Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools: A Multi-Setting Approach for Applied Learning and Improved Practice

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Background
Menstrual hygiene management is a critical issue that has been largely ignored in both public health and development. Inability to effectively manage menstruation can lead to infection, reluctance to participate in activities, physical discomfort, and embarrassment.

Difficulties managing menstruation in resource-poor settings may impair both the quantity and quality of education girls receive. Specifically, menstruation may lead girls to miss school, become distracted in class, or modify participation in school-related activities.

Objectives
1) To investigate and understand the range of challenges faced by school girls during menstruation across a range of settings;
2) To compare and contrast the varied challenges and determinants across settings to identify points of intervention;
3) To inform a set of school-based interventions that can be implemented and sustained at scale across a range of settings.

Methods
- In-depth interviews (IDIs) with girls;
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with girls, boys, mothers;
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with teachers, school administrators, community health workers, etc.
- Observations of school (WASH) facilities.
- All IDIs, FGDs, and KIIs conducted by local, trained research assistants (RAs) in the language that participants feel most comfortable speaking.

Goals
- To be the first formative research program to systematically investigate menstruation related challenges across a range of settings—Bolivia, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone—and to apply knowledge gained to inform school-based programs;
- To strengthen the relationship between Emory and UNICEF;
- To build new partnerships with local and international NGOs, and government ministries.

Communities Served
Primary and secondary schools in:
Bolivia: Tacopaya and Independencia Districts, Cochabamba
Philippines: Palanas, Balud, Milagros and Masbate City, Masbate; Sultan Kudarat; South Cotobato
Rwanda: Gicumbi District
Sierra Leone: East and West Freetown

Project Timeline
February-June: Draft research tools, organize research logistics
June-July: In-country activity planning, desk review
August: RA Training; Piloting; Data collection;
September-October: Data collection; preliminary analysis
November: Stakeholder meetings for feedback on preliminary recommendations, revision of recommendations
December: In-country presentations of preliminary findings and recommendations

January-February 2013: Finalize report for UNICEF and Partners
*Activities in Sierra Leone had a shorter time frame (July-September).
**Students in country from June/July through August.

Progress to Date
Bolivia: 5 schools, 10 girls IDIs, 5 girls FGDs, 10 KIIs, 5 facility observations
Philippines: 8 schools in Masbate: 19 girls IDIs, 6 girls FGDs, 3 boys FGDs, 3 moms FGDs, 18 KIIs, 8 facility observations
Rwanda: 6 schools in Gicumbi: 12 girls IDIs, 6 girls FGDs, 2 boys FGDs, 6 facility observations
Sierra Leone: 8 schools in Freetown: 20 girls IDIs, 10 girls FGDs, 8 KIIs, and 8 facility observations

Continuing Work And Next Steps
- Complete data collection in each country
- Perform country-specific and cross-country analyses
- Create school based interventions for each country
- Complete cross-country report for UNICEF

Project Partners
- Emory Research Fellows: Jeanne Long (Bolivia), Jacqueline Haver (Philippines), Sarah Verian (Rwanda), Alexandra Fehr (Sierra Leone)
- Environmental and Global Health Departments at the Rollins School of Public Health and the Center for Global Safe Water, Emory
- UNICEF New York, Bolivia, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone
- Plan International Philippines, Fundación Sodis (Bolivia), Oxfam Sierra Leone, CARL, ACE, Dip, CORD-5L
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