

Menstruation management in contemporary religions

Information sheet for research participants

Project overview

This research project explores the experiences of yoga and tantra practitioners on menstruation. Menstruation is understood and interacted with in various ways in different yoga and tantric communities—at times approached as a spiritual opportunity, sometimes regulated by social and religious constraints, at times harmonised by mind-body techniques, and sometimes stopped (amenorrhea) by these techniques and processes. This project combines participant interviews with textual analysis to bridge historical perspectives with contemporary lived religious practice.

About the research

You are being invited to contribute to a research project on menstruation management within South Asian religious traditions or South Asian-inspired spiritual settings, lead by Dr Ruth Westoby, Affiliate Researcher at Inform (2024-2027) and postdoctoral researcher at OCHS (2025-2027). This is an invitation to fill in an online questionnaire and potentially follow this with an online or in-person interview in relation to your beliefs and practices around menstruation management.

This study examines how menstruation is understood and managed in various religious and spiritual contexts, including practices to regulate or stop menstruation. We're particularly interested in how religious and cultural values shape these practices and how individuals navigate their menstrual cycles within these frameworks.

Menstruation-management has a profound impact on people's lives. Many yoga and tantra schools and teachers have a lot to say about menstruation, but the experience of menstruators has not so far been foregrounded. Your inputs will contribute to practitioner-facing studies and academic publications that extend our understanding of menstruation and amenorrhea.

About the researcher

Ruth Westoby is an Affiliate Researcher at Inform and the Bhagawan Sumatinath postdoctoral research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (UK). She holds a PhD from SOAS University of London awarded June 2024 on 'The body in Early Haṭha Yoga'.

About inform

Inform are an independent educational charity providing information about minority religions and sects which is as accurate, up-to-date and as evidence-based as possible. We exist to prevent harm based on misinformation about minority religions and sects by bringing the insights and methods of academic research into the public domain. Our name Inform is an acronym for 'Information Network Focus On Religious Movements'. Inform operates from Kings College London.

Research Ethics

This project has been reviewed and approved by Inform's Management Committee.

Contacts

If you have any questions after reading this information sheet, please contact the project leader:

- Ruth Westoby, PhD, Affiliate Researcher at Inform ruthwestoby@gmail.com

If you would like an independent contact to discuss this project or have a complaint please contact:

- Suzanne Newcombe, PhD, Honorary Director of Inform suzannenewcombe@gmail.com

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you agree to take part please complete the online questionnaire and indicate whether you would be willing to participate in a follow-up in-person or online interview. Interview participation is completely voluntary. You will be given a consent form to indicate you have agreed to take part. You may withdraw without giving a reason at any stage until your data has been de-identified within 1 year of the date of the interview. If you agree, interviews are recorded so that they can be transcribed. In the interview we will discuss menstruation practices related to your religious or spiritual beliefs such as your choices around having a family, celibacy and menstruation. The discussion may cover topics such as religious belief, sexual health, menstrual health, spiritual well-being, and lifestyle choices around sexuality and celibacy. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and stop the recording or the interview at any point. You have the right to withdraw consent from participation after interviews have been conducted, within one year of the interview being conducted. You can also ask the researcher to provide copies of the interview transcript. After the interview, you may be invited to participate in further research.

How will the data I provide be used?

This research will contribute to academic publications, project reports, presentations, briefings and more. This research is an opportunity to have your voice heard and recorded within academic research publications. Your contribution will generally be de-identified so that you are not identifiable in any research outputs and you can indicate the level of anonymity that you agree to in the consent form.

Your right to withdraw

Participants may withdraw from the study at any stage and without giving reasons by informing the researcher verbally or in writing (such as email) up until the data has been de-identified in accordance with participant consent within 1 year of the interview.

Data protection

Interview data is processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Data is stored securely, on password protected and encrypted computers. Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed once a written transcript has been made or stored in the Inform archive if consent is given to do so. The transcript can be anonymised and participant name removed, unless the participant gives explicit consent for their name to be stored with their data. This data will only be shared within the research team.

In general research data will be stored securely for three years after the completion of the research project. At the end of the research project data will be de-identified and securely transferred to a research repository such as the Inform archive. Where the interviewer consents for their contact details to be held for future research projects this will be encrypted and password protected. Such data will be stored in an institutional repository and available on specific requests from future researchers. This will be preserved as long as it is deemed to hold value by the repository.

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.