
A STUDY OF THE DROP OUT IN GIRL STUDENTS AT THE ONSET OF MENSTRUATION IN RURAL AREAS WHICH RESULTS IN THE FAILURE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES AND DRIVES MUCH EARLIER THAN THEIR IMPLEMENTATION.

Dr Rajshree Singh

Associate Partner, GreenGlobe Consultancy Pune

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Abstract: The girl students of the rural areas have to face the stigma attached to menstruation .There is a huge dropout rate of girls due to the onset of menstruation. The beliefs of the rural people and the lack of menstrual hygiene initiates a lot of health problems in girls which makes them miss school in those days and might also lead to permanent dropout due to the beliefs of the society .Although there are many benefits for the education of the weaker sections still we can notice a downfall in the number of girl students in the school .The onset of menstruation is marked as the transformation of girl into a woman and thereby leading to a lot of responsibilities on her tender shoulders .The expectation of the family increases and they take it for granted that she would be looking after the household and would soon be married off .There is no concern for menstrual hygiene and it is considered to be a taboo which need not be discussed.

Keywords: Drop Out, Girl Students, Onset Of Menstruation, Women Empowerment Schemes.

Introduction: The study was conducted in 5 schools in the district of Jabalpur Madhya Pradesh which has a student population primarily belonging to the backward classes. Informal talks with the parents of the girl students gave an insight into the mentality of the low income group population. Most of these parents were of the opinion that although girls should be enrolled in school, but the aim should be only to make them literate. They gave no importance to the girls' studies in terms of any kind of professional aim for them. They are keen for their sons' career but as far the girl is concerned it is just about sending them to school for some time till they become capable of handling responsibilities of the house.

Generally the onset of menstruation marks the completion of schooling for them, even those who continue their schooling tend to get uncomfortable in attending schools due to the lack of proper menstrual hygiene .They use materials like ash stuffed in rags for their menstrual bleeding which makes it uncomfortable to do their daily routine and are often unwell due to the frequent urinary tract infections that they face due to the lack of menstrual hygiene. Those who use these rags often clean them with just water and even dry them in damp places without proper sunlight which enhances the growth of bacteria and causes so many health problems from itching to serious infections inside their urinary tract and reproductive organs.

The study began with a comparison of the number of girl students in the schools before and after reaching the age of puberty .The average age of 15 to 16 when usually this biological process begins marks the maximum increase in the school dropout rates for girls. It was found that there was a reduction in 60 % of the girl students after menstruation. Around 30 % of them leave schools within 3 months of their first menstruation cycle and the rest start missing school frequently due to physical

problems and the various beliefs attached to the menstruation process. The study was conducted in the following schools.

- Target population: girl students of 5 schools of the Jabalpur region of Madhya Pradesh.
- Girls Higher Secondary School Gokalpur
- Rani Durgawati Girls School And Kendriya Vidyalaya Garha
- Govt Higher Secondary School kanchanpur
- GHHS Beoharbagh
- Govt Girls school Karondi

Findings of the Study: A questionnaire was prepared for finding out the state of menstrual hygiene among the girl students of these schools and some shocking revelations came out:

- 80% of them were not aware of the process of menstruation from before.
- 80% of them thought of menstruation as a dirty thing and do not know the biological importance of the process.
- Only 20% of these girl students use proper sanitary napkins .amongst them only 5% changed these napkins at intervals of 6 hrs. The rest 15% changed napkins only after 12 hrs. and this is because the price of the sanitary napkins is costly for them to bear and as such is considered as a burden on the already tight financial situations of their families.
- The rest 80% use clothes and often old rags in place of sanitary napkin.
- They are not supposed to dry these clothes out in the sun and therefore to dry them they have to hang them in shade only away from the eyes of the male members.
- When short of clothes they use ash inside their underwear to soak menstrual blood.
- In rainy season too they resort to using ash as the clothes do not dry easily in monsoons.
- Bulk of them get skin infections like itching for which they resort to some home remedies.
- They are considered impious during their periods and are not allowed to enter the kitchen, they are not allowed to touch the utensils of their own house and have to depend on other members even to give them water. Hence they end up consuming much lesser amount of water than they are required to during this period.
- During this period they have to sleep on a rug on the floor thus worsening their back and stomach pain.
- They do not take any iron rich diet to make up for the loss of blood and end up becoming all the more anemic.
- After the onset of menstruation they are treated like grown up girls ready to be married off .For some of them education becomes secondary while for the majority it means dropping out from the school and bidding goodbye to education.

The study was focused on how the girl students drop out in large numbers due to various beliefs and stigma. Data of reduction in the number of girl students in their puberty led to the study of the causes behind it which included the impact of their social, cultural and economic background. Some of the beliefs of the parents which makes them to withdraw their wards from school are:

- Girls need to attend school only with an aim to learn basic reading and writing.
- Once a girl starts menstruating it means she is now ready to be married.
- At the onset of menstruation they should attend to the household work.
- Menstruation is a dirty thing and such a female should not be allowed in the main rooms of the house.
- At any given time the cloth that they use for soaking blood should not be visible to the male members. It should be dried in a place which is away from their sight and after use to should be stacked in their roof or any such place carefully hidden from others.

Menstrual hygiene practices in the rural areas and among low income group:

- They use mostly cloth or ash to soak menstrual blood.

- Most of them use just plain water to wash these clothes as they find it an economic burden to buy detergents for washing them.
- The main priority while drying these clothes is that it should be a hidden process which may be mostly drying in the shade away from sunlight.
- After use it is mostly stacked in the bamboo or mud roof till the next requirement.

Suggestions for The Improvement of This Situation: Menstrual hygiene has now been established to be a powerful entry point to give a powerful voice to issues like gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, including challenging issues such as s, sex education , reproductive health , child marriage, and female genital mutilation. With this in mind, we should aim to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women not forgetting the discrimination based on customs and taboos surrounding menstruation that have a direct impact on the human rights of girls and women. We as responsible citizens need to change the mentality of the parents who have not been able to accept that menstruation is a biological process and needs to be dealt like one instead of attaching shame and stigma to it .As parents their responsibility is to have the same attitude towards the education of girl child like the education of a male child. Menstruation is a sign of female health and nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed. Its time to break the silence around for women and girls to be truly empowered. A girl whose body has been made a source of shame and embarrassment through customs clearly making her face the discrimination cannot be expected to break the shackles and bring about a change in her own life.

What is urgently required is to counsel the parents especially the males to let go off the rotten beliefs surrounding menstruation and to make them understand the importance of education for girls

The teachers in the school should make sure that the girl students are mentally prepared for the process of menstruation and are well informed of the scientific reasons of its beginning .They should also teach menstrual hygiene management to these young girls because at this tender impressionable age the right information should reach them before any crap taboo does.

It is high time for the government to provide proper menstrual hygiene kits to each and every female of the low income group of this country. Proper provision should be made through ration shops for their timely and regular distribution so that the females enjoy the right to good health, education and a life without discrimination.

Conclusion: It should be very clear to all advocates of human rights and women empowerment that there can never be an actual effort in these direction unless this basic need of right approach towards menstruation is looked after. Whom are these women empowerment schemes targeting when the bulk of them have already left schools simply thinking themselves to be inferior, when the majority of them have acknowledged that serving the males is what they are doomed for.

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