



# Menstrual hygiene management in schools in South Asia

## Overview

The Government aims to provide universal sanitation coverage by 2020 and to mainstream menstrual hygiene management (MHM) through new water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (WinS) policies. However, there is significant fragmentation of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) responsibilities.

There are usually separate toilets for girls, however only 34% report using the toilet for changing sanitary materials. Concerns about poor operations and maintenance remain.

Due to poverty, many girls use rags/cloths instead of sanitary pads (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2016). Pupils' MHM awareness has been raised by new teaching guidelines and the *Participatory MHM Toolkit* (Department of Education (DoE), Rural Development Foundation (RDF), UNICEF 2014).

## Key take-aways

**Good MoE and Ministry of Health (MoH) alignment** on WinS and MHM exists, and there are now dedicated School Health officers at all administrative levels.

**Good engagement with schools** – the *Participatory MHM Toolkit* (2014) has supported schools to integrate MHM, though more needs to be done to help teachers and school management to understand girls' MHM needs.

**Targeted and phased advocacy** to tackle one key myth at a time. For instance, the Provincial Education Ministry of the Northern Province has effectively dispelled the myth around not drinking water during menstruation.

**A Participatory MHM Toolkit (2014) has been used to develop 40 school-based action plans in the Northern Province, and the local DoE is rolling it out to all secondary schools.**

## WinS overview

### Water availability

88%

of schools have water (Ministry of Education (MoE), School Nutrition and Health branch survey, 2017).

### Sanitation availability

98%

of schools have adequate sanitation facilities (MoE, School Nutrition and Health branch survey, 2017). However, there are vast disparities in access.

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

1:66

The target ratio varies from 1:50 to 1:66 depending on the number of girls at the school. (MoE, 2010).

### Other key issues

Out of 400 schools evaluated, 49% of UNICEF-sponsored schools and 24% of government-sponsored schools have reached the target ratio for toilets to schoolgirls as per national school sanitation standards. (Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study, 2014).

Widespread norms, myths and taboos around menstruation exist which affect girls' attendance and restrict their activities. E.g. 60% of parents do not allow their daughters to go to school during their period.

## MHM overview

### Current evidence and key findings

<sup>i</sup> KAP analysis of 720 adolescent girls and 282 female teachers in Kalutara district (2015).

<sup>ii</sup> KAP study.

Few schools were equipped with MHM facilities.<sup>i</sup>

60% of teachers thought blood impure; 80% thought bathing should be avoided; and 40% thought vaginal insertion of tampons has side effects.<sup>i</sup>

In Government-sponsored schools, there was 41% availability of soap and only 1% of principals and 6% of teachers stated that emergency sanitary pads were available.<sup>ii</sup>

80% of girls were aware that they should bathe during menstruation.<sup>ii</sup>

70% were aware they should wash menstrual cloths with soap and dry them before use to kill germs.<sup>ii</sup>

37% of girls miss at least one or two days of school each month due to their period.<sup>ii</sup>

66% are not aware of menstruation until menarche (Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), UNICEF).<sup>ii</sup>

## MHM overview *continued*

<b>Educational materials</b>	<p>A comprehensive WASH in Schools Handbook (MoE, UNICEF 2015) includes a dedicated chapter on MHM, and the MoE has issued extracts from it as technical guidelines for schools to follow during their routine School Health Promotion Programme (SHPP) activities.</p>
	<p>A Manual on Hygiene Promotion in Schools: Teachers Guidebook (GoSL, UNICEF), in use in 70 schools in Batticaloa district, provides advice, lesson plans and activities/games as part of health education classes. It also includes information on MHM.</p>
<b>Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks</b>	<p>The 2007 SHPP circular laid out school community responsibilities and objectives on WinS. And there is now a dedicated national budget for WinS capital expenditure.</p>
	<p>A WinS Handbook (2015) followed by a technical guideline released in 2017, included information on MHM including disposal options (i.e. burning, burying and segregating waste disposal through local government systems).</p> <p>The concept of child-friendly schools was mainstreamed by MoE with support of UNICEF and other stakeholders. WASH and health-related components including MHM are managed by School Health Clubs and the school community, overseen by School Health Coordinators.</p>
	<p>National Sanitation Policy (2017) identifies the need for action to improve school sanitation services and includes MHM designs for girls' toilets.</p>
<b>MHM in schools practice</b>	<p>There are typically separate sanitation facilities for girls, although many are not equipped for MHM. UNICEF's WinS4Girls programme has supported the provision of more child-friendly and segregated facilities, started to establish proper disposal mechanisms, developed materials for pupils and teachers, and advocated for MHM to be prioritised.</p>
	<p>A Participatory MHM Toolkit (2014) has been used to develop 40 school-based action plans in the Northern Province, and the local DoE is rolling it out to all secondary schools. UNICEF is extending the toolkit to 30 schools in the East.</p>
<b>MHM in Education Management Information System (EMIS)</b>	<p>The Annual School Census and Annual School Sanitation Survey include quantitative WinS indicators only (i.e. not facilities functionality or hygiene behaviour). Over half of the School Health Evaluation accreditation system relates to WinS – including availability and cleanliness of sanitation facilities and personal hygiene. There is no data collected that focuses explicitly on MHM.</p>
<b>Coordination platforms/mechanisms</b>	<p>MoE and UNICEF lead MHM in schools. There is currently no national platform on MHM. However, after support from Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ministry of City Planning and Water Supply (MoCPWS) will lead and report on a programme of work on inclusive MHM up to 2020.</li> <li>▪ MoCPWS will coordinate activity on MHM for East and South Asia.</li> <li>▪ MoE will prepare a national strategic policy and plan for MHM in schools.</li> </ul>

## MHM journey in Sri Lanka

**2007** SHPP circular provides guidance on setting up advisory committees and school health/hygiene clubs.

UNICEF WinS initiatives begin.

**2008** Models designed for child-friendly toilets with water/hand-washing facilities in classrooms (MoE)

**2010** UNICEF WinS initiatives scaled-up to national level with MoE.

More dedicated funds allocated to WinS from government and donors.

**2011** South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) IV Colombo Declaration stresses the need for separate toilets with facilities for MHM.

National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) launch first National Sanitation Policy including hygiene behaviour guidance.

**2014** UNICEF launch WinS4Girls campaign in the Northern Province.

*Participatory MHM Toolkit* (2014) developed to support school-based MHM Action Plans.

Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, Behaviour (KAPB) analysis undertaken (MoE, The Nielsen Company, Australian Aid, UNICEF, 2014).

**2015** KAP analysis undertaken by Family Health Bureau.

At WinS International Learning Exchange (ILE), MoE commits to increase focus on MHM.

**2016** WASH in Schools Handbook finalised at national level with dedicated chapters on MHM.

**2017** National-level guidelines revised and MHM facilities recommendations made through a general circular for all schools.

South Asia Regional MHM training of trainers conducted by WSSCC.

WSSCC and MoCPWS developing an MHM training toolkit for visually impaired people.

## Coming up

Scaling up the use of the *Participatory MHM Toolkit* to the national level, and to mainstream MHM in more WinS programmes.

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