Management Of Menstruation Hygienenic Practices Among The Rural Adolescent Girls Of Odisha

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Abstract

This paper reports on the results of the survey among the menstruation hygienic practices of adolescent girls of Nayagarh district of Odisha. Data was collected on the knowledge, awareness and about hygienic practices during menstruation and their reproductive health by giving weightage to individual education. The adolescent girls require information regarding hygienic practices during menstruation to maintain their reproductive health status. But in rural Odisha a lot of socio cultural taboos has been associated with the menstrual hygienic practices which affect the physical, psychological and social condition of adolescent girls. The adolescent girls are neglected due to the various factors like poverty, discrimination, superstition etc. In rural areas due to illiteracy and ignorance most of people are not aware about the hygienic practices during menstruation. In rural areas the social taboos put a lot of restrictions for the adolescent girls to share the matter of menstruation among the female members of the family. They are asked by the elder female members of the family to keep secrecy about this issue, for which they became helpless to clear their doubts relating to this sensitive health issue. In these cases the adolescent girls are deprived of proper hygienic practices which hamper their reproductive health, so in many cases the adolescent girls faces different types of reproductive health problem due to their family negligence. The study suggests that majority of illiterate adolescent girls are facing problems relating to hygienic practices during menstruation. So the role of education is the important which helps the adolescents girls to change their health behaviour and make them aware about hygienic practices. Health camp and the involvement of Govt and Non-govt organizations are important to provide better reproductive health services to the rural adolescent girls.

Key words: Menstruation, Hygiene, Adolescent, Reproductive, Superstition

Introduction

This paper is concerned with management of hygienic practices among the adolescent girls of Nayagarh district of Odisha. According to an estimate, there are about 88 lakh adolescents (10-19 year) in Odisha and they constitute roughly 22% of population in the state. Thus they constitute one of the largest segments of the state population. Approximately 43 lakhs or roughly 49% of the total adolescents are girls and the remaining 51% of 45 lakhs are boys. It is estimated that about 15% of adolescents live in urban areas and the remaining 85% live in rural areas. Given the level of literacy in the state, a large number of these adolescents are out of school. A large number also get married early-the estimates vary but it is believed that on an average about 20 (NFHS-4) to 25 (RCH-2000) percentage of girls marry below the age of 18 years.

It is important to address the management of menstruation which is vital for healthy, productive and dignified lives of adolescent girls. It is essential for adolescent girls to have basic knowledge on the effective management of bleeding due to menstruation. This requires adequate access to proper sanitation and hygiene services. Access to information to understand menstrual cycle and how to manage menstruation hygienically contributes to better management of the menstrual cycle. Issues relating to the practical management of menstrual hygiene are very important because they have health implications in terms of vulnerability to infections, thereby increasing susceptibility to reproductive tract infections (RTI), such as bacterial vaginosis (BV) that is sited to be more common in women with unhygienic menstrual hygiene management (MHM) practices (Baisley, et al. 2009; Balamuruganet. al, 2012). Poor MHM may also lead to bad odor of menstrual blood putting girls at risk of being stigmatized. Many factors influence menstrual hygiene management amongst rural adolescent girls in Nayagarh. These factors range from cultural affiliation, ethnicity, availability of wash facilities in the society, educational status, income status, knowledge of menstrual hygiene, age (level of maturity) and they may all have significant influence on

menstrual hygiene management among rural adolescent girls in Nayagarh. However, this study takes into consideration all these factors.

There have been various steps taken in the state to address the needs of the adolescence. As per the data of the National Family Health Survey, in Odisha 53 per cent women use unhygienic methods and around 69 per cent women use cloth during menstruation. To address this dire scenario, the Odisha government has initiated Khushi Scheme. The government of Odisha isalso providing sanitary napkins to rural women at subsidised rates of Rs. 6 for six napkins through ASHA workers. And it is easily available at the ANM center and Anganwadi centers. Government of India has launched a new programme for the promotion of Menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls in rural areas. This programme will be targeted at adolescent girls in the age group of 10-19 years, residing in rural areas, to ensure that they have adequate knowledge and information about the use of sanitary napkins, that high quality safe products are made available to them, and that environmentally safe disposal mechanisms are readily accessible.

For instance, the department of Women and Child development is implementing the Kishori Sakti Yojana (KSY). As a part of KSY, the department is intending to form Blika Mandals in the entire state. This would provide a significant forum for the health department to provide the adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) services in the state. Besides the WCD department, the SCERT has been implementing the population education program, targeting the in-school adolescents. The state AIDS cell has also been implementing education on HIV/AIDS for the in-school adolescents through the SCERT. However, there has been no focused attention paid to addressing adolescents. The health strategy of Orissa has acknowledge the need to address them and has articulated strategies for this purpose.

Significance of Adolescent Stage:

Adolescence is a crucial phase in the life of women. At this stage, she stands at the threshold of adulthood. This stage is intermediary between childhood and womanhood and it is the most eventful for mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing. Adolescents are faced with a number of critical issues unique to their age group, such as, changes in the body brought or by puberty, and the implications of teen age pregnancy.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence in terms of age between 10-19 years. It also describes as the period of, "sexual development from the initial appearance of secondary sexual characteristics to sexual maturity, psychological development from child to adult identification, and socioeconomic development from dependence to relative independence" (WHO, 1975). The WHO defines adolescence in terms of phase of life marked by special attributes that include rapid physical growth and development; physical, social and psychological maturity but not all at the same sex and maturity and the onset of sexual activity; experimentation; development of adult mental processes and adult identify and transition from total socio-economic dependence to relative independence.

It is a period in which children attain physical maturity but are not burdened with adult roles and responsibilities (Kansal et al-2016; Senderowitz, 1995).

The term may be applied to the emotional and behavioural states supposedly associated with becoming adult; the phase in the life-cycle before the physical change associated with puberty are socially recognized; or the transition in status from childhood to adulthood, according to "A dictionary of Sociology(Oxford)".

Adolescents accounted for 22.8 % of the total population of India (Planning Commission, 2001). According to 2011, the adolescents are around 550 million and there are around 239 million adolescents in India are in the age group of 10-19 years (Government of India, Census 2011). There are over 355 million menstruating women and girls in India, but millions of women across the country still face significant barriers to a comfortable and dignified experience with menstrual hygiene. Onset of menstruation is one of the most important changes occurring among the girls during the adolescence. The onset of puberty has long been accepted as the starting point of adolescence, and key social-role transitions such as completion of marriage, and childrearing historically signaled the end. Puberty is initiated in late childhood through a cascade of endocrine changes that lead to sexual maturation and reproductive capability. Beginning of menstruation i.e.

between 11 and 15 years with a mean of 13 years; however, it may vary depending on geographic variation, environmental condition, nutritional statusetc.

Socio Cultural practices and Menstruation of Adolescent Girls

Adolescent girls constitute a vulnerable group, particularly in India where female child is neglected one. In the existing Indian cultural milieu, the society is interwoven into a set of traditions, myths and misconceptions especially about menstruation and related issues. Once girls reach menarche in India, there is significant evidence indicating increased restrictions to their mobility and activity. They have reported feeling anxious, guilty, and shocked due to lack of information about menstruation prior to menarche. There is also a substantial lacuna in the knowledge about menstruation among adolescent girls. Several research studies have revealed this gap and they have shown that there was a low level of awareness about menstruation among the girls when they first experienced it. In India, 71% of girls report having no knowledge of menstruation before their first period. Their first experience of menstruation is often associated with shame, fear, and agony. Studies have also indicated that menstruating girls are not aware of the biological reasons associated with menstruation, and in fact perceived menstruation to be a "disease." Social prohibitions and the negative attitude of parents for open discussion on related issues have blocked the access of adolescent girls to right kind of information, especially in the rural communities.

Further, there is strong bondage with the traditional beliefs, taboos and misconceptions during menstruation which has led to many serious health problems, poor personal hygiene and unsafe sanitary conditions. Almost 88% of women and girls in India use home made alternatives. The rags are washed often with inadequate and unsafe water and without soap, and used repeatedly. There are 63 million adolescent girls living in homes without toilets. Despite national efforts to improve sanitation, women and girls lack appropriate facilities and community support to manage their menstruation privately and in a safe manner.

Without toilets in their home, many adolescent girls are forced to use public spaces to openly defecate and manage their menstrual needs. In addition to the impact on their health and dignity, women in communities face an increased threat of sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of violence. Even when toilets are available, cultural practices and hygiene routines as well as community attitudes related to menstruation limit the use of existing toilets, particularly during menstruation. Social norms and community attitudes associated with menstruation also inhibit girls from using toilets and disposal mechanisms appropriately. Due to these problems girls are facing many gynecological problems, infections due to lack of hygiene during menstruation have been reported in many studies. Repeated use of unclean cloth and improper drying of used cloth before its reuse results in harboring of micro-organisms resulting in the spread of vaginal infections among adolescent girls (Paul 2007). The manner in which a girl learns about menstruation and its associated changes have an impact process; it is linked with several misconceptions and inadequate practices, which result into adverse health outcomes.

During menstruation most of girls suffer from period pains such as abdominal cramps, nausea, fatigue, feeling faint, headaches, back ache and general discomfort. They can also experience emotional and psychological changes e.g. heightened feelings of sadness, irritability,anger due to changing hormones. This varies from person to person and can change significantly over time. Though menstruation is a natural and normal biological process for all healthy adult girl as ever, but there is lack of awareness on the process of menstruation, the physical and psychological changes associated with puberty and proper requirement for managing menstruation, Unhygienic practices during menstruation can cause infections. It is therefore important to create awareness on menstrual hygiene to adolescent girls.

Menstrual hygiene refers to the personal hygiene practice during menstruation. A girl needs to practice a high level of personal hygiene during her periods. Menstrual hygiene comprises care of genital area, use of sanitary napkins and personal hygiene. Genital area should be cleaned with antiseptic solution or soap and water before changing the pad at least twice a day and clean pads or cloths should be changed frequently whenever soaked with blood. Selection of pads should be of proper size, length and quality. They should not be usually washed after usage but they should be disposed. The best method of disposal is

burning. Good menstrual hygiene practice of girls during menstruation are considerable vital, as it has an impact in terms of increased vulnerability to reproductive tract infections. Poor hygiene practices which sometime result in reproductive tract infection and its complication further can lead to complications in pregnancy and transmitted to the offspring during pregnancy. Several reports have suggested that there is association between menstrual hygiene and reproductive tract infection and in the psychosocial, biological, educational wellbeing of adolescent girls. Increased knowledge about menstruation right from childhood may escalate safe practices and may help in mitigating the suffering of millions of women. Equipping adolescent girls with adequate information, and skills on menstrual hygiene and its management is seen as empowering them with knowledge which enhances their self-esteem and academic performance. The United Nations millennium development goal 2,3 and 5 directly focused on menstrual hygiene and management for universal education, and on gender equality and women empowerment. Therefore, adolescent girls need the support and guidance of parents, teachers and nurses to facilitate healthy life practices during menstruation.

Objectives

- To identify the issues, problems and challenges of menstruation encountered by the rural adolescent girls
- To study the beliefs, and cultural practices associated with menstruation among the study population
- To analyses the linkage between the unhygienic menstruation management and the reproductive health of adolescent girls.

The Settings

Understanding the management of menstruation is vital for healthy, productive and dignified lives of adolescent girls. It is important for adolescent girls to have basic knowledge on the effective management of bleeding due to menstruation. This requires adequate access to proper sanitation and hygiene services. Access to information to understand menstrual cycle and how to manage menstruation hygienically contributes to better management of the menstrual cycle. Issues relating to the practical management of menstrual hygiene are very important because they have health implications in terms of vulnerability to infections, thereby increasing susceptibility to reproductive tract infections (RTI), such as bacterial vaginosis (BV) that is sited to be more common in women with unhygienic menstrual hygiene management (MHM) practices (Baisley, et al. 2009; Balamuruganet. al, 2012). Poor MHM may also lead to bad odor of menstrual blood putting girls at risk of being stigmatized. Many factors influence menstrual hygiene management amongst rural adolescent girls in Nayagarh. These factors range from cultural affiliation, ethnicity, availability of wash facilities in the society, educational status, income status, knowledge of menstrual hygiene, age (level of maturity) and they may all have significant influence on menstrual hygiene management among rural adolescent girls in Nayagarh. However, this study takes into consideration all these factors.

Methodology Adopted

The present research study has been conducted through purposive sampling methods. The household for the study has been selected through simple random sampling procedure and the targeted respondents has been selected through purposive sampling method. The study has been carried out in Nuagaon block of Nayagarh district of Odisha. Around 80 rural adolescent girls between the age group of 10-19 years purposively who meet the inclusion criteria like age and class has been selected from 60 households for the study.

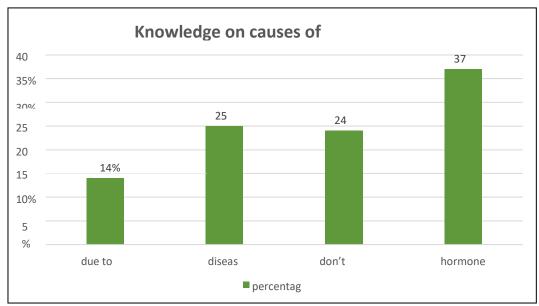
General Findings

Knowledge on Menstrual Hygiene and Management

This section discusses the level of girls' knowledge on menstruation. The sample adolescent girls were asked few questions intended to gauge their level of knowledge on menarche and its hygiene and management.

Fig-1

Distribution of Respondents on the basis of knowledge of causes regarding menstruation

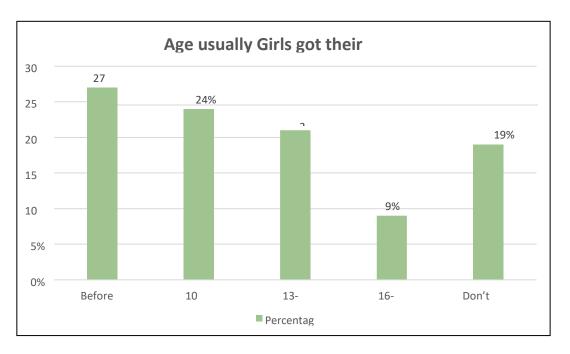


Sources: primary Data

The figure-1 sought to find out the knowledge of causes on menstruation amongst those adolescent girls in the village. It also reveals some of the glaring facts regarding the misconceptions about menstruation. Around 25% percent adolescent girls perceived menstruation as a disease. Where as 24% percent of adolescent girls perceived no idea about the cause of menstruation. About 14% adolescent girls are of opinion that it is a curse of God. 37% adolescent girls perceived menstruation caused due to secretion of some hormones.

Fig-2

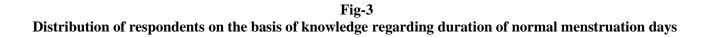
Age at which most girls usually get their first Period

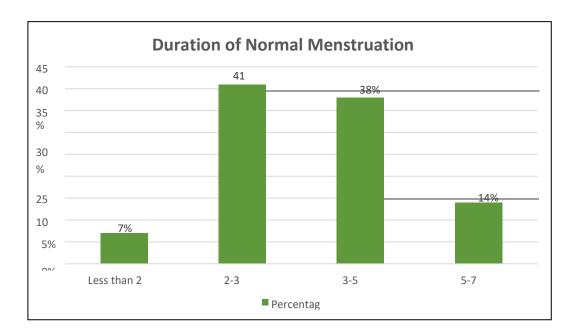


Sources: Primary Data

The above figure reveals the knowledge of adolescent girls regarding their age at first period. Around 27% of the respondents reported that the girls generally start their first period before 10

years of the age. It shows that around 19% of the respondents don't have any knowledge regarding the starting age of menstruation. Whereas 24% of girls reported that it starts between the age of 10-12 years. About 21% and a very marginal percentage of respondents i.e 9% have reported that the starting age of menstruation is 13-15 years and 16-19 age respectively.





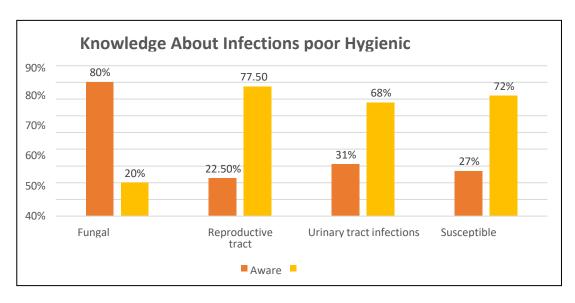
Sources: Primary Data

When the respondents were asked about the duration of normal menstruation, a majority of them 41% were said that it is 2-3 days. Around 38% of respondents are of the view that duration (days) of menstruation lasts between 3-5 days. On the contrary, there are 14% of them who believe that menstruation lasts for about 5-7 days in case of a normal person. There are only around 7% percent who has reported that the menstruation lasts for less than 2 days.

Table No-1.1

Knowledge on Infections due to Poor Menstrual Hygiene Management

Types of Infections		Frequency			Percentage		
		Aware	Unaware	Total	Aware	Unaware	Total
Fungal infections		64	16	80	80%	20%	
Reproductive infections	tract	18	62	80	22.5%	77.5%	100%
Urinary infections	tract	25	55	80	31%	68%	
Susceptible infections		22	58	80	27%	72%	

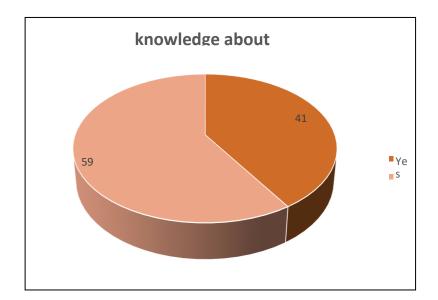




Sources: primary Data

The survey also delved into finding whether those girls knew about infections related to poor menstrual hygiene. The above figure reveals that all most all respondents i.e 80% have reported that they are aware of the fungal infection due to poor menstrual hygiene. On the contrary, about 78% percent of them have reported that they are not aware about reproductive tract infection. When they were asked about Urinary Tract Infection (UTI), 68% gave negative response. Only around 31 percent of them have reported that they were aware of UTI. About 27% of respondents were aware about the susceptible infections and 73% were not aware about this infections.

Fig-5 Knowledge about Scheme (Khushi) Govt. of Odisha



Sources: Primary Data

The survey revealed that almost 41 % of the respondents have knowledge about the scheme Khushi. "Khushi" is a scheme introduced by government to provide sanitary napkins to adolescent girls at free of cost. Its main purpose is to educate the adolescent girls about the hygienic practices during menstruation and 59% of respondents have no knowledge about Khushi napkins. The study revels from the above tables that adolescent girls preferring affordable sanitary pad. But due to the unawareness about the affordable sanitary napkins schemes most mote girls preferring the use of cloth pads, which are easily available.

Cultural Practices during Menstruation

Fig-6

This part discusses the type of absorbent used, cleaning methods, hygiene, and etc.

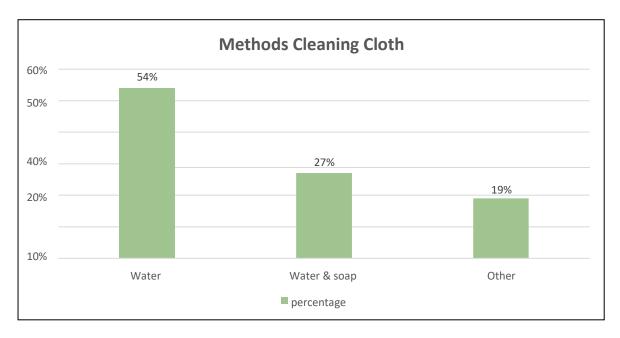


Sources: Primary Data

Given the economic situations of different adolescent girls, an improvised version of sanitary pads had been into practices. To this effect, the survey sought to find out the type of menstrual absorbents used by the adolescent girls. The use of sanitary pad is commonly reported rural areas with a percentage share of 25% and the above figure has revealed that every 38 girls out of 80 (47%) uses cloth or towel. The above Figure has also revealed a disturbing phenomenon that around 4% percent of the adolescent girls use reusable pad kind of absorbent material.

Fig-7

Method of Cleaning Cloth

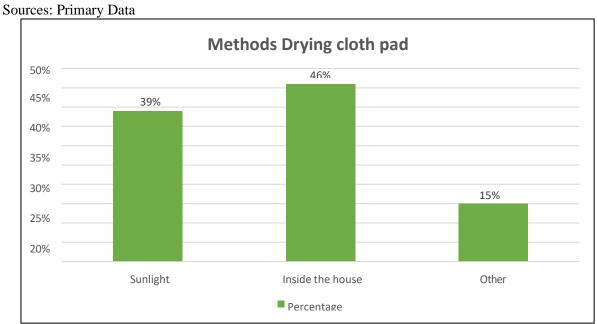


Sources: Primary Data

The survey also sought to learn about the method of cleaning cloth. Figure-7 revealed that around (27%) of the respondents have used water and soap for cleaning their cloth pads followed by around 54% percent who used water alone. As revealed earlier, menstruation still seems a taboo. Figure as well revealed that around 19% percent of the adolescent girls hide and pad beneath other clothes to avoid seeing by others and clean separately in small pond, river, rill outside of the village.

Fig-8

Method of Drying Cloth pad



To further assess the menstrual hygiene practices, the survey sought to find out the method of drying cloth pad. Around (39%) of them reported that they dry their cloth pads in sunlight. Figure also revealed that around (46%) dry their cloth pads inside the house. Around 15% percent of them hide beneath another cloth and dry them together outside of the house.

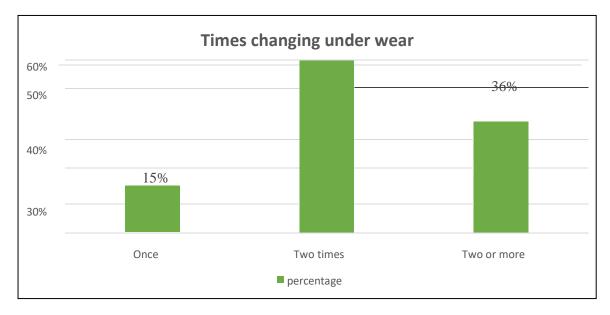


Fig-9Number of times of changing underwear during Menstruation in a Day

Sources: Primary Data

Quite interestingly, the survey has revealed that (49%) of the adolescent girls changed underwear during menstruation twice a day. It was also revealed that around 36% percent of them changed under wears during menstruation thrice a day or more. Around 15% of them have changed under wears during period only once a day. The survey revealed the extreme situations whereby percent of them have changed under wears during the period between 5 to 7 times a day.

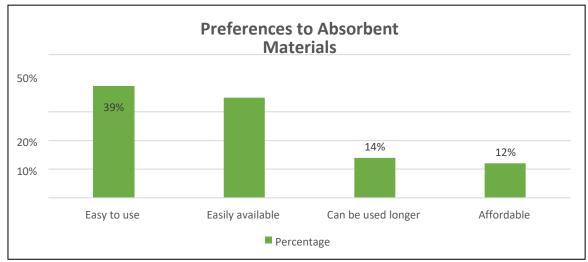


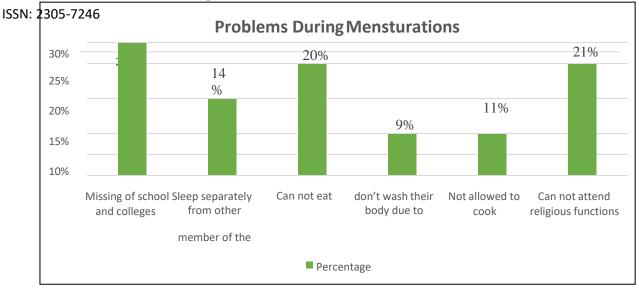
Fig-10Adolescent Girls preferring the main absorbent material during Menstruation

Sources: primary Data

The adolescent girls preferred particular type of absorbent, almost 39% reported that they use sanitary pad as an absorbent material since it is easy to use. (35%), reported that they use cloth pad since it is easily available. Around 14% of them have reported that cotton could be used for longer duration and also easily available. Affordability is also a reason why they prefer using sanitary pad. About 12% of the respondents have reported that they prefer sanitary pad to others since it is affordable.

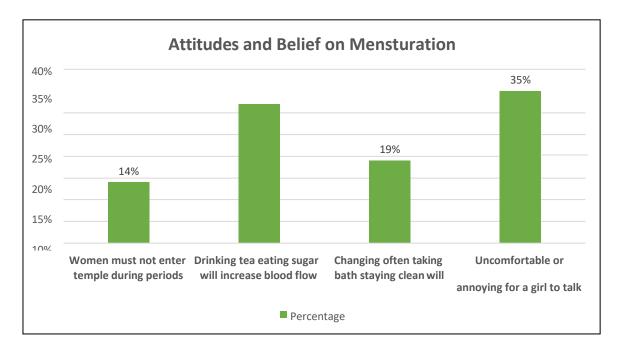
Fig-11 Problems and Challenges faced by them During Menstruation

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Sources: Primary Data

The above figure deals with adolescent girls' cultural practices and beliefs during menstruation. Survey also further delves into the misconception created around menstruation by the society and the impacts produced by it to school girls especially in terms of their school attendance and societal taboo and discrimination as well. About 25% are missing school and colleges during menstruation. 14% sleep separately from other member of the family. Around 20% of respondents are not allowed to eat certain food to eat. A marginal percentage of respondents i.e 9% don't wash their body due to taboos . 11% are not allowed to cook. 21% are not allowed attend religious functions.





Sources: Primary Data

The study sought to reveled that girls' attitudes and belief on menstruation as various social taboos are associated with menstruation. 14% respondents are of the opinion that women should not enter temple during periods. 32% are of the opinion that drinking tea eating sugar will increase blood flow. Around 19% pointed out that changing often taking bath staying clean will increase blood flow . Uncomfortable or annoying for a girl to talk about periods with others 35% girls said about this.

Conclusion

The present study has made an attempt to explore knowledge regarding menstruation hygienic practices, among the rural adolescent girls of Nayagarh district of Odisha. The knowledge on menstruation is poor, preoccupied with various misconceptions and myths, and the practices are often not too optimal for proper hygienic. This study also reveals that menstrual hygiene is far from satisfactory among a large proportion of the adolescent girls while ignorance, false perceptions, unsafe practices regarding menstruation and reluctance of the mother to educate her child are also quite common among them. The main problem areas identified in this study were poor knowledge on biology of menstruation, majority of girls having symptoms associated with menstruation and low use of sanitary napkin. This study revealed that most of the rural girls used cloth pieces as menstrual pads and they reused the clothes after washing them with soap and water.

The study has covered 80 adolescent rural girls in Mahipur village of Nayagarh district. This study was carried out in a population of adolescent rural girls belonging to the age group of 10-19 years. It has revealed the level of knowledge and practices related to menstruation and menstrual hygiene in the study population. It is clear from the study that the level of knowledge about menstruation and menstrual hygiene is inadequate among many adolescent girls. Almost 38% of the respondents have a little knowledge on menstruation. About 43% respondents have knowledge on menstruation. Where as 41% of them have reported that they heard about menstruation from their grandmothers. Various social taboos has been associated with the adolescents' girls attitude towards menstruation. About 35% of girls are deprived of sharing their issues relating to menstruation with others.32% of respondents are facing restrictions to participate in any religious activities during menstruation. The misconception about menstruation deprives 25% respondents to attend the educational institutions,11% are not allowed to cook,45 sleep separately from other members of the family. Regarding the drying of cloth pads 46% of respondents dry their cloth pads inside the house.39% dry their cloths in sunlight. The survey has revealed that (49%) of the adolescent girls changed underwear during menstruation twice a day. It was also revealed that around 36% percent of them changed under wears during menstruation thrice a day or more. Around 15% of them have changed under wears during period only once a day. The survey revealed the extreme situations whereby percent of them have changed under wears during the period between 5 to 7 times a day. The survey revealed that around (27%) of the respondents have used water and soap for cleaning their cloth pads followed by around 54% percent who used water alone. As revealed earlier, menstruation still seems a taboo. Figure as well revealed that around 19% percent of the adolescent girls hide and pad beneath other clothes to avoid seeing by others and clean separately small pond, river, outside of the village. Bath during period, more than half (36%) reported that they do so daily. Around 22% of them reported that they take bath only on first day followed by 30% of them who bathe on the very 3rd day during period. Around 12% of them do not bath any time. The survey revealed that almost 41 % of the respondents have knowledge on sanitary napkins Khushi .59% of respondents have no knowledge about Khushi napkin.

Thus, the above findings reinforce the need to encourage safe and hygienic practices among the adolescent girls, have accurate and adequate information and bring them out of traditional beliefs, misconceptions and restrictions regarding menstruation and its appropriate management. Formal as well as informal channels of communication such as mothers, sisters and friends need to be emphasized for the delivery of such information. In view of the vital role of the mothers, it is very important that the mother be armed with the correct and appropriate information on reproductive health, so that she can give this knowledge to her growing girl child. Mothers should encourage their daughters to maintain personal hygiene. It is also essential for the teachers, who may not have the necessary skills to impart reproductive health education, including menstrual hygiene to their students.

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