

Menstruation and Menstrual Hygiene Management Practices among Females in an Urban Slum of Indonesia

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Background: Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) plays an important role in women's well-being. MHM relates to different factors such as region, culture, religion, and sociocultural values. In particular, some challenges exist in the MHM practices of low and middle-income countries due to varying types of knowledge and education on MHM, and availability of menstrual products. Our objectives were to investigate methods of menstrual blood treatment and used menstrual product disposal to reveal the challenges of menstrual management and disposal.

Methods: Study participants were 32 adult women living in a densely populated area of Indonesia. We conducted a questionnaire survey with in-depth interview. The questionnaire included socioeconomic characteristics, menstruation and MHM-related questions.

Results and Discussion: A total of 26 participants had regular menstruation; six experienced irregular menstruation. About 80% of participants experienced normal bleeding duration. Disposable sanitary napkins were participants preferred product for treatment of menstrual blood (100%). This is likely due to Islam's view of menstrual blood as impure. The frequency of changing menstrual products per day was not high however, putting the user at risk of infections and other health problems. Our research found a menstrual waste disposal practice which was divided into four main steps: 1) wash away the menstrual blood on used napkin; 2) squeeze the napkin to remove any excess water and wrap the napkin; 3) dispose of wrapped napkin into the trash bin; and 4) wash hands. Between steps 1 and 2, a part of napkin was occasionally removed and thrown into the toilet. Washing of napkins may be a common practice in the area influenced by socio-cultural values.

Conclusion: Our study highlighted menstruation and MHM among women in an urban slum of Indonesia. Through the investigation, it became clear that the challenge in this area was not so much the women's menstruation, but rather the infrequent treatment of their menstruation. In order to solve challenges of MHM for women considering religious and socio-cultural factors, it may be necessary to clarify why they practice MHM as they do.

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