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Practices followed and perception towards menstruation among the women of Nagaon District, Assam

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Abstract

Attaining puberty is a normal occurrence of one's life. But it brings drastic changes in the life of a woman. Attaining puberty is somewhat seen as something unattainable. This situation is different according to different cultural context. In India specially in Assam, people have different perception regarding menstruation, some of which has scientific basis and others are purely superstition where menstruation is still regarded as inauspicious. As the women folk are the sufferers, the investigators thought to investigate on the perception of women on the practices followed during menstruation. In the present study educational level of women has been taken as a variable. All total 200 women (under matriculation 90, above matriculation 110) were taken as the sample of the study from the Nagaon district of Assam. From the study it was found that most of the women follow the practices without knowing the actual logic behind the practices. Some practices are harmful for the women yet they follow those because they think it to be their duty to follow those rituals without any question. Although it was also found from the study that education has brought remarkable changes in the thinking process of the women. Differences have been found regarding the perception of the women of both educational categories.

Keywords: Menstruation, Practices, Perception, Women.

Introduction:

Menstruation, which is known as period or monthly is a unique phenomenon of woman. It is the regular discharge of blood and mucosal tissues from the inner lining of the uterus. It refers to the reproductive period of women which generally begins between twelve fifteen years of age. Menstruation cycle is a way of preparing women for a possible pregnancy each month. During this reproductive period female reproductive track undergo a series of cyclic changes which primarily meant to prepare woman for fertilization. Menstruation is one of the most important changes that take place among the girls during adolescent period. The first menstruation is a significant event in woman's life which signifies the achievement of functional state. This functional state has a life lasting impact on the physical, psychological and social life of a woman. Though menstruation is a natural phenomenon yet various taboos are associated with it which makes the women a vulnerable group. In spite of following various hygienic measures during menstruation it is still regarded as unclean and embarrassing occurrence. In a patriarchal society like India taboos associated with menstruation are more rigid and most of which are illogical. These behavioural restrictions apart from being untrue contribute to the gender based taboos and gender discrimination. These behavioural restrictions are followed religiously by generations to generations in the name of tradition and mandatory practices. These practices refer to rules and ways of obligations which the menstruating woman has to follow. In our common prevalence it is seen that most of the women follows the practices without any questions and without knowing the



practical reasons behind it. These practices are to be followed by the women which are different according to the cultural and social context.

There was a time when attainment of puberty was regarded as the capability of a girl to get married and bear children. Celebration during the attainment of first puberty was a way to announce the society that the girl is ready for marriage. But in this era of science and technology where everything of life is science and technology driven still the perception of people towards menstruation is negative and illogical. Isolation in their own home, social and religious restrictions brings the feelings of awkwardness among menstruating girls. Moreover taboos related with the first menstruation includes complete isolation of adolescent girls for almost three to nine days, keeping fast and the girls are suppose to avoid seeing the male members of the family. Adolescents being already a stage of changes, imposing these taboos create chaos among the adolescent girls who has her first experience of menstruation. As ritual menstruating women are forbidden to participate in any religious ceremony, they can't touch family members,, prohibited in practicing normal life activities such as cooking, eating together with family etc.

Most of us don't know the reasons behind these practices, most of us fear to forgo these practices without any scientific basis. Sommer (2011)in this regard examined the problem behind the preservation of cultural beliefs and practices was the lack of knowledge and education. Often when health education is delivered it focuses mainly on reproductive issues while puberty is neglected to a great extent. In the same line Joshi(2009) conducted a study on the practices followed during menstruation in Nepal and he found that most of the Nepali people believed that it brings badluck to the family if the girls looks at the mirror during menstruation. Menstruating women are shifted to a clay house which is specially made for the period. Meyee-Rochaw (2009) observed food taboos which exists for women during reproductive period. Frazer (1963) also found various myths related to menstruation in Australia. If we go on searching for the studies done in this topic we will find that there are numerous attitudes, myths, taboos are associated with it. But why are we following these practices? Can education play a determining role in changing the perception towards theses practices? Women are the followers and they are the sufferers. Is their educational level has a impact on their perceiving? We need to find the reason. So the investigators thought to find the perception of the people towards these practices.

Objectives of the study

The study was intended to find out the perception of women (who are under matriculate and above that in educational level) of Nagaon district on the perception and practices followed during menstruation.

Methodology of the Study

For the present study descriptive survey method has been used which is useful to obtain pertinent and precise information of the present status.

Population and Sample

The Population of the study consists of all the women of Tetelikhura village and Kampur town of Nagaon District. Considering the feasibility of the study a total of 200 sample (under matriculation 90, above matriculation 110 was selected from the population using the purposive sampling method.



Data Collection Tool

For the collection of information interview method was applied to gather in-depth information. For the present study the investigators seeks not only the factual information as well as their view points and opinions.

Treatment of Data

For the analysis of the data simple percentage has been used. Along with their factual information their beliefs, opinions were also qualitatively analysed by the investigators.

Results and discussions:

The results are presented and discussed in the order of the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: To study the perception towards menstruation among the women of Nagaon District

Perception is the way in which a person seen things. In this section various statements were included regarding the perception towards menstruation practices. It was found from the study that 80% of the feels trouble to follow the restrictions that are put on the menstruating women during menstruation.60 % of the women feels that menstruation practices are scientific and these were imposed on women because it is good for them to follow. It is to be mentioned that there are many practices which has a scientific basis but further enquiry into this matter revealed that most of the women followed these without knowing the logic behind it. Almost 44% of the women feel that the first menstruation should be celebrated, because they think that it is our tradition to celebrate the attainment of puberty. Whereas 56% women feels it is not necessary to celebrate it. Among the under matriculation level 66% women thinks that if they do not celebrate the first menstruation the society will isolate them. Among the graduate women 34% feels the necessity of following this practice. It was sad to found that almost 70% women believe that god will punish them for not following the practices. Among the graduate level women 50% women feels the same. In this age of science and technology where women are marching towards progress this kind of thinking is curving many opportunities from the women folk. Because of the fear the follows the restrictions imposed upon them without having any insight on it. It was very shocked to see that 96% of women feel impure during menstruation. They said that they don't do any auspicious works during those days including the religious activities. Among the graduate level women 86% women feel impure during menstruation.

Objective 2: To study the Practices followed by the women of Nagaon district during menstruation.

Objective two was to figure out the practices followed by the women of Nagaon District. 60% of women replied that they are not allowed to touch anything during menstruation. Among the graduate level women the percentage is 38%. Previously most of the women used to sleep on the floor during menstruation. But it was a relief to find out that no women was found among the sample taken who sleeps on the floor during those days of the month. But simultaneously it was also found that no women dare to go to temples during periods. There are various reasons for this. We have already found that most of the women have the fear of punishment by god if they don't follow the practices. And most of us already conditioned by the society that it is immoral to go to temple during periods because the women are impure in those days. 30% of women replied that they use cloths during periods instead of the availability of different sanitary pads. This is not because of their economic condition but because of their ignorance and belief that sanitary pads cannot be disposed or throw away because it will bring bad luck among them. But the percentage among the graduate women is nil in this aspect. 70% of the women responded that they do



not attend social functions or enter kitchen on those days. But among the women of graduate level the percentage in this regard is only 10%. 49% of women they are not allowed to enter kitchen during menstruation. Most of the women they are bound to enter kitchen on those days because they have no other options.

Suggestion and Conclusion:

The present study reveals that there is a combination of positive and negative perception towards practices of menstruation. It is also found that education is a deciding factor in building the mental set of the women. Women who are under matriculate tend to follow the practices without any questions. And they also have illogical perceptions towards the practices. But it was alarming to found that the women of above matriculation level also find following some unscientific practices and stand to follow the traditional practices. But why this is so? One of the main reasons of this is the defect in our education system. Our education system has taught us to follow the already cemented path; we are never taught to question, to reason. We always have the fear of being rejected by the society. We have to change it. Awareness should be created in the minds of the parents and adolescents. It is seen that though the stages of human growth and development has been included in the school curriculum yet many contents remain unclear for the students. Teachers also don't want to clear the concepts as they hesitate to clear the concepts in the presence of both boys and girls. The teachers must try his best to give best possible knowledge as well as for developing positive perception towards it. By some source of entertainment like movies, documentary films, advertisement knowledge and positive perception can be provided to the masses. Avoiding certain food during menstruation is logical. Foods that generate heat such as meat and dairy should be avoided on those days. Proper knowledge and education relating to menstruation health and hygiene should be provided so that she could understand the actual reasons behind menstruation practices that she may have to follow in her later life. We need to understand that menstruation is not a curse nor menstruating women is impure. Just proper hygiene should be maintained.

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