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Menstrual hygiene challenges for individuals with visual impairments

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Abstract

For people with vision impairments, managing menstrual hygiene is an essential part of reproductive health. Still, it frequently presents special difficulties that have gone unnoticed in previous studies and legislative frameworks. The purpose of this study is to investigate the unique difficulties that visually impaired people encounter in maintaining their menstrual hygiene and to provide inclusive methods for resolving these problems. Using focus groups and in-depth interviews with visually impaired people, medical experts, and educators, the study takes a qualitative approach. The results underscore the various and complex obstacles, such as restricted availability of information on menstruation, issues in acquiring and utilizing menstrual hygiene items on one's own, and the negative connotation attached to talking about period health when one is visually impaired. The study suggests a multimodal strategy to solve these issues, which includes creating instructional materials that are accessible through the use of other forms like audio and braille. To create an inclusive atmosphere, the research also recommends raising knowledge and sensitivity among educators and healthcare professionals. To improve the independence and comfort of visually impaired people throughout their menstrual cycles, the research also suggests designing and distributing adapted menstrual hygiene products and assistive technology. Ultimately, this study clarifies the unique requirements of people with vision impairments, which adds to the larger conversation on menstrual hygiene management. Policymakers, medical professionals, and educators may all work together to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for menstruation health for everyone, regardless of visual ability, by recognizing and addressing these issues.

Keywords: Menstrual hygiene, visual impairments, reproductive health, inclusivity, educational materials, independence, healthcare professionals

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene management, which includes the behaviors and resources necessary for people's physical and mental health throughout their menstrual periods, is a basic component of women's reproductive health. Even while the world has made great progress in addressing menstrual hygiene concerns and increasing awareness, there is still a serious knowledge gap about the particular difficulties experienced by people with vision impairments. Due to this neglect, inclusive solutions are lacking, which puts a vulnerable group at a disadvantage when it comes to managing their menstrual health. Visually impaired people have a variety of difficulties that go beyond the common worries related to menstruation. The challenges encountered by this demographic are intensified by the dearth of easily accessible information on menstruation, which impairs their capacity to make knowledgeable choices regarding personal hygiene. In addition, the stigma that society attaches to menstruation combines with the general beliefs about disability to create a complicated web of difficulties for those who are visually impaired. This study aims to investigate and provide light on the unique difficulties that people with vision impairments encounter when managing their menstrual hygiene. Through the use of a qualitative study methodology and the inclusion of the views of visually impaired people, medical experts, and educators, we want to uncover the complex problems that impede the best menstrual health practices for this population. We will summarize the body of research on menstrual hygiene management and visual impairments in this introduction, emphasizing the knowledge and research gaps that remain. The study's goals and importance will next be discussed, and after that, a succinct explanation of the research methods used to capture the varied experiences of people with visual impairments in managing menstrual hygiene will follow.

Lastly, we will hint at possible ramifications of the study's findings and offer suggestions for promoting inclusion and resolving the issues with menstrual hygiene that have been observed for people with visual impairments.

Review of Literature

Even though managing menstrual hygiene is an essential part of women's reproductive health, little is known about the experiences of those who are visually impaired in this area. To identify knowledge gaps and advance a more thorough comprehension of the difficulties encountered by this underserved group, this review of the literature attempts to evaluate the body of research on the relationship between menstrual hygiene and visual impairments.

1. **Menstrual Hygiene Management and Accessibility** Prior research has mostly addressed general menstrual hygiene behaviors, frequently ignoring the unique requirements of visually impaired persons. The research emphasizes the dearth of easily accessible information and services catered to this particular population, highlighting the necessity of removing informational barriers as a necessary first step in fostering menstrual hygiene autonomy.
2. **Societal Attitudes and Stigma:** The intersectionality of visual impairments and the social stigma associated with menstruation is a topic of little investigation. According to the literature, visually impaired people may face particular difficulties as a result of the stigma associated with disabilities and the taboo around menstruation, which can lead to feelings of shame and isolation.
3. **Educational Gaps:** Few studies have been conducted on the educational experiences of people who are visually impaired in relation to menstrual hygiene. Research indicates that the absence of inclusive educational resources and awareness initiatives fuels misunderstanding and prevents this population's adoption of sensible menstrual hygiene practices.
4. **Healthcare Provider Awareness:** There is not enough research on how healthcare professionals can help people with vision impairments with their menstrual hygiene needs. Studies suggest that healthcare personnel may be lacking in awareness and sensitivity, which highlights the necessity of specialized training to improve their capacity to deliver inclusive and supportive treatment.
5. **Adaptive Technologies and Products:** The creation and accessibility of adapted technology and goods intended for people with visual impairments have received little attention. This gap in the literature emphasizes how important it is to look into creative ways to improve comfort and independence throughout menstruation periods.
6. **Global Initiatives and Policies:** Although there has been a surge in global activities addressing menstrual hygiene, its inclusion for people with visual impairments is frequently disregarded. The body of research emphasizes how important it is to have policy frameworks for menstrual hygiene that specifically take into account the various requirements of visually impaired people.

The literature study concludes that there is a substantial knowledge gap about the difficulties associated with

menstrual hygiene that people with visual impairments encounter. It is critical to close these gaps by focused research and inclusive activities to guarantee that healthcare procedures, educational materials, and regulations are tailored to the specific requirements of this group. This study aims to add to the body of knowledge by highlighting these often-disregarded issues and offering inclusive options for improved management of menstrual hygiene in people with visual impairments.

Operational Definition

1. **Visual Impairments:** Visual impairments refer to a spectrum of conditions that result in a significant reduction of visual acuity or the absence of vision. This includes blindness, low vision, and other visual impairments that may impact an individual's ability to perceive visual information.
2. **Menstrual Hygiene:** Menstrual hygiene encompasses the practices and behaviors adopted by individuals during menstruation to ensure cleanliness, comfort, and overall well-being. This includes the use of menstrual hygiene products, personal hygiene routines, and adherence to culturally specific norms related to menstruation.
3. **Challenges:** challenges, in the context of this study, refer to obstacles, difficulties, or barriers faced by individuals with visual impairments in effectively managing their menstrual hygiene. These challenges may include but are not limited to limited access to information, difficulties in obtaining and using menstrual products, societal stigma, and barriers in educational and healthcare settings.
4. **Educational Materials:** Educational materials are resources designed to provide information and knowledge about menstruation, menstrual hygiene, and related topics. In the context of this study, educational materials include but are not limited to brochures, pamphlets, audio resources, and materials presented in alternative formats such as braille.
5. **Adaptive Technologies:** Adaptive technologies refer to devices and tools designed to enhance independence and address specific challenges faced by individuals with visual impairments in managing their menstrual hygiene. This may include tactile or auditory guidance systems, adaptive menstrual product dispensers, or other technological solutions.
6. **Healthcare Professionals:** Healthcare professionals encompass a range of individuals involved in reproductive health, including but not limited to doctors, nurses, gynecologists, and reproductive health educators. In the context of this study, healthcare professionals are those who provide care, guidance, or information related to menstrual health.
7. **Inclusivity:** Inclusivity, in the context of this study, refers to the deliberate efforts and measures taken to ensure that menstrual hygiene management practices, educational materials, and healthcare services are accessible and accommodating to individuals with visual impairments, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.
8. **Stigma:** Stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, or societal perceptions that may lead to the marginalization or discrimination of individuals with visual impairments in the context of menstruation.

Stigma may manifest as shame, social exclusion, or misconceptions related to menstrual hygiene practices.

Challenges Faced by Individuals with Visual Impairments in Menstrual Hygiene Management

1. **Limited Access to Information:** It might be difficult for people who are visually impaired to get thorough and easily comprehensible information regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene. The inability of traditional educational materials to be converted into alternate formats, such as audio resources or braille, may hinder students' capacity to independently learn critical information.
2. **Difficulties in Obtaining Menstrual Hygiene Products:** It may be difficult for visually impaired people to independently access and choose the proper period hygiene products. Difficulties include needing help to buy things, having trouble understanding product labels, and sometimes feeling uneasy when traversing public areas to get these items.
3. **Stigma and Societal Attitudes:** Increased stigma is a result of the intersection between cultural attitudes and beliefs regarding menstruation and disabilities and visual impairments. Because of ingrained societal beliefs and cultural conventions, people with vision impairments may face discrimination, social isolation, or feelings of shame associated with their menstruation.
4. **Difficulty in using menstrual products independently:** Many menstrual hygiene products are tactile, which can make it difficult for people with visual impairments to use them correctly and independently. These concerns are exacerbated by potentially complex disposal management and a lack of easily accessible instructions on appropriate use.
5. **Barriers in Educational Settings:** It's possible that inclusive educational settings don't adequately meet the menstrual health requirements of people with vision impairments. Comprehensive reproductive health education is hampered by the lack of educational resources in other forms and possible social discomfort when talking freely about menstruation.
6. **Lack of Adaptive Technologies:** One major problem in managing menstrual hygiene is the lack of adaptable solutions particularly created for visually impaired users. Independence and convenience are restricted by the absence of technical alternatives, such as braille-enabled information devices or accessible menstruation product dispensers.
7. **Inadequate Healthcare Provider Awareness:** Medical personnel may be insensitive to or unaware of the particular difficulties visually impaired people have when managing their menstrual hygiene. This may lead to less-than-ideal assistance, inadequate direction, and a deficiency of inclusive behaviors in medical environments.
8. **Social Isolation and Psychological Impact:** Social isolation and psychological anguish can be exacerbated by the interaction between cultural beliefs toward menstruation and visual impairments. People might be reluctant to ask for help or talk honestly about their struggles, which could make them feel alone and have a detrimental effect on their mental health.
9. **Transportation Challenges:** For those who are visually impaired, navigating public areas, including

transportation to get necessary supplies like menstrual hygiene items, can be difficult. Timely and easy access may be hampered by limited accessibility and dependence on others for help.

10. **Inaccessible Facilities:** Accessibility elements that meet the requirements of visually impaired people during menstruation may not be present in public toilets. This may lead to unease, annoyance, and difficulties in keeping public areas clean.

Comprehending these obstacles is crucial in the development of comprehensive treatments and policies that cater to the distinct requirements of persons with visual impairments for the management of menstrual hygiene.

Inclusive Solution's

1. **Accessible Educational Materials:** Create and distribute instructional resources in accessible digital, big print, and braille forms, among others. This comprises extensive information regarding menstruation, cleanliness habits, and the use of menstrual products found in booklets, brochures, and internet sources.
2. **Awareness Campaigns and Sensitization:** Launch public education programs to debunk beliefs and lessen stigma related to menstruation and vision impairments, aimed at both the general public and healthcare professionals. Increase healthcare professionals' awareness of the special requirements of people with vision impairments, promoting a more accepting and compassionate attitude.
3. **Adaptive Technologies and Products:** Investigate, create, and use goods and technology that are adaptable and especially suited to people with vision impairments. This might involve the creation of smart gadgets to improve independence in managing period hygiene, audio-guided usage instructions, and packaging for menstruation products that are capable of being read in braille.
4. **Inclusive Reproductive Health Education:** Include comprehensive reproductive health education in community initiatives and school curricula. This entails attending to the particular requirements of those who are visually impaired, offering a secure environment for candid conversations, and advancing a positive and inclusive conception of menstruation.
5. **Accessible Healthcare Services:** Educate medical personnel about the particular difficulties in maintaining menstrual hygiene that people with visual impairments encounter. Make sure that healthcare facilities include tactile instructions and easily available information to foster an inclusive setting for reproductive health consultations.
6. **Community Support Networks:** Create peer mentorship programs or community support networks for those who are blind or visually impaired. These networks may help people share experiences, useful advice, and emotional support, which can lessen feelings of loneliness and promote a sense of community.
7. **Policy Advocacy for Inclusivity:** Encourage the government and institutions to implement inclusive policies. This involves making certain that laws and rules take into account the particular requirements of

people who are visually impaired in public areas, educational settings, and healthcare institutions.

8. **Accessible Public Facilities:** At the institutional and governmental levels, promote inclusive policies. Making sure laws and regulations take into account the particular requirements of people with visual impairments in public areas, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities is part of this.
9. **Collaboration with Accessibility Organizations:** Work together with institutions that focus on accessibility for those who are blind or visually impaired. Utilize their knowledge to guide the creation of inclusive menstrual hygiene solutions, making sure that all people can access the facilities, information, and products.
10. **Research and Innovation:** Promote and provide funding for studies that address novel approaches to the problems associated with menstruation hygiene in people who are blind or visually impaired. Encourage the creation of tools, methods, and products that improve comfort, independence, and general well-being.

Working together, legislators, medical professionals, educators, and the community can help implement these inclusive solutions. By addressing the unique obstacles that people with visual impairments have while managing their menstrual hygiene, society may strive to foster an atmosphere that is more inclusive and supportive of everyone.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications

1. **Enhanced Well-being:** Putting inclusive solutions into practice can improve the general well-being of people who are visually impaired by encouraging a feeling of comfort, dignity, and autonomy in handling their menstrual hygiene.
2. **Reduced Stigma and Isolation:** By addressing cultural attitudes and raising awareness, we may help create a more inclusive and compassionate society by lowering the stigma and social isolation related to menstruation and vision impairments.
3. **Improved Healthcare Services:** Reproductive health services may be made more inclusive and better by training medical staff and improving facilities, which will guarantee that people with visual impairments get the assistance and direction they need.
4. **Empowerment through Education:** People with visual impairments are empowered by inclusive reproductive health education and accessible instructional materials because they provide them with correct information and help them develop a positive body image.
5. **Innovation and Technological Advancements:** In addition to addressing the current issues, funding research and development for adaptable goods and technologies advances a more inclusive strategy for the creation of technology that benefits people with visual impairments.

Recommendations

1. **Policy Advocacy:** Promote the implementation of inclusive policies that explicitly take into account the

requirements of people with visual impairments in all spheres of life, such as public spaces, healthcare, and education, at the institutional and governmental levels.

2. **Community Engagement:** Encourage community involvement and support systems to enable the sharing of knowledge, advice, and emotional support between visually impaired people, fostering a feeling of community and mutual understanding.
3. **Continuous Awareness Campaigns:** Launch ongoing awareness initiatives to bust misconceptions and lower stigma related to menstruation and vision impairments. The general public as well as important stakeholders, such as schools and healthcare providers, should be the focus of these initiatives.
4. **Education Sector Collaboration:** Work together with educational establishments to include curriculums that include inclusive reproductive health education. Training teachers in inclusive teaching techniques and supplying easily available teaching resources should be part of this partnership.
5. **Healthcare Professional Training Programs:** Provide and carry out training programs for medical professionals to improve their knowledge, empathy, and ability to deal with the particular difficulties that people with vision impairments encounter when it comes to reproductive health.
6. **Public Facility Accessibility Initiatives:** Work together with groups dedicated to accessibility and promote the installation of accessible elements in public spaces, such as bathrooms. This might entail braille instructions, tactile signs, and design elements that accommodate the needs of those with vision impairments.
7. **Technology and Research Funding:** Provide funds and resources to support research and development projects that aim to find creative answers to problems related to menstruation hygiene for people who are blind or visually impaired. Encourage initiatives aimed at developing adaptable goods and accessible technology.
8. **Partnerships with NGOs and Disability Organizations:** Work together with disability advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to make use of their knowledge and experience in recognizing and meeting the special needs of visually impaired people. Create alliances that will help inclusive solutions get implemented.
9. **Regular Evaluation and Adaptation:** Assess the performance of implemented solutions regularly and be ready to modify them in response to feedback and changing requirements. Ongoing evaluation guarantees that tactics stay current and adaptable to the ever-changing array of difficulties encountered by people with vision impairments.

Through the implementation of these guidelines, stakeholders may collaborate to establish an atmosphere that is more inclusive and supportive of people with vision impairments in terms of managing their menstrual hygiene.

Conclusion

This study has examined the sometimes-disregarded relationship between menstrual hygiene and vision impairments, illuminating the particular difficulties this

group of people faces.

The results highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that tackle the various obstacles to the efficient management of menstrual hygiene.

Key Findings

- 1. Informational Gaps:** It is difficult for people with visual impairments to obtain thorough and easily comprehensible information on menstruation and hygiene habits, which limits their capacity to make decisions on their own.
- 2. Stigma and Societal Attitudes:** Increased stigma can result in discrimination, social isolation, and feelings of shame. It is a result of the interaction of cultural beliefs toward disability and menstruation with visual impairments.
- 3. Limited Access to Adaptive Technologies:** The lack of items and adaptive solutions particularly made for people with vision impairments presents challenges to autonomous and pleasant menstrual hygiene practices.
- 4. Inadequate Healthcare Provider Awareness:** Healthcare providers could not be sensitive to the special difficulties that visually impaired people confront, which could lead to less than ideal assistance and direction.

Implications

The well-being, independence, and inclusion of people with visual impairments will be greatly impacted by addressing these issues. Encouraging people to manage their menstrual hygiene with dignity, improving healthcare services, and lowering stigma are all possible outcomes of implementing inclusive solutions.

Recommendations for Action

- 1. Policy Advocacy:** To guarantee that the special requirements of people with visual impairments are taken into account in a variety of fields, such as education, healthcare, and public facilities, advocate for inclusive policies at the institutional and governmental levels.
- 2. Community Engagement:** Encouragement of community involvement and support systems can help people with visual impairments feel more included in society, enable the sharing of experiences, and lessen social isolation.
- 3. Education and Awareness:** Work with educational institutions to include inclusive information about reproductive health in school curricula. Run ongoing awareness efforts to debunk stereotypes and lessen stigma.
- 4. Healthcare Professional Training:** Provide and carry out training initiatives aimed at educating medical personnel about the difficulties that people with vision impairments encounter when it comes to reproductive health.
- 5. Accessible Technologies:** Invest funds in R & D projects aimed at producing products and technology that are adaptable and catered to the requirements of visually impaired people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, helping people with vision impairments with their menstrual hygiene needs calls for a comprehensive and

cooperative strategy. We may strive to create a society that acknowledges and meets the different needs of every person, regardless of their visual ability, by supporting inclusive legislation, raising awareness, and offering customized solutions. This study is a call to action for the community, schools, healthcare professionals, and legislators to work together to create a more welcoming and encouraging environment for menstruation health.

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