



3rd Vanuatu Health Research Symposium
26-28 October 2022
Luganville, Santo, Vanuatu

Leaving no-one behind: Improving menstrual health for people with intellectual disabilities and their caregivers in emergencies, Sanma, Vanuatu (2020-2022)

Chloe Morrison¹, [Relvie Poilapa](#)¹, Jane Wilbur²

¹World Vision Vanuatu, Port Vila, Vanuatu. ²London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

Background: There is increasing recognition in health and humanitarian sectors alike of the need to prioritise menstrual health (MH) especially in emergencies. The unique MH needs of people with disability have only begun to be considered. However, even these limited considerations have not extended to people with intellectual disabilities who require more holistic, customised support.

Methods: This study conducted in Sanma Province, Vanuatu (2020-2021) utilised a systematized review, and formative research to identify what evidence exists about the barriers to, and interventions for MH for people with disabilities in emergencies? And what approaches could be used to improve menstrual health in future emergencies? We applied purposive sampling to select 17 women and girls (aged 15-31) with intellectual disabilities and their caregivers and seven key informants.

Results: Findings illustrated the impact intellectual disability has on a young person to manage their menstruation with dignity during an emergency. There was a desire among caregivers to maintain young person's safety and privacy, especially when menstruating, which reduced evacuation options. Young people's support requirements sometimes increased after emergencies, so caregivers were less able to work. Caregivers requested more reusable menstrual materials and greater choice of materials. Key informants highlighted the need to deliver MH interventions before emergencies so people were familiar with different sanitary products.

Discussion: These findings reveal how discrimination intersects gender, disability, and menstruation and negatively impacts the ability of women and girls with intellectual disabilities to participate in daily life and seek safety in emergencies. The impacts are also felt by caregivers, who stay at home with the young people, thus reducing their potential to earn an income. This cycle of income poverty, declining mental health, and reduced ability to work push families further into poverty every time another natural disaster occurs in a country that experiences regular emergencies.