Reviewer's report

Title: 'The girl with her period is the one to hang her head' Reflections on menstrual management among schoolgirls in rural Kenya

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Reviewer: Melissa Kang

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General comments
This manuscript reports on an interesting study that adds to the small body of knowledge in this area. The study explores an important human rights issue. There are many deficiencies however in the manuscript, and with significant revision it could be greatly improved.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Abstract – Methods
(Method of) analysis needs to be stated in the abstract.

2. Background
The Background is too long; it is divided into 2 sections (literature review and research setting) both of which can be significantly shortened without losing important information. The introductory paragraph (immediately after the heading “Background”) plus these two sections should be combined into a succinct summary of the research context, what is already known about the issue/s and what the research question/s is/ are. The authors need to be explicit about what the identified issue/s is/are, what has been researched / published before on this issue and what their study will add to the body of knowledge. For example, this study specifically looked at menstrual management which other studies appear not to have done.

3. Methods
The Methods section also needs significant revision so that it is clear what research design was selected and why, followed by sample and sampling, data collection and analysis.

Currently the Methods section first mentions data collection (called ‘research activities’ which is not an appropriate academic term in this context) then goes straight into describing the number of focus groups and the sample size in those, then mentions sample selection method. The authors mention a broad range of study participants but it is not clear why they included “Teachers, Parents, Shopkeepers and Schoolboys” [nor are results for any of these other groups except Teachers presented in Results – see comments below in (4)]. Descriptions of the audiorecording and the careful way in which interviews and recording were
explained to study participants need to be summarised. Data analysis is not well explained. A “second phase of data collection” is mentioned in the paragraph on analysis – was this built into the study design (if so why, and it must be mentioned earlier in the Methods section). How was inter-rater reliability achieved?

Important issues are mentioned in the first two paragraphs of the Results section that belong in Methods.

The authors report that “Focus groups discussions and interviews...grew...long as girls...requested guidance from the moderator and one another ... [and] ...began an impromptu demonstration on how to sew a homemade pad”.

While this seems important and perhaps ethical in light of apparent need of the participants, it does appear that the researchers/ moderators were not able to guide or contain the groups in keeping with accepted focus group process. It appears that the focus groups (which are a specific and defined qualitative research method) became part-group discussion, part-education sessions and this may affect the nature and purity of the data being collected. This is at least my perception in reading the Results and it would be good if the authors clarify this. This should be included in the Methods section, not at the beginning of Results.

The authors then go on to describe the application of a theoretical framework (Social Cognitive Theory) to data analysis which was not mentioned in the Methods. In fact the authors state in Methods that “At the outset of data analysis there were no pre-defined codes” and they do not mention a theoretical framework for either data collection or analysis. This iterative process of coding stages and the discovery that SCT would be a useful way to understand the data and code it further should also be stated in the Methods. The authors need to be very clear about what happened and what they actually did and why.

4. Results

This should be just as the title suggests – presentation of the research findings. The number of interviews and focus groups should be summarised in the first paragraph (a table might be useful).

The findings should next be presented under headings and subheadings as the authors have done with illustrative quotes. The findings from Teacher interviews presented in the “Personal Feelings” section are a rich source of triangulated data to support what the young women report. Triangulation of data is not mentioned in Methods either and it is not clear whether interviews with Parents, Schoolboys and Shopkeepers actually took place. If they did but the data being presented in this paper have been limited to Schoolgirls and Teachers this needs to be stated at the beginning of Results (and why).

The findings presented are very rich and interesting, but nevertheless this whole section could be summarised and edited down to be more succinct.
5. Discussion

The Discussion is also lengthy and repetitive. The findings of this study should be compared to previous research but there is no need to repeat what is already in the Background section. There is no need to go into detail about the findings of other studies, when this study has already reported rich data and detail. The authors need only make a brief statement or comparison about how their study was similar to and/or different from comparable studies. References in the Discussion to two RCTs to examine the impact of provision of menstrual management information and / or equipment needs to be linked to whether the authors see this as a recommendation of their own study or whether such interventions arose from their own data. There needs to be brief discussion about limitations of this study and whether further research is required before interventions can be recommended. The Conclusion section is not a conclusion but puts forward important recommendations for policy and practice, and these need to go into the Discussion. The Conclusion needs to be very brief, making bold and summary statements about what the study found, what this means in terms of (women’s) health and human rights and ‘where to from here’.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.