

From Stigma to Solutions: Harnessing Innovation and Local Wisdom to Tackle Harms Associated with Menstrual Seclusion (Chhaupadi) in Nepal

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Abstract : In Nepal, prevailing sociocultural norms associated with menstruation prompt adherence to stringent rules that limit participation in daily activities. Chhaupadi is a specific menstrual tradition in Nepal in which women and girls segregate themselves and follow a series of restrictions during menstruation. Despite having numerous physical and mental health implications, extant interventions have yet to sustainably address the harms associated with chhaupadi. In this study, the authors describe insights garnered from a collaboration with community members in Dailekh district, who formulated their own approaches to mitigate the adverse facets of chhaupadi. Envisaged as an entry point to improve women's menstrual health experiences, this investigation employed an approach that uses Human-centered Design and a community-engaged approach. The authors conducted a four-day design workshop which unfolded in two phases: The Discovery Phase, to uncover chhaupadi context and key stakeholders, and the Design Phase, to design contextually relevant interventions. Diverse community-members, including those with lived experience practicing chhaupadi, developed five intervention concepts: 1) harnessing Female Community Health Volunteers as role models, for counseling, and raising awareness; 2) focusing on mothers and mother's groups to instigate behavioral shifts; 3) engaging the broader community in behavior change efforts; 4) empowering fathers to effect change in their homes through counseling and education; and 5) training and emboldening youth to advocate for positive change through advocacy in their schools and homes. This research underscores the importance of employing multi-level approaches tailored to specific stakeholder groups, given Nepal's rich cultural diversity. The engagement of Female Community Health Volunteers emerged as a promising yet underexplored intervention concept for chhaupadi, warranting broader implementation. Crucially, it is also imperative for interventions to prioritize tackling deleterious aspects of the chhaupadi tradition, emphasizing safety considerations, all while acknowledging chhaupadi's entrenched cultural history; for some, there are positive aspects of the tradition that women and girls wish to preserve.

Keywords : human-centered design, menstrual health, Nepal, community-engagement, intervention development, women's health, rural health

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