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## Beyond The Red: Supporting Menstrual Hygiene Awareness In Education

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### Abstract

The lack of menstrual education among adolescent girls in the 21st century is a pressing issue perpetuated by societal taboos and cultural restrictions. This ignorance about menstruation and hygienic practices can lead to adverse health outcomes. UNESCO's research shows a connection between menstruation and girls dropping out of school, a widespread challenge. In India, up to 1 in 5 girls leave school after their first period. Many schools worldwide struggle to provide adequate facilities for girls. Raising awareness and championing formal menstrual hygiene management (MHM) education within and outside schools is our goal. Our mission includes challenging the stigma surrounding menstruation and providing menstrual health education from an early age. This initiative can impact various aspects of a girl's life, including education, economic opportunities, health, participation, and dignity. The menstrual education status of secondary school students will be critically evaluated in our study, with emphasis placed on the necessity for proactive measures and enhancements. The goal of this research is to instigate positive change in the menstrual education landscape, ensuring that knowledge and support are received by girls. It is deemed essential to initiate improvements and take initiative to overcome these challenges.

**Keyword:** menstrual hygiene awareness, physical and mental discomfort, gender sensitization, role of education in MHM.

### Introduction

Menstruation, a natural process affecting nearly half the global population, has endured centuries of silence and stigma. Empowering girls through menstrual hygiene and education is crucial for breaking societal taboos and advancing gender equality. Worldwide, millions of women face barriers to menstrual health, exacerbated by inadequate sanitation, limited access to healthcare, and a lack of clean water. These challenges impede overall well-being and development, hinder educational opportunities, and perpetuate gender inequality.

Young girls grapple with diverse menstruation-related challenges, including insufficient knowledge, social stigma, limited access to sanitary products, financial constraints, and discomfort discussing periods openly. Inadequate sanitation facilities compound these difficulties, leading to missed school days and restricting educational progress. Disruptions in daily activities, coupled with participation limitations, can adversely impact

their well-being. Reasons for not using sanitary pads range from hesitation and shyness to challenges in disposal and poor availability, often stemming from a lack of knowledge.

Crucially, girls typically receive information about menstruation from their mothers, female friends, and older sisters. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a holistic approach, encompassing education, improved sanitation infrastructure, and accessible healthcare. By dismantling societal taboos and promoting menstrual well-being, we pave the way for a more equitable and empowered future for all women and girls.

"Beyond the Red: Supporting Menstrual Hygiene Awareness in Education" is a title associated with the sociology of health, centering on issues concerning menstrual hygiene and health education within educational institutions. Within this context, sociological aspects can be explored, examining how societal norms and education systems impact menstrual hygiene awareness. However, the primary focus lies on health and hygiene within the educational setting, emphasizing the crucial role played by schools in promoting menstrual health and hygiene among girls. Knowledge barriers can be dismantled through comprehensive menstrual education provided by schools, covering topics such as the menstrual cycle. This approach facilitates a better understanding of their bodies and promotes improved hygiene practices, ultimately contributing to the promotion of menstrual health and hygiene among girls, fostering a more equitable and inclusive Society. The WHO's 1995 Health Promoting Schools concept integrates holistic health into education, emphasising curriculum, ethos, and environment. A key element is the establishment of a management committee to plan and implement health promotion policies. This structure can facilitate outcomes like menstrual hygiene promotion and enhance overall well-being within schools.

**World Menstrual Hygiene Day:** World Menstrual Hygiene Day, observed annually on May 28th, serves as a global advocacy day to promote effective menstrual hygiene management (MHM). The choice of May 28th aligns with the average length of the menstrual cycle (28 days) and symbolises the typical duration of menstruation (around five days).

**History:** Initiated in 2013 by the German NGO WASH United, it began as a 28-day social media campaign, evolving into the established Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28, 2014, due to a positive response.

**Theme for 2023:** The theme "Making menstruation a normal fact of life by 2030" underscores the goal of integrating menstruation seamlessly into daily life, reducing stigma, and promoting awareness. This day emphasises the crucial role of proper menstrual hygiene for the well-being and dignity of individuals who menstruate. It advocates for using clean and safe menstrual products, maintaining personal hygiene, managing menstrual discomfort, and improving access to these resources, especially in low-income communities. Additionally, it encourages knowledge acquisition about bodies, menstrual cycles, and reproductive health.

### The Meaning of Adolescence

According to the WHO, the second decade of life (10–19 years of age) is a time when significant physical, psychological, and social changes occur. Adolescence is the transitional stage of physical and psychological development between childhood and adulthood. It typically involves the onset of puberty, leading to changes in emotions, identity, and relationships.

## The Meaning of Menstrual Education

Menstruation health and hygiene management involves a number of interventions in schools, including providing adolescent girls with knowledge of sanitary products and facilities to understand and manage their menstruation.

Menstrual education refers to the process of providing information and awareness about menstruation. It involves educating individuals, typically girls and women, about the biological processes, hygiene practices, and emotional aspects related to menstruation. This education aims to dispel myths, reduce stigma, and empower individuals to manage their menstrual health effectively.

### Schools should educate girls on these vital menstruation facts:

**Introduction to Menstruation:** Menstruation is a natural and normal process that occurs in girls once they reach puberty, typically between the ages of 9 and 16. It's essential to convey to the class that this is a normal aspect of a woman's life.

**Menstruation is Not a Sickness:** Emphasise that menstruation is not a sickness; girls can lead their regular lives during this time. They can attend school, engage in physical activities, eat normally, and participate in social gatherings without any hindrance.

**Understanding Irregular Cycles:** Inform the girls that irregular menstrual cycles are common in the first few years after menstruation starts. Encourage them to observe their menstrual cycles to predict when they might get their period, helping them be prepared with pads or cloths.

**Physical Changes:** Acknowledge the physical changes that come with menstruation, such as breast development, body hair growth, and widening hips. Reassure them that these changes are normal and that there's no need for fear or shame.

**Breaking the Silence:** Stress the importance of not keeping menstruation a secret. Being discreet is different from being ashamed. Encourage an open conversation, empowering girls to share information and support each other. A well-informed girl can be a leader and help others.

**Dealing with Menstrual Pain:** Recognise that menstruation can sometimes be painful. Provide practical tips like short walks, sufficient sleep, hydration, and mild pain medicine to ease discomfort. Emphasise that severe pain, excessive bleeding, or irregularities warrant seeking medical help.

**Diet and Well-Being:** Dispel myths around dietary restrictions during menstruation. Stress the importance of a balanced diet for overall well-being. Address the misconception that certain foods need to be avoided, highlighting the impact of nutrition on concentration, energy levels, and mental health.

**Importance of Exercise:** Encourage regular exercise for its numerous benefits, including mental well-being and pain relief. Share that exercise, even during menstruation, is beneficial and can help prevent cramps.

**Maintaining Hygiene:** Emphasise the significance of good hygiene practices during menstruation. Educate girls on proper washing routines, stressing the importance of cleanliness to prevent infections. Provide guidance on discreetly handling used pads or cloths.

**Managing Menstrual Products:** Highlight the importance of changing disposable pads or reusable cloths regularly, at least every six hours. Encourage girls to carry spare pads in their school bags. Address the proper washing and drying procedures for reusable cloths, emphasising hygiene.

Educating girls about menstruation involves fostering a positive and open attitude, debunking myths, promoting hygiene, and providing practical advice for managing this natural process. As a teacher, creating a supportive environment for discussion and understanding is crucial to empowering girls to navigate menstruation confidently.

### **Problems that school-going girls face regarding menstruation**

School-going girls often face various challenges during their menstruation. Some common problems include lack of access to sanitary products, inadequate sanitation facilities, stigma and embarrassment, discomfort or pain, and missed school days. These issues can impact their education, well-being, and confidence. Certainly, here are some challenges that girls often face when maintaining menstruation:

**Lack of Access to Sanitary Products:** The lack of access to sanitary products creates challenges for girls in school. Without these essentials, they may use inadequate materials, risking infections and compromising hygiene. This discomfort and distraction can hinder academic performance. Insufficient products may lead to embarrassing stains, impact self-esteem, and contribute to absenteeism. The stress of managing menstruation without proper items can affect mental health, potentially causing anxiety. Girls might avoid activities due to concerns about inadequate products, limiting their participation in school events.

**Inadequate sanitation facilities:** inadequate sanitation, including a lack of clean toilets, water access, and sanitary product disposal, causes discomfort and health issues. Girls may miss school during periods, impacting their education and well-being. Addressing infrastructure gaps is vital for a conducive learning environment. Insufficient restrooms hinder discreet and hygienic menstruation management, emphasising the need for improved facilities.

**Stigma and embarrassment:** Limited education and cultural norms contribute to menstrual stigma, fostering shame and secrecy. Misconceptions surrounding menstruation fuel anxiety, impacting girls' self-esteem and well-being. Stigma hampers self-expression and active participation in school, hindering confidence. Cultural taboos may lead to negative body image perceptions, further affecting self-esteem. The fear of judgement and withdrawal from social interactions during menstruation perpetuates secrecy, impeding open communication about menstrual health and hygiene and limiting girls' overall well-being and development.

**Physical discomfort and pain:** Menstrual discomfort affects schoolgirls, hindering concentration and attendance due to symptoms like cramps and fatigue. Emotional aspects may lead to anxiety and embarrassment, impacting confidence and social interactions. Inadequate facilities worsen these challenges. Beyond school, pain limits participation in activities, and cultural stigmas amplify feelings of shame. Addressing this requires education, open conversations, access to hygiene products, and supportive environments in school and the community.

**Missed school days:** Missed school days during menstruation can significantly impact girls' education. Absences may lead to falling behind in lessons, affecting academic performance. Stigma around menstruation can contribute to girls feeling embarrassed or ashamed, potentially deterring their participation in class. Lack of access to menstrual hygiene resources may force girls to stay home, further widening educational disparities.

**Lack of Menstrual Education: Insufficient** menstrual education can detrimentally affect girls by fostering embarrassment, confusion, and stigma. Without proper knowledge, girls may experience anxiety, miss school due to discomfort or shame, and lack essential hygiene practices. This knowledge gap can perpetuate societal taboos and hinder girls' overall well-being, hindering their ability to manage their menstrual health effectively. Comprehensive education is crucial for empowering girls, promoting confidence, and breaking down societal barriers surrounding menstruation.

**Limited privacy:** Limited privacy during menstruation poses significant challenges for school-going girls. In many educational settings, inadequate restroom facilities, a lack of disposal options for sanitary products, and societal taboos force girls to manage their periods in unsanitary and uncomfortable conditions. This compromises their dignity, contributes to absenteeism, and hampers their overall well-being.

**Bullying and teasing:** Bullying and teasing related to menstruation can profoundly affect school-going girls. The stigma surrounding periods may lead to embarrassment, anxiety, and a sense of shame, hindering their emotional well-being. Such negative experiences can impact self-esteem, academic performance, and social interactions. Girls may feel reluctant to discuss menstrual issues openly, contributing to a culture of silence.

**Limited teacher understanding:** When educators lack awareness about menstrual hygiene and the challenges girls face, it can lead to embarrassment and discomfort for the students. Girls may hesitate to seek help or discuss their needs, potentially affecting their academic performance and attendance. Inadequate facilities or a lack of proper information may contribute to feelings of shame and exclusion during menstruation. Moreover, a teacher's ignorance can perpetuate societal taboos surrounding menstruation.

**Cultural and religious restrictions:** Cultural and religious restrictions can significantly impact how menstruation is perceived and experienced by girls. In some cultures, menstruation is surrounded by stigma and taboos, leading to feelings of shame and embarrassment. Religious beliefs may also contribute to these perceptions. Such restrictions can affect girls' access to education, as they may miss school during their periods due to a lack of proper facilities or a fear of social ridicule. Additionally, limited information about menstruation may lead to misconceptions and inadequate hygiene practices, impacting girls' health.

### **The importance of supporting menstrual hygiene in education**

Education plays a crucial role in maintaining menstrual hygiene and promoting overall menstrual health. Menstrual hygiene refers to the practices and measures adopted by individuals during menstruation to ensure cleanliness, comfort, and well-being. Lack of proper menstrual hygiene can lead to various health issues, including infections and discomfort. Here's how education can contribute to maintaining menstrual hygiene:



**Awareness and knowledge:** Education in schools imparts crucial knowledge about menstruation, covering biological processes, the menstrual cycle, and hygiene practices. This empowers young girls, fostering confidence and ensuring they handle menstruation hygienically. By instilling this awareness, schools contribute significantly to breaking taboos and promoting a healthier approach to menstrual hygiene.

**Access to hygiene products:** Education can help raise awareness about the importance of using appropriate menstrual hygiene products like sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or reusable cloth pads. It can also help reduce the stigma and taboos associated with menstruation, making it easier for individuals to access and use these products.

**Safe disposal:** Education plays a crucial role in promoting the safe disposal of menstrual hygiene products to prevent environmental pollution and health risks. Emphasising the use of designated disposal bins and proper methods is essential for environmental sustainability. By imparting this knowledge, individuals can contribute to a cleaner environment and safeguard their well-being.

**Hygiene practice: education** plays a pivotal role in promoting menstrual hygiene practices. Emphasising the importance of regular sanitary product changes, instilling the habit of washing hands before and after handling menstrual products, and encouraging overall personal cleanliness contribute to a healthier menstrual experience. Through comprehensive education, individuals can cultivate habits that prioritise hygiene, fostering well-being during menstruation.

**Breaking taboos and myths:** Education is crucial in dispelling cultural taboos and myths surrounding menstruation. Many societies stigmatise menstruation, fostering shame and misinformation. By fostering understanding, education breaks these barriers, creating a supportive environment. Empowering individuals with accurate information promotes open dialogue, challenges societal norms, and fosters a more inclusive and informed community.

**Identifying health issues:** Menstrual education is vital as it enables individuals to identify signs of menstrual health problems or infections. This knowledge empowers them to promptly seek medical assistance if needed. By understanding these indicators, individuals can take proactive steps towards maintaining their reproductive health and addressing potential issues early on, contributing to their overall well-being and quality of life.

**Nutritional awareness: educational** efforts should underscore the significance of a balanced diet for maintaining overall health during menstruation. Nutritional awareness can play a pivotal role in promoting well-being, emphasising the importance of adequate nutrient intake. Educating individuals about proper dietary choices during this period is crucial for optimal health outcomes and can contribute to a better understanding of how nutrition influences well-being during menstruation.

**Gender sensitization:** Integrating gender sensitization in education is crucial for fostering understanding and breaking taboos around menstruation. Empowering students with accurate information promotes menstrual hygiene, dispels stigma, and ensures inclusive conversations. This education cultivates empathy, eradicates

misconceptions, and creates a supportive environment for all genders to discuss menstruation openly, contributing to overall societal well-being and gender equality.

**Addressing menstrual pain management: educational** initiatives play a pivotal role in enhancing awareness about menstrual pain management. Individuals benefit from learning diverse methods such as heat therapy, exercise, and over-the-counter medications. This knowledge empowers them to make informed choices, improving their overall well-being during menstruation.

**Empowerment, confidence, and support for girls in schools: education** fosters confidence and empowerment by enlightening individuals about menstruation and enabling them to navigate it with dignity. Moreover, in regions facing challenges, education drives the establishment of supportive school infrastructures, ensuring girls can continue their studies seamlessly. In conclusion, education plays a pivotal role in maintaining menstrual hygiene by spreading awareness, breaking taboos, and empowering individuals, fostering a society where menstruation is viewed as a normal process, free from stigma.

### Review of literature

**Vishwakarma, Puri (2021)** Interlinking menstrual hygiene with women's empowerment and reproductive tract infections: Evidence from India. This study examines menstrual hygiene practices in India, emphasising disparities based on gender, caste, and socio-economic factors. Despite improvements, societal norms still influence hygiene choices. Empowering women, involving men, and implementing couple-oriented counselling programmes are crucial for behavioural changes. Comprehensive education initiatives should address puberty, menstruation, and hygiene through various channels, fostering a holistic approach for improved women's health and rights.

**Ahamed, F. (2021).** "Period Matters: Menstruation in South Asia" by Farah Ahamed is a groundbreaking exploration of a typically silenced subject. Ahamed's comprehensive approach encompasses historical, cultural, social, and political dimensions, offering a nuanced understanding of menstruation in South Asian societies. With engaging and accessible writing, the book skillfully combines personal anecdotes and empirical evidence, fostering both informative and emotionally resonant narratives. Ahamed bravely challenges taboos, debunking myths surrounding menstruation and addressing critical issues like hygiene and healthcare access. This thought-provoking work is essential reading for those interested in gender studies, cultural anthropology, and advocating for social justice.

**Ananya, A. (2021).** Menstruation: A consciousness that is experienced unconsciously. This unique book intertwines menstruation with spiritual awakening, revealing the profound connection between a woman's power and her menstrual cycle. It delves into the roots of this intrinsic power, suggesting that the menstrual cycle shapes one's entire existence, fostering a deep connection to emotions and surroundings. The narrative advocates harnessing this power for an enlightened life, steering towards a heightened state of being. By recognising the cyclical nature of life through menstruation, the book empowers women to embrace their innate strength and lead a more awakened and purposeful existence.

## Objectives of the study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To find out the menstrual education status of high school-going girls
- To know about the beliefs, taboos, and problems related to menstruation among the study population.

## Research methodology and techniques

In a descriptive study on menstrual education among high school students, data collection included administering interview schedules. The focus was on gathering comprehensive information to understand the current status of menstrual education.

## Study area and sample

The present study, which focuses on Shivamogga district in Karnataka, involved the collection of data to support research. A representative sample of 30 high school girls was selected as participants using a simple random method. Through this approach, insights into the experiences and perspectives of this specific group

## Source of data collection

Primary data for the study was collected through a Interview Schedule.. Additionally, secondary data was sourced from books, journals, articles, websites (E-source), and other relevant materials, enhancing the comprehensive data foundation for the research.

## Data analysis

Various research methods and data from diverse sources are qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. This involves codification, revision, classification, indication, and a sociological framework supported by appropriate statistical tools for comprehensive understanding.

### Religious distribution of respondents

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Hindu	15	50.00
Islam	09	30.00
Christian	04	13.30
Others	02	06.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

In our data analysis of 30 respondents, religious distribution reveals 50% Hindus, 30% Muslims, 13.3% Christians, and 6.6% follow other religions. This breakdown provides insights into the diverse religious affiliations within the respondent group, aiding a comprehensive understanding of perspectives across different faiths.

### Age distribution of puberty onset

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
11 to 12	02	06.00
12 to 13	12	40.00
13 to 14	09	30.00
14 to 15	07	24.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>



The table illustrates the distribution of puberty onset in a population based on age ranges. The majority, 40%, experience puberty between 12 and 13 years, followed by 30% between 11 and 12 years, 24% between 13 and 14 years, and a smaller percentage of 6% between 10 and 11 years.

### Formal education about menstrual hygiene in the school curriculum

Opinion About Curriculum	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	14	46.70
No	16	53.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The above data indicates that it was collected from 30 respondents. 46.7% of schools include formal education about menstrual hygiene in their curriculum. Conversely, 53.3% of schools do not include menstrual hygiene education in their formal curriculum.

### Facing challenges during menstruation

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Yes (Facing Challenges)	13	43.30
NO ( No Challenges)	02	06.70
Some Times (Mixed Experience)	15	50.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The Above table indicates that approximately 43.3% of respondents encounter period challenges, such as cramps and staining fears. Only 6.7% reported a comfortable experience, while 50% indicated mixed experiences, implying intermittent struggles. This analysis underscores the diverse nature of individuals' encounters with menstruation, ranging from ease to occasional difficulties.

### Comfort level of respondents

Opinion About Comfort Level	Frequency	Percentage
Only with Friend	16	53.30
Only with Female Teachers	06	20.00
With Everyone	01	03.30
Not with Male Teachers	07	23.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The comfort levels vary: 53.3% with friends, indicating a preference for discussing menstrual health; 20% with female teachers; only 3% with everyone, highlighting a general discomfort; and 23% express discomfort specifically with male teachers.

### Educating boys about menstruation

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	41.00
No	18	59.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Data reveals a significant void in educating boys about menstrual hygiene, with 59% highlighting a lack of openness. Merely 41% acknowledge boys receiving education on the topic.

### Teachers and staff support menstrual hygiene needs

Opinion About Teachers Support	Frequency	Percentage
Yes They Always Are	18	60.00
Not Every time	11	38.00
Not At All	01	02.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The above data shows that 60% of respondents consistently find teachers supportive, while 38% report occasional lapses in addressing menstrual hygiene needs. A small 2% indicates teachers are not supportive at all.

### Status of restroom in school

Status of Restroom	Frequency	Percentage
Bad	08	25.00
Average	15	52.00
Good	07	23.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The analysis of the data on the status of restrooms in schools indicates that with 52% rating restrooms as average and 23% as good, there's room for improvement, but positive feedback exists. However, 25% labelled them bad.

### Facilities providing for maintaining MHM in school

Facilities Providing	Frequency	Percentage
Provide with All	00	0.00
Very Few Were provide	16	52.00
Neglected the basic Facilities	14	48.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

In a survey, 52% of respondents noted limited access to menstrual facilities, and 48% experienced neglect of basic amenities. Strikingly, none reported having all the necessary facilities. This highlights a significant gap in addressing essential needs.

### Awareness of health risks

Opinion of Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	62.00
No	11	38.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The above data shows that a significant 62% awareness of health risks highlights positive knowledge about menstrual hygiene. Nonetheless, the remaining 38% unawareness is concerning, underscoring a crucial need for widespread education on hygienic menstrual practices.

### Societal taboos related to menstruation

Societal taboos	Frequency	Percentage
Religious Restrictions	17	58.00
Embranchment Untouchables	08	26.00
Restricted social interaction	03	10.00
Did not face anything	02	06.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The data reveals striking trends in societal taboos linked to menstruation. Religious restrictions dominate at 58%, underscoring a pressing concern. Embarrassment and untouchability follow at 26%, emphasising societal discomfort. Restricted social interaction is noted at 10%, and 6% show no mentioned taboos.

## Research Findings

Based on the above research report, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Between the ages of 12 and 13, 40 percent of individuals commonly experience puberty.
- In 53 percent of schools, there is a lack of menstrual hygiene education, highlighting a gap in the formal curriculum.
- Challenges during menstruation, such as cramps and fatigue, are experienced by 43 percent of respondents.
- Discussing menstrual health is preferred among friends, with some discomfort expressed towards male teachers.
- There is a noticeable gap in educating boys about menstrual hygiene, with 59 percent indicating a lack of openness.
- While teachers are found to be supportive by 60 percent, occasional lapses are experienced by 38 percent, indicating room for improvement.
- The majority (52 percent) perceive restrooms as average, with potential for improvement.
- Limited access to menstrual facilities is reported by 52 percent, and neglect of basic amenities is reported by 48 percent.
- Health risk awareness is noted by the majority (62 percent), but 38 percent unawareness emphasizes the need for education.
- Prevalent societal taboos associated with menstruation include religious restrictions (58 percent), embarrassment, and untouchability.

## Suggestions

It's evident from the data that there are both positive aspects and challenges regarding menstrual hygiene awareness and education among school-going girls. To address these findings:

- An enhanced curriculum that includes menstrual hygiene education in all schools should be advocated for. Collaboration with educators to create engaging and informative materials should be facilitated.
- The discomfort some girls feel discussing menstrual health with male teachers should be recognised, and strategies for providing support through female educators or other means should be implemented.
- Programmes aimed at educating boys about menstrual hygiene should be developed to foster understanding and reduce stigma.
- Additional training for teachers should be provided to ensure consistent and empathetic support for students dealing with menstrual challenges.
- Efforts should be made towards improving restroom facilities to enhance overall satisfaction and comfort during menstruation.
- Awareness campaigns should be launched to bridge the gap in health risk knowledge and promote understanding of the importance of menstrual hygiene.
- Communities should collaborate to address societal taboos, especially religious restrictions, through open discussions and education.

• Advocacy for better access to menstrual facilities and ensuring that all necessary amenities are available to every student should be undertaken. By addressing these aspects, a supportive environment that promotes menstrual health can be created.

### **India has implemented several initiatives to address menstrual hygiene:**

**Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (2011):** Launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, this scheme targets adolescent girls in rural areas, aiming to promote menstrual hygiene.

**Swachh Bharat Guidelines (2015):** Integrated menstrual hygiene management (MHM) into school programmes, providing sanitary pads, proper vending, and disposal mechanisms, along with exclusive washrooms for girl students. MHM, by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, released guidelines emphasising menstrual hygiene.

**Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janausadhi Pariyojna (PMBJP):** Implemented by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, this project establishes Janaushidhi Kendras nationwide, offering affordable, biodegradable sanitary napkins named Suvidha.

**The Supreme Court's Call for a Uniform Policy (2022):** Urged a national policy for menstrual hygiene in schools, encompassing sanitary pad provision, proper facilities, and exclusive washrooms.

**State-Specific Initiatives:** States like Maharashtra (Asmita Yojana), Rajasthan (Udaan), Andhra Pradesh (Swechha), Kerala (She Pad), and Odisha (Khusi) have their own schemes providing subsidised or free sanitary napkins.

**Sustainable Alternatives:** Kerala and Karnataka distribute menstrual cups as eco-friendly alternatives. These efforts collectively aim to enhance menstrual hygiene, emphasising affordability, accessibility, and sustainability.

### **Way forward:**

A multifaceted approach to comprehensive menstrual health education is envisaged, wherein engaging workshops will be implemented in schools to empower girls with knowledge on menstrual hygiene and dispel myths. The integration of menstrual health into the curriculum is aimed at ensuring a systematic and widespread understanding of cycles, hygiene practices, and emotional well-being.

To address accessibility and affordability, the free distribution of sanitary pads in schools and public spaces should be advocated for. The promotion of sustainability and the tackling of financial barriers can be achieved by encouraging innovative, eco-friendly alternatives. Convenient access to menstrual products can be ensured by improving sanitation facilities through fundraising or establishing partnerships for vending machines in public spaces. The engagement of male allies is deemed crucial; fostering empathy, reducing stigma, and cultivating a supportive attitude can be achieved through workshops for boys and men.

The promotion of physical activities, sports, and yoga as tools to alleviate discomfort is deemed vital, with the breaking of stereotypes and the fostering of a more inclusive and supportive society being facilitated through this holistic strategy, not only enhancing overall well-being but also challenging misconceptions about menstruation.

### **Conclusion**

Comprehensive menstrual health education, seen as a crucial step in empowering individuals, particularly girls, to navigate various dimensions of their lives, involves addressing menstruation, which is not merely a biological process but permeates education, the economy, health, participation, and dignity. A profound understanding of the menstrual cycle, fostering empathy, and challenging the pervasive stigma surrounding menstruation can be gained by imparting this education at a young age to children of all genders. In this transformative process, a pivotal role is played by educators. Equipping girls with information about menstruation before their first period is provided ensures that they possess the knowledge needed to navigate this natural aspect of life without fear.

This preemptive approach is aimed at ensuring that girls can confidently continue their education, uninterrupted by misconceptions or anxieties related to menstruation.

Moreover, early education on menstruation offers a unique opportunity to dismantle social taboos and dispel myths associated with this natural bodily function. Addressing the root causes of embarrassment and shame surrounding menstruation is essential for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. By doing so, educators contribute not only to the well-being of individual students but also to the broader societal shift towards destigmatizing menstruation. Beyond the immediate benefits for girls, comprehensive menstrual health education promotes a culture of openness and understanding among all students, irrespective of gender. It encourages empathy, dispels myths, and fosters an environment where menstruation is viewed as a normal, healthy aspect of life.

In essence, integrating menstrual health education into the curriculum is an investment in breaking down barriers that hinder the holistic development of individuals. It goes beyond biology to touch on the very fabric of society, fostering a future where menstruation is met with understanding, support, and dignity.

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