



Menstruation & 664 Students

RWSSP-WN BRIEF 6-2018

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 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 6-2018 focuses on 664 students, both girls and boys. The following RWSSP-WN Brief 7-2018 takes a closer look at the teachers (who should know).



Photo: Re-usable pad making at school adds a creative aspect into MHM class. This programme in Syangja district was participated by the students and their teachers together with then Female Community Health Volunteers.

RWSSP-WN II Vision:

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

- ◆ Menstruation, WASH and 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 664 students
- ◆ 338 female students
- ◆ 326 male students

94% of the students were in between 13 and 17 years old.

From ethnic/caste group point of view:

- ◆ 22% Abidasi Janajati
- ◆ 22% Dalit
- ◆ 22% Disadvantaged Tarai groups
- ◆ 7% Religious minorities (Muslim)
- ◆ 26% others (mainly Brahmin or Chhetri)

In five locations:

- ◆ Bihadi Gaunpalika (Parbat district)
- ◆ Gaidahawa Gaunpalika (Rupandehi district)
- ◆ Kathekhola Gaunpalika (Baglung district)
- ◆ Phedikhola Gaunpalika (Syangja district)
- ◆ Kapilvastu Nagarpalika (Kapilvastu district)

All these locations are declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). Yet, only 83% of the girls and 84.4% of the boys knew that yes, it is ODF, while 4.7% of the girls and 2.5% of the boys stated that they do not know.

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

MENSTRUATION AT THE SCHOOLS: CAN WE TALK ABOUT IT?

Half of the respondents had attended a class or meeting where menstruation was discussed, but the gender difference is obvious: 59% of the girls and 40% of the boys had attended such class. The differences in between the municipalities are striking: out of both boys and girls, 36% in Bihadi, 79% in Gaidahawa, 45% in Kapilvastu NP, 84% in Kathekhola and 1.9% in Phedikhola had attended such classes.

Where did the students hear about menstruation for the first time? Out of all girls, 92% had heard about it from their mothers, usually in combination with sisters and friends, while only 29% of the boys had heard about it from their mothers and 46% from their friends. School and teachers were more important source of information to the boys (53%) compared to girls (31% mentioned teachers/school, usually in combination with other sources).

84% of the girls and 79% of the boys consider it important to discuss the topic of menstruation with boys and girls at school together, and more boys (87%) rather than girls (80%) considered it important to talk about menstruation with men. However, in another part of the survey 82% of the girls and 76% of the boys considered that yes, women should avoid talking about menstruation when the men are present.

DO NOT KNOW?

All statements had three options: 'yes', 'no' and 'do not know'. The following stand out in the 'do not know category':

- ◆ *"Why women menstruate?"* Out of 321 boys who answered this question, 25.5% agreed that they do not know. 92% of these were above 14 years old. Even 19 and 20 year old respondents did not know. Five suggested it is a curse.
- ◆ *"Is menstruation contagious?"* 24% of the girls and 26% of the boys agree, while 12% of the girls and 22% of the boys do not know.
- ◆ *"Menstruation means a woman is not pregnant"* 13% of the boys and 4% of the girls do not know, and 18% of the girls and 14% of the boys replied 'no'
- ◆ *"Menstrual blood contains harmful substances"* 14% of the girls and 27% of the boys do not know.
- ◆ *"Menstrual blood comes from the uterus (womb)"* 11% of the boys and 6% of the girls do not know.

IS IT A SECRET? IS IT SHAMEFUL?

All statements had three options: 'yes', 'no' and 'do not know':

- ◆ *"Women should keep menstruation secret?"* 40% of the girls and 41% of the boys think that yes, they should keep it secret.
- ◆ *"Do you think menstruation is a shameful thing?"* 41% of the girls and 40% of the boys agree.
- ◆ *"Is it important that women buy sanitary pads without being seen by others?"* 48% of the girls and 52% of the boys agreed.
- ◆ *"Do women get embarrassed when they see an advertisement about sanitary pads when they are with a man?"* The same question for the boys asked if men get embarrassed if they see the advertisement with a woman. 52% of girls and 41% of the boys agreed.

GIRLS, MENSTRUATION & RESTRICTIONS

What kind of restrictions do the girls face in practice? One motive for the survey was to verify to what extent women and girls are truly forbidden to use such as water tap or toilets, both highly relevant topics for a WASH programme that ultimately aims for access to water and sanitation to all, whether menstruating or not!

Our project area was not earlier considered to faces serious restrictions, however we found data to the contrary. For any menstruation related programme, we do need to pay close attention to the locality as well as socio-cultural setting as these can be very diverse.

Charts 1 and 2 below show the same data from two different perspectives: from ethnicity/caste/social group point of view, and from the locality point of view.

CHART 1

'Yes' replies by total 338 girls to various statements by ethnicity
Are you

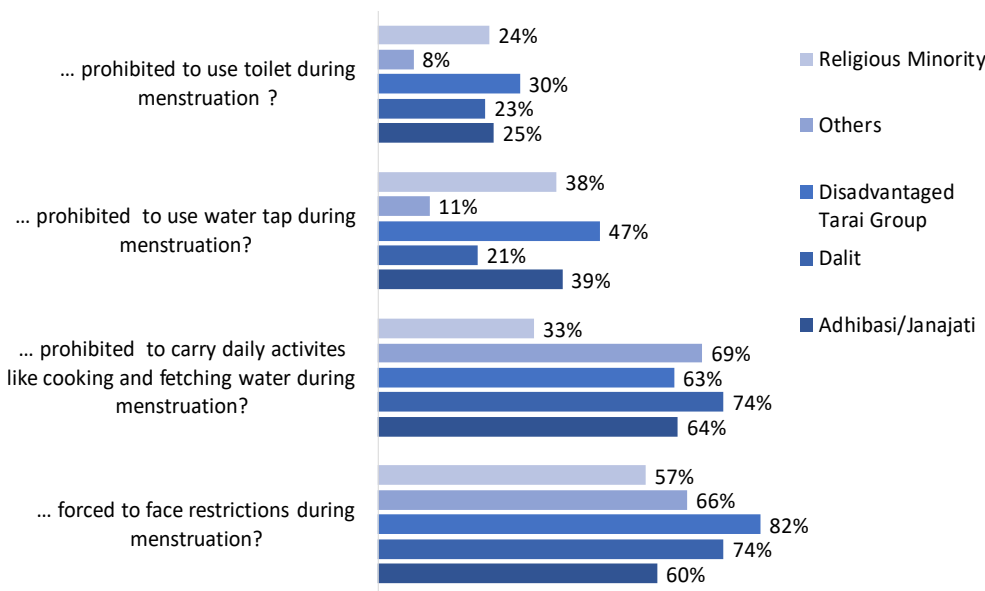
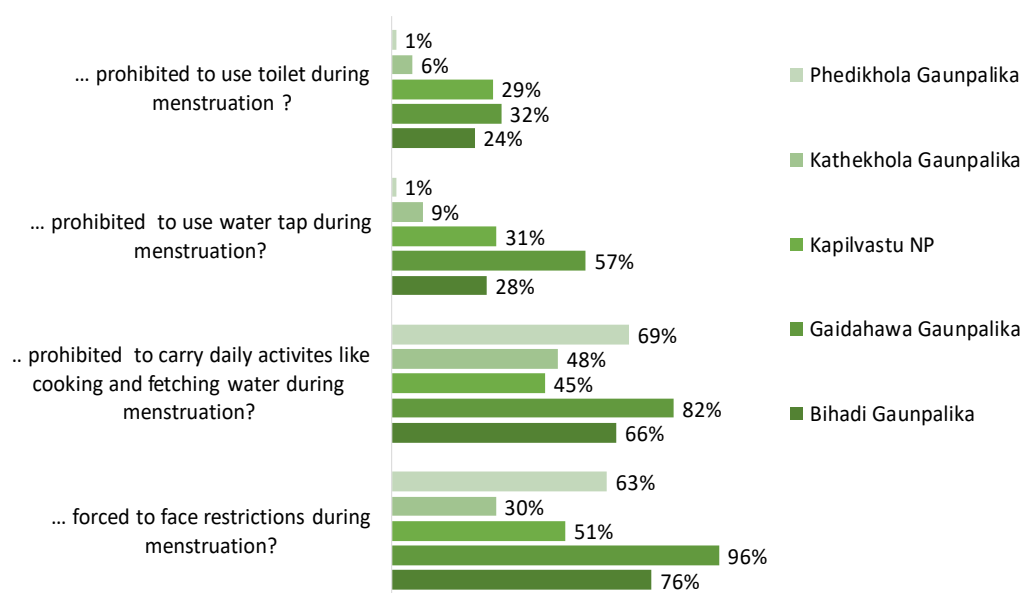


CHART 2

'Yes' replies by total 338 girls to various statements by municipality
Are you



WHAT THE GIRLS THINK?

- ♦ Slightly more than half (56%) of the girls consider that women feel happy when they start menstruating, with 23% thinking that having menstruation is a punishment for women.
- ♦ 12.7% of girls thought that menstruation was a curse from God (3% don't know) - while 11% of boys think this (6.7% don't know)
- ♦ Looking at these figures regarding the restrictions and shame they face, it is no wonder.
- ♦ 28% of the girls said that they were teased by boys if a blood stain was seen on their clothes.
- ♦ In addition, 24.3% think that they can't exercise during menstruation, and 5% don't know (and 29.4% of boys think that girls can't exercise, and 11% don't know). Presumably they are thinking of 'fun' exercise, rather than the heavy labour (carrying firewood, etc.) that menstruating women often have to do more of.

♦ The most common materials used for menstrual hygiene were clean cloths (reusable). 82% of girls mentioned that they used these, though also sometimes also using disposable sanitary pads or unclean cloths. 18% mentioned using disposable sanitary pads. Inadequate options for sanitary materials are likely to inhibit girls full participation in school, sport and everyday activities.

♦ While 80% of girls sleep in their own bed during menstruation, one respondent sleeps in an animal shed.

DO GIRLS MISS SCHOOL DAYS?

In total, 18% of the girls replied that yes, they miss school days because of their periods.

The 62 girls that replied 'yes' miss a total of 213 days of school every month - on average, 3 days per person.

Yet, when asked more about the reasons with the statement: "I miss school because ...", more than those 62 replied 'yes' as follows:

"I miss the school during my periods because ...

- 🔥 ...I am afraid of staining my clothes (20.4%)
- 🔥 ... I am afraid of others making fun of me (21.3%)
- 🔥 ... there isn't anywhere for girls to wash and change at school (28.1%)
- 🔥 ... there is no place to dispose of sanitary products (35.2%)
- 🔥 ... I don't have materials to use during my periods (34.6%)

The locality-wise differences are clear:

- 🔥 Kapilvastu NP had the highest % of girls stating that they miss days at school (34%)
- 🔥 While 51.5% of girls in Kathekhola stated that they missed days because they were afraid of staining their clothes, nobody in Phedikhola agreed with this.
- 🔥 While 42% in Gaidahawa stated that because there isn't anywhere for women /girls to wash and change at school, only 3.8% in Phedikhola stated this.

WHAT BELIEFS AND RESTRICTIONS EXIST?

In the earlier charts menstruation was considered to be a normal event linked to fertility. Yet despite the fact that practically all women (half of the world) menstruate, this is still considered something to be ashamed of, something that is unhygienic and harmful also to the others even when the act itself - such as handling food or plates - has nothing to do with menstrual blood as such.

The following Charts 3 to 5 show the same data from three different perspectives. The first Chart 3 shows it from the gender perspective. For instance, while 72% of the girls think that "yes, it is hygienic to share the room with menstruating woman", only half of the boys think that it is (51%).

Even if there are fewer 'yes' replies that it is harmful to share food/cups/plates with menstruating women, these 'yes' replies still account for one out of five girls (20%) and one third of the boys (31%).

The Chart 4 shows the data from the ethnic/caste/social group point of view, and Chart 5 shows the differences in between the different locations. **The reader is requested to reflect where the 'yes' answers go wrong, these are all different statements.**

CHART 3

'Yes' replies by total 664 students to various statements:
Is it....

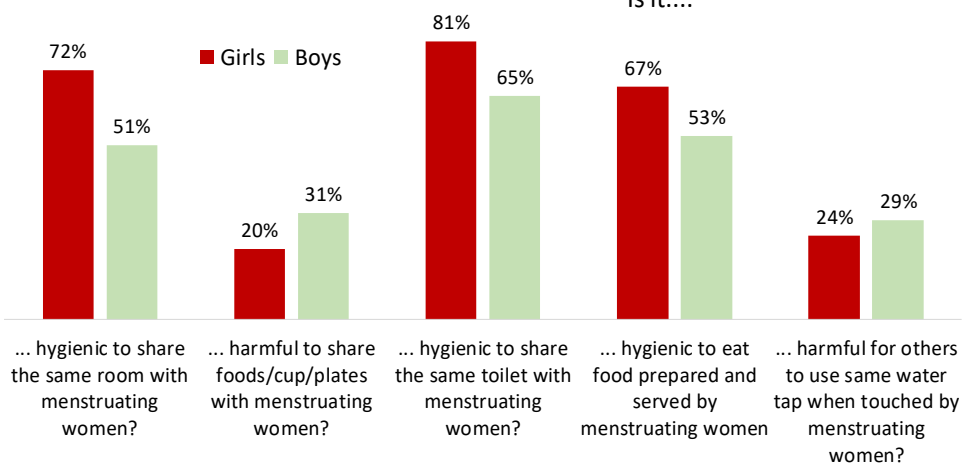


CHART 4

'Yes' replies by total 644 students to various statements:
Is it....

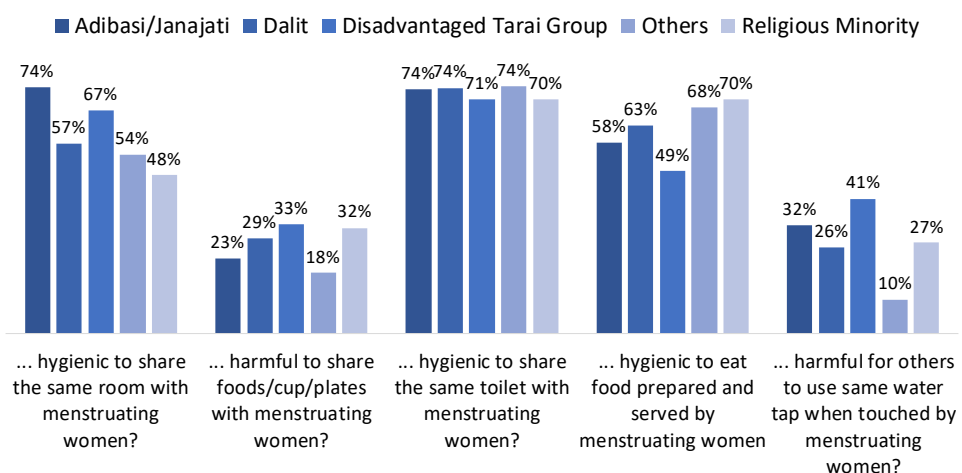
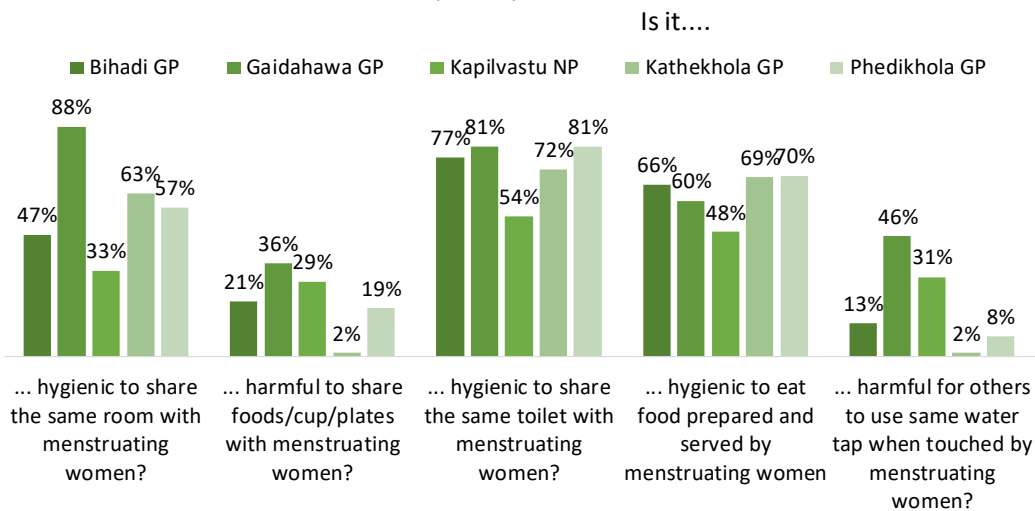


CHART 5

'Yes' replies by total 644 students to various statements:



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, based on what specific beliefs and practices exist.

- The questionnaire demonstrated clear gaps in basic knowledge in both boys and girls. Although menstruation is included in the school curricula, we should not assume that it is covered in practice. As Brief 7-2018 demonstrates, teachers also demonstrate gaps in knowledge.
- Researchers have noted the importance of including boys and men in menstruation education to better support girls (eg. Mahon et al, 2015).
- Both this Brief and other research demonstrates that girls miss school in Nepal due to menstruation (Adhikari and Maharjan, 2017). More discussion of menstruation, both in class and out, would help to normalise the issue and increase inclusion.
- 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 girl should miss a day in the school simply because of menstruation. Hardware alone, such as incinerators, will not solve the problem.
- There needs to be more work to be done with the reusable pads, their design, comfort & reliability, and also the fact that there are 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 ourselves) can do about it?”*

See the side bar for further action items for RWSSP-WN II, and the Brief-7 2018 for what we recommended for the Teachers.

THE WAY FORWARD?

The following action items stand out from this survey made for the students:

- Posters prepared by the students themselves, trying to come up with slogans in local language that address the locality specific issue,
- Quiz competitions are popular in many schools. This could be an entertaining event with good prizes for the winners, encouraging the audience to challenge the replies, whether true or not?
- Re-usable pad design workshop, aiming to improve the existing designs to make the pads more reliable, user-friendly & comfortable. This could be taken as an crafts or arts class.
- RWSSP-WN will take the results into the schools that participated in this survey: exploring the results through participatory analysis would serve both 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. Similar self-surveys and joint analysis sessions could be encouraged in other schools.
- RWSSP-WN will share the briefs with national & local education authorities, encouraging improved menstruation education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Name of enumerator	Girls	Boys	Total
Jansari Sharki	113	116	229
Binista Kumari Dhama	43	44	87
Bishnu Maya Shiwakoti	35	39	74
Kalpana Khanal	4	54	58
Sandhya Pandit	30	24	54
Reena Giri	51	0	51
Deva Laxmi Thami	31	13	44
Monika Ghimire	14	10	24
Nirmala Dhama	15	8	23
Manasa Raj Giri	2	18	20
Grand Total	338	326	664



REFERENCES

Mahon, Tripathy & Singh (2015) Putting the men into menstruation: the role of men and boys in community menstrual hygiene management. *Waterlines*, 34(1).

Adhikari & Maharjan (2017) Menstruation Management among Female School Adolescents in Makawanpur District, Nepal. *International Education and Research Journal*, 3 (11), p.83-86

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 and girls, and include a lockable door and 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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