INFLUENCE OF FAMILY BACKGROUND ON GIRLS ATTITUDE TOWARDS MENSTRUAL HYGIENE IN NIGERIA

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1.1 Background to the Study

Adolescence is a stage of growth and development in which major cognitive, psychological, and physical changes take place. Although both pubertal boys and girls need to adjust to new role expectations associated with this period of maturation, the physical changes experienced are different for each sex. For girls, one of the most memorable and defining moments of adolescence is menarche, the first menstrual period (Ikaraoha, Mbadiwe, Igwe and Akagwa, 2005).

Jane (2001) maintained that menarche is a traumatic event during which girls experience a loss of freedom, power, and spontaneity and that there is a cultural denial of menarche and menstruation which manifests itself as a decrease in girls’ self-esteem. Cultural attitudes and family beliefs regarding menstruation have been shown to have a significant relationship to the reporting of menstrual symptoms (Jane, 2001).

The meaning of menstruation varies cross-culturally. In some cultures, the symbolic polluting power of menstruation is considered the basis for negative feelings toward female bodies and the oppression of women, while other cultures emphasize the symbolic enhancement of life forces by menstrual blood in rituals (Padez and Rocha, 2003). Ikaraoha et al (2005) reported that attitudes toward menstruation among women might be characterized into four themes: emphasis on biological processes, being a normal part of a woman's life, link directly to pregnancy, and cleansing the system.

The notion of negativity surrounding menstruation among families usually holds the view of unclean menstrual blood as pollutant, by the maintenance of secrecy and seclusion surrounding menstruation, and by physical discomfort associated with menstruation. In contrast, families with positive views about menstruation posit that it revitalizes the body, clears impurities and is indicative of childbearing potential (Moronkolu and Uzegbu, 2006).

It has been established that menstrual hygiene is influenced by such factors as socioeconomic class, sports and genetic factors (Diegton, 1993). Studies have shown that the age is another major factor determining menstrual hygiene especially in the developed countries (Padez and Rocha, 2003). However, it has been postulated that this
might be due to either the effect of a ceasing improvement of environmental factors / infrastructure facilities that take care of the young girl.

Many families lack the necessary knowledge about menstrual hygiene and some of their children too lack accurate knowledge, while others are misinformed. Thus evidence of menstrual maladjustment and menstrual related problems abound in the society. Future research into the girls’ attitudes towards menstrual problems and those of their mothers therefore is warranted. Health education targeting mothers may also benefit their daughters. Primary health care workers could even encourage girls to adopt the menses chart once their menarche is reached. Reviewing the menstrual chart with the girls may educate them and rectify any misconception, and may also lead to earlier management of any underlying problems.

Given this background, this research examines the family background of students and how the socio-cultural, economic status, education of parents and religious views held by the family affect menstrual hygiene among adolescents.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ignorance concerning sexuality and menstrual hygiene has been identified as a major factor contributing to teenage pregnancies and infections in young people. Menstruation is a normal female biological milestone and abnormalities of menstruation are a major gynaecological problem in adolescence. Menstrual disorders include menstrual irregularity, menorrhagia, dysmenorrhoea, and other related symptoms. Menstrual irregularity affects female adolescents, and a frequent cause of absenteeism from school or restriction of daily activity. Moreover, family beliefs and cultural practices may affect attitudes towards menstruation, which in turn may influence the views of adolescents on menstrual hygiene. In many communities, adolescents tend to underutilize health care services, which may have a significant impact on the physical and social health of those affected. By contrast, there is little knowledge on adolescents’ health-seeking behaviour in regard to menstrual problems. Availability of such information could be important for the development of appropriate health care services and in the promotion of menstrual hygiene among girls in Nigerian secondary schools. The study is set to identify the influence of family background on adolescents towards menstrual hygiene.
1.3 **Research Questions**

i. Would there be difference between religious background of the family and adolescents attitude toward menstrual hygiene?

ii. Would there be difference between economic status of the parents affect adolescents attitude toward menstrual hygiene?

iii. Would there be difference between educational status of parents affect adolescents attitude toward menstrual hygiene?

iv. Would there be difference between cultural background of the family and adolescents attitude toward menstrual hygiene?

1.5 **Research Hypotheses**

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1.6 **Significance of the Study**

This will aid our knowledge about sexual health education and how parents influence the adolescents attitude toward menstrual hygiene.

It will also show why there is need for parents and the school managers should develop effective communication on educating young people about health education. This contributes to the types of characteristics that explain the level of influence parents and religious leaders have on the sexuality and health education of adolescents.

This study will bring about understanding with regard to what problems learners encounter and what causes their sexual health behaviour. This will then allow the development of improved strategies of help or intervention either by the teachers or the parents.

Lastly, it will serve as a contribution to knowledge in the subject area. In this regard, it will be useful for other researchers who might want to carry out research in related areas.
1.7 Delimitation of the Study

This research work is delimited to public secondary schools students in Ijebu-Ife metropolis, an area of Ogun State. The simple percentage method of data analysis will be adopted to test the variables of family background and adolescents attitude towards menstrual hygiene.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

Apart from timeframe and shortage of finance, the major limitation to this research is the inability of the researcher to cover the whole public secondary schools in Ijebu-Ife metropolis as the title suggest.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Adolescents

Adolescence (from Latin: *adolescere* meaning "to grow up") is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development generally occurring between puberty and adulthood.

Family

In human context, a family (from Latin: *familia*) is a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, or co-residence.

Menstruation

Menstruation is the shedding of the uterine lining (endometrium). It occurs on a regular basis in sexually reproductive-age females of certain mammal species. Regular menstruation (also called *eumenorrhea*) lasts for a few days, usually 3 to 5 days, but anywhere from 2 to 8 days is considered normal.

Menstrual Hygiene

Personal hygiene during menstruation includes bathing and showering, and buying and using sanitary protection products.
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