

## Causes of Violence against Women: A Qualitative Study at Bardiya District

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### Abstract

#### Background

Violence is universal act that threatens life, health and happiness of all human beings. This includes threat, coercion and the arbitrary deprivation of resources. Violence against women is usually performed by a male partner. Violence against women is a global epidemic and gives physical, psychological, sexual and economical tortures. Every individual has basic right to live in their home peacefully, but women's basic right is isolated due to violence. Violence against women is the most pervasive of human right violation.

#### Methodology

Qualitative research design was used for this study to explore perceptions, suffering, pain, feelings, opinion or views on violence against women. 20 female victims of the violence against women were selected for the study. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used. In-depth interview guideline was used to collect the data. Thematic data analysis was done to explore to causes of violence against women.

#### Results

Most of the respondents were under 30 years. Married and illiterate were observed more victims of the violence against women. Main causes of violence were low status of women, illiteracy, economic dependence, patriarchal society. Other causes were inter-caste marriage, husband listening to other family members, sexual dissatisfaction, and unemployment, and extramarital relation of husband, suspicious attitude, gambling, and dowry system.

#### Conclusion

Violence against women has evolved as a part of a system of gender relation. Ideas of male supremacy, dominance over female are often reflected in societies and considered as private matter. Violence is continuing of beliefs that grant men right to control women's behavior, violence, which results in injury of the victims.

**Keywords:** causes; violence against women; gender.

#### Introduction

Gender is socially constructed feature of women and men, and sex refers to biologically determined characters. People are born as female or male but learn as to be girls and boys and grow into women and men in the society where they live. This learned behavior makes up gender identity and determines gender roles. "Violence against women," includes any kinds of harmful behaviors against women and girls that are most often carried out by individuals inside or outside the family. The widely accepted definition of violence against women is: "any harm that perpetrates against a person's will; that has a negative impact on the physical or psychological health, development, and identity of the person; and that is the result of gender power inequities that exploits distinctions between males and females, among males and among females." (1)

Violence is a universal act that threatens the life, health and happiness in daily lives of all human beings. Such

acts are threat, coercion and deprivation of resources. Violence against women is usually done by male partners. (2) Violence against women is a global epidemic that kills and gives physical, sexual and economic tortures. Every individual has basic right to live in their home peacefully, but women's basic right is isolated due to violence. Violence against women is occurring within the public and private place, usually individuals who are related through intimacy, blood or law or stranger. (3) Violence against women is referred to as "wife beating" "wife battering" intimate "partner abuse". (4) In most of the societies, wife beating is largely regarded as a man's right. In our setting, women are expected to look after their homes and children, show an honor and respect their husbands. If

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wife has failed to play her role, for instance, asking for husband expenses or stressing the need of their children then violence is his response. Partners' violence account for huge number of deaths by murdering women. Even in developed countries like US or Australia, 40-70% of female murder victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends. (5)

Magnitude of the problems is seen in variety of forms-physical abuse, sexual abuse and rape in intimate relationship, feticide, sexual abuse of children and adolescents, forced abortions, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and differential access to food and medical care, traditional and cultural practices affecting the health and lives of women. (5) Women are suffering violence, from womb to elderly stages of life in any form; they are even prevented from birth. (6, 7)

Culturally, there is a norm which accepts fate; to be born as a woman is the result of your bad deeds in the previous life. So, it is culturally accepted in the form of women's fate. Victims of violence against women are often married women. Incidence of home based violence against women is high though it is under reported. Violence is unacceptable and no woman deserves to be beaten, sexually abused or made to suffer emotionally. Our society has created an environment, where the society is tolerant of the abuser and is intolerant of the victim. Violence against women is a sensitive issue and therefore very little information is available. This study will try to explore the causes of violence and fulfill the gap leading to violence against women.

Violence against women and girls has been in existence in Nepali society. A study conducted in Nepal revealed that 93% were exposed to mental and emotional torture, 82% were beaten, 30% raped, 28% forced to prostitution, 64% had polygamous relationship. (8) Higher suicide rate in reproductive age groups is due to violence against women. (9) A study in 2004 concluded that maternal mortality accounts for the highest number of women's deaths each year. (8) A nationwide survey conducted in 2011 showed that one third of females suffered from any kinds of violence in last 12 months. (10) About 200,000 Nepalese girls are trafficked to India and average age of trafficked girls is 14-16 years. (11) Women and girls working in carpet factory suffer from sexual harassment as 44% body touching, 29% obscenity remark and 27% even teasing. (12) In the Nepali context, no one intervenes at the time of sexual and gender based disputes in the home due to our cultural practices, perpetrator of violence against women receive legal, judicial and cultural impunity, very few organization have recognized the need for concrete effective means to address violence against women. Inadequate education, different cultural practices, gender inequality, particularly disadvantaged women, and lack of involvement in decision making and discriminatory laws and economic marginalization are reasons behind violence against women. (5)

Violence by husband is a major health concern in South-East Asia. Up to 50% women reported physical violence

by their husbands or partners in South East Asian Region. (13) Violence related injuries were the fifth most common cause of maternal death in rural Bangladesh. Out of 1842 women aged between 15-39 years from the district in Uttar Pradesh in North India and Tamil Nadu in South India reported that 42-48% and 36-38% prevalence of violence respectively. (13) Effects of such violence on victims range from relatively minor cuts and bruises to permanent disabilities and death. Victims of physical aggression are subjected to multiple acts of violence over extended period of time. Physical violence in intimate relationships is often observed by psychological abuse, about half of the cases by sexual violence. Partner violence accounts for 40-70% murders, where women are killed by their husband or boyfriend, often during ongoing abusive relationships. (2)

Violence against women is being openly discussed only since the last 10 years in Nepal. Violence against women is not accepted as violence in Nepalese society, due to strong patriarchal society and limited freedom of expression of such social evils. Violence against women is less reported in Nepal. It is because of shame and guilt experienced by the families of victims and unsatisfactory response by police. Few women are courageous to take their cases to court, because of the social pressure they used to conceal such incidents. (5)

## Methods

The study was conducted in the Aawaj organization located in Gulariya Municipality-8 of Bardiya district of Nepal. Study duration was December 1-30, 2010. Aawaj is local organization working for victims of violence against women. This organization provides counseling, legal support for victims. Community level advocacy, rehabilitations supports are other works of Aawaj in the district. Total 43 cases were attended in organization for care help and supports. Out of 43 victims, 20 victims were interviewed because it was the saturation point of intended information. Those who refused to interview were excluded from the study. The qualitative research design was used. Data collection tool was in-depth interview guideline, which was used to collect perception, experiences, views, opinions, their suffering and pains on violence against women. It was ensured that all information provided by respondents would be confidential and used only for research purpose. Ethical approval was taken from Institutional Review Board of Birendra Nagar Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Surket.

This study used non-probability purposive sampling technique. Violence against women is a very sensitive issue. Pre-tested in-depth interview guideline was used for data collection. Trained female counselors conducted in-depth interview with victims in Aawaj Office. Informed consent was taken before interview. Confidentiality was maintained during interview and they were ensured that information collected would be used only for research purpose. Right of the individual dignity was respected. Low external validity and some information biases are the limitations of the study that occurred due to sensitive issues as data collection process is passive on violence

against women.

## Results

### Socio-economic background of victims

Twenty victims were included for data analysis, out of forty three victims who attended for support in organization during data collection period. Out of 20 cases, two were unmarried and all of cases were below 30 years. Nine victims were from Brahmin/Chettri community, four from Janajati and two were Dalit and five from Madhesi ethnic community. 15 victims belonged to middle class family and 5 were from poor socio-economic status. Four victims were in 15-19 age groups. Four were illiterate, two were SLC graduates and rest of victims were primary grader. Most of the respondents lived in nuclear family. The respondents residing in joint family expressed that most of the conflicts started due to complain done by in-laws to the husband.

### Help care practices

Most of the cases, who were seeking help in the organization, came in contact with the help of community volunteers or by staffs of the organization. Some victims came in contact through relatives, especially with support of matrilineal origins. Few victims were present there of social organizations especially through social support groups e.g. mother's group. Sometimes they got support from other community people or by friends and police. Main causes of attending in the organizations were physical beating and mental tortures by their husbands. Some of the victims were neglected by their husbands and other family members. Those who were unmarried, firstly were found in love affairs, conceived after consensual sexual contact but neglected by boyfriends. One of factors for violence was excessive drinking who were married. This was the factor for sexual violence. Some of victims were suffering neglects from the family members.

### Form of violence

Most common form of violence is physical followed by mental tortures. Some women are suffering from sexual harassment. Emotional pressure in the family from the family members is common in joint family.

### Defense of the violence

An immediate defense of the victim was nothing more than to tolerate the violence. Most of them used to response the problems silently. Being offensive was harmful for themselves because of either other violence or shyness in the community. They used to hide the problems inside themselves for a long. After frequent repetition of violence, they shared the problems to nearer people either to mothers or friends of the community or with relatives who they supposed to be getting help for the violence against women.

### Causes of violence against women

Most of the victims responded that root cause of the violence against women was low status of women in the community and women were considered as a commodity. Illiteracy and economic dependence over male were

main factors of violence. Lack of participation in decision making, early marriage, traditional beliefs, values, norms which were deeply rooted to violence against women. Adolescents were seen more prone to victims of the violence against women.

### Marital status

Violence is perceived more in inter-caste marriage. Family members' pressures to husband, sexual dissatisfaction were other underlying factors for violence. Many women get marriage to bride of town, well rich or educated husband; they were prone to getting sexual violence. Victims were equally suffered who did love marriage or arranged marriage.

### Support from men and issues of autonomy

Almost all respondents stated that men are considered as outdoor workers, inheritors, future pillars and breadwinners of the family, whereas females are considered to be indoor workers and subordinates to their spouses. Victims stressed on patriarchal system. Almost all respondents agreed that their society is male dominated. Female members had no individual rights. They had to take permission from husbands to do outside works or movement.

### Underlying causes of violence

Unemployment, extramarital relation of husband, suspicious attitude, gambling, dowry and widowhood are underlying causes of violence. Unemployment, extramarital affairs of husbands and son preference in the family were other perceived factors of violence against women. Use of alcohol, supremacy feeling of men, inter caste marriage, husbands' habit of listening to other family members, gambling followed by polygamy, widowhood, sexual dissatisfaction, were the contributors for the violence against women.

"I lived with three daughters. My mother in law always tortured since I got my first daughter. My husband started to beat me when I got second daughter and forced me to leave after I got third child as daughter. They told me that I damaged their clan by birthing daughters."

-30 years old victim violence, attending for support

### Gender biased in socialization

Daughters are generally found as the tree planted for others. Females have been taught from early childhood to keep themselves in low profile, speak a low voice and are kept under strict rules and regulations. They have prescribed roles dominated by male partners in every sphere of life and are never involved in decision making process. Family members always prefer sons. Male child is taught from early childhood to be strong, bold and are given special care.

### Perception on law and policy

Regarding the provision of law and policy on women's right, most of the respondents expressed that there is no equal law and policy for males and females, especially in getting citizenship, property right, and reproductive right. Victims explained males were involving polygamous re-



relationships but society was tolerating this as usual phenomena. Some victims told 'law' and 'policy' were equal only in words but not implemented properly in practice. They perceived that the weak implementation of law is due to poor access in judicial system. There was unanimous voice about inefficiency of law enactment for the perpetrator of violence against women.

### Timing of violence and perpetrators of violence

Violence against women occurred mostly at night because nobody could recognize it. Poor victims told they were suffered at any time. The perpetrators were husbands followed by in-laws.

"My husband always comes drinking at late night. Sometimes, he used to come with other friends. He beat me and scolded me public places. He blamed me and tortured me that I did not respect him and his friends who came home for drinking."

-Response of 28 years old victim

### Economic status and perception on spouse

In most of the families, the husbands are looked upon as earning sons, who played a vital role in the family. He earns bread so rest of the family members respects him and he is always given high priority & taken, special care. It was also found that the husbands have been treated as neglected sons due to unemployment. Most of the respondents see their husbands as their life partners and some respondents feel husbands as a friends and supportive partners. The inability to supplement family income due to loss of productivity or employment as a result of having sick and having to take the sick leave from the work is an unseen cost which is usually born by the victim.

### Family support and issues of decision making

Most of the respondents have to perform their household chores themselves. Husband and the in-law members do not assist them in household chores. They considered it as a feminine work; some of them had to assist them. Majority of the victims stated that major decisions of the family have been made by the father in law and husband. Mother in-law also made some of the decisions. However, unanimously they said male members of the family are powerful for the decision of family. Majority of respondent's husband had the habit of drinking alcohol. Some of them scolded their wives with vulgar words and looked at wife in a suspicious manner. Husbands mad new female friends and enjoy themselves.

"My daughter is 11 years old and mentally retarded. When she was on the way to home from jungle of Taratal VDC, one 45 years old man attacked her and she was raped. She became unconscious; informed to home, then immediately. She was admitted for medical care in district hospital, and legal supports started. It was found that the prosecutor is their own relative."

-Mother of victim

### Discussion

Violence against women is widespread in Nepali society

but is still an under reported problem. Violence against women is violation of women's rights. The data on violence against women is hard to get. Very few studies have been done in this subject. It has been just a decade that we started discussing openly about violence against women. Among different forms of violence, domestic violence is the most common. Most perpetrators of domestic violence escaped persecution under the Nepali justice system. Violence against women frequently takes the form of physical violence, verbal harassment and emotional abuse. Psychological abuse among women is as common as physical abuse. The patriarchal family structure frequently fosters abuse in the family. (14) The South East Asian region has one of the highest incidences of violence against women in the world. (15)

Violence against women, by its nature may not be seen in isolation in Nepalese society where the neglect and abuse of females is the routine of the day in almost all families and communities. Recognizing the need of awareness about it, women rights activist organizations are bringing this issue in the forefront by initiating advocacy work against violence. (14) Almost five hundred cases of suicide were reported to Nepal police. (8) The census recorded half million women living in polygamous marriages. (11) Study conducted in 1997 on violence against women in Nepal revealed that 93% were exposed to mental and emotional torture, 82% were beaten, 30% were raped, 28% were forced into prostitution, and 64% reported polygamy. Study conducted in 2005 mentioned that domestic violence has been reported in rural as well as urban setting. (8) A study conducted among 300 mothers who delivered in hospitals and 50 mothers who delivered in the communities showed domestic violence was a frequent phenomenon during pregnancy. Verbal abuse, neglect and deprivation also resulted in emotional distress of the pregnant women and some of women reported forced sexual intercourse during pregnancy.(3)

This study has similar findings as that of previous researches done in different parts of the Nepalese context, either form of domestic violence or violence against women and girls. Violence against women issues are the contemporary issues in our context. Comprehensive and carefully documented research on violence against women is needed to know whether women are experiencing more violence in our setting. Advocacy approach is better to understand obstacles and develop appropriate methods for combating them.

### Conclusion

Violence against women has evolved as a part of a system of gender relations which points out that men are superior to women. Root causes of the violence against women were low status of women in the community and women were considered as a commodity. Illiteracy and economic dependence over male were main factors of violence. Poor access in decision making power of women, early marriage, traditional beliefs, values, norms which were deeply rooted to violence against women. Violence is a continue of beliefs that grant men right to control women's behavior, violence, among other things

that results in injury of the victim and also has to bear the cost of seeking the medical treatment. Mental torture, neglect and physical beating were the most common forms of violence. Marital rape and sexual harassment was also found in some cases. The perpetrators were husbands followed by in-laws. Violence against women occurred mostly at night during dinner. Use of alcohol, supremacy feeling of men, husbands' habit of listening to other family members, gambling, sexual dissatisfaction were the contributors for the violence against women. Unemployment status of the respondent's husband, extramarital affairs and son preference in family were also seen as the contributors to violence against women.

### Conflict of interest

We declare no conflict of interest

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Keshar Singh Rana, Manhari Dhakal for their valuable guidance during proposal development, and preliminary report writing. I also acknowledge the Shandhya Sharma and Sadhana BC for data collection process of the entire study. We would like to attribute the work to Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Birendranagar Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Surkhet, Nepal.

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