

## IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT FOR ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH PARENTAL ASSISTANCE

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**Abstrak:** Pendampingan orang tua memiliki peran yang krusial bagi remaja perempuan dengan disabilitas dalam mengelola kebersihan menstruasi selama masa menstruasi. Pendampingan ini sebagai langkah untuk memastikan remaja penyandang disabilitas dapat menangani masalah menstruasi secara higienis dan sehat. Namun demikian, orang tua yang memiliki anak disabilitas seringkali menghadapi kesulitan dan tantangan dalam mengajarkan kebersihan menstruasi kepada anaknya. Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterampilan manajemen kebersihan menstruasi kepada orang tua dengan anak penyandang disabilitas. Program ini melibatkan 28 orang tua atau wali dari remaja putri disabilitas sebagai partisipan. Program kegiatan ini menggunakan pendekatan persuasif-edukatif melalui penyuluhan dan pendampingan. Pelaksanaan kegiatan terdiri dari penyusunan rancangan program, pelaksanaan program, dan evaluasi kegiatan. Pada tahap pelaksanaan, peserta terlibat proses learning and sharing yang mencakup penyajian informasi, diskusi dan sharing session, demonstrasi dan simulasi pendampingan orang tua. Hasil program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini menunjukkan adanya peningkatan pengetahuan dan pemahaman peserta terkait kesehatan reproduksi dan manajemen kebersihan menstruasi remaja disabilitas. Setelah program, peserta memiliki keterampilan yang baik dalam mengajarkan dan mendampingi anak mereka ketika menangani masalah menstruasi berdasarkan standar kesehatan dan kebersihan. Pelibatan orang tua secara aktif dalam mendampingi remaja disabilitas merupakan dukungan yang tepat bagi remaja disabilitas untuk mengembangkan keterampilan manajemen kebersihan menstruasi.

**Kata Kunci:** pendampingan orang tua, remaja disabilitas, manajemen kebersihan menstruasi

**Abstract:** Parental assistance has a crucial role for female adolescents with disabilities in managing menstrual hygiene during puberty. This assistance is a way to ensure that adolescents with disabilities are able to handle their menstrual problems hygienically and healthily. However, parents of adolescents with disabilities often encounter difficulties and challenges when educating their teenagers regarding menstrual hygiene. This community service programme aims to improve the understanding and skills of menstrual hygiene management for parents of adolescent females with disabilities. It involved 28 parents and caregivers who have adolescent females with disabilities. The programme utilised a persuasive-educative approach through counselling and mentoring, which comprises several stages, including design, implementation, and evaluation. At the implementation stage, participants were engaged in a learning and sharing process that included information presentation, discussion and experience sharing, demonstration and simulation of parental mentoring. The results show an increase in participants' knowledge and understanding related to reproductive health and menstrual hygiene management of adolescents with disabilities. After the programme, participants have adequate skills to educate and assist their adolescent females when dealing with menstrual problems based on health and hygiene standards. Parental engagement is an effective way to develop knowledge and skills of menstrual hygiene management in adolescent females with disabilities.

**Keywords:** parental assistance, adolescents with disabilities, menstrual hygiene management

### Introduction

A good understanding of reproductive health is crucial in preparing adolescent females for their marriage phase to improve the quality of the next generations. Adolescent reproductive

health programmes concern reproductive systems, functions and processes to improve adolescents' understanding, knowledge, attitudes and positive health and reproductive rights behaviours. It has become a national programme to improve adolescent health and well-being quality.

Reproductive health education programmes for adolescents have an essential role in improving the well-being of adolescents and reducing various reproductive health issues among adolescents (Basri et al., 2021). The adolescent's behaviour and awareness in maintaining reproductive health are affected by the level of knowledge or understanding of reproductive health (Sofwan et al., 2022; Supiyani & Sukmawati, 2023). However, the lack of reproductive health knowledge significantly affects menstrual hygiene management, thereby jeopardising reproductive health. (Ramadhanti & Wijayanti, 2023; Widayati & Homsiatu, 2019).

Menstruation is an important and inevitable period for a girl as one of the indicators of the starting of the adolescent stage. Menstruation is a natural biological process for adolescent females throughout their productive periods. Therefore, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is essential to helping adolescents manage their menstrual problems. Several previous studies have shown that the realisation of human rights has been hampered due to a lack of understanding of MHM, including the rights to education, health and employment (Wilbur et al., 2021). An uncomfortable environment that provides a lack of privacy for female students during menstruation adversely affects their health, self-esteem, school attendance, and academic achievement. (Mprah & Sackey, 2021). Several aspects can influence a woman's menstrual hygiene practices. These aspects are cultural norms, parental influence, individual preferences, economic status, and socio-economic stress. (Purba et al., 2021).

Parents often do not provide MHM knowledge to adolescent females because they assume their teenagers have received it at school. Several studies have shown that the lack of parental role (particularly mothers) in providing knowledge and understanding of MHM to their teenagers might be causing a problem. It shows that parents play a primary source of information about menstruation, particularly menstrual hygiene, which helps adolescents avoid misunderstandings related to menstruation (Khasanah, 2021; Ramadhanti & Wijayanti, 2023).

Menstrual hygiene management, which is not appropriately managed, will negatively impact not merely on health but on adolescent girls' social and educational participation. For instance, the impact on health issues can trigger the onset of various diseases, such as urinary tract infections, reproductive tract infections, and skin irritation (Hastuti et al., 2019). Additionally, the physical and psychological inconvenience during menstruation often prompts adolescent females not to attend school, which would impact their education process (Khasanah, 2021).

The formal information resources such as health centres (Puskesmas), school curricula, and informal sources (people surrounding the students) have not provided adequate information regarding menstruation and MHM. Puskesmas does not have a specific programme related to menstruation or MHM. In addition, the school subjects related to menstruation have not been able to provide comprehensive knowledge on hygiene and menstrual health to students. Some primary schools skipped the material or only partially covered it due to a strong presumption

that menstruation is a sensitive and taboo subject to be discussed in a forum with male students. Meanwhile, parents, who are the primary source of information for students, still have a lack of understanding of the MHM concepts and practices (Hastuti et al., 2019).

Many adolescent females with disabilities do not have a good understanding of menstruation as a normal biological process. They require proper information on healthy and clean menstrual management to ensure that they can adequately manage their first menstrual period (Parinussa & Lilipory, 2022). Furthermore, adolescents with disabilities are negatively stigmatised in the community and may face multiple discrimination during their menstrual period. Some researchers found that there were few interventions on menstrual hygiene management implemented by caregivers of individuals with disabilities, which restricted the movement of individuals with disabilities (Wilbur et al., 2019). Another issue is the lack of parental understanding of the importance of menstruation education and the taboo of menstruation as it relates to women's vital areas.

Adolescents with disabilities certainly have different characteristics from normal adolescents since they have an obstacle in their physical growth and development. Consequently, MHM becomes a challenge for adolescents with disabilities and requires specific attention from their parents. Therefore, the role of parents is crucial in providing practical assistance to ensure that adolescents with disabilities can deal with menstrual problems in a clean, healthy and comfortable manner.

During puberty, adolescent females with disabilities often struggle with the understanding of menstruation and its symptoms, the sight of blood, changing pads and tampons, and mood disorders (Aktaş & Öncü, 2023). Hence, the ability to manage self-care during menstruation among adolescents with disabilities remains relatively low. They require assistance putting on and changing sanitary pads and cleaning and disposing of sanitary pads (Rahmawati & Hapsari, 2021). Some parents are concerned about their adolescent females in terms of menstrual hygiene, changing pads in public, mood changes, and sexual harassment. Therefore, a reproductive health management programme based on school-parent collaboration is required to provide education on complex menstrual healthcare skills for adolescent females with intellectual disabilities (Aktaş & Öncü, 2023).

Women also face problems associated with menstruation with visual disabilities. They have difficulty independently managing their menstrual period, their menstrual handling is not compliant with hygiene standards, and almost half of them still require assistance in menstrual hygiene management (Dündar & Özsoy, 2020). In addition, the behaviour of visually impaired adolescent females has not been applying personal hygiene during menstruation properly and correctly (Sofiana et al., 2022).

Based on the results of surveys and interviews with teachers and parents of female students at Sekolah Luar Biasa Negeri (SLBN) A Citeureup, it was found that many adolescent females with disabilities do not have a good understanding of how to maintain their reproductive health, particularly during menstruation. Moreover, several parents were still confused about how to teach menstrual hygiene management to their teenagers. Generally, they relied on teachers or school stakeholders to educate their adolescents about menstrual health. Thus, they

ignored this issue. Considering the complexity of menstrual hygiene care for adolescent females with disabilities, collaboration between teachers and parents is required in teaching and assisting female students.

A comprehensive and inclusive approach involving all stakeholders is imperative to address the menstrual health issues we have previously highlighted. Improving the effectiveness of parental engagement in MHM requires adequate training and support programmes. Parents should have access to relevant information and resources and receive specialised training on delivering reproductive health information appropriately and efficiently understood by their adolescent females. Educational programmes on reproductive health should be specifically designed for adolescents with different types of disabilities using appropriate methods. This community service programme aims to improve the knowledge and skills of MHM in parents who have adolescents with disabilities to support adequate menstrual management. Proper parental knowledge and understanding will enable them to educate adolescents on menstrual hygiene management more effectively.

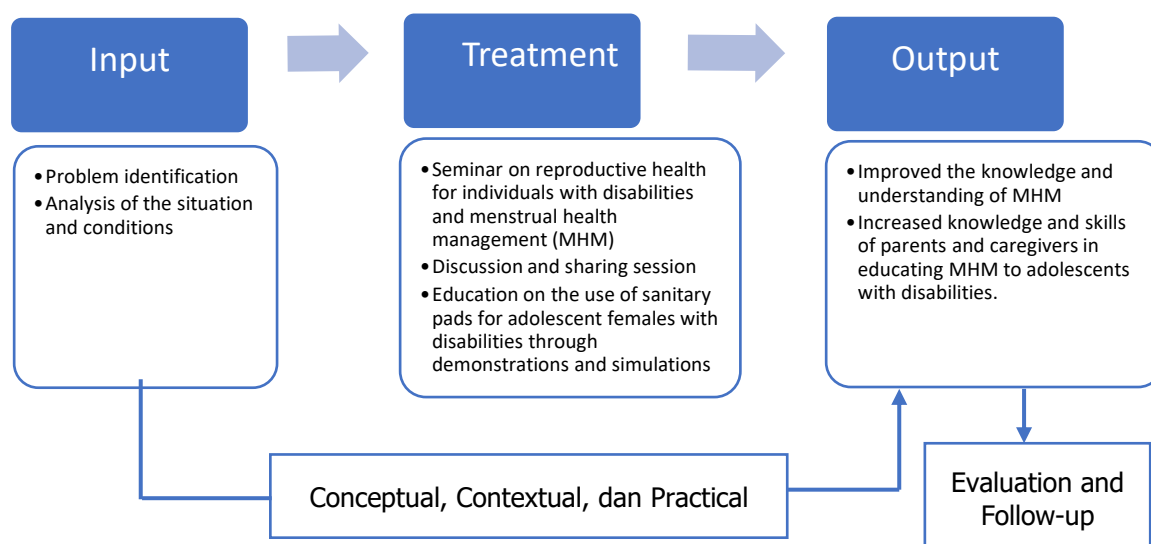
## Method

This community service programme is a reproductive health education for parents of adolescents with disabilities that focuses explicitly on menstrual hygiene management. This programme was implemented at SLBN A Citeureup in Cimahi City, West Java, from April to May 2024. It involved 28 parents or caregivers of adolescent females with disabilities who study at SLBN A Citeureup. The majority of participants were mothers (82%), with the remainder being grandmothers (14%) and aunts (4%) of the adolescents with disabilities. The types of disabilities that those parents and caregivers handle are blindness, deafness, intellectual disability, physical disability, and autism.

Counselling and mentoring on menstrual hygiene management of adolescent girls with disabilities were applied in this programme. The programme stages include: (1) providing information through lectures on reproductive health and menstrual hygiene management for individuals with disabilities, (2) discussion and Q&A through sharing sessions based on data and facts found in the field, (3) simulation of the use of sanitary pads for individuals with disabilities, (4) evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the programme. [Figure 1](#) depicts the flow of the problem-solving framework in this programme.

The programme's implementation consisted of three stages: design, implementation, and evaluation. The programme design stage consists of several activities, including (1) Field assessment which aims to obtain and understand the problems and the needs of parents regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH), particularly the management of menstrual hygiene in adolescent girls with disabilities, (2) Developing technical implementation steps that include schedules, topics for counselling provided in modules consisting of conceptual materials, contextual materials, and practical materials packaged in a handbook entitled '*Menjaga Kesehatan Alat Reproduksi Remaja Putri Penyandang Disabilitas*', (3) Formulating and

disseminating the programme to the participants through collaboration with the school and school committee.



**Figure 1.** The problem-solving framework of the programme

The programme employed a persuasive-educative approach since it enabled a learning process that influenced the participants' thoughts and positive attitudes (Heryati et al., 2022), and it aims to provide knowledge and understanding as well as skills in promoting menstrual hygiene management among individuals with disabilities. The learning and sharing method was applied in the programme's implementation to enable participants to exchange information, experiences and problems they faced in the field (Basri et al., 2021). The descriptions of each stage of this programme are outlined below:

1. Providing information to parents and caregivers regarding sexual and reproductive health in adolescent females with disabilities and menstrual hygiene management. It enables the parents and caregivers to obtain the knowledge and understanding of the importance of reproductive health for adolescent females with disabilities.
2. Discussion and sharing sessions using learning and sharing methods that enabled each participant to share information and experiences in analysing sexual and reproductive health issues in adolescents with disabilities.
3. Demonstration and simulation regarding menstrual hygiene management through demonstration of menstrual care. In this session, the trainer practised how to use sanitary napkins properly for adolescents with disability. After it, participants demonstrated it to their adolescents.
4. Mentoring parents who have adolescents with disabilities through direct supervision and assisting if required. This process was carried out through home visits to several parents who participated in the programme to observe the practice of parents while assisting their adolescents in handling menstruation issues.

5. Evaluation of the programme was conducted by distributing questionnaires, pre-tests and post-tests. In addition, an assessment was also carried out on participants' skills in simulating teaching menstrual hygiene management to adolescents with disabilities.

## Results and Discussion

Sexual and reproductive health issues in adolescents with disabilities are often neglected, albeit it has a significant impact on their quality of life. Adolescents with disabilities often face additional challenges and difficulties in understanding sexual and reproductive health and accessing information about it. The lack of inclusive and adaptive reproductive health education makes them vulnerable to the risk of various reproductive health disorders.

Parental engagement in reproductive health education for adolescents with disabilities is essential. Parents are often considered the first and primary source of information for their children, including reproductive health (Hastuti et al., 2019). The community service programme was conducted through counselling and mentoring to improve parents' knowledge, understanding, and skills in menstrual hygiene management and to guide them in educating their adolescents with disabilities.

The materials discussed in the talks and discussion sessions were conceptual knowledge information that explained fundamental issues regarding the importance of sexual and reproductive health for adolescents with disabilities. During the Q&A and sharing sessions, problems and contextual experiences in the field were explored and discussed. The presentation and discussion of such materials appealed to the participants, especially in the demonstration and simulation sessions on using sanitary pads for adolescents with disabilities. This simulation process is a practical study that aims to train participants in skills. In addition, participants also received a handbook (see Figure 2) to facilitate them when training their adolescents to learn menstrual hygiene management.



**Figure 2.** The material of the programme on Powerpoint and Handbook

The participants generally had a sufficient initial understanding of sexual and reproductive health, particularly menstrual hygiene management. However, they do not understand in detail how to teach and assist their adolescent with special needs. Based on the results of the pre-test on reproductive health of adolescents with disabilities and menstrual hygiene management, it was found that the participants' understanding was relatively low. The knowledge about the reproductive health of adolescents with disabilities is the lowest aspect, with only 28.6% of participants who have this knowledge.

The evaluation results show that the programme had a positive impact on improving participants' knowledge and understanding. The enthusiastic involvement of participants in the programme was one of the factors that resulted in the programme's effectiveness. [Table 1](#) provides the pre-test and post-test results that evaluate the achievement of the objectives.

**Table 1.** The result of the evaluation of the knowledge and understanding

No	Aspects	Pre-test		Post-test	
		n	%	n	%
1	Knowledge about the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents with disabilities	8	28,6	21	75
2	Understanding the important role of sexual and reproductive health for adolescents with disabilities	10	35,7	24	85,7
3	Knowledge of the definition and objectives of menstrual hygiene management (MHM)	12	42,8	26	92,8
4	Understanding the impact of MHM	12	42,8	25	89,2
5	Understanding the role of parents and teachers regarding MHM of adolescents with disabilities	15	53,6	27	96,4
6	Understanding of the proper use of sanitary pads for adolescents with disabilities	16	57,1	28	100

Table 1 shows the percentage of participants (n) with good knowledge and understanding indicators. The participants involved were 28; thus, the percentage of each aspect was determined based on the formula below.

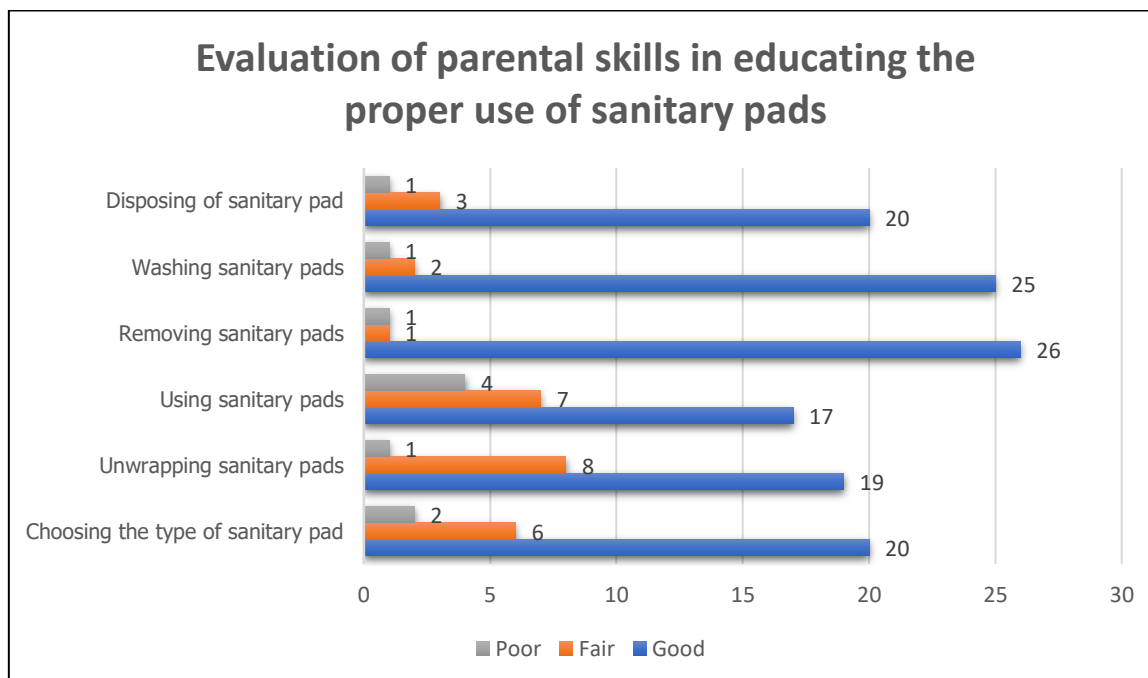
$$\text{Percentage (\%)} = \left(\frac{n}{28}\right) \times 100 \%$$

Based on the results in [Table 1](#), participants' knowledge and understanding in all aspects have increased after receiving education and counselling. Before the program, participants' knowledge regarding the reproductive health of adolescents with disabilities was lacking, with only eight people, or 28.6%, fulfilling the indicators. This condition is a concern because parents are supposed to have proper knowledge and to be able to assist their adolescents adequately. Therefore, education on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents with disabilities requires full parental support and engagement. Several studies have shown that parental involvement is critical to optimal learning for adolescents with special needs (Rani et al., [2018](#)).

The programme evaluation is not merely on the knowledge and understanding aspect but also on the skills regarding how the participants train and educate their children with special needs. The evaluation aimed to measure the impact of the demonstration and simulation



process received by the participants during the programme. All participants were asked to demonstrate how to use sanitary pads properly (based on hygiene standards) and teach it to their adolescents. Assessment of skills in using sanitary pads appropriately was measured from several components, i.e., choosing the type, unwrapping, using the sanitary pad, removing and washing it, and disposing of it. [Figure 3](#) is a graph depicting the participants' practical performance in training adolescents with disabilities to use sanitary pads.



**Figure 3.** Evaluation results of parental skills

[Figure 3](#) illustrates that, generally, the participants demonstrated good skills in teaching and assisting their adolescent girls in using sanitary pads during menstruation. The aspects of sanitary pads usage that have not yet achieved a good category are unpacking sanitary pads (9 participants) and wearing sanitary pads (10 participants). Participants had difficulties in both aspects, particularly for parents of adolescents with blindness (6 participants) and intellectual disabilities (8 participants). For individuals with blindness and intellectual disabilities, the understanding and skills of menstrual management, specifically the use of sanitary pads, becomes a challenge due to their impairments, resulting in difficulties in receiving and processing information.

For adolescents with visual impairment, acquiring a particular skill becomes more challenging due to visual barriers to learning and imitating activities performed by individuals around them. As a result, they require assistance in wearing sanitary pads. In addition, they also have difficulty recognising blood on clothes and how to clean it. Consequently, they struggle to know when the sanitary pads need to be changed (Dündar & Özsoy, 2020; Wilbur et al., 2021). The difficulties also faced by adolescents with intellectual disabilities related to menstrual hygiene management due to a lack of understanding about what was occurring during



menstruation. In some cases, they refuse to wear sanitary pads, causing frustration for their parents or caregivers (Wilbur et al., 2021).

Using sanitary pads among adolescents with disabilities is an important skill that requires attention and the appropriate approach. Practical training should include hands-on demonstrations, visual aids, and a patient and repetitive approach to help adolescents with disabilities learn better (Mprah & Sackey, 2021; Wilbur et al., 2021). In addition, the ability to recognise that each individual has different needs and abilities is crucial. With this ability, it is feasible to provide a personalised approach to ensure the child learns most effectively (Rani et al., 2018).

The community service programme through counselling and mentoring on menstrual hygiene management for parents of adolescents with disabilities at SLBN A Citeureup received a very positive response from the participants. Participants enthusiastically engaged in each programme session (see Figure 4). They actively listened to the speaker while presenting all the materials and posed questions. Moreover, during the discussion and experience-sharing session, the participants conveyed their notions on various issues related to the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents with disabilities. The evaluation results indicate that the participant's level of understanding of the material in the programme is very good. There has been an increase in post-test grades and skills in educating adolescents about the use of sanitary pads.



**Figure 4.** The Implementation of Counselling and Mentoring Programmes

The lack of understanding among adolescent females with disabilities on menstrual hygiene management during puberty is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed thoughtfully (Prihandini et al., 2019). Adolescents with disabilities, both physical and cognitive, often require more assistance in understanding and acquiring the skills on how to use sanitary pads properly. A key factor is the provision of personalised education and support from their family.

Pre-menstrual and menstrual skills guidance provided by parents promotes children's ability to develop their menstrual self-management skills (Lestari, 2017). In addition, the role of support in emotional and psychological aspects needs to be considered. Adolescents with disabilities may face additional challenges, such as embarrassment or self-confidence when they

learn how to use sanitary pads. Therefore, a supportive and inclusive approach is essential, and parents and caregivers should be actively involved in providing continuous support and motivation. By providing a supportive and positive environment, adolescents with disabilities can develop their skills, which will increase their self-reliance in daily life.

## Conclusion

Parental engagement in educating adolescents with disabilities regarding sexual and reproductive health is essential. Parental assistance in providing menstrual hygiene management skills to adolescents with disabilities is an endeavour to enhance the self-management of adolescents with disabilities in maintaining their reproductive health. Through counselling, practical training, mentoring, and evaluation, parents are able to assist their adolescent females in coping with the challenges of menstrual hygiene management. The results of this programme show that parents' knowledge, understanding, and skills increase through education tailored to the needs of the concerned stakeholders. Active parental involvement in supporting adolescents with disabilities is appropriate support to help them develop adequate menstrual hygiene management skills, increase self-confidence, and deal with menstruation issues appropriately.

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