



THE STATE OF PERIOD EQUITY IN THE UK

Breaking Cycles of Exclusion

February 2024



NO ONE SHOULD BE HELD BACK BY THEIR PERIOD

We believe in a world where no one is held back by their period. But right now, millions of people in the UK can't easily access the products, education, and support they need to manage their menstrual health and wellbeing.

You can't concentrate or be at your best when you're worried about finding a toilet or having a pad to hand. This lack of support, across all stages of life, leaves too many people missing out on learning or work each month, and feeling embarrassed or ashamed. This cycle of exclusion is preventable.

This is the first in-depth review of the state of period equity in the UK. It supplements and updates existing data, reinforcing and developing recommendations for achieving period equity in the UK. This report sets out clear, proactive steps for policymakers, business, and civil society. **Together, we can make sure no one is held back by a period.**

WHAT IS PERIOD EQUITY?

A society where everyone has access to:

- Products, facilities, and healthcare to manage a period and menstrual health.
- Universal education about menstrual health.
- Freedom from stigma and discrimination that restricts access and choices.

NOTE ON INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Throughout this report, we refer to people who have periods, recognising it is not just those who currently identify as female who menstruate. Where we refer specifically to women and girls, this reflects the wording of national surveys and existing data sets that have been used for comparison and analysis.



This project has been led by In Kind Direct, in partnership with Irise International and with the support of Essity. It builds directly from the roadmap for change set out in In Kind Direct's [Human Right to Hygiene](#) report, where we identified the need to fill national data gaps, unlock more products, increase awareness of systemic barriers, and reduce the shame and stigma of going without. This report continues that work, and sets a path for different sectors to specifically tackle period inequity together.

Through surveys and interviews, our findings bring together the opinions and experiences of more than 5,000 people, including 4,000 who have periods.

We thank the dedicated advisory group of specialist charities, academic researchers, and those with lived experience of period inequity for their insight and support in shaping this work.

This research explores the significant cost of not getting it right from the earliest opportunity. Today's schoolchildren are tomorrow's teachers, parents, healthcare providers, community leaders and workplace colleagues. Increasing shame-free access to the right products, support and education for all ages, and increasing local delivery of nuanced, culturally sensitive services are vital to achieving period equity.

We believe everyone deserves access to life's essentials, and getting it right benefits everyone.

Since beginning this research, we have welcomed the removal of VAT on period underwear, and the continuation of the schools period product scheme to July 2024. We are encouraged to see these steps being taken and hope this report fuels further bold action from government, business and the third sector.



PERIOD POVERTY IS SOMETHING NOT REALLY TALKED ABOUT AND CAN LEAD TO OTHER ISSUES, HEALTH MATTERS, SCHOOL OR WORK ABSENCE, STEALING, ETC., SO HAVING PRODUCT AVAILABLE TO HELP SOMEONE NOT ONLY TAKES THE STIGMA AWAY, BUT PREVENTS FURTHER ISSUES.

Middle Park Community Centre



KEY FINDINGS

£3.25 billion every year. That's the cost of days of work lost because of period inequity.

Almost 1 in 5 (19%) who have periods say they miss work with most or every period. This is because of symptoms affecting physical and mental health, and lack of access to products or facilities at work.

Too many people are going without essential period products.

This has a huge impact on confidence and wellbeing, and it disproportionately affects those who are already struggling. Reflecting our Human Right to Hygiene research, going without in childhood is linked to going without as an adult. Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) who went without period products in childhood went without in adulthood. Breaking these generational cycles is vital.

Going without period products means an extra day of learning and work missed each month.

That could be 1.5 extra years missed over the average lifetime. Worrying about leaking or feeling embarrassed to ask for help keeps people from education and work.

Supportive workplaces matter. Proactive and inclusive policies help people manage their menstrual health and wellbeing.

Over a third (36%) of workers who have periods said free period products are available at work. But 1 in 8 (13%) don't have suitable facilities to change products at work. That's 10 people in your train carriage potentially feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed.

70% learn about periods informally from female friends and family.

Among those who were taught about periods at school, the majority (79%) had to learn more since leaving education. We need to empower employers and educators by sharing good practice from existing community support, and proactively signpost to support in national and workplace policies.

Stigma around periods is still prevalent, encouraging shame, embarrassment, and anxiety.

1 in 10 people who have periods have been told not to speak about their period in front of others. Asian and Asian British people were among the most likely to say they experienced this. Providing, signposting and funding culturally appropriate support and resources can help remove shame.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government:

- Cross-party commitment to long-term action to address period inequity.
- Convene a dedicated group to consider period equity, replacing the period poverty taskforce.
- Evaluate existing policies and review guidance for healthcare and education providers through the lens of period equity, including by:
 - Commissioning an independent evaluation of the period product scheme in schools in England and gathering data from similar schemes in the devolved nations;
 - Strengthening menstrual health education, ensuring accurate and comprehensive information is available to all. This should extend beyond students, to guide education and healthcare providers to offer the most informed and shame-free support;
 - And continuing to prioritise menstrual health in the Women's Health Strategy through more emphasis and investment in early interventions to equip and empower people to seek care as early as possible. This could include public information campaigns and education for healthcare providers.
- Expand programmes providing free period products across the UK, such as the period product scheme in schools and in the NHS.
- Increase support and provide sustainable funding for third sector organisations providing period products, education and shame-free support and advice in the community.
- Take further action in the context of the cost-of-living crisis to ensure everyone can access the product they need, including by:
 - Ensuring savings from removal of the Tampon Tax are passed onto consumers;
 - Working with retailers and manufacturers of period products to better understand barriers to accessible essentials and how these can be removed or addressed;
 - And engaging with sector campaigns to improve the social security system.

Schools, Charities and Community Organisations:

- Increase awareness, accessibility and uptake of existing free period product provision and support.
- Explore and expand use of peer-support models of delivery.
- Explore more holistic interventions to tackle stigma which involve the wider community, including men and boys.
- Ensure culturally appropriate support and resources are available, tailored to the needs of minoritised groups.

Business and Employers:

- Take urgent action to embed period equity across all workplace policies and use existing resources to create more period-inclusive workplaces, including by:
 - Adopting the BSI Standards guidance for menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace.⁽⁴⁾
- Share manufacturer and retailer insights on barriers to accessible product.
- Increase existing partnerships and support to national and local third sector organisations delivering services to communities.



I JUST THINK PERIODS SHOULD BE TALKED ABOUT EVERYWHERE. THE STIGMA WILL STOP. I DON'T WANT TO HIDE BECAUSE THAT'S HOW I'M FEELING. JUST THE STIGMA NEEDS TO STOP.

Expert-by-experience



In 2023, In Kind Direct distributed more than 2.5 million tampons and pads, enabling more than 127,760 periods with dignity.



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I JUST WANT WOMEN TO BE FREE, TO HAVE PRODUCT, TO HAVE FREE ACCESS TO THAT PRODUCT AND KNOW THEY'RE NOT ASHAMED. I WANT THEM TO BE FREE AND TALK ABOUT THEIR PERIODS WITH PRIDE.

Expert-by-experience

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ABOUT IN KIND DIRECT

Who we are

We are a UK charity who work with charitable organisations and companies to ensure everyone has access to the products they need to keep clean, safe and well.

What we believe

Everyone deserves access to life's essentials and no usable product should go to waste.

Our purpose

We create powerful partnerships, enabling more communities to thrive.

What we do

We distribute products including personal hygiene, household, clothes, toys, and technology, donated by manufacturers and brands, to charities, community groups, food banks and schools across the UK.

At the end of 2023, we were supporting 365,000 people each week. In 2023, we unlocked £26m in savings into the third sector. This helped charitable organisations meet the increasing need in their communities, at a time when their own resources are depleted, and costs are rising.

Our role

We are a practical response to the widening gap in society, alleviating immediate need and pushing for systematic change. We are partway through our ambitious five-year strategy to triple our impact by 2025. We will do this by:

- Continuing our 26 year history of **distributing products** to people that need them today.
- **Connecting** charities, companies and other organisations to find new solutions.
- Building a strong **evidence base** of national and real-time local insight.
- **Amplifying** the voice of local organisations and **advocating for change** on behalf of communities.
- Delivering **targeted projects** that meet the needs of those we exist to serve.

About Irise International

Irise is an award-winning UK charity, working in the UK, East Africa and globally towards a world where no one is held back by their period. They enable those experiencing period inequality to overcome the barriers they face, come together to reshape their wider communities, and institutionalise sustainable change for all through collective power, learning and advocacy.

They work in equal partnership with their locally led sister organisation, Irise Institute East Africa and with their networks of frontline advocates and activists across the UK and East Africa. Founded in 2014, in 2019 they received the Power Together Award from the Global Women Political Leaders Forum in recognition of their contribution to building a global movement to end period poverty and shame and in 2020 were named one of the eight most effective organisations working on this issue in the world in a global report by The Kulczyk Foundation and Founder's Pledge.

Over the last decade Irise International has directly supported over 100,000 young people affected by period poverty and shame and supported over 287 organisations to address the issue in their work.

INTRODUCTION

At In Kind Direct, we believe everyone deserves access to life's essentials and that no one should be held back by a period. Our UK network of over 6,000 charitable organisations regularly share stories of their work supporting people to manage their period, free from embarrassment or shame.

In 2022, our [Human Right to Hygiene](#) report revealed the role that period inequity plays in period poverty and hygiene poverty. We outlined how charities, businesses and policymakers all have a role to play in building a momentum for change⁽¹⁾.

In Kind Direct, together with Irise International, set out to complete the first comprehensive review of period equity in the UK. This new research quantifies the far-reaching impacts of period inequity. Supported by Essity and informed by the insights of an expert advisory group, we commissioned Savanta to survey over 5,000 people across the UK, including 4,000 people who have periods. Individuals with a range of lived and professional experiences, from across education, the third sector, youth work and business also told us their stories.

WHAT IS MENSTRUAL HEALTH?

A state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.



I DREAD EVERY MONTH WHEN MY PERIOD COMES, AS I JUST DON'T KNOW IF I'LL HAVE THE SPARE MONEY TO BUY ANY PRODUCTS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE CURRENT SITUATION. USING YOUR BOX HAS HONESTLY LIFTED A WEIGHT OFF MY SHOULDERS KNOWING I WILL HAVE THE THINGS I NEED AND NOT HAVE TO BORROW OR GO WITHOUT

End-user
All Yours Period Box CIC



Our research reveals the cycles of exclusion caused by period inequity. This lack of support, across all stages of life, significantly affects people's freedom and wellbeing. **Too often, the cost of this inequity is greatest for those already facing disadvantage.**

Lifting this hidden burden is critical to help create a fairer society where everyone can access the essentials they need to thrive. In this report, we set out recommendations on the further action needed to end the generational cycle of period inequity.

We thank all those who participated in interviews and shared their experiences with us to inform this project. We are grateful for the time and insight of our Advisory Group:

- All Yours Period Box CIC
- Agatha-May Akora
- Dr Annalise Weckesser
- Binti International
- Bloody Good Period
- Cysters
- Irise International
- Essity
- Love Your Period
- Period Power

This report covers the following themes:

- Access to period products
- Period education
- Reducing stigma and increasing support
- Workplace cost of period inequity
- Regional variations

ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL PERIOD PRODUCTS

Too many are going without essential period products.

More than a third of people who have periods (37%) have gone without period products at some point in their lives. Of those who have gone without product, 39% said this was because they couldn't afford it.

The value of having the right product at the right time is not just financial. It has an impact on wider wellbeing, and a person's ability to engage with education and work without embarrassment or worry. An understanding of the different types of period product, and giving people with periods the choice of products at different times in their cycle and life, is a defining feature of period equity.

There are generational cycles of going without.

Nearly 1 in 5 people who went without period products in childhood said they had also gone without in adulthood.

This mirrors wider poverty and the increased likelihood of barriers created in childhood affecting a person throughout their life.⁽¹⁾ Accessible product provision can help stop these cycles before they start.

Those already struggling are more likely to be going without.

Being able to concentrate and feel comfortable at school has a demonstrable impact on educational attainment and reducing absenteeism, which in turn increases life chances for employment, and financial security. Access to the right products will not by itself create period equity. But not removing that barrier will only increase our distance from it.

1.4M people have gone without period products in the past year.



People in low-income households or those receiving universal credit were more likely to go without period products.

Women from minoritised or marginalised communities face inequalities in access to healthcare, and a heightened risk of experiencing poverty that create additional barriers to accessing product and support.^{(6) (7)}

In our survey, Black and Black British people were significantly more likely to have gone without period products at some point in childhood or adolescence when compared with white people (25% v 18%).



THEY SHOULD MAKE IT FREE FOR PEOPLE TO GET THEIR PERIOD PRODUCTS AND HONESTLY, THEY WILL SAVE A LOT OF LIVES... YOU'RE GIVING SOMEBODY DIGNITY BACK. GIVING BACK CONTROL OF THEIR LIFE

Expert-by-experience



50% In our survey, half of those who receive Universal Credit (50%) and had gone without period products did so because they could not afford them.

More than four million people with disabilities in the UK are living in poverty.⁽⁸⁾ Almost half (47%) of those with a disability have gone without period products, with 13% going without in the last 12 months. These worrying statistics demonstrate the need for a more joined up approach in policy-making, to avoid vicious cycles that disproportionately affect particular communities.

In our interviews, we spoke with women who had come to the UK seeking asylum, a group significantly affected by hygiene and period poverty due to a lack of recourse to public funds.⁽¹⁾

Women described financial, practical, and language barriers to getting the products they needed. Where product was provided by accommodation providers, it was often done in a stigmatising way, and it was challenging to get the right type and absorbency of product for their needs. We've also been told reusable products were not a possibility, without sanitary facilities to clean them regularly.

The impact of this was clear - being forced to go without essential products has a profound impact on wellbeing and people's ability to manage their period with dignity.

Ensuring the right products are available at the right time is critical for people to thrive.⁽¹⁾

In our survey, 9% of those in Scotland said they had gone without period products in the last year, compared with 6-11% across most other UK regions.



HAVING FREE ACCESS TO HYGIENE PRODUCTS HAS ENSURED THE PEOPLE WE HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING DO NOT HAVE TO WORRY AT CERTAIN POINTS EACH MONTH.

Nuneaton and Bedworth
Healthy Living Network



Scotland had a significantly higher availability of free period products in the workplace (50%) than other regions (24% - 38%).

This finding demonstrates the need to take a long-term view of any intervention, when anecdotal evidence is available to suggest it is the right step to take. Encouragingly, in the regional table provided on page 18, responses from Scotland ranked highest in being able to access period products (55%). In our survey, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) people who had gone without period products said they went without because they were embarrassed to ask, or they didn't know where to access products for free (23%). This demonstrates the need for increased resource to enable local trusted services to signpost to other support.

Expansion should focus on learning and evaluation of current schemes, like that in Scotland, ensuring we understand where provision is working well, and get it working for everyone, everywhere.

SPOTLIGHT
ON

SCOTLAND PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) ACT 2021⁽¹⁴⁾

Scotland is the first country in the world to protect in law the right to access free period products. The act, which came into force in August of 2022, means councils and education providers are legally required to make period products available free of charge to anyone who needs them.

SPOTLIGHT
ON

MORRISONS PACKAGE FOR SANDY⁽¹⁵⁾

Available across 497 stores, the 'Package for Sandy' initiative was created by a Morrisons community champion in response to period poverty. Customers can go to any Morrisons customer desk and ask for a package for 'Sandy' or a period product pack. They will then be given a free discreet envelope with sanitary products, no questions asked.

Through our work at In Kind Direct, we see the impact that providing essential product has.

In our interviews, expanding access to free period products was consistently spoken about as a transformative step toward lifting the burden of period inequity.

We know that people are struggling to make ends meet right now. We welcome the recent announcement that VAT will be removed from reusable period pants.

Recommendations:

- Government should take further action in the context of the cost-of-living crisis to ensure everyone can access the product they need, including by:
 - Ensuring savings from removal of the “Tampon Tax” are passed onto consumers;
 - Working with retailers and manufacturers of period products to better understand barriers to accessible essentials and how these can be removed or addressed;
 - And engaging with sector campaigns to improve the social security system.
- Government should expand programmes providing free period products across the UK, such as the period product scheme in schools and in the NHS.
- Schools, charities and other community organisations should increase awareness, accessibility and uptake of existing provision to free period products and support.

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WE HAD A MUM WHO RELIED ON US EVERY MONTH TO HELP WITH PERIOD PRODUCTS FOR HERSELF AND HER DAUGHTERS. SHE HAS NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS AND SHE WAS REALLY STRUGGLING. WE WERE ABLE TO GET SOME PERIOD PANTS FROM IN KIND DIRECT. THIS HAS MEANT THE WORLD TO HER AND THE GIRLS!

Home-Start Kettering

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43%

of organisations in our network say the people they support are experiencing period inequity.

43%

of organisations in our network say they have heard of people using toilet roll instead of period pads.



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND PEER SUPPORT

Comprehensive period education helps break down stigma and empowers people to make informed choices about their health and wellbeing.

Period education in school leaves gaps in knowledge that are filled by friends and family.

1 in 10 people who have periods never learned about periods in their education.

Of those who did receive period education, only 39% said it left them feeling prepared for their first period. The majority (79%) said that they had to learn more about periods since receiving that education.

Older people were less likely to have learned about periods in school, college, or university. Over time, period education in school has become more common. However, with people of all ages saying they learn most of what they know about periods through friends and family, this generational gap is critical. It means those providing education and support may themselves have gaps in knowledge of menstrual health, different types of products, and where to access support.

Gender also matters. We found that only 30% of UK men learned about menstruation in education, and just under half (49%) say they are confident they understand periods and the menstrual cycle. Ensuring all genders are educated about menstruation can foster empathy and understanding, especially with CIPD data showing over 60% of HR leaders are



male.⁹ Equity in any area generally leads to more supportive and inclusive environments.

Currently, most girls say that male teachers and classmates don't understand period inequality.⁽⁴⁾

17% of people who have periods have recently felt embarrassed or ashamed because of their period and 38% have felt stressed or anxious due to their period. 1 in 10 have been told not to speak about their period in front of others.

For those who learned about periods in education, a minority said they were taught about reusable period products (14%), menstrual health conditions and how to recognise them (15%), and stigma and attitudes toward periods (13%).

16%

of 45-54-year-olds say they never received education about periods, compared to 6% of 16-24-year-olds.

1 IN 5

young people who received period education in school said they were taught how to recognise menstrual health conditions like endometriosis.

70%

of people who have periods say what they know about periods they mainly learned from female family and friends.

A lack of education can lead to a lack of preparedness, perpetuating stigma and affecting physical and emotional wellbeing.

It is critical that young people are taught to recognise what is a cause for concern with periods.

Currently, only a third (34%) of those who received period education in school said it left them confident in identifying what is a cause for concern with their period. At present, it takes an average of eight years to receive a diagnosis for endometriosis⁽¹⁰⁾, this is potentially even longer for women from minoritised communities⁽¹¹⁾. In addition, we found only around half of people who have periods (49%) say they feel confident managing their period.

The third sector plays an important role in providing period products, education and advice outside of schools, to ensure everyone has the knowledge and confidence they need.

The use of peer support approaches can help tackle stigma and increase uptake and accessibility of these programmes. By talking about periods as part of physical and mental wellbeing, it can break down barriers and encourage more conversation.



YOUTH PROGRAMMES HAVE A UNIQUE POSITION TO GIVE SPACE TO THESE ISSUES AND DISCUSS THEM IN A WAY THAT SCHOOLS OFTEN DON'T HAVE THE EXTRA TIME TO DO... HAVING A PEER-TO-PEER KNOWLEDGE SHARING PROGRAMME FOR THESE TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS WOULD BE REALLY HELPFUL

Expert-by-experience



THERE SHOULD BE EASY ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT PERIODS FOR YOUNG WOMEN. WE PARENTS, WE DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING – THAT'S THE HONEST TRUTH! WE GOOGLE, WE ASK FRIENDS FOR INFORMATION BEFORE WE TELL OUR KIDS, SO IT'S GOOD TO HAVE EASY ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION...

Expert-by-experience



Our interviews reinforced the importance of period education at all ages. Women who had attended workshops as adults spoke about how they helped normalise periods, taught them how to recognise what may be cause for concern, and increased their confidence to speak openly about their periods.

We all wear multiple hats, and one person may be a parent, sibling, friend, colleague, community volunteer and line manager. Even small changes will have a ripple effect.

Recommendations:

- Government should strengthen menstrual health education, ensuring accurate and comprehensive information is available to all. This should extend beyond students, to guide education and healthcare providers to offer the most informed and shame-free support.
- Schools, charities and other community organisations should explore and expand use of peer-support models of delivery.
- Government should increase support and provide sustainable funding for third sector organisations providing period products, education and shame-free support and advice in the community.



“

LET A PERIOD SUPPLY ALWAYS BE THERE, JUST KIND OF CREATE THAT SAFE SPACE... THAT'S WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO DO, OPEN THAT DOOR. BECAUSE THAT KIND OF KID WILL NOT COME TO YOU FOR HELP, BECAUSE SHE'S SHY, SHE'S WORRIED THEY'RE GOING TO SINGLE HER OUT. BUT WHEN YOU OPEN THAT DOOR, IT JUST KIND OF NORMALISES STUFF.

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Expert-by-experience

PERIOD STIGMA AND SUPPORT

Stigma around periods is still prevalent, encouraging shame, embarrassment, and anxiety.

17% of people who have periods have recently felt embarrassed or ashamed because of their period and 38% have felt stressed or anxious. 1 in 10 have been told not to speak about their period in front of others.

Some elements of period stigma were more common for young people and people who are Asian or Asian British. More than 1 in 5 (21%) people who are Asian or Asian British said they had been discouraged from speaking about their period in front of others.

Period stigma is holding people back.

43% of people who have periods have avoided certain activities because of their period. 1 in 5 have felt they need to hide that they have their period from others, and 1 in 10 (12%) would not be comfortable talking about periods with a family member.



EVERY PERIOD COUNTS⁽¹⁶⁾

Led by Irise International, Every Period Counts is a movement to make the right to period products and education in schools a reality for everyone.

The campaign calls for action from schools, local, and national government to provide shame-free access to period products, information, and support for all students.



1 IN 4 Among those aged 16-24, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) said they had felt embarrassed or ashamed because of their period.

Currently, fewer than half of men say they would feel comfortable speaking about periods with a friend (42%) or family member (44%). Removing shame for everyone will increase period equity.

We hear from our charitable network every day how products act as a gateway to accessing a wider range of support without shame. As the experts in product giving, we collated advice and insight from our charitable network to create a [Top Tip Guide to hygiene product giving](#) without shame and stigma.

Stigma can often be a barrier to reaching out for support.



WHEN YOU GROW UP IN A MINORITY BACKGROUND, YOU FEEL YOUR VOICE IS SHOT DOWN... WHEN I LISTENED TO THEM TALK, I REALISED SOMETHING INSIDE OF ME. LIKE, I HAD A FIRE FOR THIS. I BECAME SO CONFIDENT TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT PERIODS ...I'M LIKE 'LISTEN, IT'S OKAY, NO NEED TO BE SHY ABOUT IT, WE ALL HAVE IT - I'M REALLY BIG ON THAT.

Expert-by-experience



Similarly, supporting people with their period, could open up conversations to other support around health, financial security and accessing other services.

Encouragingly, most people (95%) have someone they would be comfortable asking for help with their period. However, despite more than half of people who have periods saying they would be comfortable approaching a healthcare provider for support, only 37% are confident they could go to their GP with concerns about their menstrual health and be taken seriously. This is not only worrying, it also increases reliance on other sources of support, such as community organisations and informal networks.

Initiatives like England's 10-year Women's Health Strategy⁽¹²⁾ are the opportunity to address menstrual health across the life course and break intergenerational cycles of misinformation and shame.

Recommendations:

- Schools, charities and other community organisations should explore holistic interventions to tackle stigma which involve the wider community, including men and boys.
- Schools, charities and other community organisations should ensure culturally appropriate support and resources are available, tailored to the needs of minoritised groups.
- Government should continue to prioritise menstrual health in the Women's Health Strategy through more emphasis and investment in early interventions to equip and empower people to seek care as early as possible. This could include public information campaigns and education for healthcare providers.



THE COST OF PERIOD INEQUITY

There is a multi-billion cost to period inequity. Worrying about leaking or feeling too embarrassed to ask for help holds people back from getting an education or being their best at work. Supportive workplaces matter and inclusive policies help break cycles of exclusion.

Throughout this report, the relationship has been made between overall mental and physical wellbeing, with specific interventions such as access to products, removing shame and stigma and increasing universal understanding of periods. Our research and the stories shared with us show the current cost of not getting it right, and the simple steps organisations can take today.

Our survey found that millions are being held back at work by their periods.

More than half (57%) of people who have periods say they miss work or school because of their period.

Nearly 1 in 5 (19%) say this happens with most, or almost every period. 70% felt limited in the amount or type of work they could do because of their period,

with more than a third (35%) feeling this way with most, or every period.

This is because of symptoms like heavy flow (61%) and period pain (67%), their effect on mental health (26%), menstrual health conditions (18%), feeling ashamed or embarrassed (12%), and not having the right facilities (14%) or product (6%) to manage a period. We know these causes rarely stand alone, having the right products to manage heavy flow or pain, and being able to access facilities without shame often go hand in hand.

Overall, people who missed school or work because of their period missed an average of 2.6 days a month. Going without period products, or having a diagnosed menstrual health condition, means an extra day of learning and work missed each month.

That could be almost one and a half extra years missed over the average menstruating lifecycle. More than half (51%) of those in work said they felt pressured to work even when feeling unwell or in pain from their period. It is well documented that teams that feel supported and can work flexibly, perform better and have lower levels of turnover.⁽²⁾

Our survey revealed that people with more supportive workplaces find it easier to manage their menstrual health and wellbeing. The data also showed the work still to be done. A minority of those in work report feeling able to openly talk about periods at work (38%), having access to free period products at work (36%), feeling their employer supports time off for menstrual health (20%) and feeling their employer normalised conversations about periods in the workplace (25%). These are all key for supporting menstrual health at work.⁽³⁾

“

WHERE I WORK ARE REALLY FLEXIBLE AND VERY UNDERSTANDING AS WELL... I WANT TO WORK FOR A COMPANY THAT UNDERSTANDS.

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Expert-by-experience

£3.25BN

Every year. That's the cost of the days of work lost due to period inequity.

Lived-experience interviews also emphasised the difference a supportive workplace can make. Periods are often not on the agenda for employers, but having policies in place that are openly communicated can help reduce stigma or embarrassment. Having a trusted figure in the workplace meant they could be open about their needs, and flexible working policies allowed them to be at their best at work.

Being held back in the workplace starts from adolescence.

Recent research found more than half of UK girls have missed school due to their period ⁽⁵⁾. Their reasons for missing school mirror those in our research; pain, embarrassment, and a lack of access to product, demonstrating how cycles of exclusion start early.

More supportive workplaces can help ensure no one is held back by a period at work, while investment in education and product provision in schools can help stop cycles of exclusion before they start.

Similarly, a universal approach to education on periods can ensure tomorrow's teachers, colleagues and managers are allies for period equity.

Despite government-funded schemes to make period products available in schools, more than

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HAVING MENSTRUATION POLICIES IS IMPORTANT SO PEOPLE KNOW THAT IT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN TALK ABOUT, AND THAT OTHER PEOPLE HAVE BROUGHT IT UP IN THE PAST.

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Employment Professional

half of girls can't find period products in school washrooms, and fewer than a third have accessed products through the scheme.⁽⁵⁾

We hear from our charitable network how crucial product accessibility is. We need to find out what works, and get it working for everyone, everywhere.

Recommendations:

- Employers should take urgent action to embed period equity across all workplace policies and use existing resources to create more period-inclusive workplaces.
 - This includes adopting the BSI Standards guidance for menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace.
- Government should commission an independent evaluation of the period product scheme in schools in England and gather data from similar schemes in the devolved nations.



BLOODY GOOD EMPLOYERS⁽¹³⁾

Created by the charity Bloody Good Period to ensure fairer, safer workplaces for all people who menstruate, Bloody Good Employers offers support and education for employers who are committed to promoting equality and diversity. It includes a four-step accreditation programme to guide employers through a company-wide shift to more inclusive culture, communications, and policies.

13%

1 in 8 workers who have periods say they don't have suitable facilities to change their period products at work.

31%

Fewer than 1 in 3 workers who have periods agree their employer is supportive of their menstrual health.

REGIONAL PROFILES

In our survey, there were few substantive differences in responses by geographic region. This may be due in part to the data being grouped into quite broad geographic regions, which can mask more local variations in outcome. We have included responses by region for a selection of survey questions to help inform local planning, policy, and practice. We are exploring ways to make all data from this project available publicly, later in the year.

	NORTH	MIDLANDS	EAST	LONDON	SOUTH	WALES	SCOTLAND	NORTHERN IRELAND
Learned about periods in education	86%	85%	85%	86%	83%	78%	84%	83%
Had to learn more about periods since education	76%	75%	82%	80%	80%	76%	81%	82%
Missing school/work with most or every period	17%	22%	14%	25%	17%	16%	22%	21%
Average days of school/work missed due to period	2.8	3.0	1.8	2.7	2.1	2.9	3.0	*
Reason for missing school/work: lack of access to products	7%	5%	9%	7%	6%	2%	4%	10%
Free period products available in the workplace	36%	38%	34%	36%	32%	24%	50%	30%
Gone without period products in past 12 months	7%	9%	6%	11%	6%	8%	9%	6%
Can easily access appropriate period products for needs	48%	49%	53%	47%	52%	54%	55%	54%
Have no one they are comfortable approaching for help, advice, or support with period	5%	7%	4%	5%	4%	6%	6%	5%
Confident could go to GP with menstrual health concerns and be taken seriously	40%	34%	32%	35%	38%	38%	38%	37%
Find it easy to manage own menstrual health and wellbeing	64%	62%	64%	64%	63%	65%	65%	49%

*Sample size too small to reliably report.

CONCLUSION

Our research reveals the cycles of exclusion caused by period inequity, starting at school, and continuing into the workplace and beyond. This hidden burden is preventable and lifting it is critical in creating a society where everyone can access the essentials they need to thrive.

There is increasing recognition of our obligation as a society to remove barriers and disadvantage created by a lack of support for periods and menstrual health. We believe everyone has a role to play in making this a reality. This project would not have been possible without the generous insight and support of many partners, across sectors.

At In Kind Direct, we will continue to lead in distributing the right products at the right time to communities, working to increase awareness and reduce the shame around periods, and championing support for the third sector organisations already doing inspiring work. We call on businesses, charities and public bodies to work with us and the wider advisory group to ensure no one is held back by their period.

To help end the intergenerational cycle of period inequity we recommend cross-sector action, including:

Government:

- Cross-party commitment to long-term action to address period inequity.
- Convene a dedicated group to consider period equity, replacing the period poverty taskforce.
- Evaluate existing policies and review guidance for healthcare and education providers through the lens of period equity.
- Expand programmes providing free period products across the UK, such as the period product scheme in schools and in the NHS.
- Increase support and provide sustainable funding for third sector organisations providing period products, education and shame-free support and advice in the community.
- Take further action in the context of the cost-of-living crisis to ensure everyone can access the product they need.

Schools, Charities and Community Organisations:

- Increase awareness, accessibility and uptake of existing free period product provision and support.
- Explore and expand use of peer-support models of delivery.
- Explore more holistic interventions to tackle stigma which involve the wider community, including men and boys.
- Ensure culturally appropriate support and resources are available, tailored to the needs of minoritised groups.

Business and Employers:

- Take urgent action to embed period equity across all workplace policies and use existing resources to create more period-inclusive workplaces.
- Share manufacturer and retailer insights on barriers to accessible product.
- Increase existing partnerships and support to national and local charitable organisations delivering services to communities.

TOGETHER WE CAN ENSURE EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO LIFE'S ESSENTIALS AND NO ONE IS HELD BACK BY THEIR PERIOD. TO START A CONVERSATION OR FOR A MORE DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF RESULTS, CONTACT RESEARCH@INKINDDIRECT.ORG

REFERENCES

Cover page image, courtesy of Centre for Ageing Better. Images on page 10, 13-14 and 16-17 show community and youth-led work to end period inequity in the UK, courtesy of Irise International.

All data, unless otherwise specified is from Savanta. See Appendix A for further information.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INFORMATION

We commissioned Savanta to conduct two surveys, forming the basis of the data in this report.

1. An omnibus survey of 2,138 UK adults aged 16+. Responses were collected online and have been weighted to be representative of the UK population aged 16+.
2. A survey of 2,926 UK adults aged 16+ who indicated that they either currently experience periods, or that they do not currently menstruate (e.g., due to a medical condition, contraception, pregnancy etc.) but may do so again in future. The sample was weighted to be representative of the UK population that experience menstruation.
 - 99% of the sample are cis women, 1% (23 responses) are people identifying as trans or non-binary.
 - 22% of the sample live in the North of England, 22% in the South, 16% in the Midlands, 15% in London, 9% in the East, 8% in Scotland, 4% in Wales and 3% in Northern Ireland
 - 80% of the sample are white or white British, 10% are Asian or Asian British, 5% are Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African, 3% are from a mixed ethnic background and 2% are from another ethnic background.
 - 34% of the sample are in receipt of one or more means-tested benefits.
 - 34% of the sample have a longstanding physical or mental health condition or disability.
 - 16% of the sample have been diagnosed with one or more menstrual health conditions and 17% experience symptoms of a menstrual health condition but have not received a diagnosis.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL CALCULATIONS

1. £3.25 billion annual cost of days of work lost due to period inequity. (pg. 8).

Variable	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
A) People missing work with 'most' or 'every' period. ⁽¹⁾	18%	17%	
B) Average days missed each month. ⁽¹⁾	2.4	2.6	
C) Women who currently experience periods. ⁽²⁾	44%	44%	
D) UK female workforce. ⁽³⁾	9,740,000	5,920,000	
E) Median weekly pay. ⁽⁴⁾	£584	£228	
F) Weekly hours worked. ⁽⁵⁾	35	16.4	
G) UK female workforce missing days due to period. ⁽⁶⁾	771,408	442,816	
H) Median daily pay. ⁽⁷⁾	£116.80	£47.37	
I) Total workdays missed per month. ⁽⁸⁾	1,851,379.2	1,151,321.6	
J) Total cost of missed workdays per month. ⁽⁹⁾	£216,241,091	£54,542,653	£270,783,744
K) Total cost of missed workdays per year. ⁽¹⁰⁾	£2,594,893,087	£654,511,840	£3,249,404,927

Sources and Formulas

- Survey of 2,926 UK adults 16+ who experience periods.
 - Women selecting "Yes, I currently menstruate / bleed" in response to "do you, or have you ever had a period". Survey of 2,138 UK adults 16+, weighted to be representative of UK population 16+.
 - Buchanan, I., Pratt, A., & Francis-Devine, B. (2023). Women and the UK economy. House of Commons Library. Research Briefing Number 6838.
 - ONS (2022). Employee earnings in the UK: 2022.
 - ONS. (2023). Average actual weekly hours of work for part-time workers (seasonally adjusted); for full-time assumed 35-hour FTE.
 - $g = (d * c) * a$.
 - $h_{fulltime} = e_{fulltime} / 5$; $h_{parttime} = (e_{parttime} / f_{parttime}) * (7 * 0.4868FTE)$; FTE determined using University of Oxford FTE calculator.
 - $i = g * b$.
 - $j = i * h$; $j_{total} = j_{parttime} + j_{fulltime}$.
 - $k = j * 12$; $k_{total} = k_{parttime} + k_{fulltime}$.
- 1.4m people have gone without period products in the past year (pg. 10)**
Calculation carried out by In Kind Direct, using data from Savanta. 1,403,066 calculated as 8% of the female population aged 16-55 years old in the UK, based on ONS Population Estimates mid-year 2021.
 - Going without period products means an extra day of learning and work missed each month (pg. 8)**
That could be almost 1.5 extra years missed over the average woman's lifetime. Calculation carried out by In Kind Direct, using data from Savanta. Average age of first period at age 12 (NHS), and average age of menopause at 51 (Age UK). Impact of an extra day of school/work missed each period, across 41 years of menstruation (with 13 periods each year) equates to 533 additional days.



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