

White Paper

# NAVIGATING PERIODS ON RAILS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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LIFE Foundation

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# Navigating Periods on Rails: Challenges and Opportunities for Women Managing Menstruation while Travelling by Train in India

## Executive Summary:

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This whitepaper aims to highlight the unique challenges faced by women in managing menstruation while travelling by train in India. The paper focuses on the difficulties posed by the absence of easy access to sanitary pads at railway stations and on trains, and the potential solutions to address these issues.

## Introduction:

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### Background and Context

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India is home to a vast railway network, with millions of people relying on trains as their primary mode of transportation. With an increasing number of women joining the workforce and becoming frequent train travellers, it is critical to ensure that their menstrual hygiene needs are met. However, women in India face numerous challenges in managing menstruation while travelling by train, particularly due to the absence of easy access to sanitary pads.

### Objectives

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This whitepaper aims to:

- Identify the challenges faced by women in managing menstruation while travelling by train in India
- Evaluate the existing infrastructure and policies for menstrual hygiene management on Indian Railways
- Provide recommendations to address these challenges

### Scope

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The paper focuses on the issues faced by women in managing menstruation while travelling by train in India, with special emphasis on the lack of access to sanitary pads. It does not cover other aspects of menstrual hygiene management in detail.

## Challenges faced by women in managing menstruation while travelling by train in India:

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### Absence of easy access to sanitary pads

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Sanitary pads are not readily available at railway stations and on trains, forcing women to rely on their own supply or seek help from fellow passengers. This lack of access can lead to anxiety, embarrassment, and stress, especially during long journeys or unexpected delays.

### Lack of privacy and hygienic facilities

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The toilet facilities on Indian trains are often unclean and ill-maintained, with inadequate water supply and insufficient space for changing sanitary pads. Additionally, the absence of proper disposal facilities for used sanitary products exacerbates the issue, contributing to unsanitary conditions and environmental pollution.

### Sociocultural barriers

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Menstruation is still considered a taboo subject in many parts of India, leading to stigma and discrimination against menstruating women. This cultural barrier makes it challenging for women to discuss their needs and access appropriate menstrual hygiene products and facilities.

### Health risks and psychological stress

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Poor menstrual hygiene management during train travel can result in health risks such as urinary tract infections and reproductive tract infections. Moreover, the stress and discomfort associated with managing menstruation on trains can negatively impact women's mental health and overall well-being.

## Assessing the current infrastructure and policies for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) on Indian Railways:

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### Infrastructure and facilities at railway stations

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While some railway stations in urban areas have been upgraded with improved toilet facilities and vending machines for sanitary products, the majority of stations, especially those in rural and semi-urban areas, still lack basic amenities.

### Availability of sanitary pads on trains

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The provision of sanitary pads on trains is sporadic and inconsistent. Only a few trains offer sanitary products for purchase, and the quality and affordability of these products are questionable.

### Policies and guidelines on MHM for Indian Railways

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Although Indian Railways has taken some steps towards improving MHM, such as installing sanitary pad vending machines at select stations, there is no comprehensive policy or guideline addressing the issue across the entire railway network.

## Case Studies:

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### Successful initiatives in other public transportation systems

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Examples from other countries, such as Japan and the United Kingdom, demonstrate that providing accessible and affordable sanitary products in public transportation systems can significantly improve women's travel experiences.

### Community-driven solutions for menstrual hygiene management

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In India, several NGOs and social enterprises have initiated projects to increase access to affordable sanitary products and raise awareness about menstrual hygiene. Examples include Anandi Pads, Myna Mahila Foundation, and Aakar Innovations. These organizations have successfully implemented community-based models that can be adapted to improve menstrual hygiene management in the context of train travel.

## Recommendations:

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To address the challenges faced by women in managing menstruation while travelling by train in India, the following recommendations are proposed:

### Accessible and affordable sanitary products at railway stations and on trains

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Install sanitary pad vending machines at all major railway stations and on trains, ensuring that the products are affordable and of good quality.

Collaborate with NGOs and social enterprises to supply sustainable and eco-friendly menstrual hygiene products.

### Improving toilet facilities and privacy

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Upgrade and maintain toilet facilities on trains and at railway stations, with a focus on cleanliness, water supply, and proper waste disposal systems.

Provide separate, private spaces for changing sanitary pads and disposing of used products hygienically.

### Raising awareness and breaking the stigma

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Conduct awareness campaigns about menstrual hygiene and the importance of providing accessible sanitary products in public spaces, targeting railway staff, passengers, and the wider community.

Encourage open discussions about menstruation and challenge cultural taboos to create a supportive environment for women during their train journeys.

### Collaboration with NGOs and private organizations

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Partner with NGOs and private organizations to implement and scale up menstrual hygiene management initiatives across the Indian Railways network.

Leverage the expertise and resources of these organizations to ensure the effective implementation of the recommended measures.

## Conclusion:

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The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to address the challenges associated with managing menstruation while travelling by train in India. Implementing the proposed recommendations can significantly improve the travel experience for women and

contribute to their overall health and well-being. By taking action to ensure easy access to sanitary pads, better facilities, and a supportive environment, Indian Railways can set a positive example for public transportation systems worldwide.

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