

Adolescents' Perceptions and Experiences of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and Its Impact on Quality of Life at Citra Mulia High School Makassar

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ABSTRACT

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a crucial aspect of adolescent health that significantly affects physical, emotional, and social well-being. However, many adolescent girls still experience challenges in managing menstruation properly due to limited knowledge, inadequate facilities, and social taboos surrounding menstruation. This study aimed to explore adolescents' perceptions and experiences of menstrual hygiene management and its impact on their quality of life at Citra Mulia High School, Makassar. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 10 female students selected using purposive sampling. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify emerging meanings and patterns. The findings revealed three major themes: (1) Understanding and Misconceptions about Menstruation, where participants expressed varied levels of knowledge and lingering myths influenced by cultural beliefs; (2) Challenges in Practicing Menstrual Hygiene, including limited access to clean facilities, embarrassment in changing sanitary pads at school, and inadequate support from peers and teachers; and (3) Impact of Menstrual Management on Quality of Life, highlighting how menstrual discomfort and anxiety affected school attendance, participation in activities, and self-confidence. Conclusion, adolescents' perceptions and experiences of MHM are shaped by cultural norms, environmental conditions, and support systems within the school. Promoting menstrual health education, improving school sanitation facilities, and fostering an open and supportive environment are essential to enhance the quality of life and well-being of adolescent girls.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial transitional period in an individual's life, marked by significant physical, psychological, and social changes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), adolescence spans the ages of 10–19 and is a developmental stage that determines the formation of an individual's identity, independence, and lifestyle in adulthood. One of the major biological changes experienced by adolescent girls is the onset of menstruation, which signals reproductive maturity. Although a natural process, menstruation is often considered a taboo topic for open discussion in society, particularly within schools and families.

Properly managed menstruation through Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) practices is fundamental to maintaining the reproductive health and well-being of adolescent girls. WHO (2020) defines MHM as a woman's ability to use clean menstrual blood-absorbing materials, change them regularly, have access to clean water and soap for handwashing, and adequate waste disposal facilities. Furthermore, MHM includes education, communication, and social support to enable adolescents to experience menstruation safely, comfortably, and with dignity.

However, in reality, many adolescents in developing countries, including Indonesia, still face various barriers in managing their menstrual hygiene. UNICEF (2021) reports that approximately one in four adolescent girls in Indonesia lacks access to clean water and proper toilet facilities at school. Furthermore, more than half of adolescent girls feel embarrassed or afraid to discuss menstruation with teachers, friends, or even their parents. The lack of reproductive health education in schools also leaves many adolescents with limited knowledge about the menstrual process and how to



maintain hygiene during menstruation.

Limitations in menstrual hygiene management have a broad impact on adolescents' quality of life. Adolescents who experience severe menstrual pain, embarrassment due to leakage, or lack adequate facilities for changing sanitary pads are more likely to be absent from school during their menstrual periods. A study by Sommer et al. (2021) found that MHM issues can reduce educational participation by 10–20% per year among adolescent girls in Asia and Africa. This absence not only impacts academic achievement but also lowers their self-confidence and social participation in the school environment.

In addition to physical and environmental factors, adolescents' perceptions and experiences of menstruation are also strongly influenced by cultural factors. In some regions in Indonesia, traditional beliefs persist that menstruating women should limit their activities, refrain from cooking, or participate in certain religious activities. These views can reinforce the negative stigma surrounding menstruation and instill a deep sense of shame in adolescent girls. When menstruation is perceived as "dirty" or "a disgrace," it can hinder the development of healthy self-care behaviors and diminish psychological well-being.

From a psychosocial perspective, negative menstrual experiences can lead to stress, anxiety, and even mild depression, especially if adolescents feel unsupported by their environment. Conversely, emotional and educational support from teachers, peers, and parents has been shown to increase adolescents' confidence in managing menstruation and improve their perceptions of their bodies and feminine identity. Therefore, it is important to understand how adolescent girls interpret menstruation and their hygiene practices, as these perceptions shape their behavior and overall well-being.

Schools are one of the most strategic environments in shaping adolescents' behaviors and understanding of reproductive health. However, many schools in Indonesia, including in urban areas like Makassar, still lack facilities and policies that support the special needs of adolescent girls during menstruation. Poorly maintained toilet facilities, the lack of proper sanitary napkin disposal facilities, and a lack of education about hygiene (MHM) are major obstacles to creating a comfortable learning environment for female students. These conditions often lead to students refraining from changing their sanitary napkins or even choosing to miss school during menstruation.

This research was conducted at Citra Mulia High School in Makassar, an educational institution representing urban youth from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. This environment provides an interesting context for understanding how adolescent girls perceive menstruation, how they manage their hygiene, and how these experiences influence their menstrual cycle.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the experiences and perceptions of female students regarding Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). The study was conducted at Citra Mulia High School, Makassar. The study was planned to last for 2–3 months. Sampling used a purposive sampling technique with certain criteria, so that 10 participants were selected who met the inclusion criteria. including (1) Active female students in grades X and XI at Citra Mulia High School, Makassar (2) Have experienced menstruation for at least the last 6 months (3) Willing to participate in the study through informed consent (4) Able to express experiences and feelings well. Data Collection Techniques: In-depth Interviews: Conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore personal experiences regarding MHM. Data Analysis (1) Familiarization with the data: Transcription and repeated reading of interviews (2) Initial coding: Identification of important patterns in the data (3) Theme search: Grouping codes into potential themes (4) Theme review: Ensuring themes are consistent with the data (5) Defining and naming themes: Refining the essence of each theme. Data validity is maintained through triangulation by comparing interview results

RESULT

A total of 10 participants (S1–S10) were female students at Citra Mulia High School in Makassar who had been menstruating for at least one year. Their ages ranged from 14 to 18 years old, and they were from grades 10, 11, and 12. All participants were willing to participate in in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The following is a brief description of the participants:



Table 1 participant characteristics (N=10)

Participant Code	Age (years)	Grade	Age at Menarche (years)	Menstrual Frequency	Brief Description
S1	14	X	12	Regular	Less open to discussing menstruation
Master	15	X	11	Irregular	Influenced by family beliefs
S3	16	XI	12	Regular	Active in school activities
S4	17	XI	13	Regular	Embarrassed to change sanitary pads at school
S5	15	X	11	Regular	Good knowledge, often helps friends
S6	17	XII	13	Regular	Experiencing severe menstrual pain
S7	18	XII	12	Irregular	Frequent absences during menstruation
S8	16	XI	13	Regular	Sufficient knowledge, believes some myths
S9	17	XI	12	Regular	Lack of support from teachers
S10	15	X	11	REGULAR	Awkwardness in discussing menstruation in class

Theme 1: Understanding and Misunderstanding about Menstruation

Most participants had basic knowledge about menstruation, such as the biological causes and the importance of maintaining hygiene. However, there were still myths and misconceptions influenced by cultural beliefs and a lack of formal education.

Some students believe that during menstruation, they should not wash their hair or drink ice because it can "hinder blood flow." Their knowledge is generally obtained from their mothers or peers, not from teachers at school.

"When I have my period, my mom says not to wash my hair because it will stop the blood flow." (S2)

"I know menstruation is because the uterus is clean, but it has never been explained at school." (

Table 2. Theme 1 – Understanding and Misunderstanding of Menstruation

Interview Results Code	Category	Theme
"I know menstruation is because the uterus is clean every month."	Basic understanding	biological Understanding and misconceptions about menstruation
"My parents say I shouldn't drink ice during my period."	Myths and cultural beliefs	Understanding and misconceptions about menstruation
"Teachers rarely explain about menstruation."	Lack of formal education	Understanding and misunderstanding about menstruation
"I learned about it from my friends, not from school."	Informal sources of information	Understanding and misconceptions about menstruation



Theme 2: Challenges in Practicing Menstrual Hygiene

Participants described various obstacles to maintaining hygiene during menstruation, especially at school. Limited toilet facilities, lack of special trash bins for sanitary pads, and embarrassment were the main obstacles. Some female students admitted to refraining from changing their sanitary pads at school for fear of being teased or seen by their friends.

"The school toilet is dirty, there is no place to dispose of sanitary pads." (S4)
"I'm embarrassed to change my sanitary pads, afraid my friends will find out." (S1)

Some also mentioned a lack of support from teachers, especially when they experience menstrual pain in class, which causes emotional and physical discomfort.

Table 3. Theme 2 – Challenges in Practicing Menstrual Hygiene

Interview Results Code	Category	Theme
"I'm embarrassed to change my sanitary napkin at school."	Shame and social stigma	Challenges in menstrual hygiene practices
"There are no special trash cans in the toilets."	Limited sanitation facilities	Challenges in menstrual hygiene practices
"Teachers sometimes don't care if I have menstrual cramps."	Lack of teacher support	Challenges in menstrual hygiene practices
"I'm afraid of bleeding through my uniform."	Anxiety about leakage	Challenges in menstrual hygiene practices

Most participants reported that menstruation had a direct impact on school attendance, participation in activities, and self-confidence. When facilities were inadequate or feelings of embarrassment arose, they chose not to come to school or not to participate actively in class.

"If I have stomach pain, I don't go to school." (S6) *"If I leak, I feel so embarrassed that I don't want to participate in activities." (S7)*

Some students also mentioned that support from friends and family helped them feel more comfortable, but many still faced emotional pressures such as anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of being teased.

Table 4. Theme 3 – The Impact of Menstrual Management on Quality of Life

Interview Result Code	Category	Theme
"If I have stomach pain, I don't go to school."	Absenteeism and reduced attendance	Impact of MHM on quality of life
"I feel embarrassed when blood leaks onto my uniform."	Decreased self-confidence	Impact of MHM on quality of life
"I don't participate in sports during my period."	Limited participation in school activities	Impact of MHM on quality of life
"If my friends support me, I feel more at ease."	Social support improves well-being	Impact of MHM on quality of life



DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Understanding and Misconceptions about Menstruation

The results of the study showed that most participants had a basic understanding of menstruation as a natural biological process, but myths and misconceptions persist, strongly influenced by culture and a lack of formal education. Most participants acquired their knowledge from their mothers, peers, or social media, rather than from formal school instruction. This often resulted in inaccurate information.

Several participants mentioned prohibitions against washing hair or drinking cold water during menstruation because they believed it would "stagnate the flow of blood." Although lacking scientific basis, these myths are passed down from generation to generation and are believed to be part of healthy habits. These findings suggest that cultural context still plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' understanding of menstruation.

These findings are consistent with research by Hennegan et al. (2021), which revealed that in many developing countries, information about menstruation is still considered taboo and is not discussed openly in schools or families. Meanwhile, Kaur et al. (2022) also found that 60% of adolescent girls in South Asia still believe myths related to menstruation due to limited reproductive health education. In the Indonesian context, Mahmudah and Sari (2022) explained that social and religious values often reinforce taboos about menstruation and cause female students to feel embarrassed to discuss it with teachers or friends. Therefore, schools play a crucial role in providing comprehensive reproductive health education so that students' knowledge is scientific and free from misconceptions.

Theme 2: Challenges in Practicing Menstrual Hygiene

The second theme describes the various barriers adolescents face in practicing menstrual hygiene in the school environment. Key challenges include limited sanitation facilities, embarrassment when changing sanitary napkins, and minimal support from teachers and peers.

Some participants admitted to refraining from changing sanitary napkins at school due to unclean toilets, the lack of dedicated waste bins, and a lack of privacy. These conditions cause discomfort and increase the risk of reproductive tract infections. This aligns with a UNICEF report (2021), which states that approximately 25% of schools in Indonesia do not have gender-friendly toilet facilities suitable for menstrual hygiene management.

Embarrassment and social stigma are significant challenges. Sommer et al. (2021) explained that social pressure to conceal menstruation makes adolescent girls reluctant to discuss or reveal their periods. This study found a similar finding: some female students felt awkward and feared being teased if they were found out.

Research by Kusumawardani et al. (2023) also showed that limited sanitation facilities in schools prevented 30% of adolescent girls from changing sanitary pads during class hours. Furthermore, emotional support from teachers was suboptimal because some teachers lacked knowledge and training regarding gender-sensitive approaches to supporting students experiencing menstrual pain or discomfort.

These findings reinforce the importance of school policies that support a menstrual-friendly environment, including the provision of clean sanitation facilities, reproductive hygiene education, and training for teachers to understand the needs of female students during menstruation.

Theme 3: Impact of Menstrual Management on Quality of Life

The third theme indicates that adolescents' experiences managing their menstruation significantly impact their quality of life, particularly in aspects of school attendance, activity participation, and self-confidence.

Several participants reported frequent absences from school due to severe menstrual pain or discomfort caused by inadequate facilities. Furthermore, anxiety about the possibility of blood leaking onto school uniforms discourages them from participating in physical or social activities. These findings suggest that poor menstrual hygiene management can impact students' psychological well-being and academic achievement.

These findings align with research by Fitria and Nurjanah (2023), which found that suboptimal menstrual hygiene management can reduce student attendance by up to 15% per year. Meanwhile, Hennegan and Montgomery (2021) emphasized that adolescent girls' quality of life is significantly influenced by access to information and adequate hygiene facilities during menstruation.

In addition to physical factors, psychological aspects such as embarrassment, anxiety, and lack of social support also play a role. Patkar and Fakhri (2022) highlighted that support from peers and teachers can increase comfort and reduce stress during menstruation. In this study, female students who received support from



CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings presented, the following conclusions can be drawn. This study revealed that adolescent girls in secondary schools have a basic understanding of menstruation as a biological process, but are still colored by myths and misconceptions (such as taboos about washing hair or drinking iced water) that are strongly influenced by culture and information from family or friends, rather than formal education at school.

Furthermore, adolescent girls face various challenges in maintaining menstrual hygiene at school, including limited and inadequate sanitation facilities (dirty toilets, lack of dedicated waste bins), as well as shame and social stigma that discourage them from changing sanitary pads. Lack of support from teachers is also a significant obstacle.

Due to this incomplete understanding and practical challenges, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) negatively impacts adolescent girls' quality of life. This impact is evident in school absences, reduced participation in activities (due to menstrual pain or fear of leakage), and decreased self-confidence caused by anxiety and shame.

Overall, this study highlights the need for comprehensive reproductive health education in schools to correct misconceptions, as well as improving school sanitation facilities and increasing teacher sensitivity and support to create a supportive environment for adolescent girls during menstruation.

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