



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY STUDY ON PREVALENCE OF MENSTRUAL TABOOS
AMONG YOUNG GIRLS IN ANAND DISTRICT OF GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a complex phenomenon in women's life since it is related to many areas such as biology, psychology, society and religion. The average woman will menstruate almost a quarter of her fertile life, yet there are many religions which, to this day, hold primitive ideas and beliefs regarding this common phenomenon. The debate of which has been of importance since *Sabrimala* temple incidence. Taboos are intense prohibitions of certain acts and it is unacceptable to the society. It is believed that if the taboo is not followed it will result to harm to person as well as the community. Menstrual taboos are prevalent all over the world in different forms.

Objectives: To study about observance and non-observance of menstrual restrictions among young girls and reasons behind following restrictions. **Materials and Methods:** A survey of about 798 young girls between the age group of 16-25 years of urban, rural and hostel areas of Anand district, Gujarat was conducted with closed ended questionnaire related to menstrual taboos. **Results:** 380 girls (47.62%) avoided visiting temple during menstruation and 332 out of 798 (41.60%) were prohibited from religious activities. 44.53% girls (301) followed restrictions because of religion and others i.e. 39.50% (267) girls mentioned their culture as a reason for observing the restrictions. **Conclusion:** Young girls follow restrictions related to religious activities only.

Keywords: Menstruation, Taboos, Religion, *Rajaswala Paricharya*

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INTRODUCTION:

Menstruation in medical science is an indicator of healthy reproductive system but in religion and culture, it is related with many myths. Most cultures have some kind of "menstruation taboos" for girls and women. The link with blood receives many attention and majority of the restrictions imposed on female during menstruation as based on bleeding during menstruation. In many cultures a menstruating woman is considered "unclean" and "impure". The restrictions range from isolation to exclusion from religious to cooking activities and sexual intercourse. These prohibitions are consistent among all religions and cultures.^{3,4} Certain restrictions are not very strictly followed but still so called modern religions still prohibit menstruating women from entering temple for prayer. The debate became highlighted after the *Sabrimala* incident and that the menstrual taboos are an act of hampering women empowerment and also an act to continue the gender inequality status.

Rajaswala Paricharya :

Ayurveda not only defines all epoch's of woman's life like *Bala*, *Kumari*, *Rajaswala*, *Ritumati*, *Garbhini*, *Prasava*, *Sutika* etc,⁵ but also the health status in regards of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* variation and preventive steps in the form of diet and life style modifications to achieve health during all these epoch's where drastic changes occurs which makes her

susceptible for major illnesses. These diet and lifestyle modifications are known as *Paricharya*.

Recognizing the changes in female's body during menstruation (*Rajaswala*), *Ayurveda* peers have described certain do's and don'ts in the form of *Rajaswala paricharya*.^{6,7,8} to maintain her balance of *Doshas* and help in proper menstrual function. These modifications are in the form of eating light meal, not to perform strenuous activities, avoiding use of scents in the form of anointments. Non observance of these restrictions may lead to deformities, abnormalities in the progeny.⁹ Apart from these many cultural and traditional restrictions are prevalent in the many societies in the form of menstrual taboos in which isolation, not to perform domestic and sexual activities are major.

21st Century and Menstrual taboos :

21st Century has looked into major changes into the society where women are empowered with similar status as of male in the so called male dominant society. Also the role of female has shifted from just being a source of reproduction and house hold work to an earning individual of the family. The families have shifted from group family to nuclear family where the burden of household, career, job, children and others is seen majorly on the female member of the family.

Because of these reasons there has been a change in the observation of menstrual taboos or restrictions to be followed during menstruation practiced in families since ages. Education has played a major role in removing many of the restrictions. The female has to cook, do the household work, go for job and do all the activities from which she was restricted as per culture and tradition.¹⁰

OBJECTIVES:

To study about observance and non observance of menstrual restrictions among young girls and the reasons behind following restrictions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

A cross sectional survey of about 798 young girls of urban, rural and hostel areas was conducted with closed ended questionnaire related to menstrual taboos. The age group of girls was 16 – 25 years. The girls were given pre designed self explanatory questionnaire. The survey was conducted at Anand District, Gujarat. The survey was conducted within 6 months duration. Ethical approval was taken prior to initiate the survey and consent of school, college principals and rectors were taken before conducting the survey.

RESULTS:

Table 1: Observance of different menstrual restrictions

Menstrual restriction practices	N =798	%
Cooking	113	14.16
Touching others	87	10.90
Religious activity	332	41.60
Visiting temple	380	47.62
Sleeping in same bed	47	5.89
Touching plants	58	7.27
Touching pickles	49	6.14
Application of turmeric, Kajal	19	2.38
Touching flowers	8	1.00
Visiting neighbours	8	1.00
No restrictions	25	3.13

It was found that 380 girls (47.62%) avoided visiting temple during menstruation and 332

out of 798 (41.60%) were prohibited from religious activities.

Table 2 : Reasons for Observance of restrictions

Reasons for following restrictions	N= 676	%
Culture	267	39.50
Religion	301	44.53
Scared to be punished	10	1.48
Something bad will happen to family	33	4.88
Others	65	9.62

676 out of 798 girls responded to this question. 39.50% (267) girls mentioned their culture as a reason for observing the restrictions. It was found that 44.53% girls (301) followed restrictions because of religion and others i.e.

Table 3 : Reasons to disagree from observing other restrictions

Why disagree to follow restrictions	N= 583	%
New culture	144	24.70
Not possible in present time	223	38.25
Allowed	123	21.10
Others	93	15.95

Many of other restrictions like cooking, touching others etc were not followed by majority. The reason to disagree to follow such restrictions was responded by 583 girls. 38.25% (223) girls mentioned that following all prohibitions is not possible in present time along with schooling, college and working. 24.70% (144) girls mentioned new culture as one of the reason to disagree.

Table 4 : Tried to break any restriction

Tried to break restrictions	N= 684	%
Yes	257	37.57
No	427	62.43

Out of 684 respondents, 427 girls (62.43%) never tried to break any restrictions whatever

they were following, whereas 257 girls (37.57%) mentioned that they tried not to follow prohibitions at certain times.

Table 5 : Family members following restrictions

Who in the family follows restrictions	N= 760	%
Grandmother	212	27.89
Mother	418	55.00
Sister	51	6.71
Others	79	10.39

Among other female family members observing the restrictions, 418 girls (55%) mentioned their mother to be following restrictions.

DISCUSSION

The survey report suggests that the prevalence of menstrual restrictions are still seen amongst the population, but the rules are set only for religion and culture. The reasons behind observance of these restrictions in culture and tradition were that they were not considered clean and hygienic enough. Some still believe that the main reason is to maintain and unequal status quo between men and women. The 21st century woman considers these restrictions as burden and a path of obstruction towards her empowerment but the science behind following certain rules are not emphasized.

One should understand the science behind this and not blindly follow all the campaigns. The

myths and facts behind the menstrual taboos should be scientifically evaluated. The role of *Apana vayu*, menotoxins and volatile compound like pheromones should never be overlooked. During menstruation the sweat, saliva, menstrual blood and breast milk is believed to secrete a substance called Menotoxin with certain pharmacological and chemical reactions. The research shows that chemically these menotoxins exhibited properties near to oxycholestrin which causes prolongation of blood coagulation. The properties of this substance menotoxin were considered identical to Necrosin in another work. Necrosin is a toxic substance (inflammatory exudates) that induces leucopenia.^{11,12} Cooking and eating in steel utensils can transfer these toxins to other person in contact and hence prohibition from cooking was followed. In some villages, a menstruating female is not allowed to go in

field as the crops gets damaged. These is because of phytotoxic properties of menstrual blood.¹³

Volatile compounds called Pheromones, released in sweat, known for sexual attraction are supposed to influence menstrual cycle of other female in contact. The interval of menstrual cycle of recipient female is shortened.^{14,15,16} This is known as menstrual synchronization which is common in hostel inmates and female members of same family.¹⁷ Strenuous exercise and other activities like excessive walking, laughing, talking all lead to aggravation of *Vata Dosha* which in turn may imbalance the menstrual function. Apart from that excessive exercise is believed to cause loss of body fat and overall weight loss causing estrogen deficit. This also alters Hypothalamo - pituitary -ovarian axis leading to imbalance in menstrual function.

CONCLUSION:

The survey study among young girls shows observance of restrictions during menstruation are related to mainly religious activities. Other restrictions are not followed. And the reasons are new culture and education remove the myths and does not give ample time to follow all restrictions.

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