

Period Poverty in District 1

Analyzing Solutions and the Feasibility of Period Pantries in the District

Navika Dasani

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Alameda County Board Of Supervisors District 1 Intern

Pleasanton, CA, 94588

Introduction

Menstruation is a natural and healthy bodily function tied to the reproductive system, yet many menstruators face menstrual inequity, or period poverty. Period poverty occurs when menstruators are left without access to hygiene products, education about their bodies, and sanitation facilities needed to keep themselves healthy and safe while menstruating. Poverty is known to hollow out many aspects of a person's life. A lack of access to food, shelter, and education are aspects of poverty that receive some attention and support, but a lack of access to menstrual hygiene products doesn't have the same exposure. Because such a large number of people menstruate, in Alameda County specifically, almost 60% of women fall within the age range of menstruation, period poverty is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

Female Population by Age Group	County: Alameda	
	Persons	% of Female Population
0-4	39,927	4.81%
5-9	42,123	5.07%
10-14	43,752	5.27%
15-17	26,299	3.17%
18-20	31,487	3.79%
21-24	35,968	4.33%
25-34	111,218	13.39%
35-44	131,501	15.83%
45-54	112,527	13.55%
55-64	100,202	12.06%
65-74	84,793	10.21%
75-84	50,413	6.07%
85+	20,460	2.46%

Women in Alameda County within menstruating age

Effects of Period Poverty

Menstruation doesn't stop during times of need, and managing periods can be extremely stressful. The Food and Drug Administration mentions that menstrual products like pads need to be changed every few hours, while those with heavier flows may need to change them more often. Similar numbers apply for tampons, which need to be changed every four to eight hours, and for reusable underwear and pads which also need to be sanitized often to avoid bacterial infections (Menstrual). When resources are scarce, women may resort to reusing products, even when it is not safe, or fashioning period products out of cloth and other reusable material. According to a study examining girls who used reusable material rather than disposable material or menstrual cups, poor menstrual health management can result in a greater risk of reproductive tract infections as well as urinary tract infections (Das). This can be especially debilitating for people already below the poverty line who don't have ready and available access to doctors. Period Poverty has a negative impact on mental health as well as physical health. Because anxiety and stress are symptoms accompanied with the experience of menstrual stigma, having limited access to period products and education can amplify these feelings (García-Egea).

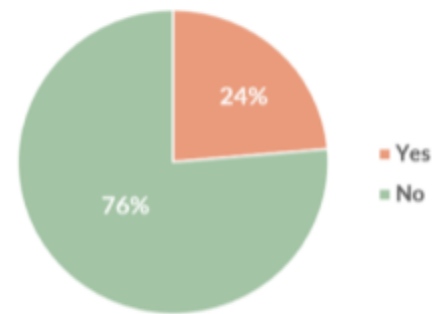
Affording healthy period management can be hard for many menstruators, as the average cost of a period can cost more than \$150 for a menstruator using disposable products, and this number may be amplified when taking into account inflation, price mark-ups, and changing products out a healthy amount (Sadlier). Furthermore, SNAP benefits cannot be applied to period products, so people relying on government assistance cannot do so in order to take care of their periods. No doubt, periods are expensive, but an inability to do so can be debilitating to women.

Menstrual Products in Schools

Period Poverty has an especially detrimental impact on girls in schools.

With almost a fourth of girls having struggled to afford period products at least once in their lives, and around the same percentage missing classwork due to it, protecting students from period poverty is a prime concern (State). In order to better serve students who menstruate in

24% of teens have struggled to afford period products (2023: 23%).



Struggled to afford period products

"State of the Period 2025."

California, California legislators passed AB 367, or the Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021.

This bill focused on public schools specifically in order to maintain the equal opportunity mandated by California's constitution. It requires that in public schools serving grades 6-12, all female and agender bathrooms as well as at least one male bathroom on campus provide free menstrual products (California).

This bill is important in expanding access to healthy menstruation during school hours, but neglects what happens when school is over. 1 in every 3 women miss either school or work because of a lack of access to menstrual supplies (Period). While research on working women specifically is limited, it's obvious that period poverty doesn't end with education. Just because school is out does not mean that women do not face period poverty anymore. During breaks, afterschool, on weekends, or after graduation, periods and a need for period products persists.

Period Pantries as a Solution

One proposed solution to the issue of period poverty for those outside of school is period pantries. Period pantries are community stocked containers, similar to little free libraries, that can be placed in public spaces containing period products (Free). The objective of period pantries is not only to provide access to free menstrual products, but to provide those taking products from



Example of a Free Period Pantry, stocked with a variety of products

the pantry with anonymity and combat effects of period stigma (Glazer). By allowing those using the products to maintain autonomy by hopefully providing them with a range of products as well as being accessible at all hours of the day, period pantries may provide a cost-effective and easy way to combat period poverty. Furthermore, period pantries can have information about safe menstrual practices contained

within the pantry in the form of posters or pamphlets in an effort to reduce unhealthy menstrual hygiene practices. [Attached](#) is a slide deck containing a guide on establishing period pantries.

In District 1, where menstruation affects a large percent of the population, period pantries can serve as a safe and effective method to combat period poverty, especially during school breaks and for working professionals.

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