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# THE NEED TO INTRODUCE & PROMOTE LOW COST AFFORDABLE SANITARY NAPKINS IN RURAL INDIA

Umesh Shrivastava  
AISECT University Bhopal

## ABSTRACT

*India is a country with many cultures, diverse ethnicities and different sub sections of castes. But one thing which remains unchanged throughout the world is the menstruation cycle of a woman. India is no exception. Though India is now considered to be a developing economy, there are many social taboos which surround the otherwise culturally "rich" country. Ignorance towards female hygiene is one of them. Not only males but females too of rural India still do not recognize or lay importance to the fact that poor sanitation habits may lead to devastating consequences. Furthermore, a menstruating female is barred from entering temples or even kitchens, and adding to this misery they are not allowed to take bath sometimes. The other problem is affordability. This paper tries to analyze and take an overview to suggest ways and means for rural mass for adopting hygienic sanitation measures.*

## I. BACKGROUND

Before starting, let us examine the results of a survey carried out by AC Nielson and endorsed by NGO Plan India. Salient points are:-

- (a) About 68 per cent rural women cannot afford sanitary napkins available in the market.
- (b) On the issue of affordability of quality sanitary care, the survey found that 81 per cent rural women use unsterilized cloths since they are cheaper and 68 per cent said they cannot afford to buy sanitary napkins.
- (c) Poor financial condition does not allow majority of the women to buy quality sanitary napkins, the survey said, adding of cloth users, 45 per cent reuse cloth and 70 per cent dry them in shade, increasing chances of infections.
- (d) According to gynecologists, use of alternative sanitary care measures such as unsterilized cloths,

sand and ash make women susceptible to infections and diseases.

- (e) The study found that awareness on basic health and feminine hygiene is very low, with 75 per cent rural women lacking adequate knowledge on menstrual hygiene and care.
- (f) Adolescent girls in rural India are unable to attend up to 50 days of schooling in a year due to inadequate menstrual care, the report said.
- (g) Research shows Reproductive Tract Infection was 70 per cent more common among those with unhygienic sanitary practices.

Of the 355 million menstruating women in India, only 12 per cent use sanitary napkins. The figure is abysmal, compared to countries like China, where majority of women use sanitary napkins, the survey maintained.

(h) The survey said among the adolescent rural girls, 23 per cent (aged 12-18 years) discontinue studies due to inadequate sanitary facilities in schools.

The above figures are really shocking, but somewhat true and representative of the entire nation.

## II. MOTIVATION

It can be seen that the non-usage of sanitary napkins may lead to health hazards and sometimes death too. Till date no or insufficient steps have been taken by the Govt. to address this very basic but uncomfortable problem of the females. Is it because we have mostly males in our Govt.? Also, the topic of menstrual hygiene is considered so taboo that even if there are women in our Govt., they will not talk about it in an open forum. Furthermore, the society is not open to talk about menstrual hygiene. There is a dire need to change this attitude and mental frame of mind because only with an open mind of the educated society can this problem be brought into light.

MNC'S who are involved in the production of napkins also have their eyes set on the urban India. They have clarity on their target market and will not venture out to cater to the needs of rural India as the margins would significantly drop. Add to this, the ignorance of rural Indian females, it will be a daunting task for the mnc's to convey them the idea of usage of napkins.

The above points are more monetary in nature. The next point is more value oriented. It is about adolescent girls who are going to be the future of this nation. Menstruation is a subject which a girl discusses only with her mother and a rural Indian mother has been taught by her mother to use a piece of cloth and so on and so forth. So she passes on the same set of values to her daughter without giving it much thought as she thinks that her mother and herself have also been doing this since ages and so there is no harm if my daughter uses a piece of cloth. Hence, the daughter already petrified with menstruation starts using that nonsanitised piece of cloth and finds solace in it.

This is a grave situation. As it is, in Rural India education is not given much importance. An adolescent girl, as her menstruation starts, stops going to school till the cycle lasts and after some time stops going to the school altogether.

During recent surveys of mine, it was found that about 70% of the females didn't even know what sanitary napkin is, forget about its usage. After knowing about it they were willing to shell out 20INR a month for its purchase. This raises a very important point. Till now it was believed that probably lack of affordability is the major factor in non-usage of sanitary napkins in rural areas of India. But no it's not that, it's the lack of awareness and knowledge which stops them from using it.

## III. LOW COST SANITARY NAPKINS PRODUCTION

The author has designed low cost sanitary napkins and carried out field tests through social service

group of AISECT University in three villages. The design was quite suitable to rural environment and women folk were quite satisfied and happy to use them.

It was found that using disposable sanitary napkins creates a sense of hygiene in general amongst rural women. The new design of napkin reduces the cost to an extremely low level which is easily affordable by poor rural women but there is still need to subsidised it further by Govt/social groups to make it almost free. This will give a big boost to health and hygiene mission of the country. AISECT University has taken a initiative and introduced it in villages in close vicinity of university campus.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Following can be some of the action area to educate women, particularly rural section of India about the necessity of using sanitary napkins:

- (a) It is the mother who needs to be educated so that she can educate her daughter and so on and so forth.
- (b) The Govt. can be of great help in creating awareness about the usage of napkins and distributing it for free or at a subsidized rate.
- (c) By promoting ssi's to manufacture napkins locally and in the process generating employment too.
- (d) The males of this section of the society should also be made aware of the advantages of use of sanitary napkins so that they encourage the practice of the same.
- (e) Universities and educational institutes can come up and adopt a few villages and start a drive on

rural hygiene. This may include a health check-up camp and free distribution of sanitary napkins.

(f) There can be weekly classes on sanitary hygiene for adolescent girls wherein a doctor can teach these girls the usage and proper disposal of napkins.

(g) The NGO'S and NPO's can be of great help in distribution of sanitary napkins and creating awareness about it.

(h) The village head or the Sarpanch should play the key role to ensure that the females of his/her village are being provided with sanitary napkins and hygienic lifestyle.

(i) Education of menstrual hygiene at a primary level will play a key role in the usage of sanitary napkins by rural females in the years to come.

There is a vast untapped rural market still to be explored, only if there is a willingness to contribute to the society, by compromising a wee bit on the margins and a vision to see rural women also at par with the other strata of the society. It will also help these women to live respectfully and with confidence and the future generations would be deeply benefitted by today's actions.

#### REFERENCE

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