

*THE EDUCATIONAL AND WELLBEING BENEFITS OF
FREE SANITARY PRODUCTS IN EDUCATIONAL
SETTINGS FOR YOUNG GIRLS AGED 15+*

ECGE7002Q Dissertation: Equality and Diversity in Society

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify the educational and wellbeing of free sanitary products in educational settings for young girls aged 15+. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of young people to demonstrate whether the sanitary products may or may not be beneficial as current research suggests. In addition to the views of young people, the study will also seek to explore the perceptions of teachers and supporting staff. The content of this study presents a variety of data that highlights a few underlying issues young girls and women have faced over the years, with the support of current literature. Additionally, 12% of girls have had to improvise their sanitary wear to items such as old socks and rags, with an additional 1 in 5 individuals changing to less suitable products due to lack of affordability (Plan-UK, 2018). Furthermore, the data below will highlight that improvising sanitary wear can affect their educational development which acts as a barrier for future success.

The focus group activity and informal interviews provided interesting information which determined and highlighted that young people require additional PSE lessons in order to understand the physical, mental and emotional side to menstruation, emphasising the fact that boys should also be included in these lessons. Furthermore, from the data gathered, the sanitary products did not affect them as much, it was the overall factor of additional PSE lessons that's needed from as early as possible. It was highlighted by the data gathered that young people were very eager to express their perceptions regarding this topic. Additionally, the participants made it aware throughout their responses that the stigma and taboo is still a reoccurring issue for many young individuals, often leaving them feeling ashamed and embarrassed which can cause mental health issues such as anxiety. The data was analysed, and the conclusion was drawn that additional PSE lessons is crucial to educate individuals in order to step forward to the right direction to eradicate the shame and barrier that surround periods.

Acronym

YP- Young person

T – Teacher

FSM – Free School Meals

SP – Sanitary Products

1. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the educational and wellbeing benefits of free sanitary products in educational settings for young girls aged 15+. The study will highlight the current challenges young people face in educational settings in terms of meeting their menstruation needs. In the last five years, it has come to the attention of several individuals that the access to sanitary products has been raised as a concern, especially for those who are unable to access sanitary products due to a variety of underlying factors.

As a society, we have seen several news reports highlighting that period poverty is the main concern across the globe, affecting several young girls and women. Furthermore, the main concern for change is, it has been reported that several young girls are missing out on vital education because they are unable to locate sanitary products to meet their needs, causing a barrier to education. Therefore, this study will seek to explore the views and perceptions of young girls aged 15+ to demonstrate whether free sanitary products may or may not be as beneficial as current research suggests. The study will be based on a qualitative approach with the aim of exploring the perceptions of teachers and supporting staff.

According to George (2019), 15% of young girls have struggled to locate sanitary products to support their needs, with an additional 12% admitting to improvising by using other items such as old rags and socks. The data gathered from the qualitative activities will determine whether provision of free sanitary products may be beneficial to young people's development and wellbeing. The study will not disclose any personal information of the participants and will hide all anonymity of the individual. Additionally, the research will also require permission from the individuals in order to participate within the study and they will also be informed that they will be able to withdraw at any time during the study. This study is crucial to identify any possible changes needed within schools in order to provide an equal start for all individuals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the educational and wellbeing benefits of free sanitary products in educational settings for girls aged 15+. It will consider the advantages and barriers of having sanitary products within an educational setting, and whether this impacts their mental and emotional wellbeing. As a result of a vast increase in trying to normalise 'periods' and menstruation, research states that 800 million women are menstruating every day however, 'period' is still stigmatised around the world, today (Walsh, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to seek the perceptions and views of young girls, and in what way can society normalise the idea of 'periods. The review of literature for this study will be obtained from government publication documents, internet scholarly articles, independent researchers, non-government documents and websites. This section of the literature review will mainly focus on period poverty, health and wellbeing and the educational benefits of free sanitary products. Additionally, the three themes will explore current literature which will then be beneficial to support the data gathered in order to interoperate in chapter 5.

2.2. Period Poverty

Given the shortage of information on period poverty, it is unclear what challenges women and young adults must face. As children transition into adulthood, it is crucial they have the correct resources that will meet their needs in order for them to develop to their fullest potential. According to Hall (1904. Cited in Petersen, 1988) adolescence is one of many important stages, yet the most challenging for young girls due to physical transition. Adolescence is the 'key link between childhood and adulthood' (PRB, 2019), which involves distinct changes between puberty and the physical maturation (Brand and Kirov, 2011), with them facing some difficult experiences and life-moments. Until the last year or so, periods and sanitary products were hardly mentioned in tabloids and in society however, it's time for change.

'Period poverty' is commonly known as having a lack of access to sanitary products due to a variety of factors (Walsh, 2019). Monthly menstruation is a topic which can be quite distressing and embarrassing for individuals, especially in circumstances where some cultures have their own beliefs about menstruation. Additionally, according to Montgomery (1974), the religious cultures of New Guinea strongly believe that "sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman will drain and weaken a man". Therefore, this study must be extremely considerate of individuals personal beliefs and views, as all religions have different restrictions when it comes to menstruation. Additionally, women around the world use all kinds to manage their monthly menstruation as they lack resources and funds, this being from "animal skins and old rags to cow patties and silicon cups" (Hodal, 2019). On average, women 'will be affected by menstruation for 3,000 days in her lifetime: that works out to be more than eight years' (Walsh, 2019) of their lives they have spent worrying about their monthly cycles, with certain individuals being forced to turn to old socks, cloths and other alternatives that will act as a sanitary product. Additionally, In the UK, period poverty has caused one in ten women, aged 14 to 21 years to miss an entire day of education due to no accessibility and affordability of sanitary products (Walsh, 2019). Abbott (2019) states that some girls are forced to use 'old socks, newspaper and toilet roll', this is not only unacceptable but also a risk to their health as its extremely unhygienic. The experience these young girls endure can

affect their overall development therefore, it may affect their overall educational performance and future opportunities due to the worry and burden of monthly menstruation.

The causes of period poverty can be caused by a variety of factors, but the main concerns are the lack of access to sanitary products within educational settings. Additionally, the holistic view of menstruation is the impact it has on their physical, psychological and wellbeing development (Tull, 2019). It has been reported that young girls in Kenya are forced to have sexual intercourse in exchange for sanitary products (Tull, 2019), leaving them in danger of contracting diseases and endangering their lives. Furthermore, the biggest barrier for women and young girls are the educational and social restrictions that influence the management of monthly menstruation. Several young girls have very limited amount of knowledge and understanding when they begin menstruating, and they have very limited knowledge (Tull, 2019) on what products they should be using that suits their body and comfortability. Additionally, using education to its fullest advantage can encourage young girls to attend school, maintain their personal wellbeing and hygiene, and empower themselves to tackle the controversial topic they must face on a regular occurrence. Additionally, the taboo surrounding the subject inflicts embarrassment and indignity upon millions of women and young girls each day, even driving them out of education which leaves them in a disadvantaged position of under-achieving and falling behind with their development (Tull, 2019). Therefore, period poverty may impact their health, the ability to perform in school and in their development as an individual (Abbott, 2019). 'It's unthinkable that young women could be forced to miss days of their education simply because they can't access or afford period products' (Murphy, 2019).

"Human rights are negatively impacted when women and girls cannot manage menstruation with dignity, but rights should also be at the heart of the solution" (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Poor management and poor policies are a few issues that have a negative impact on the rights of women (Human Rights Watch, 2017), leaving them to fight for their equal rights. Moreover, 'Menstrual Hygiene Day' (MH) is a global advocacy platform for women and young girls to eradicate the persisting stigma and taboo around menstruation (MH Day, 2020). On 28th of May 2020, the organisation holds a global event to raise awareness, change negative social norms around menstruation (MH Day, 2020) and to also appreciate all the women and

young girls who have endured suffer and embarrassment their whole lives. Additionally, Herd (2018) also states, the 'Menstrual Health Day' is an important event each year as it encourages the importance of managing periods with dignity, starting your menstruation for the first time can be overwhelming and intimidating. Furthermore, with the event being very important to recognise change and empowerment, it is crucial to celebrate the menstrual health day in educational settings in order to provide recognition "where no woman or girl is limited by something as natural and normal as her period" (MH Day, 2020).

2.3. Health and Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing benefits of individuals is a crucial aspect of life to thrive and develop. Whilst young girls may be using old socks, newspaper and toilet roll as their sanitary products (Abbott, 2019), this may affect their overall performance and development in education. An additional 1 in 7 girls have admitted to asking a friend to borrow a sanitary product due to lack of affordability (Plan-UK, 2018). Menstruation is something that goes beyond development and learning, having the correct resources and support can help them thrive to become successful, confident individuals.

The five ways of wellbeing is believed to provide a holistic overview of personal health where individuals thrive and develop from these factors to find balance and build resilience. In order for individuals to thrive in education, they must meet their five wellbeing goals in order to develop however, in spite of this, period poverty seems to be the main issue when it comes to learning and being active. There are five different approaches of the wellbeing goals which contributes to our daily living and they are: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Learn and Give (MIND, 2013). During this review, we will explore two wellbeing goals as it closely relates to the topic in mind. The two particular goals that will be reviewed are 'Be Active and Learn'. "Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups" (MIND, 2013), however, young girls are missing out on education and regular activity due to not having the correct sanitary products to keep them in education. According to heygirls (2019), by providing free sanitary products within educational settings, it may keep young girls in 'education, improve concentration and encourage participation with physical activities and support good health'. Free sanitary products provide reassurance and confidence to perform well in education, it also promotes equality (heygirls, 2019).

The second wellbeing factor young girls relate to in order to develop is: learn. According to MIND (2013), 'continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life'. Many girls will miss out on several opportunities and experiences and according to Plan international UK research (cited in heygirls, 2019), 1 in 10 girls may be affected by period poverty across the UK. Furthermore, according to the UNCRC (2010), section E of article 28 states, in order to reduce the rate of 'drop-outs', measures must be put in place in order to encourage regular attendance at school, and in relation to this, Tull (2019) states, programmes have been created aiming to keep girls in education by providing sanitary products within educational settings. By having no access to sanitary products, it may restrict young girls from attending education and be away longer than expected which can affect their overall academic achievement. As a society, women and young girls are made to feel that periods are something that should not be spoken about, and through this experience, individuals can become isolated from society and made to feel embarrassed for asking for sanitary products.

2.4. Educational benefits of free sanitary products

Menstruation is an educational topic that goes beyond learning, it's something that should be taught across all ages in order to develop and make individuals aware of the importance of periods. As young girls and women face the daily challenge of embarrassment and the stigma surrounding menstruation, educational settings must ensure 'a barrier free provision' in order to provide girls with easy access to sanitary products without the requirement of asking teachers (heygirls, 2019). Additionally, it is crucial that all students are made aware of the importance of not to misuse the products because they are seen as a necessity to certain individuals who require the products to feel human and safe. According to Drohan (2019), a male headteacher once said, "the students, likely 12-year-olds, would abuse the privilege" of having free sanitary products in educational settings however, they must be educated from an early age in order to realise the importance that sanitary wear are seen as a necessity and not a luxury item to some individuals.

Some may argue that there are more important subjects to learn however, there are many benefits for educating students about the pros and cons of sanitary products. The first major benefit of providing free sanitary products within educational settings would be the

reassurance to young girls knowing they can menstruate with dignity as the setting has a barrier free provision. Additionally, having discreet access to sanitary products may encourage students to become more confident in attending school and to raise awareness surrounding the subject. Furthermore, some may argue that educating boys is as important as educating girls when it comes to menstruation because it provides the boys a sense of idea how much girls must endure when their bodies transition. According to Plan-UK (2018), the majority of young girls feel that a large proportion of negative comments are stemmed from boys as they haven't been educated about periods, which ultimately positions this subject into a category where they will think it's a female issue and they don't have to learn nor speak about it. Additionally, George (2019) emphasises how society has conditioned individuals into thinking that periods should and must only be spoken about amongst women as it's a 'female' issue however, it's also a barrier for trans men to receive education regarding periods therefore, it is crucial all individuals receive PSE lessons from as early as year 7 in order to provide knowledge and information regarding the topic.

In order to educate individuals, the learning must begin in school in order to raise awareness surrounding this topic. Young girls are facing these issues every day with no support and are then left confused and unsupported when they hit puberty which may then affect their quality of life and the quality of their education. According to Murphy (2019), primary and secondary schools in Wales will receive a £2.3million scheme: 'the period dignity grant for Wales', where young students will benefit from free sanitary products. 'Two in five girls have had to rely on using toilet roll to manage their period, one charity's survey revealed last year' (Murphy, 2019). Additionally, according to Lea (2020) free sanitary products were made available to primary and secondary students from earlier this year. Educational settings will be able to order a range of sanitary products which will be located on campus for young people to use, the products will also include eco-friendly options. It's one step closer to bringing period poverty to an end, where individuals would feel at ease and comfortable in their own setting. Additionally, from 1st of January 2021, there will be a zero-rate applied on all sanitary wear according to Seely (2020) where we may no longer see 'tampon-tax' on sanitary wear. According to Buchanan (2015), we saw the VAT of sanitary products first drop in 2015, when it was reduced from 17.5% to 5% however, some MPs voted against the eradication of tampon-tax, they were all men. As a country who would like change and to see a more positive future, we cannot claim to be promoting fairness, equality and openness if

we are discriminating young adults from adequate access to free sanitary products. Additionally, not one individual “should face the indignity of being unable to access these essential products to manage their period” (Khomami, 2018).

2.5. Conclusion

The findings from this review highlights the lack of support young girls receive in terms of supporting their menstruation needs. It is clear that period poverty is still an underlying issue for several individuals therefore, the provision of free sanitary products may be a necessity to them in order for them to menstruate with dignity. Additionally, Walsh (2019) notes above that one in ten girls have missed out on education due to lack of accessibility and affordability therefore, change is required in order to provide a better school experience where they’ll be able to feel like every other child, to make them feel like they have somewhere safe and comfortable. Contrary to this, it was highlighted that primary and secondary schools will receive a £2.3million scheme where they’ll be able to provide individuals with free sanitary products (Murphy, 2019), with Lea (2020) also highlighting, there will be eco-friendly products to choose from. Furthermore, with the aim of this study is to identify whether young girls would benefit from receiving free sanitary products, the information gathered within the literature review has concluded the theory that change is needed within educational settings in order to provide a better provision of care for all young girls in order to support their mental wellbeing as well as their physical wellbeing. The next chapter will highlight in detail the methods chosen to gather important information that will support this study further.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will adopt a qualitative approach to gather information as it forms well with the nature of the topic. The qualitative method is a multi-method approach where it involves participants in their own naturalistic environment where they feel comfortable (Outhwaite and Turner, 2007). Qualitative approach has been chosen for this particular research as it involves a variety of empirical methods such as focus groups and in-formal interviews. Furthermore, in addition to Outhwaite and Turner (2007), Punch (2013) suggests that a qualitative approach is better known as having a variety of methods used in order to demonstrate a detailed investigation inspired by research questions to gain information to conclude a topic. Furthermore, the nature of this study is to determine whether young girls in education may benefit from free sanitary products and whether it may help the individual in the long-term. This chapter will also investigate current existing literature alongside the information given by the individuals involved. The information gathered will help the research study and provide an outcome on whether educational settings need to do more in terms of supporting the needs of young girls. During this chapter, it will demonstrate the variety of research instruments and methods that will be applied during the study. The study will also identify the ethical issues this study may come across in terms of personal information and how it will be managed in terms of confidentiality.

This research study will be qualitative in nature rather where there will be a range of methods used in order to determine whether there are benefits in providing free sanitary products to young girls in educational settings. Qualitative approach has been chosen for this study rather than the quantitative approach as it allows the participants to express their views and thoughts more openly. Furthermore, surveys, questionnaires and tick box methods deny the freedom for the participants to express their views based on lived experiences, this is why the qualitative approach was better suited for this research. Additionally, the methods used will display a participatory and creative approach to enable the study to have a comfortable, relaxing feel as the topic of the study can be embarrassing and controversial for some. Periods, pads and menstruation are a few common words of which some individuals find quite

uncomfortable, especially when the stigma around menstruation is at a high. The participatory approach has been chosen for this study to signify a philosophical perspective that encourages the researcher to play an active involvement in the study, which will minimise the awkwardness between the researcher and the participants when discussing the topic (Kumar, 2019). Additionally, the main aim for this study is to raise awareness of the findings that will be collected from the participants and to solve any issues that will be raised in order to meet individuals needs further, if applicable. Interaction with the participants at this integral part of the study will be crucial in order to seek results in order to determine what young adults think about sanitary products within education, and whether it will be beneficial for individuals or whether it will provide a negative twist to the setting. Furthermore, the study aims to provide an opportunity to the participants to express their views and opinion about the topic in mind, and whether individuals would develop mentally, physically and intellectually if they were to receive free sanitary products. As young adults will be the main participants of this study, the findings gathered from the young adults will hopefully identify a variety of information as they all learn differently and thus is an experimental learning where the participants and the researcher can be creative in terms of presenting information. Furthermore, participatory research will generate new knowledge for those involved which will be beneficial in order to identify possible development strategies that the participants may think will be beneficial for their wellbeing (Groundwater-Smith et al, 2015). According to UNCRC (2010), article 2 states that all parties must put measures in place to ensure the individual is protected against all forms of discrimination that may deny them the opportunity to develop and feel comfortable within their own environment. Additionally, if the price of sanitary products is broken down, the average cost may vary from £40 a month. Taking everything into account, 'the average woman spends £492 a year on her period' (Lee, 2018). Furthermore, the real problem is being missed with the statement above. The real issue here is that some women cannot afford to spend a little amount on sanitary products therefore, it may be time for the voice of women and young girls to be heard in order to improve the situation some unfortunate individuals must face on a daily basis. The aim of this study is to ensure that all opinions, views and voices are heard therefore, it provides the young girls the right to express their view on the topic. Additionally, according to article 12 of the UNCRC (2010), a "child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child". Therefore, all participants

will have the opportunity to reflect and express their views in a way which they feel comfortable in doing so.

Bell (2014) suggests, researchers that implement a qualitative perspective are more interested in the views and opinions of the world and individuals involved. In this study, I have chosen to use informal interviews and focus groups in order to gather information. The use of the focus group will allow myself to collect data in an informal method. The informal interviews will allow myself to gather information from “behind the scenes” with the schoolteachers and the school counsellor in order to gather information and views regarding this topic. More than often, school counsellor and the teachers will have a different opinion from the young adults however, by receiving a diverse range of information from all participants, it may create a stronger argument to conclude. Additionally, this is commonly known as triangulation. Flick et al. (2004) refers to triangulation as gathering information from at least two different perspectives. Additionally, triangulation is now seen as more of a tactful strategy to underpin and justify individuals’ views, rather than a strategy of validation (Flick et al., 2004). This will provide further depth to the study in order to gather a range of findings from a diverse group of people, from those who have lived through the experience as this will give the study a sense of reality.

3.2. Focus group

A focus group participatory method will be adapted into this study in order to create a child-friendly, comfortable environment for the individuals. Additionally, Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015) suggests that some participants draw most of their confidence whilst being in a group with other individuals. Furthermore, regardless of method chosen, it is crucial to ensure all participants will be comfortable during the process. According to the UNCRC (2010), all parties have the right to freedom and the comfortability of their own environment therefore, this may encourage a willingness to take part within the research if they feel secure with the researcher. Focus groups are group interviews where the reliance is based upon the interaction between the participants of the group based on a subject given by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Furthermore, it serves as a primary method of collecting vital information from those who have lived through the experiences. Additionally, this study involves young adults however, they are also considered as active agents as the enquiry of research involves them and their future (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, the focus group approach has been chosen as part of this study as it's more effective than a 'tick box questionnaire' method as young adults are likely to engage in activities that may concern them and their future (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). In addition to this, Morgan (1997) also states that the combined methods of qualitative research contribute 'something unique to the researchers understanding of the phenomenon under study'. Periods, pads and cramps have all been a topic of conversation but not in a positive way. According to Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), conversations can emphasise the ability for young adults and children to engage in social interaction. Moreover, the main aim of the focus group is to encourage the participants to engage in a free-flow conversation presented by the researcher in order to reduce the 'taboo' around periods, and to get them talking about their own views and opinions. Additionally, monthly menstruation has always been a taboo and controversial subject to discuss however, as children learn by experience; the information gathered from young girls will be a vital source of information that will provide knowledge and depth to this study. Additionally, focus groups have become a more popular mode of interaction among participants in order to engage within a specific topic that will hopefully better the future of individuals (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015).

Participation from young people and adults can shape a research study in many ways as it embodies the nature of the topic and moulds the conclusion together. According to Shier (2001. Cited in Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015), he strongly argues that there are five levels of participation within qualitative research. The five levels of participation are: “1) children are listened to; 2) children are supported in expressing their views; 3) children’s views are taken into account; 4) children are involved in decision-making processes; and 5) children share power and responsibility for decision-making (Shier, 2001. Cited in Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). In accordance to the five levels of participation, the UNCRC (2010) also strongly argues the similar views that children have the right to freedom of expression (article 13) and have the right to form their own views in all matters that may affect themselves and their future (article 12). Additionally, in order for ‘participation’ to work within the study, it is also crucial that experiential learning works alongside the method. Experiential learning can offer a variety of solutions in order to solve the topic in a constructive way (Kolb, 2015). Furthermore, the aim of this study is to constructively determine an outcome based on the findings gathered and create a positive solution in order to meet the needs of the participants, if needs be. Additionally, people learn from experience and according to Vygotsky (Kozulin et al., 2003), “learning in a generic sense is a part of many human activities, and to make the individual a competent learner”. Therefore, the participants knowledge and experiences will contribute a broad of depth and understanding that no other will understand.

In order to create a rich and meaningful research study, the study will conduct a participatory focus group involving sixteen young girls aged 15+. According to Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), Participatory groups are where the researcher forms a partnership with the participants in order to provide an opportunity for the young adults to ‘shape the project’, in terms of past experiences and the outcome they’d like to achieve. Young adults are often seen as ‘children’, where they should ‘do and say’ what adults tell them however, during this project; the young people will have the opportunity to become active participants in influencing the outcome of this study and to also develop their personal and social skills (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015).

The session will include a fun, energetic activity that will provide the individuals with the opportunity to express their views and opinions relating to the topic. A range of non-invasive questions will be asked in line with the topic where the individuals will be able to express their

views, opinions and will then place them on the washing line as a sign of freedom and power. They'll be given the opportunity to become active leaders in providing information that may affect their future and development. The questions being asked will not invade their personal experiences but focus solely on what educational settings can do to better their setting and whether change is needed to help young adults further. Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015) suggests that researchers seek the perceptions of young adults and children as this will help reflect on the outcome of the study. This will be done by focusing on the core information that stands out from the rest and alerts the researcher, for example: are the needs of young individuals met or are they being ignored? Furthermore, young adults may currently experience the struggle of having to ask a friend for sanitary items as the setting may not provide free sanitary products therefore, the views of young people will influence and re-direct the study as the researcher themselves may have not thought about a certain topic the individuals may discuss.

The activity will include four groups of four participants aged 15+, primarily involving girls as this study is focusing on the perceptions of young girls and how they feel about monthly menstruation. The activity will include a washing line where the participants will have the opportunity to display their feelings on the washing line as a sign of change and empowerment. There will be a set of eight questions, which will be based on their perceptions of having free sanitary products within educational settings and whether this will benefit their wellbeing. As young adults learn by experience, this activity will be better suited for this research as the participation of young adults is crucial to enhance the research. Additionally, according to Oliver and Pitt (2011), it is crucial to consider the perspectives of young adults from the outset of their past experiences, especially if they have been affected by the situation. The questions will range from positive, negative and whether improvement is needed. In addition to this, the activity will include a 'positive, negative and a new idea' templates where they'll have the opportunity to display on the washing line. The 'vest' template will represent a positive response. The 'pants' template will represent a negative response and the 'light bulb' template will represent whether improvement is needed within educational settings. These particular templates are chosen for this activity to ensure the feel of the activity is fun, relaxing and comfortable, to ensure all individuals involved participates in their own way. This activity will provide them with the opportunity to contribute what's

good, what's bad and what the government, educational settings and adults can do to better the future of individuals. Once all findings have been gathered from the young adults, the study will then proceed to collect information from the schoolteachers and the school counsellor in order to gain a different perspective to the research study.

3.3. Informal interviews

According to Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), "interviews remain a common element of much research with children and young people- either as a primary data source, or as one of a range of methods employed". The study has chosen to demonstrate the method of informal interviews as the researcher strongly believed the participants would interact in a more relaxed way, very much like a conversation (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). The purpose of informal interviews is to allow the participants to express their views and feelings, and not to imply the outcome of their answer. The study will include two females and two male participants who are either teachers or/and the school counsellor. The participants chosen will be a beneficial addition to the study as this will provide an educational insight that may add a different outcome. Jamshed (2014) suggests that unstructured interviews allow the participants to express themselves in their own way and in their own time, based on a set of questions that have been generated from the responses received during the group activity. The questions being asked will be open-ended questions as this enables the researcher to gather factual information that will be beneficial to enhance this research. There will be a set of four questions which will be formed from the responses generated from the focus group activity. The questions will be somewhat more general in the frame of reference relating to the topic in order to gather beneficial information (Bryman, 2016). From this, the researcher will then identify key themes which reappears throughout the information gathered. Additionally, the themes will then later be used for later analysis (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012) in order to form links between current data and the data gathered from the participants in order to come to a conclusion.

Compared to a questionnaire, participants may be more than likely to express their views more willingly than to write them down as the conversation may become free flowing and they may feel more comfortable expressing their experiences in that method (Groundwater-

Smith et al., 2015). By expressing personal views, participants may become reluctant to write down their opinions therefore, a free-flow conversation may encourage them to provide vital information that will develop this study. Additionally, by conducting informal interviews, the researcher will be able to clarify any confusion participants may have in regard to the questions being asked. Additionally, by conducting a face-to-face interview, it may encourage the participants to express their views more openly regarding controversial subjects (Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, in order to gather information from the participants, a good rapport and a sense of trust must be established first between the researcher and the participants involved. This will be done before the session begins with an icebreaker where all participants will be able to feel relaxed and comfortable within the environment. The researcher will begin the session by introducing themselves and will then ask the participants for their name and to share one their funniest joke; this way, it will lighten the mood and make it feel less formal.

3.4. Data collection

In order to gather vital information to develop this research, I have chosen to conduct this research in my local secondary school. To complete a good qualitative research, the study must obtain interpretations and consistency throughout with the data collected from the participants (Ibrahim, 2012). Furthermore, the participants involved will be young female adults, schoolteachers and the school counsellor. Additionally, the participants involved in the study will provide the research with a sense of reality with their views, perceptions and experiences. The main focus of this research study is to obtain views and opinions from participants involved in order to identify whether free sanitary products will benefit the development and wellbeing of young adults in education. It is necessary to obtain consent from parents, participants involved and the teachers in order to gather crucial information to determine the outcome of results.

Once all findings have been gathered from all participants, the data will then be thematically analysed in order to identify themes and reoccurring patterns. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method where it is used to determine a range diverse of reoccurring themes from the gathered findings, that may be related to current data (Ibrahim, 2012). Additionally, analysing the data provides the researcher with an opportunity to understand the topic on a

wider scale (Marks and Yardley, 2004), to gain a better perspective of participants experiences and views. According to Smith (2015), the words of participants provide an outlook to their particular experiences and their own version of reality which will be beneficial to develop the study.

Due to the global outbreak of the Coronavirus, the researcher was unable to attend the place of setting where the activity should have taken place. Despite this, all communication about the activity, informal interviews and the questions were sent forward to the teacher in charge of the particular age group this study is focusing on and they participated within the activity in their free time.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter outlined above highlights how the research will be conducted, transcribed and coded into a variety of themes which will then be categorised in chapter 4 in order to display the information gathered from the participants. The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions and views of young people and teacher's reality regarding this subject. Due to the global outbreak of the virus, the researcher was unable to conduct the focus-group or the informal interviews themselves therefore, they were in regular contact with the school as the head of year 11 was conducting the activity on my behalf in order to maintain the perceptions of the participants.

4. Presentation of Data

4.1. Introduction

This chapter contains the analysis of findings gathered from young girls aged fifteen+ and educational professionals such as the schoolteachers. Additionally, the young girls in particular was chosen for this study because their perceptions and views regarding this topic was crucial to conclude whether free sanitary wear would benefit their wellbeing and overall educational development. Furthermore, the views of teachers would also provide additional source to the study which would then conclude whether the school requires to provide further support for the students. The first step involved collecting data through a focus group activity with the young girls, this was conducted in order to determine whether free sanitary products would be a positive or a negative contribution to the school. "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time consuming, creative and fascinating process. Data analysis is a search for answers about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall and Rossman, 1990). The second step included responses from the schoolteachers in order to determine if they also think that free sanitary products would benefit the individuals in a positive or a negative approach. The aim of this study was to identify factors that may conclude whether free sanitary products would benefit young individuals, and their wellbeing. Furthermore, current literature would also be used in comparison to the data gathered from the participants in order to highlight a common theme between both and whether there is room for change to support young girls further. The data gathered from the participants would highlight any issues that have already been emphasised by current reports.

4.2. Profile of participants

Table 1:

Sex	Age	Number of participants
Female	15-40	12
Male	29-60	2

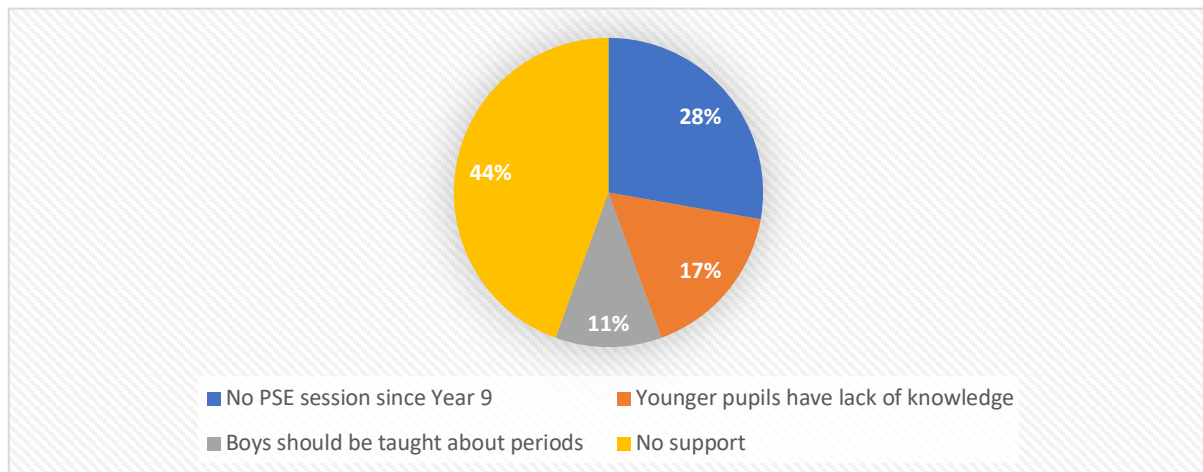
Table 1 indicates the age range that participated within this study. From the data gathered, it identified a similar pattern of information between the participants responses. According to Bazeley (2013), this is where the researcher will form a contextualised and holistic understanding from the perceptions of the participants, reading between the lines to form connections to other ideas and investigations that may need developing further. From the responses gathered from the focus-group activity, there were three reoccurring themes that have been identified which have been categorised below in section 4.3., 4.4. and 4.5. The presentation of data will be presented under these themes which will highlight the current views and perceptions of young girls and teachers. The participants felt strongly about the topic given and they identified several issues that may need to be highlighted for future development that will be discussed in chapter five.

The next area of discussion involved asking young people about the help and support they received in regard to periods. The data below will present the perceptions of young people on the current situation in terms of receiving sanitary wear within educational settings and whether they believe that change is needed in order to support their needs better or their school are doing everything they can.

4.3. Education

Question for YP: What does the school do to help and support young girls with understanding their periods?

Table 2:



The pie chart above identifies that eight out of ten participants (44%) aged 15+ said, there is a lack of support overall, in school. Additionally, YP1 quotes, “We didn’t get much help and support if I’m being honest in terms of understanding periods”. Furthermore, YP2 states, “The school doesn’t do anything to do with periods which means that the younger pupils don’t understand why they should mess about with the free sanitary products that the school provides”.

The participants involved are in year 11, fast approaching their GCSEs. Additionally, five out of ten participants (28%) strongly identified that they have not received a PSE lesson discussing the topic of menstruation since they were in year 9. “We do sometimes have PSE lessons but the last time we had one about our periods was back in year 9” (YP3). Additionally, two out of ten participants (11%) strongly believe that boys should also be educated the deeper understanding of menstruation, and what girls must endure each month. Furthermore, YP4 highlights, “there should be more lessons for not only girls but for boys because I don’t think girls should have to be ashamed of her period and boys also need to understand what happens to girls and how their bodies work while going through this change”.

Table 3:

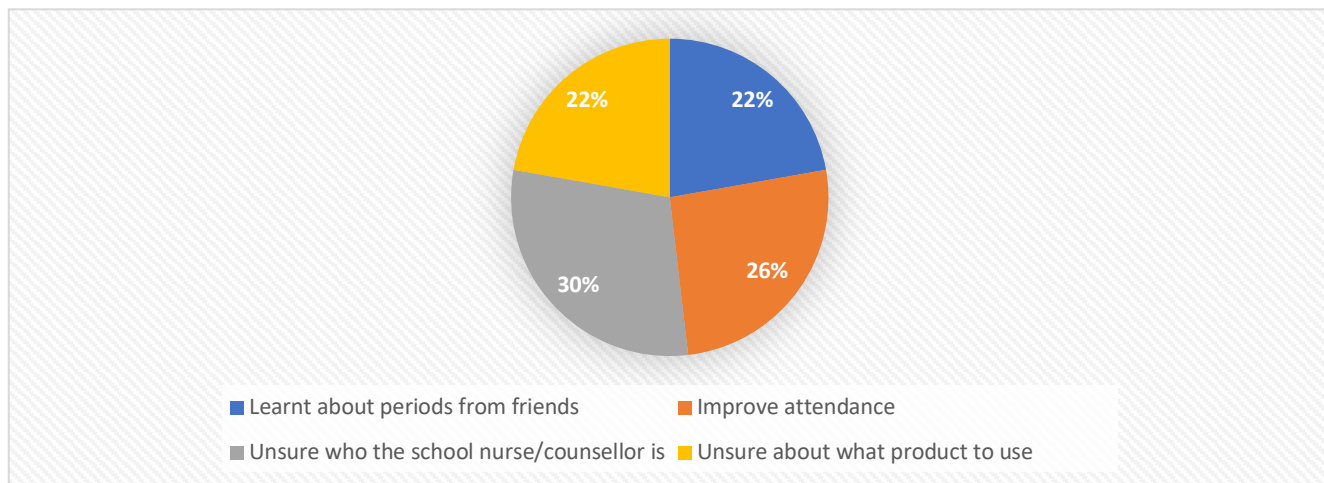


Table 3 indicates, eight out of ten participants (30%) were unsure who the school nurse/counsellor was for their school. According to YP4, “there’s a school nurse and school counsellor, but I have no idea who they are or where they are located in the school”. Additionally, YP8 states, “we could go speak to the nurse but to be honest all of us don’t know her very well and again I would feel embarrassed to talk about it with her. I do think the stigma around periods is preventing girls to talk to people”.

The below question will highlight the response gathered from the teachers. The data gathered from the teachers would add a certain depth to the study in order to compare both sides of the education system.

Question for teachers: What do you think the school/or the government can do in order to improve?

Table 4: Teacher Response

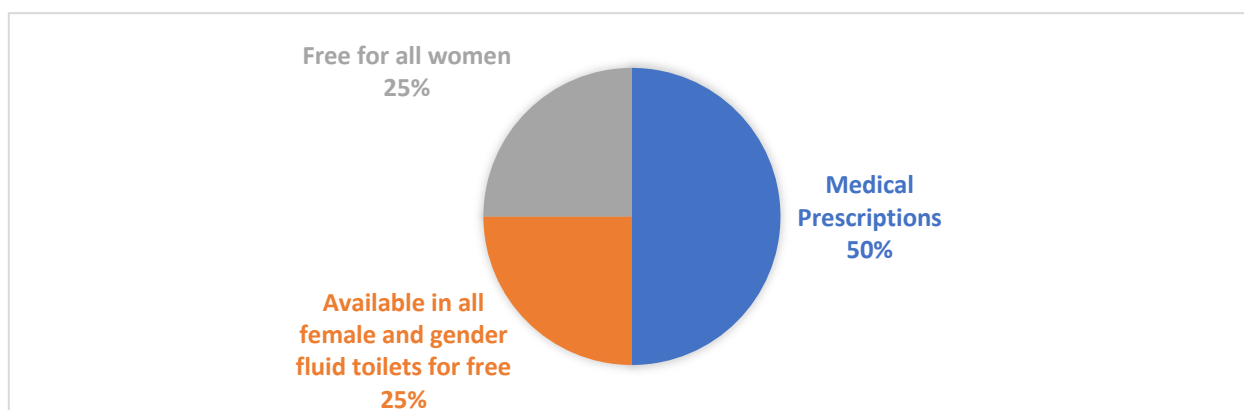


Table 4 indicates that two out of three teachers (50%) highlighted that sanitary products must be medically prescribed for women and young girls in order to see change. T1 highlights, “a

new legislation providing free sanitary products for all women as are medical prescriptions”. In addition to T1 response, T3 highlights, “remove tax for sanitary products. Products available for free for those that need it, FSM pupils etc”.

In addition to the question above, the participants were asked a similar question during their focus-group activity in order to compare responses from both parties.

Question for YP: What should be done in order to improve the future of young girls?

Table 5:

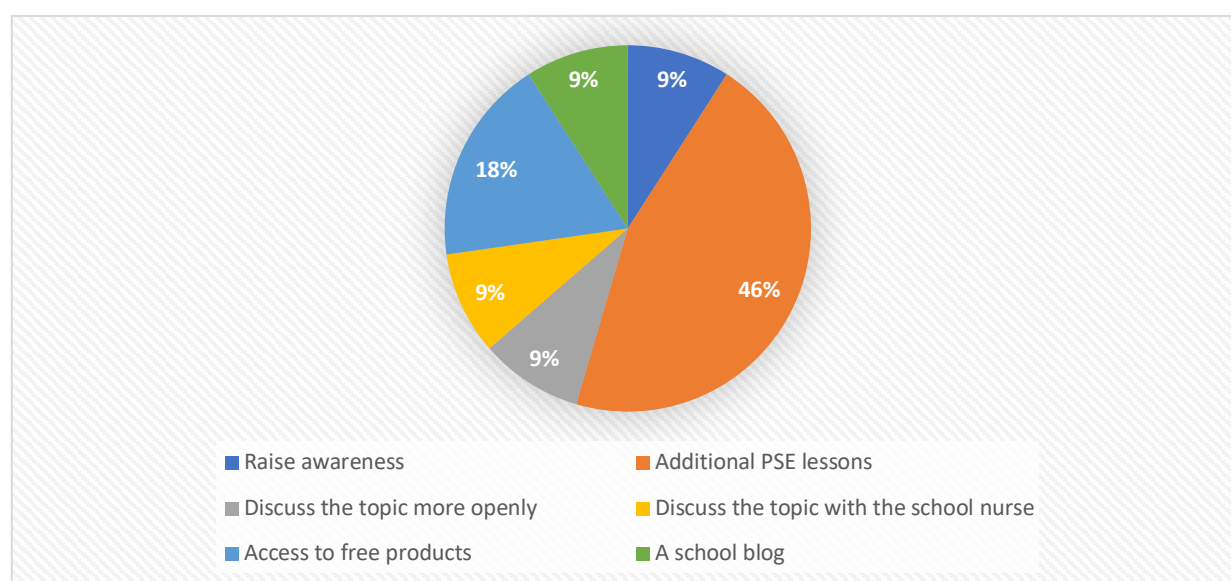
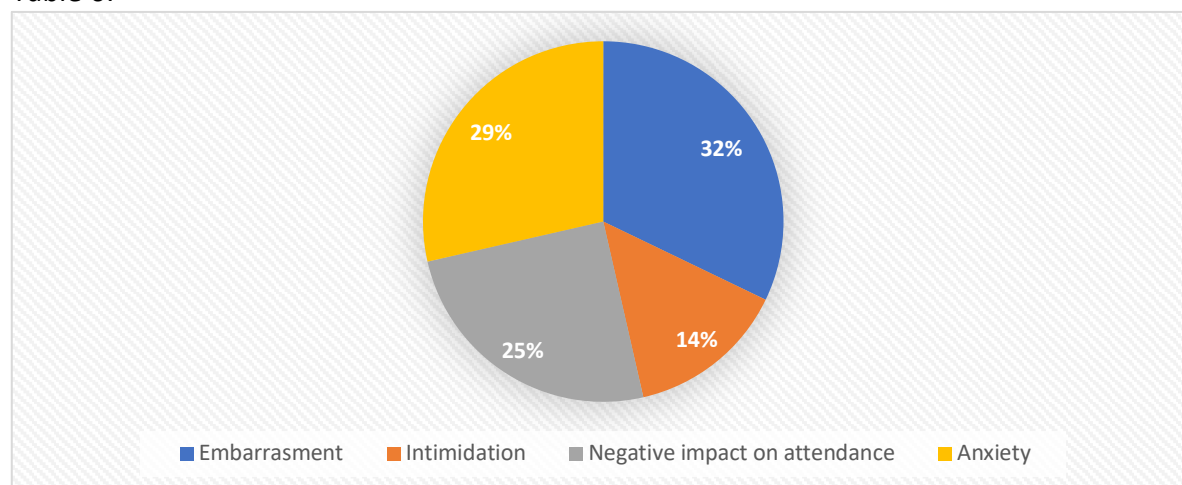


Table 5 highlights that five out of ten participants (46%) states that young adults should receive additional PSE lessons. According to YP7, “I think schools should do more PSE lessons on the topic, even when girls are older than years 7 and 8. Also, during PSE lessons, I think there should be more activities involved where young girls can discuss and be more open about the topic. By creating a more relaxed and open environment, girls feel less intimidated about the subject”. Moreover, one participant (9%) highlights that they would like to see an online response ‘blog’ to discuss the topic with other worrying individuals, “there could maybe be a website or a blog for girls to look at and not feel alone as everyone goes through it and to try and decrease the negativity about it” (YP8). Additionally, 9% of the responses also believe the topic must be discussed more openly. Two out of ten participants (18%) believes that young girls should have access to sanitary wear, for free.

4.4. Wellbeing and the voice of young people

Question for YP: Do you think young girls would benefit from free pads?

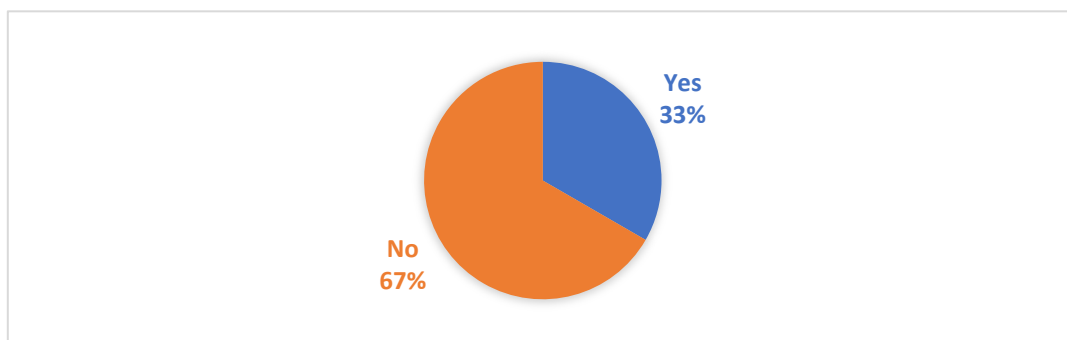
Table 6:



YP8 highlights, "It will also benefit their health and wellbeing as for example, forgot to bring one to school and having them in school already will save the panic and anxiety. They will have a healthy and clearer mind as they wouldn't be worried about it". Nine out of ten participants (32%) highlighted that they have felt embarrassed for being on their period whilst being on campus because they are unable to afford sanitary products at home and were unable to locate any in school: YP3 states, "their attendance would increase as they would not feel uncomfortable coming to school knowing there are pads available". YP2 quotes, "If girls have free sanitary products, they will be able to come to school as they won't feel embarrassed to come if they didn't. this would also benefit their education as they be missing any school". 29% of the responses states that anxiety has been a result from the negative experience of their menstruation. Seven out of ten (25%) participants states that menstruation has had a negative impact on their attendance.

Question for teachers: Are there any disadvantages of having free sanitary products in school?

Table 7: Teacher response



As seen in table 7, two out of three (67%) teachers states that there are “absolutely no downfall for having free sanitary products in educational settings” however, one teacher claims, “the chance of bullying could increase due to people using the products and others knowing that they cannot afford to purchase their own products” (T1). Additionally, T2 highlighted during this question, “younger pupils throwing them around the toilets – waste. School have done an assembly on period poverty and make pupils aware that free sanitary products are a necessity for many pupils and adults”.

Question for YP: Are there any designated people on campus that you can speak to about menstruation?

Table 8:

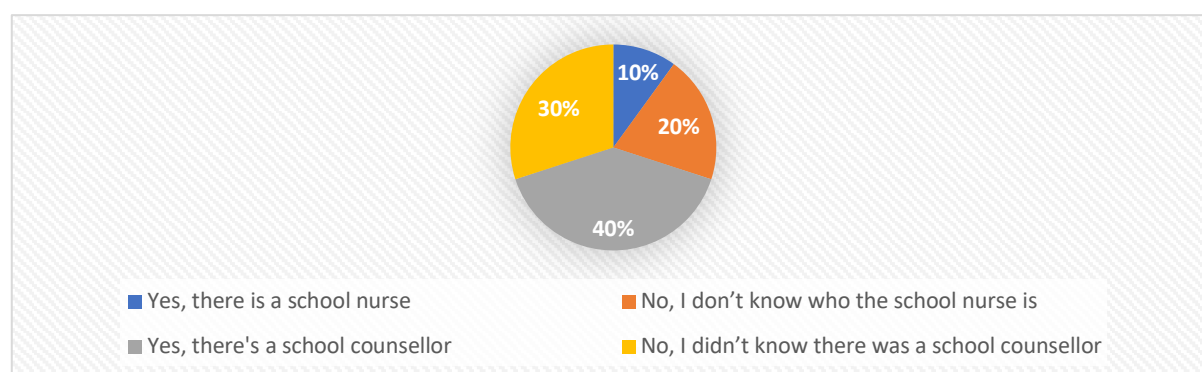


Table 8 highlights four out of ten participants (40%) claims that the school does have a school counsellor however, YP7 states, “the school counsellor said at the beginning of the school year that they would be in every Wednesday but, we have never seen her here on that particular day”, which complies with the three participants (30%) who states that they’ve never seen a school counsellor on campus . 20% of the responses claims that they don’t know who the school nurse is.

Question for YP: Why do you think it has taken so long for sanitary products to become free in educational settings?

Table 9:

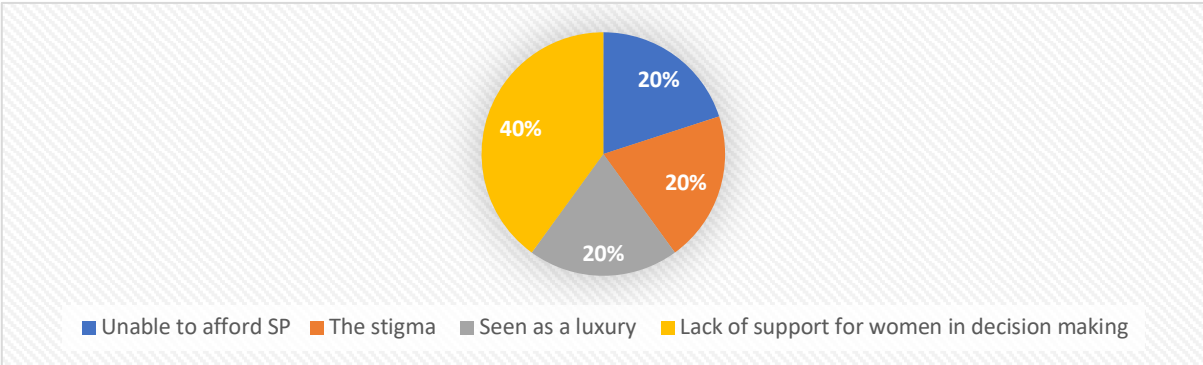


Table 9 highlights, four out of ten participants (40%) emphasised that they have seen a lack of support in terms of prioritising menstruation in educational settings as an urgent request for change. YP6 highlighted, “I think it’s because men have always been higher than women, they don’t really take it into consideration that some people can’t pay for sanitary products”. Additionally, YP8 also coincides with YP6 perception by highlighting, “I don’t think that people which are higher up don’t understand how some girls can’t get sanitary products. They don’t understand how much they really cost and how many families can’t afford them”. Two out of ten participants (20%) said that menstruation is seen as a luxury to some individuals. Furthermore, “they are seen as luxury products and most girls needs pads which are essential to life” (YP4).

Question for teachers: Why do you think it has taken so long for young girls to access free sanitary products in educational settings?

Table 10: Teacher Response

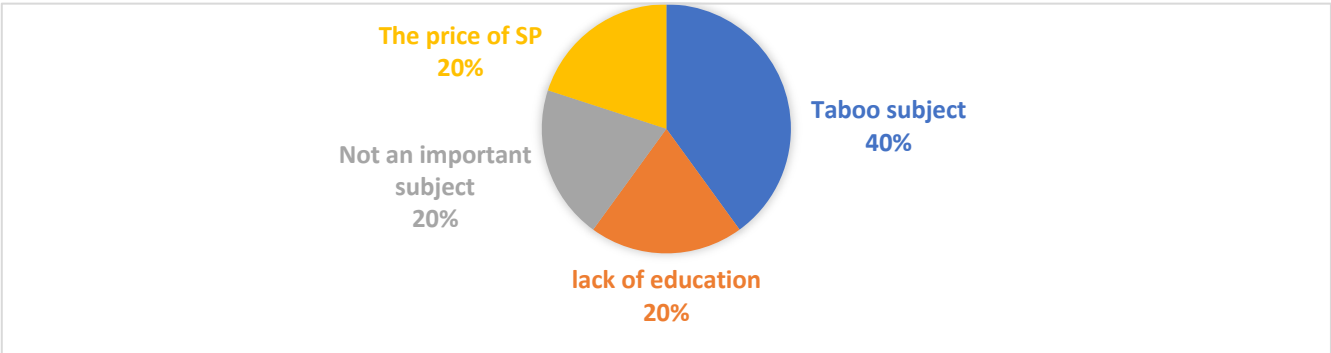


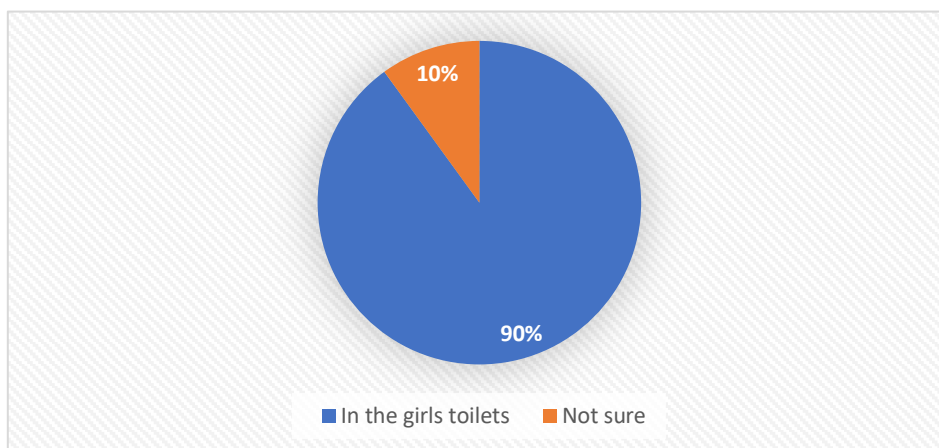
Table 10 highlights, two teachers (40%) states that sigma and the taboo surrounding the topic is the main cause for preventing young girls from receiving free sanitary wear. T3 states,

“menstruation has been a taboo subject for years, some young people haven’t had access to the correct education”. Additionally, 20% of the participants highlighted that young people haven’t had the correct education in terms of PSE lessons, in order to inform the individuals about the process of menstruation. Furthermore, one respondent (20%) claims, “the government obviously has not considered the issue to be one of importance” (T2).

4.5. Availability and Choice

Question for YP: Does the school offer free sanitary products to young people and if so; where are they kept?

Table 11:



YP8 states, "I think that young girls will benefit from free pads because some people can't afford pads and by having free pads in schools and in shops, it will help them with their attendance in school". Nine out of ten participants (90%) states that sanitary wear is located in the girl's toilets however, 10% of respondents claims that they are not sure where they are located. YP6 states, "since the school have provided free sanitary products, there have been a lack of choice to support a variety of needs and they haven't been good quality either"

Question for YP: Where do you think the sanitary products should be kept?

Table 12:

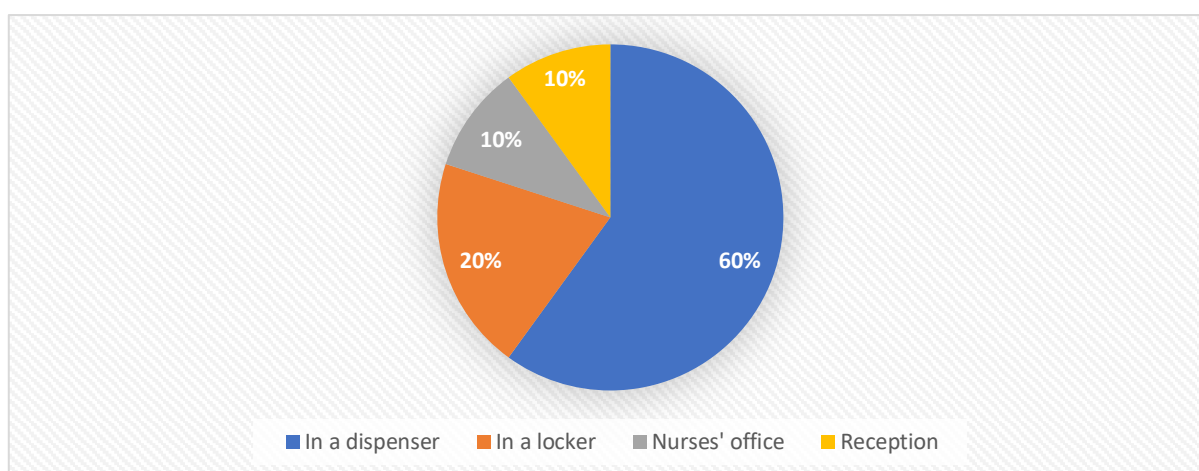
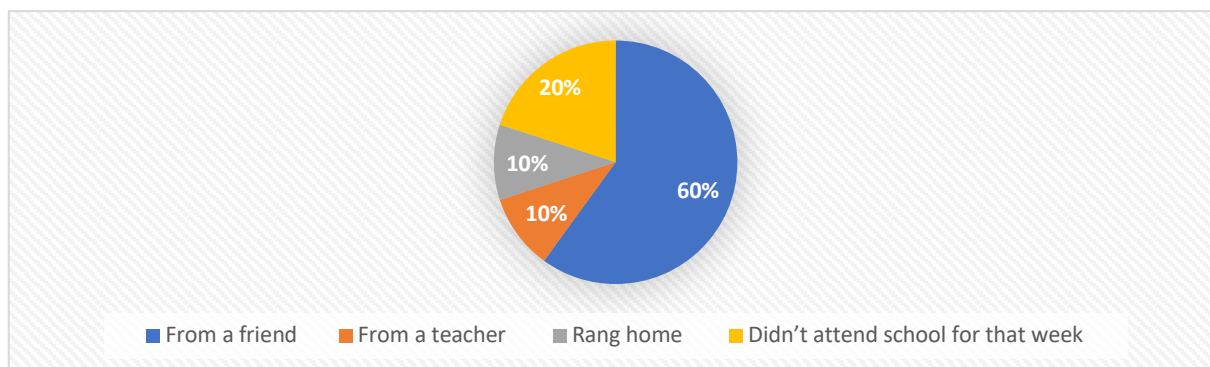


Table 12 highlights, six out of ten participants (60%) emphasised that the free sanitary products should be kept in a dispenser, and only to be used when needs be. 20% of participants believes that sanitary wear should be kept in a locker.

Table 13:



Six out of ten participants (60%) openly admitted that they have asked to borrow a sanitary product from a friend. YP9 states, “it would be easier to ask a friend for a sanitary product than it would if I were to ask the reception because I’m afraid of getting judged”.

According to YP6, “the school doesn’t really do anything to help us with understanding with our periods. We’ve only got pads in the toilets because a lot of us girls in year 11 asked for them in the toilets”. 20% of participants stated that they have ‘skipped’ school for the week due to their menstruation. Furthermore, two participants (20%) emphasised, “unable to access sanitary products on camps and suffered period pains with no pain relief to cure the pain during school time” (YP7). An additional 10% of participants have rang for sanitary wear.

Question for YP: What products would you like to see in the sanitary box?

Table 14:

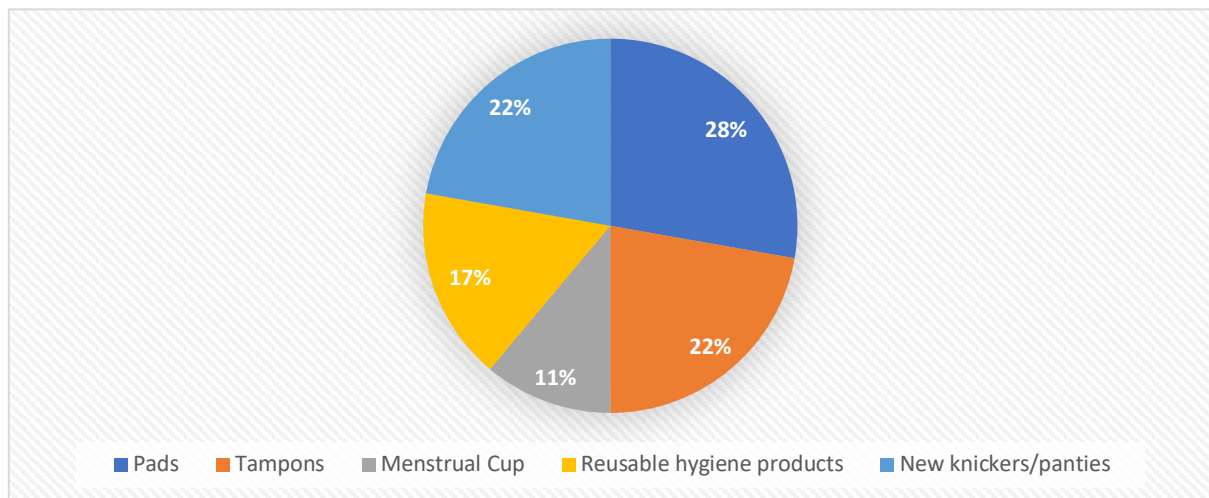
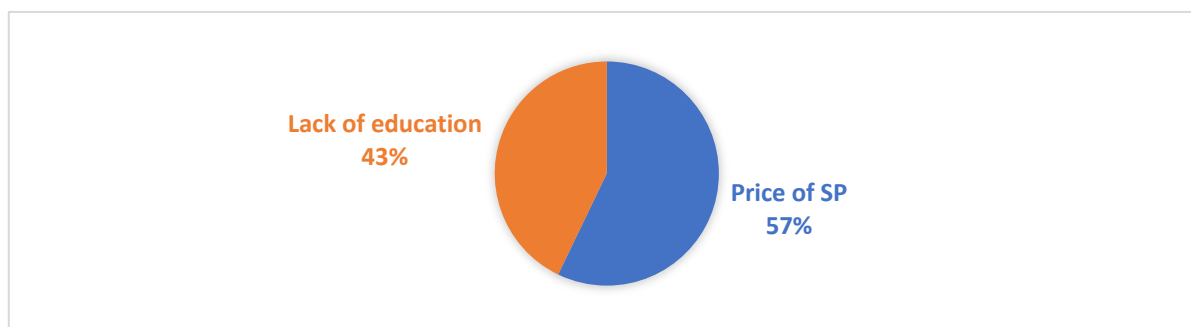


Table 14 of the pie chart: pads were identified by five out of ten (28%) participants to be the most popular choice to support their needs and wellbeing. Additionally, they also highlighted that providing free knickers would also provide that additional support for those “just in-case” situations. Four out of ten participants (22%) drew attention to the fact that free knickers/panties would be beneficial to support their needs. Menstrual cups were the least popular with only two out of ten (11%) participants stating that they would like to see these in the sanitary box. Furthermore, YP7 states, “the safeguarding officer in my school made an assembly once a few months bac about providing the school’s pupils with free pads and knickers in the future; she also mentioned potentially providing moon cups for young girls in the school. However, we haven’t heard of that plan since nor seen any action been made”.

Question for teacher's: What do you consider are the current challenges for young people in accessing sanitary products?

Table 15: Teacher's response

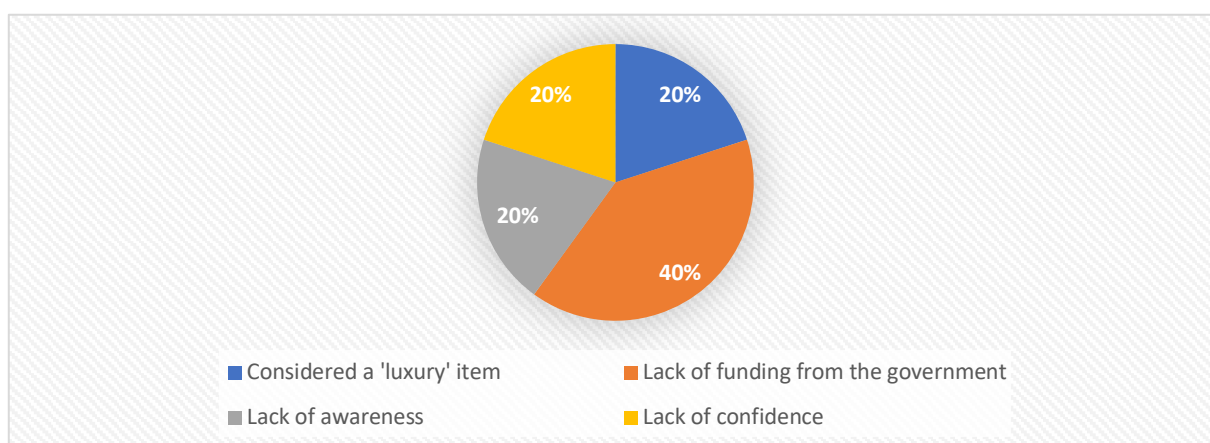


All four teachers (57%) noted the price of sanitary products. T1 states, “current prices of sanitary products are too expensive, leaving many dysfunctional families having to adapt when in need of protection”.

Additionally, 43% of participants also identified during their informal interviews that the lack of education was a contributing factor to the current challenge, “the main challenge is the lack of education on what products are best for body types” (T2). Furthermore, T4 highlights, “cost although no pupils have raised the issue in school. Free SP have been available in school for a long time”.

Question for YP: What do you think prevents young girls from having free pads?

Table 16:



Four out of ten (40%) participants noted that there's a lack of funding from the government. YP5 expressed, “some things I think that prevents young girls from having free pads are the people on the educational board, don't realise that SP are expensive”. Additionally, YP8 expressed alongside the views of YP5, “as pads are expensive the government could find it

quite hard to pay for these products for every school". Furthermore, two participants (20%) noted that sanitary wear are seen as a "luxury" to some individuals. YP6 expressed, "with people thinking that when we have periods that it's a luxury is a problem because we don't decide that we want to have a period its life stage in a woman's body, therefore the people who thinks that having periods is a luxury say that we have to pay for sanitary products". An additional two out of ten participants (20%) highlighted that there's a lack of awareness and 20% of participants noted, young girls have a lack of confidence.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented the data gathered from the participants involved in this study. The participants responded to the questions with depth and in-side knowledge which provides a sense of realism to this study. The findings were categorised into themes, which made it easier to identify the main issues young girls face. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings gathered from the participants whilst linking back to current research displayed in the literature review.

5. Discussion and Interpretation of the data

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will present a discussion of results gathered from the participants during the focus-group activity and the informal interviews, while comparing current literature to the data collected. Additionally, a reference to the literature review will be made to support the findings from the data collected. Whilst the informal interview and the focus-group activity was being conducted, the young people had the willingness to communicate from the minute they were informed about the topic in mind. The willingness to communicate and to discuss their perceptions about whether free sanitary products would benefit themselves and their wellbeing was identified throughout the data provided, and this clearly suggests that young people would like future research in order for development to happen in a more relaxed educational experience. Additionally, this will also demonstrate the significance of active participation and the importance that young people are consulted on the issues that affect them and have their voice heard (UNCRC, 2010). In chapter 4, the data were displayed through pie charts, with the aim of highlighting any reoccurring patterns the participants had provided in order to interoperate the results of this study. A copy of the questions which the teachers were given is attached in appendix 2 and a copy of the questions the young people were given is in appendix 1. To hide the anonymity of all individuals involved, all participants were referenced as such, 'YP' for young adults and the teachers were referenced as 'T'. Once the data was gathered from all individuals, young adults' responses were numbered from 1 to 10 and the teacher's responses were number 1 to 4. This way, it would be easier to reference their responses in chapter 4 and 5.

Furthermore, all participants involved were eager to share their views and perceptions on the topic in mind in order to provide depth and knowledge to the study. Those who had struggled to access free sanitary products in the past emphasised that primarily, they have asked a friend to borrow a product whilst on campus, to avoid the 'embarrassment and shame' of coming on during school time. Additionally, PLAN UK (2017) also emphasised how "one in seven girls (14%) have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues". The majority of participants emphasised that menstruation, pads and the wellbeing of women still has the reoccurring stigma and taboo surrounding the topic, which is affecting the lives and education development of some individuals. Furthermore, the

participants stressed throughout their response how they haven't received any additional PSE lessons since they were in year 9, leaving them confused about how their body transitions during the process of menstruation.

This study strongly looked at the perceptions and views of young girls as to whether they would benefit from having the security of free sanitary products in school, and whether it would help them in the long run in regard to their emotional, physical and mental wellbeing. Out of fourteen respondents, twelve were females while two others were male participants. It was clear that it was easier to approach the female respondents for data compared to the male respondents, as the female participants were more willing to provide their first-hand experience regarding the topic in mind. The below section will discuss three themes which were identified throughout the data gathered from the participants. Education, wellbeing and the voice of young people and, availability and choice were highlighted as a reoccurring issue in this educational setting, emphasised by the young people. In each section, the study will present common links between the data gathered and the literature review from current research.

5.2. Education

The first, most frequent theme that reoccurred throughout the data gathered was the lack of education the girls believed they have received. The young people strongly felt that their knowledge regarding periods, pads and the process of menstruation was something that was not taught to a certain extent in school. Furthermore, according to Piaget (cited in Slee and Shute, 2003), in order to gain knowledge and understanding of a subject, Piaget emphasised the importance that a child should be actively involved in its own development. Nonetheless, according to the young people, they highlighted during their focus-group activity that the school have overlooked the topic to the extent where some individuals have missed school due to the shame and embarrassment of 'coming-on' during school time; this is highlighted in the literature review by Tull (2019) where they also suggest periods inflict years of shame which positions them in a disadvantage to their own development. Additionally, as young people miss out on vital education due to the lack of education regarding how to deal with menstruation, it's an educational barrier which can then affect their overall development to reach their full potential. "We also know that girls' confidence plummets during puberty and missing out on the experiences of school life, only accelerates this. Girls miss out on vital lessons and teachers have told us that the girls who miss out on school, tend to perform below average in class" (ALWAYS, 2018). Furthermore, it was reported by the participants that they have not received any additional PSE lessons since they were in year 9, leaving them to experience an education full of worry and anxiety. Additionally, this was highlighted in the literature review when Tull (2019) emphasised how young girls have very limited amount of knowledge in regard to when their menstruation begins. Furthermore, the participants highlighted how they would benefit from additional PSE as soon as they commence secondary school, with some added activities during the lesson in order to create a relaxed, taboo-free environment. Nonetheless, according to Heygirls (2019), girls as young as 8 years should be taught about periods because many girls can start their menstruation at 8 years of age, so learning about menstruation in secondary school may be too late and unhelpful to them. Furthermore, secondary schools will often cover menstruation in biology but will automatically think the young people have been taught this in primary school but in hindsight, young people are missing out on valuable information that would benefit their wellbeing through the unsettling changes (Heygirls, 2019).

Additionally, 17% of participants highlighted that the younger students who are starting secondary education for the first time have a lack of knowledge regarding their periods. Furthermore, the young people emphasised throughout their responses that the younger students have been wasting the free sanitary products which have can be located in the bathroom, by sticking the pads on the wall and they've also been throwing them around (YP6). According to T4, "the school have done an assembly on period poverty and make pupils more aware that free sanitary products are a necessity for many pupils and adults". Nonetheless, despite the statement highlighted by T4, young people require education and information in order to understand the necessity and the importance of a product, more than ever as their bodies are about to transition and it will be a very unsettling time for some individuals. Additionally, according to Gov. (2020), when providing sanitary products to school and colleges, it is vital all students are made aware of how vital and important the free sanitary scheme is and how students can use the sanitary wear, sensibly.

Throughout the young peoples' responses, it was evidently clear that young people would like the idea of 'periods' to be normalised and for individuals to discuss the topic more openly however, the comments from two participants struck me the most, they would like if boys received additional PSE lessons regarding menstruation. Additionally, as highlighted in the literature review, Plan-UK (2018) a large proportion of girls highlighted that the biggest worry and embarrassment within educational settings stem from the negative reactions and the ignorance of boys who haven't been taught about the struggle of transition some girls must endure. Furthermore, YP4 noted in her response, "there should be more lessons for not only girls but for boys because I don't think girls should have to be ashamed for her period and boys also need to understand what happens to girls and how their bodies work while going through this change". Moreover, as highlighted in the literature review; George (2019) emphasises that individuals have been socialised into a way of thinking that menstruation is primarily a "female" issue however, this preserves the idea that menstruation will never affect men which then stigmatises trans men who menstruates and excludes all men from learning about the topic and develop their own perceptions. If men haven't been taught about menstruation, how can they know about period tax and the pain women and young girls must endure each month. Additionally, how can we become a more equal society if periods aren't even normalised therefore, the next generation of boys must be taught that

periods are not taboo and must be taught the topic of menstruation from early as year 6. This way, society is encouraging menstruation as a 'normal topic of conversation for everyone, regardless of their gender' (George, 2019), which encourages acceptance and eradicates the barrier for development.

Table 3 in chapter 4 highlights that 22% of participants noted that they have learnt about periods from a friend. Additionally, they highlighted how they have asked a friend for advice regarding what products to use because they believe they have not received the correct information regarding this. An additional 22% of participants highlighted that they are unsure about what product to use that suits their needs. According to Plan-UK (2018), female friends are so important in order 'to discuss, share and learn about periods' because this allows them to feel comfortable and relaxed whilst discussing the subject, as it enables them to ask questions which they wouldn't be able to ask during PSE lessons etc. Furthermore, the main barrier for menstruation development can be the attitude of all educational settings and how they can eradicate the shame and stigma surrounding the topic. Plan-UK (2018) highlights, "the attitude of a school towards menstruation can hugely influence the attitude of the young people within that school" therefore, educational settings must create an environment where menstruation can be spoken about freely with posters for example, all over the setting to promote free speech and eradicate the barrier that stands between women and their future.

Both teacher and young people were given a similar type question asking what they think the government can do in order to improve and help the future of young girls. The findings suggest that 50% of participants noted that sanitary wear should be medically prescribed for all young girls, trans people and women. Additionally, T3 noted, "a new legislation providing free sanitary products for all women as are medical prescriptions". Additionally, T2 also highlighted that sanitary wear should be free for all women, young people and trans individual, with some quoting that 'tampon-tax' should also be eradicated in order to lower the price of sanitary wear because they are a necessity and not a 'luxury' item. Additionally, in 2015; the government announced they would review the VAT on sanitary wear and would seek to change the EU law in order to create opportunities. An action plan was then published in 2016, in order to create a 'zero-rated' strategy on all sanitary wear. Furthermore, the chancellor, Rishi Sunak has confirmed that a "zero rate would be charged on sanitary products from 1st of January 2021" (Seely, 2020). Additionally, T3 highlighted

during their response, “remove tax for sanitary products. Products available for free for those that need it, FSM pupils etc”. In relation to what should be done in order to improve, the young people also responded with their perceptions and their response was highlighted in table 5, chapter 4. 46% of participants noted that they would like to see additional PSE lessons spread throughout years 7 to 11 in order to gain useful information that would benefit them. Additionally, the young people emphasised the importance that periods must be more open and free flowing in order to encourage more people to talk about the topic. YP7 suggested in their response, “during PSE lessons, I think there should be more activities involved where young girls can discuss and be more open about the topic. By creating a more relaxed and open environment, girls feel less intimidated about the subject”. Additionally, by involving young people in decision making and activity making, it encourages them that people care about their needs and their future. Furthermore, YP8 noted, “there should be definitely more awareness about it maybe more PSE days or even period poverty awareness week to table the stigma about it”. Furthermore, according to ActionAid (2020), ‘world menstrual hygiene day’ takes place every year on 28th of May to raise awareness of issues certain individuals face each day, and for those who don’t have access to sanitary wear due to financial issues, religious reasons and lack of support. Additionally, world menstrual hygiene day is something that should be made aware in all educational settings in order to break the silence and stigma around periods, it would also make young people aware that their needs matter and periods is something that should not be ashamed of. It was also noted by 9% of participants that a ‘blog’ would be beneficial for young people, to provide additional support for other individuals who have questions and concerns regarding menstruation. Additionally, the Penny (2020) has created a blog for young people and women which they can access via the internet and it provides advice and information from what menstrual products they should use to how it is vital that boys are educated about periods. It is crucial that young people have somewhere they can feel safe and relaxed to talk about periods, this will promote their wellbeing and develop their confidence further.

5.3. Wellbeing and the voice of young people

For many years, young girls and women have had to endure shameful experiences which has acted as a barrier to education, communication and self-development (Plan-UK, 2018). The second, most frequent theme that occurred during the findings was that young girls would often be left feeling overwhelmed due to the lack of support they received towards their mental wellbeing. As 'periods' are still seen as a taboo, the fear and shame still live within women and young girls which ultimately causes issues such as anxiety, insecurities and embarrassment. According to Plan-UK (2018), young people have emphasised how they still feel a "sense of pressure from society to feel ashamed, even though they now actively aim to subvert this".

In chapter 4, table 6 highlights the four reoccurring themes which the young girls highlighted that contributed to the worry of monthly menstruation. Anxiety, embarrassment, shame, judgement and intimidation were a few reoccurring statements that re-appeared throughout the responses provided, made by the participants. According to Heygirls (2019), 48% of girls have highlighted that they have felt embarrassed by their periods, this has caused them to withdraw from education subjects such as sports. Furthermore, the participants in the focus-group activity highlighted that they have often pulled out of participating in a sports lesson but never admitted to the teacher this was due to them being on their period, as they would often use the excuse of "they forgot their sports kit" or that they have a "poorly tummy". Additionally, the literature review highlights the 'five wellbeing goals' where the study focuses on 'Be active and Learn' (MIND, 2013), where all individuals have the right to an education and to participate within physical activities without the shame and embarrassment of being on their period. Supported by MIND (2013) in the literature review, regular physical activities are associated with a lower rate of mental health issues such as anxiety therefore, it is crucial that strategies are set in place such as having sanitary wear located in the school sports gym where they are easily accessible, in order to provide all individuals with the same amount of experiences and opportunities, even when they are experiencing their menstruation.

Table 6 highlights what young individuals have been feeling after they are unable to locate free sanitary products, do not have the correct support network within the school or if they were unable to speak to a parent due to personal issues. Additionally, the participants

strongly believed that sanitary wear would benefit individuals in ways that no one would understand. YP8 responded to the question in table 6 by saying, “yes, I do think the girls would benefit from free pads as It will definitely increase their school attendance because if they couldn’t get hold of some at home for whatever reason, they tend to miss school until there period is over for that month”. Furthermore, according to Oppenheim (2019), study suggest that an ‘average schoolgirl takes three days off each term due to period-related issues’, with this being said; 25% of participants agreed that providing sanitary wear to all educational settings would reduce the negative impact it has on attendance. Additionally, section E of article 28 highlights that strategies must be in place in educational settings in order to reduce the rate of individuals who miss out on the educational experience and to encourage regular school attendance, this is supported by UNCRC (2010) in the literature review.

Alongside the perceptions and wellbeing of young adults, teachers were also asked questions in line with the importance of wellbeing and they also agree that sanitary products should be available to all student within educational settings. Additionally, addressing the above question further, the teachers were asked a variety of questions which corresponds with the results from the focus-group activity. The teachers would be able to provide vital information that would support this study further, and to also provide additional information alongside the findings of the young girls. Furthermore, table 7 highlights that the teachers were asked whether free sanitary wear would be a disadvantage to young people and 67% of teachers highlighted that there are no downside to supporting the needs of young people. Nonetheless, 33% of teachers noted that there may be an increase of bullying “due to people using the products and others knowing that they cannot afford to purchase their own products”, with T2 also highlighting that the “younger pupils throwing them around the toilets- waste”. According to Calderwood (2019), one in five young girls have experienced bullying behaviour from others which links back to them having their menstruation, this can then lead back to worrying health issue the individual may experience such as anxiety and the fear of coming to school. Therefore, all boys and girls must be educated as soon as possible in order to eliminate any form of bullying from an early stage, as this transition in a girl’s life is already difficult without the added pressure from other peers.

During the focus group, the young people were asked whether there are any supporting individuals in school who they can speak to regarding their periods. Table 8 highlights that

40% of participants noted that there is a school counsellor on campus however, despite having a school counsellor on campus, YP7 noted “the school counsellor said at the beginning of the school year that they would be in every Wednesday but, we have never seen her here on that particular day”. In addition to this, 30% of participants emphasised that they don’t know who the school counsellor is, with 20% also noting that they don’t know who the school nurse is which makes it hard for the individuals to seek for advice. In addition to the question above, the young people were then asked why it has taken so long for sanitary wear to become free in educational settings. Table 9 presents that 40% of participants believe that women receive a lack of support in terms of prioritising their needs and wellbeing by providing the correct care and education for all. As highlighted in the literature review, Heygirls (2019) emphasises that good quality education can encourage young people to attend school, only if their menstruation needs are supported as this will also encourage good health. Additionally, YP6 highlighted in their response that they believe “it’s because men have always been higher than women and they don’t really take into consideration that some people can’t pay for sanitary products”. Furthermore, in the literature review, Buchanan (2015) highlighted that 2015 was the year that we saw the politicians vote against removing “the so-called tampon tax” which has been a contributing factor to certain struggles some young people and women have faced over the years. In addition to this, “the motion, brought by Labour, was defeated by 305 votes to 287 with just three conservative MPs rebelling against the whips: and they were all men” (Buchanan, 2015). Nonetheless, the law was then later passed and the VAT on sanitary products has been reduced from 17.5% to 5% (Buchanan, 2015) however, a zero rate will be applied from January 1st, 2021 (Seely, 2020). In addition to the lack of support young people strongly believe, 20% of participants noted that pads are seen as a “luxury” and that’s why it has taken so long for them to become free in educational settings.

As seen in table 9 and 10, the young people and the teachers were given a similar question in order to compare and contrast the responses from both parties, and whether the responses given would highlight a significant factor from the topic in mind. 40% of teachers noted that it has taken so long for sanitary wear to become free in educational settings because it’s been a long-standing, taboo topic for many years. Additionally, T3 noted, “menstruation has been a taboo subject for years, some young people haven’t had access to

the correct education”; this is supported by Tull (2019) in the literature review where the downside leaves the individuals in disadvantaged position of under-achieving with their development. Additionally, 20% of teachers highlighted that it’s down to the price. Nonetheless, as highlighted in the literature review, Murphy (2019) notes that primary and secondary schools will receive a £2.3million grant scheme where they’ll be able to provide sanitary products to students where they can have their periods with dignity. When the findings were gathered, one teacher did not respond to this question, leaving their response box empty.

5.4. Availability and choice

The third, most reoccurring theme was the availability and choice when it came to sanitary products. It was highlighted by many students that they've struggled over the years to locate sanitary wear in school, which ultimately positions them in a disadvantage to their own learning. In the literature review, Walsh (2019) suggests that 1 in 10 women have missed out on vital educational experiences due to no accessibility of sanitary wear in school and no affordability to locate products elsewhere.

As seen in table 11, the young girls were asked whether their school offers free sanitary products and if so; where are they kept, 90% of participants noted that sanitary wear can be located in the girl's bathroom. Nonetheless, YP6 responded by saying, "since the school have provided free sanitary products, there have been a lack of choice to support a variety of needs and they haven't been good quality either". The participants highlighted that they were able to pick up the free sanitary products from the designated pick-up point within the girls' toilets however, the participants stated that they were located in the reception which left the girls feeling embarrassed for asking for a sanitary product. Additionally, the school started the trial, making the products available in a basket located in the girl's toilets which resulted in not asking for products from the reception. In the literature review, Heygirls (2019) emphasises the importance of a 'barrier free provision' where young people can locate sanitary products without asking for them, it promotes freedom and dignity to those who are struggling while dealing with their menstruation. Contrary to this, the participants stated that the younger girls would mess around with the free products by sticking them on the wall and would often spell out various words on the wall with the smaller pads, leaving other individuals with a lack of choice and more often than usual, there would be none to be had when the girls would come to use them. As highlighted in the literature review, Drohan (2019) noted that one male principal refused to provide free sanitary products to individuals in school because it was likely that the 12-year-olds would 'abuse the privilege' however, all individuals have a right to an education (UNCRC, 2010) therefore, early intervention and the correct information would highlight the importance of sanitary wear and how some individuals depend on the products as a necessity to life. Additionally, table 12 highlights where young people believe the sanitary products should be kept. 60% of participants noted that they would like to see the sanitary products located in a dispenser, for free. This way, it would reduce the amount of waste from

the younger students in order to save them for those who require them as a necessity. An additional 20% noted that it would be a good idea to place the sanitary products in individual lockers, this tracks the amount of sanitary wear and reduces waste.

Table 13 highlights that 60% of students have asked if they could borrow a sanitary product from a friend. In addition, as highlighted in the literature review, Plan-UK (2018) noted that 1 in 7 girls have asked to borrow a sanitary product from a friend, this can be embarrassing to some individuals which will later cause a lack of confidence. The responses gathered were presented by several participants which was then 'read between the lines' by the researcher. Furthermore, 20% of participants noted that they did not attend school for the week of their menstruation due to the lack of sanitary wear on campus. Additionally, those who didn't attend school for that week missed out on vital education which restricted them from achieving their overall academic achievement, as highlighted by Tull (2019) in the literature review. Furthermore, YP9 noted, "it would be easier to ask a friend for a sanitary product than it would if I were to ask the reception because I'm afraid of getting judged". One participant's response stood out above all, YP6 quotes; "the school doesn't really do anything to help us with understanding our periods. We've only got pads in the toilets because a lot of us girls in year 11 ask for them to be in the toilets". In addition to this, YP5 also noted, "it took a long time for the school to decide to put free sanitary products in the school toilets and even now, they have rarely enough products in the box". Contrary to this, there was a conflicting response made by one of the teachers which they noted to a question by saying, "no pupils have raised the issue in school, free sanitary products have been available in school for a long time". Human Rights watch (2017) highlights in the literature review, poor management and policies can have a huge impact on an individual's development, especially when the needs of young people aren't being met. Furthermore, table 14 highlights the data gathered from the participants where they have emphasised what they would like to see in the sanitary box in terms of free sanitary products. Additionally, Lea (2020) highlights in the literature review that primary and secondary schools will provide sanitary products to all young people where they'll be able to locate the products on campus. The sanitary items will include a range of products, including eco-friendly options. 28% of participants noted that they'd like to see pads within the sanitary box, with an additional 22% stating that they'd like to see new knickers/panties in the box as an additional reassurance for those surprise

“coming-on” during school time. In addition to Lea (2020) statement, 17% of young people also noted, they would like to see eco-friendly hygiene products. This not only encourages a step-forward into providing a variety of options for young people, it also encourages sustainability by reducing waste.

Table 15 presents the data gathered from the teachers in order to gather their views on what are the current challenges many young people face in regard to accessing free sanitary products. 57% of teachers noted the price of sanitary products is the current challenge young people face however, as highlighted by Seely (2020) in the literature review, the Government have been working towards reducing the amount of VAT on sanitary products and by the start of 2021, young people will see a zero rate tax on sanitary products which signifies a huge step forward women and young people. In addition to the findings in table 15, table 16 emphasised strongly that the main reason that young girls have struggled to locate free sanitary products is down to the lack of funding and support from the government. Additionally, YP5 noted, “some things I think that prevents young girls from having free pads are the people on the educational board, don’t realise that SP are expensive”. 40% of participants believe there’s a lack of funding from the government when it comes to providing free sanitary products however, as Murphy (2019) highlights in the literature review, all primary and secondary schools in Wales will be granted £2.3million in order to provide sanitary products for all young people, for free. Additionally, they will be able to manage their period with dignity whilst on campus. From the data gathered, it was emphasised by 20% of participants that sanitary products have been unavailable because many individuals consider SP as a ‘luxury’ item. Additionally, sanitary products are often seen as a ‘luxury’ item due to the amount of stigma and taboo that surrounds the topic, making it harder for certain individuals to understand why it is a necessity for some women and young people. Furthermore, it is highly crucial that young people have a positive, healthy menstruation from as early as possible because it provides an opportunity for development, self-growth and for success. All and every-one deserves the right to education and by restricting that opportunity, it restricts them from developing into a successful, confident individual.

5.5. Recommendations and Suggestion for change

From the data gathered from both the focus-group activity and the informal interview, it was highlighted by the young adults that they would like to see change in terms of decision making, the stigma surrounding the topic and the lack of education and sanitary products available in the school. Additionally, it was emphasised by majority of the participants that they strongly believe the Welsh Government must have better strategies in place to support the wellbeing on young adults in educational settings. Nonetheless, according to the Welsh Government (2020), the Welsh Government have allocated more than £3 Million of funding to communities in order to tackle period poverty and to also promote 'period dignity' in all schools and colleges across Wales. Additionally, the funding is to ensure a "girl's period isn't a barrier to her succeeding in life" (Welsh Government, 2020).

The focus group activity highlighted how importance participation is when consulting the needs and the future of young people. It was emphasised by several participants that their future is important, and they have a right to voice their concerns and perception on the current situation involving menstruation. Furthermore, from the findings gathered from the participants, the study would recommend that the school must consult with the young people in order to gain a perspective from their experiences, and take on board what they think must change, for the younger generation to experience a better outcome with their menstruation experience. Additionally, the school must provide more PSE lessons from as early as year 7 in order to boys and girls to be educated fully on the full extent of menstruation, and what actually happens to their body when it transitions. Moreover, educating the boys will also 'reduce' the amount of embarrassment and shame around periods. In addition to more PSE lessons, an online tutorial or blog would benefit young people in many ways, in ways where they can develop themselves holistically. The blog may include content such as what products to use, how to use them and how they can approach the subject with other individuals and parents, for instance. The blog may include a section where they can submit questions for themselves, which hides their anonymity as this will reduce the shame and they'll have the confidence to reach out to others. Furthermore, the school may also want the older peers to discuss with the younger peers, where they'll be able to share their experiences and views as this may encourage the younger generation to come forward with any worries of themselves.

The older generation may act as role model for the younger peers therefore, they may feel more comfortable discussing the topic with other students and not their teachers.

5.6. Conclusion

Chapter 5 presented the main findings gathered from the perceptions of young adults and teachers during the focus-group and the informal interviews. The perceptions of young people were crucial for this study because it aimed to highlight what young people need in order support their needs, to give them a voice. Additionally, the findings suggest that if participants can locate free sanitary wear in educational settings, it would help reduce the anxiety around periods, and may also help towards maintaining a good attendance. Furthermore, 7 participants noted that having no sanitary wear in school can have a negative impact on their attendance therefore, the individuals would like additional advice on how to deal with menstruation and what the school can do to support their needs. “No one should face the indignity of being unable to access these essential products to manager their period” (Khomami, 2018). All individuals have the right to an education therefore, it is crucial that they are given that opportunity.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this research study was specifically based on the perceptions and wellbeing of young girls in a secondary school setting, with the aim to identify whether free sanitary products would benefit young girls in educational settings. Lack of choice, lack of education and the still-existing stigma was the key themes that stood out throughout the responses of young people during the focus-group activity. It is evidently clear that young people have come to the realisation that change is required in order to develop as a society, in order to eradicate the stigma and taboo surrounding this topic. An individual's first menstruation should be carefree, with no stress of judgement and embarrassment from others however, society has clearly normalised the idea that menstruation is seen as "luxury" and it is a women's problem which is something that should not be spoken about with others. Additionally, the perceptions of young people highlight the impact they've had regarding the lack of sanitary wear available in school, and how little support they've received from the school itself and the government. Contrary to this, the Government have already created strategies and schemes in order to provide students in Wales with a better future. Additionally, the MPs in parliament have also made the arrangements that there will be a zero-rate tax on sanitary wear, a small step to success. This was highlighted in the literature review by Seely (2020) and Murphy (2019).

The data gathered from the participants did not only highlight that the girls weren't that interested about the quality of the sanitary products, but simply require a better provision of education in order to inform the younger generation with a better start to their menstruation by supporting their needs and wellbeing. The findings emphasised the importance of additional PSE lessons from as early as possible because it was highlighted by the participants that they would've felt more comfortable within school if they were educated properly on what products to use, how to use them and how to deal with the stigma surrounding the subject. What stands out the most from this study is; there's room for improvement.

"Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world".
Malala Yousafzai (Random acts of kindness foundation, 2020)

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Young people's questions

1. Does the school offer free sanitary products to young people? If yes to above: (1) where are they kept? (2) Where do you think they should be kept?	
2. Do you think young girls would benefit from free pads? If yes, can you think of ways in which they would benefit?	
3. What does the school do to help and support young girls with understanding their periods? For example: are there any PSE lessons explaining the topic?	
4. Are there any designated people on campus that they can speak to? For example: a designated person that teaches the subject or a school counsellor	
5. Why do you think it has taken so long for sanitary products to become free in educational settings?	
6. What products would you like to see in the sanitary box?	
7. What do you think prevents young girls from having free pads?	
8. What should be done in order to improve the future of young girls?	

Appendix 2: Teacher's questions

1. What do you think are the benefits for young people and the school of receiving free sanitary products within educational settings?	
2. What do you consider are the current challenges for young people in accessing sanitary products?	
3. What do you think the school/or the government can do in order to improve?	
4. Are there any disadvantages of having free sanitary products in schools?	
5. Why do you think it has taken so long for young girls to access free sanitary products in educational settings?	