

## **Family life education and menstrual practices among unmarried adolescent women of urban India**

The family life education program entails to provide knowledge, practice value and attitude that affect family relationships. This proposes to develop qualities and attitudes on which successful family life depends. The family life/ sex education also proposes transfiguration of a boy child into manhood and a girl child into womanhood. NFHS-3 (2007) indicated that larger proportion of men and women in India are in favour of providing family life education. According to Rao (1988), family life education for men and women at the adolescent age should be constructive enough, so as to contribute to healthier emotional growth. Further it needs to make them a responsible adult. Lack of proper sex education may lead to emotional and social disturbances. Some people view sex education in a narrow sense. Though the importance of sex education has well been recognized in different countries of the world, the scenario in the Indian subcontinent is much more different, where sex education is considered as a “taboo”. Parents hesitate to talk to their children about family life/ sex education. Adolescents and youths are getting affected mainly due to misconception on sex. In view of increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS and RTI/ STI and teen age pregnancies, there is an urgent need to provide sex education to today’s youths/ adolescents. Moses and Praveena (1983) in a Hyderabad study found that the major sources of sex information for adolescents were books and films, followed by friend and parents. According to Youth in India (2006 -07) more than 80 percent unmarried men and women felt the need of family life education. The National Population Policy of India (GOI 2000) reiterates the need of educating adolescents about the risks of unprotected sex. It is believed that adolescent women living in urban settings may have sufficient knowledge of various reproductive health issues but this is not true. They appear to have many more misconceptions pertaining to different aspects of reproductive health. In view of the above and changing scenario of adolescents’ life style in India it becomes necessary to assess the knowledge of family life education and other reproductive health issues / menstrual practice among unmarried adolescent women of urban India.

For the first time information about family life education, menstrual practices and reproductive health issues was collected in the DLHS – 3 (IIPS 2010) from unmarried women aged 15 – 24. In all 1, 66, 260 unmarried women aged 15 – 24 years were interviewed in this survey of which 27 percent were from urban areas. A little over two third women were aged 15 – 19 years while less than one third was aged 20 -24 years. More than half of the women had level of education high school and above and around two third of the unmarried women were Hindus. Less than one fourth of the unmarried women were scheduled castes/tribes but more than two fifth of younger women were from other backward class and two fifth of older women were of other castes. The proportion of younger women hailing from richest wealth quintile was around 58 but it was 15 points higher in case of older women (aged 20 -24). More than three fourth women were aware of FLE/sex education while more than four fifth women perceived that it is important to provide family life/sex education but only 55 percent women have ever received family life/ sex education. Older women, more educated women, women of other castes and richest women have dominated the scenario. Three of every five women were of the view that family life education should be provided when the women is aged 15 – 17 years and 46 percent of the women felt that the right educational level for providing FLE is when the women is in std 8 – 9. More than 80

percent of women opined that knowledge of FLE should be provided by the teachers i.e. school/college. More than 90 percent women had knowledge about minimum legal\* age at marriage of men and women. Ninety one percent of women reported that the ideal age at marriage for men as 21 years and above while almost all women reported the ideal age at marriage for girls as 18 years and above. More than one fifth of women had menstruation related problems during last 3 months prior to survey .The major problems were painful period (84 percent), short or frequent/ irregular period (20 percent) and bleeding related problems (15 percent).Not much differential was found in case of suffering from various menstrual problems when background characteristics of the unmarried women were considered. However, older women had a slight edge over the younger women when various problems were considered (who had less problems compared to younger women)

The unmarried women were also asked to provide an idea about menstrual practices during menstruation i.e. menstrual hygiene. Around three fourth of women used cloths or locally made napkins while another 41 percent used sanitary napkins during menstruation. Three fourth of younger women used cloths and locally made napkins and only half of the older women used sanitary napkins. When asked about some reproductive health issues it was found that two third women were of the opinion that it is possible to know about the sex of the baby before it is born and one of every sixteen women was of the view that when a women has intercourse for the first time she has to bleed while one fourth women think that and a women can get pregnant on the very first time she has sexual intercourse but only one fifth women opine that a women is most likely to get pregnant if she has sexual intercourse half way between her menstrual period.

The logistic regression indicated that older woman, women having higher level education, women of other castes and richest women were more likely to have awareness about FLE/sex education and perceived that FLE/sex education is important and had ever received FLE/ Sex education. In case of socio-economic determinants of menstrual practices older women appeared to be better placed than the younger ones. Women having higher education, women of other castes and the richest women practiced more menstrual hygiene than younger women, women having low level of literacy, women of other castes and women of second, middle and fourth quintiles.

The study suggests that there is a need to create awareness among the adolescents, mainly the young ones about various reproductive health issues and issues related to menstrual hygiene and practices.

\*In India legal age at marriage for men is 21 years while for females it is 18 years.

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**Table 1**  
**Socio-economic determinants of knowledge, perception and receiving family life education among unmarried women**

Background characteristics	Aware of FLE/sex education	Perceive that FLE/sex education is important	Ever received FLE/sex education
	Exp (b)		
<b>Age of women</b>			
15-19[R]			
20-24	1.27**	1.28**	1.04
<b>Educational level</b>			
Non literate[R]			
less than 5 years	1.20*	1.25*	1.04
5-9 years	2.15**	2.54**	2.83**
10 and above	5.40**	5.82**	6.58**
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu[R]			
Muslim	0.87**	0.93	0.93*
Christian	1.72**	1.55**	2.45**
Others	1.17*	1.36**	1.01*
<b>Caste</b>			
Scheduled castes or tribes[R]			
Other backward classes	0.88**	0.83**	0.95
Others	1.13*	1.27**	1.07*
<b>Wealth quintiles</b>			
Poorest[R]			
Second	1.18	1.12	1.15
Middle	1.17	1.12	1.21
Fourth	1.39*	1.26*	1.52**
Richest	1.87**	1.75**	1.94**
Constant	0.68**	1.45**	0.16**
R square	0.136	0.114	0.143

\*\*p<.001, \*\* p<.05

**Table 2**  
**Socio-economic determinants of hygienic practices during menstruation among unmarried women**

<b>Background characteristics</b>	<b>Exp (b)</b>
<b>Age of women</b>	
15-19[R]	
20-24	1.30**
<b>Educational level</b>	
Non literate[R]	
less than 5 years	1.41*
5-9 years	4.12**
10 and above	10.86**
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu[R]	
Muslim	0.71**
Christian	6.54**
Others	2.03**
<b>Caste</b>	
Scheduled castes or tribes[R]	
Other backward classes	0.80**
Others	1.15**
<b>Wealth quintiles</b>	
Poorest[R]	
Second	1.42
Middle	2.44**
Fourth	4.42**
Richest	12.26**
Constant	0.02**
R square	0.338

\*\*p<.001, \* p<.05