

# The Status of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Knowledge among Adolescent Athletes of Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP)

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This policy brief aims to shed light on the unique needs and challenges female athletes face during menstruation. It offers recommendations for policies and practices to enhance their support and performance. It will provide an overview of the various aspects of menstruation that impact female athletes, including physical challenges, psychological factors, and societal stigmas. It will also highlight the benefits of addressing these issues, not only for individual athletes but for the sports community as a whole.

## Background

Menstruation is a natural and essential aspect of the female reproductive system. For female athletes, managing their menstrual cycle can be a physical and emotional challenge, impacting their performance and overall well-being. Yet, it is often overlooked within sports policy and athletic support systems. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing menstrual health in sports, as it directly intersects with the

broader goals of gender equity and athlete well-being. Female athletes comprise a significant portion of the sporting community, and their unique physiological experiences deserve attention and consideration. While strides have been made to increase inclusivity and support for female athletes, much work remains to be done in acknowledging and accommodating the specific needs associated with menstruation.

## Key Findings

- 62% knew about menstruation before menarche; 86% said the knowledge was inadequate
- 88% got information from family, 61% from peers—only 11% from textbooks, 5% from teachers or coaches
- 57% faced food restrictions; 65% faced physical activity restrictions during menstruation
- All respondents reported that there is no school-based education on menstruation
- Almost all girls purchase their menstrual products with funding from home
- Only 8% reported toilet facilities were adequate

Items	(%)
Age of menarche, Mean (SD)	12.23 (1.33)
Knowledge of menstruation before menarche, Yes	62%
Do you think the knowledge was adequate, Yes	15%
Days missed at practice during last menstruation	36%
Days missed at practice, Mean (SD)	1.69 (0.71)
Source of Information on Menstruation	
Textbook	11%
Family	88%
Friends	61%
Teachers/coach	5%
Restrictions during Menstruation	
Food	57%
Physical activity	65%
School programme on menstruation, Yes	0%
Curriculum on menstruation	31%
Teacher	48%

# Implications

There is an urgent need for integrated, gender-sensitive policies within sports institutions to address menstrual health management among adolescent female athletes in Bangladesh. Policies should mandate comprehensive menstrual health education tailored to the needs of young athletes, including information on nutrition, menstrual cycle tracking, and safe use of oral contraceptive pills under medical supervision. Institutional support

systems must be established to break socio-cultural taboos by fostering open communication between athletes, coaches (including male coaches), and healthcare professionals. Training programmes for coaches and sports administrators should include modules on menstrual health, energy balance, and gender sensitivity. Additionally, policies should ensure the provision of adequate menstrual hygiene

products, private sanitation facilities, and access to professional medical advice within sports training centers. Addressing economic barriers through subsidised sanitary products and healthcare services is also essential to promote equity. Ultimately, such policies will not only support the physical and mental well-being of adolescent athletes but also enhance their performance, participation, and long-term retention in sports.

# Policy Recommendations

Menstrual health education for athletes and coaches	Appointment of female medical professionals	Empower adolescent athletes through education, access, and support	Align policy with practice in sports institutions	Addressing taboos through awareness programmes
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# Call to Action

- Integrate Menstrual Health Education:** Develop and implement comprehensive, age-appropriate menstrual health education programmes for adolescent athletes, focusing on nutrition, energy balance, menstrual cycle tracking, and safe contraceptive use.
- Train Coaches and Sports Personnel:** Include mandatory training for coaches and sports administrators (including male staff) on menstrual health, gender sensitivity, and effective communication to support female athletes.
- Improve Access to Menstrual Hygiene Products:** Ensure regular supply and subsidised access to sanitary products
- within sports institutions, especially for athletes from low-income backgrounds.
- Address Socio-Cultural Stigmas:** Launch awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives to challenge menstrual taboos and foster an environment where menstrual health is openly discussed and supported.
- Develop Gender-Sensitive Sports Policies:** Embed menstrual health considerations into national and institutional sports policies to ensure inclusive, equitable support for adolescent female athletes.

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