

# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF PERIOD POVERTY ON LATINAS IN TEXAS

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## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Menstruation averages of 39 years of a menstruator's life in which approximately \$4,000 is spent on menstrual hygiene products. This additional cost along with the societal stigma that menstruators face for this biological process has left many faced with period poverty, which is the condition in which one has insufficient access to proper menstrual hygiene products and educational resources, thus forcing menstruators to turn to unsafe hygiene practices. Live experiences shared showed period poverty is significant amongst Latinas in Texas.

Despite impacting half of the global population, the lack of knowledge and stigma surrounding menstruation suggests that there is a need to intervene on a higher level to combat the period poverty across Texas.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Menstruation is a monthly process that prepares a female's body for pregnancy, marked by bleeding from the uterus (Critchley et al., 2020). This process starts with menarche, the first menstrual cycle, and ends with menopause, averaging 39 years of a female's life. Over these 39 years, a female is expected to pay an average of \$9 per month on feminine hygiene products in the United States to maintain her menstrual cycle, which costs about \$4,000 over her lifetime ("Girls and Sanitary Products," 2021). This high price is partially due to the 'tampon tax' or state sales tax placed on feminine hygiene products that ranges from 2.9 to 7.25 percent depending on the state (Ooi, 2018). 38 of the 50 U.S. states also impose a local sales tax in addition to the state sales tax (Ooi, 2018).

These taxes are a consumption-based tax that are placed on tampons, sanitary pants, napkins, underwear, and menstrual cups (Giokaris & Pouliasi, 2020). Many feminists and policy makers are combatting this tax through the Menstrual Equity for All Act because menstruation is an inevitable part of a female's life (Ooi, 2018). In contrast, items such as condoms and Rogaine are exempt from the tax since they are seen as necessities that aid health (Hartman 2017). This additional cost that females face for this natural process has left many women living in period poverty (Cardoso et al., 2021).

Period poverty is the condition in which one is unable to afford feminine hygiene products and forces females to turn to unsafe hygiene practices (Rossouw et al., 2021). One study showed that 64% of women have had difficulty at least once affording feminine hygiene products with 21% struggling each month (Sebert Kuhlmann et al., 2019). These unsafe hygiene practices include, but are not limited to utilizing rags, paper towels, cardboard or even prolonging the time that the pad or tampon is used which can lead to urinary tract infections or other infectious diseases (Das et al., 2015).

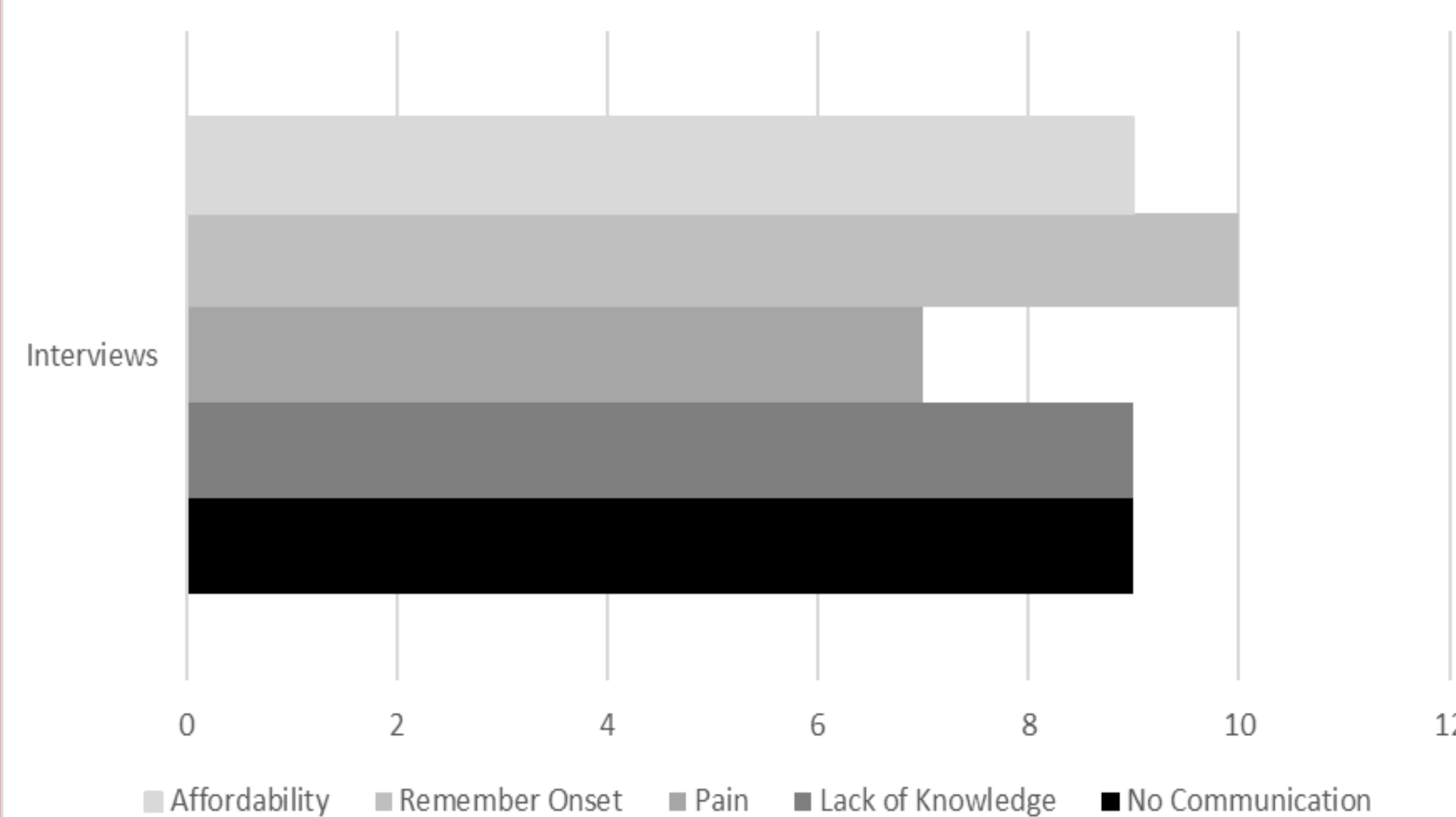
In a study amongst college-aged students, period poverty was most prevalently reported by Latina women (24.5%) followed by Black women (Cardoso et al., 2021). Both racial groups, according to the United States Census have some of the highest poverty rates ranging from lows of 16.2 percent to highs of 26.3 percent.

## STUDY AIM

The purpose of this research is to undergo a secondary analysis from existing data. Analysis will depict shared experiences low-income families might have when they have additional economic burden due to menstruation cycles.



## Frequency of Themes Throughout



### 10-POINT SCALE:

1: least amount times mentioned during the interview  
10: the most amount times mentioned during the interview

## METHODS

- We conducted qualitative research to recognize the knowledge gaps amongst Latina menstruators within urban Texas neighborhoods. Community health workers assisted with recruitment and briefed bilingual Latina menstruators, who then consented to be interviewed. The data was analyzed to identify reoccurring themes amongst interviewers.
- This qualitative retrospective research conducted in-depth interviews with 9 Latina participants

The research procedures are to analyze existing data.  
Recruitment

- The participants were either first or second generation immigrants
- In adolescent years were part of a family with an income below poverty levels.
- The participants lived in a Urban Texas neighborhood
- Ages: 18-40
- Using qualitative analyzing software, we identify key common themes of these interviews.

## DISCUSSION

Many participants who qualify for government assistance programs are aware that there is not funding to cover menstrual-related products though programs such as SNAP or WIC. However, these participants despite their financial challenges are unaware of what other roles the government plays in their accessibility to menstrual-related products. For instance, the state of Texas is one of many states that adds a tax to menstrual products. Additionally, when faced with abnormalities during their menstrual cycle, many participants do not address the concerns and continue to go about their day. To combat these issues faced by menstruators, countries around the world have served as a guide. Scotland in 2020, became the first country to offer free sanitary products in public facilities (Thornton, 2020). Through providing free products, many menstruators no longer must miss school or work. This model implies that eliminating the sales tax could result in more accessibility and positively impact menstruators who were once unable to afford sanitary products. However, normalizing menstruation is the first step. The stigma surrounding menstruation is one reason why there is not much support for menstruators because the topic is not openly discussed.

## FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The key themes for Latina menstruators to improve their quality of life, lower stigma and improve mental health concerns, and stressors by combating period poverty and eliminate menstruation as a limiting factor in a menstruator's life call for a need to eliminate the luxury sales tax on sanitary products. Furthermore, policy makers can be called upon to change the sexual education sequence in Texas schools to include a more comprehensive curriculum surrounding menstruation to better equip menstruators with the knowledge to combat period poverty. To achieve these policy changes, further research might include expanding the target population to other marginalized groups or broadening where the target population is to demonstrate a larger demand for changes.

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