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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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MENSTRUAL LITERACY AND PERSPECTIVE ON PERIODS

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ABSTRACT

The report highlights the importance of education about periods in school / colleges. It also shows the current mindset of people regarding periods and gives possible solutions to increase awareness about periods in general as well as in the education system. The report also focuses on how women themselves think about periods and their mentality towards it. It also highlights the status of menstrual hygiene among women and also gives possible solutions to increase awareness on the same.

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INTRODUCTION

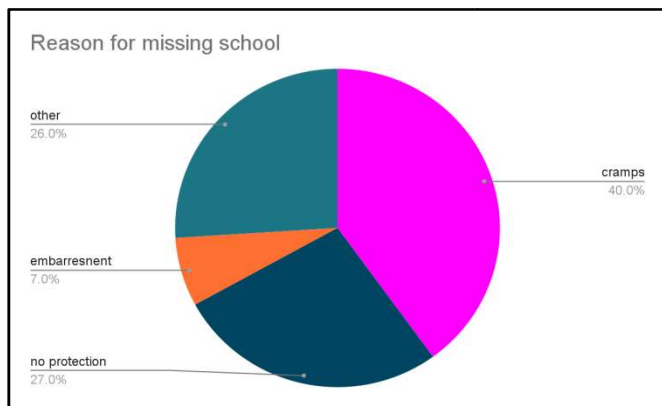
Women experience a lot during their menstrual cycle, including mood swings, stomach cramps, and nausea. However, society often makes them feel ashamed or disgusted about menstruating. A used pad is considered dirtier and more sinful than a used condom, even though both are used for hygiene and safety. Despite living in the 21st century, girls still cannot talk about their periods freely. They cannot even tell their male teachers that they need to use the restroom to change their pad. Instead, they use the vague term "girl problem," which shows how society still views menstruation as a taboo subject. It's concerning that young boys can watch ads for products like pan masala and cigarettes, yet when advertisements for female hygiene products come on, parents quickly change the channel. By restricting children from learning about menstrual hygiene from a young age, according to research article about period teasing of adolescent boys and girls in northern Tanzania; 7% of girls miss out their schools during menstruation because of embarrassment which might have arisen due to teasing done by male classmates as 13% of girls experienced teasing in real and 80% were scared being teased by male classmates because of male classmates, this shows the importance of educating boys about menstruation from the early age to remove the stigma that surrounds them. Sadly, menstrual discrimination exists in every country. For instance, in India, the Kamakhya Temple worships the yoni, a reproductive part of the Indian goddess, yet it's considered

sinful for menstruating women to enter. In Afghanistan, menstruating women were forced to sleep in separate rooms and denied access to food and water. Even developed countries like America have their own form of discrimination, with a so-called "pink tax" being charged on products marketed specifically to women, which is more than comparable products marketed to men. Despite being a natural and beautiful part of womanhood, many women still feel embarrassed to buy and use sanitary products. They may hide or wrap their pads while buying them or avoid buying them altogether because of shame. Women need to embrace their periods with confidence and pride, just like they do with their other bodily functions. After all, women can go through labor pains and continue to work just as hard as men, even while bleeding.

This shows the incredible strength of women. So, let's break the taboo and freely bleed without shame or stigma. Hence, because of the above-mentioned societal stigma, improper education, and cultural taboos women frequently encounter issues concerning menstrual hygiene, leading to shame when purchasing sanitary products or discussing their menstrual cycle with men, about 12.3% of women. These obstacles can create various challenges associated with menstrual health, including insufficient access to menstrual products and suboptimal menstrual management practices. It is essential to address these barriers and increase education on menstrual health and hygiene to promote better overall health and well-being for women.

female hygiene products	Percentage used
reusable cloth pads	12.3%
menstrual cup	18.9%
disposable pads	34.5%
disposable tampons	30.1%

reference: <https://images.app.goo.gl/Ye4k3KkTNMXFaCHC6>



Reference: <https://ddm.dk/7242/>



Objectives of the Study

- Evaluate the current situation of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) among women
- Gathering information about attitude and perception of people towards menstruation

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The need of teaching young girls about basic cleanliness and sanitation during their menstrual cycle has been brought to light by the Akshay Kumar and Sonam Kapoor-starring film "Padman." Jyotika, a 12-year-old character in the film, is subjected to limitations because of her period, but her mother explains that menstruation is a normal biological process and that, with the proper care, there is no need to limit her movements. Nonetheless, due to the high cost and scarcity of sanitary napkins, many women in rural areas and smaller cities continue to manage their periods with filthy fabric rags. Infections and skin rashes may result from this. Leading gynaecologist Dr. Kavya Krishnakumar of Chennai offers advice on how to take care of yourself during your period and maintain cleanliness and hygiene. They include using cotton pads, tampons, menstrual cups, disposable sanitary pads, and cloth pads; changing pads frequently; keeping yourself clean; using toilet paper or a tissue before changing; and avoiding using harsh soap, disinfectants like Dettol, and harsh chemicals. It's crucial to keep dry during periods and properly dispose of discarded sanitary pads. With the right care, skin rashes can be avoided, and there are a number of natural alternatives to relieve period pain without taking any painkillers. Menstruation still causes misunderstandings, thus emphasising good cleanliness is crucial. In this study, conducted from August to September 2018, the knowledge, attitudes, and practises (KAP) of female college students from Bhutan's 10 government colleges were

examined. Only 35.5% of the 1,010 participants who answered the self-administered questionnaire had a thorough comprehension of menstruation. 50% of participants cited their mother as the instructional source, while 35.1% of participants agreed that women shouldn't visit a shrine while they are menstruating. Almost 4% of the typical monthly allotment was spent on the absorbents, and 96.9% of them were wrapped before being discarded. According to participants, menstruation also interfered with daily activities, and 24.2% of female college students missed courses due to dysmenorrhea. Only a tiny percentage of respondents who indicated a pressing need for venues to talk about menstruation in their college reported feeling uneasy doing so. According to research, educational sessions enhance a number of habits, including managing menstruation pains. In this study on KAP connected to MHM among female students in Bhutan's government colleges, significant knowledge and belief gaps were found, although there were also some positive practises.

It also demonstrated that the resources needed to sustain MHM activities are insufficient on a physical and psychological level. In order to encourage cleanliness behaviours, more training sessions in schools and colleges should place an emphasis on evidence-based hygiene techniques and debunk myths. Men should also check that there are enough menstrual supplies and medical professionals available on campus and in the area. Menstruation is a critical indicator of reproduction, so maintaining good menstrual hygiene is important. This study found poor menstruation hygiene among teenage girls. This resulted from a lack of knowledge and false assumptions about the menstrual period. It is important to educate girls on the physiological realities of menstruation, eliminate damaging taboos, and point them in the direction of fundamental hygienic practises so they can safeguard themselves from infections of the reproductive system. Many schools, Anganwadi health centres, social welfare foundations, and nongovernmental organisations should take the lead in promoting awareness about menstrual cleanliness, patterns, and concerns. Parents who are aware of sanitary practises are essential in encouraging them among adolescent females, especially since the majority of the girls in our sample were school dropouts. Since there is a widespread belief that an educated woman is a family's first teacher, it is imperative that both the mother and the adolescent girl receive an education. However given the predominance of men in our culture today, educating men about the basic needs of the women in their families during menstruation can help to encourage cleaner and better menstrual habits. Hence, it is feasible to successfully erase ingrained prohibitions, customary concepts, false beliefs, and unfavourable attitudes when everyone in the household is aware of the menstrual cycle.

Teenage schoolgirls, in general, had poor hygiene habits and little knowledge about menstruation. This emphasises the need for programmes that raise the necessary awareness of and promote safe hygiene practises for teenage schoolgirls during menstruation. Teenage schoolgirls, in general, had poor hygiene habits and little knowledge about menstruation. Significant predictors of poor hygiene included lower age, a longer menstrual cycle, and a lack of hygienic knowledge. This demonstrates the need for adequate awareness development and advocacy programmes for them and the general public in order to raise adolescent schoolgirls' knowledge and safe hygienic practise of their menstrual flow. Menstrual hygiene practises are crucial because they have a substantial impact on how the reproductive system functions and develops. The majority of the study subjects, it turns out, experienced regular menstrual cycles with average length and frequency. Yet, a very small percentage did have irregular periods. The majority of people did have some knowledge of menstruation, but only around half of them had enough. Girls must be educated on the physiological realities of menstruation, harmful taboos must be dismantled, and girls must be led towards fundamental hygienic practises if they are to safeguard themselves against infections of the reproductive system. In the vast majority of case scenarios, the family and school served as the primary sources of knowledge. The subjects' main tactic for pursuing health in the case of monthly irregularity was to postpone receiving any kind of

treatment. A very small fraction of people also sought medical care for any such irregularity. The majority of women used sanitary pads and correctly disposed of them. Only one-third of the individuals cleaned their genitalia in a certain way. The respondents' most frequent symptoms were mood fluctuations, lower abdominal discomfort, and generalised pain. Another typical complaint was lower back pain. The subjects abstained from doing things like cooking or serving meals, travelling to places of worship, and going to social gatherings when they were menstruating. Despite the fact that women with regular menstrual cycles tended to have better habits, connections between menstrual cycle and a number of other traits were found to be inconsequential. Those with irregular periods, longer flow times, insufficient or plentiful menstruation, infrequently changed absorbents, infrequent cleaning, and plain water cleaning were found to be more likely to experience the majority of the problems. The aforementioned criteria highlight the key risk factors for menstrual morbidities, one of the common morbidities found in primary care settings, and urge that policymakers and carers give them the appropriate amount of attention.

Strengthening MHM programmes in India is important. Focus should be placed on educating people, making hygienic absorbents accessible, and properly discarding MHM products. A third of the teenage girls who went to school were considerate of their periods. The main contributors to this are the parents' educational backgrounds, family size, and the children's living arrangements. In this case, administrators and policymakers were recommended to provide both parents with specialised education on menstrual hygiene. Similar to that, the local government must pay for students' sanitary towels. Female college students who live in dorms waste a lot of important learning resources during their formative years, including time, energy, and money, due to issues with menstruation management. Our participants' MHM behaviours scored highly despite their general lack of understanding of menstruation, and the vast majority of them sought a forum to discuss menstruation. Despite some participants agreeing with menstruation taboos, just 5.1% of the participants felt uncomfortable discussing MHM (such as visiting shrines). Improved public health education, psychosocial/medical support, and WASH infrastructure with publicly available menstruation products may lead to more successful MHM behaviours among female college students. Breaking the taboos associated with menstruation and promoting good menstrual hygiene are vital. Teenage females should be taught about menstruation, its physiological effects, and good hygiene habits, such as choosing disposable sanitary menstrual absorbents. Girls can be educated about menstrual hygiene through educational television shows, school nurses and health professionals, required sex education in the school curriculum, and informed parents. The level of hygiene that women can maintain when menstruating can be seriously compromised by a lack of seclusion and access to basic amenities like water and restrooms. As a result, there is a need to enhance housing circumstances in terms of basic amenities, and social marketing can be used to make sanitary pads widely accessible and inexpensive for all girls.

Adolescent girls need to be liberated from these old ideas, myths, and constraints regarding menstruation, according to the study's findings. This can be done by encouraging healthy behaviours and informing people about the importance of menstruation and how it affects the development of secondary sexual traits. Regardless of the educational level of the daughters, mothers should be urged to address menstruation with their daughters well before the commencement of menarche. In conclusion, encouraging safe and hygienic practises among adolescent girls is necessary because menstruation hygiene is a critical component of women's health. We can shield girls from STIs and other health problems linked to poor menstrual hygiene by dispelling the stigma around menstruation and educating them about good hygiene habits. Menstrual hygiene refers to the behaviours and actions used to keep women's and girls' periods clean and healthy. Maintaining excellent reproductive health and avoiding infections require good menstrual hygiene.

Some key practices for maintaining menstrual hygiene include:

- Utilizing hygienic menstrual items, such as reusable cotton pads, tampons, pads, or menstrual cups.
- To avoid bacterial development and bad odour, change the menstrual product frequently (at least every 4-6 hours).
- Environmentally friendly methods for disposing of spent menstruation products.
- Upholding proper personal hygiene, which includes routine hand washing and regular bathing or showering during the menstrual cycle.
- Dispelling any taboos or stigmas associated with menstruation and educating oneself and others about managing menstrual hygiene.

Women and girls can help ensure that their menstrual cycle is comfortable and healthy and lower the risk of reproductive health issues by practising proper menstrual hygiene. Menstruating girls and women confront social and cultural obstacles that have an impact on their empowerment in addition to issues with access to menstruation products and suitable facilities for managing menstrual hygiene. They include stigmatising menstruation and limiting girls' and women's mobility and involvement in social and economic activities through discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. An all-encompassing strategy is needed to address period health and cleanliness, one that addresses gender-based violence and discrimination as well as providing access to menstruation goods and facilities, education, and awareness-raising about menstrual hygiene and management. The lives of women and girls can be dramatically changed by initiatives to promote menstrual health and cleanliness, empowering them to fully engage in social, economic, and political life, and advancing gender equality. The study makes it evident that adolescent girls in the study area need better menstrual hygiene management (MHM). Residence, the source of menstrual information, school facilities, lost school days, health issues during menstruation, and general understanding of menstruation were all found to be connected with excellent MHM practise. Hence, it is essential that all parties involved—including schools, parents, and health care providers—cooperate to increase adolescent girls' knowledge of menstruation and MHM practise.

Encourage teachers to bring up menstruation and MHM with their students, especially female pupils, is a vital action that may be taken. Schools can provide facilities that support appropriate MHM practise, such as female restrooms with inside locks, and parents should be encouraged to discuss menstruation with their daughters. Teenage girls who skip school due to menstruation or have health issues during menstruation can also get help and advice from health specialists. Overall, enhancing MHM among teenage girls is essential for guaranteeing their general health and wellbeing. In order to solve this issue and give adolescent girls in the study area and elsewhere the assistance and education they need, all stakeholders must cooperate. Menstruation stigma and ignorance must be addressed, especially among girls, as they can have serious negative effects on their health. Menstrual hygiene education and awareness campaigns should be given top attention. Girls can receive correct information about menstruation, good hygiene habits, and the value of using sanitary pads or other absorbent materials during their period through health awareness initiatives in schools and the community. Addressing the cultural taboos and constraints that frequently surround menstruation is also crucial. Girls should be permitted to engage in all activities and use all household things as they normally would, without being made to feel guilty or embarrassed about having their periods. This may lessen stigma and encourage improved menstrual hygiene practises. Overall, initiatives to promote menstrual hygiene education and awareness can lessen the social stigma associated with menstruation and improve the health and wellbeing of girls and women. Hearing that tribal adolescent girls are still not maintaining proper hygiene during their periods and are subject to different restrictions is disturbing. Infections and problems with reproductive health are only a couple of the health problems that might result from this. To maintain these girls' general health and wellbeing, it is crucial to raise awareness and provide education on menstrual hygiene management.

Breaking the stigma associated with menstruation requires creating a positive environment where people may talk openly about delicate subjects like period hygiene. This can be done in a number of ways, including by holding workshops and awareness campaigns and by making sanitary items accessible. The promotion of menstrual hygiene management among students in residential schools might be greatly aided by the teachers there. Schools can include instruction on managing menstrual hygiene in their curricula, give students access to sanitary items, and promote candid conversations about the subject. Also, integrating parents and the community in these initiatives can have a greater influence on encouraging indigenous adolescent girls to manage their menstrual hygiene. It is crucial to realise that maintaining proper menstrual hygiene is a fundamental human right, and that every girl should have access to the tools she needs to manage her periods in a safe and comfortable manner. We can make sure that girls have access to the tools they need to thrive and realise their full potential by encouraging menstrual hygiene management and shattering the stigma surrounding menstruation. It seems that the study discovered that a sizeable percentage of respondents have adequate understanding and practise of managing menstrual hygiene, which is positive. Age, grade level, learning about menstruation hygiene in school, place of living, familiarity with sanitary napkins on the market, familiarity with RTIs/STIs, and access to WASH facilities like private showers are all factors related with understanding and practise of MHM. With this knowledge, interventions to enhance menstrual hygiene management habits among various populations may be developed.

The main issue with using cloth is that due to numerous cultural and regional taboos, women are prevented from accessing clean cloth (and sunlight!) and are forced to dry their menstrual cloth in damp nooks and corners or under other clothes, making them extremely vulnerable to infections. One of the main problems is that sanitary napkins are not readily available or affordable for women or girls living in rural areas, so they end up using cloth. Although though the government and non-profit organisations have been working hard to improve menstrual hygiene in rural regions by providing free sanitary pads, such a programme has failed owing to a lack of funding or public support. Modernization will undoubtedly occur over time. But when it comes to addressing women's needs and periods, we still have a ways to go. There are still very few groups and societies who consider menstruation to be sinful and filthy. For the sake of health, economic sustainability, and the environment, it is important to talk openly about good menstrual hygiene practises. In actuality, reforms won't happen until women speak openly and without reservation about menstruation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data: We gathered the first-hand information from a google form which was asked to fill up by 14 college girls AND By observation method where girls were observed in their natural settings.

Sample size

- 14 participants were chosen for sample in questionnaire.
- 6 participants were chosen for sample in observation method.

Tools and techniques

1. Questionnaire
2. Observation

Questionnaire: There were 3 questions in the questionnaire, and responders could choose from the suitable options. The Google Docs programme was used to generate the questionnaire, which was designed as an electronic survey form. Sending the form to a selective sample of users via whatsapp and mail.

Observation: Observation method was used to collect primary data where we observed women in their natural settings when buying menstruation products and how they behave in college when bleeding.

Secondary Data: We gathered the secondary data from journals, internet, newspapers, and reports.

The following is the questionnaire format

Q. Which product do you use during periods?.

- Cloth
- Pad
- Tampons
- Menstrual Cups
- Others

Q. Who would you prefer to visit while having problems related to periods?

- Male Gynaecologist
- Female Gynaecologist
- Gender doesn't matter

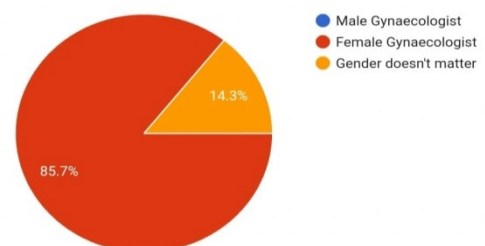
Q. When did you get to know about periods?

- When I first got it
- When my elder sister got it
- My mother told me
- My school teacher told me
- Other

Finding and Analysis: The main finding from the collected data was the behaviour of college girls toward menstruation. It was observed that despite having proper education and an open mindset, the girls were still hesitant about periods, and many felt embarrassed to buy sanitary pads in public. In fact, four out of six girls showed signs of nervousness and shyness even when mentioning the word "pad." In college, it was observed that girls were freely complaining about periods with their female friends, but they would completely avoid talking about periods in front of their male friends. It was also observed that they wouldn't take out a pad in front of their male friends and preferred to hide it in their pockets or hands. These findings showed that young modern generation college girls still have an outdated mindset about periods and are not comfortable freely talking about menstruation with their male friends. Moreover, a survey conducted among 14 college girls showed that 12 preferred visiting female gynaecologists over male gynaecologists, and only two participants chose a gynaecologist based on their qualifications rather than their gender. These results indicated that college girls still aren't open about their periods not only with their male classmates but also with other men and that proper open education is needed for both boys and girls in college.

Who would you prefer to visit while having problems related to periods?

14 responses



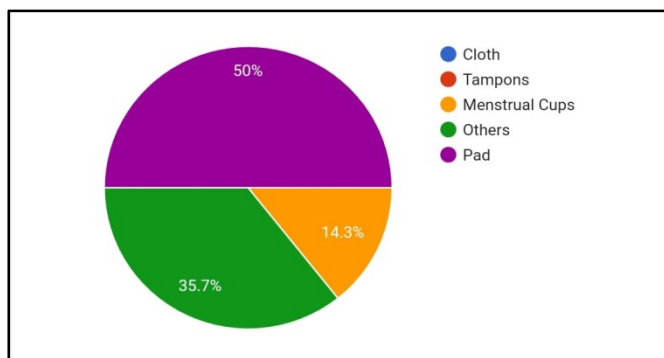
Special seminars and talks about menstruation can help to create awareness and encourage college girls to openly talk about their periods, as well as the discrimination and problems they face during

their menstrual cycle. Both female and male students should be encouraged to take part in periods/menstruation campaigns and also special co-curricular activities related to periods can be held to help female students to open up and male students to understand menstruation. Regarding the current knowledge of menstruation among women, data collected from survey revealed that 50% (7 out of 14) participants use sanitary pads, 14.3% use menstrual cups, and 35.7% use other female hygiene products during periods. This suggests that women are less open to using different menstrual products.

There could be several reasons why the usage of sanitary pads is still higher compared to other menstrual products.

- Firstly, advertisements for other menstrual products are rare in comparison to sanitary pads.
- Secondly, other menstrual products may not be readily available in shops like sanitary pads.
- Thirdly, unlike sanitary pads which are prominently displayed in medical stores or local shops, menstrual cups, and tampons are less visible, and this fails to generate curiosity among women about other menstrual products.
- Cost may be the main reason why sanitary pads are preferred over other menstrual products, but this is a false assumption. Although menstrual cups may initially be more expensive than a box of sanitary pads or tampons, they are reusable, and one menstrual cup can last much longer than disposable products. Therefore, the overall investment required in menstrual cups per year is much lower than that of pads and tampons.

There is no harm in using sanitary pads, but women should be aware of other menstrual products available. They should use the best product that is most convenient for them as every woman has different requirements. This can only happen if shops prioritize other menstrual products and take the initiative to educate women who come to buy pads about other options available. Additionally, women should research more about menstrual products and educate other women as well, such as their female friends, mother, aunt, sister, etc. about all the options available under female hygiene products.



The fact that many women are only taught about menstruation when they first experience it, as shown by the survey conducted among 14 female college participants where 35.7% of them fell into this category, highlights how the education system is failing to address this issue.

There are several disadvantages of getting to know about periods so late or only when experiencing it for the first time.

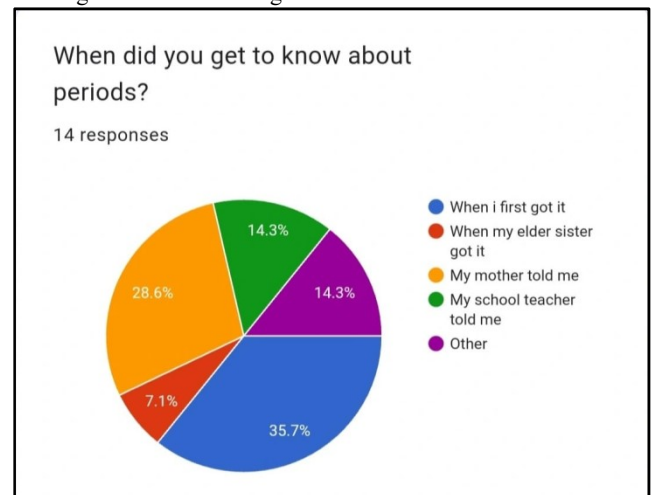
- Firstly, young girls might go through anxiety or depression when getting their first period as they may not understand what is happening to their bodies.
- Lack of knowledge about maintaining hygiene during periods can lead to health problems.
- When young girls are not taught from a young age that bleeding is normal, they may feel hesitant to open up about

their problems related to periods, which can lead to bigger issues in the future.

- When young girls are not taught about menstruation, they may feel uncomfortable or anxious to take part in activities like sports, dancing, etc., which can lead to missed opportunities for their future.
- Finally, not being aware of menstruation and getting their first periods in public places can lead to traumatic experiences when others mock them, which can have long-term psychological effects

Teachers are expected to act as period guides for young girls in school, but some teachers themselves consider periods to be dirty and convey this message to their students. There have been cases reported from different parts of the world where girls have committed suicide due to period shaming by their teachers. For example, a 12-year-old girl committed suicide in southern India after being humiliated by her teacher over a blood stain from menstruation. Similarly, in Kenya, a 14-year-old girl committed suicide after being kicked out of class and period-shamed by her teacher, even though it was her first time and she did not have access to pads.

The aforementioned cases illustrate how the education system fails to promote acceptance and comfort around menstruation and instead instills shame in young girls. Therefore, there is a pressing need for the inclusion of comprehensive menstrual health education in school curriculums, which can empower young girls with the necessary knowledge and understanding about menstruation.



CONCLUSION

Periods are common, so it's important to talk about them and educate others about them. Teachers or parents should specifically teach young girls about periods and how to manage their first period so that they are ready to deal with the cramping and other issues that come with periods. Women should be taught to use different types of sanitary products like tampons, sanitary pads, menstrual cups, etc. and to feel confident about it because bleeding every month is a natural part of a woman's body's cleansing process and is not sinful because it results from hormonal fluctuations. Sanitary napkins should also be long-lasting; women in rural regions should be particularly concerned about this. A girl's period is a normal, healthy aspect of her life. They shouldn't interfere with enjoying life, being active, or having fun. We live in the 21st century and women shouldn't be afraid or embarrassed to speak about periods openly and should start embracing menstruation as not a sin or curse but as a gift from nature.

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