The Homeless Period

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Background

Women experiencing homelessness are underserved

Menstrual health is neglected in literature and healthcare – basic human right? (WHO)

Period Poverty is a global concern (Royal College of Nursing, 2021)

Poor menstrual health can lead to infections (Sumpter, 2013)

Research is largely medicialised and serves one of two populations:

1. Middle class, cisgender, white women in the Global North
2. Women in experiencing extreme poverty in the Global South

Aim

A systematic review of the literature

To understand menstrual experiences of people living with homelessness

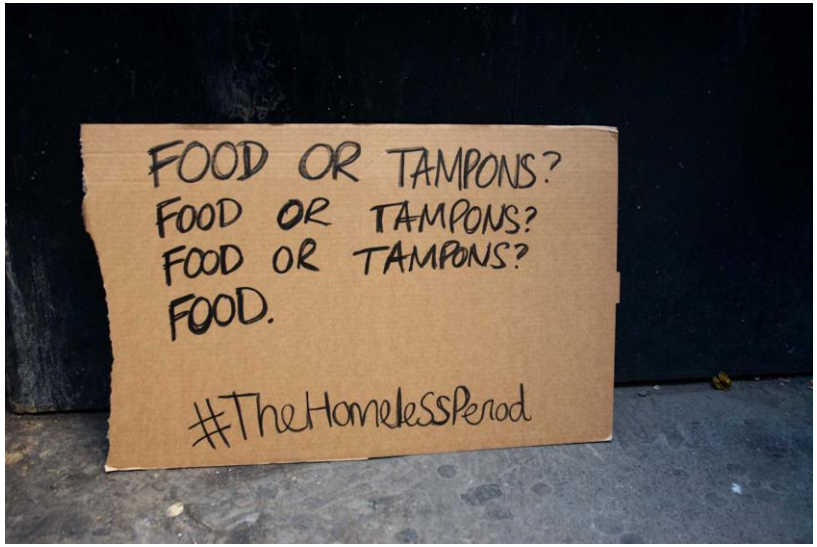
Evidence base for improving access to menstrual healthcare

Research Methods

- Databases: Medline, Web of Science, CINAHL, and PsychINFO
- Qualitative synthesis of **9** research articles
- ENTREQ = standard guidelines for thematic analysis of included papers
  (Enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research)

Population	Girls OR wom*n OR "young wom*n" OR mother* OR menstruation wom*n OR "wom*n of a reproductive age[PH1] "
AND	
Context	Homeless* OR "rough sleep*" OR "street living" OR "homeless person*" OR shelter OR Hostel
AND	
Outcome	Mens* OR period* OR "reproductive health" OR "sexual health"OR "mens* health" OR hygiene

Theme 1 - Challenges of managing menstruation while homeless



1.1 Lack of/limited facilities and privacy

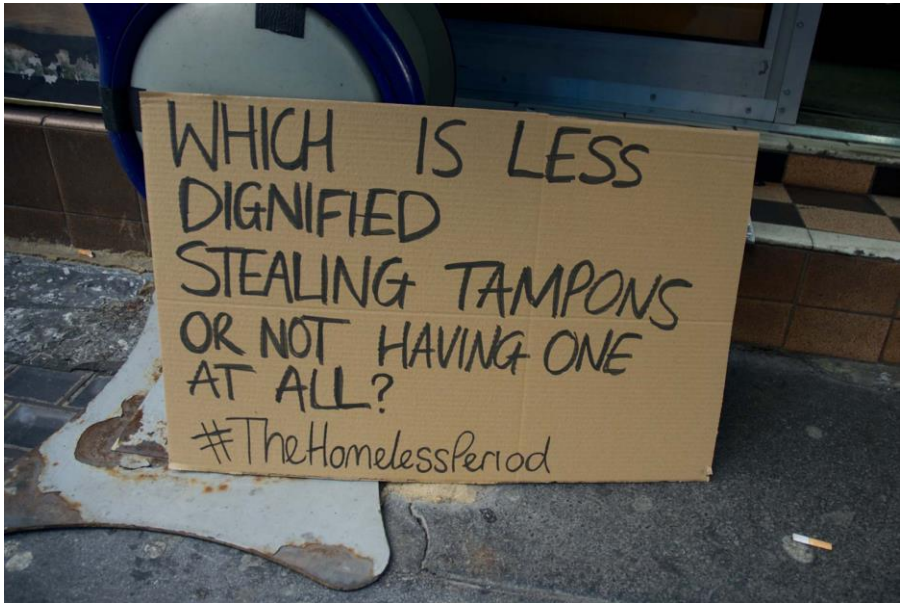
1.2 Limited access to hygiene products

1.3 Menstruation is expensive

1.4 Difficulties in maintaining hygiene while menstruating

Theme 2 - Feelings of embarrassment, shame and dignity linked to maintaining menstrual hygiene

...the humiliation is that you have to keep going back to them and asking them, and when you're asking for, because they have police and security, so it's not private. So you're asking for it in front of NYPD and DHS security, and most of those are male staff. —IDI 07 (Gruer et al. 2021, p. 4)



Theme 3 - Making do: how people living with homelessness manage challenges related to menstruation

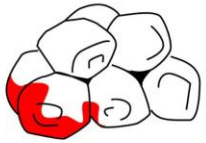
3.1 Being creative with alternative solutions

3.2 Last resorts: Sacrifices to access the resources needed to manage menstruation

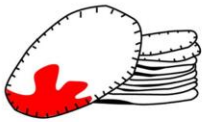
3.3 What services do women living with homelessness find useful?



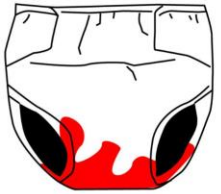
Newspaper



Cotton wool



Make up pads



Torn up nappies

Discussion

Results are not surprising, but they should be!

- Research is needed to understand the experiences of women menstruating whilst homeless
- Need to call for action for commissioners and policy makers
- Move away from donation-based approach
- Non-binary and transmasculine people who menstruate need (specialist) support: gender affirming services

Local charities:

http://thehomelessperiod.com/

https://www.thehomelessperiod.co.uk/

https://www.heygirls.co.uk/

Recommendations for Services

Choice e.g. tampons, pads, reusable products / long term vs short term birth control

Service provision by people who menstruate for people who mensturate

Hygiene products should not be gatekept, but freely available - Possible?

Maintaining cleanliness standards within accommodation bathrooms, showers and laundry facilities

Reframing menstrual health needs as distinct from sexual health

So what now?

1. How does your service support period hygiene?
2. Do you offer a selection of period hygiene products and how accessible are they?
3. What would you like to see your service do differently to improve access to menstrual products and menstrual hygiene?/ What could be done differently?
4. Are there any barriers to providing menstrual hygiene/products from the services point of view?

So what next?

Funding + Qualitative research on local homeless services - further explore people's experience (Photovoice)

Dissemination

Invitations for collaboration, Lived experience

Normalizing the Topic of Menstruation

Incorrect use of language largely contributes to vulnerability to those who menstruate.

Does talking about menstruation feel taboo?

Do you feel comfortable talking about period hygiene? If not, why?