



# Menstrual well-being by and in social design

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<https://researchmap.jp/read0155208?lang=en>

## Abstract

Gender equality is upheld as a vital principle in modern society. When translating this abstract concept into daily life, we realize the necessity of overcoming the barrier of menstruation. My research and actions have focused on achieving menstrual well-being. To realize this, I pursue activities based on two pillars:

One approach is (1) engaging in social design for sustainable access to menstrual products in toilets. We developed dispensers for providing free menstrual products, designed as self-assembly units made of cardboard to facilitate easy installation in any toilet, including disaster shelters and schools. Currently, we are advancing its diffusion with the cooperation of other organizations. During the 2024 Noto Earthquake, we installed them in shelter toilets, and we conducted a pilot study at the Osaka Kansai Expo 2025 by introducing them in some toilets.

Concurrently, in Japan, where menstruation often remains a hidden subject, we believe that increasing knowledge and awareness about menstruation (especially menstrual management) is key to achieving menstrual well-being. Therefore, we are (2) re-examining menstrual education and conducting outreach activities on menstrual management education and awareness-raising.



MeW Dispenser for free menstrual products



Assisting Noto Earthquake evacuation centers

## Background & Results

In recent years, the international community has increasingly recognized menstrual hygiene management as a significant social issue warranting support. Limited access to menstrual products, inadequate knowledge, and insufficient understanding from others can hinder proper menstrual management, restricting menstruators' opportunities in education, social participation, and their dignity. Although menstruation is a natural biological process, its meaning and experience are shaped by cultural and social contexts. Historically, menstruation has been treated as taboo in many regions, and cultural restrictions on women's behavior during menstruation continue to persist to this day in some areas.

As a cultural and development anthropologist, I conducted long-term fieldwork in Uganda, examining how global development initiatives interact with local realities. This experience highlighted the importance of listening to local voices and understanding contextual differences. Comparative cultural research has also shown that Japan faces its own menstrual challenges. Studies among young people reveal that although notions of impurity have weakened, menstruation is still widely viewed as something to hide. Many manage their struggles privately, and the idea of menstruation as a broader social issue has yet to gain sufficient recognition. While schools teach the biological aspects of menstruation, open communication remains limited. Regardless of gender, it is essential to further "know" about menstruation, individual differences, and the growing range of products and self-care options, as well as how to support others.

## Significance of the research and Future perspective

This practical research not only contributes to the well-being of menstruators but also represents a step toward achieving gender equity and a mutually supportive, inclusive society. In the future, we hope understanding and care surrounding menstruation will expand, and that having menstrual products readily available in toilets is the norm.

## Menstrual Wellbeing by/in Social Design



MeW Project



Conceptual logo of the MeW Project

Social innovation

**Patent** Japanese Patent Application No.2021-156117

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