



# "Period poverty: How access to feminine hygiene products affects the psychosocial development of young women"?

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## INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is an ongoing biological process that affects women and adolescent girls in low- and middle-income societies. Menstruating women, on average, use over 9,000 sanitary items throughout their lifetime, which adds up rapidly. Adolescent girls also, struggle to manage their menstrual cycles and lack access to the products they need. Despite how essential menstrual products are there are vast number of adolescent girls who are unable to afford or lack access to these necessities. This lack of access to period products is often referred to as, 'period poverty' can result in delayed psychosocial growth in schoolgirls. Lack of access to products amongst schoolgirls can limit a girl's potential and opportunities later in life. 1 in 5 girls in the United States reported having missed school because they did not have access to menstrual products. Without proper menstrual hygiene management (MHM), a girl's attendance at school is reported to decline or cease altogether. Providing adequate resources to meet women's and girls' menstrual hygiene needs may have an impact on female school attendance rates and expanding women's education is critical in advancing female equality.

## BACKGROUND

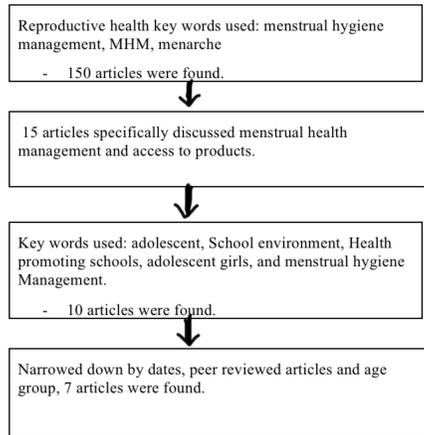
Every woman goes through a menstrual cycle which also can be defined as a hormonal process that a woman goes through every 28 days or so depending on the woman's body. Throughout the menstrual cycle progesterone and estrogen change which is what causes period symptoms. A menstrual cycle is a normal sign that shows the body is functioning normally especially when a girl hits puberty and menopause. Many girls have little understanding of what happens in their body when they begin menstruation, and they have minimal awareness of the body's natural biological processes. Lack of information not only causes stigmas, but it can also harm a girl's physical well-being, in addition to the negative psychological implications.

Childhood into early adolescence is a crucial stage characterized by the onset of puberty and rapid physical and psychosocial changes. As a girl's puberty progress, she goes through thelarche (breast budding), accelerated growth and menarche which symbolizes the beginning of the reproductive stage. Despite menarche being a biological process, a vast number of girls are unprepared to manage their cycles. The menstrual health of many women is compromised when they live in areas of extreme poverty or where a natural disaster occurred.



Students at a school in India protest to bring awareness to period poverty.

## METHODS



## RESULTS

### Theme 1: Poor access to products

Poor access to menstrual products hinders adolescent girls from attending school. Many students reported that menstrual products were not affordable and were expensive to buy. Alternatively, a girl is forced to use a cloth or any material they could find since absorbent materials were not available. In addition, schools are very limited on availability of menstrual products which puts some students at risk. Most students end up leaving before the school day ends due to lack of products and inability to menstruate comfortably at school. "However, there exist a number of reasons why a learner may miss school while menstruating, including physical symptoms, shame, secrecy and fear of leakage, access to products and/or ability to manage menstruation at school"(Crankshaw 2). Families can be especially vulnerable to period poverty if they're already dealing with financial constraints and struggling to cover monthly household expenses. Period poverty is even worse for families who have to cover the costs of multiple people in the household who menstruate. This struggle has been exacerbated during the pandemic since many families have experienced a decline in their income and increased economic challenges.

### Theme 2: School environment does not provide for the needs of young women

The school environment does not provide for the needs of adolescent girls. Menstrual hygiene needs include facilities that are clean, well-functioning, have private toilets, a method of disposal for used products, and a supply of water and soap. Many schools have limited supplies of toilet paper or soap available. Bathrooms do not have door locks that offer privacy to the girls. "Female participants used two primary disposal methods for used sanitary products: soiled sanitary products were either thrown away in the bin provided (67.5%) or stored them in their bags to be disposed at their homes (41.4%)"(Crankshaw 9). It is evident that insufficient sanitation and water disposal facilities prompted students to keep their soiled pads in their bag to dispose of later. "Many of the school facilities had leaking toilets or basins, some had muddy water over the floor; in addition, there were used sanitary pads, tissues, chip packets and sweet wrappers on the floor"(Crankshaw 10). The lack of cleanliness and poor conditions of school environments affects adolescent girls focusing and participating in class.

### Theme 3: Inadequate education on menstrual Health in schools

A shortage of menstrual health teaching in schools. Education is one of the most prevalent sectors influenced by period poverty. A lack of knowledge about MHM was a source of anxiety among girls and this can lead to inadequate menstrual hygiene management. Educators played a key role in normalizing the experience for some students, some of whom chose to approach an educator rather than a parent. "Information shared by female relatives tended to focus on appropriate behavioral conduct and to "stay away from boys" rather than on developmental or biological processes"(Crankshaw 11). Around the world menstruation is deeply stigmatized countless times. Many individuals are unaware of how period shame is draining and can affect women and young girls mentally. It causes that individual to lose their dignity and control, causing them to feel guilty over a natural biological process that every woman goes through.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review show that many school aged girls have poor access to menstrual products yet these schools do not provide the proper resources to support these girls. There is a lack of education to help prepare these girls to manage their periods independently in the school setting. Menstrual products are expensive which is challenging for many families and schools do not have the resources to provide these products to students when they're family cannot. The educational system does not assist the girls learning needs and the need to manage their periods with dignity. Experiencing increased loneliness, is harming to girls' psychosocial development given the critical role of relationships with peers during childhood and adolescent. The shortage of safe, separate and private sanitation and washing facilities is one of the leading factors preventing girls from attending schools. Ultimately, a girl's education is an investment in her future and with the proper support and products she can effectively manage her cycles.



## CONCLUSIONS

Inadequate menstrual hygiene is a problem that many women face. It affects women and adolescent girls in the developed and developing world and those living in poverty are especially vulnerable. Inadequate menstruation hygiene has been shown to be linked to school absenteeism. There is an unmet need for affordable products, and teaching that targets both the knowledge and management of menstruation. Adolescent girls must have access to their menstrual health products and materials as well as a private, clean and safe place to use them. In schools, there is a significant need for menstrual hygiene products, as well as regular use of school resources to get them. With additional research to help inform how period poverty impacts adolescent girls and young women, there is tremendous opportunity to help address this critical, yet under-addressed issue.

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