

## **Lack of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities in Schools -- An Obstacle in Girls' Education in Rural Sindh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Education is certainly an undeniable right of every child. Similarly, getting education in a clean and healthy environment in school is also a fundamental child right. Water and sanitation services are also required in schools, if these are not available as a result, the children are often exposed to unhygienic conditions that can make them sick and prevent them from attending school. Government of Pakistan is nationally and internationally committed to provide water, sanitation and hygiene services and facilities to all. The said commitment has been made in National Sanitation Policy 2006 & Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No 4 and No 6, which are related to availability of water and sanitation for all and inclusive & equitable quality education. A large number of school-going girls either drop-out or are discouraged to go to school on reaching puberty. A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted in four government higher secondary schools in district Khairpur Sindh in November 2019. Both qualitative and quantitative methods and tools were used to collect the data and information. Data was analyzed by triangulation of all information collected. Results showed that non-availability of water sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools are main hindrance for the girls to attend school during menstruation. Understanding these important challenges and experiences is essential for developing effective interventions to enable girls to attend and participate in school successfully. This includes better understanding the school WASH facilities which helps or hinders girls in managing their menstruation during school hours and how these may be hindering girls' attendance, performance in class and school completion.

**Key Words:** *water and sanitation, hygiene, menstruation, education, school environment, girl's education, Pakistan*

## Introduction

According to Asian Human Rights Commission report 2012, Education is certainly an undeniable right of every child, as enshrined in all UN and International Conventions and Protocols. Similarly, getting education in a clean and healthy environment in school is also a fundamental child right; however, thousands of children are being denied to their basic right as they have no or very limited access to clean and healthy sanitation facilities in their schools, especially located in rural areas of the country. This is certainly an unfortunate fact that lack of clean and healthy sanitation facilities are not only harmful and injurious for the health of little children but also consider as an obstacle in girls' education.

Government of Pakistan is nationally and internationally committed to provide water, sanitation and hygiene services and facilities to all. The said commitment has been made in Pakistan's National Sanitation Policy (2006) & Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No 4 and No 6, which are related to availability of water and sanitation for all and inclusive & equitable quality education. SDG 4 is on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. Sustainable development goal 6 is about ensuring access to water and sanitation for all Industry accounts for over 19% of global water withdrawal, and agricultural supply chains for 70% more.

According to Sindh Strategic Plan Wins 2017-22; emphasizes upon WASH related awareness through school teachers establishing sanitation clubs at school level and initiation of sensitization program for health and hygiene at school. Provisions of safe water and sanitation facilities have been marked as mandatory actions for all school under the policy.

According to Water Aid's report on WASH in Schools in Pakistan it is illustrated that in Pakistan, 1 in 3 schools lacks sanitation facilities. As a result, the children are often exposed to unhygienic conditions that can make them sick and prevent them from attending school. Particularly, a large number of school-going girls either drop-out or are discouraged to go to school on reaching puberty. A substantial volume of research exhibits the relationship between girls' education and improved population health. However, there is a little evidence on the WASH challenges adolescent schoolgirls may face when they start to menstruate. Understanding these important challenges and experiences is essential for developing effective interventions to enable girls to attend and participate in school successfully. This includes better understanding the school WASH facilities which helps or hinders girls in managing their menstruation during school hours and how these may be hindering girls' attendance, performance in class and school completion.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2018), which measures economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and empowerment, ranked Pakistan second-to-last globally and last regionally in South Asia. Markers such as socioeconomic status, locality, and language have an impact on education outcomes, but gender most significantly impacts a student's ability to perform well academically in Pakistan. Sindh province, in particular, illustrates this reality.

There was a time when Sindh province excelled, competing country's number 1 province of Punjab in education outcomes. But OXFAM Pakistan's report on a comparative analysis of gender responsive financing in Punjab and Sindh provinces (2016) revealed that gender parity has increased in Punjab by 3 per cent, whereas it has declined by the same

percentage in Sindh. It also highlights that the majority of girls' schools in Sindh do not have basic facilities like toilets, drinking water, or boundary walls.

Significantly, there are huge gender disparities in budget allocation for education in Sindh with only 19 per cent of its budget in 2016-17 earmarked for girls' education, compared to 48 per cent of the budget for boys' education. Gender responsive budgeting is also complicated by the opacity of major categories in the education budget, which are not disaggregated by gender.

Pakistan's education statistics from 2016-17 also reveal alarming gender disparities in education in Sindh. Eight million students are enrolled in education institutions from primary to degree level in Sindh, of which just 42 per cent are girls. However, approximately 6.4 million children are still out of school, the majority (53 per cent) of which are girls. Effective Transition Rate (ETR) between primary and lower secondary levels, which flags potential barriers in the education system, is also less than 80 per cent in Sindh.

Another key issue is the low number of female-only education institutions in Sindh. From pre-primary to degree colleges, there are 55,247 public and private educational institutions. The majority (61%) are male-only institutions, 19 per cent are mixed, and only 21 per cent are female-only educational intuitions. Institutions for girls in rural areas are mere 15 per cent of the total educational institutions in Sindh, illustrating the inequality in providing access to education, which directly and disproportionately affects women and girls living in rural areas of the province. According to a study *Neighboring Risks* by RDPI and Plan International in 2010, like other socioeconomic development sectors, Khairpur appears, in the light of official development statistics, to have made progress in the field of education and literacy too. Khairpur has second highest number of government primary schools following Tharparkar and second highest primary school enrollment after Karachi, in the Sindh Province. The district has 6th and 7th ranks when it is compared to the proportion of literacy among population aged 10+ and aged 15+, respectively in other districts of Sindh. Government schools have an important place when it comes to providing education facilities to people of Khairpur. 9 out of 10, primary school attending students go to government schools. The education sector in Khairpur, like rest of the country is flawed with a number of grave issues. Some of them are:

1. The level of literacy is not satisfactory. Compared to 46% population that is considered to be literate, 38% population has completed primary or higher levels of formal education.
2. There exist stark gender, urban rural and intra district disparities in the district. 25% females compared to 65% males, and 17% rural compared to 47% urban females are literate. Only 12% rural women have completed primary or higher levels of education as compared to 38% urban women.
3. There are much lesser educational facilities for girls than those for boys. There are 509% more primary, 107% middle and 350% high schools for boys than those for girls.

Schools can play a very important role in helping to shape children's futures and through the provision of quality education. In Pakistan many schools do not have basic infrastructure, with inadequate or no latrines or other sanitation related facilities. These result in high dropout

and low enrolment rates, particularly for girls, especially when they reach puberty – also considered a sign that they are ready for marriage. In rural areas many boys and girls travel long distances to attend school, many returning home to use toilets due to inadequate or no facilities in school. Girls face further challenges during menstruation when they have to remain absent from school for up to a week or more every month. These absences affect children's learning achievements.

As per global Gender Gap report 2018, a significant gender gap continues to exist in health and education in Pakistan. Pakistan ranks 148 out of 149 countries in the overall Gender Gap Index, indicating a lack of women's equality in economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival.

According to World Bank Report (June 2017), there is a huge gender gap in the public education system and also a significant number of students (both boys and girls) who do not transition to the secondary level. The enrolment of boys in Sindh far outnumbers girls across all levels of the public education system. Gender parity is relatively higher at the middle-secondary level: data show that for every 100 boys, 64 girls are enrolled at the primary level, 74 girls are at middle-secondary level, and 54 girls are attending higher secondary school. Annual School Census data from FY15 also show that enrolled girls fare better than boys in the transition from the primary to the middle-secondary level, but face higher drop-out rates than boys at the postsecondary level. Data from SEMIS FY15.

According to UNICEF Annual report 2016, Unhygienic environments have serious implications for all aspects of children's wellbeing. For example, lack of WASH facilities in school has been shown to deter children from education, especially girls as they reach puberty and begin to menstruate. 38.9 per cent at the primary level girls are out of school. The situation analysis for WASH in School 20117-22 indicates that in Sindh province, 46% female primary schools; 30% female middle schools; and 4% female high schools do not have latrines. Similarly, 54% female primary schools; 38% female middle schools; and 13% female high schools do not have drinking water facilities. Learner's curriculum though incorporates concepts of health, hygiene, and sanitation in some subjects but these concepts, knowledge and skills are grossly inadequate to bring about a possible change in behavior of students about WASH. Besides, WASH in School is not given due emphasis in pre and in-service teacher training. Hence overall the situation regarding WASH in Sindh public schools is not encouraging.

The limited existing evidence suggests that girls in Pakistan have insufficient knowledge about menstruation, have inadequate access to affordable sanitary materials, and experience high levels of fear and anxiety at menarche. In a cross-sectional survey of 1,267 girls, 60% reported limiting their movements and avoiding socializing and religious practices because of menstruation. Among girls in school, 79% did not use hygienic materials to manage menstruation, and many girls described poor nutritional intake due to misconceptions about foods that should be avoided during menstruation. Knowledge and habits regarding menstruation have shown to differ by educational background, suggesting that additional in-depth research is needed to better understand how the onset of menstruation may impact girls' education, socialization and health in Pakistan (Ali & Rizvi, 2010).

The potential impact of menstruation on girls' education in Pakistan has been insufficiently studied. Finding from the grey literature suggest women and girls have restricted mobility when menstruating, and inadequate resources related to hygiene and education. A lack of latrines, restricted mobility, and insufficient access to affordable sanitary materials may pose challenges to successful menstrual hygiene management. These challenges may be

augmented by the presence of male students and teachers in schools, and the absence of other "girl friendly" supports in the school environment. For example, many rural schools lack adequate water (e.g. 75% of hand pumps and 28% of latrines were found to be non-functional) and lack sex-segregated toilets (UNICEF, 2012). A recent UNICEF/Pakistan report (2018) suggested the high rates of female school dropout may be related to poorly maintained facilities as lack of female latrines, many schools lack a boundary wall to separate male and female students; these boundary walls are often considered a necessity for female students to be present.

### **Focus of Research**

This paper has attempted to assess the availability and functionality of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in girls' schools. Furthermore, it has also aimed to determine the attitude and practices of adolescent girls in those schools about the menstrual hygiene management.

### **Methodology**

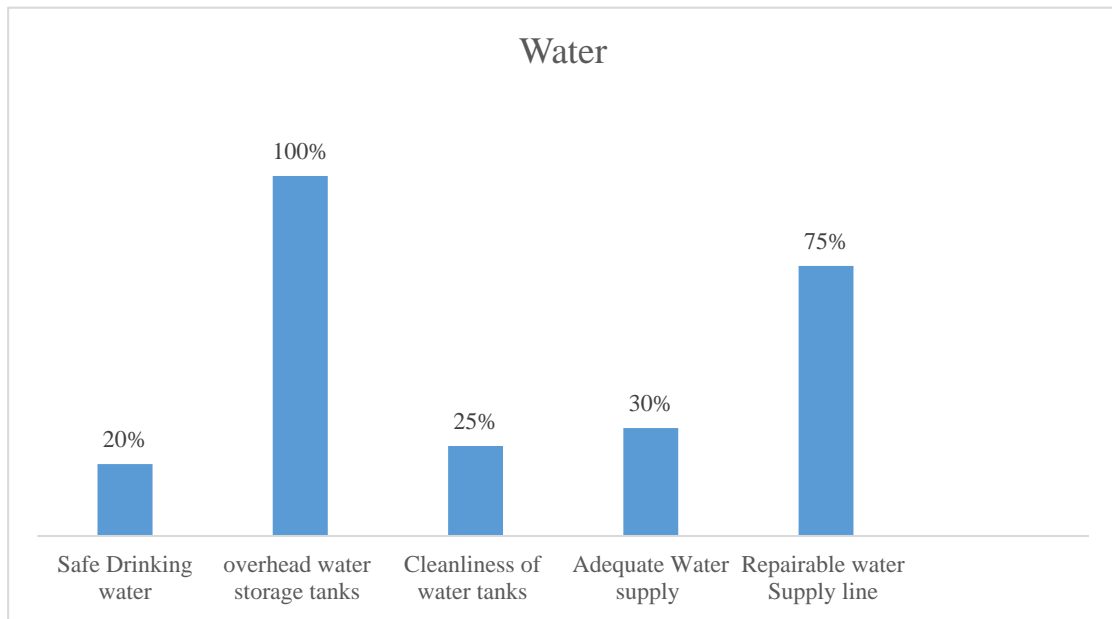
A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted in four public sector girls higher secondary schools located in district Khairpur, rural Sindh in the month of November 2019. The students' respondents are enrolled in class 9th and 10th. Total 20 students of the respective schools responded to the questionnaire. Questionnaire (Qualitative and Quantitative variables) was developed to collect information from individual students (respondents) of class 9th & 10th. Total 20 interviews were conducted. The individual respondents (girl's students) were selected through simple randomization technique. From each of five schools five girl's students were selected for interviews. Two Focus group discussions were conducted in the selected schools. WASH facility observation checklist was developed. Observation check list was filled from the above mentioned five schools. The collected data was mined and analyzed with the help of data analysis software SPSS version 21 by triangulation of all information.

### **Results and Key Findings**

The study focuses on the girl's education with respect to the availability of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services in School. It also looks into the practices and attitudes of adolescent girls in those schools about the menstrual hygiene management.

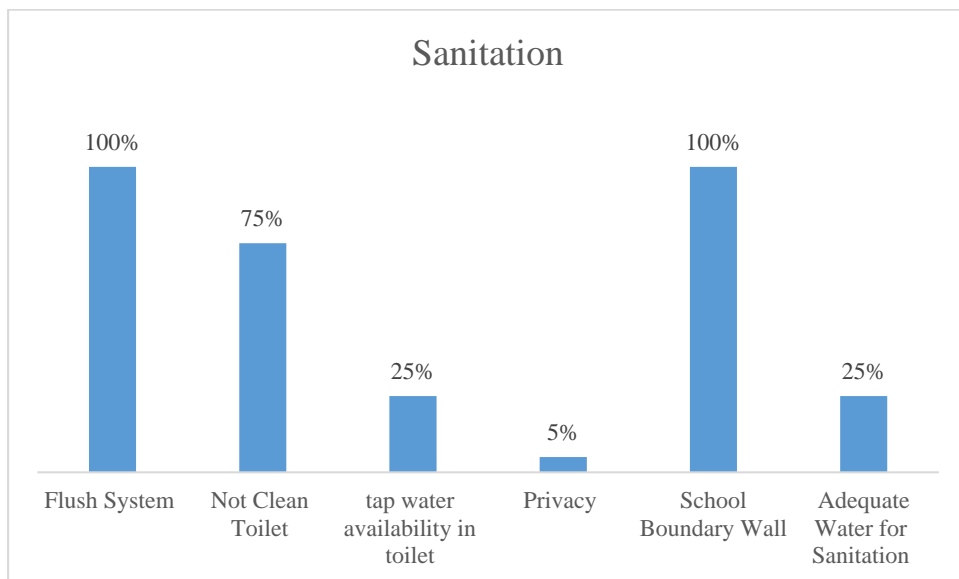
#### ***Water***

From the selected schools it is found that only 20% schools have safe drinking water, 30 % schools have adequate water supply for drinking and for sanitation purposes. It was also found that all the schools have overhead water storage tanks. In 25% schools these tanks are cleaned once in a year. 75% of the water supply schemes needs to be repaired. While talking about the sanitation and hygiene practices most of the girls were not aware of the critical times of washing hands i.e. after using toilet, before eating, before cooking, etc. same finding was also found during the focus group discussions, girls told that they were not aware of washing hands on critical times. They further told that no one in their family have ever practiced it as well. Water and sanitation infrastructure was found only 35% functional.



**Sanitation**

It is found that 100 % of the schools have flush latrines. Results shows that 75% of the toilets were not clean. It is also found that 100% of the schools had boundary walls but there had been no privacy while using a toilet. Results depict that only 5% of the schools have privacy in terms of bolt on the door, otherwise if one girls is using toilet the other stands outside to hold the door to close it. Results shows that toilets do not have adequate water supply for meeting sanitation demands. Girls further told that sometimes there is no water available in the toilets. The availability of tap water for meeting sanitation need is only 25%. It is also found that 75% of the toilets were found not clean, so girls avoid using toilets in normal days and during menstruation. While talking to girls they told that there had been no privacy while using the toilet. Girls told that during menstruation they usually do not use water which shows their practices towards menstruation.

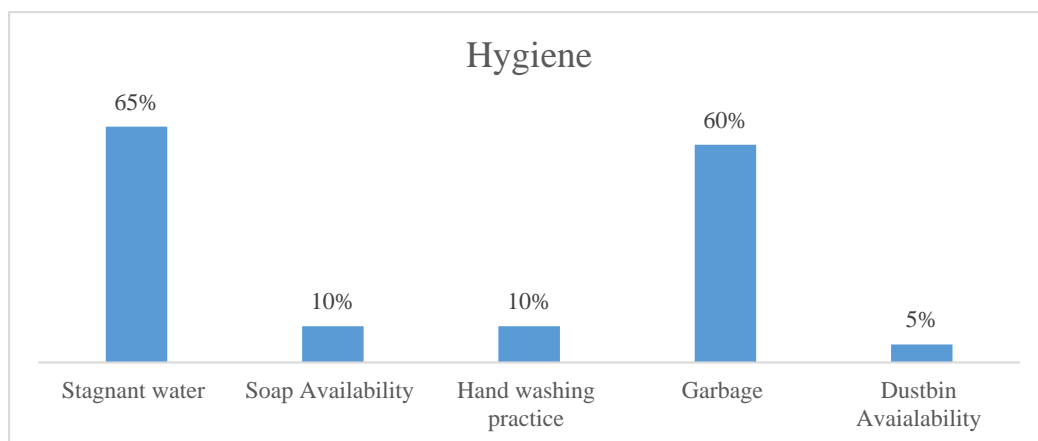


**Hygiene**

65% of the schools had stagnant water, only 10% of the schools had soap available, 60 % of the garbage was found in the schools and only 5% of the schools had dustbin available in the

toilets. Hands washing practice was found only 10%. Non availability of the soap is the main reason of this. Though the school was having a boundary wall but there had been no privacy while using a toilet. There had been no bolt on the toilet door. If someone uses the toilet other girl stands outside so that she could close the door. They further told that there had been no dustbin available in the toilets. Majority girls usually avoid attending schools during their menstruation. As they say they are afraid of having blood stain on their uniform, as there is no soap available in school. Most of girls told that there was no proper information given to them on menstruation management either by their mothers or teachers.

Majority girls usually avoid attending schools during their menstruation. Most of girls told that there was no proper information given to them on menstruation management either by their mothers or teachers. 65 % of the schools do not have functional WASH facilities.



### Conclusion and Recommendation

Presence of WASH infrastructure and awareness of good menstrual practices is of utmost importance. Understanding these important challenges and experiences is essential for developing effective interventions to enable girls to attend and participate in school successfully. Education of girls, and subsequently that of women, will not improve without deliberate efforts, which are currently missing, notably in allocation of resources and implementation. Improving gender parity in education, with a focus on girls' education, should be the first priority of the Sindh Education Department. This goal can only be met by working systematically to address gaps, allocate resources, improve ground conditions, recruit female teachers, establish institutions, and strengthen gender analyses, reviews, and feedback loops to achieve equitable quality education. Teachers and mothers needs to be educated on the issue so that they may help students and their daughters to understand menarche and associated fears with it. Also teachers ensure the availability of essential materials required to management menstruation. This includes better understanding the school WASH facilities which helps or hinders girls in managing their menstruation during school hours and how these may be hindering girls' attendance, performance in class and school completion. However, thousands of children are being denied to their basic right as they have no or very limited access to clean and healthy sanitation facilities in their schools, especially located in rural areas of the country. This is certainly an unfortunate fact that lack of clean and healthy sanitation facilities are not only harmful and injurious for the health of little children but also consider as an obstacle in girls' education.

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