

Don't neglect student hygiene in schools

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It is concerning that a significant gap persists in ensuring a hygienic environment in educational institutions in our country. Despite the government's continued emphasis on expanding girls' and women's education, safe and separate sanitation—the fundamental prerequisite for girls' schooling—remains grossly neglected, according to a recent inspection report by the Monitoring and Evaluation Wing (MEW) of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE). Many schools across the country still lack separate WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) blocks for boys and girls, while many others feature severely inadequate and unhygienic facilities.

The DSHE evaluated 740 educational institutions around the country and found that 52 completely lack separate WASH blocks for female students. Furthermore, 146 institutions have an insufficient number of WASH blocks, and 131 have heavily unclean facilities. This infrastructural deficit causes more than mere inconvenience. The lack of gender-segregated, clean sanitation facilities in schools is universally recognised as a critical barrier to female education and well-being.



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Health experts and educators rightly point out that unsafe sanitation creates profound psychological discomfort and severe health risks for girls. Fearing the use of unhygienic, shared toilets, many students deliberately avoid eating or drinking water during school hours, which leads to malnutrition and dehydration. Furthermore, during menstruation, lack of privacy and hygiene often forces female students to skip school altogether, directly impacting their academic performance and exacerbating dropout risks. It is a cruel irony that while female enrolment outpaces male enrolment at the primary and secondary levels, our schools fail to provide facilities to ensure basic dignity for young girls.

While the inspection and the DSHE director general's assurance to forward the list of deficient schools to the Education Engineering Department are necessary steps, this is not a complete solution. A widespread survey on the issues is necessary. Besides, building infrastructure is only half the battle, as maintaining these facilities requires dedicated financial allocations. We urge the concerned authorities to treat this as the urgent public health crisis and an impediment to education that it is. Dedicated funds must be allocated for the construction, regular maintenance, and cleaning of school sanitation facilities. Ensuring a safe, clean, and gender-segregated WASH block is not a luxury—it is a right. We cannot expect to build an empowered and educated generation of women if we cannot even guarantee private and safe sanitation within the school premises.