

MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE WORKSHOP

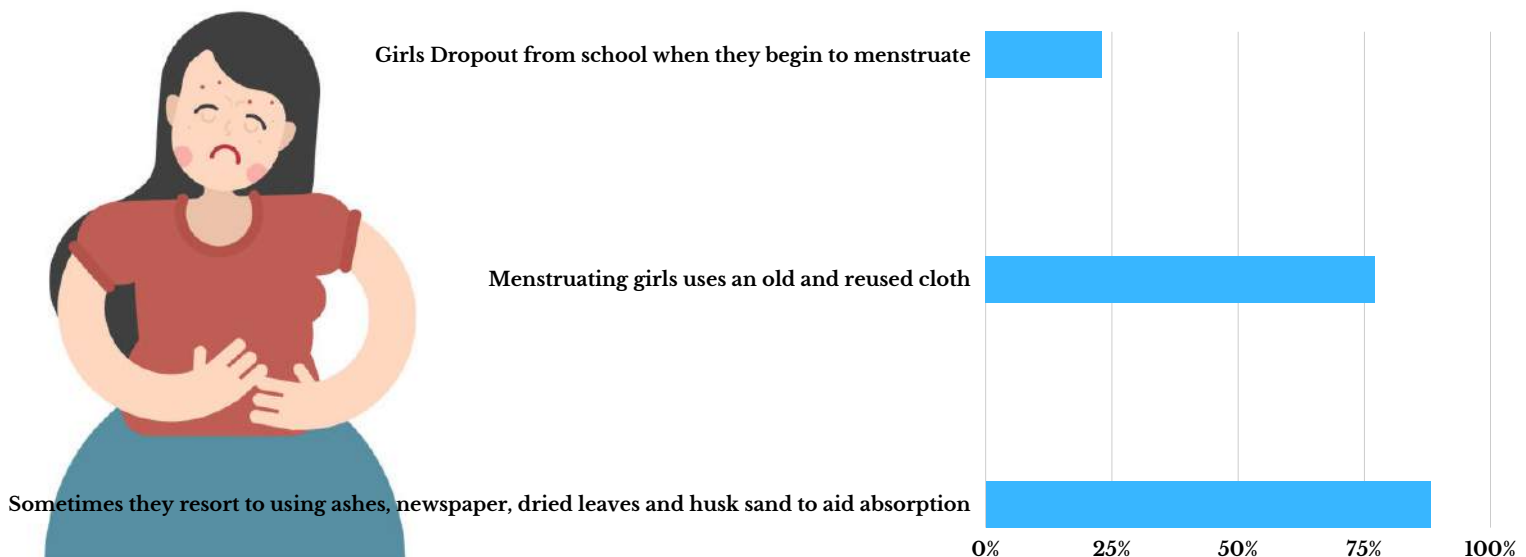


**Shreeja
India**

WHAT IS MENSTRUATION

Menstruation, or period, is normal vaginal bleeding that occurs as part of a woman's and those who identify themselves as a woman's monthly cycle. Every month, a women's body prepares for pregnancy. If no pregnancy occurs, the uterus, or womb, sheds its lining. The menstrual blood is partly blood and partly tissue from inside the uterus. It passes out of the body through the vagina.

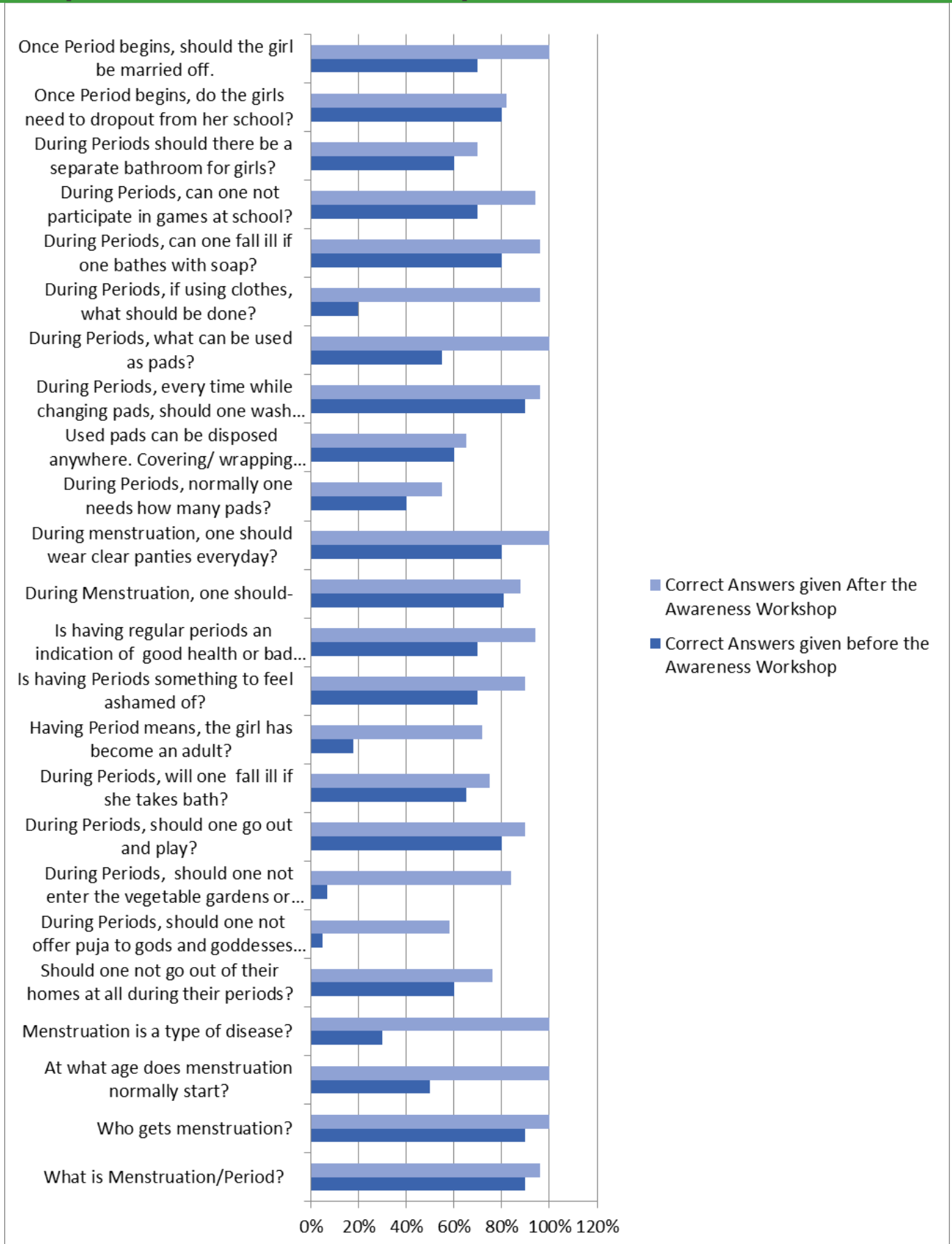
In many parts of India, the mere mention of the topic is considered taboo even today. Menstruation is taken to be dirty and impure. In many traditional religions across the world, women are prohibited from participating in normal life while menstruating. She must be "purified" before she is allowed to return to her family and day to day chores of her life. This also holds true for the rural tribal population across India. However, none of these cultural practices are scientifically valid and are just used as another excuse to oppress women in the milieu of patriarchy. Such taboos about menstruation impact girls' and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health. The gender - unfriendly school culture and infrastructure and the lack of adequate menstrual protection alternatives and/or clean, safe and private sanitation facilities for female teachers and girls undermine the right of privacy. There are health and hygiene issues also to consider relating to girls and menstruation.



This may have significant implications for their mental health. The mounting challenges related to menstruation are further compounded by the fact the girls' knowledge levels and understandings of puberty, menstruation and reproductive health are still very low. The situation of the first-generation learning girls and young women in the tribal pockets of Birbhum and Purba Bardhaman where Shreeja India works are no different!

IMPACT

A Comparison of the number of correct answers given by our Shreeja Girls on the same set of questions, pre and post the awareness workshop on menstrual health



INFERENCE:

According to the pre-workshop findings it can be clearly inferred that although many of the participants were aware about Menstruation, they still lacked substantial basic knowledge about the same. Furthermore, they were harbouring many superstitions associated with periods that were imposed by the community and passed down for generations to them.

The results of the post-workshop questionnaire indicate a substantial improvement in the understanding of Menstruation after the workshop. However, given that traditional beliefs and superstitions are strongly instilled within these first-generation learners for generations, it is natural that changing them would take more than just one awareness workshop. The percentages indicate that although the number of correct answers has increased after the program, however, there are still a number of participants who have failed to imbibe the new and correct information disseminated to them. We believe that a series of programs on this topic over a period of time will be able to bring still more impact among the participants. Hence, Shreeja India is already planning to move forward with the same thought in the near future.

At Shreeja India, we understand the value of sharing the right information about menstrual health and hygiene among first-generation learning tribal children from rural population. We also realize that this would need a sustainable approach to bring about an attitude change among the girls. We are therefore planning to continue our endeavour in this regard with a series of varied yet reinforcing awareness workshops on menstrual hygiene among Shreeja children.

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- 1.Kaur K, Arora B, Singh GK, Neki NS. Social beliefs and practices associated with menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls of Amritsar, Punjab, India. J Int Med Sci Acd. 2012;25:69-70. [Google Scholar]
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Report on

Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Workshop

(Focus: First Generation Learning Rural Girls in West Bengal)

Kolkata 2021



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I. Abstract:

Shreeja India conducted an awareness program with 50 children (age group-12-20) in Rajnagar block of Birbhum district, rural West Bengal to gain insight into the rural Indian woman's menstrual hygiene management (MHM) practices and simultaneously inculcate best practices in the area among first-generation learning tribal girls. The program integrated with a study identified a general lack of information available to women about menstruation, and limited options for alleviating their menstrual discomfort. Nearly all girls (99%) experience some lifestyle restriction associated with menstruation with the belief in impurity and being polluted as the most commonly identified reason for these restrictions. The extent, to which a woman is influenced by beliefs that result in lifestyle restrictions, is most strongly correlated with her level of education. The study done revealed that choice of products used to manage menstruation (either cloth or disposable pad) is mostly influenced by cost factors, comfort and habit as well as cultural restrictions and beliefs. Girls are largely not aware of the environmental impact in product choice. Implications for the future of Menstrual Hygiene Management for Shreeja Girls which can have relevance for India are noted at the end of this report.

II. The TABOO called menstruation:

In many parts of India, the mere mention of the topic is considered a taboo even today. Menstruation is taken to be dirty and impure. In many traditional religions across the world, women are prohibited from participating in normal life while menstruating. She must be "purified" before she is allowed to return to her family and day to day chores of her life. This also holds true for the rural tribal population across India. However, none of these cultural practices are scientifically valid and are just used as another excuse to oppress women in the milieu of a patriarchy.

Many girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily lives simply because they are menstruating. Not entering the "puja" room and not entering the kitchen are some of the main restrictions among both rural and urban girls during menstruation.[2] Menstruating girls and women are also restricted from offering prayers and touching holy books.[3] The underlying basis for this myth is also the cultural beliefs of impurity associated with menstruation. It is further believed that menstruating women are unhygienic and unclean and hence the food they prepare or handle can get contaminated. Cultural norms and religious taboos on menstruation are often compounded by traditional associations with evil spirits, shame and embarrassment surrounding sexual reproduction.[4] It is also believed that a woman can use her menstrual blood to impose her will on a man.[3] Interestingly, in Asia including India, such beliefs many others related to food and bathing are still practiced widely. However, there is no logical or scientific explanation for this. On the other hand, such practices and thoughts detrimentally impact the lives of women which sometimes turn fatal for their survival.

Impact of Menstruation on Girls & Society:

Such taboos about menstruation impact girls' and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health. Large numbers of girls in many less economically developed countries drop out of school when they begin menstruating. This includes over 23% of girls in India.[5] The gender – unfriendly school culture and infrastructure and the lack of adequate menstrual protection alternatives and/or clean, safe and private sanitation facilities for female teachers and girls undermine the right of privacy.[3] There are health and hygiene issues also to consider relating to girls and menstruation. Over 77% of menstruating girls and women in India use an old cloth, which is often reused. Further, 88% of women in India sometimes resort to using ashes, newspapers, dried leaves and husk sand to aid absorption.[5] Dearth of female agency and inadequate facilities increase susceptibility to infection, health issues and stigmatization among girls. This may have significant implications for their mental health.[6] The mounting challenges related to menstruation, is further compounded by the fact the girls' knowledge levels and understandings of puberty, menstruation, and reproductive health are still very low.[6, 7].

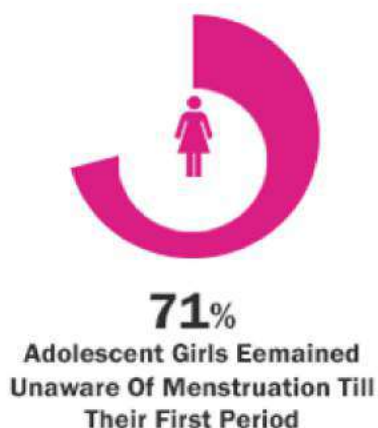


The situation of the first-generation learning girls and young women in the tribal pockets of Birbhum and PurbaBardhaman where Shreeja India works are no different!

Why a Menstrual Hygiene Workshop?

Good menstrual hygiene is crucial for the health and dignity of girls and women and yet there is still lack of awareness about the topic across India. Discussions on menstrual hygiene are important for adolescent girls to clarify existing myths and misconceptions around menstruation. Improving menstrual hygiene can enhance personal comfort and increased mobility. It also reduces the likelihood of infections resulting from poor hygiene practices. Providing all the genders with appropriate knowledge and skills on maintaining menstrual hygiene improves school attendance among girls, reduces school dropouts, early marriages and simultaneously impacts generations of women positively.

Low Awareness On Menstruation Is Widespread In India



Percentage of girls remaining unaware of menstrual hygiene practices in Indian states (2014)



Source- Spot On! a 2014 report by the NGO Dasra,
UNICEF's 2014 report on Menstrual Hygiene in India



I. Awareness Workshop on Menstrual Hygiene

Dates: 03-10-21 | Follow up done on 30-10-21 | Administration of Pre and post workshop Q on Menstrual Hygiene| Follow-up workshops will continue to be organized for the girls every two months.

Duration: 2 hours

Participants:

- Shreeja Girls' Football Team – 45 girls and 5 boys
- Sreekumar Mukherjee (Teacher)
- Aditi Mondal (Teacher)
- Ria Sarkar (Teacher)
- Asit Sarkar (Teacher)
- Tarapada Mardi (Teacher)
- Mandira Hembram (Teacher)

Purpose: As First-generation learning tribal girls from backward population, most of them still lack agency and confidence in life. They do not have the right guidance to help them manoeuvre through the many challenges they envisage every day. These hurdles are further amalgamated by the many baseless superstitions that exist, related to menstruation and masked in the name of traditional beliefs. These superstitions, passed down for generations have always been a tool to oppress the girls and women. They pose a big obstacle between the women and their leadership roles in their community. Hence, this series of menstrual health workshops for the Shreeja children was organized to impart the correct scientific knowledge regarding their own bodies, right information about menstrual health and hygiene and simultaneously to aware them about the prevalent superstitions and their harmful effect on their lives. We consciously kept the workshop open for all the genders as we at Shreeja India believe that correct knowledge needs to be disseminated among everyone to help build a gender-equitable society.



Source: <https://www.globalwaters.org/events/webinar-menstrual-hygiene-management-emergencies-july-16-2019>



Methodology:

A. Each participant was asked a series of basic questions related to Menstruation as part of a pre-workshop Quiz. Their answers were documented.

1. What is Menstruation/Period?

- a. Month end exam
- b. Groceries
- c. Losing blood every month

2. Who gets menstruation?

- a. Boys
- b. Girls
- c. Old men and women

3. At what age does menstruation normally start?

- a. 5-6 years
- b. After 20 years
- c. 12 – 14 years

4. Menstruation is a type of disease.

- a. YES
- b. NOT AT ALL

5. One should not go out of their homes at all during their periods.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

6. During Periods, one should not offer puja to gods and goddesses or visit temples.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

7. During Periods, one should not enter the vegetable gardens or consume fruits/vegetables.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

8. During Periods, one should go out and play.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

9. During Periods, one will fall ill if she takes bath.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

10. Having Period means, the girl has become an adult

- a. RIGHT
- b. WRONG
- c. Somewhat RIGHT

11. Having Period is nothing to feel ashamed of.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

12. Having regular periods is an indication of.

- a. Good health
- b. Bad health
- c. Possession by spirit

13. During Menstruation, one should –

- a. Sleep in the stable
- b. Take good bath
- c. Only consume water and fibre rich food

14. During menstruation, one should wear clear panties everyday

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

15. During Periods, normally one needs how many pads?

- a. 4b. 10
- c. 7

16. Used pads can be disposed anywhere. Covering/ wrapping them is not necessary.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

17. During Periods, every time while changing pads, one should wash hands with soap.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

18. During Periods, what can be used as pads.

- a. Sanitary napkin
- b. cloth
- c. Both a and b

19. During Periods, if using clothes, what should be done?

- a. submerge in cold water and wash with soap
- b. stack it somewhere
- c. keep it outside to dry up
- d. throw it into the nearby pond

20. During Periods, one can fall ill if one bathes with soap.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

21. During Periods, one cannot participate in games at school.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

22. During Periods especially, there should be a separate bathroom for girls.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

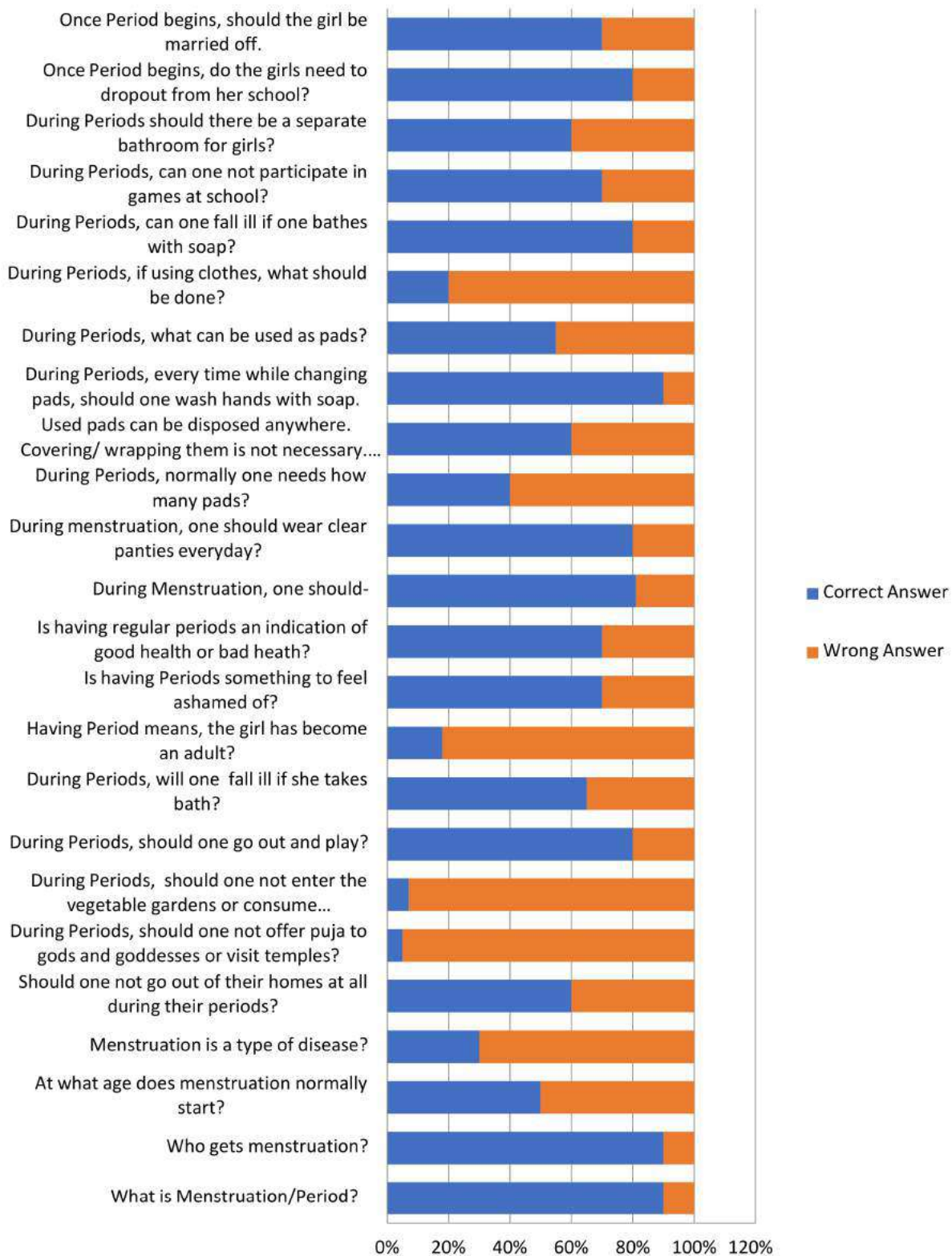
23. Once Period begins, the girl needs to dropout from her school.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

24. Once Period begins, the girl should be married off.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

Chart I: Graphical representation of the Pre-awareness program questionnaire answers given by the Shreeja girls in percentage:





B. Group Work: During the interactive session, the participants were divided into 5 groups. Then they were asked to brainstorm and think about the various beliefs they have regarding menstruation as imposed by the community. They were asked to write them out in a piece of paper and present it to everyone. The groups were given 10 minutes to prepare the information. Once presented, the points were put together on one board. Then the children were asked to identify which of these beliefs are superstitions. Discussion was done to break the superstitions and erroneous thoughts associated with Menstruation.

The following beliefs were identified by the participants during group work:

1. During periods, one should not offer puja to gods and goddesses
2. During periods, one should not light earthen lamps
3. During periods, one should not wet her hair
4. During periods, one should not go to the vegetable gardens, touch fruits and vegetables or even consume them
5. During periods, one should not go near boys
6. During periods, one should not consume meat, spicy and sweet food
7. During periods, one should not take bath
8. During periods, one should consume seeds and water

C. Discussion was done with the participants about the concept of Menstruation in details. The conception of puberty for boys and girls were explained separately. Using diagrams, the science behind menstruation was explained along with the role of specific hormones in the process. Cultural barriers, health factors, appropriate use of pads and their disposals were also conversed about.

D. The discussion was followed by showing the participants an **awareness video** on Menstruation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl&vaEUevr0>

E. The **feedback after watching the video** revealed that the girls could connect to the content regarding the challenges they face during menstruation, in their homes, schools and from the community. Some of the girls came forward and shared their experiences with the participants. These anecdotes included their experiences in school washrooms with inadequate facilities, hostilities and ignorance envisaged at their homes where they were kept away from the main household, not given good food to eat or allowed to wash their heads among other barriers.

II. Post- Workshop Questionnaire was administered among the participants to document the impact of the first awareness program on Menstrual Hygiene. *Please refer to Annexure 1 for the questionnaire).*

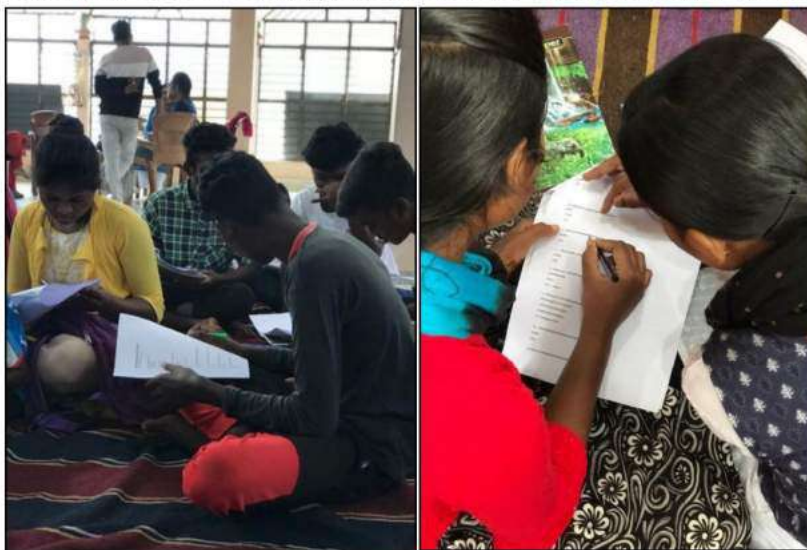




Chart II- Graphical representation of answers from Post-workshop Questionnaire

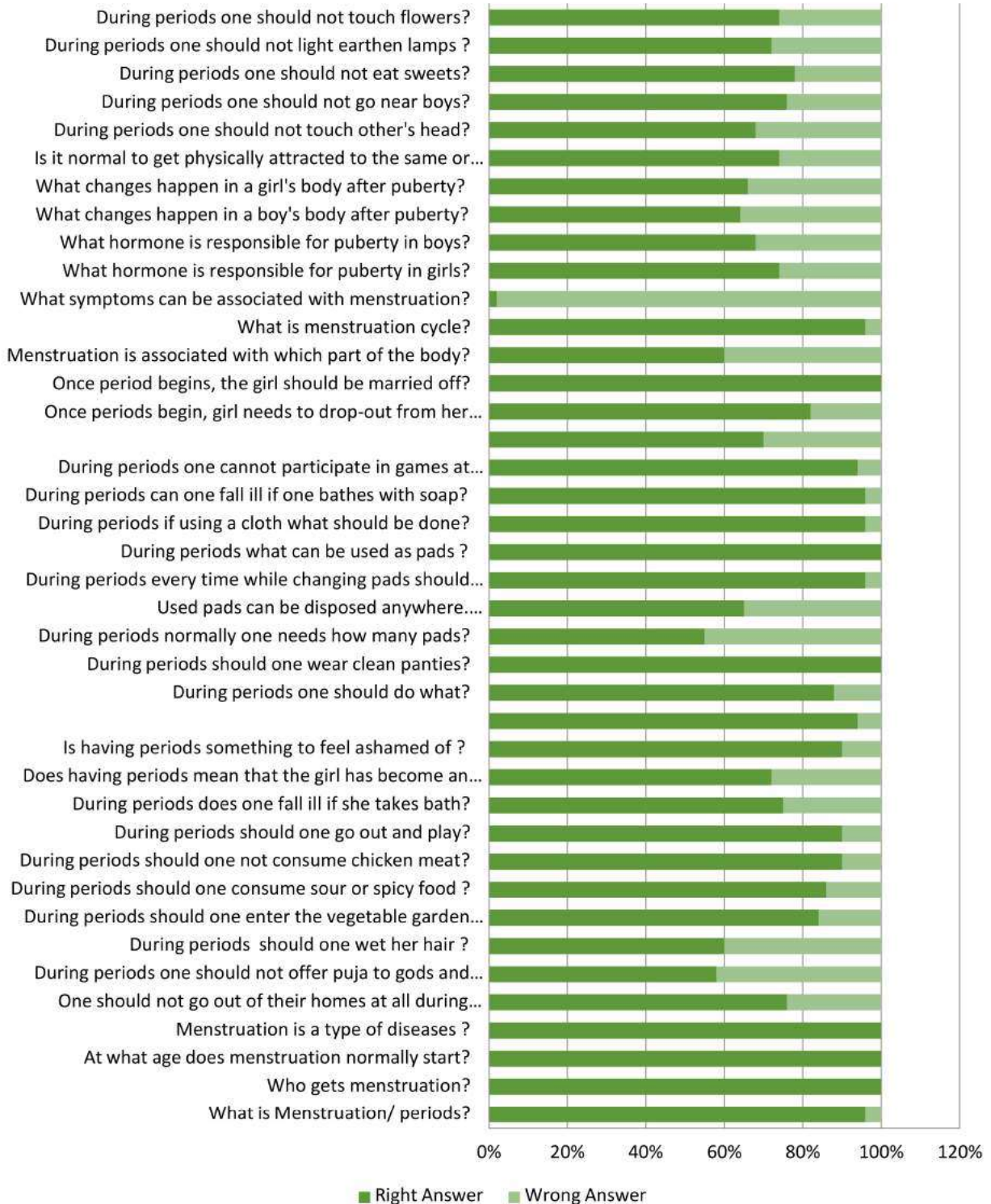
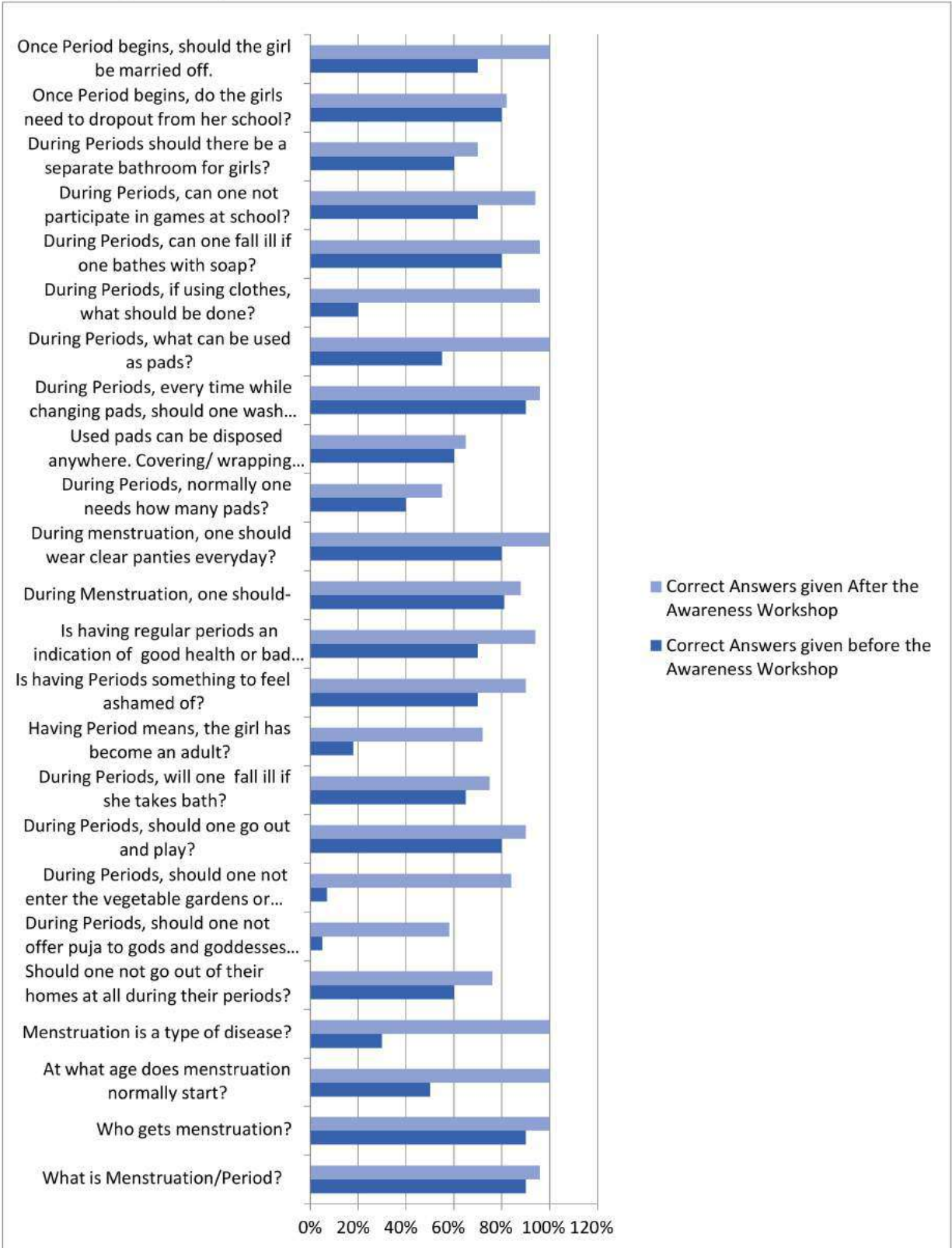




Chart III- A Comparison of the number of correct answers given on the same set of questions, pre and post the awareness workshop on menstrual health:



**Inference:**

From the results of the questionnaire given before the menstrual health workshop was conducted, it can be clearly inferred that although many of the participants were aware about Menstruation, they still lacked substantial basic knowledge about the same. Furthermore, they were harbouring many superstitions associated with periods that were imposed by the community and passed down for generations to them.

The results of the post-workshop questionnaire indicate a substantial improvement in the understanding of Menstruation after the workshop. This is further supported by Chart III, where the comparison of both the results indicates a visible positive impact of the awareness workshop among the participants. However, given that traditional beliefs and superstitions are strongly instilled within these first-generation learners for generations, it is natural that changing them would take more than just one awareness workshop. The percentages indicate that although the number of correct answers has increased after the program, however, there are still a number of participants who have failed to imbibe the new and correct information disseminated to them. We believe that a series of programs on this topic over a period of time will be able to bring still more impact among the participants. Hence, Shreeja India is already planning to move forward with the same thought in the near future.

Conclusion:

At Shreeja India, we understand the value of sharing the right information about menstrual health and hygiene among first-generation learning tribal children from rural population. We also realize that this would need a sustainable approach to bring about an attitude change among the girls. We are therefore planning to continue our endeavour in this regard with a series of varied yet reinforcing awareness workshops on menstrual hygiene among Shreeja children.



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Annexure I

Menstruation Awareness Questions (Post Workshop):

(Tick the right answer)

1 mark each for the right answer

1. What is Menstruation/Period?

- a. Month end exam
- b. Groceries
- c. Losing blood every month

2. Who gets menstruation?

- a. Boys
- b. Girls
- c. Old men and women

3. At what age does menstruation normally start?

- a. 5-6 years
- b. After 20 years
- c. 12 – 14 years

4. Menstruation is a type of disease.

- a. YES
- b. NOT AT ALL

5. One should not go out of their homes at all during their periods.

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- b. WRONG

6. During Periods, one should not offer puja to gods and goddesses or visit temples.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

7. During Periods, one should not wet her hair.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

8. During Periods, one should not enter the vegetable gardens or consume fruits/vegetables.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

9. During Periods, one should not consume sour or spicy food.

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

10. During Periods, one should not consume chicken meat

- a. CORRECT
- b. WRONG

c.

11. During Periods, one should go out and play.



- a. CORRECT
 - b. WRONG
12. During Periods, one will fall ill if she takes bath.
- a. CORRECT
 - b. WRONG
13. Having Period means, the girl has become an adult
- a. RIGHT
 - b. WRONG
 - c. Somewhat RIGHT
14. Having Period is nothing to feel ashamed of.
- a. CORRECT
 - b. WRONG
15. Having regular periods is an indication of.
- a. Good health
 - b. Bad health
 - c. Possession by spirit
16. During Periods, one should
- a. Stay at a stable
 - b. Take proper bath
 - c. Consume on water and edible seeds
17. During Periods, one should wear clean panties.
- a. CORRECT
 - b. WRONG
18. During Periods, normally one needs how many pads?
- a. 4
 - b. 10
 - c. 7
19. Used pads can be disposed anywhere. Covering/ wrapping them is not necessary.
- a. CORRECT
 - b. WRONG
20. During Periods, every time while changing pads, one should wash hands with soap.
- a. CORRECT
 - b. WRONG
21. During Periods, what can be used as pads.
- a. Sanitary napkin
 - b. cloth
 - c. Noth a and b
22. During Periods, if using clothes, what should be done?
- a. submerge in cold water and wash with soap
 - b. stack it somewhere



- c. keep it outside to dry up
d. throw it into the nearby pond
23. During Periods, one can fall ill if one bathes with soap.
a. CORRECT
b. WRONG
24. During Periods, one cannot participate in games at school.
a. CORRECT
b. WRONG
25. During Periods especially, there should be a separate bathroom for girls.
a. CORRECT
b. WRONG
26. Once Period begins, the girl needs to dropout from her school.
a. CORRECT
b. WRONG
27. Once Period begins, the girl should be married off.
a. CORRECT
b. WRONG
28. Menstruation is associated with which part of the body?
a. Uterus
b. Pancreas
c. Stomach
29. What is menstruation cycle?
a. A cycle of biological changes that take place in a woman or girl's reproductive system to prepare her body for a potential pregnancy
b. A cycle of biological changes that take place in a human body as part of the digestive system
30. What symptoms can be associated with menstruation?
a. Bloating of stomach
b. Stomach pain
c. Pimples
d. Two out of the three
e. All four
31. What hormone is responsible for puberty in girls?
a. Testosterone & Progesterone
b. Progesterone and Oestrogen
32. What hormone is responsible for puberty in boys?
a. Testosterone
b. Progesterone
c. Oestrogen
33. Change in a boy's body after puberty
a. Hair growth in face and body



b. change in voice

c. Both

34. Change in a girl's body after puberty.

a. Hair growth in the underarms and other parts of the body

b. development of breasts

c. Both

35. Is it normal to get physically attracted to the same or other genders after puberty?

a. YES

b. NO

36. During periods, one should not touch other's heads.

a. Correct

b. Wrong

37. During periods, one should not go near boys

a. Correct

b. Wrong

38. During periods, one should not eat sweets

a. Correct

b. Wrong

39. During periods, one should not light earthen lamps

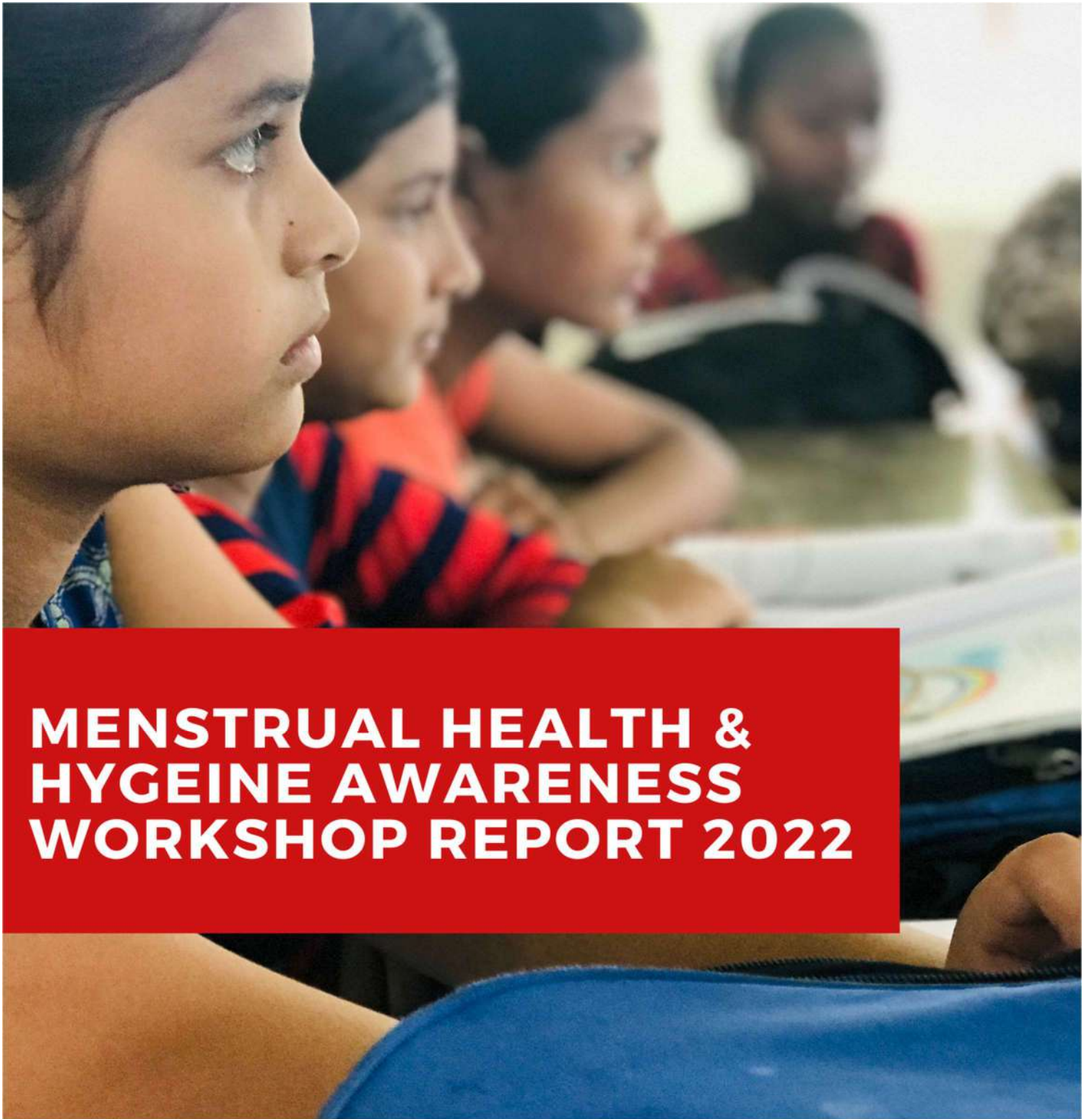
a. Correct

b. Wrong

40. During periods, one should not touch flowers

a. Correct

b. Wrong



MENSTRUAL HEALTH & HYGIENE AWARENESS WORKSHOP REPORT 2022



Focus: First generation learning rural girls from Shreeja india

26th May 2022
Kritika Rai, Program Officer
Shreeja India



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2. Details of the Awareness Workshop on Menstrual Health and Hygiene
3. The “Taboo” Called Menstruation
4. Impact of Religion on Menstruation
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6. Football for Menstruators
7. Highlights of the Workshop on Menstrual Health and Hygiene.
8. Conclusion
9. Acknowledgement
10. References
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1. Introduction:

Menstruation, or period, is normal vaginal bleeding that occurs as part of a woman's monthly cycle. Every month, a woman's body prepares for pregnancy. If no pregnancy occurs, the uterus, or womb, sheds its lining. The menstrual blood is partly blood and partly tissue from inside the uterus. It passes out of the body through the vagina.

The menstrual cycle helps a woman's body prepare for pregnancy every month. It also makes her have a period if you're not pregnant. Menstrual cycle and period are controlled by hormones like estrogen and progesterone. Here's how it goes. A woman has 2 ovaries, and each one holds a bunch of eggs. The eggs are extremely small to see with the naked eye.

During menstrual cycle, hormones make the eggs in the ovaries mature — when an egg is mature, that means it's ready to be fertilized by a sperm cell. These hormones also make the lining of the uterus thick and spongy. So if the egg does get fertilized, it has a nice cushy place to land and start a pregnancy. This lining is made of tissue and blood. It has lots of nutrients to help a pregnancy grow. About halfway through the menstrual cycle, hormones make one of the ovaries to release a mature egg — this is called ovulation. Most people don't feel it when they ovulate, but some ovulation symptoms are bloating, spotting, or a little pain in your lower belly that a woman may only feel on one side. Once the egg leaves the ovary, it travels through one of the fallopian tubes toward the uterus.

If pregnancy doesn't happen, the body doesn't need the thick lining in the uterus. The lining breaks down, and the blood, nutrients, and tissue flow out of the body through vagina. This is what is known as period!

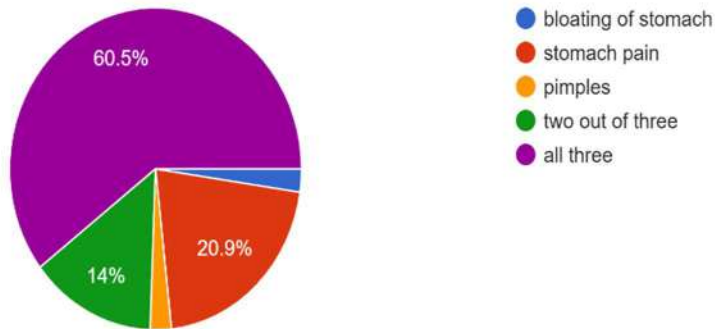
Periods usually start at some point during puberty between age 11 and 14 and continue until menopause at about age 51. They usually last from three to five days. Besides bleeding from the vagina, one may also experience:

- Abdominal or pelvic cramping pain
- Lower back pain
- Bloating and sore breasts
- Food cravings
- Mood swings and irritability
- Headache and fatigue



30. what symptoms can be associated with menstruation

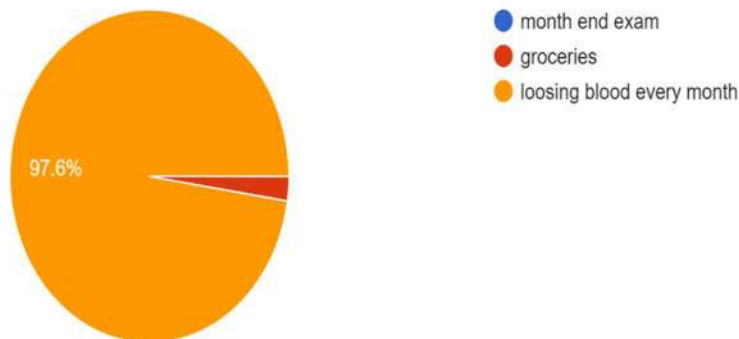
43 responses



When asked the above subjective question “what symptoms can be associated with menstruation” 60% of the participants responded that they experience Bloating, Stomach Pain and, Pimples during periods.

1) What is Menstruation/ periods

42 responses



The above pie chart shows that 97.6% of the respondents says that menstruation/ periods is losing blood every month along with other experiences. This shows that we have successfully given the information defining menstruation and what the person experiences during periods.



2. Details of the Awareness Workshop on Menstrual Health and Hygiene

Target group: 43 Shreeja Students from 11–17-Year-olds attended the workshop. Including 5 teachers, 2 coaches and a parent of a Shreeja Girl.

Location: Dhatrigram, Purba Bardaman District

Duration: 2 Hours

Nature of the Workshop: Discussions on menstrual hygiene are important for adolescent girls to clarify existing myths and misconceptions around menstruation. Improving menstrual hygiene can enhance personal comfort and increased mobility. It also reduces the likelihood of infections resulting from poor hygiene practices. Providing all the genders with appropriate knowledge and skills on maintaining menstrual hygiene improves school attendance among girls, reduces school dropouts, early marriages and simultaneously impacts generations of women positively. This workshop will also help in de-stigmatizing menstruation.

1. A pre-workshop questionnaire was distributed to the participants to know about their existing stigmas surrounding menstruation and their understanding of the topic “menstruation”.
2. A presentation was shown by the program team of Shreeja India sensitizing the Shreeja Girls, Mothers, Coaches and Teachers present in the workshop
 - To impart the correct scientific knowledge regarding a women’s body.
 - To offer right information about Menstrual health and hygiene.
 - To make them aware of the superstitions and their negative effects on their lives.
3. To reinforce the information on “Menstrual Health and Hygiene” an interactive post workshop quiz was also done.

Conducted workshop on: 27th April 2022



3. The “Taboo” Called Menstruation:

In many parts of India, the mere mention of the topic is considered a taboo even today. Menstruation is considered dirty and impure. In many traditional religions across the world, women are prohibited from participating in normal life while menstruating. She must be “purified” before she is allowed to return to her family and day to day chores of her life. This also holds true for the rural tribal population across India. However, none of these cultural practices are scientifically valid and are just used as another excuse to oppress women in the milieu of a patriarchy. It should also be noted that the various myths and misconception associated with menstruation were clearly discussed and clarified to the participants after group discussion. The participants were given opportunities to mention some of the myths and misconceptions that are within their own communities regarding menstruation.

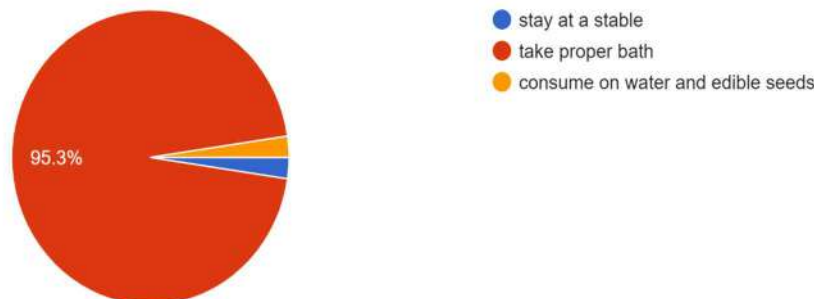
The following 13 myths were identified by the participants during group discussion:

During periods one should not

1. offer puja to gods and goddesses
2. light earthen lamps
3. wet her hair
4. go to the vegetable gardens, touch fruits and vegetables or even consume them
5. go near boys
6. consume meat, spicy and sweet food
7. take bath
8. touch ‘pickle jars’
9. eat sour food
10. eat fish
11. pluck flowers
12. wash her head
13. touch water taps

16. during periods one should

43 responses



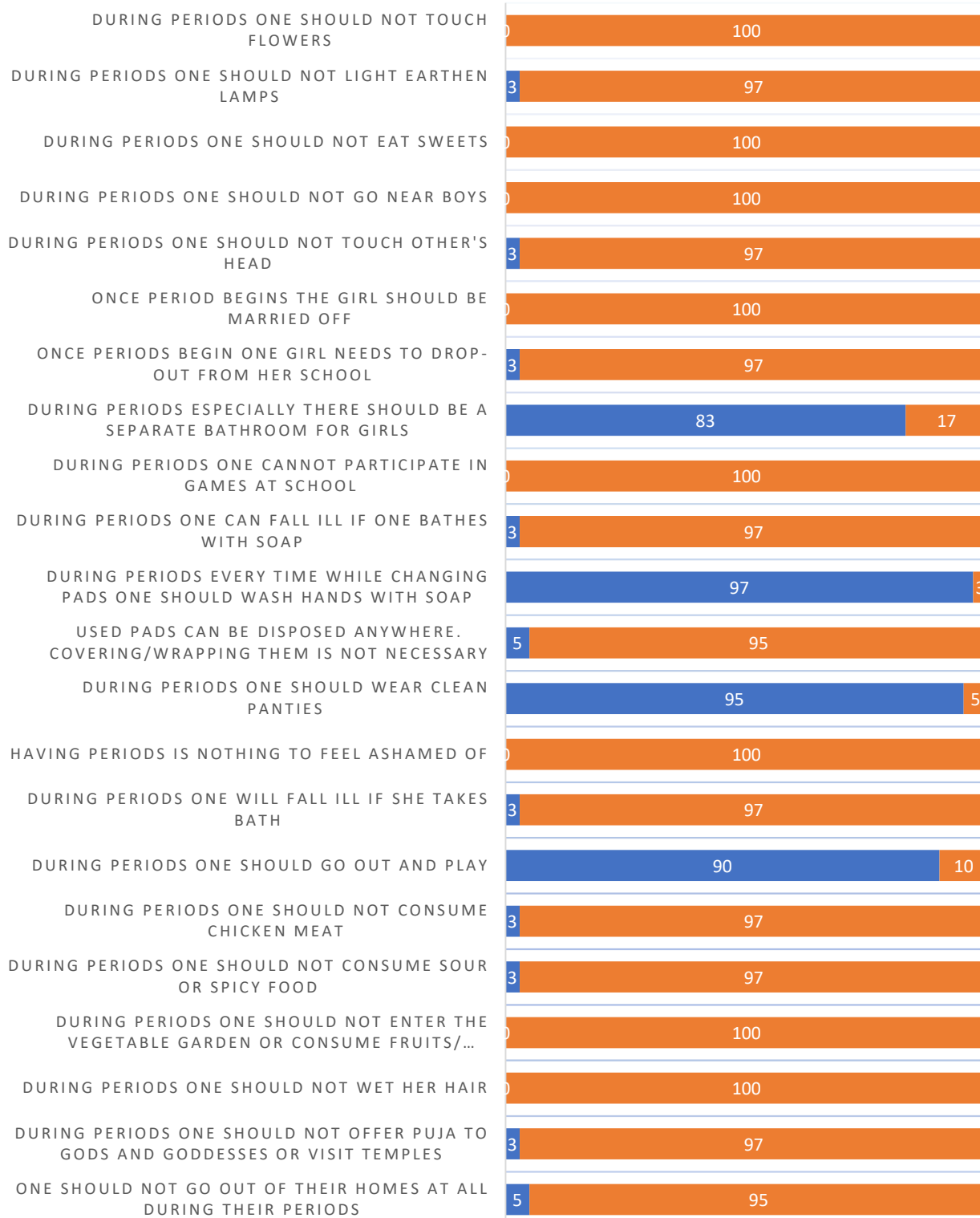


The above diagram shows that 95.3% of the respondents said that during periods one should take proper bath. Clearly show that they have been well sensitized about menstrual hygiene during the workshop. It is further believed that menstruating women are unhygienic and unclean and hence the food they prepare or handle can get contaminated. Cultural norms and religious taboos on menstruation are often compounded by traditional associations with evil spirits, shame and embarrassment surrounding sexual reproduction. It is also believed that a woman can use her menstrual blood to impose her will on a man. Interestingly, in Asia including India, such beliefs many others related to food and bathing are still practiced widely. However, there is no logical or scientific explanation for this. On the other hand, such practices and thoughts detrimentally impact the lives of women which sometimes turn fatal for their survival.



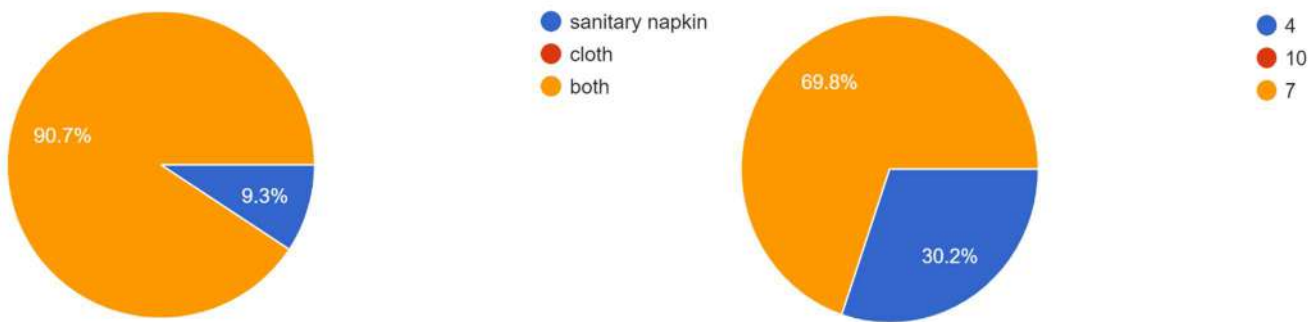
RESPONSES ON THE TABOOS AROUND MENSTRUATION

■ correct ■ wrong





The above Post workshop responses chart shows that the participants had understood the do(s) and don't(s) during periods. These taboos about menstruation impact girls' and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health. Large number of girls in many less economically developed countries drop out of school when they begin menstruating. This includes over 23% of girls in India. The gender – unfriendly school culture and infrastructure and the lack of adequate menstrual protection alternatives and/or clean, safe and private sanitation facilities for female teachers and girls undermine the right of privacy. There are health and hygiene issues also to consider relating to girls and menstruation.



Over 77% of menstruating girls and women in India use an old cloth, which is often reused. Further, 88% of women in India sometimes resort to using ashes, newspapers, dried leaves and husk sand to aid absorption. The chart above shows that Shreeja Girls resort to both sanitary napkins and cloth during their periods. When asked how many pads do they use during their periods about 69% uses 7 and 30% uses only 4 pads. Dearth of female agency and inadequate facilities increase susceptibility to infection, health issues and stigmatization among girls. This may have significant implications for their mental health. The mounting challenges related to menstruation, is further compounded by the fact the girls' knowledge levels and understandings of puberty, menstruation, and reproductive health are still very low. The situation of the first-generation learning girls and young women in the tribal pockets of Purba Bardhaman where Shreeja India works are no different!

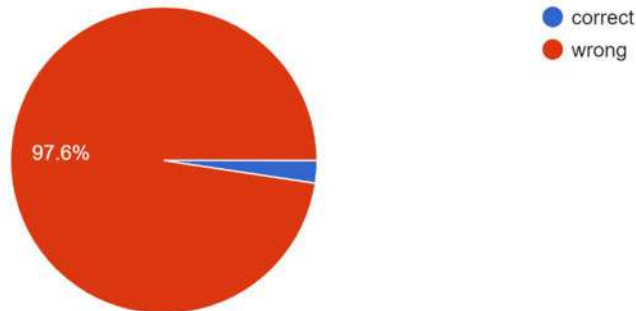
4. Impact of Religion on Menstruation

There are various accepted notions, traditions, and practices surrounding menstruation among different religions. Shreeja Girls comprises mainly of Sarna religion, and like any other religion Taboos surrounding menstruation is not overlooked. Entering temples and praying is forbidden when a woman is in her periods. Many girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily lives simply because they are menstruating. Not entering the “puja” room and not entering the kitchen are some of the main restrictions among both rural and urban girls during menstruation. Menstruating girls and women are also restricted from offering prayers and touching holy books. The underlying basis for this myth is also the cultural beliefs of impurity associated with menstruation. Not touching ‘pickle jars’, interestingly eating sour food and fish is also prohibited. Not plucking



flowers, not washing their heads till their periods get over and even water taps are not allowed to be touched by a menstruating woman.

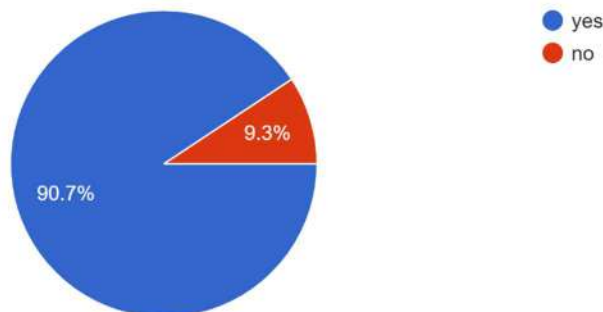
6. during periods one should not offer puja to gods and goddesses or visit temples
42 responses



The above diagram shows that 97.6% of the respondents are not allowed to offer puja or visit temples during periods. Simply because it is ritually unclean and their religion prohibits.

We also explained them how it is normal to get attracted to same gender and other genders after puberty. To this 90% of participants thinks that it is normal to get physically attracted to the same gender after puberty which is shown in the chart below. This is interesting because like any other growing children puberty can be confusing. They deal with a lot of physical changes and adjust to social challenges. In spite of living in a culture that opposes truth in many ways they have understood that it is completely normal for any form of physical attraction.

35. is it normal to get physically attracted to the same or other genders after puberty
43 responses



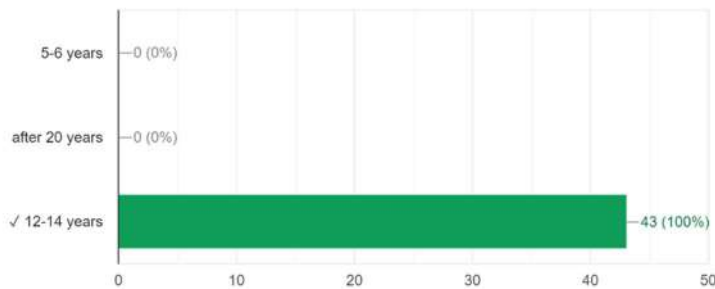


5. De-stigmatizing Periods

During the interactive quiz Shreeja Girls were asked to brainstorm about their health during periods. At what age does menstruation start was asked and almost everyone after the workshop responded that 12–14-year-old girls menstruate. The chart below shows that respondents have understood when does periods starts.

3. At what age does menstruation normally start

43 / 43 correct responses

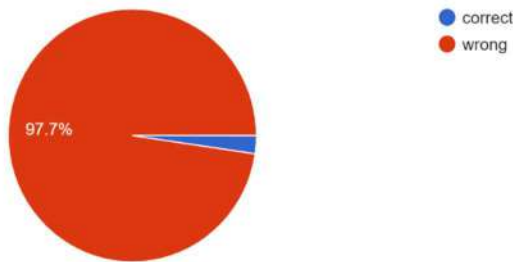


During the workshop Shreeja Girls shared challenges faced by them during menstruation, in their homes, schools and from the community. Some of the girls came forward and shared their experiences with the participants. These anecdotes included their experiences in school washrooms with inadequate facilities, hostilities and ignorance envisaged at their homes where they were kept away from the main household, not given good food to eat or allowed to wash their heads among other barriers.

During the brainstorming time one of the respondents promptly said “period blood is impure and that there should be a separate toilet for the girls who are on their periods”. This misinterpretation was busted after the workshop. All washrooms and toilets must be period friendly. At first, we could understand how having to manage their period while navigating the school day would cause them stress, embarrassment, and discomfort. Add to that the inconvenience of having limited access to toilets and sanitary products, as well as no place to dispose of used pads, and the overall effect discourages girls from attending school while menstruation and eventually led to Dropouts.

26. once periods begin one girl needs to drop-out from her school

43 responses





After workshop when asked “if a girl needs to drop-out from her school once her periods start” 97.7% responded that this statement is wrong. This workshop will also help in reducing the number of dropouts and also increase the number of enrollments in *Beyond Football* program resulting in improvement in their performances in both studies as well as in the football field. This workshop has not just helped the Shreeja Girls in getting the knowledge and basic skills about menstrual hygiene but it has also sensitized mothers of the girls attending Shreeja Centre to disseminate the right information and manage menstrual hygiene. Misinformation or a lack of information around menstruation leads to misconceptions and discrimination which hinders girls from treating it as the normal part of their childhood as it should be. It also hinders other genders from understanding its importance and normalizing it. The mother who attended the workshop with her daughter shared that if they had got the right information about menstruation the taboos and myths would not have been circulated.

6. Football for Menstruators

The way periods affect an individual who play sports is different from month to month. In fact, menstruation hampers their training and motivation along with her tournament days. Fatigue kicks in and they feel less motivated to practice which hinders them to get good results. Stomach aches, body cramps are part and parcel of a woman’s menstrual cycle. Taking your mind off these painful bits by indulging in football greatly helps Shreeja Girls. While discussing this one of the respondents said that practice helps them if they are bloated during periods.

This is a broad topic which requires deep understanding of the girls playing football. Shreeja India is getting equipped to work on this topic in the upcoming follow ups on “Menstrual Health and Hygiene” and how it affects girls who play football.



7. Highlights of the Workshop on Menstrual Health and Hygiene.





8. Conclusion

Before the workshop we had an understanding of how they were harboring many stigmas associated with periods that were imposed by the community and passed down for generations to them. But the results of the workshop indicate a substantial improvement in the understanding of Menstruation. We saw a positive impact of the awareness workshop among the participants. However, given that traditional beliefs and superstitions are strongly instilled within these first-generation learners for generations, it is natural that changing them would take more than just one awareness workshop. The percentages indicate that although the number of correct answers has increased considerably after the workshop, however there is scope of more information and knowledge in this topic. We believe that a series of programs narrowed down on this topic over a period of time we will be able to bring more impact among the participants. At Shreeja India, we understand the value of sharing the right information about menstrual health and hygiene among first-generation learning tribal children from rural population. We also realize that this would need a sustainable approach to bring about an attitude change among the girls. We are therefore planning to continue our endeavour in this regard with a series of varied yet reinforcing awareness workshops on menstrual hygiene among Shreeja children.

9. Acknowledgement

Shreeja India would like to thank Somasree Basu, Program Manager at Shreeja India whose expertise contributed greatly to the development and delivery of this workshop along with Kritika Rai, Program Officer who assisted in conducting the workshop.

Many thanks to the participants (Shreeja Girls) present in the workshop for their cooperation, patience and enthusiasm to do better. The completion of this research would not have been possible without their participation. Thanks to our teachers in the Shreeja center who had volunteered to help with the workshop. They are always there to help the students individually.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Professor Soudeep Deb, Assistant Professor of Decision Sciences and Young Faculty Research Chair at Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and Archi Roy, PhD in Mathematical Science from IISER Pune for their help and guidance.



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11. Menstruation Awareness Questions:

<p>(Tick the right answer)</p> <p>1 mark each for the right answer</p> <p>1. What is Menstruation/Period?</p> <p>a. Month end exam b. Groceries c. Losing blood every month</p> <p>2. Who gets menstruation?</p> <p>a. Boys b. Girls c. Old men and women</p> <p>3. At what age does menstruation normally start?</p> <p>a. 5-6 years b. After 20 years c. 12 – 14 years</p> <p>4. Menstruation is a type of disease.</p> <p>a. YES b. NOT AT ALL</p> <p>5. One should not go out of their homes at all during their periods.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>6. During Periods, one should not offer puja to gods and goddesses or visit temples.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>7. During Periods, one should not wet her hair.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>8. During Periods, one should not enter the vegetable gardens or consume fruits/vegetables.</p> <p>a. CORRECT</p>	<p>b. stack it somewhere c. keep it outside to dry up d. throw it into the nearby pond</p> <p>23. During Periods, one can fall ill if one bathes with soap.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>24. During Periods, one cannot participate in games at school.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>25. During Periods especially, there should be a separate bathroom for girls.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>26. Once Period begins, the girl needs to dropout from her school.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>27. Once Period begins, the girl should be married off.</p> <p>a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>28. Menstruation is associated with which part of the body?</p> <p>a. Uterus b. Pancreas c. Stomach</p> <p>29. What is menstruation cycle?</p> <p>a. A cycle of biological changes that take place in a woman or girl's reproductive system to prepare her body for a potential pregnancy</p>
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<p>b. WRONG</p> <p>9. During Periods, one should not consume sour or spicy food. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>10. During Periods, one should not consume chicken meat a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>11. During Periods, one should go out and play. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>12. During Periods, one will fall ill if she takes bath. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>13. Having Period means, the girl has become an adult a. RIGHT b. WRONG c. Somewhat RIGHT</p> <p>14. Having Period is nothing to feel ashamed of. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>15. Having regular periods is an indication of. a. Good health b. Bad health c. Possession by spirit</p> <p>16. During Periods, one should a. Stay at a stable b. Take proper bath c. Consume on water and edible seeds</p> <p>17. During Periods, one should wear clean panties. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p>	<p>b. A cycle of biological changes that take place in a human body as part of the digestive system</p> <p>30. What symptoms can be associated with menstruation? a. Bloating of stomach b. Stomach pain c. Pimples d. All three</p> <p>31. What hormone is responsible for puberty in girls? a. Testosterone & Progesterone b. Progesterone and Oestrogen</p> <p>32. What hormone is responsible for puberty in boys? a. Testosterone b. Progesterone c. Oestrogen</p> <p>33. Change in a boy's body after puberty a. Hair growth in face and body b. change in voice c. Both</p> <p>34. Change in a girl's body after puberty. a. Hair growth in the underarms and other parts of the body b. development of breasts c. Both</p> <p>35. Is it normal to get physically attracted to the same or other genders after puberty? a. YES b. NO</p> <p>36. During periods, one should not touch other's heads. a. Correct b. Wrong</p> <p>37. During periods, one should not go near boys a. Correct</p>
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<p>18. During Periods, normally one needs how many pads? a. 4 b. 10 c. 7</p> <p>19. Used pads can be disposed anywhere. Covering/ wrapping them is not necessary. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>20. During Periods, every time while changing pads, one should wash hands with soap. a. CORRECT b. WRONG</p> <p>21. During Periods, what can be used as pads. a. Sanitary napkin b. cloth c. both a and b</p> <p>22. During Periods, if using clothes, what should be done? a. submerge in cold water and wash with soap</p>	<p>b. Wrong</p> <p>38. During periods, one should not eat sweets a. Correct b. Wrong</p> <p>39. During periods, one should not light earthen lamps a. Correct b. Wrong</p> <p>40. During periods, one should not touch flowers a. Correct b. Wrong</p>
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