Significance of Menstrual Hygiene

Why in news?

The Supreme Court directed the Union Government to devise a uniform policy to ensure menstrual hygiene for school children.

What are the measures taken by governments for menstrual hygiene?

- **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme** - Launched in 2011 to provide sanitary pads to girls aged 10 to 19 at a nominal rate.
- **Suvidha scheme** - Launched in 2019 to distribute eco-friendly and biodegradable pads at a subsidized rate.
- As of 2021-22 over 1,128 lakh pads are distributed under this scheme.
- **Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram** - Focuses on promoting sexual and reproductive wellness for all adolescents.
- **Mini incinerators** - The Union Government in 2013 issued guidelines for setting up mini incinerators in schools to burn sanitary waste.

> *'Period poverty' is the term used when there is a lack of sanitary products, and other essentials like toilets with clean water due to financial constraints in the region.*

What are the links between menstrual facilities and education access?

- **Karnataka High Court** - In 2021 the court highlighted that providing menstrual facilities can empower women and it is also *fundamental right under article 21A (right to education*).
- **United Nations Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council** - Found that due to lack of menstrual measures the girls in high schools have dropped by 23%.
- **Irregular attendance in schools** - Absence of menstrual infrastructure results in irregular attendance.
- *Annual Status of Education Report* found that in Bihar girls school students had low attendance because 36.7% of primary and upper primary schools did not have separate toilets.

What are the challenges to menstrual hygiene?

- Since sanitary pads contains plastics the disposing via incinerators causes *emissions*.
- Various challenges in the scheme implementations such as lack of funds, poor quality and irregular supply of sanitary pads
- Non uniformity of the schemes across India

- The nominal rate of the pads is not affordable by marginalized girls
- *Prevailing stigma* in the society adding to low awareness about menstrual hygiene
- Awareness programs face administrative challenges too.
- Lack of female teachers at school to distribute the sanitary napkins to girls.

What is the way forward?

- The sanitary pads should be made *eco-friendly*.
- More female teachers should be recruited for effective scheme implementation that distribute the sanitary pads.
- The NGO needs to be included in order to make awareness about the menstrual hygiene in all schools.

Quick facts

- According to ***UN*** globally 1.2 billion women lack access to basic sanitation and hygiene.
- About 71% of girls in India are unaware about menstruation before their first period.
- Out of 10.8 lakh government schools, 15,000 have no toilets and 42,000 lack drinking water.
- According to ***National Family Health Survey-5*** findings
    - 49.3% of girls use cloth and 15.2% use locally produced napkins.
    - Bihar (59.7%) has the lowest percentage of girls using a hygienic method, followed by Madhya Pradesh (61%) and Meghalaya (65.6%).
    - Girls with higher than the secondary level of education are more than twice as likely to be using a hygienic method as girls without any education level.

References

1. The Hindu | Menstrual Hygiene In Schools
2. The Hindu | Facts About Menstrual Hygiene

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