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**Attitude of girls in Western Rajasthan towards menstrual cycle: A less explored domain****Sonika Agarwal<sup>1</sup>, Babita Bansal<sup>2\*</sup>, Jaspreet Takkar<sup>3</sup>, V. K Chawla<sup>4</sup>, Sushila Gehlot<sup>5</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Senior Dietician, Prettislim Bandra(W) Mumbai, India<sup>2</sup>Department of Physiology, Gian Sagar Medical College & Hospital, Ramnagar, Patiala, Punjab, India<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology, Gian Sagar Medical College & Hospital, Ramnagar, Patiala, Punjab, India<sup>4</sup>Professor & Head, Department of Physiology, Jodhpur Medical College (A Unit of National University-JNU), Jodhpur, India<sup>5</sup>Professor and Head, Department of Physiology, Gian Sagar Medical College & Hospital, Ramnagar, Patiala, Punjab, India

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**ABSTRACT**

The menstrual cycle has been the subject of many traditional tales, myths and mystery. Myth and mystery have long enveloped the truth about menstruation. The mere mention of the topic has been tabooed in the past and even to this day the cultural and social influences appear to be hurdle for advancement of knowledge on the subject. It is customary for some girls to restrict their activities during the periods as per their belief, social customs and religion. The present study was carried out on 600 unmarried healthy college going girls between the age of 18 to 23 years from Jodhpur (Western Rajasthan), during the period from Dec 2005 to May 2007 to study the attitudes of women towards menstrual cycle along with the socio-cultural beliefs and practices in their region. It was observed that 40.2% girls accepted menstruation as a normal physiological event, 20.5% considered it as a necessary evil, 19.7% considered it to be a troublesome due to physical discomforts, 18.8% indicated their disliking to menstruation and 0.8% considered it to be a bad omen due to family beliefs. Also restrictions are mostly observed in orthodox Hindu, Muslim and Christian families whereas the girls belonging to Sikh families are more liberated in this regard. Almost all Hindu(97.4%),Muslim(100%)and about two third (66.7%)of the Christian girls, who participated in this study were restricted in one way or other during the menstrual period.It is high time that these regressive attitudes and practices are done away with so that women can contribute to make India a truly progressive nation .

**Key Words:** Menstrual Cycle, Attitudes, Restrictions, Socio-cultural beliefs.**Introduction**

Menstruation is the vaginal discharge of blood along with degenerative uterine endometrium for 3-5days. It is called menstruation (menstrualis, monthly) because, strangely enough, it's periodicity of 30+3 days almost coincides with that of our calendar month[1].The menstrual cycle may affect women physically, psychologically and behaviorally, but the majority of changes experienced do not interfere with their lives.

Some women however do experience menstrual disturbances, either psychological or physical, which profoundly affect their ability to function as they would. The menstrual cycle has been the subject of many traditional tales, myths and mystery. Myth and mystery have long enveloped the truth about menstruation. It is customary for some girls to restrict their activities during the periods as per their belief, social customs and religion. In Manusmriti 4/200) it is written that "food touched by a menstruating women" should not be eaten. Even in modern times some Hindus do not allow a female to enter the kitchen or temple and she is segregated during the period. She is not allowed to touch items of food, growing plants, flowers, lest impurities may be transmitted through her hands to these inanimate

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objects. According to Patel *et al* (2006) most women (73.6%) reported restrictions in their daily activities during the menstrual period[2]. Since there is paucity of published data on this subject from Western Rajasthan, so this study has been attempted to explore the attitude of girls towards menstruation in order to evaluate the conflicting reports studied by other authors because the subject of menstruation does not permit itself to be widely or thoroughly studied in the traditional Indian setting, where the mere mention of the topic, can cause embarrassment.

### Material and methods

The present study was undertaken in 600 college girls between the age of 18 to 23 years, with regular menstrual cycles in Jodhpur city, during the period from Dec 2005 to May 2007 after obtaining prior ethical approval from Institutional Ethical Committee. The subjects were explained the purpose of study and were assured of their identity secrecy. This was essential for their full cooperation and appropriate results. Those who were non cooperative or reluctant in providing information were

excluded from the study. For the purpose of study a prepared questionnaire was distributed to each girl and they were asked to provide information related to age, religion, age of menarche, menstrual history and attitudes towards it. Each Performa was checked in the presence of the girl student concerned, to ensure completeness. Information so obtained was analyzed to find out their attitudes towards menstrual cycle.

### Observations and Result

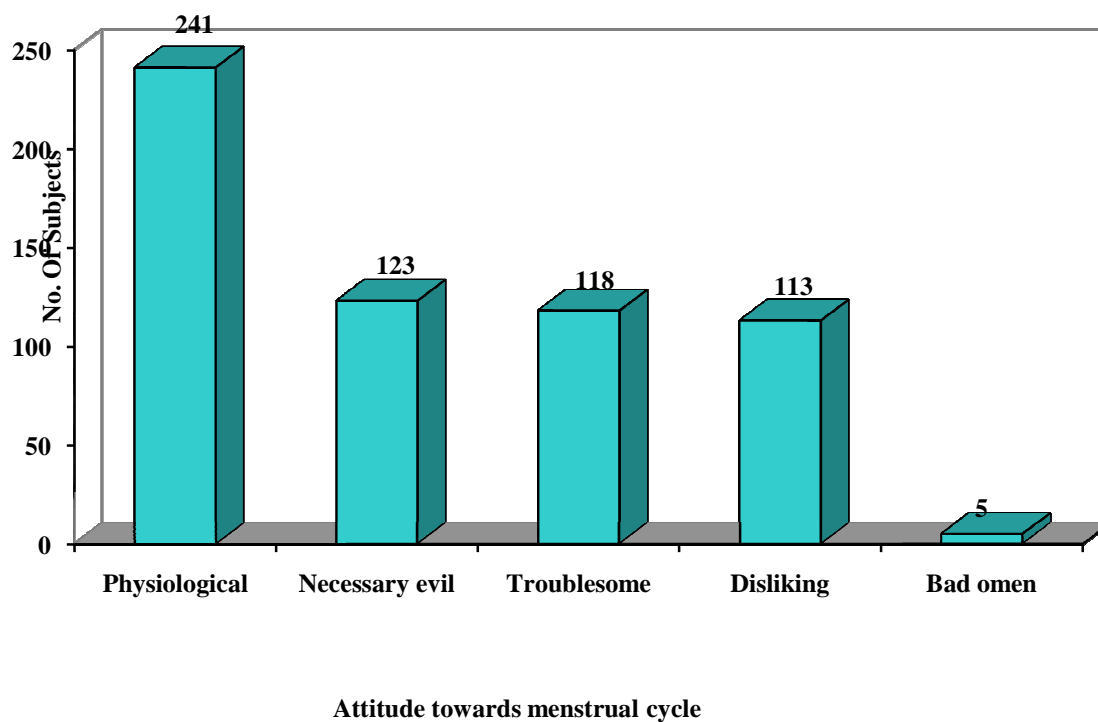
Attitude of each girl towards menstrual cycle was different according to their experiences during menstruation. Surprisingly, social and religious restrictions were followed by a majority of girls (96.4%) irrespective of difference in their education, social, cultural and economical background. Table 1 denotes the prevalence of various restrictions observed by subjects like not going to temple/church, restricted entry into kitchen and unsociability vis a vis their religion.

**Table 1: Restrictions during Menstruation Vis A Vis Religion**

Religion of Subjects	Resrictions		Total
	Present [n (%)]	Absent [n (%)]	
Hindu	564(97.4)	15(2.6)	579
Muslim	13(100.0)	0	13
Christian	2(66.7)	1(33.3)	3
Sikh	0	5(100.0)	5
Total	579(96.5)	21(3.5)	600

Of all the 13 muslim girls studied, all of them followed the restriction. It was followed by Hindu subjects (97.4%) and Christian subjects (66.7%). On the other

hand Sikh girls were liberated in this regard as there was no restriction imposed upon them by family or society. Of the total 600 subjects, 96.5% followed the restrictions by 3.5% did not follow any restriction (figure-1).



**Figure 1: Attitude towards menstrual cycle with respect to number of subjects**

The attitudes of girls towards menstrual cycle are presented in table 2.

**Table 2: Attitude towards Menstrual cycle**

Attitude	No.of Subjects	%
Physiological	241	40.2
Necessary evil	123	20.5
Troublesome	118	19.7
Disliking	113	18.8
Bad Omen	5	0.8

From observations, it is seen that 40.2% girls accepted menstruation as a normal physiological event, 20.5% considered it as a necessary evil, 19.7% considered it to be a troublesome due to physical

discomforts, 18.8% indicated their disliking to menstruation and 0.8% considered it to be a bad omen due to family beliefs (figure 2).

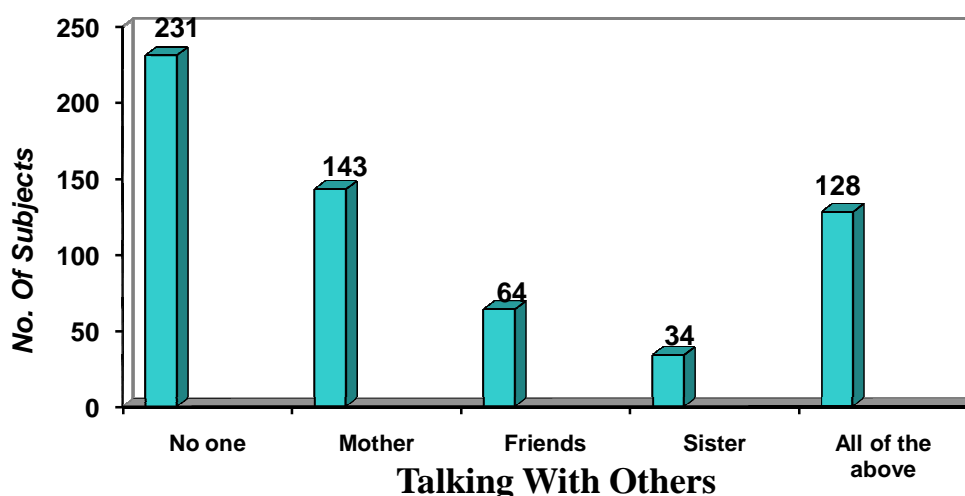


Fig 2: Graph showing number of subjects versus talking with others

In table 3 frequency with which the girls talked about their menstrual cycle with different relatives and friends. 23.8 % subjects talked to their mother, 10.7%

with friends and 5.7 % with sister while 21.3% subjects talked not only with ,mother but also with sisters as well as friends. 38.5% did not talk with any relative or friend.

Table 3: Talking about Menstruation

Talking with Other	No. of Subjects	%
Mother	143	23.8
Friends	64	10.7
Sister	34	5.7
All of the above	128	21.3
No one	231	38.5

### Discussion & Conclusion

There is a paucity of literature dealing with restrictions during menstruation. The present study revealed that the myths related to menstrual cycle still exist. In present study it is observed that 96.5% girls restricted during menstrual cycle, follow the restrictions like not going to temples/church or not offering the prayers and many others. The socio-economic status and educational status have nothing to do with these restrictions. These restrictions are mostly observed in orthodox Hindu, Muslim and Christian families whereas the girls belonging to Sikh families are more liberated in this regard. Almost all Hindu (97.4%), Muslim (100%) and about two third (66.7%) of the Christian girls, who participated in this study were restricted in one way or other during the menstrual period. Results from other studies also support this observation. Patel *et al* (2006)

studied most women 73.6% had restrictions in their daily activities during the menstrual period [2]. Prasad and sharma (1972) noticed, families of 17.7% were practicing untouchability during menstruation [3]. The information on women's attitudes towards menstruation is of special interest. Since to date there has been little study on attitudes even though the need for such information has been alluded to by others [4,5]. The attitudes of girls towards this normal physiological event are largely dependent on girl's education and the information provided to them about the event. As shown in table 2, most of the girls (40.2%), considered it to be a normal physiological event. 20.5% expressed mixed feeling considering it to be troublesome due to physical discomforts and about similar percentage of subjects (18.8%) indicated their disliking to the menstruation because of its social implications like untouchability and

other beliefs. 0.8% considered it to be a bad omen. Lu ZJ (2001) found that 78% of women accepted menstruation as a natural event[6]. Prasad and Sharma(1972)stated 92.7% girls had a feeling of botheration[3], while Moronkola and Uzuegbu (2006) indicated 93% girls had positive attitude towards menstruation [7].The subject of menstruation does not permit itself to be widely or thoroughly discussed in the traditional Indian setting, where the mere mention of the topic, can cause shyness. The present study did reveal that the girls often talk about this event to their near and dear ones. The present study showed that 23.8% of girls, communicated with their mother in respect to menstrual cycle, while 10.7% of girls also had communication with their friends and 5.7% with sisters.Lee LK *et al* (2006) indicates mother were the most important person the girls turned to for answer regarding menstruation (80.0%) followed by friends (39.7%), sisters (30.4%), the mass media (30.0%), teachers (25.2%) and health providers(14.4%)[8].Women comprise of a large part of work force at home and office, so restricting their activities due to mediaeval beliefs and practices leads to huge loss of productivity. Also their own attitudes affect their will to participate in social events like active sports, travel and field jobs. It is high time that these regressive attitudes and practices are done away with so that women can contribute to make India a truly progressive nation.

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