Thesis: Overcoming a Cycle of Shame Through Menstrual Education: How Sources of Information Prepare Girls to Detect and Treat Abnormal Menstrual Bleeding [1]

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Keywords: Menstrual health education [2] Menstrual health stigma [3]

Editor's note:

Emily Katherine Santora defended her thesis titled “Overcoming a Cycle of Shame Through Menstrual Education: How Sources of Information Prepare Girls to Detect and Treat Abnormal Menstrual Bleeding” in 2021 in front of committee members Jane Maienschein, Karin Ellison, and Ben Hurlbut earning her a Master of Science degree. [4]

Abstract:

In the US, menstrual education, which provides key information about menstrual hygiene and health to both young girls and boys, historically lacks biologically accurate information about the menstrual cycle and perpetuates harmful perceptions about female reproductive health. When people are unable to differentiate between normal and abnormal menstrual bleeding, based on a lack of quality menstrual education, common gynecological conditions often remain underreported. This raises a question as to how girls’ menstrual education experiences influence the ways in which they perceive normal menstrual bleeding and seek treatment for common abnormalities, such as heavy, painful, or irregular menstrual bleeding.

A mixed methods approach allowed evaluation of girls’ abilities to recognize abnormal menstrual bleeding. A literature review established relevant historical and social context on the prevalence and quality of menstrual education in the US. Then, five focus groups, each including five to eight college-aged women, totaling thirty-three participants, allowed for macro-level analysis of current challenges and gaps in knowledge related to menstruation [5]. To better examine the relationship between menstrual education and reproductive health outcomes, twelve semi-structured, one-on-one interviews allowed micro-level analysis. Those interviews consisted of women diagnosed with endometriosis [6] and polycystic ovary [7] syndrome, common gynecological conditions that include abnormal menstrual bleeding. Developing a codebook of definitions and exemplars of significant text segments and applying it to the collected data revealed several themes. For example, mothers, friends, teachers, the Internet, and social media are among the most common sources of information about menstrual hygiene and health. Yet, women reported that those sources of information often echoed stigmatized ideas about menstruation [9], eliciting feelings of shame and fear. That poor quality of information was instrumental to women’s abilities to detect and report abnormal menstrual bleeding. Women desire and need biologically accurate information about reproductive health, including menstruation [9] and ovulation [8], fertility, and methods of birth control [9] as treatments for abnormal menstrual bleeding. Unfortunately, menstrual education often leaves girls ill-equipped to identify and seek treatment for common gynecological conditions. Those findings may influence current menstrual education, incorporating biological information and actively dismissing common misconceptions about menstruation [9] that influence stigma.

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Subject

Topic
Reproduction [21] Disorders [22]