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## HIDDEN BURDENS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS: WHY IS MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT NOT ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH AGENDA IN OECD COUNTRIES?

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Issues relating to the management of menstrual pain and flow (including access to affordable menstrual products and pain relief) are the main reason for missed school and work for women in girls in any country. However, these barriers to participation in normal daily activities such as work and school have rarely been considered as within the purview of public health.

While inadequate access to health education and menstrual management products is recognized by UNESCO as important cultural and socioeconomic barriers for women and girls in developing countries, it is widely assumed that within OECD countries these basic necessities are readily accessible by all. However, there is evidence that in a context of growing social inequality within high-income countries, significant economic and cultural barriers to satisfactory menstrual management do now exist for women and girls. As a case study, the presenter will discuss recent media coverage and advocacy work on girls missing school in New Zealand due to the unaffordability of pads and tampons, and the inadequate provision of sanitary disposal units in schools. She will also present findings from her recent and on-going qualitative studies investigating the impact of Primary Dysmenorrhea on the lives of New Zealand women and adolescent girls.

This presentation argues that menstrual management should be recognized as a significant health equity issue in OECD countries, warranting further investigation of the extent to which access to menstrual management products and pain relief now varies significantly along socioeconomic lines.

### Biography

Sarah Donovan is a sociologist with a focus on the social determinants of health. She has also worked as a midwife. Her doctoral research (2010, Victoria University of Wellington) focused on prenatal screening for Down Syndrome in New Zealand, and investigated women's experience of prenatal screening decisions, and the relationship of this experience to principles of individual choice and informed consent. Current research focuses on menstrual pain, and cost of menstrual products as a barrier to school attendance. She currently teaches in the postgraduate Diploma of Public Health at the University of Otago, New Zealand.

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