

Age at menarche of rural girls and their experiences about it

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Two hundred rural teenage girls (15-17 yrs) who had attained menarche 2-4 yrs back were selected at random from the purposely chosen 8 villages of Omerga taluka of Osmanabad district (MS). The data were collected by personally interviewing the sample girls. The age at menarche of these girls was between 13yrs and 14 yrs. Significantly a higher percentage of the middle income group (MIG) girls were guided by their families about menstrual management as compared to their counter part girls in the low income group(LIG). Irrespective of the economic status, considerably a low percentage of the rural girls were recorded to have special support with regard to diet, relaxation in doing household chores and affectionate/social treatment. The findings advocate that there is a great need to educate rural girls about pubertal changes and how to cope up with them prior to attaining menarche in order to have comfortable and healthy life.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Rural girls, Menarche, Experiences

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Onset of menstruation is referred as menarche. Menarche is a pivotal transition event in life of girls because the dramatic physical, physiological and psychological changes take place during the period of puberty. Menarche is the beginning of a series of periodic discharges of blood, mucus and broken down cell tissue of uterus, that occur approximately after every 28 days till women reach the stage of menopause.

On an average, Indian girls are found to attain menarche between the age of 12 yrs and 14 yrs age. The onset of menarche mainly depends upon heredity, nutritional status and hormonal changes in girls. As majority of the rural girls in low SES families are found to be malnourished tend to attain menarche later than that of the rural girls of high SES families who are better nourished than them. Environmental factors such as childhood experiences and child upbringing practices are also found to influence it to a great extent. (Moffitt *et al.*, 1992). As menarche is an important developmental milestone in life of girls, they should be made well aware of it.

However, a very few parents/families are found to make a deliberate effort to educate their daughters regarding all aspects of menarche before they attain it (Sharma, 1999).

Majority of the girls who got educated about various aspects of menarche before attaining it, are found to have coped up with it at ease (Patnam *et al.*, 2004). Keeping in view above mentioned facts, the present research study was taken up.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

A sample of 200 rural teenage girls in the age group of 15-17 yrs who had attained menarche 2-4 yrs back were selected at random from the purposely chosen 8 villages of Omerga taluka of Osmanabad district of Maharashtra state. The data pertaining to the study were collected by personally interviewing the sample teenage girls. Based on the family income of the rural teenage girls, they were categorized into two groups *i.e.* middle income group (MIG) families whose family monthly income ranged between Rs. 5000 and Rs.15,000/- and low income group families (LIG) whose monthly family income was below Rs.2000-5000/- The collected data were pooled, tabulated, analyzed and discussed.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates that irrespective of the economic

status, about 36-38 per cent of the rural girls attained menarche at the age range of 13-14 yrs followed by at 12-13 yrs (23-30%), 14 -15 yrs (26%) and 15- 16 yrs (7-13%). No significant differences were recorded in their age ranges at attainment of menarche based on their economic status. Majority of the MIG rural teenage girls reported that they were well aware of menarche as compared to their counter part girls in the low income group . About 31 per cent of the MIG and 57 per cent of LIG rural teenage girls expressed that they were unaware about it. In both the income groups, relatively a higher percentage of their mothers were found to be the main source for educating these rural girls about various aspects of menarche followed by their elder sisters (9-13 %) grand mothers (10-12 %), TV programmes (4-5 %) and school teachers (3-5 %).The above findings are in line with the observations made by Uzochukwu *et al.* (2009). Highly significant differences were recorded in the awareness of the rural girls about menarche based on their economic status.

Table 1: Age at menarche and rural girls' awareness about it

Information of girls	Economic status and percentages of rural girls (200)		Z values
	MIG (95)	LIG (105)	
Age at menarche (yrs)			
12-13	23.15 (22)	30.47 (32)	1.14 ^{NS}
13-14	37.89 (36)	36.19 (38)	0.14 ^{NS}
14-15	26.31 (25)	26.66 (28)	---
15-16	12.63 (12)	6.66 (7)	1.50 ^{NS}
Awareness about menarche			
Well aware of it	63.15 (60)	42.85 (45)	3.40 ^{**}
Unaware of it	30.84 (35)	57.14 (60)	3.08 ^{**}
Learnt about aspects of menarche from			
Mothers	31.87 (30)	14.28 (15)	3.40 ^{**}
Elder sisters	12.63 (30)	9.52 (10)	0.75 ^{NS}
Grand mothers	11.57 (11)	9.52 (10)	0.53 ^{NS}
Television pogrammes	4.21 (4)	4.76 (5)	0.74 ^{NS}
School teachers	3.15 (3)	4.76 (5)	0.78 ^{NS}

Figures in parenthesis indicate the number of girls
 ** indicate significance of value at P=0.01 NS= Non-significant

Table 2 shows that the rural girls were found to feel comfortable to inform their mothers about attaining menarche (52-63 %) followed by the elder sisters/cousins (19-21%) and grand mothers (16-29%) irrespective of their economic status. With regard to their reactions to menarche, irrespective of their economic status, 52-63 per cent rural girls felt comfortable at the time of menarche, while 19-24 per cent of the rural girls were reported to have got scared and unhappy experiences at menarche while 17-24 per cent of them were just felt okay with it. There were no significant differences in them with regard to it based on their economic status.

Table 2 : Family members to whom rural teenage girls had informed about attaining menarche and their reactions to it

Information of girls' reactions	Economic status and percentages of the girls (200)		Z values
	MIG (95)	LIG (105)	
Information to family members			
Mothers	63.15 (60)	52.38 (55)	1.40 ^{NS}
Grand mothers	15.78 (15)	28.51 (30)	2.32*
Elder sisters and cousins	21.05 (20)	19.04 (20)	0.33 ^{NS}
Their reaction to menarche			
Comfortable	63.15 (60)	52.38 (55)	1.61 ^{NS}
Scared and unhappy	18.94 (18)	23.80 (25)	0.92 ^{NS}
Just okay with it	17.94 (17)	23.80 (25)	0.91 ^{NS}

Figures in parenthesis indicate the number of girls
 * indicate significance of value at P=0.05 NS = Non-significant

Table 3 indicates that 58 per cent middle income group rural girls were guided well by their family members about menstrual management followed by the relaxation in doing household chores (37%), affectionate social treating (32%) and provision of special and hot food (26%). The corresponding percentages of the rural girls in low income group were found to be 43, 29, 24 and 17. No significant differences were recorded in the support given to the rural girls by their families at menarche based on their family income level, which inturn reflects that a higher percentage of the rural families were concerned about their female pubescents.

Table 3 : Kind of support given by family members to the rural girls at the time of menarche

Kind of support received	Economics status and percentages of the girls (200)		Z values
	MIG (95)	LIG (105)	
Personally guided for menstrual management	57.89 (55)	42.85 (45)	2.17*
Relaxation in doing household chores	36.89 (35)	28.57 (30)	1.33 ^{NS}
Affectionate social treatment	31.57 (30)	23.80 (25)	1.31 ^{NS}
Provided special and hot food	26.31 (25)	17.14 (18)	1.57 ^{NS}

Figures in parenthesis indicate number of girls
 * indicate significance of value at P=0.05 NS= Non-significant

Conclusion:

Majority of the MIG rural teenage girls reported that they were well aware of menarche as compared to their counter part girls in the low income group. No significant differences were recorded in the age ranges of the rural girls at attainment of menarche based on their economic status. With regard to the rural girls' reactions to menarche, irrespective of their economic status, a higher percentage of them felt comfortable at the time of menarche, while a

lesser percentage of the rural girls were reported to have scary and unhappy experiences about it. No significant differences were recorded in the support given to the rural girls by their families at menarche based on their family income. These findings advocate that there is a great need of educating rural families and their daughters/girls at school age for understanding and coping up well with the menarche and its related issues.

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