Research Brief
Status of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management among Adolescent Girls of Nepal

Background
World Vision International (WVI) Nepal and the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) conducted a national survey to assess knowledge, attitude, and practice on menstrual health and hygiene management and psychosocial scores due to menstruation. The survey reached adolescent girls (10-19 years) in all seven provinces in Nepal. The study also explored the experiences of adolescent girls with disability during menstruation. Field work and data collection was conducted in October-December 2019.

Methods
The study adopted a mixed method design, two staged cluster sampling that included a population-based national representative survey of 3,495 adolescent girls aged 10-19 years who had experienced menarche. Total sample size was calculated using an estimation of 30% adolescents (P) with allowable error of 5% (L) and Z value of 1.96. Adopted version of MR-SSS (Menstrual Related-School Participation, Stress and Self-efficacy) tool was used to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice and psychosocial well-being of adolescent girls. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Nepal Health Research Council.

Key Findings

**Knowledge and Perception**

- **71.7%** adolescent girls knew about menstruation before menarche and perceived it to be a normal healthy process. Knowledge was least in Sudurpashchim province (47.4%).
- **50%** adolescent girls were unaware of the physiology of menstruation that sets stage for pregnancy.
- Mothers, elder sisters and friends were the major source of information with regard to both knowledge and guidance before and after menarche, while books and media (radio and television) provided least information.

**Practice**

- **8.7%** of total participants in three provinces practiced chaupadi: Lumbini (0.9%), Karnali (20.5%) and Sudurpashchim (47.7%).
- Major reasons to continue practice were family obligations (70.8%) and fearing divine retribution (13.7%).
- Restrictions include religious activities (79.1%), household chores (51.9%), social activities (46.1%) and personal activities (36.95%).
- Mothers impose these restrictions followed by grandparents and fathers.

**Menstrual Hygiene Management Practices**

- **51.2%** of all girls use disposable sanitary materials while 37.7% use reusable sanitary materials.
- At home, 92.9% was able to change sanitary materials as often as necessary.
- **26.7%** girls missed school in the last 12 months due to dysmenorrhea.
- **65%** were happy with the current use of sanitary material.
- In school only 55.2% were able to change sanitary materials and three major reasons for not being able to change were: unavailability of disposal mechanism (29.1%), embarrassed (25.9%), not enough material (23.9%).
Status of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management among Adolescent Girls of Nepal

Recommendations

- Government at all levels, should continue to make menstrual health and hygiene management a priority and allocate resources as part of reproductive health
- School as focal point for adolescent girls, should have comprehensive plan to address menstrual health and hygiene management
- Community should be responsive toward menstrual health and hygiene and management and adolescent health
- Family should create conducive environment for adolescent girls to thrive during menstruation
- Unmet needs of adolescent girls with disability should be addressed at all level

Experience of Adolescent Girls with Disability

Experience of adolescent girls with disability varied with the nature of their impairment. Major challenges were not having access to disposable sanitary materials, difficulties in disposal mechanisms, reliance on immediate female family members for changing sanitary material, reliance on female family member to oblige Chaupadi and absence of disabled-friendly WASH facilities outside home resulting in them staying home during menstruation.

Conclusion

Menstrual health and hygiene management is an important issue for adolescent girls. Findings reveal some areas of knowledge, perception and practice are quite encouraging, at the same time, much needs to be done to address the shortcomings. Adolescent girls continue to face challenges in form of cultural and religious restrictions. The psychosocial scales on secrecy and shame, annoyance, menstrual stress and self-efficacy requires attention and is an area for further research. The menstrual need of girls with disability are largely unmet. Targeted programmes in on menstrual hygiene management are relatively scattered and few.

Experience of Adolescent Girls with Disability

"When I first started menstruating, it was a very difficult situation for me. I was scared, nervous and unaware about how to manage it.

-An adolescent girl with disability, Tanahun Gandaki Province

We have to dwell at Chaupadi hut for four days. Because I am visually impaired, my sister accompanies me in the hut during night. But it is difficult during summer as the space is too small. There are lots of mosquitoes, hence we light fire for emitting smoke to chase mosquitoes and sleep. It gets very hot inside.

-An adolescent girl, Sankhuwasabha, Province 1

For more information, please contact Meghnath Dhimal: meghdhimal@nhrc.gov.np or Abhilasha Gurung: abhilasha_gurung@wvi.org