S0x: True or false? Menstrual hygiene management (MHM)

Session length

15 minutes (or longer, depending on how many questions are asked, and how much discussion there is)

Purpose

This activity can be used to “set the scene” and get people thinking about menstrual hygiene, or as an icebreaker or energizer.

By the end of the session participants will:

* Be aware of the level of their own understanding around MHM in emergencies.
* Understand that MHM in emergencies is not “black and white” and there are many different aspects to consider.

Materials and supplies required

* Flipchart or paper, markers. A large room or outdoor space.

Activity instructions

**Before you begin, adapt the questions (below are some examples) for the training and the participant profile**!

1. The point of this activity is to stimulate discussion and get people thinking about the practicalities of MHM in emergencies, and be aware how much they understand (or not).
2. Make sure you have a large room with space for people to move, or alternatively go outside.
3. **Ask a question**, and then **get** **people to move to between two points: “true”** on one side of the room, and **“false”** on the opposite side. People may stand in the middle if they think “maybe”.
4. Emphasise that they should be honest and not just follow others. They are not being scored and this exercise is most useful when people are honest on their experiences and views.
5. **After each question, promote a discussion** between the people who have stood at opposite sides. Why did they choose ‘true’ or ‘false’? What do others think? **Clarify** any outstanding issues and points that participations are unsure about.

**Possible questions to ask** (can be good to start with 1 – 2 “easy” ones first to break the ice):

* 1. Most people who are menstruating (bleeding, with the period etc.) do not want other people to know. [*Usually true –* *although nothing to be ashamed about, it is generally something “hidden”*.]
  2. Some women are not able to collect water or drink milk while they are menstruating. [*True –* *these are real restrictions and socio-cultural attitudes that women and girls and believe to be true. Every different culture and sometimes different communities have different beliefs about blood, menstruation, spirits and supernatural etc.*]
  3. Girls start menstruating at 14 years old, and it stops when they are 50. [*Maybe – There* *is a wide range of “normal”, each person is different. Periods may be irregular (not come every month) during menarche and menopause*.]
  4. Women and girls prefer disposable pads over cloth. [*Depends/maybe – Pads,* *cloth, cups, tampons, discs – everyone has different preferences for what they like to use and this can change depending on age, situation (e.g. income, access to shops etc.), time of year (e.g. rainy or dry season), life experiences (e.g. childbirth etc*.]
  5. Only women and girls menstruate, so there is no need to involve men and boys [*Partially true: While women and girls do menstruate (remember that transgender people can also menstruate!). Men are often important decision makers within the family e.g. about money spent on hygiene items, school and communities; they need to understand why women/girls have specific needs and are getting extra support (e.g. if they get special hygiene kits), boys may tease girls in school. Usually need male volunteers to engage with men.*]
  6. It is always preferable to distribute reusable cloth pads, because they are more environmentally friendly. [Partially false *– while reusable materials are more environmentally friendly than single-use items – reusable cloth needs to be washed and dried – and often women/girls do not have access to water, soap, private place to dry pads etc. and this can generate more problems. It may be rainy season, and cloth pads do not easily dry. A main point is that it should be based on preferences of the users (people who are menstruating), so you need to consult and remember to think about the practicalities of washing, drying and disposal*.]
  7. Girls being teased by boys at school about their period/menstruation is the main reason they don’t want to attend classes while bleeding. [False *– need to emphases the importance of private and appropriate WASH facilities* also, and access to materials.]
  8. Girls get information on menstruation and puberty from their mothers. [*Partially true/maybe – not* *always, many trust their teachers, peers or influencers for personal health information*.]
  9. We are distributing sanitary pads in the household hygiene kits, so we don’t need to think about MHM kits. [False – *household hygiene kits usually only include 1 or 2 packs of pads – not enough if there are 2 or more menstruating in the family; disposable pads may not be appropriate in the context; need for regular re-distribution and top-up of pads, soap etc.; HH hygiene kits may not include soap, items to support drying, disposal etc.*]
  10. Throwing used pads and cloth down the latrine pit (or toilet) is the best option. [*Partially true/false – for women and girls it may be the most private and easiest option. For latrines that need to be desludged, it is not the best because of issues with clogging desludging equipment etc. Emphasise that it can be embarrassing and uncomfortable to be seen bringing used, bloody menstrual materials out of the latrine if others can see, so privacy and being discreet is a key issue with options for menstrual waste. Need to consult women and girls on what is appropriate for them.]*
  11. Pregnant women do not get their period so they do not need any MHM kits. [*Partially true/false – pregnant women do not get their period but can talk about issues such as heavy bleeding after birth, potential incontinence, and practicalities of identifying and excluding pregnant women from distributions.]*
  12. People who have incontinence (leaking of pee and/or poo) can use menstrual hygiene items (e.g. pads) to manage their personal hygiene. [*Partially true – They can use menstrual hygiene items to manage incontinence, but special incontinence products exist (mainly in developed countries), they may also prefer to use different items and also may need additional items (e.g. waterproof mattress protectors, adult nappies etc.). This question is only to “spark” interest and get people thinking about incontinence- not answer the question comprehensively.]*