



# An Investigation into Menstrual Health Knowledge and Traditional Practices Among Badaga Women in Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu

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## Abstract:

This study delves into the intricate relationship between knowledge, traditional practices, and menstrual health among Badaga women in Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu. The persistent cultural taboos surrounding menstruation continue to influence women's social interactions and routines. Insufficient awareness and understanding of menstruation often lead to challenges faced by women in various aspects of life. This study employs the snowball sampling technique for data collection and uses a quantitative methodology for analysis. The findings are discussed within the framework of social constructionist theory.

**Keywords:** Menstruation, Traditional Practices, Menstrual Hygiene, Badaga Women, Knowledge, Social Constructionism

## Introduction:

Menstruation remains a topic steeped in cultural complexities and taboos in Indian society. Lack of proper information and education about menstruation often results in unnecessary restrictions on women's daily activities. This study aims to explore the connection between knowledge, traditional practices, and menstrual health among Badaga women in the Nilgiris District. In many parts of the country, these practices lead to challenges faced by women at home, school, and work.

## Review of Literature:

Various sources contribute to women's knowledge about menstruation, including friends, mothers, and teachers. However, misconceptions and taboos often prevail, leading to poor menstrual hygiene practices. These myths have also generated unnecessary fears among girls during menarche. Educational status, literacy of mothers, and awareness about menstruation have been identified as determinants of good menstrual hygiene practices

The primary sources of information about menstruation for the majority of Tribal (Gujjar) girls were friends, as mentioned by Dhingra, Kumar, & Kour in 2009. In resource-limited settings around Bangalore city, high school adolescent girls commonly acquired knowledge about menstruation from their mothers, as indicated by Shanbhag et al. in 2012. Conversely, girls in the United States often lack comprehensive knowledge about menstruation, and menstrual education can be contradictory—portraying menstruation as natural while

encouraging concealment, per Stubbs in 2008. Notably, well-informed girls sometimes hold misconceptions about menstruation due to emotional and cognitive limitations in pre-adolescence, as highlighted by Rierdan, Koff, & Flaherty in 2008.

A study by Jogdand & Yerpude in 2013 uncovered that mothers were often uninformed about educating their daughters about menstruation prior to menarche. Poureslami & Osati-Ashtiani in 2002 emphasize the necessity of educating female students about menstrual health behaviors, including nutrition, exercise, hygiene, and medication use based on medical guidance, particularly among adolescent girls in Suburban Districts of Tehran. Meanwhile, a study in saoner, Nagpur District (B.Thakre, S.Thakre, Reddy, Rathi, Pathak, & Ughade, 2011) emphasized the significance of promoting awareness about healthy menstrual practices.

Examining rural adolescent girls in Varanasi, Kansal, Singh, & Kumar in 2016 found a noteworthy connection between educational levels of respondents and their awareness of menarche before its onset. In a study among young women from low socioeconomic communities in Mumbai, Thakur et al. in 2014 discovered inadequate knowledge resulting in unhygienic practices and poor menstrual hygiene. Turning to traditional practices, Garg & Anand (2015) observed taboos and restrictions related to work, sex, food, and bathing in urban slums in Delhi. Dhingra, Kumar, & Kour (2009) noted that Tribal (Gujjar) adolescent girls adhere to socio-cultural taboos surrounding menstruation. Shanbhag et al. (2012) reported that three-fourths of adolescent school girls in saoner practiced various restrictions during menstruation, while Juyal, Kandpal, & Semwal (2013) found that many adolescent girls in Dehradun faced social or religious restrictions during their menstrual periods. Menstruation frequently led to prohibitions, such as worship attendance, cooking, and intimacy, with women occasionally being required to live separately at this time, according to Kaundal & Thakur (2014). Cultural and religious beliefs and taboos often contribute to inadequate information about menstrual hygiene, as noted by Yasmin et al. in 2013. The importance of raising awareness about healthy menstrual practices was highlighted by B.Thakre, S.Thakre, Reddy, Rathi, Pathak, & Ughade (2011). Kumari (2017) pointed out that backward societal thinking can lead to women feeling ashamed and unclean during menstruation, affecting their participation in various activities. Combining physiological issues with these taboos further restricts women's involvement in household, school, and social activities, as discussed by Chandra-Mouli & Patel in 2017..

Objectives:

This study aims to:

Investigate the menstruation history of Badaga women in Nilgiris District.

Examine the educational background and sources of information about menstruation among Badaga women.

Analyze the relationship between traditional practices and menstruation among Badaga women.

Methodology:

Quantitative methods were used for data collection and analysis. The study focused on Badaga women from different regions within Nilgiris District. The snowball sampling technique was employed, and data was collected through structured questionnaires..

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used quantitative method for the purpose of data collection and data analysis. Quantitative method enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables.

The study was conducted among the women from Badaga society. Badaga were spread across Nilgiris District. Throughout the district they live in nearly 400 villages, called Hattis. According to the book 'The Badaga' the Badaga population was divided into four Seemai. 1. Porangaadu (Kotagiri Taluk) 2. Thodhanaadu (Ooty Taluk) 3. Mekkunaadu (Coonor, Kotagiri and Udhagamandalam) and 4. Kundaseemai (Kundah Taluk). For sample selection, snowball technique was employed.

Data were collected using structured questionnaire. The Questionnaire was developed based on the literature review and also with the understanding of the research problem. The items used in the questionnaire were adopted from the previous studies and rephrase to suit the present study. Questionnaire was entered in google form along with the detailed description of the study and about the researcher. The major components of the questionnaire was to obtain information regarding the Demographic details, History of menstruation, source of information and communication regarding menstruation, traditional practices followed during menstruation and menstrual hygiene management among Badaga women in Nilgiris District. 84 respondents were collected during the time duration from 13th May to 9th July, 2021.

#### Statistical tools used

The data collected was saved in Microsoft excel and analyzed using standard spss16.0 and using R software. The demographic details of the respondents' like Age, income, seemai and menstruation details like puberty age, days between each menstrual cycle, the observation for these then divided into three points- a lower quartile, median and upper quartile to form four groups of the dataset using SPSS. To understand the distribution of data researcher used descriptive statistics, frequencies, mean, and standard deviation. Variables

#### Findings:

The study revealed that most respondents learned about menstruation from their mothers. They also expressed discomfort due to cultural practices, such as restrictions on entering temples and kitchens, not participating in rituals, and separating from others during menstruation

Among 84 respondents, 31% of the respondents were in the age group of 19-22 years, 26.2% of the respondents in the age group of 15-19 years, 22.6% of the respondents in the age group of 25-66 years and 20.2% of the respondents in the age group of 22-25 years

Among 84 respondents, **42.9%** of the respondents were in Under graduate, **31.0%** of the respondents in Higher secondary school, **17.9%** of the respondents in Post-graduate, **4.8%** of the respondents in Secondary school and **3.6%** of the respondents in Middle school.

Among 84 respondents, **38.1%** of the respondents family monthly income was between Rs.6000 to Rs.20000, **25.0%** of the respondents family monthly income was Rs.55000 to Rs.500000, **20.2%** of the respondents family monthly income was Rs.30000 to Rs.55000 and **16.7%** of the respondents family monthly income was Rs.20000 to Rs.30000

Among 84 respondents, **59.5%** of the respondents of the respondents from Porangaaduseemai, **17.9%** of the respondents from Mekkunaaduseemai, **16.7%** of the respondents from Thodhanaaduseemai and **6.0%** of the respondents Kundhaseemai

Among 84 respondents, **53.6%** of the respondents attain puberty in the age of 12-14 years, **29.8%** of the respondents in the age of 10-12 years and **16.7%** of the respondents in the age of 14-16 years.

- **94%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to visit temple during menstruation.
  - **89.3%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to do Pooja at home.
  - **81%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to do rituals at home.
  - **79.8%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to go near newborn babies/children.
  - **75%** of the respondents' said they were asked to wash the blankets / dress which they wore during menstruation
  - **69%** of the respondents' said they were asked to clean home after menstruation gets over
  - **67.9%** of the respondents' said they were asked to stay separately in a Place / Room at Home during menstruation.
  - **61.9%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to use same bed / cot during menstruation.
  - **60.7%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to use same blanket / bed sheet during menstruation.
  - **54.8%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to move freely at home during menstruation.
  - **53.6%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to stay in village during temple festivals on menstruation.
  - **52.4%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to wear new dress during menstruation.
  - **51.2%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to touch other family members during menstruation.
  - **51.2%** of the respondents' said they were asked to stay away from men during menstruation
  - **46.4%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to attend family / marriage functions, etc/ during menstruation
  - **45.2%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to participate in social gatherings during menstruation
  - **45.2%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to water plants / for plantation work during menstruation
  - **40.5%** of the respondents' said they were not allowing to cook food at home during menstruation
  - **38.1%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to use the same vessels to consume food
  - **35.7%** of the respondents' said they werenot allowed to welcome guests during menstruation
  - **31%** of the respondents' said they were instructed menstruation as dirty and impure.
  - **28.6%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to touch pickles / other food items during menstruation.
  - **22.6%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to talk about menstruation with Father /Husband / Brother
  - **20.2%** of the respondents' said they were asked to stay separately away from home / town during menstruation
  - **17.9%** of the respondents' said they were asked to hide / keep secret all matters related to menstrual period
  - **10.7%** of the respondents' said they were not allowed to discuss about menstruation at School / College / Work Place
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- .Conclusion

The findings clearly indicated a noticeable gap in the comprehensive understanding of menstruation and menstrual hygiene among Badaga women. The majority of their knowledge on this subject was solely derived from their mothers. Following the principles of social constructionism, knowledge and significance are shaped over time through historical and cultural interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Consequently, the limitations and misconceptions they adhered to were a direct result of the knowledge passed down through generations

within their society, which had been instilled in their mothers. Surprisingly, even in the current era of Information and Communication Technology, these practices persist. In the realm of social constructionist thought, which is rooted in postmodernism, the notion of a socially constructed reality emphasizes the continuous formation of perspectives by individuals through a dynamic exchange with society (Galbin, 2014). From the perspective of social constructionism, the rationale behind upholding traditional and cultural myths that shape perceptions about menstruation and menstrual hygiene stems from individuals' inability to disentangle themselves from societal beliefs. This lack of separation leads to clashes between knowledge acquired from scientific sources and practices grounded in personal beliefs. Consequently, this discrepancy becomes a major source of stress and discomfort related to menstruation.

The study highlights the persistent influence of traditional practices on Badaga women's menstrual health knowledge and hygiene practices. Despite advancements, these practices continue to affect women's lives. There is a need for comprehensive education and awareness campaigns to dispel myths and promote better menstrual hygiene practices among Badaga women.

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