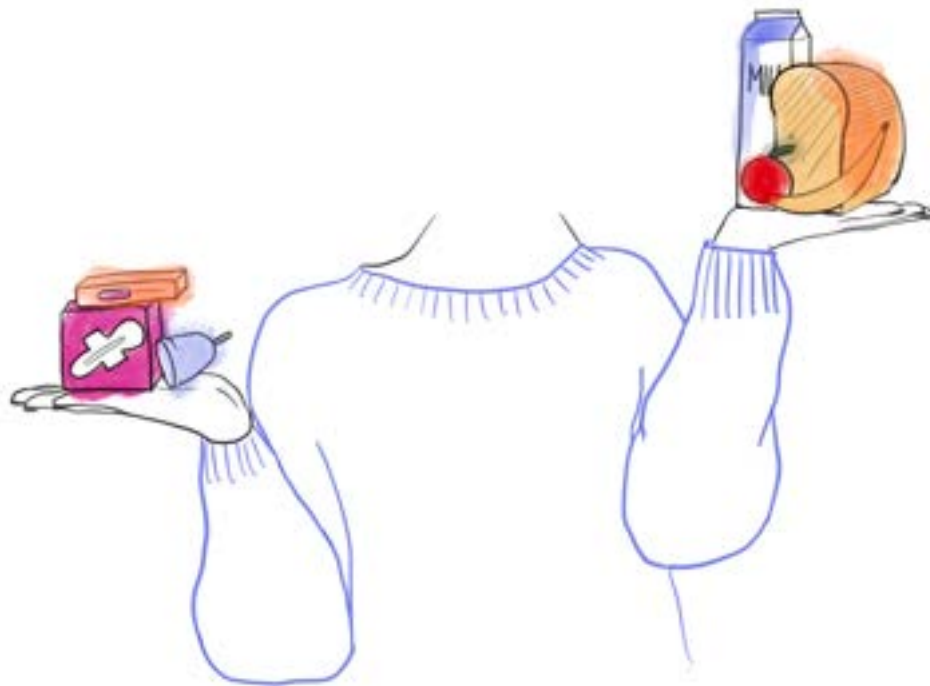


## Amsterdam Menstruates

### *Quantitative Research on Period Poverty in Amsterdam*

Neighborhood Feminists x Opinium

October 2022





## Contents

1. Introduction - Facing multiple crises	2
2. Period poverty	4
2.1 What is period poverty?	4
2.2 Why study this issue?	4
2.3 Of those who menstruate, who experiences period poverty?	7
2.4 How much does a period cost?	8
2.5 What is the impact of period poverty?	11
3. Existing research	13
3.1 Research in the Netherlands	13
3.2 Research in Amsterdam	13
4. The Amsterdam Menstruates 2022 Research	15
4.1 Research partners	15
4.2 Research scope and methodology	16
4.4 Research results	17
5. Conclusion	25
5.1 Summary of Neighborhood Feminists 2022 research	25
5.2 What do we recommend moving forward?	26
Appendix	32
I. What is being done about period poverty elsewhere in the Netherlands?	32
II. What is being done about period poverty elsewhere in Europe?	33
III. October 2022 consumer costs of period products in the Netherlands	35
IV. Research challenges, feedback and suggestions	39
References	41



## 1. Introduction – Facing multiple crises

In the Netherlands, structural poverty is a real issue. Official data from 2020 confirms 513.000 households living in poverty, with 221.000 of these households in that position for over four years.<sup>1</sup> Despite having relatively low unemployment figures, Eurostat data from 2019 estimates that “5.5% of all working persons in the Netherlands are at risk of poverty and 1.1% even lived in severe material deprivation.”<sup>2</sup>

The distribution of poverty varies greatly: one-fifth of households with a non-western migrant background subsist on a low income, while roughly half (40-54%) of refugees from Syria and Eritrea who received a residence permit, live in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Given that 17.9% of all jobs in the Netherlands are at 110% of minimum wage or lower, and 26% fall within the range of 130% of minimum wage or lower – and that the impact of covid-19 on loss of jobs and income is not yet reflected in current data – it’s unsurprising that poverty is expected to grow among those near the poverty line.<sup>4</sup>

There are significant factors that add to the structural problems. By September 2022, inflation in the Netherlands soared to an all-time high of 14.5% – the fastest rise in consumer prices since 1971 – as people grappled with skyrocketing energy prices.<sup>5,6,7</sup> As always, the cumulative impact has been and continues to be greatest on lower income families, who must spend proportionally far more of their income on essentials such as daily needs and warming their home.

Amsterdam has not been spared these worrying trends. One in five Amsterdammers lives around or below the poverty line (currently set at 120% of minimum wage, or €1.019 net per month for a single person), with an overrepresentation of women and girls.<sup>8</sup> Despite the announced government energy price cap, more than half of the lowest-income households are predicted to experience energy poverty in the coming winter.<sup>9</sup> And, despite additional responses such as softening income requirements for accessing the Food Bank, more and more people in Amsterdam will face serious financial difficulties.

Whether generational or situational, living in poverty affects all areas of a person’s life, making it far more difficult to recover from an unexpected setback or unplanned expenses.

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<sup>1</sup> CBS 2021-1. (Please note that undocumented migrants and homeless people are not included in these numbers.)

<sup>2</sup> Zekic et al 2022.

<sup>3</sup> CBS 2021-1. (Please note that undocumented migrants and homeless people are not included in these numbers.)

<sup>4</sup> Zekic et al 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Trading Economics 2022.

<sup>6</sup> RTL Nieuws 2022-1.

<sup>7</sup> Stoker, *Volkskrant* 11 October 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam 2022-1.

<sup>9</sup> NOS 2022-2.



While raising the minimum wage is key, there is no single, one-size-fits-all solution for ending structural poverty. At the same time, people urgently need support now. Poverty takes different forms, and whatever the crisis, the needed solutions require a clear understanding of the scope and impact of the problem.

**Poverty requires a person to make progressively more difficult decisions about which expenses have to be cut, including essentials such as period products**

For the past three years, Amsterdam-based foundation Neighborhood Feminists (NF) has focused on fighting period poverty in the city. While consistently finding extensive evidence of period poverty, there has been a lack of conclusive data on this issue to support NF's work. Neighborhood Feminists therefore teamed up with research agency Opinium to carry out a quantitative study on period poverty in Amsterdam.

This report focuses on the growing issue of period poverty in Amsterdam. By breaking the silence and bringing robust data about the actual scope of the problem, NF comes one step closer to its ultimate goal of ending period poverty in Amsterdam, thereby ensuring people will have one less tough decision about their needs to make.



## 2. Period poverty

### 2.1 What is period poverty?

Beyond general financial hardship, anybody who menstruates can also experience period poverty, meaning they struggle to maintain healthy period practices. Period poverty encompasses all struggles to access needed resources for maintaining menstrual health, whether products or education. In the case of those with insecure or no housing, period poverty can additionally mean irregular, insufficient or no access to sanitation facilities.<sup>10</sup> (This is a problem also in wealthy Amsterdam.<sup>11</sup>)

**Period poverty is the lack of access to period products and information essential for maintaining good menstrual health**

Period poverty also refers to the increased financial vulnerability experienced by people who menstruate due to the required expense of menstrual supplies, which include tampons and pads, but also pain medication and replacement underwear.

Research has unequivocally established period poverty to be a problem around the world, including in wealthier countries.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2 Why study this issue?

At the 2022 Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization called for the recognition and addressing of menstrual health as a “health and human rights issue,” rather than solely a matter of hygiene.<sup>13</sup> For Neighborhood Feminists, this health and human rights issue is also a matter of human

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<sup>10</sup> While definitions of period poverty abound both online and in published academic reports, some examples include the following: “Period poverty refers to the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and education, including but not limited to sanitary products, washing facilities, and waste management.” (AMWA 2019); “Period poverty is defined as a lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, waste management, and education.” (Michel et al, *Journal of Global Health Reports* 2022:6); “Period poverty describes the struggle people who menstruate face while trying to afford menstrual products. The term also refers to the increased economic vulnerability due to the financial burden posed by menstrual supplies.” (UNFPA 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Paris and London have 1 public toilet per 5,500 residents, in Antwerp, there is 1 per 4,300 residents. In Amsterdam, however, in 2019 there was just 1 toilet per 10,750 residents (Gool, *Het Parool* 18 February 2019).

<sup>12</sup> UNFPA 2022.

<sup>13</sup> WHO 2022.



dignity. In neighborhoods across Amsterdam, where period poverty is all too present, dignity can be harder to maintain.

As elsewhere in the Netherlands, people in Amsterdam are increasingly hard hit by overlapping financial crises which affect their ability to afford basic necessities. In response to the steady increase in cost of living, the Food Bank preemptively (modestly) raised the financial level at which people qualify for support in September 2022.<sup>14</sup> Looking ahead to the colder months, the added concern of the energy crisis also looms large.<sup>15</sup>

Twenty percent of people in Amsterdam are already confirmed to be living around or below the poverty line, as earlier mentioned.<sup>16</sup> Despite being high, this calculation excludes both homeless people and the many undocumented migrants and refugees living in Amsterdam.<sup>17</sup> Poverty is furthermore often gendered. At all ages, women run a higher risk of poverty throughout Europe, due to lower incomes, less stable job opportunities, and the unequal division of caretaking and household tasks.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, Amsterdam is no different. Seventy-seven percent of single-parent households already subsist below the poverty line; of these, 87% are led by the mother.<sup>19</sup> Qualitative research from 2019 confirmed that mothers in Amsterdam particularly struggle to afford period products, placing their children's needs first.<sup>20</sup>

Applying national period poverty research findings to 2022 city census data, anywhere between 24.000 and 27.000 people struggle to afford period products in Amsterdam.<sup>21</sup> Once gender diverse people and marginalized communities who disproportionately experience poverty are accounted for, though, the range of people experiencing period poverty further increases. This range, a grim indicator of poverty, has nevertheless remained an approximation, due to the lack of well-defined quantitative data on period poverty in Amsterdam.

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<sup>14</sup> NOS 2022-1.

<sup>15</sup> Although the Dutch government will impose a limit on energy price increases, millions of Dutch households will still experience significant financial struggles this winter (NOS 2022-2).

<sup>16</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam 2022-1.

<sup>17</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam 2019.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Single Supermom 2022.

<sup>20</sup> De Bovengrondse 2019-1, p.9.

<sup>21</sup> The Central Bureau for Statistics sets 15-50 as the age range for menstruating among women (CBS, 2022). In Amsterdam, 50.4% of the population is female (Gemeente Amsterdam 2022-2). The total population group aged 15-50 in 2022 is 488,582 (Gemeente Amsterdam 2022-2). 50.4% of that group means an estimated 246,245 women are within what is conventionally understood to be menstruating age. Within the total 2022 Amsterdam population of 881,933, this would mean an estimated 27.92 % of the population menstruates. These numbers rely on female population figures, however, which means that gender nonconforming or trans people who menstruate are *not* included in this percentage.



The covid-19 pandemic continues to impact people financially. In a recent worldwide survey by Plan International, 73% of respondents confirmed that the pandemic had reduced access to menstrual products.<sup>22</sup> According to a 2021 survey commissioned by Always (period products brand), some 67.000 girls in the Netherlands have experienced more difficulty buying sanitary pads and tampons since the start of the Covid-19 crisis than before.<sup>23</sup>

In 2022, these overlapping crises result in a cascade of effects, as period poverty affects growing numbers of people beyond those already living under the poverty line. The National Institute for Family Finance Information (NIBUD) has reported that, hit by significant cuts to financial support and skyrocketing rent hikes, students are experiencing period poverty in increasing numbers. Their 2021 research confirmed that students in Amsterdam and across the Netherlands have become increasingly financially dependent on their parents, and are dealing with more financial worries than they did in 2017.<sup>24,25</sup> Another hard-hit group are (self-employed) freelancers, who make up 12% of the working population, and also face the highest risk for poverty, as concluded in a recent study by the Central Bureau of Statistics.<sup>26,27</sup>

Period poverty impacts public health but also reinforces the gender income gap, through a cycle of missed school opportunities and decreased school performance which lead to reduced job opportunities and a lower range of wages.<sup>28</sup> To help break this cycle, there is a critical need for a clearly defined understanding of who experiences period poverty, in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

Studying period poverty in Amsterdam is  
a clear and necessary step  
to tackle gender inequity

Neighborhood Feminists has been actively fighting period poverty in Amsterdam by, among other actions, distributing period products at increasing numbers of locations, such as homeless shelters and community centers. Armoedefonds (the Poverty Foundation) also provides menstrual products

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<sup>22</sup> Plan International NL 2020.

<sup>23</sup> No Ties 2022.

<sup>24</sup> A representative of SRVU, the student union of the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, confirms the problem of period poverty among students in Amsterdam (Women Inc. 2021). Nibud research in 2021 confirmed an increase in student poverty since 2017 (Groen & Houtsma 2021).

<sup>25</sup> In response to demand from the student union SRVU, last year Amsterdam's VU University became the first university in the Netherlands to offer a concrete response to the issue, providing free products to students and employees. Herter, *Het Parool* 25 February 2021.

<sup>26</sup> CBS 2021-2.

<sup>27</sup> In the Netherlands, the self-employed face the highest risk for poverty, with their risk of poverty significantly increasing when they lead a one-parent household. See CBS 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Michel et al, *Journal of Global Health Reports* 2022:6.



at drop-off points in Amsterdam as well as other Dutch cities, through their national initiative.<sup>29</sup> Altogether, these locations meet the needs of only a small fraction of those affected by period poverty in Amsterdam, however. Within the wider context of rising need, it is crucial that everyone in Amsterdam who menstruates can access the resources they need for adequate menstrual health.

### 2.3 Of those who menstruate, who experiences period poverty?

In general, poverty affects women and marginalized groups to a greater extent. In Amsterdam, for example, women and people from marginalized groups, such as undocumented and single parents, are shown to be less stably employed.<sup>30</sup> As has been noted for women and marginalized people elsewhere in Europe, they have more acutely felt the economic impact of the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> Statistics show that of those relying on state support in the Netherlands, one in four are leading single-parent households.<sup>32</sup> As earlier mentioned, fully 87% of those households are headed by a woman<sup>33</sup>. In these ways, women and single parents are disproportionately affected by poverty generally speaking, and, more specifically, period poverty.<sup>34</sup>

#### **Period poverty occurs among people of a variety of ages, education levels and backgrounds**

Unsurprisingly, period poverty is found at higher rates among those who have themselves grown up in poverty. Inadequate healthcare and education mean poverty is too often passed from generation to generation<sup>35</sup>. Accordingly, period poverty can continue to affect those who grew up poor later in their lives. Additionally, period poverty is strongly suspected to disproportionately impact undocumented and homeless people. In part because many undocumented or homeless people are often harder to reach, much period poverty research in Europe and the US has tended to underreport the issue in those communities, outside of looking at issues in a specific refugee camp for example, despite the undocumented and homeless experiencing more significant general financial hardship and reduced opportunities.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Armoedefonds 2022.

<sup>30</sup> According to official estimates, 10.000-30.000 undocumented people currently reside in Amsterdam. At higher risk of poverty are single parent households. Undocumented people have extremely limited access to social services and rights in the city, commonly experiencing poverty, social exclusion, mental and physical health issues as well as homelessness as a result. See SCP 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Plan International UK 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Single Supermom 2022.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See for research on the relation between intergenerational poverty, education and healthcare amongst others Harper, Marcus & Moore 2003; Bird 2007 and Moore 2005.

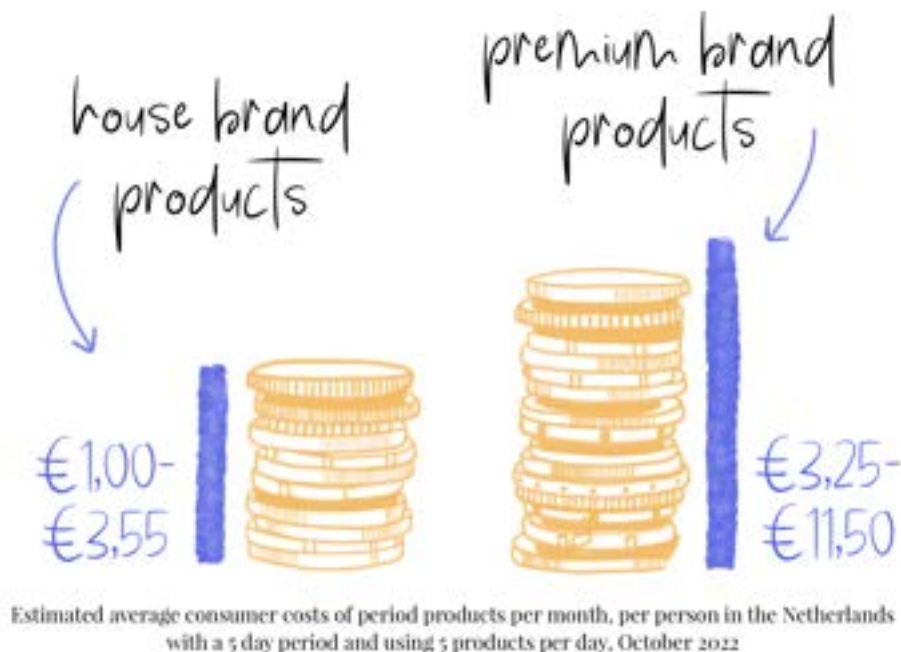
<sup>36</sup> See for example Luna-Lucero 2019 and Jauhiainen & Tedeschi 2021.



Additionally, it is important to note that while research on periods and period poverty, including some referenced in this report, has focused on women and girls, non-binary people and trans men can also menstruate. For accurate representation of the scope and range of the issue, all people who menstruate should be included in period poverty statistics and should also be taken into account in any solutions.<sup>37</sup>

**All people who menstruate should be included in period poverty research and solutions**

## 2.4 How much does a period cost?



The average menstruation lasts five days, with average use at around five products per day.<sup>38</sup> Using the least expensive, house brand products, a person will end up paying between €1,00 and €3,50 per cycle. When choosing name brand products, the cost quickly rises to between €3,25 and €11,50 per cycle. Average costs per cycle come down to €1,77 for house brand products, €5,94 for premium products, with €3,93 as an overall average monthly cost. Comparing these averages to those gathered in an earlier report, when basic house brands cost €1,43 and name brands cost €4,95 on average, confirms an increase in prices since 2019.<sup>39</sup> (Annex III of this report contains a detailed breakdown of current consumer costs for period products in the Netherlands.)

<sup>37</sup> Growing numbers of researchers argue for a more trans-inclusive view on periods and period poverty, including: Chrysler et al 2016 and Rydström 2020.

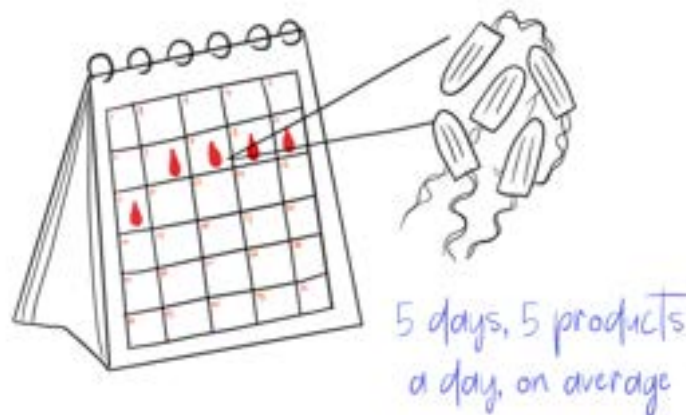
<sup>38</sup> Sanitary pads should be changed every 4 to 6 hours, tampons every 4 to 8 hours. From 8 hours there is an increased risk of toxic shock syndrome. See for example Mayo Clinic 2022.

<sup>39</sup> De Bovengrondse 2019-1, pp 49-50.



These current average costs have been calculated using current prices of normal-sized period products. This means these averages do *not* take into account products for use at night, products for heavier periods, or heavy menstrual blood loss (which affects approximately one in four people who menstruate), nor do they take into consideration longer cycles or other necessities for menstruation, such as pain relief.<sup>40,41</sup> Pain management is often part of costs for most people who menstruate: according to a 2022 study by Women Inc. involving 2,587 Dutch women, 77% of respondents reported experiencing severe pain and related issues impacting daily life and finances; of these, 65% reported using painkillers, and 38% reported using a hot water bottle.<sup>42</sup>

To keep in mind: more sustainable, reusable period products such as menstrual cups, washable pads and period underwear have not been included in this cost estimation, either. While these purchases are more expensive upfront, they can result in significant cost savings over the long term. For those who can afford it, €1,90 or even €11,50 per month may not seem that much. But over a lifetime, the costs for menstruation add up, becoming particularly considerable for lower-income families with multiple menstruating adults and/or teens, and especially challenging for undocumented people who do not have access to support such as the Food Bank.<sup>43,44,45</sup>



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<sup>40</sup> Our experience supporting menstruation needs in Amsterdam indicates that people with heavier menstrual periods are more likely to need 6 sanitary pads per day.

<sup>41</sup> Research in the US shows that 25% of all people who menstruate experience heavy menstrual blood loss (menorrhagia) (CDCP 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Duist & Gijsbers 2022.

<sup>43</sup> The living amount of the Food Bank is a maximum of €225 per month per person (€315 for two-person households). This concerns the amount that can be used for food, clothing and care products. See Voedselbanken Nederland 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Supported by the Armoedefonds, the Amsterdam Food Bank offers a MUP (or menstrual product distribution point), to supply menstrual products to those who meet qualifications for assistance. See Armoedefonds 2022.

<sup>45</sup> De Bovengrondse 2019-1, p. 23 onwards.



On average, people who menstruate will have their first period between ages 11 and 14, and their last around age 51; this amounts to about seven years of menstruation and the use of some 12,000 single-use pads or tampons. Many reports place the estimate higher, at 17,000 pads or tampons over a lifetime.<sup>46,47</sup>

**Over a lifetime, a person who menstruates in the Netherlands will use roughly 12,000 pads or tampons, spending between €480 and €5,520 on these products alone**

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Due to medical issues, actual costs for appropriate period products can also vary greatly from person to person, since some individuals require hypoallergenic, non-pH balance-disrupting options. The needed hypoallergenic or unscented products remain among the priciest menstrual products. For context, 75% of people who menstruate will develop a yeast infection at some point in their life; of those, half must deal with recurring yeast infections and purchase medication.<sup>49</sup> Not changing tampons, pads and panty liners frequently enough (often in order to save money) and using scented pads and tampons are both associated with higher rates of yeast infections.<sup>50</sup> This illustrates how poor gynecological health and period poverty can be mutually reinforcing.

### **Poor gynecological health and period poverty become mutually reinforcing over time**

Increasingly, the medical advice is to avoid all added chemicals, including scented products, and to frequently change tampons and pads, in order to prevent not only yeast infections, but also bacterial vaginosis and other health conditions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Healthline 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Berg, *AMA* 16 December 2020.

<sup>48</sup> A person menstruates over some 35 years. This estimated lifetime cost estimate is based on October 2022 costs and does not account for inflation or other costs related to menstruation.

<sup>49</sup> Achkar et al 2010.

<sup>50</sup> The Office on Women's Health 2021.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, the Cleveland Clinic advises against using scented tampons and pads in order to improve general gynecological health (Cleveland Clinic 2021).



## 2.5 What is the impact of period poverty?

A 2017 Dutch study with over 32,000 participants confirmed that periods impact productivity at school and work.<sup>52</sup> When accessing needed period products is also a struggle, the impact is even greater on absenteeism and the probability of missed educational or professional opportunities increases.

Research by Always brand in 2017 concluded that nearly 1 in 5 American youth who menstruate have missed school due to a lack of period protection.<sup>53</sup> The impact of period poverty continues into adulthood, the workplace, and reaches other areas of life. Research has shown that period poverty affects the levels to which people who menstruate can participate in their community, such as in sports or other physical activities.<sup>54</sup> Research across the world has also shown that an increase in access to menstrual products *does* lead to a decrease in absenteeism, showing an economic benefit to reducing gender inequity.<sup>55</sup>



*Posters throughout Amsterdam, part of a Neighborhood Feminists awareness campaign, winter 2021*

<sup>52</sup> Schoep et al 2019.

<sup>53</sup> The most recent Always Confidence & Puberty Survey shows that nearly one in five American people who menstruate either leave school early regularly or miss school entirely regularly because of a lack of access to period products (Businesswire 2018).

<sup>54</sup> UK research from 2019 by Always shows that more than 26% of respondents say that they have had to avoid social situations due to the lack of access to sanitary products. Another 27% of respondents said that the lack of money for menstrual products in their family led them to avoid going out all together when they are on their period. Moreover, one in four respondents said their lack of access to menstrual products led them to not engage in their planned physical or sport-related activities (Rodriguez 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Tull 2019.



As has been noted by researchers, policymakers and health providers, lack of or difficulty accessing period products can lead to increased health risks and poor health outcomes. When period products are insufficiently available, people resort to using whatever is accessible to them, however ineffective, such as toilet paper, doubling their underwear, or rationing products (using them for longer than is recommended or safe).<sup>56</sup> These types of solutions come with increased risks both physical and psychological, such as urinary tract infections, bacterial vaginosis, skin irritation, vaginal itching and abnormal discharge, as well as contributing to anxiety, depression and distress.<sup>57,58,59</sup>

### Starting from early on, period poverty deepens the established gender gap in education and work

The double stigma of period poverty further reinforces its persistence, with both menstruation and poverty being topics people too often avoid. As emphasized in Neighborhood Feminists' 2021 public awareness campaign, however, just because you can't see period poverty, doesn't mean it isn't there.

For people struggling with period poverty, there is the stigma of poverty as well as the stigma tied to menstruation.



<sup>56</sup> See, for example Cardoso et al 2021, and De Bovengronde 2019-1.

<sup>57</sup> Das et al, PLoS ONE 10(6) 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Hennegan et al, BMJ Open 2016:6.

<sup>59</sup> Caruso et al, SSM Popul Health 2018.



### 3. Existing research

#### 3.1 Research in the Netherlands

In 2019, humanitarian organization Plan International Nederland conducted research on menstruation in the Netherlands. Their research concluded that up to one in ten Dutch girls and young women across the country have experienced period poverty.<sup>60</sup> In 2019, the Kinderhulp foundation conducted its own research among 700 social workers in the Netherlands, finding that one in four knew or suspected period poverty among the youth they support, despite the topic not being intentionally discussed.<sup>61</sup> As earlier mentioned, Always also commissioned research in 2020 and 2021, their findings revealing that nearly 53.000 girls in the Netherlands have missed school because they lacked money to buy menstrual products.<sup>62</sup> Of the 67.000 girls experiencing more difficulty affording period products since covid-19, nearly 40% indicated their family can no longer afford the products they need.<sup>63</sup>



#### 3.2 Research in Amsterdam

In 2019, feminist group De Bovengrondse conducted an exploratory qualitative study into period poverty in Amsterdam.<sup>64</sup> The aim of the study was to establish whether period poverty plays a role among women living around the poverty line, and to determine in what ways they experience period poverty. To do so, they spoke to approximately 50 organizations that work in poverty relief and obtained information directly from 178 participating women. Of these, 96 indicated that they had

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<sup>60</sup> Plan International NL 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Of the social workers knowing or suspecting period poverty, 69% confirmed direct evidence of period poverty in their daily interactions with youth, Kinderhulp 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Kinderhulp 2021.

<sup>63</sup> NoTies 2022.

<sup>64</sup> De Bovengrondse 2019-1.



difficulty affording period products (54%) and 83 indicated that they had no difficulty purchasing (46%).<sup>65</sup>

The study concluded that access to products is constrained for some due to lack of financial means, particularly for (though not limited to) clients of food banks, homeless people and undocumented people. As a result, restricted in their purchases, people sometimes resorted to inferior alternatives, such as using toilet paper, or rationing the products they do have, (re-)using them for longer than is safe; yet others were unable to buy specific products needed for medical reasons. Testimonials were collected of not being able to purchase more expensive products to avoid irritations, or products designed for heavier flow. The report included testimonials of being unable to afford pain medication, and having to cut back on groceries, in order to pay for period products. De Bovengronde also confirmed that period poverty is further reinforced by a lack of access to proper sanitation, especially among homeless people, with a lack of knowledge and taboos about menstruation additionally contributing to the problem.

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<sup>65</sup> De Bovengronde 2019-1, p.49.



## 4. The Amsterdam Menstruates 2022 Research

Neighborhood Feminists' Amsterdam Menstruates 2022 study ran from September 15 to October 19, 2022. The following sections detail research partners, setup, and methodology, concluding with the study's key findings.

### 4.1 Research partners

Neighborhood Feminists (NF) is a non-profit organization that supports women and marginalized groups in Amsterdam by addressing intersectional feminist and anti-racist issues. Since 2019, in response to clearly identified need, NF has been providing at-risk people in the city with the period products they lack. These products are distributed by NF across Amsterdam in two ways, through toiletry kits known as Dignity Kits, and from NF's Menstruation Stations, which are self-serve cabinets installed at locations of greater need throughout the city.<sup>66</sup> While these and similar initiatives meet some of the most immediate need, NF's ultimate goal is transformative change. For this reason, NF advocates for substantive policy changes that better reflect actual community needs.

**Cities like Amsterdam must systematically ensure greater equity for more people; among those most at risk, this includes ensuring that fundamental needs are met**

NF partnered with international insights agency Opinium to quantitatively establish the current scope of period poverty in Amsterdam. Working with a wide range of companies and organizations, Opinium provides insights on brand and communications, product and service development, thought leadership and customer experience and satisfaction. Their clients include JustEat, Santander, and the European Commission, among others. Since 2017, Opinium has worked for Plan International UK, conducting annual research into period poverty among young people aged 14-21, with a focus on lack of access to products, inadequate education, and societal stigma. Their research revealed robust, evidence-based insights that have led to real-world changes. Plan International UK's research and campaign efforts were instrumental in the Department for Education's 2020 launch of a period poverty initiative, which provides free period products in schools across England and Wales.

*"As an independent agency, one of Opinium's fundamental principles is that we should conduct research that makes a difference to not only our clients, but also to our teams and the wider community. We call it 'research for good' and it's the reason many of us initially chose to work at Opinium and the reason we stay. For the past 10 years we have partnered with charities and NGOs across Europe to support causes and issues that tackle social and economic inequality and discrimination.*

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<sup>66</sup> At the time of writing, NF supported roughly 825 people per month, through their Dignity Kits and Menstruation Stations: <https://www.neighborhoodfeminists.com/what-we-do/>.





*Period poverty is one of these issues. It is an issue that few people talk about. An issue that we assume isn't relevant in our neighborhoods and cities. An issue we assume isn't affecting the people that we know.*

*We know that assumption is untrue.*

*By partnering with Neighborhood Feminists, we at Opinium hope to provide an accurate picture of the scale of period poverty and its impact on the lives of those living in Amsterdam so that we can drive lasting change in how we view and tackle period poverty once and for all."*

- Emily Dickinson, head of Opinium Amsterdam

## 4.2 Research scope and methodology

### *Survey*

Opinium Research developed and conducted an online and paper survey of people in Amsterdam aged 12-55 who had menstruated in the last 12 months; the survey was presented in English and Dutch. Neighborhood Feminists provided feedback on survey questions. Fieldwork took place between September 23 and October 19, 2022. Survey results were weighted for age and geographic distribution, to be in line with actual population proportions as recorded by the municipality of Amsterdam and adjusted for likely menstruation rates in the last 12 months among various age groups as outlined in the methodology section.

### *Scope*

The total sample size was 1,332, but the research conclusions were based on 841 responses which were collected online via panel survey and 29 responses collected through paper surveys. There were an additional 462 surveys completed online through an open link that was shared through social media channels such as Instagram, and flyers.

The bulk of this report's conclusions are based on statistics from the 870 weighted online panel and paper surveys. The panel and paper surveys ensured a sufficient range of age and geographic representation, while the open link was skewed more toward younger ages, with 43% of the sample in the open link between 12 and 24.

There was a separate, unweighted dataset created that merged all the data (therefore total sample size of 1,332), and so the only times that is used in this report is where the base size for a particular neighborhood or age group is too low in a particular question from the weighted representative survey to be robust (i.e. below at least 50 respondents), and so the unweighted merged full dataset is used instead. This is mentioned in the report whenever the full unweighted dataset is used.

### *Methodology*

The survey was sampled and weighted to be representative by age and area. Data from Onderzoek



en Statistiek (Gemeente Amsterdam) was used to determine representation figures. As there are no official statistics of the number of people who menstruate in Amsterdam, a proxy question was run on Opinium's UK nationally representative omnibus to find out how many people have menstruated in the last year per age group on the assumption that this would be similar between the UK and the Netherlands. These percentages by age group were used as a proxy and applied to the data from Onderzoek en Statistiek for more accurate representation than the statistics would allow us to do.

For the online survey, parents were required to provide informed consent before the survey was taken by respondents below the age of 16. Additional steps were taken to ensure that a wider demographic would be represented: paper surveys were distributed to coordinators in support centers who engage with undocumented and homeless people to ensure that the research included the experiences of these people who are often missing in research and who do not participate in online panels. Additionally, all paper survey respondents were over 16.

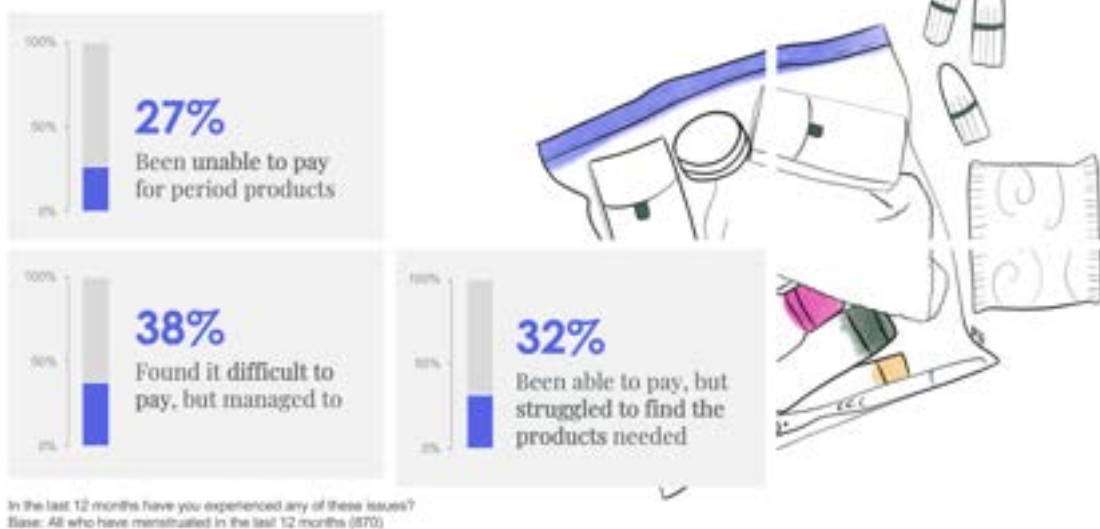
Conducting research among undocumented and homeless people presents particular challenges. A researcher who conducts qualitative research among undocumented people was engaged with to prepare, anticipate complexities, review ethics and sensitivities for people who are already experiencing ongoing pressure and stress, and in some cases, outright trauma. The language of the survey was reviewed by the researcher with these respondents in mind. Specific attention was also paid to inclusive language, to help ensure that menstruating trans men and non-binary people and non-native speakers would not be excluded.

## 4.4 Research results

### *Period poverty is widespread across Amsterdam*

The survey response exceeded previous qualitative research and confirmed anecdotal indications.

### Over a quarter have been unable to afford to pay for period products in the last 12 months



- In Amsterdam over the past year, 27% of people who have menstruated in the last 12 months have been unable to afford to pay for period products at some point.
- 38% of people who have menstruated in the last 12 months say they have managed to pay but found it difficult to do so.

Rates of people saying they have been unable to pay for period products in the last 12 months are highest in Noord (36%) and Oost (33%), while 31% have been unable to pay in Zuidoost, 23% in West, and 16% in Nieuw West.

Just under a third (32%) of all those who menstruated in the last year also said they struggled to find the products they needed – though this could include struggling to find their preferred type of product as was mentioned by some respondents.

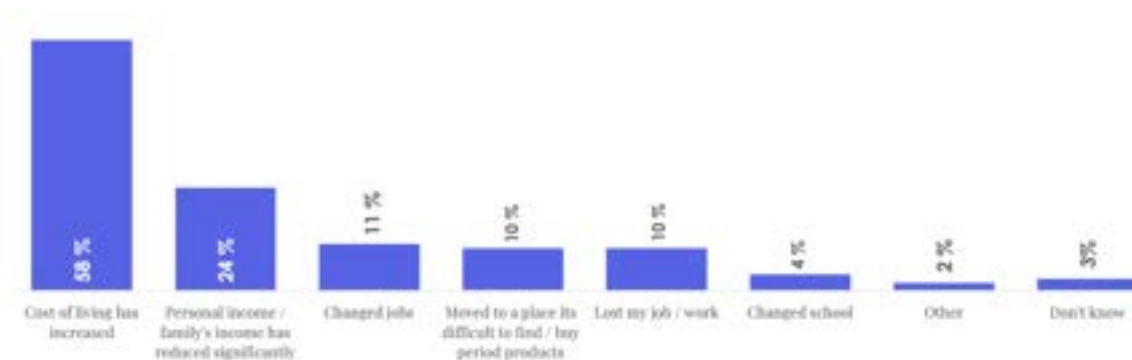


### *The cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating period poverty in Amsterdam*

The research results show different financial pressures are contributing to period poverty in the city.

- **Two in five (41%) of all surveyed stated that they found it increasingly difficult to afford to buy period products compared to the previous 6 months.**
- **The rate is higher among younger age groups: almost half (46%) of 18–24-year-olds say it has been more difficult for them, compared to 22% among 45–55 year olds.**
- **Of those who had found it more difficult to afford period products in the last 6 months, 58% said that it was due to the increased cost of living, while nearly one in four (24%) reported that their income had significantly decreased.**
- **These figures rose most significantly (+11%) among those aged 35–44: over two-thirds (69%) stating that the cost-of-living crisis had impacted their ability to purchase period products.**

### **Top reasons those surveyed found it more difficult to buy period products in the last 6 months**



Why did you find it more difficult to afford period products in the last 6 months?  
Base: All people who found it more difficult to afford period products in the last 6 months. (357)

There are differences among districts, with those in Noord (40%) and Oost (50%) again being the ones to be struggling most, with half in both areas saying they have found it more difficult in the last 6 months, compared to 29% in Centrum, for example.

Of those who have found it more difficult to afford period products in the last 6 months, those residing in Centrum (70%), Zuid (66%) and Nieuw-West (71%) were most likely to cite cost of living increases as a reason for this struggle. [Data for Noord and Nieuw-West on this question are taken



from the unweighted full dataset of 1,332 respondents, due to low base size from weighted panel and paper survey.]

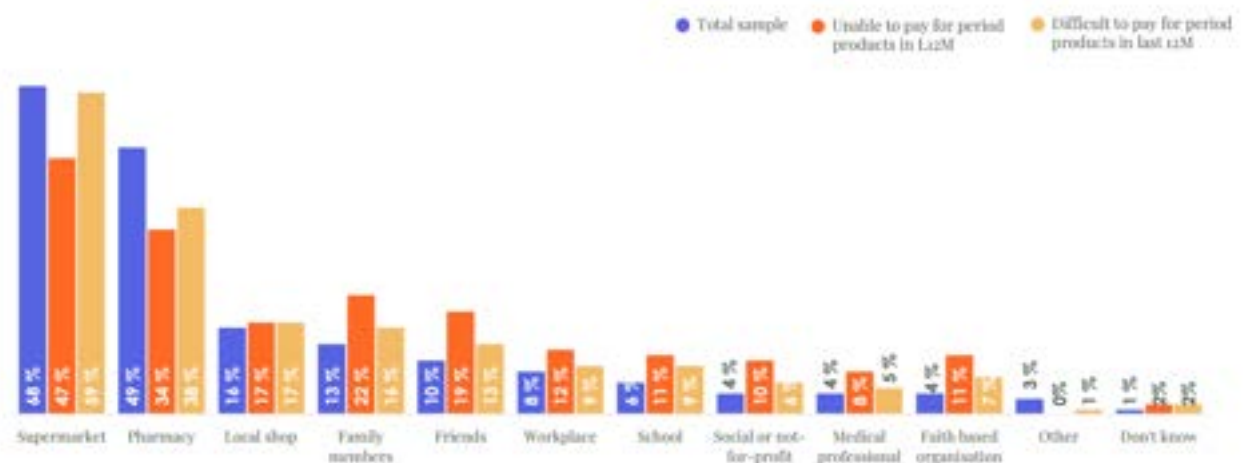
Meanwhile, those in West were most likely to state that a significant decrease in household income was a reason for increased difficulties (38%).

*Those who struggle to pay for period products are more reliant on family and friends for support*

People have had to turn to different sources to meet their menstrual health needs.

- Among those unable to pay for period products at some point in the last 12 months, over one in five have had to turn to family members (22%) and friends (19%) for support. Over one in 10 have also sought support from workplaces, schools, and faith-based organizations.

**In the last 12 months, where did you buy / get your period products from?**



Base: Total sample (870); Unable to pay for period products in the last 12 months (206); Found it difficult to pay for period products in the last 12 months (334)

Those in Noord are more likely to access products from a range of places; one in ten (12%) have got period products from a social or non-profit organization in the last 12 months, 8% from a faith-based organization and 11% from medical professionals.

*Menstruation still carries a social stigma for many*

Regardless of income, accessing period products continues to carry a social stigma.

- Over two in five (43%) experience negative emotions when they try to get period products.



One in five (20%) stated that they feel embarrassed, rising to over a quarter (26%) among those aged 12-17. More than a sixth of all surveyed also say that they feel stressed (16%) and shy (15%).

Younger people are more likely to say they feel particular emotions when accessing period products. One in ten (10%) 12-17-year-olds say they feel anxious and 14% feel fearful trying when to access period products.

## Accessing period products is a more stressful experience for those in financial need



Base: Total sample (570); NET: Unable to pay or struggled to pay for period products (454)

- For those unable or struggling to afford period products at some point in the last 12 months, these negative emotions are heightened, with nearly a third (29% of those unable to pay and 28% of those struggling) stating that they feel embarrassed, and a quarter stating they feel stressed by the process (27% for both those unable to pay and those struggling to pay).

### Many have had to make sacrifices to afford period products

Out of those struggling to or unable to afford period products in the last 12 months, nearly all (89%) have taken an alternative action to be able to buy essential menstrual products.

- Over a third (38%) had to cut back their spending on groceries.
- Over a quarter (27%) cut back spending on household products.
- Just over a fifth cut spending on health products (22%).

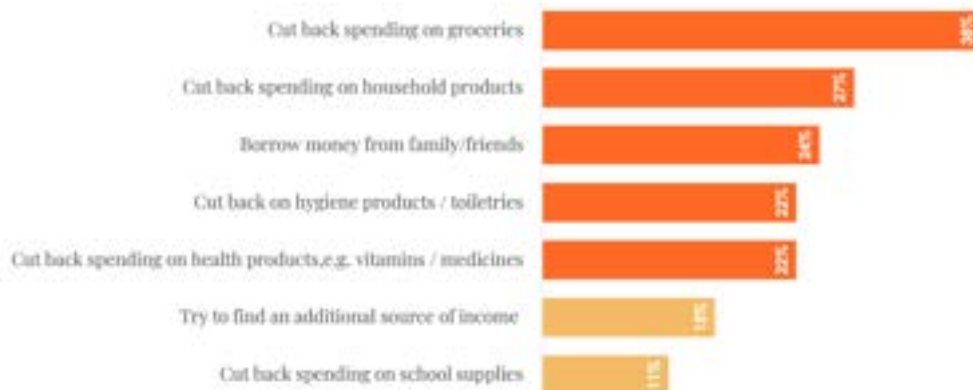


To free up room in their budget for period products, 22% have had to cut back spending on hygiene products, while 11% cut back on school supplies.

For those seeking alternative sources of money, nearly a quarter (24%) relied on money borrowed from family or friends, while a sixth (15%) tried to find an additional source of income to be able to afford menstrual products.

Those based in Amsterdam West and struggling were most likely to deal with this by cutting back on grocery spending (41%) and by borrowing money from family or friends (35%). Meanwhile, those in Zuid were most likely to deal with struggles to pay by cutting back on groceries (29%) and on health products (25%). In Oost, those who are struggling to pay were most likely to cut back on grocery spending (48%), followed by cutting household product spending (31%).

## Actions taken by those who have struggled to afford period products in the last 12 months



You mentioned that you have been struggling to afford period products in the past 12 months. Have you had to do any of the following to be able to afford period products?  
Base: All people who found it more difficult to afford period products in the last 12 months (268)

Similarly to Zuid, those struggling in Noord were most likely to deal with this by cutting back on grocery spending (37%) and on hygiene products and toiletries (30%). In Nieuw-West, those struggling were most likely to cut back on groceries (45%) and borrow money from friends and family (24%).

Meanwhile, those in Zuidoost were most likely to deal with struggles to pay by cutting back on groceries (46%) and on household products (41%). [Data for Noord, Nieuw-West and Zuidoost on this question are taken from the unweighted full dataset due to low base size from weighted panel and paper survey.]



*Many people ended up having to use inferior alternatives instead of period products*

Over three in five (63%) people who could not afford, struggled to afford, or struggled to access period products have had to resort to alternatives to their usual period products.

- **Half (50%) of these resorted to using toilet paper.**
- **A concerning 70% of those aged 12-17 resorted to using toilet paper.**
- **One in ten (10%) used other paper products, such as tissues or newspapers, while one in fourteen (7%) used pieces of fabric during their period.**

It should be noted that a respondent commented that they made *ad hoc* “tampons”, using paper alternatives internally.

*Difficulty affording and accessing period products negatively impacts day to day life for many of those that struggle*

That everyday life is impacted by period poverty is not surprising, but survey respondents clarified in which ways and to what extent they experienced this impact. Of those who could not afford or struggled to afford period products, lack of access to period products meant:

- **Seven in ten people (71%) had to alter their day-to-day routines.**
- **Almost a quarter (24%) had to stay home for some of their period.**
- **One in ten (11%) remained at home for the duration of their period.**
- **Over one in ten (12%) had to miss work, with potential economic implications.**
- **14% had to miss out on socializing because of the difficulty in accessing period products.**
- **1 in 4 (26%) 12-17 year olds who struggled or couldn't afford period products have missed school**

The proportion of people saying that they have had to miss out on socializing increased to 21% for those in Zuid who are struggling to afford to access sanitary products.

As such, unsurprisingly, a fifth (18%) of those struggling or not able to afford period products noted period poverty's impact on their mental well-being, and 10% on their physical health.

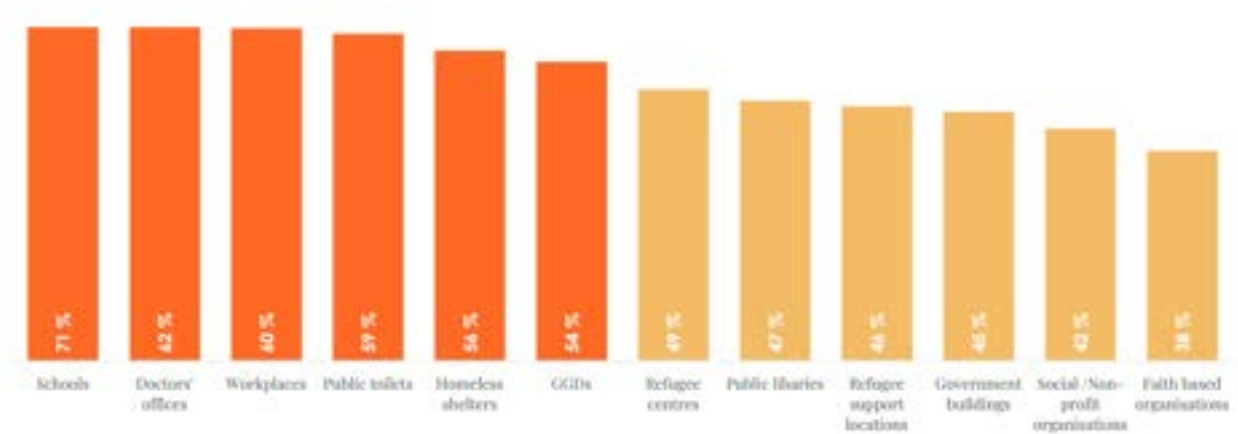
Once again there is geographic variation, with those in Zuid (22%), West (21%) and Zuidoost (21%) most likely to mention the impact on their mental health. [Data for Zuidoost on this question are taken from the unweighted full dataset, due to low base size from weighted panel and paper survey.]





*So what should be done?*

## Where do you think free period products should be available from?



Base: All those who think period products should be freely available (627)

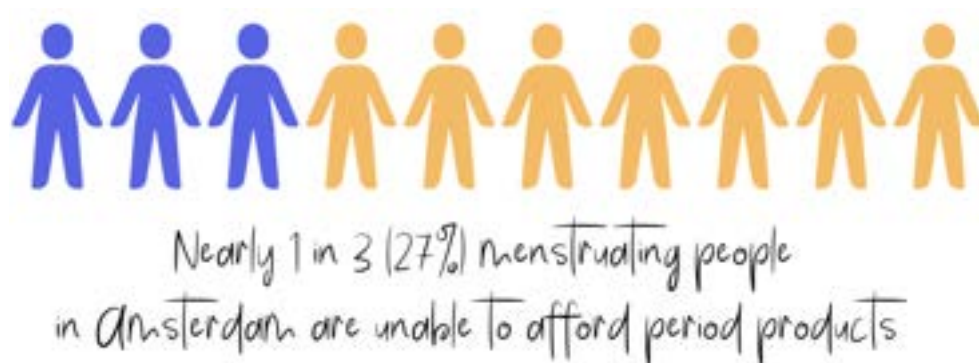
The response was clear: 95% of survey respondents support the notion that people should be able to access period products for free. Of this number, nearly three-quarters (71%) think free period products should be provided at schools, followed by doctors' offices (62%), workplaces (60%) and public toilets (59%).



## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of Neighborhood Feminists 2022 research

Period poverty is widespread across Amsterdam, with increased cost-of-living exacerbating the problem. Over the last year, 27% of people who menstruate have been unable to afford to pay for period products at some point. 38% say they managed to pay but found it difficult to do so.



Over three in five (63%) of the people who could not afford, struggled to afford, or struggled to access period products have had to resort to alternatives to their usual period products. Of these, half (50%) resorted to using toilet paper. Among those aged 12-17 who have struggled to afford in the last 12 months, the rate jumps to 70%. One in ten (10%) used other paper products, such as tissues or newspapers, while one in fourteen (7%) used pieces of fabric during their period.

89% of people struggling to or unable to afford period products in the last 12 months have had to take alternative measures to be able to buy essential menstrual products. Over a third (38%) had to cut back their spending on groceries. Over a quarter cut back spending on household products, and just over a fifth cut back on health products, while just over a tenth cut back on school supplies.

Difficulty affording and accessing period products negatively impacts day to day life for many. Seven in ten people experiencing period poverty had to alter their day-to-day routines, such as by having to stay home or missing school or work. Regardless of income, products associated with periods continue to carry a social stigma, with over two in five experiencing negative emotions when they try to get the products they need.

The outlook is concerning: two in five (41%) of all surveyed stated that they found it increasingly difficult to afford to buy period products compared to the previous 6 months. The rate is higher among younger age groups: almost half (46%) of 18-24-year-olds say it has been more difficult for them, compared to 22% among 45-55 year olds.



## 5.2 What do we recommend moving forward?

### *The problem in a nutshell*

As confirmed by NF's quantitative research, the problem of period poverty in Amsterdam is pressing and real. The survey further confirms the inability to access needed period products can impact all aspects of a person's daily life, from school to work, both physical and mental health, as well as in sports and social or community activities. Being able to manage menstrual health is a matter of basic dignity.

### *What we know works*

By doing direct need provision work and regular project reviews over the past three years, NF has been able to finetune their approach to providing health products. NF believes it is important to uphold the following 'best practices':

- Neighborhood Feminists emphasizes regular upkeep of its Menstruation Stations. Hygiene is also why these self-serve cabinets are stocked with closed product packages, rather than individual pads.<sup>67</sup>
- Whole packages additionally go beyond immediate or single use, giving a person greater autonomy.
- Both accessibility and visibility are key. When feasible, Menstruation Stations are placed in locations accessible to all genders, with information in multiple languages. New locations are regularly updated in an online, searchable map. To further normalize menstruation needs, the cabinets are not "hidden".

### *Limitations of what's been done so far*

Despite confirmation of the value of NF assistance, we recognize the limitations of our efforts. Funding limitations mean that our support, while steady for those receiving it, remains a piecemeal response, because it reaches only a small fraction of those in need. The same can be said of other assistance, such as Armoedefonds period product locations (MUPs) not supported by public funding. Support should not be limited to provisional or temporary responses by private sources who cannot necessarily ensure continuity. Increased scale and accessibility are very much needed. While building awareness is important, effective solutions that actually concretely address gender inequity and break the cycle of poverty do not happen within any annual or single campaign, but through municipality-led initiatives supported by the state.

### *Why now?*

Robustly addressing poverty is crucial now more than ever, as high inflation rates further marginalize people already at risk of or living in poverty, making them more susceptible to period poverty as well. NF research confirms 27% of menstruating people in Amsterdam are currently unable to afford period products, but this rate is likely to further increase, considering the multiple economic crises we now face.

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<sup>67</sup> Similar standards of quality are maintained for the provision of period products in NF's Dignity Kits.



### *What now?*

Ending period poverty must include tackling structural poverty as a whole at the ministerial level. Raising benefits and the minimum wage for both adults and youth to more accurately reflect the actual, rising cost of living can ensure that people are better able to meet their fundamental life needs, including those relating to menstrual health. Effective support at the national level should also include public awareness building through a campaign developed in coordination with municipalities. However, national policy changes cannot be expected in the immediate to short term.

## **Raising the minimum wage is the single most significant step the government can take against all forms of poverty, including period poverty**

While coordination with the government is important to allow for sufficient resources, the issue of period poverty is urgent and is most sustainably addressed through needs-based solutions led by municipalities.

Approaching this issue in Amsterdam at a city-wide level together with districts is the most effective way to ensure that *everyone* experiencing period poverty in the city receives the menstrual products they need in a timely manner.

Periods don't wait for national policies (or anything else). And appropriate menstrual products remain an unmissable part of healthy menstruation. At the municipal level, period products such as tampons and pads should be made freely available in all suitable locations, including public buildings, public schools and universities in Amsterdam. Options such as menstrual cups and period underwear could be covered by insurance, to encourage more sustainable practices.

A municipal period poverty initiative need not require developing new, costly infrastructure. Making use of existing facilities, whether schools, libraries, GGD locations, or other government-owned facilities, not only makes this type of policy change lower threshold, but also lower in cost. This also improves accessibility and visibility as people in need already frequent these locations. NF and other initiatives have also shown that with a relatively small investment, the gains are significant, especially as cost-savings grow with the capacity to buy in bulk.

Specifically allocated public funding is key. As mentioned in the 2022 period poverty manifesto jointly developed by the Federation of Trade Unions (FNV) and other organizations, any municipal approaches are most effective when *not* funded using budgets intended for other support of low-income families, as seems to be the case in Rotterdam.<sup>68</sup> While the total cost can be relatively modest in comparison to other municipal initiatives, fighting period poverty must not come at the

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<sup>68</sup> FNV 2022. This period poverty manifesto was submitted together with Alliantie Kinderarmoede, Armoedefonds, ATD Vierde Wereld, De Bovengrondse, Nationaal Fonds Kinderhulp, Simavi, SUN Nederland, Valente, WOMEN Inc., and Simavi.



expense of other inequality- and poverty-fighting measures. Closing more tax loopholes, enforcing existing regulations, or even requiring set fees from large companies who benefit from being based in one of the world's primary tax havens is one way to access needed funds.<sup>69</sup>

**Once there is political will for reducing gender inequity by ending *proven* period poverty, funding a comprehensive municipal initiative becomes feasible**

### *What else?*

There is another aspect to sustainably ending period poverty: comprehensive menstrual health education for all genders is an integral part of the solution. Beyond economic barriers to menstrual products and education, there are social and cultural barriers that increase discomfort. Normalizing frank and open talk is crucial to reduce shame and stress related to having periods, but also to enable awareness about menstrual health options and earlier detection of potentially serious health problems.

For people struggling with period poverty, there is the stigma of poverty as well as the stigma tied to menstruation.



Shame, or the fear of being shamed, keeps people from learning what they need to know about maintaining good menstrual health.<sup>70</sup> Examples of issues include the well-known toxic shock syndrome, which occurs when tampons are used longer than is considered safe. But stigma and lack of knowledge about menstruation also result in not recognizing when there is a problem and failing

<sup>69</sup> Independent non-governmental organization Tax Justice Network places the Netherlands in fourth place in their biennial ranking of corporate tax havens, with only three countries scoring worse on tax avoidance (Tax Justice Network 2021).

<sup>70</sup> See for example Medical News Today 2022 and De Bovengrondse 2019-1.



to seek timely help.<sup>71</sup> People miss school and work from crippling pain that can indicate serious medical issues, such as endometriosis.<sup>72</sup> Often uterine issues are poorly understood not only by patients but also by general practitioners.<sup>73</sup> Comprehensive menstrual education must therefore be supportive and engaging and include information about menstrual cycle disorders and issues to close significant knowledge gaps in menstrual health.



Stigma, negative stereotypes, myths and taboos are perpetuated by both those who menstruate and those who don't. Providing comprehensive menstrual education for all genders through a combination of blended classes and separate sessions for those who menstruate is an important way to reduce the harm caused by stigma and lack of knowledge and reach the level of menstrual health as defined by the Global Menstrual Health Collective. In the 2018 Plan International UK study on girls' experiences of menstruation in the UK, the young participants called for early education on menstrual health, pointing out that education should be a process, rather than a single discussion. Rather than focusing on the biological, they wished for an emphasis on practical menstrual health information: information on product options, pain management, how and where to access these, and the variability of periods.<sup>74</sup> In schools and beyond, the community can further contribute to

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<sup>71</sup> De Bovengrondse 2019-1.

<sup>72</sup> Endometriose Stichting 2022.

<sup>73</sup> The Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport received a petition calling for more research and education on women's health issues, including menstrual health, among the general public but also general practitioners and other medical professionals. (RTL Nieuws 2022-2).

<sup>74</sup> Plan International UK 2018.



normalizing periods and period poverty by actively and openly responding to questions about menstruation.

The Global Menstrual Collective defines menstrual health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle” further noting that people should have:

- access to information about menstruation, life changes, and hygiene practices
- the ability to care for themselves during menstruation
- access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services
- the ability to receive a diagnosis for menstrual cycle disorders and access to healthcare
- a positive, supportive environment in which to make informed decisions
- the ability to participate in all aspects of life, such as going to work and school<sup>75</sup>

**Ending period poverty is  
as much a matter of equality  
as it is a matter of public health**

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<sup>75</sup> Hennegan et al, SRH Matters 29:1 2021.



### *A personal note of appreciation*

We would like to recognize and thank all those who have stepped up and continue to step up to help marginalized people and those experiencing poverty – and period poverty in particular – across the Netherlands. With the problem of period poverty often hiding in plain sight, coordinated, strategic engagement at different levels within Amsterdam and the Netherlands continues to be vital. (To find out more about what’s being done, please see the appendix.)

Our gratitude also extends to those who have reported on and researched period poverty in the Netherlands before us, including Plan International NL, Kinderhulp and De Bovengrondse. Our research complements and builds on theirs, and we hope the concrete, quantitative data we have collected further eases the way to structural solutions and an end to period poverty in Amsterdam. Thanks to Lorijn de Boer for her advisory support in writing this report.

A great big thanks to everyone in the Neighborhood Feminists collective, the work you do ensures that we are together able to help people in need today, even as we push harder for more dignity and better living conditions tomorrow. In small ways, you bring hope – and change.

It takes a village. We’re grateful to be able to work with some great allies and partners, and thankful for each and every one of our donors, whose support keeps us handing out Dignity Kits, filling Menstruation Stations, and advocating for needed solutions.

A special thank you to Emily Dickinson and the hard-working team at Opinium, who, building on their experience analyzing period poverty in the UK, provided their expertise at no cost.

Finally, a note to our family and friends. Occupying the intersection between actions and ideals takes energy and patience, thank you so very much for bringing those.

*‘Amsterdam Menstruates: Quantitative Research on Period Poverty in Amsterdam’*  
is a Neighborhood Feminists advocacy and research report, written by  
Tammy Sheldon and Anneloes Dijkman (October 2022), and illustrated by Anneloes Dijkman.  
Field research for the study was carried out by Opinium.  
For more information, visit [www.NeighborhoodFeminists.com](http://www.NeighborhoodFeminists.com)  
or write to [hello@neighborhoodfeminists.com](mailto:hello@neighborhoodfeminists.com)





## Appendix

### I. What is being done about period poverty elsewhere in the Netherlands?

The issue of period poverty was brought up in Parliament's Tweede Kamer in 2019 and in 2020 by members of Parliament Lilianne Ploumen and Gijs van Dijk.<sup>76,77</sup> In 2020, De Bovendgrondse presented a manifesto to Parliament, outlining the urgency and calling for a comprehensive governmental response to period poverty that would include free provision of products and menstrual health education.<sup>78</sup> In 2022, a coalition of the FNV and other groups called on municipalities to take the lead on the matter, pushing for increased wages, and to ensure products are available to undocumented people and everyone earning 150% or less of minimum wage – without the responses coming at the expense of other anti-poverty programs.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, despite these efforts, there has been little animus at the national legislative level, with no national action taken on period poverty as of report publication.

At the municipal level, actions are increasingly being taken by local governments, schools and nonprofits. Some of the ongoing and developing initiatives include:

In 2021, three schools in Amstelveen decided to provide free menstrual products to help students who were struggling with period poverty.<sup>80,81</sup> The council of De Fryske Marren, a municipality in Friesland, decided to spend 10.000 euros in the spring of 2022 to fight period poverty.<sup>82</sup> In June 2021 the municipality of the Hague started a pilot in collaboration with Armoedefonds to provide free menstrual products in public toilets, a project which is currently still running.<sup>83</sup> Motions have also been delivered in Almere in 2022.<sup>84</sup> In Elst, Gelderland, a local initiative was started to provide free tampons for people dealing with poverty.<sup>85</sup> The city council of Groningen also expressed the intention to provide free period products in public municipal buildings in July 2022.<sup>86</sup> In Nieuwegein, in the province of Utrecht, people who have a “Stadspas”, which is a card people receive who live below the poverty line, have access to free menstrual products since the 30th of August, 2022.<sup>87</sup> In Rotterdam, children from low-income households can buy menstrual products with money provided

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<sup>76</sup> *Kamerstukken II* 2019/20, nr. 978.

<sup>77</sup> *Kamerstukken II* 2020/21, nr. 2020Z23041.

<sup>78</sup> De Bovengrondse 2019-2.

<sup>79</sup> FNV 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Amstelveenz 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Douma, *NH Nieuws* 24 June 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Leeuwarder Courant 2022.

<sup>83</sup> AD Haagsche Courant, *Nu.nl* 10 June 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Omroep Flevoland 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Huibers, *De Gelderlander* 13 June 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Gemeenteraad Groningen 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Nieuwegein.nl 2022.



by the municipality, but questions about the approach of this measure have been raised.<sup>88,89</sup> As of October 2022, 32 municipalities currently fund the re-stocking of non-profit Armoedefonds period products distribution points.<sup>90</sup>

There are additional private and non-profit efforts to address period poverty, both nationally and locally. Some churches and food banks, consistently or incidentally, also provide period products. Some of the growing numbers of private and non-profit efforts include:

- Armoedefonds's 1.000 distribution points across the nation, managed by local community groups and NGOs at locations such as food banks, schools, and health centers.<sup>91</sup>
- In the province of Groningen, an initiative called "Bloedserieus" ("Bloody Serious"), started by a concerned resident, to provide free tampons and pads to local schools.<sup>92</sup>
- Organization Periodic, working to reduce stigma, aiming to end period poverty in the Netherlands by shifting the responsibility for period products from vulnerable individuals towards society, treating period products *just like toilet paper*.<sup>93</sup>
- Organization Hi Sally, focusing on schools and fighting stigma, in 2022 supplied 50 schools nationwide with period products as part of a one-month pilot project.<sup>94</sup>

Please note that these are provided as an indication of the groundswell of need and response currently occurring throughout the country. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, however.

## II. What is being done about period poverty elsewhere in Europe?

In the EU, roughly 1 in 10 people who menstruate cannot afford period products; this estimate is based on various country-level studies, rather than one pan-European quantitative study.<sup>95</sup> Actual rates of period poverty and the government responses to the issue vary from country to country. To give a Europe-wide view, here are some initiatives being taken in other countries. As with the previous section, this is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

[Scotland](#) has led the way thanks to Member of Scottish Parliament, Monica Lennon, whose period products bill was passed in 2020 after four years of campaigning by her and countless others.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> NOS 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Bij1 Rotterdam 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Wier van de, *Trouw* 8 October 2022.

<sup>91</sup> Armoedefonds 2022.

<sup>92</sup> Lamers, *EenVandaag* 21-8-2022.

<sup>93</sup> See [www.periodic.nl](http://www.periodic.nl).

<sup>94</sup> See [www.hisally.org](http://www.hisally.org).

<sup>95</sup> European Parliament 2020 and Heerts, *European Waves* 28 May 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Mooncup 2022.



Thanks to her bill, as of August 15 2022, free period products are universally available, i.e. without having to establish need.

**UK** - Beyond notable ongoing initiatives such as the organization Bloody Good Period, the UK government has made period products free in all primary and secondary schools, thanks in part to the continued work of organizations like Plan International UK, who also worked together with Opinium to obtain data on period poverty in the UK.<sup>97,98</sup> Additionally, teaching about menstrual health has become a required part of sex education provided in schools.<sup>99</sup>

**France** - In France, where 1 in 3 menstruating students experiences period poverty, the French government has been providing free period products at all universities since September 2021.<sup>100</sup>

**“Never in the red again!”**

- period poverty slogan of French University of Paris-Saclay

**Belgium** - In 2021, Belgium’s Federal government announced €200,000 would be dedicated for providing free menstrual products. In 2022, the Walloon government announced €440,000 would be made available for the distribution of free menstrual products to those in need.<sup>101,102</sup>

**Spain** - Catalan government’s distribution of free period products to students and at-risk women, as part of a national menstrual strategy, as well as introduction of menstruation leave.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See [www.bloodygoodperiod.com/what-we-do](http://www.bloodygoodperiod.com/what-we-do).

<sup>98</sup> Opinium 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Opinium 2021.

<sup>100</sup> DW.com 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Kennedy, *Euronews* 31 December 2020.

<sup>102</sup> The Bulletin 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Government of Catalonia 2021.



### III. October 2022 consumer costs of period products in the Netherlands

As we are using these costs to calculate *average* costs per period, we chose the ‘normal’ option of each product to calculate. (Products suited for a heavier flow as well as suitable for use during the night tend to be more expensive.) Prices were taken from the two biggest drugstore chains of the Netherlands, with prices at Kruidvat (K) and Etos (E) averaged where brands were available at both drugstores. All prices are non-discount prices, in regular sized packaging (excluding “duo packs”, for example). Prices were accessed and checked on October 12, 2022.

The averages in Fig III.1 were developed using data shown in the pages that follow.

Fig III.1 Avg. consumer cost per cycle  
in the Netherlands, October 2022

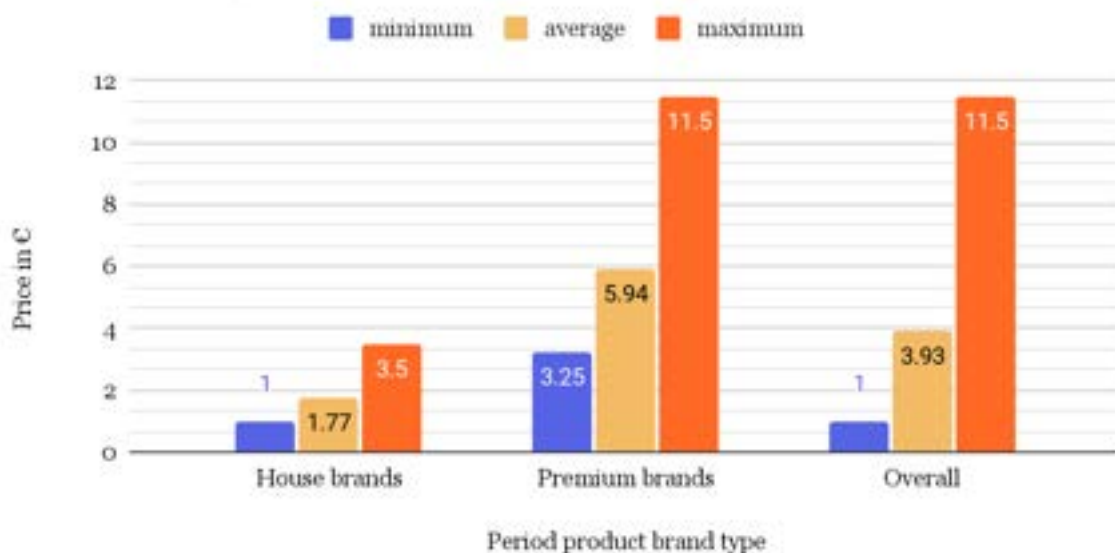




Fig III.2 Overview of consumer costs of period products

October 2022

Brand	Type	# of individual pads or tampons per box	€ per box	€ per product (avg. price per box divided by amount of items)
<i>Premium brands</i>				
Always	Always organic cotton normal	12	3,29 (E), 2,59 (K) = 2,94 avg	0,25
	Always platinum normal pads with wings	12	3,09 (E), 2,99 (K) = 3,04 avg	0,25
	Always ultra normal with wings	14	2,59 (E+K)	0,19
Libresse	Libresse Ultra Thin Maandverband Normal	14	2,59 (E+K)	0,19
	Libresse Maxi Comfort Maandverband Normal, with wings	14	2,59 (E)*	0,19
o.b.	o.b. pro comfort normal tampons	32	5,35 (E), 5,19 (K) = 5,27 avg	0,16
	o.b. original normal tampons	16	2,05 (E), 1,99 (K) = 2,02 avg	0,13
	o.b. extra protect normal tampons	16	3,59 (E), 3,49 (K) = 3,54 avg	0,22
Tampax	Tampax regular tampons with applicator	20	3,90 (E)*	0,20
	Tampax Pearl Compak tampons regular	18	5,45 (E)*	0,30
Yoni	Yoni Pads Medium	10	4,59 (E)*	0,46
	Yoni tampons medium	16	4,19 (E)*	0,26
Sanature	Sanature Pads normal	10	3,49 (E), 3,39 (K) = 3,44 avg	0,34
	Sanature tampons	16	3,15 (E)*	0,20



Brand	Type	# of individual pads or tampons per box	€ per box	€ per product (avg. price per box divided by amount of items)
	normal			
<i>House brands</i>				
Etos house brand	Etos tampons normal	32	1,45	0,05
	Etos pads normal	16	0,89	0,06
Kruidvat house brand	Kruidvat tampons normal	16	1,99	0,12
	Kruidvat normal tampons with applicator	20	2,09	0,10
	Kruidvat normal plus pads	16	1,15	0,07
Kruidvat Europrofit	Sanitary towels normal	20	0,85	0,04
Albert Heijn house brand	AH tampons normal	32	1,59	0,05
	AH cotton tampons normal	16	2,19	0,14
	AH ultra normal pads	20	1,59	0,08
Lidl	Siempre tampons normal	24	0,99	0,04
	Siempre ultra pads normal with wings Aloe Vera	20	0,87	0,04
Action	Femapure ultra normal pads with wings	10	0,65	0,07
Aldi	Loft normal pads with wings	18	1,09	0,06

\* no price available at Kruidvat



Fig III.3 Average cost of period products

Brand type	Average price in € per individual product (tampon/pad)		Price in €
Premium brands	0.24	<i>range:</i>	<i>0.13 - 0.46</i>
House brands	0.07	<i>range:</i>	<i>0.04 - 0.14</i>
Overall	0.16	<i>range:</i>	<i>0.04 - 0.46</i>

Fig III.4 Costs per 5-day period

Brand type	Average price in € for 25 products		Price in €
Premium brands	5.94	<i>range:</i>	<i>3.25 - 11.50</i>
House brands	1.77	<i>range:</i>	<i>1.00 - 3.50</i>
Overall	3.93	<i>range:</i>	<i>1.00 - 11.50</i>

Fig III.5 Overview of cost per menstruation, per brand type

Brand type	Minimum price in €	Maximum price in €	Average price in €
Premium brands	3.25	11.50	5.94
House brands	1.00	3.50	1.77
Overall	1.00	11.50	3.93



## IV. Research challenges, feedback and suggestions

### *Challenges*

The survey was open for a full month in order to be able to reach a wider range of people in Amsterdam. Those most affected by poverty, such as migrants or the unhoused, can also be the hardest to reach. While we were able to reach some, marginalized people are often resistant to filling out forms or providing information about their personal habits. There is distrust of how the information will be used and by whom; in a country still reeling from the scandal of the ethnic profiling and targeting of the Toeslagenaffaire, their concern is not unreasonable.<sup>104</sup> We emphasized full confidentiality and explained the purpose of the research beforehand and throughout.

Despite our efforts, there were two undocumented respondents who felt very uncomfortable responding to the survey questions, and, feeling triggered, did not in the end complete their surveys. In no way did we wish to contribute to any respondents' stress, whether in this process or in any other way. This is one of the reasons why we have never featured any recipients of our support in our communications.<sup>105</sup> Recognition of sensitivities and power dynamics has meant that we have only asked for formal, individual feedback from the people we support once in 3 years – beyond regular informal feedback through location coordinators – sharing written quotes from them only after having received consent. Research has shown that working with undocumented people requires careful attention which is why we discussed the research beforehand with an advisor experienced in researching undocumented people, and also had the advisor review the survey language before the survey was finalised.<sup>106</sup>

### *Feedback from participants*

While the survey remained completely anonymous for all respondents, some respondents volunteered feedback. A psychology student commented that “You did not ask how the participant takes care of their period which can influence the evaluation of the survey. e.g. I use a cup so most of the time I am exempt from using other period products, so I could answer most questions with no. Whereas someone using tampons will probably show that they have been affected by the rising prices in the last 6 months.”

Some survey respondents were confused with language (word choice) and framing. For example, they were not clear about the difference between ‘accessibility’ and ‘affordability’. Since not all respondents speak either Dutch or English as a first language, confusion like this could impact the accuracy of their responses, and it could have contributed to others not completing the survey.

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<sup>104</sup> The Toeslagenaffaire refers to the false accusation of child care benefit fraud by the Dutch tax authorities of tens of thousands of parents and caregivers in the Netherlands. The risk-classification model that was used was based on nationality and therefore ethnic profiling. See Amnesty International 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Neighborhood Feminists commits to ethical storytelling pledge:  
<https://www.neighborhoodfeminists.com/nominated-for-an-anti-poverty-prize/>.

<sup>106</sup> Luna-Lucero 2019, Jauhiainen & Tedeschi 2021.





### *Suggestions for future research*

- Going forward, period poverty research should be periodically repeated as has occurred in other countries such as the UK, in order to establish any shifts in the scope of period poverty, and evaluate the effectiveness of any municipal or district initiatives.
- Future research should be developed within a larger menstruation awareness campaign, in order to build broader willingness and participation of harder to reach people, with small, informed teams enlisted to canvas neighborhoods and speak directly to potential respondents.
- Researching marginalized people remains complex, and undocumented people in Amsterdam, who have little to no income, already face a high degree of stress every day. For this reason, future research should include careful explanations directly to potential respondents when possible, to minimize possible distress or confusion. Fully informing respondents includes explaining how the questionnaire will be used, how answers will be stored, who will have access and why.
- To ensure future research is as inclusive as possible, language used in the survey and in any explanations provided needs to be reviewed for accessibility, so non-native speakers can fully understand the questions and process.
- Include more specific questions about which period products are used in future surveys, including questions about the limitations respondents face for more sustainable options.



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