

Purple Feminists Group



# MYANMAR FIGHT FOR PERIOD POVERTY

SURVEY REPORT 2024

**Purple Feminists Group**

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Myanmar Fight for Period Poverty

Survey Report (2024)

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## Foreword of the Director

It is with immense pride and gratitude that I present the Purple Feminists Group's 2024 survey report, *Myanmar Fight for Period Poverty*. This work marks a significant step forward in our mission to address period poverty, a pressing issue that impacts countless menstruators across Myanmar.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my incredible team—Naychi Thel Kyaw Tun, Yoon Thu Wynn, Khaing Wai Lwin, Ei Phyu Sin Win, and Phyo Thiha Aung—whose dedication and hard work made this report possible.

Our work is rooted in the fundamental belief that menstruation is a natural process, not a burden. Yet, for many in Myanmar, it remains a source of physical, social, and psychological challenges due to stigma, economic instability, and lack of access to menstrual products. This report amplifies the voices of those living through period poverty, reflecting their authentic stories and real-life experiences.

I am deeply thankful to every individual who participated in our survey, sharing their stories and insights. Their courage and honesty have enriched this report, making it not just a document of findings but a testament to the lived realities of menstruators in Myanmar.

At its core, the Purple Feminists Group was founded to ensure that no one is held back by something as natural as menstruation. Through this report, we aim to shed light on the challenges faced and inspire actionable change. Together, let us continue working toward a future where menstruation is not a source of inequality but a natural part of life, managed with dignity and care.

With gratitude,

**Nandar**

*Executive Director*

**Purple Feminists Group**

## I. Executive Summary

Period poverty, defined as the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, education, and facilities, is a demand issue in Myanmar, exacerbated by ongoing political conflict, economic instability, cultural stigma, and deep-rooted taboos surrounding menstruation. In Myanmar, many menstruators, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions, struggle to afford basic menstrual supplies or access clean water and private facilities to manage their periods with dignity.

Despite the growing global attention on menstrual health, Myanmar remains under-researched in this area, particularly in terms of nationwide data on menstrual hygiene management, education, and access to products. The survey research, conducted by Purple Feminists Group in May 2024 across diverse geographic regions, utilizes both online and offline methodologies to capture a wide range of experiences, including those from rural, urban, and peri-urban areas. This survey fills a vital gap by shedding light on the challenges menstruators face in the country, offering insights that can guide more equitable and informed solutions. Through enhanced data collection and open dialogue, we aim to strengthen academic research and policy initiatives, driving progress toward women's empowerment and improved menstrual health outcomes in Myanmar.

To address these findings, the Purple Feminists Group proposes three key implementation strategies focusing on improving awareness, accessibility, and support for menstrual health management. Overall, this survey serves as a cornerstone of understanding and addressing the menstrual health challenges in Myanmar, paving the way for more equitable and supportive solutions for all menstruators.

**Keywords:** Period Poverty, Menstrual Hygiene & Hygiene Management (MHM), Myanmar Menstrual Challenges, Accessibility of Menstrual Products, Cultural Stigma, Menstrual Products Awareness, Menstrual Education, Social Impacts, Conflict Related Areas, Social Outreach Initiatives

## II. Introduction

### 2.1 Background and Objectives

There is a stigmatized concept all over the world that menstruation is shameful and period blood is dirty. It is the same for a country like Myanmar with diverse religions that practice a variety of traditions and culture. In fact, menstruation is a monthly challenge for billions of girls and women worldwide, physically, socially, and psychologically. In Myanmar, girls and women face significant challenges with their menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) due to ongoing conflicts, economic insecurity, lack of awareness and knowledge, and limited access to menstrual hygiene products, and stigma. Considering these challenges, Purple Feminists Group has carried out a survey to shed light on the menstrual challenges faced by menstruators in Myanmar. This report is guided by three primary objectives: (1) to raise awareness about the issue of period poverty in Myanmar, (2) to amplify the voices of menstruators who experience menstrual challenges, and (3) to work towards reducing menstrual inequality across different social strata.

### 2.2 Materials and Methods

The study examined women's menstrual challenges across rural, urban, and peri-urban areas in seven states and five divisions of Myanmar through both online and in-person surveys. It incorporated a mix of closed-ended questions—including demographics, dichotomous, single-choice, and multiple-choice formats—along with open-ended questions and hypothesis-driven inquiries to gather personal experiences. A total of 147 respondents participated, with 88 completing the survey online and 59 responding in person. Additionally, 10 participants were selected for survey interview discussions as a representative of the population, allowing them to share their personal experiences with menstrual difficulties through conversations, probing, and follow-up questions.

### III. Key Findings and Results

#### 3.1 Demographic Representation

The survey, conducted with **147 participants**, pointed to diverse demographic and geographic representation. Most respondents 67% were **aged between 18-35**, with smaller groups including those **aged 10-17** is 3% and **over 35** is 30%. The majority 95% identified as female, with 4% identifying as male and 1% opting not to disclose their gender. In terms of occupation, 33% were unemployed, 27% employed, and 17% were undergraduate students, with smaller groups holding high school diplomas or graduate degrees. Geographically, most respondents of 73% were from Yangon Division, with others from Shan and Kachin States and other regions. Additionally, 14% identified as persons with disabilities, while 82% did not. This diversity in demographics provides a broad perspective for understanding the issues explored in the survey in **Table (1)**.

Age		Gender		Occupation		Geography		Disability Status	
Group	%	Group	%	Group	%	Group	%	Group	%
10-17	3%	Female	95%	Unemployed	33%	Yangon	73%	Persons with Disabilities	14%
18-35	67%	Male	4%	Employed	27%	Others	27%	Without Disabilities	82%
Over 35	30%	Prefer not to say	1%	Undergraduate	17%	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	Others	23%	-	-	-	-

*Table (1): List of Demographic Representation*

#### 3.2 Menstrual Products Awareness and Usage Patterns

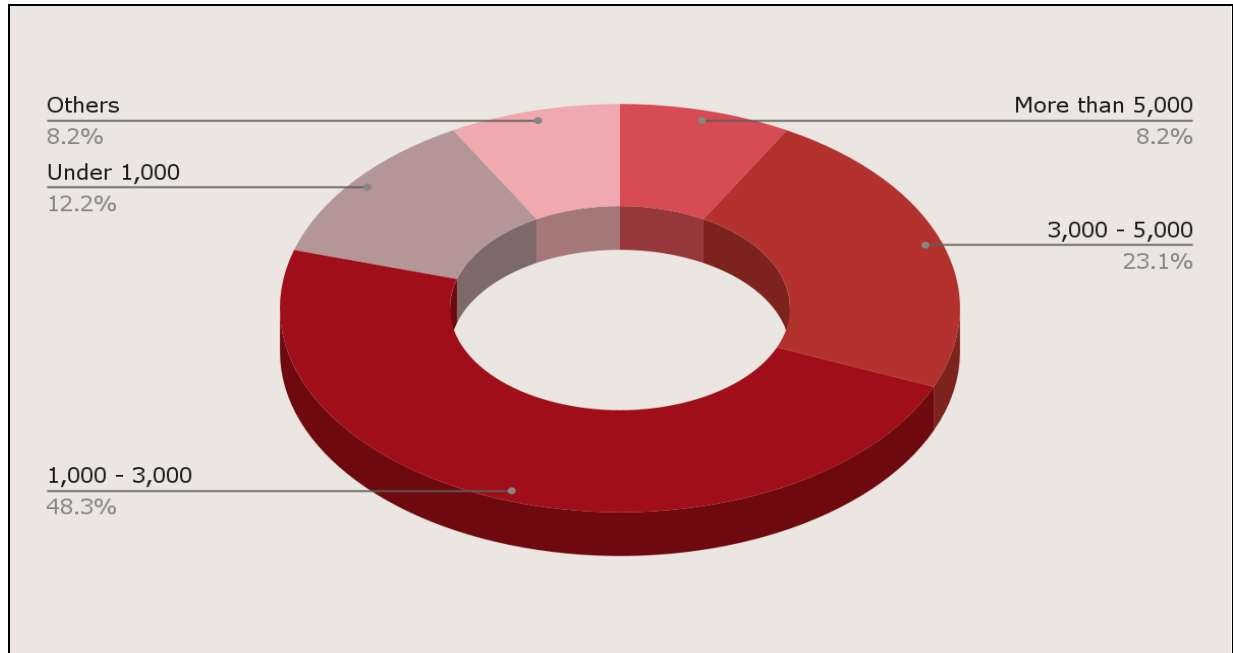
Among the 147 respondents surveyed in Myanmar, the vast majority of 86% were familiar with **disposable pads**, reflecting their widespread availability and convenience in the usages. Following this, 50% were conscious of **menstrual cups**, while 46% knew of **reusable clothing**, which is often promoted as more sustainable alternatives, particularly in rural areas. Awareness of **tampons** was relatively lower, which is around 41% of the total respondents, possibly due to cultural sensitivities and limited access in many parts of Myanmar. **Period panties**, which are a newer innovation, were recognized by 28% of respondents. Notably, awareness dropped significantly for **menstrual discs** 10% and other less common products for 3%.



In Figure (1), the cost of menstrual products varied among respondents. Nearly half of 48% were using prices ranging **from 1,000 to 3,000 MMKs**. This price range was common for disposable pads in Myanmar in 2024, influenced by high inflation and the economic challenges following three years of military rule since 2021. A smaller group of 23% applied the costs **between 3,000 and 5,000 MMKs**. However, for the 12% of lower-income individuals, finding products priced **below 1,000 MMK** is nearly impossible due to the ongoing economic challenges caused by the country's political crisis. According to the highlights of some survey interviewees, they have resorted to alternatives, such as using reusable cloth options or staying home to avoid purchasing these items. Additionally, 8% of respondents, consisting of those with privileges and those prioritizing hygiene, exclusively use products priced **at 5,000 MMK and above** for greater comfort. These findings indicate that Myanmar's current political instability has directly impacted the economic situation, affecting women's access to monthly essential items. Addressing the affordability and accessibility of these products remains a crucial issue that requires urgent attention.

Products	Awareness Percentage
Disposable pads	86%
Menstrual cups	50%
Reusable pads/clothing	46%
Tampons	41%
Period panties	28%
Menstrual discs	10%
Other products	3%

*Table 2: Percentage of Menstrual Products Awareness*



**Figure 1:** Average Prices in Menstrual Products Usages in Monthly Cycle

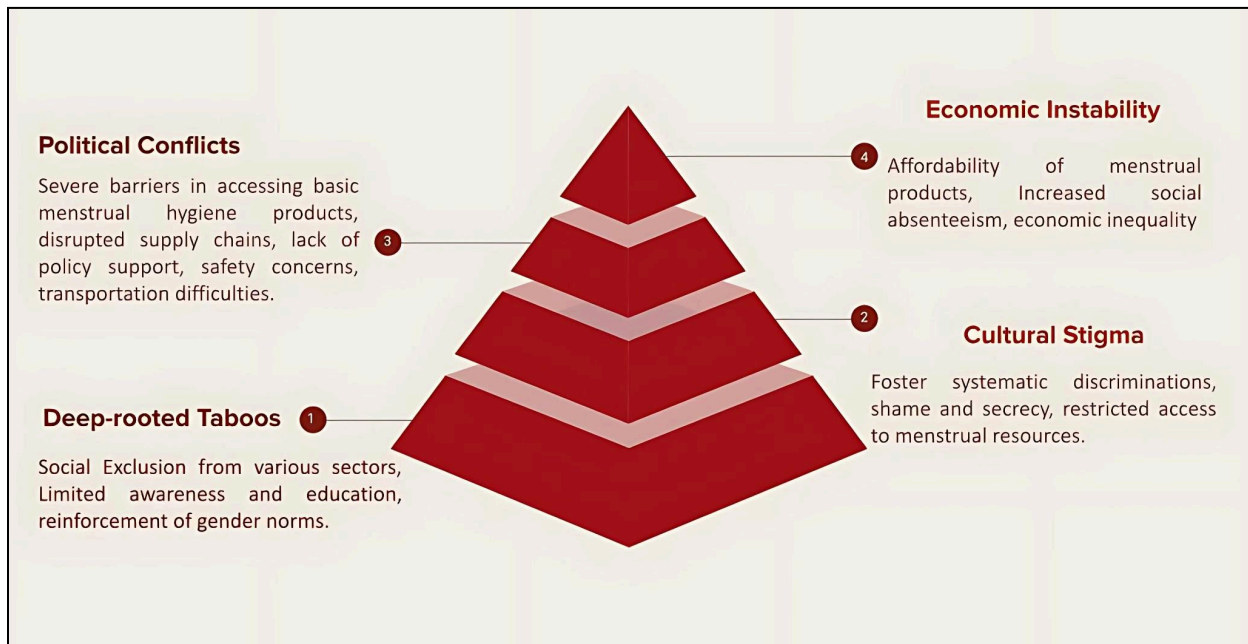
### 3.3 Its Accessibility and Difficulty

A significant portion of respondents identified that, in Myanmar, while various menstrual products are available for individuals who menstruate, the majority prefer using disposable pads. This is primarily because they are comfortable, convenient, and widely accessible in different locations. However, the use of reusable alternatives, such as menstrual cups and period panties, remains limited. This is largely due to difficulties in purchasing them from local stores and markets. Additionally, according to the survey interview, many individuals are interested in trying these alternatives but hesitate due to a lack of knowledge on how to use them properly.

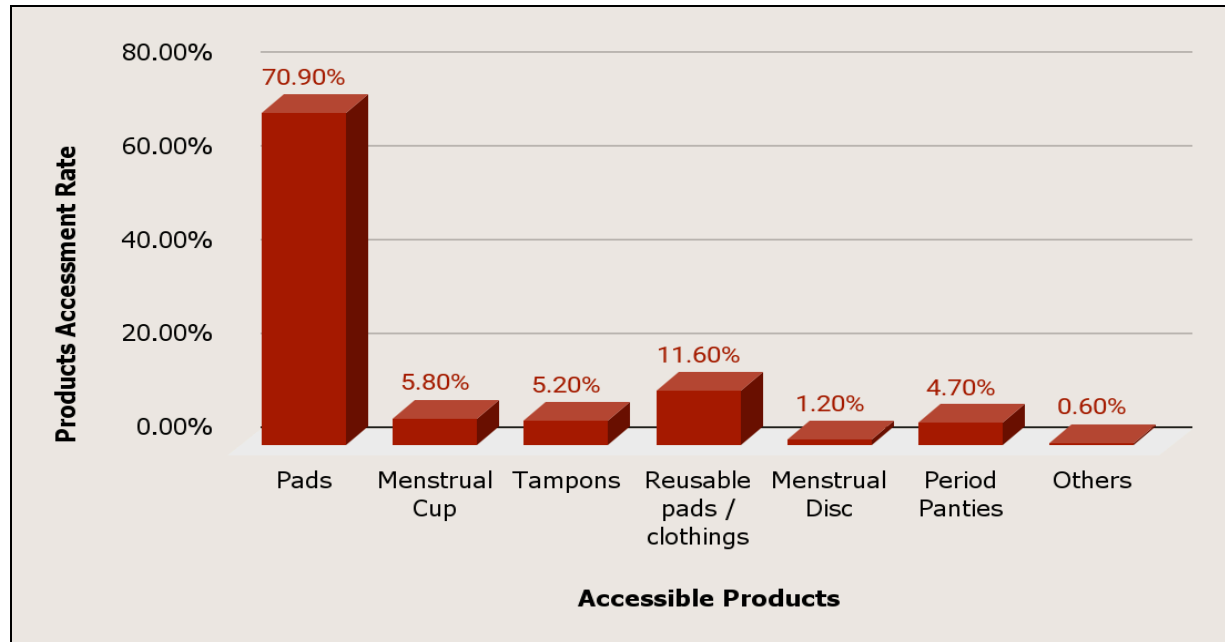
Another key reason for this hesitation is the insertion of these products into the vagina. During the survey interview, one participant stated, *“People might assume that women avoid using reusable menstrual options because of concerns about virginity, and cultural beliefs may reinforce this perception. However, the reality is that we are hesitant to try products that require insertion into the vagina for the first time.”*

Furthermore, challenges such as transportation difficulties in remote areas and financial constraints have contributed to the continued reliance on a single type of menstrual pads. The survey findings also revealed that reusable options are currently priced above (10,000) Myanmar Kyats, making them unaffordable for many. One respondent pointed out that, in order to reduce monthly expenses on menstrual products, she has resorted to using cloth at home. She shared her experience, stating, *“Nowadays, disposable pads have become too expensive, so I have limited*

myself to using only two pads a day. At night, instead of using a pad, I place a piece of cloth on my bed, which helps me save money.” Regarding this, according to the survey, 78.9% of women experience menstrual cycles lasting between **2 to 5 days**, while 14.3% have cycles **exceeding 5 to 7 days**. As a result, the monthly cost of menstrual products places a significant financial burden on those with limited income, highlighting the economic challenges associated with period care.



*Figure 2: Outlines of the root causes and its impacts*



*Figure 3: Statistical Analyses of Common Menstrual Products Accessibility*

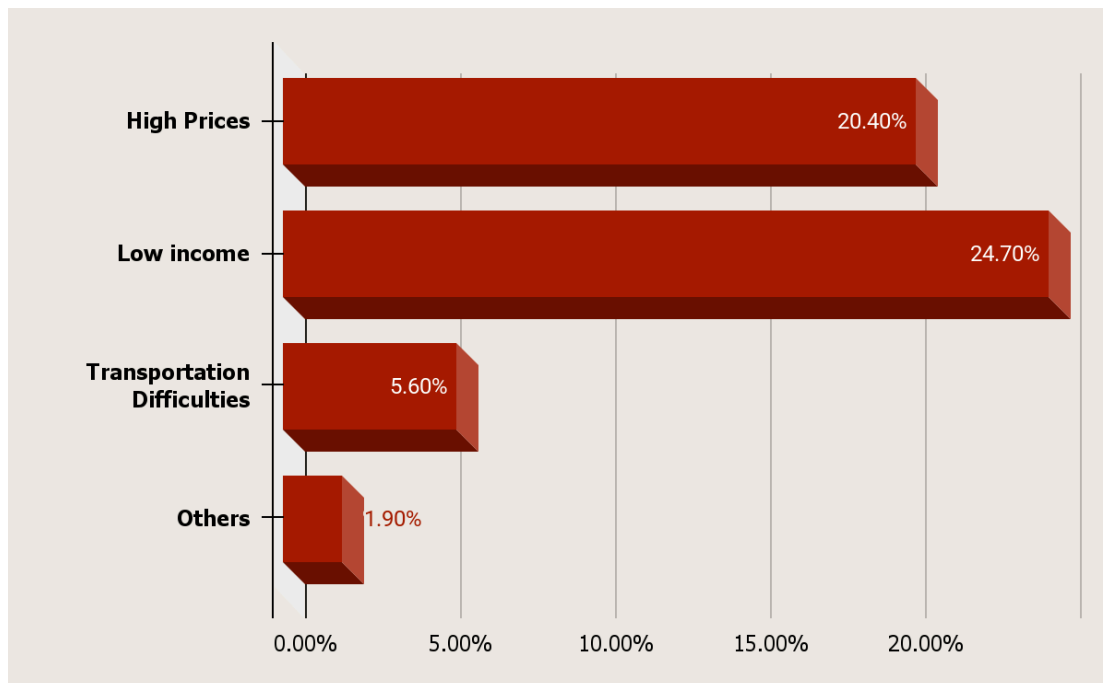
According to Figure (3), the data indicated that while pads are the most commonly recognized and used menstrual products, awareness and use of alternatives remain much lower. The background reason stands out that many menstruators are unaware of more cost-effective and sustainable options like reusable menstrual cups, discs, or period panties. This lack of knowledge leads them to rely solely on disposable pads, and can be costly over time, especially for those with limited financial resources.

Based on these findings, awareness, affordability, and accessibility of menstrual products are critical aspects that need urgent attention in Myanmar's menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) initiatives. Additionally, due to the ongoing political and economic crisis, menstrual product prices have risen, and accessibility has become increasingly difficult. This issue is particularly severe in conflict-affected and remote areas, where delays in the supply of essential goods have further limited access to fundamental hygiene necessities such as clean water, soap, and proper waste disposal facilities. The survey respondents featured that many individuals in these regions face significant challenges in maintaining menstrual hygiene and overall well-being due to these lack of supplies in the significant areas.

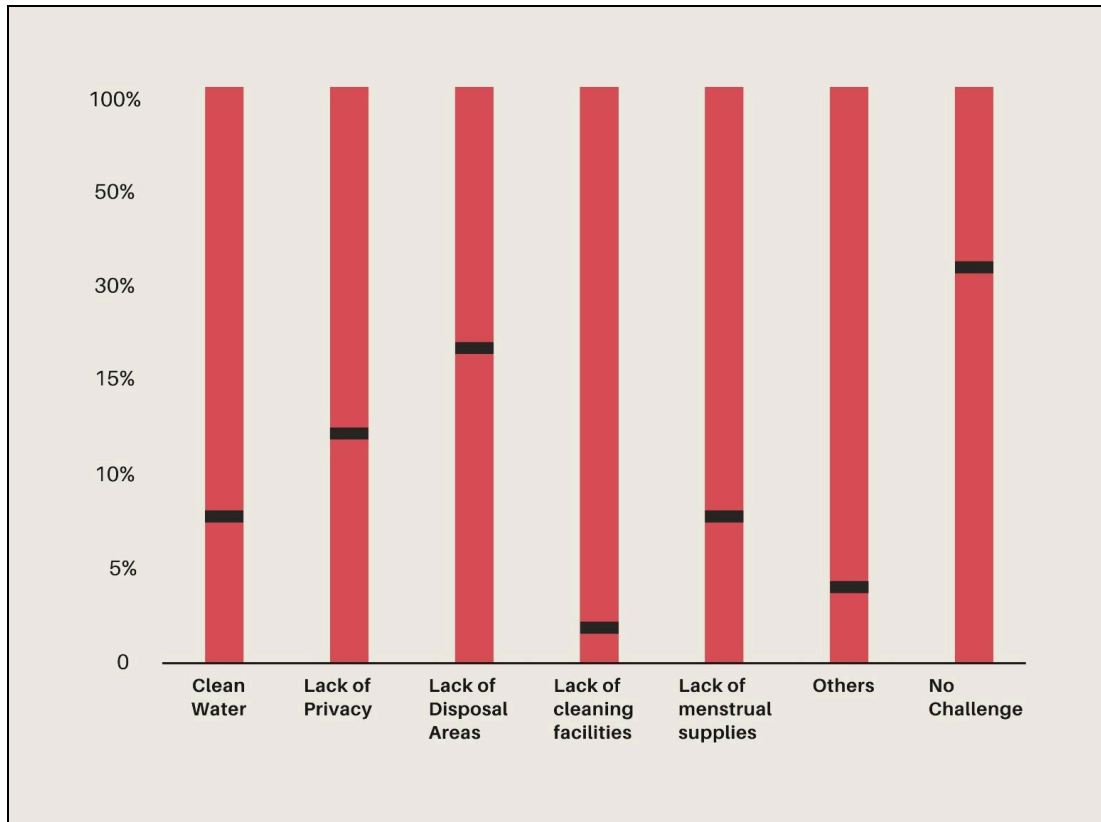
### 3.4 Measurements of Period Poverty Rate

Period poverty refers to the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, proper sanitation, and education due to financial, cultural, or infrastructural barriers. This issue disproportionately affects individuals in marginalized communities, leading to health risks, missed educational or work opportunities, and social stigma.

Furthermore, several key factors contribute to difficulties in accessing menstrual products. Among the 147 respondents, 24.7% indicated that high prices were a major barrier, while 20.4% pointed to low income as the primary obstacle. A smaller group, 5.6%, mentioned other factors such as transportation issues, as previously mentioned, and others related challenges affecting their ability to purchase and use menstrual products.



*Figure 4: Potential barrier traits of period poverty in Myanmar*



**Figure 5:** Characteristical bars of respondents' reasons to accessible difficulties

It also examined how limited resources affect menstrual management. A significant portion 19.9% illustrated that the lack of proper disposal areas was a major challenge, largely due to insufficient waste management systems, particularly in rapidly urbanizing or underdeveloped areas where the government struggles to manage sanitation effectively. Lack of privacy was another prominent issue, affecting 11% of respondents, particularly in rural and IDP Camps of conflict-affected regions. Furthermore, 8.4% of participants living in rural areas cited clean water scarcity as a problem, while 8.9% highlighted the unavailability of menstrual supplies due to transportation difficulties.

Additionally, the survey interviews also revealed that cultural beliefs continue to pose significant barriers in rural areas. One participant shared an experience from her village, stating, *“In my hometown, women often experience itching when they wear a pad for too long, which is actually due to poor hygiene practices. However, many in the community believe that these issues are caused by superstitions such as black magic or curses.”* This reflects how misinformation, when embedded within traditional cultural norms, prevents women from gaining essential knowledge about menstrual health and hygiene.

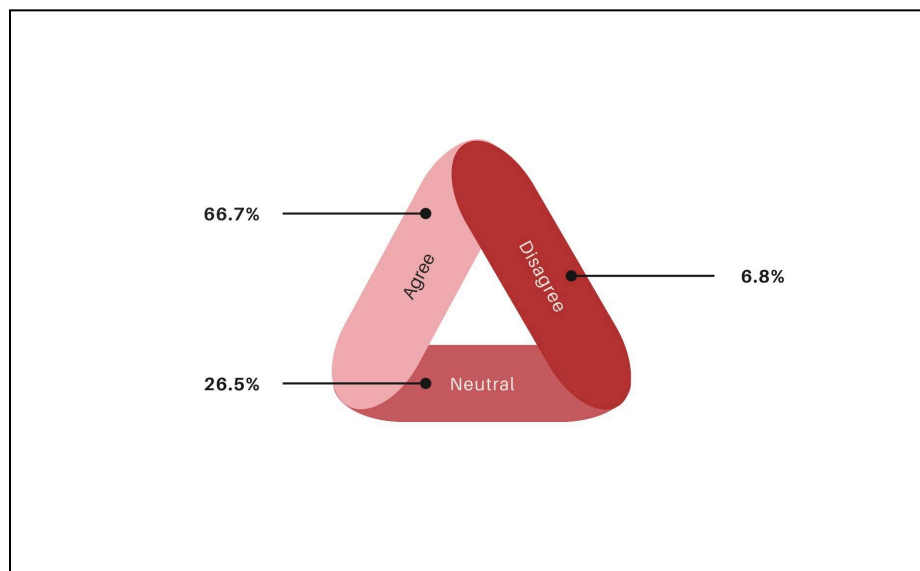
Thus, when analyzing the reasons behind menstrual product shortages in Myanmar, it becomes evident that the long-term consequence of such challenges is the deepening of *period poverty*—a

situation where menstruators lack access to affordable and sufficient menstrual products. This can lead to various hardships, including health risks, social stigma, and emotional distress. Addressing these issues is essential to ensuring the well-being and dignity of menstruators across the country.

### 3.5 Impact of Menstrual Discomfort in Burmese Women’s Daily Life

Reflecting on this, it should consider the far-reaching effects that menstrual discomfort can have on women's productivity and participation in educational and professional environments. Is the current understanding of workplace policies in Myanmar adequately addressing this issue?

Regarding menstrual leave at school or work, 62.7% respondents admitted missing school or work due to physical pain during the menstruation. One participant highlighted that *“My period pain at times gets worse to the point where I lose my appetite and am unable to move around so I have taken the absence leaves”*, which is also related to the reason of both shame and discomfort that 2.1% respondents noted in the survey process. During the survey, it is recognized that the topic of menstrual leave policy continues to be a subject of debate as evidenced by the varying perspectives expressed in their individual responses. While 98 respondents supported menstrual leave due to severe pain and emotional instability, 10 were opposed, arguing that *“menstruation is a natural process and leave should only be granted for cases of extreme pain. Without such limitations, the policy could be misused.”*

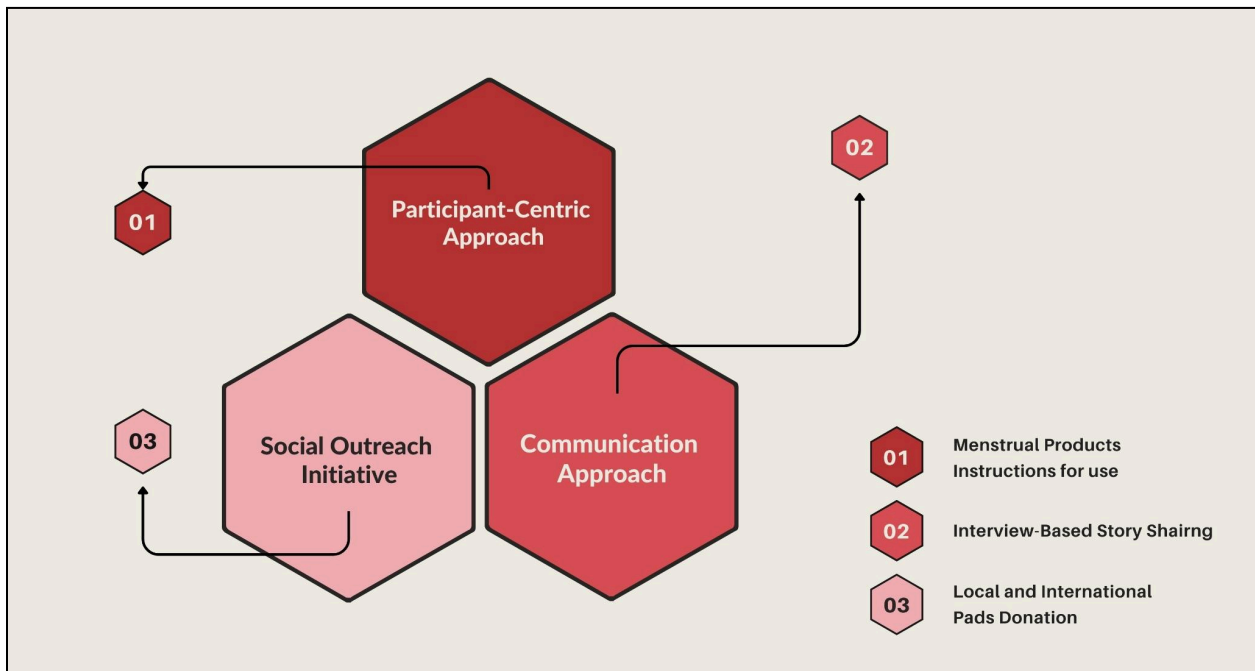


**Figure 6:** Impressions on menstrual leave policy at workplace and education sectors

In summary, the findings of this survey research highlight the cultural, political, conflict-related, and economic challenges associated with menstruation that women face. These challenges serve as a call for policymakers, educators, and employers to reconsider how they can better support women's long-term development and health promotion. Therefore, this report aims to advocate for effective policy changes that address these issues. Furthermore, such transformative actions are particularly necessary in remote and conflict-affected areas, where menstrual resource accessibility remains limited due to political and economic instability. As a result, this research sheds light on the urgent need for improved management and intervention in these regions to ensure equality and support for menstrual health.

#### IV. Implementation Strategies

In order to address the menstrual challenges identified in the survey, three key implementation strategies have been developed by Purple Feminists Group. These focus on improving menstrual health awareness, accessibility, and support through practical, participant-focused solutions. Each implementation action is tailored to tackle a specific aspect of menstrual inequality, ensuring a holistic approach to improving menstrual health & hygiene management (MHHM) across various regions in Myanmar.



*Figure 7: List of Implementation Strategies*



## 1. Participant-Centric Approach: Menstrual Products Instructions for Use

The first implementation addresses the lack of knowledge and understanding about various menstrual products, such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and menstrual discs for girls, experiencing puberty and women seeking alternative menstrual products. By sharing accurate information through social media platforms, this initiative aims to ensure that individuals make informed choices regarding their menstrual health. Given that a significant number of respondents indicated a reliance on pads and expressed limited awareness of other options, this participant-centric approach aims to provide clear and accessible instructions for the proper use and disposal of these products safely with local language and seeks to improve menstrual hygiene practices across diverse communities.

## 2. Communication Approach: Interview-Based Story Sharing

This action focuses on amplifying the voices of women and girls through personal, interview-based stories about their menstrual experiences to challenge societal stigmas and raise awareness about the difficulties menstruators face. By sharing these stories via social media platforms as the written narratives, the initiative aims to foster a more open, supportive environment for discussing menstrual health. It also calls on women-led local organizations to actively address menstrual challenges in Myanmar, encouraging grassroots involvement in breaking down cultural taboos and improving access to menstrual products.

## 3. Social Outreach Initiative: Local and International Pads Donation

This donation initiative is designed to ensure that menstrual products reach the individuals most in need. Many respondents from the survey shared financial difficulties that restricted their ability to afford essential menstrual supplies. To address this, the initiative launched a pad donation campaign aimed not only at fulfilling immediate needs but also raising awareness about menstrual health. By encouraging local and international fundraising efforts through creative approaches, the initiative successfully distributed pads to marginalized and underserved communities.

### **Purple Feminists Group**

Myanmar Fight For Period Poverty: Survey Report 2024 (English)

Myanmar Fight For Period Poverty: Survey Report 2024 (Burmese)

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