



MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES AMONG TRIBAL WOMEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Nursing

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a natural phenomenon which is common to all women in this universe. Globally all women of reproductive age practice to deal with menstruation. These vary greatly with geographical boundaries, personal preferences, available resources, education, economic status, traditions and culture. This study was conducted to explore the socio cultural realities co existing with menstrual hygiene practices among tribal women. A phenomenological design was used to assess the practices of menstrual hygiene among tribal women of Vellore, Tamil Nadu among 10 samples who were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using open ended leading questions. The data were analyzed based upon Van Colaizzi framework and the themes identified were Fear and Anxiety during menarche, Lack of Awareness regarding Menstruation, Menstruation as Distress to the body, Sense of Cleanliness during Menstruation, Convictions on Rituals and Habits, Belief in Home Remedies, Isolation during menstruation. The overall study findings revealed that the women in the tribal communities had varying degrees of menstrual hygiene practices which were both healthy and harmful to reproductive health. It underscores the vital role of the nurse to create conscious awareness and clear understanding of menstruation. Menstrual hygiene should be promoted by nurses to improve women's health and welfare.

KEYWORDS

Menstruation, Qualitative Study, Thematic Analysis, Tribal women

INTRODUCTION

The variety of cultural taboos related with menstruation makes it secrecy and shameful to be discussed in public in many developing countries. Lack of adequate guidance, facilities and materials for women to manage their menstruation is a neglected public health issue in tribal areas. Awareness about menstruation prior to menarche to the girls was transferred mostly from their mothers who they themselves had limited knowledge regarding reproductive health and hygiene².

Remarkable is also that the education concerning reproductive health, sexuality and all related issues is considered almost a "no-go" area. There is need for extensive exploration on menstrual hygiene practices and to provide them the precise information especially in rural and tribal communities.

Qualitative interviews among women in Sweden identified themes like belonging and confidence, intimacy, concealment during menstruation as a part of life. The study findings emphasized the need for intimacy and acceptance of menstruation.⁴

Focused group discussions and in depth interview were used to identify their menstrual hygiene practices and quality of life among 164 girls in rural and tribal areas of Gujarat. The highest number of adverse quality of life issues were found with old cloths and the least with falalin cloths, concluding that only few girls opted the use of sanitary pads due to cost of affordability and disposability.⁶

The evidence of inadequate knowledge regarding menstruation and poor practices, leading to burden of diseases is preventable. Therefore it is essential to explore the menstrual hygiene practices among women of under reached and inaccessible areas, so as to plan for the strategies to strengthen the healthy practices and modify the unhealthy practices. Hence this study was intended to explore the practices of menstrual hygiene among women in tribal areas in order to disclose the experiences and practices associated with menstruation.

Statement of the Problem

A Qualitative Study to explore Menstrual Hygiene Practices among Women of Reproductive Age in Tribal Areas, Vellore.

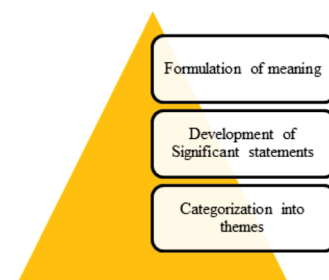
Objective of the Study

To explore the menstrual hygiene practices among women of reproductive age residing in tribal communities

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted by adopting qualitative approach. A phenomenological design was used to assess the menstrual hygiene practices among women of reproductive age. 10 women of reproductive age, who visited the Peenjamandai tribal PHC were selected by purposive sampling technique. The researcher obtained permission from concerned authorities to conduct the study and written consent was taken from women for their participation. The women who attended the tribal PHCs were interviewed for baseline data and qualitative data was collected using leading open ended questions to explore their unique menstrual hygiene practices. Baseline characteristics included age, education, occupation, religion, type of family, place of living, monthly income, marital status, number of children, availability and use of toilets. Data was collected using ten open ended leading questions by indepth interview technique and recorded by note making. Responses were reflection of their experiences regarding menarche, menstruation and menstrual hygiene.

The responses were analyzed using Colaizzi content analysis⁵ and interpreted as the following themes- Fear and anxiety during menarche, Lack of awareness regarding menstruation, Menstruation as distress to the body, Sense of cleanliness during menstruation, Convictions on rituals and habits, Belief in home remedies, Isolation during menstruation. Among all the themes that were identified, the most unique findings were the home remedies like use of sesame oil, sesame laddoos, raw egg white, Bengal gram- jaggery mixture to strengthen the women's health during menarche and menstruation. They also used fenugreek seeds, oral and local application of castor oil to relieve menstrual aches.



VAN COLAIZZIANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic data of the tribal women showed that less than half of them belonged to adolescent age group (30%) respectively. Majority of them were illiterates (80%). More than half of them were involved in unorganized works for daily wages (60%). Most of them had a family income of less than Rs. 5000 (80%). Around 70% of them were Hindus and 60% were from nuclear families. As it is 40% of the women were having at least one child.

The major themes pertaining to menstrual experiences of women were identified as follows

Fear and Anxiety during Menarche

Menarche, though being a normal physiological process was assumed to be a fearful phenomenon among women of younger age groups. This has emerged as fear due to blood, fear of pain and fear of new changes in one's body. For example one of the participants expressed, "*I attained menarche overnight suddenly. I was very afraid about bleeding*". Moreover fear leads to state of anxiety based upon the stimuli like change, etc.¹.

Lack of Awareness about Menstruation

In the present study, many women were less aware about the process of menstruation and its causes. Women expressed that menstruation is the excretion through impure blood from the body and it is harmful to retain it. According to them, bleeding was also excreted through urinary passage way. "*I attained menarche when I was in school and had no idea what it was all about*" was the concern from another participant. These study findings were consisted with findings from the study Dhingra (2009) which revealed that majority (64%) of the tribal adolescent girls were only partially aware about menstruation.

Menstruation as a Distress to the body.

Most of the women expressed their discomfort about body aches, bleeding, and inability to carry on domestic responsibilities. They also talked about difficulty in travel and maintenance of sanitary products. An adolescent participant who faced difficulties during menstruation informed that "*I have abdominal pain and pelvic pain before and during periods, itching at genital region.*"

Sense of Cleanliness during Menstruation

Due to lack of basic facilities like water and toilets, women had difficulty in maintaining cleanliness during periods. A distressed participant shared that "*I use cloths during menstrual periods due to ease, safety and less price.*" Moreover many women were conscious about the cost effectiveness of using cloth over sanitary pad. In a study conducted among Gujarat girls by Shah et al⁶, only 32% opted for sanitary pads and 68% opted for falalin cloths which were reusable.

Conviction about rituals and beliefs on menstrual hygiene

The tribal women who are much isolated and culturally oriented than their counterparts feel that menstruation was a secret issue and should not be revealed socially. Some women were glad about the rituals as they felt special, whereas others felt ashamed due to specific rituals like food and social restrictions. More than half of the girls reported restrictions in attending or carrying out religious functions and activities (57%) as imposed by their mothers in a cross sectional study conducted by Neilson⁷

Belief in the usage of home remedies

One of the most unique features of the tribal women was the use of home remedies for menstruation and menstrual problems. "*My grandmother used to give me home made medicine made up of neem leaves, cumin seeds and jaggery for strengthening my body*" was the statement by a middle aged participant. They used items like sesame oil, sesame laddos, raw egg white, bengal gram- jaggery mixture in order to strengthen the women's bones during menarche and menstruation. They also used fenugreek seeds, oral and local application of castor oil to relieve menstrual aches.

Isolation during menstruation

Women were isolated for during menarche and menstruation in separate places outside their homes, restricted from talking or seeing male family members or even attending school. This can be understood from the following statement by an young participant, "*I am isolated from doing household works and going to kitchen*"

These themes have provided insights to the researcher regarding the

menstrual hygiene practices and socio cultural aspects of the same among women living in tribal areas. These practices could be further analysed in order to create awareness regarding menstrual hygiene and to expand their uses.

CONCLUSION

The overall study findings revealed that the women in the tribal communities had varying degrees of menstrual hygiene practices which were both healthy and harmful to reproductive health. It emphasizes the vital role of the nurse to create conscious awareness and clear understanding of menstruation. Menstrual hygiene should be promoted by nurses to promote women's health and welfare.

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