

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SOUTH ASIA: AWARENESS, PRACTICES AND CONSTRAINTS

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Menstrual hygiene practices among adolescent girls in South Asia are influenced by a complex array of factors, leading to disparities and challenges in proper menstrual management. The aim of this study was to explore the dynamics of menstrual hygiene among school children in South Asia and identify barriers affecting their menstrual health. The specific objectives included assessing the level of awareness, current practices, and constraints related to menstrual hygiene. A systematic review of 15 research articles, sourced from databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PubMed, and Web of Science, was conducted. The review specifically focused on school children in South Asia, addressing aspects of their awareness, practices and constraints on menstrual hygiene. Out of these 15 articles, 10 provided a comprehensive analysis of awareness, practices, and constraints related to menstrual hygiene. Among these, seven studies were conducted in India, one in Pakistan, and two in Nepal. Two articles solely discussed awareness, with one article each focusing exclusively on practices, awareness and constraints. The findings suggest that most South Asian school girls receive information about menstruation prior to menarche and that mothers are the main providers of this information. However, the articles consistently highlight the lack of comprehensive knowledge regarding menstrual cycles, secondary sexual characteristics, and reproductive health among them. Many girls do not adhere to the recommended frequency of changing sanitary products every 3-4 hours, which can lead to various health complications, including an increased risk of reproductive tract infections (RTIs), skin irritation, and other hygiene-related issues. Additionally, burning appears to be the most common method of disposing used products. Cultural and religious taboos impose significant restrictions on menstruating girls, compounded by inadequate hygiene facilities such as gender-segregated toilets and washing and changing amenities in schools. In conclusion, the study calls for comprehensive menstrual health education, affordable products, and cultural shifts to improve menstrual management and well-being for South Asian female students.

Keywords: Cultural and religious taboos, Menarche, Menstrual health, Sanitary products