

Menstrual hygiene is important to



Photo courtesy of Himanshu Khagta

INDIA

Good Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) requires :

- Accurate information
- Access to affordable hygienic materials
- Provision of adequate (private, safe and clean) water, sanitation & hygiene facilities including soap for changing materials and cleaning the body
- Safe disposal of used sanitary materials

In India, **taboos and myths** surrounding menstruation (e.g. restrictions on entering the kitchen or temple, preparing certain foods, touching other people, etc.) make it difficult for girls and women to see **menstruation as a natural phenomenon and talk about it**. The negative impact and the scale to assure good MHM is immense, but progress addressing the issue is emerging.

The Challenges

1. In research with 747 girls across India by WSSCC, 70% of girls had no idea about menstruation at the onset of menarche.
2. In a study by ICMR it was found that 70% of mothers consider menstruation 'dirty' and 'polluting' with many teachers and frontline health workers echoing this sentiment. This perpetuates a culture of silence, shame and misinformation to the next generation.
3. In a 2010 study by A.C. Nielsen & Plan India it was found that 88% of menstruating women use old fabric, rags or sand.
4. Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) are 70% more common among women who use unhygienic materials.
5. 130 million of India's households lack toilets, leaving particularly women and girls with many challenges to manage their menstruation in privacy and hygienically.
6. In the latest Annual Status of Education Report it was found that only 53% of the 14,724 government schools visited have girls toilet available and usable.

7. Girls are typically absent for 20% of the school year due to menstruation, which is the second major reason, after household work.
8. Despite the growing number of local self-help groups producing sanitary pads, they often face limited economic viability.
9. Disposal of sanitary materials remains a challenge with lack of formalized waste management at schools and households level.

The Good News

10. Organisations, including NGOs, UN and government, have been working and increasingly start to work on MHM. Most effective strategies engage community members, train key stakeholders and cultivate peer leaders.
11. The state of Tamil Nadu has taken the lead in promoting menstrual health and hygiene. In 2004, it was the first to recognize MHM as an issue to be addressed through its sanitation policies and programs.
12. Indian media has taken steps to report about the challenges around MHM.

Recommended Actions

- > **Continue mainstreaming MHM:** ensure clear guidelines for States. Facilitate inter-sectoral coordination across ministries, as well with & among NGOs, so that the software (knowledge, attitudes, practices) and hardware (WASH facilities, products, disposal) aspects are given equal importance.
- > **Educate mothers & fathers:** A well-informed family is better equipped to teach their daughter about good MHM, and prioritize menstrual support in the household budget.
- > **Move beyond schools:** MHM should be addressed at homes, community centers, health centers, women hostels and at the work place.
- > **Share and learn from best practices and materials** that are available.
- > **Continue to break the silence:** Talking about MHM will eventually lead to menstruation being perceived as a natural process and less stigmatized.

References:1, WSSCC (2013) Celebrating Womanhood. 2. ICMR (2005-2006). Annual Report: <http://www.icmr.nic.in/annual/2005-06/hqds/rh.pdf>. 3, 4, 7 & 8: A.C. Nielsen and Plan India (2010). Sanitation protection: Every Women's Health Right. 5. National Sample Survey Office / Census (2012). 6. Pratham (2014) Annual Status of Education Report (Rural), 2013. 10, 11, 12: Dasra, Spot on – Improving menstrual health and hygiene in India, 2014.



Use these facts to end the hesitation around menstruation!