



Survey on Menstrual Poverty - *results*

Survey on Menstrual Poverty

This report presents the results of a survey on menstrual poverty. The survey was conducted as a part of the activities of the project *Tetka Perioda (Aunt Flow)* implemented by the Association for Human Rights and Active Citizenship PaRiter and Tiiiit! Inc., and financed by Frida – The Young Feminist Fund.

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1. About the survey

The research aimed at gathering information on the use, consumption and availability of menstrual products, the conditions of maintaining menstrual hygiene and the shame associated with menstruation.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire from mid-September to early October 2020. The questionnaire was distributed through social networking services (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), mailing lists and media. The survey was open to persons older than 16 who have had menstruation within the previous year, regardless of their gender. More than 6,000 people filled in the questionnaire. Only the results from completed questionnaires were included in the analysis.

The statements in the questionnaire written in female gender, as well as those in this survey report, are gender neutral.

2. Who are the participants of the survey?

A total of 6,048 people participated in the survey. The average age of participants is 30.96 (SD=8.65). All counties of the Republic of Croatia are represented, with the highest number of participants coming from the City of Zagreb (22%), and the least from Lika-Senj County (0.7%). In terms of the size of their place of residence, most participants live in a city with more than 100,000 residents (35.6%). Regarding their level of education, 46% have completed secondary education and 44% higher education. The majority of participants is employed or self-employed (58.9%), 4.9% are high school students and 16.9% are university students. Personal monthly income of 48.5% of participants is less than 5,000 kn, while 39.4% has a monthly income of more than 5,000 kn. Participants who stated that they did not know the answer to this question (12.1%) belong to the following categories: unemployed, students without a student job and high school students.¹ When high school students are excluded from the data, the personal monthly income of 49.0% of the participants is up to 5,000 kn, 41.2% have incomes higher than 5,000 kn, and 9.8% did not know how to answer this question. Approximately half of the participants live in four-member households (26.7%) or three-member households (24.9%). Persons with disabilities make up for 1.2% of the sample, and most of them have musculoskeletal conditions (32.9%). The majority of participants identify themselves as cis women (98.6%). The tables show data collected on the participants in more detail. Frequencies (f) and percentages (%) are given for individual categories.

County	f	%	County	f	%
1. Zagreb County	424	7.0	12. Brod-Posavina County	184	3.0
2. Krapina-Zagorje County	124	2.0	13. Zadar County	131	2.2
3. Sisak-Moslavina County	207	3.4	14. Osijek-Baranja County	460	7.6
4. Karlovac County	165	2.7	15. Šibenik-Knin County	118	1.9
5. Varaždin County	218	3.6	16. Vukovar-Syrmia County	196	3.2
6. Koprivnica-Križevci County	161	2.6	17. Split-Dalmacija County	355	5.8
7. Bjelovar-Bilogora County	147	2.4	18. Istra County	385	6.3
8. Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	960	15.8	19. Dubrovnik-Neretva County	128	2.1
9. Lika-Senj County	41	0.7	20. Međimurje County	136	2.2
10. Virovitica-Podravina County	108	1.8	21. City of Zagreb	1338	22.0
11. Požega-Slavonija County	98	1.6			

Size of place of residence	f	%
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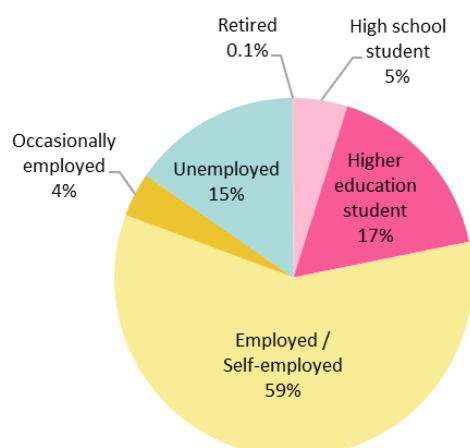
Self-assessment of their socioeconomic status	f	%
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¹ The correlation between the self-assessment of their personal socioeconomic status and the incomes listed is highly significant (participants with lower incomes show a lower self-assessment of their socioeconomic status; Spearman $\rho = .46$, $p < .01$, $N = 5,347$)

City with more than 100 000 residents	216 7	35.6
City with 50 000 to 100 000 residents	593	9.7
City with 20 000 to 50 000 residents	630	10.4
City with 10 000 to 20 000 residents	508	8.3
City up to 10 000 residents	676	11.1
Village	151 0	24.8
Level of education	f	%
Completed elementary school	319	5.2
Completed high school	279 6	46.0
Completed university or a professional study program	267 6	44.0
Completed postgraduate study program	293	4.8
Current status	f	%
High school student	296	4.9
Higher education student	103 1	16.9
Employed/ Self-employed	358 1	58.9
Employed part-time (occasionally)	241	4.0
Unemployed	926	15.2
Retired	9	0.1

Highly below average/worse than others	150	2.5
Somewhat below average/worse than others	827	13.6
Average	368 4	60.6
Somewhat above average/better than others	134 7	22.1
Highly above average/better than others	76	1.2
Personal monthly income	f	%
Less than 3,000 HRK	134 1	22.0
Between 3,000 and 4,000 HRK	800	13.1
Between 4,000 and 5,000 HRK	810	13.3
Between 5,000 and 6,000 HRK	697	11.5
Between 6,000 and 7,000 HRK	661	10.9
Between 7,000 and 8,000 HRK	427	7.0
Between 8,000 and 9,000 HRK	204	3.4
Above 9,000 HRK	407	6.7
I do not know how to answer this question	737	12.1
Number of household members	f	%
1	440	7.2
2	134 6	22.1
3	151 6	24.9
4	162 5	26.7
5	712	11.7
6 or more	445	7.3

Parts of the survey related to use, consumption and availability of menstrual products, the conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene at home and the shame associated with menstruation include data on all participants (N=6,084). The part of the survey related to the conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene in school includes data from high school students (N=296), while the part related to the conditions at universities includes data from university students (N=1,031). The part of the survey examining conditions at work includes data from participants who are employed/self-employed or occasionally employed (freelancing, seasonal jobs or working while studying), and who carry out their work fully or partially at their workplace (N=3,952).



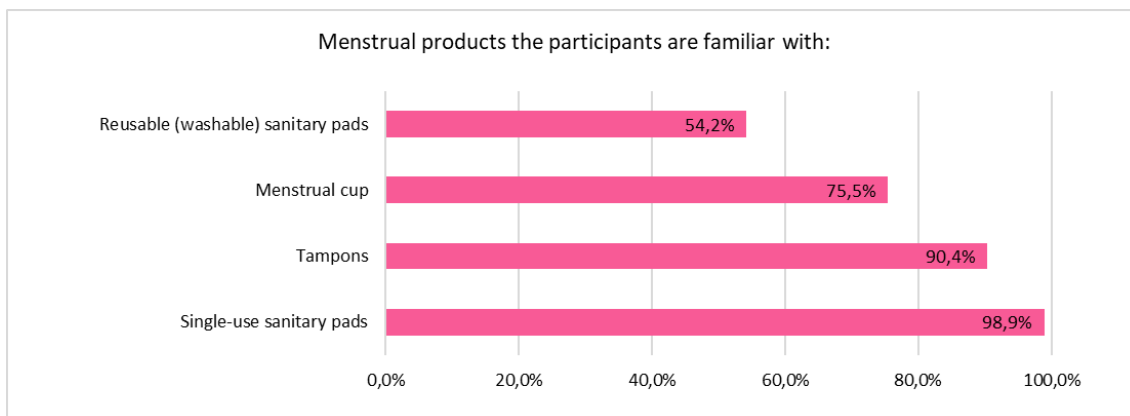
Slightly less than a quarter of all participants (24%) stated that they have not chosen a gynecologist through the Croatian Health Insurance Fund. However, the analysis by groups shows that 76.7% of high school students do not have a gynecologist assigned, as well as 40.6% of university students. Among the other groups of participants, 17.2% do not have a gynecologist assigned.

3. Use, consumption and availability of menstrual products

The survey tested the participants' familiarity with specific menstrual products (personal hygiene products used during menstruation: e.g. sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, etc.), their use, consumption and availability.

Familiarity with menstrual products and their usage

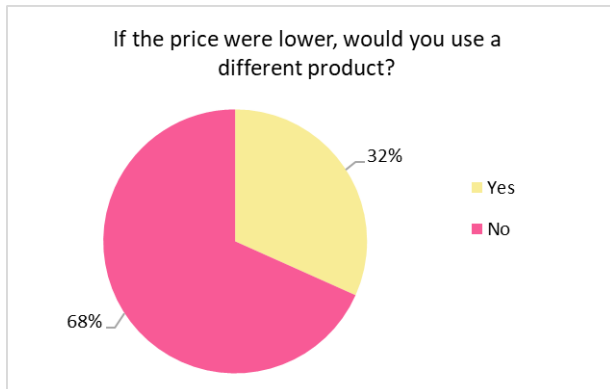
Most participants are familiar with disposable sanitary pads (98.9%) and tampons (90.4%). 75.5% of participants are familiar with the menstrual cup, and 54.2% with reusable or washable sanitary pads. A small portion of participants stated that they are familiar with other menstrual products, such as menstrual underwear (1.7%), menstrual disc (0.3%) and menstrual sponge (0.3%).



Most participants most often use disposable sanitary pads (74.1%), 13.6% use tampons, 9.1% a menstrual cup, and 2.6% reusable (washable) sanitary pads. 1% of participants use something else (a combination of disposable pads and tampons, a combination of disposable pads and a menstrual cup, menstrual underwear, menstrual disc, adult diapers, cotton wool, toilet paper or napkins).



If the price were lower, slightly less than a third of respondents (31.7%) would prefer using products other than the ones they are using at the moment. Among them, 17.2% state that they would prefer to use a menstrual cup, 5.6% disposable sanitary pads, 5.4% reusable (washable) pads, 2.7% tampons, and 0.7% something else (period panties/menstrual underwear, disposable eco-friendly sanitary pads).

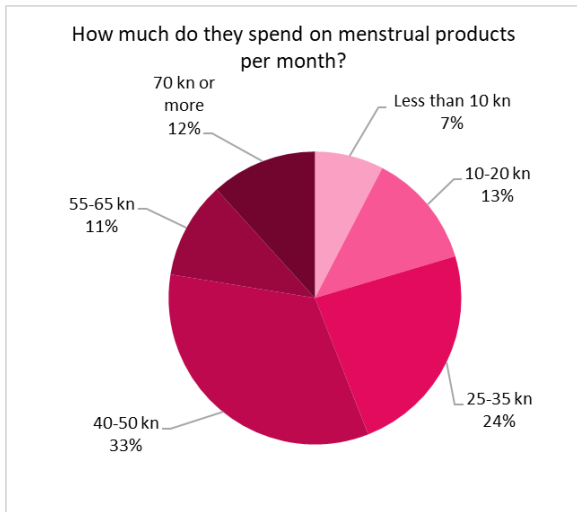


The participants were divided in three groups according to their personal monthly income (less than 3,000 kn, between 3,000 and 5,000 kn, and more than 5,000 kn), excluding high school students and participants who did not know how to answer the question (N=5,220). 23.7% of the participants have a personal monthly income lower than 3,000 kn, 30.6% have an income between 3,000 and 5,000 kn, and 45.7% more than 5,000 kn. The relationship between personal monthly income and the participants' preferred choice of menstrual products related to their price was also examined. The results show that a significantly higher number of participants who would use something different (if the price were lower) belong to the group with the lowest income (up to 3,000 kn) and the group whose income is between 3,000 and 5,000 kn, while a lower number was found among the group whose income is higher than 5,000 kn.²

Menstrual products and monthly consumption

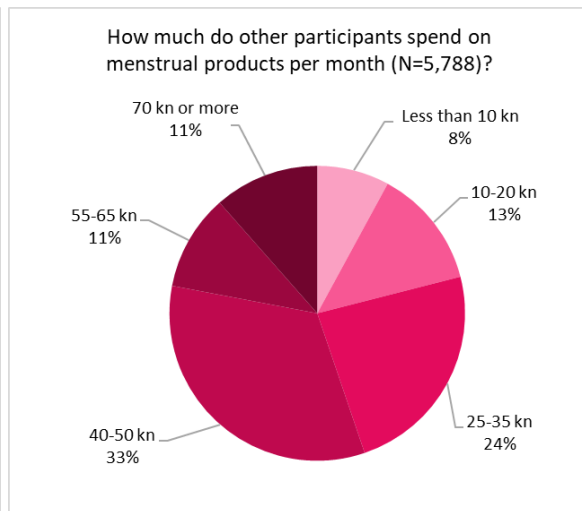
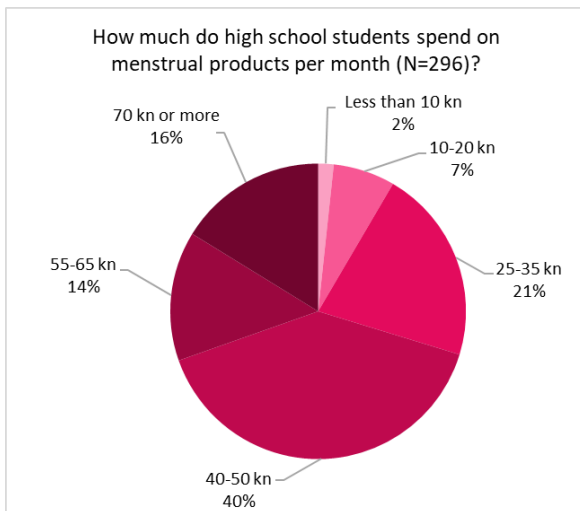
The participants were asked how much they spend per month on menstrual products. 44.1% spend 35 kn or less, and more than a half (55.9%) spend 40 kn or more. One third of participants (33.5%) spend 40 to 50 kn monthly on menstrual products, and 22.4% more than 55 kn.

² ($\chi^2=146.28$, $df=2$, $N=5220$, $p<.001$); Standardized residuals: Would not use/income up to 3,000 kn (-9.5), Would not use/income between 3,000 and 5,000 kn (-3.5), Would not use/income higher than 5,000 kn (11.3), Would use/income up to 3,000 kn (9.5), Would use/income between 3,000 and 5,000 kn (3.5), Would use/income higher than 5,000 kn (-11.3)



When the answers of high school students and answers from other participants are analyzed separately, the following results are obtained:

- 29.7% of high school students spend 35 kn or less per month on menstrual products, and 70.3% spend 40 kn or more per month. Among them, 39.9% spend from 40 to 50 kn per month, and 30.4% spend 55 kn or more per month.
- 44.8% of other participants spend 35 kn or less per month on menstrual products, and 55.2% spend 40 kn or more per month. One third (33.2%) spend 40 to 50 kn per month on menstrual products, and 22.0% 55 kn or more.

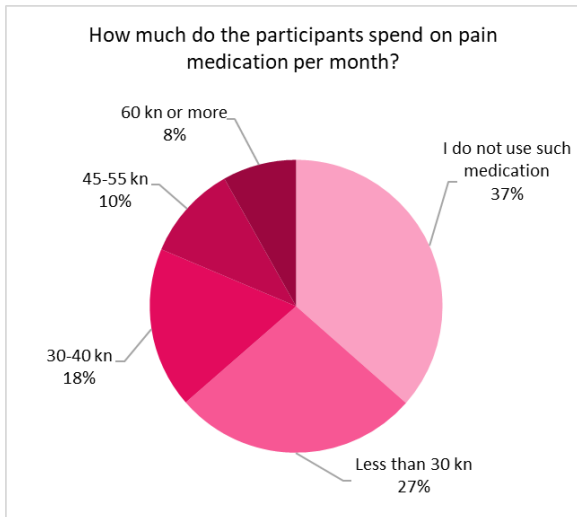


The analysis of how much the participants spend monthly on menstrual products in relation to their personal monthly income (excluding high school students; N=5,220), has shown the following results:

- 46.7% of participants who have a personal monthly income 3,000 kn or lower spend up to 35 kn per month on menstrual products, and 53.3% spend 40 kn or more. 31.8% spend from 40 to 50 kn per month, while 21.5% spend 55 kn or more per month.
- 41.8% of participants whose personal monthly income is between 3,000 and 5,000 kn spend up to 35 kn per month on menstrual products, and 58.2% spend 40kn or more. 34.0% of them spend 40 to 50 kn, and 24.2% spend 55 kn or more per month.
- 45.9% of participants with a personal monthly income higher than 5,000 kn spend up to 35 kn per

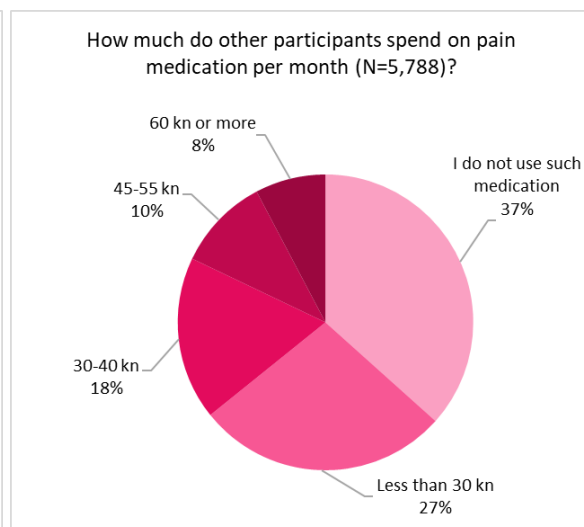
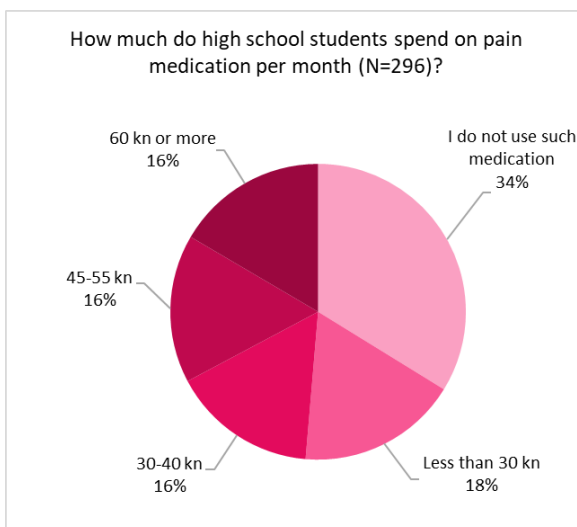
month on menstrual products, and 54.1% spend 40 kn or more. 33.0% of them spend from 40 to 50 kn per month, and 21.1% 55 kn or more.

The participants were also asked how much they spend on pain medication during menstruation. 27.1% of participants spend 30 kn or less, and 36.4% spend 30 kn or more. 36.5% stated that they do not use such medication.



When groups of high school students and other participants are analyzed separately in terms of how much they spend on pain medication, the results are the following:

- 17.6% of high school students spend 30 kn or less, while 48.6% spend 30 kn or more. 33.8% do not use such medication.
- 27.6% of the rest of the participants spend 30 kn or less, and 35.8% spend 30 kn or more. 36.6% do not use such medication.



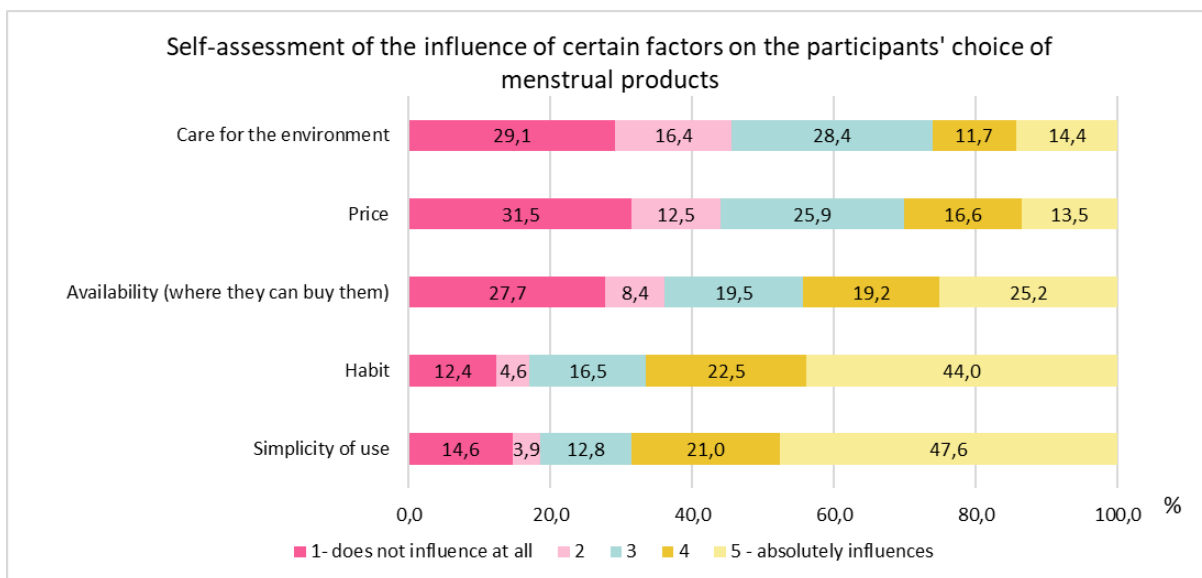
The analysis of monthly spending on pain medication in relation to their personal monthly income (excluding high school students, N=5,220) shows the following results:

- 27.8% of participants whose personal monthly income is up to 3,000 kn spend 30 kn or less for pain medication, and 41.4% spend 30 kn or more. 30.8% do not use such medication.

- 25.3% of participants whose personal monthly income is between 3,000 and 5,000 kn spend 30 kn or less per month on pain medication, while 41.0% spend 30 kn or more. 33.7% do not use such medication.
- 29.6% of participants with a personal monthly income higher than 5,000 kn spend up to 30 kn per month on pain medication, and 29.1% spend 30 kn or more. 41.3% do not use such medication.

Choosing menstrual products

On a five-point rating scale (1 – not at all, 5 – to a great extent), the participants assessed to what extent the price of menstrual products, their availability (where they can buy them), ease of use, habits and environmental concerns affect their choice of menstrual products. The results show a relatively high self-assessment of how much do ease of use (C=4, Q₃₋₁=2) and their habits (C=4, Q₃₋₁=2) impact their choices. Slightly less than 70% of participants rated these factors with the highest scores of 4 and 5. Self-assessment of the availability (C=3, Q₃₋₁=4), price (C=3, Q₃₋₁=3) and environmental care (C=3, Q₃₋₁=3) is of greater variability and rated slightly lower. This implies the participants consider these factors as a moderate influence on their choice of menstrual products.³ The participants also listed other factors that influence their decision: sense of comfort, sense of safety, the extent of the bleeding, practicality, the quality of products, materials, health reasons, allergies and recommendations.



The difference between high school students and other groups of participants in the assessment of different factors influencing the choice of menstrual products was also tested.⁴ A significant difference was observed in the assessment of the influence of availability and ease of use of menstrual products on their choice, with high school students stating they have less influence on their decision. No significant difference was obtained for other factors.

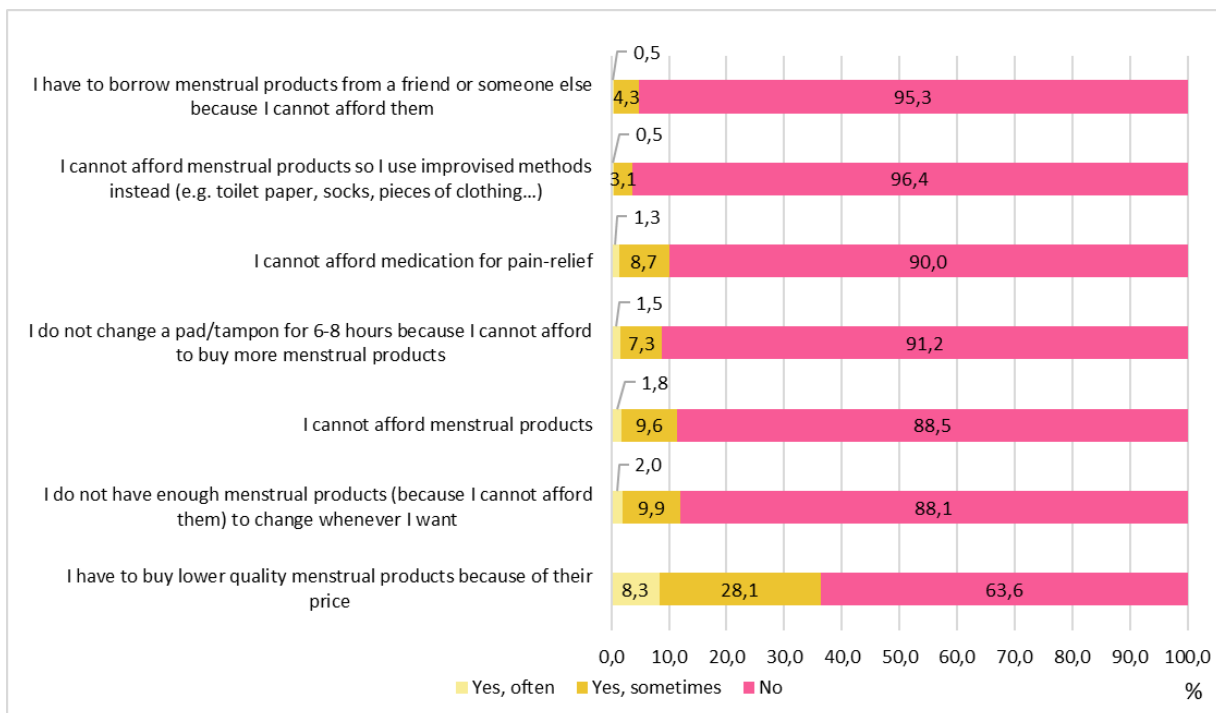
³ C – median, Q₃₋₁ – interquartile range

⁴ Mann Whitney U test: Availability (U=746830.00, Z=-3.83, p<.01), Ease of use (U=706344.50, Z=-5.44, p<.01), Cost (U=847484.50, Z=-0.32, p>.05); Habit (U=848497.50, Z=-0.29, p>.05), Care for the environment (U=804787.00, Z=-1.81, p>.05)

Availability of menstrual products

The participants assessed whether and how often they find themselves in situations which affect their (in)ability to afford menstrual products.

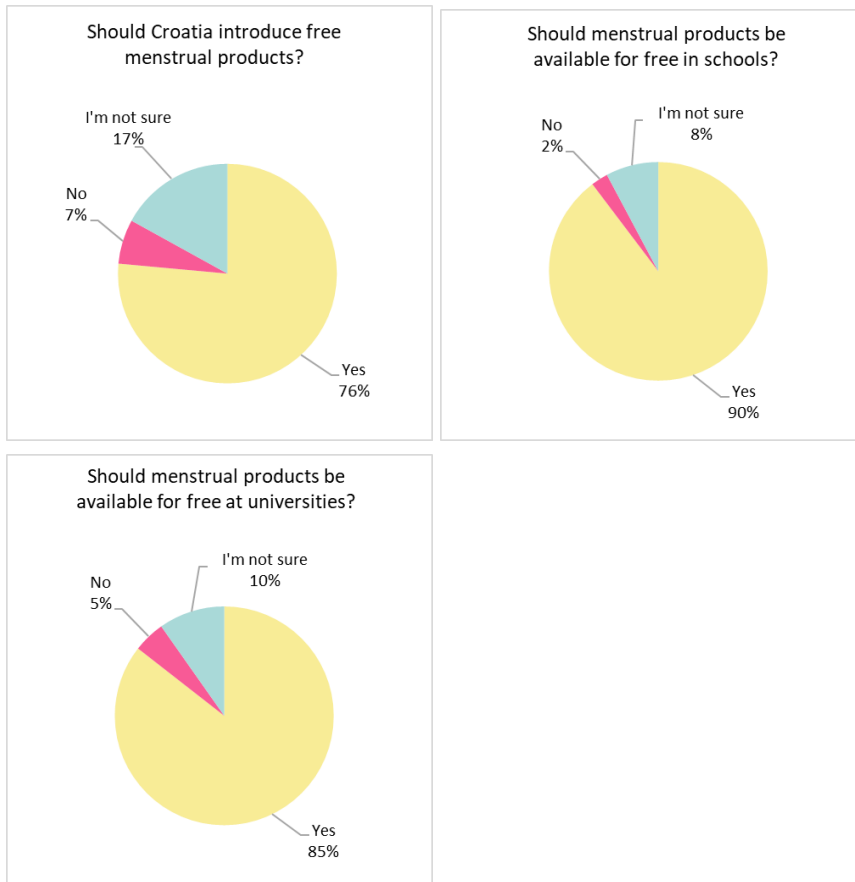
More than a third of participants (36.4%) stated that they have to buy menstrual products of lower quality because of their price, with 8.3% stating that happens often, and 28.1% stating that happens sometimes. More than 10% of participants stated that they find themselves in situations in which they do not have enough menstrual products to change them whenever they want (11.9%), as well as that they cannot afford menstrual products (11.9%). 10% found themselves in situations where they could not afford painkillers during menstruation, and 8.8% stated they find themselves in situations in which they do not change the pad/tampon for 6-8 hours because they cannot afford more menstrual products. A lower percentage found themselves in situations in which they had to borrow menstrual products from a friend or another person because they could not afford them (4.7%).



3.6% of participants stated they find themselves in situations in which they cannot afford menstrual products so they improvise instead (3.1% sometimes, 0.5% often). The improvised material they use is most often toilet paper, while a part of them uses pieces of fabric/cloth/cut-out clothes. Several respondents stated using gauze, handkerchiefs, cotton wool, towels, baby diapers, socks, paper towels/napkins or bandages.

Should menstrual products be available free of charge?

Most respondents believe menstrual products should be free of charge.



76.4% of participants believe Croatia should introduce free menstrual products. 89.7% think menstrual products should be available in schools for free, and 85.5% think they should be available for free at universities.

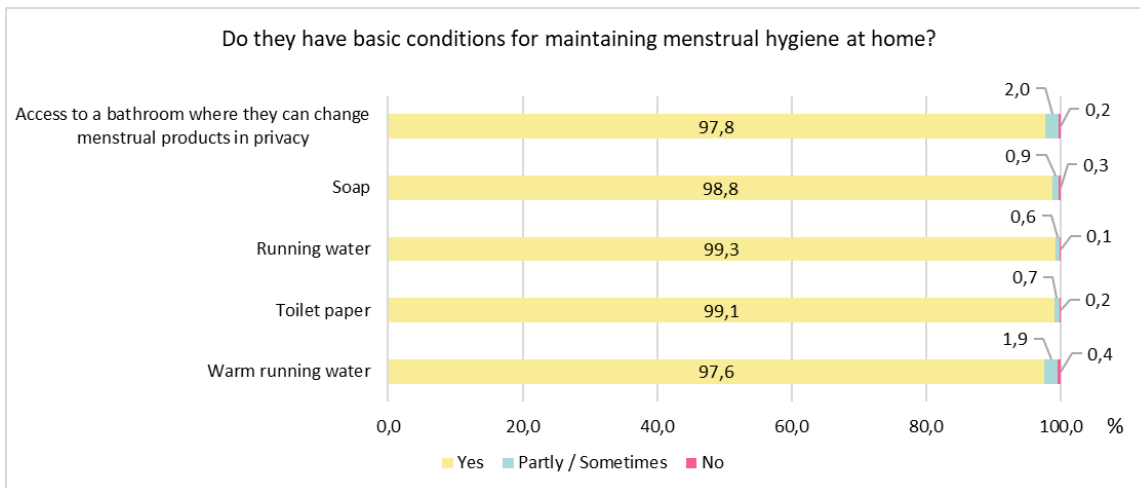
94.9% high school students stated they would use free menstrual products in schools, with 53.4% stating they would use them often, and 41.5% sometimes. 93.9% of higher education students stated they would use free menstrual products at their universities, with 49.6% stating they would use them often, and 44.3% sometimes.

4. Menstrual hygiene

One of the aims of the research was to get insight into the conditions of maintaining menstrual hygiene, considering the conditions the participants have at home. Furthermore, conditions at work, in high school and universities were examined on subsamples of participants.

4.1. Conditions at home

Data gathered on basic conditions at home needed to maintain hygiene during menstruation show that some participants do not have them. The participants answered whether or not a certain condition was available to them at home (*yes, partly/sometimes, no*). Warm running water is not available to 0.4% of participants, and 1.9% has access to it only partly/sometimes. Soap is not available to 0.3%, and only partly/sometimes available to 0.9%. Toilet paper is not available to 0.2% of the participants, and 0.7% have access to it only partly/sometimes. A bathroom where they can change in private is not available to 0.2% of the participants, and 2.0% has access to it only partly/sometimes. Running water is not available to 0.1% of the participants, and 0.6% has access to it only partly/sometimes.

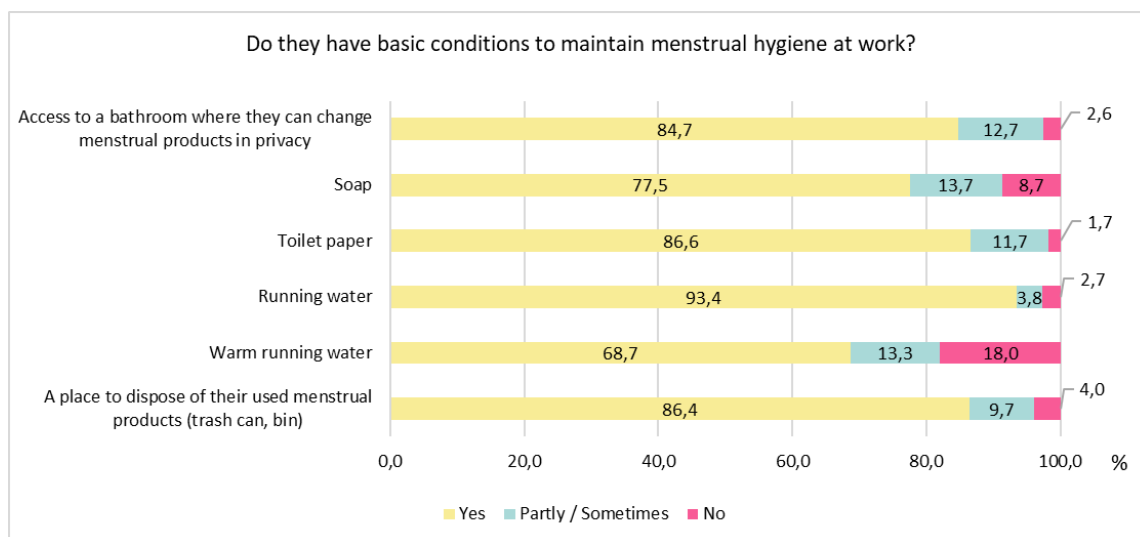


4.2. Conditions at work

The participants of the section of the survey aimed at examining work conditions related to maintaining menstrual hygiene and working during menstruation were people who are employed and do their job partially (14.2%) or entirely (78.3%) at their workplace (N=3,952). The participants who do freelancing work or work part-time referred to their current or last job and those who work multiple jobs referred to the job they spend most of their time at.

Basic conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene at work

A number of participants claimed that their workplace does not have basic conditions necessary to maintain hygiene during menstruation. 18% do not have access to warm running water and 13.3% have it only partly/sometimes. 8.7% do not have soap and 13.7% have it only partly/sometimes. 2.6% of participants do not have access to a bathroom where they can have privacy to change menstrual products and 12.7% have it only partly/sometimes. 4.0% of them do not have a place where they can dispose of their used menstrual products and 9.7% have it only partly/sometimes. 2.7% of participants do not have running water and 3.8% have it only partly/sometimes.



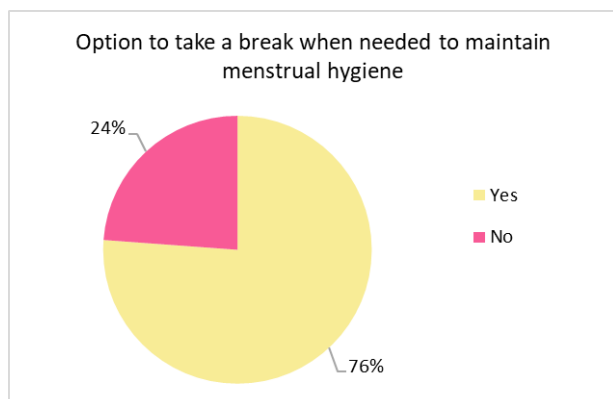
When analyzing answers only from those participants who are *employed* and do their job exclusively at their workplace (N=2,753), not taking into account answers from self-employed participants, those who freelance, those working part-time or student jobs or those who work partially from home, we get similar results:

	Yes (%)	Partly/sometimes (%)	No (%)
Access to a bathroom where they can change menstrual products in privacy	85.8	12.0	2.3
Soap	79.1	11.7	9.2
Toilet paper	88.6	9.8	1.6
Running water	94.1	3.1	2.8
Warm running water	69.5	12.3	18.2
A place to dispose of their used menstrual products (trash can, bin)	87.5	8.3	4.1

Most participants (59.6%) consider that bathroom access at their workplace is not adapted for people with disabilities. When analyzing actual responses from those participants with disabilities (N=38) it shows a similar result (57.9% consider that bathroom access at their workplace is not adapted for people with

disabilities). In the subgroup of *employed* participants who do their job exclusively at their workplace (N=2,753), 62.1% said that bathroom access at their workplace is not adapted for people with disabilities.

23.8% of participants said that at work they do not have the option to take a break when needed to maintain menstrual hygiene. When analyzing responses from the subgroup of *employed* participants who do their job exclusively at their workplace (N=2,753) they show that 26.0% do not have the option to take a break when needed to maintain menstrual hygiene.

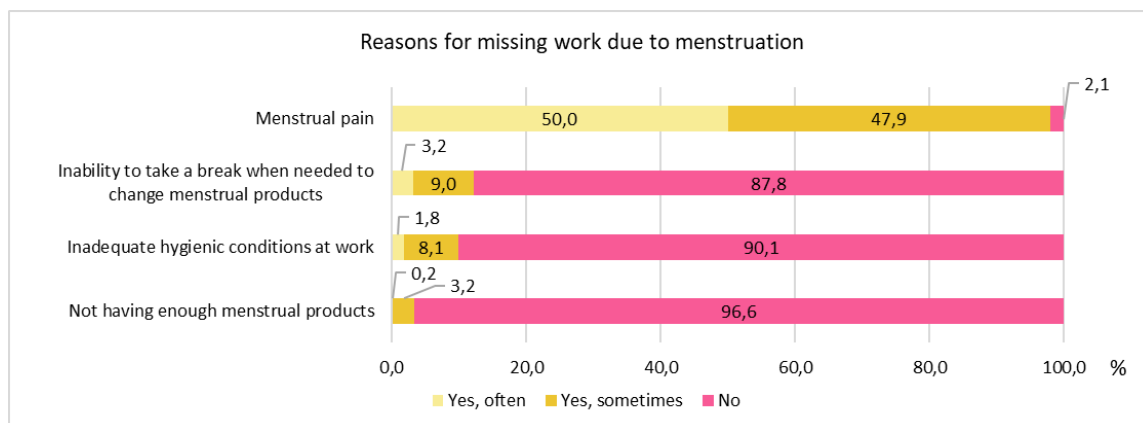


Missing work due to menstruation

Because of menstruation, 28.6% of participants has missed work at least once.

71.4% of participants never missed work due to menstruation, 24.6% on average misses work less than one day a month, 3.1% one day a month, 0.7% two days a month, 0.1% three days a month and 0.1% four days a month.

Within the group of participants who stated that they missed work at least once because of menstruation (N=1,130), 97.9% said that it was due to menstrual pains (50.0% often, 47.9% sometimes). The inability to take a break to change menstrual products as a reason to have missed work was listed by 12.2% of participants (3.2% often, 8.1% sometimes), inadequate hygienic conditions at work was listed by 9.9% (1.8% often, 8.1% sometimes) and not having enough menstrual supplies as a reason to have missed work was listed by 3.4% (0.2% often, 3.2% sometimes).



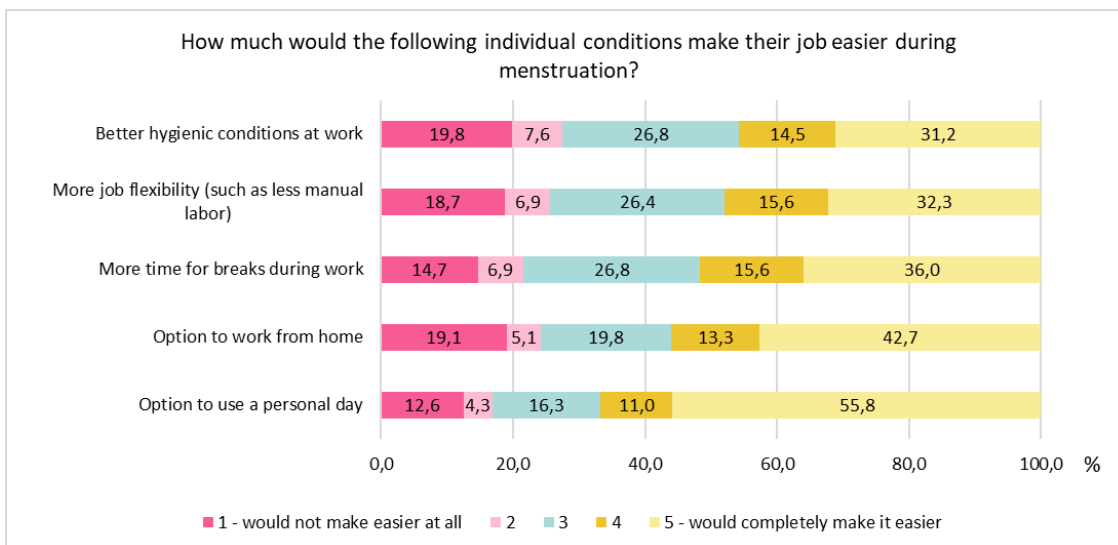
As additional reasons for missing work due to menstruation the participants listed various physical symptoms (migraines, headaches, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, slightly elevated temperature, loss of consciousness, tiredness, exhaustion, indigestion, diarrhea, vertigo), as well as profuse bleeding.

Participants who miss work due to menstruation most often use personal days for this (46.8%), 22.9% use sick leave, 12.5% use their vacation days and 4.8% use the option to work from home. 13.0% of participants listed other answers (an agreement with their employer, an arrangement with their co-workers, switching shifts, subsequent compensation of working days, missing work and relinquishing paid hours in student/freelance jobs).

The analysis of missing work due to menstruation has been additionally preformed on the subgroup of *employed* participants who do their job exclusively at their workplace (N=2,753). Because of menstruation, 24.2% of participants have missed work at least once. 75.8% of participants never missed work due to menstruation, 21.8% on average misses work less than one day a month, 2.0% one day a month, 0.3% two days a month, 0.1% three days a month and 0.1% four days a month. Within the group of participants who stated that they missed work at least once due to menstruation (N=666), 97.3% said that it was due to menstrual pains (57.9% often, 49.4% sometimes). The inability to take a break to change menstrual products as a reason to have missed work was listed by 11.7% of participants (2.8% often, 8.9% sometimes), inadequate hygienic conditions at work was listed by 9.5% (2.0% often, 7.5% sometimes) and not having enough menstrual supplies as a reason to have missed work was listed by 3.8% (0.3% often, 3.5% sometimes).

How to make work easier during menstruation?

The participants used a 5 degree assessment scale to answer the question how much would certain conditions make their work life easier during menstruation (from 1 – *wouldn't make it easier at all* to 5 – *would completely make it easier*). Considering the fact that these conditions were rated by participants whose actual work conditions and work demands greatly differ, it's important to stress that the results shown refer to all participants regardless of their current work conditions and other conditions at their workplace. The one condition that the participants found would have been most useful at making their job easier during menstruation was the option of using a personal day (C=5, Q₃₋₁=2). 66.8% of participants rated this condition with either 4 or 5 on the assessment scale. Also, the possibility of working from home was also highly rated (C=4, Q₃₋₁=2), as well as more time for breaks during work (C=4, Q₃₋₁=2). Moderate assessment grades were given to having a higher degree of flexibility in their job (C=3, Q₃₋₁=3) and better hygienic conditions (C=3, Q₃₋₁=3), which would also somewhat make their work life easier during menstruation.



The analysis of missing work due to menstruation has been additionally performed on the subgroup of *employed* participants who do their job exclusively at their workplace (N=2,753). The one condition that the participants found would have been most useful at making their job easier during menstruation was the possibility of using a personal day (C=5, Q₃₋₁=2). 67.6% of participants rated this condition with either 4 or 5 on the assessment scale. Also, having more time for breaks during working hours was also highly rated (C=4, Q₃₋₁=2), as well as the option to work from home (C=4, Q₃₋₁=2). They also stated that having a higher degree of flexibility in their job (C=3, Q₃₋₁=3) and better hygienic conditions (C=3, Q₃₋₁=3) would also make working during menstruation somewhat easier.

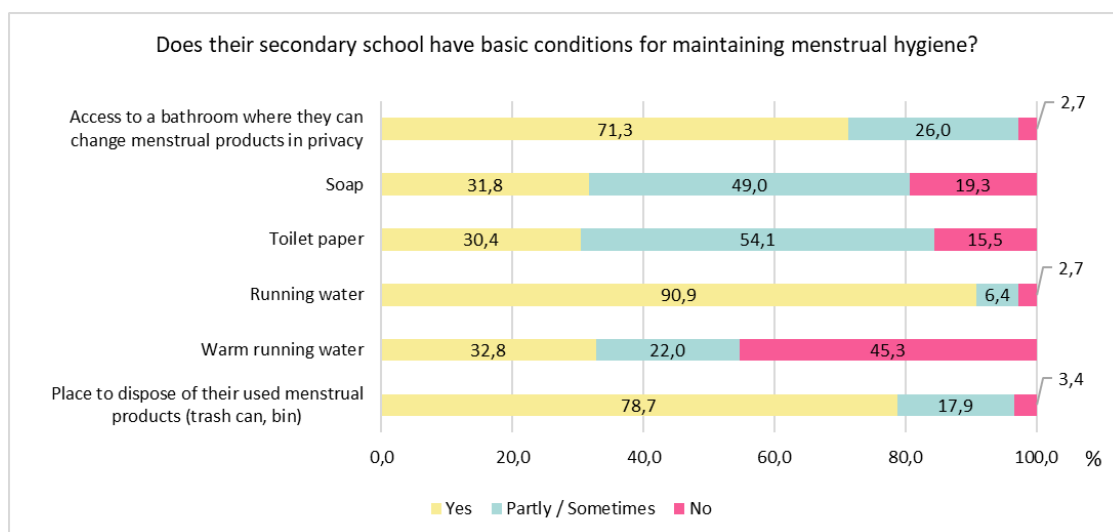
On an open-ended question about other conditions that would make working during menstruation easier on them, the participants mostly referred to conditions related to bathroom facilities; their cleanliness, available sinks not placed directly in front of the toilets, higher number of toilets, their closeness/availability, higher level of bathroom privacy, showers, bidet, availability of handicapped stalls and such. They also stated that a higher level of understanding (especially when it comes to menstrual pains) from their superiors and co-workers would help greatly when it comes to making work easier. Also, they pointed out that it would be very helpful to have of menstrual supplies available at work, machines with hygienic supplies, a place (locker) in the bathroom where they could store their own menstrual supplies, the option to bring menstrual supplies in the factory drive where they work and the availability of painkillers. A number of participants also mentioned the option to wear more comfortable clothes (work robes) and better organized public transport (shorter commute to work). A number of participants further stress that the option of using a personal day off during menstruation would make things easier for them, more flexibility in terms of sitting down, using a chair when working the register, a place for them to rest, being excused from doing hard manual labor and working on the field. They again stressed the importance of being able to take bathroom breaks when needed, working fewer hours, flexible working hours, ability to use more breaks, using breaks when needed and having shorter meetings.

4.3. Conditions in secondary schools

In the section of the survey which relates to maintaining menstrual hygiene and conditions in secondary schools we had 296 participants who were high school students.⁵

Basic conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene in secondary schools

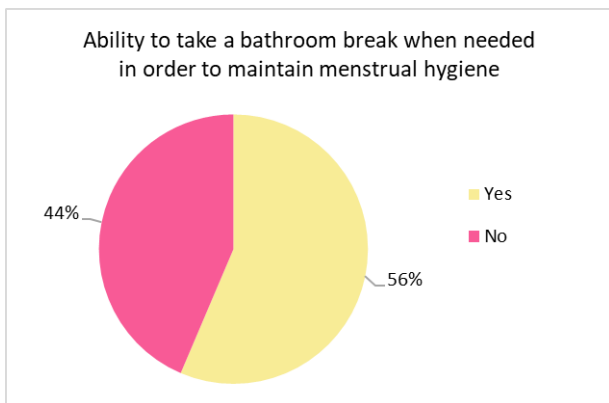
A number of high school students questioned responded that their school does not meet the basic conditions necessary to maintain hygiene during menstruation. 45.3% of students do not have warm running water and 22.0% have it only partly/sometimes. 15.5% of students do not have toilet paper and 54.1% have it only partly/sometimes. A bathroom where they can change their menstrual products in privacy is not available to 2.7% of students and 26.0% have access to it only partly/sometimes. A place where they can dispose of their used menstrual products is not available to 3.4% of students and 17.9% have it only partly/sometimes. 2.7% of students do not have running water and 6.4% have it only partly/sometimes.



Most of the students questioned (53.4%) say that the bathroom access is not adapted for people with disabilities.

⁵ Counties: 1 Zagreb County 4.7%, 2 Krapina-Zagorje County 3.4%, 3 Sisak-Moslavina County 6.8%, 4 Karlovac County 1.7%, 5 Varaždin County 6.4%, 6 Koprivnica-Križevci County 6.8%, 7 Bjelovar-Bilogora County 6.8%, 8 Primorje-Gorski Kotar County 7.8%, 9 Lika-Senj County 0.3%, 10 Virovitica-Podravina County 4.1%, 11 Požega-Slavonia County 2.7%, 12 Brod-Posavina County 6.4%, 13 Zadar County 1.7%, 14 Osijek-Baranja County 11.8%, 15 Šibenik-Knin County 0.7%, 16 Vukovar-Syrmia County 4.4%, 17 Split-Dalmatia 4.7%, 18 Istria 3.7%, 19 Dubrovnik-Neretva 0.7%, 20 Međimurje 6.4%, 21 City of Zagreb 8.1%

Place of residence size: city with more than 100 000 inhabitants 14.2%, city with 50 000 to 100 000 inhabitants 9.5%, city with 20 000 to 50 000 inhabitants 8.4%, city with 10 000 to 20 000 inhabitants 9.1%, city up to 10 000 inhabitants 10.1%, village 48.6%



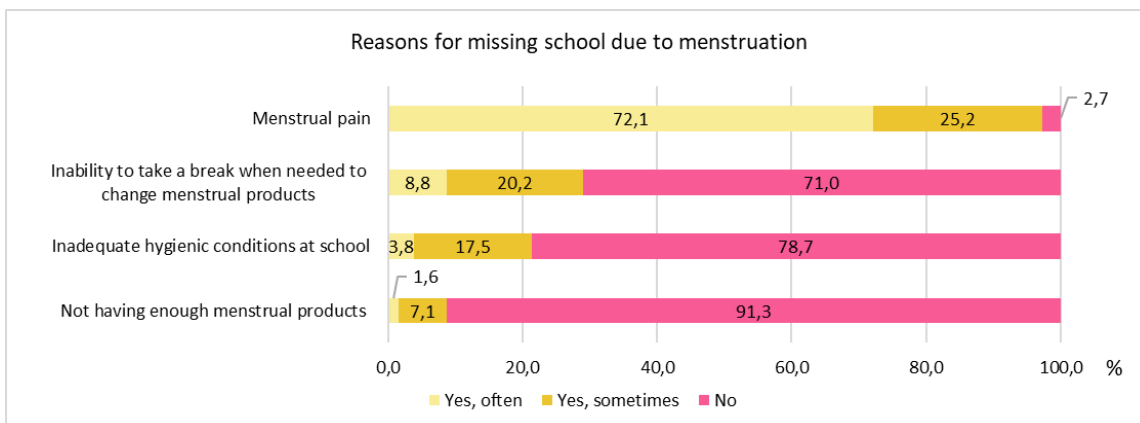
43.6% of students who were questioned stated that during school hours they do not have the option of taking a bathroom break in order to maintain menstrual hygiene when needed.

Missing school due to menstruation

61.8% of students questioned have missed school at least once because of menstruation.

38.2% never missed school because of menstruation, 40.9% on average misses less than one day a month, 11.5% one day a month, 7.8% two days a month, 1.4% three days a month and 0.3% four days a month.

Within the group of students who do miss school due to menstruation (N=183), 97.3% stated that it was because of menstrual pains (72.1% often, 25.1% sometimes). The inability to take a break in order to change menstrual products as a reason to have missed school was listed by 29.0% of students (8.8% often, 20.2% sometimes), inadequate hygienic conditions were listed by 21.3% (3.8% often, 17.5% sometimes) and missing school because they did not have enough menstrual products was the reason for 8.7% of questioned students (1.6% often, 7.1% sometimes).



As additional reasons to have missed school the students have listed a heavy menstrual flow, a feeling of social discomfort, apathy due to pain, the necessity to change clothes because of leakage and more frequent bowel movements.

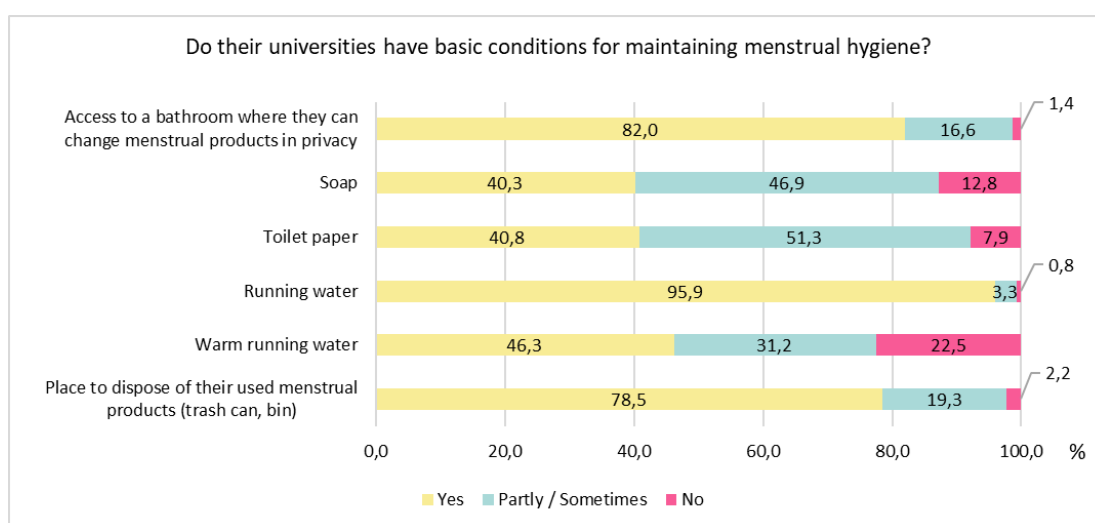
The students who have missed school due to menstruation most often use a parental note to excuse their absence (86.9%), 11.5% use a doctor's note while the rest (1.1%) write the note themselves or do not excuse their absence at all.

4.4. Conditions at universities

In this research section, which relates to maintaining menstrual hygiene and conditions at universities, 1031 students participated.⁶

Basic conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene at universities

A number of students responded that their universities do not meet basic conditions necessary for maintaining menstrual hygiene. 22.5% of students who were questioned do not have warm running water and 31.2% have it only partly/sometimes. 12.8% do not have soap, 46.9% have it only partly/sometimes. 7.9% do not have toilet paper and 51.3% have it only partly/sometimes. An access to a bathroom where they can change menstrual products in privacy do not have 1.4% of questioned students and 16.6% have it only partly/sometimes. 2.2% do not have a place to dispose of their used menstrual products and 19.3% have it only partly/sometimes. 0.8% do not have running water and 3.3% have it only partly/sometimes.

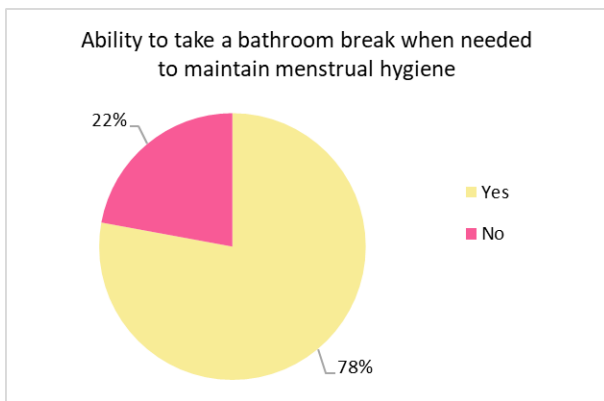


26.3% of students say that bathroom access at their university is not adapted for people with disabilities.

⁶ Counties: 1 Zagreb County 6.9%, 2 Krapina-Zagorje County 3.2%, 3 Sisak-Moslavina County 2.9%, 4 Karlovac County 2.6%, 5 Varaždin County 4.1%, 6 Koprivnica-Križevci County 2.5%, 7 Bjelovar-Bilogora County 2.7%, 8 Primorje-Gorski Kotar County 12.9%, 9 Lika-Senj County 1.4%, 10 Virovitica-Podravina County 2.2%, 11 Požega-Slavonia County 2.0%, 12 Brod-Posavina County 3.4%, 13 Zadar County 2.4%, 14 Osijek-Baranja County 7.8%, 15 Šibenik-Knin County 2.5%, 16 Vukovar-Syrmia County 2.9%, 17 Split-Dalmatia 7.6%, 18 Istria 4.6%, 19 Dubrovnik-Neretva 1.7%, 20 Međimurje 1.3%, 21 City of Zagreb 22.4%

Place of residence size: city with more than 100 000 inhabitants 35.7%, city with 50 000 to 100 000 inhabitants 9.4%, city with 20 000 to 50 000 inhabitants 11.0%, city with 10 000 to 20 000 inhabitants 8.5%, city up to 10 000 inhabitants 10.5%, village 24.9%

Employment status: 56.4% do not work in addition to being a student, 43.6% work in addition to being a student



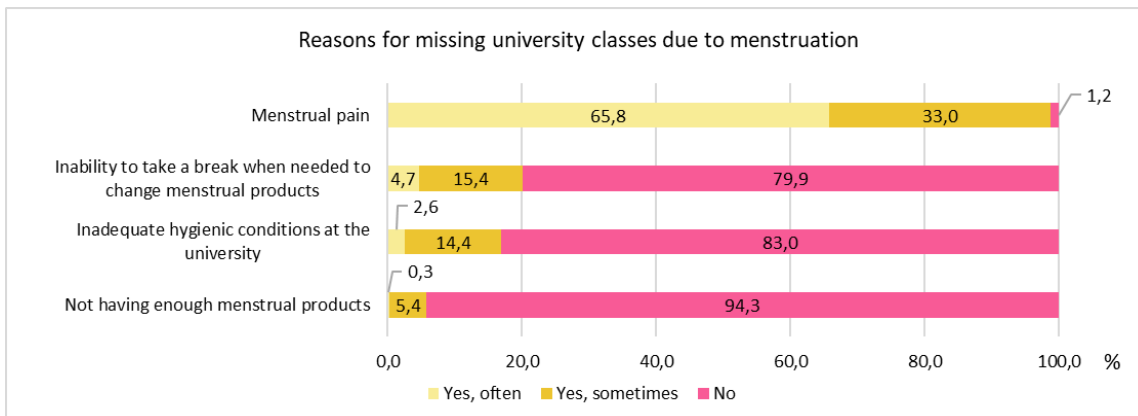
22.1% of questioned students stated that at their universities they do not have the option to take a break when needed to maintain menstrual hygiene.

Missing university classes due to menstruation

Because of menstruation, 68.1% of students have missed their university classes at least once.

31.9% of questioned students have never missed classes because of menstruation, 44.7% on average misses less than one day a month, 15.6% one day a month, 6.4% two days a month, 1.0% three days a month, 0.2% four days a month, 0.2% five or more days a month.

Within the group of students who were questioned who do miss classes due to menstruation (N=703), 98.8% stated that it was because of menstrual pains (65.8% often, 33.0% sometimes). The inability to take a break in order to change menstrual products as a reason to miss classes was listed by 20.1% of students (4.7% often, 15.4% sometimes), inadequate hygienic conditions were listed by 17.0% (2.6% often, 14.4% sometimes) and missing classes because they did not have enough menstrual products was the reason for 5.7% of questioned students (0.3% often, 5.4% sometimes).

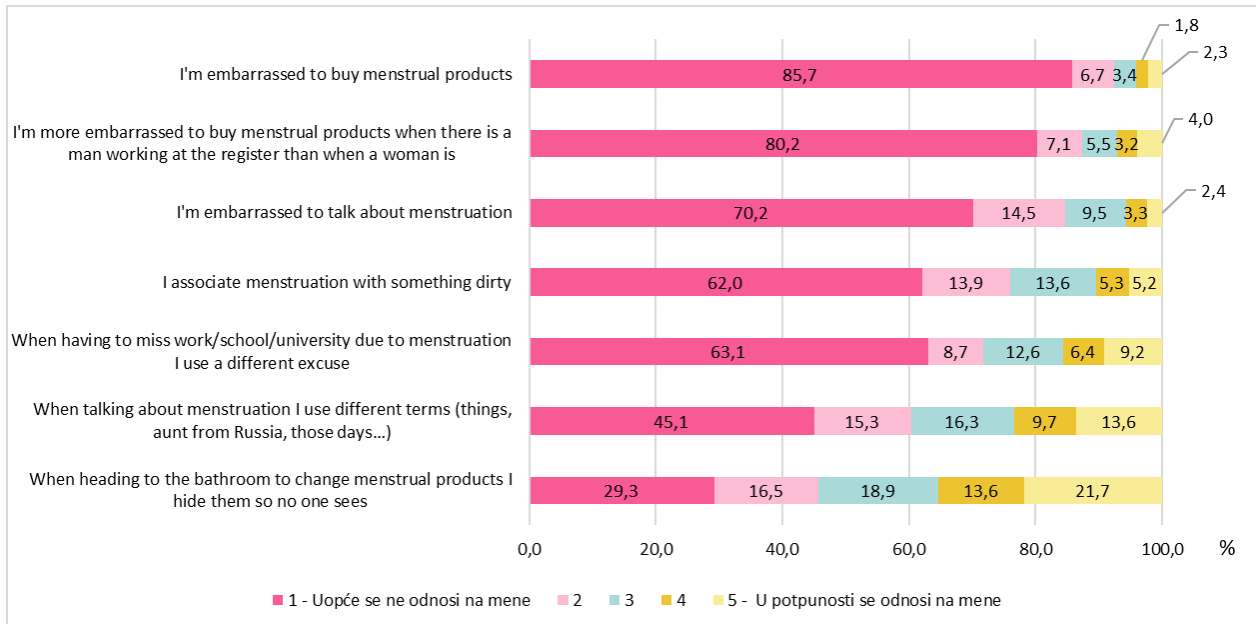


As additional reasons to have missed university classes due to menstruation, students listed various physical symptoms (nausea, fatigue, vertigo, indigestion, diarrhea, loss of consciousness), heavy bleeding, psychological reasons (bad mood, apathy, mood swings, anxiety, depression), needing a change of clothes because of leakage, long commute to university during which they do not have the option to go to the bathroom and avoiding physical education due to bleeding.

Students who stated that they miss university classes due to menstruation most often do not excuse their absence (71.1%). Fewer number stated that they excuse their absence with a parental note (17.9%) or a doctor's note (10.1%), while the rest excuse themselves (0.9%).

5. Menstruation and shame

In the final part of this survey several questions were asked which relate to the feeling of shame or embarrassment associated with menstruation. The participants used a 5 degree assessment scale (1 – *does not relate to me at all*, 5 – *completely relates to me*) to rate how much certain claims refer to them, in order to determine whether they are ashamed to talk about menstruation, buy menstrual supplies and so on.



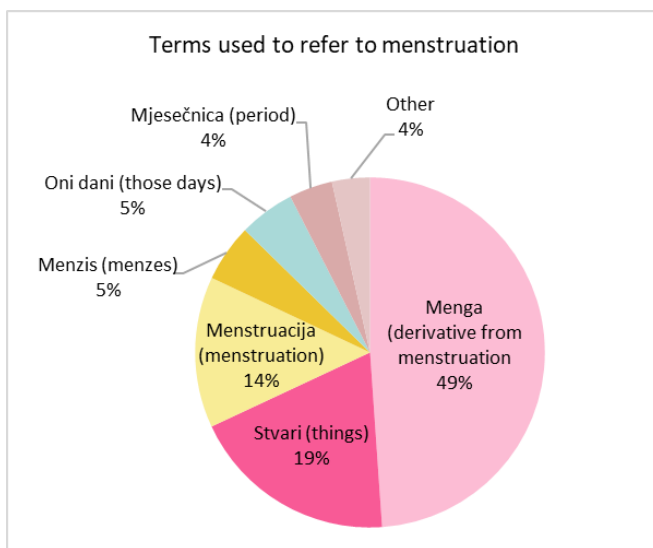
The participants rated these claims relatively low, which points to a low average assessment of menstruation related shame. Medium assessment (median value) for most of these claims was 1. The one exception was using different names when referring to menstruation ($C=2$, $Q_{3-1}=2$) and hiding menstrual products when heading to the bathroom to change them ($C=3$, $Q_{3-1}=3$). However, in a certain number of participants (who rated the claims with the highest grades, 4 and 5) there is evidently shame when it comes to buying menstrual products (4.1%), they are more embarrassed when the salesperson is a man (7.1%), they are embarrassed to talk about menstruation (5.7%) and they associate menstruation with something that's dirty (10.5%). 15.6% of participants use a different excuse when they have to miss work/school/university due to menstruation. More than one third of participants questioned hide menstrual products when heading to the bathroom to change them (35.3% rated this claim with 4 and 5).

There is a significant negative correlation between assessing these claims and age, which points to lower assessments by older people (lesser degree of shame) and higher assessments by younger people. However, it's important to stress that correlation coefficients were low (from .09 for the claim *When heading to the bathroom to change menstrual products I hide them so no one sees* to -.15 for the claim *I relate menstruation with something dirty*).⁷

⁷ Spearman ρ : I'm embarrassed to talk about menstruation (-.11**), I'm embarrassed to buy menstrual products (-.13**), I'm more embarrassed to buy menstrual products when there is a man working at the register than when there is a woman (-.12**), When heading to the bathroom to change menstrual products I hide them so no one sees (-.09**), When having to miss work/school/university because of menstruation I use a different excuse (-.10**), I associate menstruation with something dirty. (-.15**), When talking about menstruation I use different terms (things, aunt from Russia, those days...) (-.10**); ** $p < 0.01$.

To the question which term they most often used when talking about menstruation, most participants (48.9%) said they use the term *menga* (derivative from the word menstruation). The term *stvari* (things) is used by 19.1%, *menstruacija* (menstruation) by 14.0%, *menzis* (menzes) by 5.3%, *oni dani* (those days) by 5.2% and *mjesečnica* (period) by 4.0%

Other names were used by 3.5% of participants. They listed terms such as *as aunt* (from Russia, America, Germany, France, in red and so on), terms such as *I'm leaking, I'm bleeding*, unspecified terms such as *I got it, I have it, those days, that thing*, various derivatives from the word menstruation (such as *menstra, mengica, meca, menza, menzica, menstra, mengis, mengusica*), terms related to the color red (such as *red army, red sea, red-hot, red waterfalls, little red riding hood, communists, Russians*). Some participants refer to their menstruation as a living thing (such as *friend, pal, little miss, witch*), some use the term *problems* (technical, liquid), *period, PMS, female days/joys/troubles*. The responses from participants even list some very creative names such as *Uterine days, Las Cosas, Niagara Falls, Won't be a dad, celebration of my womanhood*.



6. Conclusion, remarks and suggestions

This survey tried to gather information related to using menstrual products, their consumption and availability, conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene at home, conditions at work, conditions in secondary schools and universities as well as shame often associated with menstruation.

While remaining aware of the wide scope of the chosen subject and the limitations of available research methods, we attempted to gather valuable data which would be useful for discussion and which would encourage further research on the topic of menstrual poverty. We are grateful to all participants who responded and filled out our online survey which greatly helped us in conducting this research on a sample of this size.

After seeing these results of what is the first research of this magnitude in Croatia on this topic, it's important to mention what are the limitations and guidelines for future research. As already stated in the introduction, the survey was conducted via an online questionnaire. Even though we had over 6000 participants it was not possible to include certain groups. This especially refers to those living in dismal financial circumstances whose answers would greatly contribute to this survey. Many of them do not have Internet access or any technical prerequisites to fill out the online questionnaire.

Even though the results shown here give an important insight into this research problem it is important to interpret them carefully with these limitations in mind. One could assume that conducting this survey on a nationally representative sample would lead us to results which differ from the results of this research. This assumption refers to all covered topics and mostly to the availability of menstrual products and the conditions for maintaining menstrual hygiene, where we believe they would show a much worse picture.

We hope that the results of this survey will contribute to discussions on the topic of menstrual poverty and encourage new research which would go further and deeper into this topic. Some of our suggestions for future research are examining consumption and availability of menstrual products on a nationally representative sample, developing a survey to examine the stigma related to menstruation, beliefs and attitudes on menstruation and the relationship between conditions at work (which refer to the ability to maintain menstrual hygiene and adaptation of the work environment during menstruation) and work productivity, conducting qualitative research (interviews and focus groups) with special groups such as financially challenged people, workers who do hard manual labor and so on.