

BLOODY DISCRIMINATION

Heart-touching realities



RURAL VILLAGE WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROJECT PHASE III

Karnali and Sudurpaschim Province,
Nepal



What is Menstruation Discrimination?

Menstruation is defined as a periodic, normal, healthy shedding of blood and tissues from the uterus that exit the body through the vagina. It marks the beginning of womanhood, a unique phenomenon among women, which starts around the age of adolescence (11–15 years). It is a key sign of reproductive health and a way of preparing for pregnancy. However, there are several taboos in many parts of the world concerning menstruation, menstrual blood, and menstruating girls/women. Some of those taboos are based on religious grounds, while others have their roots in culture and tradition, and they are manifested in the form of different practices.

Menstruation-based discrimination is practiced to some degree in most areas of Nepal. The mildest form of this practice restricts women from entering the temple or kitchen during their period (including in Kathmandu). However, in Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces, the most severe form is practiced - menstruating girls or women are said to be 'Chhaupadi' in local terminology (or facing chhaupadi taboos). This means that in many areas, women are made to sleep outside their home in a separate shed (Chhau hut) or with cattle and goats during their menstruation. These sheds, generally known as goths, are usually some 20–25 meters away from their own residential homes and are very small in size. Such sheds often lack doors and windows, are very narrow, dark and congested, and have cold, dirty floors where women sit and sleep. Hygienic conditions in the sheds are deplorable. Women do not bathe during their periods and usually do not have access to clean sanitary pads or cloths.



This practice excludes women from society. During their periods, many women are not allowed to participate in normal social life, such as attending meetings or going to school. She cannot cook food. However, she is still expected to carry out hard labour, such as firewood and fodder collection.



Chhaupadi tradition also denies women's right to touch water taps and use toilets. Menstruating women are also not allowed to touch men and women, and they can't eat curd, milk, fruits and some other nutritious foods,

as it is believed that they would ritually pollute them and bring bad luck or sickness to the man, cow or plant.

During their monthly menstruation, women have to live in these sheds for up to 5 days. During the postpartum period and during menarche (first menstruation) times, the stay lasts up to 11 days. After their period finishes, women take a bath, wash their clothes and their bedding, and return home. They are not allowed to use the public water source, therefore they have to bathe and clean their clothes at a stream, separate tap, or in some cases they wash in the water intake itself.



Chhau huts: challenging security

Risk of wild animal's assault



Women/girls' shelters used during menstruation: Chhau huts



Risk of burning and suffocation from fire inside the Chhau huts



- Menstruating women and girls are regularly victims of fire, cold, smoke inhalation or carbon monoxide poisoning, snake bite, leopard attacks, rape and other vulnerabilities
- Dozens of lives are lost inside Chhau huts.

The workload of menstruating women/girls



- Menstruating women are not allowed to eat nutritious foods like milk and yoghurt, leading women to suffer from diseases caused by malnutrition.
- Menstruating girls often don't attend school, and drop out of classes when their period begins while at the school. It affects their studies badly.
- Women/girls are not allowed to use the toilet and tap during menstruation, which impairs their right to sanitation and good hygiene, and also leads to open defecation (which is bad for the whole community).
- Discrimination during menstruation can upset woman/girls' dignity, causing mental stress and even long-term mental problems

Negative impacts:

Harmful practices of menstruation or Chhaupadi have many negative impacts in the lives of women. Menstruating women are forced to endure freezing temperatures in winter and sweltering temperatures in summer inside the chhau hut, along with poor nutrition. This can lead to life-threatening health problems like diarrhoea, respiratory tract infections, and suffocation related to trying to heat a closed space with an open fire. During menstruation, although women are forbidden from going inside the house, they are still expected to do more hard labour outside the home, like carrying heavy loads, digging, collecting firewood and fodder, despite the lack of a nutritious diet and a comfortable place to sleep. Even the mothers who have recently given birth are confined within the chhau hut. Post-delivery mothers are weak and vulnerable to infections, and they have to look after their newborn child under unhygienic conditions. Because of poor nutrition and vulnerable living conditions, neonatal and maternal mortality is high in those areas where Chhaupadi practices are common. In addition, the rate of prolapsed uterus is high among this group. In addition to this, deaths of young and healthy women are reported every year in relation to staying in chhau huts. The harmful practices of Chhaupadi also have an impact on the psychosocial well-being of women and girls. Isolation from family and social exclusion results in depression, low self-esteem, and disempowerment among girls. This is a matter of women's dignity. Furthermore, there is also a fear of sexual abuse and assault at night, alongside the risk of attack by wild animals and snake bites. Most of the deaths due to wild animals are not reported and neither are the cases of rape, fearing for the reputation of the unmarried daughter.

Similarly, another important impact is related to the consequences on open defecation. Despite the fact that all of Nepal has been declared open defecation free (ODF), menstruating women are not allowed to use the toilet and are compelled to go outside to defecate far from home. Open defecation has resulted in contamination of water supplies and increased chance of water borne disease for everyone in the community, as well as the risk for the woman of sexual harassment or rape, fear of snake bites and wild animals.

Menstruation-based discrimination or Chhaupadi practices have been criticized for violating the basic

Some Sad Incidents

- A woman died inside a chhau hut on January 15, 2012 in Panchadewal Binayak Municipality, Achham.
- A woman died inside a chhau hut on February 2, 2012 in Dhakari Rural Municipality, Achham.
- A woman lost her life inside a chhau hut on December 19, 2012 in Sanphebgar Municipality of Achham.
- An adolescent girl died due to suffocation inside a chhau hut on December 19, 2016 in Bannigadhi Jagad Rural Municipality, Achham.
- A teenage girl died due to snake bite in a chhau hut on July 9, 2017 in Chamunda Bindrasaini Municipality, Dailekh.
- A woman was found dead in a chhau hut while she was menstruating on January 22, 2018 in Turmakhand Rural Municipality, Achham.
- A woman was bitten by a snake and died while sleeping in a chhau hut during menstruation on June 10, 2018 in Turmakhand Rural Municipality, Achham.
- A menstruating girl was gang-raped in a chhau hut far from her house on July 2, 2018 in Barahatal Rural Municipality, Surkhet.
- A menstruating mother along with her two dependent sons died in the night in Budhinanda Municipality, Bajura on 8 January, 2019.
- A menstruating women lost her life in Purbichowki Rural Municipality, Doti on January 29, 2019.
- A woman was found dead inside a chhau hut in Sanphebgar Municipality, Achham on December 1, 2019.

human rights of women and also for the associated physical and mental health impacts. Everyone has the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. The Right to Water and Sanitation, declared in the United Nations in 2010 and signed by Nepal, means that everyone has the right to access basic water supply and toilets. Yet these rights are infringed by Chhaupadi discrimination. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) specifies the equal rights of women, and notes that they should not be subject to discrimination for cultural or religious reasons. In 2017, Chhaupadi practice was considered to be a crime and included in the Criminal Code 2074B.S.

Despite having been outlawed, Chhaupadi discrimination continues to exist due to illiteracy, superstitious beliefs, gender disparity and community endorsement of the practice. Women in villages are vulnerable to pressure as it is more difficult to keep menstruation private, and if an animal or human becomes sick it is easy to blame the menstruating woman for not following 'the rules'. Women in the cities are becoming aware of such misconceptions and consider their menstruating days to be normal. However, the women in the villages are still risking their lives.

What RVWRMP does to overcome the problems?

In order to address the issues connected to bloody discrimination, and focusing on accessibility to WASH facilities, RVWRMP executes following actions.

Appraisal of status of accessibility to the WASH facilities and planning

- Monitoring and supervision (participatory and self-monitoring system)
- Data collection and surveys to fully understand the reality
- Participatory discussion in the community
- Support to formulate policy in Rural Municipality
- Planning in Rural Municipality level
- Periodic reporting

Coordination and collaborations

- Development of coordination mechanisms among agencies working against Chhaupadi malpractices
- Coordination and collaboration with central, provincial and local level stakeholders, including mass media
- Joint programming against harmful Chhaupadi practices with the leading role taken by Rural Municipalities
- Workshops at different levels
- Other synergy development activities

Orientation programme

- Orientation to Support Organization's Staffs
- Orientation to Rural Municipality members
- Orientation to Rural Municipality level stakeholders
- Orientation to the community

Reviewing and re-planning

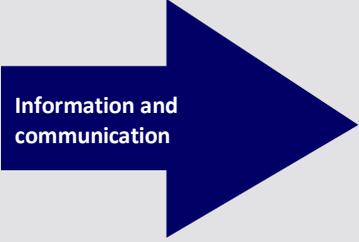
- Analysis of progress
- Findings and gap analysis
- Re-planning of the activities

Capacity building activities

- Capacity enhancement of local levels to formulate local level policy for dignified menstruation management
- Workshop on dignified menstruation management with Rural Municipality members
- Training to health and education sector and community on dignified menstruation management/MHM
- Training to community actors (traditional healers/Dhami, priests/Pujari, social leaders/ Mukhiya, etc.) on dignified menstruation management
- Training to elderly citizens on dignified menstruation management

Campaigning and creative actions

- Rallies and mass meetings for awareness raising
- Raising awareness among men and women at community level, and targeting traditional healers/Dhamis, father/ mothers-in-law, priests, adolescents and vulnerable groups in particular;
- Advocacy campaigns against harmful practices of menstruation management/ Chhaupadi
- Cultural programs, street drama, quiz competitions, speech competitions on harmful Chhaupadi practices
- Fund establishment at Rural Municipality level to enhance awareness on harmful Chhaupadi practices and encouragement to declare dignified menstruation managed zone
- Some awareness raising events at school level
- Mobilization of child clubs



**Information and
communication**

- Posters, booklets, leaflets
- Radio campaigns in local languages;
- Radio programs and Behaviour change: Communication (BCC) message broadcasting
- Displaying BCC/IEC materials widely
- Media-centred programmes

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