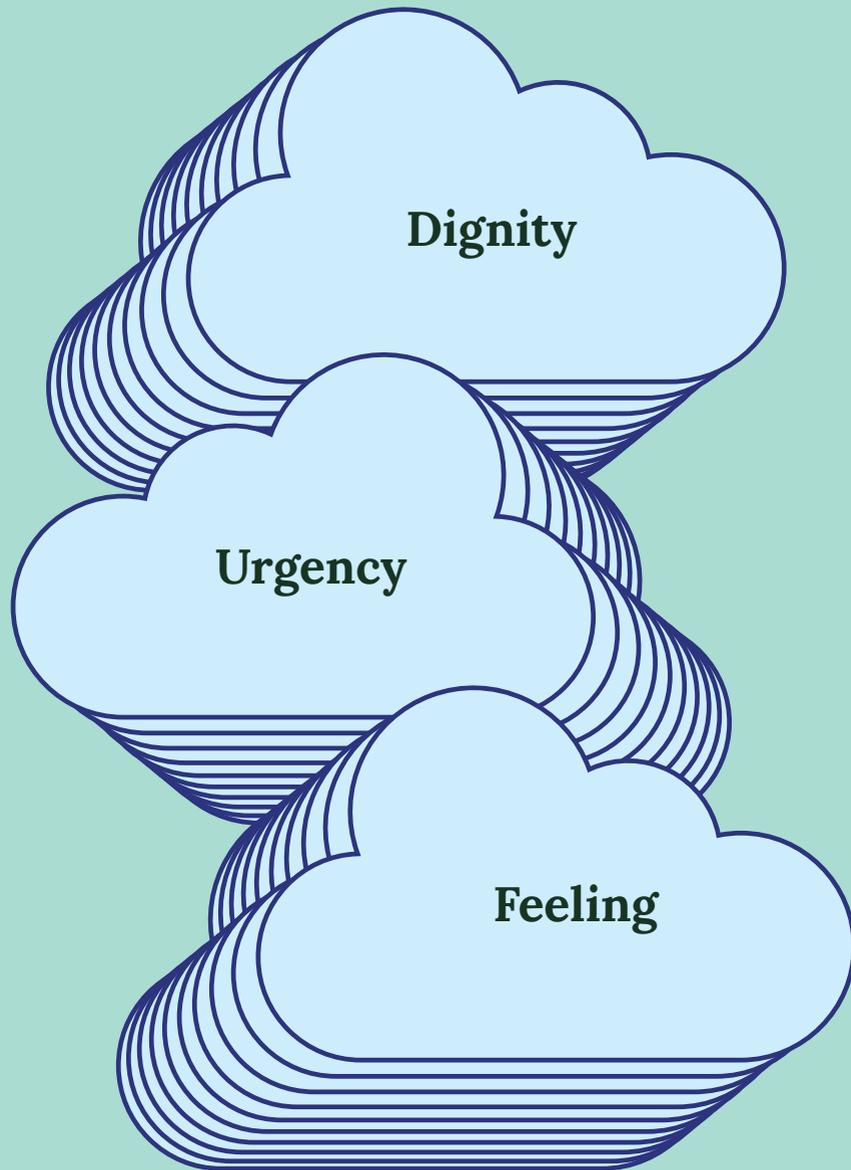


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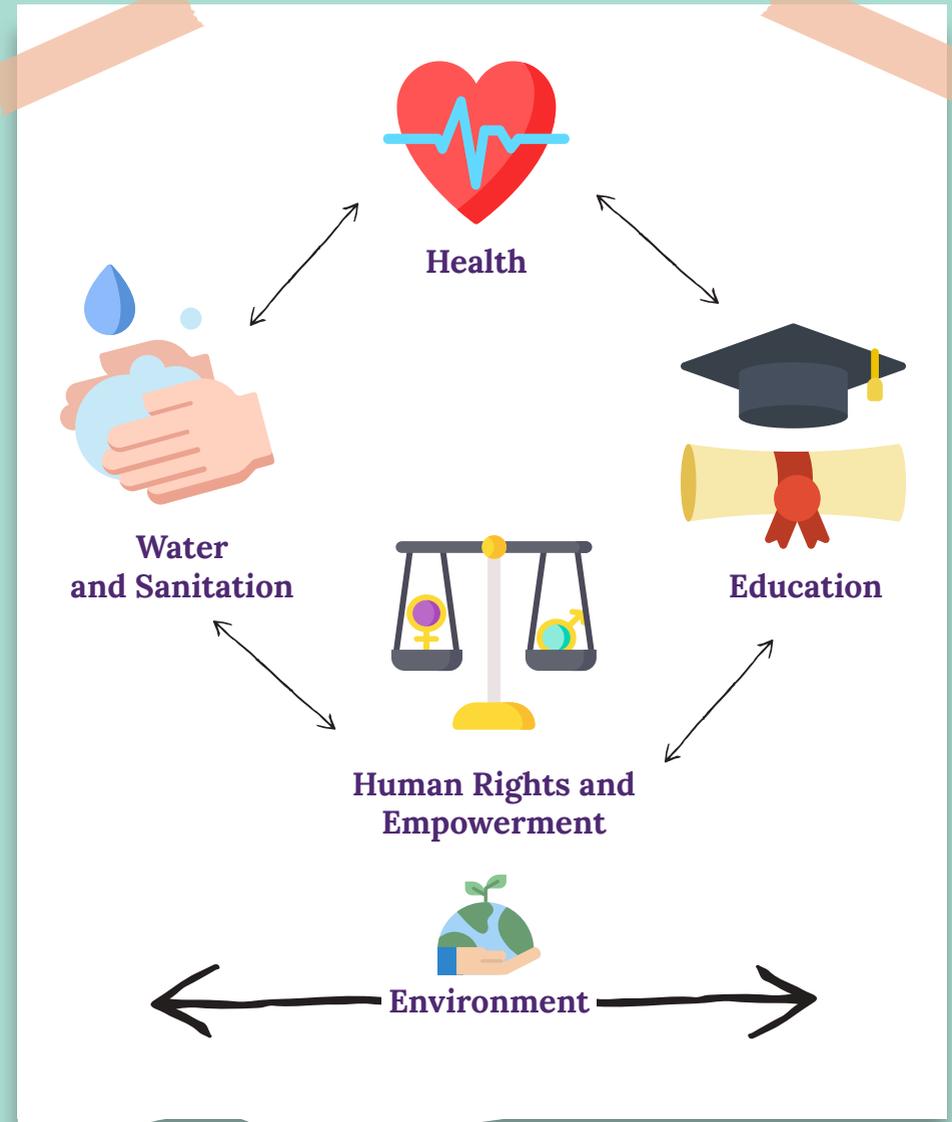
Dignified Menstruation

With voluntary contributions from Radha Paudel



Dignified Menstruation Chart

Beyond the infrastructure and hygiene



Dignified menstruation

Framework developed by activist Radha Paudel

Dignity During Menstruation

What is dignified menstruation?

Dignity is the right of a person to be valued and respected for their own sake, and to be treated ethically whether or not they are menstruating. Being shamed into thinking that you are less valued and respected because of a natural process like menstruation is a direct cause of undignified menstruation. Regardless of aspects like class, religion, and race, menstrual stigma and restrictions are practised to varying degrees globally. A key role in breaking this is understanding that menstrual blood is not impure and that menstruation is a biological milestone for women.

Misunderstanding periods and the fear of menstrual blood leads to restriction on things like mobility, food, and activities. This can lead to long term negative consequences in people's lives as they are menstruating. This can lead to both physical and psychological suffering manifested at various levels such as feeling disgusted, shocked, surprised, low, absent in school/work, etc. People should be able to have periods without it disrupting their daily lives every month.

Within the topic of period poverty and menstrual exclusion, a lot of the focus is placed on menstrual hygiene, period products, and the tax placed on menstrual products. While these are important elements to tackle, they do not guarantee dignified menstruation. More effort needs to be placed in acknowledging and educating society to view menstruation through a lens that does not involve any stigma, taboo, or discrimination.

For example, in order to improve access to education, the Kenyan Government has been distributing menstrual products to all school girls since 2017. While in theory,

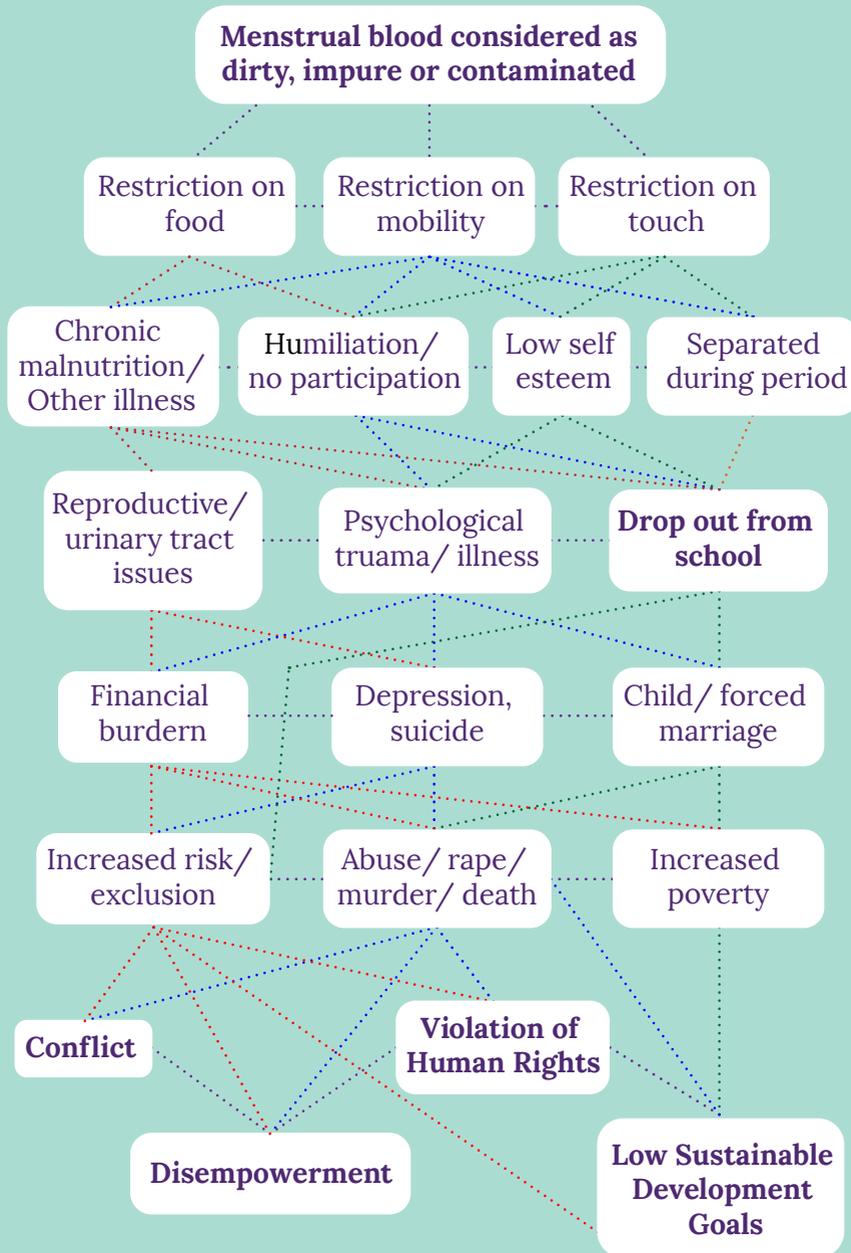
this should have made great leaps in dissolving menstrual exclusion, shame, and stigma, there is more to be done. In September 2019, a 14-year-old schoolgirl who had her first period during school lesson was reportedly branded 'dirty' and expelled from the classroom. Due to being ridiculed by both her teacher and the boys in her class, the girl's mother said her daughter took her own life after she returned home because of the menstrual stigma and shame after she stained her clothes.

Even with the access to menstrual products, there is still shame and stigma attached to the act of menstruation. This is why any menstrual education must tackle the issue of menstrual blood through the lens of dignity.

Activist Radha Paudel explains that: "*As the virtue of a human being, each girl, woman, and menstruator deserves dignity during menstruation. It is a state free from any forms of abuse, discrimination, violence associated with menstruation.*" In other words, there should not be a difference between the five days in a month when they are menstruating to the rest of the month. Here is how Radha Paudel explains the ways to achieve dignified menstruation through the three 'P's:

- **Principally**, menstruation should be viewed as a *human rights concern*.
- **Practically**, by considering the complexity and multifaceted nature of menstruation, intervention should *address both immediate and long term issues* - water, sanitation, education, human rights, and empowerment should go simultaneously under the overarching goal to achieving dignified menstruation.
- **Psychologically**, in order to cultivate the culture of gender equality and justice, the dialogue on dignified menstruation should start for girls and boys from a young age.

The Urgency of Dignity in Menstruation



Dignified menstruation

Dignified menstruation

Framework developed by activist Radha Paudel

DEAR BIG SISTERS,

Women in Nepal practice menstruation separation norms where for at least the first 3-5 days of them bleeding they are made to "live separately". Women would be restricted from entering the kitchen, sleeping on their beds and basically restricted from accessing many areas inside the house. Even the colloquial word for it is "Bahira niskeko" meaning "out of the house". The term explains itself explains it very well.

In my house, we are all women of menstruating age. There can be times when all of us have this cycle intersecting. In such a scenario, how can we run the household activities, starting with cooking food for ourselves, if we were restricted from entering the kitchen. If we choose to follow the traditional practice of remaining away from the kitchen, we would starve for days. This is not what we can afford. After analysing these practicalities of life, my family started to break the norm and enters the kitchen during the menstrual cycle. We are free to move around the house, cook, sleep on our own beds, wear any clothes we like or eat in any plates we choose. Can you imagine us being tagged as rebels for taking this step? This is how bad it used to be and it still is the case in many parts of Nepal today including the most advanced city Kathmandu.

**SUBMISSION BY
ANUJA, 29, NEPAL**

DEAR BIG SISTERS,

I knew the word and practices around menstruation when I was seven years old. I was so terrified from the hardships, restrictions during menstruation observed on my three sisters and mother. My mother shared me that I would have menstruation, as a curse from the god. I deeply traumatize and do not like to live as girl due to internalization of status of powerless, dehumanization than boys. Thus, I ran away from the home for attempting suicide.

**SUBMISSION BY
RADHA PAUDEL, NEPAL**

