

KARATE SCOTLAND



PERIODS AND KARATE REPORT



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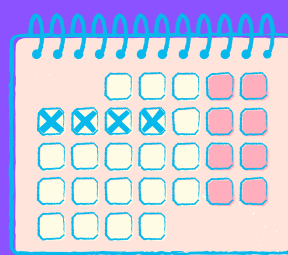
Key Facts on Periods and Sport

Women, girls, transmen and transboys may all experience periods. There is a lot of variety in how people experience a normal period. Periods often:

Begin between 8-16years

last 2-7 days

run on a 24-38 day menstrual cycle



Symptoms experienced alongside a period can include (but are not excluded to): Abdominal pain, bloating, dizziness, headaches, fainting, fatigue, lower back pain and weight gain. Normal bleeding should **not** require changing products every 1-2hours, and symptoms should be felt to be manageable. If you have a concern here, please see your GP.

Despite most females menstruating at some point within their lives, discussions, research, and strategies to support menstruation in sport, until recently, have been scarce.

Key facts on menstruation in sport from the existing literature

Whilst historically it has been *assumed* that menstruation negatively impacts physical activity, there has not been enough large-scale and high quality studies to be able to confirm what the physiological affect on sports performance are. However, research does suggest that:

- Athletes often perceive that their performance is negatively impacted by their period.
- Feelings of fatigue and being distracted by concerns about leaking blood are most often cited by athletes as ways in which their period impacts their sports performance.
- Athletes often find that participating in sport improves or alleviates their menstrual symptoms.
- The majority of female athletes do not feel comfortable discussing period issues with a coach, particularly if the coach is male.



About the research

This research sought to explore:

- What are women and girls' positive and negative experiences of periods and karate?
- What do women and girls' want or need to improve their experience of their periods at karate?

The research

Participants for this research had to be born female, be aged 16 years and older, and participate in Scottish karate as a practitioner, coach, and/or official.

Participants came from across 14 local authority areas in Scotland. All identified as women or girls.

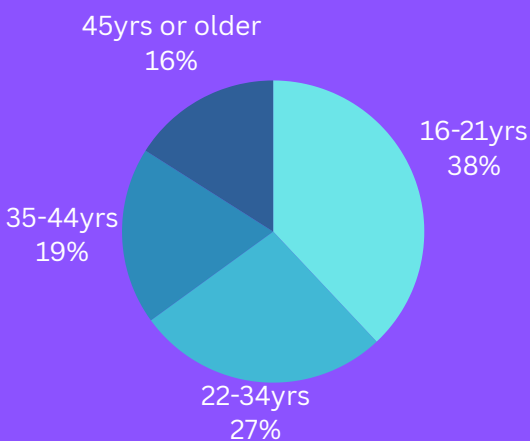


192 survey responses

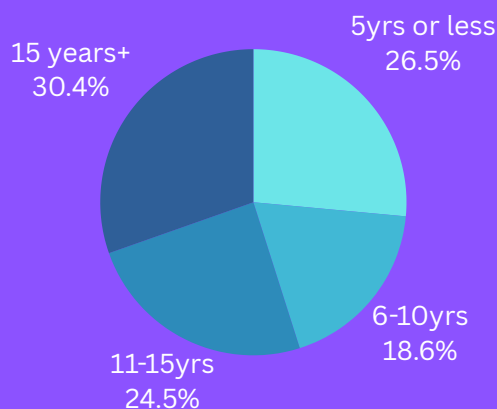


10 interviews

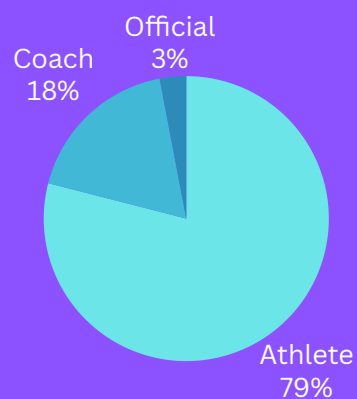
Participant Age



Years in Karate

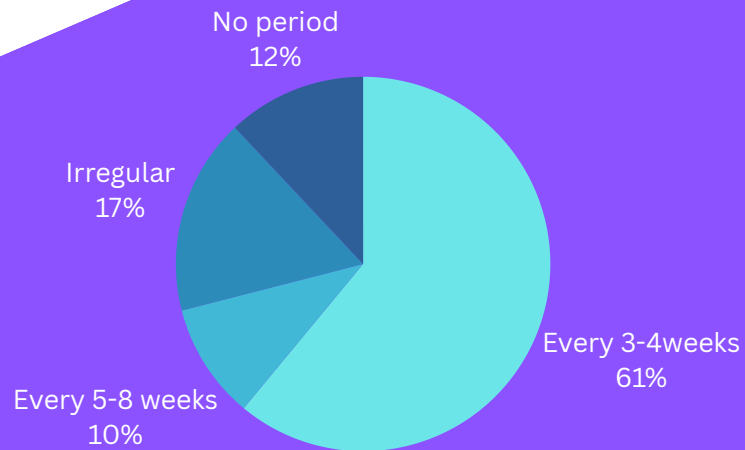


Role





Period Patterns of Women and Girls in Scottish Karate

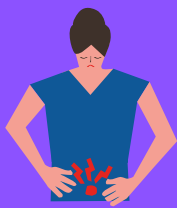


Period Frequency

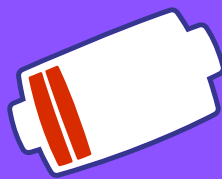
Most women and girls in Scottish Karate have regular periods, with a sizeable minority having irregular or no period. Athletes are more prone than the general population to relative energy deficiency syndrome, where the body uses up more energy than is consumed. For female athletes, this can lead to infrequency or an absence of periods. This may explain some cases where participants are unsure why their period is absent.

Symptoms

All participants reported experiencing at least one symptom whilst on their period, and on average experiencing 6 symptoms. The most common symptoms were:



Abdominal cramps (84%)



Fatigue (76%)



Decreased motivation (63%)

Period Products

Women and girls in karate used a variety of different types of period products. Many discussed wearing multiple period products at the same time to avoid leaking blood onto their karate suits. Product used included: pads (71%), tampons (58%), period pants (18%) and menstrual cups (13%).

35% worried about the frequency of their period.

11% struggle to afford or access period products

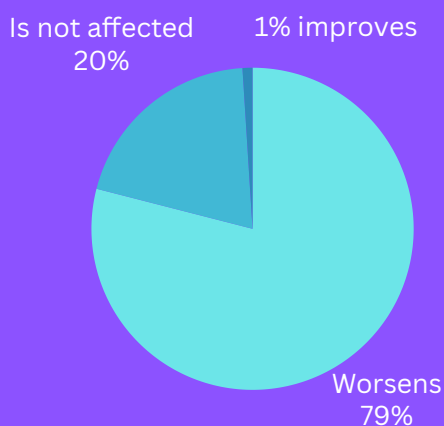


How Do Periods Impact Training?

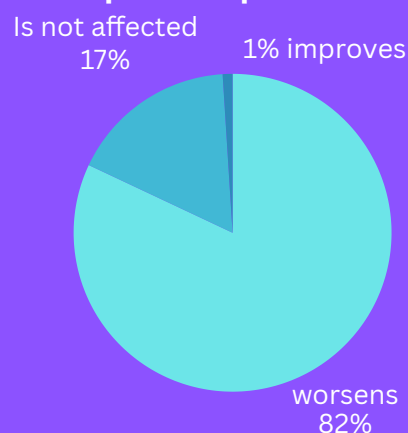
98% had participated in karate classes when experiencing a period

Women and girls experienced multiple menstrual symptoms when participating in karate, with abdominal cramps impacting them the most. Participants worried that any dips in their performance during their period may be interpreted by their coach as 'laziness'.

Impact on enjoyment of karate



Perceived impact on performance



More positively, some participants found that karate alleviated some menstrual symptoms, such as pain, alongside providing a boost to their mental wellbeing:

'Going to karate whilst on my period always makes me feel like I have accomplished something. When you come out of karate you're totally energised'

72% missed karate classes due to their period

16% missed karate classes most periods

Reasons for missing karate classes were a combination of the impact of menstrual symptoms and worries of leaking blood onto their karate suit.



Worries About Leaking Blood

95%

worried about leaking menstrual blood onto their karate suit

43%

worry about leaking menstrual blood at every karate class

The most prominent impact of periods on women and girls' karate experience were concerns about leaking blood onto the karate suit. This had significant implications on women and girls enjoyment of karate and their performance:

'It focusses your energy away from enjoying the training or like working on your karate to stressing about your period. Every time you throw a kick you get a sudden worry, like, 'oh, did I just leak?' – its distracting.'

To avoid leaking blood at karate some participants would: avoid certain moves, wear multiple layers of period products, take medication to change their cycle, or not attending karate classes.

Experiences of leaking

61%

had experienced leaking blood onto their clothing at karate

2%

felt supported when they had leaked blood

The experience left women feeling embarrassed, and worried about that others in the karate classes - particularly men/boys - might feel uncomfortable or disgusted. Positive experiences of support included other teammates making them aware of the leak, offering to share period products with them, or offering a change of clothing.

Access to period products at karate

Having access to period products at karate settings can help alleviate worries related to leaking menstrual blood. When participants found themselves in need, but without, period products many suggested that they felt they have to leave the class and go home.



Period products were provided in 50% of the karate facilities participants used



bins to dispose of period products were provided in 78% of facilities



Discussing Periods in Karate Settings

9%

had ever discussed periods with a male coach

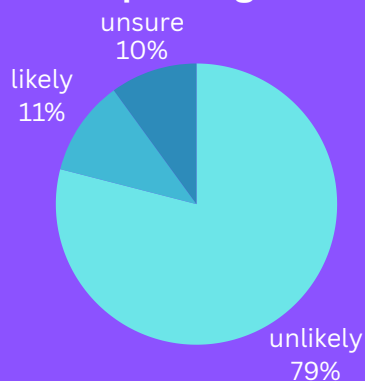
11%

had ever discussed periods with a female coach

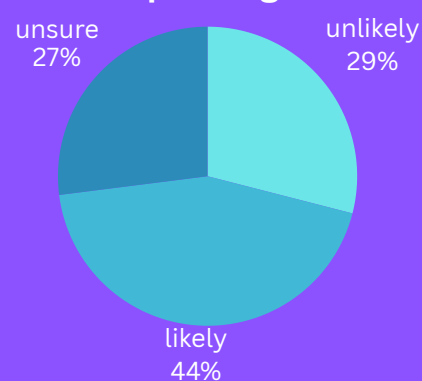
Discussing periods with coaches

Despite the impacts of menstrual symptoms and concerns of leaking menstrual blood on women and girls' experiences at karate, very few had ever discussed periods with a coach. In the event of having a period issue at karate in the future, they were more likely to speak to a female coach than a male coach:

likelihood of speaking to a male coach



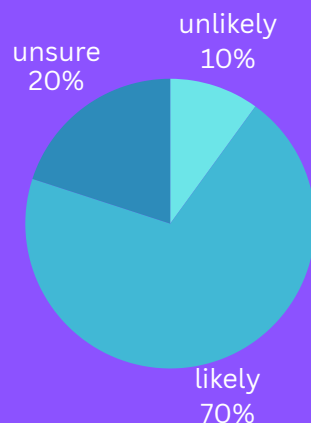
likelihood of speaking to a female coach



'I just know that if I was to speak to (male coach) about my period, they'd be mortified. And, I don't want to make them feel that awkward way. I'd maybe just say, you know, 'I'm just not feeling 100% today' instead, or just say nothing'

Positive discussions

Women and girls were most likely to speak with female teammates about their periods:



58%

would like periods to be discussed more within karate settings



Guidance For Coaches

Whilst coaches cannot take away the negative physical symptoms that many women and girls experience during their period, there are things that coaches can do to support women and girls when they are on their period. This guidance aims to enable women and girls to feel supported and in turn reduce the number of women and girls who are missing classes, or stopping karate, due to worries or issues related to their periods.

- **Normalise the 'P' word:** Women and girls do not mention period issues to their coach as they worry that it might make the coach uncomfortable or disgusted. You can help by mentioning periods yourself! For example, tell the class where they can access period products, or, signpost them to information on periods (like this resource ☺).
- **Include period products within first aid kit:** It is useful to include sanitary products within your first aid kit as not all facilities provide sanitary products, or, the products at the facility may run out.
- **Check your facility has access to period products and sanitary bins** within the toilets: If you do not own your premises, please encourage the landlord to provide these.
- **Have a flexible clothing policy:** Many participants are concerned to leak blood onto their white gi. Consider whether some of your classes can be done in 'gym wear' and make this clear to your members.
- **Be understanding of variance in performance:** women and girls are all affected differently by their period, impacting their performance differently. If you notice an isolated dip in performance, this could be related to their period.
- **Have a female 'team captain':** As some women and girls feel uncomfortable raising a period issue with men, if your club does not have a female coach then a female 'team captain' could enable women and girls to discuss period issues.



A message to my coach

As part of the research, participants were asked what they would like to say (anonymously) to their coach about doing karate with a period. Here are some of their messages:

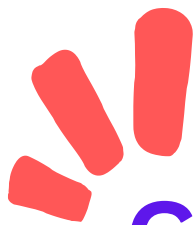
‘Make sure the girls can feel comfortable speaking to you about it. Just let them know that it’s not a taboo subject.’

‘It’s probably a struggle that you can’t really understand if you have not experienced it yourself, but, like it is a big concern for women and girls. They do worry about their period showing at karate. Just be mindful and empathetic.’

‘Not everyone has the same type of period, so not everyone can manage the same amount when they’re on their period.’

‘As long as you’ve got an understanding of it, that’s all I can ask. Find out a bit more if you can! Even if you don’t really want to talk about it all the time, have an understanding about it and what it’s like, and have empathy.’

‘If the women/girls are giving it 100% for 3 weeks a month and another week they’re not the same don’t give them a hard time. It could just be that they are on their period. Check if everything is alright.’



Guidance For Women and Girls

- **Try a variety of period products** to find the ones that make you feel most comfortable and secure: There are a wide variety of period products including pads, tampons, reusable period pants and shorts, and menstrual cups. For an extra secure feel, some people like to wear tight shorts above their underwear to hold period pads in place.
- **Keep a period kit in your karate bag** including period products, pain killers, such as ibuprofen, and a spare set of karate trousers or leggings. You will be able to feel confident that if your period arrives unexpectedly or is heavier than expected, that you can still continue to train.
- **Speak up if you have a period issue at karate:** If you have a period issue during a karate class or competition, please let your coach know. If you do not feel comfortable discussing it with your coach, then speak with a teammate. Research shows that male coaches want to know more about periods and are happy to support you. Your coach (and club mates) want you to be able to train freely without worry, and want to support you to do so.
- **Keep a record of your period experiences and symptoms:** This can help you identify any patterns in the symptoms that you experience, and how this does or does not affect your karate experience. You can learn a lot about your period doing this, and it can help you plan and prepare for future karate sessions or competitions.
- **Share your experiences with other women and girls** if you feel comfortable to. Many women and girls within your karate clubs will have experienced the same challenges and will have their own tips and tricks!
- **Visit your GP** if you are concerned about your period frequency, heaviness, or length of bleeding, or other symptoms.
- **Go to karate class:** Even if you might not feel your best, participating in sport can alleviate period symptoms for many people, whilst also boosting mood and energy levels. However...
- **Don't feel guilty** if you feel unable to attend a karate class due to your symptoms. Periods can affect everyone differently, and the same person differently each period. If symptoms that prevent you from training persist, please visit your GP.



A message to my younger self

As part of the research, participants were asked what they would say to their younger self about doing karate with a period. Here are some of their messages:

‘Make sure you’ve got your ibuprofen and don’t worry about leaking. No one cares if you leak!’

‘Don’t stress so much about leaking. I feel like I’ve spent a lot of my life stressing. And that like it feels like the end of the world, it feels like it’s going to be the end of the world if you leak. But, it’s not actually the end of the world, so yeah, don’t stress so much.’

‘Periods are completely normal and it’s good to learn how they affect you and your body on personal level’

‘Speak to other girls. Speak to older women as well and ask how they cope with it during karate’

‘You’re doing your best and do whatever you can to make yourself feel comfortable. I think it would be a good thing to push yourself to go to training when you don’t want to sometimes, but also its ok to have a night off if you need it. You’re doing your best, you’re getting through it. You’re learning to deal with periods at the same time you’re learning to deal with karate, so just keep it up, you’re doing great.’



Period Support

If you have an issue related to your period at a karate class, competition, or event, then please do speak to your coach/sensei. Please remember that your coach is there to support you and will listen to your issues. If you feel uncomfortable discussing period issues with your coach then you can contact Karate Scotland's director of women and girls' interests.

If you have concerns about the regularity of your periods or the symptoms that you experience then please consult with your GP.

Below are additional support organisations that provide information on and resources for menstruation:

- PickupMyPeriod mobile app – This app lets users identify locations across Scotland where they can access period products for free
- Hey Girls educational resources: <https://www.heygirls.co.uk/learn/>
- Period Positive resources: <https://periodpositive.com>
- Healthy Optimal Periods for Everyone resources: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/centre-reproductive-health/hope>

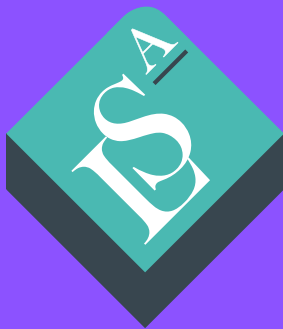


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Report produced by Dr Chloe Maclean., Karate Scotland Director of women and girls' interests.

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STUDIES

ASSOCIATION



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