

Viewpoint

As global poverty levels increase, let us not forget period poverty

Janet Michel^{1,2}, Chioma Ginikawa¹, Margaret Zou¹, Otridah Kapona³, Danielle Agnello¹, Marcel Tanner^{4,5}

¹ Global Health Mentorships (GHMe), ² One Planet Sustainable, ³ Public Health Laboratory Scientist- Infectious Diseases- Zambia National Public Health Institute/ AMR Nat. Focal Point & Coordinator, ⁴ University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland, ⁵ Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) Basel, Switzerland

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In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), period poverty is ubiquitous. As global poverty levels rise, period poverty is bound to rise too. The education and empowerment of women and girls particularly in LMICs are at stake. The dignity needed for menstruating people to attend to their menstrual cycle is a need rather than a luxury. Dignity is all we are asking for. Ending period poverty is no rocket science. Scotland has just spearheaded the way, demonstrating to the world, how easily period poverty can be eradicated. We encourage other countries of the world, to follow suit, particularly, governments of low-and middle-income countries. Getting rid of period poverty means getting rid of one system component, holding women and girls back, from contributing and participating fully in the economic system. The world is indeed facing unprecedented challenges, let's not forget a parallel and equally real challenge, period poverty.

In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), period poverty is ubiquitous.¹⁻³ As global poverty levels rise, period poverty is bound to rise too.⁴ The education and empowerment of women and girls particularly in low- and middle-income countries are at stake.⁵ Many western countries are also familiar with period poverty. Scotland became one of the first countries to end period poverty by providing these products free of charge.⁶ The effects of period poverty range from physical to mental and emotional effects including shame, guilt and stigma.^{2,7,8} It is imperative to raise awareness. The global poverty levels are rising, electricity prices are shooting up, fuel, food and housing costs are all skyrocketing.⁹ For many women, who still have to make a choice whether to buy bread or pads monthly, the situation is bound to get even worse. Then there are those menstruating people, with no access to dignified menstrual products, who improvise with feathers, newspapers, mud, rags and rags.¹⁰ The shortage of water, displacement and insecurity exacerbates their situation. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report covering 12 LMICs, poverty, stigma, lack of access to water and sanitation are causing menstrual health needs of women and girls to go unmet, thereby increasing the risk of infection.¹¹ The poorest, ethnic groups, people with disabilities and displaced people suffer the most.¹¹ The world is concerned and focused on the war in Ukraine and rightly so. Then, there are rising food, housing and gas prices, to mention just a few.¹²

ORGANISATIONS AND LEADERS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE NEEDED

The world is concerned and focused on the war in Ukraine and rightly so. However, the plight of women and girls facing period poverty could easily be forgotten. Raising awareness on the reality of period poverty and its effects on women and girls, how this perpetuates the cycle of poverty, is needed now more than ever. We need men, we need leaders from all sectors, community, political, cultural, religious and industry, not only to be aware of this issue but to also incorporate period poverty, as an additional form of poverty that needs addressing.

When organizations supply food, health, water and sanitation to populations, we would like to kindly remind them, not to forget menstrual products. Periods are an essential part of nature and periods do not announce themselves. Periods come whether a woman is on the run, in a refugee camp or on a bus fleeing war.^{2,7}

THE NEED TO RAISE AWARENESS, ENGAGE AND ACT

The dignity needed for menstruating people to attend to their menstrual cycle is a need rather than a luxury. Dignity is all we are asking for. Ending period poverty is no rocket science. Scotland has just spearheaded the way, demonstrating to the world, how easily period poverty can be eradicated.⁶ We encourage other countries of the world, to follow suit, particularly, governments of low-and middle-income countries. According to UNICEF, menstrual health and hygiene management allows girls to become healthy,

Box 1. Key messages

- As global poverty levels rise, period poverty is bound to rise too. The education and empowerment of women and girls particularly in low- and middle-income countries are at stake.
- The dignity needed for menstruating people to attend to their menstrual cycle is a need rather than a luxury. Dignity is all we are asking for. Ending period poverty is no rocket science. Scotland has just spearheaded the way, demonstrating to the world, how easily period poverty can be eradicated. We encourage other countries of the world, to follow suit, particularly, governments of low- and middle-income countries.
- Getting rid of period poverty means getting rid of one system component, holding women and girls back, from contributing and participating fully in the economic system.
- The world is indeed facing unprecedented challenges, let's not forget a parallel and equally real challenge, period poverty.

educated and empowered women.¹¹ We wrote a song, dignity (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjtcu0o0gWc>), to raise awareness as well as get the conversation on period poverty going, hoping this will culminate into action.¹³

CONCLUSIONS

Getting rid of period poverty means getting rid of one system component, holding women and girls back, from contributing and participating fully in the economic system. The world is indeed facing unprecedented challenges, let's not forget a parallel and equally real challenge, period poverty.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

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CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Janet Michel, CEO and Founder One Planet Sustainable.
janetmichel71@gmail.com

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