

SHiNE FACT SHEET - GOOD GOVERNANCE STARTS AT HOME: EMPOWERED WOMEN, A CORNERSTONE OF STRONG FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES



INTRODUCTION

This fact sheet is developed to provide vital information on Menstrual Poverty (MP). As the nation commemorates the valuable contribution made by women in building a democratic nation this month, SHiNE would like to remind the nation that the promotion, protection, and realisation of South African women's (children and adults) dignity still requires urgent attention. This August, the SHiNE project aims to emphasise the uncommon yet pressing phenomena of MP that continues to cripple the social and economic progress of millions of women nationwide. This fact sheet, in alignment with the project's theme this month, presents knowledge about menstrual poverty and how the promotion, protection, and realisation of women's dignity, in this respect, can begin at home.

Developed by: Sihle Booi and Deputy Chairperson, Fatima Chohan

¹ S. Ramphoma 'Understanding poverty: causes, effects and characteristics' (2014) 13 Interim: Interdisciplinary Journal.

² Michel J. Mettler, A. Schönenberger, S. Gunz 'Period poverty: why it should be everybody's business' (2022) Journal of Global Health Reports, available at doi:10.29392/001c.32436.

³ A Rohatgi and S Dash 'Period poverty and mental health of menstruators during COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons and implications for the future.' (2023) Front Glob Womens Health. doi: 10.3389/fgwh.2023.1128169, accessed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10014781/>.

⁴ <https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/opinion-pieces/item/1789-the-cycle-of-the-menstrual-burden>

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MENSTRUAL POVERTY

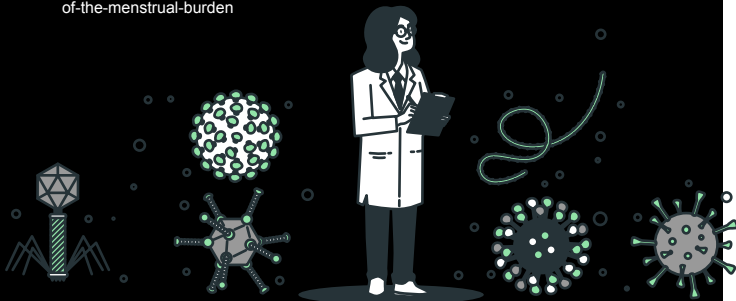
Poverty is generally defined as lack of access to basic needs and socio-economic rights.¹ Similar to the general definition of poverty, at the centre of menstrual poverty is the lack of access to basic needs during a menstrual cycle. Menstrual poverty is defined as "a lack of access to feminine hygiene products, waste management and education which affects many women globally resulting in physical, mental, and emotional distress."² As with the general understanding of poverty, period poverty has adverse effects on women including among others, diminished dignity, inability to move freely, absenteeism from school and work, social alienation, low self-esteem, lack of pain relief medication when needed and debilitating stigma.³



AFFECTED WOMEN'S (GIRLS AND ADULTS) RIGHTS

Period poverty affects the rights to⁴, inter alia:

- Human dignity
- Equality
 - Not be discriminated against
 - Equal access to education
 - Equal access to healthcare
 - Equal employment opportunities
- Clean environment
- Reproductive rights
 - Freedom of movement
 - Right to identity or to be
 - Right to bodily integrity





SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND HEALTH IMPACT

- About 7million women and girls miss school, university or work due to period poverty every month.⁵
- About 83% of female learners do not have adequate access to feminine hygiene products.⁶
- Research shows that 4 out of 5 girl learners do not know what is happening to them when they experience their first menstrual period.⁷
- Girls and women who do not have access to products are often shamed in their communities.⁸
- Lack of education on menstruation results in the stigmatisation of women's monthly period. The disgust with which it is perceived makes it almost impossible for women and girls to express their difficulties and seek help during their periods. The negative perception subsequently results in isolation and embarrassment.
- The adverse effects period poverty has on school and work attendance perpetuates gender inequality in future employment opportunities and disparities in earnings.⁹
- Poor menstrual hygiene can lead to harmful health risks such as "reproductive and urinary tract infections, which can lead to future infertility and birth complications; while not having access to hand-washing facilities can lead to the spread of other infections, like Hepatitis B and thrush."¹⁰



HOME AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

- Since 2021, Statistics South Africa reported over 42% of South African households being headed by women.¹¹ This makes women a cornerstone of the stability of the family unit, cohesion of the community, and sustainable development of the society at large.
- Empowering women result in empowered communities. It is not only women and girls who benefit from having proper menstrual hygiene, the broader society will benefit immensely. Therefore, women's sexual and reproductive health is a societal issue.¹²
- It is pivotal to ensure that women and girls who need feminine hygiene products have adequate access to such i order to preserve their dignity within their communities.



ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY

Seeing as period poverty is an urgent issue, there are a number of initiatives led by young women aimed at addressing and tackling this pressing issue. The following are some of the South African based organisations and links to their websites:

- Project dignity - <https://projectdignity.org.za/>
- Qrate ZA - <https://qrate.org.za/>
- The Cora Project- <https://thecoraproject.org/>
- Menstruation Foundation - <https://menstruation.foundation/>
- Borgen Project - <https://borgenproject.org/category/south-africa/>
- Procter & Gamble - <https://always-africa.com/en-za/tips-and-advice-for-girls-and-parents/period-guide/always-bloodsisters>

Popular hashtags:

- #BecauseWeBleed
- #periodpovertyawareness
- #talkperiods
- #AlwaysBloodSisters

⁵ N Khamisa, N Nanji, N Tshuma, and J Kagura 'The relationship between menstrual hygiene management, practices, and school absenteeism among adolescent girls in Johannesburg, South Africa' (2022) 16 S. Afr. j. child health.

⁶ Zukiswa Pikoli '83% of girl learners in SA struggle to access menstrual hygiene products' (2023), Daily Maverick. Accessed at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-04-10-83-of-girl-learners-in-sa-struggle-to-access-to-menstrual-hygiene-products/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Michel J. Mettler, A. Schönerberger, S. Gunz 'Period poverty: why it should be everybody's business' (2022) Journal of Global Health Reports, available at doi:10.29392/001c.32436.

⁹ <https://impactsa.co.za/16-year-old-humanitarian-fights-to-end-period-poverty-in-south-africa/>

¹⁰ A Rohatgi and S Dash 'Period poverty and mental health of menstruators during COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons and implications for the future.' (2023) Front Glob Womens Health. doi: 10.3389/fgwh.2023.1128169, accessed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10014781/>.

¹¹ Statistics South Africa (2021), accessed at <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15473>.

¹² <https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/opinion-pieces/item/1789-the-cycle-of-the-menstrual-burden>