

Menstrual hygiene day

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Menstrual hygiene day (**MHD** or **MH Day**) is an annual awareness day, on 28 May, that aims to break taboos and raise awareness about the importance of good menstrual hygiene management (MHM) for women and adolescent girls worldwide. It was initiated by the German-based NGO WASH United in 2014. The initiative for Menstrual Hygiene Day has received the support of over 270 global partners who are committed to making good menstrual health and hygiene a priority worldwide. The day complements other important days of the year in relationship to sanitation and hygiene, such as 15 October for Global Handwashing Day or 19 November for World Toilet Day. May 28 was chosen for its symbolism since May is the 5th month of the year and most women average 5 days every month and their cycle is approximately 28 days.^[1]

Menstrual Hygiene Day



Also called MHD or MH Day

Observed by people worldwide

Type International

Significance To break taboos surrounding menstruation, raise awareness of the importance of good menstrual hygiene management worldwide.

Date May 28

Frequency annual

First time May 28, 2014

Related to Global Handwashing Day

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Terminology

An appropriate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is defined as:

- "Women and adolescent girls use a clean material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, and this material can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of menstruation.
- MHM also includes using soap and water for washing the body as required; and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials."^[2]

Background

Inadequate menstrual hygiene management is connected with several problems that females face, in particular in developing countries. The current silence about menstruation limits women's and adolescent girls' access to relevant and important information about their bodies, directly affecting their health, education, dignity and human rights.^{[3][4]} In a 2014 study conducted in India, the researchers found that as many as 42% of women who participated in the study did not know about sanitary pads or from where in their anatomy menstruation originated from and "most of them were scared or worried on first menstruation."^[5] Worldwide, one in three women does not have access to a working toilet at all.^[6] Menstrual hygiene management issues have been ignored by professionals in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, and in the health and education sectors, too.^{[7][8]}



Celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day in Bangladesh



Celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day in Amra Padatik, India

Health and psycho-social aspects

Poor MHM may affect the reproductive tract but the specific infections, the strength of effect, and the route of transmission, remain unclear.^[8] In India, a majority of girls are at risk for reproductive tract infections (RTI) because of poor MHM and RTI can lead to various disabilities if not treated early on.^[9]

Due to prejudices surrounding menstruation, some women in India do not eat during their menstruation or take showers.^[10]

Girls' self-image may be negatively impacted by adverse attitudes towards menstruation.^{[11][12]}

Sanitation facilities at schools

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, girls can miss up to 5 days of school a month or drop out entirely due to insufficient access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and menstrual hygiene products.^{[13][14]} Improving access to WASH facilities can actually increase girls' attendance at school. A program for school sanitation in Bangladesh increased girls' enrollment at school by 11%.^[15]

Menstrual waste is largely ignored in schools in developing countries, despite it being a significant problem. Girls' access to water and sanitation at school is only available at 47% and 46% of all schools globally.^[3] Often, school toilets for girls (if they even exist) are missing bins for menstrual waste collection with the result that pads may be spread all around the school compound area.^[16] This pollutes the environment and also causes embarrassment for the school girls.

In the United States, girls who are unable to afford feminine hygiene products may miss school in order "to avoid the embarrassment of staining their clothes."^[17]

Access to materials

In low-income countries, girls' choices of menstrual hygiene materials are often limited by the costs, availability and social norms.^[18]

Girls and women in the workplace often miss work because they don't have access to sanitary materials and places of employment in some countries don't provide resources for women or even have "proper toilets."^[12] Women in Bangladesh who work in factories have reported that due to the cost of sanitary products for menstruation which they could not afford, they have resorted to using "factory-floor rags in place of pads and tampons, leading to dangerous infections and missed work."^[19]

Even many low-income and/or homeless girls and women in the inner cities of the United States cannot afford sanitary supplies.^{[17][20]} Food Banks in New York report that feminine hygiene products are in high demand.^[17] Homeless women in the United States face the challenge of not being able to shower or use the communal toilet in homeless shelters as often as they need to in cases where there are restrictions on toilet usage.^[20] In New York, proposals to help lower income



School toilets for girls in Tanzania, if they exist, often have no facilities to dispose of pads.



Reading in the book "Growth and change" about menstruation and puberty (Tanzania)

women access menstrual sanitary supplies includes proposals to remove the sales tax on feminine hygiene products and "distributing free tampons in public schools."^[17] Homeless women in other industrialized countries, such as the United Kingdom, face problems affording tampons and sanitary napkins.^[21]

Taboos

Despite the fact that menstruation is a healthy biological process, it is approached with hesitance and misinformation because of deeply-rooted cultural taboos surrounding menstruation (menstrual taboos).

For example, in many traditional Hindu homes in India, girls and women face restrictive taboos relative to menstruation, such as being denied entry to the temple and the kitchen.^[5] In areas around the Jhabua district, the belief is that "menstruation is a disease and not a normal biological process", and therefore women who are menstruating are not allowed to sleep on beds, enter kitchens, touch male members of their family or eat spicy foods.^[10]

Objectives

Raising awareness

Menstrual hygiene day is meant to serve as a platform to bring together individuals, organisations, social businesses and the media to create a united and strong voice for women and girls around the world, helping to break the silence about menstrual hygiene management.^{[13][22]}

The objectives of MHD include:^{[6][23]}

- To address the challenges and hardships many women and girls face during their menstruation.
- To highlight the positive and innovative solutions being taken to address these challenges.
- To catalyse a growing, global movement that recognizes and supports girl's and women's rights and build partnerships among those partners on national and local level.
- To engage in policy dialogue and actively advocate for the integration of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) into global, national and local policies, programmes and projects.
- It creates an occasion for media work, including social media.

Menstrual Hygiene Day makes audible and visible a growing transnational movement that promotes body literacy and autonomy, as well as gender equality.^[6]



Celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day in Uganda

Partners

The list of currently 270 partners includes international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Plan International, SNV, Plan, Water for People, Women in Europe for a Common Future; it also includes many national and regional NGOs as well as suppliers of menstrual hygiene products, washable menstrual pads and menstrual cups.^[24]

Government accountability

For partners working in developing countries, the day is not only an opportunity to raise awareness, but also to strengthen government accountability in MHM-related matters. In Kenya, the Ministry of Health is developing a national MHM strategy that is set to launch on Menstrual Hygiene Day 2015, i.e. 28 May 2015. This is an important step WASH sector actors working with the Ministry are excited about: “The development of this strategy is extremely important because it shows that the government is committed to making sure that MHM materials are accessible and affordable. This is great because this is an issue that MH Day advocacy partners in Kenya have been working really hard to push.”

Activities

2015

On and around 28 May 2015, organisations and individuals from all over the world came together to recognise the second Menstrual Hygiene Day under the theme "Let's end the hesitation around menstruation". In total, 127 events in 33 countries took place, using the day as an opportunity to engage men and boys as well, link to other important women's and girls' issues, advance policy advocacy, reach the marginalised, and challenge societal norms that claim that menstrual periods are shameful or dirty.^[25]

History

In 2012, several important groups involved in public health began to break the silence on MHM and turn their attention to the issue globally, including grassroots organizers, social entrepreneurs and United Nations agencies.^[3]

In May 2013, WASH United used a 28-day social media campaign, for example on Twitter, called "May #MENSTRAVAGANZA" to generate awareness about menstruation and MHM as important considerations within water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) development initiatives.

^{[1][23]} Those involved with the social media campaign, including WASH Advocates, Girls' Globe and Ruby Cup, were encouraged by the positive feedback for the "May #MENSTRAVAGANZA" and they decided to create a global awareness day for menstruation.^[23]

On 28 May 2014, many people around the world celebrated Menstrual Hygiene Day for the first time with rallies, exhibitions, movie screenings, workshops and speeches.^[26] There were 145 partners involved with the first MHD.^{[23][25]}

For 2015, a hashtag campaign on social media lent a light-hearted look at challenging societal norms with the tag #IfMenHadPeriods.^[27] The campaign by WaterAid, released in time for Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Day, created videos "spoof ads" where men are proud of having their periods and used "Manpons" instead of tampons.^{[27][28]} The campaign helped "raise awareness about women who don't have access to 'safe water, hygiene and sanitation,' when their monthly visitor comes along."^[28] Another aspect of the campaign is that it helped bring men into the conversation so that they could "help tackle the stigma in largely patriarchal societies and encourage women and girls to embrace their cycle with pride instead of shame."^[19] In Uganda, 2015 celebrations kicked off with a march to Parliament where a charter on MHM was signed and then the march continued to the National theatre for presentations by primary and secondary schools.^[14]

See also

- List of commemorative days
- International observance

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External links

- Official page of Menstrual Hygiene Day (<http://menstrualhygieneday.org>)
- Documents about menstrual hygiene management (<http://www.susana.org/en/resources/library?search=MHM>) in library of Sustainable Sanitation Alliance

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