

Students' Experience of Genitalia Organ Care at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi Jakarta Selatan

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Abstract:

Genital Organ Care for Adolescents, especially early adolescents, is very important to practice. Carrying out genital organ care is a preventive measure to avoid contracting health problems. During adolescence, reproductive organs begin to function fully. Good knowledge of how to care for the genital organs will influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviors in maintaining their reproductive health. The researcher aimed to describe the experiences of female students at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi regarding genital organ care during menstruation. This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involving 11 participants who met the predetermined criteria. The data obtained from the discussions with the participants were analyzed using the Collaizi technique, and four themes were identified: understanding genital organ care, methods of genital organ care, health problems related to genital organ care, and obstacles to genital organ care. Female students at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi possess a foundational understanding of genital organ care; however, gaps remain in proper practices and facility support. Persistent health complaints and suboptimal hygiene behaviors highlight the urgent need for structured, age-appropriate reproductive health education and improved sanitation infrastructure in elementary schools.

Keywords: experience, female students, genita, organs, menstruation

INTRODUCTION

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) defines reproductive health as a state in which an individual experiences complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of diseases related to the reproductive system and its functions and processes (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006). Globally, reproductive health has received varied attention since the international agreement at the Cairo ICPD in 1994, which produced a "Program of Action" for the period 1995–2015. Indonesia is one of the countries participating in this global agreement and has followed up with various activities. The broad scope of reproductive health requires cross-program and cross-sectoral collaboration, along with the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), professional organizations, and all relevant stakeholders (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006).

One area within the scope of reproductive health is adolescent reproductive health (Abdurahman et al., 2022; Janighorban et al., 2022; Mbizvo et al., 2023; Tohit & Haque, 2024). Adolescent reproductive health education, in both formal and non-formal settings, aims to equip adolescents with knowledge, skills, and a strong sense of responsibility for the functions of their reproductive organs (Sudibyoy, 2005). Reproductive health is highly important for adolescents to pay attention to today. A low understanding of reproductive health and care among adolescents can trigger undesirable conditions, such as reproductive organ diseases and

even the risk of unwanted pregnancy (Hapsari, 2019).

Adolescents who do not maintain proper reproductive organ health are vulnerable to contracting Reproductive Tract Infections (ISR). The global prevalence of ISR among adolescents in 2006 reached 35%–42%, including candidiasis (25%–50%), bacterial vaginosis (20%–40%), and trichomoniasis (5%–15%). Other causes of ISR include poor menstrual hygiene behavior, an unclean environment, and the use of unhealthy sanitary pads during menstruation (Badriyah & Nurmala, 2019).

The Indonesian population pyramid, according to the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN, 2020), shows that the proportion of adolescents aged 10–24 years who have never married amounts to approximately 67 million people or 24% of the total Indonesian population. Meanwhile, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescents in Indonesia represent about one-fifth of the world's population, or around 1.2 billion people (Ministry of Health, 2011). This indicates that adolescents constitute a major age group in the community, particularly in schools, as adolescence is closely associated with school age.

The first experience of menarche is considered an important event because it marks the culmination of a series of physiological changes as a girl enters adulthood and indicates the proper functioning of the reproductive system. Menstruation is also one of the critical biological events in a woman's life (Parvin et al., 2015). During menstruation, the use of sanitary pads, proper changing habits, and hygiene of the genital area are essential. Sanitary pads should be soft, absorbent, free from allergenic substances, and adhere well to underwear. Sanitary napkins should also be changed about four to five times a day to prevent bacterial growth on the pads and to avoid bacteria entering the vagina.

The results of a study conducted by Sugar and Graham (2006) showed that one of the problems arising from poor genital organ care is vaginal discharge. Vaginal discharge in girls is often pathological and caused by improper genital hygiene practices. The WHO estimates that one in 20 adolescent girls experiences vaginal discharge annually. The global incidence of vaginal discharge in women reaches 75%, and in Indonesia, about 70% of women—including teenagers—experience it (Mustafa, 2019).

An individual's understanding of the reproductive system and its functions is very important. Those lacking adequate knowledge of reproductive health tend to neglect their reproductive organ health, potentially causing harm. Knowledge about genital organ care plays a crucial role in preventing vaginal discharge and other reproductive health disorders (Solehati et al., 2019). Adolescent reproductive health problems often receive limited attention because adolescents are considered too young and are mistakenly assumed to be free from reproductive diseases.

A survey conducted by the Indonesian Family Planning Association (PKBI) of Central Java in 2010 in Semarang indicated that adolescents' understanding of reproductive health remained relatively low at 43.22%. Furthermore, the Demographic and Health Survey of Indonesian Adolescents (SDKI-R) reported that 13.3% of adolescent girls do not know about the physical changes occurring during puberty, and nearly half (47.9%) do not recognize when they experience puberty (BKKBN, 2012).

Open communication among teachers, students, and parents in discussing reproductive health issues—particularly regarding genital organ care—is very important. However, in

Indonesia, reproductive health issues among adolescents, especially at the elementary school level, are still considered taboo. Limited access to information about genital organ care remains one of the main problems of adolescent reproductive health in the country. According to data from the National Epidemiology Network (JEN, 2002), accurate and responsible information on adolescent reproductive health (KRR) is still lacking. Moreover, if KRR information is labeled as sexual education, it often faces strong opposition from the public (Nasional, 2009).

A preliminary study conducted at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi found that the topic of genital organ care was never discussed in detail in class due to time constraints and the discomfort felt by educators when addressing the topic. In interviews with the principal, it was found that the school had never held health-related socialization sessions involving health workers or outside parties because the principal believed that classroom instruction was sufficient and that students already understood how to care for their genital organs.

In addition to interviewing teachers and the principal, researchers also interviewed 10 female students—seven from grade VI and three from grade V—about their genital hygiene practices and whether they had experienced the effects of improper genital care. Of the 10 students interviewed, eight had already experienced menstruation. Follow-up interviews revealed that all 10 students only cleaned the front part of the vagina, six did not use soap after defecating or urinating at school due to the absence of soap in bathrooms, and eight never changed their sanitary pads at school even after bowel movements or urination.

Further questions revealed that six of the eight menstruating students had experienced vaginal discharge before menstruation, and seven out of ten commonly felt itching around the thigh or groin area.

Based on the background described above, it is evident that knowledge and behavior regarding genital organ care remain low. This is supported by Nugraheni and Romdiyah (2021), who stated that adolescent girls' knowledge of reproductive health is still very limited. Approximately 35%–42% experience reproductive tract infections, 30% pay little attention to hygiene during menstruation, and up to 50% are exposed to unclean environments and use unhealthy sanitary pads during menstruation.

Many studies have examined knowledge, attitudes, and behavior regarding genital organ care among female students. However, few have explored the direct understanding of female students using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method to assess their awareness, attitudes, and behavior concerning genital organ and personal hygiene care. Through the FGD method, students at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi can articulate their perspectives on these topics, enabling schools to design more effective and relevant health education programs on genital organ care.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of female students at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi regarding genital organ care during menstruation, with specific objectives to identify their understanding of genital organ care, describe their practices and methods, identify related health problems, and uncover the barriers they face in maintaining proper genital hygiene. The benefits of this research are threefold: theoretically, it contributes to the body of knowledge on adolescent reproductive health education in elementary school settings; practically, it provides evidence-based insights for schools and health practitioners to develop more effective and culturally sensitive reproductive health education programs; and for future researchers, it offers a qualitative foundation for developing interventions aimed at improving menstrual hygiene management and reproductive health outcomes among adolescent girls in

Indonesia.

METHODS

This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive research design. Using descriptive qualitative research, the researcher aimed to describe the understanding of female students at SDN Pejaten Barat 05 Pagi regarding genital organ care. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving 11 participants who met the predetermined criteria. The FGD sessions were also recorded using mobile phones.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the thematic analysis identified in the study regarding the experiences of female students in caring for their genital organs during menstruation, four main themes and eleven categories were identified: (1) Understanding of genital organ care, with categories including cleaning the genitals with soap, diligently changing sanitary pads, and not wearing tight underwear; (2) Methods of genital organ care, with categories such as washing the vagina from back to front, washing from front to back, cleaning the genitals with water, and drying the vagina with a towel; (3) Health problems related to genital organ care, with categories including itching and experiencing vaginal discharge; and (4) Obstacles to genital organ care, with categories including the unavailability of soap and the lack of sanitary pad provision at school.

Topic 1. Understanding of Genital Organ Care

The results of this study indicate that participants understood the importance of maintaining genital hygiene. They explained that genital care involves keeping the genital area clean using soap and clean water, frequently changing underwear, avoiding tight clothing, and changing sanitary pads at least twice a day during menstruation. Genital organ care can be carried out by regularly washing the reproductive area with clean water, wearing breathable underwear that absorbs sweat, changing sanitary pads every six hours, and bathing regularly (Pribakti, 2008).

This aligns with the research conducted by Firdaus and Astutik (2018), which found that respondents' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding external genital hygiene were relatively good. Maintaining cleanliness of the external genital area is the first step toward reproductive health. Practices include using clean sanitary napkins, changing them regularly two to three times a day, after urination, when the pads are full, or when bathing, and using soap when cleaning the genitals (Firdaus & Astutik, 2018).

A study by Mumtaz et al. (2022) analyzing adolescent behavior related to genital hygiene explained that wearing tight underwear can trap moisture in the vulvar area, creating an environment conducive to infection. Women who frequently wear jeans or tight clothing are twice as likely to experience genital infections, although other factors may also contribute (Mumtaz et al., 2022).

Topic 2. How to Perform Genital Organ Care

The results of this study also indicated that participants generally had positive attitudes toward genital care. Most participants stated that they habitually washed the genital area using clean water and soap, typically starting from the back and moving to the front because they

found it easier that way, and then dried the area with a towel to keep it dry and free from moisture.

The Ministry of Health (2018) recommends that cleaning the genital area should be done from front to back to prevent germs from the anus from entering the genital area. Furthermore, genital care should include using soft, dry towels, wearing breathable and non-restrictive underwear, and changing underwear at least twice a day (Ministry of Health, 2018).

These findings are consistent with research by Tantry et al. (2019), which noted that while attitudes toward genital care were generally good, certain unsupportive behaviors might result from limited personal experience with menstruation. Attitude is a person's internal reaction or response to a stimulus or object (Notoatmodjo, 2007). Attitudinal components such as knowledge, beliefs, and emotions play important roles in shaping one's behavior. According to Azwar (2007), several factors influence attitudes, including personal experience, influence from significant others, cultural factors, mass media, educational institutions, and emotions.

Topic 3. Health Problems Related to Genital Organ Care

The study found that participants experienced several issues related to genital health. Many reported vaginal discharge, typically occurring one to three days before menstruation. This finding aligns with Chyka Febria's (2020) research, which reported that 93.6% of respondents experienced vaginal discharge before menstruation. The study explained that most women experience discharge, particularly in the middle of their menstrual cycles. This occurrence is common among adolescent girls due to hormonal fluctuations. As long as the discharge has no unpleasant odor, no color change, and is not accompanied by pain or sores, it is considered a normal physiological process rather than an infection (Febria, 2020).

Additionally, seven of the eleven participants reported experiencing itching in the groin area, which they attributed to inappropriate sanitary pad use. This finding is consistent with Uliyatul Laili's (2019) research, which explained that itching in the genital area often results from infrequent pad changes. Sanitary pads should be replaced as soon as they become saturated with menstrual blood, as excessive moisture can increase the risk of discomfort and infection (Laili, 2019).

Topic 4. Obstacles to Genital Organ Care

The study also revealed that participants faced obstacles in maintaining genital hygiene during menstruation, particularly due to inadequate school facilities such as the lack of soap and sanitary pad provision. A lack of educational content on the importance of genital care during menstruation was also perceived as a barrier to students' knowledge and understanding.

These findings are supported by research conducted by Belayneh and Mekuriaw (2019), which reported that most respondents struggled to manage genital care during menstruation due to limited educational material and inadequate facilities. UNICEF (2019) similarly noted that the lack of access to menstrual products and proper sanitation facilities significantly affects young women's well-being and education. The absence of clean, private toilets in schools often leads to absenteeism and, in some cases, school dropout among female students during menstruation.

CONCLUSION

The students believe that maintaining genital hygiene is very important to prevent various risks of venereal diseases. Participants reported engaging in several hygienic practices, such as

cleaning their genitals with soap and clean water, regularly changing underwear, avoiding tight clothing, and changing sanitary pads at least twice a day during menstruation. However, their washing technique needs improvement, as it contradicts the recommendations of the Ministry of Health, which advises washing from front to back to prevent germs from the anus from entering the genital area. Furthermore, most participants still experienced problems such as pathological vaginal discharge and itching in the groin area, particularly during menstruation. The genital care behaviors described by the participants, along with the persistent genital health issues, highlight the need for enhanced education on proper genital hygiene practices.

In addition, improvements in infrastructure are necessary, as the lack of adequate facilities poses a barrier to proper genital care, especially in the school environment. Enhancing these facilities will provide essential support for students to continue developing good genital hygiene habits in the future.

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