



FROM STIGMA TO UNDERSTANDING:

A MULTIFACETED PERSPECTIVE OF MENSTRUAL HEALTH



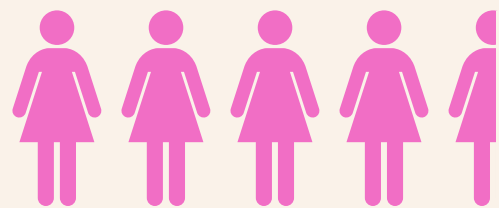
Menstrual hygiene in India has long been a complex issue influenced by a combination of cultural norms, social taboos, and economic factors. Despite progress in recent years, many Indian women still face significant challenges in managing their menstrual health, which can have adverse consequences for their overall well-being.

In many parts of India, access to affordable and hygienic menstrual products like sanitary pads or tampons remains limited. This is particularly true in rural and marginalised communities. Lack of access often forces women to resort to unhygienic alternatives such as old cloth, ash, or even leaves, which can lead to infections and health issues.



355 Million

Menstruating Women in India



Nearly

42.6 Million

Menstruating Women use Sanitary Napkins

Approximately 120 million adolescents who menstruate in India suffer from menstrual dysfunctions, impacting their daily activities. India records nearly 60,000 cervical cancer deaths annually, with two-thirds attributed to inadequate menstrual hygiene.

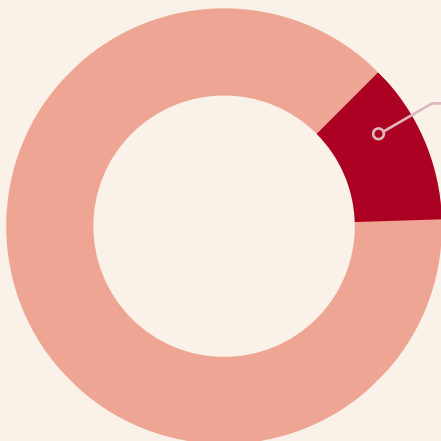


PAD BANKS:

AN INITIATIVE BY MADHYA PRADESH POLICE



Pad banks are innovative community initiatives aimed at providing women and girls with easy access to menstrual hygiene products, particularly sanitary pads. These banks function as distribution centres where affordable and hygienic menstrual products are made available to those in need, especially in underserved areas.



12%

**Menstruating women have
access to sanitary napkins in
India**

In a remarkable step towards improving menstrual hygiene and accessibility, Betul District has achieved a milestone by becoming the first district in the country to establish pad banks in all 17 police stations within the district. This forward-thinking move aims to provide convenience and support to victims who come to lodge complaints, especially in cases involving female victims and female police personnel.

This proactive approach not only acknowledges the importance of menstrual hygiene but also recognizes that women's needs should be considered holistically, even in spaces like police stations where they seek justice and support.

By introducing pad banks in police stations, Betul District is not only addressing a critical aspect of women's health but also breaking taboos and normalising discussions around menstrual hygiene in public spaces.



HEALTH RISKS

OF INADEQUATE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Insufficient menstrual hygiene can lead to reproductive and urinary tract infections. Approximately 70% of reproductive diseases in India are linked to inadequate menstrual hygiene practices.

Roughly 120 million menstruating adolescents in India experience menstrual dysfunctions, which disrupt their daily routines. Additionally, nearly 60,000 cases of cervical cancer deaths are reported in India annually, with two-thirds of them attributed to inadequate menstrual hygiene.

Other health issues related to menstrual hygiene include conditions like anaemia, irregular or excessively short periods, infections of the reproductive tract, as well as psychological problems such as anxiety, embarrassment, and shame.

Nearly 60,000 cases of cervical cancer deaths reported annually

2/3rd

Deaths attributed due to inadequate menstrual hygiene

In this context, the proactive approach of establishing pad banks in police stations gains immense importance. By providing access to menstrual hygiene products in these spaces, law enforcement agencies are directly addressing the root causes of these health issues. They are not only meeting the immediate needs of women but also actively participating in preventing a range of health problems, including reproductive diseases and cervical cancer.

Furthermore, by taking a stand and openly supporting initiatives related to menstrual hygiene, the Madhya Pradesh Police are influencing a broader societal change. These small efforts not only cater to immediate needs but also contribute substantially to a healthier, more informed society, where menstrual hygiene is a fundamental right accessible to all.

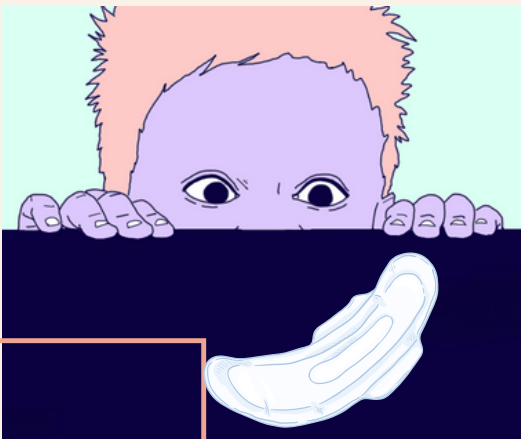


THE ONGOING STRUGGLE:

India has made significant progress in addressing menstrual hygiene, moving from a ban on sanitary napkin advertisements in 1990 to featuring a full-fledged film on a low-cost sanitary napkin entrepreneur in 2018. However, despite these advancements, social exclusion and a lack of menstrual hygiene education continue to push many girls in India to drop out of school prematurely or face ostracization during their monthly menstrual cycle.



In a study conducted by UNICEF, the UN's child protection agency, revealed that a staggering 71% of adolescent girls in India are unaware of menstruation until they experience their first period. Moreover, instances of period bullying, wherein peers—typically boys—mock and ridicule girls for menstruation-related issues, contribute to the problem of school dropouts.



BREAKING THE SILENCE:

Boys and Menstrual Education

In India, the topic of menstruation has long been shrouded in secrecy and considered a social taboo, particularly among boys.

This cultural silence has contributed to a lack of understanding, misinformation, and discomfort surrounding menstruation, making it essential to address this issue in a comprehensive manner. Boys must be educated about menstruation not only to bridge the knowledge gap but also to foster empathy and dismantle the deep-rooted stigma associated with periods.



By providing boys with accurate information and encouraging open dialogue, we can break down these barriers and create a more inclusive and understanding society.

Promote Open Communication:

Encourage an open and non-judgmental environment where boys feel comfortable asking questions about menstruation.

Provide Positive Messages:

Emphasise that menstruation is a natural and important part of a woman's reproductive system, necessary for having babies. Avoid negative or stigmatising language.



Avoid Dismissal:

When boys have questions about sanitary napkins, cramps, or other aspects of menstruation, avoid dismissing them. Dismissing their questions can lead to seeking information from unreliable sources.

Use Educational Resources:

Utilise pro-period storybooks and educational materials to facilitate conversations. These resources can provide accurate information in an approachable manner.

Show Practicality:

When shopping for sanitary pads, involve your son in the process. Let him pick up pads without shame or embarrassment. This normalises the act of purchasing menstrual products.

Explain Age Variability:

Inform them that most girls start menstruating between the ages of 10-15, but everyone's bodies are different, so there's no 'correct age' for this transition.

Address Specific Queries:

If your son finds tampons or other menstrual products and asks questions, explain that women have a part called the uterus where babies grow. The lining of this uterus thickens each month in preparation for making a baby. If pregnancy doesn't occur, the body sheds this lining as blood through the vagina, typically lasting about a week. Tampons and other products help collect this blood.

Incorporating these strategies not only educates boys about menstruation but also promotes respect and empathy towards women's experiences, fostering healthier relationships and reducing the stigma associated with periods.