

THE
**GLOBAL
✓ TABOO
TRACKER**



IT'S NEVER *JUST* A PERIOD

At Libresse, we believe every woman+ should Live Fearless. No girl+ is born ashamed of her body. Yet from first period to last, and all the stages and experiences in between, women+ continue to face taboos and silence around their menstrual and intimate health.

To help women+ 'live fearless' has been our mission and the heart of our brand for over 10 years. It is why, in 2020, we introduced our Global V Taboo Tracker; a complex research platform to explore the reality of women+'s menstrual experiences, tracking taboos and understanding the deeper structures at play that create taboo topics in our societies. Our aim: to dismantle the taboos that hold women+ back.

The research sets out to listen to people's attitudes to everything surrounding women+'s menstrual health, including the unpredictable cycles, the surprising discharge smells and the pain that can often be dismissed by healthcare professionals or that women+ can be too nervous to talk about.

This report shares the latest updates from our global research, talking to over 10,000 people in 10 countries. Whilst we are pleased to see some improvements in attitudes towards women+'s body positivity and the perceptions of periods for women+ and their partners, our research shows there is still work to do – and we are determined to continue our mission to support women+ to live fearlessly.

One of the most shocking discoveries was a clear gap in women+'s education on their own bodies; with more than half (59%) of those who menstruate saying they wish they'd been taught more about their periods and bodies throughout their lives.

This lack of knowledge is detrimental from the start, as we found only 1 in 5 of those who menstruate felt 'calm and ready' to start their first period – and, sadly, only 1 in 10 of those who menstruate felt proud their period arrived.

Periods should not be feared. That is why, guided by the feelings of women+ around the globe, we take our mission to support women+ further, with a commitment to improve education for children so girls+ understand the complexities of their periods, vulvas and wombs earlier. Because if we can help girls+ start their periods fearlessly, we can help them live fearlessly throughout their personal experiences with their bodies.

Because it's never just a period...

IT'S SO
MUCH MORE



Tanja Grubner, 2024

A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE OF FIRST PERIODS

In a world where women's experiences are sanitised, judged, and shamed, it's no wonder that women+ enter a world of unknowns when their cycle starts.

Almost half (44%) of those who menstruate feel that they have seen periods misrepresented in popular culture, with stories not being reflective of actual experiences.

Every person who menstruates has a story to tell about their first period. A longing to start and fit in with their friends. A fascination of what was to come and what it meant for the rest of their life. Or, for too many, a terrifyingly lonely moment not understanding what is happening to their body.

Talking to people who menstruate across the world, it is clear that those first periods impact their relationships with their cycles and their health for their lifetime.

This correlation is becoming more important as today, women+ are starting their periods younger. The belief that menstruation starts around age 12 is an unhelpful generalisation that is not recognising the millions of girls+ that start their period earlier, leaving them clueless and unprepared.

12%
STARTED
THEIR PERIOD
BETWEEN AGES
8-10 YEARS OLD



Whilst periods are spoken about as a rite of passage and the start of 'womanhood', for those who menstruate, first periods are often not a positive experience, with a staggering 74% reporting negative emotions when they start.



74%
REPORTED
NEGATIVE
EMOTIONS WHEN
THEIR PERIOD
STARTED

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Currently, too few girls+ start their journeys positively, feeling prepared and proud.

For such a big rite of passage, the fact that so few feel proud (only 10%) is devastating – but perhaps unsurprising if 80% don't feel calm and ready for their first periods.

It shouldn't be so hard to better prepare girl+ for the start of this journey. In fact, we found that the more concretely girls+ have learnt about period and period products, the more likely they are to have had a positive first experience and feel calm & ready to start their period.

This calls for earlier, better and more positive period education.

ONLY
1/10

OF THOSE WHO
MENSTRUATE FELT
**PROUD THEIR
PERIOD
ARRIVED**

80%

OF WOMEN+ DIDN'T
FEEL **CALM & READY**
WHEN THEIR
FIRST PERIODS
STARTED*

49%

OF THOSE WHO MENSTRUATE FELT MORE
CONFIDENT & READY FOR THEIR FIRST
PERIOD WHEN THEY UNDERSTOOD WHAT
WAS HAPPENING TO THEM, HOW
TO USE PERIOD PRODUCTS
& HAD ACCESS TO THE
PRODUCTS THEY
NEED

A LIFE OF *UNKNOWN*S

The lack of information, dismissal, and unpredictability of women+'s health can feel like chaos – setting women+ up for a world of confusion when it comes to understanding their bodies.

Almost half (46%) of those who menstruate have felt confused about their cycle, especially when it moves outside of the perceived 'normal' of 28 days.

It is no surprise when over 2 in 5 (42%) feel the knowledge of their cycle has 'lots of gaps'.

Even as women+ mature, they feel they still have a lot of unanswered questions about their periods and intimate health.

42%

HAVE BEEN SURPRISED
BY THE COLOUR OF
THEIR DISCHARGE

48%

HAVE BEEN CONFUSED
WHEN THEIR PERIOD
BLOOD WASN'T RED,
BUT BLACK OR BROWN

46%

HAVE BEEN CONFUSED
BY SPOTTING
(WONDERING IF IT
WAS THEIR PERIOD)



THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN+

This is why creating confident conversation and knowledge about women+'s bodies is so important. But to get here, attitudes about women+'s menstrual and intimate health need to change.

If women+ are forced to manage their menstrual and intimate health in silence due to shame and embarrassment, how can we create a world that truly understands women+'s bodies?

2/5

ARE EVEN HIDING
THEIR PERIOD
PRODUCTS FROM
THEIR PARTNERS



25%

OF THOSE WHO
MENSTRUATE'S
PARTNERS THINK
USED PERIOD
PRODUCTS ARE
SOMETHING
'GROSS'



1/5

OF THOSE WHO
MENSTRUATE STILL
FEEL THE NEED TO
APOLOGISE FOR
THE WAY THEIR
INTIMATE AREA
LOOKS OR SMELLS



THE *PAIN* EXPERIENCE

As women+ navigate their menstrual and intimate health throughout their lifetimes, for many, their journey is often accompanied by discomfort and pain.

And, while society has taught us that pain is just part of the parcel of being a woman+, shame, embarrassment, and a feeling of not being taken seriously add to the weight that holds too many women+ off from asking for help.

On average, half of women have felt that their pain was minimised (44%) or dismissed (55%).

Women+ admit to feeling a variety of anxieties in starting a conversation with their healthcare professional.



OVER
HALF

**FELT THEY HAD
EXPERIENCED MUCH
MORE PAIN THAN
THEY WERE LED
TO BELIEVE**



81%

**FELT CONCERNS
AROUND THEIR
PERIODS NOT BEING
TAKEN SERIOUSLY**



ONLY
2 IN 5

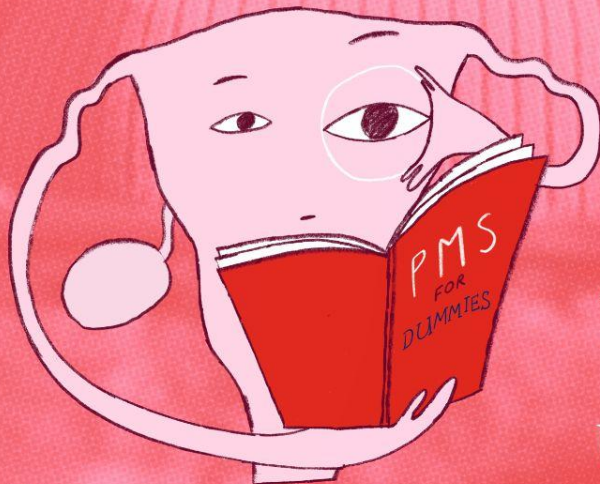
**OF THOSE WHO
MENSTRUATE HAVE FELT
COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO
TALK TO THEIR HEALTHCARE
PROFESSIONAL ABOUT
THEIR MENSTRUAL HEALTH**

"I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT..."

Creating a safe space for women+ to seek help and talk about their menstrual and intimate health is imperative.

To create a world that truly understands women+ bodies, we must not only have open conversations that allow women to talk about their menstrual and intimate health without fear of judgement and shame, but we also need to empower them and society with the right knowledge to set them up for a positive experience when they ask for help.

When it comes to conditions like PMS, PCOS, endometriosis and adenomyosis, women+ do not know enough.



9/10

HAVE NEVER HEARD OF
ADENOMYOSIS - DESPITE
1 IN 5 WOMEN+ HAVING IT

74%

OF THOSE WHO
MENSTRUATE KNOW
LITTLE TO NOTHING
ABOUT PMS

4/5

HAVE NEVER HEARD OF OR
KNOW LITTLE ABOUT PCOS
- DESPITE 190 MILLION
WOMEN+ AND GIRLS+
HAVING IT***

49%

FEMALE PAIN IS NORMALISED
BY SOCIETY; ALMOST HALF
OF PEOPLE THINK IT IS
SIMPLY JUST PART OF
BEING A WOMAN+

"IT TOOK ME 20 YEARS TO GET DIAGNOSED WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS"

CONFUSING JOURNEYS OF CONTRACEPTION

For many, the menstrual cycle experience can be a rollercoaster.

In most societies, as the weight of the responsibility of contraception is solely on women's shoulders, the rollercoaster can be even more confusing because of the effect of our contraceptive experiences on our cycles and bodies - from the long wait to our next periods to the pain of IUD insertion, and everything in between.

These experiences are made even worse by a culture that doesn't prepare us for what to expect around contraceptives.



38%

FOUND USING
HORMONAL
CONTRACEPTIVES
MORE COMPLICATED
THAT EXPECTED

1/4

EXPECTED THEIR
PERIOD TO RETURN
EASILY AFTER
STOPPING THE PILL,
BUT IT DIDN'T

40%

OF THOSE WHO
MENSTRUATE FELT
GETTING THE
HORMONAL IUD
FITTED WAS MORE
PAINFUL THAN THEY
EXPECTED IT TO BE

MYSTERY STILL SURROUNDS PREGNANCY & POST-PARTUM

There is a tendency towards oversimplification of what happens during pregnancy and after that women+ only come to realise when confronted with the reality.

It's never as simple as pregnancy means no periods until the end of breastfeeding.

So many women find that there are blurred lines between breastfeeding and the return of their periods.

For others, they can be surprised by how long they have to wait for their periods to come back.

46%

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT ALMOST HALF FOUND THEIR POST-PARTUM EXPERIENCE MORE COMPLICATED THAN THEY EXPECTED



1/4

FELT SHOCKED THEY COULD GET THEIR PERIODS WHILE BREASTFEEDING



32%

WERE SURPRISED ABOUT HOW LONG IT TOOK THEIR PERIOD TO RETURN POST PREGNANCY



PERIMENOPAUSE — A BLURRY STAGE

Given the negative experiences of first periods and knowing that education and knowledge sharing helps women+ be better prepared, it would be fair to hope that women+ are more supported for the other major changes to their menstrual and intimate health. However, this is sadly not the case.

Even among women who are about to or in the middle of experiencing perimenopause (43-54 yo), the confusion is high.

As a result, this stage is generally a daunting experience for women+.

Perpetuated by stereotypes of aging, the menopause is seen as something to fear.

This makes women+ hold off from seeking help, with only 24% feeling comfortable enough to speak about their perimenopausal symptoms with anyone.

A continued sad reflection of how women+ deal with their health in private.

OVER 1 IN 4

FEEL MENOPAUSE IS A
SIGN OF LOST FEMININITY

HALF

FEEL UNPREPARED
FOR THE
PERIMENOPAUSE

90%

KNOW LITTLE TO
NOTHING ABOUT IT,
EVEN THOUGH ALL OF
THEM WILL EVENTUALLY
EXPERIENCE IT



CONCLUSION — CLOSING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

As the research demonstrates that greater education improves girls+ and women+'s experiences and relationships with their bodies and intimate health, the need to close the knowledge gap is clear.

By identifying and addressing taboos, Libresse's Global V Taboo Tracker is just one step towards creating a world where women+ can live the life they want, without taboos and shame holding them back.

A world that gives us more answers than questions.

1 IN 3

WOMEN+ WISH THEY'D BEEN TAUGHT MORE ABOUT PERIODS AND CYCLES THROUGH THEIR LIFE

“ I FEEL THAT PERIODS ARE OFTEN UNDERESTIMATED, BECAUSE IT IS SOMETHING THAT ONLY WOMEN GO THROUGH ”

“ I AM 27 YEARS OLD, AND SOMETIMES I AM SURPRISED BY MANY THINGS ABOUT MY BODY. WE ARE NOT TAUGHT TO KNOW OURSELVES ”

“ WE ARE NEVER READY ENOUGH ”

METHODOLOGY



As a collaboration Ketchum Analytics and AMV BBDO conducted an online survey between March 21st and April 5th 2024 among 10,000 respondents across 10 markets: UK, France, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia and US.

Respondents included 80% people who menstruate and 20% people who do not menstruate over the age of 15, representing 290.6m women+* and 279.9m men in total, with a margin of error of +/- 1%.

NOTES:

- * Women+: We know that not everyone who menstruates is a woman, such as those born with a different biological sex to their gender identity, and that not all women menstruate, considering factors such as contraception, health conditions and menopause. By adding '+' to women, we recognise and include the full range of underrepresented groups who use our products, such as trans and nonbinary people.
- ** The V-Zone: This is what we use to describe the vagina and vulva and the V-shaped front you can see. Everything inside your pants, that's the V-Zone.
- *** Figures from WHO [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/endometriosis](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/endometriosis)

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MORE ON**



**NEVER
JUST A
PERIOD**

