

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE WEBINAR I SYNOPSIS

Date: May 31st Thursday 1200h UTC

Topic: Menstrual hygiene- the issue, evidence, and gaps

Guest speakers: Thematic presenter- Dr. Marni Sommer (Columbia University)

Topical presenter- Lidwien Sol (Maastricht University) and KumKum Mahbuba (Simavi)

Topical presenter- Megan Mukuria (ZanaAfrica)

Webinar host: Simavi and World Vision

Organised by: WASH United, Simavi, World Vision, GIZ, an activity of the MH Alliance

Link to the recording: <https://vimeo.com/272825204>

Thematic Presenter: Dr. Marni Sommer (Columbia University)

- **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) working definition:**
 - “Women and adolescent girls are using clean menstrual management materials to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials” - JMP, 2012.
- **Background on MHM**
 - MHM is a growing field that gained additional attention because of lobbying for MHM in the SDGs. Although MHM was not included at the level of a hygiene goal, the process enabled the creation of a working definition, which served to bring awareness to the needs of menstruating girls and to key components needing to be addressed.
 - Growing recognition around MHM; MHM can be viewed as a proxy to meet the SDGs given its relevance to health, education, gender, economic empowerment and so forth. Therefore, the ability to meet girls and women MHM can lead to the possibility to see progress across all the SDGs.
 - Essentials of MHM include information and support, materials and supplies, water and sanitation facilities, disposal and waste management.
 - Within the context MHM Essentials, some unaddressed issues include
 - Knowledge in improved approved for female-friendly toilets and bathing facilities especially among girls and women in fragile contexts including refugees and internally displaced populations.
 - Lack of emphasis on supporting materials such as underwear, soaps, wash basin, and other supporting supplies.
 - Neglected gastrointestinal issues during menstrual period which emphasise the need for easy access to sanitation facilities.
 - Improved solutions for disposal and waste management in both development and emergency contexts that are culturally and environmentally appropriate.
- **The issues**
 - “The need to overcome stigma and restrictions.... ensuring safety, comfort, and dignity.”
 - Globally, the silence around MHM is being broken through increased awareness and actions, though there is still silence in many countries.
- **Global trends on MHM:**

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- Rapid growth in menstrual products
- Increased advocacy and discussions on MHM
- Increasing government engagement and policies on MHM
- **Current Evidence**
 - Rich qualitative data exist on MHM challenges with regards to displaced population, school girls, cultural taboos and stigma, psychosocial impact, and sanitation practices respectively.
 - Growing but limited data exist on the effective holistic interventions for addressing MHM in schools, in emergencies, and engaging boys and men.
- **Gaps and Opportunities for more research**
 - Inclusion of MHM in education policies, and identifying barriers, impact, and solutions of MHM in workplaces, and peri-urban and urban slums.
 - Need for improved measures and rigorous evaluation including quantitative research with validated new measures e.g. on self-efficacy.
 - There exists a ten-year agenda (MHM in Ten) for transforming schools to better meet the needs of MHM for girls; this effort identified gaps and priorities for research in the coming years

Topical presenter: Lidwien Sol (Maastricht University) & KumKum Mahbuba (Simavi)

- The RITU Programme and Study
 - collaboration between academia and implementer with regards to evidence based programming, implemented in rural Bangladesh, and target holistic approach to MHM.
 - Lesson learned
 - A randomised controlled trial study done in selected schools in Bangladesh to identify impact and cost effectiveness of the RITU programme.
 - Provide rigorous MH evidence and draw important lessons from the RITU programme for future implementers and policy makers.

Topical presenter: Megan Mukuria (ZanaAfrica)

- The Nia Project/Study
 - Implement safe, accurate, and cost-effective reproductive health innovations for girls through sanitary pad coupled with girl-centered RH resources and information. Current target population in Kenya.
- Lesson learned
 - Menstrual Hygiene is Products and Education and not just one or the other
 - Dignity through choice of menstrual products
 - Literacy of menstrual materials is important for girls and facilitators
 - Gap in curriculum in menstrual health and in gender and power – the curriculum now addresses this

Key Points on data collection /programmatic work on MHM.

- “Keep menstruating girls and women at the centre of the programmes or studies”
- Build, test, learn, and pivot programme
- Theory of change should serve as the foundation for data collection mechanism and type of data.
- Keep your approach simple
- Research and adopt what already works (avoid reinventing the wheel)

- Avoid collecting cumbersome data
- Low-tech gathering- asking girls/boys/parents to write down questions which can be used for statistical data gathering and comprehensive education.

Resources on MHM

- Links provided by participants and presenters of the webinar
 - How to use a sanitary pad video
 - MHM in Ten global agenda, identifying five key priorities for MHM in schools (can be found using google search engine)
 - Improved MHM technical guidance (e.g. Menstrual hygiene matters, 2012. Available for free online)
 - MHM in Emergencies Toolkit (full guide or mini guide), and check the WASH chapter for the female friendly toilet design for adapting to other contexts
 - Evidence-based programming in WASH and Menstrual Health to ensure gender equality. The case of RITU in Bangladesh.

Key questions addressed in the webinar

- When will the RITU programme be available?
 - Initial (baseline) study will be publicly available in 2019
- How do you frame menstrual health knowledge? (RITU Programme)
 - Use of existing knowledge, development of six survey questions, and focus group in class. However, there are different ways of measuring MH knowledge and not just relying on the six questions.
- How do you respond about gender based violence? (ZanaAfrica)
 - Vast information such as magazines for responding to gender based violence including consents, safe space to discuss, and designated personnel addressing the issues.
- Reusable pads versus disposable pads ? (ZanaAfrica)
 - Education on the options of menstrual products and allow girls to decide choice of menstrual products.
- MHM and psychosocial related stress
 - Rigorous systematic research out of India on psychosocial stress, around menstruation and sanitation on the absence of toilets and facilities for girls and women.
 - Vast qualitative studies that recognise fears, stress, shame, and anxiety and impending trials in quantitatively capturing psychosocial impact.

Unanswered key question from the chat box

- How can we ensure the hygiene of a reusable pad?

NOTE: We discussed more about menstrual hygiene products during our third webinar on 14 June. The recording is here: <https://vimeo.com/275146525>.