Period Poverty Awareness

An estimated 16.9 million menstruating individuals in the United States do not have adequate access to menstrual health products, due to the inability to afford personal hygiene products.

Every month, people who menstruate find themselves in need of pads, tampons, menstrual cups, period underwear, and other menstrual hygiene products. However, many individuals annot afford to purchase these necessary products, due to the cost .

In a 2021 study, 2 in 5 people reported having difficulty purchasing period products, a 35% increase from a similar survey conducted just three years earlier, according to the Alliance for Period Supplies. The study findings also indicated that period poverty disproportionately impacts Black and Latina people. Other findings include:

A quarter of Black (23%) and Latina (24%) people with periods acknowledged an inability to buy period products in the past year.

More than 38% of low-income individuals reported missing work, school or life events due to lack of access to period products.

Nearly 7 in 10 (68%) people agree period poverty is a public health issue, and published studies indicate that individuals in low-income areas reported missing school or work due to a lack of period products.

Period poverty as “inadequate access to menstrual products and proper bathing facilities, as well as a lack of education surrounding periods, menstruation, and proper hygiene.” While menstruation is highly stigmatized in some cultures, menstrual health and a proper understanding of this biological process are crucial to the well-being of our population. Given that many individuals cannot afford disposable products or have access to reusable products, they are often compelled to use less sanitary alternatives, increasing their risk for vaginal bacterial infections. Period poverty may adversely impact working women and teens in school or equivalent trades with findings from published studies indicating that more than one-third of menstruating individuals skipped at least one day of school or work due to a lack of period products.

AMWA
American Medical Women's Association

Period Poverty

Period poverty has increased, at least in part, due to the higher cost of living. In 2021, the price of menstrual pads rose by 8.3% and the price of tampons increased by nearly 10%. The added costs from inflation have made obtaining these products harder for many individuals who must then seek alternatives to capture their menstrual flow.

Combatting Period Poverty

There is a movement to provide free period products in local municipalities and school districts. For instance, effective in the the 2024-2025 school year, New Jersey school districts are required by law to provide free menstrual products in every all-gender and female restroom, from grades 6 through 12. There is a provision that if there is a demonstrable need for period products for students below 6th grade, an addendum to the bill will be added, lowering the minimum grade requirement.

Similarly, period poverty has also been found to adversely impact transgender menstruators, homeless women and teens, imprisoned individuals, and nonbinary individuals the most. For instance, 68% of transgender menstruators reported feeling uncomfortable using a men's bathroom while menstruating, and an overwhelming 66% of these individuals stated feeling unsafe in these situations. To combat this, all-gender bathrooms have been established with period product dispensers available and the term, feminine has been dropped from menstrual products.

Solutions

A growing number of period product brands have donated personal hygiene products to areas in need in an effort to help bridge the gap for those below the poverty line and equalize access to affordable and clean menstrual hygiene products**.**

There is a call to action challenging the taxation of menstrual hygiene products under what is known as the "Plnk Tax." This cost gap has been reported as high as $10,500 more in one year spent by menstruating consumers, contributing to greater inequities faced by individuals living in underresourced communities. Advocating for state legislatures to abolish this burdensome tax would lower the cost of menstrual products.

AMWA
American Medical Women's Association

Period Poverty

References

Alvarez, A. Period Poverty. American Medical Women's Association.

Initiative, T. B. Period poverty - Alliance for Period Supplies.

Krumperman, K. Period poverty in the United States. Ballard Brief.

Rydstrom, K. Degendering menstruation: Making trans menstruators matter. The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies.

UNFPA. Menstruation and human rights - Fequently asked questions. United Nations Population Fund.

United States Congress, The pink tax: How gender-based pricing hurts women's buying power.

Supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Pfizer.

AMWA
American Medical Women's Association