



# MUCH ADO ABOUT THE POOL?

## IIMA COMMUNITY TELLS US WHY

September saw the inauguration of a new sports complex and a swimming pool at IIMA. These additions were met with much enthusiasm from all groups within the community, with the pool often at full capacity. While there are many seasoned swimmers on campus, we also saw several beginners, including some first-time swimmers, making the most of the pool. However, using shared spaces comes with its own set of complexities. Here, we unpack a few common concerns raised by IIMA community members.

Bodies come in all shapes, sizes, colours, and forms. A lot of us battle body image issues and having someone look at us for too long can be unnerving, often leading to a breakdown later. **Please do not stare at other people.**

-Academic Associate.



Some of us want to get in our workout and leave, while others would like to enjoy the facility in other manners. I ended up crashing into another person while doing my laps- he was swimming cutting across the lanes. It is vital that **lane discipline** is followed for an enjoyable experience for both sets of people.

-Research Associate

Men need to understand their **gaze can be problematic** no matter how 'innocent' it might be. The pool meant as a sports facility is not where you come to 'check out' people

-Student



When I reached the facility during the female only time period, there were men in the pool already, one of them a faculty member. **Flouting of rules** using the excuse of ignorance when mails were sent out with timings is not acceptable.

-Student



There have been instances where I have been shamed for being too hairy for a woman when I used to go for swimming. Thankfully, nothing has happened as such at IIMA. **Commenting on other people's body features** is definitely not acceptable.

-Student

I go with a friend as I don't feel comfortable swimming alone in public spaces. They understand that I am conscious and often maintain a watchful distance, never intervening without my explicit request for help. People need to understand that **unsolicited advice and help is not entertained.**

-Student



There was an incident where some people were standing by and watching us in the pool. I didn't get my backstroke that day as I felt conscious. **It is not ok to loiter** around the pool and stare at people. The facility might be a new experience for some. However, that doesn't discount the fact that it is a site of vulnerability for many people.

-Female Faculty Member

# BODY HAIR AND SWIMMING: DOUBLE STANDARDS OF HYGIENE

*-Research Associate (anonymous)*

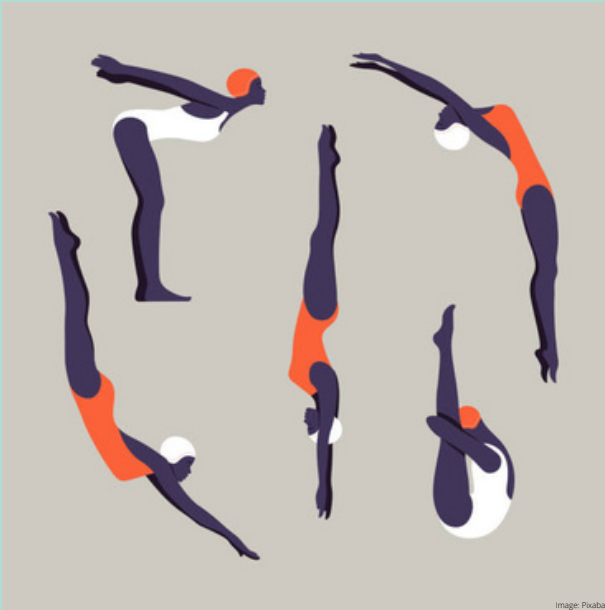
My first time using a swimming pool was in my 11th grade and that too in a new school. Earlier, even when I had opportunities to learn swimming, I wouldn't take it up as I felt uncomfortable in my body and didn't want wet swimwear further accentuating what I tried to hide under loose-fitting clothes. Thus, an enforced swimming course as part of the curriculum made sure I had my tryst with it. As part of the preparation for the class, not a single strand of 'unwanted' hair was spared. After all, it wasn't hygienic to have a hairy female body in the pool. The school had mixed swimming sessions, so the entire class would have sessions together. I felt conscious of my larger body and often made a beeline to the water from the shower section, hoping no one saw my stretch marks or bulging stomach. The same routine would be repeated for pool exit as well.



A fellow female classmate, 'X,' did not subscribe to these 'understood' norms of female etiquette in pools and refused to succumb to peer pressure as I did. I have two vivid memories from my swimming session. While one involved a near-death experience from drowning, the other involved X, who chose to withstand pressure. The scene where she was mocked by a male classmate for having too much hair is still etched in my mind. And it was comical at the time. He had hair all over him, and this man dared to point at her and mock her for having too much hair on her body. Now, when I look back at it, all I feel is rage. As a young girl, I could see the irony of it, but not the unfairness of it. The double standards based on gender regarding hygiene are starkly visible. Body hair is often equated with manliness, while women are ridiculed for it, their femininity being targeted. Incidents like this accumulate to make an already exclusionary space toxic for women.



# *Women-only swimming hour: Hit or Miss?*



Facilities like gyms and swimming pools across the world often offer specific time slots for female members only, keeping in mind some of the challenges women face in accessing these services. Many women opt for these times, citing safety concerns and freedom from the male gaze. Gender-segregated swimming hours also ensure that the pool is accessible for those with specific religious beliefs.

Several members of the IIM community echo these views, welcoming the incorporation of women-only slots at the swimming pool. According to AK, a PGP student, *"Women-only hours are essential to bring out members who might feel uncomfortable swimming with strangers. It helps to overcome any*

*initial inhibitions many face when trying out a new activity. Considering women already have access issues in public spaces, this is a welcome move."* This is reinforced by SM, a research associate at IIM, who states, *"No matter how empathetic a male is, they cannot understand the need for these time slots. Nor will they ever understand what women face daily regarding safety concerns."*

Many of the pool users also reiterate that at a time when the world of sports is becoming increasingly accommodative of differences and diversity, it is imperative that we make spaces and facilities as accessible as possible, ensuring equality of opportunity, and respecting people's desire for privacy.

However, some community members also find the 'women-only' slots to be discriminatory. *"How is having a separate hour for women help with promoting equality? Different hours stand to serve no purpose and only seek to alienate women further,"* notes AK, an academic associate. The argument here is that these slots reinforce gender stereotypes, and alienate women further, rather than empowering them.

Still, others point out that women-only slots are often kept at odd timings and, therefore impossible to utilize. Currently, the time slot allocated for women at the swimming pool is 10-11 am and 3 pm-4 pm on weekdays, which is during peak class and work hours. Some of the women we spoke to questioned the underlying assumptions behind fixing women-only timings at these facilities. Terming it as *"a token measure at being women-friendly,"* PR, a PGP student adds, *"I do not see the utility of allotting a specific hour for women to use the facility. It's an odd hour which makes it practically impossible to utilize."*

Clearly, we have varied, disparate views regarding the move to introduce a women-only time slot for the swimming pool use, as expected in a community as diverse as IIMA. But it looks like this move is here to stay, at least for now!

# Menstruation and Swimming

A few years ago, a swimming pool in Georgia **banned** women from swimming during periods, leading to a controversy. The question of whether it is all right to swim is an age-old one. We share some myths surrounding this topic and clarify some of the misconceptions.<sup>1</sup>



Can I swim while I am menstruating?

Definitely. You just need to ensure that you are using the right menstrual products.

How can I ensure a smooth swimming experience while menstruating?

One should use products such as a tampon or menstrual cup for swimming during your periods. This ensures there is no blood flow into the water and is comfortable to wear. Using pads and liners will lead to water absorption thus creating a problem.

I have been told to abstain from exercise during periods as it would further weaken me. Should I be swimming?

Exercises such as swimming are recommended during menstruation as it has been shown to help some women with cramps and bloating. It is essentially your decision, subject to your comfort level. No blanket rule exists.

I read somewhere that the blood flow stops entirely once I enter the water. So it's alright for me to go in while wearing a pad?

The flow rate will reduce due to water pressure. However, sudden reactions such as sneezing can lead to increase in flow, and pads are not water resistant. It is advisable to use products such as tampons and menstrual cups.

Am I prone to risk of infection if I swim during my periods?

There is no heightened risk of infection if you are on your periods. The pool water undergoes regular filtration and chemical treatment. Take care to change your sanitary products after use.

<sup>1</sup> Sources

Maged, Ahmed Mohamed, et al. "Effect of swimming exercise on premenstrual syndrome." Archives of gynecology and obstetrics 297.4 (2018): 951-959.

"Can I Swim During My Period?" <https://www.usms.org/en/fitness-and-training/articles-and-videos/articles/can-i-swim-during-my-period>.

Contributors, WebMD Editorial. "What to Know About Swimming During Your Period." WebMD. Accessed September 28, 2022. <https://www.webmd.com/women/what-to-know-swimming-during-your-period>.

"Can You Swim on Your Period? This Swimming Pool in Georgia Has Banned Women from Doing So." Accessed September 30, 2022. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/body/news/a45270/swimming-on-period-georgia-pool-banned/>.

If you feel you have been subjected to sexual harassment or if you would like to make any suggestions to us regarding curbing sexual harassment or gender bias on campus, please reach out to us at:

Email: [chr-cmgi@iima.ac.in](mailto:chr-cmgi@iima.ac.in)

Phone: 97129 15533

Please note that any communication with the CMGI is strictly confidential.

The monthly newsletter from the Committee for Managing Gender Issues (CMGI) is an attempt to initiate conversations on discrimination, gender bias, sexual harassment, and related issues. We would love to have the community participate. Please reach out to Therese Abraham at [theresea@iima.ac.in](mailto:theresea@iima.ac.in) for submissions, queries, and/or feedback.