

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

**THE NEXUS BETWEEN MODERN SANITARY WEAR ACCESSIBILITY AS A BASIC
NEED AND GIRLS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT MATHEBE HIGH SCHOOL IN
MAFETENG DISTRICT, LESOTHO**

A

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT THE
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO**

BY

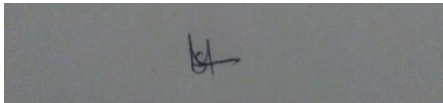
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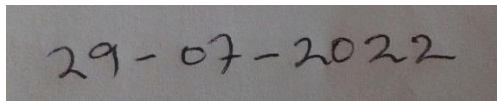
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DECLARATION

I, MOTSAMAI SAM, student number 200600517, declare that my research work entitled “The nexus between Accessibility to modern sanitary wear as a basic need and girls' academic performance at Mathebe High School, Mafeteng District, Lesotho” hereby submitted to the National University of Lesotho for the degree Master of Arts in Development Studies is my own work. This work has not previously been submitted for any other degree at this or any other institution. All sources I have used or quoted in this report have been cited and corroborated with full attribution.



MOTSAMAI SAM



DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my high school teacher **Mr Ntsane Chippa Mathibeli** who passed away in 2021. This achievement would have made him very proud. May his soul rest in everlasting peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my special and sincere thanks to almighty God for his blessings.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, **Prof. Maxwell Musingafi**, for his professional guidance and instructions, tremendous support, care and encouragement, both academically and emotionally. I will always respect your kindness and persona in you. May almighty God bless and protect you always. A special thanks goes to my family. I know we went through a lot for me to achieve this precious achievement. Thank you for your sacrifices. My wife, thank you for your love and support throughout my studies. A special thanks goes to **Dr. Thithili Makhesi**, thank you for taking care of my school expenses. **Mr. Lethole Leche**, thank you for your positive and honest comments, criticism and constructive suggestions. Thanks also to my friends for allowing me to use their cars and laptops for my schoolwork. **Mr. Selete Molete and Mrs Makhotsa Mohale**, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to follow my dreams. May all that is good be returned to you my family and friends. My sincere thanks goes to the National University of Lesotho for giving me the opportunity to learn from such a distinguished institution.

Finally, I would like to thank all participants at Mathebe High School. Without their valuable input, this study would not have been a success.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the nexus between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic performance at Mathebe High School. The main objectives were to explore the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School; examine the forms of sanitary wear available to girls at Mathebe High School and explore recommendations that could be made to improve the situation for girls at Mathebe high School. The qualitative research method was used to provide information for the study. The design was a good fit for the target population and the sample, which consisted of people from the same school as the case study. FGIs were used in data collection for this study. The empirical investigation was carried out on three consecutive days: firstly, with girls in Form D and E, secondly with girls in Form D and E grouped together to form one group and boys in Form D and E grouped together to form one group. Finally, the teachers formed a focus group. Thirty six individuals were sampled for this study. Thirty two out of eighty students from Form D and E were sampled for focus group interviews as respondents and four teachers out of ten were sampled focus group interview as respondents. The study established that a lot of girls of age group 15-20 year old at Mathebe High School experienced their first menses without knowledge of what was happening to them. In the past five years, more girls have taken International General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) examinations than boys at Mathebe high school. Although the enrolment of girls who appeared for LGCSE was high, they performed poorly compared to the boys as most girls face many challenges such as truancy, being late at school, lack of concentration and participation in school activities and get bad grades and get less education than boys. This happens due to the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear for menstruating girls at Mathebe High School as the monthly cost of modern sanitary wear particularly sanitary pads proved too high for many girls. Also at Mathebe High School, a gender gap in education between boys and girls is reported to exist due to the ill-treatment menstruating girls get from their parents and teachers as menstruation is still a taboo linked to stigma and discrimination against menstruating girls and women. Among other recommendations, the study recommends that schools should provide reliable information about menstruation by hiring a professional health counsellor to encourage changes in behaviour and practice; the government needs to implement and enforce policies that reduce the high cost of modern sanitary wear because menstruation is not an option and no one can go without menstruation. As a result, the high cost limits access to modern sanitary wear for needy and vulnerable school girls in the country.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| ABR | African Bill of Rights |
| ACRW | African Charter of Rights and Welfare |
| AYC | African Youth Charter |
| CEDAW | Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women |
| COSC | Cambridge Overseas School Certificate |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Diseases |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| CRPD | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| DFA | Dakar Framework for Action |
| EA | Education Act |
| ESSP | Education Sector Strategic Plan |
| FGIs | Focus Group Interviews |
| ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| IECCD | Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development |
| LGCSE | International General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| MD | Millennium Declaration |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| MHM | Menstrual Hygiene Management |
| N | Number |
| NGOs | Non-Governmental Organizations |
| NUL | National University of Lesotho |
| PSI | Population Services International |
| SA | South Africa |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNHRC | United Nations Human Rights Council |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund |
| WASH | Water, Sanitary and Hygiene |

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the research problem of the study and its setting. It is divided into thirteen (13) segments. Segment 1.0 shows how the chapter is structured. Part 1.1 deals with the background of the study. Segment 1.2 addresses a formulation of the study problem. Section 1.3 highlights the purpose of the study. Segment 1.4 highlights the research objectives of the study. Section 1.5 highlights the research questions of the study. Part 1.6 deals with the declaration of assumptions. Section 1.7 discusses the importance of the study. Segment 1.8 defines the research limits of the study. Section 1.9 indicates the limitations of the study. Section 1.10 defines the key terms used in the study. Part 1.11 is about the outlines of the chapters of the study. Section 1.12 summarizes the chapter.

1.1 Background to the study

According to Lliyasa et al (2012: 401), menstruation is a phenomenon that happens naturally and is linked to conditions such as amenorrhea, heavy bleeding or severe menstrual cramps. They indicate that girls will experience various emotional state such as guilt and shame during menarche simply because they have no idea of what is happening. Lliyasa et al (2012: 401) also highlight that in the world 26 percent of population are women of the age of menarche. On average a person menstruates 68 days per year, and so, and girls and women have right to use of safe and dignified menstruation as a basic need. Similarly, Tegegne and Sisay (2014: 2) note

“one in ten African girls of school age did not attend school during her period or dropped out at puberty due to lack of cleanliness”.

It is believed that adolescent girls' biological needs begin to change when they enter high school. Furthermore, Lliyasu et al (2012: 401) postulate that this calls for management of menstrual hygiene through the use of menstrual products such as sanitary towels. They also indicate that the use of modern sanitary wear in schools plays an important role in helping girls attend school without worrying about the humiliation that might result from an unhygienic menstrual experience at school.

There are three types of modern sanitary wear namely;

- **Tampons:** It is made of absorbent material that absorbs a woman's menstrual blood from inside woman.
- **Sanitary pads:** There are two types, disposable and washable, they clip onto a woman's underwear to absorb menstrual blood.
- **Menstrual cups:** They are funnel-shaped containers, made from latex, or rubber that get tucked inside the woman to collect blood.

According to Kotler (2018) the first modern sanitary wear (sanitary pad) was thought up by nurses as a new method to stop blood particularly on the battlefield. But, the first sanitary pads for ladies hit the market in 1896 and now the commonly used form of modern sanitary pads has two types, namely disposable and reusable sanitary pads even though they are overpriced especially in developing countries whereby prices keep on increasing as menstrual products are becoming a multi-million dollar industry. In Lesotho, the commonly used sanitary wear is

disposable sanitary pads and in the year 2021 the cost of disposable sanitary pads was M 25.00 per packet of 8 pads.

In all developing countries, long-lasting and far reaching economic and political effects are deemed to be the outcomes of women's educational attainment, which is why girls' education is the main focus of development efforts (Lliyasu et al 2012: 404). However, Bodat et al (2013: 212) argues that at home, at school or in other public places in developing countries, vast majority of girls lack access to good menstrual hygiene and health due to poor facilities, inaccurate information and limited choice of modern sanitary wear albeit the United Nations (UN) has reaffirmation of women's rights to reproductive health as a matter of individual human rights. Moreover, according to Nooh (2014: 198) there are places where silence, shame, and stigma surround menstruation and menstrual hygiene. This suggests that social change and increased attention at the political level are needed because she sees right to use of safe and dignified menstruation as a basic need for girls and women.

In addition, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2019:11) states that when girls' menstrual needs are fully met, girls can learn, play and maintain their health without feeling stress or shame. Tuwor and Sossou (2008: 363) complement this by pointing out that universal education for all children, girls and boys, was adopted within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). One hundred and ninety one heads of state in 2000 signed the Millennium Declarations (MD) with the objective of achieving gender equality in primary and secondary education. The World Summit for Children identified gender in education and women's education as tools for development which became the backbone of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 1990.

Additionally, Nooh (2014:199) notes that girls and women in many developing countries still do not have access to modern menstrual products and cannot buy affordable, high-quality menstrual products because they cannot afford to buy them. This according to her becomes a challenge in that inaccessibility to resources, infrastructure and lack of social support make it difficult for women and girls in developing economies to manage menstruation properly. She further argues that the situation is not the same in some regions such as Europe and America where access to modern menstrual products has increased. The implication is that if girls' menstruation in schools is not well managed, girls may not do as well as they should (Nooh 2014: 199).

However, Oppenheim (2018) argues that inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear is still a challenge in high and middle income countries. For example, he reports that in Kenya, 7 percent of women and girls depend on traditional menstrual materials such as old clothes, chicken feathers, mud and newspapers, whereas 46 percent use disposable sanitary pads and 6 percent use reusable sanitary pads.

In addition, Tuli (2019: 4) reports that Australia is leading the fight against sanitary pads inaccessibility by formally removing the sanitary pads tax for residents. Likewise, Cardoso et al (2021: 1) point out that the problem of unmet menstrual needs is primarily experienced by women and girls in developing countries. Also, worldwide a high number of women and girls is estimated to be unable to afford satisfactory facilities to manage menstrual hygiene and do not even have access to menstrual products (Cardoso et al 2021: 1).

Similarly, Tuli (2019: 4) argues that achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as goal 4 of ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education and promoting life opportunities for all, goal 5 of achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as well as goal 6 of ensuring sustainable management and availability of water and sanitation for

all is associated with better menstrual hygiene management. In line with Ntho (2013:3) Lesotho like other African countries introduced formal education through established partnership between government and Christian missions. Also she states that churches used the importance of literacy to change communities into Christianity.

In addition, she points out that Lesotho is one of the few countries that boasted a larger number of girls than boys literacy as compared with many other countries because of the fact that Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa (SA) and this has traditionally involved young men from Lesotho seeking employment in South African mines and farms as laborers and this led to a situation where boys missed out on education. Also she notes that the traditional work of boys and girls in pastoral communities was also a contributing factor to fewer boys' enrolment in school as the role of boys was to look after animals while the role of girls was to do house chores.

In addition, she mentions international conventions and protocols such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the African Bill of Rights (ABR) and African Charter of Rights and Welfare (ACRW), the African Youth Charter (AYC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that are related to education and Lesotho is a signatory thereof. Ntho (2013:3) points out that Lesotho's legislative reforms in the education sector were strongly influenced by regional and international education declarations. However, it is also mentioned that the local legal instruments adopted by the country include the 1993 Constitution, which states that education is free, compulsory and accessible to all, the Education Act (EA) 1995 and the Education Act (EA) 2010, is based on the Dakar Framework for Action (DFA) of 2000, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2005-2015 and the Vision 2020.

She further notes that the structure of the education system in Lesotho consists of the usual format of primary education (seven years) preceded by three years of Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD) and secondary education (five years) through two levels, the first being the junior high school (Form A, B and C) and the second is high school (Form D and E). The Junior Certificate is awarded to successful students upon completion of junior high school. While successful students at high school receive O- level certificate. And higher education offered by colleges and universities. In addition, she points out that there is also a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) at the post-secondary level to develop skills.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Mathebe High School is a mixed school in the rural area of Mafeteng District that has long faced the dilemma of declining girls' academic performance. In addition, there is a discrepancy concerning the performance of girls and boys in this school, because boys have performed better than girls, and research is needed to determine the cause of this discrepancy. According to Molupe(2019) the government of Lesotho struggles with a high rate of school absenteeism among girls more especially in rural areas of the country during their menstrual periods because they could not afford to buy modern sanitary wear such as sanitary pads. This according to him negatively impacts their academic performance resulting in poor grades and a high dropout rate for girls. It is therefore against the above reasons, the study would like to investigate the nexus between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic performance at Mathebe High School.

1.3 Statement of the purpose

The main goal of this study is to contribute a theoretical framework that supports advocacy efforts to address hygiene and sanitation as development issues. The aim of the study is to add further knowledge to understand the challenges of menstrual hygiene management for school-age girls and their impact on girls' educational success.

1.4 Research questions

- What are the perceptions about the link between menstruation and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School?
- What forms of sanitary wear are available for girls at Mathebe High School?
- What recommendations can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School?

1.5 Objectives

- The main objective of the study is to explore the perceptions about the link between menstruation and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School.

1.5.1 Specific objectives

- To examine forms of sanitary wear available for girls at Mathebe High school.
- To explore recommendations that can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School.

1.6 Basic assumptions of the study

The study was guided by the following assumptions:

- a) The respondents give the information as what they feel are the causes of poor performance of girls in mixed schools.
- b) In terms of curriculum both boys and girls are exposed to the same learning environment.
- c) The families' background of both boys and girls is similar.
- d) Intellectual capacity of both boys and girls is the same.
- e) Both boys and girls are exposed to the same learning opportunities.

1.7 Significance of the research study

Menstrual hygiene management among school-age girls is a developmental issue that has been overlooked by policymakers. As a result, the study raises awareness of the impact of the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear on the academic performance of girls in high schools. The study will not only benefit policymakers, development partners, teachers, parents, students, government and researchers by providing them with empirical data with recommendations to improve the situation of girls in schools, but also serve as a prerequisite for the achievement of a Master of Arts in Development Studies offered by the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

1.8 Delimitations of the study

The scope of the study was limited to one mixed school in Mafeteng district: Mathebe High School. The study used students in form D and E and teachers as study subjects excluding parents and traditional leaders. Main focus was on their perceptions, experiences and the effects of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear on academic performance of girls.

1.9 Limitations of the study

This study was conducted with the following limitations in mind:-

- a) Mathebe High School was the only school in Mafeteng district where the study was limited to. As a results, the findings of the study could not be really generalized to the entire district or country.
- b) The fact that the researcher was self-sponsored, he carried a heavy financial burden. The financial limitation came in because there was traveling, typing and binding expenses.
- c) Covid-19 pandemic and time limitation made it difficult for the researcher to trace the students who had already sat for LGSCE or COSC in the previous years in Mathebe High School whose responses would have been crucial to the research.
- d) It was difficult to check the validity of the respondents' declarations against other measures in their respective villages as the study relied heavily on self-reporting from Form D and E students and teachers. It was possible that some respondents were shy in their replies, therefore, relying only on self-report could be problematic and might threaten the validity of the findings. Focus group interviews (FGIs) with semi-structured questions technique because of its consistency was adopted to address the limitation. It was however, hoped that the results were to benefit all education stakeholders in order to improve situation of menstruating girls in high schools.

1.10 Definition of central terms

For the purpose of this study, the main concepts under investigation are defined as follows:

- **Modern sanitary wear-** are machine processed absorbent materials which women and girls wear to absorb the blood during their periods. There are three types; pads, tampons and menstrual cups.
- **High School -** A high school is a high school where teenagers receive an education before entering college or getting a job. The qualification upon completion is LGCE or COSC.
- **Academic performance –** the knowledge acquired that is assessed by marks by a teacher or the educational goals set by students and teachers to be achieved over a given period of time.

1.11 Outline of the study

The dissertation consists of five chapters and each chapter is organized as follows:

Chapter 1: Provides an introduction; background to the study, explained the research problem; research objectives; purpose of the study and the significance of the study. In this chapter, the basic assumptions delimitations; and limitations of the study were highlighted.

Chapter 2: Provides the theoretical framework that the study was based on was studied. Also an evaluation of the literature review on menstrual hygiene management.

Chapter 3: Discusses the research methodology of the study. This chapter describes the general research methodology used in the study, including the research design, data collection tools, sampling procedure, sample size, and data analysis techniques.

Chapter 4: Deals with the data presentation and analysis of the empirical data obtained from the study area. This chapter analysed the nexus between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic performance from the perspective of the respondents. In this chapter the possible remedies to improve situation of girls at Mathebe High school were recommended.

Chapter 5: Summary, recommendations and conclusion are provided in this chapter.

1.12 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the whole study, its objectives and the way the study was conducted. This chapter focuses on the background of the study; problem statement; purpose of the study; research questions; examine targets; study assumptions; the importance of the study; delimitation of the study; limitations of the study and definition of key terms. Access to modern sanitary wear and girls' academic performance have been the burning issues faced by girls at Mathebe High School and other high schools in Lesotho. Studies of this kind are therefore needed to uncover issues that remain hidden, tacit and somewhat taboo in Lesotho and many other African countries. At the Mathebe High School, a gender gap in education between boys and girls is suspected to exist due to inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear by girls. The next chapter provides an overview of theories used in this study and literature review on menstrual hygiene management and school performance of girls.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

A systematic review that examines previous empirical studies to answer a specific research question is called a literature review. The theoretical basis of the research is also formed with the aim of discovering the gap in the literature through the literature review (Barake 2013:3).

In this chapter, the literature review on the nexus between the accessibility to modern sanitary wear as a basic need and girls' academic performance at Mathebe High School is presented. The literature review for this study was compiled from books, scholarly articles from the internet and websites, UNICEF, and individual researchers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It has five (5) segments. Part 2.0 presents how the chapter is structured. Segment 2.1 illuminates the theoretical framework. Segment 2.2 is about misconceptions and taboos surrounding menstruation. Segment 2.3 covers over menstrual hygiene management. Part 2.4 discusses influence of menstruation on school absenteeism. In doing so, the study aims to provide answers to the following research questions: What is the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School? What forms of sanitary wear are available for girls at Mathebe High School? Lastly, what recommendations can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School? Segment 2.5 summarizes the chapter.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Access to knowledge, water, sanitation and hygiene services and improved social norms are regarded as complex components of menstrual hygiene interventions (PSI 2018:4). Therefore, the current study was based on the following theories: Pearson's theory; Liberal Feminism; Conflict Theory of Education and Human Capital theory.

2.1.1 Pearson's theory

Pearson's theory describes a situation whereby the society views all activities that are carried out as influenced by gender interactions and roles. Therefore, according to this society is the one that has the ultimate power to dictate what men and women should actually do and behave. However, the theory states that the ultimate power authority of society in determining the real production and reproduction of gender is biased against women. As a results, the performance of women is affected in all spheres of life such as business and education (Orodho 2004).

In this study, Pearson's gender relation's framework is found to be relevant in that it puts more emphasis on the diverse social, cultural and economic norms and standard which must be taken into consideration when girls partake in social activities such as education.

Moreover, the economic and social opportunities suggested in the theory are the factors that influence the academic performance of female students. But, in a traditional order like the patriarchal order where families are headed by men, women's roles are narrowly assigned, they mostly become subordinate, and education becomes less important to them. This also affects girls 'participation in education even when they have access to it, they do not get it the same way as their counterparts boys.

2.1.2 Liberal Feminism

According to Harrison and Boyd (2018:299) feminism is characterized by equality of the sexes and activism to achieve such equality for women.

Its main focus is on the equality in public spheres in issues such as equality in education, workplace and in political rights. Even though it does sometimes touch on private issues like how the private life affects the public equality, this theory helps in fighting against obstacles such as shame, stigma and discrimination that avert women from accomplishing on an equal level as men. It helps in fighting against all forms of prejudices, biasness and discrimination against women. As a results, it advocates for freedom of choice and equal participation of women in every area. Also it fights for the removal of all challenges and barriers that prevent women from excelling in everything they do to achieve their desired goals and dreams. In this regard, all boys and girls in education should be afforded equal opportunities to study without discrimination. All the barriers that impede girls' educational attainment should be dealt with. For example, free sanitary pads should be provided to school girls in order to enable girls to attend school and perform better to achieve better education that will give them a better chance to get into the job market. According to this theory girls are more vulnerable to poverty than boys so it advocates for girls in order to make sure that women get equal access to education and better working conditions that would enable them to get equal pay as their counterparts men. (Jones et al 2009).

2.1.3 Conflict theory of education

It is a theory that society is in a state of constant conflict due to competition for scarce resources.

The central tenets of conflict theory are the concepts of social inequality, the distribution of

resources, and the conflicts that exist between different socioeconomic classes. The conflict theory of education posits that the purpose of education is to perpetuate social inequality (Mishra 2013:27). This theory helps to address inequality that exists at schools between girls from rich families and girls from poor families whereby girls from economically disadvantaged families when they cannot afford to buy sanitary towels, they end up engaging in sexual relationships with rich 'sugar daddies' so that they can give them money to buy sanitary towels. As Connolly 2020: 18) notes "Commodification of sanitary pads comes at the cost, a cost that many girls that come from financially marginalised backgrounds struggling to pay for basic amenities are unable to bear". Besides, girls are put at a disadvantage in terms of education when they are young and prevent their mobility and productivity as women because of inaccessibility to sanitary products (Wambugu and Kyalo, 2014: 151).

2.1.4 Human Capital theory

This theory is based on the bases that people will have economic gains if they invest in education. It assumes that development is achieved by human and development is an upgrading of the labour force as a form of capital investment. Also, human capital theory maintains that not only does education improve choices but an educated population provides the labour force necessary for industrial and economic growth (Sweatland, 2016).

This theory is important in this study because it shows that educating girls is the best way of investing in people simply because the knowledge, skills and abilities girls get in education will be used as tools for sustainable development. Moreover, this theory suggests that educated people are able to make informed decisions on issues that affect their lives such as health issues. Also educated girls would be able to part take in democratic and legal due processes and pursue values such as equality, fraternity and liberality at both private and social levels. This means that

an educated girls will be able to improve her family's health and diet, raise her family standard of living, improve her social and cultural status, and also enhance nation building in terms of economic and human development.

Subsequently, these theories paint a picture of the upbringing of girls in society, particularly male-dominated where they show that issues that are happening at home and school depress girls more than they depress boys hence the gender gap in education. Also they provide guidance on how girls are involved in social, political and economic activities of society. Therefore, these theories help in fighting against lack of social support that compels girls to cope with teasing, secrecy, and social norms that command different behavioral restrictions such as what is allowed to say, who they can communicate with, places they can go to, what they are allowed to touch and how they can sit. In addition, these theories thus help to address the gender gap and gender inequality that exist at Mathebe High School in as far as girls' academic performance and educational attainments are concerned. These theories say 'NO' discrimination and stigma, humiliation and shame leveled against menstruating girls in schools.

2.2 Misconceptions and Taboos surrounding menstruation

According to UNICEF (2019: 11) vast majority of girls reach menarche without having acute information about menstruation, leading to them having a lot of stress and fear. Taboos around menstruation that are linked to sexual activities make it difficult for girls to get critical information about menstruation on time. It also emphasizes that parents need to impart their knowledge about the biology of the menstrual cycles to girls so that girls can have the opportunities to learn the skills to safely put menstruation and pain that comes with it under control. Also, there is a need for boys, teachers, parents and traditional leaders to have in depth

knowledge about menstruation so that they become better positioned to support girls as they approach menarche and during their menstruation. (UNICEF, 2019:11).

Similarly, Biljon & Burger (2019: 5) state that it happens in many Sub-Saharan African countries where people have the belief that menstruating women carry illness and disease, therefore, they should not keep going up and down, this develops a great sense of stigma around menstruation. They further point out that in Africa, culturally, menstruating women were not allowed to cook, nor permitted to go near new born babies, near weapons or animal kraals. In addition, women are forced by stigma to hide when they are menstruating simply because they do not want to experience shame and different behavioural restrictions that come with menstruation which sometimes end up creating a situation in which girls are absent from school during their menses thinking that if they go to school they are going to cause harm to others. (Biljon and Burger, 2019: 5).

In addition, Connolly (2020:18) states that girls are unable to open dialogues about menstruation simply because of misconceptions and taboos surrounding menstruation. Equally, Bobel et al (2020: 105) indicate that it is important to educate girls about menstruation before they reach menarche in order for them to know what they are going to experience and how they should handle it with dignity. However, they argue due to cultural beliefs and norms a lot of mothers are still very secretive about menstruation, leaving a lot of girls not getting education and support from their mothers. Sometimes mothers share incorrect or misleading information to their daughters. For example, they would advise their daughters to not let boys touch them when they were menstruating because boys would make them have babies.

Historically, and cross-culturally, women during their menses were restricted to enter some places such as churches or kitchen because of menstrual blood that is discursively construed as

being toxic, enchanted and contaminating. However, Bobel et al (2020: 107) put more emphasis on a need to educate girls about menstrual education in order to see to it that they fully understand biological function of menarche also an emotional transition associated with it. Indicating that the reason fathers, brothers and husbands require wives, daughters and mothers to be discrete about their menstruation is because menstrual blood is regarded negatively as bad blood, also menstruation is constructed as disgusting and contaminating, and this leads women to want to hide their menstruation.

Garikipati and Phillips-Howard (2021:3) complement this by stating that menstruation is rounded by traditional taboos rooted in religious beliefs that mire menstruation in a culture of shame and silence which cause women to think of different things to managing their menses, using all sorts of commonplace items such as scraps of fabric, soft bark, hay or sand into pad-like objects. There was inadequate education and support whereby girls learn how to hide menstruation instead of how to manage it. However, Bobel et al (2020: 12) indicate that when girls are menstruating, they experience stigma whereby they feel as if their bodies were malodorous and aberrant, also they regard themselves as potentially disgusting with the social sphere which causes internalised sense of shame and guilt. In addition, Bobel et al (2020; 12) mention that menstruating girls tend to anticipate and imagine people's adverse reactions to their menstruating bodies which leads to them feeling discomfort and embarrassment.

In *Sesotho* tradition, cultural celebrations, ceremonies and rituals used to be performed to publicly acknowledge menarche when girls first experience it. But, due to modernization these practices are undergoing changes, almost all societies have stop practising them. However, traditionally, most societies used to pray, make animal sacrifices and celebrate to publicly recognize the entry of menstruating girls into womanhood. But modernization has now changed

all that (Bobel et al, 2020: 104). For example, in *Sesotho* we used to say, “ *ngoanana ha je mahe*” meaning a girl was not allowed to eat eggs because certain types of food were regarded as ways to toughen the reproductive system and avoidance of menstrual pain but nowadays vast majority of girls eat almost everything.

Nevertheless, Dhakal et al (2018:3) mention that indignity inflicts upon a lot of women and girls by the taboo of menstruation. For example, in Nepal stigma and restrictions around menstruation are the main challenges that menstruating women experience through the practice called *Chhaupadi* whereby menstruating women are expelled from their home to cow shed, also in India *Sabarimala* temple menstruating women are not allowed to enter. Furthermore, this includes deeply formed cultural beliefs which see women and girls as impure and inferior. Also from the young age girls are constantly told about their impurity which has let them internalizing these feelings which have a damaging effect on their sense of self-worth (Dhakal et al, 2018:3).

Furthermore, according to Dhakal et al. (2018:3) 76 percent of girls In Parsa District of Nepal still not identifying the cause of menstruation; girls also mentioned missing classes during menstruation due to pain, discomfort and loss. He also shows that the majority of girls in all districts of Nepal and school types use reusable cloths, that is, between 74 and 83 percent. In addition, both boys and girls learn important information about menstruation, but girls in schools in Nepal admitted they were shy, embarrassed, and uncomfortable seeking information, supplies, or medication from a male staff member or teacher since not all schools had full-time female staff teachers (Dhakal et al, 2018: 3).

Additionally, according to Arochi (2018:12), for girls experiencing menstruation for the first time, a lack of access to information, misunderstandings, and negative attitudes towards menstruation can cause a negative self-image and low self-esteem as they grow their

personalities as women. The culture of “silence” that surrounds menstruation reinforces the perception of menstruation as something shameful, needs to be hidden and can reinforce misunderstandings and negative attitudes towards it. Khurana and Kauri (ND: 294) complements that by noting “even in the 21st century people still whisper when they are discussing menstruation because of lack of awareness and the taboos that render menstruation a dirty phase in women’s lives”.

Equally, many girls and women face discriminatory attitudes and beliefs about menstruation that cause them to feel shame and embarrassment about their menstrual cycle. Girls' experiences in school reveal common challenges, often stemming from unsupportive social environments such as stress, teasing, and a variety of limitations in everything from school attendance to food choices. However, parents, community leaders as well as teachers should ensure that girls participate in activities even when they are on their periods in order to fight stigma and exclusion. This can help to change negative perception levelled against menstruation (UNICEF, 2019: 11).

2.3 Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

No one can challenge the researcher that the necessary foundation for good health and wellbeing is meeting one’s basic needs such as food, water and shelter. However, according to Cardoso et al (2021:1) menstrual hygiene is also considered a basic need. They indicate that the unmet menstrual needs of women and girls is a global issue which involves the inability to access safe, clean facilities and affordable menstrual products.

In Bangladesh, for example, Cardoso et al (2021:1) mention that over 80 per cent of menstruating women and girls use traditional menstrual management materials such as old cloth

instead of using hygienic products such as sanitary pads or tampons. In addition, school absenteeism and school dropout are some of the negative effects of inaccessibility to hygiene facilities such as toilets and water sanitation which also negatively impact on educational attainment of (Cardoso et al, 2021:1).

In Uganda however, the government launched hygiene charter in 2015 in order to improve menstrual hygiene management among girls (Miuro et al, 2018: 2). Furthermore, Tuli (2019:4) emphasizes that inadequate sanitation facilities and inappropriate sanitary products can force menstruating girls to drop out of school temporarily or permanently. However, lack of necessities such as water sanitation and hygiene facilities is indirect contravention of the fundamental rights promised under Article 01(right to equality) and Article 03(Rights to life and liberty) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to Tuli (2019:4) poor access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene persists despite the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of two resolutions in 2010 (resolution 64/292) and 2015 (resolution 70/169) that recognize the human rights to water and sanitation. She further mentions that in some places toilets are built, but, they are built without taking into consideration the needs of menstruating women, indicating that ignoring women's menstrual hygiene needs constitutes a violation of their rights, the most important of which are the right to human dignity, the right to non-discrimination, equality, physical integrity, health, privacy and the right not to be subjected to inhuman treatment and violence.

According to Splash (2020: 3), however, beginning with the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), menstrual health was included in the goals to achieve universal primary education and to promote gender equality and empower women. With the completion of the MDGs and the start of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the path to progress in

menstrual health has evolved. Splash (2020: 4) posits that menstruation is not just a hygiene issue, but it spread across SDGs 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 12 as shown in table 2.3 below. Menstrual health solutions therefore require a multi-sectoral and integrated approach.

Below is a table outlining the SDGs related to menstrual health and the associated solutions to close the gap between the status quo and achievement of the SDGs.

| Table 2.3: MHM opportunities and SDGs |
|--|
| <p>SDG 3- Promoting well-being and ensuring healthy living for all people of all ages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Integrating menstrual health into the curriculum |
| <p>SDG 4- Ensuring equitable and inclusive education of high quality and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that young women have accurate menstrual health information and build teacher capacity so students can be instructed around menstrual health without discomfort. |
| <p>SDG5-Empowering women and girls and achieving gender equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Enabling girls to menstruate with dignity |
| <p>SDG- 6 Ensuring sustainability and availability of water and sanitation for all</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Ensuring adequate sanitation for girls o Finding solutions for the dignified disposal of menstrual products ng adequate sanitation for girls |
| <p>SDG 8- Promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, productive full employment and decent work for all</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Ensuring sanitation in workplaces and schools is accessible and includes menstrual health hardware such as soap, products, waste disposal solutions and privacy |

SDG 12- Ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

o Ensuring policies promote safe, affordable and environmentally friendly menstrual health products

Source: Splash (2020:4)

In Nepal however, Dhakal et al (2018: 3) indicate that during menstruation girls are often unable to access hygiene facilities especially girls in rural areas because of financial and supply constraints. Also, menstrual taboo is negatively affecting girls' school attendance, as a results, when school facilities do not provide convenient menstrual management, whether due to a lack of gender-specific facilities, lack of privacy, or inadequate water supply or sanitation, girls are more likely to skip school.

In Lesotho girls miss school when they have their period because they cannot afford to buy pads, they use old cloths like blankets that cannot absorb blood, and so the blood drips at a rate for everyone to see. Also schools in Lesotho do not have proper water for washing and their toilets are not usable as they lack water. It is for these reasons that girls miss school when they start menstruating during school days (Molupe, 2019).

Similarly, Knight (2020: 3) puts more emphasis on the fact that emotional and physical wellbeing of menstruating girls can be affected by poor menstrual management and affect school attendance of school girls. Equally, Khurana and Kauri (ND: 294) argue that lack of menstrual hygiene causes major health issues, therefore, it is important for school girls to have access to proper menstrual hygiene management. Similarly, Bobel et al (2020:9) state that menstruation is fundamental in that it unites the personal, the political, the intimate, the public, the physiological and the socio-cultural activities, this means that menstruation either facilitates or impedes the realisation of the whole range of human rights.

The entire framework of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) provides for the equality, dignity and non-discrimination. Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) guarantees the highest standard of attainable health to all the people. Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides for equal health care access to both men and women. It specifically provides for health care facilities to be provided to women living in rural areas (Khurana and Kauri (ND: 294).

Connelly (2020:7) adds that in 2014 the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) recognized the impact of menstrual stigma and lack of menstrual health management on gender equality. According to Vashisht et al. (2018:163), however, it is for education, dignity, and physical and mental health that good menstrual hygiene is vital. Therefore, inadequate water and sanitation facilities become a major obstacle to girls attending school during menstruation and hampering their ability to maintain proper hygiene and privacy.

In Pakistan in Punjab and Sindh, Mumtaz et al. (2019:156) indicate that toilets intended for girls were limited in number, poorly maintained, and located in places unfriendly to girls, while other toilets had no flushing or drainage systems, there were also faucets and sinks. There was also a water shortage that made them non-functional most of the time. They also mention that 4 toilets were used by 1,214 girls in the Lasbella District School which were extremely dirty and unsanitary, with a foul odour of dry leaves, broken cups and rubbish in general thrown on the floor and in the toilets. There were also no garbage disposal systems. However, in one school there were two garbage cans ready for garbage collection, but they had no lid and were full of garbage.

In Zambia according to Chinyama et al. (2019: 5), the majority of girls reported that they only learned about menstruation during menarche and were unaware of the physiological basis of menstruation. They reported challenges associated with MHM, including the use of uncomfortable, non-absorbent sanitary wear and insufficient provision of hygiene materials, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools. The bathrooms in particular had no soap and water, no doors or locks for privacy and smelled badly.

In addition, Sebastian et al (2013:135) maintain that women and girls are still facing a serious challenge of managing menstruation hygienically because of lack of appropriate sanitation facilities, they state that only a small fraction of menstruating women in developing countries currently use modern sanitary wear. For example, about 10-11 per cent of menstruating women in India use disposable pads whereas the average cost of one packet of pads in Uganda is estimated to be higher than the daily income of working parent, as results, many women and girls are unable to use these disposable products because affording the cost of MHM is not easy for menstruating girls in developing countries, some can barely afford it, others cannot afford it at all (Ajari, 2020: 1). In addition, McKnight (2020: 7) posits that inaccessibility to sanitary towels is a symptom of poverty as it happens because of high prices of sanitary towels. McKnight (ibid) further argues that the fact that people view sanitary towels as consumer goods rather than as essential support for people who menstruate, makes modern sanitary wear monthly expenses as an additional stress on budget. However, contrary to this, in European countries 73-92 percent of menstruating women afford the cost of disposable products because the cost of disposable pads is way below the minimum hourly wage also, access to modern sanitary wear is universal(Haver et al, 2018).

2.4 Influence of menstruation on school absenteeism

In Pakistan, there is imposition of restrictions on mobility of girls when they begin to experience menstruation. This negatively affects girls' school attendance because they miss school when they are on their periods. Furthermore, girls are required to dress in a modest way and they are forced to separate from boys, as a result, these experiences of girls discourage them from going to school during their menses (Mumtaz et al, 2019:152).

In Kenya, girls often use materials that are unsafe and unsuitable by washing old cloths, newspapers or even cow dung in trying to absorb menstrual blood. Other girls even go to dump areas in search for used pads and reuse them. This demonstrates how girls go through difficult times when they have to go to school during their menses. Sometimes, because of the use of unsafe and unhygienic materials they miss school altogether in order for them to manage their menses from home (Graves, 2018: 6). Girls in Kenya go through a lot of pressure to attend school to escape poverty to an extent that they frequently engage in transactional sex for money to buy sanitary products. About 10 per cent of 15 year old girls have had sex for the money to buy sanitary products and very unfortunately most of them were exposed to sexually transmitted infection and unplanned pregnancy (Graves, 2018: 6).

In Zambia girls' school attendance and participation in physical activities were impaired during menstruation due to fear of bantering by boys and embarrassment by leaking menstrual blood. The boys said they could tell when the girls were menstruating by smell and behaviour, such as moving less and isolating themselves from their peers. Girls complained of friction burns on their inner thighs during their long walk to school from rubbing against the wet, non-absorbent traditional menstrual material (Chinyama et al, 2019:6).

However, Sperling et al (2016: 12) posit that the best way to empower girls is through education. It is through education that girls will be able to bring positive returns for income and economic growth as better educated women have higher earnings and are able to get and keep better jobs. They further indicate that gender gap in the labour force can be reduced by educated girls, also better educated young women are better able to seek and negotiate life-saving health care for themselves. For example, Biljon and Burger (2019: 3) mention that reduced teenage pregnancies, reduced child marriage, lower disease risk and lower child mortality are associated with increased access to education for women. Therefore, inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear could cause significant school absenteeism for girls which could also perpetuate both gender and income inequality.

Biljon and Burger (2019: 3) argue that the poor are disproportionately affected by financial restrictions on access to modern sanitary wear and painkillers, although many inequalities are related to ingrained cultural practices, that providing girls with the resources to effectively cope with their menstrual cycle can be a relatively simple and inexpensive measure to improve their academic performance. In addition, if girls can manage their periods with dignity, they can avoid the stigma and traditional beliefs that prevent them from attending school during menstruation. However, poor water and sanitation make it difficult for girls to manage their menstrual periods with dignity and attend school. In addition, they claim that schoolgirls find it difficult to manage their menstrual periods due to lack of access to modern sanitary wear, so they resort to homemade alternatives. These homemade products, like old clothes, when worn by girls often leak and girls sometimes choose to stay at home to avoid embarrassment at school. Furthermore, Biljon and Burger (2019:6) point out that menarche is also an indicator of a girl's fertility, leading parents to fear unwanted pregnancy or early child marriage, encouraging their

girls to stay at home. Montgomery et al (2016: 2) complement this by mentioning that menstruation has become an additional gender factor preventing girls from actively participating in school activities in developing countries.

In Sierra Leone, more than 20 percent of girls miss school during menstruation, while in Nepal and Afghanistan more than 30 percent of girls miss school during menstruation, while more than 48 percent of girls in Iran and more than 10 percent in India have a believe that menstruation is a disease such that almost a quarter of girls attending school in India drop out when their menstruation begins (Basyal, 2016:2).

2.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework on the accessibility to modern sanitary wear for school-age girls and the review of the empirical literature on misconceptions and taboos related to menstruation, menstrual hygiene management, and the influence of menstruation on school absenteeism. The study adopted Pearson's theory, liberal feminist theory, conflict theory of education, and human capital theory. All of these theories reveal the gender inequalities faced by girls in education in the fulfilment of basic human needs. It has been pointed out from various sources that there is a new generation of girls who have their first menstruation at school and who need to continue managing their menstruation in schools. Schools must therefore ensure access to modern sanitary wear as well as water and sanitation facilities in schools at all times.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The review of literature was discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter describes the general research methodology used in the study, including the research design, data collection tools, sampling procedure, sample size, and data analysis techniques. It has nine segments. Segment 3.0 shows how the chapter is structured. Segment 3.1 clarifies the research methodology. Segment 3.2 sets out the research design. Segment 3.3 describes the population and sampling. Segment 3.4 describes the research tools. Segment 3.5 deals with the research process (data collection). Segment 3.6 deals with the data presentation and the analysis procedure. Segment 3.7 highlights the ethical considerations of the study. Segment 3.8 summarizes the chapter.

3.1 Research Methods and Methodologies

While a specific approach to data collection is called a research method, a systematic way of solving the research problem is called a research methodology. The various steps usually taken by the researcher to investigate the research problem are discussed in the research methodology.

The qualitative research method focuses on people's narratives about themselves or a series of events. Narrative inquiry can provide unique insights into the procedural and intangible aspects of the participants' experience, informing project design and illuminating contextual impacts that further empower local populations. The narrative analysis focuses on the stories told by the participants. The story aspect is seen as a self-contained unit with a beginning, middle and end (Mahajan, 2018). It is used when the study has a specific contextual focus or when the subject is

a biographical or life story, or an oral tradition of one or other people's personal reflections. For example, the perceptions about the link between menstruation and girls' academic success. The researcher used focus group interviews (FGI) with students and teachers at Mathebe High School, and respondents reported the association between access to modern sanitary wear and academic performance of girls at Mathebe High School.

The choice of research method was made in the belief that it would help to better understand the relationship between the accessibility of modern sanitary wear as a basic requirement and the academic achievement of girls at Mathebe High School. Therefore, a qualitative approach was applied to collect data relevant to the subject under study. Based on an exploratory design, interviews were designed using focus groups.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is the phase in which the researcher prepares and designs his project. It is the model for collecting and analyzing measurement data. According to Leavy (2017:9), quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods research, arts-based research, and community-based participatory research are five main research approaches. She also notes that there may be some overlap between these approaches. Qualitative research was therefore chosen as the research design for this study.

Leavy (2017: 9) further states that qualitative research is characterized by inductive approaches to knowledge construction with the aim of generating meaning. It is also postulated that this approach serves to explore social phenomena, that is, to study and learn to decipher the meanings that people ascribe to activities, situations, events or artefacts also to build a deep understanding of some dimensions of social life.

She goes on to mention that the values underlying qualitative research include the importance of people's subjective experiences and processes of meaning formation and the acquisition of deep understanding. She also points out that qualitative research is based on the philosophical belief system that suggests that people actively participate in the construction and reconstruction of meaning through their daily interactions. Therefore, researchers value people's subjective interpretation and understanding of their experiences and circumstances.

3.3 Population and Sampling

Subjects are research participants from both the population and the population sample. A population is known as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects that are known to share similar characteristics (Mohajan, 2018). The process of selecting a set of unique cases from a larger population is called sampling.

3.3.1. Population

According to Taherdoost (2016:20), a population is a group of elements about which statements can then be made. Taking a subset of the chosen sampling frame or the entire population is called sampling. Samples can be used to draw inferences about a population or to make generalizations in relation to existing theories.

Ninety people from Mathebe High School were used as the target population for this study. The population consisted of 80 students from Form D and Form E and 10 teachers. From this population, 4 focus groups with 8 students each and a focus group with 4 teachers were formed as a sample. Therefore, an overall sample of 36 respondents was drawn from the population who believed they represented the population well, in order to give the research good responses. The subjects (population and sample) were distributed as in table 3.3.1 below.

Table 3.3.1 Population and sample

| School | Population | Focus group interview samples |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mathebe High School | 80 students | 32 |
| | 10 teachers | 4 |
| Total | 90 | 36 |

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure

First, Mathebe High School was selected purposively from 11 rural schools in Mafeteng District using a non-probability targeted sampling technique based on the premise that finding the best case studies provides the best data and the research results are a direct result of the sampling. (Casteel and Bridier, 2021: 79). This made the students of the Mathebe High School suitable for the subject.

Second, with the help of the Headmaster, the students were divided into boys and girls, all Form D and Form E. Sample of 32 girls out of 80 formed 3 focus groups with 8 members per group and 8 boys out of 28 formed 1 focus group, meaning there were 4 focus groups of students. Finally, 4 out of 10 teachers classified as 2 male and 2 female were selected to form a focus group. There were 5 focus groups in total. Therefore, the study adopted the purposive sampling strategy to select respondents which is classified as a non-probability sample because it allows access to necessary population (Casteel and Bridier, 2021:349).

3.4 Research Instruments

In this study the researcher used focus group interviews (FGIs) with semi-structured questions. This was done because of the consistency of focus group interviews.

3.4.1 Focus Group Interviews (FGIs)

As a technique of qualitative research, FGIs were chosen for this study, reasons being that:

- Unlike individual interviews FGIs were less intimidating in that, where the participants might find individual interviews intimidating or inappropriate focus group interviews allowed access to such participants.
- Each member of a focus group was encouraged to identify, describe, analyse and solve issues, therefore, focus group interviews offered supportive group interactions.
- The usefulness of FGIs was in gaining participant's views, beliefs, values and perceptions on why they felt or thought the way they did.
- New information and different perspectives on the same issue were obtained when using FGIs.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

A letter of approval from the Department of Developmental Studies at NUL (see appendix 1) was delivered by the researcher to Mathebe High School prior to the interviews, approval was granted by the school Headmaster, with three consecutive days clearly designated for the interviews. That was done in accordance with students' periods of lessons and COVID-19 protocols.

The researcher must indicate that in all interviews, the interview guide had included a letter informing respondents of the purpose of interviews and what was expected of them(see appendix 2,3 and 4) .Then on day one the FGIs started with Form D girls and lasted 60 minutes and continued with Form E girls, which lasted 60 minutes too. On the second day, girls from Form D and E were interviewed together because the researcher wanted to maintain consistency, since those girls had already mixed with peers who had been interviewed before them. The interviews lasted 60 minutes. From there, boys in Form D and E were grouped together and questioned for 60 minutes. On the last day, the teachers were interviewed for 90 minutes. Teachers were given 30 extra minutes because the researcher believed that what they had to say takes more of their time since they would talk about everything that affected girls and boys. Girls and boys were separated because girls were not feeling comfortable to talk in the presence of boys. In all FGIs, the researcher was taking notes during the deliberations.

3.6 Data Presentation and Analysis Procedure

After collecting relevant data, the results were grouped into thematic categories to look for similarities and differences. Narrative descriptions were used to explain given situations and relationships.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

According to Prabhakar (2019:3) ethics involves learning what is right or wrong and then doing the right thing. The protection of human rights through the application of appropriate ethical principles is referred to as ethical consideration (Arifin 2018:30).In this study, the following research ethics were considered:

3.7.1 Permission to Conduct the Study

The researcher received written approval from the Department of Development Studies at the National University of Lesotho to conduct research at Mathebe High School in Mafeteng District.

3.7.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

All the participants were ensured that their information would be used confidentially for the purposes of this research. In recognition of participants' human rights, the researcher granted them anonymity and freedom to choose to whether to part take in interviews or not.

3.7.3 Respect and Dignity

The researcher respected the opinions and openness of the respondents. Therefore, all the respondents were treated with respect and dignity.

3.7.4 Voluntary participation

Potential participants were clearly informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were given ample time to ask questions and address any concerns. It was also explained that since their participation is not mandatory, a refusal or withdrawal from the study while it was being conducted would not cause any problem.

3.8 Summary

The chapter discussed research methodology and design, population and sampling techniques, research tools, data collection techniques, and data presentation and analysis. As this is an exploratory study, the qualitative research method was used to provide information for the study. The design was a good fit for the target population and the sample, which consisted of people

from the same school as the case study. FGIs were used in data collection for this study. The empirical investigation was carried out on three consecutive days: firstly with girls in Form D and E, secondly with girls in Form D and E grouped together and boys in Form D and E grouped together. Finally, the teachers formed a focus group. Thirty-six individuals were sampled for this study. The next chapter presents the presentation and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the overall research methodology. This chapter is about data presentation and analysis. It makes links to the literature review from chapter 2. It has seven (7) segments. This segment 4.0 presents how the chapter is structured. Segment 4.1 is about the demographic characteristics of respondents. Part 4.2 data analysis on research objectives 1. Part 4.3 data analysis on research objective 2. Segment 4.4 data analysis on research objective 3, Part 4.5 is discussion. Part 4.6 summarizes the chapter.

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

This section represents demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age groups, level of education and marital status.

Figure 4.1.1: Gender

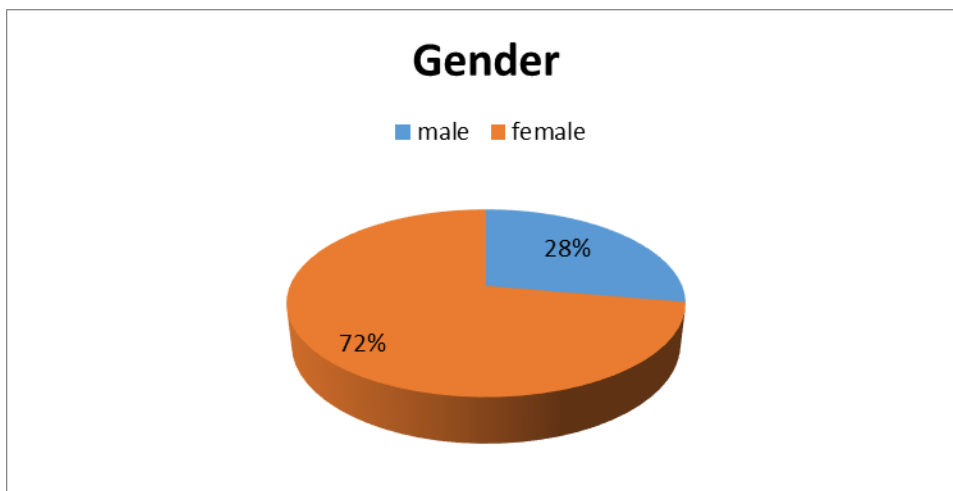


Figure 4.1.1 above is mirroring the gender distribution of the study participants. Out of the total sample of respondents, 72% (N=26) were female while 28% (N =10) were male. This shows that the majority of respondents are women. Respondents were purposively selected to launch a joint call to all relevant education stakeholders to address the issue of the accessibility to modern sanitary wear that was hampering their educational success. As a results, the researcher found that most girls at Mathebe High School were negatively affected by the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear. As result,

Figure 4.1.2: Age Groups

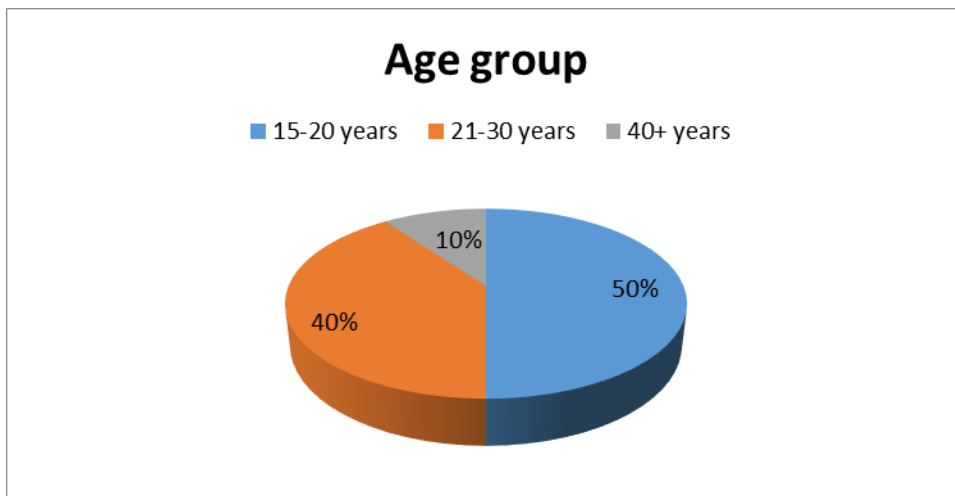


Figure 4.1.2 above reflects the age distribution of the participants. Of the overall sample of respondents, 50% (N 18) were 20 years old or younger, while 40% (N=14) were 30 years old or younger and 10% (N=4) were 40 years old. This shows that most respondents are still in the age of menarche. The researcher established that a lot of girls of age group 15-20 at Mathebe High School experienced their first menses without knowledge of what was happening to them. There is therefore a need to provide students with reliable information about menstruation.

Figure 4.1.3 Marital Status

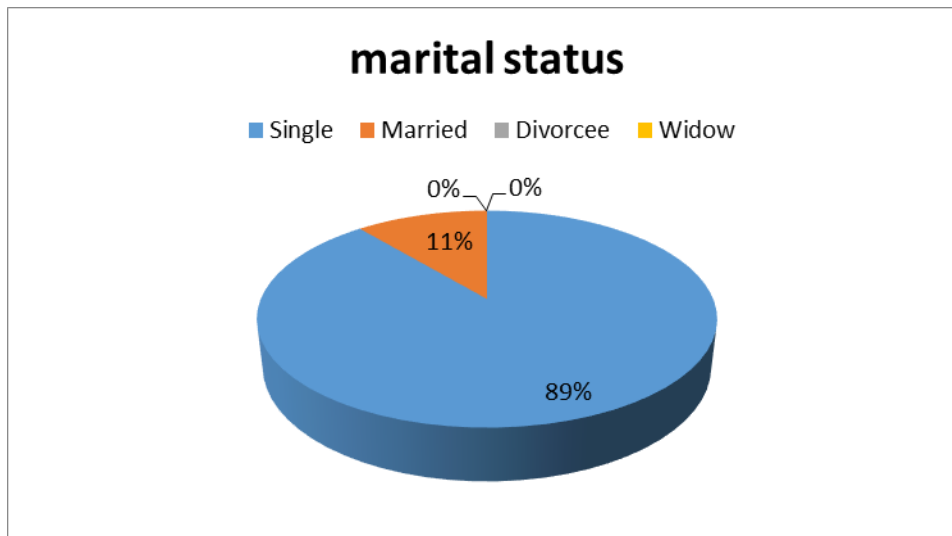


Figure 4.1.3 shows the reflection of the marital status distribution of the study participants. Of the total sample of respondents, 89% (N=32) of respondents were still single (not married), while 11% (N=4) of respondents were married and 0% indicated that there were no unmarried or no widowers among respondents. This shows that most respondents are not yet married. Here, the researcher has found that lack of access to modern sanitary wear puts many young girls at risk of being forced into marriage, as traditionally it has been assumed that once a girl starts menstruating it is a good sign of entering mature age of womanhood. There is therefore a great need to provide girls with access to modern sanitary wear so that they can continue their schooling without being withdrawn from school to become young mothers.

Figure 4.1.4 Level of Education

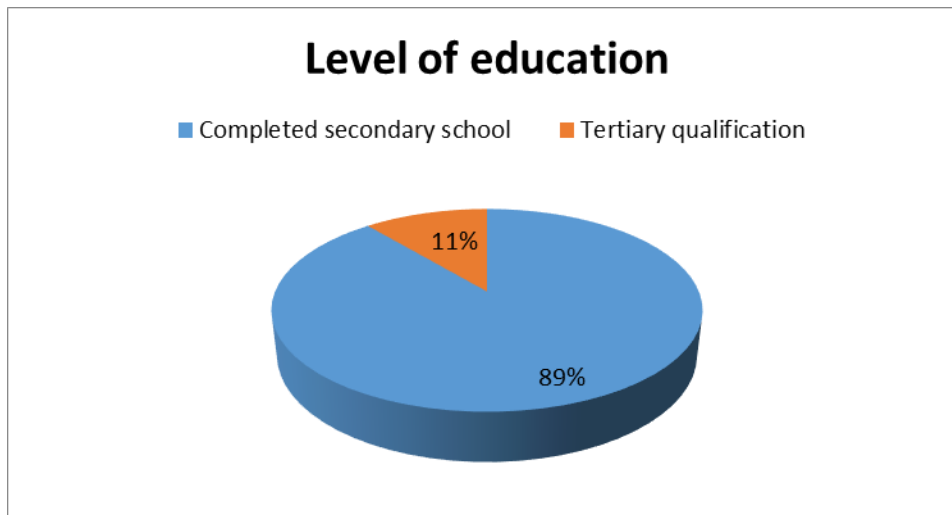


Figure 4.1.4 above reflects the educational distribution of the participants. Of the overall sample of respondents, 89% (N=32) of respondents completed secondary school, while 11% (N=4) of respondents have a university degree. This shows that most respondents are still in the learning process. Here, the researcher found that the lack of access to modern sanitary wear makes it difficult for most girls to go to school. There is therefore a great need to ensure that have girls access to modern sanitary wear so that they do not miss school or drop out altogether.

4.2 Research Objective 1; “To explore the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls’ academic achievement at Mathebe High School”

This segment presents information from the respondents by explaining the influence of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear on the academic performance of girls in relation to research objective 1.

4.2.1 The influence of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear on the academic performance of girls

Topics under this subsection include school absenteeism, lateness to school, lack of concentration and participation in school activities, lower grades, poor performance and lower education attainment.

4.2.1.1 School absenteeism

With regard to school absenteeism during menstruation, the results showed that the lack of access to modern sanitary wear put many girls at Mathebe High School at a disadvantage in terms of education, as they missed school a number of days (number 24-36 days per year), which also had a negative impact on the quality of the learning received. Similar to Pakistan and Kenya where in Pakistan there was imposition of restrictions on mobility of girls when they began to experience menstruation and that negatively affected girls' school attendance whereas in Kenya literature showed that girls were forced to skip school altogether because of the use of traditional menstrual management materials.

The data further showed that girls preferred to stay at home during menstruation because they were trying to minimize the discomfort and avoid the embarrassment of menstrual discharge caused by using unsafe materials due to the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear.

“When I am on my periods the first two days I do not go to school because I use old cloth and the menstrual flow is incredibly high at the beginning. I manage it well once I am home because there is no one to humiliate me albeit I even have menstrual leaks” (17 year girls)

The results showed that at Mathebe High School just like in many African countries such as Zambia and Uganda many girls missed school a lot during their menstrual period, mainly because they chose to stay at home during this period for a variety of reasons such as unsupportive environment, inadequate sanitary facilities and avoid humiliation and teasing over potential menstrual leaks. As a result, lack of access to modern sanitary had been identified as the leading cause of school absenteeism among girls at Mathebe High School which was hindering the prosperity of many girls as they did not receive quality education. Thus, the gender gap in education widened, resulting restricted career paths for many girls.

4.2.1.2 Lateness to school

The data showed that girls were more likely to be very late for school when they had their periods solely because of the discomfort caused by menstrual cramps, and felt uncomfortable when not using modern sanitary pads. Respondents also mentioned that the school environment was not geared towards girls who are menstruating, as there were no trash cans near their classrooms where they could dispose of used menstrual management materials.

Additionally, respondents reported that girls spent a lot of time at home making sure they were clean before they could go to school, especially if traditional menstrual management materials were used, and ended up being late for school most of the time. In addition, respondents mentioned that blood flow became excessive during the first two to three days of menstruation and girls without modern sanitary wear had difficulty staying clean. Just like in Zambia where girls complained of friction burns on their inner thighs during their long walk to school from rubbing against the wet, non-absorbent traditional menstrual material.

4.2.1.3 Lack of concentration and participation in school activities

Lack of access to modern sanitary wear, particularly sanitary pads as a common hygiene product used by school-age girls was found to have a negative impact on their academic performance. Additionally, girls have been reported to perform poorly on LGCSE when using traditional menstrual control methods. It is worth mentioning that the results showed that girls' performance was consistently low over the past five years.

“Menstruation plays in our favour because most of the time we see girls getting grumpy and we know it's due to menstruation. Therefore, they lose focus on school work” (18 year old boy)

Data had shown that girls sometimes found it difficult to concentrate in the classroom when using traditional menstrual management materials for fear of getting dirty and smelly, which caused girls to miss school. In addition, respondents mentioned that girls even found it difficult to do their homework if they did not use modern sanitary wear and that that affected their academic performance. Once again, the results showed the trauma the girls at Mathebe High School endured during their menstrual periods. They also described menstruation as a period of hysteria and malaise, especially at school, resulting in poor concentration on schoolwork.

4.2.1.4 Lower grades

Data collected from respondents indicated that girls at Mathebe High School faced a serious challenge in monthly access to modern sanitary wear. As a result, they had consistently performed worse relative to boys because their learning was interrupted by menstrual-related problems. For example, if they were late for school or did not go to school for several days. As a result, girls at Mathebe High School always had lower grades than boys.

4.2.1.5 Poor performance

Figure 4.2.1.5: Academic performance of students at Mathebe high school

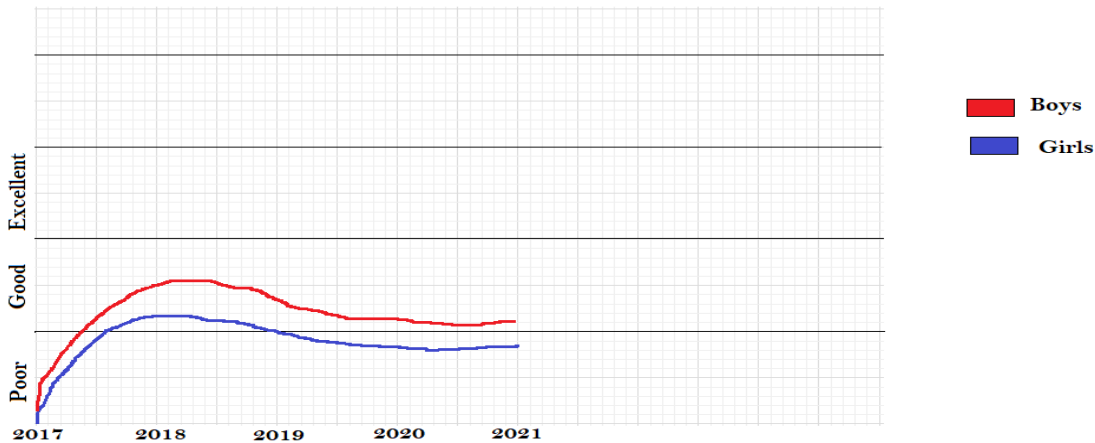


Figure 4.2.1.5 above with two lines illustrates the academic performance of boys and girls at Mathebe High School from 2017 to 2021. The red line represents boys and the blue line represents girls. Data has shown that over the past five years, the number of girls who took the LGCSE exams was higher than that of boys. Although the enrolment of girls appearing for the LGCSE was high, they performed poorly in comparison to the boys' performances.

“We don't know how to meet this challenge, it even seems like we don't teach in a mixed school because girls always get lower grades than boys. Girls miss school many days because they lack access to sanitary pads” (female teacher)

Additionally, respondents mentioned that girls performed well when they were in Form A in 2017 and Form B in 2018, when two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided them with free sanitary pads. However, their performance began to decline when these organizations stopped offering free sanitary pads. Consequently, the researcher was able to deduce that the

girls at Mathebe High School always lagged behind due to the effects of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear.

4.2.1.6 Lower education attainment

Respondents indicated that girls' poor academic performance had led to low education attainment for many girls, as a number of girls had dropped out of school over the past five years. In addition, respondents mentioned the gender gap in educational attainment at Mathebe Secondary School caused by girls' underachievement due to poor menstrual management.

According to the data collected, education stakeholders had paid less attention to the impact of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear on the academic performance of girls at Mathebe High School, as respondents indicated that the school or teachers had not offered any support to the girls during their menses. From the inconvenience and discomfort caused by the monthly bleeding, it was thus clear that the girls' poor academic performance was directly related to their lack of access to modern sanitary wear.

That was also justified with the evidence, which also showed that compared to the absenteeism of boys, girls were more likely to be absent from school than boys. Hence, the feminization of poverty has also continued through girls having lower levels of education than boys. In addition, anecdotal evidence showed that low levels of education had prompted many girls to marry early to fight poverty.

Respondents indicated that gender inequality in education is an ongoing problem at Mathebe High School due to the educational gap caused by socioeconomic factors. That was also justified with the evidence that most of the girls who lived with the grandparents hardly had money for modern sanitary wear because the grandparents did not appreciate the use of modern sanitary

wear so much, they still believed in the traditional ways of managing of menstruation and so they saw nothing wrong in using rags and sheepskins.

4.3 Objective 2 “To examine forms of sanitary wear available for girls at Mathebe High school.”

This section presents information from the respondents by explaining reasons behind the choice of form sanitary wear by girls at Mathebe High School in relation to research objective 2.

4.3.1 Reasons behind the choice of form of sanitary wear by girls at Mathebe High School

This subsection covers themes such as unavailability of modern sanitary wear, the high cost of modern sanitary wear, lack of parental or guardian support, lack of teachers support, shame and embarrassment, stigma and discrimination and low self-esteem.

4.3.1.1 Unavailability of modern sanitary wear

The study found that menstruating girls at Mathebe High School faced a titanic struggle over access to modern sanitary wear such as sanitary pads as they were unavailable at local stores in their area including at their school. Also, girls often found it difficult to buy sanitary pads when they discovered the shopkeeper was a man, since men thought girls were using sanitary pads when they first started having sex.

“We struggle a lot to have sanitary pads. I and my younger sister rely on old piece of blanket that we changeably use when we are on our periods. We are always hoping for an NGO to come and deliver free sanitary pads to our school because these old clothes we wear are not reliable at all and this situation negatively impact our school work” (16 year old girl).

Additionally, the unavailability of sanitary pads in local stores had put the girls in a situation where they had to ask people in their communities for help when going into town to buy sanitary wear on their behalf, and it was becoming a serious one problem as those people sometimes forgot to buy sanitary pads or started complaining so much that the girls eventually decided not to ask for help, leading them to hide their menstrual periods, which negatively impacted their performance at school .

In addition, the respondents mentioned that asking people in their communities to help them buy sanitary pads around town also had an economic impact, as some of the people asked the girls to donate an additional amount to the actual cost of the sanitary pads. Unfortunately, that had resulted in most girls going to school without pads during their periods. Instead, they would use unhealthy materials like old rags, tree leaves, old newspapers, and sheepskins. Similar to what was found in the literature whereby in Bangladesh vast majority of girls use traditional menstrual materials due to unaffordability of modern sanitary wear. Same thing happens in Kenya whereby girls use old clothes and newspapers.

4.3.1.2 The high cost of modern sanitary wear

The majority of respondents indicated that the monthly cost of sanitary pads was too high for many girls to cover these costs and have access to sanitary pads. Also, apart from the unavailability of sanitary pads in stores in rural communities around Mathebe High School, the girls mentioned that they could not afford the monthly cost of sanitary pads and the additional transportation fees people demanded when going to town.

“It is heart-breaking how these girls are struggling, as we speak there is no food for these children because the school does not have money to prepare lunch for students.

And let alone the prices of modern sanitary wear. Right now we know they use anything, from toilet paper to old rags just to protect themselves from the embarrassment of menstrual blood, but that's all they can afford” (female teacher).

In addition, respondents mentioned that sanitary pads prices continued to rise even though the Honourable Prime Minister Dr Moeketsi Majoro in 2019 during his 2019/2020 budget speech mentioned that sanitary pads would be sold tax free. Thus, each pack of pads cost 25 Maloti (M 25). Essentially, sanitary pads prices put a heavy burden on girls' parents, as until then there was no policy to ensure that sanitary pads for school-age girls were available at an affordable price or for free. Consequently, that had led to most girls at Mathebe High School skipping many months without purchasing sanitary pads and resorting to unhealthy traditional menstrual materials that had negatively impacted their academic performance.

4.3.1.3 Lack of parental or guardian support

The results highlighted the lack of financial support from the girls' birth parents to purchase sanitary napkins, mainly because most of their parents were not employed. Most respondents stated that they received money from their grandparents to buy pads. However, due to financial constraints, respondents indicated that living with grandparents was difficult as grandparents did not consider sanitary pads as a basic need. In fact, they did not just give girls their money for sanitary pads but even in these modern times encouraged girls to use traditional menstrual management materials such as old cloths, newspapers and sheepskin or encouraged them to get married.

“My grandfather once told me to get married when I asked him for money to buy sanitary pads. He said I wasn't a child anymore because I started menstruating” (17 year old girl).

Additionally, most respondents indicated that their parents did not provide them with adequate emotional support as most parents were reportedly too reluctant to talk to their daughters about menstrual problems, leaving girls unaware or feeling confused about how or what to do during menstruation.

4.3.1.4 Lack of teachers support

The data collected showed that the way male teachers at Mathebe High School addressed the topic of menstruation reflected broader issues of gender inequality. That was because respondents mentioned that male teachers openly reprimanded them when told they were absent from school because of "female diseases". Additionally, respondents indicated that their male teachers would verbally abuse them without asking for clarification, to the point that they would be refused permission if they tried to leave during class. Sometimes the girls soiled themselves with menstrual blood in the classrooms. Similarly, the literature showed that in Nepal girls were shy and ashamed to ask for help from a male teacher.

It also made it difficult for girls to have their menstruation with dignity. It was also clear that these norms stem from a deep-rooted stigma that perpetuates the notion that girls should hide their menstrual periods. The researcher was able to deduce that that there was a lot of shame and embarrassment surrounding girls at Mathebe high school during their menstruation.

4.3.1.5 Shame and embarrassment, stigma and discrimination

According to data collected during the interviews, respondents indicated that they attended school out of fear that their classmates, especially boys, would notice that they were menstruating and smelled of dirty blood. That caused them to feel shame and negativity towards their menstrual cycle. In addition, the inaccessibility of sanitary pads denied girls the freedom not to be afraid of other students seeing that they were menstruating and the freedom to exercise and be active during school activities.

In addition, the use of traditional menstrual materials restricted girls' movements and focus on their schoolwork. In addition, based on the information gathered during the interviews, the majority of respondents indicated that they always felt embarrassed when leaking while using traditional menstrual management materials. They mentioned that they sometimes got menstrual blood on their legs because they came to school without sanitary pads. Therefore, it was evident that the stigma associated with menstruation was rampant at Mathebe Secondary School, resulting in most girls not participating in school activities out of discomfort and embarrassment.

During the interviews, respondents mentioned that the discomfort was always present during menstruation but worsened when they used traditional menstrual management materials, such as old rags and sheepskins, which they had to wash and hang in sunlight to dry. In addition, most of the respondents said that they were also discouraged to come to school by the thought of washing unsafe materials they use because they feel ashamed even worse when boys asked them why they washed bloody materials at school on top of that felt discriminated as the school had done nothing to address their menstrual needs.

Furthermore, respondents mentioned that long school days (typically 8 to 9 hours) were increasing the likelihood of menstrual leaks as well as frequent bullying by boys in and around school toilet areas. Shockingly, it was unbelievable that most school girls were still suffering shame, mockery, and denial over menstruation and the products necessary to support them through their monthly cycles. Therefore, the researcher could deduce that those menstrual leaks led to girls feeling a sense of low self-esteem and discrimination.

4.3.1.6 Low self esteem

The lack of access to modern sanitary wear had affected the way the Mathebe girls felt about themselves, particularly when dealing with the boys. Anecdotal evidence showed that girls at Mathebe High School were terribly uncomfortable around boys during their menses, as they were embarrassed about leaking menstrual blood, for which the boys teased the girls about.

“I feel very uncomfortably when I am around my boys classmates during my menses the reason being that I am always scared that they will sense the smell of menstrual blood because of using unsafe materials such as sheepskin or piece of old cloth”. (16 year old girl).

Additionally, the study found that misinformation, misconceptions, and negative attitudes about menstruation led to negative self-image among girls at Mathebe High School when they first experienced menstruation. In addition, the culture of silence around menstruation had reinforced perceptions of menstruation as something shameful to be hidden, further damaging girls' vanity and slowing their academic performance. Similarly, the respondents reported that in the absence of sanitary pads they felt depressed during menstruation to an extent that they did not have a positive self-image and were unable to be productive in relation to schoolwork.

“I feel dirty when I am on my periods because menstrual blood is said to be dirty. I do not like menstruation at all. I always ask myself what is it that I can do to stop it for good” (20 year old girl).

4.4 Objective 3 “To explore recommendations that can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School”.

This section presents information from the respondents by explaining suggested solutions that could improve the situation of girls at Mathebe High School in relation to research objective 3.

4.4.1 Suggested solutions that could improve the situation of the girls at Mathebe High School

Topics covered under this subsection include provision of menstrual education and changes in behaviour and practice

4.4.1.1 Provision of menstrual education

According to the data collected during the interview, the majority of respondents were not yet aware of menstruation, they still associated it with sexual activity. In addition, mounting evidence showed that boys at Mathebe High School made fun of girls who had menstrual bleeding as a result of using traditional menstrual management materials at school.

“ We already know that every month there is one or two girls who are going to be teased by other students here at school, more especially boys due to menstrual accident, so we feel safe from embarrassment when we manage menses at home” (16 year old girl).

Regarding the boys' support of the girls at Mathebe High School during their menstrual periods, it turned out that the boys demeaned the girls the most instead of supporting them. For a number of reasons, respondents first stated that because of their ignorance about menstruation, every

time they saw girls with blood on their dresses, they laughed so hard that these girls even cried or dropped out of school in the middle of the lesson.

“We laugh at them because we see it as funny how girls don't realize they have blood on their school uniform. We think of many things, but mostly we think that she is engaging in sexual activity, hence the blood” (17 year old boy).

Second, there was anecdotal evidence that instead of helping girls wash their used traditional menstrual management materials, such as old rags and face masks, boys got used to going to the school faucets earlier than girls and stayed there to make it difficult for girls to use those faucets. Finally, respondents mentioned that menstruation gave boys an added advantage in terms of academic performance when they found that they performed better than girls due to the fact that girls frequently missed school due to menstrual irregularities.

“During my first experience of menstruation, I did not know what was happening. I thought I was sick and I did not talk to anyone at home or at school. I did not even bother myself to go to school. I just locked up myself in my room and used toilet paper to wipe menstrual blood” (18 year old girl).

Based on the data collected, many respondents had very limited information about why they menstruate and how to hygienically and safely manage their menstrual flow. Parents and friends were their main source of information. However, parents and friends lacked reliable information and knowledge about the biological changes that girls go through during the menstrual cycle, so during the interviews it was recommended to the school that the school should invite a trained health officer to come to the school on a quarterly basis and provide information about menstrual cycle to ensure that respondents have access to accurate and reliable information about good

menstrual management. Accurate information was believed to lead to change in bad behaviour and practice. This will be in line with SDG-4 by ensuring that young women have accurate menstrual health information.

4.4.1.2 Changes in behavior and practice

Most respondents indicated that in Lesotho, as in many other African countries such as Kenya and Uganda, menstruation was still a taboo linked to stigma and discrimination against menstruating girls and women. Fertility, femininity, and impurity were among the words primarily used by men to describe menstruating women. The practice of forcing schoolgirls to marry as soon as they experience menses, men who see menstrual blood as dangerous and impure would change if menstruation was culturally acceptable so girls could talk openly about it with all family members. Respondents mentioned that the practice of restrictions girls face at home and at school would change as menstruation becomes culturally acceptable.

“We don't talk to the students about menstruation unless a Good Samaritan comes to the school to give girls free pads. Menstruation was only discussed once, when two NGOs provided girls with free sanitary pads. For us male teachers, the situation is even worse because we don't want to talk to the students about menstruation at all,” (male teacher)

It was recommended that in order to bring changes in behaviour and practice there was a need to strengthen advocacy efforts to change negative cultural beliefs, misconceptions and taboo surrounding menstruation by enabling girls to exercise their rights and access hygiene menstrual management services .

4.5 Discussion

The data suggested that the girls could not afford modern sanitary napkins due to their background as most of the girls at Mathebe High School stayed with their grandparents who did not even work as the data showed that the majority of grandparents survive through the farming and social welfare grant. However, due to climate change, they could no longer produce enough crops and livestock to sell in order to pay for their children's schooling expenses such as tuition, school uniform, and sanitary pads.

In addition, according to the data, most of the employed parents of the girls worked in SA as domestic workers (*makitchen*) since most of them had no education. Needless to say, they didn't earn much to be able to take care of all their children's school needs. Poverty was therefore also the reason for the lack of access to modern sanitary wear due to the high level of unemployment among the parents of the girls at Mathebe High School.

Moreover, it was discovered that most parents regarded their girl children as liabilities that did not deserve to be sent to school to acquire education. The reason is that girls would marry after acquiring education and become assets to another family. In the case of Mathebe High School, it was said that parents seem to value boys' education simply because boys would remain an investment in the family even if married. Also because education was too expensive. The data collected showed that girls did not have access to modern sanitary wear because their parents did not treat them like boys at home and even teachers at school. As a result, the girls eventually came into conflict between their status as students when they pass menarche and other conditions such as early marriage and motherhood.

Moreover, that meant that due to gender roles which were related to social power and socially constructed norms affected the rights, responsibilities, opportunities and capabilities of girls at Mathebe high school because inaccessibility to sanitary towels highly impeded the academic performance of those girls denying them quality education as the main tool used to enhance self-respect and self-dignity for girls. Given these limitations, however, it was not surprising that many respondents at Mathebe High School considered menstruation to be the most notable social stressor, and the barrier to school attendance. Therefore, respondents indicated that a lot of girls preferred to manage their menstruation at home.

4.6 Summary

The chapter provided the data presentation and analysis of collected data at Mathebe high school through the focused group interviews. The demographic data has shown most girls at Mathebe High School were negatively affected by the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear. As a result, they had come in numbers to interviews to launch a joint call to all relevant education stakeholders to address the issue of the accessibility to modern sanitary wear that was hampering their educational success. Data has shown that over the past five years, the number of girls who took the LGCSE exams was higher than that of boys. Although the enrolment of girls appearing for the LGCSE was high, they performed poorly in comparison to the boys' performances. Data has indicated that the monthly cost of sanitary pads was too high for many girls to cover these costs and have access to sanitary pads. Data has indicated that in Lesotho, as in many other African countries such as Kenya and Uganda, menstruation was still a taboo linked to stigma and discrimination against menstruating girls and women. Fertility, femininity. Therefore, most respondents recommended that school should provide reliable information about menstruation by hiring a professional health counsellor to encourage changes in behaviour and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter provided findings and analysis of the collected data from Mathebe high school through FGIs .This is a final chapter of the study which aims to explore the nexus between modern sanitary wear as a basic need and academic performance of girls at Mathebe High School, Mafeteng District, Lesotho, as a case study. It has been divided into four (4) segments. This segment 5.0 introduces the chapter. Segment 5.1 summarizes the study. Segment 5.2 presents the conclusion of the study based on the research results. Segment 5.3 gives recommendations to improve the situation of school-age girls in Lesotho based on the research results of the study.

5.1 Summary

This study sought to investigate the nexus between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic performance at Mathebe High School. The main objectives were to explore the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School; examine the forms of sanitary wear available to girls at Mathebe High School and explore recommendations that could be made to improve the situation for girls at Mathebe high School. The qualitative research method was used to provide information for the study. The design was a good fit for the target population and the sample, which consisted of people from the same school as the case study. FGIs were used in data collection for this study. The empirical investigation was carried out on three consecutive days:

firstly with girls in Form D and E, secondly with girls in Form D and E grouped together to form one group and boys in Form D and E grouped together to form one group. Finally, the teachers formed a focus group. 36 individuals were sampled for this study. 32 out of 80 students from Form D and E were sampled for focus group interviews as respondents and 4 teachers out of 10 were sampled focus group interview as respondents. The study established that a lot of girls of age group 15-20 year old at Mathebe High School experienced their first menses without knowledge of what was happening to them. In the past five years, more girls have taken LGCSE examinations than boys at Mathebe high school. Although the enrolment of girls who appeared for LGCSE was high, they performed poorly compared to the boys as most girls face many challenges such as truancy, being late at school, lack of concentration and participation in school activities and get bad grades and get less education than boys.

This happens due to the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear for menstruating girls at Mathebe High School as the monthly cost of modern sanitary wear particularly sanitary pads proved too high for many girls. Also at Mathebe High School, a gender gap in education between boys and girls is reported to exist due to the ill-treatment menstruating girls get from their parents and teachers as menstruation is still a taboo linked to stigma and discrimination against menstruating girls and women. Among other recommendations, the study recommends that schools should provide reliable information about menstruation by hiring a professional health counsellor to encourage changes in behaviour and practice; the government needs to implement and enforce policies that reduce the high cost of modern sanitary wear because menstruation is not an option and no one can go without menstruation. As a result, the high cost limits access to modern sanitary wear for needy and vulnerable school girls in the country.

5.2 Conclusion

After conducting the study on nexus between modern sanitary wear as a basic need and girls' academic performance at Mathebe High School, this study concludes that menstruation does indeed perpetuate gender inequality in education. Therefore, the study calls on the government to work to dismantle the entrenched structures and perceptions that perpetuate the subordination of girls in education to the service of patriarchy. Also at Mathebe High School, a gender gap in education between boys and girls is reported to exist due to the ill-treatment menstruating girls get from their parents and teachers as menstruation was still a taboo linked to stigma and discrimination against menstruating girls and women.

Girls were afraid to talk about menstruation as it was associated with sexual activity. In addition, girls reported that they did not talk about their periods more often to avoid being forced into child marriage, as menstruation was seen as a signal of the transition from childhood to adulthood. As a result, modern sanitary wear inaccessibility was found to be a serious factor negatively affecting the academic performance of girls at Mathebe High School.

The study established that a lot of girls of age group 15-20 at Mathebe High School experienced their first menses without knowledge of what was happening to them. In the past five years, more girls have taken LGCSE exams than boys at Mathebe high school. Although the enrolment of girls who appearing for LGCSE was high, they performed poorly compared to the boys as most girls face many challenges such as truancy, being late at school, lack of concentration and participation in school activities and get bad grades and get less education than boys. That happened due to the inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear for menstruating girls at Mathebe High School as the monthly cost of sanitary pads proved too high for many girls.

The study also found that socioeconomic conditions such as high illiteracy and high unemployment of girls' parents were contributing to inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear for girls at Mathebe High School. The harsh reality, therefore, was that menstruating girls at Mathebe High School felt let down by the government to ensure they received a quality education that would allow them to challenge norms such as forced child marriage. Unfortunately, the study found that menstruation remained a hushed-up topic for most girls because the majority of the respondents mentioned that they were not openly talking about menstruation.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on the research, aim to address the current situation for girls in High Schools. The study therefore makes the following recommendations.

Policy recommendations

- The government is recommended to reform the education policy to allow the government to provide modern sanitary wear free of charge in schools in order to avoid the negative impact of the inaccessibility of modern sanitary wear on girls' school performance and also to close the gender gap in education. In addition, many girls who come from economically marginalized families struggle to meet their basic needs and as a result feel overlooked or left behind. Therefore, government should be considerate. This will be in line with SDG-8 by ensuring that modern sanitary wear is accessible in schools.
- The government needs to implement and enforce policies that reduce the high cost of modern sanitary wear because menstruation is not an option and no one can go without menstruation. As a result, the high cost limits access to modern sanitary wear for needy

and vulnerable school girls. In addition, menstruating rural girls need to be shown that they matter too and that their needs are being met. This will be in line with SDG- 12 by ensuring that policies promote safe, affordable and environmentally friendly menstrual health products.

- Government should ensure that men and boys are involved in menstrual hygiene management issues in order to change negative attitudes and perceptions in the fight against unfounded taboos and myths surrounding menstruation. Involving men and boys is very important as it reduces the impact of negative perceptions about menstruation that threaten girls' rights to equality, dignity, health, education and decent work. It is therefore of the utmost importance to ensure that menstruation is accepted, recognized and supported not only in school but in society at large as a natural process of the female body that must not lead to exclusion, shame or rejection.
- High Schools should implement a wellness program for girls at school to give them an opportunity to talk about the psychological and physical irritation caused by menstruation. Also so that girls can form strong groups so that they have more control over their lives and can break their silence. Therefore, the school must provide an environment that creates an atmosphere that gives girls more freedom and more opportunities to reach their full potential. School is required to place trash cans near classrooms for girls to dispose of used menstrual supplies. This will also help girls avoid embarrassment, it will boost their morale knowing that boys will stop making fun of them when they have their periods. Therefore, girls will have their periods with dignity.

Academic recommendation

- Further study would bridge the gap by finding out health effects of unhealthy menstrual materials used by girls in schools evidence from Lesotho.
- The study recommends further study to be carried out concerning the impact of forced child marriage on education attainment of girls' evidence from Lesotho.
- Further study would help to generalize the effects of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear across the country by finding out factors affecting the academic performance of girls in high schools in Lesotho: accessibility to modern sanitary wear as a basic need.

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APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

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P.O. Roma 180,

Lesotho.

Africa.

Faculty of Humanities

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

20 / 07 / 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter serves to confirm that ~~Mr./Mrs./Ms.~~
MOISAMA SAM is a student with the university reading
for a MA DEVELOPMENT STUDIES Degree Programme. In this
degree, research is a compulsory component of the programme. Please help her / him
in this research endeavour.

Thank you in anticipation of your support.

Yours Sincerely

Prof. Maxwell Musingafi



APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS TO GIRLS INTERVIEWS GUIDE

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| <p>Main objective: To explore the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls’ academic achievement at Mathebe High School.</p> <p>Specific objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine forms of sanitary wear available for girls at Mathebe High school. • To explore recommendations that can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School | |
| <p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation • Purpose • Student to be given a number (no names) • Confidentiality • Duration | <p>My name is Motsamai Sam. I would like us to talk about inaccessibility to sanitary towels as a basic need</p> <p>Thank you for sparing your time to meet with me for this meeting</p> <p>The purpose of these interviews is for my academic research only.</p> <p>I will assign each student with a number. In order to protect your identity.</p> <p>All your responses will be kept</p> |

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| | <p>family supported you most?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you talk to about menstruation and why? • Who buys you modern sanitary wear and why? • How much do you struggle to access modern sanitary wear? • How difficult is it for you to attend school if you do not have modern sanitary wear? • What else do you use instead of using modern sanitary wear? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you had your first menstruation, who in school supported you in any way? • Who do you talk to about menstruation when you are at school? • How do you dispose of the used menstrual materials? • How does inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear affect your academic performance? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarding your menstruation? • How does it make you feel when you are around boys while on your menses at school? • How often did you miss class and school activities because of inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear? • What do you do if you happen |

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| | <p>to menstruate while you are at school with no modern sanitary wear?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How important is it to be offered free modern sanitary wear while at school?• How does inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear give boys an advantage to perform better than girls? |
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APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS TO BOYS INTERVIEWS GUIDE

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| <p>Main objective: To explore the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School.</p> <p>Specific objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To examine forms of sanitary wear available for girls at Mathebe High school.• To explore recommendations that can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School | |
| <p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appreciation• Purpose• Student to be given a number (no names)• Confidentiality• Duration | <p>My name is Motsamai Sam. I would like us to talk about inaccessibility to sanitary towels as a basic need</p> <p>Thank you for sparing your time to meet with me for this meeting</p> <p>The purpose of these interviews is for my academic research only.</p> <p>I will assign each student with a number. In order to protect your</p> |

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| | have been given by the researcher |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does inaccessibility to sanitary towels give you advantage to perform better than girls?• What kind of support do you give girls during their menstruation?• How do you know when girls are on their periods?• What can the school do in order to support girls during their menstruation? |

APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONS TO TEACHERS INTERVIEWS GUIDE

Main objective: To explore the relationship between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' academic achievement at Mathebe High School.

Specific objectives

- To examine forms of sanitary wear available for girls at Mathebe High school.
- To explore recommendations that can be given to improve the situation of girls during their menstrual periods at Mathebe High School

Introduction:

- **Appreciation**
- **Purpose**
- **Student to be given a number (no names)**
- **Confidentiality**

My name Motsamai Sam I would like us to talk about the nexus between modern sanitary wear accessibility as a basic need and girls' performance at Mathebe High School.

Thank you for sparing your time to meet with me for this meeting.

The purpose of these interviews is for my academic research only.

I will assign each teacher with a

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| | <p>education. Please do not state your name. Instead identify yourself by the number you have been given by the researcher</p> |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of support does the school give girls during their menstruation? • Why is the school not having free modern sanitary wear to offer to girls? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear impact on girls' academic performance? • How does the school deal with girls' absenteeism? • How does inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear give boys an advantage to perform |

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| | better than girls? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there disposable facilities located near classrooms?• To what extent does inaccessibility to modern sanitary wear exacerbate gender inequality at school?• How do boys support girls during their menses? |

End