

Menstruating Bodies and Social Control - Insights From Dignity Without Danger: Collaboratively Analysing Menstrual Stigma and Taboos in Nepal

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Abstract : This paper will share insights into how menstruators bodies in Nepal are viewed and controlled in Nepal due to the deeply held stigmas and taboos that exist that frame menstrual blood as impure and polluting. It draws on a British Academy Global Challenges Research (BA/GCRF) funded project, 'Dignity Without Danger,' that ran from December 2019 to 2022. In Nepal, beliefs and myths around menstrual related practices prevail and vary in accordance to time, generation, caste and class. Physical seclusion and/or restrictions include the consumption of certain foods, the ability to touch certain people and objects, and restricted access to water sources. These restrictions not only put women at risk of poor health outcomes, but they also promote discrimination and challenge fundamental human rights. Despite the pandemic, a wealth of field research and creative outputs have been generated to help break the silence that surrounds menstruation and also highlights the complexity of addressing the harms associated with the exclusion from sacred and profane spaces that menstruators face. Working with locally recruited female research assistants, NGOs and bringing together academics from the UK and Nepal, we explore the intersecting factors that impact on menstrual experiences and how they vary throughout Nepal. WE concur with Tamang that there is no such thing as a 'Nepali Woman', and there is no one narrative that captures the experiences of menstruators in Nepal. These deeply held beliefs and practices mean that menstruators are denied their right to a dignified menstruation. By being excluded from public and private spaces, such as temples and religious sites, as well as from kitchens and your own bedroom in your own home, these beliefs impact on individuals in complex and interesting ways. Existing research in Nepal by academics and activists demonstrates current programmes and initiatives do not fully address the misconceptions that underpin the exclusionary practices impacting on sexual and reproductive health, a sense of well being and highlight more work is needed in this area. Research has been conducted in all 7 provinces and through exploring and connecting disparate stories, artefacts and narratives, we will deepen understanding of the complexity of menstrual practices enabling local stakeholders to challenge exclusionary practices. By using creative methods to engage with stakeholders and share our research findings as well as highlighting the wealth of activism in Nepal. We highlight the importance of working with local communities, leaders and cutting across disciplines and agencies to promote menstrual justice and dignity. Our research findings and creative outputs that we share on social media channels such as Dignity Without Danger Facebook, Instagram and you tube stress the value of employing a collaborative action research approach to generate material which helps local people take control of their own narrative and change social relations that lead to harmful practices.

Keywords : menstruation, Nepal, stigma, social norms

Conference Title : ICBSSR 2024 : International Conference on Body Sociology and Social Relationships

Conference Location : Oslo, Norway

Conference Dates : June 27-28, 2024