

Updated Research Project Proposal - 28/06/2021

Introduction

My research question is how period poverty impacts educational participation in Ireland. Period poverty is defined as the inability to afford female sanitary products. This is an issue that prevents women and other menstruating individuals going to school and work every day. The aim of my research is to collect data from students about how period poverty may have impacted their secondary level education, access to sanitary products in schools, menstrual education and how students believe these issues can be best solved.

I chose this research question as it is a pressing issue and one that I am involved in in my local and global community. I have worked with the Homeless Period Ireland and I am the Irish Ambassador for The Pad Project.

This is an issue that is highly relevant in Ireland. The current government's Programme for Government includes a plan to "provide a range of free, adequate, safe, and suitable period products in all educational publicly funded settings (including schools, and colleges and HEIs), to ensure that no students are disadvantaged in their education by period poverty." However, the plan has not translated to action, and it is clear that this is not a priority. The research gathered as to how period poverty impacts secondary level education in Ireland will hopefully encourage the government to take this action if it is presented to them with recommendations for implementation from those most impacted, as has occurred in countries such as Scotland and New Zealand.

Methodology

I wish to find out how a lack of menstrual equity impacts education in Irish secondary schools. I will collect data to establish if students' education has been impacted due to period poverty. For example, if they have missed school due to not being able to afford sanitary products and if so, how much school they have missed, if they believe that menstruation had an impact on their education and how they believe these issues could be solved. The data will be qualitative in nature as I aim to establish the impact this issue has, beyond the existing statistics on absenteeism.

I will prepare the study, with reference to past studies, through conducting a scoping of literature. The research must be a retrospective study due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the research timeframe. The research will take place through online surveys distributed to students from colleges across the country, with the help of their Student Unions and Access Programmes, which I will then analyse. It could be conducted entirely online if this is necessary due to COVID-19.

This data will be collected in survey form. Anonymity will be guaranteed, and context provided to help maximise the response rates. I will ask students to disclose whether they attended DEIS initiative schools, public schools or private schools in order to sort and analyse the data into a report.

I aim to collect this data from students across Ireland to avoid bias in regard to urban vs. rural lifestyle, proximity to resources such as the Homeless Period Ireland and explore a number of diverse perspectives.

Timeline

Phase 1 (07/05 - 14/05 and 28/05 – 04/06):

This project will commence with a scoping of the international peer reviewed literature with guidance from my supervisor. Coupled with the quantitative findings of the Plan International Ireland Study, a key informant semi-structured interview schedule will be developed with consent forms and a participant information leaflet (PIL) informed by both academic and grey literature sources.

Phase 2 (May-June 2021): Ethical approval will be sought from the HP&M/CGH Research Ethics Committee (REC). As this study will involve interviews with potentially vulnerable young people from lower socioeconomic groups, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) must also be undertaken. We do not expect that ethics or approval from the DPO will be available before mid-June 2021.

Phase 3 (July 12th – 25th): An invitation to interview will be issued via the Union of Students in Ireland through the Trinity College Dublin branch with a maximum of 8-10 semi-structured key informant interviews progressed online.

Phase 4 (July 26th – August 8th) Data will be transcribed and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method and published in a peer-reviewed journal with the support of my supervisor.

My knowledge transfer plan includes dissemination of my findings to,

- The Houses of the Oireachtas, Library and Research Service – policy brief;

- Peer-reviewed journal article;
- Presentation to my peers and members of The Pad Project Advisory Board

Interdisciplinary and/or international focus of your research and Collaboration

Period poverty is an issue that is relevant in many different disciplines: politics, law, health sciences and gender studies. As a law student interested in pursuing policy reform, the Scottish government inspired me to partake in this research as they passed the Period Products Bill to “allow anyone who needs period products to get them free of charge” including providing products in schools.

Columbia University has a research team studying how period poverty affects U.S. adolescents in low-income areas and as a fellow Laidlaw college we could form connections as our respective research may compliment and strengthen each other's. I will also contact Youth19, a research cohort from New Zealand who conducted successful research on this issue that led to a campaign for policy reform.

I aim to collaborate with The Pad Project and The Homeless Period Ireland, with whom I have worked on this issue, for guidance.

Outcomes

The key aim of this research is to gather robust evidence of the impact of period poverty on the education of individuals in secondary schools. Gathering this information will hopefully encourage the government to take action on this issue, (a goal committed to in the 2020 programme for government but which has not yet been acted on sufficiently), therefore ensuring a more equal standard of education for all. It will also help charities such as the Homeless Period Ireland in their fundraising efforts as it will illustrate the extent of this issue in Ireland.

Research Supervisor

My supervisor, Dr Ann Nolan from the School of Public Health, will offer a public health perspective to the project and will guide me through the research aspect as she is experienced in this area, as well as providing ethics approval. She will also help me format my results and conclusions, and will guide me in presenting this research to members of the Oireachtas to try encourage change on this issue.

Pre-clearance requirements (ethics approval and Garda Vetting)

Ethical approval will be needed as the research involves a survey of an array of people and may be perceived as questions of a sensitive or private nature. This will be possible through the school of public health within the timeframe.