

Role of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in Promoting Menstrual Health and Hygiene among Adolescent Girls

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Abstract

The Government of India launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to ensure cleanliness across the country and to address the issues of sanitation and waste management in India. While the campaign has made great strides in putting toilets in outlying areas of the nation, a ground report from four Indian states by Youth Ki Awaaz demonstrates that there is still more work to be done in the size of menstrual hygiene management. Although menstruation is a distinct physiological process that signals the start of reproductive life, it is occasionally regarded as an impure event in Indian culture. Most Adolescent girls lack basic information about menstrual health and hygiene. In addition, a lack of understanding and awareness leads to bad personal hygiene habits throughout the menstrual cycle, often resulting in reproductive tract infections. Poor menstrual hygiene practices result in an annual vaginal and urinary tract infection diagnosis in more than 70% of women. Menstrual health is also somewhat influenced by the educational program. The increased susceptibility to reproductive tract infections is strongly influenced by poor menstrual hygiene (RTIs). Currently, RTI affects millions of mothers who pass the virus to their progeny. This study aims to deal with several aspects of menstruation and menstrual hygiene. Every girl's life must include good menstrual hygiene. It is thought that women are most susceptible to infections of the reproductive tract, urinary tract, and different sexually transmitted diseases during this time. Menstrual hygiene is dependent on raising knowledge and expanding access to the necessary sanitary infrastructure.

Keywords: Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Menstrual hygiene, Health and Hygiene, Adolescent Girl Hygiene.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, often known as Swachh Bharat, is a national-level initiative launched by the Government of India to clean up the country's roads and infrastructure. On October 2, 2014, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi began this campaign in Rajghat in New Delhi. It is divided into two sub-missions: Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban). The mission's goals include obtaining universal sanitation coverage as well as encouraging sanitary sanitation practices. The Swachh Bharat Mission Guidelines state in point 5.9.2 that "Issues relating to women's hygiene, specifically menstrual hygiene, are to be focussed under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) because girls and women have hygiene and sanitation needs linked to their menstrual cycle and women suffer in the absence of knowledge about safe practices on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)." Despite the guidelines, menstrual hygiene management has always been a less spoken aspect of the

Swachh Bharat Mission. Probably the main reason for this is social taboos and gender stereotypes because many people feel menstruating with shame and consider it dirty.

In addition, regarding promoting safe menstrual hygiene practices, Youth Ki Awaaz (YKA) found that multi-faceted challenges in rural India continue to hamper its implementation compared to urban India, such as illiteracy, lack of menstrual education, lack of information, poverty, religious barriers, etc. Most girls in Jasonodi, a tribal village in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh, don't even know what a pad is, and only 2 to 5 percent of them use them, according to the women YKA spoke to about the level of awareness about menstruation there. Most women still prefer to wear clothes during their periods, according to adolescent girls who spoke with YKA. In light of this, women don't use pads even if the local Anganwadi does sell them, with the price acting as a significant disincentive. Women continue to use ash during their periods in areas further distant from the district headquarters. They conduct awareness campaigns to inform girls about menstruation, according to BL Bishnoi, district officer for the Department of Women and Child Development.

Menstruation

Menstruation is generally referred to as a period. The menstrual cycle is a normal biological process. It is a complex cycle governed by female hormones that results in frequent bleeding (periods). When you menstruate, the uterine lining sheds and flows out of your vagina. Menstruation consists of blood, mucus, and uterine lining cells. On average, menstruation lasts three to seven days. Menstruation is a phenomenon that only affects women. One of the most significant changes in girls' lives during adolescence is the beginning of menstruation. With a mean age of 13 years, the first menstruation starts between the ages of 11 and 15 years.

Menstruation Cycle

The menstrual cycle is a cycle of changes that occur every month in a woman's body as she gets ready for potential conception. Ovulation is the release of an egg from one of the ovaries once a month. The uterus is preparing for pregnancy at the same time that hormonal changes are taking place. If ovulation happens but no egg is fertilized, the uterine lining sheds through the vagina. This is known as the menstrual cycle.



Fig. 1. Feature of Menstruation Cycle

Menstrual Hygiene

Menstrual hygiene is critical to the empowerment and well-being of women and girls around the world since it has a health impact by increasing vulnerability to many health concerns. They struggle with various infections in the reproductive system because they are unaware of the care that should be taken during menstruation. Reproductive tract infections (RTI) and their complications affect the majority of women, and frequently, the infection is passed from the mother to her unborn child. RTI and its effects are less likely to affect women who are more knowledgeable about menstrual hygiene and protective measures. Menstruation demands the availability of material resources to absorb or collect menstrual blood, facilitate personal cleanliness, and dispose of waste, ideally in private. That's mean, menstrual hygiene includes everything from sanitary pads to suitable toilets. It also entails ensuring that girls and women can regulate their menstrual cycles with dignity in a society that recognizes and supports them. Every year on May 28th, people celebrate Menstrual Hygiene Day. In 2014, the German nonprofit organization "Wash United" launched this program. The major goal of this day is to educate girls and women about the need for hygiene and safety during menstruation, which occurs during the first five days of the month.

Effects of menstrual health and hygiene on adolescent girls

Have you ever wondered why many young women drop out of school in rural India? Why don't those girls finish high school or go to college? The answer is poor menstrual hygiene management. Most girls drop out of school during their periods, eventually, drop out at an early age, and miss out on their education due to poor menstrual hygiene management. The menstrual hygiene and health of adolescent girls and women in India have an impact on their self-esteem, dignity, health, education, and economic engagement in the country's labor force. Women experience fear and shame as soon as their periods start. Instead of recognizing

the transition from a girl to a young woman, it becomes their downfall. Menstrual hygiene and menstruation are still discussed in significant parts of rural and urban India. So, these women and young girls are unaware of proper hygiene practices and how doing so will harm their health.

A 2018 study by the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research found that just 30% of women use sanitary napkins, although 80% of women are aware of them. According to the same report, this plan also has issues with inconsistent and insufficient sanitary napkin supplies. Only 58% of menstruation women in India have access to safe and hygienic menstrual protection options. Another report stated that only 12% of 355 million women and girls of reproductive age in India use sanitary pads during their periods. Survivors turn to discarded clothing or unsanitary cloth, husks, hay, ashes, dried leaves, grass sand, rags, old rugs, and/or newspapers. The fact is that these dirty and unhygienic habits result in many diseases, including fungal infections, bacterial infections, urinary tract infections, pelvic inflammatory disease, reproductive tract infections (RTIs), cervical cancer, etc., which can lead to a variety of severe health problems. Most adolescent females are affected by these infections. Menstrual product preferences vary depending on the home area, way of life, financial level, etc.

Moreover, the luxury of being able to afford sanitary pads is a distant dream for underprivileged women and girls who can hardly manage one square meal daily. Such a variation in menstrual product preferences is directly related to the likelihood of developing infections. For instance, the incidence of reproductive tract infections has increased alarmingly by 70% due to inadequate menstrual hygiene. This is a serious issue because it could harm the condition and economic development of the country.

Impact of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on menstrual health and hygiene

Menstrual health is necessary for overall physical, mental, and social well-being. India has emerged as a global leader in menstrual hygiene for the last few years due to strong government leadership, and several initiatives from civil society, the corporate sector, manufacturers, and businessmen. A turning point for India's sanitation and hygiene system, particularly the control of menstrual hygiene, was the inauguration of the Swachh Bharat Mission.

In his initial Independence Day speech in 2014, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi instructed schools and institutions to have clean water and separate toilets for girls to prevent mid-semester dropouts for female students. Pink toilets have been constructed for adolescent

girls and women under the Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin. These Pink toilets have an incinerator used to safely dispose of sanitary pads and menstrual waste. These toilets have ensured adequate water supply, lighting, a changing room, and other amenities. The South Delhi Municipal Corporation opened a "Pink Toilet" on the occasion of the International Day for Girl Children. A feeding place for nursing mothers is also provided in this toilet. The Sangli (Maharashtra) district government launched a large awareness drive to educate 85,000 girls and 40 million homes in partnership with Swachh Bharat Gramin and UNICEF.

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin campaign, a scheme has been launched to train women in the village to make sanitary pads through the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) Self-help Groups. During this time, adolescent girls are being educated. Wall writing, brochures and posters disseminated and posted in public areas, and messages delivered via social media and movies are examples. For females in classes six through twelve, the Kerala government introduced the "She Pad" program on Children's Day at the 300 schools in the region. To improve the way menstrual waste is managed, a request was made by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to install sanitary napkin incinerators in women's hostels.

Some Statements of Girls Who Benefited by the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh

Sixteen-year-old student of class 10 at the government girls' school in Sitapur, UP, said she had no idea what was happening to her when she first started menstruation two years ago. When she told her mother about it, she was told not to tell anyone about it.

When several counselors visited her school, she learned about the menstrual cycle. She says she now understands why maintaining hygiene is vital during menstruation. She also claims to take iron pills offered to children at school around this time. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has not only increased hygiene but has also given menstrual health awareness programs. I'm more confident and knowledgeable about menstrual hygiene."

Rajasthan, Dungarpur

Madhulika, a social worker in the tribal district of Dungarpur, told YKA that even today, women in the tribal district of Dungarpur, Rajasthan, do not use sanitary pads, instead opting to use the same cloth for months at a time. As a result, they are more susceptible to infections and disorders.

When we discussed menstruation habits with the women we spoke with, they drew a blank. While Haru Devi, a resident of Aligarh, 40 kilometers from Udaipur, had never heard of a sanitary pad, Amari Devi, 39, said she had always used cloth. Amara Devi claims she began

using pads only after her daughter Pooja began receiving them from her school two years ago.

The effect of activities

According to the actions in many states, the topic of menstruation is certainly being discussed more freely in rural regions than it was previously. Menstrual hygiene is important to women and girls, and those who have access to them use sanitary pads or clean cloth. They are questioning ancient rules such as not washing until the third day, not entering a temple or kitchen, and not touching a pickle. In schools, incinerators are being erected. This should be extended to all homes and schools around the country. More work is needed to assist women and girls in reaching their full potential, which good MHM can provide. Girls and women should no longer be ashamed to discuss their periods or explain their doubts. If we do not support them, they may miss out on numerous elements of life and may suffer health consequences as a result.

The government, for its part, appears to be aware of how difficult it is to effect behavioral change when it comes to menstrual hygiene, citing it as one of the reasons for lagging in promoting it. With the Swachh Bharat Mission nearing the end of its five-year term, it may be a good moment to examine its aims and step up the implementation of the goals it set for itself in promoting menstrual health.

Celebrities support bringing menstruation into the public eye

The film Padman is inspired by the real-life story of Arunachalam Muruganham, who invented the low-cost sanitary pad-making machine. Meganathan had made a sanitary napkin-making machine at an affordable cost. He was also awarded the Padma Shri for this invention. Actress Sonam Kapoor, who has been filming Padman, which deals with the stigma associated with menstruation, says people's ignorance and backward mindset towards menstrual hygiene is "shocking" when talking about the aspect of ignorance. The film's co-producer, Twinkle Khanna, also expressed a similar view and claimed that the lack of understanding about menstruation leads to poor health in urban and rural women.

Akshay Kumar and Bhumi Pednekar play the lead roles in the 2017 movie Toilet, which promotes campaigns to improve sanitation standards in India, focusing on eradicating poor sanitation, especially in rural areas. The bathroom crisis in India is brought to light in the movie, resulting from cultural and religious prejudice. People in rural areas of India still lack this essential item, which annoys women and encourages sexual harassment.

According to Miss World 2017 Manushi Chhillar, education alone won't fix the issue. She believes that affordable sanitary napkins are also required, along with a sustainable system allowing girls to practice good menstrual hygiene. Manushi has reached over 20 villages with her project Shakti, providing education and low-cost sanitary napkins.

Take some precautions during periods

Change your sanitary napkin every 6 to 8 hours. Prolonged use of the same hygienic product increases the chances of infection. Cleanliness becomes even more critical during periods. Therefore, while taking a bath, take complete care of how clean your organs are. One napkin should be used at a time. Two pads at once will cause the heat to build up closer to the sensitive area. Carry suitable accessories for it during the days of your period. Some examples are additional sanitary napkins, tissues, hand sanitizers, and antiseptic medicine. You may need them anytime if you go out to school, college, work, or anywhere else.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, complete care has been taken of cleanliness. Menstrual hygiene is also being taken care of. Toilets have been arranged everywhere. Awareness is being increased so that people are aware of cleanliness. Earlier, women used to wear clothes, so they were at risk of many diseases. Now, they are using sanitary napkins after getting information.

Girls should be educated about menstruation, its physiological effects, its significance, and how to maintain good hygiene while menstruating. Additionally, it is necessary to free them from ingrained prejudices, taboos, and limits. The media, sex education in the classroom, and targeted group discussions can all help achieve this. It is essential to urge all mothers to talk openly about menstruation and menstrual hygiene with their daughters. Social marketing can be used to promote sanitary pad use to all girls.

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