

“Do we know how our body functions” The Cause of Menstruation

Dr. Chandana Eswar

Guest Faculty, University College of Physical Education,
Bangalore University, Bangalore, India
Email - chandanaped@gmail.com

Abstract: *In this study, we see how the world looks at menstruation, be it menstrual products or the menstrual taboos and also see how the college-going women from Bangalore in India respond to the question if they know what is menstruation and what is the cause of menstruation. There were 523 students from different colleges in Bangalore from whom the response was collected, aged 15 to 29 years. The results showed that the response for the question if they knew what is menstruation/periods, out of 523 women only 181 had responded positively that is 34.6% whereas 342 respondents had said they did not know what menstruation/periods was, that is 65.4%, and when the respondents were asked about what they thought about the cause of menstruation 321 respondents said it was a physiological process that is 61.4% where 189 said they did not know that is 36.2% whereas 13 respondents that are 2.5 said that it was the curse of God. As the study shows that there is a lack of understanding on menstruation where the cause of menstruation itself is not clear among most of the respondents. Where most of them knew it was a physiological process but when asked if they knew what is menstruation they were not ready to answer the same. The stigma attached to menstruation in India could be the main cause for such responses. Lack of awareness and understanding about menstruation leads to lack of skills to manage discomfort or hygiene matters and also lowers the confidence level of women to a major extent.*

Key Words: *Menstruation, Menstrual products, Menstrual taboos, Cause of menstruation.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Menstruation

The body changes as children enter puberty, this causes the adolescent children to become adults. This process needs to be known or taught to the children as they can prepare themselves for adulthood. In the case of girls, they need to prepare themselves for the monthly menstrual cycle, where there will be a lot of hormonal changes that cause the menstrual cycle like estrogen and progesterone which have a huge impact on the individuals' physiology and psychology. During the menstrual process, the women discharge blood and other fluids from the lining of the uterus where this process lasts for about 3-5 days once in every 28-30 days from menarche that is around 11 years to menopause which occurs between the age of 45-55 years except for during pregnancy.

What happens in the women's body for her to menstruate, there are two ovaries that have eggs which are very small. The eggs in the ovaries mature during the menstrual cycle which will be ready to fertilize by a sperm. The hormone helps in making the lining of the uterus thick which consists of blood, tissues, and nutrients, etc. which helps when the egg fertilizes and supports a pregnancy. In the mid of the menstrual cycle or ovulation, the hormones help in releasing an egg from one of the ovaries to the uterus. If fertilization does not occur there will be no pregnancy and the lining will no more be required and hence the fluids flow out of the body through the vagina. Whereas if fertilization takes place which leads to pregnancy the body needs the fluids and hence menstruation stops during this period and starts again post-pregnancy.

So what signs and symptoms do we see when it comes to menstruation, along with bleeding there may be symptoms of acne, pain in the abdomen and breast, mood swings, headache, bloating, food craving, etc.

1.2 How the world looks at menstruation

Menstrual taboos are not something which is new to us in spite of region, cast, race, continent, country, education, etc.

Lets gradually look into some of the shocking issues of menstrual products and taboos around the world

In one of the leading countries in the world, United States of America, we see that menstrual products are taxed under luxury products which mean they do not think that it is necessary for everyday life. Here it gets to the extent as to where people have to make a choice between their daily meal or health care to menstrual products which drives them to a state of constant struggle and shame which in turn makes them irregular at their workplace, where we also see 1 in every 5 girls miss school and they also land up missing great opportunities.

There is not much difference in Europe, they are also taxed for menstrual products and they also face period poverty which makes most of the students miss school and the working women tend to miss great opportunities. This led to a mass demonstration for End Period Poverty and FreePeriods campaign. Where in looking at all of these problems Scotland became the first country in the world to provide free menstrual products in schools, colleges, universities and low-income households.

The most populated country in the world China believes using tampons or menstrual cups would have an impact on health and also break the hymen, according to them this could mean that the girl is no longer a virgin. Where having sex before marriage is considered shameful. This belief made only 2% of their population use tampons, China had no tampon production just 4 years down the lane and there were only pads manufactured. It came as a surprise to the Chinese when Fu Yuanhui the swimmer who swam in the 2016 Olympics said she had her periods during the competition, people were shocked to know that she did not leave any blood in the pool. All this shows a lack of knowledge on menstruation and sex in China.

Like most of the countries even in Kenya and some of the African countries they face the same problem, girls miss school and lack of education on hygiene and sex and less access to menstrual products. Kenya government has taken the initiative along with some NGO's to provide free menstrual products to school going girls and low-income groups along with health education.

Chhaupadi, a practice in Nepal where menstruating women are banished to a shed outside their homes as it is believed to be impure, this has put women in great danger as they are prone to diseases, rape, and death. Although this practice has been banned, they still practice this and many deaths have been reported. It is sad to know that such inhuman practices are still being followed.

India, the country with diversities also faces the same problem as most, lack of knowledge which leads to girls miss school as they do not afford menstrual products as they are taxed even in India so they tend to use cloth, newspaper, ash, etc. and have a lack of access to toilets, Women are also not allowed to enter the kitchen, touch water, water plants or attend any religious functions or gatherings during menstruation, in some regions are also kept out of the house like in Nepal. Whereas in the state of Kerala they took an initiative to distribute menstrual cups for free to school-going children.

People around the world also believe that the first menstruation is the sign of being ready for marriage and has also been believed in the ancient time that the women's menstrual cycle should not be wasted. This is one of the major causes of early marriage and discontinuation of education and work.

There have been constant efforts from women around the world to change the understanding of menstrual taboos and to eliminate shame, stigmas, and discrimination which has been attached to menstruation so that women could feel more empowered.

2. METHODOLOGY:

With all these prevailing taboos on menstruation, this study attempted to understand the awareness among college-going women in India as they are believed to be educated and have more exposure to the outside world. The data was collected from 523 women from different colleges of Bangalore, their age between 15 to 29 years. The subjects were asked if they were aware of menstruation and if they knew the cause of menstruation/periods.

3. ANALYSIS AND RESULT:

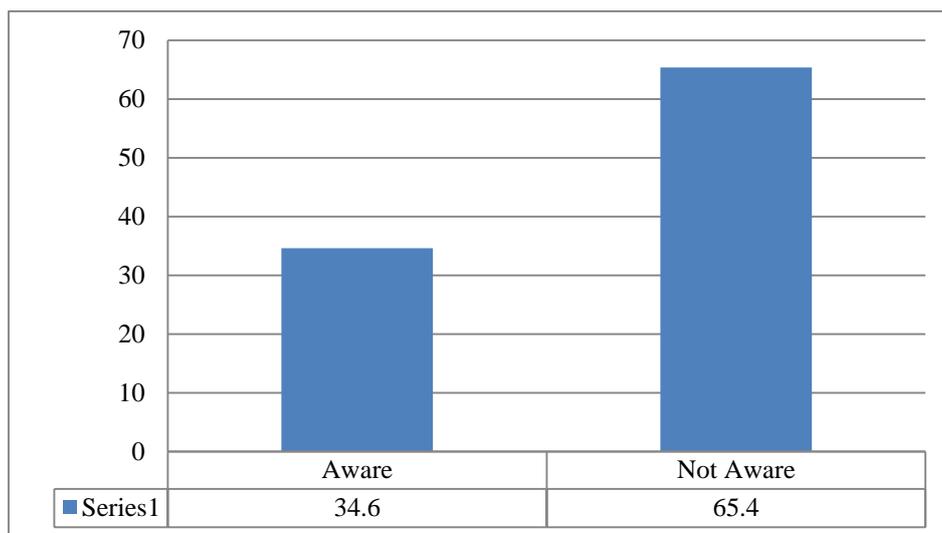
What is Menstruation/Periods: The result for the question if they knew what is menstruation/periods was asked out of 523 women only 181 had responded positively that is 34.6% whereas 342 respondents had said they did not know what menstruation/periods was, that is 65.4%.

Table - 1 showing the response to What is Menstruation

	Count	Percent
Yes	181	34.6
No	342	65.4
Total	523	100

The above Table - 1 shows, the respondents' response to what is menstruation, where 65.4% respondents said no and 34.6% said yes. A graph for the same has been represented below.

Illustration - 1 Graphical representation of What is Menstruation



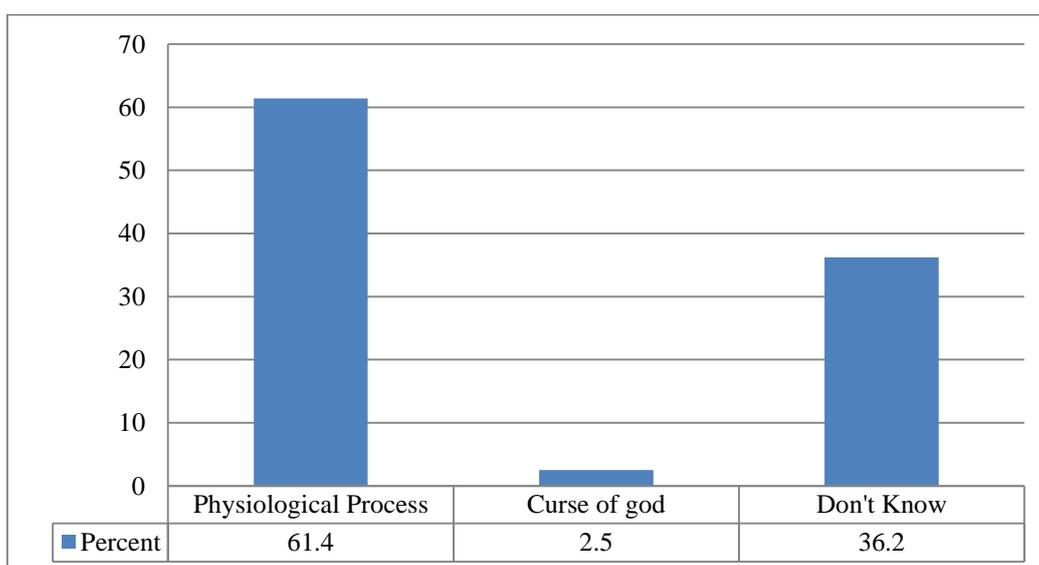
Cause of Menstruation: When the respondents were asked about what they thought about the cause of menstruation, 321 respondents said it was a physiological process that is 61.4% where 189 said they did not know that is 36.2% whereas 13 respondents that is 2.5% said that it was the curse of God.

Table - 2 Showing Response by the respondents on Cause of Menstruation

Cause	Count	Percent
Physiological Process	321	61.4
Curse of god	13	2.5
Don't Know	189	36.2
Total	523	100

The above Table - 2 shows, that most of the respondents (61.4%) knew that menstruation was a physiological process, while 36.2% stated that they did not know the cause. Only 2.5% said it was the curse of god. A graph for the same has been represented below.

Illustration - 2 Graphical representation of Response by the respondents on Cause of Menstruation



4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS:

India has been a country where women were not let to talk openly, and when it came to menstruation it was considered a sin, something that is dirty and impure which has lead to a lot of taboo around it. We think that through education and a lot of prominence towards women empowerment this scenario has changed, but no when we look at the responses of the respondents we will be surprised to see that they are still reluctant to talk about menstruation and this, in turn, does not let them have a clear picture as to what happens within their body as they hesitate to share their experiences about this natural process.

The results obtained in this study enable the researcher to draw the following conclusions.

As the study shows that there is a lack of understanding of menstruation where the cause of menstruation itself is not clear among most of the respondents. Where most of them knew it was a physiological process but when asked if they knew what is menstruation they were not ready to answer the same. The stigma attached to menstruation in India could be the main cause of such responses. Lack of awareness and understanding about menstruation leads to lack of skills to manage discomfort or hygiene matters and also lowers the confidence level of women to a major extent.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

After going through the result of the study the following recommendations were made:

- There is a need for awareness talks at schools and colleges to make the students feel comfortable with the natural process of menstruation to enable better health and hygiene.
- It is important for parents to talk to their children especially the mothers and sisters which will help in better self acceptance of oneself and to overcome social taboos and superstitions.
- The schools and colleges should provide coping assistance for the students during their menstrual cycle like providing room for relaxation and rest.
- A recommendation to provide a number of extracurricular activities to have a positive mood and better physiological functioning towards wellness.
- It is recommended to provide sports-related activities and yoga to overcome the physiological changes.
- It is recommended to have more and more research studies on menstrual syndromes and its effect on social, physical and psychological parameters.

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