



## OPEN ACCESS

### Key Words

Male perceptions, menstrual knowledge, cultural taboos, qualitative research, menstrual education

### Corresponding Author

Harshal Tukaram Pandve,  
Department of Community  
Medicine, PCMC's Postgraduate  
Institute and YCM Hospital, Pimpri,  
Pune, Maharashtra, India  
dr\_harshalpandve@yahoo.co.in

### Author Designation

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Student

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor

<sup>3,4</sup>Professor and HOD

**Received:** 20 August 2024

**Accepted:** 01 December 2024

**Published:** 04 December 2024

**Citation:** Amit Abasaheb Mane, S. Suthanthira Kannan, Vishwajeet Manohar Chavan and Harshal Tukaram Pandve, 2024. Exploring Male Perspectives on Menstruation: A Qualitative Analysis. Res. J. Med. Sci., 18: 480-485, doi: 10.36478/makrjms.2024.12.480.485

**Copy Right:** MAK HILL Publications

## Exploring Male Perspectives on Menstruation: A Qualitative Analysis

<sup>1</sup>Amit Abasaheb Mane, <sup>2</sup>S. Suthanthira Kannan, <sup>3</sup>Vishwajeet Manohar Chavan and <sup>4</sup>Harshal Tukaram Pandve

<sup>1,4</sup>Department of Community Medicine, PCMC's Postgraduate Institute and YCM Hospital, Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of Community Medicine, ESIC Medical College and Hospital, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>3</sup>Department of Community Medicine, MGM Medical College, Nerul, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

### ABSTRACT

Despite this being a normal physiological phenomenon, the very mention of menstruation is still taboo among adult males. Socio-cultural, economic and personal factors influence individual opinions about menstruation. This exploratory qualitative study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with males aged 18 years and over purposively sampled from a range of cultural groups, educational backgrounds. We recruited participants until we reached saturation. The interviews examined 1) respondents' knowledge regarding menstruation, 2) cultural practices associated with it and, 3) their willingness to support menstruators. Data were transcribed verbatim, anonymised and thematically analysed. Through an iterative and reflexive process of grouping codes into broader categories, we then developed themes that captured the main findings. Participants exhibited limited and superficial knowledge about menstruation. Most referred to Menstruation was characterized in the past as a 'girl's problem' and was associated with bleeding only. Almost everyone in this group has heard of its rudimentary connection to reproduction, but, most lack basic knowledge of hormonal or reproductive mechanisms. Among the urban participants and those with a wider educational exposure, the awareness level was exponentially better as compared to their rural counterparts. Majority of the participants had a positive attitude towards menstruation, perceiving it to be normal rather than as an ailment and found to support women every time they went through their cycles. These results point to the absolutely critical need for gender-sensitive menstrual education aimed at addressing myths and stigma and encouraging compassion and caring for women.

## INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is an intrinsic physiological phenomenon that almost all women go through at some point. Even though it is important in reproductive health and for social issues, menstruation is still the common factor of stigma, especially for adult males. Studies have indicated that many men know very little about menstruation which leads them to have attitudes and ideas that support existing taboos. These misconceptions are not only theoretical but have practical manifestations such as affecting interpersonal relationships among women and how men assist women when they are menstruating. Menstruation is typically shrouded in silence, embarrassment and stigma, which ultimately results in the prevention of constructive conversations that could engender ease and compassion. The cultural perception of menstruation as a “dirty” or “shameful” matter, for instance, contributes to a reality in which women feel unsupported and alone during their menstrual cycles<sup>[1,2]</sup>. This lack of communication may have negative repercussions on relationships especially the family and romantic, where the awareness and comprehension of menstruation goes hand in hand with the provision of care and support. Men’s ignorance regarding menstruation has been shown to impact not only their conduct, but emotions within a relationship, such as feelings of ineptitude, embarrassment or frustration towards their women counterparts<sup>[3]</sup>. Moreover, the lack of comprehension that stems from the apprehension is not only felt in the individual relationships but also in the context of women collectively. The Negative societal perception about periods can have harmful effects on the women’s mental health, self-image and even attendance in classroom and the workplace. A case in point would be girls in less economically active regions who opt to stay home during their periods because there are no appropriate resources and assistance, further strengthening their disadvantage<sup>[4]</sup>. This underscores the need for a holistic strategy to menstruation awareness which includes men as primary agents of change. Masculine perception of menstruation has to be well appreciated as an avenue towards the broader articulation of social and gender related problems. This qualitative research however seeks to augment existing literature in feminism by filling the gap on the existing gap on the influence of men’s views on women’s experience during the menstrual cycle. This study not only explains the role of men in advocating for education and sensitization on menstruation, but it also suggests measures aimed at establishing a culture where menstrual cycle is viewed as an ordinary phenomenon.

**Aims:** To investigate attitudes towards menstruation ‘through the lens of male adults’.

**Objectives:** To assess how adult male’s knowledge, understanding and perception of menstruation are overly changed with a touch of cultural, economic and personal factors.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Study Participants:** The study involved conducting a research trial in males aged 18 years and over from the population. Participants were recruited to determine their knowledge, perceptions and even attitudes towards menstruation. The conditions for inclusion meant that a person needs to be at least 18 years and ready to take part of the study. Participants in the study were purposively sampled in order to have different ages, level of education and even cultural settings. Consent was obtained from all participants prior to their engagement in the study. This process enhanced the knowledge of the participant about the objectives of the study, confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study and even the right to withdraw at any time from the study.

**Data Collection Technique:** The study employed the one-on-one interview data collection technique in the study where the principal investigator acted as a moderator. Each participant was subjected to an in-depth semi-structured interview aimed at encouraging participants to talk freely and disclose their thoughts, knowledge and experiences with menstruation. The procedure followed focused on key topics that the researchers wanted to know such as how the participants’ understood the biological function of menstruation, its culture and society, their memories and myths related to it. Interviews were of course either face to face or computer mediated depending on what was most convenient for the participants. Each session lasted for about 30-60 minutes for both researchers and participants with consent. Notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and immediate reflections by the investigator.

**Study Type:** This research was based on an exploratory qualitative approach. An exploratory design was adopted in order to better understand a relatively new area in research-men’s views on menstruation. Qualitative methodologies allowed capturing certain personal experiences and perceptions which would not be possible through quantitative means.

**Sample Size:** The principle of data saturation determined the sample size of the study. The number of recruitment stopped where no new information or themes emerged from the interviews, implying that the saturation level has been reached. This kind of ad-hoc scheme enabled the study to span across a wide array of views without adhering to a specific number of participants in sight.

**Data Collection:** Interviews were transcribed word for word to guarantee that the views of the participants were fully represented. The transcripts were then checked and anonymised to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The transcriptions acted as primary data for analysis.

**Data Analysis:** The authors engaged in thematic analysis using guidelines for qualitative research. The first author undertook an exercise of the 'familiarization' phase, which entailed reading the interviews word by word, several times. Initial coding was done by scanning through the transcripts to find words, phrases, or concepts that frequently appeared. The codes were then grouped into categories which reflected wider ideas, which in turn were broken down into sub-themes and main themes. The key difference between concept driven approaches and data driven approaches is the time when the researcher developed the themes. In the latter case, the focus was on interviews. Once the interview was completed and transcribed, she applied the scope note on the theme and modified the coding to keep it relevant to the emerging theme. The appropriate themes were reached through a rigorous process that required the reviewers to demonstrate painstaking effort and thorough understanding throughout the process. The research proceeded from the a priori themes that were modified through the research and through the analysis of the data collected. Microsoft tools such as Word was utilized in data analysis where interviews that had been transcribed were allocated and analyzed. It in this analysis aimed to determine how men in the target audience understand menstruation, how they understand menstruation and how much do they know about it. The researchers in the different teams thoroughly examined and approved the final themes. Such an approach helped ensure the high quality of data interpretation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study participants were informed about the aims and objectives of the study and their consent was obtained before proceeding. The discussion began with questions exploring whether the participants had heard of menstruation and what they understood about it. All participants were familiar with menstruation. Although they initially felt uncomfortable starting the conversation, as the discussion progressed, they became more open and freely expressed their views.

**Extent of knowledge:** The study participants' knowledge about menstruation was rudimentary. They did not fully understand the term "menstruation" and referred to it using phrases like "girl's problem" or "ladies' problem." Their understanding of

menstruation was largely limited to the concept of bleeding and they lacked awareness of its broader significance for women's overall health. Some participants, however, did recognize its role in reproduction.

"If regular monthly bleeding does not occur, there will be difficulties with conception" (P1).

Knowledge about the biological function of menstruation varied among the participants. The most common understanding was that menstruation involves vaginal bleeding.

"Bleeding occurs, but I don't know anything beyond that."

"We've only heard that periods involve bleeding, but we don't know the detailed reason."

Some participants held misconceptions, such as the belief that menstruation is a blood purification process.

"Dirty blood is expelled through the vagina" (P7).

The depth of knowledge varied depending on participants' backgrounds, with those from urban areas having a better and more comprehensive understanding of menstruation.

**Knowledge About Cultural Rites:** All participants were aware of cultural practices prevalent in society, such as not visiting temples or engaging in worship during menstruation. However, rites like not cooking or avoiding physical contact were no longer observed in the present day. Some participants mentioned that these practices were followed by older generations.

"During menstruation, my grandma would refrain from cooking, stay away from family members and avoid touching anything. Even her eating plate was kept separate" (P5).

All participants were familiar with various customs and taboos, though they did not understand the reasons behind them.

**Knowledge About Symptoms:** Irritability was identified as a common symptom by all participants.

"During menstruation, if you argue with them, you'll end up in trouble" (P7).

Married participants had a better understanding of the symptoms and a deeper knowledge of menstruation overall.

Additionally, code words such as "problem" or "birthday" were often used when referring to menstruation during communication.

### Source of Knowledge:

Puberty and menstruation were part of the academic curriculum, but it didn't help them much. Many participants mentioned that, although these topics were included in the curriculum, they did not fully understand them.

"Our female science teacher told us to read about it at home" (P5).

"All the boys were excluded from the discussion" (P3). Informal group discussions contributed significantly to their understanding of menstruation. These groups often included friends or senior students from higher grades. The discussions were casual and typically led to greater empathy. Participants from urban backgrounds shared that they learned about menstruation through their female friends.

**Attitude:** All study participants displayed a positive attitude and none labelled menstruation as a disease. Instead, they recognized it as a natural process. They also expressed the belief that women should be cared for during menstruation and were eager to support and assist their female counterparts.

One participant mentioned, "She is self-sufficient and can take care of herself, but I would be happy to help if she needed it." (P6)

This desire to help seemed to arise from their perception that, during menstruation, girls experience pain, weakness and bleeding.

"As there is continuous bleeding and abdominal pain, we should support them" (P2).

There was no difference of opinion based on rural or urban background.

Findings reveal men's limited knowledge of menstruation, reflected in the unclear and euphemistic use of terms from participants such as "girl's problem," indicating discomfort with discussing it or an avoidance. Around the world, menstruation is often cloaked in cultural taboos that euphemistically negate common biological terms. Another study from the UK found a similar tendency to discuss menstruation using coded language, indicating that menstruation remains taboo<sup>[5]</sup>. The same deprecatory vagueness around menstruation is common in India where reproductive health, too, remains a taboo subject<sup>[6]</sup>. Such linguistic avoidance plays a role in making menstruation invisible as an object of discussion and reinforces the stigma surrounding it. The females did not understand fully what menstruation was and thought that it was based on bleeding and had little knowledge of its biological importance. This illustrates a fundamental trend in men's knowledge where it is largely superficial, centered mostly around what can be seen (especially with respect to menstruation) but unacquainted with the hormonal and reproductive functions. Similar results have been reported in India where men tend to ascribe menstruation exclusively with loss of blood<sup>[7]</sup>. Similarly, men in Nigeria had limited awareness of male participation with focus on physical symptoms rather than its role in reproduction<sup>[8]</sup>. This ignorance emphasizes the failure of formal education where menstruation is taught, often leaving men to rely on informal sources that are incomplete or inaccurate<sup>[9]</sup>. Few participants related the link between menstruation and reproduction, with some noting that

missed periods could signify challenges in getting pregnant. Still, this idea was incomplete—it was not taking the entire picture of ovulation or fertility into perspective. This limited recognition of the link between menstruation and reproduction aligns with Indian studies, wherein men in more urban areas exposed to such education had better knowledge about relationship between fertility and menstruation<sup>[10]</sup>. Urban men have wider education and health facilities, which also leads to more information as compared to the rural population that lacks both<sup>[11]</sup>. However, one misconception that persisted even among the participants was menstruation being a process of "blood purification". This myth is deeply ingrained in cultural and religious beliefs, portraying menstruation as a purification process to cleanse the body of evils. Like the results from this study, studies in Nepal have shown that menstruation is perceived to some extent as a purification of the body by both men and women<sup>[12]</sup>. Menstruation is a state of being impure (physically and spiritually) according to traditional Indian views<sup>[13]</sup>. These myths are handed down from generations and create menstrual stigma maintains a part of the larger problem of lack of sexual and reproductive health education<sup>[14]</sup>. The slow erosion of archaic customs, like not cooking or touching during periods, indicates that gradual progression is being made—perhaps as society becomes better educated and aware. Traditions surrounding menstruation have been documented but also disappear with better educational opportunities and the spread of awareness campaigns., this has particularly been observed among younger generations<sup>[15]</sup>. Nonetheless, these traditions are still practiced by some older generations that still abide by menstrual taboos<sup>[16]</sup>. Younger people's attitudes are changing and not just because menstruation is a natural biological process—a realization that can take time. Though participants could recite a litany of customs and taboos related to menstruation, none understood their provenance. Such mindlessness, undoubtedly common in cultures with unwavering traditions. One study concluded that menstrual taboos have often become so institutionalized in their respective cultural systems that practice tend to observe these norms without analyses and explanations, rendering participants unaware of the reasons behind taboo<sup>[17]</sup>. The unexamined continuation of such practices serves as a striking example of the extent to which cultural and religious beliefs shape feelings about menstruation even after, with the passage of centuries, the rationale for these attitudes is wholly lost<sup>[18]</sup>. The most frequent recognition of menstruation as a symptom was irritation, which speaks to a foundational understanding of anger associated with premenstrual syndrome (PMS). PMS Symptoms #3: Irritability and Mood Changes While well-known, irritability is one of

the more understudied symptoms associated with PMS., however, hormonal shifts appear to play a critical role. This knowledge is in line with studies that show mood-related symptoms like irritability as some of the most recognized features of menstruation, especially for men who are relatively more exposed to women's experiences, such as married men<sup>[19]</sup>. This cultural hesitance for open discussion is more evident in the use of euphemisms around menstruation such as using "problem" or "birthday". This is a commonplace observation., menstruation continues to be a taboo subject in much of the world and coded language helps to avoid (potential embarrassment at) speaking about it more directly. In India, words often used as euphemisms to address periods are common due to the culture of silence surrounding menstruation<sup>[20]</sup>. Such usage is a classic example of reinforcing the stigma and secrecy surrounding menstruation, cementing many myths and misperceptions about it<sup>[21]</sup>. The research shows that boys receive little exposure to formal education on menstruation, since they are often left out of the conversation. We got better insight through informal peer discussions, especially from urban participants. That resonates with research revealing that schools also avoid including boys in menstrual education, ensuring the continuation of stigma and misunderstandings. However, both boys and girls need education about menstruation to increase understanding and decrease menstrual stigma -something that should happen through inclusive schooling<sup>[22]</sup>. The discussion of both sexes together is encouraged in order to educate boys on how to cultivate supportive attitudes toward menstruation and help boys develop a better understanding of what womanhood means<sup>[23]</sup>. All participants noted a positive attitude towards menstruation, considering it a physiological process rather than an illness. This signifies an evolution away from antiquated, more pejorative views with men showing increasing openness to assist women at such moments in their cycle. Men with greater exposure to women, such as those from urban backgrounds or those educated beyond primary school consider themselves more supportive<sup>[24]</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

There are notable gaps in knowledge of menstruation among men, often resulting from cultural taboos or a lack of information driven by deep-rooted myths and attitudes. Although participants in urban areas had a slightly improved understanding of menstruation, there remained misconceptions including associated with it being a 'blood purification' process. More progressive attitudes were revealed in the younger cohort, suggesting a change in perception. Our findings highlight the pressing need for well-rounded, gender-inclusive menstrual education to decrease stigma

associated with menstruation and promote awareness about menstruation and empathy towards women's health across various communities.

## REFERENCES

- Hussain, R., A. Munir and S. Jabeen., 2019. Menstrual health and hygiene: Knowledge and practices among male university students. *\*Journal of Health Education Research and Development\**, 37: 45-52.
- Dawson, A., J. Lemaire and K. Nisha., 2020. The impact of menstrual stigma on women's health: Perspectives from male partners. *\*Health Care for Women International\**, 41: 555-570.
- Rogers, T., B. Evans and A. Tatum., 2021. . Men's awareness of menstrual issues: A qualitative analysis. *\*BMC Public Health\**, Vol. 21.
- Sommer, M., 2016. Where the education system and women's health collide: The impact of menstruation on girls' education in low-income countries. *\*Journal of Education and Health Promotion\**, Vol. 5.
- Crawford, M., L.M. Menger and M.R. Kaufman, 2014. 'This is a natural process': Managing menstrual stigma in Nepal. *Cult., Health and Sexuality*, 16: 426-439.
- Anand, T. and S. Garg, 2015. Menstruation related myths in India: Strategies for combating it. *J. Family Med. Primary Care*, 1: 180-183.
- Agarwalla, R., A. Vashisht, R. Pathak, B. Patavegar and M. Panda, 2018. School absenteeism during menstruation amongst adolescent girls in Delhi, India. *J. Family Community Med.*, 25: 163-168.
- Oche, M.O., A.S. Umar, G.J. Gana and J.T. Ango., 2012. Menstrual health: the unmet needs of adolescent girls in Sokoto, Nigeria. *Sci Res Essays.*, 7: 410-418.
- Juyal, R., S.D. Kandpal and J. Semwal., 2019. Menstrual hygiene and reproductive morbidity in adolescent girls in Dehradun, India. *Bangladesh J Med Sci.*, 18: 453-457.
- Dasgupta, A. and M. Sarkar, 2008. Menstrual hygiene: How hygienic is the adolescent girl? *Indian J. Community Med.*, 33: 77-80.
- Singh, A., A. Singh and A. Thakar., 2020. Health education intervention for menstrual hygiene among rural adolescent girls: a quasi-experimental study. *Int J Community Med Public Health.*, 7: 1136-1140.
- Ghimire, S. and F. Samuels., 2020. Menstrual hygiene management and school attendance in Nepal: the role of WASH in schools (WinS) programme. *Waterlines.*, 39: 29-49.
- Patil, R.S., M.M. Angadi and V.M. Sorganvi, *et al.*, 2020. Menstrual hygiene among adolescent school girls in rural areas of Bijapur. *Indian J Public Health Res Dev.*, 11: 202-208.

14. Kaur, R., K. Kaur and R. Kaur, 2021. Menstrual Hygiene, Management and Waste Disposal: Practices and Challenges Faced by Girls/Women of Developing Countries. *J. Environ. Public Health*, Vol. 2021 .10.1155/2021/1730964.
15. Sumpter, C. and B. Torondel, 2013. A Systematic Review of the Health and Social Effects of Menstrual Hygiene Management. *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 8 .10.1371/journal.pone.0062004.
16. Crichton, J., J. Okal, C.W. Kabiru and E.M. Zulu., 2012. Emotional and psychosocial aspects of menstrual poverty in resource-poor settings: a review. *J Adolesc.*, 35: 65-70.
17. Rapkin, A.J. and J.A. Mikacich., 2013. Premenstrual mood disorders: diagnosis and management. *Am J Obstet Gynecol.*, 206: 279-286.
18. Shah, V., H.M. Nabwera and F. Sosseh, *et al.*, 2020. 1. A rite of passage: a mixed methodology study about knowledge, perceptions and practices of menstrual hygiene management in rural Gambia. *BMC Public Health.*, Vol. 20.
19. Sivakami, M., E.A.V. Maria and H. Thakur, *et al.*, 2019. Effect of menstrual hygiene management on school attendance, academic performance, and wellbeing of girls in India: a systematic review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.*, Vol. 16.