

ASHA- A hope towards Menstrual Health

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ABSTRACT:

In spite of numerous of government programmes targeted at improving menstruation hygiene among women and adolescent girls, studies show that sanitary napkins are still used occasionally across vast areas of India. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched a programme in rural areas to promote menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls aged 10 to 19. The ASHA-Accredited Social Health Activist is responsible for distribution of pads to adolescent girls of rural areas. In present study researcher wanted to know whether various schemes launched by Indian government are implemented successfully and improving the, menstrual health of adolescent girls. And wanted to investigate whether they are aware of such schemes or not? For the study researcher visited to slum and nearby rural areas and interacted about the menstrual health and hygiene and whether they know about such schemes. It was found that women and girls are not aware about such schemes and they are not getting benefitted by government initiative. It shows that there is a need of awareness campaign on a large scale.

I. INTRODUCTION

Only 58 percent of menstruating women in India have been exposed to safe and sanitary menstrual protection methods. The remaining face severe health risks as a result of using home-grown alternatives such as hay, dried leaves, and old rags. This disparity in menstrual product selection varies according to factors such as location, lifestyle, income level, and so on. This disparity in menstrual product preferences is directly related to the risk of infection. Poor menstrual hygiene, for example, has resulted in an alarming 70% increase in cases of reproductive tract infections.

In India, the state of female sanitation among economically disadvantaged women is a major concern. According to an AC Nielsen study commissioned by the Indian government, only 12% of women in India use sanitary pads. Even more concerning is the fact that poor menstrual hygiene causes approximately 70% of all reproductive diseases in India; it can also affect maternal mortality.

The machinery for making sanitary pads was extremely expensive, and only large corporations could afford to invest in it. The majority of sanitary napkins are produced by large corporations such as HUL and PNG. These companies' sanitary pads are frequently expensive and out of reach for the majority of women.

Furthermore, the topic of menstruation is shrouded in myths and taboos. Throughout the subcontinent, superstitious beliefs about menstruation persist.

Women resort to highly unsanitary practices in such a complex situation. In most cases, they end up using old rags. During menstruation, women have been observed using sand, sawdust, leaves, and even ash in extreme cases.

In India, only 3% of people use sanitary napkins, and this is only in cities; in villages, people still wear clothes...

Objective

1. To study challenges faced by the government to implement the MHM scheme
2. To provide suitable suggestions for spreading the awareness towards menstrual health facilities provided by government

Background

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched a programme in rural areas to promote menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls aged 10 to 19. The scheme's main goals are as follows:

- To raise awareness about menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls
- To increase adolescent girls' access to and use of high-quality sanitary napkins in rural areas; and
- To ensure the safe disposal of sanitary napkins in an environmentally friendly manner.

The scheme was first implemented in 2011 in 107 selected districts across 17 states, with rural adolescent girls receiving a pack of six sanitary napkins called "Freedays" for Rs. 6. Since 2014, funds have been made available to States/UTs under the National Health Mission for the decentralised procurement of sanitary napkins

packs for distribution to rural adolescent girls at a subsidised rate of Rs 6 for a pack of 6 napkins.

ASHA

One of the key components of the National Rural Health Mission is to provide a trained female community health activist ASHA or Accredited Social Health Activist to every village in the country. The ASHA, who will be chosen from the village and held accountable to it, will be trained to act as a liaison between the community and the public health system.

Asha's approach is primarily based on training and empowerment. We want people living in slums to be able to take charge of their own health and living conditions. Significant aspects of slum dwellers' lives, such as their backgrounds, lack of education, and the environment, make it difficult for them to do so on their own. Asha provides training, encouragement and practical help that enables people to gain the skills and confidence needed to improve their situation.

ASHA, as the first point of contact, is charged with providing adequate knowledge about menstrual hygiene. ASHA is also a member of the Village Health and Sanitation Committee (VHSC) and collaborates with panchayats. As a result, government schools can provide separate toilets for boys and girls.

ASHA is required to provide subsidised sanitary napkins. They are entrusted with the responsibility of disseminating Menstrual Health information to women through Self-Help Groups. A variety of materials have been developed in the context of MHS, but the scope of intervention is limited.

Current Situation of menstrual hygiene scheme in India

While our policymakers have begun to focus on menstruation and related issues in the last decade, the progress has been disappointing. The National Health Mission (NHM) launched a menstrual hygiene scheme in 2011 to promote menstrual hygiene among girls aged 10 to 19. Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) was established in 2014 to educate adolescent girls about menstruation and to increase their access to sanitary pads. State governments have also begun to implement their own programmes.

State governments in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala provide free sanitary napkins in schools. Adolescent girls in Bihar are given Rs 300 to buy sanitary pads through the Kishori Swasthya Yojana. Indeed, the Bihar government provides two days of menstrual leave

to its female employees each month — women can take their days off on any day of the month with no justification. The Andhra Pradesh state government launched a scheme toward the end of last year under which monthly awareness classes will be held for students in classes VII through XII.

Despite these efforts, the improvement was marginal, and the disparities were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As global business supply chains were disrupted, so was access to pads. We also have concerns about the management of menstrual hygiene for frontline workers and hospitalized/quarantined women. Our healthcare infrastructure is incapable of meeting these demands.

Current Market Scenario

Premium disposable pads currently have the largest market share in our country. In 2015, sales totalled Rs 19 billion. Disposable pads appear to be a symbol of empowerment for many girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds; they guarantee freedom of movement and a carefree life. Indeed, rural areas accounted for 32% of total sales in 2014. Homemade reusable pads, on the other hand, are not far behind. Because of personal preference/familiarity/lack of access to commercial disposable pads, 88% of women use them. Furthermore, low-cost, high-quality disposable pads designed specifically for low-income households are now entering our market. Small-scale innovators, as well as imports from China, Ukraine, and Malaysia, have increased availability.

Monetary Implications and Suggestions

- Scotland made all menstrual products free last year. Legislators were concerned that the annual costs would be too high for the government to bear. Given our population and distribution, it goes without saying that this is a far greater concern in India. People had similar questions after Prime Minister Modi's address last year; one official said, "The monthly usage of sanitary napkins in India stands at 500 crore units." The project's annual cost would be around Rs 12,000 crore based on the actual cost of production of each pad." Of course, these are all large sums that the Indian government cannot bear. However, involving the market is a sound strategy.
- Encouraging corporate entities to take on responsibilities for selected rural zones and fulfil their corporate social responsibility, partnerships with private manufacturers, collaborations with NGOs, and the merger of central and state schemes are just a few of the approaches the government considered last year — and they can be very effective. They

can also guarantee that the aforementioned strategies will be properly implemented.

Government initiative

The Modi government intends to launch a Rs 12,000 crore scheme to ensure sanitary napkin access throughout India, based on its popular Re 1/pad Suidhabrand. Suidha initiative is one of his government's highlights in terms of women's healthcare and empowerment. The Suidha brand, which was introduced in 2018 at a price of Rs 2.5 but has since been reduced to Re 1 per piece, is sold at the Janaushadhi stores set up by the government under the PM-BJP to increase access to affordable generic medicines. The pads are oxo-biodegradable, meaning they degrade into "tiny pieces in the presence of oxygen and may then slowly biodegrade." Each pad's initial production cost is estimated to be Rs 2.50. "In India, 500 crore units of sanitary napkins are used monthly." The project's annual cost would be around Rs 12,000 crore based on the actual cost of production of each pad."

Corporates may be involved

According to the officer, over the last two weeks, Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State for Chemical and Fertilizers, and P.D. Vaghela, Secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), have held a slew of meetings that included "initial rounds" of discussions on the scheme.

According to the officer, preliminary discussions included the suggestion that high net worth individuals (HNIs) and corporations adopt villages and assist with the distribution of sanitary napkins to underprivileged women across India.

"The scheme, which is still being discussed, will most likely involve corporations that can adopt villages or districts as part of their corporate social responsibility" (CSR). "We intend to make the scheme available for adoption to anyone, including HNIs and corporations," the official continued. "With the goal of achieving universal access to sanitary napkins, the government will assist them in supplying these pads."

Another proposal under consideration is to combine other state and central menstrual hygiene schemes, such as the 2011 Menstrual Hygiene Scheme, which aims to raise awareness, under the "Suidha umbrella." "It's a proven product with very high demand, whereas other schemes have yet to make a mark,"

Challenges ahead

Before the scheme can be implemented, several issues must be addressed. "The government must determine the best napkin distribution mechanism for India." "We must consider rural and

remote areas where distribution channels are limited," Women in rural areas may need someone to encourage them to use these pads, as well as instructions on how to use and dispose of them. "We also need to find an effective disposal mechanism to ensure that no harm is done to the environment."

Suggestion:

The truth is that companies that sell sanitary pads make a lot of money. If sanitary napkins are not taxed, multinational corporations will earn more money, which will not translate into lower prices for consumers. However, the government should begin selling its own brand of sanitary napkins through the health department at very low prices. The revenue generated by taxes on branded sanitary napkins should be used to provide low-cost subsidised pads. Simply not taxing the branded variety will not result in lower prices for the general public.

Tax and health policy should be intertwined; if one branch of government promotes the use of sanitary pads by providing them free to students, another branch cannot adopt a regressive tax policy. Otherwise, the circumstances would be the same.

Suggestion to the government for the availability of sanitary pads in rural area

1. The government can distribute pads with ration cards through the ASHA project. This will raise awareness of the scheme and ensure that it reaches as many people as possible.
2. NGO can help and promote the ASHA project.
3. As a CSR activity, corporations can promote and educate the public about the ASHA project.

II. CONCLUSION

According to health ministry data, only 12% of India's 355 million women use sanitary napkins. Over 88 percent of women use unsanitary cloth, ashes, and husk sand as alternatives. In these women, cases of reproductive tract infection (RTI) are 70% more common. The most significant barrier to using a sanitary napkin is cost. Around 70% of women in India say their families cannot afford them, while 88 percent use old fabric, rags, or sand to manage their flow. Colleges and schools can host a variety of awareness programmes.

"If the product is manufactured by micro enterprises, there will be a significant increase in product availability, which will increase the consumer base and thus the market size in India." As a result, this should be considered a normal commodity, and we can assume that there is a high correlation between price and quantity demanded.



"In the above case of production, there is scope for significant price reductions, which will undoubtedly increase the quantity demanded of the product, providing high positive externalities on women's menstrual health."