

Girls plead for period talk

OLIVIA JENKINS KATHRYN BERMINGHAM

PERIOD pain is taking a toll on girls' academic performance as they report not being taught enough about menstruation before their first period.

New research has revealed thousands of girls are resorting to the internet for basic information about period symptoms because they learned "too little, too late" at school.

Western Sydney University surveyed more than 5000 girls aged between 13 and 25 years old, who reported that school period education was "inadequate" despite being part of the national curriculum.

The study found that "menstrual health literacy has a direct impact on young people's quality of life, health, academic and professional performance".

Fourteen per cent of respondents said they did not learn anything useful about periods at school.

Six per cent said they did not receive any formal education about period pain, which is clinically named dysmenorrhoea.

Lead study author Christina Curry, from Western Sydney University's School of Education, said the problem was twofold.

She said unchecked period pain led to girls missing class while they went online for information about period symptoms because schools did not teach girls about periods in depth, or in a timely way.

"Period pain can have a negative impact on everyday tasks, including education," Dr Curry said. "When untreated, it can interfere with educational performance and engagement and lead to absence from educational, sporting, extra-curricular and workplace activities."

Eloise Hall, co-founder and managing director of South Australian social enterprise TABOO period products, said a report by SA's Commissioner for the Children and Young People revealed period education was delivered too late.

"It was nice knowledge to have but it was delivered after a lot of kids had

their own menstruation,” she said.

Ms Hall said children found it difficult to find the right people with whom to have educational conversations because menstruation was still considered a taboo subject.

“I think a lot of the incompetencies (around period education) come from the fact that the conversation just isn’t welcomed,” she said. “One of the reasons we’re really advocating for schools to provide period products is because it’s also an invitation for children to have the conversation.”

One suggestion made in the Commissioner’s report was to identify the best possible teachers to cover the topic, ensuring students felt they could have open discussions.

Ms Hall said the job in many cases fell to PE teachers, who were often young men and who felt uncomfortable.