Perception of Period Poverty and Menstrual Products across TTU Communities

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Abstract
Period poverty, the lack of resources and knowledge regarding feminine hygiene products, introduces undue stress in the struggle to afford menstrual products and the personal well-being of women, not only in developing countries across the world but in local communities as well. We surveyed over 250 students in the Texas Tech University Health Science Center and over 300 women from Texas Tech University.

Using several metrics, results ranged from one-fifth to over half of participants struggling with aspects of period poverty, including not limited to: lacking access to menstrual products, struggling to finance menstrual products, lacking knowledge about free local resources for menstrual products, and a general need to know more about menstrual products.

We conclude based on our data that there is a pressing need for greater awareness and education regarding different types of feminine hygiene products and resource centers. Further studies are required to assess socioeconomic determinants of period poverty, as well as to introduce public health initiatives in increasing public awareness about local resources.

Background and Study Question
The average woman spends $6,360 on menstrual products in her lifetime. This culminates in US women spending over $2 billion per year on feminine hygiene products, including pads and tampons. This financial demand is one factor, among others, contributing to period poverty.

A 2019 study conducted on female medical students at TTUHSC found that 43% of the participants reported having to miss school due to menstruation, 3%, 23% reported having been in a situation where they had to choose between paying for basic necessities or feminine products, 46%, 51% reported having been in a situation in which she or someone she knew did not have access to feminine products. 72%, 57% reported having been in a situation in which she or someone she knew used something other than feminine products due to a lack of access, and 5%, 29% reported having experienced or knew of someone who experienced health issues due to complications from a lack of access to hygiene products. Although most medical students from this study were not affected by period poverty, it remains a concern for low-income communities. In Missouri, a study surveying low-income women showed that 84% of participants were unable to afford essential hygiene products in the previous year. It may be possible that a lack of knowledge and normalcy around menstrual products could be hindering improvement of period poverty. Our study will focus on the collective awareness of TTU communities regarding period poverty and how we can use this data to meet the needs of menstruating students.

The first value indicates the percentage of women who have been in the situation and the second value indicates the percentage of women who know of someone who has been in that situation.

Study Population
The study population includes male and female individuals from the TTU system. One person identified as non-binary, and one identified as trans-female. Responses to the surveys came from undergraduate and graduate students, medical and pharmacy students, and faculty members. The average age was 24.

Data Collection Methods
This project used the TTUHSC School of Medicine P3-1 Honors Project Omnibus Survey, an anonymous online survey instrument sent to all TTUHSC School of Medicine medical students as well as medical residents/fellows, graduate students and School of Medicine faculty. The survey, which included 17 question sets that branched according to respondent groups, received a total of 333 responses. The questions that our group submitted received 254 responses. This project also used the TTUHSC School of Medicine P3-1 Women’s Night at the Rec Survey, an online survey instrument available to women who participated in the Texas Tech Recreation Center’s Women’s Night at the Rec event on February 8, 2020. The event was open to all female members of the Texas Tech Undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty and staff. The survey, which included 6 question sets, received a total of 305 responses. The questions that our group submitted received 218 responses. This project was approved for exempt review by the TTUHSC Institutional Review Board.

Results
Only data sets excluding “NA” responses were used to represent the target demographic - averaging about 140 responses from Omnibus, and 200 responses from WNR.

The largest cohort strongly disagreed that they were aware Raider Red’s Food Pantry offered feminine hygiene products (77.14%, 44.06%) and strongly disagreed they would use these resources (77.14%, 44.06%). When asked if they would use environmentally friendly menstrual products like reusable pads or cups, 29.50%, 21.39% strongly disagreed, 20.14%, 27.86% were neutral, 25.90%, 21.39% strongly agreed; in total, Omnibus presented 39.57% agreement, 40.29% disagreement, WNR presented 41.79% agreement, 30.35% disagreement. When asked if they needed more knowledge on feminine hygiene products, 30.00%, 38.31% agreed while 42.86%, 28.85% disagreed. Generally, males and females of the Omnibus survey reported similarly regarding feminine hygiene products (77.14%, 44.06%) and strongly disagreed they would access these resources (77.14%, 44.06%).

Slightly more males estimated higher pad costs. Data followed a similar trend in the WNR survey.

Metrics analyzed in past studies were reassessed in Table 1.

Next Steps
• Increase knowledge in general population about menstrual products and period poverty to help normalize the topic and better decisions.
• Create educational materials about cost-effective, environmentally-friendly menstrual products, most notably menstrual cups.
• Work with Raider Red’s Food Pantry and local donors to have steady supply of menstrual products at the pantry.

Limitation: socioeconomic status was not assessed on the Omnibus survey.

References

TABLE 1. Metrics analyzed in past studies were reassessed for the 2020 sample.