



International Network for School Social Work

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Girls, School and Menstruation

Successes in girls' education

Target 3a of the Millennium Development Goals is: *Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015*. In many countries primary and secondary enrollment rates are now the same for girls and boys. Countries have made improving the education of girls a prioritized goal for development, acknowledging that better educated women are healthier, raise healthier children, reduce poverty and contribute more to the national economy. Numerous International Non Government Organizations (INGOs) have helped, contributing many and varied interventions around the world. By 2015 gender parity in elementary education had been achieved in many countries and is close to being achieved in the rest of the world. In secondary education gender parity is getting closer, although it is still high in some regions, especially in South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/oosc-data-release-2015.aspx>.

Why girls drop out of school

While progress has been dramatic over the last few years, there are still 62 million girls out of school, half of whom are adolescents, and girls continue to lag behind boys in completing school in some low-income countries. Family issues such as poverty, the need to work either at home or at a job and inability to cover school costs contribute to adolescents of both sexes dropping out. Additional factors impact girls: early marriage, pregnancy and attitudes towards educating girls. Recently the practical difficulty for school-girls of managing menstrual hygiene has had more attention, along with attention to hygiene in general. For example, World Toilet Day on November 19 brought attention to the fact that 2.5 billion people in the world do not have access to proper sanitation.

Menstruation and school

In the early days at secondary school girls start to menstruate. Ideally this becomes a normal part of a girl becoming independent and taking more control of her education: packing her own school lunch, completing homework and being ready with menstrual hygiene supplies should be routine. About 70% of the readers of this newsletter are women and many will remember the necessity of being prepared to handle menstruation at school and also the anxiety that went along with it. In developed countries most girls will be equipped from home with disposable pads or tampons, but for many girls in many countries there is inadequate guidance on handling menstruation, and

worse still there are inadequate means of coping with the challenge. If there is no money to buy hygiene supplies or if pads are simply unavailable, girls either resort to unhygienic materials such as rags or newspaper or they stay home. They often end up dropping out simply from the fear of menstruating at school without any hygiene supplies or from missing too many days of school due to menstruation.

Menstrual hygiene is a concern for school social work

School social workers need to be involved in menstrual hygiene to protect the health of girls and to enable them to stay in school. Here are some of the issues that need attention and some resources for developing intervention:

- **Educating girls about menstruation** so that they can manage menstruation with privacy, safety and dignity. A useful resource is Menstruation Hygiene Day <http://www.menstrualhygieneday.org>, celebrated every year on May 28. It is a global platform that brings stake-holders together to increase awareness and promote menstrual hygiene. WASH <http://www.wash-united.org> is the international secretariat for Menstrual Hygiene Day.
- **Promoting installation and maintenance of toilets at schools** so that girls have a hygienic place to manage their menstrual needs, with a separate toilet block for girls, locking doors and facilities for hand-washing. Water Aid <http://www.wateraidamerica.org> is one of the organizations that helps. Watch the video to see how clean toilets and water help girls <http://www.wateraidamerica.org/our-approach>.
- **Providing clean water and facilities for hand-washing** promotes health and hygiene and relieves girls of the drudgery of fetching water. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) works with UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools program to improve sanitation https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CFS_WASH_E_web.pdf in schools in Africa, Asia and Central America.
- **Providing menstrual hygiene products** and the means for laundering them is a vital part of keeping girls in school, keeping them healthy and managing their lives with dignity. There are now a variety of solutions provided with the help of INGO's. The Afripads company is based in Kampala, Uganda and works with NGO's to deliver reusable, comfortable menstrual pads to girls around the world <http://www.afripads.com>. Days for Girls is a non-profit organization that supplies complete menstrual hygiene kits with instructions to girls <http://www.daysforgirls.org/whats-in-a-kit>. These are just some of the NGO's working on keeping girls supplied with menstrual hygiene products.



en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloth_menstrual_pad

Practical help for schools

Menstrual Hygiene Management TOOLKIT

http://www.washplus.org/sites/default/files/mhm_toolkit2015.pdf

WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education

[https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/MHM_Booklet_Final_HR\(3\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/MHM_Booklet_Final_HR(3).pdf)

Puberty Education and Menstrual Hygiene Management

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002267/226792e.pdf>