

Menstrual Problems among Adolescents

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A cross-sectional community survey was conducted to study problems related to menstruation among adolescents of a suburban colony of Chandigarh. Systematic random sampling was used to select 92 subjects out of the 457 adolescent girls of the colony. Majority 69 (75.8%) of the subjects were having problems related to menstruation. On an average each subject suffered from 3-4 symptoms.

Introduction

Menstruation is a normal physiological cycle, common to all females of the reproductive age group (Rao, 1963). The initiation of menstruation takes place during early adolescence period. Though it is considered a normal phenomenon, many studies conducted in India and abroad (Raja *et al.*, 1992; Hegde *et al.*, 1990; Natu, 1966; Brush, 1938) have revealed that menstruation is associated with several physical and psychological problems, which are likely to be complicated by a confused state caused by incomplete or wrong information among adolescents. Most of the studies have been conducted in an organised set-up either in an educational institute or some other organization. Since in India most of the girls of low socio-economic status living in suburban area may not attend schools or any organisations therefore this study was aimed at finding out the problems related to menstruation

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among a representative sample of the adolescent girls so as to plan appropriate health care programme for them.

Methodology

In Dadu Majra, a suburban colony of Chandigarh, four hundred and fifty seven (457) unmarried adolescent girls (of 15-18 years of age) who had attained menarche were registered by a house-to-house survey. A sample of 92 subjects was selected for interview by systematic random sampling. All the selected subjects were interviewed in their own houses except one who could not be contacted. Privacy was ensured at the time of interview. A semi-structured pre-tested proforma was used for interviewing the girls.

Results

The average age of the subjects was 16.4 years. About half of them (53.8%) were students and the rest were not attending school. Physical problems were present in 32 (35.2%), psychological problems in 5 (5.5%) whereas 32 (35.2%) had both physical as well as psychological problems. On an average the subjects suffered from three to four symptoms. Twentytwo subjects (24.2%) did not have any problem related to menstruation.

Most of the physical problems occurred either at the time of onset or during menstruation (Table 1). Most common physical problems were abdominal pain (49.5%) and backache (41.8%) and the commonest psychological problems were the desire to remain alone (18.7%) and depression (17.6%). Intolerable abdominal pain and backache were reported by 15 (16.5%) and 10 (11.0%) subjects respectively.

Most of the psychological symptoms occurred during the bleeding phase of the menstrual cycle. It was found that most of the physical problems lasted from one to two days, whereas in case of psychological problems the majority suffered for more than two days (Table 2).

Discussion

With initiation of menstruation, young girls suffer from physical and psychological problems. Out of a total of 91 subjects; 75.8% complained of one or the other problems related to menses. Rao (1963) reported that 78.4% of the subjects suffered from discomforts associated with menstruation which is similar to our findings. This study revealed that on an average subjects suffered from 3.8 complaints related to menses, whereas Rao (1963) reported that on an average girls suffered from two to three complaints.

The study showed that 5.5% of the subjects suffered from headache during menses, which is similar to the study conducted by Raja *et al* (1992) in USA, and Natu (1966) in India. Six per cent of the subjects were having headache during menstruation in the study conducted by Raja *et al* (1992). A study conducted by Natu (1966) also revealed that 6.0% of the subjects studying in Medical College and 7.0% of the students of Arts College were having headache during menstruation.

The problem of tender breasts during menstruation reported in the present study is 2.2%, which is also comparable with the findings reported in a study conducted by Raja *et al* (1992). In the present study, 2.2% of

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the subjects feel like crying or have crying spells before menstruation and 2.2% during menstruation. This is similar to the results of the study done by Raja *et al* (1992) which showed that 3.4% of the subjects had the problem of a crying spell before menstruation and 2.6% during menstruation.

While planning health services for female adolescents, the findings of the study can be taken into consideration. Provisions should be made to alleviate discomforts associated with menstruation as intolerable abdominal pain and backache were reported by 16.5% and 11% of the subjects. Education about the physiology of menstruation could alleviate some psycho-social problems and may encourage girls to discuss about those with parents.

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Table 1
Problems Related to Menstruation

Physical Symptoms	Time of Occurrence in Relation to Menstrual Cycle							
	At any time		Before onset		At onset		During Menstruation	
	N=91	(%)	N=91	(%)	N=91	(%)	N=91	(%)
Abdominal pain	45	(49.5)	09	(9.9)	29	(31.9)	33	(36.3)
Backache	38	(41.8)	09	(9.9)	26	(28.6)	28	(30.8)
Nausea	16	(17.6)	02	(2.2)	05	(5.5)	14	(15.4)
Fatigue	14	(15.4)	02	(2.2)	05	(5.5)	12	(13.2)
Pain in thigh	13	(14.3)	02	(2.2)	09	(9.9)	09	(9.9)
Giddiness	08	(8.8)	—	—	02	(2.2)	07	(7.7)
General bodyaches	07	(7.7)	01	(1.1)	03	(3.3)	06	(6.6)
Weakness	05	(5.5)	—	—	01	(1.1)	05	(5.5)
Headache	05	(5.5)	—	—	03	(3.3)	05	(5.5)
Pain in lower leg	04	(4.4)	01	(1.1)	02	(2.2)	03	(3.3)
Hot flushes	04	(4.4)	01	(1.1)	01	(1.1)	02	(2.2)
Psychological Symptoms								
Wants to be alone	17	(18.7)	02	(2.2)	06	(6.6)	17	(18.7)
Depression	16	(17.6)	—	—	06	(6.6)	15	(16.5)
Tension	12	(13.2)	01	(1.1)	03	(3.3)	12	(13.2)
Sleeplessness	04	(4.4)	—	—	01	(1.1)	04	(4.4)
Interrupted sleep	04	(4.4)	01	(1.1)	02	(2.2)	03	(3.3)
Crying spells	03	(3.3)	02	(2.2)	01	(1.1)	02	(2.2)
Forgetfulness	02	(2.2)	—	—	01	(1.1)	01	(1.1)

Table 2
Features of Most Common Problems Related to Menstruation

Symptoms	Total	Duration (in days)			Tolerable	
		<1	1-2	>2	Yes	No
Physical						
Abdominal pain	45	13 (28.9)	21 (46.7)	11 (24.4)	30 (66.7)	15 (33.4)
Backache	38	05 (13.1)	22 (57.9)	11 (28.9)	28 (73.7)	10 (26.3)
Nausea	16	02 (12.5)	10 (62.5)	04 (25.0)	14 (87.5)	02 (12.5)
Fatigue	14	01 (7.1)	05 (35.7)	08 (57.1)	10 (71.4)	04 (28.6)
Psychological						
Wants to be alone	17	—	05 (29.4)	12 (70.6)	17 (100.0)	—
Depressed	16	—	06 (37.5)	10 (62.5)	16 (100.0)	—
Tension	12	—	09 (75.0)	03 (25.0)	11 (91.7)	01 (8.3)

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