

# **REVIEW ARTICLE ON HYGIENIC PRACTICES IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Hygiene related practices of women during menstruation are of considerable importance especially for young girls who do not have experience especially during the onset, at menarche. Many studies have shown poor menstrual hygienic practice during adolescence. Improper use of menstrual hygienic materials may associate with the risk of developing toxic shock syndrome (TSS), UTI and PID. Poor practices increase vulnerability to reproductive tract Infections. Attitude of parents in discussing the related issues are obstacle to the right kind of information, especially in the rural areas. Primarily poor personal hygiene and unsafe sanitary conditions result in gynecological problems. Infections due to lack of hygiene during menstruation are often reported. Repeated use of unclean napkins or the improperly dried cloth napkins before its reuse results in harboring of micro-organisms causing vaginal infections.

The aim of this study was to review the literature on hygienic practices in adolescent girls.

***KEY WORDS: hygienic practices, menstruation, adolescent girl***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Hygiene related practices of women during menstruation are of considerable importance especially for young girls who do not have experience especially during the onset, at menarche. Many studies have shown poor menstrual hygienic practice during adolescence. A study in tribal adolescent girls reported very poor menstrual management (they used dirty cloth or an old used cloth was recycled for absorption of menstrual blood, improper washing of used cloth and improper disposal

of used cloth)[5]. Another study shown hygiene practices unsatisfactory because girls do not get adequate time and opportunity to clean and change timely at school[6]. In Ethiopia, the level of personal hygiene and management of menstruation also showed unsatisfactory [7]. Improper use of menstrual hygienic materials may associate with the risk of developing toxic shock syndrome (TSS), UTI and PID. Poor practices increase vulnerability to reproductive tract Infections [13]. Attitude of parents in discussing the related issues are obstacle to the right kind of information, especially in the rural areas. Menstruation is thus considered to be a matter of awkwardness in most cultures. Primarily poor personal hygiene and unsafe sanitary conditions result in gynecological problems [14]. Infections due to lack of hygiene during menstruation are often reported [15-16]. Repeated use of unclean napkins or the improperly dried cloth napkins before its reuse results in harboring of micro-organisms causing vaginal infections [17]. The prevalence of RTIs is quite higher among girls having unsafe menstrual practices[19]. It is clear from earlier studies that majority of girls had correct knowledge about menstruation but were poor in hygienic practices[20].

The aim of this study was to review the literature on hygienic practices in adolescent girls.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**It was seen in a study(1)** that 79% of the adolescent girls used pads and 21% used clothes. The use of pads was higher which was probably due to the fact that availability was high in these areas and also due to influence of television which has increased awareness regarding availability and use of sanitary napkins. It was observed that the usual practice was to wash cloth with soap and water after use and dry it at some secret place like house corner. It was found that 40% girls washed the genitals with soap and water, 41% with only water and only 19% with water and disinfectant. Thus, personal hygiene practices were unsatisfactory in the study population.

**The study(2)** reveals that most of the girls used cloth as a menstrual pad, and they reused the cloth after washing it with soap and water and discarded the cloth by burning it after using it at least for 4 - 5 months. Very few girls use sanitary napkins available in the market; possibly due to low socioeconomic status, less availability at rural areas and lack of awareness. Majority of the girls were using cloth (46.67per cent) and only 15.67per cent were using sanitary napkins. Amongst those who used cloth, 65.70per cent were found to be suffering from genital infections as compared to 12.30per cent in those who used sanitary napkins.

**In another study(3)**,majority of the girls preferred cloth pieces rather than sanitary pads as menstrual absorbent. More than half of the girls were ignorant about the use of sanitary pads during menstruation Only 13.2% girls used only sanitary pads during menstruation and around 24.2% used both reusable cloth and sanitary pad. Apparently, poverty, high cost of disposable sanitary pads and to some extent ignorance dissuaded the study population from using the menstrual absorbents available in the market. It was observed in this study that the usual practice was to wash the cloth with soap in the pond after use and keep it at some secret place till the next menstrual period. To keep the cloth away from prying eyes, these were sometimes hidden in unhygienic places. Privacy for washing, changing or cleaning purpose is something very important for proper menstrual hygiene, but in this study, lack of privacy was an important problem both at home and at school.

**Another study(4)**,reported 53.7% girls using sanitary pads during menstruation.34.63% girls have reported use of old clothes during menstruation.

Regarding the frequency of changing of the menstrual protective materials **in a study(8)**, only 40.8% of participants practiced menstrual hygiene satisfactorily.The rest of them practiced poorly or changing sanitary materials inadequately, which is less than required (three times a day). This study on disposal technique shown that, 4.8% participants reported disposing their used sanitary materials into an open field,

61.1% dispose it into latrines and 24% dispose into the waste bins, others 9.5% do not dispose or they recycled them by washing/flush/hide/burn. Study on Nigerian school girls shown the various methods that students used for disposing of used menstrual absorbents include disposal with domestic wastes 71.2%; burning 24.3%; burial 4.3% and flushing in toilet 0.3% (9).

A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based **study (10)** among adolescent school students was conducted in Sharda Vidyalayain Hyderabad in August 2015. It was seen in present study that 91.2% used pads and 6.8% used clothes. The use of pads was higher which was probably due to the fact that availability was high in these areas and also due to influence of television which has increased awareness regarding availability and use of sanitary napkins. In the study, it was found that 66.5% girls washed the genitals with soap and water, 33.4% with only water. The commonly practiced methods of disposal of the used absorbent were, house dustbin 74.1%.

It was seen in a **study in Bangalore(11)** that during menstruation 34.7% of the study population used cloth, 44.1% used sanitary pad and 21.2% used both cloth and sanitary pad. Among the study population who used cloth, 31.3% used soap and water to clean them, while 28.6% used hot water and 20.1% used antiseptic solution along with water. A large proportion of the girls dried these washed clothes in the sun (68.4%), but about 16.4% dried them inside the house. A large majority (71.7%) reused these clothes for 1 - 2 months, 20.4% for 3 - 4 months and 7.9% for 5 - 6 months. The queries on the frequency of change during the time of menstruation revealed that 39.8% changed sanitary pad or cloth twice a day, 29.5% three times a day and 21.7% once a day. A large proportion (56.8%) of the study population used soap and water to clean their private parts while the rest (43.2%) used only water. 53.8% cleaned their private parts after micturition all the time. 8.5% never cleaned their private parts after micturition. 88.8% of the girls took bath everyday during menstruation, 3.3% once in 2 - 4 days and 3% after the bleeding had stopped.

**In a study(12)**in Karnataka , around 46.06% of the girls preferred old cloth pieces rather than sanitary pads as menstrual absorbent. The reasons cited by the participants for not using sanitary pad was high cost, shyness to buy, lack of knowledge and disposal problems. Cleaning of external genitalia was unsatisfactory among 67.9% of girls. Majority of them used only water for cleaning external genitalia. The reason cited for drying the cloth inside the house as menstruation is considered as impure and meant to be hidden which reflects the taboos found in the society. When asked for the number of absorbents used per day during the last menses majority were using only one absorbents per day and majority reported that they were not comfortable changing pads at school.

**In a study in Bangalore(18)**,19.1% girls used cloth material as menstrual absorbents never the less practice of cleaning or sanitizing was not appraised. Place of storage of pads/ napkins is equally important for their cleanliness, especially practice of storing in bath rooms is disturbing since it could give rise to harboring of dust and insects. The proportion of participants having bathroom as storage place was 21.1%, this practice was significantly prevalent among younger age. In other studies practice of storing in bath room was as high as 49.8%.Higher percentage of girls (80%) practiced to changing pads at night while a small proportion changed pads at school / college hours (20.6%). On the other hand, the practice of continued use of pads during school hours was a common behavior across all the age groups. It is obvious to expect health risk due to such practices .The probable reason for not changing the pads could be ignorance and lack of facility.The practice of reuse of soiled napkins was found common among girls in the present group; although the percentage was less, significantly higher proportion of younger girls used the soiled napkins. It could be because of lack of knowledge about healthy practices in young girls. A higher percentage of girls were aware of washing genital tracts and perineum which is essential for health. Attitudes such as refraining from bath and poor perineum care were found common among a small percentage of the participants. Bathing was significantly associated to age. Use of

unsanitary and sub-standard menstrual absorbents was common among girls from low socio economic status. Therefore undoubtedly poverty and low social class play a major role on the choices of absorbents leading to the use of unsanitary materials. It is likely that poor financial resources has contributed to the use of ‘multiple material’ as menstrual absorbents.

**In another study in Pondicherry(21)**, three-fourth of girls (77%) used sanitary pads and 100% of girls took bath daily. Practice of washing genitalia by soap and water during menses was observed by only 43% in this study. High proportion of girls using sanitary pads, taking daily bath and washing genitalia with soap and water during menses in this study population might be attributed to many factors like high literacy rate among mothers and majority families were above poverty line.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Proper menstrual hygiene can protect the women from suffering. The girls should be educated about the facts of menstruation and above all about proper hygienic practices. This can be achieved through educational television programs, school/nurses health personnel, compulsory sex education in school curriculum and knowledgeable parents. Mothers should be taught about the menstruation and hygienic practices and to break their inhibitions about discussing with their daughters about menstruation much. Thus there is need to bring the girls out of traditional beliefs, misconceptions and restriction. Menstruation should not be treated as dirty and it should not be a hindrance to daily activities. Sanitary pads should be made available at affordable price and it should be easily available. Clean toilet facilities, water facilities and facilities to dispose sanitary pads should be made available at schools.

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