



MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN ROHINGYA CAMPS AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

Introduction



Taking ownership of their menstrual health and hygiene management (MHHM) continues to challenge women and girls in Bangladesh. The limited purchasing power of menstrual products, the lack of adequate sanitary facilities in schools and other public spaces, as well as taboos and stigmas surrounding menstruation, limit the ability of women and girls to fully participate in society. The problem is particularly difficult for the most vulnerable girls and in the most left behind districts in Bangladesh, such as Cox's Bazar.

In this context, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), with the support of KOICA conducted this study to increase the evidence that informs solutions to improve MHHM and support vulnerable women and adolescent girls to fulfill their potential.

This study focused on knowledge, attitudes, practices, and experiences around menstruation. An important element of this study is to uncover the barriers women and girls face to accessing, using, and disposing of menstrual products in Rohingya camps and the host community in Cox's Bazar.

It also places attention on the societal and gender norms that can impact their ability to access goods, information, and opportunities, and which can compound the challenges to improve menstrual health management.

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured questionnaires from 2,400 respondents, including Adolescent Girls, Boys (aged 12-19), and caregivers, across 8 refugee camps and 4 host communities in Cox's Bazar. Simultaneously, qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews with adolescent girls, focus group discussions with adolescents and their caregivers, and key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders.



Key Findings



a. Knowledge and Beliefs around Menstruation

“ If she eats something sour, then it will bleed more. And it's also said that, if anyone travels by motor vehicle at that time, it'll cause more bleeding. ”

Misperception

Adolescent girls, when asked how they keep track of the duration of their menstruation, **77%** said they count the days in their head.



Around **20%** of women and adolescent girls in refugee and host communities **perceive menstruation as an illness**

Over **30%** think menstruation is a process to release **'bad blood'**

b. Main Sources of Information about Menstruation

“ I don't feel comfortable talking about periods with my girl. But at the very beginning, I taught her how to use cloth. ”

Mother



90% Women



98% Adolescent Girls

...learn how to **Manage Menstruation** from their mothers

“ I don't know much about it. Her mother handles all those things. I don't have to bother with it. ”

Father



64%
Adolescent Boys



93% Men

...think it is **only appropriate for women** to discuss menstruation with their mothers

c. Restrictions around Menstruation



Female Respondents sleep in their usual place during menstruation



Only around 20% Female Respondents attend public gatherings during menstruation

d. Challenges in Managing Menstruation at Home and Schools



“ My daughter needs special attention to use toilet and change cloth during menstruation but there's no facility for her.



Caregiver
of Girl with Disabilities

The **limited mobility of girls and women** creates **challenges for bathing and accessing toilets**, especially at night, with the survey showing bigger challenges among those in Rohingya refugee camps. Over **50%** adolescents from refugee camps and **20%** of adolescents from host communities face challenges in washing, changing, maintaining privacy, and accessing toilets in schools.



In particular, **86%** of women in refugee camps said the unavailability of water supply and soap was the largest challenge, compared to **37%** of those in host communities. Distance from home was marked as the second largest challenge for women in Rohingya refugee camps and host communities, at **47%** and **12%**, respectively.

e. Knowledge of Menstrual Hygiene

- Overall, cloth was the most widely used item for women and girls both in host communities and refugee camps (**83%** of women and **64%** of adolescent girls use cloth only)
- In host communities, social media appears to be an increasingly preferred source of information; the ratio of adolescent girls who learned about reusable pads through social media & internet stood at **46%**.



13% Women
31% Adolescent Girls
use **disposable pads**



3-4% use
reusable pads

f. Accessibility to Sanitary Pads



16% Women
63% Adolescent Girls
...want **to use disposable pads** instead of cloth as it is considered that **pads absorb the blood flow better** and are considered more hygienic and convenient



22% Women
38% Adolescent Girls
...**can't use disposable pads**, as they said, **they are expensive**





“It is not proper to dry menstrual cloth outside. We will feel embarrassed if people notice it. My mother taught me that if we dry our cloth outside, a bad soul can harm us.”

Girl in Camp

g. Practices to Use Menstrual Materials

44% Women Refugee Camps



44% Women in Host Community
...source menstrual cloth
by cutting up used cloth at home



8% Women in Host Community
1% Women in Refugee Camps
...**buy cloth from Shops** to make menstrual cloth

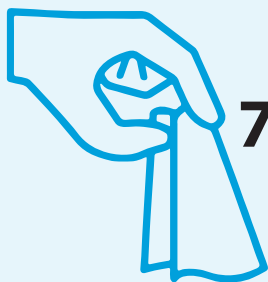


In both camps and the host communities, the majority of women (**50%**) and adolescent girls (**44%**) reported drying their cloth in a well-hidden place inside the house. In shelters, they would dry their menstrual cloth under other clothes so that the male members of their households would not see them.



Only

15% Female Respondents
who mainly use
cloth for their menstruation
have ever used a pad



78% Easy to Make at Home

28% Inexpensive

...are the reasons for using
**homemade menstrual
cloth**

When asked whether they are satisfied with their use of cloth as a menstrual product, **86%** of women and **76%** of adolescent girls said that they are. However, it is plausible that this result is driven by the lack of access to alternatives. Among the **30%** of cloth-using adolescents who have ever tried pads, the vast majority (**73%**) preferred pads.

h. Practices to Dispose of Menstrual Materials

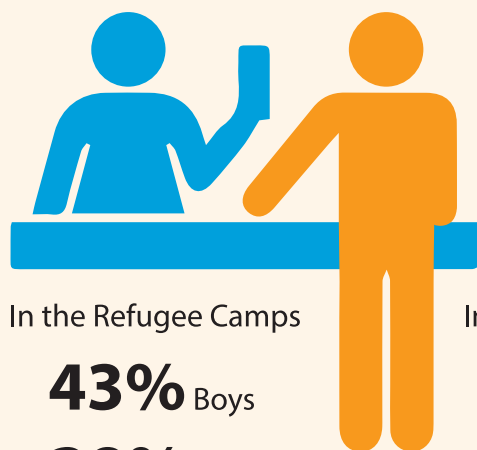
- Fears about witchcraft that seeing or taking used menstrual materials might curse people lead girls and women to discreetly get rid of this waste; they wake up before dawn to bury pads or cloth while it is still dark, which may pose safety concerns, or dispose of used materials into toilets or latrine pits, causing maintenance issues.
- Burying used cloth is more common in refugee settlements than in the host community (63% vs. 47% respectively).
- 35% of respondents from refugee camps and 30% of host community people said they bury used pads underground.

“ I dig a hole and put them there... My mother-in-law says I need to dispose of menstrual cloth secretly because if anyone finds it, they can do black magic. ”

Woman in Camp

i. Gender Equality

More men (14%) and boys (14%) living in camps see teasing women about their menstruation as harmless fun compared to men (6%) and boys (8%) living in the host community.



In the Refugee Camps

43% Boys

38% Men

In the Host Community

20% Boys

17% Men

...think it is **improper for men to buy menstrual materials**

1/4 Respondents Think
**It is Women's
Responsibility** for:



Contraception
26%



Pregnancy
28%

*“ My father beats
my mother.
My mother said he has
the right to beat her...
I do not think it is right, but
we do not say anything
about it. ”*

Girl in Camp

- **63%** of men and **61%** of boys in refugee camps believe that girls should not be allowed to decide when they want to marry, compared to **52%** of men and **57%** of boys in host communities who think so.
- **42%** of respondents think that violence against women is acceptable in some situations; **38%** agreed that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together; **53%** agreed that men are violent by nature; **42%** agreed that a husband can beat his wife.
- While **43%** of women and girls in host communities strongly disagreed that husbands can beat wives, only **22%** of women and **27%** of girls in camps strongly disagreed with the statement.

Recommendations



● Infrastructure

- › Female-friendly gender-segregated toilets with locks, lights, disposal options, hooks and shelves.
- › Facilities with privacy to wash and store menstrual materials.
- › A culturally appropriate menstrual waste collection and processing system and ensure this is communicated to women and girls.
- › Trained cleaners and solid waste workers on proper menstrual waste handling procedures.

● Access to Menstrual Products

- › Information about diverse product alternative
- › Along with cloth, underwear or belts need to be provided. Other supplies, such as tissue paper, soap, etc., as well as proper infrastructure, are as important as the products.
- › Distributions of menstrual materials should take place through accessible channels.
- › Involve female staff in the distribution to ensure girls and women feel comfortable asking questions.
- › Demonstrations on how to use different menstrual materials.
- › Consider conditional cash transfers as mechanisms to support vulnerable women and girls.
- › Support female entrepreneurship and employment in the production of menstrual products.
- › Regulations and guidelines on quality standards for menstrual products.

● Behavioral Change & Improved Access to Information

- › Consult with adolescent girls and women to determine the gaps in their current knowledge and the methods of dissemination of information
- › Improve engagement for boys and men to improve their knowledge about menstruation and challenge negative attitudes around menstruation.
- › Ensure male religious leaders, teachers, youth in and out of school, and elderly men participate in awareness-raising sessions to understand women's challenges and how they can support them.
- › Recruit more female staff for health centers and support all health and humanitarian staff, including men, to be knowledgeable and professional when discussing menstruation.
- › Leverage alternative communication channels, such as social media.

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The research team would like to sincerely thank all the participants for sharing their valuable time and knowledge with us.



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every pregnancy is wanted,
every childbirth is safe and
every young person's potential is fulfilled.

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