FORMATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

Intersections between traditional gender norms, women's economic conditions and exposure to violence against women and girls: formative research in migrant communities of Baglung district, Nepal



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WhatWorks TO PREVENT VIOLENCE
A Global Programme To Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls

UKaid from the British people

Nwabisa Shai[1,2], Geeta Devi Pradhan[3], Alice Kerr-Wilson[4], Nabin Rawal[5] and Prabodh Acharya[5]
[1]Gender and Health Research Unit, Medical Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa
[2]Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
[3]Voluntary Services Overseas Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal
[4]Social Development Direct, London, UK
[5]FACTS Research and Analytics, Kathmandu, Nepal

Contact person:

Nwabisa Shai, MPH
Gender and Health Research Unit, MRC
1 Soutpansberg Road
Pretoria, 0083
Ph.: +27 12 339 8528
E-mail: nwabisa.shai@mrc.ac.za

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Contributions from authors

The Primary Investigator (PI) for the study was Nwabisa Shai from the South African Medical Research Council. She designed the evaluation protocol and was responsible for submission to the SAMRC Ethics Committee. She also provided ongoing support to FACTS Research and Analytics (FACTS) a research company in Nepal. Data collection was conducted by FACTS, managed by Prabodh Acharya and Nabin Rawal who were also responsible for submission of the formative research protocol to the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC). They trained their own research coordinators plus BYC (Bhimapokhara Youth Club) social mobilisers to conduct the research and provided quality assurance during the data collection period. Geeta Devi Pradhan, Ratna Shrestha and Abhina Adhikari from VSO Nepal provided feedback on the formative research protocol from a Nepali perspective and translated tools into Nepali. The VSO team along with local partner BYC selected the study sites and facilitated access to the 'Village District Councils (VDCs). BYC also played a strong role in identifying participants for the study. Alice Kerr-Wilson, VSO Nepal's technical adviser, provided feedback on the protocol and additional support as needed.

The writing of this report was a collaborative effort. The preliminary version was produced by FACTS, this was then revised and updated by Nwabisa Shai with additional inputs provided by the VSO team, Alice Kerr-Wilson and members of the What Works Secretariat.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BYC	Bhimapokhara Youth Club
CA	Constituent Assembly
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
DCO	District Child Office
DLAC	District Legal Aid Committee
DPO	District Police Office
DV	Domestic Violence
FACTS	FACTS Research and Analytics
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoN	Government of Nepal
IDIs	In-depth Interviews
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MoHP	Ministry of Health and Population
NBA	Nepal Bar Association
NDHS	National Demographic and Health Survey
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NHRC	Nepal Health Research Council
NRs	Nepali Rupees
OCMCs	One-Stop Crisis Management Centres
SAMRC	South African Medical Research Council
SAWTEE	South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment
UN	United Nations
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VDCs	Village Development Committees
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas
WOREC	Women's Rehabilitation Centre

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of the formative research phase of the 'Sammanit Jeevan' project, which is part of the broader 'What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls' programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It is based on qualitative field research conducted in the two target villages of the project in Baglung district Nepal, using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted in May 2016.

The research focused on the following issues:

- Prevalent attitudes toward gender roles, identities including ideal traits of young and older men and women as well as teenage boys and girls
- Experiences of and dynamics leading to different forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including violence perpetrated by intimate partners, in-laws and community members
- Experience of male out-migration and the impact it has on young married women and the families they leave behind, particularly in terms of their economic status
- Existing services and response/support mechanisms to VAWG, experiences and potential gaps in these
- Assessing available data on prevalence and types of VAWG at the national level based on government and NGO data.

The research found that traditional gender norms were most prevalent, with a household hierarchy based on gender and age and a culture of patriarchy, with elders having authority over their younger relatives and males having more authority over females. Young married women were expected to defer to both their husbands and in-laws. Young married men were expected to provide for the family and to act as head of the household, whilst their wives were responsible for the private sphere, including housework and care of children and elders. Older women were respected if they could teach their daughters-in-law household chores and handover responsibility for these to them. Female chastity and faithfulness was important and particularly prized in the absence of their husbands. This gender hierarchy and ideal traits of men and women were similar across castes and ethnic groups, however, there was an additional hierarchy between these groups related to the Hindu belief system, with families from the Brahmin ethnic group or caste at the top and Dalit's at the bottom.

However, whilst traditional gender norms tended to be dominant, there was some evidence of changing attitudes and behaviour, particularly related to girls being more able to access education and communities having greater exposure to the outer world. Some community members also seemed to accept the fact that women needed to have paid jobs outside the home in order to support their families. Whilst there were some instances of child marriage reported, participants considered these to be on the decline and in some cases they were the result of teenagers themselves eloping.

The study found that there was a culture of silence around talking about VAWG, which made women and girls afraid to talk about their experiences for fear of reprisals and because they had been socialised not to talk about domestic violence. However, it appears from those that were willing to talk that VAWG in both communities was quite common. It took many forms including physical and psychological violence perpetrated by husbands and in-laws, economic violence when women do not have control over or access to household finances, public harassment of teenage girls and early/ forced marriage. Few respondents openly discussed sexual violence by intimate

partners. Whilst migration may decrease the prevalence of violence perpetrated by husbands who are now absent, the research found that in the absence of her husband, young married women may face increased physical, psychological and economic violence perpetrated by their in-laws, mainly the mother-in-law. There was no mention of sexual violence perpetrated by family members by study participants, however this is a taboo subject and such cases have been reported elsewhere in Nepal. The study found that in some cases there was intergenerational conflict between young married women and their mothers-in-law, often related to mothers-in-laws expectations of their daughters-in-law regarding household work, dress, how she spent money and her aspirations.

Young married women living with their extended family often found that their husbands sent remittances to their fathers, rather than to them, which meant that they had very limited access to funds. Some of them also said that they were vulnerable to abuse from both their in-laws and husbands on their return, if they were not able to produce accurate accounts of how they had spent remittances. Some teenage girls also reported that in the absence of their fathers, they sometimes faced increased harassment by young men who saw girls not being protected by their fathers and took advantage of the situation.

Communities lacked formal support mechanisms to protect and support survivors of violence at the village level, these were only available at the district level, often inaccessible to these women and girls. Informal support mechanisms at the local level did exist, with some disputes between in-laws and daughters-in-laws, husbands and wives being reported to village elders who tended to try and mediate between the two parties.

The research indicated several possible entry points for work on VAWG prevention, including needing to identify key gatekeepers already involved in mediating between parties and resolving cases of VAWG. There is also a need to include perpetrators such as mothers-in-law and husbands within this work in order to change attitudes and behaviour around gender norms. Livelihoods training was seen as an important opportunity for women to earn an income and the positive response of some men to their wives earning an income when they are away is a potential opportunity to develop interventions. Some women also reported that income-earning opportunities would help them maintain favourable relationships with their in-laws and provide a way out of excessive dependence on their husband's money and also reduce VAW.

1. Introduction

Nepal is a classically patriarchal society where women are viewed as subordinate and are socialised into lower social status compared to men. Gender roles in Nepal vary with context, caste, ethnic group, religion, and socio-economic class. The traditional family structures are grounded in respect for elders and the belief that men have supremacy over women. Women and girls in Nepal are disadvantaged by traditional practices such as the dowry system, early marriage, son-preference, stigmatization of widows, seclusion of women (pudah[1]), family violence, polygamy, and the segregation of women and girls during menstruation (chhaupadi[2]).

In many Nepali families, female children are accorded inferior status and male children are held in high esteem (Subedi 1997). Daughters are considered the property of their fathers, brothers or husbands (if married) compared to sons who are viewed as protectors and providers for families (Subedi 1997). In Nepal, daughters are also regarded as someone to be married off as they do not bear long-term natal household responsibility, unlike sons. However, marriage can involve exorbitant expenses in the form of dowry from the daughter's household. This increases the perception that women and girls are liabilities with limited bargaining power (Carr, Chen et al. 1996). These practices and perceptions are associated with women and girls' lower social status and disempowerment. Understanding the connections between women's social status and their risk of victimisation is an important step for the development of effective interventions to prevent violence against women and girls.

Women's lower status and disempowerment is characterised by their lack of access to economic resources, economic dependence on husbands and in-laws, and lack of decision-making power. In addition, women and girls often receive less health care, education and training than men and boys. Women's economic position is weak both within the family and outside due to perceptions that women are liabilities rather than assets, which diminishes their ability to assert themselves (Batliwala 1994). The low status of women and girls in Nepal is evidenced by the violence they face. A recent national survey in Nepal found almost half (48%) of women had experienced some form of gender based violence at least once in their lifetime (Nepal 2012). A high number of violence against women cases have also been reported. For instance, the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) providing shelter to abused women in seven districts in Nepal, recorded 2,225 cases of violence against women from January to December 2014. These cases of violence included 1503 cases of domestic violence, 199 rapes and 58 attempted rapes, 76 cases of sexual violence, 40 murders, and 26 attempted murders of women. These statistics indicate potential connections between women's low social status and high prevalence of violence against women and girls.

What Works To Prevent Violence? A Global Programme on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) has been funded by DFID to advance global knowledge on prevention of VAWG. The Global Programme (Component 1) is funding 10 innovation grants and six separate impact

[1] *Pudah is The practice in certain Muslim and Hindu societies of screening women from men or strangers, especially by means of a curtain https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/purdah*

[2] *http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/nepal-gender-and-protection-brief*

evaluations using rigorous methods which will enable the programme to assess the effectiveness of the interventions in prevention of VAWG. The work is being conducted in Africa, the Middle East and Asia in 10 DFID-priority countries, between 2014 and 2018. VSO Nepal received funding as part of this overall portfolio of work to develop an intervention to prevent VAWG among women whose partners have been or are migrant labourers. Formative research was conducted in order to understand the context, nature and extent of violence against women in Nepal in order to inform the development and evaluation of a behaviour change and economic empowerment intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention intervention.

1.1. History and Extent of Migration in Nepal

Nepal has a long history of migration for labour both to other Asian countries and beyond, including India, Japan, Malaysia, and in other continents. This dates back to the late 18th and 19th century when state and agrarian policies forced peasants based in the highlands to leave their land and seek employment in other parts of Nepal and India (Sharma and Sharma 2011). In the 20th and 21st century Nepalis have served in the British Army in the Gurkha regiment, and fought in the First and Second World Wars. Today many Nepalis also serve in the Indian Army and work in the private sector in India and on tea estates and coal mines. Labour migration to Gulf countries has been on the increase from 1990 onwards. This was facilitated by the decentralization of passport issuance after 1990 (Sharma and Sharma, 2011). The Nepali economy is increasingly migration-dependent. An estimated 1400 Nepalese leave the country for overseas jobs daily, contributing to over 500,000 estimated to cross the Nepal borders for work each year (UNDP 2014). The majority of migrants are men, and they are likely to leave their wives back at home with limited means of subsistence.

1.2. Extent of Migrant Labour

Migration for labour is still a common practice in certain regions of Nepal such as Lamjung, Baglung, Kaski, Tanahu. Among these regions, men continue to join the Indian and British armies and many families draw pensions from the Indian and British governments. According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) more than 3.8 million permits to work abroad (excluding India) were issued by the Nepal government during the 1993/94–2014/15 fiscal years, representing almost 14% of the current population. Nepali migrants are predominantly male, but the number of female migrants has been growing over time (not including women who are trafficked to work in India and the Gulf countries[3]) (MoLE 2016).

Migration has provided a source of livelihood and employment to many workers in the absence of enough jobs with high remuneration in their home country[4]. Remittances play an important role in terms of contribution to GDP in many South Asian countries. 56% of Nepali households received remittances in 2010/11 (MoLE 2016). On average 80,436 NRs. (~USD $800) is remitted per recipient to their household annually. 79% of remittances are used for consumption of goods, while 7% for loan repayments. Income from migrant labour remittances has been attributable to the sharp reduction in Nepal's poverty rate, from 42% in 1995 to 25% in 2011(CBS 2011).

[3] *See for instance http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2015-08-02/27-nepali-women-to-return-home-after-their-release.html*

[4] *www.sawtee.org/publications/Briefing-Paper-22.pdf [Accessed 27 July 2016]*

There are costs associated with migrant labour. Many Nepali labour migrants work in harsh working conditions. Separation of migrants from their families is an important social costs of migrant labour as it can lead to the break-up of the family (Pekin 1989). One of the benefits to migrant labour is the increased access to better educational opportunities among children in Nepal[5]. There is limited knowledge on the effects of the current social, economic, and/or political situation on Nepali women. It is imperative to investigate how the current socioeconomic situation affects the current status of women, and the underlying factors.

1.3. Status of Women in Nepal

According to Nepal's National Population and Housing Census 2011, women outnumber men in the general population and constitute 51.4% of the population (CBS 2012). Girls suffer from gender-discriminatory practices in accessing quality education. The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of girls in secondary school has grown steadily grown over the years, from 24.3% in 2003 to 74% in 2011 in the Baglung district[6].

Women in Nepal have been said to hold the triple responsibility of reproduction, production, and community work (Pearson 2000, Husselmann 2016). Personal mobility, which is required for accessing paid jobs, skills development and independent decision-making, is often highly restricted among women. Women work longer hours than men, and have fewer opportunities for waged employment or trading. Property rights have improved although they are still limited. Legally women have equal property rights to men in Nepal[7], but only 19.7% of households reported the ownership of land or houses or both in the name of female members of the household. In urban areas, 27% of the households show female-ownership of fixed assets, as opposed to18% in rural areas (CBS 2012).

The Constitution of Nepal ensures political and civil rights for all, and legislation prohibit discrimination against any citizen in the application of general laws as well as exercise of political and civil rights on the grounds of sex, religion and caste (CA. 2015). However, the promise of non-discrimination has yet to translate to reality in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres. The lower status of women has a bearing on gender power relations in both the household and the community. The family is perceived as a place of bargaining and contestation, where power is negotiated (Agarwal 1994). A person's bargaining power depends on his/her fall-back position, which in turn depends on ownership and control over assets, especially arable land and access to income, resources, and social support and services (Agarwal 1994, Agarwal 1997). Existing literature on women's social status in Nepal point to precarious economic conditions for women, which increase their vulnerability to poor social, economic and health conditions.

[5] *Amanda Peskin, "Out of Nepal: Women's Labor Migration," Women Across Frontiers, Issue 4, June 2016. Accessed 27 Sept 2016 from http://wafmag.org/2016/06/nepal-womens-labor-migration/*

[6] *http://www.ncf.org.np/upload/files/1007_en_Consolidated%20Report%202068%20(%202011)_1346397795.pdf*

[7] *An Act to Amend Some Nepal Acts Relating for Maintaining Gender Equality, 2063 (2006)*

1.4. Sociocultural Status of Nepali Women

In Nepal, the Hindu religion plays a key role in the culture. It has particularly patriarchal values and norms and it has been said that in Hinduism, "women are ranked below in all castes" (Leonard 1997), regardless of caste as higher woman marrying into a lower caste is less likely to receive any support from her family. When higher caste women married lower caste men the women would have to adjust themselves with men's family and society. She would not be support by her natal family and relatives. Hinduism emphasizes that marriage is for bearing children, and the most important goal is to have sons (Subedi 1997). Many Nepali women have been victimised in relationships for not having given birth to sons. The belief that if daughters get married before puberty their parents will gain merit in heaven reinforces child marriage in Nepali society and victimizes women without children throughout their lives (Subedi 1997). In a study on masculinities in Nepal and Vietnam, 90% of men in both countries endorsed a belief that 'a man with only daughters is unfortunate' and 'not having a son reflects bad karma and lack of moral virtue' (Priya, Abhishek et al. 2012).

1.5. Violence against women and girls in Nepal

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most pervasive human rights violation and public health concern globally. Violence against women and girls is defined as:

> *"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993.*

VAWG is driven by gendered social structures that perpetuate gender inequalities and discrimination. A third of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (Devries, Mak et al. 2013).

Prevalence rates and types

Nepal is one of the Asian countries with a high prevalence of gender based violence (GBV) (Deuba and Rana 2001), yet violence against women remains often unrecognised and underreported. The 2011 National Demographic Health Survey reported that an overall 26% of women aged 15-49 had experienced either physical or sexual violence by intimate partners in their lifetimes. Of these women, 22% had experienced physical intimate partner violence (IPV) since age 15 and 12% had been exposed to sexual violence since that age. Among women with physical IPV exposure, those who were employed for cash were more likely than other women to have experienced physical violence (28%). Other studies suggest that having access to better livelihood may increase their partners' resistance to corresponding changes in women's lives (Rocca, Rathod et al. 2009). Ever-married women were more likely than never-married women to have experienced physical violence: 28% of women who were divorced, separated, or widowed and 26% of currently married women reported physical violence since age 15 compared to 6% of never-married women (Priya, Abhishek et al. 2012). Other studies corroborated reports that married women are at higher risk of domestic or intimate partner violence as more than one-third of married women aged 20-24 years had experienced violence at home (Paudel 2007). Among women who were exposed to sexual

violence, the current married partner was the most common perpetrator (87%) (MOHP, New ERA et al. 2012). Other studies have indicated that many young married women experience violence at the hands of the mother-in-law (Rew, Gangoli et al. 2013, Wasim 2014, Mirza 2016).

In 2012, the Nepal Police recorded 2,250 cases of domestic violence nationwide.[8] In Nepal's fiscal year 2015/16, the National Women's Commission received reports of 317 domestic violence cases in Kathmandu alone.[9] Sometimes women do not report GBV and domestic violence (DV) cases directly to government service providers but to local NGOs. For example, in 2012, two well-known Nepali NGOs recorded 1019 and 272 domestic violence cases, respectively.[10] These statistics, however, measure only the women who had the resources and support to report domestic violence, an innumerable amount of others may not have ever reported cases. Studies also report high rates of sexual victimisation among women and girls including forced first sex (MOHP, New ERA et al. 2012), and sexual harassment in the work place (Asia Foundation 2010).

Causes of VAWG in Nepal

Among the factors associated with VAWG are traditional gender norms (Bhatta 2014), gender attitudes that promote male dominance over women (NDHS 2006), husbands' alcohol drinking, lower social status of women and women's lack of access to income, autonomy and decision-making (Acharya, Bell et al. 2010), as well as women's limited education, early and other marriage practices, less knowledge of sexuality, and lack of family and legal support to abused women (Hawkes, Puri et al. 2013). The National Demographic and Health Survey indicated that one in five women and one in five men believe that gender based violence is acceptable (NDHS 2006). 44% of men agreed that a woman deserves to be beaten (Priya, Abhishek et al. 2012). Marriage practices such as the dowry system have been associated with women's increased exposure to domestic and intimate partner violence (Kapoor 2000, Paudel 2007, Oshiro, Poudyal et al. 2011). Mothers-in-law who perceive the dowry brought by daughters-in-law to be inadequate tend to be abusive towards daughters-in-law (Oshiro, Poudyal et al. 2011).

Government response mechanisms

In 2011, Nepal's Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) established 17 one-stop crisis management centres (OCMCs) in hospitals and safe homes for survivors of GBV across Nepal districts. These centres are designed to follow a multi-sectorial and locally coordinated approach to provide GBV survivors with a comprehensive range of services including health care, psycho-social counselling, access to safe homes, legal protection, personal security and vocational skills training. These centres have provided support and services to 4,420 survivors of physical, or sexual violence thus far, and access occurred through self-referrals, referrals from other hospital units or the police.[11]

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[8] *As reported in Hawkes et al., p. 20; GBV, including domestic violence, cases were reported at the district level and aggregated at central police headquarters in Kathmandu*

[9] *National Women's Commission's annual report, fiscal year 2071/72, p. 37*

[10] *Hawkes et al., p. 21*

[11] *www.nhssp.org.np/pulse/Pulse_OCMC_good_practices_february2016.pdf [Accessed 16 August 2016]*

Nepal has legislation prohibiting domestic violence, the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act, 2008, and other relevant guidelines to address violence against women and girls cases. However, it is unclear how much of a deterrent the legislation is and how much these mechanisms support those who have experienced violence. The National Demographic Health Survey highlighted that three-quarters of Nepali women who have experienced physical or sexual violence had not sought help following their violence experience, and two-thirds did not mention the violent act to anyone (NDHS 2006). This sheds light on the extent of silence around experiences of domestic or intimate partner violence, and points to potential inaccessibility of relevant support services.

1.6. Rationale for the Study

This research aimed to provide insights into the nature of VAWG within the local context of migrant communities, an in-depth exploration of who the perpetrators are, the factors influencing victimisation and perpetration of VAWG, and community responses to VAWG. The study draws from ecological framework proposed by Heise on the contributing factors to violence against women (Heise 1998).

The formative study aimed to explore the intersections between traditional gender norms, poor economic conditions of women and their risk of experiencing domestic and intimate partner violence. The objectives of the study included an exploration of the dominant traditional gender norms, women's economic conditions as well as the nature and context of VAWG. Connections were sought between three areas: gender norms, economic conditions and risk of VAWG, as well as with the migration context.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design

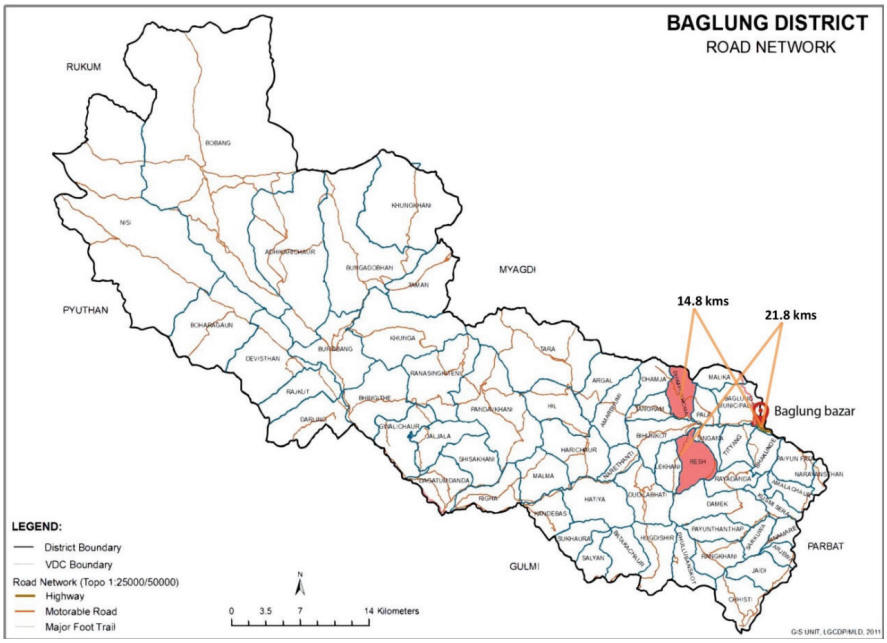
The formative research employed qualitative methods, namely in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus groups (FGDs). Semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were used to foster in-depth learning about individual perspectives about gender and violence against women and girls, and experiences related to these (DiCicco- Bloom and Crabtree 2006). The FGDs were a flexible way of informally collecting discourses about a particular topic from a group of people (Wilkinson, Joffe et al. 2004).

2.2. Study Setting

The study was conducted in two Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Baglung district, namely Bhimapokhara and Resha. Baglung district is one of the seventy-five districts of Nepal, covers 1,784 km² and had a population of 268,613 in 2011 (Nepal. 2012). Its hilly landscapes are located in the western region of Nepal. About 10% of the Nepali population is engaged in migrant labour. Baglung district constitutes the largest population engaged in migrant labour estimated

at 15.9%. The two VDCs, Bhimapokhara and Resha, have been selected on the basis of district authority consultations. These are neighbouring VDCs that are similar in geography, population, culture, the festivals celebrated and the means of livelihood. There are additional similarities in location and accessibility to the district headquarters, the extent of migration and poverty. According to the District Development Committee (DDC) data, Bhimapokhara VDC is under the poverty line. Both Bhimapokhara and Resha VDCs have relatively higher migration ratios as compared to other VDCs in Baglung district.

The two VDCs have a mix of castes and ethnic groups. Brahmin, Magars (from the Janajati ethnic group) and Chhetri castes were more dominant castes in both VDCs but Bhimapokhara had the largest representation of the Dalit[12] caste, those considered to be untouchable (956 Dalits in Bhimapokhara and 363 Dalits in Resha).



[12] *Dalits are characterised as the so-called untouchables in Nepali society and they are placed at the lowest rungs in terms of caste hierarchy.* ***Dalit*** *means 'oppressed' in Sanskrit, and is considered a self-chosen name of castes in India meant to politicise their sector of the population which is* ***untouchable****. Even though, law has criminalized this practice of untouchability, the practices associated with it is still prevalent in many rural areas of Nepal. To be untouchable means that one does not belong to the social status defined by menial and despised jobs. The Dalits are the artisan class who traditionally did not own land for farming and were tied up in patron-client relationships.*

2.3. Participants

A purposive sample was selected for the study. Study participants comprised of young married women, married men, older women and teenage girls. Community leaders and service providers also participated in the study. Married men were migrant labourers who had returned on break or were between jobs.

The selection criteria for young married women was that they had to be married and no older than 40 years. The young men needed not to be husbands or family members of the young married women selected and so did the older women and men who participated. This was so make sure that there was no risk to women who disclosed their experience of violence, particularly if it was perpetrated by a family member. Older women and men were considered for participation if they had in-law status, that is if their sons were married, whether or not they lived with their daughter-in-law.

Sixteen (16) young married women aged 16 to 40 years consented to the IDIs, as well as 8 married men over the age of 40 years. 8 older women over the age of 40 years and with in-law status were interviewed. 6 teenage girls aged 15-19 years assented to interviews. Two male and two female community leaders also gave interviews.

Seven (7) FGDs were conducted with two older women's groups, two older men's groups, and two with teenage girls. Service providers from local response service to violence against women and girls participated in one FGD. The table below demonstrates the allocation of the data collection instruments by participant type across the two VDCs.

Data collection across Bhimapokhara and Resha VDCs				
Number of IDIs			**Participants**	**Age-group**
Total	**BP VDC**	**Resha VDC**		
16	8	8	Young married women	16-40
8	4	4	Married men	Above 40
8	4	4	Older women (in-law status)	Above 40
6	3	3	Unmarried teenage girls	15-19
4	2	2	Community leaders (2 males, 2 females)	Varied
Number of FGDs			**Participants**	**Age-group**
2	1	1	Unmarried Teenage girls	15-19
2	1	1	Older men	Above 40
2	1	1	Older women	Above 40
1 at district level			Service providers	Varied

2.4. Data Collection and Management

All IDIs and FGDs were conducted in Nepali.

Interviewers were familiar with the study area and had worked there previously. The IDIs were conducted by female interviewers with young married women. These explored women social status, economic conditions and aspirations, personal experiences of marriage and experiences of conflict with husbands and in-laws. The context and effects of migration were also covered. FGDs with married men, older women and service providers explored the community perspectives about gender roles, norms and expectations, the migration context and attitudes towards violence against women and girls and domestic violence. Those conducted with teenage girls also covered their life aspirations in addition to their perceptions about gender and violence against women and girls and their experiences.

All interviews and group discussions followed an interview or discussion guide. FGDs had one facilitator and an observer who was also able to take notes of the discussions. Following each IDI interviewers recorded field notes based on their observations of their interactions with research participants. Group facilitators recorded interactions among participants as well. Field notes were typed up in English.

All data were transcribed verbatim and translated from Nepali into English. VSO participated in the cross-checking of a sample of transcribed and translated interviews. All transcribed data were anonymised for participant by assigning a unique identification code to each participant.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data was organised using Atlas.ti. The research investigators began the analysis by reading transcribed interviews. An analytic induction approach was used and emerging themes were considered to be potential codes and were discussed among the research team until a codebook was produced. This inductive coding involved gradually obtaining and developing themes and subthemes as they emerged from the data (Pope, Ziebland et al. 2000). Once the team was familiar with the data they reviewed the emergent themes, defined and named them (Braun and Clarke 2006). Relationships between themes were noted and considered in this process. Thus the intercoder agreement was established. This enabled the team to refine definitions for codes, clarify the meaning of terms and contexts where necessary (Hruschka, Schwartz et al. 2004).

The codebook resulted in the following themes: perceptions of the ideal woman perceptions of work, migration and its effects on women, factors associated with violence against women and girls, and potential shifts in social norms.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC). Access to the research setting and participants was obtained through VSO Nepal's local implementing partner Bhimapokhara Youth Club (BYC) for the What Works project. BYC facilitated access into the communities and helped to obtain permission from the district and village authorities. They explained the purpose of the study, the volunteer nature of participation, and the procedures to be undertaken.

The research was conducted by FACTS Research and Analytics (FACTS). Interviewers and group facilitators were FACTS and VSO Nepal on interviewing skills, and gender and gender based violence respectively. They were briefed about the purpose of the study, the sensitive nature of the interviews and group discussions, how to detect distress and use of referrals. The training also covered the potential risk for vicarious trauma on interviewers on gender based violence work and advised on ways to minimize the risk. Trainers were debriefed regularly by FACTS and VSO Nepal. Interviewers and group facilitators were sex-matched to participants during data collection.

All participants written informed consent. Parental consent was sought for teenage girls under the age of 18 years, and thereafter teenage girls provided assent. Interviewers and group facilitators explained the purpose of the research, the procedures to be followed, the nature of the questions to be asked, the potential risks, and how the data would be collated into a report and research publications, and would be used to develop a gender norms and economic empowerment programme for the community. Each participants was reimbursed with a bag of seeds for their time, and refreshments were provided during data collection. Interviewers and group facilitators explained that participation was entirely voluntary; that there were no right or wrong answers, that participants were free not to participate or not participate, and that they could end the interview at any time without any consequences for doing so. The use of audio-recording was also requested and explained, that it would facilitate efficient capture of all the information participants provide in interviews and group discussions. All interviews were conducted in places that provided privacy to the participants and the researcher. Personal identification of participants was not disclosed to anyone. Records containing participants' names were kept separately from their data in locked cabinets at the VSO Nepal offices. All research data were anonymised using unique identification codes. All recordings, field notes and transcripts were saved in password protected files on the VSO Nepal server with no clear identifiers between them. Any participants who showed signs of distress during interviews were provided with a list of referrals to local psychosocial support services in the Bhimapokhara and Resha VDCs and the district headquarters. No adverse events emerged during and immediately after data collection.

2.7. Limitations of the Study

The formative study was exploratory in nature and used qualitative research methods. Participants were purposefully and conveniently selected. This means that the findings of the study cannot be generalised to all migrant communities in Nepal or elsewhere. The study asked sensitive questions and non-response was highly likely due to potential discomfort to disclose such experiences. Socially desirable bias is one of the pitfalls in qualitative research methods. Due to limited time available only teenage girls were interviewed and not teenage boys, so we don't have their perspective.

3. Findings

3.1. The social context

The family was a critical social structure that can be used to explore the nature of relations between men and women, gender norms and roles and the nature and extent of violence against women and girls. The 'family' usually refers to an extended family structure made up of a married man and his close relations, including his wife, children and parents as well as siblings. However, a third of young married women participating in the study lived on their own houses away from their in-laws.

Marriage appeared to be a prevailing norm and the ultimate rite of passage for both men and women. Once men and women are married they are expected to enact specific gender roles of 'husband' and 'wife', and when their sons in turn get married, they then become 'father-in-law' and 'mother-in-law' thus creating a gender hierarchy. Older men groups explained these gender positions as "*a father acts as the head of the household (where he is) a leader of the family, and the mother is the second lead of the family*". At the bottom of this hierarchy are the children who are brought up in a certain way, driven by underlying notions of the ascribed gender roles they are expected to be play when they are older. Within the family once a young man is married, he becomes a husband with a set of expected gender roles to which he must deliver, while his wife becomes the daughter-in-law with her own set of expected gender roles.

As the second lead in the family, the mother has a primary responsibility of socialising her children and assumes decision-making power over them. As one of the elders in Resha explained, she is the one "*who decides what is right for her son and the work that suits him, his skills and interest*" and this applies to all the children. The decision-making power of mothers also implies that among families where arranged marriages occur, the mother chooses the young woman that her son is to marry. When her sons are married, the mother acquires in-law status and being a mother-in-law further elevates the mother's role. She has oversight over the daughter-in-law and the daughter-in-law becomes accountable to her, particularly when living in the same household.

The elders are seen as custodians of a prevailing patriarchal culture in Nepal. Older men occupy a leadership role where they are perceived to be "steering" the family, community and society in a particular direction. The elders' role was and is also prominent in defining appropriate and acceptable gender roles for men and women, and they were vocal in ordering and forbidding certain behaviours and actions perceived to be aligned with being an ideal man or an ideal woman.

Consistent with the literature, caste based 'untouchability' still persists in both VDCs. The practice of untouchability has declined in public spheres and among the younger generation, but the older generation continue discriminating against people according to their caste. People who belong to the Dalit caste make up the majority of the lower caste, the so-called untouchables. Dalit women constitute the people performing menial labour in the community, and they are hired by people

from other castes such as the Chhetris, Brahmins, Janajati and others. The terms of labour, types of services provided and the way they are treated demonstrates that the practice of untouchability has not dissipated. Dalits are not allowed to touch utensils and enter into so-called higher caste houses. If they happened to touch the utensils it should be kept in the sun to dry before taking it inside the house and sprinkle holy water to 'purify it'. They are not allowed to touch even the communal drinking water tap. These practices were observed during the facilitation of the FGDs where facilitators had to put extra effort to ensure the Dalits' voices were heard. Dalits were usually reserved while the people from the Chhetris and Brahmins, that is the higher castes, seemed to suppress or interrupt them. Yet Dalit women offered valuable data on the social context of women's work. One of the ways in which the continued community perceptions about Dalit's untouchability was evinced by allocation of certain jobs considered to be demeaning to the Brahmins, Chhetris, Janajatis for instance, to Dalit women in the community. While doing these jobs for the higher castes, Dalits are not even allowed to enter inside the houses of the higher castes, especially the kitchen. If Dalits were to enter there, it is believed that they make the house impure.

3.2. Gender Norms and Expectations

3.2.1. Socialisation into gender norms

Socialisation into feminine and masculine gender roles starts at a young age, and may continue as young women and young men enter into adulthood. From youth, girls' lives are shaped by elders to fit patterns of behaviour considered to contribute towards building a good female character and preserving the family's dignity. This expectation becomes more explicit among girls compared to boys and in adulthood, more among young married women compared to young married men. How well a woman or girl lives up to social expected gender roles may influence how she is treated by elders, family member or husband, and the family may benefit from a positive reputation at the community level. Doing well in this regard may earn a woman or girl status of the good female character many older men referred to in the study.

A young unmarried woman or girl was expected to exercise chastity, have no sexual relations before marriage and her first sexual debut to be with her husband. One of the ways in which parents and elders ensure a woman or girl remains chaste is by maintaining a degree of control over a woman or girl's body through prescriptions of where they can or cannot go and with whom they can or cannot associate. Restrictions on young women and girls' mobility is often done to prevent their contact with men in particular. As one of the teenage girls explained in a group discussion:

> *"As teenage girls, we are expected to maintain our dignity. We are not allowed to talk to strangers. We are accused if we talk to guys unnecessarily and we need to avoid talking to them. It is believed that a boy and a girl must not talk with each other," teenage girl, FGD, Resha VDC.*

Notably teenage girls themselves observed how restrictions placed on girls' movements and associations were not applicable to boys as they "*are sons and they can do things daughters cannot*" according to community perceptions. The findings demonstrated how these restrictive practices evolve and become even more intense when married. Ultimately these findings implied that the female body was seen as something to be safeguarded and any physical contact with a man other than the betrothed or spouse is akin to a violation of the dignity of the family, as well as the community.

3.2.2. Menstruation and 'chhaupadi'

Participants in the study also mentioned traditional social norms that isolate women and girls, restrict their interaction with family members, particularly men, and prohibit them from food preparation, as well as attending school or going to the temple. women and girls from going to the kitchen, cooking, touching milk vessels, having physical contact with male members of the family, or visiting the temple or going to school during menstruation. One specific practice termed, *chhaupadi*, occurs where women and girls are not allowed to live in their home during menstruation and are made to sleep in the shed. Restrictions that are specific to *chhaupadi* include women and girls not being allowed to touch milk vessels, to go in kitchen or cook food; and not being allowed to go to school or inside the temples for worship during their menstrual period. The practice is not common to all of Nepal or Baglung district and is selectively practised depending on the caste. During the study *chhaupadi* was only specifically reported among Chhetris and Brahmins in Resha VDC. Some teenage girls reported how in some communities or castes, *chhaupadi* related restrictions can affect women and girls' ability to maintain basic hygiene or to study as they are required to live in rooms outside the main house, and are unable to bath or have clean clothes. A teenage girl explained:

> *"Another risk in case of teenage girl is at the time of menstruation, they have to stay outside the house for seven days. Magar people are not strict about such things but us, Chhettris and Brahmins, we have to sleep on the floor till the third day of our menstruation, then only from the fourth day can we sleep on a bed. We get one blanket and one small mattress. There is a similar type of room like this, but the difference is that we have to sleep on the floor. Even though, the separate room is inside the house, it is very difficult because all my books and everything are inside my room, and I have to call someone every time I need something. Sometimes, they get angry when I call them frequently. It becomes difficult for us."*

However, in the Resha teenage girls FGD, the girls said that the practice of chhaupadi is being relaxed amongst some castes and ethnic groups but still continue even in higher castes:

> *"During menstruation we had to abide by some rules… People were kept in cow sheds, they couldn't eat on time, weren't allowed to see outside, and couldn't go out… Had to use dirty clothes. But now-a-days…it exists…but we, Magars (Janajati) do not do that. When we menstruate, we take a bath and do not touch the milk vessels for 3 days. We do everything—get in, cook. We do everything. But the Chhetris, they hide for 7 days.*
>
> *And then they use dirty clothes and live in cowsheds. [RP: Have you seen this happen to your friends?] They have come and stayed in our cow shed." Teenage girls, FGD, Resha VDC.*

3.2.3. Household Chores

Teenage girls are expected to help with household chores including cleaning the house, washing younger children's clothes, fetching water, depositing animal dung for manure, and helping younger siblings study. Girls are given these chores as a form of preparation for the jobs they are expected to carry out when married as these activities constituted the bulk of young married women's daily work. Girls are expected to carry out household chores as well as study, whilst boys are allocated minimal household chores, can spend more time studying and are expressly encouraged to do so by their parents compared to girls.

3.2.4. Education

There were notable differences in the manner in which boys and girls were brought up, particularly regarding their education. Girls' education was undervalued by their natal families under the pretext that it was not worth educating a girl as she would be married off to another family. Parents tended to enrol daughters in government run schools[13], while sons were sent to good private schools. Thus, teenage girls complained about how their education was undermined:

> *"Priority is given to sons and their education is also a concern for the family, more than that of the daughters. The parents expect children to study but favour the son more and dream of him being a doctor and work is considered to hamper his studies so he is not allowed to help in household chores."*

The 'special' attention and opportunities afforded to sons was designed to maximise their chances of success compared to daughters as job opportunities often favour those with private compared to government education. A teenage girl demonstrated the internalisation of inequity stating:

> *"There are differences: I go to a (government) school and my brother goes to (private) boarding school. My brother is young and not that my parents thought of anything bad for me…Daughters go to somebody else's house".*

The notion of women perpetuating gendered decisions about children's education[14] was even more accentuated as this teenage girl narrated her attempts to confront her parents about this:

> *"Yes, I feel bad. I ask them why they send my brother to a boarding school and me to a governmental one and then my mother cries. I haven't said this to my father. He lives abroad and he might get worried so I don't tell him such things."*

Young married women were less likely to have completed their high school education and were unlikely to get paid jobs, both due to lack of education to qualify for better jobs but also because of the community norms attributing household and menial community work to women.

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[13] *Government schools are community-managed schools and run through a grant given by the government. There fees is nominal fees (while there are some quota from the marginalized groups like Dalits receive free educations) levied on the students in the government schools but most of the government schools are poorly managed and the quality of education is seen to be very poor. Generally, people who cannot afford to go to a private school go to government schools.*

[14] *in rural areas where parents are poor and not able to afford sending all their children to boarding schools - they prioritise their sons over daughter for better quality educations (personal communication with VSON Head of Programme, Geeta D Pradhan 31 March 2017).*

3.2.5. The ideal woman

3.2.5.1. Socialisation into ideal woman through marriage

The notion of an ideal woman is centred around being married, and submissiveness to the authority of the elder members in the family and husbands, among those who are married. Gender socialisation starts from earliest childhood and in the teenage years girls are expected to behave modestly to enable a good marriage (see below).

The general discourse across age and gender groups portrayed how being married was considered an inevitable part of a young woman or girl's identity thus her destiny. Marriage also appeared to be the ultimate goal of many families raising daughters and set the precedent for what is expected and from which adherence to the ideal is evaluated. "*A woman's life is meant for marriage*," explains a young married woman. Other much younger and unmarried women believed that "*marriage is a mandatory"* such that *"if one does not get married, then society will not view her with a friendly eye*." There was consensus among all participating groups that the levels of child marriages had dropped and many women reported theirs were love marriages instead of having been arranged by families against their wishes. However, among the 16 young married women in the study, six had eloped to get married.

Once married, young married women are expected to live with their parents-in-law, and become socialised into their new life mainly by the mother-in-law. In addition to the overall role as the second leader in the family, when older women acquire the in-law status through their sons' marriages, they become highly valued for their role in the teaching their daughters-in-law the expected gender roles. Being an in-law involves adopting guardianship of a young married woman. In practical terms, the findings suggest that mothers-in-law in particular accrue a higher level of authority and power above the one they had over their own children. As mothers-in-law, they take on an inexperienced young married woman and mould them into the kind of wife they desire for their son and household. In addition to existing traditional gender roles often known to the community at large, the mothers-in-law' discretion plays a key role in how young married women are oriented into the expected behaviour and pratices. At the basic level, mothers-in-law provide guidance into feminine gender roles that are predominantly domestic. One mother-in-law explained the details of the domestic activities that are expected of young married women:

> *"I tell her to learn different household works. We can ask others to do the work outside home. I want her to learn the jobs inside our house like keeping house clean and cooking good food".*

Apart from the higher status that comes with becoming a mother-in-law, mothers-in-law accrued benefits from their role. Having a daughter-in-law join the family meant long needed rest from daunting domestic chores that are allocated mostly to women. The ability to rest from these chores, meant that older women in the family gained more ability to take up authority over running of the family. But some women appreciated some of the perks that went along with the role of mother-in-law, one of them being that they "*don't need to wake up early and can have peaceful sleep, as she will be the one to open the door when household members come late at night*".

The finding also demonstrated that older women practiced what they had learned from their own mothers-in-law and perpetuated the cycle of socialising daughters-in-law into the ideal woman. As one older woman explained: *"I did not have a bad relationship with my husband but I did have a little dispute with my mother-in-law. They practiced what they learned. They believed that a daughter-in-law should always be doing something. They should only work. I did that for 3-4 years.*" Thus it can be argued is that the relationship between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law involves a transference of traditional gender roles which are learned through trial and error and transferred at a later stage to another younger woman once she is married. This ensured the traditional legacies of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were maintained. One older woman highlighted this claiming that:

> *"When one becomes a mother-in-law, she can hand over her responsibilities to her daughter-in-law".*

3.2.6. "Good character"

A young married woman was considered a "*good character*" not only if she demonstrate subservience to husband and in-laws, but also when she worked diligently around the household and took care of her family, was sexually faithful, and wisely spent her husband's money. These attributes defined the "good female character" pronounced by older men and women in the study.

3.6.2.1. Working hard and caring for the family

Young married women were expected to be efficient managers of the house, children and farm work. They were more confined in the private sphere of the household and any land with limited participation in the community compared to their male counterparts. Participants in this study considered this division of labour to be customary. The daughter-in-law is expected to rear and care for the children, as well as care for the elderly at home. This carer role is also combined with that of cleaning, cooking and doing agricultural work, as one unmarried teenage girls reported based on her observations at home:

> *"A woman has to perform most of the household chores, cook food, and dispose of animal dung, wash the clothes of younger ones... particularly that of father and brothers, as we have custom where men are not supposed to wash their clothes by themselves. During agricultural work, it is again women carrying out "parma".*[15]

This translated into women being expected to work not only within the house but also to do so from dust until dawn.

A daughter-in-law who can carry out household activities and perform farming activities as well was idealised in these communities. For older women in the community, having a daughter-in-law meant that the drudgery of household chores would be eased as daughters-in-law were seen as having come to take over the burden of the household and farming chores.

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[15] ***Parma*** *is one form of traditional social institution and is a form of reciprocal labour. Parma is most commonly used during rice transplanting and harvest when large numbers of workers are needed for intensive work. Generally, when people provide labour in one of the household's farm other people who provided labour or parma expect a labour return quite soon after.*

> *"We feel happy when daughters-in-law brought into home after marriage, she will shoulder all the responsibility. She will take care of loans if any, will take up jobs like yours and teach us good things. So, isn't it good having daughter-in-law? They perform all the household chores. We don't need to wake up early as well and can have a peaceful sleep, as she will be the one to open the door," shared by an older woman.*

The extent to which a daughter-in-law is obedient and submits to the authority of the mother-in-law informs the extent to which she earns and upholds a reputation as a good female character. She is expected to treat her in-laws' household as her natal home by working in order to earn recognition and a sense of belonging to the family and the community. A woman was well regarded by the family and the community if she was seen to be efficiently managing the family and her household chores without anybody giving her instructions. For instance, if she cooked at the right time, served the in-laws, took care of the children and took them to school at the right time, and cleaned the house, washed the dishes, and rendered help in farm activities for the family. Young married women believed that the community preferred a daughter-in-law "*who can be involved in community works and also know what is to be done in the house without anyone telling her. She should be wise and not wait for the in-laws to ask her to do things. She has to feel that it's her own work. Everyone likes such daughter-in-law. She should be friendly to everyone, talk nicely and help in the house.*" Considering the amount of work involved and the extent to which relations needed to be soothed, a young woman who practiced these expected behaviour was likely to "*win over the hearts*" of her in-laws.

Women who "*do not feed their children well on time, ignore the studies of the children, wanders around without any purposes and eats whatever she likes*" were considered as "*women who do not possess good character.*" Elders believe that it is incumbent upon them as seniors to guide their daughters-in-law if they do not fulfil their duties, stating that "*all we can do is advise them… We have to guide them so that they do not fall on the wrong track; that is all*".

3.6.2.2. Thriftiness

When a young married woman has a good female character "*she must save the earning sent by*

the husband, she must take care of her children and she can even take up a home- based employment or tailoring (sewing/cutting), or even take up studies if she is interested," explained older men participating in the FGDs. Acting contrary to what is expected was not appreciated.

In communities such as Bhimapokhara and Resha where scores of men are migrant labourers, households depend on the remittances they send. As a result, the level of scrutiny by in-laws and the community over how young married women spends the remittances becomes evident. Elders believed that a woman who demonstrates thriftiness *"is highly approved (and) she is treated well by the community if she bears good character"*.

Saving or spend remittances wisely thus built a woman's social currency with her husband, the in-laws and the community as "*she is the one whom he has trusted and believed… He left her behind to take care of his property and his children*," to raise his children and take care of his parents while he is away. An ideal woman was also considered "*the kind of woman who has belongingness to the community, saves the money her husband sends from abroad and thinks that all the sufferings are for the betterment of their children"*. Women have the responsibility to manage the money sent by migrant husbands, as one young migrant labourer explained: "*she takes care of issues regarding money and manages the home. I earn and send money here. She takes care of all other things. I trust her.*"

Sometimes the in-laws' assessment of a woman's extravagance with her husband's remittances was influenced by their perception of her worthy to have a husband who provided financially for her livelihood. Mothers-in-law were likely to perceive their daughters-in-law to be lazy at the expense of their sons working as migrant labourers "*while daughters-in-law stay at home enjoying their lives, and they eat and watch TV, which is all they do*". It also necessitated young married women having to prove themselves to in-laws by exerting themselves in domestic labour not to be perceived as being lazy or taking advantage of their husbands.

3.6.2.3. Sexual faithfulness

The good female character associated with a migrant's wife also included the expectation on her to remain sexually faithful in his absence. Older men believed it a form of betrayal if a woman did not maintain the trust of her husband as one explained: "*it is the misfortune of the woman if she is not able to keep the trust he has on her; they should not*". With the husband abroad, community members eyed a young wife suspiciously if she was seen outside the home, scrutinised her even more compared to women whose husbands were at home. The scrutiny faced by young married women whose husbands are away has a bearing on their mobility and participation in other activities outside the household and may make them prone to violence by in-laws or other members of the community.

Some community leaders reported to have observed young married women who move from the villages to the district headquarters or city centres when their husbands left for migrant labour also began having extra-marital affairs and were not thrifty with the remittances sent by husbands. In Nepal, women who are found to be having an extra-marital affair are ostracised but men usually get away with doing so. Such women are often divorced by husbands, and sometimes her children are cut off from their natal family. However, a woman's infidelity was reportedly an infrequent occurrence.

3.2.7. Becoming the ideal young married woman

Getting married and moving in with the in-laws represents a vast change in the life experiences of young married women and authority over them as they are expected to abide by a different set of norms issued to them by in-laws and society at large. Prior to marriage, they reported having been freer at their natal homes where they could ask for or do anything they pleased without much scrutiny or reprimand. However, living with the in-laws appeared to be tougher. For many, this marks a shift from daughters to becoming daughters-in-law. Young married women explained these differences:

> *"An unmarried person may wake up and sleep whenever they want. No one would ask you to wake up in time and no one would tell you what to do. They request you if they want you to do any of their work. But after you are a daughter-in-law you have to be very alert. We have to be alert and check or sleep for 5 minutes or 10 minutes." (Young married woman BT 1.1, Bhimapokhara)*

Once married, a young married woman is scrutinized to determine how well she demonstrates the expected behaviour. Some young married women were conscious of the scrutiny regarding their behaviour and feel forced to act according to the prescribed norms. This extract illustrates:

> *"Before marriage, I was free… I could go anywhere to roam, go to play with friends, or to attend a function. My parents easily gave permission. Then I didn't need to think much. But now, where I am married, even though my family and husband give permission to do something or go somewhere, there remains a fear of what society will say. Would they talk behind my back saying his wife has done this and that? Will they make up things and say wrong and bad things about me?" (Young married woman MS2.1, Bhimapokhara)*

> *"Well, it isn't as free after you move to your in-laws' as it was at your parents' home. I mean when I was in my parent's home I could do as I wished but here it is not the same because I am the daughter-in-law. I have to keep in mind that the neighbours and people around us are sceptical about our actions. It feels like you are under someone else." (Young married woman MS2.2, Bhimapokhara)*

Whether married or not, women and girls are expected to act in ways that are considered decent, however, the extent to which doing so is monitored becomes more intense among married women. Those involved in the process of ensuring young married women adhere to the socially expected gender roles include the husband, the in-laws and the rest of the community. As noted above, failure to adhere to these expected gender roles had negative consequences for the family's reputation.

3.2.7.1. Challenges adjusting to the ideal young married woman

The reality of being a young married woman was described as difficult. Once married and living in their marital homes many young women found it difficult to adjust to her new surroundings and their new life. Many lamented the big household workload they discovered constituted the bulk of their role and found it difficult to cope: "*after coming here, suddenly I had loads of work. Sometimes I used to sit and cry because of not being able to work. And, sometimes I went to work crying all the way.*"

Others had moved to live in places where the terrain determined the form of work, which meant that the laboriousness of the work they had to undertake was more intense than normal. One woman complained saying: "*I don't know how to farm, right? I don't know how to dig up the fields, right? I cannot go to the forests and hillocks—I cannot walk up and down the slopes"*.

Those who struggled with the chores were sent to learn from others and even make friends while doing so. This expanded the social agents involved in the socialisation of women into the role of a young married woman. Even though some women were prepared to comply with the expected gender roles, they sometimes found that the ruled were different to their natal homes, as one young married woman discovered: "*when I went to cut grass, I thought it would be similar to what I did at my home where we don't go to cut grass when it is raining, but it wasn't like that*".

The restrictions women found when they moved in with the in-laws included when and what daughters-in-law were expected to eat. As a patriarchal society it is the cultural norm and practice in both urban and rural areas that the daughter-in-laws are supposed to eat the last, after the men, in-laws and children have eaten. Daughter-in-laws are expected to cook and take care of all the family members first, and not to be upfront about their wants and needs. Married women are expected to serve their husbands and in-laws first as one older women related her own experience: "*I have faced many incidents. Whenever I sat down to eat, he would appear. At such times, I would have to leave my food and serve him. So, I never ate until I served him*".

Young married women found that if they were not the ones cooking for some reasons, they would wait to be called by mothers-in-law for their turn to eat, and usually that would be after everyone else had eaten. As one young married woman explained "*At first, coming to a new family was difficult… For instance, a meal or eating habits; in my house if I was hungry, I could ask Mother anytime and eat. While here, it was difficult to say that I was hungry and ask to be provided with food at first. So, I went to eat when I was called*".

Many young married women reported that they were sleep deprived. Adequate sleep also proved to be illusive due to the long working hours. Young women described their experiences: "*I can only take a nap for shorter duration and that - also when no one is watching - and I couldn't sleep through whole nights since I needed to get up early for work"*. Many complained about lack of sleep but usually complied with the expected gender roles in order to avoid the negative repercussions, as one woman explained: "*Because of the fear that someone would say something, I had to sleep in hurry and couldn't sleep through whole nights.*"

A number of young women got married during their school years, and were unable to continue studying due to in-laws demanding to be cared for and the challenges juggling household work and studies. Underlying these challenges to women's education was also the endemic practice of not educating women and girls such that the communities at large perceived it impractical to do so. Being forced into a carer role was also advantageous in communities where welfare services for the elderly are non-existent. In addition to the benefits of having a daughter-in-law, having someone to care for the aged seemed to be an additional benefit to having a young married woman in the family.

Women who did not meet the expectations of their in-laws were often criticised directly or indirectly. Criticism often centred on the personality and diligence of the young wife. A majority of young married women described mothers-in-law complaining about when or how they spoke and the pitch of their voice, and the young women being uncertain which way they should speak: "*I had to take care of every small thing, because if we speak then others say that "She is so sharp." And if we don't speak, they say that "She is very secretive." It was very difficult.*" Some young wives resented their parents-in-law when they were judged indirectly and compared to other women in the community, others felt monitored as their work was interrogated and they were given disapproving feedback. The fact that parents-in-law used to measure daughters-in-law performance contributed the poor relations and conflict between daughters-in-law and their husbands and in-laws.

3.3. The economic context: migrant labour

Limited livelihood opportunities and income generating activities appeared to contribute to some of the challenges women in the study setting experienced. A majority of the families, the wife, children and husband's parents, were dependent on the husband working in migrant labour and sending remittances home. Of the sixteen (16) young married women aged 21 to 38 years who participated in the study, husbands of eleven (11) women had been working as migrant labourers outside the countries for 5 months to 6 years. Migrant labour was thus the major source of income for families, whose young men, whether married or not, left their homes to work in countries outside Nepal, such as Qatar, Japan, Malaysia and others. However, there were indications that some men and a few women migrated within and outside the district. Since migrant labour was dominated by men, livelihood opportunities for women in particular were few and far in between in the two VDCs.

> *"As per my view, I think that it has become very difficult to achieve any kind of employment in Nepal as our country is not big enough to hold the increasing population. One might have enough education, but there are no places for job placement. Therefore, we have most of the people going for foreign employment in our community. Our community is highly dependent on foreign employment. We did mention agriculture, but only 5% of the youth are involved in agriculture. We were all involved in agriculture; however, we cannot expect our sons to continue farming like us. They would rather opt for foreign employment over agriculture. If I ask my son to get a sack of manure in the early morning, he will be furious and will not even come to have lunch till noon. In our country…I have travelled a lot and have always found that foreign employment as major occupation all over Nepal, whether to India, Saudi or other Gulf countries." An older man, FGD*

Agricultural Labour

Older men in the study reported that farming has been the main means of livelihood in their communities for a very long time. Older men, having returned from migrant labour overseas or elsewhere in Nepal, often lead the family's farming activities and direct young married women in agricultural chores. Most households own a piece of land for subsistence farming. Major crops include rice, maize, wheat and corn in all Baglung VDCs. Vegetable gardens usually produce enough for the family, and those with surplus sell this in Baglung bazar. Farming also involves

tending to livestock such as buffalo, cows, and goats, and milking and producing dairy products. Young married women are usually responsible for looking after livestock. Some families also raise goats for sale in the market. Outside of agricultural activities, other economic opportunities were said to be few and far between. A few community members worked in wage labour, including as teachers in the local schools, some had opened up small shops in Baglung bazar, whilst others had moved to work for NGOs. However, the main economic activity in these two VDCs was foreign employment.

Employment opportunities for women

Women are less likely to be employed in waged labour and none of the women in the study were employed in the formal sector. In the community very few young married women engaged in formal positions such as teaching, nursing, or clerical work. A majority of them worked in farming, and some earned money from selling brewed liquor or clothes they had knitted or sewed in Baglung bazaar. Women use the income to supplement remittances sent by their migrant husbands. Dalit women were the poorest of all women in the study. Where possible, they carried out odd jobs thought to be socially acceptable for their 'untouchable' caste. However, these jobs were reportedly scarce, as only two women from the Dalits earned an income at the time of the study.

All young married women in the study relied on the remittances sent by their husbands, often sent to their parents-in-law and rarely directly to themselves. Six of the sixteen young married women interviewed were living in their own homes away from in-laws and ten were still residing with in-laws during the course of the fieldwork. Most of the money sent was used for household consumption and education of the children, and a few women were able to save money or invest in building homes or in acquiring land.

3.3.1. Male migrant labour as a social norm

Study participants indicated that there was a dominant perception that migrant labour was a means of livelihoods reserved for male members of household, particularly young married men who had children to support. Elders in the community indicated that high levels of unemployment in the country promoted many to choose to work in foreign countries. One older man explained:

> *"It has become very difficult to achieve any kind of employment in Nepal. One might have enough education, but there are no places for job opportunities. So, we have most of the people going for foreign employment in our community. Our community is highly dependent on foreign employment".*

A young married man shared his personal experiences saying: "*You realize that you have to be responsible after having a child. Even after marriage, I stayed here for 2-3 years. After that I realized I had to do something so I went abroad*". Underlying this was the social expectation on men to become providers responsible for their wives, children and parents. Some young married men suggested that the decision to take up migrant labour did not always come about easily. Others recognised how migrant labour was undesirable for married men who often had to leave their wives and children behind but attributed the pressure to take up migrant labour to their poor financial conditions.

Young married women also acknowledged the challenges husbands faced with accessing job and were resigned to migrant labour as inevitable:

> *"My husband, he couldn't say anything himself. If he could have studied and done something here, he wouldn't have to go abroad for work. But since he couldn't do that, he had no other choice because we had to raise the kids" shared a young married woman whose husband had just gone abroad for employment.*

The older men in the community lamented the young generation's lack of interest in agriculture which had been the mainstay of household economy in the past. They attributed young people's neglect of agriculture to the increased levels of migrant labour supporting the idea that it was becoming inevitable.

3.3.2. Perceptions of paid work

Migrant labour appeared to be driven by the high value attached to paid work of men. Paid work helped to earned income that supported entire families. It also seemed to be gendered and accorded more importance compared to paid work of women. Notably, very few cases of income earning women were reported in the two VDCs.

Among the few women who had paid jobs in the community, their financial contributions were not necessarily conferred the same value as men. This persisted even if they were the sole breadwinners when their husbands were unemployed. The role of working women appeared to be illegitimate due to notions that working women had taken up roles that naturally belonged to their husbands not themselves. An unemployed young married man whose wife earned a living as a teacher demonstrated this perception. He relayed his discomfort with his working wives providing for their family, insisting that *"I am going abroad to work so I feel that she doesn't need to work,"* The perceptions that implied he was humiliated by his unemployed status and undervalued his wife's job status were evident. This man's views were not isolated, as some sectors of society still frowned upon women taking up paid jobs to support their families.

Community leaders suggested that most women were unable to earn a living due to male dominance by husbands and fathers-in-law, or even mothers-in-law who appeared to be complicit in the enforcement of male gender power over young married women's economic positions within the family. Working women in Nepal usually spend an 8-hour day in their paid jobs, and come back home to do household chores the mother-in-law who is usually fit to attempt cooking at least deliberately leaves these chores because they are designated for daughters-in-law.

3.3.3. Effects of migration on women

Women mentioned a number of positive effects of migrant labour upon their lives. One of the major positive effects of migrant labour was income from the remittances sent by their husbands, but this was not always accessible to the migrant's wife. Receipt of remittances was usually given to the parents-in-law, often the father. It was usually when the daughters-in-law had been married for a while and were was seen to be responsible and matured enough to save or spend the money wisely. This also possible when the in-laws were not educated and could not travel to the banks in the district headquarters so their sons entrusted their wives with remittances.

Access to remittances was often restricted by the absence of citizenship documentation. Women who did not have the citizenship certificate or other officially recognised identification could not access banks and other outlets to cash the remittances. It was reportedly very difficult to acquire identification documents as women needed their husbands or fathers-in-law in order to be registered. Women cannot pass their citizenship to their children, only fathers (or husbands can do so for their wives). Women's lack of access to the documentation would be another reason why an in-law might have charge over claiming and disbursing the remittances. For example, a mother-in-law whose daughter-in-law did not have documentation and could not access banks described how she would access the money and then give to her daughter-in-law the amount of money her son had allocated. *"Until now she doesn't have her citizenship, so while sending her money maybe he sends it through someone else. Otherwise, when my son sends money in my name and tells me to give this much to his wife, I give it to her,"* said an older woman who received money sent by her son.

Having citizenship documents did not necessarily imply young women could independently access remittances sent by their husbands. It was common for young married women to report that in-laws had overall authority over remittance disbursement, often the fathers-in-law. In other cases, the problems with cashing out remittance came about when the family member in whose name the money was sent seldom go to the district headquarters to withdraw money from financial institutions. To access the district headquarters was difficult irregular public vehicles, and bad roads. Going and coming back was seen as a waste of time as it took the whole day. The business of cashing out remittances had grown as some people operated small jeeps that took people from the community to the district headquarters or cashed the money on their behalf for a fee.

The findings also suggested that whoever accessed the remittances had control over its spending. For instance, the fathers or mothers in whose names their sons sent the remittances had the final say as to how the money was to be spent. In the few cases where daughters-in-law cashed the money because their in-laws were less educated or frail perhaps, controlled the spending. Some husbands sent money to both their wives and mothers. This could result in conflict in situations where the mother-in-law queried how much money daughters-in-law received. Sometimes the remittances were inadequate to cover all their needs. This made it difficult for women Because of which, the wives were seen to be complaining about not being able to manage the expenses.

However, despite some women receiving remittances directly, women were still restricted from entering into financial transactions as according to common practice in Nepal loans were not issued without their husbands or fathers-in-law due to cultural norms. Loans still needed to be approved by the migrant husbands who were likely to call the loan providers from outside the country to provide wives the requested loans. Woman initiating loans without their husbands' involvement were perceived suspiciously.

Migration also brought about other personal complications such as wife abandonment, separation or divorce when men do not return or marry other women. According to service providers in the district headquarters, separation or divorce usually occur with men who have gone to developed countries (like Japan, the US or those in Europe) and stayed there for long periods of 10 to 15 years.

3.6. Violence against Women and Girls

Exposure to physical violence by their husband and domestic violence at the hands of the mother-in-law was a normalised, every-day occurrence but still stigmatised and so difficult for participants to discuss openly. Despite the national statistics which showed it to be highly prevalent, very few young married women reported their experiences of physical violence in the study.

3.6.1. Forms of violence

i) 'Jhagada' – emotional and physical violence

The abuse of young married women perpetrated by husbands, or in-laws usually occurred in the context of intra-household conflict. In Nepal, conflict between two or more people through quarrelling and sometimes confrontation that could escalate into physical beating was referred to as "*jhagada*. "*Jhagada*" also involved shouting matches that were dominated by those with authority or seniority, usually the husband or mother-in-law.

The discourses about the violence women in the community experienced suggested that husbands were often perpetrators of conflict and violence against their wives, and the mother-in-law appeared to be the instigator of some of that violence, and often perpetrating emotional and physical abuse herself.

Emotional and physical violence were the most common forms of abuse of young married women from their husbands. During "*jhagada*", husbands or in-laws shouted, complained, or hurled threats or insults at young married women whom they expected not to respond. The few episodes of conflict reported in the study culminated into physical abuse. Physical violence ranged from the husband slapping his wife across the face to beatings her all over the body. One teenage informant who saw a young married woman after a beating described the husband having "hit her on the shoulder, the head and elsewhere too".

ii) Verbal Threats

Participants shared other forms of violence against women and girls commonly perpetrated by in-laws, or husbands. Being threatened by husbands is also part of the cycle of violence facing some young married women. Some husbands threatened they would chase their wife away from the marital home with their children, or taking another wife. Threats of polygamy were apparently common, despite it being a rare practice in the Baglung district.

iii) Sexual Violence

Reports of sexual abuse were rare among participants. In the one case that was reported the participant indicated that the survivor had not sought help nor had she reported the incident, and when circumstances forced her disclosure, the law could not be applied and the perpetrator did not receive the punitive measured set out in legislation.

iv) Economic abuse

Participants rarely referred to many forms of economic abuse by intimate partners as financial abuse. Yet, many mentioned instances where women whose husbands were migrant labourers did not receive any remittances from their husbands. In such instances, husbands sent remittances to their parents who decided how to spend the money often without consulting his wife living with them in the same household. Consequently, some of their wives rarely received any money to address their own needs.

v) Conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law

Conflict between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law was most prevalent in the community. The mother-in-law was the usual perpetrator and verbal abuse was one of the common ways in which mothers-in-law exerted their power over the daughter-in-law. Community leaders claimed that a majority of "*mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law can be found having some type of quarrel or conflict*". Young married women also confirmed that mothers-in-law shouted frequently and "'jhagada' *occurs once or twice in a week… happens almost daily*". Common discourse suggests that mothers-in-law were always complaining, quarrelsome or dissatisfied with some aspect of their daughters-in-law's work or behaviour. Mothers-in-law were also notorious for shouting or scolding daughters-in-law while others were even described as being rather cruel. Some women believed that the abuse was mostly "verbal", but "when she gets something to say, she can really say it in a pinching way." The level of cruelty underlying the mother-in-law's demands could be drawn from this one woman's experience as she was often the subject of complaints to the extent of being reported to the father-in-law as the mother-in-law's attempt to discredit her further:

> *"Even if I work hard, I don't get any recognition for the work that I do. In the past and even now. Sometimes she complains about me to my father-in-law, she comes home and keeps on saying things… Now even my body has become weak, and since I can't work, she shouts at me and bothers me", a young married woman, Bhimapokhara.*

In other cases, the shouting matches escalated to involve the husband and other family members, physical violence and ultimately divorce. Another young woman from Bhimapokhara described these events in her ordeal with her mother-in-law, who was not only verbally abusive but also physically violent as well as instigating conflict with the woman's husband and her resultant divorce. She explained her ordeal as follows:

> *"One day I was working and my mother-in-law shouted at me. She gave me an option to leave or stay. She said that I made everyone fight and she does not want me anymore. Then I tried to go to my parent's house. She yelled at me saying that I am my father's wife and I had not brought any property to her. I replied, "If I was my father's wife then you would also have to keep your daughter for your husband and sleep with your own father. You brought me as your daughter-in-law and you are saying this to me today. I would do anything that you ask me to do. Why did you say those things to me?" Even when I said that, they wanted me to leave. My husband said he would leave me at my parents' house the next day. I came back home. That night, my mother-in-law choked me and asked me to return her jewelleries. And I said "If I die, go to the cremation site to get your jewelleries and if I elope, my next husband will give you the jewelleries. Kill me." It was very difficult to pass one week after that."*

Starvation appeared to be one of the tools that mothers-in-law used against their daughters-in-law, first generally as they were not seen to be regular members of the household, secondly as punishment for the daughters-in-laws' misdeeds. A young married woman described her experience: "*They had good food but never asked me if I wanted any*". This was consistent with the practices where young married women prepare and serve food for the rest of the family but barely have time to sit down and eat. Excluding daughters-in-law from meals was more common when the mother-in-law was in charge of cooking while the daughter-in-law was out working, and would only cater for her husband and children.

In-laws were also likely to seclude a young married woman from the rest of the family if the young wife had not paid any dowry or if they were dissatisfied with the size of her dowry. In one case, "*the daughter-in-law didn't bring dowry, (so) they keep her separate and don't allow her to enter the house… In one of the houses near us they are (from the Brahmin caste). One of their two daughter-in-laws brought dowry and the other did not. So they kept the daughter-in-law who brought dowry with her and kicked out the other one. Now she lives in the market area".* Other young married women were tortured or left to starve. While community leaders concurred that dowry related violence existed, community members were less likely to relate forms of violence to quarrels over dowry. Some young married women were accused of witchcraft, particularly those from lower castes are likely to be accused by people from the higher caste. According to participants, accusations of witchcraft, seclusion, torture or starvation perpetrated by the in-laws may have result in the death of some of the women facing such atrocities. However, none of the participants in the study provided recent examples of women being murdered as a result of violence.

3.6.2. Forms of violence against girls

Teenage girls eagerly reported on the forms of violence against girls. The majority of teenage girls reported having been exposed to 'Eve-teasing', that is the verbal harassment of young girls with sexual overtones perpetrated by groups of boys on streets in the community. They described their discomfort and fear of what boys would do to them whenever they encountered groups of boys while walking alone in the community. The extracts captured below describe the prevalent sexual harassment of teenage girls by boys who insinuate, suggest and initiate unwanted sexual contact towards girls.

> *"Eve-teasing is evident while you walk back from school. When a girl is walking alone, two to four boys follow her and tease her. I have experienced it in a few places and sometimes when I am alone and walking back from college, boys from the community tease." TG1, FGD*

> *"I had gone to Baglung… alone for some work. While returning from Baglung, there were 2-3 boys taking goats for grazing. I was scared that those boys would do something to me. After I passed, those boys started teasing and even threw pebbles at me. They said things, things that were very bad. Then suddenly one of the boys accosted me and asked if he could say something and asked me not to get mad. Even though I was not talking, they came around me and started holding my hand. I was alone there. No one was around. I kept wishing for someone to come and save me. I was scared. And one of the boys asked me if I had a condom. I retorted angrily asking them if I looked like a girl who carried a condom in her bag. Then they started calling me hey sexy girl several times and they even came and held my hand. Some in the group were telling their friends to leave me alone but the other stated that they should act when the opportunity was there and forcefully held my hand and the other grabbed my hair. I wished somebody would come for help and in that instant, two women were there who came to my rescue and the boys ran off. These women were surprised and annoyed that boys could do such a thing to a girl." TG2, IDI.*

Community leaders suggested that child marriages were on the decline, but still occurring in the communities under study. The perpetuation of child marriages is indeed unlawful by virtue that the Nepal government banned child marriage (CA. 2015). Teenage girls in a focus group discussion also complained that "*girls are forced to get married at an early age. They are sent off without their consent and their wishes are not considered.*" Evidence of the continuance of the practice of child marriage, even if at lower levels, can be observed among the young married women interviewed who reported having been married off as teenage girls.

3.6.3. Causes of violence

Violence from husbands usually occurred inside the household. Factors associated with intimate partner violence centred on perceptions of unmet gender role expectations. These include perceptions about the young married woman's ability to take care of the household, children and the in-laws, her ability to manage and account for her financial spending, etc. arguments over finances, the husband's jealousy over her use of the cell-phone, ability to sexually satisfy her husband, and how respectfully the wife related with her husband's parents. In addition, alcohol abuse appeared to exacerbate the extent and severity of the violence women experienced at the hands of their husband.

3.6.3.1. Migrant labour and related conflicts

Financial pressure on men to provide for their wives and children appeared to be the source of conflict between husbands and wives. This seemed to be worsened by wives' dependence on migrant husbands sending remittances for their needs and the upkeep of their households. Episodes of violence usually arose upon the husband permanently return from migrant labour, with a trigger being frustration about how much money he had made from migrant labour and where it had gone to, causing him to question how his wife used the money he had been sending home over the years. A community leader explained:

> *"When he comes back on holidays, their relationship remains good. He returns back to earn money. And when he comes back after quitting his job, there will be differences in their home. The major question husband asks is 'Where is the money I sent you?' Husband asks that and then their relationship turns bad. If wife has kept all the records of the expenses, then their relationship remains good".*

A wife's inability to account for her spending led to accusations and blame towards the wife for 'not coming clean' on her spending. Wives needed to convince her husbands that the money was spent on essential and legitimate needs such as food, household maintenance, and children's education. Older men had a good understanding of migrant labour, the level of accountability husbands required of their wives regarding financial spending. One elaborated on this:

> *"The relation of husband and wife as I mentioned earlier is close, very close. The wife may lose the trust of her husband if she is not able to convince her husband on the expenses that she did with the money sent from abroad. After he goes abroad, the wife must be able to account for the amount he has sent. For example, if her husband has sent Rs.1million in three years, the wife must be able to say the amount he sent and the amount she spent in what particulars… like 'the first time you sent money I spent it on children's education, household errands, lent it to others. The second time I spent it on the household and deposited in the bank', giving name and saving type. All must be shared. If she is able to give the exact expenditure of the money he sent, then he will be happy, otherwise, the relationship will not work."*

The husbands' demands for wives' accountability for expenditure on the remittances sent to them over time demonstrated the underlying need for control and actual exertion of male power and control over wives. This instance also highlights that even access to remittances did not necessarily translate into women's agency as they were forced to acquiesce to their husband's demands for accountability. Some conflict among couples was prompted by disagreements over loans repayment.

Conflict over remittances sometimes emanated from in-laws' desire to control how their son's money was spent. Since in some families there was an entrenched lack of trust of the daughter-in-law's ability to spend money wisely some in-laws sought to control the daughter-in-law's financial spending. Conventions also dictated that it was socially wrong for in-laws to be seen asking for money from their daughters-in-law. If that were to happen, it would distorted the social hierarchy of authority in the household.

Some young married women and unmarried teenage girls reported to have felt prone to abuse and harassment in the absence of their fathers who were migrant labourers. They attributed these feelings of unsafety particularly when there was no father figure in the home. These claims of vulnerability can be observed in the extracts below:

> *"When people drink and get drunk they usually harass girls and unmarried woman. This is more so in families that do not have a male member at home."*

> *"Some people think that because there are no male members in the family…They try and walk in your path."*

Young married women also indicated they were sometimes harassed by men in the community when their husbands were off working as migrant labourers. "*Sometimes, when the children are not home, they try and peek through the door and try and talk, they say unnecessary things and I do not like that. I then tell them, if you have some work tell me otherwise go your way,"* shared a young married woman during an IDI.

3.6.3.2. Husband's jealousy over wife's cell phone use

Women's access to cell phones was one of the causes of conflict with their husbands. General discourses in the study suggested that a husband usually came home after years of absence in migrant labour unaware what is happening at his home front. This led to some husbands becoming suspicious of their wives movements and who they conversed with on the cell phone.

> *"People have disagreement even on simple topics. Today's major dispute is when men see their women talking over the cell phone. They become insecure and ask who they were talking to and why they called."*

> *"Disputes normally happen when husband learns that their wives are receiving unnecessary calls and are close to other men; there will be disputes then,"*

One Resha woman concurred:

> *"When my mother called and the phone was busy he would ask who I was talking to and be very suspicious as if I was having an affair with other men in his absence.... When he had gone to a place which is far from home, like the district headquarters, he tried to call me but my phone was busy—at such times he was also suspicious about me".*

In general, migrant communities like Bhimapokhara and Resha have close-knit neighbourhoods where it is rare for women to have and maintain marital relationships. Baglung communities do not take extra-marital affairs lightly so that anyone found to be unfaithful would be stigmatised. It is always the women who bear the brunt if such relationships are discovered by the community.

Sexual problems

Though none of the participants shared personal experiences of sexual problems in their relationships, older men referred to lack of sexual satisfaction as one of the reasons for conflict among married couples. The woman was responsible for her husband's sexual fulfilment and being unable to fulfil the sexual desires of her husband implies the woman had a physical weakness, and this was the reason for the husband 'seeking other options', namely another woman. Similarly being unable to fall pregnant also caused conflict among the married couples.

3.6.3.3. Early marriage and lack of maturity

There was also a prevailing perception particularly among older men and women that early marriages were the cause of the conflict among young married couples which sometimes led to separation or divorce. Even though only about a third of the young married women eloped to get married, there was a strong belief that couples got married very young and lacked the maturity needed to sustain a marriage. This is consistent with arguments supporting arranged marriages as potentially having a sobering effect on couples, enabling them to reach maturity that can sustain their families. Older men and older women suggested that couples who had love marriages experienced a lot of disagreements and differences surfaced, which ultimately led to separation and divorce. However, the findings provide no clear links between early marriages, love marriages, and violence in intimate relationships.

3.6.3.4. Alcohol abuse

A husband's alcohol abuse was a key factor that aggravated the extent and severity of violence meted against young wives. It was common knowledge that "*men who come [home] drunk beat their wives*". Participants reported high levels of alcohol abuse among young married men in the study area. Men's perpetration of physical abuse towards wives was associated with the extent to which they visited drinking venues, came home drunk and began quarrels with their wives late at night, often resulting in beatings of wives and sometimes children (Sapkota, Bhattarai et al. 2016). Usually these beatings came about after the husband perceived his wife to be answering back.

In this respect, a young married woman said:

> *"You know the usual—drinking. They drink and then they come home and hit their wives. I think this is the main reason. Apart from that, I don't know any reasons. When they are drunk, they come and hit their wives and they are all good when they are not drunk."*

Participants suggested that husbands were generally verbally abusive towards their wives when they were drunk but such verbal abuse did not always translate into outright physical violence, unless wives protested or answered back. Answering back was considered disrespectful of one's husband and contradicted the good female character expected of young married women.

3.6.3.5. In-laws' expectations

Expectations on young married women to conform to gender roles also influenced their experiences of verbal abuse and physical abuse at the hands of the husband. Some women were beaten by husbands when were perceived to be disrespectful. Other husbands too exception if they felt that wives were not doing a good job at home taking care of the children or his parents. Several participants believed that a young wife "*would be beaten if she could not complete tasks*".

Incidents of verbal and physical violence were sometimes instigated by the husband's parents. The parents-in-law would complain to their migrant son about their daughters-in-law, and upon his return, he would take up the issues with his wife and arguments may follow, some of which would involve a beating. A young married woman offered: *"He used to call home. They must have said something, and upon his return we would fight every day. I used to have headache and bruises all over my face."* Some participants attributed the conflict between daughters-in-law and their in-laws to intergenerational differences in perspectives between the older generation and the younger generation. Contemporary influences on women's dress code also exacerbated the disputes between the older and younger generation.

Young married men were acutely aware of the disharmonious relationships between their wives and their mothers but some reported being limited in how to respond. Some believed the cause of conflict emanated from unfair expectations of the mother-in-law over the young wife. They also highlighted the differences in the levels of education, exposure to modernity and lack of flexibility of their parents. For instance even when a woman was working, she was expected to come back home after a day's job, to cook and serve the family, clean and wash clothes. Discussions with women in Nepal demonstrated that contributing to the household in any fashion did not necessarily absolve them the responsibilities ascribed to married women. Even mothers-in-law who are physically capable of doing the most basic chores chose not to do them waiting for daughters-in-law to come back from working in the field.

3.6.4. Responses to violence against women and girls

Violence against women is largely considered a private matter in Nepal, quietly spoken about within the family and hidden from the wider community. In general, women who had experienced violence tended not to report it, rather they remained silent and avoided discussing it. These responses appeared to be a result of imposed notions of what it means to be a good woman and the need to protect the family's dignity and reputation (Gill 2004). Women often conformed to the societal expectations on how they should respond to conflict and abuse, while a few reportedly rebelled. Silence and avoidance was often demonstrated by the majority of young married women who chose to ignore and not react when they were being verbally abused, even after continuous shouting.

Women had the option to report their experiences of conflict to the community elders as one community leader added, *"The wife can go and complain to other people in the village about what the husband did to her"*. However, none among the few women reporting abuse did so. The general discourse also suggested that those who reported abuse were labelled as pariah who intention was to taint their husbands' and marital family's reputation. This labelling was plausible as many participants suggested that the community generally preferred young married women to keep quiet when facing abuse in their marital homes in order to protect the husband's family. The findings indicate that many women who complied with the expectation to keep quiet did so out of fear of reprisal or hatred by their in-laws or their husbands. As one young woman suggested: "*if a woman chooses to share her incident in the society, she becomes the subject of hate and verbal abuse by her husband and in-laws*".

For some women, non-disclosure or non-reaction to intimate partner or domestic violence was also associated with a fear of intensified conflict or abuse by other partners or in-laws. This has been observed in two cases. In the first example, a teenage girl who witnessed a neighbour's recurring exposure to verbal and physical violence recounted how a young married woman in the neighbourhood kept being beaten up by her husband for "*minor mistakes*", and threatened that the husband would "*kick her out of the house and get another [wife]*" leaving her and her children destitute. She explained that this woman was always fearful of her husband and still would not talk about the violence that was obvious to everyone in the community: "s*he gets scared even if he starts talking a bit. I don't know the actual reason why she gets scared. I haven't asked her. But she gets scared of her husband"*. Threats by abusive husband are also part of the cycle of violence in intimate partner relationships that appeared to condition women's response and maintain them in a state of in-action towards their abusive circumstances.

Keeping quiet about abuse so was particularly impressed upon young married women by mothers-in-law as well as husbands who insisted on their wives not to answer back, as this had a bearing on the extent or severity of maltreatment by husbands or in-laws. Consequently, some daughters -in-law complied with this expectation. One of the young married women who decided to keep quiet about the conflict and violence she faced in her marital home claimed that she did so to protect her own reputation, she explained: *"I did not want to let the community people say that being a daughter-in-law I brought in disputes in the house within one year of marriage*." However, some women preferred to keep quiet about the violence because they believed it to be a private matter,

as one young married woman put it: "*I feel whatever happens inside the house should remain inside the house and neighbours should not be aware about it*". The concern about one's reputation was indeed associated with women's complicity with the notion of a good female character as defined by social and gender norms. The complicity with the expected gender norms regarding how women respond to violence in their relationships and homes was observed in quite a number of reports regarding IPV or DV.

Women who answered back during conflict were perceived to be disrespectful, and subjected to even more scrutiny, confrontation, or as previously indicated, increased violence. Non-compliance with the societal expectations on how women facing violence should respond resulted in penalties for young married women. Some were meted worse treatment not by the husband, in-laws or the community as well. Penalties for women also involved physical violence. Those women who did not keep quiet when their husbands confronted them reported that those confrontations became even more severe, resulting in their husbands becoming even more violent. One young married woman added when she called other people to her defence the husband became even more violent towards her: "*If someone came and tried to block me, then he would beat me even more saying that it disgraced him"*.

3.6.5. Support mechanism for conflict and violence

There were no formal institutions in place for resolution of family conflict or intimate partner violence in the two VDCs in the study. Existing facilities were found in the district headquarters, some two to four hours away. There were a number of governmental organisations, such as the OCMCs, Women's Cell of the District Police Office (DPO), government-run Safe House for Survivors operating under Women Development Office, District Legal Aid Committee (DLAC) and District Child Office (DCO), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) namely the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) that are currently legally mandated to provide service for survivors of intimate partner and domestic violence.

Informal Response Mechanisms

Informal response mechanisms to deal with cases of violence included women seeking support from her natal family or friends, the husband mediating between his wife and parents, or in-laws intervening when the husband was the main perpetrator and particularly where alcohol was factor.

i) Support from natal family or friends

Some women who remained quiet about the abuse they were facing found that the conflict persisted for extended periods of time. The only solution many women could come up with was to return home as one of the community leaders indicated, "*If there is a serious conflict and fights take place, the wife usually goes to her natal home for ten to fifteen days and with time the issue gets resolved"*. However, doing so did not come easily as marriage rendered the woman the property of her in-laws and symbolically meant her parents had washed their hands of responsibility for

her. Returning home could also be seen as one of the ways of instituting a separation or divorce as it was the prerogative of the husband to fetch his wife within a few weeks of her departure. This became even more entrenched with the pressure on women to maintain the marital family's dignity by keeping quiet about problems that could bring dishonour to them. However, some women did get some form of emotional support from siblings as one young married woman shared: *"I haven't taken much help from others, not even with my husband. The only person who helped is my eldest younger brother. I didn't tell my mother and father, I still haven't told them yet. My brother he understands my situation, I talk the most with that brother"*.

Some women found solace in talking to peers about the hardships. *"Everyone has their own preferences. It has to be with your friend, for example I am close with Manju, so when we go around together…such talks materialize. It has to be with a sister to whom you have really close bond with, you don't talk with someone who isn't close to you,"* another young married woman explained.

Teenage girls who had experienced sexual harassment reported to their parents but also feared being stigmatised or blamed in the community. Some usually shared such issues with friends and found solace in sharing such experiences. Ultimately there seems to be a dearth of institutional support mechanism for teenage girls as with young married women.

ii) Mediation by husband

Since daughters-in-law often did not address the conflict with in-laws, the onus was on their husbands to resolve conflict his wife had with his parents. Husbands were the closes allies of young wives, and the wives expected them to help them resolve the problems with the in-laws. The strategy used to end the conflict varied but some men talked to both parties involved. As one young married man put it: "*When there is misunderstanding, first, I deal with my wife. The ones who know, ones who are educated should be made to understand. The uneducated old people do not understand. So I make her understand first that we need not get into dispute. After that, I talk to my mother. My mother gave birth to me and my wife is my life-companion. I have to console both,"*.

iii) Mediation by village elders

Owing to lack of such formal institutions in the villages within the study setting, resolution of conflict and violence could be done through informal mechanisms usually made up of village elders or community leaders, as well as women groups. In small villages community leaders play a key role as mediators in trying to resolve conflicts and violence in the village. The legal access can be accessible to people living in villages but feedback from service providers suggested that it could extremely lengthy and prosecutions are less likely. These limited functions highlight the lack of remedial measures to protect the women and girls from perpetrators of conflict and violence and highlight the high levels of impunity with which some of the violent men and mothers-in-law abused women. However, some in-laws successfully intervened in violent situations that involved a husband's excessive use of alcohol and gambling.

Village elders who received women's complaints of intimate partner violence usually called up a meeting with the husband present, heard both sides and having established the source of the problem, instructed what the culprit should or should not do. Some elders even demonstrated some progressive attitudes towards harmony and unity as can be observed below:

> *"We wish that people do not have disputes or do not involve in physical disputes. But sometimes it's inevitable. When that happens, we try to solve it. We keep the husband and wife together and make an agreement on paper asking them to sign into a paper pledging that they will not fight again. But after a few days, the same thing repeats again over other issues. It is reported to us and then we look for resolution again and it has been like that". (Community leader)*

> *"We need to understand both sides of the story, both, the husband's and the wife's. We have to find out whose mistake it is and why the fight occurred. And then… we tell them, 'You shouldn't do this; the home gets destroyed; husband and wife are one'. We advise them like that, and things are changing in recent times". (Village elder)*

The village elders and community leaders also had experiences of resolving daughter-in-law and mother-in-law conflict, and identified the mothers-in-law as the culprits who mistreated daughters-in-law, as one community leader explained:

> *"We try to make mothers-in-laws understand that they should not treat their daughters-in-law badly, whom they have brought in their home as their daughter. So, we try to make them understand that they should provide her space and treat them in a good way. In this community, things work this way. And, whenever such problems arise, we help them to know that such problems shave arisen because of a lack of awareness, and poverty" a male community leader shared.*

3.7. Potential Shifts in social and gender norms

Most of the participants like the young married women, young married men, unmarried teenage girls and in some instances older men and women were open and accepting the fact that traditional gender norms were shifting in some areas. Nevertheless, some older men and women saw themselves as the custodians of the traditional norms and resisted this.

Education

Recently more unmarried teenage girls had access to education and media and with greater women's mobility they had a wider perspective of the world. Participants expressed the view that that modernisation was influencing a shift in social and gender norms and values.

Teenage girls in the study area placed a high premium on their education, and saw it as an enabler for better livelihoods and independence. All of them aspired to be educated.

> *"We need to stay focused on our education and set an example in our community and further in Baglung district. We need to study. We need to take care of the sick people. We need to come to school daily. If we do not attend school, we cannot achieve our aim of becoming doctor, engineer, as we cannot gain education staying back at home. Thus we must come to school, pick up what is taught at school by our teachers and pursue our dreams of becoming doctor and so on".*

Some teenage girls indicated that their parents' values were gradually changing, and their fathers were becoming accommodative to the idea of their becoming educated, as one unmarried teenage girls explained:

> *"My mother and father expect me to study and grow into a better person. My father wants both my sister and me to become teachers. He wants daughters to study. In villages, people make daughters do more work than sons. Our father does not do that. Instead he wants us to study and become teachers. He wants us to be independent and have a job. A lot of uneducated mothers, aunties and elder sisters have to look up to their husbands to buy everything they want. My father does not want us to do that—he wants us to earn and do things on our own."*

Early Marriage

Teenage girls were opposed to early marriage, increasingly stating their preference for marriage only after they had a satisfactory level of education and could get paid jobs and be independent. Access to education was compared to that of boys of the same age. In a FGD a teenage girl explained these shifts in social and gender norms,

> *"Girls are married of at a young age so they face discrimination. We have lots of child marriages though it has reduced a lot in recent times and there has been a change. We can sensitize people not to get their daughters married at an early age. Previously, only boys were provided education but at present girls are also allowed to study, and such belief has been reduced."*

There also seemed to be changes in how marriages were arranged by their parents, with an observation of love marriages were on the increase. Older women and men seemed to have relaxed the once common practice of arranged marriage. Nowadays, many men from the community had chosen their own wives. Before, this task was the sole domain of his family. Parents who still preferred to choose wives for their sons also acknowledged that some sons preferred to make their own choices as one older man explained, *"I would prefer to choose my son's wife. Generally, people prefer the woman they have chosen for their sons, but we also accept the one that our son has chosen, what options do we have?"*

Women's Paid Work

Similar shifts were observed in in-laws' attitudes towards working daughters-in-law even though there were very few women who were actually earning through their jobs. A few older women and men had stated that they did not have problems with their daughters-in-law working paid jobs. It appeared that were current cases where small children were being looked after by paternal grandparents while their mothers, were at work, as an older woman in an IDI stated, *"Either me or my husband takes care of our grandchildren as our daughter-in-law goes to work."* A few older women were even more open to the idea of women taking up migrant labour just like their husbands, as one suggested "*Why should only men go abroad and work? I feel women can do the same. A few women from my community are working. Some are engaged in organisations, some are volunteers and some are teachers."* This level of open-mindedness suggested that older generation was beginning to see some of the economic challenges and social benefits from paid work.

Some husbands were also supportive of their wives getting paid jobs despite opposing views from their parents. For instance, a young married man whose wife goes to work outside stated, "*I have a good relation with my wife. We help each other in every aspect. We are like an educated family. She has cleared Bachelor's level too. She wanted to work and asked to do it after two months of our marriage… I helped her get the job. She is still working and it's good. We both are educated. But our parents think that we should not leave agriculture. But we think that, being educated, we should do something different. And this brings arguments in the family."*

Changing attitudes of in-laws

Another shift in gender norms and values was observed in a few older women who sought to treat their daughters-in-law better than they themselves were treated by their own in-laws. Such views came from reflections and appreciation of their own experiences of being a daughter-in-law. As one older woman suggested in her own words:

> *"Now-a-days, we need to tell our daughter-in-law to eat this and that. Our mothers-in-law belonged to an older generation and even when we got back from a hard day's work, our mothers-in-law did not utter any words of encouragement to us nor did they make any meals for us. I feel that they should not have done that when I was a daughter-in-law. When we were daughters-in-law, we could not even talk. But now, daughters-in-law can talk as well. When we were hungry, we could not even say we were hungry. When we went to take a bath and wash clothes our mothers-in-law said that we only take bath and wash clothes and do not work at all. It is not like that now."*

There appeared to be aspirations for better livelihoods among women who had limited education and no access to paid jobs. These women look out for and took up available opportunities that came into the community in the form of trainings or skills building workshop with the hope that these would give them better livelihood opportunities. There were more women's groups in the

community who had formed savings and credit groups, and vegetable farming groups. They were also active in the public sphere, which in the past was the exclusive domain of men. Many women in the study sites reported having had access to training provided by organisations like the BYC, thus illustrating the eagerness women had for bettering their skills and livelihoods.

Some of the changing attitudes towards gender norms were observed among older men in the community. For example, an older man in a FGD in Resha VDC also talked about the changing times brought forth by education and how people in the community needed to change those old norms and conventions in terms of education, conflicts between husbands and wives and also in terms of dress that women wore. In his own words,

> *"We have to erase the older customs. Previously, there was a custom where all the tasks were routinely performed by daughters-in-law including wiping the floor, carrying bamboo baskets. Things have changed and now, daughters are also sent for education. One has to learn to guide the son and daughter-in-law in case of any problems between them. The family has to advise both of them and be cautious which line they are going towards and even encourage if he wants to pursue his dreams. While we need to control if he is on wrong track and always encourage them to the right path. If we are able to create such environment, then problems will definitely be erased. We cannot ask them to wear older clothes as we had once wore, we cannot forbid them to wear kurta/salwar[16] and we cannot forbid them in doing other works, it is not possible. The situation has changed now and more people are educated; previously there was no education and this was never considered. But now we know the value; everyone is becoming clever, educated and has gained knowledge. They also taught others and once we assure people who are not educated and cannot embrace the change, they will also do the same in the community."*

The appreciation of the value of education in women's lives appeared to influence older women's changing perspectives, as one older woman offered:

> *"We did not study at our time but today we cannot say that we do not want to educate them,*
>
> *we have to provide education to all of them. We need to send our grandchildren including our daughters to school. We even need to give daughters-in-law the proper food and not try to force her to do any excessive work and show proper support to her. Whether it is a grandson or a granddaughter, we need to send both of them to school. Earlier, the daughters were asked to get grasses but now we ask them to go to school".*

These shifts in gender ideologies applied to pockets of participants in the study, suggesting that the potential shifts may be gradual not widespread across the communities.

[16] *Typical Indian dress worn by female*

3.7.1. Shifts in perceptions about women's paid work

When asked about the value attached to women's paid work there appeared to be a shift in some of the gender attitudes towards women working to earn income. Many young married women and men, and mothers- and fathers-in-law held positive attitudes towards women taking up paid work. Paid jobs were perceived as pathways to women's economic independence and improved self-esteem, and as a means to sustain women even if they faced any form of abuse from their husbands or in-laws as they would easily support themselves if they were divorced. Consistently with this notion of economic independence from husbands, young married women fantasised about getting paid jobs to secure them financial independence their husbands, and fending for themselves. These extracts below indicate this:

> *"Being dependent on somebody else is very bad. I feel like if only I could do a job. If I could learn some skills and do something by myself, I would not have to feed off on somebody's earnings. It is hard,"*

> *"In the future, even though my husband earns, I feel like getting and experiencing a job. I have a desire to experience what it would be like to live on you own earnings."* Young married woman, Bhimapokhara

Some young married men, older men and older women entertained the possibility of young women earning a living despite the limited potential for young married women to do so due to lack of education or necessary skills to ensure they could earn their own living. Some older men were open to women not sticking to traditional gender roles to secure livelihoods rather than carrying out household and farm labour. They suggested both self-employment was possible and could enable women to provide for themselves and their children's needs such as education. Older man in a group discussion also opened up the option of young married women taking up migrant labour themselves, indicating that female migrant labour was becoming a norm:

> *"If they are self-employed… A life of any individual is never certain. If a woman is employed then she can easily raise her two children, educate them and if anything happens to her husband, she is capable of raising her children. If she is not employed and she desires to continue with farming and raise her children, we do not have any land available here and have poor irrigation facilities [and other resources]... So, it is good women also pursue other employment options including foreign employment. Thousands of them have opted for foreign employment and become independent. But, it also depends on the thinking of an individual, but to stand on one's own feet is completely agreeable. Both of them [men and women] can earn equally and it can be added together".*

Some older women raised the challenges to women earning a living due to lack of skill and education, and appeared to empathise with these limitations that could facilitate young married women getting paid jobs: "*[young married women] are not much educated. They could secure their future if they had a job and it would be so nice [if they worked for a living]*." Those older women who supported the prospects of their daughters-in-laws becoming income-earners had

reflected on there having been fewer opportunities for young married to earn money in the past compared to the recent times. Other older women supported working daughters-in-law as they believed this enabled them to adequately provide for the elders in their marital families. An older woman in a group discussion pointed these ideas out:

> *"These days even women are working and earning according to their capacity. During our times, we even involved in pottery to earn and sustained our lives. Now, the sons are capable of working abroad and sending their earnings. These days it is all about earning a livelihood. We might have worked for others involved in pottery, but we were able to buy salt or oil and continue our livelihood. Now it is the duty of the son and daughter-in-law whom we have raised and educated and hence are now earning enough. So, why should we work anymore; why to carry loads or work for others?"*

Some young married men also believed it would be good for their wives to earn a living to help support their families. Others acknowledged working wives were ideal in cases where their husbands were unemployed, having noted the limited gains from wives' engagement in farming activities. One young married man from Bhimapokhara who expressed his appreciation of working wives explained this in his own words:

> *"If she was a job holder, it would be good. What is there in agriculture? ... We have to look after home. We have to stand on our own feet ... I do not have any job. (So) if she works to take care of our home by earning, then why not?"*

Some community leaders also supported the idea of women earning a living, and held progressive attitudes that justified the notion of women's paid work, saying:

> *"Of course, they [young married women] should earn. [SP: What happens if they do?] If they earn on their own, then they do not need to depend on their husbands or in-laws for doing any work. They can spend from their own pocket. For instance, they can buy soaps, shampoos, agricultural seeds, they can bear their own travel expenses, and they can also pay the educational expenses of their children. This makes them self-reliant and I think it is not easy to ask money than having money on own." (Community Leader, Bhimapokhara)*

The traditional gender roles are slowly being eroded by the poor economic conditions in Nepal, resulting in a gradual emergence of a number of women taking up paid jobs to financially support their families. This implies a shift, even if slight, in gender roles as some endorsement of the notion of working women by some of young married men, older men and older women in the community was becoming evident. Some of the findings among teenage girls in the study indicate a desire for better access to education as a means to move away from household and farming work to take up professional positions in well paid jobs.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The formative research was conducted among young married women, older women, older men and teenage girls, as well as community leaders and service providers. The findings emphasised that traditional gender norms that expect young married women to be submissive to husbands and in-laws were dominant in the study setting. These traditional norms were enforced through relationships with partners and in particularly the mother-in-law. Young married women reported lower social status within their families, while teenage girls reported lower status within the family compared to boys in their age group. The findings also indicated that the traditional gender norms were challenging for many women, and indirectly influenced some women's exposure to domestic violence by in-laws and intimate partner violence. The migrant labour system was normative across the research setting, and men dominated as migrant labourers. Migration also had an effect on women's lives, through improved household income but there were some challenging experiences that limited women's access to remittances such as lack of civil documents to access funds. The findings also suggested that violence against women was underreported by the women themselves, in part due to a general tendency for women to keep silent seemingly to avoid abusive situations with husbands or mothers-in-law. Access to state support services among women experiencing violence was limited and though local solutions seemed to be in place they were barely effective to prevent or curb violence against women and girls.

4.1. Gendered norms and social position of young married women

The research found a patriarchal system operating among migrant communities of Baglung district, with gender norms of male dominance over women within a family structure that positions young married women in lower social status to that of husbands and the in-laws. However, some of the norms appeared to be shifting in favour of women's access to educational and economic opportunities and participation in household decision-making.

The current family structure supports a status quo in which men are more revered and women have a lower social status. Consequently young married women were largely ascribed a position subservient to their husband and in-laws. There is also a hierarchy of age, where elder family members are ascribed respect. The findings demonstrate a prevailing gender hierarchy within the family, wherein older men and older women occupy the highest authority, followed by their sons and daughters who occupy a more senior position over young married women. Boys also have more authority than girls. The family provided the premise within which gender socialisation into the various social positions was operationalised from childhood and through marriage in early adulthood. The findings also indicated that families regarded teenage boys with higher esteem compared to girls. Teenage girls reported differential educational opportunities provided to children, where boys were provided with better educational opportunities compared to girls. The notions that girls will eventually be married off were among the social norms driving the limited access to education afforded to girls. Study participants lived within a patrilocal family system that necessitates sons and their wives residing with the husbands' families. It is customary for young married women to reside with in-laws, and that is used to teach them 'how to act' in the expected gender roles (Rew, Gangoli et al. 2013).

4.2. Social status and decision making abilities

Lower social status among young married women within an extended family structure was associated with their limited ability to exercise authority in decision-making within the household. We found about a third of women lived in their own homesteads away from in-laws, suggesting that a few women had potential for exercising decision-making power. Commensurate with a higher social status attainable especially when they become mothers-in-law, older women were more likely to participate in decision making than younger married women. Customarily, older women are charged with supervision over the family are better positioned to assume a higher authority over sons and daughters-in-law. Being directly under the supervision of the mother-in-law, young married women living within extended families have a decreased ability to exercise authority over household decision-making compared to those living on their own due to age and family structure (Sathar and Kazi 2000, Acharya, Bell et al. 2010).

The study findings demonstrate the barriers faced by young married women in terms of exercises decision-making power, poor success to economic resources and their increased risk of varying forms of domestic and intimate partner violence. Studies in Nepal and elsewhere found connections between women's lower status and exposure to violence against women. Lamichhane and colleagues made similar observations seen in this study (Lamichhane, Puri et al. 2011). These entailed social practices of early marriage, though 'arranged marriages' were reportedly be less common nowadays and 'love marriages' were on the rise, young married women were still expected to play a subordinate, submissive and conservative gender role, and had limited access to economic and educational opportunities. Moreover, the social exclusion of young married women based on gender(Lamichhane, Puri et al. 2011), caste (Lamichhane, Puri et al. 2011), ethnicity (Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye 1999) as well as residence in rural areas (Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye 1999, Lamichhane, Puri et al. 2011, Samari and Pebley 2015) contributed to their subordination and their limited ability to participate in the economic sphere compared to men.

The structure of labour distribution within the family rendered migrant labour a socially accepted and gendered means of livelihoods, more accessible to men than women. This was sustained through the perpetual allocation of women to household and domestic farming chores while men were encouraged to participate in the public economic sphere. These labour distribution practices resulted in a widespread undervaluing of work of women even when that work earned them income. Moreover, young married women's limited access to remittances sent by husbands seemed to be policed and shaped by conservative attitudes of in-laws. This is consistent with research that found about a third of Nepali women have autonomy in decision over their health and household purchases (NDHS 2006). The findings show that a number of women had access to vocational training, participated in social clubs that sought to increase women's livelihood but the effectiveness of these opportunities could not be clearly understood at the time of the study. Many women reported heavy dependence on their husbands' remittances and some experienced financial exclusion by their in-laws who sought to prevent them benefiting from the money sent by their husbands.

Some financial exclusion was due to young married women being undocumented and therefore unable to participate in economic transactions. Citizenship registration is only effected at the age of 16 among Nepalese people (GoN 2006). Marriage at a young age is often to the disadvantage of many women and girls in Nepal as they are less likely to have accessed civil documentation such as birth certificates and can have challenges accessing them in their marital family. Women without civil documents cannot access remittances sent by migrant husbands at banks that require documentation of their identity, even if remittances are issued in their names. The findings suggested that this was among the key factors limiting women's ability to participate in decision-making within the extended family as they were unable to receive the money sent by migrant husbands. In some cases, this enhanced the in-laws' dominance in household decision-making, as either the father-in-law or mother-in-law likely had the required documents.

The findings, however, also demonstrated signs that traditional social norms seemed to be shifting and potentially being eroded by a weak national economy in Nepal, scarcity of jobs in the villages and the increased migrant labour of men. Shifts in elders' openness to women's participation in the wider labour system to generate cash as a means of livelihoods were evident. But this change in attitudes was slow and unclear as to what extent elders reconciled the engagement of women in paid work versus household work and the widespread notions about women's role in the family or society at large. Teenage girls indicated progressive attitudes towards their education and gender norms, suggesting that they had a modernised worldview about their future. However, it is unclear how much teenage girls are able to communicate their aspirations for better educational opportunities, late marriage and paid jobs with their parents and elders. Given the openness with which some elder men expressed progressive views about affording women and girls' educational and economic opportunities, certainly as the custodians of social norms, it is possible that they would seriously consider some of the progressive aspirations expressed by teenage girls in the study in favour of strengthening women and girls' needs livelihoods.

4.3. Violence against Women and Girls and associated risks

A few women reported having had direct experiences of domestic and intimate partner violence, though the majority of reports related to the experience of 'other' women. Consequently women's direct experiences of domestic and intimate partner violence are underrepresented in this study. This could be attributed to silence that is overtly or covertly expected of victimised women, which prevent them reporting violence or seeking help (Gill 2004, Naved, Azim et al. 2006). Emotional and physical violence were the most topical forms of violence against women, and teenage girls were exposed to sexual harassment in public spaces. Discourses among all participants suggested that violence against women is widespread despite observed silences and 'othering' of those women in the community who had been victimised. Both othering and ownership of violent experiences affirmed existing research about the extent of violence against women and girls, but also emphasised the need for deeper understanding of the limitations victimised women face to disclose violence in research.

National surveys lend support to these findings, indicating about a third of Nepali women aged 15-49 had been victimised at least once in their lifetime (Dalal, Wang et al. 2014). Other studies concur that young married women are more likely to experience domestic violence compared to unmarried women and girls of the same age (Paudel 2007).

Perpetrators of violence against women were usually husbands and mothers-in-law, and this resonates with a number of violence studies (NDHS 2006, Galam 2016, Mirza 2016). The extent to which boys are perpetrators of domestic violence requires further study. South Asian studies have demonstrated the mothers-in-law as the most common perpetrator of domestic violence against young married women in particular (Rew, Gangoli et al. 2013, Wasim 2014, Mirza 2016). These studies reiterate that major underlying factors include the extended family structure and traditional gender roles expectations contribute to a systematic subjugation of daughters-in-law. This research also highlights the mother-in-law's complicity with the existing patriarchal system and structures within which it is perpetuated and maintained to further reinforce the lower social status of daughters-in-law. On the other hand, those who seek to exert control over daughters-in-law in migrant communities often do so in order to ensure benefits from their sons, and young married women were seen as competitors for remittances received from migrant sons (Rew, Gangoli and Gill 2013). Other studies argue for a reconceptualization of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship to maximise the potential benefits of relatedness between them instead of focusing on the competition between them (Galam 2016). This approach could contribute to further changing in hegemonic social norms that undermine young women's participating in household decision-making.

Most of the findings on domestic and intimate partner were associated with perceptions of women's non-conformity to expected gender roles (Bhatta 2014). Verbal abuse, physical violence and other forms of poor treatment by mothers-in-law were usually used to force young married women living up to societal expectations of their gender roles. If mothers-in-law felt they were not working hard enough or the desired fashion they meted out abuse to enforce their authority. Studies have also reported on this use of violence as a form of shaming women into conformity (Koss 2000, Rocca, Puri et al. 2013). The findings do not clear indications of the extent to which women were successfully shamed into conformity among the participants, even though many seemed to respond passively to the violence meted against them.

The formative research suggests that young married women were exposed to maltreatment in the process. Other studies described mothers-in-law as despots who controlled every aspect of daughters-in-law's lives (Mirza 2016), and applied their authority abusively. Reported abuses at the hands of mothers-in-law ranged from being overworked (Mirza 2016), deprived of food, verbally abused and even physically abused, and sometimes were catalyst to intimate partner violence. These forms of mother-in-law perpetrated violence are some of the forms ostracism from the family meted against young married women perceived not to be living up to expected gender roles (Gangoli and Rew 2011). The findings show that some of these means of penalising women for unmet gender roles may have been covert, resulting in some participants being unaware of what other forms of abuse young married women in the community were exposed to.

Contentious relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law has been highlighted as one of the indicating factors precipitating the violence experienced by some young married women. Rew and colleague referred to mothers-in-law' relationships with their sons being the source of tension in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship (Rew, Gangoli et al. 2013). The findings suggested that the role of the husbands in these relationships can be vague as most of the violence occurred in their 'absence' while in migrant labour. Migration itself has been perceived as a pathway facilitating the perpetuation of the violence, and combined with the already inferior position of women, even reporting mother-in-law perpetrated abuse goes undeterred (Mirza 2016).

Heavy alcohol drinking and gambling facilitated women's exposure to intimate partner violence experienced by young married women in the community. Participants often drew links between migrant returnees engaging verbal abuse and physical abuse of their wives and heavy alcohol drinking. Other research has mentioned the role of alcohol consumption of husbands and incidents of intimate partner violence *(Puri, Shah et al. 2010, Puri, Frost et al. 2012)*. The findings suggested that husbands' heavy drinking increased the severity of intimate partner violence experienced by young married women. Expected gender roles, economic dependence on migrant men, and the mother-in-law were among the factors facilitating violence reported in the few incidents reported by young married women in the study.

The findings indicate that existing support services for survivors of violence are wanting in terms of availability and accessibility. At the time of the study, there were no formal support mechanisms for survivors of violence such as those provided by the state at the village level. State services were located at the district headquarters, and considering the challenges with mobility between the villages and main district headquarters, these services need to be brought closer to the local communities. Notwithstanding, indigenous support mechanisms are currently being implemented: community leaders and elders play a key role in hearing and resolving conflict situations taking place among families. However, this mechanism has no clear links with state services such as psychosocial services.

To conclude, the findings of this study indicate that Nepal has a dominant set of traditional gender norms that seek to dominate women and thereby undermine their ability to actively engage in decision-making and access educational or livelihood opportunities. However, this is offset against shifts towards progressive views about the position of women in society. Violence against women and girls appeared to flow from the existing conservative gender norms in families and the community. Emotional and physical violence perpetrated by husbands or mothers-in-law are evidence of attempts to force young married women to conform to the expected gender norms. Support services for response or prevention of violence, however were limited in their ability cover the needs of victimised women. The findings also suggested that migrant labour is normative but is still limited to men, constituting a key element of dominant masculinities in Nepal. However, these men's wives usually had access to remittances even amidst challenges that are also associated with women's limited access to economic activity. Overall findings indicate that there are opportunities for advancing the economic conditions of women and changing the harmful aspects of existing social norms for the benefit of the entire family.

5. Recommendations

Appropriate responses to key elements in these findings are much needed and should follow a social ecological model to engage the individual, dyad, community, and societal level to change gender norms, improve economic conditions of women and develop interventions to prevent violence against women and girls at the primary and secondary level.

Primary prevention strategies need to be adopted to change gender norms that perpetuate the lower social status, traditional gender norms that seek to undermine and oppress young married women and those that make it permissible for women and girls to be sexually harassed in public spaces in Nepal. These should take the community or family approach engaging everyone in the gender hierarchy including teenage girls and boys, young married or unmarried men and women, and older men and women. Such programmes as Stepping Stones have been previously adapted for different contexts (Skevington, Sovetkina et al. 2013), and found to be gender transformative (Dunkle and Jewkes 2007, Jewkes, Nduna et al. 2007, Jewkes, Nduna et al. 2008). The findings indicate that there is fertile ground for such group based participatory programmes in Nepal.

The economic conditions of women can be addressed through livelihoods strengthening programmes to improve women's economic conditions through skills building, educational opportunities and/or inputs to support income generating activities. In order to achieve significant and holistic shifts in attitudes towards women's work and economic status, livelihoods strengthening interventions could be integrated with gender transformative programmes. Educational opportunities must be equitably accessible to both boys and girls.

At the administrative district level mechanisms to provide support to abused women need to be brought closer to the people at the sub-district and local levels. This can be achieved through concerted effort to establish or revitalise existing formal services provided at the local level. Psychosocial support services need to be strengthened and made widely available to people at the local level. Village level support services have an integral role to play in the referral system to provide effective services, and should be encouraged. Some support programmes need to be aligned with existing legislation in Nepal prohibiting domestic violence, rape and even caste based discrimination. These can include efficient policing, reporting and prosecutions of related cases, and need the backing of rehabilitation measures. The translation of the anti-violence legislation to the local level needs to be a key focus of the criminal justice system to ensure that punitive measures are effected against perpetrators and levels of violence against women and girls are significantly reduced.

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FORMATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

Intersections between traditional gender norms, women's economic conditions and exposure to violence against women and girls: formative research in migrant communities of Baglung district, Nepal