

Knowledge and Perceptions regarding Menstruation among Adolescent Girls: A Research Study

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It is a well known fact that menarche is a highly emotional experience for a young pubescent. The height and intensity of emotions experienced by the girl depend on how well informed she is about menstruation and the type of supportive system around her.

Cultural factors contribute greatly towards the development of attitude and perceptions of menarche and menstruation. In the Indian setting which is peculiarly characterized by a multicultural and multireligious environment, numerous superstitions and practices regarding menstruation are still prevalent even in the upper social strata. The secretive aspect of the menstruation is exaggerated to a great extent. Very few mothers are ready to share the information, which is of paramount significance, to their pre-menarcheal daughters. In spite of the increased publicity given to sanitary products through T.V., Radio and Newspapers in recent years, many young girls face menarche even today, being completely ignorant of it. This is more so in the lower social strata.

Studies done by the investigator on a small scale, prior to this research study, revealed the fact of their ignorance very clearly. When enquired about the emotional experience at the onset of menarche some of them came out with the

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following expressions:

"On a fine day, I was shocked to find myself bleeding"

"I thought I was having cancer or some other disease..."

"I thought I was having some injury within..."

"I got frightened to see red stains on my underlinen"

"I washed it again and again as it reappeared. I did not know what to do..."

"I was feeling shy and embarrassed even to tell my mother..."

These responses clearly speak of the need for a research study on an Indian situation where the number of studies on this topic are found

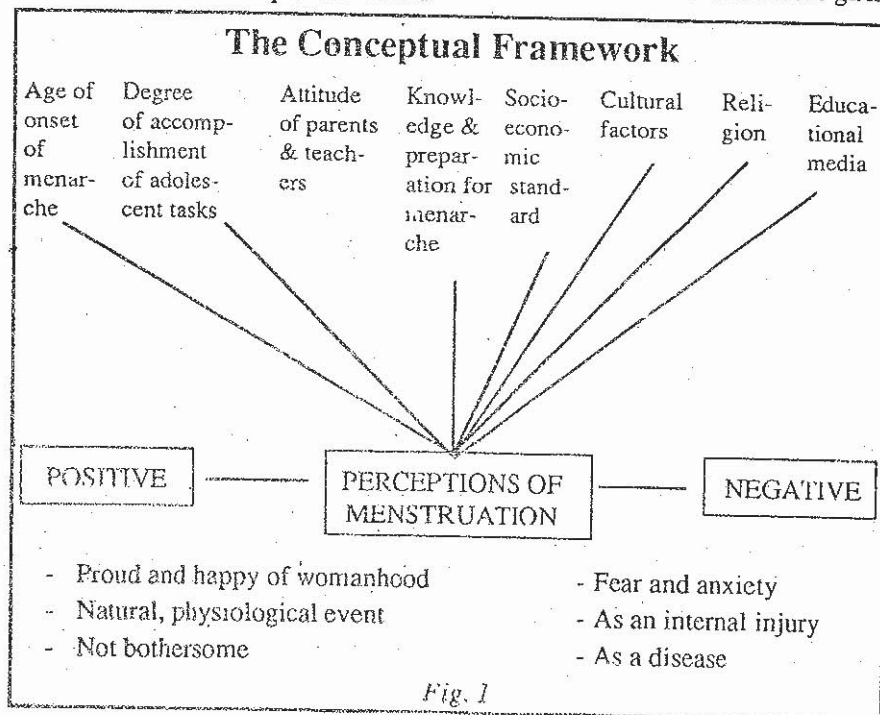
very limited.

The investigator hopes that this research study will contribute towards developing a right awareness in parents, teachers and those concerned with the care of the adolescent females, of the dire need of pre-menarcheal instructions.

Several researchers have studied the above factors which have an impact on the experience of menarche producing either positive or negative perceptions in the adolescent girls.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to assess the knowledge and the perceptions regarding menstruation of the adolescent girls



as well as to find out the difference that existed between those of the upper and the lower social strata. It was also directed towards finding out whether there was a relationship between their knowledge and selected factors such as their religion, onset of menarche as well as educational and occupational status of parents.

Methods

An explorative and descriptive survey approach was adopted by administering a semi-structural questionnaire. The study sample consisted of 100 girls attending 7th, 8th or 9th standard from four private high schools, two of them belonging to the upper social strata (U.S.S.) and the other two to the lower social strata (L.S.S.).

The Sampling Technique

A systematic stratified random sampling method was used to select the desired 100 samples who were classified as follows:

Pre-menarcheal upper social strata	25
Post-menarcheal upper social strata	25
Pre-menarcheal lower social strata	25
Post-menarcheal lower social strata	25
Total	100

Pilot Study

In order to test the feasibility, relevance and acceptance of the tool, the questionnaire was administered to 10% of the total sample (10), five of them belonging to the U.S.S. and the other five to the L.S.S.

The questionnaire was scrutinized for its content validity by three experts in the Nursing field, two psychologists, one gynaecologist and one paediatrician. After necessary modifications, the final tool consisted of 8 items on the demographic data of the respondent, twelve items on the knowledge

regarding menstruation and twenty four items in the form of views, beliefs and emotional reactions to menarche and menstruation.

Data Gathering Process

After taking appointment from the selected schools, the questionnaire was administered by the investigator to the girls during class hours.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The data analysis was done according to the objectives of the study, comparatively in two groups viz. the upper and the lower social strata.

The knowledge of the girls was scored and the difference between the two social strata was computed by 't' test. Difference in perception of the girls regarding menarche and menstruation between the U.S.S. and the L.S.S. was analyzed by frequency and percentage. Relationship of knowledge of the girls to selected factors such as religion, onset of menarche as well as occupational and educational status of parents was computed by 't' test.

Findings of the Study

(a) Demographic Data

1. Age: In both U.S.S. and L.S.S. girls below 14 years formed the majority (93%). Mean age 12.83 ± 1.37 .

2. Age at the onset of menarche: For majority of girls in the U.S.S. the menarcheal age was 12 years or below, while in the L.S.S. it was 13 years or above. Mean age was 12.3 ± 1.13 . This supports the findings of several researchers (Erisch and Rivelle¹, Osler and Crawford², and Richardson and Peters³) that socio-economic level and nutrition influence the age of menarche.

The average age of menarche reported in India was 15.4 years by Ghosh, *et al*⁴ (1974) and as 12.62 by J.K. Groover *et al*⁵ (1989) while

the present study recorded it as 12.3. This decrease in the age of menarche supports the theory of advancement of menarcheal age, 4 months per decade (Tanner 1961)⁶.

3. Parent's educational status: Majority of the parents in the U.S.S. had college or professional education (74%) whereas in the L.S.S. their education was limited to school level only (72%).

4. Parents occupational status: In the U.S.S. majority of the parents had professional or semi-professional/occupational status while in the L.S.S. they were skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers and few of them were unemployed.

(b) Knowledge of girls regarding menstruation

It was observed that there was a definite difference in the knowledge of girls regarding menstruation between the sample of the upper and the lower social strata ('t' = 3.81, $p < 0.01$).

It is likely that the subjects in the U.S.S. were more exposed to the mass media and also the influence of the educated parents might have contributed towards their better knowledge regarding menstruation than those in the L.S.S.

2. Distribution of sample who received information before menarche

Figure 2 indicates that 66% girls in the U.S.S. were given prior information regarding menarche in contrast to only 8% in the L.S.S. It was evident that in the U.S.S. girls were better prepared for menarche than those of L.S.S. However, it is surprising to note that even today in spite of the increasing literacy rate, knowledge explosion and mass media development, a good number of girls are kept ignorant of this vital fact of life.

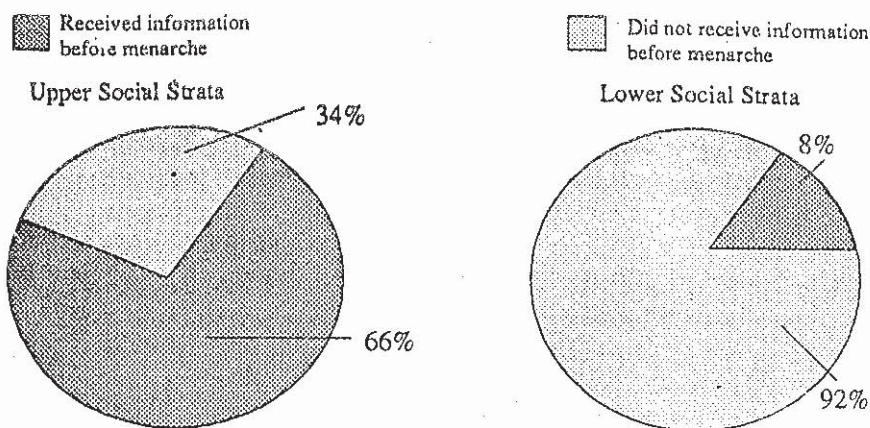


Fig. 2

(c) Relationship of Knowledge of Girls regarding Menstruation with Selected Variables

Table 1

Relationship of Knowledge of Girls with Selected Variables

Variable	N	Knowledge core		Test of significance	p' value
		Mean (total score 8)	S.D.		
1. Onset of menarche					
a) Post-menarcheal	50	5.68	1.35	t=9.32	p<0.01*
b) Pre-menarcheal	50	1.86	2.59		
2. Religion					
a) Hindu	53	3.25	2.61	t(a,b)=0.79	p>0.05 NS
b) Muslim	33	3.73	2.81	t(a,b)=2.43	p<0.05**
c) Christian	8	5.63	2.59	t(b,c)=1.85	p>0.05 NS

* High significance.

** Significant.

NS Not significant.

It was observed that pre-menarcheal girls had much less knowledge than the post-menarcheal girls (mean % of scores 23.25% and 71% respectively).

This difference could be attributed to the secretive aspect of menstruation practised among the Indian women who are firmly rooted in traditional beliefs and customs.

Religion was not found a significant factor to influence the knowledge of girls regarding menstruation except between Christian and Hindu girls ($t = 2.43$, $p < 0.05$). The reason could be attributed to the Western influence which might have made Christian mothers more open to share the information with their daughters.

Table II indicates that significant difference was found between the knowledge of girls coming from the upper and the lower social strata with regard to parents' educational and occupational status. It supports the assumption that parents' educational and occupational level might have an impact on the knowledge of adolescents regarding menstruation.

(d) Perceptions of Menstruation

The Table III indicates that in the U.S.S. when only 5 girls (20%) felt anxious and frightened towards the approaching menarche and 6 girls (24%) thought that they were unprepared, in L.S.S. 44% and 88% of the girls had the similar feelings, respectively.

Figure 3 indicates that in the U.S.S. only 7 girls (28%) felt frightened at the menarcheal onset and no one perceived it as a sickness or injury, while 17 girls (68%) felt frightened and 10 girls (40%), perceived it as a sickness or injury in the L.S.S. Moreover, 28% of the girls in the U.S.S. had positive perceptions whereas only 4% had similar perceptions in the L.S.S. It might be that the superstitions and traditional practices of menstruation are more common in the L.S.S. contributing towards the negative experiences in the girls.

Mother had been referred to by majority of the samples both in the upper and the lower social strata as the person in whom the girls confided first at the onset of menarche and the one, they thought should impart pre-menarcheal instructions.

Among the several cultural beliefs and menstrual taboos prevalent today, the one more commonly mentioned by the sample was that "menstrual blood is bad" (67%) and

Table II

Relationship of Knowledge of the Sample regarding Menstruation and Selected Variables (Contd.)

Variable	N	Knowledge score		Test of significance	'p' value
		Mean (Total score 8)	S.D.		
1. Father's Education					
a) College and Professional	50	4.32	2.92	$t=2.44$	$p<0.05^*$
b) School	50	3.22	2.59		
2. Mother's Education					
a) College and Professional	36	4.39	2.97	$t=1.6$	$p>0.05$ NS
b) School	64	3.42	2.66		
3. Father's Occupation					
a) Professional, Semi-professional and Clerical	55	4.44	2.86	$t=3.08$	$p<0.01^{**}$
b) Skilled, Semi-skilled, Unskilled and Unemployed	45	2.9	2.52		
4. Mother's Occupation					
a) Professional, Semi-professional and Clerical	12	6.25	2.20	$t=4.08$	$p<0.01^{**}$
b) Skilled, Semi-skilled, Unskilled and Unemployed	88	3.43	2.11		

* Significant

** High significance

NS Not significant.

Table III

Perceptions regarding the Approaching Menarche among Pre-menarcheal Sample in the Upper and Lower Social Strata

Perceptions*	U.S.S. N=25	L.S.S. N=25	Total N=50
Anxious and frightened	5 (20%)	11 (44%)	16 (32%)
Unprepared	6 (24%)	22 (88%)	28 (56%)
I hate the thought of getting it	11 (44%)	7 (28%)	18 (36%)
I feel embarrassed ever to think of it	7 (28%)	4 (16%)	11 (22%)
I am well prepared for it	3 (12%)		3 (12%)

* The respondents were free to give more than one response.

the "woman is unclean during menstruation" (57%).

Conclusion

From the overall view of the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that a good number of girls, especially in the L.S.S., even today experience menarche with negative perceptions and hold many superstitions. Nevertheless, it has been also an observation that adolescent girls get gradually adjusted to menstruation after a period of few months, though initially they might have had some negative experiences at the onset of menarche. As Kestenberg⁷ reported, after the pre-menarcheal or menarcheal period of disorientation characterised by psychological confusion, the girl enters into a phase of organisation during which consolidation of the feminine role and identity takes place.

Nursing Implications

As many adolescent girls even today still have shocking experience at the onset of menarche, it is a dire need to study this problem more deeply by many more nurse researchers or other health workers. It is highly imperative that definite steps are taken for imparting pre-menarcheal and post-menarcheal instructions in the schools. To create more awareness and knowledge among parents and teachers regarding menstruation, more literature on this topic should be encouraged by Nurse leaders.

An organised educational programme could be initiated so that the adolescent girls of the near future would have a smooth running through their adolescent tasks related to menstruation.

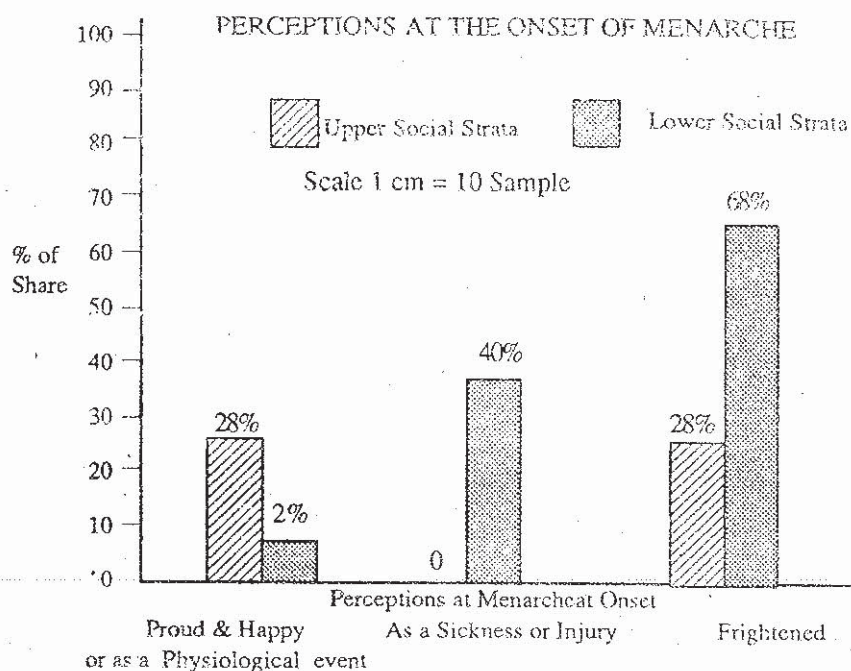


Fig. 3

Table IV
Frequency Distribution of Beliefs regarding Menstruation
among Adolescent Girls

N=100

	Upper Social Strata			Lower Social Strata		
	Agree	Dis-agree	Un-certain	Agree	Dis-agree	Un-certain
Menstrual blood is bad	30 (60%)	9 (18%)	11 (22%)	37 (74%)	6 (12%)	7 (14%)
During menstruation a girl is unclean	19 (38%)	22 (44%)	9 (18%)	38 (76%)	6 (12%)	12 (12%)
During menstruation bath and hair wash should be avoided	5 (10%)	35 (70%)	1 (20%)	9 (18%)	34 (68%)	17 (34%)
During menstruation a woman should not cook	16 (32%)	30 (60%)	4 (8%)	12 (24%)	28 (56%)	10 (10%)
During menstruation a woman should neither attend religious places nor do pooja and prayers	30 (60%)	16 (32%)	4 (8%)	38 (76%)	6 (12%)	6 (12%)
During menstruation a woman should remain segregated from other family members	16 (32%)	24 (48%)	10 (20%)	12 (24%)	26 (52%)	12 (24%)

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