MONGOLIA

Reaching the unreached:

Exploring Mongolian schoolgirls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management experiences in extreme cold and isolated conditions, for the first time

4th Annual MHM in WinS Virtual Conference
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MONGOLIA – A land of nomads

A landlocked Country in Central Asia
- Population: 3,000,000 (2015)
- Territory: 1,566,500 км²
- Low population density 1.9 prs/km
- Children under 15 yr: 27.3%

- Upper middle income country
- 27% of pop without access to safe drinking water: with large disparity b/w regions 65% in Western region and 3.4% in the capital city
Mongolia MHM study context:

• 762 schools in 2014 with over 500,000 children (NSO)
• Most rural village schools have dormitories
  – 78% are children of semi-nomadic herding families
  – Up to 9 months in crowded unhygienic dormitories
• Extreme cold weather – most education budget is being spent on heating
• Water scarcity in some rural village schools with limited bathing facilities
• “Norms and requirements for WASH in schools, dormitories and kindergartens” was approved recently incl. requirements for adolescent girls
• Menstruation barely addressed in current school curricula
• No dedicated health subject from Sept 2015
• Every school has a resident nurse

No prior formative research or study on MHM in Mongolia as child right and education right issue within CFS
Local research partner Center for Social Work Excellence conducted first research in May 2015, following ethical clearance from National University of Mongolia
Research Methodology:

Research objectives: To explore and compare MHM experiences of schoolgirls from schools in different contexts (urban vs rural / dormitory schoolgirls vs day schoolgirls), across multiple regions.

Sampling of 11 schools:

- Capital city – Ulaanbaatar: 3 urban/suburban/peri-urban schools
- Provincial capital town level - 4 schools representing 4 regions
- Rural village level – 4 schools representing 4 regions of Mongolia

Research Participants:

- Dormitory girls & day school-girls
- Urban & rural school-girls
- Early / more experienced
- (12-14 years / 14+ years)
- Boys, teachers, mothers, school staff
Instruments used:
- In-Depth-Interviews (IDIs)
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Total 125 activities:
- 22 IDIs / 34 FGDs / 51 KIIs
- 18 school and dormitory observations

Engaged with 200 Girls through:
- 22 IDIs with girls aged 12-13 & 14+ yrs
- 22 FGDs girls aged 12-13 & 14+ yrs
- 12 girls’ stories

Engaged also:
- 47 Boys in 6 FGDs
- 16 Mothers in 3 FGDs
- 14 Teachers in 3 FGDs
- School administrators in KII
Preliminary research findings:

1. Large disparities in quality of WASH facilities for Urban vs Rural schools

   • Urban schools (indoor flushing toilets)
     – provincial capital town schools (mixture of indoor flushing toilets and outdoor latrines)
     » rural village schools (outdoor unimproved open pit latrines with no privacy for girls)
Preliminary research findings:

2. At all schools
   – Access to toilets was problematic due to short break time b/w classes and poor quality of wash
   – Most girls don’t bring napkins to the school because boys tease them if they find napkins in their bag.

3. Dormitory school girls vs day schoolgirls
   – Dormitory girls:
     • lack traditional support systems from mothers and sisters
     • don’t always have money to buy napkins
     • mostly don’t have access to shower regularly
     • face difficulties in using toilets in winter when it is dark and cold, and slippery
Preliminary research findings:

Voiced stories from girls and mothers:

“I live in the dormitory. Here we does not have any bath houses in the whole town. Then I use wet tissue (regular wet wipe tissue for cleaning hands) to clean myself during menstruation, and after it finishes I go to my relatives with my siblings to do bathing and washing our clothes”

“Dorm door is locked by a guard 7-8 pm in summer and 5-6 in winter season. After that going toilet is difficult.” (girls FGD) ‘in winter when it is dark earlier, how they (girls) change napkins inside the dark toilet...(Mothers FGD)
Challenges for rural girls:

- Rural girls are not able to clean themselves because the HWF is inside classroom
- Leakage is common because they cannot carry napkins to school
- Girls request leave more often particularly from PE
- They limit their participation in class by taking back seats

For all schools:

- Girls hide napkins from boys
- School don’t address this teasing and teachers don’t know how to handle this
- In urban school, boys teasing graduated into inappropriate touching
Preliminary conclusions:

1. Common barriers exist generally for all school-girls
   - Particularly in access to WASH facilities and privacy
   - Lack of supportive environment for girls at school
   - Boys teasing is common because they were never educated on this topic

2. Education sector gives low priority on WASH facilities
   - Lack of awareness on MHM among education sector and school staff particularly among male teachers

3. The most remote rural village school girls and especially the rural dormitory girls (girls staying in host families) face more challenges which are exacerbated by extreme cold and prolonged winter conditions

4. Mothers tend to think that this is the school responsibility while teachers think that it is mothers responsibility
Preliminary recommendations:

• **WASH Facilities and standards:**
  – Sector wide prioritisation of dormitories and rural village schools for improvements in WASH and MHM facilities
  – Standards to support MHM should be promoted

• **Knowledge/understanding:**
  – School health curriculum and/or modules should be developed for girls and boys starting from 6th grade
  – Boys and male teachers should be sensitised to girls’ situation
  – Parents and host families of dormitory girls should know about the girls’ specific needs

• **Support systems:**
  – School policy should allocate time for toilets usage during break
  – Boys teasing should be address as part of Child Friendly school
  – Schools should make dormitories a girls friendly
Next steps for MHM research:

- Wide dissemination of research findings and recommendations for education sector and schools
- Development and piloting of evidence informed guideline materials for girls and other appropriate audiences
- Continued support to MoE in MHM elements of the ongoing nationwide operationalisation of the “Norms and requirements for WASH in schools and dormitories”
- Further research to better understand the unique challenges of rural and dormitory girls during winter time (2/3 of day is dark)
Changing napkins in the dark and extreme cold

IMAGINE
Thank you for listening

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