

# Menstruation among Nepalese Adolescent girls

## A Qualitative Study

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Main purpose of this study is to find factors like what, when, where and how do Nepalese girls get information about menstrual practices. Other purposes include identification of cultural practices about menstruation. This study aimed in providing information to Dynamic education institute and helping them to plan and formulate new plan. It acts as an approach to solve menstrual problems and issues which are embedded in Nepalese society. Other main objective is also to identify and promote the positive factors which are practiced by adolescence girls, and to find suggestive approach to the concerned body including family, school and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations.</p> <p>A qualitative approach was used in this research and data was obtained through written essay from volunteer female participants (15-18) of Dynamic educational institute. Data was analyzed by using content analysis method. The results shows that menstruation cycle physiology, sanitation habits and its management are introduced to adolescence girls and females are major informant to them like Mother, elder sister at home and female teachers or friends at school. However, Internet access is the next option for the source of information. Majority of participants seem to get the information at the age 10 to 13.</p> <p>There were several misconceptions about menstrual practices and cultural taboos which directly affected the quality practices about menstrual hygiene and sanitation. This research provides information about how the adolescence girls experience and understand their menstrual cycle from the beginning of adolescence life. This research can be used by participating educational organization for raising awareness program within the school settings and to the concerned families or other concerned educational stakeholders.</p>		
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Miscellaneous

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Adolescence in girls has been considered as a transition phase from girlhood to womanhood. Menstruation is generally considered as unclean in context of society of Nepal. Earlier, most of the rural Nepalese people used to think that, signs of puberty and menstrual cycles signified the girl as being potentially capable of getting married and bear children. (Joshi, 2009.)

Isolation in their own home, social and religious restrictions brings feeling of awkwardness among menstruating girls. Taboos at first menstruation include complete isolation of adolescence girls for about two weeks, without even seeing the sunlight. They are supposed to avoid seeing brothers, fathers and other male members of the society. Meanwhile, postponing study creates emotional imbalance making themselves as “untouchable “which is really challenging. It may bring emotional changes among adolescence girls who are not prepared for the periodic cycle of their life in context to scenario of Nepal. (Burbank, 2002.)

Adolescence already brings physical and physiological changes within a female body. Menstrual taboos with socio cultural aspect among Nepalese society generally create chaos among adolescence girl who has her first experience of menstruation which is called menarche. As a ritual, menstruating women are forbidden to participate in any religious ceremony and also cannot touch any family members while she is menstruating. During menstruation, they are prohibited from participating normal life activities including cooking and eating together with in a family. (Adhikari, 2007.)

Both of the authors of this study had experience of working as community health nurse in rural scenario of Nepal. It provided an opportunity to explore social and cultural context of menstrual issues. Adolescent girls were found skipping schools mentioning menstrual problem as major reason. Experience sharing from the rural exposure led the authors to study more about knowledge and practices of menstruation among Nepalese Adolescence girls. Hence, it was chosen as bachelor thesis topic. Main aim of this study is to provide information to Dynamic educational institute to help them in planning and formulating some new plans in order to solve the problems regarding menstrual cycle.

## **2 KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE**

### **2.1 Source of menstruation knowledge**

The majority of girls learnt about menstruation from their mothers, sisters and female friends circle. Teachers were considered as the source of information on menstruation in context to health education studies included in the curriculum. And there were also circumstances when a student inquired about reproductive health issues.

Most of the times they were told, “this topic need not be taught, you could self-study at home. It was like knowing to go to Toilet with slippers/shoes” (Mahon & Fernandes, 2010). The information they received were mainly regarding the use of cloth, practices of rituals, the concept of restrictions, and

cautions about behavior towards men and boys. Very little information was shared regarding the physiological process involved.

It was found that most of the adolescence girls of rural and urban community are not properly maintaining the menstrual hygiene. In regard to the data of the survey conducted among specific school going girls, only 6.0% of girls knew that menstruation is a physiologic process, 36.7% knew that it is caused by hormones. Ninety-four percentages of them used pads during the period but only 11.3% disposed it. Overall knowledge and practice were 40.6% and 12.9% respectively. (Adhikari, 2007.)

## **2.2 Practices of periodic menstrual cycle in Nepal**

Periodic menstrual cycle among females in Nepalese society is considered as “untouchable” since decades and still continued in the present context as well. The term untouchable implies with all the things which are in contact with the specific woman having periodic cycle. A woman having periodic cycle is normally kept under seclusion for four days during her menstrual cycle every month. Meanwhile, the tradition of seclusion is diverse ranging from eastern part to far western part of Nepal.

Eastern part of Nepal seems to be fragile in continuing this traditional taboo following menstruation cycle by seclusion of woman having periodic cycle for four days and abandon social and house hold activities but the condition seems to be worse in the far western and mid-western part of Nepal. This religious taboo is normally called “Chaupadi pratha” in the mid and far western part of the country and hence not only includes seclusion but totally



banished from house and is forced to live in cowshed or similar unsanitary place without proper environment to live such as without light and ventilation and which are very much dangerous to live. (Mahon & Fernandes, 2010.)



**Figure 1** Cow shed

The picture above shows typical house for females during her periodic cycle in rural area of Nepal (Mazzulo, 2011). A Chhaupadi shed or hut, also called Chhaupadi goth, was rudimentary stone, hay or stick shelter which were also commonly used as cow or goat sheds, had dirt floors and no windows (**Figure 1**). However, this tradition was so deeply rooted that despite of many activities being implemented under governmental and nongovernmental

approach for the awareness program, people seemed to be following this so called tradition which could also endanger their life. Women and adolescence girls were forced to risk their life with innumerable causes such as snake bites during summer and suffocation due to improper ventilation of the house as shown in figure 1. They were kept in animal shed or a very small dark place during their periodic cycle.

It was believed that, it brings bad luck in the house and in the family if women and girls look at the mirror during menstruating phase. Menstruating girls were shifted to a small clay home or cowshed place located 15 or 20 meter far from their own residence. This kind of clay home was specially made for woman and especially for this period. (Joshi, 2009.)

In regard to policy of Nepal government, schools must possess one toilet per 50 students. However, study report from a nongovernmental organization working on water and sanitation project named as Water Aid mentioned that, average school toilet served 127 students. This was approximately three times more than recommendation of government.

Nepal has 28,000 community schools approximately and only 18,000 of the schools had toilets out of which only 5580 were providing separate toilets for girl's child. Besides, there were not only the negative impacts of menstruation cycle among women's in eastern part. Some of the females considered menstruation cycle as periodic holidays as they were laden with household responsibility all the time. They utilized this time to get sufficient rest and avoid household chores at least few days in a month which was good according to their opinion.

According to the experience of a girl as illustrated by Raut and Tandon, (2011) her dresses were packed and she was taken far away from her home without seeing any male member of family. She was provided with separate utensils for eating and had to live in dark. Girls during their first cycle of menses often faced dilemma, confusion followed with fear and harassment. On the start of their first menstruation (menarche) they suddenly could not touch any males, including their father and brothers. They could not look at the mirror, cross a bridge and see the sunlight. They were barred from entering and staying in their own home and they were not allowed to raise their voice loudly.

They believed that if they touched plants, vegetables or any organic things, it would rot as their menses caused them to poison whatever they touch. Not all girls stay in a Chhaupadi goth (animal shed) during menarche. Some were sent away to some other place secluded. While some of the educated Nepali families did not place their daughters outside in sheds during the cycle of their menses, but they were also often isolated away from family members and the comfort of home. Habitation of girls and women in these sheds could create dangerous situations as structures might reach below freezing temperatures in the winter and sweltering temperatures in the summer. (Raut & Tandon, 2011.)

A girl sharing her past memories mentioned that her culture did not allow her to speak freely about menstrual cycle, physical bodily changes, reproductive or sexual health. It was shameful for her to ask any questions regarding the physical changes to her family and she did not hear anything from her mother before her menstruation started actually. (Raut & Tandon, 2011.)

Menstrual hygiene and management was an issue that insufficiently acknowledged and had not received adequate attention in the reproductive

health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors in developing countries including Nepal (Mahon & Fernandes, 2010).

Social and cultural taboos and restrictions existed for women during their menstrual period. Women in rural areas of Nepal were often separated from the house and were made to stay inside separate huts or cow sheds during the period of menstruation. They were also restricted from other activities like preparing food, socializing, traveling etc. In the very rural areas, girls were even restrained from attending school. Menstruation, though being a natural process, often been dealt with secrecy in many parts of Nepal. Hence, knowledge and information about reproductive functioning and reproductive health problems amongst the adolescent was poor. (Adhikari, 2007.)

The perceptions of girls were influenced by socio-cultural beliefs and symbolisms. Mothers were the important source of information on menstruation for the adolescent girls. However, information on menstruation given by mothers was often incomplete, usually based on cultural myths. Therefore this perpetuated negative and distorted perceptions and practices of menstruation. (Raut & Tandon, 2011.)

On the other hand, even girls did not make an effort to learn about the anatomical issues. Similarly, school teachers too hesitated to conduct the health classes confidently. They actually lacked the skills and attitude to handle the sensitive topics related to reproductive health which further created gap in learning process. (Raut & Tandon, 2011.)

Moreover, there were limited clothes and blankets in the menstruation hut typically called Chhaupadi during the winter when the nights were cold and the females were compelled to adjust their living during their menstrual cycle.

Such cases eventually led to health hazards like pneumonia. Menstruation cycle hence was taken as a bear bug from which no woman could escape. Even though a girl tried to avoid those rituals she was suppressed by her own family members and family members were suppressed by the community members to follow such superstition otherwise they were isolated from the community. (Kandel, Bhandari & Lamichanne.)

This ancient cultural taboo of periodic cycle had consequences of adolescent girls getting raped outside of the house while performing this Chhaupadi pratha while they were living in open spaces. In fact, they had dangers not only from, animal, insects including human being as well. (Kandel, Bhandari & Lamichanne.) Based on a concept note prepared by an organization, called enabling education network on girls' exclusion, tackling a taboo issue in Nepal, water aid organization from Nepal had made some findings and recommendation. These findings were made after having a consultation with 204 girls aged 12 to 20. Some of the findings were, restrictions persisting among 89 percentages of the females. Main reason for absence from school was found to be lack of privacy which included example of broken toilet or lack of water in the toilet, for which the students mentioned to have fear of going to such toilets and hence they were left with the option to skip from school. (Gautam, 2009.)

### **2.3 Menstrual hygiene in context of Nepal**

There were no separate toilets for girl child in schools located in slum areas and because of which parents didn't send their adolescence girls to school. Girls felt embarrassed to go in the same toilet for girls and boys. Majority of

toilets in the schools located in the slum area of India were usually unclean and they would rather prefer not going to such toilets and eventually escaped from school. The condition was similar in context of Nepal. (Deep, 2012.) Menstruation period was a matter of concern about sanitary hygiene for adolescence girls which could not be negotiated with, which directly hampered the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of adolescence girls. This situation of Indian adolescent girls was similar in context of Nepal as well especially in the rural part. (Deep, 2012.)

### **3 PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY**

Main purpose was to find out what, when, where and from who do the adolescence Nepalese girls received information about menstrual hygiene and sanitation. This study aimed to provide information to the Dynamic education institute, to help them in planning and formulating some new plans in order to address the problems regarding menstrual cycle.

Research questions for the study were as follows

1. What is the knowledge of adolescence Nepalese girls in Dynamic education institute about menstruation?
2. How and where do the adolescent girls receive information about menstrual hygiene and sanitation?
3. What traditional practices are followed by adolescence girls in Nepal during menstruation?

## **4 IMPLIMENTATION OF THE REASEARCH**

### **4.1 Research methodology**

Qualitative Research method was used in this study because it was helpful to explain the social and cultural factors influencing the research topic and attain wide understanding of how specific community and individuals within them interpreted their experience in their own words. Qualitative methods provide an insight into how people make sense of their own experience that cannot be easily provided by other methods. (Rice, 1996.)

According to Baum (1995), qualitative data were powerful as it allowed us to understand the context issues were public health concern in recent years. As stated by Brannen (1992), qualitative data documented view of the people studied instead of focusing it from researcher's perspective.

### **4.2 Study site**

Nepal is a federal republic country located in southern Asia which is located in Himalayas, bordered by china on north and India on east, west and south. It has an area of 147,181 square kilometers and a population of approximately 30 million. During the time, (2007-2011), net attendance ratio of girl in secondary school was 38% whereas in primary school was 70%. Total adult literacy rate of Nepal (2007-2011) was 60%. Use of improved sanitation facilities (rural and urban) in total was 31 %. Number of Internet users for the

purpose of education was 9 per 100 populations, in 2011. Birth by age 18 (2007-2011) was found to be 19%. Adolescent birth rate during (2006-2010) was 81 %. Comprehensive knowledge of HIV among adolescent females was 25 %. (UNICEF, 2011.)

The study was conducted in an educational institution named as Dynamic education institute, which is located in the center of Biratnagar city. Biratnagar belongs to low land or terai belt according to geographical division of Nepal. Dynamic education institute is well accessible to students residing in different corners of city. The institution has students coming from both rural and urban settings within the city. Dynamic education institute is accessible to both middle class and lower class families. Provision of subsidized tuition fees as scholarship is also provided for the talented students who have high ranking in their class according to their financial abilities. Currently, there are in total 250 students admitted in high school level with two different classes, namely class 11 and class 12.

### **4.3 Recruitment**

Eligible participants for this research were identified from attendance register of institution in relevance to their age (15-18). Participants were contacted via postal mail and telephone. Verbal and signed written consent from volunteer participants and their parents were obtained. Adolescence girls with age range (15-18), were chosen because they had started to have menstrual cycle and it was easier for them to elaborate about their practice and concepts concerning menstrual cycle in a practical perspective. Volunteer sampling technique was used in this study to collect sample of participants. Volunteer sampling



technique is a process where samples are often drawn through advertising or requesting people to volunteer to participate in the study (Rice, 1996).

Volunteer sampling technique was chosen because essay writing on a crucial issue like menstruation cycle was taken as a topic of avoidance in context of Nepal. Furthermore, sharing personal experiences and understanding about it was demanding and probably an unpleasant process to explain for the participants. (Lohr, 2010.)

The exclusion standards for the sampling group were females who were not willing to participate in the research themselves or forbidden from parents or did not like to share their personal experiences about menstrual issues. However, the number of females in the specific classroom was relatively more. Total numbers of volunteer participants were 22.

Nepali language was chosen to write essay considering the fact that it would be easier to explain in their mother tongue and native language, however English is second spoken language, officially. All participants were fully informed about the aim, expectation and procedure of the research and signed inform consent form (see Appendix 2 and 3) to guarantee their anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore, the participation was strictly voluntary.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

Essay writing method was used in this study since sharing of own understanding about menstrual practices from an individual's point of view was present. It includes explanation of their own experiences, sharing of

practices and knowledge what they have perceived through various sources. Collecting written essay from the perspective participants was focused in this study because personal document provides personal insight which cannot be accessed by another means as they have personal meanings and understandings. (Rice, 1996.)

Essay writing comprised one of the common methods for observation (Review of documents being guided by open ended questionnaires.) Essay writing program was conducted in April 2013 when the author had visited to the city, Biratnagar for one month. It took 3 consecutive days to gather volunteer participants under one roof, informing them about the study, obtaining consent from them and their guardians. As a matter of delight and surprise, there were in total 22 volunteer participants who wrote the essay. Meanwhile, essay writing lasted with time limitation of 1 hour as suggested by teacher that one hour should be enough time for the participants to write their personal experiences in own words.

Time limitation of one hour did not have any effect on data or what the participants have produced as there was not any problem with the language. Before writing the essay, the participants were verbally instructed. Written form with guided questionnaires was given in order to make their writing process clear and easier. Throughout the process, queries of participants were addressed if they had some confusion during writing session. Hint questionnaires to write essay are described in **appendix 1**. After the essay writing was accomplished, all of the papers being anonymous were collected by the researcher for data analysis process.

## 4.5 Data analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2002), qualitative data analysis includes process of working with data, organizing those data and breaking it into manageable units. Later synthesizing it, search for pattern. Discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. Data analysis was done in May 2013. Individual data was read thoroughly. Content analysis was implemented in this research.

Berg (1989) mentions that, content analysis requires explicit rules called criteria of selection, which must be formally established before the actual analysis of data. Basically, it is the process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data.

Deductive approach of content analysis was used in this research in order to achieve complex data as research finding or development of summary themes which are generally inherited from raw data, also known as data reduction. Deductive approach involved collecting and analyzing data to put into three different categories based on research questionnaire. (Hyde, 2000.)

Result obtained was categorized into three different category as knowledge, source of information and cultural practices about menstruation among adolescent girls of age (15-18). Eventually, Information from the raw data was placed in respective category of research questionnaire as result of study.

Each essay form for participant comprises 2 pages (in average) which were of A4 size. Every written document form of essay was read by the author(s) several times. Quotes from the participants about their personal experience

were translated into English and kept as it was. Translation of sentences from Nepalese to English was done being careful in order to avoid any form of inaccuracy and misunderstanding. Repeated content of categories from essay were copied and pasted all together. **(See appendix 1)**

## **5 RESULTS OF STUDY**

The content was divided into 3 main categories as following:

### **5.1 Knowledge and understanding of menstruation**

Majority of participants had written that menstrual cycle is a natural phenomenon of periodic discharge of blood which starts during the adolescence period. Many of the respondents think that first menstruation starts by the age of 10 -15 years. Few of the female participants wrote that menstrual cycle is an important process in a female's life because one cannot be a mother in future without having it. Most of the girl who participated stated that, blood coming out of the body during menstrual phase is ideally impure and hence as a waste material it is excreted outside of body every month.

*"Menstruation is impure blood coming out of body".*

However, there were also few girls who think that it is a natural gift to women. Those who cannot have it can have problems associated to reproductive organs and are victims of disease associated to reproductive

health. Some of the participants said that menstruation cycle is influenced by factors like heredity, obesity and food habits.

*“Blood coming out of our body periodically which starts during our adolescence period at age of 10 to 15 which lasts for 3 to 5 days is called menstruation cycle”*

Most of the participants mentioned that they were more concerned about nutritious diet especially during menstrual period and light physical exercises.

*“My mother told me to eat iron rich food and warm soup as there is loss of blood”.*

*“I do light exercise like yoga postures which helps me to minimize pain.”*

Almost all the participants believed that menstrual hygiene was important to prevent leaking of blood from undergarments which normally lasts for 3 to 5 days.

*“We have to change undergarments frequently and put cotton cloth or pad in order to prevent leaking of blood.”*

There were few participants who have mentioned that antiseptic liquid should be used to wash undergarments during menstruation. All of them feel that the periodic cycle is a painful process to bear every month which one cannot avoid. Moreover, special attention towards nutritious diet and light exercise are also the components illustrated by most of the respondents in regard to menstrual hygiene and sanitation.

*“I leave class or skip from school when it is too painful and stay at home when I have to endure the menstrual pain.”*

*“I prefer staying at home for 3 days because it is embarrassing to go to toilet several times and whole class will know that I am having my periods.”*

Every female participant seemed to be aware of taking painkillers if the pain is intolerable during menstruation period. However taking painkiller is the last step when household method of relieving pain is not working anymore. Maximum number of participants claimed that taking painkillers could be dangerous as it might create long term problems in their reproductive life. Some also mentioned that menstruation pain subsides itself as it is a natural process and one should not take painkiller every month for minimal pain.

*“I prefer natural remedy rather than pain killer every month as it does not have side effects like painkiller.”*

*“I take painkiller only if my pain is not subsided by natural remedy.”*

Majority of the girls said that because menstrual cycle is considered as a matter of untouchable in the society they are living. Therefore they are bound to follow all the traditional rules and remain aloof even after knowing that it is a natural phenomenon because they cannot go against their parent or society.

*“We respect our family and the social norms so we have to follow this system of untouchable as a part of our life during menstrual cycle.”*

## 5.2 Source of information

Every participant had written that menstrual hygiene and sanitation is a crucial topic which can only be discussed among females only. Maximum number of respondents claimed that boys are laughing at such topic so it can be a matter of shame when one opens menstruation topic at classroom or other settings for example at home in presence of a male member.

Majority of participants stated that they get information about menstrual hygiene primarily from their mother or their elder sister at home. Few of the participants did not have any idea about menstruation before their first menstruation started and were very much scared when they first saw blood in their undergarments.

*“When I was in my seventh grade, I was playing in ground and I had blood in my skirt, after that mother told me I had menstruation which is normal. “*

*“My mom taught me how to put on pads and how to dispose it after use, she also said to me to clean the pubic area with water after urine.”*

Some of the participant had written that they came to know about menstrual cycle from incident occurring to their friend at classroom and also being explained by female teachers at school.

*“when I was 10 year old, one of my friend had blood in her white dress inside classroom, it was very embarrassing in front of boys and female teacher asked all the boys to go to another class and helped her.”*

Many participants claimed that they did not talk about menstrual issues when health teacher in their classroom was male and were compelled to ask other female teachers if they had any question about menstrual cycle. Some of the participant also mentioned that they would escape those class taught by male teacher when they had to listen about reproductive health and menstrual issues. Few of the respondent stated that they could not face teacher when there was discussion on classroom about menstrual issues and simply bend their head towards bench or floor.

*“I was embarrassed to talk about my period and hence I stared at bench or floor during the whole class to escape questioning to the teacher “.*

Many of the females also responded that they had to search on internet about menstrual hygiene and its management when they could not approach to their teachers and did not find adequate answer from their mother or sister.

*“I went to cyber cafe and found information about menstruation cycle and its management from Internet.”*

### **5.3 Practices and taboos associated to menstruation**

Maximum number of respondents commonly stated that, they had to remain isolated for 14 days without touching any other utensil except their own. They had to avoid salt for many days during the first menstrual cycle.



*“Mother said that eating salt during first menstruation will affect the reproductive organ and I was not provided any salty food at all for 13 days.”*

*“I lived 14 days of my life only eating sweet food all because of my first menstruation. “*

According to many of the participants, experience of having first menstruation as living in dark and isolated room for 12 to 14 days was the most difficult to follow about menstrual cycle.

*“I was put into dark room by my mother saying that I can't touch anything and just stay quietly in a separate room and I can come out only when it is dark.”*

*“I was crying most of the time when I had my first menstruation because I was like jailed in my own house.”*

Most of them stated that, it aroused the feeling of untouchable and as if menstruation is something sinful during first menstruation.

*“I had my separate plate, spoon and glass to feed myself during the period of menstrual cycle.”*

*“I could not talk to my brother and father for 14 days when I had my first menstruation which was really frustrating. “*

There were many girls who told that they had to become absent in school for 14 days during first menstrual cycle.

*“I omitted study for 14 days during my first menstrual cycle and I could not sit on the final assessment of my class.”*

Majority of participants claimed, they could not enter kitchen and have holiday from household activities for 3 days.

*"We cannot go to Kitchen for 3 days as everything will be impure when we touch it."*

Few of the participants illustrated that they have enough time for social gathering within girls and share about menstrual experience as there is no need to be at home all the time being untouchable for four days.

*"whenever I have my periods, I don't have to be at home all time and help mother to cook, so I am free."*

Majority of the girls said that they were following the traditional method to relief the pain such as application of hot water bag, chewing fenugreek seeds, drinking warm liquids and so on.

*"I cannot imagine my period without hot water bags because backache and lower stomach pain is so annoying without hot water bag."*

There were much of the girls who had to practice avoidance of religious activities during menstrual cycle.

*"I cannot go to temple or attend religious functions during my menstrual cycle."*

*"I have to withdraw myself from religious offering during menstruation when everybody is enjoying, putting red vermillion at their foreheads."*

Most of the participants have adequate knowledge about sanitary behavior of menstruation cycle and are able to access in their own what are good practices

and what are the malpractices. Most of the participants are aware of the physiology of menstruation process and factors influencing the menstrual cycle such as heredity, obesity and nutritional habits.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

There were various factors influencing, knowledge and practices of menstruation among Nepalese adolescence girls. Majority of the girls understood about the physiology and importance of menstruation. However, there are also few participants who assume that it is an impure blood coming out of body. This shows insufficient knowledge about the topic among the participants as they are not aware of the menstrual process. We compared the facts proposed by Adhikari (2007) with the findings of our study about cultural issue, based on research questionnaire. The result from this study matched with the literature review. Raut and Tandon (2011) states that, isolation and restriction of adolescent girls are prevalent in Nepal. Respondents from our study also shared the experience of isolation and restrictions during menstrual cycle. Hence from the comparison between literature review and findings of our study, aloof and isolation during first menstruation was found to be so deeply rooted.

Girls missed school for 14 days during first menstruation despite knowing the fact that menstruation is a natural process (Burbank, 2002). It supported the findings of the study in regard to cultural practices. Absenteeism was mentioned by most of the participants during menstrual period. According to the data represented by UNICEF (2011), there is a huge gap between

attendances of girls at primary level as high as 70% to that of the girls attending at secondary level with 38 %. Following the traditional practices, when one has to leave school for 14 days like a compulsion during menstrual cycle, one of the major reasons could be menstrual cycle. In regard to the data presented by UNICEF (2011), use of improved sanitation facilities (rural and urban) in total was 31 %. The question already arises how difficult it might be for the rest of the population without having proper toilet at school.

In conclusion, we found that females don't like to discuss menstrual issue and reproductive issue in front of male member. Similarly, mother as pioneer informant about menstruation was likely to teach what she had followed and what she was preached by her mother during her adolescence. From the literature review we found that mother were primary source of information regarding menstruation. (Mazzulo, 2011.)

Participants, parents and school authorities should understand the influence of menstruation towards absenteeism of adolescent girls. There should be awareness program as implications of the result from our study. The findings of our study were limited to lower belt of Nepal. We tried to explore about cultural practices adopted during menstruation among adolescent girls.

## **6.1 Credibility, dependability and transferability**

According to Liamputtong and Rumbold (2008), credibility refers to the faithfulness to the description of the phenomenon in question. Choosing participants with age limit of 15 to 18 years increases the possibility of wide

expression on the research question as they all have gone through menstruation phase.

As stated by Graneheim and Lundman (2004), selection of appropriate data collection method and amount of data plays an important role in building credibility. Before writing the essay, all the participants were in contact with the author. There were two different sessions of meeting. The participants were able to develop trust and confidence to write an essay about delicate issues of menstruation. It helped a lot for the participants to explain their experiences in their own words.

Graneheim and Lundman (2004) stated that credibility of research findings correlates with how categories and themes signify data, that is, no relevant data have been misplaced, excluded or inclusion of irrelevant data. The author, firstly, translated the raw material from Nepali to English, and then, reviewed all transcripts several times in order to get categories correctly. The information that fixed the categories was re-examined that covered all valuable data. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) mentioned that transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other groups. Transferability could be facilitated with clear description of context and cultural issues, selection and characteristic features of participants, data collection method and analysis process.

In this study, the descriptions of all the parts of the study were mentioned precisely and being specified to adolescent females. Thus, the results of the study can be used in other studies focusing adolescent females in cultural context of Nepal. This study might have some limitations due to the fact that only specific geographical area (low lands) was used as study site for the

Research. The extensive the study site, the wider it becomes to analyze cultural issues of menstruation from different geographical region of Nepal.

## **6.2 Ethical consideration**

Ethical issue plays an important role when the research is associated to interaction or personal belonging from people (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). In this study, the formal application for the research was submitted to Dynamic education institution. Thus the institution was formally informed about the aim and the procedure of the study. Informed consent forms were given to the selected participants at institution and requested to be filled up by the guardians of the participants on behalf of the student. Furthermore explanations about this study were given to the participants in reference with their free will to participate and also they could ask questions in case of misunderstanding.

Prior explanation about the study clarified the concept about the research topic among the participants and hence helped them to write essay in the specific topic with their own experience. These participants under the guidance of their parents signed a form of consent showing the integrity, confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study with the right of discontinuation at anytime as per their free will.

### 6.3 Conclusion

As per the information provided by the participants, we can clearly say that mothers are the pioneer source of informants to their daughters when it comes about educating their own girl child about any reproductive health issues, secondly there are female teachers at school and also last but not least, information and experience sharing from colleagues or elder sister are of great help for the adolescent girls of Nepal.

Furthermore, internet access also has been considered a great source to find out information about menstrual hygiene and sanitation. Even mothers have some misconception about menstrual hygiene and for example avoiding the salty food, absenteeism from school. It is the responsibility of school to consult with guardians and address the solution of absenteeism of adolescence girls. Respective school should encourage awareness program among the guardian.

Participants mentioned that menstruation issues could not be discussed among male members of the society. They also stated that female take menstruation issue as a matter of shame and underestimate them following the orthodox practices. Male teachers who were responsible to take health education class have less initiation to discuss about menstrual issues because of female students.

## 6.4 Recommendation

This study was about the knowledge and understanding, source of information and cultural practices about menstrual hygiene and sanitation, in regard to the adolescence girls of Nepal. The topic is a very sensitive issue and the research was limited to research questionnaire. Findings of the study help to analyze the knowledge, understanding of cultural practices about menstruation in Nepal. Meanwhile, curriculum generating body and school authorities should be focusing the female adolescence to actively participate and openly talk about menstrual issues and reproductive health. Teacher responsible for health education should be educating all the students without being biased to any age or gender.

Mother of adolescence girls are the major source of information so they should be provided with adequate information about menstrual cycle. Misconceptions about menstruation should be cleared so that she can preach right information to her girl child. Government or non governmental agencies can launch the awareness activities in different sector. Concerned school can also play a vital role in order to provide adequate information to the guardian (involvement of both male and female member) of adolescence girl as an important step.

However, findings from this study can also lead to development of other studies such as finding the number of absenteeism of girl child in various schools because of menstrual problems. It requires a huge budget and human resources to find out but it can be a great milestone to do research on topic



about menstrual problems. It could be one of the causes of dropout rates among female students in school.

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## APPENDIX 2 Permission to perform the research

Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences,  
School of Health and Social Studies,  
Jyväskylä, Finland.

Email F5388@jamk.fi

25<sup>th</sup> march2013

Dynamic Educational Institute,  
Biratnagar, Nepal.

### PERMISSION TO PERFORM RESEARCH STUDY IN YOUR INSTITUTION

Dear sir/madam,

We are student of Jyvaskyla University of Applied Sciences, and studying degree program in Nursing. We would like to write our Bachelor's thesis on the topic "What, when, where, and how do teenage girls get knowledge about menstrual hygiene practices in Nepal. A Qualitative research in Dynamic educational institution, high school level female students". The objectives of this study is to find out level of knowledge about menstrual hygiene among Nepalese adolescence girls ,the source of information about menstrual hygiene and also to find out what traditional menstrual practices are prevalent and followed by the adolescence girls in Nepal. I am requesting your kind permission to collect research data in your educational Institution between the month of April and May, 2013. The research data is to be collected through essay writing by 12 to 20 participants in your educational institute. The selection criteria specified for this study include

- High school level females from age 15 to 20
- Volunteer participants
- Consent approved from parents and the respective participant.

The data will be collected and utilized for research purposes only and will be anonymously dealt. We are with firm conviction that this request will get your kind approval.

Thank you for your kind consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Priti Koirala, Sona G.C.

+ (358)440540267



### **APPENDIX 3 Letter of information to participants**

Jyväskylä, Finland.

Email F5388@jamk.fi

12th April 2013

Dear Participant,

We are student of Jyvaskyla University of Applied Sciences, and studying degree program in Nursing. We are writing our Bachelor's thesis on the topic "What, when, where, and how do teenage girls get knowledge about menstrual hygiene practices in Nepal.--A Qualitative research in Dynamic Educational Complex, High school level girl students". The objectives of this study is to find out level of knowledge about menstrual hygiene among Nepalese adolescence girls ,the source of information about menstrual hygiene and also to find out what traditional menstrual practices are prevalent and followed by the adolescence girls in Nepal. After the participant has agreed to be involved in this study, participant will be asked to write an essay about the topic in Nepal language. Participation is strictly voluntary and there are no known risks to participate in the study. Participating in this study may not benefit the participants directly but it is helpful for the recommendations to the school, policy making about menstrual hygiene in educational scenario and the findings from this research can also become helpful for other researches about menstrual hygiene in context of Nepal.

Participants are free to withdraw anytime from writing the essay if they find something objectionable or which make them feel uncomfortable. Essay writing will last for 60 minutes and there are no remunerations for taking part in the study. However, each participant will get a packet of sanitary pad as an

incentive for involvement in this study. Information obtained from participants will be used purposely for this study and your confidentiality or anonymity is guaranteed.

Each participant is asked to sign a consent form to confirm his or her consent to the written essay before commencement. Participants may contact the researchers or the head of Department of Nursing if they have any question, concerns or complaints about the research procedures.

Thank you for your participation

Yours truly,

Priti Koirala, Sona G.C

+(358)440540267.

## APPENDIX 4 Consent form

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have been told about the study and know why it is being done and what I will be asked to do. I also know that I do not have to do it if I do not want to. If I have any questions about the study I can ask Priti Koirala, who is one of the researcher of this study and I am also aware of the fact that, I can stop it at any time if I don't want to be involved in this study. I understand that this involvement will not hamper me and my studies at all and what I have written in the essay will be anonymous and confidential. I assume that this essay will be solely used for the research purpose and nothing else. My parents/guardians know that I am being asked to be in this study.

PLEASE SIGN BELOW IF YOU AGREE TO BE IN THIS STUDY.

We will give you a copy of this form so you can take it with you whether you agree or not.

SIGN BELOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

**Participants signature.....**

**Guardian signature.....**

**Date .....**

**Date.....**