



Menstrual Hygiene in Indian Prisons

For Prelims: [World Menstrual Hygiene Day](#), [National Family Health Survey](#), [National Crime Records Bureau](#), [World Bank](#), [Menstrual Hygiene Scheme](#)

For Mains: Menstrual hygiene in Indian prisons, Women prisoners in India, Menstrual health policies

Source: TH

Why in News?

On [World Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024](#), India celebrates significant progress in menstrual hygiene management, with the [5th National Family Health Survey \(NFHS 2019-2020\)](#) reporting that **around 80% of young women aged 15-24 now use safe menstrual hygiene products.**

- However, the needs of one of the most marginalized groups of **women in Indian prisons** remain overlooked. Societal biases deny these women **basic rights and proper menstrual hygiene management**, highlighting a critical area for further improvement.

What is the Status of Menstrual Hygiene in Prisons?

- **Population:** According to the [National Crime Records Bureau](#), there are 23,772 women in Indian prisons, with 77% of them in the reproductive age group (18-50 years) and likely to be regular menstruators.
- **Inconsistent Access:** The availability of [sanitary napkins](#) is inconsistent across prisons, and the quality of these products could be better.
- **Uniform Product Size:** All prisons issue **'one size' sanitary pads**, which do not cater to the varying needs of different women.
 - Most prisons do not offer other types of menstrual products like tampons or menstrual cups.
- **Lack of Facilities:** Despite the [2016 Model Prison Manual's](#) recommendations, many **states have not provided female prisoners with adequate water and washroom facilities.**
- **Waste Disposal Issues:** Proper disposal of menstrual hygiene materials is often neglected, impacting both women's health and the facility's hygiene.
- **Additional Challenges: Overcrowding and poor socio-economic conditions** further hinder access to necessities like water, detergent, and soap.

Why is Menstrual Hygiene Management Overlooked in Prisons?

- **Stigma and Silence:** Menstruation itself can be a **taboo subject**, and there might be hesitation to discuss it openly, especially in a prison environment. This can make it difficult for women to ask for what they need.
- **Lack of Legal Framework:** There is no law mandating the provision of free, unlimited sanitary products in prisons.
 - No prison rule has provisions for providing hot water to women prisoners to manage

menstruation.

- **Menstrual Health Schemes:** Existing schemes like the [Menstrual Hygiene Scheme 2011](#), [Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#), and [Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana](#) **do not specifically address the needs of women prisoners.**
- The **Model Prison Manual 2016** suggests providing sterilised sanitary pads as needed, but implementation varies widely across states and prisons.
- **Data Deficiency:** There is a lack of data on **water availability in prisons**, complicating efforts to address hygiene needs effectively.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Prison authorities may not be fully aware of the specific needs of women during menstruation, or the importance of menstrual hygiene for their health.
- **Budgetary Constraints:** Providing menstrual products can be seen as an extra expense, especially in overcrowded prisons with limited resources.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

- It is a critical aspect of public health and human rights. It refers to the **practice of using clean menstrual materials to absorb or collect blood, which can be changed in privacy** as often as necessary during menstruation.
- MHM also includes the use of soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual materials.
- **UNICEF** emphasises the importance of MHM as it affects the **dignity, health, and education** of millions of people who menstruate, particularly in developing countries where access to clean water and sanitation facilities may be limited.
- The **World Bank** also highlights the need for access to **water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities**, affordable menstrual hygiene materials, information on good practices, and a supportive environment to manage menstruation without embarrassment or stigma.
- **Menstrual health is recognised as a human rights issue.** Everyone has the right to bodily autonomy, which includes the **ability to care for one's body during menstruation.**

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UNFPA-UNHCR

Menstrual hygiene management kit (MHM)

One kit contains the essential menstrual hygiene items to cover the needs of a menstruating person for up to three months.

Standard content



Disposable sanitary pads



Female underwear (panty)



Detergent/
Washing Powder



Clothes
pegs + string



Bath soap +
plastic holder



Leaflet

Variable content



Disposable
sanitary pads



Reusable
menstrual Pads



Menstrual
cups



Tampons

World Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024

- World Menstrual Hygiene Day is an annual awareness day held on **28th May**. It aims to **break the silence and stigma surrounding menstruation** and promote good menstrual hygiene management.
- **Theme: "#PeriodFriendlyWorld"**.
- **History:** In 2013, **Germany-based NGO WASH United** introduced Menstrual Hygiene Day to combat the stigma around menstruation and promote access to proper sanitary facilities and affordable menstrual products.

What are the Government Initiatives Related to Menstrual Hygiene?

- **National Menstrual Hygiene Policy:** Introduced in 2023, this policy emphasises safe and

dignified MHM for all.

- Remarkably, the **policy identifies prisoners as a target population** with compromised access to menstrual hygiene facilities, marking a positive step forward.
- **Lack of Concrete Plans:** The policy does not provide a specific action plan for improving menstrual hygiene management in prisons.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS):** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched MHS to promote menstrual hygiene among rural adolescent girls aged 10-19.
 - The **scheme provides subsidised sanitary napkin** packs to adolescent girls through decentralised procurement, with Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers responsible for distribution and education.
- **Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):** [Suraksha Suvridha Napkins \(oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins\)](#) are available at Jan Aushadhi Kendras **for Rs 1 each.**
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) (Mission Shakti):**
 - Generating **awareness about menstrual hygiene** and the use of sanitary napkins.
- **Samagra Shiksha:** State-specific projects for menstrual health and hygiene, including the installation of **sanitary pad vending machines and incinerators** in schools.
- **Zero-Napkin Mission:** The zero-napkin mission aims to **replace synthetic napkins with menstrual cups implemented in Kerala.**
 - Due to the **environmental challenges and health issues posed by synthetic napkins**, local bodies in Kerala are distributing menstrual cups and raising awareness about their use.

Way Forward

- **Period Pantry:** Create **designated and accessible locations in prisons** for inmates to discreetly request and obtain menstrual supplies, such as vending machines stocked with products or designated staff for distribution.
- **Hygiene Heroines:** Train **incarcerated women to become peer educators on menstrual hygiene** best practices.
 - This empowers them to share knowledge with fellow inmates, fostering a sense of community and promoting self-care.
 - Organise workshops for prison staff on menstrual hygiene management and dispelling misconceptions.
 - Involve female healthcare professionals for regular access to gynaecological checkups and education on menstrual health concerns.
- **Guarantee Basic Standards:** The government should **establish and uphold uniform national regulations for menstrual hygiene in prisons**, including providing unlimited, free high-quality sanitary pads, ensuring clean and functional toilets with proper ventilation in female wards, and providing safe and hygienic disposal bins for sanitary pads.
 - Upgrade prison infrastructure by allocating a budget for necessary repairs and upgrades to toilets.
- **Sustainability and Monitoring:** Establish a monitoring system to assess implementation, track product availability, and address issues. Promote menstrual hygiene as a basic right and include it in prison reform initiatives for an ongoing focus on women's well-being.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Menstrual hygiene management is an essential component of public health. Discuss the importance of ensuring dignified and adequate menstrual hygiene facilities for incarcerated women in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains:

Q. What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space? (2019)

