



Menstrual Hygiene in Schools in South Asia:

2018-2020 update

Key Observations

- Initiatives include ensuring separate latrines with MH facilities, assigning a female teacher to discuss MH, making sanitary pads available at school, and monitoring these issues.
- Increased awareness on MH is evident through different platforms and networks.
- Government schemes, including initiatives under the Ministry of Health, have provided funding for pads for vulnerable girls and women.
- Value-added tax (VAT) has been waived on materials necessary for making sanitary pads.



WASH in Schools (WinS) overview:
<https://washdata.org/monitoring/schools/dashboard>

Drinking Water Availability

82% of schools have basic water supplies nationally

9.9% of schools have access to limited water supply

8% of schools have no water supply

Sanitation

56.3% of schools have access to basic sanitation nationally

43.7% of schools have access to limited sanitation nationally

Hygiene

The National Hygiene Survey (2018) included student's hand washing knowledge. It found that:

91% washed hands with soap after defecation, 14% before food preparation, and 5% before feeding a child.



Key Issues

- An inclusive WASH model at schools has been developed and demonstrated by different actors including: WaterAid Bangladesh, UNICEF, BRAC Practical Action, SIMAVI, and others. This WASH model includes: running water facilities inside the toilet; handwashing devices; arrangements for washing and drying used cloths as well as proper disposal facilities; MH corners as well as inclusive amenities.
- Advocacy is underway to ensure the Teachers Training Institute (TTI), the School Management Committees (SMC), the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and local governments take up the model to demonstrate the MH directive from the Ministry of Education.

MH Overview

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| Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks | <p>The five-year Secondary Education Development Programme (2017-2018 to 2021-2022) includes: a component to keep adolescents in school (which covers gender-segregated toilets); MH facilities and education; sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); and school safety.</p> <p>The National Curriculum Framework from pre-primary to grade eight involves key reforms including the introduction of a mandatory subject (Wellbeing) which covers health, SRHR, MH, and mental health.</p> <p>Successful advocacy on MH has led to the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development, and Cooperatives (MoLGRDC) developing a National MH Strategy through consultation with key stakeholders.</p> |
| Education materials Curriculum materials Teacher training materials Additional resources | <p>Teachers, government staff, and CSOs have been trained as trainers on MH by WaterAid, UNICEF, and others. WaterAid has developed the capacity of around 1,000 female teachers as lead facilitators for MH.</p> <p>A madrasa resource book on life skills for adolescents was produced for roll out in 2020 covering SRHR and MH for madrasa students; this has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>WaterAid promotes interactive question and answer and ICT-based classroom modules for teachers to use as part of their regular lesson plans. A social media campaign, Let's Talk About Menstruation, led by WaterAid has created an interactive platform for young people to reflect on MH issues through interactive discussions sharing knowledge, information, questions and answers.</p> <p>Several MH components are integrated into the fourth National Adolescent Health Project under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, supported by the World Bank.</p> |
| Is MH in Education Information System (EMIS) | <p>MH is not yet included in the EMIS of primary and secondary schools.</p> |
| Current evidence – key findings | <p>Key findings of the National Hygiene Survey 2018</p> <p>Only 53% of school students had heard about menstruation before their first occurrence of period (compared to 36% at baseline in 2014).</p> <p>There is a rising preference for sanitary pads, but the use of old cloth is still common – many use a mix of pad and cloth (86% of students used old cloth at baseline).</p> <p>Around 20% of those who use old cloth follow the recommended cleaning and drying practices (compared to 12% of students at baseline).</p> <p>Only 23% of schoolgirls have access to improved toilets with soap and water and a place to dispose used MH materials at school (compared to 12% of students at baseline).</p> <p>30% of schoolgirls reported missing an average of 2.5 days a month due to periods (compared to 40% at baseline).</p> <p>36% of schoolgirls have received a lesson on MH from the school (compared to 6% of students at baseline).</p> |

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| | <p>Hennegan and Sol (2020) investigated girls' confidence to undertake menstrual management tasks at home and school using a survey of 1,359 schoolgirls. Confidence to manage menstruation was defined as girls' level of assurance in undertaking tasks associated with managing menstrual bleeding, including collecting, washing, drying, and changing menstrual materials. At home, 57% of girls reported they were 'very confident' undertaking tasks to manage their menstrual bleeding, while this figure was only 7% at school. At school, supportive policies, such as providing permission to use the toilet when needed, were associated with greater confidence. Talking to a friend about menstruation was positively associated with confidence at school.</p> <p>Findings from a quasi-experimental study on WaterAid's WinS project shows that the chances of managing MH properly are 1.3-fold higher among schoolgirls that receive an inclusive WASH intervention than schoolgirls who do not. Absentee girls missed an average of 1.5 days in the intervention schools and 2.5 days in the control schools in each menstrual cycle.</p> |
| Coordination platforms/ mechanisms at national/ sub-national levels | <p>The MH Platform includes 35 national and international organisations from SRHR, WASH, private companies, and development partners. The MH Platform is steered by the Core Committee of 13 members (including UNICEF; WaterAid; EKN; BRAC; ICDDR,B; SIMAVI; and others). The MH Platform continues to operate and has been advocating for the development of an MH Strategy, reducing the price of products, and waiving the tax on pads.</p> <p>An inter-UN working group on adolescent SRHR and life skills is a coordination mechanism used by UN organisations on MH.</p> |
| MH in schools practice ▶ Materials ▶ Disposal | <p>The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is distributing sanitary napkins to 25,600 students at 128 schools in 32 districts of eight divisions. The project also provided the necessary equipment and training on sanitary-napkin production for the economic empowerment of 256 women entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Vending machines have been installed in university toilets to sell low-cost, sanitary pads.</p> <p>Through the Ritu project, TNO (a research organisation), SIMAVI, and Rodenburg Biopolymers have been working on the design of biodegradable, sanitary napkins.</p> <p>In schools, incinerators and pits are promoted for disposing of cloth and pads.</p> |
| Equity and inclusion | <p>A study by Share-Net Bangladesh on 'MHM for Women and Girls with Disabilities in Dhaka' found that girls with mental disabilities completely depend on their mothers/ sisters for their menstrual management and do not have knowledge of menstruation or hygiene management (Chowdhury, 2019, p. 26).</p> <p>Sanitary pads are also included in emergency packages for girls and women affected by disasters.</p> |

MH Journey in Bangladesh

| Year | Key steps – Bangladesh WinS MH |
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| 2018 | <p>SNV organised a week-long awareness campaign for garment workers, to build awareness on MH practices and the taboos surrounding menstruation.</p> <p>Under its Industrial WASH Programme, WaterAid Bangladesh has started MH interventions at readymade garment industries to develop safe MH practices at workplaces, dwelling places, and schools attended by their children.</p> |
| 2019 | <p>MH Day supported advocacy for age-appropriate MH content in primary education.</p> <p>The Government of Bangladesh exempted VAT and supplementary duty on imported raw materials required for manufacturing sanitary napkins; this is expected to lower the price of sanitary pads by 40%.</p> <p>Health Minister Zahid Maleque announced that the government will distribute free sanitary napkins to adolescent girls and women through 4,628 health and family welfare centres across the country, which has already started implementation at scale.</p> |
| 2020 | <p>The MoLGRDC to launch a multi-sectoral National Strategy on MH in 2020.</p> |

What's coming up? Opportunities for MH in WinS to 2024

- Continuing to advocate for a reduction or a waiver on VAT for sanitary pads so that girls and women can benefit from cheaper products.
- The implementation of a new curriculum starting in 2022 that will include Wellbeing as a mandatory subject for all.
- The introduction of a personalised learning approach (online course/game and comics) through the mainstream education system on SRHR in 2021.
- Setting standards for monitoring menstrual waste disposal in line with environmental policies.
- Formulating a comprehensive action plan to implement the National MH Strategy.
- Creating a strong knowledge base on MH, based on qualitative research and evidence.



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