

Forum: United Nations Women

Issue: The question of the pink tax and women's access to hygiene products

Student Officer: Eishaal Khan

Position: Head Chair

Introduction

The Pink Tax, often referred to as gender-based pricing discrimination, is a multifaceted issue that has gained increasing attention in recent years. It involves products and services marketed towards women being priced higher than their male counterparts, even when the products are nearly identical in quality and functionality.

The Pink Tax extends beyond luxury goods and affects essential products and services that women rely on daily. Notably, it has a significant impact on women's access to hygiene products, which are crucial for their health and well-being. The discriminatory pricing of items like sanitary products exacerbates a problem known as "period poverty," where women struggle to afford basic menstrual hygiene products.

Businesses, however, often defend Pink Tax pricing, citing differences in product design, marketing, and packaging as factors that justify higher costs. They view it as a response to market demands rather than discrimination. Meanwhile, policymakers in some regions are enacting legislation to combat the Pink Tax, aiming for price transparency and prohibiting gender-based pricing discrimination.

The implications of the Pink Tax are far-reaching and intersect with larger gender equality goals. It not only perpetuates economic disparities between men and women but also infringes on women's rights. Addressing the Pink Tax and its associated issues is pivotal to advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls worldwide.

Definition of Key Terms

Pink Tax

The pricing disparity between products marketed towards women and their male counterparts, affecting the cost of hygiene products. For example, soap or deodorant products catered towards females have pricing disparity compared to the soap or deodorant products catered towards males.

Hygiene Products

Essential goods used for personal cleanliness and maintenance of health such as toilet paper, toothpaste, soap, and sanitary pads.

Discriminatory Pricing

The practice of setting different prices for products or services based on the characteristics of the consumer such as their gender, race, or age. Firms can choose to set different prices of their products based on what they think consumers will be willing and able to demand their product at.

Period Poverty

Period poverty is a condition where women and girls face financial constraints that prevent them from accessing adequate and safe menstrual hygiene products. The lack of sanitation facilities, education, and awareness regarding menstrual hygiene also accentuates the impacts of period poverty and the inaccessibility of menstrual products.

Gender Equality

The state of providing equal opportunities, rights, and treatment regardless of anyone's gender, aiming to create a fair and just society.

Sustainable Development Goal 5

United Nations 5th Sustainable Development Goal aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Countries have the responsibility to make progress in each of the 17 SDG goals and targets by 2030.

Economic Disparities

The uneven distribution of wealth and resources among different segments of the population, often resulting in economic inequalities, highlighting the gaps in wealth and opportunity of the population.

Consumer Advocacy

Initiatives that promote and protect the rights, welfare, and interests of consumers. Consumer advocacy often addresses issues faced by consumers related to product quality, safety, and pricing in order to ensure fair and ethical treatment.

Economic Empowerment

The process of enabling individuals, particularly women, to have control over their economic resources, develop financial independence, increase their access to financial services, and hone the ability to make independent economic decisions. Economic empowerment aims to foster self reliance and independence in the realm of day to day finances and economics.

Taxation Policies

Taxation policies are government rules and regulations that determine how taxes are levied and collected. These policies have a significant impact on the price of goods and services and can be used to address or exacerbate gender inequality. For example, a tax on feminine hygiene products can make these products less affordable for women and girls, while a tax on luxury goods can help to reduce the price gap between men's and women's products.

Supply Chain Disparities

Differences in the way that goods and services are produced and distributed, which can lead to price disparities. For example, feminine hygiene products are often produced in smaller quantities than men's hygiene products, which can drive up the cost of production. Additionally, feminine hygiene products are often subject to higher marketing and distribution costs than men's hygiene products. These supply chain disparities can lead to women and girls paying more for the same products as men.

Period Equity

Period equity refers to achieving fairness and justice in access to menstrual hygiene products, education, and support, regardless of one's gender, income, or other social factors.

Menstrual Hygiene Management

The process of managing menstrual hygiene in a hygienic and dignified way. This includes having access to clean water, soap, and menstrual hygiene products as well as having a safe and private place to change and dispose of these products. Menstrual hygiene management benefits the health and safety of women and girls and helps to enhance their wellbeing and participation in society.

Gender-Based Discrimination

The unfair treatment or prejudice directed at individuals due to their gender, often resulting in unequal opportunities, pay disparities, and discrimination in various sectors such as in education, healthcare, housing, and marketplace.

Gender Norms

Societal expectations and standards that define how individuals should behave based on their gender. Gender norms restrict gender identity and can lead to individuals conforming with traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This can impact the types of products that are marketed towards women and girls and how much they are willing to pay for them.

Global Feminist Movements

Social movements that advocate for the rights and equality of women and girls. Global feminist movements have played an important role in raising awareness of the pink tax and advocating for policies to address it.

Key Issues

Intersectionality and Vulnerable Populations

Intersectionality refers to the multiple forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and classism, that can overlap and create exacerbated challenges for individuals and communities. The issue of pink tax has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations that grapple with intersectionality such as women of color, women with disabilities, and low income women.

Attributed to racial pay gaps, women of color typically have less purchasing power when they walk into a marketplace. As of 2021, Black women in the United States earn 63 cents for every dollar a white man earns, while Hispanic women earn 58 cents for every dollar a white man earns. Moreover, Black households typically have lower average wealth and are more likely to be employed in low-wage jobs. This indicates that they may have less disposable income to spend on essential hygiene products, and hence discriminatory pricing of hygiene products especially affects them.

Women with disabilities also grapple with pay gaps by earning 67 cents of every dollar a disabled man earns according to the National Women's Law Center. They also are more likely to be unemployed and have to face additional expenses due to their disabilities. This results in these women having a more difficult time affording the products most affected by pink tax, adding to their financial burden.

Similarly, low income women would already have less disposable income that they can spend on essential goods and services. However, due to pink tax, the price of products targeted at women is greater than the same products targeted at men, causing low income women to pay more than both low income men and higher income women. This can severely impact the health, safety, and wellbeing and force them to make choices on what goods and services to purchase as they will not be able to afford all of what they require.

Economic Impact on Women

Due to pink tax, women have to spend more to purchase essential goods and services, particularly hygiene products. This adds up to significant financial burden for women as more of their income and savings are spent on these goods and services that men, on the other hand, would be able to purchase for more affordable prices. A study by the American Association of University Women found that women pay an average of \$1,351 more per year than men on personal care products and services. The increasing expenditure of women on products affected by pink tax results in them having less money to spend on other avenues such as education, accumulating wealth, and so forth. Moreover, increased expenditure on these products reduces the amount of savings that women have for their retirement, hence making it difficult for them to save enough and decreasing the potential living standards for them as a result of this.

Furthermore, by spending more on essential hygiene products compared to the expenditure of men, it can further exacerbate gender inequality. Even in the workplace, as women have to spend more on their personal care products than their male colleagues, it means they also have less money to invest in areas that help advance their careers such as the expenses that come with networking, education and training, etc. As a result, women can also be put at a disadvantage in their careers, and receiving less opportunities of advancement can have negative economic impacts on these women.

The impact to the economy as a whole is also significant, as women may spend less in personal care products as a whole because of its unaffordability. Less spending on these products means that the firms who produce and provide such goods will also be earning less, thus spiraling the repercussions of pink tax to the entire economy.

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness regarding pink tax is essential for addressing the issue, for both consumers and policymakers involved. Through increased education and

awareness, consumers can make more informed choices about what products to buy and avoid overpaying for goods and services that are most affected by pink tax, an issue that currently persists. Pink tax is also commonly known as a “hidden tax” that affects the daily lives of women, indicating that a lot of women are not even aware that they are paying more for the goods that target them. The lack of awareness causes the continuous cycle of purchasing goods that are subject to discriminatory pricing, hence leading to various economic, financial, and social repercussions for women. Furthermore, by having to pay higher prices, women may choose not to purchase these essential hygiene and personal care goods at all, therefore decreasing their living standards and quality.

Additionally, the lack of awareness within society as a whole results in limited action and steps taken to prevent and mitigate the impacts of imposing pink tax. Hence, policymakers and governments are less likely to implement relevant laws and regulations to further combat this issue.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Canada

Canada’s Pink Tax premium is 43%, indicating that women pay 43% more than men for comparable goods and services such as deodorant, shampoo, and soap. However, Canada has taken a proactive approach in addressing pink tax compared to most other countries by implementing legislation preventing discriminatory pricing and taking measures to increase the awareness of pink tax. In 2019, the Canadian government passed the Gender Equality in Pricing Act, prohibiting businesses from charging different prices for products based on the gender of the customer. This act also requires businesses to disclose the prices of similar products for women and men, helping consumers to easily compare the prices between men and women and identify the pink tax that they may be paying. This aspect also helps to hold businesses accountable in the case where they are charging consumers differently based on the consumer's gender, an offense that can be reported to the Competition Bureau of Canada for further investigation.

In addition to the Gender Equality in Pricing Act, the Canadian government has taken education and awareness related measures to address pink tax. For example, the government has launched several public awareness campaigns about pink tax, aiming to increase awareness and allow consumers to also make more informed choices about their purchases.

European Union (EU)

Pink tax is an issue that most member states in the European Union grapple with. The repercussions of the pink tax result in women paying an average of 7% more than men for various products including hygiene, clothing, and personal care products in the EU. To mitigate the impact of this, the European Union has taken various measures to further address the pressing issue of pink tax. In 2019, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the European Commission to take action to address the issue. This resolution called on the Commission to propose legislation to prohibit gender-based price discrimination and launch public awareness campaigns. However, The European Commission has not yet proposed any legislation despite expressing their commitment to addressing the issue.

Moreover, various member states within the EU have taken other proactive measures in addressing the issue. For example, France has a law that requires businesses to disclose prices for women and men's similar products such as soap or deodorant. This allows consumers to better identify whether there is a "hidden tax", and therefore make more informed decisions. Furthermore, various organizations within the EU have also taken steps, including the European Women's Lobby, a network of women organizations working to promote gender equality in the EU. The European Women's Lobby is campaigning for legislation to prohibit gender-based price discrimination, and have supported protests and social movements from member states in the EU.

United States of America

Pink tax has an immense financial, economical, social, and health impact on women in the United States. A study by the University of California, Berkeley found that the pink tax costs women in the US an average addition of \$1,351 to purchase products catered towards women as they are priced higher than comparable products catered towards men. Specific instances of pink tax in the US are women's razors costing up to 40% more than men's razors, women's dry cleaning costs an average of 20% more than men's dry cleaning, and women's deodorant costing an average of 10% more than men's deodorant, along with more examples for other personal care and hygiene products. This illustrates the impact of pink tax on women in the United States, and highlights the need to take measures.

However, despite the gravity of the issue faced by the United States, there has been limited action taken by them. Some of the few steps that they have taken include introducing bills in the Congress such as the Pink Tax Repeal Act and the Fair Pricing for Women Act. These bills prohibit businesses from charging different prices for products based on customer gender, and require businesses to disclose products for women and men's comparable products. It is vital for countries as large as the United States to implement federal laws and legislation to further address gender-based price discrimination, especially considering its impact on the United States.

India

The National Consumer Council of India (NCCI) found that women in India pay an average of 43% more than men for comparable products and services, indicating the severity of this issue in India. This pink tax applies to various personal care and hygiene products as well as clothing products, having a significant impact on the financial well being of women. Low income women are especially impacted by pink tax, and considering that India has a large proportion of low income women, the impact of pink tax is exacerbated.

To address the issue, there has been growing awareness of this issue through various local initiatives. In 2019, a group of Indian women launched a campaign called #PinkTaxIndia to raise awareness of pink tax and call for action to address the issue. The significant traction gained by this movement had helped increase the pressure on the Indian government to take necessary actions. The increased awareness as a result of movements like this has also influenced consumer decisions, allowing them to be more informed about the goods and services purchased. However, India is yet to take further legislative action to address pink tax in the country, and have not taken a formal stance yet.

Procter & Gamble (P&G)

Procter & Gamble is a multinational consumer goods corporation that produces a wide range of personal care and hygiene goods such as shampoos, soaps, deodorants, sanitary pads, and diapers. A large amount of the products that P&G manufacturer are marketed and catered towards women. P&G has been accused on multiple occasions of engaging in gender-based price discrimination by charging women more for these products than the price men have to pay for similar products. For instance, in 2014, P&G was sued by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs by engaging in gender-based price discrimination and imposing a pink tax by alleging that women's razors cost up to 40% of razors for men. Studies in India have also deduced that P&G personal care products for women cost an average of 57% more than the comparable personal products for men.

However, P&G denies its engagement in gender-based price discrimination and argues that their products catered towards women are more complex and expensive to produce, hence resulting in higher prices set for them.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The International Monetary Fund has taken a leading role in addressing the issue of pink tax. The IMF has engaged in thorough research regarding pink tax to analyze the

impacts of it on women’s economic empowerment and growth as a whole. For example, in 2019, the IMF published a report titled “*Gender Dimension of Pricing: Evidence and Policy Implications*,” highlighting the additional financial burden that women have to pay due to discriminatory pricing in products. Moreover, the IMF has been persistent in calling upon governments to take action to address Pink Tax. For instance, through this report, implementing legislation has been highlighted as a recommended measure that governments should take to strategically address the issue at hand.

The IMF has a strong stance on pink tax and understands the severity of its repercussions on women, hence urging governments to take action against it. As they are a leading international financial institution, IMF’s research and advocacy helps to further raise awareness and increase the pressure on governments and businesses across the world regarding taking preventative and actionable measures.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
Prior to the 1800s	Weak rights for women	During this period, women’s rights ceased to exist. They were treated essentially as a commodity or at best, a prize.
1848	Seneca Falls Convention	It was the first women’s rights movement. It lay the groundwork for their fight against injustices and worked towards their expectations from society. It was held in Seneca Falls, New York.
1993	UNWC (1993 United Nations World Conference)	The UNW conference held in Vienna recognizes Women’s Rights as a part of Human Rights for the first time.

	recognises Women’s Rights	For a major international conference to recognise the issue played a major key in not just spreading knowledge about the existence of the issue, but also calling for attention and urgency to mitigate the matter.
1996-2002	“Pink Tax” is officially a term	The term “Pink Tax” is coined and gains public attention. Though this prompted advocacy to change, some believed that it wasn’t aimed to create gender disparity, rather a justified tax that arose from an increase in the cost of production of “pink” products.
2015	UN includes gender equality on their SDGs	The SDGs recognized by the UN are extremely influential. This calls for NGOs to take active measures to do work on this topic. This played a significant role especially in underdeveloped countries, as it called for external bodies to interfere with the societal constructs in these third world countries that restricted women’s rights
2020	Covid 19 highlights the impacts of the Pink Tax	During the Covid 19 era where hygiene products were sold at a large scale worldwide, the adverse effects caused by the implication of Pink Tax was more blatant.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Legislative Measures

State-Level Legislation in the United States:

Dating back to 1996, US states have passed legislation aimed at tackling gender-based pricing discrimination, more specifically, Pink Tax. These laws have required retailers to price products that are similar for male and female consumers the same. For example, California passed a law in 1996 that prohibits gender-based pricing discrimination.

European Union's Efforts

In 2018, the EU Parliament issued a resolution calling for measures to end gender-based pricing discrimination and to promote gender-neutral pricing.

Canada's Investigation

In 2018, the Canadian government announced plans to investigate gender-based pricing discrimination. The investigation aimed to determine if businesses were charging more for products and services based on gender, including hygiene products.

Consumer Advocacy and Awareness

Consumer advocacy groups, women's organizations, and grassroots movements have played a crucial role in raising awareness about the Pink Tax. These groups have used social media, public campaigns, and petitions to draw attention to the issue and pressure businesses to change their pricing strategies. An example of this is the "*Ax the Pink Tax*" campaign in the United States, which has successfully brought attention to gender-based pricing disparities, further encouraging consumers to advocate for change.

Organizations like UN Women have included the issue of the Pink Tax and women's access to hygiene products in their broader efforts to advance gender equality. This international recognition helps in sharing best practices and advocating for change on a global scale.

Possible Solutions

Temporarily Halting the Pink Tax during Pandemics

Considering the debate around this topic, it can be concluded that the abolition of the tax as a whole may not be something accepted. However, hygiene products during a pandemic are extremely important - especially those caused by viral infections. Mitigating this tax would greatly benefit the most vulnerable stakeholders - the underprivileged women. This is also something that is well within reach, seeing as many governments are already able to create benefits for the majority population.

Abolition of the Pink Tax on Essential Items

The main argument run by those who support the idea of the tax is that “ It is not meant to create disparity, rather a tax for those who wish to gift the product to their female someone, like a Valentine's day gift”. The fact of the matter is, this tax is still adversely affecting those needing to purchase these essential items, and hence this tax should not be on something that women *must* purchase, without any alternate option. But considering the nature of the tax, no immediate negatives arise from the abolition of the tax. 2022 saw the abolition of the pink tax in US states like California - where statistics found just women to be saving 47\$ on average per month. While this was possible immediately in purchasable products, services conveyed a whole different story. Hair stylists, designers and similar professions claimed that their job for women was a lot more demanding than for men. For example, styling women’s hair or designing clothes for women were much economically and labour-wise demanding, hence justifying the gender based tax.

Works Cited

Feingold, Spencer. “What Is the ‘Pink Tax’ and How Does It Hinder Women?” *World Economic Forum*, 14 July 2022,

www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/07/what-is-the-pink-tax-and-how-does-it-hinder-women/.

Accessed 28 Oct. 2023.

Fontinelle, Amy. “What Is the Pink Tax? Impact on Women, Regulation, and Laws.”

Investopedia, Investopedia, www.investopedia.com/pink-tax-5095458. Accessed 17 Oct. 2023.

Gillespie, Lane. “The Pink Tax: Latest Updates and Statistics.” *Bankrate*, Bankrate.com, 27 Feb.

2023, www.bankrate.com/personal-finance/pink-tax-how-women-pay-more/#pricing. Accessed

28 Oct. 2023.

Gunnarsson, Åsa, and Ulrike Spangenberg. “Gender Equality and Taxation Policies in the EU.”

Intereconomics, 1 Jan. 1970,

www.intereconomics.eu/contents/year/2019/number/3/article/gender-equality-and-taxation-policies-in-the-eu.html.

Srikanth, Anagha. “P&G Is Raising Prices on Feminine Care Brands This Fall.” *The Hill*, The Hill, 21 Apr. 2021,

www.thehill.com/changing-america/respect/equality/549391-pg-is-raising-prices-on-feminine-care-brands-this-fall/. Accessed 28 Oct. 2023.

“Press Release: Un Commission on the Status of Women Provides Roadmap to Women’s Full and Equal Participation in the Economy.” *UN Women – Headquarters*,

www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/3/press-release-un-csw-provides-roadmap-to-womens-full-and-equal-participation-in-the-economy. Accessed 17 Oct. 2023.

The Pink Tax How Gender-Based Pricing Hurts Women's Buying Power,

www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/8a42df04-8b6d-4949-b20b-6f40a326db9e/the-pink-tax--how-gender-based-pricing-hurts-women-s-buying-power.pdf. Accessed 17 Oct. 2023.