

UNDERSTANDING PERIOD POVERTY IN HAWAII

THE HAWAII STATE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
+ MA'I MOVEMENT HAWAII

November 2021

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HAWAII STATE
COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



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UNDERSTANDING PERIOD POVERTY IN HAWAI'I: A COMMUNITY SERVICE ANALYSIS



**THE HAWAI'I STATE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
AND MA'I MOVEMENT HAWAI'I**

NOVEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to build a storehouse of knowledge on period poverty in Hawai'i. Period poverty is shorthand for systematic lack of access to period supplies, such as pads and tampons. Menstrual inequity is often credited to circumstances including, but not limited to, economic oppression, inadequate menstrual health and hygiene education, cultural or societal shame or stigma surrounding menstruation, and a lack of running water or sanitary locations to maintain personal hygiene. This is the first report of its kind in Hawai'i.

This paper reviews and analyzes survey results from 361 Hawai'i residents about their experiences with menstruation. This paper also explores the structural sources of period poverty in Hawai'i. Finally, this project tests support for policy related to menstruation and finds that a majority of participants favor government provision of period supplies.

Menstruation is an involuntary bodily process experienced by over half the population of Hawai'i, or more than 701,000 people. The vast majority of people impacted by period poverty are women, but menstruation is not the exclusive domain of people who identify as women and girls: “[T]rans men and trans boys, as well as gender non-binary, intersex, and genderqueer people menstruate as well.”¹

Each month and for an average of forty years, menstrual blood and tissue passes out of a woman's body for two to seven days.² Period supplies are thereby non-negotiable necessities that determine a woman/girl, māhū, trans man/boy, and gender non-conforming person's ability to participate in life in public, especially education and employment. Consequently, period poverty is a source of gender inequality.

Period poverty is not a given. Period poverty in Hawai'i traces to American colonization. Colonization caused a dramatic decline in power for women and māhū. Once influential spiritual leaders, political decisionmakers, and economic actors whose menstruation was nurtured, women and māhū began to be associated with negative qualities and defined by Western missionaries as intellectually and physically inferior to men. Stigmatizing menstruation was part of building the case that being a woman was less desirable than being a man—a curse. Women and māhū were also placed at the margins of the new cash-wage system.

“TRANS MEN AND TRANS BOYS, AS WELL AS GENDER NON-BINARY, INTERSEX, AND GENDERQUEER PEOPLE MENSTRUATE AS WELL.”

Women's unequal status was cemented by Western missionary edicts that displaced traditional practices surrounding menstruation. The Bible says, “When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be

unclean until evening.”³ Menstruation was a mark of sinfulness that required sacrificial offering to expiate: “The priest is to sacrifice one dove for a sin offering and the other dove for a burnt offering. In this way he will make *atonement for her before the Lord for the uncleanness of her discharge.*”⁴

The Biblical treatment of menstruation stands in contrast to Native Hawaiian views that celebrated menstruation as a time of cleansing, rest and reflection. According to cultural historian Adam Keawe Manalo-Camp, Native Hawaiians did not initially have an ashamed view of menstruation. Practices of separation and dietary restriction around menstruation were misinterpreted in a negative light by Westerners.



LOST IN TRANSLATION

There are many Native Hawaiian terms for menstruation: hanawai, kahe, ma’i (wahine), he’e koko, wai, wai ‘ula, wai o ka wahine, waimaka lehua. Like many words in the Hawaiian language, these terms for menstruation carry multiple meanings, such as kahe, which means both to trickle and menstruate. Other words, like ma’i, carry negative connotations and were translated to mean sickness, disease and menstruation. Although ma’i is used colloquially today, long held attitudes that have been conceptualized through religious and colonialist ways of thinking influenced these linguistic translations and took hold because this Western interpretation aligned with the Christian premise of women’s impurity.⁵ The same has also been seen in English with “taboo” being derived from either the Polynesian tapua, meaning “menstruation,” or tabu, meaning “apart.”⁶ As a result, for “generations of women have been taught that they are to be ashamed of their bodies and of their gender.”⁷ Christian patriarchy is the ideological pillar of our education system, so these views have been normalized in our communities through various institutions.

In the United States, most individuals utilize tampons, disposable pads, menstrual cups, period underwear, or reusable menstrual pads to manage menstruation.⁸ The essential nature of these supplies remains unrecognized in law and policy, and shrouded in cultural and societal shame. Period poverty does not result from a lack of resources, but rather lack of political will.

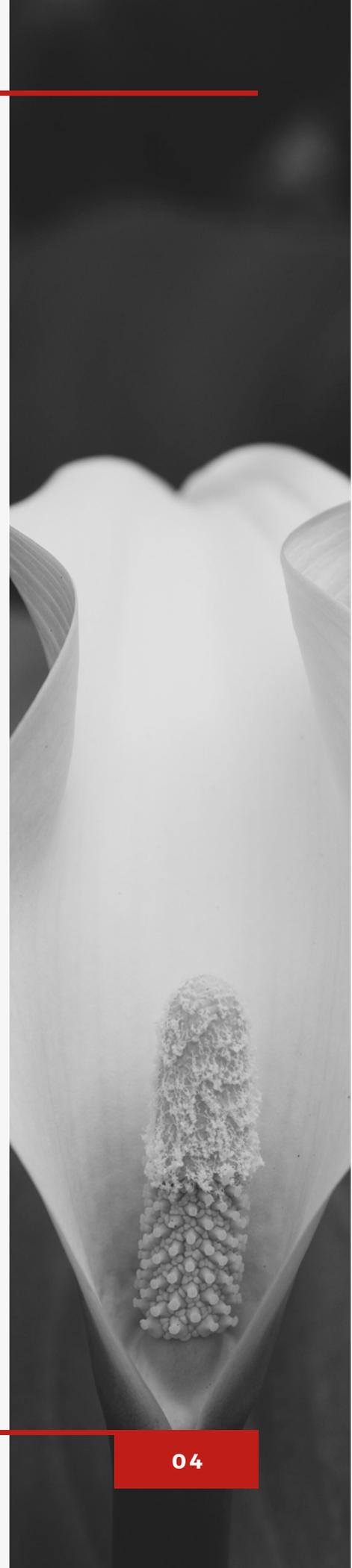
Menstruation is still a stigmatizing mark in U.S. society, although it is considered “a hidden stigma because women go to a great deal of effort to conceal it.”⁹

Menstruation is associated with raging emotions, mental instability, and dirtiness. The cultural common sense says periods are gross and shameful, and so is poverty.

In 1964, Patsy Mink was ridiculed by Dr. Edgar Berman when she stated that nothing would be wrong with a woman president. He rebuffed the idea of a “menopausal woman president” who might be “subject to the curious mental aberration of that age group.” She was quick to respond. “His use of the menstrual cycle and menopause to ridicule women and to caricature all women as neurotic and emotionally unbalanced was...indefensible and astonishing.”¹⁰

The stigma and silence around menstruation is perpetuated through sexism. Menstruation continues to be used as an insult among men to assert dominance over other men by associating them with women.

For example, Jack Harlow raps in his chart topping 2020 hit, “These boys pussy they PMSing.” Men’s stigmatizing portrayal of menstruation in pop culture sends a power message to each generation of girls.



MENSTRUAL STIGMA WAS CONFIRMED BY A SWATH OF TESTIMONY FROM RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY:

Periods are viewed as gross.

It's [a] taboo topic, so it's shameful. People, especially boys, think it's gross. They say ew.

Being poor is shame.

“

**CONDITIONED TO BELIEVE
THAT PERIODS WERE
SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED
OF.**

”

It's hard to talk about something that's not usually talked about or considered "gross."

When you talk about your period people get grossed out and don't want to be around you.

These views were widely held by our respondents, which is incredibly tragic. We take a feminist response to these findings and affirm our commitment to destigmatize menstruation, end period poverty and advance gender justice. No research is truly objective or value-neutral, nor should it be in the face of widespread injustice.

AUTHORS

BEHIND THIS REPORT



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Khara Jabola-Carolus is the Executive Director of the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women. Like many girls, Khara did not receive positive support for her first menstruation and hid her period by secretly siphoning period supplies from family members and friends. She is a lawyer with a specialization in Native Hawaiian rights.

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Nikki-Ann Yee, is the Co-Founder of Ma'i Movement Hawai'i. As a Native Hawaiian woman who grew up witnessing and experiencing firsthand the struggles many locals face, she started Ma'i Movement Hawai'i with her sisters, Brandy-Lee Yee and Jamie-Lee Kapana, to end period poverty in Hawai'i after learning about the issue while living overseas.

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TERMINOLOGY



While the conversations around menstrual inequity focus primarily on girls and women as the majority of those impacted by patriarchal structures, any gender can experience their periods. There has been an increase in menstrual advocates adopting language inclusive, using terms such as “menstruator” or “people who menstruate” in these discussions. Although the term is used more frequently today, the term “menstruator” was introduced by third-wave feminist activists in the 1990s ostensibly to “uncouple the gendered body from menstruation.”¹¹

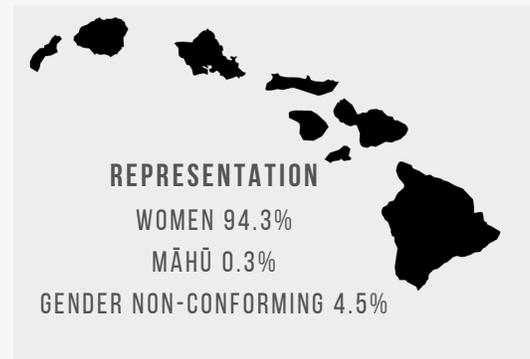
Some argue that this has had the unintended impact of uncoupling the issue from systemic sexism.

As trans inclusive feminists, and for the purpose of this report, we will use the terms “women, māhū, trans men, gender non-conforming and non-binary people” because we seek to humanize those defined as non-human by patriarchy. Historically and presently, our dehumanization is perpetuated by stereotyping language that reduces us to our bodies, body parts, and reproductive role in society. Naming ‘women’ is about focusing on patriarchy, not excluding all impacted by it.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we employed an online survey to obtain feedback in a contactless manner during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also sought to correct the exclusion of women's stories from so-called objective knowledge.

We received completed surveys from 361 Hawai'i residents about their experiences with menstruation. Survey respondents were from all inhabited islands except Ni'i'hau: 62.5% O'ahu, 18.8% Hawai'i Island, 12.8% Maui, 4% Kaua'i, 1.7% Lana'i, and 0.3% Moloka'i. The survey was conducted over one month between August 10, 2021 to September 9, 2021.



The vast majority of participants (94.3%) identified as women, but 4.5% identified as gender non-conforming and 0.3% as mähū. No participants identified as men or as transgender. Of these participants, 26.1% of began menstruation in elementary school, 62.8% in middle school and 11.1% in high school.

Period poverty and menstrual inequity are a direct result of socioeconomic, gender and racial injustices that, in Indigenous cultures, can be traced back to American colonization. Settlers and missionaries that came to Hawai'i sought to demonize ancestral belief and practices. Prohibition on Hawaiian language is a key example of the attempt to control, suppress and erase Native Hawaiians. Colonization affected women, men and gender diverse people differently. Through colonization, women were associated with sin, redefined as man's property, and became unable to survive independently without a man.

Women's vulnerability and dependency continues today, as captured by the survey results. The exceptionally high cost of living and wage gap for women specifically exacerbate period poverty in Hawai'i: 29.5% of respondents or someone in their household experienced difficulty obtaining period products. Of those that said they experienced difficulty, cost was the most cited reason (58%). In addition, 23.8% of respondents have made sacrifices or gone with less in order to afford period products.

Menstruation impacts participation in work and school for women and marginalized genders. Half of respondents have missed school or work because of their period. Specific to school absences, 21.6% reported missing a day of school because they did not have access to period products. Of those who missed school entirely, 11.9% missed 3-5 school days and 6.1% missed 6-10 or more school days in an academic year.

Period shame impacts period product access which impacts participation in school: 65.1% of respondents said they were embarrassed to ask a school administrator (e.g. teacher, nurse, etc.) for a pad or tampon or other help to manage their period. Sources of embarrassment cited were the social stigma around periods, and insensitive, unapproachable, and untrained teachers and school administrators. Relatedly, 42% of respondents have had to miss class or leave school early because they did not have period products.

Shame has a tangible impact: 42.3% of respondents stated that the lack of access to a pad or tampon at school affected their ability to learn in high school because they were too uncomfortable, embarrassed or worried. Yet less than half of respondents (42.3%) said that their school provided period products, and not necessarily for free (25.6% remembered having to pay out-of-pocket).

**“HALF OF RESPONDENTS
HAVE MISSED SCHOOL
OR WORK BECAUSE OF
THEIR PERIOD.”**

Menstruation remains taboo in Hawai'i. This has created ignorance about the basic functions of women's own bodies. Nearly half (48.3%) of participants received little to no information about their period before it started. Embarrassment about menstruation was one of the top three barriers to obtaining period products.

This report is not the end-all, be-all. This report is intended to provide an initial snapshot of menstruation issues in Hawai'i. We believe that the lived experiences of women and marginalized genders are empirical evidence. Direct testimonies from women and marginalized genders should be the foundation of policy about our lives. These testimonies lend strong public support for policy change: 95.2% of respondents believe the government should remove a tax on period products (GET taxes many necessities in Hawai'i), and 93.5% of respondents believe government should provide free period products, such as pads and tampons, to anyone who needs them.

KEY INSIGHTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

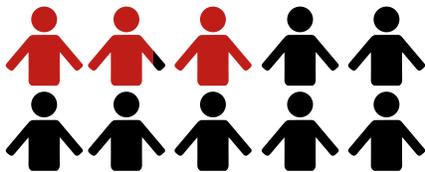
- 94.3% of respondents identified as women, 4.5% identified as gender non-conforming, and 0.3% (1) as mähū. No participants identified as transgender or men;
- Respondents were permitted to select multiple race and indigeneity categories. The most cited: 29.5% of respondents identified as Native Hawaiian, 23.6% as Filipino, 23.6% as Japanese, 11.6% Latinx and 52% white;
- Majority of respondents were still menstruating: 38.9% of respondents were age 30-44, 38.6% were age 19-29, 4.5% were age 13-18, 16.5% were 45 or older, (the average age of menopause in the United States is 52);
- Total Household income before taxes during the past 12 months:

15.3% earn less than \$20,000	12.2% earn \$50,000 to \$74,999
12.5% earn \$20,000 to \$34,999	13.1% earn \$75,000 to \$99,000
15.6% earn \$35,000 to \$49,999	23% earn over \$100,000
- 75% of respondents did not receive any government assistance, 15.3% receive SNAP benefits, 6% receive WIC, 4.5% UI, 3.4% receive TANF.

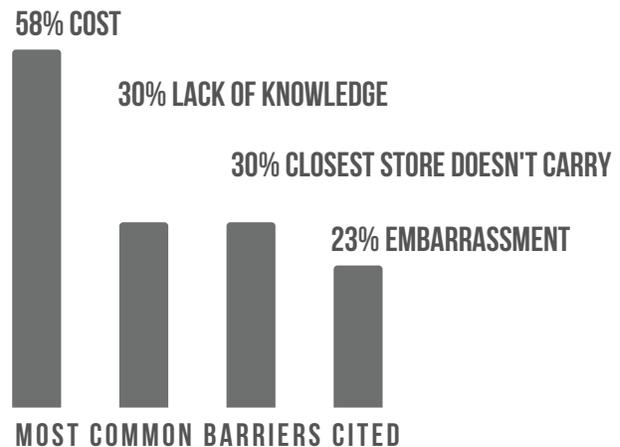
361

HAWAI'I RESIDENTS

FINANCIAL IMPACT

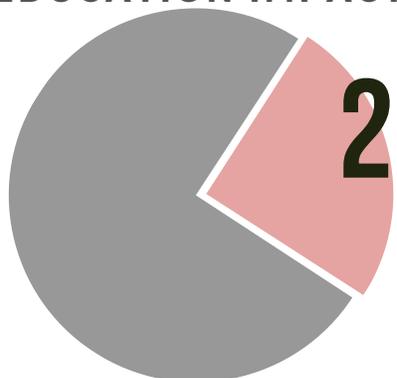


29.5% OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THEY OR SOMEONE IN THEIR HOUSEHOLD EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTY OBTAINING PERIOD PRODUCTS



- 90.3% believe period products are expensive;
- 23.8% have made sacrifices or gone with less in order to afford period products;
- 21% of respondents have had to prioritize other essential household expenses, such as food or utility bills, over buying period products.

EDUCATION IMPACT



21.6% MISSED A FULL DAY OF SCHOOL BECAUSE THEY DID NOT HAVE ACCESS TO PERIOD PRODUCTS

OF FULL ABSENCES, 11.9% MISSED 3-5 SCHOOL DAYS, AND 6.1% MISSED 6-10+ SCHOOL DAYS IN AN ACADEMIC YEAR;

- 66.2% attended high school in Hawai'i;
- 68.2% attended public high school;
- 26.1% of respondents began menstruating in elementary, 62.8% in middle school and 11.1% in high school;
- 95.5% reported that they had a period start while physically at school;
- 42% of respondents have had to miss class or leave school early because they did not have period products.

SOCIETAL IMPACT

84.7% BELIEVE MENSTRUAL EQUITY IS A REAL PROBLEM, LIKE FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITY

- 50% of respondents have missed school or work because of their period;
- 48.3% of participants received little to no information about their period before it started;
- 95.2% of respondents believe the government should remove a tax on period products;
- 93.5% of respondents believe government should provide free period products, such as pads and tampons, to anyone who needs them;
- 20.8% of respondents are embarrassed to talk about their period;
- 64.3% feel social and emotional distress when they don't have the products, such as pads and tampons, needed to manage a period.



METHODOLOGY



This report utilized an online survey to collect feedback from Hawai'i residents who experience menstruation. Online survey was the preferred method during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure contactless research and revenue-neutrality.

We received completed surveys from 361 Hawai'i residents about their experiences with menstruation. Survey respondents were from all inhabited islands except Ni'ihau: 62.5% O'ahu, 18.8% Hawai'i Island, 12.8% Maui, 4% Kaua'i, 1.7% Lana'i, and 0.3% Moloka'i. The survey was conducted over one month between August 10, 2021 to September 9, 2021.

The survey instrument was modeled on the national survey Menstruation Management in United States Schools and Implications for Attendance, Academic Performance, and Health.¹²

The survey was disseminated to the community primarily through email and social media, and word of mouth from community organizers, government agencies, non-profit service providers, and legislators on all islands.

DIRECT TESTIMONIES

I remember the period stigma in middle/high school and don't remember learning anything about periods other than that they just "happen to women" when access to period products, **gender inclusive education** and medical attention are so needed yet are a huge barrier for all people who menstruate.

A lot of my own discomfort stems from how my mom talked about periods or rather didn't talk about it at all! It would have been nice **if school had resources and started the conversation** that I never had with her.



THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM



I'm 56 years old. I raised three daughters and two sons, and used my personal experience to change how I raised my children. Open door policy, Open dialogue. Sex education truly should start at home to prepare our children for adulthood in every means possible. As a mother each child provided me an opportunity to become a better parent. I only hope my children are doing the same with their children. **We must prepare the next generations while at home and in school.**

I have struggled financially all my life. I have struggled for food, paying bills and providing myself the basic needs such as pads. There were many times in my life I was forced to use toilet paper or paper towels/napkins because I didn't have pads. Because those items doesn't stop leakage, I was forced to stay home sick. **It is so hard when you can't afford the basic things in life.**

“

**BURDENSOME COST OF
LIVING IN HAWAI'I**

”

When moving to Hawaii, **I had major sticker shock with the cost of tampons and panty liners.** And because I get a bad reaction to them cheap ones (itching), I have to spend extra on the nice ones. I quickly bought a menstrual cup for cost reasons in addition to environmental reasons.

I also started pre-menopause in my late 40's, then menopause. I lost weight and my period returned. **Thus, I am adding these products back to the shopping list in my late 40s.**

I make decent money, all things considered. But **I would not be able to afford to buy pads/tampons monthly on top of the high cost of living in Hawaii.** Which is why I opted to get an IUD (free birth control thanks to my medical insurance) to stop getting my ma'i. But it isn't something I would have chosen if I knew I could afford the alternative.

I have menorrhagia resulting in heavy bleeding & anemia, severe pelvic pain and pmdd. Was terminated from 1 job and almost terminated from another due to low performance (from anemia)/missed work (due to pelvic pain) during period. **Med professionals would not approve fmla for periods calling it "unethical."**



**THE ROLE OF
WORKPLACE POLICY**



My period made my life a living hell. It has affected my school life and my career, including the types of jobs that I applied for and held. Periods need to be normalized and so does having period products available, including pain medication. **I missed many days of school and work due to extreme period pains due to years of endometriosis.** I was not diagnosed with this until age 28 after years of pain every month.

During my 40's, I had endometriosis and had very uneven and irregular blood flows; sometimes leaking onto my dress and chair at work. So difficult when working full time. This is another reason why **telework is an important option** which should be offered to all employees; to help them manage menstrual cycles and other health challenges in the privacy of their own homes. Even having just one day of telework per week can help employees to maintain balance in their lives and be their best.

The fact that women **have to purchase such products for a biological cause** that they have no choice but to face, is not okay. As a woman, I have faced the stigma of getting my period and was always afraid of others judging me if I had ever "leaked" or asked for pad or tampon.



THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT UNDERRESOURCING



I have online friends that are probably in 7th-8th grade and some of their stories are that some of their teachers (mainly one) wouldn't let them go to the bathroom on their periods and **the teacher would make them feel ashamed of their periods**. They were in the same class again while on their periods and they didn't want to ask the teacher again because they were ashamed and scared so I think they told me that they just let their blood leak through their pants.

As a younger teen, I was told to try and stretch out using pads at home because my mom wasn't able to afford. I knew my friends had an easier time accessing pads and I would ask them. **It's the things like this that makes taxed period products inappropriate**. What reason will give the officials the eye opener to take it easy on feminine products?

I have used a diva cup for the last 3 years. There is still a lot of **negative stigma around washing the cups in public sinks...blood/disease/etc...** I don't know how to fix this, but the diva cup really did save me from situations where no tampons would have been available. Even when it's full, just dump out and start again.

“

**THE LACK OF PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE &
ACCESS TO RESTROOMS**

”

I attended public school and we never had female hygiene supplies provided (**some of our bathrooms didn't even have regular toilet paper supplied on a regular basis!**).

Often times, from my experience, young women in high school/middle school end up leaking out of their products because they are simply too embarrassed to ask their teachers for another OR because **teachers often do not allow students to go to the bathroom during class time**, and are often asked to explain why they need to go. **I was a victim** in which I had a feeling I needed to change my period product, and when I requested to use the restroom, the teacher had the audacity to ask why in front of the entire classroom. I was mortified not only because I felt that I was not able to tell HIM why, but because I had also ended up leaking throw my clothes and requested my mother to come to school to give me a new pair of pants and underwear.

ANALYSIS

THESE KEY THEMES EMERGED FROM THE SURVEY RESULTS:

Women's equality remains elusive in Hawai'i. This is attributable to systemic problems and government.

Period poverty is an "invisible barrier" to gender equality in Hawai'i. Equal access to education for women is still circumscribed by biology in Hawai'i.

Inadequate access to safe products to properly manage menstruation and medical support to treat menstruation-related disorders limits job and education opportunities.

Schools remain inhospitable to girls, gender non-conforming people and mähū in Hawai'i.

adequately prepare students for menstruation does not appear to be widely available or effective.

Training for faculty and school staff about period poverty and how to support menstruating students is needed.

Silence and secrecy is expected of women when it comes to menstruation.

“MENSTRUATION REMAINS TABOO IN HAWAI'I. PERIOD POVERTY, INCLUDING FEELINGS OF EMBARRASSMENT AND LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT MENSTRUATION PRIOR TO MENARCHE, WERE EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN, GENDER NON-CONFORMING PEOPLE, AND MÄHŪ IN EVERY GENERATION SURVEYED, INCLUDING RESPONDENTS WHO ARE CURRENTLY TEENAGERS. PERIODS AND POVERTY BOTH CONTINUE TO CARRY DEEP STIGMA IN HAWAI'I.”

Women, gender non-conforming people, and mähū in Hawai'i experience lost education time due to period poverty.

Period poverty is an obstacle to equal access to education in Hawai'i.

School policies, lack of accommodations, resources and menstruation-specific instruction impede equal access to education for them.

Comprehensive sexuality instruction and reproductive education that

Shame and stigma perpetuates the cycle of period poverty and prevents people from seeking help and support to address their menstrual needs, whether it's financial, medical or emotional.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND PROPOSED ACTION

The outcome of decades of feminist organizing, “National Period Day” was first commemorated in the United States on October 19, 2019. One year later, in November 2020, Scotland passed the Period Products (Free Provision) Act, which requires local authorities to ensure that period products are universally accessible and free. This was a global first.

Within the past several years, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Nevada, Oregon, New York, New Hampshire, Illinois, California, Rhode Island and Washington have passed laws or policies advancing menstrual equity in their public school and higher education systems. There have also been broader proposals. Congresswoman Grace Meng of New York introduced the Menstrual Equity for All Act since 2019 to “give states the option of using federal grant funds to provide students with free menstrual products in schools, require large employers to provide free menstrual products for their employees in the workplace, and require all public federal buildings to provide free menstrual products in their restrooms.”¹³

These milestones belie the negative impact of COVID-19 on women. As the pandemic swept the planet, so did period poverty. This expressed as menstrual product shortages to heightened inability to pay for products. Positively, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, on March 27, 2020, and included a provision in the Act that provided funds from tax-advantaged health savings accounts for purchase of any “menstrual care product.”

At the State level, Representative Amy Perruso introduced the first bill to make period products free in public secondary schools (HB 2430) and exempt period products from the GET (SB3016) during the 2020 Legislative Session. This legislative campaign was possible through the activism of local advocates Sarah Milianta-Laffin of 'Ilima Intermediate School and Moana Oslo of I Support the Girls. The session was truncated due to the onset of the pandemic and the bill did not progress.

Senator Laura Acasio introduced the bill (SB966) in the following 2021 session to request the Department of Education make period products free in public secondary schools, but no hearing was granted. Working with the previous year's advocates and Ma'i Movement Hawai'i, the bill was later turned into non-binding resolutions (SR77 and HR147) which were adopted.

Notably, in May 2021, Governor David Ige, Mayor Rick Blangiardi, Mayor Derek Kawakami, Mayor Mitch Roth and Mayor Mike Victorino issued state and county proclamations recognizing Period Poverty Awareness Week, created by the Alliance for Period Supplies to draw attention to the issue of period poverty and the negative impact it has on people who menstruate.

This survey confirms the prevalence of period poverty and menstrual inequity, in Hawai'i and the inability to access menstrual products, such as pads or tampons, due to lack of income, education, shame or stigma and a clean and sanitary place to maintain hygiene. The lack of access to menstrual products in schools has been linked to student absenteeism, education loss and directly impacts the health and emotional well-being of nearly half the student population.

Further, a statewide pilot currently being conducted by Ma'i Movement Hawai'i in local public schools also revealed that students used unhealthy alternatives like newspapers, old rags, diapers and leaves when they did not have access to menstrual products. Menstrual products are vital for the physical and mental health, well-being and full participation of girls, trans and gender non-conforming individuals in everyday life, especially school.

**“ THIS SURVEY CONFIRMS
THE PREVALENCE OF
PERIOD POVERTY &
MENSTRUAL INEQUITY
IN HAWAI'I. ”**



THIS REPORT RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

- Remedial steps by the Department of Education to make menstrual products available free and accessible to all students;
- Remedial steps by the Department of Public Safety to ensure policies adopted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in 2018 which requires facilities make menstrual products available for free to prisoners are executed at the state and county level, and ensure their internal policy on issued hygiene products is fully implemented;
- Recommend the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency implement policies adopted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency which adds menstrual products to the list of essential items that homeless assistance providers can purchase with federal grant funds from the agency's Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program;
- Propose steps to adopt rules that permit recipients of benefits provided under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to use their benefits to purchase menstrual hygiene products;
- End the so-called "tampon tax." Hawai'i is one of the only Democrat majority states that taxes menstrual products because the GET is so broad.¹⁴
- Mandatory training for teacher and school staff about period poverty and how to support menstruating students;
- Implementation of comprehensive sexuality education that includes content which thoroughly demystifies and destigmatizes menstruation for all genders.

CONCLUSION



Inequality related to menstruation is real and happening in Hawai'i.

Colonial ideas about women's "unclean" bodies persist in culture, law, policy, and practice. Women, māhū, and gender non-conforming people continue to be disadvantaged in material ways by colonial ideas about menstruation, women's bodies, and biology.

The stories that were shared in the report reinforces this notion and reveals a common call for action to guarantee that all individuals of menstruation age have the right to access period products, safe and hygienic places to use them, and the right to manage their bodies without shame or stigma. These are non-negotiable and the lack of is a clear violation of human rights, basic equity, gender equality, basic equity and a threat to public health.

Furthermore, this report exposes the ripple effect of sexism and menstrual stigma when it is built into policy and institutional practice throughout a society. Accordingly, women's equality and gender justice rest on the State's willingness to resource and destigmatize menstruation.

There is no single solution to period poverty or menstrual inequity because it is intertwined with other societal and cultural issues. However, Hawai'i now has a roadmap to guide the State and our community on how to start dismantling these systemic barriers.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Wiley Reading, "My Period and Me: A Trans Guy's Guide to Menstruation," *Everyday Feminism*, November 4, 2014, <https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/11/trans-guys-guide-menstruation/>.
- 2 In the United States, the average age of first menses is 12 and the average age of menopause (the permanent cessation of menstruation) is fifty-two.
- 3 Leviticus 15:19 (NIV).
- 4 Ibid.
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