

Isn't Menstrual Discrimination a Driver for Child Marriage?

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Abstract

This study is undertaken to examine the connections between child marriage and menstrual discrimination in policies and practices at national, regional and global levels. The four specific objectives are: i) to explore menstrual discrimination in countries that have high numbers of child marriages, ii) to examine the national policies and legal interventions against child marriage and menstrual discrimination, iii) to examine the networks advocating against child marriage with regards to menstrual discrimination, and iv) to assess the global policies and declarations against menstrual discrimination and child marriage. A qualitative approach with secondary resources reviews the issues in Bangladesh, India and Niger, countries which have the highest rate of child marriage. As well as the regional and global networks which are working to end child marriage, namely South Asia Initiative to End Violence, the African Union and Girls not Brides. Likewise, the study reviews the major international human rights instruments such as Human Rights Declaration 1948, Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Girls and Women 1979, Convention of Child Rights 1989 and Sustainable Developmental Goals 2016-2030. The worldwide scope and impact of discriminatory menstrual practices have been omitted from the policies, plans and activities of governments, international organizations and NGOs. Because menstrual discrimination has been used as justification to disempower women in the power structure and patriarchies, women have been left without a voice to negotiate their human rights, education, and socio-economic opportunities. Menstrual discrimination should be openly included in the discussion of the real drivers of early or child marriage.

Keywords: *Menstruation, Menstrual Discrimination, Child Marriage, Human Rights*

Setting the Context

Half of the population of this planet who were born with uterus and ovaries menstruate at some point in their lives and continue menstruating every month for about 40 years until they reach menopause. Menstruation has existed to ensure the reproduction of our species for millions of years. Mankind exists due to the presence of menstruation.

Yet there have also been many theories or courses of action over the centuries to consider menstruation a curse that is to be unrecognized, ignored, hidden, concealed, and stigmatized as a woman's issue or private issue for reasons of fear of the monthly flow or religion or culture that justify the denial of women's rights. Through the centuries, menstruation has been considered a bodily function that is dirty, impure, polluting, inferior, taboo, fearful, and unmentionable. Few scholars to this day explain menstruation as a source of pride, power or celebration for all humans.

Irrespective of the level of education, religion, region, class, etc., the majority of communities around the world practice discrimination against women during the days of menstruation with different names, forms and severity (GSCDM, 2019). Further, GSCDM (2019) associated menstrual discrimination with "taboos, stigma, shyness, abuses, restrictions that are associated with menstruation throughout the life cycle of menstruators." More importantly, menstruation is acknowledged as including complex and multifaceted phenomena and forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and violations of human rights.

Regardless of the underlying causes of menstrual discrimination, it impacts menstruators in many, mostly negative immediate and long term ways throughout all of the circumstances over her lifetime, 24/7 during 365 days every year. Menstrual discrimination is not only about five days of bleeding cycle or hygiene or health or the use of menstrual pads. Because of the breadth and depth of the systemic power of the patriarchy, the impact of menstrual discrimination is everywhere on every level: social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, technological, and so on. Often menstrual discrimination plays a role for cause and effect for many forms of SGBV, which augment with a spiral or multiplier effect. For instance, due to menstrual discrimination, girls suffer at least five days of interruption in formal and informal education which leads to failures or they are dropping out of educational opportunities that allow them to have career options and the acquiescence of farther that facilitate early or child marriage. Because of early or child marriage (starting at age 8 or 9), the menstruator is vulnerable to various forms of discrimination, stigmas and violence throughout her life. In other words, menstrual discrimination affects the physical, emotional,

mental and social health of the menstruators. This is yet to be recognized and acknowledged globally.

Child marriage is defined as a formal or informal union before the age of 18. Marriage before the age of 18 is considered a human rights violation, mostly affecting girls, and can lead to a lifetime of disadvantage and deprivation. Child brides are at high risk of experiencing poor health, bearing children at young ages which are not appropriate for their reproductive health, dropping out of school, earning less money over their lifetimes and living in poverty (Wodon et. al, 2017). There are also highly exposed to experience intimate partner violence, restriction on physical mobility, and limitation on decision-making ability. Besides this, they are disempowered and deprived of their basic rights according to the convention on the rights of the child (Wodon et. al, 2017). Child marriage is a fundamental barrier to the achievement of international commitments for gender equality and is accompanied by a significant and measurable economic development impact (Calimoutou, Liu & Mbu, 2016; International Planned Parenthood Federation [IPPF], 2006).

The determinants of child marriage include the absence of or low education, poverty, harmful practices including female genital mutilation (FGM), traditions of family honor, trafficking, and displacement. Inequitable social and gender norms play an important role in child marriage, affecting adolescent girls' wellbeing, educational attainment and protection against harmful practices.

Nevertheless, given the adverse implications of COVID-19 on the global economy and since poverty is one of the drivers of child marriage worldwide, cases of child marriages are expected to increase in vulnerable and poor communities, particularly in low-income countries.

Objectives

1. To explore menstrual discrimination in countries that have high numbers of child marriages;
2. To examine the national policies and legal interventions against child marriage and menstrual discrimination;
3. To examine the networks advocating against child marriage with regards to menstrual discrimination;
4. To assess the global policies, declarations at the global level such against menstrual discrimination and child marriage

Rational of the Study

GSCDM claimed that there is a strong connection between menstrual discrimination and child marriage. It acknowledged that child marriage is an outcome of menstrual discrimination since the girl's childhood where the power of the patriarchy takes away girls' bargaining capacity. Although several safeguards have been created through various institutions to prohibit child marriage, it has not decreased as intended. To examine the connection between menstrual discrimination and child marriage, this study is significant.

Methods

This study employed the qualitative approach where the secondary resources reviewed and explored the facts and information about menstrual discrimination and child marriage respectively. For a selection of countries, the team had chosen the few countries which have the highest rate of child marriages. For instance, Bangladesh and India have the highest rate of child marriage in South Asia. In Africa and globally, Niger has the highest rate of child marriage (UNICEF, n.d). With regards to the networks that are working towards ending child marriage at various levels, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence (SAIEVAC) was established and is operating in South Asia. In Africa, the African Union (AU) for ending child marriage 2013 (facilitated by Girls Not Brides) is working to end child marriage with 88 members in their networks respectively (African Union, 2013). Girls Not Brides is a global network since 2011 which has more than 1500 Civil Society Organizations all around the globe.

To examine the menstrual discrimination and child marriage addressed in international human rights instruments, the study focused on those most relevant with both themes such as UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) 1948, CEDAW (Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) 1979, CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) 1989, and SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 2016 – 2030. Despite having about a century of global history of intervention to stop child marriage, child marriage has not decreased as intended or invested. Therefore, further examination is overdue regarding the drivers of child marriage, its consequences, power dynamics between children and parents at home since childhood (UNICEF ROSA & UNFPA, 2019), and progress made, if any.

Key Findings

1. Menstrual Discrimination in Respective Countries; Bangladesh, India and Niger

Menstrual discrimination is practiced across the globe with different names, forms and severity (GSDM, 2019). The countries of this study are representative, but not exceptional. The taboos, intimidation, stigma and restrictions towards touching, eating, and mobility are the most common practices. Such discrimination is directed towards the menstruators, and can be observed through the communities' attitudes towards blood, the things they touch, eat, see, do or wear.

1.1. Menstrual Discrimination in Bangladesh

Both visible and invisible, overt and unspoken forms of menstrual discrimination are observed in Bangladesh. The Ritu Baseline Study (2017) cites the following: 76% of girls avoid physical exercise during menstruation; 68% avoid being near men and boys; 96% avoid religious activities; 40% of girls miss approximately three school days during menstruation and one-third perceive that menstrual problems interfere with their school performance; 59% avoid 'white' foods such as banana, egg, milk, and 53% avoid sour foods; and 32% of menstruating girls do not use the toilet at school when on their menstrual days. Likewise, menstrual discrimination is identified as non-work-related stress in the workplace in Bangladesh (Zaman & Mohiuddin, 2021). Similarly, adolescent girls remain absent from school during menstruation due to misconceptions about menstruation, family restrictions and inadequate hygiene facilities in school (Alam et al., 2017). The nominal interventions initiated to address menstrual discrimination that focuses on the availability of hygiene or pads merely address the most tangible things of menstruation and do not address the discrimination.

1.2. Menstrual Discrimination in India

As in Bangladesh, varieties of visible and invisible forms of menstrual discrimination practiced in India are widespread. In many communities of India, menstrual discrimination such as restricted to participate in activities in the kitchen or food preparation, prayers, religious activities, eating citrus fruits, hiding the clothes used during menstruation, etc. are longstanding practices due to considering menstruation as an impure, dirty and polluting event since the times of Vedic writings (Garg & Anand, 2015). Likewise, 52% of girls are kept ignorant of menstruation pre-menarche, and unaware of how it will change their lives. For example, in the Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu States, menstruating girls are asked to stay

away from religious places, kept in isolation, not allowed to play outside, or go to school, which causes them to miss 1-2 days of school per month (United Nations Children's Fund; [UNICEF], 2015). Likewise, menstrual discrimination is pervasive and girls/women are further restricted from participating in both public and private events due to the strong feeling that menstrual blood is unclean or impure or ganda (Rajagopal & Mathur, 2017). Through the government of India and NGOs, there are many efforts to improve attitudes towards menstrual issues but focused on pad or hygiene instead of social, economic, political and psychological menstrual discrimination (Alhelou, Kavattur, Rountree, & Winkler, 2021).

1.3. Menstrual Discrimination in Niger

As in many countries that have practices of menstrual discrimination, Niger has deeper and wider levels of menstrual discrimination where women are deprived of participation in agricultural activities. Menstruation is unmentionable and considered as a woman's sole and private affair (UNICEF, 2019). Ignorance and silence regard to menstruation is common where 70% of girls are unaware of menstruation in the project area of UNICEF (2019). As in other countries, during menstruation, girls and women are restricted in Niger from nutritional, sexual and religious activities (WSSCC & UN Women, n.d). Very few organizations have started to address menstruation Niger, except the priority is regarding menstrual products as in Bangladesh and India.

2. Menstrual Discrimination Across the National Policies and Interventions Regards to Child Marriage in Respective Countries; Bangladesh, India and Niger

2.1. National Policies and Interventions in Bangladesh

The government of Bangladesh started to abolish child marriage in 1929 (Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, Section 2). "In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context,- (a) "child" means a person who, if a male, is under twenty-one years of age, and if a female, is under eighteen years of age;" However, girls in Bangladesh continue to get married at a very young age. Under the Muslim legal code (Sharia Law), a child under 18 years of age may be given in marriage by a guardian until she or he reaches puberty (Calimoutou, Liu & Mbu, 2016). In 2014, the government of Bangladesh pledged to eliminate all kinds of child marriages by 2041. In alignment with this, it drafted the National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage 2015-2021 (Lessons Learned from National Initiatives to End Child Marriage, 2016).

The latest Bangladesh National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017-2030 does not mention menstrual discrimination and strongly recommends incorporating the topic in discussions for improving sexual and reproductive health and promoting human rights (Share-Net Bangladesh, 2020). On the other hand, the interventions around menstrual discrimination are so much focused on hygiene that they do nothing to guarantee the dignity of menstruators or accelerate the capacity of menstruators to gain respect to have a voice, negotiate socioeconomic improvements and bargaining power to say 'no'. The interventions around child marriage have not yet acknowledged the link to the underlying cause of the disempowerment of girls' menstrual discrimination. Both home and school fail to pull the girls to continue their education or entrepreneurship by pushing them into child marriage.

2.2. National Policies and Interventions in India

In India, the word 'marriage' included under the Indian Majority Act (1875) is defined included in 'the capacity of any persons to act in the following matters (namely), marriage, dowry, divorce and adoption'(Calimoutou, Liu & Mbu, 2016). And the Child Restraint Act (1929) or Sharadha Act addresses child marriage since it was enacted on 1 April 1930, where the minimum age for a male was 18 years and 14 years for a female. The minimum age for a female increased to 15 years in 1949. The age of marriage increased of both male and female in 1978 to 21 years for a male and 18 years was for a female. In 2006, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Section 2 described "child marriage" as a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child under 18 years old. Indian courts have ruled that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act has overriding effect over the provisions of the Muslim Personal Status Law, which allows marriage of a girl child once she attains puberty, which could be as early as 8 or 9 years old (Calimoutou, Liu & Mbu, 2016). In India, of 223 million child brides, 102 million were married before celebrating their 15th birthdays (UNICEF, 2020). The child marriage statistics vary from state to state in India but one of every three girls is married off under 18 years of age. Over the century-long history of child marriage, the linking of the practice with menstrual discrimination has been obvious, but unspoken.

2.3. National Policies and Interventions in Niger

Niger has the highest rate of child marriage at the global level where 3 girls out of 4 are married before the age of 18 and 1 in 4 are married before the age of 15 years (UNICEF, n.d). In the era of the 2030 agenda (Target # 5.3.1), ending child marriage is one of the

priorities of the government of Niger and its development partners. Therefore the series of activities took place at government, partner and family levels. However, there was no change in child marriage statistics (UNICEF, n.d). The policies, activities or anything related to menstrual discrimination is missing across the activities of UNICEF and Save the Children UK. They focus on legal factors, poverty alleviation, address the social and religious tradition and facilitate the availability of basic public services. Likewise, the absence of menstrual interventions is also missing in UNICEF and Save the Children UK recommendations, which include enrolling and retaining girls in school, developing skills of girls, raising awareness, providing economic support, and supporting laws and policies (UNICEF, n.d).

3. Menstrual Discrimination across the Regional and Global Networks of Child Marriage

3.1. South Asia Initiative to End Violence (SAIEVAC)

SAIEVAC agreed that poverty and lack of economic opportunities for girls are among the highest drivers for child marriage. For the elimination of child marriage, SAIEVAC developed 7 indicators and 12 points to call for action for eliminating child marriage. All were focused on raising awareness of the laws banning child marriage, legal reform and enforcement of the laws. There is no single mention of menstrual discrimination (SAIEVAC, 2021).

3.2. African Union for Ending Child Marriage

The AU network is formed for combating child marriage, but a girl below the legal age is married off every two seconds. Accordingly, the drivers for child marriage are poverty, tradition, social status quos and gender inequalities. Likewise, this network advised the ways to eliminate child marriage: empower girls, mobilize family and communities, provide adequate health, education, justice and other services and enable the legal and policy framework. The discussion about menstruation or menstrual practice is absent throughout the AU's policies and activities.

3.3. Girls Not Brides

Girls Not Brides is a global network for ending child marriage founded in September 2011 with more than 1500 Civil Society organizations from over 100 countries as members. Its vision urges for equal status of girls and boys but the issue of menstrual dignity remains absent across its six points of the mission. All points focus on raising awareness, amplifying

the campaign to include policy and finance, and educating on the impacts of child marriage. There is no intervention regarding menstrual discrimination (Girls Not Bride, 2021).

4. The Global Policies, Declarations or Human Rights Instruments - Relevant to Menstrual Discrimination and Child Marriage

4.1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16: Men and women of full age without any limitations due to race, nationality and religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage during marriage and at its dissolution. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses (OHCHR, n.d., p.5). However, menstrual dignity that would enable "free and full consent" of the parties is not acknowledged by the UDHR.

4.2. Convention against Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979

CEDAW stands against child marriage through articles 16.1 and 16.2. Article 16 (1) says 'States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular, shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women. The same right is freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent. Article 16 (2) says that "The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory (United Nations, 1979, p.10). However, neither Article recognizes that menstrual discrimination is a cause of child marriage since the "legal" age is ignored when the girl reaches puberty. A form of menstrual discrimination that is found in some parts of western Nepal includes the traditional, harmful practices of isolation or banishment from the home of the menstruator, which reflects the enduring nature of menstrual discrimination that exist across the globe and its role in constructing patriarchy and recurring violence.

4.3. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989

The CRC is the crucial human rights instrument to protect and promote the human rights of children. It does not expressly address child marriage across the 54 articles, however, there is some linkage observed for the protection of children in Articles 24 (3) and

34. This is because the CRC expects all of the UN member states to protect all children's rights until they reach the age of 18 (CRC, 1989).

4.4. Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) 2016-2030

Under SDG 5, target 3.1 refers to child marriage. The UN member states that have issues with child marriage are required to set the targets to eliminate it. With regards to the issue of menstrual discrimination, there is no direct mention, requirement or intervention. However, there are nine SD goals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, & 16) out of 17 that assume the abolition of menstrual discrimination: target 1.4; targets 2.1., 2.2; target 3.1, 3.2, 3.7; target 4.1, 4.2; targets 5.1,5.2, 5.3,5.5; targets 6.1, 6.2; targets 8.1, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8, 8.9; targets12.4, 12.5; and targets 16.1, 16.2 (United Nations, 2020).

5. Discussion

Both Menstrual Discrimination and Child Marriage are forms of sexual and gender-based violence according to the UN's definition for SGBV. The UN defines SGBV as any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It is a topic also overlapped with VAC (Violence Against Children), defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to include "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent (s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child".

As menstrual discrimination is a determinant factor for the construction of power and patriarchy and perpetuates the various forms of SGBV in the multiplier and systemic ways, it is a violation of all human rights. Deprivation of rights for menstruators causes great harm and cost to individuals, families, communities and governments, including multiple and long-lasting consequences for defending rights, providing health and education, promoting productivity and participation of all citizens in public spheres. The daughter who has no self-esteem or has been told that she cannot disobey, oppose, ask the questions, or say 'NO' to parents, relatives, teachers or friends imposing menstrual discrimination on her cannot say 'NO' to child marriage or forced marriage (Paudel, 2020). There is a close connection between child marriage and menstrual discrimination. The perception and practices around menstruation play a vital role in enhancing self-esteem, self-respect, self-dignity and skills such as decision-making for choices, negotiating, etc., including when to marry.

5.1. Missing the Menstrual Discrimination Discussion across the International Human Rights Instruments which are Related to Child Marriage

Over the six decades of discussions on human rights, menstrual discrimination is yet to be acknowledged as a violation of the human rights of women explicitly. The UDHR 1948 was the first human rights instrument and repeats the word 'dignity.' However, the dignity of menstruators was not mentioned and is not recognized even today. In practice, the organizations which are working to protect and promote human rights remain silent regarding the violation of the rights of menstruating individuals. Nothing is done to address the stigma associated with menstrual perceptions and practices. Likewise, the most important instrument for women's rights; the CEDAW 1979, also did not recognize menstrual discrimination on any of its levels: its role for constructing and distributing power in the patriarchy; the stigma and pervasive menstrual discrimination practices across the globe with different names; the forms and severity of menstrual restrictions and taboos that are both cause and effect for many forms of violation of human right e.g. child marriage (GSCDM, 2020). In the same vein, the power and patriarchy construct and shape by menstrual discrimination that perpetuates practices against girls since early childhood. The unequal power relations and gender inequalities formed and shape women's self-esteem, access to education and restricted opportunities since childhood. Therefore, the reconstruction of power should be started in the home for every child and should be taught in all primary education practices by having dialog on menstrual dignity. However, menstrual discrimination and its impact are absent from CRC 1989. Absent are discussions at home and at school of the natural functions of the human body especially the significance of menstruation to ensure the survival of all of mankind and the lives of both girls and boys. Global communities have been moving forward with the slogan; 'Leave No one Behind' since 2015. It is included in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals. These goals omit consideration of menstrual discrimination as a complex and multifaceted agenda item that is implicated to achieve nine different goals. The silence on menstrual dignity is the silence towards the reality of more than half of the population of this planet. More importantly, the practice of child marriage has not changed despite over a century of interventions in specific countries and about half a century in the UN. These interventions covered many things like drivers for child marriage but did not recognize the inevitable biological phenomena of menstruation and perceptions and practices around it.

5.2. Missing Action to End Menstrual Discrimination across the Policies and Plans of Child Marriage

The activities to ban child marriage started in 1929 in global history. The UN started to work on child marriage under the theme of traditional harmful practice in 1970/1980 (International Center for Research on Women [ICRW], 2011). Programmatic movements increased since 1990 that were accelerated by international conferences such as ICPD 1994, Beijing 1995. Since then, the drivers identified as responsible for child marriage, such as poverty, tradition, safety or social norms, gender inequalities, etc. fail to draw the key connection to menstrual discrimination. The complex and multifaceted nature of menstrual discrimination is heavily ignored and missing. Likewise, the activities against child marriage are focused on engaging communities, families, policymakers, faith healers, etc., enhancing the purchasing power of parents, developing the skills of girls, providing incentives for parents to educate girls, reducing the violence at school, and fostering the legal and policy framework. These activities are all very good and important but do not unveil the underlying cause of relegating girls to a status that is inferior, powerless, voiceless, dehumanized, unclean and unworthy. In a single word, there is no discussion about menstrual discrimination and its role for SGBV including child marriage. Child marriage could be eliminated if the girls would have the confidence towards their bodily autonomy and had options other than childbearing. Once they have confidence in their body, girls will be able to strategize to negotiate their role in the family and community accordingly.

6. Conclusion

Menstrual discrimination and child marriage are intrinsically linked with each other. Menstrual discrimination is a direct cause of child marriage. Both are the result of the imbalance of power and gender inequality inculcated into girls since childhood that is constructed and shaped by the stigmas and discriminatory practices to disempower menstruators. To reframe the attitudes and behaviors of all members of society, the interventions for ending child marriage should be initiated in early childhood where the dialogue on equal rights among all persons should include equal opportunity and menstrual dignity. Because the ages between 6-12 years are recognized as very crucial for children to understand their selves and build self-esteem, these years form the base for lifelong learning (Donald, et al., 2019). The interactions with family, school, and peers are key factors for learning and adapting to the social norms, and require a positive, consistent, supportive environment (Sørli, Hagen, & Nordahl, 2020). This is the 'age of reason' where children

develop new capabilities, are assigned roles and responsibilities, develop logical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving (NCBI, 2021). The long-lasting cognitive and emotional effects depend on the environment including the levels of nutrition, stress, stimulation, and social interaction (The Lancet, 2007). In this context, menstrual discrimination has a significant role to play to create a sense of power and patriarchy among girls and boys, including self-esteem and confidence towards their bodies. Menstrual discrimination is one of the important contributing factors that fuels child marriage or forced marriage, along with other factors; poverty, insecurity and gender inequality (Girls Not Bride, 2021). However, no significant study has ever taken place as of yet to change the narrative and expose the link between menstrual discrimination and child marriage. Only the GSCDM recognized the underlying power and patriarchy construction among girls and boys where girls become the victims, including through child marriage, and boys become the perpetrators (Paudel, 2020). Following the decades of failed interventions to abolish child marriage and the centuries of undermining women's rights and stigmatizing menstruation, it's urgent to finally do more research exposing the link between these two issues.

There are different international laws to ensure the right of each citizen and an SDG's road map of each country to ensure "Leave No One Behind". But, there are still cultural norms and practices which directly restrict girls' activities and opportunities during menstruation in all social and cultural functions because they are labeled as untouchable, unclean and unworthy persons during menstruation, which also breaks the girls' resiliency and self-worth. In this situation, schools are not friendly or equipped to include dignified menstruation in primary level education. The school management committee and teachers do not seriously attempt to expose the stigma or disallow the discrimination at school. Thus, school-going girls are compelled to be absent from school during menstruation, left to be treated as unequal to boys, dehumanized or degraded by teachers and classmates. Such circumstances directly impact girls' quality of education and quality of social life. Girls that cannot compete with boys or complete their education cannot be resilient to make decisions. Family and society have made the decisions for her. In this situation, girls are compelled to marry, but this status does not protect them from the ongoing stigmas imposed on them by society and family throughout their menstruating life.

The national, regional and global level strategies, action plans and campaigns that intensively and directly address child marriage omit mention of one of the driving forces of the power dynamic that perpetuate child marriage menstrual discrimination. The issue of

menstrual discrimination must be included in all strategies, action plans and advocacy to abolish child marriage.

7. Recommendations

- ✓ Child marriage is a complex issue that deprives a person of their human rights and therefore stand-alone interventions are not effective for ending the practice. Menstrual discrimination should be included as one of the key drivers for child marriage.
- ✓ The dialogue on dignified menstruation¹ at home, school and communities is important for exposing traditional stigmas around menstrual discrimination and child marriage simultaneously. The dialogue is important starting at home and in primary schools so that the concept of dignified menstruation becomes an integral part of socialization processes and community-building.
- ✓ As in Nepal, the state needs to develop policies and laws towards menstrual discrimination and ensure that these instruments are enforced.
- ✓ Multiple conventions, treaties, and international agreements exist to protect children from early marriage and social inequality and discrimination. These conventions and treaties need to address the stigma against menstruation.
- ✓ Menstrual discrimination and child marriage need to be incorporated together in the global discourse on human rights, especially during the development of progress reports such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), CEDAW report, CRC, etc.

¹ Dignified Menstruation is a holistic and innovative approach. For details; www.dignifiedmenstruation.org

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