

## **45th Biennial Convention (16-20 November 2019)**

### **Keeping Girls in School During Menses: Partnerships to Enhance Local and Global Health Outcomes**

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#### **Interprofessional and Global Collaborations Keeping Girls in School during Menses: Partnerships to Enhance Local and Global Health Outcomes**

Menarche for many girls in the developing world is a precursor to the end of their formal education. The United Nations Declaration of 2000 resolved that all children, boys and girls everywhere would complete primary school by the year 2015 (United Nations, 2000). By 2015 enrollment in primary school in Sub-Saharan Africa had reached 91%, from 83% in 2000 nonetheless 57 million children remain out of school (United Nations Report, (2015). Girls are especially vulnerable once menarche strikes. Limited or no access to menstrual hygiene supplies, no or poor quality latrines, limited soap and water, and limited knowledge or education about menses are contributing factors (United Nations Report, 2015; Hennegan et al., 2018; Wall, Teklay, Desta & Belay, 2018; Gultie, Hailu, & Workineh, 2015). In order to meet Sustainable Development Goals 4 Quality Education and 5 Gender Equality by 2030 menstrual hygiene requires several approaches by numerous agencies simultaneously (UNICEF, 2016; Sommer, 2016). In 2010 a group of committed education and health professionals called Girls2Women began teaching girls how to sew sanitary pads and care for their own sanitary pads. (Desjardins, Moran, & Smolowitz, 2014). The aim was to empower girls with knowledge and skills to manage their menses. The schoolgirls clearly articulated their specific menstrual needs, which included soap, water, and privacy while in school. Their input resulted in the successful development of a holistic approach to menstrual management in a number of schools, supported by the local communities in Ethiopia. They, in turn, became powerful advocates and trainers of girls in nearby schools supported by members of the team. Interventions such as supplying sanitary pads and menstrual cups are well documented (Mason et al. 2015). Montgomery et al. (2016) found that the provision of sanitary towels coupled with menstrual hygiene education in Ghana reduced girls' absence from school by more than half. However, the sustainability of such programs is not reliable (Jewitt, Riley, 2014) despite a body of studies suggesting that menstrual hygiene is far more significant than inadequate supplies for girls' menses as the reason for dropping out of school (Hennegan et al. 2018; Gultie et al., 2014; Wall et al., 2018). This is a public health issue that affects half of the global population for half of a lifetime. In order to positively impact school age young women in Ethiopia, from January 2019 - June 2019, the team Girls2Women will complete a qualitative study in ten schools where menstrual pad making and menstrual management training was previously provided in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The aim of the proposed study is to document the sustainability and impact that the project has had on the empowerment of girls, their school attendance during menses, and their educational achievements since its inception in 2010. The study will include private and group interviews with ten girls and two teachers from each school. The study has the following

goals: 1) To measure the impact of the interventions, students will be asked to recall the number of days missed during their last menses, report menstrual discomforts, interventions, and the presence of a home room in the school, and 2) To measure sustainability the facilitators and barriers to sustainability of the project, to see how the project may be improved moving forward, and to hear participants' closing remarks.

**Keywords:** Girl empowerment, menstruation hygiene management, school attendance, self-made sanitary pads

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**Keywords:**

self-made reusable sanitary pads, Girl empowerment, and menstruation hygiene management

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### **Abstract Summary:**

Girls who have learned how to make their own sanitary pads became strong advocates for improving sanitation in their schools and communities. Many have gone on to complete college and now function as community leaders who are impacting policy changes.

### **Content Outline:**

#### **Background:**

"Keep girls in school", was Dr. Gebreab Barnabas' wish for the school girls of Tigray, Ethiopia in 2009. Once menses began it was only a matter of time before the girls dropped out of school.

Ground work: A group of Columbia University Nursing Students agreed to make, wear, hand wash feminine pads for three menstrual cycles and document their experiences to

include comfort, reliability, ease to wash and dry. This exercise provided sufficient information to develop a work book to send to Ethiopia for their approval.

Pilot Project: The prototype was accepted and training of sewing feminine pads, menstrual hygiene management and school sanitation was rolled out in 2010 and continues today supported by teachers, trained students' health extension workers and midwives.

The current study will evaluate the impact this project has had on girls' education. And its sustainability.

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**Author Summary:** I am a Certified Critical Care and MS currently practicing as a clinical and simulation nursing instructor. My Global work is in Ethiopia where work with teachers, midwives and school girls to improve menstrual hygiene and education.