



## CASE STUDY: BE GIRL AND MERCY CORPS JORDAN

# Integrating the Be Girl SmartCycle® into an Existing Adolescent Peer Education Program

JANUARY 2020

### Overview

In partnership with [Be Girl](#), a social enterprise that focuses on menstrual health, Mercy Corps Jordan tested and integrated Be Girl's SmartCycle® menstruation education tool and curriculum content into [WISE Girls](#), an existing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) peer education program run by adolescent girls in Za'atari Refugee Camp. Be Girl's SmartCycle® is a menstruation learning tool designed as a wearable necklace to put knowledge about menstruation into the hands of girls. Be Girl has developed an age-appropriate training methodology to educate young people about the menstrual cycle. Over four months, Mercy Corps staff were trained by Be Girl on the SmartCycle® method, and then supported nine adolescent peer educators to incorporate the SmartCycle® into WISE Girls sessions with 47 younger teens (referred to as tweens). Lessons learned include:

1. **Community knowledge and acceptance in Za'atari Camp.** Girls and their mothers were enthusiastic about the SmartCycle® as a tool to both track their periods and gain a greater understanding of their overall health.

2. **Adolescent delivery of the SmartCycle® needs greater support.** Both tween participants and adolescent peer educators need iterative, hands-on support to use the SmartCycle®.
3. **Reaching and training mothers with the SmartCycle® is** a natural outgrowth of work with daughters and may mutually reinforce both groups' use of the SmartCycle®.



*Be Girl's SmartCycle® tool has numbers of the front and icons on the back to teach users to track three phases of the menstrual cycle: menstruation, ovulation, and preparation.*

*Photo Credit: Be Girl, Inc.*

## **Introducing the SmartCycle® to Households in Za'atari Camp District 4**

In August 2019, Girls' Center staff conducted consultation sessions with two mothers, six adolescent girls, and six peer educators. The initial feedback was mainly very positive and welcoming to any tool that could help them better understand their own health. These female community members agreed that the SmartCycle® is "a great method to track periods," and expressed the need for such a tool. One of the adolescents commented, "I have no idea when I get my period and when I do not." The girls reported that did not track their periods and defined the complete menstrual cycle as "the period," or just menstruation. The information about the reproductive system and the full menstrual cycle was new. "I had an idea about the cycle from school, but I did not understand it. I understand it now!" said another girl.

### **WISE Girls involves different community members:**

*Peer educators* are adolescent girls (15 – 17) trained to ready and facilitate discussion about *Jazirat Al Zohoor*, a girl-designed story on puberty, to groups of younger girls.

*Participants* are younger teen girls who attend *Jazirat Al Zohoor* sessions.

*Mothers and caregivers* give consent for peer educators and participants to be in the WISE Girls program.

*Facilitators/volunteers* are community members employed by Mercy Corps to outreach to adolescent girls and families.

The peer educators expressed interest and excitement in teaching tweens about the SmartCycle®. It emerged that mothers would talk to their daughters about menstruation, but often passed on myths or taboos. The mothers' willingness to engage in conversations about culturally sensitive topics was very insightful to our program.

## The Shift to Adolescent-led SmartCycle® Sessions

### Designing with Peer Educators

The peer educators asked for a training to practice using the SmartCycle®. The plan was to integrate Be Girl material as part of the regular WISE Girls community-based activities led by the peer educators. Mercy Corps staff and peer educators came together in a workshop to revise the biological information and co-design scenarios for adding the Be Girl SRH information and SmartCycle® to *Jazirat Al Zohoor*, the WISE Girls puberty storybook. Staff presented the peer educators with two main ideas: include the module as part of the story itself, or separate the information. The girls divided into two groups and facilitated by our team, developed the scenarios:



*Peer educators brainstorm ideas for the SmartCycle® scenarios with Nadin, Girls' Center Senior Officer, and Amani, Adolescent Girls Outreach Officer.*

1. *Zahra (main character in Jazirat Al Zohoor) designs the SmartCycle®:* The peer educators acted out how Zahra herself comes up with the idea of a tracker to help her count the days of her period. Her mother, a biology teacher, helps her with all the information.
2. *“When the egg doesn't like the nest (uterus) it leaves!”:* A shorter version covering the three phases of menstruation. The peer educators acted out a story of an egg looking for a nest. The egg leaves when it cannot find enough food or shelter, which is when menstruation happens.

### Testing with Tweens

Planning accordingly, teams of peer educators delivered two *Jazirat Al Zohoor* sessions in December that incorporated the SmartCycle®, plus one follow-up session to further explain concepts about the menstrual cycle. Each team of peer educators used one of the scenarios noted above to try them out and share feedback. Mercy Corps staff observed all sessions.

The peer educators and staff noted the following:

- Grasping and understanding SRH knowledge for an adolescent girl is not necessarily enough to communicate and share this knowledge with other girls. Communication skills and confidence are essential. For example, during the Be Girl workshop, the peer educators showed great understanding of the SmartCycle® information, but then asked for more support before and during these sessions with tweens. The peers need emotional support and encouragement to keep them motivated to address such culturally marginalized topics. This also indicated the need for more practice and a

simpler facilitator sheet. Using peer notes and questions, Mercy Corps staff adapted Be Girl's facilitator guide and created a "peer educator Be Girl cheat sheet." (See Annex 1).

- Peer educators' confidence plays a big role in delivering these activities. The older peer educators (16-17) were generally more confident about discussing menstruation than the younger peer educators (15), who were sometimes shy and needed more support. Similarly, participants needed hands on help using the SmartCycle®. Teams of two to three peer educators split up to provide personal, detailed explanation of the SmartCycle®. The peer educators always remind the tweens that "many girls experience menstruation differently," and that they should "always ask mothers for support and help."

Girls living with disabilities are often excluded from SRH education, putting them at risk for poor health outcomes and GBV. Malak, a 15 year old who attended one of the test sessions, had a hearing disability and needed specialized support. With hands-on help from a Girls' Center Volunteer, Malak learnt how to use the SmartCycle® and then demonstrated it in front of the group. One of the peer educators helped her complete the evaluation survey.



*Young girls explore the SmartCycle® in WISE Girls session in Za'atri Camp as Salam, a peer educator, explains menstruation.*



### **New Evaluation Tools**

Mercy Corps staff worked with the peer educators to design a new, more visual evaluation form for the tween participations. The previous evaluation form was a survey, but peer educators recommended simplifying it especially with the addition of SmartCycle® concepts. The new form used more everyday language, visuals, and true/false questions to be more accessible to young girls, especially girls with disabilities (see Annex 2 for evaluation form).

The results were impressive. Based on a newly designed evaluation tool (see below), **89% or more of tween participants answered the evaluation questions about the menstrual cycle, secondary sex characteristics and personal care correctly.** However, only 80% agreed that they would share the information from the session with other girls; 20% indicated that they would not share the information. Mercy Corps staff feel that this is indicative of the sensitive nature of the content, and the support that girls need to understand, use and feel comfortable with information about puberty and menstruation.



*A tween fills the evaluation sheet at the end of a session in Za'atari Camp.*

### **Outreach to Mothers**

We had a focus group discussion with five mothers of the participant girls to receive feedback on the *Jazirat Al Zohoor* toolkit and SmartCycle®.

When asked to evaluate the biological information that their daughters received, all mothers rated 5 out of 5. They reported that they heard new biological information from their daughters and they were thrilled to learn more about their reproductive system. The mothers' own sources of information were mainly NGO awareness sessions in the community or schools related to better parenting and child protection. Their knowledge of the reproductive system was often limited to the uterus, ovaries and eggs; none of the mothers knew about any other part of the system. They viewed the system mostly around pregnancy and did not really communicate full information to their daughters. Most of the mothers associated menstruation with negative past experiences that became a strong motivation for explaining menstruation to their daughter. They had experienced fear and shock getting their periods, but did not want their daughters to experience the same things.

Mothers referred to the system as the “private area” or “shame area.” The language they used to explain this area to their daughters was in relation to **privacy** and often translated to something like “it is forbidden behavior to take off your clothes in front of anyone, even your father and brothers, or show you private area to anyone.” **Hygiene** was another way of framing any conversation these mothers had with their daughters. Many introduced menstruation by explaining how to use sanitary pads. All the mothers in the group described menstruation as “bad blood” disposed of monthly.

Four of the mothers believe their daughters knew “everything” that this generation is more exposed due to openness to technology, and even stronger peer relationships. However, they do not agree on “the appropriate age” to discuss basic sexual information and or even more in depth discussions about pregnancy and protection. The mothers are mostly concerned about society and its norms, but they value education as a key to building knowledge and confidence for girls.

As we distributed SmartCycles® to the mothers, they asked for a brief on how to use it and a presentation on the biological information to reinforce it with their daughters. The Mercy Corps team delivered a 15-minute presentation explaining how to use the SmartCycle® using the Arabic brochure. Mothers had plenty of feedback:

*“Very useful, thank you so much, we were going to ask for the tracker ourselves.”*

*“I have never imagined that there could be a tool to calculate the days of my menstrual cycle.”*

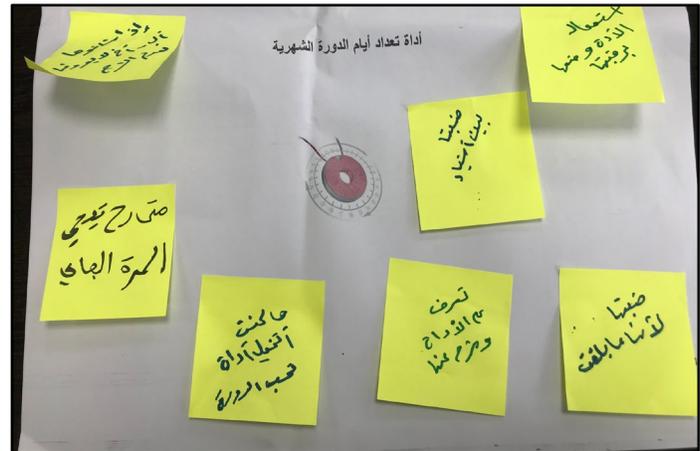
*“I am confident about my daughter using it. Nobody will ever know what it is – not the brothers or the father.”*

Based on the mothers’ comments, their girls had already started using the SmartCycle® and kept it either with their mothers or as a necklace. They also reported learning about the reproductive system from their girls who participated in these sessions. In a community with limited access to accurate healthcare information, this highlights a crucial area of information flow from younger adolescent girl to their mothers.

Finally, mothers requested more in depth biological information on the reproductive system for themselves and their daughters, and wanted to learn about the male reproductive system in order to teach their sons. They had no objection to their girls learning about the male reproductive system using a “scientific and appropriate” approach.

## Next Steps and Recommendations

- Mercy Corps and the peer educators will continue to include the SmartCycle® information in *Jazirat al Zohoor* sessions and distribute tool in puberty kits to participants.
- Mercy Corps can continue to report on evaluation results to Be Girl as they become available in 2020.



Feedback provided by participants on the SmartCycle® tool and methodology

- Mercy Corps and Be Girl can work together to disseminate this case study more widely to audiences of menstrual health management practitioners.
- Mercy Corps and Be Girl also have an opportunity to tackle introducing the male reproductive system module to mothers and adolescent boys and girls via related Mercy Corps programs.

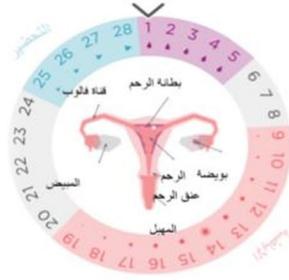


*Rawa'a, a peer educator, reads the Jazirat Al Zohoor puberty storybook.*

# Annex 1. Adolescent Facilitation Guide



## ورقة الميسر المرجعية في ورشة عمل ©BE GIRL SMARTCYCLE



### 3. اشرحي المراحل الثلاثة لدورة الحيض (5 دقائق)

كل شهر، يمر جسم الفتاة بدورة توفر إمكانية الحمل. تسمى الدورة الشهرية على الرغم من أن الحيض هو مرحلة واحدة فقط من ثلاث مراحل الحيض.

1. الحيض هو عندما تختبر الفتيات والنساء دورتهن وهي تمزق بطانة الرحم عندما لا يتم تخصيب البويضة.

2. الإباضة هي عندما يتم إطلاق البويضة من المبيض. إذا التقت البويضة بالحيوانات المنوية وتم تخصيبها، فسيؤدي هذا إلى الحمل، وإذا لم يحدث فسوف تستمر الدورة.

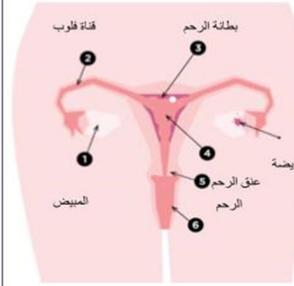
3. التحضير هي المرحلة التي تسبق الحيض حيث يستعد الجسم للدورة المقبلة.

### 4. - التمرن على (10 SmartCycle دقائق)

- اطلبي من الفتيات اخراج اداة «كون فتاة» من الحجاب.
- ابداي باليوم الاول و اشرح الرموز الموجودة في الخلف. نكري المشاركات بتدوير القرص كل يوم.
- قولي: "اعيدي ضبط الاداة دائماً إلى الرقم 1 في اليوم الأول من حيضك. إذا بدأ حيضك قبل اليوم 28 فليس هناك مشكلة. وإذا وصلت إلى اليوم الثامن والعشرين ولم يبدأ حيضك بعد، فلا تقلقي. ما عليك سوى الانتظار حتى اليوم الأول من النزيف لإعادة ضبطها إلى الرقم 1 وبده العد".

### 1. مقدمة (5 دقائق)

- اطلبي من الفتيات اخراج القصة من الحقيبة و فتح الصفحة 18
- اشرحي جهاز الأنثى التناسلي:



المبيضان، يخزنان كل بويضات المرأة حيث تصنع البويضات (وهي خلايا الأنثى التناسلية). قناة فالوب هي الطريق التي تسلكها البويضة عندما تُطلق من المبيض. عند الزواج، تلتقي الحيوانات المنوية بالبويضة في قناة فالوب لتخصيبها.

الرحم هو الوجهة النهائية للبويضة يحمل على حمايتها وتغذية الجنين حتى يكون جاهزاً للولادة.

المهبل هو الممر من وإلى الرحم. من خلاله يخرج دم الحيض والجنين من الجسم.

### 2- اشرحي عن الدورة الشهرية. (5 دقائق)

- قولي «لأن جسمك مذهل! و يعمل ضمن دورات مختلفة على سبيل المثال، دورة النوم، وتعتبر الدورة الشهرية مشابهة لها.»
- قولي: «كل شهر، يستعد جسم المرأة لحمل محتمل من خلال إنشاء «عش» مريح يمكن أن تنمو فيه البويضة المخصبة لتصبح جنيناً. إذا لم يتم تخصيب البويضة بالحيوانات المنوية، فإن جسم المرأة لا يعد بحاجة إلى «العش»، وبالتالي فإن الجسم يتخلص منه على شكل دم الحيض. تكرر هذه الدورة من التحضير نفسها مراراً وتكراراً، وهذا ما نسميه دورة الحيض.»
- يستغرق متوسط الدورة الشهرية حوالي 28 يوماً. ولكن يختلف جسم كل امرأة عن الأخرى، لذلك قد تكون أطول مدة لدورتك 35 يوماً وأقصرها 21 يوماً. وهذا أمر طبيعي تماماً! كل منا لديها دورة خاصة بجسمها!
- يبدأ الحيض عند الفتيات الصغيرات تتدرب أجسامنا المذهلة على الدورة الشهرية لسنوات قبل أن تكون جاهزة لإنجاب الأطفال.

The Mercy Corps team made the following changes to the Be Girl facilitation sheet to make it suitable for WISE Girls peer educators:

- Removed the male reproductive system because the it was inappropriate to teach the girls about it without caregiver consent; and
- Made the introduction of the female reproductive system with reference to the page in *Jazirat Al Zohoor* that has an illustration of the female reproductive system (or as referred to by the girls: “the private area”).

# Annex 2. Participant Evaluation

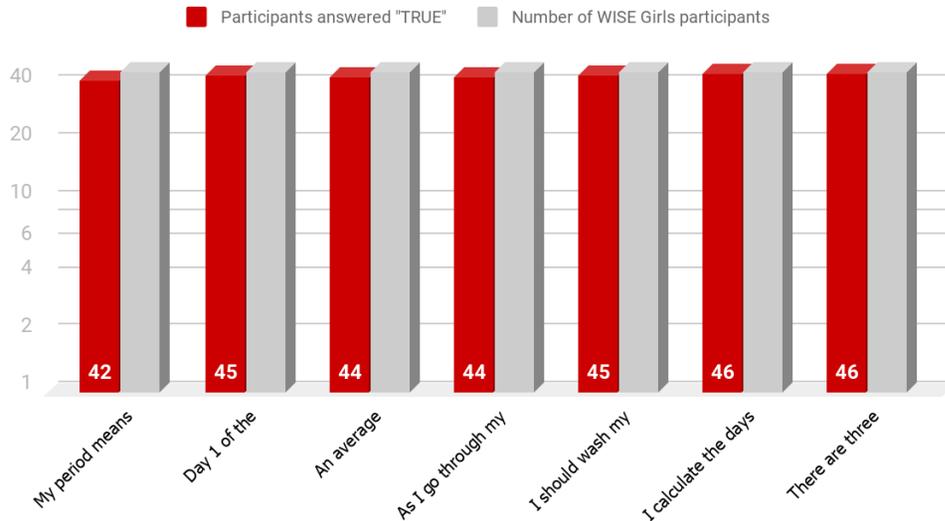
English translation of the true/false questions:

- My period means the blood from my uterus lining which flows out of my vagina usually one time per month.
- Day 1 of the menstrual cycle is the first day of bleeding.
- I should wash my private parts during my period and take care of my hygiene during menstruation.
- As I go through my puberty, I start to grow hair in new places on my body.
- An average menstrual cycle lasts 28 days but can be longer or shorter.
- I calculate the days starting the first day of menstruation to the first day of the next menstruation to know the length of my menstrual cycle.
- The menstrual cycle has three phases: menstruation, ovulation, and preparation.
- I will share what I've learned about my health, my body and my period with other girls.

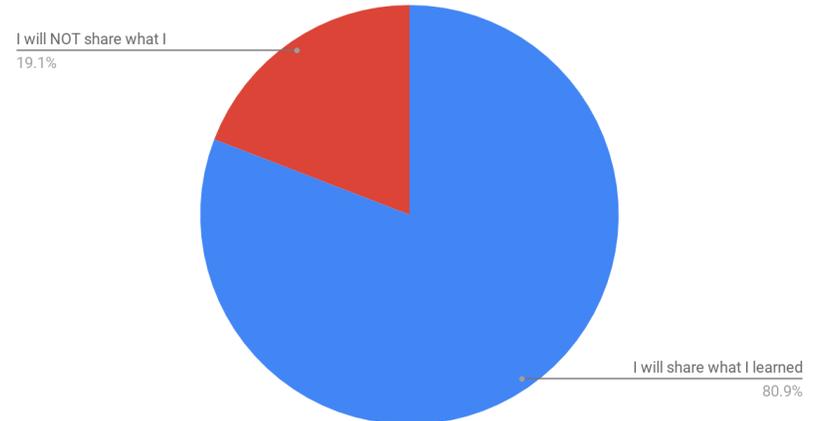
**دورة الحيض الزهور**

اليوم الأول من دورتي الشهرية يبدأ بلول يوم للتزيف.	دورتي يتكون لما تخرج بطانة الرحم من جسمي على شكل دم الحيض عبر المهبل، و بتصير مرة وحدة كل شهر.
لما أبلغ رح ينمو الشعر في أماكن جديدة على جسمي.	لازم أغسل منطقة العضو التناسلي واتحمم و اهتم بنظافتي الشخصية خلال فترة الدورة الشهرية.
بقدر احسب أيام دورة جسمي الشهرية من اول يوم حيض لأول يوم من الحيض الي بعده.	غالباً الدورة الشهرية يتكون بحوالي ٢٨ يوماً بس ممكن تزيد أو تنقص، و مش كل البنات متل بعض.
رح أشارك صديقتي و البنات الي يعرفهم الي تعلمته عن جسمي، وصحتي و دورتي الشهرية.	مراحل دورتي الشهرية هي الحيض - الإباضة - التحضير

**Evaluation Scores**



**Sharing the information they learned in WISE Girls Sessions**



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### **About Mercy Corps**

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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### **About Be Girl**

Be Girl is a social enterprise that takes a design-driven approach to menstrual health and hygiene. We challenge the status quo and use design to re-brand menstruation and build a world where all girls understand, own, and love their bodies.



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