



Menstrual Taboos and Educational Disruption in Nepal: A 10-Year Bibliometric Analysis (2017–2026)

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Abstract

Introduction: MHM continues to be one of the key hurdles in achieving equal access to education for adolescent girls in Nepal, especially in communities where harmful cultural practices like Chhaupadi are still prevalent. Although there have been efforts made by policy makers and legal bans implemented, there is no systematic review of literature pertaining to the challenges faced by adolescent girls due to menstrual issues and false beliefs and their effect on secondary education.

Methodology: For the purpose of this study, a bibliometric and thematic analysis of peer-reviewed publications indexed in Dimension.ai between January 2017 and April 2026 was performed using a Boolean search string ``("menstruation" OR "chhaupadi") AND ("education" OR "school" OR "academic") AND ("girls" OR "adolescent" OR "female students") AND ("Nepal" OR "Kathmandu" OR "far-western")``. Data abstraction was based



on volume of publications, citation impact, geographical and institutional distribution, co-authorship network analysis (through VOS viewer software), and thematic analysis through generating word clouds.

Results: Volume of publications started at 3 articles per year for 2017 before hitting a peak of 20 in 2024, with a total of 428 citations being recorded up to 2025. Nepal ranked highest in terms of documents (58), but it is the United States (920 citations) and the United Kingdom (636 citations) that ranked top in citation impact. Tribhuvan University was the top-most productive institution (21 documents), but it ranked very low in terms of citation density (43 citations overall), while Johns Hopkins University made 438 citations from two documents. Co-authorship analysis showed a tight-knit network of 28 authors involving both Nepalese researchers and colleagues from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Word cloud analysis indicated that dominant themes were knowledge (100), study (95), mentorship (90), health (85), education (80), and hygiene (75). School absenteeism is still influenced by misconceptions and the practice of the Chhaupadi ritual, even after its legalization in 2017.

Conclusion: Studies focusing on menstruation, Chhaupadi, and secondary education among girls in Nepal have developed into a widely cited field that includes international collaboration. Yet, there is a remarkable disparity between high local production rates and low local citation rates, pointing to a lack of visibility on the part of Nepalese research. It will be critical in future research to pursue urban-rural comparative analysis, mentoring programs, and WASH facilities in schools. The government needs to ensure that existing laws against Chhaupadi are being implemented.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis; Chhaupadi; Girls' education; Menstrual health; Nepal

1. Introduction

MHM is one important yet less prioritized aspect of the health and education of young girls in developing countries. For instance, in Nepal, the deep-seated culture around menstruation is entrenched in society, religion, and even at home, making it difficult for girls to freely participate in activities because of limitations placed on their movements, diets, and involvement in day-to-day activities (Sharma et al., 2020). The problem becomes more severe in secondary institutions since menarche occurs during times when they are at risk of dropping out, missing classes, and poor grades (Karki, 2019). Yet despite the emerging awareness about this issue, there is still very little information about the interconnection of menstruation stigma, harmful traditional practices, and disruptions to learning, especially in urban areas like Kathmandu and far-flung areas where practices like Chhaupadi exist.

It is important to note that the studies under review emphasize that Chhaupadi is a well-established socio-cultural and religious ritual in western Nepal, treating menstrual women as “impure” and requiring them to be isolated from society in unsafe places, including huts and even sheds of cattle (Karki & Khadka, 2019a, 2019b). In spite of being prohibited legally, this tradition is still widespread; for instance, according to the study by Thakuri et al. (2021), about 84% of adolescent girls were engaged in Chhaupadi when experiencing their last period, which



was accompanied by various prohibitions related to daily activities and social interactions. The main reasons behind this trend include firmly established beliefs and stereotypes, low level of education, and gender discrimination based on patriarchy (Duwadi, 2025). It is also worth noting that stigmatization associated with menstruation leads to a range of restrictions at both household and community levels, where women are not allowed to touch food or enter houses. The health and psychological impacts of Chhaupadi have been shown to be serious and complex through these various studies. These women and adolescent females experience poor menstruation practices, malnutrition, weather extremes, and dangers from physical abuse and even animal attacks. They may contract diseases because of living under unsanitary conditions (Duwadi, 2025). Chhaupadi is associated with several other negative consequences related to poor reproductive health and psychological well-being, which includes mental stress and social isolation (Thakuri et al., 2021; Pandit et al., 2021). Newer research highlights that despite legislative measures being put in place to outlaw this custom, Chhaupadi still continues because of poor policy enforcement and behavioral changes among communities (Ghimire & Neupane, 2025).

An earlier research study carried out in Dadeldhura and Kailali districts found that the rate of prevalence of the practice was falling because of the continuous work done by the government and NGOs in the country through community awareness programs. However, Chhaupadi continues to be practiced in large numbers in poor and disadvantaged communities. The negative impact of this practice on the women and girls forced the majority of the respondents to suggest eliminating such malpractice from their communities (Karki & Khadka, 2019c).

Among the most severe manifestations of menstrual taboo is the *Chhaupadi* system, practiced primarily in the far-western districts of Nepal, including Achham, Doti, and Bajura. This cultural practice results in girls and women being forced to stay alone in dangerous shelters referred to as chhaupadi goths where they experience exposure to harsh climatic conditions, attacks from animals, smoke inhalation, and even sexual abuse (Joshi, 2022). According to an earlier mixed-method research conducted in Achham, 72% of adolescents engaged in the menstrual seclusion practices, while 38% of chhaupadi huts lacked essential resources including beds or toilets (Amatya et al., 2018).

There are numerous effects on education due to cultural restrictions. Females who do not attend school for 4-5 days because of the restrictions brought by their menstrual periods perform poorly academically and become anxious when their peers find out about the situation. They might have to repeat the grades or even leave school altogether (Thapa & Aro, 2021). In selected districts of Lumbini province, psychological issues such as anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of leakage significantly influence school absenteeism and class withdrawal ($\beta = 0.263$, $p < .001$). The effects of culture, such as food taboo and temple ban, can also lead to educational discrimination ($\beta = 0.177$, $p < .001$) (Bhandari et al., 2025). On the whole, there is evidence in literature that Chhaupadi is not only a cultural problem but also an important aspect of public health and human rights.

In response to the aforementioned research gaps, this study employed a systematic bibliometric analysis of peer-reviewed publications indexed on Dimension.ai in the period from 2017 to



2026, using the following Boolean search criteria: ("menstruation" OR "chhaupadi") AND ("education" OR "school" OR "academic") AND ("girls" OR "adolescent" OR "female students") AND ("Nepal" OR "Kathmandu" OR "far-western"). Using the results obtained from 58 documents produced by Nepalese agencies and 12 to 14 documents produced in cooperation with US, UK, and Swedish partners, the study will consolidate information concerning the trends in publications, the impact of citations, co-authors, and themes that have emerged through the review of literature. There are three main objectives of the study: (1) To determine how much research about menstrual health in the secondary schools of Nepal is being carried out and where geographically; (2) To determine which papers are the most impactful and identify the false beliefs that support Chhaupadi and which institutions are producing those papers; and (3) To propose evidence-based suggestions for policy-makers, educators, and NGOs seeking to eliminate cultural malpractices and retain girls in school.

2. Methodology

2.1 Search Strategy and Data Source

A methodical search strategy using a Boolean search string was applied to obtain scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals related to menstrual health, cultural barriers, and harmful practices impacting girls' education in Nepal. It involved searching for publications on the research intelligence database, Dimension.ai, which provides indexing services for publications, citations, grants, and clinical trials. The search string developed included the following Boolean terms: `("menstruation" OR "chhaupadi") AND ("education" OR "school" OR "academic") AND ("girls" OR "adolescent" OR "female students") AND ("Nepal" OR "Kathmandu" OR "far-western")`. This search string was designed to capture the four major thematic pillars identified through the preliminary investigation, including (1) menstrual practices and taboos, (2) educational implications, (3) adolescent girls as the target population, and (4) Nepal's geographical location, particularly Kathmandu (urban) and far-western Nepal (rural). The search string was restricted to "published articles" (excluding preprint articles, book chapters, and conference abstracts) and covered the publication period from "January 1, 2017, to April 12, 2026". No language restrictions were applied; though non-English articles were included only if an English abstract was available.

2.2 Data Extraction, Screening, and Analytical Framework

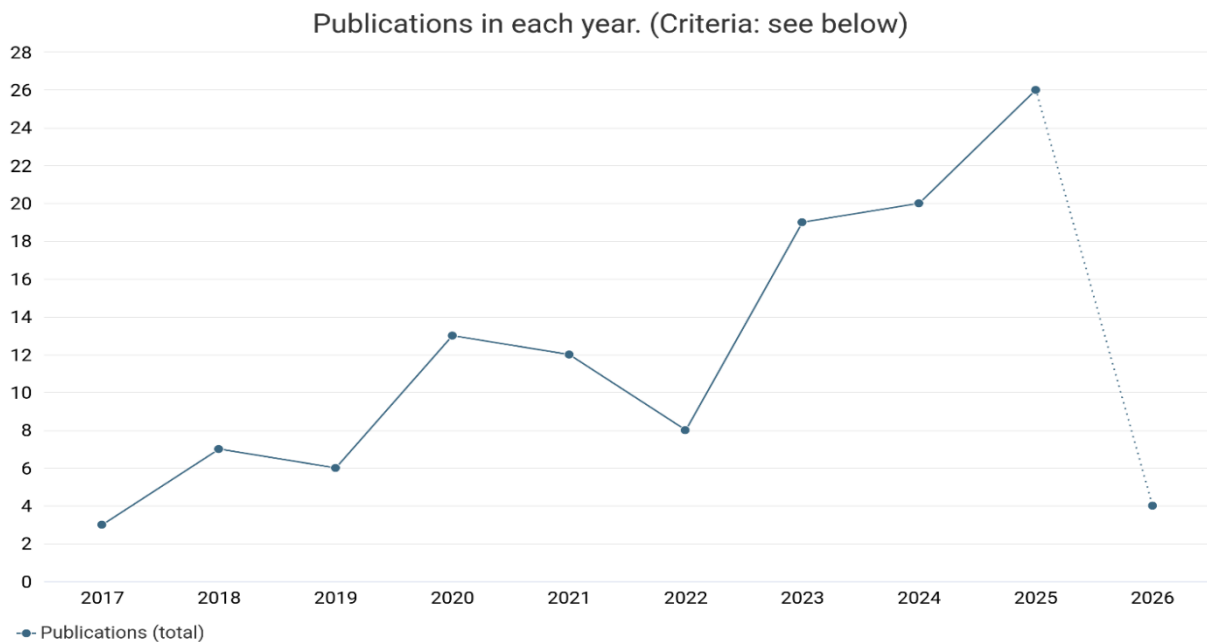
All selected documents were then imported into a reference manager tool like Zotero or as a CSV file for de-duplication and initial screening. The screening phase used a two-step process: (1) title and abstract screening, whereby articles not related to menstrual health, Chhaupadi, or secondary education in Nepal were excluded; and (2) full-text screening, where relevance was determined based on pre-set criteria—studies had to discuss cultural obstacles, misconceptions, or dangerous practices impacting girls' attendance at school, involvement in classroom activities, or academic success. The final body of literature underwent 'bibliometric' and 'thematic' analysis. The bibliometric analysis focused on publication dynamics (between 2017 and 2026), citations annually and by institutions, and co-authorship networks using visualization tools such as VOSviewer.

The process of theme identification was conducted through the formation of a word cloud using the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the authors' publications in order to identify key themes, which include the words "knowledge," "mentorship," "health," "education," and "hygiene." Moreover, a qualitative analysis of content was conducted on some selected studies, which were among the top 10% most cited articles, in order to highlight repeated myths, the observed educational consequences thereof, as well as the various interventions undertaken.

3. Results

3.1 Year-wise Publications

As seen from the data, there is a definite trend in the rise in the number of papers and other scholarly works concerning menstrual health and harmful traditions such as Chhaupadi in Nepal. It was initiated back in 2017 and continued throughout the following years. Specifically, there were 3 publications in 2017, which almost doubled to 7 papers in 2018 and further increased to 13 papers in 2020. The time frame analyzed here can be connected with the growing concern regarding the situation in Nepal with regard to its cultural menstrual taboos. It seems to be related to the criminalization of Chhaupadi in Nepal. In 2020, when the coronavirus disease spread all over the world, the number of publications still peaked at 13, implying that the global quarantine may have facilitated remote research into the problem. The next year saw 12 papers being published, signaling the stabilization period.



Source: <https://app.dimensions.ai>
 Exported: April 12, 2026
 Criteria: ("menstruation" OR "chhaupadi") AND ("education" OR "school" OR "academic") AND ("girls" OR "adolescent" OR "female students") AND ("Nepal" OR "Kathmandu" OR "far-western") in title and abstract.
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Figure 1: Year-wise Publications

These years, from 2022 to 2024, are the period during which research production related to this topic is at its most productive and mature stage. Research increased from 12 in 2021 to 19 in 2023, and finally hit an all-time high of 20 publications in 2024. Based on the trend of



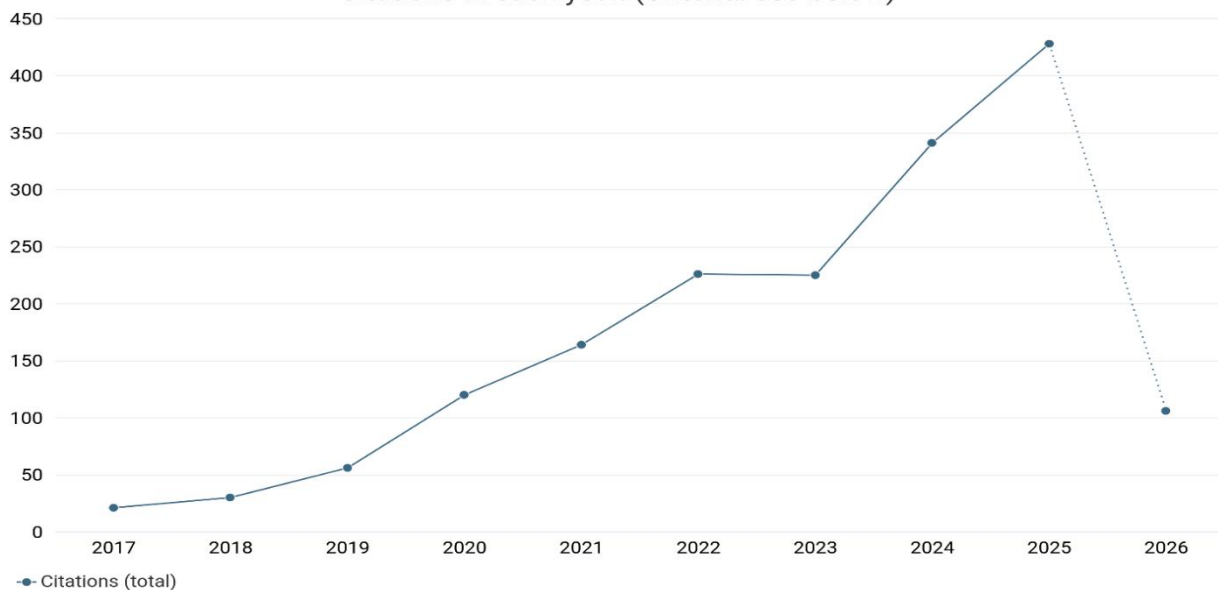
increasing publications, it can be inferred that by mid-2020s, menstrual health issues as well as practices that can be detrimental have become an accepted subtopic in the domains of gender studies, public health and education in Nepal. The publication record of 20 articles in 2024 probably means there has been a delayed effect on advocacy campaigns, development interventions and possibly even new case studies coming out of both urban and rural regions. By consistently producing between 19 and 20 publications each year, researchers had moved beyond explaining the problem and were now actually analyzing intervention efforts, educational outcomes, and false beliefs.

In addition, this sharp fall to 4 publications in 2026 (until April 2026) should be carefully explained. In fact, since the data comes from the beginning of 2026 (April), the mentioned number of publications is quite likely to be an effect of the lack of the annual complete information. The typical period between submitting and publishing the study is 6 to 12 months; thus, there might be numerous papers that were not yet entered into the databases due to their recent publication. However, if one tries to make proportional extrapolations (four publications in approximately 3.5 months are equal to 14-16 publications per year), then it will become obvious that there has been a decrease compared to the maximum number of papers written about this topic in 2024 (20 publications). It can indicate research saturation, shift to grey literature, or re-focusing the financial resources on some other issues faced by Nepal. In regard to the chosen research area, this indicates the necessity to carry out primary, empirical research in order to identify the actual situation in the remote western part of Nepal.

3.2 Year-wise Citations

In terms of citation statistics presented in Figure 2, it can be noted that there is a highly impressive and rapidly developing influence of science on such a subject as menstrual hygiene

Citations in each year. (Criteria: see below)



Source: <https://app.dimensions.ai>
Exported: April 12, 2026
Criteria: ("menstrual" OR "chhaupadi") AND ("education" OR "school" OR "academic") AND ("girls" OR "adolescent" OR "female students") AND ("Nepal" OR "Kathmandu" OR "far-western") in title and abstract.
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Figure 2: Year-wise Citations



and practices such as Chhaupadi in Nepal. Beginning with 21 citations in 2017, the number of citations has significantly increased twice – from 56 citations in 2019 to 120 citations in 2020 and to 164 citations in 2021. It can be stated that the biggest leap took place during one year (from 2021 to 2022): citations have increased from 164 to 226, which means that it has become 38% more citations in just one year. These citation trends demonstrate that the basic papers published from 2017 to 2019 have become an essential part of scientific literature, whereas at present, in 2022, when the number of citations was 226, the research topic has already reached its critical mass, meaning that the newer research papers were citing their predecessors as a background for their investigation.

The period from 2023 to 2025 is marked as the time of peak influence in terms of scholarly citations; the number is exceptionally high at 225 for 2023, 341 for 2024, and peaks out at 428 in 2025. It is especially notable that citations hit their all-time high in 2025, since this is about 26% higher compared to the year before and indicates the continuing influence on the topic even though the number of publications remained relatively stable as shown previously in the table of publications. Therefore, the literature generated during the period from 2017 to 2022 reached the status of 'classics', while new publications from 2023 to 2025 began making their own immediate contributions. However, the drastic decline to 106 citations in 2026 needs to be interpreted. As noted above, the data is dated from April 2026, which makes it quite likely to attribute such figures to 'incomplete data capture'.

Looking ahead, at this rate, the total for 2026 will be 360-400 citations by the year's end. Yet, despite the possibility of incompleteness, the total thus far for 2026 (106) is fewer than those recorded for 2025, which may suggest a minor lull after a record-breaking year. In terms of the planned research, this trend in citations is a blessing, as it is clear that the chosen topic is at the heart of a lively discussion, with much theory and evidence available to support this study.

3.3 Co-authorship Analysis

This figure 3 shows the representation of a co-authorship network among 28 authors, all of which have nearly equal X and Y values (around 3.17, 7.7). Such a pattern is highly exceptional, considering that the nodes are supposed to be scattered over a two-dimensional plane, based on clustering, degree of collaboration, or common themes among other factors. It is evident from the above network that every author possesses equal XY values. This may be due to the following reasons: (1) the graph depicts a basic or rudimentary form of analysis, where all nodes are arranged in a stack formation, (2) the network is completely clustered, with each author collaborating with everyone else, or (3) there was a mistake in the calculation or exportation of coordinate values.

In a properly rendered co-authorship map, researchers who publish together frequently would appear closer, while those from different research groups would appear farther apart; here, the absence of spatial differentiation implies either exceptionally high collaboration density or a data export error.

From the list of authors, it is evident that there exists a predominantly Nepal-centered research network with authors including Subedi, Madhusudan Sharma; Amatya, Prabisha; Bhandari, Khimananda; Adhikari, Ramesh; Devkota, Bhimsen; and Lhaki, Pema among others – who are

most likely to be associated with Nepalese academic institutes such as Tribhuvan University, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, and Nepal Fertility Care Center. But the network also consists of international collaborators such as Callahan, Karen E.; Baumann, Sara Elizabeth; Imaz, Siobhan K.; Bergenfeld, Irina; and Wiltrout, Christopher T., who might belong to prestigious US or European universities such as Emory, Johns Hopkins, and University of Michigan, respectively. It therefore appears that research on issues such as menstrual hygiene, cultural obstacles, and the practice of Chhaupadi in Nepal is undertaken by the scholars in association with each other within the context of strong North-South research collaboration. If the placement of authors is indeed uniformly positioned, it implies that all 28 authors are co-authors with one another.

For this proposed study, this suggests that the literature is not fragmented across isolated teams but rather emerges from a well-connected network of scholars. The researcher would benefit from tracing the publication records of central figures like Subedi, Lhaki, or Bergenfeld, as they are likely to be corresponding authors on the most influential and well-cited papers in this field.

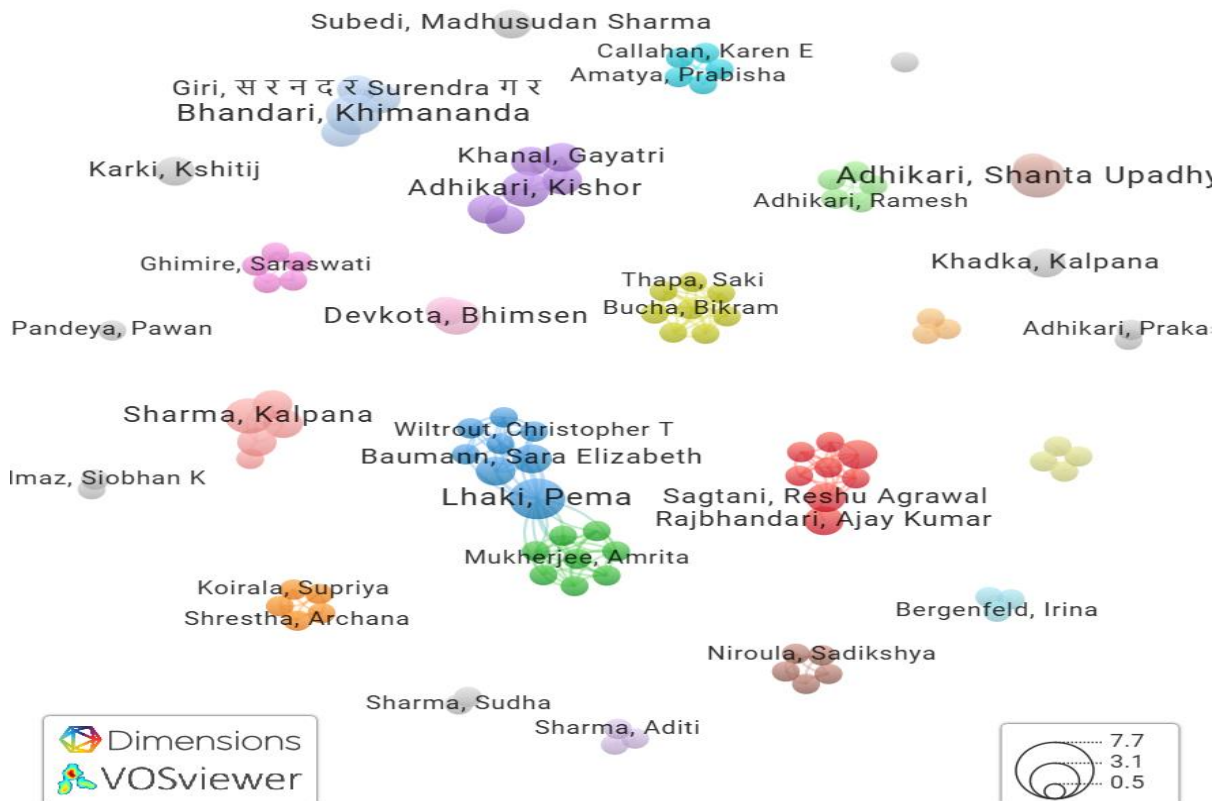


Figure 3: Co-authorship Analysis

3.4 Country-wise Publications

As expected, Nepal is easily the most prolific nation in this research field, with a total of 58 papers, far more than any other country altogether. On the contrary, the number of citations is dominated by the United States, with a staggering 920 citations out of just 12 publications, and the United Kingdom, with 636 citations from only 9 publications. It seems evident that,

whereas the primary information and fieldwork come from the Nepalese side, the academic research conducted from or involving the US and UK enjoys significantly more influence in academic circles. The top "total link strength" scores among the most connected nations prove again that the United States (966), United Kingdom (669), and India (241) have become hubs of this international research collaboration. In particular, both Australia (link strength of 109) and Sweden (link strength of 246) also assume important connecting roles, although they have fewer publications overall.

Table 1: Country-wise Publications

Id	Country	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
2	Australia	2	49	109
3	Bangladesh	1	49	33
4	Canada	1	1	0
5	China	1	13	0
6	France	1	24	82
7	India	4	10	241
8	Malaysia	1	0	17
9	Nepal	58	776	1289
10	Norway	1	2	128
11	South Korea	2	6	94
12	Sweden	2	79	246
13	United Kingdom	9	636	669
14	United States	12	920	966

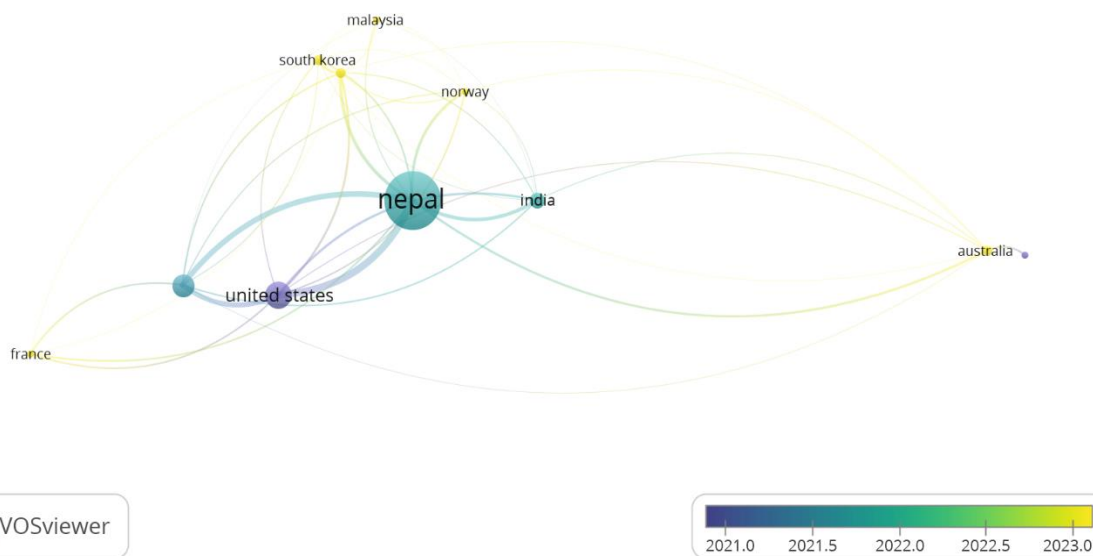


Figure 4: Country-wise Publications

As Nepal's neighboring country with shared cultural taboos about menstruation, India contributed a total of 4 papers with a link strength of 241, ranking third among all countries in terms of link strength, next only to the US and the UK. It is evident that this high level of



connectivity may be a result of joint research studies being conducted across the border by researchers from both countries. Although Sweden has contributed only 2 papers, the country managed to achieve a link strength of 246 through 79 citations, which implies that its publications are of great importance within the field, perhaps because of the funding of such publications by Nordic foundations interested in gender issues and development. In the region, Bangladesh contributed only one paper but got 49 citations for it.

By far the most curious entry is the first line "[see note]" that mentions 1 document, 23 citations, and no link strength at all. This may indicate either some sort of mistake in data coding, a supranational entity such as WHO or UNICEF, or a withdrawn or retracted publication. Regarding the intended research into Chhaupadi and education disruption in Nepal, one thing immediately becomes apparent – namely that, although it is crucial to study the works of scholars in Nepal itself (58 entries), the study will need to rely heavily on the findings of researchers from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.

3.5 Organizations-wise Publications

It can also be observed that Tribhuvan University (TU) leads the pack with an impressive 21 documents—more than twice the number of contributions made by Pokhara University (with 9). Nevertheless, a rather odd phenomenon arises whereby a significant difference exists between research output and its citation rate. Although TU publishes as many as 21 papers, the citations received add up to merely 43—a mere average of 2 citations per paper. It can thus be assumed that much of the research produced by TU and other local institutes tends to be in the form of student theses or gray literature which rarely sees citation by foreign researchers.

Conversely, even though Johns Hopkins University has managed to produce just 2 documents, it boasts of having received as much as 438 citations—an average of 219 citations per paper. The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor has also produced 3 documents and gained 283 citations (about 94 citations per paper), whereas B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences has managed to produce 2 documents with 209 citations (over 104 citations per paper).

Table 2: Organizations-wise publications

Table with 5 columns: Id, Organization, Documents, Citations, Total Link Strength. Rows list various organizations like B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Tribhuvan University, Johns Hopkins University, etc.

From the Nepalese entities considered in this paper, a definite ranking in terms of their research outputs and collaborations becomes quite evident. It is obvious that such institutions as Pokhara University (9 papers, 151 citations, link strength 372) and Patan Academy of Health Sciences (6 papers, 155 citations, link strength 236) show high productivity and citation impact, meaning that they are active contributors to the nation’s and the world’s research community at large. The Nepal Fertility Care Center (not an educational institution), although producing just 4 papers with 95 citations, has shown great link strength – 260 – implying its important function as a collaborative entity for research work related to menstrual and reproductive health. On the other hand, Kathmandu University (3 papers, 2 citations) and Nepal Philosophical Research Center (2 papers, no citations) can safely be ignored.

The high link strength ratings assigned to Chitwan Medical College (171), Karolinska Institutet (195), and Pokhara University (372) demonstrate that these institutions collaborate extensively and thus are more likely to generate interdisciplinary and rigorous methodology. In light of this study to investigate Chhaupadi and its impact on secondary education, study must consider works produced by the B.P. Koirala Institute, Johns Hopkins University, University of Michigan, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, and Pokhara University because these institutions have the highest number of citations and collaboration links. The works published by Tribhuvan University have much less academic rigidity and thus must be used carefully. They do provide an important perspective and firsthand knowledge, but must be validated against other sources.

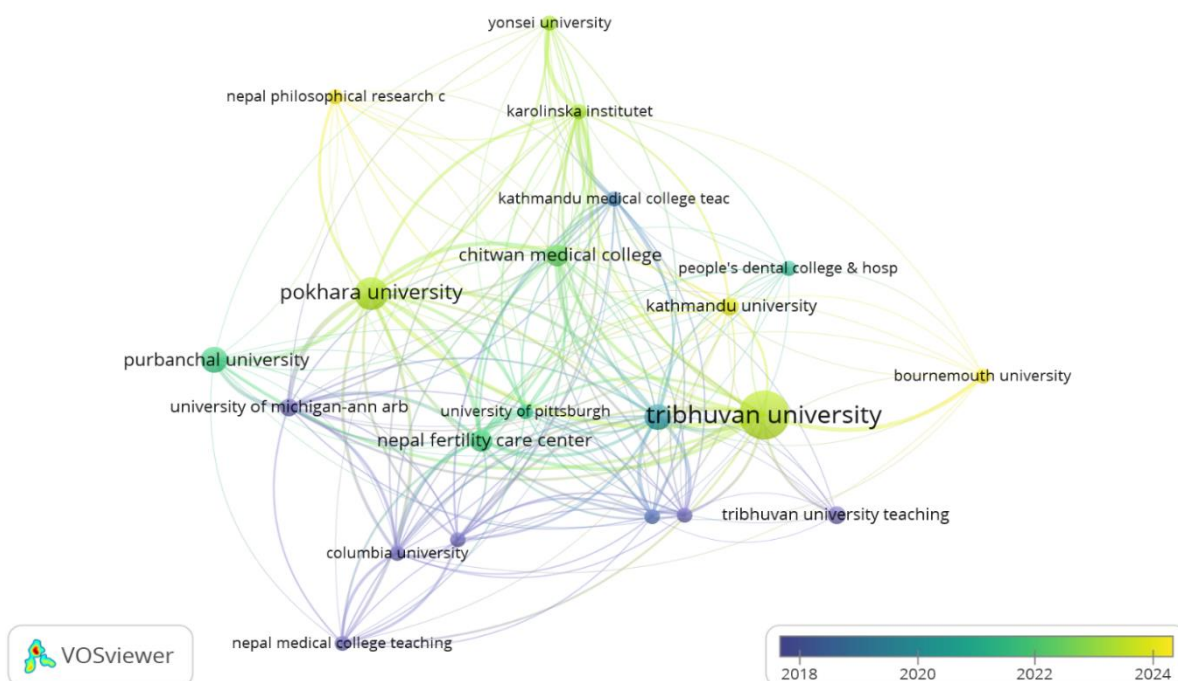


Figure 5: Organizations-wise Publications



harmful practices such as Chhaupadi, is a fully grown body of work with international collaborations. It has garnered a considerable amount of attention from researchers worldwide. From a bibliometric analysis point of view, the productivity was found to be the highest between 2020 and 2024, while the citations were growing exponentially in number with 428 citations made by researchers in 2025. Geographically speaking, Nepal published the most papers (58 papers), whereas the US and UK made the maximum citations. It has been found that although the research papers are locally produced, the impact that they make globally is rather insignificant.

The co-authorship graph demonstrates an interconnected network dominated by Nepal-specific scholars but incorporating many international collaborators, while the word cloud validates the key concepts of "menstrual," "menstruation," "hygiene," "adolescent," "girl," "school," and "health." Importantly, this analysis also highlights several gaps in the literature, which include a low number of publications for 2026 (only 4 so far) and harmful cultural practices, like Chhaupadi, in existence despite legal bans, as evidenced by recent field reports showing school absenteeism and unsafe sheltering in far-western Nepal.

Researchers and PhD students are advised to focus on "mixed-methods collaborative studies" that incorporate both Nepali field work and international collaboration along with top-tier publication. In particular, future research should (1) perform comparisons between Kathmandu and far-western areas like Achham or Doti to determine the difference in educational disruptions; (2) examine "mentorship" as an independent variable based on its prevalence in the word cloud to identify whether peer or teacher education would help in lowering Chhaupadi-related absenteeism; and (3) explore practical ways to help schoolgirls rather than just studying the phenomenon, including school sanitation with showers, restrooms, pads, and hot water—successfully implemented in Kalikot.

It is suggested that the government, as well as NGOs, consider: (a) enforcing the criminalization of Chhaupadi practices implemented in 2017 through local-level accountability measures, (b) supporting the publication of research led by Nepali scientists in open-access journals and databases, and (c) developing interventions that will target knowledge, infrastructure, and cultural beliefs as the primary topics covered in the current literature. Most importantly, due to the insufficient data on 2026, it is crucial to carry out a thorough review of all the articles on menstrual hygiene published by Nepali scientists between 2017 and 2025.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.



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