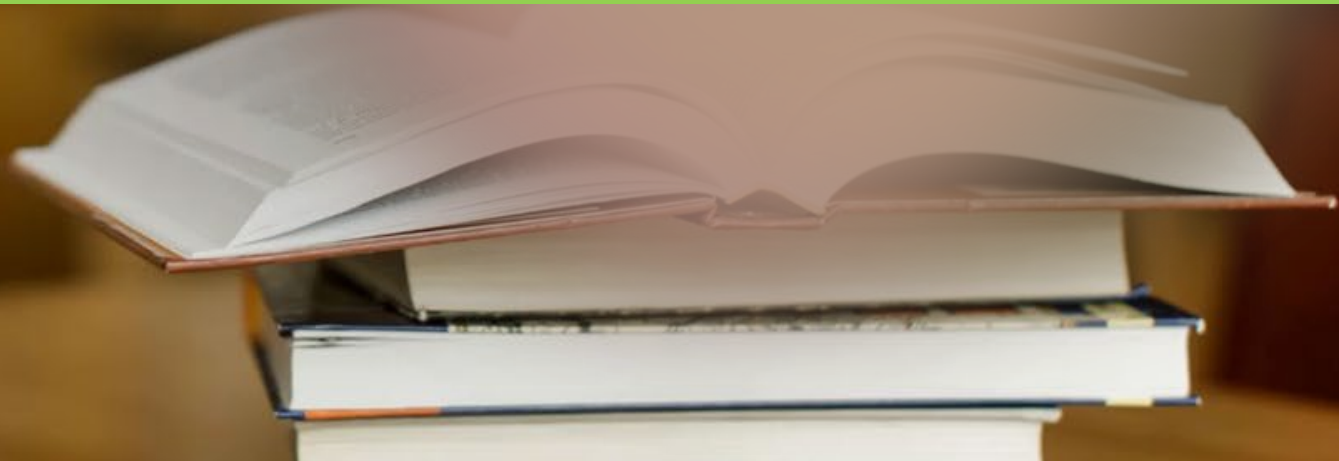


Summary of study findings.

An exploratory qualitative study of menstrual hygiene management among adult women of reproductive ages from an under-resourced community in Cape Town, South Africa.



Aims and objectives

This study sought to understand the MHM of adult women of reproductive ages (25-49) from an under-resourced community in Cape Town, SA.

Objectives were to:

- Understand women's lived experiences of MHM
- Explore their perceptions of the impacts of menstruation on their physical and psychological health and wellbeing.
- To explore key informants' perceptions of adult women's experiences of MHM.



Relevance of research

- MHM is essential for a healthy and dignified menstruation.
- Managing menstruation with adequate dignity is critical for improving girls and women's reproductive health and sanitary dignity.
- Better MHM is crucial for achieving gender equality as menstruation is a crucial driver of gender inequality and disempowerment of women as it poses barriers to girls and women's ability to engage in education, work and daily livelihood.

Why this age group?

- Existing research knowledge gap among this population when they constitute a larger population of menstruating women.
- Existing knowledge predominantly comes from quantitative research in LMICs
- Previous researchers have indicated the relations between under-resourced contexts and MHM
- They serve as points of references and educators for AGYW.

Methods

- Qualitative **in-depth interviews** were conducted using a **semi-structured interview guide** with 10 women aged 25 and 49 and **three key informants** namely a maternal health nurse and two community health care workers.
- The study occurred **over a period of three months**.
- All participants were **purposively selected** using a homogenous sampling strategy and key informants were purposively sampled using an intensive sampling strategy.
- Data was manually analysed using Braune & Clarke (2016) thematic data analysis and coding was done deductively and inductively to look for emergent codes.
- Findings were organized around a conceptual framework developed to map the distal and proximal factors affecting girls and women menstrual hygiene management in LMICs.

Results

- Women menstrual experiences were shaped by their **socio-cultural context** and **resource limitations**.
- The main findings include **psychological impacts** of poor menstrual hygiene management **namely shame, discomfort, culminating in feelings of powerlessness, loss of confidence, increased anxiety, and negative perceptions of menstruation.**
- **Physical health challenges** related to compromised menstrual hygiene including **skin irritation and rashes, increased risk of reproductive tract infections.**
- **Financial challenges** culminating in **poor access to and use of pain relief medication** and **use of substandard sanitary materials.**
- Poor menstrual hygiene management also led to **environmental pollution caused by disposal of sanitary materials.**
- In day-to-day activities, poor menstrual hygiene led to **avoidance of sexual activities and public places, reduced performance, and participation at work.**

Conclusion:

- The results of this exploratory qualitative research provide an understanding of women's lived experiences of MHM by **highlighting the context in which they manage menstruation** and the **negative experiences, menstrual practices related to access to materials, water, pain management and attitudes towards menstruation.**
- The study established that **adult women face challenging menstruation** and indicated the **continued stress and emotional challenges women face due to menstrual stigma.**
- It also indicated that adult women from an under-resourced community in Cape Town **experience poor menstrual hygiene management affecting their physical and psychological health and wellbeing.**

Recommendations for practice, policy, and research.

- **An enabling socio-cultural environment** – through (1)**health education** about menstruation to improve men, boys, and women’s menstrual knowledge and challenge existing myths and taboos, and through (2) **Public health policies** addressing socio-cultural context as a crucial social determinant of women’s health.
- **An urgent need to improve access to resources such as water, sanitation and disposal infrastructure and safer and suitable sanitary products** to enable proper menstrual hygiene management and ensure a healthy and dignified menstruation- **to contribute towards the promotion of women's physical health and psycho-social well-being, gender empowerment and equality, and access to clean water and sanitation**, as indicated in the UN’s 2030’s Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, & 6.
- **Improvement of access to health care services** to help women experience menstruation better.
- **Further research and programming** among this population, comprising a large proportion of the menstruating women population and playing the role of educators and points of reference for AGYW.
- For the field of public health, findings of this study **emphasize the need for prioritization of menstrual health** as an integral component of sexual and reproductive health programs and a **human right issue fundamental to equality, human rights, and dignity of menstruation women.**

Project #659 success

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An exploratory qualitative study of menstrual hygiene management among adult women of reproductive ages from an under-resourced community in Cape Town, South Africa.
Ncube, S & Knight, L. Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences, School of Public Health, University of Cape Town

Introduction

- Poor menstrual hygiene management is a cause for concern among women particularly in low-and middle-income countries.
- Evidence from research limited contexts show that women from resource-limited contexts experience various menstruation-related challenges.
- Yet, there is limited research documenting the menstruation experiences of adult women of reproductive age, leaving this age group at potential risk of reproductive health issues, and reduced psychological health and well-being.
- This study sought to understand the menstrual hygiene management of adult women of reproductive ages (25-49) from an under-resourced community in Cape Town, South Africa.

Menstrual Hygiene

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- Understand women's lived experiences of menstrual hygiene management.
- Explore their perceptions of the impacts of menstruation on their physical and psychological health and well-being.
- Explore key informants' perceptions of adult women's experiences of menstrual hygiene management.

Methods

- Qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in Khayelitsha with 10 women aged 25 to 49 years and three key informants, namely two maternal health nurses and a community health care worker.
- Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis framework was used to analyse data and findings were organised around a conceptual framework developed to map the distal and proximal antecedents of women's and girls' menstrual experiences in LMICs.

Community partner organization.

Findings

Women's menstrual experiences were shaped by their socio-cultural context and resource limitations. The main findings include:

- Psychological effects of poor menstrual hygiene management namely shame, distress, and discomfort, culminating in feelings of powerlessness, loss of confidence, increased anxiety, and negative perceptions of menstruation.
- Physical health challenges related to compromised menstrual hygiene, including skin irritation and rashes, increased risk of reproductive tract infections
- Financial challenges culminating in poor access to and use of pain relief medication, and use of sub-standard sanitary materials.
- Environmental pollution caused by poor disposal of sanitary materials
- The effect of poor menstrual hygiene on day-to-day activities such as avoidance of sexual activities and public places, reduced performance, and participation at work.

Conclusions

- Adult women from an under-resourced community in Cape Town experience poor menstrual hygiene management and menstruation experiences.
- Regardless of individual menstrual factors and different menstrual practices adopted, menstruation and menstrual hygiene management experiences of adult women in this study have negative physical and psychological health outcomes.

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**2023 SPH Research Week
"Sowing the seeds of research"**

**Top scoring MPH poster: winner
proudly awarded to
Semkelisiwe Ncube**

**For your poster:
An exploratory qualitative study of menstrual hygiene management among adult women of reproductive ages from an under-resourced community in Cape Town, South Africa**

Congratulations on your contribution to the SPH research eco-system!

20 September 2023

**Professor Susan Cleary
Head of the School of Public Health**

We seek to protect and promote societal health and well-being by understanding and addressing health inequity in South Africa, the African continent and globally

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