

# Awareness Against Gender-Based Violence Among Undergraduate Students in a College of Far Western

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Gender-based violence among youths has become a worldwide public health problem that could be physical, sexual, psychological, and economic. Globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. The study aimed to find out the awareness against gender-based violence among undergraduate students. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in Raghunath Adarsh Multiple Campus, Kailali District, among 195 undergraduate students studying Bachelor of Humanities (85 students) and Management (110 students).

**Methods:** Non-probability total enumerative sampling technique was used to recruit the sample. Data was collected from November to December 2023 with a self-administered structured questionnaire. Data were checked for completeness, coded, and entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 25). Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and inferential statistics Chi-square was used to measure the association between awareness against gender-based violence and socio-demographic variables.

**Results:** The study findings showed that 39.5% of respondents had an adequate level of awareness, 37.4% had a moderately adequate level of awareness, and 23.1 % had an inadequate level of awareness against gender-based violence. There was a statistically significant association between the level of awareness and fathers' education  $p= 0.001$  and fathers' occupation  $p = <0.001$ .

**Conclusions:** The study concludes that only two-fifths of students at the undergraduate level are adequately aware of gender-based violence. Nearly one-fourth of students still are inadequately aware of gender-based violence. College authorities and health professionals need to conduct awareness programs against gender-based violence at college and community levels thus they can protect themselves from violence against their sex.

**Keywords:** Awareness; College students; Gender-based violence; Undergraduate students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is defined by the World Health Organization as “any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.”<sup>1</sup> Both women and men experience gender-based violence

though, in a majority of cases, violence is inflicted on women and girls by men.<sup>2,3</sup> Gender-based violence among youths has become a worldwide public health problem,<sup>4</sup> that could be physical, sexual, psychological, and economic.<sup>5</sup>

Globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women have

been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime and 27% of women aged 15-49 years have physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.<sup>6</sup> In a recent review of 50 studies from 36 countries, 10% to 60% of women who have ever been married or partnered have experienced at least one incident of physical violence from a current or former intimate partner.<sup>3</sup>

In Nepal, about 1 in 4 women are affected by gender-based violence.<sup>7</sup> In fiscal year 2079/80, 902 gender-based violence cases were reported to Nepal police of which 61% and 19% were of age group 26-40 and 16-25 years respectively. Of them, psychological violence (94.45%), economical (65.63%), physical (56.43%), and sexual (5.88%).<sup>8</sup> Students in higher education who experienced gender-based violence have low self-esteem (45%) mental trauma (38%), low academic performance (30%), stigma (18%), and absenteeism (12%).<sup>9</sup>

Knowledge and awareness against gender-based violence could reduce violent incidents and negative consequences. Studies among adolescents and young across the countries have a different awareness of gender-based violence: Tanzania, 26.8%, 41.2%, and 26.6% had good knowledge on meaning, emotional, and economic violence respectively.<sup>10</sup> India 11.66% had adequate awareness<sup>11</sup> and Nigeria 46.2% had good knowledge of gender-based violence.<sup>12</sup>

Studies among students in Nepal, 51.3% had adequate, 40.9% had moderate and 7.8% had an inadequate level of knowledge<sup>13</sup> and 64.6% from rural areas and 56.7% from an urban area of Sindhupalchok had adequate awareness against gender-based violence.<sup>14</sup> Adolescents and young students have inadequate awareness which may make them prone to gender-based violence. Assessment of their awareness provides data about awareness of gender-based violence and conducts awareness programs

accordingly. Thus, the objective of this study was to find out the awareness of gender-based violence among undergraduate students.

## METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design. It was conducted in Raghunath Adarsh Multiple Campus which was located in Joshipur, Kailali District, Sudurpaschim Povince, Nepal. There were two streams in Undergraduate program; Bachelor of Humanities and Management. The total students studying in both stream were 195, Bachelor of Humanities (85 students) and Management (110 students). All 195 students were included as study sample through a non-probability total enumerative sampling technique. Self-administered structured questionnaire was developed by the researchers after extensive literature review. There were 14 questions and possible score range was 0-66. Each correct response was given "1" mark and each incorrect response was given as "0" mark.

Research proposal was approved from Research Department of Maharajgunj Nursing Campus. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Committee, Institute of Medicine No. (160[6-11] E2) 2080/81. Researchers contacted the campus Chief and briefly discuss about study objective and process of data collection and take the time for data collection. Then written permission was taken from the college administration. After completion of classes, researcher went to the students' classroom, explained the study purpose and informed written consent was obtained from each student. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the students, briefed about how to fill it, asked them to fill it up, and then returned and checked for completeness. Approximately 20-25 minutes was taken to fill out the questionnaire. Both boys and girls were included in the study. Data was collected from November to December 2023. Pretesting was done among 20 students studying for a Bachelor of Management at

Bardagoriya College located in Bardagoriya, Kailali District.

Respondents' dignity was maintained that their participation was voluntary and assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wanted without any explanation. Anonymity was maintained by not mentioning their name. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning code number to the questionnaire, not sharing the information with others and using data only for research purpose. Students were explained that they do not have physical and psychological harm as participation in the study. All collected data were edited, coded, and entered in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 25). Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and inferential statistics Chi-square was used to measure the association between awareness against gender-based violence and selected variables.

## RESULTS

Most of the respondents (77.4%) were above 19 years of age with a mean age ( $\pm$ SD) of  $21.74 \pm 2.088$ . More than half of the respondents were female (55.9%), almost all respondents (95.9%) were unmarried (96.4%) followed Hinduism, 40.5% were from janajati and the majority (64.1%) belonged to the nuclear family. More than half studying management (56.4%) and almost all respondents (92.8%) were staying with their parents (Table 1).

**Table 1 :** Socio-demographic Characteristics (n=195)

Variables	Number	Percent
<b>Age (In completed years)</b>		
≤19 years	44	22.6
>19 years	151	77.4

Mean  $\pm$  SD  $21.74 \pm 2.088$  Minimum 18 years  
Maximum age = 27 years

<b>Sex</b>		
Female	109	55.9
Male	86	44.1
<b>Stream of study</b>		
Management	110	56.4
Humanities	85	43.6
<b>Religion</b>		
Hinduism	188	96.4
Buddhism	5	2.6
Christianity	2	1.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Dalit	24	12.3
Janajati	79	40.5
Madhesi	2	1.0
Brahmin/Chhetri	90	46.2
<b>Marital status</b>		
Unmarried	187	95.9
Married	8	4.1
<b>Family type</b>		
Nuclear	125	64.1
Joint	60	30.8
Extended	10	5.1
<b>Staying with</b>		
Parents	181	92.8
Siblings	7	3.6
Relatives	6	3.1
Staying in other's home where work	1	0.5

More than one-third of respondents' mothers (37.4%) could not read and write and only 0.5% had higher education. More than one-fourth of respondents' fathers (29.2%) had completed secondary level education and 6.2% had higher education More than half (59.0%) of respondents' mothers were homemakers and more than half of respondents' fathers (53.8%) were engaged in agriculture (Table 2).

**Table 2 :** Education and Occupation of the Parents (n=195)

Variables	Number	Percent
<b>Mothers' education</b>		
Cannot read and write	73	37.4
Can read and write (non-formal education)	64	32.8
Basic level	43	22.1
Secondary level	14	7.2
Higher secondary	1	0.5
<b>Fathers' education</b>		
Cannot read and write	33	16.9
Can read and write (non-formal education)	48	24.6
Basic level	45	23.1
Secondary level	57	29.2
Higher secondary level	12	6.2
<b>Mothers' occupation</b>		
Homemaker	115	59.0
Agriculture	58	29.7
Business	14	7.2
Service	8	4.1
<b>Fathers' occupation</b>		
Agriculture	105	53.8
Business	42	21.5
Foreign employment	33	16.9
Service	15	7.7

Most of the respondents (86.7%) knew the correct meaning of gender-based violence. Almost all respondents (95.4%) answered females as the vulnerable group for gender-based violence, 90.8% answered lack of education as the risk factor of gender-based violence followed by lack of strict rules (65.1%), 25.1% had seen gender-based violence when they were childhood (Table 3).

**Table 3 :** Awareness on General Information of Gender-Based Violence (n=195)

Variables	Number	Percent
Gender-based violence is violence against both male and female	169	86.7
Females are the vulnerable group	186	95.4
<b>Risk factors*</b>		
Lack of education	177	90.8
Lack of strict rules	127	65.1
Alcoholism	120	61.5
Culture and tradition	107	54.9
Low socio-economic status	93	47.7
Media violence influence violent behavior	71	36.4
Acceptance of violence	58	29.7
Witnessed of violence during childhood	49	25.1

\* Multiple responses

100% of respondents knew about physical and sexual forms of violence and 87.7% knew about economical violence. Almost all respondents (93.8%) answered beating as the characteristic of physical violence followed by kicking (78.5%) and most (83.6%) answered threatening as the characteristic of psychological violence followed by insulting (81.5%). Most of the respondents (89.7%) answered rape as the characteristic of sexual violence followed by touching inappropriately (80.5%) and most (75.4%) answered restriction of financial resources as the characteristic of economical violence followed by property damage (62.6%) (Table 4).

**Table 4 :** Awareness on Forms and Characteristics of Gender-Based Violence (n=195)

Variables	Number	Percent
<b>Forms of gender-based violence*</b>		
Physical	195	100.0
Sexual	195	100.0
Psychological	193	99.0
Economical	171	87.7
<b>Characteristics of gender-based violence</b>		
<b>Physical violence*</b>		
Beating	183	93.8
Kicking	153	78.5
Slapping	134	68.7
Pushing	120	61.5
Pulling hair	115	59.0
Twisting arms	112	57.4
Throwing something	64	32.8
<b>Psychological violence*</b>		
Threatening	163	83.6
Insulting	159	81.5
Humiliation	141	72.3
Intimidating	105	53.8
<b>Sexual violence*</b>		
Rape	175	89.7
Touching inappropriately	157	80.5
Attempted rape	135	69.2
Incest	129	66.2
Exposing one's genitals or naked body without consent	100	51.3
<b>Economical violence*</b>		
Restriction of financial resources	147	75.4
Property damage	122	62.6
Controlling access to education	104	53.3

\*Multiple responses

Most respondents (82.1%) answered strangers as the perpetrator of gender-based violence followed by boyfriends (68.2%) and neighbors

(68.2%). Most respondents (75.4%) answered vehicles as the common place where gender-based violence occurs followed by street (74.4%). Most respondents (83.1%) were aware of suicide as the consequence of gender-based violence followed by depression (77.9%) and less focus on study (74.4%) (Table 5).

**Table 5 :** Awareness on Perpetrators, Common Places, and Consequences of Gender-Based Violence (n=195)

Variables	Number	Percent
<b>Perpetrators*</b>		
Strangers	160	82.1
Boyfriend	133	68.2
Neighbors	133	68.2
Family members	129	66.2
Husband	120	61.5
Relatives	118	60.5
Teachers	103	52.8
Healthcare workers	2	1.0
<b>Common places*</b>		
Vehicle	147	75.4
Street	145	74.4
Home	140	71.8
Workplace	130	66.7
College/School	101	51.8
Hospital	77	39.5
<b>Consequences*</b>		
Suicide	162	83.1
Depression	152	77.9
Less focus on study	145	74.4
Physical injuries and disabilities	127	65.1
Taking drugs and alcohol	94	48.2
Anxiety	93	47.7
Rejection from family	92	47.2
Reproductive health problems	71	36.4

\*Multiple responses

Almost all (90.8%) respondents knew gender-based violence should be reported to police administration. Regarding the barriers to reporting gender-based violence, most respondents (89.7%) answered lack of awareness against gender-based violence followed by lack of strong laws to convict the culprit (76.9%). Almost all respondents (90.3%) were aware of the implementation of strict rules and punishment against gender-based violence as the prevention of gender-based violence followed by conduct awareness campaigns (83.1%) (Table 6).

**Table 6 :** Awareness on Reporting and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (n=195)

Variables	Number	Percent
Gender-based violence is to be reported to police administration	177	90.8
<b>Barriers to report*</b>		
Lack of awareness against gender-based violence	175	89.7
Lack of strong laws to convict the culprit	150	76.9
Fear of stigma and discrimination	118	60.5
Embarrassment about the condition	108	55.4
Fear of revenge	102	52.3
Fear of parents	101	51.8
Fear of disbelief	96	49.2
<b>Prevention*</b>		
Implement strict rules and punishment against gender-based violence	176	90.3
Conduct awareness campaign	162	83.1
Include gender-based violence in the curriculum	119	61.0
Immediately report suspicious activities	117	60.0

*\*Multiple responses*

Among all, 39.5% of respondents had an adequate level of awareness, 37.4% had a moderately adequate level of awareness and 23.1 % had an inadequate level of awareness against gender-based violence (Table 7).

**Table 7 :** Respondents' Awareness Level Against Gender-Based Violence (n=195)

Level of Awareness	Number	Percent
Inadequate (<50%)	45	23.1
Moderately adequate (50 - <75%)	73	37.4
Adequate (≥75%)	77	39.5
Total	195	100

There was a statistically significant association between the level of awareness and fathers' education  $p=0.001$  and fathers' occupation  $p = <0.001$  (Table 8).

**Table 8 :** Association between the Level of Awareness Against Gender-Based Violence and Selected Variables (n=195)

Variables	Level of Awareness			Chi-square value	p-value
	Adequate	Moderately Adequate	Inadequate		
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)		
<b>Age in completed years</b>					
≤19 years	20 (45.5)	14 (31.8)	10 (22.7)	0.994	0.608
>19 years	57 (37.7)	59 (39.1)	35 (23.2)		
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	32 (37.2)	35 (40.7)	19 (22.1)	0.704	0.703
Female	45 (41.3)	38 (34.9)	26 (23.8)		
<b>Stream of study</b>					
Humanities	34 (40.0)	34 (40.0)	17 (20.0)	0.893	0.640
Management	43 (39.1)	39 (35.5)	28 (25.4)		
<b>Fathers' education</b>					
Cannot read and write	7 (21.2)	10 (30.3)	16 (48.5)	15.012	0.001*
Can read and write	70 (43.2)	63 (38.9)	29 (17.9)		
<b>Mothers' education</b>					
Cannot read and write	24 (32.9)	27 (37.0)	22 (30.1)	3.818	0.148
Can read and write	53 (43.4)	46 (37.7)	23 (18.9)		
<b>Fathers' occupation</b>					
Agriculture	28 (26.7)	45 (42.9)	32 (30.5)	16.653	<0.001*
Others**	49 (54.4)	28 (31.1)	13 (14.4)		
<b>Mothers' occupation</b>					
Homemaker	49 (42.6)	41 (35.7)	25 (21.7)	1.147	0.563
Others#	28 (35.0)	32 (40.0)	20 (25.0)		
<b>Experience of gender-based violence</b>					
Yes	67 (40.6)	62 (37.6)	36 (21.8)	3.641	0.162
No	7 (23.3)	13 (43.4)	10 (33.3)		

\*Significant at  $p$  value  $<0.05$ , \*\*Business, Service, Foreign employment, #Agriculture, Service, Homemaker

## DISCUSSION

This study assessed the awareness of gender-based violence among 195 undergraduate college students. In this study 39.5% of

respondents had adequate, 37.4% had moderately adequate and 23.1 % had inadequate level of awareness against gender-based violence. The finding is similar to a study

of Nigeria 46.2% had good knowledge, 42.9% had moderate and 10.9% had poor knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Contrast finding 51.3% had adequate, 40.9% had moderate, and 7.8% had inadequate knowledge about gender-based violence.<sup>13</sup>

In this study, most respondents (86.7%) said gender-based violence could occur against both males and females, contrast result 51.3% of students said the correct meaning of gender-based violence<sup>13</sup>. Regarding risk for gender-based violence in this study, almost all (90.8%) said lack of education and lack of strict rules (65.1%) which is similar to a study from Pokhara where 98.3% said lack of education<sup>13</sup> but different from the study of Kathmandu 73.3% said lack of education and (72.4%) alcohol.<sup>15</sup>

Characteristics of gender-based violence, respondents in this study 93.8% said beating as physical violence followed by kicking (78.5%), and slapping (68.7%). Most respondents (83.6%) knew threatening as psychological violence, 89.7% about rape, and 80.5% about touching inappropriately as sexual violence. Restriction of financial resources as the characteristic of economical violence said by 75.4%. Findings are similar to the study from Nawalparasi, 95% knew hitting/slapping is physical violence, 90% threatening is psychological violence, 91% knew force for a sexual relationship without women's consent is sexual violence and 93% denying access to basic needs is economical violence.<sup>16</sup>

In this study, strangers were believed to be the perpetrators of gender-based violence by 82.1% of the respondents followed by boyfriends (68.2%), neighbors (68.2%), and family members (66.2%). Study participants from Malaysia said strangers could be perpetrators.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, 83.1% were aware of suicide as the consequence of gender-based violence followed by depression (77.9%), less focus on study (74.4%) and physical injuries and disabilities (65.1%). This finding is inconsistent

with a study from Pokhara where 93.9% said suicidal attempt, and (75.7%) physical injuries and disability.<sup>13</sup>

In the present study, almost all (90.3%) said strict rules implementation and punishing perpetrators, and conducting awareness campaigns (83.1%) could prevent violence. This finding is consistent with the study of Malla<sup>18</sup> where 30.1% stated teaching children about safety habits, immediately reporting crime and suspicious activities (25.5%), and conducting awareness campaigns (24.4%). In the present study, 90.8% said to report incidents to the police administration which is similar finding with a study from Nawalparasi Nepal 93%.<sup>16</sup>

In this study, finding of barriers to reporting gender-based violence, 89.7% said lack of awareness, and a lack of strong laws to convict the culprit (76.9%) this is differing from the study from Bangladesh among female students 37% said lack of strong laws to convict the culprit as the reason for not taking legal steps, hassles related to the legal procedures (22%) and lack of awareness of existing mechanisms (19%).<sup>19</sup> This study found a significant association between the level of awareness against gender-based violence and fathers' education and occupation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Study findings conclude that only two-fifths of students at the undergraduate level are adequately aware of gender-based violence. Nearly one-fourth of students still have inadequate awareness of gender-based violence. Lower awareness against gender-based violence increases the possibility of such violence which might lower the reporting of incidents and affect students' physical and psychological health and academic performances. If students are aware of different forms of gender-based violence like domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, incest, violence to women, and date rape, the possibility of occurrence of these issues might



be lower in the future. College authorities and health professionals are required to conduct awareness programs against gender-based violence at college and community levels.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank to Raghunath Adarsh Multiple Campus, Kailali District and respondents for their participation in this study.

**SOURCE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** This study did not receive any financial support.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None Declared

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