

Menstrual Hygiene Management Among Women And Adolescent Girls In Ladakh

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Abstract

Menstrual hygiene is defined as the principle of maintaining and keeping our body clean during menstrual flow. The basic requirement for keeping ourselves clean requires appropriate sanitary pads, clothes, soakage materials, water, soap and toilet facilities with privacy. Menstrual hygiene management is one of the most important aspect of hygiene for women and adolescent girls in their life. In today's world the need of the hour is to give utmost importance to the health and hygiene of an individual. But the fact is despite being an important aspect which concerns women and girls in menstruating group. We often see that it has not been addressed as much as it should be. Menstrual hygiene is often neglected and not much has been talked about. The time has come to raise awareness and make enough campaign in the remote and far flung areas, so that the health and hygiene improves. The paper will bring forth the study as to why menstrual hygiene is important and what steps one should take to lead a healthy life.

Key Words: Menstrual Hygiene, Menstrual flow, Women, Adolescent girls.

Introduction

Ladakh is situated in the northernmost part of India. In the year 2019 it was given the status of Union Territory. Leh is the capital of Ladakh. Ladakh has two districts i.e. Leh and Kargil. The majority of people living here is Buddhist and Muslim. Being a cold desert, in winter the temperature goes below -22 degree Celsius (Approx.). The population of Ladakh as per Censes 2011 is 2.73 Lakhs (Censes, 2011).

The word menstruation is new to this place. Until recent years the people of Ladakh did not know the exact meaning of this word. People refer to this word in our own language with different names apart from euphemism, lie down etc. According to The New English -Tibetan Dictionary it refers to as Da-Tsan as (Da means month, Tsan means peculiar characteristics of separate parts of the body like marks). So basically, Da-Tsan is biological breakdown of ova when sperm doesn't come in contact with the ova and it fails to fertilize. So menstrual blood that is coming out of unfertilized egg as well as the endometrium lining that is on the women's uterus. So, when both of them break it comes out in the form of periods or which we call Da-Tsan in Ladakhi. And interestingly we can say that it is the funeral of the uterus because one says that the uterus cries and bleeds blood.

The menstrual blood flows in a silent way out of the body yet it is hated the most in a society because of certain taboos associated with or related to women's body and I strongly support Dr. Sanjay Prasad Pandey who says 'freedom should be provided to women to take their own decision'. This decision can be related to women's body as

well. Women's body in social, religion and cultural terms is looked upon as unhygienic or dirty that's why certain reservations are kept. For example we are not given entries and forbidden to enter certain sections of monasteries because it is considered to be impure and the smell might affect the sanctity around. Women are also not allowed to touch certain things during the menstrual phase. So, to raise awareness regarding the menstruation in particular and women hygiene in general is the need of the hour in any society irrespective of caste, creed and color.

When you have certain prejudice about things then with that you start prejudicing certain things along with it. So, when you don't talk of women body then menstruation becomes a taboo topic and shame is covered in it, so now we need to uncover it slowly. In that process when you don't talk about it and do not normalize it then what happens is that to some things which are prejudiced by the society and consequently women start looking down upon their own bodies, then you feel more dirtier and slowly you don't care about it. So, the impact of that will be being a woman our private parts are very sensitive and because of this stigmatization of calling it dirty, not talking about it we feel that it's better not to talk about it anymore and not even share or discuss on this issue which is very important. There is a saying in Ladakhi if you show a soiled pad to a man then his willpower is lowered or becomes less, I feel it's illogical and if this is truth then we all will be having low willpower.

Talking about menstruation is also important for health-related issues like polycystic ovary syndrome (Park et al.,2021), cysts and also to some extent cervical cancer (Harris et al.,2017). Also because of shame, poor talking, and no discussion on the topic, many problems seem to arise. No two bodies are the same, so when you don't talk about it even issues related to periods like mood swings, period cramps, body ache, headache etc.is looked down saying that it is just an excuse or something normal. So, with this what happens is that you are demeaning the validity of the issues the woman or the girl is having. Therefore, it becomes important to raise this issue and talk about it. In terms of data it is said that all over India only 64% of women have access to sanitary napkins, which means 36% do not have access to menstrual pads even today (Athar, 2022). So, one might wonder then if that much of less awareness is there that's very low, then what about the women who have come before us like our mothers and grandmothers. So, when I talked to an old woman in Leh a few days back, she told me that she is hearing about sanitary napkins for the first time and also said the people were not in favor of using pads and they were not fond of all this new innovation. The important part was they were not even aware of how to use and deal with it. They just let the blood flow on their own by sitting for a long time at one place or sometimes use ragged clothes and burned it later on. Earlier in Ladakh the people were poor and not much facilities were available so only few privileged classes have pants called chakstan or kangtse (these are the pants usually wear under our traditional dress like gown) in Ladakh. Mostly people did not have chakstan or kangtse. So those who had chakstan or kangtse they let it flow all over and then wash it. These are some home remedies people use to do earlier but still it is prevalent in some remote parts of the region and mostly the older generations and are not use to the modern available things in the market.

Another important thing is that one of the factors associated with drop outs of girls in schools is because there are no facilities in college and schools for menstrual hygiene and some students do not afford to buy sanitary pads and even if they do there is no proper place to dispose the soiled pads and, in some institutions, there is no proper toilets facilities to change the pads and no water facilities. So, in terms of data all over India, in order to manage all this there are several methods and sanitary napkins are just one of the methods not the best one for sure because only 64% of women have access to menstrual pads that means other 36% are using saw dust, socks, old rags of clothes, think of worst things women are using it (Athar, 2022). So, what are the options in a way to manage menstrual periods.

Pads need not be always fancy white looking and perfume smelling pads from the market. Actually, private parts have a good self-producing bacterium, so when we use perfumed products to wash our private parts it means that we ourselves are depriving of good bacteria from our body parts. So, lot need to be pondered upon before using these stuffs which we can easily buy from the market. So, what I mean to say is that one can have washable pads- and those available in the markets locally made by self-help women groups and NGO'S. Only thing is that we should know how to use it and when to change, wash it and dry in the sun. Economically it is good because once we buy cloth we can reuse it again for sometimes. And no plastic is used to make clothes and its environment friendly too. It's biodegradable too.

In conclusion, I would like to say that whatever we use whether it's cloth, sanitary pads, menstrual cups, tampons, etc. it should be clean, environmentally friendly, and affordable to all sections of society. In Ladakh, recently

schools have started distributing sanitary pads for students and it is a huge step in removing the taboo associated with periods.

Finally, I would like to say waste management should be considered while dealing with sanitary pads and raise awareness about menstrual hygiene as much as one can.

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