

Awareness and health seeking behaviour of adolescent school girls on menstrual and reproductive health problems

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ABSTRACT

The transition from childhood to adulthood occurs during adolescence period which is characterized by major biological changes like physical growth, sexual maturation and psycho-social development. During this phase of growth the girls first experience menstruation and related problems which is marked by feelings of anxiety and eagerness to know about this natural phenomenon. The study was conducted to assess the health problems, to evaluate health seeking behaviour to find the awareness about pregnancy among them and the awareness about reproductive health among them. The study was conducted on the girls age group (14 – 18) in Banasthali University located in Tonk district of Rajasthan. The study subjects were 100 girl students of 9th – 12th classes. Majority of them (82.5%) attained menarche at 13-14 years. Regarding menstruation, 84 per cent girls perceived it to be a normal process while 16 per cent girls felt that it was abnormal. Commonest reported menstrual problem was dysmenorrhoea (67%) followed by irregular menses (4%) of which only 6.2 per cent consulted doctor and 20.3 per cent, took over the counter medications from the chemist shops. Knowledge about normal duration of pregnancy was good and need for extra food during pregnancy was poor. Most of the girls knew about importance, duration of child spacing and need for three medical examinations during pregnancy. Major sources of information were television (10.2%), radio (13.3%), peer group (24.3%) and mothers (52.2%). Girls preferred to consult parents (59.2%) and doctors (34.6%) for help at times of having reproductive health problems. The study highlights the need for educating school girls about adolescent health, pregnancy and reproductive health problems through schools and 'parents by the health professionals.

KEY WORDS : Health seeking behaviour, Physical growth, Adolescence

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Menarche is a significant milestone in the transitory developmental journey of an adolescent. A normal menstrual cycle is an important determinant of reproductive development during adolescence. An adolescent girl should be made aware of the phenomenon of menstruation at least a little ahead of its occurrence, so as to enable her to accept it as a normal developmental process and manage it appropriately.

The transition from childhood to adulthood occurs during adolescence period which is characterized by major biological changes like physical growth, sexual maturation and psycho-social development. One might expect young girls to react positively to their menarche; however, negative responses such as shame, fear, anxiety and depression are more common. The manner, in which a girl learns about menstruation and its associated changes, may have an impact on her response to the event of menarche. Menarche may remain a traumatic event for

her unless she is prepared for it. In traditional countries like India, the attainment of menarche has a lot of cultural significance as it marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood and the event is celebrated with the girl as the central figure. During this phase of growth the girls first experience menstruation and related problems which is marked by feelings of anxiety and eagerness to know about this natural phenomenon. However, they do not get the appropriate knowledge due to lack of a proper health education programme in schools. Moreover, the traditional Indian society regards talks on such topics as taboo and discourages open discussion on these issues. This leads to culmination in repression of feelings which can cause intense mental stress and seek health advice from quacks and persons who do not have adequate knowledge on the subject. Such health seeking behaviour by the adolescent girls is undesirable. Moreover, the routine health services do not have provisions for adequate care of adolescent