



Women and Gender
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Attitudes and Awareness of Menstrual Equity and Period Poverty Among Canadians

Executive Summary

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For more information on this report, please contact Women and Gender Equality Canada at: FEGC.Communications.WAGE@fegc-wage.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Executive summary

Environics Research (Environics) is pleased to present this report to Women and Gender Equality Canada with findings from the Attitudes and Awareness of Menstrual Equity and Period Poverty among Canadians survey.

A. Background and objectives

This research is intended to inform upcoming efforts to raise awareness about period poverty and shift attitudes within Canada that contribute to gendered inequalities surrounding menstruation. It is also intended to provide a measure of awareness, attitudes, and behaviours to monitor the impact of change efforts over time.

The research gathered data on:

- General knowledge, familiarity, and information sources regarding menstruation;
- Level of comfort discussing menstruation with others;
- Personal experience of menstruators, including the effect that menstruation has on someone's ability to function at work, at school, or in other public settings;
- Access and affordability of menstrual products;
- Stigmas and misconceptions of menstruation;
- Definitions of period poverty and social implications of menstrual equity; and,
- Perceptions of ways to alleviate period poverty.

B. Methodology

Environics Research conducted an online survey with 2,083 Canadians aged 13 and older from March 6 to March 19, 2023. Survey respondents were selected from registered members of an opt-in online panel. Respondents aged 13-17 were reached through their parents/guardians who provided parental consent to complete the survey. Since a sample drawn from an online panel is not a random probability sample, no formal estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Quotas for the general population were set by age, gender, and region. The final data were then weighted to ensure the sample is representative of the Canadian population, according to the most recent Census. More information about the methodology for research is included in Appendix A of the full report.

C. Key findings

The survey results reveal that Canadians believe our society is generally open to the topic of menstruation. However, stated attitudes and individuals' own comfort levels, as well as the experiences and behaviours of menstruators themselves, demonstrate this is not necessarily the case. There



continue to be misperceptions of and negative perceptions towards menstruation, and this stigma continues to influence the general preference menstruators express for keeping their periods private, as well as (for example) their lack of comfort asking others for help when they find themselves away from home without period products.

Knowledge and attitudes

- **Canadians express a moderate level of comfort with and knowledge about the topic of menstruation, although there is an evident gender gap.** Overall, three-quarters (73%) of Canadians are at least somewhat comfortable discussing menstruation, but this is much higher among women (87%) than men (59%), who are relatively more comfortable discussing sexual orientation, money or politics. Similarly, eight in ten (82%) Canadians say they have a good understanding of menstruation, which also skews to women (99%) over men (65%).
- **Mothers are by far the main source of information about menstruation, for both genders, but particularly for teenage girls (95%) and teenage boys (79%).** Notably, teachers are the second most used source of menstruation information for teenage boys (59% vs 28% for teenage girls). Other relatively popular sources of menstruation information include health care professionals, friends and peers, and the Internet.
- **Menstruation is not a particularly frequent topic of conversation, reducing the opportunity to build comfort with and knowledge of the subject.** Nearly half of Canadians say they typically find themselves talking about menstruation with someone less than once a year. Discussions are more frequent for women (27% at least monthly) than men (13%). It would be interesting to see if the frequency of such discussions changes over time.
- **Beyond their own personal level of comfort, the public believes that Canadian society holds largely neutral-to-positive attitudes towards menstruation and is increasingly open to discussing the topic.** Belief that Canadians hold mostly positive (29%) or neutral (49%) opinions about menstruation outstrips belief that such impressions are mostly negative (10%). Moreover, more than half (58%) of Canadians – including two-thirds of women (65%) - believe people have become more comfortable discussing menstruation over the past decade. If the public does not recognize there to be a substantial problem, they may be less inclined to support investing resources and effort into solutions.
- **The data clearly reveals there are still widely held misconceptions about menstruation, as well as negative attitudes held by a minority of the population.** For instance, almost half of Canadians agree that periods make people physically weaker (45%) and less able to control their emotions (49%). Moreover, one in four agree periods are dirty and unclean, and about one in five agree menstruation should not be publicly discussed (22%) and menstrual products should be kept out of sight (22%).

Personal experience



- **Half of Canadians identify as someone who currently menstruates or has previously menstruated.** Among those who do not menstruate themselves (mainly those who identify as men), most (68%) have someone close to them who does menstruate.
- **Personal experience with how menstruation impacts daily life varies for each menstruator, but majorities often or sometimes experience pain, worry about leakage, and try to be discreet with menstrual products.** Fewer, but still substantial minorities of menstruators, worry that others can tell they have their period (34%), miss sports (31%), school (25%) or social events (24%), or ration period products (25%).
- **Given that menstruators can find themselves away from home without period products when they get their period, it is notable that relatively few are very comfortable asking others – including friends or other people they know – for period products.** For instance, four in ten (42%) are very comfortable asking a friend; fewer are very comfortable asking a woman outside their friend or family group (22%) or a stranger (11%) for period products or getting products from a public dispenser (35%).
- **Although they consider Canadian society to be increasingly open to discussing menstruation, individuals themselves express a relatively limited degree of comfort interacting with others about menstruation.** Half are very comfortable buying period products at a store and fewer are very comfortable talking to menstruators (39%) and non-menstruators (24%) about periods.
- **Ultimately, most menstruators prefer to remain private or use discretion about discussing their periods.** Only one-quarter (25%) say they are completely open with others about their periods, although this is more common for women aged 18-29 (41%), suggesting such attitudes may be evolving over time.

Period poverty, affordability, and access

- **A small proportion of Canadians have either direct or indirect experience with the inability to afford menstrual products.** More than one in four (28%) know someone who could not afford to buy menstrual products at some point in their lives. Seven per cent of menstruators say it is very likely they'll find themselves in that position in the coming year (another 12 per cent is somewhat likely); the majority of this group say rising inflation has been a contributing factor.
- **However, the general public has limited familiarity with and understanding about the term period poverty.** While six in ten (63%) have heard of the term, fewer than four in ten (38%) are familiar with what it means. Thus, the term needs to be clearly explained if being used in public-facing communications. One in six (17%) menstruators say they have personally experienced period poverty (based on the definition provided in the survey).
- **There is a moderate but not overwhelming sense that period poverty is a problem in Canada today, and a limited understanding about who stands to be most affected.** Six in ten Canadians say period poverty (defined in the survey as not being able to afford or access menstrual

products, thereby limiting their full participation in society) is at least somewhat serious, including only one-quarter (24%) who say it is very serious. The public best understands how period poverty could affect low-income households or those on social assistance; there is less awareness that racialized people and those with different gender identities or sexual orientations are also vulnerable to period poverty. This suggests the public more easily recognizes the challenge of affordability rather than the problem of unequal access to menstrual products.

- **If period poverty is seen primarily as a problem of lack of affordability to period products, it is not surprising the public identifies free menstrual supplies as the main solution.** Fewer Canadians recognize how other initiatives, such as better menstrual health education or more inclusive language, will help alleviate period poverty in Canada. Nor are Canadians sure who is responsible for fixing the problem, although they tend to place greater responsibility on governments (at all levels) than on the health care or educational systems.
- One potential solution to period poverty is promoting the use of reusable period products over disposable ones. **The challenge is not lack of awareness (awareness levels are quite high among menstruators, and thus will be hard to grow further), but driving uptake (use) among menstruators who are aware of them.** For instance, only one in five menstruators have used reusable pads, compared to nine in ten who have used disposable pads. There is modest interest in reusable products: three in ten current and future menstruators are very likely to use them in the future. Those who are not as interested say the main barriers are hygiene concerns and the effort involved in cleaning reusable products (i.e., inconvenience).

D. Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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