Menstrual Practice in Nepal

SMCR Conference 2017
Menstrual Health: Research Presentation
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RadhaPaudelFoundation 6/23/17
Outline of Presentation

- Videos and photos on Cowshed Practices
  - Menstrual Practice, Forms of Restrictions, and Prohibitions
  - Menstruation and Stigma
  - Cowshed and Chhaupadi practices and its Consequences
  - Nepal Government, Constitution and menstrual restriction
  - Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Menstrual Restriction
  - Action works Nepal and Radha Paudel: Action to Abolish Menstrual Restriction
- Monitor and evaluation
- Challenges/barriers
Video prepared in consultation of Action Works Nepal and its working area


(Let’s cut the in one minute)
Fear Expressed While Staying in Cowshed

Interview & video by RadhaPaudelFoundation. Verbal Consent obtained
Living away from home, in cowshed with animals. No light, no window(s) for safety and ventilation. Is this dignifying life for women and girls? Can you imagine living this way? “Birthplace is no one’s choice”. Everyone deserves basic human rights.
• A 15-year-old girl's dead body was found in the morning while practicing chhaupadi in Nov 2016-western Nepal.

• A 21-year-old mother found dead in the cowshed leaving the neonate behind in Nov 2016-western Nepal.

• Women must stay at cowshed not only during menstruation but also immediately after childbirth.

• People are dying 18 years before than national average life (67.6) expectancy (HDI 2014).
Menstrual Practice, Restrictions, and Prohibitions

- Segregation, Restrictions, Banning and Prohibitions from basic rights
  - Restricted to sleep in cowshed or designated area
  - Prohibited from touching the foundation of the house and water source.
  - Banned from eating certain types of foods, fruits and vegetables. Varies in the location.
  - Banned from joining social events, meetings, prayers, temple, etc.
  - Prohibited from touching pregnant women, infant and children, male members and elderly
  - Prohibited from touching books, male teachers, male doctors, faith healers, and priests
  - Prohibited from touching lactating cows, fruit and vegetable bearing plants and trees

Note the differences between chhaupadi practice vs. living in cowshed

More than 95 percent families have been practicing chhaupadi and negatively influenced by the ranges of restriction either at private or public and or both level.
Menstruation and Stigma

• Cultural practice of segregation, its an event of impurity, stigma and sin
• Cursed by god = Impure/untouchable (written in religious books)
• Banns and restrictions- women who violate the practice are blamed held accountable for crop failures, illnesses and sudden deaths of animals, children, loss of pregnancies, etc.
• They become isolated from family, school, and their communities.
• Instead of being aware of their body, they are ashamed and embarrassed about themselves and remain isolated and silent
• While practicing chhaupadi, everyone knows she has period or she has already started menstruating and the profiling/ targeting starts:
  • Being teased, harassment
  • Sexual abuses and violence including gang rape
Cowshed and Chhaupadi practices and its Consequences

- Emotional harm up to suicidal
- Physical harm including rape and murder
- Malnutrition
- Lack of supply, sanitation, safety and security
- Extreme cold and scorching heat
- Poor air quality
- School drop outs
- Deprivation from opportunities and economic empowerment
- Early marriage and early childbearing
- Increased risk of maternal and child morbidity and mortality
- Poverty
- Poor general health
- Decreased life expectancy – early death
Nepal Government and Constitution

• The Nepalese Supreme Court declared Chhaupadi illegal in 2005
  • Cowsheds and chhaupadi practices are still continuing.

• Nepal promulgated an inclusive and gender responsive constitution in 2015
  • Articles 16, 17, 18, 24, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37 and 38 are directly and indirectly linked with Menstrual Health, Hygiene and Rights (MHHR) and it is considered the fundamental rights.
  • The constitution has provided enough space for menstrual health right but need to unpack while formulating by laws and regulations as evidenced by continued chhaupadi practice
  • Chhaupadi is practiced wherever Nepalese community is: in western part of Nepal; in cities such as Kathmandu; overseas such as UK and US (note
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

- Menstrual Health Hygiene and Rights are the key foundation for peace, human right, empowerment and achieving SDGs.

- Poor MHHR is the key barrier to achieve just and equal society; and SDGs goals because more than 95 percent families have been negatively influenced by the ranges of restrictions either at private and/or public and/or both level.

- SDGs
  - Out of 17 goals and 169 targets, none of the target speaks related to menstrual rights such as menstrual taboos, restrictions, poor menstrual hygiene whereas it speaks directly on issues such as child marriage and FGM (Female Genital Mutation).
Action Taken by Action Works Nepal and Radha Paudel

• Radha Paudel- the first person to recognize menstrual restriction as a fundamental hindrance to the human rights and took action toward removing these practices

• Menstrual restrictions are associated with ignorance, socio-cultural practices, poverty and gender discrimination

• Poor MHHR is the key barrier to achieve just and equal society, and SDGs goals

• Menstrual Health Hygiene and Rights are the key foundation for peace, human rights, empowerment and achieving SDGs

• AWON is the first NGO that started to take an action against menstrual restriction with an holistic approach

• Currently, AWON is conducting 5 action researches in following topics in Jumla, Mugu and Kalikot
  • Chhaupadi effects on health of women and adolescents girls;
  • Chhaupadi effects on education of women and adolescents girls;
  • Chhaupadi effects on mobility and leadership skills of women and adolescents girls;
  • Chhaupadi effects on psychosocial thoughts and belief of local on Chhaupadi in the project areas (Jumla, Mugu and Kalikot);
  • Chhaupadi effects on study on situation of national laws, policies and Chhaupadi Elimination Guideline 2007
Management/Implementation Action Taken by RPF and AWON

• Phase I
  • Empowering girls and women
  • Engaging boys and men
  • Engaging the faith healers
  • Develop community leaders’ commitment letter and Charter on how they can help women and girls for their empowerment

• Phase II
  • Intervention: Build critical mass involving, recognizing and mobilizing champions from specific groups such as politicians, medias, professionals, and activists.

• Phase III
  • Intervention: examine the cultural practices and religious documents through research, and training dissemination.

This intervention is urgent and important task to institutionalize the results from the first and second levels of intervention.
Monitor and Evaluation

- Train volunteers and staffs in each community
  Evaluate and understand the community
  structure and
- Set up meetings and start dialogue about
  menstruation
- Educate- set goal for the groups (formed)
- Expectation is to change the practice
- Enforce commitment that’s been made by
  various community group: women, male
  members, faith healers, priests, teachers,
  school children (girls and boys)
- Follow up every three months
- Reward and reinforce
Challenges/barriers to successful implementation

- Stereotype male dominated perceptions and practices in the community
  - Threat from traditional healers and religious leaders
  - Poverty and dependence, discrimination and Masculinity: rural women do not have power
  - Traditional mode for livelihood
  - Resource concentrate at elite lead NGOs and the grassroots leaders heavily marginalized
- Stigmatize talking about MHM
- Government’s less priority to MHM
- Other NGOs and government worked on solving part of the problem rather than taking an holistic approach
- Geographical proximity
Menstrual Restriction Affects all Aspect of Life

- Peace, Human Right, Women Empowerment and SDGs
- Power, Gender Inequality, Violence, Injustice, Patriarchy, Masculinity
- Chronic malnutrition, anemia
- Restrictions on entering
- Restrictions on food
- Restrictions on touching and mobility
- Poor Physical, psychosocial health
- School Absent 60 days/year
- Stigma and Discrimination at home, school and community
- Chronic Reproductive/Urinary Tract Infections
- Low Economic opportunities
- Uterus prolapse +Cancer
- Spontaneous Abortions
- High Absenteeism in work
- Chronic malnutrition and anemia
- School dropped out
- Less income/Poverty
- Physical and sexual abuse and rape
- Infertility
- Trauma, shock and suicide
- Killing by wild animals, carbon mono oxide poisoning
- Death
- 6/23/17

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Conclusion and Urgent CALL for Action

Theory of change: holistic approach for redressing the menstrual restriction

No women no peace

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