Addressing adolescent menstrual health and hygiene education for girls in need: A (fem)me project

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ABSTRACT

On one night in 2016, over 500,000 individuals in the United States experienced homelessness, and in 2013, an estimated 2.5 million children endured homelessness. Women’s menstrual health is often an overlooked concern. For adolescent girls experiencing menarche, this life change can be further complicated by unstable housing. The scant literature on menstrual education in this population suggests the need of menstrual education tools for girls affected by homelessness, (fem)me™ - a non-profit in Athens, Clarke County, Georgia, provides feminine hygiene kits for women and girls in need, and an educational pamphlet on menstrual health for adolescent girls in a (fem)me™ for teen program was of interest. A pamphlet was therefore developed in English and Spanish and was assessed for readability. Receptiveness of the pamphlet was evaluated through a focus group with adolescent girls at a local middle school to a positive effect. Recommendations for the future include further focus group discussions, preferably with adolescents from the target population, as well as elicitation of more provider input.

METHODS

1. Two versions of a pamphlet were developed as educational tools: a longer, brochure-style pamphlet and a shorter, bookmark-style pamphlet. The same information was included in both versions.

Stage I: Pamphlet development

- Patient information gathered from American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and Mayo Clinic sites.

- General information and information feedback

- Text was assessed for readability using calculator and rewritten to 5th grade reading level.

Stage II: Assessment of pamphlet receptiveness

- Focus group questions developed from literature and guidelines from University of Kansas Community Tool Box.

- Local organizations were contacted to recruit adolescent girls into focus group.

- Adolescent volunteers were secured with parental consent from Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School in Athens, GA.

RESULTS

- Reception of menstrual health pamphlets

  - Participants found both versions easy to read.

  - "The design is good. It’s easy to read" – Group participant 3

  - 5 of 7 participants preferred the shorter pamphlet to the longer.

  - "I like the short one. It’s easier to read" – Group participant 2

  - 7 of 7 participants thought the pamphlets would be received well by peers.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

- Study limitations include focus group size and demographic, and insufficient number of quantitative questions.

- Living status was not recorded and there were no Spanish-speaking participants. Thus, the group may not reflect the target population.

- Additional quantitative questions may help facilitate more adequate pamphlet assessment.

- Next steps include reworking focus group questions, and implementing additional focus groups that are more diverse in nature.

- Additional input from medical providers will be elicited.

- Success of this intervention can help provide point information for girls in need about menstrual health and help promote more open discussions related to the subject.

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ON ONE NIGHT IN 2016, OVER 500,000 INDIVIDUALS IN THE UNITED STATES EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS, AND IN 2013, AN ESTIMATED 2.5 MILLION CHILDREN ENDURED HOMELESSNESS. WOMEN’S MENSTRUAL HEALTH IS OFTEN AN OVERLOOKED CONCERN. FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS EXPERIENCING MENARCHE, THIS LIFE CHANGE CAN BE FURTHER COMPLICATED BY UNSTABLE HOUSING. THE SCANT LITERATURE ON MENSTRUAL EDUCATION IN THIS POPULATION SUGGESTS THE NEED OF MENSTRUAL EDUCATION TOOLS FOR GIRLS AFFECTED BY HOMELESSNESS, (FEM)ME™ - A NON-PROFIT IN ATHENS, CLARKE COUNTY, GEORGIA, PROVIDES FEMININE HYGIENE KITS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NEED, AND AN EDUCATIONAL PAMPHLET ON MENSTRUAL HEALTH FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN A (FEM)ME™ FOR TEEN PROGRAM WAS OF INTEREST. A PAMPHLET WAS THEREFORE DEVELOPED IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH AND WAS ASSESSED FOR READABILITY. RECEPTIVENESS OF THE PAMPHLET WAS EVALUATED THROUGH A FOCUS GROUP WITH ADOLESCENT GIRLS AT A LOCAL MIDDLE SCHOOL TO A POSITIVE EFFECT. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE INCLUDE FURTHER FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS, PREFERABLY WITH ADOLESCENTS FROM THE TARGET POPULATION, AS WELL AS ELICITATION OF MORE PROVIDER INPUT.

HOMELESSNESS IS THE LACK OF A "FIXED, REGULAR, AND ADEQUATE NIGHT-TIME RESIDENCE." – US Department of Housing and Urban Development

MENSTRUAL HEALTH IS AN OVERLOOKED ISSUE FOR WOMEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. ABOUT ONE HALF OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, AS WELL AS ELICITATION OF MORE PROVIDER INPUT.

OBJECTIVES

1. Assembly of relevant patient information for menstrual health.
2. Creation of age-appropriate pamphlet for (fem)me™ kits.
3. Initial assessment of pamphlet through focus group discussion.

RESULTS

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