

Sexual Health Awareness Plan for Young Women: A Value Driven Approach

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Abstract—The current research is an initiative to address the issue of sexual health and hygiene through a peer education programme at the undergraduate level through the introduction of multipronged interventions designed by a group of students under the Value Education Program (VEP). Adopting the community health model the study identified the context as the college washroom used by the students. The values that guided the study were, namely, ‘help yourself by helping others’, ‘equal rights and equal duties’ and ‘empowerment and participation’. The intervention employed four different strategies, namely, maintenance of a daily diary to keep a record of cleanliness in the washrooms, distribution of flyers that stated basic points regarding menstrual hygiene, designed a way to enable students to use newspapers for proper disposal of personal products, and, putting up posters in the washrooms, asking students to maintain cleanliness in the washroom. The intervention was followed for a fortnight. These interventions focused on the theme of menstrual hygiene and maintaining hygienic conditions in the washroom. Following the intervention programme, it was seen that the newspapers put up in the washrooms were used by the students to dispose of the sanitary towels, the diary maintenance helped in keeping a check over washroom cleanliness, whereas, the flyers and the posters improved students’ awareness regarding personal health and menstrual hygiene. Importantly the program on sexual health is an ongoing process for the undergraduate students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public health is defined as all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations, not on individual patients or diseases. Thus, public health is concerned with the total system and not only the eradication of a particular disease. Environmental health, community health, behavioral health, health economics, public policy, insurance medicine and occupational safety and health are other important subfields in public health.

Public health is an important value as it initiatives affect people every day in every part of the world. It addresses broad issues that can affect the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities, populations, and societies—both now, and for generations to come.

Public health programs help in maintaining good health and well-being. Importantly these programmes aim at not letting a problem arise and then adopt the medical approach to health. The approach is to create awareness and promotion in health such that problems do not rise. This is known as the *salutogenesis*, this approach is characterized by the ability to identify and use one’s health resources’ and capacity for people’s ability to gain health and have a healthy orientation in life.

The present study is a project undertaken while attending ‘Value Education Programme’ (VEP), a skill development programme conducted in the college premises of Daulat Ram College. As partial fulfillment of the programme a value based project was undertaken by a group of five students who enrolled under this programme and guided by a supervisor. After much discussion and deliberation lead the students to formulate the following issues. First, to undertake a project within the college community, rather, than visiting an outside community. The aim was to learn about public health issues within the undergraduate student community. Second, sexual health and hygiene is a topic rarely discussed openly in student life and there was an urgent need to initiate this at a public level. Third, a field study would be carried out with multiple interventions, since, sexual health and hygiene should be addressed on a multi-level basis. Four, the student group wanted to inculcate basic values within the research group as well as with the student community so as to enhance public health. An outreach programme was planned and is reported below.

Health promotion and prevention is based on the three dimensions of values, knowledge and context. These are three interrelated aspects which need to be addressed while dealing with any health issue. Health strategies or programmes do not exist in a vacuum. Until we do not understand these three interdependent issues we cannot plan any programme or any intervention thereof.

Fig. 1 helps understand the framework of the present study. It draws our attention that values and knowledge are two important aspects that aid research objectives and planning of

intervention, and, this has to be situated within a given context. As shown three values are identified along with the information to be imparted to the students with a focus on menstrual health and hygiene practices that they should follow.

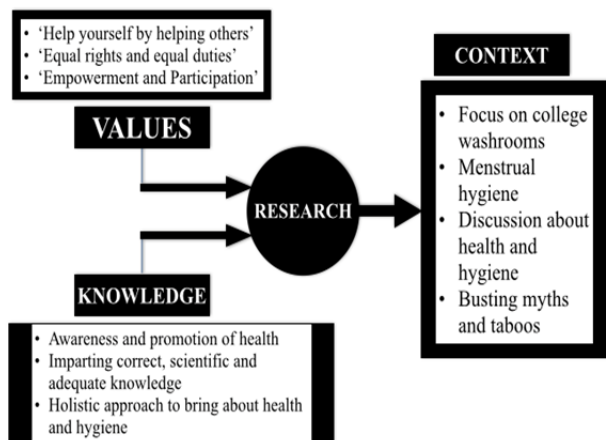


Fig. 1: Diagrammatic framework of the study

2. RATIONALE

To make students aware about personal hygiene during menstruation and to understand how a system works in cooperation to maintain public health, by taking the college washrooms as our focus of study. The research focus was:

1. Identify the level of awareness among the college students regarding menstrual health and hygiene.
2. To identify the infrastructure and facilities available to the students.
3. To introduce and assess the impact of interventions regarding sexual health and hygiene.
4. To use a value driven approach to bring in health changes.

3. METHOD

3.1. Sample

Data was collected from 30 female students of University of Delhi of the age group 17-22 years. Convenient sampling methods were used. The participants were from various academic disciplines and middle socio-economic background.

3.2. Tools

The following tools were constructed

1. Self-constructed survey questionnaires with questions focusing on menstrual health and hygiene.
2. Semi-structured interview method with questions focusing on cleanliness and hygiene in the college washrooms.
3. Intervention techniques based on a pre-and-post study method.

3.3. Procedure

The topic for the research was decided upon after taking in consideration students' viewpoints regarding the college washrooms and how it effects them. The issue of menstrual health was undertaken keeping in mind the limited knowledge and access the students have about menstrual health and hygiene. Permission was taken from these participants before requesting them to be a part of the research and fill the questionnaires. Interventions were carried out to make an effective change in the students' viewpoint and the college environment regarding public health and menstrual hygiene and hence followed a pre and post technique. Intervention techniques adopted were as follows:

1. Maintenance of a Diary, keeping a record of cleanliness in the washrooms over a period of six days at different times during a day.
2. Distribution of Flyers, stating various points regarding proper menstrual hygiene and other tips related to menstrual health.
3. Putting up newspapers in the washrooms, for the students to use for proper disposal of used sanitary towels.
4. Putting up posters in the washrooms, asking the students to keep the washrooms clean for themselves and for others by stating facts that may affect good health due to lack of cleanliness in the washrooms.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Frequency of using the college washrooms in a day.

Frequency	No. Of students
Never	7
Once in a Day	13
More than once in a day	10

Most of the students under consideration at least use washroom once in a day.

Table 2 - Using college washroom during menstruation.

Using washrooms during periods	No. Of students
Yes	14
No	16

Most of the students under consideration do not use college washrooms during their periods because they consider the washrooms to be unhygienic.

Table 3: Products used by students during their periods.

Products used	No. Of students
Sanitary towels	28
Cloth rags	2

Even though most of the students use sanitary towels, there are students who still use cloth rags.

Table 4: Disposal techniques adopted by students for used sanitary towels

Disposal technique	No. Of students
Wrap and throw	24
Throw without wrapping	6

Although the students complain of the college washrooms being unhygienic, some of them still throw the used sanitary towels without wrapping, which may lead to severe infections.

Table 5 - Awareness among students about products used for menstruation.

Products	No. Of students
Sanitary napkins	30
Tampons	14
Menstrual cups	5
Menstrual underwear	1
Newspaper	26
Cotton	24

All the students under consideration know about sanitary napkins while most of them know about newspaper and cotton. Whereas, few of them know about other products such as tampons, menstrual cups and menstrual underwear which are not widely available in India.

Table 6: Knowledge about infections related to menstruation.

Knowledge about infections	No. Of students (%)
Yes and known	37
Yes	52
No	11

While students have some knowledge about the fact that infections may take place due to improper care while menstruating, not many may not specifically know what these infections are.

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study is to develop public health awareness and its promotion at the college level and to use the ecological principles associated with sustainability, diversity and balanced development. With this objective the study used a multi-method approach to study the awareness and promotion of health at the individual and community levels. The aim was to include all the stakeholders in the college community, assess the situation and plan intervention programme accordingly.

5.1. Why public health and menstrual hygiene?

The present study focused on creating an awareness campaign and promotion of cleanliness and maintenance of college washrooms and maintenance of hygiene during menstruation. This area of study was undertaken as menstrual hygiene is often considered as a subject of taboo and various myths revolve around it. In the Indian context

Cleanliness is one of the most important practice for a clean and healthy environment. It is closely related to public hygiene and personal hygiene. It is essential for everyone to learn about cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation as it is closely linked with various diseases that are caused due to poor maintenance of hygienic conditions. Public cleanliness includes sanitation — using clean and safe toilets, keeping water sources clean, and disposing of garbage safely.

Menstrual hygiene is important because not doing so can result in one getting fungal infections. Repeated infections lead to serious reproductive tract infections and can cause infertility in the long term. Moreover, there is also lack of awareness related to menstruation. Indian society considers it as a taboo. It is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in Indian society. Parents specially mothers, don't discuss or educate their daughters about menstruation. According to them it is embarrassing to discuss about this. As a result adolescent girls remain ignorant of the scientific facts and hygienic health practices during menstruation, which sometimes result into adverse health outcomes such as reproductive tract infections (RTI).

We decided to keep our locality as a Delhi University college and the college students to be our sample. The need to undertake such a study was due to the following reasons:

1. Students are constantly complaining about how the college washrooms are not clean and are unhygienic.
2. College girls, being responsible young adults, should be well aware about how to take proper care of themselves during their menstrual periods. We note that in the Indian setting any talk or discussion about sex, menstruation, sexual behavior is a taboo. There are myths about menstruation and certain practices are followed even today. Since it is a topic that is not well discussed, we tried to act upon it by creating awareness.

5.2. What are the basic issues faced regarding hygiene?

We started out with a small aim of reaching out to people and listening to their concerns regarding the college washroom and how do they feel that the hygiene is compromised. But as we started to act upon it, we came to realize that one major health issue that was not discussed by many regarding the unclean washrooms was the fact that many students did not dispose their used sanitary napkins properly and left them open on the ground. As we came to know about it slowly, both from the students and the washroom in charges, we thought that we must include this very important but often neglected issue in our research. We considered the topic of public health under which we tried to include every problem that was concerned with the maintenance of the college washrooms and sanitation.

The major issue regarding hygiene in the washrooms which concerned both the washroom staff and the students was improper disposal of the used sanitary towels. The students complained that due to this many of them could not use the washrooms due to the fear of catching infections, whereas what they did not understand was that they themselves had to work in cooperation with the washroom staff towards improving this situation since, the washroom staff were not even aware of the fact that improper disposal of sanitary towels could cause infections. Also, another major concern for the students was the constant leakages and faults in mechanism in the washroom, and to solve this problem, the system has to work in cooperation with the washroom staff to make sure that students get access to proper facilities in the college washrooms.

5.3. How did the intervention techniques work?

The student research group attempted to bring about a change in awareness level, increasing knowledge by providing basic information about hygiene during menstruation,.

Intervention techniques were followed in a pre and post manner, and we summarize the observations made in the four methods used:

1. Maintenance of a Diary, keeping a record of cleanliness in the washrooms over a period of six days at different times during a day.
After keeping a record of what the conditions were in the college washrooms, at different points of time in a day, we noted that there were several issues that were being faced. Basic issues like proper disposal of waste and cleanliness, and issues like availability of dustbins and latches on the washroom doors. Maintaining a diary did throw light upon these issues. It brought everyone's attention to these problems and students did consider at least making a contribution towards keeping the washroom clean, from their side.
2. Distribution of Flyers, allowed the students to be aware of various points regarding proper menstrual hygiene and other tips related to menstrual health.

The flyers had tips regarding what health practices should and should not be followed while menstruating. It was distributed to a large number of students. All of them, while looking at the flyers did, admit to the fact that it has made them aware about some things that they did not know of, before. Its main purpose was to spread awareness among the college students and enhance knowledge about healthcare while menstruating.

3. Putting up newspapers in the washrooms, for the students to use for proper disposal of used sanitary towels.
Everyday 20 sheets of old newspapers was put up in the washrooms, so as to deal with the problem of improper disposal of the used sanitary towels. It was an efficient and cost effective strategy. The number of newspapers in the bunch were counted at the end of the day, and it was noted that about 8% of the newspapers were used by the students for proper disposal.
4. Putting up posters in the washrooms, asking the students to keep the washrooms clean.
The main purpose behind taking this up was to make students aware about how clean environments lead to better health, since the posters had various facts and Fig. regarding public health and maintenance of cleanliness. After the posters were put up in washrooms, we even received suggestions from some students about how can we improve this step and how some of them would cooperate with us in this endeavour.

Through the intervention programme that was carried out, we identified issues and problems at every level and everyone, if worked in harmony, can solve those problems. No individual can work alone and hence, the responsibility in this case has to be divided between the system, as providers, and, the students as the users. Hence, there is no option but coming together and working in cooperation so that the problem of hygiene in college washrooms can be solved effectively.

5.4. What were the values learned while carrying out the research?

Although the one limitation of our study was it being carried out on small scale, but even in spite of being a pilot study, we can say that the value we took for the basis of our study, "In order to help yourself, you need to help others", proves to be well in this case of ours. Since, this research was carried out in the community, a different perspective, keeping in mind the values, was kept towards the research. Another value learned through this research was, "Be change, you want to see in the world". This value has helped us in the context that if we want a change in the system, if we want to change something we don't like, we ourselves have to take a step and work towards changing it. Also, we as a community have to work together because "Nobody in this world can work alone" and all individuals are dependent on each other, hence, can be successful when work in cooperation. All that was noted from the intervention techniques, was seen in a value-driven

perspective, because this research was carried out on level of a value engagement programme.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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7. CONCLUSION

Through the research there was a chance to look at the problems of washrooms from both the perspectives, i.e., from the perspectives of the students and the washroom in charges and students. It was seen that how even in today's time, many students are unaware about the health problems that are associated with improper care during periods and also there is not much awareness about the products that can be used during menstruation. Also, while interviewing the washroom in charges, we got to know their plight and how distressed and disappointed they are because of students who do not take care of proper hygienic and sanitation. There were also students who raised up genuine problems and issues regarding the maintenance of washrooms like inefficient dustbins and shortage of water supply. Looking at the bigger picture, we got to learn through this study, that even in this day and time, there are a lot of issue regarding public health, sanitation and menstrual health that need to be addressed, not only in the rural areas but also in urban areas, as in our case, the educational institutions. It has to be us who talks about these issues and brings about a change without any shame or taboos.

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