

Original Research Article

STIGMA AND FEAR IN USING MENSTRUAL CUPS AMONG LATE ADOLESCENTS IN KOCHI, KERALA : A DESCRIPTIVE QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Menstrual cups are a cost-effective, safe, and environmentally sustainable alternative to pads and tampons. Despite their benefits, adolescent usage in India—especially Kerala—remains low due to stigma, cultural myths, and fear. **Aim:** To evaluate the levels of stigma, fear, and misconceptions associated with menstrual cup usage among late adolescents in Kochi and identify factors influencing willingness to adopt menstrual cups.

Materials and Methods: A descriptive quantitative study was conducted among 260 adolescent girls aged 16–19 years selected using simple random sampling. A validated structured questionnaire measured awareness, knowledge, stigma, fear, and willingness to use menstrual cups. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, Pearson correlation, and logistic regression (SPSS v25).

Results: Awareness of menstrual cups was high (73.8%), but actual usage remained very low (7.3%). Major fears included insertion (59.2%), discomfort (51.5%), hygiene concerns (44.6%), and leakage (39.6%). Stigma was also notable: 34.2% felt menstrual cups were socially discouraged, and 29.6% reported parental disapproval. Higher knowledge significantly reduced fear ($p < 0.01$), while stigma did not correlate with knowledge ($p = 0.23$).

Prior menstrual health education significantly increased willingness to try menstrual cups (OR = 3.41; CI: 1.9–6.1; $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Fear and myths remain major barriers to menstrual cup acceptance among adolescents in Kochi. School-based menstrual health education, peer-led demonstrations, and parental awareness programs can significantly improve acceptance.

Keywords: Menstrual cup, adolescents, stigma, fear, menstrual hygiene, Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation, though a normal biological process, remains surrounded by stigma and cultural restrictions in India. Even in highly literate states like Kerala, adolescent girls often lack adequate menstrual health knowledge and rely on traditional menstrual products due to fear, misinformation, and social pressures.

Menstrual cups, which offer long-term affordability, sustainability, and safety, continue to have low adoption among Indian adolescents. Myths surrounding virginity, fear of insertion, discomfort,

and concerns about hygiene are major factors influencing acceptance.

This study examines stigma and fear associated with menstrual cup usage among late adolescents in Kochi, with the goal of identifying actionable pathways to improve menstrual health literacy and acceptance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design: Descriptive cross-sectional quantitative study.

Sample Size: A total of 260 adolescent girls aged 16–19 years.

Sampling Method: Simple random sampling from higher secondary schools and junior colleges in Kochi.

Data Collection Tool

A structured, validated questionnaire covering:

- Awareness
- Knowledge
- Fear (insertion, pain, hygiene, leakage, virginity concerns)
- Stigma (social, familial, cultural)
- Willingness to use menstrual cups

Tool reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$

Ethical Considerations: Institutional ethical approval obtained. Informed consent was taken. Confidentiality preserved.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics
- Chi-square tests
- Pearson correlation
- Binary logistic regression
- SPSS version 25 was used.

RESULTS

1. Awareness and Knowledge

- Awareness of menstrual cups: 73.8% (n = 192)
- Never heard of menstrual cups: 26.2% (n = 68)
- Accurate knowledge of safety and hygiene: 44.6% (n = 116)

2. Fear-Related Findings

- Fear of insertion: 59.2% (n = 154)
- Fear of discomfort: 51.5% (n = 134)
- Hygiene/cleaning concerns: 44.6% (n = 116)
- Fear of leakage: 39.6% (n = 103)
- Fear of losing virginity: 21.1% (n = 55)

3. Stigma-Related Findings

- Menstrual cup is a taboo subject: 29.2% (n = 76)
- Society discourages use: 34.2% (n = 89)
- Parental disapproval: 29.6% (n = 77)

4. Perceived Benefits

- Environmentally friendly: 86.1% (n = 224)
- Cost-effective: 88.4% (n = 230)
- Comfortable for long hours: 72.3% (n = 188)

5. Willingness to Use

- Willing to try if educated: 49.2% (n = 128)
- Confident they could use with guidance: 54.6% (n = 142)

Inferential Statistics

1. Fear and Knowledge

Pearson correlation:

- $r = -0.42, p < 0.01$

→ Higher knowledge is associated with lower fear.

2. Stigma and Knowledge

- No significant association: $p = 0.23$

3. Age and Fear

- Significant association: $p = 0.03$

→ Younger adolescents exhibited higher fear.

4. Predictors of Willingness to Use

Binary logistic regression:

Variable Odds Ratio (OR) 95% CI p-value

Prior menstrual health education 3.41 1.9–6.1
<0.001

Students who received menstrual education were 3.4 times more likely to consider using a menstrual cup.

DISCUSSION

The results show that fear—especially fear of insertion and discomfort—is the strongest barrier to menstrual cup adoption among adolescent girls in Kochi. Stigma remains present but is less influential than fear.

The inverse relationship between knowledge and fear underscores the importance of structured menstrual health education. Cultural beliefs around virginity significantly discourage use, consistent with prior research in Kerala.

However, acknowledgment of benefits—cost-effectiveness and environmental sustainability—shows potential openness if fear and misconceptions are addressed.

Effective interventions include

- School-based menstrual health workshops
- Demonstrations using anatomical models
- Peer-led discussions
- Parental awareness sessions
- Social media awareness campaigns

These strategies can help normalize menstrual cup usage.

CONCLUSION

Fear, cultural misconceptions, and stigma substantially restrict menstrual cup adoption among adolescents in Kochi. Comprehensive, adolescent-friendly menstrual education can significantly improve willingness to use menstrual cups.

Normalizing discussions around menstruation, correcting myths about virginity, and providing practical guidance are essential steps toward improving menstrual hygiene practices in this population.

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