Poor Menstrual Hygiene Promotion in Secondary Schools: Led to School Absenteeism by Adolescent Girls

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Courtesy: UST, Bangladesh, Teachers and the most courageous Girls of the secondary Schools under the purview of the study.
Menstrual Hygiene Promotion Scenario in Secondary Schools in Bangladesh

• In Bangladesh and South Asian countries menstruation is considered as area of discomfort for discussion.

• In low-income communities of Bangladesh, it is deemed to be shameful with many negative connotations as matter of social taboo.

• As a result, poor menstrual hygiene promotion and inadequate sanitation facilities especially in Secondary Schools in rural areas is a serious threat for absenteeism of adolescent school going girls.
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• In the textbook (from 6th-10th class) the menstrual issue is included in the textbook titled *Home Economics*. But in most of the schools especially in co-education this particular chapter is not openly taught in the classes as a matter of shyness/shame as a matter of discomfort to discuss. Teachers tell the students to read at home.

• In this context, in-depth case studies were undertaken in 10 different secondary schools of rural areas in Bangladesh covering 315 girls students (menarche and those having menstruation) for tackling menstrual hygiene taboos vis-à-vis school absenteeism of adolescent girls through knowing the existing conditions. Data were collected having non disclosure agreement.
Results and Discussion

• It was found that in almost all secondary schools there are inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities (absence of pad disposal facilities).

• Lack of improved accessible toilet at school for girls also stands as impediment for menstrual hygiene promotions in Bangladesh. The main reasons were, absence of running water facilities or nearby potable water facilities for carrying in the toilet.

• Most of the rural girls attending schools are using old cloths/rags during menarche and subsequent menstruation period as sanitary pads are not available at affordable price or feel shy to tell male members of the family to buy it. As a matter of taboo girls are not interested to buy from the village shops as other male customers familiar to them may observe it.

• Even moms feel shy or do not feel comfortable to tell her husband to buy hygienic sanitary pads for their daughters.
Results and Discussion

• From this study, it was found that infection of reproductive tract like itching was found 57%, vaginal infection 22 %, and no problem 21%. The study found that 41 % of school girls were not aware of hygienic management of menstruation. Interestingly, in the text book hygiene practice during menstruation is totally absent.

• All these resulted school going adolescent girls to stay at home during the menstruation period for which they could miss school up to one week per month.
SDG Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation

Target:

6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.
Conclusion and Way Forward

• It has been observed that, most of the hygiene behavior promotional activities are stuck with hand washing, safe drinking, food hygiene, safe disposal of feces but not safe menstrual hygiene except the World Menstruation day.

• So, it is the dire need of the time to mainstream menstrual hygiene as mandatory element of discussion in all regular school WASH programme and other WASH events launched by development partners, NGOs, UN and government agencies.

• It will definitely reduce the sufferings of adolescent school going girls from absenteeism and social taboo especially in Bangladesh and South Asian countries as well.

• The study recommends that menstrual hygiene should be associated with other behavioral change (BC) paradigm to better understand beliefs and norms about menstruation and issues related to discomfort at school and better way to ensure school attendance.
Thanks a lot

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