

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE WEBINAR 2 SYNOPSIS

Date: June 7th Thursday at 1200h UTC

Topic: Solutions to improve knowledge, practices and attitude

Guest speakers: Thematic presenter- Dr. Chris Bobel (University of Massachusetts, Boston)

Topical presenter- Nirmala Nair (WASH United)

Topical presenter- Bosun Jang (Sesame Workshop)

Webinar host: WASH United

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

Link to the recording: <https://vimeo.com/273919486>

Thematic Presenter- Dr. Chris Bobel (University of Massachusetts, Boston)

- **Menstrual hygiene and health: Making the case for educational interventions**
 - Globally, several factors influence difficult experiences with menstruation, including inadequate facilities and materials, menstrual pain, fear of disclosure, and most importantly inadequate knowledge about the menstrual cycle.
- **Menstrual stigma is the root of these problems. It:**
 - “Constructs menstruation as a failing, a shortcoming or a handicap.”
 - Naturalises and rationalises menstrual restrictions, including those against carrying out domestic activities, religious observances, and sexual and social activities.
 - “Is a scourge everywhere, including places where high quality menstrual materials and menstrual-friendly infrastructure are both accessible.”
- **Research on effects of menstrual stigma shows that:**
 - It is impactful and ubiquitous.
 - It influences decision making at a number of decision points, such as puberty, breastfeeding and sexual activity.
 - It leads girls all over the world to feel cursed, ashamed, fearful, and embarrassed.
 - It can lead to discrimination and psychological damage.
 - It promotes constant monitoring of menstrual status necessary to function in the public sphere.
 - It discourages accurate information exchange. For instance,
 - Pre menarche, “girls have limited knowledge and understanding about menstruation prior to having their first occurrence of menstruation (menarche).”
 - Even post menarche, girls have distorted or partial knowledge about the menstrual cycle.
- **Recommendations for improving knowledge, practices and attitudes:**
 - Promote menstrual literacy; teach the entire menstrual cycles as a vital sign.
 - Resist the assumption that the body is a problem to be solved. It is not inherently a nuisance, a burden, or an impediment, but our social attitudes and environments can make it so.
 - Encourage a positive view of their body as site of power, pleasure and potential.
 - Use gender-neutral language when and where possible (e.g., menstruator, people who menstruate) because not only girls and women menstruate and not all women menstruate.

- Encourage collaborative engagements with community members who are familiar with social norms and effective and culturally appropriate approaches to promoting attitudinal change.
- Train menstrual health educators to productively address related issues that typically arise when teaching menstrual health.
- “Always put menstruators at the centre.”
- 360o approach to addressing menstrual stigma: “helping girls access their brighter futures through creative, body-positive culturally sensitive, high quality and on-going menstrual cycle education not only for girls but for everyone in girls’ lives.”



Figure 1: Bobel, 2018

Topical presenter- Nirmala Nair (WASH United)

▪ ‘Ruby’s World’- A Story-based tool

- Menstrual hygiene education guide for girls, following a story and includes games and activities build into the story.
- Developed employing user-centred design process: the solution is defined from the perspective of the user and hence the story is based on real life stories of girls.
- Based on a story of two sisters, in which the older one is unaware and unprepared before her menarche and Ruby, the younger one who faces her menarche well-prepared.
- Compact, i.e. for 2 short sessions only, low-cost, engaging, and attractive design.

▪ Key features of the story

- Encourage girls to ask questions and get answers from the story rather than just sharing what is right or wrong.
- The nature of the tool is such that it increases self-efficacy, confidence and participation through interaction and engagement.
- All characters and incidents in the story are based on real incidents from the field. Therefore, girls identify with the characters of the story, thus making it personal.
- Builds community of girls that trust and support each other in the menstruation journey.
- The trained girl can make MHM related choices out of her own free will and is able to negotiate ways to exercise that choice.

Topical presenter- Bosun Jang (Sesame Workshop)

▪ WASH UP! Girl Talk

- Menstrual education for girls from ages 10-14 implemented in Zimbabwe at a pilot stage.
- An integration of MHM education into the existing WASH UP! curriculum.
- Teachers are trained on how to provide puberty education, under which MHM falls, using the training manual with activity books for boys and girls that contain comics, interactive exercises (including building usable resources like cycle bracelets and reusable menstrual pads), and animation videos.
- Targets both girls and boys - 10 weekly sessions for girls and boys participate in 5 of them.

▪ Learnings and challenges from the WASH UP! Girl Talk

- The programme asks a lot of teachers; increasing their level of comfort in MHM is part of the process.

- Teachers want more facts about puberty and menstruation to share with learners.
- Myths surrounding menstruation are engrained part of the community culture, we must respect them.
- **Reflections from the programme**
 - Support teachers through community advocacy.
 - Provide more facts and carefully approach messaging around myths.

Resources

- [Presenters' slides and webinar information](#)
- [Key facts from WHO on female genital mutilation](#)

Key Questions addressed in the webinar

1. Is Chris Bobel's publication/ book available?
A: Not available till later this year. Hopefully in December 2018.
2. Is it possible to access Ruby's world product and WASH UP girl talk training guide?
A: Yes, Ruby's World is available for use but WASH United will like some feedbacks on the experience of using the product and for more detailed use, contact them directly.
A: WASH UP! Girl Talk can share the materials but are not publicly available and therefore for use, they will have to be contacted directly.
3. What is a good age to start education around menstruation?
A: Recommended age for menarche is 9-14 as most girls experience menarche from age 9
4. Why should only girls be thought about certain part of menstruation? Is there a limitation or rather a boundary beyond which the boys or men shouldn't know about menstruation?
A: From WASH UP!, they felt that it helps to have session for girls in privacy, especially with topics on taking care of reusable pads, creating cycle beads, etc. However, it's still a learning process.
5. Does anyone know of anyone studies or have information on how FGD might impact on menstruation and / or period pain?
A: There is a manual of the WHO that touches the topic among the negative health consequences of FGM.
6. Beside teachers and mothers, who else can be good people to turn to?
A: Adolescent mentors (15-20 years) and peer educator programmes where adolescents themselves educate their peers
A: Opinion leaders in the community should be targeted.
A: Key family members like mother in-laws should be targeted, too

Remaining key questions

- Tackling menstruation myths and stigma is extremely important, but how do you measure this as a programmer?
- What are some M&E and research tools that are effective in doing this?
- Given misconceptions about MHM among trainers and facilitators, how have you discovered how to respectfully address those to ensure that factual information is passed along?
- How can MHM be made an attractive topic for men as well?