

LEAP Initiative: Adolescent Girls' and Young Women's Perspectives on the LNG-IUS in Zambia



May 2020





Research objectives

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) examined:

1 | Potential acceptability of and interest in the LNG-IUS among AGYWs

2 | How the method's characteristics and side effect profile might meet the unique reproductive health needs of both married and unmarried adolescents



Inclusion criteria and methods

Eligibility criteria for participation in FGDs:

- Adolescent girl or young woman aged 15-19;
- Sexually active; and
- If unmarried, must have permission of primary caregiver



In FGDs, adolescent girls and young women were asked about their:

- Perspectives on contraception in general;
- Perspectives on the LNG-IUS based on a description and prototype of the method (see Appendix 1); and
- Perceived potential demand and user groups for the LNG-IUS.



Approach: Participants were asked to share their thoughts on how girls like themselves would respond to the LNG-IUS, not necessarily what they themselves thought about the method. While some participants did share their own personal reflections on the LNG-IUS, the emphasis was on understanding what AGYW as a group might think about the method. As is typical in FGDs, not all participants responded to every question, and some participants expressed contradictory opinions throughout the discussion or acknowledged that what some AGYW might like about the method, others might dislike (for example, by stating that some girls might be okay with amenorrhea, but other girls would not be able to accept it).



Participant Characteristics

FGDs with AGYW

	Unmarried	Married	Overall
FGDs	4	2	6
Participants	30	13	43
Average age (years)	17.3	17.9	17.5
1 or more children	1	6	7
Highest education attended			
No schooling	1	2	3
Primary	2	1	3
Secondary	26	10	36
> Secondary	1	0	1



In Zambia, FGDs with adolescent girls and young women were held in Copperbelt and Muchinga provinces.



Only 15% of married AGYW (n=2) had finished secondary school, compared to 43% of unmarried AGYW (n=13).



The average number of children among married AGYW with children was 1.5 (range: 1 – 3).

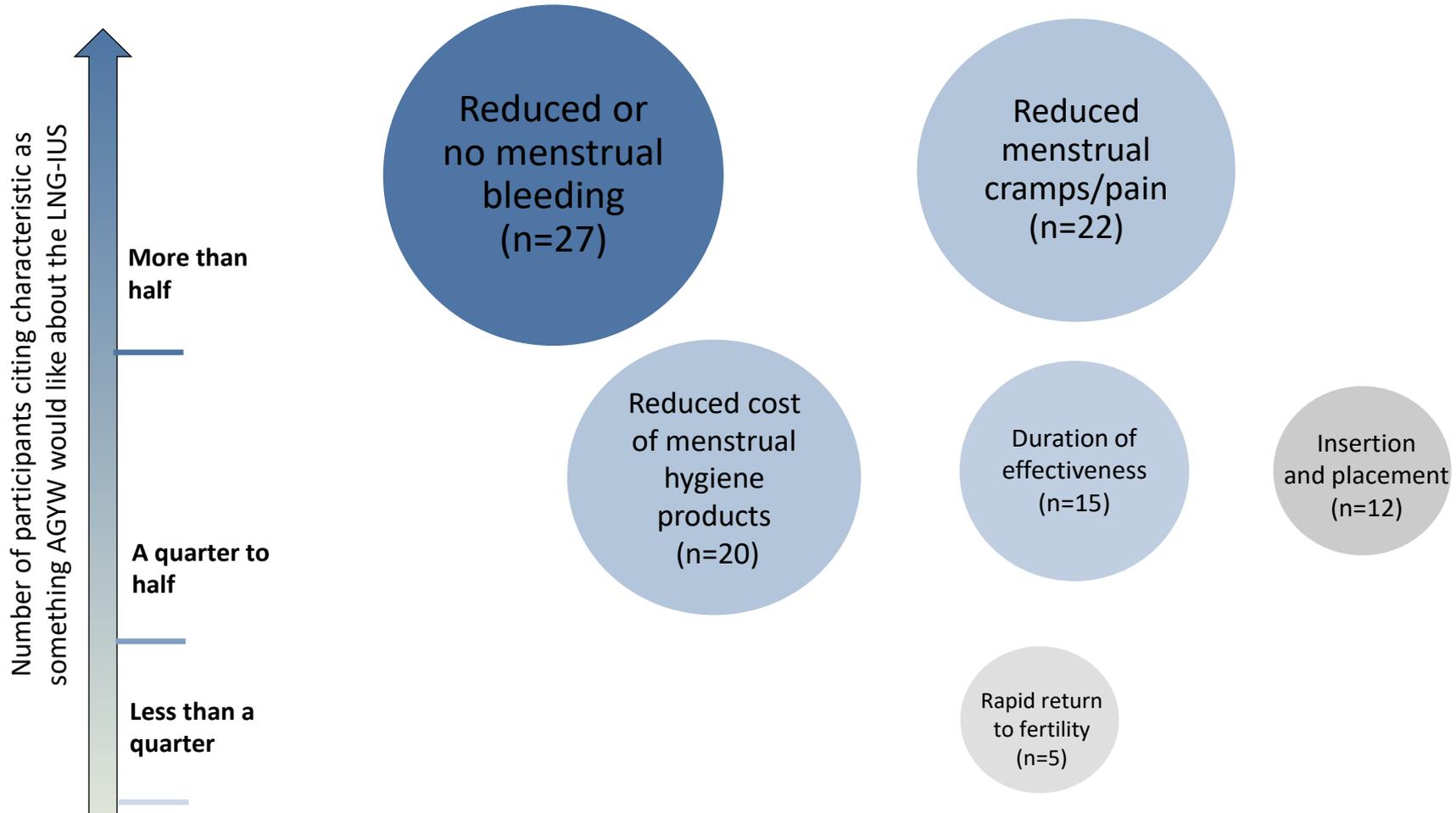


None of the participants reported having heard of the LNG-IUS prior to the focus groups.



Results: Perceived benefits of the LNG-IUS

Girls' opinions were based on a description of the LNG-IUS read to participants during the FGDs. Participants were asked what AGYW would like about the method in general, and were also specifically asked what AGYW would think about bleeding changes caused by the method, the duration of the method, the placement of the method, and the LNG-IUS as a way to spend less money on menstrual hygiene products.





Perceived advantages of LNG-IUS emerging from FGDs



For me, why I can like it is because the period stops or reduces and also it stops the period pains, because the pain we go through is just too much.



I think they can like it because it will reduce the cost of pads and also when periods are heavy, you become weak because you lose a lot of blood.



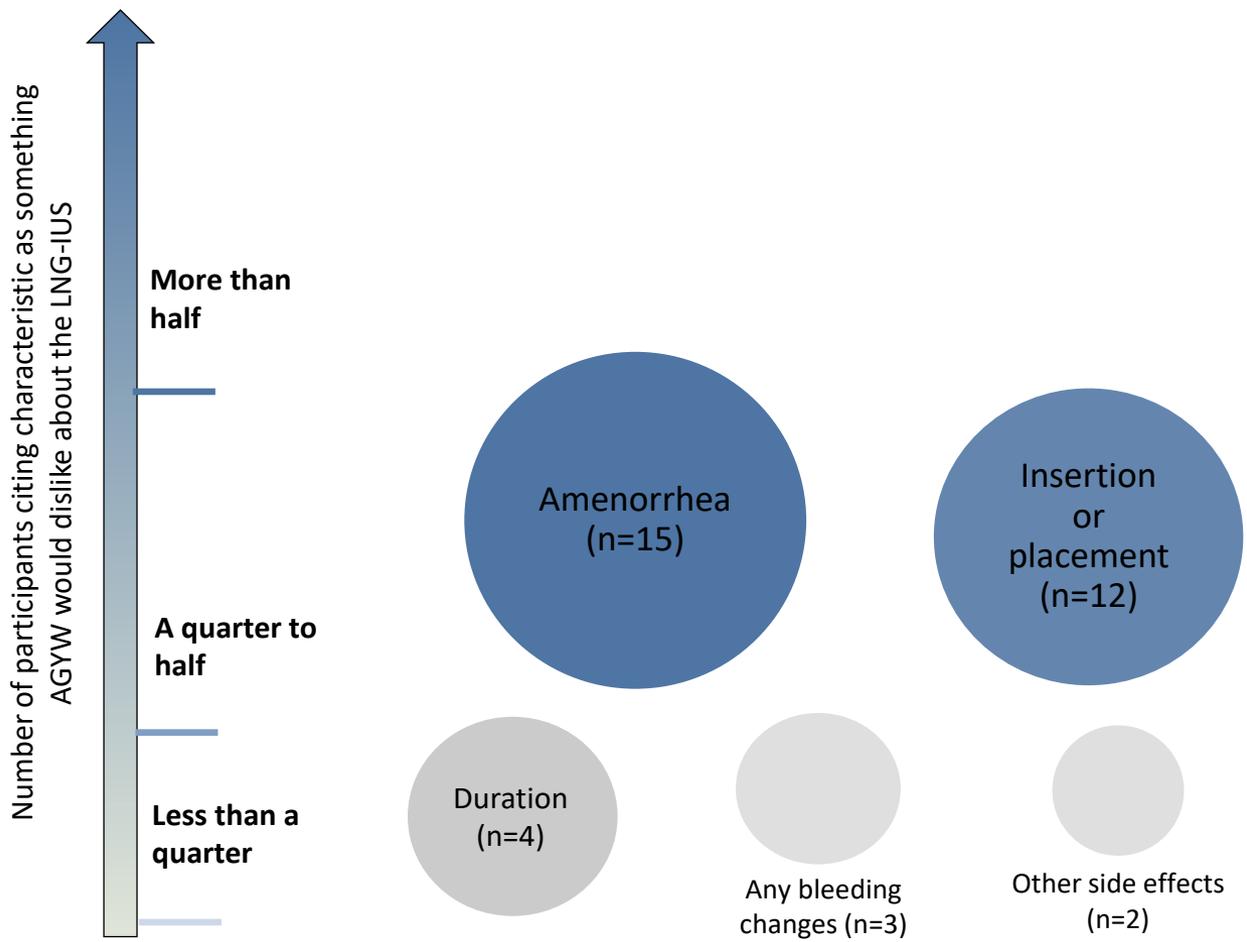
Others can like it because some people do not like having periods and it's invisible compared to these others like the implants, where can see it that one is on family planning when you just twist your hand.



To my own understanding it has no problem even if your husband wants you to have another child, you can just go back to the clinic so that they can remove it and you can't take long to conceive again.

Results: Perceived disadvantages of the LNG-IUS

Girls' opinions were based on a description of the LNG-IUS read to participants during the FGDs. Participants were asked what AGYW would dislike about the method in general, and were also specifically asked what AGYW would think about bleeding changes caused by the method, the duration of the method, and the placement of the method. The perceived disadvantages shown here include participants who indicated that AGYW would dislike a specific aspect of the LNG-IUS.



- Overall, fewer AGYW expressed concerns or dislikes about the LNG-IUS than described positive aspects or benefits of the method.
- Two participants worried about the possibility of other side effects, namely mood swings and headaches.

 Perceived disadvantages of LNG-IUS emerging from FGDs

Some girls would be scared that it would be painful when inserting since it's going straight to the uterus, and that at the time of removing it can refuse to come out.



Okay, a normal girl what we know is the period can only completely stop when she is pregnant, so this is different because pregnancy is nine months, now five years with no period is very different.



Results: Perceptions of reduced bleeding

Reduced bleeding was an important perceived advantage of the LNG-IUS
Some of the main benefits girls foresaw with reduced bleeding were:



Girls will have less pain and shorter periods



Less money will be spent on menstrual hygiene products



Girls can attend school more regularly and be more comfortable



Girls can carry out normal activities that they would normally not do when on their periods



Perceptions of reduced bleeding



When you have heavy periods and painful ones you can't do anything, so since it's reducing the pain and the flow they like it a lot.



I wouldn't want the period to completely stop but the pain to stop because hmmm... the pain is just too much.



Results: Perceptions of amenorrhea

Perceptions of amenorrhea was mixed.

Perceived advantages

 ZK Saves money on sanitary pads

 Girls or their partners dislike periods

 Girls can have sex when desired

Perceived disadvantages

 Scary or “concerning” because not normal

 Health issues possible because the body is not “cleansed”

 Girls or her parents will think she is pregnant

 Periods give married girls a chance to rest

 Importantly, some participants felt that AGYWs would be comfortable with amenorrhea caused by the LNG-IUS if they received proper counseling.



Perceptions of amenorrhea



Because when people who do not know that you have inserted the new loop might think you have become pregnant and especially that you can't have periods, and again you cannot start telling people that it's because of the family planning because you wouldn't want them to think that you are sleeping around.



Because when you are on your periods and your boyfriend calls for you to have sex with them and you are on your heavy periods you can't go, but when they are less or they stopped completely it's easy for you to go.



What I know is that we have periods so that we can release the waste materials, so I feel if you don't get to have periods it becomes a problem.



Results: Perceptions of method placement

Participants were asked what girls would think about using a family planning method that is placed in the uterus through the vagina.



Perception that some girls could like or accept the insertion and placement of the LNG-IUS (n=12) because:

- ✓ Method is discreet
- ✓ Insertion will be easy
- ✓ Providers are professionals so okay to show “private parts”
- ✓ The device is small
- ✓ Girls can make their own decisions, informed choice



Concerns about the insertion and placement of the LNG-IUS (n=12) because:

- × Insertion and placement will be painful
- × Location is too intimate
- × Method will move in body or during sex
- × Sex will be painful
- × Method will be difficult to remove

Participants were evenly split on whether or not girls would like or accept the placement of the LNG-IUS.



Three participants who had concerns with the placement of the method also expressed that some girls might not mind it.



Perceptions of method placement



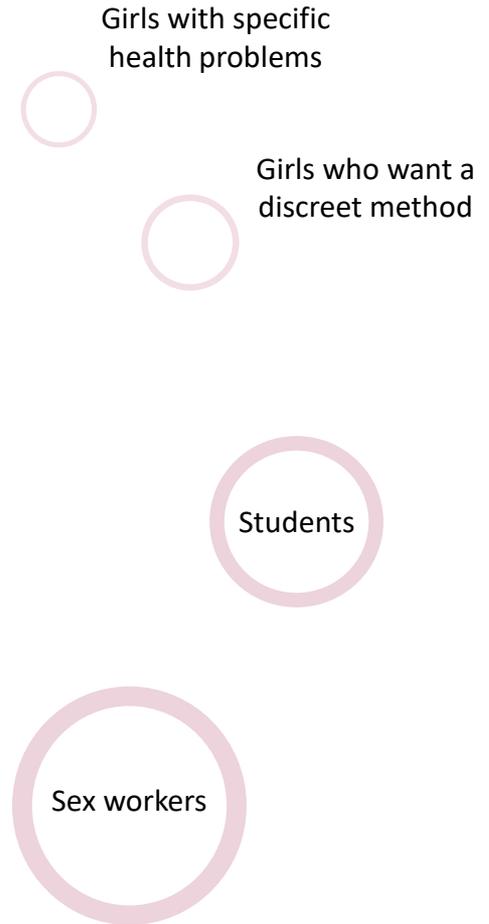
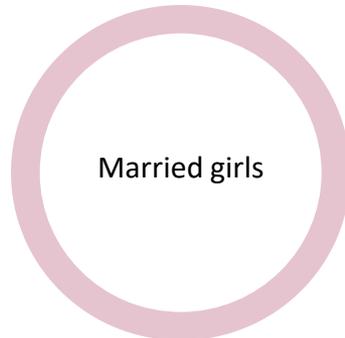
I think girls in the community can like it because when it is inserted in the vagina, no one can see it compared to the once you insert on the arm, that one is visible to the eye.



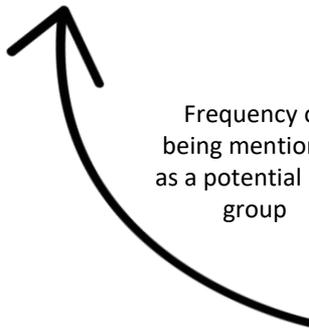
Others wouldn't like it because of the way it's inserted through the vagina, they might think it's very painful because the vagina is a sensitive place.

Potential User Groups

Participants were asked what types of girls would be interested in using the LNG-IUS generally, and also specifically about girls with heavy or painful periods and what age groups could use the method.



Frequency of being mentioned as a potential user group





Results: Counseling and information needs



Counseling emerged as an important aspect of girls' decisions about whether or not to use the LNG-IUS.

- Counseling is critical to help girls understand they can have the LNG-IUS removed at any time.
- One-on-one time with providers is important for girls to accept credible information about the method, rather than listening to rumors about the method.
- Girls need to be told they can go back to the provider if they have any questions or experience any side effects.

A small graphic of a map of the United States in green and orange, positioned to the left of the main title.

Results: Counseling and information needs

Participants thought that girls would need additional information on a variety of topics before deciding whether or not to use the LNG-IUS.

Placement, insertion, and removal:

- Is insertion or removal painful?
- How is insertion or removal done?

Effects on fertility:

- Does the method affect fertility after removal?

Bleeding changes:

- How can girls know if they're pregnant or not without monthly bleeding?
- Does bleeding return to normal after removal of the method?

Duration and efficacy:

- Do girls have to visit the provider within the five years they have the method?
- Is it effective the day of insertion?

Impacts on health:

- Can the LNG-IUS cause cancer?
- Does it affect the uterus?
- Does it prevent transmission of STIs or HIV?

Expulsions:

- Can the LNG-IUS come out of the body?
- What happens if it does come out of the body?



Perceptions of counseling and information needs



I would like to know where this new loop will be inserted... I would like to ask them why only inserting it through the vagina than any other part of the body.



They would want to know if they can be able to have kids afterwards because men love kids and one can end up losing their marriage if they can't conceive after using the new loop.



Results: Access to the LNG-IUS



Participants were asked how easy or difficult it would be for girls to ask providers for the LNG-IUS and how they thought providers would react to married or unmarried girls asking for the method.

Access to LNG-IUS:

- Many participants (n=19) felt that accessing the LNG-IUS would be easy for girls and providers would give the method to girls without any problem.
- However, some participants (n=11) thought girls may face some barriers to accessing the LNG-IUS because:
 - Providers may ask questions, disapprove, or refuse to give girls the LNG-IUS (n=8)
 - Girls may feel shy trying to access contraceptives (n=5)

Access to family planning in general:

- Fewer participants (n=8) expressed that girls have easy access to contraceptives in general.
- Nearly the same number of participants (n=10) said that girls face barriers to contraception in general.



Access to the LNG-IUS



They are not difficult because they know if you have reached the clinic, then you are there to get their service.



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Appendix 1 - Description of LNG-IUS used in FGDs with AGYW

- Here is an example of the copper IUD/IUCD (*pass method around*), which some of you may have already heard of. The LNG-IUS is similar to the copper IUD/IUCD (use local term), but contains a hormone called levonorgestrel. The LNG-IUS releases a small dose of the hormone every day.
- The LNG-IUS is used by millions of women and girls worldwide, to delay their first pregnancy and to space births. It has a very high satisfaction rate among users.
- The LNG-IUS is inserted like the copper IUD/IUCD (local name) into the uterus by a trained doctor or nurse through the vagina. It is not a surgery and only takes a few minutes.
- It is one of the most effective methods available at preventing pregnancy. You can keep it for up to 5 years before replacing it, and it can be removed at any time for any reason.
- The LNG-IUS is an easy to use method. It does not require any regular, ongoing visits with a doctor or nurse. Once you start using it you don't have to remember to do anything until you want to get pregnant. It is easily removed and after removal it is possible to get pregnant right away. It can be used even if you've never been pregnant before.
- Some women and girls using this method will have shorter, lighter periods and some will completely stop having their monthly menstrual bleeding. When bleeding is reduced or stops altogether, it does not cause any harm to a girl or woman. Once the LNG-IUS is removed, periods return to what they were like before. The LNG-IUS can also be used as a medical treatment for girls and women who have especially heavy or painful bleeding, and it may help reduce anemia.
- The LNG-IUS can be used by women who are breastfeeding or not breastfeeding.
- The LNG-IUS could come out of the uterus at an unexpected time, though this is rare. Some girls and women using this method may experience some cramping when it is inserted and for a short time after it is placed in the body. However, after it is inserted you can't feel it inside you.
- To check that it is there, you can feel the soft strings at the top of your vagina with your fingers. Sometimes the man might feel them during sex, but usually he will not notice. No one else can tell you are using it.