



SAFE PADS CASE STUDY

Nikithemba NPO, a men led organisation operating from the Msunduzi Local Municipality under the Umgungundlovu District was awarded funding under Component 2 to champion access to menstrual hygiene products through the distribution of safe pads. Safepad™ is a hygienic washable sanitary pad that contains a permanently bonded antimicrobial technology that helps reduce vaginal infections. A positively charged layer on the fabric will attract and kill the negatively charged microbes. Safepad™ is designed to provide a high-quality menstrual hygiene management and a safe and infection free experience. The campaign upheld the protection of human rights and addressed five of the 17 Sustainable Development Goal's (SDG's) which are as follows:

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

If girls and women lack access to menstrual hygiene products, they are often forced to use other unhygienic materials that might lead to an increased incidence of reproductive tract infections (RTIs)

Goal 4: Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

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Girls in developing countries like South Africa are forced to skip school monthly while they menstruate.

Goal 5: Gender Equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Lack of access to suitable menstrual health products contributes to gender inequality and continues to ignore the importance of menstrual health as a priority. Taboos and myths related to menstruation often portray girls and women as inferior to boys and men.

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

2.4 billion people lack access to improved sanitation facilities. Girls and women are particularly affected by this lack of access to privacy and hygiene. In instances where there is no clean running water, the washable pads can be washable in unclean water.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Female workers do not attend work as the workplaces lack adequate toilet facilities.

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>

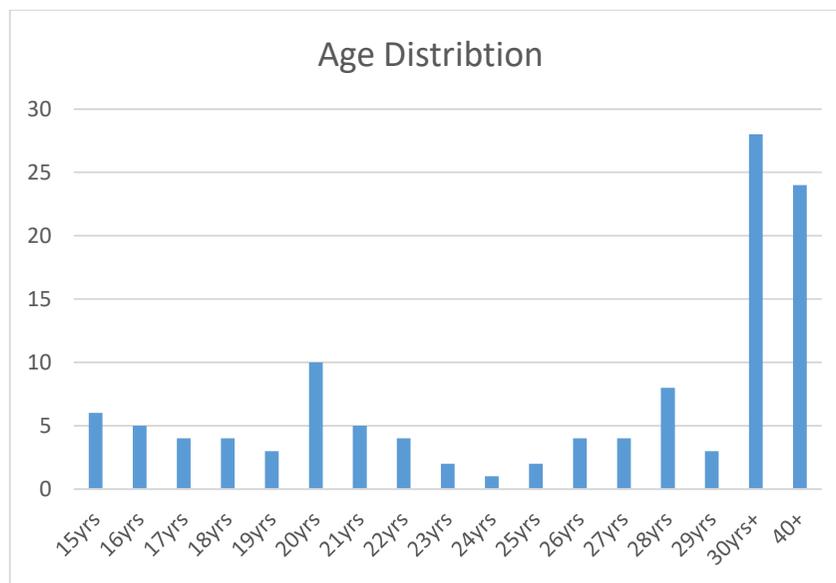
495 standard boxes of Safepad™ were procured. Each box contained 3 day pads, 1 Night pad and 1 small storage bag. 250 beneficiaries were given two boxes of the Safepad™ which allowed them to have 6 day pads and 2 night pads in order to adequately monitor their overall experience with the pad. The survey was completed by all the participants and 125 respondents were randomly selected as a sample for the survey which represents 50% responses of the survey. The survey was carried out through community mobilisation and consultations were done with community gate keepers to get their buy in for the campaign at war room meetings and stakeholder engagements. The campaign was carried out in Pakis, Masons, Swapo, Haniville, Khan Road corner which are Informal Settlements in the Pietermaritzburg area. The campaign was carried out during December 2020 and February 2021 over two phases of baseline survey and a post assessment survey from the same beneficiaries. Due to Covid-19 regulations, Nikithemba NPO was forced to implement slower than planned as they needed to work with smaller groups in order to observe COVID-19 protocol during the campaign.

Age distribution

From the 125 participants, their age distribution varied between 15 - 49 age groups with majority of the participants being under 30 years.

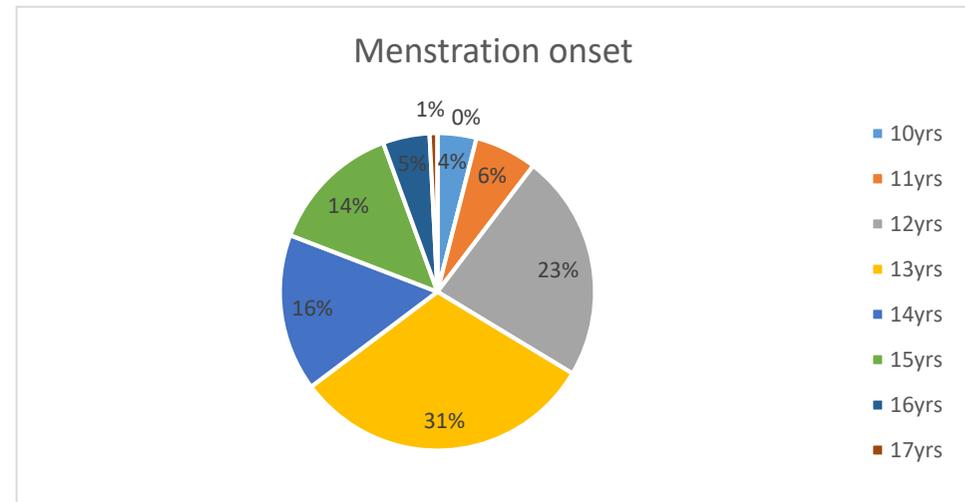
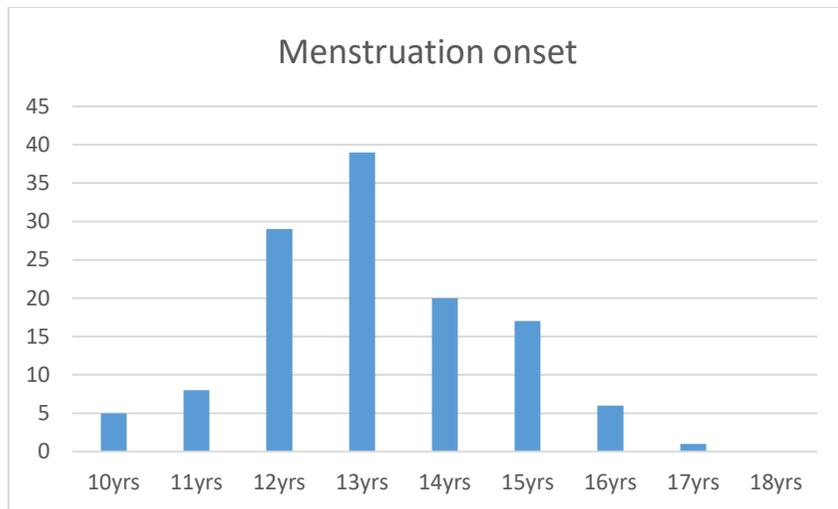
12-19year old accounted for 23% of the participants; 20-29year old accounted for 34% of the participants

30-39 year old accounted for 22% of the participants; 40-49year old accounted for 19% of the participants



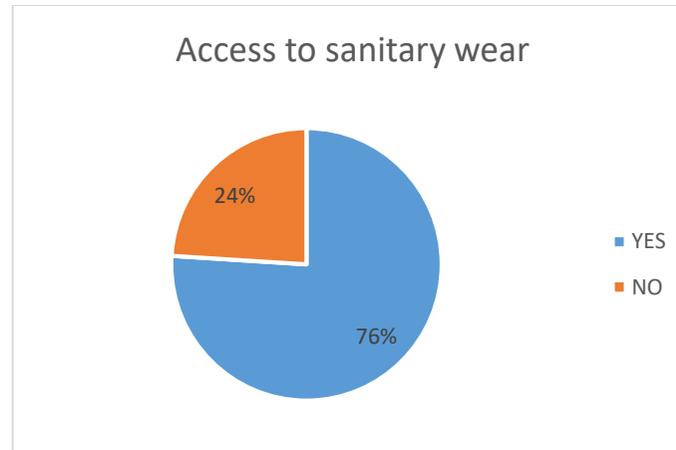
Menstruation Onset age

The participants indicated the ages of which they had started their menstruation in order to gauge their familiarity with menstrual hygiene and what products they had used. A variety of brands available in South African shops were mentioned. The ages indicated are from 10 to 17 years. The age 13 was recorded as a modal age as majority of the participants indicated that they had started their menstruation at that age which represented 31%.



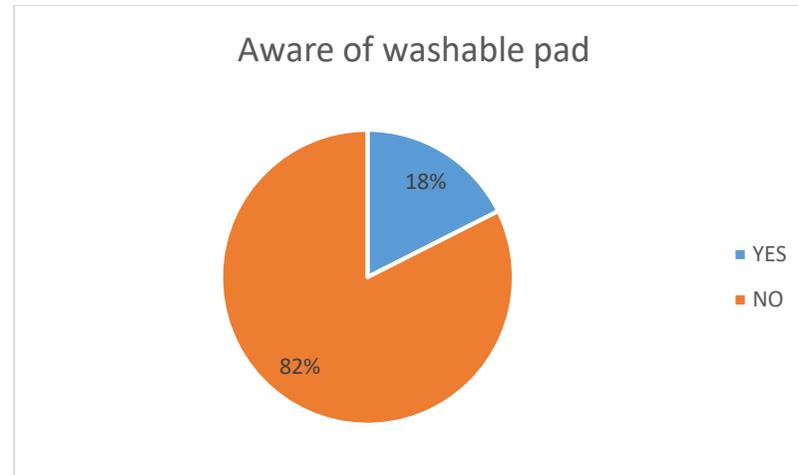
Access to sanitary wear

From the sampled population, 76% indicated that they had consistent access to sanitary wear that is provided by their parents, they are able to buy themselves or receive as donations from school. The 24% participants that do not have access to sanitary wear and at times use cloths, these also includes participants within the 30+ age group.



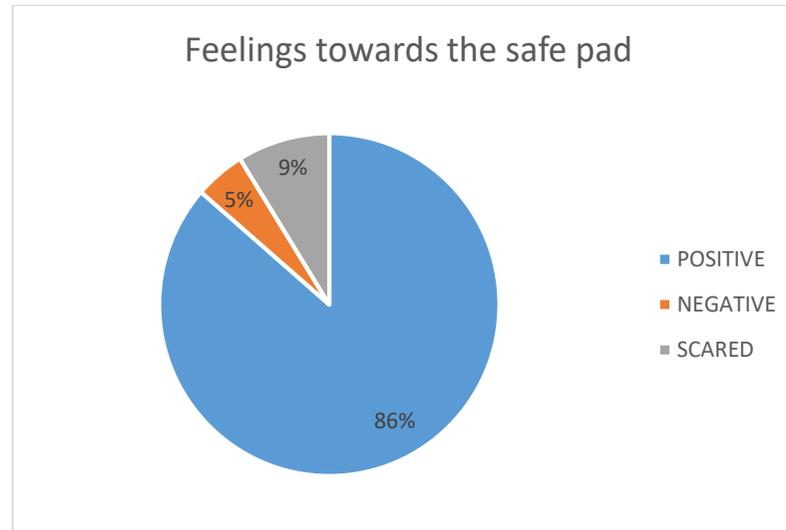
Awareness on washable pads

Given that the areas of distribution were rural and informal communities, one of the key things to know was if recipients were aware of the washable pads or had previously used them. From the sampled population only 18% had heard about the existence of washable pads but had never used it. The 82% of the participants had never heard of a washable pad. This suggests that there is not enough information about the existence of the re-usable pads. Lack of awareness on the existence of a washable pad would be a problem because not only does it bring economic benefits in monetary savings, it is also good for the planet because they are made from biodegradable and environmentally friendly products. These pads can help a number of our girls stay at school. The reusable pads also offer health benefits in the reduction of urinary tract infections as it is a hygienic product that self dis-infects.



Feeling towards the use of the safe pad

The participants were asked to share their feelings towards safe pads as they were now about to be use them. The Nikithemba team facilitated sessions where they gave detailed information about the Safepad™ 86% of the participants were excited to try them out. 5% were scared or unsure.



Male involvement in menstrual issues

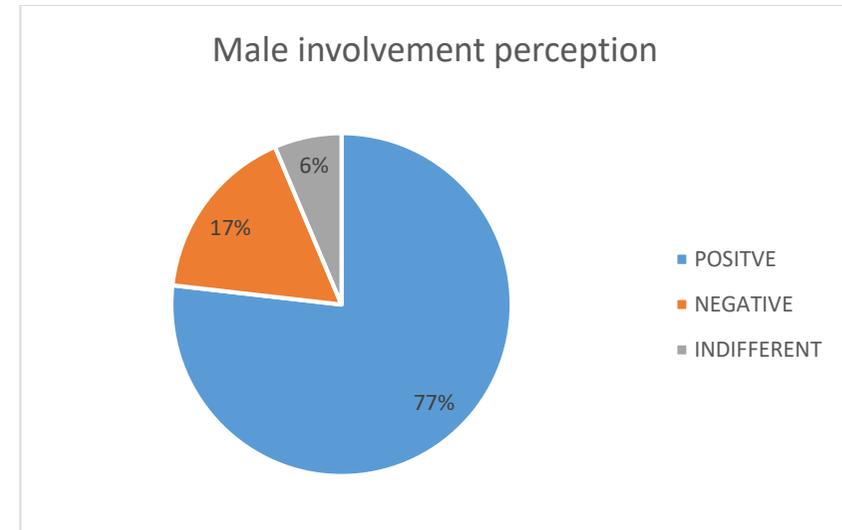
Nikithemba being a men led organisation, used male facilitators to champion this campaign. This was an opportunity for Nikithemba to align themselves with women issues, learn about menstrual issues and demystify gender norms and stereotypes. The responses to this were mixed, here are some of the quotes that participants shared.

*This is 'AWESOME',
it is the 1st time
seeing it.*

*This is weird and unusual for
men, however their participation
is affirming of our issues as we
regard them as father-brother
figures.*

*'Excellent' never
thought men cared
enough to be
involved in women's
issues*

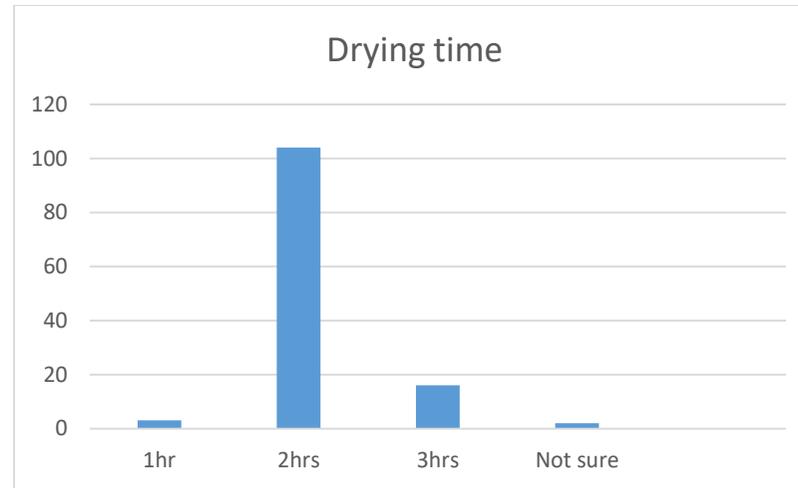
Oh what a SHOCK, no males please



Post Assessment was conducted in February 2021 as phase 2 after the participants had used and experienced the safe pads.

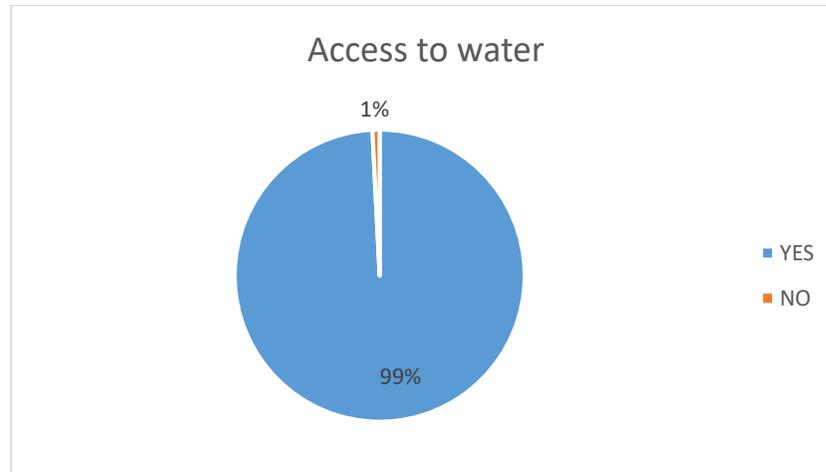
Drying time of the washed pad

This campaign was carried out during South African summer season, 83.2% participants indicated that it took two hours for the pad to dry, whilst 12.8% reported that it took three hours. 0.8% indicated that it took one hour for the washable to dry and the rest were not sure as they had not paid attention to this. It would be interesting to know if the pads were dried outside and if participants experienced any shame regarding hanging these outside. Future studies can ask these questions.



Access to water

99.2% of the participants indicated that they had access to water so they were able to wash the pads and dry them. The benefits of the safe pad is that it also can be washed in water that is unclean, treated/purified or water that had been previously used as it disinfects itself due to the antimicrobial function which is a permanent function. The fabric is what lasts for about 5 years whilst the disinfecting function is permanently bonded to the fabric which means it lasts forever.



Experienced Leakages

The participants were asked if they experienced comfort and any leakages when using the safe pad and 93% of them indicated that no leaks were experienced. Only 7% of the participants experienced minor/minimal leakages. There was also a high level of comfort experienced all around by all the participants.



Recommendations

93% of the participants highly commended the use of the safe pad as it provided comfort, was cost effective as it would save them money on a monthly basis. Sadly none mentioned the environmental impacts of using re-usable pads most of the responses were centred around comfort and economical savings. Future studies should emphasise the environmental benefits so that participants are also aware of these as these were possibly not emphasised during presentation of the safe pads. Below are some of the quotes of responses shared by participants.

This is a great money saver....it is comfortable and soft,

We will be safe from UTI and Thrush

No ways, I am disgusted by the sight of blood

I do not particularly enjoy washing



The campaign was a success in getting these much needed sanitary menstrual hygiene products to the intended beneficiaries. Importantly having men champion this campaign was a learning curve for them as well to be involved in menstrual matters in order to be supportive to females in their families and community. This helped shift gender stereotypes and gender masculinity but it is a journey that must be embarked on. It was also greatly welcomed by the beneficiaries as they appreciated to see and have men as part of this campaign which unpacked myths and taboos around menstrual hygiene.

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