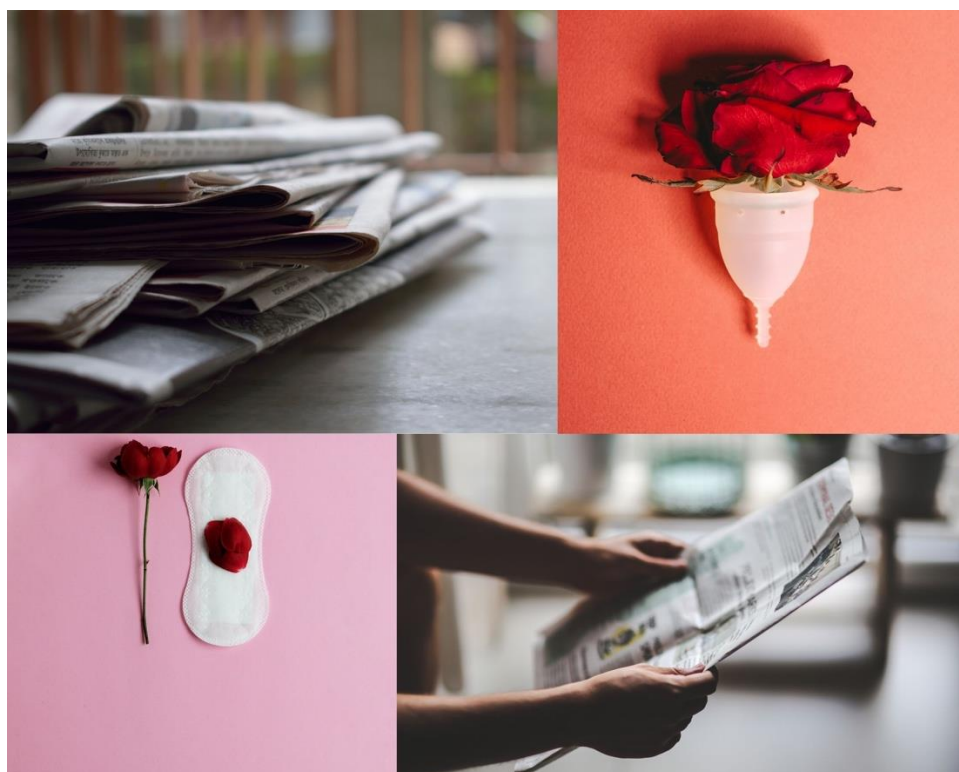


MEDIA COVERAGE ON MENSTRUATION

2021



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Acknowledgement

This is a report developed by Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance (MHMPA) Nepal.

The report would not have been possible without the help of two individuals: Mr. Guna Raj Shrestha, National Convener, MHMPA Nepal and Ms. Tabea Seiz, Development Advisor to the MHMPA Secretariat. Their valuable inputs and recommendations have immensely helped in the overall development of this report.

Thank you for the support and for helping in bringing the report to its final form.

Executive Summary

Over the years, Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHM) has become an important area of study in different parts of the world. It has gained immense importance over the last decade. Lack of WASH facilities, cultural and traditional barriers often make it difficult for women and girls to live normal lives during their menstruation. Over the last decade, advocating for dignified menstruation and menstrual health has become a global issue and many countries have started working on these areas.

As we all understand that in Nepal, the media plays an important role in providing latest and updated news along with opinion pieces, blogs and columns that have brought forward thoughts and ideas of common people. Media has also been helping and supporting in provoking information on menstruation, raising awareness and increasing access to information. Therefore, it only makes sense that media supports the menstrual health movement that has been going on for many years now.

We believed it was time to look into the media's focus on menstruation and how much coverage the topic has been given in the past year. With the increase in reach across different parts of Nepal, the media's role in developing perceptions of people has also increased.

This report tries to provide an in-depth analysis of five newspapers (print media) and two online portals on their coverage on menstruation in the year 2021. Five famous print media newspapers (The Kathmandu Post, The Himalayan Times, Kantipur Daily, Republica and Nagarik) and two online portals (Setopati and Online Khabar) were taken as base for analysis. A total number of 63 articles on menstruation have been published in the year 2021. Further breakdown and analysis of these 63 articles in accordance with different themes have been identified.

There are many articles and news pieces that have been covered about menstruation. However, our findings have suggested that other areas that relate and intersect with menstruation also need to be covered in order to have a broader understanding. A few such topics and areas that looked missing are as follows:

- Gaps in policies and plans related to menstruation
- Commitments done by Nepal government on menstruation and menstrual health and hygiene and its follow up
- National initiatives by individuals and organizations on menstruation
- Menstruation in emergencies
- Menstrual issues with individuals from LGBTQIA community and persons with disabilities
- Policy advocacy to authorities from all three levels of the government
- Coverage on menopause
- Coverage on Premenstrual syndrome and premenstrual dysphoric disorder
- Involvement on men in menstruation

It has also been found that online portals have outnumbered print media in menstruation coverage. The coverage in two online portals is almost equal to five print media newspapers.

The report also provides suggestions to Nepali media – both print and online portals on what needs to be done in order to be more inclusive.

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Introduction

Every day, there are around [237,250 menstruators](#) in Nepal. Reports have suggested that 89% face one or many forms of restrictions and exclusion. With so many women and girls still facing discrimination, it is now high time to advocate for dignified menstruation because every menstruator deserves to live with dignity without their life being controlled. And in order to do so, media plays a big and important part. Media plays a catalytic role in activism and advocacy, in addition to providing transparent news to the readers. Therefore, it is very important for the media to give space to articles, editorials and op-eds in order to highlight menstruation related topics like menstrual health and hygiene, menstrual stigma and most importantly dignified menstruation.

In this report, Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance (MHMPA) Nepal has tried to analyze media and its role in bringing forward news pieces/opinions and issues on menstruation and its related areas. The main idea behind monitoring the articles is to grab Nepali media's attention and to highlight critical feedback in order to help Nepali media in acknowledging menstruation as an important topic for exploration.

With many communities in Nepal still practicing menstrual restrictions because of cultural/social taboos and silence pertaining around the subject, Nepali media has a strong role in disseminating information to the general public.

With the media's strong link in the policymaking process, MHMPA believes that it can influence policy makers working in the area of menstruation through their tireless research and investigative efforts.

Rationale

In order to advocate for the media to focus on menstruation, MHMPA Nepal has brought forward a new publication titled, "Media Coverage on Menstruation, 2021". The main aim of this report is to highlight the media's prioritization towards a sensitive topic like menstruation and the space it has given in its coverage.

The key rationale of developing this report are as follows:

- 1) MHM PA intends to review and analyze media coverage every year
- 2) Identify gaps in media coverage and make adaptive strategies for media sector
- 3) Create evidence for policy advocacy

7 news portals (The Himalayan Times, Republica, Kantipur Daily, Nagarik News, The Kathmandu Post, Setopati and Online Khabar) were selected and thoroughly checked and analyzed.

The reason behind selecting the above-mentioned newspapers and online news portals are as follows:

- 1) To check the level of coverage on different national dailies (in both Nepali and English language)
- 2) To compare and contrast the level of coverage from print media and online media

Objectives

The main objectives of developing this report are as follows:

- To provide a comprehensive outlook on media's overall coverage on menstruation and its reach to the wider audience
- To understand what kind of coverage (articles, editorials, op-eds) has been published and what kinds of details have been provided
- To identify gaps in the media and to help media develop strategies

Methodology

The report is based on the analysis of news pieces covered by seven different newspapers from January to December 2021. The seven newspapers were randomly selected. The newspapers that have been analyzed are Kantipur (Nepali), The Kathmandu Post (English), The Himalayan Times (English), Republica (English), Nagarik (Nepali), Setopati (Nepali and English) and Online Khabar (Nepali and English).

During the initial process, where desk research was being conducted, only five newspapers were being analyzed. However, after realizing that the five national dailies (which also come out in print) did not have enough coverage, it was decided that two online portals, Setopati and OnlineKhabar would also be included.

The seven newspapers have been thoroughly analyzed and key findings have been presented. In addition, several different themes have also been identified.

The analysis has been done in order to check different themes and to see if the media has missed out on any important theme that needs to be covered.

The themes have been analyzed through thematic analysis- initially, preliminary codes were identified after which patterns/themes were generated in accordance with articles and their priorities on different topics of menstruation. The following themes were found to be prevalent in the articles that were analyzed:

- Untouchability and Menstrual Stigma/Taboo
- Menstrual Products
- Dignified Menstruation

The different themes mentioned above have been thoroughly described along with other key findings.

Key Findings

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the findings.

Overview of news coverage

There was a total of 63 news pieces related to menstruation in the year 2021 from seven different newspapers (online and in print).

The analysis has shown that OnlineKhabar has 18 pieces, which becomes the highest number in comparison to other newspapers. Similarly, Setopati has 13 pieces. Both Setopati and OnlineKhabar are online portals.

If we try to look at the newspapers from print media, Kantipur daily has a coverage of 11 articles, followed by The Kathmandu Post which has published 7 pieces, The Himalayan Times has six pieces, Republica daily has 5 pieces and Nagarik News has only two pieces which makes it the newspaper with lowest number of pieces on menstruation.

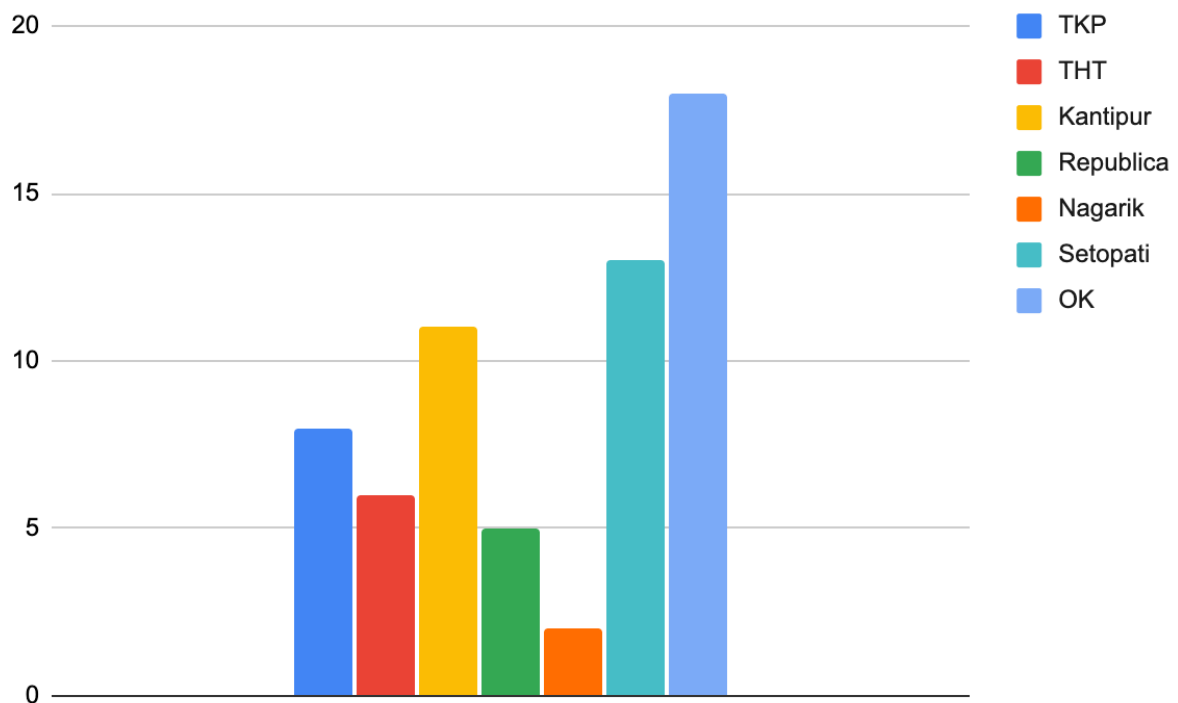


Fig: Breakdown of articles according to seven medias (newspapers and online portals)

While breaking down the pieces in the newspapers, total news articles that were published is at 32 pieces, followed by 16 pieces from blogs/columns and opinion pieces. With photo features and video features becoming available, there are 14 pieces covered throughout the year.

However, it has been seen that editorials have not been giving much importance to menstruation. Over the past year, there is only one editorial piece that has been dedicated to menstruation.

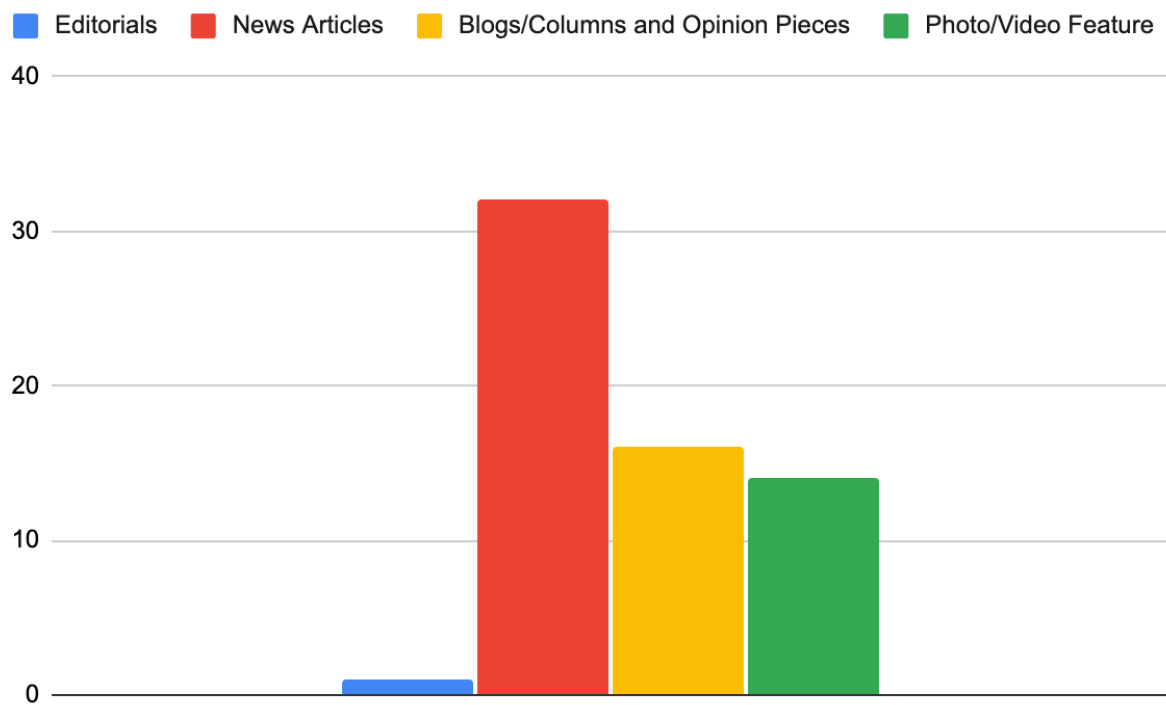


Fig: Breakdown of news pieces according to content

Furthermore, out of the 5-print media and 2 online portals, 33 news pieces are from print media and 31 are from online portals. The stark difference can be seen in this analysis on how two online portals have almost an equal number of pieces in comparison to five different newspapers that come in print.

Thematic Areas

From the total number of news pieces covered in this report, the following themes has been identified through thematic analysis

- Untouchability/Menstrual Stigma and Taboo

Blogs and opinion pieces have mostly reflected on stigma and taboo related to menstruation and various different authors have tried to destigmatize menstruation through their writings. It is clearly evident that all of the writers believe that menstruation is a natural process and that there should be no stigma and taboo attached to it. Many articles have highlighted that there is a need to change people and their perceptions related to menstruation.

In addition, many news articles have also brought forward concerns on how many communities in the far west still practice Chhaupadi even though it has been criminalized.

The majority of the articles covered in this report are related to untouchability during menstruation and its impact on women and girls.

- Menstrual Products

A number of articles have also focused on menstrual products to help menstruators know about the choices that they have while menstruating. Many articles have focused on menstrual cups and have provided insights of how it can be a long-term sustainable solution for menstruation. Similarly, news pieces on reusable sanitary pads have also made its way to newspapers.

This year, the majority of the newspapers and online portals which have been analyzed had a photo feature on the protest against red tax on menstrual products. The news gained a lot of popularity and many have also argued that menstrual products should not be labeled as luxury since menstruation is a natural process and not a luxurious one.

- Dignified Menstruation

When many communities in a country like Nepal follow menstrual stigma and untouchability, dignified menstruation becomes a distant reality. Therefore, as an effort to disseminate the idea of dignified menstruation to a wider audience, many different papers have brought forward articles, blogs and opinion pieces on dignified menstruation. Most articles mainly talk about dignified menstruation being a basic right.

Oftentimes, young girls also miss out on school in comparison to their male counterparts. Although, studies have shown that young girls miss school during menstruation because of lack of proper WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) facilities, this is NOT only the sole reason. Social, cultural and traditional barriers play an equally important role. For example, women and girls often live under fear of having stains from menstrual blood in schools and workplaces because of which they withdraw themselves from any activities in the classrooms and workplace. Similarly, lack of conversation around menstruation and the silence that is observed has also helped in maintaining menstrual stigma across all generations.

Coverage in English and Nepali Language

Out of the seven newspapers and online portals covered, five are newspapers and two are online portals. To further break down, 3 newspapers are printed in English and 2 newspapers are printed in Nepali. The online portals are both in English and Nepali language. Therefore, this report has also analyzed a number of news pieces in both English and Nepali language. The total number of news pieces in English stands at 29 while that in Nepali stands at 34.

What is the Nepali Media Missing?

In monitoring the news coverage on menstruation by Nepali media, there were a few areas related to menstruation where coverage was missing. The following has been analyzed after looking at all the articles from 5 print media and 2 online portals. In order to provide an outlook of the missing areas in Nepali media's coverage on menstruation, the following points have been summarized.

Gaps in policies and plans related to menstruation

There are several policies and plans that are in place. However, analysis and gaps are never analyzed. Analysis of gaps in policies, plans and programs will not only create a buzz among policymakers, it will help the general people understand that policy gaps exist and that there needs to be certain level of intervention to acknowledge it.

National initiatives by individuals and organizations on menstruation

There are many individuals and organizations who are working at their maximum capacity to create knowledge, awareness and to advocate for menstrual health and hygiene. There is several coverages of celebrities and their view towards menstruation. However, it would help if common man and their efforts are also acknowledged.

Menstruation in Emergencies

Every year, there is news about flooding and displacement from across the country. However, during such emergencies, there is no news and coverage on how women and girls are dealing with menstruation during such difficult times. Emergencies can happen anytime, therefore media should put its effort in covering issues of difficulties faced by women and girls during emergencies.

Menstrual issues with individuals from LGBTQIA community and persons with disabilities

Menstruation is a natural process and it does not stop for anyone. Proper mechanism for menstruators from LGBTQIA community and persons with disabilities also need to be focused. There is hardly any coverage from the media on this topic. The media needs to be inclusive in its coverage and try to include everyone.

Policy advocacy to authorities from all three levels of the government

Media has the ability to advocate for several issues through their write-ups and networking. In this regard, the Nepali media can work in advocating for policies and plans relevant to menstruation

Coverage on Menopause

Along with the themes that have been identified above, the media should also try and reflect upon issues like menopause. Several women go through several different symptoms while going through menopause.

Coverage on such sensitive issues will help women understand more about the changes in their bodies and will make them feel less isolated considering the fact that there are many women going through a similar phase.

Coverage on PMS/PMDD (Premenstrual Syndrome and Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder)

There are sensitive areas like Premenstrual syndrome and Premenstrual dysphoric disorder which need to be highlighted and the media needs to provide space for the same. It has been estimated that 80% of the menstruators have one or another form of PMS or PMDD. Therefore, this is also an important area that needs to be covered.

Involvement of Men in Menstruation

There are many male activists who have been working in the field of menstruation for a long time. Their effort in normalizing dialogues and stories on menstruation shows that involvement of men is also an integral point to destigmatize menstruation. Stories and continuous efforts of such men and their coverage will help more men being involved.

Conclusion

Looking at the level of media coverage on menstruation from renowned newspapers and online portals, it won't be wrong to say that the topic is yet to get recognition in the mainstream. With so much silence still pertaining around menstruation, the media can play a very important role by giving space and recognizing how important it is in the Nepali context.

As one of the core thematic areas of MHMPA Nepal's building block, it has become important to advocate for media's support and coverage on a sensitive topic like menstruation. This report, as a part of our advocacy effort, tries to bring forward an analysis of Nepali media's effort in bringing forward news pieces on menstruation and the space it has given to op-eds, blogs and other columns for the same. This research was done in order to raise awareness among Nepali media to highlight the importance of menstruation and to destigmatize and stop silence at a broader level. This report can also be used as an advocacy tool to help media in reaching policy makers through their constant coverage.

The findings that have been achieved from this report would be disseminated to different media houses for their individual reflections and hoping that they bring forward necessary changes by incorporating recommendations that are provided.

With Nepali media's presence in the public sphere and its capability to influence the general public, more coverage on menstruation related areas and topics would mean better outreach and proper dissemination.

The onus is also now upon some newspapers from print media to realize that they have been lacking in covering ideas and issues related to menstruation and it is also their responsibility to create a platform where menstrual health and hygiene can be discussed.

It is also important to bring forward news pieces related to policies, programs and interventions related to menstruation from the federal, provincial and local level. This will help in bringing a clear picture of what is happening in all levels of the government and its gaps and to address them.

Recommendations

The following are a few recommendations to the Nepali media fraternity from MHMPA Nepal

- 1) The Nepali media needs to hold conferences related to menstruation at least once a year in order to provide a platform to talk about challenges and opportunities faced by different stakeholders working in the field of menstruation
- 2) There is a need for more editorials on menstruation and its related topics. Over the year 2021, there is just one editorial from The Himalayan Times. This reflects lack of enthusiasm from editors in media houses to learn more about menstruation and lack of interest in addressing such a sensitive topic. With so many women and girls menstruating every day in Nepal, it is important to highlight the topic
- 3) Print media – the newspapers mentioned above must try and work with organizations working in the field of menstruation to bring forward more narratives and stories of women, girls and other menstruators in order to help bring attention and help in spreading similar experiences forward. Setopati has done a commendable job in bringing stories of famous women to help break taboo and stigma.
- 4) The media should try and focus on disseminating its people to different parts of the country to follow-up several news related to menstruation. Time and again, there are many news about Chhaupadi, but there is hardly any follow-up. By following up on news about such critical issues, it would help in creating awareness to the general public.
- 5) Nepali media houses should try and capacitate its employees by providing courses, trainings and workshops related to menstruation for better coverage.

Annex

List of articles on menstruation and list of newspapers

The Kathmandu Post

<https://kathmandupost.com/sudurpaschim-province/2021/03/01/menstrual-hygiene-campaign-benefits-girl-students-in-mangalsen>

<https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2021/03/18/paradigm-shift-to-the-menstrual-cup>

<https://kathmandupost.com/art-culture/2021/03/31/still-spoken-in-whispers-the-obstacles-of-opening-up-about-menstrual-experiences>

<https://kathmandupost.com/as-it-is/2021/05/08/learning-to-touch-yourself>

<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/09/25/women-and-activists-see-red-over-pink-tax>

<https://kathmandupost.com/life--style/2021/10/26/women-take-pills-to-delay-periods-but-many-are-not-aware-of-the-side-effects>

<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/12/10/menstrual-exclusion-practices-continue-even-in-modern-educated-families>

<https://kathmandupost.com/sudurpaschim-province/2021/12/29/anti-chhaupadi-campaign-in-achham-losing-steam>

The Himalayan Times

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/blogs/women-and-sexuality>

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/national-policies-and-plans-on-menstrual-hygiene-discussed>

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/editorial-girls-absenteeism>

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/blogs/menstrual-hygiene>

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/one-in-four-teen-girls-miss-school-during-menstruation>

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/photo-gallery/make-sanitary-pads-tax-free>

Kantipur

<https://ekantipur.com/market/2021/03/25/161668479682113211.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/opinion/2021/09/09/163115413711315469.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/health/2021/09/18/16319520054348951.html>

https://ekantipur.com/photo_feature/2021/09/24/16324448047064210.html

<https://ekantipur.com/opinion/2021/09/30/163296698414437827.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/news/2021/10/01/163305281194126247.html?author=1>

<https://ekantipur.com/news/2021/10/01/16330982516566674.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/opinion/2021/11/22/163754762684166350.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/bibidha/2021/11/18/163720025636373408.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/koseli/2021/12/11/163919057029989811.html>

<https://ekantipur.com/opinion/2021/12/14/163944833528428668.html>

Republica

<https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/do-not-impose-tax-on-my-period-photo-feature/>

<https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/the-cost-of-being-a-menstruating-individual/>

<https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/menstrual-cycle-in-nepal-curse-to-celebration/>

<https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/in-pics-rishi-panchami-being-observed-today/>

<https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/into-the-world-of-tax-free-and-stigma-free-period/>

Nagarik

https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/video/544701-1622974235.html?click_from=trending

<https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/photo-feature/630251-1632400221.html>

Setopati

<https://www.setopati.com/social/227409>

<https://www.setopati.com/social/228710>

<https://www.setopati.com/social/232208>

<https://www.setopati.com/kinmel/business/232905>

<https://www.setopati.com/social/230867>

https://www.setopati.com/social/234262/?fb_comment_id=5965948943418931_5966702580010234

<https://www.setopati.com/blog/238884>

<https://en.setopati.com/blog/155738>

<https://www.setopati.com/social/243064>

<https://www.setopati.com/social/250024>

<https://www.setopati.com/blog/249716>

<https://en.setopati.com/blog/156947>

<https://www.setopati.com/social/251934>

Online Khabar

<https://english.onlinekhabar.com/3-key-sectors-where-nepali-women-still-face-difficulties-in-accessing-justice.html>

<https://english.onlinekhabar.com/tips-to-relieve-menstrual-cramps-nepal-context.html>

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<https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2021/10/1031394>

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<https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2021/11/1033442>

<https://english.onlinekhabar.com/dignified-menstruation-issues-nepal.html>

<https://english.onlinekhabar.com/dignified-menstruation-violence-women.html>