

NARRATIVES ABOUT MENSTRUATION IN TURKEY: SELF-SHAME, SUPPRESSION AND SILENCE

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Abstract

In this study, we explore how women perceive menstruation in Turkey. The general discourse in Turkey defines menstruation as an adverse and even dirty biological process mainly described as “being ill” and/or making women unable to worship until becoming clean again. Experiences of menstruation also shape women’s identities to a certain extent and create adverse feelings as a fundamental part of womanhood in Turkey. The experiences of the participants reflect the dynamic interactions among being suppressed, feeling self-shame, and being silent. The main dataset of this study was collected from December 2021 to February 2022 in Turkey via 20 online in-depth interviews conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Menstruation, gender, woman, menstruation discourse, Turkey.

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TÜRKİYE'DE REGL ANLATILARI: UTANÇ, BASKI VE SESSİZLİK

Öz

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'de kadınların regl olmayı nasıl algıladıklarını araştırdık. Türkiye'deki genel söylem, menstrüasyonu, esas olarak “hasta olmak” ve/veya temizlenene kadar ibadet edememek olarak ele alınan olumsuz ve hatta kirli biyolojik bir süreç olarak tanımlamaktadır. Menstrüasyon deneyimi Türkiye'de, kadınlığın temel bir parçası olarak kadın kimliğini belirli bir ölçüde ve olumsuz duygular çerçevesinde inşa etmektedir. Katılımcıların deneyimleri, bastırılma, kendinden utanma ve sessiz kalma arasındaki dinamik etkileşimden oluşmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın ana veri seti, Türkiye'de Aralık 2021'den Şubat 2022'ye kadar, yarı yapılandırılmış soru formu ile 20 çevrimiçi derinlemesine görüşme yoluyla toplanmıştır.

Keywords: Menstrüasyon, toplumsal cinsiyet, kadın, regli söylemi, Türkiye.

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation, in the form of monthly periods, is a normal physiological process that shows the fertility ability of the woman. The menstruation process is perceived and experienced differently in every society depending on the social and cultural characteristics (Nagar and Aimol, 2010; McMahon et al., 2011). Menstrual health activities originated in the 1970s and 1980s, challenging male-dominated medical institutions and allowing women to manage their bodies and health. The movement, which challenged all aspects of a woman's physical experience, naturally urged some activists to ask questions about how women managed their menstrual cycle. For decades, activists have campaigned for better menstrual health education, duty-free products, and more. However, government and media interest in sanitary products has only recently gained momentum. Since around 2015, this movement has become more and more noticeable. However, it remains less studied in developing countries and there is an important need to understand current menstruation experiences, particularly among young women since this process could be closely related to the associated meanings of fertility, motherhood, womanhood, and sexuality.

Menstruation also comes costly. Being unable to afford menstrual products is a worldwide problem. According to Vora (2018), providing menstrual hygiene is not only crucial to prevent negative reactions because of leaking, but also to protect women's reproductive health. Sanitary pads are too expensive for many girls in the world (Ali et al., 2007; Crofts, 2012). Many readings in Egypt, India, and Bangladesh point out that many girls used fabric items during their periods and some young girls used sanitary pads (Mathews, 1995; Ali et al., 2010; Khanna et al., 2005; Kirk and Sommer, 2006). Many girls in the world have limited access to hygienic products such as pads, tampons, or cups. According to Day, "absence of facilities such as soap and water for washing, and safe, private, and accessible toilets cause many girls to miss school during their period" (Day, 2018). In Turkey, many women and girls who do not have access to sanitary products have to circumvent their periods using rags, and newspaper scraps resulting in infections and serious health problems (Cakir, 2007; Dundar and Ozsoy, 2020). In Turkey, sanitary pad products are evaluated in the category of 'luxury consumption' and 18% VAT was charged on these products until recently, which are already high priced (Dundar and Ozsoy, 2020, p. 350).

Menstruation, apart from its economic dynamics, is has symbolic connotations within which women are being associated with certain roles and identities (Erbil et al. 2015: 1127). When a girl begins to menstruate, she is considered to have a transition into womanhood, and her body acquires new social connotations. She starts to act out and take on the stigmas and symbolic connotations attached to adult femininity (Delaney, 1998; Kelland, Paphitis & Macleod, 2017). In this study, we aim to explore women's perceptions of menstruation in Turkey regarding social discourses about the topic and women's own experiences. We propose that menstruation plays a significant symbolic role in women's opinions about what is "proper" and "improper" femininity and, as a result, indirectly how gender roles are constructed through biological processes. The study also contends women's understandings of their bodies and themselves is informed by gendered constructs of menstruation and of women's reproductive processes (Dengiz, 2011; Jackson and Falmagne, 2013).

Studies specifically addressing menstruation in non-Western communities and situations are very scarce (Du Toit, 1987; Van de Walle and Renne, 2001). Research in Turkey is few, however, addresses certain aspects of the bodily process from a sociological and anthropological perspective (Direk, 2003; Sakar et al., 2015; Vargün, 2021; Aldanmaz and Eskitascioglu, 2022). To achieve a better

understanding we will focus on the main narratives concerning menstruation in Turkey, methods section will provide details about the research process and in the final section, we will share the results derived from the conducted interviews.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Menstruation as Taboo

Menstruation can be challenging times for any girl. Fear and panic are the main reactions stated by many girls in the studies at the time of their first periods (Sultan and Sahu, 2017). Many studies have revealed that girls are rarely informed about menstruation unless they experience it for the first time (Sultan and Sahu, 2017; Kansal et al., 2016; Mudey et al., 2010; Yasmin et al., 2013). Although it may occur at different ages for different girls, it is a period of transition from childhood to womanhood. The meaning of menstruation changes in different societies. In most societies, menstruation represents the beginning of womanhood and sexuality. Menstruating women are considered such as the need to abstain during sex or be forbidden to prepare food, touch holy things, visit a temple, etc. For example, Hindus think that menstruating girls and women are considered untouchable (Shukla, 2005). In Nepal, the cultural stigma against menstruation women entering public places is highlighted by Bista (2008). In Islam, a woman is prohibited from performing the five daily prayers, going on pilgrimage, fasting, reading from the Quran, and entering a mosque when she is menstruating (Mazumdar, 2004, p. 75).

Social and cultural norms that dictate how menstruation should be handled and discussed serve as an expression of the menstrual taboo (Kissling, 1996). Menstruation is viewed negatively by dominant discourses, which advocate for its concealment and sanitary control (Moore, 1995; Kissling 1996). The prevalent patriarchal ideologies define what it is to be a man or a woman and establish gender roles (Fingerson, 2005; Riessman, 2003). The behaviors and roles that men and women are expected to play in society are created by these roles. According to Bordo (1993), the female body is a site where men can exert power. For example, Merskin (1999) claims that "Today, many young women continue to believe that they will lose their virginity by inserting a tampon." (Merskin, 1999, p. 945). Women employ highly deliberate tactics to conceal their periods from the public eye, especially from male gaze (Jackson and Falmagne, 2013). Menstruation is regarded as an unacceptable issue for discussion in public to the point where girls and women frequently find it too awkward to bring it up even with other people, healthcare professionals, or family members (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler 2013).

In Turkey, a series of myths, euphemisms and language have been adopted to hide the period time (Guvenc et al., 2012; Erbil et al. 2015); for example, the phrase 'going to the moon' used in Uganda (FAWE U 2004), '*halam geldi*' (my aunt came), '*hasta oldum*' (I'm ill) (Guvenc et al., 2012) used in Turkey, "I'm wearing red shoes today," "red plague," "red moon," "bloody scourge" in America (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013, p. 17) to refer to the menstrual period. Studies point out that girls and women learn about themselves and their bodies in terms of cultural standards of femininity (Vargün, 2021; Aldanmaz and Eskitaşçıoğlu, 2022). Direk (2003) argues that these unfavorable ideas portray the bleeding body as unclean and filthy, which is the cause of shame. Women's bodies are portrayed as being sick, shameful, and dirty in menstrual discourse. Menstrual shame is linked to interpersonal problems and social marginalization (2003, p. 255).

1.2 Menstruation as Dirt and Stigma

As mentioned above, menstruation is a widespread social taboo. There are a lot of gaps in our understanding of menstruation. This gap has been identified by numerous research projects (Kaundal and Thakur, 2014) and pointed out that there is not much information about menstruation among women when they first experience it. Houppert (1999) explained this situation as “the culture of concealment” which means menstrual shame and secrecy to shape women’s experience in terms of menstrual taboos. In that sense, one of the sources of information about menstruation is health educators and mothers. However, health educators’ teachings are primarily about hygiene and coping menstruation with sanitary products (Rembeck et al., 2006). In these educations, the culture of silence is created when teachers separate girls and boys to talk about puberty and menstruation, and when mothers are conveying menstruation “as a special topic, not one for ordinary conversation” (Kissling, 1996, p. 495). Mothers often teach a silence with respect to menstruation (Kalman, 2003; Costos et al., 2002; Lee, 1994). Rubinsky et al. (2020) pointed out that mothers’ talk with their daughters about menstruation is important because it shapes how young people understand experience of menstruation during lifespan. A study of Chinese adolescent girls found that girls who were not prepared for menarche sufficiently had a more negative attitude towards menstruation (Yeung et al., 2005). In a study conducted in Mexico, it was determined that adolescent girls who do not menstruate, have more negative expectation about menstruation (Marván and Vacio, 2001). Research about girls in Bangladesh explained that many of the girls have “menarche in fear” (Bosch et al., 2008). A study in Iran showed that girls have different emotions such as confusing/scared/uncomfortable/good about menstruation (Djalalinia et al., 2012).

When a girl experiences first menstruation, people around her treat her differently (Lee and Sasser-Coen, 1996). In most countries, the ability to marry and reproduce is sanctioned when a girl menstruates as “the menarche marks the physical transition from being an immature girl to a new status as a potentially child-bearing woman” (Newton, 2016, p. 93). When a girl starts to menstruate, she is warned about sexuality, told that she is “grown up” and advised to act “ladylike” which restricts her behaviors (Lee and Sasser-Coen, 1996). According to many studies, menstruation hygiene is considered in terms of femininity or “ladylike” behaviors which need to control the body in Western societies (Bobel, 2019; Young, 2005). Moreover, Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2011, p. 6) point out “in a culture where women’s bodies routinely are sexually objectified, women themselves can internalize the sexual objectification of their bodies and view themselves through the lens of a critical male gaze.” In order to avoid social stigma associated with “failed femininity”, women learn regulate their behaviors and control their bodies (Chrisler, 2011; Fahs, 2018). As Fahs (2019, p. 241) explained, “The specter of failure seems to lead women not only to regulate and discipline their own bodies but also to devalue and make abject other women’s bodies that they perceive as lower status.” In another study, it is explained that women deliberately choose not to swim, avoid white clothing or be in sexual activities while they are menstruating (Oxley, 1998; Vora, 2018).

Direk (2003) in her detailed study indicates that menstruation is often associated with dirt in some societies. The belief about menstrual dirt also affects the body of the women. According to the belief the odor of menstrual blood menstruation process affects the food they cook, it poisons the plant they plant (Hage and Harary, 1981, pp. 367-369). Legendary stories about menstruation, menstruation blood as holy, a gift from the gods, or a punishment characterizes it in various ways, and this blood is time is magical and powerful therefore with menstruation women are isolated (Tan et al.,

2017, pp. 2- 11). Such beliefs show that menstruation as a natural bodily function is also the object of various taboos and rituals from past to present has been (Vargün, 2021, p. 4).

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Process

In this study, we deployed qualitative research design and analysis to examine women's experiences of menstruation. The main data set was collected from December 2021 to February 2022 in Turkey through 20 online in-depth interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire. The respondents were questioned regarding their own perceptions and experiences with menstruation as well as how they related to more general social standards. The interviews included the experiences of young women with menstruation, including any obstacles they had faced and any sociocultural narratives about menstruation that they had come across. The duration of interviews were approximately 40-45 minutes, recorded by sound recorder and for the anonymity of the participants all identity information were coded.

2.2. Profile of the Participants

Because of Covid 19 pandemic precautions, it was chosen to have online interviews. Interviewers were university students aged between 18-23 years. They were from all the same economic class families. Only one parent, mostly fathers, has job. The families' monthly income was minimum wage in Turkey. Many of the young women interviewed have student loans. They were staying at dormitories while the interviews were conducted.

Table 1. Brief Profile of the Participants

Participant	Age
K ₁	18
K ₂	21
K ₃	22
K ₄	20
K ₅	23
K ₆	22
K ₇	23
K ₈	22
K ₉	23
K ₁₀	20
K ₁₁	20
K ₁₂	19
K ₁₃	19
K ₁₄	23
K ₁₅	20
K ₁₆	22
K ₁₇	23
K ₁₈	18
K ₁₉	23
K ₂₀	19

2.3. Procedure

The information was afterwards examined and classified into themes. The variables were derived from a conceptual framework that was based on the literature. The sound recordings were transcribed by the authors and were coded in Nvivo. Analytical approach data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which allowed flexibility to treat the data from both deductive and inductive perspectives and to find common themes across different interviews. We took turns in reading the interviews in the light of the research questions, giving keywords to the statements compared across different interviews, and, finally, we defined a set of common themes. Referring to the field notes during the coding, helped move the analysis from content reflection to content interpretation and facilitated the process of raising focused codes to conceptual categories.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Menstrual Shame and Silence

In the interviews, as we discussed above, it was determined that the cultural stigma associated with menstruation in Turkey. Almost all the young girls interviewed stated that they did not discuss this issue with their mothers or other older women they know before their period began. Several participants claimed that when they were young girls, talking about menstruation was simply taboo. "I really didn't want to talk about it with my buddies", interviewer K₁ admitted. "I anticipated it would be strange. I didn't really talk about it with other people because it was kind of a personal matter." According to the study's female participants, discussing periods with others is "bizarre."

Girls mentioned that although the boys in their class could easily talk about their bodily developments, even in loud in the class, they could barely talk to other girls about menstruation experiences. When they saw a boy close to them, or when a teacher came to the class, they expressed that they changed the subject or became silent. Interviewer K₂ expressed that "In class if you ever had to go like change your pad, you always had to hide it to be secretive about it, because well boys would make fun of you for it." Menstruation is skillfully concealed by women and girls from boys and men (Merskin, 1999). They were afraid of being teased or made to feel ashamed, therefore they wanted to keep their menstruation rituals a secret. Moreover, girls feel uncomfortable to discuss their period with their mothers and not able to talk with their fathers, their brothers, or their boyfriends. Because they do not talk about their experience and cannot have enough information, those girls consider menstruation as something to hide or as something to be shameful.

Additionally, many of the participants in this study agreed that they would never fully understand the biology of menstruation. They complained about something related to reproduction when I inquired whether they knew why they menstruated. However, a typical response in interviews is "God created us like this, gave it like this. This is woman's nature. Because we are woman." Few people are aware of the biological significance of menstruation in the female reproductive cycle. Mothers are often the secondary source of knowledge when considering how girls learn about menstruation. Most girls lacked appropriate information and understanding regarding menstruation prior to menarche. The girls claimed that they did not bring up the subject with their mothers until they started menstruating. Interviewer K₃ explained:

When I got my first period, I was shocked, and I was scared. I called my mom. We had never talked about it before. I just remember the things from the sixth-grade education. My mom came and told me 'It is a woman thing. God gives this to women. It is a sacred thing. You will bleed in every month.' She gave me pad. I already know how to use it. We haven't talked about it since then.

Interviewer K₄ also told similar things:

I was really really scared. I knew some girls in my class were on period but didn't know how it occurs. I was not at my own house. I didn't have pads. I couldn't ask for one from my aunt. I was shamed. I used my nephew's one of diapers.

As we can see from the interviews, since mothers are silent, girls learn to be silent about menstruation. Another thing we should emphasize is being on period equals to be a woman as a boy becomes a man after circumcision¹ in Turkey. Different from boys², girls are warned by their mothers

¹ Atilla Barutçu, in his thesis, expressed a man in Turkey to be accepted as a man needs to pass various physical processes (Barutçu, 2013, p. 7). Circumcision is one of them. Circumcision has related to masculinity in Turkey. Being circumcised has the meaning of creating a "male" out of a boy. Circumcision, like military service, "serves to prove man's own masculinity and to express masculinity in the eyes of others" (Onur and Koyuncu, 2004, p. 40).

² While boys are getting circumcised, circumcision wedding takes place. In this wedding, a boy rests on a special fancy bed within special clothes. Families set up a dinner party for their friends and close relatives to celebrate that their boy has

to be silent because it is a private issue. Mothers warn the girls to behave more carefully since they are woman now. Without implying sexuality, mothers and the other female acquaintances exhort about girls' relations with boys. Moreover, in some places in Turkey, mothers slap the girls at their first menstruations to make girls not to forget to be ashamed. Interviewer K₁₈ highlighted expressed as follows:

When I was on my first period, I didn't talk about it. Moreover, I had no clue who was on period in my class. Later, we talked each other and then learnt some of my friends already were on period but kept as secret because they were afraid of getting married. My friends were afraid because their neighbors said they could get married now that they are on period.

Interviewer K₁₀ told "My dad twitchily changes the channel when there are pad ads on TV. Because he considers it is related to sexuality and to show such a thing on screen is impudence." Young girls' answers highlighted that for some people, menstruation equals to be sexually available. Thus, this means women should control (or should be controlled) their bodies. Therefore, one of the ways to control women is either men's eyes in the family or husband's control by getting them married.

Women's body control by men in the family is characterized as the "belt of classic patriarchy" by Caldwell and Kandiyoti in the areas in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey), and South and East Asia. The codes of the belt are male domination, son preference, control of behavior of women, and the association of family honor with female virtue. As the studies pointed out in the previous section, menstruation means biologically ability to give a birth. Thus, in Turkey, it becomes related to the association of family honor with female virtue. Consequently, girls hesitate about talking about their periods or the issues related to their periods such as irregularity of bleeding³, abdominal pain, period poverty. Interviewer K₈ told that "In every period, I feel like I'm stabbed inside. But I haven't gone to any doctor or never asked any advice. I just googled and learnt a few ways to stop or ease the pain." Moreover, almost all the participants expressed a saying in Turkey. When they complain about pain, older women in the family told those girls that "it passes when you get married." I asked the girls if they knew what this saying means. Many girls hesitate to use word "sex". Interviewer K₁₃ said that "I knew what they imply. Well, my teacher, you know that."

In Turkey, sex before marriage is not acceptable because of honor issue. So, marriage means being able to have sex. Related to hegemonic masculinity in Turkey, men subordinate women. Moreover, a woman is accepted as a girl until having intercourse with men. When they have sex with a man in a marriage, they are considered as woman. In other words, men are given to power to construct women's lives. Thus, meaning of the saying "it passes when you get married" is men accepted as abdominal pain killers.

The first source of information was hygiene education given by health staff at sixth grade. For this education, girls are secretly separated from the boys in their class without informing boys or girls what this education is about. Girls are kept in a class with female health staff. They are told about how important hygiene is and cleaning that special area of woman body is, how they can use pads. They are warned to carefully pack the pads to put them in the garbage. At the end of the education, girls are given sample pads. Interviewer K₅ explained the shock they experienced: "We were really shocked and shamed. We didn't know what to with the pads they gave us. We found a black pochette, put all

become man. People are expected to bring gifts to the boy. In other words, circumcision is a public event to announce that a boy has become man.

³ Under normal circumstances, period occurs in every 28 days.

the pads in it and kept it deep inside of the school bag.” Interviewer K₁₇ told that “During this education, first thing in my mind, what if the boys learn what we talked and make fun with us.”

Young girls sometimes struggle to describe the monthly experience that is their period or menstruation. When speaking about menstruation's practical or material features, these ladies characterized it using fictitious code words or made hazy allusions to it. Most common is “*hasta olmak*” (I’m ill). This saying also related to the social meaning of menstruation in Turkey. Although not being able to menstruate can be considered as illness, young girls describe their being on period as being ill that’s because menstruation is thought as dirty. Interviewer K₉ said “Our periods suck. They’re so annoying.”

I asked the participants if they started to talk about their period in any time now. Different from the studies discussed above, in this study, many girls pointed out that they began to be freer and braver talking about their periods after they took the gender and women’s issues lectures. They told they became aware of their selves and bodies. They expressed that they felt to be empowered. Some girls also answered that they realized gender inequalities between being woman and being man in the society. They began to be willing to learn more about their bodies and sexualities. Interviewer K₁₉ “I realized that talking about myself is not weird or shame. I started to follow the Instagram pages about feminism, women’s rights, and sexuality like Rayka Kumru⁴.” Those girls especially try to change the silence and shame about menstruation. They do not say “I’m ill.” They insist on saying “I’m on my period.” As a result, the experiences of the participants suggested that menstruation may not only be a cause of shame for women but also a source of knowledge and power.

3.2. Menstruation Taboo and Practices

Because girls do not talk about their experiences, they have taboos about menstruation. Some of those taboos are related to Islam religion and some of them are related to patriarchal social structure of Turkey. When they cannot have necessary information about menstruation, the blanks are filled with misinformation. As I discussed in previous section, girls are warned by older women. Among those warnings, there are also so-called religious warnings. Interviewer K₁₃ expressed her aunt’s advice about using pads: “My aunt told me not to use pads. Instead of pads, I should use washable clothes because my blood shouldn’t be thrown to garbage. It is kind of sinful behavior.” Interviewer K₁₅ told that

I do not cut my nails during my period. When the period finishes, you should perform ablution. If I cut my nails, my ablution will be unfinished. If I cut my nails, I keep them and then while performing ablution, I wash the nails too. According to religion, I should also keep shed hair for the same reason. However, I do not manage to pick them up.

Another participant pointed out that she did not take a shower during her period because her mother said so. When those girls come to university, some of them become more open to talk about menstruation as discussed in previous section. However, there are still taboos. Participants discuss their emotions of guilt and humiliation, especially failing to control their periods or hiding the fact that they were menstruating. For example, buying pads. Most of the girls mentioned that in the first years of menstruation they were shy about buying pads in public at the markets, or grocery stores. Interviewer K₁₈ mentioned that

⁴ She is a sexual health professional with over ten years’ experience in teaching, counseling and communication strategy around the world, <https://www.instagram.com/raykakumru/?hl=tr>.

I was hesitant when buying pads from the market. If there were other things in the grocery bag, I would squeeze the pads under them. If I was just going to buy pads, I would put it in the black bag. If the cashier was a man, I wouldn't pick it up or wait until the female cashier was free. Now I am not shamed. I just try to avoid eye contact with the cashier sometimes.

They do not share their period with men at home, as they barely talk to women in the family. Through the mothers, the fathers get the news because an extra pack of pads needs to be bought at home. Since the head of the house is responsible for the economy of the household due to the gender division of labor in Turkey, fathers become aware of their daughters' period through mothers. Most of the time they can't even tell their boyfriend. They said that their boyfriends understood that they were "in a special situation" due to their changing moods. Interviewer K₅ mentioned that "I talk to my husband so my husband. We will be close, but I do not tell my boyfriend about my period."

At this point we should talk about a classification. Some participants differentiate between menstrual talking men and unspeakable men. In masculinity studies, there have been researches about hegemonic masculinity. As important as hegemonic masculinity, other forms of masculinities are also crucial. One of them is subordinate masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Men, who are thought to have a subordinate male identity, exhibit the opposite of the qualities observed in hegemonic male identity. Behaviors that are not among the behavioral patterns expected to be seen in men in traditional gender roles such as being physically weak and crying in front of others are attributed to the subaltern male identity and subaltern men are at the lowest level in the hierarchy of masculinities. During interviews, some girls mentioned that there are a few male friends who they can talk about issues such as menstruation. From their description of those male friends, it is understood that those girls can only talk about their period with men, who have a subordinate male identity in their lives. Interviewer K₁₇ described her male friend as "Here is one of us. I know he will not be my boyfriend that I am unlikely to mate with him. Kemal is what Ayşe is." Interviewer K₄ pointed out that "He is like the seven dwarfs in Snow White. They are men but Snow White live with them at the same house. They are not the prince charming."

Another cultural taboo about menstruation is not to touch pickles while you are on period. Because it is believed, pickles will go bad. Moreover, girls shouldn't look at the babies in order not to call bad luck. All those practices are related to social meaning of menstruation in the society as we discussed in previous pages. We asked the participants why older women admonished you if you know. Most of them answered that they really did not know the meaning of such rules, but they did even so.

Moreover, we asked the participants whether they knew about any other ways rather than using pads. Many participant girls did not know tampons, menstrual cup when they were young. They know now. However, they do not use these ways. The folk tradition has traditionally prevented young women from using tampons. Finkelstein et al. (1990) found that teenagers cite "fear" as their primary reason for not using tampons. The fear of premature hymen tearing, and loss of virginal status has deterred many young women. Most of the participants said, "They do not put something there (vagina)." Interviewer K₁₆ explained why she does not use tampons: "I was raised to protect it (hymen). I am even afraid of touching there. So, I never use tampons. It is dangerous."

3.3. (In)Visibility of Bleeding

Menstrual blood is considered as a stigmatizing mark. Menstruation is more like a hidden stigma than a visible stigma, but that's because women make a lot of effort to cover it up (Oxley, 1998). It is generally not possible to know with certainty that a woman has her period, unless she says it or if the menstrual blood runs into her clothes. The self-monitoring for leaks causes women bodily control

in order not to get stigmatized. According to Young (2005), women are oppressed by menstruation. As a result of the shame of monthly bleeding and the challenges women face as menstruating women in public spaces. Some have suggested that menstrual blood is considered more disgusting or repulsive than other bodily fluids such as breast milk (Bramwell, 2001). Participants of this study also mentioned coping strategies of hiding the bleeding. They have a fear of a menstrual accident and it being “discovered.” Menstrual management strategies like wearing absorbent goods or clothing help to manage periods in a way that respects social norms and prevents blood from staining clothing.

Interviewer K₂₀ explained “I quit wearing anything white because I felt like I was definitely going to have my period in there and that would be scary.” Her fear of wearing white relates to the fear of having menstrual blood stains on her clothes. The possibility of being a girl visibly during menstruation, she controls behaviors and makes efforts. This demonstrates the “rule” according to which menstruation should be hidden. Indeed, menstrual leaks are stigmatizing mark representing a gap in ‘proper’ feminine behavior (Chrisler, 2011). Interviewer K₈ mentioned “if a woman has a leak on her clothes, I consider her loser because she couldn’t manage to do one simple feminine thing. She is not proper woman for me.”

Each young woman brought up the subject of concealment in her own unique way. For instance, participants hide emotional changes related to the menstrual cycle and prevent bleeding onto clothing, bed linen, or a chair. They also avoid being seen with hygiene equipment. In addition, several participants learned body language that encourages girls to examine their backs for leaks in their clothing. The interviewees also stated that they try to shield themselves from male scorn and adverse reactions.

3.4. Chasing the Discount

In this study, many young women expressed that they experience menstrual poverty because of cost of sanitary items. In Turkey, there is 18% tax cut on sanitary items. After high increase in price nowadays, basic sanitary items such as Kotex, Orkid, etc. are about 50 Turkish Liras. Many young women pointed out that they chase the discount on markets to buy sanitary items. Interviewer K₁₃ said that she preferred to stay at dormitory not to use so many pads on daily basis. Many young girls expressed that they stock sanitary items when they are on discount.

They interrupt active participation in schooling attendance, meeting with friends outside. Interviewer K₃ expressed that “Sometimes, if I couldn’t buy enough pads, I use one pad longer than its average usage time.” Absorbent sanitary pads should be used during the menstrual period and these pads should be changed every 3-4 hours, that is, 6-8 times a day (Karatay and Özvarış, 2006). Not using sterile sanitary products can lead to various health problems.

Another interviewer expressed that “once I have stolen my nephew’s diaper and used it whole day.” Most of the young girls pointed out that they felt embarrassed to ask for sanitary items from their friends. They could ask extra pads for their mothers that when their father bought pads for her mom.

CONCLUSION

This study explores women’s perceptions about menstruation in Turkey. The results of this study showed that women were preoccupied with embodied experiences of the general discourses defining menstruation as a “dirty” biological process. Mentioned constituters of menstruation experience also construct women’s identity which carries adverse feelings as fundamental parts of womanhood in Turkey.

Menstruation period of embarrassment that should be kept for women perceived as a situation and this situation is cultural is felt. in the menstruation process that the woman is sick and dangerous during this period and that what he does will be negatively affected by it. Those who think are not only the women's environment, but also the woman herself seems to believe it. Most of the young women in this study were bound by social stigma to treat menstruation as a private issue. Thus, they do not speak about their experiences about their periods. The students participating in the study use sanitary pads during menstruation. However, when the pad replacement frequencies are examined, it changes according to their economic situation. Many of the young women in this study expressed menstruation poverty. Most of the participants still believe social stigma about menstruation and behave accordingly to those understandings.

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