



Disabling Menstrual Barriers – research in Nepal

Emerging themes

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Background



- About one quarter of the global population is made up of women and girls of menstruating age (Ahmed & Yesmin, 2008). They need:
 - A clean menstrual management material
 - A private and accessible place to change their menstrual product
 - Water and soap to wash their body and materials used
 - Proper disposal of used materials in a safe and dignified way
 - Accurate information on the menstrual cycle and how to manage it with dignity
- Disabled people in LMICs often lack access to WASH services, or can't get enough to meet their needs (White et al, 2016; Cavill et al, 2016; Wilbur & Jones, 2014)

Disabling Menstrual Barriers research

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- **Research aim:** investigate and address the barriers to menstrual hygiene that adolescents and young people with disabilities face in the Kavre district in Nepal.
- **Research questions:**
 1. What are the specific MHM requirements of:
 - adolescents and young people with disabilities and the barriers they face in managing their menstruation hygienically and with dignity
 - carers who support adolescents and young people with disabilities during their menstrual cycle
 2. What intervention could feasibly meet these requirements

Qualitative research methods



Method	Respondents
In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary Participants (20)• Carers (12)• Policy makers and implementers (13)
Accessibility and safety audits of the menstrual hygiene facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary participants (20)• Carers (12)
Market survey and product attribute assessment	
PhotoVoice and ranking	Primary participants and carers (5)



Emerging themes

Barriers differ depending on the impairment



Intellectual disabilities

- May be unable to understand the purpose of a menstrual product “She just walks like that with blood on her clothes”
- Some people with IDs don’t observe social norms, and show their used menstrual product to others. “She would take it out and show it to others and would tell them to look at it. It was embarrassing”
- Some are unable to retain information on how to manage their menstruation

Barriers differ depending on the impairment



People with physical disabilities:

- Uncomfortable sitting on a menstrual product all day in a wheelchair. “When I sit in the wheelchair the pads may fold or something like that might happen which makes me feel uneasy”
- Many participants change and wash their menstrual cloth in / on the latrine
- Inaccessible latrines and a lack of water inside emerged as a major barrier

Barriers differ depending on the impairment

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Caption: It is difficult to go to toilet.

Credit: Sharmila Tamang



“Even today, I fell down two-three times because yesterday it rained.... [I] need to wash menstrual cloth in toilet. There is no water in the toilet.... I have to carry water in a bucket while also managing the crutches. It is very difficult, specially in the mornings”.

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Dignity, safety, privacy



"People would tell me to close while using it but I can't use the latch. When I have to change my pad, people might just open it. Whoever is helping me to change the pad might also forget to use the latch. My sister had taken me to the toilet and came inside and took a nap. My brother opened the door and yelled at me for not closing the toilet door properly".



Caption: When I have to use the toilet, I need someone else to help with the latch otherwise I can't do it myself.

Credit: Tulasa Karki

Restrictions



- Many people follow restrictions because of fear of upsetting the gods
- People with intellectual disabilities didn't always understand, or adhere these. This was a great source of stress for mothers



Caption: Cannot touch during period as per our tradition

Credit: Bishnu Maya Sapkota



Disability is viewed as a curse in Nepal. If you don't follow the restrictions, people believe the gods will curse you.

“....I am already suffering like this and people anyway say that my disability is a curse, so if I don't obey I will be further cursed”.

Desire to stop periods



- People with intellectual disabilities are sterilised or put on long-term contraception because of the menstrual care burden and fear of unwanted pregnancies (Thapa et al, 2017, Chou et al, 2012, Van der Merwe et al, 1987)
- Unconfirmed reports that sterilisation is done in Kathmandu
- MHM is a SRHR issue

“I normally wish it didn’t happen. People find it disgusting. My mother once had said to remove my uterus... My mother consulted with the doctor..... Apparently others had told her about it that the uterus can be thrown away”.

Summary



- The general population faces extreme barriers related to MHM
- For people with disabilities, these barriers are complex and further marginalise them from society
- The barriers also negatively impact on the mother's wellbeing

Thank you!

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