

Chhaupadi: A Menstrual Taboo in Far Western Nepal

Yasoda Gautam*

Lecturer, NPI-NSH College of Nursing and Health Science, Chitwan Nepal.

*Corresponding author

Yasoda Gautam, Lecturer, NPI-NSH College of Nursing and Health Science, Chitwan Nepal, E-mail: paudelyasoda@gmail.com.

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Abstract

Chhaupadi is a practice where girls/women are not allowed to enter inside the house, touch water and milk for 4 to 7 days during their menstruation period. They must stay in a hut outside, identified as a Chhaupadi house. A mixed method study (QUAN+qual), was conducted to find out the practice of school going female adolescents regarding chhaupadi practice in Doti District of Far-western region of Nepal. It was found that Practice of chhaupadi ritual was significantly associated with ethnicity (OR: 54.667 95% CI, 5.990-498.909), education of father (OR: 8.743 95% CI, 1.140-67.076), education of mother (OR:8.069 95% CI, 1.814-35.892), occupation of father (OR: 3.337 95% CI, 1.262-8.823) and family Income (OR: 4.085 95%CI, 1.576-10.589). The findings also revealed that chhaupadi ritual has been practiced by in spite of the fact that it has serious effect in the health of the female. Also, it has threatened the security of the women, sometimes resulting brutal consequences like rape and death of the women. The study concluded that beside all other factors responsible for continuation of chhaupadi ritual, there is a strong superstitious belief that various miss happenings will occur due to violation of chhaupadi ritual. Therefore, it is necessary to increase awareness by lunching awareness programs and should be emphasized in school curriculum as well.

Keywords: chhauadi, menstrual taboo, practice, perception.

Introduction

Adolescent has been defined as the period between 10 to 19 years of age (WHO,2007). It is the period of physical, psychological and social maturing from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents account for nearly one fifth of the world's population. In Nepal they account for 23.62% of the population. Adolescent female populations are an important portion of reproductive age group. Health Behavior and practices during menstruation vary from culture to culture. Literacy is one of the important factors associated with various social stigmas and myths regarding menstruation and chhaupadi practice [1]. In addition, menstrual practices are influenced by many misconceptions, rituals and cultural restrictions resulting in female population remaining ignorant of the scientific facts about menstruation and hygienic health practices [2].

There are strong religious and cultural beliefs linked to Chaupadi ritual in Nepal. Chhaupadi is a practice where girls/women are not allowed to enter inside the house, touch water and milk for 4 to 7 days during their menstruation period [3].

Far-western development region represent the highly prevalence areas of Chhaupadi ritual. Some in the far west still believe that a god or goddess become angry if the practice is violated, which could result in a shorter life, the death of livestock or destruction of crops (5). In spite of advancement in science and technology, still there is prevalence of chhaupadi ritual which further foster gender

based violence and prevent women from adoption of modern way of life.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were

1. Identify the practice of chhaupadi ritual
2. Identify the perception towards chhaupadi ritual

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frame work adopted for the study was based on health belief model [4].

Review of Literature

Pandit, 2014 A study conducted on Chhaupadi and delivery system and effect on women's health in Bajura, District in Nepal reported that majority of the respondents(73.7%) stayed in chhaupadi hut for 5 days. The distance between house to chhaupadi hut was less than 1 minute in majority of cases (89.1%) There were no toilet facilities (91.4%). Majority of respondents did not like chhaupadi system (78.3%) [5].

Reported that 77% were kept inside the cowshed, 14 % reported that they were kept in a separate room inside the house, and the rest 9% were kept in a neighbor's house. Eighty percent of the respondents claimed that they were not allowed to go inside the temple. While, 77% reported that they were not allowed to go inside the pray room followed by 70% not allowed in the kitchen, 48% not allowed in the social gatherings and 19% were restricted

in the schools. About 76% of the respondents reported restriction in eating and drinking milk and other milk/dairy products [6].

A qualitative study on Chhaupadi Pratha: Mahila Astitwa mathi Prahar revealed that they have the strong superstitious belief of mishappening due to angriness of god. Chhaupadi is the result of illiteracy and culture. Although chhaupadi ritual is believed to be connected with poverty but the females of two storey building were also staying in seclusion so it was not solely depends on poverty but on strong superstitious belief [3].

Reported that Chhaupadi system, a traditional practice prevalent in far west and some parts of mid west region in Nepal, in which women and girls are considered as impure and polluted during their period As like lower caste who are treated as Untouchable (nachhune manchey), women are treated in similar way in each period of their menstruation and delivery [7].

Methodology Research Design

A mixed research (QUAN + qual) paradigm was adopted where quantitative approach was used to describe the practice regarding chhaupadi among the female adolescents, as well as focus group discussions were conducted for qualitative research design to explore their perception towards chhaupadi ritual.

Setting

Research study was carried out in Doti District.

Population

The population comprised of female adolescents from grade 8, 9 & 10 from three public secondary schools namely Shree Saraswoti higher secondary school, Sanagaun, Shree Sajendreshwar higher secondary school, khirshaini and Shree maglekh higher secondary school, Dipeleshwar.

Sample Size

A total number of 185 female adolescents were selected.

Sampling Technique

Cluster sampling technique was used to select the subject for quantitative design. Each of the public schools of Doti districts were taken as clusters. There were 68 clusters and among these 68 clusters 3 clusters were selected randomly and all female adolescents from grade 8, 9 and 10 who meet the inclusion criteria were the subjects for the study. And participants for qualitative section were selected using nested sampling.

Description of the Tool

Part I: semi Structured Interview Schedule for demographic data.

Part-II: Semi Structured interview schedule to assess practice of chhaupadi ritual.

Part-III:Unstructured guideline to conduct focus group discussion.

Data Collection

Study was conducted in a four week period after getting formal permission.

Findings of the Study

Table 1: Practice regarding Chhaupadi

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Practicing chhaupadi ritual		
Yes	165	89.2
No	20	10.8
Does during chhaupadi ritual*(n=165)		
Stay in seclusion	165	100
Eating dry food	12	7.3
Wearing same cloth	95	57.6
working outside the house	157	92.2
Don't during Chhaupadi*		
Religious practice	185	100
Direct access to kitchen and food	169	91.4
Touching other people ,animal and plants	148	80.0
Reason for practice		
Religious belief	104	63.0
Prevent adverse effect	27	16.2
Pressure from other	34	20.8
Type of diet restricted *		
Dairy product	185	100.0
Meat related items	14	7.6
Vegetables and fruits	87	87.0
Reason for restriction on diet		
Religious reason	116	62.7
Prevent adverse effect on health	11	5.9
Prevent adverse effect to cattle	21	11.4
Pressure from other	37	20.0

*Multiple responses

Table 1 displays the practice regarding chhaupadi. About the practice of chhaupadi ritual majority of the respondents (89.2%) practiced chhaupadi ritual. Regarding the activities done during chhaupadi ritual all of the respondents (100%) stayed in seclusion. Talking about the restriction applied during menstruation all of the respondents (100.0%) were not allowed to do religious practice.

Table 2: Seclusion Practice during Menstruation

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Duration of seclusion		
3 to 4 days	43	23.2
5 to 6 days	33	17.8
7 to 10 days	104	56.2
More than 10days	5	2.7
Place of residence during seclusion		
Livestock quarter	141	76.2
Chhaupadi hut	24	13.0
Separate room of same home	13	7.0

Place as usual	7	3.8
Distance of chhaupadi hut from home (n=24)		
Less than one minute	22	95.7
2 to 5 minute	2	4.3

Table 2 reveals seclusion related practice during menstruation. About the duration of seclusion more than half of the respondents (56.2%) stayed in seclusion for 7 to 10 days followed by 3 to 4 days by (23.2%). Regarding the place of residence during seclusion majority of the respondents (76.2%) stayed in livestock quarter followed by chhaupadi hut (13.0%). Talking about the distance of chhaupadi hut from home most of huts (95.7%) were within one minute of distance.

Table 3: Perception of Adolescents regarding Chhaupadi

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Perceived Health effect of seclusion practice		
Bad effect on health	138	74.6
No effect on health	47	25.4
Likelines of the chhaupadi ritual		
Like	26	14.1
Do not like	159	85.9
Reason for liking the ritual (n=26)		
Culture	20	76.9
Good for Health	6	23.1
Reason for not liking the ritual (n=159)		
Taboo	35	22.0
Bad for health	124	78.0

Table 3 shows perception of female adolescents regarding chhaupadi. Regarding the perceived health effect of chhaupadi ritual on health, three out of four respondents (74.6%) considered that the ritual had bad effect on health. Majority of the respondent (85.9%) did not like the chhaupadi ritual. Among the respondents who like the ritual, majority of the respondents (76.9%) said they liked it because it was a culture. Talking about the reason for not liking the ritual more than three quarter of the respondents (78%) considered that it was bad for health followed by taboo or bad tradition (22.0%).

Table 5: Factors Associated with Practice of Chhaupadi Ritual

Concepts	Chhaupadi Ritual		P value	OR (95%CI)
	Practice n=165	Do not practicen=20		
Age group				
<18 years	143	14	0.057	2.786 (0.969,8.012)
>18years	22	6		
Religion				
Hindu	160	18	0.168#	3.556 (0.643,19.672)
Christian	5	2		
Ethnicity				
Other than Janajati	164	15	<0.001*#	54.667 (5.990,498.909)

Education of father				
Illiterate	52	1	0.037*#	8.743 (1.140,67.076)
Literate	113	19		
Education of mother				
Illiterate	78	2	0.006*#	8.069 (1.814,35.892)
Literate	87	18		
Occupation of father				
Agriculture	106	7	0.015*	3.337 (1.262,8.823)
Other than agriculture	59	13		
Occupation of mother				
Agriculture and home maker	159	19	0.764#	1.395 (0.159,12.213)
Other than Agriculture and home maker	6	1		
House hold level food security				
Upto 12 month	127	9	0.002*	4.085 (1.576,10.589)
More than 12 month	38	11		

*p significant at <0.05 level of significance

Fisher exact test applied

Table 4 displays the association between socio-demographic variables and practice of chhaupadi ritual. No significant association was found between age group of the respondent and practice of chhaupadi ritual. Similarly no significant difference was identified with religion of the respondent. However practice of chhaupadi ritual showed significant association with ethnicity. Likewise educational status of father, (OR 8.743, 95%CI: 1.140, 67.076) education of mother (OR 8.069, 95% CI: 1.814, 35.892) household level food security (OR 4.085, 95% CI: 1.576, 10.589) were significantly associated with the practice of the ritual.

Discussion of the Findings

About the practice of chhaupadi ritual, majority of the respondents (89.2%) practiced chhaupadi ritual. Similarly Survey report of Action works Nepal (2013) reported that 100% of the respondents were practicing the chhaupadi ritual but they do not want to disclose it. Regarding the activities done during chhaupadi ritual all of the respondents stayed in seclusion. Similarly the study done in Chitwan district of Nepal revealed that 92.7% of the respondents stayed in seclusion during their period [8]. Talking about the restriction applied during menstruation all of the respondents were not allowed to do religious practice, more than 90% of the respondents did not have direct access to food and about 80% of the respondents were not allowed to touch other people, animal and plants. Similarly a study done in Rural Area of Wardha District, India revealed that Maximum number of girls (87%) did not attend religious functions during their cycle [9]. Concerning the reason for practice of chhaupadi ritual majority of respondents (63%) from quantitative section believed that there was religious belief for the practice of the ritual. Likewise qualitative section noted that community people had strong superstitious belief behind the practice of chhaupadi ritual. On the topic of dietary restriction 100% of the respondents were restricted to one or more type of food. About the type of diet restricted all of the respondents were not allowed to eat dairy product. On the same way qualitative portion

of current study also revealed that there was dietary restriction during menstruation. Participants from all focus group discussion agreed that menstruating female were not allowed to have milk and curd. Similar result had been observed by the study of Pandit C. (2014) in Bajura district of Nepal. Considering the likeliness of the ritual majority of the respondent (85.9%) did not like the ritual and only about 14% of the respondents liked it. Similar type of results had been revealed by another study which reported that 78.3% of the respondents did not like the ritual [5]. No significant association was found between age group of the respondent and practice of chhaupadi ritual. Similar finding was revealed by the study of Chherti et al.(2013) [3]. On the same way educational status of father, (OR 8.743, 95% CI: 1.140 - 67.076) education of mother (OR 8.069, 95% CI: 1.814-35.892) family income (OR 4.085, 95% CI: 1.576-10.589) were significantly associated with the practice of the ritual. Similarly qualitative section of this study revealed that it was revealed that awareness can modify the ritual. Which means as the educational level of the villagers will improved the chhaupadi ritual will get modified.

Conclusion

This is a mixed method study conducted among school going female adolescents. The findings revealed that chhaupadi ritual has been practiced by the people of different ethnic group as a cultural practice in spite of the fact that it may increase vulnerability to infection and insecurity. Although people aware of these all consequences, they are not able to avoid it because of strong superstitious belief of miss happenings for not practicing this ritual. The study revealed that this ritual is in transitional phase and increased awareness and improvement in educational status can modify it. Therefore there is the necessity to make the community people aware of this malpractice and should emphasized in school curriculum also.

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