

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on menstruating women and girls in Uganda: preliminary findings

Rapid Assessment
June 2020

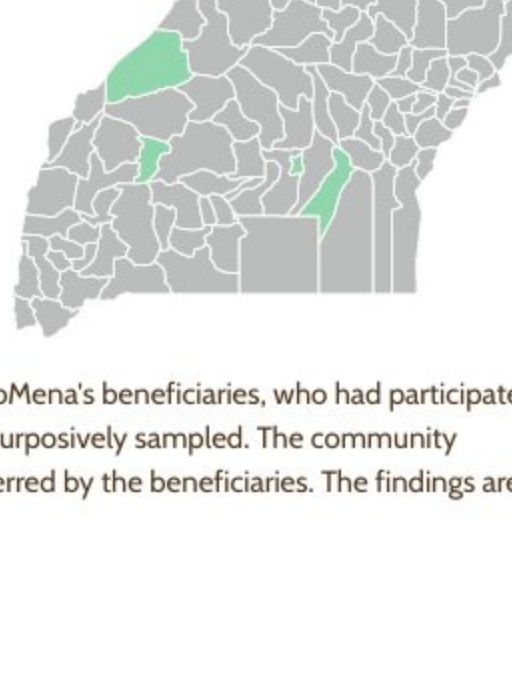
Introduction

This infographic aims to demonstrate the preliminary findings of the rapid assessment conducted by Womena Uganda in collaboration with WoMena's Knowledge Management team from 19-24th of May in six districts in Uganda. The objective was to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on menstruation status and practices, gender-based violence (GBV), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) status, accessibility to markets, Menstrual Health Management (MHM) products accessibility, and livelihoods.

Methods

Key informant telephone interviews were performed between the 19th and 24th of May 2020 among beneficiaries and community members in six districts in Uganda:

- Kampala
- Buikwe
- Gulu
- Adjumani
- Kyegegwa (Kyaka II refugee settlement)
- Kikuube (Kyangwali refugee settlement)



Different sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. WoMena's beneficiaries, who had participated in Womena's MHM trainings and had received MHM products, were purposively sampled. The community members were recruited using snowball sampling as they were referred by the beneficiaries. The findings are therefore indicative only.

Socio-demographic characteristics

In total, there were 65 respondents in the survey, 29 of them were WoMena's beneficiaries and 36 were community members. There were 11 male and 54 female participants with an average age of 25 among the female respondents and 43 among the male respondents. The majority (55%) of the participants were unemployed during the survey.



Findings

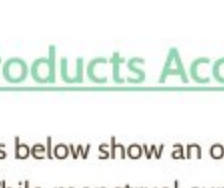
Menstruation Status

35% of the respondents has reported changes in their menstruation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes can be broken down as follows:

Changes in Menstruation (n=18)



High stress level is cited as the leading cause for changes in their menstruation. Other reasons are due to reduced spending on MHM products, violence at home, low food intake, weight loss and restrictions in mobility. The absence of medicines in healthcare centres has exacerbated the situation, resulting in limited access to pain relief methods for women and girls.

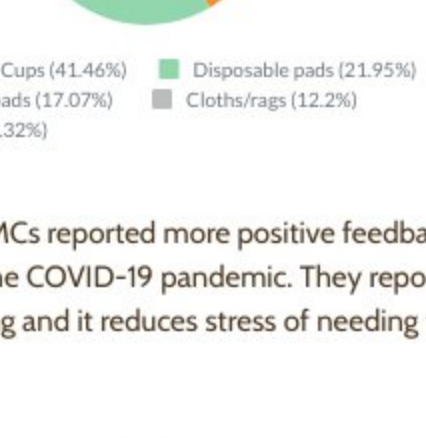


"There is no medicine in our health centres even paracetamol. So this situation has really affected us."

MHM Products Accessibility

The two charts below show an overview of MHM products that WoMena's beneficiaries and community members usually use. While menstrual cups (MCs) and disposable pads are commonly used MHM products of the beneficiaries, community members usually use disposable pads and cloths/rags.

MHM products usage among beneficiaries (n=29)



MHM products usage among community members (n=25)



Those who use MCs reported more positive feedback in terms of accessing MHM products and on managing their periods during the COVID-19 pandemic. They reported that they like the MC because it saves money, takes less water for cleaning and it reduces stress of needing to buy MHM products or asking someone for financial support.



"Mobility isn't easy and shops are closed, so menstrual cups have been of great impact on us."

Various factors have adversely affected the accessibility to MHM products for girls and women:



72% of the respondents reported that there has been an increase in the price of disposable pads in markets, stores and pharmacies from 3.000 UGX to 3.500/4.000 UGX.



Menstruation and GBV

17% of the respondents (11 cases) knew someone or experienced themselves violence (physical/sexual) during the lockdown.

14% of the respondents (9 cases) knew someone or experienced themselves violence because they are using household finances for MHM products.

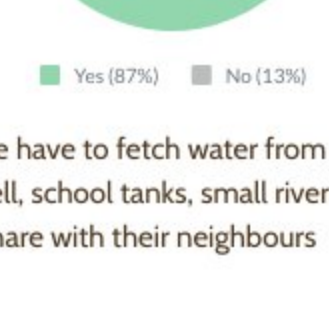
12% of the respondents (8 cases) knew someone or experienced themselves restrictions of using household finances to purchase MHM products. They therefore had to use clothes, blankets, rags or cottons.

"A lot of violence and some have even lost lives because the money is less, so we need to spend on somethings that are considered more essential." (e.g. food)

"A woman was beaten by the husband because she asked him for support and yet he was giving the support to his new wife."

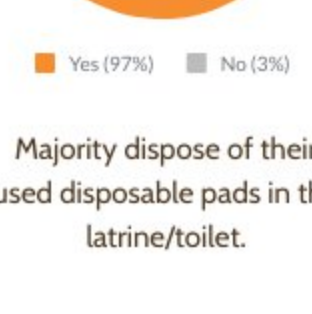
WASH Status

Access to clean running water during the lockdown



Some have to fetch water from the well, school tanks, small rivers or share with their neighbours

Access to toilets/latrines during the lockdown



Majority dispose of their used disposable pads in the latrine/toilet.



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic respondents reported that they wash their hands and clean their homes more often. They also prepare soap and water for visitors and children.

As there is an increased use of water and soap, some households need to pass a long distance to fetch water, which poses challenges and affects their usual hygiene practices.

Livelihoods and Accessibility to Markets

Question: Was your/ your family's ability to carry out livelihoods activities affected in the past month? 70% of the respondents answered YES to this question

The main reported reasons for disruption in carrying out livelihood activities are restrictions in movement, transport limitations, unavailability of livelihood inputs and closure of markets/stores/pharmacies.

85% of the respondents answered YES to this question

Question: Has your household income changed over the past month?

34% of respondents reported that they have had difficulty in accessing MHM products, due to loss of household income.

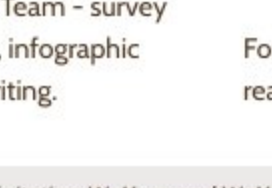
Question: In the past 7 days, has there been a time when you or your family could not access the markets/stores/pharmacies? 48% of the respondents answered YES to this question

Conclusion

As our preliminary findings indicate, the COVID-19 pandemic has had some impact on girls and women in Uganda. In all five research areas, changes were reported by the respondents.

However, various stories were shared by respondents who have sought out solutions to adapt to the new challenges by:

- Engaging daughters and other family members in farming to ensure food security and financial security for MHM products.
- Using cotton, wool, old clothes and blankets.
- Extended help to the community by sensitizing the community of MHM topics.



- 1. Menstruation status**
35% of respondents had changes in their menstruation mainly due to higher levels of stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. MHM products accessibility**
Products are more difficult to access due to i.a. price increases, affected income, shops closures, dependency on breadwinners. MCs were found by many to be extreme useful and beneficial during the lockdown.
- 3. Menstruation and GBV**
12-14% of respondents experienced or knew someone who experienced either physical or economic violence during the lockdown for requiring financial resources to obtain MHM products.
- 4. WASH status**
Due to increased use of water and soap, some households need to fetch water more often from far distances, posing more challenges.
- 5. Livelihoods and accessibility to markets**
The majority of respondents indicated restrictions to carry out livelihood activities (70%) and changes in household income (85%) due to COVID-19.

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Partners of WoMena Uganda:

