

Ms. Surbhi Kumari* & Dr. Amit Kumar Singh**

Research Scholar* Assistant Professor**

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

Gopal Narayan Singh University

Mail Id: surbhi.journalist@gmail.com, amitkumarsingh1712@gmail.com

Understanding Menstrual Hygiene Management: A Baseline Study from Gaya District of Bihar

Abstract

The study aimed to understand the practices, awareness levels, and challenges related to MHM among women and adolescent girls. A cross-sectional design was employed, using structured interviews with 120 respondents. The results highlights significant gaps in knowledge, despite high levels of awareness of menstruation. Many women and girls still lack comprehensive information about MHM. The study also revealed the widespread use of cloth as the primary menstrual product, emphasizing the need for better access to sanitary napkins and improved hygiene practices. Additionally, it points to socio-cultural stigma surrounding menstruation, which hampers open discussion and leads to feelings of embarrassment. Socio-economic factors, particularly poverty, also limit access to adequate menstrual hygiene resources. The findings provide a basis for future interventions aimed at improving menstrual health and well-being in the region.

Keywords: Menstrual Hygiene, information, stigma, Socio-economic factors, poverty.

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) plays a critical role in women's reproductive health and overall well-being. It not only ensures physical comfort and hygiene but also empowers women and upholds their dignity. However, it remains a persistent challenge in various regions worldwide, particularly underserved areas like the Gaya district.

Globally, women and girls' menstrual experiences have been overshadowed by myths, misconceptions, cultural taboos, and limited access to necessary resources. These challenges have adverse effects on women's health, education, and social participation (World Health Organization, 2020).

In the Gaya district, where socio-cultural factors intersect with economic disparities, MHM presents complex issues. Menstruation is still surrounded by deep-rooted myths and stigma here (Bhattacharya & Arora, 2013). This not only hampers the adoption of healthy practices but also perpetuates a culture of silence and shame surrounding a natural biological process.

This baseline study serves as a crucial step towards addressing the multifaceted challenges related to MHM in Gaya. By focusing on this specific district's context, our goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique difficulties faced by women and girls when managing their menstruation. Shedding light on these issues will contribute to targeted interventions that can bring about positive change.

The study has three main objectives: firstly, assessing existing knowledge levels regarding MHM; secondly, exploring current practices employed by women and adolescent girls in the district; thirdly identifying the challenges they encounter in managing menstrual hygiene. Through these objectives, we aim to provide valuable insights into context-specific factors influencing MHM in Gaya while laying the foundation for evidence-based strategies to enhance menstrual health and well-being (Divya, 2022).

Understanding the complexities of menstrual hygiene in Gaya is crucial not only for individual women but also for broader goals such as gender equality, education, and public health. By addressing the identified challenges and gaps outlined in this study we can work towards a future where menstruation is no longer a source of discomfort, discrimination, or exclusion. Instead, it should be celebrated as a natural and healthy aspect of women's lives. This study represents a significant step towards realizing this vision in the Gaya district of Bihar.

Objective of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to gain a profound comprehension of the prevailing methods, levels of knowledge, and struggles linked with overseeing menstrual hygiene among women and adolescent girls in the Gaya district. To accomplish this intention, we have discerned definite objectives that are in accord with the modules of concentration amid our examination:

1. Assessing Knowledge Levels and Information Sources

Our principal mission is to examine the level of knowledge pertaining to the subject of menstruation/periods among females and adolescent girls in the Gaya district. Additionally, we will be attempting to recognize the original resources that enlighten women and adolescents about menstruation. Lastly, we will look into any connection between knowledge calibre and components such as age, schooling, and financial standing.

2. Exploring MHM Practices and Materials Used

Another goal is to investigate the different materials utilized for managing menstrual hygiene (e.g., cloth, sanitary napkins) and determine their frequency of usage. We also seek to understand the reasons behind individuals choosing specific materials and practices. Additionally, we aim to assess the accessibility of menstrual hygiene products and examine any challenges faced in obtaining those (Pandey et al., 2016). Moreover, we will explore how socio-economic factors such as poverty category, occupation, and family income impact MHM practices.

3. Examining Hygiene and Sanitation Facilities

Our next objective is to evaluate the availability and adequacy of sanitation facilities in respondents' homes. We also aim to gain an understanding of bathing habits during menstruation as well as access to clean water for personal hygiene purposes. Furthermore, we will investigate practices related to cleaning and maintaining genital hygiene. Additionally, we will explore experiences related to white discharge including its timing and associated symptoms. Lastly, we will identify any rashes or skin-related issues experienced during menstruation.

4. Understanding Socio-Cultural and Psychological Aspects

Another important aspect is gauging the emotional and psychological impact that menstruation has on women's lives as well as those of adolescent girls. We aim to explore feelings and perceptions towards menstruation and identify any cultural or societal factors

that influence these perceptions. Moreover, we will investigate experiences of teasing or stigma related to menstrual stains and reactions from husbands and family members. Furthermore, we plan to assess the level of information sharing about menstruation within families, including with husbands and daughters.

5. Identifying Challenges and Areas for Intervention

Our final objective is to document the challenges faced in accessing menstrual hygiene products and sanitation facilities. We will highlight any barriers that are related to socio-economic factors such as poverty and income.

Lastly, we will detect chances for interference and enhancement in Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) activities as well as cognizance. By structuring our aims around the particular fields of concentration in this study, our intention is to provide an exhaustive comprehension of the menstrual cleanliness environs in the Gaya district. These objectives will serve as a guide for our investigation, allowing us to bring forth profitable perceptions that can guide tailored interferences and directives geared towards bettering the menstrual health and prosperity of females and adolescent girls in this region.

Methods of the study:

Study Design

A cross-sectional research strategy was deployed in order to establish the present situation of MHM in Gaya district of Bihar. A structured questionnaire was employed as the central mechanism for collecting data, deliberately formulated to garner information about knowledge, practices, and difficulties associated with menstrual hygiene.

Sample

For this research endeavor, a stratified random sample of 120 women and adolescent girls was interviewed, taking into consideration economic disparity and age. This ensured that the study population was suitably representative.

Results

The investigation provided an extensive comprehension of the menstrual cleanliness procedures and obstructions encountered by females and teenage girls in the Gaya district. Here are the significant discoveries:

Knowledge about Menstruation

An almost total proportion of participants (98%) evinced acumen regarding menstruation/periods, affirming a sound basis of erudition in the Gaya district.

Yet, an alarming divulgence is that above half of the participants (54%) conceded to not having adequate information on menstruation. This implies that while they have a basic conception, they may not own a complete apprehension of the organic and practical elements.

It is worth remarking that the majority of respondents (67%) did not have anterior understanding concerning menstruation prior to encountering their inaugural period. This uncovers a break in pre-menarche tuition and cognizance.

Stigma and Embarrassment

A prevalent trend discernible from the discoveries is a feeling of shame frequently linked with menstruation. Virtually all respondents (99%) expressed discomfort discussing menstruation/periods. This underscores the deeply ingrained stigma surrounding this natural bodily process in the Gaya district.

Usage of Menstrual Hygiene Products

Despite the discomfort linked to cloth usage, a significant majority (75%) still rely on cloth as their primary menstrual hygiene product. This emphasizes an urgent need for improved access to and education about alternative options like sanitary napkins, which can enhance comfort and hygiene during menstruation. Regarding disposal practices, most respondents (63%) reported disposing sanitary napkins in garbage bins. This finding highlights the importance of proper disposal facilities and awareness campaigns promoting responsible waste management.

Social and economic factors

More than half of the population (57%) falls below the poverty line, indicating significant socio-economic challenges in Gaya district. Access to menstrual hygiene products and services can be severely affected by poverty.

All these findings reflect the complex situation of menstrual hygiene in Gaya district. Despite widespread knowledge about menstruation, the lack of complete information is obvious. The prevalence of shame around menstruation, coupled with the continued use of uncomfortable clothing as the mainstay of menstrual hygiene, means that targeted interventions are increasingly needed.

Furthermore, the socio-economic challenges faced by a large segment of the population underscore the importance of addressing affordability issues, to improve access to menstrual hygiene products and infrastructure. By addressing these challenges and reducing the stigma associated with menstruation, Gaya district can work towards ensuring that women and adolescent girls can manage their menstrual hygiene comfortably, hygienically and with dignity.

Conclusion

In the Gaya district, this study sheds light on the intricate and diverse landscape of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) among women and adolescent girls. These insights uncover key areas for intervention and improvement to enhance the well-being and menstrual health of individuals in the region.

Limited Comprehensive Knowledge: Despite nearly all respondents being aware of menstruation, more than half of them lack comprehensive information regarding this natural biological process. This knowledge gap indicates a need for educational programs that not only create basic awareness but also foster a deeper understanding of MHM.

Persistent Stigma and Embarrassment: The overwhelming feeling of embarrassment reported by almost all respondents underscores the deeply entrenched stigma surrounding menstruation in the Gaya district. This stigma not only hampers open discussions but also perpetuates misconceptions and misinformation.

Cloth Usage: The predominant use of cloth as the primary menstrual hygiene product by a significant majority (75%) of respondents highlights discomfort and hygiene concerns that require attention. Promoting alternative products, such as sanitary napkins, is clearly necessary to enhance comfort and hygiene during menstruation.

Socio-Economic Challenges: The fact that over half of the respondents are below the poverty line emphasizes the socio-economic challenges faced by a considerable portion of the population. Poverty can significantly impact access to menstrual hygiene products and sanitation facilities, thereby exacerbating MHM challenges.

In conclusion, this study provides a crucial foundation for tailored interventions in the Gaya district. Addressing these challenges necessitates a multi-faceted approach:

Education and Awareness: Comprehensive MHM education programs are vital to dispel myths, reduce stigma, and provide accurate information about menstruation.

Access to Affordable Products: Initiatives aimed at improving access to affordable and comfortable menstrual hygiene products are imperative to replace traditional cloth usage.

Infrastructure Improvements: Investing in sanitation facilities and waste disposal systems is essential to ensure safe and hygienic MHM practices.

Poverty Alleviation: Tackling poverty through economic empowerment programs can indirectly enhance MHM by improving access to resources.

Community Sensitization: Engaging communities in open discussions about menstruation can help reduce stigma and foster a supportive environment.

By strategically implementing these interventions, the Gaya district can work towards a future where menstruation is no longer a source of discomfort, shame, or disadvantage, but rather viewed as a natural and healthy aspect of women's lives. This study serves as an invaluable roadmap for achieving this vision and ensuring that all women and adolescent girls in the region can manage their menstrual hygiene comfortably, hygienically, and with dignity.

References

1. Bhattacharya, S. and Arora, R., 2013. Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour: PRACHAR. *Innovations in Maternal Health: Case Studies from India*, p.177.
2. Divya, K.L., 2022. A cross sectional study on menstrual hygiene and associated factors among high school girls in rural Mysuru. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 9(11), p.4207.
3. Pandey, N., Jejeebhoy, S.J., Acharya, R., Singh, S.K. and Srinivas, M., 2016. Effects of the PRACHAR project's reproductive health training programme for adolescents: Findings from a longitudinal study.
4. World Health Organization, 2020. Global progress report on water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities: Fundamentals first.
5. Sommer, M., Hirsch, J. S., Nathanson, C., & Parker, R. G. (2015). Comfortably, safely, and without shame: Defining menstrual hygiene management as a public health issue. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(7), 1302-1311. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302525>.

6. Patkar, A., & Bharadwaj, S. (2017). Menstrual hygiene management: Making the case for an incredible national movement. *Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council*.
7. Hennegan, J., Shannon, A. K., Rubli, J., Schwab, K. J., & Melendez-Torres, G. J. (2019). Women's and girls' experiences of menstruation in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and qualitative metasynthesis. *PLoS Medicine*, *16*(5), e1002803. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002803>.
8. van Eijk, A. M., Sivakami, M., Thakkar, M. B., Bauman, A., Laserson, K. F., Coates, S., & Phillips-Howard, P. A. (2016). Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in India: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Open*, *6*(3), e010290. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010290>.
9. Jewitt, S., & Ryley, H. (2014). It's a girl thing: Menstruation, school attendance, spatial mobility, and wider gender inequalities in Kenya. *Geoforum*, *56*, 137-147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.07.006>.
10. Sumpter, C., & Torondel, B. (2013). A systematic review of the health and social effects of menstrual hygiene management. *PLOS ONE*, *8*(4), e62004. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0062004>.