

## ENHANCING MENSTRUAL HYGIENE: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

**Author's Name:** Acsah Regulas<sup>1</sup>, Dhanya S<sup>2</sup>, Tessa Thomas<sup>3</sup>, Avani Prakash<sup>4</sup>, Ashlin Biju<sup>5</sup>, Sajjay Sudhakar<sup>6</sup>, Ajin Deepak M S<sup>7</sup>

### Affiliation:

1. Lecturer, Dept. of Pediatric Nursing, Suyog College of Nursing, Mysore, India.
2. Lecturer, Dept. of Obstetric and Gynecological Nursing, Suyog College of Nursing, Mysore, India.
3. III BSC Nursing Student, Suyog college of Nursing, Mysore, India.
4. III BSC Nursing Student, Suyog college of Nursing, Mysore, India.
5. III BSC Nursing Student, Suyog college of Nursing, Mysore, India.
6. III BSC Nursing Student, Suyog college of Nursing, Mysore, India.

**Corresponding Author Name and Email ID:** Acsah Regulas, [acsahregulas1234@gmail.com](mailto:acsahregulas1234@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a critical aspect of adolescent health and well-being, yet it remains inadequately addressed in many parts of the world due to cultural taboos, lack of education, and limited access to resources. This study explores the impact of teaching modules on menstrual hygiene among teenage girls, aiming to enhance their knowledge, hygiene practices, and overall confidence. The teaching module encompasses a comprehensive curriculum covering the biology of menstruation, debunking myths and misconceptions, promoting proper hygiene practices, and addressing the psychological impacts of menstruation. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as cultural and social barriers, economic constraints, and limited resources persist. Addressing these challenges through culturally sensitive approaches and improving access to sanitary products is crucial for the sustained success of menstrual hygiene education programs. The study concludes with recommendations for expanding the reach of these programs and suggests avenues for future research on long-term health and social benefits.

**Keywords:** menstrual hygiene management, adolescent health, cultural barriers, sanitary products

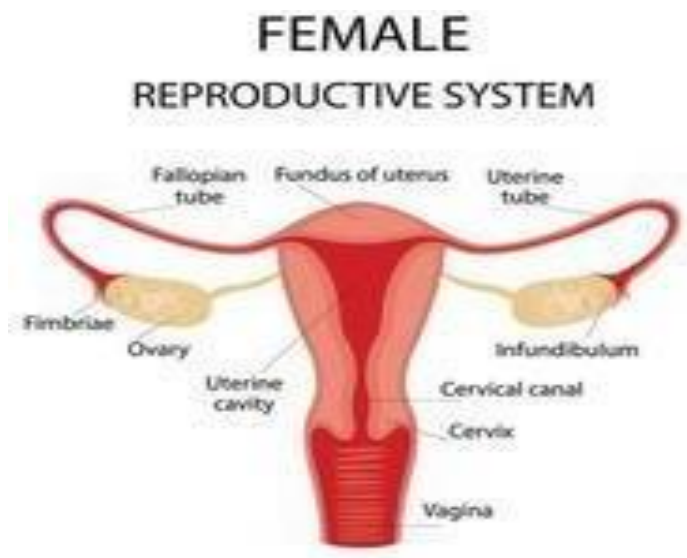
## INTRODUCTION



For women and girls around the world to be empowered and to live healthy lives, menstrual hygiene is essential. Though those are crucial, it is about more than just having access to sanitary pads and suitable restrooms. It also involves making sure that girls and women live in a community that respects and encourages their ability to menstruate in a dignified manner.

Menstruation is a significant biological process designed by nature for women, marking a crucial phase in their reproductive life. It involves a range of physiological changes from the onset of menstruation, known as menarche, until menopause. Adolescence, the period between puberty and legal adulthood encompasses significant physical, psychological, and reproductive development, during which menstruation plays a key role.<sup>1</sup>

## FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM



The female reproductive system is made to do multiple tasks. It generates the ova, also known as oocytes, which are female egg cells required for reproduction. The system's purpose is to deliver the eggs to the location of fertilization.<sup>2</sup> The fallopian tubes are where conception—the fertilization of an egg by a sperm—usually takes place. The fertilized egg's next action is to deposit itself into the uterine walls, initiating the first phases of pregnancy. The mechanism is intended to undergo menstruation, or the monthly shedding of the uterine lining, in the event that fertilization and/or implantation do not occur. The female reproductive system also generates female sex hormones, which are necessary to keep the reproductive cycle going.<sup>3</sup>

## **DEFINITION**

Menstrual hygiene refers to maintaining cleanliness during menstruation, which involves using suitable materials like sanitary pads or tampons, along with access to water, soap, and private toilet facilities. Inadequate menstrual hygiene can cause issues such as itching, rashes, unpleasant odors, and more serious health problems like pelvic inflammatory disease and toxic shock syndrome.<sup>2</sup>

## **MENSTRUAL CYCLE**

The series of events that take place in your body each month as it gets ready for the potential of pregnancy is called the menstrual cycle. The amount of time between the first day of your menstrual period and the first day of your subsequent menstrual period is known as your menstrual cycle. Although each person's cycle is a little bit different, the procedure is the same.<sup>4</sup>

## **IMPORTANCE OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE EDUCATION**

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is crucial for the well-being and health of adolescent girls. Effective education about menstrual hygiene helps in reducing the risks of reproductive tract infections, urinary tract infections, and other health issues. It also fosters a sense of confidence and normalcy in managing menstruation, which is a natural biological process. Educating young girls on menstrual hygiene practices is essential to break the silence, dispel myths, and challenge societal taboos associated with menstruation.<sup>5</sup>

## **BIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MENSTRUATION**

The menstrual cycle is a hormonally driven process that prepares the female body for potential pregnancy. Understanding its biological basis is essential for normalizing menstruation and dispelling associated myths and stigmas.

## THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

The menstrual cycle typically spans 28 days, though it can range from 21 to 35 days in different individuals. It is divided into four main phases:

- 1. Menstrual Phase:** The cycle begins with menstruation, lasting 3-7 days, during which the endometrial lining is shed due to the decline in estrogen and progesterone levels.
- 2. Follicular Phase:** Overlapping with the menstrual phase, this phase continues until ovulation. The pituitary gland releases follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), prompting the growth of ovarian follicles, each containing an egg. The rising estrogen levels during this phase thicken the endometrial lining in preparation for potential pregnancy.<sup>6</sup>
- 3. Ovulation:** Around the midpoint of the cycle, typically on day 14, a surge in luteinizing hormone (LH) triggers the release of a mature egg from the dominant follicle into the fallopian tube. This phase is crucial for fertility, as it is the only time when fertilization can occur.
- 4. Luteal Phase:** After ovulation, the ruptured follicle transforms into the corpus luteum, which secretes progesterone to maintain the endometrial lining for potential implantation. If fertilization does not occur, the corpus luteum degenerates, leading to a drop in progesterone and estrogen levels, triggering the start of menstruation and a new cycle.<sup>5</sup>

## HORMONAL CHANGES

The menstrual cycle is regulated by a feedback system involving the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and ovaries. The hypothalamus secretes gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH), which stimulates the anterior pituitary to produce FSH and LH. These hormones regulate the ovarian cycle and, consequently, the levels of estrogen and progesterone.<sup>6</sup> Estrogen is critical for the growth and maintenance of the endometrial lining, while progesterone prepares it for implantation and supports early pregnancy.<sup>7</sup>

Educating girls about these biological processes helps to demystify menstruation and present it as a natural, healthy aspect of life. Such understanding can reduce fear and shame, promote positive attitudes towards menstrual health, and encourage the adoption of healthy practices.<sup>8</sup>

## DEBUNKING MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MENSTRUATION

Menstruation is often surrounded by numerous myths and misconceptions, which contribute to stigma and shame. These misconceptions can negatively impact the physical and mental health of menstruating individuals, leading to poor hygiene practices, social exclusion, and psychological distress. Educating girls and the broader community with accurate information is essential for promoting a healthy, informed, and supportive environment.<sup>7</sup>

## COMMON MYTHS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

### *1. Menstruating Women Are Impure or Unclean*

A prevalent myth is that menstruating women are impure or unclean. This belief, rooted in cultural and religious practices, can lead to social exclusion and restrictions, such as prohibiting women from participating in religious activities, cooking, or touching certain objects during menstruation. These practices not only reinforce gender discrimination but also undermine women's self-esteem and autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

### *2. Avoidance of Certain Foods*

Another widespread misconception is that menstruating women should avoid specific foods, such as sour or cold items, believed to adversely affect menstrual health. There is no scientific evidence supporting these claims. On the contrary, maintaining a balanced diet, including iron-rich foods, is crucial for managing menstrual symptoms like fatigue and cramps. Misinformation about dietary restrictions can lead to poor nutrition and associated health issues.<sup>2</sup>

### *3. Physical Activities Should Be Limited*

It is often wrongly believed that menstruating women should avoid physical activities such as exercise or sports. While some may experience discomfort, regular physical activity can actually alleviate menstrual symptoms like cramps and mood swings by promoting endorphin release. Encouraging girls to continue participating in physical activities helps maintain a healthy lifestyle and prevents the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes.<sup>3</sup>

### *4. Menstrual Blood Is Toxic or Dangerous*

The misconception that menstrual blood is toxic or harmful perpetuates stigma. Menstrual blood, composed of blood, uterine lining, and other fluids, poses no danger to others. This myth can lead to unhealthy practices, such as inadequate hand hygiene when handling menstrual products, further contributing to stigma and embarrassment.

### *5. Menstruation Is a Sign of Sickness*

In some cultures, menstruation is mistakenly viewed as a disease or illness, leading to the isolation of menstruating girls and women, which can prevent them from attending school or work. It is crucial to educate communities that menstruation is a normal biological process indicating reproductive health, not a sign of illness.

## STRATEGIES TO DEBUNK MYTHS

### *1. Educational Programs and Workshops*

Educational programs and workshops are essential for providing accurate information about menstruation. These programs, which can be conducted in schools, communities, and healthcare

settings, cover the science of menstruation, proper hygiene practices, and the psychological aspects of menstrual health. Engaging healthcare professionals and educators ensures that the information is reliable and comprehensive.<sup>8</sup>

### ***2. Incorporating Menstrual Education into School Curriculums***

Integrating menstrual education into school curriculums normalizes the topic and provides accurate information from an early age. This education should include both boys and girls to promote understanding and support among peers, helping dispel myths and foster a more inclusive environment.

### ***3. Media and Social Media Campaigns***

Media and social media platforms are effective in sharing factual information and positive narratives about menstruation. Campaigns can include testimonials from public figures, educational videos, and infographics that challenge common myths. These platforms also provide a space for open discussions, encouraging individuals to share their experiences and questions about menstruation.

### ***4. Community Involvement and Dialogue***

Engaging community leaders and influencers in dialogue about menstruation helps challenge entrenched myths and promote cultural change. Community events, discussions, and outreach programs can create safe spaces for addressing misconceptions and providing support. Including men and boys in these conversations is crucial for breaking down gender barriers and promoting a supportive environment for all.<sup>9</sup>

## **IMPROVEMENT IN HYGIENE PRACTICES**

### ***1. Usage and Types of Sanitary Products***

The module educates girls on the various types of sanitary products available, including sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and reusable cloth pads. It emphasizes the importance of choosing the right product based on individual needs and comfort.

### ***2. Proper Hygiene Practices During Menstruation***

Proper hygiene practices, such as regular changing of sanitary products, washing hands before and after changing, and maintaining personal cleanliness, are crucial to prevent infections. The module provides practical tips and demonstrations to reinforce these practices.

### ***3. Disposal Methods and Environmental Considerations***

Safe and environmentally friendly disposal of sanitary products is a critical aspect of menstrual hygiene. The module teaches girls about proper disposal methods, such as using dustbins with lids and avoiding flushing products down the toilet. It also discusses the environmental impact of disposable products and promotes the use of sustainable alternatives where feasible.<sup>10</sup>

## REDUCTION OF STIGMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

- **Addressing Cultural Taboos and Stigmas**

The module tackles cultural and societal stigmas associated with menstruation by fostering open discussions and encouraging a positive dialogue. This helps in breaking down barriers and normalizing conversations about menstrual health.

- **Mental Health and Emotional Support**

Menstruation can be accompanied by emotional changes, such as mood swings and anxiety. The module provides guidance on managing these changes and emphasizes the importance of seeking support from friends, family, or mental health professionals if needed.<sup>11</sup>

## EMPOWERMENT AND CONFIDENCE

- *Body Autonomy and Self-Care*

Education on menstrual hygiene empowers girls by promoting body autonomy and self-care. Understanding their bodies and how to care for them instils a sense of control and confidence, encouraging girls to take charge of their menstrual health.

- *Impact on School Attendance and Participation*

Poor menstrual hygiene management often leads to absenteeism and reduced participation in school and extracurricular activities. By providing the necessary knowledge and resources, the module aims to reduce these barriers, allowing girls to engage fully in their education and personal growth.<sup>12</sup>

## COMMUNITY AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- *Role of Parents and Guardians*

Parents and guardians play a crucial role in supporting girls through their menstrual journey. The module encourages open communication and provides guidance to parents on how to discuss menstruation with their children.

- *Community Outreach and Education*

Community involvement is essential for creating a supportive environment for menstrual hygiene. The module promotes community outreach programs, workshops, and campaigns to raise awareness and educate the broader community, including men and boys, about menstruation.

## CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

### Cultural and Social Barriers

1. *Cultural Taboos and Stigmas*: In many societies, menstruation is surrounded by cultural taboos and stigmas that contribute to misinformation and discrimination. Cultural beliefs may dictate that menstruating individuals are impure or unclean, which can lead to social exclusion and restrictions on

daily activities. These taboos can hinder open discussions about menstruation and limit access to menstrual health education and products.<sup>1</sup>

2. **Lack of Comprehensive Education:** In many communities, there is a lack of comprehensive menstrual health education, which exacerbates myths and misconceptions. Educational materials might be inadequate or culturally insensitive, failing to address the specific needs and concerns of different communities.<sup>2</sup>

3. **Gender Inequality:** Gender norms and inequalities can also be a barrier. In some cultures, menstruation is not discussed openly due to a lack of emphasis on women's health issues. This silence perpetuates misinformation and reinforces negative stereotypes about menstruation, which can prevent individuals from seeking help or using menstrual products.<sup>3</sup>

## ECONOMIC AND RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

1. **Access to Menstrual Products:** Economic barriers significantly impact menstrual hygiene management. Many individuals, especially in low-income settings, cannot afford or access sanitary products. This leads to the use of unhygienic alternatives, such as rags or paper, which can increase the risk of infections and discomfort.

2. **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Inadequate sanitation facilities, such as the lack of clean, private places for changing menstrual products, can further exacerbate menstrual hygiene challenges. This issue is particularly acute in schools and public places where proper sanitation infrastructure is often lacking.

3. **Cost of Education Programs:** Implementing effective menstrual health education programs requires financial resources, including funding for educational materials, trained personnel, and outreach efforts. Many communities or institutions may not have the budget to invest in such programs, limiting their reach and effectiveness.<sup>13</sup>

## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

### • Sustained Changes in Hygiene Practices

1. **Improved Hygiene Practices:** Effective menstrual health education can lead to sustained changes in hygiene practices. Individuals who receive accurate information are more likely to use appropriate menstrual products, maintain better menstrual hygiene, and manage their menstrual health more effectively. This results in fewer instances of menstrual-related health issues and improved overall well-being.

2. **Enhanced Knowledge and Attitudes:** Long-term educational interventions can transform attitudes towards menstruation. By normalizing menstruation through education, individuals are more likely to approach it with a positive attitude, leading to better self-care practices and a reduction in menstrual-



related stigma.<sup>14</sup>

## HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

**1. Reduction in Menstrual-Related Health Issues:** Improved menstrual hygiene practices can reduce the incidence of menstrual-related health issues, such as infections and reproductive health complications. Proper use of sanitary products and hygiene practices can prevent health problems associated with poor menstrual management.

**2. Economic Benefits:** Access to menstrual products and education can have significant economic benefits. For example, better menstrual management can reduce absenteeism from school and work, enhancing educational and economic opportunities for menstruating individuals. Furthermore, reducing menstrual-related health issues can decrease healthcare costs and improve productivity.

## BROADER SOCIAL IMPACTS

**1. Increased Gender Equality:** Addressing menstrual health through education and resource provision can contribute to greater gender equality. By challenging taboos and promoting open discussion about menstruation, societies can work towards eliminating gender-based discrimination and creating a more inclusive environment for all.<sup>15</sup>

**2. Enhanced Educational and Economic Opportunities:** Improved menstrual health management supports educational attainment and economic participation. Girls who have access to menstrual products and education are more likely to attend school regularly, perform better academically, and pursue higher education and employment opportunities.

**3. Strengthened Community Support:** Successful menstrual health programs often involve community engagement and support, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity. This community involvement can enhance social cohesion and ensure that menstrual health issues are addressed comprehensively and sustainably.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF MENSTRUATION

Menstruation, while a natural biological process, can have significant psychological impacts on individuals. These effects can vary widely among individuals and may be influenced by various factors, including cultural attitudes, personal experiences, and the severity of menstrual symptoms.

### *Emotional and Psychological Effects*

**1. Mood Swings and Irritability:** Many individuals experience mood swings and increased irritability in the days leading up to menstruation. These symptoms are often associated with premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and are thought to result from fluctuations in hormone levels, particularly estrogen and

Progesterone. Mood swings can affect personal relationships and daily functioning.

2. **Anxiety and Depression:** Some individuals may experience heightened anxiety or depressive symptoms around their menstrual cycle. These feelings can be exacerbated by hormonal changes, but they can also be influenced by stress or pre-existing mental health conditions. For some, premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is a more severe form of PMS that can significantly impact mental health and quality of life.

3. **Self-Esteem and Body Image Issues:** Menstruation can affect body image and self-esteem. For instance, bloating, weight gain, and acne, which are sometimes associated with menstruation, can lead to negative self-perceptions and body dissatisfaction. This can impact overall mental well-being and self-esteem.

4. **Social and Psychological Stigma:** Cultural taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation can lead to feelings of shame and embarrassment. The lack of open discussion about menstruation can create a sense of isolation and affect mental health, especially if individuals feel they must conceal their menstruation from others.

5. **Impact of Menstrual Pain:** Menstrual pain, or dysmenorrhea, can have a considerable psychological impact. Severe menstrual cramps and discomfort can lead to stress and frustration, affecting an individual's mood and daily activities. Chronic pain can also contribute to anxiety and depression over time.<sup>16</sup>

## COPING STRATEGIES

1. **Education and Awareness:** Providing education about menstruation and its effects can help normalize the experience and reduce stigma. Understanding that mood swings and other symptoms are a common part of menstruation can help individuals manage their psychological impacts more effectively.

2. **Support Systems:** Having supportive friends, family, or support groups can help individuals cope with the psychological impacts of menstruation. Open communication about menstrual health can alleviate feelings of isolation and provide emotional support.

3. **Mental Health Interventions:** For individuals experiencing significant psychological distress related to menstruation, mental health interventions such as counseling or therapy can be beneficial. Addressing underlying mental health conditions or seeking professional support for PMS or PMDD can improve overall well-being.

4. **Healthy Lifestyle Choices:** Engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a balanced diet, and practising stress-relief techniques such as mindfulness or relaxation exercises can help manage the psychological symptoms associated with menstruation. These lifestyle choices can mitigate the effects of hormonal fluctuations and improve mood.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Enhancing menstrual hygiene is crucial for improving health and well-being, particularly among teenage girls. Effective strategies include integrating menstrual hygiene education into school curricula and community programs, ensuring access to a variety of affordable sanitary products, and promoting proper hygiene practices.<sup>13</sup> Addressing cultural barriers and reducing stigma through community engagement are essential for creating supportive environments. Additionally, promoting sustainable menstrual products and proper disposal methods can benefit both personal health and the environment. Support systems, including access to health services and peer networks, along with supportive policies and regular program evaluation, further contribute to effective menstrual hygiene management. By adopting these comprehensive strategies, we can achieve significant improvements in menstrual health, reduce stigma, and enhance overall quality of life.<sup>15</sup>

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