

## SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF IRREGULAR MENSTRUATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

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### ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a natural process that occurs in females. It normally begins throughout adolescence and lasts till menopause. The study examines the physical and psychological changes associated with irregular menstruation, emphasizing the importance of correct diagnosis and adequate treatment through health care advice. In different societies, socio-cultural factors, such as cultural beliefs and social expectations, surround menstruation. The stigma and taboos associated with irregularities in girls increase feelings of shame and isolation. Studies have shown the impact of social stigma associating menstruation with impurity, which has a negative impact on mental health. Menstruation is silenced in some cultures, leaving girls lacking support systems and affecting their body image and self-esteem. In Indian society, menstruation is often associated with impurity, with restrictions placed on women and isolation from them. Teenage girls' first menstrual experience is often filled with fear and pain, causing challenges and difficulties. Additionally, rural girls have been highlighted as having limited access to facilities in schools and the restrictions impacting their education and daily lives. It suggests several measures to address these challenges, such as comprehensive menstrual health education programmes, awareness campaigns, peer-to-peer communication and community engagement. These strategies aim to create a more understanding and inclusive society by dispelling myths and promoting open debate that supports the overall well-being of adolescent girls. Education, peer support and community involvement are important in challenging social attitudes and promoting menstruation.

**Key Words** – Menstruation, Irregularities, Mental Health, Socio- cultural.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a natural phenomenon that occurs in women, due to which women have an intrinsic quality of fertility, sexuality, creativity and inner life. Menstruation means "month", which comes from the Latin word. Menstruation affects your daily routine, including academic achievement, physical condition, behavior, diet, exercise, mood, and sleep (Khamdan, 2014). Cyclical vaginal bleeding from the uterine endometrium occurs during menstruation. Menarche is called when menstruation starts in girls, then they are between 11 to 15 years and the average age of menstruation in girls is 13 year. Menstruation is a very difficult and painful time for women. In which they have to face many problems like being irritable, having fever and pain. Apart from these physical aspects, it is also associated with psychological aspects like stress, depression, anxiety, aggression etc. These psychological factors make a woman more vulnerable in various dimensions of her performance (Bharadwaj & Patkar, 2004; Fernandes & Mahon 2010; Warenus et. al, 2007). Social, geographic, nutritional, and environmental factors influence young girls in her puberty age (Dhingra et al., 2009). The experience of irregular menstruation in adolescent girls is not just a physical phenomenon, but is influenced to a large extent by socio-cultural factors, which has a profound impact on their mental and physical health. In different societies, menstruation is surrounded with cultural beliefs and social expectations. When irregularities do occur, they increase stigma and taboos that typically exist, creating feelings of shame and isolation for affected girls. Social stigmas that associate menstruation with impurity or cause irregular cycles to deviate from a sense of acceptance can lead to stigmatization and negatively impact mental health. The silence around menstruation and lack of open dialogue in some cultures further compounds these challenges, leaving girls without essential support systems. Body image and self-esteem may also be affected, as girls may internalize societal ideals of femininity. To meet these challenges, there is a critical need for holistic monthly health education programs that dispel misconceptions, challenge stigma, and encourage an environment of support. By recognizing the socio-cultural influences on irregular menstruation, we can work towards a more understanding and inclusive society that promotes the overall well-being of adolescent girls. In Indian society, women are generally considered impure during menstruation. Many types of restrictions are imposed on them. The restrictions and isolation imposed on menstruating women in the family have promoted a negative perception of the phenomenon (Dhingra and Kumar, 2009). The first menstruation for a teenage woman is often scary and painful because usually they do not know anything about it and even if they do know, they do not have any idea of the pain that occurs during menstruation, due to which they suffer a lot. C studies going through difficulties (Gupta and Gupta, 2001). There is a huge lack of information about menstruation among adolescent women at the arrival of their first menstrual cycle; they neither know anything about

menstruation nor have any knowledge about it (Ahuja & Tiwari, 1995). Information about menstruation in women comes mostly from mothers, television, friends, trainers and relatives (Dasgupta). Physical and psychosocial problems are common during menstruation in adolescent girls. Menstrual problems greatly affect their academic performance, school attendance and social life, especially for adolescent girls living in rural areas. Menstrual problems are emotional and physical in nature. Some rural and urban girls feel the need to seek doctor's help for menstrual problems and most do not feel the need to seek doctor's help and do not receive counseling for menstrual hygiene from professionals and most of them do not have access to their Mothers are given advice regarding menstrual hygiene. Most of them are teenage girls who felt sad and scared about the bleeding and body changes during menstruation when they did not have enough information about it. Many restrictions are imposed on girls in rural areas during menstruation, which affects their normal life. Hence, the most of the girls believe that restrictions should not be imposed on them during menstruation. Rural girls face more problems than urban girls, especially school going girls because schools in rural areas lack facilities like lack of water in schools, non-availability of toilets, lack of privacy, etc. Due to which they do not go to school during menstruation and even face bathing restrictions during menstruation in their own homes.

### **The Physiological and psychological changes that occur during menstrual Irregularities**

Menstrual irregularities, such as variations in menstrual cycle length or abnormal bleeding patterns, may indicate underlying health concerns. Tracking these irregularities helps identify potential issues such as hormonal imbalance or reproductive health conditions. Consultation with a health care professional is important for accurate diagnosis and appropriate management. Regular health monitoring empowers individuals to promptly address concerns, promoting overall well-being and reproductive health. Menstruation irregularities encompass both physiological and psychological changes.

**Physiological Changes** - It fluctuations in menstrual cycle length, flow, or consistency could suggest hormonal imbalances or reproductive health problems. These changes can have an impact on one's physical well-being, potentially causing exhaustion or discomfort.

**Psychological Changes** - Menstrual abnormalities can lead to mood swings, worry, and stress. Understanding and resolving these two factors are critical for overall well-being. Seeking medical counsel for a correct diagnosis and using self-care practices can help manage both physiological and psychological aspects, encouraging a healthier and more balanced approach to dealing with menstrual irregularities.

**Emotional Stress Experienced by women's during Menstruation** - Menstruation is a normal physiological phenomenon that occurs every month during a girl's reproductive age. It is an essential process in a woman's life and an important sign of normal sexual and reproductive health in adolescents. Besides, there are many psychological problems associated with menstruation, which also impacts the mental health of girls. During menstruation, women may suffer from various mental problems like dysmenorrhea, due to which they become lonely and are not able to participate in various social activities and there are also some physical activities in which women are not able to participate.

**Viewpoint of Psychosocial on menstruation** - The biggest obstacles to increasing the understanding of the menstrual process are social, family, cultural and sociological attitudes, as discussing this topic is considered taboo and is considered a matter of great shame (Patil et al. 2011). In India, menstruation is considered impure due to cultural beliefs. Menstruating women in India are subjected to restrictions based on their religion, which restricts them from doing many daily activities and even prevents them from participating in regular daily life. She must first be "purified" before resuming her and her family's regular activities after menstruation. Many Indian places consider the concept of purity central to Hinduism. That is why in many temples, women are barred from entering the temple when they are menstruating. Every woman, no matter what caste she belongs to, pollutes her body through excrement. There are many myths regarding menstruation, such as one is not allowed to go to the temple or worship during menstruation, one is prohibited from going to the kitchen and there are many such restrictions. Menstruation is frequently cloaked in secrecy and cultural expectations throughout countries. When anomalies arise, they are magnified in these socio-cultural situations, with far-reaching consequences for the mental and physical well-being of the affected girls. Social norms that associate menstruation with impurity or see irregular periods as deviations from the accepted norm can cause stigma, leading to feelings of shame and isolation.

### **Strategies to dispel menstruation myths –**

- **Education and Awareness Programs:** Put into action thorough educational campaigns to debunk misconceptions about menstruation. Educate people on the health and physiology of the menstrual cycle by holding workshops in businesses, communities, and schools.

- Media Campaigns: Use multiple media venues to confront and correct disinformation. Create compelling content that tackles common myths, emphasizing evidence-based information to dispel preconceptions and promote a positive narrative.
- Peer-to-Peer Communication: Promote open talks among peers to exchange experiences and knowledge, thereby establishing a supportive environment that debunks falsehoods. Peer-led projects can be very helpful at reducing stigma and spreading factual information.
- Menstrual Health: Incorporate comprehensive menstrual health education into school curricula to ensure that young people obtain accurate information at a young age, establishing a culture of understanding and acceptance.
- Community Engagement: Encourage community leaders, healthcare professionals, and influencers to actively participate in refuting falsehoods. Their impact might shift society beliefs and encourage open conversations about menstruation.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Shalini, Vijeta Singh and Rakesh kumar Behmani given by Mensuration: The socio-cultural Perspective in the Indian. This study shows negative social stigma associated with menstruation in India and its effects on women's lives and general health. It talks about the difficulties in dispelling myths, cultural beliefs, and general ignorance about menstruation and highlight common misconceptions, their impact on women, the significance of having these conversations in the healthcare industry, and potential solutions.
- Thirupura Sundari, Alfred J George, Sinu Ezhumalai given by Psychosocial Problems of Adolescent Girls during Menstruation(2021). This cross-sectional study in Chennai investigated the psychosocial obstacles that adolescent females confront during menstruation. The majority of the 60 participants (ages 13-16) were between 14 and 15 years of age. Physical difficulties included premenstrual syndrome and menorrhagia, while psychological problems included mood swings and restlessness. Many preferred to discuss menstruation with their families, although a large proportion experienced psychosocial difficulties, emphasizing the importance of mental health education for adolescent females.
- Kanagabala Balasubramanian given by Menstrual Hygiene Management among Adolescent Girls in Tamil Nadu: A Narrative Review (2021). Adolescence is a critical shift that includes physiological, psychological, and social changes. Misconceptions about menstruation in India are exacerbated by a lack of awareness and taboos around the subject. This lack of understanding leads to poor menstrual hygiene practices, which increases the risk of reproductive tract infections. A comprehensive approach at multiple levels is required for efficient menstrual hygiene management that includes both men and boys.
- Julie Hennegan, Inga T. Winkler, Chris Bobel, Danielle Keiser, Janie Hampton, Gerda Larsson, Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli, Marina Plesons, and Thérèse Mahoni given by Menstrual health: a definition for policy, practice, and research. This study changing conversation surrounding "menstrual health," emphasizing the absence of a uniform definition. The study emphasizes the importance of a thorough and globally acknowledged definition to prioritize menstrual health in global health initiatives, development, policy, and financial frameworks. The authors give a definition established by the Terminology Action Group of the Global Menstrual Collective, outlining the development process and providing supporting evidence for interpretation.
- Dani Stoilova, Rebecca Cai, Sandra Aguilar-Gomez, Naomi Heller Batzer, Elias Charles Nyanza, Anja Benshaul Tolonen given by Biological, material and socio-cultural constraints to effective menstrual hygiene management among secondary school students in Tanzania (2022). This study shows the effect of menstrual hygiene management on females' academic performance. The study examines data from 524 female students in Northern Tanzania and highlights material, biological, social, and informational restrictions. While information is widely available, physiologic problems like menstruation pain and irregular cycles, as well as socio-cultural barriers like shame, have a substantial impact on absence. The findings point to the need for interventions that target pain management, menstrual cycle tracking, and social activities to improve girls' educational involvement and attentiveness.

## 3. CONCLUSION

The socio-cultural influences on the experience of irregular menstruation and their serious effects on women's mental and physical well-being. Menstruation, a natural phenomenon inextricably linked to women's fertility and identity, has profound impacts on various aspects of daily life, including academic achievement, physical health, behavior, mood, and sleep. The study emphasizes that irregular menstruation is not just a physiological phenomenon; Socio-cultural factors also influence it a lot. Cultural beliefs, social expectations and taboos associated with menstruation lead to disgust, shame and isolation of women who experience irregular periods. In many societies, menstruation is associated

with impurity, causing even greater hardship for affected women. The lack of support systems that adolescent girls need, silence and lack of open conversations about menstruation, compound these challenges. Girls may adopt societal ideals of femininity, so the study highlights negative effects on mental health, self-esteem and body image. It also emphasizes the disparities between urban and rural settings, as well as the unique challenges girls face in rural areas due to lack of privacy, limited facilities, and restrictions imposed during menstruation. Holistic monthly health education programs have called for adolescent girls to dispel misconceptions, challenge stigma, and promote overall well-being. The physical and psychological changes associated with menstrual irregularities are discussed, emphasizing the need to monitor these changes and resolve them promptly. The emotional stress experienced by adolescents during menstruation. The need for comprehensive support systems Socio-cultural perspectives on menstruation in India have been specifically explored, highlighting cultural beliefs that consider menstruation impure. There is a great need for education and awareness among people to dispel the myths related to menstruation. Overall, the study advocates a paradigm shift in social attitudes towards menstruation. It emphasizes the need to create open dialogue, understanding and an inclusive environment, as well as the need for community involvement and education, which promotes the overall well-being of women, especially women experiencing irregular menstruation.

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