



MENSTRUAL RELATED KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES (KAP) AMONG THARU WOMEN: A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

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Abstract:

Background- *Menstruation is a normal healthy physiological process and not an illness or curse. In a lay man's language menstruation is known as a "period". Menstrual Hygiene is an issue that every girl and woman has to deal with once she enters adolescence around the age of 12yrs and until she reaches the menopause somewhere in her 40's. Good menstrual hygiene is crucial for the health, education and dignity of girls and women.*

Objective: *The aim of this study was to assess knowledge, attitude and practices regarding menstruation among Tharu women and its improvement after intervention of health education.*

Methodology: *The study was a community based cross sectional study. A total of 400 Tharu women were interviewed using pre tested interview schedule.*

Conclusion: *The basic awareness regarding menstrual process was insufficient and also there were many taboos associated with menstrual process.*

Keywords: Menstruation, Knowledge, Attitude, Practices and Tribe

Introduction: Menstruation is a normal healthy physiological process and not an illness or curse. In a lay man's language menstruation is known as a "period". The terms 'menstruation' and 'menses' are derived from the Latin word *mensis* (month), which in turn relates to the Greek word *mene* (moon) and to the roots of the English words month and moon reflecting the fact that the moon also takes close to 28 days to revolve around the Earth (actually 27.32 days). The menstrual cycle is regulated by hormones. Every phase of menstrual cycle is influenced by female hormones like estrogen, progesterone, Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and Luteinizing hormone (LH).

Menstrual Hygiene is an issue that every girl and woman has to deal with once she enters adolescence around the age of 12yrs and until she reaches the menopause somewhere in her 40's. Hygiene-related practices of women during menstruation are of considerable importance, as it has a health impact in terms of increased vulnerability to reproductive tract infections (RTI). Women having better knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene and safe practices are less vulnerable to RTI and its consequences. Therefore, increased knowledge about menstruation right from childhood may escalate safe practices and may help in mitigating the suffering of millions of women. Good menstrual hygiene is therefore crucial for the health, education and dignity of girls and women.

In several cultures there are (cultural and or religious) taboos concerning blood, menstruating girls and women and menstrual hygiene. In recent years importance of health counseling for adolescents has been appreciated but there are no large scale community based studies to assess awareness about menarche and reproduction in Indian adolescent girls. In India problems are more difficult and complicated because of marked socioeconomic diversity. This is an important sanitation issue which has been in the closet and still there is a long standing need to openly discuss it.

With the above background, this study was undertaken to elicit the knowledge on source of information regarding menstruation, restrictions and customs/rituals practiced during menstruation among the study population.

Methodology:

Study Design: The present study is a cross-sectional community-based descriptive intervention research design.

Study Area: The study was conducted in the Paliya block of Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh. This district is in the Terai region of Indo-Nepal border and is abound with Tharu tribe.

Objective: The aim of the study was to assess knowledge, attitude and practices regarding menstruation among Tharu women and its improvement after intervention of health education.

Data collection: Data was collected through interview schedule.

Sample population: women and girls of 13-45years age group were taken as the study population. The scholar had classified the study population in three groups according to their age as follows:

- 13-18 years age- onset of menarche and adolescent girls.
- 19-35 years age- true reproductive/ child bearing age.
- 36-45 years age- elderly women who are more transfer their knowledge & practices to next generation

Inclusive Criteria:

- Females who have achieved menarche and their age is < 45 years of age.
- Willing to participate in the study.
- Maximum two of a family members were selected (mother in law and daughter in law or daughter or sister in law)

Exclusion criteria:

- Female who had serious systemic diseases or complications.
- Pregnant women.

Table No-I**Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

General information		N	%
	19-30 years	133	33.2%
	31-45 years	134	33.5%
	Total	400	100.0%
Ordinal number of birth of the respondents	First number	77	19.2%
	Second number	167	41.7%
	Third number	103	25.7%
	>Third	53	13.2
	Total	400	100.0%
Marital status	Married	298	74.5%
	Unmarried	102	25.5%
	Total	400	100.0%
Education status of the respondents	Illiterate	163	40.8%
	Primary school certificate	43	10.8%
	Middle school certificate	37	9.2%
	High school certificate	85	21.2%
	Intermediate or diploma	61	15.2%
	Graduate	11	2.8%
	Profession or Honours	0	0%
	Total	400	100.0%

Table No-I shows the general information of the 400 respondents by age, ordinal number, marital status, education status, 133 respondent i.e. 33.3% were from 13-18 years, another 133 i.e. 33.3% were from 19-30 years and 134 respondents i.e. 33.5% were from 31-45 years. It was found that 19.2% belonged to 1st ordinal position 41.7% belonged to 2nd, 25.7% were 3rd and 13.2% belonged to > 3rd ordinal position in the family. Out of 400 respondent population 74.5% were married and 25.5% population were unmarried. Majority of the respondents i.e. 40.8% were illiterate, 10.8% of them completed primary classes, 9.3% completed middle school, 21.3% completed high school, 15.3 intermediate or diploma and only 2.8% completed graduation.

Table No-II

Knowledge score on menstruation

Knowledge regarding menstruation		N	%
Age at menarche (years)	<10	45	11.2%
	10-13	129	32.2%
	14-15	137	34.2%
	>15	89	22.2%
	Total	400	100.0%
Knowledge about menses before menarche	No	256	64.0%
	Yes	144	36.0%
	Total	400	100.0%
First knowledge about menses	Mother/ Family member	256	64.0%
	Neighbour/Friend	81	20.2%
	T.V/ Mobile/ book/ Radio	27	6.8%
	School/institute	36	9.0%
	Total	400	100.0%
Experience at Menarche	Confusing	166	41.5%
	Freighting	145	36.2%
	Expected	89	22.2%
Physiology of menstruation	Don't know	32	8.0%
	Child birth	117	29.2%
	Any disease	53	13.2%
	Impure blood	109	27.2%
	Course of GOD	36	9.0%
	Biological process	53	13.2%
	Total	400	100.0%
	Origin of menstrual blood	Don't know	23
Ovary		111	27.8%
Stomach		142	35.5%
vagina		96	24.0%
Uterus		28	7.0%
Total		400	100.0%

Table No. II shows that 34.3 % respondent achieved the menarche at the age of 14 to 15 years. Almost equal percentage i.e. 32.2% had their menarche at the age of 10-13 years. Only 11.2% respondents were of age less than 10 years at menarche. 22.2% experienced their menarche after 15 years of age. A maximum of 64.0% of respondents got their first information about menses from their mother or some close family member. 20.2% of respondents got first information from

their neighbour or friend. **Due to high illiteracy rate and lack of informative resources their knowledge about menstruation from school/institute was only 9.0%. Due to lack of knowledge about menses 41.5% of respondent's population found menarche confusing and 36.2% found it frightening.** Similar findings were found in a study done by **Dhingra, Kumar and Kour, (2009)** entitled "Knowledge and Practices related to Menstruation among Tribal (Gujjar) Adolescent Girls" in Jammu and Kashmir (India). The study revealed that only 64% of the participants were aware of menstruation before menarche and were informed by their parents (mostly their mothers) that menstruation is "necessary for every girl, as it was the removal of dirty blood from the body, otherwise a female would develop an infection or disease. The table further shows that **only 13.1% respondents had correct knowledge** that menstruation is a biological process and **29.2% related their knowledge of menstruation with child birth.** Rest had some or the other vague knowledge regarding physiology of menstruation. Further when origin of menstrual blood was asked, **only 7% had the correct knowledge. Overall the knowledge of respondents regarding menstruation was found to be poor.**

Table-III
Attitude score on menstruation

Attitude regarding menstruation		N	%
Are you restricted from going to temple during periods?	yes	316	79.0%
	No	84	21.8%
Are you restricted from attending religious ceremonies during periods?	Yes	278	69.5%
	No	122	30.5%
Are you restricted from entering kitchen during periods?	yes	293	73.2%
	No	107	26.3%
Are you restricted from having certain foods (pickle, curd, Imli) during periods?	yes	306	76.7%
	No	94	23.5%
Are you restricted from touching your family members?	yes	115	28.8%
	No	285	71.2%
Do you/ your partner indulge in sex during menstruation? (only for married women)	yes	216	72.5%
	No	82	27.5%

Table No. III The analysis of above data shows that the mindset of tharu women is still conservative and they follow age old customs. **Almost 70% or more than that were restricted from going to temple or attending religious ceremonies during their periods. Entry to kitchen and restrictions from having certain foods during periods was also prohibited by 73.2% and 76.7% respectively.**

Table-IV

Practices score on menstruation

Practices regarding menstruation		N	%
Absorbent material used during periods.	Ash with cloth	37	9.2%
	Used old cloth	204	51.0 %
	New cloth every time	101	25.2%
	Sanitary Napkin/ Homemade pad	58	14.5%
	Total	400	100.0%
Reasons for not using sanitary pad.	Costly	189	55.6%
	Don't know about it	53	15.6%
	Don't feel comfortable with it	29	7.9%
	Difficulty in discard	46	13.5%
	No reason	25	7.3%
	Total	342	100.0%
Type of absorbing cloth used.	Any cloth	161	47.1%
	Jute cloth	69	20.2%
	Synthetic cloth	81	23.7%
	cotton	31	9.1%
	Total	342	100.0%
Frequency of cleaning genital area	Only while bath	112	28.0%
	Every time during change the napkin	59	14.8%
	Not answered	229	57.2%
	Total	400	100.0%

Table No. IV During the study of menstrual practices it was found that **only 14.5% were using sanitary pads and rest used cloth or ash with cloth. 55.3% of sample population found napkin costly.** Due to lack of information 15.6% of sample population did not know about sanitary pads.

When the type of absorbing cloth was probed, 47.1% reported that any cloth is used by them and **only 9.1% preferred cotton cloth. Tharu women were not aware about the type of cloth to be used during periods. Due to poverty as well as absence of knowledge, Tharu women used any type of cloth, no matter it may produce rashes on their skin.**

As far as question regarding taking bath during periods was asked, almost 50% replied in affirmative way but the number of times they cleaned their perineum was very less. Only 14.8% cleaned their perineum every time i.e. during changing the sanitary pad/cloth.

CORRELATION BETWEEN AGE AND TYPE OF ABSORBENT USED BY RESPONDENTS DURING PERIODS

Table No. V

Absorbent material used during periods.	Age			Total
	13-18	19-30	31-45	
Ash with cloth	0	13	24	37
	.0%	35.1%	64.9%	100.0%
	.0%	9.8%	17.9%	9.2%
Used cloth	52	77	75	204
	25.5%	37.7%	36.8%	100.0%
	39.1%	57.9%	56.0%	51.0%
New cloth every time	45	29	27	101
	44.6%	28.7%	26.7%	100.0%
	33.8%	21.8%	20.1%	25.2%
Sanitary pad/ Home made pad	36	14	8	58
	62.1%	24.1%	13.8%	100.0%
	27.1%	10.5%	6.0%	14.5%
Total	133	133	134	400
	33.2%	33.2%	33.5%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

χ^2 value=57.34; df(6);p-value=<0.001; consider highly significant.

Table No. V helps us to know the correlation between different age groups of respondents and type of absorbent used by them. Among 13-18 years age group out of 133 respondents, 27.1% were using napkin, 33.8% were using new cloth every time / homemade pad and 39.1% were using used cloth. **However percentage of Napkin user among this age group was the maximum as compared to the other two age groups.** Among 19-30 years of age group out of 133 respondents 10.5% used napkin/ homemade pad, 21.8% used new cloth every time, 57.9% used reused cloth and 9.8 % used ash with cloth. **In this age group use of used cloth is more as compared to other**

age groups. Among 31-45 years age group out of 134 respondents only 6% used napkin/homemade pad, 20.1% used new cloth every time, 56.0% used reused cloth and 17.9% used ash with cloth. In this age group percentage of respondents using napkin is very low in comparison to other age groups and percentage of respondents using ash with cloth is high.

CORRELATION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS AND TYPE OF ABSORBENT USED BY THARU WOMEN

Table No. VI

Absorbent material used during periods	Education status of the respondent						Total
	Illiterate	Primary school certificate	Middle school certificate	High school certificate	Intermediate or diploma	Graduate	
Ash with cloth	34	3	0	0	0	0	37
	91.9%	8.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	20.9%	7.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.2%
Used cloth	101	25	31	28	19	0	204
	49.5%	12.3%	15.2%	13.7%	9.3%	.0%	100.0%
	62.0%	58.1%	83.8%	32.9%	31.1%	.0%	51.0%
New cloth every time	27	12	3	41	17	1	101
	26.7%	11.9%	3.0%	40.6%	16.8%	1.0%	100.0%
	16.6%	27.9%	8.1%	48.2%	27.9%	9.1%	25.2%
sanitary pad/ Homemade pad	1	3	3	16	25	10	58
	1.7%	5.2%	5.2%	27.6%	43.1%	17.2%	100.0%
	.6%	7.0%	8.1%	18.8%	41.0%	90.9%	14.5%
Total	163	43	37	85	61	11	400
	40.8%	10.8%	9.2%	21.2%	15.2%	2.8%	100.0%

Absorbent material used during periods	Education status of the respondent						Total
	Illiterate	Primary school certificate	Middle school certificate	High school certificate	Intermediate or diploma	Graduate	
Ash with cloth	34	3	0	0	0	0	37
	91.9%	8.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	20.9%	7.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.2%
Used cloth	101	25	31	28	19	0	204
	49.5%	12.3%	15.2%	13.7%	9.3%	.0%	100.0%
	62.0%	58.1%	83.8%	32.9%	31.1%	.0%	51.0%
New cloth every time	27	12	3	41	17	1	101
	26.7%	11.9%	3.0%	40.6%	16.8%	1.0%	100.0%
	16.6%	27.9%	8.1%	48.2%	27.9%	9.1%	25.2%
sanitary pad/ Home made pad	1	3	3	16	25	10	58
	1.7%	5.2%	5.2%	27.6%	43.1%	17.2%	100.0%
	.6%	7.0%	8.1%	18.8%	41.0%	90.9%	14.5%
Total	163	43	37	85	61	11	400
	40.8%	10.8%	9.2%	21.2%	15.2%	2.8%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

χ^2 value=197.4; df(15);p-value=<0.001; consider highly significant.

Table No. VI depicts that the out of **11 graduate respondents 90.9%** used sanitary pads. **Out of 163 Illiterate respondents only 0.6% used them.** They mainly use used cloth during periods. Similarly in case of respondents with primary school certificate and middle school certificate absorbent used during periods was mainly cloth as 58.1% and 83.8 % respectively.

Conclusion:

Menstrual related Knowledge Attitude and practices were not satisfactory. So, the tharu women should be educated about the significance of menstruation, use of proper sanitary pads or absorbents and its proper disposal. This can be achieved by giving them proper training and health education by teachers, family members, health workers, and media so that there won't be any misconception to the adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene.

The basic awareness regarding menstrual process is insufficient and also many taboos are associated with menstrual process, which need to be corrected. The use of sanitary napkin was found to be much lower in present study. It is often said that motherhood makes a women complete. A woman's body is made ready to become mother through menstruation. But menstruation is still seen as impure, evil, practices. The study concluded that strengthening of Menstruation Hygiene Management programs (MHM) among Tharus in Palia Block is needed urgently. There is a need to impart them accurate and adequate information about menstruation and how to maintain proper hygiene during menstruation.

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