

Outline of the report

- 1 Menstruation as a social taboo
- 2 Myths and superstitions
- 3 Menstruation's "dark side"
- 4 First experiences with menstruation
- 5 Adult experiences with menstruation
- 6 Male narrative on menstruation
- 7 Period poverty





We conducted:

- Individual in-depth interviews with experts
- Interviews in pairs with teenagers
- Focus group interviews:
 - ✓ With female university students
 - With young childless women
 - √ With mothers of teenagers

The study was conducted in February 2020.

Research participants





EXPERTS N=24 IDI

- People who work within the area of menstruation and, due to their professional experience, could familiarise us with the problem and highlight its various aspects: psychological, social, financial, etc.



FEMALE **TEENAGERS** N=10 DIDI (20 people)

- 12-15 years old
- All girls had begun menstruating



YOUNG FEMALE **ADULTS**

N=4 FGI (24 people)

- Female university students
- 19-24 years old
- Living with a partner or single women

FEMALE ADULTS N=4 FGI (24 people)

Two groups:

- Women agred 25-35, professionally active, without family /children
- Mothers of already menstruating girls aged 12-16 years

Warsaw

Warsaw and Kielce

Warsaw and Kielce

Skarżysko and Częstochowa





We conducted:

- CAWI online panel interviews in Poland:
 - ✓ With adults
 - With teenagers
- Tests on TAPI tablets:
 - With women from poorer regions of Poland

The study was conducted in February 2020.

WHO WAS OUR TARGET GROUP?





1

WOMEN N=606

- A representative sample of women aged 18+
- Representative sample by age, size of hometown and home district



2

FEMALE TEENAGERS N=100

- Girls aged 15-19 years old



3

POOR WOMEN N=200

- Women aged 20-45
- Menstruating
- With an income of 800 PLN+ per person



4

MEN N=551

- A representative sample of men aged 18+
- Representative sample by age, size of hometown and home district

Across Poland

Across Poland

Selected cities:

Białystok, Lublin, Kielce, Olsztyn, Włocławek, Bydgoszcz, Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow, Szczecin

Across Poland





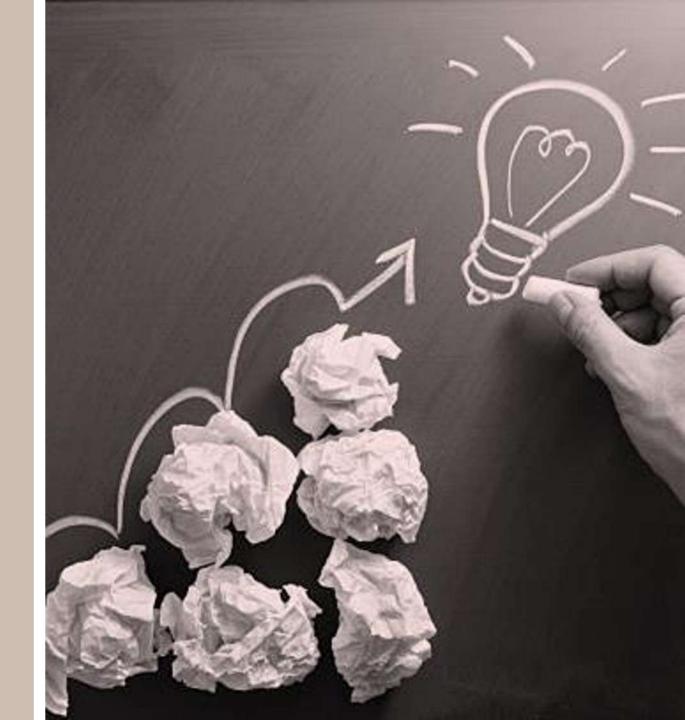
RESULTS



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THE STUDY?

We have summarised the results of the study as key insights which form the most important findings of the research project.

Some of them were verified in quantitative research and supported by numerical data, others include qualitative observations.









INTHE PAST ALMOST NOTHING WAS SAID ABOUT MENSTRUATION...

Only a dozen or so years ago, menstruation was a very taboo topic:

- It was not the subject of any social discourse
- Women's magazines were not interested in publications on this topic (an attempt by one of the experts to create a semantic field for the word menstruation in female media titles turned out to be impossible because the term did not appear in articles at all)
- The classic advertising message showed menstruation in a false manner



Three years ago, one of the women's magazines approached me because they had a lot of possible content ideas about menstruation and wanted to start writing about it. Then they withdrew from the idea – they thought it would lower their sales as women do not want to read about something like that because it is disgusting and advertisers do not want to advertise beside it.

TODAY STILL TOO LITTLE IS SAID...



3-4 years ago, a narrative on menstruation entered social discourse

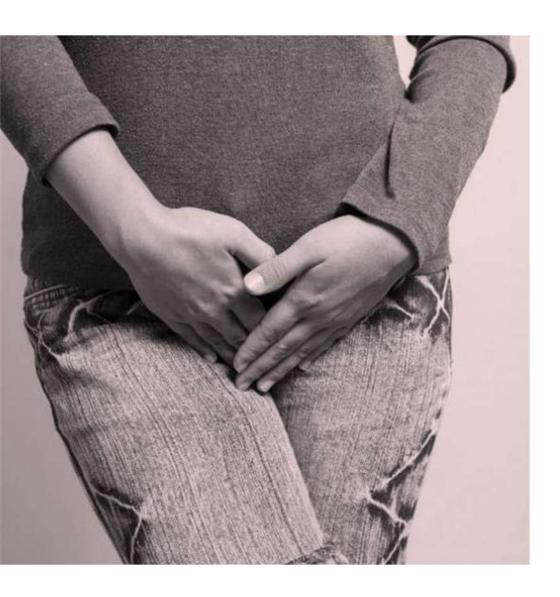
but...

- Attempts to normalise it still seem to be undertaken by grassroots projects, not systemic initiatives
- There is still little said about menstruation the topic is poorly presented in mass pop culture (while disability and homosexuality are now more widely discussed, menstruation is still ABSENT)
- There continues to be a lack of ads normalising menstrual blood (showing it as red!) or saying simply "I have a period!" and showing reality
- There continues to be a resistance against showing physiological
 manifestations of sexuality images of traces of menstrual blood on
 underwear or pictures showing lactation continue to be highly controversial
 and cause disgust amongst a significant number of people (including WOMEN!).



(Eng.: Yes, I have a period)





PERIOD AS A TABOO TOPIC

The dominant narrative about menstruation is the PHYSIOLOGICALone.

The discourse showing menstruation from the social perspective (e.g. in regards emotions and tensions) is still niche.

In many environments and social groups, one simply doesn't talk about menstruation!

- No transfer of medical and colloquial knowledge
- No transfer of experience between women
- There are no mechanisms/habits related to the support of girls during puberty
- Repetition of false myths, superstitions, consolidation of stereotypes



Where does the menstrual taboo come from?









Attitude towards menstruation

Despite a declaration of acceptance for menstruation, for many women it still remains a shameful topic that is not discussed.



	I accept that I have my period My partner / husband understands that I may feel worse during menstruation When I have a period, my partner / husband is caring and helpful	68% 71% 44%	Acceptance
	In my family home, no one talked about menstruation Talking about menstruation is embarrassing for me	41% 23%	Taboo
l make s	sure that nobody sees me going to the toilet with any kind of sanitary products I make sure that nobody notices that I'm having a period It is embarrassing for me when a man realises that I'm having a period I try to be discreet when buying sanitary products so that no friend can see me	37% 33% 28% 12%	Discretion
	During menstruation, I can't do many things that I normally do Menstruation is a time when I would like to hide from the whole world	27% 19%	Exclusion
	I can't always afford good quality sanitary products I often don't have enough money to buy sanitary products	18% 6%	Poverty



MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES OF MENSTRUATION



- Currently, many myths and stereotypes remain around the topic of menstruation
- Some are harmless superstitions and beliefs – which are told playfully and treated with a grain of salt

but...

- Some myths and stereotypes are harmful: they reinforce misconceptions among men and women, promoting the wrong attitudes and often risky behaviours!

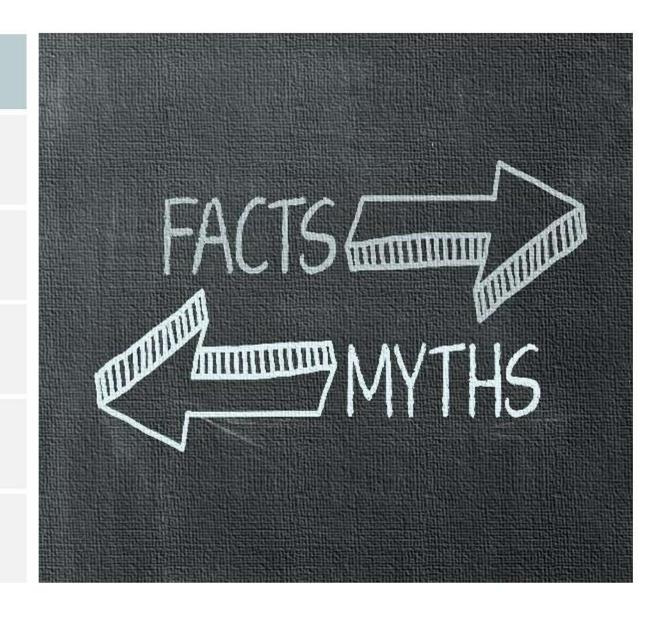






MOST HARMFUL MYTHS ABOUT PERIODS

- THE "PMS" MYTH
- 2 MYTH OF IMPURITY: DIRTY BLOOD
- 3 MYTHS AROUND SEX
- 4 MYTHS RELATED TO CARE
- 5 MYTH OF THE REGULAR CYCLE



Truths and myths about menstruation

There is a large number of relatively strong myths and superstitions about menstruation – the need to give up sex, visit the dentist or even prepare food.



The most believed myth



25%

Menstruation is a safe time

- you can't get pregnant

You must not have sex during your period	% AGREE 23%
You should not go to the dentist during your period	22%
During menstruation, you should not bake cakes or pickle cucumbers	21%
Menstruation must hurt, this is how it is	18%
The menstrual blood is full of dangerous germs and toxins	17%
Amenorrhea always indicates pregnancy	6%

Truths and myths about menstruation

Jation 1

Teenagers

Teens believe myths and superstitions about menstruation less frequently.



21%

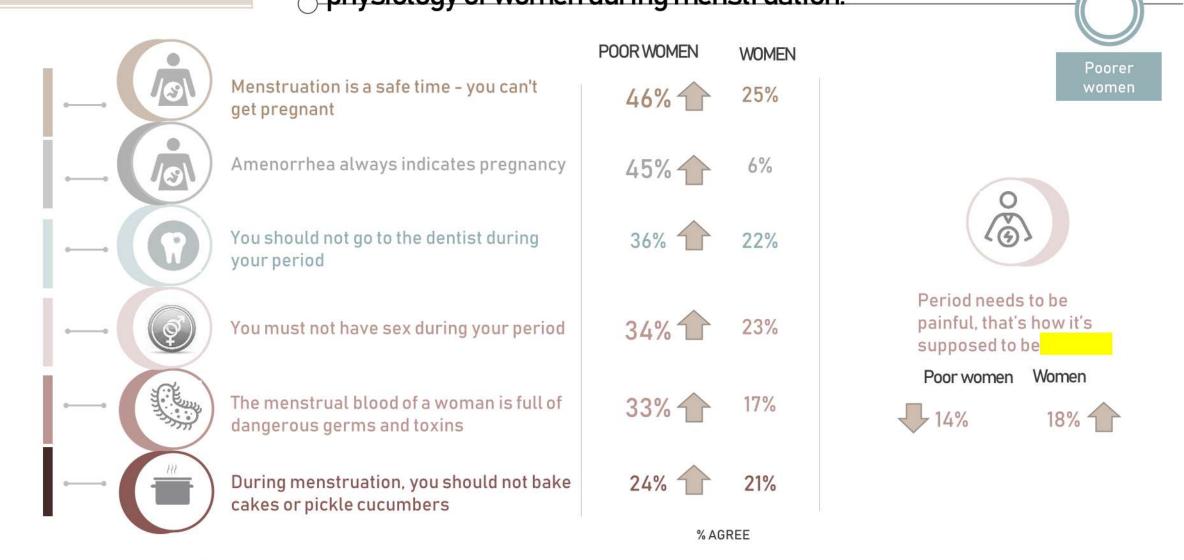
Menstruation is a safe time

you can't get pregnant

Amenorrhea indicates pregnancy	TEENAGERS	WOMEN
Amenorrhea indicates pregnancy	/ 1070	0 /0
You must not have sex during you	r period 12%	23%
During menstruation, you should cakes or pickle cucumbers	not bake 12%	21%
You should not go to the dentist do period	uring your 12%	22%
Menstruation must hurt, this is ho	owitis 7%	18%
The menstrual blood is full of dan germs and toxins	gerous 7%	17%
tion? N = 101		%TRUE

Truths and myths about menstruation

Among poorer women, there is a stronger belief in menstruation myths and superstitions and a greater lack of knowledge about the physiology of women during menstruation.







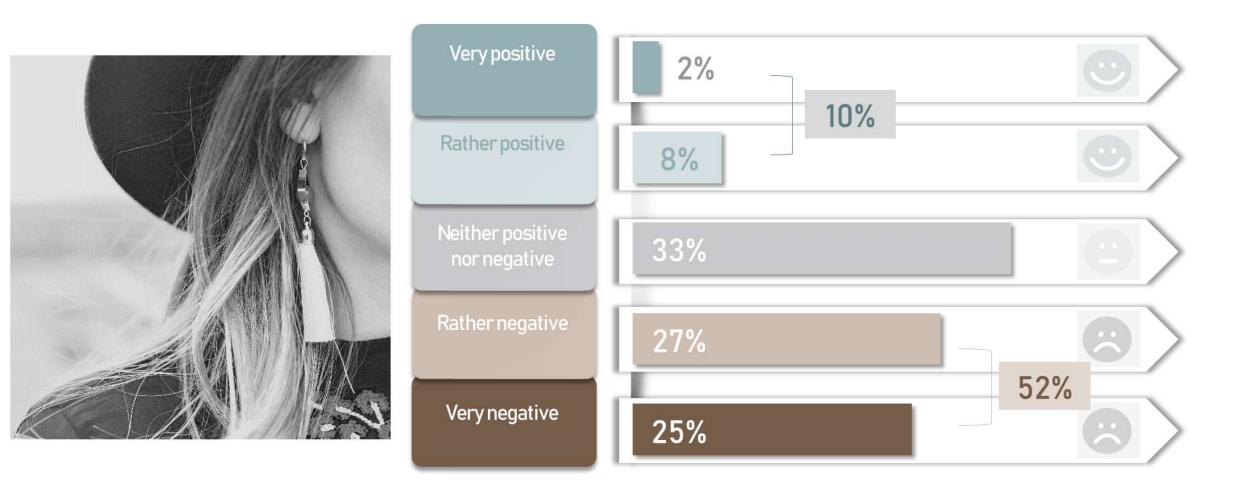
Pushing menstruation into the sphere of taboos, the lack of open and honest discourse about it, the myths and stereotypes connected with menstruation - all this means that at present, menstruation is connected with only negative associations and emotions...



General perception of menstruation

1 in 4 women view menstruation as something very negative.

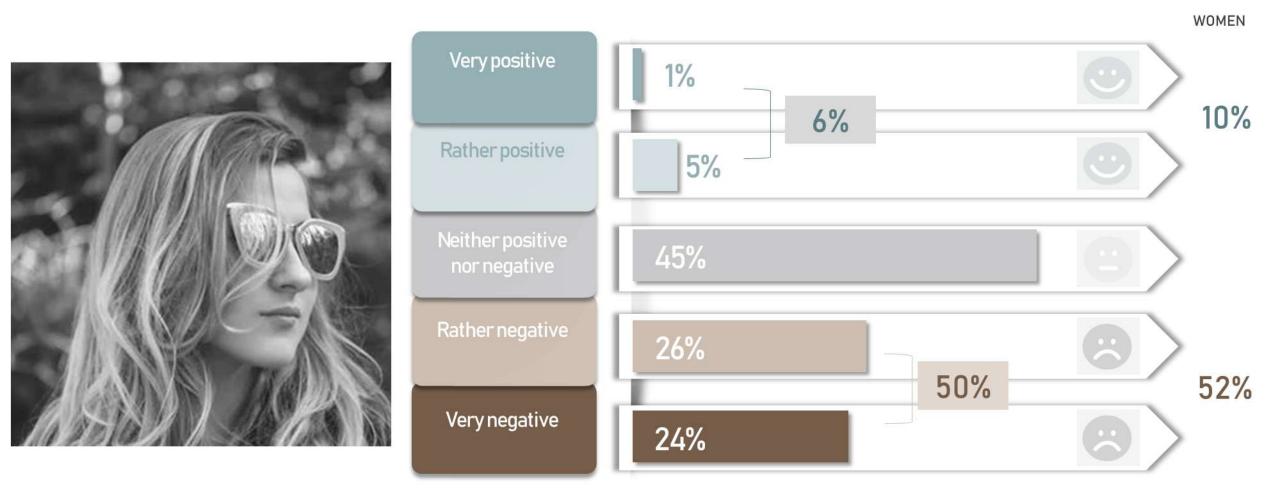




General perception of menstruation

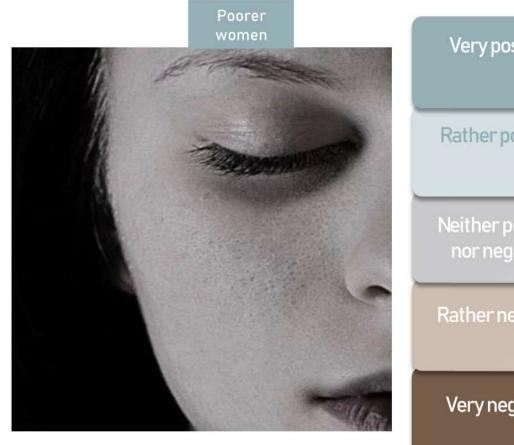
Similarly, a large numer of teenagers have a very negative attitude towards menstruation.

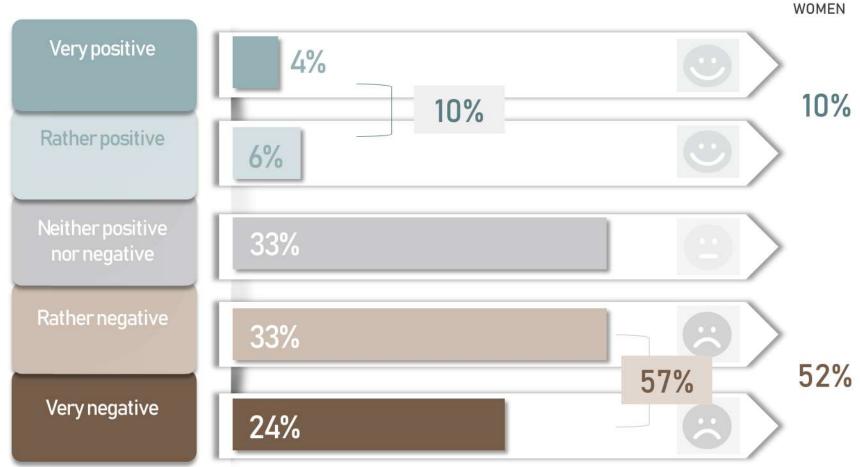




General perception of menstruation

Poorer women have the most negative attitude towards menstruation. Poverty amplifies the problems experienced and is associated with a greater social burden from menstruation.





Beliefs about menstruation

Women possess primarily negative opinions about menstruation – they avoid the topic, feel ashamed, and perceive menstruation as if it was a mental health disorder.





Emotions during menstruation





Shame



Perception of physicality

36%	Women have trouble controlling their emotions when their period approaches
18%	Women are proud when they start menstruating
17%	Women feel sorry for themselves during menstruation
16%	When menstruation is approaching, women do not think rationally
14%	During menstruation, female brain function reduces
48%	It's important to talk about menstruation at school, with boys and girls
25%	Menstruation should not be a topic of public conversations among women
24%	Women should not talk about their period in the presence of men
22%	It is important that menstruation remains the secret of women
24%	A period is dirty
19%	It is important that nobody knows that a woman is having a period
18%	It is embarrassing when a man realises that a woman is having a period
18%	Women must hide everything that indicates that they are having a period
400/	When women have their period they should stay away from men
10%	when women have their period they should stay away it off their
37%	When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things
37%	When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things
37% 29%	When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things When women have a period, they must avoid swimming Menstruation is one of the main weaknesses of women A period reduces a woman's fitness
37% 29% 25%	When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things When women have a period, they must avoid swimming Menstruation is one of the main weaknesses of women
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37% 29% 25% 21% 20%	When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things When women have a period, they must avoid swimming Menstruation is one of the main weaknesses of women A period reduces a woman's fitness When women have a period, they must avoid exercising

Beliefs about menstruation



Emotions during menstruation

Teens more often believe that women have trouble controlling their emotions during menstruation. At the same time, there is a clearly stronger normalisation of menstruation among this group (and a significantly lower sense of shame).

\circ	Teenagers	Women
Women have trouble controlling their emotions when their period approaches	50%	36%
During menstruation, female brain function reduces	21%	14%
Women feel sorry for themselves during menstruation	19%	17%
Women are proud when they start menstruating	17%	18%
When menstruation is approaching, women do not think rationally	14%	16%
It's important to talk about menstruation at school, with boys and girls	49%	48%
Women should not talk about their period in the presence of men	6%	24%
It is important that menstruation remains the secret of women	6%	22%
Menstruation should not be a topic of public discussion among women	5%	25%
A period is dirty	24%	24%
It is embarrassing when a man realises that a woman is having a period	9%	18%
It is important that nobody knows when a woman is having a period	5%	19%
Women must hide everything that indicates that they are having a period	4%	18%
When women have their period they should stay away from men	2%	10%
When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things	26%	37%
Period reduces a woman's fitness	26%	21%
Menstruation is one of the main weaknesses of women	21%	25%
When women have a period, they must avoid swimming	20%	29%
Menstruation is an excuse for women to shift their responsibilities to others	19%	11%
When women have a period, they must avoid exercising	14%	20%
When women have a period, they must take hot showers	4%	5%
e opinions? N = 101		scale of 1: 7

%top2boxesresponses



Conversations about menstruation



Shame



Perception of physicality

Beliefs about menstruation



Emotions during menstruation



Conversations about menstruation



Shame



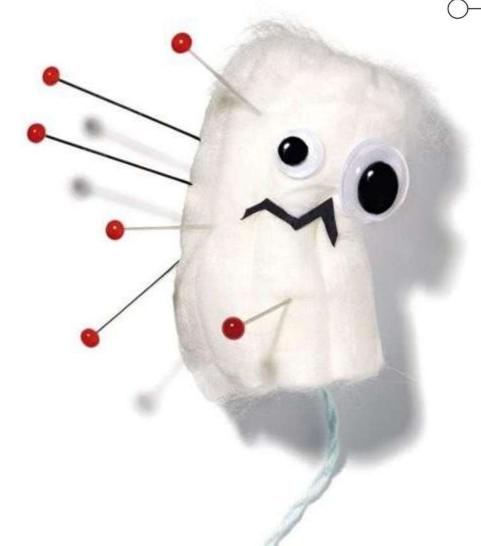
Perception of physicality

Among poorer women, menstruation creates a more pronounced feeling of shame and physical disorder. Feelings of uncertainty, embarrassment and anger are a lot stronger.

()	35 UE 1	D	Management	2
		Poorer women	Women	
Women have	trouble controlling their emotions when their period approaches	36%	36%	
	Women are proud when they start to menstruate	24%	18%	
	Women feel sorry for themselves during menstruation	20%	17%	
	During menstruation, female brain function reduces	18%	14%	
	When menstruation is approaching, women do not think rationally	16%	16%	
It's i	mportant to talk about menstruation at school, with boys and girls	51%	48%	
	Menstruation should not be a topic of public discussion among women	24%	25%	
	Women should not talk about their period in the presence of men	23%	24%	
	It is important that menstruation remains the secret of women	13%	22%	
	A period is dirty	44%	24%	
	It is embarrassing when a man realises that a woman is having a period	21%	18%	
	Women must hide everything that indicates that they are having a period	19%	18%	
	It is important that nobody knows when a woman is having a period	18%	19%	
	When women have their period they should stay away from men	18%	10%	
	When women have a period, they must avoid carrying heavy things	51%	37%	
	When women have a period, they must avoid swimming	40%	29%	
	When women have a period, they must avoid exercising	37%	20%	
	A period reduces a woman's fitness	36%	21%	
	Menstruation is one of the main weaknesses of women	34%	25%	
	Menstruation is an excuse for women to shift their responsibilities to others	15%	11%	
	When women have a period, they must take hot showers	15%	5%	
		Scoroonas	calo of 1:7	







- Menstruation is something we experience regularly and relates to our body – yet most women see it as something dirty, disgusting and wrong
- This attitude has its implications, and contributes to a lack of acceptance of:
 - our body
 - our womanhood
 - our sexuality



THE EXPERIENCE OF MENARCHE IS OFTEN FULL OF SHAME, FEAR, LONELINESS.

Going through puberty is often a process full of loneliness

Experts who work with adolescent girls indicate that adults (parents, educators, and teaching assistants) LACK KNOWLEDGE and do not offer SUPPORT \rightarrow teenage girls experience menstruation in LONELINESS.

Growing up they experience a lot of EXCITEMENT (they are changing, transforming) but also FEAR (they do not know how their bodies are changing, they are afraid their change may be abnormal, pathological) and SHAME (which often makes it impossible for them to function in the peer group).

Sometimes, the experience of menarche can be traumatizing!

"

Many girls do not know, or did not know, that periods exist. I talked with many women who thought they were dying, because nobody had told them about bleeding. These are really traumatic experiences.



The LACK OF OPEN COMMUNICATION in families is symptomatic – the mother often does not speak about her own periods, neither with her partner nor with children...

There are a number of EMBARRASSINGRITUALS linked with menstruation (hiding sanitary pads from the rest of the family/from men, throwing used pads directly into the outside bin and not into the one at home).

The culture of silence often applies to EXPERIENCING periods – women do not speak about their emotions, preferring to suffer in silence.

The experience of menarche has, according to experts, two important consequences on the relation of mother and daughter: 1) it has an influence on the bond between mother and daughter, 2) it shapes the girl's image of womanhood (a woman is not important and has to deal with difficult situations on her own).

It is not so much about telling somebody that periods are terrible and disgusting – it's rather the total silence and lack of conversation on the topic. It shows children that there are subjects we avoid because something is wrong about them.



How do teenagers react to the first signs of puberty?

They are stuck – they are no longer a child but not yet a woman...

They feel embarrassed by their own sexuality and their transformation from a girl into a woman. They do not know how to behave towards their parents.

There are two main behaviours:

THEY DON'T TELL THEIR PARENTS...

They hide the fact that something is changing

They reluctantly share their emotions and experiences

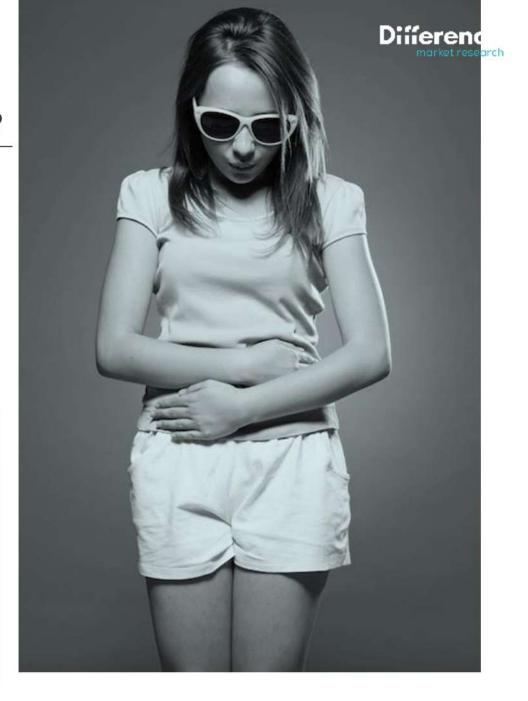
They don't ask questions or actively seek out information

THEY SPEAK BUT DONT LISTEN

They inform their parents about their experiences

but...

are not interested in receiving information, especially because their mothers only tend to their basic needs, and do not respond to their emotional needs



Teenagers' knowledge is fragmentary and sometimes incorrect

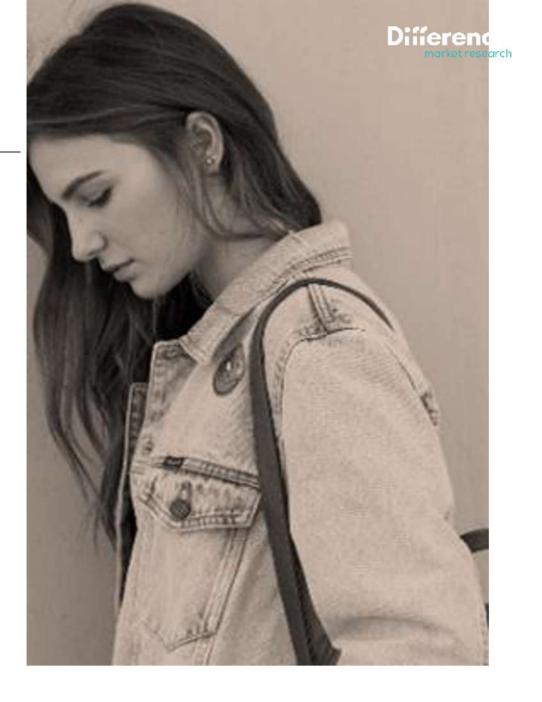
The main source of information is the INTERNET, sometimes also peers.

The information is NOT SELECTED OR VERIFIED – teenagers often learn false 'facts', half-truths and myths about menstruation.

At the same time, people working with adolescents report that girls have a pressing need to understand the processes happening in their bodies and minds. Sometimes they contact experts themselves in order to find answers to their questions (helplines, websites focused on menstruation).

"

For many years, I ran an educational website miesiączka.com and the content on menarche had four times more visits than any other topic. I received a lot of letters from young girls. Those letters where heartbreaking. Some wrote about vaginal discharge, others about hair growing in different places, about being too embarrassed to talk with their mothers. Many asked how they could tell that menarche was coming.









TEENAGERS' perspective





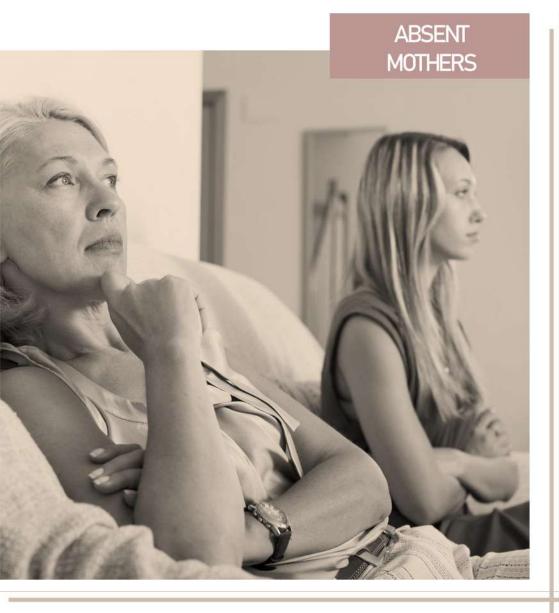
Three types of mothers = three ways of introducing girls to the subject of menarche

ABSENT MOTHERS

TECHNIQUE-FOCUSED MOTHERS

3. SUPPORTIVE MOTHERS







66

My friend's parents are quite strict, she has to sit upstairs and learn a lot. I think that when she got her first period they must have reacted like 'really, did you have to get it?' – but of course she had no influence over it! I find it sad that her parents are not understanding, that they tell her to 'get it together', that she is old enough and that it is nothing wrong. The problem is that they do not say it in a supportive way, rather showing that it is embarrassing to even think about it.

- Mothers who are withdrawn or absent during menarche
- They do not know how to talk and sometimes do not have the time for calm and considerate contact with their daughters
- They belittle the importance of puberty ('everyone grows up and manages...')
- They expect school and peers to educate
- Girls who experience the first period alone tend to react in one of the two ways: 1) they become more reserved and distanced, or 2) they hide their emotions by showing aggression (they become difficult and quarrelsome)







When I was approaching the moment of menarche my mum told me where everything was and how I should handle it but we did not have any open conversation. She said that since there are so many women at home, I should know what to do.

I remember she gave me a package of pads. I don't remember if she showed me how to attach it to my panties. Probably she did. But I do not remember a long conversation about it.

- Mothers who try to talk with their daughters but:
 - ✓ Often do not initiate the conversation themselves
 - ✓ Teach their daughter about menarche after the appropriate time
 - ✓ Talk to their daughters in a purely technical ('you will experience it every month, you have to use pads, remember to have them on you all the time...')
 - ✓ Approach the topic as a one-off conversation







I remember I was stressed because I was afraid how my mum would react. She got her first period when she was fourteen years old so I was scared that I was too young, if I did not reach puberty too early and if she was going to start to treat me differently. On the contrary, she was happy and she bought me a chocolate bar so that I was less worried. She had No Spa pills (painkillers) in case I was in pain, because she had a period at the same time.

- Mothers celebrate the first period of their daughter, considering it as an important step in puberty
- The daughter receives a message from her mother that she is important, her body and what is happening with it is important, that her needs should be met
- This kind of support gives a lot of self-confidence
- Girls that are taken care of do not withdrawfrom society but start to be more conscious and become leaders in peer groups.

Women are convinced that they have sufficient knowledge about menstruation (self-perception). Young girls consult the Internet. Mothers' and girls' friends also play an important role in the search for knowledge.

Knowledge about menstruation TEENAGERS POORER WOMEN WOMEN Very good 93% 86% 90% How do you assess your Very limited 7% 14% 10% knowledge Yes, I am searching 55% 45% Are you interested in this subject? 45% 55% No, I already know everything 77% The Internet 56% 61% 53% 21% 34% Mum Where do you look for 51% 35% Girl friends 35% information? 43% 38% 56% Doctor

Q. How do you assess your knowledge about menstruation?

Q. Are you interested in the topic of menstruation? Do you look for information?

Q. Where do you look for information about menstruation?

Menarche



For half of teenage girls menarche is a negative experience. Only 50% were prepared for it (i.e. had had a conversation with their mothers before the first period).



Was is a nositive or	Positive	38%
Was is a nositive or		3076
Was is a positive or negative experience?	Negative	51%
	Mum	85%
	Friend / best friend	15%
Who did you tell about it?	Sister	14%
	Dad	6%

Q. Women have various experiences with the first period. How did you experience it?

Q. Who did you tell about your first period?

Q. When did the conversation happen? N=101



Only a small group of teenagers experience a clearly positive emotional reaction and support. Rational, 'functional' conversations are the most frequent.

Mum's reaction



Rational 76%



Indifferent 68%

Emotional





Showed me where the hygiene products were stored Asked if I knew where the hygiene products were 29% Talked about women's biology and explained it well Had an educational conversation with me 5% Said that from now on I am a woman 43% Said it was no big deal 7ook it indifferently Said that now I need to be careful 5% She smiled at me 37% She hugged me 23% She was happy 17%		
Talked about women's biology and explained it well Had an educational conversation with me Said that from now on I am a woman Said it was no big deal Took it indifferently 13% Said that now I need to be careful She smiled at me 37% She hugged me 23%	59%	Showed me where the hygiene products were stored
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Took it indifferently 13% Said that now I need to be careful 6% She smiled at me 37% She hugged me 23%	43%	Said that from now on I am a woman
Said that now I need to be careful 6% She smiled at me 37% She hugged me 23%	30%	Said it was no big deal
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She hugged me 23%	6%	Said that now I need to be careful
	37%	She smiled at me
She was happy 17%	23%	She hugged me
	17%	She was happy

Conversations about menstruaution

Teenagers

Teenage girls readily talk about menstruation with female friends and with Mum, as well as participate in online discussions. Male friends and fathers are not deemed good partners to talk about menstruation.

With whom?	With what attitude?	Teenagers	WOMEN
	Readily	68%	36%
(1) With female	Reluctanly	16%	30%
friends	l avoid this topic	9%	17%
	Readily	5%	11%
(2) With male	Reluctantly	45%	30%
friends	l avoid this topic	45%	42%
	Readily	29%	14%
(3) >> On Internet Fora	Reluctantly	22%	20%
	l avoid this topic	23%	40%
	Readily	50%	
(4) With Mum	Reluctantly	27% ←	
	l avoid this topic	15%	
	Readily	13%	
(5) With Dad	Reluctantly	31%	
	l avoid this topic	43%	



The ABSENT father





ABSENT FATHER

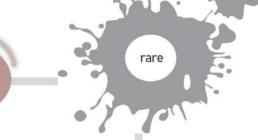
- Does not particiate in his daughter's puberty
- The sphere of sexuality is a taboo for him
- Has very limited knowledge of sexual education
- Feels embarrassed and does not want to talk about it

2

"AWKWARD" FATHER

- Does not initiate the conversation about puberty/menstruation but if asked tries to "rise to the challenge" and talk about it
- Has rather limited knowledge about menstruation, refers to myths, stereotypes and superstitions
- Tells awkward jokes that can embarrass his daughter

3



SUPPORTIVE FATHER

- Has a close relationship with his daugher
- Is present throughout different stages of her life (including puberty)
- Tries to be discreet and understanding
- Does not initiate conversations on menstruation, but when asked adopts a kind and supportive attitude







MOTHERS' perspective



As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined...

The way mothers lead their daughters through puberty (including the menarche) strongly correlates with the experience their got from their own mother.

REPEATING ATTITUDES OR PATTERNS is very common but there are mothers who try to transform their negative experiences into positive ones!







NOBODYTAUGHT ME HOWTO SPEAK ABOUT MENSTRUATION - I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH MY DAUGHTER

I don't know if my mum ever talked about it. I don't know when she stopped menstruating, it was never a topic of conversation. When I was a child, this topic did not exist, you simply wouldn't talk about it.



NOBODYTALKED ABOUT IT WITH ME **BUTI AMTRYING TO CHANGE IT AND** START A CONVERSATION

My relationship with my mother did not allow me to speak about periods comfortably. My mum made me behave as if nothing was happening. My mum told me to hide pads so that when my brother opened the bin he would not see an unfolded sanitary napkin. I remember I felt constantly ashamed in my own home.



MY MOTHER SUPPORTED ME - I WANT TO DO THE SAME FOR MY DAUGHTER

I lived in the countryside, when I got my first period in the sixth grade and the entire village knew about it because my mum went to all our neighbours to boast about it:) I immediately bought my first bra, even though I didn't need it at all :) But as I was a woman I wanted to have one!

because it was an easy experience for her.

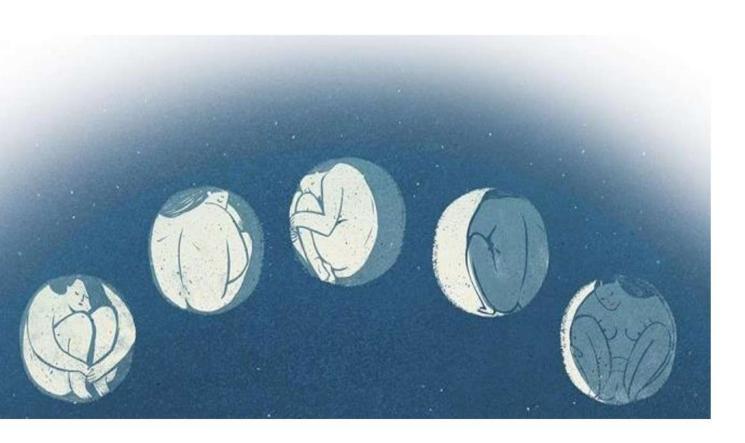
I tried to prepare my daughter and I told her well ahead of time so that she would not find herself in the same situation as me. I didn't overdo it and didn't give excessive details. I told her not to be scared when her first period came and I advised her to carry a sanitary napkin, just in case.

When she got her first period, her friend was at our house. All of a sudden, she called 'Mum!', I replied 'I'll come in a minute'. When she was leaving the bathroom, I asked her what she wanted and she said, at the top of her voice, with great pride: "I got my period!" with no hiding!

I even wondered if I should speak with my daughter about it but I thought she wouldn't want it. She has friends, attends lessons at school and I am sure they will deal with it better than I would. She did not have any problems with the first period. I even learnt about it much later - she didn't tell me



A LOW LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE is a major barrier in mother-daugher conversations



A difficulty in initiating conversations often results from a lack of appropriate skills and competencies.

An educational deficit is a very big barrier. Breaking it would mean:

- Admitting a lack of knowledge
- Making an effort to find information and pass it to the daugher, and often there is no time or willingness to do that...



Some girls do not have a clue about menstruation, I collect information through interviews with my patients and I see that even mothers do not talk about periods with their daughters. So if mothers do not cover this subject and it is a taboo, it is a serious problem.



Not much attention is paid to the topic of menstruation

The school curriculum is overloaded and the topic of menstruation is not properly addressed.

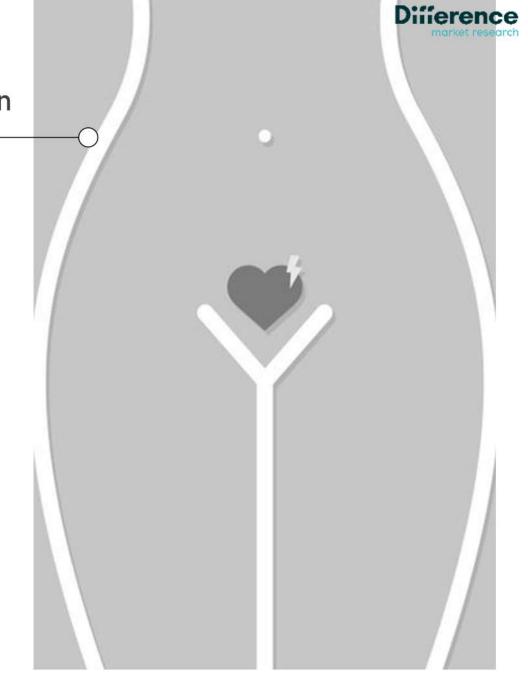
During biology lessons, menstruation is only talked about in a superficial way, touching only on the physiology aspects of it.

Sometimes teachers belittle the subject because they are afraid of students' reaction.

The current political climate also does not promote good sex education!



I have the feeling that unfortunately parents have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders and we cannot change the school system right now. There is also an unfavourable political system, full of disinformation and nonsense!





Family Life Education Classes do not serve their purpose...

Family Life Education Classes, in theory aimed at tackling the subject of puberty (including menstruation) in a wider, deeper context, are carried out:

- Early in the morning or late in the afternoon as a result, the attendance is very poor (often there are only few students present).
- By unqualified people who are not prepared to talk about these subjects (for example: catechists) or often embarrassed to talk about the subjects – in the end they either present the topic with the wrong angle or simply avoid it
- Separately! Boys are excluded from the lessons on female puberty. As a result, boys do not know how to deal with the subject – they see that girls change but do not know why it happens and what it means... Derision and mockery is a NATURAL DEFENCE MECHANISM and a way of releasing the tension.



Eng

^{-&#}x27;Guys, there is no pregnancy, we can dismantle this epithelium!

⁻ OK!'

A lack of solid school education has its consequences ...

Some parents transfer the responsibility for sex and puberty education to schools.

Yet, schools, transfer the responsibility back to parents...

As a result, a VICIOUS CIRCLE is formed, which results in children being the victims.

The transformation from a child to an adult is a source of anxiety and fear. A lot of questions and doubts arise and a sense of being is sometimes lost. Some young people feel there is a great need to search for answers related to their new "role" – but they are often left ALONE with these questions!



This is beginning to be even more oppressive. There are textbooks that say that when an adult abuses me, one should not show him disrespect. There are a lack of educational programmes in Poland that address not only sexuality but puberty in general, for both boys and girls. Due to the fact that young people are often so excited about the subject, when there is a biology lesson on the reproductive system, they don't remember anything from it. It's such a dose of emotions, puberty, sex, boys, girls, the Internet, violence – it's totally mixed. And there are parents who repress it ...



LIMITED ACCESS TO SANITARY PADS

In many schools there is a problem of LIMITED ACCESS to pads and tampons.

Most often, sanitary products are available at the school nurse's office but...:

- The nurse's office is not always open, sometimes only 2–3 days each week
- Often the available products are of poor quality, impacting the comfort and safety of girls
- Girls who got their periods unexpectedly often need to walk a considerable distance to get to the nurse's office, without any sanitary product (potential leaks, huge stress...)



Once I had to walk a few floors to get to the nurse's office and when I arrived, I had already stained my trousers with blood. I was embarassed to go back to the classroom.



TOILETS AS A PLACE TO MEET OTHERS

- The space is occupied by many students and the access to the toilets is obstructed
- They are overcrowded, lacking intimacy and discretion
- A need to make a noise in order to mask the sound of unfolding a sanitary pad

LACK OF BINS INSIDE OF TOILET CUBICLES

 A need to leave the toilet cubicle and throw the used pad/tampon in the bin placed in a common space

LACK OFTOILET PAPER

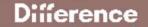
- Toilet paper is sometimes strictly rationed by the janitor (for example two sheets of paper per person)
- No possibility to wrap the used pad in toilet paper



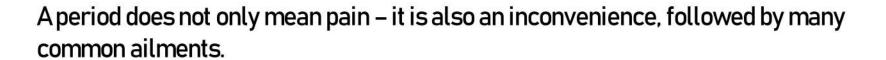
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Sometimes there is no toilet paper, or you have only a limited amount. You can't manage with it when you have a period and need to wipe your fingers after inserting a tampon. You also have no paper to wrap the used pads or tampons in, so you need to throw them just like that into the bin – and then people say it is disgusting. And what were you supposed to do with it? Eat it?

2



5 MENSTRUATION MEANS PAIN, AND OFTEN IT BRINGS ACUTE SUFFERING





Menstrual ailments



Pain or painful abdominal cramps	55%
Profuse bleeding	43%
Tender breasts	40%
Irritation, outbursts of anger	40%
Pain radiating to the back	34%
PMS	31%
Skin problems	30%
Skin problems Irritability/tearfulness	30% 28%
Irritability/tearfulness	28%
Irritability / tearfulness Sadness, depressive state	28% 21%
Irritability / tearfulness Sadness, depressive state Headaches, dizziness	28% 21% 20%







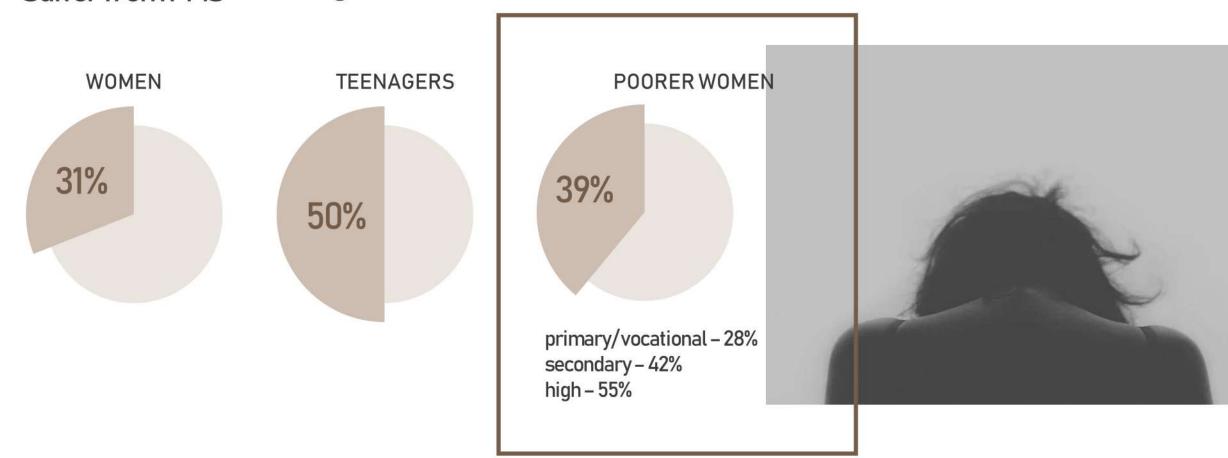
Menstrual ailments



	Teenagers	WOMEN	
Pain or painful abdominal cramps	79%	55%	
Irrability/tearfulness	75%	28%	
Irritation, outbursts of anger	67%	40%	
Skin problems	55%	30%	
Sadness, depressive state	55%	21%	
PMS	50%	31%	
Tender breasts	48%	40%	
Headaches, dizziness	42%	20%	
Pain radiating to the back	39%	34%	
Profuse bleeding	√ 30%	43%	
Bowel problems (bloating / constipation)	23%	17%	
Period that is lasting too long	16%	19%	

Awareness of PMS among poorer women increases in line with the level of education

Suffer from PMS









PROFESSIONAL SPHERE: EXCLUSION



An area in which experiencing pain is MOST DISRUPTIVE due to the urge to be active, effective, efficient.

At work, you can't afford to let it go – you have to "keep on your toes", mobilize and function normally, even in the case of malaise: pain and accompanying symptoms. There is a need to put on a happy mask, create appearances, pretend.

At the same time, the performance of women struggling with pain decreases due to inability to concentrate; they strongly focus on pain / discomfort.

Inability to properly perform their duties creates stress and fear of failure, accumulation of tasks to be performed, negative opinion of others ...

Women often experience a lack of understanding and empathy from their superiors, especially other WOMEN!

Sometimes menstruating women:

- are forced to work in arduous, uncomfortable conditions (they have to lift heavy things, have no rest breaks, etc.)
- They have limited access to sanitation facilities (no chance to change sanitary pads/tampons),
- They have less exposure to interesting projects (you are less effective, someone else will do it faster/better)



SOCIAL SPHERE: ISOLATION



Menstrual pain triggers a natural pursuit of BEING ALONE, isolating yourself from the surroundings.

Pain (especially when it becomes intense) limits a desire to contact other people.

The need to cancel schedule (classes, meetings) translates into FEELING OF LOSS (financial – because you paid for the classes, physical – because of stagnation, lack of physical and mental activity – because I don't do what I like ...), at the same time introducing a state of constant nervousness and tension.

When we give up things that make our life more pleasant, then anger, frustration, irritability appears ...



SOCIAL SPHERE: ISOLATION



- Lack of understanding from the environment: exclusion from activities, scheduled events
- There are no questions from doctors conducting procedures / operations, whether a woman is on her period (the need for proper preparation, menstruation as a medical contraindication)
- No sanitary pads in public institutions (schools, colleges, hospitals, means of transport - trains, especially on longer routes!)

"

I have read stories of women who say that they were not asked ahead of a procedure about their periods, and only then when it turned out that they have to take their clothes off they said 'but I am on my period, I have a sanitary pad', and doctors didn't know how to comment on this.

We planned trip on bicycles, in a group, and suddenly one gets her period, and so plans need to be changed a little – if I had a migraine or if one of them had a hangover or drank yesterday that would be ok – while menstruation is like 'oh my God, after all, all women have periods', we all have it and now you're acting like a princess..

Negative experience

There are many negative experiences and situations related to menstruation: Surprise, giving up normal functioning, staining clothes/furniture and shame associated with it.

		WOMEN
	You got period unexpectedly when you weren't prepared for it	55%
A 174	Menstrual blood soaked and soiled your clothes when you were in a public place	38%
	You had to ask someone for sanitary products because you didn't have your own	32%
M	You have stained bedding or furniture (e.g. sofa, chair) at your / someone else's home	32%
	You couldn't go to the toilet while you felt you had to, because of the heavy menstrual bleeding	19%
	Someone felt an unpleasant smell from you during menstruation	3%
		001/
100	You gave up going out during menstruation because of feeling unwell	38%
****	You had to come home due to severe pain during your period	29%
	You didn't go to school or work because of your period	17%
	You had to leave / leave school or work due to lack of sanitary products	10%
	You gave up leaving home during your period due to lack of sanitary products	4%
FI.	A male colleague made fun of you because of your period	6%
	You didn't buy sanitary products because of the presence of men	3%
, 9,	A male colleague treated you badly or insulted you because of your period	2%
	Vou didn't have manay to hyvranitamy mandy eta	/ 9/
	You didn't have money to buy sanitary products	4%
TRE	You had difficulty accessing sanitary products	3%
	You could only choose poor quality sanitary products	3%
	You went to an institution (for example, a foundation or a social welfare center) for sanitary products	1%

Negative experience

The vast majority of teenagers experience very negative situations and emotions associated with menstruation – they very often feel shame and give up activities.



		Teenagers	WOMEN
	You got period unexpectedly when you weren't prepared for it	54%	55%
ACT 4	Menstrual blood soaked your clothes when you were in public place	56%	38%
	You had to ask someone for sanitary products because you didn't have your own	59%	32%
(Y)	You have stained bedding or furniture (e.g. sofa, chair) at your / someone else's home	78%	32%
	You couldn't go to the toilet while you felt you had to do it because of heavy menstrual bleeding	36%	19%
	Someone felt an unpleasant smell from you during menstruation	7%	3%
	You gave up going out during menstruation because of feeling unwell	51%	38%
₹ •	You had to come home due to severe pain during your period	54%	29%
₩ ₩,	You didn't go to school or work because of your period	54%	17%
	You had to leave / leave school or work due to lack of sanitary products	21%	10%
	You gave up leaving home during your period due to lack of sanitary products	10%	4%
日 之	A male colleague made fun of you because of your period	10%	6%
* 67	You didn't buy sanitary products because of the presence of men	3%	3%
	A male colleague treated you badly or insulted you because of your period	3%	2%
	You didn't have money to buy sanitary products	8%	4%
	You had difficult access to sanitary products	1%	3%
	You could only choose poor quality sanitary products	3%	3%

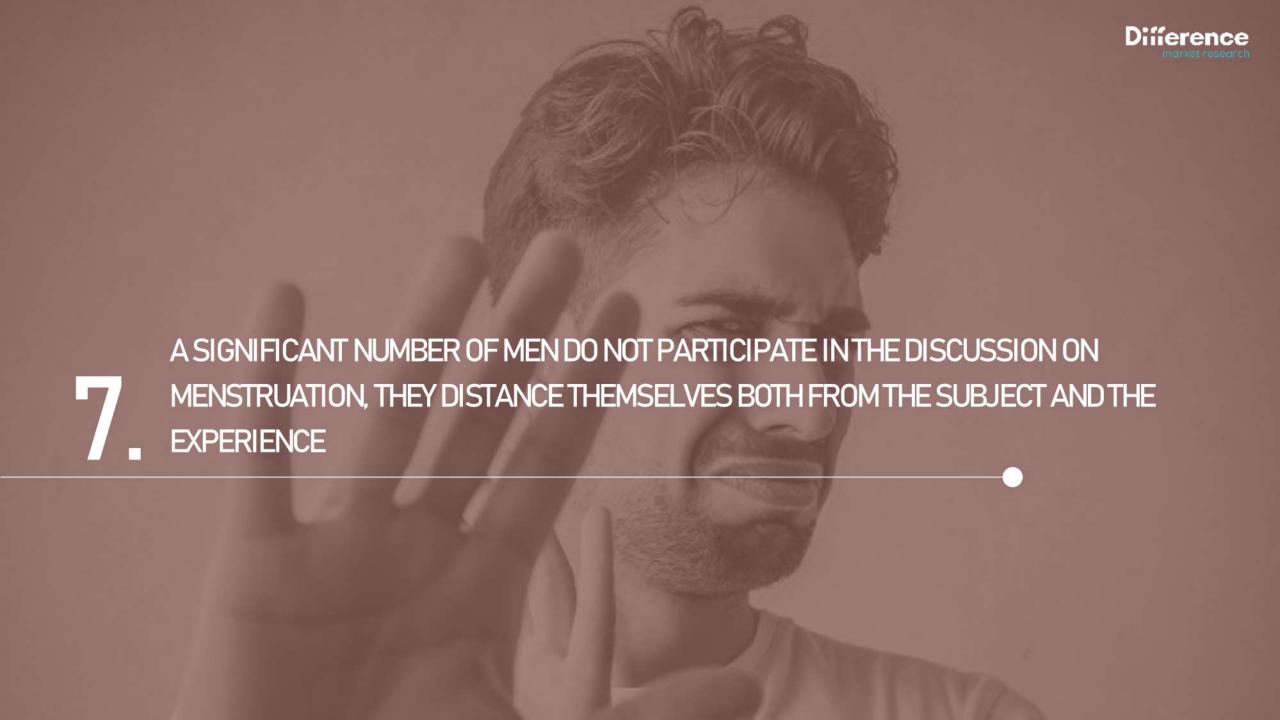
Negative experience

In addition to typical experiences in the group of poor women, there are situations related to poverty, i.e. the lack of money to buy sanitary products.



Poor

		Poor women	WOMEN
	You got period unexpectedly when you weren't prepared for it	52%	55%
	Menstrual blood soaked your clothes when you were in a public place	46%	38%
52.4	You had to ask someone for sanitary products because you didn't have your own	39%	32%
	You have stained bedding or furniture (e.g. sofa, chair) at your / someone else's home	38%	32%
	You couldn't go to the toilet while you felt you had to do it because of heavy menstrual bleeding	19%	19%
	Someone felt an unpleasant smell from you during menstruation	9%	3%
_			
	You gave up going out during menstruation because of feeling unwell	43%	38%
* * ••	You had to come home due to severe pain during your period	38%	29%
((a (a))))	You didn't go to school or work because of your period	24%	17%
T	You had to leave / leave school or work due to lack of sanitary products	19%	10%
	You gave up leaving home during your period due to lack of sanitary products	15%	4%
	A male colleague made fun of you because of your period	11%	6%
	You didn't buy sanitary products because of the presence of men	9%	3%
. 9	A male colleague treated you badly or insulted you because of your period	7%	2%
	You didn't have money to buy sanitary products	19%	4%
	You had difficult access to sanitary products	6%	3%
	You could only choose poor quality sanitary products	4%	3%
	You got a period unexpectedly when you weren't prepared for it	4%	1%







When talking about menstruation, some men use denial mechanism resulting in a DISCLAIMING AND STIGMATIZING approach, often depreciating woman and her "value" at that time.

This mechanism is deeply rooted in childhood experiences, conditioned by the approach of parents to their own sexuality / corporeality.

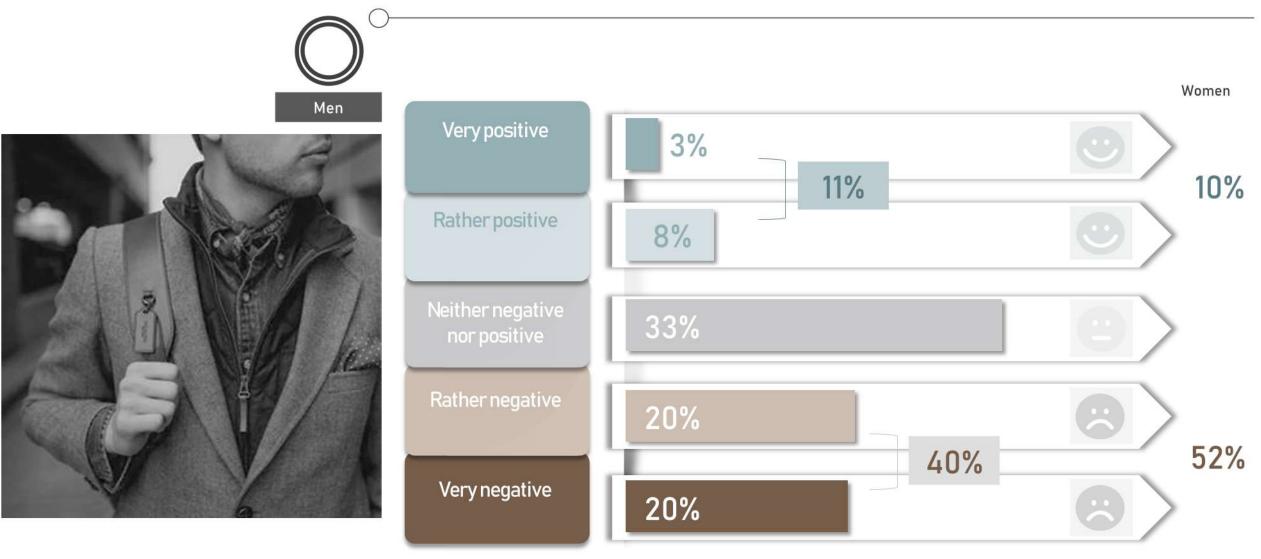
Inability to talk about topics related to sex, lack of knowledge and language skills make men very unwilling to talk about menstruation. It still remains shrouded in mystery, curiosity, but also embarrassment, shame, disgust ...

THE CHANGE IS VISIBLE IN THE YOUNGER GENERATION – men are often more caring and emphatic towards women, they understand potential limitations caused by menstrual ailments...



Perception of menstruation

Men (similarly to women) have a negative attitude towards menstruation



Men's knowledge about menstruation

Men strongly believe that women function out of the ordinary during periods.



Do you know when your loved ones are on their period?	Usually Sometimes Never	59% 34% 5%
How do they function during period?	Different than on other days Same as on other days	73% 27%
Do you buy sanitary products for women?	Yes	65% 32%

Q. Do you know when your loved ones have a period?

Q. Do you think women close to you function differently when having a period or in the same way as on other days?

Q. Do you ever buy intimate hygiene products (e.g. sanitary pads, tampons) for women close to you? N = 551



PERIOD POVERTY IS NOT UNDERSTOOD AND DOES NOT HAVE A CLEAR DEFINITION...





Period poverty is a relatively new subject in social discourse

The topic is still poorly known / explored.

It is not entirely clear what it really means and whom it concerns. Is this phenomenon present in Poland, and if so - on what scale?

Some people perceive is as educational poverty; other – as emotional deficits of menstruating women (especially those entering puberty).

Some define it in a very narrow way, perceiving it only through the prism of limited access to sanitary products.





Period poverty

The problem of a lack of access to sanitary products may also be temporary and apply to women who, for various reasons, have found themselves destitute:

- Women from violent families/relationships
- Girls in conflict with their parents
- Women who lost their jobs
- Divorced women raising children on their own

Temporary financial poverty translates into hindered access to sanitary pads/tampons - women often face a dilemma: what to choose / buy? Food or sanitary products?

The problem is more relevant for menstruating women, who need a greater amount of sanitary products (sometimes they are forced to wear one sanitary napkin / one tampon for a longer period of time, exposing themselves to various types of infections).





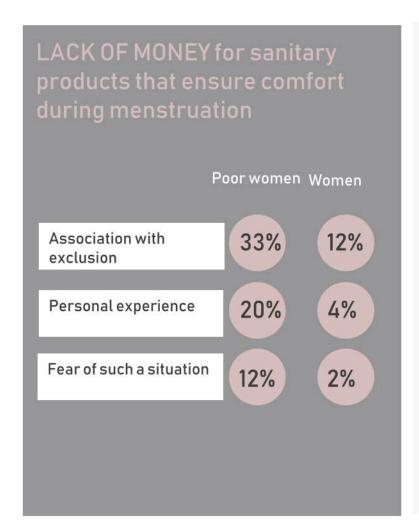
Menstrual exclusion of prisoners

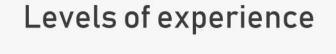
The problem of period poverty particularly affects women in prison:

- For standard 5-7 days of menstruation a woman receives only 20 sanitary pads (monthly allocation)
- In general, these are not sanitary products of the best quality (they are not comfortable to wear, are not protective enough, generate the risk of soiling bedclothes)
- The allocation of painkillers is also regulated
- There are problems with the availability of toilets (one in each cell), as well as shower cabins. In a situation of synchronization of periods (which is often the case) the problem becomes particularly acute
- Conditions are not conducive to reducing tension (being around others = being unable to separate, rest, relax)

LACK OF MONEY as a menstrual exclusion

Women affected by poverty are more likely to notice and experience menstrual exclusion. It is often associated with a lack of funds for sanitary products.







You didn't have money to buy sanitary products

9%

Women

4%

1% Women

You went to an institution (for example, a foundation or a social welfare center) for sanitary products



Deciding not to buy sanitary products

Women from poor families often give up buying sanitary products in favour of other items that they see as more important / urgent.





DECIDING NOT TO BUY SANITARY PRODUCTS





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