



# ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

ISSUE Tackling the Issue of Period Poverty and Stigma

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## Introduction

Period poverty refers to the social, economic, political, and cultural barriers to menstrual products, education, and sanitation. It affects an estimated 500 million people worldwide. Even though the number of sufferers is enormous, countless more steps need to be made to remedy this problem.

Period poverty can affect people in a variety of ways. One of these is the feeling of shame imposed on people who menstruate because of the stigma surrounding these monthly cycles. The other most common way people are affected by this issue is the sheer lack of sanitary products due to poverty in less developed countries or regions or in families of a lower socioeconomic status. Because of this some children might not be able to go to school or fulfil other responsibilities during their cycle. In some cases, this is paired with a culture that finds menstruation shameful or “dirty.”

In addition to the negative repercussions on their education, this problem affects the emotional well-being of adolescents. The social stigma and the resulting lack of discussion on the subject causes many to feel isolation and rejection, which makes it difficult for them to understand and accept their menstrual cycle as a natural bodily process. This negative effect is further worsened by the lack of education on the subject.

It is important to note at this point that the Issue Description as well as other sources may often refer to women when addressing the topic of menstruation as they are the largest group affected by the phenomenon. This, however, does not mean that it is only women who menstruate.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Feminine Hygiene/Menstrual Products:** tangible personal property designed for feminine hygiene in connection with the human menstrual cycle, some common examples are tampons, sanitary napkins or “panty liners”

**Social Stigma:** disapproval of, or discrimination against, a person based on perceivable social characteristics

**Period Poverty:** Inadequate access to hygiene products and education for women and persons who menstruate

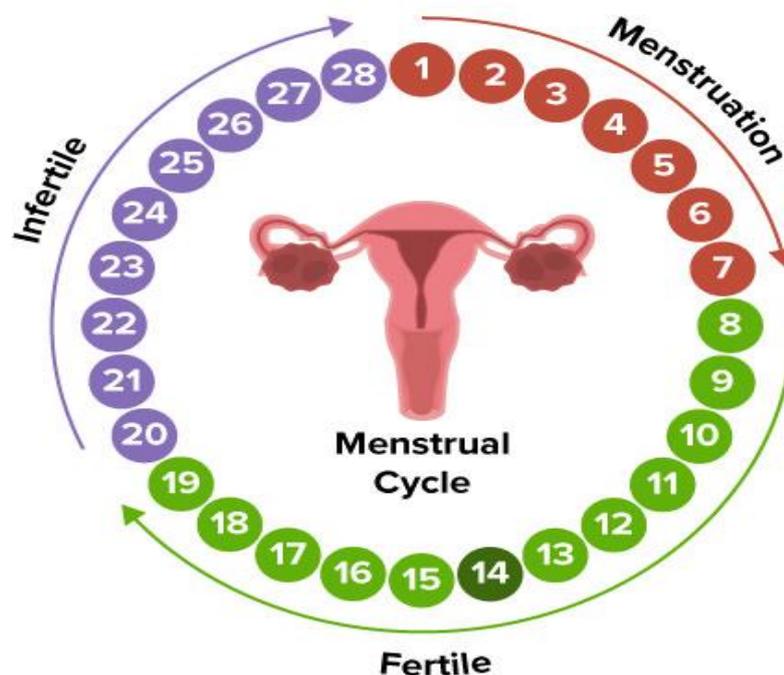
## General Overview

Although period poverty is a global issue, people living in low-income countries are disproportionately affected by it. Overwhelmingly, economic hardship is a major reason for high rates of period poverty. On average, people who menstruate use over 9,000 sanitary products in their life, and for someone already living in poverty, that many products can be an enormous financial burden.

As a result of period poverty, people who do not have access to or cannot afford menstrual hygiene products are often forced to use unhygienic materials such as dirty rags, which can lead to serious health risks such as infections or even infertility. There are also cases of people who undergo sexually exploitative measures in order to have access to these products. Additionally, for menstruating children, not having access to these products often leads to them missing weeks of school or dropping out of school altogether. Without the proper products to contain the bleeding these people simply cannot leave their homes for days in fear of bleeding through clothes - and this fear of embarrassment is worsened with intense social stigma and the spread of misinformation about menstruation. As a result of both stigma and lack of access to hygiene products, in India, nearly 40% of students miss school during menstruation, and 1 in 5 drop out of school after their first menstrual cycle begins. In addition, there have been studies that show higher rates of anxiety and depression in those who experience period poverty. As a study states, 68% of the women who experienced period poverty every month showed symptoms of

moderate to severe depression, compared to 43% in the population who had not experienced period poverty.

Research on menstrual health is still scarce. Moreover, most research has been conducted in low-income countries, neglecting its need in high-income regions. Menstrual health is associated with the access of people who menstruate for accurate information on menstruation, menstrual products, and clean and safe washing facilities. Menstrual health also needs to be understood as a tool for health promotion, as it is linked to experiences related to the menstrual cycle, a naturally occurring phenomenon.

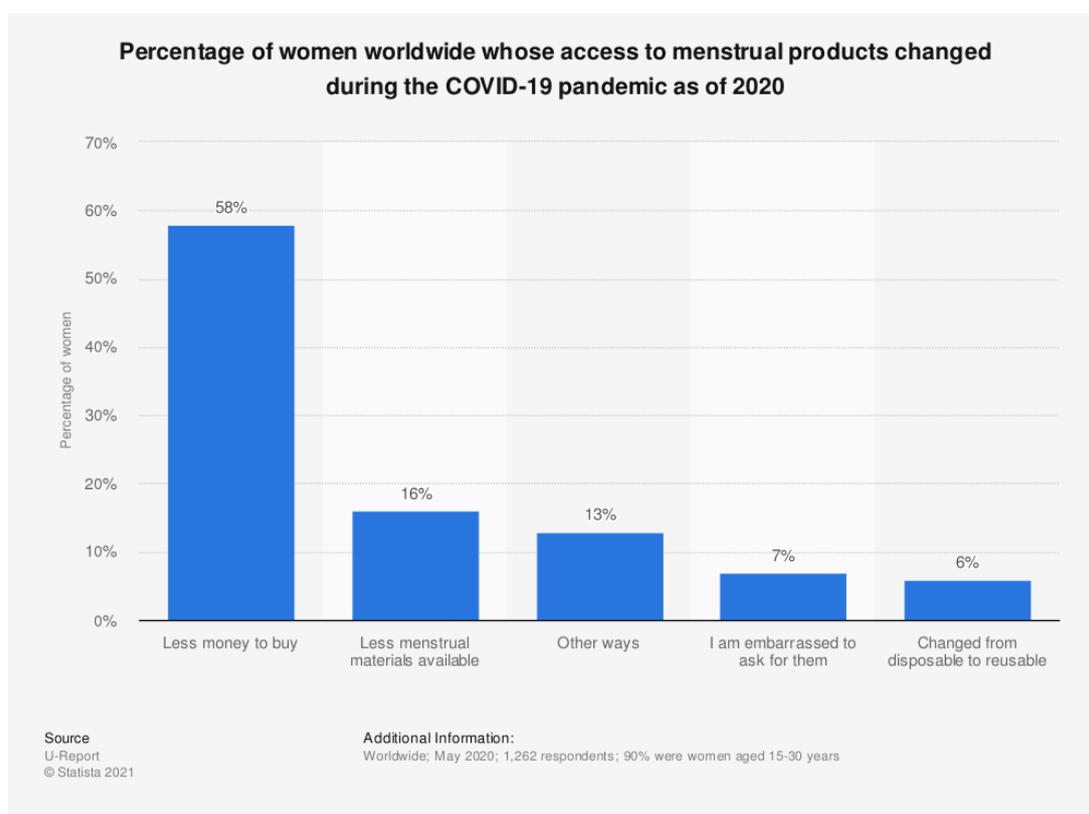


## The Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle is not a health condition to be medicalised. However, Sadly, in many cases that is exactly how it seems to be conceived within society and healthcare systems. Contrary to this it would be important that the menstrual cycle is understood as a natural process that is associated with good health. This makes educating society and professionals a priority to promote health among young people who menstruate. Developing education and a more positive conceptualisation of the menstrual cycle and menstruation could help teenagers be more aware of their bodies.

The Pandemic has also had a negative effect on period poverty, meaning that purchasing and consumption of menstrual products had decreased.

Of women worldwide surveyed in 2020, over half said they had less money to buy menstrual products due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to another study conducted online, a total of 14.2% experienced period poverty at least once during the year, which is defined as not having access to the menstrual products needed for financial reason. This statistic illustrates the percentage of women worldwide who's access to menstrual products changed during the COVID-19 pandemic as of 2020.



*A Graph showcasing a study collected during the pandemic in 2020*

## Major parties involved

**Lebanon:** Sanitary products used to be imported in great numbers, but because of Lebanon currency's fall, they became expensive.

**United States:** Period poverty is an existing issue for many people who menstruate in the United States of America, but there are initiatives aimed at supplying such people with sanitary products.

**India:** Women are prohibited from taking part in several activities while menstruating, such as religious practices, entering baths or kitchens. According to a study 71% of adolescent girls are not educated about periods before they experience their own first monthly flow. In addition to that, they also must hide their sanitary pads from men and children.

**Kenya:** Women are in some cases forced to conduct illegal activities to acquire menstrual products. This may include exploiting their sexuality and getting abused by other people.

**Scotland:** Scotland was the first country to develop a hygiene product program, where sanitary and other necessary products became available for free to students.

**UK:** Legislation ensures that hygiene products are available for free to students in need.

## Timeline of Events

**2014** - The Government of West Africa created the Joint Programme which focused on studies and stories of those in need of help against period poverty

**2017** - Kenya passed the law that requires provision of free menstrual pads for teenage girls between the age of 12-18.

**2018** - Scotland and England passed legislation by which menstrual products became free for students.

**2019** - Australia removed the tax on tampons for residents officially.

## Previous Attempts to solve the issue

As seen above in the timeline, several attempts have already been made to remedy the situations. Most of these focused on providing hygiene products for young women so that they would not have to purchase them for themselves. This approach can be highly effective, though we must note that there still exist countless countries with lower incomes where such initiatives sadly are not the priority of the government. The other thing to note is that simply giving these products to those in need will not in itself reduce

the stigma. For that to happen adequate education and raising awareness of this basic function of the human body will be necessary. This is especially difficult to those in places where the culture deems menstruation shameful or dirty.

## Possible Solutions and Approaches

Action on the level of governments: People who menstruate need the support of their governments to provide adequate infrastructure and access to affordable menstrual products.

Developing education on the subject: Due to the social attitudes surrounding periods in many countries or cultures many people simply do not have the proper education on the subject. It is important for schools to include the menstrual cycle in their curricula for all genders and to discuss this subject freely, thus lessening stigma.

The private sector: Businesses can provide information and access to facilities and products, contribute to destigmatizing menstruation, and integrate menstruation management into their policies.

Further research: More research could be conducted on one hand about the effects of period poverty, but even more so on different hygiene products that are more affordable for a wider group of people as well as more environmentally friendly.

Legislation: Protective legislation can ensure affordable access to proper facilities and menstrual hygiene products. Governments can also reduce or completely omit taxes on menstrual products, making them more affordable.

### Useful documents/websites:

A study about “Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States:”

<https://bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5>

Global Perspective on Period Poverty:

<https://wiisglobal.org/period-poverty-a-global-crisis/>

<https://policylab.chop.edu/blog/period-poverty-public-health-crisis-we-dont-talk-about>

<https://theowp.org/reports/period-poverty-and-stigmatization/>

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/period-poverty-everything-you-need-to-know/>

Period Poverty in the United Kingdom:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/aug/25/lets-make-period-poverty-history-girls-miss-school-sanitary-products>

Socio-Economic Studies on Period Poverty:

[https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14348/536\\_Period\\_Poverty\\_Impact\\_on\\_the\\_Economic\\_Empowerment\\_of\\_Women.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14348/536_Period_Poverty_Impact_on_the_Economic_Empowerment_of_Women.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y)

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/10/7/e035914.full.pdf>

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41885-020-00070-3>

Statistics on Period Poverty:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1243493/period-poverty-worldwide-covid/>