

## Cultural Barrier at the time of Menstruation: Perspective from Girl Students

Dr. Tej Bahadur Karki<sup>1</sup> & Mrs. Kalpana Khadka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Expert, Nepal Philosophical Research Center (NPRC), Kathmandu, Nepal

<sup>2</sup>Research Associate, Nepal Philosophical Research Center (NPRC), Kathmandu, Nepal

### Corresponding Author

Dr. Tej Bahadur Karki

Email: drtej.karki@gmail.com

### Abstract

*Culture is man-made; one belief system originated with the human civilization. It has bounded the people within one common belief system. Culture determines the personality of people. Here, the main objective of this study is to find out the cultural barriers to girls at the time of menstruation. The study was conducted among the 120 girls of secondary level school. The study found that 50% girls reported that they were deprived to carry out the daily activities like cooking and fetching water and more than 80% girls shared that they were deprived to go in religious places at the time of menstruation. The result founds that still the cultural practices have created the stigma and discrimination towards the girls at the time of menstruation which has direct effect in their personal and professional growth and development as well as it has also significantly affected in the menstrual hygiene management. So, there is need of massive awareness program to society about the negative impact of harmful cultural practices related to menstruation.*

### Keywords

Barriers, Culture, Girls, Menstruation, Student

### Introduction

Nepal is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-caste and ethnicity country so there is diverse cultural belief system in different caste, ethnicity and cultural group. In Nepal, cultural taboos related to menstruation is different in different geography. People differently perceived the menstrual girls and women as their cultural orientation and belief system.

Globally, attitudes, beliefs and social norms relating to menstruation vary widely, and these variations impact on practices during menstruation. People in some settings believe that menstruation is dirty and that menstruating women are unclean (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Ahmed & Yesmin, 2008; Burnet Institute; SurveyMETER; WaterAid Australia; Aliansi Rem aja Independen, 2015). Cultural perceptions and restrictive practices associated with menstruation can serve to isolate and stigmatize girls and women (Adhikari, Kadel, Dhungel, & Mandal, 2006; Tamiru, 2014). Where this is the case, stigma and silence around menstruation can contribute to gender inequality that discriminates against women and girls throughout the lifecycle. Such

restrictive practices can also influence Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and the extent to which menstruation can be managed effectively and with dignity (House, Mahon, & Cavill, 2012). Restrictive practices during menstruation can have considerable psychosocial implications for girls and women (House, Mahon, & Cavill, 2012). Harmful practices related to menstruation is a kind of social discrimination and violence on women and girls. They are deprived from the many household activities and social activities as well.

In the Nepalese social practices, the menstrual girls and women are not allowed to go inside the kitchen room, religious places, and also not allowed to participate in cultural program. They were not allowed to touch the water tap, fruit's trees, any food items and also not provided the milks thinking that menstrual women and girls are impure and unclean. So, considering these socio-cultural beliefs on menstrual women and girls, the main objective of this study is to explore the cultural barriers for menstrual girls.

### **Materials & Methods**

The study was conducted among the 120 girl students of secondary level public and private school of Kathmandu district. The girls were selected from the grade 9 and 10 who has experience of menstrual hygiene management practice and cultural taboos related menstrual girls. The structured questionnaire survey was done to collect quantitative data and also conducted focus group discussion with girls to know their experience. The study was more focused to explore the cultural beliefs and barriers related to the menstruation. The girl students were oriented about the objective of this study and requested them to give the honest answer to find out the real practices. The study had considered the ethical aspect so girls were not forced to participate in the study. Privacy was well maintained and information was not used other purpose than the study. The statistical model was used to analyze the quantitative data collected from the survey and qualitative approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. The conclusion was drawn by merging the findings of both types of data.

### **Result & Discussion**

The study was conducted to explore the cultural barriers at the time of menstruation. There are many types of cultural barriers associated with the menstruation in Nepal which is also called the cultural taboos. Some of the major barriers were discussed with the girls' students of secondary school and presented the findings as bellows:

#### **Deprived to carry out daily activities like cooking or fetching water**

As the traditional practice of Nepalese societies especially in Hindu culture, girls are not allowed to enter in kitchen room for cooking and prohibited to touch the drinking thinking that girls become impure at the time of menstruation. But this concept is gradually changing; especially in urban society. This study was conducted in the Kathmandu valley so it may be reason that there was equal response from total students that 50% said that they were not allowed to carry out the daily activities like cooking and fetching drinking water whereas 50% said no problem.

**Table 1: Deprived to carry out daily activities like cooking or fetching water**

	Types of school				Grade				Age in Year				Total	
	Public		Private		9.00		10.00		13-15		16-19		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	33	54.2	27	45.8	32	49.2%	27	50.9%	38	50.7%	21	48.8%	60	50
No	27	45.8	33	54.2	33	50.8%	26	49.1%	37	49.3%	22	51.2%	60	50
Total	60	100	60	100	65	100.0%	53	100.0%	75	100.0%	43	100.0%	120	100
Chi-Square test	P = .357				P = .853				P = .848					

**Source:** Field Survey 2017

Comparatively, public school girl students (54.2%) felt unable to carry out the daily activities than the private school girl's students (45.8%). It indicates that still public school students are culturally dominated than the private school students.

The statistical analysis of Pearson Chi-Square test shows that there was no significant association between the public and private schools' students ( $p = .357$ ), no association between grade 9 and 10 students ( $p = .853$ ) and no association between two different age group ( $p = .848$ ) on their response on barriers to carry out daily activities like cooking or fetching water at the time of menstruation. It indicates the similar experience and practices of girls from the different strata.

In Nepal, menstrual taboos are high in some societies far-western region. The cultural practice is called '*Chhaupadi*' when menstrual women and girls are kept in small separate hut or shed; outside of the main house/building thinking that menstrual girls and women are impure. A qualitative study conducted on 'Social Discourses on Practices and Remedies of Harmful Tradition of *Chhaupadi* in Far Western Region of Nepal' by Dr. Karki and Mrs. Khadka reported that with the increasing of educational level of youth, awareness program from Government and non-governmental organizations, the prevalence of *Chhaupadi* is gradually decreasing though still its prevalence is high in poor and disadvantage community. In that report, a 25 years girls of Samaijee VDC ward no. 5 of Dadeldhura shared her experience regarding the experience of *Chhaupadi*, 'I was facing discrimination in my own house in the name of tradition and culture' (Karki & Khadka, 2019). The finding has clearly indicated the cultural barriers of menstruation to girls and women.

### **Unable to go to religious places**

Religious norms and belief system is still strong. People may be secular but s/he cannot ignore the existence of god and cross the rules accepted by majority of people. The data also shows that in total 80.5% girls students reported that they were unable to go in religious places during the time of menstruation.

**Table 2: Unable to go to religious places**

	Type of school		Grade		Age in Year				Total					
	Public	Private	9.00	10.00	13-15		16-19		N	%				
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%				
Yes	47	78.3	49	82.8	52	80.0%	43	81.1%	60	80.0%	35	81.4%	96	80.5
No	13	21.7	11	17.2	13	20.0%	10	18.9%	15	20.0%	8	18.6%	24	19.5
Total	60	100	60	100	65	100.0%	53	100.0%	75	100.0%	43	100.0%	120	100
Chi-Square test	P = .544		P = .877		P = .854									

**Source:** Field Survey 2017

The comparative data of public and private school shows that slightly higher number (82.8%) of public school students felt unable to go in religious places than the public school students (78.3%).

The study had also run the statistical model of Pearson Chi-Square test to identify the association between the variables. The result of Pearson Chi-Square test shows that there was no significant association between the public and private schools' students ( $p = .544$ ), no association between grade 9 and 10 students ( $p = .877$ ) and no association between two different age group ( $p = .854$ ) on their response on barriers to go to the religious places at the time of menstruation. It indicates the similar experience and practices of girls from the different strata.

Menstruation is a normal biological process and a key sign of reproductive health. When we talk about the menstruation then it becomes the issue of shyness for girls and women in family and society. Still in Nepalese society, women did not speak clearly about their problem of menstruation. Due lack of awareness or economic crisis, women cannot properly maintain the menstrual hygiene. The continued silence around menstruation combined with limited access to information at home and in schools results in millions of women and girls having very little knowledge about what is happening to their bodies when they menstruate and how to deal with it. A study from UNICEF revealed that 1 out of 3 girls in South Asia knew nothing about menstruation prior to getting it while 48% of girls in Iran and 10% of girls in India believe that menstruation is a disease (WaterAid, 2013). Menstruating women and girls are supposed to be invisible and silent, too. Millions of girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily lives simply because they are menstruating. Such deprivation causes in the personal and professional growth of girls and women. Culture is man-made so it should be in favor of mass community.

## Conclusion

The cultural practices are inevitable part of every society; it bounds the people to follow the social norms and values. Culture is so powerful tool which determines the personality of people. People behaviours is based on their cultural learning so every society has specific rules

developed either by social norms, or by cultural values, or by religious belief system. The cultural practices explain the expected behaviours of either male, or female or children as their assigned social responsibilities or their biological status. Here, the study discussed on the cultural barriers at the time of menstruation. 50% girls reported that they were deprived to carry out the daily activities like cooking and fetching water and more than 80% girls shared that they were deprived to go in religious places at the time of menstruation. The result founds that still the cultural practices have created the stigma and discrimination towards the girls at the time of menstruation which has direct effect in their personal and professional growth and development as well as it has also significantly affected in the menstrual hygiene management. So, there is need of massive awareness program to society about the negative impact of harmful cultural practices related to menstruation.

## References

- Adhikari, P., Kadel, B., Dhungel, S., & Mandal, A. (2006). Knowledge and practice regarding menstrual hygiene in rural adolescent girls of Nepal. *Kathmandu University medical journal (KUMJ)*, 5(3), 382–386.
- Ahmed, R., & Yesmin, K. (2008). *Menstrual hygiene: Breaking the silence*.
- Burnet Institute; SurveyMETER; WaterAid Australia; Aliansi Rem aja Independen. (2015). *Menstrual Hygiene Management in Indonesia: Understanding practices, determinants and impacts among adolescent school girls*. Melbourne: Burnet Institute.
- Burrows, A., & Johnson, S. (2005). Girls' experiences of menarche and menstruation. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 23(3), 235–249. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02646830500165846>
- House, S., Mahon, T., & Cavill, S. (2012). *Menstrual Hygiene Matters: a resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world*. UK: WaterAid.
- Karki, T. B., & Khadka, K. (2019, March ). Social Discourses on Practices and Remedies of Harmful Tradition of Chhaupadi in Far Western Region of Nepal. *Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (NJMR)*, 2(1), 1-6.
- Tamiru, S. (2014). *Girls in Control: Compiled Findings from Studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management of Schoolgirls*. Addis Abbaba, Ethiopia: SNV Netherlands Development Organisation.
- WaterAid. (2013). *Bookshelf: Menstrual Hygiene Matters: a resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world by Sarah House, Thérèse Mahon, Sue Cavill*. WaterAid and 17 other organisations. doi:DOI: 10.1016/S0968-8080(13)41712-3