

# Menstrual Hygiene Management for Girls in Kenya: An Evaluation of the Always School Program

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## Introduction

- Evidence shows (UNESCO, 2017) there is a wide-ranging set of positive outcomes associated with good menstrual hygiene management (MHM), including increased confidence, improved health, and increased employment opportunities.
- Good menstrual hygiene management consists of girls, and the communities in which they live, understanding menstruation and how to manage it safely and effectively, whilst having access to the period protection and WASH and disposal facilities they need.
- Clearly, significant barriers to good menstrual hygiene management persist across Kenya. The purpose of our research was to better understand what MHM barriers were stopping girls going to school and what impact providing MHM/Life Skills education to girls in Kenya would have.
- We hope the subsequent report would provide useful information and recommendations to stakeholders, such as education and health leaders tasked with overseeing instructional matters, as it provides the program evaluation data and student level assessment data needed to guide policy decision-making.

## Methods

- The Qualtrics Experience Management Platform was used to record survey responses in February 2018 from the following Kenyan Counties: Bungoma, Embu, Kajiado, Kakamega, Kiambu, Kisii, Kisumu, Machakos, Meru, Migori, Mombasa, Muranga, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nyeri, Othaya, Tharaka-Nithi and Trans-Nzoia.
- A total N of three hundred sixty-two (362) girls aged 10-16 participated.
- Inclusion criteria: participation in the Always School Program one school year prior to survey participation.
- The Always School Program helps girls aged 10-16 learn about puberty and menstruation via trained nurses and teachers who give a 45-60 minute talk. The girls learn about health and hygiene, changes in their bodies, critical thinking and decision-making, character strengths, relationships, and the importance of being able to communicate openly with parents and teachers. The trainers also demonstrate how to use and dispose of the sanitary pad.
- Research team members entered the data into a cell phone survey format to record the responses. Names and individual identifying information were not recorded. Parental consent was obtained.
- Tests for significance involved a comparison of proportions "N-1" Chi-squared test as recommended by Campbell (2007). The confidence interval was calculated according to the recommended method given by Altman et al. (2000).

## Results

**Result #1: There are many MHM related factors that impact girls' attendance at school.**

Cramps (41%), embarrassment (26%) and lack of sanitary pads (23%) are the top MHM reasons why girls miss school



**Result #2: Learning about MHM/Life Skills help girls feel more relaxed and more confident.**

- A significant number of girls (94%) felt the Always School Program provided them with new information that was not provided in class ( $P < 0.0001$ ).
- Participants were more relaxed about menstruation and puberty because of the puberty education they received ( $P < 0.0001$ ).
- Participants felt more confident about themselves and their bodies because of what they learned from the Always Program, with 92% of the girls agreeing their self-confidence increased ( $P < 0.0001$ ).

**Result #3: Learning about MHM/Life Skills at school enabled girls to be able to talk more openly about topics related to their bodies with their teachers, parents, and guardians.**

81% of girls said they were able to talk more openly with their teachers, and 90% said they were able to talk more openly with their parents or guardians.

## Advocacy Impact

- There is a mandate for the education sector to teach girls puberty education, including life skills and strength based learning.
- Contrary to the education sector's tendency to treat menstruation as a private matter, schools have the potential to provide health, hygiene, sanitation and puberty education to ensure a positive impact on both girls and boys.
- Given the prevalence of girls missing school due to embarrassment, lack of period products and lack of toilets for girls, advocacy efforts should highlight holistic MHM interventions to ensure a broader educational effort focus on creating a culture of open dialogue about menstruation and gender equality throughout Kenya.
- Public-Private partnerships have a role in improving MHM and the provision of period products and WASH/disposal facilities, to help Kenya achieve the wider social and economic development goals the educational system has the potential to deliver.

