

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



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Photo by:
Jessica Scranton, FHI 360

The LEAP logo, consisting of two stylized human figures in blue and orange.

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.



Summary: Key Take-Aways



Perceived benefits: Participants were asked what AGYW would like about the LNG-IUS 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. More than half noted the potential for reduced or no menstrual bleeding as a key advantage. Other perceived benefits were potential for reduced menstrual cramps/pain, duration of effectiveness, reduced cost of menstrual hygiene products, insertion/placement, and fewer side effects.

Perceived disadvantages: Overall, fewer AGYW expressed concerns or identified potential disadvantages about the LNG-IUS than those expressing benefits or positive characteristics. Among disadvantages that were identified, attributes included insertion and/or placement requirements, potential for amenorrhea, potential for other bleeding changes/reduced bleeding, duration, and lack of protection from STIs.

Perceptions of bleeding changes: The majority of participants believed that the potential for reduced menstrual bleeding was an important advantage of the LNG-IUS. Perceptions of amenorrhea were varied with some feeling it was primarily an advantage, some feeling it was primarily a disadvantage, and some with mixed feelings.

Perceptions of method insertion: Participants were asked what girls would think about using a family planning method that is placed in the uterus through the vagina. Some AGYW were concerned that the location is too intimate, insertion would be painful or dangerous, or that the product could disappear in their bodies, cause health problems or fall out. Others felt that insertion would be easy, method use would be discreet, and insertion would be acceptable to girls once they were counseled.

Access to FP in general and LNG-IUS specifically: AGYW were divided about whether it is easy or hard for girls to access contraception in general. Likewise, some participants felt it would be easy for girls to obtain the LNG-IUS if it were available, while others felt that girls would likely face barriers to access. Key barriers to accessing contraception in general included difficulty getting to a facility, needing husbands' permission, fear that privacy will not be maintained, a lack of knowledge about family planning options, and being shy with providers.

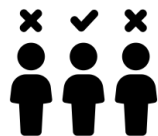


Inclusion criteria and methods



Eligibility criteria for participation in FGDs:

- Adolescent girl or young woman aged 15-19;
- Sexually active; and
- If 15-17 years old and 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	38	21	59
Average age (years)	17	18	18
1 or more children	1	21	22
Highest education attended			
No schooling	0	0	0
Primary	0	5	5
Secondary	38	15	53
> Secondary	0	1	1



FGDs were held in Oyo and Kaduna provinces in Nigeria



All unmarried participants had at least some secondary education, compared to 76% of married participants



All 21 married participants had at least one child (range: 1-3)



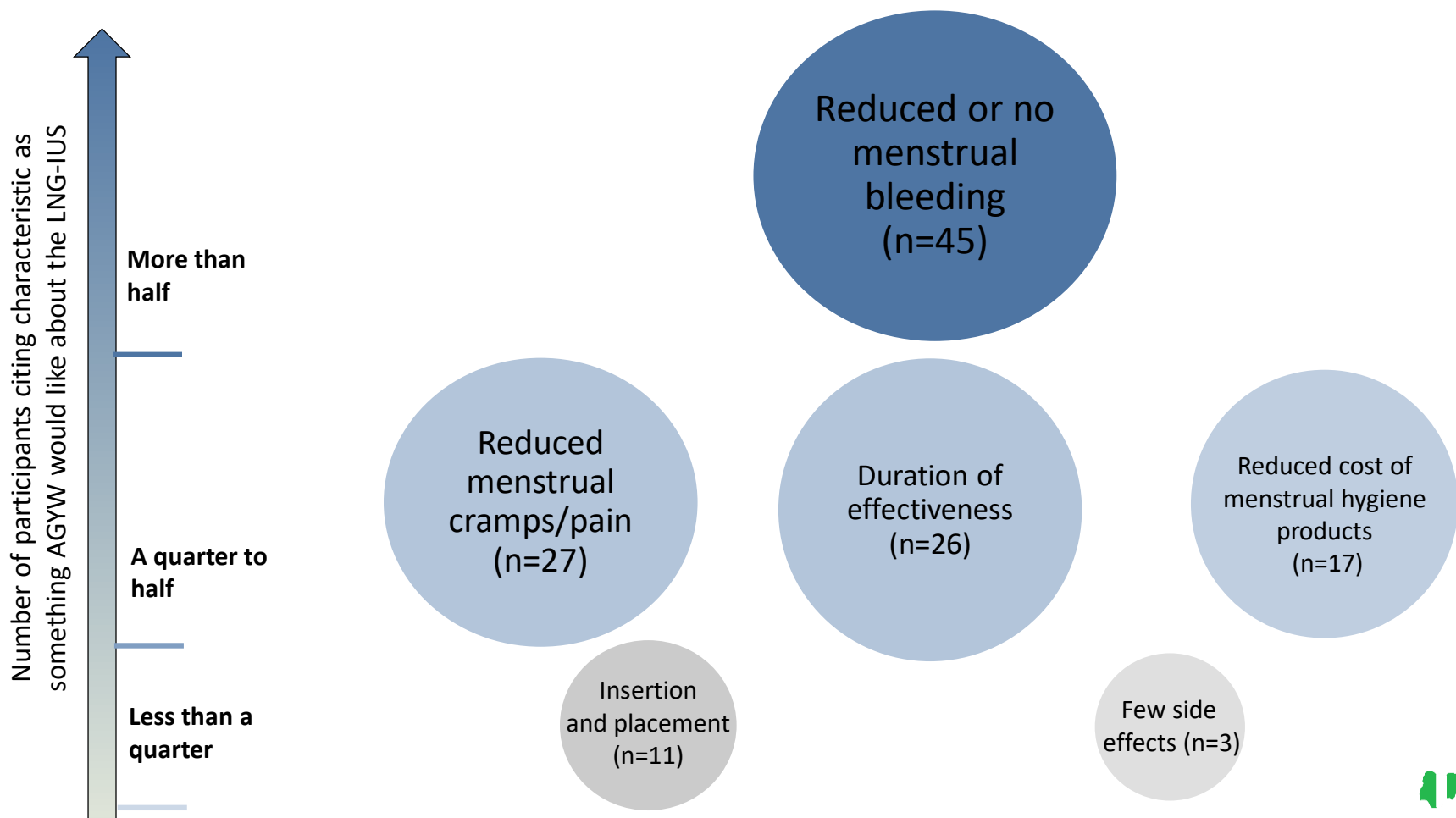
None of the participants reported having heard of the LNG-IUS prior to the focus groups



Results: Perceived benefits of the LNG-IUS

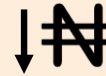


Girls' opinions were based on a description of the LNG-IUS read to participants during the FGDs. Participants were asked what AGYW would like about the method in general, and were also specifically asked what AGYW would think about bleeding changes caused by the method, the duration of the method, the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

Girls will like it because some have painful period and usually will not be able to go out for their daily activities...this IUS will cure it...so it is a welcomed idea for young girls in our community.



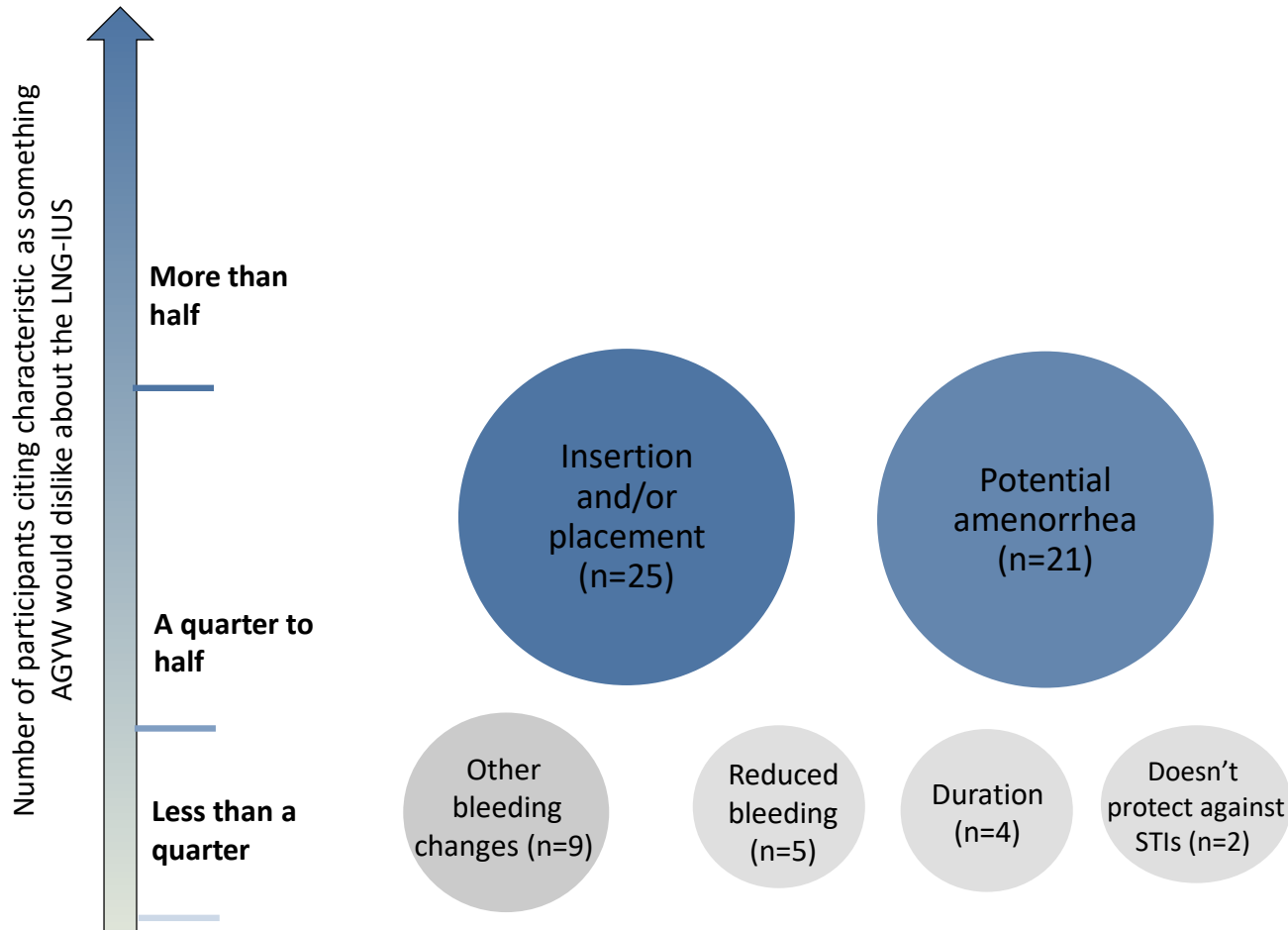
They will like it because of economic situation at the onset she might have money for pad but towards the end she can no longer afford the pads since with the LNG IUS if she was making use of 5 packets of pad she will now make use of two.



They will like it because some people have heavy period and this method will reduce the flow.

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.
- Only one (1) participant felt that non-bleeding-related side effects of the LNG-IUS were a negative; she was concerned about the possibility of headaches with the method.
- Other potential bleeding changes that participants disliked were irregular bleeding, spotting, and the risk of prolonged periods.



Perceived disadvantages of LNG-IUS emerging from FGDs



It is better I insert the implant... because this one is inserted into the vagina, while the implant is on the hand.



Some girls will be bothered and when they feel certain wetness they will feel that it is the period that wants to come and they will rush into the toilet to have a check and not seeing the period they will be disturbed and they will be scared.



Some girls would say they can't imagine their self spreading, opening their self to have something inserted into them and it will be difficult convincing them they would tell you there other methods to use rather than spreading their legs to have a method inserted.



Results: Perceptions of reduced bleeding

Reduced bleeding was an important perceived advantage of the LNG-IUS (n=41). Some of the main benefits girls foresaw with reduced bleeding were:



Girls will have less pain and shorter periods



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



Girls can attend school more regularly and be more comfortable



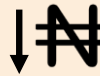
Others will not know when girls are on their periods



However, several participants (mostly unmarried) felt that girls' parents would notice any bleeding changes and would either think their daughter was pregnant or would discover her use of family planning. Overall, participants were less concerned about this possibility with reduced bleeding than with amenorrhea.

 Perceptions of reduced bleeding

They will really love to use it because it will relieve them of the pain they feel or the heavy flow that gets them embarrassed.



Some will feel happy having a reduced flow because they will not spend much money buying pads and there will not be need for checking back whether she is stained.



Results: Perceptions of amenorrhea



Perceptions of amenorrhea was mixed. Some felt it was primarily an advantage (n=19), some felt it was primarily a disadvantage (n=21), and some were mixed in their feelings (n=7).

Perceived advantages



Girls will experience less pain



Girls can be more active



Partner preferences



Girls can have sex when desired

Perceived disadvantages



Parents will notice amenorrhea and want an explanation



Health issues possible because the body is not “cleansed”



Girls will think they are pregnant



Might damage future fertility



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

 Perceptions of amenorrhea

Some people believe that when they are pregnant they cannot see their menstruation and then you read that some people don't get to see their periods anymore, for that period so the fear will be, hope this thing has not disappointed, am I not pregnant, they may be worried.



For me, my mum asks me every month if I have seen my period... and if my response is I have not seen it she would inquire what is going on and want to know more. I can't tell her I am using family planning.



That is the thought of some persons that if I don't see my period it is being piled up somewhere in my system someday I will have to be operated to get the piled blood out, but when they are assured that even if they don't see their period for over a year they are okay, they will make use of [the LNG-IUS].

-AGYW FGD PARTICIPANTS



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=11) because:

- ✓ Insertion will be easy
- ✓ Method is discreet
- ✓ Could be acceptable to girls once they are counseled



Concerns about the insertion and placement of the LNG-IUS (n=25) because:

- × Location is too intimate
- × Insertion will be painful or dangerous
- × Fear it will disappear in their bodies and cause health problems or fall out altogether



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

 Perceptions of method placement

Those that are used to using the IUCD will not be scared because the IUCD is also inserted through the vagina ... the only thing that will make them scared is am I sure of this, it is new and ... so I will want to know more before using.



Some people are scared of the fact that it must be inserted by a trained provider, how to identify a trained provider becomes an issue...so that they don't perforate their cervix.



They will need to know that their uterus will not be damaged because most girls feel if something is being inserted into their uterus through their vagina while they are conscious, harm will be done to them and it will be painful so they need to know more on the process to eradicate that fear from them.

-AGYW FGD PARTICIPANTS

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.





Potential user groups



They will really embrace it as they will have some comfort if not for anything but let the pains be off and again the reduced flow will allow her to engage in lot of activity rather than remaining in one spot.



They give birth at quick interval, you may find a girl of 17 years with 4 children, this LNG IUS will be beneficial to them to regain lost strength and nutrient to be healthier, reduce the rate of child mortality because every now and then a child is lost due to improper care.

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:

- Some participants (n=11) felt that accessing the LNG-IUS would be easy for girls and providers would give the method to girls without any problem. Mobilizers were mentioned as key players for girls to access contraception.
- However, others (n=16) thought girls may face some barriers to accessing the LNG-IUS because:
 - Individual providers' attitudes vary and affect how easy or hard it is for girls to access contraception; some may ask girls if parents/husband have given permission
 - Girls may feel shy trying to access contraceptives

Access to family planning in general:

- Nearly equal numbers of participants felt that it was easy or hard for girls to access contraception in general.
- Key barriers to accessing contraception in general included **difficulty getting to a facility**, needing husbands' **permission**, fear that **privacy** will not be maintained, a lack of **knowledge** about family planning options, and being **shy** with providers.



Access to the LNG-IUS



It will be easy if the providers are friendly with the girls...there needs to be a cordial relationship between the girls and the providers. The providers shouldn't be sabotaging her interests.



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...Creating Change, Enhancing Lives

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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.