

Menstrual Stigma: Dispelling Myths And Misconceptions



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Abstract: *Menstrual stigma remained a pervasive societal issue, sustained by deep-rooted myths and misconceptions. This paper examined the impact of menstrual stigma, exploring its effects on individuals' physical, emotional, and social well-being. The paper focused on the various myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation, examined their impact on females' lives, and developed strategies to dispel menstrual stigma and myths effectively. The research included a mixed-method approach. Through a comprehensive review of literature, numerous surveys, personal observations, and interviews, common misconceptions surrounding menstruation and their consequences on females' lives were identified. How people of a society symbolize menstruation also influences the behavior and attitude towards menstruating females. That's why strategies for combating menstrual stigma were also proposed in this paper. This paper hoped to contribute in creating a more informed, supportive, and inclusive society for menstruating women.*

Menstrual stigma is the common issue existing in almost all society. Menstrual stigma and negative social attitudes towards menstruating females creates obstacles in their economic opportunity as well as social participation and impact their mental and physical well-being. Culture of silence on menstruation also perpetuate menstrual stigma. The paper aims to eliminate false statements, wrong believes and untrue sayings about menstruation that creates embarrass environment for women as well as aims to foster a culture of openness and acceptance about menstruation in a society.

Keywords: Menstrual stigma, myths, misconceptions, awareness, menstrual education, mental well being, physical health

Introduction

Menstrual stigma persists as a significant challenge in almost all societies, driven by widespread misunderstandings and false beliefs. Menstrual stigma encompasses of taboos, misconceptions, wrong believes, myths and social stereotypes of menstruating women and about menstruation. Menstruation is a natural biological process which is experience by every female after the specific age (12-15years). Women needs more love, care and affection during menstruation days. It's a high time to eliminate menstrual myths and misconceptions and to talk about more real things and experiences about menstruation.

Cultural myths, social taboos and religious beliefs contributed in a sustainability of menstrual stigma and misconceptions. These false believes vary from unclean and impure to harmful or disgust red blood. Such misconceptions and myths create barriers in women's social progress and daily life. Menstruation is not something one should feel ashamed of. An online survey was conducted during the research to see how menstrual stigma effect females' social participation. Many females still feel embarrass and uncomfortable menstruating which creates hurdles in social participation and lower self esteem. According to the results,

32.3% females don't feel embarrassment about their menstruation, 33.8% feels embarrassed sometimes about it while 32.3% rarely feels ashamed and only 1.6% females always feel embarrassment or ashamed about menstruation.

This paper aims to discuss all the issues faced by women out there and struggling on a monthly basis to get basic sanitary products. People need to understand that menstruation is a natural biological process and has nothing to do with impurity. Menstrual education is essential to eliminate and dispell menstrual myths and misconceptions and more talk and discussion on menstruation and it's hygiene is the only way to create awareness ,foster a more informed and inclusive discourse surrounding menstruation.

Different societies think differently about Menstruation which also shape their perceptions about it. Some societies may see menstruation as a dirty thing while other see it as a natural processe or scientifically. Hence, Menstrual stigma is socially constructed according to the norms, beliefs and culture of the society. People need to understand that menstruation is a natural biological process and has nothing to do with impurity. Educating society as a whole about menstruation and it's hygiene is very crucial. Menstrual education is essential to eliminate and dispell menstrual myths and misconceptions and more talk and discussion on menstruation and it's hygiene is the only way to create awareness and promote reality about menstruation.

Educating people about menstruation is very important in order to create more inclusive environment. This paper also discuss the socio-cultural stigmas and how it impacts women's physical and mental well being. Society's attitude towards menstruating females significantly effects their health which in return creates stress, anxiety, feeling of shame and make them uncomfortable.

Review of literature:

- Sharma, S. Joshi,K and Joshi,A.etal,(2024) studies stigma, challenges and silences around menstruation .This study focuses on the taboos, social Stigmas, cultural beliefs and misconceptions that Contribute in the marginalization and exclusion of menstruating

females. It also highlights the adverse effects on the mental, physical and reproductive health of females. This paper aim to break stigma and silence around menstruation. This paper highlights the significance of good care of menstruating females and how it contributes in the mental and physical well being and reproduction cycle.

- Cardoso,L.F,Scolese.A.M,Hamidaddin,A.etal.(2021), studies period poverty among university girls. Period poverty means limited access towards sanitary products, health ,education and awareness. This focus on challenges faced by girls in accessing affordable sanitary products and how it effects their mental health. This paper highlights sanitary products as a basic women's need and it's importance. This paper suggests that availability, accessibility and affordability of menstrual products are very essential for women's mental well being.
- Van Lonkhuijzen, R. M., Garcia, F. K., & Wagemakers, A. (2023). The Stigma Surrounding Menstruation: Attitudes and Practices Regarding Menstruation and Sexual Activity During Menstruation. *Women's Reproductive Health*, 10(3).This article expect to comprehend the ways of behaving and rehearses about period and sexual movement during feminine cycle because of shame. This study utilized a blended techniques plan that incorporated a review and meetings with residents and specialists to acquire a knowledge into the perspectives and works on in regards to feminine cycle and sexual action during period in the Netherlands .This study reveals that women don't feel understood by society specifically by men about their menstruation.

Methodology:

The research applied mix methodology for the collection of data from the respondents. The data is collected through online surveys, interviews, review of articles and observation. The research focused on both primary and secondary data for

more wider, in depth and accurate information on the topic.

- **Interviews:**

Data is collected through online and face to face interviews from 10 respondents, which is recorded according to the respondents consent. Interviews enable to collect more in depth data on menstrual hygiene, menstrual medical problems, socio- cultural beliefs and stigmas surrounding menstruation as well as detailed discussions on menstruation history and experience from respondents .

- **Online Surveys:**

Online survey through Google forms was conducted to obtain data from wider respondents. The sample size of online survey was 65 respondents.

- Secondary data :

Already published articles and existing data on menstruation was studied for more information on menstruation stigmas and challenges.

Discussion:

For the purpose of this research, primary data is collected systematically through interviews. Several interviews were conducted to collect perceptions of individuals on menstrual stigma as well as cultural beliefs surrounding menstruation and how these stigmas and beliefs impact females lives.

10 interviews were conducted, out of which 2 interviewees faced cyst problem and 1 interviewee's uterus was removed by doctors because of extremely heavy bleeding without any pause. Other interviewees have suffered from heavy cramps, back pain, vomiting, headache and mood swings.

Taking about menstrual myths, interviewees have heard different myths including no use of water (even after using toilet)during menstruation instead tissue is preferred, myths related to eating and drinking, menstrual pad can cause vaginal infection avoid giving sweet to anyone or kneading dough, not sitting on a sofa where a religious man sit even if it's your father, don't go out at dark , don't wear flower jewellery, girl's second periods should be in her

in laws house, don't wear tight bra during menstruation, clothes you wear during your cycle are impure even if there is no stain , hide your waste cloth in multiple bags and then throw and dispose your used cloth or pad after washing it to avoid black magic.

The case studies show that menstruation is stigmatize in various ways such as avoiding menstrual discussion, culture of silence, perceiving menstruation as impure, thinking menstruation is a disgust thing and hiding menstrual products from male members.

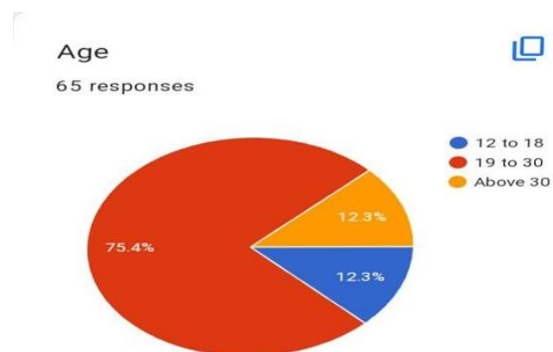
Some interviewees believe that menstruation is not purposely stigmatized rather, there is a fear of being judged and a feeling of embarrassment about what others may think, resulting in silence on menstruation.

Moreover, the results show that menstrual stigma and myths effect mental well being of the menstruating individual and lower her self-esteem. Psychological issues faced by interviewees include anxiety, low self confidence, stress, self questioning, irritation, feeling of exclusion, emotionally disturb,and mood swings.

Lastly, menstrual stigma can be eliminate bt dispelling myths and misconceptions and it can only happen if society as a whole accept and treat menstruation as a natural biological process and spread awareness regarding it's hygiene through media, blogs, articles and education institutions.

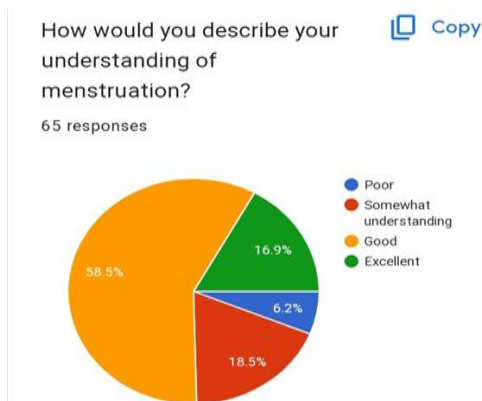
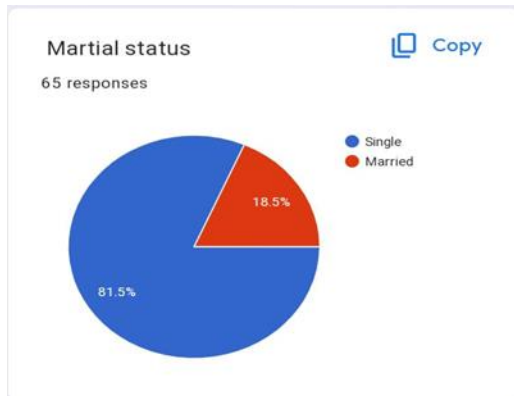
Results:

Online Surveys were conducted through google forms for the purpose to get more diverse data on menstruation. Recorded results are shared below.Figure:1.1



Google forms were shared to more than 100 females but only 65 responses were collected. Targeted respondents were the females who are having or had menstruation. 12.3% respondents are between the age of 12 to 18, 75.4% are between the age of 19 to 30 and 12.3% are above 30 years.

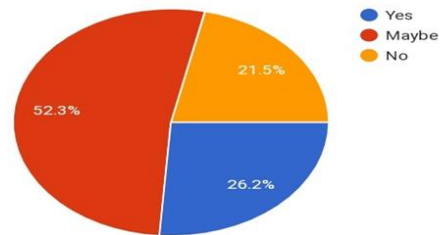
Out of 65 respondents females 18.5% are married and 81.5% are single.



Understanding about menstruation also affects how females deal with it. Understanding doesn't only include what menstruation is but also includes knowledge about its hygiene, medical issues, facts and difference between myths and reality. The results of the pie chart clearly demonstrate that 6.2% of females have no understanding about menstruation, 18.5% of females have little understanding about menstruation while 58.5% of females have good understanding about it and 16.9% of females know very well about menstruation.

Do you believe menstrual myths and misconceptions contribute to menstrual stigma?

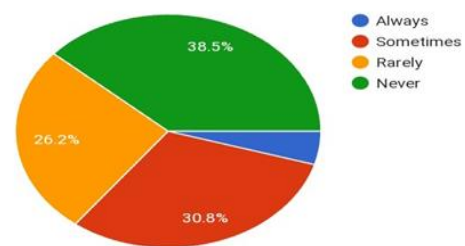
65 responses



Menstrual myths and misconceptions are something that can completely change the meaning of menstruation. Undoubtedly, menstruation is still stigmatized in our society and menstrual myths and misconceptions somehow contribute to it. According to the obtained data, 26.2% of females think that menstrual stigma is because of menstrual myths and misconceptions, 52.3% believe that menstrual myths and misconceptions may be the reason of menstrual stigma and 21.5% of females think that there is no relation between menstrual stigma and myths and misconceptions. This means that more than 50% of females agree that menstrual stigma is the result of menstrual myths and misconceptions.

Have you ever encountered negative comments or attitudes about menstruation?

65 responses

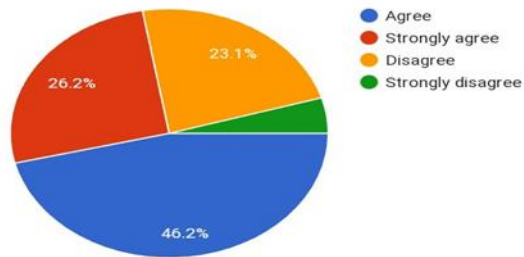


Menstrual stigmatization sometimes may lead to negative comments or attitudes towards menstruating females which affect them psychologically. These results show that 4.5% of females have always encountered negative comments, 30.8% sometimes experienced such bad comments, 26.2% of females rarely encounter negative attitudes and comments, and 38.5% of females have never faced such comments and attitudes towards them.

Do you think menstrual stigma affects individuals' well-being and mental health?



65 responses



Menstrual stigma can affect menstruating females physical health and mental well being and these results support this argument. The obtained results show that 46.2% females agree on it, 26.2% females strongly agree with this while 23.1% females disagree on this and 4.5% females strongly disagree on it.

Conclusion:

Menstrual stigma is a serious and incomunicable issue and needs more attention and research. Menstrual stigma effects menstruating females psychologically and made them suffer even during ramadan. Menstrual myths and misconceptions contributes in menstrual stigma that's why to eliminate menstrual stigma it is important to dispell menstrual myths and misconceptions.

People perception and thinking about menstruation needs to be changed and for that focus should me on reality rather than some untrue myths. Proper education should be given on menstruation, it's hygiene and medical consequences including reproduction issues. Media can play a crucial role in building a positive and new meaning of menstruation. World should know that menstruation is a natural biological process and menstruation cramps are equivalent to mini heart attack. When society as a whole start accepting menstruation as a natural processe and not as an impure thing the change will become gradually.

The elder females in our homes need to understand that discussing about menstruation the daughter not a bad thing but helpful for the daughters in a future . Learning from homes will also have huge impact on menstrual perception and will dispell menstrual myths and misconceptions.

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