

Menstrual Hygiene Management among Tharu Tribal women of Palia Block - Practices, Hygiene and their Impact

Paper Submission: 03/04/2021, Date of Acceptance: 16/04/2021, Date of Publication: 25/04/2021

Hygiene is a concept related to cleanliness, health and medicine. It is as well related to personal and professional care practices. In medicine and everyday life hygiene practices are employed as preventative measures to reduce the incidence and spreading of disease. Menstrual hygiene is a sub- category of hygiene, an extremely important step for women. "Menstrual hygiene is the window of reproductive health". Female cannot get good reproductive cum general health without healthy menstrual cycle. The Menstruation is a normal biological process in adolescent girls which indicating about beginning of reproductive life of girls, but sometimes due to lack of knowledge it becomes a problematic phenomenon in the Indian society for adolescent girls. In India the menstrual hygiene mostly depends upon the girl's educational status, socioeconomic status, and cultural status of family. However, the lack of adequate guidance and social support, male-dominated decision making, on-going gender inequality and taboos around menstruation leave girls in numerous problem like experiencing shame, fear, confusion and discomfort. The achievement of good menstrual health has an impact on general health and wellbeing, education, socioeconomic outcomes, dignity and gender equality. The objective of this conceptual paper is to problematise the unhygienic menstrual practices among Tharu women.

Keywords: Menstrual Hygiene, practices, Tribe

Introduction

Term "Hygiene" is derived from the name of the Greek Goddess of health (Hygieia). Hygiene is a set of practices performed to preserve health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Hygiene refers to conditions and practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases". Hygiene is a practice which in long run affects the overall health. Hygiene includes both personal and professional care practices.

In medicine and day to day life, hygiene practices are usually employed as a preventive measure to reduce morbidity. In the manufacturing of food, pharmaceutical, cosmetic and other products, good hygiene is a critical component of quality assurance. Hygiene is an umbrella term. Menstrual hygiene is a sub- category of hygiene an extremely important step for women. "Menstrual hygiene is the window of reproductive health". Female cannot get good reproductive cum general health without healthy menstrual cycle.

Menstruation is a normal healthy physiological process and not an illness or curse. In a lay man's language menstruation is known as a "period". Menstruation is also called menses or cat-mania and more commonly a period of monthly flow. The word 'menstruation' is etymologically related to 'moon'. The terms 'menstruation' and 'menses' are derived from the Latin mensis (month), which in turn relates to the Greek mene (moon) and to the roots of the English words month and moon reflecting the fact that the moon also takes close to 28 days to revolve around the Earth (actually 27.32 days). The female, being more intelligent and perhaps aware of her environment, adapted to a cycle close to that of the moon (Charles Darwin 1879 and Cecil Adams 1999).

The menstrual cycle is regulated by hormones. Hormones are the chemical messengers present in our body. They are released by various endocrine glands and are responsible for many changes in a



Bhagya Preet Kaur

PDF Scholar,
Dept. of Home Science,
Lucknow University,
Lucknow, UP, India

Female's body. We can say that Menstruation is the slave to certain hormones. Every phase of menstrual cycle is influenced by female hormones like estrogen, progesterone, Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and Luteinizing hormone (LH). Some changes in the level of these hormones may decide the phase of menstrual cycle which a girl undergoes. LH and FSH are produced by the pituitary gland, to promote ovulation and stimulate the ovaries to produce estrogen and progesterone which are female sex hormones.

Estrogen and progesterone stimulate the uterus and breasts to prepare for possible fertilization. According to some studies it is suggested that women should consume healthy food to make up this loss of blood. A balanced diet which includes cereals, nuts, seeds, milk and milk product, vegetable and fruits should be consumed to obtain adequate amount of energy protein, iron, vitamin and minerals.

Phases of menstrual cycle

1. Menstrual Phase
2. Follicular (before release of the egg)
3. Ovulatory (egg release)
4. Luteal (after egg release)

Menstrual Phase

In this phase that is Day 1 when period starts and it lasts 3 to 5 days normally. The menstrual cycle begins with menstrual bleeding (menstruation), which marks the first day of the follicular phase. The period is considered the beginning of any menstrual cycle.

Follicular Phase

A matured egg follicle releases an egg from one of the ovaries. So, uterus starts preparation for another pregnancy when the follicular phase begins, levels of estrogen and progesterone are low. As a result, the top layers of the thickened lining of the uterus (endometrium) break down and are shed out, and menstrual bleeding occurs. During this time, the follicle-stimulating hormone level increases slightly, stimulating the development of several follicles in the ovaries. Each follicle contains an egg. Later in this phase, as the follicle-stimulating hormone level decreases, only one follicle continues to develop. This follicle produces estrogen.

Ovulatory Phase

This is known as mid-cycle phase. In this phase ovulation takes place that is the day 13th to 17th. End of Follicular phase along with ovulation is the fertilisation period. The ovulatory phase begins with a surge of luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone levels. Luteinizing hormone stimulates egg release (ovulation), which usually occurs 16 to 32 hours after the surge begins. The estrogen level decreases during the surge, and the progesterone level starts to increase. One of the ovaries releases an egg and the uterus begins to rebuild its lining. Only one egg is released in each cycle. The egg slowly travels down the fallopian tube from the ovaries towards the uterus. If the egg is fertilised by a sperm before it arrives the uterus, the girl becomes pregnant.

Luteal Phase

This is the post ovulation phase where the fate of corpus luteum is decided. If fertilisation occurs, pregnancy starts. If fertilisation does not occur then it is the onset of another cycle. During the luteal phase, luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone levels decrease. The ruptured follicle closes after releasing the egg and forms a corpus luteum, which produces progesterone. During this phase, the estrogen level is high.

Progesterone and estrogen cause the lining of the uterus to thicken it more, to prepare for possible fertilization. If the egg is not fertilized, the corpus luteum degenerates and no longer produces progesterone, the estrogen level decreases, the top layers of the lining break down and are shed off, and menstrual bleeding occurs (the start of a new menstrual cycle). If the egg is fertilized, the corpus luteum continues to function during early pregnancy. It helps to maintain the pregnancy.

Menstrual Hormones

Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH)

This hormone is released from the master gland in the brain, and stimulates the ovarian follicles to mature and produces an egg or ovum.

Luteinizing Hormone (LH)

This hormone upon releases from pituitary gland causes the mature ovarian follicle to rupture and release the egg.

Estrogen

Estrogen is another female sex hormone, also known as the growing hormone because of its role in the body. This hormone helps to grow and mature the inner lining of uterus which sheds during menstruation. This hormone also matures the egg before ovulation. This hormone is produced by ovaries and to a lesser extent from adrenal glands and in adipose tissues. This hormone predominates during follicular phase.

Progesterone

Another female hormone is progesterone. It balances the work of estrogen in the body. It is produced from the corpus luteum which is the sack from where egg has been oozed out. It is produced only after ovulation. It is mainly produced in the second half of the cycle i.e. luteal phase. Progesterone's main job is to control the build up of the uterine lining and help mature and maintain the lining of the uterus in case there is pregnancy. If there is no pregnancy, the progesterone levels fall and the lining of the uterus is shed, which is known as start of menstrual cycle.

Testosterone

Testosterone is also a sex hormone present in both male and female, though in lower levels in female. It is produced by the ovaries and adrenal glands. It is produced in high amounts during ovulation and there is again a slight rise immediately before menstruation. The main function of testosterone is to help in maintaining muscle, mass and bone strength in females. It also increases sex emotions and help with overall sense of well being and zest of life.

Objective of the Study

To study the problematic unhygienic menstruation practices among Tharu women.

Menstruation Hygiene Management (MHM)

United Nations provides a specified term for adequate menstrual hygiene known as Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) which is defined as the "use of clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to facilities to dispose off used menstrual materials. Menstrual hygiene deals with the special health care needs and requirements of women during monthly menstruation or menstrual cycle. Menstruation Hygiene Management (MHM) focuses on practical strategies for coping with monthly periods. MHM refers to ways for women how to keep them clean and healthy during menstruation and how they acquire, use and dispose blood-absorbing materials.

Menstrual Hygiene Day 28 May

In order to make people aware, and to reveal the importance of menstrual cycle menstrual day on is celebrating 28 may. Menstrual Hygiene Day creates awareness and changes negative perceptions associated with menstrual hygiene. Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH) day was initiated by a German based non-profit NGO WASH United in 2013 with an aim to benefit women globally. 28th May is observed as menstrual hygiene day (MHM day). This day is dedicated to bring awareness regarding good menstrual hygiene management play a key role in empowering women and girls to achieve their goals in life. Basically this day has an aim that each women and girl in the world may be able to manage her menstruation in a hygienic way with safety, privacy and full dignity.

There are seven essentials or components of MHM**Change sanitary napkin every 4-6hours**

Changing sanitary napkins or tampons every 4-6 hours is the thumb rule to maintain vaginal hygiene. Menstrual blood, when released from the body attracts various organisms' micro organisms, which multiply in the blood, and cause irritation, rashes or urinary tract infections. Changing ones sanitary napkin or tampon regularly inhibits the growth of these organisms and prevents infections.

Washing the Vagina properly

Washing ones vagina regularly is extremely important, because the organisms cling to our body once removed our sanitary napkin. Most people wash themselves regularly, but not the right way--which is, using our hands in motion from the vagina to the anus, not vice-versa. Motioning your hand from the anus to the vagina can lead to the transmission of the bacteria from the anus into the vagina or urethra opening leading to infections.

Avoid using soaps or vagina hygiene products

Vaginal hygiene products are good but using these products during menses can be harmful. Vaginas have their own cleaning mechanism with the

help of mucus and these artificial hygiene products can hamper the natural process leading to infections and growth of bacteria.

Disposing off the sanitary napkin properly

Disposing off our tampons and sanitary napkins properly is another important step. One should wrap them properly before throwing them away. This way one can stop the spread of bacteria and infections, one should never flush them. Washing ones hands properly is of utmost importance after one has wrapped and discarded the used sanitary napkins.

Stick to one method of sanitation-

Women tend to use tampons and sanitary napkins, or two sanitary napkins simultaneously during heavy flow. While this helps to keep one dry and stainless, it can cause infections too.

Seven bad menstrual hygiene habits that can be a risk to ones health**Unclean Sanitary Napkins**

Using unclean pads can actually lead to fungal infections, reproductive tract infection, Urinary infection and even makes one vulnerable to infertility. All over the world millions of women are still using things like dried leaves, plastic, cloth and such as a substitute for pads. Menstrual hygiene routine is not just about cleaning once body internally but also making sure to use sterile and clean pads so as to avoid any such infections.

Wearing one pad for way too long

This unhygienic practices has to removed off as most of the women do not change the pad on regular basis the moment sanitary pad is crased it should be changed to curb the bad outer that raises and can causes virginal yeast infection .

Wiping or washing from back to front

Another mistake one makes is washing or wiping back to front after peeing or pooping. This actually brings bacteria from the bowel to the vagina and can lead to serious urinary tract infections. Wiping or washing should be done from back to front.

Unprotected sex during the menstrual period

Many of us might be confident of not getting pregnancy due to period. One must use protection, not just because one may get pregnant but also because one is more likely to contract STD (sexually transmitted disease) like herpes, HIV and Hepatitis B during these days.

Used sanitary Napkin

Used sanitary napkins should not be thrown anywhere or in river/ponds etc. The exposed sanitary napkins not only cause the water to get contaminated, they can cause serious health issues like Hepatitis B for the waste collector.

Use of Pond Water

Use of contaminated pond water for washing can create infection and itching problems.

Not Washing Hands

Not washing ones hands after changing our sanitary pad can cause **yeast infections** or **Hepatitis B**. So, even if we have just been hanging out watching TV all day long, it's very important that one wash the hands before wearing a pad and after disposing too.

Conclusion

Maintaining good menstrual hygiene during menstruation plays a major role in women health. Along with personal hygiene, environmental hygiene is also to be maintained well. During menstruation use of unclean cloth/napkin may lead to fungal infection. Frequency of changing cloth/napkin should be as per flow. Cleaning of genitals area and hands after changing absorbent keep women safe from infections. So the women should be made aware to use safe practices during menstruation and misconception or social restriction should be prevented.

References

1. Abraham C, Ian F, Val G, Coral K Derk L J, Michael M, Don MC. (1985). *Menstruation, Menstrual protection and Menstrual cycle problems, the Knowledge attitude and practice of young Australian women. The Medical journal of Australia*42: 247-251.
2. ACOG. (1995). *The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologic Problems: Dysmenorrhoea. Washington*: 5-9.
3. Backe. (1997). *Tainted femininity -traces of traditional menstruation myths in product advertising of feminine hygiene products. Gynakol Geburtshilflichc Rundsch -Article in German* 37:(1):30-8,
4. Ballinger CB, Smith AHW. (1 985). *Factors associated with psychiatric morbidity in women a general practice survey. Acta Psychiatre Scand* 71 :272-280.
5. Basanayaka. S. (1987). *Knowledge and attitude about reproductive health among youth in Srilanka. The journal of family welfare*: 33: 56-88.
6. Berry C., Mc Guire FL. (1972). *Menstrual distress and acceptance of sexual role. American journal of obstetrics and gynaecology*: 144: 83-87.
7. Chandra PS, Chaturvedi S K. (1992). *Cultural variations in attitudes toward menstruation. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*: 37: 196-198.
8. Dalton K. (1969). *The menstrual cycle. Pantheon books. New York.*
9. Fakeye O, Egade A. (1994). *The characteristics of the menstrual cycle in Nigerianschool girls and the implication for school health programmes. Afr J. MedScience*: 23: 13-17.
10. Faundes A, Hardy F. (1995). *From birth control to reproductive Health: Inter National Journal of Gy and Ob*: 49 (1): 55-62.
11. Golub S. (1992). *Periods from menarche to menopause. SAGE publications. New Delhi.*
12. Shivani Chhabra. *5 things to keep in mind for your menstrual hygiene. UPDATED. May 28, 2017. 15:29IST*
13. WHO / UNICEF. *Consultation on draft long list of goal, target and indicator options for future global monitoring of water, sanitation and hygiene. [https:// washdata.org / sites / default/files / documents / reports/ 2017-06 / JMP- 2012- post2015-consultation.](https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2017-06/JMP-2012-post2015-consultation)*