

Exploring young women's menstruation-related challenges in Uttar Pradesh, India, using the socio-ecological framework

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INTRODUCTION Menstruation poses many logistical challenges for girls and young women living in low- and middle-income countries. In India, high levels of stigma around menstruation add to these challenges. The Kissa Kahani study uses life course interviews with young women ages 15-24 living in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, to learn about the role menstruation plays in their lives. The socio-ecological model is a multi-system framework (individual, social, and institutional) for understanding individuals and their behaviors. We used this model to organize the study findings.

FINDINGS

- **On the individual level**, young women have gaps in their knowledge of menstruation, and the information they do have is often incomplete or incorrect. Most participants learned about menstruation for the first time at its onset and were not prepared in advance for the experience.

- **On the social and relational level**, menstruation can be a source of stigma, there are few opportunities to discuss it, and young women's mobility and daily activities are restricted during menstruation. While stigmatizing

messages (such as "menstruating individuals are dirty or impure") were common, for a few participants, conversations in which they were told it was normal provided reassurance. It was common for participants to be advised not to discuss menstruation with men or boys, even those in their own families; similarly, many participants were advised to avoid boys and men altogether during menstruation.

- **On an institutional level**, such as in school, menstrual stigma is reinforced. Menstruating during school was a source of shame and embarrassment due to teasing and negative messages from teachers and others. Further, bathroom facilities are inadequate for private and sanitary management of menstruation. Dirty or insufficiently private toilets made managing menstruation at school difficult.

IMPLICATIONS

Our findings suggest the need to target multiple levels of young women's lives to address the challenges associated with menstruation and menstrual stigma. Two important points for intervention include providing education early, before menstruation begins, and engaging older women relatives, men, and boys in the process of destigmatizing menstruation. Another important first step toward long-term sustainable interventions and policies that support menstrual hygiene management is destigmatization at individual, social, and relational levels. These interventions should emphasize well-being and comfort during menstruation as well as issues of health, education, and work.

Read the full article here: https://bit.ly/Ci3_MenstruationSRHM

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