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Where Menstruation Means Isolation

[Dorothy Khan](#) (photo above) is working as a Peace Fellow with the Women's Reproductive Rights Program in Surkhet, western Nepal. Part of her job is to help adolescent girls understand menstrual hygiene. As Dorothy explained in [this recent blog](#) menstruation causes shame, embarrassment, and absenteeism from school.

"*Pakha Lagnu*" in Nepali means "isolation." It is also the word that people here use for menstruation.

Take a moment and let that sink in before you read ahead. Isolation - it is what these girls are made to feel every month when they menstruate. In some households, menstruating girls are not allowed to step into the kitchen or eat and sleep with the family.



I went to a school called Jeevan Jyoti, in Gutu, Nepal to teach adolescent girls about menstrual hygiene and in return learn more about the social and cultural context of menstrual issues. The taboo nature of menstruation was apparent as the girls struggled to discuss menstruation with me and Suresh, the program coordinator from my host organization [the Women's Reproductive Rights Program \(WRRP\)](#).

Their nervous laughs, avoidance of eye contact, and the fact that they covered their faces with their *dupatta* (scarf) when speaking made it clear that menstruation, body changes and sexual health are shameful and embarrassing topics.

As a woman I can tell you that having your period is not a walk in the park. So, imagine that you are made to feel unclean, dirty or guilty for having your period every month. After speaking to the girls about menstruation, I realized one thing; they really do not have any knowledge of the changes that take place in their body and why they get their period.

When I asked the girls to explain what happens when a girl menstruates, they simply listed some of the symptoms of period, such as back ache and belly ache, but they did not understand the cycle. The girls first learned about their period from their sisters, mothers or female friends. Most of the information they were told was about the use of cloth to manage their flow, restrictions and rituals

But nothing about the psychological process were mentioned. I am assuming that if the girls do not have a good knowledge about their period, then the boys are just clueless.



Dorothy and teacher at the Jeevan Jyoti school

The lack of proper hygiene and privacy is another major problem for a lot of girls in school. The girls I met mentioned that they use cloths or other materials during their period. They always have this fear that either the cloth will fall out or leak into their pants.

The school isn't gender friendly, which means that girls lack access to adequate resources, facilities and accurate information to manage menstrual hygiene. It makes it very difficult for them to wash and change at school, which is why menstruation causes so much absenteeism from school.

At first, when we spoke, the girls couldn't even bring themselves to use the word *Pakha Lagnu* in front of us, but at the end they were discussing the topic openly and expressing their feelings. They simply cannot wait for us to go back and conduct training on reproductive health and menstruation.

Don't worry girls, the world is reading about you and is standing up for your dignity and rights.

- * Dorothy is raising funds for girls in her program. To donate [click here](#) and thank you!
- * For more blogs by Dorothy, [click here](#)
- * For Dorothy's photos, [click here](#)
- * For more about the Women's Reproductive Rights Program in Nepal [click here](#).

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