

Youth19 – Period Poverty Fact Sheet

What is period poverty?

Period poverty is when someone cannot access menstrual items for their period, because of cost. Period poverty can lead to missing out on school, work and other important activities.



It can also lead to physical health problems (such as infections caused by using unhygienic items) as well as embarrassment and shame.

Missing out on school, work and other opportunities because of period poverty perpetuates cycles of disadvantage.¹

Recently, several countries and states have intervened to make menstrual products more affordable or routinely provided in institutions, just as toilet paper is.

In New Zealand², and indeed globally, we have little data about how common the problem is.

How common is it?

We found 12% of New Zealand year 9–13 students who had had their period reported having had difficulty getting menstrual items due to cost. For 5% this happened once a month or more. This was more than four times as common for students in less financially well off communities (see over).

8% of students who menstruated reported having missed school due to lack of menstrual items. In decile one schools, over 21% (of those who had had their period) had ever missed school due to lack of menstrual products, with 14% missing more than one day a month.

Māori and Pacific students are impacted disproportionately. 19% of Māori and Pacific students (compared with 9% of European) reported ever experiencing period poverty and 15% of Māori and 14% of Pacific students (5% of European) have missed school because they did not have menstrual items. Of Māori and Pacific students who menstruate, almost 1 in 12 miss school once a month or more for this reason.

A scientific paper presenting more detailed analyses is in preparation.

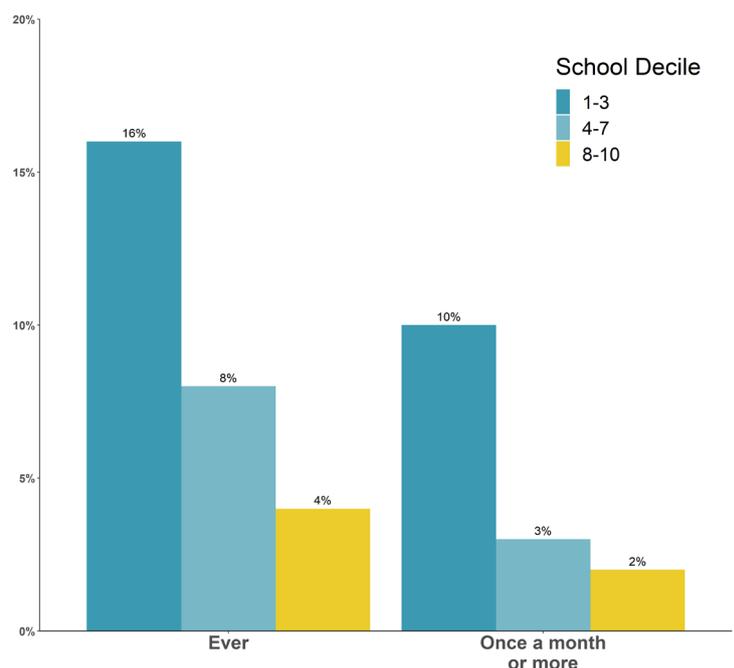
New high quality data

In 2019, researchers from four Universities collaborated to survey over 7700 New Zealand adolescents in 52 Auckland, Northland and Waikato schools. This is the latest survey in the Youth2000 series.³

The survey was a representative, high quality and ethical study about the wellbeing of rangatahi/ youth. Schools were randomly selected from the region and then students were randomly selected from each school roll. Consenting students completed the anonymous survey in English or Te Reo Māori on handheld internet tablets with optional voice over.

The survey included many aspects of health and wellbeing – expect more Youth19 findings soon. See www.youth19.ac.nz.

Missed school due to period poverty



The details

Of students who have had their first period...

	Has had difficulty getting menstrual items due to cost				Missed school due to not having menstrual items			
	Ever		Once a month or more		Ever		Once a month or more	
	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]	n (N)	% [95% CI]
Total	488 (3769)	12 [10-15]	185 (3769)	5 [3-6]	299 (3758)	8 [5-10]	165 (3758)	4 [3-5]
School Decile 1-3	163 (820)	19 [16-23]	82 (820)	9 [6-12]	140 (807)	16 [11-21]	87 (807)	10 [6-15]
School Decile 4-7	195 (1342)	14 [12-16]	72 (1342)	5 [4-6]	99 (1346)	8 [6-10]	45 (1346)	3 [2-4]
School Decile 6-10	129 (1588)	8 [7-9]	31 (1588)	2 [2-2]	58 (1586)	4 [3-4]	32 (1586)	2 [2-2]
Māori	137 (721)	19 [14-23]	57 (721)	7 [5-10]	116 (714)	15 [11-19]	66 (714)	8 [6-11]
Pacific	97 (509)	19 [14-23]	43 (509)	8 [3-12]	75 (505)	14 [10-18]	45 (505)	8 [5-12]
Asian	91 (883)	10 [8-13]	35 (883)	4 [3-6]	39 (882)	5 [3-6]	26 (882)	3 [2-4]
Other/Not Stated	28 (166)	17 [10-23]	10 (166)	6 [1-10]	11 (164)	7 [3-12]	5 (164)	3 [0-7]
European	135 (1490)	9 [7-11]	40 (1490)	2 [2-3]	58 (1493)	5 [3-6]	23 (1493)	2 [1-2]

Ethnicity prioritised according to NZ Ministry of Health protocol, 2017.⁴

Reading the table. For example the top cells show that 12%, or 488 of the 3769 students who have had their period have ever had difficulty getting items due to cost. CI refers to confidence interval.

Addressing period poverty

Period poverty can be solved by reducing poverty and by improving access to menstrual products. For example, the Scottish government implemented a programme of free menstrual products in all schools. 84% of students reported the scheme had a positive impact for them.⁵

Increasing numbers of primary school aged pupils are menstruating, so solutions must include primary students too.²



Find out more at www.youth19.ac.nz Contact us: youth19@auckland.ac.nz

1 Sommer et al (2015). Comfortably, safely, and without shame: defining menstrual hygiene management as a public health issue. American Journal of Public Health, 105(7);1302-1311.

2 Donovan, S. & Telfar-Barnard, L. (2019). Age of first menstruation in New Zealand: findings from first ever national-level data and implications for age-appropriate education and support. NZMJ, 132(1500):100-103.

3 <https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/en/faculty/adolescent-health-research-group/youth2000-national-youth-health-survey-series.html>

4 Ministry of Health. 2017. HISO 10001:2017 Ethnicity Data Protocols. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

5 YoungScot (2019). Access to period products in your school, college or university: survey results. Survey commissioned

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