

# A Realist Synthesis of Menstrual Seclusion Interventions in Nepal: How Programs Work, for Whom, in Which Contexts, and Why

11<sup>th</sup> National  
Summit of Health  
and Population  
Scientists in Nepal

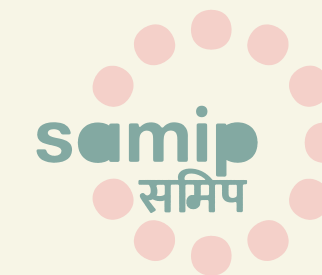


Women's education and empowerment are central to *chhaupadi* programs implemented to date.

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Strengthening Actions  
in Menstrual Health and  
Hygiene Interventions  
for Promotion of  
Women's Health in Nepal

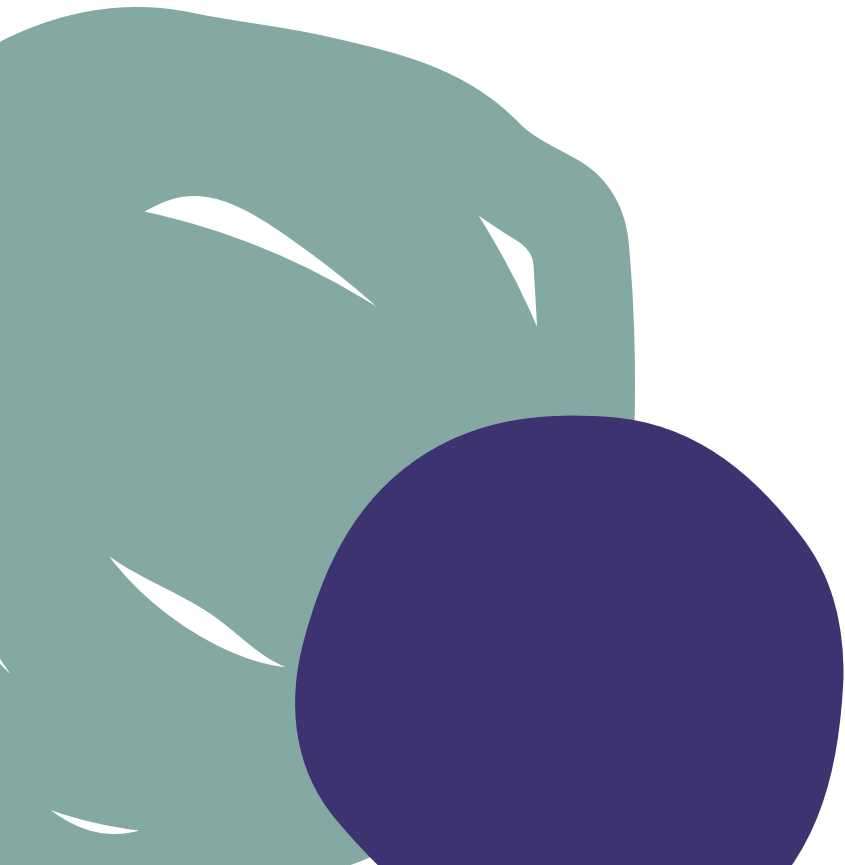


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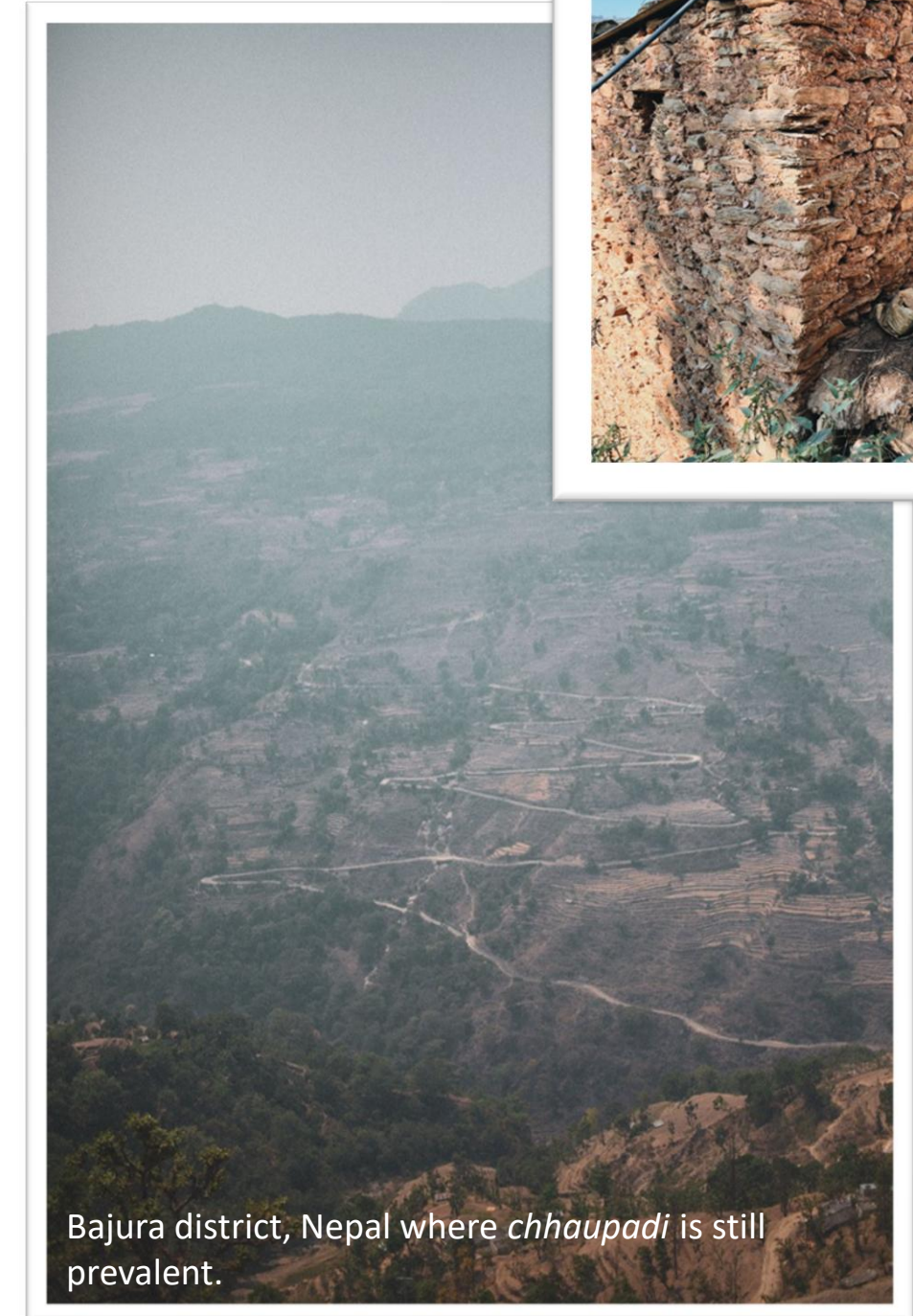
# Overview of Presentation

- Provide context of chhaupadi in Nepal
  - Brief introduction to Realist Synthesis methodology
  - Preliminary findings
  - Implications and Conclusions
- 



## Context

- In Nepal, menstruation is often associated with health and safety challenges, social stigma, and human rights concerns.
- In parts of the country, menstruators adhere to *chhaupadi*, a menstrual seclusion ritual grounded in social and religious traditions, which exposes them to a spectrum of harms.
- A range of interventions have been implemented to address the illegal practice, however, *chhaupadi* persists.
- **No published studies have comprehensively assessed which components of chhaupadi interventions hold promise or scrutinized the mechanisms and theories underpinning them.**





# Study Objective

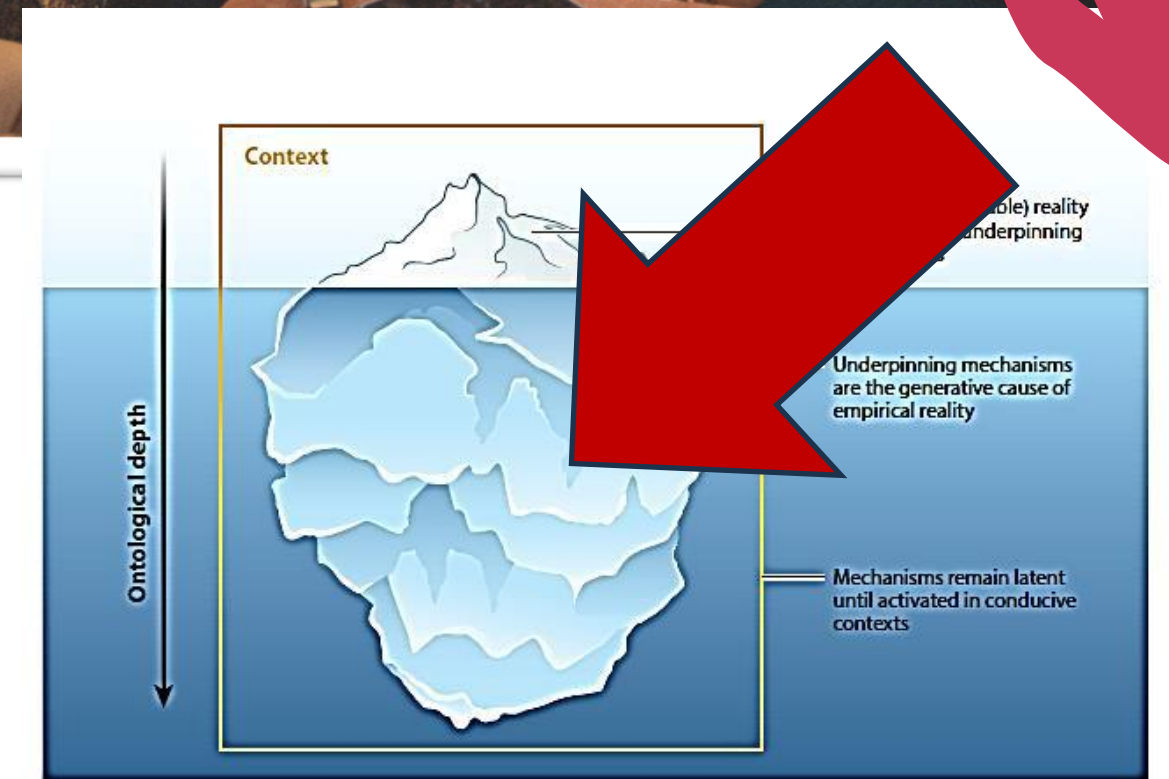
- Distill programmatic insights from chhaupadi interventions implemented to date to **elucidate how programs work, for whom, in which contexts, and why.**





# Methods

- We applied **Realist Synthesis (RS)**, a theory-driven, and systematic approach for synthesizing complex intervention evidence to assess **underlying program mechanisms**.
- Primarily concerned with **theory development** and refinement.
- It operates under the assumption that interventions will be **partially successful in all cases; RS allows us to study the complexities**.
- RS uses mixed methods, and a blend of secondary and primary data (KIs), secondary data can include:
  - Journal articles, grey literature, editorials, commentary, newspaper, blogs, social media posts, YouTube, dissertations, etc.
- **RS helps uncover the deeper causal forces behind programs.**
- **Goal is to develop a middle range theory that can guide the field.**

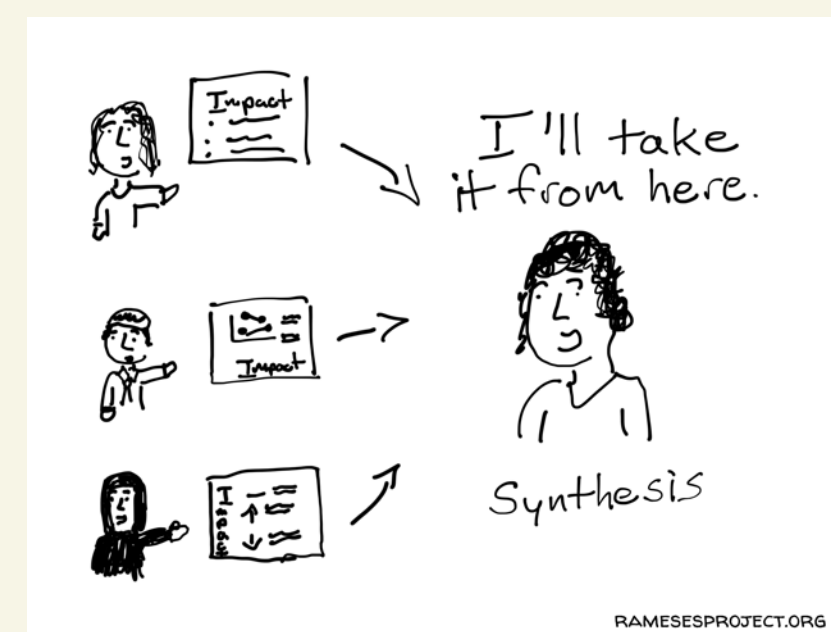


From: Jagosh (2019) Realist Synthesis for Public Health: Building an Ontologically Deep Understanding of How Programs Work, For Whom, and In Which Contexts. Annual Review of Public Health: Vol. 40



# Methods

- Held a **knowledge sharing workshop** to gather insights on underlying theories of chhaupadi interventions, representation from 8 organizations →
- **We analyzed *chhaupadi* program documents, articles, and videos** utilizing realist methodology (e.g., initial program theories; context, mechanism, outcome [CMO] configurations) (systematic searches with librarian)
- **We consulted with program experts, implementers, and community members** in Bajura, Achham and Kathmandu via in-depth interviews.



Chhaupadi  
experts/practitioners

Our team will synthesize  
and share back.

# Preliminary Findings

**2,033  
resources**

**Inclusion criteria:**

- *Must examine chhaupadi in Nepal*
- *Must focus on a chhaupadi intervention and/or offer recommendations for addressing chhaupadi (can include but not limited to policy, educational, media, community interventions)*
- *Published after 2006*

**Systematic  
screening**  
(3 levels of  
review)

**69**

- Our searches and consultations with experts yielded **69 references** meeting inclusion criteria
- Final resources included in analysis:
  - 31 from structured database searching (support of a university librarian)
  - 19 from unstructured searching/grey literature
  - 19 from YouTube (videos)

# Preliminary Findings

- The following configurations consider context, mechanisms, and outcomes (CMOs) underpinning interventions, which help to explain how chhaupadi interventions work in various contexts.
- These are the theoretical underpinnings of chhaupadi interventions:
  - **1: Enabling Environments:** By creating enabling environments - including educating women on their rights and involving collaborators across various levels - it is possible to take action against chhaupadi.
  - **2: Economic Empowerment:** Supporting income-generating activities for women can enhance their status and decision-making power in society, and in turn reduce chhaupadi harms.
  - **3: Raising Critical Consciousness among Women and Beyond:** Education and raising critical consciousness among women can equip them to diffuse their beliefs within their families and communities for wider changes in attitudes and improved behaviors.





# Preliminary Findings

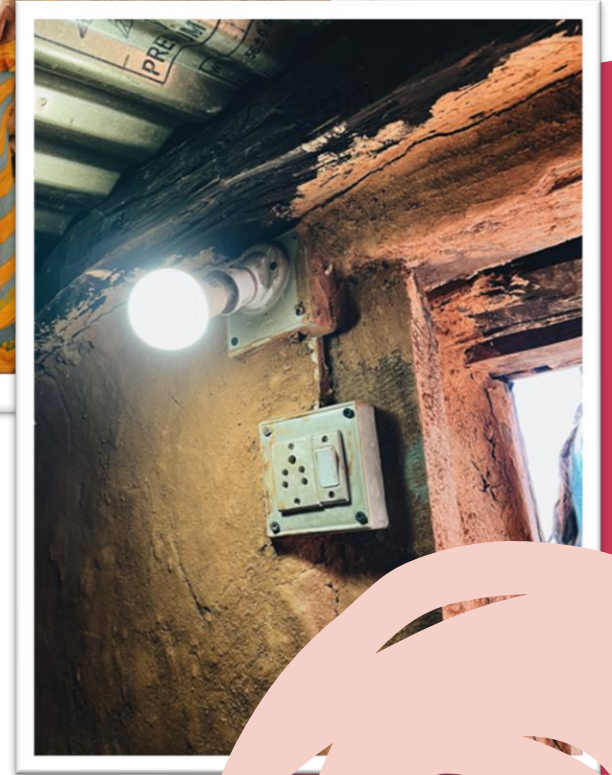
- **4: Families as Key Allies:** Families play a role in the cultural construction and intergenerational transfer of menstrual beliefs and practices, which must be considered in designing interventions.
- **5: Partnering with Religious Leaders and Traditional Healers:** Interventions that target these key community members can have significant influence at the local level.





# Preliminary Findings

- **6: Awareness Campaigns Plus Policy Enforcement:** If the government mobilizes state mechanisms and conducts public awareness campaigns, accurate information will capture the attention of key groups (e.g., religious leaders and traditional healers), making those efforts more effective.
- **7: Harm Reduction Approach:** If community people take gradual steps towards behavior change, it will ease people into more substantial change in the long run to ensure the wellbeing of the community and mitigate the potential harms that come with drastic and abrupt changes.
- **Next steps:** Further analysis will be completed to compile CMO configurations and develop a conceptual model and middle range theory to guide the field.





# Conclusion

Creating **enabling environments** through **education, gradual behavioral shifts, family involvement**, and the mobilization of key **community leaders**—such as religious figures—along with **women's economic empowerment and awareness campaigns**, can collectively challenge and transform harmful menstrual practices like *chhaupadi*.



Traditional healer in Bajura who is engaged in an intervention to improve behaviors associated with *chhaupadi*.

## Implications

These findings are expected to provide program implementers, researchers, and policy makers with a **theory- and evidenced-based framework** to develop and refine culturally sensitive chhaupadi interventions across various settings in Nepal.





# Acknowledgements & Contact

- We express our deepest gratitude to the communities throughout Achham and Bajura districts, and experts in Kathmandu who shared their expertise.
- Thank you to all the organizations who continue to dedicate their expertise and efforts to tackling chhaupadi harms, we thank them for reflecting and sharing their lessons learned with us, specifically:
  - SUSWA
  - Green Tara
  - Good Neighbors International
  - KIRDARC
  - Days for Girls
  - GIZ
  - Oda Foundation
  - Radha Poudel Foundation
- Thank you to Kemlin Acharya for supporting with data analysis, as well as our advisory board members.
- This research is supported by Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health (K01TW012424). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

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