STUDENT PERIOD POVERTY PRIMER

A guide to understanding period poverty and the disproportionate impacts on marginalized groups.





Free The Period is a student-led campaign and coalition fighting to end period poverty, or the systemic lack of access to menstrual healthcare, by securing access to menstrual products in all California K-12, college, and university institutions.

Join our movement and find more menstrual advocacy resources at freetheperiodca.org. *Let's #FreeThePeriod!*



Table of Contents

Student Period Poverty: A Primer	2
Impact of Period Poverty	3
Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Groups	5
Key Terms	7

Student Period Poverty: A Primer



These issues of period poverty occur when students lack access to menstrual products or other menstrual health necessities, such as bathroom facilities, pain relievers, menstrual product receptacles for safe disposal, and medically accurate, comprehensive menstrual health information that often isn't covered in schools.

Just like toilet paper and soap, these resources are needed for menstruators to fully participate in the public sphere. Instead, our society taxes menstrual products as a non-essential good, stigmatizes conversations around periods, and places an unfair burden on menstruators to carry products with them at all times.

IN THE FACE OF THESE INEQUALITIES, STUDENTS ARE RALLYING TO

FREE THE PERIOD.

The Impact of Period Poverty



EXCLUSIONARY CAMPUS CLIMATE

Lack of free menstrual products on campus sends the message that menstruators' health and academic participation does not matter. One student sums up the gross disparities:

"To those who claim that menstrual products in on-campus bathrooms will simply not be feasible, I ask, why is it feasible to provide free condoms and chapstick in every residence hall? Free water bottles with built-in filters in every dorm room?" ¹⁰

- ¹ <u>State of the Period</u>, white paper authored by PERIOD and Thinx, survey conducted by Harris Analytics
- ² State of the Period.
- ³ Smith, A. "<u>The State of Period Poverty in the US</u>." University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing.
- ⁴ "<u>Women Forced to Choose Between Food and Menstrual Products</u>." DePaul's Center For Journalism Integrity and Excellence.
- ⁵ Seibert, V. "<u>Nearly half of women have experienced period</u> <u>shaming</u>," New York Post.
- ⁶ State of the Period.
- 7 ibid.

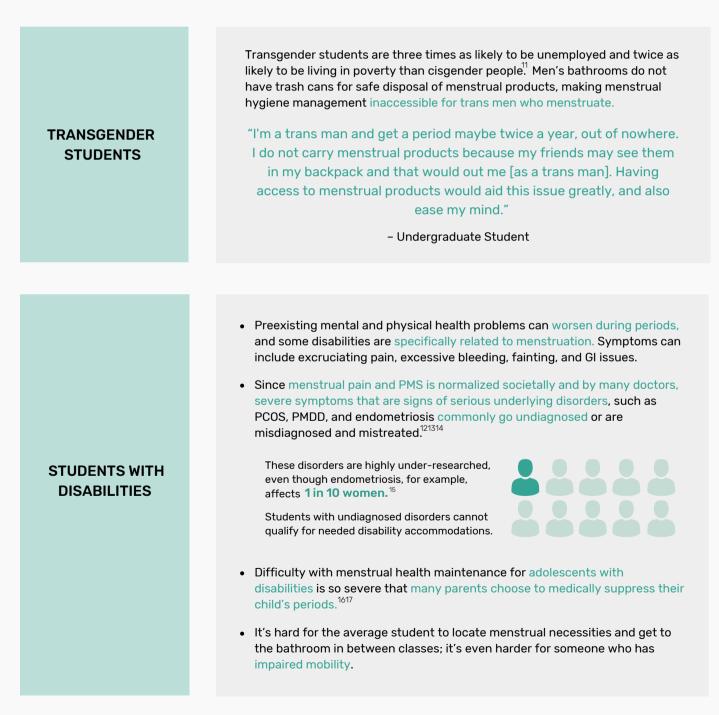
- ⁸ Kaur, R., Kaur, K., & Kaur, R. <u>Menstrual Hygiene, Management, and</u> <u>Waste Disposal: Practices and Challenges Faced by Girls/Women</u> <u>of Developing Countries</u>. Journal of Environmental and Public Health.
- ⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "<u>Causes of</u> <u>pregnancy-related death in the United States: 2011-2016</u>."
- ¹⁰ Lau, C. "<u>Campuses should provide free menstrual products</u> <u>to students</u>." The Daily Californian.

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Period poverty is created by barriers to menstrual healthcare access, and those barriers are created by systemic inequities. Thus,

- → Different menstruators experience different barriers to access
- → Menstruators who are part of marginalized groups can face more barriers than others.

Ending period poverty means prioritizing the unique challenges these groups face – we highlight some of them below.



BIPOC **STUDENTS**

(BLACK, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF COLOR)

- A quarter of all Native Americans live in poverty the highest rate of any US racial or ethnic group.¹⁸80% of people living in areas of concentrated urban poverty are Black or Hispanic, though they make up only a third of the population.¹⁹
- Evidence has shown that Black and Hispanic adolescents may experience menarche (their first period) earlier than their peers, which leads to poor health outcomes across the life course, including reproductive cancer in adulthood.20
- Many religions and ethnicities carry taboos that shroud periods in shame and forbid participation in everyday activities, such as leaving the house, praying, or being in the kitchen, during menstruation. Risk of mental illness and lifethreatening physical conditions are consequently increased among these groups.²¹
- Periods can begin as early as 8 years old, a time when kids have little to no access to information about menstrual health maintenance.

"I wrapped a sock around my underwear just to stop the bleeding, because I didn't want to get shouted at. And I wrapped a whole tissue roll around my underwear, just to keep [it] dry until I got home. I once Sellotaped tissue to my underwear. I didn't know what else to do. I kept this secret until I was 14 years old and then I finally started asking for help."

• Students are barred from caring for their periods during the school day. In addition to punishments that teachers enforce for using the bathroom during class, a student in CA who misses more than 30 minutes of academic instruction over 3 times in a school year is labelled truant and can be subject to weekend classes, monetary fines, and community service hours.

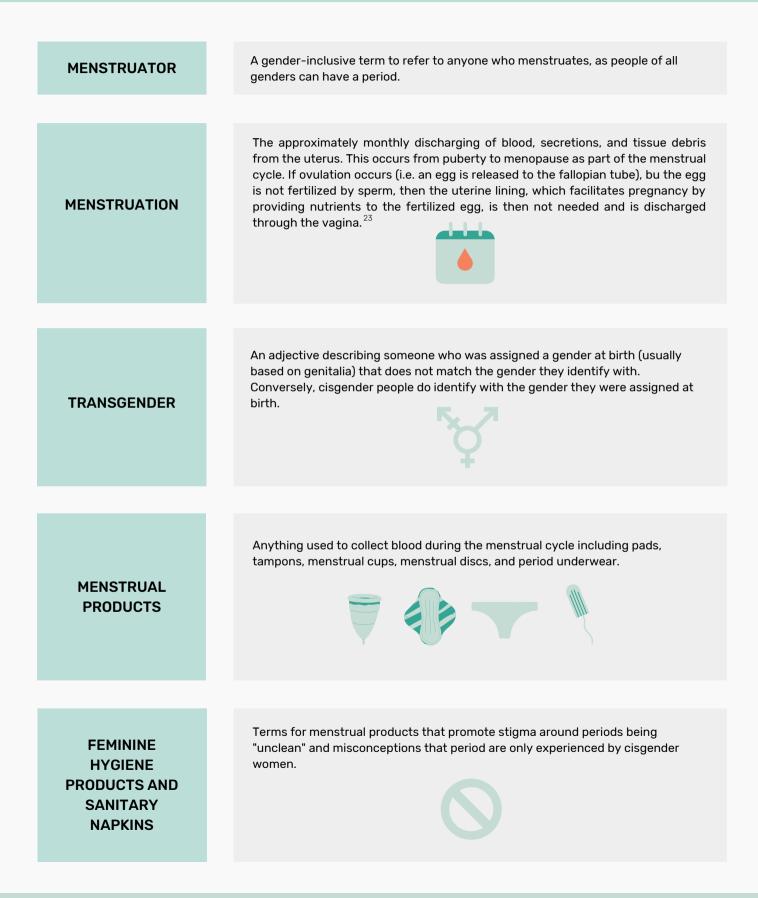
"When I went on my period I started taking time off school, because I didn't know what was going on with my body. That made my attendance really low and I was getting in trouble. I thought it was only happening to me...so I was scared and I wanted to stay at home."

of teens say that schools teach them more about frog anatomy 5 64% them to be ashamed of than female anatomy

say that society teaches their periods

STUDENTS GRADES K-12

KEY TERMS



References

- ¹¹ Hunter, L., McGovern, A. & Sutherland, C. eds., <u>Intersecting Injustice:</u> <u>Addressing LGBTQ Poverty and Economic Justice for All: A National</u> <u>Call to Action</u>. Social justice Sexuality Project, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2018
- ¹² Dusenbery, M. "<u>Endometriosis IS Going Undiagnosed Due to the</u> <u>Normalization of Menstrual Pain</u>." Teen Vogue.
- ¹³ Mostafavi, B. "<u>Experts: Research Gap Stalls Improvements in</u> <u>Endometriosis Care</u>." University of Michigan Health Lab.
- ¹⁴ Duke Health News. "<u>Bleeding Disorders in Women Going</u> <u>Undiagnosed: New Guidelines to Help</u>"
- ¹⁵ Endometriosis Fund of America. "<u>What is Endometriosis</u>?"
- ¹⁶ Committee on Adolescent Health Care. <u>Menstrual Manipulation for</u> <u>Adolescents With Physical and Developmental Disabilities</u>. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.
- ¹⁷ Health Professionals Committed to the Reproductive Needs of Children and Adolescents. "<u>Menstrual Suppression for Girls with</u> <u>Special Needs</u>."

- ¹⁸ Muhammad, D, Tec, R., & Ramirez, K. "<u>Racial Wealth Snapshot:</u> <u>American Indians/Native Americans</u>." National Community Reinvestment Coalition.
- ¹⁹ Meade, E. <u>Overview Of Community Characteristics In Areas With</u> <u>Concentrated Poverty</u>. US Dept of Health and Human Services.
- ²⁰Deardorff, J., Adams, B., Ukwaru, P., & Rehkopf D. <u>Socioeconomic status and age at menarche: An examination of multiple indicators in an ethically diverse cohort</u>. Annals of Epidemiology.
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- ²²State of the Period.
- ²³ Planned Parenthood. "<u>Menstruation</u>."