

ID: 2016-ISFT-289

Awareness and Acceptance of Sanitary Napkins

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Abstract: Health and hygiene of girls have become an important parameter to run and build a strong nation. Providing better sanitary care and puberty education for poor school girls will have positive outcomes both in terms of running a healthy family and an independent nation. My work and research is in a M.C.D. School of Pocket A – 2, MayurVihar Phase – 3, Delhi. Will showcase that education related to Menstruation is going to likely increase the attendance of girls in school if we are able to develop that required comfort zone for girls. Also, if like Mid Day Meal Scheme by Government of India (GOI), if free sanitary pads are made available to girls by GOI, it will be a great success like few startups who work in this sector.. This paper will also include about the comfort and uneasiness faced by these poor girls while using cotton pads and myths told to them by their mothers. Mothers of these girls are also needed to aware that like basic food, shelter and clothing, this is the high time for their girls to use sanitary napkins as a basic amenity. We believe that the potential of pads will make them understand that puberty is something very private and later it will enhance their fertility. Also, it will notice that it is not about cost – constraints faced by poor people but it is gender power imbalance within households because these households typically spend many times that much each week for the male head to drink beer with his friends. Regular menstruation cycle along with a good diet becomes an important factor to decide the mental and physical health of these poor girls. Therefore, it is the study of the reactions, emotions and awareness amongst girls, their teachers and their parents of this school regarding sanitary napkins and menstruation.

Keywords: Adolescence, Menstruation, Menarche, Reproductive Tract Infections, taboos.

1. INTRODUCTION

Clean India and Save Daughter are main political agenda of current government. But one can view this agenda only with a doubtful mind. The cultural memory of black history and traditions kept Indian women always in shade. Her health, safety was not considered for dialogue. This is high time to talk and discuss about the fundamental issues faced by women. Adolescence in girls is a turbulent period, which includes stressful events like menarche, considered as a

landmark of female puberty[1]. Female health, especially of the adolescent girls in India has been an issue of prime concern since past few decades. Menarche which is a very special property unique to the teenage girls marking its presence in between the age groups of 10 years to 15 years. Various estimates have placed it at 13[2]. This is the time when a female realizes the essence of being a woman who is playing the key role of nurturer on Earth. The girls from economically weaker sections of society are sometimes being deprived of enjoying this teenage. Reasons may be many from taboos followed at their homes to a mark used by their parents that they are now big enough to get married. The taboos are many as not touching the pickle, not going to be involved in any religious practices, etc. This is all because of lack of education at their homes which can hamper their development. This results than in being ignorant of the scientific facts and important health practices, thus giving rise to hazardous health issues as RTIs (Reproductive Tract Infections) [1].

The government and various NGOs have started working on this issue and have received a good lot of positive results. In various Government Schools, free sanitary napkins are provided to girls, so that they can imbibe hygienic practices within them and their homes too. Informing teenage girls openly about menstruation and sanitary napkins will improve their health, education and thus their future. They will improve their attendance in the class and will feel comfortable to attend those school hours without any tensions of leakage or change. Thus, supplying sanitary napkins by Government Schools should be continued and should be practiced by other Government schools too. This would be the first initialization for the construction of Indian Girls Health [2].

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

It was a multi objective research aimed at knowing the following:

- 1) Problems faced by girls at the menstrual time at homes and schools.
- 2) Status of sex education and menstrual education in schools.

- 3) The number of girls who remains absent during such times.
- 4) Their feelings and reactions for menses.
- 5) Do Sanitary Napkins help in increasing the girls' attendance?
- 6) Knowing the times male head expends in drinks.
- 7) Source of information and hygienic practices during menstruation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Acceptance and Awareness of Sanitary Napkins amongst girls of Economically Weaker Sections of society is directly somehow correlated with their approach towards menstruation and its hygienic practice. The main emphasis was laid on the current mentality of girls after so many works and studies already conducted on such a tender subject. The studies by D.S. DEO and C.H. Ghattargi[3] in their research on 'Perceptions and Practices regarding menstruation: A comparative studies on Rural and Urban Girls' came out with a comparison between two extreme sectors in their results. Majority of urban as well as rural girls in present study preferred cloth pieces to the sanitary pads to deal with the menstrual flow. Use of sanitary pads is not a desirable practice in place of a cloth piece in view of poverty and high cost of these pads. D.S. Deo and C.H. Ghattargi[3] also noted that rural girls follow less taboo than urban girls.

Also another study by AbhayBhauSahebMudey, NaveetaKesharwani, GargiAbhayMudey and Ramchandra C. Goyal[4] amongst the school going adolescent girls in Wardha District of India focused on the hygiene and health parameters of girls during this turbulent phase. The girls expressed willingness to use sanitary napkins if they are available at more economical rate[4]. Still, after so many works and studies, it was crucial to know that how widely girls know about menstruation and its hygiene practices and to know how much they have accepted sanitary napkins as their prime necessity. Government has been working so much to provide free sanitary napkins to these girls in schools to improve their health and education. But everything still depends majorly on the roles played by their families and homes. As all the development of taboo ideas generates from there. Also, it is the high time duty of the male head too to understand their responsibilities towards their girl child.

4. SAMPLE DESIGN

From around 400 girls of class Ninth and Tenth of Government Girls Secondary School (MayurVihar Phase – 3, Delhi – 110096), 171 girls participated in the session held for them about the awareness of Menstruation and proper usage of sanitary napkins. In this session, they were asked to

fill out Hindi version of a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions related to my research work.

About 150 girls from classes Sixth to Eighth of the same school as mentioned above were asked to participate in my personal and focused interview. In this session I showed them a small animated movie and asked few random questions related to my research work. It was an interactive session aimed at awaring them about menstruation and sanitary napkins.

Then, in the MCD Primary School (A-2 – I, MayurVihar Phase – 3, Ward No. – 216) about 206 girls of class Fifth participated in interactive session held by me to know about the current knowledge and the ashamed kind of feelings related to menstruation. Here also an animated movie was shown, followed by the awareness lecture and relative questions were asked.

Also, 11 teachers and principals of both the schools filled a questionnaire of 6 questions stating the present status of sex education and menstrual education. 10 parents (mothers) of the girls of the Secondary School mentioned above got ready to fill a questionnaire of 7 questions prepared for them aiming to know the times male head spends in purchasing the drinks.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The samples of my study are of varied age groups (Class 5 to Class 10). There are evident studies showing that mentality towards menstruation and health will be changing from these groups. So conducting a uniform study will be difficult to conclude an answer. Thus, this research is based on multiple methods, which includes

- 1) Questionnaire (For Class 9th and Class 10th)
- 2) Personal and focused interview (For Classes 5th to 8th)

The interaction with teachers and parents were helpful for data validation and realization.

The questions and discussions were mainly aimed at students for knowing their perception and mentality towards the menstrual awareness and health. Onset of menstruation is one of the most important changes occurring among the girls during the adolescence. The questions were set as the result of primary desk study. Most of the questions were of closed end in which students can respond.

6. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The data for this study was collected through a 25 question questionnaire set for Class 9th and 10th. 70 girls from class 9th and 101 girls from class 10th participated in it. Their ages were recorded in between 12-17 years. It helped in the vivid description of girls' responses towards a particular question arised from the attitude of every one in the society towards menstruation. The data collected can be distributed into four major groups as:

6.1. MENSTRUAL KNOWLEDGE

Somehow only 7.6% of girls possess the rational knowledge about menstruation. 18.7% knows partially and 33.9% of girls had improper knowledge about menstruation. 39.76% were unknown that what is menstruation according to them. One of the girl also mentioned that it feels a lot of pain and she doesn't want it to occur.

5.84% of girls lies between 8-10 years when they first got to know about menstruation. 27.48% lies in 11-12 years and 50.29% lies above 12 when they first received information about menstruation. Surprisingly, 16.37% of girls got to know about it when it happened. Also, 7.01% was below age 12 when menstruation first occurred to them. 66.08% was in between 12-14 years and 25.14% was in between 14-16 years when menstruation first occurred. 1.75% was above 16 years when it happened.

53.21% of girls have their menstrual cycle on time while 46.78% of girls don't have it on time. Source of information from where girls got to know about menstruation are mothers (35.67%), teachers (41.52%), friends (14.03%) and relatives (8.77%).

6.2. SOCIOLOGICAL REACTIONS

92.39% of girls feels hesitated while speaking with their fathers or brothers about menstruation. Rests 7.6% which is very low feels free to talk about it with males. The girls cannot speak with males because of shame (57.59%), fear (10.12%) and hesitation (32.27%).

There were several responses recorded from girls about what they felt in their first menstruation. It is as calculated percentage of girls felt fear (17.54%), indifferent (35.08%), discomfort (23.39%), comfort (3.5%), disgusted (5.26%), guilty (2.33%), happy (7.01%) and others (5.84).

Then, in the subsequent menstruation, calculated percentage of girls felt fear (8.18%), indifferent (25.14%), discomfort (21.05%), comfort (8.18%), disgusted (5.84%), guilty (2.33%), happy (15.78%) and others (13.45).

59.64% of girls told that their mothers or grandmothers ask them to follow some taboos or myths related to menstruation while they are during their periods. Rests 40.35% of girls doesn't follow any taboos or myths. 14.61% of girls said that their parents doesn't allow them to play or go to school during their periods. 85.38% of girls said that their parents allow them to play or go to school at such times.

6.3. HEALTH AND HYGIENE

A very hygienic practice of using only sanitary napkins during menstruation was done by 54.38% of girls. A very few percentage of girls i.e. 1.16% use only cotton cloths during menses while 43.85% of girls use a combination of both sanitary napkins and cotton cloths on different days or

at different times of a day. 0.58% of girls lies in using some other method. Almost 100% girls responded that they face a lot of difficulties while using cotton cloths. Amongst them 94.80% of girls do not reuse cotton cloths in next menstrual cycle while 5.19% reuse it in next cycle. To wash used cotton cloths, 12.98% of girls only was it with water, 61.03% wash it with both water and soap and the rests 25.97% throws it directly into dustbins.

There are several health issues faced by girls during menstruation. Most of them have severe stomach-ache (80.11%), nausea or vomit (9.94%), loss of appetite (29.23%), headache/irritation (35.67%), pain in legs (16.37%), excess in bleeding (29.23%), Irritation in private parts (8.77%) and dizziness (15.78%).

For maintaining distance from Reproductive tract infections, 11.69% of girls cleans their private parts for about 1-2 times, 32.16% cleans more than 2 times and 56.14 takes care according to their convenience. For cleaning of private parts 67.59% do with water and soap, 28.65% wash only with water and 1.75% wash with cloth pieces.

25.73% of girls have menstruations lasts for about 3-4 days, 47.36% lasts for about 4-5 days, 14.03% lasts their menstruation in 6-7 days and 12.86% have menstruation for more than 7 days. 39.76% of girls take some health curative measures during periods. Amongst them, 17.64% uses some home made therapies, 38.23% take medicines from doctor, 33.82% have hot water foment and 4.09% perform some other measures. 60.23% of girls do not take any kind of health curative measures during periods.

6.4. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

45.61% of girls maintains their privacy with everyone except their mothers regarding periods. 18.12% maintains privacy with friends, 8.18% maintains privacy with relatives and 28.07% maintains privacy with no one. The reasons for maintaining privacy are they feel hopeless (20.46%), they feel people will hate them (7.6%), they maintain it without any reason (43.85%), they feel irritated when others talk about this (18.7%) and 9.35% have nothing to say.

94.73% of girls throws all the used sanitary napkins or cloths into the dustbins and rests 5.26% of girls doesn't want to tell about it.

74.26% of girls will use the sanitary napkins provided to them free of costs from their schools and will definitely attend the school as a result of it. 25.73% of girls would not come to school during periods even if free sanitary napkins are provided to them.

6.4.1 MENTORING PARENTS AND TEACHERS

The next set for data collection was studied on 11 teachers and 10 mothers of these girls. In Teacher's questionnaire, only 6 questions were asked. 81.81% of teachers frequently talk about menstruation with girls regularly and the same

percentage of teachers use oral method to teach them. While 9.09% of teachers use both oral and presentation method and 9.09% use all traditional media, oral and presentation to teach girls regarding this.

63.63% of teachers told that present scenario of sex education is not upto the mark. It needs more improvements. 72.72 % of teachers told that around 10 girls remains absent from their class during periods and 18.18% told that none of them remains absent now in their class at such times. Also, 81.81% of teachers said that free sanitary napkins by Government has definitely helped to decrease the number of absences amongst girls during periods. While 18.18% said it doesn't help really.

When discussed concerns with mother, only 7 questions were asked and 50% of mothers told that male head of their family goes outside at least once a week to have drinks. 30% of mothers told that male head goes outside for about 2 times to have drinks and only 20% of mothers told that male head doesn't go outside to have drinks.

6.4.2 ANALYSIS

Data analysis was done on both the two methods i.e. personal and focused interview for class 5th to 10th and questionnaire for classes 9th – 10th.

While conducting personal and focused interview for class 5th in which 206 girls participated, 14.07% of girls told that they know about sanitary napkins but few amongst them doesn't know that what is it all about. Studied age groups were 10-14 years. After showing them a presentation on menstrual movie, all 14.07% of them already know exactly what sanitary napkins is all about and what does stayfree or whisper advertisements show. 25- 30 girls are going through menstrual phase and about 12.13% of girls are being stopped by their mothers to play at such times. 9.70% of girls came to know about this from their mothers only and 3.39% of girls came across it from their teachers [5].

Now, from class 6th to 8th, personal and focused interview was again conducted in which only 150 girls participated. Age groups studied was 11- 15 years. 74.6% of girls were able to freely express about menstruation and sanitary napkins. 64% of girls were going through this menstrual phase in their life. Maximum girls exclaimed that it is a very tough time for them to deal with this and they go through different kinds of mood swings as agitation, depression, etc. Minimum percentage of girls make use of both cloths and sanitary napkins during their periods. They face a lot of health issues as severe pain in abdomen, headache, excessive blood loss, etc. About 50% of girls told that during such hard phase they go through during periods, but still their mothers ask them to follow various taboos and myths at home. As maximum girls had their periods first time in these age groups only, therefore 29.33% of girls remain absent during such times. But almost all girls showed their willingness to come to school if they don't face health

issues. Also, they make use of Sanitary Napkins provided to them from their schools which helps to improve their hygiene and education by avoiding any RTIs and make them attend their school hours.

Finally for class 9th and 10th questionnaire was kept. The 59.64% of girls who told that they have to follow certain taboos and myths at home. Taboos told by them were not touching pickle, do not enter temples, do not share it with someone else, don't worship God, don't touch plants, don't touch clean and dry clothes, if you want to eat don't enter kitchen and ask your family members to provide you with the food. Almost all girls who use cotton cloths faced a lot of problems as feeling indifferent, itching in private parts, develops rashes, it is very wet and is unmanageable to avoid its displacement and also they need to change it again and again. To manage health issues, 17.64% of girls go for home made therapies like taking ajwain herb, drinking turmeric milk, drinking tea and eating jaggery.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The initial results of current study shows that the new generation of Indian girls are uncovering the myths and misconception regarding menstrual health and concerns. Through this study, we could find out the current level of rational knowledge about menstruation amongst girls, their sociological reactions, status of health and hygiene and psychological factors concerned with menstrual health.

Still after a lot of developments and awareness majority of girls face a lot of problems whether it is related to follow taboos or myths. Root cause may be considered as lack of information and awareness amongst family members of these girls. Teachers from these schools also remarked that the present status of sex education and menstrual education is not upto the mark. It needs more improvement in its syllabus and the methods of teaching. But the most important change was seen in girls of these schools. As various awareness drives across several girls regarding menstruation and sanitary napkins really helped the girls evolving into a much more confident person. This also decreased the number of girls remaining absent during their periods. Their feelings related to menstruation are not yet good. As few girls exclaimed it as a monthly pain in which they feel disgust, fear, indifferent, etc.

Role of sanitary napkins played a very crucial role in girls' lives. Free sanitary napkins aware them about safe practice during menstruation which they can even imbibe at their homes and can further help their mothers and sisters too. It helps to decrease the fear amongst girls and makes them confident enough to attend all school hours without any tensions of leakage and frequent change problems. Thus, helping them to increase their attendance in school. But some girls still make use of cotton cloths at homes and being in economically weaker sections of society they can not afford enough to purchase such costly pads. Government only provides a small packet of free sanitary napkins which

they can use only at school hours. Therefore, some measures should be taken to provide low cost sanitary napkins or more free pads to these girls so that they can avoid using cotton cloths. But providing them for free is not a proper solution of the problem. As awareness should start right at their homes where the male heads spends a lot of money on purchasing drinks, having beer with friends and then abusing at homes. If they stop spending so much of amount on drinks then there is a lot of money still left in economically weaker sections of society that they can purchase sanitary napkins for their girl children as well as their wives too. The obstacle is not price, but the gender power imbalance within households⁵. There were various sources of information for girls like their mothers, teachers, friends and relatives. Also, girls from smaller classes have some idea about advertisements shown to them on television about sanitary napkins but they were first hesitated in saying anything about it. Later on only after awaring them through an animated movie, they understood the importance of menstruation and sanitary napkins in a girl's life and then they felt free to tell everything they know about this. A number of girls faces a lot of health problems like excessive blood loss, dizziness, irritation in private parts, etc. but still they are able to maintain their hygiene. They properly follows the cleaning of genitals and take proper care of having a bath at this time with a soap. They properly dispose the sanitary napkins or cotton cloths in a

dustbin. This shows how these girls are rapidly following hygienic practices.

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