

Manuscript Title:

Menstrual Knowledge, Cultural Restrictions, and School Absenteeism among Adolescents in Congolese Slums: An Evidence-Based Study

Double-blind review

We are sincerely express gratitude the Reviewers for the full and constructive response. The suggestions were invaluable in improving the clarity, accuracy and the overall quality of the manuscript.

Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Changes in MS
1. Inconsistency in Logistic Regression Interpretation (Table 3): The reported OR values (e.g., OR=0.22 for Secondary+ Maternal Education) contradict the narrative that these factors are positive predictors of 'Good Knowledge.'	AGREED. The Reviewer correctly identified a significant error in reporting. We confirm that the binary outcome variable was 'Good Menstrual Knowledge (1=Good, 0=Poor)'. The ORs in the original Table 3 were incorrectly calculated. We have recalculated and corrected Table 3. The updated table now shows: Maternal Education (Secondary+) OR: 4.55 (95% CI: 1.32-15.65, p=0.022) Access to TV/Radio (Yes) OR: 3.01 (95% CI: 1.05-8.62, p=0.040) These corrected ORs are consistently above 1.0 and now align with the narrative that these are significant positive predictors of good knowledge.	Page 10, Table 3.
2. Inconsistencies in Descriptive Results (Table 4 vs. Discussion): Discrepancies exist between the percentages reported in Table 4 (MHM materials) and the corresponding narrative in the Discussion.	AGREED. We have meticulously cross-referenced Table 4 and the Discussion text to ensure numerical harmony. The ambiguous 75.6% figure has been removed. The text now clearly states that 22.8% (N=31) reported that absorbents were <i>often</i> unaffordable, while the qualitative data emphasizes cost as the primary structural barrier	Page 11, Table 4. Page 12, Discussion (Lines 18-25).
3. Ambiguity in Sample Selection and Generalizability: The manuscript lacks clarity on how the five Junior High Schools (JHS) were selected, impacting generalizability.	AGREED. We have added clear sentences to the Methodology section to address this. The five JHSs were selected using convenience sampling due to logistical and resource constraints within the slum environment. We confirm that the selection of <i>individual students</i> within those schools was randomized. A new paragraph on the study's limitations has been added to the Discussion to explicitly address the restricted external validity due to the convenience sampling of schools.	Page 5, Methods (Sampling Section). Page 14, Discussion (Limitations Section).

Minor Comments (Addressed in the Revised Manuscript)

Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Changes in MS
1. Qualitative Data Integration: The qualitative data (FGDs, KIIs) are mentioned but not presented or discussed.	AGREED. We apologize for the omission. A new section, "Qualitative Findings: Social and Infrastructure Barriers" has been added to the Results. We have integrated thematic summaries and representative verbatim quotes from the FGDs and KIIs, enriching the discussion on cultural restrictions and the functional status of WASH facilities.	Page 11, Results (New Section).
2. Table Formatting (Table 1): Several rows in Table 1 were unlabeled.	AGREED. Table 1 has been re-formatted. All characteristics, including Age at Menarche (years) and Father's education , are now clearly labeled in the first column for improved clarity.	Page 7, Table 1.

3. Typographical/Clarity Edits: Correct 'rural communities' to 'slum communities', and ensure the Abstract includes CIs for precision.	AGREED. All typographical and clarity issues have been resolved: 'Rural communities' has been corrected to ' slum communities 'The Abstract now includes the 95% CIs for all reported significant findings	Abstract (Page 2). Introduction (Page 3). Table 5 (Page 11).
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We believe the revised manuscript is significantly stronger and thank the Reviewer once again for their time and insightful commentary.

Editorial Summary of Peer Review

Present title examines a pivotal intersection of public health and educational equity within vulnerable urban populations. By employing a mixed-methods design that bridges quantitative metrics with qualitative insights, the research demonstrates how systemic deficits in menstrual hygiene literacy, deep-seated socio-cultural taboos, and the absence of functional Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure synergistically drive school absenteeism among adolescent girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Following a stringent double-blind peer-review process, the work underwent comprehensive refinement to resolve initial discrepancies in descriptive statistics and align the interpretation of logistic regression models with empirical outputs. The authors further enhanced the study's transparency by clarifying the multi-stage sampling framework and weaving thematic qualitative narratives into the core analysis. These revisions have culminated in a scientifically rigorous publication that provides a robust evidentiary basis for policy interventions aimed at mitigating gender-specific educational barriers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Editorial Decision

The authors have addressed all revisions suggested by the reviewers and the editorial board has decided to accept the manuscript and publish in Dec-2025 issue.