

# Do Brazilian schools know that girls are in pain?

How many girls miss class because of menstrual cramps? How many had their first period before age 11, without knowing what to expect? How many teachers missed work for the same reason as their students? How is this data distributed across regions, races and school stages?

The answers you'll find in this material come from a survey carried out by Instituto Equidade.info with 2,551 students, 303 teachers and 181 school administrators from public and private systems across every region of Brazil.

Menstruation is part of life for millions of Brazilian students. For many of them, school is where the pain arrives with no protocol, no infrastructure and no record. There is no sick note for cramps. There is no protocol for the girl who can barely stay seated. In most Brazilian schools, there is no institutional path for a problem that affects millions of students every month.

What is not named is not counted. What is not counted does not become public policy. And what does not become public policy keeps being treated as a private matter, for each girl, resolved in silence, month after month, throughout her entire school career.

**This is the first of six waves of research to be carried out by Alana with Instituto Equidade.info. The data are the starting point for transforming this reality.**

## PAIN KEEPS GIRLS OUT OF SCHOOL



**6 in 10**

students who menstruate have strong or moderate cramps that disrupt their days and require medication.



**4 in 10**

girls who menstruate miss class at least once a month because of menstrual symptoms. That is around 3.6 million girls across Brazil.

THE PREVALENCE OF ABSENCES RISES WITH CRAMP INTENSITY:

**45.1% of students with moderate cramps and 40.3% of those with strong cramps have already missed school for menstrual reasons, versus just 15.5% of those who don't have cramps.**

→ Of those who miss, 20.5% lose 1 day a month, 16% lose 2 to 5 days and 0.6% lose more than 5 days.

South

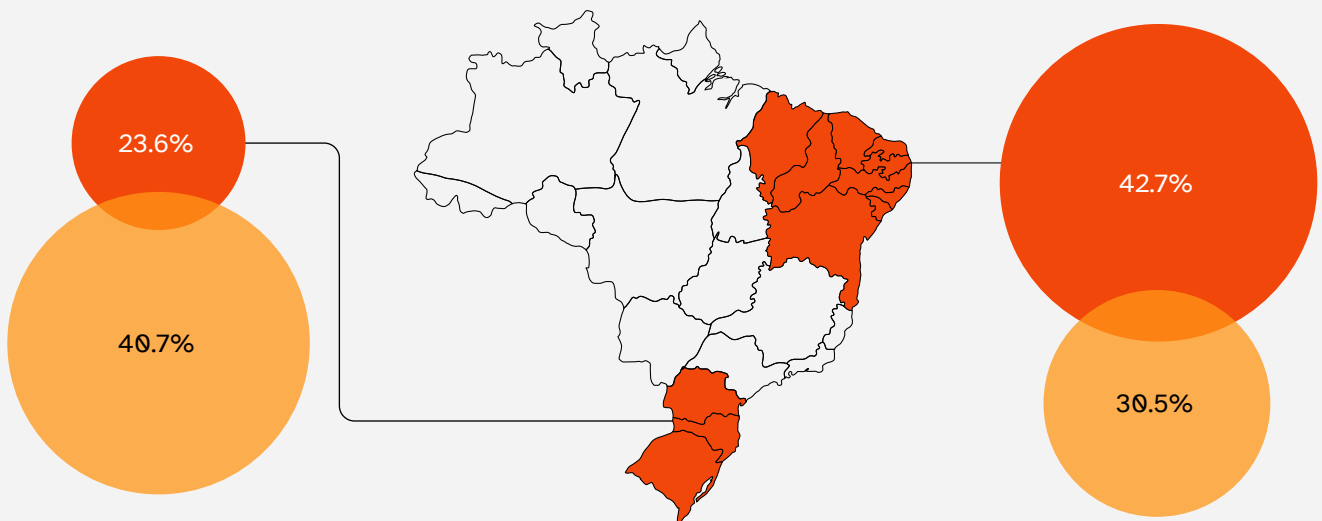
Region with the lowest incidence of strong cramps and the highest proportion of girls who miss school for menstrual reasons.

WHO IS MOST AFFECTED?

- Have strong cramps
- Miss class for this reason

Northeast

Region with the highest incidence of strong cramps and the lowest proportion of girls who miss school for menstrual reasons.



## AND IT ALSO AFFECTS THOSE WHO TEACH

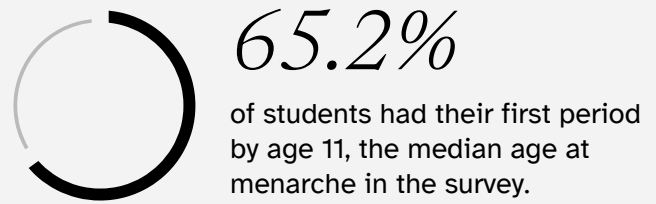


**1 in 10**

teachers missed work at least once in the past year for menstrual reasons.

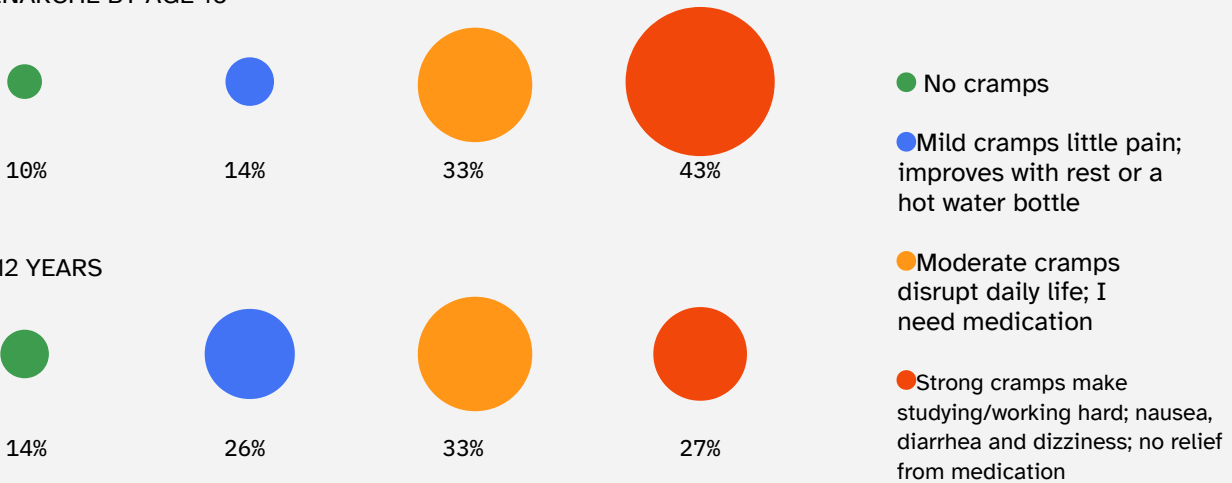
→ Among them, 15.6% describe their cramps as strong. Among administrators, this figure rises to 28.3%. There is a double impact here for girls, who lose on both ends: through their own absences and those of their teachers.

**GIRLS ARE MENSTRUATING EARLIER AND EARLIER.**  
**IS SCHOOL READY FOR THIS?**

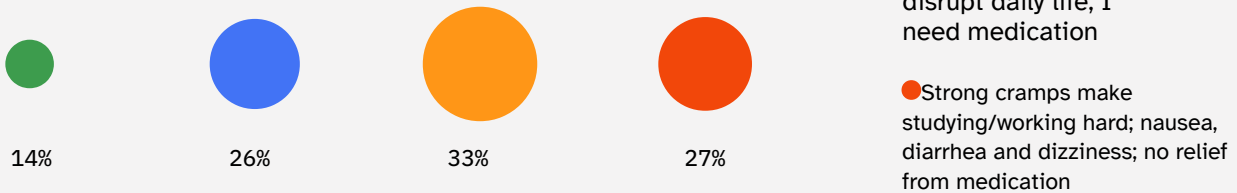


**AGE AT MENARCHE VERSUS CRAMP INTENSITY**

**MENARCHE BY AGE 10**



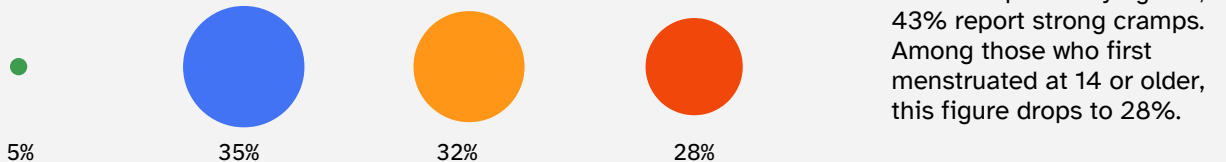
**11-12 YEARS**



**13 YEARS**



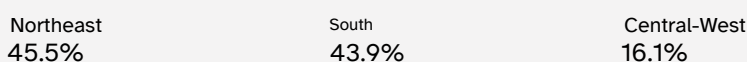
**14 YEARS AND OLDER**



Cross-referencing age at first period and cramp intensity points to an association: girls with early menarche feel more pain.

Among those who had their first period by age 10, 43% report strong cramps. Among those who first menstruated at 14 or older, this figure drops to 28%.

**PREVALENCE OF MENARCHE BY AGE 10**



The prevalence of menarche by age 10 also varies by region: the highest proportions are in the Northeast (45.5%) and the South (43.9%) and the lowest in the Central-West (16.1%).

## AND THE BOYS?



# 36.8%

of boys say they don't think much about the subject when the topic is menstruation.

Among girls, this figure is 19.7%.



# 23.7%

of boys believe that menstruation can interfere with school or sports.

Among girls, this figure is 41.2%.

→ THE THREE BIGGEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS: engagement with the topic (a gap of 29.2 percentage points), the perception that menstruating interferes with school or sports (a gap of 17.5 points) and the perception that menstruating can hurt or be uncomfortable (a gap of 14.6 points).

## DIFFERENCE IN PERCEPTION BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS

'What comes to mind when you think or hear about menstruation?'

I don't know what it is



Whether the school bathroom has what I need to take care of myself



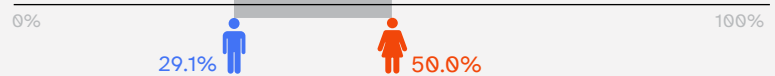
It can stain clothes and draw attention



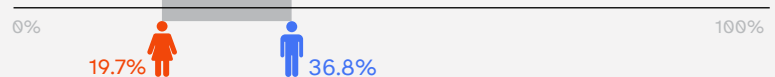
Sometimes it can make it harder to go to school, play or do sports



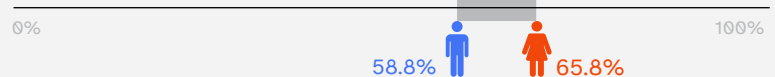
Sometimes it can hurt or be uncomfortable



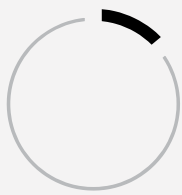
I don't think much about it



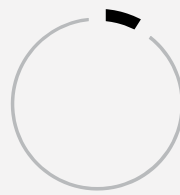
It's something normal for the body



**PAIN IS NOT DEMOCRATIC. AND ABSENCE RATES PROVE IT.**



**14.5%**  
of Black students miss 2 to 5 days a month.



**9.6%**  
is the absence rate among white students.

→ The share of students who have ever missed school for menstrual reasons is similar between white and Black girls, around 34%. The difference appears in the number of school days lost:

**the rate of those who miss 2 to 5 days a month is 1.5 times higher among Black girls.**

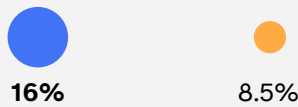
**PERCEPTION OF MENSTRUAL CRAMPS**

● Black students ● White students

STRONG CRAMPS

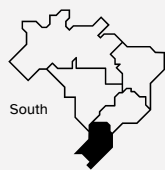


NO CRAMPS

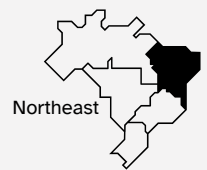


→ White girls report more intense pain. Black girls, when they miss, stay out for more days. Read together, these two findings describe a pattern that no single factor explains and that the research alone does not resolve. What the numbers show clearly is that the menstrual experience is not uniform across racial groups, and that aggregate indicators, read without this breakdown, hide inequalities with direct consequences for the school path of Black girls.

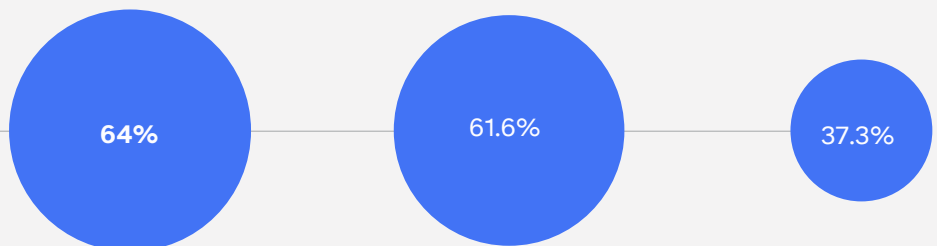
**EARLY MENARCHE: WHO IS MOST AFFECTED?**



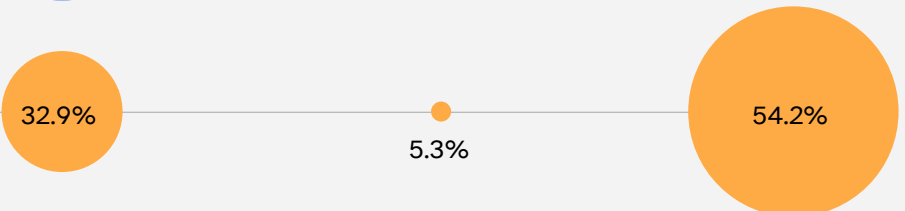
Southeast



BLACK STUDENTS



WHITE STUDENTS



→ Race and territory must be part of every school screening for menstrual cramps. Read only through the national aggregate, the strong-pain indicator underestimates the problem among Black girls.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

### *Recognize pain as a collective problem*

Protocols for absences justified by menstrual symptoms, with guidance for teaching staff, reduce embarrassment, improve record-keeping and let the system respond with data.

### *Bring menstrual education into elementary school*

77.6% of girls menstruate before age 11. Many reach their first period with no guidance about the cycle at all. Talking about menstrual health cannot wait for adolescence to arrive.

### *Ensure infrastructure that welcomes*

A lack of bathrooms and menstrual hygiene products appears as a reason for absence especially in the North (18.9%) and the Central-West (30.2%). Access to adequate infrastructure is a basic condition for staying in school.

### *Integrate education and health*

Strong cramps in roughly 1 in 3 girls signal the need for clinical screening. Conditions such as endometriosis, which affects 1 in 10 women and can take up to 12 years to diagnose, can also begin silently in adolescence.

### *Consider the school's workers*

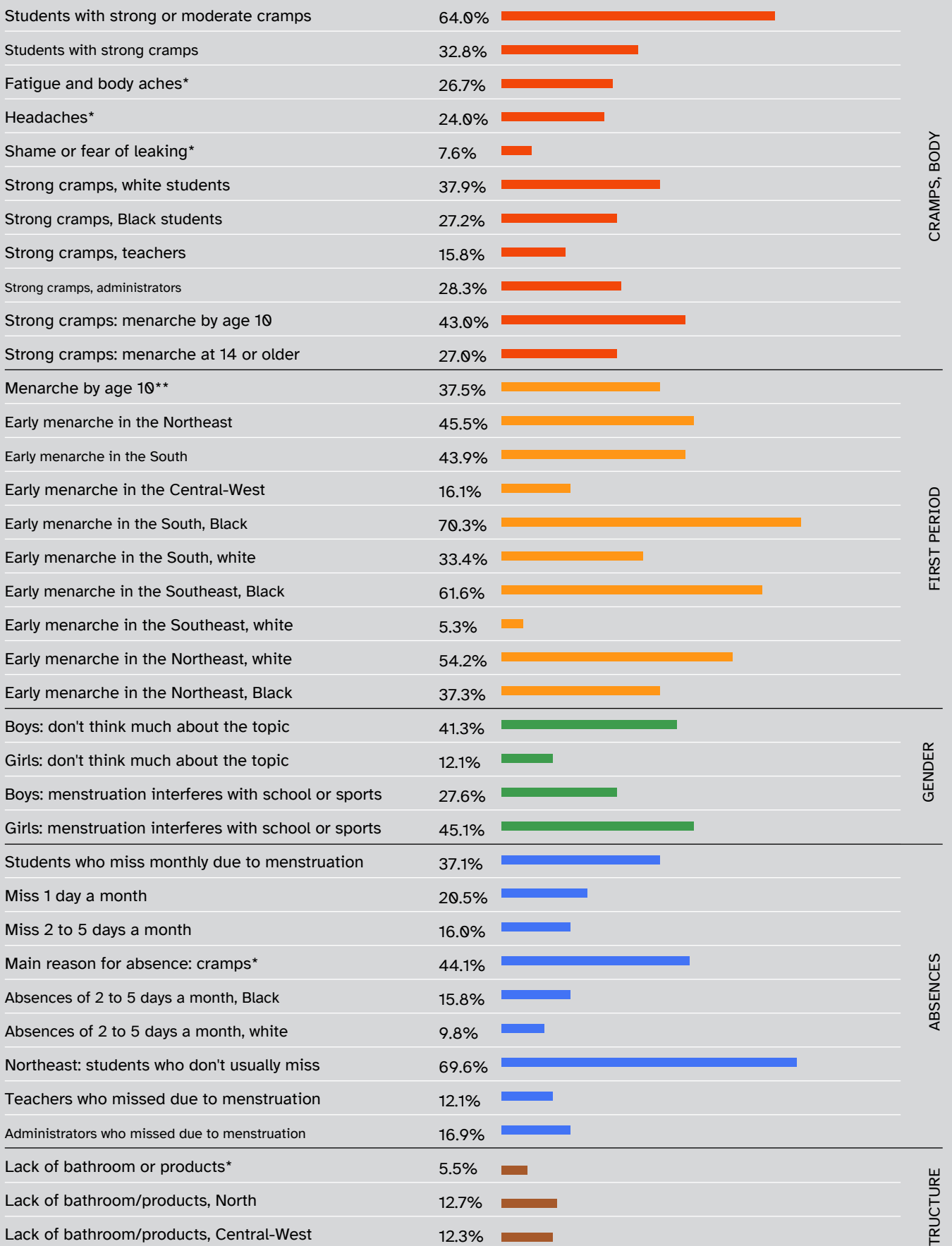
11.9% of teachers and 16.2% of administrators have missed work for menstrual reasons. Menstrual health policies in schools must include both students and workers, with protocols suited to each profile.

## Conclusion

The data from this survey describe a public-health problem that the Brazilian education system still does not recognize as such. Girls arrive at school in pain, miss more than their peers, and that cost appears in no standard education indicator. The pain is real. The absenteeism is measurable. The racial inequality is documented. And boys' lack of awareness about the topic is data, not assumption.

Investing in menstrual health in schools is essential, both to guarantee the right to learning and to reduce inequalities that begin in the body and accumulate over the school path. Including menstrual health in protocols, in the curriculum and in infrastructure, prioritizing the most affected students, is an opportunity to promote equity and foster a school that recognizes the reality of all children and adolescents.

## DATA REFERENCE



Girls in HS miss  
**2.07**  
days /mo

Boys in HS miss  
**1.65**  
days /mo

Median age at menarche:  
**11 years**

Approximately  
**3.6 million students,**  
miss class every month  
because of menstruation.

\*percentage of mentions \*\*percentage of the sample

## About the research

Survey carried out in February 2026 by Alana in partnership with Instituto Equidade.info, with 2,551 students (770 girls who menstruate), 303 teachers and 181 school administrators, from public and private systems across every region of the country.



**≡ EQUIDADE.INFO**