



# Menstruation & 48 Teachers

## RWSSP-WN BRIEF 7-2018

### WHY THIS BRIEF?

**Menstrual hygiene management is about water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). It also matters for education:** There is a risk that girls and female teachers may not attend school when menstruating. This is particularly evident in schools with inadequate WASH facilities, or with temples or altars nearby or within the school grounds. This means negative impacts for girls' education, women's rights, sanitation in general and the environment.

Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Western Nepal Phase II (RWSSP-WN II) is committed to create an environment in which all community members have equitable opportunities to pursue their right to water and sanitation, **whether menstruating or not!**

The background and motive for this Brief is described in *the Menstruation, WASH and RWSSP-WN - Position Paper, RWSSP-WN Brief 2-2018*. This triggered us to explore the topic more in depth through different types of surveys as listed in the side bar. This Brief 7-2018 focuses on 48 teachers while the previous Brief 6-2018 focused on their 664 students, both girls and boys.



**Photo:** Re-usable pad making session joint event with teachers, students and Female Community Health Volunteers. This is a relaxed creative space where many menstruation related issues can be discussed at ease.

### RWSSP-WN II Vision:

The right to access to water, sanitation and hygiene for all **means all**, including menstruating women and girls.

- ◆ Menstruation, WASH & RWSSP-WN - Position Paper Brief 2-2018
- ◆ Community health volunteers (N-55) Brief 5-2018
- ◆ Students (N-664), Brief 6-2018
- ◆ **Teachers (N-48), Brief 7-2018**
- ◆ Adult women (N-755), Brief 8-2018
- ◆ Toilet use (N-933) Brief 9-2018

This Brief was prepared by Sanna-Leena Rautanen with Pamela White. Kalpana Dishwa was in charge of the field research, coordinating the Kathmandu Training Institute On-The-Job Trainees who collected the data 22.2.-21.4.2018. Aura Liski and Sangita Khadka contributed to the question setting.

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## WHO RESPONDED IN THIS SURVEY?

- ◆ Total 48 teachers
- ◆ 35 male teachers
- ◆ 13 female teachers

The age of teachers varied from 24 to 57, median age 37.5 and average 39.

From ethnic/caste group point of view:

- ◆ Abidasi Janajati : Eight
- ◆ Disadvantaged Tarai group : One
- ◆ Religious minorities (Muslim) : three
- ◆ Others (mainly Brahmin or Chhetri) : 36

In five locations, where also 664 students were interviewed (see Brief 6-2018):

- ◆ Bihadi Gaunpalika, Parbat district (N-10)
- ◆ Gaidahawa Gaunpalika, Rupandehi district (N-9)
- ◆ Kapilvastu NP (N-5)
- ◆ Kathekhola Gaunpalika, Baglung district (N-15)
- ◆ Phedikhola Gaunpalika, Syangja district (N-9)

All these locations are declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). Yet, one teacher did not know and three others claimed that it is not declared.

Questions were asked by trained enumerators, in Nepali. Responses were recorded using Kobo Toolbox (a mobile phone-based application), in Nepali.

## MENSTRUATION & TEACHERS: CAN WE TALK ABOUT IT?

Slightly more than half of the teachers (65%) stated that as a teacher they had conducted a class where menstruation was discussed. However, this is more than what the students replied: 58.6% of the girls and 39.9% of the boys said they had attended such a class. The proportions were fairly similar in between female (69%) and male teachers (65%).

More male teachers (23%) than female teachers (15%) agreed that it is important to discuss the topic of menstruation with boys and girls at school separately; and 100% agreed that it has to be also discussed with boys and girls together. Only 8.6% of the male teachers agreed that it is difficult for a male teacher to talk about this topic.

Ideally menstruation should be discussed both in mixed and single sex groups—but also with families, to ensure parents understand the issues and can support students. Teachers play an important modelling role.

## HOW TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE COMPARES WITH STUDENTS

All teachers agreed that menstruation is a physiological process that has to do with fertility and is controlled by hormones. None of the teachers considered that it is a curse from a god (12% of the students did). All also knew that women stop menstruating when they grow older. The replies to all other knowledge questions were not 100% correct, which is minor cause for concern: teachers should know!

- ◆ One male teacher considered menstruation as a disease (10% of the students think the same while 6% did not know)
- ◆ Two male and one female teacher did not agree that “*menstruation [normally] means a women is not pregnant*”. (14% of the students also think in this way, with 13% also stating that they do not know)
- ◆ Total 25% of the teachers thought that menstruation is contagious, with 17% stating that they do not know (similarly to the students, 26% agreed that it is contagious).
- ◆ Only 89% of the teachers agreed that menstrual blood comes from the uterus (womb) while 8.6% stated that they do not know; the students had exactly the same percentages for both questions.
- ◆ One third of the teachers thought that menstrual blood contains only blood (27%), while 42% thought that menstrual blood contains “*harmful substances*”.
- ◆ One third (35%) of the teachers did not know how many eggs are normally released in ovulation.

One would assume that as teachers, the correct answers would be close to 100%. The majority of the respondents do have right answers, but considering their important role, there is still room for improvement—including strengthened knowledge and also confidence (Thakre et al., 2011).



## BELIEFS: HOW TEACHERS COMPARE WITH THEIR STUDENTS?

Teachers have an important role to play in breaking and making taboos, and getting the facts right in such a manner that the taboos would not substitute for the facts. The following Charts show how the teachers' 'Yes' replies resonate with their students with regards to the statements that are not 'right' or 'wrong' from the scientific point of view but rather, are more about beliefs.

In the first question there is little difference in male and female responses, but teachers have an important potential role to convince their students. In the second question the difference between male teachers and female students is striking. Female students stand out for their opinion that women should face restrictions during the menstruation (a surprising 52%).

### CHART 1

Opinions by teachers (13 female & 35 male) and their students (338 female & 326 male)

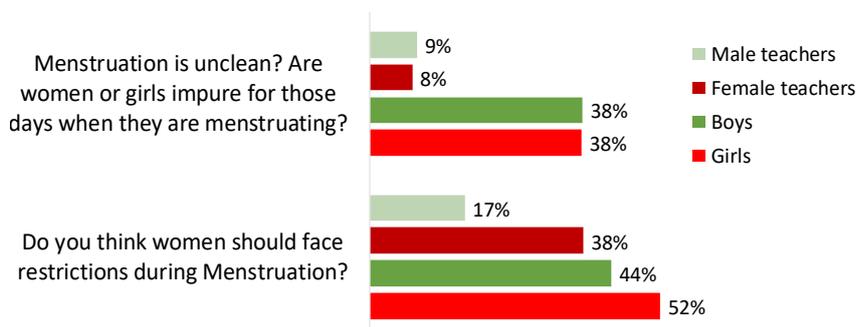
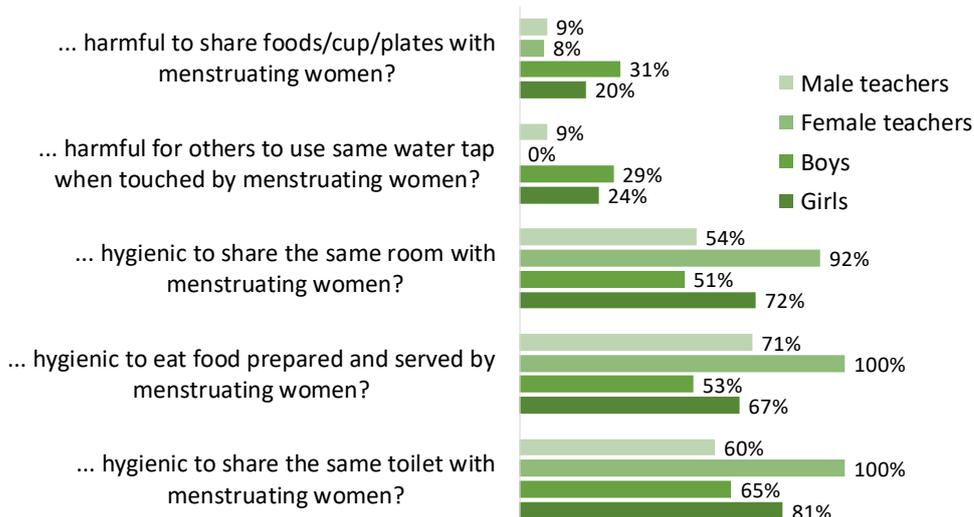


Chart 2 compares views on more specific beliefs. When considering the responses of female teachers and their female students, it is obvious that at least in the interview, the teachers express less negative beliefs about what is harmful and hygienic than their students.

However, it is clear that many of the male teachers hold quite negative beliefs. For instance, only 60% believe it is hygienic to share the same toilet, and only 54% believe it hygienic to share the same room with a menstruating woman. This runs the risk of menstruating teachers and students feeling they aren't welcome at school.

### CHART 2

'Yes' answers by 48 teachers and their 664 students to the questions starting "Is it ..."



## THE EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF MHM AT SCHOOLS?

The re-usable pads are a good point of entry for RWSSP-WN into MHM: we have witnessed a number of unused incinerators and the solid waste management problem caused by disposable sanitary pads. Having this kind of waste in an open environment adds to embarrassment and enhances negative feelings towards the entire natural state of being.

Disposable sanitary pads are also expensive (meaning users are even less likely to change them regularly). Meanwhile, using traditional, bulky cloths is uncomfortable, and potentially smelly and unhygienic if not changed frequently.

Of the 8 teachers who answered the question on types of sanitary materials used, all used reusable cloths, while 7 had tried sanitary pads also.

Only five out of 13 female teachers and two out of 35 male teachers had attended any training on reusable pad making—this is clearly something new.

While re-usable pad making may not sound like something that all should learn to do, it is a good example of how to make the MHM classes interesting and engaging.

While making the pads, there is a relaxed opportunity to discuss about menstruation openly, as if you would discuss any topic while doing something together.

See the Side Bar on the next page on more ideas triggered by this thought.

## PEDAGOGY & MHM ?

How to approach menstruation at school classes creatively? The usual approach would be to lecture about it through chalk-and-talk or similar traditional approach. See *previous page Side bar for reusable pad making*. What else could be done? The following ideas were triggered by Briefs 6-2018 and 7-2018:

- ♦ Mathematics—basic or advanced statistics: conduct a survey similar to these Briefs 6 & 7, organise the data in columns, prepare charts and present the results, raising discussion why the results are what they are, and what kind of errors are possible.
- ♦ Social sciences: Quiz competition with menstruation-related topics.
- ♦ Biology or any other subject where the questions are about facts, not beliefs: *Snakes-and-Ladders* game where correct answer leads to the 'Ladders' and wrong answer to the 'Snakes'.
- ♦ Health: see a menstruation relevant movie together, such as 'PadMan'. Ask students to take notes on what kind of health issues were presented in the movie. Students present their notes after the movie. Who identified most number of topics? Which topic was identified by all? What was missed, identified maybe by one or two only?
- ♦ Nepali & English language: take a menstruation related statement, such as those presented in these Briefs, and ask students to interview somebody on why people think in this way, and then write about it.



**Photo:** The more we talk about menstruation in public, the easier it becomes, and with this, the easier it is to change harmful practices. Teachers have an important role to play in this.

## HOW ABOUT THE BELIEFS, SHAME, AND RESTRICTIONS?

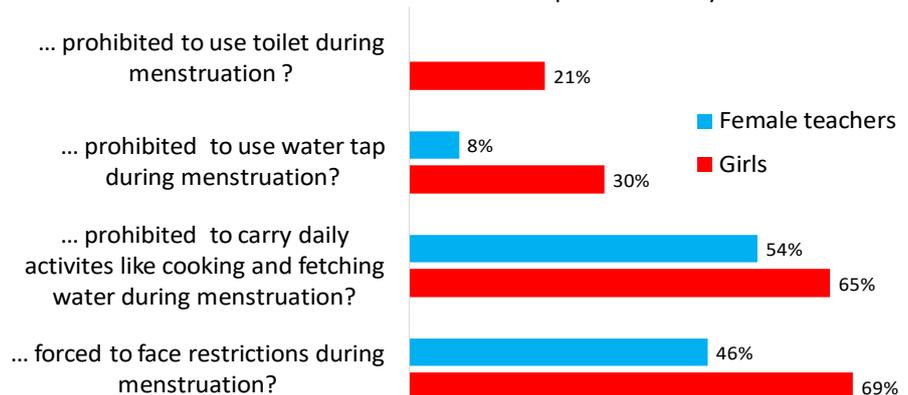
Only one female and one male teacher responded that menstruation is a shameful thing. Yet, even if it would not be a shame, it can be embarrassing: four male teachers (and none of the female) agreed that men get embarrassed when they see a sanitary pad advertisement when they are together with women. More were thinking that women get embarrassed when they see a sanitary pad advertisement when they are together with men (five female and 11 teachers agreed with this). Similarly five female teachers and 15 male teachers were thinking that it is uncomfortable to talk about menstruation.

Research shows that both female and male teachers are not prepared to discuss the topic of puberty and menstruation with their students. Even if the curriculum includes menstruation and related topics, teachers reportedly skipped over or minimised such material, either being uncomfortable covering such topics due to local sensitivities and taboos, or insufficiently trained to cover them. (UNESCO, 2014). The following Chart 3 shows how the teachers' 'Yes' replies resonate with their students with regards to the statements that are not 'right' or 'wrong' from the scientific point of view but rather, are more about beliefs.

From this chart we can conclude that female teachers are facing themselves the same barriers as their students due to menstruation. Simple issues such as the prohibition to touch the tap could prevent them from coming to school during menstruation. Fewer male teachers than female teachers considered that women should face restrictions (17% compared with 39%).

### CHART 3

'Yes' replies by 338 female students & 13 female teachers to the question "Are you ..."





**Photo:** These students are the winners in an essay competition where the topic was Total Sanitation. Certificates were distributed during the Total Sanitation Declaration event at Thaprek VDC, Tanahun district. Could we encourage more essay competitions like this, engaging male students to also think, reflect & write... and acknowledge their achievements in public? This would 'force' also their male teachers to do more research on the topic of menstruation and encourage open discussion of menstruation.

## WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE FROM HERE?

There is still need to raise public debate at schools on what is truly harmful and what is not, and based on what certain beliefs are there.

Based on these findings, we can conclude that: there are still very basic gaps in the knowledge, in both students and teachers. Although menstruation is included in the school curricula, we should not assume that it is covered in practice.

- ◆ There are still beliefs and taboos even within the younger generation related to what is harmful and hygienic, and what is not from the biological and scientific point of view.
- ◆ There is still work to be done with the school environment: no female teacher should miss a day in their workplace simply because of menstruation. There needs to be more development done with the reusable pads, their design, comfort & reliability, and also the fact that there needs to be enough of them to keep changing during the school day.
- ◆ Locality but also ethnic group –wise results are very diverse. There cannot be one-fit-for-all-schools solution given the diversity of situation but rather, each school class itself should be encouraged to explore its own reality: “why we think as we do, why we consider something harmful when it is not, where do these understandings originate and what we (as students or teachers ourselves) can do about it? “

Teachers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes need to be strengthened. This could be linked to, for instance, exploring creative pedagogic ways to make students to learn (see the sidebar).

## THE WAY FORWARD?

The following action points stem from the teachers' survey:

- ◆ RWSSP-WN needs to target both male and female teachers. We should not take an approach where menstruation is only a female matter and not a topic for males. Their attitudes and understanding count. And practically there may not always be a female teacher available.
- ◆ As a WASH sector stakeholder, we need to actively share our findings with the education sector nationally and locally. The regular teacher training events should include menstruation related matters in the curricula, and not assume that all teachers are automatically fully aware on facts related to reproductive health and menstruation.
- ◆ The current results—and potential future self-surveys—could be put through participatory analysis in schools. This would serve as a mathematics class, as well as biology & social studies class, giving an opportunity to further break taboos by talking about menstruation as we would talk about any other natural phenomena.
- ◆ We will facilitate the delivery of MHM workshops with teachers, imparting information on menstruation and reusable pad making. Teachers can then replicate with classes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Name of enumerator	Total
Jansari Sharki	9
Deva Laxmi Thami	8
Manasa Raj Giri	7
Bishnu Maya Shiwakoti	5
Monika Ghimire	5
Nirmala Dhama	5
Binista Kumari Dhama	4
Reena Giri	2
Sandhya Pandit	2
Kalpana Khanal	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>48</b>



**Photo:** Well resourced school library at a remote school in Bima, Myagdi district. A good source of information for both the students and teachers. Can we procure menstruation & MHM related books to be distributed across all schools and their reference libraries like this one?

## REFERENCES

Thakre et al. (2011) Menstrual Hygiene: Knowledge and Practice among Adolescent School Girls of Saoner, Nagpur District, *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, Vol 5(5), pp. 1027-1033

UNESCO (2013) Puberty Education and Menstrual Hygiene Management, *Good Policy and Practice in Health Education, Booklet 9*.

## DEFINITIONS

### **MHM: Menstruation Hygiene Management**

focuses on practical strategies for coping with monthly periods. MHM refers to ways women keep clean and healthy during menstruation and how they acquire, use and dispose of blood-absorbing materials.

## RESULTS INDICATORS FOR RWSSP-WN II

This Brief relates to the RWSSP-WN II Overall objective: Improved health and fulfilment of the equal right to water and sanitation for the inhabitants of the Project area.

Particularly to the following result areas:

Result 1: Access to sanitation and hygiene for **all** achieved and sustained in the project working municipalities.

Result 2: Access to safe, functional and inclusive water supply services for **all** achieved and sustained in the project working Municipalities.

## RWSSP-WN II & WASH AT SCHOOLS

RWSSP-WN II supports WASH in schools, institutions and public locations. RWSSP-WN Phase II has provided improved water supply to 158 schools, 17 health facilities, 13 institutions and 26 public locations, and the construction of 22 school, 55 institutional and 120 public toilets.

All the school toilets supported by RWSSP-WN II are pour flush latrines that have separate blocks for women/girls and include a hand washing facility in their design. RWSSP-WN Phase II promotes hand washing with soap as part of the Open Defecation Free and Total Sanitation campaigns at both household and institutional levels.

Source: RWSSP-WN Brief 4-2018



**FCG**

Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Western Nepal Phase II is a bilateral development cooperation project funded by the governments of Nepal and Finland, and implemented through local governments and users' groups under the Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agricultural Roads (DoLIDAR), Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. RWSSP-WN II works in 14 districts in two Provinces of Western and Mid-Western development regions in Nepal, through municipality-based programmes.

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