

The Lack of Personal Hygiene Education and the Effect of Menstruation on Girls in Rural Ghana

Before coming into contact with *Days for Girls*, I thought all was well in Ghana since issues affecting women and girls had not crossed my mind knowing how I have trained my girls in our home. Life in Accra did not seem unusual since everybody behaved almost the same. I had not realized the challenges some girls and women have been facing.

Then I heard of a “witches camp”¹ created by people living in the Northern Region for women they considered as witches, a place called Trokosi² in the Volta region for a fetish priest who desired to have many wives, cases of female genital mutilation also in the Northern Region of Ghana, and cases of rape and abuse of women and girls and children.

Until I began to look deeply into issues affecting girls and women in my country Ghana, I did not realize how much is going on in their lives—more than I could imagine and that I had not taken the trouble to know about.

I met a representative of *Days for Girls* who introduced me to what she was doing. Sharing some *Days for Girls* kits with a few girls in the church made me aware of the need since several other girls and women asked me about the kits I was sharing.

Serving as *Ambassador for Days for Girls International* opened my eyes to see how issues of menstruation and personal hygiene, lack of education on female reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, menopause, or self-defense affect girls and women.

The Management of Menstruation for Girls in Ghana

I also realized that women are reminded every month by their communities that menstruation is a curse and a taboo. In some family homes, when a woman menstruates she has to leave that home and find another place to stay till the menstruation is over.

Girls engage in early sex and are exploited due to lack of money to buy sanitary pad.

Many girls between ages 12 to 16 get themselves pregnant due to lack of parental caution and education about premarital sex.

Many girls have to stay home during menstruation. If they find themselves menstruating on their way to school, they have to go home until menstruation is over. Others are laughed at when they menstruate during school hours, and it affects them so much that they don't want to go back to school. In Ghana, it is estimated that girls miss up to 5 days of school per month due to inadequate sanitation facilities and lack of sanitary products. Ninety-five percent of girls in rural Ghana miss school during their periods.³

Ghana and the Need for *Days for Girls* Washable Kits

In our training and education, we realized that our country needed to give more direct education to these girls and that they needed to be taught right away all the knowledge they need to stay safe and guard themselves against men who try to take advantage of their ignorance and naiveté.

The situation is alarming, but *Days for Girls* has received many invitations to help girls in many areas who need education and sanitary kits to improve their lives.

After receiving *Days for Girls* washable kits, a group of girls responded:

“How happy we are to receive these beautiful hygiene kits and how this will alleviate our hardship in buying sanitary pads.”

“We will no longer be laughed at in school by the boys.”

“We can now go to school with confidence and to compete with the boys.”

“We will no longer depend on other people to manage our menstruation.”

“For 3 years? Goodness!!!”



These girls are so happy and said, “No worries for the next 3 years about menstruation.”



This girl was bold enough to show us what she had been using during menstruation. This affected her so much that she had to stay home.

If a girl receives a *Days for Girls* kit that will last her for 3 years, she will not have to spend money on sanitary pads, and the education will empower her and will help alleviate

monthly worries and poverty. For example, if a girl gets pregnant, she will not be able to go to school and as a result she will be uneducated and poor.

Exploitation

Many girls are taken advantage of because they lack the education of their worth and what they can become. They also lack the requisite knowledge to stay safe and be guided to reach their dreams. A culture of disempowerment surrounds this issue. Their poverty makes it difficult to think ahead or realize what they might become if they stay safe.



This girl got pregnant at age 14 because she was receiving a little money from a man. She was paralyzed after delivery through scissoring and lost the baby as well.

Her mother now regrets deeply not helping her daughter with her needs.

Opportunity

Dignity and knowledge is available to girls who once felt inadequate and suffered great hardship due to the lack of sanitary pads. Confidence is restored to girls who have received *Days for Girls washable sanitary kits*.

In Ghana it is said that when you educate a boy you have educated an individual and when you educate a girl you have educated a whole nation.

Days for Girls and Sankofa



Sankofa is a word in the [Akan language](#) of Ghana that translates as "reach back and get it" (*san* - to return; *ko* - to go; *fa* - to fetch, to seek and take) and also refers to the [Asante Adinkra symbol](#) represented either by a bird with its head turned backwards taking an egg off its back, or as a stylized heart shape. Sankofa is often associated with the proverb, "*Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi*," which translates as: "It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten."^[1]

The Sankofa symbol appears frequently in traditional [Akan art](#), and has also been adopted as an important symbol in an [African-American](#) and [African Diaspora](#) context to represent the need to reflect on the past to build a successful future. It symbolizes taking from the past what is good and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress through the benevolent use of knowledge. It is one of the most widely dispersed Adinkra symbols, appearing in modern jewelry, tattoos, and clothing.⁴

In the olden days in Ghana, women used a clean piece of cloth or material to manage their menstruation. They washed the cloths or material until the menstrual stain was out.

They passed this habit on till a time when it was considered outmoded and embarrassing especially when discovered in public, so women used to hide themselves during the time of menstruation.

Then disposable pads came to replace the clean piece of material or cloth, and the use of a clean piece of cloth, which was pass on as tradition was ended.

Women and girls in poor areas who could not afford disposable pads had to stay home during menstruation. Now they use rags and unhygienic materials to manage their menstruation. This has affected many women and girls' hygiene and psychology.

In summary, every girl in Ghana deserves **education, safety, and dignity** regarding her personal hygiene needs. We further this goal by helping girls in Ghana who would otherwise go without to have access to quality sustainable feminine hygiene products, and appropriate education and awareness.

We intend to systematically produce and supply *Days for Girls washable feminine kits* for girls throughout Ghana, and educate and sensitize young women on how to safely manage their monthly menstrual periods in a dignified manner. Most girls sometimes find it difficult to afford sanitary pads for use during their menstrual period and as a result use a variety of unsafe, unsanitary, or dangerous materials to care for themselves and can be exploited by men.

As a result this project will bring employment, education, awareness, safety and dignity to girls and women.

Feminine hygiene is the most important factor affecting school dropout among girls in Ghana, due to a combination of poverty, local customs, cultural traditions, and taboos.

Call to Action

Your contribution to *Day for Girls* in Ghana will bless the lives of girls and women and bring dignity to them. As you donate to sustain this program, it will bring employment, protection, and awareness.

Days for Girls breaks the taboo barrier through products that help girls and women remember that they are beautiful, important, and worthy of dignity.

Days for Girls has taken from the past what is good and brought it into the present in order to make positive progress through the benevolent use of knowledge and skills.

Days for Girls washable feminine kits are modern and Sankofa

Days for Girls ... Every Girl Everywhere Period.



References

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