

Women's Menstrual Experience in India: A Psycho-Social Approach

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Abstract : Today women experience more menstrual cycles than their ancestors did a hundred years ago, owing to early puberty, fewer pregnancies and dietary changes. Much of the research in menstruation is located in the medical domain with a focus on physical symptoms. The research in psychology is largely concerned with premenstrual syndrome (PMS), whereas the focus in sociology is on social and cultural practices relating to menstruation. Research that simultaneously studies the physical, psychological, social and cultural aspects is lacking. Therefore, in this study, an attempt has been made to identify socio-cultural, psychological and physical factors that interact to influence a woman's experience of menstruation in the urban setting. The study included seven unmarried women in the age group of 24-30 and data was obtained through a focus group discussion. The transcript of the focus group discussion was thematically analysed. Two major themes relating to the self and social experience of menstruation emerged. Themes relating to the self included menarcheal experiences, self-perception, mood and management of menstrual hygiene and symptoms while themes relating to social experience included the construction of menstruation by family and peers, and cultural factors. Attitudes towards the menstrual cycle appeared to be primarily influenced by severity of symptoms and the resulting disruption to daily life. Outcomes of this study have indicated that future research needs to study menstruation and its impact on women's wellbeing by adopting a socio-ecological approach and by collecting data using the whole cycle approach across a woman's reproductive years.

Keywords : India, menstrual cycle, psychosocial approach, wellbeing

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