

Dorothy Khan  
Peace Fellow  
WRRP Nepal  
Advocacy Project

Ever since I arrived to Kathmandu, Nepal, my time has been nothing but a roller coaster of emotions, anxiously waiting for the next to one to unfold. The start to my journey was a little shaky since my luggage did not arrive on the same flight as me. However, after three days of waiting for my luggage to arrive, I embarked on the most intense journey of my life. I took an eighteen hour bus journey from Kathmandu to Surkhet, Nepal to work in the CAED office for the WRRP Project. Although, Surkhet is not my workstation, I often came here from the field to use internet and buy essential items for the field. During my time here, I have been monitoring “Life Skills” workshops conducted by the staff of WRRP project in very rural districts of Nepal. These workshops are conducted in order to teach 25 adolescents behavior skills, such as conflict management, problem solving skills, reproductive health, puberty, etc. The workshops include a plethora of learning games, collaborative thinking, and tons of team work. These workshops are designed to encourage creative thinking and ways of dealing with various social issues the student’s will face in their schools and community.



Gutu, Nepal

I conducted one activity in the workshop in the village of Gutu in Surkhet District on Pakha Lagnu. Pakha Lagnu literally means isolation in English, but it is the word the Nepalese use for menstruation. In the activity, I had the students draw what girls can't touch or eat and where they may not enter or stay during their period of menstruation. The results were shocking. Almost everyone drew trees, fruits, livestock, milk, yogurt, their father's and brothers and a hut where they are isolated for seven days during their period. I was in disbelief that these girls are forced to stay out of their homes in small open huts during their period. These girls cannot even go near the house when they are menstruating and must eat and sleep in complete isolation. This practice is called Chaupaddi and even though it is

outlawed, people still follow this culture. The traditional practice is prevalent because there is a false belief that girls are unclean or dirty and they if they touch livestock or trees during that time, those things will die. It is already appalling that these girls are seen as unclean, but to cast them out of the household altogether is hurting their dignity and self esteem.



Some of the girls from the workshop

I decided to do follow-up home visits on some of these girls and actually take a closer look at the place they are forced to stay for seven days. I wanted to understand the practice more and dig a little deeper. I spoke to some of these girls and they expressed that they do not like to stay in these huts. Some of the girls said it is really uncomfortable as there are no beds to sleep in and they are also scared sleeping there alone with no door or locks to ensure their safety. The girls are not even allowed to go to the nearest tap to shower for three days. When speaking to some of these girls, I realized one thing, that perhaps the problem isn't the girls. The problem is that there are no proper bathrooms for girls to wipe, wash, and properly clean their homemade pads. Disposable sanitary pads are too expensive, a luxury in this rural area of Nepal, therefore these girls make homemade pads and wash and dry them daily in damp places where people can't see. Perhaps these are the things that create a false image of uncleanness associated with these girls during menstruation.



A hut where a girl stays during menstruation

I am hoping that the workshops we are holding will help educate not only the girls, but also the boys and the rest of the community about the harmful effects such a practice has on these girls and that they will begin to stand up for girls rights and help them gain their dignity back.