

## **Effects of Inaccessibility of Sanitary pads on Academic Performance of Girls in Primary Schools in Njoro Sub-County**

Wambui Alice<sup>1</sup>; Charles Nyamwaya<sup>2</sup>; Kimani Njoroge<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Main Author Email Address: [serah7alice@gmail.com](mailto:serah7alice@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT:**

The purpose of this study was to analyse the effects of inaccessibility of sanitary pads on the academic performance of girls in primary schools in Njoro Sub-County. The survey targeted girls in primary schools in Njoro sub-county. Primary school girls do not do well in academic performance and also do not participate fully in school activities, and so the study sought to find out the causes for this. A descriptive survey design was applied in the study. Questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to collect data from the girls and female teachers. The target population was 4595 class 6-8 girls in Njoro Sub –County and 858 female teachers. A sample of 101 girls was selected for the study using simple random sampling to pick the specific girls. 87 Female teachers were sampled using purposive sampling. The data was analysed through descriptive statistics, tables and charts were also used for presentation. The conclusion was drawn from the findings and recommendation for further research was made.

**Key Terms:** Inaccessibility, Sanitary pads, Academic performance, Primary schools.□

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## **Introduction**

Adolescence is a crucial stage of life and one that is challenging for most girls because of the physical and psychological changes that come about during this stage. Today in Kenya, menstruation is not only a health concern but also an educational policy concern because it creates gender disparity in primary and secondary education. This is because school attendance is an important proxy for educational outcomes; by improving access to education, Kenya would make progress toward achieving both the Vision 2030 Plan and several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality. The reforms for free primary education have led to the expansion of enrolment, with the net primary school enrolment reaching 82.7 per cent by 2009, and thus brought to school more girls, but still, there are disparities especially in girls' attendance, participation and performance.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the issue is compounded by high poverty levels that force millions of adolescent girls out of school, as a result of the fact that they cannot afford sanitary protection (Burrows, & Johnson, 2005). According to Ngugi and Nyaura (2014), studies conducted in Kenya have shown that menstruation causes adolescent school girls to lose an average of 3.5 million learning days per month. For many girls in school in Kenya and other parts of the continent, this period is characterised by challenges that not only negatively affect their education but also cut into their school activities to such an extent that many temporarily or even permanently leave school thereby affecting their progression in school Chebii (2012).

One of these challenges is menstruation which is a natural biological process that is experienced by girls from adolescence and in adulthood by women up to the time of menopause. Menstruation is one of the physical changes

that occur in girls at the start of puberty, and the average age of the onset of puberty for many girls is between 7 and 13 years (O'Grady, 2009). Menstruation is an important element in the restricting of school attendance, and completion by girls and there are researchers and policymakers who have argued the same (Sommer, 2010). A girl who misses 4 days of school every 4 weeks due to her monthly period misses 10 to 20% of her school days (Mooijman et al., 2005; Tjon, & Ten, 2007; World Bank, 2005). Some studies that have been conducted in Kenya have shown that menstruation causes adolescent girls to lose an average of 3.5 million learning days per month (Muvea, 2011).

Another study carried in Ghana by Scott Linda (2009) revealed that girls attending school in several remote rural areas stayed at home the entire length of their periods due to fear of soiling themselves in the presence of others. They used discarded cloth, which they felt offered insufficient protection on the long walks to school, which in turn prompted them to stay at home. A study conducted in Uganda on the effect of sexual maturation on the performance of girls in secondary schools by Namugambe (1997) found that sexual maturation affects girls' educational performance. Menstruation makes them absent from school for some good days hence affecting their performance. Universal Primary Education started in 1997 in Uganda.

In Kenya, a need assessment was undertaken by Girl Child Network (GCN) in 2003 on gender equity and equality following the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE). The study revealed that a girl absent from school due to menstruation for four days in 28 days loses 13 learning days equivalent to two weeks of learning in every school term. In a year, a girl loses 39 days, equivalent to 8 weeks of learning time. A girl in primary school between grade 6 and

8 loses 24 learning weeks out of 108 weeks. The same girl loses 156 learning days which is equal to almost 31 weeks out of 144 weeks of learning in secondary school. In addition, this lowers her self-esteem, militates against girls' retention and transition in schools and leads to poor performance.

According to Brehm et al. (2002), there is need for self-esteem. That people with positive self-image tend to be happy, healthy, productive, successful and confident. While people with a negative self-image tend to be more depressed. In the absence of sanitary pads, the sense of girl's interaction gets interfered with as they feel very uncomfortable being together with boys counterparts. The girl child constantly fears to mess her clothing and to get embarrassed. This damages their self-esteem even further. Girls' low self-esteem slows their progress (Dona, & Berry, 1993). It is this high expectation in the change in behaviour that puts pressure on the girl child to be not only good in class but also is neat.

This study will attempt to investigate the experiences of primary school girls and how they cope with their special needs. For girls, the issue of availability and affordability of sanitary pads raises concern. This would contribute to the confidence and ease with which girls in rural areas; specifically the study area in Njoro Sub-county primary schools could participate in education and reduce illiteracy levels in the society.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Inaccessibility of Sanitary Pads**

Globally, 150 million children presently enrolled in school may drop out before finishing primary school at least 100 million of these are girls. Menstruation for girls without access to sanitary Pads and underpants is a major contributor to girl's performance in examinations. Kenyan primary and secondary schools have at least 1.5 million

menstruating girls, at least three fifths, or 872,000 of whom miss four to five days of school per month due to inaccessibility of funds to purchase sanitary Pads and underwear combined with inadequate sanitary facilities at their schools. These 3.5 million lost learning days each month impede their ability to compete in the classroom and leads to low self-esteem hence affecting performance in the examination.

On the other hand, as coping mechanism girls who inaccessibility sanitary Pads often use crude and unhygienic methods, including using dry cow dung, or inserting cotton wool into their uterus to try to block the flow. In urban slums, girls are widely known to collect used pads from rubbish dumps and wash them for their own use. This often amounts to serious health complications which consequently affect their performance in examinations.

### **Perceived impacts of inaccessibility sanitary pads provision**

#### **Effects of inaccessibility of sanitary pads on economic development**

According to the OECD, economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. It is our feeling that at the country's level, a lack of education for girls can lead to substantial losses in national wealth. World Bank figures estimate that wider society and national economies can profit from better menstruation management: with every 1% increase in the proportion of women with secondary education, a country's annual per capita income grows by 0.3%. Empowered women and dignified work are critical to better business that is more ethical and more productive. Other than improved finance, impacts in Bangladesh, Kenya, and India include behaviour improvements in health

and workplace gender equality outcomes, as well as improvements in self-esteem.

Research shows that poor school attainment reduces girls' economic potential over her life course. However, in the rural west, frequent follow-up to evaluate use and safety of menstrual products by primary schoolgirls 14–16 years may have positively influenced participants' attitudes to attending school, affecting school outcomes which in turn affects girl participating in job market after schooling this results in low Gross domestic product of the country thus affecting the economic negatively (Sommer et al., 2016). The most common claim among MHM advocates is an implied causal relationship between menstruation and school attendance (Hennegan, & Montgomery, 2016; Bobel, 2019). Many studies argue that inadequate MHM forces many girls to miss a class or drop out of school altogether (Sahin et al., 2015; WSSCC, & UN Women, 2015a). Perhaps the top-cited statistic is that one out of ten African girls misses school due to menstruation. This claim often appears (Bobel, 2019), such as in pieces generated by the World Bank and the World Economic Forum (Thomson, 2015).

Furthermore, regular absence from school for several days a month can- even in the short term - have a negative impact on a girl's learning and therefore on her academic performance in school. Interrupted attendance, insufficient learning and therefore, poor results in the long term can contribute to drop out eventually. This shows that when the girls are affected this way due to inadequate sanitary facilities, they cannot participate well in education and economic development in future (Oche et al., 2012). Breaking the silence around menstruation is essential for girls to be able to reach their full potential (Patkar et al., 2016).

#### **Embarrassments and psychological trauma**

This happens when the girls in accessibility sanitary pads resulting in leakages and exposure hence great embarrassments. A review of several studies done by NGOs on the matter indicates that the inaccessibility of menstrual products resulted in embarrassment, anxiety and shame when girls stained their clothes, which is stigmatising. The schoolgirls interviewed for the various studies generally described menstruation as a time of anxiety and discomfort especially at school, leading to low concentration in class In his study (Oche et al., 2012) highlights the inability of girls to remain comfortably in class during their menstrual cycle and inaccessibility of menstrual knowledge as being traumatising to the young girl. According to him, a troubled mind cannot accommodate new instructions. Furthermore, since menstruation is unfortunately treated as a taboo subject in many countries, thus enabling a lot of myths and misconceptions from both the male and female populations. Girls are prone to feel a sense of shame and fear on the onset of menstruation, and the chances of boys teasing the girls because of aim accessibility of understanding about the issue may cause even more challenges to the adolescent girls.

The stigma surrounding menstruation may have significant physiological damage where the girls who are not properly educated about menstruation, have had no chance to understand what they are going through completely. Besides facing problems at school, girls are also susceptible to intense physiological and symptomatic challenges during their menstrual cycle, another factor that hinders their access to education. Many of the girls may go through days of physical, psychological and behavioural changes; all symptoms of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), which has a wide variety of symptoms, including mood swings, tender breasts, food cravings, fatigue, irritability and depression. Sharma et al. (2006) also point out that dysmenorrhea is one of the most common problems among girls between the ages of 15 and 25 and it necessitates periods of bed rest

which may affect the girls" access to education and other social activities.

Beyond health issues, there are considerable cultural issues related to menstruation. In some communities in Kenya, particularly among the Somali and in the Rift Valley among the Kalenjin, female circumcision is practised although it is illegal. Girls who have undergone circumcision, mostly those who have been "infibulated", will have additional health and hygiene problems whereby there may be blockages and build-up of blood clots created behind the infibulated area and can be a cause of long-drawn-out painful periods (dysmenorrhea), odour, discomfort and the potential for additional infections. Poor girls in rural or marginalised communities who receive minimal instruction on menstruation are bound to have experiences that are upsetting, bewildering and shame-inducing especially in patriarchal cultures where the men are the ones that define what is "good" or "bad". Women are thus, in such communities, seen as inferior, menstruation is the subject of derogation and what is normal for most women may be used as a tool for harassment. A review by Chebii et al. (2012) on research focused on the Kibera, Korogocho, Mukuru and Kiandutu informal settlements, show that many adolescent girls and women in Kenya have limited knowledge about their bodies, especially in relation to menstruation and sexual and reproductive health.

#### **School attendance during period's days**

Inaccessibility of affordable sanitary products and facilities for girls keeps them at a disadvantage in terms of education when they are young and prevent their mobility and productivity. Menstruation is the most outwardly visible feature of a woman's menstrual cycle. Occurring once every four weeks, it typically lasts 3 to 5 days. Using a mean of four days per period, most girls have their menses 52 days of every year, totalling 13 cycles per year. Sexual maturation process has been found to have a negative

impact on the education of girls. One of the ways to enhance and retain girls in school is the provision of sanitary pads to needy girls, especially in public primary schools, towards ensuring girls retention and effective participation in education. Menstruation is an important element in the restricting of school attendance and completion by girls, and there are researchers and policymakers who have argued the same. A girl who misses 4 days of school every 4 weeks due to her monthly period misses 10 to 20% of her school days. Some studies that have been conducted in Kenya have shown that menstruation causes adolescent girls to lose an average of 3.5 million learning days per month. According to Muvea (2011), studies conducted in Kenya have shown that menstruation causes adolescent school girls to lose an average of 3.5 million learning days per month.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey research design was applied in the study. The study was carried out in five primary schools in Njoro Sub- County. The target population was girls in primary schools who are in class 6-8. It also included the teachers of these girls in the respective schools. This sub-group was carefully selected so as to be representative of the whole population with the relevant characteristics. The total numbers of schools in Njoro sub-county are 74. They were put into four clusters which represent the four zones. A cluster was then randomly selected. Schools in the cluster were randomly selected. The study used stratified random sampling to achieve desired representation from various subgroups in the population. Female teachers were also sampled using purposive sampling method. Data from the girls and the teachers was collected using questionnaires. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted for the girls and the teachers. The questionnaires were pre-tested to a selected sample which was similar to the actual sample. Validity was largely determined by the absence or presence of systematic error

in my data, also referred to as non-random error. The random error was minimised by accurate coding of the data and not being biased when using the FGD. The split-half technique was used to assess reliability. The study generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was systematically organised and coded into various categories using the statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software version 25.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Influence of lack of sanitary pads on primary school girls academic performance

Lack of proper protection during the monthly periods can make girls feel very uncomfortable, and this can affect not only their co-curricular participation but also their academic performance.

### Provision of sanitary pads

Lack of sanitary pads can be a big limitation to the girl's participation in school activities. Girls were asked who provided them with sanitary pads, and this was their response, as indicated in Figure 1.

Most of the girls who answered the questionnaire got their sanitary pads from their teachers and from friends. Very few of them are provided for by their parents.

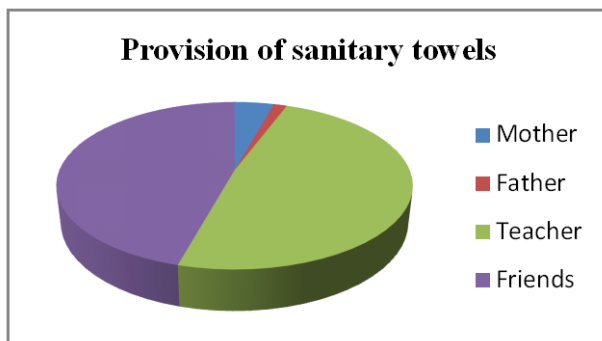


Figure 1: Provision of sanitary pads

### Frequency of distribution of sanitary pads

The girls were further asked to indicate whether they got any sanitary pads from the schools. Their responses are as shown in Figure 2. The girls (31.4%) indicated that the schools provide them with the sanitary pads on a termly basis while 17.1% get them on a monthly basis.

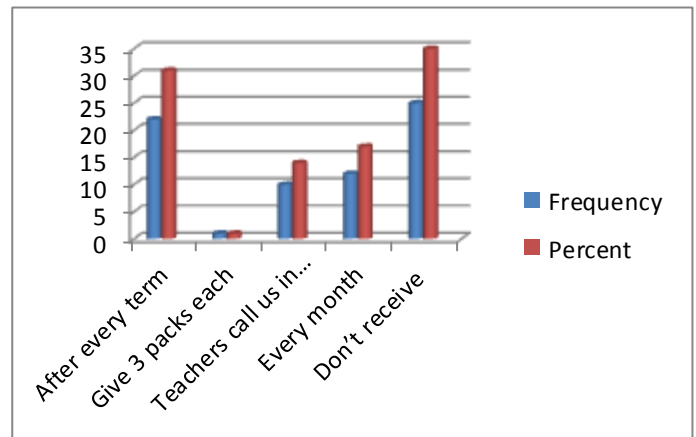


Figure 2: Frequency of distribution of sanitary pads

### What girls do if not prepared?

The girls were asked to indicate what they did if periods started in school, and they were not prepared. The findings from the study are as indicated in Table 1.

- 1)
- 2) Table 1: What girls do if not prepared?

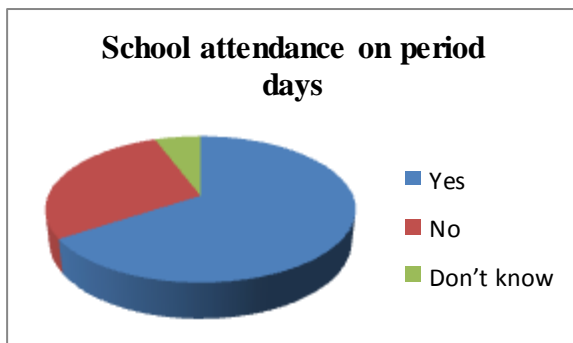
What girls do if not prepared	Frequency	Per cent <sup>2</sup>
Tell the teacher	42	60
Go home	4	5.7
Tell female teacher	6	8.6
Tell class teacher	10	14.3
I tie a pullover around my waist	6	8.6

Not applicable	2	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings indicate that the girls have confidence in their teachers, and they are able to confide in them.

#### School attendance on period days

The girls were further asked to indicate whether they attended school when they were on their periods. Findings were as presented in Figure 3.

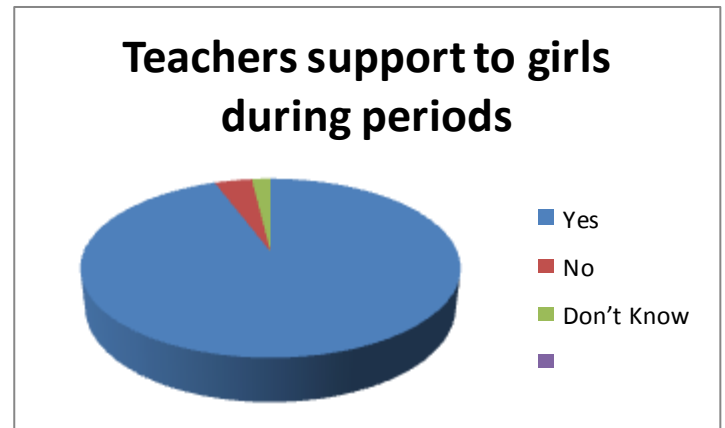


**Figure 3: Respondents on School attendance on period days**

60 per cent of the girls did not miss school on their period days, while 34.5 per cent did miss.

#### Teachers support to girls during periods

The teachers in the sample were also asked to indicate in one of the items whether they gave any support to the girls during their periods. Their responses are as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Teachers support to girls during periods**

From the above responses, it is clear that the teachers are very supportive of the girls during their periods.

#### Ease in class participation

The girls were asked whether they found it easy to participate in class during their periods. They responded, as indicated in Table 2.

**3) Table 2: Ease in class participation**

Ease in class participation	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	28	40
No	34	48.6
Don't know	8	11.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the girls did not find it easy to participate in class during their periods, as shown in Table 2 above.

#### Reasons for not participating

The girls were asked to indicate on one of the items their reasons for not participating in school activities. Their responses are as indicated in Table 3.

**4) Table 3: Reasons for not participating**

Reasons for not participating	Frequency	Per cent <sup>2</sup>
I have messed	5	7.1
I am worried	4	5.7
Because boys will laugh at me	11	15.7
When you are participating it can start	3	4.3
Because I am not comfortable	5	7.1
I feel shy	8	11.4
I have stomach pain	4	5.7
I have a headache	2	2.9
Don't Know	28	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>

From this information, it is evident that girls had reasons that made them not to participate in the activities fully. Fear of being laughed at and feeling shy are some of these reasons.<sup>2</sup>

**Days absent from school**

The girls were also asked to indicate how many days they had missed school during the term, and their responses were as shown in Table 4.

**5) Table 4: Days absent from school this term**

Days absent from school this term	Frequency	Percentage
None	40	57.1
One day	6	8.6
Two days	5	7.1

Three days	5	7.1
Four day	10	14.3
Five days	3	4.3
Not Applicable	1	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the girls had not missed school though a number had. Majority had only missed one day.

**Reasons for missing school**

The girls were asked to indicate further what reasons made them miss school. Their responses are as indicated in Table 5.

**6) Table 5: Reasons for missing school**

Reasons for missing school	Frequency	Per cent <sup>2</sup>
Because I was not prepared	19	27.1
Pad is disturbing	4	5.7
My mother did not give me pads because of no money <sup>2</sup>	22	31.4
Because of pain in the stomach	11	15.7
My class teacher told me to go	1	1.4
I was feeling unwell	6	8.6
Don't Know	5	7.1
Not applicable	2	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the girls missed school because their mother did not give them pads because no money, they were not prepared. Some were having stomach pain, and so did not go to school.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The schools provided the sanitary pads either on a termly (31.4%) basis or monthly (17.1%). The sanitary pads were bought by the head teacher's through a special kitty levied

to the government. Some schools got them from well-wishers. If the girls start their periods while in school, most of them (60%) are confident to tell their teachers, but there are those who will tie a sweater around their waist. Few of the girls (5.7%) opted to go home when their periods started. Majority of the girls (60%) did not fail to attend school because of periods, and this is because they are aware that they have to acquire an education to make their future bright. Some of the girls (11.4%) are not confident of the kind of protection they use, and they are afraid it might fall and get embarrassed, and so they opt to stay at home instead. Majority of the girls (60.0%) do not fully participate in school during their periods, and it is because they fear

the boys will laugh at them if they have messed themselves. They complained the pad was not comfortable and so did not feel confident to participate.□

#### Recommendations

The National Government, the County Government and other stakeholders should consider the following suggestions should consider these recommendations. Provision of sanitary pads to all-girls' schools should be encouraged as part of good participation in school activities with government and development partners being involved in supporting the practice through relevant policies.

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