



# Menstrual Hygiene Management and School Absenteeism: A Comparative Study of Adolescent Girls Living with HIV in Rural Zimbabwe, 2004

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## Abstract

Adolescent girls living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa face compounded vulnerabilities, which may include challenges in managing menstruation. The specific impact of menstrual hygiene management on school attendance for this population in rural settings requires clearer quantification. This study aimed to quantify the association between menstrual hygiene management challenges and school absenteeism among adolescent girls living with HIV in rural Zimbabwe. A secondary objective was to compare these findings with existing data on their HIV-negative peers. A comparative, cross-sectional survey was conducted in rural health clinics. Structured questionnaires were administered to a purposive sample of adolescent girls living with HIV, capturing data on menstrual hygiene practices, material use, and school attendance. A comparative analysis was performed against previously published regional data for HIV-negative adolescents. Girls living with HIV reported significantly higher school absenteeism during menstruation compared to regional peers. Sixty-eight per cent missed at least two school days per menstrual cycle, primarily due to pain and fear of leakage. Inadequate menstrual hygiene materials and a lack of private water, sanitation and hygiene facilities at school were strongly associated with increased absenteeism. Menstrual hygiene management challenges are a significant contributor to school absenteeism among adolescent girls living with HIV in rural Zimbabwe, likely exacerbating existing educational and health disparities. This association appears more pronounced than for their HIV-negative peers. Integrated school health programmes should specifically address the menstrual hygiene management needs of adolescents living with HIV. Interventions must include provision of reliable materials, improvement of school water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, and integration of menstrual pain management into routine HIV care services. Menstrual hygiene, HIV, adolescent health, school absenteeism, Zimbabwe, comparative study, rural health This study provides comparative evidence quantifying the disproportionate impact of menstrual hygiene management on education for girls living with HIV.

**Keywords:** *HIV/AIDS, menstrual hygiene management, school absenteeism, adolescent health, sub-Saharan Africa, comparative study*

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