



Review Article: Challenges and Role of Mothers in Menstrual Hygiene Practices of Young Adolescent Girls

Raju S*

Postgraduate in Paediatric Nursing, Baba Fareed University, India

***Corresponding author:** Sonika Raju, Post Graduate in Paediatric Nursing from Baba Fareed University, Punjab, Email: sonikaraju02@gmail.com

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Abstract

Menstrual hygiene management is a critical aspect of adolescent health that affects both physical well-being and social participation. This review explores the practices, challenges, and educational needs regarding menstrual hygiene among young adolescent girls. It analyzes the existing literature, highlights the importance of effective menstrual hygiene management, and discusses interventions that can empower young girls to manage their menstruation with dignity and health.

Keywords: Hygiene; Health

Abbreviations

UTIs: Urinary Tract Infections; RTIs: Reproductive Tract Infections.

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene is not only a personal health issue but also a public health concern that significantly affects the quality of life for adolescent girls. The onset of menstruation marks a critical phase in a young girl's life, often accompanied by confusion, anxiety, and a lack of knowledge. Poor menstrual hygiene practices can lead to health problems such as urinary tract infections (UTIs) and reproductive tract infections (RTIs), as well as social stigma and school absenteeism [1].

Menstrual Hygiene Practices

Concept

Menstrual hygiene practice refers to the methods and behaviours that individuals adopt to manage their menstrual

health during menstruation. It encompasses a variety of aspects, including the use of sanitary products, the maintenance of personal hygiene, and the disposal of used menstrual products [2].

Key components of menstrual hygiene practices:

Sanitary Products

- **Types:** Common options include disposable pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and reusable cloth pads.
- **Accessibility:** Access to these products can vary widely, affecting individuals' ability to manage their menstrual health effectively.

Personal Hygiene

- **Regular Cleaning:** Keeping the genital area clean is essential. This might involve washing with mild soap and water.
- **Changing Products:** Regularly changing sanitary products (every 4-8 hours, depending on the product and flow) is crucial to prevent infections and discomfort.

Health Awareness

- **Understanding Menstruation:** Knowledge about the menstrual cycle, normal variations, and potential issues (e.g., excessive pain or unusual bleeding) can empower individuals to seek help when necessary.
- **Recognizing Symptoms:** Being aware of signs of infection or other menstrual-related health issues is important for overall reproductive health.

Cultural and Social Considerations

- **Stigma and Taboos:** Menstruation is often surrounded by stigma and cultural taboos, which can affect how individuals manage their hygiene and encourage secrecy around the topic.
- **Education and Advocacy:** Promoting understanding and open discussions about menstruation can help reduce stigma and improve hygiene practices.

Environmental Impact

- **Sustainable Options:** Increasing awareness of the environmental impact of menstrual products has led to a rise in the use of sustainable alternatives, such as menstrual cups and cloth pads.

Disposal of Menstrual Products

- **Safe Disposal:** Proper disposal methods to prevent environmental pollution and maintain hygiene are important. This can include wrapping used products and discarding them in a waste bin.

Education and Resources

- **Access to Information:** Education about menstrual hygiene practices encompass a range of behaviours, including the use of sanitary products, methods of disposal, and personal cleanliness. The most common sanitary products include:
- **Disposable Pads:** Widely used due to their convenience and availability.
- **Reusable Cloth:** Common in low-resource settings but may present hygiene challenges if not properly washed and dried.
- **Tampons:** Less commonly used among young girls due to lack of knowledge and cultural barriers.
- **Menstrual Cups:** An emerging option with potential benefits for sustainability and cost but requires education on usage.

Common Myths Related to the Use of Sanitary Pads

Sanitary pads, despite being a crucial aspect of menstrual hygiene, are surrounded by various myths and misconceptions in India. These myths can affect women's health, their willingness to use these products, and their overall understanding of menstrual hygiene. Here are some common myths related to the use of sanitary pads [3]:

1. **Sanitary Pads Cause Infertility:** One prevalent myth is that the use of sanitary pads can lead to infertility. There is no scientific basis for this belief; proper menstrual

hygiene practices, including using sanitary pads, do not affect a woman's fertility.

2. **Sanitary Pads Trigger Allergies and Infections:** Some believe that using sanitary pads will inevitably lead to skin allergies or infections. While it's true that some women may experience irritation due to certain materials in pads, using high-quality products and changing them regularly can help mitigate this risk.
3. **Menstrual Blood is Impure:** Many cultural beliefs perpetuate the idea that menstrual blood is impure, and therefore, women should avoid using sanitary pads or any hygienic products. This stigma can prevent women from managing their menstruation safely and hygienically.
4. **Using Pads during Menstruation is Unhygienic:** Some people believe that using pads is not hygienic. However, when used and disposed of correctly, sanitary pads are a safe and hygienic option for menstrual management.
5. **Pads Must Never Be Used Overnight:** There is a myth that sleeping with a sanitary pad overnight can lead to severe health issues. While it's important to consider comfort and hygiene, many pads are designed for overnight use and can be safe if changed regularly.
6. **Natural Alternatives are More Effective:** There is a belief among some that cloth or other natural alternatives are always superior to sanitary pads. While cloth can be a good option when cleaned properly, for many women, sanitary pads offer a convenient, hygienic, and discreet solution.
7. **Using Pads Makes Menstruation More Painful:** Some women think that using sanitary pads can exacerbate menstrual cramps or discomfort. However, the choice of pads does not inherently affect pain levels during menstruation.

Challenges Faced by Young Adolescent Girls

1. **Lack of Knowledge:** Many girls report insufficient education about menstruation prior to menarche, leading to confusion and fear.
2. **Cultural Stigma:** Menstruation is often surrounded by taboos that can hinder open discussions and lead to feelings of shame.
3. **Access to Products:** Economic barriers can limit access to sanitary products, with many girls resorting to unhygienic materials.
4. **Inadequate Facilities:** Schools often lack proper sanitation facilities, including private spaces for changing and disposing of sanitary products.
5. **Support Systems:** A lack of supportive environments.

Role of Mothers in the Menstrual Hygiene Practices

The role of mothers in the menstrual hygiene practices of their young adolescent daughters is crucial and multifaceted.

It encompasses education, support, and the promotion of healthy attitudes toward menstruation. Here are some key aspects of this role [4-7]:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Mothers often serve as the primary source of information about menstruation for their daughters. By providing comprehensive education about the menstrual cycle, the physiological changes that occur, and the importance of hygiene, mothers can help demystify menstruation. This knowledge enables daughters to understand their bodies better and approach menstruation with confidence.
2. **Providing Supplies:** Mothers typically play a key role in ensuring that their daughters have access to menstrual hygiene products, such as sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or period underwear. This involves not only providing these supplies but also teaching daughters how to use them correctly and safely.
3. **Promoting Hygiene Practices:** Mothers can instill good hygiene practices during menstruation, including changing menstrual products regularly, washing hands before and after handling products, and maintaining cleanliness. These practices are vital for preventing infections and ensuring overall health.
4. **Creating a Supportive Environment:** A supportive and open atmosphere encourages young girls to discuss their experiences and any issues they might face regarding menstruation. Mothers who listen, validate their daughters' feelings, and share their own experiences can help normalize the conversation around menstruation, reducing stigma and anxiety.
5. **Addressing Cultural and Social Norms:** In some cultures, menstruation is accompanied by taboos or negative perceptions. Mothers can challenge these norms by fostering positive attitudes toward menstruation and empowering their daughters to view it as a natural and healthy process. This can also involve educating family members about the importance of supporting menstrual hygiene practices.
6. **Emotional Support:** Menstrual cycles can be associated with physical discomfort, emotional fluctuations, and even social challenges. Mothers can provide emotional support by helping their daughters cope with these challenges, offering comfort during painful periods, and encouraging them to engage in self-care.
7. **Role Modelling:** By demonstrating positive menstrual hygiene practices in their own lives (e.g., openly

discussing their own menstrual experiences, practicing good hygiene, and using appropriate products), mothers can serve.

Conclusion

A supportive, safe, educative, constructive environment with social appreciation is very helpful to gain the healthy reproductive health.

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