



Høgskulen på Vestlandet

Samfunnsfag 3, emne 4 - Masteroppgave

MGUSA550-O-2022-VÅR2-FLOWassign

Predefinert informasjon

Startdato:	02-05-2022 09:00	Termin:	2022 VÅR2
Sluttdato:	16-05-2022 14:00	Vurderingsform:	Norsk 6-trinns skala (A-F)
Eksamensform:	Masteroppgave		
Flowkode:	203 MGUSA550 1 O 2022 VÅR2		
Intern sensor:	(Anonymisert)		

Deltaker

Kandidatnr.:	503
---------------------	-----

Informasjon fra deltaker

Antall ord *:	36011
----------------------	-------

Egenerklæring *: Ja

Jeg bekrefter at jeg har Ja registrert oppgavetittelen på norsk og engelsk i StudentWeb og vet at denne vil stå på vitnemålet mitt *:

Jeg godkjenner autalen om publisering av masteroppgaven min *

Ja

Er masteroppgaven skrevet som del av et større forskningsprosjekt ved HVL? *

Nei

Er masteroppgaven skrevet ved bedrift/uirksomhet i næringsliv eller offentlig sektor? *

Nei



Høgskulen
på Vestlandet

MASTER'S THESIS

A Bloody Taboo? Menstrual Health Management among Girls in Tanzanian Secondary Schools

Cecilie Grevstad

Master of Social Science in Education
Department of Pedagogy, Religion and Social Science
Faculty of Education, Arts and Sports
Supervisor: Vibeke Vågenes
15.05.22

I confirm that the work is self-prepared and that references/source references to all sources used in the work are provided, cf. Regulation relating to academic studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), § 12-1.

Abstract

Recently, menstrual health has received increasing attention globally. The assumption that improved menstrual health management (MHM) has a positive impact on girls' education is becoming widely accepted amongst stakeholders, but being an emerging field of research, the evidence for it is not yet considered to be strong. This thesis explores MHM amongst adolescent schoolgirls in Tanzania. The study was conducted in northern Tanzania, in a predominantly Maasai area, where aspects of the economic and socio-cultural environment might impact girls' menstrual experiences. In addition, the thesis examines how local non-governmental organisations and authorities address MHM, and how menstrual health interventions may influence girls' empowerment and their ability to realise their capabilities. Through a mixed methods qualitative approach, this thesis is aimed at producing a phenomenological understanding of the essence of the menstrual experience for a group of schoolgirls. Qualitative data was collected through a two-month field work. In total, I spoke to twenty-four participants through focus groups discussions and semi-structured individual interviews, in addition to countless field conversations.

Different theoretical frameworks were used to elucidate the *intersectionality* of girls' menstruation and wider gender inequalities in education. *Gender theory* was used to discuss how bodily functions impact lived experiences. Anthropological perspectives on taboo, pollution and confinement were used to discuss menstrual conduct. Naila Kabeer's framework for *empowerment* was chosen to analyse power(lessness), and *capabilities approach* was deemed appropriate to identify the freedom and lack of freedom of menstruating girls.

Some consistent themes emerged from the girls' menstrual narratives. The findings suggests that insufficient sanitary products and knowledge, as well as expectations of gendered behaviour, influenced girls' menstrual experiences. Menstrual taboos caused shame and fear and lead some girls to be aware and adaptive to their surroundings during menstruation. Moreover, menstruation impacted girls' performance and well-being in school, which in itself proves the importance of including MHM in further research and interventions.

Sammendrag

Sammenhengen mellom menstruasjon og jenters utdanning har i det siste mottatt økende oppmerksomhet globalt, men som forskningstradisjon er feltet relativt utforsket. Formålet med denne masteroppgaven er å undersøke håndtering av menstruasjon (MHM) blant ungdomsskolejenter i Tanzania. Datainnsamlingen ble gjennomført i nordlige Tanzania, i et område hovedsakelig befolket av Maasai, med mål om å undersøke hvordan det økonomiske og sosiokulturelle miljøet påvirker jenters opplevelse av menstruasjon. I tillegg fokuserer studien på hvordan ikke-statlige organisasjoner adresserer menstruasjon, og hvordan deres arbeid kan påvirke jenters opplevelse av menstruasjon og dermed skape *empowerment* og øke jenters sjans til å realisere sine *capabilities*. Studien tar i bruk triangulering av metoder for å produsere ulike former for kvalitative data. Målet har vært å produsere en fenomenologisk fremstilling av den generelle opplevelsen av menstruasjon blant en gruppe ungdommer. Oppgavens datamateriale ble samlet inn gjennom et to måneders feltarbeid i Tanzania. Totalt hadde jeg samtaler med tjuefire informanter gjennom fokusgruppediskusjoner og semistrukturerte individuelle intervju, i tillegg til utallige feltsamtaler.

Ulike teoretiske rammeverk har blitt tatt i bruk for å framheve et *interseksjonelt perspektiv* på jenters menstruasjon og videre kjønnsulikheter i utdanning. Kjønnsteori ble brukt til å forklare hvordan kroppslige funksjoner påvirker jenters liv. Antropologiske perspektiver på tabu, *pollution* og *confinement* er blitt brukt for å diskutere atferd ved menstruasjon. Naila Kabeers rammeverk for *empowerment* og *capabilities approach* ble brukt for å diskutere jenters makt og frihet.

Jentenes fortellinger om opplevelsen av menstruasjon resulterte i noen gjennomgående funn. Datamaterialet tilsier at utilstrekkelig tilgang på sanitærprodukter og kunnskap, i tillegg til forventninger om kjønnset oppførsel, påvirker jenters opplevelse av menstruasjon. Tabuer omkring mensene førte til skam og gjorde at jentene tilpasset seg sine omgivelser under menstruasjon. Menstruasjon hadde stor påvirkning på jentenes følelse av trivsel og velvære i skolen og påvirket deres deltakelse og utbytte av utdanning. Det er i seg selv en tydelig indikasjon på at MHM bør inkluderes i videre forskning.

Acknowledgements

Working on this thesis has been a great learning experience for me. I have had my own perspectives and knowledge challenged again and again, and looking back, there are many people I need to thank.

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to all of my participants and friends in Tanzania. Thank you for being so welcoming and including me in your lives and activities. It is your knowledge that made this paper what it is. Asante sana!

I also want to direct the biggest thank you to my travel companions in Tanzania, Malin and Eirin. My time in field (or at home) would not have been the same without your company and support.

A thank you is also directed to my family and friends for continuous support throughout my entire education, and to my fellow master students for excellent company these past five years and for making the many long hours of writing more enjoyable. A special thank you to Malin J for supportive breaks and an extra set of eyes from time to time.

Last, but definitely most important, to my supervisor Vibeke Vågenes. There are so many reasons for why this thesis would not have happened if it was not for you. Since I am not able to mention them all- thank you for making this possible! Thank you especially for the time and energy you spent fighting for our chance to make this happen. I am so grateful for your persistence! Your knowledge, support, encouragements, and sincere interest in the project has been inspiring and my greatest motivation in this writing process. It is something I will value and remember far beyond this thesis. Thank you!

And to anyone else reading, enjoy!

Cecilie Grevstad
May 15th, 2022

Table of content

ABSTRACT	I
SAMMENDRAG	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
LIST OF PICTURES	VI
LIST OF TABLES	VI
LIST OF FIGURES	VI
ABBREVIATIONS	VII
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.2 TANZANIA AND GIRLS’ EDUCATION.....	3
1.2.1 <i>Maasai</i>	5
2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH	8
2.1 MHM AND EDUCATION IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES	8
2.2 “HOLDING BACK”	11
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
3.1 GENDER THEORY.....	12
3.2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON MENSTRUAL TABOOS	12
3.2.1 <i>Taboo and pollution</i>	12
3.2.2 <i>Witchcraft</i>	14
3.2.3 <i>Confinement</i>	15
3.3 EMPOWERMENT	16
3.4 CAPABILITIES.....	17
3.5 INTERSECTIONALITY	18
4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	19
4.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	19
4.2 PRESENTATION OF SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPANTS.....	20
4.3 ACCESSING THE FIELD AND RECRUITING OF INFORMANTS.....	20
4.4 CHOICE OF RESEARCH METHODS	23
4.4.1 <i>Focus group discussions</i>	23
4.4.2 <i>Tracing kinship</i>	24
4.4.3 <i>Semi structured interviews and field conversations</i>	26
4.4.4 <i>Participant observation</i>	26
4.5 TRANSCRIPTIONS AND ANALYSIS	27
4.6 MY ROLE AND POSITION IN THE FIELD	28
4.7 CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL ISSUES	30
4.7.1 <i>Time</i>	30
4.7.2 <i>Ethical considerations</i>	31
4.7.3 <i>Trustworthiness</i>	33
5 CONTEXT PRESENTATION - MHM SITUATION IN FIELD SCHOOLS	34
5.1 SCHOOL 1.....	34
5.2 SCHOOL 2.....	37
6 MENSTRUATION AND EDUCATION	39
6.1 MENSTRUAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOL.....	39
6.2 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	42
6.3 MENSTRUATION AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT	44

6.4	“I AM STAYING AT HOME WHILE OTHERS ARE LEARNING” – MENSTRUATION AND SCHOOL PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE	47
7	FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EXPERIENCE OF MENSTRUATION.....	52
7.1	POVERTY AND “FAMILY ISSUES”	52
7.2	“IT’S NOT GOOD FOR EVERYONE TO KNOW YOU ARE IN MENSTRUATION” – MENSTRUAL SHAME AND TABOOS 55	
7.2.1	<i>Pollution taboos</i>	56
7.2.2	<i>Witchcraft</i>	58
7.2.3	<i>Consequences of menstrual taboos</i>	60
7.3	INITIATION CEREMONIES	61
7.4	GIRLS “HOLDING BACK”.....	63
8	GIRLS’ AGENCY.....	66
8.1	“BUTTER TRADING”- TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS.....	67
8.2	EARLY PREGNANCY AND CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURE	72
9	GOVERNMENT AND NGOS INFLUENCE ON MHM AND EMPOWERMENT.....	78
9.1	MHM INTERVENTIONS- RESOURCES & EDUCATION.....	78
9.1.1	<i>Empowerment through MHM interventions?</i>	83
9.2	CHALLENGING GIRLS “INFERIORITY”	85
9.3	“BREAKING THE SILENCE” - INCLUSION OF BOYS IN MHM EDUCATION	87
9.4	GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE	89
10	CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	93
11	REFERENCES.....	97
12	APPENDICES.....	102
12.1	APPENDIX 1 – TABLE OF INFORMANTS	102
12.2	APPENDIX 2 – TABLE OF STUDENT INFORMANTS.....	103
12.3	APPENDIX 3 – ENROLMENT IN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS BY REGION, COUNCIL, SEX AND GRADE, 2018	104
12.4	APPENDIX 4 – CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION EXAMINATION (CSEE) RESULTS BY SUBJECT AND SEX FOR SCHOOL CANDIDATES, 2016 – 2017	105
12.5	APPENDIX 5 – INTERVIEW GUIDE FGD.....	106
12.6	APPENDIX 6 – INTERVIEW GUIDE NGOS	108
12.7	APPENDIX 7 – INTERVIEW GUIDE TEACHER	109
12.8	APPENDIX 8 – INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM ORGANISATIONS.....	110

List of pictures

Picture 1 - Public school bathrooms in private school (Malin Stave).....	36
Picture 2 – Incinerator and waste management in School 1 (Private)	37
Picture 3 - Students watching NGO representative teach how to wear underwear and sanitary pads (Private).....	41
Picture 4 - Students in School 2 receiving self-sewn reusable pads and underwear (Private). 79	
Picture 5 - Poster informing students about different types of menstrual products (Private) ..	80
Picture 6 - Government initiated messaging on disposal and perceptions of menstruation from field school (Private)	91

List of tables

Table 1 - Family structure of FGD participants	25
Table 2 - Number of Dropouts in Government and Non-Government Schools by Region, Council, Reason and Sex, 2017 (MoEVT, 2018, p. 283).....	73
Table 3 - Number of Dropouts in Government and Non-Government Schools by Region, Council, Reason and Sex, 2017 (MoEVT, 2018, p. 284).....	74

List of figures

Figure 1 - Integrated model of menstrual experience (Hennegan et al., 2019).....	8
Figure 2 - Kinship diagram student example	25

Abbreviations

CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSEE	Certificate of Secondary Education Examination
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
LMIC	Low- and middle-income countries
MHM	Menstrual Health Management
MoEVT	Tanzania Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSA	Sub- Saharan Africa
TSH	Tanzanian Shillings
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTI	Urinary Tract Infection
WASH	Water supply, Sanitation and Hygiene

1 Introduction

The link between girls and education has been a reoccurring theme in global development strategies for years and has grown substantially in the last decade. There has been, and still is, a global concern for closing the gender gap in education, and even though girls school enrolment increases, gender gaps in education are still prevalent, especially in secondary education. According to data from UNESCO the gender disparities are soon to be equalised, but still the General Net Enrolment Rate for girls is lower than that of boys. In low - and middle-income countries (LMICs) in sub-Saharan Africa girls are still more prone to drop out of school than boys, especially in secondary education (UNESCO, 2019). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address this by focusing on how gender equality and equal access to education is important to create sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.). To reach the sustainable development goals it is important to ensure that girls not only enrol in education, but that they are able to complete it. This thesis will argue how the experience of menstruation might contribute to creating gender inequalities in education.

The topic of menstruation as a part of people's everyday lives has up until recently been more or less overlooked in research and as something to consider in educational development, especially in the context of LMICs. However, the impact of menstruation on girls' lives is receiving increasing attention globally. The term "period-poverty" has made visible the struggle that many women and girls face trying to afford menstrual products. The term contributes to ideas of feminised poverty and refers to the financial burden of sanitary products that menstruating people, especially from low-income households, face (UNFPA, 2021). Period poverty also contributes to an understanding that girls who face intersecting disadvantages, like poverty, are more likely to be excluded from education (UNESCO, 2019).

For this reason, I found it important to study the lived experiences of Tanzanian school girls students in managing their menstruation. In difference to girls growing up in the Global North, many girls in LMICs do not have the same access to water and dignifying sanitary facilities, sanitary products, and credible puberty information (UNICEF, n.d.). Furthermore, the sociocultural environment in which girls in sub-Saharan Africa grow up might lead to

significant changes after they reach menarche¹ that challenge their ability to successful school participation.

Using anthropological theories on shame and taboo, as well as geographical understandings of spatiality and confinement, this thesis attempts to understand how attitudes towards menstruating women and their periods might limit girls mobility and use of public spaces, like schools. The menstrual experience is a big part of the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Because students are going through this transition during their most important years of schooling, it should be regarded as something that could potentially impact their educational outcomes. Hennegan et al. (2017) write about how consequences of inadequate menstrual experiences have been suggested to extend beyond the classroom to also impact girls participation in society. This thesis will draw on this and try to understand how menstruation, and the gendered norms surrounding it, might also affect Tanzanian girls' ability to lead a dignified life.

At the same time as this thesis discusses whether girls' education is affected by a natural part of their existence, it is also important to look beyond the narrative that girls and women are oppressed through their menstrual experience. Although, this thesis will inevitably link menstruation to power relations that might be perceived as oppressing, it will also include perspectives of how girls are *engaging* in their menstrual experience. In addition to this, it is discussed how other stakeholders like NGOs and local Tanzanian authorities, are promoting safe and positive MHM for adolescent girls.

Before continuing it is important to disclose some terminology used in this paper. In this thesis girls/women are used to describe those menstruating. This done to make reading easier, but it also reflects the heteronormative environment in Tanzania and corresponds with the language used by the informants. However, it is important to recognise that all girls do not menstruate, and not all that menstruate are girls. More inclusive labels would therefore be menstruating/non-menstruating. Furthermore, except for when citing others, the term menstrual *health* and menstrual *health* management (MHM) is used as opposed to *hygiene*, which implies that menstruation is something "unclean".

¹ First menstrual bleeding.

1.1 Research questions

The overall objective of this thesis is to do an in-depth study of girls' lived experiences of menstruation in hopes that this will add to a more complex realisation of female living. On the basis of this, the following research questions were formed:

- I. *How do Tanzanian secondary schoolgirls experience Menstrual Health Management (MHM)?*
- II. *How do NGOs and local authorities work to improve MHM for adolescent schoolgirls?*
- III. *To what degree can menstruation hinder girls' empowerment and their realisation of capabilities through education?*

1.2 Tanzania and girls' education

The United Republic of Tanzania is a country in East Africa and consists of mainland Tanzania, and the islands Zanzibar, Unguja, Pemba and Mafia Island. The United Republic of Tanzania was formed by the uniting of mainland Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964. Tanganyika became a German colony in 1885 but was after World War I mandated by the British until its independence in 1961 (Wedgwood, 2010, p. 841). In 2018 the World Bank estimated 26,4 percent of the population to be living below the national poverty line, whilst 49,4 percent were suggested to be living below the international poverty line of 1793.5 TSH or 1.90 USD per day per capita (World Bank, 2021).

The school system found in Tanzania today originates from the colonial period. Before colonization, the only schools in Tanganyika were a few mission schools and Koranic schools, but several tribes had their own well organised initiation training and education (Wedgwood, 2010, p. 841). The first president of Tanzania, President Julius Nyerere, was a teacher by profession and his political party TANU, used education as a tool to create a peaceful, united, and self-reliant nation (Education for Self Reliance). Nyerere made a foundation where education has since been an important part of the country's political ideology (Mashaza & Majani, 2018, p. 109).

Today the Tanzanian educational system is built on a structure of 2 years pre-primary, 7 years primary (Standard 1-7), 4 years lower secondary (Form 1-4), 2 years upper secondary (Form 5-6), and 3+ years of university education or shorter college courses. Primary and secondary school leavers can also obtain vocational education certificates as an alternative to the standard education. Primary school is compulsory, and the Tanzanian government is committed to providing primary education for all disadvantaged social and cultural groups, among them hunters and gatherers and pastoralist communities.

Tanzanian educational statistics (BEST) from 2018² shows that there is near gender parity in primary enrolment with more girls than boys enrolled in lower secondary education, Form 1-4, from 2017 to 2018. However, the enrolment levels become increasingly more biased towards boys in the advanced secondary levels, and boys outnumbered girls in Form 5 and 6 (Appendix 3). This is largely due to girls' poor performance in the Form 4 national examinations, where boys continue to outperform girls with a higher pass rate in all subjects except Kiswahili (Appendix 4). This is a different tendency than in many other countries today, like in Norway, where girls usually outperform boys in most school subjects (NOU 2019:3). It also proves that there is still a gender gap in education in Tanzania, but that it today is related to performance rather than enrolment. However, the educational statistics also show disparities in completion rates. Girls are prone to drop out in higher levels of education and also outnumber boys in numbers of repeaters in secondary education (MoEVT, 2018, p. 279). Therefore, there is still a need to investigate what impacts girls' performance in, and completion of, secondary education. This thesis might contribute to elucidate some of these factors.

As primary enrolment becomes universal, there is an inflation in education, where higher levels of education are needed for formal jobs. This is especially challenging for girls that are outperformed by boys in education. Academic inflation causes many young people to find work in the informal sector. The field work for this thesis coincided with several substantial changes to the informal economy in Tanzania. During my time there the government banned all "Machingas" (woman street vendors) from the streets of some of Tanzania's major cities (Makakala, 2021). The fact that there, in KiSwahili, is a name for street vendors which implies that they are women, says something about how women comprise a large share of the

² Latest available Tanzanian educational statistics I have been able to obtain.

petty traders in Tanzania's informal sector. When I first arrived, the streets were full of women selling their produce on the street, but around halfway through my stay the urban city areas had completely transformed. All the vendors disappeared from streets "overnight" and the sidewalks, that were usually very crowded, were empty. This development is addressed because I regard it an interesting and quite substantial development that transforms the role of women in the society by removing an important income-making activity for them.

Another important recent political development in Tanzania, is the decision made by the Tanzanian government to allow adolescent mothers to resume their education after delivering a child. Tanzania has been heavily criticised for the discriminating practise of denying pregnant girls to finish their education, limiting their right to education (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The law, which was reinforced in 2017 by the late President John Magufuli, lead girls to drop out of school and also caused schools across Tanzania to perform compulsory pregnancy testing and expelling of pregnant students. Even girls about to complete the pivotal National Form 4 exams were not allowed to sit the exam to finish their education. On November 24th, 2021, the current government lead by President Samia Suluhu Hassan revoked the practise. All students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy are now allowed to resume their education (Wambura, 2021). I will return to this at a later point in the thesis but emphasise how they can be understood as reflecting a change in how the Tanzanian government views women's position in the society. The current government seems to be making strides towards honouring girls' right to pursue education, as well as acknowledging young mother's agency and productive value in the society.

1.2.1 Maasai

Tanzania is estimated to have over 120 ethnic groups. Most Tanzanians identify with one or more groups, however, extensive efforts have been made by the Tanzanian government to also forge a strong national unity amongst all citizens as Tanzanians. Since independence, ethnic or religious identity has not been disclosed in public registers. Still, ethnic identity is essential to most inhabitants. One of the most well-known tribes outside of Tanzania might be the Maasai. The Maasai identifies as an indigenous tribe and live primarily in what is also tourism hotspots, in northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. Traditionally, the Maasai have lived as semi-nomadic pastoralist and livestock has been, and still is, an important economic capital. Today the Maasai naturally live in both rural and urban areas throughout the country with a varying degree of traditional lifestyle. When giving a presentation of the Maasai, I find

it important to emphasise the many differences within this group. While I might at some points refer to Maasai people or Maasai girls as a whole, I do not wish to imply that there is just one way of living as a girl or a Maasai girl in Tanzania. Furthermore, although most of my informants were Maasai, some of my informants also had other tribal backgrounds and came from other parts of the country.

The Maasai live by a patrilinear social structure in extended family groups and clans (Mashaza & Majani, 2018, p. 117). They also arrange to live by an age-set system, where each individual belongs to a group of similarly aged people. The Maasai have a strong division of responsibilities, roles and labour related to these age and sex groups. Young boys are first given herding responsibilities. When they reach puberty, the boys are circumcised along a group of same-aged adolescents. They are thereby initiated into adult life together and incorporated into a new age-set as Moorans (warriors). As warriors, young boys are responsible for livestock and protecting their village. With age, they will move to a new age groups, and gain increased status and responsibility and lastly become respected male elders (Coast, 2001, p. 46).

Women do not have specific age sets like men, but also pass through different stages in their life. Girls are also traditionally circumcised around puberty, but individually and not by a communal ceremony. Female genital mutilation (FGM) indicates both physical maturity and a change in the girl's social status. After FGM she is considered ready for childbearing and marriage and will usually be married off after completion of primary school (Coast, 2001, p. 48). By that the family forges bonds with other family groups and in addition the bride's family receives dowry in the form of livestock which gives wealth. Thereby, marriage is essential to the continuation of the group or the clan.

The Maasai traditionally live by quite rigid and patriarchal gender roles. Male and female Maasai operate in different spheres, where women traditionally have more domestic and reproductive responsibilities. The men are usually responsible for the livestock. The patriarchal system also creates differences in occupation and education between Maasai men and women. Maasai children, and other pastoralists in general, have lower school enrolment rates than children of other backgrounds. Maasai girls are especially disadvantaged in formal education. There are several factors that can contribute to explain this tendency, and only some will be briefly mentioned here. One of them being that Maasai historically have

perceived formal education to have high costs and low returns. Tanzania has had a focus on developing universal education for self-reliance that was not contextualised to the Maasai pastoralist lifestyle. Because the formal education did not fit the needs of the Maasai society, it was perceived as less important (Mashaza & Majani, 2018, p. 119). However, it is not just the attitudes towards formal education that has caused low school enrolment among the Maasai. Because the rural Maasai often live in less developed or remote areas with temporary settlements, they have not had the same access to quality education as in other parts of the country. The development of secondary schools in rural areas has been inadequate and many parents have been forced to send secondary school students to boarding schools. Because of the added risks of sending girls to boarding schools, many parents have been reluctant to do so. At the same time children are also needed at home to fulfil their duties connected to the Maasai lifestyle. The low levels of education creates fewer occupational opportunities and therefore Maasai women are considerably less integrated than men in the "non-traditional" economic system. It is possible to argue that Maasai women face double marginalisation. They are marginalised like other girls and women in mainstream society, but at the same time the patriarchal system in which they live, creates some limitations for pastoralist women that intersects with their access to formal education and employment. Nevertheless, this thesis will show how some Maasai girls use education to negotiate their situations in the patriarchy system that prevails in these communities.

2 Previous research

2.1 MHM and education in low- and middle-income countries

Even though there is a growing body of qualitative research on MHM and education in LMICs, there is still not much rigorous quantitative research evidence supporting this connection. Hennegan et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review and synthesis of qualitative research on the topic of *Women’s and girls’ experiences of menstruation in low-and middle-income countries*. Despite different contexts and populations, the narratives and lived experiences that emerged reflected some consistent themes. Mapping these themes Hennegan et al. produced an understanding of antecedents influencing the menstrual experience and how they result in impacts on “physical and psychological health, education, employment, and social participation” (Hennegan et al., 2019, p. 31).

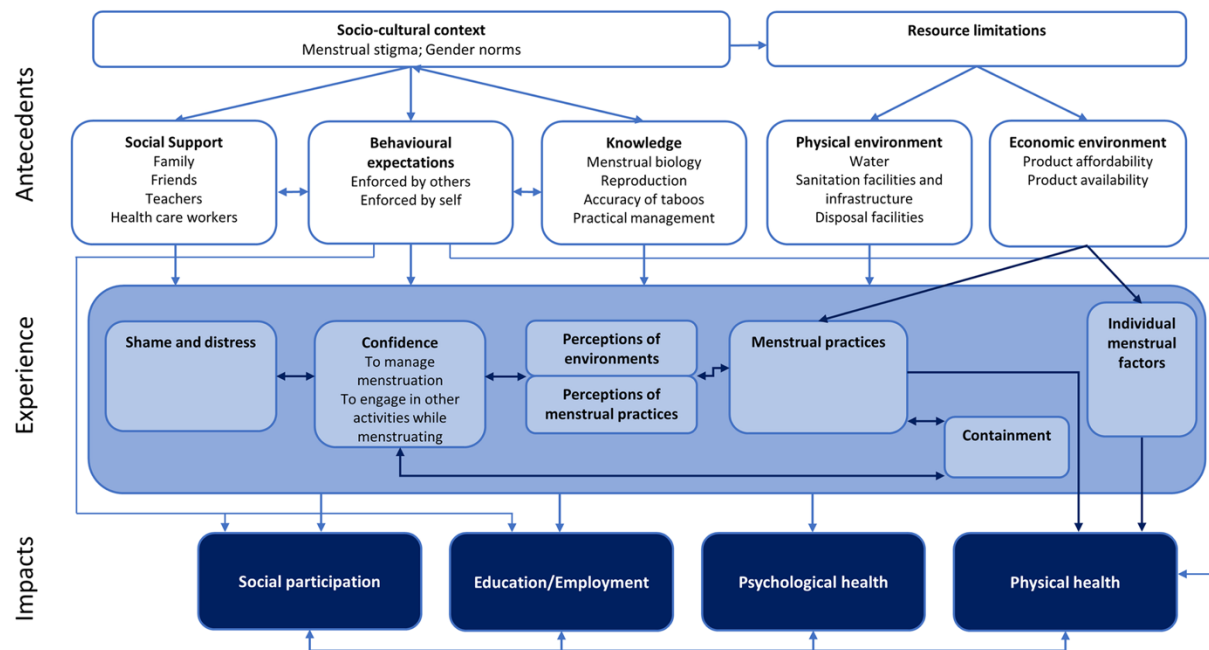


Figure 1 - Integrated model of menstrual experience (Hennegan et al., 2019)

Hennegan et al. conclude that “future interventions should seek to address identified antecedents of menstrual experience, including knowledge, social support, restrictive behavioural expectations, and the physical and economic environment” (Hennegan et al., 2019, s. 3).

Sommer (2009, 2010, 2013) also focuses on how there is a demand for understanding what factors are influencing girls academic abilities and achievements. She emphasises that

capturing girls voiced experiences of their everyday life through participatory methodologies can contribute to understand if and how menstruation is impacting girls schooling (2009, p. 383). Sommer also discusses how the girls in her studies lacked adequate information about menstruation and puberty and that the traditional cultural or family directions of growing up were perceived as insufficient by girls growing up with more global influences and shifting societal traditions (2009, p. 394). Being one of the most prominent researchers in the field, Sommer encourages further research to focus on the importance of studying contextual factors impacting girls lived experiences. She highlights that there is a need for capturing these accounts in sub-Saharan Africa today because of the possibility that menstruation may influence girls educational achievements (2009, p. 383).

Some of Sommer's research has been situated in the towns of Moshi and Rombo in the Kilimanjaro region, an area in Northern Tanzania. Having also collected my own research in Northern Tanzania, several parallels can be drawn from Sommer's findings to the results of this study. However, the area where Sommer conducted her research is for the most part inhabited by people from Chagga tribe, whereas the data collection for this thesis was situated in a district with people predominantly Maasai inhabitants. There are notable differences in how these tribes historically have viewed for instance schooling and gender roles. The Chaggas are known for being highly educated. They were early influenced by Christian missionaries, but more importantly, education has also had a central position in the traditional Chagga culture (Mashaza & Majani, 2018, p. 114). Chagga people are also known for having had less dramatic menstrual practices and traditions than others (Sommer, 2010, p. 523).

Contrary to Sommer and Hennegan et al. there are researcher like Grant et al. (2013) and Osther & Thornton (2011) that question the likeliness of menstrual solutions lowering school absenteeism. Through a survey-based study of students at 59 primary schools in Malawi, Grant et al. found no causal relationship between provision of sanitary supplies or improvement of toilet facilities on school dropouts or absenteeism. Even though their results indicated that one third of all girls reported missing at least one day of school during their periods, menstruation accounted for only a small part of female absenteeism. They state that even though menstruation might negatively impact quality of life, it unclear whether girls' school performance and attendance is related to menstruation. Emphasizing that the most stated reason for school absence was "sickness", and only a small amount blaming menstruation, they draw attention to the fact that there are few studies that link actual

attendance data to the impact of menstruation. (Grant et al., 2013, p. 262). Jewitt & Ryley (2014) points out how the term “sickness” is often used as a euphemism for menstruation related illness and that menstruation related absence can be wrongly categorised.

The findings of Grant et al. (2013) corresponds with the research of authors like Unterhalter et al. (2014). Through a review of 169 research studies from 1991 to 2014 they study what research evidence suggests can lead to expansion and improvement of girls’ education, gender equality and empowerment (Unterhalter et al., 2014, p. 1). Unterhalter et al. presents targeted cash transfers, information about employment returns to education and school development as the interventions that are most strongly supported by research-based evidence to have an impact on girls school participation, learning and empowerment. From their research, water, hygiene and sanitation measures has a promising positive impact on girls absenteeism, but the evidence for it is not yet considered to be strong. In line with Oster & Thornton (2011) they also highlight that there is limited evidence that provision of menstrual supplies directly impacts girls attendance, but emphasise that it is suggested to have an effect on quality of life and education in general, which in itself should encourage further research.

Furthermore, MHM has also received increasing attention by private stakeholders. Over the course of me preparing and writing this thesis I have seen a clear increase in organisations fronting MHM. The acknowledged Tanzanian NGO, HakiElimu, published a report in 2019 focusing on factors that can affect girls’ retention and transition rates³ in Tanzania. Through interviews with schoolgirls from five different districts in Tanzania, HakiElimu identified three focus areas that might impact girls’ retention and transition: (1) girls sexuality, (2) domestic environment, and (3) teaching and learning environment. Compared to barriers such as economic restraints, family commitments and academic difficulties, menstruation had less impact on girls missing school. Nevertheless, HakiElimu found that as much as 69,2 percent of their participants strongly agreed to be scared of attending class during menstruation (Sambaiga, 2019, p. 40). The high percentage of girls stating that they fear going to school on their period suggests it is a problem to be addressed. Shame and poor access to sanitary products were some of the reasons for this fear. As an important influence on the Tanzanian government and other NGOs, HakiElimu presents solutions to the problems addressed in the study. Improving of schools’ sanitary facilities is among the solutions that are encouraged.

³ Number of students transitioning from primary to secondary level.

They also highlight that provision of sanitary pads in schools should be expanded to reach more girls (Sambaiga, 2019, p. 46).

As part of efforts to advocate for girls' education and rights, HakiElimu also recently published a study assessing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education in primary and secondary schools in Tanzania (HakiElimu, 2021). Their findings indicated that SRHR education improved girls' school attendance during menstruation and reduced the stress related to menses (HakiElimu, 2021, p. 30). These findings support the evidence that menstruation might impact school participation in Tanzania and calls for continued emphasis on girls menstrual experience.

2.2 “Holding back”

Most of the literature presented above focuses on how girls education is essential for development, and how poor menstrual experiences may influence girls' ability to stay in school. Through research on girls and women in the Tigray region in Ethiopia, social anthropologist and photographer Thera Mjaaland (2013) encourages looking beyond the narrative that specific cultural practices or domestic work limits girls education. She raises awareness around how girls' socialisation and “specific understandings of femaleness” can impact girls academic performance.

Mjaaland explains how girls in Tigray are required to be modest and “hold back” in public in order to fulfil societal and cultural standards of what is “female”. She often refers to this as the “virginity ideal” and highlights that amongst her informants, femininity is connected to modesty, virtue and seclusion. By elucidating that boys and girls are encouraged to develop different traits, she suggests that female modesty causes girls to “hold back” in their educational assertiveness (2013, p. 140). Her point is that girls cannot avoid relating to and negotiating the implications of their gender when pursuing education (2013, p. 290).

Mjaaland's ideas will be integrated in this thesis by focusing on how the way girls are socialised can lead them to have a withdrawn attitude towards their capabilities and potential. Through my data collection process this appeared as an important perspective to address, and I believe attention needs to be paid to how “holding back” and displays of modesty impacts girls' performance in education.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Gender theory

Mjaaland's (2013) research on gender stereotypes and school participation for Tigrayan girls leads to a discussion of how to understand gender. The field of gender studies is extensive and will not be fully explored in this thesis. Nevertheless, this chapter will start by briefly introducing some of the most commonly used ways of understanding gender, as they can be used to argue the importance of girls' menstrual experience. Simone de Beauvoir separates the concepts of "sex" and "gender" to question whether (wo)man is born or made. "Sex" is used to describe biological conditions, while "gender" does not express sex as a primary given, but is changeable and refers to an interpretation and internalisation of social and cultural systems (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003, p. 3).

This dichotomous view of sex and gender is shared by other gender theorists. Judith Butler uses it to critique naturalistic explanations that render women's social existence as dependent upon their physiology (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Butler understands gender as performative. Thereby, gender is understood as a historical and cultural construct in which the (wo)man compels the body to conform to a historical idea of (wo)manhood (Butler, 1988, p. 522). The understanding of gender as a social construct is commonly acknowledged today, but this way of understanding the relationship between biological sex and social gender has also been challenged (Moi, 1998). Are women's lived experiences not at all impacted by bodily functions such as menstruation or childbearing? This thesis does not argue against the viability of social gender, but rather elucidate how the body, and thereby menstruation, is always a part of most women and girls' lived experiences.

3.2 Anthropological perspective on menstrual taboos

Above it is argued that bodily functions can impact one's lived experiences. The following chapter will present anthropological theories of taboo and pollution surrounding the female body and menstruation.

3.2.1 Taboo and pollution

Several qualitative studies, like Jewitt & Ryley (2014, p. 137) highlights how taboos, and the silence around menstruation, might restrict female mobility, create or enforce gender inequalities and impact girls' access to resources like education. Sommer (2009) also found that taboos or etiquette on menstruation can influence girls' behaviour or freedom of

movement during menstruation (Sommer, 2009, p. 386). These culturally or self-imposed restrictions make interesting approaches for studying the everyday experience of menstruation.

Menarche is in some cultures followed by rituals and symbolism. The numerous rules for the conduct of menstruation have caused it to be foregrounded in some anthropological studies. Herein, menstruation is often connected to a concept of taboos. Menstrual taboos are customs or institutionalised perceptions that restricts women's behaviour during menstruation. The taboos are often rooted in beliefs that menstruating women or their blood are dangerous or offensive and results in rules of menstrual conduct (Young & Bacdayan, 1965, p. 225). Buckley & Gottlieb (1998) write about how theories of taboos are multifaceted, but the dominant theory being the one that equates taboos with oppression. Studies of how the menstrual experience is related to male dominance through taboos has contributed to the construct of theories of pollution (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 9). The theories of pollution arise from the perception by both men and women that menstrual blood is unclean or messy. Mary Douglas (2002), an acknowledged anthropologist who worked on general pollution theory, defined pollution as something that is out of place or that offends against social order. Menstruation is considered to be out of place because it is moved from inside the body where it is normally contained. Taboos are therefore constructed to protect people from the "danger" that this matter out of place is imposing (Douglas, 2002, p. 3). And thus, is female behaviour influenced by how their bodies are viewed through ideas of pollution.

Longhurst (2000) also focuses on how taboos arise from the female body challenging conventional ideas of boundaries. Women can be understood to be in possession of "insecure bodily boundaries", like leaking of menstrual blood, that makes their bodies not trusted in public spheres. Men, on the other hand, do not have the same insecure bodily boundaries. In this context, leaking bodily fluids and bodily waste can also be referred to as a liminal state where women are vulnerable and between two stages, the exterior and interior. The term liminality was developed by anthropologists and refers to the middle stage of a rite of passage, but has later been expanded to refer to boundary or in-between experiences in general (Horvath et al., 2015, p. 39).

3.2.2 Witchcraft

Buckley & Gottlieb highlights how the liminal state of menstruating women described above makes them susceptible to manipulation through rituals. By being defined as a pollutant menstrual blood is an “obvious candidate for ritual use with the intent of bringing harm to others”, for example through witchcraft (1988, p. 34). Hence, are taboos not only created to protect the society from menstrual “pollution”, but also to protect menstruating women from spiritual forces or witchcraft (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 7). Keesing (1998, p. 291) defines witchcraft as a “malevolent power that operates through individuals as an involuntary force”. Data from this study suggests that witchcraft was one factor that influenced girls’ menstrual experiences. Special attention was given to how blood can be an entry point for a “witch” to inflict harm on a person. Therefore, an understanding of the place of witchcraft in the society seems relevant. In Africa, witchcraft is still an accepted fact that is not just limited to certain communities, but extends to all levels of society including academic and political spheres, religion and medicine (Green, 2005, p. 247). In Tanzania witchcraft is most widespread in north-western and central regions like Mwanza, Shinyanga, Tabora and Singida, but the belief in witchcraft is pervasive throughout the country and an acknowledged part of daily life for many (Mesaki, 1993, p. 169).

In societies where witchcraft is prevalent, customary practices are commonly explained to be originating from witchcraft (Keesing, 1998, p. 291). In this way witchcraft serves as a mechanism for explaining experiences of misfortune or mysterious happenings. Mesaki describes how witchcraft can work for conformity in a society by being a way of sanctioning and discouraging behaviour that is deemed socially unacceptable (1993, p. 154). Historically, elder women, people with albinism and others that act or look “out of the ordinary” risked being labelled as witches in Tanzania. They have been, and still are, therefore suffering from witch killings and violence. Most of the literature on witchcraft in Tanzania seems to be focused on extreme cases of witch-killings and witchcraft eradication, but in this thesis, it is more interesting to study how superstitious beliefs is a latent part of people’s daily lives in less extreme ways. In the context of menstruation, it is interesting to research how menstrual conduct is rooted in witchcraft and how a fear of witchcraft being directed at themselves, makes girls conform to menstrual norms.

3.2.3 Confinement

In addition to taboos, another way of sanctioning menstruating girls and make sure their bodies do not “pose a threat to the social order” is through confinement. Confinement refers to boundaries, bounds or borders and is by Longhurst (2000, p. 36) used to describe many different phases of women’s life cycles where they cannot move freely. An example is pregnant women withdrawing from public space, becoming confined to their home. Buckley & Gottlieb (1988) addresses how it might be problematic to view taboos only as oppressive towards women. Some parts of menstruation etiquette have been suggested to have been self-imposed. They make examples of how confinement of menstruating women historically might have originated due to women themselves wanting to stay out of the public sphere while menstruating. They do not argue that menstrual taboos are not made to oppress women, but reflect on how it might have different social functions in different contexts (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 11).

In this thesis, confinement will be discussed as a cultural imperative as described above. As a cultural imperative, confinement is a result of customs reflecting the power relations between men and women. Furthermore, confinement can also be used to show how some physical environments causes menstruating women to restrict their behaviour and use of space. In the field of geography menstruation is sometimes studied with a focus on the relationship between bodies and spatiality, where menstruating girls might experience exclusion from places they have previously been welcomed or felt comfortable, for example school environment. This leads to a state of confinement where a person is restrained, and either is obliged or feel obliged to stay indoors due to the state of their bodies. For menstruating and pregnant women both, lack of adequate sanitary infrastructure in public spaces, or lack of pads, can for example lead to confinement. In this context confinement is a result of the intersection between poverty and being a menstruating girl.

Considering that confinement may emerge from either culturally imposed customs or materialistic inadequacies, Longhurst argues that simply adapting the public sphere to the need of women is not in itself enough to eradicate female confinement. Longhurst emphasises that a change needs to happen at “both the material and discursive levels” (Longhurst, 2000, p. 40).

3.3 Empowerment

One way of eradicating female confinement might be through the concept of empowerment. The World Bank defines empowerment broadly as “the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life” and people’s ability to influence institutions that affect their lives (Narayan, 2002, p. 18).

The World Bank’s definition of empowerment is similar to Naila Kabeer’s framework for empowerment. Kabeer is a social economist known for her research on the agency of women factory workers in Bangladesh. She is one of the most important contributors to the issue of women empowerment and looks at power as the ability to make choices and control key aspects of one’s life. Thereby being disempowered is the inability to choose (1999, p. 437). Menstruation is a key aspect of women’s and girl’s lives, and in this context, empowerment is for example about the ability for women to choose how they want to handle their menstruation and how to relate and engage with societal and cultural norms and taboos. According to Kabeer (1999) the *ability* to choose is fundamental, but not enough to create empowerment, there also needs to be an *expansion* of people’s ability to make strategic life choices to live the lives they want to live. This could for example be choosing whether to marry or whom to marry, to have children or achieve higher education (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). In this thesis it will be argued that having the ability and the means necessary to influence one’s own menstrual experience is essential to being able to make these strategic life decisions.

Kabeer identifies three inseparable dimensions of empowerment (1) resources, (2) agency and (3) achievements (1999, p. 437). Resources are structures, both material and human, that can expand the ability to make choices. Agency refers to the decision-making of the actor and the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Achievements are explained by successful exercises of agency that can in turn generate more empowerment (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

Murphy-Graham & Lloyd (2016) proposes a conceptual framework for how education can empower adolescent girls by mapping educational interventions with empowerment potential. Their framework includes three core conditions that is necessary if education is to have an impact on girls’ empowerment. The three conditions highlight that: (1) the physical, material, and socio-cultural environment must be conducive to learning, (2) empowering education for girls should foster their dignity and equal worth with others and (3) empowering education

should expand girls' agency and promote "learning by doing" (Murphy-Graham & Lloyd, 2016, p. 570). Although ambitious, especially in under-resourced contexts, the framework elucidates how education can contribute to empowering adolescent girls.

3.4 Capabilities

According to Kabeer, resources and agency together constitute what Amartya Sen refers to as capabilities (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). Pioneered by philosopher and economist Amartya Sen, the capabilities approach (CA) raises the question of what people are actually able to do and to be. Furthermore, the capability approach places human development and welfare focus on people as active agents and emphasises the diversity in human needs and priorities. This means acknowledging that people have different ideas and values. CA is therefore about individuals ability or opportunity to obtain what *they* find valuable. Sen combines ability and opportunity and uses the word freedoms. Capabilities understood as freedoms means that a person has all the means necessary to achieve what they wish to do (an activity or functioning) or to be (state of being). Sen emphasises that when people describe what they value, it is often a state or an activity (Banik, 2006, p. 17). Thereby, CA shifts the focus from means or resources to ends, focusing on what people are able to do and be with the available resources, in their particular circumstance. Sen therefore accentuates that an individual's freedom, or capability, to act on what they find valuable can be used to measure quality of life (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 14).

One of those that have further developed Sen's capability approach is Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum focuses especially on individual rights, for example the freedom to obtain one's right to education, participation and income-earning (2000, p. 5). For girls that experience menstruation as an obstacle for education, capabilities is about their freedom to realise their right to education. The capability approach is addressed because it can be a useful way of identifying barriers for improving women and girls' situation. Menstruation can possibly be identified as one such barrier. Nussbaum states that, as a result of their gender, women lack the support and resources for leading their lives fully (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 4). It is also possible to argue that women who lack the support and resources they need to meet their menstrual needs, have limited freedom to fulfil their capabilities, simply by them being women and having a body that goes through menstruation.

3.5 Intersectionality

Nussbaum also argues that when gender inequality is combined with poverty it creates a profound failure of human capabilities where the freedom to choose and realise one's aspirations is increasingly limited (2000, p. 3). The material of this thesis suggests that this is the situation for many of the young girls in the sample. An article by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) is therefore used to discuss how the concept of intersectionality can be useful when understanding how the menstrual experience is shaped by many dimensions of girls identities. Intersectionality has roots in the black feminist movement and was coined by Crenshaw as a way of understanding how different identity categories like race, gender, class or sexuality coincides in creating inequality. As a pioneer for critical race theory, Crenshaw emphasises how inequality discourses often focuses only on one identity category, like race, when explaining disparities, forgetting to respond to other categories, like gender. She argues that the focus should be on how some people are subject to several intersecting identities at a time. In her article she does this by showing how patterns of racism and social class impacts women of colour's experiences with violence in a way that it is not relevant for white women (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). This accentuates how women who are socially, culturally, or economically disadvantaged at the same time are less likely to be able to mobilize the resources needed to fulfil their capabilities. Through my thesis I will argue that a combination of intersectional issues like poverty, lack of empowerment and gender can contribute to explain the unique vulnerability of young women that impinges on their freedom to realise their capabilities.

The theories presented above vary greatly but may altogether contribute to understand the menstrual experience of a group of Tanzanian adolescents. Several different theories have been presented to reflect how there are many different aspects to consider when attempting to understand menstruation. I believe important aspects could have been lost without the diversity of the chosen theories.

4 Research methodology

In this chapter I account for the methodological approach for this master project. Answering my research questions required me to collect data through field work in Tanzania. The focus on girls' personal and individual experiences influenced the choice of research methods. Lived experiences are difficult to quantify. I therefore made a choice of using focus group discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews and participatory observation as methods to produce different forms of qualitative data. A qualitative research approach is suited for addressing the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social and human phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 42). In my case I was interested in how girl students, both as individuals and a group, experience menstruation as a biological and social phenomenon. Therefore, a qualitative approach was a good foundation for learning about the multiple perspectives of my informants' menstrual experience. By also addressing the meaning they place on intersectional factors influencing their experiences, I have tried to form an in-depth picture of how different factors of adolescent girls' lives interacts in shaping their experiences. I wanted to avoid basing the data collection on my own assumptions and therefore chose a qualitative study that allowed for a flexible approach to the data collection where the methodological approach could be adapted during the field work.

4.1 Phenomenological approach

Attempting to describe the lived menstrual experiences of a group of people, places my research within a phenomenological research tradition. Phenomenological studies describe the common meaning of a phenomenon amongst a group of people and attempts to describe what all participants have in common when experiencing a phenomenon. By doing this, individual experiences are reduced to describe the universal essence of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). In line with this I set out to collect data from people that have experience with a phenomenon, which in this case is menstruation and school participation, and attempted to develop a description of the essence of this experience for the participants. Creswell & Poth (2018, p. 75) emphasizes how a phenomenological description should include *what* the participants experienced, but also *how* they experienced it, which is reflected in my material.

Following a phenomenological research tradition also presents some challenges. While I am in search of the common experience of menstruation, I also acknowledge that there is not just *one* way of experiencing menstruation for my participants. I have attempted to let my material

reflect this duality by also studying aspects of the underlying reasons for how my participants experience their realities the way they do. Researching people's lived experiences has the potential of uncovering underlying structures, routines and habits that is cemented in the consciousness and impacts the experience of being a menstruating adolescent student. In addition to the phenomenological descriptions of *what* and *how* a phenomenon is experienced, it has also been important to study *why* girls are experiencing menstruation the way they are.

4.2 Presentation of schools and participants

The sample population of this study includes girl students from two different secondary schools, a female teacher, a school matron and three different NGOs. Tables of FGD and interview participants, with information about their positions and involvement in the project, can be found in Appendix 1 and 2. Information about the two field schools can be found in chapter 5.

I have chosen to give all my informants fictive names. The two field schools have been called School 1 and School 2. To secure their anonymity I have also given the two NGOs fictive names. The only organisation I chose to name is Norwegian Church Aid as they are strictly representing their official work and strategies.

4.3 Accessing the field and recruiting of informants

My data was collected through a two-month field work in northern Tanzania from early October to early December of 2021. I went to Tanzania along with two fellow students that would also be conducting their field work in Tanzania. We all did most of our data collection based at a secondary school (School 1), where we also resided for most of our time in Tanzania. Prior to departing we had organised with the school to let them know the objectives of our research. I had already done teaching practice at the same school in 2019 and was therefore familiar with the environment and had a network to rely on. The fact that I knew several of both students and staff made recruiting of informants easier. In School 1 I conducted four focus group discussions (FGDs) with students and two semi-structured individual interviews with a female teacher and the school matron. For the FGDs I recruited students from the upper secondary classes and chose to do two groups with students in Form 3 (16-17 yrs.) and two groups from Form 5 (18-19 yrs.). This to make sure all student

participants were above the age of 16 and could comply with rules for consent, but also because of their English proficiency.

The teacher, whom I have called Florah, was chosen because she was my practice teacher in 2019. This meant I already had established a relationship with her, but I also chose her because her way of teaching differed from other teachers I had experience with. She comes across as an especially devoted teacher, and as a teacher student I admired how she built her lessons on real life experiences. She spoke honestly with the students and encouraged them to reflect in ways that I had not seen done by other teachers in Tanzanian schools. I therefore asked her for the opportunity to participate in and observe her social science lessons (Civics and General Studies) on advanced level. In these lessons she specifically brought up topics of menstruation, sexuality, relationships and gender norms with a critical perspective. Even though menstruation only made up a small part of her lessons, I found them useful for learning how they spoke about topics that in other contexts might be deemed taboo. I also asked the school matron for an interview. She is in charge of the students health and wellbeing and is also the one to distribute pads to the students. Because of my focus on lived experiences, I believed she would be able to provide a different, and thereby useful, insight into other aspects of the students' lives.

In addition to collecting data at School 1, I also made arrangements with stakeholders from three different NGOs. As people with experience in the field, I was interested in their perspectives on MHM and empowerment. I also wanted to interview them to put the data collected in the schools in perspective. One of them, Beatrice from Menstrual Health Awareness org. (MHA org.), was recommended to me by my supervisor. After following her work on social media for a while, I contacted her prior to leaving for Tanzania and arranged a meeting. Beatrice became a key informant who contributed with valuable insight into the research field and gave suggestions for other sources of information. Beatrice was also the one to introduce me to School 2. She brought me along on her visits to the school and gave me the opportunity to do participatory observation and have field conversations with students and staff. I chose not to do any interviews at this school as I was mostly interested in seeing how the students responded to and engaged in Beatrice's work. Together, Beatrice and I therefore developed a habit of sitting down shortly after the visits to discuss the day and write down the important things we remembered. Because most of the visits were conducted in

KiSwahili, Beatrice would explain to me what had been said and I would be able to question her about the matters I did not understand.

Having chosen a qualitative study approach, I was able to make use of the snowball method to recruit new informants as opportunities presented themselves to me. Because the snowball method can lead to having many informants from the same networks, sharing the same characteristics, it has been suggested to lead to sampling bias (Grønmo, 2020, p. 117). However, having a qualitative approach I do believe it rather contributed to creating the in-depth descriptions I was after. Beatrice was the one to introduce me to Jackson, a government official working with her on sanitation and menstrual related issues.

I found Emmanuel from Live Your Dreams org. (LYD org.) through School 1. On my last visit to Tanzania, they were working with the students in School 1. I therefore decided to contact them as I knew they were working on menstrual health in an empowerment perspective.

Lastly, I contacted the Norwegian Church Aid in Tanzania. I had also followed their work for some time and had noticed that they recently started including MHM in their programmes. I therefore arranged an interview with them at the end of my field work. Unfortunately, when the time came for the interview, it turned out that the representative that was in charge of their MHM strategy was on maternity leave and the replacement was away on a conference. Therefore, the interview did not go exactly as planned. Nevertheless, they were very accommodating, and although not an expert on the MHM field, the representative I met with still provided some useful insights on MHM from a stakeholder perspective.

My field work was, as mentioned, conducted during the fall of 2021 when the covid-19 pandemic was still undergoing. All formal safety precautions were taken to make sure not to put myself or my informants in any risk. This meant that my research had some limitations. Because of the uncertainty around whether the research plan could be realized, I put off contacting and making appointments with most of my informants until I knew that I would be able to follow through. This meant that planning cooperation with organisations was limited mainly to interviews, except for my work with Beatrice and MHA org. that I followed over a longer course of time. Had I been able to go about the preparations as I wished, I might have

used more time in advance establishing relationships with informants and attempted to involve myself even more in their work.

4.4 Choice of research methods

To collect data, I used a qualitative mixed methods approach. Qualitative data was collected through a triangulation of different methods such as interviews, FGDs, observation and field conversations. This gave me the chance to study girls menstrual experience from multiple sources and from different perspectives. This adds to the trustworthiness of the data collected and has helped to minimize bias, which I will return to in chapter 4.7.

4.4.1 Focus group discussions

Most of my field work was, as mentioned, based on a longer stay at School 1. Here I spent time being an active participant in the school environment. I did this by engaging myself as a student teacher, and taught several subjects in Form 1, 3 and 5. Most days I returned to School in the afternoon and on the weekends to spend time with the students outside of the classroom. This gave me the opportunity to conduct participatory observation and field conversations with the students. Moreover, I then had the chance to single out students that I thought would be interesting informants in FGDs.

The FGDs with students became an important source of information in my data collection process. My initial plan was to carry out both individual interviews and FGDs with the students, but after conducting the first two focus groups, I realized that the students benefitted from a group environment where they were comfortable with each other. The groups also allowed them to help each other with language difficulties. FGDs also proved to be a useful method for capturing an exchange of thoughts among the informants and gave room for more spontaneity than individual interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 179). I felt that the interactions among the participants made it easier to discuss sensitive, tabooed topics. I also understood that topics like menstruation was most commonly discussed among friends, and rarely with others. I therefore thought the students would benefit from discussing such topics with their peers rather than just me as a researcher. I do however recognise that some in-depth, individual perspectives could be lost because of the group dynamics in FGDs.

FGDs often consists of 6 to 10 participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 179). I chose to have groups of around five students. One of the reasons being that the students had quite busy schedules that limited the time they had available for non-educational activities. I also conducted my field work at the same time as the students were doing their national exams which further limited the time they allocated to other activities. Furthermore, I experienced that the number of students gave everyone a chance to be heard and created a non-threatening environment for discussing personal experiences. I attempted to form groups of both extroverted, talkative students and more reserved students and found this dynamic beneficial as the more talkative students would often help the others to partake in the discussion. Some of the students were also strategically chosen as I knew they were especially proficient in English.

In some of the groups it took the participants some time to understand the I indeed wanted them to have a real discussion, not simply answer my questions. Some discussions therefore started with the students talking one by one and presenting an individual answer to each question. FGDs involves that the researcher is more passive, allowing the discussion to unfold naturally (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 179). However, since I wanted an informal discussion, I sometimes had to take charge of the conversation and make my expectations clear. I attempted to facilitate an environment where different and conflicting perspectives could be raised. All groups eventually ended up having constructive discussions.

4.4.2 Tracing kinship

In addition to partake in the discussion, I also asked the participants of the FGDs to draw a kinship diagram. Kinship diagrams is often used in anthropological studies to get an overview of kin relations between parents and children and more distant relatives (Keesing, 1998, p. 181).

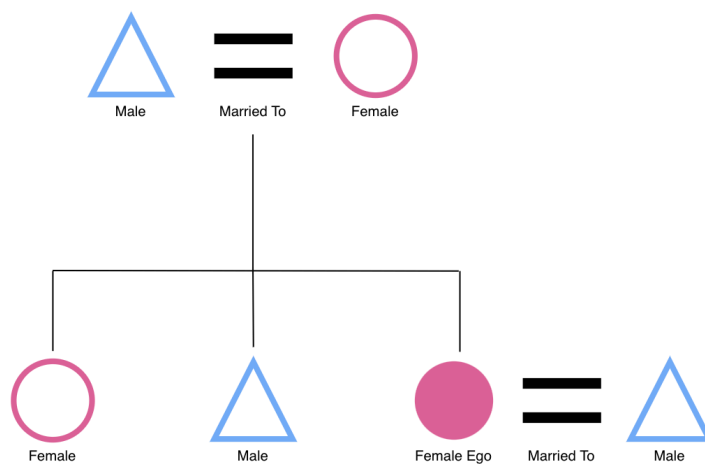


Figure 2 - Kinship diagram student example

I mainly used kinship diagrams to map family situations to gain a clearer understanding of the students' backgrounds and what their at-home menstrual experiences were rooted in. It also made me better able to ask meaningful follow-up questions and I was able to avoid generalising and assuming that all students came from a certain type of family or background. Naturally, several students were not living in nuclear families, and one student did not live with her immediate family at all. My interview guide contained questions about father's attitudes towards menstruation but seeing as 39 percent of my informants did not live with their fathers, many of them would not have been able to answer this question based on personal experience. This was valuable insight to have when analysing the interview data. The kinship diagrams resulted in the following overview of the student informant's family structures. The table shows the type of guardians the students lived with and does not account for siblings or if the informant was married, as none of them yet lived with their spouses.

Table 1 - Family structure of FGD participants

Nuclear family	Single parent*	Extended family	Polygamous family	Not stated**
6	7	1	2	2

* None stated living with a single father.

** Arrived late to FGD and were not there to answer

4.4.3 Semi structured interviews and field conversations

Semi-structured interviews are a common method for collecting qualitative data (Grønmo, 2020, p. 140). I conducted five semi-structured individual interviews with school actors and stakeholders from the MHM field. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 ½ hour. When combined with the FGDs this was in my opinion enough informants to be able to conduct a thorough analysis, and I therefore stopped the recruiting of new informants when I felt I had reached a saturation point (Grønmo, 2020, p. 104).

To guide the conversations, I developed interview guides with some open-ended and some closed questions. The open-ended questions and the semi-structured approach to the interviews allowed for new topics to emerge during the conversations. It also increased the trustworthiness of the material by attempting to avoid guiding the informants' answer in the "right" direction. The questions in the interview guides were based on previous research literature, but they were also adapted along the way to my experiences in field. In most cases the interviews deviated from the structure of the interview guides.

As a part of my field work, I also conducted field conversations as another type of informal conversations. The field conversations were an integral part of the participatory observation, as observations are not only what can be seen, but also what can be heard. Furthermore, I also used field conversations as a separate source for obtaining empirical material. They sometimes provided me with answer to questions I had not thought to ask, but that came up naturally in conversation (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014, p. 33). The field conversations were noted in a field diary and later categorised thematically.

4.4.4 Participant observation

A school-based field work required a high level of participation from me as a researcher. Participant observation therefore became an important source of information for me and offered a different insight into how my informants lead their lives (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014, p. 63). All discoveries were noted in a field diary and later categorised along with the rest of the data material. My observations include both descriptions of situations, but also my own impressions of what happened. I attempted to keep the two kinds of observation separate. However, I am aware that my own interpretations probably have impacted what is supposed to be neutral descriptions. An important part of the observation was therefore reflecting on my

own role and how I, as the researcher, impacted the field. This will be further elaborated in chapter 4.6.

The observations were guided by the following questions:

- How do my informants manage their menstruation?
- How do the physical environment and infrastructure facilitate a dignified way of managing menstruation?
- Do examples of gendered social structures appear in the daily life of my informants?
- How do the students interact with others about menstruation or other related subjects?
How do they interact amongst themselves, with me, teachers, the matron?

Because I lived just outside School 1 and therefore could spend a lot of time there, I had many chances of doing observations in a school context. I also conducted observation with MHM org. in School 2.

4.5 Transcriptions and analysis

To process the data from the field work I transcribed the interviews using voice recordings and field notes. I have attempted to transcribe my material as my informants said it. I have chosen not to correct any of the quotes used in this paper, as this ensures low interference from me as the researcher in changing the meaning of my informants' statements (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 266). Therefore, there is some wrong use of language in the quotes. In some cases, I have put an explanation for a quote in brackets. The qualitative analytical software *NVivo* was used to code and categorize the material. I did not have predefined codes or categories. My analysis was therefore based on an inductive approach where new categories were formed from the data material. However, I do consider that the topics raised in my interview guides (Appendix 5-7) are a form of predefined categories and that they did influence which topics were discussed in the interviews. The interview questions were based on theory, previous research and personal experience, but were not used to form the analytical categories.

I aimed to do a thematic analysis of my material to identify themes within the data. Thematic analyses are more inductive than other forms of content analysis, because categories are not decided prior to coding, but are induced from the material (Ezzy, 2002, p. 88). I started by

identifying descriptive codes that described the different parts of the material. These codes were then used to make categories of data with common features. However, different codes and new themes emerged after having started analysing the material, so a big part of the analytical process involved arranging and rearranging the material into categories for a second time during the writing process (Ezzy, 2002, p. 92). Because the study was aimed at producing a phenomenological description of the essence of a lived phenomenon, I also analysed the data looking for connections between codes and between parts and the whole of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67).

4.6 My role and position in the field

A challenge with having a phenomenological research approach is understanding that this thesis is a result of my own interpretation of my informants' experiences. Phenomenology is not only a description of the lived experiences of a phenomenon, but also an interpretative process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the shared meaning of lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). This idea is similar to what is often referred to as double hermeneutics, where the researcher interprets the informants' interpretations of their realities (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014, p. 74). This requires the researcher to understand her own role and position in the field. I came to Tanzania as a young, white, European, and educated woman and met a culture that is different, but also in certain aspects similar to my own. The differences meant that I had to reflect on how my previous experiences have influenced my knowledge and way of thinking. In the absence of a shared background, both me and my informants make more or less educated assumptions about each other's lives.

An important part of understanding my position in the field was having a conscious relationship to my roles in the field. Initially, the people in the field will always place the researcher within their normal social landscape and within already existing power relations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 63). I was therefore prepared to have to negotiate my role and position in the field. I first wanted to avoid being labelled as a visitor, as I believed this would give me limited access to information. In the schools I did this by focusing on my role as a teacher student and focused on how I was there to learn from both students and teachers. However, being a Norwegian teacher student on masters level, I already had far more education than most of my colleagues at the school. Most teachers in Tanzania have 1-2 years of higher education, and I therefore had a higher academical status than them, even as a student.

Therefore, I was not a normal part of the usual social landscape of the school, thus is this probably not the most effective way to facilitate exploratory dialogue (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014, p. 70).

In my relationships with the students, I felt like I had two roles. During school hours I was their student teacher, but since I am also a young woman, not that much older than my oldest informants, we would have a more friendly and equal relationship in our spare time. I felt like this suited my research well. It also contributed to subdue my role as a researcher in the FGDs, which created a more informal interview situation. In general, I attempted not to be labelled simply as a researcher as I believed this would create a distance between me and the people around me. Therefore, I tried to position myself in a learner's role where I focused on being there to learn from my informants. Even though few people know how to relate to being the focus of research, everyone knows what it is like to learn and be taught, and I hoped this would help me avoid creating unequal power relations that placed me "above" my informants (Wadel & Fuglestad, 2014, p. 42).

I sometimes felt like my background, educational level and skin colour brought with it an assumption that I had money, knowledge or connections and could therefore offer opportunities. This is not wrong, but I often felt the need to re-establish myself as a student and a learner and disconnect myself from other Western organisations or researchers, from whom people usually receive money. There was especially one incident when this became especially evident. I was asked to present myself as the director of an organisation because the person I was with knew they had a better chance of getting access to a school when accompanied by a "mzungu⁴ director". This took me out of the role as a researcher or student and gave me the position as a "director" of a company, which I was not.

I also sometimes had my role and position challenged during the FGDs. The students were well aware that I was a teacher student. However, since I was asking them about menstruation and other issues that they normally discuss with NGO representatives, or doctors and health workers brought by the NGOs, I sometimes felt like they also saw me as one of them. They

⁴ KiSwahili expression used to describe someone who is European, but mostly used in more general term to refer to someone who is white. Furthermore, the term is often used to denote economic well-being and knowledge.

therefore often asked me health related questions that I was always qualified to answer. Not all of these questions were written down, but some of them included:

- “Maybe you are in menstrual period, when you face some pain, are you advised to use drugs”?
- “If sometimes when you are in menstrual [period] is it good if you experience maybe ten or twelve days? Or one month?”
- “Sometimes we are told that maybe if you hear strange news even if you are not in menstruation period you get a period. What makes that to happen?”
- “Why when you are experiencing for the first time, why is the blood that is coming out, it is just like black?”
- “And maybe you are in menstrual cycle. That blood which is coming out, is it associated with your blood, your body blood?”

I was able to answer most of their questions, but sometimes had to re-establish that I am not a health worker. Moreover, these questions told me something about the students’ level of knowledge on these issues. Having the questions directed at me, also gave me an indication that I had been successful in creating an atmosphere where, what is otherwise regarded as taboo topics, could be raised.

4.7 Challenges and ethical issues

As presented above one of my main challenges during the field work was understanding my own role and position and how it influenced the data collection. Kvale & Brinkmann (2019) focus on how issues of validation in qualitative research should not be confined to a separate stage of an interview inquiry, but rather be permeate all stages of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 278). I have therefore chosen to discuss some challenges and weaknesses with the study as integrated parts of this chapter and refer to the whole of the chapter regarding issues of trustworthiness. However, there were some further overreaching challenges of trustworthiness and ethical issues that should be mentioned.

4.7.1 Time

Regarding the FGDs and teacher interview, the methodological challenge I faced most often was the issue of time. I would often schedule interviews that fell through because the informant(s) was occupied, had misunderstood, or did not show up in time for an interview.

This often meant that scheduled interviews had to be moved, which affected other parts of the data collection. I had for example scheduled an interview with a second teacher that fell through because it was continuously pushed forward on the teacher's request. Eventually, it was scheduled for my last day in field, but it turned out the teacher was not present at school that day. I therefore regard challenges with time as something that lead to some missed opportunities. Having a limited amount of time in field, efficiency was crucial for the progress of the data collection.

Making appointments and having all participants present at a certain time was also challenging when working with NGOs. It became evident to me during a field visit to School 2 how the NGOs also struggle with the concept of time in their own work. Beatrice had scheduled a time to come there to teach the kids and even reminded the administration of the visit in advance. However, when we came to the school, we found out all the primary students she was supposed to teach had been sent home from school early that day.

4.7.2 Ethical considerations

In the above chapter I described how I found taking a “learners role” to be quite effective in the school context. I also stuck with this role when meeting stakeholders. At the same time, I recognised that I, in most cases, were in a more powerful position than my informants by being the one who inevitably controlled the interview. I strived in my interviews and field conversations to have an equal and informal relationship between me as the interviewer and my informants, focusing on how I could learn from them. However, I also found myself in situations where I wished I had given my informants less power to control the interview. There was especially one occasion where I spoke to a highly respected individual that I knew could contribute with interesting insights for the study. When we met, I quickly learned that the person was more interested in entering in a relationship with a “mzungu”, young woman than answering my questions. After countless offers of a marriage, a newly built house and being refused to leave, as well as several attempts by me to shift the conversation, I chose to not complete the interview as planned to preserve the integrity of both my informant and myself. I felt that the statuses involved and the informant's wish to control the conversation made it difficult to insist on changing directions. This decision meant that I partly missed an important source of information for the project.

Another challenge I faced while interviewing NGOs was understanding their relationship to local authorities. During one of my conversations, one person explained their relationship with the government by showing me a drawing of a barking dog on their phone. The dog was barking, but wearing a muzzle, so no air came out. The dog was supposed to represent an NGO and the muzzle being a suppressive government. The relationships between the local NGOs and local government seemed to be two-fold. On the one hand, the local government also looked to pursue sanitation and MHM interventions as a part of their own agenda and was therefore supportive towards private actors doing the same. They would also occasionally provide private stakeholders with jobs. Furthermore, the support and the trust from the government was crucial for the NGOs to be given work licences and permits that would allow them to continue their work. These permits would not seldom be accompanied by what was referred to as “sitting allowance”, which meant that local government officials would ask the NGOs for bribes in exchange for their licences or when they came to observe their activities.

My NGO informants expressed that they, in general, had “a good working relationship with the government” as their support was important for them to be able to run their programmes. This also meant that people were often careful not to make critical comments towards authorities. In Tanzania, the freedom to critically question political decisions has been decreasing for years. Even though it seems to be improving after the presidential change in 2021 several of my informants expressed that they still had concerns of making critical comments about the government as “the same security and intelligence people were still in office”. This was often brought up in relation to the covid-19 school closure or government policies such as the pregnancy ban. Often, people I met would be hesitant to make critical comments while on the record during an interview, but more willing to speak about the same issues during informal and non-recorded field conversations. This required me to consider how, and if, I wanted to include any of this material in my thesis. In most cases, it has been left out, as my research questions can be answered without it. I also made similar assessments to leave out other types of what I regarded as intimate knowledge. I sometimes engaged in conversations, that although interesting, brought up delicate matters that were shared between me and my informants as friends. After consideration, this information was not reproduced in this study to ensure that the research would not bring harm to others.

4.7.3 Trustworthiness

Qualitative methods require, as detailed above, a high level of involvement from the researcher. Qualitative studies can therefore lead to researcher-subjectivity and bias (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 273). I have previously explained how reflexivity about my own role in field, how I positioned myself in relation to my informants, and my involvement in the process in general, can be used to avoid my own subjectivity influencing the material. Furthermore, it is also important to consider that the data collected in qualitative studies is also based on my informants' subjective experiences. A sense of intersubjectivity is developed, where the data collected is a result of the intersecting perspectives of the researcher and the informant. I therefore considered that my informants represented their own interpretations of their own experiences, and that they can also have biases and wish to present themselves in certain ways.

I attempted to avoid informant subjectivity by doing negative case sampling where I also looked for something that disconfirmed my findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 265). This also happened naturally, as my informants would disagree with my questioning or reflect critically about their own struggles. I also conducted my field work in Tanzania with two fellow students. One of them studied a topic similar to mine, and I was therefore able to make use of dialogical intersubjectivity and challenge my findings and interpretations by discussing them with my peers. This also meant that we were multiple observers and sometimes made the same findings, which I believe contributed to increasing the trustworthiness of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, p. 284).

5 Context presentation - MHM situation in field schools

In all studies based on field work it is important to understand the context in which the data collection takes place. The context is important for understanding on what grounds the data is examined and analysed. The following chapter therefore contains information about the two field schools, with emphasis on the current MHM situation. Additional focus is placed on School 1 as this is where the majority of the field work was conducted.

5.1 School 1

School 1 is a secondary school located in Northern Tanzania close to an urban centre. The school has about 350 students. It is a boarding school for girls, meaning the students live in dorms on the school premise, only returning home during holidays. Since its establishment, the school has targeted the pastoralist Maasai people with a goal of offering education to Maasai girls. As mentioned in chapter 1, Maasai girls have historically received limited formal education. The girls are usually married off at an early age. The boarding school was therefore created so the students do not have to walk long distances to school, but also as a safe space for students that do not have supportive family environments.

Each year, School 1 cooperates with different communities to offer secondary education to selected Maasai girls. On the basis of interviews and thorough background checks, some of the students are recruited and picked up by representatives from School 1 directly after they finish their Standard 7 examination. The student herself sometimes does not know she has been admitted to the secondary school. This is to make sure the guardians do not interfere with the process of enrolling her in secondary. Often the mother of the girl might know and support of her daughter going to secondary school, while the father is unsupportive and unknowing. In most cases, the school contacts a family to offer their daughter secondary education, but the father declines. Some mothers will then re-establish contact with the school later on with a wish for her daughter to be enrolled in school after all, without the father's permission. The process is carried out with assistance from the students' primary teachers and each case requires approval from the District Commissioner. In Tanzania student's right to primary education is protected by law, however secondary education is not. Although once the girl is enrolled in secondary, her right to finish is according to the school management, protected by law. For this reason, it is important for School 1 to ensure that girls from

vulnerable backgrounds are enrolled without interference. By doing this they are also assisting the government in providing education to girls from marginal backgrounds.

In Tanzania students finish primary school in September, and do not start secondary until January. To take care of the recruited students, School 1 is offering a “Pre-Form” class intended to introduce the girls to secondary education, while offering them to stay in a secure school environment in the period between primary and secondary. This a period where many girls are otherwise subjected to marriage. The topic of school holidays will be discussed later in the thesis. A few girls also leave their families and come to the school themselves. During my last visit in 2019, the school had three students in Pre-Form that had presented themselves at school after leaving their families.

Earlier, the school used to admit 60 recruited and sponsored Pre-Form students each year. However, after 2015 their outside support was reduced and today the number is around 20-30 sponsored students, while the rest are paying students. This changes the function of the school in some ways, but they are still devoted to providing education to girls from marginal backgrounds. They also strive to ensure that the students maintain their strong traditions in the rapidly developing world. The school aims to recruit the top students from an area, but because they also account for who is actually in need of support, they admit students with varying academic results. Many of their students are very ambitious, but some girls have by varying degree internalised their society’s tradition of placing low value in formal education. This makes it an interesting environment for studying how social structures such as norms and traditions are a part of the lives of young adolescents.

Because School 1 is privately owned and funded, they are able to afford extra expenses like hiring a nurse and a matron and also a visiting doctor. When a girl comes to the school, she is also provided with most of her basic necessities. In difference to many other private boarding schools, the students do not need to bring their own mattress, books or other learning materials, as a bare minimum is provided by the school. The school also provides the girls with menstrual products. During my last visit to the school in 2019, the girls were being provided with disposable sanitary pads. When I returned for this study, each girl received a pack of eight reusable sanitary pads to cover their menstrual needs. The school nurse provides basic training for the use of the sanitary pads.

Despite being able to offer the students a lot of services, I would not describe the school as particularly affluent, especially compared to other private schools in the country. Prior to the data collection, I assumed that the physical environment in which students are living and learning impacts their experience of handling menstruation in school. School 1 is a boarding school with the classrooms, staff rooms and dormitories all in one circle compound made to resemble the structure of a traditional Maasai boma (homestead). The school's classrooms are simple, but spacious, and equipped with basic school necessities. When the students are in school, their dormitories are locked. This meant that the students are supposed to make use of the public toilets during school hours. As evident from the pictures below, several of these toilets are unequipped, lacking doors, and some, running water. This resulted in the students having to walk to the water taps in the middle of the schoolyard to rinse themselves. The same goes for the toilets and washrooms in the student dormitories. Many of them also lacked doors for privacy and had issues with overflowing and leakage. Still, they are notably better than the facilities in other schools, especially many government schools.



Picture 1 - Public school bathrooms in private school (Malin Stave)

Most of the student toilets had “special buckets” for disposing menstrual products. During cleaning hours, the students carried the buckets outside the school premise to an incinerator located just outside the school gates. Here, the waste was emptied and burnt. If it was not for this incinerator all waste, including menstrual waste, would be spread or burnt in nature as the area has no infrastructure for garbage disposal.



Picture 2 – Incinerator and waste management in School 1 (Private)

When choosing to do most of my field work at this school I knew going into it that the students there are more privileged than government school students. I found it interesting to research how these girls are experiencing handling their periods, and the silence and taboos surrounding it, in a relatively safe and secure school environment. It is also important to consider that most of these girls would not be going to a private school of this standard if they were not recruited and sponsored. Many of them went to public primary schools, and several of them might not even have gone to secondary school at all. The situation that they are in, and their previous experiences, makes them knowledgeable and well able to reflect on different situations of life and how their lives would be unfolding without all these securities.

5.2 School 2

The second school was randomly selected and serves as a contrast to School 1. School 2 is essentially two separate schools, one primary and one secondary school, located next to each other. Both schools are government run and located in a different area of Northern Tanzania than School 1. As mentioned, I gained access to School 2 from Beatrice. Beatrice was already working in the primary school. During my time there, she also expanded her work to the secondary school, which gave me the chance to do observations her and have field conversations with students and staff. As this thesis focuses on adolescents, the emphasis is on data from the secondary school. However, some observations from the primary school is also included. The secondary school has 560 students (224 boys and 292 girls). The area

where the school is located is an area inhabited by majority Maasai people. In 2021 the school had no students scoring division 1⁵ in the Form 4 national examinations, proving that the school faces some challenges in educating their students that is not seen in School 1, which had a higher number of high performing students.

In a Tanzanian context School 1 is a “typical” public school with upwards from fifty students tightly packed in small classrooms. The school does not have a school nurse or doctor and are not able to provide menstruating students with sanitary pads, requiring them to source pads from home. According to teachers, accessing sanitary pads was a big struggle for many of their female students. They were in need of pad supplies as many of their students stayed at home due to menstruation. Lack of underwear was also a challenge addressed by the Beatrice. Especially in the primary school, many students did not have a change of, or even one pair of underwear. The school had open pit latrines with no running water in the toilets or anywhere close, except from a handwash station at the school gate as a covid-19 measure. During one of my visits to the school we were supposed to meet with a group of around 100 students, but only 50 of them were present at school this day, reflecting a big issue of absenteeism. I used my observations and field conversations from School 2 to explore the consequences of not being taken care of like they are in School 1.

⁵ Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) are graded into divisions I to IV, where grade I is the highest level of performance.

6 Menstruation and education

Throughout the following chapters of analysis, the study findings will be continuously related back to the theories and concepts explored up to this point. The aim is to show how girls menstrual experiences are multivalent and nuanced. Firstly, student experiences and menstrual narratives will be explored and discussed before information from my other informants will be added on.

6.1 Menstrual health management in school

As presented in the chapter above, most of the data presented in this thesis is from School 1, which is a private boarding school. The girls here have been provided with reusable sanitary pads for one year and was before that given disposable pads. Schools distributing sanitary products is not common, although the number of schools engaging NGOs to deal with provision of sanitary pads is increasing (Sambaiga, 2019, p. 46). The role of NGOs in distributing sanitary products will be further elaborated in chapter 9.

During my FGDs I found that many of the student informants had different opinions on the sanitary products they received from school, some more pleased with their options than others.

It is a problem for nowadays. Because I remember at the time you came here to the school [in 2019] we were given towels which are more valuable [disposable pads], you know? But now we are given the ones to wash. Like a handkerchief, so they are not protective (Neema, FGD 1, Form 5).

It is very dangerous for us. Because you find a person in her menstruation and she has only two of those towels, but she has to wash one and dry them, but you found there is no sun. And we don't have the ironing. So they get like curled and at the end we got the UTI [Urinary tract infection] and fungus... (Rose, FGD 1, F5).

Several students addressed the issue of not being able to wash and dry reusable sanitary pads properly and that it especially was an issue during the rainy season.

According to me, here at school what I wish they could increase, or we could have more. Because I am seeing that it is better for people to be given... I mean to increase the number of sanitary pads and pants. Because there are some students coming from the villages which their parents don't know the importance of wearing pants. And some people have like two or three pads. So maybe if she is in menstruation period she is supposed to change the inner pads, but maybe they don't have or some people just have two. So this can lead them to... To do what? To just wear that because she has no another one. So, she can wear it for the whole day or she can wear it from morning up to evening. For example, it is rain season and I just have two inner pads. So, it will lead me to wash one in the morning and wear another one. So, that this other one can dry. So if I come to wear it I won't feel dry. Because I just have two, I will prolong wearing this one until another one is dry (Gladness, FGD 1, F3).

Several students expressed problems with not having enough reusable pads to alternate between. Even though they received a pack of six to eight pads, some would get stolen or lost. Others expressed that it was an issue with the pads getting ruined when they were not able to wash and dry them. Some students also focused on how the education on the use of reusable pads was insufficient, which caused problems.

Yes, we have those [reusable pads]. In a package we have six, but now you know, everybody comes from different places so you see some other don't know the use of that, so some put as handkerchief. So I think it could be better. Yes, they provide the education [for the pads], but you know us students we just ignore things. So I think it could be better if they could return that other pad. It could be better (Catherine, FGD 1, F3).

On top of there being a range of issues regarding the washing and drying of reusable pads, the students also expressed a frustration with reusable pads consuming their time. The students at this school are privileged to have running tap water at different locations on the school grounds. Still, the process of washing clothes is still quite tedious. Washing is done by hand in buckets with cold water from taps in the middle of the schoolyard. During the weekdays the students have almost no time to do the washing as their schedules are fully packed. They are expected to engage in school or religious activities from morning until 10 pm with limited

breaks in between. They have designated times for washing during the weekends, but they cannot wait that long to wash used pads.

Both girls in School 1 and School 2 explained how some will use “local ways” to absorb menstrual blood when lacking sanitary products. In School 1 most students agreed that they themselves did not have to use “local ways” at this time, but they described how, in their villages, one might still find people handling their periods by cutting and wrapping a piece of “Kanga” (wrap-around clothing) to fit in the underwear. Moreover, this was a problem for some girls that lacked underwear. During a field trip with Beatrice to School 2 I got to participate in handing out packages of basic necessities that she had put together for the students in Standard 5 to 7. The packages included two reusable menstrual pads, that the students had sewn themselves, two pairs of underwear, soap, a washcloth and a calendar for keeping track of the menstrual cycle. To my surprise what caused the most excitement amongst the students was the underwear. Every one of them held them up with excitement to show their friends and would not put them away.

Lacking underwear is also a face of period poverty (UNFPA, 2021) and is especially prevalent in Maasai areas. School 1 students coming from Maasai villages explained how some girls might resort to tying a string around their waist to make sure the homemade cloths stay in place. A few of the girls in my FGDs had not heard of these kinds of solutions before and were quite surprised. They all collectively agreed that having to handle their periods like this would be very uncomfortable. Having underpants and a change of underpants is without question essential to being able to come to school, and a big part of Beatrice’s job that day in School 2 was to teach the students how properly wear and wash the underwear. Observing how intently the students listened to this information I gathered that they considered this very valuable knowledge.



Picture 3 - Students watching NGO representative teach how to wear underwear and sanitary pads (Private)

6.2 School environment

As mentioned in the theory chapter, Murphy-Graham & Lloyd (2016, p. 560) developed a framework with a set of necessary conditions for education to have an impact on girls' empowerment. They accentuated the environment where girls learning takes place is an important factor for learning. They emphasise that the learning environment must be physically, materially, and socio-culturally conducive to learning and focus their attention on how schools' physical and material conditions, such as inadequate sanitary facilities, overcrowded classrooms, lack of appropriate learning materials impacts girls' education.

The relationship between girls' bodies and spatiality was also mentioned in the theory chapter as a useful approach to studying the experience of menstruation. The ability to make use of one's environment is a central part of the menstrual experience. The lack of privacy that inadequacies in sanitary facilities creates, might for example lead to confinement of menstruating girls. That menstruation should be handled in a private sphere is a common conception, not just in Tanzania, but this requires there to be a private space available. It is therefore interesting to study if and how girls in boarding school are able to find private spaces in a school environment where they are living closely with others.

When questioning the students in School 1 about their experience of the school environment, most of them responded with positive perceptions of their environment. In the boarding school, the students were generally happy with the facilities and emphasised that what their school was offering is better than many other places. When asked about the school environment, many of the informants would bring up lack of sports gear and fields for extracurricular activities, or lack of teaching equipment in classrooms. However, some would also point to obvious inadequacies impacting their experience of MHM. One of the most prominent deficiencies brought forward by my informants was the lack of doors to toilets and sanitary systems overflowing.

There to toilets the doors are already broken, even those for entering to the toilets. That between the last rooms. Also, the water will enter to the last rooms [in the hallway]. But there are people that are living there. They are living, but they should have door and something to avoid water to come into the side that they are staying (Dorcas, FGD 2, F5).

Considering these findings, it would be natural to assume that the students would have some concerns for privacy. Still, when asked if the lack of doors to toilets affected them, around half responded having no issues with privacy, while others felt the situation was not ideal. If one looks at privacy as being culturally defined, it is likely that the understanding and perception of privacy is varying in different contexts. I am aware that I personally have grown up with a different understanding and value of privacy than my informants. Most of the students in School 1 are used to smaller living spaces and a more communal way of living from home. The fact that the students live so close to each other in school probably also creates a sense of family and sisterhood where there is less need for privacy.

Rose: *All toilets have doors. Because if you enter there is doors [front door to public toilets]. But in dormitories we don't have doors.*

I: *And how do you feel about that?*

Rose: *It's okay. You just take it as normal. It is okay because you put the mattresses [use of a bed mattress to cover the stall]. But they are not permanent (FGD 1, F5).*

Several of my informants reported problems with their dorms being locked during school hours, from 7.30 am to 2-2.40 pm. This was a decision made by the school administration to prevent girls from sleeping or doing other activities during lessons. I believe that many students regard their dorms as a type of “safe space”. It is their home in school, and the only place they can withdraw to when needing privacy. By closing off these spaces during the day the school is removing a space that some students find important to manage their menstruation in a dignifying way.

I: *So what is it like having your period in school?*

Dorcas: *Sometimes it is very difficult [...] Ooh! An example is tomorrow you enter to class and then the dormitory has been closed until 2-2.40 pm. You are going to stay in class until that time, and you feel uncomfortable because we cannot go to change the pad. Even to stay in the class or to stand or to walk from.... You will stay in class like this [mimics staying still] (FGD 2, F5).*

The problems with access to dorms are mostly related to boarding schools. However, a lack of doors in toilets was also an issue in School 2 where they did not even have a front door to the toilets. At the same time, an even bigger issue in School 2 was the absence of running water. During field conversations with Beatrice, I learned that the girls there had expressed troubles with leaving the latrines without the ability to rinse themselves during their periods. Sommer (2013, p. 332) also found that the shame of leaving toilet facilities without the ability to privately wash their hands can make going to the toilet a stressful environment for girls. A source of water to rinse their hands or clothes is crucial for a girl to be able to return to class in a dignifying manner.

6.3 Menstruation as a school subject

“Teachers should communicate freely with students about sexuality. Pupils should feel free to come to their teachers with any questions they may have. Teachers should create positive social relationships with their students” (Ngodu & Chambo, 2011, p. 155).

The above statement is from a biology textbook for Form 3 students in Tanzania. The statement is highlighted because it differed from my informants experiences of their own education. In Tanzania the students learn about menstruation for the first time in primary school, in Standard 6, when they are around 12-13 years old. It is introduced as a part of the science subject under the topic of “Maintaining health and the environment” when learning about the human body (MoEVT, 2019, p. 47). This topic includes competencies such as “Applying principles for good hygiene, health and environment” as well as “Identifying various systems in the human body”. The topic of menstruation is under the latter with the objectives of teaching students to “identify parts of the reproduction system” and “explain the concept of puberty for boys and girls”. As expected from a biology subject, this implies a factual approach to the topic, with little sharing of practical knowledge.

It is interesting to note how the curriculum mentions menstruation in relation to hygiene. This implies, as mentioned before, that menstruation is something “unclean”. The limited practical knowledge shared about menstruation in primary school is focused on menstrual *hygiene* education. The objective is to stay clean and fresh and to manage the period *away* from the public eye, and the ideal that it should not be visible. Under the same topics there are

mentions of “*The importance of cleanliness and smartness of garments*” and “*Identifying sources of waste*” which I believe reflects how looking “smart” and proper is an important ideal not just for students, but in the Tanzanian society as a whole.

It is first in Form 3, when the students are around 16 years old, that menstruation is mentioned directly in the Tanzanian biology curriculum as a part of the topic of reproduction. The objectives are for the students to learn about the phases of the menstrual cycle and it therefore does not have a practical approach. There are some mentions of menstruation related symptoms, like depression, stomach cramps, irregular bleeding and amenorrhea, which is the absence of menstrual blood, in the textbook, but it is not elaborated (Ngodu & Chambo, 2011, p. 128). The only part that has a somewhat practical focus is a section about premenstrual syndrome (PMS), which includes a list of symptoms and ways to manage PMS like “plenty rest, exercise, reduced stress, reduced caffeine, sugar, alcohol and salt intake and a regular diet high in carbohydrates” (Ngodu & Chambo, 2011, p. 146). In addition to being a part of biology, menstruation is also taught briefly as a part of the nutrition subject in secondary school, but hereunder it is hygiene related in the same way as in primary school.

The limited space given to menstruation in school subjects is not unique to the Tanzanian educational system. It is something that is also lacking in other countries, which is continuously getting more attention along with the focus on “period poverty”. However, the difference is that many of the students in this study does not have access to other credible sources of MHM information. Several of the students I talked to were dissatisfied with the MHM education they received in school, because the teachers were not able to answer their questions. The quote from the textbook in the beginning of this chapter presents an ideal of how Tanzanian teachers are supposed to approach teaching about reproduction, and thereunder menstruation, through “positive social interactions with the students”. This was not reflected in the informants’ experiences of reproductive education.

They [male biology teachers] are not comfortable. Because they are boys. They only tell you “read”, “find more”, “look on yourself”. They are not even comfortable. You can say that they feel like it is shameful, because they can’t tell you everything. Just shallow, shallow (Dorcas, FGD 2, F5).

Teachers being shy when teaching menstruation was an experience shared by all my informants. Some made examples of the teachers not being able to use specific words while teaching.

Like in the menstrual cycle. Once you are learning, from the first day of your menstrual, like the safe days. Somehow, he [biology teacher] is feeling shy to answer such kind of questions. And he cannot pronounce “sex”, he is using “mate”. Sometimes he cannot say maybe “vagina”, he will say “reproduction system” hahaha” (Amina, FGD 2, F3)

The students clearly picked up on the shame and taboo of talking about menstruation that their teachers were conveying. They emphasised that this affected their MHM education. This may suggest that the teachers of these subjects does not have enough education to be able to distance themselves from the societal shame of menstruation. Some students also expressed that the teacher’s lack of knowledge impacted their education

Rehema: *No! Mr. John [biology teacher] is not talking to us about menstruation. Only when he is in a period of teaching reproduction. And within it there is a topic of menstruation. So like just talking and not that deeply. That like... There are some things he doesn’t know.*

I: Mmm. So what are the things you would like for him to talk about that he doesn’t?

Rehema: *For instance, there are some people that are going through twice... Within a month they are entering in menstrual period twice. So, like if you ask him, somehow he cannot answer you that much as the way that you feel to be answered (FGD 2, F3).*

As mentioned in chapter 4.7, some of these questions and frustrations were directed at me as the researcher. I experienced that when inviting to openly discuss subjects that were not often talked about, the students naturally turned to me as a source of information. They were frustrated that these subjects are taught “only to pass exams”, and I saw it as an example of how there is gap in their puberty education.

Sommer (2013) explains why some teachers might find it difficult to allocate time to teach practical knowledge by emphasising how the structure of the Tanzanian school system is heavily dictated by the national curriculum. Even though teachers might want to integrate more discussion on topics like reproduction, there is limited time available for this (2013, p. 340). In Tanzania, the teachers are bound by a lot of responsibilities limiting their freedom to choose teaching methods and topics. The Tanzanian school system is highly result focused and the students' success and ability to transition to higher levels is strictly measured by their exam results. Therefore, the teachers are bound to provide an education close to government guidelines. The government is responsible for developing the national curriculum. In addition to this, each subject has its own syllabus that gives details about objectives, teaching methods, teachings aids and evaluation. The teachers are obliged to use these documents when planning their lessons. They are also required to document through a *scheme of work* how much time they will be allocating to each topic in their subjects. On top of this, they are supposed to develop *lesson plans* for each lesson, detailing the contents of each session, how the lesson will be taught and with which teaching aids. Both the lesson plan and the scheme of work needs approval by the school headmaster and will be checked by school inspectors from the government. Knowing how detailed and structured the work of Tanzanian teachers is, it might be understandable why they have limited time to allocate to non-curricular topics and activities.

6.4 “I am staying at home while others are learning” – Menstruation and school participation and attendance

The experiences of menstruation that have been explored above suggests that menstruation might be impacting girls' education. It was therefore natural to further examine which parts of the menstrual experience are most impactful on girls' schooling. Given the limited scope of my material, I am not able to make any generalisations on the impact of menstruation on school attendance. As mentioned in the chapter about previous research, there are already both qualitative and quantitative research focused on mapping menstruation and school attendance. While researchers like Hennegan et al (2019), Sommer (2009) and (2013) and Sambinga (2019) suggests menstruation to have an impact on girls education, researchers like Grant et al. (2013) and Oster & Thornton (2011) points to the fact that menstruation might impact students' performance and wellbeing, but has little to no effect on school attendance. However, most of the research that finds no correlation between menses

and schooling has so far been limited to specific geographical contexts and studies impacts of sanitary product distribution without considering it in a broader social, cultural or economic perspective. In this chapter it will be highlighted how the informants' experiences suggests that they believed *their* education to be affected by menstruation.

During my FGDs, my informants explained several ways in which menstruation was impacting their school attendance. Heavy flows, strong pains and lack of pads and painkillers were some of the reasons mentioned.

I: In general, what are other reasons for why girls stay home from school or they drop out of school? So we have talked about pregnancy...

Amina: *Some girls they are not getting any pads, so that they do not go to school.*

I: Do you think it is a problem in general that girls cannot afford to buy pads?

Amina: *Yeah. Like someone will be like "How am I going to school when I am shedding blood and I do not have any pads? Like what if I go to school and just disgrace myself in front of the other students? So, it is kind of like better I remain myself for some days until my period is over and then I will be going back to school". And maybe you didn't get the permission from the school committee and maybe they will give you a suspension and you will have to go back again home. And the days you are at home, the other students are proceeding with their studies (FGD 2, F3).*

It interesting that this girl unprovoked raises the issue of how girls that miss school due to menstruation is disadvantaged compared to non-menstruating peers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Tanzanian education is categorised by "teaching to the test"-strategies. Many students do not have textbooks or access to online resources. Thus, coming to class is the only way they can acquire the knowledge needed to pass exams. In this perspective it is possible to argue that missing even a day or two some months due to menstruation would be quite challenging.

Most of my informants agreed that menstruation related absence was mostly an issue for students in day-schools.

Also, there are students who are in day school. Someone can leave the school because maybe she is in menstruation period and she is attending [having her period] for the whole week, some people are afraid to go to school because they don't have sanitary pads. So, they will say "How can I stay with others while I am in this condition? So, I can't go to school for the whole week until it stops". Then, by the time she is staying at home, others are learning. I mean they are studying in school, so if she comes back to school she will find other students have learnt a lot, so she will end up saying "Aah better I leave the school because I am really being bored with this condition". Like staying at home while others are learning... (Gladness, FGD 1, F3).

It is true that at home students, especially us girls, we skip school due to periods. Why? It is because we lack the sanitary pads so that we can go there and feel comfortable. But here in school [School 1] we are given those sanitary towels. We are using them so that we can accept (Rose, FGD 1, F5).

The above interview quotes highlight how several of the informants believed menstruation to be impacting school attendance. Apart from this I also took notice of how the students were using words like “disgrace” and “feeling comfortable”. When researching how menstruation impacts education, it is important to not only consider school attendance, but also participation. Girls might be able to cope well enough to avoid missing school, but it is important to reflect on how staying in school, with what they regard as inadequate materials, is making them *feel*. It is important to consider that girls should have equal access to education during menstruation, but they should also have the freedom to feel dignified *within* school.

There was a shared consensus among most of the student informants in School 1 that, in this particular school, menstruation was not often a reason for skipping school for longer periods or dropping out since they were supported in many of their menstrual needs. However, most of them agreed that it did have an effect on their performance and participation, which can be connected to their descriptions of wanting to feel “dignified” and “comfortable”. They also

expressed fears of having to stand up in class during their periods. In the schools that I visited, it was common practice for the students to have to stand up when answering the teachers question. Several students described this as uncomfortable due to fears of stained clothing, leaking or odour being noticed by other students or the teacher. One student said “If I stand up I think maybe there will be a bad smell which will pass someone” (FGD 1, F5). Another student focused on how menstruation affected her participation in class by explaining that she would restrict herself due to a fear of others noticing her period.

To me I think “Aah, I am standing... Haha, if I stand I must... [stands up to show her checking her skirt]”. And if I check myself Madam will know that I am looking, so even if I know the question I do not want to raise my hand because I know Madam will... Madam will choose me, and I am afraid for Madam to choose me. Especially if there are male teacher I am afraid to raise up my hand. I am just staying, and if I know the question I can even tell my neighbour to tell instead of me (Gladness, FGD 1, F3)

Similar examples were made by several of the students, and the need to check the skirt for stains was reoccurring in all of the FGDs. This was not surprising as I had repeatedly observed students checking or rearranging their skirts when they were moving. The statements above can be examples of how girls do not feel dignified or empowered and therefore experience that their periods impact their school performance. Additionally, it can be seen as an example of how menstruation causes girls to “hold-back” (see chapter 7.4) by limiting their use of space and thereby confining themselves due to the fear that someone will smell or see their menstrual blood.

Teacher Florah also had experiences with menstruation impacting students’ performances.

Sometimes menstruation is the cause of them skipping the sessions. Especially those who have strong, painful menstruations. Yes. That is very true, that is very true. I remember, last year the girls had to go through menstruation, and it was just in the night and the next morning she had to sit for the exam. So she was totally unable to attend the preparation time at night to study. They call “Mama, somebody is not feeling well”. And she had that panic like “Tomorrow I am going to do the exam and this thing has come now. How am I going to manage it?”. I had to go and stay with

her for four hours. We do the exercise [physical exercise] from 7 pm up to 10. We do the exercise, we drank warm water and she was relieved from the pain. She stood up and she went to the class to start. And the next morning she entered calmly, healthily in the exams. Yes, so that it was I did. So, if you get a person, to encourage them to do physical exercise, they are so cooperative (Florah)

I did not ask the students about menstruation and exams, simply because it occurred to me too late in the data collection process. I also imagine the students did not bring it up because the likelihood of the exams colliding with their menstrual cycle is limited. However, one can only imagine the experience of sitting for a six-hour exam with one reusable pad that cannot be changed until the end of the exam. Measuring if menstruation effects exam performances is difficult because only a handful of girls in one class will have their periods collide with exam days. Nevertheless, for those whom it concerns, the stress of handling menstruation will be put on top of the already high performance demands. The quote from teacher Florah shows how supportive teachers are important to empower students so that menstruation does not affect their school performance.

This chapter has focused on how girls' menstrual experience is related to education. Factors such as physical environments, access to basic necessities like toilets, underwear and sanitary products, as well as MHM education has been presented as important for girls' menstrual health. The following chapter will address other factors that may be essential to understanding girls' menstrual experiences.

7 Factors influencing the experience of menstruation

Above it has been described how poor access to resources and infrastructure impacts girls' movement and behaviour in school, and thereby their participation in education. Furthermore, I believe my material can be used to show how menstruation is impacted by and connects to more overarching cultural and societal structures connected to the role of women in the society. The following chapters will focus on other factors that might influence girls' menstrual experience.

7.1 Poverty and “family issues”

As the student quotes above show, the ability to afford sanitary pads influences girls' menstrual experience. This elucidates the financial aspect of menstruation. The term “period poverty” was raised in the introduction and relates to an idea that menstruation creates unequal opportunities for women to realise their capabilities due to the economic restraints of menstruation. Thereby, period poverty contributes to show how menstruation and poverty intersect in creating disadvantages for girls, where poor girls are less likely to succeed in education and realise their capabilities.

During my interviews, issues of poverty were mostly discussed in an individual context, however it inevitably relates to the nation's economic state. As discussed in chapter 1.2, a large share of Tanzania's population lives below the international poverty line of 1.90 USD, or 4500 Tanzanian shillings per day per capita. A packet of disposable pads costs around 2000-2500 TSH whilst other products and high-quality products are more expensive. 2500 TSH is about 1 USD and would equate to about 1 kg of rice or vegetables or 2 kg of flour. For most people this is not a notable expense, but considering the amount of people living in poverty, it is understandable that sanitary products are in competition with other household goods and therefore might not be a priority. There are many ways of measuring poverty, but here the focus is on the ability to realise one's capabilities.

In School 1, there was a quite clear distinction between those that had the financial capacity to afford disposable sanitary pads and those who did not. Even though all the students were provided with reusable sanitary pads, several of them were dissatisfied with this solution and explained in the FGDs that they ended up bringing their own disposable pads from home. The students in School 1 were organised in “school families”, a kind of mentorship programme

among the students. The girls who could not afford disposable pads would sometimes ask their “school sisters” for disposable products. In this way the girls were using their school network to obtain the products needed to handle their periods in their preferred manner. When girls were unable to access products to manage their menses it would cause them to use local ways and lead to confinement.

During my interviews, poverty was discussed both as period poverty, but also as being a barrier for girls education in general.

Poverty also can lead other students to leave the school. Because maybe you are coming to school, but your parents cannot afford to pay the school fees or buy for you the uniforms [...] So, this can lead yourself to engage yourself in other groups. This can lead another person to engage herself in prostitution. So yes, it can lead her to leave the school because she is feeling “How can I live, I don’t have maybe toothpaste, soap, inner pants, pocket money, books, uniform...”. So, and their parents cannot afford even the food that their siblings are eating at home, so that can lead a person to leave the school and stay at home with their parents (Gladness, FGD 1, F3).

This shows how my informants experienced that economic vulnerability enhances the likelihood that they, as young girls, will engage in risky sexual behaviour which will be further elaborated in chapter 8.

My informants also expressed a great concern for their families economic state. During one of my visits to School 2 I noticed one of the girls wearing a face mask. Considering that no other students were wearing masks, I found it strange for this one student to be doing so. I later asked her why she was wearing the mask. The girl pulled down her mask uncovering a sore above her mouth that she had gotten from an injury. She did not speak English very well, so I could not further question her about it, but I figured she was trying to protect her injury from infection. However, Beatrice from LYD org. later told me that the girl had explained that she was wearing the face mask so that the teachers would not get alarmed by her sore and call her mother. She did not want to bother her mum as she “already had enough problems” and probably would not be able to provide any care for her. This incident made me reflect on how much many girls from less resourceful families worry about being a burden to their guardians. Worrying about family economy might also be a reason for why girls feel that they cannot ask

their parents for pads and other necessities. This may also reflect how girls are conditioned to take responsibility for their family and reproductive duties. Several of my informants shared concerns about how “family issues” could affect their school performance and attendance. On a question about why girls might be prone to dropping out of school, one girl told me that:

Maybe sometimes it is about family issues. For example, your parents have just “kicked the bucket”, I mean they have just died. And you have youngs [young siblings], and yes you are in school, but the people who are around you, those youngs of yours, they are not good, so what you want is to be with them at that time. So, what you think at that time it is better I get pregnant. Or it is better I leave the school and I could just handle my youngs, even if it is in a tough period, at least I am with them. Because when you are far away you do not know what is happening [...] So it is better you leave the school and then stay with the youngs. Even if you are going to stay under the bridge, any place, but you know they are safe, and you are with them at that time. So that can lead even to dropouts (Catherine, FGD 1, F3)

I found this to be quite a forceful statement. The girl who shared this lives with both her birth parents and one sister in an urban city centre, which suggests that this was not an experience of her own. From her other answers I gathered that her family is doing well. However, other informants also told me similar stories. I asked teacher Florah what kind of problems her students most often brought to her, and she explained that:

Mmm, most of the problem they normally bring to me, is about family issues. Family issues, where they came from... You find a girl who is in tears. Probably she is recruited and because the father does not approve, the mother is divorced. So, the mother is living a very difficult and tough life. You see now that is one that I have experienced with so many girls. That is now they are worried. I remember one time there was a girl who did not do well when I was teaching English. And one day I told them “Now everyone should write to me why are you not doing better in my subjects. Have I not taught you well? [...] Do you have any other problem that hinders you to achieve your full performance in your subject?”. And they wrote it. One of the girls say she feels so angry, she was so tempered and “I am losing interest in studies because my father passed away, my mother passed away and I have my young brother who is left there at home with no one to care for him. And I came with no supporting

money for anything. So, when I think the situation that I have left behind at home it is real traumatising". So family issues is the huge thing (Florah).

7.2 “It’s not good for everyone to know you are in menstruation” – Menstrual shame and taboos

Another factor that can impacted girls’ menstrual experience was the shame and taboo connected to periods. One of the assumptions I had before starting my fieldwork was that talking about menstruation was not very common amongst Tanzanians. Menstruation is a taboo topic in many societies, but there is a general culture in Tanzania of not sharing to much of your inner thoughts, especially to someone you do not know. This became apparent to me during my first visit to Tanzania. When trying to learn some phrases in KiSwahili I was taught that when greeting people, one never responds negatively to the question of how one is doing. After a while my informants also confirmed that menstruation was not often spoken about openly in KiSwahili without “beating around the bush”. This silence seemed to be transmitting to education. During my previous visit to School 1, in 2019, I almost never heard anyone mention their periods. After a while, I also understood that many of the girls in my study would say that they felt sick instead of explaining that they had menstruation troubles. Even though I would consciously use the words “menstruation” or “period” during my interviews, several students would answer me with stories of what happened when someone was “sick”, meaning they were in menstruation. In my experience there was an underlying understanding that “sickness” was used as a euphemism for menstruation, which, as mentioned in chapter 2, is also found by other researchers like (Jewitt & Ryley, 2014). Considering that School 1 is an all-girls school, I found this silence interesting, and it made me want to learn more about the topic.

As introduced in the theory chapter, perspectives on menstruation as a pollutant have contributed to creating taboos and shame that influence the lives of menstruating women and in different ways promotes seclusion and self-restriction (Douglas, 2002). The fear of someone seeing one’s blood, underwear or sanitary products might cause girls to alter their behaviour during menses. Girls feeling the need to hide their period products from others is not specific to the Tanzanian context, but arguably a universal tendency. However, unlike girls from resourceful backgrounds, these girls are unable to choose freely between reusable

and disposable products, and do not have the same opportunity to discretely wash and dispose their pads after use.

Young & Bacdayan (1965, p. 225) defines menstrual taboos as customs that publicly restrict women's behaviour during menstruation, and thereby throughout a big part of their lives. The taboos may range from beliefs that menstrual blood is dangerous to requirements that certain things should be avoided. Buckley & Gottlieb (1988, p. 11) identifies five classes of taboos (1) Isolation of menstruating women, (2) Menstrual blood is dangerous, (3) Prohibition of menstrual sex, (4) Prohibition of cooking, and (5) Others.

7.2.1 Pollution taboos

The shame around menstruation was brought up in many different contexts, but in the FGDs it first emerged during a discussion of how to properly clean and dry reusable sanitary pads. Most students in School 1 expressed that they did not have any trouble with their pads being visible to other girls in school. Many of them however, expressed that it was a bigger issue at home, and that they would put other clothes on top of their pads on the clothing line. When I asked them why they felt the need to do this, they answered that it was “because of fear” and “respect”.

I: Why do you put the other clothes on top?

Zawadi: *Because of fear.*

All: *Yeah because of fear.*

Zawadi: *Sometimes shy. “Eeh, if a man saw this, how would they...”.*

Neema: *Yeah, if a man saw this.*

I: So, the problem is if a man sees it?

All: *Yeah, yeah.*

I: Mmm, even fathers and brothers also?

Rose: *Yeah, yeah haha. We respect them (FGD 1, F5).*

None of my informants were able to properly explain why menstruation is disrespectful, or why they would fear men seeing their pads. When I asked follow-up questions, most of them explained that it was “just matters of culture” and that “the environment that our family have kept us is not for talking to us about those things [periods]”. The fear of being disrespectful may be connected to ideas of menstruation being a pollutant, or something unclean that is out of order, and that will offend others if they are confronted with it (Douglas, 2002). Instead of offending others, and especially men, the students chose to hide traces of their menstruation as a sign of respect.

Some students also explained that “talking with them [parents] about menstruation or even relationship it is like bad behaviour”, implying that there is a more “proper” menstrual behaviour. Several students noted that if someone were to notice their menstruation, they would be “judged”. Some girls also suggested that talk about menstruation might be improper because it implicated ideas of sexual relations, especially amongst the Maasai.

- I: Do the Maasai have some thoughts about menstruation? Do you talk about it?
- Glory: *They don't talk.*
- Neema: *They don't talk a lot.*
- Glory: *Like they feel like they will be damaged.*
- Rose: *They think that if they taught you [about menstruation], you will go and do it [sex]. But if they don't you will not do it (FGD 1, F5)*

Some pollution taboos were also more explicitly connecting menstruation to pollution. Beatrice explained how rules of menstrual conduct originated in menstruation being perceived as a contaminant.

It [menstruation] is still a taboo. And it's crazy because it is accompanied by a lot of myth. Like one of them is like don't eat meat when you are on your periods. And when I tell the girls they are like, they are like “Aah, we want meat” and I was like “No don't eat meat”, because that is what their parents say or maybe you hear like you are not allowed to go take vegetables from the garden when you are on your period. Why?

Because the vegetables will go bad. That means we will not be having groceries or something. You know haha? And they would tell you like don't shave your hair when you have periods. Why? Or maybe one community says like don't go out. Why? They are not supposed to stay inside. So you see like it's still a taboo (Beatrice).

The taboos mentioned by Beatrice above shows how taboos can be restrictive for menstruating girls. Moreover, other reoccurring taboos said that “If you touch a boy when you are in menstruation it is like a curse”, “Don't touch your father's machete while on your period, because your father may catch the same period”, “Don't carry a child when on your period, the child can get rashes” or that “You are supposed to stay inside while menstruating”. These taboos are directly related to ideas of the menstrual blood inflicting harm on others, which can also be viewed as a form of polluting. There were also other reoccurring food taboos connected to menstruation, like “Don't eat eggs or protein rich foods when on your period” or “Don't take tea because you will overbleed”. Even though many of my informants meant that some of these taboos were outdated, Beatrice's experience suggested that it was still common for parents to communicate such kind of taboos to their children.

7.2.2 Witchcraft

The students did not just fear their menstruation being disrespectful, but also expressed a fear of being seen as “damaged”.

Gladness: *It is not good for everyone to know you are in menstruation.*

I: No? Why is it not good for people to know?

Deborah: *Haha, they will be laughing at you.*

I: Yeah? And what is it that you believe...?

Editha: *That if you hang it and everybody could see it, he will laugh at you. He will see you like damaged... (FGD 1, F3)*

The fact that menstruating women are seen as damaged or vulnerable may suggest that menstruation can be connected to the concept of liminality. Liminal stages are vulnerable in-between stages of being. In the case of menstruation, the inside of the body is coming out, and

menstruation may thereby be a way of entering the body and making women vulnerable to outside influence (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 34). Britton (1996, p. 648) also points to how some women considered themselves to be vulnerable during menstruation due to a belief that the uterus “opened up” at the onset of the menstruation, and that this made women susceptible to becoming infected. The vulnerability perspective on menstruation also makes a good foundation for creating a narrative where it can be used to inflict harm on others. There was a shared consensus among the informants that making this vulnerable state visible to others might subject women and girls to witchcraft. My material suggests that there were quite strong taboos surrounding menstrual blood and its linkages to witchcraft.

I first came across the topic of witchcraft unintentionally during the first FGD. I had read about the connection between menstrual taboos and witchcraft before arriving in field but was unsure of its relevance in the Tanzanian society today. The topic was, however, raised quite early by the students in the first FGD when I asked them about how they disposed menstrual products. Knowing that the waste in the area is thrown in nature or burnt, I assumed the same was done with menstrual products. The students were quick to correct me and inform me that they would never throw menstrual waste with the regular waste. First, because of the risk of spreading diseases like cholera, but also because you would then leave your blood to be found by others.

I: So with the disposable pads, you just throw them away?

Glory: *Oh, not throwing, we are going to... We are burning them in the incineration. Yeah, you burn them. Yes, yes, yes. If you said we are only throwing away it is bad. Yeah, it is bad. Witch will come. Hahaha. And it can effect... It can effect... You may lack children in the future.*

I: You may lack children? Why?

Rose: *Yes because of blood! You know witch-people? They use that blood too... Your blood is more valuable than everything. If you find a witch person is carrying your blood, he or she may do something through your blood in order to hurt you. Yeah, witches have many ways to hurt a person (FGD 1, F5).*

The quote above suggests that menstruating women are vulnerable to witchcraft. Furthermore, they also emphasised that a person's blood, and in this context menstrual blood, is "more valuable than anything". Thereby, menstruation is not only looked upon as something unclean and polluting, but also as something with value that should be protected. This makes it the only "positive" taboo in the data. During the FGDs most of the students focused on how witchcraft could make women infertile, because their menstrual blood is linked to fertility. Some also explained that it could affect "your ability to reach the level of what you want" (FGD 1, F3). Teacher Florah also explained that taboos about witchcraft made her students insecure.

Some of them complains that their parents, or maybe their stepmothers or other stepmothers are doing witchcraft to them. You see? So you have to help them to overcome that kind of notion and feeling to show them that being here you are secured. Your future is not interfered with any charms, any crafts, anything (Florah).

7.2.3 Consequences of menstrual taboos

The data presented in the above chapters suggests that menstrual taboos and the threat of witchcraft is impacting the lives of the interviewed adolescent girls. Their menstrual experience therefore cannot be fully understood without considering the impact of shame and taboos. During her interview, Beatrice was of the opinion that, even today, menstrual taboos have a greater impact on girls' school performance than for example period pains. When asked if she thought periods could be a reason for girls to drop out of school, she answered:

Mhm, definitely! I would say here it's a challenge. Actually, I wouldn't, I would put like sickness like, aah, I would put it to maybe 20 percent [of the reason why girls stay home while on period] because of the stomach upset and the headaches and such. But the rest is because a girl feels ashamed. You know here in Tanzania, or Africa, I would say it's a taboo, like hey how do you even start speaking about that, you know? (Beatrice).

The fact that many girls felt the need to hide their menstrual products, also during washing and cleaning lead to them being left to dry in dark corners, in a closet or under the mattress. This caused them to not be dried properly, resulting in wrinkled and moist pads that increases the risk of infections.

Sometimes they [pads] aren't dried properly because they are put under the bed where there is no sun, so they stay moist and fungi is invited. Why are they put under the bed? Because of that shame. So, they don't want to put their underwear out in the sunlight, literally. So, another reason why shame is harmful (Emmanuel).

The interview quotes in this chapter also shows how menstrual taboos require women and girls to be aware and adapting to their surroundings while menstruating. In particular they talk about having to be constantly aware of men, but also other women. When taboos create a fear of other people seeing one's stained clothing, or witchcraft creates reluctance to throw sanitary pads in waste bins, it shows how taboos can contribute to restricted behaviour and use of space. Jewitt & Ryley (2014, p. 140) highlight that menstrual taboos thereby can contribute to reproduce wider gender inequalities by restricting girls' school attendance and income-earning potential. In this way, taboos can be used to understand women's place in the society in general. Douglas (2002, p. 3) also highlights that taboos and ideas of pollution provide knowledge about the interests of the powerful members of society and thereby links taboos to power relations. The girls' narratives of how their menstrual experiences were affected by cultural taboos also shows how their capability to realise their right to education is affected by menstruation. Being enrolled in school might present the girls with the freedom to get an education. Furthermore, if they have pads, they might have increased freedom to *function* in school during their period. However, for some of the menstruating girls, the fear induced by cultural taboos means these freedoms are not *real* freedoms or options (Nussbaum, 2000).

7.3 Initiation ceremonies

The menstrual taboos described above can be seen as a way of managing the conduct of something that is perceived as "out of the ordinary". Furthermore, it is not only the menstrual blood that crosses spheres, but adolescent girls also transition from being a child to entering womanhood. A way of managing this transition or crossing of spheres is by initiation ceremonies.

As mentioned above my material suggests that, besides schools and NGOs, mothers, sisters or aunties (other women from the community) were the primary source of knowledge for girls

regarding menstruation and adolescence. However, some girls also told stories of initiation ceremonies as a source of knowledge for when a girl reached puberty. The majority of the girls expressed no interest in such traditional ceremonies, defining them as outdated, but several students also reported having some kind of ceremony in their community. During my FGDs it was mostly the girl coming from the coastal areas and the Zigua tribe that were familiar with initiation ceremonies, but several of the girls with Maasai origin also reported having, or knowing of, similar ceremonies. The initiation ceremonies were referred to as “unyago”, both by the coastal people and the Maasai alike. Even though the word unyago was mostly used by the girls from the coast, it is generally a non-specific word that can refer to a variety of adolescent initiation rituals throughout Tanzania (Halley, 2012, p. 165).

For the coastal people like I, once a girl is matured, she will stay for one month inside the house, and by that time she will be taught how to become a woman. A woman like a real mother, having your own husband. Like such kind of things. And we call it “Unyago” in KiSwahili [...] And they will teach you and they will have a small party for that thing [...] I have a friend, once she reach the period of growing, matured period, she was told how to become a real woman, things that she has to do to attract a man, things like that. Maybe preparing yourself to become somebody’s wife (Amina, FGD 2, F3).

In my tribe [Maasai], when you are facing menstruation period, they do like Amina said, Unyago. And teach how to be seated when you are cooking, the way that you are greeting people and the things... The way that you attract men (Naserian, FGD 2, F3).

The Maasai girls explained that the ceremony would usually take place around menarche, whilst it amongst the coastal people was often performed before menstruation. This corresponds with data from Halley (2012, p. 18) suggesting that it in the south-eastern parts of Tanzania is practised for girls between 6 and 12 yrs., before the body changes, to prepare girls for the transition to reproductive maturity. For those practising traditional unyago, it entails a one-month seclusion from the community, separated into a three-stage process that for some involve FGM and recovery from FGM, a period of learning and a final celebration. From what I have learned, big unyago celebrations resembles wedding parties or bridal send-off parties with speeches, music, dancing. During the ceremony girls dress up and are given gifts like underwear, soap, textiles, and money by other women from the family and community.

Considering the shame around menstruation in the society in general I found it interesting that the shame is not present in these ceremonies.

It was also brought up in my interviews that the Maasai had other initiation rituals for when a girl matures. Historically, the Maasai have had a tradition called Esoto, where the Moorans (Maasai warriors) gather to slaughter a goat, share a meal, socialise, and dance. The Maasai mothers would then send their pre-pubescent and adolescent girls to these gatherings of young men to dance and get sexual experience before marriage. The tradition of Esoto is gone in most of the places where the research for this thesis was conducted, but Emmanuel emphasised that it was still existing in some villages, including the village of his father. Esoto will be further discussed in chapter 8.1.

This thesis does not go into detail about what these kinds of ceremonies entail, however it is interesting to note how the state of womanhood is initiated by confinement through unyago. It is possible to question whether ideas of confinement relates equally to entering maturity and start of menstruation. Often, girls' spatial freedom of movement is already restricted by puberty. When puberty hits girls are considered "hot" and must therefore be more mindful of their surroundings and their behaviour, being careful not to attract unwanted attention (see chapter 7.4 and 8.1). Through unyago these confinement ideals are exasperated. Confinement is, as previously mentioned, a strategy to deal with unclear liminal phases. In the same way that menstruation can be regarded a liminal state, initiation processes like unyago can also be seen as a liminal rite, being a transitional period between different stages of life. Longhurst (2000, 36) also writes about how to be confined also can mean "to be in childbed" or "to be delivered" as child. The period from the onset of labour until the birth of a child is commonly known as confinement. By withdrawing to the house girls are confined for a period of time until they are "reborn" back into society as women. Thereby, initiation ceremonies are also, like menstruation, considered as vulnerable, liminal phase that makes girls susceptible to witchcraft (Halley, 2012, p. 209).

7.4 Girls "holding back"

The initiation ceremonies described above represents a life-stage transition for young girls where they move into a new face of womanhood. It represents them becoming feminine

beings and I argue that, like in most other societies, what is considered feminine and correct behaviour for a woman is in many ways decided for them.

During my teaching practice in School 1, I took notice of how many of the younger girls would feel shy answering the teacher's questions aloud in class. When answering, they would often stand up, look to the floor, and mumble their answers in a very low voice, sometimes covering their mouths with their hands. The same happened during oral presentations, even in the advanced secondary levels. On several occasions I had to spend parts the lessons discussing with the students how we could improve their speaking skills. If you catch these girls outside of class, amongst friends, most of them are extremely talkative and loud, but their behaviours change in the classroom. I have always thought of this mostly as a consequence of long and tiring school days, physical discipline from teachers and the schools systems failure to train these competencies. Although, on further reflection, I think this behaviour might also stem from how girls are socialised to "hold back", as discussed in chapter 2.2.

Mjaaland also found Tigrayan girls to be too shy or embarrassed to speak up in class and questions how this affects girls' school performance. She notes that while boys are encouraged in ways that will enable them to achieve, compete and win, girls are discouraged to develop such traits because they are not necessary for the stereotyped female gender roles of housewives and mothers (2013, p. 290). In *Women and Human Development* Nussbaum (2000, p. 91) also describes how boys are encouraged to be physically and mentally adventurous, to achieve and to explore. She notes how this kind of behaviour or way of *functioning* is not available to girls in the same way. Thus, Nussbaum uses it as an example of how girls do not have equal capability to realise their educational aspirations. This elucidates that societal or cultural ideas of gender identity may impact girls' capabilities.

As previously stated, the Maasai people are traditionally known for placing low value on girls education. Growing up in a patriarchal society where girls are not expected to be aspirational in their academic endeavours, it is natural to assume that the lack of educational encouragement leads them to have a withdrawn attitude towards their capabilities. Even though this attitude towards girls' formal education is improving in the Maasai society, there are still differences between girls' and boys' upbringing, where boys are more likely to be encouraged in their educational endeavours. Teacher Florah agreed in her interview that the

school sometimes faced problems with the girls complying to the normative femaleness and low educational aspirations enforced by their parents. She also raised the issue of gender stereotypes in one of her Form 5 General Studies classes. To make an example, she asked the students whether a boy or a girl was more likely to attract people's attention when giving a presentation in class. All students collectively agreed that male students would be more likely to speak up, advocate for themselves and take up space in class.

Mjaaland (2013) presents honourability, virtue, modesty, and seclusion as some ideals for femininity in Tigray that causes girls to "hold back". These virtues are probably of most significance when girls hit puberty and are considered "hot" and on the height of attractiveness, as described in the previous chapter. Since this is an age where many girls enter into marriage or relationships, I believe that girls in this period are further required to hold back to suppress their "male qualities" such as forthrightness, assertiveness so as to be more desirable to men and emphasise their rising beauty and reproductive abilities. Because this is also the period when girls reach menarche, I believe it can be used to explain how ideals of femininity might also involve "holding back" the menstrual experience and hiding it from others. If girls are forthright about menstruation, women and girls might risk going against the societal ideals of femininity, crossing boundaries, and polluting their surroundings, and thereby being labelled as less virtuous or honourable. Therefore, a solution is to comply to the societal standards of menstruating women that is based on patriarchal standards of femininity.

When I started teaching practice in Tanzania, the students in Form 1 were finishing the topic of "Proper behaviour" in the social science subject Civics. I found this to be quite a fascinating title for a school subject. As a part of "Proper behaviour" the students were taught to differentiate between good and bad behaviour, where proper behaviour is "behaviour that is acceptable to the society". The textbook gave examples such as honesty, love, kindness, obedience, cooperation and proper dressing. Throughout the chapter concepts of obedience and respect were reoccurring, especially for elders and the community. Even though the civics subject did not address menstruation, I believe there is also a "proper menstrual behaviour" that is "acceptable to the society", teaching girls to manage the shame of menstruating by concealing it to prevent others discomfort.

8 Girls' agency

Throughout this thesis it has been argued that women's menstrual experience is influenced by the material context, physical structures as well as by gender norms and ideas of shame. However, it is also important to elucidate some ways menstruating girls are using their agency to control their own menstrual and adolescent experience. It has taken me some time to understand that the girls that seem disempowered through poverty, lack of sanitary products etc. might, in fact, be empowered through having developed strategies for coping with their realities and their menstrual needs.

The previous chapter elaborated how the interview material suggests that my informants seemed to comply to a state of "normative femaleness". The hierarchic gendered structures have so far been argued to be something that restricts girls' freedom to realise their capabilities. Moreover, complying to the societal standards ideas of femininity can also be argued to be a strategic choice. A part of this is complying to the societal standards of hiding menstruation from others, which is also a strategy consciously used by most of my informants. In doing so they are *choosing* to act in a way that does not disrupt the socio-cultural dynamics and therefore have the least possible impact on their environments.

During the interview with the matron at School 1, I asked her what topics the students most often came to her to discuss. She answered that they wanted to know how to "protect themselves at home", especially from pregnancies. This shows that the girls are aware of the consequences they risk if they lose focus on their education, and that they take calculated and informed steps to avoid finding themselves in this situation. One way the girls did this was by appealing to education to negotiate with their parents and with their culture. Mjaaland (2018, p. 144) writes about how practices such as underage marriage can be seen as preventing girls from continuing their education, but that it at the same time it is important to recognise how female students can use education as leverage to avoid being married. As explained in chapter 5, the objective of School 1 is to be an opportunity for girls to negotiate their futures and they encourage their girls to show agency. Several of the students in School 1 are already married by arranged marriage, but by performing well and advancing to higher levels of education they can delay, or even cancel, the marital process.

In chapter 5 it was also mentioned how for many students, their mothers were often the ones making sure their daughters were admitted to secondary school by hiding it from the father. In doing so, the mothers are showing agency by actively changing the capabilities and range of choice for their daughters. Furthermore, a possible consequence of the mother defying the traditional gender hierarchy can be seen in table 1 (chapter 4.4.2). The overview of the participant's family structures revealed that as many as 7 out of the 18 participants lived in single-parent, female headed households. In chapter 7.1, Florah explained that several of the students have divorced parents because the father "does not approve" of their girls receiving secondary education. Without going into detail, divorced women in Tanzania are left with few rights, which causes many to lead difficult lives. Moreover, this probably further increases girls' feeling of responsibility towards their family, which was elaborated in chapter 7.1.

8.1 "Butter trading"- Transactional relationships

All the above-mentioned examples are ways in which girls are using their agency to make strategic life choices. The following chapter will focus on another strategy girls used to support their MHM needs and discuss the agency behind it.

During the FGDs, the most discussed way in which girls were supporting their basic needs or MHM needs was through transactional relationships for money. Emmanuel explained that girls coming from marginal backgrounds, that need to generate an income on their own, have less opportunities than boys to support themselves. Even though it is not ideal, it is quite common for boys to take some time off school and do "Kibarua"⁶ or temporary labour. Some will then make enough money to return to school until their funds run out again. Emmanuel from Live Your Dreams org. explained that day labour is more challenging and less available for girls. He said that "They [girls] are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and that comes with disease and pregnancy, both of which disqualify them for education, so poverty is another obstacle" (Emmanuel). Having fewer options of casual labour, some young girls resort to engaging in transactional relationships for money to support their basic needs.

Relationships are naturally a popular topic of discussion for adolescents, and the phenomenon of transactional relationships emerged in my first FGD as a part of a conversation on boys and relationships. It was brought up by the students, who asked me if "relationships for money"

⁶ KiSwahili expression for temporary work/casual day labour.

was common in Norway. To my surprise it continued to be brought up in all of the interviews, even if I did not ask about it specifically. What is commonly known as having “sugar daddies” or transactional relationships, was by several of the students referred to as “butter trading”. However, some informants also used the term “sugar daddies” to refer to the men in the relationships. Transactional relationships refer to sexual interactions in which something is exchanged or transferred, though on a more informal basis, distinct from commercial sex work (Deane & Wamoyi, 2015, p. 438). Several of my informants reported that this was a commonly used strategy that girls used to get money when the parents were not able to provide for them. A girl in Form 3 said:

You meet people [girls] asking for money from her dad maybe, but she has to be sent five thousand [TSH]. Is that enough for the girl? It is not enough. She is always having a menstruation period for every month and she need other money for eating, clothes... So it is very tough, so that is why she engage in those relationships (Neema, FDG 1, F5).

Another student from the same group said that girls were unlikely to do casual day labour, but “they will find men who are capable for giving them money so that they can buy other things that their parents are not providing for them” (FGD 2, F3). After teaching in School 2, Beatrice told me that several of the secondary students had told her in KiSwahili that “Madam, I ended up knowing what sex is because I had to buy sanitary pads”.

After conducting the first FGDs, I was quite unsure whether transactional relationships were as widespread as the student participants portrayed it to be. The fact that it was also brought up by the NGO representatives, made it more trustworthy. I asked NCA, who operates in communities throughout the country about the universality of the phenomenon. Esther from NCA focused on how she believed it to be most common in southern regions, like Mtwara and Lindi, because they historically have been more closed off and less educated. These regions are therefore more marginalised than other areas today and Ester meant that poverty was the main cause for transactional relationships.

Yeah, it [transactional relationships] is a big problem. Especially in the poor and very marginalised communities. And I guess it is the poverty that... Eh, maybe the child was trying to fend for themselves, trying to at least get a meal or two per day and they

fall into the hands of you know wrong men who deceive them. 2000, 5000 TSH they end up getting pregnant (NCA).

Apart from being a consequence of poverty and a lack of basic needs, others focused more on how transactional relationships was a way for girls to get additional “luxuries” that they could not otherwise afford.

Rose: *We students, not all, but some, we are in relationship to get what we want – money! Money! We love money guys.*

Zawadi: *We are after money.*

Neema: *They [girls in transactional relationships] are parasites!*

Ellen: *No!*

I: *What do they need the money for?*

All: *Fashion. Yeah, fashion.*

(FGD 1, F5)

The phenomenon of sugar daddies and transactional relationships has received increasing attention in research on sub-Saharan Africa, often in the context of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Wamoyi et al., 2010). There is a growing body of research addressing how girls engage in risky sexual relations should not be seen as victims, but rather active social agents engaging willingly. Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001, p. 1816) write about how men in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania are commonly engaging in relations with young girls since they are less likely to be affected by HIV, promising financial security in return. They also emphasise that the girls in their selection are not mere objects of men’s choices, but rather active social agents exploiting their male partners. Most of my informants that shared the same impression this is not normally a one-way exploitation. The focus on how girls have concealed powers in their choices can be used to show that girls who might seem disempowered are, in fact, making active choices to cope with their situations. During my interview with Emmanuel, he asked if any of my student informants had referred to transactional relationships as “prostitution”, because he regarded it more as coerced sex, rather than being taken advantage

of. I personally struggle to understand transactional relations simply as something girls do willingly. In my opinion, it is important not to forget that it is girls' limited choices that requires them to engage in risky sexual behaviour and that allows for men to leverage girls for sex. When referring to it as a strategy or an active choice, one avoids portraying the girls as victims. However, the girls probably would not expose themselves to serious health risks for material needs, if they had a wider range of choice available. Several of the girls also talked about how another consequence of engaging in transactional relationships was that the men would turn violent if they refused to give them what they wanted.

They say there are no free things so you must pay it. If you don't pay you will see what he is going to do. You will suffer yourself. You may be beaten or killed somehow, or he is going to rape you (Glory, FGD 1, F5).

As seen above some of the FGD participants were presenting girls in transactional relationships as strategic "parasites", while others focused more on girls vulnerability. A surprising number of girls blamed their adolescent age for why it was easy for men to take advantage of them. They said that since they were in "the stupid period of girls" or the "hot period" which allowed men to take advantage of their "stupidity".

We call it the stupid period of girls. Hot period. They [men] use that hot period to attract girls. But you found he can't go to an older girl. Because [older girls would say] "If you want me to give you sex, build me a house". "No, go!". "I want one million, ten million. Will you give me?". "No". "Then go, I won't give you". But we [young girls] love even one hundred thousand. Not all, but for some they want cheap money like that (Rose, FGD 1, F5).

Some of the girls were focusing on how they are easy targets of abuse, giving no fault to the man. Furthermore, the quote above can also be an example of how the society views adolescent girls. As discussed in the previous chapter, they are as adolescent girls considered to be on the high of attractiveness. The FGD participants are suggesting that this state of being makes them easier to take advantage of. In the previous chapter it was discussed how adolescent girls are often cultured into being virtuous or secluded and "hold back". Mjaaland refers to these ideals of femininity as "the virginity ideal". The virginity ideal in the Tigrayan

context is about girls learning to ‘hold back’ sexuality in order not to be seen as “damaged” (Mjaaland, 2013, p. 239).

A dichotomy appeared when discussing transactional relationships with the students. At the same time as they were vocal about the normality of transactional sex, they also voiced great concerns about premarital sex, and the importance of “protecting” ones virginity. The girls expressed that they would be shamed if someone, on their wedding day, noticed that they were not a virgin and that relationships should not be had until college age. I found this contradicting and it seemed like transactional relationships was an exception to the “virginity ideal”. Through her work in Northern Tanzania, Sommer (2009, p. 392) also found girls to be at an intersection between modernity and traditional virginity preservation. In the same way that girls said they would be seen as “damaged” if someone saw their menstrual blood, they also expressed that they would be seen as damaged if not a virgin, placing girls’ value on whether or not she is “a virgin” and has been able to “hold back” until marriage.

And it is good to be, for example if your husband knows you are still a virgin, he will respect you because he will see that you have stand for all those years. Hehehe. So you are strong and he will really respect you. Yeah, if it seems that you are not a virgin they will not respect you. They won’t value you (Gladness, FGD 1, F3).

Teacher Florah was the only one labelling transactional sex as abuse. She focused her attention on the fact the constellations of transactional relationships, where older men taking advantage of young girls, shows the unequal gender power relations in the society. She also explained that it, in her opinion, was not normally practised among the rural Maasai girls, but rather by the students coming from more urban areas, and that they had seen an increase in this as a consequence of the school admitting more paying students from urban areas.

Maasai girls, you find them, they are so shyful. It is hard for them to express because they are cultured that way. So initiating relationship for money orientation it is not easy, it is not easy [for the Maasai]. But others, who are coming from other areas they are aware of a variety of things. They are aware of different information. Yes, and they are so, so, so good in the internet and in the news. They know what is happening in the world. For those ones it is easy, it is easy because their society nowadays is really loaded. You find grown up people, you find grown up people abusing girls. They are

abusing because they are taking advantage of them. They have no intention of marrying them, but they know that if I just offer her a certain amount of money at her level, she is going to see that it is so huge. Just to get her on bed. And they succeed (Florah).

In this quote Florah explained transactional sex as a form of “contamination” from the students coming from urban areas or from the students’ use of the Internet. This resonates with the data from the FGDs. Most of the girls that expressed having experience with transactional relationships had other backgrounds than Maasai or were Maasai living in urban areas. However, in the chapter about initiation ceremonies I wrote about the traditional Maasai practice of Esoto. Although this is a dying tradition in many societies, it was used by Maasai girls to get sexual experience while young. Esoto is not equivalent to transactional sex, but it is addressed in this chapter because Esoto has traditionally been the only time in life where Maasai girls have been free to use their agency and *choose* their own partner temporarily, similar to what girls in transactional relationships are doing.

All the abovementioned examples can be understood as girls using their agency to make strategic life choices for themselves, even though their range of options are limited. By viewing it as choice one avoids labelling the girls as disempowered. However, in line with Kabeer’s definition of empowerment as an expansion of choice, the girls will be empowered when they experience an expanded range of actual options to *choose* not to engage in risky sexual relations and by that avoiding the negative consequences. Overall, this chapter also shows the intersections of different aspects of the girls lives, where risky sexual relations add to poverty, risk of pregnancy and school dropouts.

8.2 Early pregnancy and consequences of covid-19 school closure

Even though the practice of transactional sex is quite commonly accepted in several communities in SSA, the full scope of consequences of girls’ engagement in risky sexual relations are not well explored. In the above chapter I wrote about how I was unsure of how to approach the phenomenon of transactional sex. The moral standards that I, as a white woman from the Global North, have been influenced by, leads me to focus on how these young girls are being abused by older men. However, even if approaching transactional sex with a focus on agency rather than victimisation, such practices inevitably expose girls to an elevated risk

of STDs and unplanned pregnancies. Transmission of HIV, STDs, low contraceptive use, and elevated risk of unplanned pregnancies are amongst consequences that have received attention in research (Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001, p. 1819).

Apart from impacting girls’ health and wellbeing, early pregnancies also have other consequences for adolescent girls. As previously mentioned, they also risk losing their right to standard education and are thereby likely to have less chances of employment. During all my FGDs I usually started asking in broader terms about what kind of barriers exist for girls education, without bringing up menstruation. Pregnancy tended in almost all groups to be one of the first things discussed by the informants.

Table 2 - Number of Dropouts in Government and Non-Government Schools by Region, Council, Reason and Sex, 2017 (MoEVT, 2018, p. 283)

GRADE	Death			Indiscipline			Pregnancy			Truancy			TOTAL			% of Total
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Form 1	86	69	155	200	80	280	0	973	973	11328	7824	19152	11614	8946	20560	31.3
Form 2	117	76	193	384	220	604	0	1642	1642	13949	11438	25387	14450	13376	27826	42.4
Form 3	64	53	117	432	201	633	0	1528	1528	5041	4377	9418	5537	6159	11696	17.8
Form 4	56	42	98	262	73	335	0	1157	1157	1760	1559	3319	2078	2831	4909	7.5
Form 5	6	6	12	46	16	62	0	102	102	181	93	274	233	217	450	0.7
Form 6	6	4	10	60	13	73	0	41	41	101	34	135	167	92	259	0.4
Grand Total	335	250	585	1384	603	1987	0	5443	5443	32360	25325	57685	34079	31621	65700	100.0
% of Total	1.0	0.8	0.9	4.1	1.9	3.0	0.0	17.2	8.3	95.0	80.1	87.8	51.5	48.5	100.0	

Note: Dropouts in secondary schools is higher in lower grades as compared to upper grades, where Form 2 has the highest number of dropouts (42.4%). The major reason for dropout is truancy (87.8%) followed by pregnancy (8.3%), and the least is death by 0.9%.

According to Tanzanian educational statistics from 2018, shown above, there were 5443 female students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy in 2017. This number is relatively low compared to the numbers for truancy which accounted for 87,8 percent and 57685 cases of the total dropouts. Truancy is used to cover all kinds of unexplained dropouts, and there is no explanation for exactly what kind of absenteeism is included in the truancy category. Because adolescent pregnancies have been causing expulsion, it is possible to assume that some, if not many, of the pregnancy cases in secondary school are wrongfully reported as truancy. Most likely, many adolescent girls drop out before the school becomes

aware that they are pregnant, recognizing that expulsion is inevitable (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2013).

There were also quite a lot of variations in the pregnancy rates between the northern regions. The more rural region of Mara experienced the most dropouts due to pregnancy. This is also a region inhabited mostly by Maasai.

Table 3 - Number of Dropouts in Government and Non-Government Schools by Region, Council, Reason and Sex, 2017 (MoEVT, 2018, p. 284)

REGION	COUNCIL	Total Enrolment 2017	Death			Indiscipline			Pregnancy			Truancy			TOTAL			% of Total Enrolment
			M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Kilimanjaro	Hai	15,325	2	0	2	28	5	33	0	62	62	167	117	284	197	184	381	2.5
	Moshi	36,620	7	2	9	12	4	16	0	89	89	201	137	338	220	232	452	1.2
	Moshi MC	16,984	3	1	4	1	0	1	0	16	16	65	42	107	69	59	128	0.8
	Mwanga	15,717	1	1	2	15	11	26	0	27	27	204	155	359	220	194	414	2.6
	Rombo	19,232	1	1	2	8	3	11	0	32	32	250	137	387	259	173	432	2.2
	Same	21,464	4	5	9	11	14	25	0	83	83	158	120	278	173	222	395	1.8
	Siha	7,121	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	24	24	56	47	103	56	75	131	1.8
	Sub Total	132,463	18	12	30	75	39	114	0	333	333	1101	755	1856	1194	1139	2333	1.8
Manyara	Babati	12,709	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	255	196	451	256	198	454	3.6
	Babati TC	7,552	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	4	10	12	22	11	16	27	0.4
	Hanang	8,337	0	2	2	2	1	3	0	7	7	209	176	385	211	186	397	4.8
	Kiteto	5,049	1	2	3	5	0	5	0	45	45	76	80	156	82	127	209	4.1
	Mbulu	5,929	0	1	1	3	0	3	0	17	17	168	183	351	171	201	372	6.3
	Mbulu TC	6,436	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	3	146	147	293	147	150	297	4.6
	Simanjiro	4,785	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	9	9	59	36	95	60	47	107	2.2
	Sub Total	50,797	1	6	7	14	3	17	0	86	86	923	830	1753	938	925	1863	3.7
Mara	Bunda	9,397	1	0	1	3	0	3	0	52	52	211	96	307	215	148	363	3.9
	Bunda TC	7,765	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	27	92	62	154	92	89	181	2.3
	Butiama	9,832	6	3	9	6	0	6	0	47	47	160	92	252	172	142	314	3.2
	Musoma	8,132	3	1	4	10	9	19	0	63	63	115	83	198	128	156	284	3.5
	Musoma MC	12,572	1	2	3	2	1	3	0	27	27	82	21	103	85	51	136	1.1
	Rorya	12,992	6	3	9	4	2	6	0	69	69	158	114	272	168	188	356	2.7
	Serengeti	11,235	3	1	4	5	2	7	0	29	29	197	108	305	205	140	345	3.1
	Tarime	10,472	3	0	3	3	6	9	0	20	20	252	125	377	258	151	409	3.9
	Tarime TC	5,978	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	14	14	47	19	66	48	34	82	1.4
	Sub Total	88,375	24	11	35	33	20	53	0	348	348	1314	720	2034	1371	1099	2470	2.8
Arusha	Arusha	22,481	1	2	3	20	2	22	0	24	24	123	95	218	144	123	267	1.2
	Arusha CC	28,615	3	5	8	20	1	21	0	57	57	88	79	167	111	142	253	0.9
	Karatu	10,644	3	1	4	1	0	1	0	16	16	142	136	278	146	153	299	2.8
	Longido	5,922	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	26	26	58	10	68	59	38	97	1.6
	Meru	20,732	4	0	4	7	1	8	0	37	37	135	90	225	146	128	274	1.3
	Monduli	8,727	2	0	2	7	2	9	0	23	23	110	41	151	119	66	185	2.1
	Ngorongoro	5,810	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	44	47	91	44	47	91	1.6
	Sub Total	102,931	13	8	21	56	8	64	0	183	183	700	498	1198	769	697	1466	1.4

The students were all aware that unplanned pregnancies were a real threat to their education. There seemed to be a fear of getting pregnant amongst the students because they had seen other girls have their lives changed and their education removed because of this. They were very aware that once they fall out of school due to pregnancy their education would be terminated and said things like “if you fall pregnant you will be fired out of school” or “if you come with your pregnancy here, you will be sent back”. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some also expressed that the students who fell pregnant were ignorant or “stupid” and

said that “some people they do not use their chance [vacation] well” or that “it is really easy for us [to fall pregnant] because we are weak. We are not tough enough to handle them [men]”. Several girls also clearly expressed that pregnant girls *should* be allowed back in school because “there is a reason for why they got pregnant” making examples like rape or lack of basic needs.

Early pregnancy also can lead you to leave the school because if once you get the pregnancy you can't continue with the studying. Many schools here in Tanzania doesn't allow that because, I mean you cannot handle two things at the same time that you are studying at the same time you have the pregnancy you won't listen to the teacher. So, and these early pregnancies are caused by early relationships because many men are just lying at the girls, cheating you that “I will marry you”. But once he has given you the pregnancy or he has misused you he is telling you that “I don't know, I don't know you and I do not know that pregnancy” [...] So this can lead you to leave the school because once the school headmaster or the other teacher know that you are pregnant they won't allow you to continue with your studies (Gladness, FGD 1, F3).

The very first night I arrived at School 1 I had a conversation with one of the school staff. Having been there before, I asked for the whereabouts of a specific student I had been teaching two years prior. I came to know this girl had “disappeared” two days before our arrival. The teacher was insinuating that the girl had probably gotten pregnant and explained that there had been a huge problem with girls dropping out after the closing of the schools due to covid-19. In Tanzania the government closed the schools for about three months, sending all students, including those at boarding schools, home. As my field work progressed it turned out many of my informants, both students and adults, shared the same concern over this.

Most of them who normally conceive are those once they go home... It is not that they conceive willingly. No. Majority of them, once they reach home, because their parents have received the dowry, they bring the man in the house. So eventually they get carried away just like that. And we are so sad that the government sometime overlook things, leaving out the nature of the societies [...] I remember last year there were two girls who failed to do the exams. They were here, but during corona vacation the government announced that no school should keep a girl or a student at the school.

They forgot that there are other school like these ones. You see? So the girls went home, when they went there home they came back pregnant. And they had already been registered to do the national exam, which could qualify them to go for further educational steps. They could not do it [...]. They [the government] have forgotten. They have forgotten. We are sad about it. We don't know who is going to remind them that there are those who are just victims of circumstance. There are those who are being forced by their culture, by their families. So how will you judge them in the same pot as those who are doing it freely. So those who happen to get pregnant from this school, they were just victims, victims indeed (Florah).

Teachers, the matron, students, and NGO informants alike, all agreed that the covid-19 pandemic had caused increased student dropouts. The matron confirmed that School 1 had lost about four students solely due to pregnancy during the school closure. Another person I talked to during a field conversation made an example of a school in Arusha city losing as many as 18 female students during the covid school closure. Seeing as the school closure was a political decision made by the previous government, many people were reluctant to discuss this because of the fear of the consequences of critiquing the government.

During an informal field conversation with the Headmaster of School 1, he referred to holidays in general as a “No-man’s land”. The headmaster explained that if they make the mistake of sending the wrong students back home, they might never come back to school. Several of their Maasai students are already married by arranged marriage but are able to await starting family life until after they finish their education. The husband is also likely to break off the arrangement completely when having to wait for the girl to finish secondary education. This increases girls’ capability to lead a life of their own choosing. In some instances, the families will interfere and rush this process if their child returns home. The students are especially vulnerable during the long breaks between Standard 7 and Form 1 (three months) and Form 4 and Form 5 (6 months) and the headmaster estimated they lose about two to three students this way each year. As mentioned in the introduction, the current president has recently (in 2021) lifted the ban on pregnant schoolgirls allowing them to resume formal education (Wambura, 2021). However, it remains to be seen how this development impacts dropout rates and girls’ school participation.

Unwanted pregnancies are in this chapter presented as a consequence of risky sexual behaviour, but also as a barrier to girls education in general. However, several of my informants also directly related pregnancies to menstruation. One connection being that if a girl often refrains from going to school due to lack of funds for sanitary pads, this will in turn make her susceptible to pregnancy or early marriage. One of my student informants also made a direct connection between menstruation and pregnancy explaining how some girls might consider pregnancy to be a solution to relieve menstrual pain.

But sometimes it is really bad because you are entering your menstruation. It is like you enter in a huge very big job. So, like morning you are wearing a pad. After four hours you have already removed it, and after four hours you remove it, and after four hours you remove it. So, it is like some they are sick. They get sick of the stomach, someone get syringed, maybe they could be better. So, some, because they are tired of this issue, they say maybe let us... Because maybe they are living in Maasai culture... I am Maasai, but I am not in that deep. So maybe they say "I will get pregnant. When you get pregnant you won't get what? Periods". And when you get back you will see your studies are gone, you won't be allowed to continue in school. So that is really sad (Catherine, FGD 1, F3).

I found myself being quite surprised about the lack of knowledge presented in this statement. The student made it clear that it was not her own opinion, but one shared by "uneducated" girls, especially in rural Maasai areas. I discussed it with one of my fellow students that also conducted interviews in the same school, and she had had a similar statement from another student. This shows the importance of comprehensive MHM-education. In the following chapters, the role of organisations and public authorities in promoting MHM-education and other MHM interventions will be elucidated.

9 Government and NGOs influence on MHM and empowerment

As a result of the closing of the gender gap in school enrolment, the focus has shifted from girls' primary enrolment to how they are able to transition to higher levels of education. Empowering girls through secondary education has become important for scholars, governments and NGOs alike (Murphy-Graham & Lloyd, 2016, p. 557). I have in the previous chapters used some data from the NGO interviews to support the findings from the FGDs. In the following chapters I will present and discuss NGO representatives' understanding of how MHM interventions can affect girls' school performance and thereby promote empowerment. As presented in the methodology chapter, I interviewed three different NGOs about their work on MHM. Two local NGOs operating in the northern Tanzania (Live Your Dreams org. and Menstrual Health Awareness org.), as well as the Norwegian Church Aid Tanzania, whose operations expands throughout the country. LYD org. cooperates with School 1, while MHA org. operated in School 2. The three organisations had different, but also coinciding reasonings for addressing MHM. All organisations focused on MHM as a part of a wider focus on SRHR. SRHR-education is an extensive field that will not be discussed in its entirety in this thesis. The focus will be on MHM as a part of sexual health.

9.1 MHM interventions- Resources & education

Beatrice from MHA org. grew up as a Maasai and had therefore experienced some similar challenges to what my student informants were facing today. Alike some of the girls in School 1, Beatrice ran away from home when she was supposed to be circumcised, but she later returned to her village. She used her own life experiences as a woman and a Maasai to explain the impacts of providing pads and MHM education to girls.

I was already twelve years. Then there came my periods. I cried because I was like now they really... I am really circumcised now. Because it was at night and in the morning I saw a lot of blood and I was like "What is this? Maybe something is very wrong with me?". Now what did I have to do? I thought of taking something like eeh, you know the maize comb? The comb after you remove the maize. I thought of inserting it to the "vivi" [vagina] so that the blood would stop coming out. Hahaha. That I saw didn't work. It was painful. Then I thought okay maybe I can use mattress or maybe the cow dung. I started using all of them. Then I got so infected. I got sick. I

couldn't tell my mum. There was no one I could have told because no one spoke about menstruation. Then I came up with an idea. A very clever one. I took the polythene bag, and then I put my brother's t-shirt around, and then I put it down. And it was working [...] So, it was very stressful. I thought of missing days to go to school. It was challenging. Until I got to secondary school, that is when I came to learn about menstruation (Beatrice).

A lot has changed since Beatrice was young and sanitary products are more easily available. Still, her experience with providing sanitary products and MHM-education to students suggests that the demand is still very much alive. Beatrice runs her own local NGO, with herself as the only full-time employee. Her work is financed by outside support from international and local donors. She estimates that she reaches around 1500 students a year directly with her educational programmes, as well as many more indirectly through advocating on radio shows and social media groups. Her motivation for providing MHM education is that it will have a trickle-down effect. By teaching primary school girls to sew their own reusable menstrual pads, she hopes that they in turn can teach others and thereby leave a long-lasting sustainable impact.



Picture 4 - Students in School 2 receiving self-sewn reusable pads and underwear (Private)

Beatrice focused her MHM education on teaching girls about what happens to their bodies during menstruation and gave the students opportunities to ask questions about MHM alongside other SRHR topics. Several of my student informants expressed a need for MHM education as a part of sexuality education because the traditional mechanisms for teaching them were insufficient. Beatrice emphasised that there was a generational divide where adolescent girls today might have access to menstrual products that their parents did not use. A lot of the menstrual products, especially tampons and menstrual cups, have English instructions and not KiSwahili. Since some lack parental support on how to use these products, Beatrice filled the gap by providing education on the use of menstrual products. Information about the menstrual cycle, menstrual symptoms, health and nutrition were also important parts of her MHM education.



Picture 5 - Poster informing students about different types of menstrual products (Private)

Emmanuel, from Live Your Dreams org.'s, reasoning for providing pads and incinerators for burning menstrual waste were closely related to the concept of intersectionality. He focused on how the adolescents they are working with are marginalised by their economic situations, but makes a point about how girls, through their gender, experience more compounding forms

of inequality. One of these being that their bodily functions, such as menstruation, restricts their freedom of choice, making them especially disadvantaged.

I think that is one of the things that is in my heart that drives me personally, that idea of liberation. And liberation for who? For the marginalized and the oppressed, who usually are women and girls. Because he [made an example of a poor male farmer] is also marginalised by a lot of these systems that poor-ish farmers face... The world is not designed for him, but women and girls take that same thing to even a higher degree. That same marginalisation to a higher degree (Emmanuel)

Emmanuel also believed that pad distribution can have an impact on school absence, but highlighted that “pads are not enough”, it needs to be combined with menstrual health education.

I: Why do you think it is useful to spend money on sanitary supplies for girls?

Emmanuel: *Ehm, so when you don't, a lot of the time they'll struggle to find a place where they can get them. And in the absence of being able to get pads, then they'll use whatever they can find, and probably they will stay out of school and miss school. And if it is five days a month, that's... Five out of thirty that's 18 percent [correction: 16 percent] less school days that their male peers would get or their non-menstruating peers. That's a big disadvantage.*

LYD org. focused their MHM education on reducing the shame and stigma connected to menstruation. Emmanuel explained that:

I think when they are able to get pads it is dignifying, it lets them stay in school. I don't think pads is enough, it comes with menstrual health education. Ehm, I think that there is enough in society that teaches them that periods are something to be ashamed of and thus womanhood is something to be ashamed of and we want them to be proud to be women. So menstrual health education is the other side of that coin and it is also very important. There are lots of situations where they don't need pads... (Emmanuel)

Apart from providing pads, LYD org. worked on breaking down menstrual stigma by promoting life skills, SRHR education and critical thinking. Emmanuel emphasised that teaching girls to critically assess their place in the culture is useful to increase girls' capability to break down harmful menstrual taboos. It has previously in this thesis been discussed how menstrual taboos often results in oppression or seclusion. Furthermore, as described in the theory chapter, taboos may not be exclusively suppressive (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 11). Therefore, Emmanuel emphasised that it is useful to raise girls' awareness of "what parts of the culture builds identity [...] and what parts of the culture are harmful". Their objective is not to remove the girls from their culture, but they aim to build girls' competency for understanding how the "rules of conduct" (Young & Bacdayan, 1965) surrounding menstruation impacts their lives.

Norwegian Church Aid Tanzania pointed out that they had only recently started learning about girls' challenges of accessing menstrual pads. Today they work on MHM as part of two programmes, the Economic Empowerment and Gender Based Violence programmes. The fact that they have integrated it into two different programme areas contributes to show how menstruation is affected by and affects different parts of women's lives. Esther from NCA talks about how the access to reusable sanitary products in Tanzania is limited. They are expensive, and NCA is looking for more local companies to start producing reusables so the price can be reduced, and it can be made available to more people.

From the economic empowerment side we saw the need to address it so that women are also having like sort of equal opportunities to go to school or to continue with the economic activities during menstruation (NCA).

Among the three NGOs, NCA was the one that most clearly linked menstruation to economic empowerment by adding reusable sanitary pads in packages for farmers living in rural and marginalised communities that have limited access to sanitary products. The packages that normally contain components for creating drip irrigation, were supplemented with sanitary pads because of a huge demand from the recipients.

They need [sanitary supplies], the demand is so huge we can't afford. We are not able to meet it. Because basically they [recipients] would like each package they purchase to contain the reusable pads. Because maybe a mom and the two daughters in the

home, so they end up maybe distributing the package they get. So, they would like to get more sanitary pads. And it is a request that keeps coming and coming (NCA).

During my visit, NCA was conducting a campaign for sixteen days of activism against gender based violence (GBV), and all NCAs partners in the country were supposed to hand out reusable pads at their events. They had chosen to promote menstruation as a part of GBV because they had experiences of girls being in transactional relationships for money to buy pads, and these kinds of relationships tended, in their opinion, to be violent and thereby have negative consequences on girls' capabilities. Therefore, they focused on providing pads and SRHR training in school clubs. They advocated for expansion of public health services for youth and promoted a holistic and interreligious approach to MHM and SRHR. They focused on how religious platforms can be useful in promoting adolescent SRHR because they already have high credibility and trust within the society.

9.1.1 Empowerment through MHM interventions?

All three organisations had a common understanding that provision of sanitary pads and other basic necessities is one way of promoting girls' empowerment. It varied what kind of products the NGOs were offering. Some of them provided reusable pads, while others distributed packages of disposable pads. The varying experiences of the FGD participants regarding reusable pads raised a question of whether they served their purpose. Reusable sanitary products are more environmentally and economically friendly and for NGOs they are a long-lasting alternative that ensures that their interventions will have a sustainable impact over time. However, since several girls described that it was shameful to wash them and that they had issues of wrinkling, low absorbency, and leaking, I believe it added further stress to some of their lives. For the students that had several reusables to alternate between, clean water, privacy for rinsing and an iron to de-wrinkle them, they are a more economically sustainable option. However, returning to the focus on girls' lived experiences, it seems to be important for NGOs to study how girls experience the use of these products. If providing pads is going to be an instrument for poverty alleviation, programmes should be adhering to the needs and wants of the girls that will be using them. There is little use in supplying reusable options if the students still end up having to buy their own like in School 1. Then the differences between those coming from resourceful backgrounds and those who cannot afford pads maintains, suggesting that it does not empower or increase girls' capabilities.

As presented in the theory chapter, Naila Kabeer is known for distinguishing between three dimensions of empowerment. The resource dimension is about structures that enable individuals to make choices. Using Kabeer's framework as a foundation, provision of sanitary pads can be regarded as a *resource* contributing to female empowerment. Giving girls pads might not in itself be enough to empower them, but is a resource that can expand their power to choose by being something to bargain with (Kabeer, 1999). I also add that resources, combined with MHM education, can enhance girls capabilities to practice safe MHM. However, using CA can contribute to emphasise that resources are not enough to predict a person's state or wellbeing or empowerment. CA shifts the focus to also include the utility and functioning of a resource (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 12). The dissatisfaction some girls expressed with reusable pads suggests that it, as a resource, did not contribute to increase their capability to equal school participation during menstruation. However, in general pads seemed to be integral in supporting girls' dignity and well-being during menses.

Chapter 8 discussed different ways girls are displaying agency by creating strategies to cope with menstruation. One of the strategies that appeared was the practice of being in transactional relationships to fund basic necessities or extra expenditures like "fashion". For those that lack money for "luxuries", being supplied with basic needs like sanitary pads and underwear might enable them to use that money on other things, like clothes, that makes them feel empowered and accomplished. Madsen (2011) made a similar example from her own experience which underlines this argument. She emphasises that what a person considers an empowering choice should always be understood as context-specific. This corresponds with CA and a focus on the value of people's ability to pursue self-set goals. CA acknowledges the diversity of human needs and priorities and focuses on the freedom to realise one's own goals. Moreover, it goes beyond expansion of for example educational or economic gains to focus on which state of being is valuable to the agent (Nussbaum, 2000). From my experiences in the schools, I often found that the girls were eager to present themselves as "educated" "non-traditional" and not from "the interior". They often made remarks like "I am not pure Maasai, I am shallow" or "I am an educated Maasai" which suggests that what was valuable and empowering to them was presenting themselves as well-dressed, "proper", modern, educated and a part of the global society. Therefore, I found it very valuable interviewing NGOs with a strong local commitment, learning why *they* believed pads, amongst other things, is an important factor for empowerment and expansion of freedoms.

9.2 Challenging girls “inferiority”

So far in this chapter it has been discussed some ways in which NGO interventions can have a positive impact on girls’ menstrual experience. Through MHM interventions girls are given the resources and knowledge needed to manage the biological functions of their bodies. However, my data suggests that societal implications of their gender also create experiences of injustice that limits girls’ capability. This thesis has therefore also been aimed at showing how individual menstrual experiences might be structured by underlying social systems beyond girls’ control. Both School 1 and the NGOs focused on how the cultural environment in which the girls live can impact their agency and MHM experience. Their empowerment strategies therefore involved strengthening girls’ capability to change their realities and the power relations surrounding them. In line with Kabeer’s definition of power, girls need to be given the freedom to move out of a “state of powerlessness” (Kabear, 1999). This meant that the NGOs challenged the societal and cultural ideals of femininity to make sure that schoolgirls can access the same capabilities as boys.

This study exemplifies how culture and socialisation leads girls to display modesty and not aiming to fulfil their full potentials, something both Emmanuel and Beatrice aim to change. As I see it, there is a need for the same issues to also be addressed in education, so that the educational system does not reproduce the ideal of female modesty or submissiveness. Access to sanitary products might be a resource that gives girls access *to* education, but they also need to be supported in developing the skill or the mindset to succeed *within* education. Female students need to be able to manage themselves and their education, but also to have the aspiration and the desire to do so. This in turn depends on how the girl is “conditioned” (Mjaaland, 2013).

An important part of Murphy-Graham & Lloyd’s framework for empowerment is how empowering education should foster dignity and equal worth to others (2016, p. 561). MHM interventions can contribute to foster girls dignity during menstruation, but as previously discussed, girls that have been conditioned to believe their inferiority to boys or that have internalised placing low value on formal education, needs to have their self-esteem and belief in their own capabilities fostered.

What I think the girls are hungry for, even if they don’t know it, is affirmation. When they’re in Form 1 and they’re new, there is a high probability that they are coming

from a background or a family where they are not encouraged in their academic abilities, in their creativity, in any of these soft skills or emotional skills. And if they are encouraged it is for these external things. Like “Wow you are so beautiful”, “Wow you hair is so nice”, those kind of thing, which is not as productive because those are external thing, not about who they are as a person (Emmanuel).

Like Mjaaland, Murphy-Graham & Lloyd also discuss how girls being conditioned to believe their inferiority to boys, might benefit from gaining a clear understanding of their own dignity and self-worth and that this will increase girls capability to imagine alternative futures and provide motivation to make different choices. Emmanuel also emphasises that having a clear understanding of one’s own dignity and abilities increases girls capability to dream and imagine different realities for themselves.

To live your dreams, you have to have dreams in the first place. And for women and girls so often, in societies where they are marginalized, like ours, culture does this thing that puts such a weight on their shoulders that it pushes out the dreams that children have and makes them foolish things. Or even worse than that, is it gets to them before they even form dreams, when they are really young. And children are cultured like that so young and so early, so sometimes the girl can know her place in society isn’t to dream or isn’t to imagine, it is just to do the things women and girls are expected to do in our society, which is usually to be submissive and make babies and take care of them. I think that is one of the things that is in my heart that drives me personally, that idea of liberation for the marginalized and the oppressed, who usually are women and girls (Emmanuel).

Emmanuel’s arguments about how girls are cultured not to dream resonates with Mjaaland’s modesty ideal. Having the ability to dream and to act on those dreams comes with comes with an expansion of power. A lot of the dreams these girls have challenge the cultural perceptions of what a woman should be. As mentioned before, several the students I interviewed were already married and would be returning to their husbands after finishing their education. While some girls were looking forward to returning to their village and being a mother, while others dreamt of getting careers and working as doctors, accountants or teachers and having a family and a husband of their choosing. Many of the informants were already challenging the

existing power relations simply by being in school, and thus gaining greater control over the sources of power that will give them a wider range of options and the capability to dream.

This expansion of control and power is a process, and a part of this process might be to take control of their menstrual experiences. The NGOs are assisting the girls in doing so by teaching them to exercise their dignity, confidence and by promoting life skills. By challenging the shame and stigma connected to menstruation with skills and knowledge, the girls may be liberated from the perception of their menstruating bodies being “disrespectful” or “vulnerable”. Being one way to approach empowerment, confidence and dignity builds power and strength from within, which will give girls the freedom and skills necessary to challenge existing power relations in society and in the family. Having such a focus on empowerment also affirms that empowerment is something done by women, not to them, and providing pads and other supporting structures can clear some of the obstacles from their path.

9.3 “Breaking the silence” - Inclusion of boys in MHM education

So far, this chapter has shown how access to material resources like pads has the possibility to empower girls to better manage their periods and allow them to partake in education and social activities. Furthermore, challenging girls’ inferiority might enable them to better understand and negotiate their life experiences. Moreover, the shame and embarrassment reported by many of the girls shows the need to initiate more discussions on menstruation. Social norms and taboos on menstruation creates a “culture of silence”, where girls’ mobility seemed to be constrained due to social and cultural norms upheld by men in several of the local ethnic groups, where the family and societal power structures appear patriarchal. It therefore proved important for the NGOs to also work towards creating enabling environments that does not require girls to self-restrict or confine themselves during menstruation. All three of the NGO informants emphasised that, in their experience, inclusion of boys in MHM education is of importance when challenging persisting menstrual taboos and creating a structural foundation for gender equality.

You know, traditionally it is like a women’s thing, so women handle it and then that is it. Men don’t want to know about it. But I am glad the discussions, people are breaking the silence, because men really need to understand and be supportive. Like in the clubs [school clubs] with the students we want to also they engage boys as well,

so in issues of menstruation, the boys take part in the training to reduce that stigma. From an early age to tell them you need to help your sister when they are going through this (NCA).

In line with Grant et al (2013), they all emphasised that caution should be given to creating a causal relationship between girls' access to sanitary products and their educational success. All informants emphasised that they saw additional interventions such as SRHR education, competence building and boys puberty education as equally important as pad distribution in encouraging girls' empowerment. They emphasised that exclusion of boys in MHM interventions failed to understand menstruation as a part of wider social systems. Engaging boys, and thereby challenging their perceptions of menstruation, was by my informants suggested to play a meaningful role in improving women's health and dignity. If menstruation and education can be said to be under-researched, then the role of boys in MHM has received even less focused attention. A few qualitative studies have highlighted boys' menstrual knowledge and the potential of involving boys in the menstrual discourse in LMICs (Gundi & Subramanyam, 2020; Mason et al., 2017). They highlight that adolescence is an important transformative period where boys and girls are socialised into gender roles. This can make it a good entry-point for shaping gender related notions, for example about menstruation. Since there are few opportunities for girls to learn about menstruation in school, the opportunities for boys to learn about MHM are even more limited. Hence, boys have little knowledge about the menstrual realities of girls, which reinforces misinformation and restrictive taboos. When NCA first started including menstruation interventions in their programmes they found that the discussion had to start within their own office.

It is still a taboo in many... To talk about menstruation, huh! Some men they are like "No, no, no, no don't tell me that!". So it is still, we are still trying to break the silence. It was very funny even here when we started ordering these sanitary pads and they came and we were trying to pick the best so the men here were like [shy] (NCA).

The quote from NCA shows how inclusion of boys also has to extend beyond schools to family and societal levels. There were also family expectations around the handling of menses that required it to be hidden and dealt with in secrecy. Anxiety and embarrassment pervaded my informants' menstrual experiences also at the home (see chapter 7.2).

The taboos they are also making it very hard for, for the girls to be able to open up. Like I have a girl, she told me she's 13. The other day I went to her school, she told me she lives with her dad only. The mother she left. And that day she told me she had her period. And she was like "I cannot even tell my dad. And I was crying, so my dad started beating me. Can you please call my dad?". Then she gave me the phone number (Beatrice)

This incident that Beatrice speaks about, shows the reluctance of girls to speak with their parents about periods. It also elucidates how it is not only speaking about menstruation that is a taboo, but perhaps also expressing emotions. As discussed in chapter 6.3 and 7.4 obedience and appropriate behaviour is important, and this involves keeping emotions to oneself. Beatrice explained that most parents, especially in rural and more traditional areas, are not encouraging their children to be open, and that they mostly rebuke them. My student informants emphasised that parents, and especially fathers are strict. In line with the kinship system of the Maasai, the eldest male, which is often the father or patriarch, holds the authority and respect of women and younger men. Men of age are at the top of the hierarchic system and showing dignity and respect towards one's elders is an important part of the social order.

Seeing as these unequal social relations caused negative menstrual experiences for girls, it is necessary to address them in order to ensure that girls have access to the same capabilities as boys. Furthermore, Sommer (2009, p. 395) emphasises that changing oppressive cultural perceptions of women cannot only be done from the outside, and that interventions must derive from local communities. Girls should be given the freedom and skills necessary to challenge existing power relations in society and in the family. In School 1, they want the girls to be "good motivators who can influence their parents now the world has changed" (Florah). Several of the students also emphasised that they want to "go back to change their societies" and challenge the male and the masculine as the site of power and authority in the society (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003, p. 15).

9.4 Government perspective

Inclusion of boys in MHM-education was not only important for the NGOs, but it also proved to be a point of focus for the local authorities in the district where I conducted my research.

During my time in Tanzania, I was put in contact with the district's Sanitation and hygiene coordinator and disease surveillance officer, and I was able to have a field conversation with him about the how the local authorities work to improve girls MHM. My NGO informants experienced that the connection between MHM and education was on the local government's radar as an issue needing to be addressed. The official, whom I have named Jackson, was pleased to see someone researching MHM and expressed great interest in expanding their competencies. He highlighted three areas of focus that were especially important in a governmental perspective: inclusion of boys, environmentally friendly disposing of sanitary products and promotion of reusable sanitary pads.

Jackson expressed that the local authorities encouraged further research to be directed at rural public schools, as this was where they faced the biggest challenges. In his experience schoolgirls in urban areas were more capable of accessing menstrual products. The local government was also exploring promotion of reusable pads in the district and expressed an interest in learning about how girls actually perceived using them. He highlighted that in an economic perspective, reusable pads were cheaper, both for the consumer and government as providers. Furthermore, he saw it as an advantage that they can be produced locally, or by girls themselves. He highlighted how this would have a trickle-down effect where girls who learn to sew their own pads in turn can teach others. In his opinion this made reusable pads a long lasting and sustainable option. He focused especially on possible spread of diseases due to improper disposing of one-use pads. Another benefit to reusable pads, in his opinion, was that they do not involve waste disposal. Water and sanitation (WASH) was an important priority for the government, but because there is no infrastructure for safe and environmentally friendly waste disposal, they found this to be challenging.

Jackson also expressed that he found inclusion of boys in MHM education to be “revolutionary” and an important way to solve the problems of shame and taboo. Thereby, the local government showed willingness to contribute to “breaking the silence” around menstruation. This shows how Tanzanian authorities are responding to the increased global focus on menstrual health and “period poverty” as part of public health and gender equality.



Picture 6 - Government initiated messaging on disposal and perceptions of menstruation from field school. Reads "Like flowers, menstruation needs care. Store the used pads in a special container. Do not throw the pad in the toilet. Clean yourself regularly. Be proud to have a period" (Private)

Another important responsibility for the government is to ensure that they do not disadvantage menstruating individuals in public spaces, and thereunder in schools. One of the ways in which the Tanzanian national government contributes to creating enabling school environments is by keeping record of Pupils to Pit Latrine Ratios in public primary and secondary schools nation-wide. In secondary schools the average female Pit Latrine Ratio in 2018 was 1:24 against the standard of 1:20. However, there were notable variations among the regions (MoEVT, 2018, p. 333). In primary schools the adequacy of latrines to pupils was worse, with an average female PLR of 1:55 against the standard of 1:20. Some councils had a ratio of as much as 1:141 in primary schools (MoEVT, 2018, p. 189). In School 2 the toilet to pupils ratio was approximately 1:58 for the girls. Although I did not have the chance to discuss the impact of toilet infrastructure with the students there, I believe my other findings suggests that it is something that impact girls menstrual experience.

Considering the national governments history of isolating pregnant girls by refusing schooling, I regard it important for the government to make sure menstruating people are accommodated and not isolated or restricted in school. However, it is debateable how and how much control the government should take of peoples menstrual experiences. In the introduction I wrote about the developments in Tanzania where the government banned female street vendors (Machingas) from working on the streets and confined them to

designated trading facilities. Jackson was working on this transition in his district and emphasised that the move had a WASH-perspective where female traders would now have access to sanitary facilities in the new trading grounds, thereby making it a more secure space for women.

The public discourse around the transition suggested that female traders were dissatisfied with the move and felt like the government was limiting women's agency and an important income earning activity for many women, as they are not otherwise breadwinners. When discussing a state's relation to its citizens, the issue of paternalism raises. Nussbaum (2000) discusses paternalism from a feminist and development perspective. Paternalism is by her defined as a state's treatment of groups within the nation where people are denied behaving according to tradition (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 53). Based on a universal set of norms, paternalistic policies show little respect for people's agency and their freedom or capability to lead their lives in the way they wish. It might be possible to suggest that the value system promoted by Tanzanian authorities through pregnancy-bans and restrictions on female informal workers is paternalistic against women.

The transition in the informal sector was, amongst other things, based on a claim that the restructuring was done to promote both women's and the common good. The situation of the female street vendors thereby might illustrate a general sentiment that women and girls are in need of authoritative "help", and that their full potential is irrelevant to the case. This raises the question of whether it should be the responsibility of authorities, or men, to define what is a safe space for women, regardless if it concerns menstruation or work space. In my opinion, these policies show a tendency where the government fails to respect women and girls' autonomy and their capability to pursue their own conceptions of value (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 55). In my experience, a consequence was that the female traders had to be more mobile, carrying their produce around. Another visible effect was that more women came out to sell their produce at night, often together with their children. It is debateable whether this is a more secure environment for women and their children. Researching this development was not a focus in my research, but rather something I came across unintentionally. I am not in a position to evaluate government policies, but I aim to use it to contextualise and show the importance of understanding women's lived experiences when working on menstruation or other important aspects of women's lives.

10 Concluding remarks

The aim of this master's project was to investigate (I) *How Tanzanian secondary schoolgirls experience Menstrual Health Management (MHM)?* Overall, the diverse menstrual experiences that appeared in the data shows the complexity of MHM. To study Tanzanian girls' experiences of menstruation I went on a field trip to northern Tanzania. I spent time at two Tanzanian secondary schools, one private all-girls boarding school (School 1) and one mixed government day school (School 2). Many of the menstrual narratives were relevant in both contexts and some collective experiences appeared. The multiple research methods used, proved that the informants, just like girls anywhere, had mixed experiences of managing menstruation. The material suggests that many girls transition into puberty with lack of sanitary products and with insufficient knowledge and support. My student informants presented a knowledge gap in their MHM education and expressed a need for more comprehensive MHM education in school. Period poverty was widespread and many reported that sanitary products to support girls capability for MHM was not always a priority in household budgets. The girls' menstrual narratives also proved that fear, shame, and taboos impacted their menstrual experience.

Some differences in the girls' experiences also emerged between the two schools. Period poverty was more prevalent in School 2. As a public school they lacked the capacity and funds to provide girls with menstrual product and MHM education, even though they considered it an important reason for girls' school absence. Nor was the school infrastructure with few toilets and no running water supportive towards girls' menstrual needs. In School 1 they were able to use private donations to supply their girls with menstrual products. However, girls here also expressed challenges with MHM such as a lack of private space to deal with menstruation, lack of parental support and dissatisfaction with reusable menstrual pads. The accumulated data on girls' use of sanitary pads showed that there is a need for more comprehensive research on the effectiveness of sanitary products.

Both School 1 and 2 had engaged NGOs to provide their students with MHM education, which is not uncommon in Tanzania. This led to the formulation of the second research question: (II) *How do NGOs and local authorities work to improve MHM for adolescent schoolgirls?* All three of the interviewed NGOs emphasised the importance of enhancing girls capabilities to practice safe MHM. They contributed to this by providing girls with resources

and education. Resources like pads translated into a realization of choice, which may give girls greater freedom to act on their capabilities. When girls had a legitimate choice of going to school on their period, and handling it in their preferred manner, it seemed to be empowering. The NGOs also played an important role in improving girls' MHM by challenging the cultural and societal notions of gendered behaviour, which also extends to menstrual behaviour. Both NGOs and local authorities recognised that exclusion of boys in MHM education fails to address menstruation as a part of larger gendered power relations. They promoted that this is an area that needs increased focus moving forward.

Hierarchic gendered structures appeared to be contributing to upholding the shame and taboo and the "culture of silence" around menstruation. Even though most of my informants agreed that menstrual taboos were "outdated" and traditionally upheld by men in a patriarchal society, my data suggests that it still pervaded girls' menstrual experiences today. The students expressed that taboos still lead to behavioural change during menstruation and restricted their movements both in and out of school. This thesis therefore also aimed at exploring (III) *To what degree can menstruation hinder girls' empowerment and their realisation of capabilities through education?* Several students explained how the fear of their periods being visible would limit how they took part in educational activities, which was further exacerbated by a lack of resources. The fear of visibly bleeding would thereby limit their school performance and feeling of well-being, and possibly also extend to affect their school attendance. Menstruation can therefore be suggested to give girls unequal access to capabilities that enables them to complete secondary education. Thereby, it can also contribute to reproducing wider gender inequalities in education, which in turn may extend to their power and freedom to fulfil their capabilities in society in general.

Moreover, I also believe menstruation can be used to show the importance of not using school results and transition rates as the only determinants of girls' success in education. Broader health and well-being outcomes that includes menstruation, should also be considered an important factor for success. Girls' school experience is made up of a range of different factors. The feeling of having successfully managed menstruation in a dignified manner might be of as much importance for a girls' feeling of success and well-being as any other educational achievement. Nussbaum treats human well-being and bodily health and integrity as central human functioning capabilities that has value in itself (2000, p. 78). A dignified school participation should therefore be considered a valuable capability for adolescent girls.

Unlike gender theories that critique naturalistic explanations that render women's social existence as dependent upon their physiology (Butler, 1988), I aimed to elucidate how the body, and thereby menstruation, is always a part of women and girls' lived experiences. However, girl's destinies should not be reduced to simply be a result of their biological functions. Negative menstrual experiences should therefore not be used in its own to explain wider gendered inequalities. An intersectional approach to gender equality can be used to avoid interventions that focuses only on one type of discrimination. MHM interventions alone probably does not create equality or ensure that all girls can stay in school, but it can be a way of addressing the intersections of poverty, girls' bodily functions, and implications of their gender, in creating inequality.

Schools and teachers also have great potential to challenge taboos and creating supportive structures that contributes to more gender equality in education. Tanzanian secondary education has the potential to use MHM and SRHR education to encourage boys and girls to challenge girls' "inferiority" in society and thereby empower adolescents in Tanzania.

Lastly, I am aware of the limitations of my thesis. I have attempted to account for issues of trustworthiness throughout the text. I have also come across other topics that I did not have the capacity to include, but that would be interesting to investigate further. Whilst again asserting that I am aware my findings cannot be used to generalise, I believe the qualitative data produced can be used to form an overall argument that; in order to understand what MHM means for women and girls' participation in education and work, an in-depth understanding of women's lived experiences in a materialistic, social, and cultural perspective might be essential.

11 References

- Aase, T. H., & Fossåskaret, E. (2014). *Skapte virkeligheter: Om produksjon og tolkning av kvalitative data* (2. utg.). Universitetsforlaget.
- Banik, D. (2006). *Poverty, politics and development: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Fagbokforl.
- Britton, C. J. (1996). Learning about “the curse”: An anthropological perspective on experiences of menstruation. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 19(6), 645–653.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(96\)00085-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(96)00085-4)
- Buckley, T., & Gottlieb, A. (1988). *Blood magic: The anthropology of menstruation*. University of California Press.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- Center for Reproductive Rights. (2013). *Forced Out: Mandatory Pregnancy Testing and the Expulsion of Pregnant Students in Tanzanian Schools*.
https://reproductiverights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/crr_Tanzania_Report_Part2.pdf
- Coast, E. E. (2001). *Maasai demography* [Doctoral dissertation, University College London]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1779685554?pq-origsite=primo>
- Cranny-Francis, A., Waring, W., Stavropoulos, P., & Kirkby, J. (2003). *Gender studies: Terms and debates*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Deane, K., & Wamoyi, J. (2015). Revisiting the economics of transactional sex: Evidence from Tanzania. *Review of African Political Economy*, 42(145), 437–454.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2015.1064816>
- Douglas, M. (2002). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative analysis: Practice and innovation*. Routledge.

- Grant, M., Lloyd, C., & Mensch, B. (2013). Menstruation and School Absenteeism: Evidence from Rural Malawi. *Comparative Education Review*, 57(2), 260–284.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/669121>
- Green, M. (2005). Discourses on inequality: Poverty, public bads and entrenching witchcraft in post-adjustment Tanzania. *Anthropological Theory*, 5(3), 247–266.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499605055959>
- Grønmo, S. (2020). *Samfunnsvitenskapelige metoder* (2 utg.). Fagbokforlaget.
- Gundi, M., & Subramanyam, M. A. (2020). Curious eyes and awkward smiles: Menstruation and adolescent boys in India. *Journal of Adolescence*, 85, 80–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.09.013>
- HakiElimu. (2021). *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. A Study on Policy and Practice in Primary and Secondary Schools in Tanzania Mainland*.
<https://www.hakielimu.or.tz/download/srhr-reasearch-full-report-a-study-on-policy-and-practice-in-primary-and-secondary-schools-in-tanzania-mainland/>
- Halley, M., C. (2012). *Negotiating sexuality: Adolescent initiation rituals and cultural change in rural southern Tanzania* [Doctoral dissertation, Case Western Reserve University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/negotiating-sexuality-adolescent-initiation/docview/1033779911/se-2?accountid=15685>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Hennegan, J., Dolan, C., Steinfield, L., & Montgomery, P. (2017). A qualitative understanding of the effects of reusable sanitary pads and puberty education: Implications for future research and practice. *Reproductive Health*, 14(1), 78.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-017-0339-9>
- Hennegan, J., Shannon, A. K., Rubli, J., Schwab, K. J., & Melendez-Torres, G. J. (2019). Women’s and girls’ experiences of menstruation in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and qualitative metasynthesis. *PLOS Medicine*, 16(5), e1002803.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002803>
- Horvath, A., Thomassen, B., & Wydra, H. (2015). *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*. Berghahn Books.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021, October 6). *Tanzania: Pregnant Student Ban Harms Thousands*.
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/06/tanzania-pregnant-student-ban-harms-thousands>

- Jewitt, S., & Ryley, H. (2014). It's a girl thing: Menstruation, school attendance, spatial mobility and wider gender inequalities in Kenya. *Geoforum*, 56, 137–147.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.07.006>
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. B. (2012). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
- Keesing, R. M. (1998). *Cultural anthropology: A contemporary perspective* (3rd ed.). Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2019). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju* (3. utg.). Gyldendal.
- Longhurst, R. (2000). *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Madsen, U. A. (2011). Uddannelse- Et våben mot fattigdom. In H. J. Kristensen & P. F. Laursen (Eds.), *Pædagogikhåndbogen: Otte tilgange til pædagogik* (1 utg.). Gyldendal.
- Makakala, C. (2021, September 30). *Government's approach to the 'machinga' problem is bound to fail*. The Citizen. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/oped/-government-s-approach-to-the-machinga-problem-is-bound-to-fail-3568020>
- Mashaza, L. G., & Majani, W. P. (2018). Kulturelle ulikheter og utfordringer. In V. Vågenes & J. Christophersen (Eds.), *'Uhuru na umoja'. Samfunn og utdanning i Tamzani*.
- Mason, L., Sivakami, M., Thakur, H., Kakade, N., Beauman, A., Alexander, K. T., van Eijke, A. M., Laserson, K. F., Thakkar, M. B., & Phillips-Howard, P. A. (2017). 'We do not know': A qualitative study exploring boys perceptions of menstruation in India. *Reproductive Health*, 14(1), 174. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-017-0435-x>
- Mesaki, S. (1993). *Witchcraft and witch-killings in Tanzania: Paradox and dilemma* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304064765?pq-origsite=primo>
- Mjaaland, T. (2013). *At the frontiers of change? : Women and girls' pursuit of education in north-western Tigray, Ethiopia* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen]. Bergen Open Research Archhiv. <http://hdl.handle.net/1956/6361>
- Mjaaland, T. (2018). Negotiating gender norms in the context of equal access to education in north-western Tigray, Ethiopia. *Gender and Education*, 30(2), 139–155.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1175550>
- MoEVT. (2018). *BEST*. President's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government.

- MoEVT. (2019). *Syllabus for Science and Technology for Primary School Education, Standard III–VII*. Tanzania Institute of Education.
- Moi, T. (1998). *Hva er en kvinne?: Kjønn og kropp i feministisk teori*. Gyldendal.
- Murphy-Graham, E., & Lloyd, C. (2016). Empowering adolescent girls in developing countries: The potential role of education. *Policy Futures in Education, 14*(5), 556–577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210315610257>
- Narayan, D. (2002). *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*. World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-5166-4>
- Ngodu, A., S., & Chambo, B., J. (2011). *Biology 3*. Ujuzi Books Ltd.
- NOU 2019:3. (2019). *Nye sjanser – bedre læring. Kjønnforskjeller i skoleprestasjoner og utdanningsløp*. Kunnskapsdepartementet.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Oster, E., & Thornton, R. (2011). Menstruation, Sanitary Products, and School Attendance: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 3*(1), 91–100.
- Sambaiga, R. (2019). *A study on girls' basic education in Tanzania: A focus on factors that affect girls' retention and transition rates*. HakiElimu.
- Silberschmidt, M., & Rasch, V. (2001). Adolescent girls, illegal abortions and “sugar-daddies” in Dar es Salaam: Vulnerable victims and active social agents. *Social Science & Medicine (1982), 52*(12), 1815–1826. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(00\)00299-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00299-9)
- Sommer, M. (2009). Ideologies of sexuality, menstruation and risk: Girls' experiences of puberty and schooling in northern Tanzania. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 11*(4), 383–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050902722372>
- Sommer, M. (2010). Where the education system and women's bodies collide: The social and health impact of girls' experiences of menstruation and schooling in Tanzania. *Journal of Adolescence, 33*(4), 521–529. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.03.008>
- Sommer, M. (2013). Structural factors influencing menstruating school girls' health and well-being in Tanzania. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 43*(3), 323–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2012.693280>
- UNESCO. (2019). *Global education monitoring report- Gender report: Building bridges for gender equality*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368753>

- UNFPA. (2021, June). *Menstruation and human rights—Frequently asked questions*. United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unfpa.org/menstruationfaq>
- UNICEF. (n.d.). *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)*. <https://www.unicef.org/wash>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J., & Saito, M. (2014). *Girls' education and gender equality Education Rigorous Literature Review*. Department for International Development. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.2509.8562>
- Wadel, C., & Fuglestad, O. L. (2014). *Feltarbeid i egen kultur*. Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- Wambura, B. (2021, November 25). *Tanzania lifts ban on pregnant school girls*. The Citizen. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/tanzania-lifts-ban-on-pregnant-school-girls-3629738>
- Wamoyi, J., Wight, D., Plummer, M., Mshana, G. H., & Ross, D. (2010). Transactional sex amongst young people in rural northern Tanzania: An ethnography of young women's motivations and negotiation. *Reproductive Health*, 7(1), 2–2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1742-4755-7-2>
- Wedgwood, R. (2010). Tanzania. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education (Third Edition)* (pp. 841–846). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01436-6>
- World Bank. (2021). *Tanzania (Poverty and Equity Brief. Africa Eastern & Southern)*. https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_TZA.pdf
- Young, F. W., & Bacdayan, A. A. (1965). Menstrual Taboos and Social Rigidity. *Ethnology*, 4(2), 225–240. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3772731>

12 Appendices

12.1 Appendix 1 – Table of informants

Profession	Relation to MHM field	Participation in the project	Gender	Fictive name	Fictive name of organisation
Secondary school teacher	Teacher of Civics, English & General Studies at School 1	Semi-structured interview Field conversations Observation	Female	Florah	-
School matron	Nurse responsible for student health at School 1	Semi-structured interview/Field conversation	Female	Nembris	-
Social worker and managing director of NGO	MHM an SRHR educator. Provides education on production of sanitary pads for students.	Semi-structured interview Field visits to School 2 Field conversations Observation	Female	Beatrice	Menstrual Health Awareness org.
Norwegian Church Aid Representative	Working on MHM as a part of GBV and Economic Empowerment	Semi-structured interview	Female	Esther	Not anonymised
Founder of Arusha based NGO	Girls empowerment. Provides sanitary pads and SHRH education in schools.	Semi-structured interview	Male	Emmanuel	Live Your Dreams org.
Arusha District Health Officer	Sanitation and hygiene coordinator and disease surveillance officer	Field conversations	Male	Jackson	-

12.2 Appendix 2 – Table of student informants

Type	Number of students	Age	Tribes represented
Focus Group 1	Five	18 yrs. (Form 5)	All Maasai
Focus Group 2	Four	18-19 yrs. (Form 5)	Maasai & Chagga
Focus Group 3	Five	16-17 yrs. (Form 3)	Three Maasai, Luguru, Sukuma
Focus Group 4	Four	16 – 17 yrs. (Form 3)	Three Maasai, Hadzabe, Zigua
Field conversations with secondary school students at School 2	-	16-19 yrs. (Form 3-5)	Majority Maasai

12.3 Appendix 3 – Enrolment in Government and Non-Government Secondary Schools by Region, Council, Sex and Grade, 2018

Secondary Education

Table 3.3: Enrolment in Government and Non-Government Secondary Schools by Region, Council, Sex and Grade, 2018

REGION	COUNCIL	FORM 1		FORM 2		FORM 3		FORM 4		FORM 5		FORM 6		GRAND TOTAL			% of Total Enrolment
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T	
Songwe	Ileje	811	1125	689	1035	495	719	430	532	50	54	197	200	2672	3665	6337	0.3
	Mbozi	3447	4723	2872	3707	2385	3135	2027	2368	361	251	341	332	11433	14516	25949	1.2
	Momba	803	676	440	325	330	190	213	124	0	0	0	0	1786	1315	3101	0.1
	Songwe	599	506	456	422	337	282	230	177	217	91	188	183	2027	1661	3688	0.2
	Tunduma TC	950	1074	719	775	492	555	361	383	92	0	146	0	2760	2787	5547	0.3
	Sub Total	6610	8104	5176	6264	4039	4881	3261	3584	720	396	872	715	20678	23944	44622	2.1
Tabora	Igunga	1980	2527	1724	1996	1267	1191	1015	943	68	91	126	149	6180	6897	13077	0.6
	Kaliua	1671	1407	1319	1086	969	647	665	409	114	73	143	103	4881	3725	8606	0.4
	Nzega	1630	2106	1257	1572	817	632	465	416	0	76	0	76	4169	4878	9047	0.4
	Nzega TC	652	932	528	764	395	492	302	310	112	16	42	12	2031	2526	4557	0.2
	Sikonge	728	698	627	732	497	469	418	379	0	2	0	1	2270	2281	4551	0.2
	Tabora MC	2115	2245	1765	1926	1475	1502	1204	1246	1244	374	1246	349	9049	7642	16691	0.8
	Tabora/Uyui	1516	1515	1097	1176	798	705	535	567	65	57	67	56	4078	4076	8154	0.4
	Urambo	1188	1044	883	885	676	611	560	457	36	217	53	168	3396	3382	6778	0.3
	Sub Total	11480	12474	9200	10137	6894	6249	5164	4727	1639	906	1677	914	36054	35407	71461	3.3
Tanga	Bumbuli	1286	1540	1054	1373	855	1020	665	777	7	70	3	46	3870	4826	8696	0.4
	Handeni	1373	1699	1019	1097	842	1112	673	766	0	0	0	0	3907	4674	8581	0.4
	Handeni TC	628	778	487	644	413	592	312	452	73	0	80	0	1993	2466	4459	0.2
	Kilindi	1082	1441	854	1187	716	956	530	724	0	0	0	0	3182	4308	7490	0.3
	Korogwe	1781	1989	1524	1879	1083	1255	858	1074	201	97	118	66	5565	6360	11925	0.6
	Korogwe TC	552	774	436	708	397	675	367	570	0	271	0	385	1752	3383	5135	0.2
	Lushoto	1759	2874	1463	2620	1300	2273	995	1879	321	553	220	433	6058	10632	16690	0.8
	Mkinga	857	897	514	612	492	622	361	391	0	112	0	49	2224	2683	4907	0.2
	Muheza	1432	1567	1256	1460	1196	1292	884	1051	169	77	93	54	5030	5501	10531	0.5
	Pangani	493	428	500	423	324	360	301	197	54	0	41	0	1713	1408	3121	0.1
	Tanga CC	3057	3076	2835	2764	2313	2453	2119	2100	1085	243	1044	224	12453	10860	23313	1.1
	Sub Total	14300	17063	11942	14767	9931	12610	8065	9981	1910	1423	1599	1257	47747	57101	104848	4.9
Grand Total		316,440	335,590	265,114	286,898	209,392	224,500	174,359	178,728	46,858	34,459	44,335	31,793	1,056,498	1,091,968	2,148,466	100.0
% of Enrolment		14.7	15.6	12.3	13.4	9.7	10.4	8.1	8.3	2.2	1.6	2.1	1.5	49.2	50.8	100.0	

Note: Total enrolment in Form 1 - 6 is 2,148,466. Enrolment in Form 5 & 6 is 7.3% of the total enrolment. About 9.5% of total enrolment was recorded in Dar es Salaam Region, of which Ilala Municipal Council has the highest enrolment.

(MoEVT, 2018, p. 248)

12.4 Appendix 4 – Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) Results by Subject and Sex for School Candidates, 2016 – 2017

Secondary Education

Table 3.25: Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) Results by Subject and Sex for School Candidates, 2016 - 2017

Subject	Year	Candidate Sat			Candidate Passed					
		M	F	T	M	%	F	%	T	% of T
Civics	2016	170565	178669	349234	93752	55.2	76274	42.9	170026	48.9
	2017	156905	160768	317673	100103	64.1	85599	53.5	185702	58.8
Kiswahili	2016	170682	178713	349395	129942	76.5	140462	78.9	270404	77.7
	2017	156910	160755	317665	127643	81.8	139199	87.0	266842	84.4
English	2016	170660	178707	349367	115131	67.8	108375	60.9	223506	64.3
	2017	156887	160739	317626	110717	70.9	103784	64.9	214501	67.9
History	2016	166618	175294	341912	97611	58.9	65977	37.8	163588	48.1
	2017	152531	156585	309116	99527	65.6	72689	46.7	172216	56.0
Biology	2016	170025	178111	348136	103949	61.4	89045	50.2	192994	55.7
	2017	156277	160211	316488	104328	67.1	88938	55.8	193266	61.4
Geography	2016	169910	178569	348479	99403	58.8	78347	44.1	177750	51.2
	2017	156030	160534	316564	94720	61.0	72785	45.6	167505	53.2
Basic Mathematics	2016	170549	178653	349202	37891	22.3	25099	14.1	62990	18.1
	2017	156744	160700	317444	36288	23.3	24333	15.2	60621	19.2
Physics	2016	70031	58757	128788	36613	52.5	20840	35.6	57453	44.8
	2017	71398	59845	131243	36126	50.8	18965	31.8	55091	42.2
Chemistry	2016	86302	77562	163864	57002	66.3	39649	51.3	96651	59.2
	2017	85136	74990	160126	51082	60.3	33994	45.6	85076	53.4

Source: NECTA - CSEE Results, 2017

Note: Pass rates by subject in Form 4 examination was higher in Kiswahili (84.4%), English (67.9%) and Biology (61.4%) in 2017. The lowest was Basic Mathematics 18.1% and 19.2% followed by Physics 44.8% and 42.2% in 2016 and 2017 respectively. The performance of boys in science subjects is higher compared to that of girls. However, the performance of girls in Kiswahili was 78.9% exceeding that of boys by 2.4% indicating that girls have better competence in this subject compared to boys.

(MoEVT, 2018, p. 302)

12.5 Appendix 5 – Interview guide FGD

Introduction:

Project presentation (handout). How we will do the group interview. Encouraged not to share information that can identify other people

- Age, form and favourite activities?
- Background (kinship diagrams)

General Qs:

1. Are there any differences being in secondary school compared to primary? Challenges in secondary school?
2. Is there anything that is important for you to have in school to perform well? (E.g. learning/teaching material, teachers, matron, toilets, toiletries, dorms).
Do you feel like there is something missing in this school?
3. What do you think about the facilities in the school?
 - a. Dorms, toilets, garbage disposal, washing/drying of clothes
 - b. Describe toilets
4. Experience of having your period in school?
5. What kind of products is it normal to use when on your period?
6. Do you have everything you need to manage your period in school?
 - a. Materials, privacy, ability to clean, washing and drying, pain killers
 - b. Do you use reusable pads/cups? If yes: cleaning and drying.
7. If you need to talk to someone about periods, who can you go to?
Friends? Teachers?
8. Do you discuss these topics in school (periods, puberty, reproduction)
 - a. If yes, which subject?

Claims/discussion:

9. *“I struggle to pay attention in school while on my period”*
10. *“It is common for girls to stay in their dorms/at home while on their period”*
11. *“I feel like I have to hide my period from other people at school”*
12. This is an all-girls school. How would it be to handle your period in a mixed school?
13. I know in many classes you have to stand when answering a question from the teacher.
Is that uncomfortable when you are on your periods?
14. Can menstruation cause girls to drop out of school? Anything else that may cause girls to drop out? Pregnancy?

Home/Culture

15. Is it different having your period at home compared to at school?
16. What products do you use at home? Can most families/girls afford sanitary products?
 - a. *“It is normal for girls to have to work to be able to buy pads”*
17. Do most girls talk to their parents about menstruation? If not, who?

- a. Is there anything else you find challenging to discuss with your parents?
- 18. Do you hide your period from the others at home?
- 19. Do you feel like you are treated differently after you grew up/started puberty?
 - a. Are there any special practices in your tribes for when a girl matures? Or do you know about it from other tribes?
- 20. Would you be willing to share your experience with getting your period for the first time?
- 21. What does your friends tell you about their menstruation?

- 22. Do you have any boys/men in your family? Do you ever feel like you are treated differently as a girl?
- 23. Who makes the decisions about finances in your household? Do you worry about family economy?
- 24. Do you feel like boys and girls have the same opportunity to succeed in their education and get a good job?
- 25. Hopes and dreams for the future? What do you want to do when you finish school?

12.6 Appendix 6 – Interview guide NGOs

The interview guide was adjusted to each organisation.

Preliminary:

Information about me, the project and purpose (handout). Audio recording, rights, anonymity, withdrawal. What have I done so far with the project.

Organisation

1. Tell me in brief terms how your organisation works, and what is your role?
2. For how long have you been working in this field? What got you started as an organisation? What made you passionate about this topic? Full time job?

Girls' empowerment

3. Activities/objectives for girls empowerment interventions?
4. In your opinion, what are some of the main obstacles for girls to complete secondary school?
5. In your experience, what are the girls most in need to discuss/get information about?

Culture

6. Do you have any examples of gender roles and cultural practises (in tz in general or for specific ethnic groups) that you identify as challenges for girls?
7. How do you reinforce the positive cultural traditions, while at the same time advice on how to handle the negative ones?
8. Are girls treated differently at home once they start to visibly mature/get their periods?

MHM

9. How does your organisation work to meet women and girls' menstrual needs?
10. Why pads? Demand? Who requests it?
 - a. Response /results of pad distribution?
11. MHM education. Importance? What do you teach them?
12. In your opinion, is menstruation a barrier to girls' education today? How?
13. Poverty and MHM. In your experience, is it common for girls to take extra work to secure basic necessities like pads?
14. In the schools in which you operate, how are the sanitary facilities?
15. My impression - silence surrounding menstruation in Tanzania. Accurate? How do you work to end period stigma & taboos?
16. How do you experience cooperating with schools?

Covid + Gov.

17. Experience of covid school closure? Consequences?
18. Experience of cooperating with local authorities? Interest in MHM?
19. In your opinion, how should the (local) government get involved in improving MHM for young girls?
 - a. Official strategies for MHM on a regional or national level?
20. How do you experience cooperating with schools? Accommodating and interested?

12.7 Appendix 7 – Interview guide teacher

Preliminary:

Project information (handout). Remind teachers of responsibility for student confidentiality. Encouraged not to share information in a way that makes it possible to identify students. Here to learn from you!

Background.:

- a. Where do you come from? Family?
- b. For how long have you been a teacher? How long have you taught in this school? What do you teach?
- c. What did you study to become a teacher?
- d. How do you like being a teacher? Challenges?

Menstruation and education

2. How are handling their periods in school?
3. How are the school's facilities (with regards to menstruation)?
4. In your experience, does menstruation impact girls' participation in school?
 - a. Do you have students that miss school regularly? Due to menstruation?
 - b. Anything else that may cause girls to drop out?
5. In your experience, do girls in general have what they need (products/financially) to secure their menstrual needs? In this school?
 - a. If not, how do they solve it?
6. Do you ever talk to your students about menstruation? If not you, is there anyone else that does? Subject?
7. What are girls taught about menstruation in school? In your opinion, sufficient?
8. Do you feel like it's a private matter – In general/in the Maasai community?

Culture, society, family

9. What do the girls normally tell you about their situation at home?
10. Are there subjects a young girl will not talk to her parents about
11. Are parents involved in teaching their kids about MHM?
 - a. Maasai community vs. in general?
12. Is there a stigma/taboo surrounding menstruation in Tanzania or in specific ethnic groups today?
 - a. How does it affect young girls?
 - b. *“The stigma and shame (cultural/religious expectations) that surrounds menstruation impacts what girls are taught about it in school”?*
13. *“Parents prioritize boys over girls in education”?* Why?
14. In your opinion, what are the greatest benefits to educating girls in your society?

12.8 Appendix 8 – Information letter and consent form organisations

Are you interested in taking part in the research project *“Menstrual Health Management among Girls in Tanzanian Secondary Schools”?*

Dear Sir/Madam,

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to examine experiences female students in Tanzanian secondary schools have with managing their menstruation. In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

My name is Cecilie Grevstad. I am a master student at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. I am currently in my final year of a master’s degree in Social Science in Education. I am writing my master’s thesis on topics concerning girls’ participation in secondary education in Tanzania. My work will be especially focused on the impact that the experience of menstruation has on girls’ education and everyday life. I would be extremely thankful if you would help me in my study by letting me learn from your experiences as an organization.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences is the institution responsible for the project.

The researcher in lead of this project is Cecilie Grevstad.

Why are you being asked to participate?

In this project I will interview different people who have knowledge about adolescent girls and menstruation in Tanzania. Most of the study will be based on focus group discussions with secondary school students and their teachers. In addition to this I am also looking to for perspectives from local organisations/activists/officials working in related fields.

I believe the work you do provides you with a valuable insight into the importance of integrating menstrual hygiene management to women empowerment.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be removed.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

- I will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter.
- I will not share your information with anyone else and I will make sure no one else have access to the information. Only researcher Cecilie and my supervisor will have access to the information.
- All the information will be stored safely.
- Voice recordings will be deleted once the interview has been transcribed.
- Your name or any information special to you will NOT be mentioned. I will make sure no one reading the project can recognise who you are.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end June 2022. All voice recordings will be deleted by the end of this project.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data, and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences via me, Cecilie, or my supervisor:

Student

Cecilie Grevstad
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Education, Arts and Sports
E-Mail: [REDACTED]
Phone number: [REDACTED]

Supervisor

Vibeke Vågenes
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
Department of Pedagogy, Religion and Social Studies
E-mail: [REDACTED]
Phone number: [REDACTED]

You can also contact:

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS

Email: personverntjenester@nsd.no
Telephone: +47 55 58 21 17

Our Data Protection Officer

Email: personverombud@hvl.no
Telephone: 55 30 10 31

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader
(Researcher/supervisor)

Student

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

To be a participant in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. June 2022.

(Signed by participant, date)