

Characteristics of menarche in adolescent girls in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Introduction: Menarche is an important biological milestone in girls. The age at attainment of menarche is important for implementing programmes to improve the life skills of girls.

Objective: To describe the characteristics of menarche, the factors influencing the onset of menarche and to describe the knowledge, beliefs and practices during menarche of adolescent girls in Sri Lanka.

Methods: This cross sectional study was conducted among girls 10-16 years of age in four schools situated in the Ragama Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area. Six hundred and sixty two girls were randomly selected and data were collected using a pre-tested, self-administered questionnaire.

Results: The median age of our sample was 13 years (range 10-16 years); the mean and median ages of attaining menarche were 12,53 and 11,48 years respectively. The mean BMI of girls who had attained menarche was 17.6 (SEM 0.22) Kg/m² and those who did not was 16.92 (SEM 0.32) Kg/m². 47% of the girls had a menstrual cycle length of e" 29 days, 23.4% had irregular cycles and 59% reported that the duration of bleeding was 3-5 days. First borns reported a lower mean age at menarche (12.34 years) than the later borns (12.6 years) (p=0.02). Girls from single child families, who were from higher social categories (Categories 1 & 2) and whose parents were educated beyond O/L attained menarche earlier. 40.8% stated that menstrual blood is not dirty, 70% admitted that there was no prohibition of having cold or sour foods. The majority of the students had adequate knowledge regarding physical changes during menarche. Girls experienced negative emotions during menstruation.

Conclusion: The median age of attaining menarche is 11.48 years. Girls experienced negative emotions during menstruation.