

Menstruation and School Attendance in Rural Western Kenya

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Introduction

- Numerous studies have demonstrated significant gender gaps in both primary and secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Girls have both decreased retention rates and poorer performance in school compared to boys in the same class.
- Major causative factors behind post-pubescent adolescent girls dropping out of school include gender inequalities and poverty.¹
- Additionally, there is a strong link between poor sanitation and low school attendance in rural regions.¹
- Management of menstruation is a major factor contributing to decreased school attendance in adolescent girls. This includes both obtaining menstrual hygiene supplies as well as the management of dysmenorrhea, or pain associated with menstruation.¹
- Studies in rural areas in other developing nations have shown that dysmenorrhea is a major problem contributing to problems with concentration, poor performance and absenteeism.²
- Within these studies, many girls report dysmenorrhea but only a minority seek treatment. It was found that most girls consider severe pain a normal part of menstruation.²

Objectives

- Observe ongoing public health studies at KEMRI
- Understand the impact of interventional clinical studies in a rural setting



Ongoing Study

- An ongoing study is being completed by principle investigator, Penelope Phillips-Howard of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. The study is done at the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) and enrolls girls who attend schools within Siaya County, a district in rural Western Kenya.
- There are approximately 3000 girls enrolled in the study between ages 15-19.
- The study examines menstrual solutions. Enrolled girls fill out surveys with a series of questions included but not limited to questions concerning menstrual hygiene and school attendance. The girls also fill out calendars indicating which days of school they missed with provided reasoning behind the absence.



Our Role

After learning about the study, we were assigned to utilize pilot data to examine the relationship between school absences and reported pain/severe cramps from menstruation. Our hypothesis is that due to poor pain management, adolescent girls have increased absenteeism from school.

Further Steps

Immediate next steps include analyzing pilot data by using statistical tests to examine the correlation between pain and school absences.

In the future, the data set will be used to examine the impact of interventional menstrual solutions on rates of HIV transmission.

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