

TABOO AROUND MENSTRUATION



MENSTRUATION

When the lining of the uterus sheds, breaking down into blood. This blood then leaves the body through the vagina.

PRESENTED BY: TEAM 21



The women less talked about

The scope of the project was covered in bihta in which various women both inside and outside the college were consulted to understand their situation regarding menstruation. What problems did they face? How did they overcome those problems? What restrictions they had to face?

The women who were consulted were from various working departments; for example one picks wood for household, one makes kulhad cups, one herds goats and another is a housewife.



First reaction

Menstruation is called “emcee” amongst these women.

The younger women seemed shy and were hesitant to answer the questions.

But the older women talked freely.



COMMON TABOOS

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- They were not allowed to worship god during menstruation as it was considered ashudh("Unholy")
 - One of them termed it as "gheenaa". And one even linked it with "naraka". ("disgust" and "hell" respectively)
 - They didn't wash their heads during menstruation and used soil ("maati", as termed by them) and then shampoo to do it once their emcee is over.
 - They used a cloth instead of a pad when they undergo menstruation. Everyone has their reason to do so. Some had monetary issues, some find cloth comfortable as they never used a pad before, and some women didn't have access to pads.
 - One even mentioned that they don't use tampon as they are not allowed to break their hymen so as to retain their virginity.

Cloth and ash

Interestingly one older woman explained how they used the cloth. They used to cut a cloth and put some burnt ashes ("raakh") on it as an absorbent and wrapped the cloth around it and then reused the same cloth after washing.



How does it work?

Burnt ash can help soak up moisture due to its absorbent properties. Ash is made up of tiny particles that can absorb water molecules through a process known as adsorption. When ash is burned, its surface area increases, which allows it to absorb more moisture.



MONEY, HYGIENE, AWARENESS

One

- Surprisingly there is no organisation or NGO here in this locality that offers them pads for free or even at nominal costs. They all have to buy it from these local stores at high rates.

Two

- Women here know that using pads is hygienic ,yet they cannot afford them and are prone to diseases.
- A woman in bihta reported that her grand-daughter had to get her uterus removed as she got infection.

Three

- They are not educated enough to understand the whole concept of menstruation. So that's the reason why they don't want to talk.
- Some of them don't buy medicines due to monetary issues but few buy for pain.

General taboos

1. In urban region, not entering the puja room of house or not going to the temples is the major restriction whereas in rural areas not entering the kitchen is also a main restriction as it is believed that women during menstruation are unhygienic and impure and hence the food they prepare can get contaminated.

Reason:

It is being reported that during menstruation the body emits some specific kind of smell or ray which can turn preserved food bad but as long as hygiene is maintained menstruation can't be a reason for spoilage of any food.

2. Girls are not allowed to touch holy books also during menstruation.
3. In India even mentioning about menstruation openly is a taboo in itself as many of the women are still not comfortable to talk on this topic even to this date.

General taboos

4. In some cultures, women bury their clothes used during menstruation to prevent them being used by evil spirits as it is believed that menstruating women can get harmed by black magic.
5. In some parts of India people believe that sour food like curd, tamarind or pickles will disturb or stop the menstrual flow and hence having such food is being restricted.
6. Many adolescent girls believe that doing exercise/physical activity during menses aggravate the dysmenorrhea while in real exercise can help relieve the menstruating women with symptoms of premenstrual syndrome and dysmenorrhea and relieve bloating.
7. Women in some areas are discouraged from taking bath during their periods to eliminate the fear that it might contaminate the water of a communal bathing area.
8. It is believed that if a girl or women touches a cow while she is on her period, that the cow will become infertile

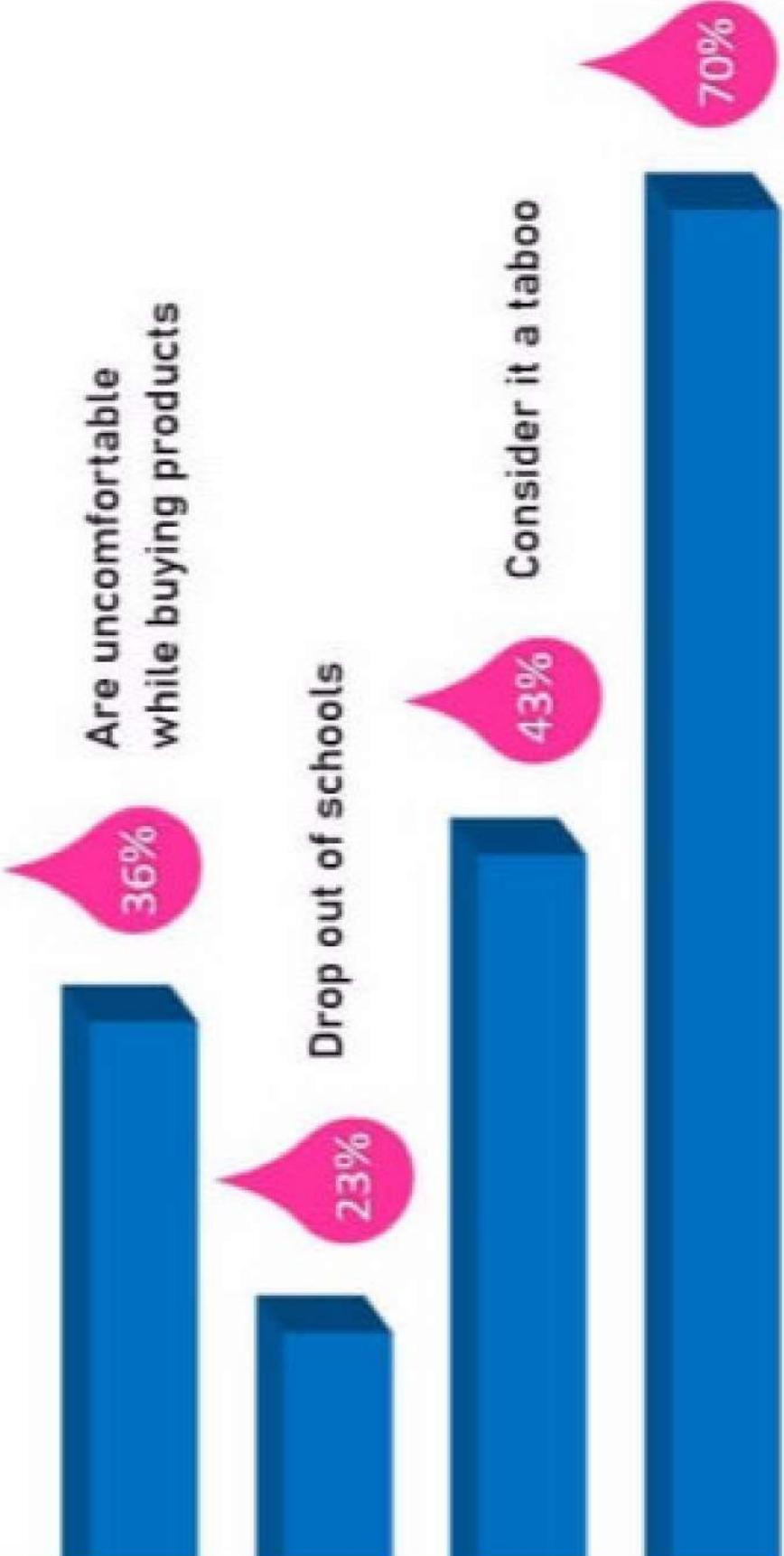
Menstruation taboos exclude women or girls from many aspects of socio-cultural life. Some of these are helpful, but others have harmful impact on their emotional state, mentality and most importantly health.

About 23% of girls in India drop out of school when they begin menstruating due to lack of clean and private sanitation facilities for females.

Over 77% of menstruating women use an old cloth, which is often reused which increases susceptibility to infection, with the odor of menstrual blood which can be a reason of being stigmatized.

Myths like not taking bath during menstruation can lead to the reproductive tract infections as it compromise in hygiene. The myths are leading girls to associate their own body with curse and impurity.

How menstruation affects women in India



The challenge of addressing the socio-cultural taboos in menstruation is compounded by the low knowledge levels and understandings menstruation and reproductive health among girls. Cultural and social influences acts as a hurdle for advancing knowledge on this topic. Hence it is very important to raise the awareness among women, specially to adolescent girls related to menstrual health and hygiene even before they start to get their periods.



Girls should be given knowledge about menstruation at earlier age as they often grow with its limited knowledge because their mothers or other family members shy away from discussing this topic.

Empowerment of women through education plays an important role in overcoming the myths and taboos of menstruation and it improves their health status also.

Adequate facilities for sanitation should be made available and low cost sanitary napkins should be distributed in rural and slum areas. Government of India has approved a scheme to improve menstrual hygiene for 1.5 Crore adolescent girls by distributing low cost sanitary napkins in rural areas under the National Rural Health Mission since 2010. More efforts should be made to achieve such kind of schemes.



It is important for men and boys also to understand this topic so that they can support their partners, sisters, daughters, mothers and colleagues during menstruation days.

People should understand that menstruation is nothing but a very normal biological phenomenon, and women have the power of procreation only because of this virtue and it should be seen with respect.



UNFPA @work to provide menstrual hygiene products @south sudan @nepal @kenya @angola @india

- Period taboos include the idea that women are impure, dirty, or sinful while they're menstruating and they are not allowed to touch their genitals and are not allowed in communal bathing area.
- "Period poverty" leads to girls(ex: in Kenya) engaging in transactional sex with older men to meet their needs. Hence, they are subject to STD, pregnancy and violence by the older man. The taboo of women depending on men for their menstrual needs.
- First time menstruating girls are married , yet their child like body suffers from pregnancy complications as it is not fully developed yet.
- Practice of closing vaginal opening with thread leads to health issue and is a human rights violation.
- Menstruating women are left in cold, among animals and men away from home cause they are seen as bad luck.



UNFPA

Educes girls and women about periods and what to use, supplies menstrual goods to refugees, and helps women become empowered without having to depend on others.

In Angola, refugees in Louva received UNFPA-distributed dignity kits, which had sanitary napkins, soap, laundry, detergent, and supplies involving hygiene.

In Nepal, girls attended an informative session about body health, including menstruation and on how to raise their voices for their rights.

In Kenya, advocates and community leaders teach other girls about menstrual health and its management under UNFPA.

Innovative ideas like EcoSmart reusable pads get tested out by girls in Uganda under UNFPA.





EFFORTS:

- Pradipti Mondal : Ideation and PPT
- Tanya Kumari: Bihta Case study
- Gaurav Garg: Bihta Case study
- Priya Raj: India and Taboo
- Sarthak Biswas: Write up and blog website

THANK YOU!