

Age at Menarche in Two Caste Groups (Brahmins and Rajputs) From Rural Areas of Jammu

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ABSTRACT The present study was conducted to find the mean age at menarche in two different caste group i.e. Brahmins and Rajputs and to study the rituals, taboos, social restrictions, health problems and nutrition observed during the menstrual period. The sample for the research comprised of 50 Brahmin girls and 50 Rajput girls in the age group of 9-15 years from different rural areas of Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir State). Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. Status quo method and interview schedule was used for data collection. The results reveal that the mean age at menarche in Brahmin girls were 13.857 ± 0.0125 and the Rajput girls is 13.859 ± 0.0125 . Majority of the girls belonging to both the caste group felt bad at the time of menarche and they faced painful menstrual periods. There are no restrictions in eating but they avoid sour foods. It was found that the girls of both the communities follow certain beliefs like avoid going to kitchen and temples, separate utensils, and prohibition from social intercourse. The result showed that the 't' value is not significant therefore there is no difference in the mean age at menarche between the two-caste groups.

INTRODUCTION

The age at which first menstrual period occurs is an excellent physiological marker of adolescent maturation. The first appearance of menstruation flow in girls indicates the mature stage of uterine development, however, it does not signify the attainment of full reproductive function. The age at menarche is widely considered as an important landmark in the sexual maturity. The menarche occurs between 10-16 years of age. The average girl reaches the menarche at about the age of 12-15 years. A small proportion of girls reach the menarche before the end of the 10th year, whereas a small proportion does not reach the menarche before the age of 16, 17 or even 19 years. It has been observed by number of investigators that there is a wide variation in the age at menarche. Kaur and Singh (1981) found the mean age of the menarche of girls was 14.7 ± 0.16 years. Gupta (1990) also found that the mean age of menarche among Brahmin girls was 13.25 ± 0.129 and Rajput girls were 13.70 ± 0.121 , respectively.

Although menstruation is a physiological process, it may give rise to various discomforts in some females, most of them appear in the late premenstrual phase and persists on the first day of menstruation. These comforts are feeling of heaviness and discomforts in the pelvis, lower

abdomen, and in the back, feeling of pricking and fullness in the breasts, frequency of urination and constipation and feeling of lassitude, irritability and headache. However these discomforts do not interfere with the usual activity of normal women.

There are many misconceptions and superstitions about menarche that have not been at all flattering to womankind. The vernacular referring to menstruation as a 'curse' suggests that it is a symbol of unworthiness or punishment for sin. Old superstitions and traditions die hard and slow. The physiological process of menstruation is still regarded by women as an unclear state, which segregates them from the activities of normal life. Early in her menstrual life a young girl is conditioned to the idea of dysmenorrhoea, she may be discouraged from the ordinary social intercourse of adolescence, games and parties being strictly restricted, all domestic chores stopped and she may not allowed to enter in the kitchen and prayer (pooja) room', keep separate utensils etc. the present study was focused to find the mean age at menarche and to study the rituals, taboos, social restrictions, health problems, nutrition, sanitary measures observed during the menstrual period.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: For determining the age at menarche the sample comprised of 840 girls i.e 420 belonging to Brahmin families and 420 from Rajput families

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in the age group of 9-15 years from the various Government High Schools of the rural areas of Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir state). For taking other pertinent information 100 girls (who had experienced menarche) from the above 840 girls were selected (50 Brahmin girls and 50 Rajput girls). Purposive sampling technique was used. Sample was drawn from among the middle socio economic strata. Status quo method was used to obtain the age at menarche, and interview schedule for gathering the information regarding the rituals, taboos, social restrictions, health problems, nutrition, sanitary measures observed during menarche.

Analysis of the Data: The response obtained was coded, tabulated and percentages were drawn. Content analysis was done. Mean, Standard Deviation and 't' test were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 reveals that the mean age at menarche among Brahmin girls is 13.857 ± 0.0125 and for Rajput girls is 13.859 ± 0.0127 . No significant differences were observed in the mean age at menarche between the two-caste groups.

Table 1: Number of respondents from different age groups (in year) among two caste groups who have experienced menarche

Age (in years)	Caste Group		Total
	Brahmin	Rajput	
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	5	7	12
12	19	13	32
13	30	35	65
14	47	42	89
15	60	60	120
Mean	13.857	13.859	
S.E	0.0125	0.0127	
't' Value		1.87	

Table 2 reveals that 100% girls of both the group felt bad during menstruation but their family's (100%) attitude was positive. Majority of the Brahmin girls (22%) faced pain in abdomen whereas most of the Rajput girls (40%) faced pain in back. All the girls (100%) of both the communities did not consult doctor at the time of pain. 100% of the Brahmin and Rajput girls do their household chores. 88% of Brahmin girls and 90% of Rajput girls had their regular menstruation period and 97% of the girls from both the group remember their dates. All the girls used cloth pads

at the time of menarche and they take bath daily. 100% of the girls eat whatever is cooked in the home but 76% Brahmin girls and 78% of Rajput girls avoid eating pickles, curd and other sour foods during menstrual periods. 76% of girls belonging to Brahmin families and 60% of Rajput girls avoid going to kitchen at the time of menarche. More than half (58%) of Brahmin girls and less than half (20%) Rajput girls keep their utensils separate during menstruation. 44% of the Brahmin girls and only 16% of Rajput girls are prohibited social interactions at that time. All the girls of both the community avoid going to temple during this period.

Table 2: Social and health problems during menarche (in percent)

Response		Brahmin	Rajput
Feeling during menstruation	Negative	100	100
Family Reaction	Positive	100	100
Painful Periods	Yes	56	54
<i>Location of the Pain</i>			
1) Abdomen	Positive	22	20
2) Legs	Positive	18	20
3) Back	Positive	20	40
4) Head	Positive	8	10
Whether you consult doctor	Negative	100	100
Do household work	Yes	100	100
Regularly Periods	Yes	88	90
Whether date is remembered	Yes	97	97
Take bath daily	Yes	100	100
Material used (cloth)	Yes	100	100
<i>Nutrition</i>			
Do you eat whatever cooked at home	Yes	100	100
Avoid Pickles, Curd, Sour foods	Yes	76	78
Avoid going to kitchen	Yes	76	60
Whether utensils are separated	Yes	58	20
<i>Prohibition from</i>			
Social Interactions	Yes	44	100
Avoid going temple	Yes	100	100

DISCUSSION

Menarche is the age of onset of first menstruation. The age at which a girl starts menstruating varies from individual to individual and cultural differences among them. It has been observed by number of researchers that there is a wide variation in the age at menarche. The age at the onset of menarche varies widely even within the same population and is influenced by many factors. But the present study reveals that there

is no difference in the mean age at menarche between rural Brahmin and Rajput girls. Gupta (1990) reported the mean age of menarche among Brahmin, Rajput and Mahajan girls belonging to urban areas of Jammu was 13.25 ± 0.129 , 13.55 ± 0.127 and 13.70 ± 0.121 , respectively. Comparing the data from rural and urban areas, it was found that the differences are significant for Brahmins and Rajputs (at 0.005 level of significance). Mehta et al. (1991) observed that the onset of menarche was significantly delayed in low socio-economic status girls. Chakravarty and Renuka (1971), Dare et al. (1992), and Chatterjee and Mandal (1994) too reached similar conclusion that the girls belonging to high socio-economic status attain puberty earlier. Girls in the present study also faced some discomforts during menarche like pain in abdomen, back or in head. Gupta (1990) and Huerta-Franco and Malacare (1993) too reported that at the time of menarche girls faced problem in back, head, abdomen and sometimes they feel weakness during this period. There are many beliefs prevalent about the menarche, which were also found in the present study from both the communities like avoiding sour foods, avoiding going to kitchen and temples, separate utensils and avoid going outside. Gupta (1990), and Bhat

et al. (2004) also observed similar beliefs and superstitions as the present study depicted.

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