

## Devastating floods and period poverty: Leaving women exposed to severe health outcomes

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Madam, Period poverty is the lack of access to menstrual supplies, hygiene education, and waste management which can lead to severe health outcomes. In developing countries like Pakistan, menstruation and menstrual practices still face many social, cultural, and religious restrictions, which form a barrier to menstrual hygiene management and creating awareness, especially in less privileged areas of the country. However, in the present condition of catastrophic floods in Pakistan that has affected 33 million people leaving 1 million homeless<sup>1</sup> has exposed women to more vulnerable sexual reproductive and health items.

A survey which was held to check the resources used by women during current conditions of flood showed that women are using leaves, torn pieces of cloth, dirty rugs, and even cans instead of sanitary pads to manage their bleeding<sup>2</sup> Moreover, food and water is given more priority over basic needs of women like sanitary pads, which are considered luxurious items.

By reviewing the literature, we found that lack of menstrual hygiene is one of the main causes of lower reproductive tract infections that can lead to morbidity and severe health conditions.<sup>3</sup> Another cross-sectional study also shows same results that the more women use these unhygienic methods to manage their bleeding the more they are exposed to the risk of lower reproductive tract infections.<sup>4</sup>

In 2017, a similar UNICEF supported study conducted in Pakistan showed that 49% of women in rural areas had no menstrual knowledge prior to their menarche and 44% didn't have access to basic menstrual hygiene needs.<sup>5</sup> All the aforementioned studies raise the question: Is sanitary pads a luxury or a necessity?

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The circumstances caused by flood can be taken as an opportunity by the government to bring long-term changes by suggesting certain plans by to eradicate period poverty permanently from society. Lack of access to period products can occur mainly due to financial and physical barriers. The government should start an awareness programme, and make the basic resources accessible at cheaper costs especially in less privileged and rural areas of the country that can also help to break the social taboo of not considering period products as important as food and water.

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