

## **Plays for the trackers (pdf)**

### **1. Stereotypes on menstruations**

The interviewees linked such things as adulthood and preparedness to give birth, being sick, moodiness and pain, bad smell and dirtiness.

In this scene you are at a slumber party with friends at the home of one of the group members.

You have cooked tortillas together and talked about your crushes. After eating you eat candy as a dessert and talk together. Soon the topic turns to menstruations. One of the members has just gotten their periods and wants to ask their friends more about it.

1: What do these periods mean?

2: You are a grown woman now!

3: Yeah, when your periods start you can have babies!

1: Oh no that can't be, I mean we're still kids... This kind of grosses me out. My little brother said that I'll become grumpy now every time I get my periods. I was upset when I noticed that he saw that we went to the store to buy pads.

3: Ugh no they do not smell but your stomach really hurts. And yeah, everyone tells me now whenever I am upset that I'm on my periods even if I am not.

2: Yeah the stomach pain is bad! I was also called disgusting when we were at the cabin with my friends and I was on my periods!

1: Hey did you know that my family has friends in Uganda and the daughter of the family told me that periods mean that you're sick! I wonder if that is true?

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### **2. Education and knowledge**

Many menstruating persons know nothing about menstruation before they start. The sudden start of menstruations can cause shame, fear as well as confusion. Without knowledge about periods the person might not understand what is happening in their body and can for example think it is an illness.

In this scene you are in Uganda and on your way to school. A group of friends walk to school together. One of the friends has a stomach-ache and suddenly starts to bleed and their dress is stained.

1: Ouch my stomach hurts!

2: Oh that's a shame. It'll pass!

3: Hey look at your dress! There is something red!

1: What are you talking about, red? It's blood! (starts crying) It's coming FROM THERE, what is happening to me?

2: Oh no are you going to die? (is frightened)

1: I don't want to die, help!

3: Yuck you have to go home now! That is gross! My mom said you have to be ashamed if others notice you are bleeding.

1 returns home crying when the others continue to walk to school.

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### **3. Beliefs**

There are many beliefs and social norms related to menstruation. The interviewees expressed that often many people believe that menstruation makes a person dirty. In this period you are not allowed to hold a baby, climb in trees or ride a bicycle, go to sacred places such as church or mosque, play with other children or cook food. During menstruation, the person is not allowed to participate in farming activities because the plants are believed to ruin.

In this scene you are in Uganda. A mother and her two daughters are talking together because the younger daughter has gotten her period.

Mom: Now that you have started bleeding you must remember a few important things.

Little sister: Oh what things?

Big sister: Important female information!

Mom: Yes. Now that you are bleeding there are many things that you should not do! The most important thing is you are not allowed into sacred places such as church or mosque, because you are dirty.

Big sister: Yeah! And you cannot cook food because it will be ruined!

Little sister: I am not dirty. We were not taught that in school! We have this thing in scout where we discuss about these things and there we were told that bleeding is not a dirty thing but it's normal!

Mom: Yeah, I heard about that, but you are still not cooking!

Little sister: You should also go and educate yourselves...

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### **4. The community's attitude, behaviour, and approach**

Talking about menstruation to other people can be uncomfortable, which can lead to people not talking about the subject. Some people that do not menstruate might not realize how menstruation affects them. Sometimes discomfort and lack of knowledge can unravel in for example bullying. This can cause fear and discomfort to people who menstruate about their own menstruation for which they might easily stay home because they are afraid of others' reaction.

In this scene you are in school in Finland. The pupils are in math class and the teacher is handing out the exams. One of the pupils did not do so well in the exam and they are sad about it. The class ends when the bell rings and the children want to go out to jump rope.

1: I don't think I want to jump rope.

2: At least come and spin the jump rope, someone must do it.

1: I don't want to (says angrily).

A group of other people start bullying the person:

1: Haha look, they are all moody because they have their periods! Did you get your period?

2: YEEW GROSS, they have their periods!

3: Stop, I'm just having a bad day!

1: Periods are making you cranky, yew now you're always cranky!

2: And you smell of periods, yew! Run to the bathroom!

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## 5. Menstrual hygiene

Maintaining menstrual hygiene in Ugandan schools is not easy. According to the interviewees, often the bathrooms do not have enough water available and you should carry it in yourself, but it is not always possible. In addition, the bathrooms are described as dirty or non-existing. This can cause school dropouts during periods.

In this scene you are in Uganda. A group of friends are on a break and jumping rope. Suddenly one of the friends stops jumping and blushes.

1: Hey, are you okay?

2: I think I got my period (whispering).

1: Oh, well go to the bathroom, I can come with you!

The others continue jumping when the two head to the bathroom.

1: There is no water! I can't even wash my dress.

2: Ugh it's always the same!

1: I have no choice but to go home! We would have math next though, it's my favourite. (Says sadly)

2 returns to the others.

3: Where did 1 go?

2: They had to go home. The bathroom was again in bad shape.

3: Ah okay. Well, I don't think its fair that you have to skip school every time you have your period.

The bell rings and the group return to class.

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## 6. Menstrual hygiene products

The interviewees were worried about the use of menstrual hygiene products. One concern was that the products would be harmful. Many mentions were made about disposable pads burning the skin or causing cancer. One pad could be used as long as possible because they are very expensive. Depending on family and resources, in addition to actual menstrual pads, old clothes, toilet paper, banana leaves, panties or cotton pads can be used as menstrual padding. In some schools they teach how to make cloth pads.

In this scene a group of friends are going swimming. The friends are on their way to the pool:

1: Oh no!

2: What is it?

1: I think I got my periods! (shyly)

2: Well let's run to the pool, there is a bathroom and you can buy tampons in the cafeteria. It's okay if you got your periods.

1: Yew I don't want to use a tampon! I heard you get sick if you use one. It can cause cancer!... Besides, you can't even swim if you're wearing one!

2: Nonsense, it doesn't cause cancer and you won't get sick. Believe me I've used them!

1: Oh well I was told so... But maybe I don't want to use them...'

2: Why? Let's just buy them, it will be fine.

1: I don't know, I don't know even how to use them and besides (says quietly) I don't have the money for it.

2: But they're not that expensive.

1: Oh they are! I only get a few pads and they have to last because we can't afford to buy more.

2: Oh! I've never thought of it like that! Hey, guess what! (goes through their bag) I have an extra tampon here and I can tell you how to put it! I use the menstrual cup but luckily, I still had these!

1: Okay let's do it.

The two run gladly to the pool.

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## 7. Going to school while menstruating

During menstruation school dropouts increase. Many times, people stay home due to the lack of menstrual paddings or hygiene. In addition, a lot of shame, fear and shyness is connected to menstruation for which often people are afraid to talk about it with their parents. Sometimes even parents do not let their children go to school during menstruation. Missing school due to menstruation disrupts the schooling of children and teenagers because often they are absent from school from four to five days. This affects their learning and school activity because they have not learned the same things as their classmates. Sometimes absence from school can also lead to punishment and dropouts.

In this scene we are home and ready to go to school.

Child: Mom, mom come here! (screams)

Mom: Well what is it, you should get ready for school!

Child: Mom I'm bleeding!

Mom: Let's see. Aah, you got your period. Today you'll be staying home because you can't go to school like that!

Child: Mom! We have an exam! Why can't I?

Mom: Do you want to go to school with your dress dirty? We don't have any pads right now.

Child: Well maybe no one will notice.

Mom: They certainly will and then you'll get bullied! You are staying home, end of discussion!