

MENSTRUATION, STIGMA, & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

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EXPLORING THE EFFECTS
OF PERIOD STIGMA
ON FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

BACKGROUND SIGNIFICANCE

There is no state-wide sex education curriculum to which school systems in North Carolina must adhere. Reproductive health education programs are only required to teach students information that has been considered “factually accurate or pathological information” related to the human reproductive system. Many curricula used in the state do not discuss the stigma or the many psycho-social aspects of menstruation for young girls. Not only is there a lack of depth to the curriculum as it stands, but parents can also opt their child out of the classes. This lack of focus on menstruation is a manner that stigma is produced and reproduced, impacting the self-esteem, academic achievement, health, and dignity of menstruating young girls and adolescents.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was primarily a literature review that analyzed stigma and its effect on young girls, the stigmatization of menstruation, and the role of menstruation hygiene products. It also analyzed both North Carolina's laws and individual school district policies regarding reproductive health education.

FINDINGS

- Reproductive health education in NC begins in the 4th - 5th grade with puberty classes; students may be segregated by gender during these classes.
- Many young girls worry about attending school while on their period in fear of teasing and embarrassment. Some would rather skip school than attend while menstruating.
- Misinformation regarding menstruation is prevalent among young boys, which can lead to teasing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Require that *all* students learn about menstruation during the 4th - 5th grade puberty classes together.
- Incorporate a period stigma module during the 4th - 5th grade puberty classes.
- Post relevant information regarding the curricula onto district's website, similar to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools;
- Provide teachers/school staff/bathrooms with menstrual hygiene products for students to minimize the stigma that attends those who might not have their own products.