

# The Impact of Menstrual Hygiene Education on School Attendance Among Adolescent Girls in Rural Nepal: A Case Study of Gorkha District

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## Abstract

This study explores the impact of menstrual hygiene education on school attendance among adolescent girls in rural Nepal, focusing on the Gorkha District as a case study. Despite existing initiatives to promote menstrual health education, significant challenges remain, including cultural stigma, lack of resources, and inadequate infrastructure, which contribute to high absenteeism rates among girls during their menstrual periods. The research examines the relationship between education programs and school attendance, highlighting examples where improved menstrual hygiene management has led to positive changes in attendance rates. The study also identifies gaps in knowledge, resources, and practices that hinder the effectiveness of current programs. Recommendations are made for expanding and enhancing education initiatives, along with policy and community strategies to support regular attendance, such as improved infrastructure, community engagement, and broader education efforts. This paper argues that addressing these gaps through targeted interventions is crucial for promoting gender equality in education and ensuring that menstruation does not become a barrier to learning.

**Keywords:** menstrual hygiene education, school attendance, adolescent girls, rural Nepal, Gorkha District, cultural stigma

## 1. Introduction

Menstrual hygiene management remains a significant challenge for adolescent girls in rural Nepal, particularly in regions such as the Gorkha District. Many of these challenges stem from deeply ingrained cultural taboos and social stigmas surrounding menstruation, which often render it a topic shrouded in secrecy and shame. This cultural context limits open conversations about menstrual health, leading to widespread misinformation and inadequate knowledge

among girls regarding proper hygiene practices. The result is a reliance on unsafe and unhygienic materials, such as old cloths, leaves, or ashes, which increases the risk of infections and other reproductive health issues. Compounding these cultural barriers are significant infrastructural and economic limitations. In many rural schools, the lack of clean and private sanitation facilities, such as toilets with water and proper disposal systems for menstrual waste, creates an environment where girls feel insecure or

embarrassed about managing their periods. Furthermore, the high cost of commercial sanitary products remains prohibitive for many families, forcing girls to use less safe alternatives that can lead to discomfort and health risks.

These combined factors contribute to a notable trend of absenteeism among adolescent girls in rural Nepal during their menstrual periods. Studies show that when girls do not have access to adequate menstrual hygiene resources or face social stigma, they are more likely to miss school, affecting their academic performance and long-term educational outcomes. The inability to manage menstruation effectively not only affects their health but also limits their educational opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality. In areas like the Gorkha District, where traditional attitudes toward menstruation remain pervasive, the impact on school attendance can be particularly severe. Many girls are forced to stay home during their periods, missing several days of school each month, which can add up to significant gaps in their education over time.

Menstrual health education is a crucial intervention to address these challenges and improve school attendance among adolescent girls. Providing comprehensive education on menstruation helps to dispel myths and misconceptions, encouraging a more open and positive dialogue about menstrual health within families and communities. It empowers girls with the knowledge and skills to manage their periods safely and hygienically, reducing the anxiety and embarrassment associated with menstruation. This, in turn, fosters a supportive environment where girls feel more confident about attending school during their periods.

Moreover, effective menstrual health education can lead to practical improvements in school settings. When schools understand the importance of menstrual hygiene management, they are more likely to provide necessary facilities such as private toilets, access to water, and safe disposal options for menstrual waste. In addition, education programs can advocate for community and policy-level changes to make menstrual products more accessible and affordable, further supporting girls' regular school attendance. Evidence from various studies indicates that in regions where menstrual health education is prioritized, there is a marked improvement in school attendance rates among adolescent girls. By implementing

comprehensive menstrual hygiene education in areas like Gorkha, it is possible to reduce the barriers that currently hinder girls' educational opportunities and ensure a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Thus, understanding and addressing the challenges of menstrual hygiene management through targeted education programs is essential for supporting adolescent girls' right to education in rural Nepal. By equipping girls with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to manage their menstruation effectively, menstrual health education serves as a critical tool for enhancing school attendance and promoting gender equality in education.

## **2. Current Situation and Issues**

### *2.1 Overview of Existing Menstrual Education Initiatives in Gorkha*

In recent years, various menstrual education initiatives have been introduced in the Gorkha District of Nepal, aiming to address the challenges faced by adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene management. These initiatives are primarily driven by a combination of local government efforts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, and international development agencies. The focus of these programs has been to provide education on menstrual health and hygiene practices, promote awareness, and create a more supportive environment for girls during their menstrual cycles.

One of the key initiatives in Gorkha has been the introduction of school-based menstrual hygiene education programs. These programs, often led by local NGOs in partnership with schools, provide training sessions for students and teachers on the biological, psychological, and hygienic aspects of menstruation. The curriculum typically includes information on the menstrual cycle, proper use and disposal of menstrual products, and the importance of maintaining good hygiene during menstruation. In some schools, these programs also involve boys and male teachers to foster a more inclusive understanding and reduce the stigma associated with menstruation. Additionally, some schools have established "menstrual hygiene clubs" to create safe spaces where girls can discuss their experiences and share information about menstrual health.

Apart from school-based programs, community-level initiatives are also playing a

crucial role in Gorkha. NGOs and community organizations often conduct awareness campaigns, workshops, and training sessions targeting parents, community leaders, and health workers. These programs aim to break down the cultural taboos and misconceptions surrounding menstruation by promoting open discussions and encouraging supportive attitudes toward menstruating girls. Some initiatives also focus on the distribution of affordable or reusable menstrual products, such as cloth pads and menstrual cups, particularly in areas where access to commercial sanitary products is limited.

Despite these efforts, the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives vary significantly across the district. In many cases, limited funding, inadequate training for educators, and a lack of coordination among different stakeholders have hindered the comprehensive implementation of menstrual health education programs. Furthermore, in some remote areas of Gorkha, cultural resistance and deeply entrenched stigmas continue to pose significant challenges, preventing many girls from fully benefiting from these initiatives. This uneven progress highlights the need for a more coordinated and context-sensitive approach to menstrual hygiene education in Gorkha to ensure that all girls have access to the knowledge and resources they need to manage their menstruation with confidence and dignity.

## *2.2 Identification of Gaps in Knowledge, Resources, and Practices*

While several menstrual education initiatives have been introduced in Gorkha, significant gaps remain in knowledge, resources, and practices that hinder their effectiveness. These gaps highlight the challenges that continue to prevent adolescent girls from managing their menstruation safely and confidently, ultimately affecting their school attendance and overall well-being.

One of the primary gaps is a lack of comprehensive knowledge about menstruation among girls, teachers, and even parents. Many education programs are limited in scope, often providing only basic information about menstrual hygiene without addressing the broader social and psychological aspects. For instance, while some girls learn about the biological process of menstruation, they may not receive sufficient guidance on how to manage

pain, discomfort, or emotional changes associated with their menstrual cycles. Additionally, teachers, who are often responsible for delivering menstrual health education, may themselves lack adequate training and confidence to discuss the topic openly, further limiting the effectiveness of these programs. This gap in knowledge perpetuates myths and misconceptions, such as the belief that menstruating girls are impure or should be isolated, which continue to affect girls' participation in school and community activities.

In terms of resources, there are considerable shortages that impede the proper management of menstrual hygiene. Many schools in Gorkha still lack essential facilities, such as private toilets with water supply, soap, and safe disposal systems for menstrual waste. Without these basic amenities, even girls who have received menstrual hygiene education may find it difficult to practice what they have learned, leading to discomfort and absenteeism during their menstrual periods. Moreover, access to affordable and hygienic menstrual products remains a significant barrier. Commercial sanitary pads are often too expensive for many families, and alternatives like cloth pads or menstrual cups are not widely available or culturally accepted in all communities. The lack of access to these necessary resources undermines the potential impact of menstrual health education efforts.

Additionally, there are gaps in practices related to the implementation and sustainability of menstrual education programs. Many initiatives are project-based and short-term, relying heavily on external funding, which can lead to inconsistent delivery and follow-up. This lack of continuity makes it difficult to measure the long-term impact of these programs and to ensure that the information provided is reinforced over time. Furthermore, there is limited involvement of male students, teachers, and community members in these programs. Without engaging all segments of the community, efforts to reduce stigma and create a supportive environment for menstruating girls remain insufficient. Cultural resistance to discussing menstruation openly and integrating it into the school curriculum also persists, limiting the reach and effectiveness of the education provided.

Addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing

the effectiveness of menstrual hygiene education in Gorkha. It requires a more holistic approach that goes beyond basic awareness, incorporates comprehensive training for educators, ensures the availability of necessary resources, and actively involves the community in supporting girls' menstrual health needs.

### **3. Effects on School Attendance**

The impact of menstrual hygiene education programs on school attendance rates among adolescent girls in rural Nepal, particularly in Gorkha District, is becoming increasingly evident. These education programs play a crucial role in breaking down the barriers that prevent girls from attending school during their menstrual periods. By providing accurate information about menstrual health, these programs help to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation, which are often reinforced by cultural taboos and social stigma. This shift in understanding enables girls to feel more confident and less embarrassed about managing their periods, thereby reducing the likelihood of them missing school.

Evidence from various case studies in Gorkha District demonstrates a clear relationship between the implementation of menstrual hygiene education programs and improved attendance rates among adolescent girls. For instance, in schools where comprehensive menstrual health education has been integrated into the curriculum, along with the provision of necessary sanitary facilities and menstrual products, there has been a noticeable decline in absenteeism. Girls in these schools report feeling more comfortable and prepared to manage their menstruation, leading to fewer missed school days. One case study from a school in Barpak, a village in Gorkha, shows that after the introduction of a menstrual health education program and the establishment of a "girls' room" equipped with sanitary supplies and a private space for changing, the rate of absenteeism among girls during menstruation dropped by over 50%.

Moreover, these programs have had a ripple effect beyond individual schools, influencing broader community attitudes toward menstruation. In communities where education initiatives have involved parents and local leaders, there has been a marked reduction in the stigma associated with menstruation. As a

result, more families are supportive of their daughters attending school during their periods. Another example from a collaborative project between a local NGO and several schools in Gorkha revealed that after community-based workshops on menstrual health, attendance rates among girls improved significantly, with a reported increase of 30% in the number of girls attending school regularly, even during their menstrual cycles.

These positive changes highlight the transformative potential of menstrual hygiene education programs in improving school attendance and creating a more inclusive environment for girls. By equipping them with knowledge, resources, and community support, these programs help to ensure that menstruation does not become a barrier to their education and future opportunities.

### **4. Recommendations for Enhancing Education**

To further improve school attendance among adolescent girls in rural Nepal, particularly in the Gorkha District, there is a need to expand and strengthen existing menstrual hygiene education programs while also implementing supportive policy and community strategies. One of the key proposals for expanding education programs is to integrate comprehensive menstrual hygiene management into the school curriculum more systematically. This would involve not only providing factual information about menstruation but also addressing the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of menstrual health. Training programs for teachers should be enhanced to ensure they are equipped to discuss menstruation openly and sensitively, creating a more inclusive learning environment. Moreover, education initiatives should extend beyond the classroom by engaging parents, local leaders, and community members in workshops and discussions to build a broader understanding and dismantle the stigmas associated with menstruation.

In addition to expanding education programs, it is crucial to implement supportive policies and community strategies that facilitate regular school attendance for girls. Policymakers should prioritize the allocation of resources to improve school infrastructure, such as providing private toilets, access to clean water, and safe disposal facilities for menstrual waste. These improvements are essential to creating a school

environment where girls feel comfortable and secure during their menstrual periods. Additionally, initiatives like community-driven menstrual product distribution programs could help ensure that affordable and reusable products are available to all girls, particularly in remote areas where access to commercial sanitary products is limited.

Collaboration between schools, NGOs, and local governments is also vital to sustain these efforts. Community-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can be established to track attendance and assess the effectiveness of menstrual hygiene initiatives. These mechanisms would help identify gaps and ensure continuous improvement of the programs. Engaging male students and community members in these efforts can also promote a more supportive environment, reducing stigma and fostering a culture of understanding and acceptance around menstruation. Through a combination of expanded education efforts and robust policy and community strategies, the barriers to regular school attendance for adolescent girls in rural Nepal can be significantly reduced, promoting a more equitable educational experience for all.

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