



> Lifting the lid on period equality

Period equality research

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> **phs** Period Equality

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> Starting the conversation

Period equality is a topic that people are still learning about. It refers to giving women equal access to sanitary products, regardless of age or financial circumstance. Young girls and women in our communities are experiencing stigma and inequality due to being unable to afford such basic products which are essential to their day-to-day lives.

Awareness of period equality is growing and steps are being taken to counter it. But how big an issue is period equality in the UK?

This **phs** Period Equality research study reveals new insights* into the experiences of teenage girls in the UK. We asked how they were impacted by their periods and about their access to sanitary products. But we also went one step further, asking their opinions on period equality; whether it is a real issue, if it's taken seriously enough, its potential effects on their future and what should be done to combat it.

We can only identify the true scale of the problem and tackle it effectively by asking these hard questions, and this is exactly what we set out to do.

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*Based on research conducted in May 2019 of 1,000 girls ages 13-18 who attend school or college

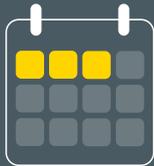
> Periods and staying in school

The research reveals that:



More than
52%

of teenage girls have missed school or college because of their period



Over
one quarter

said they've done so more than once, missing an average of three days per school term*

*higher than cold or flu, holidays or truancy.

Of those who missed school due to their period, almost one in five girls missed an average of **five or more days** each term, equating to a loss of three or more full weeks of school over the course of the academic year.

By comparison: Just **11%** said they lose this much school to holidays and just **12%** to cold/flu.

And what's more, **3%** missed more than **10 days each term**, equivalent to **six weeks of school over the year**.

For the **52%** who missed school due to periods, the majority of absences are due to period cramps, affecting **85% of girls** but:



one in fourteen

of these said they missed school as they **could either not afford or access sanitary products**

One in 10 of these also said they didn't go to school as they were embarrassed about being on their period. When it comes to being upfront about their periods, only **32%** had told their school that this was the true cause of their absence.

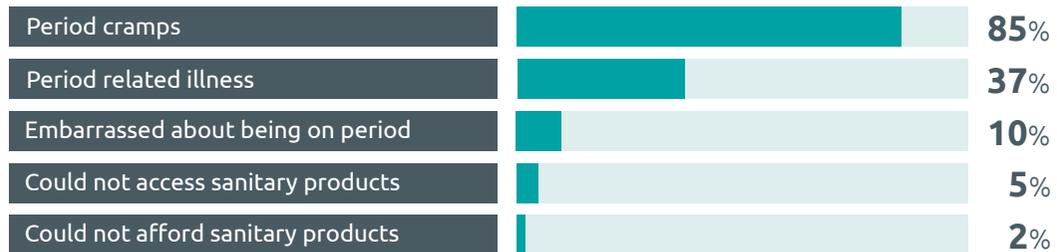
A **quarter of girls** said that their period was likely to make them miss school or college over the next year.

> Key figures

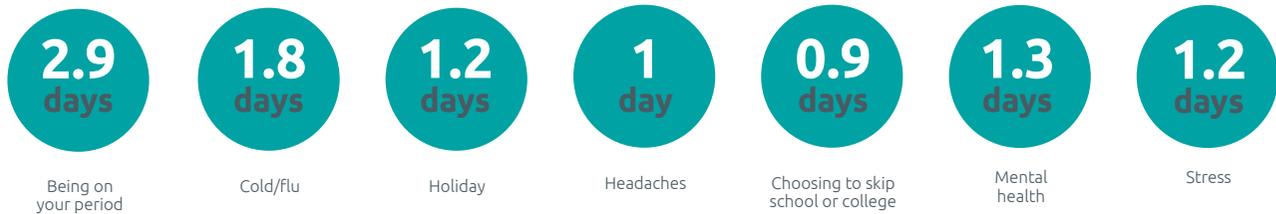
Have you ever taken time off school or college because of your period?



What were the reasons for missing school or college because of your period?



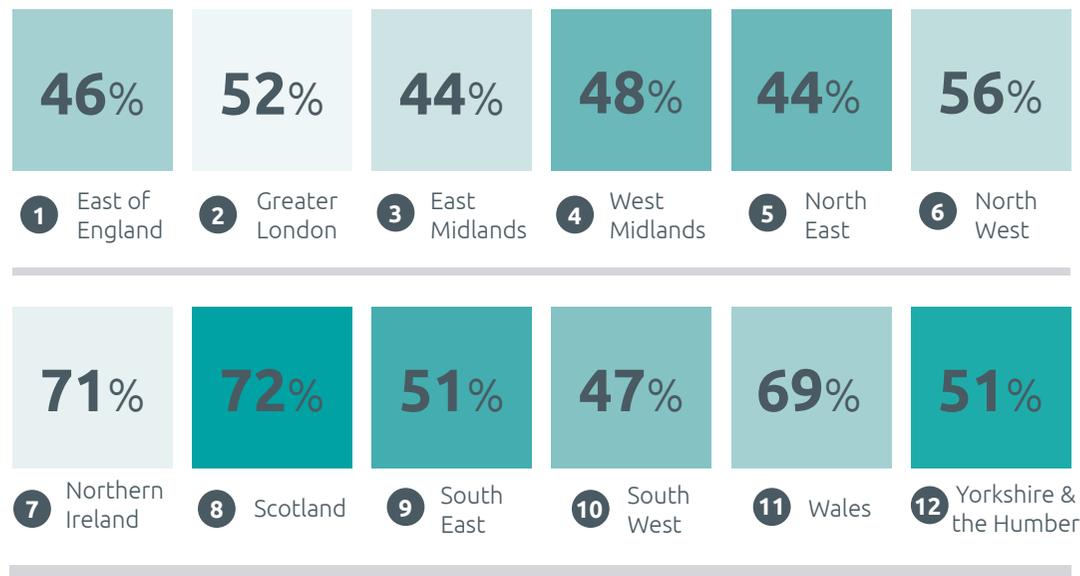
Average number of school days lost per term because of the following reasons:



> Key figures

How many girls have missed school or college because of their period?

Regional split:

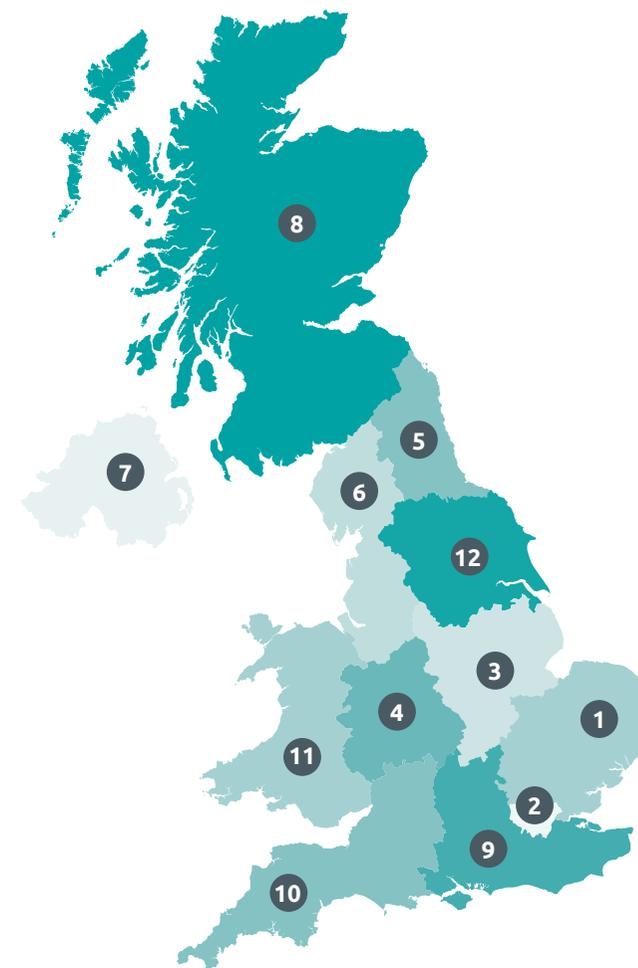


Summary

The importance of education cannot be overstated and strong attendance is essential to achieving this.

The impact of periods on attendance is clear, causing **more than half** to miss school. They cause nearly **one in five** of these to miss at least a full week each term and a quarter expect this trend to continue.

While it may seem like a small number at first glance, the fact that **7%** of girls of those who miss school due to periods have had to do so because of period inequality is highly significant. If you take **one class of 30 pupils**, that's **one girl** who will miss school for the simple reason of being unable to afford or access sanitary products. That's one too many.



In the last 12 months



one third

have had to give sanitary products to a friend

Nearly



one quarter

have had to ask for some themselves

> Access to sanitary products

32%

Nearly one third of teenage girls admitted either they, or someone they know, has been impacted by period poverty in the **last 12 months**.

5%

One in 20 said they had been unable, or found it difficult to afford sanitary products, while **4%** said they had been unable to access them.

more than **one in ten**

In addition, **12%** of girls said someone they know had been unable, or found it difficult, to afford sanitary products. The same number also knew someone who had been unable to access sanitary wear.

almost **one in five**

This has led to **17%** needing to wear sanitary products longer than they should have with **8%** admitting to having to use something else while on their period, other than sanitary products, in the **last 12 months**.

£

8% also said they have had to spend their lunch or travel money on sanitary products.

3%

Meanwhile, **3%** said they have had to do entirely without sanitary products and **1%** have resorted to stealing them.

> Research

Summary

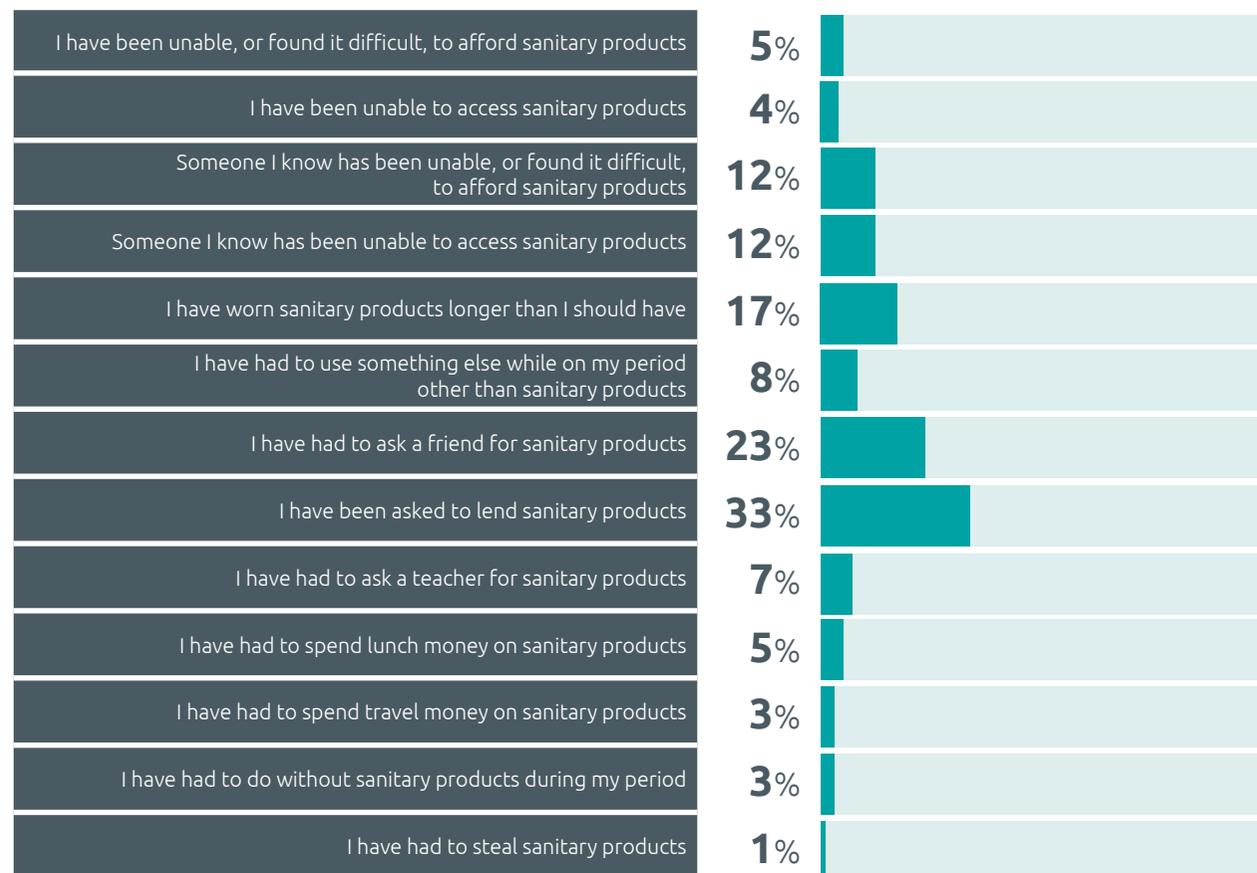
The research suggests that **a third of girls in the UK** are directly or indirectly impacted by period inequality – either having experienced it themselves or knowing someone who has. That is a stark figure.

One in 20 have struggled to afford products while **4%** haven't been able to access them. It's also clear that girls have had to make do without enough products which isn't good enough.

What's significant about this research is that it's based on experiences specifically in the **last 12 months**. Some previous studies have asked if participants have ever been impacted by the stigma of not being able to afford sanitary products. This new survey shows the scale of the current impact of period equality.

It's very much a live issue, accelerating the need for it to be tackled – and fast.

Which of the following applies to you within the last 12 months?





> Period equality – it's a real issue

The vast majority of teenage girls:

89% | believed that period equality was a real issue.

More than half:

58% | are calling for more action to tackle it.

Worryingly, more than half think period equality is not taken seriously enough by the Government and **nearly a third** said it isn't taken seriously enough by teachers.

Nearly half also believe that girls have been let down by not enough being done to prevent period inequality.

When asked what action should be taken to tackle period equality, providing free sanitary products was the resounding choice. **Three quarters** of teenage girls said free products should be offered at schools, **over two thirds** said they should be offered in public places such as leisure centres and community centres and half at food banks.

Nearly half believed more awareness of the issue should be raised while a similar number called for the stigma around periods to be removed. **Nearly 40%** said people needed more education about periods, **a third** believed more donations should be made to organisations and charities and nearly **one in five** backed more petitions and campaigns.

> Key figures

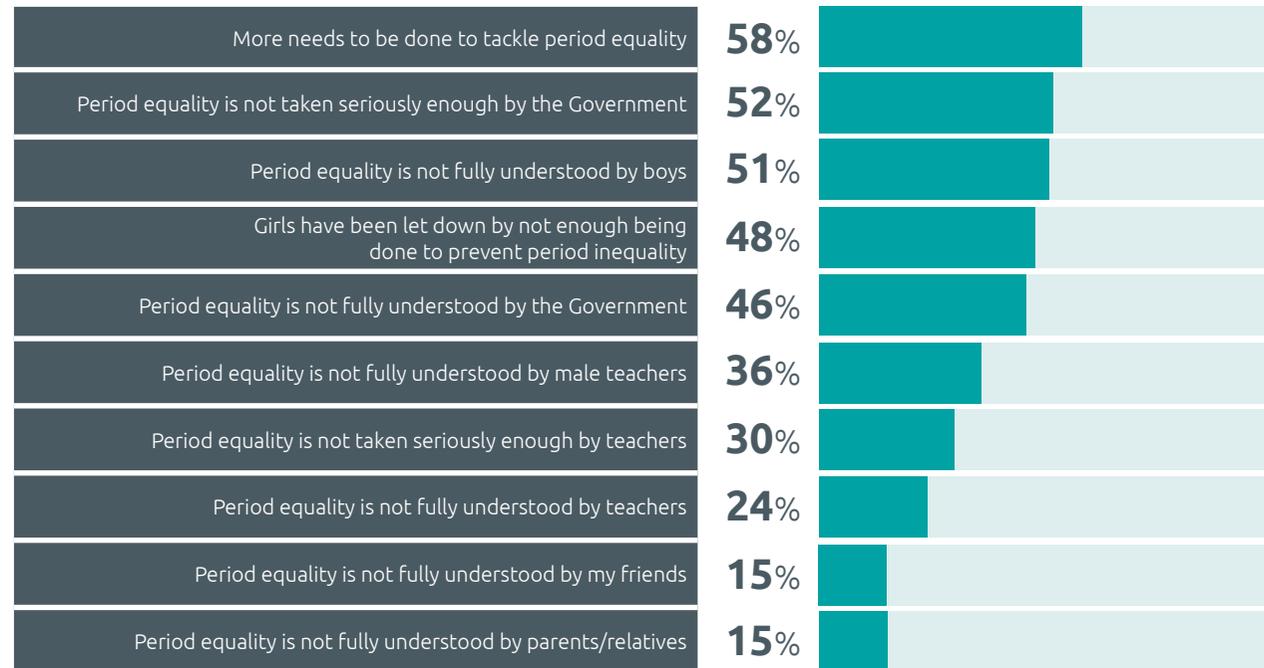
Do you believe period equality is a real issue?

	Age of respondents						
	Total	13	14	15	16	17	18
Yes, definitely	58%	47%	44%	47%	61%	64%	77%
Yes, somewhat	32%	40%	40%	39%	30%	29%	17%
No	11%	13%	16%	14%	9%	8%	5%

	Yes, Definitely	Yes, Somewhat	No
East of England	51%	35%	14%
Greater London	55%	32%	13%
East Midlands	52%	38%	11%
West Midlands	56%	35%	9%
North East	71%	19%	10%
North West	63%	27%	10%
Northern Ireland	43%	50%	7%
Scotland	69%	25%	6%
South East	56%	33%	11%
South West	54%	38%	8%
Wales	62%	22%	16%
Yorkshire & the Humber	55%	35%	10%

> Key figures

Which of the following statements do you agree with?



What action do you think needs to be taken in order to tackle period equality?

Free sanitary products at schools or colleges	Free sanitary products in public places	Access to sanitary products in food banks	Raising awareness	Remove the stigma around periods	Educate more people about periods	Donations to organisations and charities	Petitions/campaign	I think no action needs to be taken
76%	65%	51%	47%	46%	39%	33%	18%	4%

> Key figures

Summary

We all have our opinions on period equality but the most important opinions should be those who are exposed to it. If nearly **nine out of 10 girls** are telling us it's a real issue, we should all be listening. And while a lot of work may be being done nationally, it's not yet filtering through to the younger generation which evidences the need for urgent action and to stop so many girls feeling as if they are being let down.

The good news is that a solution proposed, offering free sanitary products in schools, is the right one – backed by **three quarters** of girls. Keeping the issue high on the agenda by awareness raising, breaking down stigma and continued campaigning is also key.





> Free sanitary products – but where from?

When asked where girls should have access to free sanitary products, **school toilets were the most popular choice**; chosen by **more than half** of respondents.

52%

believe girls should have access via **free vending machines in the toilets**

46%

suggested providing products at the **school reception** or from the **school nurse**

35%

suggested an **open basket** of products in the toilets

27%

would like to see these available by **asking a teacher**

In addition, nearly half would like to see free sanitary products **offered at the GP or from hospital** with **43%** suggesting **pharmacies with leisure centres and community centres** chosen by **37%** and **33%** respectively.

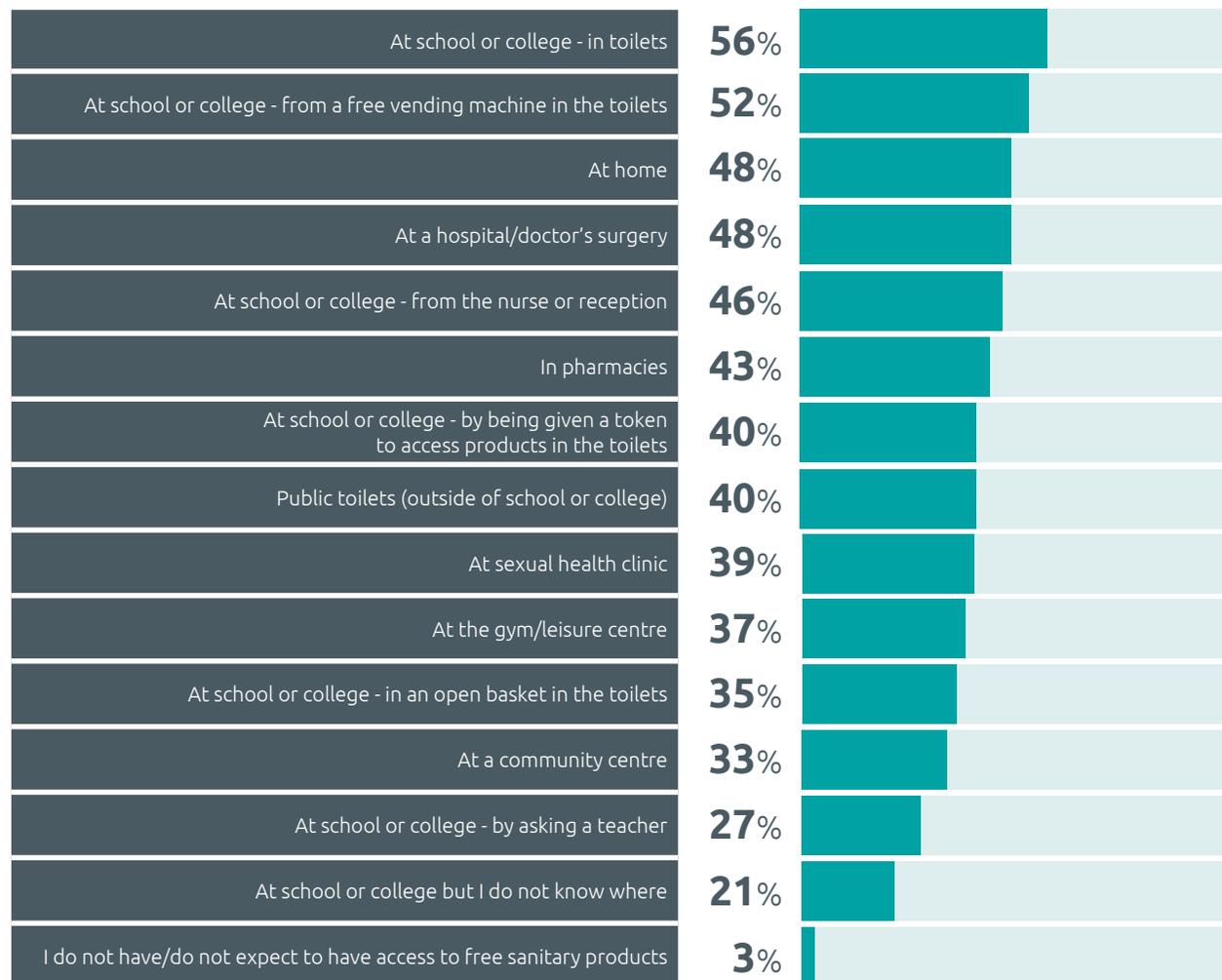
> Research

Summary

It's clear that steps are already being taken to offer free sanitary products with some girls having access to them in schools. However, **6%** of respondents said that while they were available at school, they did not know where. This heightens the need to educate pupils and signpost them to the facilities they need, otherwise they are redundant.

School toilets are the most chosen popular location to access free products whenever they are needed. Free vending machines were the preferred solution, chosen by **52%** of respondents. These offer the ultimate in convenience, discreetness as well as being able to keep products clean and dry. They also prevent girls from the embarrassment of having to ask for products which may deter them from doing so in the first place.

Girls feel they should have access to free sanitary products in these places:





> Period equality – the big picture

Nearly half of girls:

46% | believed that period inequality holds girls back from attending school or college everyday.

A total of:

38% | think period inequality holds girls back from doing well in their education.

Nearly a third:

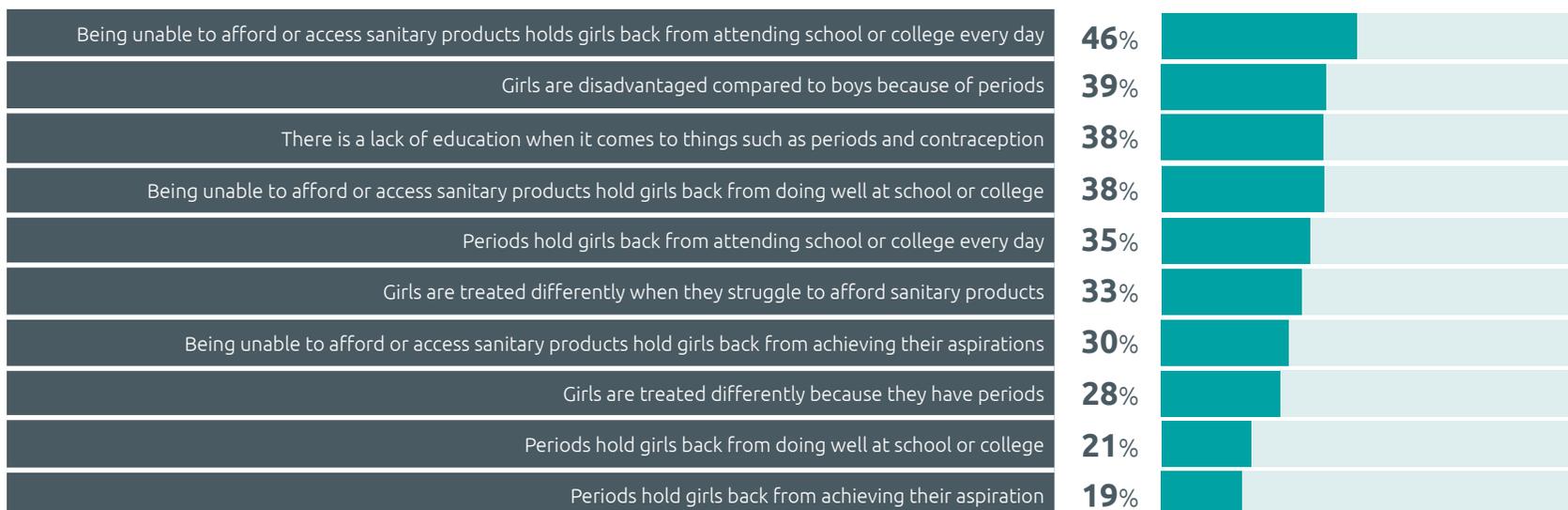
30% | went so far as to say they believe period inequality holds girls back from achieving their aspirations.

Just under **one in 10** girls believe having to miss school due to the lack of access to sanitary products was the biggest barrier facing young girls at school today.

More than a third think that girls are disadvantaged compared to boys because of periods and **over a quarter** believed that girls are treated differently because they have periods. **A total of 38%** believe that there is a lack of education when it comes to things like periods and contraception.

> Research

Which of the following do you think is true?



What do you consider to be the biggest barrier facing young girls at school in the UK?

Social media pressures	Pressure to do well at school	Nothing	Sexism	Having to miss school due to lack of access to sanitary products	Gender pay gap	Lack of education about periods and contraception
20%	17%	16%	10%	8%	6%	6%
Expectation to grow up and have a family	Not enough range of topics on the curriculum	Lower expectations than for boys	A curriculum that is more focused towards boys	Lack of career choice	Other	
6%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	

> pHS Period Equality

Because of our day job (being the UK's leading hygiene services company), period equality is a cause that is a natural fit for **pHS** and something that we are passionate about tackling. That's why we've created **pHS** Period Equality, a programme of activity designed to do four things:



Raise awareness of the scale of the issue



Invoke action to meet the fundamental needs of girls who can't afford or access sanitary products



Break through the stigma of talking about periods and period equality



Create a practical solution to achieving period equality

As part of this **pHS** Period Equality initiative, we've commissioned new research into the experiences and opinions of girls surrounding period equality and have kick started an awareness-raising campaign. We've also been appointed to the UK Government's official Period Poverty Taskforce with one common goal; eliminating period poverty. In partnership with Bloody Good Period, **pHS** is leading one of just three workstreams tasked at improving access to period products for those who need it. We believe that bringing together our expertise, experience and resource will create a force to be reckoned with.

But we're not just talking about period equality, we're taking action too. In consultation with schools, local authorities and FM providers, we have developed a free-vend sanitary machine which we believe is the best solution in providing free sanitary products to girls. Located within washrooms, girls can simply open the vending drawer and take their choice of product whenever they need. It's not only convenient, it's also discreet and offers schools a managed and hygienic method of distributing products without the embarrassment of having to ask a teacher or staff member.

What's more, we've pledged to offer the pHS free-vend sanitary machines free of charge to the education sector.

We believe every girl should have access to free sanitary products – because they are a necessity, not a luxury. Together, we can make a difference and prevent periods from holding young people back.

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