



Period Poverty

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The documentary film, [Period. End of Sentence.](#), shows a twelve-year-old's menses amidst the shame, embarrassment, and misinformation surrounding menstruation.

“Why does [the bleeding] happen?” the young girl asks the women of her village. “What happens in the body?”

An older woman explains, “This is something only God knows. It’s bad blood which comes out.”

Without proper education and information, such taboos and myths surrounding menstruation are perpetuated. In the documentary, women share how they are not allowed to enter the temple to worship, nor are they allowed “to pray to any of the gods during our periods,” because “the elders . . . say that the prayer isn’t heard, no matter how much you pray.” One young woman, Sneba, observes that the goddess they pray to “is a woman, just like us, so I don’t agree with this rule that women should not enter the temple during menstruation because they are believed to be dirty. I don’t think it’s right.”

Education—for all—about menstruation and better management of it, as well as access to clean water, soap, security, privacy, and affordable hygiene products, will vastly decrease “period poverty” globally. Education can promote healthy habits and break stigmas about a natural biological process.

[Period poverty](#) denotes the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene resources, tools, and education and the inequalities related to menstruation. In the United States, students, those living in poverty, and those experiencing homelessness are often unable to access sanitary products, which can force them to choose [between purchasing food and purchasing sanitary products](#). Currently, there are 30 states that tax period products because they consider them “nonessential goods.” Similarly, food stamps do not cover period products, though [25 million women in the United States live in poverty](#).

Globally, it is not uncommon for girls to stop attending school upon beginning to menstruate, because they lack access to menstruation products and private restrooms with toilets, clean water, and soap. They [resort to using](#) bits of clothing, socks, rags, newspapers, even toilet paper or plastic bags. They have no safe place to change, and because the menstrual blood seeps through their clothing, they are teased and even bullied. When they try to find a place to change, they discover that men follow them and watch them. [Approximately “1.25 billion \[menstruators\] have no access to a safe, private toilet, \[and\] 526 million don’t have a toilet at all.”](#)

Period poverty is a justice issue and a “hidden” public health crisis. Because our faith encourages us to care for our bodies as well as our spirits, we are invited to care about this issue. Congregations may help reduce period poverty in their own neighborhoods by ensuring there are sanitary products in all restrooms. A congregation could hold a collection drive for menstrual products in their building, as well as local schools and shelters. They could host a film screening of *Period. End of Sentence.* and invite conversations on women’s empowerment and overcoming stigma and taboos through normalizing menstruation. They could write letters to Congress demanding that the “pink tax” on period products be removed. Together, we can help reduce the stigma of shame, humiliation, embarrassment, disempowerment, and miseducation surrounding menstruation.



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