



Evolution of a Research Landscape: A Bibliometric Analysis of Harmful Cultural Practices in Nepal (2016-2025)

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Abstract

Background: Harmful cultural practices (HCPs) in Nepal, such as Chhaupadi (menstrual seclusion), child marriage, dowry-related violence, and witchcraft accusations, persist as significant social problems with severe consequences for health, education, and human rights. Despite legal bans and interventions, deeply rooted social norms hinder full behavioural change. The research landscape on these practices is fragmented across public health, legal, and social-anthropological disciplines, creating a need for a systematic analysis of the evidence base.

Objective: This study aimed to map and analyse the evolution of the research landscape on HCPs in Nepal from 2016 to 2025 using bibliometric techniques. The objective was to identify temporal trends, disciplinary emphases, leading institutions, geographic collaborations, and persistent research gaps.

Methods: A bibliometric analysis was conducted on literature published between 2016 and 2025. Data were retrieved from [Dimensions.ai](https://www.dimensions.ai/), PubMed, Google Scholar, and NepJOL using a standardized Boolean search string. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles in English or Nepali (with English abstracts) addressing HCPs in Nepal. After deduplication and cleaning in EndNote 21 and Excel, the final corpus was analysed using VOSviewer for network visualization and Excel for descriptive statistics.

Findings: The analysis revealed a steady increase in annual publications, peaking at 27 in 2024, indicating growing scholarly attention. Citations also rose markedly, reaching a peak of 302 in 2024, signifying the field's growing academic influence. Nepal and the United States were the leading contributors (35 publications each), with strong international collaboration networks. Tribhuvan University was the most productive institution (22 documents), while



Pokhara University's publications had notably high citation impact. Key research themes identified included Chhaupadi, child marriage, and gender-based violence, with a focus on health, legal, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Conclusion: Research on HCPs in Nepal has expanded significantly over the past decade, maturing into an internationally recognized and interdisciplinary field. The findings confirm that while scholarly output and impact are growing, the evidence base remains uneven, with some practices and regions receiving more attention than others.

Implication: This bibliometric map provides a valuable resource for researchers, funders, and policymakers to identify influential works, understand collaboration patterns, and pinpoint under-researched areas. Future efforts should prioritize cross-disciplinary studies and community-led, culturally sensitive interventions to effectively address persistent harmful cultural practices.

Keywords: Harmful Cultural Practices, Nepal, Bibliometric Analysis, Chhaupadi, Child Marriage, Research Trends, Gender-Based Violence.

1. Introduction

Harmful cultural practices in Nepal — including but not limited to Chhaupadi (menstrual seclusion), child and early marriage, dowry-related violence, witchcraft accusations and related persecution, and caste-based exclusion — remain persistent social problems with measurable health, educational, legal, and human-rights consequences. National assessments and thematic literature reviews conducted over the last decade document both continuity and change in these practices: the state and civil society have advanced legal bans, policies, and community interventions, yet deeply rooted social norms and geographic inequalities (stronger persistence in remote and marginalized areas) limit full behavioural change and protection for affected individuals.

Research on particular practices has grown unevenly. For example, menstrual seclusion (Chhaupadi) and menstrual health have attracted epidemiological and implementation-focused studies documenting health risks and the effects of legal bans instituted in recent years, while child marriage and dowry practices have been examined both legally and socio-culturally with renewed interest as policy reforms and court decisions are debated. At the same time, witchcraft accusations and persecution — often concentrated in specific regions and ethnic groups — have been the subject of anthropological and human-rights investigations highlighting the intersection of gender, poverty, and local dispute resolution mechanisms. These disciplinary differences point to a fragmented evidence base: public health, legal/policy, and social-anthropological literatures address overlapping topics but are scattered across journals and institutional reports (Nepal et al., 2021; Shrestha et al., 2025; Thakuri et al., 2021).

Karki's study on the Chhaupadi menstrual-seclusion system reveals that deeply held socio-religious beliefs continue to drive exclusion of menstruating women and girls in parts of Nepal. He finds that girls in grades 9–10 reported that during menstruation, they were typically prohibited from entering kitchens, cooking, touching drinking water, attending religious places,



or participating in social functions. These prohibitions are rooted in the belief that menstruating women are “impure.” Karki argues that such practices negatively affect girls’ health, hygiene, and their personal and professional growth (Karki & Khadka, 2019b). Another similar study highlights that *Chhaupadi*, a tradition of menstrual exile in far-western Nepal, remains widely practiced despite legal bans, with 72% of adolescent girls in Achham district experiencing exile to livestock sheds, courtyards, or traditional Chhau sheds during menstruation. Observations revealed that most living spaces lacked basic sanitation, ventilation, electricity, and bedding, and nearly all girls faced dietary restrictions, while some suffered psychological stress, physical abuse, or snake bites (Amatya et al., 2018).

The previous studies collectively reveal that harmful cultural practices surrounding menstruation and gender norms continue to undermine women’s and girls’ rights, health, and education in Nepal. A study analyses of the *Chhaupadi* system in the far-western region show that despite legal bans and awareness campaigns, socio-religious beliefs about impurity still compel women and girls to isolate during menstruation, exposing them to health and safety risks and reinforcing gender inequality (Karki & Khadka, 2019c). A study highlights that mitigating the harmful effects of Chhaupadi in Nepal requires community-driven, culturally sensitive interventions. Using a human-centred design approach in Dailekh, researchers identified five key strategies: leveraging female community health volunteers (FCHVs) for counselling and awareness, targeting mothers to influence behavioural change, engaging the wider community, empowering fathers to drive change at home, and training youth for advocacy. Among these, the FCHV-led counselling and awareness intervention was deemed most promising. The study emphasizes that effective mitigation must address the harmful aspects of Chhaupadi while respecting its cultural significance, balancing health and safety with community values (Baumann et al., 2025).

A study on *Cultural barriers at the time of menstruation* and *Menstrual effects on the education of girl students in Kathmandu* indicates that menstrual taboos—such as restrictions on entering kitchens, temples, or social gatherings—persist even in urban schools, contributing to absenteeism, emotional distress, and reduced classroom participation (Karki, 2019; Karki & Khadka, 2019b). Furthermore, a study on the *Experience of sexual violence among college students* highlights that harmful socio-cultural norms extend beyond ritual practices into educational spaces, where stigma, victim-blaming, and silence discourage survivors from reporting violence (Karki & Rawal, 2023). Together, these findings underscore that Nepal’s harmful cultural practices—whether ritualised as *Chhaupadi* or manifested as gendered violence—are deeply embedded in patriarchal norms that sustain discrimination and require culturally sensitive, community-led interventions for eradication.

A previous study found a high prevalence of child marriage (77.0%), with a median age at marriage of 18 years. Logistic regression analysis identified several significant risk factors, including low educational attainment of both respondents and their parents, the husband’s occupation, lack of awareness of the legal minimum age for marriage, limited decision-making autonomy regarding marriage, belief in the dowry system, peer discussions about child marriage, and the experience of child marriage among friends. These findings indicate that



child marriage in the study population is influenced by a combination of educational, socio-cultural, and peer-related factors (R. Karki et al., 2024).

Karki and Khadka (2019), in their study “*Cultural Barrier at the Time of Menstruation: Perspective from Girl Students*,” highlight that menstrual restrictions rooted in traditional Nepali culture continue to impose significant physical and psychological barriers for adolescent girls. The authors found that girls were commonly prohibited from entering kitchens, temples, and social or religious functions during menstruation due to beliefs that menstruating women are “impure.” Such practices, though varying by region and ethnicity, reflect deeply embedded patriarchal and religious norms that stigmatize menstruation and limit girls’ participation in family, education, and community life. The study concludes that despite growing awareness, these cultural taboos remain prevalent and require comprehensive education, family engagement, and policy interventions to challenge the long-held misconceptions surrounding menstruation in Nepal (Karki & Khadka, 2019a).

Bibliometric methods have been used in related fields (for example, to map research trends in female genital mutilation and cultural heritage) to reveal publication volumes, influential authors and institutions, collaboration networks, dominant themes, and research gaps. Applying a bibliometric lens to harmful cultural practices in Nepal (2016–2025) offers a systematic way to quantify how the scholarly and policy literature has evolved over a recent decade marked by legal reforms, high-profile policy attention, and targeted interventions. Such an analysis can identify disciplinary concentrations, temporal shifts in topics, regional emphases within Nepal-focused research, and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration — information that is useful for researchers, funders, and policymakers aiming to prioritize studies that will most effectively inform interventions (Sweileh, 2016; Vlasse & Lähdesmäki, 2023).

2. Research objective

To map and analyse the evolution (2016–2025) of the research landscape on harmful cultural practices in Nepal using bibliometric techniques, identifying temporal trends, disciplinary emphases, leading institutions, geographic focus within Nepal, and persistent gaps that require future research and policy attention.

3. Methods & Materials

3.1 Study Design

This study employed a bibliometric research design to systematically map, quantify, and visualize the evolution of scholarly output on harmful cultural practices in Nepal between 2016 and 2025. Bibliometric analysis enables the identification of publication trends, influential sources, research networks, and thematic development within a defined corpus of scientific literature. Similar types of study design were also adopted by the previous authors (Karki, D’Mello, Mahat, et al., 2024; Karki, D’Mello, Neupane, et al., 2024; Neupane et al., 2024).



3.2 Data Sources and Databases

The bibliographic data were collected from major multidisciplinary and discipline-specific databases to ensure comprehensive coverage and minimize database bias. The selected databases were:

- **dimensions.ai** – 152 related articles were collected for the quantitative analysis.
- **PubMed (U.S. National Library of Medicine)** – for health and medical-related publications.
- **Google Scholar** – to capture grey literature and regionally indexed journals not covered by Scopus or WoS.
- **NepJOL (Nepal Journals Online)** – to include national-level publications and policy-oriented papers relevant to harmful cultural practices.

All searches were conducted between September and October 2025 to include the most recent publications indexed in the above databases.

3.3 Search Strategy

A standardized search string was applied consistently across databases, adjusted only for syntax differences. The final Boolean search string was: (*"harmful cultural practice" OR "chhaupadi" OR "menstrual exile" OR "child marriage" OR "dowry" OR "witchcraft accusation" OR "son preference"*) AND "Nepal"*

The publication year filter was limited to: 2016 OR 2017 OR 2018 OR 2019 OR 2020 OR 2021 OR 2022 OR 2023 OR 2024 OR 2025

Publication type was restricted to: “Article” (excluding editorials, letters, conference abstracts, and book chapters).

Search results were exported in compatible bibliographic formats (BibTeX, RIS, or CSV), including all metadata fields (authors, title, source, abstract, keywords, references, and citation counts).

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1. Publications focusing on harmful cultural practices, traditional norms, or gender-based socio-cultural behaviors within the Nepalese context.
2. Articles published between 2016–2025.
3. Indexed in at least one of the selected databases.
4. Written in English (or Nepali if metadata and abstract were available in English).
5. Peer-reviewed journal articles.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Articles discussing cultural practices in countries other than Nepal.
2. Duplicates identified across databases.
3. Non-research content such as news reports, commentaries, or policy briefs without empirical or analytical focus.
4. Studies addressing general cultural or religious issues without linkage to harmful practices (e.g., art, festivals).



3.5 Data Cleaning and Preparation

All bibliographic records were merged and de-duplicated using EndNote 21 and Microsoft Excel. Metadata fields were standardized following the Scopus schema. Non-English records lacking abstracts were excluded. Keywords were harmonized through stemming and unifying synonyms (e.g., *Chhaupadi* and *menstrual exile*).

3.6 Analytical Tools and Software

Data analysis and visualization were performed using the following software tools:

- **VOSviewer (v.1.6.20):** for constructing co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence maps.
- **Microsoft Excel 2021:** for descriptive statistics and tabulation of publication counts by year, author, and institution.

3.7 Quality Assurance and Validation

To ensure reproducibility and accuracy, the search process and inclusion criteria were validated through inter-researcher cross-checking of 10% of records. Additionally, manual verification of abstracts was performed to confirm relevance to harmful cultural practices. Data consistency was checked for author name variations and journal metadata.

4. Results

4.1 Number of publications in each year

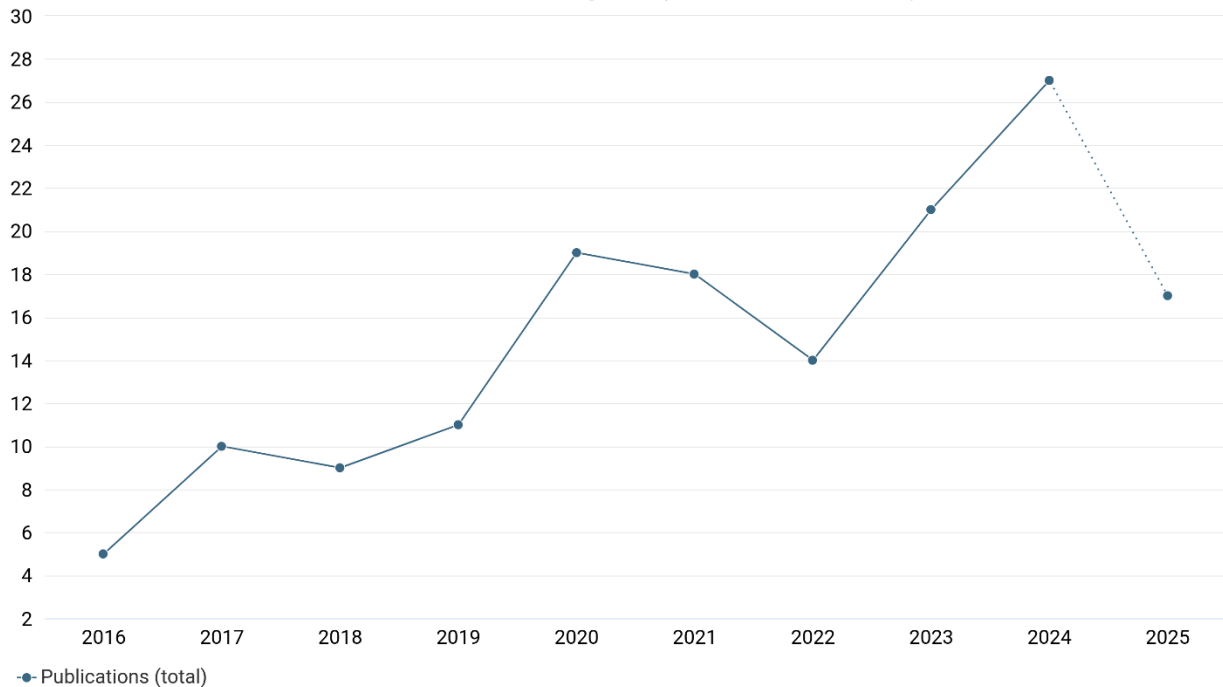
The publication trend from 2016 to 2025 on harmful cultural practices in Nepal shows a steady and progressive increase in scholarly attention toward the topic. In the early years (2016–2018), research activity was relatively limited, with only 5 to 9 publications per year, indicating that harmful cultural practices such as *Chhaupadi*, *child marriage*, *dowry*, and *witchcraft accusations* were emerging but were less prioritized research themes.

Table 1: Number of publications in each year

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Publications (total)	5	10	9	11	19	18	14	21	27	17



Publications in each year. (Criteria: see below)



Source: <https://app.dimensions.ai>
Exported: October 25, 2025
Criteria: ("harmful cultural practice*" OR "chhaupadi" OR "menstrual exile" OR "child marriage" OR "dowry" OR "witchcraft accusation" OR "son preference") AND "Nepal" in title and abstract; Publication Year is 2016 or 2017 or 2018 or 2019 or 2020 or 2021 or 2022 or 2023 or 2024 or 2025; Publication Type is Article.

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From 2019 onward, there was a noticeable growth, with 11 publications in 2019 and a sharp rise to 19 in 2020 and 18 in 2021, reflecting expanding academic and policy interest likely influenced by national awareness campaigns, legal reforms, and increased funding for gender and social inclusion studies. The trend peaked in 2024 with 27 publications, suggesting heightened scholarly engagement and interdisciplinary exploration of cultural practices affecting women's rights, education, and health. Although there is a slight decline to 17 publications in 2025, the overall pattern demonstrates a sustained upward trajectory in research output, signifying that harmful cultural practices have become an important area of socio-cultural and developmental inquiry in Nepal.

4.2 Citation of published articles in each year

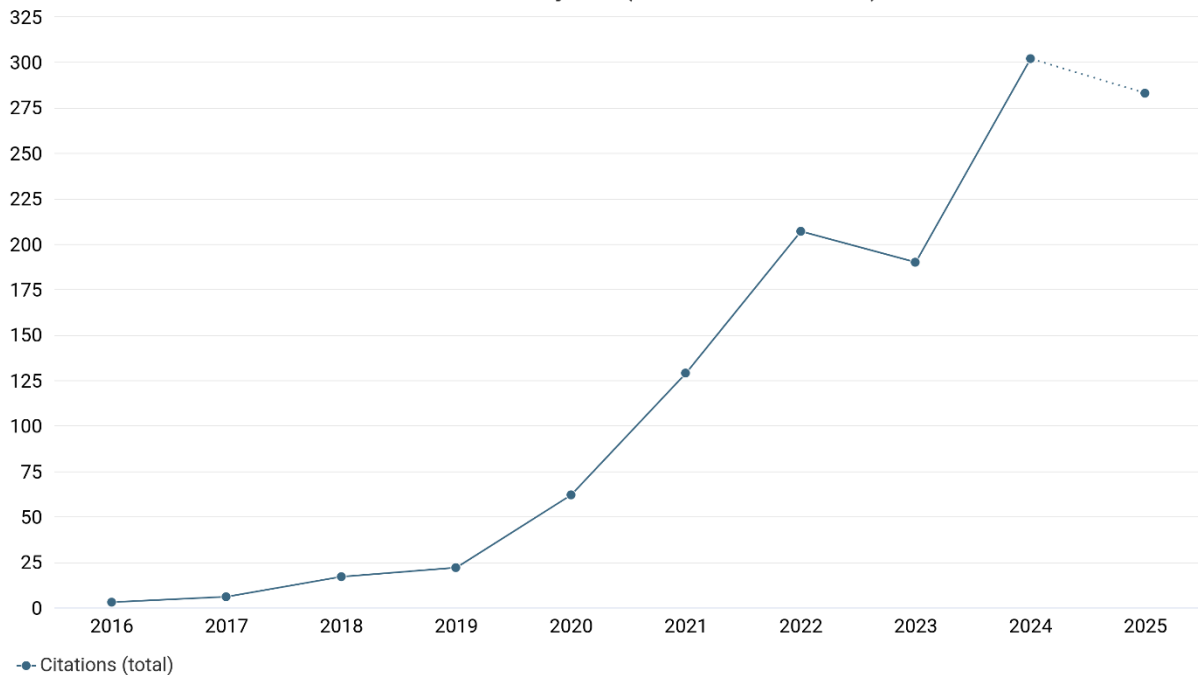
The citation trend from 2016 to 2025 indicates a consistent and substantial rise in academic influence and recognition of research on harmful cultural practices in Nepal. In the initial years (2016–2018), citations were relatively low—ranging from 3 to 17—suggesting that the field was in its formative stage with limited scholarly visibility.

Table 2: Citation of published articles in each year

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Citations (total)	3	6	17	22	62	129	207	190	302	283



Citations in each year. (Criteria: see below)



Source: <https://app.dimensions.ai>
Exported: October 25, 2025
Criteria: "Harmful cultural practice" OR "chhaupadi" OR "menstrual exile" OR "child marriage" OR "dowry" OR "witchcraft accusation" OR "son preference" AND "Nepal" in title and abstract; Publication Year is 2016 or 2017 or 2018 or 2019 or 2020 or 2021 or 2022 or 2023 or 2024 or 2025; Publication Type is Article.
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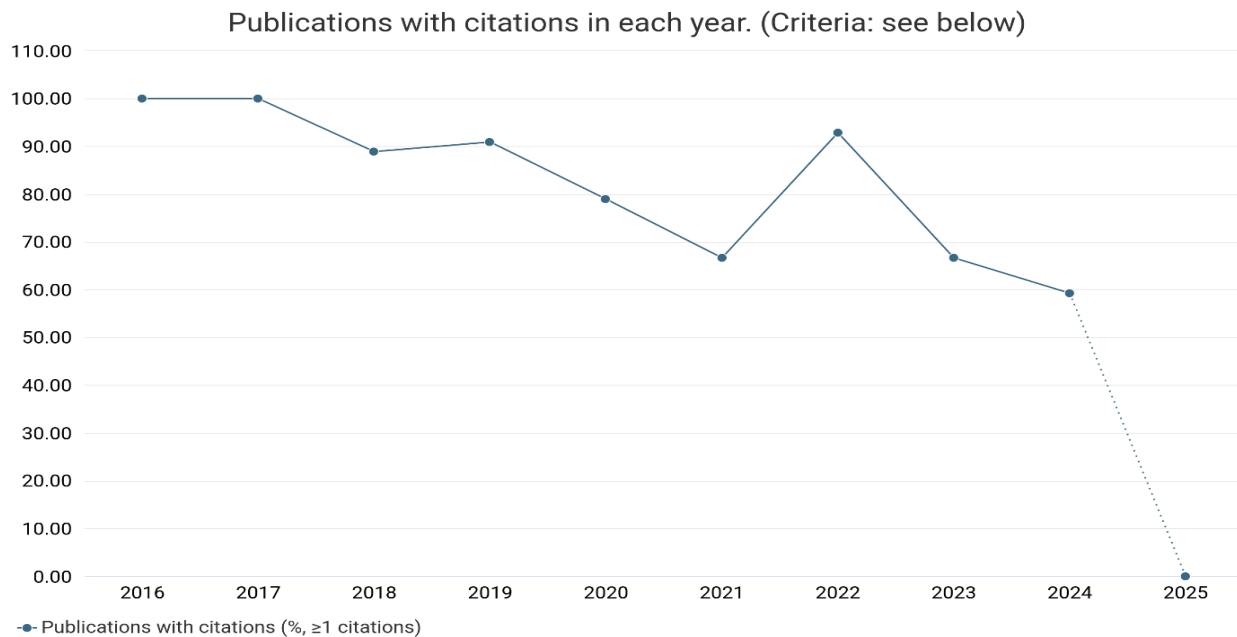
However, from 2019 onward, there was a steady increase, with 22 citations in 2019 and a remarkable jump to 62 in 2020, reflecting growing engagement from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. The momentum continued through 2021 and 2022, reaching 129 and 207 citations respectively, showing that studies addressing issues such as *Chhaupadi*, *child marriage*, and gender-based violence were gaining prominence in both national and international academic discourse. The peak citation count of 302 in 2024 demonstrates the maturation of the research field and its integration into broader gender and cultural studies. Although there is a slight decrease to 283 citations in 2025, the overall trajectory suggests a strong cumulative impact and recognition of Nepal-focused research on harmful cultural practices, underscoring its growing contribution to global discussions on cultural transformation and social justice.

4.3 Publications with citations (% , ≥ 1 citations)

The trend in the percentage of publications with at least one citation (≥ 1 citation) from 2016 to 2025 reflects important fluctuations in the visibility and academic engagement of research on harmful cultural practices in Nepal.

Table 3: Publications with citations (% , ≥ 1 citations)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Publications with citations (% , ≥ 1 citations)	100.00	100.00	88.89	90.91	78.95	66.67	92.86	66.67	59.26	0.00



Source: <https://app.dimensions.ai>
Exported: October 25, 2025
Criteria: "Harmful cultural practice*" OR "chhaupadi" OR "menstrual exile" OR "child marriage" OR "dowry" OR "witchcraft accusation*" OR "son preference") AND "Nepal" in title and abstract; Publication Year is 2016 or 2017 or 2018 or 2019 or 2020 or 2021 or 2022 or 2023 or 2024 or 2025; Publication Type is Article.

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During the early years (2016 and 2017), all publications received citations (100%), indicating that the few studies available were highly relevant and frequently referenced by subsequent researchers. Between 2018 and 2020, the proportion of cited works slightly declined from 88.89% to 78.95%, suggesting that while the research output was increasing, not all studies achieved the same academic reach. The drop continued in 2021 (66.67%), possibly due to the expansion of publication volume and the time lag required for new studies to accumulate citations. Interestingly, 2022 showed a recovery to 92.86%, indicating renewed scholarly attention, but subsequent years (2023–2024) again experienced a gradual decrease to 66.67% and 59.26%, likely reflecting saturation in the field and the slower citation accumulation of recent outputs. By 2025, the percentage dropped to 0%, which is likely due to the recency of publications in that year not yet having time to be cited. Overall, the pattern suggests a maturing research landscape, where earlier studies continue to anchor the discourse on harmful cultural practices, while newer publications are still in the process of gaining academic recognition and integration into broader research dialogues.

4.4 Top 13 countries of publication

The table of the top 13 countries of publication for research on harmful cultural practices highlights the global and regional distribution of scholarly contributions. Nepal and the United States emerge as the leading contributors, each producing 35 publications, with citations totaling 233 and 417, respectively, and the highest total link strength (13) indicating strong collaboration networks. This reflects both the domestic focus of research in Nepal and significant international interest, particularly from U.S.-based institutions, in Nepalese socio-cultural issues.

**Table 4: Top 13 countries of publication**

Id	Country	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
2	Australia	7	188	5
4	Bangladesh	3	28	4
7	Canada	4	68	3
9	Denmark	2	84	1
11	India	2	29	1
13	Japan	8	18	6
18	Nepal	35	233	13
20	Norway	2	48	0
25	South Korea	4	14	2
26	Sweden	2	8	1
28	Turkey	2	20	3
30	United Kingdom	10	120	6
31	United States	35	417	13

Other countries show notable but smaller contributions. The United Kingdom follows with 10 documents and 120 citations, demonstrating meaningful engagement with the topic, likely through cross-national collaborations. Japan (8 documents, 18 citations) and Australia (7 documents, 188 citations) also show a strong presence, with Australia demonstrating a particularly high citation impact relative to its publication count, suggesting influential studies from a smaller number of outputs.

Regional collaborations are evident among Bangladesh, India, and South Korea, which, while producing fewer documents (2–4 publications each), contribute to the cumulative discourse with varying citation impact. Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden appear with low document counts (2 each) but relatively high citations in some cases (e.g., Denmark with 84 citations), indicating that even limited research can exert substantial academic influence.

Overall, the table indicates that research on harmful cultural practices in Nepal is internationally recognized, with Nepalese and U.S. researchers driving publication volume, while other countries contribute through high-impact, collaborative, and specialized studies. This highlights a networked and interdisciplinary research landscape where domestic and global perspectives intersect.



4.5 Top 10 organizations of publication

The table of the top 10 organizations of publication for research on harmful cultural practices in Nepal highlights the institutional landscape driving scholarly output and influence. Tribhuvan University stands out as the leading domestic contributor, producing 22 publications with 55 citations and a moderate total link strength of 4, reflecting its central role in Nepal-based research and collaborative networks. Pokhara University, although producing only 3 publications, has an exceptionally high citation count of 145, indicating that its few studies are highly influential and widely referenced in the field.

Table 5: Top 10 organizations of publication

Id	Organization	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
9	B.P. Koirala Institute Of Health Sciences	3	3	1
17	Care Usa	4	28	4
54	Emory University	7	33	6
67	Harvard University	3	28	0
75	Hiroshima University	3	8	2
98	Kathmandu University	4	3	3
144	Pokhara University	3	145	2
180	Tribhuvan University	22	55	4
212	University of Pittsburgh	3	21	2
228	Yonsei University	3	9	0

Other Nepali institutions, such as Kathmandu University (4 documents, 3 citations) and B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (3 documents, 3 citations) contribute to the research corpus but with relatively lower citation impact, suggesting either more recent outputs or limited visibility in broader academic networks.

International organizations also play a significant role in this research area. Emory University leads with 7 documents and 33 citations, while Care USA produces 4 publications with 28 citations and a strong link strength (4), reflecting active collaboration and programmatic engagement in Nepal. Harvard University (3 documents, 28 citations), University of Pittsburgh (3 documents, 21 citations), Hiroshima University (3 documents, 8 citations), and Yonsei University (3 documents, 9 citations) further demonstrate the global academic interest and contribution to understanding harmful cultural practices in Nepal.

Overall, the table reveals a mixed landscape of domestic and international institutional contributions, where a few Nepali universities dominate in publication volume, while some organizations—both local and foreign—achieve high citation impact, emphasizing the combination of research productivity and scholarly influence in advancing knowledge on harmful cultural practices.



5. Conclusion & Recommendations

The extensive bibliometric analysis highlights that harmful cultural practices in Nepal, such as Chhaupadi (menstrual seclusion), child and early marriage, witchcraft accusations, and caste-based exclusion, remain deeply entrenched in socio-cultural norms despite the presence of legal frameworks and policy interventions. The research demonstrates that these practices are predominantly driven by patriarchal beliefs, religious taboos, and social norms that are resistant to change, especially in remote and marginalized regions. Although national efforts have made significant strides in legislating against these practices, their persistence underscores the complex interplay of tradition, poverty, gender inequality, and lack of awareness. The evidence suggests that addressing these deeply rooted practices requires a nuanced, culturally sensitive approach that goes beyond legislative measures to include community engagement, education, and empowerment.

To effectively combat harmful cultural practices in Nepal, it is essential to implement multifaceted and community-driven strategies. Culturally sensitive interventions that involve local leaders, women, youth, and grassroots organizations are crucial for fostering social change from within the communities. Specific focus should be placed on awareness campaigns that challenge misconceptions, particularly regarding menstruation and women's purity, and on promoting gender equality through education. Training community health volunteers and empowering women and girls with knowledge and decision-making capacity can serve as effective catalysts for change. Furthermore, policymakers must strengthen enforcement of existing laws while ensuring they are accompanied by programs that address the underlying social norms and economic factors. Continued research and monitoring are also vital to understand the evolving landscape of these practices and to tailor interventions that are context-specific, sustainable, and culturally respectful.

Transparency Statement: The author confirms that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

Data Availability Statement: Author can provide data.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares there is no conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contributions: The author solely conducted all research activities i.e., concept, data collecting, drafting and final review of manuscript.



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