

ECW FUNDED MULTI-YEAR RESILIENCE PROGRAMME

BEYOND MENSTRUATION: FOSTERING WELL-BEING AND EDUCATION FOR GIRLS



MHM BENEFICIARY RAFIYA STUDYING IN GGHS,
PONGA-OSMANIA, LORALAI DISTRICT.

Despite concerted efforts, Pakistan continues to grapple with the highest number of out-of-school (OOS) girls in South Asia, intensifying gender disparities. Globally, Pakistan holds the second position in the count of OOS children, reaching around 22.8 million aged 5-16, making up 44% of this age group's population¹. Notably, the disparity is more acute among 5-9-year-olds, where 5 million children are not enrolled, and further escalates in the 10-14 age group, leaving 11.4 million adolescents without formal education. Gender, socio-economic, and geographic imbalances are evident, with Balochistan recording a staggering 78% of OOS girls.

Existing literature highlights various challenges associated with menstruation, including lack of information about their bodies, insufficient knowledge on successful menstruation management, inadequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities at schools, unaffordability of sanitary pads, the risk of embarrassment due to menstrual leaks, and resultant school absenteeism. While addressing menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in schools without proper facilities is crucial, there is a growing emphasis on the need for enhanced menstrual health and hygiene education to improve the well-being and educational outcomes of

¹ UNICEF Report



adolescent females.² This has serious implications for girls' enrolment, retention and completion rates.

This case study explores the transformative impact of the MHM awareness programme, rehabilitation of latrines and hand-washing facilities, provision of MHM kits and setting-up MHM corners under the Rural Support Programmes Network's (RSPN) component of the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) funded Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) in Loralai, Panjgur and Kohlu districts of Balochistan Province.

Rafiya (name changed for privacy), a 11-year-old student studying in class 5th at Government Girls' High School in Ponga-Osmaniya District, Loralai, faced challenges related to MHM that hindered her education. Rafiya's journey began with lack of awareness about menstruation, leading to confusion and her abrupt departure from school, when she experienced her first periods in school. In an area where discussing menstrual hygiene is taboo, the high cost of pads exacerbates the situation. Consequently, majority of girls resort to using a piece of cloth, repeatedly washed and reused. This practice poses health risks, with potential infections going untreated due to the stigma surrounding menstruation and gynaecological issues. In Rafiya's case, the absence of information compelled her to seek guidance from her sister, who provided limited information. Resorting to using cloth during her periods, Rafiya often avoided school or attended class while standing the entire time, fearing potential embarrassment due to stains.

Rafiya's life took a positive turn when she became a beneficiary of the MHM awareness programme implemented by RSPN under the ECW-funded MYRP. She received an MHM kit from the Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP), a partner organization of RSPN, which played a pivotal role in improving her confidence and overall

well-being. The MHM kit provided Rafiya with the necessary resources, including sanitary pads, underwear, soap, and other items related to health and hygiene, such as toothbrush, toothpaste, combs, nail cutter etc. that significantly boosted her confidence. With her newfound confidence, Rafiya started attending school regularly, even during her menstrual days.

Rafiya's interaction with her elder sister transformed as well. The MHM awareness programme facilitated open discussions about menstruation, enabling her to share her experiences freely and seek guidance without hesitation.



The positive changes in Rafiya's life had a ripple effect on the community. Other girls who were initially reluctant to attend school during their menstrual days appreciated the establishment of MHM corners in their school. The MHM corner in Rafiya's school is providing a permanent solution for girls facing challenges related to menstruation. These corners are offering a safe and supportive environment where girls can access sanitary pads and other necessary items without fear or hesitation.

Rafiya's case exemplifies the transformative impact of MHM awareness programmes and the provision of MHM kits on the lives of young girls in rural areas. By addressing the challenges related to menstruation, these initiatives not only empower

² Adolescent Girls Information Needs regarding Menstrual Hygiene Management- UNICEF

individual girls like Rafiya but also contribute to breaking the barriers that hinder girls' education. The establishment of MHM corners in schools further ensures a sustained and inclusive approach towards MHM, fostering a conducive environment for girls to thrive academically and socially.

"Before receiving the MHM kit from MYRP, menstruation left me confused, causing me to skip school. I resorted to using cloth and staying home or embarrassingly attending class by standing the entire time, as coping strategies. Now, with the kit, I attend school confidently, even during periods. It opened conversations with my sister. This kit transformed my well-being, bringing happiness and relaxation."

Rafiya, 11 years old, Govt Girls' High School, Ponga, Loralai.

Ms. Kareema, a devoted mother of 13-year-old Huma (name changed), emphasised the transformative impact of MHM interventions on the well-being and educational outcomes of girls. Despite providing initial orientation to her daughter about menstruation, cultural and social norms limited her ability to purchase pads or other necessary items, as women cannot go to shops to buy them. This constraint led Huma to use cloth, causing discomfort and anxiety at school, occasionally resulting in absences due to the fear of stains.

However, significant positive changes occurred after implementation of MHM interventions, including awareness-raising sessions, provision of MHM kits, and establishment of MHM corners in school. Ms. Kareema also attended an MHM awareness session conducted by Community Resource Persons (CRPs) in their area, which

"The MHM awareness sessions have made a significant positive impact on Huma's well-being and education. " Attending one of these sessions at the community level by CRPs also allowed me to connect with other women in our community, breaking barriers and dispelling myths around MHM, diet, and hygiene practices."

Ms. Kareema, Mother of Huma.

facilitated open communication among women. This session dispelled myths and misconceptions surrounding MHM, diet and hygiene practices, fostering a more informed and supportive community.

Ms. Maria Bibi, a dedicated teacher at Government Girls' High School in Ponga, Osmaniya, stressed the importance of regular awareness programmes in classrooms. She highlighted the significant challenge posed by non-functional wash facilities in schools, a factor that often leads young girls to drop out or avoid attending school during their menstrual days. In response to this, teachers, including Ms. Bibi, underwent specialised training on menstrual health and hygiene to enhance their understanding of the issues surrounding MHM.

Following the provision of MHM kits, these trained teachers have been consistently conducting informative sessions. Ms. Bibi personally witnessed a remarkable improvement in the girls' confidence levels, translating into increased participation in extracurricular activities.

In collaboration with the MYRP team, Ms. Bibi and her fellow educators are actively engaged in transforming the school environment. Their collective efforts aim to create a more conducive and protective space, eliminating anxiety and fear that may hinder girls from pursuing their education. Ms. Bibi underscores the positive impact of these initiatives not only on confidence but also on the overall well-being of the young girls, highlighting the transformative potential of MHM interventions within the school setting.

"Health and Hygiene awareness training programmes boosted girls' confidence, making them active and increasing their participation in activities. Regular awareness sessions turned challenges into positive change. Collaborating with MYRP, we're transforming the school conditions, by empowering girls through anxiety-free education. These initiatives enhance not only confidence but also the overall well-being of our young learners."

Ms. Maria Bibi, Teacher, Govt. Girls' High School, Ponga, Osmaniya.



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