

Preventable Stress and Trauma, and Menstrual Health Management: Experiences of Adolescent Girls from India

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Abstract : Background and significance of the study: Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is poor in many Lower and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) such as India. Poor and inadequate menstrual hygiene has an adverse effect on the health and social life of adolescent girls and women. There are many well-known barriers to adequate Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM); e.g., lack of awareness, lack of WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) facilities, lack of affordable menstrual absorbents, etc. But, there is a unique barrier which is very much avoidable; i.e., lack of proper guidance and counseling about menstruation. Menstruation is associated with various social and cultural restrictions and taboos and being a taboo topic; often there is no discussion in the society on this topic. Thus, many adolescent girls encounter the menarche with a lot of unnecessary and avoidable trauma, stress and awkwardness. This trauma, stress, and anxiety are even more prevalent among adolescent girls residing in rural areas. This study argues that this unnecessary stress and anxiety of the adolescent girls can be alleviated by reinforcing social support and adequate information and guidance about MHM and eliminating the futile socio-cultural restrictions during menstruation. Methodology: A qualitative study was conducted in a North-eastern State of India where 45 adolescent girls were interviewed both from rural and urban areas. The adolescent girls were asked about their experiences of stress and anxiety on their first menstruation, their preparedness for menarche, their source of information and guidance, their hygiene-practices, and the various restrictions they follow. Findings: Maximum number of girls did not receive any information about menstruation before menarche. Most of them reported that they were terrified about their first menstruation as they were unprepared. Among those who were aware before menarche, reported that they did not receive proper guidance to manage their menstruation in a hygienic manner. Hygiene-related practices are also influenced by their knowledge about MHM. In maximum cases, girls are bound to follow certain cultural and religious restrictions even if they don't want to follow which created additional stress in managing their menstruation with dignity. Conclusion: Lack of proper guidance and counseling about menstruation and MHM along with an array of socio-cultural restrictions can enhance a negative attitude in adolescent girls towards menstruation due to which they have to go through an extra and unnecessary burden of stress and trauma. This stress and trauma is preventable by improving the provisions of proper guidance and counseling about menstruation in a supportive environment.

Keywords : adolescent girls, menstrual hygiene management, socio-cultural restrictions, stress, trauma

Conference Title : ICAP 2019 : International Conference on Applied Psychology

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : June 25-26, 2019