

Keeping Ethiopian Girls in School a Pad at a Time



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BACKGROUND

- The United Nations Millennium Declaration mandates that, by 2015, “children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education”.
- However, across the developing world, millions of girls miss up to 50 days of school per year due to problems related to menstruation.
- Critical factors include lack of adequate sanitation facilities, unaffordable or inappropriately designed sanitary materials, and other sociocultural factors.
- There is evidence to show that girls’ attendance increases once hygiene, water-sanitation facilities and knowledge about menstruation are available.

CLINICAL SERVICE TRIPS

- After a visit to Ethiopia in 2009, it was learned that one of the greatest unmet needs was keeping girls in school.
- Nursing students from Columbia University made and evaluated several different designs of reusable cotton pads.
- The author returned in 2010 to visit six secondary schools in Mekelle and Addis Ababa and conducted workshops for teachers and students in the creation of reusable sanitary pads and menstruation management.
- By the end of the first visit, almost 300 high school girls, Health Extension Workers, and midwifery students had made a series of reusable sanitary pads.
- To date over 3000 have been taught to make and maintain reusable sanitary pads as well as manage menstruation.
- In 2013, the author returned to employ focus group discussion with the same schools and students.



TRAINING

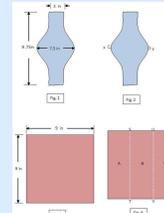
Girls During Lesson



Colleagues Prepare Material



Sample Pad Design



Girl with Finished Pad



- **To remove the stains:**
 - Immediately rinse pads in cold water or soak them in cold salted water overnight
 - Afterward, the water is good for plants secondary to the high iron content
- **To kill any bacteria:**
 - Boil the pads in soapy water: 5 minutes
 - Bleach will remove stains but kills less germs than boiling
 - Remove from boiling water and rinse in cold water
- **Hang to dry in the sun**
 - For privacy, cover pads with light towel



STUDY PROCEDURES

- A focus group discussion was employed to explore the issues Ethiopian school girls face during their menstrual cycle.
- 6-8 girls, aged 10-19, were chosen from each of the six schools utilized during the clinical service trips and previously educated on menstruation management.
- The focus group moderators collected information through recorded discussion and questionnaires to help develop policies that will improve menstrual management needs in school and communities.
- Experts in health education and development will be invited to evaluate the outcomes of the working groups and make recommendations for next steps.

FOCUS GROUPS QUESTIONS

Selected Focus Group Questions

- Do you understand the biological reason of why women menstruate?
- Do you miss school during your menstrual cycle?
- Have you used commercially available sanitary pads?
- Have you been taught to make reusable cloth sanitary pads and underwear?
- Have you taught other girls how to make their own pads and underwear?
- Do you know how to sanitize your reusable sanitary pads?
- Did you receive training on menstruation management?
- Do you feel you have support at school during your menstrual cycle?
- What type of toileting facilities (latrines) do you have at your school?
- What would make managing your menses easier?

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