

The background features several decorative elements in shades of pink and red. On the left side, there is a large, irregular, light pink shape. To its right, there are several smaller circles of varying sizes, some solid pink and one white with a pink outline. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Period Stigma

By BELLAs

What is “Period Stigma”?

When people who menstruate face discrimination, harassment, and are looked down upon because of their menstruation, as it is seen as a form of weakness rather than a necessary biological function.

Roots of Period Stigma

- **Long history of menstrual taboos**
 - “Periods [have long] been associated with dirt, and disgust, and shame, and some might say fear. Some would say that it's to do with everything in terms of the female body that's leaking and seeping, and anything that's coming out of us as women is seen as disgusting. So that would be menstruation, breast milk, sweat ... what it is to be female is seen as abject. What I would say is that it is a sign of misogyny, it's a sign of positioning something that is essentially feminine as other, dirty and disgusting.” - Jane Ussher
- **Religious + Historical Context**
 - Bible and Quran → menstruation associated with uncleanness
 - Latin Encyclopedia → stigmatizes period w/ definition

Examples of Stigma in Different Countries

- **India** → women not allowed to enter the kitchen or handle food
- **Tanzania** → the idea of being cursed because of menstruation
- **Bangladesh** → discouraged from leaving home while on your period
- **Ghana** → can't enter house if a man is present in the house
- **Venezuela** → women forced to sleep in huts

Efforts to Combat Stigma

- United Nations Population Fund
 - Distributing dignity kits, which contain menstrual hygiene products, in communities affected by humanitarian emergencies
- PERIOD.
 - Distribute pads, tampons and other menstrual hygiene products to people in need and to advocate for legal and social change surrounding period
- Femme International
 - Educational courses for women and men

The U.S. Compared To Other Countries

- The significance of menstruation varies among different cultural religious groups
 - In American culture, periods are a taboo topic
- Access to menstrual products also varies around the world
 - In some parts of the world, access to disposable menstrual products is high limited, and women often have to use reusable cloth
 - In places where products are widely available, access to products may still be a struggle for those in poverty or who are homeless

Laws That Stigmatize Periods

- The US provides safety net programs to assist poor women and low-income mothers
 - None of these programs cover period products
 - Related to the issue of period poverty
- Limited access to period products in prison systems
 - In a 2016 ACLU report, a California county inmate said that they are often forced to reuse pads and beg for what they need, and if an officer is in a bad mood they can easily take their supply and accuse them of hoarding

Period Stigma in Schools

“What’s important is that we as educators impress upon youth that their bodies are sites of power and pleasure and agency...And they can make up their mind and change their mind about how they feel about their bodies, how they want to care for their bodies. Right now, menstrual education is really about, ‘What do you do to clean up the mess?’”

- Lack of conversations about periods in schools
- Over 1/2 high schools and 4/5 middle schools lack proper sex education
- Socialized to believe periods are dirty and shameful
- Thus, students try hard to hide their period

Period Stigma in School Policies

- Lack of consideration for menstruating students is evident in restrictive restroom policies
- Noble Charter Schools network of Chicago accused of instituting dehumanizing policies to monitor their high school students
 - Students had to wait for “bathroom escorts”
 - Several incidents of students bleeding through their pants after escorts never showed up
- Dress codes are rarely created with menstruating bodies in mind
 - Khaki dress code policy at Noble Charter Schools

Period Stigma in the “Swim Unit”

“I know students, including myself, have felt like it’s not acceptable. It feels like a punishment because I would have to work out on the side of the pool while my entire class would be able to see me... I’ve had P.E. teachers who have required a note from a parent or doctor before taking days off of swimming, making the process significantly more challenging instead of just trusting students about their own bodies”

- These thoughts and experiences resonate with many teens who menstruate
- Students, especially those who may experience longer or irregular cycles, often have to worry about their PE teacher thinking they are faking their period to get out of swimming
- Exacerbates the shame and discomfort many already experience when on their period

Period shaming

Generally speaking, it's the feeling of shame or acts of shame surrounding having a period, usually inflicted on you by others.

Examples include:

1. Covering up leaks, being very secretive about your period
2. Always connecting emotions to PMS
3. Not talking about periods

Quick Stats on Period Shaming

42%

Of women have experienced
Period shaming

51%

Of men studied believe it is
inappropriate for women to openly
mention their menstrual cycles in
the workplace.

62%

Of women say that they have
experienced others failing to take
their period pain seriously.

Effects of Period Shaming

Larger issues

- Stigma surrounding language
- Lack of sexual agency
- Shame, the menstrual closet, and menstrual moaning

The effect on girls

- Readiness for marriage
- Punishment and taboo

Resources + Ways to move forward and defeat stigma

1. Change the narrative around periods through period activism and discussion
2. Understand how periods might affect those in your life
3. Learn more about periods, period stigma, and period poverty
4. Donate to different organizations combating period stigma.

True or False?

Period pain can be severe enough to interfere with daily activities, affect our ability to concentrate, and make us more anxious.

True or False?

Everyone who menstruates get PMS.

True or False?

The amount of time a period lasts is not the same for everyone.

True or False?

It is unsafe to use birth control pills to skip your period for a prolonged period.

Let's Discuss!

Have you ever witnessed period stigma or have been personally affected by period stigma?

Let's Discuss!

Do you think ending
period stigma is a
realistic goal?

Let's Discuss!

What do cultural attitudes look like without period stigma? Are they severely disrupted?

Sources

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[Feedback: Noble Charter Schools Story Hit A Nerve](#)

[Dressed for Success? This Charter School's Policies are Humiliating Its Female Students](#)

[It's time to end the stigma. Period.](#)

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