

University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO), La Source, School of Nursing, 3rd year of Nursing

UNIL, Faculty of Biology and Medicine, 3rd year of Medicine

Module B3.6 - Community Immersion

Abstract - Group n°47

Usage of cloths by adolescent girls during menstruation in Mangalore, India

Alessandra Dioguardi, Vanessa Gottreux, Elena Orita, Sage Zesiger

Introduction

Menarche is an important transition in any adolescent's life, as a step of growth and maturation. Multiple studies have shown that menstruation is not only perceived as a physiological process but also as having a social, psychological, and cultural impact on a girl's life (1). An essential aspect of menstruation is menstrual hygiene. Girls need to maintain a high level of personal hygiene during this period starting from the proper selection of absorbent materials, its proper usage and disposal (2). However, there are several barriers for young girls to access sufficient knowledge about proper menstrual hygiene practices (3). In Mangalore, factors that mostly influence girl's menstrual hygiene practices are their mother's education (4), limited financial resources necessary to buy quality absorbents, as well as a lack of appropriate toilet facilities (3). The lack of education and financial resources lead girls to use old rags, cloths or other unhygienic absorbent materials which may have a significant impact on their health (e.g. infections). The percentage of the usage of cloth has been reported in a study conducted in two schools both in urban and rural areas, respectively at 34% and 50% (3). Given the current situation, the goal of this research was to explore which socio-cultural, economical, and political factors influencing the use of cloth for menstrual hygiene among adolescents in Mangalore.

Methods

This study was a qualitative research based on the phenomenological approach consisting of the analysis of data obtained from 12 participants in 11 semi-structured interviews, one comprising 2 interviewees. The protocol was approved by the Father Muller Institutional Ethics Committee, Mangalore. To conduct the interviews, we established an interview guide based on the research question and objectives. We interviewed 2 gynecologists, 2 community nurses, a pediatric nurse, 2 accredited social health activists, 3 teachers and 2 women of the general population. The sample selection was done by purposive sampling technique and by networking technique. The participants were chosen by our tutor at the Father Muller College of Nursing, according to the study protocol. The length of the interviews was of 60 minutes on average. Each interviewee signed an informed consent form prior to the discussion. All interviews were recorded with the consent of participants. Two students conducted the interview, one student took notes while another ensured the interview guide was followed. For three interviews, our tutor translated from English to the local language. Each interview was listened to by a student who selected the most important information, redacted it and anonymized it. The data were analyzed by two of us separately, then jointly, to ensure intersubjectivity and to increase fidelity. The thematic analysis was performed using an analysis grid based on the dimensions of the transcultural nursing model of Leininger (5). Afterward, all analytical grids were assembled to extract common conclusions. In order to have expert opinions, we shared the results and insights with two professionals. The first expert, whom we met in person, was a professor of Community Medicine who wrote an article on menstrual hygiene management among rural and urban adolescent girls in Mangalore. The second was a medical doctor who conducted a study on menstruation knowledge among students in Mangalore.

Results

The study points to 5 main factors influencing the choice of absorbent material among adolescents in Mangalore. First, **education** was largely recognized as the most influential factor. Teachers and health professionals play a key role in this regard. They transmit information on menstrual hygiene and promote the use of sanitary pads. Health professionals educate adolescents primarily in schools and during home visits made by community nurses. They were designated as the first to speak about menstruation with girls by some participants while others designated the mother. Second, the majority of participants thought that **transmission** of knowledge and experience about the absorbent to be used for menstruation is mainly passed on **from mothers to daughters**. They also mentioned other relatives and peers as important sources of information. One participant recognized mothers, relatives and peers as the only sources providing information on using cloths. Third, a majority of interviewees presented **media** as promoting pads through ads. Media were also seen as new means of obtaining information about menstruation. Fourth, **low financial resources** were mentioned by a large majority as the first factor contributing to the use of cloths. A minority disagreed, thinking low resources were not a barrier to obtaining pads. Lastly, regarding the **cultural aspects**, some participants mentioned that discussions on the topic of menstruation are evolving. It is a topic that is more frequently discussed, in particular through sexual education classes implemented by the government and through the

intervention of NGOs. Nevertheless, several participants noted that it was taboo. Perceptions about cloths were divergent: some think it is not hygienic enough, while others perceive it as an acceptable material if hygiene is properly maintained. Participants pointed out that women were ashamed of showing their cloth and only one person thought that they were not affected by this. Interviewees noted that the choice of absorbent material was not influenced by religion. Concerning the use of cloths, most participants estimated that most girls use pads and only a minority uses cloths. When asked about how to reuse the cloth, the results showed that it needs to be soaked, washed with soap and dried outside under the sun for obtaining sufficient hygiene. Concerning the risks related to the use of cloths, infections and skin irritation were mentioned. Some participants thought that using cloths is uncomfortable, not practical and subject to a higher probability of leaks in comparison with pads. However, one interviewee mentioned cloths are easy on the skin and economical.

Discussion

The data indicated there was a shift in the usage of absorbent materials from cloths towards pads. A major factor of this change might be related to the rise of education, which is more impactful than tradition. Another element is mandatory schooling of children. Lack of sanitary facilities and increased time spent in school imply less possibility to wash the cloth. Indeed, a recent survey revealed that only 53% of girls in government schools had a separate and usable bathroom (3). The growth of sanitary pad advertisements and the increased access to media provides girls with more information about which absorbent materials are available and might contribute to the rise of pads usage.

The higher visibility of sanitary products could play a role in diminishing the taboo surrounding menstruation (6). Nevertheless, this study as well as the scientific literature (3) show that the cloth is still used as an absorbent material. A probable link was shown between this usage and the limited financial resources, and the low educational status of the mother (3). A lack of knowledge about other sanitary options from mothers heavily influence their daughter's use of cloth, as this is the information they will impart. Another factor is that if the number of free pads distributed in schools is insufficient, girls may go back to the cloth. This was confirmed by the fact that teachers expressed finding both pads and cloths in sanitary dustbins.

Menstruation as a taboo was a controversial subject in many of the interviews. Health professionals and teachers had a tendency to speak about it more freely, given they are more exposed to the topic, in opposition to people outside these fields. The interviewees expressed there was no taboo in Christianity around menstruation. Given that most of the participants were Christian, this could also explain why the subject was considered as acceptable, in opposition to findings in the scientific literature. The participants estimated the use of pads in a higher percentage than those found in scientific studies. An explanation could be that most of the participants came from a high educational background which could lead them to overestimate the use of pads. If we had the possibility to directly interview the girls about their menstrual practices, it could have increased the fidelity of the results. Limits in this study were that we had mostly participants from a Christian background and also highly educated. A strength of this study is that we compared the results with the ones in scientific literature and contacted experts to discuss the results with them. Further research needs to be done to reveal the influence of education, economy and modernization over time on the use of absorbent materials. To apply our results to Switzerland, given our findings, we would recommend implementing classes in schools for adolescents on menstrual hygiene and on what are the best practices when using the different absorbent materials.

References

1. Behera D, Sivakami M, Behera MR. Menarche and Menstruation in Rural Adolescent Girls in Maharashtra, India: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Health Management*. 2015;17(4):510- 9.
2. P. C. A, Roy A, Sara AB, Vcm F, Babu GP, Tamrakar A. Knowledge Regarding Menstrual Hygiene among Adolescent Girls in selected school, Mangalore with a View to Develop an Information Booklet. *IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science*. 2014;3(1):55- 60.
3. Senapathi P, Kumar H. A comparative study of menstrual hygiene management among rural and urban adolescent girls in Mangaluru, Karnataka. *International Journal Of Community Medicine And Public Health*. 2018;5(6):2548.
4. Javalkar S, M A. Menstrual hygiene practices among adolescent schoolgirls of rural Mangalore, Karnataka. *International Journal of Medical Science and Public Health*. 2017;6(7):1.
5. Sagar PL. *Transcultural nursing theory and models: application in nursing education, practice, and administration*. New York: Springer Pub. Co; 2012.
6. Arpan Shailesh Yagnik (2014) Reframing Menstruation in India: Metamorphosis of the Menstrual Taboo With the Changing Media Coverage, *Health Care for Women International*, 35:6, 617-633.

Key words: Menstruation; cloths; pads; absorbent material; hygiene; adolescent girls

July 2019

EVOLUTION OF ABSORBENT MATERIALS IN MANGALORE, INDIA

Alessandra Dioguardi, Vanessa Gottreux, Elena Orita, Sage Zesiger

Introduction

- Menarche: important transition (1)
- Menstruation perceived as :
 - physiological process
 - having social, psychological, cultural impacts (1)
- Menstrual hygiene is impacted by :
 - selection of absorbent material (2)
 - knowledge (3)
 - financial resources (3)
 - sanitary facilities (3)
 - mother's education (3)
- Use of cloth, Mangalore : urban 34%, rural 50% (3)
- Unhygienic material leads to urinary tract infections (3)

This leads us to the present question


What are the socio-economical-cultural factors that influence the use of cloth?

Objectives

- Understand the transmission of usage of cloths to adolescents
- Explore the process of cloths reuse
- Determine the risks and benefits of cloths' use
- Identify the role of health professionals

Methods

- Qualitative phenomenological research
- 11 semi-structured interviews
- 12 participants
- Translation by nurse research guide for 3 interviews
- Data analysed separately then jointly for fidelity
- Thematic analysis based on the transcultural nursing model of Leininger
- 2 experts opinions




Education

What ?

- Unanimously defined as the primary factor

Why ?

- Teachers and health professionals recommend pads because of hygiene
- Education about menstruation has then contributed to the increasing use of the pads.
- Could be a factor explaining the evolution of absorbent material usage



Transmission

What ?

- Only mothers and peers will transmit knowledge of the use of cloths

Why ?

- Link between education and transmission: impart knowledge
- Education has bigger impact than tradition because use of pads increase

“Every change brings a change in about every aspect, in the thinking, hygiene aspects, the change is overall, but in some aspects it takes more time.”
(woman, Mangalore)

Brig Dr. Hemant Kumar :


- Accessibility: free pad machines should exist
- “Despite high educational and economical level, menstruation is not talked about, it is cultural. Change is coming in Mangalore, it is gradual. We have to break the ice to change the mentality”



Religion

What ?

- No influence on absorbent material's choice

Media

What ?

- New mean of :
 - Obtaining information about menstruation
 - Promoting pads

Why ?

- Increases visibility of pads
- Indirectly impacts the topic of menstruation

Dr. Sheetal Sriraman :

- High socio-economic background : overestimation of pad usage
- 30+ y/o : more cloths because less education

“I have seen an evolution in the usage of pads in myself.”
(teacher, Mangalore)

Expert opinions



-  1 paediatric nurse
-  2 women of general population
-  2 community nurses
-  2 accredited social health activists
-  3 teachers
-  2 gynaecologists




Economy

What ?

- Low financial resources maintain the use of cloths

Why ?

- Cloths are cheaper than pads
- Government provides free pads in some schools
- Insufficient stocks means more cloths



Culture

What ?

- Discussion about menstruation is evolving
- More spoken about nowadays, but for some still taboo
- Divergent opinions on this taboo

Why ?

- Most participants from a Christian background therefore open subject as it is not a taboo
- Majority of participants were teachers and health professionals : more exposure so it is a common subject

Discussion

- The use of cloth is evolving towards the widespread use of pads
- Menstruation touches a wide range of dimensions, examples :
 - Social interactions
 - Values: taboo vs. accepted
 - Environment: plastic in pads, pollution
 - Politics: free distribution of pads
 - Economy: cost of free pads absorbed by society
- Further research : longitudinal quantitative study

References

- Behera D, Sivakami M, Behera MR. Menarche and Menstruation in Rural Adolescent Girls in Maharashtra, India: A Qualitative Study. Journal of Health Management. 2015;17(4):510-9. DOI: [10.1177/0972063415612581](https://doi.org/10.1177/0972063415612581)
- girls in Mangaluru, Karnataka. International Journal Of Community Medicine And Public Health. 2018;5(6):2548. DOI: [10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20182193](https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20182193)
- P. C. A, Roy A, Sara AB, Vcm F, Babu GP, Tamrakar A. Knowledge Regarding Menstrual Hygiene among Adolescent Girls in selected school, Mangalore with a View to Develop an Information Booklet. IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science. 2014;3(1):55-60. DOI: [10.9790/1959-03145560](https://doi.org/10.9790/1959-03145560)
- Senapathi P, Kumar H. A comparative study of menstrual hygiene management among rural and urban adolescent

Acknowledgements : We thank Département de la formation, de la jeunesse et de la culture (DGES), Université de Lausanne, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, Father Muller Charitable Institution. Special thanks to Dr. Rodrigues D. E., Dr. Vuilleumier S. Prof. Ass. Guinchard B. and Privat-docent Gaume J., as well as all the participants.

Contact : alessandra.dioguardi@etu.ecolelasource.ch ; vanessa.gottreuxbarron@etu.ecolelasource.ch ; elena.orita@unil.ch ; sage.zesiger@unil.ch