“THE IMPACT OF PROVIDING REUSABLE SANITARY PRODUCTS TO ADOLESCENT GIRLS ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES IN TANZANIA”

By Christina Thomas Fille

Problem statement
Increasing female education is an important policy priority in many developing countries. Girls lag behind boys in schooling attainment, and female schooling is thought to be important for a variety of development outcomes (Behrman and Rosenzweig 2002, Behrman and Wolfe 1989; Wolfe and Behrman 1987; Glewwe 1999). A number of researchers and policy-makers have argued the importance of menstruation in limiting school attendance and attainment (World Bank, 2005; Beyene, 1989; Herz et al, 1990. Mehrah, 1995; Sommer, 2009). The World Bank has put concrete numbers on the menstruation problem; if a girl misses 4 days of school every 4 weeks due to her period, she will miss 10 to 20 percent of her school days (World Bank 2005; Tjon a Ten 2007). Menstrual hygiene is a critical aspect of women’s health and well-being. Yet, it is often overlooked or stigmatized in many parts of the world. In Tanzania, menstrual hygiene remains a taboo subject often met with silence and shame. In addition, the lack of access to affordable and reliable menstrual hygiene products is a significant barrier to women’s education, employment, and social mobility.

Research Questions
To identify whether providing reusable sanitary products to adolescent girls have impact on school attendance and learning outcomes.

Contribution to Learning
Policy-makers have cited menstruation and lack of sanitary products as barriers to girls’ schooling.

Rebecca Thornton and Emily Oster (2010) evaluated these claims using a randomized evaluation of sanitary products provision to girls in Nepal and found that menstruation has a very small impact on school attendance, they estimate that girls miss a total of 0.4 days in a 180-day school year and improved sanitary technology has no effect on reducing this (small) gap: girls who randomly received sanitary products were no less likely to miss school during their period. They rejected (at the 1% level) the claim that better menstruation products close the attendance gap. Although Rebecca Thornton and Emily Oster got null results, I expect to get different results in Tanzania since it is a different context.

The possible role for menstruation in limiting school attendance has received significant attention in popular media, nearly all of which argues that menstruation is likely to be significant factor in schooling (e.g., Kristof and WuDunn, 2009; Kayiggwa, 2007; Mawathe, 2006; BBC, 2010). For example, Kristof (2009) writes: “education experts increasingly believe that a cost-effective way to keep high school girls from dropping out in poor countries is to help provide them with sanitary products.” These arguments are based largely on anecdotal evidence: girls report missing school during their period and report limited access to modern sanitary products. In response, a number of NGOs and sanitary product manufacturers have begun campaigns to increase availability of
sanitary products, with a stated goal of improving school attendance (Deutsch 2007, Callister 2008, Cooke 2006).

The largest of these is a program by Proctor & Gamble, which has pledged $5 million toward providing puberty education and sanitary products, with the goal of keeping girls in school (Deutsch 2007). The Clinton Global Initiative has pledged $2.8 million to aid businesses who provide inexpensive sanitary pads in Africa; again, the stated goal is improvement in school and work attendance. In addition to these large-scale efforts, a number of smaller NGOs (UNICEF, FAWE, CARE) have undertaken similar programs (Cooke, 2006; Bharadwaj and Patkar, 2004).

Despite the money being spent on this issue, and the seeming media consensus on its importance, there is little or no rigorous evidence quantifying the days of school lost during menstruation or the effect of modern sanitary products on this time missed. Existing evidence is largely from anecdotes and self-reported survey data. This fails to give a sense of the depth of the issue: even if every girl reports missing school one day a year during her period, the problem may be widespread but not large in magnitude. The evidence on sanitary products has similar problems. In this project we will provide the first rigorous evidence on (1) how much school girls actually miss during their periods and (2) the causal effect of modern sanitary technology on school attendance.

**Description of Program**
The Intervention in this study is reusable sanitary products.

**Target Population**
The target population for this study are all secondary schools in Kisarawe District which is in Pwani Region in Tanzania. To avoid spill overs, girls on promotion group should encourage girls on non-promotion group to use the reusable sanitary products.

**Identification Strategy**
I will use Randomized Promotion Design to estimate the impact of providing reusable sanitary products to adolescent girls on school attendance and learning outcomes. The reusable sanitary products will be provided to all secondary schools in Kisarawe District in order to avoid spill overs so that girls on promotion group encourage girls on non-promotion group to use the reusable sanitary products. The girls on promotion group will be reminded to use the reusable sanitary products during their periods by either calling them or sending them a message.

**Data and Outcomes of Interest**
Two rounds of surveys-baseline and endline will be conducted to collect data on intermediate and final outcomes, which include increase in school attendance and improvement in learning outcomes.

I will collect daily data in all secondary schools in Kisarawe District on girls’ school attendance and menstrual calendars for 10 months. This will allow me to directly estimate the impact of periods on school attendance. Further, I will randomize access to reusable sanitary products such as disposable pads, reusable pads, tampons, and menstrual cups (sanitary products which are used internally during menstruation) and I will evaluate the attendance impact.
I will first present estimates of the effect of menstruation on school attendance using official attendance data for every day of the study and time diary data for a subset of days. I will estimate the difference in attendance rate between days on which the girl has her period and days on which she does not, controlling for individual and calendar date fixed effects.

Second, I will use our randomized design to estimate the impact of the reusable sanitary products on school attendance. We will compare attendance rates for girls in the treatment group (who will be given the reusable sanitary products) to girls in the control group. My central estimates focus on estimating treatment effects on days in which girls have their period.

**Power Calculations**

Power calculation estimates will use the latest DHS data for Tanzania, NECTA data and school attendance roster.

**Policy Translation**

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, The National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA), Ministry of Health, and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).

**Implementors**

Softcare Sanitary Pads Tanzania

**References**


