Gender and System Constraints on the MHM Consumer Journey: Insights from India and Ethiopia

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**PROJECT OBJECTIVES & METHODS**

- **Objective:** To evaluate the preferences for commercial products, understand the root cause(s) of low usage, and determine whether a market intervention could be an appropriate part of the solution

- **No explicit gender lens**

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- Literature Review
- Qualitative Consumer Research
- Quantitative Consumer Research
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Analysis Workshops
APPROACH TO STUDYING THE MARKET

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AWARENESS OF COMMERCIAL DISPOSABLE PADS IS HIGH & PRODUCTS CONSIDERED DESIRABLE

“When we use pads, we can walk freely and work freely”
---India

- “[I] use improvised product when I stay at home or out for short while. Otherwise if I go out [I] always use pad to make myself free of any worry of staining and falling down.”  
  ---Ethiopia
MENSTRUATION SEEN AS TABOO, ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUAL ACTIVITY, & NOT FREQUENTLY DISCUSSED

“Met a girl who was crying. She was menstruating but afraid to tell mother because she would think she had intercourse.” -Ethiopia

“There was a girl in community whose period came at 11. This was not seen as normal by the community.” –Ethiopia

“Households don’t know about period; if they see stain they will feel it’s some sort of disease I’m not telling about.” -India

When Did You First Discuss Menstruation?

[Bar chart showing percentages of urban and rural populations in AG and YW groups discussing menstruation at different stages: Never, Before 1st Period, During 1st Period, After 1st Period]

Ethiopia

- Never: 12% Urban AG, 13% Urban YW, 11% Rural AG, 16% Rural YW
- Before 1st Period: 17% Urban AG, 17% Urban YW, 22% Rural AG, 19% Rural YW
- During 1st Period: 39% Urban AG, 36% Urban YW, 24% Rural AG, 19% Rural YW
- After 1st Period: 44% Urban AG, 46% Urban YW, 46% Rural AG, 46% Rural YW
SOCIAL NORMS LEAD TO SHAME & EXCLUSION FOR AGYW’S DURING MENSTRUATION

Restrictions on Behavior during Period

- 46% None
- 8% 1
- 5% 2
- 6% 3
- 36% 4 or more

India

- “Those more into worship, we try to keep distance from them during period. We can talk, but cannot touch them.”

Ethiopia

- “My mother told me men should not see these [MHM products]. It’s not good for them. It is harmful to them. They should not see it.”
CONSUMER JOURNEY

AWARENESS  PURCHASE  USE  DISPOSAL
RELUCTANCE TO PURCHASE MHM PRODUCTS FROM OR AROUND MEN, ESPECIALLY AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Would you buy MHM Products in a Crowded Shop, or from a Man?

- Yes, with men or women
- Yes, only with women
- No
- Would not buy from man

- Urban AG
- Urban YW
- Rural AG
- Rural YW

- Male harassment at site of purchase commonly reported
- Feelings of shyness, embarrassment, and discomfort also common

Ethiopia
COMMERCIAL PRODUCT AFFORDABILITY IS A PROBLEM

Demand curve for basic sanitary pads amongst users and non-users of commercial products in Uttar Pradesh

- Can be considered from two angles
  1) Household prioritization
  2) Price sensitivity.

- “Money needs to be saved; The amount of money we spend on a packet of pads we can use to get some groceries... we can get flour and grains.” YW India

- “If income increase would still prefer cloth. It is fine, why change it? Cash can be used elsewhere.” Influencer, India
CONSUMER JOURNEY

AWARENESS  PURCHASE  USE  DISPOSAL
TO GET AROUND THE AFFORDABILITY ISSUE, WOMEN AND GIRLS RATION PADS, AND USE A MIX OF COMMERCIAL AND HOMEMADE PRODUCTS

Use of products amongst adolescent girls and young women in rural and urban Uttar Pradesh.

- Rural YW: 24% Only Cloth, 34% Mixed use, 39% Only Disp. Pads, 4% Other
- Rural AG: 32% Only Cloth, 27% Mixed use, 36% Only Disp. Pads, 6% Other
- Urban YW: 11% Only Cloth, 30% Mixed use, 54% Only Disp. Pads, 5% Other
- Urban AG: 17% Only Cloth, 22% Mixed use, 57% Only Disp. Pads, 4% Other

▶ “Now I am at home, so I use cloth. We are 4 sisters, so it is not possible to spend so much” — YW Rural India

▶ “Daughter asked me once for 34 Rs pad – I told her 34 Rs every month is too difficult.” — Influencer, India
GIRLS AND WOMEN FACE MANY STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO MANAGING THEIR MENSTRUATION

- Have water near toilet at school/work***
- Private place at home to change pads/cloths***
- Private place at school/work to change pads/cloths***
- Private place to wash clothes***
- Have soap at school/work***

Ethiopia

Urban AG
Urban YW
Rural AG
Rural YW
DISPOSAL IS A CHALLENGE, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL AREAS

Product Disposal

- Other
- Public Dump
- Field
- Pit/Ditch
- Garbage Can
- Latrine/Toilet
- River

Urban | Rural
---|---
Other | 25% | 50%
Public Dump | 0% | 25%
Field | 0% | 25%
Pit/Ditch | 0% | 25%
Garbage Can | 75% | 100%
Latrine/Toilet | 50% | 75%
River | 0% | 25%

Ethiopia

How often do you have difficulty disposing products?

- Never have difficulty
- Sometimes have difficulty
- Always have difficulty

Urban AG | Urban YW | Rural AG | Rural YW
---|---|---|---
India

Ethiopia
SO WHAT DO AGYW VALUE IN AN MHM PRODUCT?

Key product preferences amongst adolescent girls and young women in Uttar Pradesh

We thought price would be the most important factor, but it really wasn’t:

- Stickiness
- Length of the pad
- Wings
- Absorbency
- Cost
Reflections
AGYW WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MENSTRUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

What would you like more information about?

- Opportunities to integrate MHM into other areas & interventions (e.g. FP/RH, HIV, WASH, education)
- Education for **boys & girls** that menstruation is a part of healthy development
- Close, natural links with family planning
EXPERIENCE IN TAMIL NADU SUGGESTS INTEGRATION & SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENT INCREASE PAD USE

Product Use among AGYW in India

- Tamil Nadu wealthier than UP
- Has strong policy support for MHM
- School-based MHM programs
- Free product distribution
PRODUCTS AREN’T A COMPLETE SOLUTION

- Low knowledge about menstruation
- Restrictions on behavior during menstruation common
  - Menstruation still seen as dirty, taboo, or associated with sin, disease/infection, sexual activity, and shame
- Structural barriers are substantial
  - Private spaces, toilets, running water, soap, etc.
  - Male harassment at point of purchase
  - Disposal challenges (especially in rural areas)
...BUT PRODUCTS ARE IMPORTANT & QUALITY IS VITAL

- High-quality MHM products give AGYW freedom
  - of movement
  - from fear from leaks and stains
- Allow for fuller participation in society
  - Workforce
  - Education
MHM at PSI

- Not a stand-alone part of our core business
- **Crosses two organizational pillars: Market development and FP/RH**
  - MHM as an entry-point for FP/RH services
  - Opportunity for AGYW to learn about fertility and sexual health
- **PSI focusing more on understanding MHM markets**
  - Less focus on product distribution
  - Identification of market failures and interventions
  - Contribute to a healthy, sustainable MHM product market that meets AGYW’s needs
OPPORTUNITIES

– Explore outcomes beyond health or education
  • Gender-sensitive outcomes such as empowerment, gender equality, agency, etc.

– Incorporate intentional gender lens:
  • What areas AGYW are being excluded from because of harmful traditional practices?
  • Where do harassment, misinformation, and maintenance of restrictions come from?
  • Household spending decisions
  • Community & household engagement
  • Gender roles, power-dynamics
  • Male involvement
Next Steps
PSI’S NEXT STEPS

- WASH conference presentations & panel
- Ethiopia concept note
- Continued presentations to BMGF WASH and RH teams
- Webinar of final project results for internal and external stakeholders
- Publication of DCE and survey results
- Case study comparing environment in Tamil Nadu vs. Uttar Pradesh and commercial product use
Questions?
Comments?
Extra Slides
THOUGH THE COMMERCIAL MARKET IS GROWING RAPIDLY, THE USE OF CLOTH IS STILL PERVERSIVE

- Use of MHM products amongst AGYW ages 15-19 shows high reliance on improvised, cloth products
DATA FROM ETHIOPIA SUGGESTS SIMILAR SITUATION

- Women and girls in rural areas were much more likely to use cloth or other improvised materials than urban AGYW.

- Unmet need for MHM is high across the country.

### Percent of Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sanitary Pads</strong></td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cloths</strong></td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cotton Wool</strong></td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Materials</strong> (e.g., tampons, toilet paper, foam, natural materials)</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Women are asked to select all types of absorbents they use.

ONLY 28.1% OF WOMEN in Ethiopia report having everything they need to manage their menstruation.

Source: PMA2020
MOST GIRLS WHO USE CLOTH ARE POOR AND LIVE IN RURAL AREAS

The use of menstrual products amongst AGYW age 15-19 by wealth quintile across the urban/rural divide

Source: NFHS-4
THERE IS A HIGH VARIABILITY BETWEEN STATES

Use of ‘hygienic’ products in rural areas, females age 15-24

Use of ‘hygienic’ products in urban areas, females age 15-24

Source: NFHS-4
MENSTRUATION FREQUENTLY NOT DISCUSSED WITH AGYW

Someone Discussed Menstruation with Me***

- Rural YW: 55%
- Rural AG: 56%
- Urban YW: 67%
- Urban AG: 69%

Who Did You Talk To?

- Mother
- Sister
- Aunt
- Friend
- Teacher

* \( p<0.05 \)  ** \( p<0.01 \)  *** \( p<0.001 \)

Ethiopia
...AND USE IS STRONGLY CORRELATED WITH HOUSEHOLD WEALTH QUINTILE

Disposable Pad Use at Home

Cloth Use at Home

Data from Ethiopia
DISCRETE CHOICE EXPERIMENTS

- Quantitative, stated preference method
- Force respondents to make trade-offs between a set of product attributes
- Attributes selected based on literature review, formative research, expert opinion, and consultation with local teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Attribute</th>
<th>Option A</th>
<th>Option B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price (for pack of 10)</td>
<td>15 Birr</td>
<td>30 Birr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pad shape</td>
<td>Long length, thick pad</td>
<td>Long length, thin pad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well the product stays in place</td>
<td>Stays in place if seated/not moving</td>
<td>Stays in place during moderate-heavy activity (dancing/running)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection from leaks</td>
<td>Provides 6 hours of leak protection on highest flow days</td>
<td>Provides 6 hours of leak protection on lightest days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pad features &amp; texture</td>
<td>Disposable, with rough nylon feel</td>
<td>Reusable, cleanable with soft cotton feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wipes</td>
<td>Sold with wipes</td>
<td>Sold without wipes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which option would you prefer?  
( )  
( )
WHAT DO ETHIOPIAN AGYW PREFER?

Urban

- Price: 20 Birr
- Price: 15 Birr
- Regular length, thick
- Long length, thin
- Long length, thick
- Sticks: Light activity
- Sticks: Moderate activity
- Protocols: Medium flow
- Protocols: Heavy flow
- Protocols: Overnight
- Feature: Disposable Nylon
- Feature: Reusable Cotton
- With wipes

Rural

- Interaction p-value<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001
CONSUMER PREFERENCE IS CLEAR

“When I compare sanitary pads with cloth it’s incomparable. I continue using improvised products because I have no [other] option.” - Ethiopia

“If we had enough money we would never buy the cloth. We have other priorities than this.” - Ethiopia

“No advantage to improvised pads I can think of till now.” - Ethiopia

“When we sit, it [cloth] is uncomfortable. Now we use whisper choice and it is flat so we don’t feel anything. But when using cloth it used to bulge and when we sit, it used to be uncomfortable” - India

[after switching from cloth to commercial pads] “I feel free now and I can go outside” - India