



Menstrual hygiene management in schools in South Asia

Overview

In Afghanistan, there are separate schools for girls and boys and it is estimated that only 16% of schools are for girls. Many rural and displaced girls are unable to attend school regularly. There are no specific menstrual hygiene management (MHM) policies; however, gender-separated toilets are the norm and girls' washrooms have been incorporated into designs. O&M remains a huge problem. Poor security complicates matters.

Government strategies aim to improve MHM and water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (WinS), but currently MHM is rarely taught. Programmes are developing the capacity of teachers and school management on MHM, and an information booklet for girls is in production.

Afghanistan celebrated the first-ever Girls' Hygiene Day in 2017. Ministry of Education (MoE) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) lead MHM in schools – there is currently no multi-stakeholder platform on MHM.

Key take-aways

Beyond schools

As many girls do not attend school or only attend Community-based Education (CBE) or Accelerated Learning Centres (ALCs), UNICEF is providing their new MHM guidelines and booklet in different educational and health centre settings, and using these materials to encourage inter-generational and peer-to-peer promotion of healthy and hygienic choices.

Better use of cloths

Cloths are financially and environmentally a better solution in the Afghan context. The new UNICEF guidelines promote hygienic use of cloths, and ideas for girls to make more effective cloths for themselves.

'Girls' Hygiene Day' 2017 was commemorated with the slogan 'Nothing can stop me going to school'. It was championed by the First Lady, the Ministers of Education and Public Health, and a high-profile Islamic scholar.

WinS overview

Water availability

69% of schools have drinking water (MoE, Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2015).

Sanitation availability

67% of schools have functional sanitation facilities (MoE, EMIS 2015).

Toilet to schoolgirl ratio (WHO standard = 1:25)

1:26 in rural schools and 1:120 in urban schools (Formative Research, 2016).

Other key issues

49% of schools have low quality buildings. 76% lack electricity (MoE, 2015). Many have poor WinS facilities and inadequate O&M.

75% of primary age children out of school are girls (UNICEF, 2016). Nationwide, only 39% of children enrolled are girls (National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), 2016), just 14% in some areas (MoE, 2015).

Girls' attendance is affected by violence, insecurity, poverty, culture, and a lack of female teachers: only 33% of teachers are female, and some districts have no female teachers (MoE, 2016).

MHM overview

Current evidence and key findings

According to an MoE, Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and UNICEF WinS study (2010), Knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) analysis (2012) and MHM Formative Research (2016), in the surveyed areas:

50% of girls do not know about menstruation before menarche (2010) and tried to hide their period (2016).

37% miss school for one or more days when menstruating.

12% use sanitary pads (mainly in urban areas); most use cloths.

70% do not wash during menstruation for fear of infertility.

80% do not play sports or eat certain foods.

Educational materials

Some MHM information is taught in girls' schools in Islamic studies and science subjects (grades 10 to 12).

UNICEF WinS Programme, with support from the Canadian Government's WinS4Girls Project, has been developing the capacity of teachers and school management on MHM since 2012. In 2016, 77 master trainers from 34 provinces were trained and will disseminate *Menstruation Matters: Guidelines on Menstrual Hygiene Management for Teachers in Afghanistan*, to be accompanied by a booklet (and audio version) for girls about menarche and MHM.

MHM overview *continued*

Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks	<p>WinS is led by MoE with support from UNICEF.</p> <hr/> <p>The NESP for 2017-2021 includes a Girls' Education Strategy and Policy which supports improvements in MHM.</p> <hr/> <p>Neither the NESP nor the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2007–2017 directly reference MHM; the latter refers to the lack of adequate “facilities” as one of many obstacles for gender equality in education (Sommer et al, 2017).</p> <hr/> <p>There is no specific budget line for MHM or for WinS in general; schools receive a lump sum and determine its allocation.</p>
MHM in schools practice	<p>Through the MoE and UNICEF intervention, in 2017, 900,000 adolescent girls in 21 provinces received information about MHM, health and nutrition.</p> <hr/> <p>Since 2012, school toilet construction designs include MHM provisions. Over 200 schools have been equipped with a private and safe girls' washroom.</p> <hr/> <p>Poor operations and maintenance (O&M) means lack of water, cleaning materials, functional locks and nearby handwashing facilities with soap.</p> <hr/> <p>Most girls use reusable cloths. Beyond urban areas, pads are not widely available or known, are too expensive, and improperly disposed of. UNICEF and MoE have focused on personal hygiene and promoting the more hygienic use of existing materials. Some schools have emergency pad supplies.</p>
MHM in EMIS	<p>No data is collected on MHM. UNICEF is working with MoE to incorporate elements of its WinS Monitoring Package into EMIS. It is unlikely that the SDGs' enhanced indicators for MHM will be included.</p>
Coordination platforms/mechanisms	<p>Afghanistan celebrated Girls' Hygiene Day in 2017. Currently no multi-stakeholder platform exists on MHM. There is some interest in setting up an MHM working group with UNICEF, NGOs and others.</p>

MHM journey in Afghanistan

- 2010** WinS assessment in two provinces by MoE, MoPH and UNICEF.
- 2012** UNICEF KAP study.
- MoE participation in International Learning Exchange (ILE) on WinS.
- First educational materials and training on MHM in schools developed for teachers and students.
- MHM washrooms and incinerators introduced into designs.
- 2014** Canadian Government WinS4Girls Project launches.
- 2015** Government representatives and UNICEF participate in WinS4Girls E-Course on building advocacy and research capacity on MHM (Emory University).
- 2016** MHM Formative Research (part of WinS4Girls Project) with MoE, MoPH, UNICEF.
- Female master trainers trained on MHM in every province.
- 2017** Girls' Hygiene Day celebrated for first time.
- MoE and UNICEF develop new MHM guidelines for teachers and a storybook for girls.

Coming up

Improving girls' experience – Bringing MHM into the new curriculum; rolling out the new UNICEF MHM guidelines and advocating for their inclusion in the school curriculum; improving WinS. A new budget line exists to “support and enhance school health” of USD\$8.7million for 2017-2021.

Increasing female teachers – the percentage of female teachers will grow to 40.7% in 2021 (247,000); formal schools and CBEs/ALCs to be more aligned; more MHM training for teachers, and better monitoring of girls' enrolment and attendance is planned.

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