

A report commission by the Girls' School Association
In partnership with the Ellen Wilkinson School

'What impact does pain management have on secondary school girls' physical health and well-being across three generations?'

16th October 2026

Authors

Manha Amin

Maddy Apps

Siya Ganatra

Florence Lionetti

Victoria Macioszek

Jaya Nandhe

Our research starts with the hypothesis that women feel pain bias in their life. This is supported by the quote - "*What we do know is that when it comes to pain, men and women are treated differently*"(Billock, 2018). This research project investigates the central question: *'What impact does pain management have on secondary school girls' physical health and well-being across three generations?'* The purpose of our survey was to evaluate how different generations of women experienced and managed pain, and to determine whether perspectives have shifted over time. Specifically, we examined whether individuals felt comfortable discussing their pain, what management strategies they were advised to use, and whether they felt adequately supported and listened to. To compare these cross - generational experiences we surveyed three generations: secondary school girls , middle aged, and older. Ultimately, our aim is to analyse these generational differences to understand how attitudes towards pain management have evolved over time.

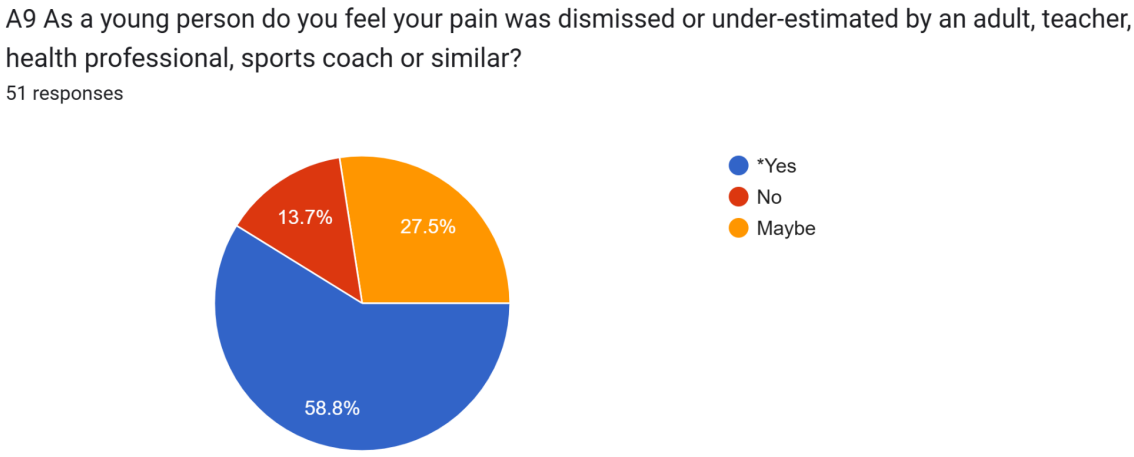
To further explore this concept, we provided three generations the same 15 questions. These questions were designed to identify the differences and similarities between secondary school girls, middle aged women and older aged women's experiences. It was noticeable that a large number of respondents generally had some sort of problem with pain management during school hours.

On average, 52.9% of secondary school girls have felt reluctant to report or merely discuss their pain, but what is the reasoning behind this and where did these issues form?
50% of the older generation respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel my pain is something to ignore', whereas only 18% of secondary school girls agreed. This suggests that women dismissing their own pain is much less likely to happen within this generation, leaving dismissal by coaches/teachers/similar the main issue. This also shows that over time, there has been greater awareness of girls' pain, whereas in the past there was more bias towards how their pain was perceived.

A quote from an anonymous younger generation respondent stated:

"Majority of the time, especially in sports lessons, female students are compared to professional female athletes when talking about pain. We are told, if grown female athletes can do sport during menstruation then we can as well. Sports teachers don't tend to consider the fact that everyone has a different pain tolerance. What I find especially strange is that it's the female teachers saying this and not the male teachers."

This proposes the idea that male teachers/coaches do not feel the same pain as women do, therefore they cannot evaluate the true urgency of the child's pain, so their decisions are unbiased. Whereas, female teachers tend to experience similar problems (for example menstruation pain) which leads them to compare the child's experience with their own, slightly biasing their judgement. This form of evaluation does not seem to account for the fact that every woman and every man has a different pain tolerance. This is supported by question A9, where 58.8% of younger respondents said their pain had been dismissed or underestimated by an adult, teacher or sports coach, while 27.5% said maybe. In comparison, only 3.9% said this happened with medical professionals.



This suggests that girls are more likely to have their pain dismissed in everyday settings, such as school and sports, rather than by medical professionals.

Furthermore, our research showed a surprisingly high increase in the amount of middle-aged women who were reluctant discussing period pain in school. On average, 61.9% of middle-aged women have experienced issues with reporting period pain, compared to 52.9% of secondary school girls and only 33.3% of older generation women. A study by Rose Stephenson (Higher Education Policy Institute) in 2025 shows that only 33% of women in colleges agreed that the education they received in school regarding periods was 'good'.
A quote from an anonymous respondent stated: *"I would say I have a headache rather than being on my period. I feel like people would look at me and think 'why are you a cry-baby' rather than just getting on with it.",* but why do women feel this way?

The fear of being shut down or told your pain is completely normal is more than enough to make women hesitate discussing their periods. For most girls, it is much easier to keep quiet rather than have no change being made, and possible embarrassment. This issue leads us back to dismissal by teachers/coaches. If a female's pain is truly evaluated in a fair way, there would be no doubt more girls would not feel reluctant to report their pain.

Conclusion

Our main findings from this research showed how female teachers' judgement of secondary school girls' pain is usually biased. This raises the question as to whether male teachers make decisions that are impartial since they do not experience the same pain as women do. Therefore, they do not compare the child's pain with their own experience. A further expansion of this research project would include increasing the number of questions about menstruation, as it appeared to be a topic of particular interest. One third of secondary school girls who gave additional comments mentioned menstruation. Our limitations for this project included the number of respondents, which was limited with a total of 51 responses. Furthermore, we would include more questions about what causes the hesitation women feel when discussing period pain in school and the differences of this between the generations.

Bibliography

Zhang,L et.al.(2021),'Gender biases in estimation of others' pain', J Pain, issue 22, (9) September 2022. [Online] Available at: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8827218/ (Accessed on 5 July 2026)

Teare,K.(2019),'Yale psychologists find that adults take girls' pain less seriously', YaleNews, January 24 2019. [Online] Available at: https://news.yale.edu/2019/01/24/yale-psychologists-find-adults-take-girls-pain-less-seriously (Accessed on 7 July 2026)

Stephenson,R.(2025),'The hidden impact of menstruation in higher education',Higher Education Policy Institute, July 21 2025. [Online] Available at: https://www.hepi.ac.uk/reports/the-hidden-impact-of-menstruation-in-higher-education/ (Accessed on 2 August 2026)

Jada Wiggleton-Little(2024),'"Just" a painful period: A philosophical perspective review of the dismissal of menstrual pain' *National library of medicine,National Centre of Biotechnology Information.* [Online] Available at: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11113068 Accessed on 21st July 2026

UK Parliament. (2026) 'WEC warns against 'financial half measures' for women's health',26 May [Online] Available at https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/328/women-and-equalities-committee/news/213736/wec-warns-against-financial-half-measures-for-womens-health/ (Accessed: 13 July 2025)

Appendix

Research survey questionnaire responses

BGS & Girls' School Association
Year 7/8 Research Project 2026

Research Question: "What impact does pain management bias have on secondary school girls' physical health and well-being across three generations"

Thank you for agreeing to complete our research project questionnaire.
Your answers will be used in our research report into gender bias in pain management.
Your answers are anonymous and will not be shared with anyone outside the project.
Please submit this form before Midnight Wednesday 16th September.

Our survey looks at **the experiences and feelings across three generations**. In order to reflect on the thoughts of each generation we are asking you, a **BGS Student, to complete section 2, questions A1 - A15.**

If able and willing, **Mother/Aunt/Guardian** or similar: **Please complete section 3, questions B1 - B15**

If able and willing, **Grandmother/Great Aunt** or similar: **Please complete section 4, questions C1 - C15**

Once you have completed any or all of the sections, please submit your form.

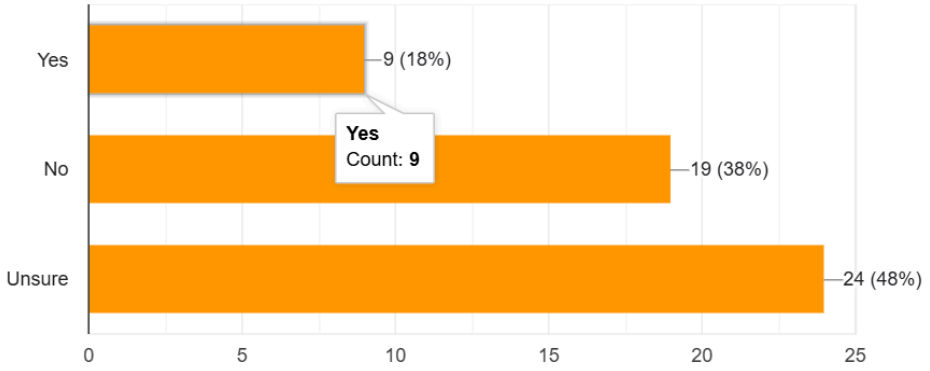
Thank you for taking part in our survey and allowing us to highlight issues related to bias in pain management.

BGS Student

A1 Do you feel that girls' pain is taken seriously?

Copy chart

50 responses



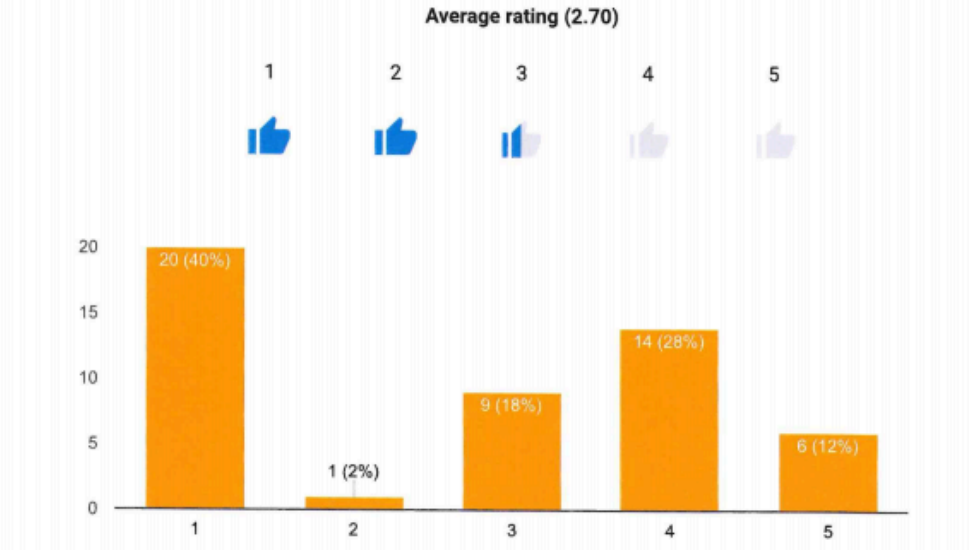
A2

Copy chart

On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statement, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

I have missed school days because of pain

50 responses

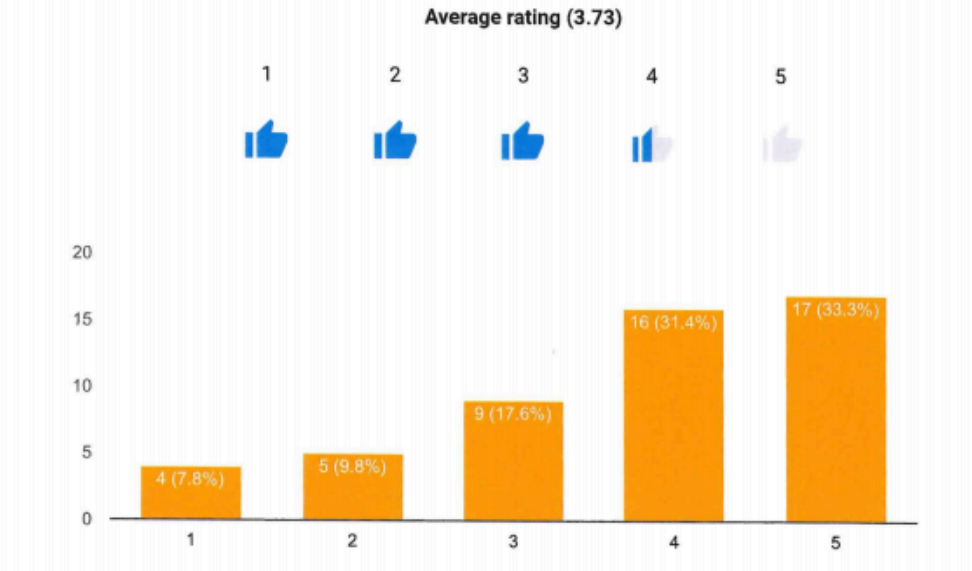


A3 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

My pain impacts my concentration and performance

51 responses

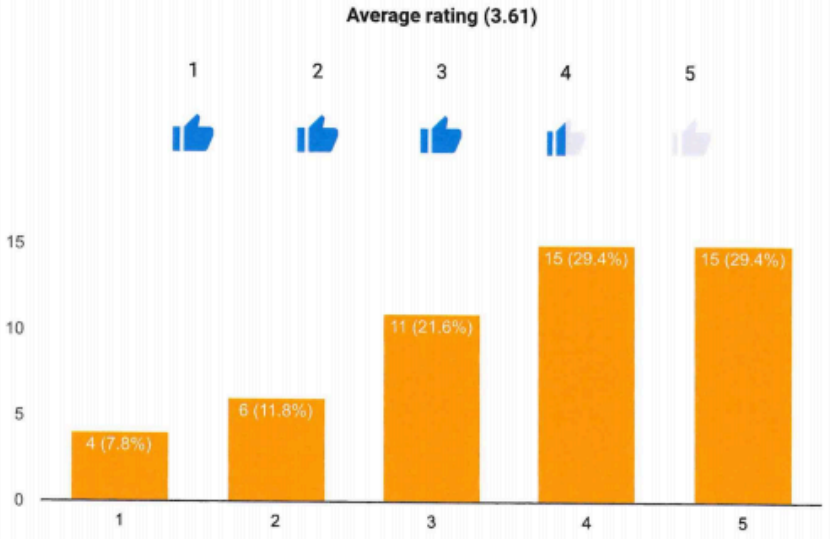


A4 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

My pain impacts my physical wellbeing

51 responses

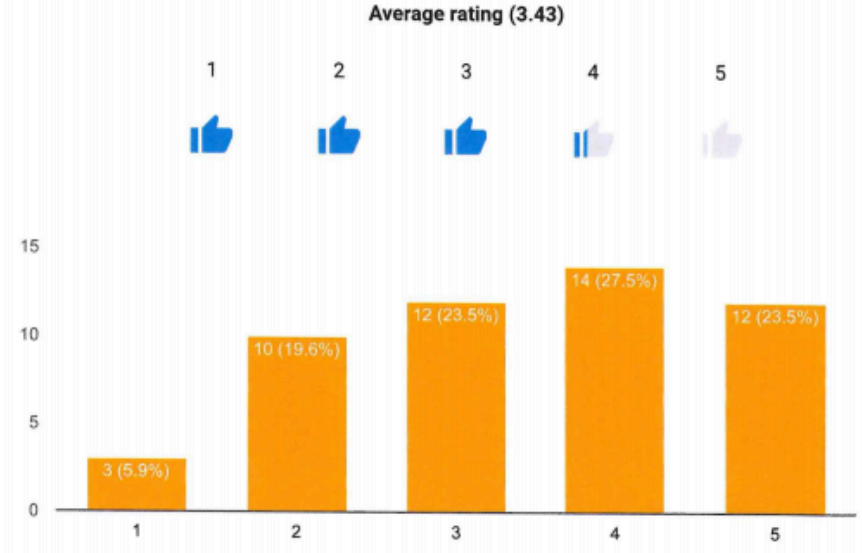


A5 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

My pain impacts my mental wellbeing

51 responses



A6 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

I feel my pain is something I should ignore

50 responses

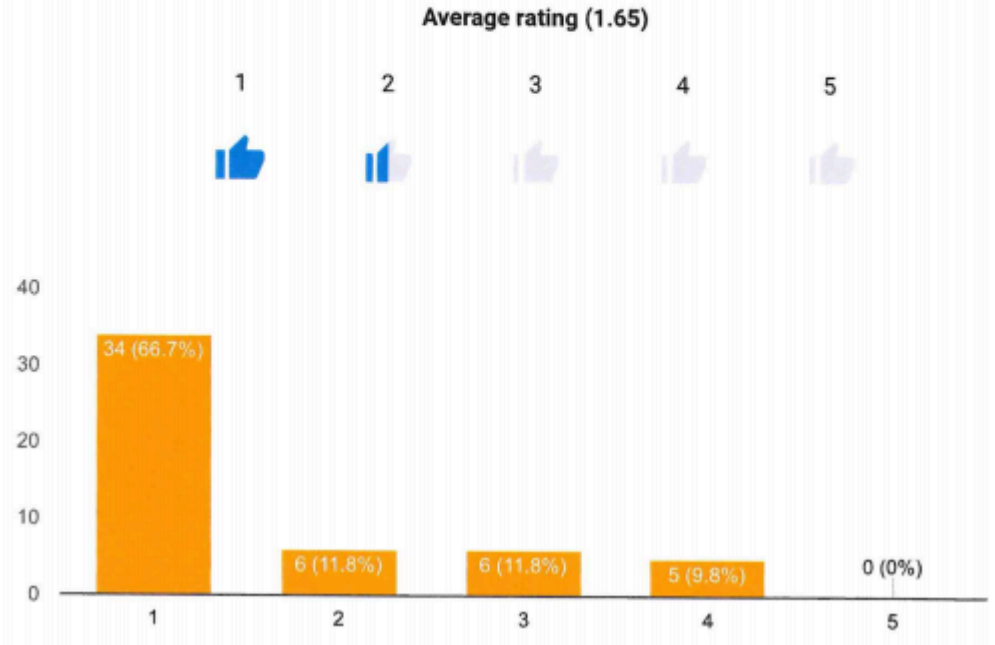


A7 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

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Girls who report their pain are not as strong as those who don't

51 responses

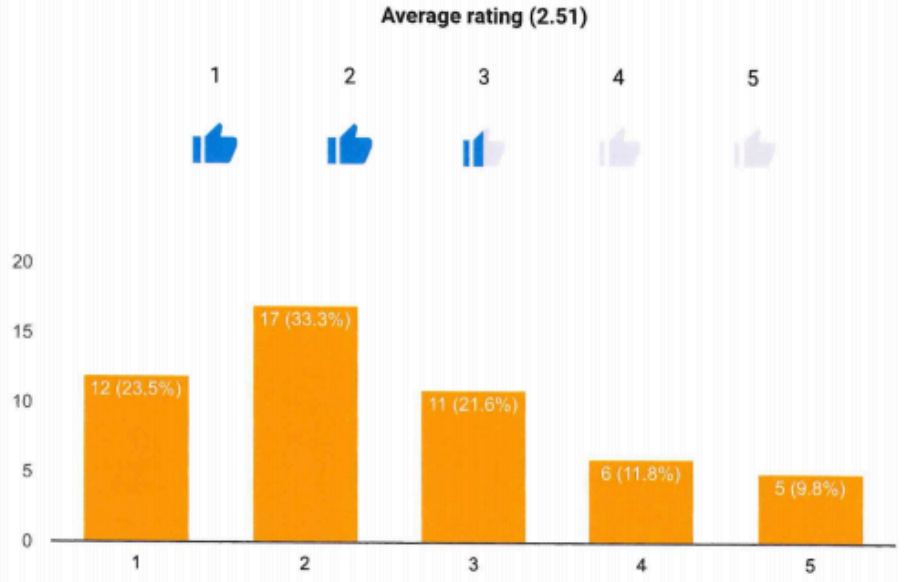


A8 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

Pain is normal and "nothing to worry about"

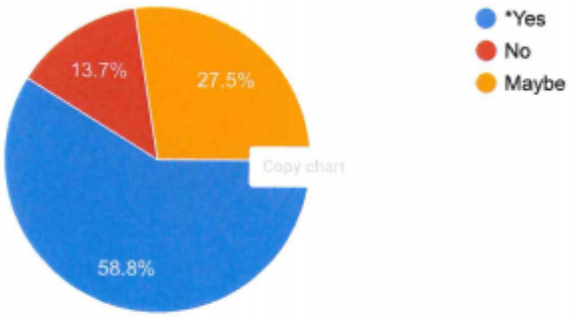
51 responses



A9 As a young person do you feel your pain was dismissed or under-estimated by an adult, teacher, health professional, sports coach or similar?

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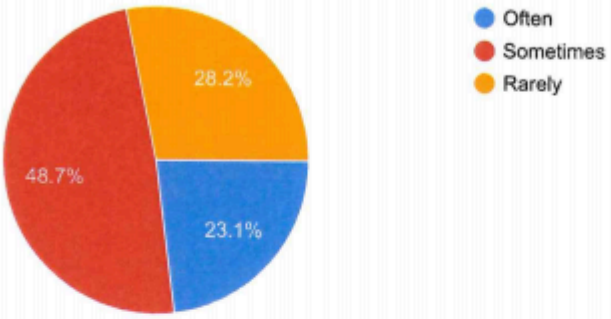
51 responses



If you answered ***YES** to the question **A9** how frequently has this happened?

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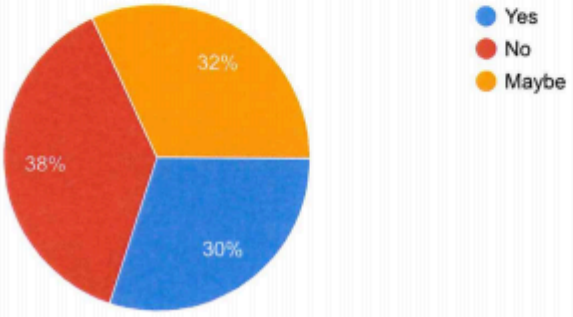
39 responses



A10 Do you feel your pain was not been fully investigated as a result of your gender or age?

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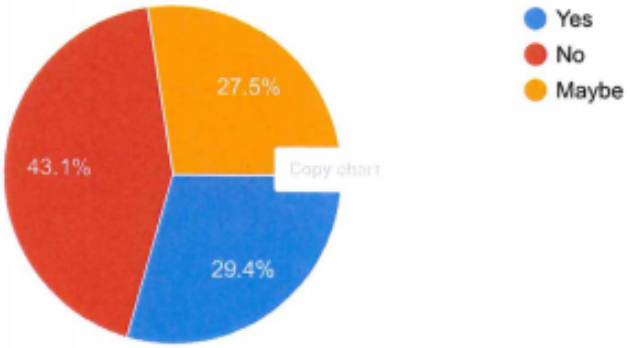
50 responses



A11 Have you witnessed a gender bias in the treatment of pain?

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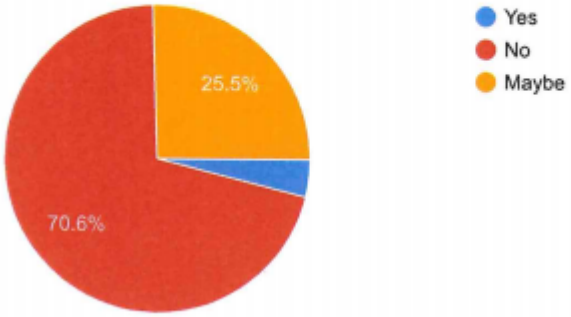
51 responses



A12 Have you ever been refused access to medical services or first aid support because of persistently reporting pain?

Copy chart

51 responses



A13 Have you ever been reluctant to report your pain and why did you feel this way?

51 responses

No

I have been reluctant to report pain to my parents because my mum often over worried or under worried and not actually giving me the support I needed and my dad would dismiss it as 'normal for what I do'.
I have also been reluctant to report my pain to my coaches mainly because I don't want to sit out of sessions

Yes

Yeah

I was reluctant because I was always told that it's just hormones when it was really impacting my mental health very badly and I felt depressed/alone

Because it's embarrassing sometimes

A lot of girls / women have not been given the correct treatment or diagnosis due to them being female and it being dismissed as 'period pain'

Yes because I didn't want to create a fuss

I feel this way because I feel that it's not important and I'm probably just overthinking it and making it worse myself. Also, because I'm afraid to find out what's wrong if it is more malicious than just a bump or a sprain.

N/A

Yes because people assume it's just period pain and we are over exaggerating

Yes, I wasn't sure whether it was strong enough to report.

Copy chart

It has never happened to me but if it where to happen to me I think I would feel embarrassed

No, only with friends other wise I would feel a wuss

no

Because people might make fun of you

Sometimes because a lot of people don't think it's that bad and don't take it seriously

Because it's embarrassing

I don't know

Yes because i just have to deal with it

I didn't want to seem weak

Maybe

Because it's embarrassing and a waste of someone's time

.

Yes and i dont know

Yes because I didn't want to be rejected

Yes because I thought i would be just fine.

Yes, didn't want the fuss

Because I was scared I might get surgery or big operations or something

There is nothing they would do about it.

Unsure if I would get the right treatment

The teachers wouldn't do anything to help anyways

I was too embarrassed.

Embarrassment due to frequency

Don't know how to describe it

Copy chart

Don't want people worrying

Yes because I stress a lot when I am in pain

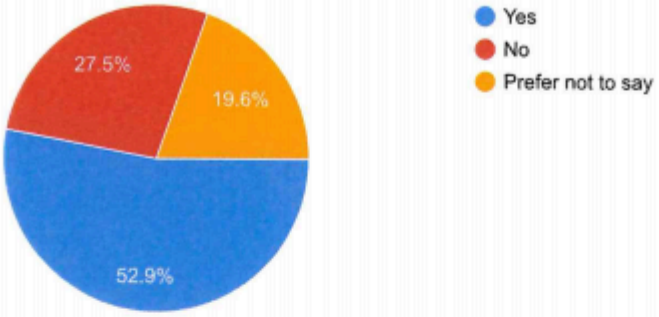
I haven't

Yes, I believe I should suck it up and get on with what I need to do. Also people won't take it seriously anyway.

A14 Have you ever been reluctant to report or discuss menstrual pain or cycles at school?

Copy chart

51 responses



A15 Additional Comments

If you have a reflection or observation not included in this questionnaire, please use this space to communicate your own experience of **pain management bias have on secondary school girls' physical health and well-being**

9 responses

As a girl in a girls' school I haven't seen any bias behaviour, however I do think some of my pain has been dismissed due to the fact that I am doing so much and it's bound to happen

I feel like this school dismisses pain a lot and only cares if it's "important "

Majority of the time, especially in sports lessons, female students are compared to profesional female athletes when talking about pain. We are told, if grown female athletes can do sport during menstruation then we can as well. Sports teachers don't tend to consider the fact that everyone has a different pain tolerance. What I find especially strange is that it's the female teachers saying this and not the male teachers.

I have personally not started my period so that most likely affects my answers.

I don't know

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No

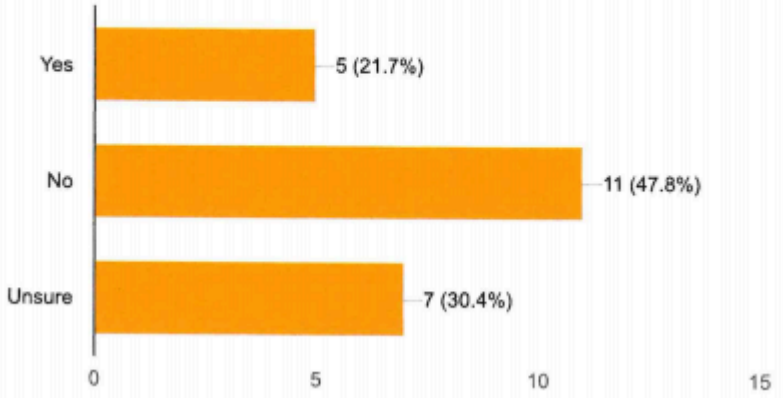
Tell trusted friends and family

I feel that whenever a girl says anything about their period and also explains what they want to do à.k.a. Need to go to the bathroom or to the nurses, that they should be allowed to go immediately

B1 Do you feel that girls pain is taken seriously?

Copy chart

23 responses



B2

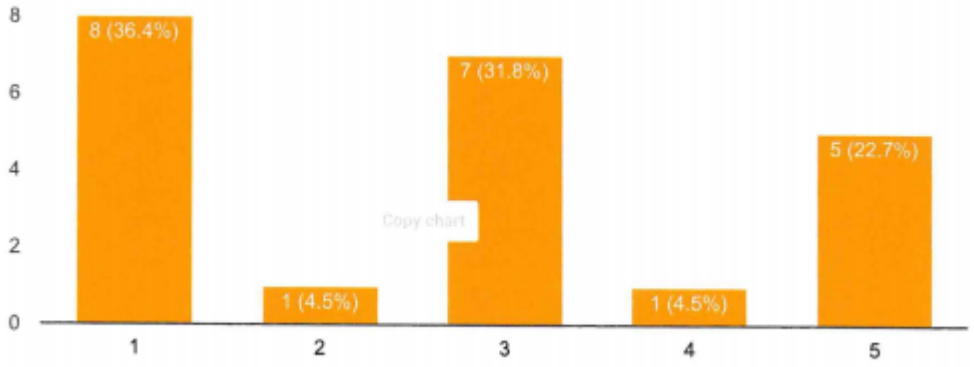
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On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statement, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

I have missed school days because of pain

22 responses



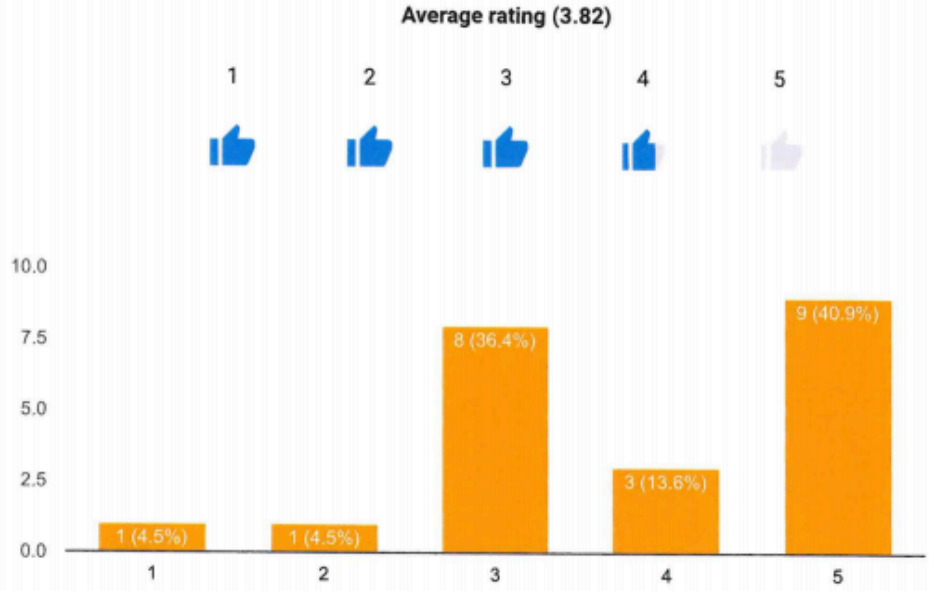


B3 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

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My pain impacts my concentration and performance

22 responses

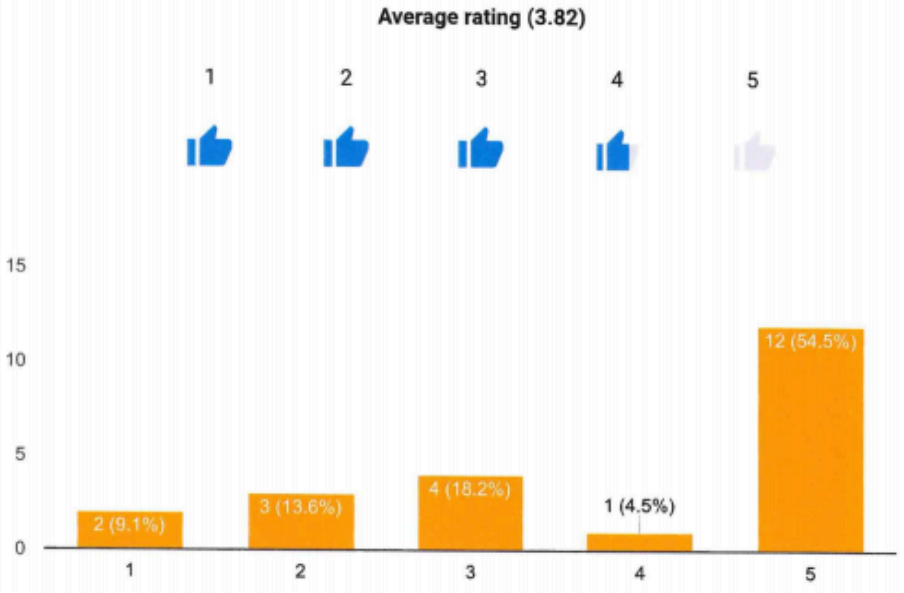


B4 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

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My pain impacts my physical wellbeing

22 responses

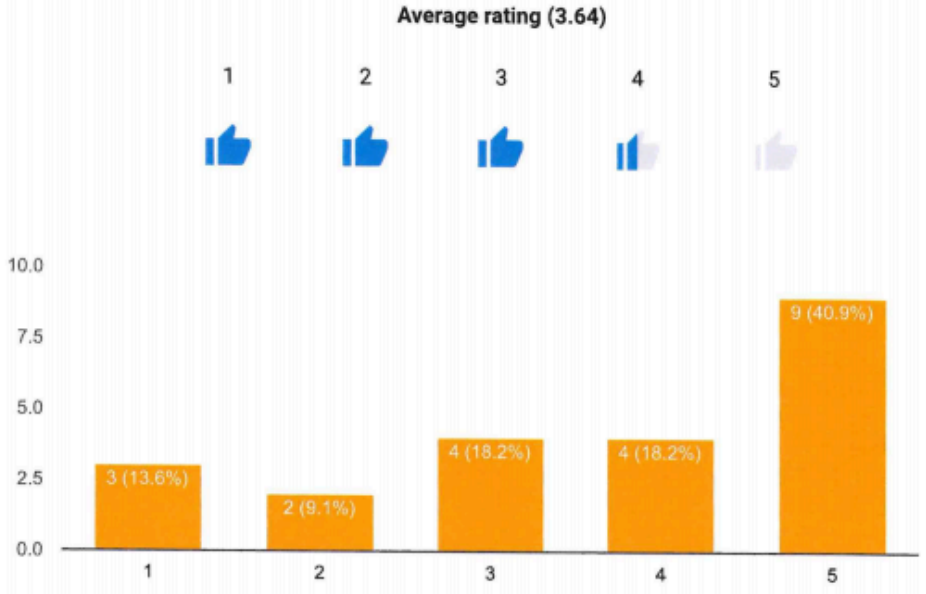


B5 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

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My pain impacts my mental wellbeing

22 responses

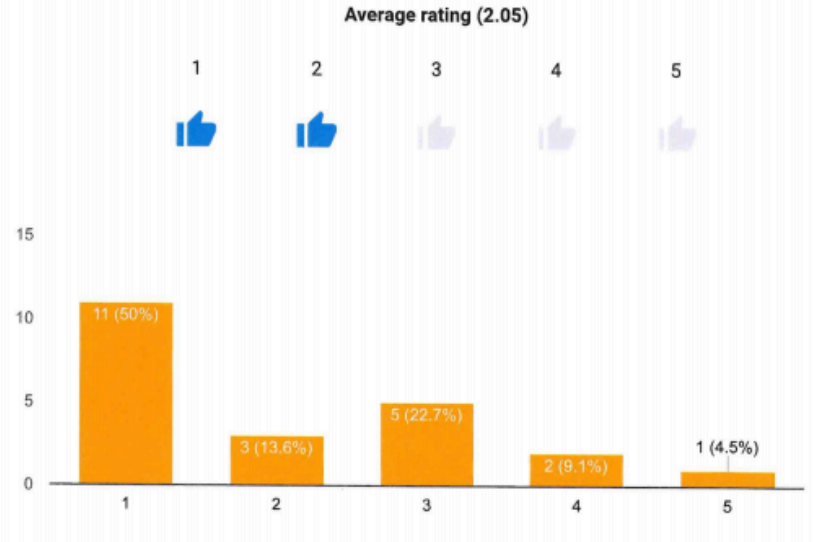


B6 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

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I feel my pain is something I should ignore

22 responses

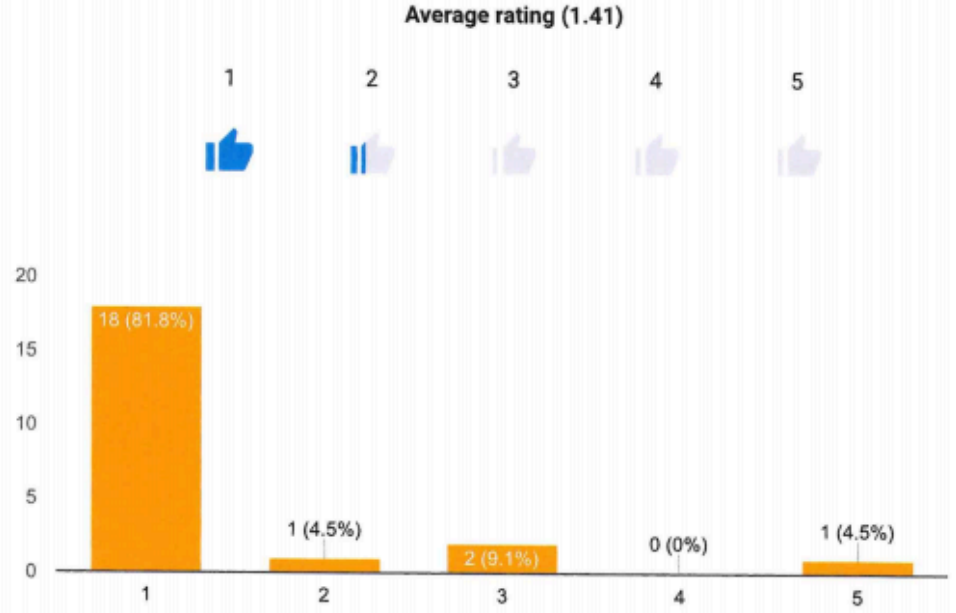


B7 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

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Girls who report their pain are not as strong as those who don't

22 responses

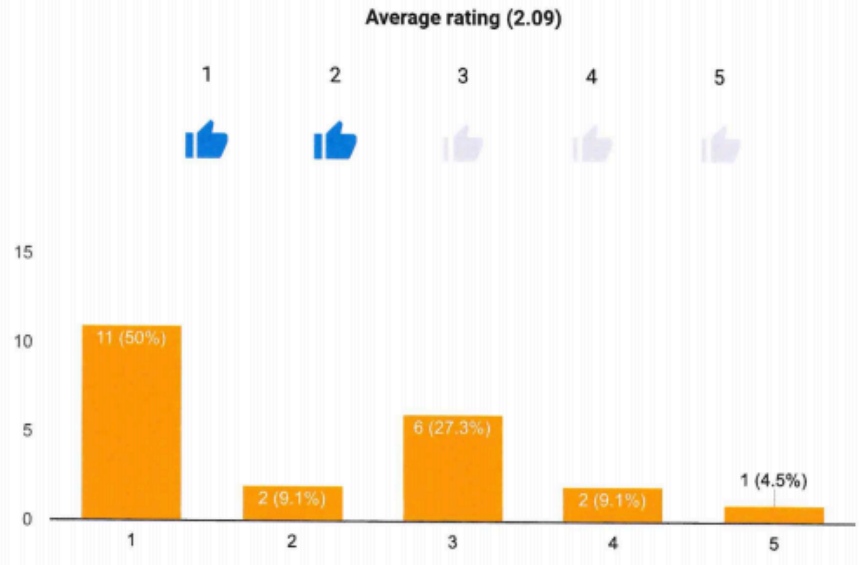


B8 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

Pain is normal and "nothing to worry about"

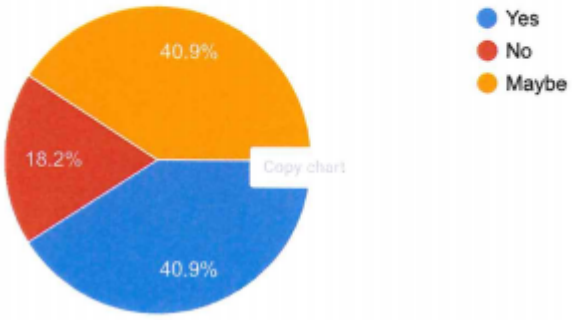
22 responses



B9 As a young person do you feel your pain was dismissed or under-estimated by an adult, teacher, health professional, sports coach or similar?

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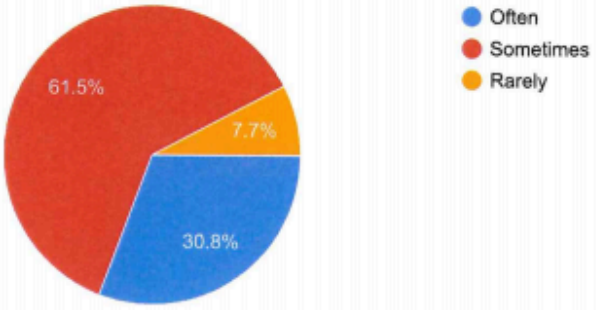
22 responses



If you answered ***YES** to the question **B9** how frequently has this happened?

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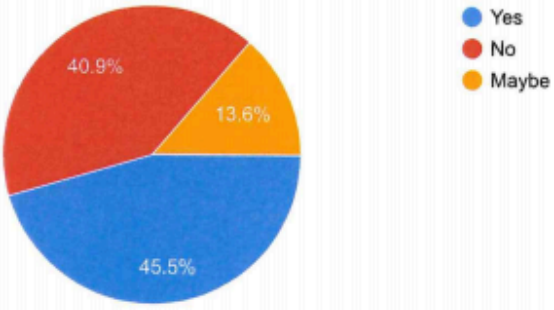
13 responses



B10 Do you feel your pain was not been fully investigated as a result of your gender or age?

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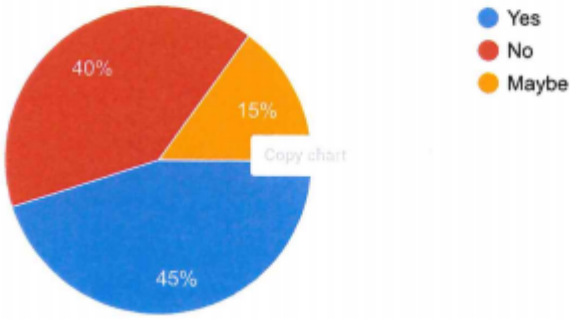
22 responses



B11 Have you witnessed a gender bias in the treatment of pain?

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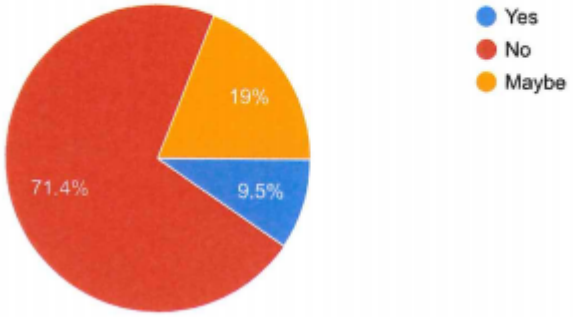
20 responses



B12 Have you ever been refused access to medical services or first aid support because of persistently reporting pain?

Copy chart

21 responses



B13 Have you ever been reluctant to report your pain and why did you feel this way?

51 responses

.

No

Yes

It wasn't ever discussed

N/a

.

Embarrassed

B

Yes. I don't want to be stigmatised or to be told "you need to keep it together".

Not really

Embarrassment

Ye

in case I'm not heard

I don't know

It was normal as advised n not spoken in the open

Parent didn't want to do the form

Copy chart

Yes and I'd prefer not to say why

As teenagers period pain was seen as something to just get on with and take pain killers if necessary.

Maybe I did as a young child because I was shy

Not so much about pain but PMS symptoms were strongly dismissed by my doctor and I was told there is no such thing

*

I don't know.

,

It was the 1980

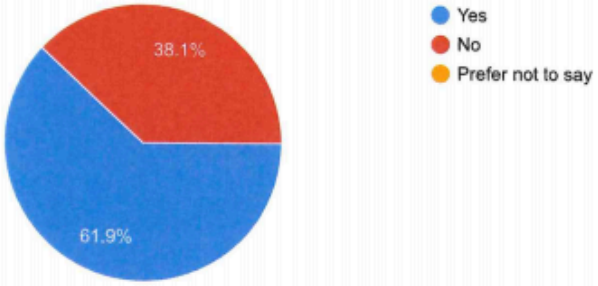
G

Because I knew it wouldn't be taken seriously

B14 Have you ever been reluctant to report or discuss menstrual pain or cycles at school?

Copy chart

21 responses



B15 Additional Comments

If you have a reflection or observation not included in this questionnaire, please use this space to communicate your own experience of **pain management bias have on secondary school girls' physical health and well-being**

6 responses

I'm not sure was any bias management as pain wasn't really discussed with adults and only sometimes with friends

I personally feel period pains are not taken seriously and missing school or reporting this would not be taken seriously.

No doubt pain will impact all aspects of an individual's health and wellbeing and interactions with others, but how "brave" a girl is depends on how she was brought up and hers and her family's perception on the importance of sharing with trusted adults and the need to get to the root of any situation causing pain.

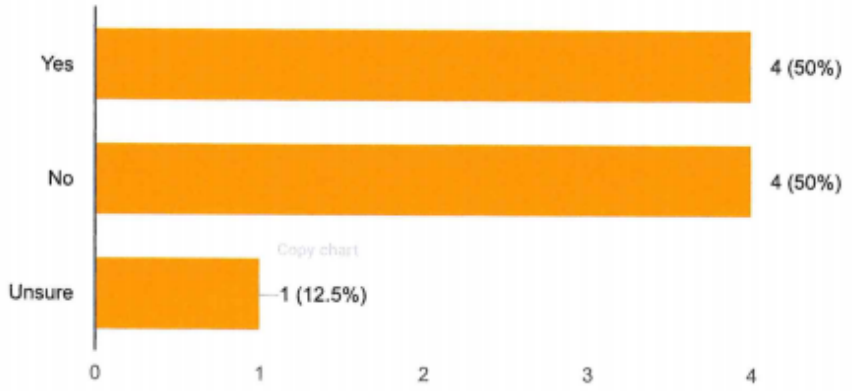
Educated by adults around girls and give proper advice

When I was at school approx 30yrs ago, my health related pain was dismissed and I was expected to put up with it. I

C1 Do you feel that girls pain is taken seriously?

Copy chart

8 responses



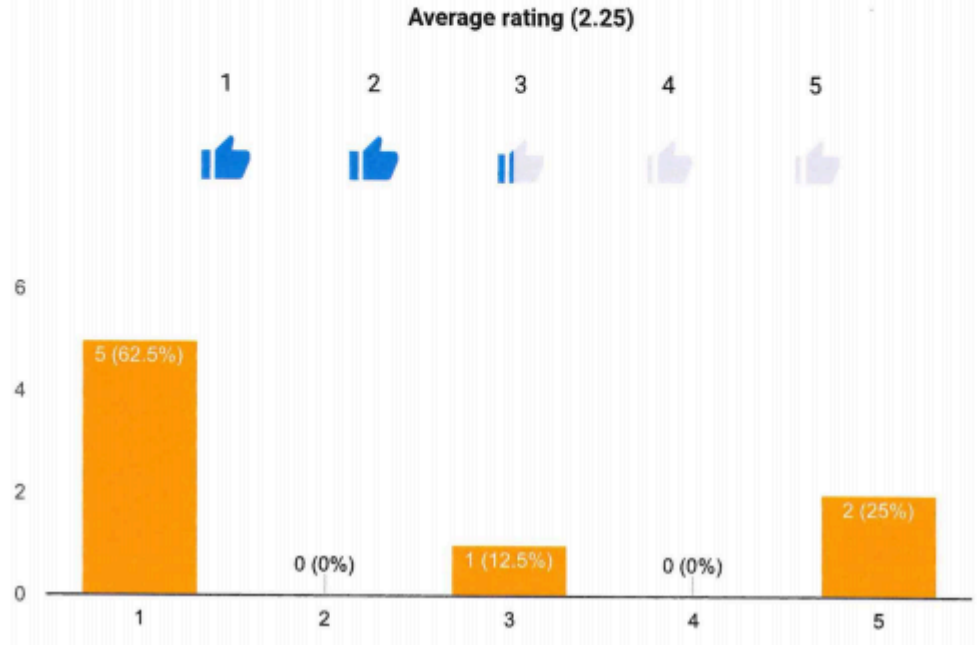
C2

Copy chart

On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statement, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

I have missed school days because of pain

8 responses



C3 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

My pain impacts my concentration and performance

8 responses

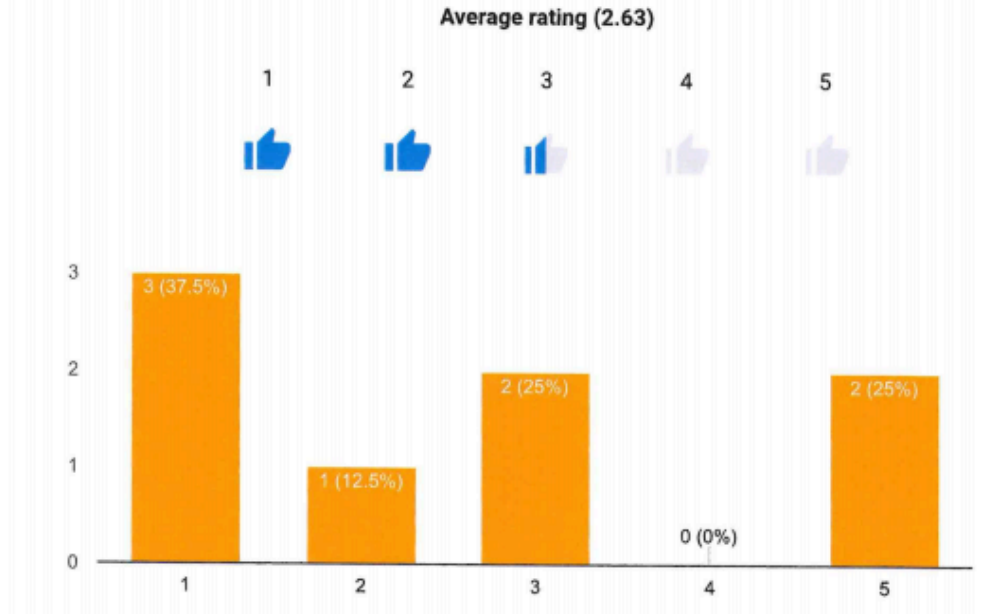


C4 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

My pain impacts my physical wellbeing

8 responses

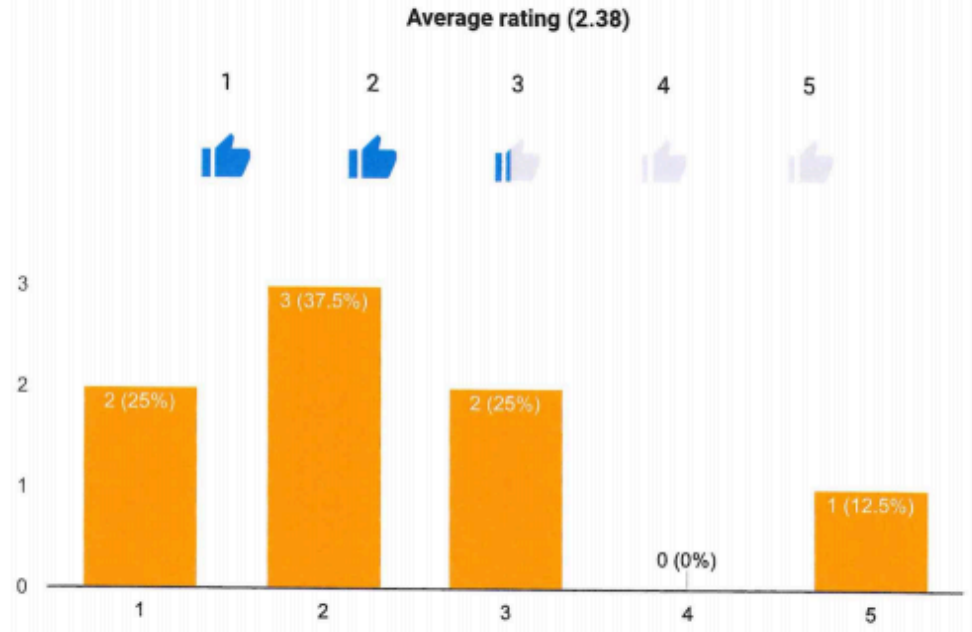


C5 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

My pain impacts my mental wellbeing

8 responses

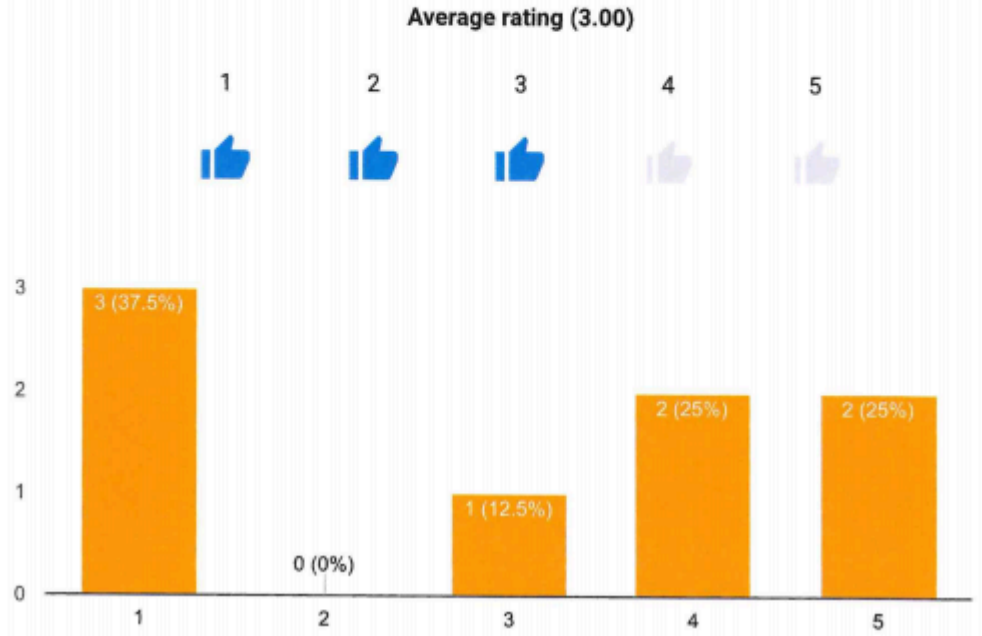


C6 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

I feel my pain is something I should ignore

8 responses

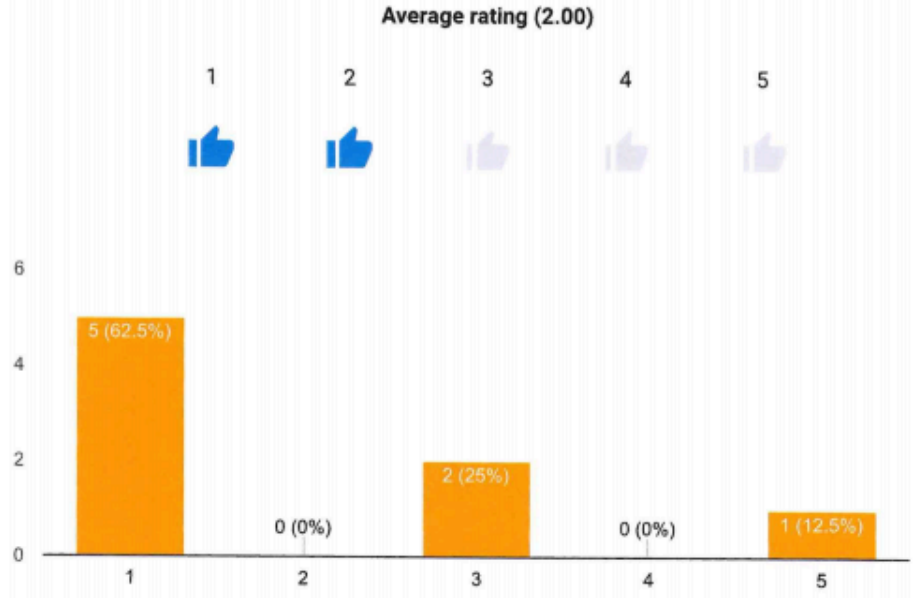


C7 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

Girls who report their pain are not as strong as those who don't

8 responses

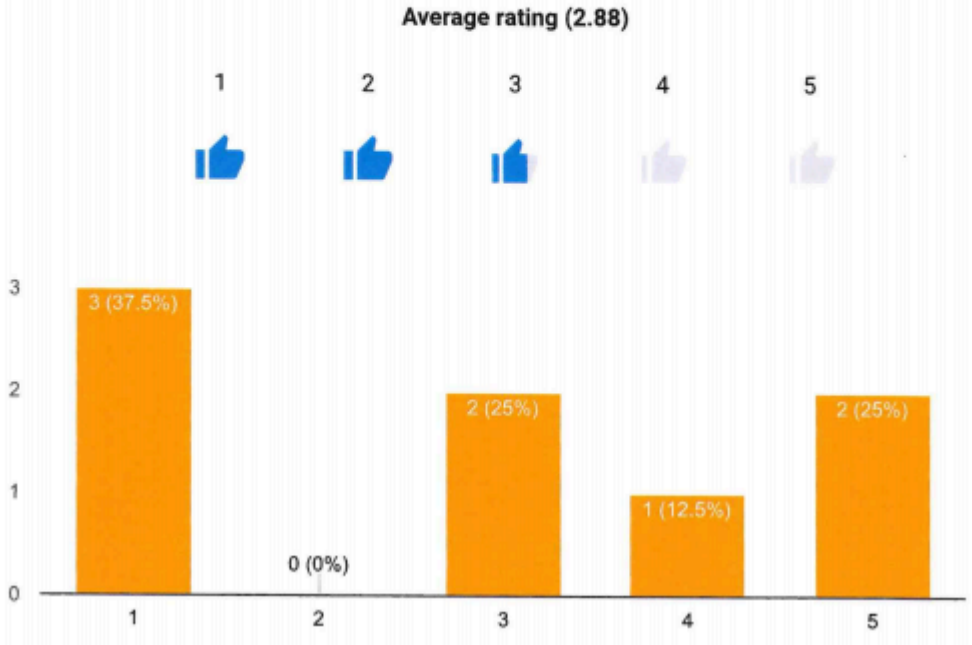


C8 On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements, (**1** being disagree - **5** strongly agree).

Copy chart

Pain is normal and "nothing to worry about"

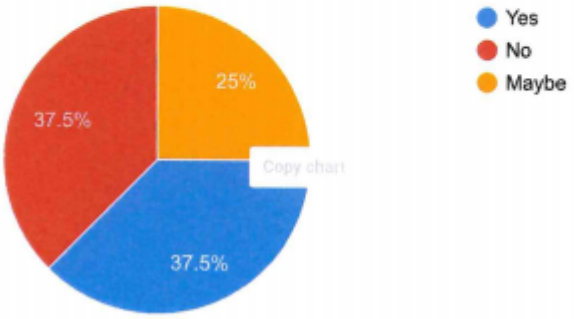
8 responses



C9 As a young person do you feel your pain was dismissed or under-estimated by an adult, teacher, health professional, sports coach or similar?

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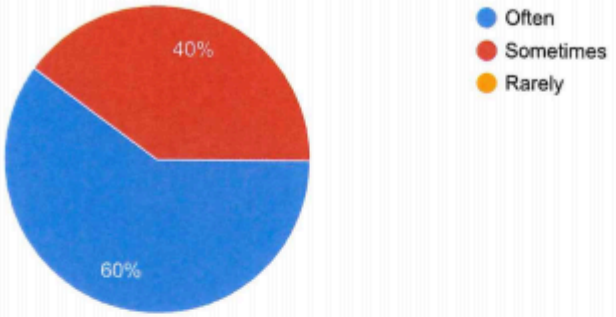
8 responses



If you answered ***YES** to the question **C9** how frequently has this happened?

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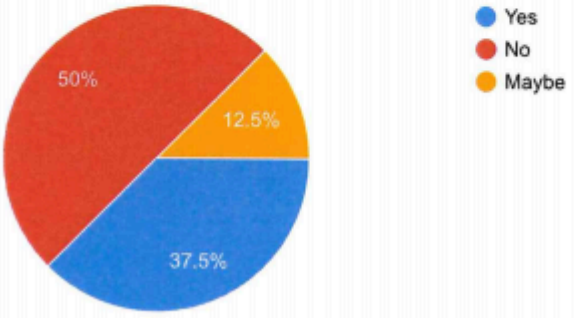
5 responses



C10 Do you feel your pain was not been fully investigated as a result of your gender or age?

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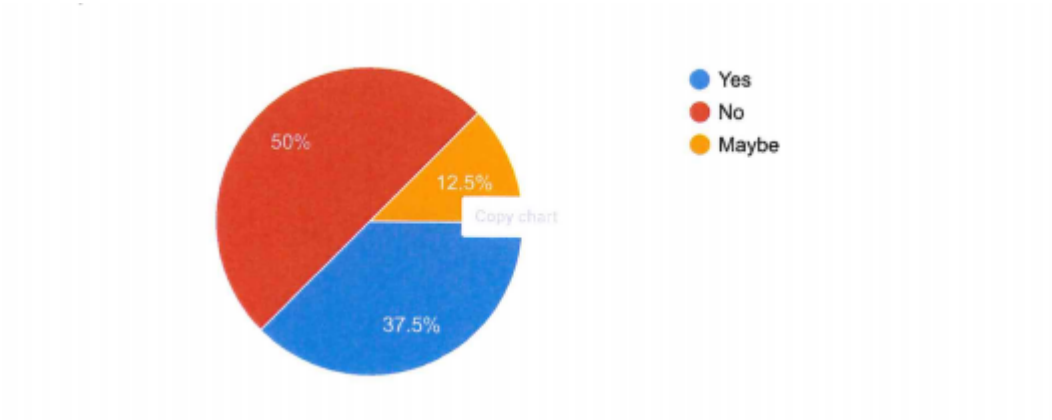
8 responses



C11 Have you witnessed a gender bias in the treatment of pain?

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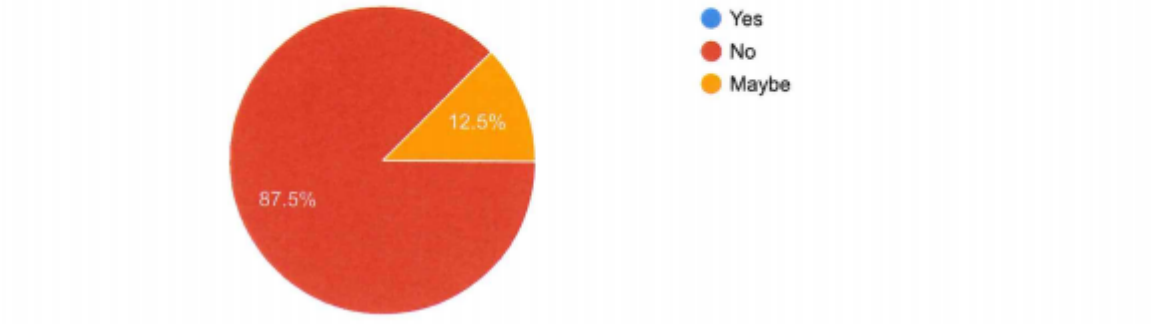
8 responses



C12 Have you ever been refused access to medical services or first aid support because of persistently reporting pain?

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8 responses



C13 Have you ever been reluctant to report your pain and why did you feel this way?

51 responses

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No

N/a

NA

I thought it was normal, and little could be done about it

Yes

Not really

Not applicable

Yes, taught taboo

-

No

Yes

I don't now

Not available to fill in this form

No one to answer this part of the survey

Yes because it would be diamissed

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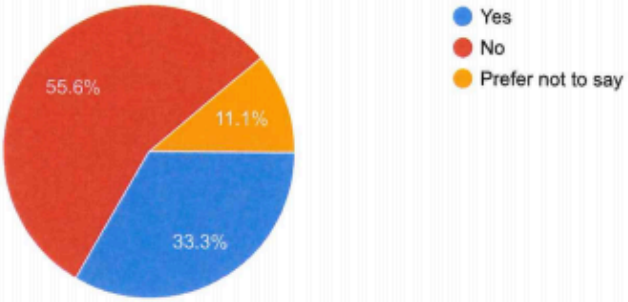
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Yes period related problems

C14 Have you ever been reluctant to report or discuss menstrual pain or cycles at school?

Copy chart

9 responses



C15 Additional Comments

If you have a reflection or observation not included in this questionnaire, please use this space to communicate your own experience of **pain management bias have on secondary school girls' physical health and well-being**

5 responses

Pain would have been taken seriously but it wasn't really much of an issue. You would be given a pain killer. I went to a kindly school, we could be excused from games if we had a letter or had a convincing story

More awareness and education around should discussed

Yes this was my pain years ago was period related. Now my pain is arthritis related

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