



An Assessment of Menstrual-Related Needs in Northern Communities

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land, Treaty, and Territorial Acknowledgements

Moon Time Connections and the University of Saskatchewan respectfully acknowledge the lands on which our research originated and from which we gathered the stories and data that inform this report. Moon Time Connections has deep roots from coast to coast to coast. The University of Saskatchewan is located on Treaty 6 Territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway, Sauteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many other peoples whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to inform the futures of all Treaty people. We respect and honour the Treaties that were made and continue to provide the foundational framework for just relations among peoples and across the lands that make up the province of Saskatchewan. We also recognize and honour unceded territories throughout Turtle Island.

Participants from across the country provided data for our study. In making this territorial tribute, we also acknowledge the harms and mistakes of our colonialist past and present, remaining committed to moving forward in respectful partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations and all our relations in a learning spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

Project Acknowledgements

This research has been inspired and driven by individuals, Community, and agencies committed to creating a country committed to menstrual equity for all. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all who have participated in the survey. We appreciate your willingness to share your invaluable experiences, stories, and insights to this work. We also acknowledge all of those who have considered participating, those who had not yet participated by the time data collection was completed, and those for whom this report has come too late. We appreciate the support of True North Aid, of which Moon Time Connections is a flagship project.

We sincerely appreciate all of the partners and volunteers who have supported the research process through the many stages of work including designing the research, refining data instruments. Special thanks to Nicole White, Veronica Brown, Heather Lane, Dr. Karen Lawson, Adriana Cashwell, Dr. Lisa Smith for the time, patience, energy, and guidance through this work.

AN ASSESSMENT OF MENSTRUAL-RELATED NEEDS IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

Purpose and Overview of the Survey

The purpose of the survey is to provide data on menstruators 15 years and over in northern, remote communities for the reference year 2022. The data from this study will help Moon Time Connections better understand the needs of menstruators in these communities to provide the most helpful delivery of menstrual/Moon Time products and services.

Data Sources and Methodology

The sole data source for the study is respondent data. A sampling frame was not available to use, so instead, the sampling method selected was convenience sampling. The results in this study cannot be used to make inferences about the population of interest. Data was collected with electronic questionnaires which were distributed using the following methods: social media channels, word of mouth, and informational posters placed around points of interest in remote communities. In addition to the electronic questionnaires, paper questionnaires were distributed to health centres and schools in northern communities.

Population of Interest

Data collection was focused on collecting from as many menstruators in remote northern communities as possible. However, as convenience sampling and crowd-sourcing collection were unrestricted, the responses from people who are non-Indigenous, or Indigenous people living in non-remote communities were also collected. No mandatory responses were included, so some respondents did not specify their Indigenous identity, their locations or if they were living in a remote community. For the purpose of this survey, we omitted responses where there were no Indigenous status or community type indicators provided.

Topics of Interest

The key objectives of the survey were to assess:

1. Menstrual/Moon Time¹ product related experiences, the needs and preferences of menstruators in remote northern communities, including availability of products in the community, cost of products, preferred menstrual products, and barriers to participating in activities due to lack of product availability.
2. Menstrual pain-related experiences, needs, and pain-relief preferences.

¹ Moon Time, menstrual and period all refer to menstruation and will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

3. Attitudes toward menstruation and experiences of menstrual stigma.
4. Community characteristics, facilitators, and barriers that impact product availability, use, and preferences.

Data Cleaning and Imputation

Data was cleaned to format existing responses and impute missing responses that had obvious answers. Imputations were used to assign respondents to remote or non-remote communities based on their postal code and information from other respondents.

KEY FINDINGS

- 74% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities and 55% of Indigenous respondents in non-remote communities “sometimes” or “often”² have issues accessing menstrual products.
- 93% of non-Indigenous respondents and 26% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities “rarely” or “never” have issues accessing menstrual products.
- Indigenous respondents in remote and non-remote communities said that the main reason they cannot access period products is that products are not available or out of stock at the store (37%), they have to buy other priority items (23%) and that products are unaffordable (24%).
- 65% of Indigenous respondents say that they have issues accessing pain products. The main reason they find pain relieving products unavailable is due to affordability issues (41%), supply issues (20%), or some other reason³(4%).
- Indigenous respondents in remote communities were most likely to miss out on exercise (42%), work (28%), and school (18%) due to a lack of access to period products.
- The product with the most positive responses is disposable pads with 52% of respondents saying they “extremely like” and only 10% saying they “extremely dislike” this product.
- There is an interesting area to explore with reusable products given the high proportion of indifferent responses reported for reusable products (20%) compared to disposable products (10%). This could indicate that Indigenous respondents in remote communities haven’t tried these products.
- 75% Indigenous respondents in remote communities feel comfortable speaking about their period with someone from two or more different types of personal relationships⁴ or professional relationships⁵. 12% of Indigenous respondents from remote northern communities said they are comfortable speaking with no one about their period.
- On average, 48% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities “often” or “always” feel feminine, capable, strong, empowered, connected to themselves and other women during their Moon Time.

² Respondents were given the options “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes” or “often” unlike most other questions which include “always” as the option describing the highest frequency.

³ Other reasons for lacking access specified by respondents related to the logistics of travelling to a store to buy the product, a preferred product only being available online, and difficulties replacing a forgotten product while at school or work.

⁴ Personal relationship types include family, friends, and partners.

⁵ Professional relationship types include healthcare professionals and teachers.

RESULTS - DEMOGRAPHY

Demographic information was collected to better understand the sample for more insightful analysis of the results. The most important dimensions of demographic information collected identified the target population: Indigenous menstruators in remote communities. Questions regarding age and gender identity were also included in the questionnaire and responses are summarized below. In some cases, the data was partitioned into two larger age groups for analysis.

Indigenous Identity

Respondents were asked about the Indigenous nation they identify with. Out of the 151 respondents who participated, 42% self-identified as Indigenous. Within that group, 86% of Indigenous respondents identify as First Nation. 8% of respondents identified as Métis, and 6% identified as Inuit. Although Indigenous people were the population of interest, we received 17% of responses from non-Indigenous respondents and 41% of respondents left the question about Indigenous identity blank.

Indigenous identity	Count of responses	Proportion of responses
Indigenous	63	42%
Indigenous - Inuit	4	2.5% (6% of Indigenous)
Indigenous - Métis	5	3.4% (8% of Indigenous)
Indigenous - First Nation	54	36% (86% of Indigenous)
Non-Indigenous	26	17%
Not specified	62	41%
Total	151	100%

Remote Communities

Responses regarding remote community residency were collected from our survey. Our sample comprises 44% of respondents living in a remote community, 13% who are not living in a remote community, 40% did not respond to this question, and 3% were not sure.

Remote Community	Count of responses	Proportion of responses
Remote	67	44%
Not Remote	19	13%
Unspecified	61	40%
Unsure	4	3%
Total	151	100%

Age Groups

The data collected skewed towards older age groups. Of the 151 responses, 40% of respondents did not provide their age. 41% indicated that they were 30 and older, 19% indicated that they were younger than 30, and 40% did not specify. This is important to consider when interpreting the results as experiences may differ across age groups.

Age groups	Count of responses	Proportion of responses
Under 15	2	1%
15-17	7	5%
18-24	6	4%
25-29	13	9%
30-34	15	10%
35-39	15	10%
40+	32	21%
Non-response	61	40%
Total	151	100%

Gender Identity

52% of the respondents in the sample identify as a woman, 42% did not answer this question but provided other responses, and the remaining 7% of respondents identify as a man, non-binary, trans-masculine, two-spirit, or a combination of responses. We structured the question to include a write-in response and included those responses in the summary.

Gender identity	Count of responses	Proportion of responses
Woman	79	52%
Non-Binary	2	1%
Man	1	> 1%
Trans-Masculine	1	> 1%
Two-Spirit	1	> 1%
Woman/non-binary	1	> 1%
Woman/Non-Binary/Two-Spirit	1	> 1%
Woman/Two-Spirit	1	> 1%
Non-response	64	42%
Grand Total	151	100%

RESULTS - CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

Product Preferences and Barriers to Access

We asked respondents to provide information on menstrual product preferences and availability of products in their communities. The main objective of Moon Time Connections is to offer a range of period products, free of charge, and ship the requested menstrual products to remote northern communities. One of Moon Time Connections' key principles is to ensure mindfulness to not project our own virtues and prescribe solutions that are unwanted or inappropriate for Indigenous communities. For example, one might feel the instinctive solution would be reusable cups. However, cups can be difficult to maintain if clean tap water is unavailable, as is the case for many remote northern communities. This principle is essential to serve communities effectively and with dignity and ensure that the products being shipped are being used and reflect preferences of menstruators. Menstrual product availability questions were included for a deeper understanding of the shortages experienced in remote northern communities.

Access to Menstrual/Moon Time Products

Remote northern communities have historically faced many barriers in accessing affordable necessities, including menstrual products. However, there is minimal information available on this topic. As such, questions were included to investigate why respondents lacked access to period products and how frequently they find themselves without access were included.

Frequency Without Access to Period Products – Indigenous Respondents

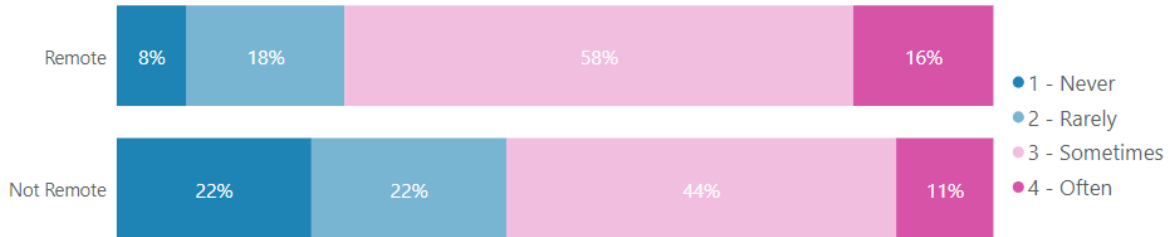
74% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities and 55% of Indigenous respondents in non-remote communities “sometimes” or “often⁶” have issues accessing period products. The frequency of without access for respondents in remote communities is significantly different⁷ than the frequency of access for communities that are not remote.

⁶ Respondents were given the options “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes” or “often” unlike most other questions which include “always” as the highest frequency.

⁷ Chi square test significance level alpha = 0.01

Frequency without access to period products

Respondents in all Communities

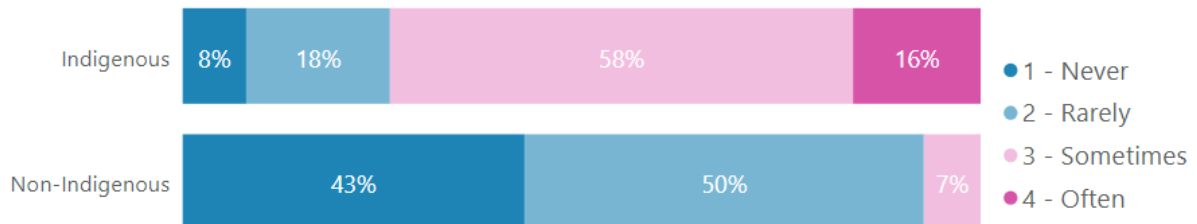


Frequency Without Access to Period Products – Remote Respondents

Comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents in remote communities, there is a significant difference⁸ between access to menstrual products. 93% of non-Indigenous respondents and 26% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities “rarely” or “never” have issues accessing menstrual products.

Frequency without access to period products

Respondents in Remote Communities



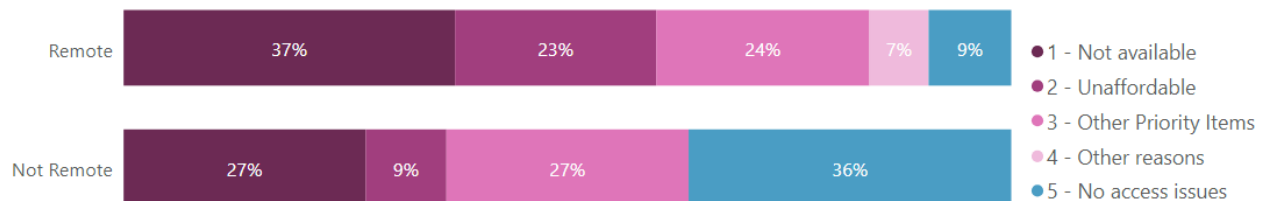
⁸ Chi square test significance level alpha = 0.01

Reasons For Lacking Access to Moon Time Products – Indigenous Respondents

Indigenous respondents in remote and non-remote communities said that the main reason they cannot access period products is that products are not available or out of stock at the store (37%), they have to buy other priority items (23%) and that products are unaffordable (24%). 36% of respondents in communities that are not remote say that they have no access issues which is significantly different² from the proportion of respondents in remote communities say they don't have access issues (9%).

Reasons for Lack of Access to Period Products

Indigenous Respondents in all Communities

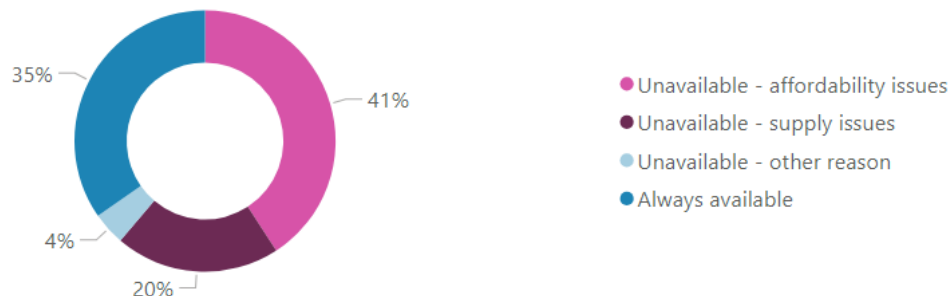


Access to Pain Relieving Products

Period pain can be debilitating for some menstruators and a contributing factor to missing activities, so it is important to consider if pain relieving products are accessible in remote communities. 65% of Indigenous respondents say that they have issues accessing pain products. The main reason they find pain relieving products unavailable is due to affordability issues (41%), supply issues (20%), or some other reason (4%). Other reasons for lacking access specified by respondents relate to the logistics of travelling to a store to buy the product, a preferred product only being available online, and difficulty replacing a forgotten product while at school or work.

Reasons for Lack of Access to Pain Relieving Products

Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities

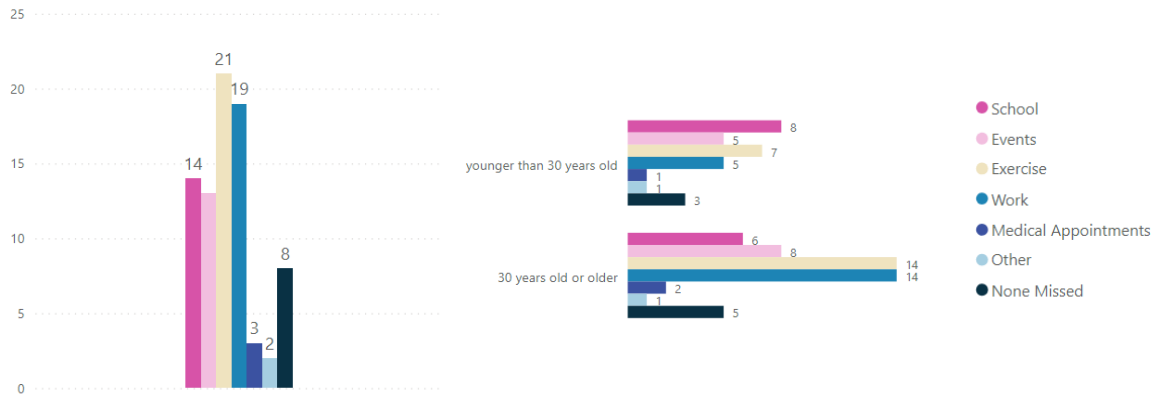


Missed Activities Due to Lack of Access to Period Products

We asked respondents to report on missed activities due to a lack of access to period products during their Moon Time. The most important reason for Moon Time Connections to send products to menstruators in remote northern communities is to reduce the frequency of missing out on school, work, or other important activities due to a lack of access.

Missed Activities by Type

Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities



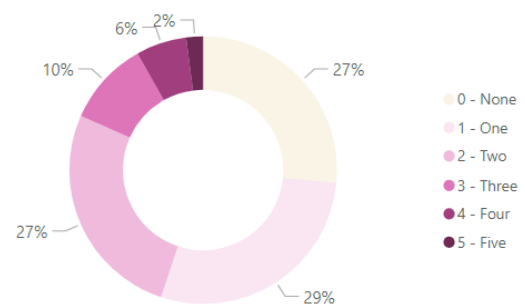
Indigenous respondents in remote communities (n=50) were most likely to miss out on exercise (42%), work (28%), and school (18%) due to a lack of access to period products. However, our sample composition is weighted towards the older age group and there is minimal data for individual age groups, so the data was split into two main groups: 30 and above (n= 33) and younger than 30 (n=17). The activities most likely to be missed are significantly different⁹ when data is partitioned: the younger than 30 age group is most likely to miss school (47%), exercise (41%), and work (29%); and the group of 30 and over are most likely to miss work (42%), exercise (42%), and events (24%).

Number of Missed Activity Types

73% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities say that they have missed at least one type¹⁰ of activity during their period because they lack access to menstrual products. 29% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities said that they missed one type of activity, 27% said two and 18% said that they missed three to five types of activities due to a lack of access to period products.

Number of Missed Activity Types

Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities



⁹ Chi square test significance level alpha = 0.01

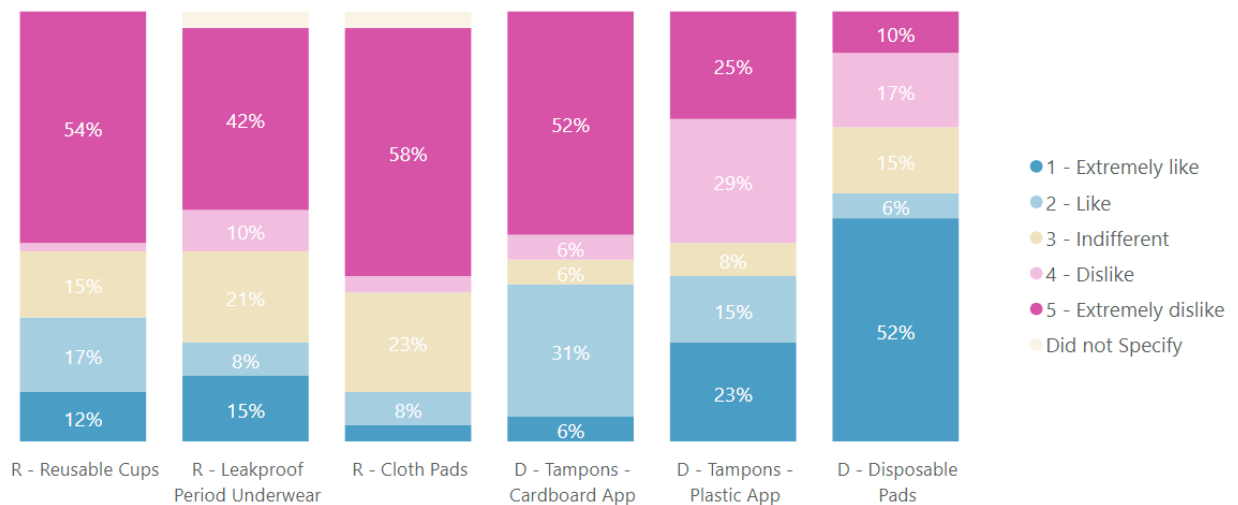
¹⁰ This refers to types of activities missed, not frequency of activities missed.

Product Preferences

Respondents were asked to rate six products on a scale from “extremely like” to “extremely dislike”. Three of the six products were reusable products: cloth pads, reusable cups, and reusable leakproof period underwear. The other three were disposable products: tampons with plastic applicators, tampons with cardboard applicators and disposable pads. Disposable products have significantly¹¹ higher proportions of positive responses (like and extremely like) than reusable products.

Period Product Preferences

Indigenous Respondents from Remote Communities



Reusable products were mostly disliked by Indigenous respondents in remote communities. The lowest average score overall was for cloth pads with 58% of respondents saying they “extremely dislike” cloth pads and only 4% of responses for “extremely like”. 54% of respondents said that they “extremely dislike” reusable cups, and 42% “extremely dislike” leakproof period underwear.

Disposable product ratings vary significantly¹² within the product category. 52% of respondents said they “extremely dislike” tampons with a cardboard applicator, but 37% of respondents at least “like” this product. There is a similar proportion of respondents who at least “like” tampons with a plastic applicator (38%), but most respondents at least “dislike” this product (54%). The product with the most positive responses is disposable pads with 52% of respondents saying they “extremely like” and only 10% saying they “extremely dislike” this product. This is consistent with community requests and knowledge acquired from community contacts.

¹¹ Chi square test significance level alpha = 0.01

¹² Chi square test significance level alpha = 0.01

Area of Opportunity

Given the information acquired through community connections it is not surprising to see disposable pads rank as the most liked and least disliked product. However, there is an interesting area to explore with reusable products given the high proportion of indifferent responses reported for reusable products (20%) compared to disposable products (10%). This could indicate that Indigenous respondents in remote communities haven't tried these products. Information gathered by community consultations provides information on minimal access to clean tap water or laundry facilities in the home. From a recent Australian study, respondents were more likely to try reusable menstrual products if they were in a higher earnings bracket and had more information about the products. Results from the study (Ramsay et al., 2023, p.1) could be a predictor of potential obstacles faces by menstruators in remote northern communities:

Overall, 37% of participants reported not having enough information about reusable products... Respondents highlighted the need for earlier and better information, challenges navigating the upfront cost and availability of reusables, positive experiences with reusables, and challenges for use, including cleaning reusables and changing them outside the home.

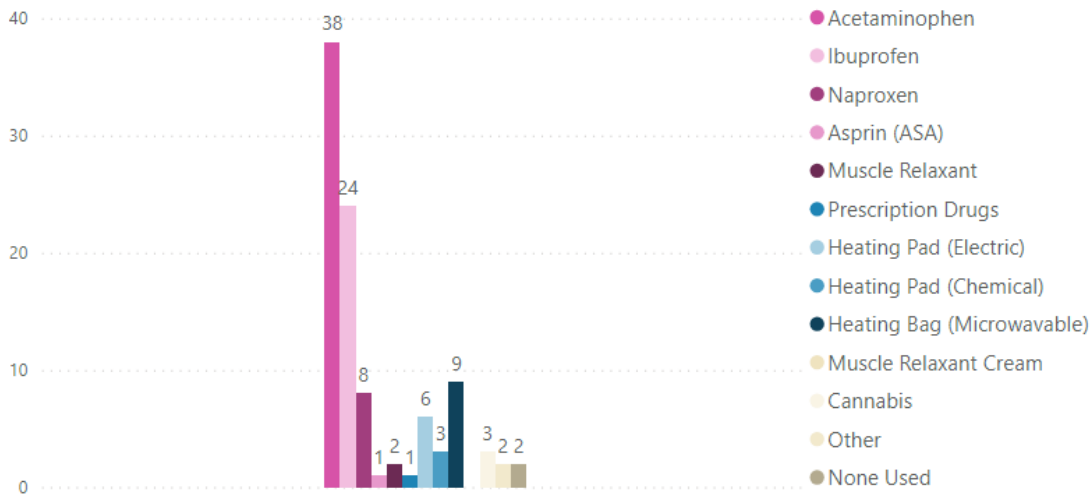
Another reason for strong negative feelings about reusable products could be a high upfront cost. If the product did not fit well or work well, the high cost could exacerbate the dislike for the product. Providing education about reusable products could help match users to a suitable product, and delivering free reusable products could eliminate the upfront cost. If completed in this order, Moon Time Connections could increase the desirability of reusable products among members of remote communities. A substitution of disposable products for reusable products could minimize long term costs and increase the number of communities served, but the course of action that upholds the initiative's existing values is to send the communities the products that they prefer.

Preferred Pain Relief Products

Respondents were asked to select products they have used to help relieve menstrual pain. The top five preferred pain relief products for remote respondents are acetaminophen (76%), ibuprofen (48%), naproxen (16%) and non-medicinal pain relief like electric and microwave heating pads (12% and 18% respectively). Barriers to using reusable heating pads include upfront cost, access to a microwave, and additional electricity costs.

Pain Relief Product Preferences (n=50)

Indigenous Respondents from Remote Communities

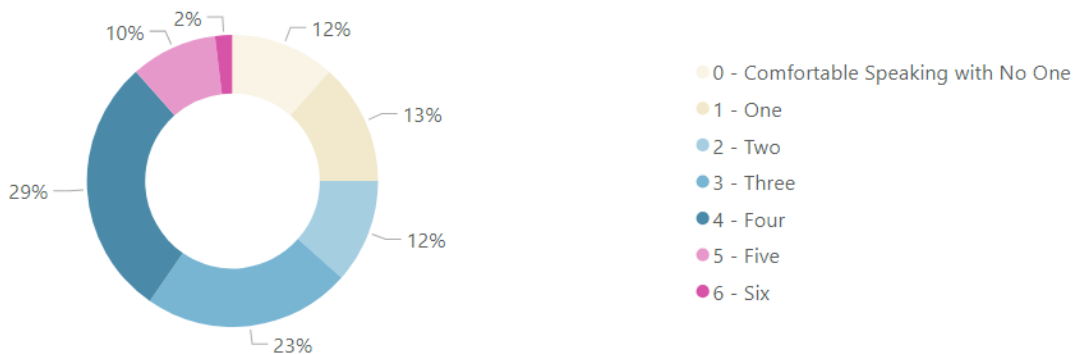


Comfort Speaking about Menstruation

We asked respondents with whom they feel comfortable speaking with about their period. The response options include six professional or personal relationship types. The survey results indicate that 75% Indigenous respondents in remote communities feel comfortable speaking about their period with someone from two or more different types of personal relationships or professional relationships. 12% of Indigenous respondents from remote northern communities said they are comfortable speaking with no one about their period.

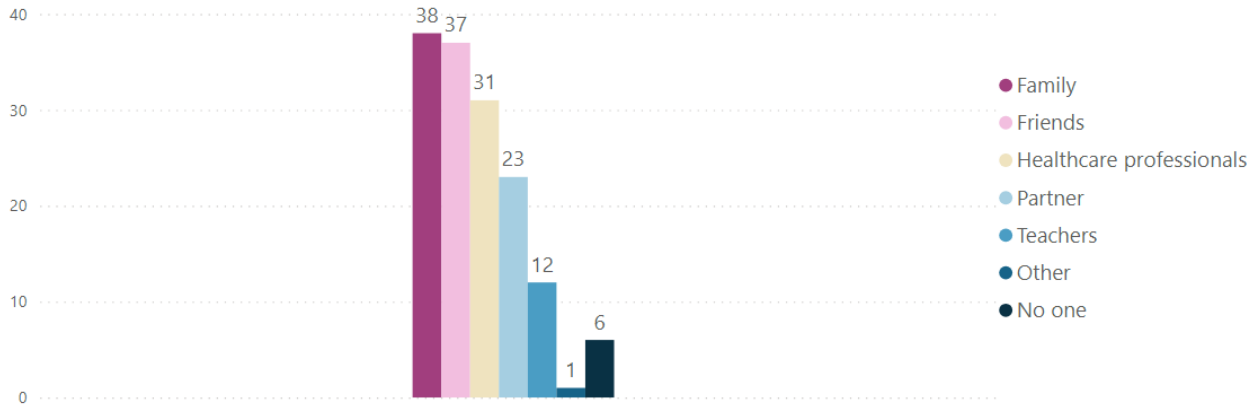
Comfortable Speaking with about your Period by Count of Relationship Type

Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities



76% of respondents (n= 50) feel comfortable speaking about their period with family, 74% are comfortable speaking with friends, and 62% respondents are comfortable speaking with healthcare professionals about their period.

Comfortable Speaking about Periods by Type of Relationship Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities



Feelings about Periods

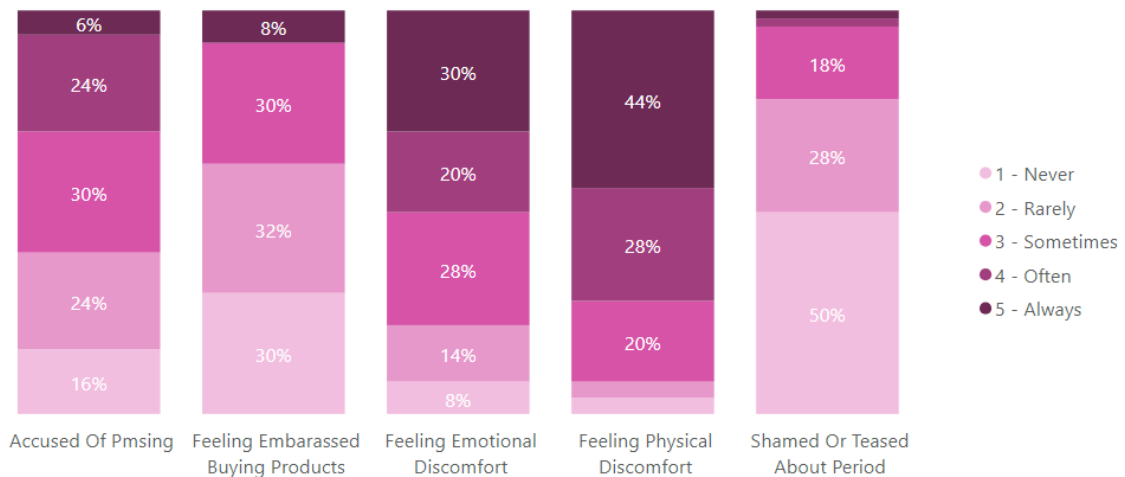
Respondents were asked to report on five negative and six positive feelings associated with their periods. They were also asked to provide comments about negative and positive experiences surrounding their periods. The results below summarize the experiences of Indigenous respondents in remote communities.

Negative Feelings

Of the five questions asked to understand negative experiences, 72% of Indigenous respondents from remote communities "always" or "often" feel physical discomfort, which is the highest occurrence of the five negative experiences that were reviewed. The second highest occurrence is with emotional discomfort, where 50% of respondents said this happened "often" or "always".

Negative Feelings Associated with Menstruation

Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities



Two of the questions asked were about external menstrual related experiences. 60% of respondents felt that they were sometimes (30%), often (24%) or always (6%) accused of “PMSing”, and 22% said they sometimes (18%), often (2%) or always (2%) get teased or shamed for having their period. Respondents were asked how frequently they felt embarrassed while buying menstrual products. 38% of respondents sometimes (30%) or always (8%) felt embarrassed while buying menstrual products. Considering earlier findings, embarrassment could have two sources: stigma surrounding periods and/or stigma surrounding affordability of products.

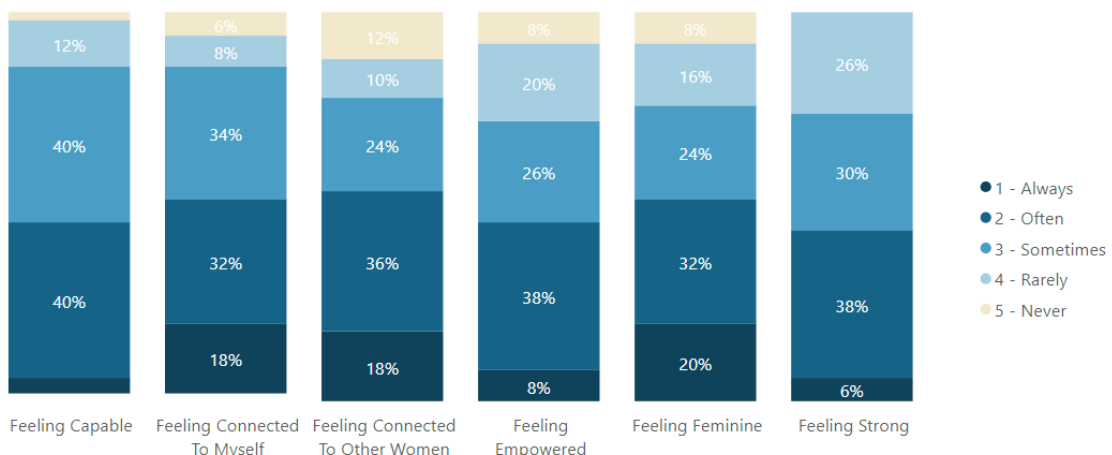
Respondents had the opportunity to add additional comments about other negative or uncomfortable things they experienced during their Moon Time. Respondents expressed feelings of worry about staining their clothes, running through products too quickly, and hygiene. They said that they experienced physical symptoms like migraines, cramps, and gastrointestinal issues. Many of the respondents mentioned feelings of fatigue, some more extreme than others and some mention difficulty sleeping. Many of these aspects of menstruation have a solution, whether it be product or strategy, and the hope is the roll out of Moon Time Connections' new menstrual education pilot program will offer new learnings and solutions for these issues.

Positive Feelings

We asked respondents to report on six positive feelings associated with menstruation. On average, 48% of Indigenous respondents in remote communities “often” or “always” feel feminine, capable, strong, empowered, connected to themselves and other women during their Moon Time.

The positive feelings choices with the highest proportion of “never” or “rarely” responses are feeling empowered (28%), strong (26%), and feminine (24%). An interesting note is that “feeling feminine” also has the highest proportion of respondents to say that they “always” feel feminine during menstruation (20%).

Positive Feelings Associated with Menstruation
Indigenous Respondents in Remote Communities



Other positive experiences reported by Indigenous respondents in remote communities say that menstruation is a time for caring for themselves and resting, to be connected to their body and acknowledge the body's ability to procreate.

Conclusion

This study provides insights and evidence for menstrual-related product preferences, needs, issues, and experiences to close information gaps on remote northern Indigenous menstruation issues. The study's findings draw attention to a number of issues including barriers to access, product availability, menstrual product preferences for disposable products, and opportunities for education on reusable products. The results will enable Moon Time Connections to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of menstruators in remote northern communities and better equip the organization to continue providing menstrual products and vital menstrual education to improve the menstrual experience and work towards the ultimate goal of period equity in the North.

Impacts of Preliminary Research

Based on survey findings and other knowledge presented to the House of Commons FEWO Committee, key recommendations have been made to specifically address menstrual equity in Indigenous communities. The first four recommendations from the report “LET’S TALK ABOUT IT, PERIOD: ACHIEVING MENSTRUAL EQUITY IN CANADA Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women” (Government of Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada, Integrated Services Branch, Government Information Services, Publishing and Depository Services, 2023, p. 3) include:

1. That the Government of Canada consult with Indigenous peoples to address period poverty and accessibility, particularly in northern communities where limited access to menstrual health products is common.
2. That the Government of Canada ensure funding for First Nations and First Nations-designated education organizations to procure the quantity needed as well as the desired type of free menstrual health products, including reusable and sustainable products, for students both on and off reserve.
3. That the Government of Canada ensure all First Nations communities have reliable access to clean water and safely lift, as soon as possible, all long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves in Canada.

Future Work

In future iterations of this survey program, Moon Time Connections hopes to include product pricing information, understand the frequency of missed activities due to lack of period products, and once again assess product preferences in remote communities. In addition, there is also an opportunity to assess attitudes about menstruation and products by participants in the pilot menstrual education programs set to launch in the coming months.

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