

# STATUS OF MENSTRUAL AWARENESS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY: AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY

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## Abstract

*Menstruation is a vital transition process in women from puberty to menopause, and it has an association with both the physiological and psychological maturity. Menarche is a momentous transitory developmental journey of an adolescent girl. Naturally Adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability have less awareness to handle such period and will feel difficult to follow the healthy management practices taught to them. Thus, the current study focuses on study the status of menstrual awareness that exist among adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability. Normative survey method was adopted to identify 175 samples studying in special schools and inclusive schools of Madurai, Sivakasi and Trichirapalli Districts, Tamil Nadu. Data collection from the sample identified was done through self-developed and validated questionnaire. Descriptive analysis of the data gathered was carried out through percentage analysis and correlation. Findings of the study highlighted the necessity to create awareness about menstruation and its process which includes menstrual health management among Adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability.*

**Keywords:** *Menstrual Awareness, Adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability*

## Introduction

Adolescence is a transition period where gradually child transforms to become an adult. An individual undergoes many changes in the physiological and emotional areas such as bodily changes, moods swings and so on when puberty begins. Children with intellectual disability as like other adolescent girls get their first menstruation when they are about 12 to 13 years of age and go through same changes during their menarche. Adolescent girls with intellectual disability

experience menarche differently and have to meet out additional challenges than other adolescent girls. Coping up with menstruation and its related practices depends on many things depending on the level of disability which includes:

- Recognizing the occurrence of period
- Access to menstrual hygiene products and usage
- Maintaining personal hygiene
- Washing and cleaning

### **An Overview on Menstruation**

Menstruation is a vital transition process in women from puberty to menopause, and it has an association with both the physiological and psychological maturity. Adolescence spanning from about 12 years to 18 years, is crucial for reproductive maturity among both males and females. Universally, an approximate of 52% of the women population representing 26% of the total population belong to reproductive age. Menarche is a momentous transitory developmental journey of an adolescent girl. Reddy et al (2005) revealed that about 84.7% of girls attain puberty and their mean age of attaining puberty was observed to be 13 years. The knowledge of menses was found among 13.8% of girls while 24.5% of girls know the process of menstruation. During their period 32% of girls recorded that they take bath once in a day and 66.4% of girls responded that that they take bath two times in a day. 83.2% of girls use warm water for bathing while 16% of girls use cold water. During high menstrual flow half of girls change their absorbents two times, one fourth of girls three times and one tenth change more than three times in a day.

Adopting hygienic practices becomes a major concern since reflects and influences reproductive health and its development. Menstrual awareness among adolescent girls with intellectual disability traced to be low due to their disability specific limitations. Hence, it becomes quintessential to instruct adolescent girls with intellectual disability about the physical changes that occurs during periods and need to adopt and follow appropriate hygiene and cleanliness practices to protect against various reproductive tract infections.

## **Menstrual Awareness and Adolescents with Intellectual Disability**

Menstrual awareness is to understand the occurrence of period and the related practices such as usage of observant, disposal of it, washing and drying of undergarments hygienically. Menstrual awareness emphasizes maintenance and management of hygiene by using hygienic products. Girls with intellectual disability drop out from school once they reach adolescence and attain menarche which results in curtailing from society and inclusion. This happens due to lack of awareness among adolescent girls with intellectual disability about the occurrence of period and its management in school. Even before throwing light upon the appropriate facilities at school, lack of awareness about menstruation forces them to stay home under the influence of the parents. Quint (2008) stated that menarche and its process creates major impact upon the girls with disabilities and their families. Irregularity in menstrual cycle, necessity to maintain hygienic practices during menstruation, managing mood swings, hormonal changes and physical ailments affect their normal functioning at home and school.

## **Need and Significance of the Study**

Individuals having intellectual disabilities, definitely consume more time to grasp, understand and acquaint with menstrual management skills that are mandated during mensuration period. Difficulties basically starts with inability to understand the steps to be followed practically in the menstrual management process and appropriate social behaviours. Educating adolescent girls with intellectual disability to practice these skills in order to make them independent when issues happen, such as blood stain on cloth, disposal of pads, support or disclosure of private information at appropriate time, place and to person is crucial step in menstrual awareness. Another really important issue menstruation awareness helps with is educating adolescent girls with intellectual disability about their periods and feminine hygiene. Because of their limitations these categories of girls are not aware of the menstrual practices and share the same with elders. The beginning of menses extremely disturbs independent functioning of girls with physical and developmental disabilities. It develops additional concern and burden upon family in various settings (home, school, public places). Transition to adolescence is of huge concern for parents of adolescents with developmental

disabilities as they need to encounter various challenges and adopt strategies to overcome it. Impact of puberty and its related process serves as a major concern for the parents in managing the health and life of their adolescent daughters.

### **Objectives**

To explore upon status of awareness about menstruation of Adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted primarily in three phases. Firstly, Adolescents Girls with Intellectual Disability were identified. In phase II, identified persons were assessed for their awareness about menstruation and related issues. Thirdly, the data collected was analyzed and reported so that the outcome of the study will establish the menstrual awareness of adolescent girls with Intellectual Disability. In the light of the research objectives along with the questions mentioned above, the survey research design was considered the suitable design and has been adopted to obtain the objectives and questions of the present study.

### **Sample Design**

The sample frame of the present study includes adolescent girls with intellectual disability in three districts (Madurai, Sivakasi and Tiruchirappalli) in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Sample of study were identified and selected through purposive sampling. 175 Adolescent girls with Intellectual disability belonging to the age group of 13 - 19 years were identified and included as sample for the study with informed consent to collect data pertaining to the study.

### **Research Question: Does the Adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability have basic Awareness about Menstruation Among?**

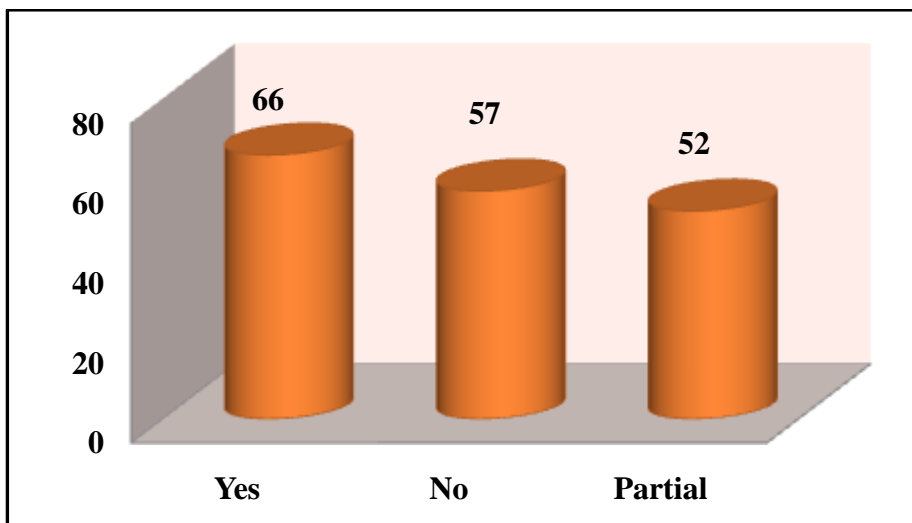
The framed research question was answered with the data gathered about the basic awareness about menstruation and its process among collected Adolescent Girls with Intellectual Disability through developed and validated Questionnaire. Frequencies of the answer obtained from the selected sample were

converted to percentage to record their reflections about the nature of basic awareness level of adolescent girls with intellectual disability.

**Table 1 Frequencies and Percentages of Basic Awareness About Menstruation**

| Awareness about Menstruation | N   | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-----|-----------|------------|
| Yes                          | 175 | 66        | 37.7       |
| No                           | 175 | 57        | 32.6       |
| Partial                      | 175 | 52        | 29.7       |

The table (1) shows that 37.7 percentage of sample have basic awareness about menstruation and 32.6 percentage of sample did not have basic awareness about menstruation whereas 29.7 percentage of sample have only partial knowledge of menstruation. Hence it can be inferred that even though majority (37.7%) of sample have basic awareness about menstruation it is noted that other 62.3% of sample have to be educated in gaining information and understanding about the occurrence of period and the process associated with it. Reddy et al. (2005) also revealed that the knowledge of menses is found among 13.8% of girls while 24.5% of girls know about the process of menstruation.



**Figure 1 Frequency on Basic Awareness About Menstruation**

## Recommendations

In the light of research findings, the researcher suggests for the following recommendations in alerting for preparedness upon various issues to be tackled with reference to easy access of products to be used during period, educating adolescents regarding occurrence of period, hygiene and cleanliness practices to be followed that includes:

- Awareness about recognizing the occurrence of period
- Ensuring access to appropriate menstrual hygiene products (absorbents), its usage and disposal
- Adequate and appropriate training to practice personal and menstrual hygiene (usage of toilet, washing and drying of undergarments)

## Conclusion

Menstruation is a vital transition process in women from puberty to menopause, and it has an association with both the physiological and psychological maturity. Menstrual hygiene plays crucial role in reproductive health of women. Adolescent girls with intellectual disability have inadequate education on menstruation and its process during pre-menarche and post menarche and ignore sanitation practices to be followed during menstruation due to limitation in their cognitive functioning and personal adaptive skills. Findings of the study indicate that almost 65 percent of participants have either partial or no awareness about the process of menstruation. Hence earnest efforts are to be taken to educate this category of population to understand and follow healthy practices during their menstruation. This study also helped to have a clear understanding about thrust areas wherein menstrual awareness to be focused upon in educating adolescent girls with intellectual disability.

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