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Baseline Survey Report

Indicators for Menstrual Health Initiative Project-2017

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With this survey, we have a foundation for providing a well-structured project on Menstrual Hygiene and Management in 2 selected schools.

Nangulu Michael
Programs Director

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Abstract

Introduction: Menstruation is culturally stigmatized natural biological event. In Uganda, adolescent girls in primary schools miss school due to lack of sanitary materials and facilities and due to associated stigma. This small baseline study was conducted to assess the knowledge, perceptions, stigma experienced and school attendance of adolescent girls aged 10-17 years studying in rural primary schools in Mayuge and Kamuli districts.

Methodology: The survey used a descriptive design employing both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. A total of 188 respondents-183 adolescent girls aged 10-17 and 5 Senior Women Teachers (SWTs) and Senior Man Teacher (SMT) were selected and included in the study using a simple random method. Permission and informed consent was first sought before collecting data from respondents.

Primary data collection was through the use of a pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire and an interview guide.

Collected data was entered in Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) from where it was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Cross tabulations and bivariate analysis was conducted to establish relationships between selected variables.

Results: Survey findings showed that most girls had ever been taught about menstruation before they started their periods. However, the information provided was inadequate and incorrect leading many students holding self-stigmatizing beliefs and engaging in practices which affected proper management of menstrual health and hygiene.

The most common sanitary materials used during menstruation by adolescent school girls to manage menstrual flow were disposable pads, pieces of cloth, cotton wool, reusable pads, panties and sponge. Though majority of students had wanted to buy disposable pads in the past, inability of their parents to afford them restricted their use.

Less than half (3 out of 10) of adolescent girls missed an average of 4 days of school last term due to menstruation. Most of them missed due to lack of adequate sanitary materials like pads, poor management of pain, stigma associated with menstruation and poor sanitary facilities at school.

Conclusion: The pilot project should centre on improving access to menstrual health information among adolescent girls and boys so as to facilitate production of homemade reusable pads, reduce on stigma associated with menstruation which will improve on school among girls.

In addition, CCUG should design and plan for projects to improve access to privacy (washrooms) and water and soap to facilitate timely cleaning and changing of pads by adolescent girls in primary schools and teachers during menstruation.

1.0 Background

Menstruation is a normal biological event experienced over much of the lifespan and, thus, is a recurrent feature of women's lives. Globally, about 52% of the female population is of reproductive age and most of them are menstruating every month.

However, an unfortunate aspect about menstruation is that it is culturally stigmatized and women and young girls are discriminated due to this biological event. For example, in some cultures, women and girls are told that during their menstrual cycle they should not bathe (or they will become infertile), touch a cow (or it will become infertile), look in a mirror (or it will lose its brightness), or touch a plant (or it will die) (HOUSE et al. 2012). Most striking is the restricted control which many women and girls have over their mobility and behaviour due to their 'impurity' during menstruation, including the myths, misconceptions, superstitions and (cultural and/or religious) taboos concerning menstrual blood and menstrual hygiene (TEN 2007).

Stigma around menstruation and menstrual hygiene is a violation of several human rights, most importantly of the right to human dignity, but also the right to non-discrimination, equality, bodily integrity, health, privacy and the right to freedom from inhumane and degrading treatment from abuse and violence (WSSCC, 2013).

Despite the fact that menstruation is a normal, biological process experienced by all girls beginning during puberty, it is often perceived in a negative manner within Ugandan communities. Ugandan girls are subject to discrimination due to false stereotypes, misconceptions, and stigma about menstruation that have historically developed from misinformation, harmful cultural beliefs, and gender inequality. This unfair treatment of girls has been confirmed by a UNICEF study. According to the organization's data, 1 in 10 menstruating girls avoid going to school for 4-5 days every 28-day cycle. When a girl can't go to school for 4-5 days during their menstrual periods because they don't have access to sanitary materials or hygienic washrooms, they lose the opportunity to learn for approximately 3 weeks each term. In addition to educational time lost, approximately 23% of adolescent girls, between the ages of 12-18, drop out of school after they start menstruating.¹

To understand menstrual hygiene in schools Community Concerns Uganda (CCUg) with support from Foundation for Sustainable Development conducted a baseline survey in 4 primary schools in Mayuge and Kamuli district to assess the knowledge, perception, stigma and impact of menstruation on school attendance.

2.0 Survey Implementation

2.1 Purpose of the Project

To increase access to information about menstrual health among adolescent girls aged 10-17 years in 2 rural primary schools in Mayuge district.

¹ "Initiatives and Innovations in Uganda for the National Conference on Menstrual Hygiene Management." *The Gender Eye*, August 14, 2014, 1-20.

2.1.1 Project Objectives

1. To increase awareness about the menstrual health among 300 adolescent girls, their teachers and parents so as to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with menstruation.
2. To initiate 2 health clubs for dissemination of information and support about menstrual hygiene and management in 2 rural primary schools.
3. To train 40 peer mentors and 4 teachers in the production of homemade re-usable sanitary pads.

2.2 Objective of the Survey

The purpose of this survey was to assess the knowledge, perceptions, stigma experienced and school attendance of adolescent girls aged 10-17 years studying in rural primary and secondary schools in Jinja, Mayuge and Kamuli districts.

2.2.1 Survey Objectives

1. To establish the knowledge and perception towards Menstrual Hygiene and Management among adolescent girls aged 10-17 years.
2. To assess the internal and external stigma experienced by adolescent girls aged 10-17 in 2 rural primary schools.
3. To assess the school attendance of adolescent girls aged 10-17 years in 2 rural primary schools.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Study Setting and Population

This project (Menstrual Health Initiative) was funded by a Seed grant from Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD). Although it was planned to cover 2 schools, data was collected from 4 primary schools namely, Wabulungu, Nalinaibi, Baitambogwe and Lwanyama Primary Schools. The survey involved adolescent girls aged 10-17 years studying from Primary five to Primary Seven. All the girls involved had already started menstruation.

3.2 Study Design and Instruments

A descriptive cross-sectional study design employing both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection was used.

The survey used a pre-coded and open ended questionnaire which was individually administered to students face-to-face. In order to ease comprehension of the tool, the instrument was translated into Lusoga.

An in-depth interview guide was formulated and used to collect qualitative data from Senior Women Teachers (SWT) and Senior Men Teachers (SMT). Both tools were pretested before being used in the survey.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected from female students (aged 10-17 years) during school hours at the respectful schools. Verbal consent and permission was accessed from school administrators before the data collection process. A total of 183 respondents were involved in the survey.

For the interview guide, oral interviews were conducted where consent was sought from SWT/SMT and interviews were recorded. A total of 5 oral interviews were conducted.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data was entered into Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS 22.0). Descriptive statistics was used to present some variables, cross tabulations and bivariate analysis was used to test relationships between variables. Qualitative data was first transcribed verbatim and later thematically analyzed to establish commonly reported themes.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was sought from school administrators weeks before the data collection process. CCUg signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the schools after comprehensive explanations about the Menstrual Health Initiative Project.

In addition, respondents were explained about the purpose and nature of the project, confidentiality of the information and the voluntary nature of their participation. Verbal consent was sought before collecting data from them.

3.6 Limitations to the Study

1. The use of purposive sampling, which prevented input from female students who hadn't begun menstruation created bias and as thus may limit the generalization of the survey findings to other schools.
2. Some respondents, due to gender difference did not feel comfortable discussing issues related to menstruation with male CCUg staff hence affecting the reliability of some sensitive information provided.
3. In nearly all primary schools involved, a different NGO had recently conducted health education about Menstruation. This meant that students had relatively higher levels of awareness about menstruation.

4.0 Survey Results

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Age and Class of Respondents

Age	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage
11 years	1	0.5
12 years	19	10.4
13 years	83	45.4
14 years	49	26.8
15 years	26	14.2
16 years	5	2.7
Class		
Primary Four	7	3.8
Primary Five	56	30.6
Primary Six	71	38.8
Primary Seven	49	26.8

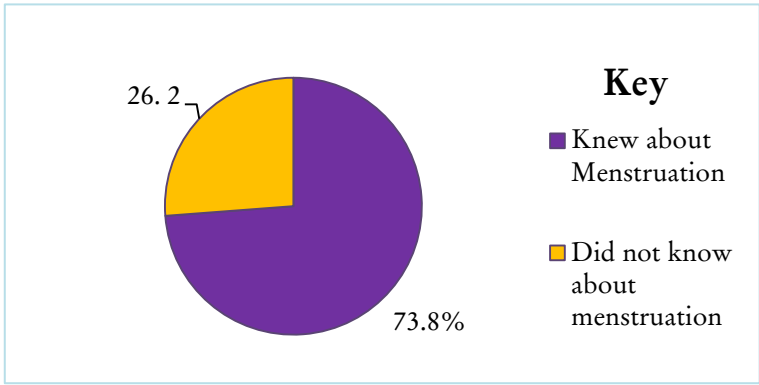
The highest number 83 (45.4%) of respondents were 13 years and 1 (0.5%) was aged 11 years.

The mean age for starting menstruation for respondents was 13 years.

About class, 71 (38.8%) adolescents were studying in primary six while 7 (3.8%) were in Primary Four.

4.2 Menstrual Health Knowledge and Experience

Figure 1: Knowledge of Menstruation before menarche (n=183)



Majority of respondents 135 (73.8%) knew about menstruation before they had their first period while 48 (26.2%) did not know about it before they started menstruating. Of the 135 respondents who had been educated about menstruation before their first period, mothers 51 (37.7%) were the main source of information.

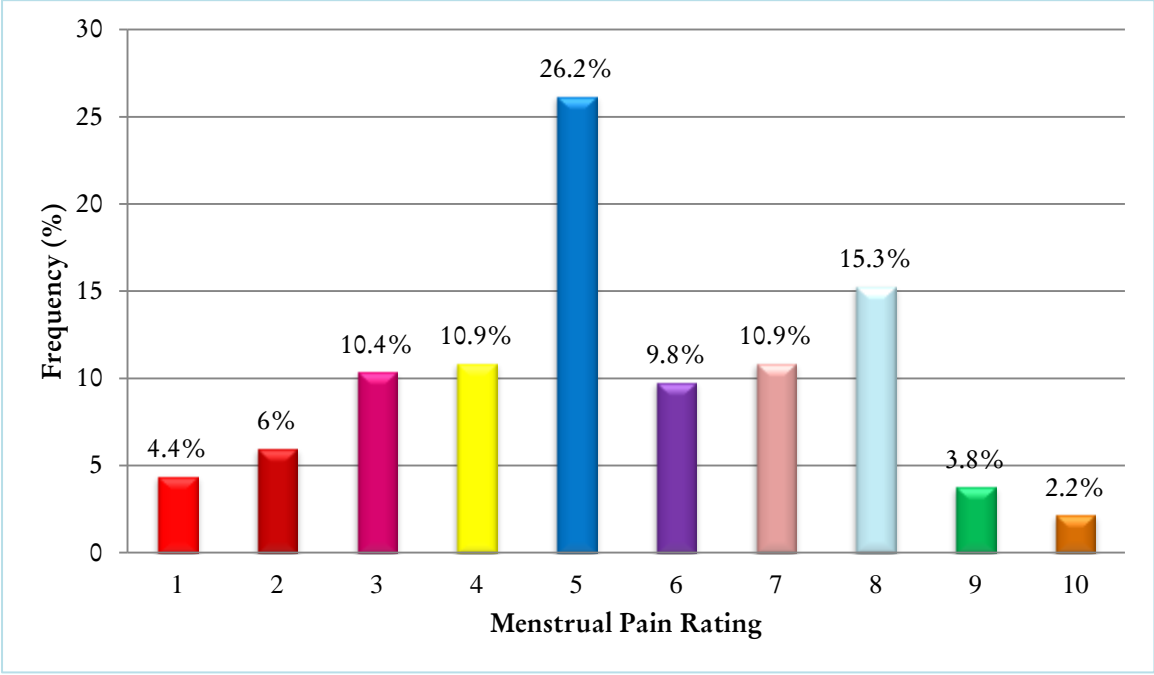
Other sources included; SWTs 38 (28.1%), both mother and SWT 14 (10.4%), sister 10 (7.4%), aunt 7 (5.2%), NGOs 6 (4.4%), grandmother 5 (3.7%) and female friend 5 (3.7%) while mother, grandmother and SWT, and mother and sister all represented 1 (0.7%).

Table 2: Experiences during menstruation

Experiences	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)
Lower abdominal pain	86	47.0
Lower abdominal pain and headache	34	18.6
Lower abdominal pain and backache	15	8.2
No pain	14	7.7
Headache	9	4.9
Back pain	3	1.6
Nausea, heart burn, and increased appetite	7	3.8
Lower abdominal pain, headache and backache	2	1.1
Lower abdominal pain, nausea, headache, and i feel moody and easily irritated	2	1.1
Lower abdominal pain, nausea, moodiness and easily irritated	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, headache, moodiness and easily irritated	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, headache, and i feel moody and easily irritated	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, nausea and headache	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, headache, aggressive behavior, increased appetite, nausea and easily irritated	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, nausea, heartburn, aggressive behavior, reduced appetite, back pain	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, i often vomit, heartburn, increased appetite	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, nausea, headache, heartburn, increased appetite, back pain	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, nausea and i often vomit	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, headache, and reduced appetite	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, nausea, headache and heartburn	1	0.5
Lower abdominal pain, nausea, headache, and backache	1	0.5

As shown in table 2, 86 (47%) of respondents said they experience excessive abdominal pain only during menstruation while 1 (0.5%) said she experiences lower abdominal pain, nausea, headache and backache.

Figure 2: Pain² rating as experienced during Menstruation (n=183)



The highest number 48 (26.2%) rated the pain experienced during menstruation as 5 while 4 (2.2%) said they experience the worst pain, at 10.

Table 3: Menstrual Pain Management by students

Pain Management	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)
I don't do anything	77	42.1
anadol Painkillers	51	27.9
I engage in exercises	27	14.8
Unknown Painkillers	9	4.9
I take warm water	7	3.8
Ibuprofen Painkillers	3	1.6
Diclofenac Painkillers	3	1.6
I use herbs	2	1.1
I drink hot tea with a lot of tea leaves	1	0.5
Sleeping	1	0.5
I drink warm water and use a warm cloth on my stomach	1	0.5
I lie on the floor	1	0.5

Majority of students 77 (42.1%) were not doing anything to manage menstruation related pain while 1 (0.5%)

² Pain was rated using a scale of 1-10, as 1 was considered the least pain experienced and 10 being the worst pain experienced.

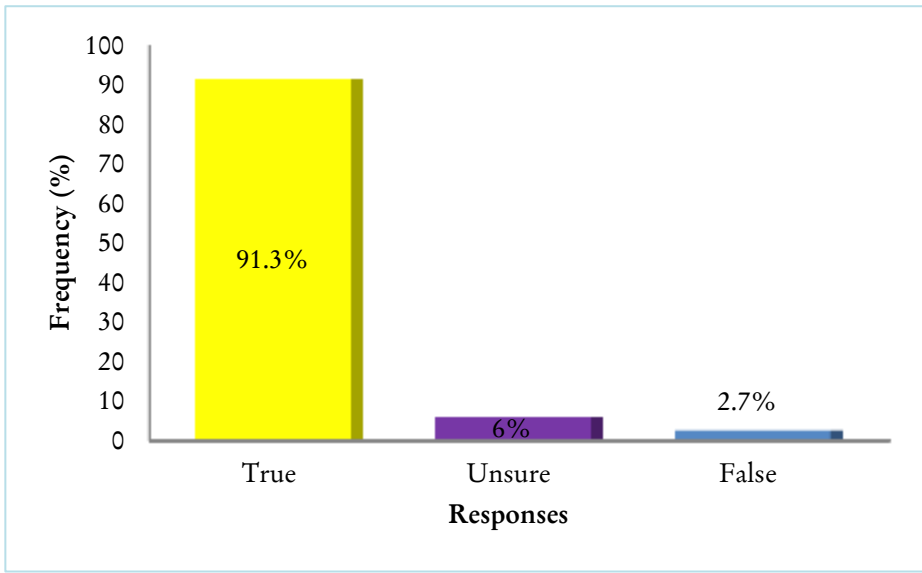
said she lies on floor.

Table 4: Good Points about Menstruation

Good Points about Menstruation	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)
I don't know	93	50.8
Sign of maturity	12	6.6
Shows that I am normal	19	10.4
Show that I am healthy	9	4.9
Shows that I am not barren	2	1.1
Indicates that one is not pregnant	1	0.5
Nothing	16	8.7
Reduces on dirty things in the body	3	1.6
Sign of fertility	7	3.8
Shows that I am healthy and can give birth	16	8.7
Sign of body growth	5	2.7

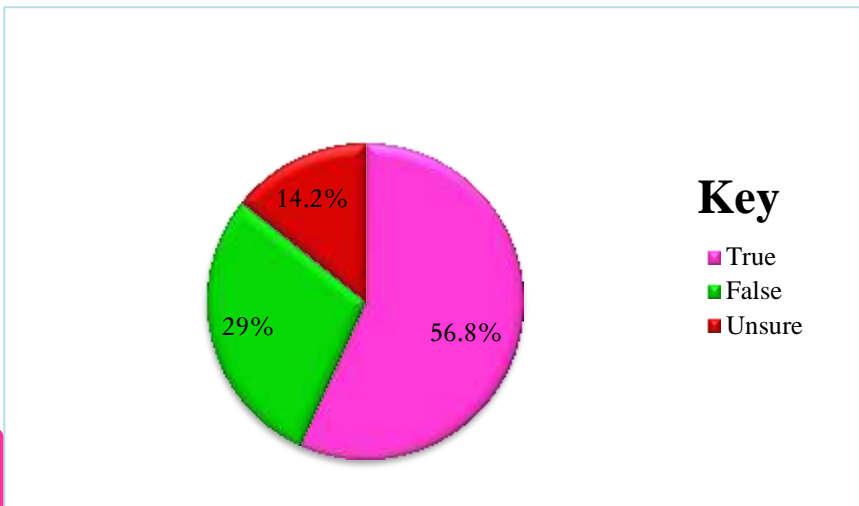
Slightly above half 93 (50.8%) of respondents did not know anything good about menstruation while 1 (0.5%) said it indicates that one is not pregnant.

Figure 3: Whether Menstruation is a normal sexual development stage (n=183)



An overwhelming majority 167 (91.3%) of students indicated that menstruation is a normal sexual developmental stage while the least 5 (2.7%) said it was not.

Figure 4: Whether respondents understand how and why they experience menstruation (n=183).



More than half of respondents 104 (56.8%) reported that they did not know how or why they experience menstruation while 26 (14.2%) were not sure about how or why they have periods.

4.3 Perceptions of adolescents towards Menstruation

Perception was measured using statements which had ratings from 1-3, 1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest. For overall perception, the scores to the questions were summed up to come up with a total that ranged from 10-30, 10 being the lowest and 30 being the highest score.

Table 5: Perceptions towards Menstruation

Statement	True	False	Not Sure
It is harmful for a girl or woman if she runs or plays during menstruation	51.4	39.9	8.7
Menstruation means I am ready to start a relationship	17.5	59.0	23.5
Menstruation means I am ready to start sex	14.2	59.6	26.2
Sex cures painful menstruation	7.7	57.6	34.4
You cannot get pregnant if you play sex during menstruation.	22.4	50.3	27.3
Menstruation indicates that I am ready for marriage	18.0	58.5	23.5
Menstruation is a period of suffering for girls and women	30.6	52.5	16.9
Menstruation is a disease/curse	20.2	60.7	19.1

Information presented above shows that more than half 94 (51.4%) believed that it is harmful for a girl or woman to run or plays during menstruation while 16 (8.7%) were not sure.

When asked whether menstruation means that a girl is ready to start a relationship, most respondents 109 (59.6%) disagreed while 26 (14.2%) perceived it to be true.

On whether sex cures painful menstruation, 106 (57.9%) said it does not, 63 (34.4%) were not sure while 14 (7.7%) believed that sex cures painful menstruation.

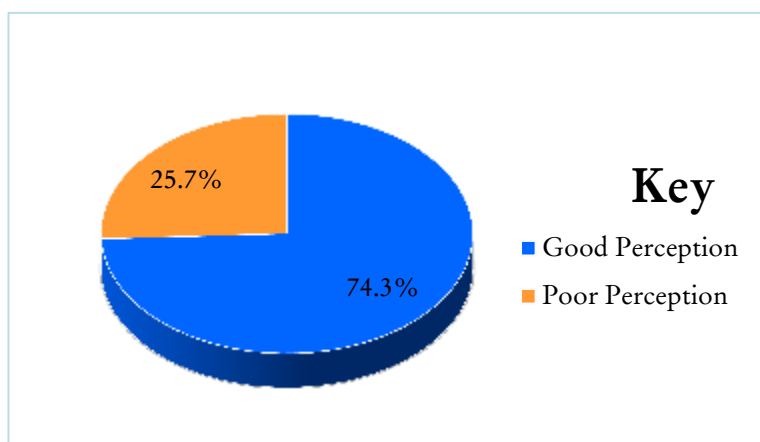
Slightly more than half of respondents 92 (50.3%) mentioned that a girl can get pregnant if she plays sex during menstruation while 41 (22.4%) believed that a girl cannot get pregnant if she has sex during menstruation.

Majority of respondents 107 (58.5%) stated that menstruation does not mean that a girl is ready for marriage while 33 (18%) perceived menstruation as a sign of a girl's readiness for marriage.

More than half of respondents 96 (52.5%) indicated that menstruation is not a period of suffering for girls and women while 56 (30.6%) believed it to be a period of suffering for girls and women.

When asked whether menstruation is a disease, most 111 (60.7%) disagreed while 37 (20.2%) agreed to the statement that menstruation is a disease.

Figure 5: Ratings for perception towards (n=183)



Majority of respondents 136 (74.3%) had a good perception towards menstruation while the minority 47 (25.7%) had a poor perception towards menstruation.

4.4 Stigma associated with Menstruation

The survey sought to measure stigma associated with menstruation experienced by adolescent girls in primary schools. Stigma was divided into internal and external. It was measured using a selected set of questions whose responses were rated with a 1-3 point scale. Both internal and external stigma used 5 different questions. Scores to the questions were summed up to come up with totals ranging from 5-15, 5 being the lowest and 15 being the highest. The scores were divided into sections depicting the different levels of internal and external stigma. These included (5-7 Not Stigmatized, 8-12 moderately stigmatized and 13-15-Severely stigmatized).

For measuring overall stigma (both internal and external), a total of 10 questions, rated using a 1-3 point scale were used. The scores ranged from 10-30, 10 being the lowest and 30 being the highest. The scores were also divided to establish levels of stigma experienced. These included 10-15 Not stigmatized, 16-24 Moderately Stigmatized and 25-30 Severely Stigmatized.

Table 6: Stigma associated with menstruation experienced by adolescent girls

Statement	True	False	Not Sure
I feel dirty during menstruation because I lack enough sanitary materials ³ to use.	63.9	27.9	8.2
I am embarrassed to speak about menstruation with other people	50.3	39.9	9.8
I believe girls should not discuss menstruation with boys/men	83.1	13.1	3.8
If I go to the garden or climb a tree during menstruation, crops/fruits will die.	37.2	39.9	23.0
I fear to use the latrine during menstruation because I might become barren.	16.9	61.2	21.9
Some students don't want to associate with me during menstruation.	31.1	53.0	15.8
Male students tease me during menstruation.	26.8	57.9	15.3
I am not allowed to use the water source ⁴ during my periods	23.0	60.1	16.9
I fear to stand up and give an answer in class during menstruation because of worries of leakage and pain.	42.6	43.2	14.2
Some students and teachers say abusing words about my body during menstruation	19.1	60.7	20.2

Study findings presented above show that majority 117 (63%) of girls interviewed felt dirty because of lack of adequate sanitary materials during menstruation. In addition, 92 (50.3%) said they feel embarrassed to speak about menstruation with other people, 152 (83.1%) believed girls should not discuss menstruation with boys while 68 (37.2%) believed that if a girl goes to the garden or climbs a tree during menstruation, crops/fruits will die.

Furthermore, though 112 (61.2%) students said they don't fear to use the latrine during menstruation, 40 (21.9%) were not sure about it while 31 (16.9%) said they fear to use it because they might become barren.

When asked whether adolescent girls are socially discriminated by other students by not associating with them during menstruation, more than half 97 (53%) disagreed while 57 (31.1%) agreed.

On whether male students tease girls during menstruation, 106 (57.9%) disagreed while 49 (26.8%) agreed. When asked whether menstruating girls are not allowed to use water sources such as boreholes and wells, 110 (60.1%) disagreed while 42 (23%) agreed.

³ Sanitary Materials meant sanitary pads and access to water and soap.

⁴ Examples given during data collection included borehole and both protected and unprotected wells.

Respondents representing 78 (42.6%) mentioned that they fear to stand up and give an answer in class during menstruation because they worry of leakage and pain while 35 (19.1%) reported that some students and teachers say abusing words about their bodies during menstruation.

4.4.1 Rating of Stigma experienced by adolescent girls

Table 7: Internal and External Stigma rating

Internal Stigma ratings	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)	More than half of students 107 (58.5%) were experiencing moderately internal stigma associated with menstruation while 39 (21.3%) were experiencing severe internal stigma associated with menstruation.
Not Stigmatized	37	20.2	
Moderately Stigmatized	107	58.5	
Severely Stigmatized	39	21.3	
External Stigma Ratings			
Not Stigmatized	123	67.2	
Moderately Stigmatized	42	23.0	
Severely Stigmatized	18	9.8	
Overall Stigma Ratings (Both Internal and External Stigma)			
Not Stigmatized	60	32.8	
Moderately Stigmatized	100	54.6	
Severely Stigmatized	23	12.6	

Regarding external stigma, 123 (67.2%) of students were not experiencing external stigma associated with menstruation while 18 (9.8%) were experiencing severe external stigma associated with menstruation.

On the overall stigma ratings (both internal and external stigma), 100 (54.6%) adolescent girls were moderately stigmatized while 23 (12.6%) were severely stigmatized.

4.4.2 Reactions towards stigma experienced

Table 8: Reactions towards stigma associated with menstruation

Reaction towards stigma experienced	Frequency (n=102)	Percentage (%)
Withdraw from other students during menstruation and feel stressed and lonely	38	37.3
Withdraw from other students during menstruation	23	22.5
Feel stressed and lonely	17	16.7
Stay away from class during menstruation	9	8.8
Stay away from school until I finish the periods	9	8.8
Withdraw from other students and stay away from class during menstruation	4	3.9
Do nothing	4	3.9

Note: Students reported to engaging in more than 1 action.

The highest number of adolescents girls 38 (37.3%) said that they withdraw from other students, feel stressed and lonely due to stigma associated with menstruation while 4 (3.9%) withdraw from other students and stay away from class during menstruation.

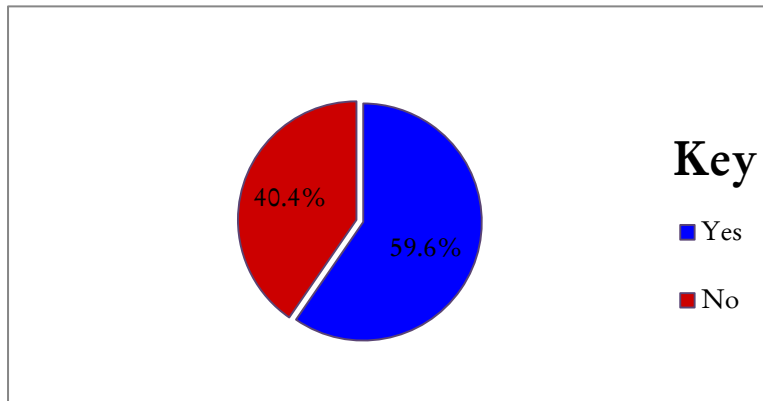
4.5 Practices related to menstruation among female students

Table 9: Sanitary materials used during menstruation.

Sanitary Materials used during menstruation to prevent stains	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)
Disposable sanitary pads	83	45.3
Cotton cloth	39	21.3
Pieces of clothes	33	18.0
Reusable pads	23	12.6
Double clothes (2 panties)	2	1.1
Use both disposable pads and homemade reusable pads	1	0.5
Disposable pads and pieces of cloth	1	0.5
Sponge	1	0.5

Survey findings show that 83 (45.3%) of adolescent girls were using disposable pads while 1 (0.5) was using a sponge.

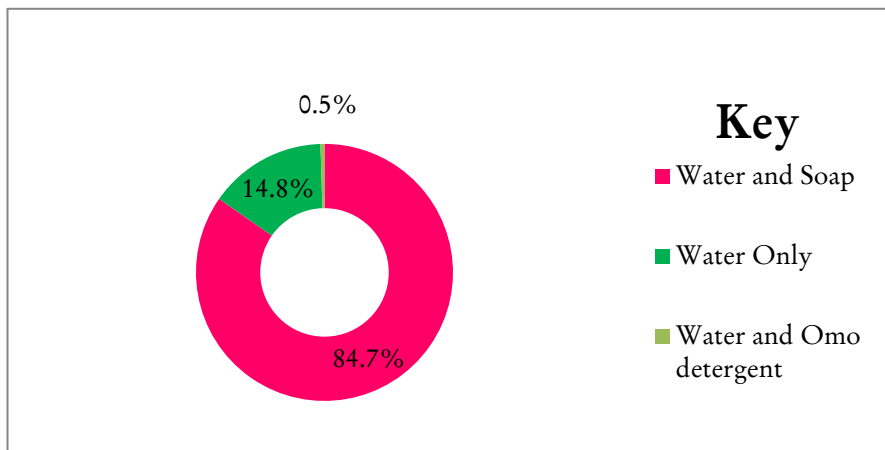
Figure 6: Whether respondents had ever wanted to buy disposable sanitary pads for themselves in the past and were unable



The highest number of respondents 109 (59.6%) of respondents said they have ever wanted to buy disposable pads in the past but were unable because their parents lacked the means to often give them money to buy the parts. Of these, 92 (84.4%), said they were unable to buy

the pads because their parents can't afford buying disposable pads, 11 (10.1%) said they were scared to buy the pads from shops while 6 (5.5%) girls reported that they are unable to buy pads because they were unavailable in the shops.

Figure 7: Cleaning agents used during menstruation (n=183).



Most respondents 155 (84.7%) said they use water and soap to clean themselves during menstruation while 1 (0.5%) said she used water and omo detergent.

Table 10: Sanitary facilities at schools to aid menstrual hygiene and management

Availability of a room ⁵ where students can change pads and clean themselves during menstruation.	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)
Yes	132	72.9
No	51	27.1
Presence of adequate water and soap to aid in menstrual hygiene.		
Yes	00	00
No	183	100
Actions taken in the absence of adequate water and soap to aid in menstrual hygiene		
I use what is available	72	39.3
I go back home	40	21.9
I don't clean myself	28	15.3
I carry soap from home	3	1.6
I use the teacher's home bathroom.	1	0.5

Less than three quarters of respondents 132 (72.9%) reported that they have a room where students can change pads and clean themselves during menstruation. (Note: In all the 4 schools included, there was only 1 school which offered a separate room to offer students privacy and agents (water and soap) to clean them during menstruation. In the remaining 3 schools, the rooms mentioned here were pit latrines for, although some of them did not have doors/locks to provide privacy. Besides, there was no school which provided both water and soap to aid in menstrual hygiene. Only 2 schools provided water in 5 litre jerricans without soap.)

When asked whether the students had access to adequate water and soap to aid in ensuring menstrual hygiene, all 183 (100%) girls disagreed. Students 40 (21.9%) said they would go back home to clean themselves while 28 (15.3%) said they did not clean themselves during menstruation.

⁵ In all the 4 schools included, there was no separate room/washroom equipped with water and soap. Students referred to pit latrines for this matter although some of them did not have doors/locks to provide privacy. However, 2 schools had separate rooms and provided girls with 5 litre jerricans to draw water to clean themselves during menstruation.

4.6 Menstruation and School attendance among female students

Table 11: Missing school due to menstruation

Missing school due to menstrual periods in the last term	Frequency (n=183)	Percentage (%)
Yes	69	37.7
No	114	62.3
Number of days missed due to menstrual periods last term		
1 day	05	7.2
2 days	15	21.7
3 days	26	37.7
4 days	06	8.7
5 days	01	1.4
6 days	07	10.1
7 days	01	1.4
8 days	01	1.4
9 days	03	4.3
12 days	01	1.4
15 days	01	1.4
16 days	01	1.4
18 days	01	1.4
Reasons for Missing school	(n=69)	
Fear of staining my school uniform	22	31.9
I am afraid of other students making fun of me	05	7.2
Pain associated with menstruation	18	26.1
There is no privacy for girls to wash and change	02	2.9
I don't have sanitary pads	11	15.9
I have nowhere to throw used sanitary pads	7	10.1
Pain associated with menstruation and lack of sanitary pads	8	11.6
Fear of staining my school uniform and I am afraid of other students making fun of me	1	1.4

Note: Students mentioned multiple reasons for missing school during menstruation

Out of 183 students who participated in the survey, 69 (37.7%) said they missed school last term due to menstrual periods. Of these, 26 (37.7%) missed 3 days, 15 (21.7%) missed 2 days, 7 (10.1%) missed 6 days, 6 (8.7%) missed 4 days, 5 (7.2%) 1 day, 3 (4.3%) 9 days while 1 (1.4%) missed 5, 7, 8, 12, 15, 16 and 18 days respectively.

On the reasons for missing school during menstruation, 22 (31.9%) said they feared to stain their school uniform with menstrual blood, 18 (26.1%) missed because of pain associated with menstruation, 11 (15.9%) did not have sanitary pads while 2 students representing (2.9%) missed school because it did not have a place to offer privacy to girls to wash and change.

Table 12: Average number of days missed due to menstruation

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Missed School Duration	69	1.0	18.0	4.159	3.3939
Valid N (list wise)	69				

According to the descriptive analysis as presented above, the average number of days missed by the 69 students was 4 days.

Table: Impact of days missed due to menstrual periods on academics

Whether days missed last term due to menstruation impacted on academic performance of students	Frequency (n=69)	Percentage (%)
Yes	47	68.1
No	22	31.9
Impact of days missed on academic performance	(n=47)	
I found it hard to cope up with other students when I missed school often	24	51.1
I missed learning about vital information which negatively affected my performance	21	44.6
I missed vital explanations from teachers	02	4.3

Of the 69 students who reported to missing school last term due to menstruation, 47 (68.1%) said it affected their academic performance. Twenty four (51.1%) said they found it hard to cope up with other students when they missed school often while 2 (4.3%) said they missed vital explanations from teachers.

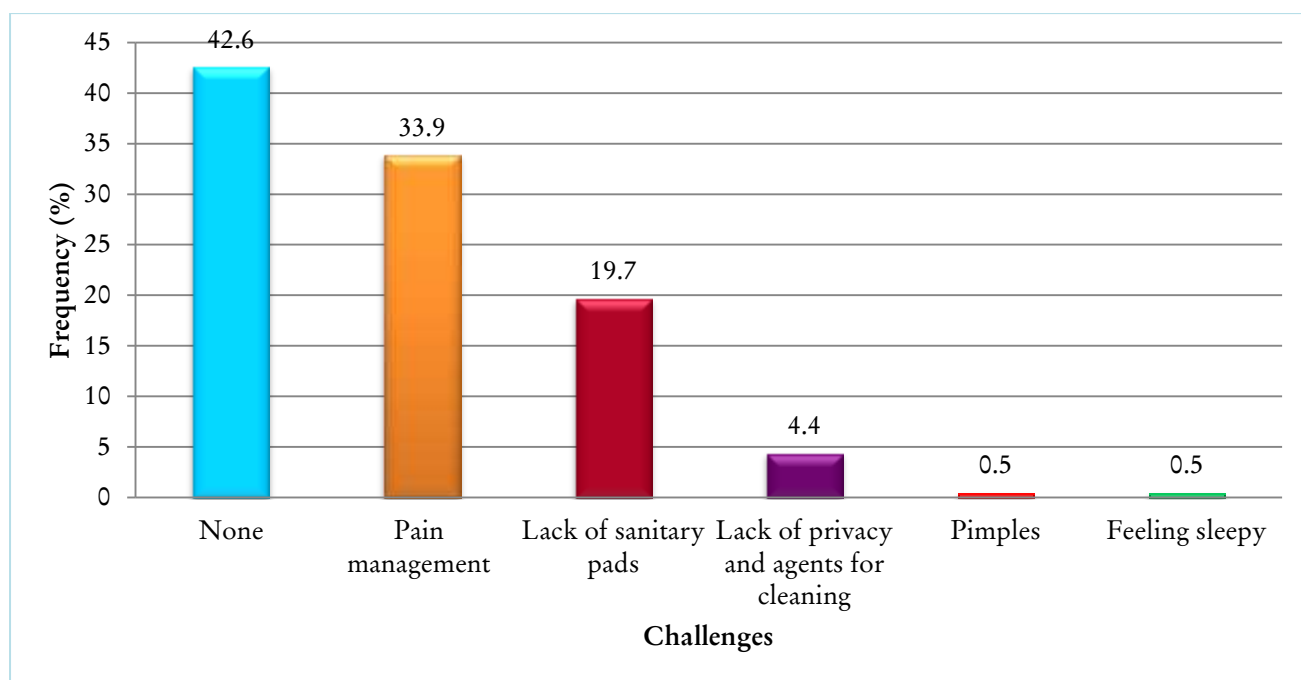
Table 13: Impact of Menstruation on other activities

Statement	Yes	No
Menstruation makes me miss doing my home work	29.0	71.0
I am unable to carry out daily activities like cooking or fetching water during menstruation	31.1	68.9
I am unable to play with my friends during menstruation	45.4	54.6
During menstruation, I feel confused, scared/worried and have no one to talk to, so I run back home/stay home	32.8	67.2

Table 13 reveals that 53 (29%) of adolescent girls indicated that menstruation makes them miss doing homework, 57 (31.1%) are unable to carry out daily activities like cooking or fetching water during menstruation while 83 (45.4%) said they can't play with their friends during monthly

periods. In addition, 60 (32.8%) girls said they feel confused, scared/worried and have no one to talk to, so they run back home/stay home during menstruation.

Figure 8: Other Challenges associated with menstruation (n=183).



The most pressing challenge reported was pain management (backache, headache and abdominal pains) 62 (33.9%) followed by lack of sanitary pads 36 (19.7%), lack of privacy and agents⁶ for cleaning during menstruation 8 (4.4%).

4.7 Relationships between variables

4.7.1 Relationship between perception and stigma associated with menstruation

4.7.1.1 Perception and Internal stigma

Table 14: Bivariate analysis showing relationship between students’ perception and internal stigma

Correlations			
		Perception towards Menstruation	Internal Stigma associated with Menstruation
Perception towards Menstruation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.417
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	183	183
Internal Stigma associated with Menstruation	Pearson Correlation	-.417	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	183	183

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

⁶ Agents refer to adequate water and soap.

There is a negative significant relationship between students' perception and internal stigma associated with menstruation ($r=-.417^{**}$ P value < 0.01). This means that any interventions aimed at improving on the perception of students will reduce on the internal stigma associated with menstruation.

4.7.1.2 Perceptions and External stigma

Table 15: Bivariate analysis showing relationship between perception and external stigma

Correlations			
		Perception towards Menstruation	External Stigma associated with Menstruation
Perception towards Menstruation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.545 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	183	183
External Stigma associated with Menstruation	Pearson Correlation	-.545 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	183	183

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Findings presented above shows that there is a strong negative significant relationship between students' perception and external stigma associated with menstruation ($r=-.545^{**}$ P value < 0.01). This means that any interventions aimed at improving on the perception of students will reduce on the external stigma associated with menstruation.

4.7.1.3 Perception and Overall Stigma

Table 16: Bivariate analysis showing relationship between perception and overall stigma

Correlations			
		Perception towards Menstruation	Overall Stigma
Perception towards Menstruation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.497 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	183	183
Overall Stigma	Pearson Correlation	-.497 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	183	183

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 16 shows that there is a negative significant relationship between students' perception and overall stigma associated with menstruation ($r=-.497^{**}$ P value < 0.01). This means that any interventions aimed at improving on the perception of students will reduce on the overall stigma associated with menstruation.

4.7.2 Stigma and missing school due to menstruation

4.7.2.1 Internal Stigma and Days missed due to menstruation

Table 17: Cross tabulation showing relationship between internal stigma and days missed due to menstruation.

Days missed due to menstruation * Internal Stigma associated with Menstruation Cross tabulation					
Count					
		Internal Stigma associated with Menstruation			Total
		Low Internal Stigma	Moderate Internal Stigma	Severe Internal Stigma	
Days missed due to menstruation	One Day	0	4	1	5
	Two Days	4	8	3	15
	Three Days	3	12	11	26
	Four Days	2	4	0	6
	Five Days	0	1	0	1
	Six Days	2	4	1	7
	Seven Days	0	1	0	1
	Eight Days	0	0	1	1
	Nine Days	0	1	2	3
	Twelve Days	0	0	1	1
	Fifteen Days	0	1	0	1
	Sixteen Days	0	0	1	1
	Eighteen Days	0	1	0	1
	Total		11	37	21

Cross tabulation reveals that out of the 69 students who said they miss school due to menstruation, 37 were experiencing internal stigma while 21 were experiencing severe internal stigma. This may imply that internal stigma had adverse effects on school attendance as more than half 58 (84%) students who lost days due to menstruation experienced moderate-severe internal stigma.

4.7.2.2 External stigma and days missed due to menstruation

Table 18: Cross tabulation showing relationship between external stigma and days missed due to menstruation.

Missed School Duration * External Stigma Associated With Menstruation Cross tabulation					
Count					
		External Stigma Associated With Menstruation			Total
		Low External Stigma	Moderate External Stigma	Severe External Stigma	
Days missed due to menstruation	One Day	3	1	1	5
	Two Days	10	4	1	15
	Three Days	13	9	4	26
	Four Days	3	2	1	6
	Five Days	0	1	0	1
	Six Days	5	2	0	7
	Seven Days	1	0	0	1
	Eight Days	0	0	1	1
	Nine Days	1	0	2	3
	Twelve Days	0	0	1	1
	Fifteen Days	1	0	0	1
	Sixteen Days	0	0	1	1
	Eighteen Days	0	1	0	1
Total		37	20	12	69

Cross tabulation show that out of the 69 students who said they miss school due to menstruation, 20 were experiencing external stigma while 12 were experiencing severe external stigma. This could imply that external stigma had minimal effects on days missed as less than half 32 (46.3%) of students who lost days due to menstruation experienced moderate-severe internal stigma.

4.7.2.3 Overall stigma and days missed due to menstruation

Table 19: Cross tabulation showing days missed due to menstruation and overall stigma experienced

Days missed due to menstruation * Overall Stigma Cross tabulation					
Count		Overall Stigma			Total
		Low Overall Stigma	Moderate Overall Stigma	Severe Overall Stigma	
Days missed due to menstruation	One Day	1	3	1	5
	Two Days	7	6	2	15
	Three Days	3	18	5	26
	Four Days	2	4	0	6
	Five Days	0	1	0	1
	Six Days	3	4	0	7
	Seven Days	1	0	0	1
	Eight Days	0	0	1	1
	Nine Days	0	1	2	3
	Twelve Days	0	0	1	1
	Fifteen Days	1	0	0	1
	Sixteen Days	0	0	1	1
Eighteen Days	0	1	0	1	
Total		18	38	13	69

Cross tabulation revealed that out of the 69 students who said they miss school due to menstruation, 38 were experiencing moderate stigma while 13 were experiencing severe stigma. This could imply that stigma associated with menstruation had a big effect on schooling among girls last term as 51 (73.9%) of students who lost days due to menstruation experienced moderate-severe stigma.

4.7.2.4 Reactions to stigma and reasons for missing school

Table 20: Cross tabulation showing relationship between reaction to stigma and missing school due to menstruation.

Reaction to Stigma * Missed School Cross tabulation				
		Missed School		Total
		Yes	No	
Reaction to Stigma	Withdraw from other students during menstruation	7	16	23
	Stay away from class during menstruation	3	5	8
	Stay away from school until i finish the periods	6	3	9
	Feel stressed and lonely	4	12	16
	Withdraw from other students during menstruation and feel stressed and lonely	19	19	38
	Withdraw from other students during menstruation and stay away from class during menstruation	2	2	4
	None	1	3	4
Total		42	60	102

Of the 23 students who said they withdraw from other students during menstruation, 7 missed school while 8 of those who said they stay away from class during menstruation, 3 missed school. Out of the 9 who said they stay away from school until they finish their periods, 6 missed school. Of the 16 who said they feel stressed and lonely, 4 missed school while all the 19 who withdraw from other students during menstruation and feel stressed and lonely, missed school due to menstruation.

4.7.2.5 Days missed due to menstruation and reasons

Table 21: Cross tabulation showing relationship between days missed and reasons for missing school.

		Days missed due to Menstruation * Reasons for missing school Cross tabulation								Total
		Why Miss School								
		Fear of staining my School uniform	Afraid of other students making fun of me	Pain associated with menstruation	No privacy for girls to wash and change at School	I Have Nowhere to Throw Used Sanitary Pads	I Don't Have Sanitary Pads	Pain Associated with Menstruation and I Don't Have Sanitary Pads	Fear of Staining my School Uniform and Afraid of Other Students Making Fun of Me	
Days missed	1 day	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
	2 days	5	2	4	0	1	2	1	0	15
	3 days	8	0	4	0	4	5	4	1	26
	4 days	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	6
	5 days	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	6 days	2	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	7
	7 days	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	8 days	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	9 days	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
	12 days	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	15 days	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	16 days	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
18 days	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Total		23	5	15	1	7	9	8	1	69

Table 21 shows that the biggest number of girls missed more school days because of fear of staining their school uniforms. Altogether, the 23 girls missed 121 days last term due to lack of adequate sanitary pads which caused fear of staining their school uniforms.

5.0 Survey Discussions and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Basing on the study findings, it is no doubt that menstrual hygiene and management in rural and peri-urban schools is an issue for adolescent school girls. This section discusses some of the factors which have an impact, directly or indirectly on the management of menstruation in the 4 primary schools surveyed.

5.1.1 Knowledge and Perception

Study findings revealed that out of 183 adolescent girls involved in the survey, majority of them (72.6%) had been taught about menstruation before they had their first period. In addition, most of the girls (91.3%) knew menstruation as a normal sexual developmental stage.

Overall, although (74.3%) had a good perception towards menstruation, (56.8%) of the adolescent girls did not know how or why they experience menstruation while 26 (14.2%) were not sure about it. As such, 51.4% believed that it is harmful for a girl or woman to run or plays during menstruation, (18%) perceived menstruation as a sign of a girl's readiness for marriage, (30.6%) believed menstruation as a period of suffering for girls and women while (20.2%) thought menstruation was a disease. Such misconceptions are also held by boys who feel that when a girl starts menstruation, she is ready to have sexual intercourse as explained by a SWT; '*.....boys here think that if a girl starts menstruation, she is ready to have sex. We had a case this week where a girl who started periods reported that certain boys were requesting sex from her*' (Participant IV).

Bivariate analysis showed a negative significant relationship between students' perception and internal stigma associated with menstruation ($r=-.417^{**}$ P value < 0.01). A strong negative significant relationship was also found between students' perception and external stigma associated with menstruation ($r=-.545^{**}$ P value < 0.01). Further, a negative significant relationship was established between students' perception and overall stigma associated with menstruation ($r=-.497^{**}$ P value < 0.01). This implies that perceptions towards menstruation among adolescent girls have a big influence on internal and external stigma experienced. Therefore, any interventions aimed at improving on the perception of students may reduce on the overall stigma associated with menstruation.

5.1.2 Practices related to menstruation

Less than half (47%) of girls were using disposable pads, (21.3%) cotton cloths, (18%) were using pieces of cloth while (12.6%) were using reusable pads donated by NGOs. Majority of the girls (59.6%) had ever wanted to buy disposable pads in the past but were unable because their parents lacked the means to often give them money to buy the pads (84.4%), pads were unavailable in the

shops 6 (5.5%) and students were scared to buy the pads (10.1%). Worthy to note is that (31.9%) of girls missed school because of fear of staining their school uniforms while (15.9%) missed because of lack of sanitary pads. This is described in the narrative; *girls usually use these local cloths, because majority of their parents, they don't know these artificial pads. Only some educated parents buy for their children these artificial pads. Others, they say they cause diseases. Most of the girls here use cloths; they get some T.shirts, cut them into pieces and use these pieces during menstruation. After using, they throw them into the pit latrine (Participant I).*

The lack of sanitary pads was also echoed by another SWT who said; *'they use rugs which are dangerous to their lives. Because the rugs may be dirty, this may cause cervical cancer. The parents can't afford buying packets of pads this month at 3,000 then another month, when they don't have food, it is a burden. At times, they also use toilet paper which is not advisable' (Participant III).*

In all the 4 schools involved in the survey, none of them had a washroom equipped with water and soap to aid in menstrual hygiene. Though 2 schools had separate rooms to enable students to change pads, both did not provide adequate water and soap to enable students wash up during menstruation. Besides, the room provided by one of the schools could not offer privacy because it was incomplete without a roof.

Both schools provided girls with 5 litre jerricans to collect water from the nearby borehole and tap. Apart from the school where there was a tap near the 'safe room', the water source for the 2nd school was outside the school making it hard for girls to easily access during menstruation. It is no wonder that (21.9%) girls said they would go back home to clean themselves during menstruation. This affected their school attendance as SWT revealed that this was often done during school lesson hours. In addition, (15.3%) said they did not clean themselves during menstruation. This causes discomfort and increases on stigma associated with menstruation as one SWT stated; *'generally, we have poor sanitation for girls during menstruation. We lack facilities-we don't have soap and water for girls to clean themselves. We don't have the funds to provide that. The boys sometimes abuse girls during menstruation saying that they smell dirty blood. Which is true, menstrual blood does not smell good. It smells bad. Immediately someone notices that you have menstrual blood, it is not good' (Participant I).*

Nonetheless, there was an observation by the SWT of the school with a dedicated room for cleaning and changing pads during menstruation that they were generally better off in helping girls manage periods at school as described in the narration; *'.....we have a safe place. When a girl is in*

that period, she can go to that room, clean herself then she changes the pads. The girls are doing good and it has reduced on absenteeism in class. They come to school daily. They have a room where they can change, they have what to use. At least it has improved. But, we still have challenges because only 70 girls were provided with pads by a certain NGO.we need painkillers for abdominal pain and we still need some changing uniforms. Because when a girl's uniform has been stained, we don't have spares. We also need materials such as soap, basins and more pads' (Participant III).

Majority (68.2%) of students rated the pain experienced during menstruation as 5⁷ and above, (42.1%) said they don't do anything to reduce on the pain. However, there was a weak negative relationship between menstrual pain management and days missed due to menstruation (($r=-.227$, P value < 0.01). Besides, pain management (backache, headache and abdominal pains) was mentioned by (33.9%) of respondents as one of the most pressing challenges girls faced during menstruation. In addition, (26.1%) of adolescent girls who missed school last term said it was due to pain associated with menstruation, This implies that poor pain management during menstruation is an important factor affecting school attendance during menstruation. Efforts to improve pain management will positively impact on days lost due to menstruation.

5.1.3 Stigma associated with menstruation

Most female students (58.5%) reported to experiencing moderately internal stigma while 39 (21.3%) were experiencing severe internal stigma associated with menstruation. In addition, (23%) of the girls were experiencing external stigma while (9.8%) were experiencing severe external stigma associated with menstruation. Adolescent girls experienced more internal stigma as compared to external stigma associated with menstruation. This indicates that students stigmatized themselves more as opposed to stigma experienced from fellow students, teachers and other community members. This may be related to internalized negative cultural views and norms associated with menstruation as explained in the narrative: *'I usually tell girls that it is not good to show other people that you are in your periods. Immediately anybody sees that you are in your periods, they will minimize you. They are going to say that you are so dirty and will not want you to touch anything eaten. And it is true, because a woman is not clean during menstruation. Menstrual blood is dirty. Actually, a girl in menstruation should not associate with boys, because she is dirty' (Participant I).* This implies that some of the internal stigma associated with menstruation was being fuelled by SWT who held negative views about menstrual blood and menstruation as a whole.

⁷ Pain was rated from 1-10, as 1 was the least pain experienced and 10 was the worst pain.

Furthermore, a SMT had fears about who should talk about menstruation in school as he felt boys should not be involved in menstruation. He had reservations about training boys about menstrual health as a measure of reducing stigma associated with it. This is described in the narrative; *‘Menstruation needs to be handled in a way that is special. Not every person should talk about menstruation. If everybody is given a chance, for example, interact one on one with girls, some people may add in their things. Menstruation needs to be handled by a few selected people who are trusted. Like me and the SWT’ (Participant II)*. It is therefore not surprising that (83.1%) of respondents felt that girls should not discuss menstruation with boys while (50.3%) said they feel embarrassed to speak about menstruation with other people. Contrary to what the SMT felt, (19.1%) of girls reported that some students and teachers say abusing words about their bodies during menstruation. This implies that though teachers including SWT and SMT may be seen as the best individuals to speak with about menstruation, they instead stigmatize girls causing fear and social isolation. This may explain why (32.8%) of girls said they feel confused, scared/worried and have no one to talk to, so they run back home/stay home. It was further explained by a SWT; *‘girls stay at home always when they are in their periods. This affects their academic performance. Some miss because they fear teachers, some come and we help them. Some fear to approach the teachers’ (Participant V)*.

Overall (both internal and external stigma), (54.6%) of adolescent girls were moderately stigmatized while (12.6%) were severely stigmatized. Stigma affected socialization of students as (76.5%) said they withdrew from other students during menstruation which causes stress to some of them and they felt lonely.

5.1.4 Menstruation and school attendance

Survey findings revealed that (37.7%) of adolescent girls missed school last term due to menstrual periods. Of these, (37.7%) missed 3 days, (21.7%) missed 2 days, (10.1%) 6 days, (8.7%) 4 days, 5 (7.2%) 1 day, (4.3%) 9 days while (1.4%) missed 5, 7, 8, 12, 15, 16 and 18 days respectively.

Internal and external stigma had a hand in leading students to stay home during menstruation. Of the 69 students who missed days due to menstruation, (73.9%) of them experienced moderate-severe stigma. Furthermore, fear of staining their school uniforms due to lack of adequate pads was also a major cause of days missed due to menstruation. Cross tabulation showed that the 23 girls who missed school due to fear of staining their school uniform lost a total of 121 days (average of 5.3 days per girl) last term.

However, the overall average number of days missed due to menstruation was 4 days among the 69 students. This negatively affected academic performance of (68.1%) of the girls who missed school. Most of them (51.1%) said they found it hard to cope up with other students when they missed school often, (44.6%) missed learning about vital information while (4.3%) said they missed vital explanations from teachers. This was further explained by the narrative; *‘when girls begin menstruation, they don’t come to school. Some feel inferior. Besides, when a girl is menstruating and her dress is soiled, the attention span to the teacher will be very small. She will pay attention to herself and the patch on her dress. She will feel inferior and her academics will be affected’* (Participant IV). On how the days missed due to menstruation affect girls, a SWT reported that *‘..... according to how we teach them, the boys are often in the first positions, the girls are not doing as well as the boys. They are mediocres’* (Participant IV).

5.2 Conclusion

Although most girls had ever been taught about menstruation even before they started their periods, the information provided was inadequate. As such, many students had self-stigmatizing beliefs and practices which affected their proper management of menstrual health and hygiene.

To manage menstrual flow, less than half of the girls surveyed were using disposable pads. Others were using pieces of cloth, cotton wool, reusable pads and wearing two panties. More than half had wanted to buy sanitary pads in the past but were unable because their parents could not afford them.

Three out of ten adolescent girls missed on average, 4 days each of schooling last term due to menstruation. Majority of them missed due to lack of adequate sanitary materials like pads, poor management of pain, stigma associated with menstruation and poor sanitary facilities at school.

5.3 Recommendations

- 1) There is need to conduct health education among students about menstruation so as to improve on their knowledge while tackling several misconceptions. Trainings should also be conducted among SWT/SMT and other teachers so as to encourage on provision of correct information and support during menstruation.
- 2) There is need to train adolescent girls, SWT/SMT and boys about production of homemade reusable pads so as to reduce on days lost due to lack of sanitary pads and stigma associated.
- 3) CCUg should engage parents during PTA meetings and encourage them to provide the necessary support to their adolescent girls during menstruation.

- 4) It is important that male students are educated about menstruation and encouraged to be understanding and supportive to girls instead of fueling stigma.
- 5) CCUG should plan for projects to improve access to privacy (washrooms) and water and soap so as to facilitate timely cleaning and changing of pads by adolescent girls and teachers during menstruation.