

Culture of Silence: Understanding Psycho-social Aspects of Menstruation

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Abstract—Menstrual hygiene and its management is critical as habits are inculcated during a woman's younger years and once inculcated it sets the tone for adult life. In the Indian context poor menstrual hygiene is closely associated with cancer, health problems and gender issues. Belief in myths and taboos and perception of menstruation as 'impure' and 'polluted' interferes with socialization practices adopted by young and old women alike. The present study attempts to break this culture of silence and endeavors to start a discourse among the young women to talk about menstruation beliefs and practices and ultimately learn about hygiene and its management. The study carried out a survey on 101 young women participants aged between 17-20 years of age. Questions about information, knowledge, beliefs, taboos, restrictions, first menstrual experience, source/s of information and products was sought. Results indicate that 23% of the students did not have prior information about menstruation, and the mother-sister dyad or a friend, or the school often helped the students to have some preliminary information about menstruation as a natural process in women. The emotional consequences of menstruation and its toll on overall mood, productivity and restrictions were noted. The need for health education among the young undergraduate women cannot be underestimated.

Key words: culture of silence, menstruation, psycho-social health