

ELEVATING MENSTRUAL HEALTH : EXPLORING MENSTRUAL PADS, CUPS AND OTHER SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

EP – 369



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INTRODUCTION

Menstrual health is a foundational component of women's well-being, influenced by biological, cultural, and environmental factors. Menstrual product choices, traditionally limited to disposable pads and tampons, have expanded with innovations such as menstrual cups, organic cotton pads, and reusable cloth pads. These newer options bring both promises and challenges, particularly in terms of health outcomes, comfort, environmental sustainability, and accessibility. This paper examines the benefits, challenges, and barriers associated with menstrual cups, reusable pads, and traditional products. By understanding these factors, healthcare providers can better guide patients in making informed, eco-friendly choices that support both personal health and sustainability.

MENSTRUAL HEALTH & PRODUCTS OVERVIEW

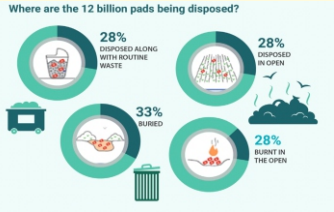
1. Traditional Products :
 - Disposable Pads
 - Tampons
2. Sustainable Options :
 - Menstrual cups
 - Cloth pads and Period Underwear
 - Organic and Biodegradable Pads

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Disposable pads and tampons are most often made of cotton with rayon or other synthetic fibers and plastics such as polyester. Tampons can contain amounts of plastic within the core of the cotton tampon and may come with plastic applicators. Pads often contain even more synthetic plastic material than tampons, such as leak-proof bases and/or extra absorbent strips. After use, tampons, applicators, and pads are either thrown out as solid waste or end up in the water systems if flushed down the toilet; if disposed as solid waste, these products end up in landfills or are burnt in incinerators to generate energy. In a landfill, disposable pads are estimated to take 500 to 800 years to break down, and materials such as plastic never truly biodegrade. Each menstruator will use and dispose of between 5000 and 15,000 pads and tampons in their lifetime.

SANITARY WASTE MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

According to the Menstrual Hygiene Alliance of India(MHAI), 336 million girls and women of reproductive age in India generate about 1 billion sanitary napkins per month , or 12.3 billion sanitary napkins annually. Sanitary waste is voluminous and infectious, and plastic is used as a primary material in the manufacture of disposable sanitary products, underlining the need for sanitary waste management in India.



OBJECTIVE

To assess the awareness, usage and perceptions of menstrual health products and examine the impact of sustainable options on health and hygiene products.

METHODOLOGY

- **Study Site** – A study conducted in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department in Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital, Mumbai
- **Inclusion Criteria** – 120 cases including Students, Healthcare professionals, Non-Healthcare professionals who are menstruating
- **Exclusion Criteria** – Postmenopausal women

SAMPLING ANALYSIS

Age	18-25	25-45	45+	Profession	Student	Healthcare Professional	Non Healthcare Professional
Total 120	82	36	2	Total 120	20	86	14

DATA COMPARISON ON USAGE

SANITARY PADS AND TAMPONS	SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS (MENSTRUAL CUPS, CLOTHS, BIODEGRADABLE PADS)
114 cases primarily use sanitary pads 2 cases use tampons	4 cases use these products

MOST COMMON CHALLENGES FACED WITH SANITARY PAD USAGE

- Discomfort
- Skin irritation and rashes
- Leakage
- Odour
- Infections

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

- 99% were aware of the environmental challenges faced with sanitary pad usage
- 83% cases out of 120 were willing to switch and experiment other sustainable products
- 98% cases out of 120 were willing to support the government and healthcare professionals in a safe and smooth transition to other sustainable products




RELUCTANT TO SWITCH

- 96% cases out of 120 believed that it will be difficult to insert and remove menstrual cups
- 91% cases out of 120 believe the most common problem faced with menstrual cup usage will be leakage

BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

- Environmental Impact – Reduced waste and carbon footprint
- Health Benefits – Less exposure to chemicals, reduced TSS risk with menstrual cups
- Cost Saving – Reusable options are more economical long term

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF REUSABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

 <p>Reusable pads can be made with synthetic or natural fibers and last about 5 years. Individual who choose reusable pads also require access to clean water in order to be able to wash these products after use.</p>	 <p>Period underwear or pants can be made of synthetic or natural fibers and are quoted to last about 2 years; as with the reusable pads, period underwear must be washed after use.</p>	 <p>Menstrual cups are made of medical grade silicone or rubber and can last up to 10 years; cups are placed internally by the use and the cup collects menstrual blood. Individuals who use menstrual cups require water access for washing the cup as well, although less water is required as compared with washing a reusable pad. The reusable menstrual cup has been estimated to have the lowest impact on the environment by far, especially for waste.</p>
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HEALTH BENEFITS

SANITARY PADS AND TAMPONS	SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS (MENSTRUAL CUPS, CLOTHS, BIODEGRADABLE PADS)
Convenience and Accessibility: Widely available, easy to use, and disposable, making them a preferred choice for many. Hygiene Control: Designed for single use, reducing the risk of infections if changed frequently. Potential Risks: May cause skin irritation, rashes, or allergic reactions due to synthetic materials, fragrances, or chemicals. Prolonged use or improper disposal increases the risk of infections.	Reduced Exposure to Chemicals: Made from medical-grade silicone or organic fabrics, free from harmful chemicals, bleaches, and fragrances. Lower Risk of Irritation: Reusable cloth pads and cups minimize skin irritation and allergic reactions due to the absence of synthetic materials. Reduced Risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS): Menstrual cups have a significantly lower risk of TSS compared to tampons. Vaginal Health: Menstrual cups maintain the natural vaginal pH and moisture balance, reducing risks of dryness and infections.

COST BENEFITS OF REUSABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

- Initial Cost:**
- Disposable sanitary pads cost ₹30–₹150 per pack (10-12 pads), requiring monthly purchases.
 - Sustainable products like menstrual cups cost ₹300–₹1,000, while reusable cloth pads cost ₹200–₹400 per pad, making the initial investment higher.
- Long-Term Savings:**
- An individual spends approximately ₹2,400–₹6,000 annually on disposable pads (₹200–₹500 per month). Over 10 years, this amounts to ₹24,000–₹60,000.
 - A menstrual cup (₹300–₹1,000) or a set of reusable pads (₹1,000–₹2,000) lasts 5–10 years, reducing overall expenditure significantly.
- By transitioning to sustainable menstrual products, individuals can save ₹20,000–₹50,000 over a decade while also contributing to environmental conservation.

POTENTIAL MEASURES TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

1. Educate on Benefits:
 - Highlight health advantages, such as reduced exposure to chemicals and lower risk of irritation or infections.
 - Emphasize long-term cost savings and environmental benefits, such as reduced waste and pollution.
2. Address Barriers:
 - Provide clear guidance on usage, maintenance, and hygiene for products like menstrual cups and reusable pads.
 - Address myths, misconceptions, and cultural taboos through factual, relatable content.
3. Targeted Outreach:
 - Tailor programs to specific groups (e.g., adolescents, working women, rural communities) with culturally sensitive messaging.
4. Hands-On Demonstrations:
 - Conduct workshops to demonstrate how to use and care for sustainable products. Provide samples to reduce hesitation in trying new products.
5. Involvement of Healthcare Providers:
 - Train OB-GYNs and healthcare workers to advocate for sustainable products and counsel patients on their benefits.
6. Affordability and Accessibility:
 - Collaborate with NGOs, government programs, and private companies to subsidize sustainable products or distribute them at low cost.
7. Media Campaigns:
 - Use social media, print, and television to share success stories and testimonials from users of sustainable products.
8. Monitoring and Feedback:
 - Track program effectiveness through surveys and focus groups. Use feedback to refine strategies and address ongoing challenges.
 - Partner with schools, colleges, workplaces, and community groups to reach diverse audiences.