

# BRIEFCASE

J-PAL POLICY BRIEF CASE [JUNE 2011]

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TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACTION



## MENSTRUATION AS A BARRIER TO EDUCATION?

Girls in Nepal missed only half a day of school per year due to menstruation, and modern sanitary products did little to address this very small attendance gap.



PHOTO: UNICEF/RAA GAMING

**I**ncreasing education for girls is an important policy priority in many developing countries, where secondary school enrollment often remains lower for girls than for boys.

Some researchers and policymakers have argued that menstruation may be causing girls to miss a significant number of school days. At the maximum, some have estimated that girls might be missing as much as 10 to 20 percent of school days due to menstruation. Anecdotal evidence seems to support this. Girls report missing school during their periods and lacking access to modern sanitary products.

In response, NGOs and sanitary product manufacturers have conducted campaigns to distribute sanitary products in the hope that this will remove a barrier to female education (CH Deutsch, 2007, "A Not So-Simple Plan to Keep African Girls in School," NYT Nov. 12). However, there has been little or no rigorous evidence on how much school girls miss due to their periods and the impact of providing sanitary products.

Emily Oster and J-PAL affiliate Rebecca Thornton introduced a convenient and hygienic sanitary product, reusable menstrual cups, to Nepalese girls in the seventh and eighth grades. Their evaluation addressed several questions: Is menstruation as large a barrier to education as many believe? Does switching to modern sanitary products increase attendance and school performance among girls?

- **Girls miss fewer school days because of menstruation than previously believed.** Even though 47 percent of the girls in this study reported missing some school due to menstruation in the past year, attendance data found that girls missed only about half a day of school per year because of their periods.
- **While the menstrual cups were used by many girls in the treatment group, they did not reduce the (very small) amount of school missed due to menstruation.** The study found no significant impact on attendance, even though 60 percent of the girls in the treatment group chose to use the menstrual cup.
- **Although the new sanitary product did not have a direct educational benefit, girls liked the product.** When offered the menstrual cup, most girls chose to use it, often switching away from traditional cloth rags.

## Menstruation as a Barrier to Education in Nepal?

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