

Period Poverty

LEVEL 1

Education

Toilets

Community

Period Poverty

*I REMEMBER FRIENDS
HAVING TO SKIP
SCHOOL BECAUSE
THERE WEREN'T
ENOUGH TOILETS! - S.*

What is period poverty?

Period poverty is the lack of access to menstrual products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, hand washing facilities, and waste management. It is a global sanitation issue affecting people around the world. Menstrual products are essential, but unlike toilet paper and sometimes condoms, they are not free in public areas, leaving many to go without pads or tampons, or to use toilet paper, rags, socks, or nothing at all. Not having access to a safe and hygienic way to deal with menstruation can have profound consequences, particularly on education, mental health, and dignity!

Another problem intertwined with period poverty is the taboo surrounding menstruation - this can be particularly harmful in terms of mental health, and directly affects a child's potential to succeed. Studies conclude that the knowledge of effective treatments for period pain is low, people with period pain experience reduced classroom performance, and a lower level of class attendance.

Period poverty also denies children some of their rights, for example their right to education (article 28 in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child-CRC) as some children are forced to skip school due to lack of access to menstrual hygiene. Find the UN CRC website online to view all 41 articles and think about how period poverty can affect your rights.

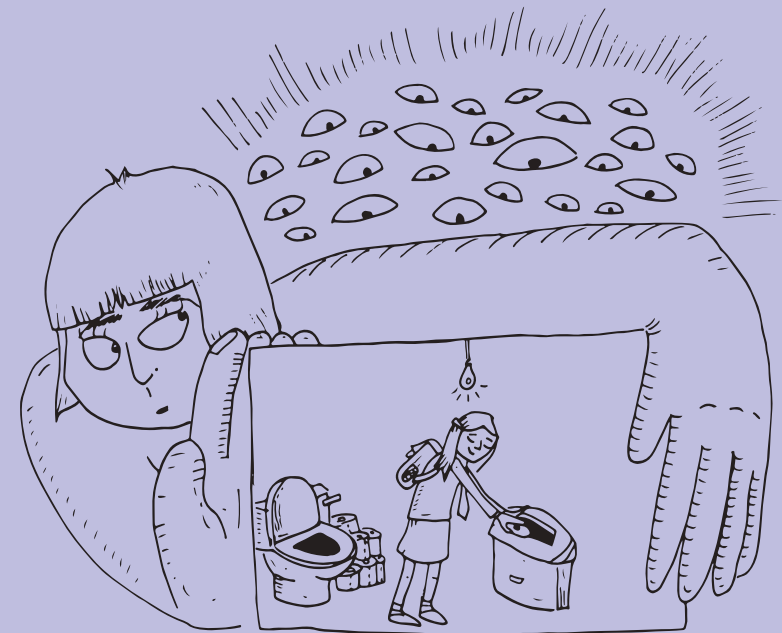
If a pupil misses school every time they have their period, they are set 145 days behind their fellow students.

IF YOU KNOW ANYONE MISSING SCHOOL, IT WOULD BE NICE TO SHARE YOUR NOTEBOOK AND HELP THEM CATCH-UP. IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT. - A.

Building Safe, Separate Toilets at School

Without a safe, private toilet at school, people can't feel secure and comfortable going to the toilet. This is a problem throughout people's school lives, but it is especially problematic when they are on their period.

Due to the lack of sanitary facilities at school, some people flush their used pads and menstrual cloths down the toilets or leave the soiled pads in the toilet corners. This causes many problems including blocked sewage and dirty toilets. Some schools provide incinerators or "feminine hygiene bins" for disposing menstrual waste materials, but many people refrain from using them due to shyness or fear of being seen by others. Also many are reported absent from school due to the lack of a proper disposal system, water tap and supply, bucket, and lockable doors.



Period Poverty Cycle



LACK OF REPRODUCTIVE EDUCATION

In the UK, 1 in 7 girls didn't know what was happening when they got their first period.




LACK OF HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

79% of girls and women in Pakistan do not use menstrual products to manage their menstruation.



PREGNANT AT YOUNGER AGE

In Bangladesh, 33% of girls aged 15-19 years are pregnant with their first child.



MISS SCHOOL DURING THEIR PERIODS

1 in 5 American girls have missed school each month due to their period.



GREATER RISK OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Niger has the highest overall rate of child marriage in the world, with 77% of girls married before their 15th birthday.



DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

In India, 23 million girls are forced to drop out of schools every year, once they begin menstruating.



Period poverty

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Tackling Period Poverty



How can we help fight this issue?

An average person is affected by menstruation for 3,000 days in their lifetime. That works out to more than eight years! The basics that can make a period bearable is having a private place to manage it, knowing there are people to talk to who understand what you are going through, and having clean materials to use. Sadly, this is not a reality for many people living with period poverty.

Despite an emerging body of evidence and an increased commitment to gender equality, the global response has been slow. One reason is this issue falls through the cracks between programmes such as health, education, gender, water, sanitation, and hygiene. Across the world, it is men who are in most positions of power and policy making, and they do not deem menstruation an important enough aspect of life to give it the attention it needs.

Poor menstrual hygiene can cause physical health risks and has been linked to reproductive and urinary tract infections. It also stops people from reaching their full potential when they miss out on opportunities crucial to their growth. The impact of people missing out on secondary education is huge. The loss of education can mean they are more likely to be forced into child marriage, experience an early pregnancy, pregnancy complications, social separation and neglect, and domestic violence. If everyone had a secondary education, child deaths would be cut in half, saving three million lives.

*MY MOM'S FRIEND HAD TO DROP
OUT OF SCHOOL WHEN SHE WAS
15 BECAUSE SHE WAS SICK OF
LEAKING THROUGH HER RAGS. - M.*

How to Help

As individuals:

- Hygienically manage your own menstruation to maintain your health and that of others - including washing, drying and safely disposing sanitary materials.
- Support and educate each other, especially young teenagers, about menstrual hygiene practices.
- Address barriers to water and sanitation for the hygienic management of menstruation.
- Challenge negative attitudes and ideas.

As a community:

- Break the silence, confront dangerous myths/tabooes/practices, and challenge negative perceptions.
- Ensure access to water and sanitation facilities.
- Involve women and girls in policy and decision-making.
- Encourage all households and schools to have private and secure toilets and facilities for the safe disposal of sanitary products.
- Ensure everyone in vulnerable situations can manage menstruation hygienically with privacy and dignity.
- Encourage local businesses that make sanitary products, or ensure shop keepers sell affordable and accessible alternatives.
- Encourage and promote the use of reusable period products to reduce the health and environmental impact of disposable products.

Men, Boys, and Menstrual Hygiene

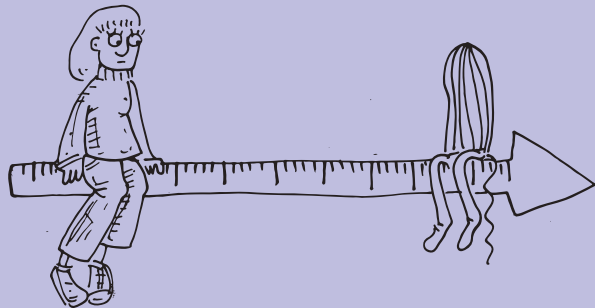
Reasons to get men and boys involved in menstrual hygiene.

Men and boys typically know even less about menstruation, but it is important for them to understand menstrual hygiene so they can support their wives, daughters, mothers, students, employees, and friends.

- To provide support at home or school when a person faces their first period and has an embarrassing or difficult experience.
- Challenge taboos/social norms/stigma and influence the attitudes of others (both male and female).
- Ensure that the school or work environment makes it easy for everyone to manage menstruation with dignity.
- Support programmes for improving the menstrual hygiene context for everyone.

It is important for boys and men to respect the experience of menstruation. Educating boys (from adolescence) on the challenges people with periods face could help reduce teasing and help them become more understanding and supportive.

To find out more about different activists around the world, go to the Let's Stand Up chapter



IT MAY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE TO TALK ABOUT, BUT PERIOD POVERTY IS NOT A WOMEN'S ONLY ISSUE! -S.

Helping Someone Who Needs It

An empathy building exercise



A friend has recently been missing a lot of school. At first they tell you it's nothing but one day you notice that they started their period during school. Then they packed up their things ready to leave and goes home.

They explain to you that their unable to manage their period while at school and the only option is to stay at home during this time.

Write to your friend. What would you say to comfort them? How would you find ways of helping them?

Dear friend,

Period poverty

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DEAR BIG SISTERS,

I had my first period when I was in high school. I already knew what I was gonna face because all my female cousins already had their first period. The only thing they never spoke about were the signs, pains, cravings and mood swings. Clearly we were not all informed about that. I had and still have the worst flow. All the time I have had heavy flow and I have to double up my pads, meaning I'll have to wear a pad and a tampon at the same time.

I stopped wearing a tampon because I was advised that my period pains were caused by clogs and that is why I am always worst when I am wearing one. After my mother passed away, I had to ask for pads at school and that meant I could only have proper sanitary towels when the schools are opened. During the school holidays I had to improvise. That put down my self esteem because after my high-school, I had to find ways to be able to buy pads. And I was so ashamed to ask someone because they didn't know that they have to buy double of everything. It took me a year to find a job and actually get myself some sanitary towels.

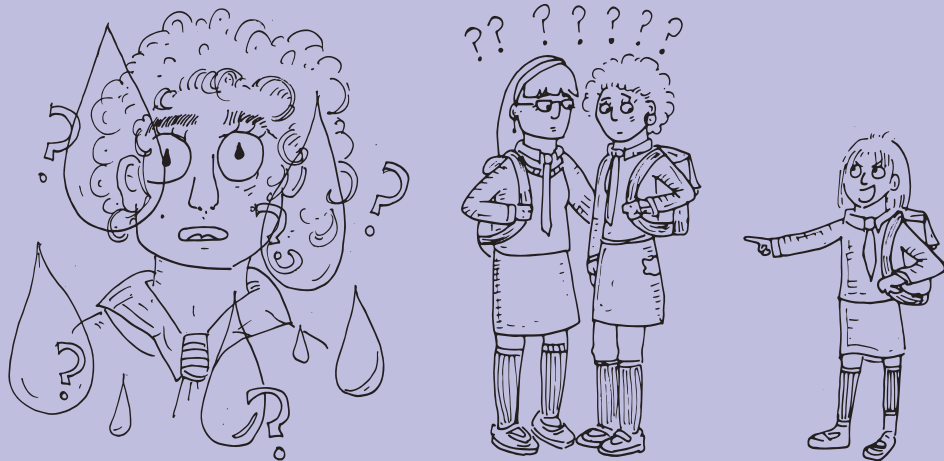
SUBMISSION BY ANONYMOUS, SOUTH AFRICA

Period poverty

DEAR BIG SISTERS,

I got my first periods at the age of 14 years. I had heard about menstruation from my big sister who talked to me about periods, but I did not take it seriously since I could not understand anything. I was lucky that I was at home when I got my first periods. When my mother saw me, she called and explained to me in detail what was happening to me, and she gave me a pad. I was not green about a pad because our senior woman at school had never talked about pads and demonstrated how to use them. I was very lucky that I never got to be laughed at like some girls. This was also because my friends had gotten periods before me and were also handy to offer me extra advice.

**SUBMISSION BY
NANCY KAYEN, UGANDA
HAD TO LEAVE SCHOOL**

**DEAR BIG SISTERS,**

The first time I had my period I was 13 and I didn't know anything about it. I felt ashamed thinking I would go to my school the day after and I finally found the information I was looking for on the internet or by myself, growing. The taboo is still there even with science teachers. We should open the mind and the dialogue.

**SUBMISSION BY
ELSA, 22, FRANCE**

DEAR BIG SISTERS,

I got stomach ache and later saw blood but I did not know where the blood was coming from. Since I was at school students came around me looking and laughing at me so I ran home and told mom who told me that all women go through what I was going through and she told me how to take care of myself. Mom had no money to buy pads but they were also scarce at that time so I started using clothes and whenever periods came I had to miss school because of heavy flow and pains and I was scared of being laughed at. This also happened to my friends at school and some dropped out of school.

**SUBMISSION BY
JULIA, 20, UGANDA - HAD TO LEAVE SCHOOL**