



**ASIAN UNIVERSITY
FOR WOMEN**

Knowledge of Menstruation among University Attending Males in Bangladesh

Summer Research Project

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Introduction

Menstruation is a natural, reproductive process for women and yet strong cultural taboo restricts menstruation to be discussed, seen or acknowledged in so many ways (Kissling, 1996; Roberts, 2004). Taboo regarding menstruation causes women to feel uneasy about it and even themselves during menstruation. It has been found that a lot of girls feel ashamed being seen with a menstrual product or bleeding through clothing, to the extent that many adolescent girls report that the mere fact that they are menstruating embarrasses them (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996; Kissling, 1996; Roberts). Women are very shy and secretive about their menstruation around people, especially boys, they constantly worry about their dress being blood stained.

Although menstruation is a normal biological and physical phenomena and universally every girl has to go through, it is very unfortunate that girls are extremely secretive about it especially around boys. During menstruation a girl may go through various physical, psychological and dysmenorrhea complex and hiding from male peers on top of that can put extra pressure on them. Some of the consequences of such secrecy can result in low menstrual hygiene maintenance (Mahon and Fernandes, 2010) among girls which may be dangerous for her health. For example, a girl may not change her sanitary napkin for a long time while staying outside in fear that someone may see her disposing it and get to know that she is on her period which can cause cervical cancer.

Period-shaming cause's women to feel embarrassed about menstruation and demeans them. Some of the period shaming events have been discussed globally recently. The issue of period-shaming has reached to such a point that not too long ago a post on Instagram (mobile photo-sharing application) had been deleted by the authority because a girl supposedly had period stain on her clothes and bed sheet which according to them went against the regulations (Escobar, 2015). A more recent incident in India led to the suicide of a 12 year old school-girl who was asked by her teacher to raise her dress up in front of the class of boys and girls, show the blood stain on her clothing and use the provided duster cloth as pad (The Guardian, 2017).

The social seclusion during menstruation is still evident in many Asian countries. According to a newspaper article, women in rural Nepal still are being secluded during menstruation. They are given separate huts to live in if they are going through menstruation so that they do not come in contact with other members of the society or even their family (The Independent, 2017). This also leads to little girls missing schools and later on staying way behind in terms of education and career compared to men.

All the secrecy, embarrassment and period shaming pushes women towards insecurity and inferiority which only destroys them in terms of health and career. Women begin to focus more on hiding during menstruation than concentration on more important and self-constructive opportunities like studies and career development. They can get ahead of this when menstruation is acknowledged on a greater scale with the male peers being more understanding rather than hostile towards it. Knowledge among male's peers is important for even a little improvement.

In Bangladesh, the national education system, 10th-12th grade biology teaches Physical Education where basic information about menstruation and puberty are discussed. This means

that a male who has passed his 12th grade is most probably familiar with menstruation. However, this knowledge is not solely able to make a better and safe environment for women where they are comfortable unless there is awareness.

Women around the world are victims of this issues and therefore this summer research project, named Knowledge of Menstruation among University Attending Males in Bangladesh, was proposed with the aim to raise awareness against social taboos and misconception regarding menstruation. This was to be done by assessing the level of knowledge that male university students have regarding menstruation, its hygiene maintenance and whether they have any perception regarding it.

The study Objectives:

1. Creating awareness against social taboos
2. Knowing the perception on menstruation
3. Assessing the knowledge among male students

Methodology

Knowledge of Menstruation among University Attending Male Students of Bangladesh, summer research project, used cross-sectional and descriptive study design. A cross-sectional study is known as a type of observational study where the data is collected only at one given period of time and the data is analyzed from a population. The data was mostly quantitative with a few qualitative data.

The study was done in three major cities of Bangladesh from July, 2017 to November 2017 by all four members of the study and no research assistants were recruited. The cities included Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet. The initial plan of this research project was to have a sample size of 500 students but was decreased to a target of 300 male students due to the sensitivity of the topic. The target population for this study were male students from various universities, more importantly Bangladeshis, doing their undergraduate or graduate.

The survey conducted had been completely anonymous. The participants of students in this study were approached voluntary participation and there was no incentive provided for participation. According to the protocol, if any of the approached male students denied to take part in the study, they were not forced in any way to participate.

The participants were first introduced to the purpose of the research project, handed the information sheet and a consent form and explained before they were asked to volunteer to take part in the study. Only those students who agreed to participate were handed the questionnaire after they signed the consent form. Upon completing the full questionnaire, the participants returned the questionnaires.

Materials

For the purpose of this project the team had required the following documents as listed below:

1. Institutional letter for permission
2. Consent form
3. Participant information sheet
4. Questionnaire
5. Handouts

The institutional letter for permission had been provided by the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Prof. Nazmul Alam, which was used to get permission from different universities to conduct the survey with the male students from their institution. A few universities also required a separate application asking for permission to be sent to the registrar or dean.

The consent form required the participants to voluntarily agree to take part in this survey and sign the form so that the data they provide can be legally and ethically used for the research purpose. The consent form also contained contact information of AUWIRB, the researchers and Faculty Advisor so that they can be contacted regarding any queries.

Participant information sheets provided information about the project and survey which helps the participants to take informed decision whether they want to participate in this survey or not.

The questionnaire used in the survey were semi-structured and consisted of 3 sections with a total of 50 questions. The 3 sections in the questionnaire were:

1. Background Information
2. Basic Information regarding Menstruation and
3. Perception about Menstruation.

The background information part includes 8 questions regarding participant's age, religion, educational level of mother, occupation of mother, number of sisters etc. The questions about mother is included so that we can understand if there is any chance that the son of an educated mother is more aware of menstruation and hygiene matters regarding it. We can also compare the students who have sisters at home to find out if they have a better knowledge of menstruation.

The second part of the questionnaire contained 20 questions to understand if the participants have basic idea about menstruation ranging from the duration of menstruation to the hygiene practices that are necessary during menstruation. This section tells us how far the male students know about menstruation which is a very normal regular physiological process for females.

The last and final part of the questionnaire contained 22 questions about participants' perception regarding menstruation. In this section the questions are set to find out whether the knowledge of menstruation among these university attending males may lead to more prejudice and isolation for the female peers or to more an environment for the females to reach for greater goods rather than be concerned about secrecy.

The handout was attached in notice boards in all the universities visited and also provided to participants so that some awareness about menstruation can be spread.

NO MORE PERIOD SHAMING

Menstruation is a normal biological and physical phenomenon that females go through during puberty.

During menstruation a girl may go through various physical, psychological and dysmenorrhea complex and hiding from male peers can put extra pressure on them and hamper their life.

Period shaming causes secrecy from male and female peers of the society & result in low menstrual hygiene maintenance among girls which is harmful for their healthy life.

YOU *can encourage a friendly environment for your female peers to freely discuss their problems during menstruation and focus on menstrual hygiene by not participating in period shaming and preventing it.*

Summer Project by Asian University for Women (2017)
Knowledge of Menstruation among University Attending Males in Bangladesh

Figure 1: The handout used to spread awareness regarding menstruation

Survey Results

The survey had been conducted on more than 250 students however some data had to be dismissed due to missing information or incomplete response. The final usable data came from 180 surveys. The survey data had been analyzed using the software SPSS version 22 to find out the results than can show us some important statistics.

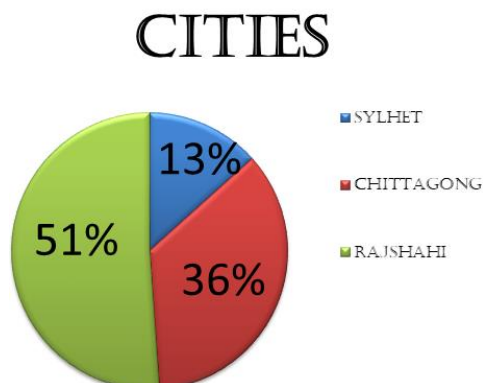


Figure 2: The percentage of surveys collected from different cities

The above pi-chart gives an idea about the percentage of survey that are done in Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet. As shown above, out of the 180 surveys 36% was done in Chittagong, 51% in Rajshahi and the least that has been done is in Sylhet (13%).

Variables	Number (%) N =180
Age (mean, SD)	21.9 (2.02)
Religion	
Islam	151 (83.9)
Hinduism	19(10.6)
Christianity	1(0.6)
Buddhism	3(1.7)
Participant's Education Level	
1 st Year	59(32.8)
2 nd Year	18(10)
3 rd Year	31(17.2)
4 th Year	69(38.3)
Mother's Education:	
Illiterate	11(6.1)
Upto Primary	36(20)
Upto SSC	67(37.2)
Upto HSC	59(32.8)

Figure 3: Socio-demographic data from the survey

From Figure 3, the socio-demographic data, we can find that the mean age of the participant was 21.9 years old with a standard deviation of 2.02. The highest number of participants were Muslims which is expected as Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country. Participants ranged from their first years to fourth years and high numbers were from their fourth year (38%). More than 93% participants had mothers who were educated at least till primary school.

Variables	Number (%) (N=180)
Know about menstruation	
Yes	162 (90.0)
No	15(8.3)
Source of Knowledge	
Textbook	103 (57.2)
Parents	23(12.8)
Friend	45(25.6)
TV	49(27.2)
Internet	14(7.8)
Think Menstruation is	
Psychological Process	23(12.8)
Physiological Process	126(70)
God's Curse	22(12.2)
Don't Know	16(8.9)
What causes menstruation	
Hormone	132(73.3)
Disease	11(6.1)
Stress	10(5.6)
Don't know	23(12.8)

Figure 4: Knowledge about menstruation

According to survey findings in Figure 4 162 out of 180 (90%) participants of the male university students have knowledge about menstruation. Around 57% of the participants reported that they knew the information regarding menstruation from the textbook, 35% knew through different media (TV 27.8% & internet 7.8%). The other sources for the knowledge had been through parents and friends respectively around 25% and 13%. Some of the participants reported more than one sources of the information.

126 out of 180 (70%) participants know that menstruation is physiological process while 132 out of 176 (73.3%) reported menstruation is caused by hormone which is a good number of male students . 23 out of 180 (12.8%) participants think menstruation is psychological process and 22 out of 180 (12.2%) even believe that menstruation is God's Curse. Such responses are very low but it is evident that poor knowledge on menstruation still gives space for superstition.

At least 11 out of 176 (6.1%) participants think menstruation is a disease and stress causes menstruation reported by around 5.6% participants. Conceptions of menstruation being disease or from stress makes people stay away from menstruating women and secluding them. There are the remaining people in the survey, 23(12.8%) participants out of 176, who reported that they do not to have any idea about what causes menstruation.

Variables	Number (%) (N=180)
A menstruating girl should not	
Get out at night	24(13.3)
Enter a mosque	65(36.1)
Enter a temple	33(18.3)
Pray	63(35)
Read Al-Qur'an (Islamic religious book)	75(41.7)
Enter Kitchen	11(6.1)
Discussing about menstruation:	
Opposite genders should be comfortable	129(71.7)
Male should not hesitate to discuss about menstruation, especially around females	121(67.2)
Should women be restricted food:	
Yes	30(16.7)
No	81(45)
What would you do to stop taboos	
Promote awareness	117(65)
Discouraging period shaming	31(17.2)
Encourage hygienic practice among female peers	24(13.3)
Don't know	18(10)

Figure 5: Perceptions about Menstruation data

In the Figure 5, we can see that 81 participants say that menstruating women should not be restricted food. Their reason behind saying this is that women lose a lot of blood during menstruation and to make up for that they need nutritious food. On the other hand, remarkable number of participants from those 16.7% who think that women's should be restricted food think that they should be restricted food only as long as they are provided the necessary nutritious food

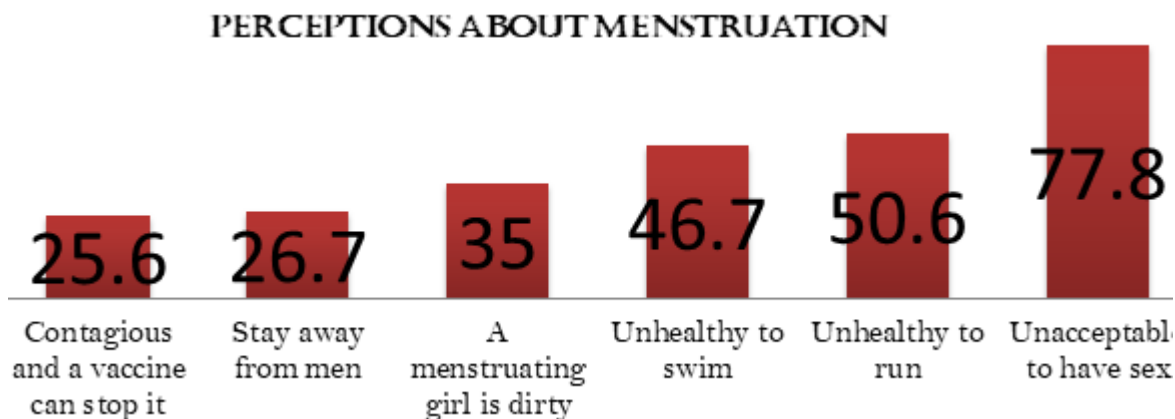


Figure 6: Perceptions about menstruating women and activities during menstruation

The statistical graph, Figure 6, shows that 25.6% of undergraduate male students have a misconception regarding menstruation that it is contagious and a vaccine can stop it. 77.8% male think that it is unacceptable to have sex during menstruation and it is not clear whether this is their belief due to the physical consequences or because they find menstruating women dirty. Another 26.7% think female should stay away from male and 35% think it is very dirty. In addition to these, 46.7% of men thinks that it is unhealthy to swim and 50.6% are saying that it is unhealthy to run because of menstruation. These are some misconceptions undergraduate male students are having regarding menstruating women and the activities they can get involved in during menstruation.

Another interesting finding has been that 114 participants out of 180 who have mothers who don't go to work outside of home and are housewives know that menstruation is a physiological process. This is important finding because there were 158 participants who had stay-at-home mothers. Now we understand that stay-at-home mothers do have a positive impact in the upbringing of their children. The topic of menstruation is sensitive and yet their children are aware of this crucial topic and they deserve the credit for it.

Discussion

During conducting this survey there have been some observations made which can give us an idea of how people perceive menstruation in real life. Our observation ranges from closely interacting with Dean of universities to the male students.

We have come across very enthusiastic faculty who were very supportive when they were introduced to the topic and purpose of the summer research project. They lead the research and helped them get the surveys done and even showed interest in finding out the results of this study.

The participants were not less enthusiastic either, there was occasions when students called other friends so that they could participate in the study which a great form of raising awareness among themselves and their male peers. The male students were very eager to participate and share their information knowing that they could help in a study being done on menstruation.

Limitations and Challenges

Although there have been many useful findings from this summer project there also have been a lot of challenges and limitations. Yet, the surveys continued until there were almost a good number of participant information to be useful.

While doing the survey problems like difficulty in getting participants to conduct the survey were always present due to taboo associated to the topic. Other reasons for this could be the religious shyness or conservativeness towards the topic of menstruation which prevented interaction with the male students. There have been incomplete questionnaires returned to the researchers which could not be used in the research later. This could also be due to cultural more than a religious aspect as menstruation is not openly discussed or talked about.

Interestingly some of the universities strictly prohibited us from doing any research in their institutions saying that menstruation is not an issue that should be discussed in public neither it is a topic that needs special attention. Getting such response was indeed disappointing especially when it is known that- It is definitely not the case and the reason our research was being discouraged was because of mere social, cultural and other stigma related to it. While approaching different authorities of universities we were told that they would like to cooperate with us but they fear that we would be teased because of the topic we are working on. As a result, even though we were given hope and we noticed enthusiasm while we approached some of the authorities eventually we were given negative responses because it was thought that the topic was not suitable enough to conduct research in their universities because of the taboos related to it.

Convincing people to take part in the research was another challenging part. For example, in Sylhet the universities had exam period so it was a struggle to get participants who would voluntarily participate when they had an exam minutes away or just came out of hours long exam. Another obstacle was being faced with the unfriendly and judgmental glare from participants. Interestingly even though the targeted participants for the project was male students, they were noticed taking help from their female peers which, we believe, contributed in creating bias for the research which were strictly observed and some of those data had been discarded.

Language barrier was another challenge that was faced while doing the research. In English speaking institutions the research went pretty smoothly in terms of collecting data in English but for other Universities such as in Rajshahi people seemed confused about answering the questions because of the questionnaire being in English because majority people of Bangladesh do not speak English we should have been particularly careful about that.

Presentation of results

The survey results were presented on the 11th of November 2017 at AUW Summer Project Showcase. The presentation was open for all AUW faculty and students who came to find out the results of the summer projects performed during the summer of 2017.

This summer project received much appreciation and many faculty encouraged the team to carry on conducting more surveys so that the results are stronger and more substantial. More support was seen for doing workshops at both AUW and other universities in Bangladesh to raise awareness about menstruation. We shall make further effort to include more participants in the study.

Some of the presentation pictures are at the end of this report.

Opinion

After doing the study we came to know the level of knowledge about menstruation among male students. We also tried to contribute in minimizing the misconception about it. Besides we tried to understand any correlation between menstrual hygiene and peer knowledge about menstruation.

There could be higher number of participation if the research was done with more time and included more universities around Bangladesh. The timing conflict could also be solved if there was enough time.

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