



Menstrual Hygiene in Schools in South Asia:

2018-2020 update

Key Observations

- The School Health Policy (2019) calls for dedicated menstrual hygiene (MH) facilities for adolescent girls as well as timely and accurate information in line with the National MHM Guidelines. The production of the MHM Teacher Guide, talking book, and comic book were a major achievement.
- Famous personalities, local influencers, school, and community leaders have increased awareness on MH in addition to girls' attendance in schools.
- In coordination with UNICEF's Gender Unit, a gender and WASH training is planned for government officials involved in WASH in Schools (WinS) implementation.



WASH in Schools (WinS) overview:

According to the Ministry of Education's (MoE) EMIS for 2018-2019

Drinking Water Availability

65% of schools have limited water supplies

35% of schools have no water supply

Sanitation

38% of schools have improved sanitation

12% have unimproved sanitation/non-functional latrines

50% do not have latrines

Hygiene

29% of girl students were absent during menstruation because schools did not have facilities for hand washing or changing and disposing used cloths/pads

94% of schools lack basic handwashing with soap and water in 2019. This translated to almost 5.6 million children lacking handwashing facilities in schools in Afghanistan

Key Issues

- In 2019, the standards for WinS facilities and a construction manual were developed and harmonised in close collaboration with the MoE and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).
- The design for MH rooms changed from a standalone room to a room integrated within the toilet block to avoid causing girls embarrassment.

MH Overview

<p>Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks</p>	<p>The MoE has a 'National WinS Design & Construction Manual' which includes standard latrine designs as well as gender considerations and disability access. MH is included in the Implementation Plan of the MoE.</p> <p>The School Health Policy (2019) calls for all schools to have: a clean and safe drinking water source; adequate numbers of gender-segregated sanitation; designated hand-washing facilities with soap; dedicated MH facilities for adolescent girls; the provision of timely and accurate information in line with the National MHM Guidelines; and an emphasis on facilities for children with disabilities.</p> <p>The National Education Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 notes that the MoE is responsible to ensure the availability and quality of water, the accessibility of toilet facilities, and other WASH services. MH is part of the operational plan of the MoE.</p> <p>New funders include USAID and JICA who are supporting MH in WinS.</p>
<p>Education materials Curriculum materials Teacher training materials Additional resources</p>	<p>In 2018, in collaboration with the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Religious Affairs, and Public Health, UNICEF provided technical and financial support for the MoE to develop a comprehensive guide 'Menstruation Matters in Afghanistan' for teachers, a booklet titled 'Wisdom of Girls Health and Success', and a comic book for adolescent girls to address MH.</p> <p>In 2018, the MoE in collaboration with UNICEF conducted a National Consultation and Planning Workshop with national Master Trainers from 34 provinces. The workshop was attended by 40 female participants including 34 MH Master Trainers for 34 provinces.</p> <p>In 2019, UNICEF published 110,000 copies of the MH booklet in Dari and Pashto, which were distributed to around 1,250 schools across 22 provinces. UNICEF, in coordination with the MoE, successfully built the capacity of 965 teachers from selected provinces with high rates of out-of-school girls through training. The training was further cascaded down to 109,202 girls and 3,010 female teachers in 89 girls' schools who were reached with adequate information on hygiene behaviors including menstrual hygiene in schools in 2018-2020.</p> <p>The first-ever MHM guideline and promotion packages were translated to local languages and disseminated across 22 provinces.</p> <p>In 2020, the Teacher Guide was simplified in consultation with the MoE and MH Committees. 100,000 copies of the second version were reprinted.</p>
<p>Is MH in Education Information System</p>	<p>WASH rooms for girls are included as an indicator in the EMIS checklist. Data is collected once every two years by MoE, however, and there is a lag in reporting too.</p>
<p>Coordination platforms/ mechanisms at national/ sub-national levels</p>	<p>There are MH committees in Kabul (2016) and the five zones (2018). National Technical Assistance (NTA) staff support these MH committees. In the provinces NTAs form a network of professionals working on MH.</p> <p>The First Lady's support to break cultural taboos around menstruation has led to the recognition of MH as a multi-sectoral issue. Efforts have been made to ensure integration between five ministries (the Ministries of Public Health, Education, Women's Affairs, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and Religious Affairs) to coordinate the national rollout of MHM Guidelines.</p> <p>NGO partners continued their commitment to educate girls on MH and intensify efforts to raise awareness in order to mitigate harmful social taboos.</p>

MH in schools practice ▶ Materials ▶ Disposal	Few girls are reported to use disposable pads; incinerators have been dropped from the school WASH designs as a result. Reusable pads have been promoted instead.
	Teachers and social enterprises are being trained to produce washable, reusable, handmade, sanitary pads. The aim is to foster income generation for women whilst increasing the local availability of sanitary materials. A small study is planned to compare girls' experiences using the Afripad versus a locally-manufactured pad. The findings will inform the design of the pads that social enterprises will manufacture in the future.
	MH Rooms (rooms within the toilet block that include water and soap) have been introduced into national standards.
Equity and inclusion	There are an estimated 3.7 million out-of-school children 60% are girls. With the technical and financial support of UNICEF, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) drafted an MHM talking book for Community Health Workers (CHWs) in coordination with the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and MoE. The MHM Talking Book will be used by CHWs during their house-to-house visits to educate hard-to-reach women and girls including out-of-school girls in communities.
	Girls and teachers in provinces with low-female enrolment were trained on MHM Guidelines developed by UNICEF, reducing the risk of dropout amongst adolescent girls by challenging taboos and educating them on good MH practices.
	An MoU between MoWA and MoPH was agreed to for the provision of MH interventions/services for out-of-school girls and young mothers, including engaging with community influencers (mothers, etc.) and the provision of MH kits.
	School WASH facilities have been made inclusive for girls with disabilities. The MHM Guidelines include advice for mothers to help support their daughters with MH.

MH Journey in Afghanistan

Year	Key steps – Afghanistan WinS MH
2018	MoE developed MH materials including a booklet titled 'Wisdom of Girls Health and Success' (a comprehensive guide for adolescents), an MHM guide for teachers entitled 'Menstruation Matters in Afghanistan', and a comic book, 'Sadat's Untold Stories', for the awareness of parents and community leaders.
	The MH materials were launched on Girls' Hygiene Day (the Afghan variation of MH day), by the First Lady of Afghanistan, Ms. Rula (Bibi Gul) Ghani. The presence of the First Lady as well as two male Ministers who talked openly about MH was one way of engaging men in shifting social norms. The event received a high-level of attention and media coverage.
2019	The second Girls' Hygiene Day was celebrated under the patronage of the country's First Lady and new MHM guidelines were launched.
	36 provincial engineers from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) were trained on WASH, social inclusion, and gender.
2020	Innovation in the production of washable and reusable handmade sanitary pads to foster income generation.

What's coming up? Opportunities for MH in WinS

- UNICEF plans WASH, social inclusion, and gender trainings for MoE Provincial Education Department engineers in 2021. This was postponed from 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- An MHM talking book for CHWs and Family Health Action Groups will be launched on MH Day in 2021.
- Teachers and female members of shuras/school shuras/Community Development Councils will be trained to act as MH champions as well as disseminate MH and hygiene messages.
- Advocacy will continue for the national rollout and provision of MH services for girls in formal and informal learning centres as well as introducing MH in school curricula (grades five to eight) to prepare girls for menstruation earlier.

References:

Formative Research on Menstrual Hygiene Management in Afghanistan- August 2016

EMIS data 2018-2019

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