

A Report
On
Training of Trainers
in
Sri Lanka



Colombo
October 23-27, 2023

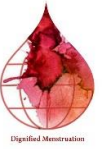


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Acknowledgement

On the behalf of Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude towards Shanthi Maargam, Family Planning Association Sri Lanka and French Embassy of Sri Lanka & Maldives for providing this opportunity to share the platform and facilitate our knowledge on Dignified Menstruation.

I would also like to extend my appreciativeness to the participants for hearing us patiently and supporting us to by actively participating in the individual work & group work. Without their compliance it will be challenging for us to achieve the goals of this training. And we are indebted with the engagement of the participants which was significant for exploring the menstrual practices in Sri Lanka.

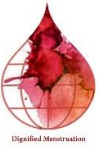
Thank you, Shanthi Maargam team for managing all our logistic arrangement. We are grateful for taking care of us and priotizing our requirements.

Last but not least, I would like to thanks Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation for providing me this opportunity to co-facilitate the TOT on Dignified Menstruation.

Sincerely,

Sapna Poudel

GSCDM

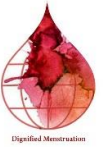


Executive Summary

5 days Training of Trainers (TOT) was organized with 28 representatives from 13 NGOs of Sri Lanka from October 23-27, 2023 in the Courtyard by Marriot, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The program was organized by Shanthi Maargam, Family Planning Association Sri Lanka and French Embassy in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Individual and group work were the foremost approach to break the resistance of the participants. With the mandate of the equal and active participations of the participants, participatory introduction method was applied which aims to build the trust and familiarity among the participants.

Altogether, 154 menstrual discriminatory practices was explored during the sessions of the trainings which is further categories as: restriction related to mobility, restriction related to participation, restriction related to touch, restriction related to eat, menstrual health issues, and menstrual products (Poverty). In contempt of having a higher literacy rate and belonging from the urban setting, menstrual discrimination is similar to Nepal. Activism on menstruation is centering on menstrual product as a menstrual poverty which does not addressed the menstrual discriminatory practices that has violates the fundamental human rights of an individual.



Background

Out of [22.16](#) million of population of Sri Lanka, the population of menstruators¹ is 52.1% over the non-menstruators whose population is 47.9%. According to the [UNESCO](#), the literacy rate is 92.38% where the male literacy rate is 93.28% and female literacy rate is 91.6%. The HDI² of Sri Lanka is 0.724. The majority of the [population](#) is Sinhalese followed by the Tamils where 74.9% population are Sinhalese, 11.2% population are Sri Lankan Tamils, 9.2% are Sri Lankan Moors, 4.2% are Indian Tamils and 0.5% are others. 70.2% of the population follow Buddhism followed by 12.6% Hinduism, 9.7% Islam, 7.4% Christianity and 0.1% others. ([Wikipedia](#))

While talking about the menstruation, over the 52.1% of female population, 51% (5.7 millions) of the female population are of menstruating women aging from 15-49 years. The social and cultural norms, taboos, myths, stigma associated with menstruation has resulted the increase in the number GBV³. According to [UNFPA, Sri Lanka](#), 1 in 5 (20.4%) women in Sri Lanka have experienced sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime; and 1 in 4 women (24.9%) in Sri Lanka have experienced sexual and/or physical violence since the age of 15 (2019). According to the report of [Escalation of Domestic Violence against Girls and Women in Sri Lanka](#), Sri Lankan women subjected to physical violence by their partners during their lifetime are more than double (17.4%) compared to violence from anyone else (7.2%). Similarly, the occurrence of sexual violence from partners (6.2%) is also higher than sexual violence from non-partners (4.1%). These data reveal that Violence perpetrated by partners is comparatively high in the context of Sri Lanka.

Despite of having a high literacy rate in the country, the rate of GBV is rapidly increasing because of the menstrual practices which creates the foundation for the discrimination, violation and abuses. Menstrual discrimination is the cause and effect of Power & Patriarchy. It is complex and multi-faceted. Menstrual Discrimination refers to taboos, shyness, restrictions, abuses and violence associated with menstruation throughout the life cycle of menstruators (girls, women, transmen, queer). It is a form of sexual and gender based violence and violation of human rights. ([GSCDM, 2019](#)).

More importantly, menstruation is acknowledged as including complex and multifaceted phenomena and forms of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and violations of human rights. Regardless of the underlying causes of menstrual discrimination, it's presence impacts menstruators in many ways, both immediate and long term, and over the course of their lifetime, that is 365 days of every year. The impact of menstrual discrimination extends beyond the approximately five days of bleeding, and beyond menstrual products or materials and beyond menstrual health. Because of the breadth and depth of the systemic power of patriarchy, the impact of menstrual discrimination is on every level: social, cultural, educational, health, economic, political, environmental and technological. By patriarchy we mean the socio-political system whereby the male and masculine is preferenced over the female and feminine, which is not

¹ A person born with uterus and ovaries

² Human Development Index

³ Gender Based Violence

specifically about individual men or women, but is a system we all live within and through it's imbalance are disadvantaged by to a greater or lesser extent. Menstrual discrimination plays a role directly or indirectly in many forms of sex and gender-based violence (SGBV), augmenting a spiral or multiplier effect.

Methodology

The training session fully engaged with the individual and group work through participatory approach. Aiming to unveil the personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and practices around menstruation for context mapping through the reflections, menstrual rivers considered as the foundation of individual work to move ahead with the upcoming training sessions.

1st day of the training was focused on individual and group work which aims to explore the practices, perception and belief around menstruation at individual, family, community, schools and work place. To understand the gravity and magnitude of learning around Dignified Menstruation, expectation from the participation was collected. Due to the limited time frame, it was difficult to cover all the expectation however, liable with the “Training Manual on Dignified Menstruation” all the topic were covered.

The Pre-Test results in the average of 38% with the highest number 68 and lowest number 10. By the end, the post-test results shows with the huge transformation by the average of 65% with the highest number 93 and lowest number 45. From the feedback form provided to the participants, the content of training was liked by the all participants and shared they have gain the confident to speak about menstruation openly at their home, community and workplace. “Menstruation is the business of Men also not only Women”, statement by the male participants.



Participatory approach



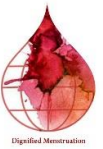
Individual presentation



Group presentation

Key Findings

The key findings on the perceptions and practices around menstruation through the different tasks are mentioned as below:

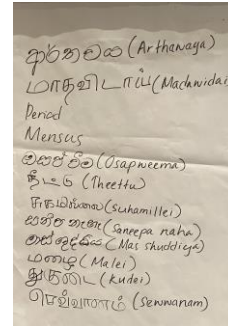


The word “Menstruation”

The names of menstruation vary from place to place and culture to culture. From the 4 days long TOT on Dignified Menstruation, it is found that 12 different names are used to point out “MENSTRUATION”.

Due to the shame associated with menstruation they are using different terms for menstruation such as:

- Arthawaya
- Madawidai
- Period
- Mensus
- Osapweema
- Theettu
- Mas Shuddiya
- Malei
- Kudei
- Sewwanam
- Suhamillei
- Saneepa naha



Name of Menstruation

The discussion here, concluded that the shyness, stigma, taboos, myths associated with menstruation, they don’t feel comfortable to speak out loud using the word “Menstruation”. The reason behind is menstruation is still the topic of shame. The gesture such as facial expression, whispering found as a common practices in participants if talking about the menstruation. This is determined due to the lack of dialogue on menstruation at family. There is a deep level of ignorance and silence in this issue which is challenging the capacity of menstruators to be vocal and say NO to all the discriminatory practices around menstruation.

Primary Response on Menstruation:

According to [GSCDM](#), a child (either girl or boy) know something about the menstruation for the 1st time in their life at the average of 6 years. However, this training as shown that at the average of 10 years old the participants heard something about the menstruation for the 1st time in their life from their mother, sisters, siblings, grandmother or any other family members or friends, the source also could be the advertisement on television, radios or internet.

Their 1st reaction when they heard/learned something about menstruation or experienced their 1st menstruation, their reaction were:

- Ashamed
- Vulnerable
- Disrespect
- Uncivilized
- Afraid
- Fear
- Humiliation
- Unlucky
- Sadness
- Powerless
- Isolated
- Stressed
- Depressed
- Sad
- Shy
- Uncomfortable
- Screaming
- Confused
- Impure
- Disgusting
- Sacred

Age	First Reaction (Color)
7, 11, 8	Shocked, Curious
7, 9, 9	Was heard of my period
14, 8	Worried, Fear, First Shocked, Curious
10, 11	Curious, No Pain
10, 14	Questional, Scared
12	Scared, Fear
09, 13	Confused, Fear
07, 11	Afraid, Curious
09	Curious, Shocked
10	Curious, Shocked
08	Scared, Shocked
5	Shocked
3	Shocked, Fear
3/4	Shocked, Fear, Disgusting

1st Reaction

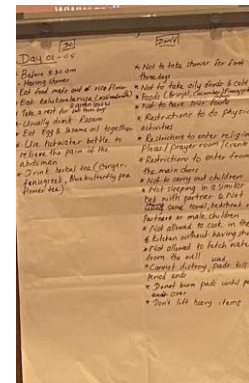
These responses shows that menstrual discrimination play vibrant roles in the construction of Power and Patriarchy. By the age of 6-10 years old, child learn from their family, relatives, community, school, television, internet etc. that menstruation is a state of “impurity”, which inhales the girls child to feel insecure, impure, inferior, powerless, and disadvantaged. In addition, they feel more insecure, impure, inferior, powerless and disadvantaged when they had their 1st menstruation. At the same time, boy child starts to feel pure, powerful, privileged and superior and these feeling keeps on growing with the age.

Menstrual Practices and Perception Sri Lanka

From the analysis of the five days of menstruation at family level through the pair work, the participants come up with the numbers of the restrictions related to mobility, participations, eat, touches, health issues, facilities and so on. This analysis intent to explore the perceptions, beliefs and practices related to the menstruation at the family level in-depth.

The restrictions has been categorized as follows:

1. Restriction in mobility during menstruation
2. Restriction in participation during menstruation
3. Restriction to eat during menstruation
4. Restriction to touch during menstruation

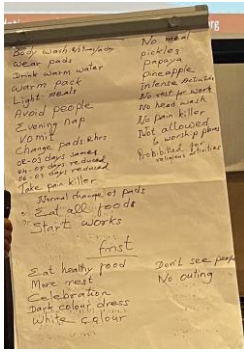
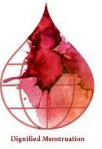


Menstrual Practices

Regardless of having a high literacy rate and belonging from urban setting, there is a deep silence and ignorance in Sri Lanka. This silence has fueled the discriminatory menstrual practices which rationalize the cultural beliefs, social norms and traditions with menstruation. During the menstruation, they⁴ are not allowed to go to school, enter into the home, religious places (temple premises, prayer room) enter from the main entrance of home, outing with friends after 6 pm with the belief that *BLACK PRINCE* will kidnap the menstruators. Alike to Nepal, they are also should stay in goat shed during the menstruation.

With these restriction in mobility, they are not allowed to participate in the sports, festivals, marriage ceremony, birthday, play/studies with the boys, in the kitchen, religious activities, physical exercise. They are forced to carry a small piece of iron rod during their menstruation while traveling outside. There several restrictions they followed to eat during the menstruation such as they are not allowed to eat meat, fish, egg, turmeric, oil, brinjal, cucumber, pineapple, papaya, sour foods, spicy food, normal water, tomato. They are not allowed to Boo tree, water well, infants, male children, elders of family, *tulsi* (a herb), specific lemon, basil, bettle, vegetables, neem leaves, bindi, kum-kum, white clothes, sharing the bed with partner, use same towel & bedsheet, no sexual intercourse with partner.

⁴ Menstruators



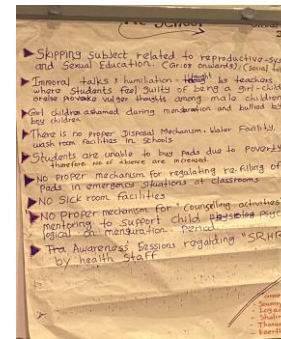
Menstrual Practices

All restrictions live on the spectrum and there are various forms of restrictions, some are visible while others are not.

Not only at home, the menstrual discriminatory practices has influenced the community, schools and work place too. In order to find out the menstrual practices and perceptions, a group work was given to list out the menstrual practices that has been practiced at their community, schools and workplace. 5 different groups of 6 participants has explored the below the menstrual practices at the school, community and workplace:

At School

During the menstruation, menstruators are not allowed to participate in any sports, they feel shy & fear to talk about menstruation at school with teacher, friends. There is a lack of knowledge and helping system with the no lock in the toilet's door, no proper disposal management of used menstrual products, compelled to use same menstrual pad for more than 6 hours because of no availability of menstrual pads, skipping the lesson on menstruation by teacher, bullied, gossiping and humiliations by friends which has increased the rate of school absenteeism of female child. Before the menstruation, girls child are found to be fast, talent, hold the 1st position in the class, participate at sports but right after the menstruation, they started to become weak at the study, ignore the participation in the sports, feel themselves powerless, inferior, weak.



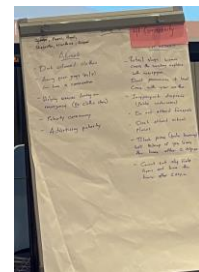
At School

"I used to wear double layer of inner clothes at school to cover the menstrual blood in case of licking."
- Participant

"I loved to participate in the sport but when I get my menstruation, it was like impossible for me."
-Participant

At Community

At the community level, during the menstruation, menstruators are not allowed to attend the funeral, participate in religious activities, whisper while talking about menstruation, consider women as impure due to menstruation, confine the mobility of women, consider menstruation as a joke/slang, consider menstruation as punishment, consider women as "Fate" and secondary to men, not allowed to dry the underwear under the sunshine in open areas. These menstrual practices at community level has adverse immediate impact on the menstruator's mental, physical, emotional and social health that influences the all of the gender based violence such as rape, murder, sexual harassment, abuse, and more.



At Community

At Workplace

According to [UNDP](#), 33.55% are working women in Sri Lanka. It is still forward in percentage of working women in [Nepal](#) (28.6%). Alike to Nepal, there is a deep ignorance of menstruation at work place. There is no dialogue on menstruation, coworkers does not support menstruators, lack of proper management of menstrual products, no availability of menstrual products, lack of resting areas, bullied and being teased by colleagues, lack of budget planning for menstruations.

With the same methodology (participatory and individual approach), it was resulted that the 95% of the menstrual practices are socially constructed. The practices that has been practicing during menstruation inhales the Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) as per the UN definition. 98% of the menstrual practices falls under the SGBV as per the definition of UN on SGBV.

Menstrual Products

Majority of participants have an experienced for working on the menstrual products through their organization. For them, the menstrual product is the plastic contain products that can be easily available in the market. Some of them were familiar with the menstrual cup, tampons. Alike to Nepal, there is a myths regarding some of the menstrual products such as menstrual cup and tampons where the use of this products is directly linked with the “Virginity” of the menstruators. Menstrual products cannot be dry under the sun at open place. Menstrual products are categories under the luxury product, it is yet to recognize as the requirement of every menstruators.



Menstrual product with 3Ps Approach

Challenges:

Due the resistance associated with menstruation, it will be challenging to break the silence which is highly influenced by the religious, cultural norms & beliefs. Likewise in other countries menstruation is the subject of the taboos, myths, stigma deeply rooted with the silence in Sri Lanka as well. Internal resistance, social structure, legal challenges, lack of dialogue, lack of participations, cultural norms & setting, multiple languages, budget allocation etc. are the often occurring challenges with advocating on the Dignified Menstruation.

Way forward

Regardless of all the challenges, the following solutions are addressed by the participants:

- Initiating the dialogue on Dignified Menstruation at management and board level of work place
- Raising awareness at school, community
- Conducting research on menstrual discrimination
- Mobilizing youth
- Incorporating Dignified Menstruation through the engagement of boys and men in skill development programs
- Right based awareness on Dignified Menstruation



- Social Media Campaign
- Creation of audio, video on Dignified Menstruation
- Develop IEC materials on Dignified Menstruation
- Street drama on Dignified Menstruation
- Peer to peer session
- National level focus group discussion on Dignified Menstruation