

## **My Vital Cycles™: a way for schools to future-proof lessons in ovulatory-menstrual health literacy and support the health of their female students.**

Felicity Roux<sup>1</sup>

Sharyn Burns<sup>1</sup>, Jacqui Hendriks<sup>1</sup> and Jun Chih<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Curtin University

### **Background:**

A high prevalence of female adolescents experience ovulatory-menstrual (OM) health difficulties (e.g., pain, premenstrual symptoms, irregularities, abnormal bleeding and anaemia). These difficulties are associated with absenteeism, reduced concentration in class, negative body image, eating disorders, non-suicidal self-injury and poor quality of life. The OM cycle is complex and stigmatized. Teachers can find it difficult and awkward to teach. This may account for a tendency to outsource OM health education to external facilitators. COVID has highlighted how this model fails to build teaching capacity and fails to individualise students' learning beyond a one-size-fits-all OM cycle description.

### **Significance and aims:**

This research aimed to develop and trial an OM health literacy program based on the World Health Organization's Health Promoting School framework. It applied Nutbeam's Health Literacy Model and mapped the program to the Year 9-10 Health and Science curricula. It demonstrates how a common point of teaching and healthcare enables teachers and school healthcare professionals (nurses and psychologists) to work in tandem towards individualized education and care of students.

### **Research design:**

A PRISMA-driven systematic literature review of school-based menstrual health programs was published. This informed a Delphi Panel of experts in education, fertility medicine and public health. The review and Delphi consensus informed the development of (1) a draft program to teach and (2) a draft questionnaire to test adolescents' OM health literacy. These drafts were reviewed by adolescents, parents, teachers and school healthcare professionals in focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The draft questionnaire was then test-retested for validity. This is used for the pre- and post-test health literacy scores of Year 9 students who are trialing the program in one single-sex school in Perth. Realtime feedback from these students, their teachers and the school's healthcare professionals are being collected, and will be supplemented with focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

### **Key findings:**

The systematic literature review discovered that current menstrual health programs are single issue and outsourced to external facilitators. The Delphi Panel content validated the draft program and questionnaire. Their face validation prompted refinements (e.g., website, animations, videos, and the name *My Vital Cycles*™).

**Implications for future research:**

The trial to measure the impact *My Vital Cycles*<sup>™</sup> has on teaching adolescent OM health literacy and the school's care of students with common menstrual difficulties ends in September 2021. The results will further refine *My Vital Cycles*<sup>™</sup> for a larger scale trial.