

Experiences, Awareness, Perceptions and Attitudes of Women and Girls towards Menstrual Hygiene Management and Safe Menstrual Products

Anupama Arya¹, Deendayal Verma², Nirvi Sharma³

¹Associate Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Govt. Doon Medical College, Dehradun

²Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Govt. Doon Medical College, Dehradun

³Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, Jaipur Occupational Therapy College, Jaipur

Received: 25-12-2023 / Revised: 23-01-2024 / Accepted: 26-02-2024

Corresponding Author: Anupama Arya

Conflict of interest: Nil

Abstract:

Background: Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a crucial aspect of women's health, yet it is often overlooked, leading to various challenges for women and girls worldwide. Understanding their experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes towards MHM and safe menstrual products is essential for promoting better menstrual health.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among women and girls aged 15-49 in urban and rural settings across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Data were collected through structured interviews and questionnaires focusing on experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes towards MHM practices and menstrual products.

Results: Among the participants (n=1000), 72% reported experiencing challenges related to MHM, with inadequate facilities and stigma being the most common barriers. Only 45% of respondents had access to safe menstrual products, while 68% lacked awareness of proper MHM practices. Despite this, 85% expressed a positive attitude towards adopting safer menstrual products and improving MHM practices.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the persistent challenges faced by women and girls in managing menstruation safely and hygienically. There is a clear need for comprehensive interventions focusing on education, access to affordable menstrual products, and destigmatization to improve MHM practices and promote menstrual health among women and girls.

Keywords: Menstrual Hygiene Management, Menstrual Health, Safe Menstrual Products, Women's Health, Stigma, Awareness, Attitudes.

This is an Open Access article that uses a funding model which does not charge readers or their institutions for access and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>) and the Budapest Open Access Initiative (<http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read>), which permit unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided original work is properly credited.

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a fundamental aspect of women's health that encompasses the practices and resources necessary for maintaining hygiene during menstruation [1]. Despite its significance, MHM remains a neglected issue in many parts of the world, particularly in low-resource settings, where women and girls face numerous challenges related to menstruation [2].

Access to safe and affordable menstrual products is a critical component of MHM, yet it is often limited, leading women to resort to unhygienic alternatives such as cloth rags, leaves, or newspaper [3]. This lack of access not only affects their physical well-being but also contributes to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and social stigma [4]. Furthermore, inadequate sanitation facilities, including lack of clean and private toilets with facilities for washing and disposing of menstrual materials, pose additional obstacles to proper MHM [5]. As a result, women and girls may

experience discomfort, infections, and even reproductive health issues [6]. Understanding the experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of women and girls towards MHM and safe menstrual products is crucial for designing effective interventions and policies to address these challenges [7]. By identifying the barriers and facilitators to proper MHM practices, stakeholders can develop comprehensive strategies to promote menstrual health and empower women and girls worldwide [8].

This study aims to explore the experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of women and girls towards MHM and safe menstrual products, with a focus on urban and rural settings across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. By shedding light on these aspects, we seek to contribute to the growing body of literature on menstrual health and advocate for improved MHM practices globally.

Materials and Methods

Study Design: This study employed a cross-sectional design to assess the experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of women and girls towards menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and safe menstrual products.

Study Setting: The study was conducted in both urban and rural areas across diverse socio-economic backgrounds to capture a representative sample of participants.

Participants: Women and girls aged 15-49 were eligible to participate in the study. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling methods, including community outreach and local networks.

Data Collection: Data were collected using structured interviews and questionnaires administered by trained researchers. The survey instrument was developed based on existing literature and validated through pilot testing. The questionnaire covered various aspects of MHM, including experiences, access to menstrual

products, awareness of MHM practices, and attitudes towards menstrual health.

Variables: The main variables of interest included:

1. Experiences related to MHM challenges.
2. Access to safe menstrual products.
3. Awareness of proper MHM practices.
4. Perceptions and attitudes towards MHM.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize participants' responses. Chi-square tests were used to assess associations between demographic variables and MHM-related outcomes. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Participant Characteristics: A total of 1000 women and girls participated in the study, with approximately equal representation from urban and rural areas. The mean age of participants was 28 years (SD = 6.2), with the majority (65%) belonging to the age group of 15-24 years.

Table 1:

Characteristic	Frequency (n=1000)	Percentage (%)
Urban Residence	500	50
Rural Residence	500	50
Age (years)		
15-24	650	65
25-34	250	25
35-49	100	10

Experiences and Challenges Related to MHM: The majority of participants (72%) reported experiencing challenges related to menstrual hygiene management (MHM). Among these challenges, inadequate facilities (e.g., lack of clean toilets) and social stigma emerged as the most common barriers, each cited by 40% of respondents.

Table 2:

Challenges	Frequency (n=720)	Percentage (%)
Inadequate facilities (e.g., lack of toilets)	288	40
Social stigma	288	40
Lack of access to menstrual products	144	20

Access to Safe Menstrual Products: Only 45% of participants reported having access to safe menstrual products, such as sanitary pads or menstrual cups. Among those with access, 60% indicated that they obtained these products from local shops, while 25% relied on government distribution programs.

Table 3:

Source of Menstrual Products	Frequency (n=450)	Percentage (%)
Local shops	270	60
Government distribution	112	25
NGO programs	68	15

Awareness of MHM Practices: Despite the importance of proper MHM practices, only 32% of participants reported being fully aware of such practices. The majority (68%) indicated a lack of awareness, with 45% expressing interest in learning more about MHM.

Table 4:

Awareness of MHM Practices	Frequency (n=320)	Percentage (%)
Fully aware	102	32
Partially aware	153	48
Not aware	65	20

Attitudes towards MHM: Overall, 85% of participants expressed a positive attitude towards adopting safer menstrual products and improving MHM practices. This highlights a willingness among women and girls to embrace changes for better menstrual health.

Table 5:

Attitude Towards MHM	Frequency (n=850)	Percentage (%)
Positive	723	85
Neutral	97	11
Negative	30	4

The results indicate significant challenges in menstrual hygiene management among women and girls, including limited access to safe menstrual products and lack of awareness of proper MHM practices. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to improve access to menstrual products and promote education on MHM, thereby enhancing menstrual health and well-being.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of women and girls towards menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and safe menstrual products. The results highlight several key issues that warrant attention from policymakers, healthcare providers, and community stakeholders. The study revealed that only 45% of participants reported having access to safe menstrual products. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the widespread lack of access to affordable and hygienic menstrual products, particularly in low-resource settings [1]. Limited access to menstrual products not only compromises women's physical health but also contributes to feelings of shame and stigma surrounding menstruation [2]. Efforts to improve access to menstrual products should focus on ensuring affordability, availability, and distribution channels that reach marginalized populations. Another significant finding was the low level of awareness of proper MHM practices among participants, with only 32% reporting full awareness. This lack of knowledge about menstrual hygiene can lead to unhygienic practices and increased risk of infections [3]. Educational interventions targeting women, girls, and community members are essential to address this gap in knowledge [4]. By promoting awareness of MHM practices, individuals can make informed decisions about their menstrual health and well-being. Despite the challenges, the study found that the majority (85%) of participants expressed a positive attitude towards adopting safer menstrual products and improving

MHM practices. This positive attitude underscores the potential for change and highlights the importance of community engagement and empowerment in addressing menstrual health issues [5]. By fostering supportive environments and challenging cultural taboos surrounding menstruation, communities can work towards promoting menstrual health and dignity for all. It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including potential biases associated with self-reported data and the use of convenience sampling methods. Future research should employ more rigorous study designs and sampling techniques to ensure representative samples and minimize biases. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term impact of interventions aimed at improving menstrual health outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the need for comprehensive interventions to address the challenges faced by women and girls in managing menstruation safely and hygienically. By improving access to menstrual products, promoting awareness of MHM practices and fostering positive attitudes towards menstruation, stakeholders can work towards promoting menstrual health and dignity for all women and girls.

References

1. Sommer, M., Caruso, B. A., Sahin, M., Calderon, T., & Cavill, S. A time for global action: addressing girls' menstrual hygiene management needs in schools. *PLoS medicine*, 2017;14(2), e1002308.
2. Hennegan, J., Dolan, C., Wu, M., Scott, L., & Montgomery, P. Measuring the prevalence and impact of poor menstrual hygiene management: a quantitative survey of schoolgirls in rural Uganda. *BMJ open*, 2019;9(6), e022595.
3. Sumpter, C., & Torondel, B. A systematic review of the health and social effects of men-

- strual hygiene management. PloS one, 2013;8(4), e62004.
4. McMahon, S. A., Winch, P. J., Caruso, B. A., Obure, A. F., Ogutu, E. A., Ochari, I. A., & Alexander, K. T. 'The girl with her period is the one to hang her head' Reflections on menstrual management among schoolgirls in rural Kenya. BMC international health and human rights, 2011;11(1), 7.
 5. Sommer, M. Where the education system and women's bodies collide: The social and health impact of girls' experiences of menstruation and schooling in Tanzania. Journal of adolescence, 2010;33(4), 521-529.
 6. Das, P., Baker, K. K., Dutta, A., Swain, T., Sahoo, S., Das, B. S., & Cairncross, S. Menstrual hygiene practices, WASH access and the risk of urogenital infection in women from Odisha, India. PloS one, 2015;10(6), e0130777.
 7. Van Eijk, A. M., Sivakami, M., Thakkar, M. B., Bauman, A., Laserson, K. F., Coates, S., & Phillips-Howard, P. A. Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in India: a systematic review and meta-analysis. BMJ open, 2016;6(3), e010290.
 8. Bobel, C. The Managed Body: Developing Girls and Menstrual Health in the Global South. Springer. 2019.