



Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity

Public Hearing Summary

Friday December 08, 2023 at 10:32 a.m. to 12:28 p.m.

Topic:

An inquiry into addressing the effects of period poverty in Trinidad and Tobago

Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present for the public hearing:

Present

- Dr. Muhammad Yunus Ibrahim - Chairman
- Mrs. Shamfa Cudjoe- Lewis, MP – Vice Chairman
- Mr. Helon Francis
- Mr. Keith Scotland, MP
- Ms. Anita Haynes- Alleyne, MP
- Ms. Jearlean John

Excused

- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
- Mr. Kazim Hosein

Witnesses who appeared:

Ministry of Education

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| • Mrs. Anna Singh | Director, Curriculum Planning & Development Division |
| • Dr. Ayinka Nurse-Carrington | Manager, Student Support Services Division |
| • Mrs. Carina Henry-Carrington | Guidance Officer II (Ag.) |
| • Mrs. Jasmin Ramoutar | Schools Supervisor III |

Ministry of Health

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| • Mr. Stephen Boodhram | Deputy Permanent Secretary (Temporary) |
| • Dr. Adesh Sirjusingh | Director, Directorate of Women's Health |
| • Dr. Roma Bridgelal-Nagassar | Manager, Medical Research and Audit & Directorate of Women's Health |

Office of the Prime Minister [Gender and Child Affairs]

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Mr. Vijay Gangapersad | Permanent Secretary (Ag.) |
| • Dr. Ayanna Sebro | Technical Director, NACC |
| • Ms. Shelley-Ann Hart | Director, Gender Affairs |
| • Mr. Amilcar Sanatan | Deputy Director, Gender Affairs |

Crown Her Trinidad and Tobago

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Dr. Nadira Rambocas | President of CrownHerTT |
| • Dr. M. Shastri Motilal | Member of CrownHerTT |
| • Mr. Yasphal Kissoon | Member of CrownHerTT |

Key Issues Discussed:

1. Schools do not receive direct funding to provide a supply of period products for students.
2. Products are provided for emergencies based on the petty funds/cash available in the school.
3. Currently, in schools the onus is on the principal and staff to provide period products for emergencies for students.
4. The Ministry of Education (MoE) educates students on the menstruation cycle, puberty and hygiene in the curriculum with the assistance of guidance counsellors.
5. Absenteeism data in the MoE is not collected or aggregated according to the reason students stay home as such, there is no data on absenteeism due to lack of period of products.
6. There is the need to sensitize both males and females on the menstruation cycle of females to address the stigma that can be association with menstruation.
7. There need to be a nationwide public awareness and education session on the topics of period hygiene, products and the menstruation cycle.
8. The feasibility of medication and feminine hygiene products in relation to menstrual disorders such as Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), to be available to persons under the CDAP programme of the Ministry of Health (MoH).
9. A multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to address the issues associated with period poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.
10. The Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA) partnered in 2022 with UNFPA and NGOs to assist in the distribution of “Dignity Kits” to women and girls in vulnerable situations.
11. The OPM-GCA, MoE and MoH is open to working together with NGOS and other state agencies to promote public awareness and amend practices and procedures to become sensitive to issues in relation to period poverty.

Recommendations

The following recommendations (direct and implied) were derived from the public hearing meeting by the Joint Select Committee:

1. The Ministry of Education should consider the following:

i. Provision of Menstrual Hygiene Products in Schools

Providing free and consistent access to menstrual hygiene products in schools across Trinidad and Tobago.

ii. Menstrual Health Education Programme

Integrating age-appropriate menstrual health education into the primary school curriculum.

iii. Impact Assessment of Period Poverty

Assessing the impact of period poverty on student attendance similar to how other barriers (like transportation or access to books) are monitored.

2. Develop a Cross-Ministerial Educational Campaign

Consider the implementation of a joint Ministry of Health–Ministry of Education campaign led by the Ministry of Health, targeted at schools and tailored to be accessible and age-appropriate.

3. Integrate School Nursing or Medical Staff for Menstrual Health Counselling

Nursing staff should be made available in schools to offer support and guidance to students, particularly to alleviate confusion or fear related to menstruation.

4. Encourage Donations of Menstrual Products

Encourage individuals, civil society groups, and the private sector to include menstrual products in donation drives, especially around times like Christmas.

5. Include Males in Menstrual Health Education and Sensitization

Males, from the school level upwards, should be educated and sensitized about menstruation and its impact on their female peers. Menstruation is often seen as a "female-only" issue, but educating boys and men is equally important for creating a level of understanding of what girls and women face during their cycle.

6. Consider Including Feminine Products in the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP)

Consideration should be given to include feminine hygiene products (e.g., sanitary pads) in the CDAP for those suffering with chronic reproductive health conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and other conditions that cause irregular bleeding. This would help women who are facing additional burdens from these chronic conditions.

7. Implement a Coordinated Mechanism Across Ministries for Addressing Period Poverty

The Committee emphasized the need for a coordinated approach from various ministries to tackle the broader issue of period poverty. This includes the Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Development, along with potential involvement from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

8. Policy Development

It was recommended that a formal policy be developed or enhanced to address period poverty, with an emphasis on a coordinated and comprehensive approach. The focus should shift from short-term relief efforts to creating long-term, sustainable strategies. Given that period poverty affects individuals continuously, particularly between the ages of 9 to 55, efforts should aim to provide systemic solutions rather than temporary assistance.

View the Hearing:

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEu4Ip3I2_0

Contact Information:

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jschumanrights@tpparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2627/2427.

*Committees Unit
December 08, 2023*