

Exploring the Impact of Social Norms on Adolescent Girls' Menstrual Health in Nepal

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AIM

Explore how social norms impact adolescent girls' menstrual health in Nepal and identify how they can be addressed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What influences norms and beliefs regarding menstruation?
2. How do menstrual norms and beliefs affect adolescent girls' menstrual experiences?
3. How can the Nepali government support menstrual health?



BACKGROUND

Menstrual taboos are negative social norms that present a major barrier to adolescent health and wellbeing. In some areas of Nepal, menstrual taboos have translated into restrictive practices that have become normalised within communities over generations. Chhaupadi is an illegal practice where women and girls are forced to sleep away from their home while menstruating. Restrictions are tied to religious and cultural beliefs of menstrual impurity and carry with them fear of retribution if they are not adhered to.

METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative, social-constructivist approach
- Primary data collection and analysis in collaboration with CREHPA
- Secondary analysis of data produced through the MeJARA project

SAMPLE

- Data collected in two districts: Surkhet and Kaski
- In-depth interviews: healthcare workers, teachers, community leaders and faith healers
- Focus groups: adolescent girls, adult women and men

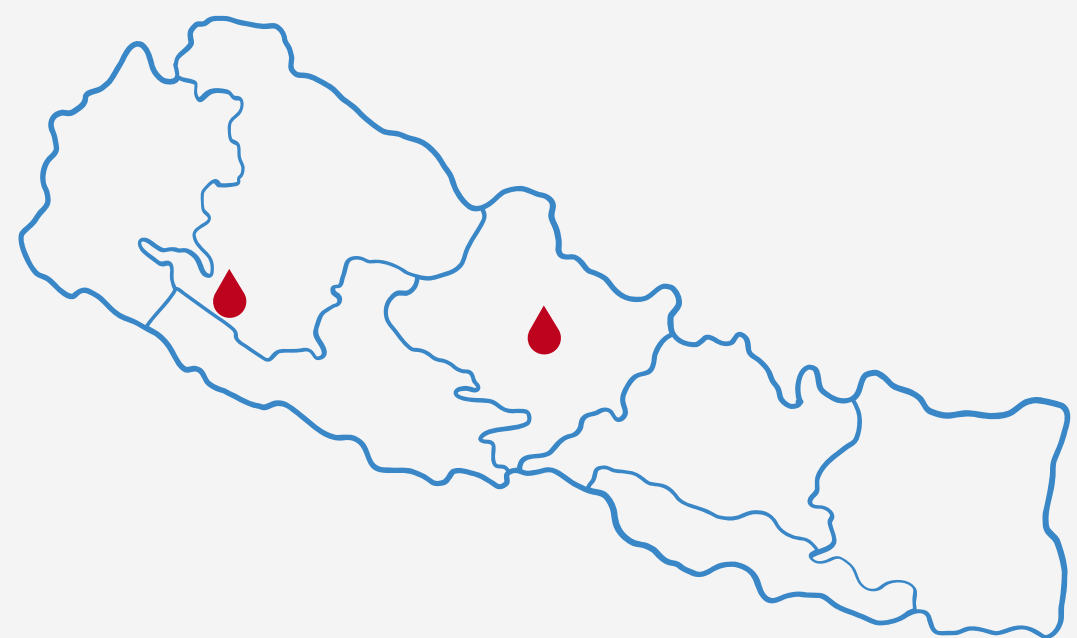
INITIAL FINDINGS

“they say you're impure”

“we have to obey... we cannot refuse”

“they blame us if something bad happens”

“I feel scared to sleep alone”



Common in both districts for adolescent girls to adhere to menstrual restrictions. Chhaupadi is common in Surkhet, despite awareness of its illegality. Girls do not like restrictions but comply to protect their families from misfortune and maintain their reputation. Communities in Surkhet are heavily influenced by superstition and community leaders and faith healers ensure these norms are upheld. They believe women and girls have accepted these restrictions as a normal part of their everyday lives and follow them willingly. Girls feel ashamed and stigmatized which negatively impacts their menstrual experiences. The findings raise important questions about perceptions of what others do, approve of and expect.