

Menstrual Hygiene in Prison

Why in news?

India has witnessed a promising shift in the landscape of menstrual hygiene management over the years.

Status of menstrual hygiene in prisons

- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2019-2020) revealed that about 8 out of 10 young women aged 15-24 years in India are now using safe menstrual hygiene products.
- Women in Indian prisons- They face injustice due to societal bias and systemic neglect.
- As per National Crime Records Bureau, there are 23,722 women in Indian prisons, with 77% in the reproductive age group (18-50 years).
- A study in Maharashtra prison revealed that water, sanitation and hygiene facilities failed to meet women prisoner's demands.

What are the challenges faced by women in prisons with respect to menstrual hygiene?

- **Accessibility-** Availability of sanitary napkins has been inconsistent across different prisons, and their quality has been unsatisfactory.
- **Health care services-** Female prisoners often face inadequate access to healthcare services including reproductive health.
- **Overcrowding-** This increased the poor conditions within prison making it challenging for incarcerated women to manage menstruation with dignity.
- **Societal bias-** Society often views prisoners as unworthy of fundamental rights, female prisoners face additional stigma due to unrealistic standards of female purity.
- **Quality constraints-** Prison authorities often depend on donated sanitary napkins, leading to substandard products and insufficient supply.
- **Policy paralysis-** National Menstrual Hygiene Policy acknowledges the needs of female prisoners but however it lacks a comprehensive action plan specifically tailored for prisons.

What are the steps taken by India to promote menstrual hygiene?

- **Menstrual hygiene scheme-** It aims to improve access to menstrual hygiene products for women across the country. It has contributed to raising awareness and promoting safe practices.
- **Suraksha suvidha napkins-** The government has launched 100% oxy-biodegradable sanitary napkin called Suvidha they are available at Jan Aushadhi Kendras (government-run pharmacies).
- **SABLA program-** The Scheme for Adolescent Girls is implemented by Ministry of Women and Child Development, it has incorporated awareness generation on menstrual hygiene as an important initiative to improve health, nutrition, and

empowerment for adolescent girls

- **National Menstrual Hygiene Policy, 2023-** The draft policy emphasizes to prioritize equity to enable all menstruating individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status and geographical location, to have equal opportunities to access and manage their menstruation in a safe and hygienic way.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management-** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has prioritized MHM as a part of National Health Mission and the RMNCH+A strategy.

Goal 6.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals advocates explicitly for “access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

WHO on menstrual hygiene

- To recognize and frame menstruation as a health issue, not a hygiene issue – a health issue with physical, psychological, and social dimensions.
- To recognize that menstrual health means that women and girls and other people who menstruate, have access to information and education about it.
- To ensure that these activities are included in the relevant sectoral work plans and budgets, and their performance is measured.

What can be done to promote MHM in prison?

- **Uniform implementation-** The government must ensure that every state adheres to the recommendations of the 2016 Model Prison Manual, particularly those concerning menstrual hygiene.
- **Holistic approach-** Public health authorities and prison administrators should collaborate to develop a comprehensive strategy ensuring access to adequate menstrual hygiene products and facilities, prioritizing the health and dignity of incarcerated women.
- **Foster research-** There is an urgent need for empirical research to understand the current state of menstrual hygiene within prisons, providing data to inform policy and improve conditions.
- **Inclusive policy making-** The National Menstrual Hygiene Policy should include concrete plans for prisons and involve key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Home Affairs to address menstrual hygiene management effectively within prison systems.

What lies ahead?

- While progress has been made, a more comprehensive approach is necessary to safeguard the menstrual health of incarcerated women.
- Advocacy, awareness and targeted interventions is the need of the hour.

References

1. [The Hindu- Menstrual hygiene in Indian prisons](#)

2. [WHO- Menstrual hygiene rights](#)

