

Research Paper

Sociological Study on Menstrual Hygiene and Practices among Female Students at Government First Grade Colleges in Dakshina Kannada District

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates menstrual hygiene practices, socio-religious beliefs, and resource accessibility among female students at Government First Grade Colleges in Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka. The research aimed to identify prevailing menstrual hygiene products, assess the adherence to hygiene practices, and understand the impact of socio-religious beliefs on menstruation. A sample of 120 respondents was randomly selected, ensuring a diverse and representative population. Data were gathered through a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of 30 questions covering various aspects of menstrual hygiene, beliefs, and resource accessibility. The analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel and statistical techniques to identify significant trends and patterns. The results indicated that a predominant majority (94%) of the students preferred using menstrual pads, with none opting for cloth pads. A small minority (6%) used menstrual cups, appreciating their comfort and economic benefits. Hygiene practices revealed that 88% of the respondents changed their menstrual pads every six hours, with most utilizing college-provided incinerators for disposal, though 12% waited until they returned home to change their pads.

Keywords: Menstrual hygiene, socio-religious beliefs, menstrual products, hygiene practices, female students, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka

Menstrual hygiene is a critical aspect of women's health and well-being, particularly among young females in educational settings. Inadequate menstrual hygiene can lead to significant health issues, including infections and reproductive problems. Socio-religious beliefs and cultural practices often shape how menstruation is perceived and managed, impacting women's daily lives and their access to education and resources.

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a critical public health issue that affects the physical, social, and psychological well-being of millions of adolescent girls and women globally. In developing countries, challenges related to menstrual hygiene are compounded by inadequate access to sanitary products, insufficient menstrual hygiene education, and deeply entrenched socio-religious taboos. These factors collectively contribute to a spectrum

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of issues, ranging from school absenteeism to severe health complications. Adolescence is a crucial phase in a girl's life, characterized by rapid physical, psychological, and emotional changes. Menstruation, a significant event during this period, is often shrouded in secrecy and stigma, particularly in conservative societies. In India, many girls lack basic knowledge about menstruation and proper hygiene practices before they experience menarche. According to Dasgupta and Sarkar (2008), the lack of accurate information and preparation can lead to anxiety, fear, and misconceptions about menstruation. This underscores the need for comprehensive menstrual education programs that can equip girls with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage their menstrual health effectively.

Socio-religious beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping menstrual practices and attitudes. In many cultures, menstruation is viewed as impure, leading to various restrictions on the daily activities of menstruating women. For instance, research by Amatya et al. (2018) in Nepal highlights how cultural practices like Chhaupadi force menstruating girls into isolation, significantly affecting their mental and physical health. Similarly, McMahan et al. (2011) observed that Kenyan schoolgirls often face stigmatization and inadequate sanitation facilities, impacting their school attendance and performance.

Access to menstrual products is another critical aspect of MHM. Studies such as those by Kuhlmann, Henry, and Wall (2017) emphasize that the availability and affordability of sanitary products are essential for effective menstrual management. However, in many low- and middle-income countries, girls resort to using improvised materials like cloth, which are often unhygienic and uncomfortable. The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of proper disposal facilities, as highlighted by Mohammed and Larsen-Reindorf (2020), leading to environmental pollution and health hazards.

In Karnataka, despite various governmental and non-governmental efforts to improve menstrual hygiene, challenges persist. The present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the menstrual hygiene practices among female students in Dakshina Kannada District. By exploring the interplay between socio-religious beliefs, hygiene practices, and resource accessibility, this research seeks to identify gaps and propose interventions that can enhance menstrual health and education in this region. This study investigates the menstrual hygiene practices, socio-religious beliefs, and resource accessibility among female students at Government First Grade Colleges in Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka.

Addressing menstrual hygiene management is not only a matter of health but also of human rights and gender equality. Ensuring that adolescent girls have access to accurate information, sanitary products, and supportive environments is crucial for their overall development and empowerment. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on MHM and provides valuable insights that can inform policies and programs aimed at improving menstrual health for female students in Karnataka and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this sociological study involved a systematic approach to data collection and analysis. A sample size of 120 respondents was randomly selected from the colleges to ensure a diverse and representative population. A comprehensive questionnaire, consisting of 30 carefully designed questions, was distributed to these participants. The questionnaire aimed to capture various aspects of menstrual hygiene practices, socio-

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religious beliefs, and access to resources during menstruation. Upon collection, the data was coded using Microsoft Excel, facilitating organized data management and enabling efficient analysis. The coded data were then subjected to detailed statistical analysis to identify trends, patterns, and correlations within the responses. This methodical approach ensured the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a robust foundation for understanding the sociological dimensions of menstrual hygiene practices among the female students at Government First Grade Colleges of Dakshina Kannada District in Karnataka.

RESULTS

Preferred Menstrual Hygiene Products

The study revealed that a vast majority of students (94%) prefer using menstrual pads, which they have used since their first period. None of the respondents reported using cloth pads during menstruation. A small minority (6%) opt for menstrual cups, citing comfort, ease of management, and economic benefits, particularly during heavy flow (Fig 1.1).

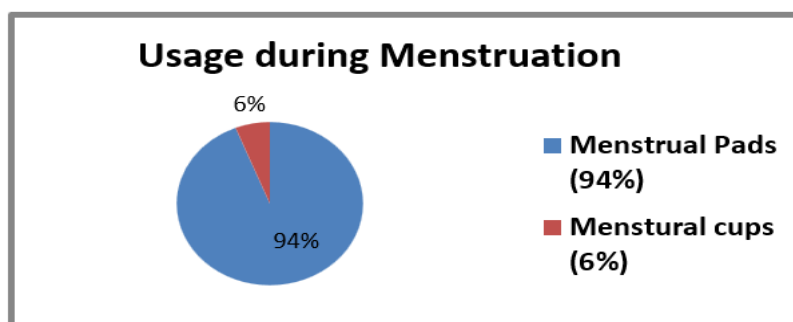


Fig 1.1

Hygiene Practices

Hygiene remains a paramount concern during menstruation for the majority of students (88%), who adhere to a routine of changing their pads every 6 hours. While most dispose of their used pads at college, a small number opt to burn them using the available incinerators. Conversely, a minority (12%) choose to retain their pads, changing them only upon returning home. Despite the college's provision of infrastructure, including water and incinerators in restrooms, some students still prolong the use of their menstrual pads beyond six hours (Fig 1.2).

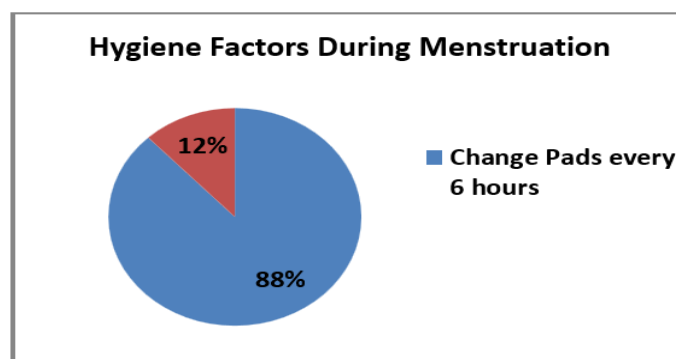


Fig 1.2

Bathing Habits

Maintaining personal hygiene, particularly through regular bathing, is essential during menstruation. The study reveals that a vast majority (94%) of the students take bath twice daily, indicating healthy practices among the college population. A smaller segment (6%)

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bathes once a day, which is often the case in households experiencing water shortages (Fig 1.3).

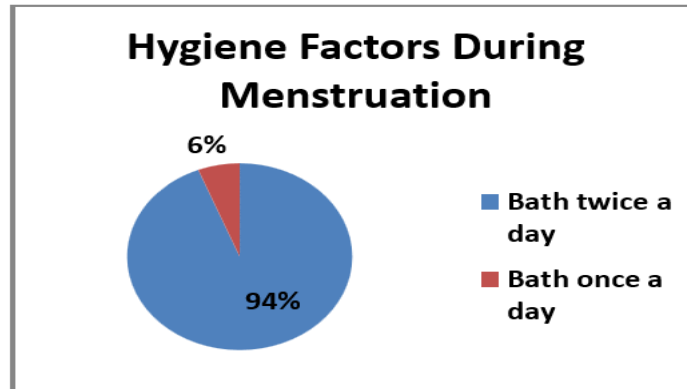


Fig 1.3

Socio-Religious Beliefs

The study highlights the influence of socio-religious beliefs on menstruation practices. A significant majority of respondents (94%) are prohibited from entering prayer rooms in their homes during their menstrual period. Additionally, 4% of respondents are restricted from accessing the kitchen on these days, relying on family members to provide food, water, and other necessities. Furthermore, 6% of respondents are required to live in seclusion in a separate room attached to their house. Some respondents are also given separate utensils and kitchen accessories to use exclusively during menstruation. These practices reflect deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms that continue to shape the experiences of menstruating individuals, underscoring the need for increased awareness and education to challenge and potentially reform these traditional practices.

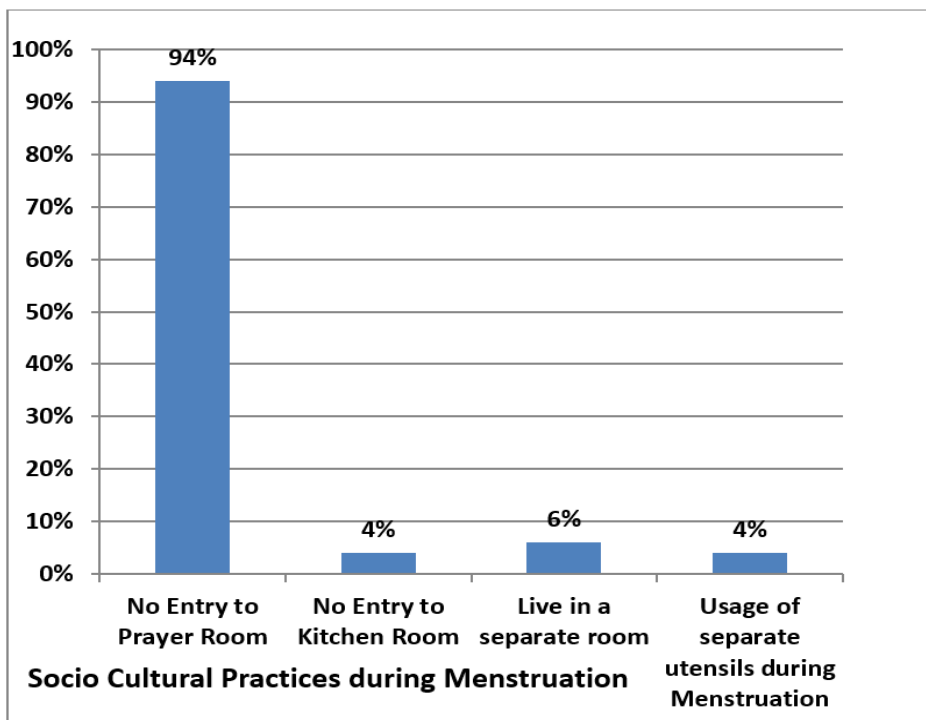


Fig 1.4

DISCUSSION

Menstrual Hygiene Products and Practices

The predominance of menstrual pad usage among the students indicates a general preference for and awareness of modern menstrual hygiene products. The absence of cloth pad usage suggests a shift towards more convenient and hygienic options. However, the small minority opting for menstrual cups highlights an emerging awareness of sustainable and economical alternatives. The adherence to changing pads every six hours by the majority reflects a commitment to maintaining hygiene, yet the practice of some students extending pad usage beyond this period points to a need for better education on optimal menstrual hygiene practices.

Bathing Habits

The regular bathing habits observed among the students demonstrate a strong commitment to personal hygiene during menstruation. This practice is crucial in preventing infections and maintaining cleanliness. The few students who bathe once daily often do so due to water shortages, indicating that resource availability can impact hygiene practices. This highlights the importance of ensuring adequate water supply to support proper menstrual hygiene.

Socio-Religious Beliefs

The significant influence of socio-religious beliefs on menstruation practices underscores the role of cultural norms in shaping menstrual hygiene behaviors. The restrictions on entering prayer rooms and kitchens, as well as the practice of seclusion, reflect traditional beliefs that view menstruation as impure. These practices can negatively impact the physical and psychological well-being of menstruating individuals, emphasizing the need for educational interventions to promote more inclusive and supportive attitudes towards menstruation.

Major Findings and Conclusions

The study conducted at Government First Grade Colleges, in Dakshina Kannada District, revealed significant insights into the menstrual hygiene practices, socio-religious beliefs, and resource accessibility among the student population. The following major findings emerged from the data analysis:

1. Preferred Menstrual Hygiene Products:

- A vast majority of students (94%) prefer using menstrual pads, which they have used since their first period.
- None of the respondents reported using cloth pads during menstruation.
- A small minority (6%) opt for menstrual cups, citing comfort, ease of management, and economic benefits, particularly during heavy flow.

2. Hygiene Practices:

- Hygiene is a paramount concern for most students, with 88% adhering to a routine of changing their pads every 6 hours.
- Most students dispose of their used pads at college, utilizing the available incinerators. However, a minority (12%) prefer to retain their pads and change them only upon returning home.
- Despite the colleges' provision of basic necessary infrastructure, such as water and incinerators in restrooms, some students extend the use of their menstrual pads beyond six hours, highlighting a gap in optimal hygiene practices.

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3. Bathing Habits:

- Maintaining personal hygiene through regular bathing is common, with 94% of the students taking a bath twice daily.
- A smaller segment (6%) bathes once a day, typically due to water shortages in their households.

4. Socio-Religious Beliefs:

- Socio-religious beliefs significantly influence menstruation practices. A significant majority (94%) of respondents are prohibited from entering prayer rooms during their menstrual period.
- Additionally, 4% of respondents are restricted from accessing the kitchen on these days, relying on family members to provide food, water, and other necessities.
- Furthermore, 6% of respondents are required to live in seclusion in a separate room attached to their house during menstruation.
- Some respondents are provided with separate utensils and kitchen accessories to use exclusively during menstruation.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study "Sociological Study on Menstrual Hygiene and its Practices among Female Students" at Government First Grade Colleges in Dakshina Kannada District, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed to enhance menstrual hygiene practices and address the socio-religious constraints observed among the students:

1. Enhanced Education and Awareness Programs:

- **Menstrual Hygiene Workshops:** Conduct regular workshops and seminars to educate students about the importance of menstrual hygiene, proper use of menstrual products, and the health risks associated with prolonged use of pads. These sessions should include practical demonstrations and Q&A segments.
- **Educational Materials:** Distribute informative pamphlets, brochures, and posters around the campus that highlight best practices in menstrual hygiene and address common misconceptions.

2. Improved Access to Menstrual Products:

- **Subsidized Menstrual Products:** Provide subsidized or free menstrual products such as pads and menstrual cups to ensure all students have access to safe and reliable options. This can be facilitated through partnerships with NGOs or government programs.
- **Introduction of Sustainable Options:** Promote the use of sustainable menstrual products, like menstrual cups and reusable pads, by providing information on their benefits and usage. Workshops on how to use and care for these products can be beneficial.

3. Enhanced Facilities and Infrastructure:

- **Regular Maintenance of Facilities:** Ensure that the restrooms are regularly maintained, with a consistent supply of water and functioning incinerators for sanitary pad disposal.

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- **Private Changing Areas:** Provide designated private changing areas within restrooms to ensure privacy and comfort for students when changing menstrual products.

4. Addressing Socio-Religious Beliefs:

- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Organize cultural sensitivity training for staff and students to foster a supportive environment that respects diverse beliefs while encouraging open dialogue about menstruation.
- **Inclusive Policies:** Develop policies that respect students' socio-religious beliefs while ensuring their health and well-being are not compromised. This includes creating safe spaces for students who might face restrictions at home.

5. Support Systems and Counseling:

- **Peer Support Groups:** Establish peer support groups where students can share their experiences and provide mutual support regarding menstrual hygiene practices and challenges.
- **Counseling Services:** Offer access to counseling services where students can receive advice and support on menstrual health and hygiene issues, as well as address any emotional or psychological concerns related to menstruation.

6. Community Engagement and Advocacy:

- **Parent and Community Workshops:** Conduct workshops for parents and community members to raise awareness about the importance of menstrual hygiene and to challenge stigmatizing socio-religious practices.
- **Advocacy Campaigns:** Launch advocacy campaigns to promote menstrual hygiene awareness and to push for policy changes that support better menstrual health management in educational institutions and communities.

7. Research and Continuous Improvement:

- **Ongoing Research:** Encourage further research on menstrual hygiene practices and socio-religious beliefs among students to continually improve programs and policies based on updated data.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Implement feedback mechanisms where students can provide input on the menstrual hygiene facilities and programs, ensuring continuous improvement based on their needs and experiences.

By implementing these suggestions and recommendations, Government First Grade Colleges, can significantly enhance menstrual hygiene practices, support the well-being of its students, and foster a more inclusive and informed campus environment.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted at Government First Grade Colleges, underscores critical aspects of menstrual hygiene practices, socio-religious beliefs, and the accessibility of resources among female students. The findings reveal a predominance of menstrual pad usage, with a noteworthy minority adopting menstrual cups. This indicates a general awareness and preference for modern menstrual hygiene products among the students. However, the extended use of pads beyond the recommended duration by a small minority suggests a need for further education on optimal menstrual hygiene practices.

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Bathing habits among the students reflect a strong commitment to personal hygiene, with the majority adhering to a routine of bathing twice daily. This practice is essential in maintaining cleanliness and preventing infections during menstruation.

The influence of socio-religious beliefs on menstruation practices highlights the need for educational interventions to promote more inclusive and supportive attitudes towards menstruation. Restrictive practices such as seclusion and prohibition from certain areas of the home can have negative implications for the physical and psychological well-being of menstruating individuals. Increasing awareness and challenging traditional norms through education can help in fostering a more supportive environment for menstruating individuals. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the menstrual hygiene practices and socio-religious beliefs among female students at Government First Grade Colleges in Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka. The findings emphasize the importance of continuous education and resource provision to improve menstrual hygiene and challenge restrictive socio-religious practices. Future research should focus on broader populations and include longitudinal studies to assess changes over time and the impact of educational interventions.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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