

Editorial

The Importance of Menstrual Hygiene for Women in Communities

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Women and adolescent girls can face serious health risks if proper menstrual hygiene is not maintained. Yet, despite the importance of this issue, it is still surrounded by discomfort, shame, superstition, and ignorance in our society. Apart from a few developed countries, awareness of menstruation is alarmingly low in most parts of the world. According to a World Bank report, around 500 million women and girls worldwide lack access to adequate menstrual hygiene management. A joint report by UNICEF and the World Health Organization states that only 2 out of every 5 schools (39%) globally include menstrual hygiene in their education. To break taboos and raise awareness, May 28 is observed every year as 'World Menstrual Hygiene Day'. The theme for 2025 is: "Together for a Period-Friendly World."

In Bangladesh, according to the National Hygiene Survey 2018, only 29% of women use sanitary napkins, meaning about 71% still do not. Using unclean cloths during menstruation can lead to cervical infections, infertility, and even cancer. Therefore, raising public awareness is crucial. Menstruation is a vital part of reproductive health, yet negligence and lack of protection are common in every household. Experts and doctors say that the greatest challenge is breaking the myths and taboos about menstruation. Due to societal stigma, menstruation is seldom discussed within families, resulting in the neglect of related health needs and exposing individuals to various risks. Menstruation is not something shameful; it's a natural biological process. To treat it that way, we need to change our perspectives. Male family members, especially fathers and brothers, should participate in open discussions about it. Although some fathers buy pads for their daughters, this number is very small.

The president of OGSB (Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Bangladesh) stated journalists that many women and girls still use old cloth during their periods. To hide the fact that they are menstruating, many women dry their

used cloths in hidden, poorly ventilated areas without sunlight, which increases the risk of infection. Naturally, the female reproductive system has defenses against bacteria and fungi, but during menstruation, the body's natural acidic protection decreases. Wearing unclean clothes during menstruation can lead to itching, infections, and long-term harm to reproductive health. Sanitary pads are available in the country for as low as 35 taka per pack, yet many women spend more money on less essential items. Women who use unclean cloths, cotton, or chemically scented pads face higher risks of cervical infection.

Medical professionals emphasize that menstruation is still such a deeply rooted taboo that many girls feel uncomfortable talking about it even with their mothers or sisters, and even more so with their fathers or brothers. As a result, girls often rely on temporary solutions like cloth or cotton when they first get their periods. Thus, menstruation remains hidden, and girls silently suffer from health issues. In many schools across the country, there are no proper facilities for changing or disposing of pads. Using a pad for prolonged periods is risky; it needs to be changed at least every six hours. Otherwise, there is a risk of cervical cancer. Some girls use tissue paper over pads, which is also unhygienic. Others use menstrual cups, but there is no reliable government-approved information about their safety. These cups come into contact with the cervix and collect menstrual blood for extended periods, which raises concerns.

Most schools also lack adequate water, soap, and proper disposal systems for used pads. Many girls report experiencing abdominal pain, itching, swelling, and foul-smelling discharge during their periods. Since mothers are usually the first to notice changes in their daughters, a proper menstrual health guideline is necessary. Parent-teacher meetings should include discussions on this topic, and mothers should ensure menstrual hygiene at home, while female teachers can help

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at school. Government policy and budgeting must also give priority to menstrual health. Excluding VAT and other taxes from menstrual hygiene products could help reduce their prices.

Some institutions, like Holy Cross, have long ensured access to sanitary pads. All schools should implement such measures. Domestic workers should also be given access to sanitary pads and be educated on how to use and dispose of them properly. Many women in the country are affected by cervical cancer, which is preventable. Raising awareness, school health clinics and sanitary pad supply programs can play a crucial role in prevention. In garment factories, subsidized access to sanitary pads is important too. Poor menstrual and sexual hygiene can lead to infections by both viruses and bacteria, including HPV (Human Papilloma Virus).

The date May 28 was chosen for Menstrual Hygiene Day because May is the fifth month of the year (symbolizing the average five-day period), and 28 represents the average menstrual cycle length. Menstrual Hygiene Day is more than just a date. It is a powerful effort to raise awareness, break taboos, and promote menstrual health and dignity for all. We hope this step helps to create a society where menstruation is no longer a source of shame, but a natural experience that every woman can face with comfort, dignity, and confidence. There's still a long period ahead for improving menstrual health in Bangladesh. Menstruation is a natural process, and through open discussion, we must make everyone aware - so that women can choose the best products for themselves and stay protected from reproductive health risks.

Sources

Electronic media, Internet.