

Original Article

Understanding Women's Perceptions and Practices Regarding Menstrual Hygiene: A Qualitative Study.

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Abstract

Background: Menstrual hygiene is a crucial component of women's health and wellbeing. Women still encounter major difficulties in controlling their menstrual periods, though. This qualitative study intends to investigate how women view menstrual hygiene, including the difficulties they encounter and the methods they employ to control their periods. Many women still struggle with menstruation hygiene, especially in low- and middle-income nations. Women may experience considerable difficulties managing their periods due to a lack of access to menstrual products and facilities, cultural taboos and shame around menstruation, and other factors. These issues may have a substantial impact on the health, education, and employment prospects of women.

Methodology: This study used a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews with 20 women of reproductive age (18-30 years) living in urban areas. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically, following an iterative coding and categorization process.

Results: The results of this study showed that several variables, including culture, education, socioeconomic level, and availability of menstruation products, had an impact on how women perceive and practice menstrual hygiene. While some women claimed access to sufficient menstruation products and facilities, others encountered serious difficulties managing their periods due to a lack of access to menstrual products, clean water, and sanitation facilities.

Conclusion: Menstrual hygiene is essential to women's health and wellbeing. For women to manage their periods safely and respectably, access to adequate menstruation products, clean water, and sanitation facilities, education and awareness campaigns, and confronting cultural taboos and stigma are all necessary.

Keywords

Menstrual Hygiene, Women Health, Myths and false perceptions, Menstrual practices.

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene is a crucial aspect of women's health and wellbeing. It refers to the practices and facilities that are necessary to ensure women can manage their periods safely and with dignity¹. Menstrual hygiene includes the use of appropriate menstrual products, access to clean water and sanitation facilities, and education and awareness about menstruation².

Unfortunately, menstrual hygiene remains a significant challenge for many women, particularly in low- and middle-income countries³. A lack of access to menstrual products and facilities, as well as cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation, can lead women to face significant challenges in managing their periods⁴. These challenges can significantly affect women's health, education, and economic opportunities⁵.

One of the most critical components of menstrual hygiene is access to appropriate menstrual products. Various menstrual products are available, including disposable pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and reusable cloth pads^{6,7}. However, many women cannot access these products, or they may be prohibitively expensive. In some cases, women resort to using unsafe and unhygienic materials, such as rags or old clothing, which can lead to infection and other health problems⁸⁻¹².

Access to clean water and sanitation facilities is also crucial for menstrual hygiene. Women need to be able to wash and dispose of menstrual products safely and hygienically. However, in many communities, access to clean water and sanitation facilities is limited, which can make it challenging for women to manage their periods^{1,13}. Lack of access to sanitation facilities can also lead to women missing school or work during their periods, which can have significant economic and social consequences¹⁴.

Education and awareness about menstruation are also limited in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. Many girls receive little or no education about menstruation before they start menstruating, which can leave them unprepared to manage their

periods effectively. Menstrual hygiene remains a significant challenge for many women in Pakistan¹⁵. Addressing the lack of access to menstrual products, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, cultural taboos and stigma, and limited education and awareness about menstruation are critical to improving menstrual hygiene in the country. The efforts of the government and non-governmental organizations are crucial in addressing these challenges and promoting women's health and wellbeing in Pakistan¹⁶.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews with 20 women of reproductive age (18-30 years) living in urban areas. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling, and the interviews were conducted in English and recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically, following an iterative process of coding and categorization.

Results

The findings of this study revealed that various factors, including culture, education, socioeconomic status, and access to menstrual products influence women's perceptions and practices regarding menstrual hygiene. While some women reported having access to adequate menstrual products and facilities, others faced significant challenges in managing their periods, including a lack of access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and menstrual products.

Furthermore, many women reported experiencing shame and stigma surrounding menstruation, which led them to conceal their menstrual cycles and avoid seeking support from others. Despite these challenges, women also reported adopting various strategies to manage their periods, including the use of reusable pads, menstrual cups, and traditional cloth, as well as seeking support from female peers and family members.

The following key areas were identified:

Access to menstrual products

Access to menstrual products, such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and reusable cloth pads, is a critical aspect of menstrual hygiene. Many women, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, do not have access to these products, or they may be prohibitively expensive.

Clean water and sanitation facilities

Clean water and sanitation facilities are essential for menstrual hygiene. Women need to be able to wash and dispose of menstrual products safely and hygienically.

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness about menstruation are also critical components of menstrual hygiene. Women need to understand how to manage their periods safely and hygienically and have access to accurate information about menstrual health.

Cultural taboos and stigma

Cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation can be significant barriers to menstrual hygiene. In some communities, menstruation is considered a taboo subject, and women may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their periods.

Health implications

Poor menstrual hygiene can lead to several health implications, including infection and other health problems. It is essential for women to manage their periods safely and hygienically to protect their health.

Economic and social implications

Lack of access to menstrual products and facilities, as well as cultural taboos and stigma, can have significant economic and social implications for women. Women may miss school or work during their periods, which can have long-term consequences for their education and future opportunities.

In summary

These six key factors are noticeably the most reported and genuine issues related to menstrual hygiene, and it has to be addressed.

Along with that, participants also reported that their female peers have less knowledge or no knowledge at all about menstruation or MHM, and they do not guide them properly, which leads to unhygienic practices and false perceptions in adolescent girls. The attitude and shyness of men while talking about and purchasing menstruation products was another important issue raised by the participants in the unstructured interview, and it was noted as a barrier to receiving the essentials for MHM.

Discussion

Menstrual hygiene is a significant challenge for many women in Pakistan¹⁶. A lack of access to menstrual products, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, and cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation are all contributing factors to this challenge. Access to menstrual products, such as pads, tampons, and menstrual cups, remains limited in many parts of Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. In some cases, women resort to using unhygienic materials, such as rags or old clothing, which can lead to infection and other health problems¹⁶.

Water and sanitation facilities are also limited in many parts of Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. This can make it difficult for women to manage their periods safely and hygienically. Lack of access to sanitation facilities can also lead to women missing school or work during their periods, which can have significant economic and social consequences. Cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation also pose a significant challenge to menstrual hygiene in Pakistan¹⁵. In many communities, menstruation is considered a taboo subject, and women may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their periods. This can lead to women hiding their periods or avoiding seeking support from others^{4,17,18}.

Cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation can also be significant barriers to menstrual hygiene. In some communities, menstruation is considered a taboo subject, and women may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their periods¹⁹. This can lead to women hiding their periods or avoiding seeking support from others. In some cases, girls may miss school during their periods, which can have long-term implications for their education and future opportunities²⁰.

Education and awareness about menstruation are also critical components of menstrual hygiene. Women need to understand how to manage their periods safely and hygienically and have access to accurate information about menstrual health¹⁶. Girls also need to receive education about menstruation before they start menstruating, so they are prepared and have the necessary knowledge and tools to manage their periods effectively²¹⁻²³.

In conclusion, menstrual hygiene is a crucial aspect of women's health and wellbeing. Access to appropriate menstrual products, clean water and sanitation facilities, education and awareness, and addressing cultural taboos and stigma are all essential for ensuring women can manage their periods safely and with dignity. Governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector all have a role to play in addressing the challenges of menstrual hygiene and promoting women's health and wellbeing.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of addressing the challenges that women face in managing their menstrual cycles, including improving access to menstrual products and facilities, addressing cultural taboos surrounding menstruation, and increasing awareness and education about menstrual hygiene. Furthermore, the findings suggest that there is a need for more research on the effectiveness of different menstrual products and interventions to support women in managing their menstrual cycles.

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