Menstrual Hygiene Management in Low-Income Countries

By: Santora, Emily

Keywords: menstrual hygiene management, low-income countries

Menstrual hygiene management, or MHM, is a concept that concerns girls' and women's access to the appropriate information and resources to manage menstruation. In December 2012, the Joint Monitoring Program, or JMP, was one of the first organizations to define MHM as a global development goal. Since then, other organizations like WaterAid and the United Nations have expanded JMP's definition to include menstrual education that is biologically accurate and free of taboo and stigma. Many women in low-income countries lack those necessities for MHM due to high prices of menstrual sanitary products, lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities, and social taboos surrounding menstruation that prevent it from being talked about. However, as more organizations began to frame MHM as an issue of concern rather than a woman's private problem, more researchers, organizations, and governmental bodies have begun to address issues at the root of inadequate MHM.

Menstruation, also called a period, is when blood and endometrial tissue, or tissue lining the inside of the uterus, sheds from the uterus through the vagina. Menstruation occurs approximately once every twenty-one to forty days and typically lasts three to five days. Menstruation is a part of the menstrual cycle, the cycle in which a woman's body prepares for pregnancy each month, and occurs as a result of ovulation. Ovulation is when an egg is released from the ovaries, through the oviducts, and into the uterus. If a sperm fertilizes an egg after ovulation, an embryo begins to develop on the inside of the uterus. If fertilization does not occur and an embryo is not formed, then the endometrial tissue is not needed and expelled through the vagina during menstruation.

In order to properly manage their menstruation, women need access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, materials like sanitary pads and tampons, and knowledge of how and why menstruation occurs according to the United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF. Such resources are vital to women's MHM in both high- and low-income countries. The World Bank, an international organization made up of financial policymakers from 189 different countries, categorizes countries according to their gross national income, or GNI per capita, which counts the average amount of money a person in a certain country makes each year. As of 2021, the World Bank defines low-income countries as having a GNI per capita between $1,045 and $4,095 US dollars, while high-income countries have a GNI per capita of $12,696 or higher.

In low-income countries, women are often unable to access the resources necessary for proper MHM due to circumstances such as the lack of necessary sanitation infrastructure and the inability to afford menstrual products. MHM resources such as menstrual pads are not affordable to the average woman in a low-income country, so they end up using materials such as cloth or toilet paper instead. Such materials do not keep women and girls clean as they are not as absorptive, which can put a woman at risk of health problems such as urinary or reproductive tract infections. Many low-income countries also lack clean and private water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, which UNICEF calls WASH facilities. That may exacerbate the feelings of shame and embarrassment girls might experience when menstruating because they do not have a private place to change or dispose of their sanitary pads. Additionally, even where women and girls do have WASH facilities, those facilities may be dirty or lack adequate disposal systems to clean or get rid of sanitary pads. As a consequence, girls who do not have access to WASH facilities may be more likely to miss school days due to the inability to manage their menstruation.

According to UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF, women need access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities to manage menstruation. In 2014, UNICEF partnered with Columbia University to create MHM in Ten, a ten-year plan for addressing MHM in schools, specifically in low-income countries. MHM in Ten is an interdisciplinary approach to address challenges related to menstruation in schools, including researchers, non-governmental organizations, and governing bodies like the United Nations. The plan is aimed at improving water and sanitation and reproductive health education in an effort to improve MHM in low-income countries. As of 2020, UNICEF holds the annual Virtual
However, as more organizations began to frame MHM as an issue of public concern rather than a woman's private problem, more researchers, organizations, and governmental bodies have sought to address the high prices of menstrual sanitary products, lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities, and social stigma surrounding menstruation that prevents it from being talked about.

Menstrual hygiene management, or MHM, is a concept that concerns girls' and women's access to the appropriate information and resources to manage menstruation. In December 2012, the United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization published a report that outlined the importance of addressing MHM as a public issue rather than a woman's private problem.

The concept of MHM has influenced researchers to study and address menstruation-related challenges in low-income countries at a social and political level. According to Sommer, as more researchers, organizations, and stakeholders increasingly MHM as a public issue resulting from an area’s policies and infrastructure rather than just as a girl's private issue, more attention is being directed to address the necessary changes in public services. As it has helped define menstrual issues as a public issue, the concept of MHM has helped to improve educational and health outcomes for women and girls.

**Sources**


**Subject**


**Topic**

Menstruation, Menstrual hygiene management, Menstrual cycle

**Details**

- **Publisher:** Arizona State University. School of Life Sciences. Center for Biology and Society. Embryo Project Encyclopedia.
- **Rights:** Copyright Arizona Board of Regents licensed as Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0) http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/

**Last Modified:** Friday, July 16, 2021 - 18:17

**DC Date Accessed:** Friday, July 16, 2021 - 06:06

**DC Date Available:** Friday, July 16, 2021 - 06:06

**DC Date Created:** 2021-07-16

---
