

PREVALENCE OF MENSTRUAL TABOOS AMONG YOUNG GIRLS IN GUJARAT – A SURVEY STUDY

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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.^{1,2} Menstrual taboos are prevalent all over the world in different forms. **Objectives** : 1. To study about observance and non-observance of menstrual restrictions among young girls. 2. To study about the 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.

Key words: Menstruation, Taboos, Religion, Culture

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a physiological process often imbued with powerful cultural and religious symbols. Most cultures have some kind of "menstruation taboos" for girls and women. In many cultures a menstruating woman is considered "unclean" and taboos are imposed. The menstruating female is restricted from doing certain things as she is considered to be impure during periods. 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.

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. 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. ⁵

OBJECTIVES

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

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A 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.

RESULTS

Table I : 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 II : 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. It was found that 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.

Table III : 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 reasons to disagree.

Table IV : 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 V : 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 is still seen amongst the population, but the rules are set only for religion and culture.
- ◆ Other restrictions are no longer followed.
- ◆ 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 an unequal status quo between men and women

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