

**NATIONAL
SURVEY
ABOUT
MENSTRUAL
RELATED
EXPERIENCES
AMONG
SWEDISH
YOUTH**

A summary of the report



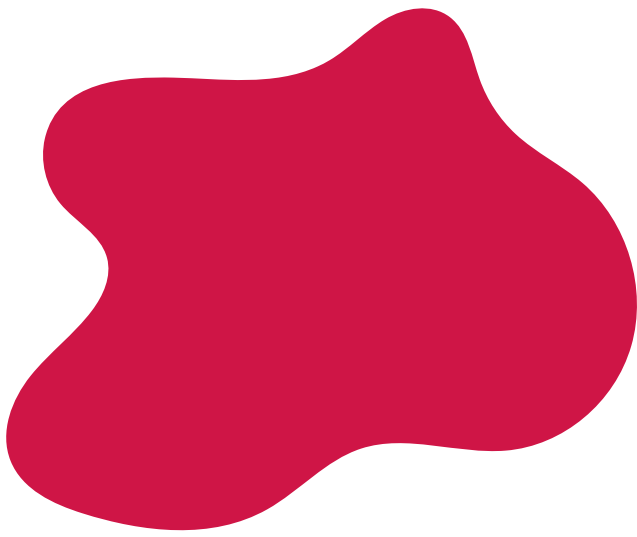
Introduction

In 2021, MENSEN conducted a unique national survey on young people's menstrual related experiences such as period poverty, stigma, and level of menstrual knowledge.

For a long time there has been a lack of statistics regarding menstrual issues in Sweden, making it easier to dismiss the need for better education in schools, more accessible period products and tangible consequences of taboo and stigma - the result of the survey provides undeniable evidence that these areas are indeed problematic.

They must be addressed and tackled in order to improve the overall menstrual health and equity in Sweden.





About the survey

The survey was ordered by MENSEN and conducted by Kantar Sifo.

Target group	Girls/women* age 16-21 years old
Method	Web panel
Number of interviews	742 interviews
Field period	20th of April - 16th of May 2021
Project manager at Sifo	Jennie Bacchus Hertzma & Thea Eriksson Almgren

*MENSEN's official standpoint is to use gender neutral language and include trans- and non binary people when talking about menstruation. Due to limitations in Kantar Sifos web panel, the survey was only answered by cis women.



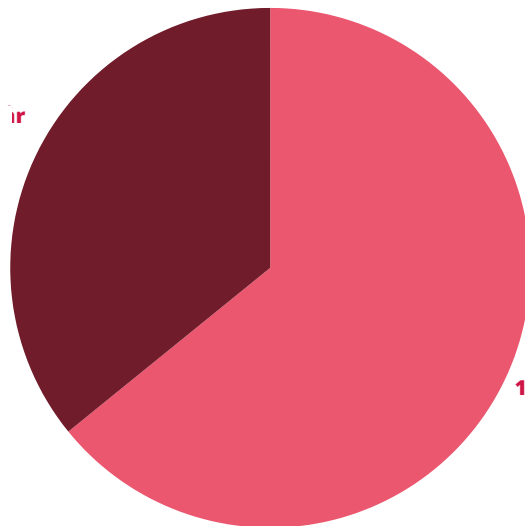
Number of interviews

2 participants
had not had their periods



740 participants
have had their period

266 participants
19-21 years old



476 participants
16-18 years old

A total of 742 participants.



Result summary

Young people's experiences of not being able to afford or not having access to period products

1-2 % have often experienced that they or their family have been forced to opt out of buying something in order to afford period products, that they have not been able to afford the period product that they prefer to use and/or that they could not afford period products at all. Another 3 % have experienced that they have not been able to afford it, even if it does not happen often. 4 % have experienced that their family had to opt out of buying something in order to afford period products, though it does not happen often.

6 % have had to (though not very often) use a different period product than they would have preferred due to their, or their families', strained economy. 16% have at some point experienced anxiety about not being able to afford or have access to period products. 10 % responded 'not very often', 3 % 'pretty often' and 1 % 'very often'.

71 % have experience in various degrees of using a makeshift solution as protection, such as toilet paper or fabric, due to lack of access to period products: 55 % 'not very often', 13 % 'pretty often', 3 % 'very often'. 29 % state this has never happened to them.

66 % have to a varying degree used period products for so long that it has leaked, because they did not have the opportunity to change in time. 50 % answered 'not very often', 12 % 'pretty often' and 3 % 'very often'.

11 % of the respondents have, to a varying degree, missed school, sports training or a leisure activity because they lacked access to period products; 10 % answered 'not very often', 1 % 'pretty often'.

Only 9 % agree that there are period products at their school or workplace. 28 % were uncertain/did not know. 42 % responded that they do not agree at all which - can be interpreted as them not having access to period products at their schools or workplaces at all. Only 30 % completely agree with the statement that they know who to turn to and ask about period products if needed. 15 % do not agree at all.





Young people's experience of menstrual taboos, stigma and negative attitudes

There are still feelings of shame, stigma and a culture of secrecy regarding period products and the conversations around them.

Only 40 % feel completely comfortable asking a classmate or a colleague to borrow menstrual products, 7 % do not feel comfortable at asking.

25 % responded that they do not feel comfortable at all talking about menstruation with a teacher or manager at work, only 15 % answered that they feel completely comfortable.

72 % responded that they have heard degrading comments or mean 'jokes' about periods; 50 % answered 'not very often', 16 % 'pretty often', and 3 % 'very' often.

20 % say that they 'pretty often' (15 %) or 'very often' (5 %) have felt that it has been awkward to buy period products or ask to borrow one.

Young people's experiences of health effects and concerns in relation to use of period products

25 % of the respondents have at some point used period products for too long which have lead to problems with their genitalia, for example itching. 22 % answered 'not very often', and 3 % 'pretty often'.

35 % of the participants have experience of using the same period product for so long it made them scared of health concerns, 28 % answered 'not very often', 7 % 'pretty often', and 2 % 'very often'.



Young people's experiences regarding level of menstrual knowledge before their first period

Only 17 % felt they completely agreed with the statement "I had enough knowledge about periods before I had my first". 12 % did not agree at all. The respondents were given the question 'Where did you get information about menstruation and period products when you were young?' - 59 % said parents, school came in second place (40 %) close to other alternatives such as getting information from friends (37 %) and internet/books (39 %).

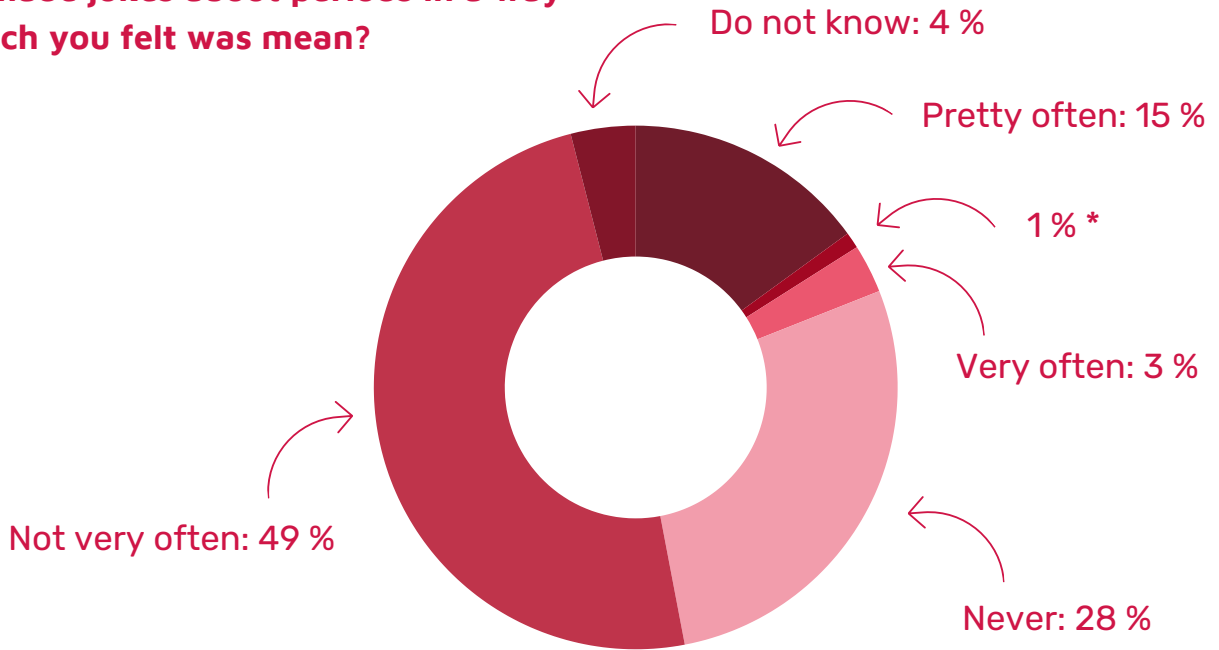
On the question "If you wish you would have gotten more information about menstruation, where would you have preferred to get it from?", the absolute majority (59 %) said school would be their first choice. 29 % said their parents followed by Youth Guidance Centers/ The Health Care System (24 %). This indicates that menstruation is considered a private matter and not treated like other bodily functions one learns about in school.



Stigma and negative attitudes

A total of 72 % have heard degrading comments or 'jokes' about periods; 3 % answered 'very often', 15 % 'pretty often' and 49 % said 'not very often'.

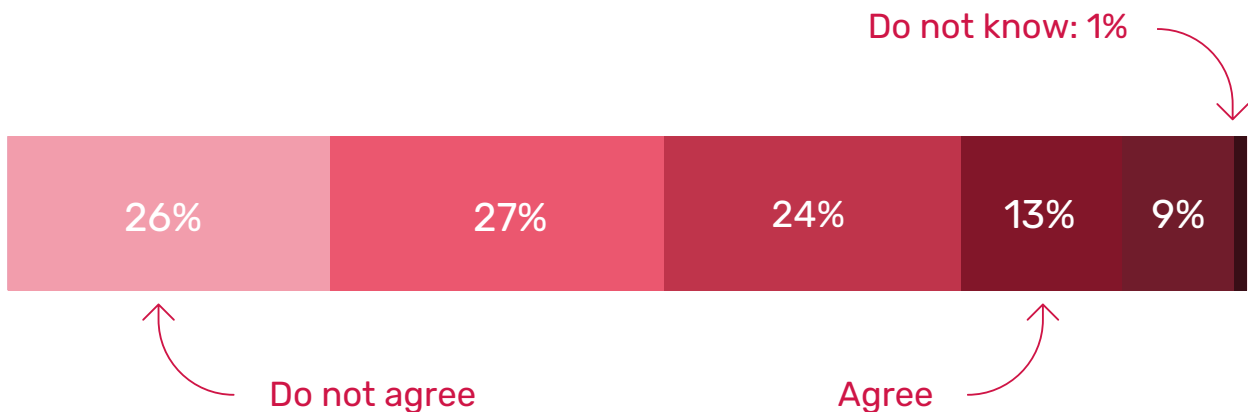
How often, if at all, have others commented or made jokes about periods in a way which you felt was mean?



*In Kantar Sifos official report the percentages in this diagram only adds up to 99 %. The last percent is therefore unaccounted-for.

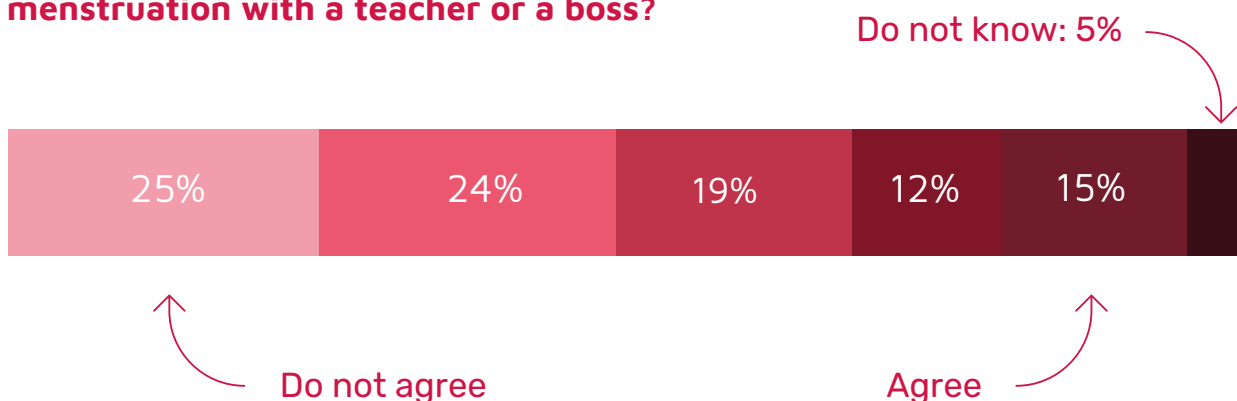
Menstruation and feelings of shame

To what extent do you agree that you've felt shame or embarrassment when being on your period, or when talking about period products?



Uncomfortable to talk about menstruation

To what extent do you agree that you feel comfortable to talk about menstruation with a teacher or a boss?



25 % responded that they do not feel comfortable at all talking about menstruation with a teacher or boss, only 15 % answered that they feel completely comfortable.

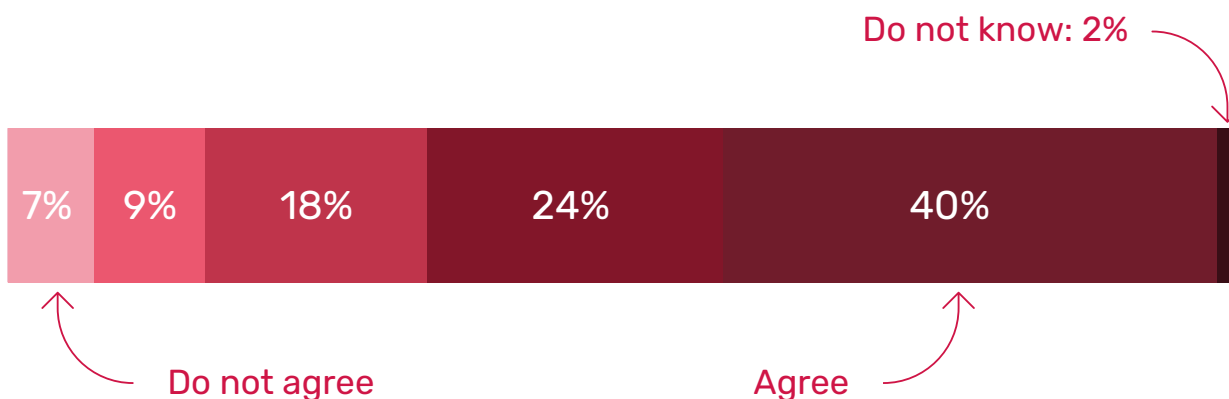


20 % say that they 'pretty often' (15 %) or 'very often' (5 %) have felt that it has been awkward/embarrassing to buy period products or asking to borrow one.

It's easier to borrow period products from a classmate

There are still feelings of shame and secrecy regarding period products. 40 % feel completely comfortable asking a classmate or a colleague to borrow one, 7 % do not feel comfortable at all asking.

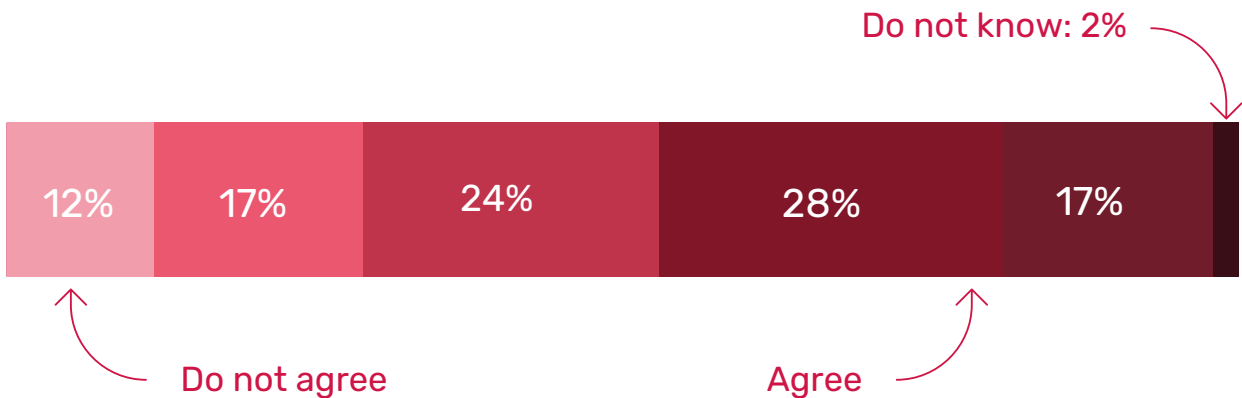
To what extent do you agree you feel comfortable asking a classmate or a colleague about period products?



Knowledge

Menstrual knowledge should be given early in life.

To what extent do you agree that you had enough knowledge about menstruation before you got your first period?



Only 17 % completely agreed that they had enough information about menstruation before they had their first period, 12 % did not agree at all.

“No one should feel worried about their period due to lack of knowledge. This kind of anxiousness is both unnecessary and troublesome, and it can affect your everyday life.

Kids need information and knowledge about menstruation and period products, just like they need knowledge about everything else. That is why it is important for everyone to get the opportunity to learn and to ask questions in school.

With increased knowledge we can prevent the anxiousness some kids experience, making them feel more secure in their bodies when they reach puberty and get their period”,

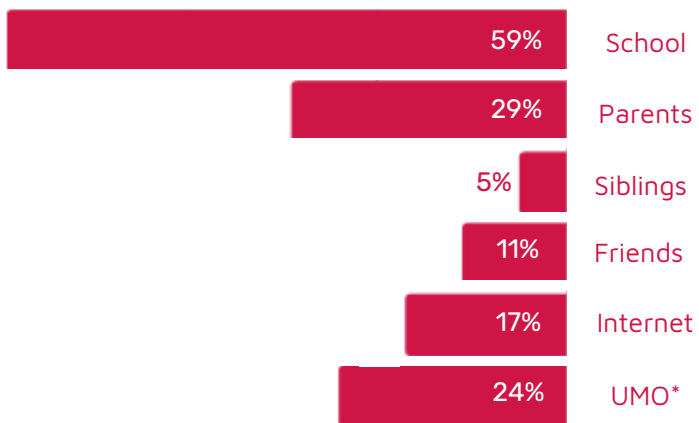
Sanna Vanno, project manager at MENSEN



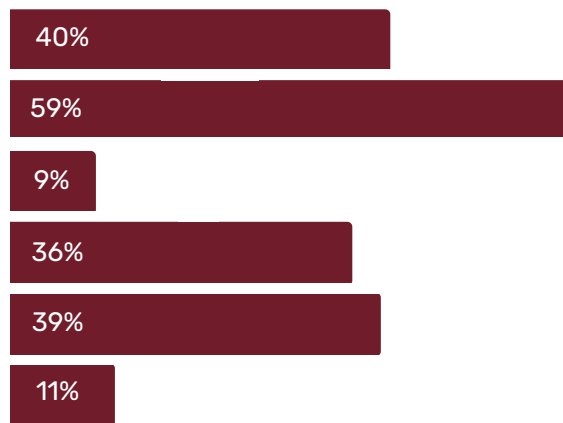
Young people want more education about menstruation in school

Parents are the primary source of menstrual knowledge about according to the respondents.

Where would you have preferred to get information from?



What has been your primary source of information?



On the question "Where did you get information about menstruation and period products when you were young?", parents were the primary source (59 %). School came in second place (with 40 %) close to other alternatives such as getting information from friends (37 %) and internet/books (39 %).

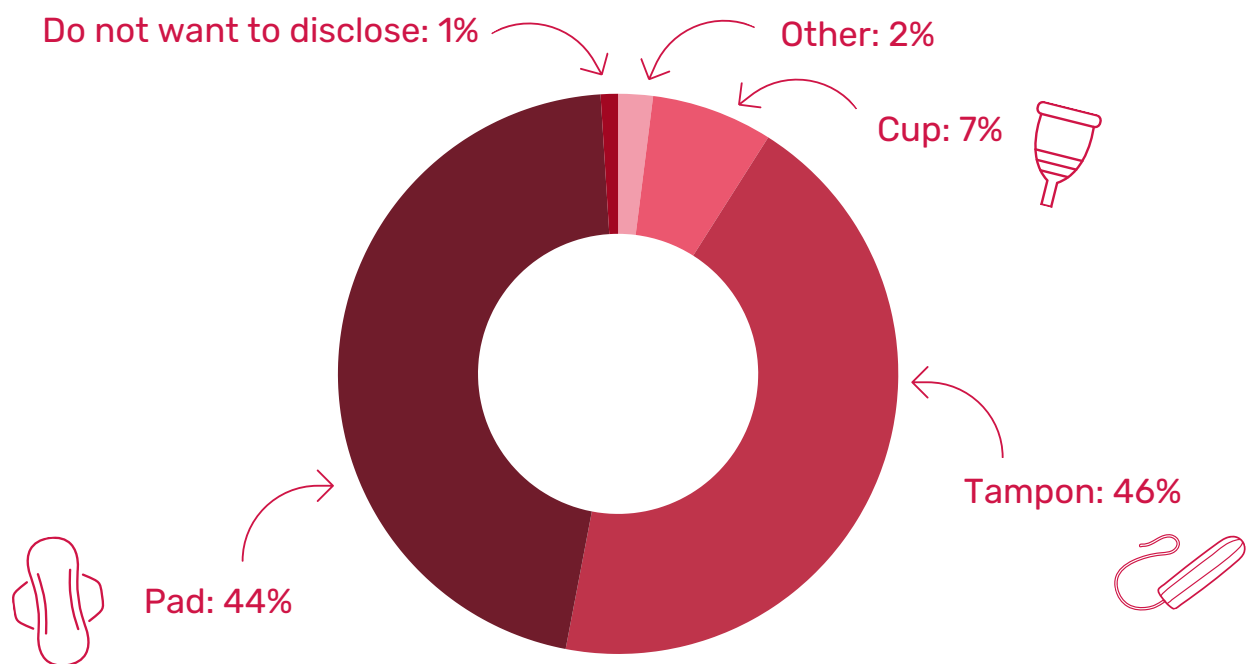
Regarding the question "If you wish you would've gotten more information about menstruation, where would you have preferred to get it from?", the majority answered school (59 %). Only 29 % said that they wished that they had gotten the information regarding menstruation from their parents.

*Youth Guidance Centre



Period products

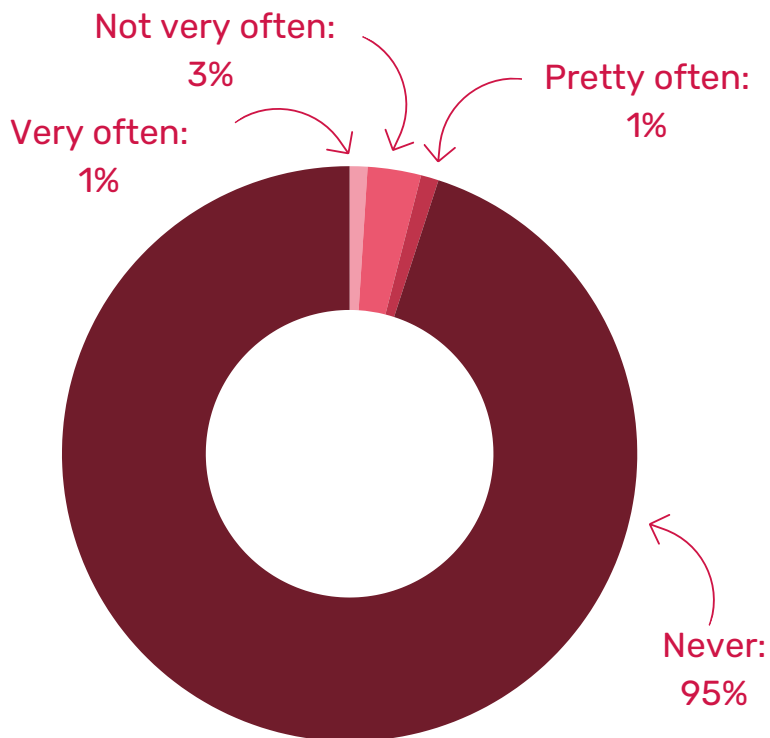
Which period product is most commonly used among 16-21 year olds?



Period cup is more common among the older group. In the age span between 16-18 year olds, 5 % say period cup is their primary choice, this number increases to 9 % in the age span between 19-21 year olds.

Period poverty exist - but luckily it's not common

How often, if at all, have you experienced that you or your family could not afford period products?



1-2 % have often experienced that they or their family have been forced to opt out of buying something in order to afford period products, that they have not been able to afford the period product that they prefer to use and/or that they could not afford period products at all. Another 3 % have experienced that they have not been able to afford it, even if it does not happen often. 4 % have experienced that their family had to opt out of buying something in order to afford period products, though it does not happen often.

6 % have had to (though not very often) use a different period product than they would have preferred due to their or their families' strained economy. 16% have at some point experienced anxiety about not being able to afford or have access to period products. 10 % responded 'not very often', 3 % 'pretty often' and 1 % 'very often'.

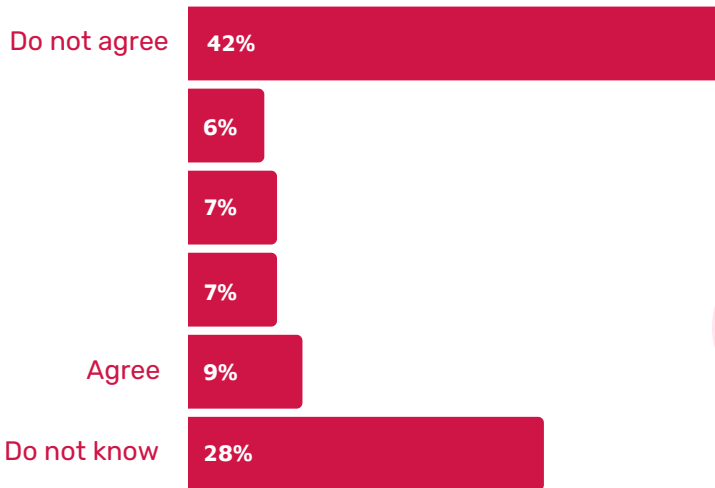
"We believe that the only acceptable number is zero. No one should have to experience period poverty. A few percent might not look like much on paper but think about the fact that a considerable part of the Swedish population menstruate. A couple of percent means thousands of individuals"

Rebecka Hallencreutz,
co-founder and manager at MENSEN



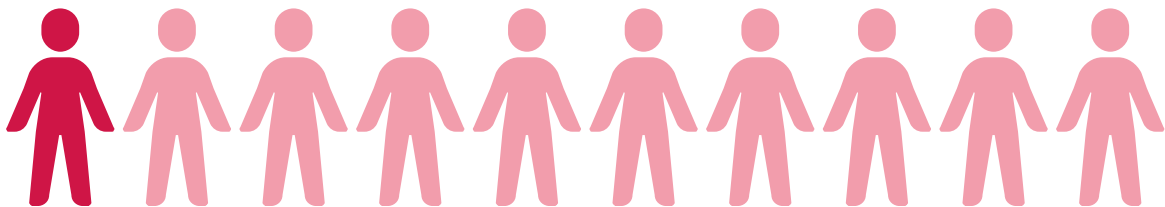
Where are the period products?

To what extent do you agree that there are accessible free period products at your school or work place when you need it?



“Without period products I feel limited because I'm scared of leaking. Having access to period products in my school makes me feel safe”
says the high school student Elina from Lindesberg

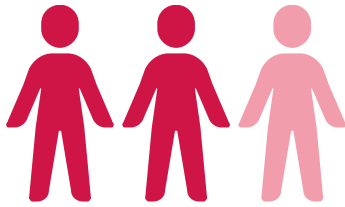
11 % of the respondents have, to a varying degree, missed school, sports training or a leisure activity because they lacked access to period products; 10 % responded 'not very often', 1 % 'pretty often'.



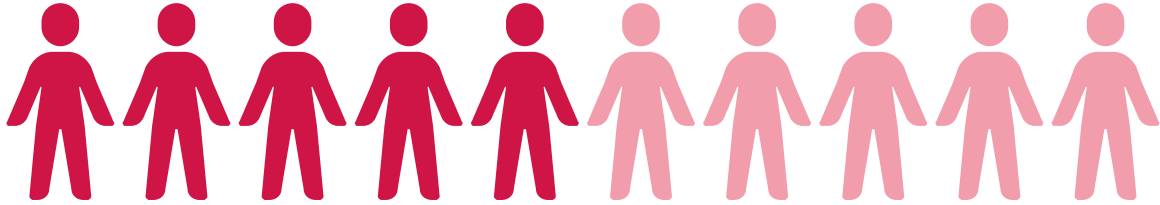
16 % have at some point experienced anxiety about not being able to afford or have access to menstrual products. 10 % responded 'not very often', 3 % 'pretty often' and 1 % 'very often'.

Only 9 % agree that there are period products at their school or workplace. 28 % were uncertain or did not know. 42 % responded that they do not agree at all which - can be interpreted as them not having access to period products at their schools or workplaces. Only 30 % completely agree with the statement that they know who to turn to and ask about period products if needed. 15 % do not agree at all.

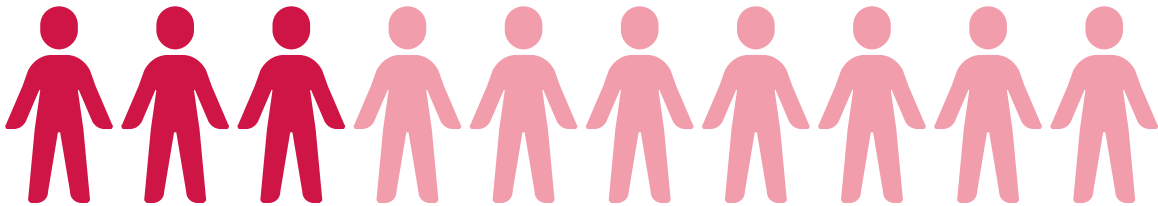




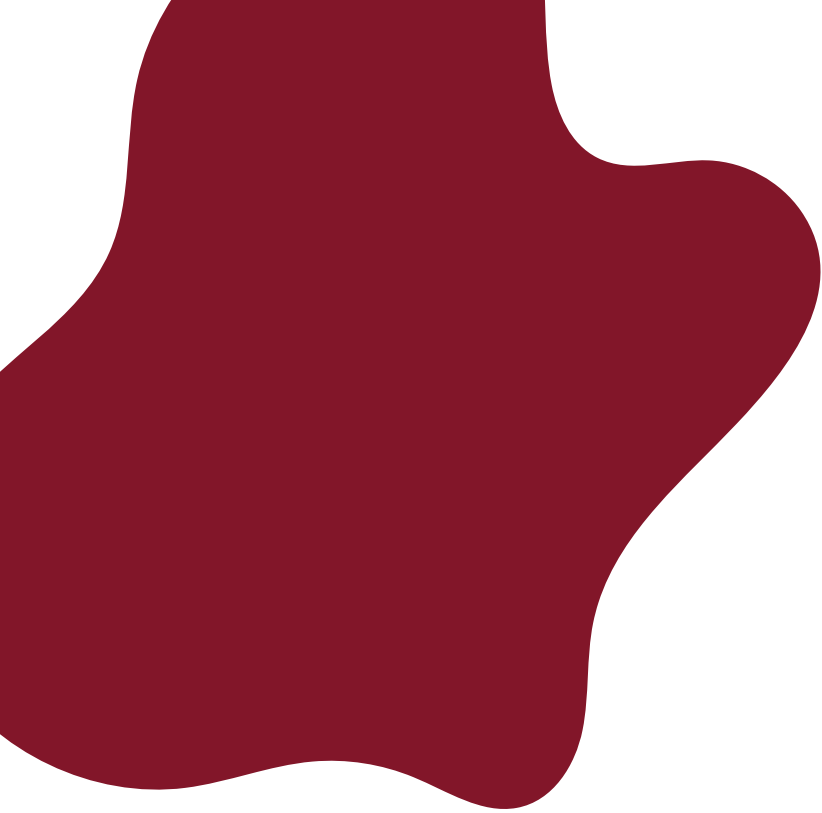
Two out of three feel comfortable to ask a classmate or colleague about period products.



48 % do not agree that there are free accessible period products at their school or workplace

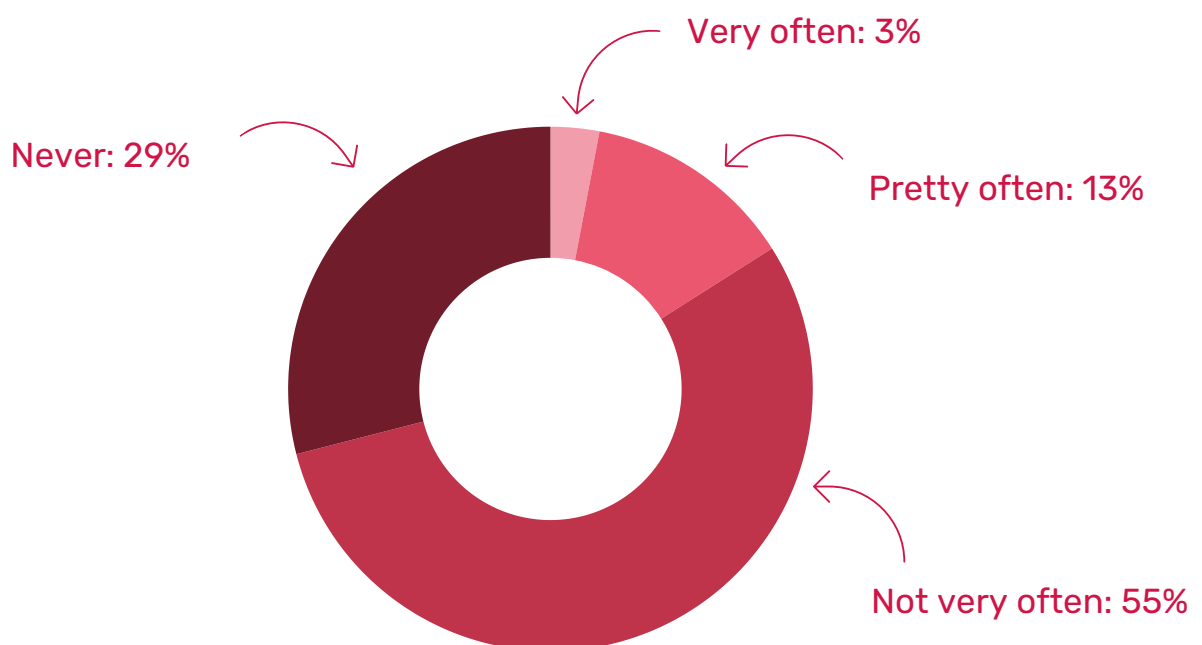


Only 30 % completely agree with the statement that they know who to turn to and ask about period products if needed.



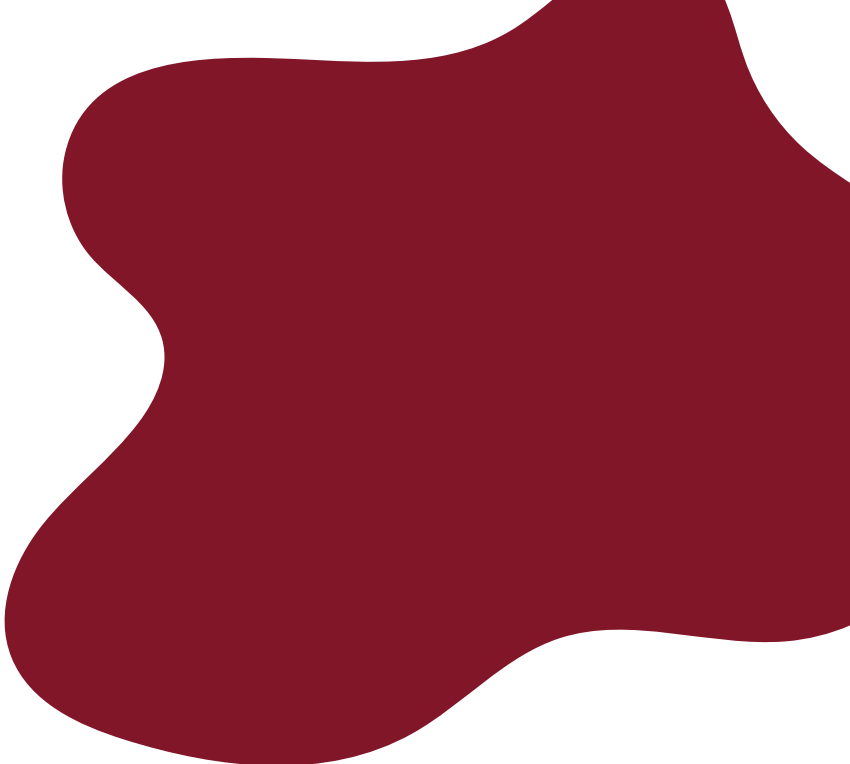
Emergency solutions

How often, if at all, have you used a makeshift solution for period protection, for example toilet paper or fabric, because you did not have access to period products?



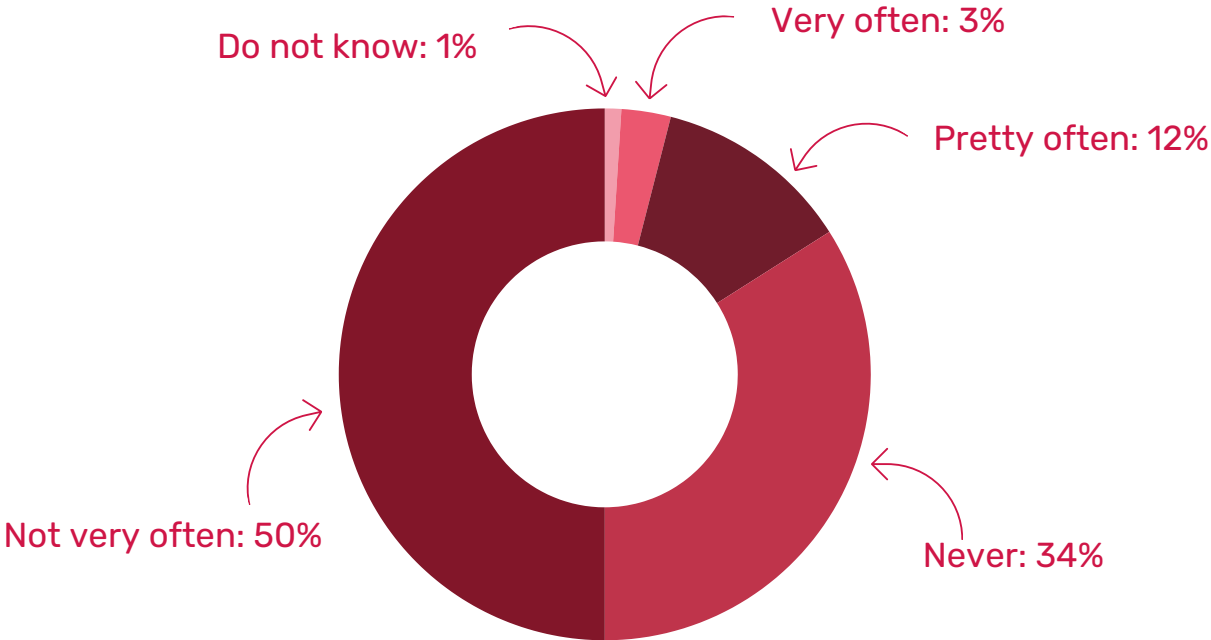
71 % have experience in various degrees of using a makeshift solution as protection, such as toilet paper or fabric, due to lack of access to period products: 55 % not very often, 13 % pretty often, 3 % very often. 29 % state this has never happened to them.





Leakage

How often, if at all, have you used the same period product for so long that it leaked, because you did not have the possibility to change?

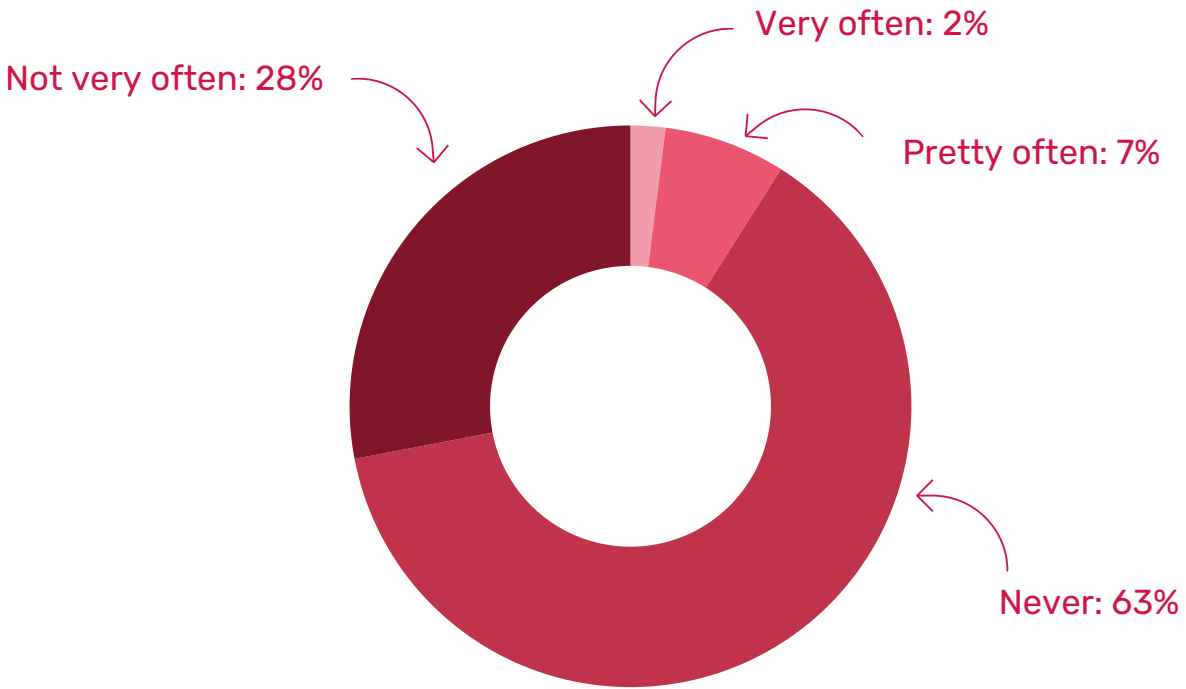


66 % have to a varying degree used period products for so long that it leaked, because they did not have the opportunity to change in time. 50 % answered 'not very often', 12 % 'pretty often' and 3 % 'very often'.

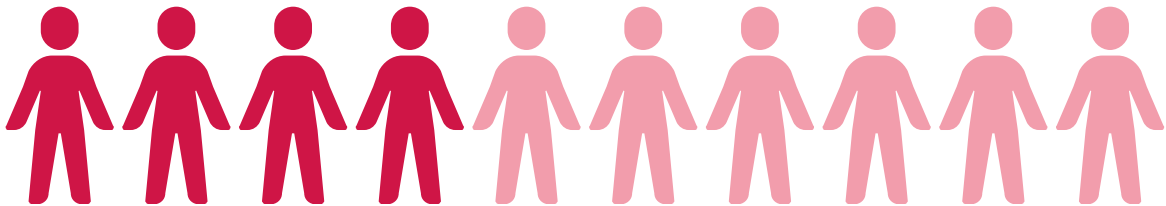


Health concerns

How often, if at all, have you used the same period product for so long it made you worry it would affect your health in any way?



35 % of the participants have experience of using the same period product for so long it made them have health concerns, 28 % answered 'not very often', 7 % 'pretty often', and 2 % 'very often'.



25 % of the respondents have at some point used period products for too long which lead to problems with their genitalia, such as itching. 22 % answered 'not very often', and 3 % 'pretty often'.





MENSEN is a politically and religiously unaffiliated Swedish NGO founded in 2014. MENSEN strives for a society where menstrual rights are met: everyone has access and can afford period protection, as well as knowledge of the body, there is an infrastructure in place that meets sanitary needs and supportive norms around menstruation.

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