



## Consultation Workshop on “Menstruation Issues from LGBTQIA+ Community, Persons with Disabilities, and Youth”



April 18th, 2024

Alfa House, Baneshwor

## Abbreviations used in the Report

MHM PA	Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance
BBC	Beyond Beijing Committee
MH Day	Menstrual Hygiene Day
GoN	Government of Nepal
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
NGO	National Government Organization
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
PCOS	Polycystic Ovary Syndrome
PCOD	Polycystic Ovarian Disease
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health
NDWA	Nepal Disabled Women Association
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organizations

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## Introduction

On 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024, MHMPA Secretariat Office, BBC Nepal organized a consultation workshop on “Menstruation Issues from LGBTQIA+ Community, Persons with Disabilities, and Youth” with support of GIZ Nepal and Plan International Nepal.

The participants include organization working for Women’s Rights, Women with Disability, Organizations working for the rights of LGBTIQ community, youth and activist. The consultation used a participatory approach to encourage the effective participation of participants. The consultation was conducted using appropriate adult learning tools and methodologies, i.e. icebreakers, group works, cases, ppt, pictures. Etc.

The voices and recommendations gathered during the workshop will be instrumental in further advocacy processes. Additionally, video excerpts from the group work presentations will be showcased during the Menstrual Hygiene (MH) Day celebrations on May 28th, 2024. This grand event will bring together government officials, NGOs, INGOs, policymakers, activists, and journalists, providing a platform to highlight the unique challenges faced by these communities and propose actionable recommendations.

## Background

The Menstrual Hygiene Management Partners Alliance (MHM PA) is an informal network of over 80 institutional members working to promote dignified menstruation in Nepal since 2017. Originally starting with 20 members, MHM PA has grown significantly with 80+ members by the end of 2022/2023. The network's vision is a Nepal where dignified menstruation is a daily reality for all. Members include UN agencies, bilateral organizations, the World Bank, INGOs, NGOs, civil society, media, researchers, activists and interested individuals. MHMPA works on policy advocacy, public awareness/education, innovation and sustainability, knowledge management and capacity building around dignified menstruation and menstrual health and hygiene in Nepal. It also positions itself as an advisory network for the Government of Nepal and helps in facilitating knowledge management for decision-making at national and sub national levels.

MHM PA has successfully established dignified menstruation as a national priority across government and non-government sectors, especially in education, health, WASH, and gender. Since 2018, the Menstrual Hygiene Management Partners’ Alliance (MHM PA) has taken a leading role in coordinating stakeholders to celebrate International Menstrual Hygiene Day at the national level each year. The network also nominates and mobilizes Goodwill Ambassadors annually to raise awareness about dignified menstruation. In partnership with media and celebrities, MHM PA creates mass awareness campaigns centered around menstruation.

Moreover, menstruation is a natural biological process experienced by individuals with female reproductive systems. However, the experiences and challenges related to menstruation can vary significantly based on one's gender identity, sexual orientation, disabilities, and age group <sup>1</sup>. The LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youth often face unique and complex issues

related to menstruation, which is often overlooked or not adequately addressed in existing policies and programs <sup>2,3</sup>. Most studies and policies related to menstruation in Nepal focus primarily on cisgender girls and women <sup>2,3</sup>. There is limited research and understanding about the distinct needs and experiences surrounding menstruation among LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and youth. The LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youths often experience menstruation differently due to factors such as gender identity, physical limitations, and social stigma. Understanding their unique challenges is crucial to ensure inclusive and accessible menstrual health management.

Therefore, MHMPA organized a consultative workshop of the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youths in Kathmandu and captured comprehensive issues around menstruation to inform the policymakers for addressing these issues, thereby helping them attain menstruation dignity.

## Objectives

The overall objective is to comprehensively understand and address the menstrual needs, challenges, and support gaps for the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youth to promote their menstrual dignity and well-being.

### Specific Objectives

- Identify the specific challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youths regarding menstruation.
- Understand their needs and preferences regarding menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices and access to WASH facilities in the schools, public and workplaces.
- Explore the impact of menstruation on their daily lives, education, psychosocial health and wellbeing.
- Gather insights on existing support systems and identify gaps in service provision.

## Outputs

- Compilation of voices and recommendations from the workshop participants for further advocacy efforts.
- Video documentation of group work presentations capturing the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youth regarding menstruation.
- Dissemination of the video excerpts during the Menstrual Hygiene (MH) Day celebrations on May 28th, 2024, to raise awareness and reach a wider audience.
- Engagement of key stakeholders, including government officials, NGOs, INGOs, policymakers, activists, and journalists, during the MH Day celebrations to:
  - a. Highlight the unique menstrual challenges faced by these communities.
  - b. Propose actionable recommendations to address these challenges.

- Advocacy efforts informed by the voices and recommendations gathered during the workshop, aimed at promoting menstrual dignity and well-being for the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youth.

## Methodology of the Event

The workshop brought together a diverse array of participants, including representatives from LGBTQIA+ community organizations, disability rights groups, and youth networks. Experts in the field were invited to deliver key thematic presentations, providing context and guiding the participants on the intricacies of menstrual health and hygiene management. To facilitate an in-depth understanding of the menstruation issues faced by different communities, the participants were divided into smaller groups. Separate group discussions were held to explore the unique challenges encountered by the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youth, respectively. These interactive sessions allowed for open dialogue and the sharing of personal experiences, ensuring that diverse perspectives were heard and captured.

With the consent of the participants, video documentation was undertaken to record their voices and narratives. This visual documentation aimed to preserve the authenticity of the experiences shared and serve as a powerful tool for advocacy and awareness-raising efforts.

Throughout the workshop, a participatory approach was adopted to comprehensively understand the unique needs and concerns of each community. Facilitators ensured that the discussions were inclusive and provided a safe space for individuals from marginalized and underrepresented groups within the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and youth to voice their experiences and perspectives. The group work sessions delved into the specific challenges faced by these communities in relation to menstruation, including access to menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices, and the availability of appropriate WASH facilities in schools, public spaces, and workplaces. Participants explored the impact of menstruation on their daily lives, education, psychosocial health, and overall well-being.

Additionally, the discussions aimed to identify existing support systems and services available to these communities, while also highlighting gaps in service provision. Participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences, both positive and negative, and provide insights into the areas that require further attention and improvement.

The workshop facilitators ensured that the discussions were conducted in a respectful and inclusive manner, creating an environment that fostered open and honest dialogue. Through this participatory process, the workshop aimed to gather comprehensive and nuanced perspectives, which would inform future advocacy efforts, policy decisions, and initiatives aimed at promoting menstrual dignity and well-being for all.

## Session I: Concept and Understanding of Disability



Ms. Dev Kumari Parajuli, General Secretary at Nepal Disabled Women Association (NDWA) shed light on the often-overlooked issue of menstrual health management for women and girls with disabilities. By adopting an intersectional approach, she challenged the narrow societal narratives surrounding disability and menstruation. She began by defining disability from a holistic perspective, moving beyond the traditional medical model. She explored the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of the disabled community, emphasizing the importance of recognizing disability as a natural part of human diversity.

The presentation then delved into the various barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, including physical, attitudinal, and systemic barriers that hinder their full participation and inclusion in society. She highlighted the need to understand the different types of disabilities and their unique challenges, particularly concerning menstrual health management. Drawing from personal accounts and research, she vividly illustrated the unique challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities during menstruation. These challenges ranged from limited access to menstrual hygiene products and facilities to societal stigma and lack of awareness about their specific needs.

Throughout the presentation, Ms. Kumari emphasized the importance of recognizing the diverse needs and perspectives of the disabled community. She underscored the necessity of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing these needs, particularly concerning menstrual health. In her concluding remarks, she called for prioritizing accessibility, inclusivity, and empowerment for all individuals, irrespective of their abilities. She advocated for the involvement of the disabled community in decision-making processes, ensuring that their voices and experiences are heard and incorporated into policies and initiatives.



Laxmi Ghalan, President at Mitini Nepal presentation began by challenging traditional assumptions surrounding gender and menstruation, noting that some individuals assigned male at birth can menstruate, while some individuals assigned female at birth may not.

With this inclusive lens, the core of the presentation explored the ethical dilemmas and issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender and non-binary individuals, when it comes to menstrual health research, medical practice, and access to menstrual products and facilities. To provide context, the presenter defined the term LGBTQ+, offering an overview of the different sexual orientations and gender identities that fall under this umbrella term. The presentation then delved into the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ menstruators. One key issue highlighted was the barriers they face in obtaining insurance coverage for menstrual products and care, often due to a lack of understanding or inclusive policies within the healthcare system.

Another critical aspect addressed was the lack of gender-neutral bathroom and hygiene facilities, which can pose significant problems for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those who are transgender or non-binary. The presenter likely used real-life testimonials to illustrate the impact of such barriers on individuals' dignity, safety, and overall well-being. Additionally, the presentation shed light on the ethical dilemmas that arise in menstrual health research when it comes to capturing accurate data across gender identities and ensuring inclusive study designs. This section likely explored the challenges researchers face in creating inclusive protocols and the potential consequences of failing to do so. Throughout the presentation, the use of real testimonials from transgender males who menstruate, as well as medical and scientific data, likely helped to illustrate these issues and provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.



## Group Work Session



## **Group 1-LGBTQIA+ Community**

### **a) What are the specific challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community regarding menstruation?**

The LGBTQIA+ community faces significant challenges concerning menstruation, stemming from societal stigma, lack of awareness, and limited access to resources. At the core of these challenges lies a self-identity crisis, where individuals within the community may struggle to accept themselves as they are.

A primary issue is the lack of knowledge and information surrounding menstruation, which can lead to mental stress and improper self-medication. Such circumstances can have severe negative impacts on health, including an increased risk of suicide and cervical cancer. This lack of knowledge is exacerbated by the persistent lack of acceptance and understanding within society, creating an environment where menstruating individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community feel marginalized and unsupported. To address these challenges, there is a pressing need for separate laws and policies specifically tailored to the LGBTQIA+ community that menstruates. These laws should aim to reduce menstrual discrimination and ensure the fundamental human rights of all menstruating individuals within the community. Additionally, there should be distinct policies that facilitate easy access to sexual and reproductive health resources (SRHR) for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Trans men, in particular, often avoid seeking medical care during menstruation due to the perceived judgmental attitudes of healthcare professionals. This reluctance can lead to self-medication, which may pose various side effects and health risks. It is crucial to educate and sensitize healthcare providers to create an inclusive and supportive environment for the LGBTQIA+ community. Furthermore, policy makers at all levels, from local to federal, must prioritize the inclusion of programs and initiatives that address the menstrual issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community. This could involve raising awareness, providing affordable menstrual products, and promoting inclusive educational campaigns. Recognizing and commemorating events such as Pansexual Pride Day (December 8) can serve as a platform to highlight the unique challenges and experiences of the community.

By fostering a society that embraces diversity and promotes understanding, we can create an environment where menstruating individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community feel accepted, supported, and empowered to navigate their experiences without fear or stigma.

**b) What are the needs and preferences of LGBTQIA+ community for menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices and access to WASH facilities in schools, public places, and workplaces?**

The LGBTQIA+ community has specific needs and preferences when it comes to menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices, and access to WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities in various settings. While their fundamental requirements during menstruation may be similar to those of cisgender women, the unique challenges they face due to societal stigma and lack of inclusive infrastructure must be addressed.

Firstly, it is crucial to provide gender-friendly toilet facilities with necessary menstrual accommodations. These facilities should be equipped with access to pads, soap, dustbins, clean and well-maintained toilets, and a reliable water supply. Importantly, these amenities should be available not only in women's restrooms but also in men's restrooms, as some members of the LGBTQIA+ community may identify as men or non-binary individuals who menstruate. In educational institutions, the provision of gender-neutral toilets is essential to maintain proper hygiene and facilitate comfortable pad changes during menstruation. Additionally, free distribution of sanitary pads should be extended to all individuals who menstruate, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

Many LGBTQIA+ individuals may experience heightened anxiety or discomfort during menstruation, leading to absenteeism from school or work. To address this, schools and workplaces should strive to create a safe and inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and reduces the stigma associated with menstruation. This can be achieved through comprehensive education, awareness campaigns, and the implementation of supportive policies. Access to menstrual hygiene products can be a significant challenge for some members of the LGBTQIA+ community due to concerns related to gender identity and self-confidence. The inability to purchase pads discreetly may lead to situations where individuals experience overflow or staining on their clothes, further exacerbating feelings of embarrassment and discomfort. To mitigate this, gender-neutral services, such as consultation services in hospitals or specialized healthcare facilities, should be made available. Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge and address the lack of acceptance and understanding towards the LGBTQIA+ community within society. Misconceptions, such as the belief that recognizing the needs of the queer community will undermine the rights of cisgender women, must be addressed through education and open dialogue to foster a more inclusive and accepting society.

By implementing inclusive policies, providing gender-neutral facilities, and fostering a supportive environment, we can ensure that the menstrual needs and preferences of the LGBTQIA+ community are met with dignity and respect. This not only promotes better menstrual health and hygiene but also contributes to the overall well-being and empowerment of this marginalized community

**c) How does menstruation affect daily lives, education, psychosocial health and overall wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ community and what support systems are currently in place or needed?**

Menstruation can have a profound impact on the daily lives, education, psychosocial health, and overall well-being of individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community. Despite the common misconception that menstruation is solely a women's issue, it is essential to acknowledge that individuals from the queer community, including trans men, lesbians, and bisexual individuals assigned female at birth, may also experience menstruation if they have a uterus.

One of the primary challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community during menstruation is the lack of gender-friendly services in healthcare settings. Many individuals resort to self-medication practices, which can lead to severe complications and adverse health effects. Therefore, it is crucial to establish inclusive and welcoming healthcare facilities that cater to the specific needs of the LGBTQIA+ community, ensuring they receive appropriate medical care and support during their menstrual cycles. Moreover, there is a pressing need to address the widespread stigma and lack of acceptance towards the LGBTQIA+ community within society. Efforts must be made to change mindsets and behaviors through comprehensive education and awareness campaigns. Schools and educational institutions play a vital role in this process, as they can foster an environment of inclusivity and understanding by incorporating LGBTQIA+ education into their curriculum. This can help combat the bullying and discrimination that LGBTQIA+ individuals often face, particularly during their menstrual cycles.

Access to gender-neutral toilet facilities in educational settings, workplaces, and public spaces is another critical aspect that must be addressed. The absence of such facilities can significantly impact the daily lives and well-being of menstruating individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community. Feeling comfortable and having access to safe and hygienic spaces during menstruation can alleviate stress, improve mental health, and promote overall well-being. Furthermore, support systems tailored specifically for the LGBTQIA+ community are essential to address the unique challenges they face during menstruation. These support systems can take various forms, such as peer support groups, counseling services, and educational resources that provide accurate and inclusive information about menstrual health and hygiene.

By raising awareness about the reality that not only women but also individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community can menstruate, we can break down societal barriers and promote a more inclusive and understanding environment. Collaborative efforts involving healthcare providers, educational institutions, policymakers, and community organizations are crucial in ensuring that the menstrual needs and well-being of the LGBTQIA+ community are adequately addressed and supported.

## Group 2- Adolescent and Youth

### **a) What are the specific challenges faced by the adolescent and youth regarding menstruation?**

Adolescent and youth face numerous challenges regarding menstruation, stemming from a lack of comprehensive education, stigma, and limited access to resources. These challenges are exacerbated by cultural and traditional practices that vary across different ethnic and social groups.

One of the most significant hurdles is the lack of accurate information about menstruation, not only among female adolescents and youth themselves but also among men and boys. This knowledge gap perpetuates misconceptions, taboos, and stigma surrounding menstruation, hindering open discussions and creating an unsuitable environment for seeking guidance or support. Even when menstrual education is included in the curriculum, it is often inadequately taught or omitted entirely. Teachers may feel uncomfortable discussing topics like menstrual cups or newer menstrual product options. As a result, students lack access to essential information about menstrual cycles, potential complications like Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) or Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD), and appropriate menstrual health services.

They also face discriminatory practices and restrictions during menstruation, such as limitations on certain foods, clothing, or participation in cultural or religious activities. These practices stem from deeply rooted stigma and misinformation, further perpetuating a cycle of shame and secrecy. Moreover, the lack of reliable information flow and open discussions within families and educational settings deprives young people of trusted sources to consult about menstruation. Parents and teachers themselves lack adequate knowledge, leaving adolescents and youth with limited access to accurate information and support. Access to menstrual products and services is another significant challenge. Many young individuals lack informed choices due to limited awareness of available options, coupled with issues of affordability and accessibility. Government-distributed pads is of low quality, further compromising menstrual health and hygiene. Additionally, policies aimed at addressing menstrual health and hygiene management (MHM) often remain aspirational rather than actionable, failing to translate into tangible improvements in the lives of adolescents and youth. Inadequate legal literacy further hinders their ability to access their rights and available services. Menstrual-related issues, such as menstrual blues (premenstrual syndrome, menopause, and postmenstrual syndrome), are often overlooked or stigmatized, leaving adolescents and youth ill-equipped to understand and manage these natural processes.

To address these multifaceted challenges, a comprehensive approach is required. This includes promoting accurate and inclusive menstrual education, fostering safe spaces for open discussions, improving access to affordable and eco-friendly menstrual products, and ensuring menstrual-friendly infrastructure in educational institutions and public spaces. Furthermore, engaging policymakers, parents, and educators in addressing menstrual stigma and ensuring the implementation of practical and sustainable MHM policies is crucial for empowering adolescents and youth to navigate their menstrual experiences with dignity, health, and well-being.

**b) What are the needs and preferences of adolescent and youth for menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices and access to WASH facilities in schools, public places, and workplaces?**

Adolescents and youth have specific needs and preferences regarding menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices, and access to WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities in various settings. Addressing these needs is crucial for ensuring their well-being, educational attainment, and overall empowerment during this critical phase of their lives.

One of the primary concerns is the lack of menstrual-friendly infrastructure in schools, public places, and workplaces. Many of these facilities lack adequate disposal systems for used menstrual products, and access to affordable and eco-friendly menstrual product options. This absence of appropriate amenities can significantly impact the daily lives and experiences of menstruating adolescents and youth, leading to discomfort, embarrassment, and potential health risks. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for comprehensive education and awareness about reusable or biodegradable menstrual products. The widespread use of disposable pads, often driven by a lack of knowledge about alternative options, contributes to environmental concerns and may not align with the preferences and values of environmentally conscious youth. In terms of menstrual hygiene practices, adolescents and youth require accurate and age-appropriate information on proper menstrual management, including guidance on maintaining personal hygiene, changing menstrual products regularly, and handling stains or leaks discreetly. This information should be provided through educational programs, outreach initiatives, and accessible resources tailored to their specific needs and preferences.

Access to affordable and high-quality menstrual hygiene products is another essential requirement for adolescents and youth. Financial constraints can often lead to the use of unsafe or unhygienic alternatives, compromising their health and well-being. Ensuring the availability of subsidized or free menstrual products, particularly in educational institutions and youth-centric spaces, can alleviate this burden and promote menstrual dignity. Furthermore, adolescents and youth may have unique preferences when it comes to menstrual product choices. Some may prefer discrete and compact options, while others may prioritize eco-friendly or reusable alternatives. Understanding and accommodating these preferences can foster a sense of empowerment and ownership over their menstrual experiences.

In addition to physical facilities and product access, there is a need for safe and inclusive spaces where adolescents and youth can openly discuss menstrual-related concerns, seek guidance, and receive support from trained professionals or peer groups. These spaces should be free from stigma, judgment, and misinformation, fostering a positive and empowering environment for menstrual education and dialogue. By addressing these critical needs and preferences, educational institutions, public spaces, and workplaces can create an environment that supports the menstrual health and hygiene needs of adolescents and youth, promoting their overall well-being, educational attainment, and participation in various aspects of life without fear or stigma.

**c) How does menstruation affect daily lives, education, psychosocial health and overall wellbeing of adolescent and youth and what support systems are currently in place or needed?**

Menstruation can profoundly impact the daily lives, education, psychosocial health, and overall well-being of adolescents and youth. During this critical stage of development, the challenges and stigma surrounding menstruation can have far-reaching consequences if not addressed appropriately.

One of the most pressing needs is the incorporation of age-appropriate and comprehensive menstrual education into the school curriculum, making it a compulsory component of the educational system. This ensures that adolescents and youth receive accurate and relevant information about menstruation, dispelling myths and misconceptions that can perpetuate stigma and unhealthy practices. Additionally, providing training and resources for parents and teachers is crucial for fostering a holistic understanding of menstrual health and hygiene. By equipping these influential figures with the knowledge and skills to support adolescents and youth, a supportive and inclusive environment can be cultivated, promoting open dialogue and addressing concerns without judgment.

Law reforms and effective enforcement mechanisms are necessary to safeguard the menstrual rights and well-being of adolescents and youth. This includes ensuring access to proper infrastructures such as WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities, pad vending machines in schools and public spaces, clean and well-maintained toilets, and appropriate waste disposal systems. Furthermore, the provision of free menstrual hygiene products in both public and private schools is essential to alleviate financial barriers and ensure that no adolescent or youth is forced to miss educational opportunities due to a lack of access to menstrual products. This initiative should be coupled with investments in mental health support services, recognizing the potential psychological and emotional challenges associated with menstruation.

Creating safe and inclusive spaces for open discussions and sharing experiences is vital for fostering a sense of community and empowerment among adolescents and youth. These spaces can serve as platforms for addressing concerns, seeking guidance, and promoting mutual understanding and support. Social awareness campaigns and educational initiatives are crucial for challenging deeply rooted stigmas, taboos, and misconceptions surrounding menstruation. By involving various stakeholders, including media and community organizations, a broader cultural shift can be facilitated, promoting menstrual dignity and normalizing open conversations about menstrual health. Proper and regular monitoring of the quality of menstrual hygiene products is essential to ensure the health and safety of adolescents and youth. Establishing minimum standards and regulations for production companies can help maintain product integrity and prevent potential health risks. Leveraging digital media platforms and disseminating accurate and age-appropriate information can help combat the spread of misinformation and empower adolescents and youth with reliable resources. Sharing best practices and success stories from various regions or communities can also inspire and guide others in implementing effective menstrual health and hygiene initiatives.

Collaboration and coordination among all three tiers of government (local state/provincial, and federal) are crucial for prioritizing and addressing menstrual health and hygiene needs. This includes allocating adequate resources, developing comprehensive policies, and ensuring effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Adolescent-friendly health services should be established and strengthened, providing accessible and non-judgmental support, information, and resources tailored specifically to the needs of adolescents and youth. Additionally, establishing adolescent empowerment centers can contribute to fostering a sense of agency, leadership, and advocacy among this age group, enabling them to become active participants in shaping menstrual health and hygiene initiatives.

By addressing these multifaceted aspects, a comprehensive support system can be built to empower adolescents and youth, minimize the negative impacts of menstruation on their daily lives, education, and well-being, and foster an environment of understanding, respect, and dignity surrounding this natural physiological process.

### **Group 3- People with Disability**

#### **a) What are the specific challenges faced by the people with disability regarding menstruation?**

People with disabilities face numerous specific challenges regarding menstruation, stemming from a lack of accessible facilities, information, and societal perceptions. It is crucial to acknowledge the variations in disabilities and the unique experiences they present.

One of the primary challenges is the pervasive societal perception and lack of understanding regarding disabilities. This can lead to stigma, discrimination, and a failure to accommodate the specific needs of individuals with disabilities during their menstrual cycles. Access to disability-friendly toilets and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) services is often lacking. This absence of appropriate facilities can make the menstrual experience overwhelming and undignified for individuals with disabilities, hindering their ability to manage their menstrual hygiene independently and comfortably. Furthermore, there is a significant lack of information and guidance on how to use reusable menstrual products and properly dispose of used products. This lack of knowledge can lead to unhygienic practices, increasing the risk of infections and other health complications. Young girls with disabilities may face additional challenges due to the lack of MHM information and practices tailored to their specific needs. This can result in confusion, anxiety, and a lack of preparedness when navigating menstruation for the first time.

In certain cases, individuals with disabilities, such as autistic children, may lack awareness or complete understanding of the physiological changes associated with menstruation, further compounding the challenges, they face in managing their menstrual cycles. Access to information and communication can be a significant barrier for individuals with disabilities, particularly those



with hearing or visual impairments. The lack of sign language interpreters, Braille writing on menstrual product packaging or medication instructions, and other accommodations can deprive them of crucial information and guidance. Cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding menstruation can also contribute to the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. In some communities, they may be deprived of nutritious foods or subjected to restrictive practices during their menstrual cycles, impacting their overall health and well-being. Caregivers and healthcare professionals may hold misguided perceptions about the menstrual needs of individuals with disabilities, leading to inappropriate recommendations or a lack of adequate support. In extreme cases, a violation of an individual's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights occurs when caregivers, such as parents or guardians, opt for the removal of the person's uterus, viewing menstruation as a burden or hassle.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves raising awareness, promoting inclusive policies, improving accessibility, and providing comprehensive menstrual health education tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities. This includes training healthcare professionals, caregivers, and educators to better understand and support the menstrual needs of people with disabilities. By fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, individuals with disabilities can navigate their menstrual experiences with dignity, autonomy, and access to the necessary resources and information, ensuring their overall well-being and equal participation in all aspects of life.

#### **b. What are the needs and preferences of people with disability for menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices and access to WASH facilities in schools, public places, and workplaces?**

People with disabilities have specific needs and preferences regarding menstrual hygiene products, health and hygiene practices, and access to WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities in various settings. Addressing these needs is crucial for promoting their dignity, autonomy, and overall well-being during their menstrual cycles.

Firstly, it is essential to ensure that menstrual hygiene products are designed with accessibility and ease of use in mind for individuals with different types of disabilities. This may include products with larger grips, braille labeling, or easy-to-open packaging for those with visual or dexterity impairments. Additionally, offering a range of product choices, such as reusable or disposable options, can cater to individual preferences and needs. Furthermore, comprehensive and accessible menstrual health education is vital for equipping individuals with disabilities with the knowledge and skills to manage their menstrual cycles effectively. This education should be tailored to different disabilities, utilizing various formats like visual aids, sign language interpretation, or tactile learning materials to ensure inclusivity and understanding.

Access to disability-friendly WASH facilities in schools, public places, and workplaces is a fundamental need for individuals with disabilities during menstruation. These facilities should be designed with features such as wheelchair accessibility, grab bars, and appropriate height and spacing for toilets and sinks. Additionally, the provision of menstrual product disposal units and

adequate privacy is crucial for maintaining hygiene and dignity. Ensuring proper waste management systems and disposal practices for used menstrual products is also essential. This may involve providing specific training and guidance for individuals with disabilities, their caregivers, and facility staff on proper disposal methods to prevent environmental contamination and potential health risks. In educational settings, the availability of disability-friendly and inclusive menstrual health education programs is crucial. These programs should be designed to cater to diverse learning styles and abilities, fostering a supportive and empowering environment for students with disabilities to learn about their bodies and menstrual cycles. Furthermore, the involvement of individuals with disabilities in the design and implementation of menstrual hygiene initiatives is vital to ensure their needs and preferences are accurately represented. This can be achieved through consultations, focus groups, or advisory committees that include individuals with different types of disabilities, allowing for their voices to be heard and their experiences to shape inclusive policies and practices.

Collaboration with disability advocacy organizations, healthcare professionals, and support networks can also play a crucial role in addressing the menstrual needs of individuals with disabilities. These partnerships can facilitate the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and resources, ensuring that menstrual health and hygiene initiatives are inclusive and responsive to the unique challenges faced by this community. By prioritizing accessibility, education, and inclusivity, societies can create an environment where individuals with disabilities can navigate their menstrual experiences with dignity, autonomy, and access to the necessary resources and support systems. This not only promotes their overall well-being but also contributes to their full participation and empowerment in all aspects of life.

**c. How does menstruation affect daily lives, education, psychosocial health and overall wellbeing of people with disability and what support systems are currently in place or needed?**

Menstruation can significantly impact the daily lives, education, psychosocial health, and overall well-being of people with disabilities. The challenges they face during their menstrual cycles are often exacerbated by lack of awareness, accessibility, and supportive systems. To address these issues, a comprehensive approach is needed, involving education, awareness-raising, and the implementation of inclusive policies and practices.

One of the crucial steps is to conduct trainings and educational programs on how to use menstrual products effectively. These trainings should be tailored to the specific needs of individuals with disabilities and their caregivers, as well as organizations working to support and empower people with disabilities. By equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills, they can better manage their menstrual hygiene and maintain their dignity and autonomy. Raising awareness about the variations in disabilities and their unique experiences is essential. This can help dispel myths, stigma, and discrimination surrounding menstruation for people with disabilities, promoting self-acceptance and fostering an inclusive and understanding society. Ensuring the availability of disability-friendly toilets in schools, public places, and workplaces is a fundamental requirement.

These facilities should be designed with universal accessibility guidelines in mind, incorporating features such as wheelchair accessibility, grab bars, and appropriate height and spacing for toilets and sinks. Additionally, the provision of menstrual product disposal units and adequate privacy is crucial for maintaining hygiene and dignity. Vending machines that dispense menstrual products should be widely available and accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. These machines should be strategically placed in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, ensuring that everyone has equal access to essential menstrual hygiene products when needed.

Changing perceptions and challenging existing menstrual taboos and stigmas is vital for creating an environment that supports and empowers people with disabilities during their menstrual cycles. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and inclusive dialogue that celebrates menstrual health as a natural and normal part of life. Encouraging local manufacturing and distribution of menstrual products can help ensure accessibility and affordability for people with disabilities. By involving local communities and organizations, menstrual product supply chains can be tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, reducing barriers to access. It is essential to ensure that the use and disposal of menstrual products are accessible to all, including people with disabilities. This may involve providing clear instructions in various formats (such as braille, large print, or audio), as well as ensuring that disposal facilities are designed with universal accessibility in mind. Disseminating information, education, and communication (IEC) materials through social media and other channels should be inclusive and disability-friendly. This can involve incorporating alternative formats, such as sign language interpretation, audio descriptions, or easy-to-read versions, ensuring that menstrual health information reaches and resonates with people with disabilities.

Prioritizing the involvement and representation of people with disabilities in the production, distribution, and use of menstrual products is crucial. Their perspectives and experiences should inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of menstrual hygiene initiatives, ensuring that their needs and preferences are accurately reflected. Increasing discussions and dialogue around menstrual stigma and discrimination faced by people with disabilities can help raise awareness and foster a more inclusive and supportive society. These conversations should involve all stakeholders, including policymakers, healthcare professionals, educators, and community leaders, to collectively address the barriers and challenges faced by this community. Ensuring accessible menstrual hygiene management (MHM) services is essential for promoting the well-being and autonomy of people with disabilities. This may involve providing disability-friendly healthcare facilities, trained personnel, and tailored support systems that cater to their specific needs during their menstrual cycles.

Ultimately, by implementing inclusive policies, fostering awareness and understanding, and creating accessible and supportive systems, societies can empower people with disabilities to navigate their menstrual experiences with dignity, autonomy, and equal access to resources and support. This not only contributes to their overall well-being but also promotes their full participation and inclusion in all aspects of life.

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## Annex

### Participants List

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46	Sanjita Bajracharya	BBC
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