

# Re-usable Sanitary Pads in Nepal

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# Nepal Overview



- 59 indigenous groups, 123 languages, 75 districts
- Population 29million (F=50.5%)
- 18% population urban  
25% below poverty line
- 145th HDI
- 2 earthquakes 2015,

# British Academy Funded

**Study** Menstrual taboos widespread, understanding of menstrual hygiene limited, especially in rural areas (Sapkota et al, 2013) unhygienic menstrual hygiene practices linked to negative outcomes in relation to reproductive health and social factors (eg school attendance) (Heenegan and Montgomery, 2016, Standing et al 2016)

The distribution of sanitary pads as part of menstrual health management programmes

(MHP), are widely used amongst the NGO

# Menstrual Pollution Beliefs



## Types of restriction during menstruation in Nepal

Inter sectionality  
Diversity of experiences  
No 'one story'

Restriction	%
None	10.8
Don't attend religious functions	67.6
Don't go to school	3.4
Don't cook	46.1
Don't do household work	20.6
Don't touch males	23.5
Don't play	9.8
Don't eat certain foods	13.2
Sleep separately	28.4

(WaterAid, 2009)

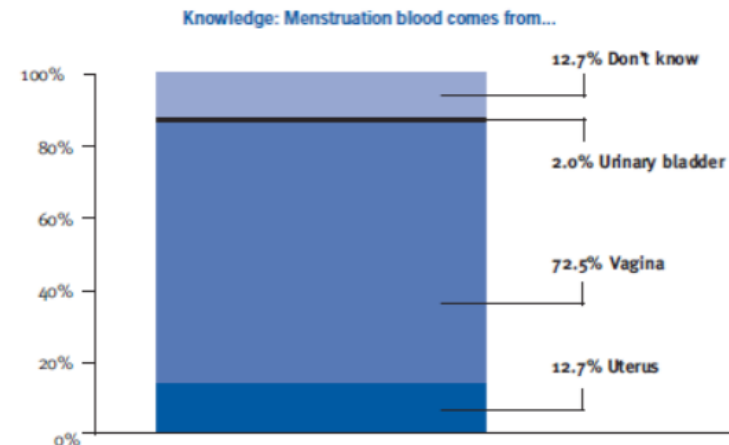
Source: CNN

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# Menstruation context

- High rates uterine prolapse (+60%) & reproductive tract infections (64%) abnormal discharge (48%) genital swelling/inflammation (55%) in Chaupadi region (Ranabhat et al. 2015)
- Lack of private toilets/water supply mean girls don't attend school due to facilities/embarrassment (Mahon & Fernandes, 2010)
- 20% girls don't attend school due to menstruation (WaterAid 2016)
- Menstruation 'shocking event'. Average  $\frac{1}{3}$
- Earthquake response (Standing et al 2016)

Distribution of knowledge of where menstrual blood comes from (n = 204)



# Re-usable sanitary pad kits – post earthquake

The reusable sanitary towel is appropriate for displaced populations, as it is user friendly, culturally acceptable, available and affordable... The use of locally available, reusable and biodegradable materials is eco-friendly and empowering, as well as being a sustainable and culturally appropriate method for menstrual hygiene management in emergency situations.

(Budhathoki et al, 2016:2-3)





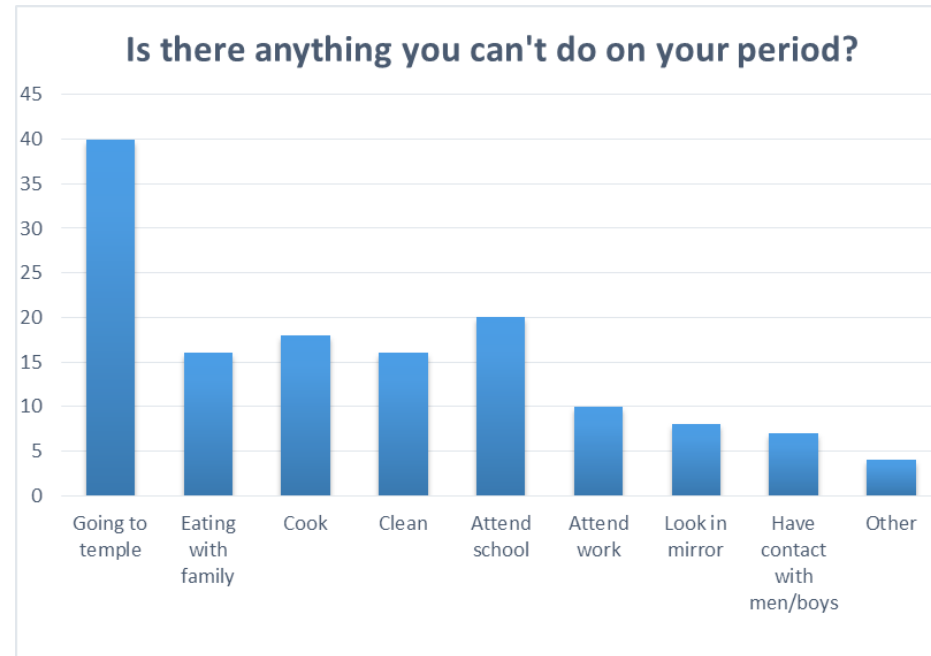
# Research so far:

- 259 questionnaires – girls in years 5-10, age 11-16
- 19 interviews with NGOs/INGOs/grassroots women's organisations
- Initial request to evaluate from two NGOs.



# Taboos

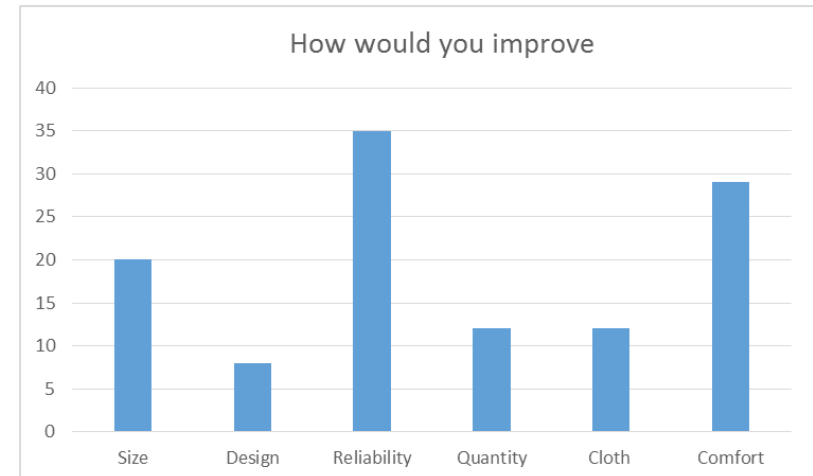
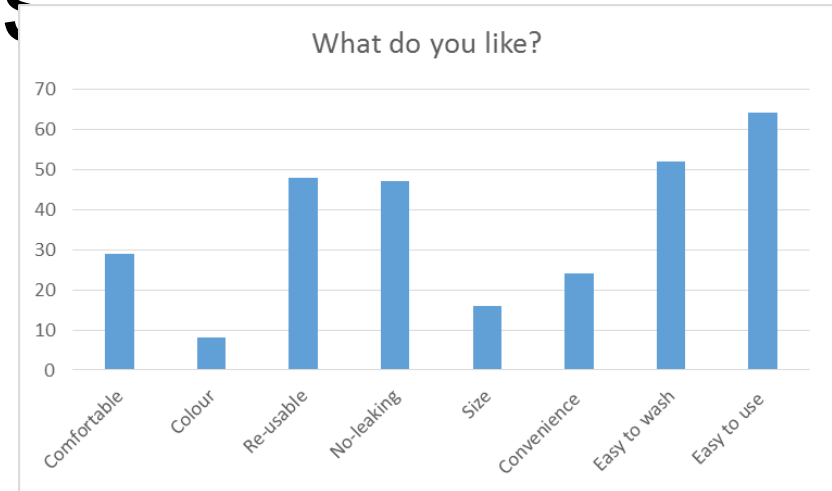
- “Even the teachers who are educated women, when they have their period they do not touch their husbands or do the cooking, they still practice restrictions”. (NGO)
- “Even in Ktm amongst educated women they still practice some





# Feedback on pads

- Questionnaires positive, enthusiastic and recommend
- 75% would use kits in school
- *‘ share my problem to Miss X’, ‘I use the pad all the times during my menstrual cycle so I am regular at school’.*



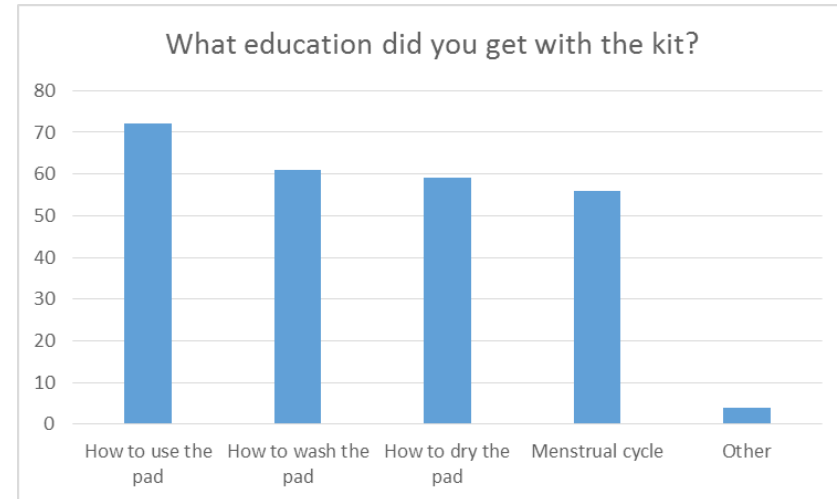
# Disadvantages – Washing and Drying

- “Some \$ considered as a God so not good to show your dirty things to God. Kept them under the bed leading to fungal infections”
- “it’s a problem to wash and dry them, in Nepal it’s not the cultural norm to hang out with normal clothes, you cannot dry properly and then there is a possibility of infection”
- “I dry them somewhere in the house where others can’t see”
- “The first time young girls do go somewhere to wash and dry them where men can’t see – maybe still some who get upset , but now girls hang outside”



# Quality, distribution and education varies

- “Education is most important and the way the pads are delivered and given out, need to treat women as equals and not patronise them”
- “give health education, need to teach menstrual cycle first, not just how to use, how to wash, how to save money... in remote areas NGOs distribute but don't explain...in rural areas use pads as hankies on school uniform, costs 70 rupees for hankies so....”
- “In some places you see the overseas distribute, and ladies take the panties out and throw the rest away”



Income generating? “Everyone wants to make, no one wants to buy”

- If we train women it can be income generating
- Set up independent units in villages to ensure sustainability as just buying and distributing kits is not sustainable
- Need to set up in country production but can't do that if it stifles voluntary free products
- Ngos go into villages to train women but why not train the tailors?



- “It has become the ‘trendy’ thing to do, too many (NGOs) set up and then just leave”
- “We are against westerners coming in and just distributing”
- “too many people are prof iting from them”
- “NGOs, they only go where there is a road, so not to the remote places, where there is a road there is more awareness, and tourism, so that is where the culture and beliefs are backward [sic] where chaupadi is, because no ngos go there”
- “Everyone got excited about the pads....but it’s the same principle as using sari – re use and re cycle”
- “Women are already managing their menstruation”



# School Attendance

“The priority is gender specific toilets, once girls are teenagers they stop coming to school because of period, if there is no toilet, they have to share with boys, won’t go. Boys spot girls have period and make fun of them. Many days are lost and girls just stop coming [to school] it’s important to have gender specific toilets, for boys with urinals and washbasin and girls with separate washbasin and always water – that’s more important than the kits, if you have the kits but have nowhere to change them or to wash what is the point? That is the main issue, gender specific toilets” (NGO)

*Toilet and lock is not good. And we always have a fear that someone might pull the door while we are using because there are always long queues to use the same toilet (yr8)*

*we are scared that someone sees us or knows about our period (yr9)*

*Inconclusive*



# Education

- Menstrual health education in curriculum but how delivered and by who key – need for material in local languages
- “education has to be modified down to the local level of understanding”
- Cross generational
- “menstrual hygiene should be topic discussed by families as well”
- “it’s important for grandmother, mother, daughter to share experiences and come



# Concluding thoughts

- Need for more research at local level
- Education is key -pads as catalyst for discussion
- Production/training vs donors
- Urban/rural – need for research/evaluation in rural
- Menstrual cups?
- Changing attitudes/menstrual activism
- Grassroots led

“I actually feel happy as timely menstruation it's the sign of healthy women” (G14)

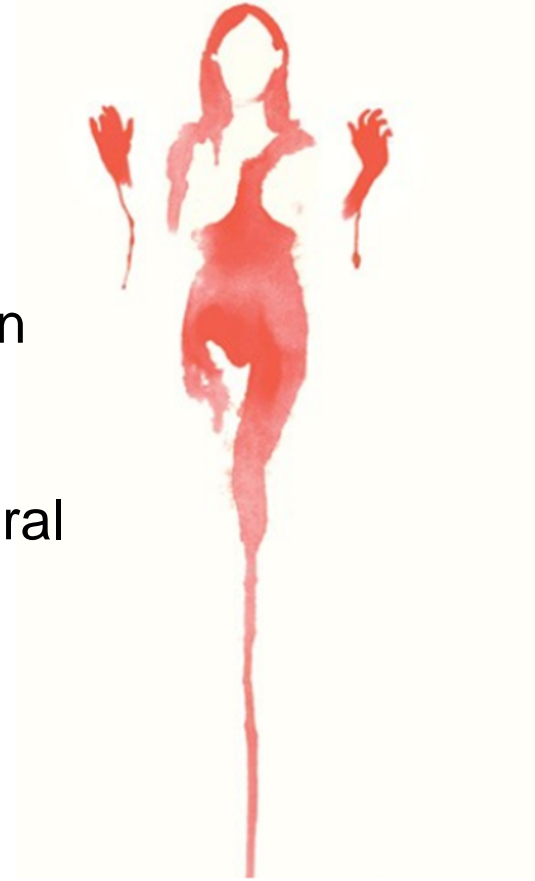


Image Richa Bhattari, Kathmandu Post

4/3/17

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