



Menstrual management in Ugandan Schools

Menstruation is an integral and normal part of human life, indeed of human existence. Menstrual hygiene is fundamental to the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls and an important part of the basic hygiene, sanitation and reproductive health services to which every woman and girl has a right. Globally, approximately 52% of the female population (26% of the total population) is of reproductive age¹. Most of these women and girls will menstruate each month for between two and seven days. In an average woman's lifetime she will menstruate during some 3,000 days (McVeigh E & Guillebaud J, Homburg, R. 2008 Oxford Handbook of Reproductive Medicine and Family Planning. Oxford Oxford University Press). As a result of these facts, the WHO/UNICEF JMP led technical process on the formulation of Post-2015 WASH targets and indicators, as part of the post 2015 Development Agenda have cited that by 2030 all schools should provide all users with handwashing and menstrual hygiene facilities².

The subject of menstruation, however, is too often taboo, and has many negative cultural attitudes associated with it, including the idea that menstruating women and girls are 'contaminated', 'dirty' and 'impure'. Women and girls in rural settings and in particular girls in schools suffer most from stigma and lack of services and facilities to help them cope with the physical and psychological pains they undergo during their menstrual periods. Some of the problems they face are: inadequate preparations for young girls not yet experiencing menstrual hygiene, lack of or inadequate water to clean and wash the body, lack of materials for managing menstrual hygiene, no private space and wash rooms and inappropriate facilities for disposal of materials for those who have used pads. In spite of these issues, menstrual hygiene has been routinely ignored by professionals in the water, health and education sectors.

There is varied literature which focuses on the effect of menstruation while at school. A number of studies have shown that poor performance in school in relation to girls menstruating (UNICEF, 2010; WaterAid, 2009, Lidonde, 2005). Lower performance and school drop-out of girls have been related to absence from class during menstruation and reluctance of parents to let girls continue schooling at the onset of menstruation, especially when schools lack sanitation with privacy. Surveys with self-reports show 33%-61% increase in absence due to lack of menstrual hygiene provisions. Intervention studies show both insignificant and significant differences in class attendance. Reasons may be problems with recording and with intervening factors such as water, sanitation and privacy conditions in schools and

¹ UN. 2010. The world's women 2010. Trends & statistics. Series. No. 19. UN statistics division. N.Y.

² Anticipating the discussion on post-2015 development goals, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) in May 2011 started a process of formulating proposals for post-2015 targets and corresponding indicators for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), in the context of a plausible global WASH goal. Under school hygiene the percentage of primary and secondary schools with a private place for washing hands and drying reusable materials; and safe disposal of used menstrual materials.

homes, distance to school and attitudes of teachers and parents. One of the better study is from Uganda, which used both self-recording and teachers' attendance records as well as data on possible intervening factors and then did find significant impacts (Biran et al.,2012). There is however need for further action research to validate this data³.

Therefore, during the period of 2012-2013, SNV with the assistance of IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and with the financial support of Austrian Development Organization focused on a study on menstrual management in Ugandan schools focused on (a) the impact of menstrual management on girls in school; (b) the analysis of the role of primary schools in menstrual management; and (c) on possible ways forward around menstrual management that could be implemented from national to primary school level. The aim of this study was the impact of menstrual management on school girls in selected primary schools in seven districts in which SNV works.

The study was carried out in seven districts (Arua, Adjumai, Budibugyo, Kasese, Kyenjojo, Lira, and Sorti) using random samplings of SNV primary schools. This short study was carried out in selected schools in the seven SNV districts. A total of 20 primary schools per district were selected, which translates into 140 schools in all the seven districts. The sample size per district was aimed at 280 questionnaires in total, out of which: 200 questionnaires for the girl pupils, 20 questionnaires for senior women teachers, 20 questionnaires for senior head teachers, and 40 questionnaires for focus group discussions.

Within the context of this study, the following points have been brought to light, namely:

- Missing school: About half of the girl pupils in the study report missing 1-3 days of primary school per month. This translates into a loss of 8 to 24 school days per year. This means per term a girl pupil may miss up to 8 days of study. On average, there are 220 learning days in a year and missing 24 days a year translates into 11% of the time a girl pupil will miss learning due to menstrual periods;
- Impact of menstruation on girls: Over 60% of the girl pupils absent themselves from school during their menstruation while the senior head teachers note that around 40% absent themselves;
- Inadequate menstrual facilities around schools: A total of 70% of the head teachers and 80% of the senior head teachers stated that they are not satisfied with menstrual facilities at their schools;
- Menstrual pads: Over 50% of the senior women teachers confirmed that there is no provision for menstrual pads to school girls; and
- Keeping girls in school: Over 60% of the girl pupils stated that they need better facilities (hardware aspects). In addition, issues around sensitization of boy pupils, and the role of the senior woman teacher were also cited.



³ Note that IRC has done a full literature review on menstrual management with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which can be sent on if requested.