

Lack of Access to Feminine Products: A Global Women's Health Issue

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Imagine that time of month coming around, but you do not have any hygiene products to use. Females across the world are shunned and stigmatized about a monthly visit that they cannot control. Imagine young girls budding into puberty who are afraid to go school due to embarrassment. The 250 million girls lacking access to safe menstrual products and the hygienic tools necessary to manage their periods are at risk of losing their futures. Not being able to afford these items should not hinder their ability to study or make a living. Most of us living in Western cultures can go out and easily buy needed products, but in other parts of the world, these products are simply not available or are priced too high to be affordable to any but the rich. This leads many girls to rely on dirty rags or old newspapers which is not sanitary.

In many countries around the world, sanitary items are seen as "luxury items" and not as necessities. For example, girls cannot easily obtain feminine products in the African country of Uganda. Paul Montgomery, a professor at Oxford University, decided to bring reusable pads and feminine education to Uganda to see which would cause a bigger impact in the area. The reusable pads were called AFRIpads. According to Crofts, these were made from polycotton blend fabric and impermeable materials, and because their manufacture does not rely on electricity, workshops could be located in rural settings. An Afripads menstrual kit is designed to last for a year. Montgomery took more than 1,100 girls from ages 10 to 13 in rural Uganda from eight different schools and divided them into groups. Over the next two years the attendance rate of these girls was followed. School attendance improved for the girls who had received pads or education or both while a drop in attendance was recorded for those who received neither. Montgomery concluded that having access to feminine products does cause a positive change in girls' lives. Accessible hygiene products can be the difference between getting an education and being homebound.

A lack of access to menstrual products is also an issue for some women in the US, particularly the homeless and those in prison. Some shelters do not provide products due to cost or lack of donations. These homeless women, who lack resources, risk infection and health problems. Another American demographic of women with limited access is prisoners. Fetting, for example, reports that for too many incarcerated women, a basic human function has been turned into a monthly violation of basic human rights. In many

prisons women are coded for being out of dress and this includes stains. Without products they bleed onto their clothes. When they get punished for these marks they may lose privileges to buy at the commissary, which is where they buy feminine products. This is unfair to many. These different situations are some of the ones menstruating women in America face. They lack the means to get the products they need and suffer from it.

It may seem like this problem is too complicated to solve, but there are some simple steps anyone can take to help. For example, L Menstrual Products,, founded by Talia Frenkel, a photojournalist who worked for the Red Cross and UN, donates a pack of pads to developing nations for every pack purchased by a customer. Their program has grown and spread into stores across the country; they have also included condoms. The organization Freedom4Girls (<https://freedom4girls.wordpress.com>) provides products and education for girls in Kenya. Alternatively, PATH-Sanitary Pads (<http://www.path.org/projects/sanitary-pads.php>) is working to develop new, lower cost hygiene products made from local materials.

There are also feminine product outreaches in America that help the homeless. Fulfilling Destiny (<https://www.fulfillingdestiny.org>) is an outreach in San Diego, California, that takes donations and volunteers to help the homeless in America. Another way to help girls in school in America is through Helping Women Period (<https://www.helpingwomenperiod.org>). They are an organization who also takes donations to help girls in Michigan by providing pads at school.

While you may not be able to solve this problem, you can make a difference in a girl's life by donating to these groups. Think about the difference it would make if each month you purchased a pack of pads so that another girls in some far off country could get one too.

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