

An Exploratory Study on Experiences of Menarche and Menstruation among Adolescent Girls

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Abstract : Menarche and menstruation is a nearly universal experience in adolescent girls' lives, yet based on several observations it has been found that it is rarely explicitly talked about, and remains poorly understood. By menarche, girls are likely to have been influenced not only by cultural stereotypes about menstruation, but also by information acquired through significant others. Their own expectations about menstruation are likely to influence their reports of menarcheal experience. The aim of this study is to examine how girls construct meaning around menarche and menstruation in social interactions and specific contexts along with conceptualized experiences which is 'owned' by individual girls. Twenty adolescent girls from New Delhi (India), between the ages of 12 to 19 years (mean age = 15.1) participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the nuances of menarche and menstrual experiences of these twenty adolescent girls. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. From the detailed analysis of transcribed data main themes that emerged were- Menarche: A Trammled Sky to Fly, Menarche as Flashbulb Memory, Hidden Secret: Shame and Fear, Hallmark of Womanhood, Menarche as Illness. Therefore, the finding unfolds that menarche and menstruation were largely constructed as embarrassing, shameful and something to be hidden, specifically within the school context and in general when they are outside of their home. Menstruation was also constructed as illness that programmed 'feeling of weaknesses' into them. The production and perpetuation of gender-related difference narratives was also evident. Implications for individuals, as well as for the subjugation of girls and women, are discussed, and it is argued that current negative representations of, and practices in relation to, menarche and menstruation need to be challenged.

Keywords : embarrassment, gender-related difference, hidden secret, illness, menarche and menstruation

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