

Knowledge And Practice of Menstrual Hygiene among Female Undergraduate Students at Redeemer's University Ede

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ABSTRACT

Menarche is the beginning of menstruation in the life of every girl child, and it has a significant transformation in their reproductive life as they grow up. Globally, menstrual hygiene is a major public health and social issue that needs adequate attention. Inadequate knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene and culturally restrictive practices make menstruation a challenge for women and girls. Knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene are essential to the dignity and well-being of girls and women. The objective is to review the knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State.

A questionnaire-based cross-sectional survey was conducted. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) female respondents from Redeemer's University were used for the data collection of this study. Based on the study's objectives, descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25 for the data analysis. This study found that the knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduates at Redeemer's University is inadequate. Ninety-five (95) respondents do not know the meaning of menarche. Their knowledge is adequate for 67 respondents (55.8%), while 53 respondents (44.2%) do not know about menstrual hygiene. Their practice is sufficient for 89 respondents (74.2%), while 31 respondents (25.8%) lack proper practice. This study concludes that more awareness should be created regarding the knowledge and practice of female undergraduate students in sensitization and enlightenment on menstrual hygiene for females across tertiary institutions. This could also be achieved by adding subjects of this nature into the general studies curriculum that will benefit both male and female students.

Keywords: Knowledge, Practice, Menstrual Hygiene, Menarche, Menstruation.

Word count: 261

INTRODUCTION

Menarche means the beginning of menstruation and a significant transformation that girls experience during their adolescent years (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2020). Menstruation is part of life and is normal, but it is associated with a lot of myths and misconceptions that will affect health negatively (Majeed, Sharma, Ajmera, and Dalal, 2022). The onset of menstruation is a critical period in women's lives with a significant effect on their physical, emotional, cognitive, and social life changes (Salim and Begum, 2016). Menstruation is a healthy and physiological natural sign that occurs every 21 – 35 days and lasts for two to seven days. This leads to bleeding of about 25ml – 80ml in females. Globally, menstrual hygiene is a neglected issue and is seen as a public health issue that should be addressed with all urgency (Hassan, Ghandour, Bakri, et al., 2023).

Most societies see menstruation as a taboo with lots of norms and stigma associated with it, this leads to discriminatory gender roles and cultural restrictions. The culture of silence has prevented many from receiving adequate information and education on menstruation and its related issues (Ha and Alam 2022). Statistics have it that millions of women and girls from many countries struggle to manage their monthly period because of

shame, stigma, stress, social exclusion, support, inadequate information, and lack of access to menstrual products, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools and the workplace (Plesons et al., 2021)

Across the globe, menstruation is a monthly experience among millions of women and adolescent girls (Hennegan, Brooks, Schwab, and Melendez-Torres, 2020). In recent years, menstruation has gained increased attention, especially in terms of female health and social participation, thereby canceling the history of neglect and silence. Policy and programmes are geared toward seeking to address unmet menstrual needs (Hennegan et al., 2020).

Knowledge about menstruation and menstrual hygiene is key for the dignity and well-being of girls and women. Irrespective of age, culture, and marital status, adolescents should be properly informed about their body structure in terms of sexual and reproductive health issues and how they function. When the information is not adequate, this leads to poor choices and practices, which will have long-term negative effects on their reproductive health. (Nnennaya, Atinge, Dogara, and Ubandoma, 2021).

In the global sphere, girls' school attendance and educational pursuit are affected by poor menstrual management, psychologically and physically in terms of discomfort, stress, fear of stains, headache, excessive bleeding, and dysmenorrhea (Ha and Alam 2022). Their maternal and reproductive health system suffers because of the risk of reproductive tract infections (RTI) like sexually transmitted diseases (STD), Human Papillomavirus (HPV), and affects pregnancy later in life (Salim, and Begum, 2016; Sommer, Caruso, Sahin, Calderon, Cavill, Mahon, et al, 2016). Once there is an understanding of menstrual hygiene management practices among girls and women, it informs them on strategies that will promote equitable education, gender equality, and empowerment for women, health, and their environment following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Alam, Luby, Halder, Islam, Opel, Shoab, et al. (2017).

Poor menstrual hygiene has both direct and indirect effects on SDGs 3.4.5 and 6, and the achievement of these goals is vital to the development of adolescents and the country at large (Majeed et al. 2022). With adequate knowledge and good hygienic practices during menstruation, there will be a great impact on SDGs, e.g., health, education, gender equality, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). (Nnennaya, et al, 2021).

Globally, menstruation is a public health issue that lacks proper knowledge; this is because of the culture of silence at home, in school, and places of worship. In some societies, menstruation and its related issues are prohibited to talk about (Michael et al., 2020). The societal restriction of menstrual information in females has led to social dishonour, which affects their physical and emotional state (Michael et al., 2020).

Menarche is a word that is not known to girls, which should be what they should know and understand. The knowledge of this word goes a long way to help them protect their dignity, self-worth, and self-esteem within society. In attaining proper menstrual hygiene, knowledge about menstruation plays a key role. Menstruation, a natural biological process that dignifies women and girls within society, has become a subject of shame and disgrace full of social taboos, social stigma, myths, and societal and socio-cultural restrictions.

The problem of lack of menstrual hygiene and adequate menstrual practice is what this study seeks to address. For this problem to be solved, girls and women alike must be informed about menstrual hygiene knowledge and practices, which are essential during menstruation.

For a long time, there has not been adequate dissemination of accurate information about menstruation, especially in the developing world. Menstruation has been neglected more because of the culture of silence, and our religion does not allow such to be spoken of.

According to Chandra-Mouli and Patel (2017), most girls enter puberty without knowledge about menstruation, and they have mistaken beliefs about menstruation because of their culture and religion. They lack knowledge because of inadequate information from older people who are uncomfortable discussing issues that are related to sexuality, reproduction, menstruation, and menstrual hygiene.

Inadequate knowledge about menstruation leads to a lack of understanding of the physical process of menstruation in adulthood. Lack of knowledge will increase the vulnerability of females to unhygienic practices, which has led to them having multiple infections like reproductive and urinary tract infections. Also, it leads to social dishonor among girls, which affects their physical and emotional state and will eventually lead to loneliness, school absenteeism, etc., thereby isolating them from society.

This study is limited to female students only across faculties and departments within the university, from 100 level to 500 level. Across different social contexts, menstruation has been pushed away as mere shadows. In most contexts, menstruation remains a socially stigmatized condition. According to anthropological literature (Sommer, Hirsch, Nathanson, and Parker, 2015), menarche has been traditionally celebrated by a lot of societies globally; it is seen as an important rite of passage while the menstrual blood is perceived as polluting and a taboo, not to be mentioned within the society (Sommer et al., 2015). In both low- and high-income settings, secrecy abounds about menstruation, with girls being taught to keep it a secret, especially from boys and men, but the experience can be shared with menstruating women (Sommer et al., 2015).

A lot of girls are not properly informed or prepared for menstruation; as such, they experience fear, pain, and anxiety with the onset of menstruation (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2017; Hennegan et al., 2019). Usually, mothers, female relatives, and female peers are the major sources of information when it comes to menstruation, which is most times neither adequate nor timely enough for girls to make use of (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2017).

Knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene are very important to the dignity and well-being of girls and women alike (Nnennaya et al., 2021). Girls need basic information about menstruation and menstrual hygiene that is correct, current, and complete in taking care of themselves in terms of reproductive health issues, body structure, and how it functions. This should be done irrespective of culture, age, and marital status (Nnennaya et al., 2021).

Several studies have shown that a lot of girls receive little or no information about menstruation. Poor personal hygiene and unsafe sanitary conditions have resulted in gynecological problems among adolescent girls; a lot of cases of infections have been reported because of a lack of good hygiene during menstruation (Shanbhag, Shilpa, D'Souza, Josephine, Singh, and Goud, 2012 in Nnennaya, et al., 2021).

Menstrual health management (MHM) means having access to clean absorbent materials as well as having private and safe spaces to use these materials (Rossouw and Ross, 2021). It is required for effective and adequate menstrual hygiene management that women and girls should have access to menstrual health materials and products of good quality and quantity that will help to practice good hygiene in a clean, safe, and comfortable environment (Rossouw and Ross, 2021).

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and its practices call for great concern (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2020; Hennegan and Montgomery, 2016). More than 50% of girls in LMICs have unsatisfactory MHMs, with a higher percentage in rural areas than in urban areas (Majeed et al., 2022; Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2020; Hennegan and Montgomery, 2016).

For an effective menstrual hygiene practice, it is required that there should be access to clean absorbents and facilities for changing, cleaning, and proper disposal of absorbents used during menstruation (Majeed et al. 2022). There can be an increase in the risk of developing reproductive tract infections when hygiene-related practices are not properly followed during menstruation.

Knowledge about menstruation plays an important role in achieving proper menstrual hygiene management (Michael et al., 2020). A lot of girls are not properly informed or prepared for menstruation; as such, they experience fear, pain, and anxiety with the onset of menstruation (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2017; Hennegan et al., 2019). Usually, mothers, female relatives, and female peers are the major sources of information when it comes to menstruation, which is most times neither adequate nor timely enough for girls to make use of (Chandra-Mouli and Patel, 2017).

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The purpose of this study is to create more awareness of the knowledge of menstruation among female undergraduate students and to reduce the psychosocial effect that menstruation has on female undergraduate students. As well as create more awareness of menstrual hygiene practice by using clean menstrual hygiene materials and proper disposal of the absorbents to avoid the breakout of diseases within the society. This study will assess the knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene practices among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University and proffer solutions to the identified problems. The results will be useful in planning programs that will improve the knowledge and practice of good menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

1. What is the knowledge of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University?
2. How do female undergraduate students practice menstrual hygiene at Redeemer's University?

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate the knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the knowledge of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University.
2. Know the practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University.

METHODS

Study design

This research was carried out at Redeemer's University in Ede, Osun State. This research employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to assess the knowledge and practices of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University in Ede, Osun State.

Study Location: Redeemer's University (RUN) Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Techniques:

A multistage sampling strategy was employed for this study. This research involved students from all academic levels (100 to 500) across diverse faculties and departments. One hundred and twenty (120) female undergraduate students were selected for this research via a convenience selection method, while the questionnaire was administered via Google Forms. Only female undergraduate students who provided data and exhibited sufficient patience to respond to all items participated in the research.

Research Instruments: A structured questionnaire was used for this study.

Methods of Data Collection: For this study, the data collection methods include a Google Forms questionnaire.

Data Analysis:

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 software was used for the analysis of the data. Data generated for the study were examined by descriptive statistical approaches such as Frequency count (F), Percentage (%), Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), and Chi-Square (X^2) using tables to express derived conclusions. The factors were not actively modified because they cut across multiple levels of study as well as numerous disciplines. The data was obtained within a specific time.

Thematic Discussion of Findings

Frequency Distribution Showing Respondents' Socio-demographic Factors

Factors	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Age	16 - 18 years	62	51.7
	19 - 21 years	45	37.5
	22 - 24 years	9	7.5
	25 - 27 years	3	2.5
	28 years and above	1	0.8
	Total	120	100.0
Religion	Christianity	116	96.7
	Islam	4	3.3
	Total	120	100.0
Ethnic Group	Hausa	1	.8
	Igbo	14	11.7
	Yoruba	85	70.8
	Others	20	16.7
	Total	120	100.0
Family Type	Monogamous	116	96.7
	Polygamous	4	3.3
	Total	120	100.0
Academic Level	100 level	35	29.2
	200 level	50	41.7
	300 level	21	17.5
	400 level	10	8.3
	500 level	4	3.3

	Total	120	100.0
Father's Educational Status	Primary	3	2.5
	Secondary	3	2.5
	Tertiary	41	34.2
	Postgraduate	73	60.8
	Total	120	100.0
Mother's Educational Status	Primary	1	.8
	Secondary	8	6.7
	Tertiary	40	33.3
	Postgraduate	71	59.2
	Total	120	100.0
Who do you live with?	Both parents	101	84.2
	Father	3	2.5
	Mother	14	11.7
	Others	2	1.7
	Total	120	100.0

According to age, there are more female undergraduates in the age group of 16 – 18: sixty-two (62) students (51.7%). Forty-five (45) female undergraduates are 19 - 21 years old (37.5%). Nine (9) female undergraduates are 22 - 24 years old (7.5%). Three (3) female undergraduates who are between the ages of 25 - 27 years old (2.5%). Finally, one female undergraduate is in the age group of 28 years old and above (0.8%).

Concerning religion, this study suggests that one hundred and sixteen (116) female undergraduates are Christians (96.7%), while just four (4) female undergraduates are Muslims (3.3%). This may be a result of the university being a Christian-owned institution.

The family type aligns with religion, with one hundred and sixteen (116) female undergraduates who are from monogamous households (96.7%), whereas only four (4) female undergraduates are from polygamous homes (3.3%).

One hundred and one (101) female undergraduates live with both parents (84.2%), three (3) female undergraduate students live with their father (2.5%), fourteen (14) female undergraduate students live with their mother (11.7%) and two (2) female undergraduate students live with others (1.7%).

Research Question One

What is the knowledge of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University?

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation Showing the Knowledge of Menstrual Hygiene among Undergraduates

Tested Factors	N	Mean	SD	Poor	Adequate
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				F	%	F	%
Knowledge of Menstrual Hygiene	120	3.58	.97	53	44.2	67	55.8

The table above shows the knowledge of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University; their knowledge is adequate, having 67 respondents with 55.8%. On the other hand, 53 respondents, 44.2%, are quite high, so it shows that the knowledge of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University is inadequate.

Research Question Two

How do female undergraduate students practice menstrual hygiene at Redeemer’s University?

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation Showing the Practices of Menstrual Hygiene among Undergraduates

Tested Factors	N	Mean	SD	Poor		Adequate	
				F	%	F	%
Practice of Menstrual Hygiene	120	13.33	1.37	31	25.8	89	74.2

The table above shows the practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University; their practice is adequate, having 89 respondents with 74.2%. On the other hand, 31 respondents, 25.8%, are quite high, so it shows that the practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University is inadequate.

FINDINGS

From this study, it was discovered that female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University do not have adequate knowledge about menstruation. This is following the study of Kuhlmann, Henry, and Wall (2017), who reported that girls did not have adequate knowledge about menstruation because they lacked adequate information before the onset of menarche. In India, a study was carried out by Majeed et al. in 2022, and the report has it that 70% of girls had not heard about the word menarche before the onset of menstruation.

Sources of information about menstruation at Redeemer’s University were family members, which was the same as the study of Nnennaya et al. in 2021, whose sources of information were obtained from mothers, other female family members, and female peers. The study by Chandra-Mouli and Patel in 2017 reported that mothers and family members were primary sources of information for menstruating girls. Teachers were not involved in helping girls in terms of good hygienic practice because of the culture of silence, which in turn affected their hygienic practices as well as their health-seeking behaviours.

According to Majeed et al., in 2022, a lot of studies were conducted on menstruation from different parts of the world, including sub-Saharan African countries, assessing menstrual hygiene practices, menstrual knowledge, menstrual experiences, menstrual feelings, and attitudes about menstruation.

From this study, it was discovered that female undergraduate students at Redeemer’s University do not have adequate menstrual hygiene practices, this supports the study of Muralidharan, Patil, and Patnaik, in 2015, conducted in Southeast Nigeria, which found that about 44% girls had no knowledge on menstruation which led to inadequate menstrual experiences and very poor menstrual hygiene practices.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the knowledge and practice of menstrual hygiene among female undergraduate students at Redeemer's University are inadequate. This is a great challenge to the university community and society. It must be improved upon to meet global best practices. This can be taken to be a representation of the society in which we live.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the following to the management of Redeemer's University:

1. The management should see to it that more awareness is created among female undergraduate students to have a piece of good and adequate knowledge about menstruation and its related issues. This can be done by adding courses that will create this avenue for both male and female students within the institution.
2. The institution should have a friendly environment where female students can have proper menstrual hygiene practices. This will safeguard their health and make the environment safe for all and sundry.
3. There should be good and functional facilities for female undergraduate students for them to practice adequate menstrual hygiene management within the university community.

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