Improving menstrual health for adolescents with disabilities during emergencies

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Background
Disability prevalence

Today

1.3 billion people have significant disability

That’s 1 in 6 of us.

1 in 6 people globally have significant disabilities

80% are invisible disabilities

About 110-119 million adults rely on caregivers

Nearly 80% of persons with disabilities live in low-and middle-income countries
Menstrual health for people with disabilities

- Of the global population, 12-18% of women of reproductive age have a disability
- Menstruation and disability carry stigma
- 20% less likely to know about menstruation at menarche
- Nearly twice as likely to miss social activities
- Limited interventions to support the menstrual health of women and girls with disabilities
• Challenges intensify for those reliant on others for menstrual health
• Many of those have intellectual and/or physical disabilities
• Caregivers have no support or guidance
• Physical restraint, isolation and sterilization
Our study
Shifting humanitarian norms study

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Vanuatu

- Vanuatu is a collection of 83 islands
- 307,815 population
- The world’s most ‘at risk’ country for natural hazards, cyclones, earthquakes, flooding, volcanic eruptions
The inclusion of disability within efforts to address menstrual health during humanitarian emergencies: A systematized review

Jane Wilbur, Felicity Clemens, Elisabeth Sweet, Lena Morgan Banks and Chloe Morrison

Article

Menstrual Health Experiences of People with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Caregivers during Vanuatu’s Humanitarian Responses: A Qualitative Study

Jane Wilbur, Relvie Poilapa and Chloe Morrison
Adapting the Bishesta campaign

Illustrations by Raju Shakya

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The Veivanua campaign
### The Veivanua campaign

#### Target groups and target behaviours

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<th>Target groups</th>
<th>Target behaviours</th>
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| Women with intellectual disabilities ('young person') | 1. Use a menstrual material  
2. Use pain relief  
3. Don’t show used menstrual materials in public |
| Caregiver                                          | 1. Provide enough menstrual materials  
2. Provide pain relief  
3. Show love and emotional support |
Key adaptations made

• Revised target behaviour
• Reduced and simplified handouts to reduce costs
• Revised visuals to suit socio-cultural context and humanitarian context
• Depicted men and women providing menstrual health care and support
• Piloted period underwear with reusable menstrual pads
• Delivered house to house instead of in group settings
• Involved women and men caregivers
Campaign components
‘I manage’ visual story
The Veivanua doll
Feasibility study findings
Evaluation findings

• The Veivanua campaign was feasible and acceptable for young people, caregivers, facilitators and practitioners

• Improvements across all target behaviours

• Many young people are managing menstruation more independently

“The last month was the first time; we slept, and she went to the...toilet, and she saw (her period) and took her towel and went to bathe. [...] I saw a big change in her. It was the first time ever...it’s helping her now.”

(Pania, female caregiver)
Male and female caregivers said they can better support young people to manage menstruation as independently as possible.

“When they were running this training, they were discussing women’s sickness [menstruation], and so I learnt things that I had never learnt, that I never knew. And it has helped me. If sometimes her mother is not there, I can...”

(Lono, male caregiver)
Caregivers and young people felt more prepared for the next emergency.

“It seems small but taking these things with us [in an emergency] helps us so much, so much. The feedback helps us as mum and dad, but the family too”.

(Aleki, male caregiver)

Caption: “I’m going to a house to hide in case a cyclone comes.”

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How to incorporate the Veivanua campaign in different stages of Vanuatu’s disaster preparedness plans

- Pre-position period packs and campaign materials.
- Raise awareness of humanitarian actors and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) about the importance of menstrual health response for people with intellectual disabilities in emergencies.
- Train actors to deliver the campaign.
- Deliver the campaign.

- Distribute period pants and campaign materials. Include visual instructions about how to use menstrual materials.

- Deliver the campaign.
- Repeat awareness and training activities from Preparedness phase.

- Medium-long term recovery
The Veivanua campaign worked in the Vanuatu context.

Now it needs to be adapted, piloted and evaluated in other humanitarian settings.

Caption: “Dolly and book.”
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Adapting menstrual health interventions for people with intellectual disabilities in emergencies

Jane Wilbur (The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) and Chloe Morrison (independent consultant)
References


Evidence from emergencies in low-and middle-income countries

• People with intellectual disabilities and their caregivers are unintentionally excluded from menstrual health interventions in emergencies

• Supportive water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are often inaccessible

• Inaccessible distribution points for cash transfers and hygiene kits

• Few outreach programmes
Scaling up the Veivanua campaign in Vanuatu

- World Vision Vanuatu: funding from New Zealand govt and UN Women to scale up
- World Vision Vanuatu in partnership with the Vanuatu Services for Disabled People
- Rolling out training across Efate and Tanna islands over the next 12 months