

## **Enhancing socio-emotional adjustment of girls attaining menarche at an early age**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study was carried out in three villages of Vijaypur Taluk viz Honaganahalli, Savanalli and Hitnalli on fifty girls aged between 9 to 12 years to identify who had attained menarche at an early age, to assess the knowledge regarding pubertal changes and their socio-emotional adjustment and the impact of educational intervention on socio-emotional adjustment. The results showed that eight per cent of the girls had attained puberty at the age of 9 and 54 per cent at the age of 12 years. It was found that 68 per cent of them were unaware of the age of onset of menarche and equal number of the girls was unaware of the number of days of menstrual cycle. Majority (82%) of the girls were unaware of the scientific background for the onset of menstrual cycle; 78 per cent were unaware of the nutritious food to be consumed during menstrual cycle; 74 per cent were unaware of the age of menopause. It was found that 16 per cent of the respondents had good social adjustment and 8 per cent good emotional adjustment. After the educational intervention there was an increase of 18 per cent in social adjustment and of 10 per cent in the emotional adjustment.

**Keywords:** Girls; menarche; knowledge; social; emotional; adjustment

### **INTRODUCTION**

In humans there are two periods of rapid growth. The first growth spurt occurs during infancy and the second during adolescence. While the first growth spurt is largely a continuation of fetal growth the second is largely attributed to the secretion of the hormones androgen and estrogen. Although there may be individual differences the average age for the onset of the growth spurt is 10 and 11 years in girls (Coleman and Hendry 1990). Menarche ie the first menstruation appears fairly late in the

sequence of sexual maturation approximately two years after the start of breast development, enlargement of the uterus and after the growth spurt has slowed down.

The age at which adolescents reach physical maturity affects their psychological development especially when they reach maturity either much earlier or much later than the average expected age (Coleman and Hendry 1990). Where early maturation generally seems to be more advantageous for boys than late maturation, the late

maturation is considered more beneficial for girls than early maturation.

The girl who reaches physical maturity early is often attractive to older boys but she is not always emotionally mature enough for the more intimate relationships associated with her physical appearance. Also she often does not have much in common with her peers which could lead to social isolation. She is therefore in a marginal social position because she is half-child, half-woman and does not fit in with an older group nor with a group of her own age (Berk 1994). Furthermore unusually early maturation is often linked to poor academic performance, early sexual activity and unplanned pregnancies (Dubas et al 1991, Stattin and Magnusson 1990). On the other hand early maturing girls seem to be more flexible, independent and effective and are generally more satisfied with their lives in later years. The reason could be that individuals who mature early are not completely accepted by their peers and so they have to develop coping skills. These skills contribute towards their flexibility, independence, clear goals and general stability in later years.

However the onset of menstruation could also be accompanied by mixed feelings. Girls who have been prepared for this event usually accept it with pride and as sign of femininity whereas girls who had not been prepared for menstruation often experience shock and revulsion.

For many years psychologists believed that puberty was stressful for young people. We now know that any difficulties associated with adjusting to puberty are minimized if adolescents know what changes to expect and have positive attitude toward them. Although the immediate impact of puberty on the adolescent's self-image and mood may be very modest the timing of physical maturation does affect the teen's social and emotional development in important ways. Early maturing boys tend to be more popular, to have more positive self-conceptions and to be more self-assured than their late maturing peers whereas early maturing girls may feel awkward and self-conscious. Hence this study on enhancing socio-emotional adjustment of girls attaining puberty at an early age was carried out to assess the age at menarche of rural girls and to identify the girls who had attained menarche at an early age, assess the knowledge regarding pubertal changes and their socio-emotional adjustment and the impact of educational intervention on their socio-emotional adjustment.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in three villages Honaganahalli, Savanalli and Hitnalli of Vijaypur Taluk. A questionnaire was prepared and baseline survey was carried out in four schools of the selected villages. The girls who had attained menarche at an early age were identified. The sample

comprised fifty girls aged between 9 to 12 years. The knowledge regarding pubertal changes and their socio-emotional adjustment was assessed using questionnaire and Bell's adjustment inventory. There were twenty questions each under both areas of adjustment viz social and emotional adjustment which required answers as 'Yes' or 'No'. Scoring was done with the help of scoring key. For 'Yes' response a score of 1 and for 'No' a score of 0 was given. The scores were categorized as good (0-6), average (7-12) and poor (13 and above) for social adjustment and for emotional adjustment a score of 0-3 as good, 4-9 as average and 10 and above as poor. Educational intervention was given through lectures, slideshows and booklets on pubertal changes. After the educational intervention post-test was carried out.

## RESULTS

Out of 50 girls identified, eight per cent of them had attained puberty at the age of 9 followed by 12 per cent at the age of 10, 26 per cent at the age of 11 and 54 per cent at the age 12 years (Table 1).

It was found that 68 per cent of the girls each were unaware of the age of onset of menarche and the number of days of menstrual cycle. 82 per cent of the girls were unaware of the scientific background for the onset of menstrual cycle; 78 per cent were unaware of the nutritious food to be

consumed during menstrual cycle; 74 per cent were unaware of the age of menopause (Table 2).

The social and emotional adjustment of the respondents was assessed using Bell's adjustment inventory. It was found that 68 per cent of the respondents had average social adjustment and 16 per cent each had good and poor social adjustment (Table 3).

More than half (54%) of the respondents had poor emotional adjustment followed by 38 per cent who had average emotional adjustment and only 8 per cent had good emotional adjustment (Table 4).

Post-test was carried out after the educational intervention through lectures, slide shows and distribution of handbook on Kishoriyarigagi. The results revealed that the knowledge of respondents with regard to age of onset of puberty, number of days of menstrual cycle, scientific background for the onset of menstrual cycle, nutritious food to be consumed and age at menopause improved by 64, 68, 82, 78 and 74 per cent respectively. With regard to social and emotional adjustment there was an increase of 18 per cent in the number of respondents whose social adjustment was good. There was an increase in the percentage of respondents whose emotional adjustment was average ie by 30 per cent followed by good social adjustment ie by

Table 1. Age at which girls attained puberty

| Age      | # respondents | Age      | # respondents |
|----------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| 9 years  | 4 (8)         | 11 years | 13 (26)       |
| 10 years | 6 (12)        | 12 years | 27 (54)       |

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Table 2. Knowledge of girls regarding menarche

| Aspect                                                | # girls  |         |           |        | % increase in knowledge |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|-----------|--------|-------------------------|
|                                                       | Pre-test |         | Post-test |        |                         |
|                                                       | Yes      | No      | Yes       | No     |                         |
| Age of onset of menarche                              | 16 (32)  | 34 (68) | 48 (96)   | 2 (4%) | 64                      |
| # days of menstrual cycle                             | 16 (32)  | 34 (68) | 50 (100)  | 0      | 68                      |
| Scientific background of the onset of menstrual cycle | 9 (18)   | 41 (82) | 42 (84)   | 8 (16) | 66                      |
| Nutritious food to be consumed                        | 11 (22)  | 39 (78) | 48 (96)   | 2 (4)  | 74                      |
| Age at menopause                                      | 13 (26)  | 37 (74) | 45 (90)   | 5 (10) | 64                      |

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Table 3. Social adjustment of girls attaining menarche at an early age

| Social adjustment | # girls  |           |                                 |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|---------------------------------|
|                   | Pre-test | Post-test | % increase in social adjustment |
| Good (0-6)        | 8 (16)   | 17 (34)   | 18                              |
| Average (7-12)    | 34 (68)  | 31 (62)   | -6                              |
| Poor (13 & above) | 8 (16)   | 2 (4)     | -12                             |

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Table 4. Emotional adjustment of girls attaining menarche at an early age

| Emotional adjustment | # girls  |           |                                      |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|
|                      | Pre-test | Post-test | Increase in emotional adjustment (%) |
| Good (0-3)           | 4 (8)    | 9 (18)    | 10                                   |
| Average (4-9)        | 19 (38)  | 34 (68)   | 30                                   |
| Poor (10 & above)    | 27 (54)  | 7 (14)    | -40                                  |

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

10 per cent. The percentage of respondents whose social and emotional adjustment was poor had reduced by 12 and 40 per cent respectively.

## DISCUSSION

Recent studies view the multiple dimensions of the adolescents as complex with fresh insights into the process and timing of puberty. It is recognized that the second decade of life is a time of dramatic change: a period of rapid physical growth, endocrine (hormone) changes, cognitive development, increasing analytic capability, emotional growth, a time of self-exploration and increasing independence and active participation in social interaction (Litt 1995). It is also reported that age of onset of puberty can affect other aspects of development particularly in girls. It is seen that early onset of puberty can have an adverse effect on girls' physical and emotional development besides their behaviour (Caspi et al 1993). There appears to be a variation in both the onset and the tempo of puberty. Girls showed more evidence of adjustment problem with early onset of menarche (Graber et al 1997). The puberty rather than chronological age may signal the onset of delinquency and problem behavior among some teenagers (Keenan and Shaw 1997, Rutter et al 1998). Researchers have speculated that for girls, the transition during puberty may bring about greater

vulnerability to other environmental stress factors (Ge et al 1996).

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