

Menstrual Hygiene Management and School Absenteeism among Adolescent Girls of Urban and Rural West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The level of knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls may differ depending on their socio-demographic background. The aim of the present study is to understand the association between Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) practices and school absenteeism among a group of adolescent girls living in rural and urban areas of West Bengal. We recruited a total of 284 Bengali speaking adolescent girls from both rural and urban areas. We used a mixed-method approach, which involved the combination of a cross-sectional survey and qualitative research methods. We conducted a survey among a cohort of school going adolescent girls (12-18 years old). This was followed by conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the participants and the respective teachers of their schools. Data on socio-demographic, menstrual hygiene and school absenteeism were collected and frequency and mean values were obtained for discrete and continuous variables. The association between socio-demographic characteristics and other categorical factors affecting school absence were assessed. Results showed mobility issues ($p < 0.001$), humiliation ($p < 0.001$) and level of pain ($p < 0.001$) during menstruation were the main factors behind school absenteeism among the urban and rural areas. Despite a higher educational enrollment rate (99.3%) in urban areas, adolescent girls in urban areas had a higher rate of school absenteeism (51.1%) than those in rural areas (42.5%). The present study found that poor hygienic conditions of the restrooms was the main cause behind absence from school. Educational institutions should focus on menstrual hygiene practices in their biology curriculum and implement WASH guidelines for improving attendance and academic performance of adolescent girls by addressing the above-mentioned gaps.

Keywords: Bengali Speaking Adolescent Girls; Menstrual Hygiene Management (mhm); School Absenteeism; Water Sanitation And Hygiene (WASH); West Bengal; India.