



eco femme



SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

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Pad for Pad Menstrual Health
Education program impact
assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The menstrual hurdle

Background overview

In India, approximately 120 million young adolescent girls encounter significant obstacles to menstruate comfortably and healthily impacting their education and health. This is due to social, cultural, and religious constructions and interpretations surrounding menstruation which have led to menstrual stigmas and taboos¹. Essentially, reports reveal that 23 million girls drop out of school annually when they reach menarche due to lacking or absent menstrual knowledge, as well as inadequate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities, including clean and accessible toilets, and menstrual products².

At present, to achieve menstrual care, the MHM field advocates for the access to menstrual care products, WASH infrastructure (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) and menstrual health education (MHE)³. Nevertheless, extensive data from MHM projects, reveals a predominant focus on 'hardware resources' through emphasizing practices of bleeding 'hygienically' with adequate menstrual products and WASH infrastructures ensuring proper product disposal and privacy⁴. Problematically, the overemphasis of the words "hygiene", "clean" and "sanitation" perpetuates an image that menstruation is inherently dirty, necessitating containment and concealment promoting a 'culture of silence' and 'inaction'. Consequently, this solidifies the engrained stigma⁵. Therefore, it is paramount to establish menstrual awareness through access and quality MHE, the

so-called 'software resources', in order to destigmatize menstruation.

Achieving sustainable and continuous menstrual knowledge through education demands for a societal interplay, as stigmatized information is passed down intergenerationally by mothers and grandmothers, if any at all⁶. This includes religious restrictions and practices such as not entering the house, not eating pickles, or touching anyone whilst menstruating. Within schools, teachers often identify little to no MHE due to the challenging cultural barriers⁷. Therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen and investigate educational and awareness initiatives surrounding menstruation. The goal is to create a supportive and safe environment where women and girls can menstruate in a dignified and non-stigmatised manner, while also learning how to use menstrual products and implement menstrual care practices effectively. Additionally, it is essential to recognise the pivotal role of various actors in positively impacting multiple dimensions of a young girl's life and ensuring the attainment of a full educational degree.

Eco Femme in this regard stands out as a prominent locally-based enterprise in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India. It understand the interconnected need for providing context specific MHE and sustainable, eco-friendly menstrual products to help girls menstruate with dignity and without stigma.

CHAPTER I

About Eco Femme

Eco Femme, a women-led socially driven enterprise, has firmly anchored itself in dismantling the deep-rooted menstrual stigma, shame and taboo experienced by women and girls in low-income communities in India. This is achieved through intensive yet culturally sensitive social engagement and educational initiatives, such as the Pad for Pad program. In addition to their local educational efforts, Eco Femme makes use of its extensive grassroots partnership network, spanning the entirety of India to provide menstrual awareness to over 110,000 women and girls. Eco Femme's approach is one that prioritises sustainable menstruation,

recognising the intricate interplay between education, menstrual products and environmental responsibility. Since its establishment in 2010, Eco Femme offers eco-friendly reusable cloth pads as a global market solution and commits to empowering women to make informed choices regarding these products.

Crucially, Eco Femme integrates ethical business practices, engages rural women as cloth pad producers, and provides holistic life-affirming MHE. This holistic approach blends business, education and environmental consciousness to redefine the narrative surrounding menstruation.



Pad for Pad program

Eco Femme in action

Initiated in 2012, the Pad for Pad program approaches menstruation as a healthy, dignified, affordable and natural human process. It teaches MHE and offers access to kits of free reusable cloth pads at the end of a 3-hour long, two-part program. The first session covers the female anatomy, the female reproductive system, and the menstrual cycle. Girls are educated about puberty and the changes that come along with it, addressing breast development, pubic hair, vaginal discharge, and hormonal changes. To contextualise these changes, white discharge is likened to other bodily discharges such as earwax, mucus, and tears. Additionally, the female reproductive system is visually explained, and girls are encouraged to say 'vagina', 'ovaries' and 'uterus' out loud. This is done so that girls can develop a sense of power, agency, and pride over their bodies.

Furthermore, an explanation of how one gets pregnant is given followed by the



menstrual cycle. The menstrual cycle duration, the menstrual window, ovulation, and fertility is covered, giving girls the tools for cultivating body literacy. This is accompanied by a cycle tracking exercise with a monthly calendar. Additional topics addressed include irregularities of menstruation and when to seek professional help, menstrual myths and restrictions, and nutrition.

The second session showcases all the different menstrual products, their correct usage, disposal, and changing practices. This empowers girls to make their own informed product choice and understand the health and environmental risks associated with disposable pads and tampons. All girls are offered a free kit which includes four reusable pads suitable for medium heavy flow, a leak proof storage pouch to transport used pads, and an instruction leaflet. All pads are made from organic cotton flannel and have a leak proof layer. A recurrent and core aim of the program is to create a safe space for questions and sharing where all questions are answered with care and empathy.

Outreach Pad for Pad program until today:



80,000

girls received pads under the program in India



320,000

pads freely distributed under the program



35

grassroot partners across India

Research overview

Aim and participant information

Eco Femme is well-placed in devising and instructing context specific MHE training and programs within schools and villages, providing culturally appropriate menstrual products and most imperatively challenging the menstrual stigma. Between January and March 2023, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with young adolescent girls at the Government Higher Secondary School Koonimedu to assess the impact of Eco Femme's Pad for Pad MHE program. The main research question was: **How does the program influence experiences of menstruation amongst young adolescent girls in the Government Higher Secondary School Koonimedu?** To answer this question, the research aimed to investigate the menstrual knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of the schoolgirls. This also required developing an understanding about the menstrual knowledge and experiences of parents and teachers as they were identified as key actors who play a role in the knowledge and perceptions of girls. These findings are discussed in chapter IV. Subsequently, a comparative approach assessed the program's impact on the menstrual knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of girls by comparing the pre and post program interviews. These findings are discussed in chapter V.

In total, 20 girls, aged 12–14, participated in the Pad for Pad program and underwent interviews both before and after the program. Consent was obtained from the school principal due to the limited proximity and accessibility to the girls'

parents. Four girls had not yet reached menarche, five were Muslim and 15 were Hindu.

Furthermore, 11 parents were interviewed, all of whom were mothers, as two fathers declined to partake in the research. These mothers are unrelated to the girls from Government Higher Secondary School Koonimedu and were interviewed through connections facilitated by Kalvi, the Pad for Pad program facilitator. Mothers were aged between 36 and 50, including one 72-year-old grandmother. All were Hindus and most had both sons and daughters, or two daughters, whilst two parents only had sons. Notably, mothers with only sons revealed an interesting gateway in researching the parental role in the menstrual education of boys. All daughters but one had menstruated. Furthermore, none of the mothers had completed secondary school (up to 12th standard), with three parents having studied until tenth standard, six parents until eighth standard, one until seventh and one until fifth (which corresponds to 11 years of age). Mothers were either housewives or cooks and two were Eco Femme employees.

A 3rd group consisted of 11 teachers. These teachers were interviewed, and all taught at schools where the Pad for Pad program had previously been implemented. Nine of them taught at Vedha Secondary High School, while two were from Edayanchavadi primary school. Ages ranged from 33 to 54 years old, with two male teachers and nine female teaching science, English, Tamil, social studies, mathematics, or P.E.

Findings Part 1

Menstrual beliefs, knowledge and actors

The pre-program interview data first revealed a complex landscape of beliefs surrounding menstruation amongst girls, parents, and teachers. The general observation amongst more than half of the girls was that menstruation involved 'bad', 'dirty' or even 'toxic' blood, and perceived the secretion of this blood as a sign that the body was returning to a 'pure state'. For instance, this was commented by Isha (13 years), "**All the bad blood, all the dirty blood comes by period**". This belief for many girls extended to deeming the menstruator 'untouchable' and that people should refrain from going near them. However, many girls struggled to rationalise or provide a concrete explanation for their beliefs about menstruation. When asked why menstruation was considered 'untouchable', Suhasini (14 years), responded, "**I don't know why, but that's how people at home treat it**". Additionally, Lakshmi (14 years), highlighted the influence of her religion on her perception of menstruation and drew a distinction between cultural and religious beliefs, stating, "**in my practice no, I am Muslim, and we don't practice untouchability**". This underscores the importance of understanding the diverse menstrual practices within different cultural and religious contexts. Furthermore, a quarter of the girls responded that they didn't know anything about menstruation and shared little about any beliefs or opinions.

In terms of menstrual health and hygiene, varying levels of awareness were present. Firstly, whilst more than half of the girls that menstruated changed their pads during each school break or with four-hour intervals, others did not change them at all. This was generally due to unawareness, unhygienic or broken school toilets, and feelings of shyness with obtaining pads from the staffroom, as it would reveal one is on their period. Suhashini (14 years) who had been menstruating for two years revealed, "**I didn't know that I should change the pad after a long time**". These improper hygienic practices present potential health risks including UTIs.

Secondly, only a few girls commented about nutrition during menstruating, but rather in a concerning way as Satya (14 years) shared "**I don't eat properly during my periods because I don't like that I bleed**". This is correlated to the belief that eating meat, fish, sweets, or spicy food will increase blood flow and make the blood smell bad. Nevertheless, several girls expressed curiosity for more knowledge including the biological reason behind menstruation and the array of menstrual products on the market.



Sources of knowledge

When exploring the sources of menstrual knowledge, beliefs and perceptions among girls, multiple sources were recalled including mothers, siblings, friends, and teachers. Firstly, more than half of the girls expressed receiving some degree of information about menstruation from their mothers. However, this information was often limited to menstrual beliefs and restrictions, and how to use menstrual products, illuminating a cultural and societal conditioning being passed down intergenerationally. Notably, throughout parent interviews, only Vedja (38 years) positively normalized and supported her daughter through puberty changes and informed her about getting her period soon. In contrast, the majority of mothers viewed menstruation as 'impure' or 'dirty' and shared these perspectives with their daughters, often accompanied by a lack of accurate menstrual knowledge, or any at all. Many mothers thought period blood came from the same hole where women urinate and Ramani (38 years) even recounted: ***"I thought, uh, like period means it should come through the anus. So, when I saw it coming from the vagina, I, I got very afraid and then I started crying"***. Additionally, in the case of Soma (36 years), she passed down factually incorrect information taught by her elders. She shared, ***"Every woman once their body is matured enough, they start bleeding, and it will last forever. This is what I have learned from my family. My elders have taught me, so I just passed the same message"***. Whilst these examples indicate a step forward in providing a degree of menstrual awareness, there is a necessity for educating parents in MHE to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to offer accurate guidance to their daughters.

Furthermore, multiple parents stated that a girl achieves a state of being 'full' or 'mature' upon reaching menstruation, including one parent even linking this to the readiness for marriage. This belief is highly problematic as it perpetuates social norms that define a girl's purpose and function based on her reproductive capabilities and suitability for marriage. This can in addition lead to child marriages and early pregnancies which are still recurrent in India fortifying the need for an intergenerational and societal approach to MHE.

Secondly, a quarter of the girls revealed that their mothers didn't share anything about menstruation. Consequently, these girls learnt through external support networks, such as their sisters, who would comment about their menstrual cramps, or their friends, who shared that menstruation involves dirty blood coming out. In some instances girls came to know about menstruation as they were requested to accompany their friends to the restroom during menstruation. Suhasini (14 years) shared her first encounter with menstrual knowledge; ***"my friends would make me feel scary by saying things like after one gets period, they cannot be outside, they will lock you in the house"***. This critically highlights the importance of providing accurate menstrual knowledge in schools.

Thirdly, a third of the girls recounted attending a MHE session from a social worker at their school approximately one month prior to this study. However, many forgot what they were taught. Alarming, Fatima (12 years) showed interest in the session but was unable to attend as she had not yet reached menarche. She recollected: ***"In school they have provided education but for the ones who***

got their period, and because I didn't have my period, they sent me back to the class". This highlights gaps and challenges in providing MHE which points towards the need to not only provide recurrent MHE sessions to solidify and ensure long-term retention, but also including premenarcheal girls to ensure positive and safe first menstrual experiences.

Fourthly, in regard to teacher support and guidance, girls shared MHE within school was generally limited to the P.E teacher showcasing how to properly dispose of pads to maintain clean and hygienic toilets for everyone's use. Additionally, on two accounts, girls shared uncomfortable experiences with teachers when requesting for pads, as Amrisha (14 years) disclosed, **"I ask my teacher, sometimes they would ask like, why do you ask me? It's over there only, why don't you go and take it? And then like, uh, I feel very shy to go and take it and walk out from the staff room".** The induction of fear, shame and shyness experienced by

girls due to their friends and teachers points towards the necessity of not only providing adequate MHE in schools, but also addressing teacher training to ensure students and children receive accurate, supportive and stigma free information about menstruation. This necessity is further reinforced as almost all teachers equally believed menstrual blood was 'toxic' and 'bad' and recalled having zero knowledge or no idea what period meant before they reached menstruation due to their mothers and sisters not sharing any information. Anusheela (46 years, female, teacher) provided an additional account of her beliefs when women and girls menstruate, **"I also believe that, uh, during period a girl has lot of negative energy and whatever she touches might, uh, uh, it's like passing on those negative energy and I have also observed that like when a girl is on her period for the blood smell, lot of insects like, you know, centipedes or millipedes or other insects might follow".** Only one female teacher was able to correctly share the function of the menstruation.



Girl's general menstrual experiences

Generally, the first menstrual experiences of girls were marked by emotions of fear, confusion, and insecurity, as the majority had no menstrual knowledge. Such emotions were also caused by the 'menstrual ceremony' which all girls recounted began with a turmeric bath to be 'purified' from their menstrual blood. Then they were physically isolated either on the verandah or a corner of the house and made to sleep on a mat due to the belief of being 'untouchable'. Several parents explained the ceremony is a transition into womanhood, and an announcement of marriage eligibility as neighbours and friends are invited to attend. Additionally, in two cases, girls were so afraid they even stayed without menstrual product for multiple hours due to fears their mothers would scold them. These experiences emphasise the need for open conversations to help girls navigate this phase with confidence and support.

In further detail, throughout the menstrual ceremony, menstrual restrictions and practices are imposed which are to be followed hereon after. The most common restriction followed by all girls entailed not worshipping their Gods by refraining from going to the temple or doing puja ceremonies within their home. For Muslim girls, this meant not going to the mosque, reading the Quran, or worshipping, as doing so would 'curse you'. This restriction went unquestioned by all girls and simply followed due to parental orders and observations of their mothers adhering to the same restriction. Other restrictions included not talking with boys, not leaving the house, not touching anyone, showering before entering the house, not touching any cooking appliances or plants and refraining from pickles, meat and fish.

Similarly, a few parents and teachers recalled being instructed not to talk with men or boys anymore, or 'fool around', driven by fears of falling in love and something 'going wrong'. However, Buhvana (34 years, teacher) explained how nowadays there is a lot of child abuse, rape and sexual harassment, which has led parents to restrict their daughter's activities by imposing the fear of being haunted if talking to boys or leaving the house. Furthermore, Garimai (42 years, teacher) provided an explanation behind the belief of deeming a menstruator untouchable, explaining that the initial intent was for women to take some rest during menstruation, but over time, this concept has been misunderstood leading to the portrayal of women as untouchable and in need of isolation. In sum, this data sheds light on the underlying intentions behind menstrual practices, which have unfortunately been distorted due to menstrual stigmatization. This calls for a balanced and transparent examination behind menstrual practices, aiming to dispel misconceptions and differentiate between healthy and unhealthy practices.

Menstrual Health Education responsibility

In the light of the lacking menstrual knowledge amongst all research participants, both parents and teachers were asked **"from whom should girls learn about menstruation?"**. More than half of the parents and most teachers deemed mothers should have the primary responsibility to first teach their daughters. However, in saying this, these same mothers had not passed on this knowledge to their daughters, illuminating a gap between an ideal and reality. Two examples illustrating this gap are the accounts of Amirithini (37 years) and Sudha

(43 years). Amirthini insisted parents must teach first but added, ***“the reason I didn’t pass on the knowledge is because I don’t know more about period”***. Sudha (43 years) who has a son shared ***“I never had any dialogue with my son, in school they will educate him”***. Nevertheless, some mothers preferred that their daughters receive menstrual education in school from their teachers, as they found it troubling to engage in menstrual conversations due to limited knowledge and confidence. In regards to teachers, half stressed the need to educate both girls and boys as boys also go through puberty and experience bodily changes such as erections. Aadhiraiyan (37 years), the male P.E teacher also reasoned, ***“They will take more responsibility to play a role in the society, like to take care of their mother and sister and few in future, he’s going to get married and have his wife and daughter and all, so then he will know how to support them, and you know, like he will behave differently”***. This shows a progressive understanding of the need to include boys in menstrual discussion, as a means to further tackle the menstrual stigma. However, several teachers shared that MHE was limited to sessions conducted by external organisations, which were only provided for menstruating girls from eighth standard.

Lack of teacher involvement and guidance was commented on by many teachers, attributed to limited menstrual knowledge, a lack of confidence, and cultural challenges in teaching boys and non-menstruating girls. Khushi (33 years) shared her experience as she said, ***“We are not comfortable to teach, so, you know, like it’s a kind of blurry chapter that you teach like, with using kind of technical words and all, sometimes, you***

know, if to teach you need to simplify so that the kids are understanding. So in this case they use like certain kind of technical words and just finish it off”. However, it is essential to foster an inclusive environment that incorporates boys to encourage them to ‘support their sisters’ and promote empathy and understanding.

Many teachers found it challenging to teach about menstruation but eagerly expressed gratitude for the presence of Eco Femme and wished for the education to be implemented in other schools. Priyala (38 years) observed the richness of the sessions and commented, ***“And even sometimes, you know, when, when we go and advise the students something about menstruation, if we say something wrong information the students, they say like, no, no teacher the aka came and she told us to do this. So I find it very happy about it and it also feels like, you know, a little bit of burden in our shoulder is getting reduced because of their work”***. This data, along with Priyala’s account provides additional rich insight into the need for MHE training for teachers. Eco Femme in this case, can help bridge the void by providing more regular Pad for Pad programs to multiple standards each year including premenstrual girls and boys, as well as providing specific guidance to teachers on what and how to deliver MHE.



Mother attending the Pad for Sisters program

Findings Part 2

Impact on menstrual beliefs and perceptions of girls

Following the implementation of the Pad for Pad MHE program, a great impact was observed among girls. Firstly, regarding menstrual beliefs and perceptions, almost all the girls shared that they now believed period blood is good blood and rejected the belief that girls are 'untouchable'. Isha's (13 years) stated, ***"So now I feel good about period and period is not untouchable at all anymore. When we get period, I feel more positive about it. It's not bad blood. It's good blood"***. Moreover, more than a quarter of the girls commented that menstruation is ***"a power to women"***. Girls also shared emotions of feeling more comfortable, confident, and happy to menstruate indicating a newfound sense of empowerment and pride with their menstrual cycles and their bodies.

Impact on menstrual knowledge

The program effectively filled the knowledge gap experienced by young girls. Almost all girls were able to recall all the topics that were covered ranging from nutrition, products, hygienic practices, to the process of menstruation. In further detail, two thirds of the girls correctly explained the bodily production and monthly release of eggs, the concept of fertilisation, and the menstrual process. Approximately half of the girls expressed appreciation for learning about the menstrual cycle and the reproductive

system, with Lakshmi (14 years) who shared, ***"That a woman is, uh, powerful, that she can bear a baby, she can make a baby, and she needs to feel proud about it. That I really appreciate"***. A few girls also valued learning about the different menstrual products and their advantages and disadvantage regarding environmental sustainability. Others enjoyed learning about cycle tracking for better preparedness. Nevertheless, three girls fell short. Whilst they remembered the topics, they were unable to define the process of menstruation or why women menstruate. This reveals the need for continuous efforts to standardise MHE within school curriculums, as these girls represent the future agents of societal change.

Furthermore, the majority of girls shared their newly acquired knowledge with their mothers. On the one hand, some girls reported no noticeable impact on their mother's attitudes and behaviours, instead encountering a resistance to change. Geetika (13 years) noted that her mother ***"is being the same"***. On the other hand, many girls reported that their parents expressed happiness and empowerment when receiving this newfound knowledge. An example is the mother of Riya (14 years), ***"So I shared it with my mother, and my mother, uh, reacted as if like, she's learning this for the first time. And she felt very happy and empowered about it"***.

Deepthi (13 years) also shared the following impact on her mother, ***“I told my mother and sister how many holes are there. My mother was not aware that she had three holes in her private part”***. Furthermore, knowledge also extended to siblings and friends through dialogue as was Parvati’s case (12 years) who hadn’t yet menstruated shared her knowledge to a friend in 7th standard, ***“So my friend who is studying at 7th standard, I also passed the information to her and, uh, she say she got her period, but she didn’t know what period is. So after me telling her everything, she thanked me. She said, thank you so much for letting me know everything hereafter I will use cloth instead of disposable”***.



Overall, these findings reflect the growing personal agency among girls and their role as knowledge disseminators within their social circles, breaking generational menstrual misconceptions. This dissemination of menstrual knowledge went beyond the biological aspects and included information about menstrual products, indicative of a holistic understanding of menstruation. Nevertheless, it is essential once again to extend MHE to parents to further dispel menstrual misconceptions and foster a healthy learning experience for their children.

Impact on menstrual restrictions and practices

Saanvi’s (14 years) experience, similar to many other girls, highlights the impact of the Pad for Pad program on menstrual restrictions and practices. Her mother, who had previously enforced numerous restrictions during menstruation, such as refraining from religious rituals, touching certain items, and sleeping separately,

eventually chose to remove these constraints. She shared, ***“Now my mother said you can know that restrictions I won’t impose, you can take bath if you feel like, and like you can touch whatever you want, you can sleep with us and do whatever you feel comfortable. You can be yourself”***. Furthermore, a quarter of the girls reported a partial impact wherein they selectively continued some restrictions while discarding others, including two girls who adhered to their mother’s restrictions only when they were present but disregarded these in their absence. This reveals yet again the importance of providing MHE to parents as they have an integral impact on the menstrual experiences of girls. Ultimately, an overall empowerment to make informed choices and challenging the menstrual stigma was observed.

Impact on family dynamics and social relationships

After the program, a significant increase in the willingness and comfort to talk about menstruation was observed by almost all girls. Saanvi's (14 years) experience, encapsulates this transformation as she stated, ***"Before when I have any question to ask my mother, I feel a little nervous and afraid and all like whether I'm like, uh, is it okay to talk about these topics to her. Now that after I shared all of this information with my mother, I feel more free to go and ask and talk with her"***. Whilst Saanvi's relationship with her mother might have eased when it comes to menstruation, her initial degree of uncertainty and fear which many other girls also experienced reiterates the importance of mothers being equipped with knowledge to embody a supportive source of information.

Pad for Pad program experience

During the post program interviews, an important objective was to gain an insight into the most effective and empathetic methods of educating girls within the context of the menstrual stigma and culture of silence. Generally, all girls shared utmost satisfaction and appreciation for having participated in the educational program as most didn't have any prior knowledge of the topics that were covered. A few girls that had not yet attained menarche, shared they would apply the knowledge given. Furthermore, the majority expressed feeling comfortable and happy in listening and at ease throughout the session. While a minority of girls felt shy at the beginning of the sessions, they gradually warmed up as the sessions progressed. Significantly, more than half of the girls conveyed their gratitude for the way the sessions were conducted. They shared how they felt as if they were being taught by a sister which

made them more curious and confident to ask questions. Girls also appreciated the openness and boldness of the facilitator as Babitha (14 years) commented, ***"I like the way how you boldly spoke about like, you know, how the, uh, process really happens, like how baby forms and, uh, I never seen any other people like explaining this clearly, like, you know, they don't usually in our culture or in our school, they don't teach anything in depth. So I appreciate learning those information from you"***. Charukesi (13 years) also shared the following aim, ***"If any other people who are like, you know, is very stressed about period and all. If I see them then I can go and convince them and console them. I can share my knowledge, so it feels good"***. This overall positive feedback girls gave supports the necessity of not only providing MHE but also delivering it in a manner that fosters trust in the educator, encouraging questions and facilitating the application of knowledge.



Impact on menstrual product experience

All the girls interviewed were offered and accepted a free kit of cloth pads at the end of the MHE session. During the follow up interviews, almost half of the girls had menstruated during the three-week interval and used the cloth pads. Generally, girls expressed satisfaction and content when using them in comparison to disposable pads. Their feedback included cloth pads feeling good and softer for the body, prolonged blood retention, absence of rashes and sensations of 'heat', and no shifting of the cloth pad. Additionally, all girls who used the cloth pads indicated no difficulty, discomfort, or awkwardness in washing their own pads, and correctly soaked, washed and dried them in the sun. Amrisha (14 years) even commented **"I started liking washing my pads"**. Some mothers also expressed an interest in using these pads and offered to buy more pads, after their daughters showcased the products. However, Suhasini (13 years)

explained her mother was worried the cloth pad would stain her clothes, pointing towards the need of extending product awareness to parents. Furthermore, not only were girls happy about their shift, they also developed a newfound awareness of the sustainability of reusable pads. Many explained the harmful effects of disposable pads, such as cramps, itching, and rashes, due to their composition of plastics and chemicals. A few girls also explained the environmental benefit of reusable pads, mitigating menstrual waste. Girls that had not yet menstruated expressed eagerness to try the product, influenced positively by their friend's experiences. Overall, girl's menstrual experiences shifted from shyness, concealment, and nervousness to a new prideful feminine identity within themselves, indicating a positive impact on their self-esteem and menstrual empowerment journey.



Cloth Pad Kit provided during the program



CONCLUSION

Just the beginning

Take away

The Pad for Pad program has demonstrated a significant and positive impact on the menstrual knowledge, perceptions, restrictions, and overall menstrual experiences of girls, but also parents. The program created a space for critical reflections, allowing girls to grow a sense of personal power, confidence, and autonomy. However, it is still important to acknowledge that stigma still persists, affecting the knowledge and ability of parents and teachers to provide guidance and information surrounding menstruation. To address this, a comprehensive approach that involves not only girls but also boys, parents and teachers in MHE is essential.

Most importantly, the program's effectiveness lies in its delivery method, which integrated Indian values, beliefs and cultural practices. This approach went beyond merely educating about menstruation; it tapped into the broader societal knowledge and empathised with the research participants' experiences, which resulted in feelings of being taught by a 'sister'.

Through the work of Eco Femme the following SDG goals were tackled:



Policy and research recommendations



Making MHE part of school curriculum to ensure recurrent and accurate education.



Providing teachers with menstrual health education training to support and teach students.



WASH facilities need to be ensured at all schools, as a few girls recounted dirty and broken toilets.

Up until the aforementioned policy recommendations are implemented:



Eco Femme should provide MHE on a biyearly basis between standard 7 - 8 and yearly up to standard 12 ensuring retainment and a fluid learning journey about menstruation and its necessary hygienic practices alongside the cloth pads.



MHE sessions should include boys as well as pre-menstrual girls into the discussion.



Eco Femme should provide MHE training for parents and teachers, imperative to provide a growth supporting environment for girls.



Research into: (1) the explanations behind religious menstrual practices, (2) waste management of menstrual products, and (3) impact assessment of parent and teacher MHE trainings.



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Gift 1 pad for 1.20€ or a pad kit for 6.50€



Find us on social media



Margarita M. Mudde Cruz

For her master's thesis in International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam, Margarita partnered with Eco Femme and conducted this research. Her interests lie in advancing women's health, education, and equality, and is actively seeking opportunities to further these causes. For more information, contact through: [linkedin.com/in/margaritamudde](https://www.linkedin.com/in/margaritamudde) margarita.mudde@hotmail.com



Kalvi, the Pad for Pad program facilitator and Margarita