Breaking the Silence

PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AND GENDER NORMS AROUND MENSTRUATION AND THEIR EFFECTS ON GIRLS’ AGENCY:

ALKA MALHOTRA, C4D SPECIALIST
UNICEF INDIA
120 MILLION
Adolescent Girls in India

- 22% have no education
- 30% are married
- 24% have begun child bearing
- 55% live in houses with no toilets
- 36% have not heard of HIV/AIDS
- 56% are anaemic

Adolescents age 10-19 years; Source: Census 2011, Government of India
Government Programmes and UNICEF’s Efforts to Make Menstrual Hygiene MATTER

Menstrual Health Programme launched in 200 districts; Supply of sanitary napkins

UNICEF’s formative research on perceptions, knowledge and practices related to menarche; Baseline for benchmark data Social and Behaviour Change Communication Project on Adolescent Girls Empowerment

Communication Strategy on Menstrual Hygiene developed, finalised, approved, rolled-out

Government of India’s Adolescent Health Programme and Sanitation Programme includes Menstrual Hygiene

2011 2012 2013

2014 LANDMARK DECISION

Jaunpur Mirzapur Sonebhadra
Research Framework

EXPOSURE

Knowledge
• Physiology of Menstruation
• Importance of menstrual hygiene

Attitudes
• Agree/ Disagree

Self Confidence
• Can do it
• Can do it even if opposed by family

Norms
• Descriptive Norms (prevalence)
• Injunctive Norms (approval)

Interpersonal Communication
• Had a discussion
• Self-Initiated

PRACTICE

IMPACT
Regular school
Diet
Mobility

Socio Economic status, place of residence, education and other determinants
Methodology

Sample large enough to give estimates at the district level

Two stage stratified sampling

1. Village: Random selection of 50 villages using PPS (Probability Proportions to Size) method

2. Respondent: House listing for sampling frame, Villages more than 200 households were single segment and > 200 HH multiple segments, 2 segments of 100 households each. 12 households were randomly selected from the listed households.

1800 post menarche girls, 1800 mothers, 900 community level workers
Social Conditioning Affects Menarche related Attitudes, Perceptions & Practices

- **Girls**: 90% girls unaware of importance of washing cloth with soap and drying in sun to kill germs. 86% girls completely unprepared for menarche. 64% girls felt scared at menarche.

- **Mothers**: 88% mothers unaware of importance of washing cloth with soap and drying in sun to kill germs. 47% mothers have negative attitudes towards menarche preparation. 84% mothers said ‘Menstruation is release of bad blood from body’.

- **CHWs**: 62% CHW unaware of importance of washing cloth with soap and drying in sun to kill germs. 47% CHW have positive attitudes towards menarche preparation. 85% CHW said ‘Menstruation is release of bad blood from body’.
Hesitation, Reluctance, Shame Lead to Limited Conversation Around Menarche

100% had discussions on ‘What to do’

0% discussions on ‘why menstruation happens’

97% had discussions on ‘How to manage – what to use’

Girls most comfortable with mothers, least with CHW
Impact

69% girls consider mobility related restrictions as “fair”.

- 60% girls missed school sometimes due to pain and the fear of staining
- 91% girls missed 1-2 days of school on an average
- 44% girls expressed embarrassment and humiliation over restrictions
- 86% had no toilet facility or use open spaces
## Bringing about change...

**Interpersonal Communication**
- Change in Knowledge, Attitude, Confidence at the individual level
- NGOs, CHWs, Peer Educators
- Monthly Adolescent Girls’ Group meeting (AGG)
- Interpersonal communication (IPC) sessions
- Life skills based activities by Peer Educators
- Monthly Mothers’ Group Meetings
- Small Group Meetings for Fathers

**Community dialogue and mass media**
- Change attitudes and challenge social norms
- Mass media - TV, Radio, NGOs, CHWs
- Community dialogue for creating common knowledge and challenging social norms
- Mass media
- Advocacy

**Training & capacity building**
- Build communication skills, knowledge
- Govt training centres, NGOs
- Training and Capacity building of community health workers, teachers and peer educators
Diffusion from Within...

- Entertainment Education (EE) film on process and physiology of menstruation
- Story-based illustrated flip book on menstrual management
- Start stop videos (*Ammaji Kehti Hain*) to trigger dialogue
- Life skills and activities

**RESULT**

Girls groups; Effective communication; Ability to negotiate for private spaces and Willingness to consider hygienic options for improved menstrual management
Introspection & Questioning Attitude Leads to Diffusion from Within

I will be silent no more! I have the right to ask questions related to my body.

I have the confidence to challenge norms and restrictions.

I can negotiate for private spaces to bathe and change absorbent.

I can communicate effectively and ask for hygienic options to manage menstruation.

Equipped with knowledge and life skills I can question myths and misconceptions.

I know why menstruation happens and how to maintain hygiene.
Mothers and Others: Changing Views Lead to Action on Ground

**Mothers Groups**

- I want my daughter to have a **private space** to manage her period.
- My daughter can **openly discuss** menstruation with me and her friends.
- I will **prepare** my daughter for menarche, don’t want her to be scared or unprepared.

**Fathers Groups**

- I will ensure my daughter gets a **nutritious diet**.
- I will get a **toilet** constructed so that my daughter can manage her period with dignity.
- I will ensure my daughter has **hygienic options** to manage her period.

My daughter can open discuss menstruation with me and her friends.
Enhancing Skills of Change Agents

Correct knowledge and information on menstrual management help us demystify myths and misconceptions.

Interpersonal communication skills help us effectively communicate, engage in meaningful dialogue with girls, mothers and community.

Counselling skills help address issues that may crop up as result of open discussions among girls on various issues.
It’s Working!

In the pilot district of Mirzapur:

- Girls reached so far: 38,000
- Mothers reached so far: 19,000
- 24% girls negotiated with parents and making temporary private spaces for bathing and changing menstrual absorbent

Source: 2014, Project MIS data; 7000+ girls from 29,000 adolescent girls group members
Menstrual management addressed in a **holistic manner** - changing knowledge, attitudes, availability of products and socio-cultural norms.

‘Normalisation’ and platforms for dialogue enhance level of comfort for girls, parents, frontline workers, school teachers and community leaders and enhances communication.
Theory of Change

Cognitive Factors
Emotional Factors
Social & Normative Factors

AGENCY
Confidence to Speak Up
Negotiate
Regular school
Mobility
Diet

Socio economic status, place of residence, education and other determinants