

Attitudes towards reusable and disposable period products

July 2024



Background & research objectives

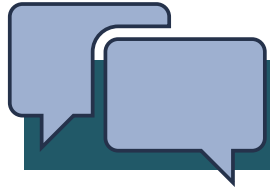
The disposal of single-use period products, including tampons, pads, and liners, contributes to approximately 200,000 tonnes of waste per year in the UK.

Approximately 2.5 million tampons, 1.4 million pads, and 700,000 panty liners are flushed down toilets across the UK every day imposing significant costs on water companies.

Yorkshire Water commissioned research to understand flushing and disposal behaviours, and to determine how to speak to this audience in a way that encourages uptake of reusable period products.

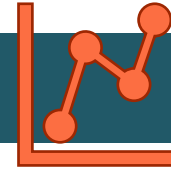
- 1 To understand the current usage trends and disposal patterns within the period product market
- 2 To explore current attitudes and behaviours surrounding reusable period products





Qualitative phase

- Fieldwork ran **15th April – 9th May**
- Total 40 respondents from Yorkshire Water region participated in:
 - 3 x Focus groups
 - 5 x Friendship groups
 - 5 x Mother / daughter paired interviews
 - 6 x Follow-on depths with current users
- Interviews covered:
 - Current period product knowledge and use
 - Attitudes towards reusable products
 - Factors influencing period product choice
 - Reactions to information on blockages in the water supply
- Ethnicity:
 - A focus on ethnic minority groups to understand cultural or religious factors which may impact period product use



Quantitative phase

- Fieldwork ran **15th May – 23rd May**
- 500 survey respondents from Yorkshire Water region
- Survey questions covered:
 - Demographics
 - Usage and self-reported disposal of disposable products
 - Awareness, attitude and usage of reusable period products
 - Drivers and barriers to uptake of reusable products
 - Environmental and blockage attitudes





Key findings

Periods are very personal: often uncomfortable, sometimes painful, still carrying a stigma. While taboos are lessening, **most women have a deep-rooted fear and embarrassment of leaking or revealing period blood.**

Mums are the biggest influencers about period habits and product choices for their daughters – with schools playing an important role too. Peer influence increases as young women become independent. **Awareness of reusable product options is relatively high but only a quarter have used them** – with just 1 in 10 using reusables exclusively.

Reusable period products strongly associated with being an environmental choice. However, they are not perceived to offer the same comfort, hygiene or reliability as disposable products. There are significant barriers: women are concerned about the difficulty of removing blood stains, their potential to fail (causing leaks) and managing 'dirty' reusables when out of home.

Most claim to dispose of period products responsibly although at least a fifth are flushing tampons (often unaware this is wrong). At the point of disposing of period products, the need to be clean, hygienic and discreet is paramount – a full (or no) bin leaves no other choice than to flush.

Most women, when asked, do believe that flushing period products will impact sewer blockages, but this is not a top-of-mind issue. While women were initially shocked when shown the statistics on the scale of waste caused by disposable period products it is difficult to relate to the 'big numbers.' **There is a risk of inadvertently blaming women** when communicating these facts.





Section 1: The wonderful world of periods...



In the UK:

- 15 million women of menstrual age
- Periods begin at 11-13 years of age (school years 8 & 9)...
- ...and end at around 50-55
- On average, women will have 485 periods in her lifetime
- Losing approximately 85g of menstrual blood each time

So just a normal part of everyday life...?

Powerful social norms exist around periods

- Personal, often private: lack of open (societal) discussion
- The need to be discrete, concealing evidence (such as products)
- Potential for embarrassment (especially around leaks)
- Cultural and evolutionary response to blood: disgust / visceral reaction to grossness / impurity
- Societal expectation for cleanliness
- Woman's world: men don't feature here

Becoming less of a taboo?

- Women believe there is more openness these days
- Some attribute this to social media
- NB: Our experience of recruiting women happy to discuss periods posed no barrier in the sample recruitment





70s/80s: positive confidence – and lots of copy



1985: Courtney Cox used the word 'period' for the first time in a TV commercial



1990s: product developments to meet needs for discretion and no leaks (compact tampons, wings)



- 2017: first ad to depict period blood rather than blue liquid to show absorbency
- #BloodNormal campaign – seen as groundbreaking
- (But still a rare sight)



- Today social media is normalising periods and period blood
- Often politicised or campaigning
- Or pushing taboo frontiers

Lingering taboos despite contemporary attitudes changing and periods becoming normalised



Grandmothers

- Largely taboo; periods not openly discussed within families
- *Practicality*: Conversations were practical and focused on managing blood
- *Environment*: sustainability and periods not linked

Mothers

- Conversations opening up within families - less taboo talking about periods with fathers/brothers around
- *Comfort*: prioritise period comfort and practicality
- *Environment*: Some links to sustainability

Daughters

- More open conversations – driven by social media
- *Choice*: Increased range of products helps ensure comfort and practicality
- *Environment*: Higher awareness of sustainability
 - For some, eco-friendly choices important

The next generation...?

- Increasingly open conversations: periods normalised?
- *Environment*: a core driver of period product choice..?

N.B. Conversations were more sensitive for mothers and grandmothers from different cultural/ religious backgrounds, but many daughters raised in the UK are as open as their western counterparts, especially in safe spaces (i.e., with female friends and family members).



Context: women's bodies go through significant change as they age, impacting how they view ¹⁰ their periods



9-12

- Girls learn about menstruation
- Menstruation begins
- Most will have information from a) school and b) their mums
- The focus for this age group will be on comfortably and discreetly managing their periods



12-20

- Increasingly comfortable managing periods
- Open conversations
- More primed to adverts
- Financial independence; purchase own products
- Become more familiar with bodies



20-40

- Cervical exams / gynaecological health starts
- Most have formed a habit around products: less primed to messaging about period products
- Some conversations on periods during conception, pregnancy, and post-birth



40-50

- Some become mothers of teenage daughters
- Re-engaging with messaging about periods – as mothers
- Learn about products for teenagers
- Some take up new products and form new habits through this



45+

- Women become peri-menopausal - adapting and managing physical symptoms
- Some may have irregular / very heavy periods driving product choices
- Primed for information on managing symptoms of the menopause





Mums

- Mother-Daughter relationship is significant
- *A supportive role:* comfort and openness observed
- *An educating role:* mothers offer advice on managing periods & disposing of products
- *Product influencer:* mums usually choose & buy products

Mothers are a very strong influence in the early years



Friends (and sometimes sisters)

- Most younger women talk openly – pain, cramps, etc
- Transition to living with flatmates shifts influence re product choices: peers discuss products
- Older (36+) women less likely to discuss periods openly (out of choice rather than stigma)

Peer influence is strongest for young women (under 36)



Schools

- Most learn about periods at school – formal education
- Some also learnt about product choices – but a gap in the curriculum
- Schools often provided disposable products
- Managing periods at school can be difficult

Schools appear to play a more functional role



Partners / men

- Very few mentions of men
- Some embarrassment about discussing periods in mixed gender households
- School girls see embarrassment about periods among boys – affecting their comfort
- Some women feel supported by male partners

Not influencers. The role of men re periods is limited

NB: there are differences for women from different cultural backgrounds where menstruation holds different/stronger stigma

No product is perfect: women have frustrations with managing their periods

It's generally accepted that menstruation is a burden; especially true for those with heavy or painful periods



Products can be uncomfortable

- Periods can cause physical and mental **discomfort** (e.g. painful cramps and mood changes)
- **Period products** can cause further discomfort:
 - Insertable products: can be uncomfortable to **insert, keep in** for an extended time, and **remove**
 - Non-insertable products: can be **uncomfortable - sit against the body** for a long time



It takes a lot of effort to use and clean certain products

- For reusable products: frustrations with the **effort required to clean them after use**
 - E.g. putting on a separate wash, or finding a sink to clean them in when away from home



Products can be unreliable

- Products unreliable or result in **leaking** - particularly for those with a heavy flow
- Some use **multiple products at once** to deal with this
 - E.g. a disposable pad and a disposable tampon, or a reusable menstrual cup and a disposable pad



Products are expensive, and costs are rising

- Some find it frustrating to spend money on disposable products **every month**
- Reusables users can find the **upfront cost frustrating**. In addition, they require more effort to find as they are not as readily available as disposable products

Health and hygiene during a period

- Keeping clean, feeling fresh – and avoiding any smell
- Losing a tampon (or cup) internally – risk of TSS
- Concerns about chemicals/bleaches in period products
- Concerns about materials irritating skin
- Feeling pain, low, miserable

Avoiding leaks at all costs

- Managing blood flow is top of mind
- Avoiding (acute) embarrassment
- Concerns about stains

Cultural & social norms

- For everybody: the need to be discreet, clean
- Some feel periods are private – not for discussion
- South Asian cultures: reference to restrictions around religious practices (attending worship; touching holy books etc.)

Practical aspects

- Managing periods when out of home: having products; easy to change; avoiding getting blood on hands/clothes
- Having products suitable for activities (swimming, gym)
- Affordability

Core needstates

- **Comfort** is a key need
- Higher use/preference for 'external' products (pads)

- Effectiveness and **reliability** of products
- Need for extra protection e.g. pads with wings

- **Discreet: disposal** – or **cleanability** – of blood-stained products

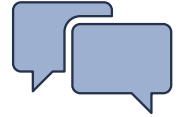
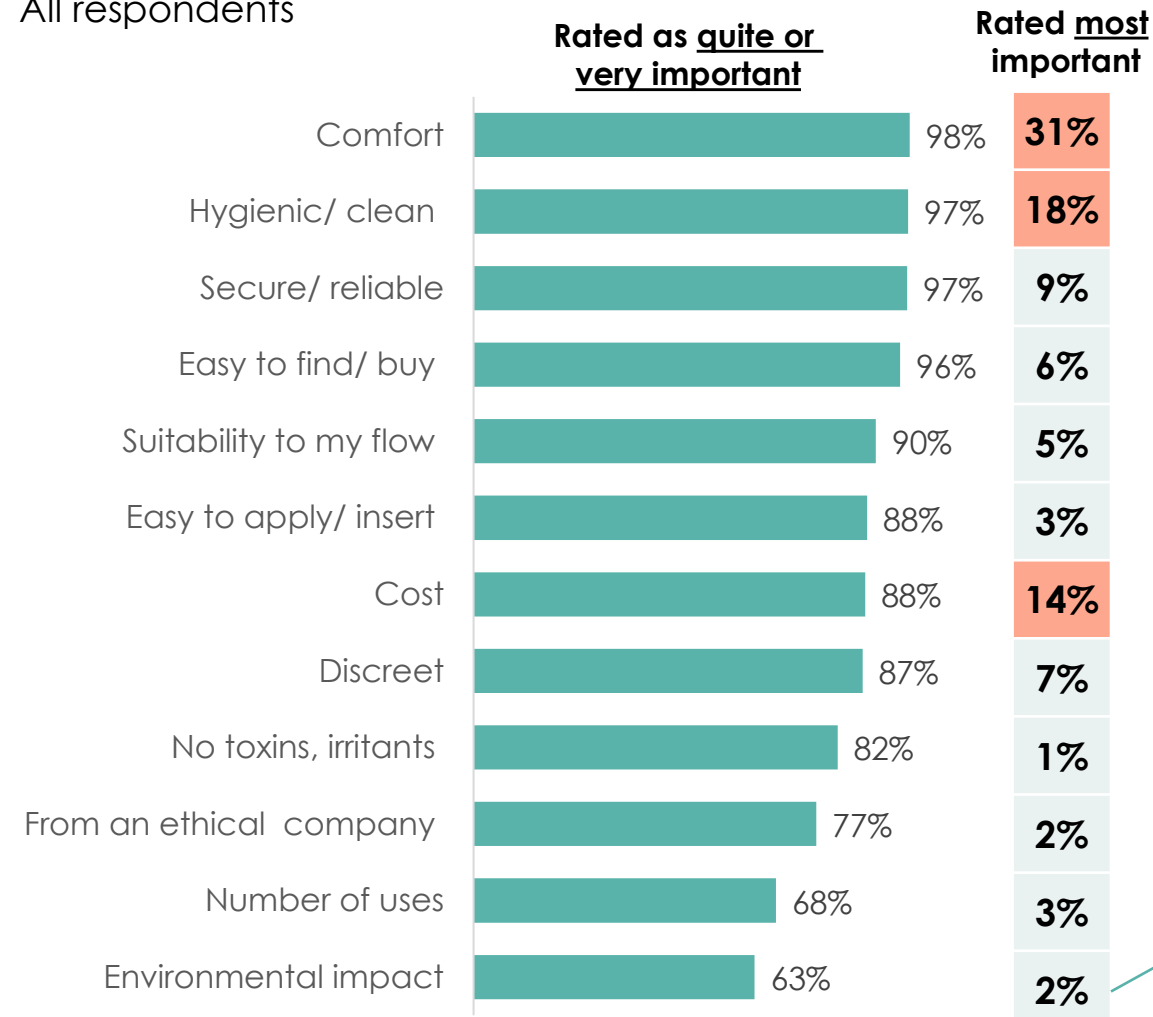
- **Convenience**, ability to be discreet



Younger users prioritise cost and discretion; ethical and environmental factors are secondary, even for those using reusable products or who are eco-conscious

Importance of period product features

All respondents



'Green' choices are very low priority in prompted choice hierarchy

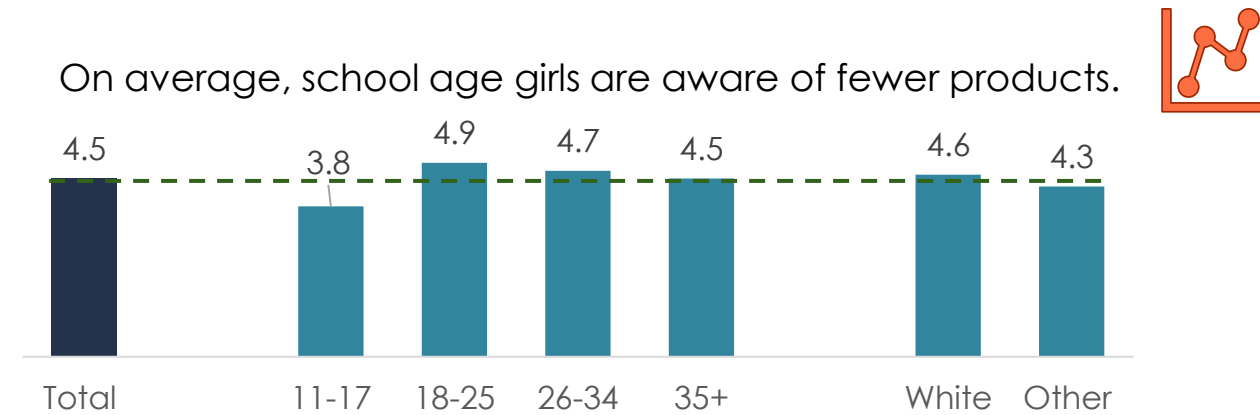
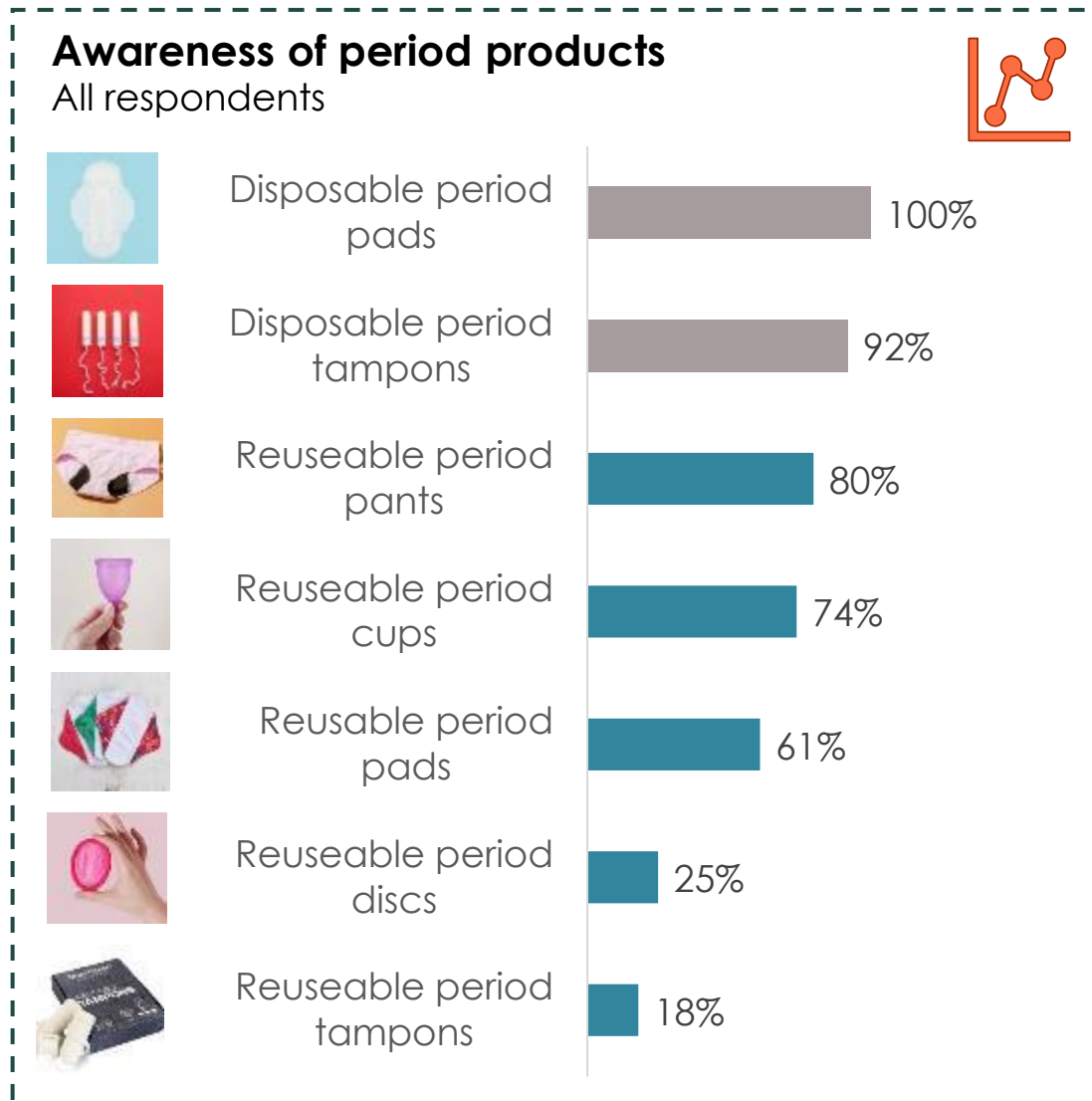
However qualitatively we see environmental impact is a more significant reason for choosing reusable products



A photograph of two women in a warm embrace. The woman on the left has short, wavy blonde hair and is wearing a brown top. The woman on the right has long, wavy brown hair and is also wearing a brown top. They are both smiling and looking towards each other. The woman on the right is kissing the woman on the left on the cheek. A semi-transparent teal banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing white text.

Section 2: Period product usage and attitudes

Highest levels of awareness for reusable products among women 18+



Qualitative interviews corroborated this:

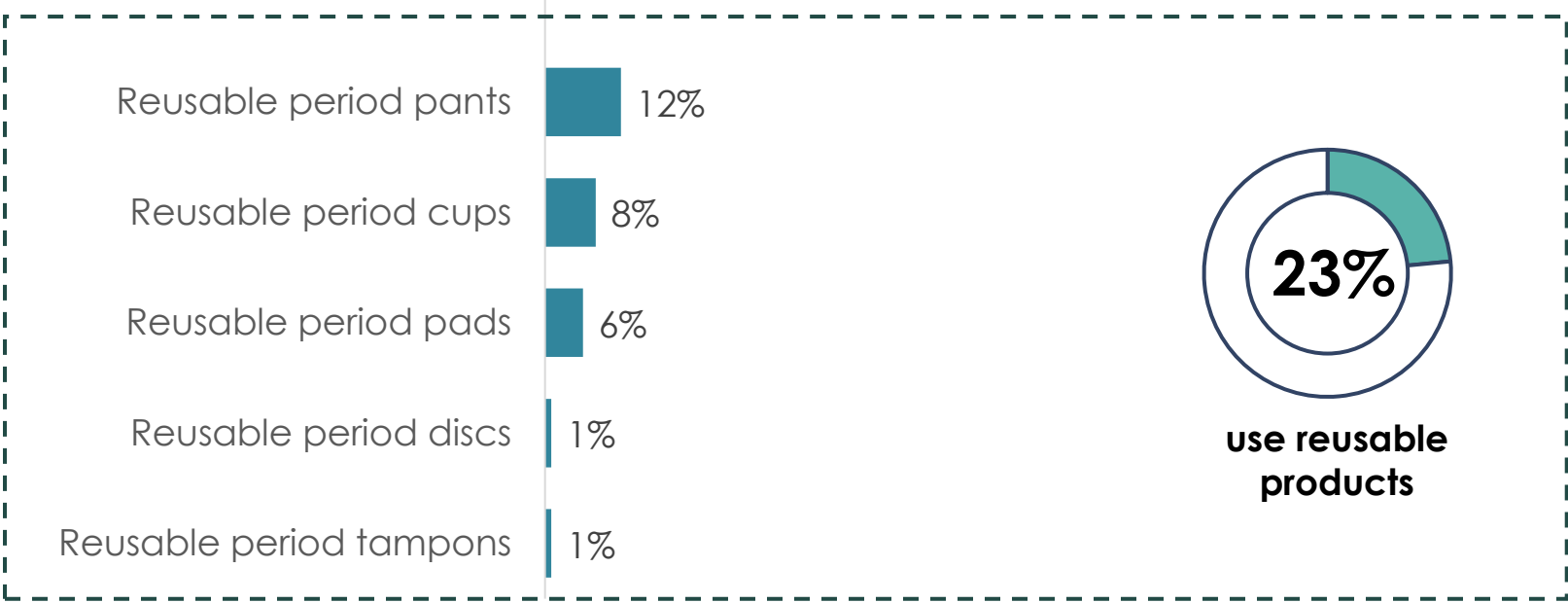
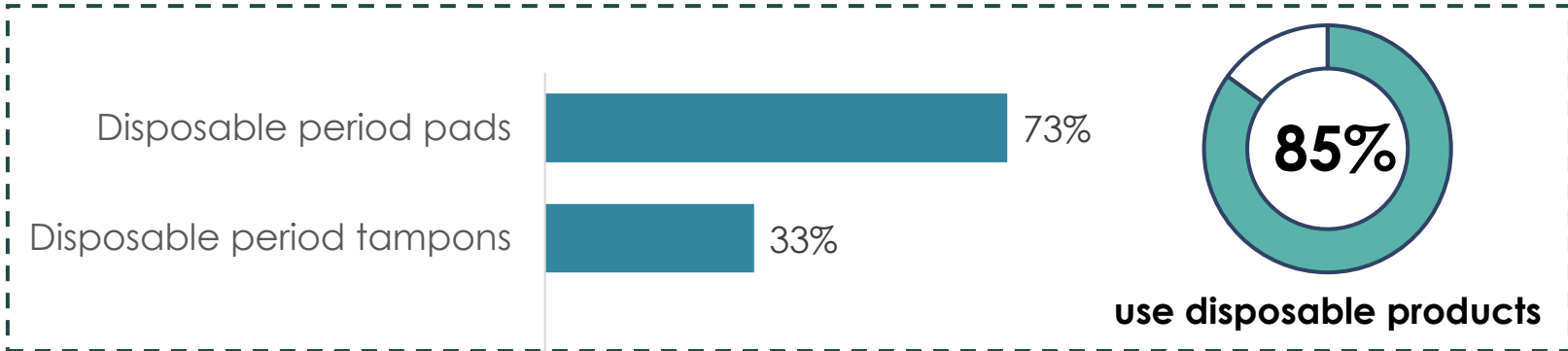
- Youngest respondents rely largely on mum's choices
- Young girls learn about period products through menstrual hygiene talks at school (but reusables not offered/spoken about in the way disposables are)
- Younger participants (late teens - early 20s) hear about a range of reusable period products mainly through social media / influencers
 - Those aged 35+ are less likely to be influenced by these forums

Despite high awareness of reusables, just 23% currently use them - often alongside disposables

Almost three quarters of women use disposable pads – and a third disposable tampons

Currently used products

All respondents



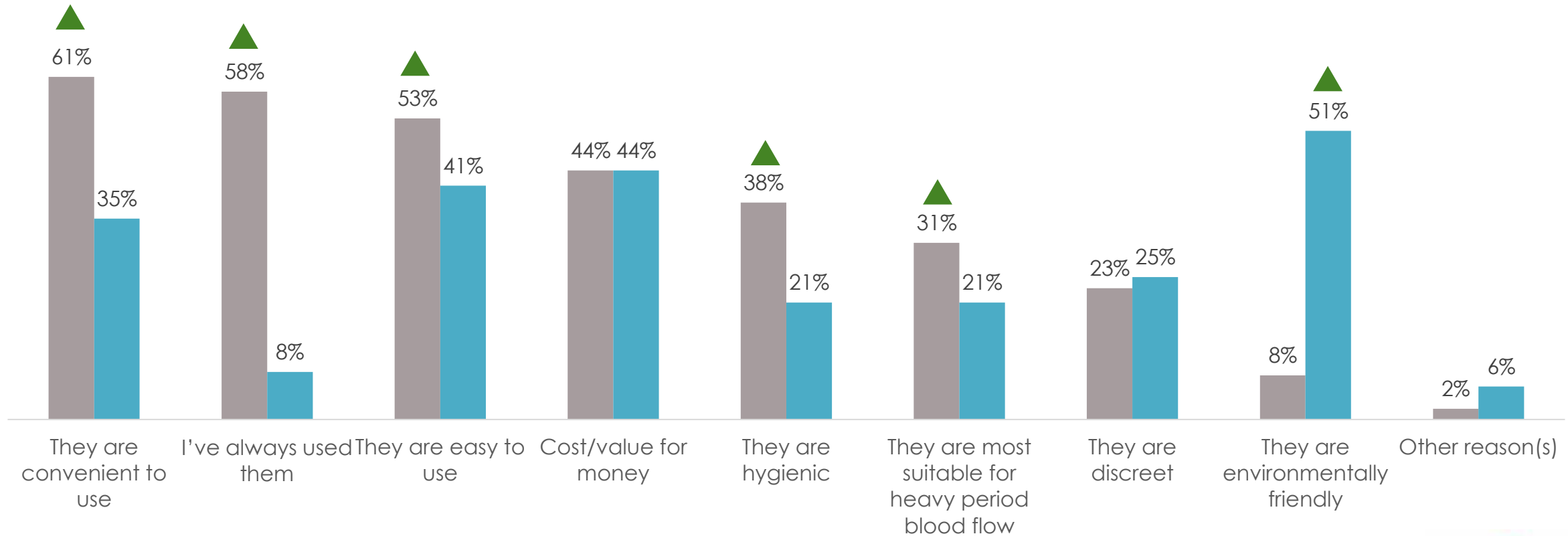
Disposable users more often cite comfort, habit, hygiene, and better handling of heavy flow as reasons for their choice



Reasons for using disposable vs. reusable period products

All respondents

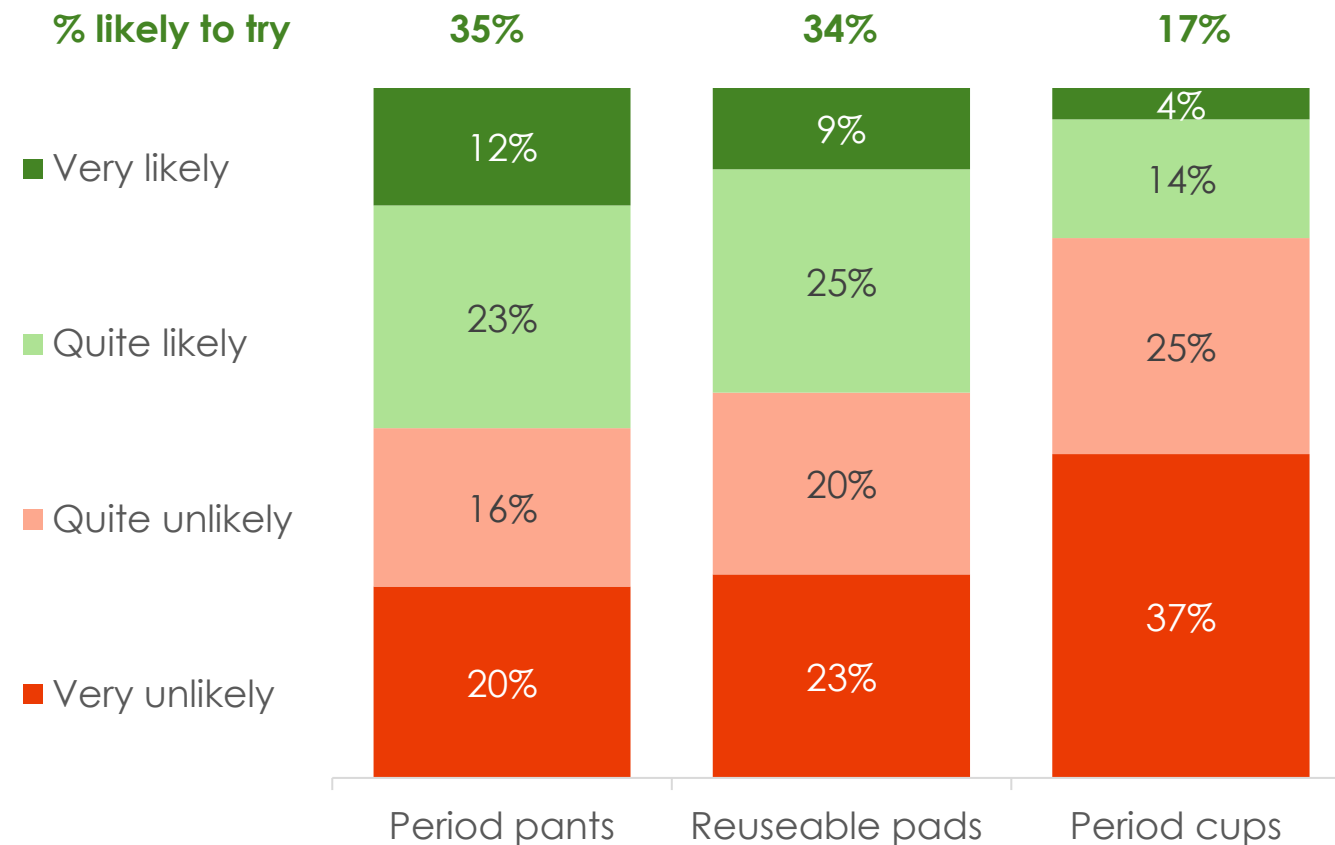
- Users of disposable period products (423)
- Users of reusable period products (155)



Greater barriers to trying 'internal' products: cups, reusable tampons and reusable period discs

Reusable period product consideration

All respondents who have not tried these products



Women are more open to trying reusable products with a similar format to their current disposable product.

- Those who currently use disposable **period pads** are more likely to consider **reusable pads (36%)** – significantly more likely than **disposable tampon users (28%)**



- Those who currently use **disposable period tampons** are more likely to consider **period cups (23%)**



Almost half of women are deterred by having to deal with the used product in public

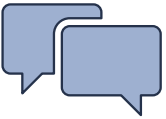
Perceived drawbacks of using reusable period products

All respondents

% rated main barrier



	Pants	Pads	Cups
Handling in public	17%	20%	15%
Irritation/ infection/ hygiene	19%	22%	17%
Difficulty using	10%	11%	14%
Nowhere to clean	6%	8%	7%
Cost	6%	4%	2%
Insertion	N/A		22%



- Perceptions **of reusable period pants and pads/liners** are similar – with issues such as up-front costs, smell, and the logistics of having to deal with blood and needing to keep the product with them in public
- **Period cups** are more likely to be seen as difficult to use generally - and less reliable than disposable products



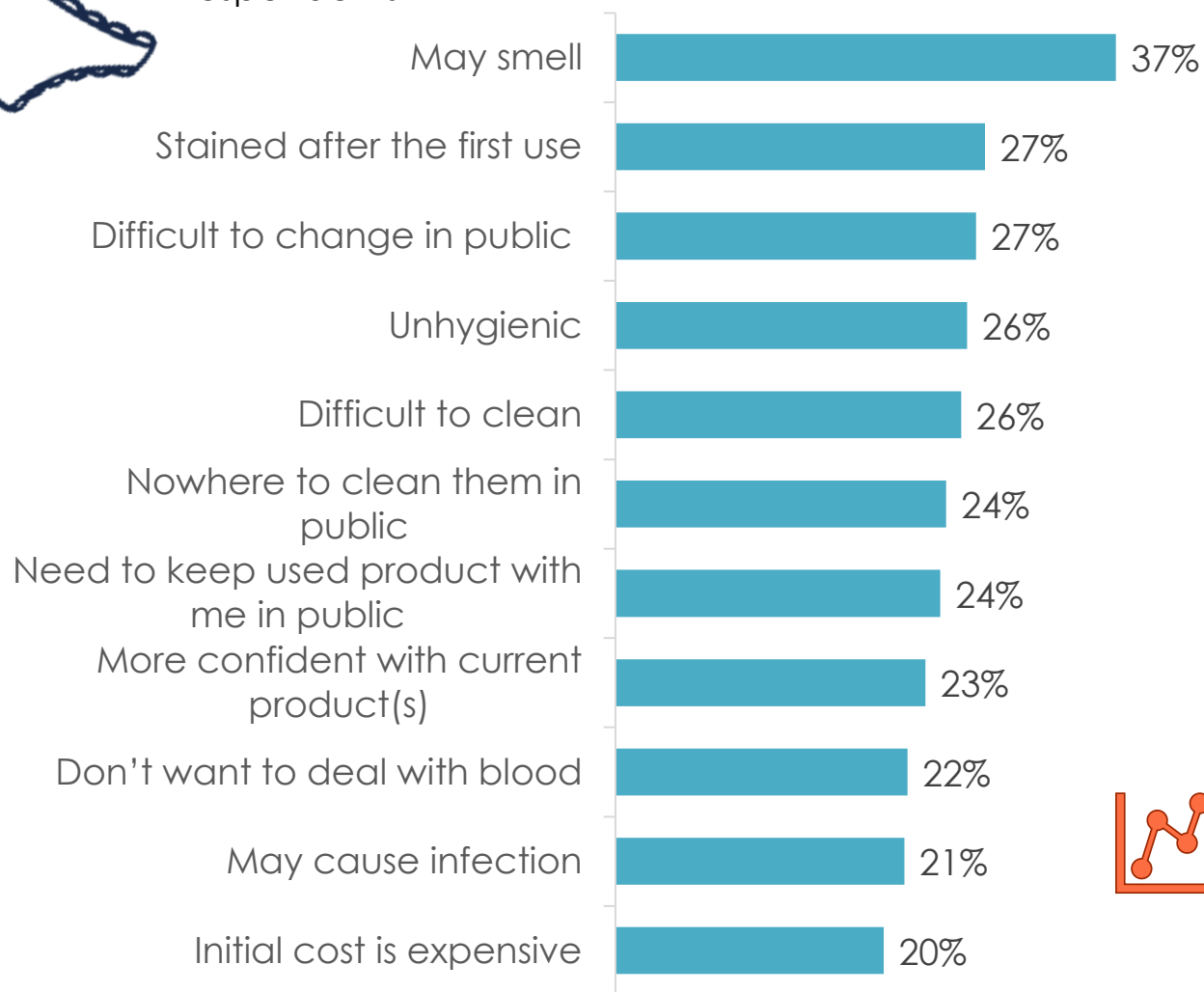
Primary concern about period pants is smell

There are also practical barriers about using when out the home – and cleaning them



Perceived drawbacks of reusable pants/ underwear

All respondents



Women worry that reusable pants are difficult to clean properly resulting in stains and smells

- **Comfort questioned:** feeling like 'sitting' in period blood
- **Convenience questioned:** changing pants in public loos; not wanting to carry 'bloody' underwear around with them
- **Cleaning:** will blood stain other clothes, or the washing machine?
 - Some separate their clothes from dirty things e.g., tea towels – they question if they would have to wash period pants separately
- **Aesthetic:** pants may look 'bulky', 'ugly', or 'feel like granny pants'
 - Many respondents unaware of 'prettier' looking period pants

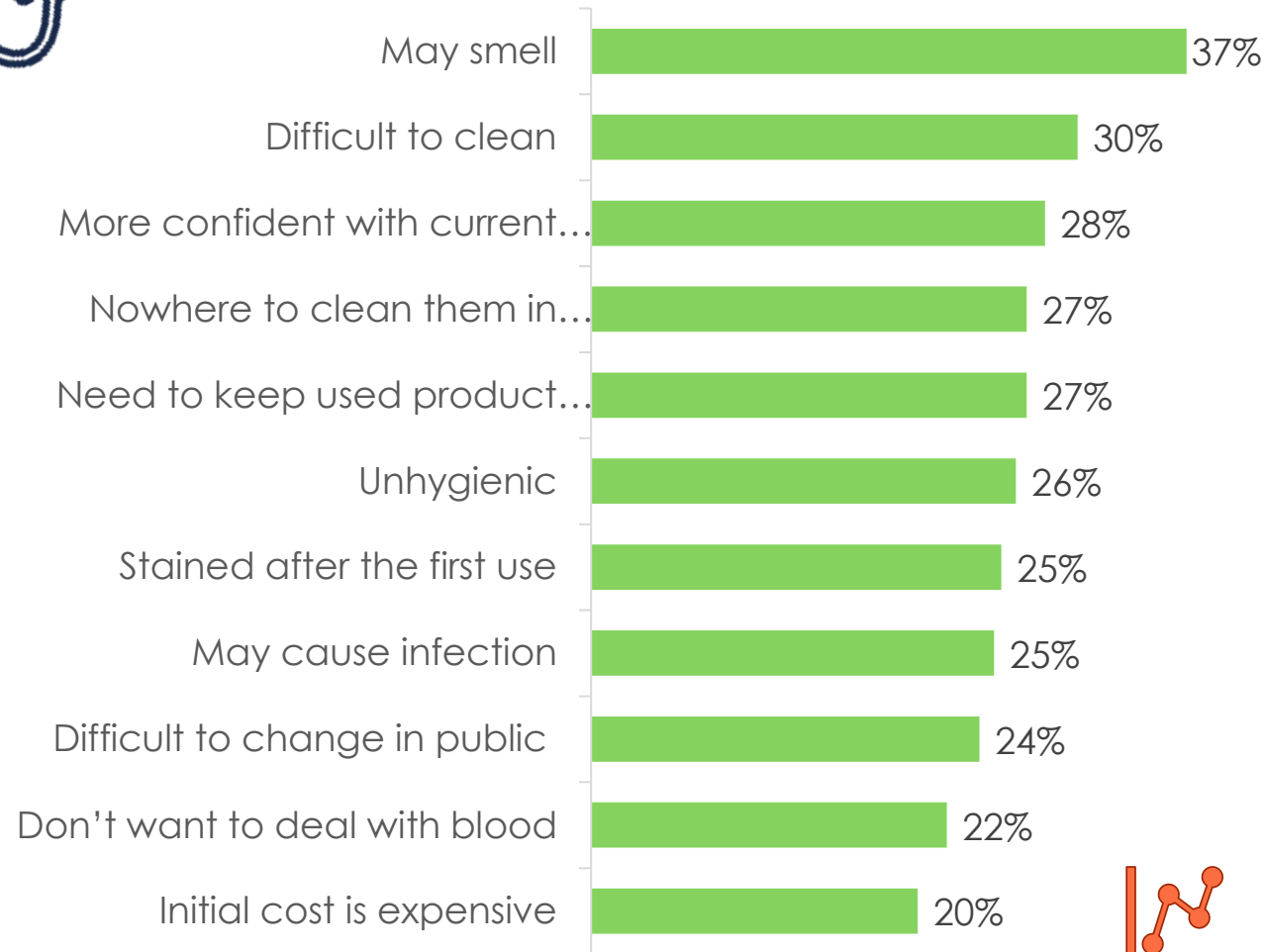


Many believe pads would have stains and bad smells; therefore, they are not seen to be as hygienic as disposable pads

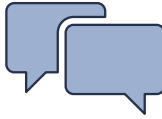


Perceived drawbacks of reusable pads/ pantyliners

All respondents



- **Difficult to clean properly:** stains make them feel unclean
- **Hassle of washing** them separately and potential 'contamination' of other items if not done properly
 - Could mould grow between periods if not properly cleaned and dried?
 - Younger girls who live at home and do not do their own washing worry about managing this
 - Associated worries about smell
- Absorbency and potential discomfort feeling they are 'sitting' in their blood
- Concerns about what to do with product when changing out of home – i.e., do they carry it around with them?

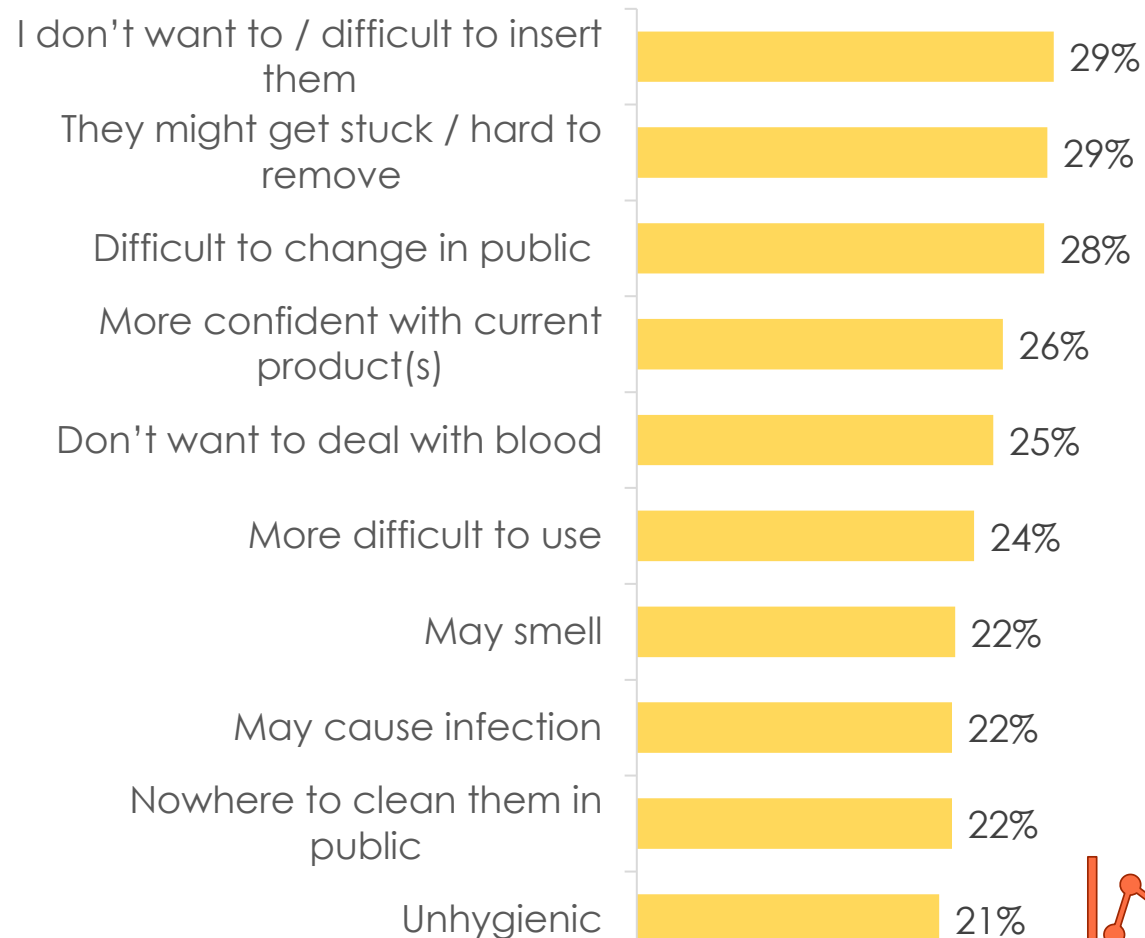


Notional barriers such as a perception of difficulties are a larger barrier than the more tangible barriers

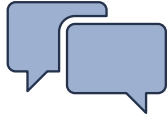


Perceived drawbacks of menstrual cups

All respondents



Perceived difficulty and nervousness about inserting and removing – especially when out of home



- Perceived **'learning curve'** to be able to use effectively
- Concerns about adding stress if already experience painful periods – or if need to change in public/work toilets
- **Upfront cost** is a barrier given concerns around comfort and useability – a big outlay if not sure it will work
- Examples where women had been disappointed:
 - One experienced difficulties removing: painful and scary
 - One spent £25 on a menstrual cup which was too big. She plans to buy another but can't afford to right now



Anam and Azia, two good friends discussed how their cultural and religious backgrounds impact on knowledge of reusable products.

"I think we've diminished the barriers because my mum is quite modern. But I know she had barriers with her parents, and I know friends who have barriers with theirs. There are cultural barriers because of the stigma, we [the community] don't talk about products, so we just have to wait for them [the products] to find us."

Paired Depth, 17-18, Sometimes/Always Use, British Asian



Aamira and her daughter Maryam, discuss their religion, Islam, and how cleanliness and attitudes to blood impacted on their use of reusable products.

"I ended up chucking it in the bin because I don't want to wash it in my bathroom sink because that's where we brush our teeth. I don't wash it in the bath because we shower in there. I didn't want to put it in the washing machine because I wash my tea towels and our clothes there."

Mother Daughter, Low/No Use, British Asian



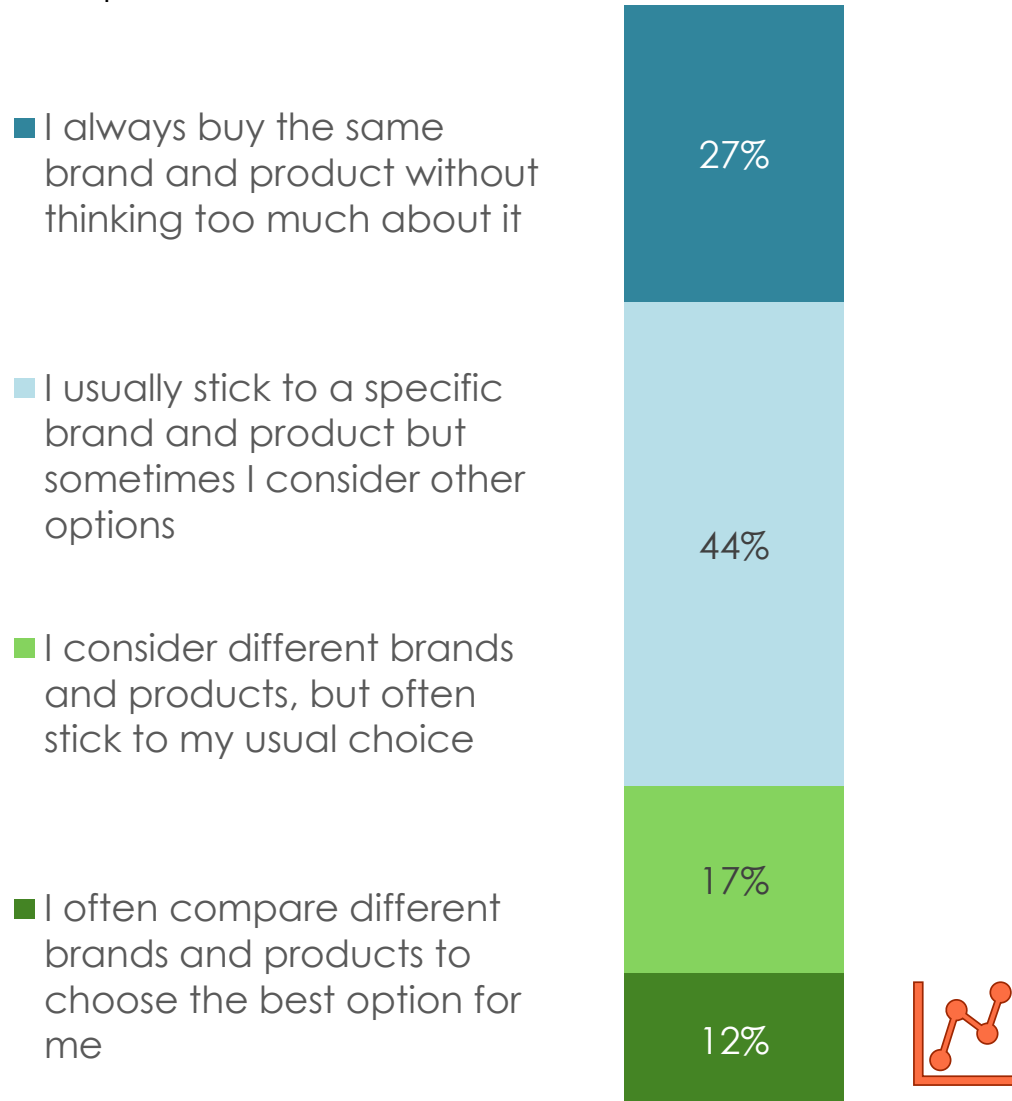
A photograph of two women hiking through a forest. The woman on the left is wearing a dark beanie, a grey long-sleeved shirt, and a dark blue quilted vest. She is smiling and looking towards the woman on the right. The woman on the right is wearing a grey long-sleeved athletic top and a backpack. She is also smiling and looking towards the woman on the left. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and green foliage. A semi-transparent blue horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Section 3: The journey to reusables' in white.

Section 3: The journey to reusables



Period product purchase behaviours

All respondents



- Choice of period product is often **habitual**:
 - Not too much thought goes into purchase
 - Not exciting
 - Not aware of new products
- It's a habit that is formed **young**:
 - Products influenced by Mum
 - Mums are less aware of reusable products
- Initial product choice can 'stick' due to **familiarity**:
 - A familiar product feels **safe and trusted**
 - Women aren't willing to **take risks**
- **Accessibility/ease** contributes:
 - Disposables are more available than reusables
 - Easy to pop product in the trolley during the weekly shop
- **Frustrations** with current products can drive consideration of alternatives:
 - Those who don't experience frustrations - *'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'*
 - Those who do are more likely to be **open to alternative options**





Awareness

- Awareness currently very high but there is still scope to increase awareness (especially 36+)

Knowledge

- Knowledge around how to use/clean products is lower
- Product misconceptions e.g., unhygienic, difficult to clean

Reason

- Being 'fed up' with current product e.g. rising costs of disposables; irritating/uncomfortable
- Positive reviews online about reusable products
- A recommendation from a friend/ family

Opportunity

- Moving out of family home = more privacy to use products
- Increased familiarity with body grows confidence to experiment (e.g., through cervical exams, losing virginity)
- More disposable income to spend on new products

Trigger

- A free product
- A social media/ google online advert
- Products in supermarkets/ department stores/ shops



5%
Have tried and now only use reusables

What causes a woman to <u>convert</u> ?		
Cost Cheaper than disposables in the long run	Environment An added perk is less waste and a sustainable/eco-friendly period	Comfort/practicality Reusables more suited to their body/flow



- Those who always use reusables are excellent **advocates** to peers
 - These are often women who research how to use and clean products meticulously; many have persevered through initial difficulties
- Many are **environmentally conscious**

11%
Have tried and now use both

Why do women sometimes use <u>both</u> ?		
Leakage concerns Multiple products protect against heavy periods/leaks	Comfort / practicality Different products work for different occasions	Convenience Disposables easier to use travelling/ easier to purchase if period begins when on-the-go



- Those who use both may **not be aware of reusable alternatives**
 - Increased knowledge of the range of products may help convert this group further
- Others do so when **travelling/out-of-home**
 - Increased ease of using reusables when on-the-go could further convert this group

8%
Have tried and reverted

What causes a woman to <u>revert</u> ?		
Impracticality Difficulties with cleaning at home/ in public, or changing when out and about	Inconvenience For those who travel a lot, or with busy lives, disposables are easier	Discomfort/suitability Some find reusables less suited to their body/flow, and less comfortable



- For some the initial experience may have been **traumatic**; re-converting may be difficult
- Some found the product **unsuitable**; knowing more about the range of products and brands may help
- Information about **cleanliness and hygiene** could benefit





Jess discussed how the learning curve with her menstrual cup was steep, but she managed to overcome it with perseverance.

“Once I got it out, the kind of fear, like, the anxiety of it subsided...I think my technique was just bad. So yeah, I kept trying after that.”

26-35, Depth, Sometimes/Always Use

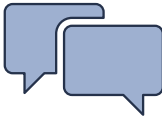


Naomi, and her daughter Ella, discussed discomfort with disposable pads, and was persuaded to try reusable alternatives after seeing reusable period pants on social media and in stores.

“The period pants were a big thing, because I remember when you put your first pad on, you were like, ‘I don't like the feel of it. Feels weird.’ So that was a reason why I bought the period pants for her, because it's just like wearing knickers. She didn't really see much difference, did you?.”

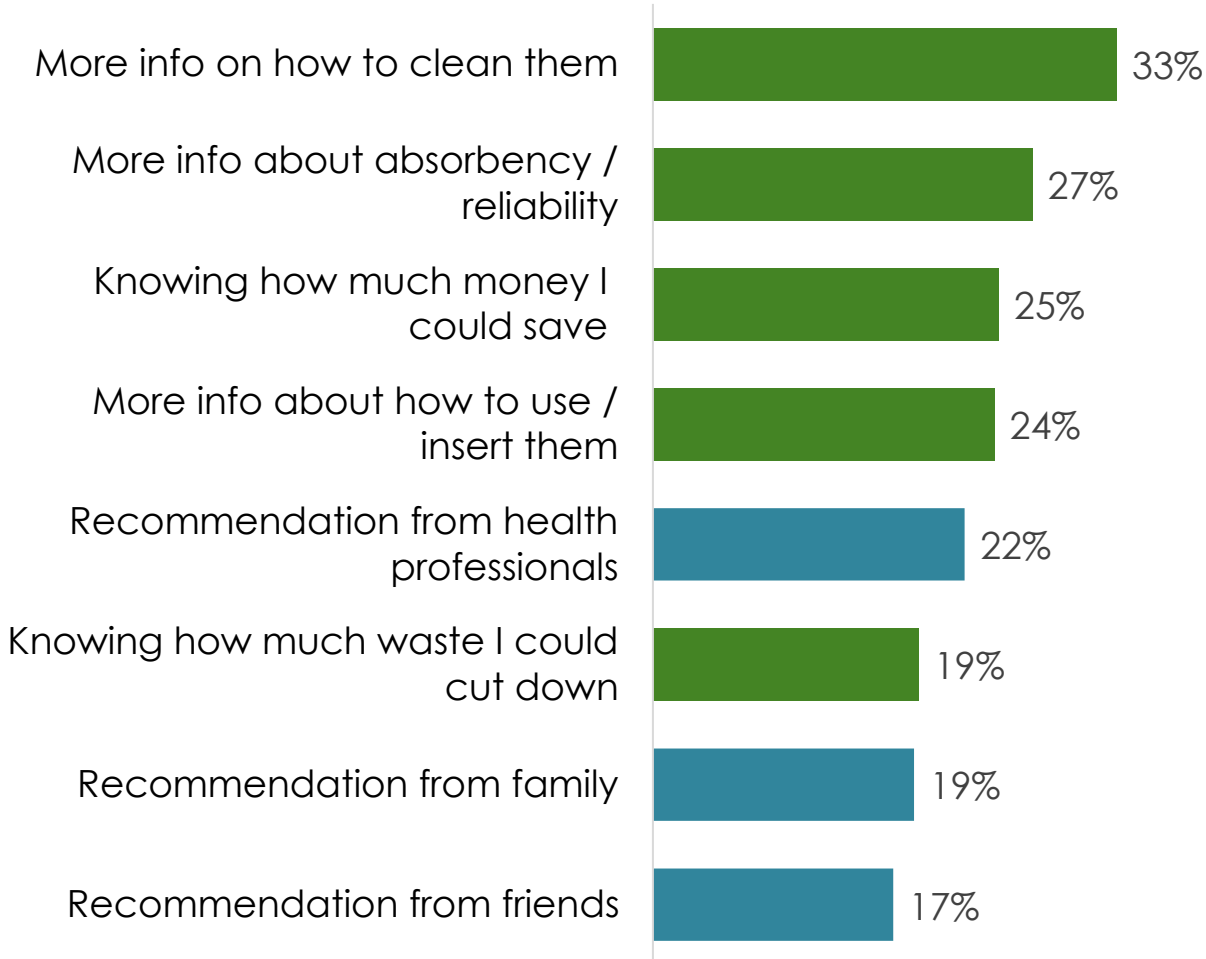
Mother Daughter Pair, Sometimes/Always Use





Prompts to consider reusable period product use

All current users of disposable period products



Information Recommendation

Women had questions about the products, and though awareness is high, knowledge is much lower

- Women had all heard of reusable products
- Few can name specific brands
- There is some misinformation and misconceptions about these products:
 - One woman assumed a cup sat externally
 - Another assumed period pants were all large and 'ugly', with pads sewn into them
 - Some imagined reusables needed to be changed more often
 - Some assumed blood stains on pants/pads meant the products had not been properly washed/ they were unclean
- Many expressed a want for more information to make an informed decision





A word-of-mouth recommendation

- Peers are the **most trusted** source of information
- Women remember conversations with friends/family, increasing **retention** of information
- For younger girls, recommendations from **schools/ teachers** is trusted
- Healthcare providers are also trusted, but few hear about products from them

Friends and family are the most trusted sources of information

Online reviews

- Reviews are powerful for those without friends/family to recommend
- They can offer **unbiased opinions** from 'real women'
- Many reviews also **address barriers and concerns** (e.g., leakage)
- Reviews can address specific issues, (e.g., heavy periods) helping women find relevant information

Reviews help when friends/family don't have recommendations

In-store information

- Stalls/kiosks in shops draw attention to products and **build awareness**
- Retail stores **more reliable/trusted** than online shops
- Women like to **see and feel** a product before purchasing it – especially with products they cannot return

Tangibly being able to see/feel a product can address concerns

Social media posts and adverts

- Social media helps to **increase awareness**
- Continuous **adverts** can gradually build women's knowledge of products
- **Reviews or posts from influencers** can be powerful (if from a trusted account)
- **Has the largest reach**, particularly amongst 18-34, so helpful with 'osmosis' messaging

Less trusted, but a core primer where many first become aware



A photograph of two women jogging in a park. The woman on the left is wearing a bright pink long-sleeved top and has her hair in a ponytail. The woman on the right is wearing a grey hoodie with pink accents and is smiling. The background is a blurred green park with trees. A teal banner with white text is overlaid across the middle of the image.

Section 4: Attitudes towards the environment and disposable period products

When prompted, most women are concerned about these environmental issues

Pipe and sewer blockages are relatively less concerning (perhaps reflecting no direct experience of a blockage) but concern about water pollution is high

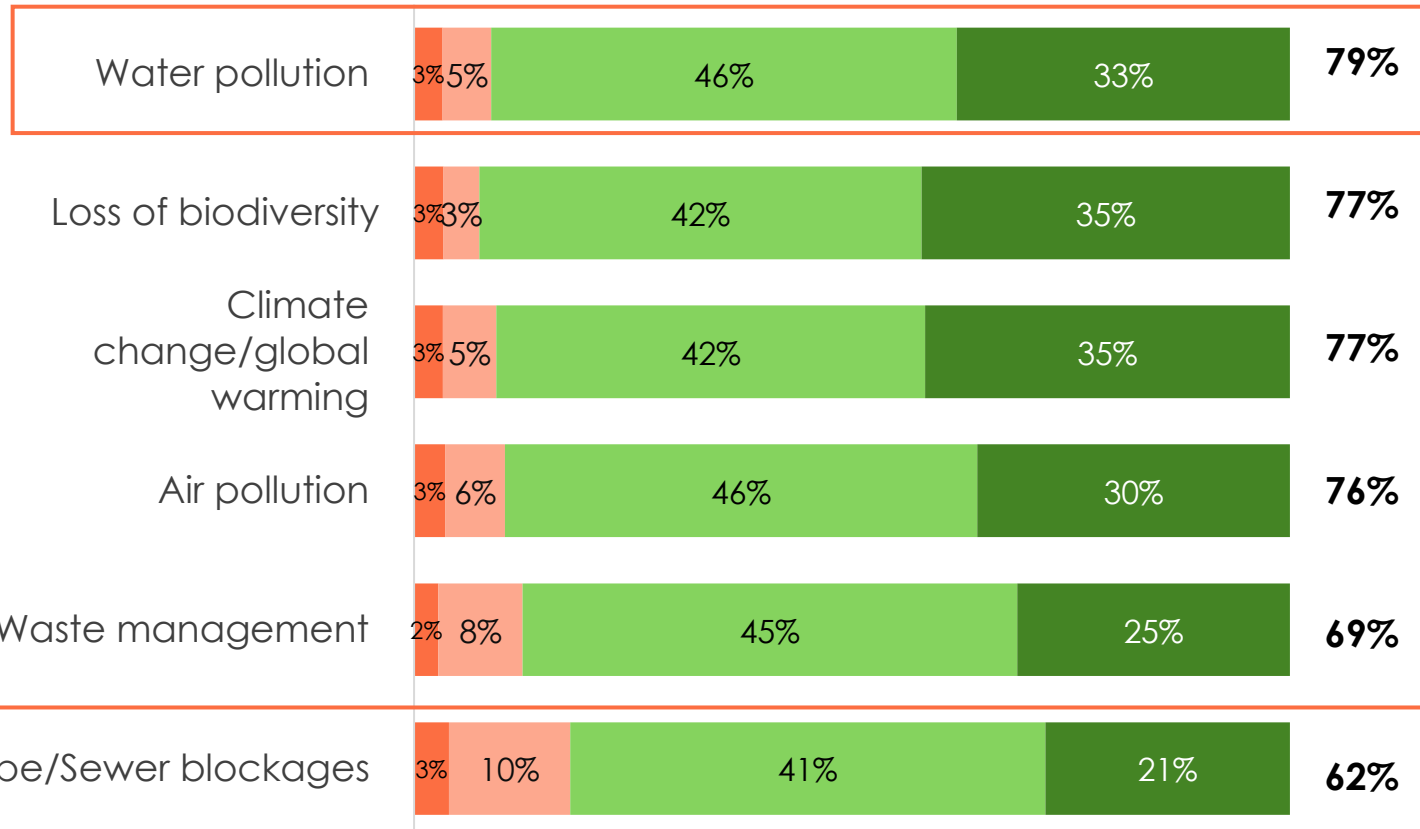


Concern about environmental issues

All respondents



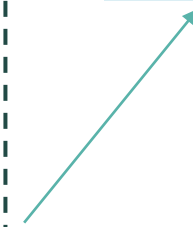
■ Not at all concerned
 ■ Not very concerned
 ■ Quite concerned
 ■ Very concerned
 % concerned



Spontaneous awareness and concern of sewer blockages is low

- Not a top-of-mind issue
- Amongst those who were aware, this was usually through professional context, rather than general knowledge
- However, **water pollution** as a concern is high:
 - Suggests Yorkshire Water discuss pipe/sewer blockages in the context of wider water pollution

85% think flushing pads impacts this
71% think flushing tampons impacts this



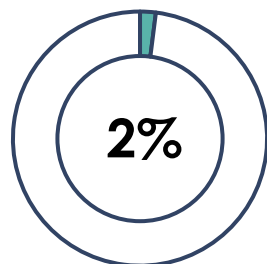
About a fifth of disposable tampon users admit to flushing them

Reported data may be unreliable about a behaviour that is private and lacking observable social norms

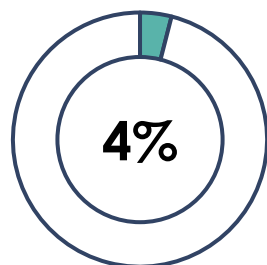


Disposal of (disposable) period products

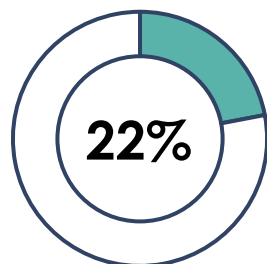
Those that currently use these products



claim to flush disposable period pads in the toilet



claim to flush disposable panty liners in the toilet



claim to flush disposable tampons in the toilet



All claim to be aware that disposable pads should not be flushed, however, some are unaware that tampons should not be flushed

- 'Always told' tampons are flushable
- Tampons seem flushable because of their size
 - One recalled Instagram post showing flushing tampons down the toilet which led her to start doing it too

The privacy around managing periods means girls and women do not have clear social norms about disposal behaviours

- Some say they do not flush their tampons, but think is fairly common practice in the UK
- Some mention the exceptional circumstances when they do flush
 - **Full or no** sanitary bin – don't want to carry a used tampon around
 - **Assuming the damage can't be that bad** – partly because tampons are so small and partly due to an 'it's just one' mindset



However, caution should be taken about messaging that could 'blame' menstruating women

Respondents rated a series of statements about the impact of 'unflushables'

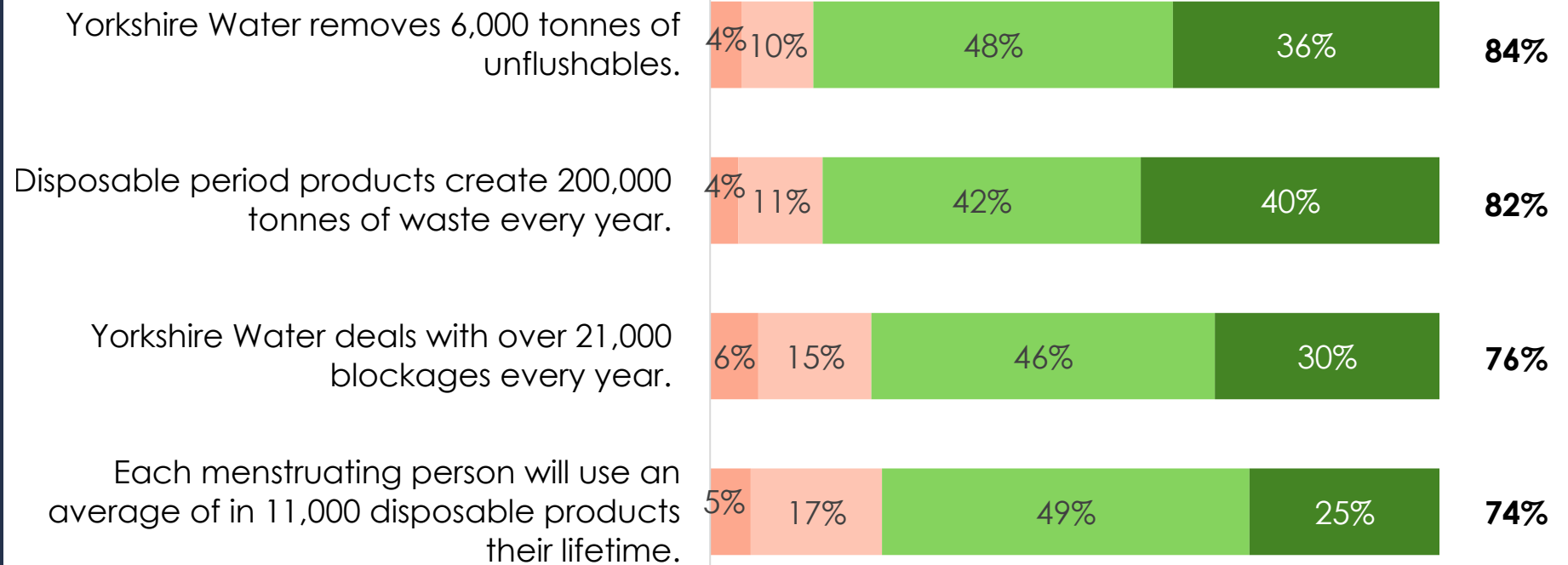
Message effectiveness - % those who think the message is effective

All respondents



■ Not at all effective
 ■ Not very effective
 ■ Somewhat effective
 ■ Very effective

Net: Effective





Statistics have shock value but large numbers are difficult to conceptualise

Qualitative interviews prompt a little pushback: potential for messages to misfire where there has been limited education in the past, with other factors beyond women's behaviour – including product labelling

Disposable period products contributes approximately **200,000 tonnes of waste per year in the UK.**

The statistics have shock value

- Most unaware of the problem of period waste
- However, it is difficult to visualise 200,000 tonnes of waste

2.5 million tampons, 1.4 million pads, and 700,000 panty liners are flushed down toilets across the UK every day.

Powerful numbers that show the scale of the problem

- Communicates why period waste is an issue
- Some are shocked that people flush disposable products at all, especially panty liners and pads
- But some pushback from those who don't flush disposable products: not their fault

It is estimated that water companies need to spend around **£100 million annually** to clean this up.

Least powerful statement:

- Difficult to contextualise this large figure – or to know if this is significant for a large water company
- Unsure whether this spend will impact their bills



But this requires individuals to be educated on the damage flushing can do



Schools



Local/ national government



Yorkshire Water



Period product companies

It's important to **educate the younger generation**, to instil in them good habits early.

Schools giving out **free, reusable products** will increase familiarity and awareness at this crucial young stage.

To ensure **its importance is reiterated** and its reach is national, the message around blockages and the impact that period products have on this should be pushed by government.

Only when probed as to whether Yorkshire Water had a responsibility to tackle this issue did women think they could be doing more to raise awareness.

Companies that produce disposable period products are **responsible for educating users on proper disposal** through their packaging / advertising.

Companies producing reusable products could **inform how much waste could be saved** through using the product.

A scenic coastal landscape featuring a steep, grassy cliffside on the left. In the foreground, there are numerous small, light-colored flowers, possibly sea purslimes, growing along the edge of the cliff. The cliff face is composed of dark, layered rock. To the right, the ocean extends to the horizon under a clear sky. The overall scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. A semi-transparent teal banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "Conclusions and recommendations".

Conclusions and recommendations

Reusable product companies should be confronting barriers head on: a **focus on hygiene, cleanliness, and ease of use of reusable products to encourage consideration** – and practical information about how to use reusable products in the real world.

Few women are actively looking for information about period products; consistent messaging, distributed little and often over a variety of platforms, should eventually raise knowledge and trial. Women will be primed to messaging about periods at different times in their lives, and it is different for each woman, so **using algorithms to target marketing will be more effective than demographic targeting**.

Consider releasing tangible products to help overcome barriers: e.g., the saalt cup uses a portable steamer to clean cups rather than boiling it; can reusable pants/pads come with a laundry bag which protects other clothes from period blood (when in the washing machine) as standard?

Consider cost; **reusable period products pose a financial risk for women** unsure of the value she will get. A free product, pop-up stalls in department stores/shopping centres, getting tangible products into schools, or increasing visibility of these products on shelves in shops will all create opportunities for purchase. Schemes such as a money-back guarantee may also help to assuage fears of sunk costs.



There is an opportunity for the water industry to support women in making environmental choices when choosing period products. However, **there are risks in entering a conversation that is traditionally private, all-female** and concerns something only women must bear – menstruation.

Schools support girls starting their periods with educational resources – and provide period products ad hoc when a student needs them. However, we see **lower awareness of reusable products at school age, perhaps not yet established as part of the educational provision – nor (understandably) being provided by schools in the way disposables are.** The water industry and period product companies should focus their attentions here.

Water companies have well-established relationships with primary schools, but links with the secondary sector tend to be weaker. **Promoting reusable period products at Key Stage 3 presents a positive excuse to develop community links.**

Water companies are not natural messengers for period health and behaviours. **The industry should work with third parties, acting as an enabler to better period product disposal by providing sponsorship/funding for e.g. reusable period products.**

Water companies sponsoring reusable period products is **a positive contribution to period health and potentially period poverty too.** While we recommend any campaign activity directed to young women via schools is delivered without any overt messaging about sewer blockages, there is an opportunity to communicate more overtly to stakeholders about these initiatives and how you are evaluating the impact of this activity.



There is a role for **collaboration between water companies and any stakeholders** who can influence flushing behaviours and encourage uptake of reusable products. Mapping who these stakeholders are would be the first task – local authorities, transport hubs, large retailers and any organisations maintaining toilets used by the public would be included.

This collaboration would highlight the need to support women to manage their periods through **tangible, practical aids** (e.g., ensuring that all public, business and school toilets have clean and accessible sanitary bins that are regularly cleaned).

Messaging in-situ (in cubicles) should work to reinforce the implications of flushing tampons and other sanitary items down the toilet. While many are aware that products should not be flushed this is not always the case for tampons – and routine behaviours such as ‘proper’ disposal of period products can be back of mind, especially ‘in the moment’.

Water companies could **work with reusable product manufacturers to sponsor public signage** and cubical posters, with mutual benefits. Commercial brands can build awareness and counter barriers and misconceptions while linking reusables with environmental benefits. Water companies reinforce good flushing habits, building awareness of blockages.





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