



# Assessing acceptability and feasibility of using menstrual cups to reduce non-working days amongst female Community Swimming Instructors (CSIs)

## Research Area



Kalapara, Taltali & Betagi  
Upazila of Patuakhali and  
Barguna district.

## Research period



January 2023 to  
January 2024

## Population



Pre intervention - 81 F  
Post intervention - 70 F

## Research design



Mixed method

Since 2016, the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB) has been implementing 'Project Bhasa' to prevent child drowning in collaboration with Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) UK. Project Bhasa is implemented in the Kalapara, Taltali and Betagi upazilas of Patuakhali and Barguna district. One of the major interventions of this project is 'SwimSafe' where children aged 6-10 years receive training in survival swimming from Community Swimming Instructors (CSI). Majority of the CSIs are female. Menstruation management impacted on their ability to deliver swimming lessons as none of the menstrual hygiene product available in Bangladesh convenient to enter water. Generally they don't enter water to teach swimming on the first 2-days of their menstrual cycle.

In the 2022 swimming teaching season, 46 CSIs out of 52 CSIs were female, with an age range of 18 to 30 years. The biggest obstacle to their work was to enter the water during menstruation. They abstained from teaching swimming for at least two days a month which resulted cut down of 92 working days from the project work plan. Around 200 children could have been taught swimming during this time.

For the first time in Bangladesh, CIPRB has conducted research on how the female CSIs can be able to continue swimming training during their menstruation. Menstrual Cups (MC) can be a feasible and acceptable solution to enter the water.

MC is made of medical grade silicone and it can contain the menstrual blood before it leaves the body. As a result, it can be possible to enter water by wearing a cup without any inconvenience or discomfort. Female CSIs can continue their swimming training in the water by wearing a cup. Cup can be used for a time period from 3-4 hours up to a maximum of 12 hours. Then it to be removed, washed the blood and inserted again.

## Research Objectives



Determine the current Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) practices of female CSIs and willingness to try alternative menstrual products.



Identify whether female CSIs feel comfortable to include menstrual cups as part of their MHM



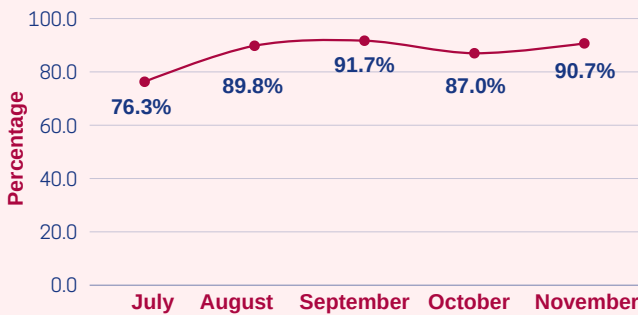
Quantify the impact of menstrual cup usage on the number of days that female CSIs are unable to work during their menstrual cycle

At the starting of the 2023 swimming season, 81 female CSIs received training on MHM. Menstrual cups, sterilization containers and user guidelines were provided to them. 70 trainees worked through to the end of the swimming teaching season. 12 of them dropped out before starting teaching swimming to children due to getting married, better job etc.



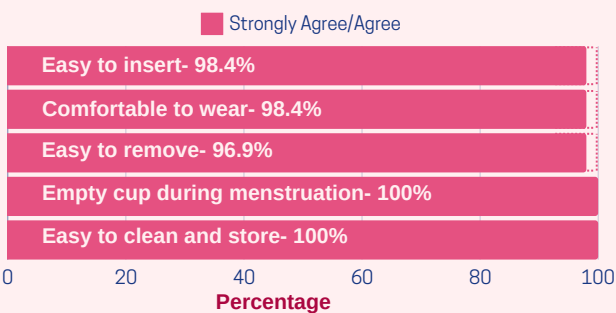
# Key Findings

## Acceptability of menstrual cup



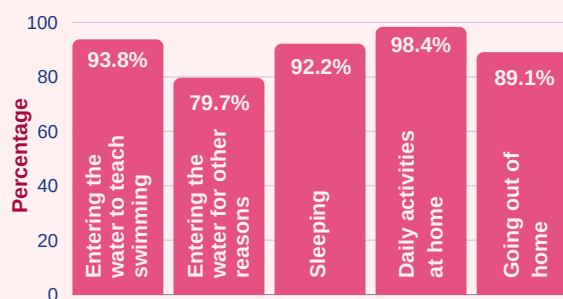
All of the users used the cup for several months during the trial period. Some users were not able to continue using cups each month due to reasons including irregular menstruation, pregnancy etc.

## Feasibility of menstrual cup



Respondents identified the cup removal process as the most inconvenient and challenging to learn. It takes more time to get used to than other techniques.

## Swimming teaching with menstrual cup



6% of CSIs did not enter water during menstruation due to severe pain, physical weakness or having peer CSIs. Some of them took leave for collage examination.

## Reducing non-working days of CSIs with the use of menstrual cup

The focused group discussions and in-depth interviews findings revealed that none of the CSIs was absent from teaching swimming only for menstruation and they continued swimming teaching by wearing the menstrual cup. They also said that without cup, they might have taken leave for first two days of their menstruation.



CSIs are using sanitary pad in 85% of cases and cloths 31% of cases for MHM which are not appropriate while entering water



98% of the respondents stated to continue using the menstrual cup onward



100% of the respondents referred the cup to other female considering the comfort, relief and benefits of using menstrual cup



30% of the respondents reported that cup removal is the most difficult part



9% of the respondents did not use the cup due to irregular periods, pregnancy etc. whereas all of them liked the menstrual cup

"Menstruation was unbearable to me. To be a male is blessing and female as curse. After using the cup, I'm gradually accepting menstruation; I am learning to love myself." - CSI

"Use of menstrual cup changed my whole life. Before this, I could never be so comfortable and at peace during menstruation." - CSI



## Challenges

- » Purchasing menstrual cups locally is a challenge because they are not available in any physical shop.
- » Around 15% of the initial respondents dropped out throughout the course of the trial.
- » Small sample size and there is no repetition of CSIs as the swimming centers' location changes each year. So it was not possible to directly quantify working /non-working days of the female CSIs within two swimming seasons.
- » It takes minimum 3 months to get use to with cup where the total trial period was for 5 months.



## Recommendations

- » The most CSIs are willing to incorporate MCs into their menstrual management, if provided with the menstrual cup and suitable training to use it. Menstrual cup training can be included in CSI training guideline.
- » Training should consider some education on methods to manage pain or discomfort associated with menstruation.
- » Peer support and learning is an important component of MCs being an acceptable option.
- » Male staff should receive an MHM orientation so that they can supervise and support the CSIs in this regard.