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A. Introduction

What is period poverty?

Period poverty isn't just about money.

It's a 'toxic trio' of issues preventing girls and women from managing their periods as they need to.

Cost of Menstrual Products



Women struggle to cover the recurring monthly cost of their periods. They may go without products or unsafely improvise with tissues or other material. This compromises not only physical health but also dignity.

Lack of Access to Menstrual Products and Facilities



Even with the financial means, some may still face challenges in obtaining safe, hygienic products and accessing clean, private spaces to manage their menstruation. These barriers can disrupt daily routines and reduce productivity, underscoring the systemic nature of period poverty.

Lack of Education about Periods



Young people aren't being taught how menstruation works. If you don't understand your body or what a healthy period looks like, you can't ask for medical help when you need it. Without right knowledge, women may fail to recognise abnormal symptoms, delay seeking medical attention, and miss opportunities for early diagnosis—posing long-term risks to their health.

What is period shaming?



The shame, stigma and taboo about periods

Girls and women are made to feel there's something wrong with their bodies when they have their period. They may withdraw from activities and be denied the chance to enjoy life to the full.

Why do we need this survey?

This issue affects not only women in developing countries, but also those in developed economies. It is important for the public to gain a deeper understanding of period poverty and its potential societal impact. In Hong Kong, there is a pressing need to address the research gap on this topic. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights to shape the development of services aimed at combating period poverty in the local context.

This executive summary outlines the study's findings and provides recommendations for eliminating period poverty.

B. Study Objectives

Plan International Hong Kong (“Plan HK”) commissioned the School of Social Sciences, Saint Francis University, to collaboratively conduct a Situation Analysis Study on Period Poverty in Hong Kong. The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the current situation of period poverty and related challenges in Hong Kong.
2. To examine how girls/ women perceive the situation of period poverty and their awareness of this issue.
3. To understand the experiences of underprivileged girls/ women in Hong Kong regarding period poverty and period shaming.
4. To provide evidence-based suggestions to alleviate period poverty, enhance sex education, health status of underprivileged girls/ women.

C. Methodology

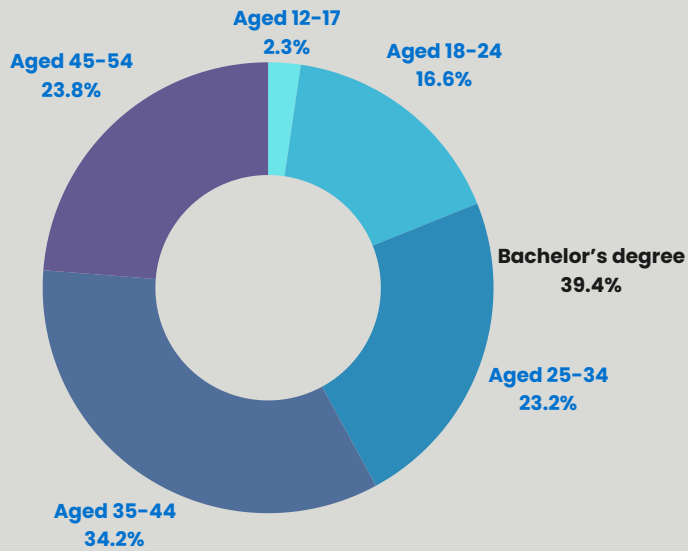
This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine period poverty in Hong Kong.

Quantitative Research: Random sampling was conducted using a telephone database, and a total of 1,000 respondents (women who had menstruation and were currently living in Hong Kong) successfully completed the telephone survey between June and August 2025.

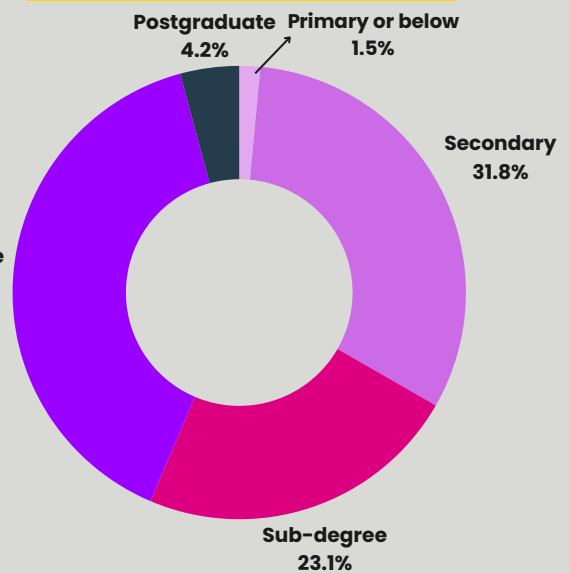
Qualitative Research: To complement the survey findings, 7 focus group interviews were conducted between August and September 2025. These interviews involved ethnic minority women, women and girls living in subdivided flats, female recipients of food bank and girls residing in residential settings.

D. Demography Profile

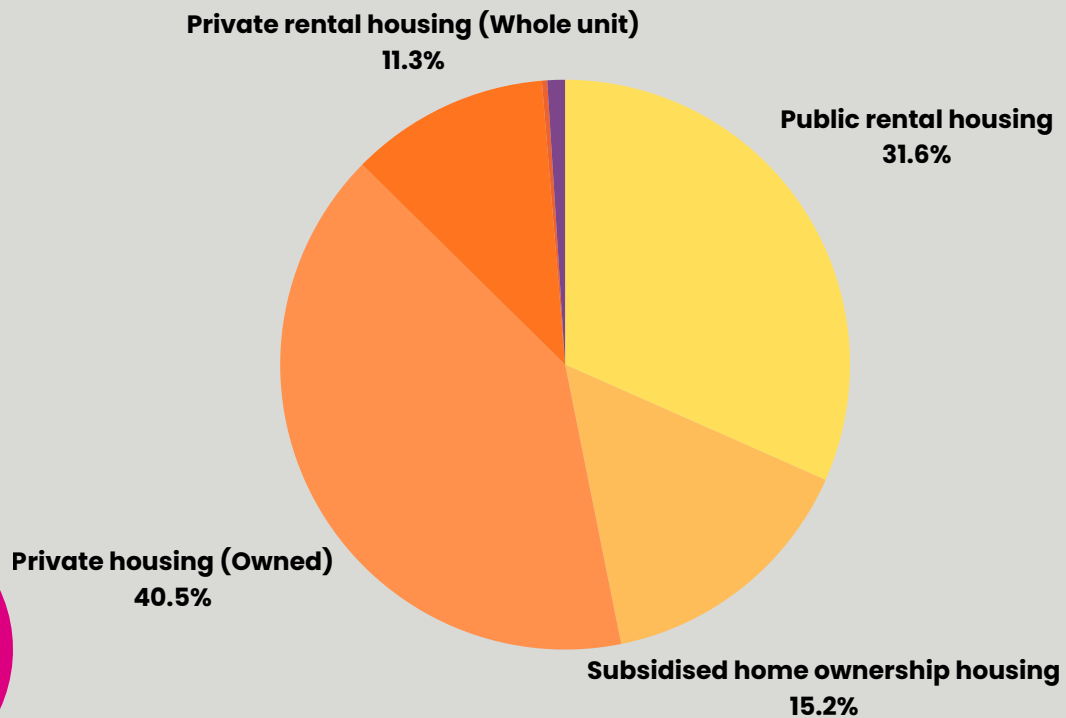
D1. Age of Interviewees



D2. Educational Attainment



D3. Housing Type Distribution



E. Key Findings

The respondents reported these 4 main problems in handling menstruation:

1. Financial Burden

- **1 in 10 respondents** experienced difficulties in purchasing/ accessing menstrual products due to financial constraints. Extrapolated to the broader population, around **236,289 women** aged 12–54 are facing period poverty in Hong Kong.
- **Over 27% women** and **nearly 1 in 3 girls or young women** have experienced some form of period poverty in Hong Kong.

2. Lack of Access to menstrual facilities

- **60.5%** of all respondents reported that menstrual products are never available/ don't know the availability at the places they frequently visit.
- **Only 4.5% respondents** reported there are always menstrual products provided in school/ workplace/ public places.

3. Poor Menstrual Health Management

- **95.8%** women reported experiencing menstrual pain or discomfort.
- **93.3% of respondents** have never sought medical consultation for managing menstrual pain or discomfort.
- **Over 1 in 6 women** reported experiencing infections or gynaecological health issues related to menstruation; where **17.3%** of the above respondents had never sought medical treatment for their gynaecological health issues.

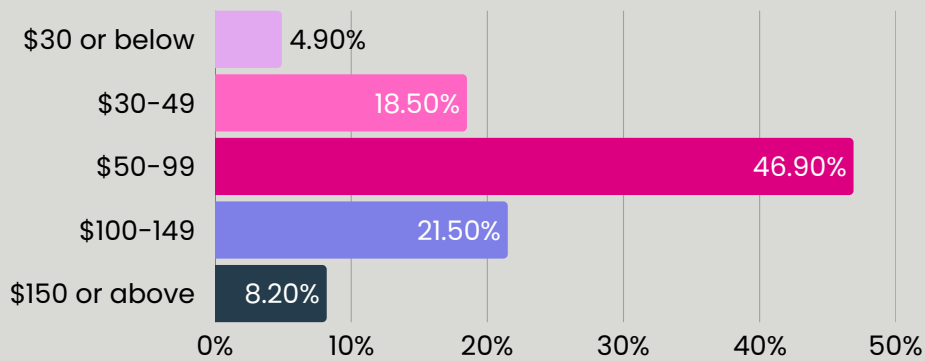
4. Period Shaming

- **Nearly 2/3** respondents had either experienced or witnessed negative comments or jokes about menstruation and premenstrual syndrome (PMS) within their social circles.
- **Nearly 1 in 4 women** strongly agreed or agreed that they felt embarrassed or ashamed about menstruation.
- **Nearly half of the respondents (49.6%)** agreed that they found menstruation troublesome and would rather not be a woman. Among respondents aged 12–24, **57.2%** expressed the same perception.

F. Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

1. Financial Burden and Pattern in the Use of Menstrual Products

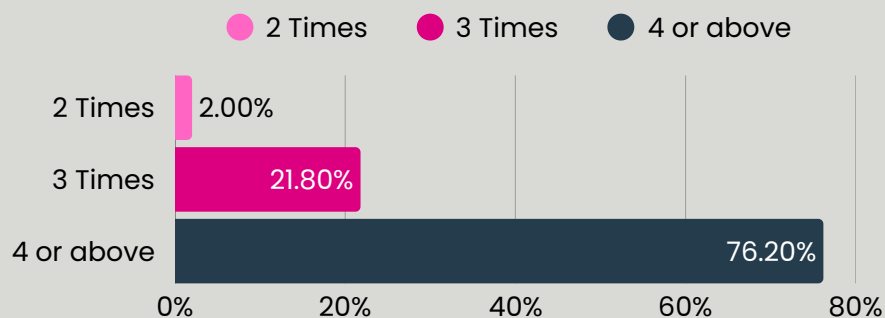
1.1 Monthly spending on menstrual products



It is important to note that approximately 5% of respondents reported spending \$30 or less, **which might raise concern about their usage pattern or the quality of the products they can afford.**

"If it's about periods, pads are really expensive...if you look in stores, the cheapest are still in the \$20s. But the more expensive ones are in the \$30- \$40. So... I found myself afraid to use that many (pads)." (R2-Y)

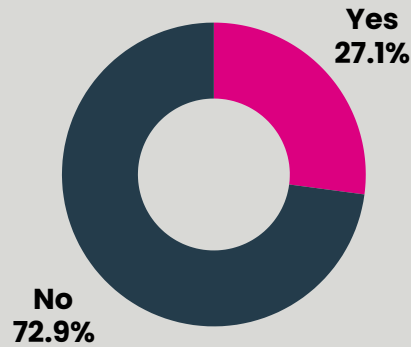
1.2 Frequency of changing menstrual products



it is worth to note that nearly a quarter of all respondents reported changing their menstrual products not more than 3 times/day, while nearly 30% of those aged 12 to 24 followed the same pattern. Insights from focus groups revealed that financial constraints were a contributing factor influencing this behaviour.

1.3 Reduced usage of menstrual products due to financial constraints

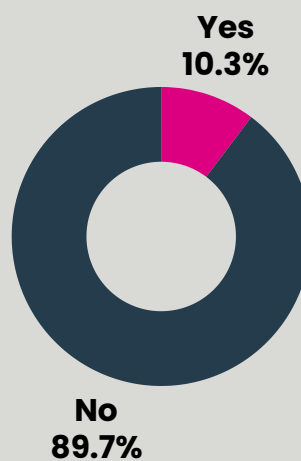
Have you ever had to use menstrual products sparingly due to **financial constraints**?



Over one quarter of women and nearly 1 in 3 girls or young women have experienced some form of period poverty in Hong Kong. They may need to reduce menstrual product usage due to their financial constraints.

1.4 Experienced difficulties in purchasing/ accessing menstrual products due to financial constraints

Have you ever had difficulties in purchasing/ accessing menstrual products due to **Financial Constraints**?



If extrapolated to the broader population, this could represent **236,289 of women aged 12-54 facing menstrual poverty in Hong Kong.**

Some girls expressed feeling financially burdened by the cost of menstrual products, especially for those with longer periods or heavier menstrual flow.

“(Period pads) are so expensive, ...it's really a struggle to afford them. Think about people with heavy flows— yes, I really need to use lots and lots and lots.” (R1–B)

“Only rich people can afford to have period.” (R2–L)

“I only have \$400 a week including transport and meals...and, my school is located in Tung Chung. So buying pads is actually a bit of a struggle. (R2–Y)

“Living is already expensive, and having to pay for pads on my own on top of all is just another burden... Sometimes I find myself wishing —what if only rich girls got their periods, and poor girls didn't have to? (R2–M)

“I buy (sanitary pads) from Taobao... really cheap.”(R2–L)

“When my family buys (pads) they say it's such a waste of money... We have lots of girls in the house, it really costs a lot. (R1–B)

Some interviewees shared that they occasionally adopted alternative strategies to reduce the frequency of changing the products, such as increasing the number of toilet visits.

I use tissue as a layer on top of the pad. At least (period blood) won't leak as much so I don't have to change (the pad) so often. (R2-E)

No, I just go to toilet more, push it out, so... I keep going to the toilet to let the blood out. (R2-M)

I'm used to going to the toilet. I don't rely on pads- whenever I feel like (blood flow) comes, I go to the toilet. (MW-F)

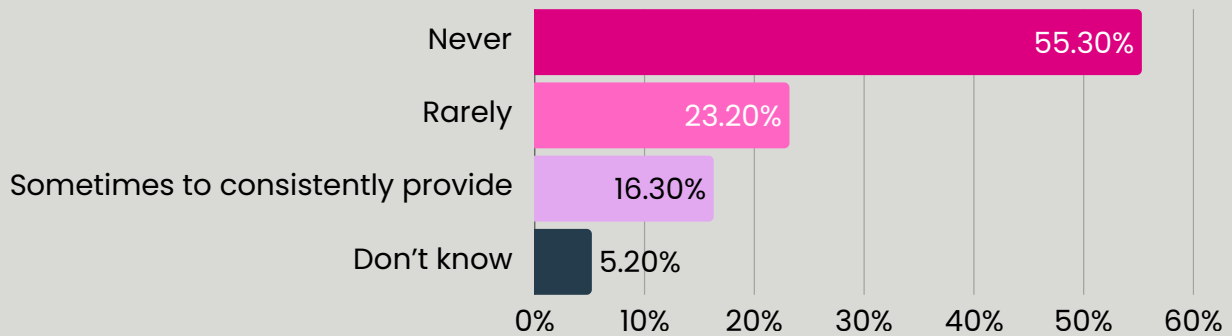
At first, my mum told me to use day pads for daytime, not night ones, because they're expensive. I leaked a lot using day pads, I need to change once or twice every hour, and the blood keeps leaking. It just didn't work out, so I had to hide and use night pads from my mum. (R1-B)

I once tried to save money by using just one pad for the entire day without changing it... making sure to use it until it was completely worn out. (PW-C)

2. Access to Menstrual Products and Facilities

2.1 Availability of menstrual products at the places you frequently visit

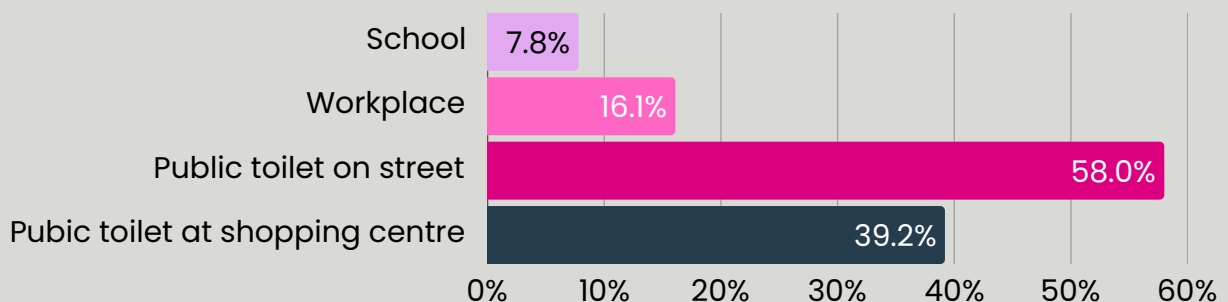
Are menstrual products readily available at **school, work, or public spaces** when you need them?



The widespread unavailability of menstrual products in schools, workplaces, and public venues is a matter of serious concern. This reflected **another dimension of period poverty, which highlighted the lack of accessible menstrual support in their lived environment.**

2.2 Access to clean and private facilities for managing menstrual hygiene at various locations

I have experienced difficulties in accessing clean and private facilities for managing menstrual hygiene in the following locations:



This data highlights significant barriers to menstrual hygiene management across various public and institutional settings.

Some interviewees shared different barriers they encountered in public places during menstruation.

On my first day (of my period), the flow was quite heavy... because the school doesn't provide pads... I actually sneaked out just to buy pads, I skipped school to get pads. (R1-B)

The school office does sell pads... \$5 per pad. We even have to pay to borrow uniforms... It's expensive, ~\$50, and you have to return them the next day washed and cleaned. (R1-M)

Think about this, your period suddenly starts, and you don't have tissues. You got a lot of blood stains to handle... but without tissues you just can't. If you haven't brought any with you there's nothing you can do. (R2-L)

The school toilets are filthy... they're always dirty, I don't know why there are urine or blood stains on the toilet seat. (R1-B)

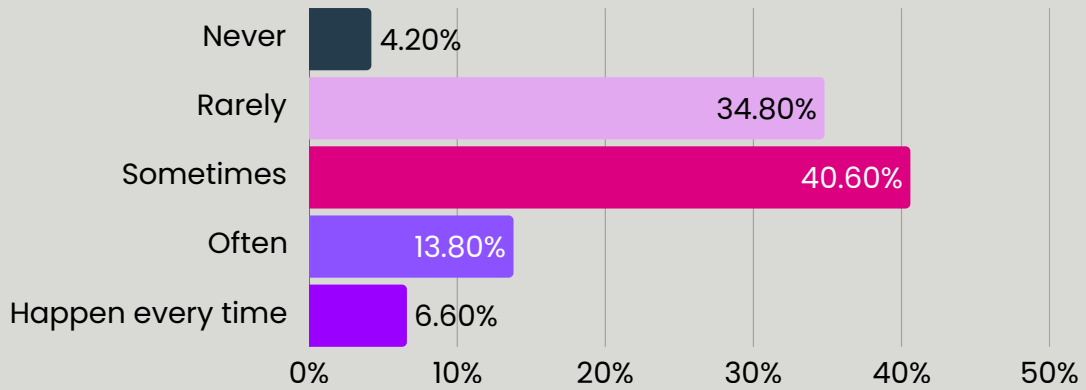
The toilet stalls are ridiculously small... if you're a bit bigger in size, you literally can't get in. (MW-A)

I want the toilet doors to go straight up to the ceiling, not have holes in the middle... there's a gap up there and a gap down here, sometimes the lower gap... and people outside can see in. (A: Some people secretly film from below.)(R1-B & A)

3. Menstrual Health and Management

3.1 Experienced pain or discomfort during menstruation

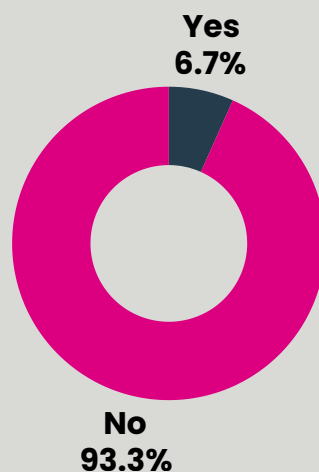
How often do you experience pain or discomfort during menstruation?



A majority of respondents (95.8%) reported experiencing menstrual pain or discomfort at least occasionally. The findings underscored the importance of menstrual pain management as both a public health and educational concern. **They also reinforced the need for accessible menstrual health resources**, including pain relief options, supportive environments, and education on menstrual wellness.

3.2 Strategies in managing menstrual pain or discomfort: Sought medical consultation

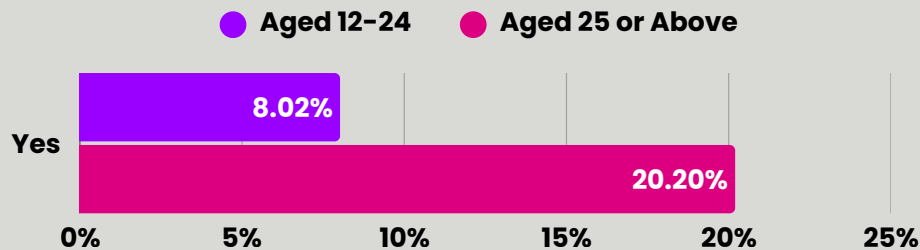
Have you ever sought medical consultation to manage menstrual pain or discomfort?



The findings revealed that **seeking medical consultation for menstrual pain or discomfort was relatively uncommon, despite the high prevalence of pain reported in 3.1 findings.**

3.3 Experienced infection or gynaecological health issues related to menstruation

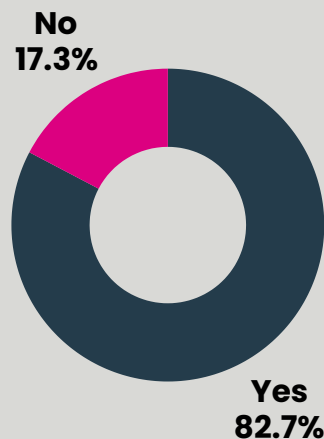
Have you ever experienced infection or gynaecological health issues related to menstruation?



17.9% of all respondents (over 1 in 6 women) reported experiencing infections or gynaecological health issues related to menstruation, with a notably higher prevalence among the aged 25 or above group (20.2%) compared to those aged 12-24 (8.02%). The results suggested that gynaecological health issues become more prevalent with age. **The absence of reported cases among adolescents might not necessarily indicate better health. It could reflect a lack of diagnosis, awareness, or access to healthcare.**

3.4 Sought medical treatment for the above menstrual health issues

Have you ever sought medical treatment for the above menstrual health issues?



17.3% (over 1 in 6 women) of respondents answered “yes” in 3.3 had never sought medical treatment for their menstrual-related gynaecological health issues. This suggests that barriers still exist for a significant number of women in accessing appropriate medical care.

Women across different age groups disclosed menstrual-related health issues and highlighted barriers that prevented them from seeking medical help.

I have a very heavy flow, lasting at least five days, and I usually avoid going out during the first two. It was so excessive that my family even asked if I had a miscarriage. Once, under stress, my period lasted for an entire month. (MW-E)

The pain is so intense that I have to curl up tightly, this form makes me feel some relief. (MW-J)

Almost every time I have my period, I experience pain. Once, the pain was so severe that I fainted on the street— everything went black. After resting for a while, I managed to leave on my own. (R2-W)

I blacked out for quite a while, and when I got to the bathroom, I realised I had my period... this had happened more than once. I didn't (visit a doctor) because my family tells me to avoid visiting a doctor as much as I can, it's expensive. (R2-L)

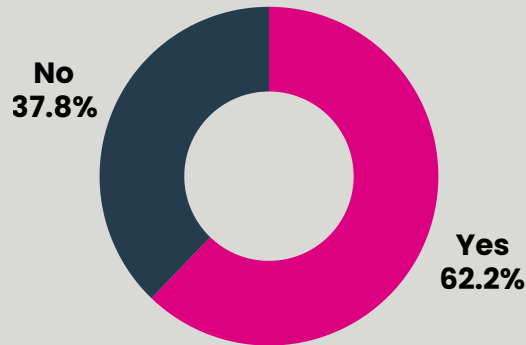
Visiting a doctor is very troublesome. Even a general outpatient appointment has a long waiting time, and in most cases, they only prescribe some medicine without referring you to a specialist. For specialists, the waiting time can take up to several years. Thinking about all these obstacles, I just chose to ignore my (menstrual-related) condition. (MW-D)

For our family, visiting a doctor is a financial burden. I don't know if it is serious or not, and I don't know how to explain clearly to the doctor. Doctors might just not take the symptoms seriously, often prescribe medicine based only on the symptoms, but how do I know if the medication is appropriate? Repeated consultations also mean ongoing expenses, which creates a dilemma. (MW-B)

4. Impacts of Menstruation

4.1 Negative comments or jokes about menstruation and PMS

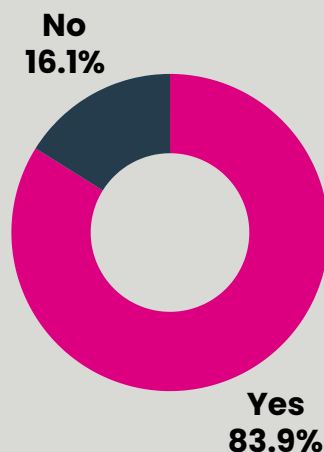
Have you ever experienced or witnessed negative comments or jokes about menstruation and PMS?



The findings indicated that **62.2% (nearly two-thirds)** of respondents had either **experienced or witnessed negative comments or jokes about menstruation and premenstrual syndrome (PMS)** within their social circles. **This high prevalence of menstrual stigma reflects a persistent culture of period shaming, which is a key social driver of period poverty.** When menstruation is treated as a taboo or a subject of ridicule, it discourages open discussion, limits access to accurate information, and reinforces feelings of shame and embarrassment.

4.2 Impact on emotion during menstruation

I have felt distress and depressive during menstruation.

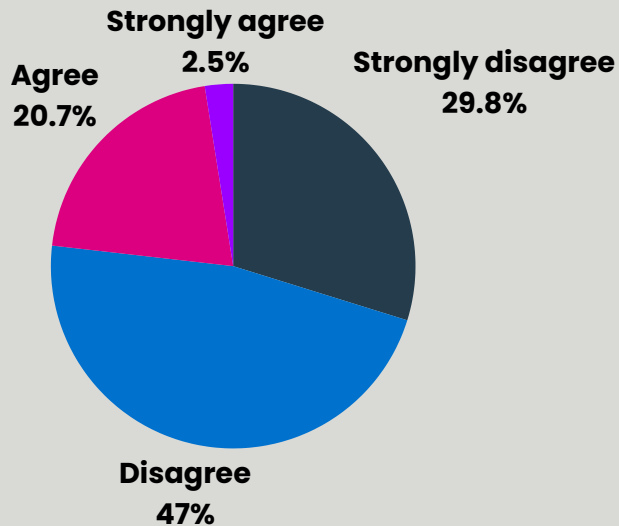


A striking 83.9% of respondents reported feeling distressed or depressive symptoms during menstruation. These findings highlighted the profound emotional and psychological burden that menstruation could impose. The emotional impact of menstruation, as shown in this data, **underscores the need to address period poverty not only as a matter of physical health and hygiene but also as a critical component of mental well-being and gender equity.**

5. Menstrual Stigmas and Education

5.1 Embarrassment or shame about menstruation

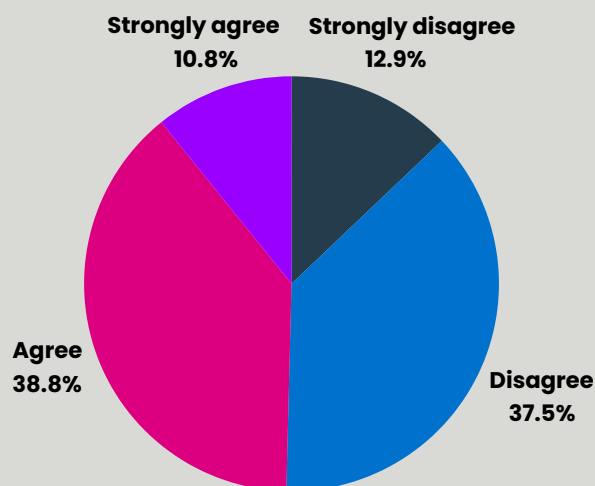
I feel embarrassed or ashamed about menstruation.



23.2% of respondents (nearly 1 in 4 women) strongly agreed or agreed that they felt embarrassed or ashamed about menstruation. Among respondents aged 12-24, **28.9%** agreed or strongly agreed to the statement.

5.2 Self-perception about menstruation

I find menstruation troublesome and would rather not be a woman.



A significant proportion (nearly half) of respondents (49.6% in total), either agreed (38.8%) or strongly agreed (10.8%) with the statement "I find menstruation troublesome and would rather not be a woman." Among respondents aged 12-24, **57.2%** expressed the same perception.

This sentiment reflects a troubling internalisation of period shaming, where menstruation is not only viewed as an inconvenience but also as a source of gender-based dissatisfaction.

Many women in the focus groups reported having personally experienced period shaming, noting that the forms of such experiences have shifted over time and with changes in technology.

(D): The biggest fear is embarrassment, leakage – if it happens, you have to cover it with a jacket.

(G) : People laugh at you.

(D): The boys laugh at you. (MW–D & G)

When there is period blood leakage that will be laughed at by classmates. People gossiped about it every day, and then there were anonymous posts on Instagram – not naming people directly, but pointing out class and describing features. (R1– A)

It's gotten so ridiculous. People used to just shame you face-to-face, but now they've taken it online... They'll make a whole post about it... and get everyone to pass it around. The entire point is to make sure she sees it. And then, the moment she has, they take it down." (R1–B)

Menstruation disrupts your hormones, so your thoughts and feelings are different from usual. Especially when you hear comments, it makes you feel even worse. People may not understand the pain or emotional struggles women go through during their period, so they don't show empathy.

They say we're overly irritable during our period, or unreasonable – even calling us 'crazy.' Using menstruation in this way feels discriminatory. (MW–B)

Interviewees shared their personal feelings, experiences of the emotional and psychological impacts of menstruation.

” Attending school can be exhausting and often leads to emotional instability that others may not understand. After calming down, I feel so strange... these emotions are uncontrollable. (R2-L) ”

” During menstruation, the pain and mood swings can affect how I do things. When I feel low, it's hard to stay engaged or focused. (MW-B) ”

” I really hate it (menstruation). It's like, 'Oh no, period is here again.' I don't want it, but there's nothing I can do. (MW-E) ”

” When it comes to menstruation, my feeling is: I would rather be a man in the next life. (R2-W) ”

G. Recommendations

- 1. Include menstrual product expenses in poverty alleviation schemes such as CSSA to support low-income women/ girls.**
- 2. Install menstrual product dispensers in schools, public toilets, and youth-dense areas, e.g., MTR stations, malls, school or training institutes.**
- 3. Enhance public awareness of menstrual health services provided by the newly established "Women Wellness Satellites" through targeted promotion. Conduct regular user data analysis to monitor women's menstrual health in Hong Kong and guide future strategies and educational initiatives.**
- 4. Integrate menstrual health education into health, biology, or sex education curricula at primary and secondary levels, encompassing topics such as menstrual stigma, pain management, wellbeing, and period poverty alongside biological content.**
- 5. Include the psychological effects of menstruation within existing emotional support frameworks to ensure appropriate recognition and response to related emotional and psychological challenges.**

Interviewees' recommendations for eliminating period poverty and menstrual stigma/discrimination:

Could the government subsidise the cost of menstrual pads for women? (R2—M)

I've seen a (vending) machine outside the (restroom) where you can pay and get a pad. But it seems like we don't have that in Hong Kong... It's for emergencies—like if your period suddenly starts (you can buy a pad). (MW—E)

I didn't even know what it was when I had my first period...I was P.4 back then, and I cried and thought I was very sick. I think men should understand that menstruation isn't something strange. Every girl experiences it, and it's not a bad thing or something dirty. (R1—B)

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