

Project Leaders: Haja Isatu Bah '21, Victoria Thorpe '23, and Elizabeth Gimba '23 (Skidmore College)

Participating Institution: Saint Joseph Junior Secondary School for Girls (JSS)

Country of project: Sierra Leone

Project Title: ***Strengthening the conversation of Menstrual and Sexual and reproductive health among adolescent girls in St. Joseph's JSS, Freetown.***

Background

The prevalent nature of poverty in Sierra Leone disadvantages women in addition to their alienation through female genital mutilation, sexual abuse, less access to education, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and child marriage. Moreover, about 40% of girls are married before they turn 18 (Shakespeare 2020). Most girls and women lack the economic capital to access safe and sustainable menstrual products. Consequently, they use rags or pieces of fabric which are ineffective and unhygienic (WeAreRestless para. 1). Rather than deal with the potential embarrassments and public shame, girls prefer to stay at home and miss classes which eventually leads them to drop out of school. According to Brewah (para. 1) from Good Deeds Sierra Leone, 93% of girls start menstruating without knowing or understanding what is happening. As a result, as much as 20% of school going girls in the country miss school when they are menstruating. Though period poverty significantly contributes to the lack of access to sanitary pads, a research by One Girl (1) reveals that social and cultural beliefs are as much to blame. Talking about periods is a taboo in Sierra Leonean society. Due to a problem that has largely been resolved in major parts of the world, Sierra Leonean girls lose out and are continuously at a disadvantage. Due to first-hand experience of period poverty, lack of access to menstrual and sexual health hygiene, we established this project to educate girls on the topic of menstrual and sexual health.

Team Biography

Name and Major	Role and Experience
Haja Isatu Bah '21 from Sierra Leone. Environmental Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Project Leader 1● Former student of ST. Joseph Secondary School● Project Management Experience● Founder and CEO of Uman4uman
Elizabeth Gimba '23 from Kenya and South Sudan. Neuroscience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Project Leader 2● Partner with Femme International (Kenya)● Certified Menstrual Health Educator
Victoria Thorpe '23 from Sierra Leone. Neuroscience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Project Leader 3● Certified Peer Health Educator● Leadership Training experience

Project Description

Our project seeks to holistically address menstrual, sexual and reproductive health as well as equally significant realms such as sexual violence and period poverty amongst adolescent girls in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Awareness and actions towards the latter will play an instrumental role in not only ameliorating sexual and reproductive health amongst our target group but also give them access to sustainable and healthier alternative menstrual products. We will be collaborating with the Home Economics Department and Guidance & Counselling Unit at Saint Joseph Junior Secondary School, Brookfields, Freetown; one of Sierra Leone's top secondary public schools for girls. We will also be working with UMAN4UMAN, a Sierra Leonean based social enterprise that sells reusable sanitary pads for girls. The packages that will be distributed to the girls will be bought from UMAN4UMAN. We have communicated with them, and they have agreed to sell us a package for \$6, compared to their original price of \$8.

Proposed Intervention

Our project will be based on educating adolescent girls on topics of menstrual and sexual and reproductive health through interactive health literacy workshops on the following topics: sexual violence, consent, menstrual hygiene, personal hygiene, STIs prevention, female genital mutilation, and menstrual health. Our project will be held at St Joseph's JSS, which has an enrollment of 1314 girls between the ages of 11 and 15 years.

Project Timeline

	Date	Activity	Phase
	November-January 2020	Communication with St. Joseph's Junior High School and Uman4Uman on logistics of the process.	Preparation
	December-January 2021	Curation of menstrual health curriculum, pamphlets and interactive menstrual health journals for the girls.	Preparation
	April-May 2021	Purchasing equipment, we are going to use finalizing curriculum with the Home econ dept and guardian counselling unit	Preparation
Week 1	June 14th, 2021	Introduction of the project to the girls with detailed explanations on the timeline.	Execution
	June 15 th , 2021	Narration cafés: Stories, dialogues, and encounters on menstruation with the girls to break the taboo of silence on periods and break the ice in preparation for the project.	Execution
	June 16 th - June 18 th , 2021 (The Day of the African child)	Workshop 1: Distribution of workbooks, brochures, interactive menstruation journals and educational session on the female reproductive system, menstruation, sustainable menstrual products, the menstrual cycle and tracking periods in the interactive journals + trivia	Execution
Week 2	June 21 st - June 22 nd , 2021	Workshop 2: Distribution of reusable pads kits and educational session on psychosocial aspects of menstruation, Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs), Reproductive tract Infections (RTIs) and menstrual hygiene + trivia	Execution
	June 24 th - June 25 th , 2021	Workshop 3: Session on decoding cultural preconceptions of sex, STIs, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sexual violence and consent.	Execution
Week 3	June 28 th , 2021	Workshop 4: Reflection session with the girls and open conversations on aforementioned sessions and future anticipations.	Execution
	June 29 th - July 1 st , 2021	Training of 20 Peer Health Mentors (PHMs) in the school and establishment of a Peer Health Club as a support network and resource for girls in the school. PHMs selected for training are school prefects/ representatives who have already undergone leadership training. Project wrap-up	Execution
	July 2 nd , 2021	Competition: Debate competition and prize giving ceremony: Debate on current menstrual issues in Freetown and sustainable solutions of alleviating the latter. Invited adjudicators will announce the top 3 winners.	Final
Week 4	July 3 rd , 2021	Bimonthly check up on the Peer Health Club and students who participated in the project.	Follow-up

Sources

Brewah, Elizabeth. "Supporting Girls With Sanitary Pads In Sierra Leone". *World Pulse*, 2019, <https://www.worldpulse.com/community/users/elizabethbee/posts/93247>.
One Girl. *We're Talking Periods*. One Girl, Sierra Leone, 2019. Accessed 4 Jan 2021.
WeAreRestless. "These Girls Are Fighting Period Poverty In Sierra Leone | We Are Restless". *We Are Restless*, 2018, <https://wearerestless.org/2018/05/29/these-girls-are-fighting-period-poverty-in-sierra-leone/>.