Menstrual hygiene management knowledge, facilities, and practices associated with school absence among Bangladeshi adolescent girls

Mahbub-Ul Alam1, Amal K. Halder1, Stephen P. Luby2, Md. Khairul Islam3, Aftab Opel3, Abul Kasham Shoab1, Probir K. Ghosh1, Supta Sarkar1, Therese Mahon4, Leanne Unicomb1

1 Center for Communicable Diseases, icddr,b; 2 Stanford University, USA; 3WaterAid Bangladesh; 4 WaterAid UK

Introduction
Schools in low-income countries often do not provide appropriate facilities for menstrual hygiene management
• Lack of facilities at schools may impact attendance among menstruating girls
• Globally there is limited evidence that school menstrual hygiene management facilities impact attendance among menstruating girls

Objectives
• To examine the association of menstrual hygiene management knowledge, facilities, and practices with school absence during menstruation among Bangladeshi school girls

Methods
• Study type: A cross-sectional, nationally representative school survey in Bangladesh
• Sampling: 700 schools from 50 urban and 50 rural clusters using probability proportional to size sampling
• Interviewed: 2,332 school girls (11 to 17 years old) who had reached menarche were interviewed from March to June 2013
• Asked to report whether they usually miss class during menstruation
• Asked to estimate the average duration (in days) of absence during each menstruation cycle
• Spot check at schools:
  • toilet access and condition
  • gender-specific improved toilet for girls with soap, water, and trash bin

Results
• School absence: 40% (931) reported missing school during menstruation for an average of three school days each menstrual cycle
• School facilities: 82% (1,906) thought that school facilities were not appropriate for managing menstrual hygiene
• 12% (291) of school girls had access to gender-specific toilets with water and soap available
• Only 3% (70) of school girls had a trash bin inside toilets

Table 1: Factors associated with absence among school girls during menstruation in Bangladesh, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>School absence n/N (%)</th>
<th>APD* (CI) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel uncomfortable at school during menstruation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>778/1,343 (60)</td>
<td>43 (35, 50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>153/989 (15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel uncomfortable sitting beside boys during menstruation</td>
<td>765/1,363 (56)</td>
<td>41 (33, 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>166/965 (17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe menstrual hygiene interferes with school performance</td>
<td>480/756 (63)</td>
<td>36 (29, 44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>451/1,576 (29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>115/229 (50)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe menstruation is an illness</td>
<td>816/2103 (39)</td>
<td>10 (4, 17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Adjusted prevalence difference for age and education

• Student’s knowledge and practice: 64% of the 2,332 school girls did not know about menstruation before menarche
• Only 10% school girls used disposable pad as absorbent during menstruation
• Urban school girls were more likely to use disposable pad than rural school girls (21% vs. 9%, p<0.001)

Figure 1: Materials used during menstruation by school girls in Bangladesh.

Figure 2: Typical girls’ toilet at school. Note lack of trash bin

Conclusion
• School absence during menstruation is a significant problem
• School absence was associated with beliefs about menstruation, discomfort during menstruation and lack of school menstrual hygiene management facilities

Recommendation
• Schools should provide toilet for girls that are hygienic, ensure privacy, water, soap and trash bins
• Conduct studies to better understand beliefs and norms about menstruation, and issues related to discomfort at school

References


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For more information: mahbubalam@icddrb.org