

# Addressing a blind spot: The importance of menstrual health for sexual and reproductive health and rights

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## Introduction and Background

### A COMMON GOAL

At their core, the fields of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and menstrual health share a **common goal**:

**To ensure greater access to products and services and to improve behaviors for better health and greater empowerment of girls and women.**

Thus far, however, the common purpose and potential synergy between these two fields has gone largely unexplored.

### WHAT IS MENSTRUAL HEALTH?

As many as half of all girls and women in low income countries lack what they need to manage their menstruation. To address that challenge, menstrual health, including menstrual hygiene management, programs work to:

- Increase access to affordable menstrual hygiene products.
- Increase access to basic safe and private sanitation facilities.
- Provide information and education on menstruation and puberty.

To date, menstrual health programming has been largely spearheaded by the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and education sectors. The SRHR community has not yet fully embraced menstrual health as part of its agenda.

### HOW ARE MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND SRHR DIFFERENT?

- The **menstrual health** field primarily focuses on girls at or prior to menarche, around **8–12 years** old. Talking to girls at this age about SRHR issues, especially within schools, where many menstrual health programs take place, can be controversial.
- Meanwhile, **SRHR** programs tend to focus on women of reproductive age, or **15–49 years**. The SRHR field tends to assume that its clients already understand their bodies, and reproductive systems in particular, and are able to adequately manage their menses.

**However, PMA2020 survey data from across ten countries showed that women across their reproductive years struggle to manage their menstruation.**

### METHODOLOGY

We conducted a landscape analysis of the published evidence to support the potential linkages between menstrual health and SRHR.

## Results and Conclusions

### RESULTS

Very little published research describes the impact of menstrual health interventions on SRHR outcomes, or vice versa. And where there is research, the data are often inconclusive and fraught with challenges of study design and unclear causal pathways. The potential linkages where this is evidence for correlation between the two fields is presented in Figure 1.

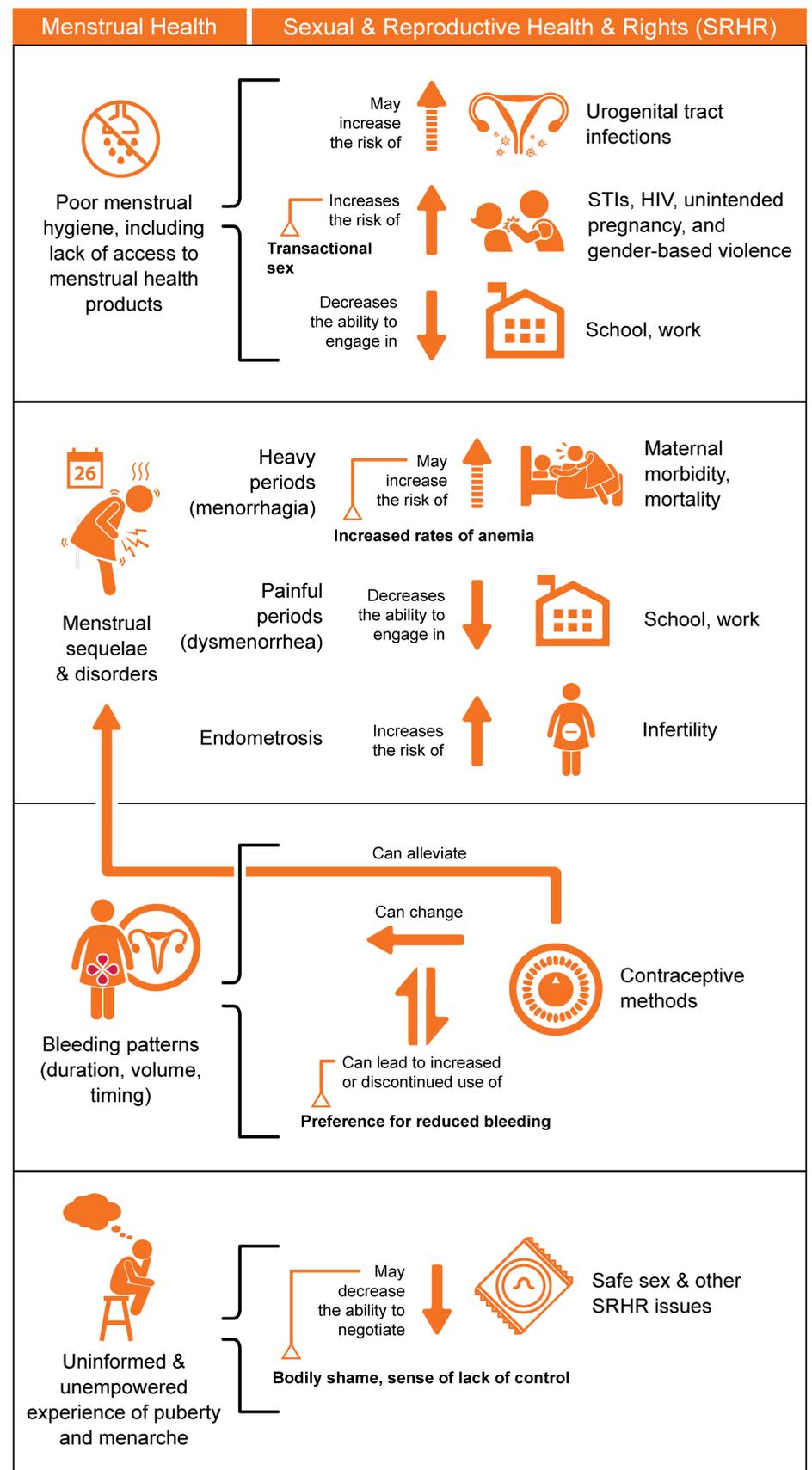
### CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

At its essence, menstruation is about reproduction. It is the biological indicator that pregnancy has not occurred. And as shown in Figure 1, there are clearly areas where potential linkages exist between the two fields, which if addressed, could yield improved outcomes for both.

The SRHR field needs to address its menstruation “blind spot” by including menstrual hygiene education and products in its programs, and by embracing the work of the menstrual health field as necessary to achieving its goals.

Meanwhile, program planners and designers can use the linkages identified here as potential entry points for menstrual health and SRHR program integration.

Figure 1. Potential Linkages Between the Two Fields



△ Likely causal pathway for the potential linkage

### REFERENCES

All sources are available from: <https://bit.ly/mh4srhr>

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### QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

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Poster # 1.100

# Complexity-aware approaches for monitoring and evaluation: A case study in contraceptive development

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## Introduction and Background

### WHAT IS COMPLEXITY-AWARE M&E?

Complexity-aware approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) aim to provide rigor to the challenges of monitoring projects and programs that are **changing rapidly**; have **non-linear causal pathways** and **multiple potential sources of influence**; and seek to affect change on a **systems level**.

These approaches differ from the traditional performance monitoring approaches that most family planning programs have used, such as logic models, indicators, and impact evaluations.

### WHY COMPLEXITY-AWARE M&E?

The increased emphasis on topics such as **evidence-informed** policies and programs, **integrated programming**, and work in **humanitarian settings**, opens new opportunities, if not, requirements, for complexity-aware approaches for M&E.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE APPROACHES?

- [Outcome Mapping](#)
- [Outcome Harvesting](#)
- Most Significant Change
- [Learning and Adapting](#)
- Significant Instances of Policy and Systems Influences

## Case Study Context

### THE CONTRACEPTIVE TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION (CTI) INITIATIVE

The CTI Initiative is a portfolio of work that covers new contraceptive product research and development, regulatory innovation, and knowledge sharing partnerships to support the contraceptive development community.



As the timeline for product development can span decades, the primary outcomes – bringing products to market – are not likely to occur within a five-year project.

Identification of secondary outcomes can show success in the meantime. These can include use of results in further research, attraction of new funding and/or new partners, and changes in market dynamics.

These outcomes, as well as those related to knowledge sharing & partnerships, are a good fit for complexity-aware M&E approaches.

## Learning and Adapting

### MAKING TIME FOR REFLECTION!

The CTI Initiative has used several approaches that focus on continuous learning for program improvement. This means taking time to reflect on what is working and what is not, and to make changes based on what is learned. Learning approaches used to date include:

#### ➤ Learning Evaluations

Two internal evaluations have been conducted, which included the development of actionable recommendations. Support is provided to ensure that the key recommendations were successfully implemented.

#### ➤ Brainstorming Lunches

Regular, informal time for brainstorming, reflection, and learning among the team is scheduled on a bi-weekly basis.

#### ➤ Landscape Reviews & Research

The selection of technologies for development support was based on in-depth landscape reviews and user-preferences and acceptability research.

### LEARNING & ADAPTING IS IDEAL FOR...

Any project, program, team, or organization!

## Outcome Mapping

### BRAINSTORMING WHAT IS POSSIBLE!

The CTI outcome mapping approach is based on:

- Focus on the outcomes (both deliberate and unintended) to which the project can contribute.
- Reflection on and inclusion of what might be possible to achieve, not just what is realistic.
- Recognition that the project is part of a complex system with many actors and influences.
- Recognition that partners are necessary to accomplish the outcomes.
- Participation and engagement from the team.

The outcome mapping process is about brainstorming what might be possible for the project to change in the broader system.

The map is then used as a tool to guide monitoring. Each progress marker is reviewed at least annually to assess what the team has done to influence change and what has happened in the external environment that represents change. This information is documented in an annual outcome map report.

### OUTCOME MAPPING IS IDEAL FOR...

Any project where the potential outcomes may be diverse and reflective of the entire system in which it operates. This may include research, community development, and capacity building activities.

### Components of Outcome Map

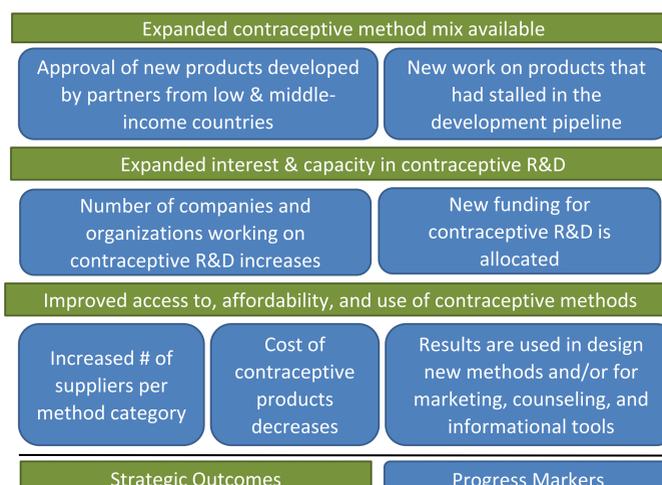


An outcome map is somewhat like a theory of change, but with a focus on the progress markers that represent specific changes possible under each strategic outcome.

The CTI Initiative Outcome Map has:

- 61 Progress Markers, organized by
- 5 Strategic Outcomes

### Illustrative Section



## Outcome Harvesting

### SLEUTHING AND SLOGGING!

If outcome mapping is prospective, then outcome harvesting is its retrospective partner. The CTI Initiative uses outcome harvesting to monitor outcome map progress.

The process of identifying, or harvesting, the outcomes is a combination of sleuthing and slogging. This means creatively and doggedly reviewing all types of documentation and following up with partners and stakeholders to identify changes and the pathway(s) of influence that exist between the project and the change.

### OUTCOME HARVESTING IS IDEAL FOR...

Projects where the outcomes may be uncertain at the beginning and/or dispersed throughout a system. This may include projects with advocacy, community development, and capacity building activities.

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