



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CLASS ABSENTEEISM AMONG FEMALE MEDICAL STUDENTS: A STUDY REFLECTING ITS ASSOCIATION WITH COMMON MENSTRUAL DISORDERS

Shete J S^{1*}, Warbhe P² and Padmini D³

^{1,3}Dept Of Community Medicine, RCSM, Government Medical College, Kolhapur

²Grant Government Medical College, Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

Aim and Objectives: To study common menstrual complaints and health seeking behaviour of first and second year medical students in Mumbai and to establish association between menstrual disorders and class absenteeism. **Methodology:** A self-administered questionnaire given to 150 female students from first and second year MBBS. Research tool comprised of questions about demographic characteristics, age at menarche, menstrual cycle pattern, complaints and its impact on daily activities including class absenteeism. Health seeking behaviour and knowledge about menstrual cycle was observed. Percentage and chi square values were calculated using SPSS 16. The study was conducted in period between August to October 2012. **Results:** 150 first and second year female medical students participated in the study. Their mean age was 19yrs. Mean age of menarche was 13-14 years in 84.7%. Menstrual cycle was regular in 79.3%. Menstrual flow was average in 79.3% of respondents and 84% reported duration as 3-5 days. 90% respondents had painful menses especially reporting moderate pain in 74% while in 67.3% of those pain resolved on its own. 62.7% reported mother as source of menstrual cycle information. Although menstrual disorder was cause of class absenteeism of 1-2 days in 48.7% students, 90% students didn't seek medical advice for menstrual disorders. **Conclusion:** Improving health seeking behaviour towards common menstrual problems can reduce class absenteeism.

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INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a normal physiological phenomenon in a woman indicating her capability for procreation. However, this normal phenomenon is often associated with some degree of suffering and embarrassment. Almost every woman does experience one or the other type of menstrual problem in her lifetime. The prevalence of menstrual disorders has been recorded as high as 87%.⁽¹⁾ The list of menstrual disorders may range from amenorrhea, irregular cycles, abnormal flow to dysmenorrhoea and premenstrual symptoms. Dysmenorrhoea is the commonest gynaecological disorder among women, with a prevalence of 60% to 93%. Dysmenorrhoea is pain perceived before or during menstruation, confined to lower abdomen, back and thighs, and of varying severity, ranging from mild, moderate to severe. Menstrual periods are said to be regular if they are coming at regular interval varying between 21-35 days from last menstrual period and the menstrual flow lasts for 3- 5 days with an average loss of 30-80 ml of blood. Irregular menstrual cycle is any deviation from normal duration. Menorrhagia denotes regular cycles with bleeding either excessive in amount (>80ml) &/or, in duration with flow lasting >7 days. Hypo menorrhoea is scanty menstrual flow which lasts for <2 days. Menstrual flow is considered as scanty if 1-2 sanitary pads were used in a day, average if 3-5 sanitary

pads were used in a day and heavy if more than 5 sanitary pads were used. In polymenorrhoea, the interval between two consecutive cycles is <21 day and in oligomenorrhoea, this interval may extend to >35 days.^(2,3)

Painful menstruation (dysmenorrhoea) is major cause of activity restriction and class absence in adolescent girls. However, this condition is often considered as physiological pain and ignored by adolescents, and only few adolescents consult physician for menstrual pain. Considerable percentage of women of reproductive age group suffer from menses associated health problems such as painful menstruation (dysmenorrhoea), unusual heavy bleeding and irregular menstrual cycles. These conditions are not life threatening but they can seriously decrease quality of life of many women and affect their mental health and their productivity. In this study, impact of menstrual disorders in adolescent girls especially medical college students was studied and its association with class absenteeism was explored.^(4,5,6,7)

METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional study was conducted in a Government Medical College, Maharashtra, India on 150 female medical students. A self administered questionnaire given to 150 female

*Corresponding author: **Shete J S**

Dept Of Community Medicine, RCSM, Government Medical College, Kolhapur

students from first and second year MBBS. Research tool comprised of questions about demographic characteristics, age at menarche, menstrual cycle pattern, complaints and its impact on daily activities including class absenteeism. Each participant was given 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire; they were advised not to write their name on the questionnaire and were told that, their responses would remain confidential. Informed consent was taken from participants and health seeking behaviour and knowledge about menstrual cycle was observed. Prior permission taken from institutional ethical committee. The study was conducted in period between August to October 2012. Percentage and chi square values calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) V16 Software and p value <0.005 was considered as statistically significant.

RESULTS

In the present study, 150 under graduate female medical students, aged between 17-21 years were interviewed through a structured questionnaire. Their mean age was 19 yrs. Mean age of menarche was 13-14 years in 127 (84.7%) respondents. Menstrual cycle was regular in 119 (79.3%) and 31 (20.7%) had irregular cycle. Menstrual flow was average in 119 (79.3%) of respondents while in 23 (15.3%) it was scanty and was heavy in 8 (5.3%). Among respondents 126 (84%) reported duration of menstrual cycle as 3-5 days. 90% respondents had painful menses especially reporting moderate pain in 74% while in 67.3% of those pain resolved on its own. 62.7% reported mother as source of menstrual cycle information.(Figure-1). Although menstrual disorder was cause of class absenteeism for 1-2 days in 73 (48.7%)(Figure-2), students, 90% students didn't seek medical advice for menstrual disorders.(Figure-3).

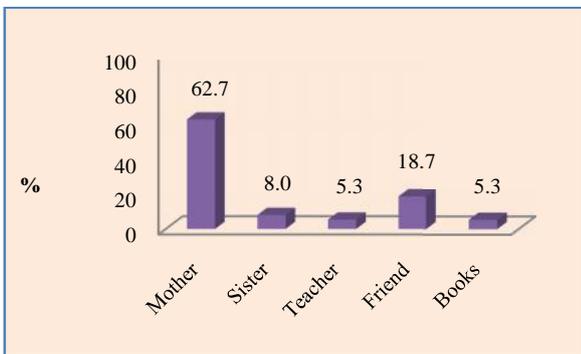


Figure 1 Source of information regarding menstrual cycle

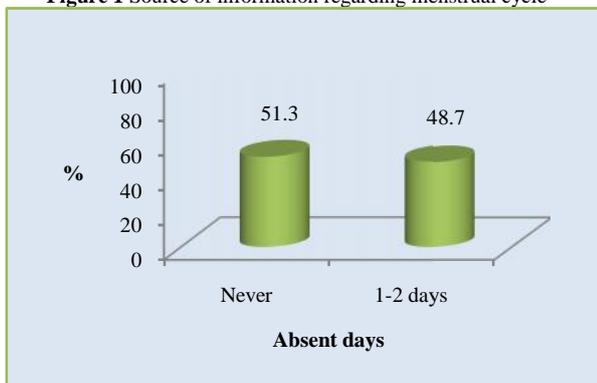


Figure 2 Class Absenteeism days during menstrual cycle

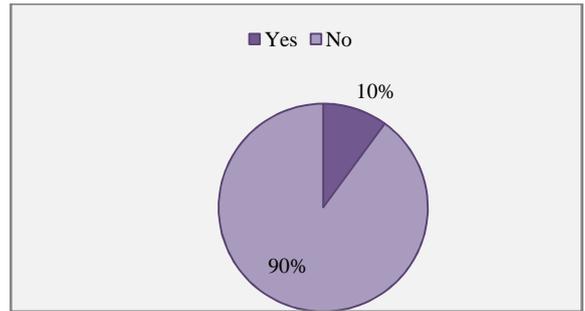


Figure 3 Medical advice taken for menstrual disorders

Table 1 Class absenteeism Vs Nature of menstrual cycle

Nature of Menstrual Cycle	Class Absenteeism				Total
	Never	1-2 days	3-4 days	Throughout Cycle	
Painful	0(0%)	73(48.7%)	48(32%)	14(9.3%)	135(90%)
Not Painful	15(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	15(10%)
Total	15(10%)	73(48.7%)	48(32%)	14(9.3%)	150(100%)

Pearson Chi square test, value = 150.02, df = 3, p < 0.01 (Statistical Highly Significant)

Fishers Exact Test, value = 86.28. df = 3, p < 0.01 (Statistical Highly Significant).

(p < 0.05 Statistical Significant, p < 0.01 Statistical Highly Significant)

In above table, 73(48.7%) respondents were absent for 1-2 days during their menstrual cycle and 48 (32%) were absent for 3-4 days.

Association between nature of menstrual cycle (painful or not painful) and class absenteeism was found highly significant (p < 0.01).

DISCUSSION

In a study done among female medical students in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, India, it was observed that mean age of menarche was 12.5 +/- 1.5 years. The prevalence of dysmenorrhoea was 73.8% and 7.47% of respondents had irregular periods. The average duration of menstrual flow was 4.5+/-2.4 days. Among female medical students who reported dysmenorrhoea 31.6% and 8.6% were frequently missing college and classes respectively. Maximum participants do not seek medical advice.⁽⁸⁾

In present study, mean age of menarche was 13-14 years of age in 127 (84.7%) students. 90% respondents had dysmenorrhoea (painful menses) especially reporting moderate pain in 74%. Menstrual flow was average in 119 (79.3%) of respondents. Among respondents 84% reported average duration of menstrual cycle as 3-5 days and 31 (20.7%) students had irregular periods. 62.7% reported mother as source of menstrual cycle information. Although menstrual disorder was cause of class absenteeism for 1-2 days in 73 (48.7%) students, 90% students didn't seek medical advice for menstrual disorders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevalence of dysmenorrhoea (painful menstruation) was high (90%) and majority (84%) had menses for 3-5 days. 119 (79.3%) respondents had regular cycle with average menstrual flow. Class absenteeism for 1-2 days due to menstrual disorders was found in 73 (48.7%) respondents though only 15(10%) respondents had taken medical advice for the same.

Prompt health seeking behaviour would further help in reducing the sickness absenteeism due to menstrual disorders in adolescents.

Continuous Medical Examination, workshops emphasizing role of hygienic practices and health seeking behaviour during menstruation will help in reducing health problems of adolescent girls.

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