

Varsity Students bust menstrual stigma among rural teens



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Jacob Islary 9 April 2018 18488 views

Sonapur : A [group](#) of social work students in Assam organised a [workshop](#) on menstrual health and hygiene for high school [girls](#) of a rural village near Guwahati, Assam.

The [workshop](#) held at Kamarkuchi High School on 7 April, 2018 while creating awareness on menstrual hygiene, provided a platform for the teenage [girls](#) to speak out their mind on the many stigmas attached to their 'bleeding days'.

“More than just awareness we are on a mission to stain the very stigma itself by building courage among [girls](#) to accept the fact that menstruation is part of their natural biological cycle and that there is nothing to feel shy or guilt about it,” said Ms. Memorial Khongkai the [leader](#) of MSW [student workshop](#) team from Guwahati’s Assam [Don Bosco](#) University.

According to [National Family Health Survey](#) (NFHS) 2015-16 study about 43% of Indian women do not have access to sanitary pads and according to some other studies only about 12 % of women use sanitary napkin and the remaining using unsanitised cloths, ashes, husk and sand.

Currently there is 12% [GST](#) (Goods and Services Tax) levied on sanitary napkin making purchase of the pads prohibitive.

The findings of a study carried out by a team of social work students of [ADBU](#) in Sonapur locality in the outskirts of Guwahati too is not any different from the national findings.

Women and [girls](#) have reported of reusing washed sanitary pads, clothes, and rags; having to sleep on floor, avoiding interacting with men including ones [father](#), and avoiding family, community and social events and places of worship during menstruating days.

Speaking on the occasion Mr. Papan Sharma a teacher of the School said that the '[workshop](#) on menstrual hygiene was very relevant for students considering the fact that there is very little open talk or discussion on this matter. It also serves purpose as most of our students come from a background where the parents are not educated enough to give their children appropriate guidance concerns, so such [workshop](#) will remove misconception among the [girls](#) if not with older generations." H

Sharma however, regretted that, "such discussions on menstrual hygiene are rarely carried out in schools."

"The [workshop](#) was planned in keeping with the findings of the preliminary study carried in the community,' said Ms. Asha Sangrola an [ADBU Social Work student](#).

Another [ADBU student](#) Gisel Erumachadathu added, "The [workshop](#) gave a deeper understanding of the concerns that teen age [girls](#) face in family, community and society - having to abstain from interacting with men including with ones [father](#), avoid community and social events and places of worship, having to sleep on the floor, during menstrual days ."

"Often I hide the menstrual cloth under my mekhla (Assamese traditional dress worn by [girls](#) and women), sleep on the floor, and am forced to restrict my mobility during menstruating days," confessed Ms. Bhonti Pathak a class 9 [student](#) who shared her period experience.

Citing the expressions of teen age [girls](#) like - “how I wish, I were a boy. I could have been care free like them. Being a girl is a kind of curse that restricts my life. Sometimes, I feel sad that I am a girl,” Asst. Professor, Mr. Jacob Islary of [ADBU Social](#) Work speaks of “the teen age [girls](#) developing mental health issues like depression, self-image development concerns like inferiority complex and non-acceptance of self and problem with socialisation because of avoidance and isolation caused by menstruation.”

The [workshop](#) was attended by 54 girl students of Kamarkuchi High School, Sonapur.

The study which started four months ago is guided by Asst. Professor Islary.

The [student](#) team is planning to [start](#) a movement for sanitary pad use and working on mobilising resources to make sanitary napkins available to rural teenage [girls](#) who come from poor background.

Jacob Islary

BY JACOB ISLARY

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