

Menstrual Hygiene Awareness and its Management among school going Adolescent Girl Students

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Abstract

Girls' enrolment in schools is steadily showing an upward spiralling trend with the increasing awareness among parents and their wards for better education and its accompanied benefits'. In the wake of this emerging social reality, there is a pressing need for schools to go all out with total preparedness for handling girl's issues especially menstrual related problems and hygiene.

While the government machinery is at work to take care of the health and hygiene related issues especially menstrual hygiene, the international organizations like UNICEF and a slew of NGO are zealously spreading massive awareness among the target group regarding the core issue encompassing menstrual hygiene in the best interest of the individual girl child in particular and the society at large.

The present paper seeks to explore, hitherto less explored area of menstrual hygiene awareness and its management practices among school going adolescent girls and different plans and programmes being run for effective Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM).

(Keywords: -**Menstruation, Adolescent, Hygiene Management**)

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls is a burning issue in the current social. Economic and political perspective. WHO in 1995 proposed the concept of Health promoting schools (HPS). It advocated the total life approach of school-based Health Promotion.

Menstruation is one part of a woman's cycle when the lining of the uterus (endometrium) is shed. This occurs throughout a woman's reproductive life cycle. However, Menstruation is not just a biological phenomenon but entails cultural, religious and psychological dimensions. The way the people view menstruation is largely influenced by religious,

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customs and traditions in a particular society. Most importantly, there are a number of misconceptions, wrapped around Menstruation, which still prevail.

Fallacies related to Menstruation

Menstruation in many countries is treated as a taboo and mired with misconceptions. For most girls menarche is a negative, frightening and difficult experience, or, at the best, a nuisance, or is something to fear or to be ashamed of (Abera, Y. 2004). Restrictions in daily activities such as not being allowed to take bath, change clothes, comb hair and enter holy places and dietary restrictions (taboo on consumption of food like rice, curd, milk, *lassi*, potato, onion, sugarcane etc.) during the menstrual period are also imposed. (Dhingra, R., Kumar, A., & Kour, M. 2009)

A study in Egypt found many schoolgirls reporting that they do not bathe during their menstruation because it is considered a social taboo to come in contact with water during the menstrual cycle (ElGilany, Badawi, and El-Fedawy 2005).

A study in Nepal found that many girls were forced to stay in a hut or slept in the fields during their period even though the government had decreed this practice illegal (Thompson et al. 2020).


There is a lack of or limited awareness among girls about the MHM. (Gupta, J.; Gupta, H. 2001). They see menstruation as taboo or menstrual blood is the sign of impurity, sign of a sin, punishment, etc. But many studies documented that a huge population of girls knows the details about menstruation (Kotecha, P.V.; Patel, S 2009)

Family, Culture and Traditions

For centuries, the natural process of menstruation, that helps sustain life on earth, has been neglected. In the wake of menstruation, girls are forced to use unhygienic means like cloth, sawdust etc. Economically deprived and backward class adolescent girls are stuck in the cycle of period poverty, because of lack of financial support, they are unable to buy menstrual hygiene products.

The Ugly Facts

Poor menstrual hygiene and faulty management can lead to serious complications and can pose serious threats to life. Urinary Tract Infections can adversely affect the well-being of students and due to discomfort and menstrual pain they may not concentrate on studies so absenteeism increases. Lack of disposable systems for pads, poor water supply for flushing or washing, bad hygienic conditions of washrooms/toilets, lack of wash basins, soap in toilets and non-availability of separate toilets for girl students were found (Vashisth A, Pathak, R, et al. 2018).

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Life Skills Practice and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

Life skills and Menstrual Hygiene Management are closely interlinked. World Health Organisation (WHO) defines Life skills as the 'abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable an individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life'. Life skills represent psychological skills that determine valued behaviour and include reflective skills, problem solving and critical thinking, as well as personal skills such as self-awareness and interpersonal skills.

Life skills practice among girls, involve managing periods and maintain proper menstrual hygiene. This combines social, behavioural and psychological skills. Learning good habits and managing mental behaviour has great effect on the all over awareness program of MHM. Life skills learning motivates the person to maintain herself to avail the benefits needed for overall development.

Strengthening Teachers Training and Sensitization Programmes in Community

The major stake holders in Menstrual Hygiene Management programmes are the adolescent girls, their parents, schoolmates, neighbourhood and society. The success of effective MHM rests on the convergence of awareness and community-based sensitization training programmes. Menstrual hygiene friendly administration, teachers and students in a school make a strong team to achieve the desired results.

Communication for Development

There is a big gap in terms of communication when it comes to menstrual hygiene and its effective management. The menstrual hygiene is the most neglected and tabooed topic to discuss in India and many of its neighbouring countries because of religious, cultural and other factors. Even the girls experience shame in discussing the matter with their female teachers let alone male teachers or male classmates. The communication gap creates confusion and frustration among the adolescent girls who are undergoing periods.

Disposal of Waste Products

WHO- UNICEF report 2018, mentioned that only 36% of schools in India had functional incinerators for disposal of sanitary waste (Bedi, R.; Choudhary, P.K. et al 2017)

Used pads management is a crucial issue in the schools, which comes under the head 'waste management'. Many schools show ignorance on this issue and so the girls were ready to skip the school days during menstruation (Vashisht, A., Pathak, R et al 2018)

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Proper management of waste and planning accordingly, is the responsibility of the head of the school. He must use the proper resources, form committee, direct and control the activities, using or delegating his authority if necessary. Dustbins, incinerators, it's hygiene, operating sweepers, proper place to dump or dispose must be on the rule book of the school.

The GOI Initiatives

The government of India has launched oxy biodegradable sanitary napkins on environment day on 4th June 2018, by the name 'Suvidha', under the scheme 'Pradhanmantri Bhartiya janaushadhi Pariyojna'. These napkins biodegrade automatically when it comes in contact with oxygen after being discarded (Sneha R. N. et al 2018).

Conclusion

The adolescent girls during menstruation face fear and fright, lack emotional support and feeling of dejection. There are cultural taboos and discriminatory practices across cultures. Lack of information among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) often lead to unhygienic or unhealthy menstrual practices, misconceptions, and negative behavioural attitude marked by heightened anxiety, nervousness and self-depreciation. There is an imminent need for greater thrust on interlinking and convergence of different programmes and initiatives by Govt of India, UNICEF, INGOs and NGOs on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

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