

Period Talk in Silence: Understanding Menstrual Health Among Deaf Adolescent Girls





■ Rita's Perspective on Menstrual Health

"I didn't know what had happened to me. I suddenly started bleeding and was scared"

Rita (Name Changed) is a 15-year-old student at Dhaulagiri Deaf Residential Secondary School in Baglung. Rita recalls her first period at the age of 12 as a frightening experience. **"I didn't know what had happened to me. I suddenly started bleeding and was scared"**

A friend stepped in to explain menstruation and guide her on what to do, which helped her overcome the initial shock. Following cultural norms, she stayed inside her room for a few days, avoiding contact with male family members. Thankfully, her school plays an important role in providing access to menstrual hygiene products by providing free sanitary pads. Rita only needs to purchase these products when she visits home, which happens a couple of times a year. This support has allowed her to focus more on her studies and personal well-being without worrying about affordability or availability.

Physical symptoms during menstruation are a regular challenge for Rita. **"I get stomachaches, leg pain, and headaches,"** she explains. She manages these symptoms by resting, using a hot water bag, and doing light exercises. Emotionally, Rita feels the need for peace and quiet. **"When other friends are playing and shouting, it disturbs me. I just want to keep on sleeping,"** she admits.

Menstruation does impact Rita's daily routine, especially during the first two to three days of her cycle. She often stays home to rest and informs her teachers about her condition. Once she feels better, she eagerly returns to school and resumes her social interactions with friends. Her teachers provide understanding and support, creating an environment where she feels comfortable taking the necessary time to recover.

Cultural practices continue to influence Rita's experience with menstruation. "I can cook in the kitchen but cannot enter the Pooja room until I bathe after four/five days," she shares. However, she doesn't feel stigmatized by her school peers, where a supportive and empathetic environment helps everyone feel at ease. A major challenge for Rita is maintaining hygiene due to limited water availability at school. "It's difficult to take a bath and take care of personal hygiene due to water scarcity," she says, emphasizing the need for better sanitation facilities. She strongly believes that an adequate water supply would make a significant difference.

Looking ahead, Rita hopes for a future where menstrual health education is prioritized, and both girls and boys are involved in awareness programs. She suggests introducing pad-making training and believes it would be empowering if boys could also contribute to creating a more supportive environment. Rita's journey serves as a call to action for inclusive and sustainable solutions in menstrual health management.





Bidhya's Call for Better Menstrual Health

"Menstruation causes body odor, making daily bathing ideal, but water scarcity makes it difficult. More water availability would help maintain hygiene and control odors."

Bidhya (name changed), a 14-year-old, navigates menstruation amid cultural traditions, emotional challenges, and practical needs. She had her first period at 12 while staying in a hostel, where she managed independently, though cultural restrictions at home confined her movements for five days, forbidding her from touching certain items or entering specific spaces. Initially, her understanding of menstruation was limited to what she read in health books, but her mother later guided her on using pads and managing the process, reassuring her it was normal.

Access to menstrual hygiene products has generally been easy for Bidhya, but water scarcity poses a significant challenge, particularly as she feels daily bathing is essential for hygiene and comfort.

Physically, she often experiences **stomach pain and backaches before menstruation**, which she alleviates through traditional methods like **heating a brick and wrapping it in cloth to warm her stomach and massages from her mother**.

Emotionally, she feels irritable and prefers isolation during her periods. Menstruation occasionally disrupts her routine, causing her to skip classes due to pain. She wishes boys understood menstruation better, refrained from teasing, and showed empathy, which would greatly help the girls during their menstrual time.

In her family, cultural taboos restrict her from entering the kitchen, touching red items, or participating in religious activities during menstruation. Bidhya finds these practices disheartening, especially as they isolate her from family and community events. She recalls her health teacher explaining myths associated with these taboos, which helped her understand their origins but did not alleviate the emotional impact.

Bidhya further mentioned **"Menstruation causes body odor, making daily bathing ideal, but water scarcity makes it difficult. More water availability would help maintain hygiene and control odors."**

Despite supportive female peers and school facilities, including a pad-burning machine, she emphasizes the need for improved water access, waste management, and awareness programs to educate boys about menstruation, promoting understanding and reducing stigma. She also feels the need for providing training on reusable pad-making to empower girls. Bidhya's story underscores the importance of addressing both cultural taboos and practical challenges to enhance menstrual hygiene management.





Dikshya's Struggle with Menstrual Challenges

Dikshya (Name changed) , an 18-year-old student from a rural community in Nepal, faces many challenges in managing her menstrual hygiene due to cultural practices and limited resources.

She experienced her first period at the age of 14 and had to follow the tradition of staying in a separate room during menstruation. **“I felt lonely and scared during my first period,”** Dikshya recalls. She adds **“When I told my mother this practice was unfair, she replied that it had always been this way.”**

“I always worry about stains,”

In her community, menstrual hygiene products are hard to find and expensive. Dikshya explains, **“There are no shops nearby to buy menstrual hygiene products in my area.”** She mostly uses cloth as pads and occasionally gets sanitary pads when her mother visits the market. At school, she has access to sanitary pads, making it easier to manage her period during class.

Dikshya also deals with bloating and back pain during her periods. Her friends support her by bringing hot water to ease her pain. Despite the challenges, Dikshya remains determined to attend school, though she often feels anxious. **“I always worry about stains,”** she says. **“What if someone teases me?”**





The lack of proper WASH facilities at school further complicates her situation. **“We don’t even have enough water to shower,”** Dikshya says.

Dikshya believes raising awareness about menstrual hygiene can bring positive change. **“If we could learn how to make reusable sanitary pads, it would solve many problems in my community,”** she suggests.

POONAM'S EXPERIENCE WITH MENSTRUATION AND CULTURAL STIGMA

At 17, Poonam (name changed), a student at Dhaulagiri Residential Deaf School, is going through her teenage years. When asked about her first encounter with menstruation at the age of 14, she described feelings of confusion and fear. **"I didn't know anything about menstruation until I had my first period,"** she shared, adding that her mother's guidance helped her gradually adjust to this new phase of life. However, societal and cultural taboos still cast a shadow on her experience. During her first period, Poonam was confined to a closed room in her home; a tradition rooted in superstition. Such practices made her feel isolated, but she endured them quietly.



Poonam's story is a reminder of the importance of breaking cultural taboos and improving access to menstrual health education and resources.

For Poonam, access to menstrual hygiene products is another hurdle at home. "**I have to go far to buy pads,**" she explained. Due to financial constraints, Poonam often has no choice but to use and reuse cloth, carefully cleaning it to make it last. Despite these challenges, Poonam remains resourceful, doing her best to maintain hygiene. Like many girls, Poonam experiences physical discomfort such as cramps and headaches during her periods. She finds comfort in talking to friends and resting when needed. Emotionally, she battles mood swings and irritability but copes by sleeping and seeking support from peers.

Menstruation affects Poonam's daily routine, but her school provides some support. If she gets her period during class, she takes permission from her teacher to rest and drink warm water. Dhaulagiri Residential Deaf School has introduced initiatives like coin-operated machines for sanitary pads, helping students manage their periods discreetly. However, she emphasizes the need for better water facilities to further improve hygiene management.





The cultural restrictions Poonam faces are disheartening. **"My father and brother don't touch or talk to me during my periods which makes me sad"** she admitted. At school, she has also faced stigma from some peers. However, her response; confronting friends and maintaining respectful boundaries reflects her growing confidence in challenging unfair treatment.

Poonam believes that consistent education and support could alleviate the struggles she and her peers face. She shares **"I believe regular visits from healthcare workers could ease our struggles with menstrual health, making a big difference."**

■ Ranju's Call for Change in Menstrual Practices



As Asoj approached, the biggest hindu festival, Dashain, was just around the corner, filling the air with excitement and preparations. But for 12-year-old Ranju (Name changed) , this year's Dashain carried a different memory, one that was both challenging and transformative. It was during this festive time that she experienced her first period.

“I was kept hidden in a neighbor's house for three days during my first period”, she recalls with mixed emotions. This cultural practice added the discomfort she was already feeling. Her elder sister handed her plain white clothes to use as a sanitary napkin, offering some guidance in an otherwise isolating experience .**“Even now when there are no pads, I use old sari pieces, wash them and reuse”** she shared, her voice calm but reflective of the challenges she faces.

“I don't expect any help from male members of my family during my period,”

She shares that with adequate water and good WASH facilities at her house, she can take better care of herself. However, the school hostel she stays in lacks such facilities, making her periods more difficult. **“I feel relaxed when I shower during my period but we can't shower often in the hostel due to a lack of water”** she shared. Even the comfort of a warm blanket during cold nights comes with strings attached. **“At home, we have to wash the blankets after a period. Sometimes I feel cold but don't ask for an extra one because I don't want to wash more”** Ranju admitted, a quiet compromise that reveals the weight of unspoken responsibilities placed on her shoulders.

Despite her struggles, Ranju remains determined to continue her education. Previously, she often missed school during her periods, which saddened her deeply. However, she no longer lets menstruation disrupt her learning, showing her commitment to education despite societal challenges.

Ranju credits her elder sister and mother for teaching her about menstruation and how to manage it. However, being taught to avoid going out during her period doesn't resonate with her. She feels strongly that societal attitudes toward menstruation need to evolve.



“We shouldn't be treated differently during menstruation”, she added. When asked about her male family members, Ranju simply shook her head. **“I don't expect any help from male members of my family during my period,”** she expressed, her gestures calm yet thoughtful.

Ranju is one of many deaf girls who face significant challenges during menstruation. Her story is a reminder of the need for better menstrual health resources and a shift in societal perceptions. Her hope for a world where menstruation is treated without stigma reminds us of the changes needed to create a more supportive and understanding society.





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