



Eastern Africa Journal of Contemporary Research (EAJCR)

Providing Sanitary Towels to Teenage Girls: Implications for Retention and Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Narok North Sub-County, Kenya

Nkuraiya Beatrice and Kibera W. Lucy

Article information:

To cite this article:

Beatrice, N. & Kibera, L.W. (2019). Providing Sanitary Towels to Teenage Girls: Implications for Retention and Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Narok North Sub-County, Kenya. *Eastern Africa Journal of Contemporary Research*, 1(2), 126-136.

For Authors

If you would like to publish your conceptual/theoretical and empirical research articles, case studies and book reviews with EAJCR, please use for authors information about how to write your work and submission guidelines. Please, visit <http://www.eajcr.org/for-authors/>

About Eastern Africa Journal of Contemporary Research (EAJCR)

The Eastern Africa Journal of Contemporary Research (EAJCR) (ISSN: 2663-7367 (*Online*) & ISSN: 2663-7359 (*Print*)) is both an online (open access) and print double-blind peer-reviewed quarterly journal published by the Directorate of Research and Publications of Greta University, Kenya.

EAJCR aims at advancing the frontiers of knowledge by publishing contemporary multidisciplinary conceptual/ theoretical and empirical research articles as well as case studies and book reviews.

Providing Sanitary Towels to Teenage Girls: Implications for Retention and Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Narok North Sub-County, Kenya

Nkuraiya Beatrice

School of Education, University of Nairobi, Kenya
Email: bnkuraiya2012@gmail.com

Kibera W. Lucy

School of Education, University of Nairobi, Kenya
Email: proflucykibera@gmail.com

Abstract

This study sought to establish whether teenage girls who had been provided with sanitary towels were more likely to complete primary school and if doing so also enhanced their academic performance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and focus group discussions from randomly selected 110 class seven girl pupils from 16 primary schools in the Central Division of Narok North Subcounty who had benefited from a sanitary towels provision project. The findings show that school retention and academic performance of teenage girls who benefited from the provision of sanitary towels was better than that of their counterparts who were not been provided with the sanitary towels. The study recommends that primary school administrators need to encourage parents to make available sanitary towels to their daughters so as to retain them in schools during their menstrual period as this directly improves their academic performance. The government is also urged to avail sanitary towels to girls in primary schools just as it provides textbooks to such schools as this will increase accessibility of education to teenage girls in primary schools consequently enhancing the girl's potential to meaningfully participate in socio-economic and political affairs of the society.

Key Words: Sanitary Towels Provision, Retention of Girls in Schools, Academic Performance

1. Introduction

The teenage phase of life or adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Majority of individuals in this phase are generally between 14 and 17 years of age. Such individuals experience various changes including physiological changes depicted in form of ability to reproduce and increased body size (O'Connor & Kovacs, 2003). This transition is related to menstruation among girls which ushers them into



adulthood. Unfortunately, the changes affect girls from challenged socio-economic background negatively since their families do not have sufficient resources to purchase sanitary towels for use during the menstrual cycle. Which may result into girls dropping out of schools. Consequently, Gross Enrolment Rate of boys in the primary schools has surpassed that of girls in most countries (UNESCO, 2011; UNESCO, 2012; EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012).

During menstrual periods girls face shame, embarrassment and anxiety when they stain their clothes where they cannot afford menstrual hygiene products (FAWE, 2006). Additionally, Muvea (2011) found that unreachability of menses products undermines the effectiveness of uptake of family planning amenities. This is occasioned by the fact that girls who do not have the funds for sanitary towels are usually put at risk of being cheated by men who entice them with finances to buy the sanitary pads after which they demand sexual involvement for their moneys. Ultimately, poor girls find themselves in sexual relationships in exchange for money to buy sanitary towels. This leads to unplanned pregnancies and related dangers of child health and maternal difficulties because adolescent girls are not able to safely give birth to babies at such early years.

In the financial year 2011/2012, the Kenyan government allocated the Ministry of Education KShs. 240 million for provision of sanitary pads to teenage girls in public schools. It was envisioned to help 443,858 girls in public primary schools in selected regions. Nevertheless, the money was not sufficient to procure the requirements for the 2.6 million girls in secondary and primary school levels even though there is evidence that provision of sanitary towels to girls has positive influence on school attendance (Dolan *et al.* 2014; Sumpter & Torondel, 2013). Besides improving the girls' educational attendance, sanitary products also make girls feel more comfortable and secure at school. Consequently, their academic performance is improved.

Girls who do not access basic hygiene requirements in terms of sanitary towels while in school feel uneasy to intermingle with peers freely for fear of soiling their clothes during menstrual period. The situation is so desperate to the extent that some girls use cow dung, pieces of cloths and occasionally leaves from trees so as to stop blood flow during menstrual cycle. The challenge faced by many girls makes them embarrassed and nervous resulting in most of them missing school during the menstrual period for between 3 to 4 days per month. The effect of regular absenteeism results in lower educational accomplishment and often leads to dropping out of school.



It is therefore important to examine the influence of provision of sanitary pads on retention of girls in public primary schools and academic performance of girls who had benefited from the provision of sanitary towel project.

1.2 An Overview of Narok County

Narok County is located in Maasai land within the Rift Valley region of Kenya. It is made up of Narok South, Narok North and Kilgoris constituencies. To the south of the county is the People's Republic of Tanzania. The county borders Kajiado county in the East, Bomet, Kisii and Migori counties in the West and Nakuru county to the north. Narok South Constituency is the biggest with a coverage area of 10,412.1 Km², while Narok North covers 4,662.7 Km². Kilgoris on the West of the Narok county covers 2,858.3 Km². The whole County covers 17,944 kilometers square. (Narok County Strategic Plan, 2012). Based on the 2009 Kenya National Census, the county has a population size of 850,920 residents with the Maasai ethnic group being the majority. The population of this county has 53% is population comprising of young people below 14 years. Narok county has a higher population progression at 3.3 percent per annum compared to the average national population growth of 2.2 percent (Republic of Kenya, 2009).

According to County Education Report (2014), Narok County had 496 primary schools with a pupil to teacher ratio of 33:1 with an enrolment of 175,409 pupils. There is indication that more girls are being registered in schools (County Education Report, 2015). This might be credited to the provision of the sanitary towels to the girls and existence of Free Primary Education.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to establish whether the provision of sanitary towels to teenage girls in public primary schools in Narok Central Division of Narok North Sub-county has improved their school retention and academic performance. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Identify the challenges experienced by teenage girls during the menstrual period in primary schools in Narok North Subcounty
- ii. Assess the methods used by the teenage girls in the primary schools to manage menstrual flow
- iii. Establish the key factors contributing to school dropout among teenage girls in primary schools in Narok North Subcounty
- iv. Examine the effects of menstrual flow on school attendance of teenage girls in primary schools in Narok North Subcounty



- v. Examine the contribution of sanitary towels provision to the teenage girls school involvement

2. Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study since it enabled description of situations, opinions, demographic information and perceptions of the participants. Target population was made up of 2280 girls in class seven in fifty two public primary schools in Central Division of Narok North Sub-County. The research sampled 16 primary schools that had benefited from sanitary towels provision project. A total of 110 girls were randomly selected to participate in the study. A structured questionnaire as well as Focus Group Discussions were used to gather information from girls. Data was analyzed and presented in tables in form of frequencies and percentages.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Background Descriptive

3.1.1 Teenage Girls Demographic Profile

Information on the girls' demographics was gathered for the purposes of providing characteristics of the pupils targeted by the study. The demographic data for class 7 girls are presented in Table 1 by their current age and age at first menstruation.

Table 1: The age of girls by current age and age at first menstruation

Demographic factors	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Current Age	Below 10	3	3
	10 years	12	11
	12 years	60	54
	13 years	23	21
	14 years	7	6
	Above 14	5	5
Total		110	100
Age at first menstruation	9 years	0	0
	10 years	6	7
	11 years	12	11
	12 years	71	64
	13 years	11	10
	14 years	6	5
	15 years	4	3
Total		110	100



The findings in Table 1 indicate that the majority of respondents (54%) were currently aged 12 years while 21% of them were 13 years old. Some 7% and 11% of the girls stated that they experienced their first menstruation at age of 10 and 11 years respectively. An overwhelming majority of girls (64%) experienced their first menstruation at age of 12 years. Since most of the girls get menstruation when they are in class 6, two years before they sit for their final primary examinations (KCPE), it means challenges that come with menstruation are likely to affect their academic performance. The fear of soiling their clothes due to lack of sanitary towels is likely to make some girls opt not to attend school during menstruation.

3.1.2 Parents Profile

After capturing the pupils' data that of their parents has been analyzed in terms of level of education attained, occupation and family size. These variables are indicators of socio-economic status and also parental financial resources. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Background Information on the Pupil's Parents

Demographic factors	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Parents level of formal education	No formal education	7	6
	Primary level	12	11
	Secondary level	14	13
	Diploma level	59	53
	Degree level	18	17
Total		110	100
Type of parents' occupation	Salaried	19	17
	Self-employed	63	57
	Unemployed	28	26
Total		110	100
Number of children in pupil's family	2 children	21	19
	3 children	61	55
	4 children	10	9
	Over 5 children	18	17
Total		110	100
Total		110	100

The findings in Table 2 indicate that 53% of parents held a diploma qualification as their highest level of education while only 17% had degree. This is an indication that a lot of girls came from parents who were moderately educated. Further, 57% of the



respondent's parent were self-employed while 26% were jobless. This suggests that most of the parents do not have sufficient income and consequently might find it challenging to afford sanitary towels for the girls given that self-employment in most cases in developing countries does not earn sufficient and reliable income. It was again found that 55% of the pupils came from families with 3 children while 9% and 18% came from families with 4 and 5 children respectively. This implied that most of the parents were unable to buy sanitary towels for their girls because they had fairly large families competing for scarce resources coupled with the fact that the majority of them did not have reliable sources of income.

3.2 Challenges Experienced by Teenage Girls during Menstrual Period

Girl pupils were further asked to provide information about the challenges they experienced during their menses. The analysis is contained in Table 3.

Table 3: Challenges experienced by girls during menstrual period

Challenges	Frequently		Rarely		Not at all		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Irritation of skin	19	17	54	49	37	34	110	100
Feeling insecure	14	13	34	31	62	56	110	100
Soiling of pants	9	8	21	19	80	73	110	100
Soiling outside clothing	8	7	12	11	90	82	110	100
Nasty scent	34	31	71	64	5	4	110	100
Headache	90	82	13	12	7	6	110	100
Cramps	89	81	16	15	5	4	110	100
Swellings	28	25	54	49	28	25	110	100
Pains on the back	94	85	9	8	7	6	110	100
Grumpiness irritability	88	80	21	19	1	1	110	100
Hopelessness	65	59	31	28	14	13	110	100

The results in Table 3 show that 85% of the girls frequently experienced back pains, headache (82%), cramps (81%), grumpiness or irritability (80%), hopelessness (59%) and nasty odor (31%). These results seem to suggest that girls also require medical attention in addition to making sanitary towels available to them. It is important to note that inaccessibility of menstrual merchandises frequently caused anxiety and embarrassment conditions that are not conducive to learning. These results are similar to those of FAWE, (2006).



3.3 Methods of Managing Menstrual Flow Among Teenage Girls

The research also sought to find out how girls managed their menstruation flow. The results on various ways used by girls to manage the menstrual are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Methods of managing menses flow

Different items used to manage menses	Always		Rarely		Not at all		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reusable Manufactured Sanitary Pads	13	11	49	45	48	44	110	100
Hygienic disposable Sanitary Pads	27	25	62	56	21	19	110	100
Sponges	23	21	66	60	21	19	110	100
Rags/Old Clothes	61	55	45	41	13	12	110	100
Cotton Wool	52	47	37	34	12	11	110	100
Tissue paper	12	1	43	39	55	50	110	100

The findings in Table 4 show that 55% of the girls always used rags or old clothes to manage menstrual flow followed by 47% of those who used cotton wool. It is important to note that use of disposable sanitary towels is the best in the management of menstrual flow because they are absorbent and guarantee proper hygiene.

3.4 Factors Contributing to School Drop out

When teenage girls were asked why some of their colleagues were not attending school, they highlighted the challenges indicated in Table 5

Table 5: Reasons why some teenage girls had to drop out of school

Reasons	n	%
Cannot afford sanitary towels	38	54
Shyness and fear of soiling their clothes due to menses	11	16
Cannot afford basic needs	21	30
Total	70	100

The findings in Table 5 indicate that more than half of girls (54%) said that their colleagues dropped out of school as a result of lack of sanitary towels while (30%) said it was due to insufficiency of basic needs. A few (16%) of the girls stated that pupils dropped out of school due to uneasiness they experienced prompted by fear of soiling their clothes during menstruation. This seems to imply that accessibility of sanitary towels would contribute towards retention of girls in schools.



UNESCO (2009) had projected that one (1) in ten (10) African teenage girls avoided school in times of menses. It is probable that the girls might drop out of school as a result of issues linked to menstruation due to unaffordability of the sanitary towels, social-cultural prohibitions connected to menses and the practice of silence culture in nearly all African belief system.

3.5 Effects of Menstrual Period on Girl Pupils School Attendance

The study also sought to find out the number of days girls missed school per month as a result of menstrual flow. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Number of days girls missed school due to menstruation per month

Days	N	%
None	5	3
Once	6	5
Twice	10	9
Thrice	58	55
Four times	19	17
Above 5 days	12	11
Total	110	100

As the results in Table 6 show, 55% of the girl respondents were absent from school for three days in a given month because of menstruation followed by (17%) who were absent for 4 days, and (11%) for 5 days. The results agree with those of Neamat, Maher, Nadia and Eman (2011) who observed that lack of sanitary facilities, sanitary wear and adequate privacy kept girls out of school.

3.6 Extent of Sanitary Towels Provision to the Teenage Girls School Involvement

The study also sought to assess the effect of provision of sanitary towels on the girl's academic performance and participation in co-curricular activities. The analysis is presented in Table 7.

The data in Table 7 indicates that 56% of the girl participants strongly agreed that menstruation was negatively influencing class performance while 67% strongly agreed that they remained at home throughout the menstruation period thus jeopardizing their academic work. Additionally, 74% of the girls strongly believed that sanitary wears would positively affect their academic attainment while another 73% felt that more girls would be in schools rather than being at home during menses if sanitary towels were



provided. Further, 75% of the girls were in agreement that sanitary wears had improved their engagement in co-curricular activities.

Table 7: Extent of sanitary towels provision to the teenage girls' school involvement

Opinions on usefulness of sanitary wears	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
When girls experience menses, the class performance is affected negatively	61	56	17	15	23	21	9	8	110	100
The staying of girls at home during menses affects their academic performance	73	67	25	23	4	3	8	7	110	100
The sanitary towels provision to girls has positively influenced their academic performance	80	74	16	14	7	6	7	6	110	100
Sanitary wears improved school attendance	79	73	15	13	9	8	7	6	110	100
Provision of sanitary wears increased school retention	83	75	20	19	7	6	0	0	110	100
Providing sanitary towels assisted girls' participation in extra-curriculum activities	95	87	6	5	9	8	0	0	110	100

Finally, during the focus group discussions, girls acknowledged the positive role sanitary pads played in enhancing retention of girls in schools. They also said that lack of sanitary pads influenced their participation in class negatively since they were in constant fear that they may soil their clothes, which often resulted to ridicule by their male classmates. Girls further agreed that provision of sanitary towels had increased their school attendance. The girls proposed that male teachers and male pupils ought to be enlightened on the socio-emotional needs of the female pupils associated with menstruation. The school management ought to make sure that the girls undergoing menstruation are sufficiently given sanitary pads, medical care and sensitivity when handling them during this period.



4. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the study findings, it can be concluded that girls who benefit from the sanitary towels provision perform better academically compared to their colleagues who are not provided with the same. This is due to the fact that girls would not miss school due to menstruation and that they would concentrate better in class without fear of soiling their clothes and being mocked by fellow pupils.

Informed by the results of the study the following recommendations are made: First, schools management should enlighten the parents on the significance of provision of sanitary towels to girl children in order to retain them in schools. This can be conducted during meetings between parents and teachers. Second, the government should provide funding for purchase of adequate sanitary towels. Third, head teachers ought to encourage other teachers to inform girls on the proper ways of managing their menses. This is likely to boost girls' confidence in participating in academic work as well as in co-curricular activities. Finally, male teachers ought to handle girls with care and should also be sensitive to their needs since menstruation occasionally makes girls moody and sick.

References

- Dolan, C.S., Ryus, C.R., Dopson, S., Montagometry, P., & Scott, L. (2014). A blind spot in girls Education: Menarche and its website of exclusion in *Ghana. Journal of International Development*.
- FAWE (2006). Experiences in Creating a Conducive Environment for Girls in School: FAWE Centre of Excellence.
- Kenya, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2014). *County Education Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.go.ke/index.php/downloads>
- Kenya, Narok County Government (2012). Strategic Plan. Retrieved from www.narok.go.ke/com
- Muvea, F. (2011). Menstruation a Hindrance to Girls Education in Kenya. *Ezine Articles. com*.
- Neamat A, Maher S, Nadia H, Eman R (2011). Assessment of dysmenorrhea and menstrual hygiene practices among adolescent girls in some nursing schools at *EL-Minia governorate, Egypt. J Am Sci.*; 7(9):216–223.



O'Connor, R. C., & O'Connor, D. B. (2003). Predicting hopelessness and psychological distress: The role of perfectionism and coping. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50(3), 362-372.

Sumpster, C. & Torondel, B. 2013. A Systematic Review of the Health and Social Effects of Menstrual Hygiene Management. PLoS ONE, 8, e62004.

UNESCO (2011). GLOBAL EDUCATION DIGEST 2011: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World: Paris: UNESCO

UNESCO (2012). The Education for All Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO

UNESCO. (2009). *EFA Global Monitoring Report: The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

