



Menstrual hygiene management in schools in South Asia



Overview

Various federal and provincial initiatives support menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in schools; the National water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (WinS) Strategy, Baluchistan WinS Strategy and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa WinS Strategy all refer to MHM in WinS. Appropriate curricula together with teacher training are needed at provincial level.

Agencies implementing MHM as part of WinS are demonstrating lockable, girl-friendly toilets, including water taps, soap and disposal facilities like waste bins or incinerators for sanitary materials.

MHM Working Groups have been established for coordination and advocacy. MHM champions include provincial government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and role models such as female athletes.

Key take-aways

A coherent approach has been developed by the MHM Working Group at the federal level. WaterAid with support from the MHM Working Group developed a tool kit for MHM practitioners.

MHM is being championed at various levels by politicians, prominent female athletes and through social media campaigns.

Communicating directly with girls has been effective, using traditional and technology-based media such as SMS-based polls and livechats, a mobile-phone game and animation. The Puberty Book and a Menstrual Matters comic have been designed to reach those more comfortable with print.

Focusing beyond the girl has helped mothers to communicate with daughters about MHM, dispel myths/taboo, and make reusable pads at home. Opportunities for engaging men and boys on MHM are foreseen as people become more sensitised.

49%

of girls had no knowledge of menstruation prior to their first period.

WinS overview

Water availability

68%

of primary-, 82% of middle-, and 86% of high schools have a drinking water facility available in school (MoFE & Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2015-16).

Sanitation availability

67%

of primary-, 86% of middle- and 89% of high schools have toilet facilities (EMIS 2015-16).

Toilet to schoolgirl ratio (WHO standard = 1:25)

The national standard is 1:40 for girls (and 1:50 for boys). No data is available on actual figures.

Other key issues

The overall situation of WASH in private schools is worse than public sector schools (National WinS Strategic Plan for 2017-22).

The WinS National Strategy sets design standards for school WASH infrastructure but a parent-teacher association and School Management Committee funds are not sufficient for O&M and WASH is not a priority for them.

MHM overview

Current evidence and key findings

One survey of girls in Karachi found that 50% understood the biology of menstruation. 60% reported restrictions in socialising and religious practices because of menstruation. Many girls described poor nutritional intake due to cultural restrictions on foods allowed during menstruation. Among girls not in school, 79% did not use hygienic materials to manage menstruation (Ali & Rizvi, 2010).

UNICEF conducted an SMS poll of 700 girls in 2017. 49% had no knowledge of menstruation prior to their first period. 44% do not have access to basic MH facilities at home, their workplace or school. 28% of respondents said they missed school or work because they were afraid of staining their clothes/uniform, that boys would find out, or due to pain related to their period (Hafeez-ur-Rehman, 2017).

Through formative research (Mumtaz et al 2017), girls identified the need to learn about puberty and menstruation; recognition and relief of menstrual symptoms; and appropriate MH and management practices.

A study by Integrated Rural Support Programme (2013) found that 66% of the girls/women used cotton or a cloth during menstruation, and only 17% used a sanitary pad; 30% did not wash their hands after changing the cloth; 49% reused the cloth.

Educational materials

The curriculum does not cover MHM: life skills education is only taught at primary level (grade 1-5) and does not refer to MHM; middle and high school classes do not cover MHM in sufficient detail.

NGOs and private sector actors are conducting awareness sessions in schools to educate and inform girls and teachers on MHM.

MHM overview *continued*

Educational materials continued

MHM is included in the Lady Health Worker (LHW) curriculum in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, LHWs are generally not allowed to talk to young girls or adolescents because their function is associated with family planning.

Various MHM information materials have been developed by numerous agencies for use by teachers, LHWs and School Health and Nutrition Supervisors. Many school WASH Clubs have been trained on MHM. Some collect and contribute money to replenish sanitary pads in the school.

The Puberty Book, created by Grow and Know and Real Medicine Foundation, will be distributed by sector partners once approved by government.

Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks

In Pakistan, the education mandate is managed at the provincial level. Education policies as well as provincial Education Sector Plans refer to WinS and all provinces have approved WinS Strategies.

In Punjab WaterAid is supporting the Women Development Department to develop their MHM strategy.

Pakistan has a Federal-level WinS Strategic Plan, approved in 2017.

National Child Friendly School Standards were endorsed in 2013, which led to the Pakistan WinS Manual.

MHM kits are regularly distributed by WaterAid, UNICEF and Proctor and Gamble in some schools in Baluchistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa/Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Punjab, containing items such as an information leaflet, hot water bottle, sanitary pads, underpants and soap.

MHM in schools practice

Some schools with a WASH project are also provided with incinerators for safe disposal.

In low-income areas students are taught to make cotton pads. In Punjab, AGAHE/Water Aid has supported a fledgling low-cost sanitary pad production enterprise and developed the supply chain mechanism to ensure the availability of pads.

AGAHE/WaterAid formed Mother Support Groups and conducted MHM sessions with mothers in school catchment areas in Punjab.

MHM in EMIS

EMIS at federal (and provincial) level collects provincial EMIS data on water and toilet facilities in school but does not monitor MHM. WaterAid is supporting the Department of Education and Literacy in Sindh to identify gaps in EMIS and recommend indicators for functionality of WinS including MHM.

Coordination platforms/ mechanisms

The national MHM Working Group and three provincial groups – all comprised of NGOs and government agencies – in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan support policy development and implementation. The groups also coordinate involvement in MH Day.

MHM journey in Pakistan

- 2011** Integrated Regional Support Program (IRSP) starts a 3-year project, supported by WaterAid. Female IRSP staff conducted MH sessions for the first time.
- 2013** UNICEF start the Learning, Acting and Learning project to develop in-depth understanding of girls' MHM needs.
- 2014** National level MHM Working Group is formed.
AGAHE/WaterAid launch MHM project in Punjab province and establish a provincial level MHM Working Group with the collaboration of the Women Development Department.
- 2015** 3 Star approach for WinS rolled out in two provinces.
WinS minimum standards are developed and provincial WinS strategies formulated.
MHM-based 3-year WinS project launched in 160 schools in two districts (Swat and Muzaffargarh) with support of WaterAid.
- 2016** GRID and UNICEF launch a mobile phone game aimed to raise MH awareness and challenge myths.
Government representatives participate in a 'Training of Trainers' on MHM conducted by WSSCC.
- 2017** UNICEF host a 3-hour live chat about MHM on U-Report, answering 2,500 questions via free text messages.
UNICEF launch the Be Bold Be Free campaign that uses female celebrity athletes as champions for MHM and launches an MH Innovation Challenge with grants for ideas on MHM services.

Coming up

Life skills education and MHM could be integrated into middle and high schools as part of the 2018 curriculum revision.

There are opportunities to integrate MH education into programmes for child protection and ending child marriage.

The functionality and technical/environmental challenges of incinerators are being evaluated by WaterAid.

DoE is preparing standards for waste management in schools, including MHM waste disposal.

The launch of the Federal-level WinS Strategic Plan is planned for early 2018.

The launch of an MHM tool kit and puberty book in public and private schools.

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