

# **SEMINAR ON DEBUNKING PERIOD MYTHS AND ENCOURAGING MENSTRUAL CUPS**

**Report on Event Conducted on  
November 21, 2023 at Symbiosis  
Law School, NOIDA.**

**ABSTRACT:** The event discussed was organised by the Legal Aid Centre in collaboration with the Millennium Fellowship Project 'Say Yes To Cups (SYTC). It was aimed at spreading awareness regarding menstruation and menstrual health/hygiene as well as encouraging the use of alternative period products promoting sustainability.

Conducted by:

1. Ms. Vibhuti Rao,  
Paralegal Volunteer
2. Ms. Pragya Patel,  
Volunteer

Under the Guidance  
of:

Dr. Charvi Kumar,  
Administrator -  
Legal Aid Centre,  
Symbiosis Law  
School, NOIDA

## **I. Concept Note**

Say Yes To Cups is a United Nations Academic Impact and Millennium Fellowship Project aimed at leadership development for a social impact cause. It aims to provide access to world class training, connections, and recognition through a holistic program. SYTC specifically focusses on SDG 12, which is Responsible Consumption and Production by breaking the barriers of knowledge around sustainable menstrual practices. The seminar conducted on November 21, 2022 was in similar vein.

It featured discussion around “Debunking Period Myths and Encouraging Menstrual Cups,” and was open for all students and staff—both teaching and non-teaching. Members and volunteers of SYTC were asked to encourage participation and attendance of peers. Menstruation and menstrual hygiene, despite being a biological function as old as time itself, still remains largely a taboo topic, even among the urban elite. It is intrinsically seen as something shameful and dirty, and automatically hidden, almost as if on instinct. This makes it extremely hard for conversations around menstrual health and hygiene to be started, making it a fatal silence, one that causes death and disease for thousands of women in the country. Despite there being some progress in the recent years, a lot of misinformation and superstition still remains around menstruation, especially in regards to blood collection methods, leading to new innovations in the field being looked at with suspicion rather than curiosity.

As such, Dr. Neha Gupta, senior consultant (Obst. and Gynae), Co-founder & Vice President, Society of Menstrual Disorders & Hygiene Management, was invited to Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA, to speak about menstrual health and various alternate period products present currently in the market, and educate the attendees of the seminar on the pros and cons they presented.

During the session, the reasons behind menstruation being a social taboo and the stigma behind it were discussed, as well as the importance of hygienic blood collection and proper disposal of used products. Alternative products such as tampons, menstrual cups, cloth pads, etc. were also discussed, as well as the issue of sustainability in terms of period products.

Furthermore, at the end of the seminar, a question-and-answer session was held, aimed at both increasing engagement as well as in clearing doubts and encouraging attendees to take better care of their menstrual health.

## **II. Objectives**

The main objectives of this event were:

1. To create awareness about menstrual health and hygiene
2. To address and mitigate social taboos around menstruation
3. To inform attendees about alternative period products and discuss proper disposal of such products
4. To discuss sustainability in terms of period products

## **III. Preliminary Preparations**

Before conducting the event, the organisers made the following preparations:

1. Gained permission from Prof. (Dr.) C.J. Rawandale for hosting the event.
2. Invited Dr. Neha Gupta to speak as resource person.
3. Conducted research on menstrual health as a human right.

#### **IV. Conducting the Event**

The session was jointly organised by Ms Vibhuti Rao, Ms Pragya Patel, and Ms Prachi Shreyskar, who, while not being a part of the Legal Aid Centre, was one of the Co-Founders of Project Say Yes to Cups.

The session lasted for a total of one hour and thirty minutes, beginning at 1 pm and ending at 2.30 p.m. Attendees, both learners and staff, were seated by 12.45 pm, after which the session commenced. The seminar began with Ms. Vibhuti Rao, Third Year Learner at Symbiosis Law School NOIDA, introducing the aims and goals of Say Yes To Cups as well as the speaker and Resource person, Dr. Neha Gupta. Ms. Rao made her introductions in both Hindi and English, to better facilitate understanding for all those attending.

Following the introductions, Dr. Gupta opened the session by providing a brief description and definition of what menstrual sanitation is. She explained that it referred to objects used to catch discharged blood, and how it was of supreme importance that these were sanitary and clean.

Dr. Gupta also mentioned the importance of facilities such as water, clean washrooms, disposal facilities, etc. which were important for menstrual health in addition to access to menstrual products. She also talked about the dangers of using unsanitary products such as cow dung and hay for blood collection, and revealed the fact that surveys in the Nizamuddin area had revealed that the most common form of menstrual product used was torn rags. Here, Dr. Gupta brought up the issue of period poverty, which aggravates the problem of menstrual sanitation in the country, in addition to the taboo already existing around it.

She also discussed the root of the taboo around menstruation, and the fact that patriarchal standards had caused it to be seen as a women's issue, rather than a humanitarian one. Dr. Gupta also explained how the fact that menstruation was seen as something dirty only helped reinforce our views of it as unclean, highlighting that people who viewed it so were less likely to dispose of used products correctly and thus would end up dirtying their surroundings.

Following this, Dr. Gupta discussed the financial and environmental cost of menstruation. Essentially, a menstruator would spend 6-7 years total menstruating and use up an average of 11000 plus pads in their lifetime. Furthermore, some pads also have dioxins which are harmful to the human body, as well as added scents which can cause irritation. Most pads are non-biodegradable, and take 800 years to decompose. Taking all this into account, an average menstruator creates 175 kg of menstrual waste during their lifetime, which would take generations to decompose.

One of the aims of the seminar was also to create a discussion around alternative period products, which Dr. Gupta initiated by stating that different methods work for different people, since the pattern of bleeding rarely remained the same from person to person. Furthermore, people's choices are also influenced by socio-cultural norms, sexual activity, environmental consciousness, affordability, etc. Her advice in deciding which product one should use was short, yet succinct— "suno sabki, karo manki" (transl.: take everyone's opinion, do what you feel is right).

Dr. Gupta started by introducing biodegradable pads, made of absorbent easily washable cloth, which can be used to collect blood and then washed before further use, thus making them a

good option for those looking to reduce cost and environmental impact of using regular pads.

However, she warned that cloth pads still remain unaffordable for the masses, and risks of leaking remain. There is also the fact that since they are reusable, they cannot be disposed, requiring one to carry soiled pads on their person. Dr. Gupta acknowledged the fact that this can be difficult for someone who cannot overcome the mental block regarding menstrual blood, and overall recommended that cloth pads be used along with another method, rather than independently.

Following this, menstrual cups were discussed. Dr. Gupta mentioned that they were made of soft silicon, safe for the body and environment friendly. It was also brought to note that the average cup in the market is sold for around Rs. 200 to Rs. 500, they can be used for five to ten years and are generally only replaced when damaged. This makes them a more affordable and environmentally conscious method of blood collection as compared to pads and tampons. The proper method of using cups was mentioned, i.e., to boil it before and after each cycle and to use clean hands to insert. The various methods of folding the cup for insertion was also discussed, as well as the fact that it may require a water-based lube for insertion at early stages.

Dr. Gupta also talked about the fact that various sizes of cups were available, dependant on sexual activity and blood flow of the menstruator. She did also mention the disadvantages of cups, stating that they can cause misplacement of Copper T Coils, are unsuitable for those with vaginismus, and can be uncomfortable to use for someone unused to touching blood, as well as the fact that it may take a few cycles to familiarise oneself with the technique.

Samples of menstrual cups and cloth pads were also displayed onstage and passed around the attendees to educate them further. Ms. Pragya Patel, founder of SYTC and fifth year learner at Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA, also directly approached the non-teaching staff to better explain the processes and clear doubts.

As the session came to a close, a question-and-answer session took place, where various members of the audience posed questions regarding the contents of the seminar, which were answered by Dr. Gupta. The queries essentially ranged from who can use menstrual cups and whether it causes any damage, to how one can spread awareness and work for the betterment of menstruators. All of them were answered by Dr. Gupta, who stated that any sexually active person would find it easy to use a cup, and even virgins would find it comfortable with some precautions. She also addressed the fear some might experience that using a cup may result in loss of virginity, and explained that the hymen may break even as a result of physical activity such as swimming and biking, and that the only true indicator of virginity was sexual activity. She also stated that vaginas are elastic organs, and it is absurd to think they could be stretched out by something as small as a cup when they are designed for childbirth. Regarding menstrual cups, some also asked how to know which cup to buy, to which Dr. Gupta simply stated that different cups suit different people, and that while reviews on websites were a good place to start, the best way to know is through use.

Questions regarding how to make an impact were answered with encouragement to open conversations at home and make menstruators feel comfortable sharing. Outdated statements such as PMSing and joking that women in bad moods were on their period were condemned. It was also heartening to see men

raising the question of how they could help in raising awareness regarding menstrual health, and Dr. Gupta referred them to first educate themselves and then reach out to NGOs and organisations on the subject.

Following this, the session was concluded with a brief address by Dr. Chandrashekhar Jayvantrao Rawandale, Director of Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA, who praised the dedication of the learners and the fact that the entire event had been organised entirely by them. He also condemned the stigma of menstrual health being seen as a women's issue, and emphasised the importance of men stepping up and taking initiative for the same.

Ms. Vibhuti Rao closed the session by restating the aims and goals of SYTC, and mentions to the attendees that if any of them had questions or concerns about the session or menstrual health and sustainability in general, they were free to approach any member or volunteer for the same.

## **V. Response of the Target Population**

The total number of attendees was around fifty six students and another 20 staff members, with the predominant population being assigned female at birth (the target population for this seminar). The beneficiaries consisted of learners from first till fifth year, as well as teaching and non-teaching staff. Attendees enjoyed the session and found it productive. Ms. Pragya Basak, third-year learner at Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA, stated that she found the session beneficial—while she was aware of menstrual cups, she learned about it more in depth. Around two weeks following the seminar, Ms. Basak has switched to using menstrual cups for blood collection and has found the same to be a good option for her.



Men attending the session also acclaimed it as eye-opening and that it helped expand their horizons. The resource person, Dr. Neha Gupta, also thanked the team of SYTC and the Legal Aid Centre for inviting her to speak and inspiring many to fight against the taboo of menstruation and learn about sustainable period products.

The floor was opened for the question-and-answer session in the end where audience actively asked questions and clarified their doubts. The resource person emphatically assisted these students. The resource person was glad to answer the questions of these students who showed great enthusiasm and curiosity throughout the course of the workshop.

## **VI. Future Plan of Action**

The Legal Aid Centre plans to hold such events outside of the law school too. Now that the housekeeping staff of Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA has been sensitised to the merits and health benefits of menstrual cups, menstrual cups will be distributed to them for themselves and their family members free of cost. The same will be done to other beneficiaries who attend future talks.

## **VII. Suggestions/Feedback**

It was noted that Dr. Neha struggled to switch from Hindi to English repeatedly. It would be a better idea to hold the talk in either English or Hindi, and group the attendees accordingly.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Menstrual health forms a crucial part of larger aspects of reproductive and sexual well-being, which are not just human rights and sustainable development goals, but also the essential building blocks to a safe and healthy society where maternal and infant mortality rates are low, something India has been targeting for a long time now.

## GLIMPSES OF THE EVENT

