

# Development Communication and Awareness Levels: A Case Study of Alternative Menstrual Hygiene Products

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## Abstract

Menstrual cup is an alternative to sanitary pads, which has received attention in relatively small-scale studies in high income, and low- and middle-income countries, particularly among schoolgirls. Made of high-grade medical grade silicone (biodegradable), menstrual cups have the advantage of reuse, and can potentially last up to 10 years. Menstrual cups have been available for decades, but its use in India is limited because of lack of awareness and popularity of sanitary pads. These cups are environment friendly because it is reusable and reduces solid waste. The need of the hour is education, awareness, and availability of the eco-friendly practices when it comes to managing menstrual waste effectively. This aspect deters many from making a 'green switch' to menstrual cups.

All students who participated in this study used sanitary pads, owing to its popularity and promotion. In order to boost the adoption rate of menstrual cups, youth should be targeted, who are more open to the idea of environment-friendly products. The study evaluates Governmental initiatives to conduct awareness programs in rural areas which appeal to all socio-economic classes. The dream of India becoming a 'pad free country' will be a reality only if there is an exponential increase of adoption rate.

Popular sanitary pads are detrimental to the natural environment due to the presence of plastics in disposable items. This research seeks to find out whether people realize its harmful effects on environment and whether they are ready to make choices for the preservation of nature. Plastics associated with sanitary pads are under the radar and it escapes the affirmative actions to restrict the use of single-use plastics. Freidenfelds conducted inter-generational interviews with women to reveal their personal experiences of dealing with menstruation and compared their views with modern outlook on such issues. She found that clothes were used and reused widely used by older generations for menstrual hygiene before the availability of commercial sanitary pads and tampons. The prevalent notion of approaching menstruation as taboo clouded the discussion on the issue and restricted the adoption of menstrual cups. Profit-craving manufacturers of sanitary pads were also intervened in the

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process indirectly. A mixed method approach is adopted for the present study which includes online survey and focus group discussions.

#### **Keywords**

Development Communication, Menstrual Hygiene, Environmental Communication, Public Communication Strategies

### **Introduction**

Much of the adverse environmental impact from popular menstrual products comes from their disposable nature. Historically, women felt that menstruation was something to be ashamed of, a feeling that is still prevalent in society and popular culture today. It is this taboo that creates a difficult arena for discussion of more sustainable alternatives. Feminist critiques claim that disposable menstrual products are loaded with patriarchal ideas that suggest menstruation is an unhygienic problem and that should be hidden. Increased use of non-reusable sanitary pads may be due to the discomfort of women in male-dominated workplaces (Berkely, 2015). It could also, however, be seen as a liberation of women, as the history of menstruation would suggest that modern management of the menstrual cycle is a much more convenient experience.

The desire of companies to make a profit could help to explain why disposables have become more popular than reusable. They have a higher commodity potential than reusable as the consumer is required to re-purchase them regularly, whereas a menstrual cup, for example, can last for up to 10 years. Although reusable menstrual cups were developed shortly after disposable pads and around the same time as tampons with cardboard applicators in the 1930s, they did not become popular at the time. Shure suggests that this was due to the high levels of marketing for disposable products and comparatively poor marketing for the cups, but she also notes that women were not keen on getting that intimate with their own body after these discreet disposables had been made available. Ashley et al. suggest that contemporary women are now so accustomed to efficient and discreet sanitary products that reusable are not viable in developed countries as a result. There is, however, a more recent surge of interest in these reusable products, which appears to have spread via social media. The need of the hour is education, awareness, and availability of the eco-friendly practices when it comes to managing menstrual waste effectively. So, we conclude that menstrual cup needs promotion in India. To boost the adoption rate of menstrual cups, youth

should be targeted, who are more open to the idea of environment-friendly products.

The study evaluates the governmental initiatives to conduct awareness programs in rural areas and work constantly spreading the message across all socio-economic sectors. So, we can make the dream of a “pad free country”, a reality which enhances sustainable development. Currently the most popular types of product are also the most detrimental to the natural environment, particularly due to the amount of hidden plastic in disposable items. Single-use plastics have recently become a target for action, but it seems that menstrual products are going under the radar, with disposables often not recognized publicly as a source of single-use plastic. Although the presence of micro plastics in the ocean was highlighted in the 1970s by scientists who warned that their concentration is likely to increase and cause problems, renewed interest has sparked more studies into its effects.

## **Objectives**

### **General Objectives:**

- To evaluate the development communication and media awareness of menstrual hygiene in the society.
- This study explores the level of awareness in people about the environmental sustainability of menstrual products.

### **Specific Objectives:**

- The aim of the study was to analyze the level of acceptance of women towards menstrual cup.
- To study the environmental impact of menstrual cup and whether its awareness level affects their product choices.
- To study the persuading role of media to change the attitude of general public towards menstrual cup.

## **Methodology**

A mixed method approach comprises of online survey and focus group discussion has been adopted for conducting this study. Data is planning to collect from the selected eligible participants by an interviewer administered

study proforma. It is a descriptive cross-sectional study. Multimethodology or multimethod research includes the use of more than one method of data collection or research in a research study or set of related studies.' Mixed methods' is a research approach whereby researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. This research employed a mixed-method approach, with the intention of increasing validity by providing a more holistic perspective, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. An anonymous online survey was used to gather the views of a broad range of participants using a mixture of multiple choice and open questions. In addition, two focus groups were used to allow a more in-depth discussion and exploration of different menstrual products. In both methods of data collection, it was very clear to participants that the questions referred only to the menstrual products themselves, not their packaging.

### **Data collection procedure**

The investigators collect samples using random sampling method. The online questionnaire consisted of twenty questions and distributed it through different online platforms. The 100 samples are selected from different age groups. The investigators also interviewed ten women from different sectors of society. That includes two journalists, two entrepreneurs, two professors, two civil police officers and two volleyball players. The investigators adopted both personal and telephonic interview. The investigators also select 19 post graduation students as focus group and conducted series of discussions.

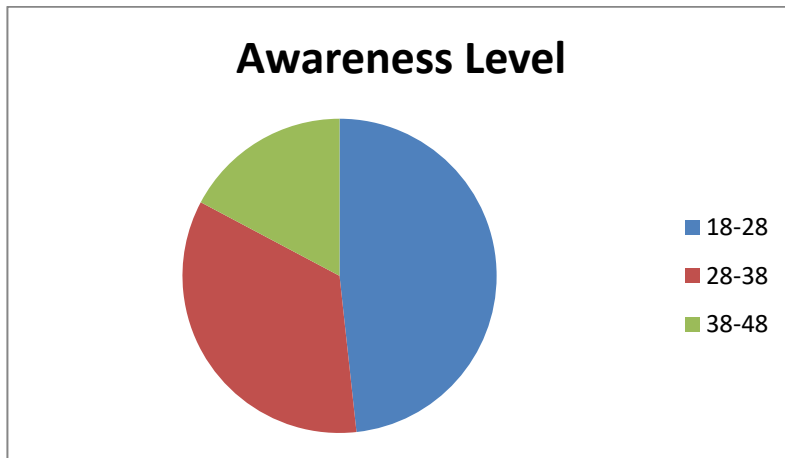
### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The samples responded that the menstrual cup is the safest alternative for various menstrual products instead of sanitary pads, panty liners and tampons. A menstrual cup is often cheaper than using tampons and pads long-term because it is reusable. The samples responded that they are used sanitary pads and the main issue associated with using sanitary pad is its disposal. The samples searched for alternatives menstrual hygiene products and they switched to menstrual cups. The awareness on menstrual cups mainly spread through interpersonal communication. The awareness level of the samples about the menstrual cups is incorporated in a diagram

### **Cup of Life**

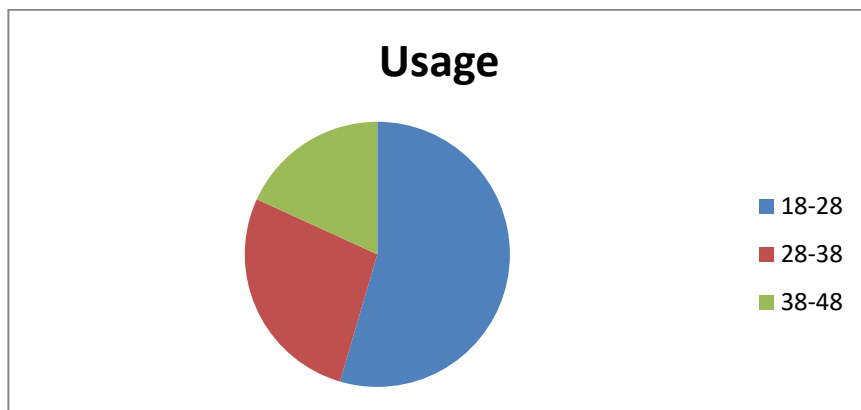
It's a campaign put forwarded by local administration of Ernakulum in Kerala state. An initiative by Hybee Eden, MP and the project is funded by Muthoot

Finance in their corporate social responsibility category and supported by the Ernakulum district administration and IMA. It is aimed at creating awareness about menstrual hygiene and the availability of consumer-friendly, sustainable, eco-friendly and cost-effective menstrual cups. Under which the local administration distributed 1 lakh and one menstrual cup.



The graph shows the awareness level of respondents from the age group 18 to 48

The usage level of the menstrual cups is low compared to its awareness. The samples are aware about the menstrual cup but most of them are failed to use it's because of various traditional outlook and tensions associated with the insertion and removal of cups. Some samples revealed that they feared that the insertion and removal will affect their hymen.



The graph shows the usage level of respondents from the age group 18 to 48

The investigators selected 19 Post Graduate students as their case for the study and suggested them to use menstrual cups instead of using sanitary pads. 4 among them denied that they can't ready to use menstrual cups because the family considered using menstrual cups is a taboo before their marriage. From the respondents, 15 respondents were ready to buy the product and 3 of them used the product but in the initial days of their periods they faced some difficulties for insertion, removal and also face leakage. So they use sanitary pads along with menstrual cups that cause mental stress and fear of leakage to them and they refuse to use. The 2 respondents bought menstrual cups but it's not a suitable size for them there by they shows unwillingness towards it. 10 respondents were used the product successfully. They responded that the initial days of periods of course, they faced some difficulties for insertion and they take more time and practice, also refer many books and channels that help them for the successful insertion and zero leakage periods. When they compared their experience, 4 among the respondents were paying guests. They meet some problems related to the disposal of pads but after the usage of the menstrual cup, the situation is vanished. 2 among the respondents felt that using menstrual cup mellow down the menstrual cramps. 3 among the respondents felt that the usage of menstrual cup support them to lead a itching free periods; they added that using plastic coated sanitary pad created itching in their private parts. One among the respondent facing heavy flow and that forced her to use at least four to five pads daily, that caused financial hardship and mental stress but after the usage of menstrual cup enable her to lead a safe, clean and happy period. The common opinion put forwarded by the respondents are that it's a time consuming process and the continuous practice empowered every women to use menstrual cup successfully. They also opinioned that it will need at least the duration of 3 to 4 menstrual cycle turned to use the cup successfully.

The results from the interview conducted were all the respondents are using menstrual cup at least for the past 2 years. All of them get the awareness about the menstrual cup is from the interpersonal communication i.e. their friends. All the respondents bought it from online shopping sites; they responded that the availability of menstrual cups in the retail shops is very low even now. In the initial stage of their trial it's difficult for them to hesitate instead of sanitary pads. Compared to menstrual Cups sanitary pads are very popular and also the availability is very high. The volleyball players opined that using menstrual cups help them to be more confident in the court. The civil police officers opined that menstrual cups moulded them to leakage free; the journalists also have the same opinion. The professors opined that the main issue they faced with sanitary napkins is its disposal during working hours now that problem is

solved happily. Simply, all the respondents opined that menstrual cups provide menstrual hygiene as well as eco-friendly and sustainable periods.

## **Conclusion**

Menstrual cups are a boon for every woman, the feedbacks collected from the survey and also the interview responses compile that it states the menstrual cups is definitely a blessing aid for every women and a perfect choice for period cycle. Of course, it creates a mental tension and stress in the initial stage of its use. But through its continuous use the stress will disappear and comfortable menstruation cycle will arise. There is a conviction in the society that the menstrual cups are difficult to insert but there is lots of documents, vlog, information and referents available in the online sites that molding every women. In every life situations, women can avoid many things except one thing in their body i.e. menstrual periods. Periods affect both the body and mind of every women, the main constrain of every women in their period is the leakage and pad disposal. Thus, during that time every women wish to be in most comfortable and happy surroundings. Menstrual cups are an appropriate aid for menstruation. In future, all the women will empower with eco-friendly menstrual cups with zero usage of napkins.

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