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## MARKETING OF SANITARY NAPKINS AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS AND ITS EFFECT ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM)

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### **Abstract :**

Adolescent Girls and Women face many physical, psychological and social issues in life with respect to menstruation. Good menstrual hygiene management (MHM) which is basic human right which ensures dignified and healthy life. Recently use of hygienic products like sanitary napkins, tampons etc has increased over period for easy availability, low cost and good marketing. But many government schemes products or other alternatives in compared to the well marketed products hardly reaches to masses due to lack of marketing . Author has reviewed current guidelines and various products available which still need to reach to masses via marketing .This will help ensure better menstrual hygiene management (MHM) .

**Keywords :** Sanitary pads, menstrual hygiene , marketing

### **Introduction :**

Beginning of menstruation is very important step for any adolescent girl . Girls undergo many physical and psychological changes during this process. Menstruation is still taboo in India and many countries in the world. Many girls and women feel ashamed even to discuss about it . They tend to skip school , work and tend to sit at home (1) . Thus managing menstruation hygienically is basic need for well being of any girl or woman. Across the globe and almost in all religious followings menstruating women are considered dirty or impure. This affects the social wellbeing of female the population. Ahead lack of awareness about menstruation till menarche, myths and unscientific attitude makes girl's and women's life still more miserable. WHO /UNICEF defined Menstrual Hygiene Management MHM as “Women and adolescent girls are using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having

access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials ”(2). United nation’s all state members are have to follow sustainable development goals. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG ) 6.2 acknowledges ‘right to menstrual health and hygiene’. It states that “By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations”(3). May 28 is observed as ‘Menstrual Hygiene day to raise awareness and change negative social norms surround MHM. This is because in general the women cycle is of 28 days and most women menstruate for 5 days a month. Thus 28<sup>th</sup> day of fifth month is followed as Menstrual Hygiene day worldwide (4). For absorption of menstrual fluid centuries together women have used various means .Various products are used as unhygienic means of menstrual absorbent in different parts of the world .These includes natural material like mud, cow dung, leaves cotton wool , tissue paper , newspapers, plastic bags , strips of saree , towel etc. While reusable napkins, commercial reusable sanitary napkins and commercial disposable sanitary napkins are hygienic means of menstrual absorbents .(5). Government of India is trying hard for all women and girls especially in rural areas to have easy access to sanitary napkins .Latest report of National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5 2019-20 ) says 90.2 % of urban and 80.1% rural women and total average of 84.8 % women from Maharashtra state use hygienic means of menstruation .While previous Survey 4(NFHS 4 2015- 16) says total average of 66.1% women used hygienic products in Maharashtra(6) .Due to rapid urbanization , rising income and easy availability , use of sanitary napkins is increasing rapidly.

### **Freedays Pads –**



**Pads sold under Government Schemes**

Govt has run the scheme to distribute free sanitary pad 'Freedays' in rural areas under Menstrual hygiene scheme. Ministry of health and family welfare introduced scheme for promotion of menstrual hygiene in adolescent girls ( 10 to 19 years ) in rural areas. Sanitary pad 'Freedays' were provided to rural girls at 06 rupees .Now since 2014 , funds are provided to states and union territories for providing girls sanitary napkins at subsidized rate of Rs 6 under National Health Mission . Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) of Anganwadi centre focus on Menstrual Hygiene issues (7). MHM is integral part of Swachh Bharat Mission and Ministry of Drinking water and Sanitation has published guidelines to be implemented by the State Government , District level officials , engineers and teachers.

There is no doubt commercially available disposable pads have made women and girl's menstruation hygienic and comfortable. These pads have devastating effect on environment. As use of Sanitary Pads has increased , the concern of disposal and management of menstrual waste is on rise. In India we lack mechanism for collection and disposal of menstrual waste. In India its estimated that 1.02 billion pads are disposed monthly leading to 113000 tonnes of menstrual waste generated annually(8). Classification of the menstrual waste in dry waste , wet waste or biomedical waste is highly confused. These used sanitary pads goes in sewage, landfills and water bodies and create environmental problem(9).

Sanitary waste falls within two categories plastic and biomedical waste. They are classified as biomedical waste due to presence of blood. Thus it needs to be pre treated before disposal by the process of incineration. WHO recommends the incineration of sanitary waste at temperature above 800 degree. In India most incineration is done at low temperature incinerator. Burning of these sanitary pads produces harmful toxins (10).

Raw material used for sanitary napkin is considered to be cotton and plastic . Once thrown in environment these plastic takes more than 500 years to degrade. They break into smaller pieces called microplastic is found everywhere in various flora and fauna especially tissues of fish aand shellfish and gets

bioaccumulated (10) Sanitation workers are also affected as they handle the waste bare handed. They are exposed to many health hazards.

Due to taboo involved around Menstruation, most women do not get access to clean cloth and sunlight to dry reusable cloth . Many of them dry their menstrual cloth in damp corners of houses which makes them susceptible to infection. Many women tend to throw in open spaces like rivers, wells and even roadsides due to lack of awareness and unavailability of safe options. In rural area people tend to burn , bury or flush the sanitary waste in water bodies.

To address this issue Govt of India has promoted use of incinerators . Thus mini incinerators are put for institutions , school and housing society etc . Burning is uncontrolled and unregulated while incineration is controlled burning at specific temperature in contained space with monitored emissions. Burning plastics at less than 800 degree releases dioxins which are carcinogenic chemicals linked to problems of reproductive health and child development. Due to incineration process , mass of plastic waste is decreased . The remaining ash , some of it is fly ash , needs disposal and is put in landfills(10).

There should be appropriate solution to minimize the adverse effect on health of girls and women , sanitation workers and further environmental consequences. There are few products available in the market which may surely help to reduce the burden of non degradable waste generated . They are as follows –

#### **Reusable pads :**



Such pads are made up of organic materials like cotton Eg: Ecofemme company has pack of 7 pads which can be washed 75 to 100 times and used for 3 to 5 years .Rinsing with water , washing with soap and sun drying is required to ensure sanitization. But these kind of companies which create such reusable

pads hardly reach to people due to lack of advertising. Also they are costly products hence its use is still less.

### Oxo Biodegradable pads :



### Oxo Biodegradable Pad sold under Government Schemes

Jan Aushudhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkin is given at Rs 1 under Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana is Government Initiative to reach out to rural girls where pack of 4 is sold at Rs 10. This is oxo biodegradable sanitary napkin i.e. 100 % biodegradable as it reacts with oxygen when discarded (12). Such kind of products need to reach till poorest of the women and hence advertising of these types of pads has to happen at the grassroots level.

### Compostable Pads :



### Compostable -Biodegradable Pads

They are compostable i.e. capable of disintegrating naturally in compost environment ( within 90 – 180 days). Eg : Anandi Compostable pads which are first fully compostable sanitary napkin which provides women and girls in rural areas and urban slums a environmentally sustainable solution. ( Pack of 8 Pads costing rs 40 ). Company suggest they should be buried in pits and wait for compounds to decompose(13). Various companies are using plant based materials instead of plastic . After one disposes in waste bins, they degrade

within 6 months. Many companies are available in market with different costs like Sathee pads ( Banana fiber) ,Azah pads ( organic cotton) , Pee Safe pads (Cotton and Bamboo fiber). These kind of pads are not reaching to masses due to lack of easy availability and marketing. Users at large are sceptical to use it due to lack of proper advertising. Also according to raw material used its price varies and in compared to readily available plastic based pads they are sold at higher price. This also hampers its purchase and use .

### **Menstrual cup:**



Menstrual Cup

Its soft bell shaped cup which is worn internally. Eg SheCup Company . This menstrual cup is made up of silicone holds upto 28ml of liquid, reusable , gives 10 hours protection . Before and after use of each cycle , it has to be boiled and immersed in hot water for 5 to 6 mins. Little water is needed to clean . It is advisable to be used by rural women where there is scarcity of water. It can be used upto 10 years(15). Such products are costly and they need training for its use. Thus its use is limited.

### **Green Dispo – Incinerator :**



Green Dispo – Model I

Scientist at International Advanced Research Centre Powder Metallurgy and New Materials ( ARCI ) Hyderabad, under DST & CSIR , NEERI – National Environment Engineering Research Institute developed incinerators named Green Dispo. This incinerator instantly heat up to temperature greater than 800

degree Celsius and helps to complete combustion of sanitary pad waste with min gas emission (16). Many units are established in various schools, colleges, government and public places. More and more advertising is needed and such kind of Incinerators needs to be installed and maintained which will help in better menstrual hygiene management.

#### **Conclusion :**

Various products of sanitary pads are available in market with different price ranges. Marketing of such products are limited in compared to regularly sold plastic based cheaper pads. Initiatives needs to be taken so that wide choice is available for use of sanitary pads. This will surely help Good menstrual hygiene management (MHM) which improves health , gives confidence and self esteem to women. For overcoming menstrual waste management issues there is urgent need of intensive action from all stake holder to change the menstrual hygiene in India.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Government should frame policy for availability of cheaper , high standard biodegradable pads by removing the good and service tax on sanitary napkins
2. Marketing of such products needs to rise to reach to masses.
3. Awareness and policy making for classification of menstrual waste as solid or biomedical waste and prioritising separation from rest of the waste.
4. Transport of such waste and appropriate treatment for urban and rural setting.
5. Planning for disposal of Sanitary pads , biodegradable and compostable pads.
6. Setting up of large number of production units for compostable disposable pads that would be run by community based organisation and self help women groups.

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