



# **Menstrual Regulation: Bringing back a late period or stopping a pregnancy?**

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# Menstrual Regulation: A socio-cultural, historical Perspective

- Pregnancy as a continuous rather than binary state
- Menstruation as “*cleaning the inside*” or “*washing the stomach*” (Ngom, P., 2000.. *Etude de la population africaine*, 15(1))
- “*If the menses do not flow, women's bodies become prone to sickness*” (Hippocratic Corpus)
- Emmenagogues largely used as menstrual stimulators not abortifacients (Van de Walle 1997)

*Be electrified. Or, take half a pint of strong decoction of pennyroyal every night at going to bed. Or, boil five large heads of hemp in a pint of water to half. Strain it and drink it going to bed, two or three nights. It seldom fails.* (John Wesley Primitive Physick 1776)



*Many married women who have a history of menstrual problems affirm that they are not pregnant and request emmenagogic medicines from their physician, in the belief that the suppression they are experiencing is purely accidental..... caution requires that women wait until that time to attack the suppression with energetic means that would endanger their life as well as that of the child in their womb* (Jean Fernel & Ambroise Pare in Bergues et al., 1836 )

#### Herbs for irregular periods

As already mentioned above, Vitex is a great herb for irregular periods and erratic cycles. Two others herbs that are often used to regulate cycles include White Peony and Dong Quai.

**White Peony** (*Paeonia lactiflora*) is a wonderful herb for hormonal and menstrual complaints. It has shown to increase low progesterone, reduce high testosterone and regulate other hormones including oestrogen and prolactin. When all of these hormones are out of balance, menstrual irregularities can occur. White Peony not only balances hormones, it also helps to improve circulation in the pelvic area and tone the uterus which helps build healthy blood flow to regulate menstruation. White Peony is particularly helpful for those with PCOS (Polycystic ovary syndrome), PMS, bleeding in between periods and painful menstrual cramps due to its analgesic and anti-inflammatory actions.



**Dong Quai** (*Angelica sinensis*) is known as the female ginseng due to its many therapeutic actions on the female reproductive system. Considered a blood builder and tonic, Dong Quai is used by herbalists to enrich a woman's blood supply, strengthen the uterus, promote circulation and increase blood flow to the reproductive system – all of which are key for a regular, healthy menstrual cycle. Dong Quai contains a compound called coumarins which have shown to relax the muscles of the uterus and reduce inflammation which makes it a great herb for menstrual cramps. It is also helpful for PMS and menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes.

Both of these herbs are best taken as a liquid tincture, which is more potent than other herbal preparations. Herbalists tend to use a combination of different herbs within one formula when addressing hormonal complaints.

#### Categories of Herbs to Avoid During Pregnancy

In general, those in their first trimester of pregnancy are better off using few herbs, and only those that have an established safety record, because of the delicacy of this stage of fetal development. Herbal use in the second and third trimesters, while it should still stick to herbs known to be safe, can be a bit more generous.

While there are a variety of different herbs to be aware of that contraindicate with pregnancy, we can simplify these by focusing on specific categories to avoid. Uterine stimulants, herbs with high amounts of volatile oils, emmenagogues, and progesterone-decreasing herbs are a few of these.

Uterine stimulants is a primary category of herb that may cause cramping, bleeding, and stimulation in the uterus. You want to stay away from any herbs that draw forth energy and blood from the uterus or pelvic region in general, such as **black cohosh** (*Actaea racemosa*) - pictured below, **blue cohosh** (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) - pictured above, **motherwort** (*Leonurus cardiaca*), **wild yam** (*Dioscorea villosa*), **aloe** (*Aloe vera*), **feverfew** (*Tanacetum parthenium*), **angelica** (*Angelica archangelica*), **mugwort** (*Artemisia vulgaris*), **tansy** (*Tanacetum vulgare*), **pennyroyal** (*Mentha pulegium*) and **goldenseal** (*Hydrastis canadensis*). Some of these herbs are used around the time of birth to stimulate uterine contractions and bring on labor.





# Menstrual Regulation: a regulated health care practice

- Can return menses &/or stop pregnancy
- Often used in places where access to safe abortion services is limited or where abortion laws are restrictive
- MR is legally distinct from abortion
- MR can be perceived as a distinct concept from pregnancy removal

(Sheehy et al. *Reproductive Health*, 2021 18:251  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-021-01306-5> )

*So we don't see this as a pregnancy that is being ended when the person has a period that's 2 weeks late, 1 month late, and she has to go to the hospital and take medication so her period comes back ... we don't see that as a pregnancy—42-year old, married woman with five children who works*



# Menstrual Regulation: Methods

	Nigeria		Cote d'Ivoire		Rajasthan	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Surgery	3.5	19	6.2	10	11.5	10
Mifepristone/misoprostol pills	4.8	30	2.3	4	24.9	22
Non-medication abortion pills/pill type unknown	43.9	258	21.5	45	26.0	23
Traditional/other methods	47.8	266	70.0	137	37.6	32
Total	100.0	573	100.0	196	100.0	87

## Menstrual regulation method among respondents aged 15–49, by country

Bell, S.O., *et al.* Menstrual regulation: examining the incidence, methods, and sources of care of this understudied health practice in three settings using cross-sectional population-based surveys. *BMC Women's Health* **23**, 73 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02216-3>



# What are Period Pills?

Period Pills are medications you can take if your period is late and you suspect that you are pregnant when *you don't want to be*. We also call these “missed” or “late” period pills.

<https://www.periodpills.org/>



Sheldon, W.R., Mary, M., Harris, L., Starr, K. and Winikoff, B., 2020. Exploring potential interest in missed period pills in two US states. *Contraception*, 102(6), pp.414-420. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.contraception.2020.08.014>

# • Legal and Cultural Context in Bangladesh

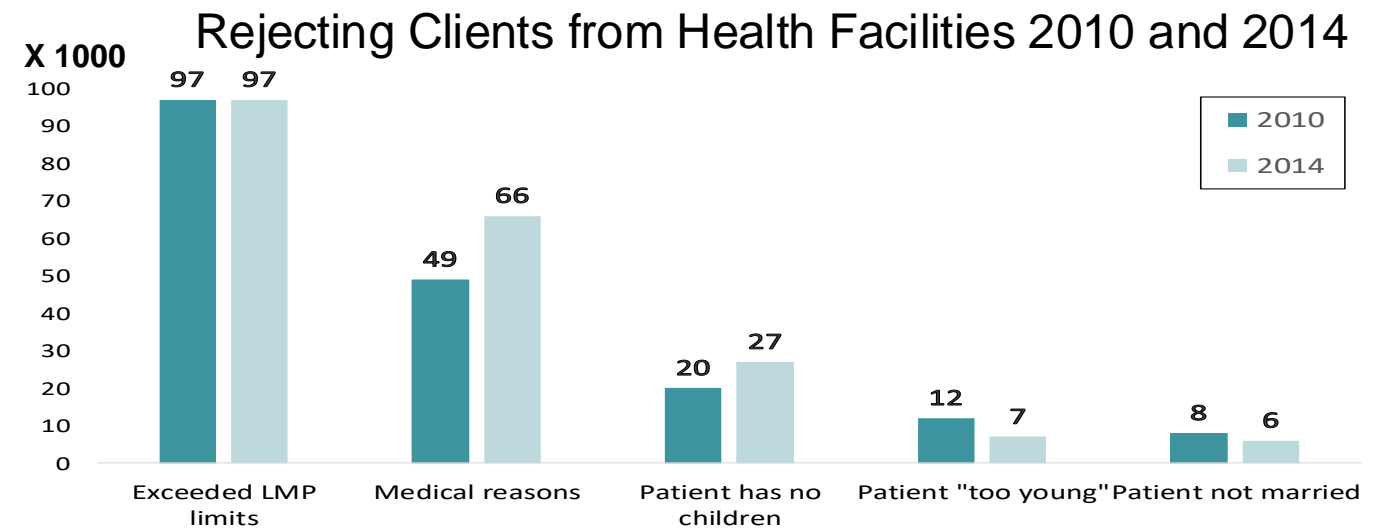
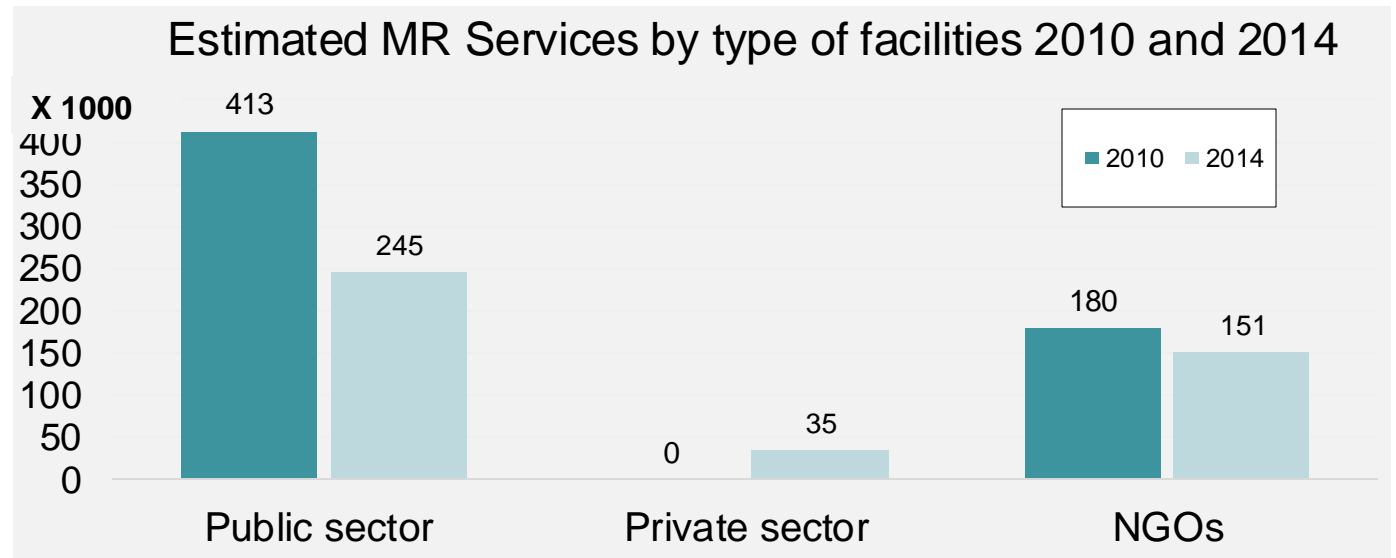
- Abortion is only permitted to save the life of the woman
- Menstrual Regulation (MR) introduced by the government in 1979, and is defined as:
  - “an interim method of establishing non-pregnancy for a woman at risk of pregnancy, whether or not she actually is pregnant” (Bangladesh Institute of law and International Affairs, 1979).
  - “Uterine evacuation with or without laboratory or ultrasound confirmation of pregnancy for women who report recent delayed menses” (Safe abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems, 2nd edition, WHO 2012).





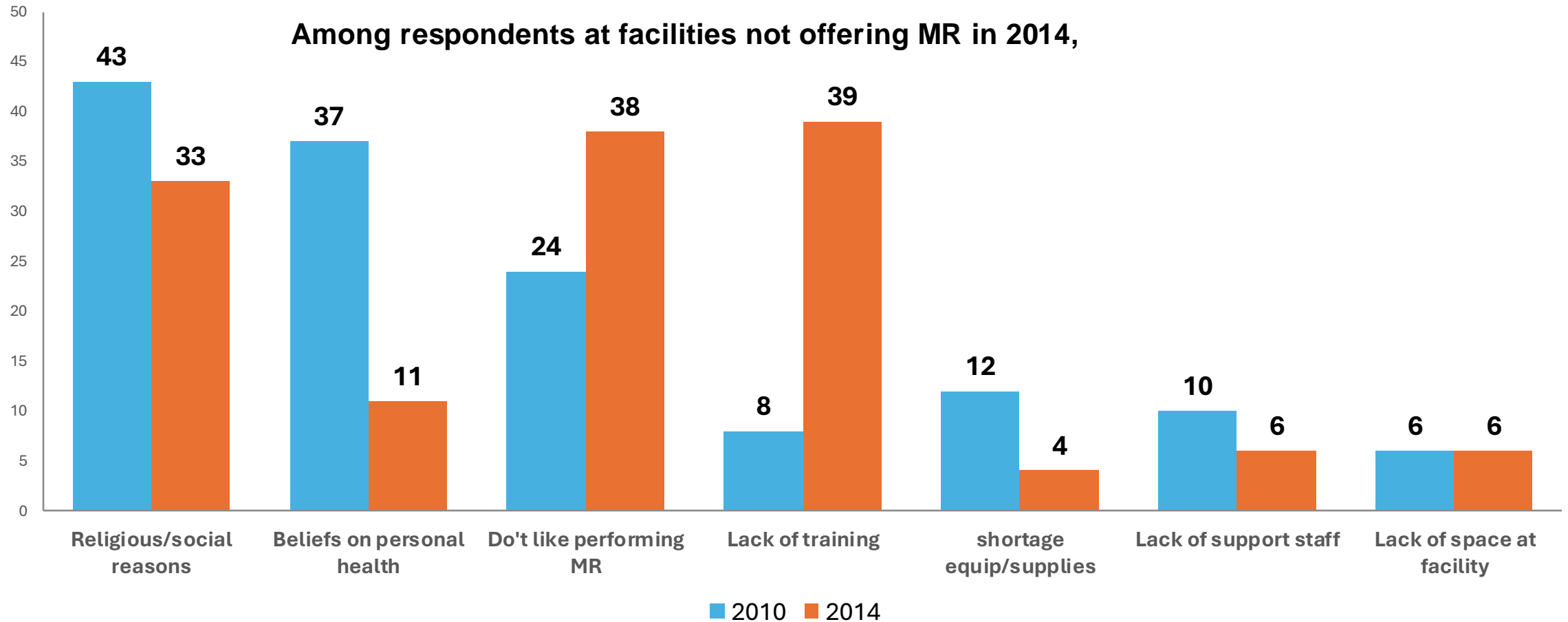
# Service Availability and Accessibility in Health Care Facilities

- 71% of facilities reported having both the equipment and trained staff required to provide MR.
  - However, only half of these facilities actually provided MR services.
- This gap was particularly large among private facilities:
  - Among the 63% of private facilities that were equipped to provide MR, only a third provided MR services.
- One fifth of facilities providing MR also offered MRM.
  - This was an important achievement since MRM was approved only months before the 2014 survey



Source: Singh, S. et al., 2014; Hossain, A. et al., 2017.

# The reasons for not providing MR service shifted between 2010 and 2014



Source: Singh, S. et al., 2017; Hossain, A. et al., 2017.

# Menstrual Regulation: Summary

- Provides access to fertility regulation
- May shield women from social, psychological, and legal repercussions
- May enable women to reframe their experience in a manner that is more acceptable to themselves & others
- Pregnancy is not confirmed

