

Evaluating the Need for Menstrual Hygiene Management in Trojes, Honduras

Pure Water for the World

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Abstract

Surveys and focus groups conducted in communities surrounding Trojes have concluded that Pure Water for the World (PWW) needs to work with local health professionals to establish a menstrual hygiene management component to the current PWW health education curriculum. Key findings include: adolescent girls reported missing school due to menstruation related causes; women and girls are negatively altering their daily hygiene habits and diets during menstruation; men and boys have a lack of understanding and respect for women and girls who are menstruating.

It is recommended that PWW develops a menstrual hygiene lesson plan for health center nurses to give during community de-worming. This lesson plan would include basic information to increase knowledge of why women menstruate, how women should take care of themselves during menstruation (diet, physical activity, etc.), and how men should treat women during menstruation.

A filter maintenance and health booklet for all families is also recommended. This would be a simpler version of the community agent manual with added sections regarding personal hygiene and menstrual hygiene management.

In the future, expansion of the project would include more in-depth focus groups and/or surveys that narrow in on specific topics of menstrual hygiene management; for example, why girls are missing school and how to better cope with menstrual hygiene management in class. Because the surveys were administered in homes, we found that many girls had completed school or had never attended school. Future surveys could be administered during school hours to capture information regarding menstruation for girls during school hours. Also, teachers could be surveyed to understand their experiences with menstrual hygiene education and MHM in schools.

Survey Methods

Surveys were administered to 21 adolescent girls, 30 mothers, 20 adolescent boys, and 30 fathers in five communities surrounding Trojes, Honduras. The surveys were administered privately by a health promoter of the same gender in homes during routine Biosand filter supervisions.

Four focus groups, one for each age group and gender, were also conducted. The groups consisted of between 6-10 adolescent girls, mothers, adolescent boys, and fathers from two local communities. The participants were separated by gender and questioned by two health promoters of the same gender. We found that the responses given in the focus groups were very similar to the responses given on the surveys. Therefore, survey responses will be discussed in more detail here.

Adolescent age range for girls was determined by probable age of menarche, 11 or 12, ending at the birth of the first child. In rural communities, girls can be as young as 15 when their first child is born. For boys, the age range was also established by age, ending when they are married or became a father to their first child. Mothers and fathers began with the birth of the first child and did not have an age limit.

We believe education level of children and parents plays a role in their knowledge and perceptions of menstruation. In rural communities, the school system ends at 6th grade, around 12 years of age. Although higher grades are offered in the town of Trojes, it is unlikely that children would travel to town to continue their education. Honduras does have a curriculum for menstruation and sexual health that should be taught in rural schools, but it is uncertain how often this curriculum is implemented. With the addition of teacher surveys, we can determine how menstrual hygiene is taught in schools and the quality of content.

For girls and women we investigated when they learned of menstruation and who they learned it from. It is important to know if they learned before or after menarche and if the topic is discussed in the home. We further investigated about materials used and personal hygiene habits during menstruation.

We felt that it is important to determine the knowledge level of menstruation among boys and men. They were prompted about who they learned from, as well as if they learned different things from different sources (i.e. academic information from a teacher and other information from a friend).

For all participants, we asked if they would like more information and from whom they would like to hear the information from.

Findings

Details and charts can be found in the appendix.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The average age of the girls surveyed was 16. 43% were either in the 6th grade or had completed school up to the 6th grade. 28% of girls did not go to school. 24% of mothers had not attended school, only 5% completed the sixth grade. 48% of fathers did not go to school and only 5% completed sixth grade.

76% of girls received information, 62% of those were before menarche. Of the girls that received information, the majority learned from their mother or teacher.

48% of girls do not know why women menstruate. 14% responded that it was a normal process for women. 5% mentioned reproduction, religion or health. 10% said it was when a girl transitioned into a woman.

43% of girls reported changes in their eating habits and 43% reported no changes in their daily habits during menstruation. 24% refrain from doing hard work. And for 10% their sleep is affected.

Many of the girls interviewed were no longer in school, but for those that were still attending school, 63% of girls have missed class due to menstruation. Of those responses, all stated that their schools had separate latrines for boys and girls. 60% of those felt comfortable changing materials at school.

Five girls surveyed never attended school. Of these girls 100% of their fathers also did not go to school. As fathers are culturally the decision makers of the household, they would have had an influence on the education of their daughters. Of these five girls, three did not receive information about menstruation. Only one girl does not make changes to her diet, sleeping habits, and bathing routines. Only one of the girls who learned about menstruation learned before menarche. Neither girl learned about menstruation from her mother.

33% of girls feel that during their menstruation, boys and men treat them the same. 14% stated that usually boys and men do not know when a girl is menstruating. 14% said boys will make fun of girls during menstruation.

95% of girls would like more information. 48% would like the information from a health professional. Mother, female health promoter, and teacher all received 9% of responses.

MOTHERS

The average age of mothers interviewed was 41. 23% of mothers did not go to school. 37% completed only first or second grade. Only 10% of mothers finished sixth grade.

80% of mothers did not receive information before menarche. Of the 20% that did receive information, 40% received information from their mothers and 30% received information from teachers.

40% of women did not know why women menstruate. 10% replied with a religious reference. 7% responded that it was a normal process or that it was part of development.

53% of mothers feel comfortable teaching their daughters about menstruation. Only 17% feel comfortable teaching their sons about menstruation.

63% of women change their eating habits during menstruation. 17% refrain from doing hard work. While 33% do not make any changes to their daily routine.

47% of women feel that during menstruation men treat them differently.

80% would like more information. 67% of those would like information from a health professional.

ADOLESCENT BOYS

The average age of boys surveyed was 16. An interesting observation is that while 28% of adolescent girls did not go to school, all adolescent boys had some level of schooling, 55% of boys being in or having completed the sixth grade.

25% of mothers did not go to school, with 30% of those completing only second grade or lower. 30% of fathers did not go to school, with 45% of those completing only third grade or lower.

70% of boys had received information about menstruation. 52% of information was received from teachers and only 5% received information from a parent.

23% of boys knew nothing about menstruation. 38% of boys know that menstruation involves blood flow. 19% knew that menstruation occurs when girls develop and have bodily changes. 4% of boys called menstruation a sickness.

A third of boys did not change their attitudes when they knew a girl or woman was menstruating. A third did not usually know when women or girls were menstruating. And a third changed their demeanor towards girls and women negatively by avoiding and staying away from them.

75% of boys would like more information, with 46% requesting information from a health professional.

FATHERS

The average age for fathers interviewed was 42. 10% did not go to school. 23% completed the sixth grade. 34% did not answer the question.

53% received information about menstruation, with 26% of those learning from a teacher. 26% received information from a family member prior to marriage. 22% received information from their wife or wife's family.

41% of men know that menstruation is a monthly bleeding. 11% said it was a natural process for women. 8% said that it is a time to treat women differently, with more caution. 8% also knew that menstruation is a natural bodily cleansing for women.

63% of men treat girls and women normally when they know they are menstruating. 23% are uncomfortable with menstruation and keep away.

90% would like more information. 54% would like information from a health professional. 23% would like lecture materials.

Recommendations

From the findings we can determine several topics that could be addressed through education. The major common theme was that the people wanted to learn more information and they wanted to hear it from health professionals. As an organization, PWW cannot mandate the health center to provide these services. However, PWW might be able to assist the health center in providing education to communities. For every community PWW works in, the final stage of the project is a de-worming campaign and accompanying PWW personal hygiene talk, often with a nurse being present. It would be my recommendation that PWW works with the local health center to develop a short but comprehensive talk regarding MHM for the nurse to give to the community members during the de-worming campaign and PWW hygiene talk.

I believe it would also be beneficial to create a health manual to give to every household with the installation of their biosand filter. A third of men and boys specifically requested lecture materials to receive more information about menstruation; girls and women did not. The manual, a shortened version of the community agent manual, could include topics such as: filter and latrine maintenance, personal hygiene, menstrual hygiene management, pregnancy health, etc. Separate male and female sections could help to alleviate some of the embarrassment that comes with such a sensitive subject as menstrual hygiene. The health manual would be able to provide answers to questions that people might be afraid to ask in a large group setting.

Topics that need to be addressed include: importance of educating both girls and boys, why women menstruate, proper diet, menstrual material maintenance, and personal feminine hygiene.

The surveys revealed that many mothers were embarrassed to educate their daughters and sons about menstrual hygiene. 53% of mothers have or are anticipating to tell their daughters about menstruation. For the mothers that were comfortable talking to their daughters, speaking to their sons was out of the question – only 17% responded that they would be comfortable.

Timing for education is also critical. Girls need to know what will be happening to their bodies before menarche, as many girls reported experiencing fear. The statistics have improved because only 20% of mothers learned of menstruation before menarche, compared to the 62% of girls currently. About a third of men learned of menstruation in school, a third at home, and a third from their wives. The majority of boys were learning of menstruation in school – an environment where they are not comfortable to ask questions to grasp the concept. Yet another reason to educate and encourage mothers to teach their male children about menstrual hygiene.

48% of mothers and 40% of girls did not understand why women menstruate. A basic understanding, for both women and men, would be beneficial and should be the base of the education component. This topic can also be delicate with multi-gender group settings, but the health professional should cover the basic education. The health manual could go into more detail, if necessary.

PWW is anticipating to revise and implement the water and sanitation curriculum in schools with both students and teachers. MHM could be included within the teacher component.

Many women reported changing their diet during menstruation. Foods that were commonly avoided make up the basic diet of people living in rural settings (eggs, rice, beans, citrus fruits, butter, avocados, cabbage, etc.). An interesting and positive discovery is that a few women and many girls understand that changes to diet or physical activity (grinding corn, etc.) are actually okay while menstruating. They are learning that the customs of their mothers or grandmothers are not necessary. However, some husbands and fathers think because their wives and daughters are not adhering to older customs, the women are not taking care of themselves. It seems that everyone needs to understand the importance of a balanced diet and what activities women should and should not do during menstruation.

Women and girls need to be educated on proper menstrual material maintenance and aspects of personal health during menstruation. The majority of females use sanitary pads, but the frequency of changing is below recommendations. Many of the women stated that it was bad to bathe with cold water during menstruation and limit the number of showers they take during this time. Girls will learn these habits from their mothers, creating a cycle of misinformation.

The surveys were administered in homes, therefore skewing the data regarding girls' experiences with menstruation in schools. Only three girls responded as to why they would miss school. Future surveys could take place during school hours to capture more information regarding MHM in school settings.

Conclusion

The findings of the survey clearly illustrate a need for PWW intervention in the municipality of Trojes – in form of coordination with the health center and provision of health manuals.

Today more girls are being educated about menstruation than during their mothers' generation, however in-home education is still falling short. Having resources available for parents to educate both girls and boys in homes will create a comfortable environment for them to learn about menstruation and its effects.

Women need to be instructed on components of a proper diet, how to manage menstrual materials, and the importance of personal feminine hygiene. Men should also be informed of the proper ways for women to care for themselves in regards to diet and physical activity; alleviating some of the worries expressed by men.

Because the survey solely aimed to determine if there is a need for MHM in Trojes, the questions were somewhat broad. Future surveys could focus in on specific topics such as MHM for girls in school, why women feel their diet must change, etc.

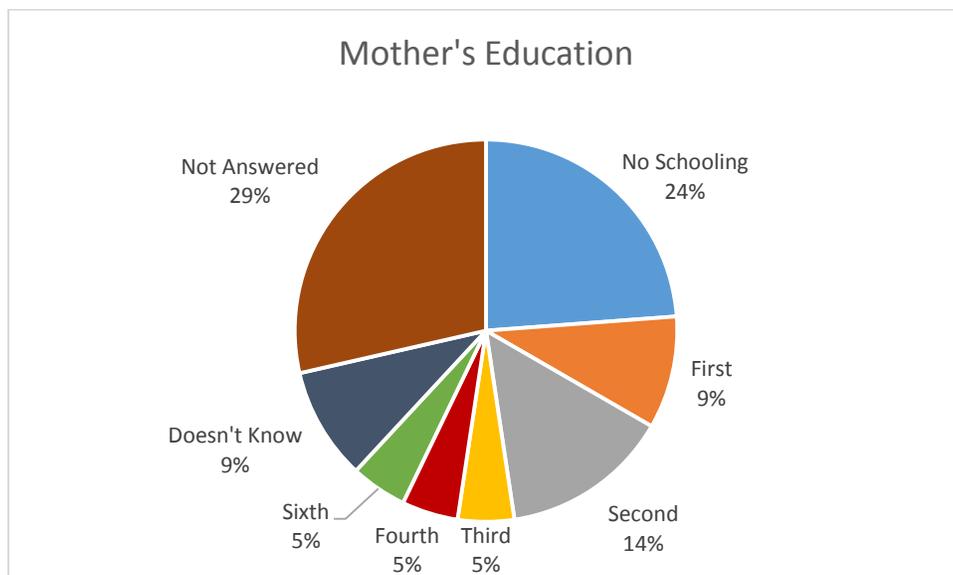
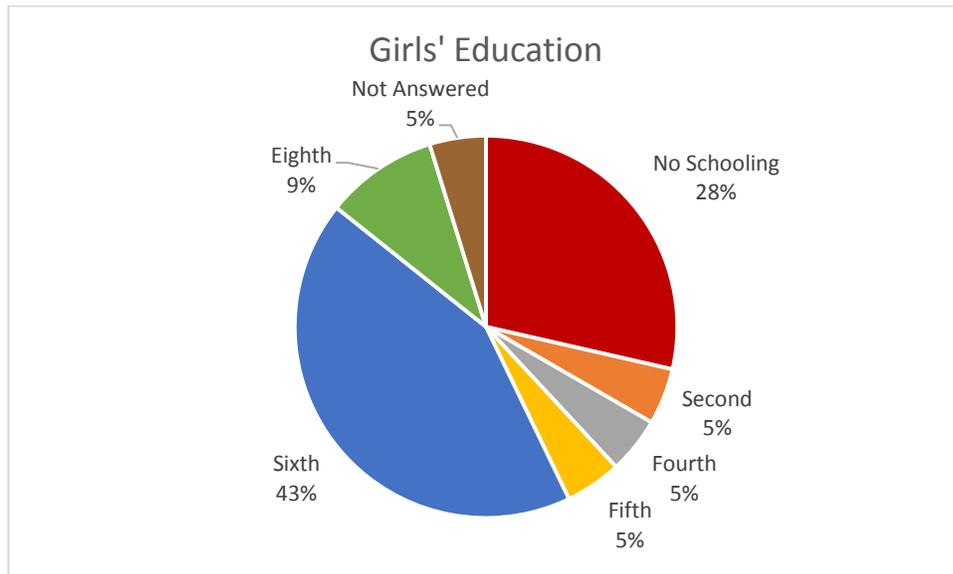
PWW now has the opportunity for discussion with local health professionals and growth of the hygiene curriculum. However informative this round of surveying was, we have only just begun to learn about the culture and needs of women surrounding MHM in rural Honduras.

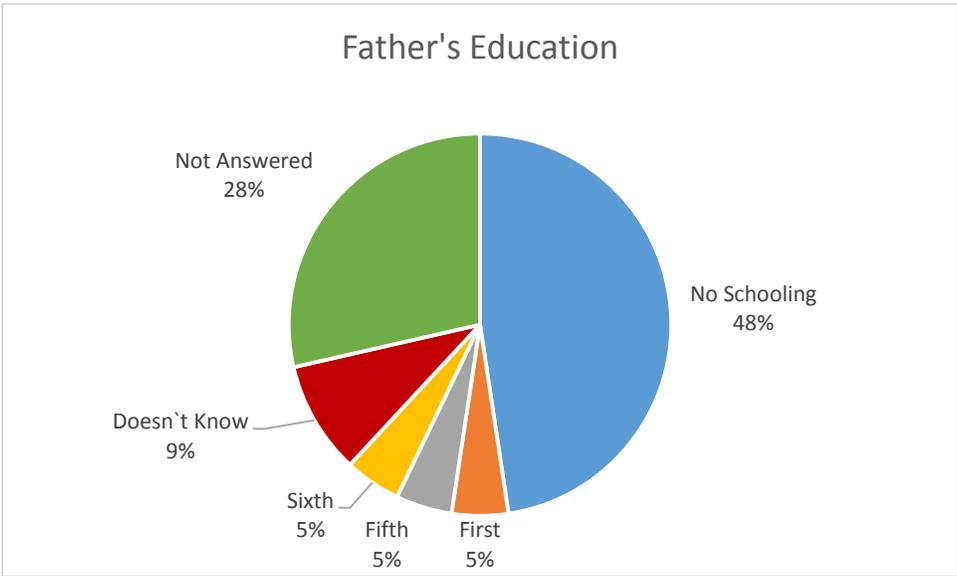
Appendix

ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Demographics

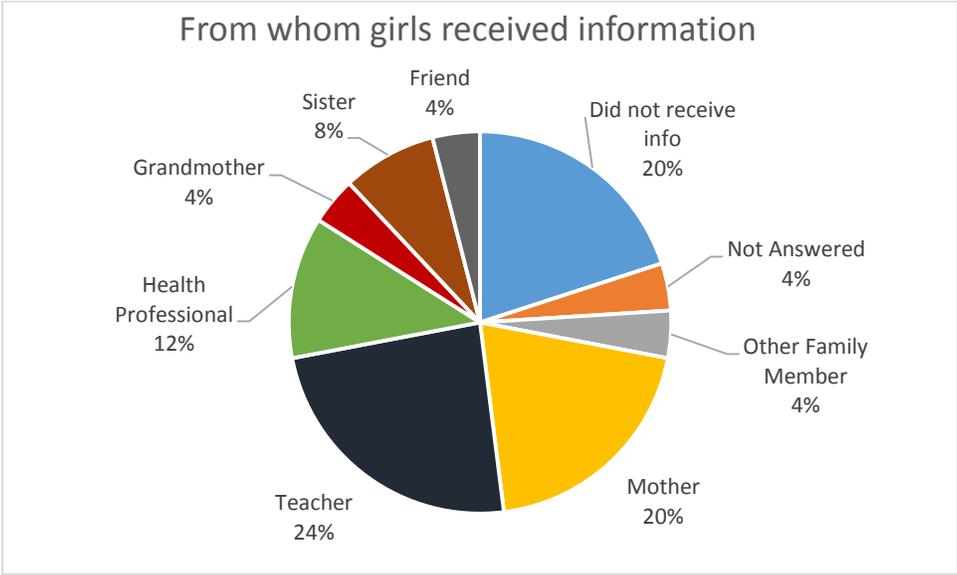
Age – Average: 16, Minimum: 11, Maximum: 24

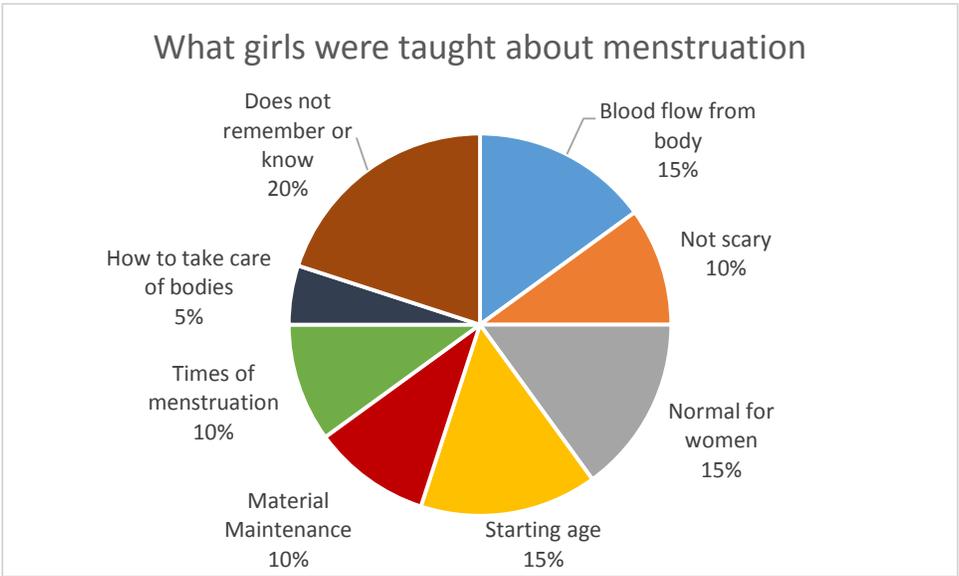




Knowledge / Previous Education

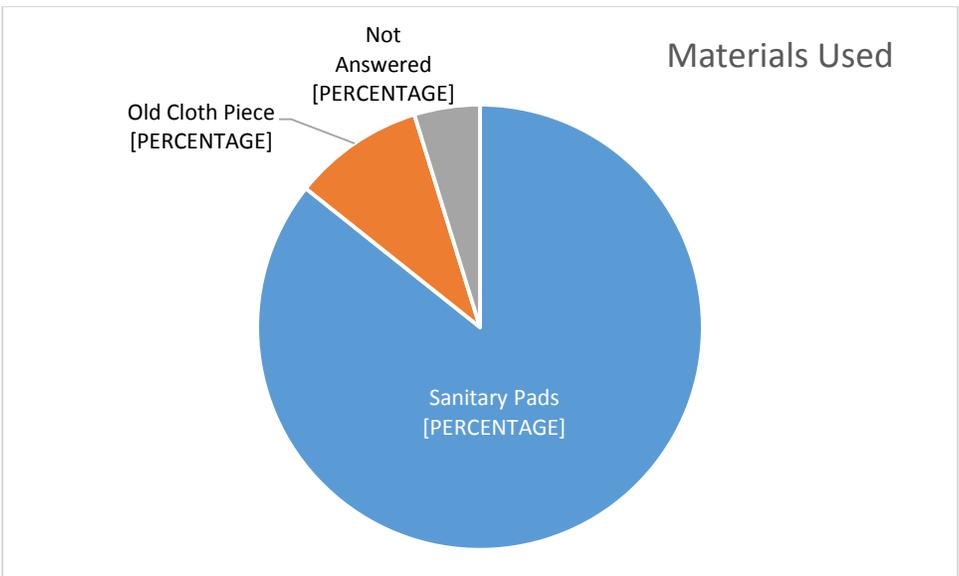
76% of girls received information about menstruation, 62% of those were before menarche.

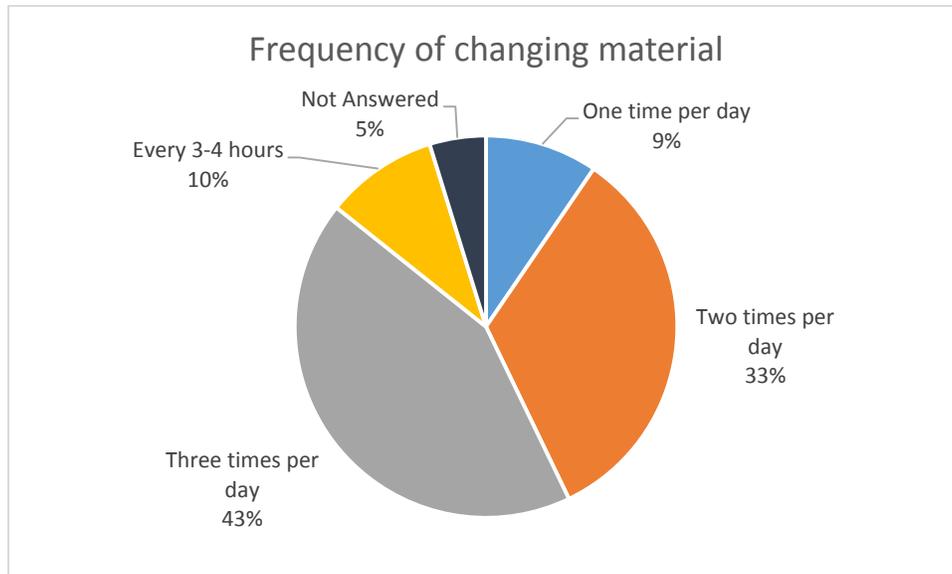




48% of girls do not know why women menstruate. 14% responded that it was a normal process for women. 5% mentioned reproduction, religion or health. 10% said it was when a girl transitioned into a woman.

Personal hygiene





81% bathe during menstruation; 71% daily. 81% clean their external genitalia. 29% use toilet paper to clean themselves. 29% use only water. 24% use water and soap.

When in School

Many of the girls interviewed were no longer in school, but for those that were still attending school, 63% of girls have missed class due to menstruation. Of those responses, all stated that their schools had separate latrines for boys and girls. 60% of those felt comfortable changing materials at school.

Cultural Perceptions / Stigmas

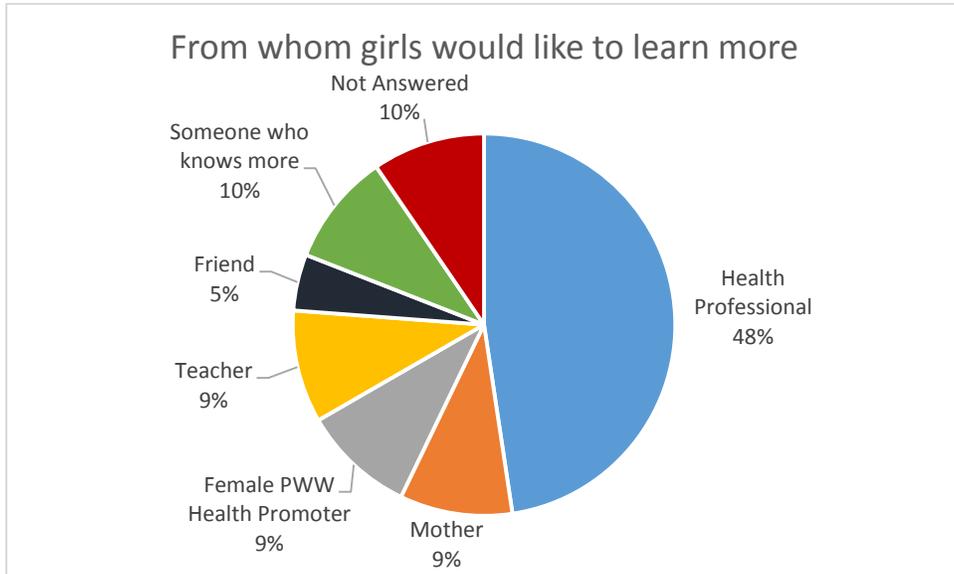
43% of girls reported changes in their eating habits and 43% reported no changes in their daily habits during menstruation. 24% refrain from doing hard work. And for 10% their sleep is affected.

The majority, 57%, do not have any worries during menstruation. Pain was the largest worry at 33%. Two girls (5% each) reported worrying about the duration of menstruation and discomfort.

33% of girls feel that during their menstruation, boys and men treat them the same. 14% stated that usually boys and men do not know when a girl is menstruating. 14% said boys will make fun of girls during menstruation.

Need for More Information

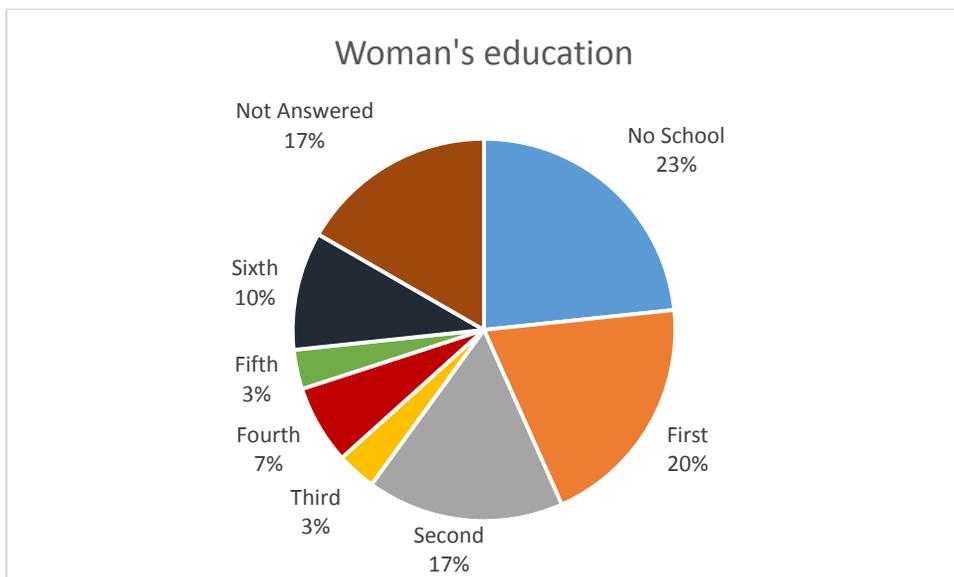
95% of girls would like more information.



WOMEN (MOTHERS)

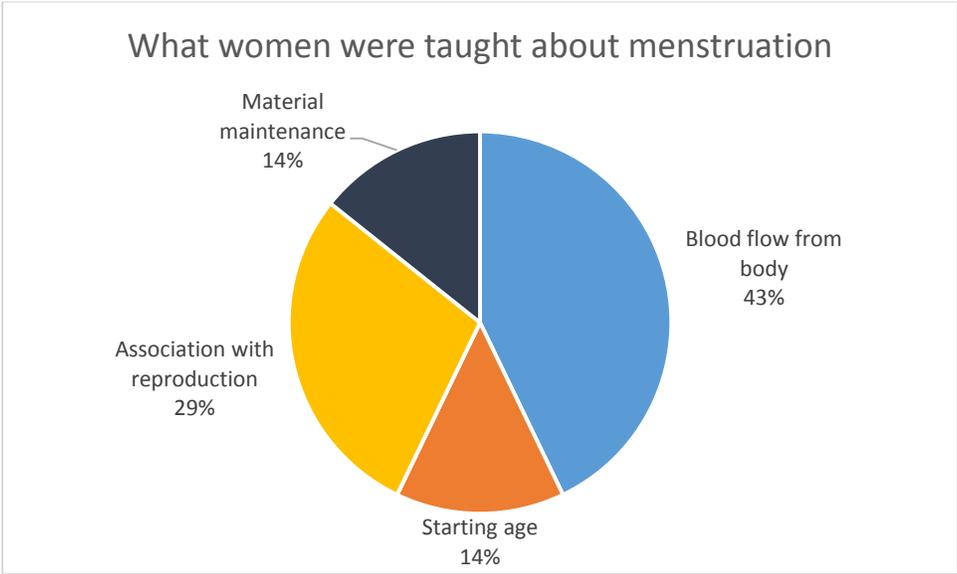
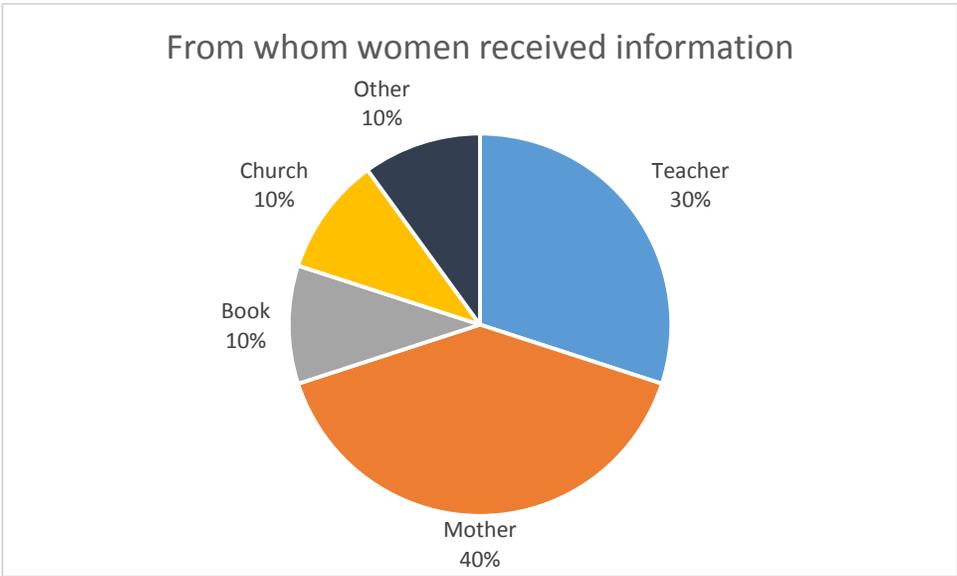
Demographics

33% of women were in their thirties, 23% were in their forties, 20% were in their twenties. The average age was 41.



Knowledge / Previous Education

80% of women did not receive information before menarche.

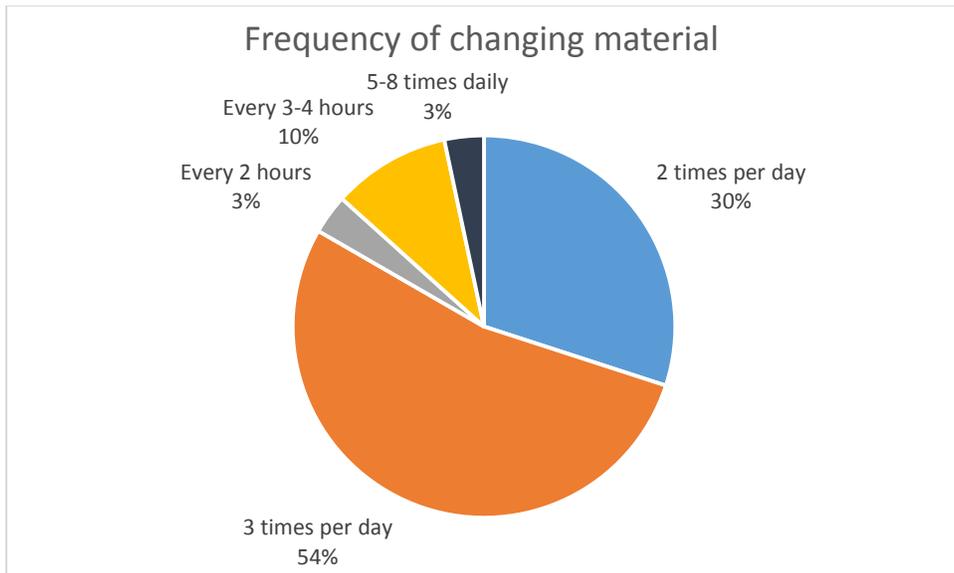
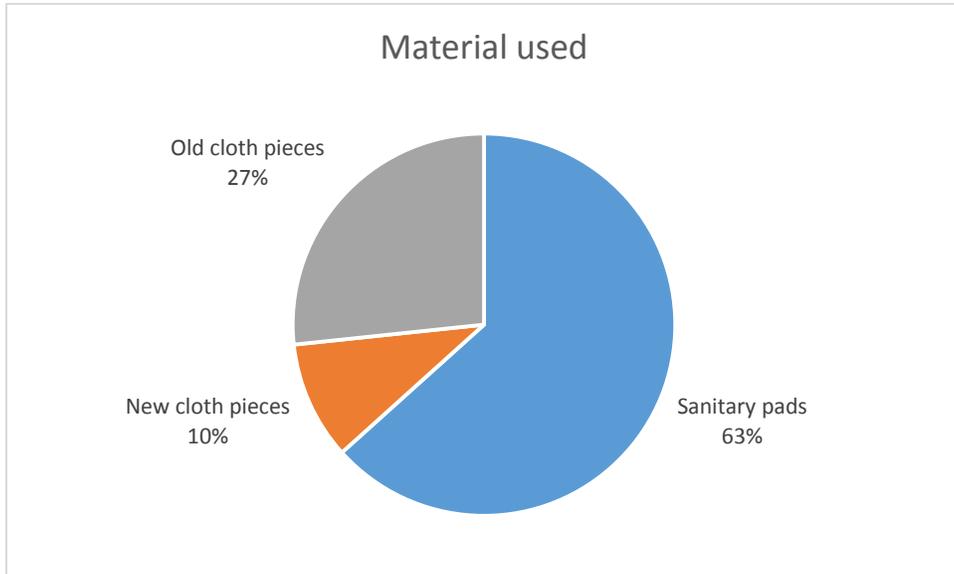


40% of women did not know why women menstruate. 10% replied with a religious reference. 7% responded that it was a normal process or that it was part of development.

53% of women feel comfortable teaching their daughters about menstruation. The average age taught was 12, with the minimum age of 9 and the maximum age of 20.

Only 17% feel comfortable teaching their sons about menstruation. For those that did teach their sons, the average age was 13.

Personal Hygiene



43% throw the materials in the trash, 10% throw them in a latrine, 10% put the materials in the ground or forest, and 3% burn the materials.

Of the 37% of women who reuse materials, all use water and soap. Only 27% dry the materials outside in the sun. The majority dry the materials inside without sunlight.

93% of women bathe during menstruation, with 73% of those bathing daily. 87% clean their external genitalia. 40% use water and soap to clean themselves.

Cultural Perceptions / Stigmas

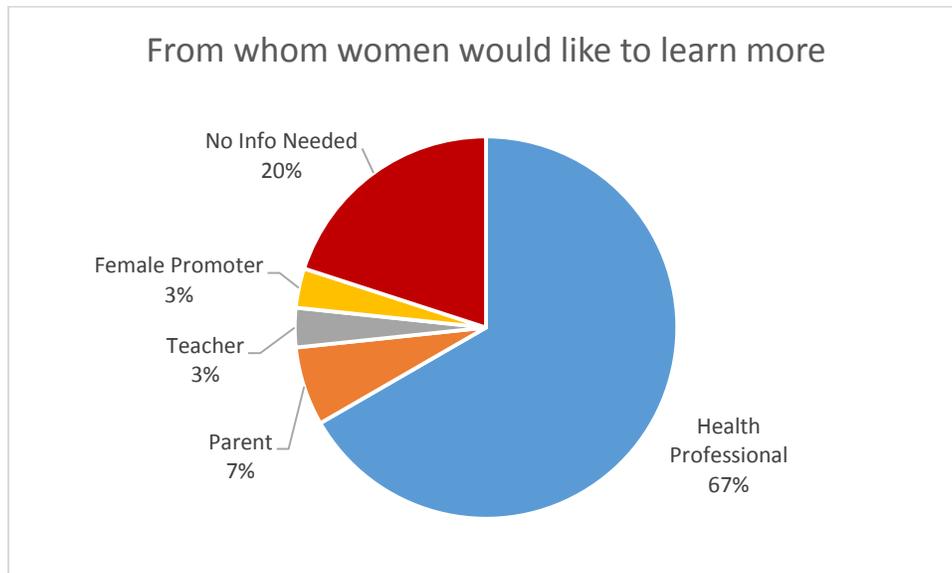
63% of women change their eating habits during menstruation. 17% refrain from doing hard work. 13% take caution with the types of clothes or colors they wear. While 33% do not make any changes to their daily routine.

43% do not have any worries during menstruation. 33% worry about associated pain. 7% worry about bleeding through on clothes or discomfort.

47% of women feel during menstruation men treat them differently. 37% feel that men treat them normally.

Need for More Information

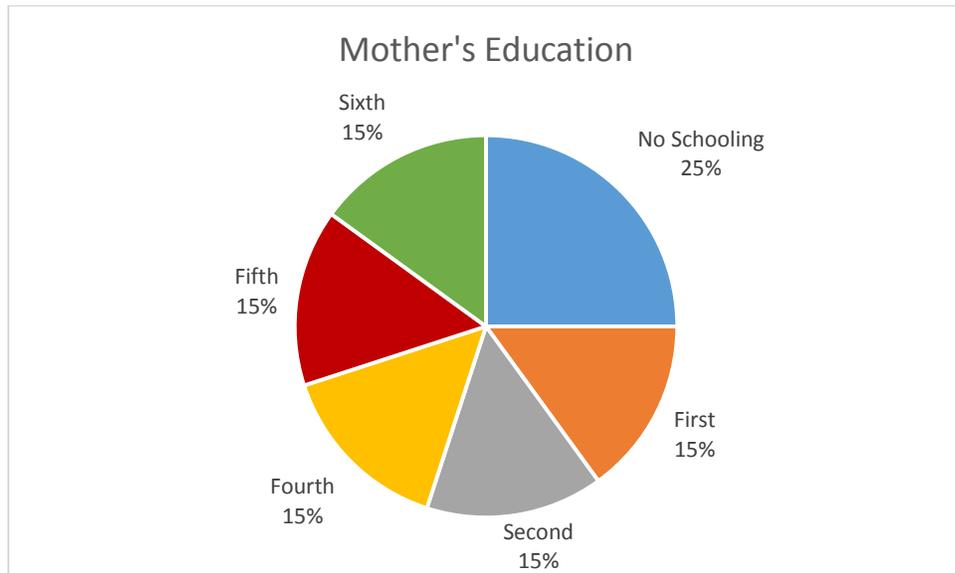
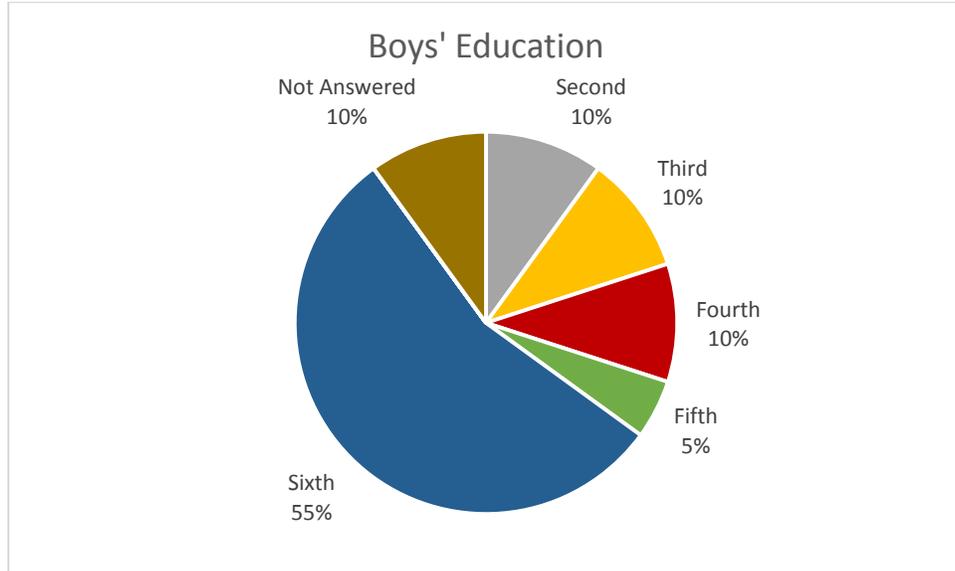
80% of women would like more information.

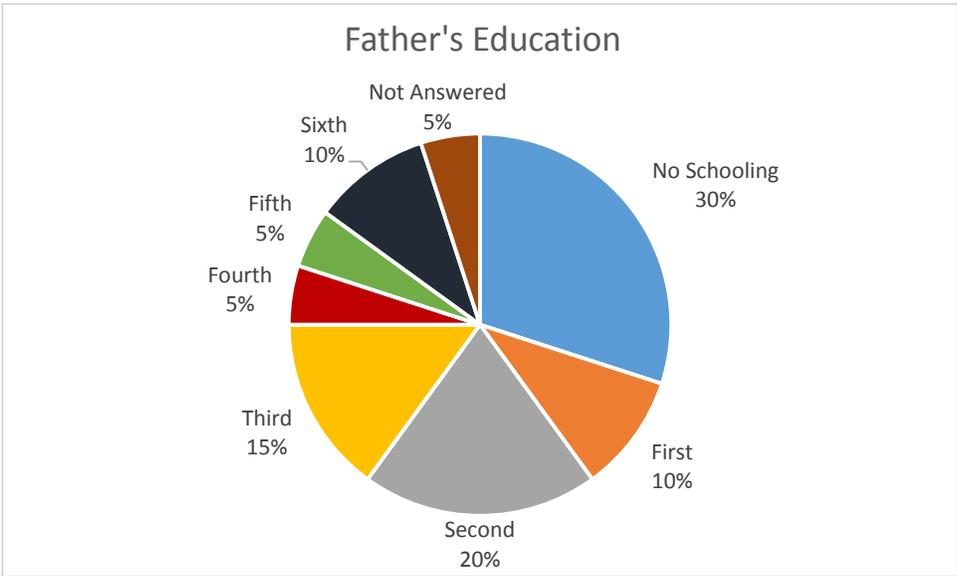


ADOLESCENT BOYS

Demographics

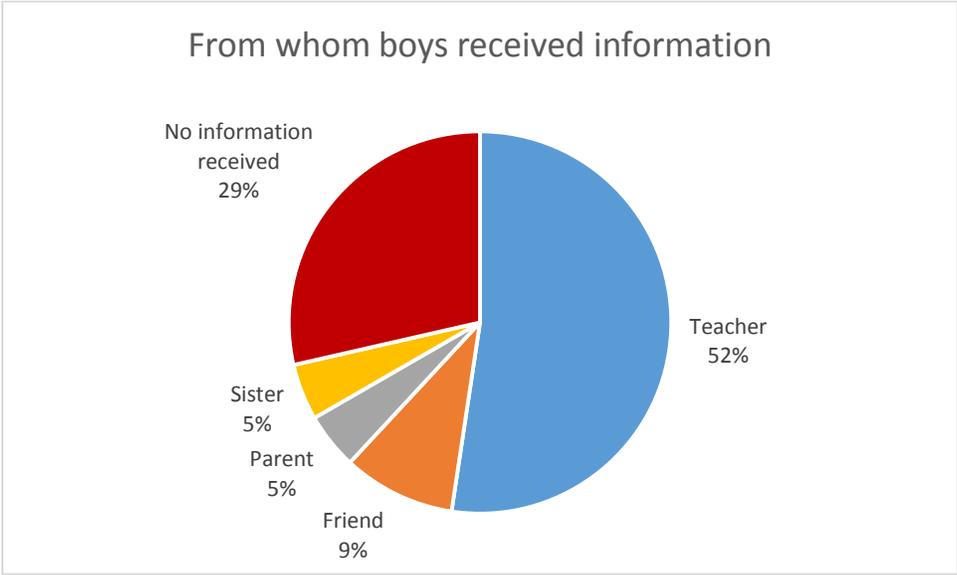
The average age of boys surveyed was 16, with a minimum age of 11 and maximum age of 26.

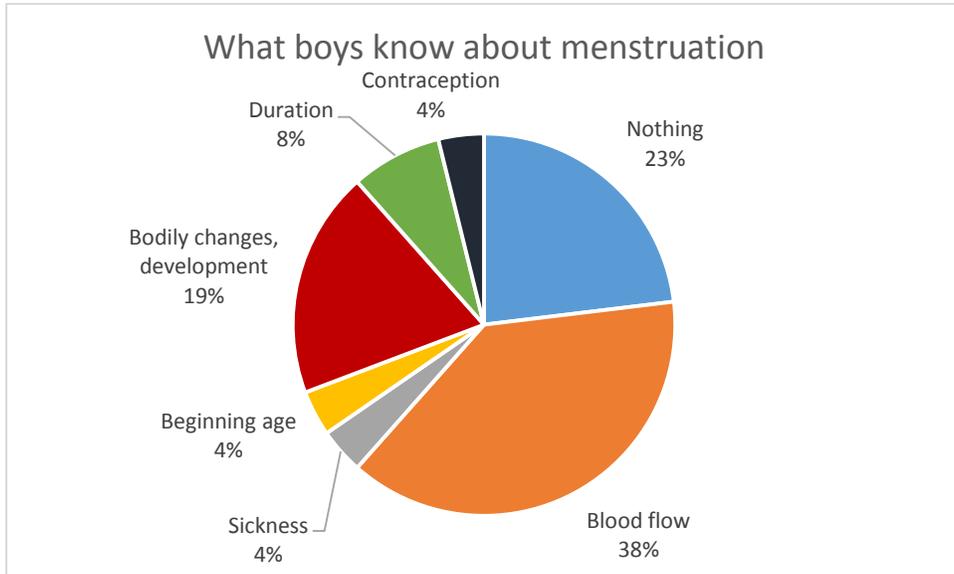




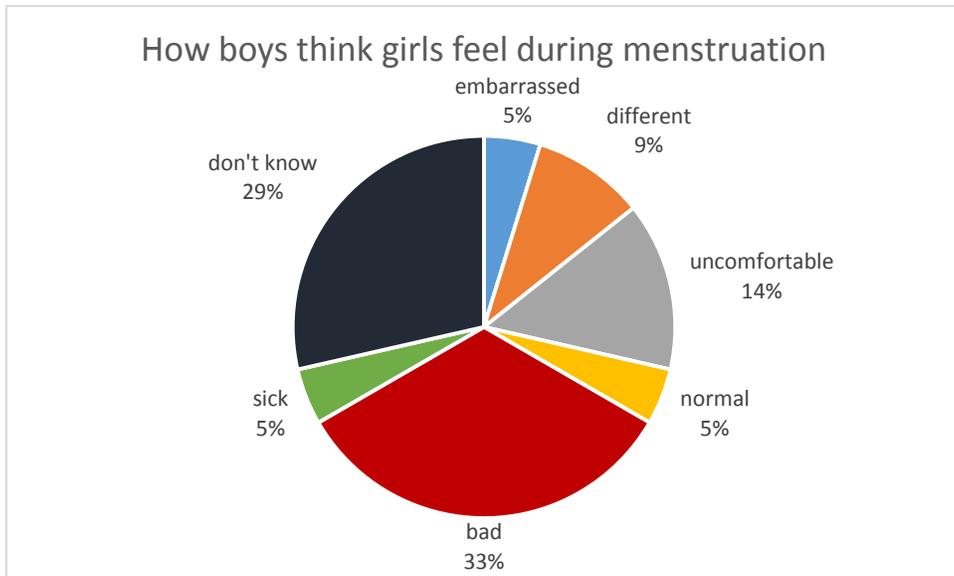
Knowledge / Previous Education

70% of boys had received information about menstruation.





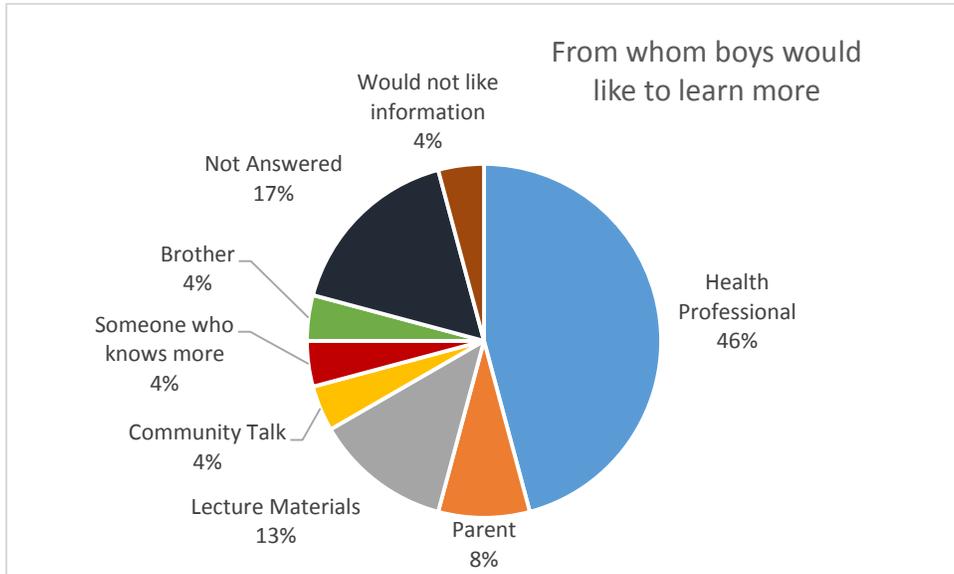
Cultural Perception / Stigmas



A third of boys treat girls normally when they know they are menstruating. A third usually do not know when a girl is menstruating. A third treat them differently by avoiding girls.

Need for More Information

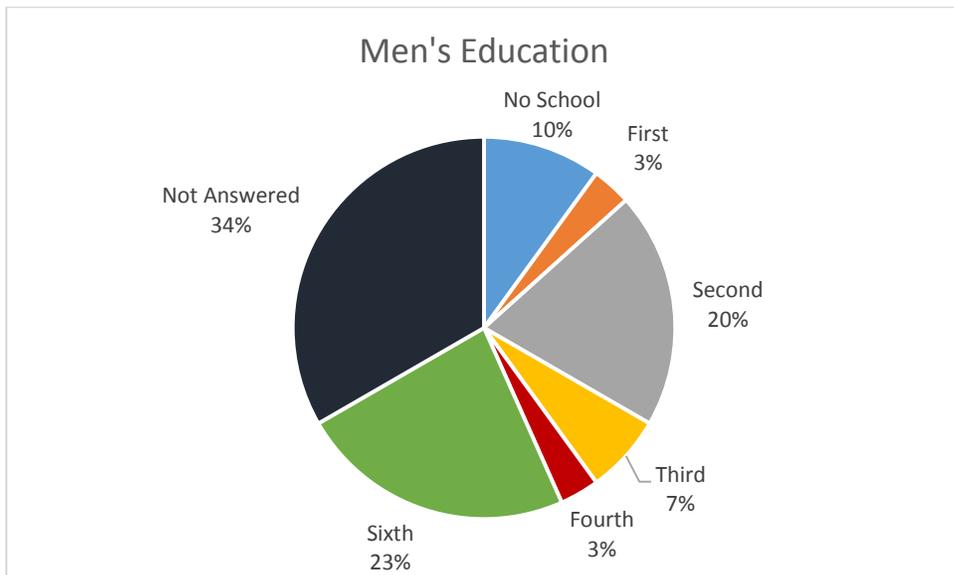
75% of boys would like more information, with 46% requesting information from a health professional.



MEN (FATHERS)

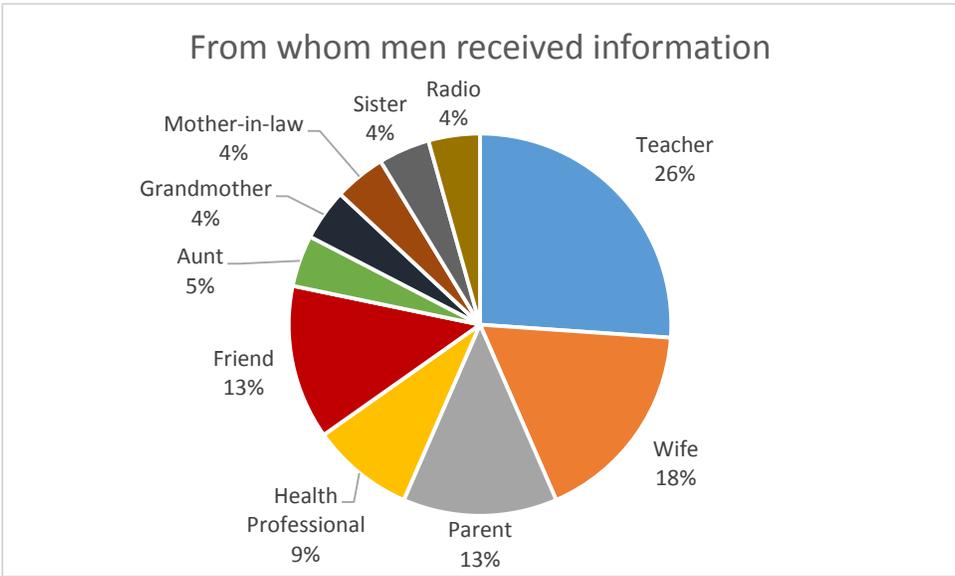
Demographics

The average age for fathers is 42 with a minimum age of 15 and a maximum age of 78. 30% are in their twenties, 23% are in their thirties, and 17% are in their forties.



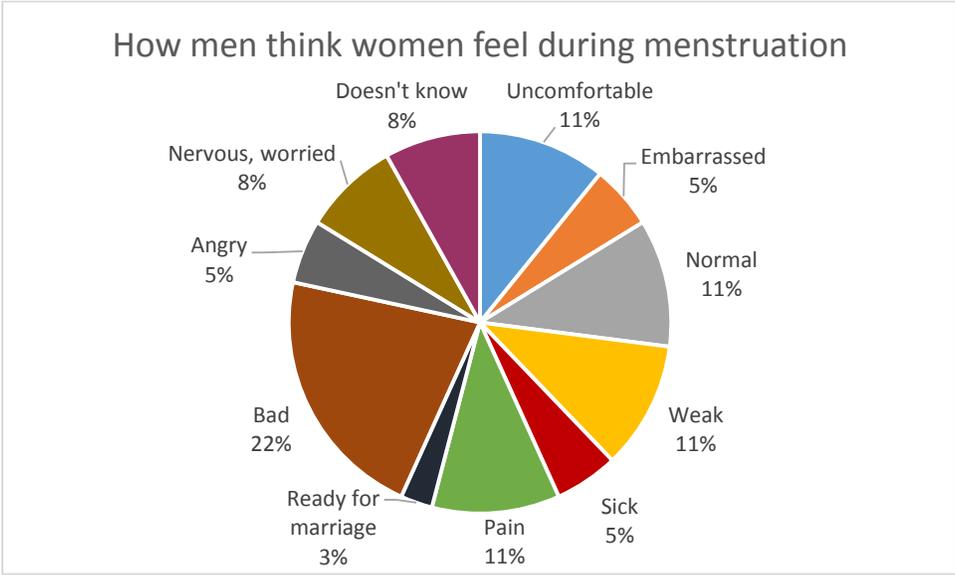
Knowledge / Previous Education

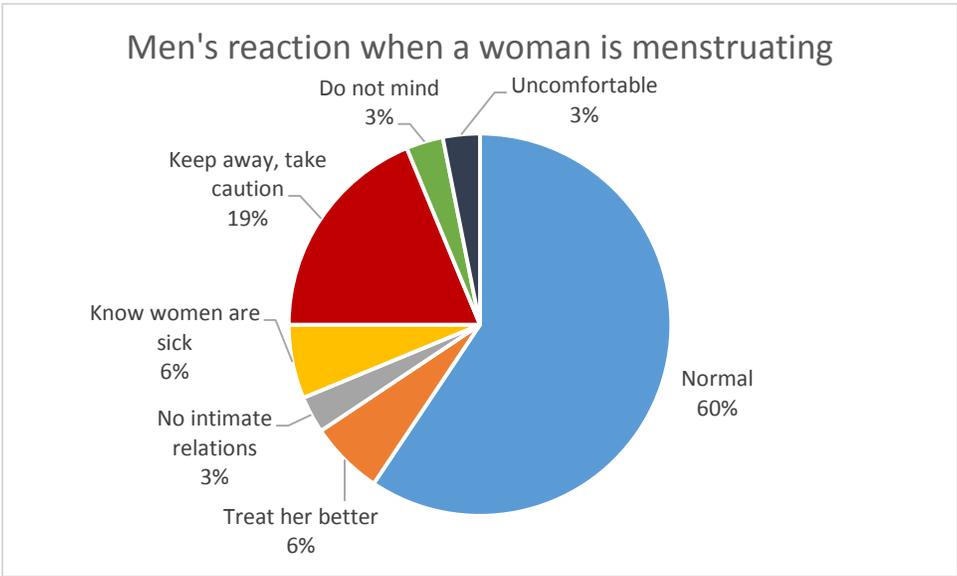
53% of men received information about menstruation.



70% of men know menstruation is a monthly bleeding. 20% said it was a normal process.

Cultural Perceptions / Stigmas





Need for More Information

90% of men would like more information.

