

**RESTRICTIONS DURING MENSTRUATION: PREVALENCE AND PERCEPTIONS OF
ADOLESCENT GIRLS ATTENDING SCHOOLS OF CHANDIGARH****Dinesh Kumar^{1*}, Naveen Krishan Goel², Munesh Kumar Sharma³ and Gurleen Kaur⁴**¹Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Government Medical College and Hospital, Chandigarh, India.²Professor and Head, Department of Community Medicine, Government Medical College and Hospital, Chandigarh, India.³Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Government Medical College and Hospital, Chandigarh, India.⁴BDS/MPH, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.***Corresponding Author: Dr. Dinesh Kumar**

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ABSTRACT

Background: Menstruation has continually been surrounded by secrecy and myths in various societies in India. Under societal pressures, adolescent girls are faced various taboos, myths and certain restrictions imposed during menstruation. Despite the fact that menstruation is closely associated with reproductive health matter of females, community based research on this particular topic has been relatively unexplored among unmarried girls. **Objective:** To investigate prevalence of restrictions during menstruations and perceptions of school going girls regarding such restrictions. **Methods:** A cross sectional survey was conducted among 655 unmarried adolescents aged 14-19 years. Total 12 schools including 8 Government and 4 Private were selected. A stratified multistage random sampling was adopted to select girls within schools comprising two strata: Government and Private schools of Chandigarh. **Results:** There were 438 (66.9%) girls who reported comfortable family environment followed by 84(12.8%) reporting free and harmonious family environment. In spite of very low number of girls reporting restrictive family environment, there were 580(88.5%) girls who reported restrictions during menstruation. No reaction was reported by 74(11.3%) respondents while 420 (64.1%) accepted restrictions normally. There were 78 (11.9%) respondents who were angry and reacted on following menstrual restrictions. The most common restriction was on worship/religious activities: 487 (74.4%) followed by avoiding food items 275(42.0%) and lifting of weight 216(33.0%). Respondents adopted more into practice the restrictions like worship/religious activity 453(69.2%) followed by restriction on avoiding food items 257(39.2%). Lifting of weight was also actually followed by 225 (34.4%) respondents. Even some restrictions like consuming some food items in excess, entering kitchen activities were followed at even to greater extent than without imposing restrictions by their parents. **Conclusions:** The study concludes that some restrictions during menstruations are easily acceptable by girls and some of those restrictions are self imposed. These findings show that imposing unnecessarily the rigid and undesired restrictions on respondents cannot bring fruitful results as respondents are self disciplined in following restrictions to be followed during menstruation. Imposing unnecessary undesired restrictions on adolescent girls may result in psychosocial consequences affecting their reproductive health.

KEYWORDS: Adolescent girls; Menarche; Menstrual restrictions; self imposed.**INTRODUCTION**

Puberty is the unique stage of growth and development associated with the social and psychological changes. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in Indian society. Menstruation has continually been surrounded by secrecy and myths in various societies in India. Under societal pressures, adolescent girls are faced various taboos, myths and certain restrictions imposed during menstruation like staying away from participation in religious activities or prayers, staying away from routine house hold activities, restrictions in taking part in social gatherings, entering kitchen, dietary restrictions, physical activities etc.^[1,2,3,4,5]

Our previous study in a different set-up reported 78% girls faced restrictions during menstruation and 61% of girls facing such restrictions took the restrictions normally. Age and educational status were found significant correlates of restrictions during menstruation.^[6] Menstruation and menstrual practices are still linked with several misconceptions, ignorance and practices taboos and socio-cultural restrictions resulting in adolescent girls remaining ignorant of the scientific facts and hygienic health practices, which sometimes result into adverse health outcomes.

Despite the fact that menstruation is closely associated with reproductive health matter of females, community based research on this particular topic has been relatively unexplored among unmarried girls. Considerable number of menstrual problems can be prevented by creating awareness and by modifying factors like lifestyle, environment, and practices during menstruation, dietary habits, psycho-social conditions, and cultural norms. Therefore, present study was conducted to investigate prevalence of restrictions during menstruations and perceptions of school going girls regarding such restrictions.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Present study was conducted among girl students of Chandigarh, in Northern India. Chandigarh is a highly urbanized city. A cross sectional survey was conducted among 655 unmarried adolescents aged 14-19 years as a part of detailed survey under Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), India sponsored project "Natural Mentoring and Its Impact on Health Conditions of Adolescents". Approval of Institutional Ethics Committee was granted for the project. Total 12 schools including 8 Government and 4 Private were selected. A stratified multistage random sampling was adopted to select girls within schools comprising two strata: Government and Private schools of Chandigarh. Sample included 655 girls based on 60% anticipated prevalence of menstrual problems, 90% confidence coefficient and 5% relative precision.

Study variables included socio-demographic characteristics: age, gender, literacy status of students as well as of their parents, elder/younger siblings, religion, type of family, occupation of parents and socio-economic status. Respondents were also asked about restrictions imposed during menstrual cycle and whether they think those restrictions as right. They were also asked whether they actually follow those restrictions imposed or not. Information was collected by personal interviews conducted in privacy using pretested semi-structured interview schedules. Only those unmarried girls who had already attained menarche and were

willing to participate were interviewed provided their parents also gave consents.

RESULTS

Study included 655 girls who had attained menarche at the time of the study with mean age 14.93 years. Surveyed girls represented all socio-economic classes and 92.4% were from an English-medium school and 6.9% from Hindi-medium. There were 67.9 % of the total respondents were from a government school and 32.1% were from a private school and 64.6% of all girls were having at least one problem related to menstruation. There were 438 (66.9%) girls who reported comfortable family environment followed by 84(12.8%) reporting free and harmonious family environment. Whereas, only 48(7.3%) of surveyed girls reported restrictive family environment as shown in Table-1. Reactions of respondents on restrictions imposed are also shown in this table. In spite of very low number of girls reporting restrictive family environment, there were 580(88.5%) girls who reported restrictions during menstruation. Large number of those girls facing restrictions, 420(64.1%) accepted those conditions normally and only 78 (11.9%) reacted or showed anger to follow those restrictions.

Respondents were also asked about restrictions imposed during menstrual cycle and their opinions regarding those restrictions imposed. They were also asked whether they actually follow those restrictions imposed or not. Different types of restrictions reported by respondents are listed in Table-2. The most common restriction was on worship/religious activities: 487 (74.4%) followed by avoiding food items 275(42.0%) and lifting of weight 216(33.0%). Differences of opinions between parents' views and respondents' views on these restrictions were observed in the present study. Respondents adopted more into practice the restrictions like worship/religious activity 453(69.2%) followed by restriction on avoiding food items 257(39.2%). Lifting of weight was also actually followed by 225 (34.4%) respondents. There were several other misconceptions prevalent among respondents regarding varied practices to be adopted during menstruation.

Table 1: Respondents by perceived family Environment and Reactions on menstrual restrictions.

Environment	No	Percentage
Comfortable	438	66.9
Free and harmonious	84	12.8
Uncomfortable	42	6.4
Religious	13	2.0
Social	12	1.8
Unsocial	3	.5
Restrictive	48	7.3
No response	15	2.3
Menstrual restrictions	580	88.5
Reaction (N=580)		
Accept normally	420	64.1
Become angry and react	78	11.9
Become angry but do not react	74	11.3

Any other	9	1.4
No response	74	11.3

Table 2: Adolescent girls by type of restrictions imposed, opinion on Restrictions and Practices.

Restriction Imposed	Restriction imposed		Think restriction is right		Practice/follow restriction	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Worship/religious activity	487	74.4	401	61.2	453	69.2
Entering kitchen	96	14.7	172	26.3	161	24.6
Social gathering	89	13.6	147	22.4	137	20.9
Interacting with boys	111	16.9	157	24.0	144	22.0
Touching anybody	80	12.2	138	21.1	124	18.9
Choice of clothes to be worn	181	27.6	206	31.5	209	31.9
Sleeping on bed with any body	98	15.0	157	24.0	142	21.7
Physical activity	159	24.3	201	30.7	193	29.5
Washing hairs	130	19.8	172	26.3	171	26.1
Washing cloths	90	13.7	145	22.1	139	21.2
Drying cloths	73	11.1	128	19.5	124	18.9
Taking bath	99	15.1	154	23.5	140	21.4
Lifting of weight	216	33.0	238	36.3	225	34.4
Touching food items	160	24.4	191	29.2	184	28.1
Consume some food items more	208	31.8	229	35.0	226	34.5
Avoiding some food items	275	42.0	265	40.5	257	39.2

DISCUSSION

Unmarried school going girls are prone to various restrictions during their menstrual cycles. Menstruation is linked with several misconceptions, ignorance and practices among young girls, which sometimes results into adverse reproductive health outcomes. Our previous study explored menstrual problems and their treatment seeking behavior.⁷ Present study explored restrictions faced by girls during menstruation. In spite of only 7.3% girls reporting restrictive family environment, 88.5% girls reported restrictions during menstruation may be imposed either by others or self imposed. Among girls facing restrictions, 64.1% accepted those conditions normally and only about 12% reacted or showed anger in following those restrictions. The maximum percentage of girls (74.4%) reported to have been restricted to participate in any kind of religious activities during menstruation followed by dietary restrictions and avoidance of lifting of weight as reported by 42.0% and 33.0% of the respondents. The present study also investigated the opinions of the girls regarding the restrictions. It was observed that majority of girls (69.2%) usually followed restrictions like avoiding involvement in religious activities, followed by 257 (39.2%) girls who avoided some food items during menstruation.

In our study 88.5% of girls facing restrictions during menstruation was higher as compared to 70% girls following restrictions of varied nature observed in an earlier study among Punjabi girls.¹⁵ In the present study, 88.5% girls reported restrictions during menstruation and 64.1% accepted those restrictions normally. In an earlier study 78% girls faced restrictions during menstruation and about 72% followed at least one restriction.¹⁶ The most common restriction was on worship/religious

activities faced by 74.4% girls followed by avoiding some specific food items faced by 42.0% girls as compared to the most common restriction imposed was on taking bath (50.8%) during menstruation and restriction on worship/religious activity was faced by 39.5% girls.¹⁶ In another study from Bareilly, inability to attend the religious functions was the main restriction in majority of girls.¹⁸ Restrictions imposed on worship in our study agree with findings of study conducted in East Delhi wherein restrictions in worships and in house hold activities had been found to be among 92% girls and 70% girls respectively.¹⁹ In another similar study conducted in Amritsar, 72% of the adolescent girls were reportedly restricted from going to religious places and dietary restrictions were also imposed upon 27.3% of the girls.¹⁰

Restriction on worship and entry to kitchen among urban adolescent girls was reported to be 41.5% and 24.7% respectively.²² Whereas, about 78% girls did not attend any religious occasion.¹¹ Restriction on taking bath was imposed by 15.1% girls in the present study while higher 21.4% of girls followed it, may be due to restrictions self imposed. About 51% respondents were imposed restriction on taking bath daily but only 35.2% practiced it.¹⁶

Only 1.6% girls avoided bathing during menstruation as reported among female adolescents in rural area of east Delhi.¹⁸ The practice of taking a bath during menstruation was almost universal in Sewagram study.¹² Restrictions on taking bath daily and use of shampoo were also reported by 38% and 27% girls respectively.¹³ Restriction on avoiding food items was followed by 39.2% girls against 42.0% prevalence of

restrictions on food items during menstruation. Several dietary misconceptions regarding consumption of non-vegetarian food and fruits, avoidance of milk, rice, sugar, green leafy vegetables, hot food and non-vegetarian food avoidance during menstruation as a common belief had also been reported in earlier study.^[2] Entering the kitchen was not so common in the present study unlike for the menstruating girls from rural as well as urban areas in Patiala.^[5]

In the present study, it was found out that most of the girls who faced menstruation-related restrictions were imposed; they readily practiced them while only a few opposed those restrictions. In our study only 12% girls reacted or showed anger in following the restrictions. Whereas, about 27% respondents did not react on restrictions imposed to them during menstruation as reported among girls in Allahabad.^[14]

Respondents have easily accepted restrictions like entry into kitchen, lifting of weight, touching food items etc. but they could not follow restrictions to that extent on components like social gathering, choice of clothes to be worn, physical activity, washing hairs, washing clothes and drying clothes in the open. Even some restrictions were like consuming some food items in excess, entering kitchen activities were followed to a greater extent than without imposing restrictions by their parents.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that some restrictions during menstruations are easily acceptable by girls and some of those restrictions are self-imposed. These findings show that imposing unnecessarily the rigid and undesired restrictions on respondents cannot bring fruitful results as girls are self-disciplined in following restrictions to be followed during menstruation. Imposing unnecessary undesired restrictions on adolescent girls may result in psychosocial consequences affecting their reproductive health.

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