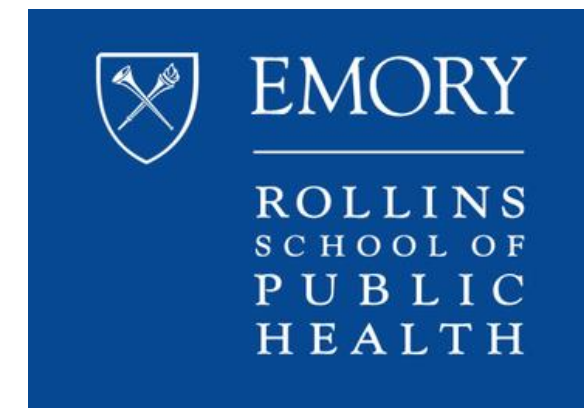


MHM and WASH

Supporting a gender-responsive learning environment



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Background



Supported by the Fiji Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, UNICEF—in partnership with Emory University, Fijian Teacher's Association (FTA) and Project HEAVEN—completed the first formative research on menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in Fiji. Following devastation from category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston in late February, Education sector partners focused on restoring WASH services to damaged schools, with specific emphasis on gender-conscious approaches to recovery and rebuilding. These efforts provided an entry point to conduct MHM research in cyclone-devastated schools in the Western Division of Viti Levu from May to September, 2016

Objectives

- ❑ To **investigate** and understand the range of challenges faced by school girls during menstruation—as well as the determinants of those challenges—within the setting and cultural context of Fiji.
- ❑ To **inform** 'a basic package of school-based interventions' for menstrual hygiene management that can be implemented and sustained at scale within Fijian schools, particularly in accordance with the guidelines for the 3 star approach to WASH in schools.
- ❑ To **understand** the social and cultural beliefs and attitudes that drive behaviors related to menstrual hygiene management in Fiji, and how these impact girls' education.

Methods

- ❑ Data were collected from **seven schools** in three educational sub-districts between May and September 2016.
- ❑ **151 participants** (75 girls, 42 boys, 34 teachers) were interviewed for their opinions.

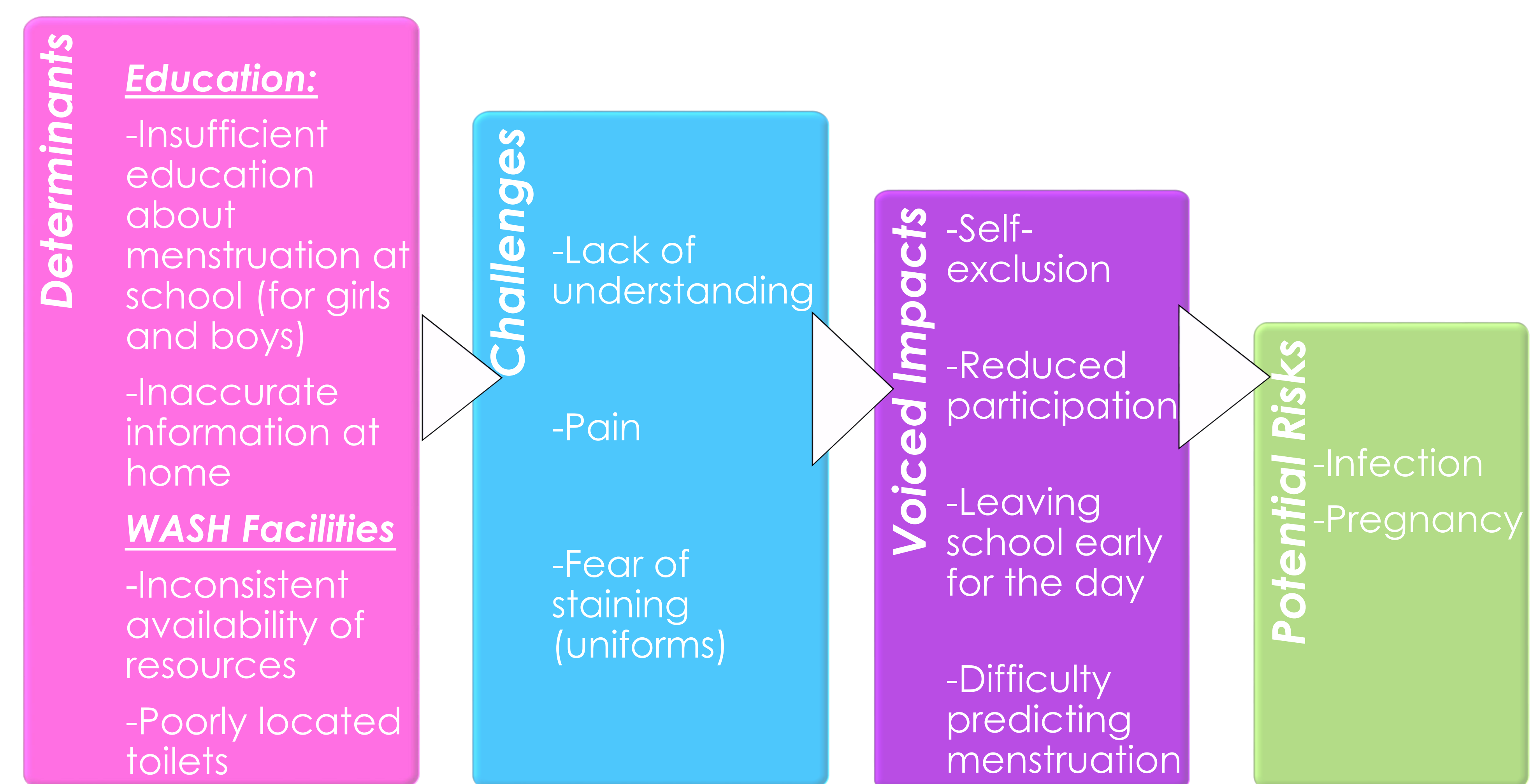
- ❑ **Methods included:**
 - In-depth interviews
 - Focus group discussions
 - Participatory learning activities
 - Structured observations of WASH facilities

- ❑ Schools were purposively selected to ensure representation of the following:
 - Type of school
 - Location
 - Similarities and differences across Fiji's religious (Christian, Hindu, and Muslim) and ethnic groups (iTaukei Fijian, and Fijians of Indian descent).

Tool	Theme/Purpose	Participants	No. of activities completed	No. of participants
Focus group discussion	Knowledge, attitude, beliefs and practices	Girls	10	52
	Knowledge, attitude and beliefs	Boys	7	42
	Knowledge, beliefs, practices and learning impact	Teachers	7	34 (16 male, 18 female)
In-depth interview	Personal experience (practice, management)	Girls	23	23
Observation	Facilities (spaces for managing MHM in schools)	Schools	14	
Total			61	151

Results

- ◆ **Lack of understanding of menstruation:** Common sources of information for most girls were home and school. Despite the fact that the majority of the girls mentioned receiving information prior to menarche, the **interviews demonstrated a serious gap in knowledge and understanding of menstruation.**
- ◆ **Fear:** Girls talked about fear of staining their clothes and how it affected their concentration in class. One girl stated **"in school, we [girls] have to be careful with our uniform" (Girls IDI)**. During focus group discussed, girls added **"In class, she'll not want to participate;"** "When she stands up she will be checking and looking at the back [of her uniform]." The girls discussed managing this challenge in several ways, including: wrapping a jacket around their waist; sitting for long hours, including not participating in sports and other school activities; and leaving school to go home for the day.
- ◆ **Inability to manage menstruation at school** The challenges girls discussed around facilities and resources at school focused on the **inconsistent availability of materials**, which they linked to the impact of frequent cyclones and floods. Some girls discussed **issues with the location and size of their toilets at school.** "If we want to go change for sports, we get crowded in the toilet[...] girls have to go round at the back, if anything happen at the back, how will the teachers know?" (Girls FGD)



Conclusions and Recommendations

Girls' and teachers' recommendations share a common focus on availability of water and soap, and private facilities equipped with sanitary bins. The cost of pads and impact on the environment in terms of waste is not considered a concern for students or teachers.

There is, however, a need for disposal options for girls, to avoid having to carry used pads home with them. Schools in Fiji have an existing platform for sharing information and learning to break the silence and unpack the secrecy around MHM for adolescent boys and girls. However, there is room to improve the quality of the information provided.

Recommendations:

- ◆ **Advocacy:** At both national and community levels. Advocate for policies that address MHM, and integration of menstruation-related indicators in the country's EMIS.
- ◆ **Capacity building:** of school based management to maintain operational WASH facilities and resources especially after emergencies.
- ◆ **Education:** that covers not only the biological aspect but also the psychosocial aspect of menstruation.