

## **Perception and behaviour on use of sanitary pads during menstruation among adolescent school girls in Bayelsa State, Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Knowledge of perception and behaviour on the use of sanitary pads during menstruation among adolescents of school age is a vital aspect of health education. The study was carried out among 140 school girls, It investigated perception as well as behaviour on the use of sanitary pads during menstruation. Specific objectives were tailored to determine adolescent girls' perception on the use of sanitary pads during menstruation and also to assess their behaviour on using sanitary pads for menstrual hygiene. Girls were selected by cross-sectional population survey of educational institutions, 56 from primary school and 84 from junior secondary school within the age group of 10-20 years were given questionnaires to gather data for analysis. The results show that of the 140 girls studied, 64.3% of the girls used sanitary pads, 62.3 % had positive self perception on use of sanitary pads for hygiene purposes while 67.1% felt satisfied as well as good and nice as it boosted their self-confidence, although 66.4% perceived it as expensive. However, there seems to be a behavioural change on use of sanitary pads with 66.4% as well as being positive; enabling a majority (52.1%) to attend classes normally at school. The conclusion from this study is that 66.3% of the adolescent girls of Niger Delta area, Bayelsa state, Nigeria had positive perception on use of sanitary pads; 67.1% have perception that was satisfying, good, and nice on use of sanitary pads, boosting self-confidence though expensive for 64.4%. , thus leading to a behavioural change that is positive. This study therefore recommends the use of sanitary pads among adolescent school girls to be monitored and taught at schools to prevent infectious diseases as well as to bridge the gap with the training at home by mothers and other sources of information.*

**Keywords:** Sanitary pads, Adolescent, Menstruation, Behaviour, Perception and Bayelsa State.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The proportion of the world adolescents' population is rising faster than that of other age groups. As at today, 84% of the world's adolescent live in the developing world (Singh *et al*, 2006). In Nigeria, the onset of menstruation profoundly changes an adolescent pupil's life (Aniebe and Nwankwo, 2009). Young adolescent girls in schools need access to clean soft absorbent sanitary

pads or products, as menstruation necessitates some form of sanitary protection. To meet this need, learning about perception and behaviour of adolescent's on the use of sanitary protection is of pivotal significance to health education and their reproductive health, as attitude developed during this period is likely to be pursued to adult life and this trend may continue to their offspring. Pads come in different thickness and styles, depending on menstrual flow, and should be changed at least 3 - 4 hours regardless of the amount of staining for comfort and to prevent odour and infections (Egyptian Fertility Care Society, 1999). Unhygienic behavioural practice of not using sanitary pads during menstruation is a result of negative perception and behaviour, thus endangering the reproductive health and wellbeing of these adolescent school girls especially in their early period of transition from childhood to adulthood. There is a limited availability of commercial sanitary pads and those that exist are financially out of reach for most women and girls. Clean clothing materials, toilet tissues, sanitary napkins, pads, tampons have been identified as materials used to manage menstruation (Moronkola and Uzuegbu, 2006). The study attempts to determine the perception and behaviour of adolescent pupils on use of sanitary pads during menstruation; specifically to determine adolescent girls' perception on use of sanitary pads during menstruation and also to assess their behaviour on use of sanitary pads for menstrual hygiene during menstruation.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Using a cross sectional survey method, attempts were made to interview; and give out questionnaires, by randomly selecting adolescent pupils and purposely selecting the educational institutions included for the study. These were made up of public primary schools and secondary schools in Amassoma, the location of the Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The primary and secondary schools in Amassoma are characterized by high attendance ratio of mixed classes of boys and girls due to influence and presence of the Niger Delta University. Primary level (Classes 4 – 6) and junior secondary school (Classes 1 – 3) were targeted in the study. Permission to collect data was taken from appropriate governmental body, as well as from the educational board members of the participating schools. Consent was sort from each pupil as well as their teachers. The questionnaire was divided basically into three (3) parts that includes: demographic data, questions on perception on use of sanitary pads and also, behaviour on use of sanitary pads during menstruation. The questionnaire was pilot tested for reliability and content validity with pupils from private school outside Amassoma. Data collected were analyzed and processed using descriptive methods manually.

### **RESULTS**

The age range of the pupils was 10 – 20 years, with a mean of 11 years. About 60% were in junior secondary school, while 91.4% were Christians, 30.0% were first daughters of the family and 55.5% have had premenarcheal training, with a majority (72.9%) commencing menarche at 12 years or over.

46.4% of the adolescent girls used 2 pads per day, 30.0% used three pads, with 12.9% using one pad while only 10.7% used more than three pads daily. 39.3% had their sources of information from their mothers while 27.9% from a teacher or a health worker and 20.7% from the other parameters combined. Table 2 shows that 64.3% of the respondent adolescent girls used sanitary pads during menstruation while 22.1% used toilet tissue/paper during menstruation, with less than 15.0% using clothes, tampons and multiple materials for their sanitary hygiene during menstruation.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of adolescents (n = 140)**

Age (years)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
10-12	76	54.3
13 – 15	47	33.6
16 – 20	17	12.1
Grade		
Primary school	56	40.0
Junior secondary school	84	12.1
Religion		
Christianity	128	91.4
Islam/others	12	8.6
Position in family		
First daughter	42	30.0
Middle daughter	37	26.4
Last daughter	43	30.7
Only daughter	18	12.9
Premenacheal training		
Yes	78	55.7
No	62	44.3
Age at menarche		
11 – less	38	27.1
12 or more	102	72.9

**Table 2: Number of pads, sources of information and type of menstrual absorbent in use during menstruation (n = 140)**

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Number of pads per day		
One	18	12.9
Two	65	46.4
Three	42	30.0
More than three	15	10.7
Sources of information		
Mother	55	39.3
Relatives/Friends	29	20.7
Teacher/Health Workers	39	27.9
News paper/Radio	17	12.1
Sources of menstrual absorbent		
Toilet tissue/Paper	31	22.1
Sanitary pad	90	64.3
Clothes	6	4.3
Tampon	9	6.4
Multiple items	4	2.9

67.1% of adolescent girls had the perception that on using sanitary pads they felt good and nice, 10.8% perceived it was confusing at first, 12.1% felt it was frightening, while 10.0% were expectant. Over 40.0% of the adolescent girls perceived a new found confidence on use of sanitary pad, 29.3% felt no staining with use, and 17.1% perceived no difference on use of sanitary pads, while 13.6% perceived they had reduction of pain on use of sanitary pads. 60.0% of adolescent girls on use of sanitary pads felt protected, 18.6% felt clean and 13.6% felt grown up on use of sanitary pad. 67.1% felt satisfied and positive on use of sanitary pad during menstruation. Table 3 also showed that 39.3% of these adolescents perceived the cost of sanitary pads to be expensive with 27.1% perceiving it to be too expensive. On the other hand 16.4% perceived the cost not expensive and 17.2% did not know about costing of sanitary pads.

**Table 3: Perception on use of sanitary pads during menstruation among adolescents surveyed (n = 140)**

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Perception on use of sanitary pads		
Confusing	15	10.8
Frightening	17	12.1
Expectant	14	10.0
Good and nice	94	67.1
Perception after use of sanitary pads		
Reduction of pain	19	13.6
Confidence	56	40.0
No difference	24	17.1
No staining	41	29.3
Feeling on use of sanitary pad		
Grown up	19	13.6
Stupid	11	7.9
Clean	26	18.6
Protected	84	60.0
Satisfied on using sanitary pads		
Yes	94	67.1
No	46	32.9
Perception on use of sanitary pads		
Negative	18	12.9
Positive	88	62.9
Indifference	34	24.2
Perception of cost using sanitary pads		
Too expensive	38	27.1
Expensive	55	39.3
Not expensive	23	16.4
Don't know	24	17.2

**Table 4: behaviour on use of sanitary pads during menstruation among adolescents surveyed (n = 140)**

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Behaviour change on use of sanitary pads		
Yes	43	33.6
No	93	66.4
Described behaviour as		
Positive	106	75.7
Negative	34	24.3
Behaviour on use of sanitary pads and attending school classes		
Always attended classes	73	52.1
Never attended classes	12	8.6
Sometimes attended classes	44	31.4
I don't know	11	7.9
Behaviour without the use sanitary pads		
Wash with water	23	16.4
Use toilet tissue	92	65.7
Use clothes	20	14.3
Cover with sweater/wrappers	5	3.6

Table 4 shows that 66.4% of respondent adolescent girls reported that their behaviour did not change on use of sanitary pads while 75.7% responded that it had a positive behaviour them. Majority (52.1%) always attended classes on use of sanitary pads, while 8.6% never attended classes and 31.4% sometimes attended classes on use of sanitary pads. Majority (65.7%) have been getting along by using toilet tissues without sanitary pads, 16.4% wash with water and 14.3% use clothes as sanitary pads during menstruation.

## DISCUSSION

Despite the fact that this study was limited to adolescent girls of school age in primary and junior secondary schools, who have started experiencing menstruation, it is observed that problems may arise if positive perception and behaviour on the use of sanitary pads during menstruation is not achieved and provisions of sanitary supplies are not made especially during early menarche (Quint, 2008), since health education and promotion are an integral part of learning.

The study highlights the need for further implementation of educational programs, counselling and training on the use of sanitary pads during adolescent girl's menstruation. In this study, 55.7% of adolescent pupils had training on use of sanitary pads during menstruation. This is in line with other studies from Nigeria (Adinma and Adinma, 2008, Aniebue *et al*, 2009), and from Western background (Dickson and Wood, 1995). However, the view of Cooper and Koch (2007) reveals few sources of information as well as limited menstrual learning/training from schools, their mothers and other women. Results from this study revealed that mothers were cited as the primary source of information (39.3%) on use of sanitary pads, even though Cooper and Koch (2007) wrote that most mothers lacked the necessary skills to comfortably discuss such topics. It is the authors believe that source of information whether it is from mothers' or others may influence their perception and behaviour on use of sanitary pads, as most teachings from mothers' are fundamentally laid down cultural beliefs from ancestors even with regard to sanitary hygiene. Furthermore, the study showed that the source of information on use of sanitary pads were acquired also from mothers with 46.4% using two or more sanitary pads per day, and over 80% of the adolescent girls complaining of the cost of buying sanitary pads. Previous findings reveal that sanitary pads are not usually affordable for many adolescent girls of schooling age, and as such they use other materials and methods such as washing or staying away from school completely. According to Shukla (2005), most girls are left to cope as best as they can with rags or other insufficient protection. The Forum of Africa Women Educationalist, Uganda (FAWEU, 2004) states that buying sanitary protection (pads) means a monthly spending equivalent of four radio batteries or enough paraffin to last a family one month; or sanitary protection may cost around a tenth of a family monthly income (Kayinke, Akankwasa and Karungi, 2004).

The study found out that 62.4% of the respondents indicated a positive perception on use of sanitary pads during menstruation among these adolescent girls, 67.1% were satisfied on use of sanitary pads and 40.0% believed it was a means to achieve confidence because there was no staining (29.3%) with use of sanitary pads, as well as good and nice (67.1%) for most respondents. These results are in agreement with the research work of Gilbreth (Cited by Dickson and Wood, 1995) which states that women needed menstrual protection that is readily available, disposable, undetectable, comfortable and offered adequate protection. Pads are thinner, shaped to fit the body, maximum absorbency, sanitized and other deodorized, thus a welcomed development as well as positively perceived. Despite this, kayggwa (2007) described the lack of access to sanitary pads during menstruation has been a hindrance to attending school, thus most poor girls use cloth rags to absorb flow with emission of bad odours or easy leak, extreme discomfort and embarrassment. Furthermore, there is the indication that using sanitary pads help confers protection from infectious diseases as well as complications that may arise from lack of use of sanitary products (Farage, 2006) during this sensitive period of adolescent girls life even though expensive. Thus, there is urgent need for counselling and education enlightenment program for this vulnerable group of girl child.

However, behaviour on use of sanitary pads during menstruation showed that a majority (66.4%) among respondent girls had no change of behaviour on use of sanitary pads; even though (33.6%) was observed to have had a change.

Adinma and Adinma (2008) have suggested in a similar study that poverty and low social class which is highly prevalent in Nigeria undoubtedly plays a major role in the use of sanitary pads. They reported that the effective modification of perception on menstruation (on use of sanitary pads) amongst these adolescent girls is a major prerequisite towards effecting the necessary behavioural change on menstrual behaviour on use of sanitary pads during menstruation amongst them. According to the authors, these observed behaviour may be explained by the fact that there is always pain associated and experienced as accompanying symptoms during menstruation, while there could also be mixed feelings such as mood swings at this point which may result to frustration for many adolescent girls, with the effect of making them miss out in their school activities, attendance or even withdrawn to themselves because of shame. Poreslamic and Osati-Ashtian (2002) are also of this view.

Since, adolescent girls, are mothers of tomorrow - a good health and reproductive education and counselling especially in the area of sanitary hygiene (on use of sanitary pads) cannot be overemphasised for their long-term health outcome and prevention of ugly circumstances that may have been avoidable by acquiring knowledge necessary for development of positive perception and behaviour on use of sanitary pads during menstruation and disperse any fears or problems they may encounter at this special period of need and support.

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