

Critically analyse how a local, national or international campaigning organisation has engaged with a topic of your choice of the past year.

Abraham Maslow (1943) would argue that one who lacks basic essentials in life is simply unable to thrive and prosper, therefore being unable to become a self-actualized individual. A plethora of girls and women, are experiencing a newly discovered form of deprivation, which has existed for centuries, but is only recently being considered seriously and appropriately. This type of deprivation has been described as period poverty, a form of poverty where girls and women lack the financial means necessary to access sanitary products such as pads or tampons, therefore effecting their ability to prosper (WHO/UNICEF *cited in* Tull, 2019; Maslow, 1943).

This deprivation appears to have a detrimental effect on one's health, mental health, wellbeing and social inclusion (Tull, 2019). Along with this, there is a direct link between girls experiencing period poverty, and lower school attendance, and furthermore lower academic attainment (Hennegen and Montgomery, 2016 *cited in* Tull, 2019). This form of deprivation exists both on a macro scale across the globe in less developed countries, however, also exists, on a more shocking note, in economically thriving counties such as the UK (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tull, 2019).

Research by Plan International UK in 2017 found that; one in ten girls across the UK have been in a position where they cannot afford sanitary products and more than one in ten have improvised sanitary wear from items such as socks due to financial constraints. Research also established that forty eight percent of fourteen to twenty-one-year olds are embarrassed by and embarrassed to discuss their periods, this research highlighting the financial and health issues surrounding the topic, along with the stigma which exists, because of this, campaigning organisations are becoming more involved with the issue (Plan International UK, 2017).

Girlguiding is an organisation which was established, over a century ago, Girlguiding focus on working closely with girls and young women to encourage them to become empowered individuals who have the confidence and knowledge to make a difference both at a local level in their communities and in wider society as they grow (Girl Guides, N/D).

In 2018 Girlguiding initiated a campaign entitled 'END PERIOD POVERTY AND STIGMA', the campaign is ongoing. The aims of this project are; to encourage reducing the stigma surrounding periods and getting girls and young women to talk openly about them, pushing for government funding which supports free menstrual products across society, focussing on

secondary schools and educational facilities and encouraging period education as part of sex and relationship education in schools. The remainder of this assignment will focus on whether this organisation and this campaign is engaging with these aims, and with the contemporary issue of period poverty and the stigma which surrounds it (Girlguiding, N/D).

Girlguides appear to be engaging considerably successfully with their aim which focuses on encouraging period education in schools. Girlguides (N/D) webpage states that 'From next year all pupils in England will learn about periods as part of Relationship and Sex Education' this is confirmed by The Department for Education. The department have introduced new statutory guidelines for sex, relationship and health education. A new curriculum will be implemented under the guidelines which will be mandatory for all schools in England following September 2020 (GOV.UK, 2019, a), this new curriculum ensures that menstruation education is compulsory under sex and relationship education. Along with the education will promote dealing with periods in a healthy and safe way (GOV.UK, 2019, b).

This is important because girls and young women will be receiving the education which supports them with understanding their own menstrual health, along with cope with it, which also engages with reducing stigma (GOV.UK, 2019, b). Although this new curriculum has not been introduced as a direct result of Girlguiding campaigning alone, it can be considered that the campaigns aims and objectives, and understanding of what is necessary to promote ending period poverty and reducing stigma complies with both government and the Department for Education guideline (GOV.UK, 2019, b).

Stigma describes the way in which one is treated because they adopt a characterise or trait which is deemed to be shameful, or out of the social norms, someone or something which adopts a stigmatization can often feel marginalised and unaccepted which can result in social exclusion and isolation. (Heatherton *et al*, 2000)

Reducing stigma is considered good practice in influencing social change and helping to change the paradigm in which society views a topic (Stuart, Arobeleda-Florez and Sartorius, 2012). In relation to period stigma, government guidelines state that good practice in engaging with reducing stigma, requires sensitive, yet effective and conclusive education to not only those who experience the stigma but also those who surround the individuals. Also explaining that this education, when involving children and young people, should be presented using methods which engage with them, such as posters and interactive resources (GOV.UK, 2020).

Girlguiding, in working towards engaging with their aim of reducing the stigma which exists in relation to period poverty, have produced two activity and information packs. These packs include interactive activities, games, thinking exercises and talking exercises concerning periods and menstruation. The packs are used around the UK by Rainbows, Brownies and Guides leaders to inform girls and young women about periods, and to encourage getting them talking about their periods, all of which government recommend for tackling reducing stigma. (Girlguiding, N/D; GOV.UK, 2020). The resource packs are also available online to the public, which ensures their message and influence is readily available to anyone in need, and ensures that they can reach a larger target audience, which is considered good practice to successful campaigning (Girlguiding, N/D; Trent and Friedenburg, 2008).

It is important to note that with campaigns such as this, positive change may occur at different points in different areas. Girlguiding Scotland for example, were given the opportunity to give evidence of their personal experiences with period poverty, or stigma surrounding period poverty in response to MSP Monica Lennon's proposal for free sanitary products in Scotland. This evidence was used in the proposal bills consultation paper (Girlguiding Scotland, 2017; The Scottish Parliament, 2018).

Although this was back in 2017, the campaign can be said to be engaging considerably well with their aim of pushing for government funding for free menstrual health products such as pads and tampons over the past year, as on the 25th February 2020, The Scottish Parliament backed the proposal. '*The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill*' (The Scottish Parliament, 2019; The Scottish Parliament, 2020) would ensure Scottish Government are responsible in providing free menstrual products for all who require them, this is being considered as a landmark achievement for Scotland, and for the girlguides. This indicates positive engagement with their aim, and positive outcome also (Gallagher, 2020). Although this is a considerable success, it must be noted, that although the backing is a step in the right direction, they have still not quite reached their final target. It is also notable that although this is considered ground-breaking for Scotland, women and girls are experiencing period poverty across the whole of the UK, (Tull, 2019).

In Conclusion, with the nature of this assignment being relatively short and having a restrictive wordcount, it was inevitable that not all aspects of the campaign, and all successes, or failures could be analysed. On the contrary however, the assignment covers the areas in which the

Girlguiding engagement with the topic resulted in considerable succession, and the areas in which appear to be the most significant outcomes.

It appears in terms of encouraging period education in schools, the organisation has seen considerable success and in terms of England, have achieved their goal. As of September 2020, all children and young people in schools in England will receive period education which in turn is good practice in helping young people to understand periods, which in turn should help young people to normalise and understand menstruation, and to deal with such safely in a way which poses no risk to their health (GOV.UK, 2019, a; Girlguides, N/D).

Along with Girlguiding having influenced Scotland being the world first to coming closer to offering free sanitary products for all, by giving consultation evidence, which can and has been considered a massive achievement by the Girlguiding across the country (The Scottish Parliament, 2020; Girlguiding, N/D)

Girlguiding are also complying successfully with government guidelines in talking and reducing stigma also, and by doing so engaging with the aims of their campaign (GOV.UK, 2019, a).

On a whole it appears Girl guiding are engaging positively with all of the aims of their campaign and in doing so, influencing considerable social and legislative changes in terms of period poverty and stigma. Although it can be said that changes are being made at a more rapid rate in some areas compared to others, these changes are all positive and can be considered as successes. It will be interesting to see if and how Girlguiding engage with this contemporary issue moving forward and what the future holds for period poverty in the UK.

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