

MENSTRUATION RELATED TABOO IN INDIA AND ITS IMPACT IN WOMEN'S LIFE: A REVIEW

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Abstract: Menstruation is a normal physiological cycle that occurs in female reproductive system for preparing the uterus for pregnancy. Since time immemorial menstruation has been regarded as impure. Women in most of the parts of India had to go through hardships during their menstrual cycle due to religious norms and cultural rituals related to menstruation. Menstruating women are isolated from the society and not allowed to be a part of societal and family functions as they are considered dirty. Women living in a society crowded with menstruation related myth are definitely struggling with their mental health along with physical health. Strategies are undertaken to eradicate menstrual related problems. India still is a victim of serious menstrual myth according to our religion, society, cultures and traditions. This review focuses on the various age old menstrual myths and the impact it has on the physical and mental health of women.

Keywords: Menstruation; menstrual myth; mental health; physical health; education.

I. BACKGROUND

Menstruation is a normal biological cycle of woman's monthly bleeding with social and cultural dimensions. During menstruation the body sheds the lining of the uterus through the vagina. Most menstrual periods last from 3 to 5 days. The menstrual cycle prepares the body for pregnancy and keeps the body healthy by providing hormones.

Menstruation in India has been very painful for the women's. Since ancient times menstruation is a myth for the people. Women are regarded as impure during their menstrual cycle. Women are isolated from the society and family. During the days they bleed they are not part of any family celebrations. Women are not allowed to worship God. Entering temples during menstruation is a sin. Food touched by menstruating women becomes poison. Women's are strictly prohibited from any physical contact with their family members. They stay separately, away from the touch of any family members. In many parts of the country separate sheds are been made for the girls during their menstrual cycle.

Religion has played an important role in propagating the myth related to menstruation in different cultures of our country. In Hinduism menstruation is a curse. There is the tradition of Goddess Kamakhya menstruating every year. People are restricted from entering the Kamakhya temple located in Guwahati, Assam as the temple remains shut for three days. In the same way menstruating girls are not allowed to enter temples. There is the belief of possession by evil spirit during menstruation period. Temples are places of positive energy, where people come to heal their minds with positivity. Menstruating women's are a reflection of negativity. Women are following the tradition in spite of being traumatized, as there is the practice of ostracizing women from the society. In Hinduism there are also the tradition of welcoming menarche by celebrating but after that she has to live a restricted life for 3 days every month.

Different cultures and traditions are following different kinds of rituals and beliefs regarding menstrual cycle. Societies role in menstrual myth is found in euphemism, source of information, open discussion, media and perception. Women from various parts of the country are bound to follow the same ancient traditions. Adolescence girl's first menarche is celebrated in many parts of India. In Assam the tradition of second marriage is prevalent. The girl is segregated from the family and out of contact of male for seven days. Normal food is not allowed. She leaves on fruits for the entire week. After a week she is married to a banana tree.

Not much study on the impact of menstruation myth on women's life had been conducted. When it comes to low mood, poor performances in academic, poor physical health, anxiety and stress, dysmenorrhea, heavy menstrual flow and other menstrual disorders the girls from rural area are not vocal about it. Accepting their self as portrayed by the society exempts them from consulting their parents, teachers or physician. Discussion of the menstrual problems and the discomfort feelings of the ritualistic menstruation the girls face are hidden within oneself. Questions are raised on the myths and taboo related to menstruation. Mental status remains the same, menstruating women's are treated as impure. Focusing on the effects of menstruation taboo on the menstrual problems, physical and mental health is of demand. Studies on the relation between stress and abnormal menstrual cycle have been reflected. On the other hand mental illness has a religious cause in some cultures. Thus religious views on menstruation can be a cause of severe stress and mental illness in girls which again leads to menstrual abnormalities. Restricting women from living a normal life could also be a barrier for education. Detachment from the society could be a reason for low self esteem and depression.

To study the life of women who goes through menstrual taboo during their menstrual cycle is requirement of the time. Although urban areas are expected to be free of menstrual taboos, but surprisingly the ratio doesn't differ much. The culture and traditions of the rural area are found to be more prone to menstrual myths and ritual. It becomes difficult for people to rule out the real nature of menstruation as proper knowledge on scientific nature is absent. Strategies by government and societies has been taken to eradicate menstrual related disorders prevalent in the country by creating awareness among the people, providing sanitary napkins and educating the adolescent girls regarding menstruation. Undertaking to study the impact that menstrual related myth has on the life of women is very few.

II. RELIGION AND MENSTRUATION

The word menstruation derived from the Latin word "mensis" means "month", which is related to the Greek word "mene" means "moon" (Allen & Kevin, 2007).. Menstruation is also called "Rajaswala Dosh", given by Vishnu to the women's according to Hindu mythology. Vishnu, who got "Brahmahatya Dosh" by killing a Brahmin, distributed his sin among the land, water, tree and stree (women) (B Swami, 1975). Sikhism is the only religion who allows women to enter Gurudwara. Women's menstruation is regarded as a normal process of social interest. Hindu religion like all other religion doesn't allow worshipping God during menstrual cycle. Girls become impure, menstrual blood is "Tamas" means black in Hindu mythology. (Bhartiya, 2013). Indian goddess has the tradition of menstruating. In Punjab there is the belief of mother earth sleeping for a week every month. From tenth to full moon day the Navratra Goddess temple are closed as she refreshes in Deccan. Assam (Kamakhya Goddess), Malabar and Orrisa still practices the ritual Goddess menstruation. (Chawla, 1992). In ancient times menstruation cycle is compared to moon's cycle. Cosmic rhythm is same as the body rhythm.

III. SOCIETY, CULTURE AND MENSTRUATION

Cultural aspects are surrounding around how society perceive menstrual cycle. Euphemism is prominent in earlier days like 'Kapde kab aaenge?', for enquiring whether a girl is on her menstruation. (Bhartia, 2013). Different culture view menstruation in different ways. In Judy Grahn theory of Metaformic, culture is created from the term menstruation. (Grahn, 2018). One of the central myth and traditional ritual of the community all over the world is harmony of menstruation with cosmic rhythms. Cultural association with menstruation appear convincing with the fact that menstrual cycle approximates the month's 29.5 days synodic cycle. (Saltzman et al., 2010). Menstruating blood is considered sacred; it turns obscene things to dirty and dangerous. (Durkheim, 1965). Women on their menstruation are dangerous. (Frazer, 2014).

Menstrual cloths are buried as they are believed to possess evil spirit. Also there is the belief that menstrual blood is used for black magic. In a community based study of rural area in Pondicherry 63.4 % of the females had the misconception of dirty blood, intrusion of evil spirits, excessive sweets leads to excessive bleeding, mandatory purification bath after

menses, prohibition to enter temples, kitchen and sleeping on bed. (Patil et. Al., 2011). Basically menstruation revolves around the conception of dirt and impure in most of the parts of India. (Garg et.al., 2001). Not allowing women's to perform their daily normal routine considered holy (George ,1994). Restriction from religious activities is the most prohibited activities in India. (Patil et.al.,2011). Negative attitude towards menstruation is more prevalent in urban slum areas due to poverty, lack of education and poor sanitation. (Dogra, 2017). Study on the adolescence girls of rural and urban areas of Punjab found menstruation as a myth equally among the rural and urban areas. The most prevalent notion of menstruation are not to enter temples and kitchen, not to attend visitors, avoid exertion, not to wear new cloths, not to see mirror, not to touch books and avoid non-vegetarian food, cold milk and papaya. (Puri & Kapoor,2006).

IV. INFLUENCES MENSTRUATION RELATED MYTH HAS ON WOMENS LIFE

Menstruation myth varies from country, religions, societies, cultures, peoples, gender and families. (Ten,2007). Menstruation related taboo impacts emotions, physical health, mental wellbeing and academics of girls. (Menstruation cycle abnormality deteriorates mental health.(Quraishi et al.,2015). Epidemiological studies indicate more prevalence of depression among female population. Psychiatric disorders could have a history of irregular and lengthy menstrual cycle. (Barron ML et. al.,)

In Maharashtra 58.4 % of the adolescent's girls have menstrual discomfort of menorrhoea along with depression, anxiety, social phobia, negative body image, genitor urinary tract infection and stress. (Quraishi et al.,2015). On the other hand menstrual disorders are equally related to the social environment, perception and the personal threshold of women. (Quraishi et al., 2015). A difference in the rural and urban traditions and social perception of menstruation has a different proportion of the menstrual problems. (Thakre et al., 2012). Menstrual disorders like dysmenorrhoeal and PMS are more prevalent in the urban area as the girls are more serious about their problems and seek medical help, whereas the girls from the rural areas are not able to open up when it comes to their menstrual complaints. (Avasarala et. al., 2008).Psychological stress and menstrual disorders are related to each other. (Lakkawar et. al., 2015). Women's not conceiving and having menstrual flow have a profound psychological impact as they are considered unholy. (Patil et.al., 2011). Unhygienic practices of using cloths, leaves, etc have health issues. Lack of proper social and cultural approaches of dealing with menstruation may lead to discomfort, menstrual hygiene issues, restraint from academics and other socio-cultural activities. (Dogra,2017). Confinement of girls from academics and social contact increases anxiety and discomfort. (Dogra, 2017). Huge drop outs of girls from school have been found due to menstruation, about 23% in India. Lack of proper sanitation and female friendly toilets in schools and colleges refrain female teachers from attending classes is a setback for the academics. (kaiser, 2014). Poor cleaning facilities causes infections and stinking could have an impact on the mental health.ons (Kirk & Sommer, 2006). Bathing is not allowed during menstruation, which could lead to reproductive tract infections. (Grad & Anand,2015). Menstruation misperceptions have serious effects on the functions and process reproduction. (Ten,2007).

V. LITERACY AND MENSTRUATION

Percentage of menstrual disorders is more in urban area than the rural area, as the urban girls are more open regarding their menstrual discomfort. Health promotion programme with appropriate health education in schools and colleges had an impact on reducing menstrual problems and promote mental health. (Weare, 2011). Cultural and social practices act as an obstacle transferring the knowledge related to menstrual health. (Rao, 1963). Ignoring culture and society leads to various health related problems.(khanna et.al.,2005). Literacy plays a great part on the myths and taboo of society. (Patil et.al., 2011). A study conducted in a rural area of India found rate of illiterates having misconceptions are more in comparison to the literates but it doesn't differ much. (Patil et.al., 2011). Literacy plays a crucial part but it doesn't create complete awareness, most essential is educating all adults, specially the adolescent girls about the physiological process of menstrual cycle and the unscientific assumptions regarding menstruation. (Patil et.al., 2011). Challenges which girl's are facing due to menstrual myth in India are result of poor education on menstrual cycle, sanitation and hygiene among girls. (Sadiq & Salih, 2013).

VI. STRATEGIES FOR ERADICATING MENSTRUATION TABOO

Focus has been more on the studies on adolescent girls' menstrual complaints than the adults, as adolescents are the significant section of the society. (Patil et.al.,2011). Opportunities for the girls to discuss their discomforts and emotions should be provided. (Dogra,2017). Medical practitioners can play a holistic role in accordance with the cultural myth prevalent in the society and increase the sensitivity of biological process of menstruation and related menstrual disorders. (Gard & Anand ,2015).

Adults are not aware of dealing with menstruation cycle, need of the hour is to educate the mothers of adolescence girls. (Garg,2015). Government is introducing various schemes for eradicating menstrual unhygienic taboo, one of them is to provide sanitary napkins low of cost under NRHM. Without proper initiative by the schools and organizations to educate, the schemes will not be a successful. Also the need of the hour is to educate the males of our society, to acquire sensible behavior from fathers, brothers, husbands, male colleague's and male friends. (Kirk & sommer,2006).

A holistic approach is required including all the approaches of cultural traditions, sanitary issues and health related complications in addressing the menstrual related misperceptions. (Kaur et.al.,2012). Menstrual is a biological process of procreation, people need to understand the value of natural menstruation for child birth. (Sadiq & Salih, 2013). Before organizing any education programme for menstrual awareness, it is important to respect the age old cultural milieu and plan accordingly. Study conducted on the urban slums of Ranchi founded girl's education, family and beliefs are responsible for the cultural practices of menstruation. (Kumar & Srivastava, 2011). School curriculum and textbooks should incorporate the scientific process of menstrual cycle.

VII. CONCLUSION

Prevalent age old socio-cultural and religious stigma, taboo, misconception and unawareness has discriminated women. Literacy has a significant role in eradicating unhealthy beliefs on menstruation. Initiative from educational institutions is immense in educating the girls regarding healthy menstrual life. Despite many campaigns challenging menstrual myth and creating the consciousness of menstrual cycle in India, rural areas are still not exempted from menstrual misunderstandings. Policy makers, media and various organizations are taking measures to wipe out menstruation related discomfort like Abnormal uterine bleeding, Amenorrhea, Fibroids, Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and Premenstrual dysphonic disorder (PMDD). Focus has been on promoting healthy sanitation by providing sanitary pads at low price and building separate toilets for girls in public places. Despite all the efforts, what is it that is still playing an important part on maintaining menstrual disorders and associated psychiatric disorders. Underscored the attention on religion, culture and traditional stereotypes that shape women's mental, emotional and physical health. The same age old tradition is followed for menstruation process.

Urgent reflection should be on the young girl's life. Impact family or societal tradition regarding menstruation could have on their emotions and health should be examined. Menarche is biological rhythm with bodily changes and fluctuating hormones associated with stress. Without a supportive environment, there are changes of developing mental illness. Although healthy sanitation facilities has been implemented in many rural and urban areas of India. Instead of attending to the psychological and physiological health of girls universally, the urgent need of the time is to concentrate on the individual's culture, family, education, religion and perception on women and their biological process of menstruation. A new healthy belief on menstruation could be formed through examining policies, researches and knowledge in this issue.

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