

Key messaging and dissemination around Menstrual Health Management (MHM)

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CONTEXT

Menstrual health is vital to the empowerment and well-being of women and girls. Though access to sanitary products and gender friendly toilets are important, menstrual health has wider linkages with sexual and reproductive health, where life cycle knowledge of menstruation, informed choice and moving beyond stigmas associated become crucial.

OBJECTIVES

- Gain an in-depth understanding of MHM practices and beliefs in terms of the MHM value chain: Awareness, Access, Usage and Disposal.
- Analyse socio-cultural beliefs and taboos in schools and in the community.
- Review Hygiene management infrastructure in schools as well as the curriculum on MHM.
- Design an MHM module to be implemented in schools and low-income communities.

Scoping Study

A scoping study in four slum settlements in the two town panchayats of Periyanaicken-palayam (PNP) and Narasimhanaicken-palayam (NNP) in Coimbatore district, was conducted to understand their knowledge of MHM, myths and prevalent practices, usage and disposal of menstrual waste. The findings of the scoping study (TNUSSP, 2018) highlighted the need to involve the communities in breaking the taboos and creating an enabling environment to openly talk about menstruation.



APPROACHES

Focus Group Discussion

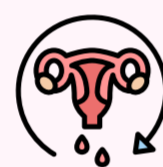
A community-based study which included focus group discussions (FGD) and purposive sampling using a structured questionnaire was conducted among 50 women and 50 adolescent girls in both the settlements to understand their menstrual pattern, management of abnormalities and ailments and coping mechanisms, belief and practices.

The data collection tools employed for the study is presented as a table below.

Study Model Adopted in PNP and NNP		
Tools	Sample Size	Key Topics
Questionnaire on menstruation pattern	100: 50 women and 50 adolescent girls from PNP and NNP	Menstruating pattern, management of abnormalities and coping mechanisms
MHM assessment tool for school students	2 FGDs: 1 each at PNP and NNP	Knowledge of menstruation, personal experiences, practices and behaviours, taboos, and inter-personal relationships
MHM assessment tool for women including mothers	3 FGDs: 2 at PNP and 1 at NNP	Knowledge of menstruation and its management, perceptions & behaviours, mothers' support to children and their understanding of their daughters' menstrual experiences in the family, community and school

KEY FINDINGS FROM FGD

Findings of the study from the perspectives of beliefs and practices, menstruation patterns and management of abnormalities, and based on the MHM value chain are discussed in detail.



AWARENESS

- Lack of knowledge around mensuration and menstrual hygiene management
- Lack of preparedness prior to attaining menarche
- Around 40% of girls give school a miss during the day of heavy flow
- Inadequate knowledge on how to use sanitary pad



ACCESS

- Irregular supply of subsidised pads (Pudhuyugam)
- 60% women and girls are hesitant to buy menstrual product themselves
- Limited Access to Wash facilities in low-income settlements
- 60% schools lack proper toilet facilities for girls



USAGE

- Multiple pads used at same time. Sometimes additional cloth layers are added with pads
- 43% women were found to be suffering from fungal infection



DISPOSAL

- Lack of Safe Disposal Facility
- Used Pads are washed and Disposed/ Burnt in open air / Thrown into bushes and drains

INTERVENTIONS

Two types of interventions were developed to address the gaps in the knowledge and understanding of menstrual hygiene management.

Menstrual Hygiene Management Module

- A Menstrual Hygiene Management module called Ungal Thozhi (Your Friend) was compiled to disseminate facts on menstruation and enable to women and adolescent girls to have comfortable and open conversations about periods.
- The 8-session module was aimed at fighting the stigma and secrecy around menstruation, dispelling myths and taboos, enabling women to make informed choices on affordable MHM products as well as their safe usage and disposal, stressing the importance of reproductive and sexual health among women and adolescent girls, and ensuring MHM-friendly WASH infrastructure is in place.
- The Ungal Thozhi module is an activity-based facilitator's guide to be used by teachers, sanitation workers, health workers, government officials and departments, schoolchildren and people in communities. The module also allows for collaboration with educational institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Anganwadi Workers (AWW), and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives for capacity building.

Outreach Programmes

The outreach programmes plan to employ communication strategies to reach a mass audience to build awareness and knowledge of menstrual hygiene.

- FM and community radio programmes to discuss and debate the taboos and myths associated with periods and encourage people to have open dialogues about periods.
- Exhibitions, folk art and street plays and other medium such as advertisements, billboards and wall paintings are to be used as tools to raise awareness.

WAY FORWARD



Endorsing MHM teaching/community champions from community/school and colleges.



Improvement of existing MHM infrastructure in schools and Community toilets.



Exclusive health camps for addressing menstrual ailments and counselling.



Inclusive Education-engaging boys and men in the community to break the silence.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

MHM requires girls and women to have access to information, products, and services across the MHM value chain and is intrinsically connected to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and waste management facilities.

- Safe Menstrual waste disposal- shifting to 'eco-friendly products, availability of infrastructure to handle the non-biodegradable MH wastes.
- Strengthen existing policy guidelines- Most schemes/programmes have a hardware focus in terms of toilet construction and sanitary napkin production and distribution and there is a need for greater focus on awareness, access to product basket, hygienic use, and disposal.

