

Influence of Menarche Experiences on Reproductive Health Knowledge, Emotional Well-Being, and Social Support among Adolescent Girls at SMPN 1 Paiton

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Abstract: Menstruation is a major developmental milestone for adolescent girls and is often associated with various emotional and physical reactions. Limited knowledge prior to menarche frequently contributes to feelings of anxiety, confusion, and discomfort. This study aims to explore the experiences of adolescent girls during their first menarche and identify the factors that shape their responses. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, and data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Paiton who had experienced menarche within the past two years. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to emotional reactions, sources of information, and perceived support. The findings indicate that anxiety, confusion, and surprise were common initial responses. Most participants relied on informal sources such as mothers, peers, and social media while school-based education was perceived as insufficient. Family and peer support played an important role in increasing awareness, reducing fear, and improving menstrual readiness. These results highlight the need for comprehensive and evidence-based menstrual education programs in schools, along with stronger engagement from families and the community. Enhancing these support systems may improve adolescents' understanding of menstruation and promote more positive physical and emotional experiences during menarche..

Keywords: Menarche, Adolescent Girls, Emotional Well-Being, Menstrual Education, Social Support.

1. Introduction

Menstruation, or menarche, is a significant developmental milestone for adolescent girls, marking the transition from childhood to puberty and influencing emotional, social, and psychological aspects of their lives (Kalyan et al., 2021). Although it is a normal part of biological development, many adolescent girls are not fully prepared—either cognitively or emotionally—when they experience menarche for the first time (Okagbue et al., 2024). Limited knowledge prior to menarche often leads to feelings of anxiety, confusion, and discomfort (Suttor et al., 2025). In the Indonesian cultural context, discussions related to menstruation are still frequently considered taboo, leaving many girls without adequate information. This lack of

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knowledge may hinder proper menstrual management and negatively affect both physical and mental health outcomes among adolescents. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how adolescent girls experience and respond to menarche, as well as the factors that influence their reactions (Suttor et al., 2025) (Panda et al., 2024).

Previous studies have examined similar issues related to menstrual experiences among adolescent girls. For example, limited knowledge about menarche has been linked to increased anxiety among school-aged girls (de Magalhaes et al., 2021), while menstrual education has been shown to reduce anxiety. Additionally, family and peer support play an important role in preparing girls for menarche (Aşık et al., 2025). Other research highlights that mental readiness is shaped by prevailing social and cultural norms, with many girls—especially those in rural areas—feeling embarrassed or unprepared due to limited access to accurate information in their environment. Despite its importance, menarche experiences continue to receive insufficient attention in both the literature and society (Nishan et al., 2025).

This study aims to explore the subjective experiences of adolescent girls as they encounter menarche and to identify the various factors influencing their responses. A clearer understanding of their emotional and mental readiness, physical changes, and the role of family and school support is expected to contribute to more effective and sensitive educational and health promotion programs (Cherenack & Sikkema, 2022) (Malin et al., 2022). Furthermore, this study enhances understanding of how social and cultural norms shape girls' menstrual management and can serve as a reference for developing policies and programs that better prepare adolescents for menarche with confidence and readiness.

2. Materials and Methods

This study applied a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how adolescent girls experienced their first menarche. A qualitative paradigm was selected because it allows researchers to explore subjective meanings, emotions, and personal interpretations that cannot be captured through quantitative measurements. Menarche is a personal and sensitive experience, strongly influenced by individual perceptions and social-cultural contexts; therefore, a phenomenological design was considered appropriate for capturing its complexity.

The research was carried out over a two-month period, from May to June 2025, at SMPN 1 Paiton in Probolinggo Regency, East Java. The school was chosen intentionally due to its large population of early adolescents and its relevance to the research criteria, making it a suitable setting for gathering rich information on first-menarche experiences.

The primary participants were seventh-grade students who had experienced their first menstruation within the previous two years. Additional information was obtained through brief conversations with teachers or school health personnel who were familiar with adolescent health issues. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by open-ended questions. These questions explored participants' feelings, their understanding of menstruation, and the support they received from family, peers, and the school environment. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

The transcripts were then carefully coded to identify recurring ideas and meaningful units. A thematic analysis approach was used to develop themes related to emotional reactions, sources of information, coping strategies, and forms of social support. This analytical process enabled the researcher to interpret how adolescents made sense of their first menarche and how their experiences were shaped by personal, familial, and social factors.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Menarche Experiences in Relation to Menstrual Education

This study explored how adolescent girls interpreted and responded to their first menarche and how this experience shaped their perceptions and knowledge of reproductive health at SMPN 1 Paiton. The interviews revealed that many participants felt confused and anxious when menarche occurred, mainly because they had not received sufficient education about menstruation beforehand. Their lack of preparation often intensified emotional discomfort during this transitional period. Most of the girls reported that they obtained information about menstruation from friends, peers, or social media rather than from trained health professionals or teachers. As a result, the information they received was often incomplete or inaccurate. This limited understanding affected their ability to manage menstruation properly and contributed to emotional distress, particularly among those who felt unprepared for the physical changes they were experiencing. The findings suggest that menstrual knowledge plays an important role in shaping adolescents’ readiness to understand their bodies and perceive their reproductive health. Girls who had better access to accurate information tended to feel more prepared and less anxious. These results highlight the importance of strengthening school-based sexuality education so that discussions about menstruation can be delivered in a more structured, accurate, and evidence-based manner (Elsayed & Hassan, 2024) (Nikbakht et al., 2025).

Table 1. Relationship Between Menarche Experience and Menstrual Education

Challenge	Experience	Source of Information
Lack of knowledge on how to properly use sanitary pads	Experiencing menarche for the first time	Friends of the same age
Menstrual leakage occurred due to not using a sanitary pad, causing stains on clothing	Received an explanation from mother before menarche	Mother, Social Media
Lack of understanding about physical and emotional changes during menstruation	Did not receive information from school	Social Media, Friends
Does not understand the menstrual cycle	Obtained information from school textbooks	Textbooks, Mother

The table above illustrates that most adolescent girls rely on limited or inappropriate sources of information regarding menstruation. This reflects a broader gap in the educational system, particularly the role of schools in providing structured and accurate menstrual education. The lack of reliable information contributes to confusion, anxiety, and distress when adolescents experience menstruation for the first time (Guo et al., 2023). At SMPN 1 Paiton, many girls described their first menarche as a confusing and worrying experience. This situation is largely influenced by the absence of adequate menstrual education within the school environment. Although some girls receive explanations from their mothers or friends, school-based education remains insufficient, leaving students without a complete understanding of menstrual health (Fennie et al., 2022). The anxiety they feel is often heightened when the information they receive is inaccurate or contradictory, making them less prepared to manage the physical and emotional changes that accompany menarche (Riboli et al., 2022).

These findings highlight the urgent need for a more structured and evidence-based menstrual health curriculum at SMPN 1 Paiton. Limited understanding not only causes emotional discomfort but can also affect physical well-being. When adolescents do not receive clear explanations from trusted sources, they tend to rely on peers or social media—sources that are not

always credible (Kedare et al., 2024). Implementing comprehensive education about menstruation can help reduce students’ anxiety and provide them with a solid foundation for understanding their reproductive health. Such education has been shown to diminish stigma, improve knowledge, and promote better long-term health outcomes (Karki et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the extent of menstrual preparedness is strongly influenced by the education adolescents receive before menarche (Nurkhamidi et al., 2023). The findings indicate that when girls lack accurate information, they are more likely to feel afraid or confused during their first menstrual experience. This emotional burden can affect how they adapt to the physical and psychological changes associated with puberty (Sunarto et al., 2023). Therefore, integrating comprehensive sexuality education—particularly on menstruation—can play an essential role in reducing stigma, promoting understanding, and preparing adolescents for their reproductive development (Nomsenge, 2025). When menstrual education is delivered in a clear, supportive, and evidence-based manner, adolescent girls are more emotionally and physically prepared to face menarche. This readiness can improve their overall well-being and reduce feelings of shame or embarrassment that often arise during adolescence (Long et al., 2022).

The results of this study also reinforce the strong link between limited menstrual education and heightened anxiety during menarche. Without proper guidance, adolescents tend to rely on inaccurate sources of information, which can exacerbate confusion and fear (Maulingin-Gumbaketi et al., 2021). Providing correct, easily understood information—whether through family or school—helps adolescents feel more in control and less anxious (El Ayoubi et al., 2021). These findings underscore the importance of delivering menstrual education through competent and trained personnel, ensuring that students clearly understand both the biological processes involved and the emotional responses that may accompany them (Sahu, 2025).

3.2. Menarche Experiences and Emotional Well-Being

This part of the study aims to explore how the experience of menarche influences the emotional well-being of adolescent girls at SMPN 1 Paiton. For many adolescents, menarche can be a confusing and stressful event that affects their psychological state. Interview findings showed that a large number of participants felt anxious, embarrassed, or confused during their first menstrual experience. These reactions were closely linked to their limited understanding of menstruation and the lack of clear explanations before menarche occurred.

Emotional responses were shaped not only by their knowledge but also by the support and acceptance they received from their families, peers, and the school environment. Girls who lacked basic knowledge about menstrual changes tended to feel more anxious, which negatively influenced their emotional well-being. Conversely, those who received guidance—particularly from their mothers—felt somewhat calmer, although some worry still remained. These findings emphasize the importance of providing adequate and accurate menstrual education to help adolescents feel more prepared and emotionally steady when facing menarche (Bobade, 2025).

Table 2. Menarche Experiences and Emotional Well-Being

Experience		Feelings			Source of Information
Experiencing menarche for the first time		Anxiety, embarrassment	confusion,		Peers, Mother
Receiving explanations from mother before menarche		Feeling calmer but still somewhat worried			Friend’s mother, Peers

Not receiving information about physical changes	Fear, stress, difficulty accepting bodily changes	Friends, Social Media
Obtaining information from school textbooks	Worried about physical changes but slightly more prepared	Textbooks, Mother

The table above illustrates that a girl's first menstrual experience has a strong emotional impact. Feelings of confusion, anxiety, and embarrassment emerged consistently among participants, although support from mothers and peers played an important role in reducing emotional tension. Interview findings revealed that menarche greatly influenced the emotional well-being of the adolescent girls at SMPN 1 Paiton. Many participants described their first menstrual experience as worrying and confusing, largely because they had not received clear information beforehand. Even when some girls felt calmer after receiving explanations from their mothers or friends, many still struggled to accept the physical and emotional changes that accompanied menarche. This suggests that better menstrual knowledge could help reduce emotional distress and improve adolescents' readiness during this transition (Kim et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings indicate a strong relationship between emotional well-being and the information girls receive prior to experiencing menstruation. When the information is incomplete, unclear, or obtained from unreliable sources, levels of anxiety and confusion tend to increase. This highlights the importance of proper menstrual education—both at home and in school—to help reduce shame and stress among adolescents. Emotional support from parents, peers, and close friends also plays a major role in easing anxiety. Therefore, systematic and comprehensive menstrual counseling could significantly improve the emotional well-being of adolescent girls during menarche (Sood et al., 2022).

These results further show that a girl's first menstrual experience can strongly influence her emotional health. Ensuring that adolescents encounter menarche without negative psychological impacts requires structured menstrual education and adequate social support. When adolescent girls receive sufficient information and emotional guidance, they tend to feel more prepared for both the physical and psychological changes that occur. This underscores the need for schools and families to build a supportive and informative environment so that girls feel more confident and calm during their first menstruation. Such an environment also helps them cope with emotional challenges as they undergo physical development (Mukminah & Hirlan, 2024).

The connection between menarche experiences and emotional well-being becomes clearer when considering that menarche is a major developmental milestone. Without proper knowledge or social support, adolescents often feel confused and anxious, which can heighten emotional stress. The findings align with previous research showing that girls who lack accurate menstrual information are more vulnerable to feelings of shame and uncertainty (Hennegan et al., 2024). Experiencing menstruation for the first time without credible guidance can worsen emotional responses, increasing anxiety and psychological strain. By contrast, adolescents who receive supportive interactions from family and friends, along with clear and accurate menstrual knowledge, tend to feel calmer and more prepared—significantly reducing negative emotional effect (Fennie et al., 2021).

3.3. Menarche Experiences and Social Support

Experiencing menstruation for the first time is a major transition in an adolescent's life, often accompanied by anxiety, embarrassment, and confusion. During this period, social support becomes

crucial, as it greatly shapes how young girls interpret and manage their experiences. This section explores how social support affects the emotional and psychological well-being of adolescent girls at SMPN 1 Paiton following their first menarche.

Interview results showed that girls who received emotional support—especially from their mothers, peers, or close friends—felt more prepared and experienced less worry. Support in the form of explanations, reassurance, or even simple emotional presence helped reduce the uncertainty commonly felt during menarche. Information provided by mothers and peers often offered a sense of comfort and familiarity, which adolescents found essential during this transition (Kpodo et al., 2022).

Table 3. Menarche Experiences and Social Support

Experience	Social Support Received	Social Support Received
Experiencing menarche without prior explanation	Mother provided attention and clarification	Felt calmer and less worried
Experiencing menarche while at school	Friends/peers offered information and shared experiences	Reduced shame and embarrassment; felt more accepted
Not receiving any information beforehand	No significant support from family or peers	Felt confused and highly anxious
Receiving information from textbooks	Mother and teacher offered further explanation	Improved confidence and readiness

The data indicate that adolescents who receive adequate emotional and informational support tend to feel more prepared and less overwhelmed. In contrast, girls who lack social support—whether from family, friends, or school—often experience heightened confusion and anxiety when menarche occurs. These findings reinforce the importance of strong social support in helping girls manage their first menstrual experience.

Support is not limited to practical information about menstrual management; emotional encouragement also plays a fundamental role in reducing embarrassment and anxiety. Adolescents who feel accepted and supported by their social environment develop higher emotional resilience. Conversely, those who do not receive such support are more likely to experience emotional distress, which can negatively affect their well-being (Poonam et al., 2022).

Social norms and the level of openness within families or schools also shape girls' emotional responses to menarche. Participants who received support from their mothers and friends reported feeling calmer and more able to manage the anxiety they felt. This suggests that the social environment plays a significant role in helping adolescents navigate the psychological challenges associated with menarche. Meanwhile, girls who do not receive such support tend to experience greater uncertainty and emotional strain. Thus, it is essential for families, friends, and schools to provide clear information and emotional attention to ensure girls feel supported and confident during this transition (Bulto, 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social support significantly influences how adolescent girls experience their first menstruation. A supportive environment—both at home and at school—helps reduce anxiety, confusion, and shame, which are common during menarche. With adequate social support, adolescents are better equipped to handle physical and emotional changes with confidence. Strong support networks and open communication provide girls with a sense of security and acceptance, which are essential for their emotional well-being (Barendse et al., 2022).

The strong correlation between social support and menarche experiences can be understood through the emotional challenges associated with this developmental milestone. Without support

or clear information, adolescents often feel isolated and unprepared to face these changes (Putra et al., 2025). The study confirms that girls who receive emotional encouragement from their mothers and peers feel more secure and confident. Social support reduces uncertainty, promotes a sense of acceptance, and helps adolescents cope better with both emotional and physical changes. These factors underline the importance of reliable social support in reducing stress and enhancing the emotional welfare of adolescent girls throughout the menarche transition (Loper & Nyaronga, 2025).

4. Conclusions

This study highlights that the experience of menarche has a substantial influence on the emotional well-being, menstrual knowledge, and social adjustment of adolescent girls at SMPN 1 Paiton. Many participants entered menarche with limited understanding about menstruation, which contributed to feelings of anxiety, confusion, and embarrassment during their first menstrual experience. The lack of structured menstrual education in schools, combined with cultural taboos surrounding discussions about menstruation, further complicated their readiness to manage the physical and emotional changes associated with menarche.

The findings also show that social support especially from mothers, friends, and peers plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' emotional responses. Girls who received clear explanations, guidance, or emotional reassurance felt more prepared and less anxious. In contrast, those who lacked such support experienced greater emotional distress and uncertainty.

Overall, menstrual knowledge, emotional readiness, and social support are closely interconnected. Ensuring that adolescents receive accurate and age-appropriate information before menarche can significantly reduce fear and confusion. Likewise, supportive interactions from family, peers, and the school environment help adolescents navigate menarche with greater confidence.

Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of implementing comprehensive, evidence-based menstrual education both at home and at school. Strengthening support systems and creating open channels of communication can enhance the emotional well-being of adolescent girls and help them approach menarche as a natural and manageable part of their development.

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