

Chapter 2

Menstrual Hygiene Management: A Case Study Through Participatory Action Research in Rural Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring proper menstrual hygiene among girls in Nepal, particularly in rural schools, is challenging due to limited access to sanitary pads, inadequate toilets, and a lack of waste management facilities. To improve menstruation hygiene practices among teenage girls, the authors conducted participatory action research in one of the community schools in rural Nepal involving 28 female students who learned to make reusable fabric pads. Qualitative data was collected from a focus group discussion which was held with seven members of the pad bank management committee to discuss their menstrual hygiene routines at school. They showcased their empowerment by establishing a pad bank in their school, improving access to sanitary pads, and enabling them to manage their menstruation comfortably. A comprehensive intervention should focus on education, proper facilities, and waste management to empower girls and break barriers to education. Collaboration between schools, communities, and policymakers is essential for sustainable progress.

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INTRODUCTION

The menarche period marks the beginning of a girl's reproductive life. In Nepal, an estimated 290,000 women have periods every day (Karki et al., 2017). Menstruation is a common phenomenon, yet many women and young girls struggle to maintain proper menstrual hygiene. Adolescence, which is defined as the period between the ages of 10 and 19, is marked by a significant change in girls' physical, sexual, psychological, and social development (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). As females experience menarche or their first menstrual cycle at the onset of adolescence, care must be taken. Girls experience joy, worry, and embarrassment because of changes in their physical appearance and hormones. Due to limited access to sanitary pads, the availability of a private place to change and dispose of sanitary pads, and a proper toilet with soap and water, female students tend to skip school during menstruation. Thus, the performance of female students at school is impacted by absenteeism. Furthermore, it can be challenging for female students to find information on reproductive health or menstrual hygiene. Due to a lack of knowledge about the realities of menstruation, many adolescents engage in risky sanitary behavior and practices, which can cause gynecological issues.

Menstruation presents several difficulties. Women occasionally use sanitary pads made of cloth that must be often changed and cleaned. They face difficulties when forced to dry washed sanitary pads in the sun, as this is constrained by cultural norms. Likewise, in school, managing the menstrual cycle without access to a sanitary pad, the lack of soap and water to wash their bodies as needed, and an appropriate location to change and discard sanitary pads are additional challenges. It also indirectly influences how female students behave and alter their habits.

BACKGROUND

Menstruation emerges as a natural occurrence in the lives of females. Different cultural interpretations shape menstruation practices, and Nepal also has some taboos tied to menstruation that girls learn at home and carry to school. Moreover, maintaining menstruation in school is challenging for female students. Not only female students, but it is concerned with female teachers also. So, the research was implemented to enhance menstrual hygiene management within the school context. The study centered on a public school within Namobuddha Municipality situated atop a hill and was established in 1929 AD. Around 200 students were enrolled when the study was done. There was a total of fifty-eight students in grades six to eight, out of which twenty-eight were girls. The school faced towards the north, with one toilet located at the eastern end and another at the western end of the premises for female students. There is no running water in the toilet, so the toilets at the school aren't very clean. For water facilities, the school draws water from a nearby natural source and stores it in a three-thousand-liter reservoir. One big issue is that female students do not have access to sanitary pads if they need them during the school day. The Government of Nepal Sanitary Pad (management and distribution) Procedure 2076 encouraged the Community Schools to organize awareness campaigns on menstrual health and sanitation and offer the skills required to create reusable fabric sanitary pads. Hence, to implement the menstrual hygiene management intervention, a participatory action research approach was used. The core intervention is to make reusable sanitary pads and interact with the participants studying in grades six, seven, and eight participating in making informed decisions across all phases

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