



What is Period Poverty?

If you use the toilet in a public area or a coffee shop you will very likely find toilet paper available as this is considered an essential product... Then why are period products not equally available...? Around the world periods remain a taboo topic. Period products are still taxed as luxury products in many countries, blood is blue on period adverts on the television and periods are seen as a personal rather than a collective issue. All of these factors contribute directly to shame and stigma around menstruation, meaning that most women will grow up feeling silenced about their bodies and cycles.

A direct consequence of this is period poverty.

Period poverty is the lack of access to menstrual products. It's the lack of access to a clean and safe bathroom. It's the lack of access to education about menstruation. It's the lack of access to a safe space where women and girls can talk freely about their periods. But most importantly period poverty is a product of social injustice.

Period poverty affects both women's physical and mental health! The lack of education on women's health, causes extreme problems like women missing opportunities such as going to school or to work, serious health issues due to lack of hygiene or avoiding seeking medical care for small issues that then become more severe, leading to illness, depression, fear, and in some extreme cases suicide. Many women will live all their lives with shame and misunderstanding about their own bodies.

The context in Lebanon

Old cloth, tissue rolls, paper, newspapers, used pads, etc... This is what more than 80% of women suffering from period poverty in Lebanon are using during their menstruation.

In a region where gender inequality is pronounced and women's health is an ongoing taboo, period poverty in Lebanon is now becoming an urgent health crisis. In the past years Lebanon has dealt with an uprising, an explosion, political instability and is currently struggling with its most severe economic crisis in history.

For years, Lebanon has been viewed as a relatively stable country in the region. Recently the country's economy has collapsed due to a mix of government malpractice, economic instability and international interference. The existing crises were compounded in 2020 by the 4th of August explosion which caused hundreds to lose lives, thousands of injuries, and 300 000 people to lose their homes. In a Beirut struggling to rebuild, everyday products have tripled in price in the last year, and vulnerable groups are now finding everyday necessities unaffordable. In 2020, when the economic crisis began in Lebanon, the government-subsidized products they considered essential such as razors and condensed milk: period products were excluded from the list. It is in this context that we are seeking to address the issue of a valid study of period poverty.

Who are we?

Jeyetna is an intersectional feminist collective fighting for menstrual rights and equality, based in Lebanon. We began our journey 6 months after the blast that destroyed Beirut and propelled the country into an additional crisis on top of the ongoing crises: economic, financial, political, and health (with the Covid-19 pandemic). After months of distress, we felt it was time to bring a sustainable solution to the table.

In November 2020, Evelina Llewellyn, film director, gathered an all-women Lebanese team to portray 10 stories of period poverty across the country, filming women from different socio-economic, geographic, and age groups. The team spent days with each interviewee building the intimate portraits that are at the heart of Jeyetna - A 67-minute feature documentary. These cameos include Amira, a Syrian refugee, Funmi, a house worker in the Kafala system from Nigeria, and Gigi, a transgender woman from Beirut.

‘Jeyetna the collective’ is a by-product of ‘Jeyetna the documentary’ and sets out to break the taboo and religious stigma around periods and period poverty by opening up the subject and starting conversations.

Our Work

Our aim is to shift the topic of periods from a personal issue to a collective one.

We chose the name ‘Jeyetna’ which literally means ‘we are coming’ because in Lebanese it is the most common term used to say, “I have my period”. That a more explicit term does not exist demonstrates the persistent embarrassment and unease that surrounds the subject of periods in Lebanon. The silence occurs within the family domain, in society, in schools, in the workplace, and in the political sphere. This all-encompassing taboo ensures that politically the issue of period poverty is ignored rather than acknowledged as an ongoing crisis. And yet it affects almost half of the population.

By starting conversations, redefining menstruation, and approaching periods in a holistic and environmentally friendly way, we aim to normalize periods and make menstrual care accessible to all.

Jeyetna provides solutions through education, sustainability (through the provision of reusable products that last up to 15 years) and the creation of safe spaces for participants to share a collective period experience.

We tackle period poverty by organizing events that consist of:

- The screening of the documentary directed by Evelina Llewellyn (co-founder of Jeyetna). Each screening is followed by a Q&A in the shape of a safe space where participants reflect on the content and share their experience, guided by Rouba Kiprianos, who is Jeyetna’s discussion mediator.
- An awareness session on period products, presenting reusable and disposable options (reusable pads, panties, menstrual cups, tampons, and pads), after which each of the participants is offered 2 products of their choice, in addition to a hot water bottle to help with period pain.
- As of March 2022, we collaborate with Koun, an NGO giving yoga classes to marginalized communities, teaching the participants stretching and massage techniques to relieve period pain in a sustainable way.
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Empowering the next generation

Many of our events are tailored to young girls, who have just started menstruating or are about to. For example, we led several mother-daughter discussion circles during our events, creating conversations about periods between generations. Furthermore, our team is a young one, composed of 10 women under the age of 30. In all our events we insist on the importance of understanding period poverty as a universal and collective issue that needs structural solutions. Our accomplishments over the last 12 months.

Despite Lebanon's ongoing economic and political collapse, between July and August 2021 we managed to fulfill the program of our touring festival, driving to 12 areas across Lebanon (focusing on remote places and refugee camps), reaching more than 900 women and girls. Jeyetna events are intimate, fun, and filled with sorority.

A Collective mission

Since July 2021, we have concentrated on collaborations to increase our reach including an event with migrant women activists with the NGO 'Concern' (September 2021), three events with the Women's Program Association working with women and youths in Palestinian refugee camps – more than 100 participants between Burj el Barajneh and Ein el Helwe.

Since October 2021, we have been working with MEPI-TLS students at AUB providing them with an awareness session and screening. We are currently working with them to implement a Jeyetna activity in collaboration with AUB Neighborhood Initiative as part of their scholarship requirements.

Our latest event, on IWD March 8, in collaboration with Basket beats Borders, in the Palestinian refugee camp Shatila was themed around sports and menstruation. After a yoga session that focused on period pain, one of the women told us that it was the first time in her life that she had been able to take time for herself and switch off from her daily tasks.

Our target population

We provide content for all people that menstruate in Lebanon regardless of their legal status. We strive to be as inclusive as possible and have organized specific events for under-represented communities (migrant workers, refugees, and the LGBTQ+ community).

Jeyetna team and structure

Our collective is composed of 90% of young Lebanese women under 30. A third of our team identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community. In a highly centralized country, we work towards building a network of Jeyetna advocates in their own community, we are beginning this mentoring work with Basket Beats borders with whom we are collaborating for 2022. Moreover, our structure is very flexible, and we welcome any initiative that could make our fight against period poverty more holistic and comprehensive. We prioritize partnerships with small women-led initiatives.

All in all, in a country on the edge of economic collapse, a pandemic, political instability, and conflict, life for women is challenged by constant hardship. On top of this, no woman should have to choose between milk for her baby or pads for her periods. No woman should have to miss a day's work because she cannot afford medication for her period pain. No woman should have to live in

shame and misunderstanding about her own body. But this can be changed. By opening this discussion, we can break the silence! PERIOD.



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