



MENSTRUAL HYGIENE IN PRISONS - GS I AND II MAINS

Q. Critically analyze the status of menstrual hygiene management in Indian prisons. Discuss the challenges faced by female prisoners in accessing adequate menstrual hygiene products and facilities. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

News: *Menstrual hygiene in Indian prisons / Explained*

What's in the news?

- India has made significant progress in menstrual hygiene management.
- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2019-2020) shows that around 80% of young women aged 15-24 now use safe menstrual products.

Key takeaways:

- However, while urban areas and certain groups have seen improvements, women in Indian prisons remain neglected.
- In a society that often denies prisoners basic rights, female prisoners suffer more due to societal biases that refuse to accept women can commit crimes.
- This has led to their basic needs, like menstrual hygiene, being overlooked.

Status of Menstrual Hygiene in Indian Prisons:

1. Menstrual Hygiene in Indian Prisons:

- In Indian prisons, there are 23,772 women, with 77% falling within the reproductive age group and likely to menstruate regularly.

2. Challenges in Providing Adequate Facilities:

- Despite the recommendations outlined in the **2016 Model Prison Manual**, numerous states have failed to furnish adequate water and restroom facilities for female inmates.
- **Overcrowding and substandard conditions** further exacerbate the difficulty for women in accessing essential items such as water, sanitary napkins, detergent, and soap during menstruation.

3. Conditions of Prisons:

- In a Maharashtra prison, a study conducted in 2023 uncovered inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, compelling women to store water and utilize limited toilets collectively.
- Consequently, this scenario resulted in increased occurrences of urinary infections and challenges in upholding menstrual hygiene.

4. Inadequate Sanitary Napkins:

- Prisons often depend on NGOs for donations of sanitary napkins, which can sometimes lead to the distribution of inferior products.



- In one instance, each woman received only one set of reusable napkins, which proved impractical due to limited access to water and detergent.

Challenges Faced by Women Prisoners:

1. Inconsistent Supply and Quality of Sanitary Napkins:

- The provision of sanitary napkins in prisons is largely dependent on donations from non-governmental organizations, resulting in an inconsistent supply.
- The quality of sanitary napkins is often poor, with reports of subpar absorption leading to discomfort, skin rashes, and infections.

2. Inadequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Facilities:

- Prisons often fail to meet the water and hygiene needs of female inmates, which are exacerbated during menstruation.
- Limited water supply forces women to store water in already cramped toilet spaces, further complicating their hygiene practices.

3. Overcrowding and Poor Socio-economic Conditions:

- Overcrowded prisons amplify the struggle to access basic necessities.
- The poor socio-economic conditions of inmates make it difficult for them to obtain essentials like sanitary napkins, detergent, and soap.

4. Health Issues:

- Inadequate menstrual hygiene management leads to a higher incidence of urinary infections and other health problems among female prisoners.
- The discouraging conditions in prison washrooms also contribute to these issues.

Government Measures to Promote Menstrual Hygiene:

1. SABLA Scheme:

- The SABLA program, initiated by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**, addresses nutrition, health, hygiene, and reproductive and sexual health, connecting them with rural mother and child care centers.

2. National Rural Livelihood Mission:

- The National Rural Livelihood Mission, under the **Ministry of Rural Development**, aids self-help groups and small-scale manufacturers in producing sanitary pads.

3. National Guidelines for Menstrual Hygiene Management:

- The **Ministry of Jal Shakti** under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan released the National Guidelines on Menstrual Hygiene Management in 2015.
- They encompass various aspects such as awareness-raising, behavior change, demand generation for hygiene products, capacity building for frontline workers, stakeholder



sensitization, convergence efforts for effective interventions, and the establishment of WASH facilities with safe disposal options.

4. Suvidha Sanitary Napkins:

- **Jan Aushadhi** Suvidha Sanitary Napkins are accessible at Jan Aushadhi Kendras across India at a subsidized rate of Rs. 1/- per pad.
- It is an initiative under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).

Way Forward:

1. Ensure Adherence to the Model Prison Manual 2016:

- The Indian government should enforce uniform implementation of the Model Prison Manual 2016 across all states, which includes provisions for adequate water and washroom facilities.

2. Government Supply of Menstrual Hygiene Products:

- The government should directly supply prisons with a sufficient quantity of high-quality sanitary napkins through existing schemes like the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme.

3. Develop a Comprehensive Strategy:

- Collaboration between public health authorities and prison administrators is crucial to creating a comprehensive strategy that ensures access to adequate menstrual hygiene products and facilities, prioritizing the health and dignity of female inmates.

4. National Menstrual Hygiene Policy Implementation:

- The new National Menstrual Hygiene Policy, which recognizes prisoners as a vulnerable group, should include a concrete action plan for improving menstrual hygiene in prisons.
- This policy should engage the Ministry of Home Affairs as a critical stakeholder.

5. Public Health Priority:

- Addressing menstrual hygiene in prisons should be viewed as a public health priority and a crucial step in combating 'period poverty.'

Ensuring menstrual hygiene for women in Indian prisons is crucial, demanding urgent action, standardized implementation, and collaboration to uphold their health and dignity.