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Advocacy Paper

A period is a natural cycle. This is a monthly process where females bleed for about a week, getting rid of excess blood from the internal lining of their reproductive organs. For a long time, when a woman got her period she had to undergo the feeling of shame and embarrassment without realizing that it was a natural occurrence. Unfortunately, menstrual cycle shame still exists in countries with conservative lifestyles. Slowly, first and second world countries have accepted that females can't avoid a menstrual cycle. There have been many organizations in first and second world countries that made efforts to diminish the negative stigma towards the natural process of a menstrual cycle. For instance, Days for Girls is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping females through their menstrual cycle. To eradicate period poverty, volunteers distribute reusable feminine hygiene product kits to these females. This organization aims to create a beneficial impact towards menstrual health and hygiene, to aid females in third-world countries by providing better access to hygiene products, destigmatizing menstrual cycles, and instituting global education about menstrual equity.

The purpose is to raise awareness about feminine hygiene and promote menstrual health. I am a female and being able to take care of hygiene makes me feel privileged. Basic necessities are not a want, but a need. Many females in third world countries cannot afford these products, and as a result they are prevented from attending school. I speak from the perspective of

someone who experiences a menstrual cycle monthly, and others need to be educated about a topic like this. Essentially, I am advocating for something I am truly passionate about. I believe that an appeal to pathos and logos approach will make my argument stronger.

Although periods occur in almost every female's life, not everyone has access to female hygiene products such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups, etc. Females in third world countries bleed through their clothes since they don't have access to menstrual products. An international data collection study was conducted by UNICEF on menstrual hygiene. Yemi Lufadeju, a communications specialist at UNICEF, claims that before the establishment of menstrual health organizations like Days for Girls, females would not have the confidence to step outside the house until they were supplied these "dignity" kits. In Lufadeju's article, "FAST FACTS: Nine things you didn't know about menstruation", he claims about "2.3 billion people lack basic sanitation services and in Least Developed Countries only 27 percent of the population has a handwashing facility". Even if the female population is subtracted from 2.3 billion, the number is still high. Due to a lack of sanitary services, women and girls face more challenges when dealing with their menstrual hygiene. As a result, girls are restricted from going to school. Days for Girls has created a product that resolves this issue—the DfG pad. This item consists of organic, absorbent cotton which is covered with patterned fabrics. It has a pad shape, with a long rectangle shape with rounded ends, with two flaps that snap around the undergarments. The best part is that the product is washable, and can be reused for every cycle. The concept around better access for hygiene products is sustainability. Supplying less fortunate females with DfG product kits saves money, keeps them protected, and allows them to freely engage in daily activities.

On the other hand, females in first and second world countries don't have these problems, so period health serves as a privilege for them. Similarly, author Molly Ligon talks about how females in the United States do not have to worry about menstrual hygiene, explaining the Penn State student organization's collaboration with Days for Girls. According to Ligon's news article, "Paterno Fellow advocates for sustainable, accessible menstrual health products", by creating menstrual hygiene pouches for females, the Penn State community is "giving opportunity for someone to go to classes and not have to worry about their period product" (Ligon, Par.15). Penn State students did a great job of carrying forward the tradition of Days for Girls. Even if the student volunteers aren't able to make enough kits to supply to everyone, the students made an impact for girls of their age in foreign countries.

Despite menstrual movements, periods continue to be a taboo subject being denounced by millions of people around the world. Most citizens living in poor countries are not educated enough to understand that menstruation is part of a female's reproductive system. Even in first-world countries like Japan, people are lacking education and have misconceptions about periods, proving that the mindset of people living in third-world countries is ten times worse. During 2021, Japanese females in high school, college and graduate school were interviewed about their menstruation experiences. Authors Noriko Akiyama, Fan Li & Wenqian Xu claim that a good amount of millennials and generation Z females still have orthodox beliefs about periods. Additionally, menstrual hygiene products aren't fairly priced, which causes people to buy low quality substitutes, further neglecting menstrual health. According to "Ending Period Shame and Poverty in Asia", "almost 30 percent of respondents said they were embarrassed about their period"(Akiyama, Li, and Xu, Par 3). This article also mentions that school

restrooms don't have proper facilities such as lighting and/or tap water which makes female "students more reluctant to change their pads" (Akiyama, Li, and Xu, Par 7). The issue here is period stigma. Fortunately, Days of Girls advocates for the destigmatization of a period cycle. One of their primary goals is to elevate menstrual health through education on puberty, menstruation, and the female reproductive system. The organization strives to educate both males and females who are experiencing puberty and/or are still growing. By doing this, females living in conservative households become more aware about their menstrual health and they are incentivized to take proper care of their menstrual hygiene. Males, on the other hand, should be educated about the menstrual cycle in order to practice safe sexual intercourse and to prevent unintended pregnancies. I appreciate the organization's approach towards elevating menstrual health because it sets the stage for our future generations. If the period movement starts impacting a small group of people now, then we will have influenced several groups of people by the next two decades.

Policies passed by national governments reinforce menstrual advocacy. International policies that support period movements are beneficial because they institute global education about menstrual equity. Good quality period products are heavily taxed leading females to buy cheap, inexpensive products that are harmful to their reproductive systems. Ellen Nemitz, a human rights advocate and journalist, asserts that Brazilian women are not able to explore their full potential in the real world because of menstrual inequity. In her article, "Period Poverty: The Ignored Social and Economic Costs of Menstruation", Nemitz references a national study which declares that "fulfilling women's basic needs may cost more than men's" (Nemitz Par.5). This has been a recurring issue. One of the main reasons is male-dominated leaders in most countries'

governments. Males tend to overlook women's hygiene because they don't face challenges while taking care of their hygiene. Why females have to pay extra for a different scented product that is identical to the same product in the men's section is still a mystery to me. There is no logical reasoning as to why females have to pay more to take care of their hygiene. Days for Girls has implemented several approaches to tackle menstrual inequity through policies, local events, partnerships, and research. Menstrual policies will help establish Days for Girls' principles and make an attempt to create a better society for females. Meanwhile, local events and partnerships ensure a stronger community as more organizations come together for one cause. Research will expand our understanding on what should be developed further regarding menstrual hygiene and/or policies. Menstrual equity is important because a period is natural, making hygiene products a necessity and not a luxury. Men's hygiene products are not as heavily taxed as female's products. If men's products were highly priced, then most likely there would be reforms to change those policies. The deeper problem of menstrual inequity relates to the individuals that regulate a nation's laws—the politicians. If even 50% of politicians supported menstrual health, then the world would be more progressive minded. If we dig deeper, menstrual inequity furthermore encourages the concept of gender inequality. Since most nation's leaders are male dominant, it becomes tough to persuade them about gender equality agendas. This is why women's issues are more neglected in comparison to men's issues. Days for Girls takes several measures to actually be the change, making the period movement more influential. For example, recently, "Days for Girls worked in collaboration with the South Africa Department of Women, UNFPA, WaterAid, and other stakeholders in order to launch the South African Coalition for Menstrual Health Management (SACMHM) in March 2020" (Days for Girls International). By

collaborating with organizations that support menstrual health, Days for Girls advocates for a stronger, safer community.

A number of organizations have decreased the shame towards the natural occurrence of a menstrual cycle. Days for Girls supports females living in impoverished nations through their menstrual cycles by supplying hygiene kits to them. To drastically reduce period poverty, volunteers contribute reusable feminine hygiene product kits to these girls. Three key objectives that Days for Girls strives to achieve are to provide better access to hygiene products, destigmatize menstrual cycles, and institute global education about menstrual equity. Regardless of how many efforts any organization makes, it really depends on citizens and their mindsets. If we want to be the change, then we need to educate others about what the movement is really about and how making efforts to influence other people will benefit our society. Another issue with creating a lasting movement is politicians and their neglect towards better public policies. The best way to garner support for an issue like better menstrual hygiene and health is to gain more progressive mindsets. Take the Black Lives movement, for example. People created an uproar to protect the rights of immigrants and people of color. Eventually, politicians had to punish the perpetrators that caused the violence of George Floyd. Therefore, regressive minded individuals will realize that organizations like Days for Girls will not budge until action is taken. I appreciate Days for Girls for taking the time to make a difference in the lives of less fortunate females.

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