



Irise International



DiverseCity
Development Trust



University of
Sheffield



FAITH INFORMED MENSTRUAL HEALTH EDUCATION: THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

THE ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

This report is about the “Faith-Informed Menstrual Health Project” which began in South Yorkshire in 2024. It explores its impact on Muslim communities in Sheffield and Rotherham between 2025 and 2026.



By creating menstrual health resources with and for Muslim communities, running workshops around these resources, and organising an iftar, this project aimed to reduce menstrual stigma and improve knowledge about menstrual health. Through training menstrual health champions within Muslim communities to lead menstrual health workshops, it also aimed to give women the confidence to advocate for themselves and others.

This project was a collaboration between DiverseCity Development Trust, Irise International, and The University of Sheffield. Other contributors included The Menstrual Health Project, AKIN Fertility Dietitian, and Days for Girls. The project was funded by the University of Sheffield.

In autumn 2024, Dr. Maria Tomlinson (University of Sheffield), Acushla Young, (Director of Programmes and Development at Irise International), DiverseCity Development Trust, and Cysters secured funding from the University of Sheffield for a community-led project that would improve the menstrual health knowledge and reduce stigma in Muslim and Sikh communities.

This report focuses on the impact of this project on Muslim communities.

Please contact Cysters (smile@cysters.org) for more information about the faith-informed menstrual health project with and for Sikh communities.

The project was informed by research by Dr. Maria Tomlinson (funded by the Leverhulme Trust). She spoke to 77 teenagers about their experiences of menstrual education and period stigma. They revealed that:

- Menstrual education does not meet the needs of young people. It does not equip them to identify atypical menstrual symptoms, nor does it prepare them to advocate for themselves in medical settings.
- **Women from the global majority and faith groups feel the most underserved** by their menstrual education in school. They wish to learn about menstruation through a faith lens and see examples of lived experience from women in their communities.
- Videos and written instructions are not always helpful in understanding how to use period products, in-person demonstrations on how to clean and use reusable products are more effective.

Further findings are available in [The Menstrual Movement in the Media: Reducing Stigma and Tackling Social Inequalities](#) (2025).

PROJECT PARTNERS AND APPROACH



FOR AND BY MUSLIM WOMEN

When designing the project, we wanted to ensure that it was **community-led** and brought **genuine benefits for Muslim communities**.

We brought together individuals and organisations that are embedded in Muslim communities. Community organisations, workshop facilitators, and audiences were compensated and rewarded for their time and work with us.

With the aim of creating lasting impact beyond the end of the funded project, we hired three community engagement coordinators who were embedded in Muslim communities. They were consulted throughout the project. We trained them to lead consultation with communities about the content of the menstrual health resources. They were also trained to deliver menstrual health workshops.

It was also important to hire community engagement coordinators because they are best placed to create a **comfortable space** for women who attended consultations and workshops to discuss their culture, faith and menstrual experiences.

After the three coordinators led workshops in six different community settings, we also trained **seven further women as Menstrual Health Champions**. The aim of this training was to support our three coordinators and seven new champions to continue conversations about menstrual health beyond the end of the project.



Irise International



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Cysters

PROJECT PARTNERS

Irise International is an award winning, global leader in menstrual justice programming, policy and research. Irise amplifies the power of youth-led activism by fostering collaboration and peer learning. Irise's mission is simple: equip young people with the tools, resources, and networks they need to drive the social transformation needed to realise menstrual justice for all. Director of Programmes and Development, Acushla Young, co-led and co-designed this project.

DiverseCity Development Trust is an organisation who empower Sheffield's underserved populations, including Muslim women. They enhance their health, education and housing.

Cysters is a community-led charity who works to enhance the health and wellbeing of individuals experiencing menstrual, maternal and mental health challenges. As part of this project, Cysters created resources for women from Sikh communities.

Dr. Maria Tomlinson is a lecturer at the University of Sheffield. She researches the impact of health communication on social inequalities, with a particular focus on women's health. She works closely with organisations, schools, and communities to drive social change.

MEET THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CO-ORDINATORS



MARIAM PASHA

'I've worked for many years delivering projects in community settings and translating for South Asian languages. I understand the hesitations and shyness around talking about periods in traditional Asian families and could relate to what the women were telling me. I think this made it easier for them to open up to me.'



NAZIA KHAN

'I am so honoured to have been chosen to take part in this amazing project. Education on menstrual health is something that was so needed in my community. Talking about periods in the Muslim community, as far back as I know from my childhood, has always been a taboo subject. We simply didn't speak about it, and we didn't know who to speak about it, so we just had to deal with it the best we knew how.'



OLA FAGBOHUN

'Contributing to a project focused on improving menstrual experiences for Muslim women has been a privilege, especially as this area is often overlooked in research and practice. As one of three coordinators, I worked alongside Nazia and Mariam, whose cultural knowledge, language skills and identities as Muslim women ensured our work was culturally and faith-informed.'



CONSULTATIONS WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

To determine what should be included in the menstrual health resources, we organised 4 consultations with Muslim communities.

Consultations took place at Chapel Walk Masjid (Rotherham), Family Voices (Sheffield), Reach Up Youth (Sheffield), and Zest (Sheffield).

These consultations were attended by 97 women.

The aim was to find out what the women would like included in the menstrual health, better understand their menstrual health needs and experiences, as well as identify gaps in their knowledge.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

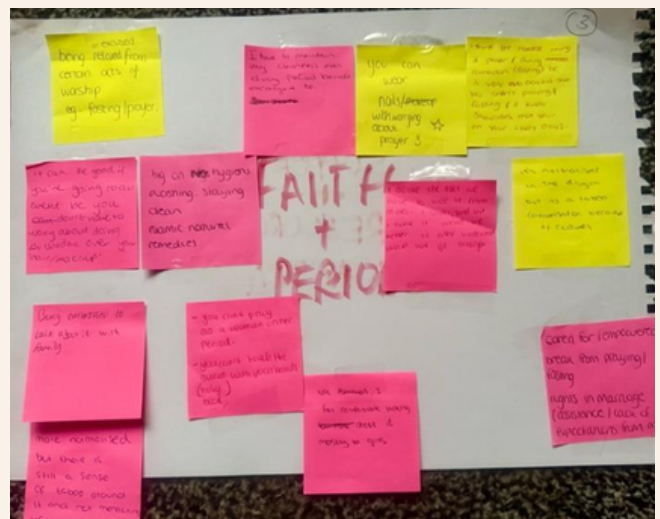
All three coordinators received training from Acushla Young (Irise International) on how to lead consultations. This included training on trauma-informed practice and how to create a safe environment in which women feel confident to share their experiences of menstruation and ask questions.

Between January-February 2025, each coordinator led a consultation in a community setting of their choice.

Ola Fagbohun's consultation at Reach Up Youth consisted of 11 women, while Mariam Pasha led consultations with 5 women at the community centre, Zest. Lastly, Nazia Khan held a consultation session at the mosque, Chapel Walk Masjid, where 65 women attended. Acushla also hosted a consultation at Family First which was attended by 16 women.

In total, **97 local Muslim women participated in these consultations.** They shared the needs of the women in their communities, explored the different influences of faith and culture on menstrual experiences, discussed their menstrual education in school.

"The in-person consultations in Sheffield and Rotherham created a space in which women could approach the traditionally taboo subject of menstruation - some for the first time. Providing an open space for women of Muslim faith to come together to discuss how society views menstruation, led to the majority of women opening up about their personal experience with menstrual health, relating to pain, product use, menarche, and challenges with accessing menstrual healthcare. The space that was created saw women dismantling their internalised menstrual stigma through conversation, validation of their experience and a shared sense of solidarity with those who had shared menstrual health challenges". - **Acushla Young (Irise International)**



THE MENSTRUAL HEALTH RESOURCES



CONTENT OF THE RESOURCES

Following the consultations, feedback from the coordinators, and input from Diversecity Development Trust, we created four menstrual health resources.

The resources cover a range of topics related to menstrual health. They are titled:

- Period products
- Food and your menstrual health
- Pain management and self-care
- Asking for help

The resources are available in **Arabic, English, French** and **Urdu**.

To further benefit local communities, we hired local translators for the Arabic and Urdu. After learning about the project on social media two translators in France, Inès Hinojo-Moulin and Pauline Caclan, asked if they could translate the resources into French for free so that they could reach North African audiences in France.

The Menstrual Health Project worked with us to create the materials on period products and nutrition. Akin Fertility offered further guidance on nutrition.

Uzma Rani created five bespoke images for the resources that represented their intended audience.



Resources are available for free at
irise.org.uk/resources

THE IFTAR

‘I feel empowered.

It made me think about how I want to educate my daughters about (menstrual health) in the future’



On 27th March 2025, we hosted an iftar at the Isaac Somali Centre in Sheffield. The Iftar was a woman-only event where members of Muslim communities could come, enjoy iftar together, learn about menstrual health, and share their experiences. A local caterer was hired to cook a meal for everyone.

A key part of the Iftar was **Sabiha Ali** (who is a member of Irise's youth board) and Nur Ali (Sabiha's mother) talking together to the audience about their experiences of periods. This talk was intended to inspire mothers to initiate discussions about menstruation with their children. Shahida Siddique (CEO Diversecity Development Trust) and Ola Fagbohun also gave inspiring talks to the audience. They encouraged them to attend future workshops and consider signing up to be trained as menstrual health champions.

COMMENTS FROM OUR GUESTS

‘Girls should be encouraged to speak with confidence about periods. Not see it as shameful. Girls should talk about their periods to their grown ups without reservation’

I'll be more assertive and request a second opinion, regarding periods and menopause’

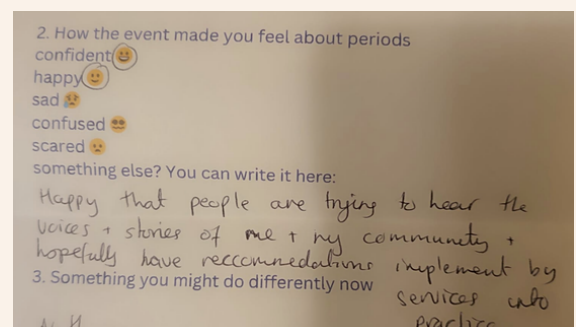
‘Learned about period pain and how to help my daughter during menstruation’

‘I will further educate my husband and sons about periods and how to talk about it’

In total, **85 women** from **6 different communities** attended the iftar. Not only did the women learn more about menstrual wellbeing and menstrual health, they met new people across different Muslim communities. At the end of the Iftar, the guests filled out comment cards. In return, they received a free raffle ticket and prizes were handed out to the winners.

A key takeaway from the evening was that **the women felt encouraged, inspired and confident** in opening discussions on menstrual health with their own families.

95% of the guests indicated that the iftar made them feel confident and/or happy about periods



REFLECTION FROM DIVERSECITY



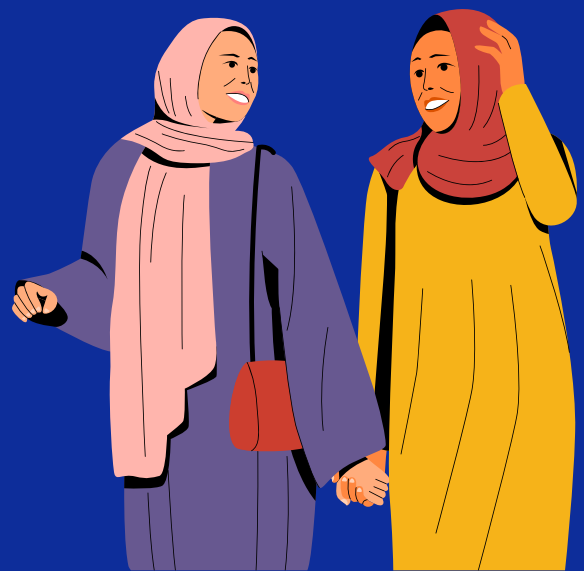
‘The iftar evening showcased young women brave enough to have the conversation in schools and their community. Gathering women from all backgrounds was great to see. Particularly from the Muslim community as it showcased this community having conversations about menstruations and breaking the taboos around a sensitive subject. The iftar showed just how important this research and community engagement is.

As Muslims, we are guided by the principles of mercy, dignity, and knowledge. The feedback from our recent iftar gathering has illuminated a powerful truth: the conversation around menstruation is not only necessary, but deeply rooted in our responsibility to care for one another with compassion and understanding.

We heard from mothers, daughters, and talked about fathers, sons, and brothers, who are ready to break the silence and replace it with empathy, education, and openness. This is a communal responsibility – not just for women and girls, but for entire households. By speaking about periods without shame, we empower our daughters, educate our sons, and uphold the dignity of every member of our community.

Let us continue to create safe spaces for learning, dialogue, and support. Let us advocate for accessible resources, challenge stigma, and raise awareness in our homes, schools, and mosques. In doing so, we honour the values of our faith and build a future where every girl feels confident, informed, and supported.’

– **Shahida Siddique, DiverseCity Development Trust**



RESOURCE-BASED WORKSHOPS



In May and June 2025, the three co-ordinators hosted 6 workshops. They opened discussions about periods, shared the four resources, improved women's knowledge about menstrual health, and demonstrated different period products.

106 women participated in these workshops.



Ola hosted workshops at Reach Up Youth and Zest. Mariam's workshops took place at Family Voices and Zest. Nazia led her workshops at Chapel Walk Mosque and Steel City Community Consultancy.

Workshops lasted 1.5 hours. Coordinators created a safe and comfortable atmosphere to talk about periods. They gave information and led activities based on the four menstrual health resources. They demonstrated various menstrual products. This included showing the absorbency of period pants using water, folding a period cup, and explaining how to clean reusable products.

Everyone who attended these workshops was offered a free reusable period pad (thanks to a generous donation from Days for Girls) and another two products of their choice. This included period pants and menstrual cups.

A total of 106 women attended the workshops spanning the age of 14 to 70.

‘Creating an inclusive and safe space in which women can talk about periods, it really helps to lay out the period products to start with and lead into the conversations with general perceptions rather than asking for their personal stories. These often follow once the group is comfortable talking about the topic. As I did more of the demonstrations, I realised that the more I saw and became familiar with the newer products like the cup, the less daunting was the idea of trying them myself. In mainstream media, one only sees disposable pads and tampons. People are not encouraged to think they have other options’

– Mariam Pasha



FEEDBACK FROM WOMEN ATTENDING OUR WORKSHOPS

What have you learned from today's workshop?

'There are different types of products out there to use like cups, tampons, reusable pads'

'Learnt about pain management and period products'

'It was very interesting and useful for me. I learned about how to help my daughter in future'

'It has been absolutely amazing, I have learnt about reusable products. How to deal for my daughter with period pains'

'I have learned different methods to handle my periods and their pros and cons. I learned about foods we can eat during our periods - we also learned about different methods to reduce pain like hot water bottles and pain killers. Now I can handle my periods more naturally by using reusable pads, menstrual cups and period pants'

'I saw some new products that I did not know about before. I also got to talk to different people. It was a really good experience'

Is there anything you might do differently now?

'Might use cups to have a more easy life'

'Now I can handle my periods naturally by using reusable pads, menstrual cups and period panties'

'Prepare for GP appointments with written notes. Try period pants'

'I will tell my daughters/granddaughters about the products available'

'I'll switch to reusables'



THE 'TRAIN THE TRAINER' SESSION



The final stage of the project was to train 7 more women to become Menstrual Health Champions.

The 'train the trainer' session on 7th July 2025, was led by Acushla Young and Maria Tomlinson. The three co-ordinators attended to share their experiences and participate in discussions with the new champions. During the session, the women received training in menstrual health, anatomy, menstrual products, and how to deliver a workshop. Each woman was given a pack of products, training materials, feedback cards to use in future workshops, and access to the resources in English, Arabic and Urdu.

'The workshop in Rotherham was extremely helpful in introducing reusable menstrual products and resources to the attendees. All the feedback received was very positive and the need to have more workshops like it was raised. At the training session, I learned a lot of information regarding the biological side of things. Acushla and Maria were brilliant in sharing their expertise and advice. I am hoping to set up a workshop in my local area using the resources' – **Nosheen Mohammed**



During the training, I learned about the number of products you can use, how the female body works. I learned a lot more than I did at school. It was delivered in a culturally sensitive way, taking into account the faith element. I will deliver a workshop to women attending English language classes' - **Zanib Rasool**

'Attending the workshop allowed me the confidence to know about my own reproductive system and help other women in Asian communities talk openly about their menstrual cycle, food, what's normal and how to advocate for themselves. I've seen the women who attended that workshop grow in confidence and build stronger connections with each other too. During the training session, I learned the accurate words for the reproductive system. I learned about community groups and the research that has gone into creating these resources. I'll apply all of it.' - **Kim Dhatt**



The workshop at Zest was a brilliant experience. It helped me understand how many myths and taboos still surround periods, and how important it is to create open, supportive spaces where people can learn and share without judgement. The resources were really clear and empowering, and it's made me more confident to talk about menstrual health with friends and family. This workshop really changed the way I think about menstrual health. I had always seen periods as a personal or medical issue, but the workshop helped me understand how much wider the impact is: how stigma, lack of education, and poor access to resources affect people's daily lives, especially those already facing disadvantage. The session made me reflect on how normalised silence around periods is, and how that silence reinforces shame. I now feel much more confident speaking about periods openly, and I'm also thinking about how I can bring these conversations into my community work, especially with younger people'. - **Huma Iqbal**

THE CERTIFICATE CEREMONY



After the training session, the 7 Menstrual Health Champions and 3 co-ordinators were invited to attend a certificate ceremony at the Sheffield Town Hall on 22 July 2025. Here, **Lord Mayor Safiya Saeed** presented the certificates for the champions.



‘I was so glad to elevate and host the incredible work being done alongside our Community Engagement Coordinators and the new menstrual health champions.

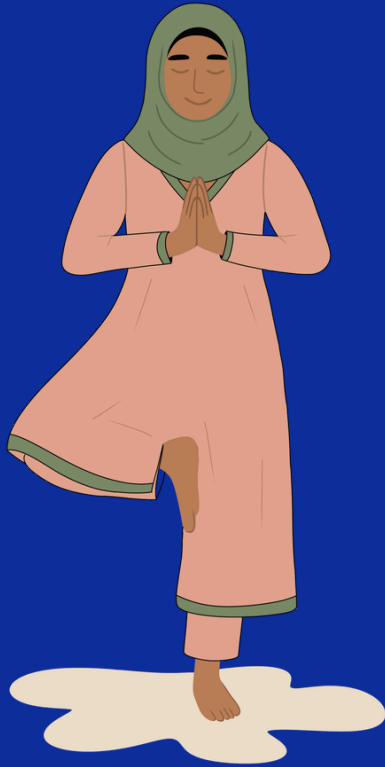
It was inspiring to witness such dedication to breaking taboos, promoting dignity, and ensuring access to vital health education.

Together, we’re creating real change at the grassroots level. Thank you to Irise International and the University of Sheffield’ –
Safiya Saeed, Lord Mayor of Sheffield



FURTHER WORKSHOPS

Since seven more menstrual health champions were trained, this project has continued to provide opportunities for Muslim women to learn about menstrual health and wellbeing.



One of our fantastic menstrual health champions, **Shaden Abdullah**, has led more workshops with Muslim girls and women. She has continued to advocate for women in Muslim communities as a member of Irise's Empower Period Committee.

In February 2026, Shaden led a workshop for 26 women at the **Sheffield Grand Mosque** and for 12 girls (ages 12-13) at **Almahad Alislami School for Girls**

Comment cards from the workshop at the Grand Mosque showed that the women and girls who attended left feeling confident in themselves and empowered by the discussions that took place. Feedback also demonstrated that faith-informed menstrual education and community engagement leads to confidence, open discussions, and reduced menstrual stigma.

Organised by our champion Zanib Rasool at **Rotherham West Community Connections**, another workshop took place in a women and toddler group in March 2026. 10 women attended.

Feedback from the workshop at the **Grand Mosque**:

'I feel more confident to talk to my daughter about periods. I feel more prepared for when she starts her period'

'I learned about the pain during the periods and how I can get help and when I need to see the doctor if other pain relief doesn't help me'

Swimming costumes for periods exist!'

'I will use this information to inform women in my coffee morning session in my community'

'I shared lots of ideas and I learned from others'



Since the project finished, Shaden Abdullah has continued to advocate for women in her community. She is now a member of Irise International's youth board. Her mission is to ensure that all women have access to essential period products and the information they need to manage their menstrual health with confidence.

Workshop at an Islamic School for Girls

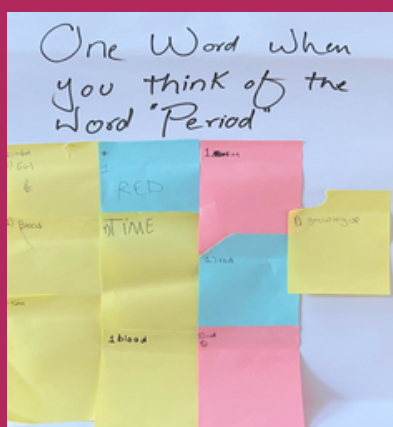
(Based on a report by Shaden Abdullah)

In February 2026, Shaden Abdullah led a 2 hour workshop with **12 girls aged 12-13** at an Islamic school.

In this workshop, Shaden used the faith-informed menstrual health resources and elements of Irise's Period Confident Schools curriculum to teach the girls about the biological process of menstruation, how to use a range of period products, managing menstrual pain, and how to identify if symptoms require medical attention. The workshop included interactive presentations, product demonstrations, Q and As with yes/no signs, and crawling through tents and tunnels that represented the uterus during menstrual bleeding.



Tunnel and tent uterus conceptualised by Belszki for the Period Confident School Programme



The menstrual health workshop at the Islamic school was a valuable and impactful initiative. Delivered in an engaging and culturally respectful manner, the session successfully increased students' understanding of menstrual health.

Feedback confirms that participants gained key knowledge, from anatomical terms like "uterus" to practical skills like cycle tracking, and developed a healthier perspective, moving from viewing periods as a "sickness" or source of "shame" to understanding them as "normal" and "natural." Several feedback sheets highlighted a new understanding that they can swim while on their period. This was as a result of teaching them about period swimwear: a product category with which most students were previously unfamiliar.

While complete attitudinal change takes time, students acquired valuable practical knowledge, including guidance on pad changing frequency and proper menstrual hygiene practices. Students also reported a positive shift in attitudes. One participant shared that the workshop "made her feel more natural," while another expressed that "it made her feel like she isn't the only one going through teenage hormones," highlighting how the workshop helped in reducing feelings of isolation and increase of confidence.

To sustain these benefits, further educational initiatives are strongly recommended to continue empowering young women in the community. Please contact Irise International if you are interested in organising a workshop for your school/ community centre.

OVERALL IMPACT OF THE PROJECT



Summary of the impact of this project (October 2024 - April 2026)

So far, this project has directly benefitted **239 Muslim women and girls** in South Yorkshire who have attended faith-informed, culturally sensitive, and educational menstrual health workshops in mosques, community centres, and schools. This project had a significant impact on the menstrual health knowledge of Muslim communities in Sheffield and Rotherham. This includes improving their knowledge of menstrual health, menstrual health management, nutrition, and a range of period products (including how to use reusables). Workshops have also brought evidenced benefits to women's self-confidence and empowered them to start conversations about menstruation within their families and communities, as well as seek medical support when required. The workshops also led to women making some positive changes in their own lives and helping others. Examples include speaking to their doctor about their menstrual symptoms, supporting their daughters to seek medical support, swimming for the first time during their period thanks to learning about period swimwear, and speaking to their family members about periods.

We are delighted to see that this project significantly contributed to reducing menstrual stigma in Muslim communities in South Yorkshire: opening conversations within families including between women and their daughters, sons, and husbands. It has therefore impacted people beyond the **338 women** who attended our events, consultations, and workshops. The project empowered women to advocate for themselves and their communities. It showcased the value of culturally sensitive and faith-informed menstrual health education. As this project has demonstrated, **to achieve the most sustainable, positive, and meaningful change in communities, community members are best-placed to become leaders of change, and flourish when supported to do so.** Conversations about menstrual health that began at the workshops have continued within Muslim communities in South Yorkshire and our menstrual health champions are continuing to lead positive change for women in their communities.

‘The workshop I went to was very informative. The conversations have been ongoing since then – they’re now more relaxed, open and honest.’ – **Kulvinder Phuller**

‘The workshop was attended by a mother who was able to seek support from GP when her daughter was suffering from severe pain and missing school’. – **Zanib Rasool**

UPDATES

- **Youth friendly versions** of the four resources for Muslim communities have now been created so that they can be used in workshops with girls from primary school to secondary school. They were designed by Irise's Empower Period Committee member, Libby Andrew.
- The faith-informed menstrual health project was highlighted as an example of best practice in a report by the **Women's Environmental Network** and the Pesticide Action Network which includes recommendations to government: "We want to see a more intersectional and inclusive approach to menstrual education that includes accurate and faith-informed menstrual education within schools and also community settings and other safe spaces." (Blood, Sweat and Pesticides 2025)
- **Menara Health** has uploaded our faith-informed resources for Muslim communities onto their app. The Menara Health app reaches 1000s women across North Africa and the Arab World. It is available in seven languages. It is a clinically informed app that supports women with their menstrual health and perimenopause
- **Endometrioseforeningen** (The Norwegian Endometriosis Association) published an article about this project, which includes an interview with Maria Tomlinson and a photograph of the project leads and community engagement coordinators.



إدارة آلام الدورة الشهرية والعناية الذاتية

ديسمبر 1, 2025

Dr Maria Tomlinson, University of Sheffield, Irise International

لماذا يعاني البعض من الألم أثناء الدورة الشهرية؟

يحدث الألم أثناء الدورة الشهرية نتيجة انقباض عضلات جدار الرحم. يحدث هذا لأن الرحم يحاول دفع دم الحيض إلى الخارج عبر المهبل. ويُعرف هذا الألم أيضًا باسم التشنجات.

Endometrioseforeningen

Nytt verktøy for å bryte tabuer rundt menstruasjon i trosbaserte miljøer

02.07.26

Hvordan snakker man om menstruasjon på en måte som oppleves relevant, trygg og inkluderende, også i trosbaserte miljøer?

Dr Maria Tomlinson University of Sheffield, Irise International

जून 30, 2026

पीरियड प्रोडक्ट्स

पीरियड प्रोडक्ट्स क्या होते हैं?

पीरियड प्रोडक्ट्स की एक पूरी रेंज उपलब्ध है। इससे आप वो चुन सकती हैं जो आपको सबसे आरामदायक और सही लगे। कोई "सही" या "गलत" पीरियड प्रोडक्ट नहीं होता। अगर आपको पीरियड प्रोडक्ट्स के बारे में और मदद चाहिए तो आपका लोकल फार्मासिस्ट, GP/डॉक्टर



UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD, DIVERSECITY & IRISE INTERNATIONAL

Thank you to

Antonia Assersen-Skadberg for her help in drafting the report (PhD Researcher, and Research Impact Intern), University of Sheffield

Ola Fagbohun, Nazia Khan, and Mariam Pasha (community engagement co-ordinators)

Uzman Rani (illustrator)

The Menstrual Health Project, Akin Fertility, Zest, Family Voices, Israac Somali Centre, Chappel Walk Masjid, the Grand Mosque in Sheffield, Reach up Youth, Menara Health, Rotherham West Community Connections CIC

Our seven menstrual health champions

Everyone who led or attended the events and workshops that were part of this project

Feedback shared in this report is based on 145 comment cards from the iftar and seven menstrual health workshops.

Evidence of impact on the Islamic school was obtained from a report by Shaden Abdullah (based on feedback from the girls and observations).

This project was informed by the following research:

Tomlinson, Maria (2025) The Menstrual Movement in the Media: Reducing Stigma and Tackling Social Inequalities, Palgrave Macmillan, [Series: Palgrave Studies in Communication for Social Change]

Tomlinson, M. and Young, A. (2023) 'Using Social Media to Communicate Effectively with Young People about menstruation. mariatomlinson.co.uk

Tomlinson, Maria (2023) "Periods Don't Stop for Pandemics" The Implications of COVID-19 for Online and Offline Menstrual Activism in Great Britain. *Women's Studies in Communication*.

The Menstrual Health resources for Muslim communities are available at irise.org.uk/resources