

Let's Bring Girls' Secret to a Period!

National Institute of Technology, Toyama College

Ayana: When our body is getting ready to become an adult, we experience many changes both physically and psychologically. And one of them is really annoying, particularly to us, girls. Because of this, some people feel depressed, do not want to do anything, and have to stay in bed all day. This is called menstruation. Once a month, blood flows from our womb. This is a natural and essential process for us to be able to have children.

Haruna: Have you ever talked about it with someone important to you? I guess you may hesitate to talk about it openly. Why is that? We would like to live in a world in which it is easy for us to talk about menstruation with each other regardless of sex.

Yuzuki: According to Luna Luna, which develops an application for understanding the menstrual cycle, 63% of males have never talked about menstruation with their girlfriend, wife, or daughter. But a Mint+ survey says that 84.7% of women responded that they want men to understand menstruation and its symptoms, and 76.6% of men responded that they want to know about it. So, why is the topic of menstruation so difficult to talk about? We believe it is due to the lack of awareness about menstruation and different people having a different perception of menstruation, even among women. To illustrate this point, we would like to share our stories with you.

Ayana: When I was a junior high school student, I would always suffer from cramps during my period. But I wouldn't talk about it with anybody. And one day, during recess, I fainted and fell on the floor. Then, my male homeroom teacher told me, "You were too weak, so you collapsed during your period."

Haruna: Seriously!? Your teacher wasn't very understanding.

Ayana: No, he wasn't. And my female classmates also told me that I was exaggerating it.

Haruna: No way! I can't believe it.

Ayana: I was so shocked by those words, and I realized that symptoms vary from person to person, and nobody felt as I did.

Haruna: Here's another story. When my cousin applied for menstrual leave at work, her female boss asked her, "Did you see a doctor? If you haven't seen a doctor, is it really that bad?" She was skeptical towards her. Even a female boss didn't show an understanding. My cousin said she found it difficult to use the menstrual leave system.

Yuzuki: Are there other people like her?

Haruna: Yes, according to a survey by Daio Paper Corporation, 87.2% of women have never actually used the system.

Yuzuki: Why is that?

Haruna: Many companies don't have the system and people are not familiar with it. We think the fundamental problem is that it is difficult to talk about menstruation

with colleagues.

Ayana: Then, how can we change this situation? Today, we offer two solutions. One is to improve education about menstruation and the other is improvement of media, especially TV commercials.

Yuzuki: First, we suggest changing modern education regarding menstruation and improve classes offered about it. By the way, what do you remember about “period class”?

Ayana: I hardly remember anything about it. But I think the class was separated between boys and girls. We didn’t even take the class together. It is strange, isn’t it?

Haruna: Yes, I think so. I took the class only once when I was in elementary school, and it was separated too. So, I assumed it was normal.

Yuzuki: Now, as reported by NHK research, boys don’t even take part in “period class” in elementary schools. The class is for female students only in many cases. In addition, the number of lessons about menstruation for girls is limited. If male students are excluded from the class, female students will believe that talking about menstruation is embarrassing. Similarly, male students will not be able to learn about menstruation, and they will think they should avoid talking about it.

Haruna: We suggest that both male and female students take part in it together. By taking the class together at an early age, both boys and girls will feel more open to it, so we will have different attitudes and it will be easier to talk about it. On top of that, it would be even better if “the period class” were to be held in junior high and high schools as well, and even in companies. By holding many lessons over time, we will raise awareness about it.

Yuzuki: Second, we suggest we create and broadcast TV commercials that convey how women really feel. In Japanese TV commercials, a woman who wears white and tight pants says, “I am happy with my period.” “It is okay to have a painful day!” This is far from reality because we wouldn’t wear tight white clothes due to the chance of blood stains.

Ayana: How can we be happy when it hurts, and we are nervous? Wearing sanitary napkins doesn’t make our menstruation less serious. We think TV commercials about sanitary items in Japan are too idealized, which makes it difficult to understand menstruation. Everyone watches many TV commercials every day. So, we should create commercials that help us understand the reality of menstruation.

Haruna: In Korea, for example, in a TV commercial for a sanitary product called “Natracare”, women show their real feelings during menstruation. In this commercial, women deny these positive words such as “Put on your favorite clothes even when you are having your period”, “Women must always shine”. Instead, they tell their real feelings, saying menstruation is “painful and frustrating”, “We feel anxious no matter what we wear”, and “We don’t want to do anything”.

Yuzuki: We think there should be more commercials in Japan too that convey the reality of menstruation. There should be more commercials in which men buy sanitary napkins or everyone talks about menstruation to change the wrong image that it is embarrassing, something that must be hidden, and has nothing to do with men.

Haruna: We made two suggestions to promote better understanding about

menstruation. One is to change education about menstruation and the other is the improvement of TV commercials.

Ayana: Last but not least, here is a more realistic suggestion for you. Talk about it with somebody close to you. In fact, I talked about menstruation with my family while preparing this presentation. I have never talked about it with my father before, so I was very nervous. After our first conversation about menstruation, it became easier to ask my father to buy me sanitary napkins. Also, my father said that it was good to know that he could do something for me. I feel that it is important to communicate with each other.

Yuzuki: Have you ever talked about menstruation with someone important to you? Is there anyone around you who is in need? If you are in trouble right now, please talk to someone about it. And if somebody is in trouble, please talk to them. It may take courage, but we want you to take the first step. We believe that small steps will bring about big changes and create a better future.