

Let's talk about ... Period Poverty

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So what is period poverty?

Period poverty, defined as **a lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, waste management, and education**, affects many women globally causing physical, mental, and emotional challenges. The stigma that shrouds periods further prevents individuals from talking about it.



NO WOMAN OR GIRL SHOULD
BE HELD BACK BECAUSE OF
HER PERIOD



Menstrual dignity and equity

Access to menstrual products is a right, and feeling clean, confident, and capable during one's period is a necessity. We can all work toward menstrual equity, and the opportunities are boundless.



A few facts and figures

- Plan International found that at least 10% of girls unable to afford period products
- It is estimated up to 49% of girls have missed a day of school due to a lack of menstrual products
- 27% of UK girls have reported using a period product for longer than its intended use because they couldn't afford a fresh one
- 1 in 5 girls reported having been a victim of bullying/teasing because of their periods
- In lieu of menstrual products, some have resorted to using socks, cardboard, rags and toilet paper
- 40% of girls have admitted using toilet paper in lieu of tampons/pads
- Over the course of a year, 137,700 children in the UK miss school because of period poverty
- Charities revealed a 'worrying rise' in period poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic

How the movement began

- Campaign to abolish Tampon Tax designed to break down barriers around menstrual health and evoke conversations about issues previously considered taboo/stigmatised
- Tracey Gee from BBC Radio Leeds contacted me to advise that she had met schoolgirls in Leeds who admitted missing school due to not being able to afford period products
- First Parliamentary debate on period poverty in 2017
- Engagement with charity sector
- Menstrual Health Coalition established
- 28 May 2022 – Menstrual Hygiene Day
- December 2016 – Boots agreed to trial in store donation point to allow customers to donate period products

An amazing, indefatigable charity sector

- Freedom 4 Girls – based in Leeds. Provision of period products and creation of washable, reusable pads
- Red Box Project – encouraging donations through red boxes found throughout communities, shops, libraries, youth centres etc.
- Bloody Good Period – period supplies for vulnerable migrants and those who can't afford them
- Binti – access to products, UK and abroad.
- Free Periods – supplying period products to girls in low income households
- Action Aid – supplying products UK and abroad
- Hey Girls – social enterprise. For every unit bought, they donate another to those in need

A work in progress

- In March 2019, Government announced that from 20 January 2020, all secondary schools and FE colleges in England would be funded to provide period products. Question marks remain as to whether the amount of funding given is adequate
- Further announcement in April 2020 that women in Police custody would have access to free period products
- Statutory Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) – agreement that secondary school students would be taught inclusive menstrual health education, including period poverty (from September 2020)
- In 2020, Scotland passed significant legislation to become the first country in the World to introduce free, universal access to period products
- Thankfully, a general acceptance that period poverty DOES exist

What next...

- Awareness raising with seldom heard or rarely reached out to communities including BAME, GRT, vulnerable migrants, homeless
- Collaboration with food banks
- More employers to become 'period friendly workplaces' and provide staff with menstrual products
- Investment in reusable products e.g. washable pads, period knickers, moon cups etc
- Campaign for free period products for all low-income families (some local authorities are autonomously)
- Promote knowledge of In Kind Direct – distributor of free period products donated by large manufacturers
- Further work with commercial/corporate partners
 - Use of language is crucial. 'Sanitary' implies unclean
 - Donations to foodbanks/local charities



