

# PadSeva

## The Newsletter.

### **Breaking the Silence: Tackling Period Poverty, One Pad at a Time**

Around 500 million people worldwide lack access to menstrual products and safe, hygienic spaces to manage their periods.

### **Ending Stigma and Ensuring Access to Menstrual Care Together, We Can Create Change**

In a 2014 UNICEF study, 48% of girls in Iran and 82% of girls in Afghanistan felt that menstruation was a topic that should not be discussed openly.

Anwitha Srivatsa   Saanvi Koneru   Haasini Akineni   Arya Anandram   Jigna Yaganti  
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## ABOUT US

## About PadSeva

PadSeva is an initiative dedicated to combating period poverty in rural southern India. It was launched as part of the founder's 10th-grade IB MYP personal project, with a mission to provide affordable, biodegradable sanitary pads made from bamboo and raise awareness about menstrual hygiene. The project began with a hands-on approach, as the founder personally visited rural villages, engaging directly with women and girls to discuss the challenges they faced due to a lack of access to menstrual products. During these visits, she not only distributed the biodegradable pads but also conducted sessions on how to use them safely and effectively. Through these interactions, she helped reduce the stigma associated with menstruation, empowering the women in these communities with both knowledge and resources.

Since then, PadSeva has produced 7,500 pads, reaching over 9,000 individuals, and has raised \$6,000 to further expand its efforts. The founder now leads a growing team that works on increasing production capacity, raising funds, and establishing partnerships with local organizations to distribute more sanitary products and continue menstrual hygiene education. Looking ahead, PadSeva aims to scale its impact, reaching more communities, refining its biodegradable product designs, and promoting sustainable menstrual health solutions on a larger scale.

## Our Team

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## Note From Editor-in-Chief

It is with profound intent that we inaugurate this premier issue, delving into the insidious yet largely unacknowledged phenomenon of period poverty—a pervasive societal malady that is often relegated to the periphery of public discourse. This edition seeks to **elucidate the intrinsic complexities of period poverty**, not merely as an issue of deficient access to menstrual hygiene products, but as a multifactorial crisis with deleterious ramifications for education, psychosocial stability, economic mobility, and overall well-being.

At its core, period poverty represents a profound intersection of inequities, manifesting as an entrenched connection between gendered socio-economic disparities, public health deficits, and cultural stigmatization. This systemic deprivation reverberates through generations, perpetuating cycles of marginalization and disempowerment, particularly for women and girls in vulnerable communities. The ramifications of this neglected issue are multidimensional—transcending the corporeal to impair cognitive development, impede scholastic achievement, exacerbate psychosomatic disorders, and constrict vocational aspirations.

In this issue, we endeavor to report the various intricacies of period poverty, invoking critical discourse on its far-reaching consequences. By interrogating the broader sociocultural and economic frameworks that underpin this crisis, we aim to catalyze an epistemological shift—one that moves beyond superficial solutions toward a more profound structural reconfiguration.

We anticipate that this edition will serve not merely as an exposé, but as a clarion call for sustained advocacy, intellectual rigor, and systemic intervention. The eradication of period poverty requires a paradigmatic overhaul, one that addresses the latent inequities embedded within global health, education, and economic systems.

Regards,





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## An Enduring Crisis: Period Poverty

Period poverty in South India, driven by economic disparity, inadequate sanitation, and entrenched cultural stigma, severely impedes the education, health, and dignity of young girls, necessitating comprehensive intervention for gender equality and social development.

Period poverty, a pervasive yet often overlooked phenomenon, refers to the deprivation of essential menstrual hygiene products, sanitation infrastructure, and adequate health education, disproportionately affecting women and girls, particularly in underprivileged communities. In South India, this issue manifests as a multifaceted crisis, exacerbated by socio-economic disparities, entrenched patriarchal norms, and inadequate public health interventions.

Statistically, the magnitude of this issue is perturbing. Studies indicate that **71% of adolescent girls** in India remain uninformed about menstruation prior to the onset of menarche, a statistic that underscores the systemic failure to impart significant reproductive health education. The dearth of such knowledge perpetuates misinformation and cultural stigma, rendering menstruation an issue shrouded in shame, silence, and social exclusion.

Economically, the ramifications of period poverty are equally concerning. For households subsisting on minimal income in rural South India, the cost of sanitary products is prohibitive. A single sanitary pad, priced at **approximately ₹7**, represents a significant financial burden, compelling many girls to resort to makeshift alternatives such as rags, leaves, or even ashes. Such unhygienic practices elevate the risk of infections, reproductive health disorders, and long-term medical complications, further entrenching the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Furthermore, period poverty contributes to educational attrition, with approximately **23 million Indian girls** discontinuing their education annually due to the inability to manage menstruation in a school environment. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the infrastructural inadequacies in many rural schools, where functional sanitation facilities, particularly private toilets and disposal systems, are scarce. The absence of such basic amenities compels menstruating girls to remain absent from school for extended periods, cumulatively resulting in significant educational deficits and, in many cases, early school dropout.

Moreover, the socio-cultural dimension of period poverty in South India cannot be ignored. Menstruation remains a deeply stigmatized issue, often regarded as impure or defiling. As a result, many girls are subjected to social isolation during their menstrual cycles, precluded from participating in religious, social, and even educational activities. Such discriminatory practices, deeply embedded in cultural traditions, reinforce gender inequality and hinder the advancement of women's rights and empowerment.

Addressing period poverty requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. While the provision of affordable menstrual hygiene products is fundamental, this must be complemented by infrastructural improvements in schools and public spaces, particularly with regard to sanitation. Furthermore, an educational framework is essential, one that normalizes discussions surrounding menstruation, dispels harmful myths, and equips young girls with the necessary knowledge to manage their health with dignity.

Public policy interventions, alongside private sector and civil society initiatives, must converge to ensure equitable access to menstrual health resources, thereby mitigating the pernicious effects of period poverty on education, health, and gender equality.



Founder and Editor-In-Chief

### Anwitha Srivatsa

I am an IB Diploma student with a profound enthusiasm for History and Language & Literature, reveling in the intricate nuances of English literature. My editorial experience spans numerous newsletters, where I passionately engage with contemporary issues, including the pressing topic of period poverty, which I believe is an essential conversation to have. Furthermore, I possess a keen interest in global politics, aspiring to follow a career in law that embodies my commitment real-world issues and advocacy.



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## Breaking The Cycle: How Period Poverty is Affecting Education

Addressing period poverty in India is crucial not only for ensuring girls' access to education but also for breaking cycles of poverty and advancing gender equality, as it directly impacts girls' ability to attend school, their self-esteem, and their long-term socio-economic prospects, making it an urgent issue that requires comprehensive policy and societal interventions.

Period poverty in India significantly hinders girls' access to education, exacerbating gender inequality and perpetuating cycles of poverty. The lack of access to affordable sanitary products, inadequate hygiene facilities, and the social stigma surrounding menstruation lead to chronic absenteeism and high dropout rates among girls, especially in rural areas.

Addressing period poverty is crucial for ensuring equal educational opportunities, achieving **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** and **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)**, and empowering girls to realize their full potential. Access to education is an enabling factor for a successful transition to adulthood, and lack of access may increase the risk of gender inequality.

As we delve into this pressing issue, it becomes clear that addressing period poverty is not just a matter of health and hygiene, but also a critical step towards ensuring equal educational opportunities for all.

Many girls are too embarrassed to attend school during their periods, fearing ridicule or bullying from classmates. This absence is not merely a matter of personal discomfort; it can lead to a significant loss of confidence and increased anxiety, ultimately affecting their academic performance and long-term well-being. Without a supportive environment that normalizes menstruation and provides access to proper sanitary products, these girls are left feeling ashamed of a natural biological process, reinforcing harmful stigmas that hinder their growth and potential.

In many rural regions of India, including states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, access to affordable sanitary products remains severely limited. As a result, girls often resort to using makeshift solutions like cloth, mud, and even leaves—neither safe nor comfortable methods. In several unreserved areas, schools may have

restrooms, but many lack essential facilities such as doors, and in some cases, women are forced to share these restrooms with men. Disturbingly, approximately **15,000** government schools in India still do not have restrooms at all, and facilities for the disposal of used sanitary pads are often unavailable.

A survey by **Thinx and Period** revealed that **two-thirds** of teenage girls feel stressed due to the lack of menstrual products in schools. While some schools provide these products in the infirmary, should the girls be expected to walk to the infirmary while bleeding to access something as basic as menstrual products? Schools should provide free menstrual products directly in girls' restrooms, ensuring easy and private access. This eliminates the need for girls to walk to the infirmary, reducing embarrassment and disruption.

Such measures promote dignity, reduce absenteeism, and support gender equality in education. Approximately **23% of girls** drop out of school once they reach puberty, often due to inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities. This perpetuates a cycle of misogyny, leading to early child marriage and teenage pregnancy, further cutting short their education and future prospects. Without education, girls face limited career opportunities, becoming trapped in cycles of poverty and dependence, which reinforces gender inequality and impedes both community development and societal progress. The persistent devaluation of girls' education and rights perpetuates this systemic inequality, hindering overall social advancement.

Period poverty goes beyond being a health issue; it severely limits girls' access to education, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and reinforces gender inequality in India. The lack of proper menstrual hygiene facilities in schools results in high dropout rates, leading to early child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and lifelong disempowerment. Without education, these girls face restricted career opportunities, keeping them trapped in poverty and dependence, while further entrenching societal inequality.

By addressing the lack of sanitary products, improving school infrastructure, and breaking the stigmas around menstruation, we can create an environment where girls can attend school with confidence and dignity.

Ensuring equal access to education is essential for empowering girls, advancing gender equality, and fostering sustainable community development. It's time to take decisive action so that no girl can choose between her education and her dignity.



Writer  
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## The Unseen Impact: Mental Health Challenges Linked to Period Poverty.

Understanding the mental health implications of period poverty, which is often overlooked for the physical challenges, is crucial for developing more comprehensive solutions and fostering empathy in addressing this issue.

One of the most immediate psychological impacts of period poverty is the emotional distress and anxiety it generates. Individuals who lack access to menstrual products often face the stress of managing their periods with inadequate resources, leading to a constant state of worry. This anxiety is compounded by the fear of leaking or staining clothing, resulting in embarrassment and shame. For many, the stress associated with these concerns contributes to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem.

Period poverty also causes social isolation. Those struggling to manage their periods may avoid social situations, school, or work to prevent potential embarrassment. This withdrawal can lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation. The stigma surrounding menstruation, particularly in communities where it is considered a taboo subject, reinforces these feelings. The psychological toll of period poverty extends to educational

and professional settings. Many students miss school during their periods due to a lack of sanitary products, leading to academic setbacks and reduced future opportunities. This absence from school can trigger a sense of frustration and anxiety about falling behind, which in turn affects their overall mental well-being. Similarly, adults who face period poverty may experience disruptions in their work life, leading to job insecurity and financial stress, which compounds their psychological burden.

The inability to manage menstruation effectively can severely impact an individual's self-esteem and body image. When menstrual management is challenging, individuals might feel embarrassed about their bodies and less confident in their personal and professional lives. This negative self-image can contribute to long-term psychological issues, including chronic stress and depression. The ongoing struggle to maintain dignity while managing menstruation with inadequate resources can erode an individual's sense of self-worth over time.

Despite these challenges, many individuals develop remarkable resilience and coping strategies. They may seek alternative solutions, such as homemade sanitary products or creative ways to manage their periods, demonstrating ingenuity and strength. However, these coping mechanisms often come at a psychological cost, as the constant need to improvise can lead to chronic stress and mental exhaustion.

To mitigate the psychological impacts of period poverty, a multi-faceted approach is essential. First and foremost, increasing access to menstrual products is crucial.

People may feel shameful about discussing their menstrual needs or seeking help, further isolating themselves from support

support systems and community resources.

This involves not only providing physical resources but also ensuring that they are available in discreet and accessible locations. Educational programs that promote open conversations about menstruation can help reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek the support they need.

Additionally, integrating mental health support into initiatives aimed at combating period poverty can be beneficial. Providing counseling services and support groups in areas with high rates of period poverty can help individuals process the emotional and psychological challenges they face. Creating community programs that address both menstrual health and mental well-being can foster a more well-rounded approach to the issue.

Period poverty is not just a matter of lacking physical resources; it deeply affects mental health and well-being. By recognizing and addressing the psychological impacts of period poverty, we can work towards more comprehensive solutions that support individuals not only physically but also emotionally. Efforts to reduce stigma, increase access to menstrual products, and provide mental health support are essential in ensuring that everyone can manage their menstruation with security and confidence.



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## The Hidden Health Crisis: Period Poverty's Effects on Well-Being

**Period poverty, characterized by inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products and education, poses a significant public health challenge in India. A vicious cycle of poor health outcomes, social stigma, and educational disparities is amplified by it, impacting the health and well-being of millions of women.**

In India alone, over **23 million** girls drop out of school each year due to menstruation-related issues. This statistic highlights the correlation between menstrual hygiene management and education. When women do not have access to safe menstrual hygiene products, they are left with unsafe alternatives, such as rags or leaves. Many women may use these alternatives repeatedly for an entire cycle, which can result in infections, including gynecological infections.

With limited access to menstrual hygiene products, women are left with a problem of poor hygiene practices. The Indian Journal of Community Medicine revealed that approximately 70% of Indian women suffer from reproductive tract infections, many of

which are linked to inadequate menstrual hygiene management practices. These figures clearly show a logic that connects period poverty with health problems.

Moreover, inadequate menstrual hygiene can lead to long-term health issues, including infertility. Conditions such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) often go undiagnosed in populations with limited access to healthcare and education. This lack of awareness can result in severe chronic pain and complications, significantly impacting women's quality of life.

Period poverty has both psychological and social impact. Low awareness of menstrual hygiene management is combined with societal taboos that intensify period poverty. Many girls and women who are socially impacted face stigma and feel shame associated with their period, resulting in feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. **WaterAid** estimated that **48%** of women surveyed in India felt embarrassment associated with menstruation. This provides insight into the emotional component of period poverty, as these feelings not only act as barriers for many girls or women to feel safe talking about their menstrual hygiene but also associate with mental health issues that carry through menstruation, throughout a woman's lifetime, and well after menopause, which also impacts their social lives.

Period poverty has serious implications for educational outcomes. One in five girls in India reportedly miss school during their periods. Consider an eager to learn student who is compelled to stay at home because she cannot afford the necessities to manage her menstruation. Her absence only contributes to lower educational performance and higher dropout rates, placing them in a deeper cycle of perpetual poverty. It should be noted that the mental toll of missed opportunities and lost potential is, unsurprisingly, heavy.

In conclusion, period poverty in India presents a significant health, psychological, and socio-economic problem that must be addressed immediately. All of these things are compounded by inadequate access to menstrual products, continued stigma around menstruation, and a lack of education around menstrual health. And these correlatives only sustain an already vicious cycle overall.

Collectively, however, all these problems can be solved by employing strategies to combat period poverty through expansion of the market for low-cost menstrual hygiene products, stigma-reducing educational programs, and curriculum education around menstrual health.

It is of utmost importance that communities collaborate to reach solutions that promote dignity in managing periods. When periods are managed with dignity, health improves, and people thrive. And prioritize that every person in it, free of the burdens of period poverty, can prosper. Together, let's dismantle the socio-cultural stigmas around menstruation to affect social change that benefits everyone in the community, which is what PadSeva represents. Come along with us as we inspire and implement change today to build a better tomorrow.



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## Period Poverty and its Effects on Employment & Career Opportunities for Women

**Period poverty refers to the inability to afford menstrual products or access proper sanitation facilities. It can have significant negative impacts on a woman's employment and career prospects.**

Women who cannot afford menstrual products may miss work during their periods due to discomfort from leakage or the lack of proper facilities. This absence can lead to decreased productivity and even loss of employment. The stigma attached to menstruation can cause women to feel humiliated or embarrassed, lowering their self-worth. Consequently, their ability to engage with clients and coworkers, as well as their overall work performance, may suffer.

Moreover, women who are unable to attend school or complete their education due to period poverty are likely to face limited career prospects. This situation perpetuates a cycle of inequality and poverty. Those experiencing period poverty may also be subjected to discrimination or harassment at work, particularly if they lack access to menstrual products or adequate facilities.

Additionally, a lack of access to menstrual products can lead to serious health problems, including infections, urinary tract infections, and reproductive health issues. These health complications can further hinder women's ability to work and pursue their careers.

This is an important issue that remains largely unspoken in society—women's access to sanitary products and the impact that poverty has on this critical aspect of health and well-being. As per the study of the Indian Ministry of Health, only 12% of menstruating women in India have access to hygienic sanitary products. The remaining 88% are dependent on unhygienic options like rags, cloth, sand, and leaves. This reliance puts them at risk of infectious

infections (UTIs), vaginal itching, and bacterial discharge. As a result of social shame, isolation, humiliation, and lack of access to products, more than 40% of students in India miss school when they are menstruating.

The corporate landscape, while evolving, still reflects a significant gender disparity. Women often find themselves underrepresented in leadership positions, earning lower salaries, and facing unique challenges that men do not. One such challenge is the impact of period poverty on women's employment and career opportunities. The introduction of paid menstrual leave in certain regions is a positive step toward addressing period poverty. By recognizing the physical and emotional challenges women face during menstruation, these laws aim to reduce absenteeism and create a more supportive work environment. However, it is crucial to ensure that these laws are implemented effectively and consistently across all sectors.

Public perception of period poverty has evolved, with increasing awareness and advocacy. Governments play a vital role in addressing this issue by implementing policies that promote menstrual hygiene, provide access to affordable menstrual products, and create supportive environments for women in the workplace.

To truly understand the progress made, it's essential to look back at the historical context. Women's participation in the workforce has increased significantly over the centuries, but there is still room for improvement. By comparing the number of women employed today to historical figures, we can gain valuable insights into the challenges and triumphs of women's economic empowerment.

Period poverty is a complex issue with far-reaching consequences. It not only affects women's physical health but also has a significant impact on their economic well-being. By addressing this issue through policies, education, and societal change, we can create a more equitable and inclusive corporate landscape.



Writer  
**Jigna Yaganti**

It is imperative that corporations and governments take proactive steps to address period poverty. This includes providing access to menstrual products, implementing supportive workplace policies, and promoting menstrual hygiene education. By working together, we can create a world where women can thrive in their careers without being hindered by the challenges of period poverty.



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## Period in culture

**Women and girl's periods are a normal natural occurrence, but they lack the basic necessity products to manage it throughout the month.**

A global problem and thrives especially in the low and middle income countries. These include; poor access to affordable menstrual products, lack of proper amenities during the period such as latrines and the lack of education on proper menstrual hygiene practices.

It is crucial to address period poverty to promote equity, the success of education systems, the welfare of girls and women and their overall economic independence. The lack of accessibility of menstrual products and hygiene can adversely affect girls' attendance to school and may pose difficulty for women in working.

Said this, attaining menstrual equity is of great importance in creating a society that is sensitive and non-discriminative to every individual. This study aims to evaluate the global extent of period poverty, focusing on the regions most affected, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and conflict-impacted areas in the Middle East.



Writer  
**Yasaswini**

Menstrual product scarcity is a severe problem in the Sub-Saharan region, and the countries that are affected most are Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan. Currently, **65%** of women and girls in Kenya lack the basic necessity of sanitary pads, thereby influencing their school attendance patterns. In Uganda, one in each ten female learners misses school due to menstruation, and in South Sudan, **70%** girls cannot afford basic sanitary products, some abandon school.

South Asia faces these challenges in the similar way especially in the case of India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Currently, in India alone, around **23 million** young girls drop out of school every year as they cannot afford good menstrual hygiene products and **70%** of these women cannot even afford to buy a pad. In rural Nepal around **50%** of girl child are bound by culture in terms of menstruation, and **30%** of school going girls in Bangladesh miss school due to improper hygiene facilities and instruments.

Latin America and the Middle East regions are also highly impacted. In Bolivia, only half of school going girls have access to proper MH facilities and in Venezuela **90%** of women cannot even access sanitary products because of economic problems. AMU documented that **60%** of women and girls in Yemen and **50%** of women and girls in Syria, conflict affected areas, did not have access to menstrual products which multiplied their vulnerability to health problems and social marginalization.

A brief on UNICEF's MHM interventions Period Poverty is something that UNICEF's Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) programs have primarily addressed in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. These initiatives give information, and share with sanitary items and washable pad, and make a call for better washroom facilities for learners and that is solving MHM.

UNICEF has seen millions of girls in countries such as Kenya and Uganda benefited from there menstrual campaign hence minimizing cases of absenteeism due to menses.

These programs of promoting menstruation and deconstruction of minority taboos have brought positive change in gender equity and girl child education particularly in the most conservative societies.

Period poverty is a pervasive issue that transcends borders and disproportionately affects women and girls in developing regions and conflict zones. The lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, proper sanitation, and education exacerbates gender inequality, disrupts education, and harms the health and dignity of millions. Urgent action is required at both the policy and grassroots levels to address this global issue, ensuring that women and girls everywhere have the resources and support they need to manage menstruation with dignity.



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## Cultural Perspectives on Menstruation: A Journey Through South India

In South India, menstruation is often shrouded in taboo and silence. Many women grow up internalizing the belief that their periods are "impure" or "shameful," which significantly affects their daily lives. The stigma around menstruation creates barriers that limit their participation in various aspects of life, from education to career opportunities. Despite this, change is slowly emerging as communities begin to challenge these deep-seated beliefs.

In many South Indian communities, menstruation is viewed as an impurity or even as an illness. Women and girls are often restricted from participating in religious activities, temple visits, and even daily household tasks during their menstrual cycles. In some rural areas, menstruation is seen as a curse from the gods, resulting in social exclusion. This isolation can have devastating consequences, especially for young girls. A study by the Menstrual Health Alliance India reports that up to 23% of girls in rural areas face social exclusion during their menstrual cycles. This exclusion not only affects their emotional well-being but also interrupts their education, as many girls miss school during this time, ultimately hindering their future opportunities.

Additionally, the lack of proper education about menstruation in rural areas exacerbates the problem. Without access to menstrual hygiene products, many women resort to unsafe methods like using old rags, husks, ash, or leaves to manage their menstrual flow. According to DNA India, 64% of menstruating women in India rely on such unsafe practices, which can lead to long-term health complications, including infections and reproductive health issues.

Compounding these issues is the lack of awareness among men, who often view menstruation as solely a "women's issue." This mindset reinforces the stigma and prevents meaningful conversations about menstrual health. Educating everyone—both men and women—is crucial for creating a more supportive environment. Men need to be part of the conversation to help shift the narrative from silence to understanding.

Efforts to promote menstrual health education are slowly gaining momentum. Schools and NGOs across South India are starting to integrate menstrual health awareness into their curriculums. These initiatives aim to normalize the conversation around menstruation, helping to dispel myths and break the taboo. By involving men in these discussions, communities can create a more inclusive environment where women feel supported.

Interestingly, some communities in South India celebrate the onset of menstruation with ceremonies like the "Ritushuddhi" or "Half-Saree Function," which marks a girl's transition into womanhood. These ceremonies are often filled with blessings, gifts, and festivities. While such traditions can be a positive acknowledgment of menstruation, they often coexist with the persistent taboos that still affect many women. The contradiction between celebration and exclusion highlights the complexity of cultural attitudes toward menstruation in South India.

Breaking the silence surrounding menstruation is crucial for creating a more inclusive and supportive society. Encouraging open discussions, educating young girls, and challenging outdated beliefs are key to shifting the narrative. Menstrual health should be treated as a matter of comfort and pride rather than embarrassment or shame.

By continuing to challenge these societal norms, South India is slowly but surely changing the conversation around menstruation. Grassroots movements, social media campaigns, and local NGOs are playing a vital role in promoting menstrual health and awareness. These efforts are helping to foster an environment where menstruation is recognized as a natural and essential part of life, rather than a source of shame.

Addressing the stigma surrounding menstruation in South India requires a collective effort from all sectors of society. Education, open dialogue, and increased awareness are key to empowering women and creating a culture where menstruation is embraced as a normal aspect of life. Through these efforts, future generations can experience menstruation not as a burden, but as a natural and celebrated part of their journey into womanhood.



Writer

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