



Government endeavor towards improving Menstrual Health and Hygiene in the State of Bihar

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ABSTRACT

This study will help to understand the importance of menstrual health and hygiene and why has it become a major challenge for development. This study is about how Bihar is performing in the fight against this issue; it will focus on finding out various schemes and programs started by the central Government as well as the state Government of Bihar to achieve good menstrual health and hygiene. This study will be descriptive in nature and is based on secondary data. The valuable data would be collected from plenty of literatures such as research papers, journals, articles, Government websites, and many other sources. Data will be analyzed deliberately to conclude.

KEY WORDS

Menstrual Health, Hygiene, Women, Government Schemes.

INTRODUCTION

Menstrual health and hygiene is a worldwide problem for adolescent girls, especially in emergent nations, India being one of them. Menstrual health is at the center of the well-being of women, which automatically results in the rise of education, employment, income, and development of India. Girls and women in India have a poor understanding of Menstruation because of inadequate puberty education; they find menstruation shameful and uncomfortable. They fail to understand the menstrual process and use unhygienic alternatives like old clothes, rags, etc. Unhygienic practices during periods can lead to cancer, RTIs, UTIs, yeast infections, more

serious illnesses can also lead to death. Mostly women in rural area feel shy to buy sanitary items and to discuss with doctors about their menstrual problems. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the first Prime Minister who addresses menstrual health on 15 August 2020, not just as women's problem but as a universal health problem. This changed the perspective of our society towards menstrual health.

There are lots of myths and stigma related to menstruation that forces women to fall behind, we can see its visible impact on their education, well-being, and health. Millions of girls abandon their schools because of a lack of awareness and hygiene facilities at the school campuses which leads to early marriages and pregnancy. If we are able to add these women to our system we can positively impact the GDP of our country.

Today there is a need to break the silence and stigma about menstruation, making safe and effective menstrual absorbents easily available to girls and women and improving the school environment. Keeping all these factors in mind Government commenced several schemes to raise the condition of menstrual health and hygiene of women. Apart from the Central Government, various state Governments have also started numerous programs related to menstrual health and hygiene and took forward the central Government schemes.

Some of the State Government's Initiatives

Almost 30 years ago in 1922, when Bihar was an underdeveloped state of the country, launched a 'paid menstrual leave' for female employees of Bihar state. At that time the number of working women was very low and menstruation was not identified as a health issue (Johri, 2020). In 2004, Tamil Nadu was the headmost state to understand the importance of menstrual hygiene management and the need to address it through programs and policies. Tamil Nadu Government took initiative to make schools easy and healthy for menstruating girls by providing basic facilities such as sanitary napkin vending machines, separate toilets for girls, etc. The state of Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra started working to provide the last Mile availability of pads. They installed sanitary napkin vending machines in schools to distribute good quality pads at low cost. Maharashtra, Haryana, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu supported local small entrepreneurs and Self-Help-Groups in producing low-cost sanitary napkins. In Himachal Pradesh, education, health, and Rural Development departments got combined for the implementation of menstrual hygiene programs in all over the state (DASRA, 2014).

Menstrual Hygiene Day

Wash United initiated to celebrate 28 May as Menstrual Hygiene Day. It is an effort to engage all sectors all over the world in creating awareness and advocating and sharing knowledge regarding the importance of menstrual health and hygiene. It aims to break the silence and convert the world into a better place for women and girls so that they can healthily handle their periods without any hesitation and shame. Day '28 may' have been selected to celebrate menstrual hygiene day as it denotes the menstrual cycle. Date '28' express the average days of the menstrual cycle and women generally menstruate for 5 days each month and 'May' is the 5th month of the year. At present, MH Day have 380 partner organizations from all over the world that includes Government Agencies, non-profit organizations, private sectors, media organizations, and individuals. Its network is continuously expanding to more and more countries (Menstrual Hygiene Day 2016 Planning Guide, 2016).

Central Government Schemes

Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya (SBSV): Swachh Bharat Swachh's Vidyalaya is a national campaign aimed to make sure that all the schools of India is functioning properly and have well-maintained water sanitation facilities as it plays major role to develop a healthy environment in school. It includes availability of safe drinking water, hand washing, toilet and soaks facilities and promoting healthy practices among students to avoid water hygiene and sanitation-related disease (Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya, 2021). In 2016-17, the provision of Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar was started to acknowledge and celebrate sanitation and hygiene excellence, and to honor schools for taking noteworthy steps towards the Swachh Vidyalaya and

achieve the significant standard of hygiene and cleanness, and to promote sustainable practices of water cleanliness and healthful living in schools (Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya A National Mission).

Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK): Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya karyakram was launched on 7th January 2014 to reach the 253 million adolescence without any division on the basis of gender, demographic segmentation, marital status, or others, and with special focus on marginalized and underserved groups with the aim of the holistic development of the adolescent population. Initially, the scheme was limited to the sexual and conceptive health but with time it expanded its area and included nutrition, injuries, all kind of violence, communicable disease, mental health, and misuse of substance. It was a great transformation from clinic-based services to promoting women empowerment by meeting adolescents in their locality such as schools, families, and communities for their comfort [Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), 2023].

The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls SABLA: SABLA is a central Government sponsored scheme that started in 2010-11 with the aim of overall development of adolescent girls between the ages of 11 to 18 years. The scheme focuses on making the adolescent girls self-reliant by improving their status of fitness and nourishment and creating awareness regarding their well-being. This scheme focused on providing them with education, skill development training, and exposure to public services like hospitals, Post Office, Police Station, Bank, etc. It is implemented through the Anganwaadi centers (AWs). This scheme included out-of-school adolescent girls as well as school-going adolescent girls with the hope that mixed interaction between them might motivate out-of-school girls to join the school (Vivek Joshi, 2010).

Menstrual Hygiene Scheme: Menstrual hygiene scheme brought by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for promotion of menstrual hygiene among rural adolescence girls between the age of 10 to 19 years. The major objectives of this scheme is, to expand the awareness level of rural adolescent girls about menstrual hygiene, provide access of sanitary napkins of good quality and ascertain environment friendly dumping of sanitary napkins. Initially, in 2011, the scheme was active in 107 districts of 17 States. In these districts a packet of 6 sanitary napkins known as ‘Freedays’ was provided to rural adolescent girls for rupees 6. From 2014 funds are being provided to all the states and Union Territories under National Health Mission to provide packs of 6 sanitary napkins to the rural adolescent girls at a subsidize rate of rupees 6 through Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) (Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS), 2023).

Bihar

Bihar is one of the oldest states of India, located in the eastern part of the country. It is a landlocked state and has West Bengal in the east, Uttar Pradesh in the West, Nepal in the North, and Jharkhand in the South. The economy of Bihar can be divided into two sectors: Agriculture and Industrial sector (Bihar State Profile). According to the census 2011, Bihar is the third most populous state in the country (Chandramouli & General, 2011) and it is among the bottom sitter in overall performer in overall health performance (Health Index, Round 4, 2023).

Report of National Family Health Survey- Among women aged 15 to 24 who ever menstruated, only 59.2% of them used a healthy method of protection. 67.5% of women use cloth, 17.3% of women use local napkins, 42.2% of women use Sanitary napkins, 1.5% of women use tampons, 0.1% of women use menstrual cup, 0.5% of women use other things and 0.8% uses nothing during their periods (James, et al., 2022).

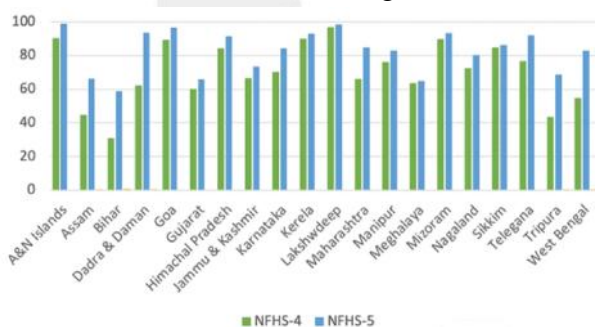


Figure1: Ratio of women using sanitary napkins during menstruation in NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 (Babbar, 2021)

The above graph is showing the changes in the sanitary napkins uses from National family health survey-4 (NFHS-4) to National family health survey-5 (NFHS-5). According to this graph, in all the states and union territories use of sanitary napkins increases from the data of NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 surveys. While in NFHS-4, Bihar scored the lowest percentage (almost 30%) on sanitary items use. But it went up to 60% (almost double) in the report of NFHS-5. That is the highest growth of all the 22 states and union territories (Babbar, 2021).

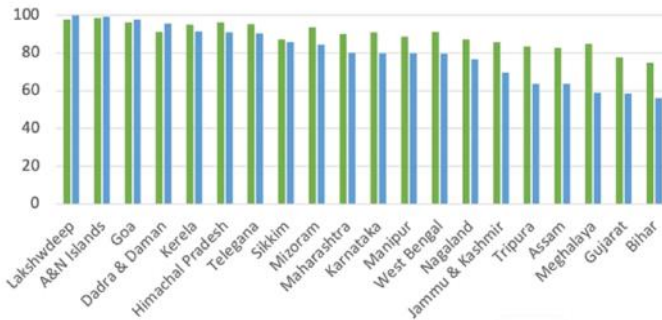


Figure2: Ratio of women using sanitary napkins during menstruation in urban and rural areas in NFHS-5 (Babbar, 2021)

The above graph shows “the percentage of women using sanitary napkins in urban and rural areas”. In Bihar below 80% of urban women are using sanitary napkins that is the lowest among all 11 states, and less than 60% of women use sanitary napkins in rural areas of Bihar which is also the lowest among the states mentioned (Babbar, 2021).

Menstrual Leave for Female Employees: In 1992, when Lalu Prasad Yadav was Chief Minister of Bihar, it introduced a policy of menstrual leave for female employees in Bihar. According to this policy, female working staff was allowed to take 2 days paid leave every month for taking care of their health during menstruation and this policy is still active in Bihar. Aim of this policy was to promote good health and well-being of female employees as well as reduce absenteeism and thus increase production. The Policy had been through lot of controversies; some people were opposing it that it will add to gender stereotypes and in future could become a base for discrimination against female employees. While some people were in support of this, stating that it is the first and very important step in the favor of special needs of women’s health (Sharma, 2023).

Mukhya Mantri Kishori Swasth Yojna: Mukhya Mantri Kishori Swasth Yojna has been started by the Chief Minister of Bihar under the guidance of Ministry of Women and Child Development. Under this scheme amount of rupees 300 will be given every month by the Government to the girls studying in classes 7 to 12. The main objective of this scheme is to develop the health, nutrition, and education level by providing support to adolescent girls to make them self-reliant and aware. All girl students studying in secondary and higher secondary Schools in the Bihar state will get benefit under this scheme. Every month rupees 300 will be sent to the girl’s account by the Government through DBT. Initially, 75% attendance of girl students was mandatory to take the advantage of this scheme but later this rule has abolished so that more and more girls students can take advantage of this scheme (Mukhyamantri Kishori Swasthya Yojana Bihar, 2022).

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Plan: Bihar on 8 March 2013, initiated an action plan for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and become the first state to do so. In early April 2021, with the help of UNICEF Bihar and Nav Astitva Foundation, the district administration of Bihar started the first MHM plan in the Kasba Block as a pilot project. After seeing the vast impact of the plan and understanding how it could be beneficial for girl students after they attend puberty and help to reduce their dropout from school NITI Aayog approved the proposal for mhm friendly toilets (comprises of sanitary pads, soaps, towels, and other MHM products) and awareness kits for 200 Government High Schools in Bihar. Jeevika played the role of nodal agency for this project and the other departments like education, social welfare, the Integrated Child Development Scheme, and health also contributed to the cause. 3 days of the training session were

organized for 133 Jivika cadres and they further transfer the information of MHM to 22000 jeevika didis and 50,000 adolescent girls (Dey, 2022).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study confirmed that with Limited resources the state of Bihar made significant progress in menstrual hygiene management. Growth in using hygienic products during periods of NFHS-4 report and report of NHFS-5 is exponential which is praiseworthy. Bihar presented an ideal example for other states by implementing 'paid menstrual leave' in the year 1992, when menstruation was not considered an issue that needs attention. Kishori swasth yojna and MHM plan are also a great move to promote the use of sanitary pads during menstruation. But this is just a few steps in the right direction still a long way to go. First point of contact for any child is always their family so the Government should also consider educating the parents of adolescent girls for better result.

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