



## **Demystifying menstruation with students from state public schools in the municipality of Joinville, SC**

### **Desmistificando a menstruação com alunos de escolas públicas estaduais no município de Joinville, SC**

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#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Extension project entitled "Demystifying menstruation with girls from state public schools held in the municipality of Joinville / SC", was approved with internal funding (2022 PROEX 12), by PROEX Notice No. 12/2022 in student protagonism. The extension project was developed within the thematic division DT 3 - Educational challenges in Brazil today, didactic innovation and inclusive professional practice, in order to bring health education, answer questions about the topic and solve situations experienced by menstruating girls from state public schools. Scholarship students from the IFSC undergraduate nursing course and teachers from the health and services area participated in the project.

The project had the external partnership of professors of bachelor's degree courses in Nursing from other institutions in the region of SC. According to the notice, participation in the project was carried out through scholarship students in the health area



in the nursing undergraduate modality of the Federal Institute of Santa Catarina IFSC, under the guidance and supervision of the project coordinator professor. As a justification, menstruation needs to be addressed for all genders, in different scenarios (homes, workplaces, community, media, public policies) in an empathetic and meaningful way, as an important health and education issue (PLESONS et al, 2021).

Menstruation is still seen as something dirty, impure, shameful that should be hidden. The difficulty in addressing the issue seems to be related to its association with sexuality and reproductivity and even in schools, approaches are often superficial and directed exclusively to the female audience, which reinforces gender inequality (PLESONS et al., 2021).

According to (WHO, 2022) menstruation is one of the events of puberty in girls, that is, it is one of the stages of the preparation and maturation of the body and maturation of adolescents to women, aiming at planning the body and mind for the conception of having children. Considered as natural, menstruation affects menstruating people from all over the globalization, yet, it is considered a taboo by most of the population, especially for girls in the adolescence stage, who are going through their first cycles.

Menstruation is a natural occurrence, starting at puberty on average at the age of 13 and ending around the age of 50. A physiological process that usually occurs once a month, if there is no fertilization. The subject is still considered a taboo for many people, surrounded by misinformation and lack of access to pads and other hygiene products (LOPES, 2021) which corroborates with Franco N. et.al., (2021) who mentions that the topic of sexuality is still considered taboo in schools, thus making it a challenge for teachers.

From this perspective, it is necessary that the teacher has knowledge to emphasize the approach of themes related to menstrual poverty, sexuality, sexual education and the changes that occur in the human body, within the school context, according to Moreira BLR and Folmer V. (2015).

In this context, it sought to bring to light the problems faced by Brazilian girls and women who experience situations of menstrual insecurity, but without prejudice to the recognition that, in addition to them, there are other trans groups and non-binary people.

The work is justified because, according to UNICEF, more than 60% of adolescent girls and young women who menstruate have already stopped going to school or another place they like because of menstruation. On the other hand, 713,000 girls live without access to a toilet or shower in their household and more than 4 million do not have access



to minimum menstrual care items in schools. Menstrual poverty affects black girls more than white girls, as they have less access to basic sanitation services (UNICEF, 2023). In Brazil, this happens to at least 28% of low-income women (PLESONS, et al, 2021).

PLESONS et al., (2021) highlights that a study by experts sought to investigate the menstrual health status of adolescents in low- and middle-income countries and points out that indicators and evidence are needed to develop policies effectively. Some governments have launched efforts to remove/reduce taxes on products such as pads, or provide them free of charge.

Every month the routine of women is the same, when it reaches the period to occur ovulation, at some point, the menstrual cycle, i.e. menarche, considered the first menstruation, begins and lasts between three and seven days (FRANÇOSO; GERER; REATO, 2001). Ribeiro (2008) points out that knowledge is essential to better meet the needs of care and maintenance of hygiene and daily intimate health of adolescents. The absorbent or menstrual cup has to accompany her all the time, now imagine living this situation without access to basic items to maintain sanitary dignity (WHO, 2022).

## **2 OBJECTIVE**

The general objective of this study was to conduct conversation circles with high school adolescents from state public schools in the municipality of Joinville/SC. And the specific objectives were: Characterize the socio-demographic menstruating adolescents of 13 state schools located in the municipality of Joinville; provide moments of health education to adolescents; identify how adolescents experience the menstrual process and resolve possible doubts related to the menstrual process.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

The proposed study was characterized as an expansion and applied research project, part of one of the research lines of the GEFAMAC group.

According to Paulo Freire, health education can be carried out through the method of conversation circles, when it is possible to share knowledge and experiences (LIMA, et al, 2020). In this aspect, it was intended to carry out a conversation circle per school, totaling 13 state schools located in the municipality of Joinville during the period of the project from 01/09/2022 to 30/11/2022, serving approximately 260 adolescents.

Contact with the schools was made after the project was approved by the IFSC - Câmpus Joinville extension notice. From the approval of the project, telephone and e-



mail contacts were made to the managers of the respective state schools, for the process of implementing the action was carried out through a schedule.

As a basic requirement, the target audience (project participants) were adolescents regularly enrolled in high school courses and studying in state public schools located in the municipality of Joinville-SC. The external community in this project corresponds to people and adolescents menstruating in state public schools residing in the municipality of Joinville/SC.

Working on issues related to menstruation is a demand always requested by high school teachers of the Nursing course. In this project, adolescents had the opportunity to express their experiences, fears, doubts about the menstrual process, actively participating in the conversation circles based on their reports.

There was the active participation of teachers and students in the elaboration of this project, and they were responsible for the planning, organization, execution and evaluation of the project, such as:

- 1) design the educational actions;
- 2) organize and conduct the conversation circles;
- 3) evaluate each meeting held. The material available in the course "O fazer extensionista" was used to elaborate the actions proposed by the Campus notice.

The conversation circles took place in a respectful, empathetic way, according to Freire's teachings, so that the themes that emerged were conducted by the students of the Nursing course, with the help of a teacher in all the conversation circles of the referred institutions. The meetings were previously scheduled with the school management, and were held with one class per school weekly, lasting two hours per class.

The conversation circles took place in six stages:

- **1st stage:** The first stage consisted of scholarship students, under the supervision of the teachers, who used the Capes journal portal, online libraries, internet, search for articles and results, and the texts with the bibliographic review were delivered. The teachers involved in the project made the evaluations of the same. Topics were created, as the theme would be addressed to adolescents in public schools, aiming at the commitment and understanding of the general objective of the project and specific, always aiming to opportunize their feelings through expression, fears and doubts.



- **2nd stage:** The second stage was presented the synthesis of the project, general and specific objective, provided to all who made questioning about the project. Held after the second stage, doubts were resolved and providing a moment of health education that permeates the themes on: puberty, menarche, menstrual poverty, adolescence process, among others.
- **3rd stage:** In the third stage, the evaluation given by teachers and students in relation to the conversation circle was collected.
- **4th step:** Participating students are given the opportunity to describe on a piece of paper offered to them, what caught their attention during the round of conversations, what is their doubt that they did not feel like asking and would like an answer in private (leave your contact if you feel comfortable, or look for us during the break).
- **5th stage:** Elaboration of the final report, carried out by the scholarship students and the project coordinator teacher. Group discussions on the report of the previous stage and future results of the final project.
- **6th step:** weekly meetings, to evaluate the performance of the fellows and suggest improvements. The social groups involved expressed their needs regarding the activities in menstrual development.

As presented, the target audience of this project were students, regularly enrolled in high school of state public schools in the municipality of Joinville/SC. Health professionals who work directly with this audience also actively participated in the project in the stage of health education development, emphasizing the importance of boys respecting girls in the face of the hormonal transformation process of their bodies and understanding that menstruation is a natural process that will happen to all menstruating people, maintaining socialization, that is, what they have to demand and what can be done by the academic area to assist them.

This project in its methodological conception meets all the guidelines of the IFSC Extension - Câmpus Joinville, which are: 1) interdisciplinarity and Interprofessionality; 2) dialogical interaction; 3) inseparability teaching, research and extension; 4) impact and social transformation; 5) impact on student training.

The project also converged with the following sustainable development goals: 6) health and well-being; 7) quality education; 8) gender equality; 9) reduction of



inequalities; 10 peace, justice and effective institutions; and, 11) partnerships and means of implementation.

The realization of educational actions in schools broadens the vision of academics regarding the nurse's performance, which is not restricted to curative activities, but which is equally important in the field of health promotion, in addition to meeting the premises of articulation of teaching, research and extension recommended by the institution. The student can develop in practice the knowledge of the disciplines Extension Activities; Collective Health; Women's and Men's Health, Child and Adolescent Health. As a product of this work, we also obtained the articulation of research, with the intention of developing the publication of articles, posters or experience reports on the activities developed for presentation at a scientific event.

#### **4 DEVELOPMENT**

The possibility of participating in this extension project enabled the academic to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in class and experiences acquired during the life process, from a closer bond with the external community, who are also users of the health service.

According to Barbosa, et. al (2019) highlights that from the guiding documents PCNs (1998) in the school environment sexual orientation was presented only as a proposal for knowledge and valorization of sexual rights, reproductive preventions of sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancy. While, in the BNCC (2017) the theme of sexuality in the school context was reduced to questions about human reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases. The literature on the subject is still fragile in the country, but international studies point to various scenarios and contexts in which menstrual poverty is evident (PLESONS et al, 2021).

The student will be able to develop in practice the knowledge of the multidisciplinary disciplines of the Bachelor of Nursing Course. As a product of this work, it is also expected to articulate the research, developing an experience report on the activities developed for presentation at a scientific event.

This educational action activity enables these adolescents to experience the menstrual process in a healthier, guided way and with fewer doubts, fears or taboos. The articulation and partnerships between universities enabled teamwork, inter-institutional and multiprofessional.



## 5 RESULTS

The work presents relevance of the extension activity among adolescents, which relates the relationship, dialogues with exchange of experiences and doubts about the theme.

In view of the results obtained, we had as participants: 260 adolescents from 13 schools in the state education network in the city of Joinville / SC, only 6 schools were contemplated in the requirement of the Public Notice. Even in the face of the reduced number of schools, the study was not without enrichment, the discussion and the conversation circles held among students of the state network allowed to obtain data of sociocultural relevance, about situations, doubts, speeches and *taboos* experienced daily by menstruants, who throughout their fertile period go through too many stressful situations.

In the study conducted by Zanatta, et.al. (2016) with 18 (eighteen) adolescents from an itinerant school of the MST in the state of Paraná, aiming to present their perceptions about sex education at school. It is concluded that sexuality education in the itinerant school should be carried out with emphasis on the health-disease binomial, thus aiming at teaching with guidelines and clarifications regarding the theme in an interdisciplinary way allowing adolescents to expand their knowledge and demystifying menstruation.

During the realization of this project, the interest of the classes on the theme in question became evident, highlighting the participation of young and adult males. The dynamics carried out was through a conversation circle, being directed by two teams, in which three members of the project, two scholarship students who conducted the wheels, assumed a certain day of the week to teach the content in the afternoon and evening with a class in each shift and the other three members were responsible for another day to perform the same task in another class of the same school.

It was noticed that in the classes of the first school year, there was more need to approach the subject, there were pertinent doubts regarding the use of internal absorbents such as: how to use, virginity, effectiveness, cost benefit, hygiene and comfort. In the second and third year classes, the most frequent doubts were related to sexuality during the menstrual period, hormonal factors, uterine health and social adaptation after menarche. In addition, after the conversation circle, there were requests to answer questions about personal situations, life reports and requests for guidance on the care







Figure 3: Conversation rounds held with students, Joinville, 2022.



Source: Collection of researcher Marlete Scremin (2022).

To conclude the explanation, we believe that it was one of the enriching works both in academic life and for student training.

Promoting health education to the Joinville community was simply pleasurable. We realized how much students need a moment with qualified professionals to highlight conflicting and controversial topics. We came from a previous generation, from where nothing could do absolutely and we were facing an audience that in the adolescent phase the vast majority have their own experiences regarding menstrual poverty, sexuality, doubts about the menstrual cycle, hormonal transformation process, functioning and in detail of each function of the human organism.

## **6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We consider that the participation in this activity strengthened the ties between the institutions and the school community, based on the student protagonism that was responsible for conducting the conversation circles. On the occasion, the students of the Bachelor of Nursing course put into practice the skills developed in the classroom, contributing to their professional training.

The realization of conversations with adolescents from schools in the state education network was one of the challenges in the face of the issue of evolution of the subject, making conversations that brought reflective moments to the participating students present that brought moments of maturation and scientific construction for this project, also aimed at possible challenges, building a concrete basis for the evolution of this project.



In view of the activities carried out, several moments brought important aspects to the construction of a solid project, which brought knowledge and learning to the teachers and students involved. The construction of this project had a bias of nursing, physical education and physiotherapy professionals, building an environment of theoretical and practical knowledge, which were passed on in wheels to the adolescents present.

The presentation of this project built unique moments and each day of realization, always bringing new reports, new questions and positions. Building moments with young people is hard work, but with the right didactics the project brought a base of good sharing for the parties involved, students, teachers and adolescents.

Even with the reduced number of schools, the results exceeded all our expectations such as: reception, learning, suggestions for new projects, among others. We aim to structure a quantitative and qualitative data collection in order to visualize the relevance of the project actions.

We think: working with what we like, generates positive results and valuable feedbacks. never stop promoting health education to people. We must first understand their needs and limitations and, from there, carry out a strategic planning that makes the students feel like the real main protagonists of our community. We will mainly serve people with low and needy social vulnerability. Then we will reach other less deprived communities.

We are capable of doing anything we want, whether we are on our period or not. The fact that we are on our period cannot and should not be a reason to lower our self-esteem, self-confidence and security.

We emphasize that having sex during menstruation is a personal choice that depends on the intimacy and comfort of the couple. There is nothing wrong or harmful in having sex while menstruating, as long as you take some basic precautions, for example: the use of a condom or menstrual pad to avoid contact with blood and prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy; sanitize the intimate area before and after intercourse to reduce the risk of contamination by fungi and bacteria; avoid using tampons during sex, as they can cause pain and infection when pushed deep into the vagina; choose a suitable and clean place for intercourse, such as the shower or a dark towel, to avoid blood stains on the sheet or mattress; raise awareness among parents, talk about the topic with them.



In addition, we have some advantages of having sex during menstruation are: increased libido and sensitivity of the intimate area, which can make sex more pleasurable; release of endorphins and serotonin, substances that provoke well-being and relieve menstrual cramps. reduction of stress and anxiety, which can negatively affect a woman's mood and health.

Our opinion on the subject is that each person should decide what is best for themselves and their partner, respecting their limits and desires. Sex during menstruation can be a positive experience if it is done safely, hygienically and consensually.

To conclude, we believe that public policy involvement is needed to combat menstrual poverty and promote the health and education of adolescent girls in state public high schools. Menstrual poverty is a situation that affects millions of people who menstruate in Brazil and worldwide, preventing them from having access to adequate hygiene products and conditions during the menstrual cycle. This can lead to several problems, such as infections, diseases, unwanted pregnancy, stigma, shame, low self-esteem and school dropout.

Some considerations we suggest for the next projects:

- 1) Seek partnerships with social organizations that are already working in the area of fighting menstrual poverty, such as Projeto Luna, Absorvendo com Amor, Projeto Ciclo Novo, Absorvidas and Fluxo Sustentável. They can offer logistical, financial or technical support for your project, as well as share experiences and good practices;

- 2) Raise awareness among adolescent girls about the importance of menstrual dignity, i.e. the right to have access to adequate hygiene products and conditions during the menstrual cycle. This involves providing information on the functioning of the body, the types of pads available (disposable, reusable or menstrual cups), intimate health care and the prevention of infections and pregnancy.

- 3) Distribute menstrual hygiene kits to adolescents in need, containing pads, toilet paper, intimate soap, panties and plastic bags for disposal or storage of used pads. The kits can be delivered monthly or according to the beneficiaries' demand.

- 4) Ensure that state public schools have clean toilets equipped with waste garbage cans, running water and soap so that adolescent girls can change pads



safely and comfortably. In addition, schools can make pads available free of charge to students who need them;

5) Promote an open and respectful dialog about menstruation with adolescents, teachers, parents and the school community in general. The aim is to demystify the taboos and prejudices surrounding the topic and to value the diversity of menstrual experiences. It is also important to involve non-menstruating people in the discussion, so that they can understand and support people who menstruate.

**Alert:** Having sexual intercourse during your period is not the same as experiencing violence. This moment should be consensual and pleasurable for couples who have performed the sexual act themselves, seeking to know each other as true partners. There are numerous types of violence and channels for help. If you are in any way experiencing: physical aggression, psychological aggression, threats, humiliation and even rape. **ASK FOR HELP.**



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