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**Prevalence and Predictors of Physical and Sexual Violence among Women in  
Nepal**

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**Abstract**

This article analyses the incidence and factors associated with physical and sexual violence against women in the age group of 15–49 years in Nepal, based on the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022. Despite the increase in the literature, it is justified that violence affects the well-being and socio-economic development of people in many areas globally. This paper incorporates demographic factors which are explained from both the social and the feminist theoretical perspectives. In the present study, based on the cross-sectional data, the factors including age, marital status, education, wealth and the region were established as significant logistic regression analysis predictors. The sample was selected from women aged between 15 and 49 years old, and methods of stratification and weighting were followed to make the sample more representative. The findings suggest 22.5 percent women faced physical violence starting from the age of 15 and 7.5 percent women reported lifetime sexual violence. Older women aged 35 and above years old and women who have been divorced, separated or widowed were at a higher risk. Female survivors of violence were 4.29 [CI 3.67–4.98] times more likely to experience physical violence. The comparison of different regions equally revealed that the Madhesh province was more experiencing higher levels of violence,

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education and wealth influencing violence in that the lower level of education and lower level of wealth was positively associated to violence. Community level responses should cover the cost and educational aspects of tackling the effects of violence.

**Keywords:** Physical violence, sexual violence, parental violence, women empowerment

## **Introduction**

Women's struggle against violence, especially physical and sexual violence, has become a universal issue, the growth of which negatively impacts the health of women and their economic standing. This vice is even worse in countries where they are classified as having low or middle incomes where gender roles are embedded in the culture and women have to immensely labor to protect themselves and find justice (World health organization [WHO], 2021). In Nepal, the stereotypical violence against women remains so unyielding and rampant owing to extreme poverty, ethnic diversity, and high levels of illiteracy (Nepal demographic health survey [NDHS], 2022).

The gender and caste discrimination on women in Nepal shows that Nepali women are still subjected to baseless caste, class and gender discrimination hence protecting this social order that disembowels them. Due to their lower status in the caste hierarchy, Dalit women who are referred to as 'untouchables', suffer from a triple oppression based on gender, caste and class, which have been cultrate into acceptable practice by, religious scriptures and social practices (Khan & Beig, 2015; Kumar, 2010). However, due to constitutional protects that were intended to increase equality in the provision of law for every citizen the performance of these laws is poor thus allowing for continued discrimination and violence against such women (Berg, 2021; Kumar, 2010). The idea of 'relational poverty' underscores the denial of access to crucial relations such as material, symbolic and others to Dalit women and the deepening of their poverty (Chrispal, 2021).

These vulnerabilities were also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, which posed health risks and violence to already vulnerable groups, with Dalit women being the most deprived (S & Subbulakshmi, 2024). Even so, it is through literature and activism that Dalit women are gradually reclaiming their stories and fighting for their

rights and respect (Chauhan, 2024; Sisodia et al., 2024). Furthermore, organizations combating domestic violence and providing medical care have been formed in support of Dalit women, which is a clear indicator of their strength and agency (Sisodia et al., 2024). As much as the situation of women from marginalized communities is still wretched, the developing concept of Dalit feminism is a bringer of oppressed change and a tool for women's empowerment.

Nepal, being a male-dominated society, presents a unique challenge for women; violence against women is what can be termed as the order of the day. Such normative attitudes find expression in legal frameworks and are also practiced by society (Ong et al., 2021). Another widely acknowledged tactic used by individuals in their socio cultural relationships with groups or communities is intimate partner violence, which is a major contributor to the various types of violence against women (Clark et al., 2018). One in every four women in Nepal has experienced violence, whether physical, psychological, or sexual, mostly enacted by men as partners. Such values as dowry and the societal preference for sons increase violence and a sizeable chunk of women view it as normal. Standard gender expectations and aspects such as the caste system or financial capabilities of a family cause a high level of domestic abuse (Shrestha et al., 2024).

Violent behavior in adulthood is also strongly correlated with experiencing maltreatment of any form, including seeing others be violent. Studies indicate that a different range of psychosocial trauma experienced during childhood leads to different violent outcomes and explain these outcomes by referring to, for instance, psychopathic and substance abuse tendencies (Khan et al., 2024). Some researchers have made observations that there are certain types of individuals who, because of early childhood suppressed traumas, tend to internalize violent notions that in later years concentrate on criminal behavior (Yao, 2023).

According to the 'World Health Organization' (WHO), on an international level, intimate partner violence (IPV) and other forms of sexual violence not only in partners, affect 736 million women (Oo, 2024). The phenomenon of sexual and physical violence is not restricted to North America, as such tendencies have been reported from

nations in the African continent and equally detrimental effects are observed on largely the reproductive health, with cases of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, etc. (Xianguo et al., 2024; Bitzer, 2024). Changes such as these, in which violent experiences are part especially from when one was young, create higher chances of violence in the future (Sardinha et al., 2024).

The purpose of this study is to address a gap in the existing academic literature by examining the social and demographic factors that influence physical and sexual violence against women in Nepal. The study aims to investigate specific characteristics such as age, marital status, education, wealth, happiness, and ethnic background, and their potential to predict instances of violence. Understanding these patterns is crucial for developing strategies and policies to combat gender-based violence and enhance support services for those affected.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Study Design**

The nationwide survey, the Nepal demographic health survey (NDHS) 2022, is the subject of a secondary study. The NDHS 2022 was carried out by New ERA under the direction of Nepal's Ministry of Health and Population, with technical assistance from ICF International and financial support from the United States agency for International development. In this research, the dataset that has been utilized is accessible on the official DHS Program website, which makes the survey data available to the general public. The NDHS 2022 referred report provides detailed information on the findings along with the survey methodology and the questionnaire used in conducting the survey.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The sampling procedure adopted for this study reflected that of the NDHS 2022 report, which employed a stratified, two-stage cluster sampling design that makes the sample nationally representative. The first stratum involved systematically selecting enumeration areas (EAs) based on probability proportional to size. In the second stage,

we randomly selected 1272 households from the 325 EA in the country. From the selected households, women between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine years were considered suitable respondents. For the domestic violence module, a subsample of only women was selected from which 5,177 women were selected. Systematic random sampling was used when making this selection to eliminate any clustering bias in the data arising from more than one woman being interviewed per household. To overcome this imperfection of the sampling design, some changes were made to weight the special testing in order to achieve a national representation. Of the 5177 women selected for the domestic violence module, 4211 women (unweighted) who were in an intimate relationship in the index period constituted the final study sample for this research. The inclusion criteria guaranteed the accumulation of the required data on partners to explore the intimate partner violence – partner characteristics connection.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The NDHS 2022 was based on four primary questionnaires: the households' questionnaire, women's questionnaire, men's questionnaire, and biomarker questionnaire. This research analysis utilized data collected in the woman's questionnaire, which provided coverage on domestic violence as perpetrated against women in the age group 15 to 49 years.

The domestic violence module was administered to women from households included in the men's survey subsample, with only one eligible woman per household chosen to participate. The module was carried out strictly by WHO-recommended rules and ethical standards to ensure respondent safety and confidentiality, with interviews taking place only when privacy was possible.

### **Statistical Analysis**

All the statistical analyses were conducted with the aid of SPSS version 20. The analysis was developed to account for the complex survey design and non-response adjustments done in the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2022. Sample weights were applied to make sure that the data represented the intended population. The frequency, percentage, and 95 percent confidence interval of categorical variables are

presented, while continuous variables are presented in means and standard deviations (SD). Since we conducted an inferential analysis, we performed both univariate and multivariable logistic regression analysis and explored the factors contributing to the occurrence of intimate partner violence. In the univariate analysis to assess the individual relationship between all independent variables and the outcome, crude odds ratios were estimated. The variables which had a p-value < 0.2 on the univariate analysis were considered for the multivariable logistic regression analysis to adjust for mediator effects. Crude and adjusted odds ratios were the outcomes calculated, with accompanying 95 percent confidence intervals. The level of significance used for analysis was 0.05; this reduces the probability of developing a conclusion that is less than 5 percent likely to be a chance. This type of modeling augments the predictive validity's scope and permitted an overall appraisal of numerous different predictors and controlled confounders.

## Results

The purpose of the evaluation is to ascertain the socio-demographic factors related to physical and sexual violence against women in Nepal and generalize the use of logistic regression to measure influential determinants. In this study, age, marital status, education, wealth, and geographic location were analyzed and their effect on violence was established.

**Table 1**

*Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondent*

Characteristics	N	%
Age group		
15–24	814	21.1
25–34	1453	37.7
35–49	1586	41.2
Mean age (SD)	32.4 (8.6)	-
Caste/ Ethnicity		

Brahmin/Chettri	1072	27.8
Dalits	581	15.1
Janajatis	1419	36.8
Muslim/Other	781	20.3
Marital Status		
Living Together	14	0.4
Married	3839	99.6
Province		
Bagmati province	707	18.4
Gandaki province	371	9.6
Karnali province	253	6.6
Koshi province	650	16.9
Lumbini province	682	17.7
Madhesh province	848	22
Sudurpashchim province	343	8.9
Residence		
Urban	2568	66.6
Rural	1285	33.4
Wealth Index		
Rich	1572	40.8
Middle	796	20.7
Poor	1485	38.5
Witnessed Parental Violence		
No	3230	83.8
Yes	623	16.2

Table 1 explores the individuals' socio-demographic characteristics. The average age of the subjects was 32.4 years (SD = 8.6) with most of the participants being in the 25 – 34(37.7%) and 35 - 49 (41.2%) age groups. Castes and ethnicities recorded a significant variation in their population structure, with Janajatis emerging

as the most predominant ethnic group at 36.8 percent, followed by Brahmin/Chettri which accounted for 27.8 percent, Muslim/others at 20.3 percent and lastly Dalits who made up 15.1 percent.

Almost all respondents (99.6%) were reported to be married, while only 0.4 percent claimed to be cohabiting without marriage. The highest proportion of respondents was drawn from Madhesh province (22.0%), followed by Bagmati (18.4%), Koshi (16.9%), Lumbini (17.7%), and other provinces accounting for between 6.6 percent and 9.6 percent.

More than half of the respondents (66.6%) resided in cities while the rest 33.4 percent lived in the countryside. Concerning the wealth index, 40.8 percent of respondents were rich while poor and middle-income respondents constituted 38.5 percent and 20.7 percent respectively. Furthermore, 16.2 percent of respondents reported experiencing violence from parents while the overwhelming majority 83.8 percent did otherwise.

**Table 2**

*Experience of Physical Violence by Any Perpetrator among Women*

Background Characteristic	Percentage of women experienced physical violence since age 15	Percentage of women experienced physical violence in the last 12 months	Number of Women
<b>Age Group</b>			
15–24	14.1	1.1	1,878
25–34	26.4	1.9	1,768
35 and above	28.4	1.4	2,452
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Unmarried	6.6	0.2	1,146
Married	26	1.8	3,853
Others (Divorced/ Separated/ Widowed)	47.3	2.8	178



Education			
Illiterate	35.5	2.4	1,364
Literate (Basic and Above)	18.8	1.1	3,813
Wealth Quintile			
Lowest	23.8	1.6	955
Highest	12.5	0.3	1,041
Province			
Koshi Province	20.5	1.4	877
Madhesh Province	36.5	2.6	1,042
Bagmati Province	17.4	0.4	1,037
Gandaki Province	15	1.4	496
Lumbini Province	23.4	1.6	947
Karnali Province	16.7	1.5	324
Sudurpashchim Province	16.1	1.1	455
Total	22.5	1.5	5,177

The prevalence of physical violence against women aged 15-49 years by the Nepal DHS data for 2022 is presented in Table 2. In general, 22.5 percent of the surveyed women reported having been subjected to physical violence since age 15, while the 12-month prevalence was reported to be 1.5 percent.

By the age groups, women who were aged 35 and above reported the highest lifetime prevalence of physical violence (28.4%), followed by women aged 25-34 (26.4%), and lastly, women aged 15-24 reported the lowest prevalence (14.1%). In the same manner, 1.9 percent of the women ages 25-34 and 1.4 percent of the women ages 35 and above reported having been physically abused in the previous 12 months, while only 1.1 percent of women aged 15-24 reported the same.

Another factor observed involved that regarding women's marital status, the percentage of surveyed individuals that had ever experienced physical violence

was significantly higher among divorced, separated, and widowed women (47.3%) compared to married women (26.0%) and never-married women (6.6%). Only 1.8 percent of married women and 0.2 percent of never-married persons experienced violence, compared to about 2.8 percent of women who did not have a husband during the past year among married and divorced people. The level of education was also related to the prevalence of physical violence. Uneducated women had a higher lifetime prevalence of physical violence (35.5%) than educated women (18.8%). Within the last 12 months, the prevalence of physical violence was 2.4 percent among illiterate women as opposed to 1.1 percent among literate women. The fattest women (the first wealth quintile) tended to have suffered from physical violence 23.8 percent of the time than those in the topmost rich (wealth quintile 12.5%), illustrating the facts on reduced injustice and poverty alleviation. Recently also, physical violence was more prevalent in the lowest wealth quintile (1.6%) than among women in the highest quintile (0.3%).

If states are taken geographies, Madhesh province had the highest view lifetime prevalence of physical violence at 36.5 percent, with Lumbini and Koshi provinces coming next at 23.4 percent and 20.5 percent, respectively. The provinces of Gandaki and Bagmati had the lowest prevalence at 15.0 percent and 17.4 percent, respectively. Slightly over the last year, 2.6 percent of women from Madhesh province experienced physical violence, while the province with the least prevalence was Bagatmi with 0.4 percent.

**Table 3**

*Experience of Sexual Violence by Any Perpetrator of Women*

Background Characteristic	Percentage who have experienced sexual violence (ever)	Percentage who experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months	No. of woman
Age Group			
15–24	5.2	2.5	1,878
25–34	8.3	4.1	1,768
35 and above	9.1	4.2	2,452

Marital Status			
Unmarried	2.4	0.2	1,146
Married	8.4	4.6	3,853
Others (Divorced/ Separated/ Widowed)	19.8	2.3	178
Education			
Illiterate	10.7	4.9	1,364
Literate (Basic and Above)	6.6	3	3,813
Wealth Quintile			
Lowest	9	4.5	955
Highest	4.9	1.3	1,041
Province			
Koshi Province	7.4	3.9	877
Madhesh Province	10.6	5.5	1,042
Bagmati Province	6.9	2.9	1,037
Gandaki Province	6.1	2.3	496
Lumbini Province	6.3	2.4	947
Karnali Province	9.5	4.5	324
Sudurpashchim Province	4.4	3	455
Total	7.5	3.5	5,177

Table 3 shows the percentage of women aged 15–49 who have experienced sexual violence according to the Nepal DHS 2022 survey. Overall, 7.5 percent of the women reported experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime out of which 3.5 percent noted the occurrence of the same in the past 12 months to the survey.

Based on age distribution, women above the age of 35 had the most lifetime sexual violence prevalence (9.1%), with the next being women aged 25–34 (8.3%) and 15–24 (5.2%), respectively. There was also a similar trend in the past 12 months proportion where 4.2 percent of women aged 35 and above reported sexual violence,

4.1 percent in age groups 25 -34 years, and 2.5 percent in the 15 to 24 year age group subjected to sexual violence.

Within the context of this study, the impact of marital status on sexual violence prevalence was highly significant. Women who were divorced, separated, or widowed indicated the highest lifetime prevalence (19.8%) than any other respondent categories: married women (8.4%) and women who never got married (2.4%). In the past 12 months, however, the most married women had the highest prevalence (4.6%), followed by divorced or separated and widowed women's prevalence (2.3%), and lastly, unmarried women (0.2%).

On the other hand, educational attainment exhibited significant differences, whereby rates of sexual violence were higher among illiterate women (10.7%) than literate women (6.6%) over their lifetime. Similarly, 4.9 percent of women without education experienced sexual violence recently compared to 3.0 percent of educated women.

In terms of wealth, 9.0 percent of women in the lowest wealth quintile reported lifetime experiences of sexual violence, while 4.9 percent of women in the highest wealth quintile reported similar experiences. Sexual violence in the past year was also more common among women in the lowest wealth quintile (4.5%) compared to those in the highest (1.3%).

Geographically, Madhesh province had the highest prevalence of sexual violence, with 10.6 percent of women reporting lifetime experiences and 5.5 percent reporting sexual violence in the past year. By contrast, the lowest lifetime prevalence was observed in Sudurpashchim province (4.4%), and the lowest recent prevalence was reported in Gandaki province (2.3%).

**Table 4***Logistic Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Physical Violence among Women in Nepal*

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	Odds Ratio (Exp(β))	p-value
Age Group (Reference: 15–24)				
25–34	0.85	0.12	2.34	0.001**
35 and above	1.05	0.1	2.86	0.000**
Marital Status (Reference: Unmarried)				
Married	1.23	0.15	3.42	0.000**
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	1.76	0.18	5.81	0.000**
Education (Reference: Literate)				
Illiterate	0.87	0.09	2.39	0.001**
Wealth Quintile (Reference: Highest)				
Lowest	0.69	0.08	1.99	0.003**
Province (Reference: Koshi)				
Madhesh	0.64	0.07	1.9	0.004**
Bagmati	-0.45	0.08	0.64	0.028*
Witnessed Parental Violence	1.46	0.13	4.29	0.000**

Table 4 illustrates the logistic regression of determinants of physical violence against women in Nepal. Numerous key determinants of physical violence were found.

When it came to the time of life element, women who were 25–34 years old had an odds ratio (OR) of 2.34, making them more likely to be victims of physical violence than women who were 15–24 years old. Among women 35 years of age and

older, 19 percent reported having experienced physical abuse (OR =2.86,  $\beta$  =1.05,  $p=0.000$ ).

Similarly, marital status was another strong predictor of the outcome measure. The odds of married women being physically abused were over three and a half times greater than that of single women ( $\beta$  =1.23,  $p=0.000$ ). Higher odds were, however, registered among divorcee, separated, or widowed women with a reserved odds of 5.81 ( $\beta$  =1.76,  $p =0.000$ ).

The findings also showed that compared to literate women, the illiterate ones had odds more than two times the risk factors of physical abuse (OR =2.39,  $\beta$  =0.87,  $p =0.001$ ).

Again, the incidence of physical violence was determined by wealth index; for it those who fell in the lowest wealth quintile, experienced near to two times the violence, than those who fitted in the upper quintile group (OR =1.99,  $\beta$  =0.69,  $p =0.003$ ).

In terms of regional differences, women from Madhesh province had higher chances of physical violence than women from Koshi province (OR =1.9,  $\beta$  = 0.64,  $p =0.004$ ). On the contrary, women in Bagmati province were less likely to suffer from physical violence (OR =0.64,  $\beta$  = -0.45,  $p =0.028$ ).

Witnessing parental violence greatly affected the probability of encountering physical violence, which was central to the finding that those who had witnessed parental violence were 4.29 times more likely to experience physical violence ( $\beta$  = 1.463,  $p=0.000$ ).

## **Discussion**

This research attempted to evaluate women's socio-demographic characteristics in Nepal and their connection with the incidence of violence against women. The study findings indicated that the prevalence of experiences of physical and sexual violence among women varies with certain socio-demographic characteristics, which include age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and the residential area of women.

This research attempted to evaluate women's socio-demographic characteristics in Nepal and their connection with the incidence of violence against women. The study findings indicated that the prevalence of experiences of physical and sexual violence among women varies with certain socio-demographic characteristics, which include age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and the residential area of women (Mannell, et al.).

The alarming prevalence of physical violence is very disturbing, with 22.5 percent of the respondents being women who have experienced physical violence. Older women, especially those aged 35 years and above, vehemently argued that they have experienced physical violence the most, standing at 28.4 percent. This concurs with other studies that have pointed out that older women are last heard or spoken against the violence as they have suffered in such relationships for a longer time and the structures of their societies make them passive-aggressive and violent at all times (Nath et al., 2022; Sapkota et al., 2024). Moreover, divorced, separated, or widowed women (47.3%) experienced more physical abuse than married (26.0%) women. This might be because of the stigma and ostracization faced by women who are not conformists to the ideals of a married woman (Goktepe, 2024).

Regarding the level of education attained, the incidence of physical harassment is more prevalent among uneducated women (35.5%) than educated women (18.8%). Additionally, there is an increase, that is, 23.8 percent, in violence towards women in the lowest wealth quintile as compared to the wealthier ones. This indicates how powerlessness and the very restoration mechanism thanks to which power is sustained only make the situation worse (Fiske & Shackel, 2015). Women who are more likely to be uneducated are equally more likely to be poor, and this in turn creates a cycle of disadvantage that predisposes people to being victims of violence.

A lifetime prevalence of sexual violence was reported by 7.5 percent of women, and 3.5 percent experienced it in the last year. The patterns of sexual violence trends were consistent with physical violence trends; however, increased incidences were

reported among older age categories and those who were divorced and separated. The level of education also correlated with the experience of sexual violence in that more educated women reported experiencing less sexual violence than less educated women (Khanal et al., 2021).

Logistic regression analysis facilitated the identification of several strong predictors of physical violence, which include age category, marital status, education, wealth quintile, geographical location, and parental violence exposure. Observing parental violence had the greatest odds ratio of 4.29 among the assessed factors. Mitigating these cycles of indoctrination into aggression by initiatives and campaigns is essential, as early exposure to violence may elevate the probability of violent conduct in adulthood (Nath et al., 2022).

These findings will have significant consequences for the policy formulation and intervention programs to be adopted against violence towards women in Nepal. Increasing the education of women, especially in the poor and rural parts of the country, has the potential to decrease their chances of violence. Moreover, community interventions that aim at changing the existing norms concerning marriage and violence and providing services to those women who have been divorced or separated are also very important.

Because economic dependence increases the risk of violence against women, encouraging vocational training and financial access among women can promote their economic independence and reduce the risks associated with gender-based violence (Gyawali et al., 2023).

## **Conclusion**

This study tried to identify factors that could trigger violence against women in Nepal alongside analyzing the impact of age, marital status, education level, income level and geographical difference. The study established that the vulnerable groups of women most vulnerable to physical and sexual violence include the elderly, divorcees, those who are illiterate, and those with no knowledge of property rights. From the



results presented above, gender-related stereotypes and cultural practices that facilitate are affirmed hence supporting structural variables in diverse settings in Nepal.

This, therefore, calls for a population-centered approach to address violence against women. These are relevant because it is crucial to address the underlying determinants of violence in addition to offering women and girls more protection by engineering changes, including in legislation and policy, to education, employment rights, healthcare access and entitlements on the one hand and to the community and relevant informal norms on the other. The policy should improve protection for legal frameworks, and victim services and devise effective awareness campaigns for women throughout the country to address social issues affecting women.

Subsequent research studies should assess how such community-based interventions and the currently applicable law can be effectively implemented and how they can help decrease violence among particularly vulnerable populations. Therefore the outcomes act as a wake-up call for society, the state, and interested parties to ensure women's safety and parity is not a mere political slogan but a reality.

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