A Multimodal Qualitative Approach to Understanding Menstrual Health Equity among Adolescents and Young Adults

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Study objective: Menstrual inequity-unequal access to menstrual health care or products-negatively affects well-being in relation to the menstrual cycle, a construct known as menstrual health. Few studies have explored menstrual inequities among adolescent and young adult populations in the United States. This multimodal qualitative research aimed to explore factors that influence the lived experience of menstruation among this population.

Methods: This qualitative study consisted of individual interviews among menstruators ages 13-24, recruited from an urban academic medical center. Participants (N = 20) were a mean age of 19 years; 25% previously endorsed period poverty, and 90% were publicly insured. We conducted semi-structured interviews using participant video diaries in a video elicitation exercise. Data were coded by 2 investigators using thematic analysis driven by grounded theory.

Results: Emergent themes included the need to normalize menstruation, the need for comprehensive menstrual health education, and the need for menstrual products to be more accessible. Twelve youth prepared video diaries, and all reported positive experiences with the video process.

Conclusions: This youth-centered, multimodal study is one of the first to qualitatively explore the lived experiences of menstruation among adolescents in the United States and identified key inequities in menstrual health from their own perspectives. Thematic findings were mapped onto a proposed framework for menstrual equity that can be applied to future research and efforts around policy change. More research is needed to assess the impacts of these policies.

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