



AWARENESS, PERCEPTION AND ACCEPTABILITY OF MENSTRUAL CUPS AS AN ALTERNATIVE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT AMONG COLLEGE TEACHERS OF PERAMBALUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Millions of women globally experience menstruation every month. It is normal biological process. The start of menstruation indicates the start of the reproductive years in female life. The menstrual cup is a recently developed alternative to sanitary napkins. These cups are made from higher level medical grade silicone, latex, rubber, or elastomer and when inserted inside the vaginal canal and are capable of collecting menstrual flow.

Objective: To assess the level of awareness, perception and acceptability of menstrual cups and also their hygiene among Women in the reproductive age.

Material and methods: A cross sectional study was conducted at a private college, with a study population about 245. The study Participants were women aged 18-45years. Women who attained menopause were excluded in the study.

Results: The majority of study participants belonged to 31 to 40 years of age (43.5%). Among participants 89.4% was using sanitary pads. Only about 37.3% of the study population knew about menstrual cups. Most (42.7%) of them gathered information about menstrual cups from mass media/Internet. 35.7% of them knew that menstrual cups were safe. About 22.1% of them correctly knew that menstrual cups can be emptied in 6 to 12 hours. A large proportion 64.2% knew that boiling was the proper method of sterilization of menstrual cups.

Conclusion: The stigma around menstruation is still prevalent in India. Majority of them are sticking with sanitary pads, still many lacks on knowledge in solid waste disposal. Green menstruation, sustainable menstruation, looking after our planet, so promoting menstrual cup usage is the need of the hour. Awareness programs should be conducted by the Government and free menstrual cups should be distributed.

Keywords: Menstrual cups, Awareness, Sanitarynapkins.

INTRODUCTION



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Millions of women globally experience menstruation every month. It is normal biological process. The start of menstruation indicates the start of the reproductive years in female life. It often marks the transition of a child to the full-grown adult woman in society. Though it is the most common biological process, in lower and middle-income countries, because of social issues and lack of guidance maximum of the girl's experience fear, confusion, shame, and discomfort while they try to be accustomed to their monthly period.[1]

One of the big barriers faced especially by the rural areas girls are the menstrual hygiene and practices which comes along with social, cultural, and religious restrictions. In Indian society, menstruation still remains to be a taboo and is considered unclean, dirty and impure. The menstrual fluid is also believed to be misused for black magic and the women are instructed to wash the menstrual cloth only at night when everyone is asleep.[2] Women face restrictions on cooking, work activities, sexual intercourse, bathing worshipping and from taking certain foods like pickle.[4]

Studies have pointed that in India, menstrual health management should be strengthened by providing proper education about the MHH items, spreading awareness about the usage of hygienic absorbents and their disposal, and managing the menstrual flow effectively and hygienically.[3] The United Nations defines adequate menstrual hygiene management as “women and adolescent girls using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood the can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials”.[1]

It is also reported that in India, 62% of the young women in the age group of 15-24 years still use clothes for their menstrual protection. Approximately, 43% to 88% of the women still wash their cotton cloths and reuse them instead of using disposable pads.[5]

According to the recently released fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (2019- 21), the use of unhygienic menstrual methods of protection among women (age15-24years) is almost three times that of their urban counterparts. The survey has also found that women in the highest wealth quintile are almost twice as likely to use hygienic methods of menstrual protection as compared to women from the lowest wealth quintile.[6] In rural areas maintenance of menstrual hygiene is, therefore, is an important yet unrecognized issue. It was reported previously that menstrual protection in these areas mostly comprises locally prepared napkins, and sanitary napkins.[7]

The menstrual cup is a recently developed alternative to sanitary napkins. These cups are made from higher level medical grade silicone, latex, rubber, or elastomer and when inserted inside the vaginal canal and are capable of collecting menstrual flow. They can be emptied and reinserted and they are required to be boiled after each cycle.[8]

These cups were first patented in the USA and presently almost 100 brands are available globally that marketed this product. Previously in the few of the studies conducted in low and middle-income

countries have shown that among school girls menstrual cups have received positive response [9,10] These studies have shown a potential option of these cups in reproductive women. However, in India the feasibility and safety of menstrual cups among reproductive women are scarce. Hence, in this present study, the knowledge, practices, and attitudes of menstrual cups among reproductive age group women will be evaluated. The average duration of menstruation is 28days-30 days, but may vary due to various factors and is called the female monthly sexual cycle. Irregular cycles are linked to decrease fertility.[16]

Menstruation is considered to be annoyance, pain, stress and a lack of hygiene, safety and health care. Clothes, sanitary pads, tampons and menstrual cups are some of the products used to absorb menstrual blood. Midwifery group of McGlasson and Perkins patented a bullet shaped menstrual cup. [17-20]. It is reported that females ages 12-15years, it was reported that 39% stated they had felt prepared for menarche but negative feelings dominated over positive feelings.[11].In China the main symptoms related to menses were cramps, irritation, abdominal pain before and during menstruation, fatigue, headaches, backaches before and during menstruation, nausea, weakness, spasm, abdominal discomfort, and irregularity.[13] It has been reported from media,26.7% from family,20.8% from friends, and 14.2% from media personnel[14] The Knowledge about menstrual cup and its usage was evaluated among medical students, it was found that 92.7% felt it was a safe device and 84.13% said virgins can use it.[15] . The main aim of this study is to assess the level of awareness, perception and acceptability of menstrual cups and also their hygiene among Women in the reproductive age.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

A cross sectional study was conducted in Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan Engineering College, Perambalur for a period of four months. About 245 women with reproductive age of 18-45 years have been included in the study. The study was conducted in the class room of the college. An informed consent was taken from the each participants before start of the study. Women who attained menopause and did not give a consent for the study have been excluded from the study. The participants were given a pre designed self-administered questionnaire. Fifteen minutes time was given to complete it. All the queries were addressed immediately and completion of questionnaire was checked on the same day. Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Committee of Human Subjects (IRCHS). Confidentiality was ensured throughout the

study. Pilot study was done in 10% of the study population. The data was cleaned, coded and entered in Epi info version 7. Data was entered into Microsoft excel sheet and analyzed into descriptive statistics and analysis was carried out by using SPSS version 16. Baseline data has

been expressed as Mean and Standard Deviation for continuous variable and proportion for categorical variable. Data Proportion by using Chi square test, t test, correlation and multiple regression analysis was done.

RESULTS

Table 1: Age Distribution of the Study Population:

Age (yrs)	Frequency	Percentage
< 30	100	39.2%
31 – 40	111	43.5%
41 – 50	36	14.1%
>50	8	3.2%

From the above table 1, Majority of the study participants belonged to 31 to 40 years of age (43.5%). Only 17.3% of participants were aged above 40 yrs.

Table 2: Marital and Menstrual Characteristics of Study Participants (N=255)

Marital & Menstrual characteristics		Frequency (n=255)	Percentage
Marital status	Married	204	80%
	Single	51	20%
Number of children(n=204)	Nil	11	5.4%
	1 living child	62	30.4%
	2 living children	122	59.8%
	≥3 living children	9	4.4%
Emotional state at menarche	Confused	52	20.4%
	Embarrassed	33	13%
	Afraid	53	20.8%
	Sad	71	27.8%
	Happy	27	10.6%
	Combination of multiple emotions	19	7.4%
Product used during menarche	Menstrual cup	7	2.7%
	Sanitary pad/Tampon	187	73.3%
	Washable cloth pad	56	22%
	Combination of 2 or More	5	2%
Blood flow during menstruation	Heavy	40	15.7%
	Medium	195	76.5%
	Light	20	7.8%
Premenstrual Syndrome before menstruation	Yes	152	59.6%
	No	103	40.4%

From above table 2, Most of the study participants (80%) were married. A large proportion of the study population had at least 2 living children (59.8%). Regarding the mental and emotional state during the first menstrual period, most of the participants revealed it to be a sad feeling (27.8%) followed by a confused (20.4%) and an afraid state (20.8%) with those feeling happy the least (11%). On questioning

regarding the products used during menstruation, most (89.4%) of them said they used sanitary pads. About the menstrual characteristics, a major (76.5%) share of them had medium blood flow and loss. While enquiring about the incidence of premenstrual syndrome, almost 60% experienced it before menstruation.

Table 3: Knowledge Regarding Menstruation among Study Participants

Knowledge regarding menstruation		Frequency (n=255)	Percentage
Knowledge about normal duration of menstrual cycle	Yes	243	95.3%
	No	12	4.7%
Changing sanitary materials before Bedtime	Yes	243	95.3%
	No	12	4.7%
Source of information on sanitary material at menarche	Mother, Sister/Family member	147	57.6%
	Friends & Relatives	68	26.7%
	Health personnel	21	8.2%
	Mass media/Internet	10	4%
	Teacher	9	3.5%
Knowledge about the cause of menstruation	Natural phenomenon	175	69%
	Unique to female	45	17.6%
	Lifelong problem	13	5%
	Curse of God	10	4%
	Sign of conception	12	4.4%
Restrictions faced during menstruation	Abstain from entering Home	24	9.4%
	Abstain from touching Others	37	14.5%
	Abstain from entering kitchen	5	2%
	Abstain from religious activities	129	50.6%
	Not permitted to go to work	20	7.8%
	Multiple restrictions	40	15.7%
Mode of disposal of sanitary product	Burning	58	22.7%
	Burying	12	4.7%
	Dustbin	143	56.1%
	Flushing in toilet	42	16.5%
Cleaning of private parts during menstruation	None	3	1.2%
	Only water	84	32.9%
	Soap and water	138	54.1%
	Vaginal washes	30	11.8%
Physician consultation during menstrual cramps	Yes	46	18%
	No	209	82%

About 95.3% of them knew that sanitary material should be changed before bed time. Almost half of study population (58%) responded that information about general menstrual practices was from Mother, sister and other family members. About 69% of the study participants knew that Menstruation is a natural phenomenon whereas 4% of them still believe it as a curse from God. All the participants faced

restrictions during periods in some form or another with abstinence from religious activities being the maximum. Almost 56% of them said that they disposed the sanitary material in dustbin with only 22.7% of them going for Burning. Most of them knew that soap and water should be used for cleaning private parts during menstruation. 95.3% had adequate knowledge about the duration of menstrual cycle.

Table 4: Knowledge Regarding Menstrual Cups

Knowledge regarding menstrual cups		Frequency (n=255)	Percentage
Knowledge about Menstrual cup	Yes	95	37.3%
	No	160	62.7%

Source of information regarding menstrual cup	Mother, Sister/Family member	30	11.8%
	Friends & Relatives	66	25.9%
	Health personnel	32	12.5%
	Mass media/Internet	109	42.7%
	Teacher	18	7.1%
Knowledge about safety of menstrual cup	Yes	91	35.7%
	No	58	22.7%
	Don't know	106	41.6%
Knowledge about Mechanism of action of menstrual cup	Absorption	14	14.7%
	Collection	67	70.6%
	No idea	14	14.7%
Knowledge about the raw material for Menstrual cup	Latex	2	2.1%
	Rubber	10	10.5%
	Silicon	48	50.5%
	No idea	35	36.9%
Knowledge about frequency of emptying Menstrual cup	3 to 6 hours	45	47.4%
	6 to 12 hours	21	22.1%
	No idea	29	30.5%
Knowledge about sterilization of Menstrual cup	Boiling water	61	64.2%
	Running water	15	15.8%
	Microwave	3	3.1%
	No idea	16	16.9%

Only about 37.3% of the study population knew about menstrual cups. Most (42.7%) of them gathered information about menstrual cups from mass media/Internet. 35.7% of them knew that menstrual cups were safe. Regarding raw material, 51% of them correctly knew that

silicon was the raw material. About 22.1% of them correctly knew that menstrual cups can be emptied in 6 to 12 hours. A large proportion 64.2% knew that boiling was the proper method of sterilization of menstrual cups.

FIGURE 1:KNOWLEDGE LEVELS

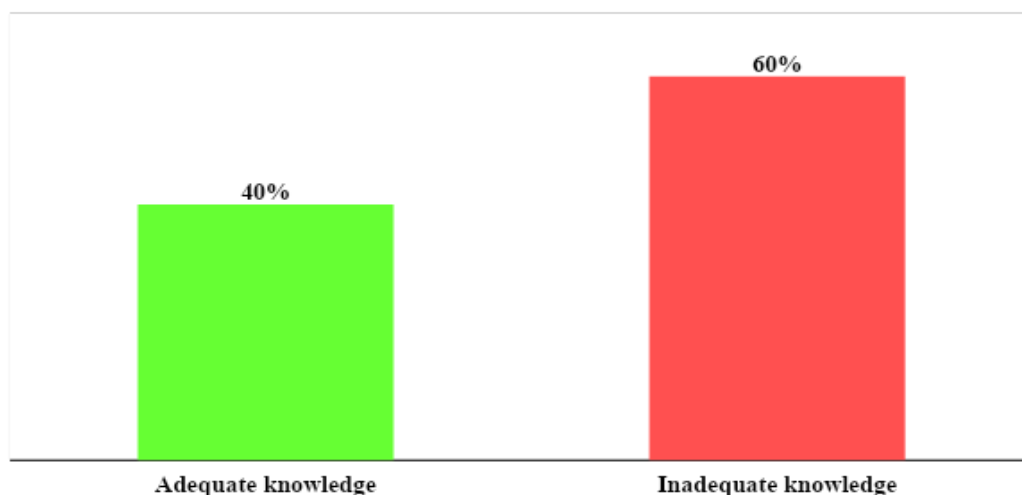


Table 5: Knowledge levels regarding menstrual cups:

Knowledge levels (Total score=6)	Percentage
Adequate knowledge (score>3)	40%
Inadequate knowledge (score ≤ 3)	60%

From above table 3, scores were given to various parameters to assess the overall

knowledge levels of the study participants regarding menstrual cups. The total score was 6 and a score > 3 was considered to be adequate.

Based on the above scoring system, only 40% of the participants had adequate knowledge regarding menstrual cups.

Table 6: Attitude Regarding Menstruation Practices and Menstrual Cups

Characteristics		Frequency (n=255)	Percentage
Applying restriction to their daughters regarding menstrual practices/taboo	Yes	64	25.1%
	No	191	74.9%
Usage of menstrual cup if provided at free of cost by Govt	Yes	192	75.3%
	No	63	24.7%
Recommend to others	Yes	165	64.7%
	No	90	35.3%
Recommend to others for practice	Yes	11	64.7%
	No	6	35.3%

From table 6, It is understood that 75% of them had a positive attitude regarding non application of restrictions in further generations and would use if it

is in free of cost. Nearly 65 % of the women using menstrual cups.

Table 7: Attitude Levels Regarding Menstrual Cups:

Attitude levels (Total score=4)	Percentage
Positive attitude (score>2)	74%
Negative attitude (score ≤ 2)	26%

Scores in the above table 7, that the score of 4 was obtained from both Positive and negative attitude. Based on the above scoring system, a large proportion of the participants (74%) of

them had a positive attitude towards usage of menstrual cups irrespective of poor knowledge levels.

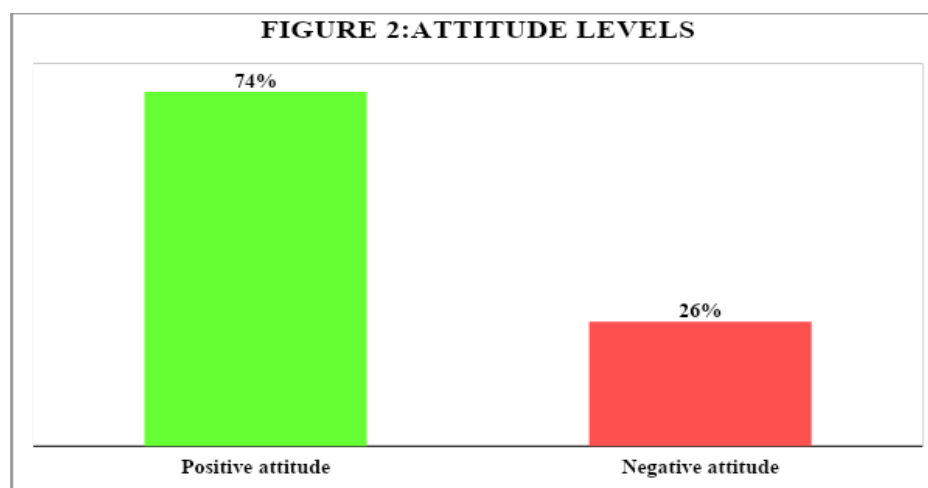


Table 8: Practice Regarding Menstrual Cups

Characteristics		Frequency (n=255)	Percentage
Currently using menstrual cup	Yes	17	6.7%
	No	238	93.3%
Mode of procuring menstrual cup (n=17)	Friend	5	29.4%
	Medical shop	10	58.9%

	Online purchase	2	11.7%
Comfort with menstrual cup(n=17)	Yes	9	53%
	No	8	47%
Side effects of menstrual cup	Allergies	8	47%
	Leakage	2	11.8%
	None	7	41.2%

Only 7% of the entire participants were currently using menstrual cups. Most of them using it, procured it from medical shop (59%). 53% of them in current practice say that it was

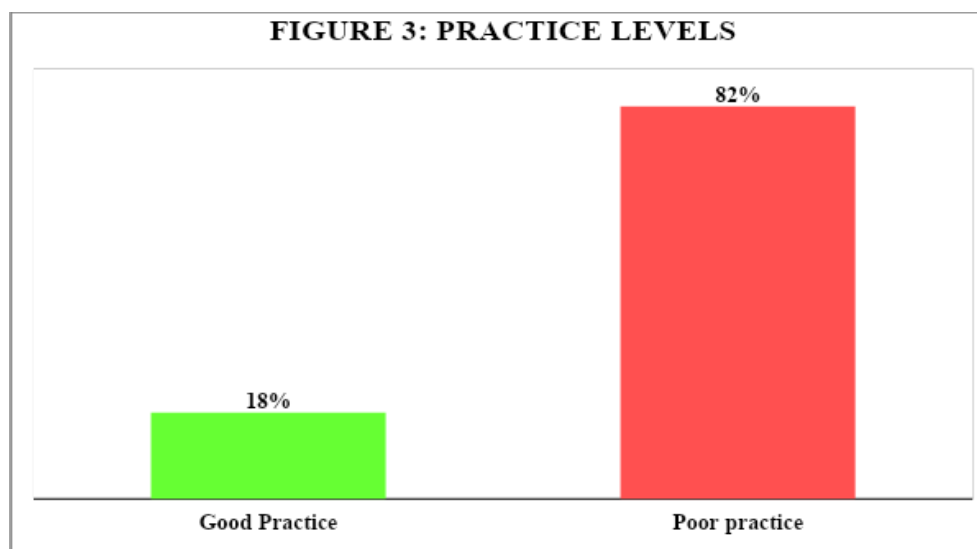
comfortable. Allergies were the major side effects recorded in about 47% of the study participants.

Table 9: Practice Levels Regarding Menstrual Cups:

Practice levels (Total score=4)	Percentage
Good practice (score>2)	18%
Poor practice (score ≤ 2)	82%

From table 9, scores were given to various parameters to assess the overall practice levels of the study participants regarding menstrual cups. The total score was 4 and a score > 2 was

considered to be adequate. Based on the above scoring system, only **18%** were practicing usage of menstrual cups among who had adequate knowledge.



DISCUSSIONS

When women were enquired about mental and emotional state during the menarche, most of them revealed it to be sad, followed by a confused state and least feeling happy. This is similar to a previous study done by M.L.Marvan and M. Molina- Abolnik, the participants scored highest on negative feelings and secrecy rather than on positive feelings regarding menstrual

attitudes. Regarding the products used during their menstrual period, most (73.3%) of them said they used sanitary pads. This finding is similar to the finding of the study by Meghana S and Gomathy E. In this study the authors reported that most of the participants used sanitary napkins for maintenance of menstrual hygiene. This finding was also similar to the previous Indian study findings. Majority of the

participants in this study had medium blood flow and loss. While enquiring about the incidence of premenstrual syndrome, almost 60% experienced it before menstruation. This is in contrast to the study done by Asem Alkhatib et al., wherein only 18.49% of participants encountered menstrual symptoms.

A large population knew about hygiene protection with 95.3% changing their pads regularly and changing before bed time. Most of them knew only soap and water should be used for cleaning private parts during menstruation. The knowledge about general menstrual practices came from mother, sister and relatives. This is in contrast with the study done by Chloe et al., with majority saying they were not informed about hygiene protection and only 13.6% having discussed the subject with a health professional. 75% of them had a positive attitude regarding non application of restrictions in further generations. This is similar to the study done in Nepal, wherein three out of four women reported experiencing high menstrual restrictions Shamsudeen Mohammed and Roderick Emil Larsen- Reindorf's study on menstrual knowledge, socio-cultural restrictions, and barriers to menstrual hygiene management in Ghana also reported that girls were not allowed to prepare some local dishes and forbidden from participating in religious activities during the period of menstruation. When enquiring about menstrual waste disposal techniques used by the participants, almost 56% of them said they disposed the sanitary material in dustbin, 16.5% of them said they flush in toilet, 22.7% said they burn and only 4.7% of them went to bury. This is similar to the findings in a study done by R Kaur et al. on menstrual hygiene, management, and waste disposal.

This study revealed that only 37.3% of the study population knew about menstrual cups. This is in contrast to the study done by Manorama Eti et al., wherein 84.13% knew about menstrual cups. Meghana S and Gomathy E reported that, 80% of the study participants were aware of the menstrual cup and 36.7% got information from media. 62.5% reported that they think the menstrual cup is a safe device. Similar to this finding, the present study reported that 35.7% of them knew that menstrual cups were safe. Interestingly, 51% of them correctly knew that silicon was the raw material. 22.1% of them correctly knew that menstrual cups can be emptied in 6 to 12 hours. A large proportion 64.2% knew that boiling was the proper mode of sterilization of menstrual cups. This is contrast with a previous finding which reported 53.3% chose washing with water to be the mode of

sterilization.

Knowledge levels regarding menstrual cups were assessed. Based on the questionnaire, scores were given to various parameters to assess the overall knowledge. In a previous study conducted by Sweatha et al., it was reported that 82% of the participants have good knowledge about menstrual cups. In contrast the present study reported only 40% of the participants had adequate knowledge regarding menstrual cups. Other studies conducted, which reported low percentage of the study population having good knowledge about menstrual cups.

Aishwarya and Tharani et al; also reported similar findings, wherein 75% of them had a positive attitude that they would use and suggest it to others if these were given at free of cost. However, Meghana S et al., reported that the acceptability of menstrual cup among the study participants was low. In the current study, nearly 65% of the women using menstrual cups currently also had a positive attitude in recommending it to others. Based on the questionnaire, attitude regarding the menstrual cups were assessed. A large proportion of the participants (74%) of them had a positive attitude towards usage of menstrual cups irrespective of poor knowledge levels. Only 7% of the entire participants were currently using menstrual cups.

The current study recorded 53% of them using menstrual cups say that it was comfortable. Allergies were major concern. Based on practice levels regarding menstrual cups, only 18% were practicing usage of menstrual cups among who had adequate knowledge. Sanitary pads and tampons need to be changed every four hours. With menstrual cups, we can go up to 12 hours without having to empty it. Our study revealed that there is lack of knowledge about menstrual cups among the study population but the willingness to use menstrual cups were found to be high.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study awareness, perceptions, knowledge and practices of the menstrual cup among teaching faculties were evaluated in detail. The stigma around menstruation is still prevalent in India. Despite the limitation of knowledge, the acceptance is well appreciated. A huge gap can be seen between willingness to use and actual use. Ignorance, prejudice, costs and safety impedes women from testing the full range of menstrual products available. The majority of the population is sticking with sanitary pads, because old habits are hard to break. India is a developing country and still lacks proper solid

waste management. So, nowadays we are talking about green menstruation, sustainable menstruation, looking after our planet, so promoting menstrual cup usage is the need of the hour. Awareness programs should be conducted by the Government and free menstrual cups should be distributed.

Declarations:

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