

# Period Poverty among Adolescents: A Comparison between Urban and Rural Areas in Sri Lanka

Weerasinghe, S.P.S.P.

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

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## ABSTRACT

This research intends to investigate the period poverty among adolescents in urban and rural settings. In Sri Lanka, menstruation is considered a taboo topic, and therefore, it is not openly discussed in society. Ergo, period poverty is not given sufficient attention by the people in power and the public. Period poverty is “a global issue affecting women and girls who do not have access to safe, hygienic sanitary products, and/or who are unable to manage their periods with dignity, sometimes due to community stigma and sanction. This research followed a mixed method since both qualitative and quantitative methods were used by the researcher. Since the study is on period poverty, which is a sensitive topic for many participants, a mixed-methods approach was developed. Since the unit of analysis is schoolgirls, a method that allowed the researcher to have one-on-one discussions with them was essential. In conclusion, the study identified that both urban and rural schools are affected by period poverty in a similar manner. It is true that the students in the urban school find it more comfortable to purchase period products due to their upbringing and wealthy family background, which is not the case when it comes to the rural school. However, the lack of awareness of sexual and reproductive health, misinformation, social stigma, and lack of sanitary facilities can be identified as similar concerns for both schools. Therefore, the researcher is convinced, through data, that period poverty exists, is felt, and experienced by both rural and urban schools despite their geographical locality. Since only two schools were selected for the study, it is difficult to generalise it to the country. However, it is possible to gain inferences and make predictions that involve the big picture.

## INTRODUCTION

This research intends to investigate the period poverty among adolescents in urban and rural settings. In Sri Lanka, menstruation is considered a taboo topic, and therefore, it is not openly discussed in society. Ergo, period poverty is not given sufficient attention by the people in power and the public. Yet, it is a pressing concern as it is directly linked to a person’s human rights. “Meeting the hygiene needs of all adolescent girls is a fundamental issue of human rights, dignity, and public health,” said Sanjay Wijesekera, former UNICEF Chief of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (Rodriguez, 2019).

Women and children have to go through many difficulties when they menstruate on a monthly basis. Due to the lack of period products, sanitary facilities, and awareness of basic hygiene necessities, they become victims of extreme levels of discrimination. The following are a few anecdotes regarding the period poverty that is experienced by women on the Asian continent.

“In Rajasthan, India, 15-year-old Meena sleeps outside her home, in a space cordoned off by a sari, when she has her periods. She wears the same clothes and uses the same utensils when she menstruates; these are believed to be unclean and cannot be taken into the home, even after her period is over” (United Nations Population Fund, 2022).

“On the last day of her period, Poonam, in India, burns her used pads to prevent animals from feeding on

them, which is considered inauspicious. UNFPA India” (United Nations Population Fund, 2022).

“Zainab, from Yemen, said, “I always used cotton cloths, folded them, and placed them in my underwear. I came from an uneducated family, so I did not know that there were menstrual pads used for this purpose” (United Nations Population Fund, 2022).

When the situation on the Asian and African continents is pathetic, one might wonder about the situation in Sri Lanka. After conducting the literature review, the researcher was convinced that the situation in Sri Lanka is as serious and heartbreaking as in other parts of the world. The following are some of the anecdotes I came across:

“In our home, there are four members who have period every month. One packet is not enough for each, and at least two packets are needed for each month. They cost nearly 1000 rupees, and I cannot afford that much for pads. We used to use pieces of clothes at home and use pads for school when they were schooling” (Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021).

“In this home, there are two families living together. My mother has been abroad for five years, and my father works in Colombo. I am 16 years old, and I don’t have a separate room at home. At least there are no proper doors in any room. When I get my period, it is difficult to change pads comfortably without a proper space. Feel to leave this home and go to a friend’s home” (Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021).

“When a girl gets her first occurrence of blood, we keep her in a locked room and never let her see a man’s face, not even her father or brothers. We keep her inside for at least a week, and we check her horoscope and make an auspicious time for her first bath after puberty. After having a bath, we guide her to follow some rituals according to our belief system, such as bathing with herbal water, breaking a pot, cutting a tree that has milk like jackfruit, breaking a coconut, and many other rituals” (Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021).

“I have three daughters, and I never let them go outside after 5 in the evening when they have periods. We believe evening and nighttime are not good for unmarried girls and women who have their periods because some invisible demons called “Kalu Kumaryana” can come to them and torture them when their bodies are impure” (Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021).

### **What Is Period Poverty?**

Period poverty can be identified as follows: According to ActionAid, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that aims to tackle poverty and injustice worldwide, period poverty is “a global issue affecting women and girls who don’t have access to safe, hygienic sanitary products and/or who are unable to manage their periods with dignity, sometimes due to community stigma and sanction” (The ASEAN Post Team, 2016).

“Georgie Nicholson, of social enterprise “Hey Girls”, told BBC Radio’s Good Morning Scotland that period products should be as accessible as toilet roll in public bathrooms. Nicholson said: “There’s a very simple way to describe period poverty: you go to the supermarket, and you have to actually choose whether you can buy a bag of pasta or a box of tampons. It’s that basic” (Diamond, 2022).

“We hear of a lot of mothers going without their period protection just so they can feed their children and using things such as newspaper stuffed into socks or bread... because they’re cheaper than period products”(Diamond, 2022).

### **Significance of the Study**

The researcher is under the impression that this study is of extreme importance and necessity in modern

society. “Scotland has become the first country in the world to make period products free for all. There is now a legal duty on local authorities to provide free items such as tampons and sanitary pads to “anyone who needs them” (Diamond, 2022). It is important to realise that in the majority of countries, period poverty exists, and menstruation is believed to be the right and luxury of a few. The road toward equality in menstruation is a long one with many obstacles. “As the cost-of-living crisis takes hold, the Period Products Act is a beacon of hope that shows what can be achieved when politicians come together for the good of the people we serve” (Diamond, 2022).

Period poverty is a serious condition that needs immediate attention. “According to the UNICEF findings, period poverty is a widespread problem in Kenya; 46% used disposable pads, and 6% used reusable pads. 7% of women and girls that they surveyed relied on old clothes, pieces of blankets, chicken feathers, mud, and newspapers. Currently, Australia is leading the way in fighting period poverty by officially removing the tampon tax for residents beginning on January 1, 2019. The Menstrual Equity Non-profit Organization noted that 35 US states have a so-called tampon tax, where products are subject to a value-added levy, unlike other necessities” (UNICEF, 2015, as cited in Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021).

While the condition of period poverty is severe in other countries, the situation in Sri Lanka is not very different from it, which reiterates the significance of this research. “A survey found that more than half of Sri Lankan girls had to miss school when they were menstruating, and another study found that 60% of teachers associated menstrual blood with impurity. In a survey of adolescent girls in Sri Lanka, when asked why they missed school while on their periods, 68% to 81% mentioned pain and physical discomfort, and 23% to 40% said that it was due to fear of staining clothes” (UNICEF, 2015, as cited in Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021).

The situation in Sri Lanka is pathetic, as only a handful of women are in a position to afford period products. Others rely on homemade or available alternative methods, such as clothes and newspapers. “In a country with 4.2 million menstruating women, only 30% of them use sanitary napkins (SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneurs Council). This statistic is appalling, and the truth about it is saddening. As a nation where 52% of its population is women, the reality that sanitary napkins are only an option for a handful of 30% is an injustice” (Jayamanne, 2022). As a result of inflation, there is a possibility for period poverty to increase in Sri Lanka. It is no longer an issue for the underprivileged. Even if you have money in hand, certain period products are unavailable in stores due to the economic crisis. This also reiterates the importance of this study, as we need to take a closer look at the repercussions of the period of poverty.

There is also a very apparent research gap in terms of period poverty. The researcher was able to come across a handful of research studies regarding this matter while conducting the literature review. At the same time, there is also an insufficient amount of medical research conducted in this regard. There are certain medical conditions that are related to the so-called safe period products. “Use of highly absorbent tampons has been associated with toxic shock syndrome (TSS), a life-threatening condition, but these cases are rare. Frequently changing tampons greatly lowers the risk of TSS” (United Nations Population Fund, 2022).

### **Research Problem**

In terms of period poverty, are there any variations in the experiences, awareness, and challenges faced by school students in urban and rural settings?

It is my contention that period poverty is no longer an indication or a concern of the poor, as it impacts both the privileged and the underprivileged, irrespective of their social background, geographical location, or education level. I argue that period poverty is a concern and a challenge for all, as it affects everyone regardless of their gender. It is primarily the result of the economic crisis, social stigma, and a general lack of awareness and attention to menstruation.

## Research Questions

The following are the research questions that are raised in this study:

1. What are the reasons for period poverty among school students?
2. What are the discrepancies in period poverty among urban and rural schools?
3. What is the awareness of period poverty and menstrual hygiene among students and the availability of period products, medication, and sanitary facilities in the selected schools?
4. How do economic and social concerns impact period poverty among school students?

## Research Objectives

The aim of the study is to identify whether there are any discrepancies in the experiences, awareness, and challenges faced by school students in urban and rural settings with regard to period poverty.

### Objectives

The general objective of the study is as follows:

#### General Objective:

- To assess the level of discrepancies in period poverty among urban and rural schools

#### Specific Objectives:

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To evaluate the awareness of period poverty and menstrual hygiene among school students in urban and rural settings
- To investigate the reasons for period poverty among school students
- To assess the availability of period products, medication, and sanitary facilities in the selected schools
- To identify the economic and social concerns regarding period poverty among school students

## Limitations of the Study

The researcher faced various difficulties when conducting this research. Mainly, the researcher wasn't provided with a letter of verification, which prevented her from entering the urban school. Even if she was able to enter the school after facing a disturbing experience at the main entrance, she wasn't given a class to conduct the survey. Instead, the principal requested that the questionnaires be distributed among students at a later date. Moreover, the time factor was also a limitation when conducting this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of the key variables and terms will be discussed in this chapter, along with the conceptual framework of the study.

### Period Poverty

“Period poverty describes the struggle many low-income women and girls face while trying to afford menstrual products. The term also refers to the increased economic vulnerability women and girls face due to the financial burden posed by menstrual supplies. These include not only menstrual pads and tampons but

also related costs such as pain medication and underwear. Period poverty does not only affect women and girls in developing countries; it also affects women in wealthy, industrialized countries” (United Nations Population Fund, 2022).

### **Adolescents**

“Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health” (“Adolescent health”, 2022).

### **Urban and rural areas**

“The Census Bureau’s urban-rural classification is a delineation of geographic areas, identifying both individual urban areas and the rural areas of the nation. The Census Bureau’s urban areas represent densely developed territory and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses. The Census Bureau delineates urban areas after each decennial census by applying specified criteria to the decennial census and other data. “Rural” encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area” (Bureau, 2022).

### **Similar Research**

The presentation titled “Period Poverty in Rural Sri Lanka: Understanding Menstruation Hygiene and Related Health Issues to Empower Women” was referred to in order to gain more perspective (Hettiarachchi et al., 2021). “Menstruation is a common bodily function for every female of reproductive age. However, the methods used to manage their menstrual periods are highly influenced by social, cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. Several studies conducted in Sri Lanka show that menstrual problems have been one of the most common health issues perceived by adolescents and young girls. Despite high literacy rates, exceptionally good maternal and child health care services, and having one of the most appraised public health systems, menstrual problems are still mostly under-explored and considered a “taboo” even in most affluent settings in Sri Lanka (Hettiarachchi et al., 2021).” This article helped the researcher formulate the relationship between period poverty and its educational and social impact on students.

The journal article “Impact of Socioeconomic Factors on Period Poverty in Sri Lanka: Evidence from Selected Rural Areas in Kurunegala District” by D. M. Chandani Dissanayake and W. M. Chathuri Rangika Sri Bandara is a significant study conducted in Kurunegala district. It follows a mixed method and identifies the economic factors contributing to period poverty in Sri Lanka (Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021). “The study revealed that the unavailability of drinking water in the household, family low-income level, lack of access to sanitary products, lack of sanitation facilities, lack of education about menstruation, cultural beliefs, and restrictions during menstruation were the key issues of period poverty related to girls and women in the sample” (Dissanayake & Bandara, 2021). This paper also identified a direct relationship between period poverty and the social issues it creates.

The report “Taxing Menstrual Products Hygiene in Sri Lanka: A Policy Analysis” discusses mainly the taxing involved with menstrual products in Sri Lanka, which is higher than in some other countries (The Advocate Institute, 2021). Unnecessary taxing makes period products more expensive and more difficult to purchase for women and children. “The analysis finds that repealing the 52% tax, or at the very least reducing the tax on menstrual products, can make sanitary napkins and tampons more accessible to low-income consumers. This study finds that at present, Sri Lanka’s period poverty rate stands at approximately 50% and that eliminating trade barriers that restrict the free flow of these essential products into the market will help increase choice in terms of both price and type of product. The benefits of improved access to menstrual products are numerous and include improvements in the overall school experience of girls,

decreased health risks, and improved comfort and emotional wellbeing of menstruating women and girls in the workplace or at school” (The Advocata Institute, 2021).

### **Theory and Concepts**

The researcher intends to make use of Hill’s concepts as cited by Koskenniemi “A simple act of revolution is to learn about your body, to get to know the terrain of your cycle, and to take charge of your own health. Our bodies have long been weaponised against us and used to keep us out of positions of influence and power, but the red tide is turning and it’s time for us to take advantage of what our hormones can do for us” (Hill, 2019, as cited in Koskenniemi, 2022).

“Discussing the menstrual cycle and the hormonal changes steering it, the quote demonstrates how Hill’s text establishes menstruation as a potentially empowering process and presents knowledge about the menstrual cycle as imperative for both individual health and social change. But how is the book’s approach to menstruation constructed? And why does it matter how we understand the menstruating body?” (Koskenniemi, 2022).

It is also intended to make use of Malathi de Alwis’ article on “Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities”. “Gananath Obeyesekere observes that Sinhala females as well as males are socialised into such practices in very early childhood. He proceeds to point out, however, that ‘in spite of the cultural view that females should be especially *lajja-baya* [i.e., susceptible to ‘norms of sexual modesty and proper behaviour’], it is the male child who becomes sensitive to the second part of the verbal set, *baya*, or “fear of ridicule”, as it is men who ‘have public roles and hence must be more sensitive to the reactions of others’. The higher a family’s social position, Obeyesekere further notes, ‘the greater the preoccupation with *lajja-baya* in socialisation’ which reaches its epitome among educated urban folk” (de Alwis, 2022). Certain excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The second sex* (1949) are also referred to in this study.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The research design is descriptive in nature, as there is only one variable selected for the study, which is period poverty. The researcher intends to discuss the selected variable in detail by comparing the existence of period poverty in urban and rural settings.

### **Research Method**

This research followed a mixed method, and both qualitative and quantitative methods were used by the researcher. Since the study is on period poverty, which is a sensitive topic for many participants, a mixed-methods approach was developed to be the most appropriate. Since the unit of analysis is schoolgirls, a method that allowed the researcher to have one-on-one discussions with them was essential.

### **Primary Data**

The primary data will be mainly gathered through questionnaires and interviews. 70 questionnaires were distributed among 70 students, of whom 35 were selected from each urban and rural school. Even though the most popular method in the present day is the distribution of Google Forms, the researcher was prevented from employing this method as this study mainly considers schoolchildren as the unit of analysis. Since many of them don’t own an email account, and most of the email accounts are handled by parents, it was not an effective way of gathering information from them. Therefore, the researcher decided to visit each school in order to collect data. The initial plan was to walk into each class and observe the participants while

they filled out the questionnaires. However, in school A, this intention was not met, as the researcher wasn't given permission to walk into a classroom. Instead, the principal took on the responsibility of gathering responses from students in the absence of the researcher. Therefore, unfortunately, the data gathered from school A might be contaminated as the researcher was absent in the process of data collection.

Yet, in school B, the researcher was provided with a classroom of 35 students, where it was possible to observe the way the students reacted to the questions and the task. Therefore, the visit to school B was much more fruitful than to school A.

Although the researcher had intended to conduct interviews with students, it wasn't possible in school A due to a lack of accessibility. Yet, it was possible to conduct three unstructured interviews with students, as more accessibility was granted to the researcher. Students freely shared their experiences and thoughts with the researcher, which are documented in the data analysis and discussion section.

### **Secondary Data**

The secondary data will be gathered through journal articles, books, and websites. Mainly, Google Scholar was used as the main search engine for the purpose of gathering further data and information on the selected topic.

### **Population**

The population consists of grade 9 students in urban and rural government schools. The researcher was able to identify that the urban school had 180 students in grade 9, with 45 students in each class. The number of students in the rural school was 70, with 35 students in each class. Therefore, the total number of the population was identified to be 250 students.

### **Sample**

Depending on the population, the sample size of the study should ideally be 250 students. This is with a confidence level of 95% and leaves out the margin of error of 5. However, depending on the time restraints and the difficulty of getting access to students who were engaged in their school activities, the researcher couldn't reach the ideal sample size. Therefore, the sample size was further reduced due to practical reasons. Hence, the sample size was decided to be 70 students, of whom 35 were selected from the urban school and 35 were selected from the rural school.

### **Sampling Technique**

The sampling method that is employed in the study is non-probability sampling, under which convenience sampling is used for the ease of the researcher. The urban school is chosen depending on access to the school and the feasibility of collecting information, which is referred to as school A in the research. The rural school was identified as school B, which is identified due to the ease of gaining access to the school as it is placed in close proximity to the researcher's university.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Microsoft Excel is employed for descriptive statistical data analysis, and content analysis is used to analyze interviews.

### **Ethics and Dissemination**

Ethical approval was obtained before proceeding with the study, and the identities of the participants were

kept confidential throughout the study. The names of the two schools are kept confidential by naming the urban school, A, and the rural school, B.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher intends to analyse and discuss the data. It is expected to identify trends and gain insights through the data that is collected with careful consideration.

### Quantitative Data Analysis and Inferences

#### Q 1: How do you cope with the menstrual pain? Do you think it’s appropriate to take painkillers?

Table1: How do you cope with the menstrual pain? Do you think it’s appropriate to take painkillers?

Likelihood	A	B
Strongly disagree	1	7
Disagree	9	10
Neither agree nor disagree	18	17
Agree	4	1
Strongly agree	3	0

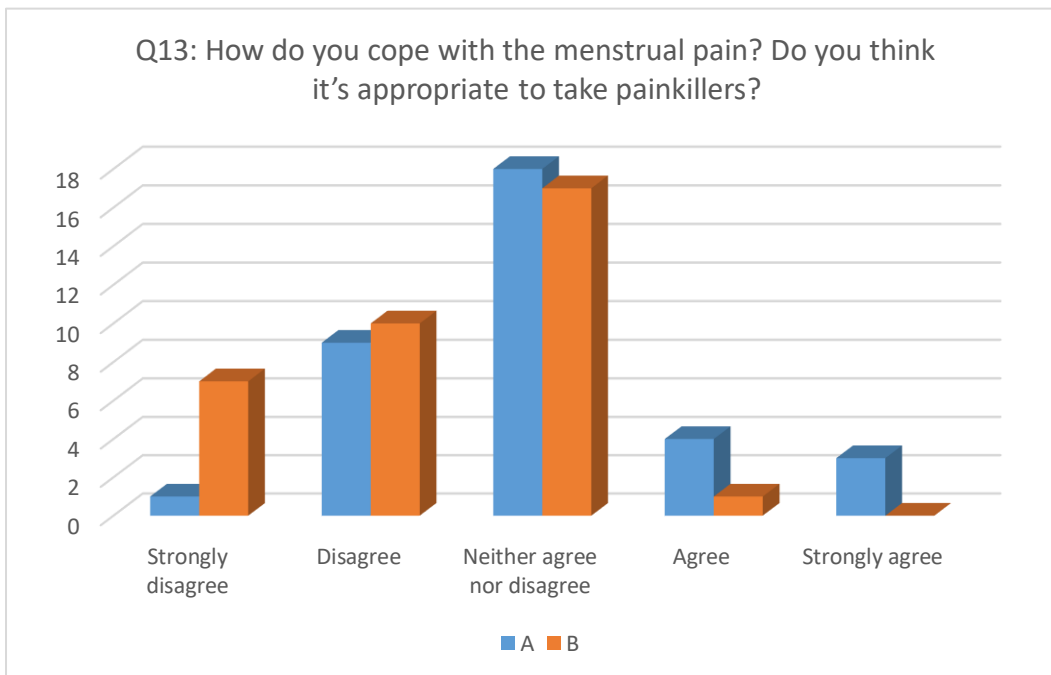


Figure 1: How do you cope with the menstrual pain? Do you think it’s appropriate to take painkillers?

This graph indicates the perception of painkillers during menstruation. There is a strong inclination for students to disagree with the statement or to maintain a neutral position. Even though it’s an uncomfortable time for students, many seem to reject the idea of using painkillers. The tendency to disagree is higher in the rural setting compared with the urban setting. This could be mainly due to societal pressures and conventional beliefs.



**Q2: In your opinion, how much would it cost you to buy period products per month?**

Table 2: In your opinion, how much would it cost you to buy period products per month?

Cost	A	B
Less than Rs. 300	1	9
Rs. 301 – 600	8	13
Rs. 601 – 900	19	2
Rs. 901 – 1300	4	1
More than Rs.1300	3	0

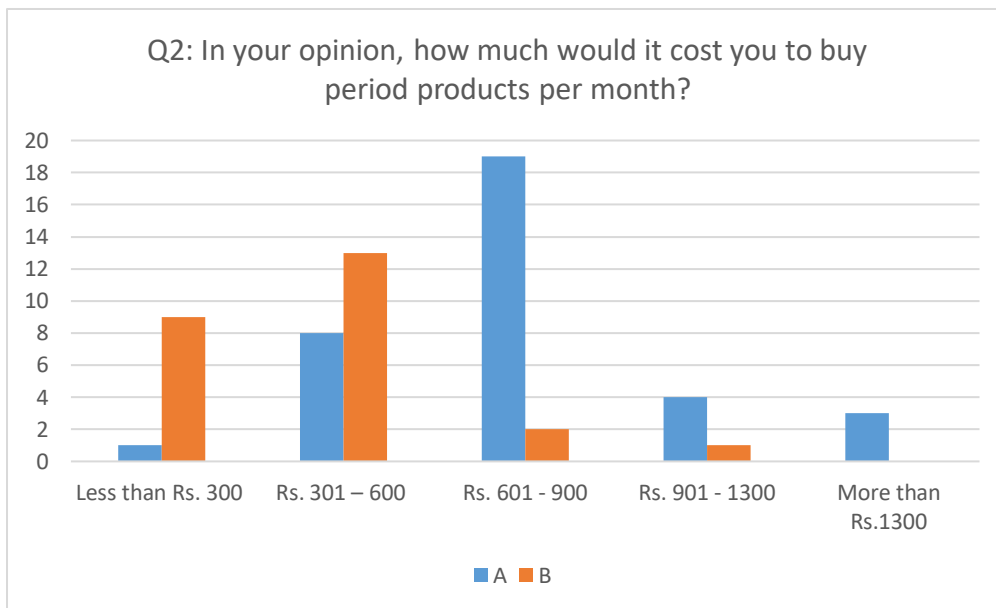


Figure 2: In your opinion, how much would it cost you to buy period products per month?

The above graph is an indication of the cost borne by students for sanitary products on a monthly basis. The students in the urban school tend to spend from Rs. 600 to Rs. 900 per month, whereas students in school B tend to spend less than that. Therefore, it is possible for us to draw the conclusion that students in urban areas have to pay more when purchasing period products.

**Q 3: How accessible are period products in your hometown?**

Table 3: How accessible are period products in your hometown?

Accessibility of products	A	B
Very difficult to find	0	0
Difficult to find	0	1
Neutral	7	15
Easy to find	14	11
Very Easy to find	14	7

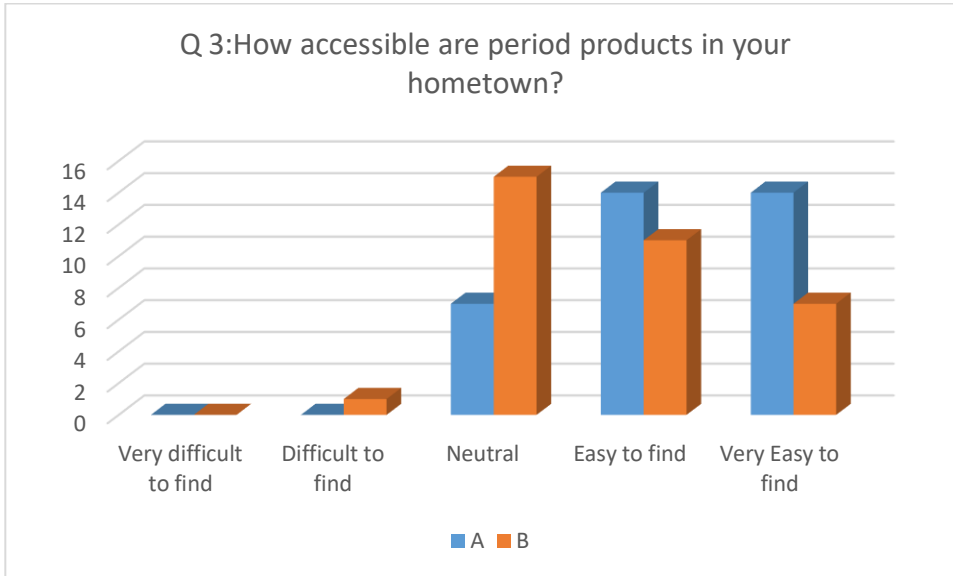


Figure 3: How accessible are period products in your hometown?

This question targets discovering the accessibility of period products. According to the gathered data, students in both schools seem to be able to find period products easily.

**Q 4: Do you feel comfortable buying period products from a shop?**

Table 4: Do you feel comfortable buying period products from a shop?

Comfortability	A	B
Highly uncomfortable	2	5
Uncomfortable	4	8
Neutral	17	17
Comfortable	11	4
Highly comfortable	2	1



Figure 4: Do you feel comfortable buying period products from a shop?

This particular question focuses on identifying perceptions towards period products. The majority of the students, despite the school, seem to stand on a neutral basis when it comes to this question. However, when comparing the two schools, the students in the urban school seem to be less uncomfortable when purchasing period products. In comparison, students in rural schools tend to feel more uncomfortable when doing so. This is an indication of societal norms and perceptions and their impact on students’ sexual health awareness.

**Q5: When you are on your period, do you feel comfortable coming to school?**

Table 5: When you are on your period, do you feel comfortable coming to school?

Comfortable	A	B
Highly uncomfortable	7	0
Uncomfortable	8	20
Neutral	14	13
Comfortable	6	0
Highly comfortable	1	2

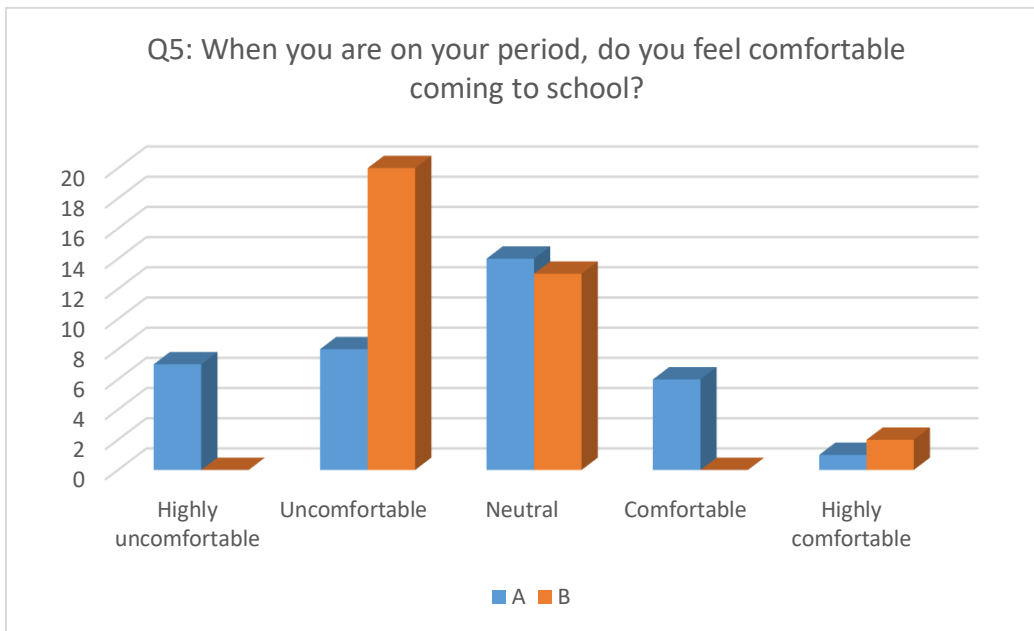


Figure 5: When you are on your period, do you feel comfortable coming to school?

As the sample consists of school students, the researcher was interested in identifying the impact of menstruation on them. According to the gathered data, the students in school B seem to find it more difficult and uncomfortable than the students in school A. That number reaches the maximum of 20.

**Q 6: How likely is it for you to skip school when you are on your period?**

Table 6: How likely is it for you to skip school when you are on your period?

Likelihood of skipping school	A	B
Very unlikely	13	18
Unlikely	4	7

Neutral	15	9
Likely	0	1
Very likely	3	0

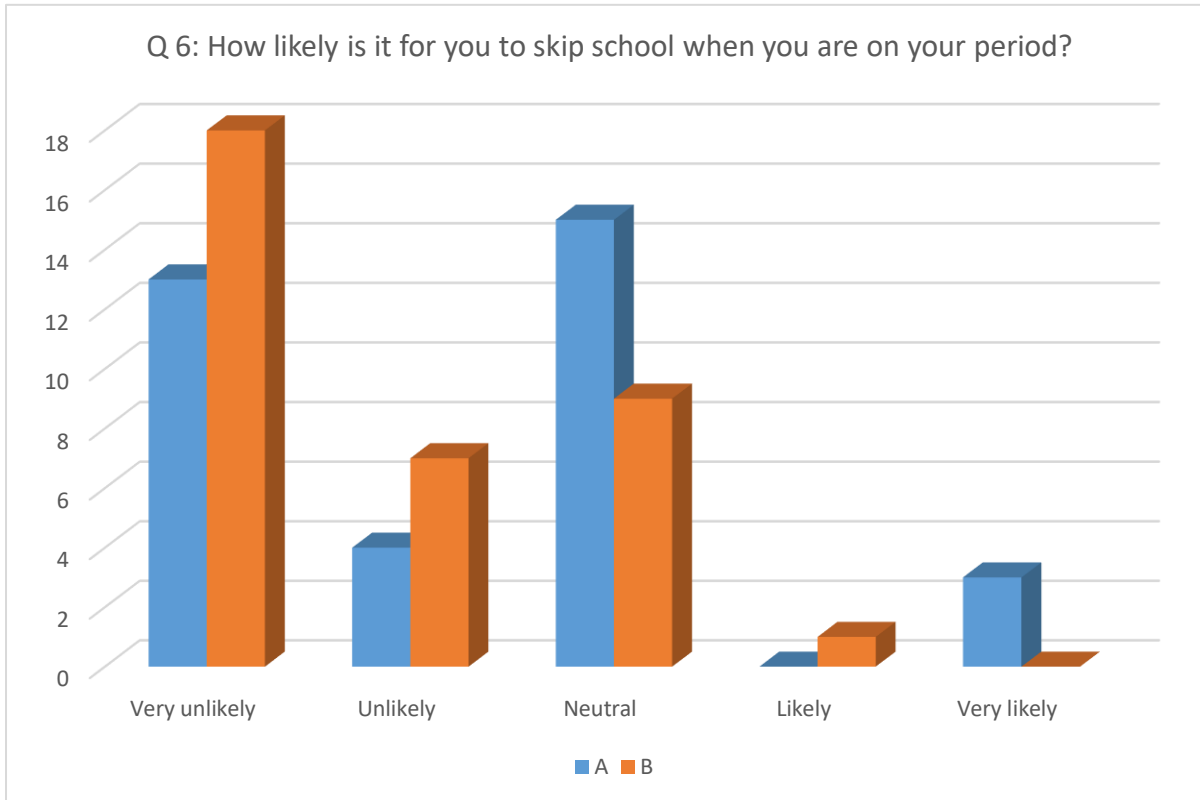


Figure 6: How likely is it for you to skip school when you are on your period?

Many answered the question by saying they were very unlikely to skip school on the days they were experiencing menstruation. This is a positive trend that is identified in the study, as priority is given to education by the students who participated in the research.

**Q 7: How satisfied are you with the sanitary facilities at your school?**

Table 7: How satisfied are you with the sanitary facilities at your school?

Satisfaction	A	B
Highly dissatisfied	6	9
Dissatisfied	10	11
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	14
Satisfied	7	1
Highly satisfied	1	0

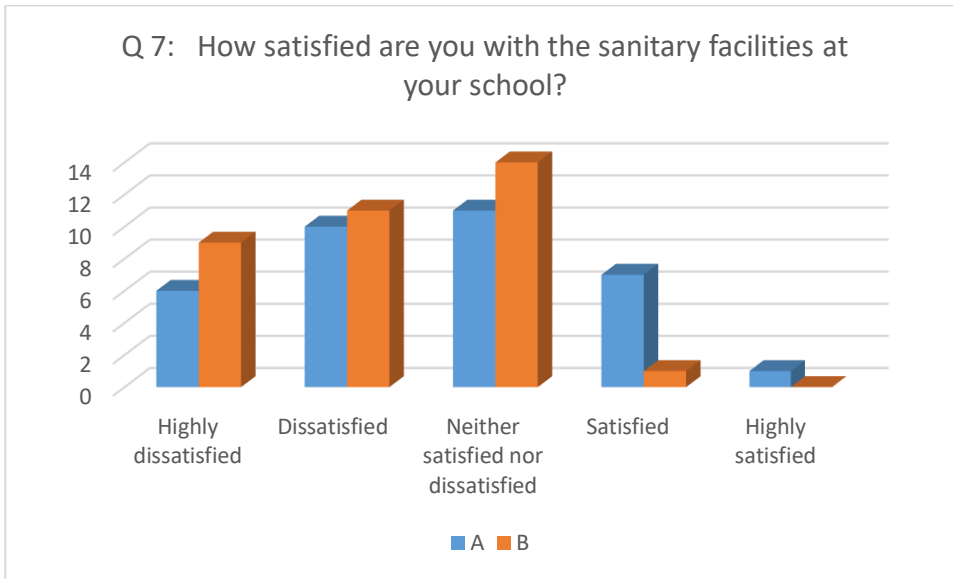


Figure 7: How satisfied are you with the sanitary facilities at your school?

Although the majority of the students indicated a neutral opinion regarding sanitary facilities at their school, many seem to be dissatisfied with the availability and condition of sanitary facilities at schools. This is an alarming condition, as it could have an impact on students' education.

**Q 8: What do you feel about your self-image when you are on your period?**

Table 8: What do you feel about your self-image when you are on your period?

Self-image	A	B
Highly dissatisfied	3	3
Dissatisfied	7	13
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21	15
Satisfied	3	1
Highly satisfied	1	0

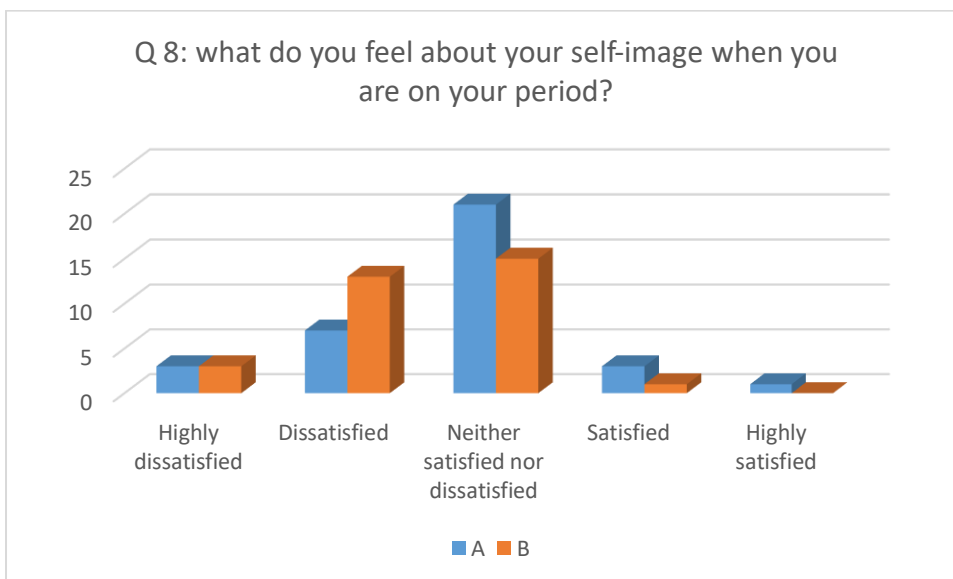


Figure 8: What do you feel about your self-image when you are on your period?

The responses received for this question vary, as students from school A seem to be taking a neutral stance while the students in school B seem to be dissatisfied with their image when they are on their period.

### **Open-Ended Answers**

#### **Q 9: explain the menstrual cycle in your own words.**

The following responses are given to the open-ended question asking students to explain the menstrual cycle in their own words. The responses are not heavily edited in order to preserve the authenticity of the answers.

Out of the many responses that were received, the following were selected as they demonstrated a lack of awareness toward the menstrual cycle. Many had not answered this question, while some had said: “I don’t know”.

Participant 3: “I don’t know”.

Participant 4: “I know nothing about it. I only know that I leak blood”.

Participant 8: “It is a cycle when blood comes out of your private every month”.

The following responses are examples of misinformation regarding menstruation. Many seem quite misinformed regarding this matter. It also tends to be a very basic level of knowledge, even though the participants are in grade 9. This allows the researcher to arrive at the conclusion that there is a lack of awareness of menstruation. Some responses are also steeped in conventional and cultural beliefs.

Participant 7: “Menstruation occurs after 28 days. Blood and some tissues are removed from the urethra in this period”.

Participant 23: “Transfusion of blood per 29 days”.

Participant 29: “As a child is not in the womb, the vaginal walls are removed and passed out as blood. It could happen in 28 days or so.”

Only a few responses contained information that was remotely close to a valid scientific explanation of menstruation. The following are a few examples of such responses:

Participant 1: “It’s a normal process for every woman. It happens after ovulation has been unsuccessful. What happens after an unsuccessful ovulation is that the tissues in the uterus break down. After the tissues break down, they come out of the vagina with blood”.

Participant 5: “It indicates that we have reached adolescence. It happens when an unsuccessful ovulation takes place. Our endometrium sheds and blood comes out”.

#### **Q 10: What is menstruation like for you? What are your thoughts and experiences?**

The majority of the students complained that menstruation was a difficult experience and that they felt uncomfortable during those days.

Participant 4: “It’s very uncomfortable to wear pads. I wish we had period pants in our country. I feel like I’m getting a heart attack”.

Participant 5: “I mean, I’m not in love with it. I get cramps, and pads are uncomfortable.”.

Participant 8: “I feel really uncomfortable when I am on my period. I have trouble sleeping and eating, and it disturbs all my schedules. I go through the worst cramps every month, and sometimes my cycle is messy. It stops for about 2 months and starts again. I use an app called ‘Flo’ to keep track of it”.

Participant 26: “I have a deep pain in my lower abdomen, and my vertebrate column hurts too. It’s unbearable the first day, and I mostly spend my time on the bed. I dread the day”.

Below are a few responses where they have indicated that they weren’t bothered by menstruation. This is mainly due to the lack of physical discomfort the participants felt.

Participant 1: I don’t really think about it that much. I do not experience any cramps or discomfort. It’s just another day of the month for me. But it’s quite inconvenient when it happens early and when I’m in a public place.

Participant 2: I get menstruation every 30–35 days. It lasts about 5–7 days. I get some cramps in the first 2–3 days.

Participant 7: “When I first had it, I was a little afraid. But I am now used to it, so because I have no pain or discomfort, I don’t really care about it”.

Below is a sample of responses where the participants indicate how they truly feel about menstruation. Other than feeling physical discomfort, they also feel disgusted with themselves. This is quite alarming, as it might have an impact on their self-image.

Participant 3: Well, I am uncomfortable wearing period products to school, and it’s disgusting. I hate it.

Participant 11: “I find it truly disgusting. And I find it uncomfortable.”

Participant 10: “I’ve learned to accept it, but it’s still very annoying and sometimes disgusting. I love doing sports and dancing, but when I’m on my period, I feel weird doing that. It doesn’t cause me too much discomfort, but it’s still annoying and disgusting.”

The following responses indicate their irrational fear of blood stains on the uniforms. This is considered to be an embarrassment by participants rather than a natural phenomenon.

Participant 17: “It is nothing for me other than coming to school. I am always scared whether something is on my frock, and it is uncomfortable to ask my friends if something is on my frock (uniform)”.

Participant 9: “I feel like it’s really annoying when I’m on my period because I can’t do anything as usual. And when I participate in school these days, I feel like I’m uncomfortable. I feel scared because what if I get a stain on the back of my frock? It’s embarrassing”.

The following responses again indicate a lack of awareness of these matters. Respondent 56 seems to be having a difficult time due to her irregular menstrual cycle. Participant 63 seems to demonstrate questionable cultural beliefs.

Similar to the above responses, the following answers illustrate that for women, menstruation is a burden they must carry.

**Q11: What do you know about the various kinds of period products? Do you mind sharing your experience with the ones you have used?**

The above question tested experience with regard to sanitary products. None of the students in the urban school indicate that they use clean clothes. They mostly use sanitary napkins.

Participant 1: “It depends on the brand. In my opinion, some brands are not quite up to my expectations. Others are good. Pads are the products I use the most. They are quite expensive. It would be good if the prices were reduced in rural areas”.

Participant 2: “I use pads. I do know about tampons, but I don’t use them. I am comfortable with using pads”.

Participant 3: “I only know about heat patches, pads, and painkillers. Well, I think it’s better if the pad is thin, liquid-proof, and long. It’s rare to find heat patches”.

Participant 5: “I use pads. I know about tampons. Pads are uncomfortable.”

Participant 28: “Sometimes I feel uncomfortable, and sometimes it’s disgusting”.

However, the students in the rural setting stated that they use clean pieces of clothing as an alternative. This is not to be more environmentally friendly, but mainly due to economic reasons.

**Q12: Do you wish to say anything else regarding your experiences in this regard?**

As this question was a very open one, a mixture of responses was given to it. Many expressed their discomfort.

Participant 1: It is good that the government is doing something for the normal processes of all women. I say that prices should be decreased, especially for rural people. I truly understand how period poverty is a global issue. I highly appreciate those who are acting against it.

Participant 3: “No, I only want to say I hate it. But I like my educational development.”.

Participant 5: “I’m glad that people are fighting to reduce period poverty.”

Participant 7: “Most of the people are saying they are having a sharp pain in the stomach, legs, and backs. But I do not feel anything because of this; sometimes I don’t even know if it’s my period. And I have no definite date either.”.

Many students highlighted the importance of decreasing the price of sanitary products or distributing them free of charge. As this is a practice in certain countries, there should be mechanisms in place to do so.

**Data Gathered through the Interviews**

The researcher was able to gather information by conducting three unstructured interviews with students at the rural school. Since she wasn’t allowed to enter the urban school, such an opportunity wasn’t given to her there. However, the students in school B freely shared their experiences with the researchers. They explained their grievances and concerns about period poverty and menstruation. The researcher was able to notice the amount of misinformation they carry and the lack of information they have regarding these matters.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research is on period poverty among adolescents: a comparison between urban and rural schools. The researcher selected this topic as it is a timely concern in the country. Due to the economic crisis, many face difficulties in spending on day-to-day needs; sanitary products are one of them.

The research focused on two schools, one in an urban setting and the other in a rural setting. Based on the data gathered through the questionnaire, it is possible to conclude that there are mixed responses toward this subject. However, the situation in rural schools tends to be a little bit worse than in urban schools. The students in the rural school seem to be more worried about the perception of society regarding menstruation than they are about purchasing period products from stores. In comparison, school A tends to have a more open-minded approach toward menstruation.

However, both A and B lack awareness in terms of sexual health and reproduction. They seem not to know about the scientific terms, as in many instances they haven't used the term by itself. Since they lack knowledge regarding this subject, they have used terms such as this, it, and that most of the time to refer to menstruation. This indicates the lack of knowledge they have about the subject matter. Many students also seem to be misinformed.

Another alarming situation is that both rural and urban schools' sanitary facilities aren't satisfactory for their students. Both student groups complained about unsatisfactory sanitary facilities at schools. As this is a fundamental requirement, schools and authorities should look into this matter more.

In conclusion, the study identified that both urban and rural schools are affected by period poverty in a similar manner. It is true that the students in the urban school find it more comfortable to purchase period products due to their upbringing and wealthy family background, which is not the case when it comes to the rural school. However, the lack of awareness of sexual and reproductive health, misinformation, social stigma, and lack of sanitary facilities can be identified as similar concerns for both schools. Therefore, the researcher is convinced, through data, that period poverty exists, is felt and is experienced by both rural and urban schools despite their geographical localities. Since only two schools were selected for the study, it is difficult to generalise it to the country. However, it is possible to draw inferences and make predictions that involve the big picture.

### Recommendations

The researcher would like to propose the following recommendations as ways of addressing the period poverty.

1. The government should pay more attention to period poverty by decreasing prices or allowing such products to be purchased free of charge.
2. Schools and educators need to make students more aware of sexual and reproductive health through knowledge-sharing sessions.
3. The students need to be empowered with the correct information as to how they can manage menstruation without shame or embarrassment.
4. An attitudinal change is required in society, which would grant the students a less toxic environment.

### Future Research Possibilities

This research essentially targeted schoolgirls and their perceptions of period poverty. Due to time restraints, the researcher had to make the decision to protect the feasibility of the study. However, there are many

future research possibilities for other researchers. It is possible to conduct a study on period poverty and awareness by selecting the population as boys. Since menstruation is a natural phenomenon, even boys should know about it. Therefore, it will be interesting to identify their thoughts, knowledge, and perceptions of menstruation and period poverty.

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