

All About Periods

Lets talk about it! Period.

Team Members

- Ankita Shukla - Analyst, Goldman Sachs
- Divya Upadhyay - Associate Product Manager, Drishti Soft

Both the team members, based in India, have been very motivated to raise awareness around periods and promote menstrual hygiene. We contributed to the product development, reaching out to women for learning their perspectives and sparking a conversation on this subject.

Story of Sarla

Darkness was just falling in her village when Sarla came out of her house. After making sure no one was around, she hung a wet piece of cloth to dry on the bush nearby. Early next morning before anyone awoke, Sarla removed the cloth although it was still damp. She didn't want anyone to know she was in the middle of "those days". In her hurry she didn't notice the tiny insect atop the cloth. This was to prove fatal. A few days later the infection caused by the insect moving up the bloodstream through her vaginal tract led to her death.

Had she not considered menstruation something to hide or be ashamed of, she would have been alive. "It is the culture of silence and ignorance around the issue of menstruation that is behind unsafe menstrual hygiene practices," says Anshu Gupta, founder of Goonj, the Delhi-based social enterprise addressing menstrual hygiene.

The reality of menstruation

One school study in Ethiopia reported over 50% of girls missing between one and four days of school per month due to menstruation.

A factory case study in Bangladesh showed that 60% of female workers used rags from the factory floor as menstrual cloths. This resulted in infections that caused 73% of the women workforce missing work for an average of six days a month. An intervention to change this saw absenteeism drop to 3% resulting in significant economic gains for workers and factory owner

(<http://worldtoilet.org/documents/WecantWait.p>)

“Women in rural areas resist using sanitary napkin because it is difficult to dispose them off. They fear it might fall into the hands of someone who can use Jadu tona (black magic) against them.” - Putting Women First: Women And Health In Rural Community, Dr Rani Bang

Delving deeper into statistics in India

In India, 350 million women and girls menstruate on any given day.

- 70.9% of girls in India had no idea what was happening to them when they started their period.
- Only 12% of India's 355 million menstruating women use sanitary napkins as compared to 100% per cent women in Singapore and Japan, 88 per cent in Indonesia and 64 per cent in China.
- Over 88% of women resort to shocking alternatives like unsanitised cloth, ashes and husk sand.
- Incidents of Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI) is 70% more common among these women.
- Inadequate menstrual protection and lack of toilets makes adolescent girls (age group 12-18 years) miss 5 days of school in a month (50 days a year). Around 23% of these girls actually drop out of school after they started menstruating.
- The biggest barrier to using a sanitary napkin is affordability. Around 70% of women in India say their family can't afford to buy them.

Delving deeper into statistics in India

- Women are barred from entering places of worship and kitchens at such times in many communities.
- Some don't even take a bath during periods so that they do not make the water impure.
- Some have to sleep in a small room outside the house during periods.
- Only 55% of young girls in India think of menstruation as a natural process and only 23% know that the blood comes from the uterus.
- In India - many women and girls are forced to use old rags, husks, dried leaves, grass, ash, sand or newspapers every month.
- Only in seven of India's 36 states and union territories did 90% or more women in the 15-24 age group use hygienic protection during menstruation, according to the latest national health data.
- 70% of Indian mothers consider menstruation "dirty"
- **Poor menstrual hygiene can kill and yet talking about menstruation still remains taboo.**
- Sanitary protection is every woman's right.
- Close to 70% per cent of Indian women risk getting severe infection, at times causing death, due to poverty, ignorance and shame attached to their menstruation cycle.

How did this start

I identified with the cause since I, too, was shy of talking about the issue.

Ashwini Ponnappa, Arjuna Awardee Badminton Player

We identify with the cause because we too were shy talking about periods in adolescence. But we were the fortunate ones to get proper exposure and awareness and soon it dawned upon us how “normal” it was to have periods, and there’s nothing to hide it.

At the end of the day, we were however left with the thoughts of those unable to get proper counselling, support and awareness about menstruation.

Solution

- We're using a tech based solution to spread awareness because it has the maximum impact and reach. There is large wave of Indians coming online because of much cheaper internet access and affordable devices by Reliance Jio and other operators.
- Anonymity is what Indians need to start getting comfortable about periods.
- All about Periods is a community driven platform for raising awareness about Periods. It consists of :
 1. Allaboutperiods Facebook MessengerChat Bot [[Talk about Periods](#)] is a virtual friend to learn about periods in the most interesting way possible.
 2. Inviting women to share stories (to let little girls know that it is all okay!)
 3. Forum (a safe place to ask/discuss/answer - for those who identify as women)

We will be adding :

1. Bot on Whatsapp (as Whatsapp is more common in rural India)
2. Advice videos from Doctors regarding periods and feminine health

Sources

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Research Paper- Mythic Origins of Menstrual Taboo in Rig Veda by Janet Chawla

<https://thewire.in/148894/menstruations-taboo-hygiene/>