



Menstrual hygiene management in schools in South Asia



Overview

The Government supports the provision of gender-appropriate **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)** facilities in schools and nunneries. However, there is poor operations and maintenance (O&M) and limited knowledge about menstruation among girls. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) guidance for students has been developed and training for teachers is underway to improve their understanding of – and confidence to teach – menstruation and puberty.

Efforts to improve the supply and disposal of MHM materials include a government pledge to make safe and low-cost sanitary pads available to every schoolgirl. Research on girls' needs, priorities and proposed solutions is guiding advocacy and awareness programmes. An inter-sectoral approach is being promoted through Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrations.

Key take-aways

Reusable pads – Promoted as an alternative to commercial pads, in part because disposal systems are not widely in place. But challenges remain, such as lack of hot water, and poor facilities for drying cloths given the cold climate.

Promoting health – An important focus of the MHM training provided by Bhutan Nuns Foundation has been to provide dietary advice on how to prevent anaemia. This is particularly important where nuns are at risk of under-nutrition, due to a lack of funds for meals.

Normalising MHM – Menstrual Hygiene Day celebration, trained health coordinators and the 'WASH in Schools' Facebook are normalising MHM, providing practical advice on how to manage menstruation and helping develop a consensus for advocacy.

Changing opinion – Sharing accurate information on menstruation with religious leaders is influencing social norms and religious restrictions on women and girls.

The role of NGOs – NGO-developed materials explain puberty, menstruation and hygiene. Further training is underway to develop the capacity of teachers to use them.

WinS overview

Water availability

94%

of schools have access to an improved water source. Only 65% of schools meet the government standard.

<http://washinschoolsmapping.com/projects/bhutan.html>

Sanitation availability

97%

of schools have toilet facilities. Only 65% of toilets are functional.

<http://washinschoolsmapping.com/projects/bhutan.html>

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

The Government aims to provide a toilet ratio of 1:25 girls and 1:40 boys.

Other key issues

The availability of girls' toilets in secondary schools does not meet the national standard (Annual Education Statistics, 2017) – they are often located too close to boys' toilets, causing privacy concerns.

Only 22% of schools have a caretaker trained on O&M. Much of the cleaning is done by the children (Annual Education Statistics, 2017).

There is insufficient budget to meet WASH standards and cover O&M.

Unlike monasteries, nunneries receive no government funding and very limited private support (Bhutan Nuns Foundation), resulting in dismal living conditions.

Most nunneries are headed by monks which inhibits open discussion of MHM.

MHM overview

Current evidence and key findings

According to the 2017 Knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) survey on MHM of adolescent schoolgirls and nuns

About 42% of girls and nuns received information on menstruation from their mothers or older nuns.

One-third of girls thought a woman must not enter a shrine or temple during menstruation. 21% thought women susceptible to possession by an evil spirit during menstruation.

90% use sanitary pads, disposed of in 'menstrual' pits, general rubbish bins or down the toilet. Some toilets have bins with lids to collect used sanitary pads. Most report changing pads in the toilets. 3% do not use any kind of absorbent material.

78% of adolescent nuns miss classes or activities during menstruation because they find the toilets too dirty to use.

At boarding school and nunneries, 45% of schoolgirls only take a half-body bath during their period due to lack of hot water.

32% of schoolgirls and 50% of nuns reported being ridiculed when attending classes or activities during their period.

48% missed school due to pain or discomfort.

Educational materials

Hygiene promotion is undertaken through the School Health Coordinator (usually a teacher). 200 teachers from monastic schools and nunneries have been trained on hygiene through the UNICEF Religion and Health project. Most schools also have School Health Clubs.

MHM overview *continued*

Educational materials continued

Nunneries do not have any standard health curriculum for teachers. Some teachers cover health but report inadequate knowledge and training. Bhutan Nuns Foundation has created a facilitator guide for a one-day training workshop on MHM at nunneries.

Teachers are said to feel uncomfortable teaching life skills or sexual and reproductive health. Social norms around menstruation are still a barrier, especially with male head teachers. NGOs (like Bhutan Nuns Foundation and SNV) train teachers or teach MHM to students as an extracurricular activity.

Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks

Bhutan has an Education Blueprint 2014-2024.

There is no current School WASH Policy although there is a School Health and Safety Guideline (2013).

The Government's 12th Five Year Plan includes WinS plans and targets which are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

MHM in schools practice

UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Central Monastic Body is supporting water and sanitation facilities in schools and hygiene promotion among school children, child monks and nuns.

NGOs and the Government's Comprehensive School Health Division (CSDH) conducts workshops to raise awareness of MHM in schools and nunneries, both for girls and boys, and include instructions on how to make reusable sanitary pads.

MHM in EMIS

Since 2013 WASH was included in the Education Management Information System and is reported in the Annual Education Statistics Report. MHM information is not captured.

A Baseline Assessment of Water and Sanitation Facilities in Schools (2009) and follow up survey in 2011 was conducted.

UNICEF also conducted an evaluation of its WinS programme in 2013. A baseline and KAP survey was conducted in monastic institutions in 2014 and an MHM KAP survey was carried out for girls and nuns in 2017.

Coordination platforms/mechanisms

The coordinating agency for WinS is the Ministry of Education's (MoE's) Comprehensive School Health Programme.

A Technical Working Group was established to support the 2017 KAP survey on MHM of adolescent schoolgirls and nuns. It included MoE, Ministry of Health (MoH), UNICEF, National Statistics Bureau and Bhutan Nuns Foundation.

MH Day and social media activities aim to build awareness amongst and support from the monastic community. Organisers include UNICEF, SNV, Public Health Engineering Division of the MoH, School Health and Nutrition Division of the MoE, the Bhutan Nuns Foundation and relevant sectors.

The Bhutan 'WASH in Schools' Facebook page provides messages to girls and boys, school co-ordinators, teachers and policy makers.

MHM journey in Bhutan

- 1989** Religion and health projects begin, with a focus on WASH awareness.
- 2000** WinS programme starts.
- 2010** WinS Baseline Assessment performed.
- 2013** Impact assessment of WinS includes MHM knowledge, information, attitudes and practices.
- Baseline and KAP Survey on Water and Sanitation in Monastic Institutions.
- 2014** The Department of Youth and Sport's CSHD (now School Health and Nutrition Division of Department of School Education) starts a Government MHM education programme.
- 2015** A two-day MHM training workshop – 'Upscaling Menstrual Hygiene Management programme in schools and nunneries' – is organised for 20 nuns from eastern Bhutan.
- 2016** First celebration of MH Day.
- 2017** KAP survey on MHM of adolescent schoolgirls and nuns is conducted by Department of School Education, MoE.

Coming up

The Safe Sanitary Pad to Every Girl project, launched in 2017, continues in nine schools.

School Health Coordinators will receive additional training on MHM and there will be similar training in nunneries.

MHM disposal needs will be integrated into existing sanitation facilities in schools and nunneries by development partners including through the UNICEF WASH programme with the Religion and Health project of Dratshang Lhentsho. A needs assessment in rural areas is required.

There are opportunities for MHM to be integrated into National Youth Policy programmes.

References

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- UNICEF (2015) *Coming out of the dark*
- UNICEF (2013) *Baseline and KAP study – water and sanitation in monastic institutions in Bhutan*
- Bhutan Nuns Foundation www.bhutannuns.org



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