Knowledge and Attitude of Menstruation before Menarche among Early Adolescent Girls in Nepal

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Abstract

Every girl experience menarche in the early adolescent stage of their life. Menarche is the first menstrual period as well as a biological process that is seen with physiological, psychological and emotional change. The knowledge and attitude regarding menstruation and menarche among girls not only determine their reproductive life but are also directly related to the quality of their life. The aim of the research was to assess knowledge about menstruation before menarche and find out restriction’s attitudes during menarche and the menstrual period. In the research, I have selected five secondary schools from Itahari sub-metropolitan city by using convenient sampling and have asked structured questionnaires to 32 early adolescent girls belonging to the Brahmin-Chhetri community to collect primary data. This research finds that 43.75 percent of respondents have low, 41.94 percent have medium and 16.13 percent have high knowledge regarding menstruation before menarche. They receive their first knowledge about menstruation from their mothers. Most respondents think their mothers can give adequate knowledge before experiencing menarche. Likewise, 65-75 percent of respondents are negative towards different kinds of restrictions during menstruation and menarche. The majority 90 percent of respondents agree with the tradition of ‘should not go to the temple and worshipping Gods’ but the practice of restrictions was just opposite from the attitude except worshipping the God and going to the temple. Similarly, the study showed that 56 percent of adolescent girls followed restriction regarding menstruation in order to respect senior members of the family and followed in-home and another 44 percent girls followed it due to the fear of sin. On the basis of the above findings, it is clearly shown that a significant number of mothers of today’s mother generation are not aware of menstruation. They do not give adequate information as knowledge to their daughters and still follow restrictions regarding menstruation as sin, curse, and dirty things.

Keywords: Adolescent, First menstruation, Puberty, Period and Restriction

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Menarche is the first menstrual period and a normal biological process. Generally, it occurs in early adolescent girls (UNFPA, 2020) and the mean age at menarche varies influenced by various characteristics of the population including nutrition status, geographic location, environment and socio-economic condition. After menarche, every woman experience menstruation every month (Amy E. Lacroix et. al., 2020). Menstruation is vaginal bleeding that comes from the lining of the uterus at the interval of about one month until menopause. This blood-flowing process lasts about 4 to 7 days. Likewise, adolescence is the period of transition
between childhood and adulthood. It is considered to begin with puberty, a process of physical, psychological, social and emotional development that lead to sexual maturity and reproductive capacity. Knowledge of menstruation and puberty before menarche has importance in the life of every girl because a key maker of puberty is menarche (Shrestha, 2008).

Reproductive health is not a new topic, the international community embraced a new broader concept of reproductive health since the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) 1994. Adolescent reproductive health issue was one of the main agenda at the conference (UNFPA, 1995). Likewise, World Health Organization (WHO)’s efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) has given priority in attention to issues pertaining to the management of adolescent problems (UN Millennium Declaration, 2000). Despite remarkable progress over the past 25 years, the promise of the ICPD Programme of Action remains a distant reality for millions of people across the world. Universal access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health information, education, and service, as defined in the ICPD programme of action has not been achieved (ICPD25, 2019).

Problem Statement

Knowledge and information regarding menstruation before menarche is the most important factor to make women healthy in the community, nation, and the world. Many pieces of research on menstruation have been carried out globally, nationally and locally, most of them are focused on menstrual hygiene knowledge and practices. Likewise, in Nepal, the population census takes in every 10 years interval and a national level survey Nepal Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) takes in every 3 years interval but both have not included questions to know about the knowledge of menstruation before menarche. Although the school curriculum comprises some topics on sexual and reproductive health, the topic ‘menstruation’ is not included. Researches have proven that the mean age at menarche is declining day by day but the school curriculum is not addressing a suitable age group accordingly. On the other hand, many taboos, traditions, and bad religious practices regarding menstruation still exist in society, which are barriers to get adequate knowledge. Lack of education and awareness prevents or discourages them to openly discuss on this issue. Therefore, girls do not get sufficient knowledge and information about menstruation before menarche. Inadequate knowledge and information influence their menstrual attitudes. On the basis of the literature review, I felt a gap to assess knowledge and attitude regarding menstruation before menarche. This research finds the current situation in this issue and these are research questions. What types of Knowledge and information do adolescents receive before menarche? How socio-economic and demographic factors have affected knowledge and attitude toward menstruation?

Objectives

The objectives of this study are: To assess knowledge about menstruation before menarche and their sources of information before it happens. To find out the attitude of restriction during menarche and menstrual period.
Literature Review

Menarche is treated as something negative, shameful, dirty and a curse in low- and middle-income countries because of various cultural and traditional practices (Chandra-Mouli & Patel, 2020), (Chothe V et al., 2014), (Bhutan, 2018), (UNICEF, 2016). Many adolescent girls experience their menarche uninformed and unprepared. Although mothers are primary sources of information regarding menstruation knowledge before menarche, they get too little and too late information and knowledge, mothers often communicate their own misconceptions (2017). In Bhutan, only 45 percent of girls get first-hand information from their mothers, others get it indirectly (Bhutan, 2018). Likewise, the mean age at menarche has been found to show a steady decline of about two to three months per decade in developed countries (Wyshak G, Frisch RE, 1982) and about six months per decade in developing countries (Bagga & Kulkarni, 2000) including Nepal (Ghimire M et al., 2014) however girls do not know usual age of menarche. Similarly, girls are oblivious about blood flow during menstruation because they are facing problems in everyday activities which may also establish a foundation of life-long disempowerment. Nepalese girls are facing different kinds of restrictions i.e., not allowed in the kitchen, holy places, religious functions, and touching male members as well as kept in separate places in a corner of the house. Still, a significant number of adolescent girls miss school during their menstruation (Sapkota D et. al. 2013)

Methodology

The study is on knowledge and attitudes about menstruation before menarche of the early adolescent (10-14 years of age) girls, specifically focusing on socio-demographic and cultural factors that may affect attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge towards menarche and menstruation. I selected 5 schools in Itahari sub-metropolitan city, province 1, Nepal by using the purposive or convenience sampling method. The study was based on primary data collected by interviewing 32 early adolescent school-going girls with the prior consent of their parents. The survey was done using an online google form because it was not possible to reach respondents due to fear of the Covid-19 pandemic and due to the mobility restrictions of lockdown. Mothers and the respondents were assisted using a telephone conversation. The survey was made between July to August 2020 and covered 32 households of the Brahmin and Chhetri community because socially and culturally these two castes practice more restrictions during menstruation in comparison to other communities. Likewise, I used a structured questionnaire (both open-ended and close-ended) for data collection. After collecting the data, I constructed a percentage distribution table and then analyzed and interpreted the results. Some data were analyzed using a percentage distribution table and some using descriptive methods. Therefore, it is a qualitative and narrative study.
Findings and Discussion

The following table draws picture of knowledge about menstruation before menarche and their sources of information before it happens and to find out the attitude of restriction during menarche and menstrual period.

Table 1
Respondents (Studying in various schools) with experience of menarche and without experience of menarche.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Girls with experience of menarche</th>
<th>Girls without experience of menarche</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – Field survey 2020

Above table shows that the respondents studying in various schools have and do not have experience with menarche. It is only background information for research.

Table 2
Menstruation knowledge Before Menarche on Early Adolescent Girls by Family Structure (Number and Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Structure</th>
<th>Knowledge of Menstruation Before Menarche</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High (in %)</td>
<td>Medium (in %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>1 (3.23)</td>
<td>7 (22.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>4 (12.90)</td>
<td>6 (19.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5 (16.13)</td>
<td>13 (41.94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – Field survey 2020

Table 2 shows the knowledge of menstruation before menarche in early adolescent (10-14 years) girls on the basis of family structure. Among 32 girls who stay in a joint family, 3.23 percent have high knowledge, 22.58 percent have medium, and 22.58 percent have low knowledge. Likewise, in the nuclear family, 12.90 percent have high knowledge, 19.53 percent have medium and 19.53 percent have low knowledge. From the above data, it is known that there is no more difference between girls who have moderate and low knowledge about
menstruation before menarche. On the basis of family structure, girls who live in nuclear family have got high knowledge rather than the girls who live in a joint family. The finding shows that menstruation is still a topic that is very least talked about in the family. In comparison to nuclear family people living in a joint family talk even less about it. For centuries, menstruation has been interpreted as the result of the deeds in previous birth, a curse, a disgusting filth, and the belief that such things should not be talked about publicly. This practice is being inherited from the previous generation and handed over to the succeeding one. As a result, girls are always deprived of acquiring adequate knowledge about menstruation.

Table 3

Percentage Distribution of Menstruation knowledge Before Menarche by Education level of respondent’s mother

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level of Mother</th>
<th>Knowledge of Menstruation Before Menarche</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High (in %)</td>
<td>Medium (in %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (3.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLC</td>
<td>1 (3.13)</td>
<td>3 (9.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate +2</td>
<td>1 (3.13)</td>
<td>5 (15.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor and above</td>
<td>3 (9.37)</td>
<td>4 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5 (15.62)</td>
<td>13 (40.63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – Field survey 2077

Table 3 shows the knowledge of menstruation before menarche on the basis of the education level of the respondent’s mother. There is a positive relationship between mother’s education level and the knowledge of the daughter. While seeing the mother’s education, it is found that when the respondent’s mother has higher education the daughter has higher knowledge, when she has lower education, the daughter has lower knowledge.

Source of information about menstruation before menarche-In the questions ‘from whom did you get knowledge about menstruation before menarche?’ the study found that girls got knowledge firstly from their mother, secondly from the Internet and thirdly from teachers and textbooks. For another question ‘in your opinion, who is the source of adequate information about it?’ girls give the opinion that the first expected source of adequate knowledge about menstruation is the mother (elder sister-if they have), second is the teacher and or textbook, and third is the Internet. Likewise, the girls argue that their mothers are not transforming adequate knowledge even if they know they have to. It shows the gap between demand and supply of knowledge between mother and daughter. Previous research showed that only 45
percent of girls got first-hand information from their mothers, others got it indirectly but here, girls received information from their mothers directly.

**Different kinds of restriction Attitude During Menarche and Menstruation**

Attitude is a state of mind. It indicates a favorable or unfavorable evaluative reaction towards persons, objects, and events. This research looks at the attitude of girls towards menstruation. There are three types of attitudes these are positive, neutral, and negative attitudes. The questionnaire included various questions about restriction attitudes during menstruation and menarche. Analyzing the data, on the basis of answers given to these questions, the majority (65-75%) of early adolescent girls think that they can cook meals, go to school, and attain religious function during the normal menstruation period. Majority (90%) of girls think that they should not go to the temple or worship God during menstruation. In the question, ‘why do women follow restrictions during menstruation?’ the study showed that 56 percent of adolescent girls followed restrictions regarding menstruation to respect senior members of the family because their family followed restrictions at home traditionally. But 44 percent of girls followed it because they think it is a sin and are afraid of it. Assessing the practice of restriction among 13 girls who have experienced menarche, 92 percent of girls went to school, 31 percent cooked rice, and 33 percent attained religious functions but, none of them worshipped God nor went to the temple during menstruation and menarche.

Likewise, 39 percent of girls faced different kinds of strict restrictions. They are restricted to stay in their own home, getting out from the assigned room, face to sunlight, go to school, talk to male members of the family during menarche. Similarly, among 13 menarche experience girls, 50 percent girls felt normal and another 50 percent of girls felt nervous fear, and upset. On the basis of the above finding, it is clearly shown that majority of today’s mother generation are not aware of the negative impact of unclear information on menstruation. They followed restrictions regarding menstruation as a sin and curse. Some signs of change in the practice of sending girls to neighbors’ or acquaintances’ homes in menarche have been seen, however, most of the respondents experienced ‘staying away from home’ during their menarche. They think they should be allowed to stay in their own homes during menarche.

Comparing restriction, attitude and the practice of girls during mensuration and menarche, it was found that the practice of restrictions was just opposite from attitude except for worshipping the Gods and going to the temple. This research argues that the cause of the opposite result between girls’ attitudes and practice regarding menstruation and menarche are existing social norms and practices following the tradition. Today’s mother generation has been following those norms and values regarding menstruation as if it is a dirty thing, a curse from previous incarnation sins because the concept of taking menstruation as sin has been deep-rooted in their brain. Such norms and values were established in the culture of the Brahmin-Chhetri community. Although tradition still exists to consider menstruation as a sin, around 70 percent of adolescent girls disagreed the restrictions regarding menstruation and menarche which is a positive sign of change in the community. The findings argue that in the future when today’s adolescent girls become a mother and independent to decide about practices their daughters should follow, they shall reduce traditionally imposed restrictions.
Conclusion

Girls receive some knowledge about menstruation but they may not get sufficient knowledge about it. The first source of information is her mother. Restriction during menarche and menstruation still exists in our society. Adolescents’ attitude toward menstruation is more or less negative. The study about knowledge and attitude regarding menstruation and menarche among early adolescent girls in the Brahmin-Chhetri community is done to assess knowledge about menstruation before menarche and find out restriction’s attitude during menarche and menstrual period. This research finds 43.75 percent of respondents have low, 41.94 percent have medium and 16.13 percent have high knowledge regarding menstruation before menarche. It has shown that there is a significant association between a mother’s education and a daughter’s knowledge i.e. higher the mother’s education level higher the daughter’s knowledge, lower the education lower the knowledge. Girls receive first menstrual knowledge from their mothers, second from the Internet, and third from teachers and textbooks. The finding says girls consider that their mothers can give them adequate knowledge. But the mothers are not transferring necessary knowledge to their daughters. Similarly, various restrictions during menstruation exist in society but the majority (65-75 percent) of respondents disagree with different kinds of restrictions during menstruation and menarche. Majority (90 percent) respondents agree that they should not go to the temple or worship God. In practice, all respondents do not worship God and do not go to the temple, 70-75 percent of respondents follow other restrictions and cent-percent of respondents have experienced any type of restriction willingly or unwillingly. In this way, the study shows that 56 percent of adolescent girls followed restrictions regarding menstruation to respect senior members of the family, the next 44 percent of girls followed in fear of sin.

On the basis of the above findings, it is clearly seen that mother of today’s mother generation is less aware of the importance of knowledge on menstruation. They do not give adequate information as knowledge to their daughters and follow restrictions regarding menstruation as sin, curse, and dirty things. Although girls expect their first information regarding menstruation from their mother, they are not getting adequate knowledge. Restriction during menarche and menstruation still exists in our society. Adolescents’ attitude to obey restrictions during menstruation is more or less negative. The research argues that people in Brahmin-Chhetri families do not discuss menstruation issues openly and freely. For this reason, early adolescent girls do not get a chance to properly understand menarche and menstruation. If mothers, teachers, and school textbooks could persuade adolescent girls that menarche and menstruation are neither a curse nor sin or disease, it is a normal biological process, girls shall be prepared psychologically and understand that they are entering into puberty and feel happy. This will help for their multidimensional development rather than carrying the burden of fear and regret in the mind.

The findings from this study can be important and useful for general parents, academic as well as non-academic readers for understanding the issue, making policy and implementing in the targeted group. However, there are few limitations of the study. First, the respondents are limited, second, due to Covid -19, the survey takes online. Further researchers can carry research on the same topic in larger scale and in other communities. This study’s respondents...
are daughters, further researchers may carry a comparative study of mothers and daughters as well.

References


