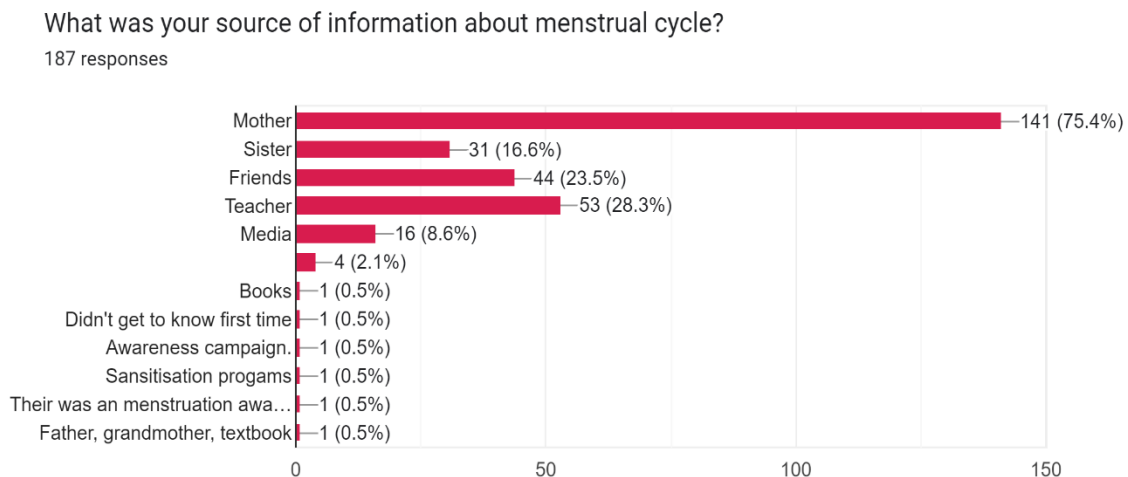


2. *Knowledge about Menstruation obtained before or after attaining Menarche* - 122 people responded with YES and 47 people responded with NO.

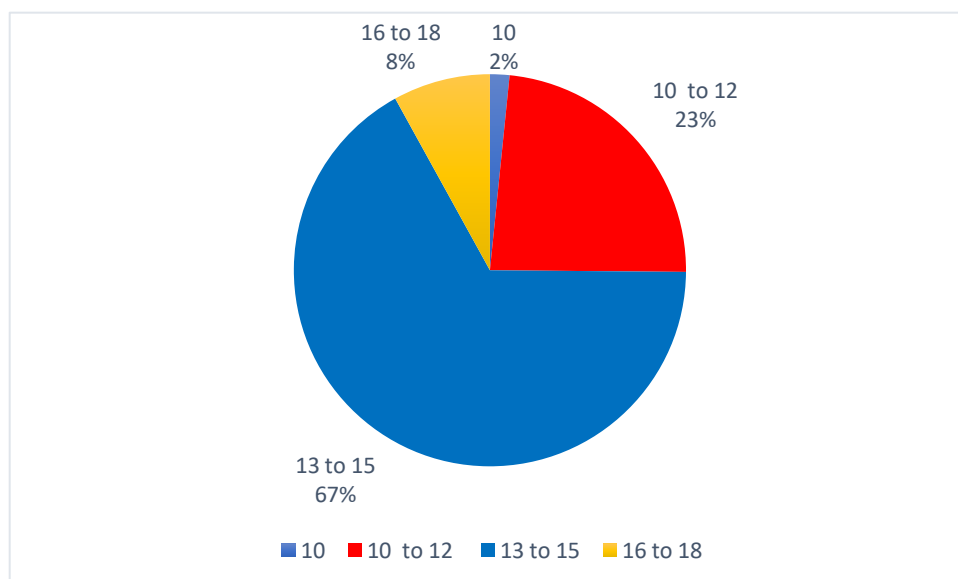
Did you know about menstrual cycle before you got your menstruation?
187 responses



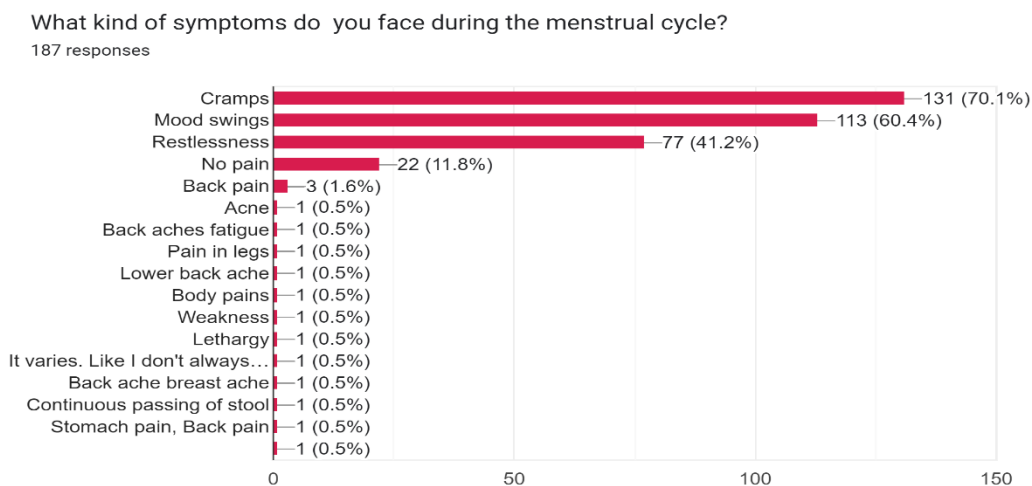
3. *Source of Information about Menstruation* - In the present study, mother indeed was the most common source of information about menstruation (75.4%). Apart from mother, Teacher and Media also plays role in informing students.



4. *Age of Menarche*- This study shows that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 10-18 years with maximum number of girls in the 13 to 15 years group.

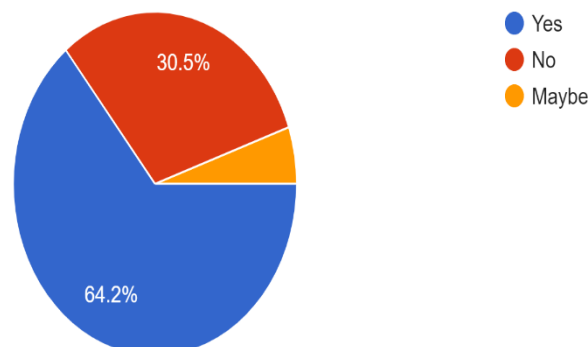


5. *Observation of PMS symptoms in samples:* The symptoms vary from individual to individual with most prevalent is cramps (70.1%) followed by mood swings (60.4%) and restlessness (41.2%).

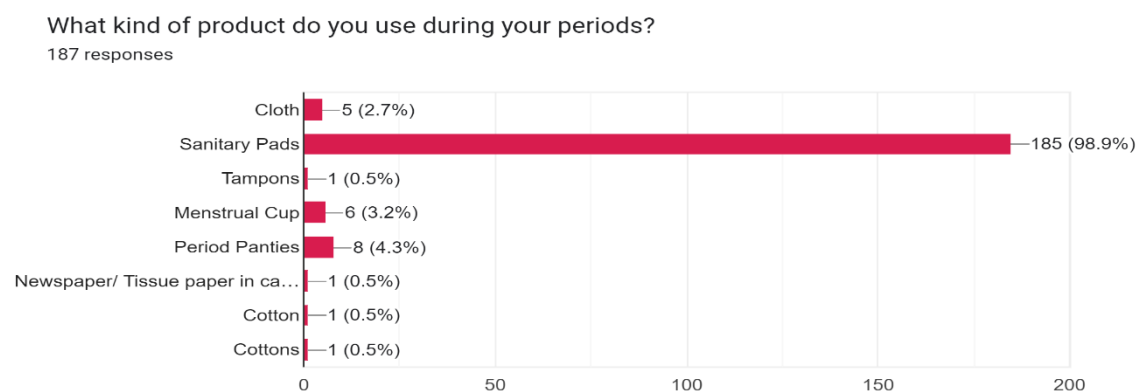


6. *Awareness Campaigns in Schools:* 120 people responded that they have attended awareness camps and 57 people responded that they did not attend any awareness camps.

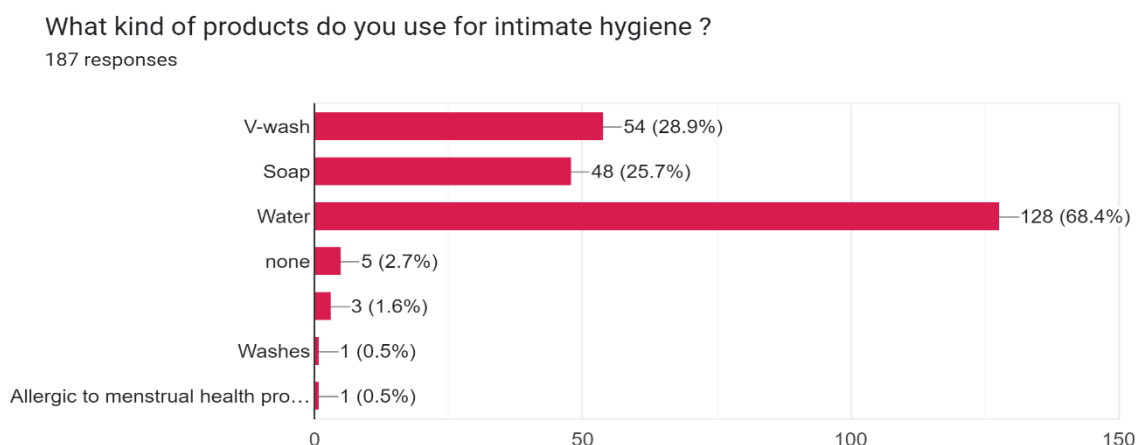
Have you attended any awareness campaigns regarding menstruation in your college/school/society?
187 responses



7. *Kind of Products that are used during Menstruation:* About 98.9% people responded that they use sanitary pads during periods. But as we know most of sanitary pads contain plastic and are just thrown in the garbage or flushed down the toilet. It is a havoc environmental challenge as these pads take years to biodegrade, so there should be more awareness regarding other eco-friendly alternatives to it.



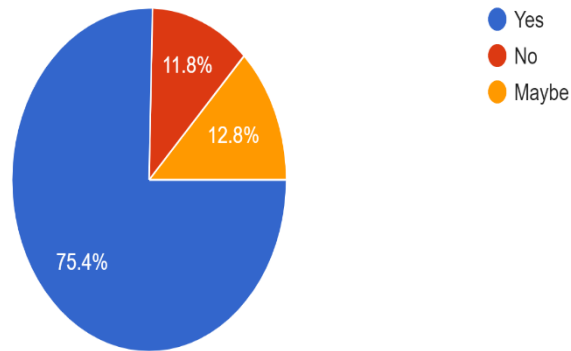
8. *Usage of Products for Intimate Hygiene:* Out of 187, majority of respondents use water for intimate hygiene followed by V-wash and Soap.



9. Fear of Urinary Tract Infections: About 141 people responded that they have fear about UTI while using public washrooms.

Do you have fear about urinary tract infections while using public washrooms.

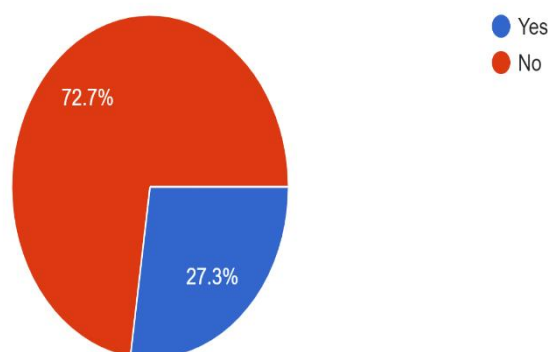
187 responses



10. Percentage of people suffering from urinary tract infections among the samples : In our sample 51 (27.3%) people responded that they have faced Urinary tract Infections.

Have you ever suffered from Urinary Tract Infections?

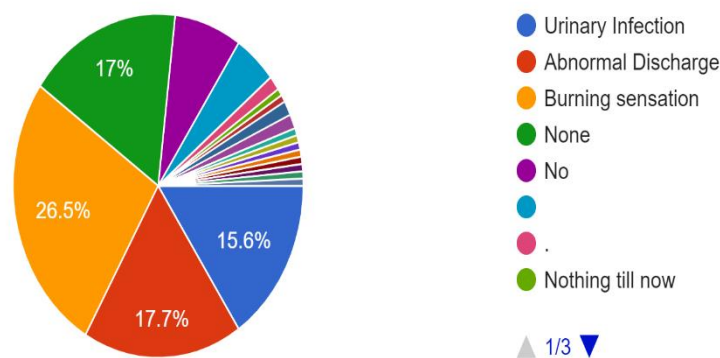
187 responses



11. Percentage of people suffering from types of urinary tract infections: 39 people responded that they have faced burning sensation in intimate areas, 26 faced Abnormal Discharge and 23 urinary infections.

Which type of urinary Tract Infections have you face?

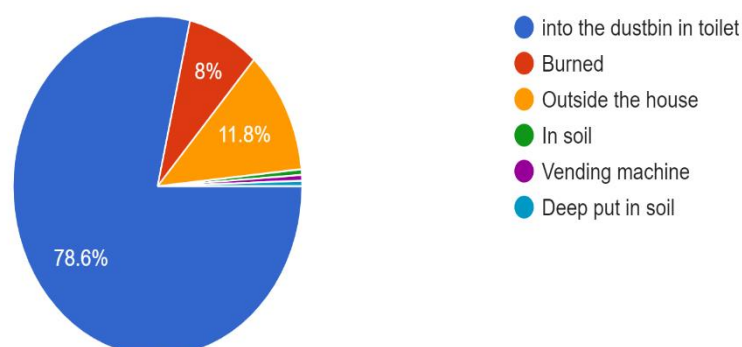
147 responses



12. Place Of Disposal of Menstrual materials: 147 respondents dispose menstrual materials in dustbins, 15 burned the materials and 22 outside the house.

where do you dispose your menstrual materials?

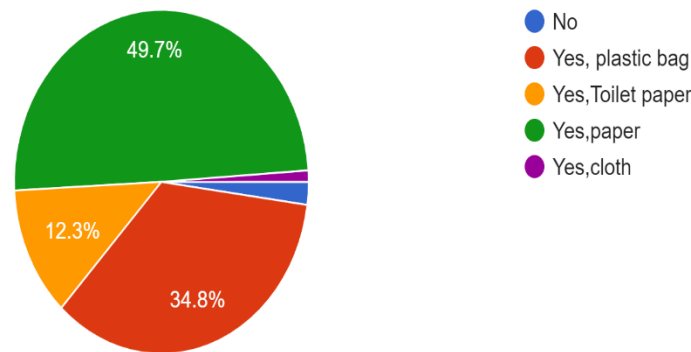
187 responses



13. *Way Of Disposal*: 93 responded wrapping it with paper and 65 with plastic bag.

During disposal , do you usually wrap them in anything ?

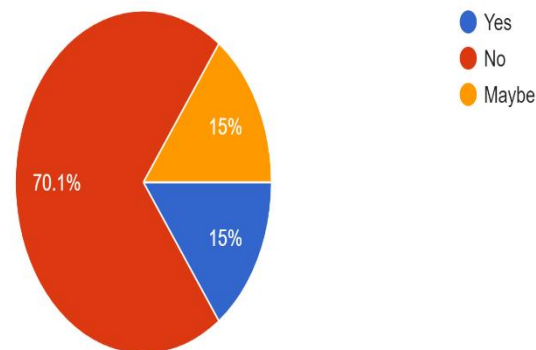
187 responses



14. *Percentage of people for not consuming any medications during PMS symptoms*: 131 people responded that they do not consume any medicine during menstruation. 28 responded with as YES.

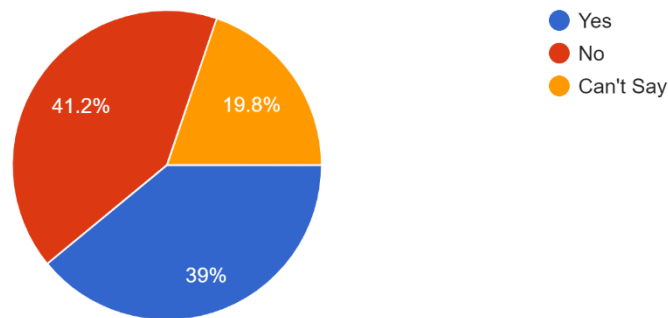
Do you take any medicine during menstruation ?

187 responses



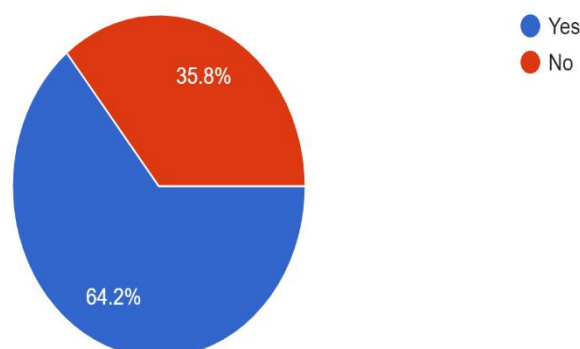
15. Awareness in community: 77 respondents believe that there is no awareness and 73 believe that there is enough awareness in their community.

Do you feel there is enough awareness and education about menstruation in your community?
187 responses



16. Open talk about Menstruation: 120 people says that they can talk openly about menstruation. However, 67 people says that they still can not openly talk about it.

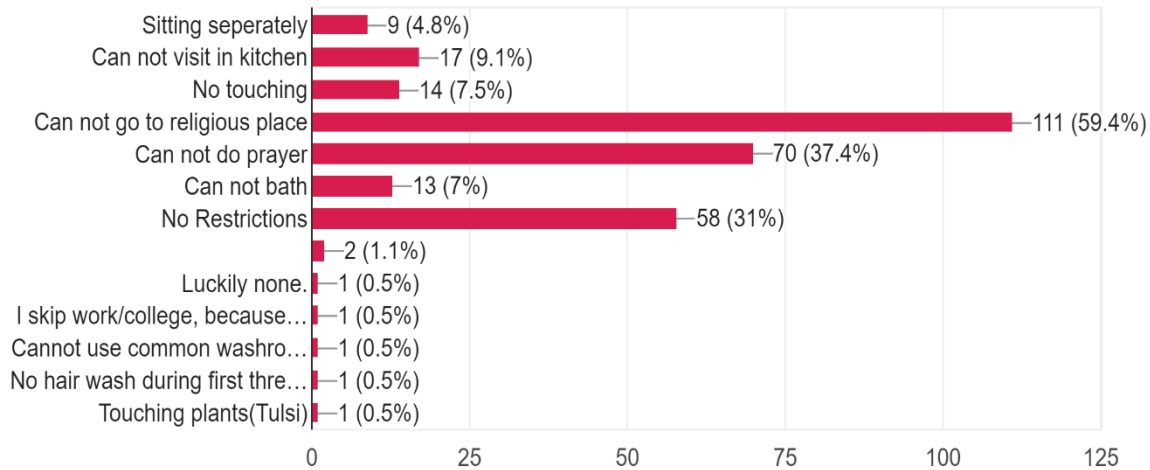
Are you able to talk openly about menstruation with your family ?
187 responses



17. Restrictions related to menstruation:

What kind of restrictions do you face during menstruation?(select more than one)

187 responses



18.Challenges Faced in Train journey During Menstruation:

What kind of problem do you face while you are in train during menstruation?

87 responses

Unclean washrooms

Basically because toilet are not clean so I face hygiene issues and there is not facility of sanitary napkins in the train.

As in the coming days we won't be able to bathe so it would be tedious to maintain hygiene

Lack of water

Cleaness of toilet

Unclean washroom.

Cramps, problem in changing sanitary pads, properly disposing of sanitary pads.

19. Suggestions' Regarding Improvement in Train journey:

Do you want to give any suggestion regarding the improvement of menstrual hygiene during train journey?

187 responses

I prefer Indian Toilet seat and currently I'm feeling very uncomfortable and unhygienic to use Western Toilet seats

Improve toilet conditions

Required a sanitary machine
Having medicine 🚑

There should be some napkins where we keep sanitary napkins which are available to everyone

Toilet should be clean and providing pads in the train

Sanitary napkin disposing machine in every toilet, non graffiti coating in the toilets to make less contacts with the seats ,handles etc.

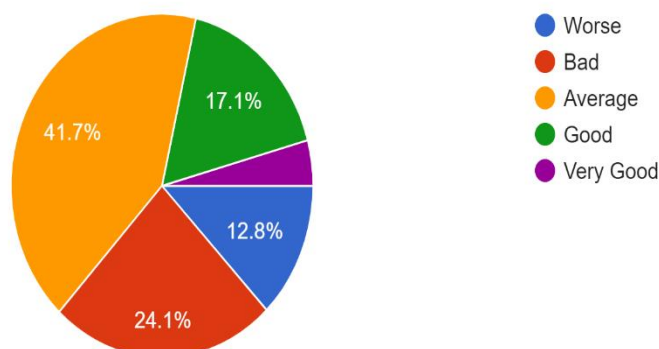
Improvement of hygiene and availability of enough water

Availability of water . clean washroom or napkins box

20. Rating of the Experience:

Rate the experience of your train journey in context of Hygiene and Cleanliness.

187 responses



DISCUSSIONS

This study was carried out in a population of girls above 18 who were travelling in train. It has revealed the practices and challenges related to menstruation and menstrual hygiene in the study population. Since the study population is girls studying in university the level of knowledge among girls is adequate. This study shows that the age of menstruating girls ranged from 10 -18 years with maximum number of girls in the 13 to 15 years group. A similar study conducted by Dasgupta A and Sarkar M reported the age of menstruating girls to be between 14-17 years with maximum number of girls between 14-15 years of age. In our study only 47 people (25 %) were ignorant about menstruation before attaining menarche. Each girl should know about menstruation which is an important event at the threshold of adolescence and ideally a mother should be the main source of information at this tender age. In the present study, mother indeed was the most common source of information about menstruation and menstrual hygiene (75.4%). This observation is not surprising since mothers are often the closest informant and “teacher” of the growing adolescent girl and the increase in mothers being the main source of information in the present study may be due to the decreasing family size and a more healthy and friendly relationship between the mother and her daughter. However, information on menstruation given by the mother is often incomplete and incorrect, usually being based on cultural myths, and therefore probably perpetuating negative and distorted perceptions and practices of menstruation. In the present study, teachers constituted 28.3% as the source of information. This reflects that teachers do impart the knowledge through education programs about menstrual hygiene in their schools. In the present study most of the girls (70%) experience severe menstrual cramps. The medical term for period pain or the pain associated with menstruation is dysmenorrhea. A 2018 article in Quartz quoted John Guillebaud, a University College London reproductive health professor, as saying that patients described menstrual cramping pain as “almost as bad as having a heart attack.” About 3 to 33% of menstruating females report very severe pain that renders them incapacitated for 1 to 3 days, causing them to miss school or work. More than one-quarter of females take work absences or reduce their working hours for at least 1 day per 6 months for period pain. It can also have a negative effect on multiple aspects of a person’s life, including their friendships, family relationships, school or work performance, and social and recreational activities. In our study the percentage of people who have attended any awareness programs in school or college is 64.2% that shows that there is an increment in spreading awareness related to a topic that is considered as a taboo. But in most cases these types of programs only include girls and that’s why male population has less knowledge about menstruation. There should be equal awareness about menstruation between male and females. Regarding the material used during menstruation, in the present study, surprisingly 98.9% of girls used sanitary napkins. This shows the gradual modernization occurring in this part of the country & better hygienic practices adopted by these girls. And for intimate hygiene majority chooses water for cleaning intimate areas as it is the most neutral cleanser followed by v -wash and soap that may not be suitable for everyone.

In our study 75.4 % people have generated fear of UTI from using public washrooms. And 27.3 % have faced UTI, like 39 people responded that they have faced burning sensation in intimate areas, 26 faced Abnormal Discharge and 23 urinary infections. In train journey most of the people almost try to avoid using washrooms, because the toilets are not clean and many people are using it. Many urged to have at least a clean toilet in all girls' train tour. Regarding the disposal of menstrual materials, 147 respondents dispose menstrual materials in dustbins, 15 burned the materials and 22 outside the house and 93 responded wrapping it with paper and 65 with plastic bag. As most of the people use sanitary pads means burning them release harmful chemicals in the environment. Many cities do not have waste segregation system in collecting waste and that leads to mixing of degradable and non-degradable waste from households. And that also harms the people who are segregating your waste (if they), otherwise the waste collected just end up in land fills and polluting air and soil. Therefore, there should be a separate segregation of sanitary waste to protect the environment and health of people. 41.2 % people believe that there is not enough awareness about menstruation in their community and 35.8% are still not able to talk openly about menstruation. Though in the age of technology and information spreading awareness is not tough but changing the mentality of people to accept it as normal as any other body phenomenon is difficult. However, 39% believe that there is enough awareness in their community, 64.2% people can talk openly about it. Many restrictions were imposed on the girls in the present study, like not visiting temple (59.4%), cannot do prayer, can not go in kitchen especially not touching pickles, sitting separately, no touching, cannot bath, can not touch plants like Tulsi. This is similar to study, Sudeshna & Aparajita, 2012 where visiting temple (75.6%) have been the most common restrictions observed by the girls. Many faced various challenges in train journey like unclean washrooms, lack of water, toilets are less spacious, there is no proper disposal system in train, uncomfortable in changing pads in train, and there is no availability of pads in case of emergency.

When asked about suggestions to improve the condition, many urged to have a clean washroom with proper water facilities, a separate washroom for females, sanitary napkins vending machines should be there, separate disposal for sanitary pads should be there, there should be option for Indian toilets as well, the washrooms should be designed in more spacious way. Cleaning should be done on regular interval. A separate changing room and a bathroom in long train journey.

For the overall train journey experience in context of hygiene and cleanliness 41.7% rated as Average, 24.1% as Bad, 12.8% as worse and only 17.1% as Good and 4.3% as Very good. From this we can say that the majority did not like the hygiene conditions in train.

CONCLUSION

Education has been the key stone in propagating menstrual hygiene practices. The study has showed that there is adequate awareness among the study population as the participants were college students. The study shows various aspects of practises and challenges that females face during menstruation. Majority of girls are using sanitary pads and using proper disposal ways. Many have fear of urinary tract infections from using public washrooms. They try to avoid using it during train journey because they are unhygienic and proper cleaning is not done. The overall experience in context to hygiene in train is not very good for majority of participants. Majority participant believe that the community awareness is still less and much people are not able to talk openly about it. There are still many restrictions that are practised in society related to menstruation. Thus, it can be concluded from the study that the practises that girls are following is good enough and major efforts should be done to provide good hygienic conditions for females in train.

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