



May 22, 2023

Jail Mail

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AWARENESS WEEK

22ND MAY TO 28TH MAY, 2023*

Dear friends,

Greetings from CHRI!

Menstrual Hygiene Day is celebrated on 28th May every year to raise awareness about and normalise conversations around menstruation.

As per the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) means that *“women and adolescent girls are:*

- *using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period,*
- *using soap and water for washing the body as required, and*
- *having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose off used menstrual management materials.*

This year, CHRI is celebrating Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Week from 22 to 28 May 2023 as part of its initiative to secure proper menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in prisons. The National Crime Record Bureau’s *Prison Statistics India, 2021* report points to the fact that more than half (50.7%) of women prisoners are in the age-group of 30-50 years. One out of every three (29.4%)

women prisoners are in the age-group of 18-30 years. In other words, about 80% of women in prisons are those who menstruate.

CHRI's interaction with prisoners and prison staff indicate that existing prison rules largely lack provisions to enable access to safe and hygienic menstrual management amenities for prisoners. It is also our experience that conversations around menstrual hygiene usually revolve around access to sanitary pads, with hardly any focus on the choice and quality of the menstrual product, access to water, disposal, period management and other related aspects.

CHRI calls upon the State Prison Departments to formulate a policy to ensure minimum MHM standards in prisons under their jurisdiction and take affirmative measures to address the needs of women prisoners, particularly about their menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, to ensure that they are not neglected.

The absence of a standard policy to address this important issue is highlighted in CHRI's recent report, [‘PERIOD IN PRISONS: Short Report on Menstrual Hygiene Management in India’s Women Prisons’](#). In 2021, CHRI, in collaboration with Boondh - a social enterprise that works on Menstrual Literacy and Policy - carried out an exploratory study of MHM standards and practices in women prisons situated in different parts of the country. The objective of the study is to apprise the stakeholders (State Governments, Heads of the Prison Departments, prison officers and civil society) of the stark realities of period management practices in prisons and assist them in ensuring basic minimum MHM standards across all women prisons.

Information was sought, in the form of a questionnaire, from the superintendent/officer-in-charge of women prisons across the country, for the purpose of this study. Between June and September 2021, we received responses from 11 women prisons across seven States namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu.

Key Findings of the study are as follows:

- 1. Difference in Access to Number of Sanitary Pads:** According to the Model Prison Manual, 2016, "sterilised sanitary pads should be issued to women prisoners as per their requirements." However, access to free sanitary pads ranged from eight to 25 per month to as per requirement.
- 2. ‘One-size’ sanitary pads for all:** The study shows that all the prisoners are mostly provided with **small size sanitary pads** which makes it difficult for women prisoners with heavy cycles to manage their periods.
- 3. Lack of data about the amount of water available to women inmates:** The Model Prison Manual, 2016 states: "the daily requirement of water of an individual is about 135 litres, there will be an arrangement for the adequate running supply of water in every prison." Two prisons reported that they provide inmates with less than

the daily required amount. Many prisons do not bother to measure the amount of water that they provide.

4. Irregular testing of water: Bacteriological testing of water is conducted regularly, but not chemical testing. There is a general lack of awareness about the importance of water quality testing and what interventions need to be taken based on the results of the test.

5. No conversation about choice of sustainable menstrual products: None of the prisons covered by the study reported offering menstrual products other than sanitary pads like menstrual cups or cloth pads, which are more sustainable and environment-friendly.

6. No policy on providing hot water to manage period pain: In none of the States, the respective prison rules require the prison administration to provide hot water to women prisoners to manage menstruation. It is provided only when it is recommended by the medical officer on the grounds of health issues or if requested by a woman prisoner.

7. Lack of sensitisation programs for women prisoners and personnel: Four prisons reported that there are no specific sensitisation programs for menstrual health management, either for prisoners or for prison staff. Prisons in Kadapa (Andhra Pradesh), Shivamogga (Karnataka), Jodhpur (Rajasthan) and Tiruchirappalli and Chennai (Tamil Nadu), organise such training/ awareness programs either on their own or with the help of a NGO.

8. Lack of policy to ensure minimum standards of menstrual hygiene in prisons: None of the state prison departments included in the study has a clear policy for ensuring:

- i. free access to sanitary pads;
- ii. different sizes of sanitary pads;
- iii. other sustainable menstrual products as per the individual's requirements;
- iv. quality control for menstrual products supplied;
- v. sustainable methods of disposal of sanitary pads;
- vi. unhindered access to [Wash, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\) standards](#); and
- vii. access to necessary infrastructural facilities.

These findings indicate the urgent need for proactive interventions by all State Prison Departments across the country to improve MHM standards in prisons.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

As Union Ministries of Jal Shakti, and Housing and Urban Affairs

- Include menstrual hygiene management in prisons as an “integral part” of the Swachh Bharat Mission.

As Prison Departments

- Formulate a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Menstrual Hygiene Management in Prisons in consultation with subject experts and ensure its prompt and effective implementation. (Refer to the detailed recommendations of the CHRI's report [here](#))
- Raise awareness of prison personnel as well as prisoners about menstrual hygiene management.

As National/ State Commission for Women

- Ensure regular monitoring of women prisons to plug the gaps in the implementation of menstrual rights of women prisoners and conditions of women prisons/enclosures as mandated by the SOP.

As Media and civil society

- Engage in initiatives to raise awareness about issues specific to women prisoners and menstrual hygiene management in prisons. You may refer to our [Recommendations](#) document and [poster](#) on this issue.

You can also write to us at chriprisonsprog@gmail.com with your comments and suggestions.

Regards,

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