

# A significant number of New Zealand teenagers are missing school because they cannot afford menstrual products

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"Period poverty is when people are unable to access menstrual items due to the cost," says Dr. Terry Fleming from the Te Herenga

Waka—Victoria University of Wellington's Faculty of Health. "Those suffering from period poverty miss out on school, work, and other opportunities."

A lack of access to menstrual products such as pads, tampons or cups can also cause infections and [health problems](#), as well as embarrassment and shame, Dr. Fleming says.

New Zealand has previously had little data on the problem of [period poverty](#).

The research, led by Dr. Fleming and Associate Professor Terryann Clark from the University of Auckland, surveyed nearly 4000 students about their experiences of period poverty.

"Our results show that 12.5% of students who had had their first period missed out on menstrual items due to cost, and that 7.5% had missed [school](#) because they couldn't access menstrual products." Dr. Fleming says. "The number of students missing school rose ever further to 20% in lower income areas. Missing school causes these students to miss out on important academic, sporting, and social experiences."

"Period poverty perpetuates inequity and cycles of disadvantage, particularly for our poorest communities and for Māori and Pasifika students," Associate Professor Clark says. "19% of Māori youth have experienced period poverty, and 16% missed school because they couldn't afford menstrual products. Our rangatahi deserve better, they deserve to have their basic needs met."

Other research and initiatives have shown that the way to address period poverty is through improving access to menstrual products or working to reduce poverty as a whole, Dr. Fleming says. For example, the Scottish government has introduced free menstrual products in all schools, and

84% of students said this programme had a positive impact for them.

Associate Professor Clark also says that "while increasing access to products is really important, period poverty is a symptom of much wider concerns that families have about providing the basics for their children—after paying for housing and food, menstrual products are one of the first things to go."

This research is part of the Youth19 survey, which aims to collect data on a range of issues affecting New Zealand youth. Further results from the survey will be available over the coming year. This survey is led by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, the University of Auckland, the University of Otago, and AUT.

Dr. Sarah Donovan from the University of Otago, who was also involved in the period poverty research, says that this study is among the first in the world to investigate period poverty in a scientifically rigorous, randomly selected sample.

"This high-quality data is brilliant in that it directly addresses the significant data gap we have in New Zealand."

**More information:** Period poverty fact sheet:  
[www.youth19.ac.nz/publications ... d-poverty-fact-sheet](http://www.youth19.ac.nz/publications...d-poverty-fact-sheet)

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