



# BLOODY EDUCATION: MENSTRUAL AWARENESS AND PERIOD POVERTY PERCEPTION



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## INTRODUCTION

According to UNICEF, 1.8 billion people worldwide menstruate, and millions experience period poverty, “a lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, waste management, and education” (Michel et al., 2022). In the United States, 500 million people lack access to menstrual products and hygiene facilities, and 16.9 million people who menstruate live in poverty (Michel et al., 2022).

A recent study on the perceptions and experiences of impoverished women revealed that “managing menstruation was difficult for many women because of the heavy financial cost relative to their incomes” (Boyers et al., 2022). Most participants received federal financial assistance and suggested that products should be free, often remarking that this would happen if men required similar items. Additionally, there has been a correlation between the continued state of period poverty and poor mental health among college-aged students, some with reports of suicidal ideation (Cardoso et al., 2021).

Improving menstrual health challenges requires menstrual education and awareness, menstruation-friendly infrastructure, and the accessibility and affordability of menstrual hygiene products. With quality menstrual education, people will be more aware of period poverty and be prone to supporting changes that fight period poverty. Our survey experiment aims to study the relationship between menstrual awareness and people’s perception of period poverty.

## METHODS

**Design:** Survey Experiment on Qualtrics

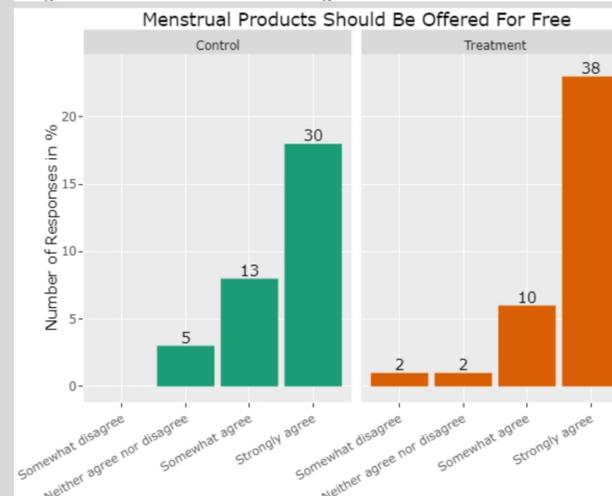
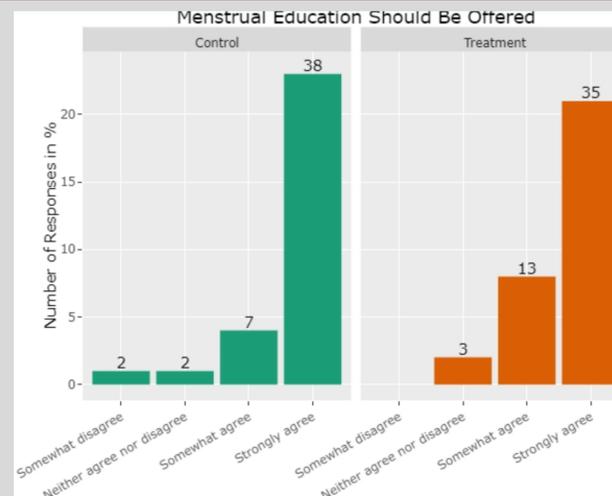
**Sample:** 60 UMass undergraduate and graduate students

**Treatment:** Participants were randomly assigned a vignette from a recent world bank survey discussing period poverty and its effects on millions worldwide, such as lack of menstrual education and product availability.

The following questions were asked to participants using the Likert scale, from strongly to strongly agree:

1. Menstrual education should be a part of the secondary education curriculum.
2. Menstrual products should be offered for free.
3. The tax on menstrual products should be eliminated.

## RESULTS



	Control	Treatment
Female	12	20
Male	16	10
Non-Binary	1	1

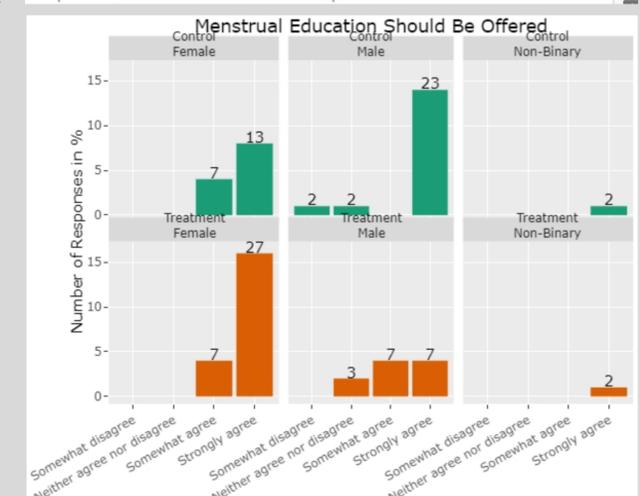
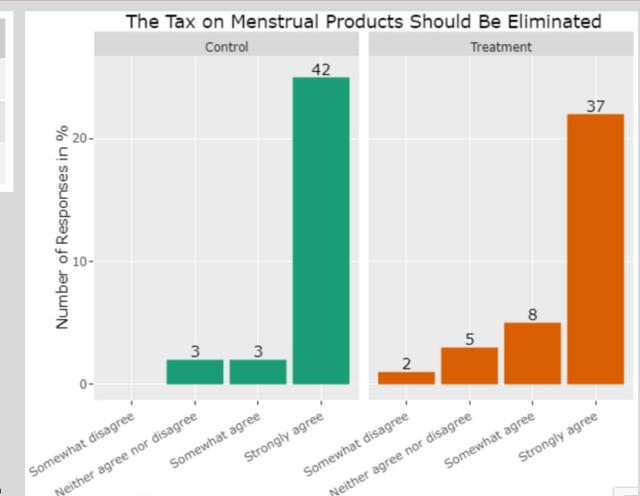
percentage calculation = responses of each category / total number of respondents (60)

The results of the chi square tests for the three questions are as follows:

**Menstrual Education:**  
Chi-squared: 2.6939,  
p-value = 0.4413

**Elimination of Tax:**  
Chi-squared: 2.613,  
p-value = 0.4551

**Free Menstrual Products:**  
Chi-squared: 2.832,  
p-value = 0.4183



## CONCLUSIONS

All three graphs showed that regardless of the participants’ experimental group, most strongly agreed to more accessible and affordable menstrual products and curricular menstrual education. Therefore, although fewer people in the treatment group disagreed with providing menstrual education as a part of secondary education, we cannot conclude that the vignette affected respondents’ perceptions of period poverty. Moreover, the chi-squared tests showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Moreover, we wanted to observe whether gender would influence perceptions of period poverty. However, the distribution of the genders in the treatment and control groups was skewed, with the treatment group having a majority of female respondents and the control group having a majority of male respondents. Hence we cannot conclude that gender and perception of period poverty have a causal relationship.

In summary, to derive meaningful results about the correlation between menstrual awareness and period poverty perception and the effect of gender on the results, the same research should be carried out for a larger sample size.

## REFERENCES

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Cardoso, L.F., Scolese, A.M., Hamidaddin, A. et al. Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States. BMC Women's Health 21, 14 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5>.