

To Be Free But Not to Bleed Free: America's Inequality in Menstrual

School of Communication Arts,
Ramapo College of New Jersey,
Mahwah, NJ 07430

Product Access

By: Sara Hosbach

Faculty Advisor: Satarupa Dasgupta



Method

To gather more firsthand accounts of how menstrual product inequality impacts individuals, an anonymous, optional, confidential survey was conducted and sent to college students between the ages of 18 and 24. The survey was shared via social media. The survey commenced with questions about demographics. Participants were asked to rank statements following a five-point Likert scale with one being "do not agree" and five "strongly agree." They were also given an opportunity to answer optional open-ended questions to elaborate on their thoughts. Overall, there were 17 responses for the quantitative portion and varying responses for qualitative.

Analysis

Menstrual inequity prohibits individuals from accomplishing their full desires. The persistence of this inequality proliferates the uneven distribution of power within gender as menstruators are forced to face unfair barriers. Often labeled as indirect discrimination, on account of their period, menstruating individuals are frequently left behind in educational and occupational realms. This is of greater presence in historically marginalized communities, therefore allowing continued racial and classist boundaries to persist. Proper education must be prioritized to remove the taboos surrounding period talk. Normalizing and even encouraging discussions around menstruation removes the persistent degrading of menstruating individuals. By prioritizing advocacy and additional social research, the inequalities present in proper access to menstrual supplies can be understood and corrected.

Abstract

Women, nonbinary, and transgender individuals who menstruate encounter a plethora of economic, societal, and legislative barriers to obtaining safe supplies and properly treating the monthly occurrence. These roadblocks punish an uncontrollable bodily function, specifically targeting lower-status individuals. Within America, the inaccessibility to menstrual products reflects overarching inequalities that continue to wither and divide the nation. To further analyze this inequity, a literature review and anonymous survey was conducted. Ultimately, menstruation should not stand in the way of an equalized playing field, but results indicate that even within America, these inequities triumph.

Literature Review

Period poverty and mental health implications among college-aged women in the United States. (2021) Cardoso, L. F., Scolese, A. M., Hamidaddin, A., & Gupta, J.

Law's ability to further the "menstrual movement." (2021). Cotropia, C. A.

Period Poverty: A Neglected Public Health Issue. (2023). Jaafar, H., Ismail, S. Y., & Azzeri, A.

How can we improve knowledge and perceptions of menstruation? A mixed-methods research study. (2020) Moon, G., Kim, I., Kim, H., Choe, S., Jeon, S., Cho, J., Hong, S., & Lee, J.

"Sometimes I just forget them": Capturing experiences of women about free menstrual products in a U.S. based public university campus (2023). Rawat, M., Novorita, A., Frank, J., Burgett, S., Cromer, R., Ruple, A., & DeMaria, A. L.

"I stretch them out as long as possible:" U.S. women's experiences of menstrual product insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. (2023). Schmitt, M. L., Dimond, K., Maroko, A. R., Phillips-Howard, P. A., Gruer, C., Berry, A., Nash, D., Kochhar, S., & Sommer, M.

It's not just the tampon tax: Why periods are political. (2018, July 22). Zraick, K.

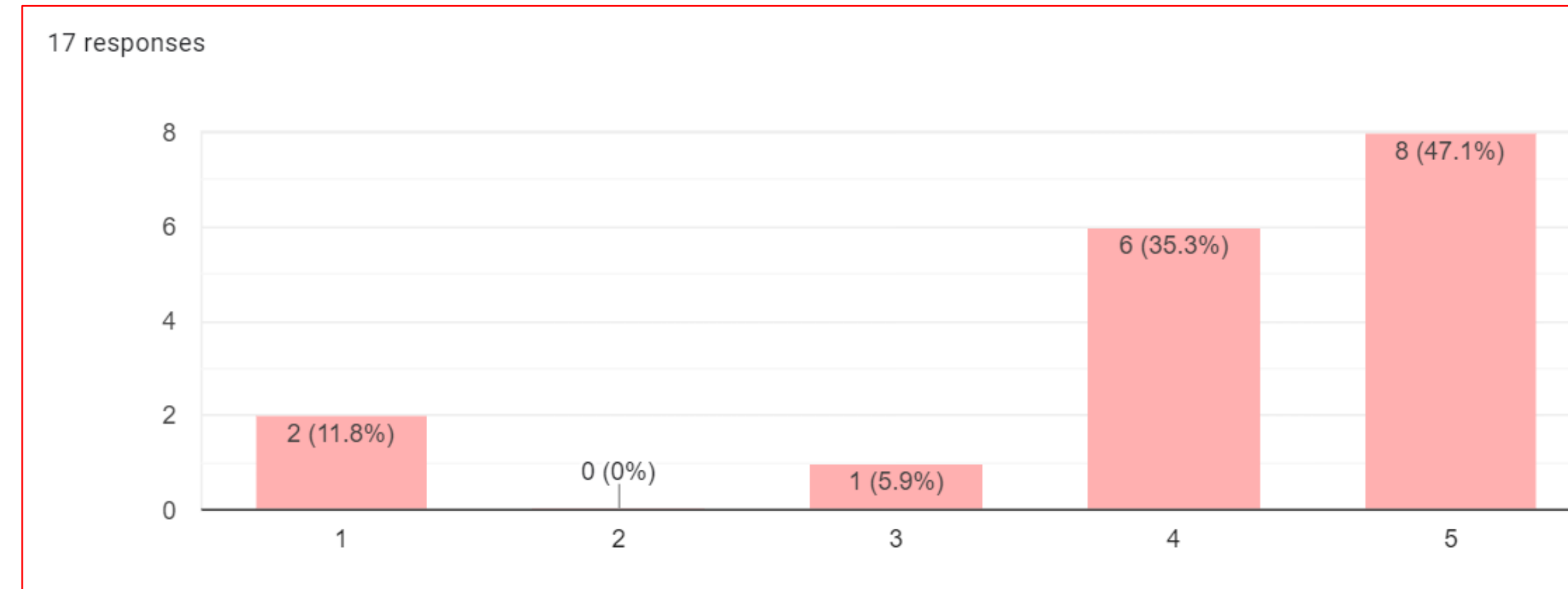


Figure 1: Receiving free menstrual supplies from the school/state would relieve the financial burden.

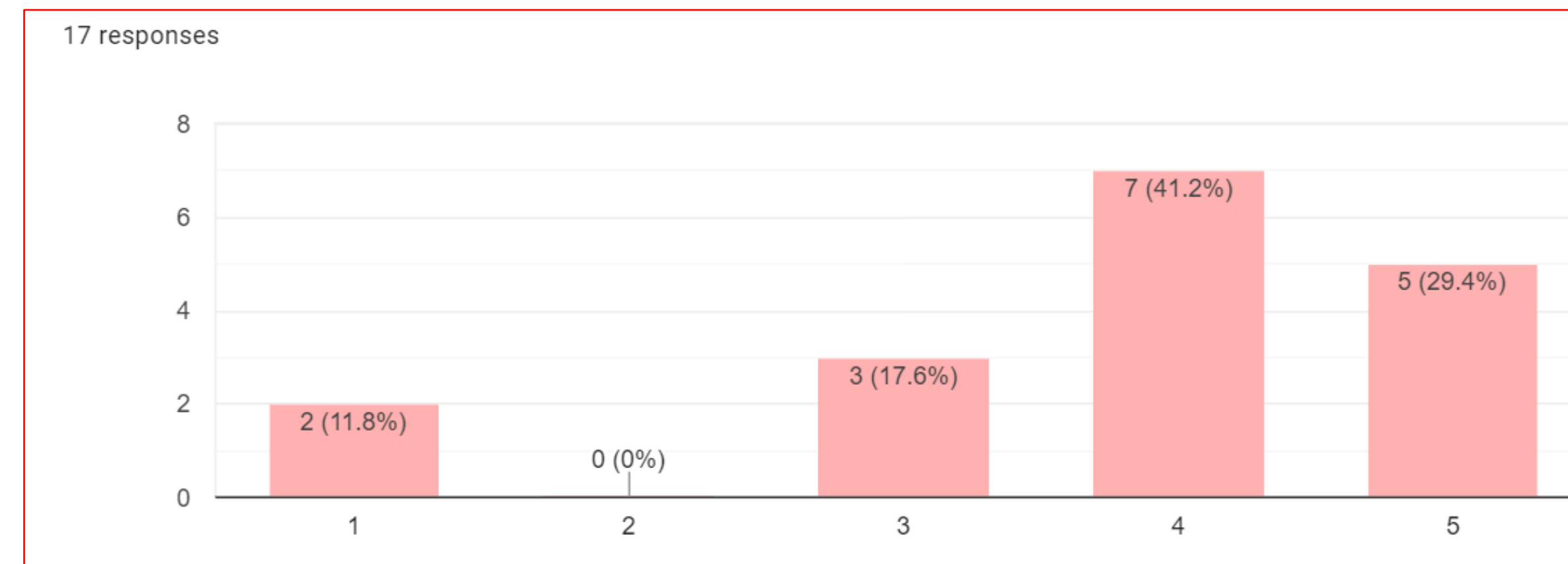


Figure 2: There is a lack of support from the state for menstruating individuals

"People think it's dirty or unclean or gross. It's not. It's natural. It certainly isn't pretty, but it's something people with uteruses go through."

Anonymous survey response

"I have heard many horror stories from students who've had to use the bathroom but have been unable to due to their teachers and ended up bleeding through and none of this is okay. I'm sure if a man had a similar situation it would be handled differently so why is this stigma a thing, let us live our lives."

Anonymous survey response