

**MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS IN PALABEK  
REFUGEE SETTLEMENT, LAMWO DISTRICT, NORTHERN UGANDA.**

**BY**

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**RS19MI3/013**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN A PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES  
OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

**Mukono, Uganda**

**September 2023**

## **ABSTRACT**

Menstruation and its management practices are still faced with several restrictions from cultural, religious, and social settings. This is not only in rural areas but also in towns among the educated. These dictate how menstruation and management should be handled. This study explores the cultural rationale for menstrual management practices, perceptions of women and men, and the attitude of men and women towards the cultural practices of refugee women in Palabek refugee settlement in Lamwo district.

For this exploratory study, a qualitative research method was chosen. Zone 5A and B were chosen with 2 FGDs in each zone and 5 key informants' interviews including local refugees, a representative from UNHCR, and OPM respectively.

Overall, participants displayed knowledge of the topic by sharing their views, beliefs, experiences, and what they have heard about menstruation and its management. The common menstrual management practices are using clothes, sitting on sand or cow dung. Generally the perception of the participants was that culture bites women so hard and dictate how they should run their life. The attitude of the participants towards menstrual management practices indicated that the whole process being painful is not enough but the practices associated with menstruation are demeaning.

The study recommends that partners should hold awareness meetings to help change the perception and attitude of the community on menstruation and educate on the hygienic methods of managing it. OPM and UNHCR should order all partners to have a budget to support women and girls with MHM materials. Safe space conversations should be given attention so that they identify silent issues such as this under research, training women and girls in making reusable menstrual management pads and a need for massive community and women's awareness against the practices.

## DECLARATION

I, Babu Teddie declare that this work is my original work, and has never been submitted to any university or institute of higher learning for the award of any academic qualifications.

Students Name: Babu Teddie

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Babu Teddie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022

**APPROVAL BY SUPERVISOR**

This is to certify that this research has been submitted to the department of Development studies in the faculty of social sciences of Uganda Christian University Mukono with the approval of;

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to God who against all odds enabled me to complete this course and document, and discover my passion and domain in gender, protection, and development. To love, cherish and practice it for the glorification of his Name.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I would love to greatly appreciate the Almighty God for the opportunity and zeal to study and complete this course against all odds. For my great university UCU for granting me the opportunity.

To all my lecturers especially Mr. Solomon Mwije, for teaching me about gender, the state, and development. He encouraged me to carry on with my research topic. Mr. Bukenya for all the encouragement, Dr. Waiswa for uncompromisingly holding academic especially research arm high and Prof Mary N. Sonko for standing with us as a team. To my research supervisor and Friend madam Mercy Amaniyo, for your intrinsic role in advising this research project, thank you so much for mentoring, encouraging, guiding, and not giving up on me throughout this research period, especially during the covid19 lockdown. To my hubby Joseph (Cece) for encouraging me none stop. My best lovely sister Janet Kojo for all inspirations, encouragement, and support to carry on no matter what. My baby Proffy, you gave me the time to write this work. Asante.

My classmates Ronald, Daphine, Issac, Jeniffer, Henry, and Natale, for a great time shared together especially the good Bishop Ronald M. Kwagala you are a God sent friend and brother God richly bless you in all areas of your life.

Again to the almighty father, for the strength, ability, finances, good health and victory belongs to you Jesus.

**ASANTE!!!!**

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

APA:	American Psychological Association
BV:	Bacterial Vaginosis
FFG:	Female Focus Group
KI:	Key informants
MFG:	Male Focus Group
MHM:	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MMP:	Menstrual Management Practices
OPM:	Office of the Prime Minister
R:	Respondent
TSS:	Toxic Shock Syndrome
UCU:	Uganda Christian Management
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UTI:	Urinary tract infections
WHO:	World Health Organisation

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter gives an overview of the research on menstrual Management practices, perceptions and attitudes of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement in Lamwo district, Northern Uganda. The focus of the chapter is background information, objectives, problem statement, and justification of the study among others.

#### **1.1 Background to the study**

Menstruation is a natural occurrence among women and a very critical point of a girl's transition into womanhood. It also defines a woman's worth in virtually all parts of the world (McMahon et al., 2011 Sarkar 2015).

According to UNICEF (2019), menstrual management describes the measures and practices that women and adolescent girls use to deal with their periods. This includes managing the menstrual flow, maintaining proper hygiene and cleanliness, eating a balanced diet and maintaining an active lifestyle.

Menstruation is a normal biological scenario that has been distorted and riddled with negative connotations. Inappropriate MMP (menstrual management practices) have great consequences on the health of a woman if not well handled. Sarkar (2015), defines menstruation also termed as menses as the shedding of the endometrium, the uterine lining. In a normal sense, it occurs once a month lasting for 3 to 7 days until the onset of menopause. Some women may experience it even twice a month.

Menstrual management practices in Uganda vary depending on socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors that affect women in different regions and settings. Disposal pads are more common among urban educated women while reusable pads and cloths are more common among rural and low-income groups. However, some cultures have dietary restrictions or taboos for menstruating girls and women such as avoiding meat, eggs and fish. Some may encounter stigma or discrimination from health providers or community members (Kalembe & Emojong, 2020). This creates self-isolation in fear to

be discriminated or low self-esteem keeping the women away from participating in community meetings and development processes.

In Uganda, southern Sudan, and India for instance, menstruation is considered unclean and dirty which culminates in exclusion from several socio-cultural practices (Kaur, 2018)

In many parts of the world, more specifically in countries that are still developing, menstruation, its management and practices have been considered taboo and several socio-cultural restrictions attached to it. As a consequence, women's rights from the adolescent age remain unknown with the scientific facts and hygienic health practices of managing their menses, which has led to several adverse health conditions. Many programs that have been designed for improving women's health have not adequately recognized this in their interventions. In the Palabek refugee settlement, partners that handle gender and protection have also not given this attention and so it keeps such groups in bondage so to speak.

The transitional constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011, Art 11) under the bill of rights states that every person has the fundamental right to life, dignity, and the honor of his/her person which shall be protected by law; no one shall be injudiciously deprived of his or her life. However, in practice, women continue to experience degrading treatment, including the socio-cultural taboos related to menstrual practices in many parts of the country.

In refugee settings, common fears of chafing, staining, and odor are exacerbated, for instance, when menstruators walk long distances to food distribution points (CARE International and Women Uganda 2018, 11). Such discomforts may induce stress: 60% of Syrian refugees reported stress due to lack of underwear (Pujol-Mazzini 2017, 1), refugees in Iran reported that asking unfamiliar male health providers for help caused stress (Sohrabizadeh et al. 2018, 4) and, for refugees in Jordan, drying materials where unfamiliar males may see them is a major problem (ACF et al. 2017, 4-12) (M Tellier , 2020 ).

In Palabek refugee settlement, Lamwo district, some cultural norms, and beliefs prohibit some women from using menstrual hygiene pads during menstruation hence affecting the utilization of the menstrual materials distributed by NGOs. An important contributor to this could be the failure to relate poor menstrual hygiene management to the wellbeing and development of women, households, and the nation. This is so because some practices isolate women from everyday activities including what they earn from or contribution to development.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Around the world, a huge number of women and girls face stigma, exclusion, and discrimination simply because of a one perfectly natural body function called menstruation or periods (IFRC article 27/25/2022).

In many cultures, menstruating women are considered impure, dirty, polluting, and are comprehensively excluded from participating in everyday activities (Rajanbir et al., 2018). This equally affects women's participation in development processes.

A study carried out in 7 districts of Uganda (Kasese, Budibugyo, Arua, Adjumani, Kyenjojo, Lira and Soroti) by the ministry of Education and sports and its partners in 2012 indicated that the subject of menstruation is too often a taboo with many negative cultural attitudes associated with it. These include the ideal that menstruating women are contaminated, dirty and impure (MOE&S- Uganda 2012). The overall culture of silence around the topic, results in the continued oppression of women and adolescent girls. Limited attention is paid to how Menstrual management practices are compromised because of cultural practices around it. This may cause serious repercussions on their health, dignity, and integrity.

For some women in Palabek refugee settlement, menstrual management practices are demeaning, unhygienic, unhealthy and yet there is a dearth of literature documented on the subject. Women do not use dignity hygiene kits, even when they may be available, because of cultural pressure against their use. These practices have continued despite the presence of Partner organizations working in the area to increase

awareness of menstrual hygiene management (Kemigisha, E., 2020). The women are only given save for the one-time distribution when they arrive at the location center. According to the women leader, some women will collect the pads and sell them to the hosting community while others will not go to pick the pads at all. Considering that refugee settlements are homes to people from different countries, tribes, and cultures, it is paramount to practices, attitude and perceptions around menstrual management. The researcher is therefore prompted to explore menstrual management practices, perceptions, and attitudes of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement, Lamwo district.

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

1.3.1 To establish the menstrual management practices in refugee settlements.

1.3.2. To explore perceptions of women and men surrounding menstrual management practices.

1.3.3. To explore the attitude of men and women towards menstrual management practices.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This study would have the following research questions:

1.4.1 What is the cultural rationale for menstrual practices?

1.4.2 What are the perceptions of women and men surrounding Menstrual management practices?

1.4.3 What are the attitudes of men and women towards menstrual management practices?

### **1.5 Justification for the study**

Despite the presence of many organizations working with refugees to protect the rights of all persons in the settlement especially women, little is known about some unhealthy cultural practices that are demeaning the ability of women to use hygienic menstrual management practices, keeping them away from community activities and development thus likely to affect the health of women. More so the perception of societies on menstrual management, the various taboos, norms, beliefs, and cultural practices associated with menstruation continue to affect women. A huge gap exists in the need to protect the dignity of women and girls from such harmful cultural practices. This research, therefore, seeks to increase on the adoption and utilization of hygienic menstrual kits and materials.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The study will be an eye-opener to tribes or groups that still use such menstrual management practice such to consider good and hygienic management practices. The study got men involved in issues that affect women and have been centered on the change as they were involved in this research. The major contribution of this study is to rescue women from oppressive practice and adopt and utilize hygienic menstrual kits and materials provided by NGO workers. To get women involved in leadership positions at the settlement through active participation in community activities. Women make up 70% of the population at Palabek Settlement, and these women need to work for their families to foster positive changes and successful community development outcomes. With little or no literature on such topics and studies, this study will be of importance to refugee interventions like UNHCR and other partners working in refugee operations.

## **1.7 Scope of the study**

### **1.7.1 Content scope**

Menstruation is a biological phenomenon and an important part of a woman's life. However, its management is jeopardized by some socio-cultural practices and thus likely to affect the health rights of women. This study seeks to understand menstrual management practices, perceptions, attitudes of refugee women in Palabek refugee settlement. The study focused on establishing a cultural rationale for menstrual management practices, exploring perceptions and attitudes of both women and men on/towards the practices.

### **1.7.2 Time scope**

The research would focus on information between 2010 to 2023. This period was considered because the subject under study is not new and has persisted over decades. The researcher would therefore be able to track any changes that may have occurred during the period of this study topic. In addition, this period is adequate to examine the relevance of earlier research on the same subject.

### **1.7.3 Geographical scope**

This study will be undertaken in Palabek refugee Settlement in Lamwo district just after Kitgum district in northern Uganda. Palabek refugee settlement is hosting refugees from Southern Sudan. The study will target the southern Sudanese women and girls of reproductive age in zone 5A and B respectively. These are the epicenter of this menstrual practice and thus the target of the study. Men will also be included in this study as they are often the custodians of cultural norms, beliefs, and practices.

## **1.8 Conceptual/ Theoretical framework**

Over the years, there have been very little public discussion about the menstrual management-related challenges facing girls and women in Low and medium-income countries (LMICs) and this is continuing to happen.

According to (Dorfman et al., 2005), some concepts are being used to shape the perceptions of MHM as an issue of social justice within the context of public health. However, this is silent because the topic of menstruation is taboo in many contexts across the low, middle, and high-income world/class of people. Some players



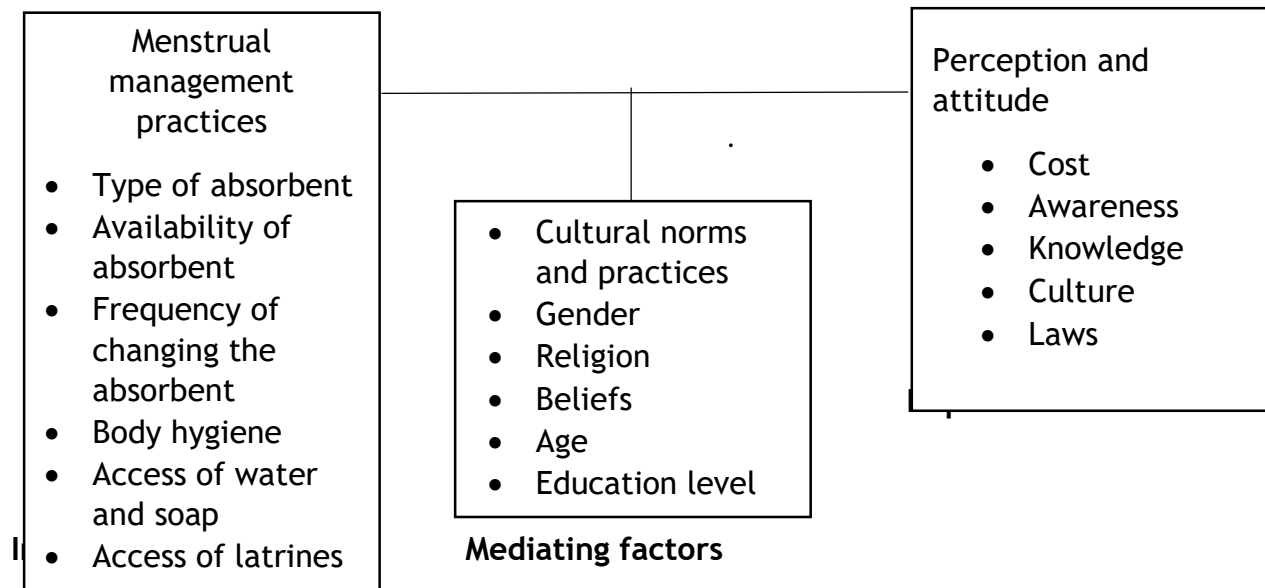
(individuals, organizations, institutions) have had to carefully develop worded messages on menstruation and MHM because of the existence of strong taboos considering local cultural sensitivity.

By contrast, other players have tackled the taboo head-on without fear of fronting the effect on women with more obvious targeted messaging on menstrual blood. To provide useful insights to address other neglected or insufficiently recognized health concerns, a global social movement on MHM has been growing (Sommer .M, et al., 2015)

Abdullahi An-Na'im Professor of Laws at Emory University in Atlanta USA, makes a valid argument for the dynamic concept of cultural transformation as the most entrenching human rights in African societies.

The right to health also means everyone should be empowered to control their wellbeing, including having access to sexual and reproductive information and services free from violence and discrimination.

**Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework**



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of related literature and publications about the research objectives. The researcher draws additional insights from personal experience while working in the refugee settlement to provide a credible synergy.

#### 2.2 Menstrual management practices in refugee settlements

There is limited documentation on the cultural rationale for unhealthy menstrual practices. By and large, inadequate, inaccurate, or incomplete knowledge of menstruation presents a huge hindrance in the path of personal hygiene and menstrual hygiene management (MHM). This primarily has attributed to the cultural norms, values, and beliefs which characterize the way of life in each context. Many girls and women especially in rural areas have less or no knowledge about reproductive tract infections (RTI) caused due to ignorance of personal hygiene when menstruating. Women are also constrained by cultural practices in accessing healthy menstrual hygiene practices and this often exposes them to RTIs.

The importance of menstrual hygiene was abandoned by development partners by all sectors especially WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) sector and even a sector such as reproductive health which is closely related. This means that stakeholders and development partners at the grassroots have and continue to neglect the social life and health impacts of women indicating that they face cultural constraints around menstruation and, they continue to suffer in such culturally designed taboos and practices.

All over the world, religion and culture have dictated to women not to do certain household activities which are women related such as cooking, working, praying, and having sexual intercourse while menstruating, as they are considered unclean (Buckley & Gottfried, 1988) Such restrictions and secrecy around and surrounding menstruation, usually impact negatively on womanhood by violating them psychologically, demeaning their self-esteem, creating a feeling of shame and undermining the physiological significance of menstruation (Umeora & Egwuatu, 2008 as cited by Megan, 2013).

Again, in many societies around the world, women and girls have been limited to following or using hygienic menstrual management processes due to the overall culture of silence around the topic (Guangzhou & Thorsten, 2020). The fact that menstruation is a normal condition that every woman goes through, should be given attention instead of abusing it and making women regret creation and why God chose to make them women as one local refugee woman who is suffering from cultural related restrictions regarding menstruation. Even with the availability of menstrual pads, some women opted for local cultural techniques to manage their menses.

According to (Mazokopakis & Samonis 2018), in the Old Testament in the holy bible (Provisions for clean and unclean of the Mosaic Law) during menstruation, a woman or a man who has sexual relations with a menstruating woman is perceived as “unclean”. It is after seven (7) days have passed from the first day of menstruation that a woman is regarded as “clean” and thereafter sexual contact is permitted. The character of these provisions, according to the New Testament and fathers of the Christian church was mainly academic aimed at helping the Israelites to move from physical purity and sanctification and worship of stereotypes to spiritual worship.

According to the bible in the New Testament (Mathew 22:37) which we live by worshiping God is a thing of the soul and mind not what happens in our bodies therefore it should not be associated with menstruation.

In this context, Studies have been undertaken to root out the countless myths, mysteries, beliefs and taboos prevailing around menstruation. For example, in most parts of Indian societies regarding menstruation which have negative implications for adolescents’ health, particularly their menstrual hygiene. Socially and culturally the most common restrictions during menstruation among Indian women are not entering the puja room (a place of worship) which is common in urban settings, not entering the kitchen commonly seen in rural settings, not looking into the mirror, and not attending to guests (Puri & Kapoor, 2006 as cited by Anant & Kamiya, 2012). Menstruating women are restricted from offering prayers and touching holy books. Such practices related to

menstruation have been sighted in urban residential areas and slum areas of Ranchi in India (Ten, 2007).

Similarly, it even gets worse on issues of life like water said one woman during the FGD during my research. When women are menstruating, they are restricted from accessing water sources for fear that they will pollute the water sources. More similar to the scenario under research, menstruating women and girls are forced to forgo their baths for so many days (Fernandes, 2008 and Sumpter & Torondel, 2013). Such beliefs and misconceptions consequently compromise their right to health and wellbeing.

In the Gambia, menstruation is not only a taboo but loaded with silence and secrecy that speaking about it in public or private leads to misconceptions and lack of preparedness, especially among adolescent girls (Shah et al., 2019). During the research, it was quite hard especially with local refugee women to get information from some women especially the one-on-one interview or when the researcher asked one woman during the FGD. One of the respondents boldly told the researcher that:

*“I do not even want to think about it myself, how do I then talk about it with someone else”.* (FFGD)

### **2.3 Perceptions of women and men on cultural practices on menstrual hygiene management**

As many parts of the globe continue to believe and practice taboos, cultural misconceptions and superstitions surrounding menstruation, parts of India and Zambia depict women and girls as unclean and pollutants. According to (Ten, 2007 and Kumar & Srivastava, 2011 and Lahme et al., 2016 and Kaur 2018), during menstruation, the mobility and behavior of women and girls is controlled or under strict observation. Such restrictions transcend into seclusion from activities including cooking food, fetching water, having sexual intercourse, cleaning, and attending social and religious gatherings. The intention of this is to rid the community of such shame, impurities, and pollution caused by women and girls. The researcher does not agree with this, rather such acts make women feel indifferent, and abnormal challenging the ‘women in development’ drive of countries.

Additionally, Creoles and Maron unveil that menstruating women are not only excluded from cooking or sharing a bed with their partners but expected to stay in a separate house or be confined in a room until the end of the menstrual flow. This is what is reported in some parts of South America (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013). The women reported the same during the FGD. These practices seem to be the same in the different countries where research about this topic has been carried out. In a relation to the above, it even gets worse on issues of life like water. When women are menstruating, they are restricted from accessing water sources for fear that they will pollute the water sources. This is quite absurd.

More similar to the scenario under research, menstruating women and girls are forced to forego their baths for so many days (Fernandes, 2008; Sumpter & Torondel, 2013). Such beliefs and misconceptions consequently compromise their health and wellbeing.

The perception of impurity during menstruation is also justified and referenced in the bible. In Leviticus 15:19-20, Torah states when a woman is menstruating, she would be ceremonially clean for seven (7) days and whoever touched her during that time would be unclean until evening, and anything they sit or lay on would be unclean. It is insulting for women to declare their natural body functions as unclean. This is also confirmed in a qualitative study by (Mohamed et al., 2018) in Fiji, Solomon Islands [SI], and Papua New Guinea [PNG]. Some male respondents during this study believed that the seclusion of women during menstrual is a religious ritual. In rural Puja-India, menstruation is considered a sin and curse from God (Dasgupta & Sarkar, 2008; Sharma et al., 2006, Kumar & Srivastava, 2011) as cited by Mohamed et al., (2018). Much as such thoughts are existing among different faith, it is absurd for people to think that God thinks like them. God does not see any human being and what he created as a sin and no one should see or consider menstruating women as sinners or the condition as sin.

In a study conducted by (Oche et al., 2011), about half, (51%) of Muslim girls and women avoid prayers and the worship place during menstruation a similar practice sighted in

Egypt and India (Dhingra, 2009 and Omidvar et al., 2010 and Nair et al., 2007) as cited by (Oche & friends, 2011). Menstruating women are forbidden from touching holy books and visiting holy places (Garg, 2011). In this regard, the researcher has personally heard and seen where menstruating females are mandated to abstain from prayers and fasting as also studied by (Ten, 2007). However, our relationship involves our souls and spirit, not our bodies. Therefore, no one should be controlled from worshipping or house of worship because they are in their period.

According to (Oche et al., 2020), in a study carried out in Nigeria which aimed at evaluating the level of knowledge on menstruation and hygienic practices among adolescent schoolgirls in the urban city mentioned that the perception and appropriate hygiene practices of girls and women is related to their level of knowledge and beliefs. Kaur et al. (2018), in agreement mentioned that most men do not know about the menstruation and physiological changes in women during menstruation and the menstrual cycle, so it is difficult to change their perception regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene. Due to unwillingness, myths, prejudices, and misconceptions, it is difficult to talk about menstruation with men and boy's because the topic is handled with secrecy, from a young age hence not appreciating menstruation as a natural and normal occurrence in women and therefore they cannot help women in such situation.

Other studies indicate that women are not expected to expose their sanitary materials either used or not as it is deemed secretive and shameful (Kaur et al., 2018 and Mohammed et al., 2018 and Shah et al., 2019). In particular, a review by (Kaur, et al., 2018), this secrecy is in washing, drying, and storing the materials as they are not supposed to be seen by anyone. Similar information is revealed by (Mohammed et al., 2018), stating that girls and women must hang their menstrual cloths under a wider sheet when drying, to hide from the public as cited by (Kaur et al., 2018). This is true in every African setting that no one is even supposed to know that a woman is in her period. This was as well mentioned by all the women during my research that menstruation and materials used to manage it are secretly handled.

In a study conducted by (Mohamed et al., 2018) he reveals that it is a bad omen for a male to meet or even interact with a menstruating female. It is believed that it gives a negative effect on men's health and physical strength limiting their ability to participate in activities such as fishing, hunting, and sports. As such any female menstruating is supposed to avoid any contact with the male not even cross their path. In some remote communities, these necessitated women staying in separate rooms until the end of the menstrual flow.

Other studies conducted in developing countries reveal that menstrual blood is used in witchcraft/ black magic leading to excessive bleeding, sterility, and sometimes death in extreme cases or even to make portion love (Ten, 2007 and Pillitteri, 2011 and Oche et al., 2012 and Kaur et al., 2018). More beliefs regarding menstruation, in southern Africa reveal that menstrual blood can be dangerous to men and the fertility of cattle and crops. Similar reports are reported in regions of Africa. Closer to Home, in western Uganda, menstruating women and girls were not allowed to drink milk as this would turn cow milk bloody. While in Eastern Uganda, menstruating women were not allowed to plant groundnuts out of fear that it would affect the yield in one way or another (Ten, 2007).

Sommer's (2008), in a study conducted in Kilimanjaro, Northern Tanzania revealed that social pressures forced girls that have reached reproductive age into marriage and consequently quit school. When girls were menstruating, they would not share bath shelters with their parents or associate with friends who have not started their periods. Similar findings were reported from southern India where the social dimensions of the ritual celebrations of menstruation include strict rules of seclusion of girls and women confined to a hut or room unable to go out unaccompanied or to touch some food items (Narayan et al., 2001).

52% of the world population are of reproductive age and menstruation is part of that long time life. In many countries, this natural process is handled with secrecy due to taboos and beliefs related to sexuality and reproduction, given gender norms and values related to culture, religion and belief, (Anne, 2015). This was witnessed during the first

steps of this research right from my class where we were presenting our topics to the class, some students looked at me wondering how I openly talk about menstruation even after the so many levels of education they have gone through. The culture of secrecy about this topic is still strong. While in the settlement, some women distanced themselves from us when they heard the topic of discussion at the introduction level.

Despite the current discussions on the misconceptions, beliefs, and taboos surrounding menstrual management practices, no study reveals the reason for sitting on the sand by women/girls during menarche as experienced by women in Palabek refugee settlement. All the studies reviewed explore secrecy about menarche even in the presence of sanitary products such as pads, cloths, and toilet papers among others. This gap in literature uniquely provides clear-cut justification for this study.

#### **2.4 Attitude of women and men towards cultural practices around menstrual hygiene management**

Attitude of menstruation are both negatively and positively constructed primarily by young women's introduction to menstruation which are sustained by the influences of their culture, religion, peers, family members, and the media.

Women have to undergo seclusion, in the context of relief from their daily duties. They are not allowed to enter the kitchen when they are menstruating because they are considered unholy (Chaturvedi & Chandra, 1991 and Patila & Agarwal, et al 2011). Women in India go through such difficulties due to the attitude of society towards menstruation. During the research, some women mentioned that they practice some unhygienic menstrual management practices because society spells it to them to do so even with the availability of hygienic menstrual management kits (Chaturvedi & Chandra 1991). This only makes them feel unwanted and what they are going through is not of God so to speak.

According to (Ajum et al., 2005), in a study carried out at Isra University and the villages around the university with an objective to determine attitudes towards menstruation among young women, out of the 500 participants in the study, the biggest number



regarded menstruation as a natural process and it is good for the health of a woman, others perceived it as a disease and a curse from God and the whole process not healthy at all. Ajum and his friends then concluded that there is ignorance, false perceptions and unsafe menstrual management practices are not uncommon among young women and so they ought to be emotionally prepared well before they experience menstruation to lessen negative reactions.

Menstrual Management practices (MMP) are considered an issue for only women which is not discussed else it brings shame. As a result, women cannot express their needs and what affects them within their homes, community, or society in general in this regard. They don't even talk about it as women but individually dealt with. It is suggested that stigma and myths surrounding menstruation are powered by men. This makes women feel like outcasts in society hence demeaning their ability to step into development waters, this keeps them in the background. This is caused by society setting as the matter of Menstruation being so private and not talked about and seen as shame that's why when women face negative effects around menstruation and its management, they keep quiet about it and find no solace or help from either male or fellow female counterparts.

George (1997) and Umeora, & Egwuatu (2008), in their study have observed that other than cultural and society imposed restrictions on women and girls during their menstrual periods, their study shows that some of the restrictions are also self-imposed, and intended to keep clean, lessen the discomfort (for those with abdominal discomfort) and avoid embarrassment especially while in public places (Umeora et al., 2008) as cited by (Oche et al. 2011). The researcher does not agree with these writers that women, or some women impose restrictions on themselves. If they do, all was brought about by what culture and society spelled out. If culture embraced menstruation as a natural occurrence, then women would feel proud about it.

According to (Roberts, 2004), in western culture women view monthly menstruations as disgusting or shameful. They have been socialized to believe that their bodies are

naturally dirty and abnormal compared to the male body. Throughout western history, menstrual cycle has been associated with shame and women's dark and uncontrollable nature (Northrup, 2010 and Kumar & Srivastava, 2011) A study carried out in India revealed that many mothers reported that they were restricted a lot during menstruation, but they feel that girls should not be curbed by traditional practices during menstruation in this error as they are working and some are the breadwinners in homes. The women during the research mentioned that these restrictions are hurdles in the progress of girls.

Mason et al., (2017), mentions that some boys and men learn about menstruation as part of the curriculum but had concerns that the lessons were not in-depth. Most who didn't go to school gathered knowledge from formal sources, overhear conversations, or observed cultural rituals. Few boys and men that went to school openly displayed a negative attitude, although a minority voiced the idea that menstruation is a 'disease'. Boys and men were mostly sympathetic to their menstruating sisters and wanted to support them but instead, the girls and women have grown to hide the situation and not talk about it when it affects them negatively.

Men and women have different attitudes towards menstruation and its management which are mostly found to be either positive or negative. Majority of the literature report that men and women mostly hold negative attitude toward menstruation and its management (Rembeck et al., 2006). The negative attitudes displayed include feeling embarrassed, seeing menstruation as annoying, disabling (drawing certain things that women should do and not do while they are menstruating) (Marván et al., 2005). Similarly in western culture, women also tend to view monthly menstruations as disgusting or shameful (Roberts, 2004). Furthermore, negative attitudes also include seeing menstruation as a monumental physical and psychological burden that women must bear. For example, the belief that menstruation affects the performance of women may lead to a restriction of women's opportunities in society and may also result in many women keeping away from their responsibilities and not climbing the ladders

that they would have climbed which continues to keep them in the kitchen which is discriminating.

The idea of menstruation and its management being inconvenient and cumbersome has gained significant momentum, starting with the federal Drug Administration's approval of a contraceptive pill named Seasonal that reduces the frequency of menstrual periods to four times a year (Sanabria, 2011). Brazilian women possess a general dislike towards menstruation. 61% of participants of a study conducted by Makuch et al., (2011) reported a dislike for menstrual bleeding followed by pain, mood changes, interference with sex, cost of hygiene pads, loss, of time with school or work, and more.

Mohan et al., (2012), spelled out a few examples of challenges and attitudes of women in different countries on MHM and menstruation. A young woman in Tanzania stated that:

*"I do not know what was happening to me or what to do to manage menstruation. I use cotton wool, pages from an exercise book, and leaves from trees. I suffered much embarrassment at school because I leaked and stained my uniform."*

According to a teenager in India:

*"How can I wash blood in the toilet? The drain that leads out is not covered. My brothers and father are in the courtyard, and I don't want them to see what is happening to me"*.

A girl from Nepal stated:

*"During winter it is difficult as we have to sleep alone out of the house with no warm clothes at night"*.

A woman in Uganda made mention that:

*"When you start getting periods, our mothers take us to a separate room and start advising you that you have to keep it a secret and no one should know that you are in menstrual periods. So, when a drop of blood passes through you, they say, 'Ah, she is a namagwatala' meaning a very dirty person ... So, it's shameful."*

Similarly, in a study conducted in South African by (Du Toit, 1988), 85.7% participants felt that men had an advantage over women because they do not menstruate. Participants felt that men are not restricted in the practice of religion or sex, and they do not have the monthly bothers of menstruation, so they don't really care. During the study, one man-made mentioned that:

*"I don't care what women use during their periods, for me when my wife starts her issues, I go away from home, and I return when she is fine. That is her business". MFGD.*

This only shows the relation in most happenings from country to country which must be given uttermost attention as men don't offer support to women bringing about issues of gender imbalance in a long run.

A study conducted by (Cevirme et al., 2010) in Turkey revealed that 48.8% of their participants felt that menstruation is considered shameful, dirty, disgusting and, which must be hidden to avoid potential embarrassment of the woman and the man in her company. This stereotype of secrecy and hiding further perpetuates the dominant view of menstruation as a process that women should be ashamed of as opposed to celebrating it as a natural biological indication of fertility and health.

In a study conducted in Mexico, (Marván et al., 2005) investigated the beliefs and attitudes towards menstruation with Mexican women and men of different ages being the sample indicated that participants younger in age reported that menstruation was more annoying to younger participants than older participants (Marván et al., 2005). Revealing that menstruation was disabling because men's knowledge on menstruation is inferential and are largely influenced by cultural stereotypes that are negative in western societies. Results further indicated that middle-aged participants indicated a greater need for secrecy about menstruation than older participants. This may be a consequence of these participants having been brought up in a culture of concealment of menstruation and its management, and they, therefore, menstruation should be hidden, not openly talked about (Marván et al., 2005).

## **2.5 Literature review Summary**

This presents the gaps in the existing literature on the different menstrual management practices in refugee settlements especially in Palabek.

The perceptions and attitudes in literature are from elsewhere like in India, Mexico, Nepal among others but not in Uganda.

Limited studies exist in the current studies about perceptions and attitudes on menstrual management practices and none in Palabek refugee settlement.

There is no standard for hygienic menstrual management practices. The literature only mentions what is commonly used and not describing appropriate management practices.

The current literature and discussion tend to largely focus on the perceptions and experiences of girls. No robust evidence in research points to the association between the perceptions and attitudes of girls and women. It would be suicidal to assume that girls and women feel the same about these practices. Similarly, the perceptions and attitudes of men as custodians of cultural norms and values in many societies have not been documented in the existing literature. Not even one woman during my research appreciated the culture around menstruation even those that practiced did not like it but were following it bitterly.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an in-depth presentation of the methodology for the study including research design, approach, study population, sampling, methods, and tools of data collection as well as the data analysis process.

#### 3.2 Research design

The study employed was a qualitative approach as the researcher collected information from people's experiences and through conversations with the different respondents to establish cultural rationale for menstrual practices and to explore the perceptions and attitudes of both women and men on these cultural practices. An explorative research design was adopted in this research. This is defined as research used to investigate a problem that is not clearly defined. According to (Bhat, 2013), the exploratory research design is useful when the research problem and the researcher have no past data or only a few studies for reference. Due to the unique nature of this study, therefore, the researcher found this an instrumental design for an in-depth study of the research topic. The research paradigm used was constructivism. This is so because the research believes that there's no single reality or truth to the scenario hence being open to the different experiences, beliefs, attitudes and perception. According to (Lisa M, 2023), Constructivism implies that reality is constructed through human interaction. rejects the idea that there is objective knowledge in some external reality for the researcher to retrieve mechanistically. Instead, the researcher's values and dispositions influence

the knowledge that is constructed through interaction with the phenomenon and participants in the inquiry.

### **3.3 Area of study**

The study examined the attitudes and perceptions of refugees in Palabek Refugee settlement on menstrual management, Lamwo district, in northern Uganda. The study was conducted in zone 5A and 5B which has both new and old arrivals with approximately 40,000 South Sudanese refugees with 13 tribes. Zones 5A and 5B were selected for the study because they contain all tribes with different cultures to share cultural practices around menstruation. The two zones also have the most women-headed households giving many women who were the main target population of the study. The target population was refugee women in the selected zones within the camp. Some of the common tribes are Acholi, Lutungu, Bari, and the Nweri (African Women and Youth Action for Development- AWYAD 2019) Organizations working to support women and girls with menstrual hygiene kits for good health menstrual practices in Palabek Refugee settlement include implementing partners of the United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) like Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Other Operating partners like African Women and Youth Action for Development (AWYAD), and African Women Raising (AWR). These organizations have women in the community and schoolgirl awareness in good Menstrual Hygiene Management and thereafter distribute pads to these groups. Some Organizations have gone ahead to provide reusable pads for the sake of sustainability. However, amidst all this support, some women have come out boldly and turned down the offer of pads when asked why they refuse to accept a free offer of pads, they say that their culture does not accept them using pads of any kind.

### **3.4 Sources of Information**

The research was conducted using primary and secondary data sources. Primary research will gather information from the target population, men, and key informants in selected blocks in zone 5A and Zone 5B using interviews and focus group discussions. While secondary research gathered information from previously published primary

research from sources like case studies, magazines, books, reports, articles from online research, and libraries (Adi, 2013)

### **3.5 Population and Sampling techniques**

#### **3.5.1 Sampling technique**

The population that was used in this study was sampled women and men of zone 5A and zone 5B using purposive and convenience sampling. With 34 respondents from zone 5A and 33 respondents from zone 5B. The other 2 respondents were from the base camp with one representative from the UNHCR and the office of the Prime minister (OPM) who were both protection officers forming part of the Key informants.

**Table 3.1: Number of participants**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
Zone 5A	34
ZONE 5B	33
Base camp	2
Total number of people	69

A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. It is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective (Ashley, 2020). Here, participants are selected according to the need of the study. Purposive sampling was used to access a particular subset of people who have the information like the cultural leaders and the women leaders who usually mobilize women for sanitary distributions or who are or have been affected by or experienced the cultural practices around menstrual management and females who have been refused to use pads. The researcher only picks a sample from individuals who fit the profile (Foley, 2018). Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to get a lot of information from the data collected.

The researcher also employed convenience sampling technique in data collection. This is so because since all women go through menstruation, the easily accessed were part



of the participants. Being that it is a non-probability sampling method, the easily accessible and available women in the different zones. According to (Simkus, 2023), Convenience sampling is a method where data is collected from an easily accessible and available group of people.

### **3.6 Procedure for data collection**

An interview guide was structured was used to collect qualitative data. This was developed in relation to research questions. These were in English but pretested using the local language Acholi and Arabic so that we get the best and most appropriate words to use in the local languages bearing in mind that the interview questions don't change. The semi-structured interview guide schedule included an FDG guide for women, an FGD guide for men, and a key informant guide. These were read out in English and translated to participants in Acholi and Arabic who gave their responses in either Acholi which was again translated to the researcher.

### **3.7 Data collection methods and instruments**

The researcher employed 2 data collection methods 4 FGDS comprising of women. Each focus group comprised members between 12 to 15 women and 1 FGD comprising 7 men to get their views, 5 key informants among which were a representative from the UNHCR and OPM comprising 3 women and 2 men.

**Table 3.2: Number of data collection methods**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
Focus group discussions (FGD)	Women	4
	Men	1
Key informants	Women	3
	Men	2

The above is justified based on the concept of data saturation in qualitative research which is defined as a point in data collection when the collection of new data doesn't change, but gives the same information or adds little change to the previously collected data Marshall et al.,(2013) and Guest et al., (2006).

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to guide data collection using Focus Group Discussions, and key informants' interviews methods which were undertaken in English language and translated into Acholi the most spoken language by most tribes in the settlement, and Arabic for a few who would not speak and understand Acholi. All KII understood the English language.

The researcher chose to have interviews with key informants for a one-on-one interviews with local refugees because of the sensitivity of the topic that most people shunned away and so key persons in the community were engaged to give their views on what the local women in the community they lead in different capacities go through, what they have done and intend to do to help the women out of bondage. Similarly, the reason the researcher used FGD was to make women comfortable with the topic hence bringing them together with other women. This made women comfortable, and confident and it lightened the burden making the topic 'light'. Because the FGD was conducted in a safe space for women only, they owned the topic, opened their hearts, shared experiences, views, opinions, and what they have heard.

Usually, Key informant interviews (KII) are in-depth interviews with influential persons to the subject matter.

However, the researcher had 5 key informants with 3 women and 2 men. The three women included a female protection associate from the UNHCR and 2 women leaders from zone 5A and B respectively. The men included the community and protection officer from the OPM and a cultural leader. The UNHCR protection associate discussed the attitude of the refugees, poor menstrual management brought about because of lack but also cultural beliefs, inability to distribute pads to refugees, and funding gaps.

The protection officer from OPM mentioned the attitude of refugees, health issues related to poor menstrual practices, and the position of the government. The women leaders shared issues concerning health rights, lack of pads, and perception of men. The cultural leader talked about cultural beliefs and their impact.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with women groups in a kind of safe space conversation so as the women feel free and safe to talk about the topic and discuss. 4 FGDs with women only were conducted each with 15 members and another one comprising of men only from both Zones. The members comprised of the different tribes in each block and so there were translators for the different tribes although Acholi which is understood by most people in the settlement given that many refugees can speak Acholi was used in most focus groups. However, some blocks like block 13 of zone 5B, translation was in Arabic as that is the tribe understood by most people. Fortunately, most women leaders and traditional leaders plus all block leaders understand English. For those that cannot understand English, their knowledge of local languages, and sensibilities were crucial and considered.

In a bid to seek the opinion of men being that they are custodians of cultural norms and have the power to influence behavior in the community/society this time around menstrual behavior the researcher had a session with 7 men in an FGD. The group of men comprised 5 local refugee men and 2 block leaders from the different tribes. All the men expressed a good understanding of menstruation and gave an understandable definition of menstruation.

### **3.8 Quality control**

To ensure the quality of data, the researcher used the following concepts to define and investigate data quality.

**Authenticity:** The research had different findings and experiences based on the different views shared. Even when the topic was sensitive and secretive, the community found the research useful as it gave the women freedom to speak about it and say what they go through away from what culture spells.

**Dependability:** Given an opportunity that someone else wanted to conduct a similar search on this same topic, and location, they would find the same information and if this research is investigated, surely the same information would be given by the correspondents or community. This is so because even in the different blocks that the researcher went to, the researcher ensured that the same tools are used for the different categories. The men and women gave their views depending on their understanding, and experiences.

**Confirmability:** This ensured data quality in a way that the findings in this research are only views, experiences, and responses of the participants giving a more transparent report and data. These are the same responses the participants will give if asked the same questions any other day because it is what they go through, they will tell their own stories.

### **3.9 Data processing and analysis**

Data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis using systematic searching and arranging of the interview transcripts and procedures from the collected data, the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, and text documents into some form of explanation, understanding, or interpretation of the people and subject of study.

Data processing involves mainstreaming facts, data, or writings collected from the field. From the field, data is usually in raw form and so the researcher had to clean it as it contained spelling errors, and use appropriate words were necessary. These steps were used in data processing;

**Data editing:** during data collection, some respondents were fast or interrupted by others, especially during the FGDs the researcher ended up writing shorthand and abbreviated most words. Therefore, to give clear and understandable meaning and a good flow to the interview guide editing was necessary.

**Data coding:** Was important, especially because this research topic was sensitive and so the researcher did not want to mention people's names instead gave them codes such as KI 1 for key informant one, and R3 for respondent 3. This was used during data collection for the FGD giving the women confidence that no one will read about them for talking about menstruation that culture forbids them from openly talking about.

**Data Analysis:** Involves remodeling data so that it makes sense by gathering, organizing, and interpreting raw data into manageable, clear, convenient, and understanding what it represents. The researcher went through the interview guide to ensure that responses were correctly written in their respective questions, omit, no irrelevant information, and make corrections where necessary. Being that the research was qualitative, the researcher chose interview guides to collect data using Key informants' interviews and the focus Group Discuss method.

The researcher employed thematic and content analysis of data because it encompasses coding, generating themes from the data, defining, and naming themes, and getting familiar with the data. Content analysis emphasizes certain words, themes, or concepts. Words are broken into manageable easy and simple words called codes. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher decided to give codes to respondents instead of using their names. This also gave the respondents confidence that they will not be known or punished for openly sharing cultural beliefs such as menstruation. This was the best form of analysis for the study because it is qualitative research, and the data collection was to get respondents' views, opinions, knowledge, and experiences. Respondents shared what they know, experienced, viewed, heard, and understood. According to (Caulfield, 2019), thematic data analysis has different approaches, and an inductive approach allows the data itself to determine the themes used. Given that during the FGD, even an interview guide, the research was conversational hence picking out the most outstanding words used by respondents became my theme.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

The study was designed in compliance with the requirements of Uganda Christian University (UCU) School of postgraduate studies, the school of social sciences, the department of development studies of UCU. Given the sensitive nature of the study, the research paradigm used was constructivism. The researcher did not believe that there's a single reality or truth but was open to the different experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitude of the participants using interview guides to inform the study without predicting or controlling what they have to say. The data collection processes include interviews and the FGDs to make the participants sensitive and free to share their experiences in a safe space conversation arrangement. Secondly, the approval and clearance to carry out this study was sought from a panel of lecturers of the school of social sciences of Uganda Christian University (UCU). Respondents were informed of their anonymity and confidentiality i.e not sharing their information beyond the purpose of the study. There was informed consent from the beginning of data collection. Reflexivity reporting was involved as the exact responses from the research participants was recorded.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS.**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the research carried out on menstrual Management practices, attitudes, perception of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement in Lamwo district, Northern Uganda. The findings are based on the specific objectives of the study including the menstrual management practices in refugee settlements, perceptions of women and men surrounding menstrual management practices, the attitude of men and women towards menstrual management practices in Palabek refugee settlement, Lamwo district, Northern Uganda. This will also present sample characteristics of the variables used and respondents' information.

#### **4.2 Social demographic characteristics of the sample**

The results of the study are described in the socio-demographic features of the respondents including Age, gender, marital status, tribe, gender, and education level as the researcher found important and beneficial in this research to get the views from a wide scope and understanding.

**Table 4.1 Social demographic characteristics of the sample**

Variable	Category	Number
Gender	Female	60
	Male	9
Zone	Base camp	2
	5A	33
	5B	34
Age	20 - 29	17
	30 - 39	38
	40 - 49	10
	50 - 59	4
Marital status	Married	28
	Not married	41
Tribe	Acholi	30
	Lango	15
	Lutungo	11
	Murule	08
	Bari	05
Education level	Primary level	19
	Secondary level	02
	Certificate level	2
	University level	2
	Uneducated	44

From table 4.1, shows the attributes of respondents. Given that the research was targeting women, four FGD were organized for women, with 15 members in each group.



One FGD was organized for men comprising of 9 members and because their perception is equally important since they live with the women and are probably burdened or support the cultural practices around menstruation. The research was in zone 5A and 5B plus a representative from OPM and UNHCR who sit at the base camp respectively. Focus was on women and men in reproductive age of 20 to 49. The settlement camp is a home to several tribes including Acholi, Lango, Lutungo, Murule and Bari. Most respondents were uneducated.

### **4.3 Cultural rationale for menstrual practices.**

#### **4.3.1 Defining Menstruation**

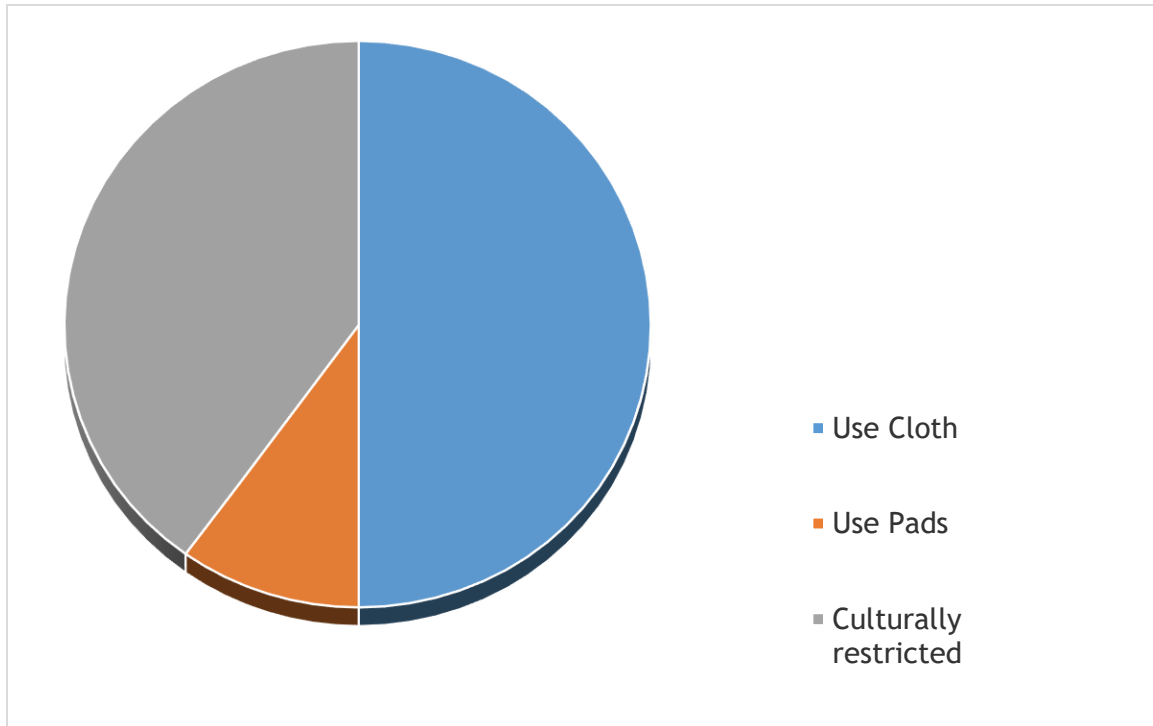
The study intended to establish the cultural rationale on menstrual practices. What happens culturally around menstruation and what was heard happening about menstruation. The respondents were also asked if they knew what menstruation is. Despite the differences in responses, all respondents pointed to what menstruation is as perceived by individuals. Male R 1 (respondents 1) defined menstruation as...

*“The pain and suffering that women go through every month... the pain comes when blood comes out of their vagina and they suffer for a week when the blood starts from the age of 12”.* (Male R.1)

All the female respondents understood and acknowledged what menstruation is. Some only nodded their heads in response as they didn't even want to talk about it even when it is a fact that they go through and that it happens to them. The women in the FDGs did not particularly define menstruation but acknowledged that they go through it every month unless they are pregnant. One respondent from the women's Focus discussion group one (FFGD1) defined menstruation as...

*“that time of the month when a woman goes through pain and suffering for being a woman”.*

#### 4.3.2 Menstrual management practices in Palabek refugee settlement



How women manage their periods is a person's choice and reason. However, this is likely to affect children, husbands, health partners, health facilities, development partners, and the government at large. Among the common menstrual management practices included use of Cloth, pads and other menstrual management practices.

One of the women from the FGD made mention that;

*"I usually collect sand from the roadside and keep it close to my periods, I keep it in a cup and hide it in the kitchen so that even when it rains, I have my sand and I do it early in the morning before people wake up so that they don't see me and guess why I always get the sand on particular dates.... When my periods start, I only fill the small hole". FFGD 2*

KII made mentioned that;

*“At OPM, we are concerned with the welfare and protection of refugees. By welfare, we ensure that other partners settle this in all aspects. However, when these refugees come to the border, we pick them up and keep them at the Lukungu collection center and the women are given pads each even if it’s just one pack. We noted that some don’t come to pick pads that culture says no. I think this is the group”.*

OPM a government body has given its position that pads are not its business, but the security of the refugees is its priority. At the same time, UNHCR says they don’t have enough funding to support the women. Other partners in the settlement extend support of pads to school-going girls. The women are then left to their mercy for those that can afford it and the rest to the mercy of God.

The KI acknowledged that some women don’t want to use pads yet they unhappily use other menstrual management methods which are unhealthy. KIV narrated that they are the mobilizers of women for either meetings or any distribution.

*“One-day LWF came to our block to give new arrivals pads”.*

She went house to house but some refused to come. Others that came went back to their huts. She wondered if it was the long queue that deterred them from lining up for the menstrual pad distribution. She thought followed them and they instead became rude. Then one whispered that:

*“We can’t use pads because our culture does not accept them”.*

Concerning menstrual management, of the 7 men in the FGD, 2 of the men didn’t care about what the women go through and how they manage their periods because, during that time, they do not stay around with their families as they give the woman space to heal completely then they come back home. MFGD4 indicated that:

*“The practice is good since it is not expensive, and women do not ask for money for pads. You see we don’t have jobs here in Uganda and even when you get some small thing to do, the children need food and need to change their diet from what the world Food Organization (WFP) gives which is not even enough. So there is no money to buy pads every month”.*

MFGD5 made mentioned that:

*“The issue of culture should not make women suffer in the name of culture. Why sit on sand or cow dung for almost a week. What culture tells the women about menstrual management is so dirty and makes women hate their periods because they do not come out of the house even during food distribution, they send their school going children to collect food making them miss lessons. This is so bad. I think the OPM should help remove some of these cultures because women are falling sick after their periods yet the health center is far in zone 5A”.*

During the discussions with the different groups, they mentioned how women manage their periods and why women are prohibited from using sanitary materials based on cultural reasons. Most of the people interviewed acknowledged that they have heard/ know/ use pieces of clothes to manage their periods, very few and lucky ones use or know people who use pads.

*“I do not know women in my block that use pads, the closest to that is the reusable pads that we were trained to make, and each of us that attended was given material to make 2 pads which is not comfortable and not enough.*

*“ ... We do not have the soap to wash the pads every day so we resort to sand”.*

This means that many are still tied up in cultural beliefs or are restricted on what to use, and how to manage their periods by culture. Some of the items and ways mentioned that women use to manage their periods were.

One of the women leaders acknowledged that there are women who do not use menstrual pads even when they are distributed to them. Some women come to see what is being distributed and go back to their homes. The women leader said that she followed a group of the women that turned to go back to their homes. She inquired whether it was the long queue that deterred them from lining up for the menstrual distribution.

### **Sitting on sand**

About this, the women explained that they dig a small hole mostly in the kitchen and it is filled with sand collected from the roadside. One of the respondents in the group discussion made mentioned that:

*“I usually collect sand from the roadside and keep it close to my periods, I keep it in a cup and hide it in the kitchen so that even when it rains, I have my sand and I do it early in the morning before people wake up so that they don’t see me and guess why I always get the sand on particular dates.... When my periods start, I only fill the small hole”*. FFGD 2

When the periods start, the women move from the main house to the kitchen and sit on that sand for all the days they are on their periods. When the sand gets very wet, it is removed, and clean sand filled in the hole and again the women sit till the period’s end.

*“The reason we kept in the kitchen is not known but I think it is to isolate us from the rest of the family especially the male in the family since they do not enter the kitchen but also to keep us helping with house chores especially cooking when everyone else has gone.... I also know that in some homes, a woman in periods does not cook because no one will eat food cooked by them”*. FFGD

### **Sitting on cow dung**

Similar to sitting on the sand, the small hole here is filled with cow dung.

*“This practice is however not every common here because there are no cows in this settlement like we had in South Sudan”*. (K.3)

This is to send a signal to the household members that someone is in her period given the smell of cow dung.

### **Sanitary pads**

All the women preferred pads either reusable or disposable as a material for managing their period, however, these are not available as the few partners that support this

initiative are concentrating in schools as a bid to keep girls in school even during their periods leaving women out.

KIII made mentioned that:

*“We as OPM don’t have money to support women and girls with menstrual support materials. That is the duty of UNHCR and other partners that we give permits to operate in the settlement. We must look for space to settle refugees, protect them and run the settlement. Government works with other partners that should handle such issues”.*

Due to funding gaps, organizations like the UNHCR and other development partners working in the settlement are not able to support women with sanitary pads. KI indicated that:

*“As UNHCR, we uphold and esteem other people’s culture however, we condone acts that demean dignity. Much as women are not supported by most partners and if any, they cannot cover a whole zone and more so the whole settlement. Hmmm, I do not know what these women use as a management vice during their periods and, sadly, we cannot support our women”.* K3

### **Self-isolation**

A woman who is on her period is not allowed to go out of her home. She stays away from community activities, water sources, marketplaces, and any other place where people gather. In Palabek settlement, such women don’t attend community activities such as meetings, awareness meetings among others. More so their husbands also keep away from home for all the days the woman is on her period. The husbands either go to their relatives or go to their other women/ wives:

*“Men used this as an excuse to marry many women,”* said one of the female respondents. FFGD

There are many aspects surrounding the topic of menstruation and how it’s managed. About Palabek refugee settlement, given the fact that the allocation of blocks depends on the arrival of refugees, which makes them mix up with other tribes hence adopting

the cultures, ways of living, and practices fading most cultural practices of the different tribes.

Important to note is that some women are deeply grinded in their cultures and no one can talk them out of it even when it brings more harm than good.

Since most of the households in the settlement are women-headed, cultures norms demand that women have to look for food and other home requirements to meet the needs of their children and other family members. As such, keeping them away from community activities for almost a week when they are in their periods does not help the situation. KI 1 indicated that:

*“The case back home in South Sudan was that when a woman is in her periods, her sisters come and help with household activities as she is in isolation which cant here in Uganda as everyone id one their own and the food given by world food is not enough”. He said that even if as a cultural leader he is supposed to ensure that culture is followed, following this one can only kill his people”.*

Concerning cultural beliefs around menstruation, K3 commented that:

*“We have battled with these refugees in trying to bring them to drop some habits and beliefs so that they co-exist with other tribes within the settlement and more so with the hosing community. So, we condemn beliefs that affect the well-being of these refugees. The belief of not using pads came to our attention when children were not getting food at home because their mothers are in their periods and therefore not allowed by culture to do any house and this was coming from a certain tribe mostly which pulled out attention and we are engaged in awareness creation and talks with some cultural leaders”.*

#### **4.4 Perception of women and men on cultural practices surrounding menstruation**

##### **Perception of women.**

##### **4.4.1 Women**

The menstrual management practices that were common during as mentioned by the participants, the women felt that they were inhumane, unhygienic practice, Humiliating, Discriminative and A taboo (not to mentioned openly)

Much as menstruation is a monthly normal process that involves the shedding of blood from the uterus for all women above the age of 12, the female respondents do not like the process because it comes with discrimination, shame, pain, and keeping away from the community. This is attached to the way the culture was designed but also to how the community perceives menstruation. Only 4 of the female respondents appreciated menstruation even with the huge burden it comes with because then, they are rated women and can give birth:

*“Without menstruation, a woman cannot give birth so it’s God’s gift to women”*

FFGD

This was said by one of the women who were positive about menstruation before she was interrupted by one who said loudly:

*“It is not a gift, it is pain that women endure.... I would ask God not to have it if I had a chance to talk to God”* She went ahead to say that *“in South Sudan when a girl starts her periods, she can decide to stop school, get married and make other decisions for herself and so their young siblings look forward to starting their periods so that they become independent”*. FFGD

These are culturally concocted beliefs and attitudes.

Most female respondents negatively perceive cultural practices around menstruation as it is only harmful to their health. It embarrasses them as their children get to know that they are in their periods making the girls hate the natural occurrence, they are not supported by their husbands they instead go away from home for the days they are in their period, they are supposed to keep away from the community or even engage in



activities that support their children or household, male respondents, however, appreciate the cultural practices surrounding MHM because it is cheap as they do not have to buy MHM materials for the women, it is also a way of maintaining their culture even when they are in another country, it keeps their women home instead of moving in the community which brings shame to them as men. Some men were saddened by the cultural practices which put the women at risk of contracting reproductive diseases, it is a dirty process. They suggested the use of pads or clothes so that they continue supporting their families since it is not a disease and most households are female-headed.

#### **4.4.2 Men**

The male respondents indicated that the practices that have knowledge of are discriminative, inhumane and Cost effective favoring them especially given that women would ask them for money to buy menstrual management materials.

During the interview, some men respondents made mentioned that they do not care about how women manage their periods because it is not their business and not their problem as they keep away whenever the women start their periods. Other responses were:

*“The cultural practices do not need money which other menstrual management measures need money, so we do not spend or waste money to buy items. Our women and girls get the materials freely”*. MFG.

Women said that the men don't want them in the community when they are in their periods, and they tell them to observe culture by putting all cultural practices into use.

MI from the male FGD who the researcher met to get their views shared a sad story of how his sisters were married off at the age of 13 years because they had started their periods and yet they had nothing to say about it but to go to the marriage all in the name of culture.

*“I hated periods because I knew it comes with a serious problem for women”*.

M2 made mentioned that:

*” My sisters would cry when their periods started, they would sleep in the kitchen for 5 days all by themselves. I vowed never to get married from my tribe so that I get out of such cultural beliefs and am happy I did it”.* MFGD

These are some of the stories that men shared with me during the FGD and they indicated that culture makes menstruation a curse even when it should be enjoyed by women.

Much as most if not all cultural beliefs around menstruation affect women directly, men on the other hand also suffer the shame, directly and it affects them in one way or another. M3 in the men FGD lamented that:

*“It is us the men to challenge these cultures since the women fear and have no say even when the practice oppresses directly. In my house, I refused my Lutungu wife to use a hole. I know I do not have money for buying her periods every month, but I got her reusable pads which she uses and washes during her periods. If it is not enough, she had cut a blanket that she also uses. So, I think it is us the men to help the women overcome cultural oppressions of this kind”.*

Perception varies from tribe to tribe and individuals, given all factors are constant, the researcher does not think there is anyone who would accept such decay and suffering of another. Respondent said that:

*“I don’t know why women are lamenting about these cultural practices when they were born knowing these cultural practices and these practices identify us”.* MFG

#### **4.5 Attitude of men and women towards cultural practices**

Attitude strongly influences a position and behavior on certain matters. So many statements have been made mentioned to assess the attitude of men and women towards cultural practices around menstruation and its management with many respondents having a negative/bad attitude towards cultural practices and a few still carrying a positive/good attitude towards the practices.

##### **4.5.1 Men**

As earlier mentioned, most of the men do not care what the women's cry for as long as they do not mention anything to do with money towards the purchase of items to manage periods. One gentleman mentioned that:

*"I do not care what women say, they should know that there is no money to buy pads every month, and usually, when the periods start, I move away from home and leave her with the children. While in South Sudan, I would go get other women for that time. The problem here in Uganda is that we don't have money and these Ugandan women only love men with money. So we go visit our single friends in or out of the blocks. We come back when she has finished her suffering". MFG*

Another male respondent who supports cultural practices in menstruation said:

*"I have never seen anyone dying from these practices and so women should stop misbehaving because they are in another country, culture must be maintained anywhere we go. These women are just copycats, they just copy things anyhow. When they were in South Sudan, they were quiet, now they are making noise". MFG*

What men did not agree with is refusing women to work while in their menses yet they are the bread winners in the settlement as most jobs are given to men being that most of them are the heads of their homes like one as one male respondent made mention that:

*“life in the settlement is not for the weak and everyone has to work on their own to be able to sustain life and take care of children’s needs as it is the responsibility of women sadly, for us men, we just move around the settlement looking for what to do and some of us even sell the little food given as a family potion for the month to get money to buy alcohol”. MFG*

Men however agreed with one of them who called for support from the different actors to also consider women and their dignity just as the refugees are given food which is an important aspect of life, menstrual management materials are as well important to women’s health, wellbeing and development.

*“just as we have world food giving us food, there should be someone, an organization to distribute pads to women every month. They need it.”*

#### **4.5.2 Women**

Women, on the other hand, women feel enslaved in culture especially when they are the ones that suffer discrimination, isolation, and use of harmful materials to manage their periods at the expense of their health and wellbeing.

“I can’t wait to become old because I have suffered with pain, itching, and what to use when periods start” (ffgd 2)

*“For me madam, seeing period is annoying and it makes me bitter, not because of blood but because of how I will suffer for 5 days with no one to talk to, even food ... aaaah”.*

Apart from 3 women from the Lutungu tribe who had a positive attitude towards a culture that should be respected everywhere they go as it identifies them and makes them unique from others.

One of the respondents from one of the targeted tribes made mentioned that:

*“I cannot talk about that as it is a private matter and even our parents didn’t talk us through it, I was only shocked when blood started oozing out of me, unfortunate for me, I was young and hadn’t learnt of it while in school. I had however seen my big sister sitting in the kitchen the whole day and night and so when my periods started, my mother sent me to gets and from the roadside, filled a small hole that was already in the kitchen and that was it for me without any single advise from any elder and we never spoke about it ever again”. FFGD3*

In a study carried out in Mukono district: Menstrual health challenges in the workplace and consequences for women’s work and wellbeing, Hennegan and friends discovered the attitude that menstruating women are dirty, along with pain and norms around absenteeism or not being allowed to participate in activities or work kept the women away. (Hennegan et al., (2022)). The women feel and know what people say about menstruation, so they tend to isolate themselves away from happenings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

#### 5.1 Introduction

Practices around menstrual management have heavily affected the health, dignity, wellbeing and development of women. Women did not have any kind words for such practices even as some still suffer from the burden of some cultural practices while others are using good materials to manage their menses in hiding. This study sought to explore the menstrual hygiene management practices and health rights of refugee women in Palabek refugee settlement, Lamwo district. The study had Three (3) research objectives one of which was to establish the cultural rationale for menstrual practices in Palabek refugee settlement. The second one was to identify the perceptions of both women and men on these cultural practices. What men and women understand or see in and concerning the cultural practices around menstrual management. The third was to understand the influence of poor menstrual management practices on the health rights of women in Palabek refugee settlement. The position of men and women towards cultural practices around menstrual management.

#### 5.2 Cultural rationale on menstrual practices

The first research question of the study was to explore the cultural rationale for menstrual practices in Palabek Refugee settlement. This was for respondents to give their own experiences, what they have seen happen or heard in the community justifying cultural practices around menstruation. Respondents especially the women who were asked how they manage their menstruation. The most common material used during menstruation is small torn clothes. This is because they do not have menstrual pads nor money to buy the pads given that they do not have husbands to support them as they are single mothers.

Fernanda, (2010) states that women use numerous traditional methods to counter menstruation. These include sand and ash, old cloth, and at times nothing. These materials used are nothing close to cleanliness and therefore cannot be put in the most

sensitive area but they are not only by the respondents but worldwide. Some give reasons for using them such as lack of money to pay sanitary pads and cultural practices and beliefs.

In most cultures, many girls developing into women around the world receive virtually no information about menstruation before their menarche making the management of menstruation guesswork or unclear depending on what they find in the society or community. For example, girls in India expressed embarrassment and reluctance to approach mothers. Even in Australia, where information about menstruation is readily available, 80% of young urban girls surveyed felt that menstruation was an unacceptable topic of conversation (Sivakami et al., 2019).

In addition, many traditional cultures often strongly discourage conversations regarding sexuality between parents and children. Cultures in which relatively low numbers of mothers prepare their daughters for menstruation may also reflect poor literacy which strengthens traditional taboos and heighten maternal feelings of inadequacy about physiological knowledge.

Important to note is that some of the women that have opted to use clothes because they are not living with their kings' men or elders that would dictate how menstruation should be managed. Some of these options include digging a small hole in the kitchen, use of cow dung. One reason indicated for using old clothes is the absence of cultural leaders, who put emphasis on such practices. This enables them to keep active with their day-to-day activities as they are the breadwinners. The fact some women still use this cultural practice to manage their periods because they live with or near their king's men, their husbands want them to continue following cultural practices and beliefs and some decided to be faithful followers of culture.

Buckley & Gottlieb (1988), noted that all over the world, religion and culture have dictated to women to avoid certain activities such as cooking, working, praying, and having sexual intercourse while menstruating, as they are considered to be in a state of uncleanness. This natural accuracy in woman has been turned by society to make

women suffer and those around them. Women have found themselves heading families meaning an entire household depends on her. When told to keep away from society and people, it is not only her suffering but everyone in the household especially the children.

In many cultures, menstruation is considered taboo and is clouded with silence and secrecy this was very evident during the interviews when some questions were not being answered as they did not want to talk about it. The women in the FGD would respond by nodding or otherwise. In Gambia for example, menstruation is not only taboo, but it is clouded with silence and secrecy that speaking about the subject is not only taboo in public but even in private leading to misconceptions (Shah et al., 2019).

In India, women are not allowed to enter the puja room (a place of worship) which is major in urban settings, not entering into the kitchen commonly seen in rural settings, not look into the mirror, and not attend to guests during menstruation in India (Puri & Kapoor, 2006 as cited by Anant, & Kamiya, 2012).

In the researchers view, not much has been done to revamp the dignity of women and girls on issues concerning their reproduction and more specifically menstruation. Governments, local leaders, and communities may not pay attention to issues concerning menstrual practices because they are not loudly spoken about, they happen mostly in rural settings, but these affect the wellbeing, esteem, and involvement of women in development which governments around the world are focusing on. Consideration should be for all women not only women in urban areas. According to the literature reviewed, menstruation has not been given due consideration in many countries and communities, yet it is a natural occurrence that all women go through, and it is not going anywhere hence it should be given great consideration.

### **5.3 Perceptions of both women and men on these cultural practices.**

This was to establish how men's and women's understanding of the cultural practices around menstrual management. The respondents started by giving what they use, what they have seen people using, and what they have heard regarding their culture as



practices around menstrual management. Women made mentioned that they sometimes do not want to be identified by their tribes because they do not want to be followed by their tribe's mates on issues of culture. While others are learning Acholi which has cultural flexibility.

According to (Kaur, et al., 2018), most men do not know about menstruation and physiological changes in women during menstruation and the menstrual cycle, so it is difficult to change their perception regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene. Due to unwillingness, myths, prejudices, and misconceptions, it is difficult to talk about menstruation with men and boys. Male respondents said they do not care about these cultural practices since it spells that they do not have to be around during this period. However, this has to change so as the perception of men changes toward menstruation and women.

According to (Roberts, 2004), even in western culture, women also tend to view monthly menstruations as disgusting or shameful. The fact that men stay and live with women, they must know, understand, and support women in aspects of their lives, get involved in their lives especially the natural changes and occurrences like menstruation hence misconceptions, and the myths around menstruation will die off. Time is now that issues concerning women are given time and attention. No woman smiled about any of the cultural practices but wailed about them.

More literature indicates that women have also been socialized and brought up to believe that their bodies are essentially dirty because they are abnormal compared to the male body. Throughout western history, the menstrual cycle has been associated with shame and degradation of women's dark and uncontrollable nature. With such a perception concerning menstruation, women will only continue to lag in most aspects of life and only be kept in the kitchen (Northrup, 2010).

After all, has been said, fathers, brothers, uncles must be brought on board to change their perceptions of menstruation and be mindful of what women go through in this

regard so that they support women in the transition from culturally spelled menstrual management methods to hygienic healthy and user-friendly menstrual management methods.

#### **5.4 Attitude of women and men towards cultural practices around menstrual management.**

The position of men and women concerning the cultural practices around menstrual management depends on how they perceive the practices. Some men who were for these practices made mentioned that it does not cost them a penny which is insensitive because at least the used clothes do not cost a penny as well since old clothes are used most times. Besides the monetary concern, they said that they would like to have clean women for wives and sisters. This, therefore, means that besides their fear of spending on buying pads, they would like clean and hygienic methods to manage their periods. There is another group that insisted that culture is culture, and it should be accepted with all it comes with.

However, the women who were in the FGDs had one single position that the practices are unclean, dirty, isolative, and discriminative as they have to keep away from the community, and they get rushes and itching once they use them.

As (Chaturvedi & Chandra, 1991 and Patila & Agarwal, et al 2011) state, women have to undergo seclusion, in the context of relief from their daily duties. They are not allowed to enter the kitchen when they are menstruating because they are considered unholy Women in India go through such difficulties due to the attitude of society towards menstruation. In Palabek, the women are secluded from even their own family members, and they join the rest after their periods end. Some of the men that were in support of the practices were only looking at the issue of them not spending money to buy materials to support women during their periods against the health, wellbeing, dignity, and progress of women.

In the researcher's opinion, men are the number one and first front liners to support women overcome the torment of all kinds that are thrown at them by culture.

Menstruation being a reproductive issue concerns the men in the lives of these women. OPM and UNHCR have direct responsibility for the refugees and should start awareness sessions, women's own forums, men's forums, women's, and men's safe spaces to have conversations regarding the health rights of women regarding menstruation and cultural issues surrounding its management. After hearing from representatives from the UNHCR and OPM, they seem not to have any tangible assistance towards the same, they can however make it a rule for all partners that implement the settlement to have a separate budget in support of this cause. Partners can distribute reusable sanitary kits consisting of a bar(s) of soap, nickers, a lesu, and a pair of slippers. This can go hand in hand with awareness sessions which should have traditional leaders so that the culturally rigid groups appreciate and start using pads to manage their periods.

A study conducted in Mexico investigated the beliefs and attitudes towards menstruation in a sample of Mexican men and women of different ages indicates that younger participants reported that menstruation was more annoying to younger participants than older participants (Marván et al., 2005). It was also suggested that men see menstruation as disabling. This may be because men's knowledge of menstruation is largely influenced by cultural stereotypes that, in western societies, are quite negative. Men have lived with women from their mothers, wives and sisters this attitude must change given that it is even negative attitude and instead support them whenever help is needed and acknowledge that it normal and harmless.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Summary

This study was conducted among South Sudan refugees living in zone 5B, in Palabek Refugee Settlement in Lamwo district in northern Uganda. This study was in abide to collect information concerning cultural practices around menstrual hygiene management.

The first revelation in this study was the truth that women still practice unclean cultural practices in the management of their periods every month such as sitting on sand got from the roadside, sitting on cow dung which is a source of reproductive infections in addition to isolation, discrimination women during their periods. Men are so aware of what women go through during periods for 3 to 7 days every month just like (Fraser, 2011) made mentioned. According to the male respondents, this only shows that the woman is healthy, can give birth, and is therefore ready for marriage. The study also revealed men who were approached understand menstruation and are aware of some of the cultural practices around which they, however, termed dirty and suggested that women should at least use clothes and continue with their work.

However, some men also indicated that they do not care since, during that period, they stay away from their homes and either go to relatives or to another woman who is not in the same state. They made mention that women should stop lamenting about these practices as no one has ever died from the same.

Findings from the study indicated that most men do not support the practice as it has done more harm than good and those that do not, are clean, healthy and go on their day to day activities to support their families given that most households are female-headed and so they have to work daily to put food on the table for their children so keeping them away from the community and other activities for all the days they are

in their periods may cost the whole family. This perception and attitude of men was changed after the conversational interview while collecting data.

The men that thought it was the business of women to which method they use to manage their agreed with the rest that the cultural burden should be lifted from women and they leave them to use what is appropriate and available to them like clothes and pads for those that can find. The men also revealed that the women in the settlement have more opportunities to find paid off labour therefore they supported a ban on restriction on community engagements, going to markets when a woman is in her periods as they are the bread winners in most homes. This change of attitude and perception is the start of solving cultural problems such as these. The researcher therefore recommended forming male own forums so that such issues should be opened to men in its totality and reality to change their mindset and stand to fight for the rights of women or at least support the women.

The cultural rationale for menstrual practices was bisected even when the women perceived it as sensitive and therefore must not be talked about. Again, the interview guide for the FGD made data collection conversational that we laughed making the women share deeply. The researcher showed them the advantages of using pads, and they shared the pain of using sand and cow dung. This again was a mind opener as they felt that there was a better option. When they cried foul that they cannot afford, the researcher revealed to them that they can make pads using local materials like cloth and a 'kavera' or mackintosh if they can find one. Development partners should take this up with a move from the OPM and provide or train them to make them. Women should be engaged in such discussions so that they open further to issues they hold secret yet demeaning, devaluing and dangerous to their wellbeing.

To explore perceptions of women and men surrounding menstrual management practices. The refugees especially the women revealed that they are not treated for unseen illnesses like reproductive diseases but malaria mostly. This research revealed that all health concerns are vital and should be given big attention especially the unseen illnesses which become big health threats later. The women saw this as an eye opener

and took it very seriously and promised to be taking a lot of water and take their bath against all odds as the first step to curb reproductive illnesses and diseases. The health partner should be cautioned on this matter and give priority to every illness.

Menstruation and its management still place women in a devastating The monthly period still puts many girls in Sub-Saharan Africa in very challenging situations, which have potentially devastating ramifications for their health, wellbeing, and empowerment. The

development of adequate and evidence-based measures and programmes requires an in-depth

understanding of the dynamics of this phenomenon, which, however, still lacks in many geographical and cultural contexts, and particularly in Malawi.

## **6.2 Limitations**

The study location is in the new district of Lamwo, transport to the settlement from the nearby district of Kitgum was very hard now that the roads are so bad so accessing the settlement was quite hard.

No standard or level is stating what appropriate MHM is, this is also as noted by (Balls et al., 2007) and (Mills et al., 2006), there is a great need for a universal agreement that defines what adequate MHM is. With similar studies for example a study among schoolgirls in Uganda that found 90.5% of the participants failed to meet the stated criteria of adequate MHM (Hennegan et al., 2016). This is a limitation in studies such as these. However, on hearing from participants in this study even without ganging criteria, one can rightly say that there is no proper MHM among the South Sudan refugee women living in Palabek refugee settlement.

Some tribes that the researcher wanted to engage in data collection kept away as they felt that the topic was sensitive as in their culture, menstruation is secretive and therefore cannot be spoken about openly.

The data collection period was affected by the outbreak of Coronaviruses worldwide with so many restrictions in the country, access to the settlement was restricted as the OPM and UNHCR were protecting the refugees from the deadly coronavirus. Activities in the settlement were restricted especially holding FGDs which brought about 6 to 15 persons together.

Data collection was interrupted by the food distribution exercise in both zone 5 A and B as it was hard to get anyone at home as the food distribution day collects everyone at the distribution center. The researcher had to reschedule another day for data collection which was quite costly. Transport costs to and within the settlement was extremely expensive due to high fuel prices making the cost of movement expensive. Being that the subject of study was sensitive given cultural practices and beliefs, the respondents did not disclose much especially the cultural leader since culture to them is like a god. Lastly, the global spread of coronavirus led to a lockdown that made assessing the community very hard which delayed the research process.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

According to the 1995 women's conference (UN 1995) states that hygiene conditions in workplaces must be prioritized and a special urgency considering the special need of women and girls which is accepted as a reference to MHM.

Therefore, as UNHCR is a UN agency for refugees, this may have to front availability and access of sanitary towels at the forefront of budgeting and allocate a budget to its implementing partners to support women in their zones of operation with pads. This will revamp the dignity of women in communities and their development.

Additionally, (the UN general assembly 2017), MHM ought to be seen and related to the attainment of the UN gals 3 which considers access to sexual and reproductive health services, UN Goal 5 which is gender equality encompassing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, UN Goal 8 which focuses on economic growth and employment.

OPM MUST consider or order that all partners working in the settlement to get their work permits renewed each year, must have a budget to support women with reusable sanitary pads and nickers. With this, lack of clean materials to manage menstruation will be sorted since the reusable pads can be used for a whole year before disposing it off.

Partner organizations may have to hold safe space conversations with women to listen to them as such topics are sensitive in an open community meeting. They should also hold separate men's own safe space to hear their views and work together to combat the vice. Safe space conversation meetings/ women or men own forums are usually small groups of up to 30 women or men only where sensitive matters such as MHM are discussed in a conversation-like meeting. In these groups, women or men share heart-to-heart experiences and together come up with solutions.

Most women made mentioned that they use old clothes as they do not have pads. Partners should support women with menstrual hygiene kits (nickers, soap, reusable pads), to help them manage their periods. The use of clothes is as well becoming dangerous as the women do not have soap to wash the clothes which also remains an unhygienic method of MHM.

Since OPM and UNHCR cannot support women and school-going children, they should dictate that all organizations (Operating and implementing partners operating in Palabek Refugee settlement) have a budget to support women and girls in their blocks of operation in the settlement. This can be a one-off each year and so this means that reusable pads can help since they can be used for up to 1 year.



Male involvement in the wellbeing of women is very important in this matter as it is a health issue. The issue of men saying that it's not their business is selfish. Therefore, it again comes back to partner organizations especially those in the gender and protection sector should ensure that men are involved in matters concerning their families and much more attention to their wives.

Again, partners should come up with culturally, environmentally accepted, and user-friendly but also affordable and available materials in and around the settlement for example making single-use pads. Additionally, short-term programs such as training women in making reusable pads or even MHM complete kits from local materials for example mackintosh, soft clothes, and buttons to make these pads. Women highly recommended this cognizant that there are hygienic implications of this in terms of cleanliness and maintenance.

The researcher suggests further research on this topic targeting especially the cultural leaders, women and men leaders, the refugee leaders in the settlement, UNHCR and OPM heads, and protection team leaders. Thereafter engage with the community in FGDs. This can be done after community awareness meetings on mindset and embracing clean ways of living. This will be the first step to seeing a stop to cultural bondage of all kinds.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the attitudes and perceptions of refugees living in Palabek Refugee settlement Lamwo district, Northern Uganda on menstrual management practices. What became evident is the silence about cultural practices around menstruation, the health implications from these practices which were not treated yet they continue to happen every month of a woman's life, no support from development partners, lack of clean menstrual management materials, women have nothing good they talked about the practices. Findings such as the ones in this study happen in many

other African and Asian countries with little or no documentation. This has slowed the involvement of women in development and kept them away from social engagements which are a move to development.

To stop such vices, all stakeholders i.e., local refugees, refugee leaders, cultural leaders, local government, women activists like me, the ministry of gender and social development, UNHCR, OPM, and governments (Uganda the hosting country, and South Sudan the country of origin of the refugees) must get involved and in harmony kick such practices out of culture and the face of the earth.

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## **Scholars**

Professor of Law at Emory University in Atlanta, USA and ... Human rights and secularism

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Keywords—Perceptions, attitudes, gender equality, South Sudan.

## RESEARCH TOOLS

### Semi-structured interview guide.

#### Tool 1: Focus Groups Discussion Guide

My name is ..... I am a student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a master's degree in development purpose. I am undertaking research on **Menstrual management practices: attitudes and perceptions of refugees in Palabek Refugee settlement, Lamwo district, in Northern Uganda**. The purpose of this study is purely for academic purposes. All information you provide in this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and dependent on your consent. Your participation in this course will be highly appreciated and acknowledged.

Name of the interviewee: .....

**Study on menstrual practices: perceptions and attitudes of refugees in Palabek Refugee settlement.**

**Purpose: To explore menstrual management practices: Attitudes and perceptions of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement.**

<p><b><i>To establish the menstrual management practices in refugee settlements.</i></b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you know about menstruation?</li> <li>2. How do women manage their menstruation in this community? (Get different views from the women)</li> <li>3. Why? (regarding question 2)</li> <li>4. What are the cultural reasons which prohibit women from using sanitary pads/materials? (Probe for sitting in the sand during menstruation)</li> </ol>
<p><b><i>To explore perceptions of women and men surrounding menstrual management practices</i></b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What are some of the negative perceptions or attitudes relating to menstrual hygiene? (Probe)</li> <li>5. What do women do differently when they are in their messes, for example, withdrawal from the community?</li> <li>6. What is the perception of men towards these practices?</li> <li>7. According to you, are these practices good or bad?</li> <li>8. Why?</li> </ol>

<p><b><i>To explore the attitude of men and women towards menstrual management practices.</i></b></p>	<p>9. What are some of the impacts of these practices on the health of women?</p> <p>10. What effect or changes do the practices bring or cause to the life of women and their families?</p> <p>11. What do you recommend for better menstrual hygiene management to enhance the health rights of women?</p>
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**Tool 2: Key Informant Guide**

My name is ..... I am a student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a Master’s degree of development studies. I am researching *Menstrual management practices: attitudes and perceptions of refugees in Palabek Refugee settlement, Lamwo district, in Northern Uganda*. The purpose of this study is purely for academic purposes. All information you provide in this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and dependent on your consent. Your participation in this course will be highly appreciated and acknowledged.

Name of the interviewee: .....

(Age-----, Marital status-----, Tribe-----, Education level-----)  
if the interviewee is a woman, please fill in the above information

<p><b>Study on menstrual practices: perceptions and attitudes of refugees in Palabek Refugee settlement.</b> Age-----, Marital status-----, Tribe-----, Education level-----</p>	
<p><b>Purpose: To explore menstrual management practices: perceptions, and attitudes of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement.</b></p>	
<p><i>To establish the menstrual management practices in refugee settlements.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are some of the things you have heard about menstruation?</li> <li>2. How do women manage their menstruation in this community? (Probe her own experience as well if the interviewee is a woman)</li> </ol> <p>Why? (Regarding question 2)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What are the cultural reasons which prohibit women from using sanitary pads/materials?</li> </ol>
<p><i>To explore perceptions of women and men surrounding menstrual management practices</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What are some of the negative perceptions or attitudes relating to menstrual hygiene? (Probe)</li> <li>5. What do women do differently when they are in their messes, for example, withdraw from the community?</li> <li>6. What is the perception of men towards these practices?</li> <li>7. As a leader, are these practices good or bad</li> <li>8. Why?</li> </ol>
<p><i>To explore the attitude of men and women towards menstrual management practices.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. What are some of the impacts of these practices on the health of women?</li> <li>10. What effect or changes do the practices bring or cause to the life of women and their families?</li> <li>11. What do you recommend for better menstrual hygiene management to enhance the health rights of women?</li> </ol>