

Toilets are not enough:

addressing menstrual hygiene
management (MHM) in
secondary schools in Malawi

Introduction



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Toilets are not enough

- Introduction, aim and objectives of 2011 research
- Participative research methodology
- Results
- Recommendations
- Conclusions
- Questions

Malawi

Size of England; pop. 14 000 000



wikipedia.org/wiki/Malawi

153/169 on HDI
3 regions & 28 districts



Aim and Objectives

Aim:

- to carry out a pilot study on the beliefs, problems, requirements and awareness around MHM in secondary schools

Objectives:

- Develop participatory research into MHM
- Identify issues and beliefs around MHM
- Ascertain girls' MHM requirements
- Evaluate the methodology for future use

Schools selected for study

School	A	B	C	D	E
Type	Urban Girls' boarding	Co-ed Boarding	Peri-urban CDSS	Peri-urban CDSS	Rural CDSS
Distance from Lilongwe	Centre	25 kms	15 kms	15kms	140kms
N° of visits	5	5	2	2	1
N° of PGS	8	7	5	5	4
N° girls	519	281	130	147	98
N° Form 3 girls	186	82	29	40	29
N° girls for questionnaire	70	40	8	8	8
Age range of PGS girls	14-18	14-18	16-21	15-18	16-19.5
PGS girls: mean age at menarche	13	12.72	14.43	14	14.5

Questionnaire

- 104 girls out of 134 answered questionnaire
- Central region: 67; Southern: 20; North: 17
- Christian 95%; Moslem 5%
- Mean age of girls 16.38 years
- Median age at menarche (1st menstruation) was 13-14 years
- 31% unaware about menstruation prior to menarche
- 30% scared; 26% sad; 28% happy

Rural CDSS PGS



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Participatory methods

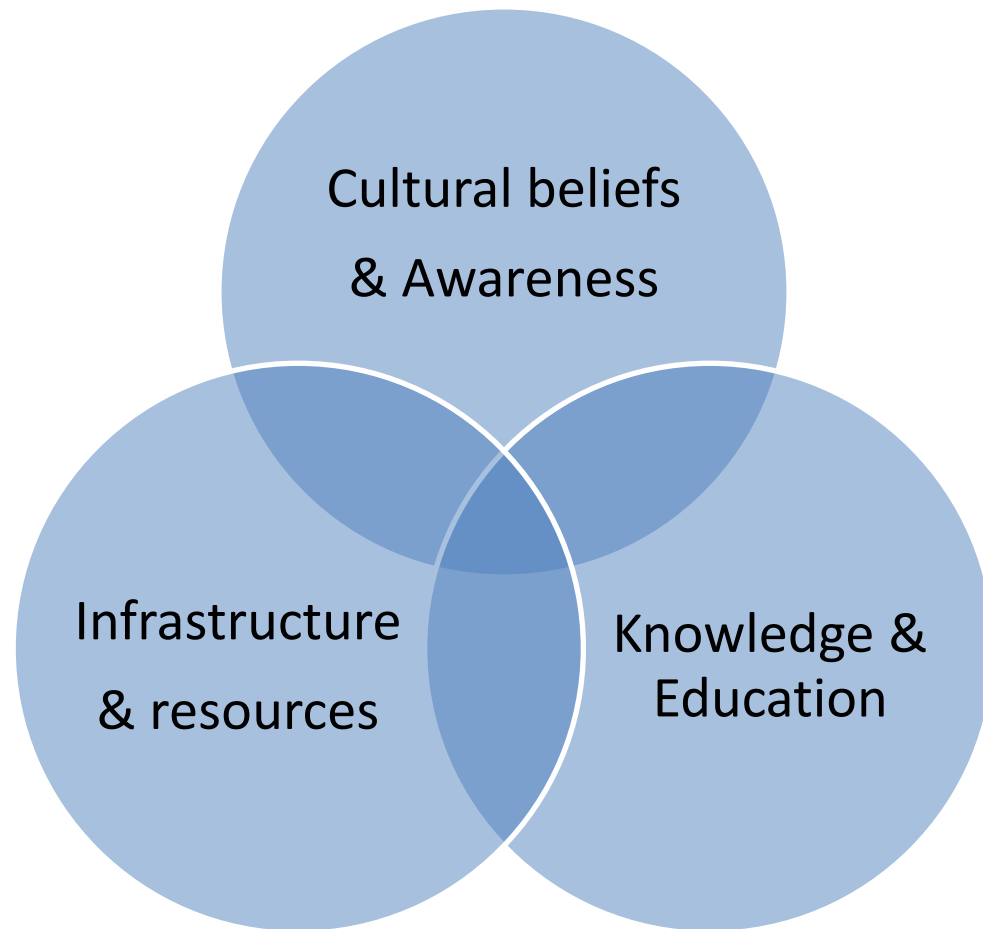
1. Questionnaire
2. Toilet Walk
3. Making a school toilet map
4. Toilet drawing
5. Priority list for improving MHM in schools
6. Writing first menstrual experience
7. Anonymous question and answer session
8. Writing a puberty curriculum
9. Closure session with participatory groups
10. Stakeholders interviews

Mapping the school toilets



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Results: Three main themes



Infrastructure, facilities and resources



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No water for flushing & blocked with sanitary pads & faeces



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Open pit for sanitary napkins



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Incinerator for disposable sanitary pads



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No doors – stolen



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Door-less design toilet



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No space for girls to change



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Girls liked to squat



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Good advice, but.....



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No water for washing



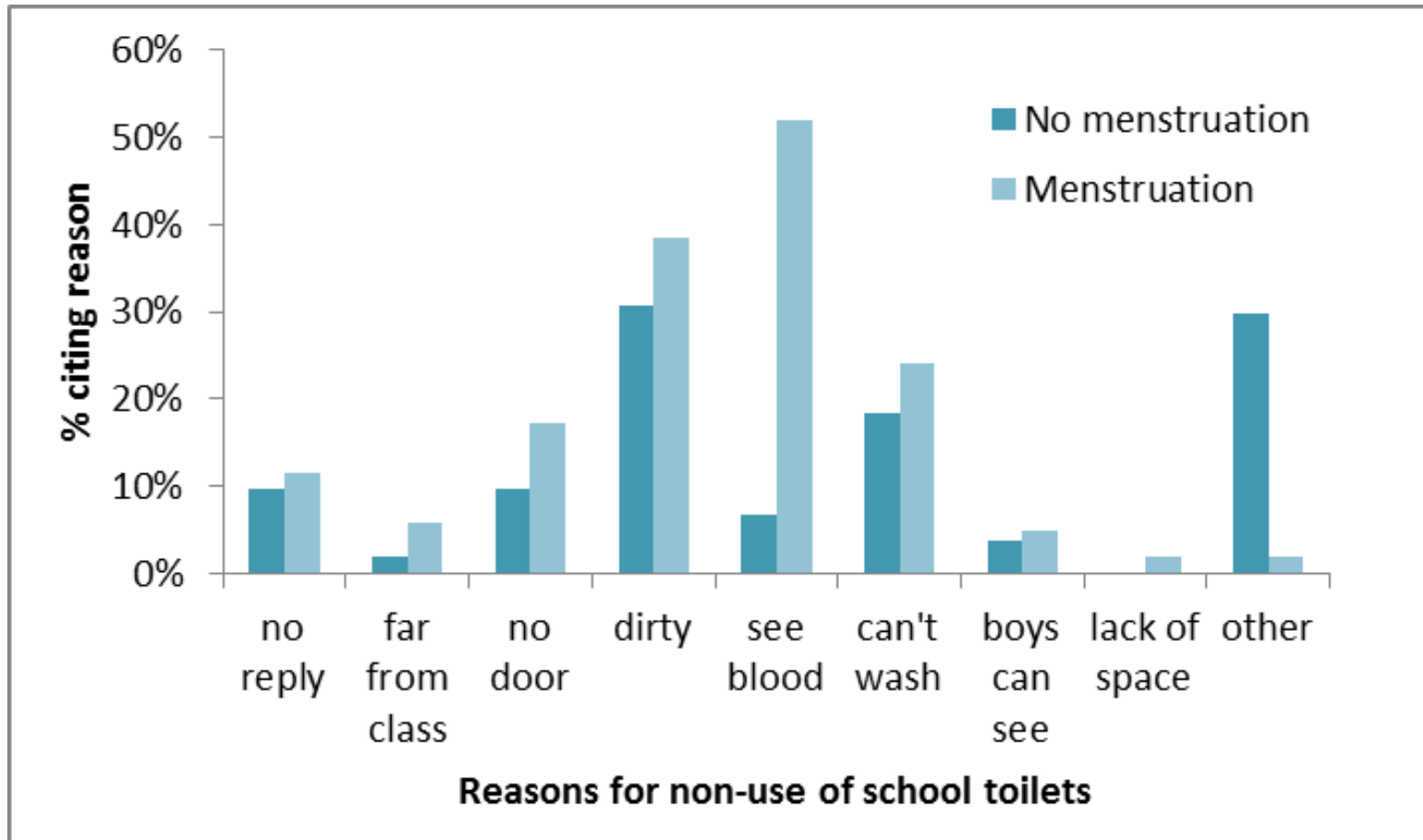
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No Handwashing: no soap, stolen taps, blocked basins

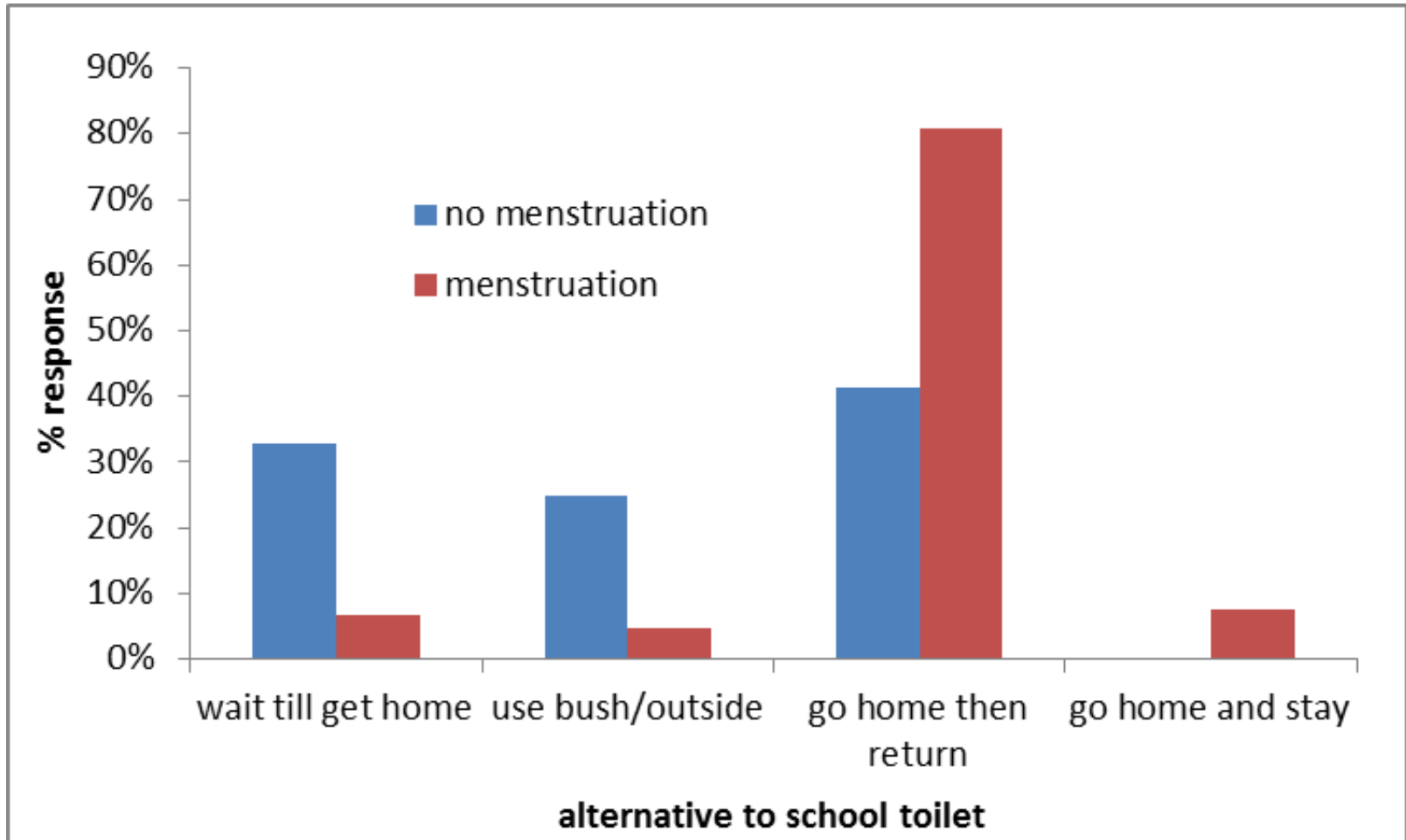


Why girls do not use school toilets

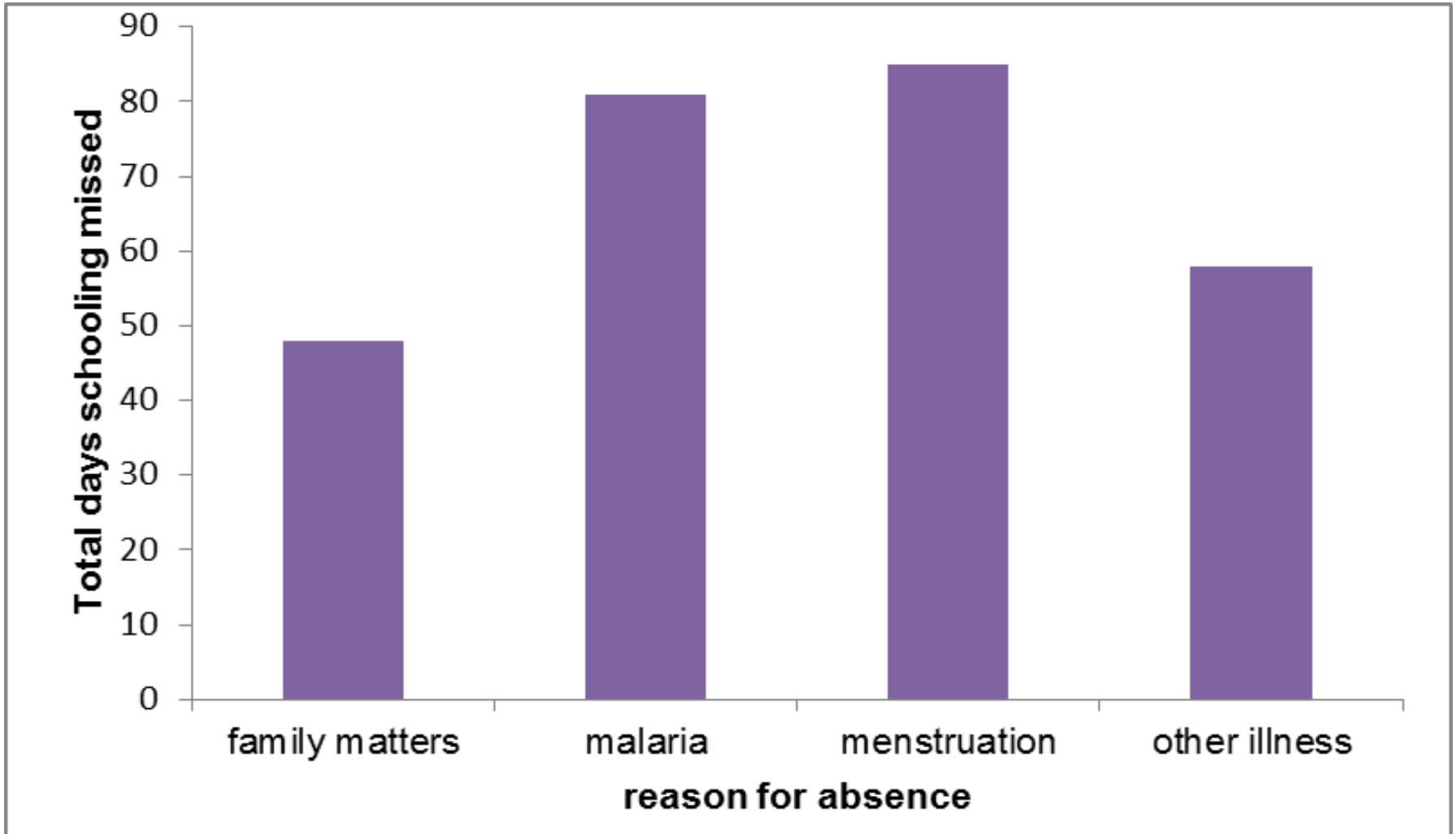
multiple answers possible



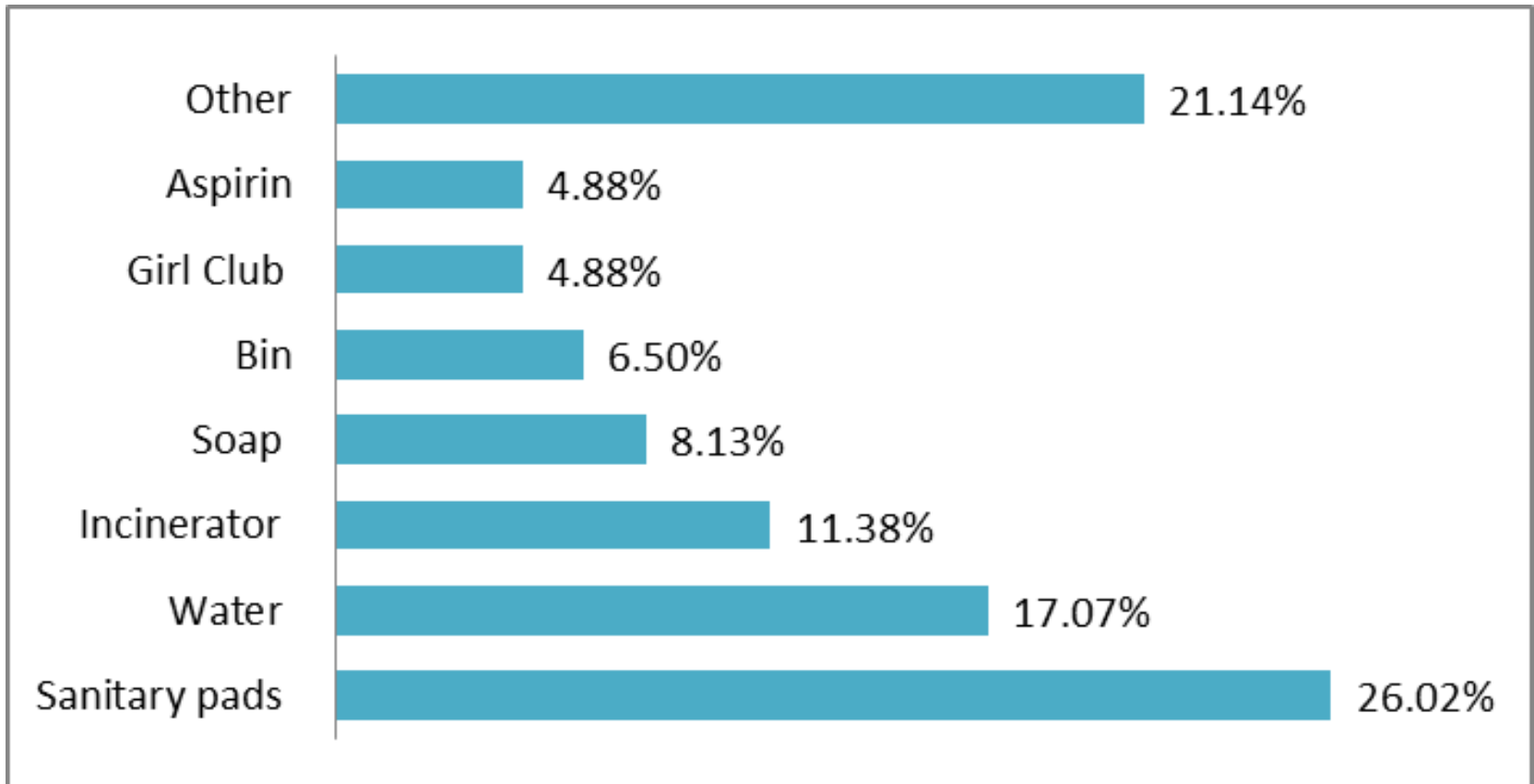
Alternatives to school toilets



Days absent last term n=104



Girls' MHM priorities



Cultural beliefs and practices



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Write your menstrual story



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Cultural beliefs and practices

- “Menstruation is the end of childhood.”
- “Menstruation is strictly secret”.
- “It was the worst day of my life”.
- “If someone sees my blood in the toilet she can use witchcraft to poison me.”
- “I would never wash my cloth at school; if people steal it they can take it to practice witchcraft on me.”

Cultural beliefs and practices

- “We need to stop these myths around menstruation”.
- “Use the word menstruation at all policy meetings.”

Education and knowledge



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Education and knowledge

- “Guidance and support at school is more important than anything. There is nobody to talk to. When we have problems we just run from class and go home.” C.5

Education and knowledge

- “ The best thing is to put puberty courses in schools. It would be nice in primary school. The teacher should do this in a loving manner and not so girls are embarrassed in front of boys. Sometimes boys just humiliate us. We should learn about menstruation separately.” A.2.

Recommendations

- Pads: reusable or biodegradable
- Girl-friendly toilets: doors, water, soap, disposal method, cleaning materials/rosters/hygiene club
- Maintenance of sanitation facilities
- Puberty knowledge for girls easily available
- MHM training for teachers & puberty workers - & boys
- Incorporate MHM into the school curriculum

Pads: reusable



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Pads: disposable



Girl friendly latrine



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.. but empty water tank



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Coherent information on managing menstruation



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Girls' Voices

- “Friends gave us wrong information. We didn't know about cotton blocking toilets and how to manage, and now we do.”
- “Does the government know about our problems? The toilets are broken. Tell them there are no cleaning materials. Tell them we miss school because we are cleaning toilets.”

Girls' Voices

- “Before I thought that being a girl was horrible and I wanted to be a boy. I was anxious about periods but after this work I’m not fearful. Now I like being a girl. I help others when they are menstruating – tell them it is OK, how to use a cloth, how to be hygienic.”
- “We have enjoyed doing this. Next year we can start a girl- friendly club. We’ll be very happy if the report is published and it helps our sisters in Malawi.”

Conclusion

- Participatory research is productive and raises awareness of MHM
- Toilets are not enough to address MHM in schools
- Listen to girls' voiced needs and provide information
- Develop infrastructure; provide pads & education; PLUS transform cultural practices
- Support local NGOs in raising awareness amongst partners and policy makers
- Include MHM in the school curriculum – primary & secondary
- Coordinate information and approaches

Questions?



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