

Menarche among Adolescents: A study of knowledge and Experiences

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1. Introduction

The Menarche (first period) is a significant milestone, in any woman's life. It is a major event which marks the transition of childhood to womanhood (Golub, 1992). When children enter adolescence, they face a lot of changes such as biological, psychological, or social. Biological development starts before psychological developments therefore adolescents face difficulty in adapting new changes in their body (Ozdemir et al, 2011) For a female adolescent, It can be sharply defines, distinct and sudden biological event (Koff, Rierdan & Silverstones, 1978) Menarche is also socio-cultural event that is often shaped and constructed by cultural institutions such as media, science and religion (Paige & Paige, 1981). The psychological effect of menarche can last for years and is frequently related with adolescent's attitude towards menstruation, their behavior towards their health in future and esp. the female body image (McPherson & Korfine, 2004). Therefore if adolescents do not get the correct information about these changes or about this topic in general, they can be confused and can adopt negative feelings.

In various studies, it is found out that in many societies, menarche and menstruation are treated as taboo subject and parents, relatives and friends prohibit talking about it (Maria et al., 2011; Cathryn, 1996; Chrisler, 2011). Negative emotions towards menarche were reported such as scared, ashamed, shocked, worried (uskul, 2004; Cathryn, 1996) and these negative feelings could be influenced by the girl's inadequate preparation for menstruation, or lack of knowledge and support (Uskul, 2004; Beasung, 2000; Tang, 2003) There is also some evidence that women if exposed to some positive and affirming aspects of Menstruation may view menstruation more positively (Chrisler et al., 1994). Therefore present study is an attempt to explore the knowledge, attitude and experiences of adolescents related to menarche.

2. Method

Participants

A convenience sampling of students (of class 7th - 10th) from a private school in Rishikesh (Uttarakhand, India) was used. Out of the total 114 girls in all the classes, the girls who attained menarche were selected. A total of 71 girls participated in the study.

Table 1 Number of girls participated (N=71)

Class	Total number of girls	Girls who attained menarche
7 th	22	4
8 th	19	12
9 th	27	26
10 th	29	29
Total	114	71

Table 1 shows the total number of girls in each class and out of those girls, column three shows the data of girls who attained the menarche and hence included in the study.

Table 2
Age Distribution for Menarche

Age (y)	13	14	15	16
n	14	2	28	27
(%)	(19.7)	(2.8)	(39.4)	(38.1)

Table 2 shows the Age the distribution of the girls, included in the study and **Mean age of the respondents found out to be 14.9 years.**

3. Procedure

Data were obtained from written responses to a questionnaire. Participants were provided with the questionnaire and got them filled as per their convenience. The questionnaire had questions related to socio economic profile

of the respondents and it also had open ended questions where the participants were open to share their views freely and because the universe of the study was finite hence all the subjects were studied.

4. Data Processing and Analysis Techniques

After collection of all research related information from the respondents. Further information was scrutinized; tabulation was done by making a systematic order and finally

summarizing the matter to find out the response of the respondents. All questionnaires were tabulated in MS Excel in a systematic order through each question and responses and summarization of the data done as per the needs of the objectives.. Simple statistical technique was used to analyze the data.

5. Findings

Psychological preparedness for menarche, first information providers, the quality of information provided, emotional reactions played important role in menarche presented through Table no 3-6.

Table 3 presents whether adolescents were informed regarding menstruation. Around 81% of girls reported they did not have given any information regarding menstruation prior to their menarche.

Table 4 shows clearly, that mother was the first information provider to the girls, around 67 percent of the respondents confirmed it and approx. 22 % of respondents reported friends to be the first information provider. Siblings

(5.63), television (2.81) and internet (1.40) also reported to have a played a little role.

Table 5 described the positive and negative feelings, adolescents may have experienced during menarche, to which respondents reported that around 78 % of them felt scared, fearful and have experience d strange feeling during their menarche, around 11% reported the positive feeling of normalcy, approx. 5% experienced the feeling of disgust, and around 2% felt excited and happy to the fact that they are now comes to the category of grown ups.

Table 6 presented the response to whether the respondents were given the information of using sanitary pads by their mother to which around 90% of the respondents reported to have given the information by their mothers during menarche and rest around 9% told to haven't been given any such information.

Table 7 showed that the school did not provide any information regarding menstruation to the girls for preparing them for the major event of their lives. Majority of respondents (95% approx) confirmed it.

Table 3: Knowledge regarding Menstruation prior to Menarche

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	14	19.8
No	57	80.28
Total	71	100%

Table 4: First Information providers

Source	Frequency	%
Mother	48	67.6
Friends	16	22
Siblings	4	5.63
Internet	1	1.40
Television	2	2.81
Total	71	100%

Table5: Attitudes related to menarche (Items)

Feelings	Frequency	%
Fear, scared, anxiety, strange feeling	56	78.87
Feeling of disgust	4	5.63
Normal feeling	8	11.26
Excited, happy	2	2.81
Not revealed	1	1.40
Total	71	100%

Table 6: Knowledge given by mothers about using Sanitary pads

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	64	90.14
No	7	9.85
Total	71	100%

Table 7: Information regarding menstruation in school

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	3	4.22
no	68	95.77
Total	71	100%

Experiences of menarche

Most girls reported to have experienced intense emotions, and they were told to treat it as a top secret event. Table 6 presents the summary of quotes of few.

Participant	Quote
1	<i>I was so scared when I first saw "it"..., experienced pain.. didn't know if I can perform my regular work during" it"!</i>
26	<i>I felt something strange is happening, I told my mother..she told me to use the sanitary pad and later the day she told me that I cant enter kitchen during these days and cant eat pickle or touch Tulsi plant!</i>
34	<i>When this happened to me, I was scared.. didn't know who to tell this..I told my mom a day later when It didn't stop..It was really scary!</i>
46	<i>I remember I was in school that day..thought at first I had some disease , because I was the first among my friends who experienced it, my friends didn't have the information either.. my frinds took me to principal, she then me to my home.. !</i>
68	<i>My mother is the doctor, she told me before hand as what to do if had it , I knew how to use sanitary pad.. I experienced little pain around abdomen area, but overall It was normal experience!</i>

6. Discussion

The study showed that most of the adolescent girls lacked accurate knowledge about menstruation before menarche, this supports the findings of past studies conducted in India (**Datta et al., 2012; Gupta & Sinha, 2006; Kundal & Thakur, 2014; Deepanjali et al., 2015**). Further majority of them reported to have the first information regarding menstruation either from their mothers and friends which demonstrated the important role of mother in construction the image (positive or negative) about menstruation (**Nagar & Aimol, 2010**) The lack of proper knowledge and fear found in this study similar to other studies (**Bata, 2012; Currie et al., 2012**)

The experience of menarche, the respondents reported was also scary and horrifying for those girls who did not have any prior idea about it (**Koff & Rierdan 1995**). Further this study also tried to explore the role of schools in preparing girls before they hit menarche, like in some nations school based health education programmes are found to be major source of information (**Olinas, 1999**).

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