



Building further evidence for the relevance and importance of adopting sustainable solutions for tackling period poverty in Lebanon

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Executive summary

With the aim of building momentum on the relevance and importance of producing and distributing locally made reusable sanitary pads to tackle period poverty in Lebanon, this assessment provides further needed evidence on: 1) an estimation of the number of women of reproductive age affected by poverty in Lebanon in need for menstrual hygiene products; 2) a cost-effectiveness analysis for the production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads (versus disposable pads); and 3) current menstrual hygiene practices and acceptability for reusable sanitary pads following the intervention by UNFPA and Akkarouna.

We estimated that around 927,693 women (15-49 years old) currently residing in Lebanon are affected by poverty and are at risk of period poverty (in possible need for menstrual hygiene products). The estimate is based on the most recently available sources, but with caveats in the assessment pointed out.

For the cost-effectiveness analysis, the cost of reusable sanitary pads was compared to the current cost of disposable pads purchased by UNFPA, and the current cost of disposable pads available in the market. Reusable sanitary pads have a life cycle of usage of a minimum of 12 months (13 cycles) so we examined the cost effectiveness of this pad compared to a year-supply of disposable pads. The cost of the reusable sanitary pads distributed by UNFPA is around 18.2 USD. Shifting to reusable sanitary pads (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) in 2 years saves UNFPA 30% of the cost and thus allows UNFPA to reach more women in the long run. Using the market price for disposable sanitary pads, shifting to reusable sanitary pads (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) in 1 year saves women 36% of the cost, allowing women to save money after 9 months of using reusable sanitary pads.

In order to assess current menstrual hygiene practices and acceptability for reusable sanitary pads following the intervention by UNFPA and Akkarouna, an explanatory mixed methods design was adopted where the qualitative data built upon the results of the in-depth analysis of the quantitative data. For the pre-post quantitative assessment, a total of 141 beneficiaries were matched in the pre- and post- survey to investigate the effect of the intervention. Qualitative data was collected through two key informant interviews with two social workers and one Akkarouna staff, and two focus group discussions with a total of 10 vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee women.

The study revealed the changes in menstrual hygiene-related practices among these women following the intervention implemented by Akkarouna, the actual acceptability of reusable sanitary pads, the changes in purchasing practices, and a decrease in the employment of negative coping strategies.

Targeted beneficiaries reported that the main challenge for inadequate access to menstrual hygiene-related products was price inflection. This has led women to opt for lower-quality or cheaper products or to adopt negative coping strategies to alleviate the situation on themselves or their daughters/ sisters. While women aged more than 25-year-old were comfortable using home-made reusable pads, women aged less than 25-year-old preferred disposable sanitary pads. However, following the intervention, there were changes in the usage of sanitary pads. Although young women (under the age of 25) still preferred the use of disposable sanitary pads, they started using reusable sanitary pads as daily pads or during the last one or two days of their period. As for women aged above 25-year-old, while some women switched fully to reusable sanitary pads and felt comfortable during all days of menstruation, most women used disposable pads during the first days of their period or when there is heavy blood flow and switched to reusable sanitary pads during the following days. Additionally, many women reported using reusable sanitary pads as daily pads. Regarding other practices, women reported an improvement in the frequency



of changing pads, as they used to keep the pad for longer hours to reduce the number of pads used during one cycle and save money.

The concept of reusable sanitary pads was generally well-welcomed and accepted by beneficiaries involved in the surveys and/or FGDs, especially among those who are aged above 25-year-old and among those who already used home-made pads. It was reported that the reusable sanitary pads are comfortable, soft, well-supported by a shield, hygienic, pocket-friendly, and environment-friendly. It was also reported that these pads didn't cause any discomfort in relation to allergies, infections, itching or bad smell. Still, women reported several challenges such as low absorbent capacity, a low number of distributed pads (especially when women shared the pads with their daughters), washing issues due to water shortage, and drying issues.

With regard to purchasing practices, there was a decrease in purchasing feminine gel and an increase in purchasing shower gel and soap. In fact, the survey results showed that there was a significant decrease in the amount of money spent on menstrual hygiene products. FGDs showed that most women used this amount of money to buy things/ necessities for the house, and very few women used the saved amount to buy menstrual hygiene products (mainly disposable pads) of better quality.

Concerning the potential impact of reusable sanitary pads on overall well-being, survey participants reported a decrease in relying on negative coping strategies related to menstrual hygiene products, a reduction in stress and tension during the menstrual period, and a significant decrease in missing work or school following the intervention.

For the future adoption and use of sanitary pads, targeted beneficiaries reported that they would be willing to use them in the future if the pads were improved as per their recommendations. These included increasing the thickness of pads, increasing the number of pads, increasing the number of awareness sessions (specifically targeting young women), and expanding the outreach program to others. Key informants, on the other hand, suggested that women must first become users of the product so they can be convinced by it and accordingly use it in the future, so they recommended distributing these pads to the largest possible number of women in society. In addition, they highlighted the importance of word of mouth, and how women can affect other women's opinions after they are happy with the product. As for the challenges, one major challenge reported by most targeted beneficiaries for the future adoption of sanitary pads was cost. Although the price of reusable sanitary pads might be cheaper than disposable pads in the long run, it might be difficult for women to spend such an amount of money in one go. To overcome the barrier of cost, women suggested buying the items step-by-step until they get the needed/ sufficient number of pads and shields for themselves and their daughters.

In light of this assessment's findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

Advocacy

1. In order to tackle period poverty in Lebanon, UNFPA, other United Nations (UN) agencies, and governmental entities should continue advocating for the mainstreaming of menstrual hygiene management within already existing structures. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) should mainstream MHM within the Primary Health Care package (as part of the Sexual and Reproductive Health package, and the personal hygiene service package). The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) can further mainstream MHM within its protection package in the social development centers. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) should incorporate to a greater extent MHM in schools, mainly by updating the curricula to include MHM as well as including it in extra-



curricular activities. The Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET) can invest in developing and implementing programs that provide or subsidize the menstrual hygiene needs of marginalized populations. The Ministry of Industry (MoI) and the Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) can mainstream MHM through developing advocacy activities and enforcing standards for the practices of reusable sanitary pads production, in line with international standards.

2. At the level of the community, relevant entities, NGOs, and civil society should develop well-planned advocacy plans to fight the social stigma around MHM, specifically targeting male-headed households.
3. UNFPA, other relevant entities, and governmental organizations should advocate and promote for the use of reusable sanitary pads in the community, as this is a fundamental girl and woman right. This could be through the implementation of media campaigns (TV, social network, online platforms) or, for example, by assigning representatives in relevant institutions such as PHCs or supermarkets to promote and normalize its use. Showcasing the three cost scenarios (purchasing disposable pads, purchasing reusable sanitary pads and purchasing a mix of both) would be an effective tool.

Coordination

4. UNFPA, other UN agencies, governmental institutions, and local partners, should coordinate to establish a multi-sectoral approach for MHM to ensure optimal integration and implementation of services. In particular, there should be proper planning and collaboration between the private as well as public sectors in the country,
5. UNFPA and other relevant entities such as UN agencies, humanitarian actors, and NGOs producing and/or distributing menstrual hygiene kits should coordinate to further expand their outreach to vulnerable women and girls increasingly affected by period poverty.
6. UNFPA, other relevant entities, and NGOs producing and/or distributing menstrual hygiene kits should further leverage resources and create markets to produce culturally-appropriate reusable sanitary pads based on the availability and prices of raw vs. imported materials.

Knowledge generation

7. UNFPA should engage in the development of a policy brief, explaining the urgency of mainstreaming MHM, especially in the current context, and highlighting the relevance of switching to reusable sanitary pads for health, social integration and women's economic empowerment purposes. The brief would also present the findings of this assessment and other available data, and provide recommendations to use for advocacy and policy change.
8. UNFPA, through implementing partners, should conduct additional pilot studies in different contexts and living conditions (such as informal settlements) in order to assess the actual acceptability of reusable sanitary pads, as well as check for any other concerns or challenges, raised by beneficiaries. This allows for better and more effective production of reusable sanitary pads.

9. Following this pilot intervention, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis should be conducted to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of reusable sanitary pads vis-à-vis disposable pads; the opportunities to improve its positioning, and what may be emerging threats coming from competitors, evolution in consumer preferences and other factors.
10. Local NGOs producing reusable sanitary pads should conduct feasibility studies to expand their production and distribution of these pads to the local market for women to purchase them out-of-pocket and at subsidized cost.
11. UNFPA, other relevant UN agencies, governmental institutions, humanitarian actors, and local organizations should integrate MHM monitoring and evaluation (M&E) into their ongoing M&E sexual and reproductive health and rights outreach and awareness-raising activities to measure the impact of their policies and programmes. UNFPA and other entities should survey the same participants before intervention delivery and post intervention delivery, in order to quantify the impact of interventions.
12. The Ministry of Environment (MoE) along with local and international NGOs, governmental institutions, and humanitarian actors should conduct an environmental impact assessment to compare the effect of disposable vs. reusable sanitary pad production in terms of waste management and energy use.
13. UNFPA and other relevant UN agencies should advocate to assess unmet needs for menstrual hygiene management using nationally representative large-scale surveys.

Capacity development

14. Actors involved in the provision of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services should implement structural changes to ensure the availability of clean and practical latrines and washing basins as well as maintain proper access to WASH facilities including access to clean and safe water.
15. UNFPA and other relevant entities should build the capacity of local community-based organizations supporting marginalized women, for the production of reusable sanitary pads, as well as other MHM products such as soaps. Such programs would contribute to women's economic empowerment. The Ministry of Industry (MoI) and the Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) can support small-scale industries in the production of reusable sanitary pads, including compliance with international standards.
16. UNFPA and other relevant entities should create a supportive environment to fight social stigma and build social acceptability for the adoption of reusable sanitary pads. Trusted sources, such as UNFPA implementing partners working on gender-based violence and reproductive health should give these educational sessions, especially that these activities fall within their organizations' objectives and current activities.



Service provision

- 17.** UNFPA, and other relevant entities such as UN agencies, should replace the disposable pads included in the dignity kits with reusable sanitary pads as a sustainable cost-effective solution.
- 18.** UNFPA, and other relevant entities including PHCs (whether supported by MoPH, MoSA or other entities) should distribute (for free or at a subsidized cost) reusable sanitary pads to the highest possible number of vulnerable women visiting the centers.
- 19.** Following this assessment, local NGOs producing reusable sanitary pads should be informed about the experiences of women and take into account their recommendations in order to produce improved pads that meet women's expectations.

MHM education

- 20.** At the level of community, NGOs and civil society should implement nationwide campaigns and awareness sessions that aim towards de-stigmatizing "menstruation" and encouraging the use of reusable sanitary pads. The campaigns should specifically target young women and adolescents which are the most reluctant target groups concerning its usage. For example, as part of the campaigns, the development and dissemination of a short video with a young influencer could be an effective way to target young women and adolescents.
- 21.** UNFPA, and other relevant entities, should develop simple, attractive, and animated educational material on reusable sanitary pads: what they are, their benefits, and how they are used, washed, and dried. The information material should also include, among others, the following messages:
 - The difference between home-made and reusable sanitary pads.
 - Reusable sanitary pads are for personal use and not to be shared with other family members.
 - Reusable sanitary pads need to be washed with cold water and require a limited amount of water.
 - Reusable sanitary pads are made from cotton 100%, and accordingly, they don't cause any health risks related to allergies, infections, irritations, or itching.
 - Reusable sanitary pads are more cost-effective than disposable pads in the long run.



List of abbreviations

CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
DfG	Days for Girls
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ILO	International Labor Organization
KI	Key Informant
LIBNOR	Lebanese Standards Institution
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoET	Ministry of Economy and Trade
Mol	Ministry of Industry
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MSNA	Multi-sector needs assessment
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PHC	Primary Healthcare Center
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VASyr	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene



Background

Period poverty is a “global issue affecting women and girls who don’t have access to safe, hygienic sanitary products, and/or who are unable to manage their periods with dignity, sometimes due to community stigma and sanction”¹. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has recently described it as “the struggle many low-income women and girls face while trying to afford menstrual products. The term also refers to the increased economic vulnerability women and girls face due the financial burden posed by menstrual supplies. These include not only menstrual pads and tampons, but also related costs such as pain medication and underwear”².

As Lebanon faces economic, financial, and social crises which were further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, 82% of the total population in 2021 has been reported to be living in multidimensional poverty, a percentage that has doubled from 42% in 2019³. Poverty rates among Syrian refugees, hosted in the country since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, have also been consistently high and worsening⁴.

Increasing poverty rates among nationals and Syrian refugees are likely to have implications on women and girls’ menstrual hygiene management (MHM), yet there is limited evidence from Lebanon (whether among its nationals or refugees) on period poverty. A recent needs assessment aiming to determine priority needs and risks emerging from the COVID-19 outbreak and affecting the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee adolescents and their families revealed that a key need in health is for menstrual pads. 35% of adolescent girls (69% Syrian, 31% Lebanese) reported not having physical access to local shops within walking distance to buy menstrual pads, and 66% (55% Syrian, 45% Lebanese) do not have the financial means of securing these items, with particular difficulties in Akkar⁵. Furthermore, while 74% of female caregivers do have access to a shop to buy pads, only 47% (36% Syrian, 64% Lebanese) can afford to do so. A 2021 national study conducted by Fe-Male, a local NGO, in partnership with Plan International, a UK-based NGO, found that the sharp increase in prices was the major barrier for accessing menstrual hygiene products, affecting 76% of women and girls from Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian communities.”⁶ According to the market assessment conducted by Statistics Lebanon, the increase in prices was between 98 and 234% for products made in Lebanon compared to an increase between 66 and 409% for imported products⁶. These challenges have led women and girls to adopt various coping strategies such as switching the product type, reducing the consumption of these products or using them for longer periods than they are intended for, using less sanitary means (e.g., tissues, cloths)⁶.

For the last decade, UNFPA has been distributing dignity kits to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese through their implementing partners – over 25 national and international NGOs all over Lebanon. These

¹ Action Aid. Period Poverty. 2020. Available on <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/womens-economic-empowerment/period-poverty>

²United Nations Population Fund. 2022. Menstruation and human rights - frequently asked questions. Available on <https://www.unfpa.org/menstruationfaq#Period%20Poverty>

³ ESCWA. 2021. Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021) Painful reality and uncertain prospects https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-_multidimensional_poverty_in_lebanon_policy_brief_-_en.pdf

⁴ UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2021 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. Available on <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90589>.

⁵ Plan International Lebanon. COVID-19 Multi-sectoral needs assessment. April 2020.

⁶ Fe-Male, Plan International. 2021. Period Poverty in Lebanon. Research Study. Data collected by Statistics Lebanon – August 2021. <https://www.fe-male.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Plan-International-Fe-Male-research-on-Period-Poverty-in-Lebanon.pdf>



kits include age, gender and culturally appropriate garments and other items in addition to basic hygiene items and sanitary supplies such as disposable sanitary pads and soaps⁷. With the increasingly complex humanitarian context in Lebanon and decrease in international aid, UNFPA was interested in adopting a more sustainable and cost-effective solution such as reusable sanitary pads which could offer a better solution for vulnerable Lebanese as well as Syrian refugees who are increasingly affected by the economic, financial and COVID-19 crises and unable to secure their basic needs, let alone their menstrual supplies.

Accordingly, in 2020, UNFPA commissioned a study to assess the hypothetical acceptability and potential utility of reusable sanitary pads among vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees by examining the beliefs and practices related to MHM from the perspectives of potential beneficiaries, implementing partners and other key informants (*thereafter referred to as the 2020 UNFPA assessment*). The qualitative assessment, which was complemented with a cost-effectiveness analysis comparing locally produced reusable sanitary pads to a year-supply of disposable pads revealed challenges in the availability, affordability and accessibility to key menstrual hygiene products, mainly sanitary pads, soap and feminine hygiene wash. The increasing prices of these products have led women and adolescents to opt for their less preferred items or to adopt coping strategies to alleviate the situation on themselves or their families/siblings. Some have either stopped purchasing certain goods to be able to buy disposable pads, or women have opted to using cloth themselves to be able to provide disposable pads for their daughters. The concept of reusable sanitary pads was generally well welcomed whether by Lebanese or Syrian adolescents and adults, especially among those who were using cloth at time of study rather than disposable pads, and other stakeholders. However, they expected several challenges for its potential use, none of which was related to culture or religion. Challenges revolved around absorbent capacity, disgust from washing the reusable sanitary pads, cost of cleaning products and clean water, raising concerns about possible infections. Syrian refugees expected additional issues related to privacy in washing and hanging the reusable sanitary pads given the stigma around menstruation. The cost of purchasing a set of reusable sanitary pads was reported as a major challenge despite recognizing its cost-effectiveness in the long-run. Given the recent increases in prices of disposable sanitary pads, increasing social acceptability for reusable sanitary pads was highlighted as the access point to overcome the barrier of cost, whether these would be paid for by the beneficiaries themselves or subsidized by international organizations.

Based on these findings, UNFPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with SOS Children's Villages Lebanon, a non-governmental, non-profit social development national association, to produce reusable sanitary pads. In turn, SOS Children's Villages signed an agreement with Days for Girls (DfG) to train its staff on the production of reusable sanitary pads. DfG is an international NGO, who produces reusable sanitary pads locally and had previously partnered with various NGOs in Lebanon for the distribution of reusable sanitary pads as well as provide health education.⁸ As a result, 5,000 kits of reusable sanitary pads were produced in late 2021 and stocked for distribution through a comprehensive plan.

In 2022, UNFPA initiated a pilot for the distribution of 498 kits through Akkarouna, an implementing partner in the North of Lebanon, between mid-April and end of June. Akkarouna, in partnership with UNFPA, has been working for the past two years at primary healthcare centers (PHCs) to provide sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and referral to gender-based violence (GBV) services as well as awareness sessions on SRH and GBV to vulnerable women and girls in Tripoli. The recent intervention

⁷ United Nations Population Fund. UNFPA basic dignity kit. Available on <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-basic-dignity-kit>

⁸ Anera. Hygiene kits help Syrian refugees live with dignity. Available on <https://www.anera.org/stories/hygiene-kits-help-syrian-refugees-live-dignity/>



involved giving awareness sessions on menstrual hygiene and the distribution of the reusable sanitary pads' kits to beneficiaries by social workers. The latter had attended a training session provided by the AUB-WISH programme in collaboration with UNFPA on SRH and were introduced to the concept of reusable sanitary pads. At the PHC, social workers first gathered demographic information of patients who were either walk-in individuals or referrals, but who in both cases would benefit from the services provided at the PHC. Social workers then identified who was eligible to get reusable sanitary pads; these were adolescent girls/women aged above 12-year-old excluding pregnant and postmenopausal women. Once the recruitment process was completed for the day, a baseline assessment was done face-to-face and then the social workers invited the beneficiaries to a private closed room to conduct the awareness sessions. At the end of the awareness sessions, one kit was given to every woman distributing a total of 498 kits within 1 month (mid-April to mid-May). The social workers conducted a post-assessment by phone with beneficiaries at least 6 weeks after the distribution of the kit (to give them time to use the reusable sanitary pads at least once). Thus, the pilot study took 2.5 months to be completed.

Study objectives

To build momentum on the relevance and importance of producing and distributing locally made reusable sanitary pads to tackle period poverty in Lebanon, this study provides further needed evidence on:

1. An estimation of the number of vulnerable as well as women affected by poverty in Lebanon in need for menstrual hygiene products
2. A cost-effectiveness analysis for the production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads (versus disposable pads)
3. Current menstrual hygiene practices and acceptability for reusable sanitary pads following an intervention by UNFPA and Akkarouna.

The outputs will support in the proposition of policy and programme recommendations.

Project timeline

The assessment was launched on September 12, 2022 following a week of consultations with the UNFPA Lebanon office to refine the scope of research. The first three weeks involved the in-depth analysis of the quantitative dataset, the development of qualitative data collection tools, and data collection for the cost-effectiveness analysis. Qualitative data collection took place on weeks 2 and 5. Estimation of women/vulnerable population in need of menstrual products was conducted in weeks 3 and 4. Data analysis and report writing were done simultaneously and the final report was submitted on December 16, 2022 (Appendix 1). Dissemination of study findings will take place in February 2023.



Methods

This assessment involved:

1. An estimation of the number of women of reproductive age affected by poverty in Lebanon in need for menstrual hygiene products
 2. A cost-effectiveness analysis for the production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads (versus disposable pads)
 3. An explanatory mixed methods design where the qualitative data explain and/or build upon the results of the in-depth quantitative analysis of the data collected from the Akkarouna pilot study surveys.
1. **An estimation of the number of women of reproductive age affected by poverty in Lebanon in need for menstrual hygiene products**

An estimated number of women of reproductive age affected by poverty was determined. By conducting a search, we relied on the most recent published reports to determine this estimate. In Lebanon, no recent census is available for the Lebanese population, thus a range number was estimated based on published reports such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) report and Central Administration of Statistics (CAS). For the number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, we relied on the ILO report, the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon (VASyr) report and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported numbers. For poverty assessment, we relied on percentages of multidimensional poverty published by different agencies for Lebanese (ESCWA) and refugees (VASyr). To assess the number of women/girls in need for menstrual hygiene products, we relied on prevalence of *'relying on less preferred types of menstrual items'* as reported by the multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) 2022. It is important to note that we present estimates of potential number of women in need for MHM. We highlight in the results the potential sources of errors in these estimates.

2. **A cost-effectiveness analysis for the production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads**

For the cost analysis, we collected details on the cost of reusable sanitary pads (from microfiber material, cost of washing soap, cost of labor to produce the pad, cost of the water used to clean the pad and other costs related to production, cost of distribution) from Days for Girls, SOS Children's Villages Lebanon and UNFPA. These were compared to the current cost of disposable pads purchased by UNFPA and the current cost of disposable pads available in the market using the same methodology adopted in the 2020 UNFPA assessment.⁹ Reusable sanitary pads have a life cycle of usage of a minimum of 12 months (13 cycles) so we examined the cost effectiveness of this pad compared to a year-supply of disposable pads.

⁹ UNFPA. (November 4, 2020). Assessment of the potential acceptability and utility of using reusable sanitary pads, and needs for health education/ awareness raising on menstrual hygiene among vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee women and girls.



3. Explanatory design mixed methods

In-depth analysis of the data retrieved from the Akkarouna pilot study surveys

Out of the 498 beneficiaries who received the intervention, a random sample of beneficiaries was selected. A total of 254 beneficiaries were interviewed in the pre-assessment survey before receiving the reusable sanitary pads. A total of 249 beneficiaries were interviewed for the post-assessment survey at least 6 weeks after the distribution of the kit. A total of 141 beneficiaries were matched in the pre- and post-assessment.

Survey data were linked with the demographic data of the beneficiaries including marital status, nationality, age, and whether the beneficiary has children or not. Using the linked demographic and survey data, the primary aim was to assess the intervention's acceptability and feasibility by reporting the uptake of the intervention.

Analysis

We first examined data quality by examining missing data, and outliers. The descriptive statistic was used to assess the demographic characteristics of the sample. We reported prevalence differences to measure the intervention uptake and outcomes. Outcomes included pre-post analysis of access and usage of different menstrual hygiene products, and reasons for poor access, frequency of changing menstrual hygiene products, use of reusable sanitary pads, acceptability for reusable sanitary pads, purchasing practices of menstrual hygiene products, change in menstrual vulnerability related to employment of negative coping strategies related to menstrual hygiene as well as mobility and social interaction. We also assessed the difference in intervention uptake by age of participants (younger than 25 years old/older than 25 years old) by stratifying the data. The analysis was conducted using Stata 17.

Interviews with implementers of the intervention and focus group discussions with beneficiaries

Development of research tools

Topic guides of interviews with key informants (KIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries were developed by the research team based on published literature and the 2020 UNFPA assessment.

Recruitment

Implementers of the intervention

We conducted one interview with two social workers who were trained on the reusable sanitary pads and whose role was to introduce these to women and girls, and the project manager from Akkarouna.

The interviews covered topics related to the intervention (administration of the awareness session, feasibility, any challenges faced), and their views of the potential benefits and impact of the distribution of reusable sanitary pads kits (Appendix 2).

Focus group discussions with beneficiaries who have received the reusable sanitary pads kit

The selection criteria of potential beneficiaries to take part in FGDs depended on the analysis of preliminary quantitative results and was informed by the interviews conducted with the project manager and social workers following appropriate consultations with UNFPA. As some quantitative findings



differed by age, separate FGDs were conducted for beneficiaries younger than 25 years old and those older than 25 years old. We aimed to recruit 6 – 8 beneficiaries per FGDs.

The FGD participants were identified through Akkarouna. Potential participants were informed of the purpose of the FGD prior to attending.

As the qualitative assessment aimed to further understand the survey results on beneficiaries' perceptions and experiences with the use of reusable sanitary pads, the FGDs topic guides were developed once the survey's preliminary findings were analyzed.

The topic guide covered topics related to menstrual hygiene related practices, actual acceptability and utility of reusable sanitary pads, stigma associated with use of reusable sanitary pads, extent of implementing recommendations included in the awareness sessions and potential impact of these kits on improving wellbeing during menstruation, decreasing employment of negative coping strategies, and increasing mobility and social interaction (Appendix 3). Using the cost-effectiveness analysis, we also presented different scenarios of usage of disposable pads only, reusable sanitary pads only, or a mixture of both with their costs to investigate how price affects women's choices (Appendix 4).

Interviews and FGDs were conducted face-to-face. Verbal consent was taken from KI and beneficiaries prior to the start of the discussion. All interviews and FGDs were recorded after consent was given by all attendees.

Ethical considerations

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to decline to participate without affecting their relationship with UNFPA or the implementing agency or the services they obtain through them. The team ensured participants that all the information they provide will remain confidential and no names will be retained.

Data analysis

Detailed notes/transcripts of FGDs and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings

1. Estimated number of vulnerable as well as women affected by poverty in Lebanon in need for menstrual hygiene products

We estimated that around 927,693 women (15-49 years old) currently residing in Lebanon are affected by poverty and are at risk of period poverty (in possible need for MHM) (Table 1). The estimate is based on the number of women 15-49 years old residing in Lebanon, the percentage of multidimensional poverty experienced by Lebanese and refugees, and the percentage of vulnerable population relying on less preferred MHM items. At each point of the calculation, we point out in Table 1 the potential sources of error in the estimate. Thus, the estimate is based on the most recently available sources but with caveats in the assessment pointed out. For future household surveys in Lebanon, it would be essential to quantify the unmet need for MHM.

Table 1- Estimated potential number of vulnerable women affected by poverty in Lebanon in need for menstrual hygiene products

Population	Number of women 15-49 years old residing in Lebanon	Multidimensional poverty	Coping strategy employed relying on less preferred MHM items	Estimated number of vulnerable as well as women affected by poverty	Estimated number of vulnerable women affected by poverty in possible need for menstrual hygiene products
<i>Potential errors</i>	<i>Accurate estimation of number of 15-49 years old women in Lebanon are not available.</i>	<i>Lebanese poverty assessment was conducted before the most recent crisis. A prediction was done based on the data available. We used the predicted poverty levels for Lebanese population.</i> <i>Poverty changes based on age, gender and marital status and employment (prevalence not available for 15-49 years old women)</i>	<i>The need is estimated based on coping strategy adopted reported in a survey. This is an assumption that this is the need.</i>		
Lebanese	1,836,000 in 2018 ¹⁰	82% in 2021 ¹¹	44% in 2022 ¹²	1,505,520	662,428
Refugees (Syrian and Palestinian)	550,000 in 2018 ⁹	91% in 2021 ¹³	53% in 2022 ¹¹	500,500	265,265
TOTAL estimated women at risk for period poverty estimate that is based on several assumptions noted					927,693

¹⁰ Labor Force and Household Living Conditions Survey 2018-2019 Lebanon

¹¹ ESCWA Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021) Painful reality and uncertain prospects

¹² Multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) Key Findings WASH (2022)

¹³ VASYR

2. The cost-effectiveness analysis for the production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads (versus disposable pads).

Calculations for the future production of reusable sanitary pads (UNFPA side)

The cost of the reusable sanitary pads distributed by UNFPA is around 18.2 USD including 2 shields, 6 liners, 1 pair of underwear, 2 plastic bags, 1 fabric bag and 2 soaps (Table 2). The average cost of 1 disposable pad based on UNFPA pricing is around 0.05 USD in 2022, while the average cost of 1 disposable pad in the market in October 2022 is 0.11 USD.

Table 2- Price of one distributed reusable sanitary pads kit

Items	Source for price	Number of items	Price/ unit (USD)	Price/ items (USD)
Shields	Days for girls	2	2.5	5.0
Liners	SOS	6	1.5	9.0
Underwear	UNFPA	1	0.5	0.5
Plastic bag	UNFPA	2	0.1	0.2
Fabric bag	UNFPA	1	3.0	3.0
Soap	UNFPA	2	0.27	0.5
TOTAL				18.2 \$

As shown in Table 3A, when examining 1 cycle per woman the cost of UNFPA disposable pad is 1 USD, while the cost for 26 cycles is 26 UDS. Shifting to reusable sanitary pad (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) becomes more cost-effective for UNFPA at 18 months. Shifting to reusable sanitary pads (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) in 2 years saves UNFPA 30% of the cost and thus allows UNFPA to reach more women in the long run.

We show in Table 3 B, the market price for a disposable sanitary pad is USD 2.2, while the cost for 13 cycles is USD 28.6. Shifting to reusable sanitary pads (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) in 1 year saves women 36% of the cost and thus allows women to save money especially after 9 months of using reusable sanitary pads.

Table 3- UNFPA price and market price cost of disposable sanitary pads versus cost of reusable sanitary pads over varying number of cycles

A. UNFPA price

UNFPA price of disposable pads Cost of 1 disposable pad based on UNFPA prices is 0.05 USD Average 2 packets per dignity kit. 20 disposable pads per woman		Reusable pads per woman including 2 shields 6 liners 1 underwear 2 plastic bag 1 fabric bag and 2 soap	
USD Price 1		USD Price	
1 Cycle per woman	1.0		18.2
6 Cycles per woman	6.0		18.2
9 Cycles per woman	9.0		18.2
13 Cycles per woman	13.0		18.2
18 Cycles per woman	18.0		18.2
26 Cycles per woman	26.0		18.2

UNFPA starts saving at 18 months
Save 30%

B. Market price

The market price of disposable Cost of 1 disposable pad in the current market 0.11 USD Average 2 packets per dignity kit. 20 disposable pads per woman		Reusable pads per woman including 2 shields 6 liners 1 underwear 2 plastic bag 1 fabric bag and 2 soap	
USD Price 22		USD Price	
1 Cycle per woman	2.2		18.2
6 Cycles per woman	13.2		18.2
9 Cycles per woman	19.8		18.2
13 Cycles per woman	28.6		18.2
18 Cycles per woman	39.6		18.2
26 Cycles per woman	57.2		18.2

Women starts saving at 9 months
Save 36%
Save 54%
Save 68%

3. Current menstrual hygiene practices and acceptability for reusable sanitary pads following intervention by UNFPA and Akkarouna

Findings from this assessment provide insight into current menstrual hygiene practices and acceptability for reusable sanitary pads following the intervention by UNFPA and Akkarouna, using the quantitative data collected from the Akkarouna pilot surveys, the qualitative data collected from interviews and FGDs, and the cost-effectiveness analysis.



Characteristics of beneficiaries

Beneficiaries who participated in the Akkarouna pilot study surveys

A total of 498 beneficiaries received reusable sanitary pads from UNFPA via Akkarouna. Beneficiaries included Lebanese (69.7%) and Syrian and Palestinian refugees (30.3%) attending one PHC center in Tripoli. The majority of beneficiaries were married (83.7%), older than 26 years old (84.3%) and had children (86.5%) (Table 4).

Intervention delivery

In the pre-assessment, 47% of participants mentioned that they were receiving menstrual hygiene assistance, while in the post-assessment, 100% of participants indicated receiving menstrual hygiene assistance in the form of in-kind assistance (dignity kits or others).

In the post-assessment, 99.2% of women indicated receiving information about MHM training. It is also important to note that all the participants reported proper access to water, cleanser, and a bathroom. Thus, the report assesses the impact of the intervention in the context of proper access to water and a bathroom.

For the pre-post assessment, a total of 141 beneficiaries were matched in the pre- and post-survey to investigate the effect of the intervention (Table 4).

Table 4- Characteristics of beneficiaries

	Total beneficiaries	Pre-Post analysis
Total N	498	141
Nationality n (%)		
Lebanese	347 (69.7%)	118 (83.7%)
Syrian/Palestinian refugees/others	151 (30.3%)	22 (16.3%)
Age (mean and SD)	35.9 (10.9 SD) min 13 max 63	35.4 (11.2SD) Min 15 max 58
Age		
Younger than 25 years old	78 (15.7%)	35 (24.8%)
Older than 26 years old	427 (84.3%)	106 (75.2%)
Marital Status		
Married	417 (83.7%)	115 (81.6%)
Divorced	20 (4.0%)	4 (2.8%)
Widowed	11 (2.2%)	3 (2.1%)
Single	50 (10.0%)	19 (13.5%)
Has children		
Yes	431 (86.5%)	116 (82.3%)
No	67 (13.5%)	25 (17.7%)



Beneficiaries who participated in the FGDs

Two FGDs were conducted at Akkarouna offices with a total of ten vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian women. The first FGDs included 6 women above 25 years old, and the second 4 women under 25 years old.

Menstrual hygiene-related practices

Menstrual hygiene-related practices pre-distribution of reusable sanitary pads

In the context of the recent economic crisis and the various challenges faced by vulnerable populations in Lebanon, all survey participants (100% of participants) mentioned that the reason for inadequate access to menstrual products was price inflation. KI highlighted that many women had to switch to lower-quality or cheaper products as alternatives to the sanitary pads usually used. For instance, they started using towels, sewn in a pad-like shape, to be used during menstruation.

“The lady doesn’t even call it a towel. Because she spent time sewing it and working on it, she doesn’t consider it a towel or a cloth. She considers it a sanitary pad.” – Social worker

In fact, KI mentioned that while a significant proportion of Syrian women were already familiar with the use of home-made reusable pads, a higher percentage of Lebanese women were switching to these during these hard economic times.

FGDs with Lebanese and Syrian women revealed that women aged more than 25-year-old were comfortable using home-made reusable pads, while women aged less than 25-year-old preferred disposable sanitary pads. Accordingly, mothers were obliged to buy sanitary pads for their daughters.

“When a husband gives a certain amount of money to his wife in the early morning, she has to take away from the amount set for lunch, to get the pads for her daughter because she can’t use anything other than these sanitary pads.” – Lebanese woman aged above 25-year-old

Yet they reported buying them from the cheapest stores such as one-dollar shops, random places on the street, or shops that sell the product in boxes (unknown brands).

“Before the crisis, we used to buy good-quality products, but then we had to switch to cheaper products. The ones we previously used were made of cotton, but now we have to get them made of nylon, which [unfortunately] causes a bad smell, itching, and infections.” – Lebanese woman aged less than 25-year-old

Menstrual hygiene-related practices post-intervention

The surveys revealed a decrease in the usage of less favorable items during menstruation such as toilet paper (3% pre to 0% post), and towels (77% pre to 9% post) (Figure 1). A shift in usage of pads was noted with an increase in usage of reusable sanitary pads (55% pre to 71% post) and a decrease in usage of disposable pads from 100% in pre to 85% in post-assessment (Figure 1).

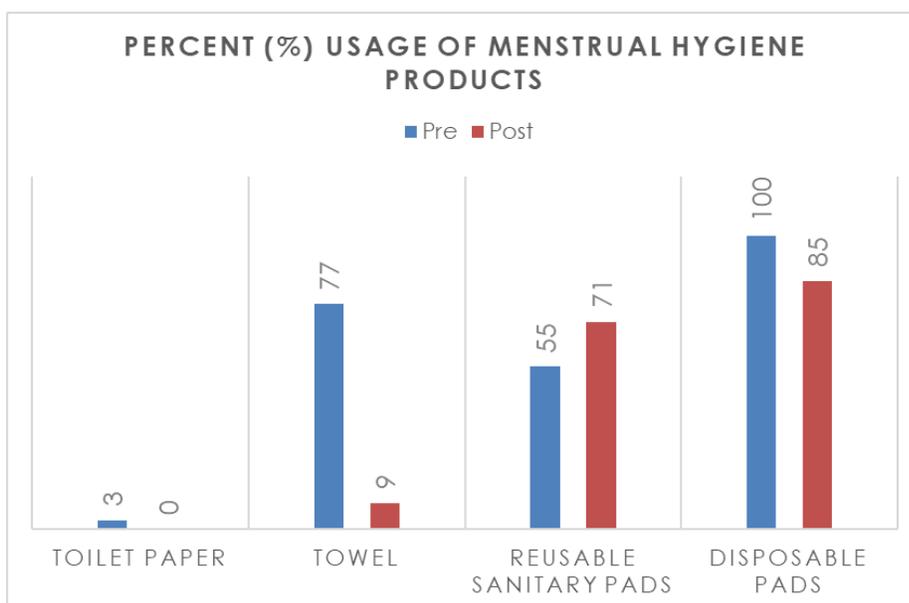
KI involved in the intervention delivery highlighted that the usage of sanitary pads among women differed according to their age. For example, women under the age of 20 were very clear and honest about it. They mostly refused to try reusable sanitary pads during their menstruation cycle and preferred the usage of disposable pads. This was supported by the results of FGDs, where women above 25-year-old reported that it was hard for them to convince their young daughters to try using them. Additionally, women under the age of 25-year-old who participated in the FGDs reported that they still used and preferred disposable pads during menstruation, while they used reusable sanitary pads as daily pads or during the last one or two days of their period,

“A lot of young women still use disposable pads during their period. They use reusable pads, the ones you distributed, only as daily panty-liners, outside their menstruation cycle.” – Lebanese woman aged above 25-year-old

“I even tell her [woman younger than 25 years old who received the reusable sanitary pads kit] “Please try it”, she says “No, no, I am afraid, I go to school, I have [things to do], I am afraid, ... I don’t want to.”” – Social worker

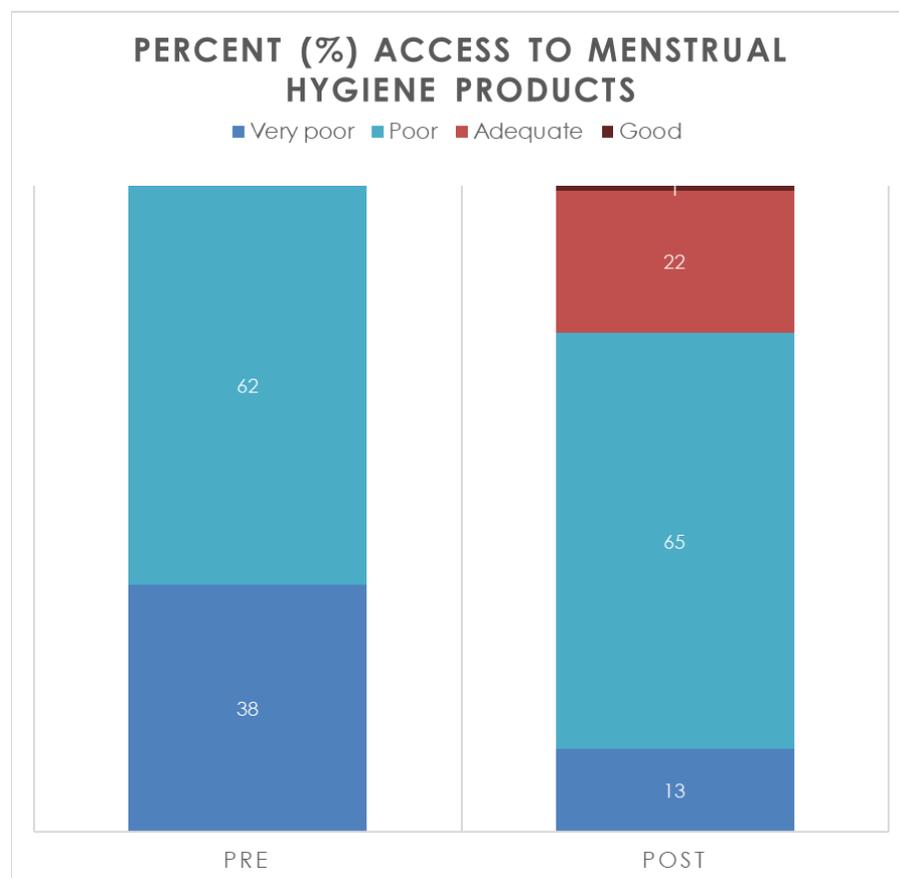
As for women aged above 25-year-old, KI highlighted that most women aged 26-40-year-old used a combination of disposable and reusable sanitary pads while women aged above 40-year-old used primarily reusable sanitary pads. In more detail, FGDs revealed that while some women were always using reusable sanitary pads and were comfortable with them during all days of menstruation, most women used disposable pads during the first days of their period or when there is heavy blood flow and would switch to reusable sanitary pads during the following days. Additionally, many women reported using reusable sanitary pads as daily pads, and few women reported putting two or three reusable liners on top of each other during their menstruation or used them while at home only (they used disposable pads when outside home).

Figure 1- Pre-post menstrual hygiene products usage



In summary, following the intervention, access to menstrual products and supplies improved. While none of the survey participants indicated adequate or good access to menstrual products in the pre-assessment, 23% of participants reported adequate or good access in the post-assessment (Figure 2). The mean score of access significantly improved from 1.61 [1.53; 1.69] in the pre-assessment to 2.10 [2.01; 2.21] in the post-assessment with higher scores indicating better access. None of the participants reported restricting the usage of menstrual products for younger females in the household.

Figure 2- Pre-post access to menstrual products

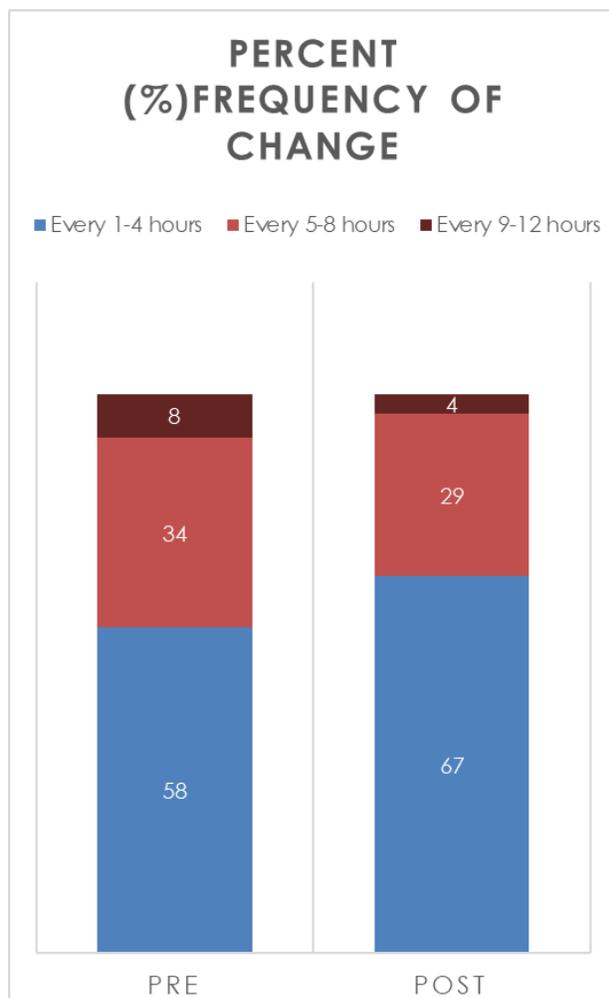


Changes in hygiene practices

Regarding hygiene practices, survey participants reported an improvement in the frequency of changing (disposable/reusable) pads. In the pre-assessment, 58% of participants reported changing pads every 1 to 4 hours, while 67% reported this in the post-assessment (Figure 3). Women who participated in the FGDs, especially those who have multiple daughters, revealed that they used to keep the pad for longer hours to reduce the number of pads used during one cycle and save money. However, following the intervention, they reported being able to change the pad more often/ frequently.

“Of course, there was a big difference. Instead of changing the pad three times per day, now, we are able to change it six times a day.” – Lebanese woman aged less than 25-year-old

Figure 3- Pre-post frequency of changing pads



Acceptability for reusable sanitary pads

Preconceived acceptability (before the distribution of reusable sanitary pads)

KI reported that women of older age who were already familiar with the concept of reusable sanitary pads from their grandmothers' old practices or those who already used home-made reusable pads, showed acceptability to this concept during the awareness sessions. On the other hand, younger women showed some resistance to this idea.

"[Younger] women refused the idea at the beginning. [They commented] "You want us to go back in time?", [I replied] "We want you to go back for your health" ... we want to go back to the old healthy habits." – Social worker

Still, KIs had to explain to women who already use home-made reusable pads that these reusable sanitary pads differed from the ones they were using.

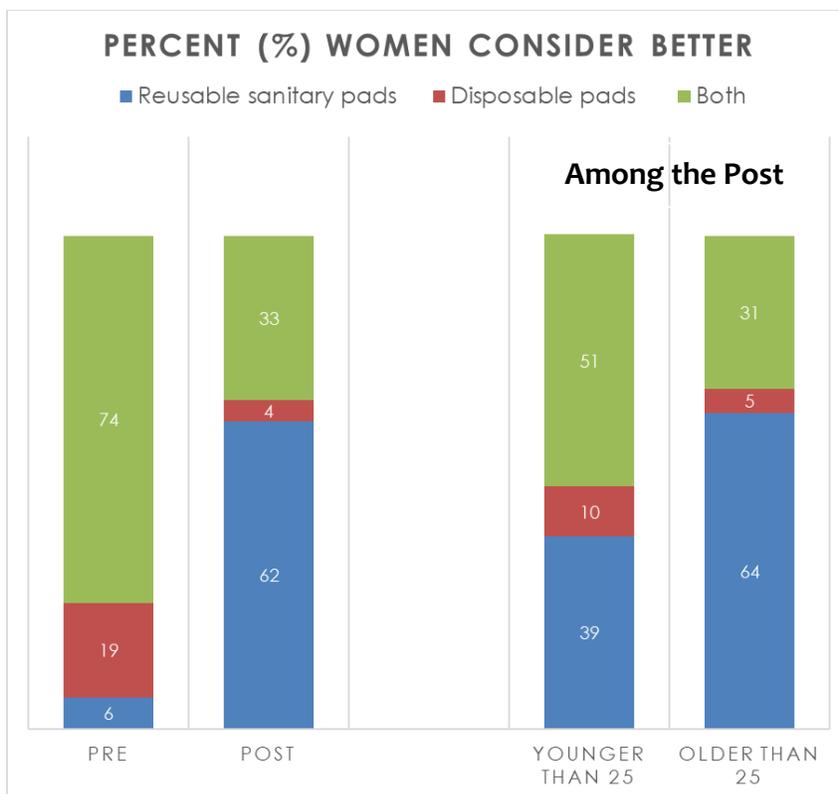
“[When beneficiaries saw the reusable sanitary pads] they commented “Oh, it’s like my grandmother’s” ... “I also use these pads”. [I replied], “your grandmother used to use white pads, and you used to be shy when using them”. I start to explain that we want to facilitate things for them. A woman shouldn’t be shy, this is her right.” – Social worker

Post-intervention acceptability

A shift in the perception of what is considered better was noted between pre- and post-survey assessments. In the pre-assessment, 6% of participants reported considering reusable sanitary pads as better than disposable pads while in the post-assessment, 62% of participants reported this. This was also highlighted during the FGDs as this shift in perception was mainly due to the good quality of reusable sanitary pads as compared to the home-made pads and the low-quality disposable pads.

In fact, acceptability differed in the post-assessment by age of participants. While women older than 25 years tended to prefer primarily reusable sanitary pads (64%), younger participants preferred to combine and use both at the same time (51%) (Figure 4). However, it is important to highlight that usage of sanitary pads was different from what women preferred to use mainly due to the challenges they faced and issues that bothered them when using the reusable sanitary pads.

Figure 4- Pre-post consideration for pads, segregated by age





In the post-assessment, participants’ data on using reusable sanitary pads included open text view (Figure 5). Data was cleaned and grouped into themes. In terms of positive comments, the most frequently reported theme included that reusable sanitary pads mainly helped improve saving (reported 108 times), did not cause any allergy or yeast infection (reported 70 times), or itching (reported 45 times) and were of good quality (reported 41 times). Reusable sanitary pads were reported to also be comfortable (33 times), hygienic (31 times), soft (5 times) and did not cause any leakage (20 times), or a bad smell (9 times). Three participants reported that reusable sanitary pads are environmentally friendly. This is in line with the FGDs results where women reported that they liked the reusable sanitary pads because they are well-supported by a shield, soft (made of cotton), easy to clean, pocket-friendly, and environment-friendly.

Figure 5-Positive themes related to using reusable sanitary pads, frequency reported

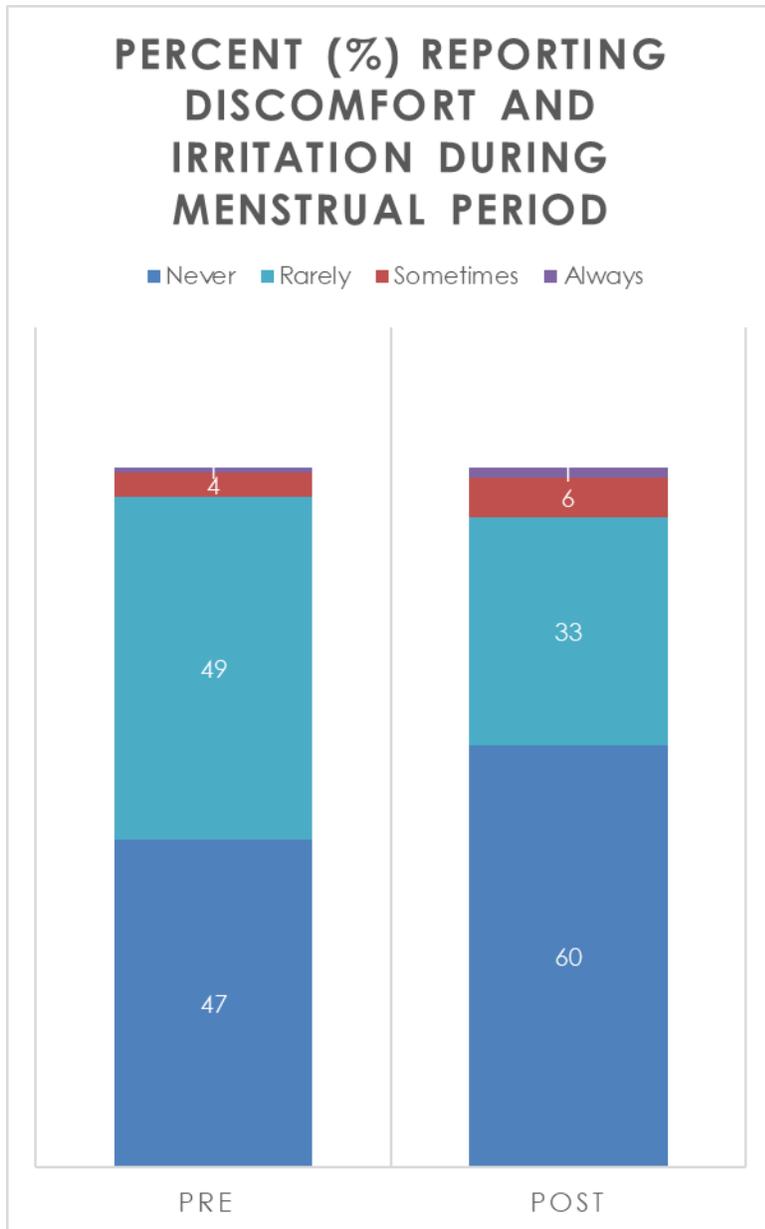


The surveys and FGDs reported conflicting information on discomfort and irritation. Survey participants did report a decrease in discomfort and irritation during menstruation due to the usage of blood absorbing material (Figure 6). While, 47% reported never experiencing discomfort in pre-assessment and 60% in post-assessment, around 40% of participants still experienced it post-assessment. We are unable to report on the main reasons of this discomfort (whether the newly distributed reusable sanitary pads or the ongoing use of low-quality disposable pads), yet women in FGDs highlighted that the reusable sanitary pads did not cause any discomfort in relation to itching/ irritation, smell, or allergic reactions/ infections. Women also reported that the use of reusable sanitary pads, in the long term, costs less than visiting doctors in a month time due to itching caused by the use of disposable pads.

“Especially when you go shopping; when you have long distances, and you put it, it never moves from its place [this one is supported with a shield unlike the cloths/ home-made pads we use], it is very nice.” – Lebanese woman aged more than 25-year-old

“It saved [us a lot of] money. We used to buy lotions or medicines for infections [now, no], so it did save a lot of money.”- Syrian women aged less than 25-year-old

Figure 6- Pre-post discomfort and irritation



The concept of reusable sanitary pads was generally accepted among Syrian women from before the intervention due to extended periods of living in poor conditions. Following the intervention, there was greater acceptability among Lebanese women as compared to the pre-crisis situation, mainly due to the economic challenges faced by these women.

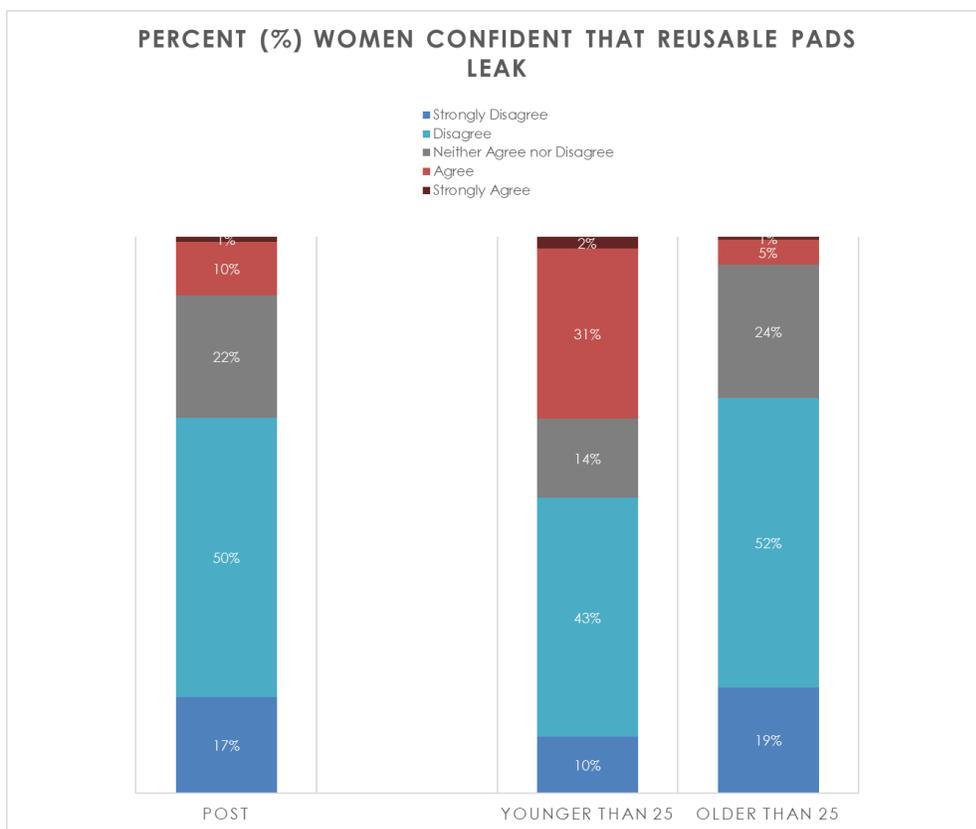
“This is true [the higher acceptability among Lebanese due to the current situation] ... Lebanese women felt very comfortable [when using reusable sanitary pads]. She tells you “I was relieved from something called itching, from allergic reactions”. You know, the ones who asked me about the availability of the pad at the market, ... were Lebanese.” – Social worker

Reported challenges with the use of reusable sanitary pads

The survey findings aligned with those of the FGDs regarding preferred products to use. Most women who participated in FGDs preferred to use disposable pads during the first couple of days of menstruation, mainly due to reported low absorbent capacity and, the limited number of distributed liners. In fact, 11% of survey participants felt confident that reusable sanitary pads would leak. Women younger than 25 years old were significantly more likely to report that reusable sanitary pads would lead to leaks (red) (Figure 7). While 33% of women younger than 25 years old believe that the reusable sanitary pads would leak compared to 6% of women 25 and above. Women in FGDs and KI interviews reported on the thin layers of liners as the main reason for leakage.

“During the first couple of days [of menstruation], I use disposable pads, while during the last three days, I use these [reusable sanitary pads]. This is because I have heavy blood flow, and the absorbance is not enough... No, I didn’t feel comfortable because the liners are small. It [the liner] should be bigger and thicker” – Syrian woman aged less than 25-year-old

Figure 7- Confidence that reusable sanitary pads leak, segregated by age



Another challenge faced by women is that the number of distributed liners, which is 6, was considered low especially for the mothers who divided their kits in half to allow their daughters to use it. The number of liners was also considered low as the drying process may take longer with balconies not being exposed enough to the sun. Also, several women highlighted the issue of water shortage in Tripoli as a barrier for washing pads regularly.

“Why are we asking for more liners? Because there is water scarcity, there is no water to wash it [on daily basis]. Also, it’s winter now, it needs time to dry.” – Lebanese woman aged more than 25-year-old

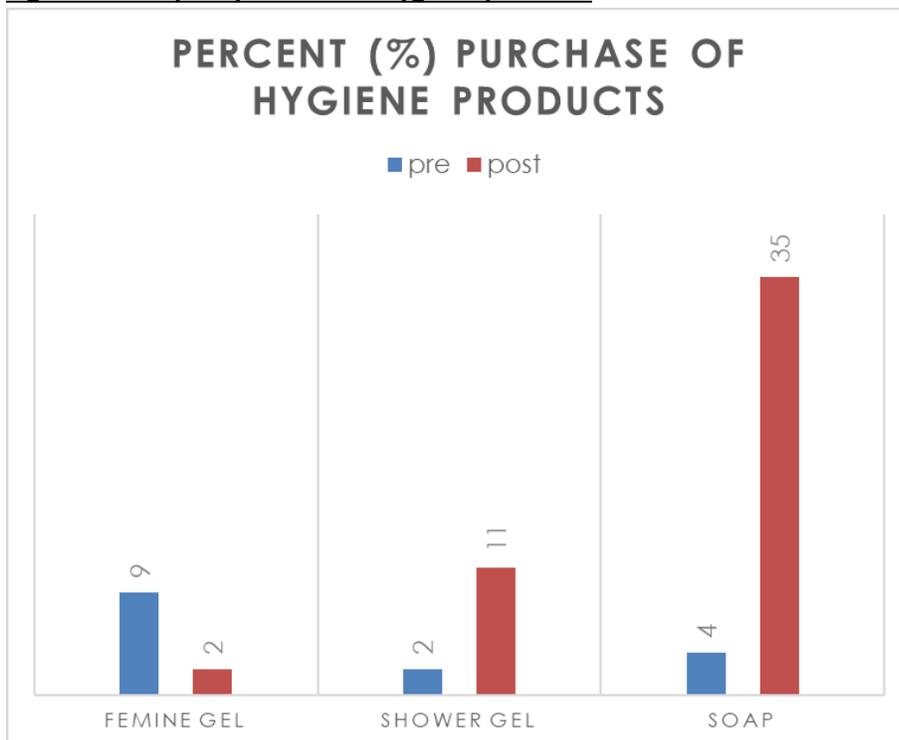
Furthermore, most women complained about the color of pads, mainly red and blue, which causes discoloration in washing.

Purchasing practices

In relation to purchasing practices, survey participants reported a decrease in purchasing feminine gel (9% pre to 2% post), and an increase in purchasing shower gel (2% pre to 11% post) and soap (4% pre to 35% post) (Figure 8). The increase in purchase of soaps is in line with what KI reported about an increased purchase of soaps among women replacing the purchase of disposable pads.

“One woman informed me, I stopped paying 80,000 and 90,000 for the pads; instead, I am paying 20,000 and 30,000 for the soap (like the one you gave us) from the pharmacy.” – Social worker

Figure 8- Pre- post purchase of hygiene products



In fact, survey participants reported a significant decrease in the amount of money spent per month on menstrual products (mean of 124,33 L.L. pre-assessment to 79,106 L.L. post-assessment) (Figure 9). Moreover, the FGDs revealed that women were able to save money during the last period and accordingly, most women used this amount of money to buy things/ necessities for the house, and very few women used the saved amount to buy menstrual hygiene products (mainly disposable pads) of better quality.

“When I used to buy disposable pads, I used to suffer from allergic reactions. Currently, with the use of reusable pads, I use the money I save to buy disposable pads of better quality so I don’t experience any allergies. Yes, that’s true, the pads I used to get were made of nylon, they have a smell and cause allergic reactions and itching. Now, I never buy these, I buy disposable pads made of cotton - of better quality” – Lebanese woman aged above 25-year-old

Figure 9- Pre-post mean amount of money paid monthly on menstrual products



Willingness to buy reusable sanitary pads (if available in the market)

When KI were asked about their expectations of whether women would be willing to buy reusable sanitary pads if available at the market, they assumed that women who were already using home-made reusable pads and felt more comfortable and relaxed when using the distributed reusable sanitary pads would be willing to buy them out-of-pocket. This is especially true for women using them as daily panty liners as the frequent use of the distributed reusable pads would decrease their shelf life.



“One woman asked me “Can I get them [reusable pads] from the market?” I told her “We’re now conducting studies, and I hope soon, once the product is available at the market, we will let you know.” – Social worker

“If it was the same price, they won’t buy it.” – Akkarouna staff

During the FGDs, when women were first shown the prices of each item included in the distributed kit, they all agreed that the items were very expensive, and they preferred buying disposable pads. However, when they were shown the different scenarios and how they would be saving money in the long run, they agreed that this would be more cost-effective and they would be willing to buy them in the future, especially that the use of reusable sanitary pads were more comfortable and healthier for them. They added though that a one-sum payment to buy the kit would be difficult and suggested buying the pads gradually every month, until every female household has a sufficient number of pads for herself

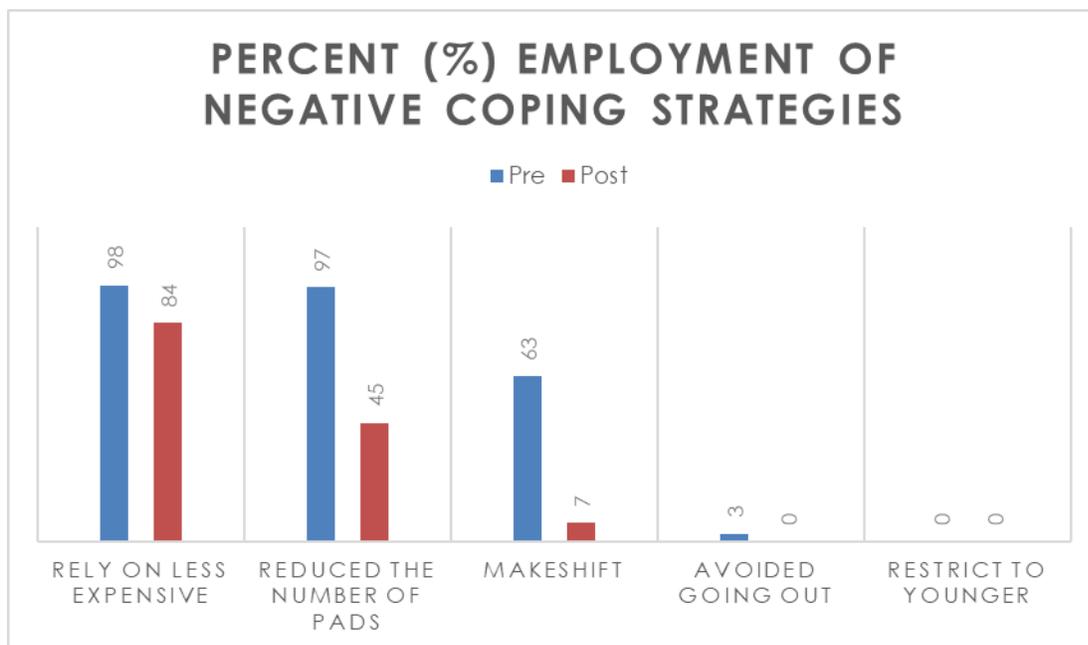
“The issue is that a person looks at how much she is paying at this moment, not how much she is paying in the long term. For example, if I were in a shop and I was told that this is for 67,000L.L. and these are for 640,000L.L., I would definitely buy the ones that cost 67,000LL.” – Lebanese woman aged less than 25-year-old

“I think they should make one box/ packet for reusable sanitary pads like the ones they make for disposable pads. The box/packet could include, for example, 7 to 10 pads. This way, I will pay for it knowing that it will last for two to five years... Honestly, instead of buying disposable pads every month for every daughter, I will divide this number of pads between my daughters, and [step by step] I will buy more pads [until I buy the needed number of pads for each daughter].” – Lebanese woman aged above 25-year-old

Potential impact of these kits on decreasing employment of negative coping strategies, and increasing mobility and social interaction

Survey participants reported a decrease in relying on negative coping strategies related to menstrual hygiene products (Figure 10). As detailed above, participants were less likely to rely on less expensive quality disposable pads (98% pre to 84% post), less likely to reduce the number of pads (97% pre to 45% post), less likely to use/make their own menstrual hygiene products (63% pre to 7% post) and less likely to avoid going out (3% pre to 0% post).

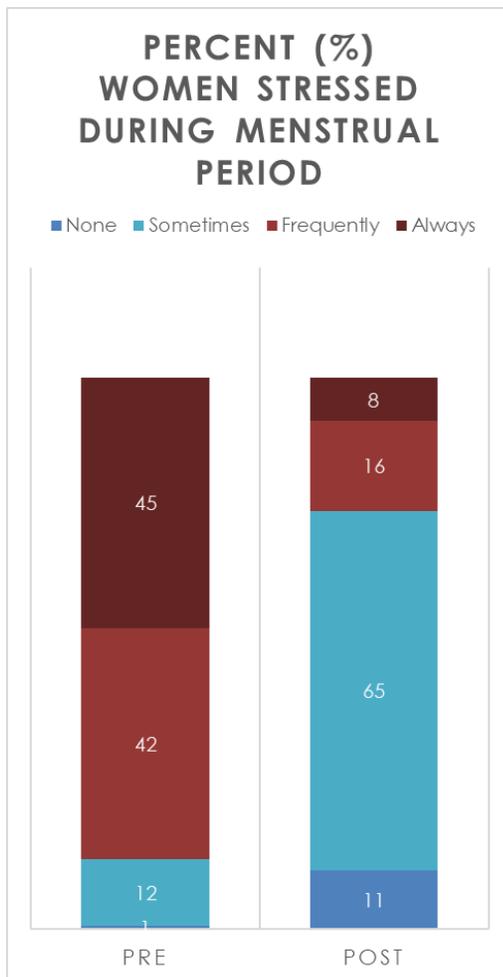
Figure 10: Pre-post-employment of negative coping strategies related to menstrual hygiene



Survey participants indicated a reduction in stress and tension during the menstrual period. Most participants (87%) reported frequently and always experiencing stress in the pre-assessment while 24% reported this in the post-assessment (Figure 11). Mean reported stress reduced from 3.3 [3.2; 3.4] score in the pre-assessment to a score of 2.2 [2.1; 2.3] with higher scores indicating higher stress. These findings were in line with the FGDs as women reported experiencing less stress and tension due to better access to menstrual hygiene products.

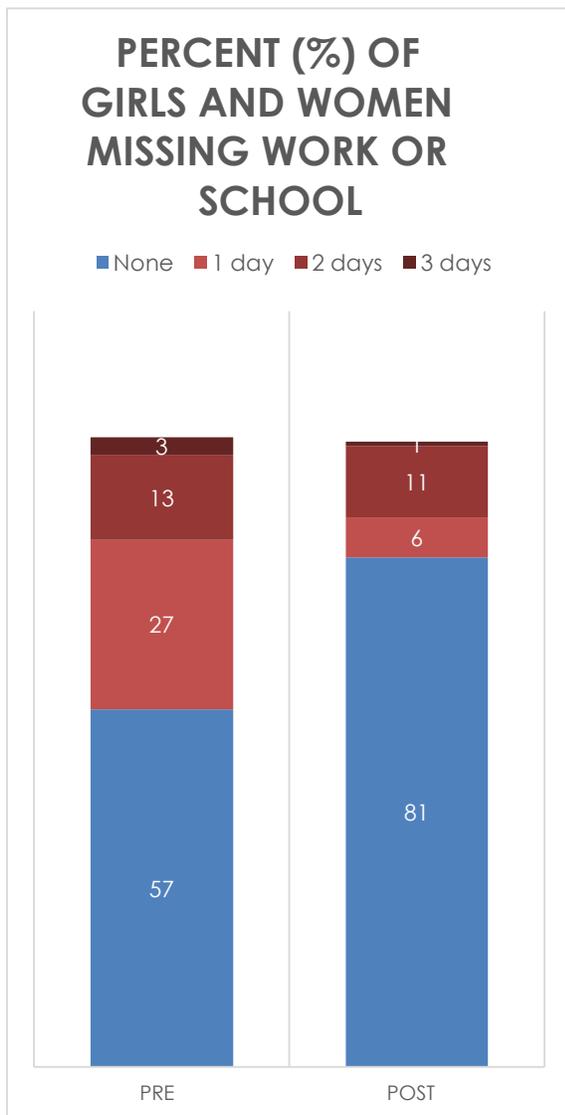
“Now, psychologically, you are at ease.”- Lebanese woman aged above 25-year-old

Figure 11- Pre post stress



Survey participants reported a significant decrease in missing work or school following the intervention, with 43% reporting missing work or school (1, 2 or 3 days) in the pre-assessment while 18% reported missing work or school in the post-assessment (Figure 12). During FGDs, women did not report on missing work or school whether pre- or post-assessment. Yet they reported an increase in mobility with the use of reusable sanitary pads as they felt more comfortable and confident when going out during menstruation, especially that the reusable sanitary pads are well-supported by shields.

Figure 12- Pre-post missing work or school



Suggested recommendations for future adoption & use of reusable sanitary pads among vulnerable communities in Lebanon

Beneficiaries' suggested recommendations

When asked about their adoption of reusable sanitary pads, women who participated in the FGDs highlighted that they are willing to use them in the future if the pads were adjusted/ modified and improved. Most survey participants indicated a need to increase the number of pads (58 times) and proposed to increase the thickness of the pads (43 times) (Figure 13). These findings are in line with the recommendations suggested by women who participated in the FGDs. Furthermore, while some recommended increasing the size of the liner (both its length and width of wings), others were reluctant about the increase in length as it might lead the pad to become visible under women's clothes especially given its bright colors.

Figure 13- Themes related to using reusable sanitary pads, frequency reported



Women reported that their daughters are reluctant to try the reusable sanitary pads, either due to fear of trying something new or ego that they don't want to use what their mothers and grandmothers use. Therefore, women highlighted the need of investing in awareness-raising sessions targeting adolescent girls and young women on the benefits of reusable sanitary pads and then forcing them to try the pads so they can see the difference by themselves. After they feel comfortable and free from all health-related issues such as allergic reactions and infections, they would be willing to use these pads.

"My daughters and I get our period at almost the same time. Last time, they started calling "mom, get us pads", I told them, "I don't have money, not even 1,000L.L.", although I had money, I told them that I am broke. I told them "you either use this or manage it by yourself - put any cloth, put your clothes, etc...". This way they had to put them, and this was a test for them to try it, and actually, they liked it a lot." – Lebanese woman aged more than 25-year-old

In line with this, participant women proposed increasing the number of awareness sessions (14 times) and expanding the outreach of the program to others (11 times). In addition, they proposed making reusable sanitary pads available in the market (6 times).

Key informants' suggested recommendations

KI highlighted several important aspects for future adoption and use of reusable sanitary pads. They recommended that women must first become users of the product so they can be convinced by it and accordingly use it in the future, especially that in the local context, women avoid trying new brands or modalities for managing their menstrual hygiene. Therefore, KI suggested distributing these pads to the largest possible number of women in society, so they first try them for free. In addition, they highlighted the importance of word of mouth, and how women can affect other women's opinions after they are convinced by it.

"The promotion here is not the product as a product. The beneficiary who benefited from the product will walk as a radio. "Have you tried it?". I swear to God, last time there was one walk-in woman who came just because she heard about it [the reusable sanitary pad] from her neighbor," She told me "I want from it." – Social worker



“It’s true that we distributed 498 [kits] but you have to multiply them by 5 because each woman tells others. Each woman informs 10 women; especially if they were in a brunch or something. Maybe, currently, there are 2,000 women who have an idea about it [concept of reusable sanitary pads].” – Akkarouna staff

Still, one KI highlighted the importance of media, including, for example, the distribution of flyers, as a tool to introduce and promote for the concept of reusable sanitary pads among women.

Suggested recommendations for better implementation of the intervention (awareness sessions & distribution of reusable sanitary pads)

Social workers suggested a couple of recommendations for better implementation in the future. For example, in the short term, they reported on the importance of including pregnant women as beneficiaries as they would likely benefit from using these pads post-delivery. For the awareness sessions, they suggested they would be pre-planned and organized according to age groups. This is because younger women showed more resistance to the concept of reusable sanitary pads and accordingly, they need a different approach to be convinced. Finally, they suggested the flyer be more detailed.

As for the long-term, KI suggested ensuring that the SRH awareness session becomes a prerequisite to the awareness session on MHM including the advantages of reusable sanitary pads. This is because women would be more knowledgeable about the basic concepts related to menstruation and menstrual hygiene and thus it would take less time and be easier for them to be introduced to the concept of reusable sanitary pads. KI realized this when they saw the difference in questions and length of the session between walk-ins and referrals where the latter already had attended the SRH session before the awareness session on reusable sanitary pads. KI even discussed the possibility of merging the session on reusable sanitary pads with the SRH session. Yet this should only be implemented once reusable sanitary pads are distributed to all beneficiaries (as part of dignity kits) and/or are available in the market for purchase out-of-pocket.

“Once, there were walk-in beneficiaries, they had their check-up at the doctor, came out, and asked “can you continue the session for us? We have many questions”. I told them “Okay, gather yourselves again”– Social worker

“Once you are asked a question where you don’t know, the trust of the beneficiary will be destroyed. Even if it was for seconds, they would say “what is she talking about? She’s pretending she knows everything”. On the other hand, when someone already had a previous awareness session, here I am comfortable because I know the background is clear for them. When someone is a walk-in case, sorry but technically, they don’t know anything. So here I have to provide more awareness, [but [unfortunately] I don’t have time to explain all the information they need to know], but at least I feel satisfied that I did my best.” – Social worker

KI also highlighted that women wished that such awareness sessions were given to their daughters, and they wished that the pads were available in the market so they can buy them for their daughters.

“Seriously, there is one woman who told me “My daughter is getting married now, I want to get her these pads to put them with her new clothes”, imagine. [she commented], “I liked it a lot, it’s very comfortable.” – Social worker



Conclusion and recommendations

This assessment highlights the increasing period poverty in Lebanon, and presents further evidence for the relevance and importance of producing and distributing locally made reusable sanitary pads.

Around 927,693 women (15-49 years old) currently residing in Lebanon are affected by poverty and are at risk of period poverty (in possible need for menstrual hygiene products). The estimate is based on the most recently available sources, but with caveats in the assessment pointed out.

Reusable sanitary pads constitute a cost-effective solution for women as well as UNFPA. The cost of the reusable sanitary pads distributed by UNFPA is around 18.2 USD. Shifting to reusable sanitary pads (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) in 2 years saves UNFPA 30% of the cost and thus allows UNFPA to reach more women in the long run. Using the market price for disposable sanitary pads, shifting to reusable sanitary pads (distribution of reusable sanitary pads per woman) in 1 year saves women 36% of the cost and thus allows women to save money after 9 months of using reusable sanitary pads.

Following the intervention implemented by UNFPA, through Akkarouna, this mixed-methods study revealed changes in menstrual hygiene-related practices, actual acceptability of reusable sanitary pads, changes in purchasing practices, and a decrease in employment of negative coping strategies.

Targeted beneficiaries reported that the main challenge for inadequate access to menstrual hygiene-related products was price inflection. This has led women to opt for lower-quality or cheaper products as alternatives to the disposable sanitary pads usually used or to adopt negative coping strategies to alleviate the situation on themselves or their daughters/ sisters. While women aged more than 25-year-old were comfortable using home-made reusable pads, women aged less than 25-year-old preferred disposable sanitary pads. However, following the intervention, there were changes in the usage of sanitary pads. Although young women (under the age of 25) still preferred the use of disposable sanitary pads, they started using reusable sanitary pads as daily pads or during the last one or two days of their period. As for women aged above 25-year-old, while some women switched fully to reusable sanitary pads and felt comfortable during all days of menstruation, most women used disposable pads during the first days of their period or when there is heavy blood flow and switched to reusable sanitary pads during the following days. Additionally, many women reported using reusable sanitary pads as daily pads. Regarding other practices, women reported an improvement in the frequency of changing pads, as they used to keep the pad for longer hours to reduce the number of pads used during one cycle and save money.

The concept of reusable sanitary pads was generally well-welcomed and accepted by beneficiaries involved in the surveys and/or FGDs, especially among those who are aged above 25-year-old and among those who already used home-made pads. It was reported that the reusable sanitary pads are comfortable, soft, well-supported by a shield, hygienic, pocket-friendly, and environment-friendly. It was also reported that these pads didn't cause any discomfort in relation to allergies, infections, itching or bad smell. Still, women reported several challenges as was expected from the 2020 UNFPA assessment. These challenges included low absorbent capacity, a low number of distributed pads (especially when women shared the pads with their daughters), washing issues due to water shortage, and drying issues. Furthermore, as compared to the 2020 UNFPA assessment, nothing was reported in relation to disgust from washing the pads, the cost of cleaning products and clean water, concerns about possible infections, and privacy issues. The need to purchase clean water, at a time of financial crisis and a cholera outbreak



since October 2022, may inflict additional restrictions on the availability of water to properly clean the reusable sanitary pads, despite the limited amount of water needed for the cleaning process.

With regard to purchasing practices, there was a decrease in purchasing feminine gel and an increase in purchasing shower gel and soap. In fact, the survey results showed that there was a significant decrease in the amount of money spent on menstrual hygiene products. FGDs showed that most women used this amount of money to buy things/ necessities for the house, and very few women used the saved amount to buy menstrual hygiene products (mainly disposable pads) of better quality.

Concerning the potential impact of reusable sanitary pads on overall well-being, survey participants reported a decrease in relying on negative coping strategies related to menstrual hygiene products, a reduction in stress and tension during the menstrual period, and a significant decrease in missing work or school following the intervention.

For the future adoption and use of sanitary pads, targeted beneficiaries reported that they would be willing to use them in the future if the pads were improved as per their recommendations. These included increasing the thickness of pads, increasing the number of pads, increasing the number of awareness sessions (specifically targeting young women), and expanding the outreach program to others. Key informants, on the other hand, suggested that women must first become users of the product so they can be convinced by it and accordingly use it in the future, so they recommended distributing these pads to the largest possible number of women in society. In addition, they highlighted the importance of word of mouth, and how women can affect other women's opinions after they are happy with the product. Similar to the 2020 UNFPA assessment, one major challenge reported by most targeted beneficiaries for the future adoption of sanitary pads, was cost. Although the price of reusable sanitary pads might be cheaper than disposable pads in the long run, it might be difficult for women to spend such an amount of money in one go. To overcome the barrier of cost, women suggested buying the items step-by-step until they get the needed/ sufficient number of pads and shields for themselves and their daughters.

Recommendations

Advocacy

1. In order to tackle period poverty in Lebanon, UNFPA, other United Nations (UN) agencies, and governmental entities should continue advocating for the mainstreaming of menstrual hygiene management within already existing structures. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) should mainstream MHM within the Primary Health Care package (as part of the Sexual and Reproductive Health package, and the personal hygiene service package). The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) can further mainstream MHM within its protection package in the social development centers. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) should incorporate to a greater extent MHM in schools, mainly by updating the curricula to include MHM as well as including it in extra-curricular activities. The Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET) can invest in developing and implementing programs that provide or subsidize the menstrual hygiene needs of marginalized populations. The Ministry of Industry (MoI) and the Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) can develop and enforce standards for the production of reusable sanitary pads, in line with international standards.



2. At the level of the community, relevant entities, NGOs, and civil society should develop well-planned advocacy plans to fight the social stigma around MHM, specifically targeting male-headed households.
3. UNFPA, other relevant entities, and governmental organizations should advocate and promote for the use of reusable sanitary pads in the community, as this is a fundamental girl and woman right. This could be through the implementation of media campaigns (TV, social network, online platforms) or, for example, by assigning representatives in relevant institutions such as PHCs or supermarkets to promote and normalize its use. Showcasing the three cost scenarios (purchasing disposable pads, purchasing reusable sanitary pads and purchasing a mix of both) would be an effective tool.

Coordination

4. UNFPA, other UN agencies, governmental institutions, and local partners, should coordinate to establish a multi-sectoral approach for MHM to ensure optimal integration and implementation of services. In particular, there should be proper planning and collaboration between the private as well as public sectors in the country,
5. UNFPA and other relevant entities such as UN agencies, humanitarian actors, and NGOs producing and/or distributing menstrual hygiene kits should coordinate to further expand their outreach to vulnerable women and girls increasingly affected by period poverty.
6. UNFPA, other relevant entities, and NGOs producing and/or distributing menstrual hygiene kits should further leverage resources and create markets to produce culturally-appropriate reusable sanitary pads based on the availability and prices of raw vs. imported materials.

Knowledge generation

7. UNFPA should engage in the development of a policy brief, explaining the urgency of mainstreaming MHM, especially in the current context, and highlighting the relevance of switching to reusable sanitary pads for health, social integration and women's economic empowerment purposes. The brief would also present the findings of this assessment and other available data, and provide recommendations to use for advocacy and policy change.
8. UNFPA, through implementing partners, should conduct additional pilot studies in different contexts and living conditions (such as informal settlements) in order to assess the actual acceptability of reusable sanitary pads, as well as check for any other concerns or challenges, raised by beneficiaries. This allows for better and more effective production of reusable sanitary pads.
9. Following this pilot intervention, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis should be conducted to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of reusable sanitary pads vis-à-vis disposable pads; the opportunities to improve its positioning, and what may be emerging threats coming from competitors, evolution in consumer preferences and other factors.

10. Local NGOs producing reusable sanitary pads should conduct feasibility studies to expand their production and distribution of these pads to the local market for women to purchase them out-of-pocket and at subsidized cost.
11. UNFPA, other relevant UN agencies, governmental institutions, humanitarian actors, and local organizations should integrate MHM monitoring and evaluation (M&E) into their ongoing M&E sexual and reproductive health and rights outreach and awareness-raising activities to measure the impact of their policies and programmes. UNFPA and other entities should survey the same participants before intervention delivery and post intervention delivery, in order to quantify the impact of interventions.
12. The Ministry of Environment (MoE) along with local and international NGOs, governmental institutions, and humanitarian actors should conduct an environmental impact assessment to compare the effect of disposable vs. reusable sanitary pad production in terms of waste management and energy use.
13. UNFPA and other relevant UN agencies should advocate to assess unmet needs for menstrual hygiene management using nationally representative large-scale surveys.

Capacity development

14. Actors involved in the provision of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services should implement structural changes to ensure the availability of clean and practical latrines and washing basins as well as maintain proper access to WASH facilities including access to clean and safe water.
15. UNFPA and other relevant entities should build the capacity of local community-based organizations supporting marginalized women, for the production of reusable sanitary pads, as well as other MHM products such as soaps. Such programs would contribute to women's economic empowerment. The Ministry of Industry (MoI) and the Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) can support small-scale industries in the production of reusable sanitary pads, including compliance with international standards.
16. UNFPA and other relevant entities should create a supportive environment to fight social stigma and build social acceptability for the adoption of reusable sanitary pads. Trusted sources, such as UNFPA implementing partners working on gender-based violence and reproductive health should give these educational sessions, especially that these activities fall within their organizations' objectives and current activities.

Service provision

17. UNFPA, and other relevant entities such as UN agencies, should replace the disposable pads included in the dignity kits with reusable sanitary pads as a sustainable cost-effective solution.

18. UNFPA, and other relevant entities including PHCs (whether supported by MoPH, MoSA or other entities) should distribute (for free or at a subsidized cost) reusable sanitary pads to the highest possible number of vulnerable women visiting the centers.
19. Following this assessment, local NGOs producing reusable sanitary pads should be informed about the experiences of women and take into account their recommendations in order to produce improved pads that meet women’s expectations. For example, they should increase the thickness of pads for better absorbent capacity and they should invest in diversifying the size of reusable sanitary pads offered.

MHM education

20. At the level of community, NGOs and civil society should implement nationwide campaigns and awareness sessions that aim towards de-stigmatizing “menstruation” and encouraging the use of reusable sanitary pads. The campaigns should specifically target young women and adolescents which are the most reluctant target groups concerning its usage. For example, as part of the campaigns, the development and dissemination of a short video with a young influencer could be an effective way to target young women and adolescents.
21. UNFPA, and other relevant entities, should develop simple, attractive, and animated educational material on reusable sanitary pads: what they are, their benefits, and how they are used, washed, and dried. The information material should also include, among others, the following messages:
 - The difference between home-made and reusable sanitary pads.
 - Reusable sanitary pads are for personal use and not to be shared with other family members.
 - Reusable sanitary pads need to be washed with cold water and require a limited amount of water.
 - Reusable sanitary pads are made from cotton 100%, and accordingly, they don’t cause any health risks related to allergies, infections, irritations, or itching.
 - Reusable sanitary pads are more cost-effective than disposable pads in the long run.



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4. All participants – beneficiaries and key informants for their valuable contributions.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Project timeline

Activity	September 12 – December 16, 2022 (weeks)								January 3 – February 15, 2023			
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7-13				
UNFPA sharing Akkarouna survey data and the linked-demographic survey data	█											
In-depth analysis of quantitative data-set (incl. data cleaning, analysis, visualization)		█	█	█								
Development of qualitative data collection tools		█	█	█								
Planning of interviews and FGDs with Akkarouna			█	█	█							
Data collection for cost-effectiveness analysis			█									
Cost-effectiveness analysis				█	█							
Estimation of women/girls in need of menstrual products				█	█							
Data collection - FGDs and KII			█			█						
Data management and analysis			█	█	█	█	█					
Report writing					█	█	█					
Submission of draft 1 report							█					
Submission of final report								█				
Support in the development of infographics									█	█	█	
Dissemination led by UNFPA												█



Appendix 2: Topic guide of interviews with implementers of intervention

Information about the project (GBV, SRH, etc...)

1. Can you please describe the project that is being implemented by Akkarouna?
2. Who is involved? (InterSOS, UNFPA, Akkarouna, etc...)

Now I would like to focus on the intervention itself which involved the awareness session + distribution of reusable menstrual pads)

Information about the intervention (awareness session + distribution of reusable menstrual pads)

1. Can you please tell us details about the pilot project (awareness session + distribution of reusable menstrual pads)?
 - a. What was your role in this pilot project?
 - b. Who else was involved in this pilot project?
 - c. Who were the beneficiaries? (Women vs. young girls, married vs. unmarried, number of female households at one place of residence/their children, average age, educational level, any common practices/ values, Syrian vs. Lebanese). How did you select these beneficiaries?
 - d. What was the content of this intervention? Who gave the awareness sessions?
 - e. For the social workers, please explain to us what specific information you shared with the attendees. Where did you get the information, you shared with them from? Did you attend any training on how to use reusable pads?
 - f. How many women/girls benefited from attending the awareness sessions + distribution of pads?
 - g. How many sessions did these beneficiaries attend? What did the kit they received include?
2. What do you think were the factors that facilitated the implementation of this intervention as it was planned (in terms of place, modality, convenience, reach)?
 - h. During the administration of the awareness sessions
 - i. During the distribution of reusable menstrual pads
3. What challenges did you face during the implementation of the intervention? (e.g., crowdedness, people not interested, limited resources, etc.)
 - a. During the administration of the awareness sessions.
 - b. During the distribution of reusable menstrual pads



4. What was the beneficiaries' feedback on how the awareness sessions were held, and the distribution of reusable pads (did they want more to share with their families)?
5. If this project is to be implemented in another district/ region, what recommendations/ suggestions would you give for better implementation?

Potential benefits and impact of the intervention (awareness session + distribution of the reusable sanitary pads)

1. What topics of the awareness sessions were women/girls not aware of? What new concepts did they learn?
2. What did women/girls use prior to the distribution of reusable pads?
3. How much did women/girls know about the reusable pads? Had they been using it (ask specifically if women use cloth or reusable pad)? Had they attended any previous sessions on reusable pads?
4. How much do you think were women/girls open to the idea of using these reusable pads?
5. What do you think was the impact of this awareness session + distribution of reusable pads on women's acceptability for using these?
6. In your opinion, what are the benefits of reusable sanitary pads? (e.g., lower cost, more hygienic, less infections, environment-friendly, more sustainable solution for menstrual hygiene management, less stigma/ more socially acceptable)
 - a. How much do you think the use of reusable pads would decrease period poverty in Lebanon?
7. How do you think would the use of reusable pads affect the lives of vulnerable Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees?
8. How would you enhance the adoption/ use of reusable pads among communities?

Thank you



Appendix 3: Topic guide of focus group discussions with beneficiaries

Information learned during awareness sessions conducted by Akkarouna

1. What topics have you discussed during the awareness sessions? (e.g., menstruation and ovulation, menopause, personal/ vaginal hygiene during menstruation, infertility, PCOS, PMS)
2. What misconceptions have you learned about?

Menstrual hygiene-related practices

3. What did you usually use before the distribution of the reusable pads? (e.g., towels, hand-made washable pads, baby diapers, cloth, cardboard, newspapers, toilet paper, tampons, etc.)
 - 3.1 Ask specifically about the use of more than one product pre-distribution of reusable pads.
 - 3.2 How often were these changed?
4. Before the crisis, what were your preferred menstrual products? Why? How often do you purchase/ get menstrual hygiene products?
5. Since the distribution of reusable pads, what products do you use during your menstruation? Are there any changes in relation to your MH practices?

Actual acceptability and utility of reusable pads

6. Tell us about your experience with the use of reusable pads. Have you used them? Why?
 - 6.1 For those who already use washable pads, how is the use of these distributed washable pads different? (e.g., better quality, less leakage, more hygienic, more sustainable solution, safe and easy to wash, use of a limited amount of water, etc.)
7. What challenges do you currently face regarding the use of reusable pads?
 - 7.1 *Discuss issues related to comfort; any discomfort – why?*
 - 7.2 *Appearance (designs)*
 - 7.3 *Absorbent capacity - How are you dealing with that? Either use disposable pads for the first two-three days or add a layer of towel/cloth or use two reusable pads on top of each other)*
 - 7.4 *Concern with washing/drying*
 - 7.5 *Availability of soap/ detergent, clean water, washing basin, etc.*
 - 7.6 *Concerns about possible infections or irritation; any hygienic restrictions; privacy issues; any cultural or religious restrictions; stigma/ no social acceptability, etc.*
 - 7.7 *Quantity (the need to change more often/time for the pad to dry/the use of the reusable pads as daily panty liners)*
8. How did your purchasing practices change since the distribution of reusable pads?
 - 8.1 What products are you now buying and why?
 - 8.2 How often do you purchase MH products?
 - 8.3 How much are you paying now? (***Slide on decreased expenses***)
 - 8.3.1 Are you able to purchase products that are of higher quality than what you were purchasing pre-distribution? (***Slide on coping strategies***)



9. List the items included in the distributed sanitary kit, please. ***(Slide on items in the sanitary kit)***
Tell us your opinion about it in general. How did it resolve any previous challenges you used to encounter?
 - 9.1 Which are the most needed/ useful items? What items you don't see a need for?
 - 9.2 Are the quantities sufficient? Who are the main users? *Compare women who have a different number of daughters.*
 - 9.3 If these reusable pads were available in the market at the following prices, would you pay for them? based on the discussion, show the different scenarios

Potential impact of distributed sanitary kits

10. How did the use of these reusable pads affect/ change your life in terms of daily living/ as a whole? What are the advantages of reusable pads? (e.g., improving well-being during menstruation, decreasing employment of negative coping strategies, feeling more comfortable, confident, and safe, increasing mobility (work and school), increasing social interaction, etc.)
(Slide on missing school/work)
11. How did you feel during the recent menstrual periods in terms of stress or tension? If you were experiencing any kind of this, what are the reasons? (e.g., poor access to MH products, inability to conduct some activities, extreme pain, use of unpreferable materials)
12. In the future, are you willing to use washable pads? What do you need for better menstrual hygiene management?

Thank you

Appendix 4: Different scenarios related to the price of disposable, reusable, and a mixture of disposable and reusable sanitary pads – presented to women*

Increase Font Size	Disposable pads (scenario A)	Reusable sanitary pads (Scenario B)	Mixture (Scenario C)
Number of pads per 1 cycle 	15-25 	2 shields, 6 liners, 1 soap 	7-13 1 shield, 3 liners, 1 soap 
Average price per 1 cycle	67,000 – 112,000 L.L.	630,000 L.L.	351,000 – 378,400 L.L.
Average price per 1 year (13 cycles)	875,000 – 1,458,000 L.L.	661,000 L.L.	418,000 – 1,078,000 L.L.

**Saving from scenario A
25% to 55%**

**Saving from scenario A
16% to 26%**

*The price of reusable sanitary pads presented during the FGD was based on the exchange rate at that time of the FGD (1 USD equivalent to 31,000 L.L.)