

A Report on the Situation of
Gender-based Violence
against the Chepang Women of
Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality in
Chitwan

National Indigenous Women Forum
Kathmandu, Nepal



**The Situation of
Gender-based Violence against the
Chepang Women of
Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality in Chitwan**



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The views expressed in the book are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of UNDP in Nepal.

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As an organization committed to addressing the needs of Indigenous women (IW), we understand the importance of conducting research on violence against this community in Nepal. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of data on this issue. Our expectation is that the findings from this research will provide insights into the situation of violence against IW within the Chepang community in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality, Chitwan. Furthermore, we aim to identify the root causes of such violence and develop effective strategies for prevention and response.

I want to thank all the participants who shared their experiences and insights during the research process. The entire research team deserves appreciation for their diligent work in collecting and analysing the data, making this report possible.

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In conclusion, I once again extend my sincere thanks to everyone involved in this project. It is our hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, activists, and organizations committed to promoting the rights and well-being of IW in Nepal.

Suni Lama

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	:	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COCAP	:	Collective Campaign for Peace
CSOs	:	Civil Society Organizations
FPIC	:	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GBV	:	Gender-based Violence
IASC	:	The Inter-agency standing Committee
ILO	:	International Labour Organisation
IPs	:	Indigenous Peoples
IW	:	Indigenous Women
LAHURNIP	:	Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples
NDHS	:	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey
NGOs	:	Non-governmental Organizations
NIWF	:	National Indigenous Women's Federation
NIWForum	:	National Indigenous Women Forum
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals
SEE/SLC	:	Secondary Education Examination/School Leaving Certificate
UNDRIP	:	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNFPII	:	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
VAW/G	:	Violence against Women and Girls

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Executive Summary

In Nepal, gender-based violence (GBV) affects more than one in four women and girls, with almost one-third of married women experiencing partner-perpetrated violence at least once in their lifetime. The prevalent forms of violence against women (VAW) are physical and emotional.

Notably, there is a lack of available data on VAW within Nepal's Indigenous communities. It is suggested that some Indigenous Peoples (IPs) of Nepal may not have had a concept of gender in their early stages, potentially resulting in relative gender equality.

However, IPs face challenges to their social, cultural, and economic lives due to historical discrimination by the state and global economic policies, making them vulnerable to domestic violence. A 2018 report indicated that 49 percent of trafficked women survivors belonged to Indigenous nationalities.

This study focused on the Chepang community in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality, Chitwan, examining the prevalence of VAW and recording the experiences of survivors. The analysis encompassed various types of violence against Chepang women, identified perpetrators, and explored their understanding of "violence". Based on data analysis, the study offers recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study surveyed 118 Chepang women, including one person with a disability, from six different hamlets within the municipality. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven survivors of physical violence.

The analysis primarily categorized the types of violence endured and examined them by hamlets. Statistical analysis utilized the interim set of indicators adopted by the Statistical Commission. Physical violence was further subdivided into five types for detailed analysis. Data disaggregation by traditional occupation, education, and marriage type were gathered where feasible and relevant.

Major Findings:

1. Physical violence was identified as the most prevalent form at 23 percent, followed by emotional violence (21 percent), psychological violence (17 percent), and sexual violence (9 percent). Physical and psychological violence were primarily perpetrated by husbands, with only one case involving a father in physical violence, and a few instances of emotional violence involving in-laws.

2. Out of the 27 survivors of physical violence, 93 percent reported enduring it from their partners at some point in their lives, with 37 percent experiencing it in the last 12 months.
3. Among the physical violence survivors, 56 percent fell in the age category of 26-35, 59 percent had primary education (mostly class two or three), 14 percent were illiterate, 78 percent were married between ages 15 and 19, 19 percent were married before or at 14, 70 percent had their first child before or at 18, and 56 percent had direct access to and control of money. Only eight used mobile phones, mostly feature phones, and only one listened to the radio.
4. Among the husbands of physical violence survivors, 15 (56 percent) had education up to class five, five up to class eight, one up to class 10, two were illiterate, two had informal adult education, one had passed SLC/SEE, and one had passed high school. A majority (70 percent) worked as manual labourers, known locally as coolies.
5. The study found 43 percent of the total participants had direct access to and control of money, while 57 percent did not.
6. Three cases of polygynous marriage were recorded, lacking proper legal procedures. In these cases, second wives were often unaware of their partner's existing marriage and children. In one case, a child was born to the second wife, and both wives resided under the same roof. In another case, children from the second wife were present, but the family did not reside in the village. In the third case, the second wife did not live in the village.
7. The participants were unaware of the municipality-level judicial committee, and cases of violence were often attempted to be resolved at the community-level through discussions among neighbours, influential individuals, and/or relatives. Some women reportedly left their abusive husbands and married other men.
8. Both women and men lacked awareness of legal provisions regarding VAW, with some men viewing wife beating as natural and normal.
9. The practice of early marriage and the preference for male children were noteworthy.
10. Some women faced restrictions in using temporary contraceptives.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and issues identified through this research, the study puts forward specific recommendations relevant for future policies and programmes:

1. **Investment in awareness programmes:** The local government should allocate more resources to awareness-raising programmes. It is crucial to develop targeted outreach messages and mechanisms that effectively reach every individual within the community, considering mass media accessibility and the low level of education. Community members need awareness about fundamental legal provisions related to VAW and GBV, the roles of family members and the community in preventing VAW, supporting survivors, and the types of assistance available, both generally and locally.
2. **Confronting violence against women and girls (VAW/G):** In accordance with the Local Government Operations Act 2017, the local government should address VAW/G by implementing both preventive and protective measures. It should understand the intersection of gender with other social and economic inequalities and address potential drivers of GBV, aligning with Schedule-8 of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal and the Government of Nepal's commitment to the SDGs.
3. **Proactive judicial committee:** The judicial committee at the local level should be proactive. The local government should raise awareness among all residents of the municipality, with a special focus on Chepang people, regarding the judicial committee, its roles, and its means of access.
4. **Provision of necessary support:** The municipality should establish provisions to provide necessary support, including a safe house, psychosocial counselling, legal aid, referral services, and health facilities for seriously affected GBV survivors.
5. **Review of educational materials:** A review of educational materials and pedagogical practices is needed to ensure that they teach respect and equality, consistent with prevention of VAW, while promoting the norms, values, beliefs, practices, and institutions of Chepang people.
6. **Implementation of legal provisions:** All three tiers of government should seriously implement legal provisions and policies such as the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009, the Crime Victim Protection Act, 2018, National Gender Equality Policy, 2021, and similar regulations.
7. **Effective use of the GBV Elimination Fund:** All three tiers of government should commit to using the GBV Elimination Fund effectively and without

legal confusion, ensuring alignment with other women-targeted policies.

8. Targeted awareness programmes: The local government and civil society, in collaboration, should develop targeted awareness programmes for community leaders, proselytisers, and the wider community, including men, focusing on gender equality/equity and the prevention of VAW.
9. Community-level efforts for women's empowerment: Ethnicity-based organizations, particularly the Nepal Chepang Association, NGOs like NIWF, and local governments collaboratively should increase community-level efforts to advance women's empowerment, education, and employment opportunities. In doing so, they should revitalise cultural practices, institutions, and beliefs that promote gender equality and deter VAW.
10. Upholding Indigenous rights: The violation of the Indigenous rights of the Chepang people, ensured by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), increases their vulnerability to VAW. All stakeholders should be committed to upholding their rights as IPs.
11. Upholding CEDAW General Recommendations: All the stakeholders should be committed to upholding the general recommendations the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has adopted. The governments should be committed to implementing, in particular, General recommendation No. 39 (about Indigenous women and girls), General recommendation No. 36 (about the rights of girls and women to education) and General recommendation No. 35 (about gender-based violence against women).
12. Interdisciplinary research: Collaboration and increased investment are required for interdisciplinary, in-depth, and ethnographic research to analyse core drivers of VAW and GBV, such as imposed patriarchy by colonial or state policies in the Nepali context that have diminished Indigenous women's power, status, and material circumstances in mainstream society and their own communities.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Context

Since the political shift of 1990 in Nepal, there has been a proliferation of publications addressing the rights and issues of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Indigenous women (IW). Additionally, organizations dedicated to upholding the rights of IPs and IW, as guaranteed by UN bodies, have actively emerged over the years. NGOs like the National Indigenous Women Forum (NIWF) engage in advocacy, lobbying, and empowering efforts for IW.

Amidst marginalisation and structural discrimination, literature on IPs and Indigenous movements have primarily focused on their political rights, inclusion in various spheres, and concerns about identity, recognition, and rights outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) (C169).

However, existing publications lack a comprehensive analysis from a gender perspective within IPs. Violence against women (VAW) within Indigenous communities appears overshadowed by the emphasis on state-sponsored violence. Some even argue that IW, compared to "high-caste" Hindu women, hold a better status in their community, as suggested by ethnographic studies. Still, caution is advised against generalizing this viewpoint to all IPs.

In the international context, reports highlight higher rates of domestic violence among IPs. In Nepal, however, data on VAW among IPs is notably scarce. While violence against women and girls (VAW/G) is prevalent globally, this study pioneers an effort to inspire Indigenous organizations, activists, researchers, and stakeholders to examine VAW within their own communities and take appropriate actions, regardless of its prevalence.

The Chepang People: A Brief Introduction

The Chepangs, classified as one of the highly marginalised IPs of Nepal, are primarily concentrated in Chitwan, Makwanpur, and Dhading districts in central Nepal, with additional settlements in various parts of the country. Nepali anthropologist, Dor Bahadur Bista (1967), categorized them into two socio-economic types: P?k?nthali and Kachh?re. The former are engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, maintaining relations with other castes/ethnic groups, while the latter reside in small huts in the hills west of the P?k?nthali, engaging in agriculture and collecting wild edibles.

Bista noted that elopement is a common form of marriage among the Chepangs. Regardless of the type of marriage, all require a ritual called dhogbhet (literally

kowtowing to offer gifts) to gain approval. Traditionally, all life-cycle rites and rituals are performed by a Pande, a Chepang shaman and priest. However, due to proselytization, the presence of a church in Chepang villages has become more prevalent.

The Chepang people share an inherent connection with their territory and environment. Rai (1985) discovered that some Chepang clans are named after geographical areas, emphasizing their territorial connection. Riboli (2002) highlighted two major Chepang festivals: Namrung Puj?, involving hunting in honour of the god Namrung, and Chhon?m, presenting offerings to divinities and ancestors with the first harvest's fruit.

Gurung (1995) asserted that the Chepangs once had their own small states and were the rulers of their territory. However, their practices, including shifting cultivation, were significantly impacted by the Private Forest Nationalisation Act of 1957, which restricted their access to and use of forests.

Originally reliant on fishing and hunting for sustenance, the Chepangs transitioned to a sedentary lifestyle. Presently, they predominantly cultivate maize, millet, buckwheat, and vegetables. Due to the agricultural season lasting approximately half a year, Chepang men often seek employment in construction sites along the Prithvi Highway and nearby districts.

An Overview of the Concept of VAW

The concept of VAW is nuanced and contested, shaped by diverse norms, values, worldviews, and cultures within societies. International bodies such as the UN and various gender equality forums have made efforts to define and address VAW.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted General Recommendation No. 19 in 1992, defining discrimination against women to include gender-based violence (GBV). This encompasses violence directed against women because of their gender or disproportionately affecting them, constituting a violation of their human rights.

The UN defines VAW/G as any act of violence resulting in physical, sexual, or mental harm to women and girls, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within families or communities, and may be perpetrated or condoned by the state.

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the International Indigenous Women's Forum, understanding violence against IW and girls requires a broader perspective encompassing the historical and ongoing marginalisation and discrimination faced by IPs. This includes violations of their collective and individual rights, often compounded by limited access to culturally appropriate basic services and justice, amongst other challenges.

VAW/G reflects unequal relations between men and women, often backed by patriarchy,

a political system where men rule, leading to women's inferior social and political status. Discussions exist on whether Indigenous communities are patriarchal. Anthropologists acknowledge patriarchal discrimination within some Indigenous societies, influenced by colonial violence and historical interactions between state and Indigenous law. Studies also suggest that societies following matrilineal-matrilocal structures generally display lower levels of gender stratification in contrast to patrilineal-patrilocal societies.

Domestic violence involves both "intimate/patriarchal terrorism" (physical violence) and coercive control (emotional/psychological/verbal violence), which work together. Johnson (1995) argued that "patriarchal terrorism" is "a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women, a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systemic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics." Johnson and Ferraro (2000) call it an "intimate terrorism."

Forced marriage, a form of VAW, may involve force, fraud, or coercion, where one or both parties do not or cannot consent to the marriage. It can be both a cause and a consequence of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

VAW is a cross-cutting issue, and a feminist-informed approach is valuable for prevention. This approach recognizes violence as a systemic and structural phenomenon rooted in patriarchy, aiming for transformational change through infrastructure at the societal level; environment at the community level; recognition, respect, and dialogue at the interpersonal level; and empowerment and opportunity for women and support and accountability for men at the individual level.

In the context of violence against IW, Indigenous feminism asserts that patriarchal imposition has diminished the power, status, and material circumstances of IW in mainstream society and their communities. Hundorf and Suzack (2010) stressed understanding the evolving situations, commonalities, and specificities of IW to achieve social justice. They highlighted politics, activism, and culture as three areas where IW unite to challenge policies that erode their power and status.

An Overview of VAW in Nepal

GBV is a consequence of normative gender roles and unequal power dynamics within society. Rooted in gender inequality, it stands as a significant human rights violation in Nepali society. Common manifestations of GBV include domestic violence, marital rape, dowry-related violence, child marriage, polygamy, female infanticide, witchcraft accusations, Chhaupadi (the practice of isolating menstruating women), and trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation.

In the Gender Inequality Index 2021-2022, Nepal ranked 113th out of 191 countries,

indicating the persistence of gender disparities. In 2018, 11.4 percent of women aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

The Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2016 revealed that nearly one-third of married women in Nepal had encountered violence from their partners at least once in their lifetimes, predominantly in the forms of physical and emotional abuse.

In the first half of 2019, the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), a national network of 43 human rights-based NGOs, recorded 674 GBV incidents, including 151 incidents of domestic violence, 501 incidents of rape/sexual assault, and 16 incidents of dowry-related violence, resulting in 102 fatalities and 67 injuries.

During the 2021/2022 (2078/2079 BS) fiscal year, the National Women Commission reported 1318 cases of domestic violence, with psychological violence accounting for 42 percent, followed by economic violence at 31 percent, physical violence at 24 percent, and sexual violence at 3 percent.

According to the Nepal Social Inclusion Survey 2012, 10 percent of Chepang women experienced psychological violence and 3.3 percent faced physical violence from their husbands. However, none reported sexual violence from their spouses.

These statistics underscore the multifaceted challenge of GBV in Nepal, demanding comprehensive efforts to address and eliminate its various forms.

An Overview of the Legal and Policy Frameworks in Relation to VAW

In the face of persistent incidents of GBV, the Government of Nepal (GoN) has reiterated its commitment to ensuring women's rights through constitutional and legislative frameworks, along with the implementation of action plans.

Nepal marked 2010 as the "Year against GBV" and implemented a National Action Plan, followed by the introduction of a National Strategy and Action Plan on Women Empowerment and Abolition of GBV in 2012 for fiscal years 2012/2013-2016-2017 (2069/2070-2073/2074 BS). While no amendments have been made to the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009, the 2015 Constitution of Nepal established principles of equality, non-discrimination, and social protections, as well as national human rights institutions, including the National Women Commission (NWC).

Constitutional provisions under Article 18 (Right to equality) and Article 38 (Rights of women) explicitly safeguard women from various forms of violence. The post-2015 legal landscape introduced significant laws such as the National Penal (Code) Act, 2017; National Criminal Procedure (Code) Act, 2017; Act Relating to Children, 2018; Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act, 2018; and Crime Victim Protection Act, 2018. Notable pre-2015 legal provisions include the Guidelines

on the Elimination of Chhaupadi, 2007, and the aforementioned Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009, among others.

The Crime Victim Protection Act, 2018, considered a milestone, expands victims' rights, including compensation and relief services. In addition, the National Gender Equality Policy, adopted in March 2021, further underscores the commitment.

In 2010, the GoN established the GBV Elimination Fund-designed to address the urgent needs of GBV survivors-through an executive order. It was amended in 2019 to align the fund with federalization, intending to operate across all three government tiers.

However, operational challenges emerged due to discrepancies between the fund's regulation and two separate criteria formulated within the President's Women Upliftment Programme (PWUP), introduced in 2019 by the federal government. While the GBV Elimination Fund Regulation envisioned operation through the formulation of local laws and resources at each government level, the PWUP criteria established federal financing for the funds.

The conflicting procedures outlined in the regulation versus the criteria under the PWUP created confusion for provincial and local governments. This dilemma has left provincial and local authorities uncertain about whether to establish their funds under the GBV Elimination Fund Regulation or await federal funding per the PWUP criteria.

To address this immediate operational gap, Rule 10(2) of the amended regulation could be employed. This rule allows district administration offices or local municipalities to requisition funds from the federal fund if not established at their level, offering a provisional solution to the current confusion. However, on 26 January 2020, the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, at the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens' request, urged all local governments to establish GBV Elimination Funds.

CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH METHODS

Objectives of the Research

The key objective of this study was to investigate the prevalence of VAW among the Chepang people from Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality in Chitwan. Specifically, the research aimed to explore various forms of domestic violence and the experiences of the victims/survivors.

Research Methodology

Survey statistics are crucial for gauging the extent of GBV, especially considering underreporting to agencies. A report of the Expert Group Meeting states, "whilst survey-based statistics also suffer from a certain degree of under-reporting, in general, they are considered to offer a reasonably reliable outcome measure on violence against women."

On 19 December 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled 'Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women' (A/RES/61/143) that prompted the Statistical Commission to develop and propose a set of possible indicators on VAW. This study employed a survey based on this set of indicators.

As the notion of VAW is contested, the study focused on the prevalence of physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual violence.

Physical violence incidents included pushing, grabbing, beating, hitting, hitting with objects, and threats with knives. Psychological violence was examined through incidents causing fear by intimidation; threats of physical harm to self, partner, or children; destruction of pets and property; and isolation from friends, family, and work. Emotional violence analysis involved constant criticism, belittling, verbal abuse, and damage to parent-child relationships. Sexual violence prevalence was assessed through incidents of sexual harassment (non-consensual physical contact and rape) and marital rape.

For qualitative analysis, key-informant interviews (KII) were conducted with GBV survivors. Purposive sampling was employed, and all households in selected hamlets were included to enhance representativeness. The hamlets were chosen based on reported incidents and remoteness.

Nature and Sources of Evidence

This study relied on primary data gathered directly from 118 Chepang women through surveys and KIIs. To provide context to the Chepang community, the study supplemented its findings with secondary sources such as ethnographic studies and news reports. Secondary sources were also employed for analysing structural violence against the

Chepang people.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Data collection strictly adhered to informed consent, ensuring the confidentiality and protection of all documents. Private conversations were held with participants to safeguard sensitive information from being overheard by others. To maintain privacy, the report discloses minimal details about participants' location. A local Chepang woman assisted the researcher during data collection, considering the sensitivity of the subject.

Limitations of the Study

Due to scope delimitation and feasibility constraints, the study focused on selected indicators for VAW. The research primarily explored the prevalence and types of GBV, rather than delving extensively into its causes and consequences.

With scattered settlements and low population density, the study utilised the 118 participants through purposive sampling, conducting in-depth interviews only with severe VAW survivors. This approach aligned with the Expert Group Meeting's recommendations to initiate a small local survey as a first step in studying VAW prevalence.

CHAPTER 3: PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE SURVEY

Socio-Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Age Group

Every participant in the survey was married, spanning ages 15 to 55. The majority, constituting 44 percent, fell within the 26-35 age bracket.

Table 3.1 Sample Population by Age Group

Age group	Percent	Number
15-25	33	39
26-35	44	52
36-45	14	17
46-55	9	10
Total	100	118

Level of Education

The participants' educational attainment was highest in the classes one to five category, accounting for 44 percent. Within this category, many had only reached classes two or three. This suggested a high dropout rate within the Chepang community. The limited education aligned with a lack of knowledge about legal procedures for vital events such as marriage, divorce, or remarriage, as well as GBV.

Table 3.2 Level of Education

Level of Education	Percent	Number
People who could not read and write	14	16
Informal education	14	16
1-5	44	52
6-8	16	19
9-10	8	10
SLC/SEE	0	0
High school (10+2)	4	5

Marital and Reproductive Characteristics

Marriage by personal choice is the predominant form among the Chepang community. Chepang women have the authority to decide their own marriages and remarriages, with the latter being socially acceptable. This autonomy grants significant influence to Chepang women within their families. Despite this, polygyny is also present, though in limited occurrences.

With regards to this study, child marriage, a common practice in Nepal, including among IPs, was observed among 76 percent of participants who married between 15 to 19 years of age. Additionally, 59 percent of them gave birth to the first child before or at the age of 18, while seven participants had not borne any children.

Table 3.2 Types of Marriage

Type of Marriage	Percent	Number
Elopement	86	102
By abduction	4	5
Arranged	7	8
Mixed (love and arranged)	3	3

Table 3.3 Age at Time of Marriage

Age at Marriage	Percent	Number
≤14	10	12
15 - 19	76	90
20 +	14	16

Table 3.4 Age at Delivery of First Child

Age at Delivery of First Child	Percent	Number
≤18	59	66
19 - 20	23	25
20+	18	20

Religious Beliefs

The influence of Christian missionaries and the reduced role of shamans/priests in traditional rituals have led to a distinct division within the Chepang community, with some adhering to Christianity and others to Hinduism.

In this study, 58 percent identified as Hindus and 42 percent as Christians, with several subdivisions within this group. One participant identified as a Buddhist.

For those identifying as Hindus, their adherence to Hindu practices was not strictly defined. They neither involved Brahmin priests in rituals nor aligned entirely with Hindu worldviews. Despite this, they celebrated Dashain and Tihar, two major Hindu festivals. Some individuals, though having adopted Christianity, also participated in Dashain and/or Tihar celebrations by organizing family gatherings and sharing meals.

Table 3.5 Religious Beliefs

Religion	Percent	Number
Hindu	58	68
Christian	41	49
Buddhist	1	1

Seasonal Migration

Agricultural yields sustain Chepang families for approximately half a year. Typically, if a family is not involved in commercial vegetable production or earns minimal income from such activities, Chepang men often migrate to work at construction sites.

Specifically, 68 of the men in this study worked as coolies or manual labourers at construction sites. Their work commitments necessitated leaving their homes for periods ranging from a fortnight to several months, the frequency based on individual needs.

Table 3.6 Economic Dependence

Women	Percent	Number
Access to and control of money	43	51
No direct access to and control of money	57	67

Engagement in Customary Practices

Nearly half of the participants reported that they did not engage in the collection of wild edibles like aerial yam (gittha), deltoid yam (vyakur), and wild edible yam (ban tarul), as well as fishing. Aerial and deltoid yams are eaten as vegetables, and wild edible yams are consumed as a staple food after boiling, and have high market value. Many reported a scarcity of fish in the rivers and a limited availability of wild edibles in the forests.

Table 3.7 Engagement in Customary Practices

Customary practices	Percent	Number
Fishing	7	8
Collecting wild edibles	25	30
Both fishing and collecting wild edibles	23	27
Neither of these	45	53

Table 3.8 Husband's Engagement in Customary Practices

Customary practices	Percent	Number
Fishing	19	14
Collecting wild edibles	4	4
Both fishing and collecting wild edibles	36	43
Neither of these	48	57

Alcohol Consumption

Partaking in locally-brewed alcoholic beverages, such as jand, chhang, raksi, or beer, is a widespread tradition among IPs. Consumption of these beverages was prevalent among both Chepang men and women participants of this study. However, a notable number of men also reported having discontinued this practice.

Table 3.9 Husband's Alcohol Habit

Alcohol consumption	Percent	Number
Consumes alcohol	69	81
Quit	67	8
No consumption	24	29

CHAPTER 4: PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE

This chapter outlines the prevalence of VAW in six hamlets of the municipality individually, with a subsequent focus on statistical insights into physical violence. Despite differing household numbers and socio-economic statuses, the hamlets shared a common Chepang identity without noticeable discrimination based on socio-economic differences.

Prior to delving into statistical data on VAW prevalence and survivor experiences, a case is presented to illustrate the coercive control wielded by patriarchal mindsets:

Communal disputes, including those between spouses, are often settled by "influential persons" from the village. One such gathering was held to settle a disagreement between a Chepang couple.

In this particular dispute resolution, two non-Indigenous men, two Chepang men, and two Chepang women were invited by a husband to address his wife's recurrent departure from their home. During the discussion, the wife revealed that her husband often told her to leave their home with the expectation that another wife would replace her.

The individuals criticized her actions, questioning her moral choices. One of the Chepang men even normalized physical violence, stating that one or two slaps to a wife was normal. The gathering collectively asserted that a woman's disappearance equates to her demise, while a man's absence is inconsequential unless he brings another wife. This incident exemplified the community's exercise of male power and authority over women.

Additionally, it was disclosed that the wife's mother-in-law had recently left home due to physical violence inflicted by her father-in-law.

Hamlet 1

Hamlet 1 was situated close to its ward office and a high school, but residents had to walk for approximately five hours to reach the municipal office at Kurintar. However, the recently established agriculture track had significantly reduced this travel time. Benefiting from favourable geographical and environmental conditions, many Chepang individuals in this hamlet were involved in commercial vegetable farming, ranging from small to larger-scale operations. According to their claims, none in this hamlet participated in wild bird hunting, men refrained from spending leisure time playing cards, and there were no instances of uncontrollable liquor consumption leading to disputes or fights.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

In this hamlet, data revealed a strong preference for marriages of personal choice among the Chepang community. Conversations with women from the community

underscored the active role of mediators, often friends, who not only persuaded them to marry certain individuals but also played a role in physically escorting the girl to the boy. For instance, participants recalled instances of being intercepted on their way home from school or farm, and being followed by the boy or his friends (playing the role of mediators) for extended periods. It is important to note that the concept of elopement, where a woman willingly chooses a partner regardless of persuasion by mediators, is distinct from marriage by abduction, and no cases of the latter were recorded in this hamlet.

Most participants mentioned that there were no formal discussions about having the first child; instead, the decision to have children happened organically as part of married life. Nevertheless, one participant, who was 18 years old and in her ninth month of pregnancy during the time of the study, had initially expressed a desire to wait for a few years after marriage before starting a family. Unfortunately, her husband did not respond positively, and they did not use contraceptives. Another participant had wished to continue her education and was not ready for immediate childbirth after marriage, but her husband did not support this decision.

Regarding subsistence activities, 65 percent of participants from this hamlet neither collected wild edibles nor engaged in fishing. A small percentage (2.5 percent) were engaged in the collection of wild edibles, while 3.6 percent participated in both fishing and collection of wild yams, with no exclusive engagement in fishing observed among women and men.

Economic Characteristics

"Women are unable to take strong decision due to economic insecurity." - A Chepang woman

In terms of access to and control of money, whether earned by themselves or their husbands, the data revealed that 37.5 percent of them had direct access to and control of money, while 62.5 percent did not.

Some participants mentioned that they kept livestock as a means of savings, although the generated income was mainly directed towards fulfilling household needs, with only small amounts reserved for personal expenses.

Given the agrarian context, family members, including women, actively engaged in farm work. A few women also sold vegetables in nearby markets. While some women handled the financial aspects independently, many submitted income and expense calculations to their husbands, who often held control over the money. In cases where husbands were away or did not engage in selling vegetables, they were relied upon to bring essential items.

In one case, a woman in her fifties, who had visited a market only twice in her life,

highlighted her husband's role in providing for both household essentials and personal items. This pattern was noted among participants from various hamlets. The socio-economic landscape also involved the division of property among sons, with families separated, and land allocation typically settled orally, although some properties were still registered in the name of their father-in-law's fathers.

Out of the 40 surveyed participants, 14 men worked as labourers at construction sites in nearby districts, one worked as a primary school teacher, and another as a peon. One participant had previously been employed in Malaysia.

Table 4.1 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 1

Age Group	Number	Education	Number
15-25	11	People who could not read and write	3
26-35	20	Informal	3
36-45	7	1-5	19
46-55	2	6-8	8
Total	40	9-10	5
Type of Marriage		SLC/SEE	1
Types	Number	High school	1
Elopement	35	Age at Marriage	
By abduction	0	Education	Number
Arranged	4	≤ 14	4
Mixed (love and arranged)	1	15-19	30
Total	40	20+	6
Age at Delivery of First Child			
Age	Number		
≤ 18	23		
19-20	5		
20+	11		
Total	39 (Unable to bear children: 1)		
Religious Beliefs			
Age	Number		
Hindu	24		
Christian	16		

Table 4.2 Economic Characteristics of the Population from Hamlet 2

Age Group	Women	Men		
Fishing	0	0	Women who had access to and control of money	15
Collecting wild edibles	6	0		
Both	8	13	Women who had no direct access to and control of money	25
Neither of these	26	27		

The Cases of Violence

"The witch has just left to gather fodder." - A mother-in-law's derogatory remark about her daughter-in-law.

Five out of 40 participants in Hamlet 1 reported being survivors of physical violence at some point in their lives, with their husbands identified as perpetrators in all cases. The reported physical violence included acts such as pushing, shoving, and having hair pulled. Notably, no such cases were reported within the last 12 months.

Among the survivors, two individuals had experienced three subtypes of physical violence: being pushed, grabbed, and shoved; hit with objects; and threatened with a knife.

The remaining three survivors reported instances of being hit, kicked, pushed, and pulled by their hair.

The data from this cluster revealed a higher number of cases of emotional violence, often perpetrated by mothers-in-law or the husbands themselves, followed by psychological violence. One participant, married at the age of 16, shared her experience of being stalked and followed by her future husband, with friends mobilised to facilitate the marriage. She faced restrictions on her mobility after marriage, continuous criticism from her in-laws, and derogatory comments about her cooking skills, leading to emotional distress.

Another participant, married at 17, reported hearing backbiting from her mother-in-law about her lack of domestic skills and frequent illnesses. The mother-in-law predicted pain in her son's life due to his wife and interfered even when the former rebuked her own children. This participant recalled several verbal arguments with her mother-in-law and instances of crying alone.

The study also examined the relationship between alcohol consumption by husbands and VAW. According to the data, 23 men consumed alcohol, three had quit, and 14 never consumed alcohol. However, the study did not find a direct correlation between VAW and alcohol consumption.

Table 4.3 The Cases of Violence from Hamlet 1

Types of Violence	Lifetime		Men	
	Number	Perpetrator	Number	Perpetrator
Physical Violence	5	Husband	0	
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	4	Husband		
Kicked/beat/hit with a fist	1	Husband		
Hit with objects	3	Husband		
Choked	-	Husband		
Threatened with a knife	2	Husband		

Psychological Violence	7
Emotional Violence	8
Sexual Violence	0

Hamlet 2

Situated approximately one and a half hours away from the ward office, Hamlet 2 had a school up to the eighth grade in close proximity, but reaching the nearest high school required more time than reaching the ward office. The Chepang people inhabited this region alongside some Gurungs, whose settlement was slightly more distant. Similar to Hamlet 1, this area appeared to have favourable environmental and physical conditions for vegetation.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Like in Hamlet 1, elopement was the most common form of marriage with over 45 percent of women marrying before or at the age of 18. Among participants who gave birth before 18, two had their first child at 15 and two at 16.

Three participants were abducted for marriage, with two being married at 14 (now 24 and 27 years old) and the third forced into marriage at around 17 or 18 (currently 55 years old). The 27-year-old participant expressed her reluctance to get married, but the persistent pursuit by her future spouse led her to elope after being repeatedly dragged by boys.

The 55-year-old participant shared her experience of resisting a "marriage by kidnapping", enduring six months in the forest, and the subsequent loss of identity and location. She revealed her inner conflict about dishonouring her natal family and eventually stopped hiding in the forest, taking several months for her and her husband to come closer and communicate.

A case of polygynous marriage was identified in this hamlet, involving a 21-year-old

woman who married a man three years older. They connected via social media before eloping. The woman discovered that he had lied about being unmarried, finding out about his existing wife and children only when she was brought home. Currently, they all live together in the same house with her in-laws.

Economic Characteristics

In contrast to Hamlet 1, over 75 percent of the participants in Hamlet 2 engaged in fishing and/or collecting wild edibles. Among the 13 participants from this cluster, the husbands of 10 women were involved in both fishing and collecting wild edibles, particularly during the productive months of April and May.

Seven participants lacked direct access to and control of money, relying on their husbands or in-laws. Typically, husbands provided money before leaving for work. Some obtained necessities on credit from groceries, but most participants expressed a practice of asking their husbands to acquire specific items, highlighting limitations for many Chepang women within their homes and villages. One participant mentioned relying on her father-in-law for money or accessories.

In this hamlet too, the majority of men left their homes for several months to work as coolies. Eight worked as manual labourers, with one reporting only two instances of working at a construction site in 13 years of marriage. Another participant mentioned her husband working at a construction site twice in his youth. Notably, one participant owned a four-wheeler for transporting vegetables, and another served in the Nepali Army. Eight men were reported to consume alcohol, one had quit, and four did not have a habit of drinking alcohol.

Table 4.4 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 2

Age Group		Number	Education		Number
15-25		3	People who could not read and write		2
26-35		6	Informal		2
36-45		1	1-5		4
46-55		3	6-8		2
Total		13	9-10		1
Type of Marriage					
Types		Number	SLC/SEE		0
Elopement		9	High school		2
By abduction		3	Age at Marriage		
Arranged		1	Education		Number
Mixed (love and arranged)		0	≤ 14		2
Total		13	15-19		9
			20+		2
Age at Delivery of First Child					
Age		Number			
≤ 18		6			
19-20		4			
20+		2			
Total		1			
Religious Beliefs					
Age		Number			
Hindu		9			
Christian		4			

Table 4.5 Economic Characteristics of the Population from Hamlet 2

Age Group	Women	Men		
Fishing	1	0	Women who had access to and control of money	6
Collecting wild edibles	4	0		
Both	5	10	Women who had no direct access to and control of money	7
Neither of these	3	3		

The Cases of Violence

"My brother raped me, but my mother blamed me and protected him instead." - A 25-year-old sexual violence survivor.

More than 20 percent of the participants in Hamlet 2 reported enduring physical violence, with two out of 13 experiencing psychological violence due to fear and threats. An equal number of women reported facing emotional violence in their lifetime.

Common manifestations of emotional violence resulted from physical violence by an intimate partner and verbal abuse by either the mother-in-law or father-in-law, or both. One participant noted restrictions on visiting family and friends, leading to being chased, beaten, and kicked by her husband. Complaints from her in-laws included remarks about her eating habits compared to her work.

Another participant, whose husband had worked overseas, revealed that he never talked to her or sent money for their children during his stay abroad. She felt additional distress as her marriage had been forceful, and she was chosen by him while still attending school.

Of the two participants who experienced sexual violence, one was occasionally forced into intercourse by her husband, while the other reported being raped by her brother. Others asserted that their husbands had not forced them into intercourse.

A participant who endured physical violence from her husband four or five times in her lifetime (not during the last year) shared accounts from three women in her village. Marital conflict for these individuals, all above 25 years old, often stemmed from their husbands suspecting extramarital affairs.

A CASE OF INCEST

The study uncovered a case of incest involving a 25-year-old woman who repeatedly endured raped by her brother, who had a habit of consuming alcohol, when she was around 12 years old. Her education suffered due to the traumatic experiences. Unable to confide in her parents, she collapsed emotionally.

When she finally mustered the strength to share her ordeal with a married sister living close to her natal home, the sister advised her to remain silent. The situation worsened when her parents discovered her pregnancy. Blaming her condition on an unknown man, she was forced to leave her home. She sought refuge with another sister, married in a village five to six hours away. The news of her pregnancy spread, and her parents defended her brother, accusing her of bringing shame to the family.

With support from another sister, who arranged her marriage to a widower just one year her senior, she gave birth to her child from her brother after the marriage. Despite finding happiness, she remains distressed by her mother's persistent claims that she engaged in premarital sex with an unknown man, blaming her instead of her brother for his actions.

Table 4.6 The Cases of Violence from Hamlet 2

Types of Violence	Lifetime		Men	
	Number	Perpetrator	Number	Perpetrator
Physical Violence	3	Husband	0	
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	3	Husband		
Kicked/beat/hit with a fist	2	Husband		
Hit with objects	-			
Choked	-			
Threatened with a knife	-			

Psychological Violence	2
Emotional Violence	2
Sexual Violence	2

Hamlet 3

The participants from Hamlet 3 belonged to at least three small clusters situated in close proximity. For the residents, the high school was more conveniently located than the ward office, which was approximately a one and a half hour walk from the farthest cluster. Additionally, the settlements of Chhetris and Magars were nearby, and the physical environment was highly conducive for vegetation, complemented by a river flowing at the foothills.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Similar to other hamlets, elopement was a common method of marriage here. Early marriage and childbirth were widespread, accompanied by a low level of education. For instance, one participant had only attended the first year of school.

Economic Characteristics

One participant, a 52-year-old woman, mentioned managing financial transactions and having control over money.

The husbands of seven participants worked at construction sites, typically spending two to six months away, and returning during the agricultural season. During this time, women bore the sole responsibility of caring for the children, cattle, and farm. Regarding alcohol consumption, 11 of the men drank alcohol, while one had quit.

Among the nine women surveyed from this cluster, three reported engaging in both fishing and collecting wild edibles, while six focused solely on the collection of wild edibles. Collaborating with their husbands, seven of them participated in both activities,

while one was exclusively involved in fishing. Those who collected wild edibles did so during the months of April and May.

Table 4.7 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 3

Age Group		Number	Education		Number
15-25		4	People who could not read and write		1
26-35		6	Informal		1
36-45		1	1-5		6
46-55		1	6-8		3
Total		12	9-10		0
Type of Marriage					
Types		Number	Age at Marriage		
Elopement		10	Education		Number
By abduction		0	≤ 14		1
Arranged		2	15-19		11
Mixed (love and arranged)		0	20+		0
Total		12			
Age at Delivery of First Child					
Age		Number			
≤ 18		8			
19-20		3			
20+		0			
Total		11			
Religious Beliefs					
Age		Number			
Hindu		9			
Christian		3			

Table 4.8 Economic Characteristics of the Population from Hamlet 3

Age Group	Women	Men		
Fishing	4	8	Women who had access to and control of money	3
Collecting wild edibles	7			
Both	0	3	Women who had no direct access to and control of money	9
Neither of these	1	1		

The Cases of Violence

"My husband has to accompany me even when I visit my parent's house." - A 20-year-old physical violence survivor.

Of the 11 participants from Hamlet 3, eight reported experiencing physical violence from their intimate partners. Three of the eight participants disclosed incidents of all five subtypes of physical violence, both during the last 12 months and throughout their lifetime, occurring two to three times a week.

Among the remaining five participants, one endured all five subtypes at some point in her life. All five survivors experienced being pushed, hit, and were threatened with a knife during the last 12 months.

One participant reported no incidents of physical violence during the last 12 months, but had experienced all subtypes except choking from her previous husband. This had taken place every month.

Another participant was hit once in the last 12 months, and threatened with a knife three or four times in her lifespan. One participant was often shoved by her husband. She reported being kicked both in the last 12 months and her lifetime, totalling around four times. The eighth survivor claimed to be hit once in her life.

The data revealed that at least two participants from this hamlet endured all forms of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual violence. More than 35 percent of the participants were physically forced to have sexual intercourse against their will by their husbands. In terms of emotional violence, verbal abuse by husbands, and rarely by other family members, was highly prevalent, followed by criticism and belittling of their abilities.

For psychological violence, threats of physical harm were the most common, followed by attempts to destroy property and forcing isolation from friends and family. Some experiences are highlighted below:

A 20-year-old girl reported multiple forms of domestic violence. She lacked access to money, and endured verbal and physical abuse while being blamed for alleged extramarital affairs. Her movements were severely restricted, needing her husband's approval for any outdoor activity. In the past 12 months, she suffered one instance of physical assault, and endured threats with a knife at least four times in her lifetime. As the mother of one child, she faced the added trauma of a recent miscarriage, with medical attention being delayed. Physically and emotionally affected, she struggled with breathing difficulties, which was exacerbated at night, impacting her sleep. Furthermore, she revealed instances of sexual violence, with her husband coercing her into engaging in sexual intercourse against her will.

A 28-year-old participant, married by choice at 16, reported physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual violence, detailing regular verbal abuse and threats of beatings.

She had been kicked and beaten at least four times, and once in the last year. She was also forced into intercourse with her husband when he was under the influence of alcohol. This occurred approximately 10 times a year.

A 31-year-old participant, also married by choice at 16, disclosed her experience of enduring more than seven incidents of physical violence over her 15-year marriage, coupled with frequent episodes of emotional abuse. In the past year, she endured a traumatic incident where her husband threw a spatula, resulting in a leg injury that took nearly a month to heal. More recently, she narrowly escaped a knife attack from her spouse.

Another participant, aged 18 and married at the age of 14, endured physical violence from her husband at least twice a week on average. These incidents began two months after her marriage, and continued even during pregnancy. She reported being beaten, kicked, strangled, and having sharp objects thrown at her. She also mentioned that her husband was careful not to leave visible injuries on her body.

A 33-year-old participant, married at 17, had faced physical violence from her former husband. Her past marriage involved monthly instances of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, including forced intercourse; inquiries about her dowry; and demands to leave his house. Paralysed below the waist at 26 after falling off a tree, she returned to her natal home with her two daughters after her husband brought in a second wife. Recently giving birth to a male child from her second marriage, her husband treated his step-daughters well, but when drunk, told them to go to their own father.

Despite being survivors of VAW, most participants claimed they had not heard of the term *hinsa* (violence).

Table 4.9 The Cases of Violence from Hamlet 3

Types of Violence	Lifetime		Men	
	Number	Perpetrator	Number	Perpetrator
Physical Violence	8	Husband	8	Husband
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	5	Husband	4	Husband
Kicked/beat/hit with a fist	7	Husband	6	Husband
Hit with objects	5	Husband	4	Husband
Choked	4	Husband	3	Husband
Threatened with a knife	6	Husband	4	Husband

Psychological Violence	6
Emotional Violence	7
Sexual Violence	4

Hamlet 4

Hamlet 4 was situated across a vast expanse at a hill's summit, providing spectacular panoramic views. While environmentally conducive for vegetation, its elevated position posed challenges, such as water scarcity, especially for commercial vegetable farming. An elementary school was in proximity, and the high school was about half an hour away on foot. Accessing the ward office required an hour-long walk.

Socio-demographic Description

Nearly half of the participants in this hamlet had completed their education only up to class five, with three having passed class five and an equal number having passed class three. None had attained a SLC/SEE certification.

Among the participants, 11 had their first child at 18 or below, while seven had their first child at 19 or 20. Two participants had not yet become mothers.

Elopement was the prevalent method of marriage in this cluster, with one participant having a courtship turned arranged marriage, symbolized by the groom's family offering a wooden jar filled with local alcohol, known as pong. Accepting and serving this alcohol signifies the acceptance of marriage.

Distinctly, one participant in this cluster practised Buddhism in her natal home, causing uncertainty about her religion, as her husband's family claimed to follow Hinduism.

Two cases were reported where women eloped with other men, escaping domestic violence from their former husbands.

Economic Description

The nearest river was quite distant from this hamlet, which meant there was minimal engagement in fishing. Similarly, the collection of wild edibles was limited, with over 65 percent of the participants not engaging in either fishing or collecting. Half of the men also refrained from these activities. Over 65 percent (16 of 24) of the men worked as manual labourers. Out of all the men, 18 were reported to have a habit of drinking locally-made alcohol. Two individuals consumed it excessively, five were not addicted to alcohol, and one had quit drinking.

The number of women with no direct access to and control of money was four times greater than those who did have such control. Financial dependency on husbands or other family members was observed in more than 55 percent of women.

Table 4.10 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 4

Age Group		Number	Education		Number
15-25		13	People who could not read and write		5
26-35		7	Informal		5
36-45		3	1-5		8
46-55		1	6-8		4
Total		24	9-10		2
Type of Marriage					
Types		Number	SLC/SEE		0
Elopement		21	High school		0
By abduction		1	Age at Marriage		
Arranged		0	Education		Number
Mixed (love and arranged)		2	≤ 14		0
Total		24	15-19		20
			20+		4
Age at Delivery of First Child					
Age		Number			
≤ 18		11			
19-20		7			
20+		3			
Total		22t			
Religious Beliefs					
Age		Number			
Hindu		11			
Christian		12			
Buddhist		1			

Table 4.11 Economic Characteristics of the Population from Hamlet 4

Age Group	Women	Men		
Fishing	1	5	Women who had access to and control of money	10
Collecting wild edibles	4	3		
Both	3	4	Women who had no direct access to and control of money	14
Neither of these	16	12		

The Cases of Violence

"In an attempt to escape violence from my first husband, I eloped with another man. But he turned out to be no different from my first husband." - A 36-year-old survivor of multiple forms of violence.

Four participants, constituting more than 15 percent of this hamlet, disclosed that they had experienced physical violence from their husbands.

A 55-year-old widow shared that she had been shoved and hit by her husband once in her life. Another woman, aged 40, who had recently lost her husband, reported a single instance of being hit when she asked him to refrain from drinking alcohol.

Another participant revealed that she had been subjected to shoving, kicking, hitting, and threats with a knife by her previous husband, occurring once or twice every two or three months. She disclosed ongoing physical violence by her second husband as well.

A 40-year-old woman, whose husband had passed away, reported incidents of being shoved, hit, choked, and threatened with a knife during her lifetime.

Two of the four survivors of physical violence also mentioned experiencing emotional violence, predominantly in the form of verbal abuse by their husbands. One of the 40-year-old women, married at 17 through abduction, recounted her initial childless years filled with verbal abuse. Similarly, the survivor who had remarried suffered emotional violence from both her former and current husbands. She shared that her current husband repeatedly threatened to sell his property and forced her to leave his house. The psychological trauma resulting from physical violence, threats to life, and intimidation also led to experiences of psychological violence by their intimate partners.

Three participants in their early twenties reported instances of forced sexual intercourse by their husbands. Two of them stated that it happened only once in their lifetimes, and the third mentioned it occurring twice. However, none of them reported experiencing physical violence

Table 4.9 The Cases of Violence from Hamlet 3

Types of Violence	Lifetime		Men	
	Number	Perpetrator	Number	Perpetrator
Physical Violence	3	Husband	1	Husband
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	2	Husband	1	Husband
Kicked/beat/hit with a fist	4	Husband	1	Husband
Hit with objects	2	Husband	1	Husband
Choked	1	Husband	1	Husband
Threatened with a knife	2	Husband	1	Husband

Psychological Violence	2
Emotional Violence	2
Sexual Violence	3

Hamlet 5

In Hamlet 5, coexisting with the Chepang community were households belonging to Gurungs and Magars. For certain residents, a different ward office was more conveniently located than the one designated for that area. There were two high school options, and although children favoured the nearest one, the travel time varied between one to two hours based on their enrolment location. This region, in proximity to the mountains, boasted dense forests and offered an advantageous environment for cultivating vegetables.

Socio-demographic Description

The age group 26-35 constituted the largest population in this hamlet, mirroring patterns observed in other hamlets. Common characteristics of this community included marriages through elopement, a low literacy rate, and the prevalent practice of early marriage and childbearing.

Economic Description

Fishing was not common among the residents of this hamlet, with only one woman occasionally engaging in the activity.

Seven women actively participated in the collection of wild edibles. Some emphasized the significance of this activity, stating that they searched for edibles because it was their traditional right. Others mentioned collecting edibles during periods of food shortage. A majority of the men did not partake in these activities, with over 70 percent (10) of them working as manual labourers. In terms of alcohol consumption, 12 drank alcohol, with two having quit.

Regarding financial autonomy, six women in the hamlet had access to and control of money, while eight did not. Similar to other hamlets, a higher number of women in this community relied on their husbands or other family members for economic support.

Table 4.13 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 5

Age Group		Number	Education		Number
15-25		2	People who could not read and write		2
26-35		7	Informal		2
36-45		3	1-5		7
46-55		2	6-8		1
Total		14	9-10		1
Type of Marriage					
Types		Number	Age at Marriage		
Elopement		13	Education		Number
By abduction		0	≤ 14		1
Arranged		1	15-19		10
Mixed (love and arranged)		0	20+		3
Total		14			
Age at Delivery of First Child					
Age		Number			
≤ 18		7			
19-20		3			
20+		4			
Total		14			
Religious Beliefs					
Age		Number			
Hindu		9			
Christian		5			

Table 4.11 Economic Characteristics of the Population from Hamlet 4

Age Group	Women	Men		
Fishing	1	0	Women who had access to and control of money	6
Collecting wild edibles	7	1		
Both	0	0	Women who had no direct access to and control of money	8
Neither of these	6	13		

The Cases of Violence

"Following the birth of my two daughters, I was labelled as a woman with vices, capable of giving birth only to daughters, which intensified the violence." - A 29-year-old violence survivor.

In one instance, a participant shared her experience of mistreatment from her in-laws, who consistently found fault in her daily chores. These critiques ranged from timing of meal preparation to the seasoning in the curry. The most hurtful moments occurred when they rejected the meals she had prepared and opted to cook for themselves. Although mistreatment lessened two years into her marriage following her husband's intervention, she continued to face criticism from her in-laws even after giving birth to her first child, a daughter. While her in-laws subjected her to verbal and psychological abuse, her husband, when intoxicated, resorted to berating and physically assaulting her, resulting in bruises. These incidents occurred at least once or twice a month during the initial years of their marriage, including a forced intercourse episode. However, she reported no cases of violence in the last 12 months.

In another case, a 29-year-old woman, married at 17, reported enduring physical, emotional, and psychological violence from her husband and in-laws. Her husband's recent marriage to another woman escalated the frequency and intensity of the abuse. He would grab her by the hair and physically assault her, accusing her of having extramarital affairs. Initially restricted from visiting her natal home, she faced violence even when fleeing there. The abuse intensified after giving birth to two daughters, with derogatory labels added. Her husband opposed her birth control decisions and became violent upon learning about it, relenting only after the birth of a son.

Another participant mentioned being shoved and hit by her husband around five times in her lifetime, leading her to seek refuge at her natal home.

A 39-year-old participant, married at 12, reported a higher frequency of shoving and hitting, occurring almost twice every month when her husband was intoxicated. He would threaten her, saying he would kill her and demanded she leave. She resorted to hiding in the forest and spending nights in the neighbourhood to escape the violence.

The neglect of a 32-year-old woman, married at 17 and a mother of six daughters, was detailed, with her husband expressing disappointment for not bearing a son. Despite facing neglect, she reported no incidents of physical or sexual violence. Living in a relatively isolated area on the top of a rugged hill, she was unaware of her husband's second marriage and his two daughters from that union. Facing financial uncertainties after her father's recent passing, she expressed concerns about agricultural activities and relied heavily on wild edibles.

Table 4.15 The Cases of Violence from Hamlet 5

Types of Violence	Lifetime		Men	
	Number	Perpetrator	Number	Perpetrator
Physical Violence	4	Husband	0	
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	4	Husband		
Kicked/beat/hit with a fist	4	Husband		
Hit with objects	-			
Choked	-			
Threatened with a knife	-			

Psychological Violence	2
Emotional Violence	3
Sexual Violence	2

Hamlet 6

Hamlet 6 was situated in an area with rocky topography. Due to the rough geophysical structure, the field sizes were so narrow that the residents had only recently started employing oxen to plough the fields. The locals considered it an unsafe place to reside, especially during the monsoon season. The ward office was about a two and a half hours' walk, and the high school was about 30 minutes farther from the office.

Socio-demographic Description

The population of this hamlet shared common characteristics with other hamlets, including elopement, a low literacy rate, and early-age marriages. Remarkably, the number of women who married before or at the age of 14 was four, while the number of women who married at or after 20 was only one.

Economic Description

The number of women and men engaging in both fishing and collection of wild edibles was high, involving more than 70 percent of those surveyed. Due to the stony topography that discouraged agriculture, most of the men were involved in wage labour at construction sites, with 13 of them working as coolies. One of them reported having gone to work in construction sites only once after marriage. Regarding alcohol consumption, 10 men in this hamlet drank alcohol, one had quit, and four never consumed it.

Table 4.13 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 5

Age Group		Number	Education		Number
15-25		6	People who could not read and write		3
26-35		6	Informal		3
36-45		2	1-5		8
46-55		1	6-8		1
Total		15	9-10		
Type of Marriage					
Types		Number	Age at Marriage		
Elopement		14	Education		Number
By abduction		1	≤ 14		4
Arranged			15-19		10
Mixed (love and arranged)		0	20+		1
Total		15			
Age at Delivery of First Child					
Age		Number			
≤ 18		11			
19-20		3			
20+		1			
Total		15			
Religious Beliefs					
Age		Number			
Hindu		6			
Christian		9			

Table 4.11 Economic Characteristics of the Population from Hamlet 4

Age Group	Women	Men		
Fishing	1	1	Women who had access to and control of money	11
Collecting wild edibles	2	0		
Both	11	13	Women who had no direct access to and control of money	4
Neither of these	1	1		

The Cases of Violence

"My husband suspects me of having an extramarital affair and beats me almost every day." - A 24-year-old survivor of violence.

A 24-year-old woman, married at 18, disclosed that she had experienced physical abuse once from her husband. In moments of intoxication, he would subject her to verbal abuse, expressing regret for marrying her. He would threaten her, insisting that she should no longer reside in his home.

Another participant, aged 33, mentioned that her in-laws used to belittle her abilities in the early days of her marriage. Her husband would also ignore her for days when dissatisfied with her household chores.

A 23-year-old woman shared that she endured emotional violence, particularly from her in-laws who demeaned her child-rearing abilities. Additionally, she was restricted from attending local events unless accompanied by her husband.

A 27-year-old woman revealed that her mother had survived domestic violence inflicted by her father. The woman, too, faced physical violence from her father, compelling her to discontinue her education. She recounted instances where her father beat her for reading the English alphabet.

Another woman, 24 years old, had been forcibly married at 15 to an unknown man. The man's earnings from working as a coolie at a construction site constituted a major source of their income. Until the birth of their daughter, life had been normal with the expected common disputes. Since then, she suffered various forms of violence, with daily physical abuse from her alcoholic husband. Though not subjected to forceful sex, she faced regular physical, emotional, and psychological violence. The husband expressed dislike for their son and daughter and suspected infidelity. She described instances of torn clothing, water thrown in the fireplace, and emotional breakdowns, highlighting the profound psychological and emotional violence she endured.

Table 4.18 The Cases of Violence from Hamlet 6

Types of Violence	Lifetime		Men	
	Number	Perpetrator	Number	Perpetrator
Physical Violence	2	Husband	1	Husband
Pushed/grabbed/shoved	1	Husband	1	Husband
Kicked/beat/hit with a fist	2	Husband	1	Husband
Hit with objects	1	Husband	2	Father
Choked	1	Husband	1	Father
Threatened with a knife	1	Husband	1	Father
Psychological Violence	1			
Emotional Violence	3			
Sexual Violence	0			

Summary of the Findings

The study highlighted a significant prevalence of early-age marriages, with 10 percent of participants marrying before or at the age of 14. Elopement was the predominant form of marriage, but discussions on family planning, including the first child, number of children, birth-spacing, and contraceptive use, were lacking. Consequently, 56 percent gave birth to their first child before or at the age of 18. Out of 118 participants, two had expressed a desire not to become mothers immediately after marriage, but their husbands dismissed their wishes.

Five cases of marriage by abduction were identified, with the most recent incident taking place a decade earlier. Additionally, three cases of polygynous marriage were reported, the latest being two years ago. In this recent incident, the man and his wife were not divorced. The first wife was unaware of her husband's affair with another woman, while the second wife did not know that the man was already married. One of the polygynous marriages resulted from the husband's desire for a male child, which he could not fulfil from his former marriage.

Husbands' preference for a male child led to both physical and emotional violence against their wives. One participant revealed that instances of physical violence commenced following the birth of their first daughter. In another case, the husband rejected his wife's request for him to remarry after they failed to have children in the initial years of marriage. Conversely, he resorted to verbal abuse and issued threats to her life.

Conflict often stemmed from possessiveness and jealousy, focusing on real or imagined transgressions, with specific issues including domestic work, alcohol use, and concerns about children. Meal-related matters were particularly sensitive, sometimes resulting in violent attacks. Emotional violence from in-laws included belittling abilities, verbal abuse, and constant criticism.

Survivor accounts revealed that perpetrators (men) did not believe women had the same right as men to argue, negotiate, or debate.

Ten participants reported incidents of being physically forced by their husbands to have sex, indicating that marital rape was comparatively lower than other forms of violence. However, it is also possible that the participants may not have disclosed much about this private matter. One case of incest was also reported.

In conclusion, there was a prevalence of violence against Chepang women, but they frequently refrained from seeking legal assistance, primarily due to a lack of information about available legal mechanisms.

The highly marginalised Chepang women remain susceptible to violence unless prompt and suitable actions are implemented.

Socio-demographic Details of Physical Violence Survivors

A total of 27 out of 118 participants reported experiencing physical violence in their lives. Among them, 93 percent had encountered physical violence from their partners at some time, and 37 percent had experienced it within the last 12 months.

Breaking down the data for the 27 survivors of physical violence revealed that 56 percent fell within the age category of 26-35. Furthermore, 59 percent had acquired primary education, typically up to class two or three, while 14 percent could not read and write. The data showed that 78 percent got married between the ages of 15 and 19, with 19 percent being married before or at the age of 14. Moreover, 70 percent gave birth to their first child before or at the age of 18.

Examining the husbands of the 27 survivors, it was observed that 15 (56 percent) of them had education up to class five. Additionally, five of them were educated up to class eight, two could not read and write, and two had gained informal education for adults. One had education up to class 10, one had passed SLC/SEE, and one had completed high school. Furthermore, 70 percent of them worked as manual labourers.

The study also noted that over 15 (56 percent) of the participants had direct access to and control of money. Additionally, it was found that only eight used mobile phones, mostly feature phones, and just one listened to the radio.

Table 4.13 Socio-demographic Information of the Population from Hamlet 5

Age Group		Number	Education		Number
15-25		6	People who could not read and write		4
26-35		15	Informal		1
36-45		4	1-5		16
46-55		2	6-8		5
Total		27	9-10		0
Type of Marriage					
Types		Number	SLC/SEE		Number
Elopement		20	High school		0
By abduction		2	Age at Marriage		
Arranged		4	Education		Number
Mixed (love and arranged)		1	≤ 14		5
Total			15-19		21
			20+		1
Age at Delivery of First Child					
Age		Number			
≤ 18		19			
19-20		5			
20+		3			
Total		27			
Religious Beliefs					
Age		Number			
Hindu		14			
Christian		13			

Systematic Violence Against the Chepang People

Within the historical and structural marginalisation of Indigenous communities, the distinctive qualities and experiences of Indigenous women have been overlooked in terms of their human rights. Disaggregated data on the violation of human rights of Indigenous women is lacking, but sparse reports, due to low literacy rates and exclusion, indicate an alarmingly high level of violation.

Everyday abuse of women in Nepal is often linked with patriarchy. Although Indigenous communities were historically egalitarian, they currently exhibit gender-based discrimination as a result of acculturation and patriarchal governance. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal has failed to acknowledge patriarchal governance as a cause

of discrimination and oppression, only recognizing feudalistic, autocratic, centralised, and unitary governance as causes. Indigenous women are at risk of domestic violence, trafficking, high mortality rates, early marriages, and denial of access to education, health, information, services, and justice.

The Government of Nepal is a signatory to various international instruments for human rights including CEDAW, and has enacted laws accordingly. However, CSOs claim that the government is not fully implementing CEDAW recommendations. This is reflected in the Shadow Report for the Periodic Report of Nepal to CEDAW Committee.

Amnesty International and CSRC have documented several incidents of forced evictions and attempted forced evictions by national park authorities, including in Chitwan and Bardiya, ignoring Nepal's international human rights obligations and new legal standards for eviction under the Right to Housing Act.

A 2020 study revealed alleged rape, abuse, harassment, and mistreatment against Indigenous women by Nepali Army personnel in protected areas. In one of the incidents from the report, a woman was allegedly raped by army personnel while collecting fodder within Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve. The case went unreported to the police, and the army personnel involved was swiftly transferred to another district overnight. The study also reported additional instances of alleged torture by army personnel.

In another instance, a 24-year-old Chepang man, along with six others, was apprehended by Chitwan National Park security personnel while foraging for their traditional food in the park's buffer zone. Tragically, the man succumbed to excessive torture inflicted during the detention. Subsequently, the district court of Chitwan sentenced the security personnel to a nine-month jail term for the "unintentional killing" of the Chepang man.

In 2007, Nepal voted in favour of the UNDRIP. The same year, the Legislative Parliament of Nepal approved the ratification of ILO's C169, making Nepal the first country in South Asia to do so. C169 upholds the principle of self-management and ensures the right of IPs to be consulted and participate in matters concerning their own development. Despite being the sole legally binding instrument on IPs' rights, it has not been implemented with the Chepang people from Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality. Furthermore, there is no mechanism in place to obtain free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) from the Chepang people regarding planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Schedule-8 of the Constitution grants 22 powers to local governments, including the "protection and development of languages, cultures and fine arts." However, this receives the least attention and investment, not aligning with C169 and UNDRIP.

This discriminatory approach reflects the continuation of the state's systematic violence against the Chepang people.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the historical marginalisation of Indigenous communities and the state's imposition of caste-based Hindu ideology in Nepal, gender relations among IPs have undergone changes. This study examined the prevalence of violence against women among the Chepang people in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality, Chitwan district, aiming to contribute to a better understanding of violence against Chepang women, improving their situation, and promoting gender equality.

This study challenges the notion that IPs in Nepal do not exhibit gender inequality. It emphasizes the need to avoid applying a blanket approach of gender equality to all Indigenous communities and urges consideration of changed gender relations within the Chepang community and possibly other Indigenous communities.

Various forms of GBV are prevalent in Nepal, including domestic violence, marital rape, dowry-related violence, child marriage, polygamy, female infanticide, witchcraft accusations, Chhaupadi (the practice of isolating menstruating women), and trafficking. Approximately one-third of married women in the country have experienced partner-perpetrated violence. And yet, many cases go unreported due to the fear of social stigma and lack of awareness about legal provisions.

This study underscores the deeply ingrained male supremacy that seeks to normalise physical violence, while neglecting the emotional violence experienced by women as a consequence of physical abuse. Data showed that the preference for a male child was predominant, leading men to resort to physical violence against their wives. This was also a factor contributing to polygynous marriage. Some Chepang women attempted to escape abusive and alcoholic husbands by eloping with other men.

While Chepang women and men generally marry following courtship, the study found that early marriages and forced marriages were common. The low level of education among participants and their husbands, coupled with limited awareness of legal provisions related to vital events registration, family planning, and VAW/G, contributed to the prevalence of gender-based discrimination.

Identifying the causes behind Chepang men committing violence requires a multi-disciplinary ethnographic and longitudinal study, and this report can serve as a pretext. This study found that a disjunction between expected and actual behaviours of women often resulted in physical violence.

In the recorded cases of physical violence, 59 percent of the perpetrators were found to be alcoholic.

Overall, gender-based discrimination was evident through the preference for sons, the practice of polygyny, early marriages, and restrictions on women using temporary

contraceptives. Additionally, the vulnerability of Chepang women to domestic violence was underscored by their low educational attainment and limited awareness of legal provisions regarding marriage, remarriage, and divorce.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and issues identified through this research, the study puts forward specific recommendations relevant for future policies and programmes:

- 1. Investment in awareness programmes:** The local government should allocate more resources to awareness-raising programmes. It is crucial to develop targeted outreach messages and mechanisms that effectively reach every individual within the community, considering mass media accessibility and the low level of education. Community members need awareness about fundamental legal provisions related to VAW and GBV, the roles of family members and the community in preventing VAW, supporting survivors, and the types of assistance available, both generally and locally.
- 2. Confronting VAW/G:** In accordance with the Local Government Operations Act 2017, the local government should address VAW/G by implementing both preventive and protective measures. It should understand the intersection of gender with other social and economic inequalities and address potential drivers of GBV, aligning with Schedule-8 of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal and the GoN's commitment to the SDGs.
- 3. Proactive judicial committee:** The judicial committee at the local level should be proactive. The local government should raise awareness among all residents of the municipality, with a special focus on Chepang people, regarding the judicial committee, its roles, and its means of access.
- 4. Provision of necessary support:** The municipality should establish provisions to provide necessary support, including a safe house, psychosocial counselling, legal aid, referral services, and health facilities for seriously affected GBV survivors.
- 5. Review of educational materials:** A review of educational materials and pedagogical practices is needed to ensure that they teach respect and equality, consistent with prevention of VAW, while promoting the norms, values, beliefs, practices, and institutions of Chepang people.
- 6. Implementation of legal provisions:** All three tiers of government should seriously implement legal provisions and policies such as the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009, the Crime Victim Protection Act, 2018, National Gender Equality Policy, 2021, and similar regulations.

7. **Effective use of the GBV Elimination Fund:** All three tiers of government should commit to using the GBV Elimination Fund effectively and without legal confusion, ensuring alignment with other women-targeted policies.
8. **Targeted awareness programmes:** The local government and civil society, in collaboration, should develop targeted awareness programmes for community leaders, proselytisers, and the wider community, including men, focusing on gender equality/equity and the prevention of VAW.
9. **Community-level efforts for women's empowerment:** Ethnicity-based organizations, particularly the Nepal Chepang Association, NGOs like NIWF, and local governments collaboratively should increase community-level efforts to advance women's empowerment, education, and employment opportunities. In doing so, they should revitalise cultural practices, institutions, and beliefs that promote gender equality and deter VAW.
10. **Upholding indigenous rights:** The violation of the Indigenous rights of the Chepang people, ensured by UNDRIP and C169, increases their vulnerability to VAW. All stakeholders should be committed to upholding their rights as IPs.
11. **Upholding CEDAW General Recommendations:** All the stakeholders should be committed to upholding the general recommendations the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has adopted. The governments should be committed at implementing, in particular, General recommendation No. 39 (about Indigenous women and girls), General recommendation No. 36 (about the rights of girls and women to education) and General recommendation No. 35 (about gender-based violence against women).
12. **Interdisciplinary research:** Collaboration and increased investment are required for interdisciplinary, in-depth, and ethnographic research to analyse core drivers of VAW and GBV, such as imposed patriarchy by colonial or state policies in the Nepali context that have diminished Indigenous women's power, status, and material circumstances in mainstream society and their own communities.

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