

# **Menstrual Hygiene Among Teen Girls in Marginalized Communities**

## **Executive Summary**

Menstruation is an important aspect of every girl's life, but it is an often overlooked critical issue, particularly for teen girls in marginalized communities. There are so many barriers to proper menstrual hygiene management (MHM) such as inadequate water and sanitation facilities, limited menstrual health education and poor access to affordable menstrual products can have significant consequences for girls' education, health, and well-being.

Thus this funding proposal aims to seek funding to provide educational workshops, community outreach programs and provision of sustainable menstrual hygiene products to teens girls in marginalized communities and empower them and break the stigma surrounding menstruation.

### **1. Introduction**

Menstrual health is a fundamental aspect of human rights, dignity, and public health (Sommer et al., 2016) (Sommer et al., 2020) (Phillips-Howard et al., 2016) Globally, an estimated 500 million women and girls lack access to adequate menstrual hygiene management. This disproportionately affects those living in poverty, with girls in marginalized communities particularly vulnerable (Phillips-Howard et al., 2016). Many girls lack access to affordable, hygienic menstrual products, leaving them to rely on makeshift options that can be uncomfortable, unsanitary, and stigmatizing. Inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools and communities, as well as sociocultural taboos around menstruation, further exacerbate these challenges. Consequently, poor menstrual hygiene management can lead to school absenteeism, reproductive health issues, and psychosocial consequences like shame and anxiety (Nalugya et al., 2020) (Sommer et al., 2016) (Phillips-Howard et al., 2016). Research has also linked poor menstrual hygiene management to increased risk of transactional sex, with negative implications for sexual and reproductive health.(Sommer et al., 2016). A growing body of research has highlighted the urgent need to address menstrual hygiene disparities, particularly among marginalized populations. However, progress on this issue has been hindered by a lack of standardized research methods, inadequate funding, and persistent stigma.

Providing girls with the knowledge, facilities, and materials to manage their menstruation with dignity is critical to promoting gender equity, empowering adolescents, and supporting positive health and educational outcomes.

Improved menstrual hygiene management can help address barriers to girls' education, as well as tackle broader social and health consequences.

## **1.1 Menstrual Hygiene and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Proper menstrual hygiene is integral to achieving several United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 1: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, as we distribute sanitary pads monthly at the marginalized communities.

Goal 2: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 3: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

### **The Importance of Menstrual Hygiene**

Good menstrual hygiene is crucial for the health, well-being, and empowerment of women and girls worldwide. It plays a critical role in enabling women and girls to reach their full potential:

**Health and Dignity:** Effective MHM helps prevent health risks and ensures that menstruation is managed with dignity.

**Education and Opportunities:** Girls with access to menstrual hygiene education and products are more likely to continue their education and participate fully in society.

**Breaking the Silence:** Open conversations about menstruation challenge taboos and promote gender equality.

## **1.2 Current Challenges in Menstrual Hygiene Management**

Even in the 21st century, there are significant challenges when it comes to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) around the world. Here's a breakdown of some of the biggest hurdles:

### **1. Period Poverty:**

- **Affordability:** In many regions, disposable menstrual products are simply too expensive for many women and girls.
- **Lack of access:** In remote areas, there may be limited availability of sanitary pads or menstrual cups altogether.

### **2. Stigma and Taboos:**

- Cultural and religious restrictions surrounding menstruation can lead to shame, silence, and social isolation for girls and women.
- This stigma can prevent open communication and education about periods, hindering proper hygiene practices.

### **3. Inadequate Sanitation Facilities:**

- Many girls lack access to private spaces to change sanitary products or wash themselves properly during menstruation.
- Schools and public facilities may not have adequate toilets or disposal options for menstrual waste.

### **4. Limited Knowledge and Education:**

- Misconceptions and lack of scientific knowledge about menstruation are widespread, leading to unhealthy hygiene practices and potential health risks.
- Girls may not receive proper education about their bodies and menstrual cycles, leaving them unprepared to manage their periods effectively.

### **5. Environmental Impact:**

- Disposable sanitary pads create a significant amount of non-biodegradable waste, posing environmental challenges.
- Limited access to or knowledge of reusable menstrual products creates a further strain on waste management.

These challenges all contribute to a cycle of negative consequences for girls and women, impacting their health, education, and overall well-being.

These challenges collectively contribute to:

- **Absenteeism from School:** Girls missing school days due to fear of leaks or lack of proper hygiene facilities.
- **Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs):** Increased risk of infections due to improper hygiene practices.
- **Social Isolation:** Feelings of shame and isolation due to menstrual stigma.
- **Negative Impact on Education:** Overall disruption of education and future opportunities.