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Menstrual poverty and discourses of mensuration in New Zealand school girls' narratives: "It's just not a subject that comes up in talking'

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Sheralee Ann Wootton

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ABSTRACT

Menstrual poverty is a relevant New Zealand public health and social justice issue effecting the personal wellbeing and psychosocial outcomes of women (House, et al., 2012). Associated menstrual stigma also compounds the issue in that poor menstrual hygiene can disrupt social engagement, employment, and school attendance. In New Zealand, amid increasing rates of poverty (UNICEF, 2016) there have recently been national news reports of girls using unsafe materials, such as phonebooks and newspaper, to conceal menstrual bleeding, in addition to being unable to attend school due to lack of affordable sanitary options (Roy, 2016). This research responds to the need for local knowledge on this emerging issue, particularly work that takes young women's own experiences into consideration. This research adopts a feminist post-structuralist view that perceives understandings of menstruation as socially constructed in ways that shape both girl's experiences of menstruation and their understandings of themselves as women. This research also considers what narrative performances in menstrual stigma talk suggest about the construction of gender identities. The results from this project will add to the knowledge in the field of reproductive justice by considering how menstruation, poverty, stigma and gender ideals are intertwined in specific New Zealand contexts. It also provides future directions for further work on this topic.

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