

Not Just A “Women’s Issue”: Menstrual Discourses in *The Lancet*

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Discussions about menstruation are commonly restricted by societal taboos, limiting them to private contexts. Its medicalization in the mid-19th century was shaped by male-dominated gynecology, which often framed menstruation as a disease of women rather than a normal bodily function (Strange, 2000). Such medical discourses may perpetuate stigmas while some contemporary ones may instead legitimize the experiences of menstruators.

Menstrual discourse has largely been examined through qualitative methods (e.g., media advertising, Erchull, 2013; self-help literature, Koskeniemi, 2022). This study supplements those close analyses with a quantitative, corpus-based approach to examine such discourses in a prominent medical journal. To that end, we compiled a corpus of research articles from *The Lancet*, one of the oldest medical journals still published. Articles published between 1980 and 2024 that contain keywords such as *menstrua**, *menopaus**, and terms related to menstrual disorders were collected (3,859 articles; 13,906,597 words).

Using AntConc (Anthony, 2022), we identified high-frequency words and investigated their collocates (frequently co-occurring words). For example, the collocates of *women* were largely related to age, reproductive status, and illness. Our analysis also highlights how *The Lancet*’s language reinforces cisnormative assumptions. Terms like *cisgender* and *transgender* are not frequent, with most articles using *women* without qualification. Thus, these articles implicitly assume that all menstruators are cis women. This exclusion erases the experiences of trans people—such as trans women, who may experience period-like symptoms such as cramping (Lowik, 2021), and trans men or nonbinary individuals who may experience gender dysphoria surrounding their period (Frank, 2020).

By investigating these linguistic patterns, we advocate for more inclusive and broader language surrounding menstruation in medical publications. This study contributes to gendered medical discourse research by showing how authoritative publications help sustain narrow representations of who menstruates and how menstruation is framed. However, our analysis is limited by the lack of medical journals in this corpus alongside the lack of works written by trans people. Future studies could collect articles from other medical journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine* or create a corpus of trans-authored works in relation to menstruation.

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