

The Misunderstanding and Prejudice of Menstruation in China- The Situation of Women

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Abstract. Menstruation has long been considered taboo in most cultures. Physical discomfort, heightened emotionality, and interruption of tasks and social interactions are frequently linked to menstruation. As a result, women experience not only physical and mental suffering and inconvenience during menstruation but also endure social and cultural discrimination. Women of all ages, particularly adolescents from rural regions who experienced economic hardship in China, are the subject of this research. The detrimental effects of health education's level of distribution, the underlying historical or cultural causes of "period shame," and the need to offer a potential cure for menstruation poverty. According to analysis, cultural variables have a particularly harmful impact on Chinese women and girls. The best method to lessen the unpleasant effects of menstruation is to accept menstruation as a natural occurrence, have a positive perspective of oneself, and reject conventional negative menstruation attitudes, according to hierarchical data that indicates the cultural expectations of menstruation.

Keywords: Menstruation; misunderstanding; cultural expectations; prejudice; health education.

1. Introduction

The topic of menstruation has been taboo around the world for centuries. Menstruation is often associated with physical discomfort, increased emotionality, and a disruption of activities and social interactions, according to research [1].

China, as a large country, has a cultural belief been accepted that menstruation and its byproducts are seen as harmful and polluting. People consider menstrual blood, urine, dung, sweat, mucus, phlegm, and all other bodily waste to be unclean [2]. Because they pose a threat to the current order, they are also rejected by and expelled from the body's orderly structure, and out of all body waste, menstrual blood is viewed to be the dirtiest. Those who come into contact with menstrual entities run the risk of being impure and unable to perform rituals or enter the presence of a sacred object or being. Chinese culture holds that menstruation blood has magical properties and is very deadly to anyone who comes into contact with it. Blood and breath are considered powerful essences of the human body in Chinese culture. The life essences of the human body are its breath and blood. To maintain health as well as to develop and sustain new life, clean blood is necessary. Bleeding that is not pure and flows from the body is linked to danger, suffering, and death. Blood from the menstrual cycle, in particular, represents a dead fetus [3].

Menstrual shame permeated every bit of what people think, say, and do. Most of the cultural stigma of menstruation started from religion. Chinese culture forbids menstruation women from washing their own and their husband's clothing simultaneously and from sitting on a chair that a male will be using. In public rituals, open temples, or even ancestral halls, menstruating women are not permitted to worship the gods; nevertheless, they are permitted to do so privately [3]. Additionally, they are not permitted to attend open houses, weddings, funerals, or birthday parties. Chinese culture forbids having sexual relations while they are menstruating. If a man engages in sexual activity while menstruating, he will absorb the woman's polluting essences, become polluted, and get penis sores and a condition known as crushing red, which can lead to severe illnesses and even death.

According to the "2022 Menstrual Cognition and Current Status Report", underneath the cultural belief and moral pressure from society, nearly half of the respondents feel ashamed of menstruation [4]. However, compared with the previous generation, the menstrual shame of the women who were born in the 90s or 2000s is reduced, and women's awareness of "stopping the menstrual shame" is

significantly improved. Menstruation throughout adolescence has caused discrimination and teasing for 19.2% of women, with post-80s women experiencing the highest rates of prejudice from peers and classmates of the opposite sex. 65.9% of women desired help that included partner understanding and related public benefits because they thought that they did not receive enough social support during their periods. Less than 10% of participants in a previous study predicted they would feel joyful (7.5%), proud (3.4%), or enthusiastic (5.7%) as they approached their menarche. Another research indicated, only less than 10% of participants expected to feel joyful (7.5%), proud (3.4%), or enthusiastic (5.7%) as they approached their menarche. In contrast, 43.3% of women reported feeling humiliated and 42.6% annoyed at the time of menarche [5].

This research focuses on the situation of females of all ages, especially those from rural areas who suffered economic difficulties in China. The negative impact of the dissemination degree of health education, the historical or cultural reasons that lead to "period shame", and hoping to present a possible solution to menstrual poverty.

2. Existing Menstruation Misunderstanding

2.1 Menstruation Misunderstanding in the Undeveloped Areas

In certain tribal communities, women who are menstruating frequently put aside a space to reside in another area until their menstrual blood is pure in order to safeguard the community from the elimination of female biological impulses. Women's menstrual blood is regarded as a particularly potent item of filth, and menstrual blood also possesses unique magical properties [6]. Both ordinary men and gods are particularly taboo against this defilement, and menstrual blood also has distinctive magical properties. Menstrual blood has occasionally taken on a spiritual quality, which is related to the fact that humans despise and dread ghosts.

Why are there so many phobias and even hatred around the natural occurrence of menstruation in females? The first reason was that menstruation women's diverse behaviors were restricted because of their ancestors' misinterpretation of physiological events that were not understood. As a result of the stigmatization of menstrual blood, prejudice against all menstruating women becomes worse since it reinforces the idea that women are always unclean while they are bleeding [7]. As a result, the young girl is not permitted to climb the roof after menarche, and the woman is not permitted to step over the man. Women are unable to step over men's coats, flat stretchers, gun barrels, daily necessities, and production equipment used on the upper body. Some ethnic groups forbid women from living upstairs out of concern that men passing below will cause catastrophe. Men are not only forbidden from having intercourse with menstrual women but even items that they touch are thought to be extremely harmful and may be fatal. Women who are menstruating cannot travel the same path as males since they would eventually perish [8]. Menstruating women must be kept apart, even in some societies, to prevent the special magic of menstrual blood from harming others [6]. All of this is connected to the idea that women are unclean, and breaking these taboos is thought to bring bad luck severe enough to make men unlucky. Because the female biological structure cannot be changed, this disdain for and fear of menstrual blood is both a manifestation and a direct result of gender inequality. It also poses a significant barrier to gender equality.

2.2 Menstruation Misunderstanding in the Urban Area

Even though the status of women has greatly improved and society is much more open and inclusive than it was in the past, we must acknowledge that issues like "menstrual shame" and "body shame" persist. Many overt bonds have been broken, but many ingrained cultural traits have persisted in people's ideas ever since. Menstruation is a socially "invisible" issue in China's public discourse, with terms like "menstruation" and "period" hardly ever appearing in movies, TV shows, or news stories [7]. Sanitary napkins and sleeping pants were not included in the aid supplies of medical staff during the epidemic, and many primary and secondary schools did not include menstrual education in their physiological health curricula, according to the "Self-Discipline Rules for Sanitary Pin

Advertising" published by the China Advertising Association in 2016 [9]. These rules also state that the liquid absorbed by sanitary napkins in advertising films cannot be red or a color similar to it but may instead be blue.

Menstrual taboos, menstrual shame, menstrual stigma, and other issues are also common in women's daily life in the private discourse arena. Women have come up with several nicknames to refer to menstruation in order to conceal it, and while discussing sanitary napkins, they will often use some illogical pronouns. Menstruation is referred to by 5000 different pronouns around the world, according to a 2016 study by the International Women's Health Alliance [9]. This allows women to discuss their periods in social situations without feeling embarrassed. The following statistics from the "Adolescent Girls' Physiological Health Insight Report, " which was released in 2020 by Meiyu and Beijing Red Maple Women's Psychological Consultation Service Center, show how widespread menstrual shame is in China: a little over half of the girls are vaguely aware of how their bodies change the following menarche; More than 90% of females completely lose their freedom of speech and behavior when menstruation starts; 70% of girls advised carrying sanitary napkins discreetly; 61% of females must substitute the term "menstruation" with another; 44% of females "dare not move, " "dare not sit, " or "dare not stand, " while 26% of girls worry about strange looks from other people.

About half of the participants were asked if it was acceptable to use a napkin in public, and the responses were both yes and no. Young ladies hold sanitary towels securely in their hands, in their sleeves, or in little bags to conceal them from prying eyes. Respondents frequently limit their conversations to trivial topics like menstrual periods, dysmenorrhea, and hygiene items utilized. Respondents believe that "menstruation with a special smell, excretion from private parts, and a special colour can easily make people subconsciously ashamed to expose and try to hide [10]." Therefore, the more individuals locate the characteristic of "privacy", the stronger the shame caused by menstruation. Few individuals consider or talk about the social difficulties surrounding menstruation [11]. This reflects how Chinese women from wealthy families and above view menstruation based on the social class of middle-class interviewees. Kids are lucky in that they understand that menstruation is not humiliated before they are disgraced; nonetheless, this is insufficient since it is challenging for them to relate to or pay attention to situations like menstrual poverty or distant menstrual shame.

3. Influence Factors of the Result

3.1 Traditional Culture and Modern Social Attitudes

Menstruation has long been associated with uncleanness, and the ancients thought that the blood shed by a woman during her period was an especially terrible dirt that might cause any number of bad things to happen [11]. Women are not allowed to partake in ancestor worship when they are menstruating since doing so will result in uncleanness. Menstrual blood pollution is a concern for regular males, and it is particularly frowned upon by the gods.

Menstrual intercourse supposedly means that both men and women experience menstrual cramps during sex, which claims that this situation is extremely harmful to men and even has the potential to cause death; sex during a woman's menstruation will cause great harm to women's health [6]. This proverb has been around since ancient times. Major life events should also prevent women from having their periods since menstrual blood carries taboo words like "filthy, " "dirty, " "unclean, " and "destruction" and cannot be seen on the wedding day at all. Menstruating women are not permitted to attend other people's weddings since doing so will ruin the bride and groom's family. The guy must know the woman's period before marriage in order to prevent having the wedding during the bride's period. Han people also think it is shameful for males to be seen as menstruation in person. It is also frowned upon to wear menstrual belts directly on the body, which are often used as sanitary towels, for fear that they may be permanently marked with obscurity [12].

Menstruation, a normal physiological response for women, is also categorized as a cultural taboo of shame in traditional culture. When a girl experiences her first menstrual period, her mother or older

female relatives teach her that menstruation is a woman's trouble, menstrual blood is filthy, and to be secretly hidden and exposing it will invite shame [12]. One may argue that ever since a patriarchal culture was established, menstruation has been demonized. First of all, males lack such a physiological trait, and women's social standing has drastically dropped, making them men's vassals. The underlying implication of the argument that women's typical physiological phenomena are related to uncleanliness is that women are inferior and that things that are closely related to women's bodies but unrelated to men's bodies are also subservient [13]. This perspective can also help women better control their bodies. This is simply a sort of "misogyny, " which stigmatizes women's typical physiological events by using lofty phrases.

3.2 Deficiencies in Education and Misleading from Inappropriate Information

The strange myths surrounding menstruation have substantially diminished as scientific understanding has permeated society today. Children's physical and mental health is, however, also being impacted by cognitive disparities between the sexes both inside and beyond the home. Menstruation and sanitary napkins are covered physiologically in sex education, but it also aims to improve women's positive self-esteem by eradicating the stigma associated with menstruation in society [5]. The promotion of women's self-esteem and gender equality are two goals of menstrual education. Sex education encompasses not only the study of sexual physiology but also the development of the individual's personality and interpersonal interactions.

Numerous reports released in 2020 claimed that the existing sex education system is not perfect. In a survey of senior students at two primary schools in Chongqing, Li Yang, a lecturer at the New Era Social Work Research Center with Chinese Characteristics at Chongqing University of Science and Technology, discovered that 77.3% of students said they did not know, and 9.1% believed it was incorrect. This demonstrates how a lack of sex education causes elementary school pupils to be ignorant about reproductive organs. Huifang Xia, an associate professor at the Guizhou Normal University School of Education Science, conducted a survey of 1221 junior high school students in 16 junior high schools in Guiyang City. The results revealed that 36.69% of the students did not comprehend the risks associated with teenage pregnancy and that 30.14% did not comprehend sperm loss, menstrual physiology, or personal hygiene. In a survey of junior high school students, Hefei Maternal and Child Health Care Family Planning Service Center found that only 28.0% of adolescent girls had knowledge of menstruation before menstruation, only 5.2% had learned about it from teachers, and only 13.7% had learned it from books. Only 25.6% and 31.3% of adolescent girls had knowledge of menstruation and menstrual health care, respectively, and 64.7% of adolescents were satisfied with these knowledge levels [5].

People frequently confine disorders of the reproductive system to the realm of medicine and believe that they are issues best handled by institutions of medicine and health. Academic performance and advancement are prioritized in schools, and health instruction concerning pubertal development and puberty is only necessary as a side topic. Due to the influence of educational evaluation and the lack of qualified teachers, the school's menstrual health education has not been fully understood. As a result, the teaching method is straightforward, focusing on the injection and instillation of knowledge. Additionally, there is a phenomenon known as "following the book and coping with things, " which negatively impacts the effectiveness of the school's menstrual health education. According to an interview with administrators and teachers at two different schools, neither the primary nor the junior high school offered courses on reproductive health education for teenage girls, and neither had full-time instructors or instructional materials [14]. Some of the pertinent material is taught in junior high schools as "Biology" lessons. The curriculum is also too simplistic to suit the kids' demands in terms of depth and breadth, which means that this aspect of education falls behind the rate at which pupils are physically developing.

Students' existing knowledge of adolescent menstrual health still shows that the school's development of adolescent menstrual health education has some shortcomings, and there is a knowledge gap between what students want to learn about adolescent and menstrual health and what

is covered in the school's health education curriculum [14]. Schools have not yet done a good job of serving as the primary location of menstrual health education for teenage girls, and the menstrual health information that adolescent girls require is significantly greater in breadth and depth than the existing level of menstrual health education.

Additionally, it is impossible to overlook the impact of family and schooling. Family sex education is the most crucial type of sex education for kids, even if folk sex education is the most successful type of sex education in China [5]. According to the current state of affairs, many parents feel ashamed or even stigmatized about sex, and most parents lack proper sex education. Mothers frequently impart this knowledge based on their own experience and experience because they also lack the necessary knowledge of adolescent menstrual health care, which means the knowledge imparted lacks systematic and scientific due to the long-standing lack of menstrual health education in China. Many parents have not received scientific and systematic menstrual health education, they have insufficient knowledge and skills on menstrual health, and they do not have relevant knowledge. Children can learn about menstrual health to a certain extent at school, but once they get home, they revert to accepting the conservative and incorrect views of their parents, which severely undermines the efficacy of schooling.

4. Possible Solutions and Advice

4.1 Education

Adolescent students' menstrual health education is a crucial organizational component of school health education, with the goal of empowering students to acquire accurate menstrual health knowledge, establish accurate health concepts, employ accurate healthcare skills, develop a positive sense of self-care, and lay a solid foundation for lifelong menstrual health and happiness. The school's health education curriculum is also the most preferred and trusted way for students to acquire knowledge, and schools should formally incorporate menstrual education into the teaching plan according to the characteristics of adolescent girls' development and carry it out systematically and scientifically. The teaching content should be divided into different stages in accordance with the age characteristics and physiological and psychological needs of the students, with each stage having its own requirements and emphasis.

Schools should also add more menstrual health-related topics to the curriculum. In terms of families, schools also need to take on certain responsibilities. In order for family schools to build a combined force of education, increase the effect of education, and fulfill the aim of education, schools should aggressively seek the understanding, collaboration, and support of parents while educating teenage girls about menstruation health. In order for families and schools to develop consistent educational ideas, school teachers should have open lines of communication with parents about their children's menstrual health education during adolescence. They should also exchange opinions with parents on the subject of education as well as on teaching methods, scheduling, and other issues. They should also listen to and respect parents' opinions and adopt and use constructive ones.

4.2 Society

In China, the performance of the gender game has always been dominated by men. Gender stereotypes are still pervasive, the idea of gender equality has a long way to go, and women can only truly create a social environment and public discourse space that respects women's individual development by shattering the patriarchal and consumerist cultural confinement concealed by external men and internal women themselves. The creation of female images in today's society must begin from the viewpoint of female subjects, comprehend their requirements for expression, and arouse their autonomous consciousness.

5. Conclusion

The female menstrual cycle was once a common natural occurrence, but ever since the beginning of time, it has been stigmatized as "filthy" and shunned from being spoken about in public. Numerous causes, including the degradation of traditional culture, the domination of the social environment, a lack of professional expertise, and a lack of popularization, contribute to the lack of voice in women's physiological health. Strengthening the idea of gender equality, encouraging the development of women's subjectivity, and encouraging independent thought are all important steps in creating a reasonable women's health discourse system. We should also give opinion leaders in women's groups more prominence, encourage women to engage in public discourse, and create a system that is reasonable for women's health discourse.

In order to address a number of social issues related to menstruation, it is hoped that more in-depth research will be done in the future on cultural variations and positive menstrual attitudes. This will help to end long-standing taboos surrounding menstruation, as well as menstrual shame and stigma. In what way do ladies exfoliate their "shame"? Everyone who advocates eradicating shame need to give this some serious thought.

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