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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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EXPLORING MALE AND FEMALE PERCEPTIONS OF MENSTRUATION

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a natural process in which the lining of the uterus sheds through the vagina. It is negatively viewed in society due to various stigmas and myths related to it in various cultures. Societies have beliefs about menstruation that impact the way individuals are treated during their periods. Efforts are being made globally to address the challenges faced by females during menstruation and promote menstrual health and hygiene. The present study focuses on the phenomenon of menstruation among young adults. It also investigates the difference between the perspectives of males and females regarding menstruation. The sample consists of 15 female and 15 male participants of the age-group 18 to 24 years. Here, semi-structured interview method is used to collect data from participants. The interview has been recorded and transcribed to derive the themes, sub-themes, frequency, and narratives from it. The qualitative data is analysed using thematic analysis to obtain results. The results revealed that the phenomenon of menstruation is bounded with various stigmas in our society and significant difference is found in the perception of males and females regarding menstruation.

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INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a natural process that occurs in every 21 to 35 days and lasts about 5 to 7 days. Menstruation cycle generally begins during puberty and continues till menopause, except during pregnancy. It is a normal and healthy part of female's reproductive system. Abnormalities in the menstrual cycle, such as very heavy bleeding, irregular periods, or severe pain, indicate underlying health issues. Menstruation, ingrained in complex value systems, is associated with various myths, taboos, and stigmatizing, negative and shameful sentiments (Barrington et al., 2021; Hensel et al., 2007). Rerwordings such as "aunt flow," "time of the month," and "on the rag" are used often by both men and women to refer to menstruation, reflecting the taboo and stigma surrounding it (Newton, 2016). Across different cultures, menstruation is stigmatized and conceptualized as something that is "dirty" or "impure" and that should be kept private (Barrington et al., 2021; Hennegan et al., 2021). Society as a whole also believes that menstruating women are physically or mentally (during the premenstrual phase) disordered, perceiving them as out-of-control, ill, crazy, and unfeminine (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2020). These negative views toward menstruation and menstruating women are related to stigma and society's views of women in general (Johnston-Robledo et al., 2007). Stigma related to menstruation is a widespread issue that can affect individuals' well-being and access to resources. Socially, menstruation is stigmatized in various cultures,

leading to feeling of shame or embarrassment. This stigma results to the limited access to menstrual products, inadequate sanitation facilities and rejection from various activities or places which can influence an individual's confidence, self-esteem, and overall well-being negatively.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study examines the phenomenon of menstruation, whether the perseverance of menstruation as a social and psychological barrier is actual or not. Cultural taboos, physical and social challenges and restrictions are found associated with menstruation which is perceived negatively in various studies done in Indian context. According to Shalini, Singh and Behmani (2022), negative social stigma is related to menstruation and puts negative impact on women's well-being. The difficulties like removal of myths, cultural biases and various misconceptions associated with menstruation were also addressed in the study. To look over the social and cultural aspects related to menstruation, Singh and Srivastava (2011) performed a study to investigate the "Cultural and social practices regarding menstruation among adolescent girls". The result of this study reveals that religion (Dhingra et al., 2009), socioeconomic status (Dasgupta and Sarkar, 2008), education and family background have significant impact on the menstrual activities. Financial situation has direct impact on menstrual practices; the girls of rich families use sanitary napkins

which are not affordable to girls from slums and have no facility of private bathrooms. It is found that mostly mother provides information about menstruation to daughters; educated mother has no hesitation to talk about menstruation and does not impose any social restrictions on their daughters. But in slum areas, friends are the information providers about menstruation, with whom they spend time and feel free to share their experience. Sundari, George and Ezhumalai (2021) found in their cross-sectional study which focused on the "Psychosocial Problems faced by Adolescents Females during Menstruation". The result revealed that the physical challenges faced by them were the premenstrual disorders and heavy menstrual bleeding where the psychological issues were mood swings and anxiousness. Chawla (1992) demonstrated that on the basis of cultural beliefs in India, menstruation is considered to be an impure and dirty activity. The Origination of these beliefs and myths is considered from Vedic times. Vedas says that monthly menstrual flow occurs due to the Indira's guilt that women's have taken for killing a Brahmins. According to Chawla and Matrika (1992) performed a study in Surinam and demonstrated about a myth which states that evil-mind practising witchcraft can harm the menstruating women by using her menstrual blood and can also control a man according to her wish. These beliefs are prevalent in South Asian Sub-continent countries including India. Stoilovo, Cai, Gomez, Batzer, Nyanza and Tolonen (2022) performed a study in order to investigate "Biological and material and socio-cultural factors that constraints the effective menstrual hygiene management among secondary school students in Tanzania", the study shows that how cleanliness during menstruation is important and the study highlights the impact of menstrual hygiene on academic performance among school students. This study reveals a substantial impact of bodily issues such as menstruation pain, irregular cycles and socio-cultural barriers such as prejudice and stereotype on academic performance of students.

Implications of the Study: In this modern era, there are a few scientific approaches to study the phenomenon of menstruation which acts a major barrier in women's life and becomes the victim of various social stigmas which are irrelevant and unscientific. The present study enables us to understand the phenomenon of menstruation with its various aspects in the society such as prejudice and stigma. It highlights that the lack of menstrual products, proper sanitation facilities and education about menstruation are major challenges faced by women's especially in low-income countries, the present study would thus help us in improving or diminishing the above problems by spreading awareness and taking preventive measures starting at the level of societies, smallest unit, i.e. family (especially male members), peer groups etc.

Objective of the study: To investigate the difference between the perception of males and females regarding menstruation.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: Purposive Sampling has been used in the present study and participants would be 15 females and 15 males of the age group from 18 to 24 years from the city of Gorakhpur (U.P).

Procedure: The objective of the present study was to investigate the difference between the perception of males and females regarding menstruation. To collect qualitative data, a semi structured interview has been prepared with the help of a pilot study and the following questions were framed: -

- How is menstruation viewed in society ?
- Is menstruation a feminist issue ?
- What kind of challenges do you feel when your partner or family member is in her menstruation cycle ?
- What kind of physical challenges do you feel in your partner or family member during her menstruation cycle ?
- What kind of emotional challenges do you feel in your partner or family member during her menstruation cycle ?
- What is the social stigma related to menstruation ?

- What is the psychological stigma related to menstruation ?
- Do you feel that females are discriminated on the grounds of menstruation ? Justify it.
- Do you believe that there are certain superstitious beliefs related to menstruation?
- Do you think there should be official leave during menstruation ? If yes, Why ?
- Menstruation is believed to be the toughest time of the month for a female. Do you agree or disagree ? Justify it.

After taking a proper consent from the participants, the interview has been taken on the basis of the above questions. The information from the pilot survey has been used to derive themes, sub-themes, frequencies and narratives. After completion of the interview the participants was thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis: A thematic analysis of qualitative data has been used to obtain the result.

RESULTS

The narratives described the perception of males and females regarding menstruation which was obtained using semi-structured interview, themes, sub-themes, and their frequencies were obtained in the narratives by using thematic analysis are following:

The present study examined the perception of females regarding menstruation. With the help of thematic analysis various themes, sub-themes and frequencies emerged. In order to gain a deep insight of the result, the section given below discusses the themes, sub-themes and frequencies as obtained from the above table.

Positive perception of menstruation: The positive aspects of an individual's understanding and perseverance of the phenomenon of menstruation have been addressed here. The sub-themes include cared, emergency issue, broken stereotypes/changing scenario, not a taboo, irrespective to gender, not the toughest time and no discrimination. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 4 with respect to the sub-theme which is "No Discrimination".

Stigmatization of menstruation: This represents the social stigma which is bounded to the phenomenon of menstruation. The sub-themes are embarrassing, secret matter, female centered, impurity, face stigma, mistreatment, intrinsic matter, discrimination, prohibition to religious places, a taboo and viewed differently. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 6 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Impurity".

Menstruation as a natural phenomenon : This lays an emphasis on the understanding of menstruation as a normal and natural occurrence. The sub-themes are normal situation and health issue. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 3 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Health issue".

A feminist issue: Menstruation is observed as a feminist issue which states that female should be given equal rights and opportunities. Sub-themes include pseudo-feminist issue, feminist issue, poor upbringing of men's, straightforwardness, and gender inequality. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 5 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Feminist issue".

Emotional changes as perceived by male counterparts: Perceptions of male's regarding emotional fluctuations in females during menstruation are portray here. Sub-themes are mood swings, negative thoughts, feeling low, sad, angry, irritation, exhausting, depression, emotionally drained and isolation. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 7 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Mood swings".

Physical changes perceived by male counterparts: The physical changes experienced by females during menstruation have been

Table 1. Themes, Sub-themes, Exemplars and Frequency regarding the perception of females on menstruation

Themes	Subthemes	Exemplars	f
Positive perception of menstruation	Cared	"A time when a women needs to be cared".	1
	Emerging issue	"Now people have modernized with time"	1
	Broken stereotypes /changing scenario	"Their stereotypes have also been broken".	2
	Not a taboo	"The atmosphere I live in is not a taboo anymore".	1
	Irrespective to gender	"I think it is related to health of a human and health has no gender".	3
	Not the toughest time	"I disagree it is a toughest time because it is a natural process".	2
	No discrimination	"I have never faced any kind of discrimination".	4
Stigmatization of menstruation	Embarrassing	"In some societies menstruation has been perceived as unclean and embarrassing".	4
	Secret matter	"Matter about which people should not talk in public".	3
	Female centered	"A phenomenon which is only related to females".	1
	Impurity	"Women's have been considered as impure".	6
	Face stigma	"Women's also face social stigma and mistreatment for not having periods".	2
	Mistreatment	"Women's also face social stigma and mistreatment for not having periods".	1
	Intrinsic matter	"In a general society, it is still considered as an intrinsic matter for ladies but in medical field it is quite normalised".	1
	Discrimination	"Females are regarded as untouchables during those days".	5
	Prohibition to religious places	"Prohibited to visit religious places".	2
	A taboo	"Menstruation has been considered as a taboo".	4
Viewed differently	"Menstruation is viewed differently in various societies".	1	
Menstruation as a natural phenomenon	Normal situation	"In our society, it is viewed normal".	2
	Health issue	"Menstruation is related to health of a human".	3
A feminist issue	Pseudo- feminist issue	"It is considered as a pseudo-feminist issue because now a day's people have started to take advantage of their menstrual cycle just to get a break from their regular routine work".	1
	Feminist issue	"Menstruation can be considered a feminist issue due to the negative societal attitude and exclusion of females from certain roles and leadership".	5
	Poor upbringing of men's	"Women's poorly up bring their son by keeping menstruation in a negative and low light context".	1
	Straightforwardness	"Yes, menstruation is a feminist issue".	3
	Gender inequality	"Challenges faced by individuals based on their gender".	1
Emotional changes as perceived by male counterparts	Mood swings	"Mood swings continuously hamper the lifestyle of women's".	7
	Negative thoughts	"It impacts our thought process negatively".	1
	Feeling low	"Feel very low, sad and angry at the same time".	1
	Sad	"Feel very low, sad and angry at the same time".	2
	Angry	"Feel very low, sad and angry at the same time".	3
	Irritation	"Feels irritated".	5
	Exhausting	"Feeling of exhaustion".	2
	Depression	"Feels depressed".	2
	Emotionally drained	"To behave as per societies expectations despite being physically and emotionally drained".	2
Isolation	"In some places they are not even allowed to come in contact with other people".	1	
Physical Changes as perceived by male counterparts	Tired / fatigued	"I feel tired and fatigued".	3
	Physically drained /discomfort	"To behave as per societies expectations despite being physically and emotionally drained".	7
	Strong cramps	"Not getting your period regularly, whether too many or too few and severely painful cramps".	6
	Tender breasts	"Tenderness of breast is experienced".	3
	Food cravings	"Food craving is seen".	3
	Low energy	"Low energy level in body".	2
	Dynamic in nature	"During the menstrual cycle, individuals may experience a range of physical and emotional changes".	1
	Bloating	"Bloating occurs".	3
	Digestive changes	"Digestive changes are experienced".	3
	Physical pain	"Pain in the body".	3
Maturity with age	"Understanding after growing up".	1	
Challenges female faces during her menstruation	Inaccessible products	"women and girls can't afford menstrual products or have access to safe water and sanitation to manage their menstrual health and hygiene"	1
	Can't afford menstrual products	"Millions of women and girls can't afford menstrual products".	1
	Excuses	"I had to make excuses to cover my bed sheet with an extra sheet to prevent it from any kind of stains".	1
	Can't attend classes and social groups	"Menstruation affects my daily life functioning and stop me from going to school, college and parties".	1
	Bad comments	"Women face bad comments about menstruation that affects their physical and emotional states".	1
	Demonstrate differently	"A widespread issue that manifests in various ways across different cultures and societies".	1
	Issue of physical touch	"For society still it is the issue of physical touch".	1
	Toughest time	"Females go through a lot of pain and struggle during their menstruation, so yes, it is the toughest time of the month".	9
	Face struggles	"Struggle during their menstruation".	1
	No warmth	"People around them are unable to provide the warmth that they want from them".	1
	Easier life without menstruation	"I personally face challenges then i think that life would be way easier without this".	1

Continue

Psychological changes as perceived by male counterparts	Mental distress	"Females go through a lot of mental distress during those days".	3
	Low cognitive process	"Decline in cognitive abilities".	1
	Can't disclose problems	"That no matter how much you are suffering from pain at the end of the day. You can't disclose that thing in society".	2
	Negative thought process	"It impacts our thought process negatively".	3
	Moody	"Mood fluctuations".	1
	Anxiety	"Anxiety emerges".	2
	Misconceptions	"Misconceptions are present regarding menstruation".	2
Discrimination on the grounds of menstruation	Exclusion from leadership	"They may be excluded from certain roles and positions of leadership".	1
	Public humiliation	"They keep on discriminating and shaming them in public".	1
	Not allowed to enter temples	"Can't enter holy places".	5
	Straightforwardness	"Discrimination is seen in society regarding menstruation".	1
	Stereotype	"Official leave during menstruation encourages stereotypes".	2
Superstitious beliefs still prominent in society	Can't touch pickles	"It is said that don't touch pickles during menstruation".	4
	Can't follow beliefs	"Women were not allowed to enter the kitchen not because they were impure but they need rest at that time".	1
	Unhygienic	"Women on her period will spoil the food or make it rot".	2
	Superstitious beliefs	"There are superstitious beliefs related to menstruation in some cultures".	5
	Not allowed to cook	"A woman is impure and should not cook or enter the kitchen".	2
	Not allowed to sleep on bed	"They can't sleep on bed during their cycle".	1
	Can't bath from head	"Not to take bath from head for first three days".	2
	Not allowed to enter temples	"Can't enter holy places".	5
Reasons given by women for following these beliefs	Stupid beliefs	"I actually don't follow such stupid beliefs".	2
	Learned belief from childhood	"It has been etched in our minds since childhood".	2
	Social pressure towards beliefs	"I follow those beliefs in society pressure".	3
	Difficulty in changing new habits	"We follow beliefs because it is not easy to break habits".	1
	Cultural traditions	"I follow beliefs to respect my cultural traditions".	2
	Stupid beliefs	"I actually don't follow such stupid beliefs".	2
Requirement of leave as stated by females	Equality between working women and housewives	"It is difficult for every woman out there to work during menstruation but the housewife's who work at home also goes through the same process and they never get leave".	1
	No leave required	"It is a part of their life so no leave is required".	7
	Mandatory leave	"There should be two days off because women's feel immense pain and face problem in mobility".	5
	Leave for the new one's experiencing it	"Leave for girls who are new to it as it takes time for a child to accept it as a part of their life and yet they are unaware of the changes and pain they have to go through".	1

Table 2. Themes, Sub-themes, Exemplars and Frequency regarding the perception of males on menstruation

Themes	Subthemes	Exemplars	f
Positive perception of menstruation	Sacred	"Menstruation is considered as sacred".	1
	Powerful	"Menstruation is considered as powerful".	1
	Changed attitude	"Menstruation related attitudes are gradually changing".	3
	Acceptance	"Increase in acceptance".	1
	Education	"More focus on education and health".	1
Stigmatization of menstruation	Impure	"Menstruation is viewed as impure". "A woman is not pure when she goes through menstruation".	05
	Shameful	"As a topic of shame".	16
	A taboo/stigma	"Menstruation is often viewed as a taboo subject which leads to stigma and restrictions".	12
	No open talks	"Menstruation is something which should not be talked openly in the society".	1
	Not in front of males	"Not to be talked openly in front of males".	1
	Restriction for women	"Menstruation acts as restriction for women".	1
	Dirty	"Menstruation is considered as dirty".	2
	Social Exclusion	"Menstruation includes social exclusion".	2
Menstruation as a natural phenomenon	Natural process	"As a natural occurring physiological condition".	4
	Daily routine	"Menstruation is a normal monthly routine".	1
	Cultural context	"Different approaches have been seen in urban and rural areas in Indian society towards menstruation".	3
	No special case	"Menstruation is a taboo and no special care is provided to women's".	2
	Weird phenomenon	"To some it is viewed as weird phenomenon".	1
	A cycle	"Menstruation is a cycle".	1
Emotional changes as perceived by male counterparts	A problem	"Menstruation is viewed as a problem in society".	1
	Mood swings	"Women's experience continuous mood swings".	13
	Irritability	"Pain during menstruation causes irritation for overall activities".	6
	Daily routine disturbance	"Menstruation disturbs a women's daily work".	5
	Social activities	"Menstruation causes difficulties in social activities".	1
	Intimacy	"Menstruation leads to adjustment in intimacy".	1
	Straightforwardness	"There are lot of emotional changes occurs during menstruation".	4
	Seek emotional support	"Requires emotional support from the partner when they are facing this problem".	2
	Behavioral changes	"Change in behaviour is seen during menstruation".	4
	No social support	"No social support is provided".	2
	Anxiety/ Stress	"Menstruation causes stress and anxiety".	3
	Sadness	"The emotional changes include sadness".	3
	High Sensitivity	"During menstruation, the emotional changes include high emotional sensitivity".	6
Seek motivation	"Women's requires motivation from their partners during menstruation".	2	

Continue

	Interpersonal relationships problem	"Menstruation causes difficulties in interpersonal relationship".	1
Physical Changes as perceived by male counterparts	Cramps	"Menstruation includes discomforts like cramps".	5
	Fatigue	"Menstruation includes discomforts like fatigue".	7
	Bloating	"Menstruation includes physical changes like bloating".	1
	Breast tenderness	"Menstruation includes physical changes like breast tenderness".	3
	Headaches	"Menstruation includes discomforts like headache".	3
	Digestive issue	"Menstruation includes discomforts like digestive issue".	1
	Joint pain	"Menstruation includes physical changes like joint pain".	2
	Sleep disturbances	"Menstruation includes discomforts like sleep disturbance".	1
	Intense pain	"Menstruation includes discomforts like intense pain".	7
	Aggressive	"During menstruation, females become aggressive".	4
	Rude	"During menstruation, females become rude".	2
	Discomfort	"The most occurring physical changes cause discomfort".	1
	Low energy	"Females feel low during menstruation".	1
Challenges her female faces during menstruation	Physical discomfort	"Menstruation causes physical discomforts such as cramps, fatigue and adjustment in activities".	4
	Emotional fluctuation	"During menstruation, females often face emotional fluctuations such as mood swings and irritability".	4
	Social stigma	"Menstruation is surrounded with many social stigmas in our society".	2
	Unproductivity	"Sometimes irregular period causes Unproductivity in females".	1
	Constant ache	"Menstruation includes discomforts like constant ache".	2
	Heavy blood flow	"Menstruation includes discomforts like heavy blood flow".	1
	Adjustment	"Adjustment in daily routine is seen due to menstruation"	2
	Hormonal changes	"Hormonal changes occur during menstruation".	2
	Hygiene maintenance	"Difficulty in maintaining hygiene especially in winter".	1
	Difficulties in performing activities	"Menstruation hinders their work and everyday life".	2
	Toughest time	"Menstruation is physically, emotionally and mentally challenging which make it a tough time of the month".	2
	Unacceptable	"Difficulty in accepting the changes across body during menstruation".	2
	Impurity	"It is a bad thing which makes the women impure".	2
Psychological changes as perceived by male counterparts	Guilt	"Guilt occurs due to degrading comments from people".	03
	Anxiety/ Stress	"Menstruation causes stress and anxiety".	5
	Embarrassment	"Menstruation includes psychological stigmas such as it brings embarrassment in females".	3
	Low self-esteem	"Menstruation includes psychological stigmas such as it causes low self-esteem in females".	1
	Affects mood	"Menstruation affects their mood".	2
	Abnormal practices	"Menstruation is still not considered normal".	2
	Isolation	"Women's during menstruation should stay away and should be kept in different space".	3
Discrimination on the grounds of menstruation	Limited opportunities	"Due to menstruation females face limited education and job opportunities".	1
	Discrimination	"Females face discrimination due to menstruation".	4
	Straightforwardness	"Discrimination occurs due to menstruation".	6
	Religious restrictions	"Females were not allowed to visit temple and not allowed to participate in any religious activities".	2
	Misconceptions	"Lack of information about menstruation leads to misconceptions in people's mind".	2
	Injustice	"Inappropriate information leads to injustice".	1
	Lack of information	"There is lack of information about menstruation in our society".	1
	Stigma	"Different cultures have different stigmas related to menstruation".	14
Changes required as perceived by male partners	Social support	"Social support should be given to females".	1
	Well-being	"Society should focus for their well-being".	2
	Equality	"Equality should be given to females".	1
	Productivity	"Menstruation doesn't affect female's productivity".	1
	Straightforwardness	"There should be official leave for women's".	3
	Discrimination	"No discrimination on the basis of this natural phenomenon".	1
	Proper rest	"Proper rest should be provided to females".	3
	Mandatory leave	"Mandatory leave is required".	2
Unaccomplished	"Difficulty in completing their daily work".	1	

addressed as perceived by their counterparts. Sub-themes are tired / fatigued, physically drained / discomfort, strong cramps, tender breasts, food cravings, low energy, dynamic in nature, bloating, digestive changes, physical pain and maturity with age. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 7 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Physically drained/discomfort".

Challenges female faces during her menstruation: Various physical, social and psychological obstacles are addressed that woman faces during menstruation. The sub-themes include inaccessible products, can't afford menstrual products, excuses, can't attend classes and social groups, bad comments, demonstrate differently, issue of physical touch, toughest time, face struggles, no warmth, and easier life without menstruation. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 9 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Toughest time".

Psychological changes as perceived by male counterparts: Perceptions of males regarding psychological changes associated with menstruation have been addressed. Sub-themes include mental distress, low cognitive process, can't disclose problems, negative thought process, moody, anxiety and misconceptions. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 3 with respect to the sub-themes which are "Mental distress" and "Negative thought process".

Discrimination on the grounds of menstruation: The emphasis is on the discrimination done on the ground of menstruation which leads to practices such as maltreatment of females and that isolate them from general population. Sub-themes are exclusion from leadership, public humiliation, not allowed to enter temples, straightforwardness, and stereotype. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 5 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Not allowed to enter temples".

Superstitious beliefs still prominent in society: The underlined superstitious beliefs related to menstruation which is followed by people that they have learned from their ancestors has been addressed here. The sub-themes include can't touch pickles, can't follow beliefs, unhygienic, superstitious beliefs, not allowed to cook, not allowed to sleep on bed, can't bath from head, not allowed to enter temples and stupid beliefs. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 5 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Superstitious beliefs".

Reasons given by women for following these beliefs: There are various justifications given by women for following superstitious beliefs when it comes to menstruation. Sub-themes include learned beliefs from childhood, social pressure towards beliefs, difficulty in changing new habits, cultural traditions stupid beliefs and equality between working women and housewives. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 3 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Social pressure towards beliefs".

Requirement of leave as stated by females: Here the various perspectives of women addressing the issues of menstrual leave has been portrayed. The sub-themes include no leave required, mandatory leave and leave for the new one's experiencing it. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 7 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Mandatory leave".

The present study examined the perception of males regarding menstruation. With the help of thematic analysis various themes, sub-themes and frequencies emerged. In order to gain a deep insight of the result, the section given below discusses the themes, sub-themes and frequencies as obtained from the above table.

Positive perception of menstruation: The positive aspects of an individual's understanding and perseverance of the phenomenon of menstruation have been addressed here. The sub-themes include sacred, powerful, changed attitude, acceptance, and education. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 3 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Changed attitude".

Stigmatization of menstruation: This represents the social stigma which is bounded to the phenomenon of menstruation. The sub-themes are impure, shameful, a taboo/stigma, no open talks, not in front of males, restriction for women, dirty and social exclusion. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 12 with respect to the sub-theme which is "A taboo/stigma".

Menstruation as a natural phenomenon: This lays an emphasis on the understanding of menstruation as a normal and natural occurrence. Sub-themes include natural processes, daily routine, cultural context, no special case, weird phenomenon, a cycle and a problem. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 4 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Natural process".

Emotional changes as perceived by male counterparts: Perceptions of male's regarding emotional fluctuations in females during menstruation are portrayed here. The sub-themes are mood swings, irritability, daily routine disturbance, social activities, intimacy, straightforwardness, seek emotional support, behavioral changes, no social support, anxiety/stress, sadness, high sensitivity, seek motivation and interpersonal relationships problem. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 13 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Mood swings".

Physical changes perceived by male counterparts: The physical changes experienced by females during menstruation have been addressed as perceived by their counterparts. Sub-themes are cramps, fatigue, bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, digestive issue, joint pain, sleep disturbances, intense pain, aggressive, rude, discomfort and low energy. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 7 with respect to the sub-themes which are "Fatigue" and "Intense pain".

Challenges female faces during her menstruation: Various physical, social, and psychological obstacles are addressed that woman faces during menstruation. The sub-themes are physical discomfort, emotional fluctuation, social stigma, unproductivity, constant ache, heavy blood flow, adjustment, hormonal changes, hygiene maintenance, difficulties in performing activities, toughest time, unacceptance, and impurity. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 4 with respect to the sub-themes which are "Physical discomfort" and "Emotional fluctuation".

Psychological changes as perceived by male counterparts: Perceptions of males regarding psychological changes associated with menstruation have been addressed. Sub-themes include guilt, anxiety/stress, embarrassment, low self-esteem, affects mood, abnormal practices, and isolation. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 5 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Anxiety/Stress".

Discrimination on the grounds of menstruation: The emphasis is on the discrimination done on the ground of menstruation which leads to practices such as maltreatment of females and that isolate them from general population. Sub-themes are limited opportunities, discrimination, straightforwardness, religious restrictions, misconceptions, injustice, lack of information and stigma. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 14 with respect to the sub-theme which is "Stigma".

Changes required as perceived by male partners: During menstruation a woman needs social support and sense of understanding therefore here the changes required within the society has been addressed. and its sub-themes are social stigma, well-being, equality, productivity, straightforwardness, discrimination, proper rest, mandatory leave and unaccomplished. The highest frequency obtained in this theme is 3 with respect to the sub-themes which are "Straightforwardness" and "Proper rest".

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate the difference between the perception of males and females regarding the phenomenon of menstruation. Menstruation being a natural process and a duration in which the lining of the uterus sheds through the vagina that usually begins during puberty and continues till menopause, except during pregnancy. It is the topic which is kept secret and viewed negatively in the society due to various stigma and myths related to it in various cultures. Shalini, Singh and Behmani (2022) performed a study on Menstruation to investigate the "Socio-cultural perspective in Indian context". The results of this study revealed that negative social stigma is related to menstruation and puts negative impact on women's well-being. Further to investigate the gender difference in knowledge and to see subjective reaction towards menstruation (Chang, 2007) performed a study and reported that limited information's are provided to boys and false beliefs are taught such as menstruation is a kind of punishment from the god or it is a mental or physical illness, which leads to ignorance, secrecy, and misconceptions regarding the consequences of menstruation among boys.

On the basis of obtained results the perception of males and females regarding menstruation has been compared with the help of the frequency obtained on various sub-themes of common themes. In the first theme "Positive perception of menstruation" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-themes "No discrimination" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Changed attitude" which shows absolute difference in their thought process. Penakalapati.G (2009) described that men moved forward to investigate Menstrual Health Maintenance Programmes because they were curious to access more knowledge about menstruation and secondly, they were exploring the reasons behind the established beliefs in society rather than following those beliefs. In the second theme "Stigmatization of menstruation" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Impurity" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Shameful" and both of them share some common sub-themes such as "Impurity" and "A taboo/stigma". In the third theme "Menstruation as a natural phenomenon" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Health issue" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Natural process" and both of them shared a common sub-theme that is "Normal situation". In the fourth theme "Emotional changes as perceived by male counterparts" girls and boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Mood swings" and both of them shared a common sub-theme that is "No social support" which leads to isolation. In the fifth theme "Physical challenges perceived by male counterparts" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Physically drained/discomfort" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-themes "Fatigue" and "Intense pain" and both of them shared some common sub-themes such as "Fatigue", "Breast tenderness" and "Digestive changes". In the sixth theme "Challenges female faces during her menstruation" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Toughest time" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-themes "Physical discomfort" and "Emotional fluctuations" and both of them shared a common sub-theme that is "Toughest time". In the seventh theme "Psychological changes as perceived by male counterparts" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-themes "Mental distress" and "Negative thought process" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Anxiety/stress" and both of them shared some common sub-themes that is "Anxiety" and "Moody". In the eighth theme "Discrimination on the grounds of menstruation" girls have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Not allowed to enter temples" whereas boys have obtained highest frequency on the sub-theme "Stigma" and both of them shared a common sub-theme that is "Straightforwardness". The results depict some uncommon themes in both boys and girls. In boys, we obtained a theme "Changes required as perceived by male partner" with its sub-themes that have obtained highest frequency are "Straightforwardness" and "Proper rest". In girls, we obtained four themes which are following: The first theme is

"A feminist issue" with its sub-theme that have obtained highest frequency is "Feminist issue". The second theme is "Superstitious beliefs still prominent in society" with its sub-themes that have obtained highest frequency are "Superstitious beliefs" and "Not allowed to enter temple". The third theme is "Reasons given by women for following these beliefs" with its sub-theme that has obtained highest frequency is "Social pressure towards beliefs". The fourth theme is "Requirement of leave as stated by females" with its sub-theme that has obtained highest frequency is "No leave required". The findings of the present study are consistent and can be explained through a study performed by (Chang, 2007) to investigate gender differences in knowledge and attitude towards menstruation and found that lack of appropriate information and the secrecy society maintains toward menstruation leads towards a man who is unable to understand the consequences and problems faced by females either with his mother, sister, or life partner. Singh and Srivastava (2011) performed a study to investigate the "Cultural and Social Practices Regarding Menstruation among Adolescent Girls". The results of this study reveal that religion (Dhingra et al., 2009), socioeconomic status (Dasgupta and Sarkar, 2008), education and family background have significant impact on the menstrual activities. Financial situation has direct impact on menstrual practices.

CONCLUSION

Hence, from the present study it can be concluded that the perceptions of males and females with respect to menstruation are somewhat similar. Some common themes regarding menstruation in both males and females is perceived as positive menstruation, stigmatization of menstruation, as a natural phenomenon, a feminist issue, physical changes, emotional changes, challenges faced by females during menstruation, and psychological changes. The perspectives of both the participants are also seen to be slightly different. The perspectives of females differ from males as the themes perceived by females are discrimination, superstitious beliefs, and requirements of leave during menstruation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the perspective males and females only differ slightly.

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