



KEY INFLUENCER'S STUDY ON MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN NEPAL

BACKGROUND

Safe and effective menstrual health management is a critical component of, and premise for, adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health. The knowledge and attitudes that key influencers hand down determine and shape the adolescent girls' future actions and beliefs about menstruation, how menstrual health should be maintained, and transmit many important messages about female roles in society. "Who" the key influencer is matters. "What" the key influencer knows (in terms of accuracy and empirical foundation) determines his or her attitudes about menstrual health and hygiene management (MHM). In this context, a comprehensive list of key influencers were enlisted and their level of influence identified.

METHODOLOGY

Key Influencers were identified following In-depth interviews (IDIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and literature reviews. Data was collected between 13 April and 17 May, 2017 and the study was conducted in 12 districts of Nepal (2 villages in each district) representing urban and rural settings from three ecological zones and five development regions. Altogether, there were 72 IDIs and 408 participants in 48 FGDs. Ethical approval was obtained from Nepal Health Research Council's Ethics Committee.

Table 1. Breakdown of Identities of Key Influencers

Key Influencer Identity	# Interviewed for This Study
Mothers	19
Fathers	2
Brother of Adolescent Girl	1
Sister of Adolescent Girl	1
Friend of Adolescent Girl	1
Teachers	18
Religious Leaders	9
Traditional Healers	9
Social Workers	7
Health Professionals	5

KEY FINDINGS

- Key influencers were comprised of a vast group, including mothers, teachers, religious leaders, faith healers, traditional healers, social workers and health service providers.
- Mothers were the immediate source for information, as they provided support during menstruation, followed by sisters and female friends.

Key Influencers' Knowledge

Key Influencers develop layers of understanding in terms of what is clean and dirty and people relate these attributes to good health and bad health. Understanding these symbolic meanings were essential to develop a nuanced view of the levels of understanding and awareness about MHM.

Key Influencers' Beliefs and Perceptions about Menstruation

Beliefs, attitudes, and social norms around menstruation forms a complex web of control that limits adolescent girls' and women's independence. These controls ultimately strengthens the position of men in the society by placing the burden of responsibility for managing menstruation on females. But the women are rarely given any corresponding authority or freedom to manage it responsibly and in a healthy manner.

Key Influencers' and Socio-cultural Practices around Menstruation

After menarche, adolescent girls' menstruation increasingly becomes subject to sanction and physical separation enforced by patriarchal attitudes regarding men's and women's roles. These attitudes and norms are often enforced by men and women alike on the premise that overall societal health depends on exercising this control over adolescent girls. Restrictive practices were categorized into four themes: 1) responsibility to society, 2) shame, 3) imposed privacy, and 4) seclusion. None of these themes stands alone; in fact, they were deeply entwined just as the complex of norms and attitudes around menstruation and



Focus Group Discussion with Key Influencers' - Bhaktapur

form a sophisticated web that entraps, rather than liberates, adolescent girls.

Key Influencers' Perspective on MHM Practices, Products and Services

School attendance was greatly impacted by the beliefs and restrictions surrounding menstruation. In some districts, parents do not allow their daughters to go to school during menstruation; instead, parents insisted daughters to take rest at home. Cost factors aside, barriers to access were found in many districts, where adolescent girls and women had to walk far from home to a market where sanitary pads were available.

Key Influencers' Perspective on Product Disposal

Apart from the availability and affordability of sanitary pads and MHM products, proper disposal was another issue, which was also influenced by existing beliefs and attitudes about menstruation, particularly the controversial issue of "seeing" menstrual blood. This issue was consistent across all districts in the study.

Ideas for Change

Despite the considerable obstacles – attitudinal and practical – many individuals had started to question the foundation and assumptions upon which many restrictions are premised. In some cases these questions emanate from economic concerns, while in others they were the result of external influences such as media, education, or awareness-raising programs. Together, these individuals represented potential points of intervention that could augur much-needed change in MHM and go a long way towards enabling adolescent girls and women to have much more secure and fulfilling lives.



Recommended Citation

PSI/Nepal, MIRA, and Maverick Collective. 2017. Key Influencers' Study on Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management in Nepal. Kathmandu Nepal. <http://maverickcollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PSI-Menstrual-Hygiene-in-Nepal-Key-Influencer-Study-Upissue-2.pdf>