

Exploring the nature of VAWG, and its effects among migrant labour communities in Baglung district, Nepal

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Introduction

- Traditional family structure is grounded in patriarchal values of male dominance over women and respect for elders in Nepal
- Women and girls are disadvantaged by discriminatory traditional practices
- Male migration is a dominant source of employment and livelihoods
- Remittances play an important macroeconomic role; amounting to 29.2% of GDP in Nepal (World Bank, 2016)
- Women and girls' social positions and migration contribute to unequal power relations, limited livelihoods, and exposure to DV and IPV

Aim of the presentation

- To share the preliminary findings from the formative research conducted among communities engaged in migrant labour in Baglung district of Nepal
- The study explored:
 - **the nature of VAWG and its effects**
 - the community response to VAWG
 - the linkages between economic conditions and VAWG

Methods

- Qualitative research using in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus group discussions (FGDs)
 - May-June 2016
 - Two VDCs of Baglung district with high levels of male migration
 - IDIs and FGDs were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim from Nepali to English
 - Ethics approval from SAMRC & NHRC
 - All informants provided informed consent for IDIs and FGDs and recording of these
 - **Data drawn from 42 IDIs and 7 FGDs**
 - Inductive analytical approach
 - Emerging themes
- Participants summary
 - 16 Young married women aged 16-40 years
 - 8 Young married men aged 16 - 40 years
 - 24 Older women with in-law status over 40 years
 - 16 Older men with in-law status over 40 years
 - 22 Unmarried teenage girls between 15 and 19 years
 - 4 male and female Community leaders
 - 8 male and female Service providers from govt. and non-govt. bodies

Dominant gender norms associated with being a woman

- **Being a woman was judged on the basis of how well women were perceived to be carrying out expected roles and behavior that included:**
 - **Household chores, childcare, caring for family members; and farming activities**

"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 a custom where men are not supposed to wash their clothes themselves. During agricultural work, it is again women carrying out parma¹" (Unmarried teenage girl, IDI)
- **Women also judged on how well they spent husband's remittances if they directly received any**
- **Female dignity was highly valued, was defined by limited mobility and association with other men, and woman of "bad female character" reflected on the family's status**
- **Elders were custodians of traditions, and mothers-in-laws actively involved in transference of traditional gender roles**

1. Parma, one form of traditional social reciprocal labour usually during rice transplanting and harvest

Dominant gender norms associated with being a man

- **Men were seen as breadwinners, legal guardians of their wives and the ones with utmost duty to look after the welfare of the family**
- **Male migration has become a culturally accepted practice and means to fulfil the provider role of men** (echoed by the older men, older women as well as the unmarried teenage girls in FGDs)

"A duty of a man is to go abroad to earn so as to fulfil his duty. He needs to look after his family and children." (Unmarried teenage girl)

- **Notion of men as providers influenced their limited views regarding women's paid work**

"It is my responsibility to arrange for things needed in the house. I am going abroad to work so I feel that she doesn't need to work." (Young married man)

Are there shifts in gender norms at the community level?

- As the majority of men took jobs abroad, some women were left to take up the provider role by *working* in agriculture
- While MiLs upheld traditional notions about DiLs, some MiLs however, acknowledged that young married women were overworked indicating they were sensitive to their plight

"It is not easy to look after the household activities..." (Older woman, FGD)

- Some older men and women seemed to be supportive of DiLs working in paid jobs, that were usually outside their home

"Either me or my husband takes care of our grandchildren as our daughter-in-law goes to work." (Older woman, IDI)

- Unmarried teenage girls stated that they preferred marriage only after being educated and independent

"We need to stay focused on our education and set an example in our community and further in Baglung district. We need to study."

Conflicts in the household

- “Jhagada”, disputes ranging from mere arguments to verbal or physical abuse
- But there were seldom reports of disputes turning into physical DV/IPV
- Conflicts in intimate relationships stemmed from the husband’s drinking and gambling habits, sometimes turned physically violent
- There were disputes emanating from intergenerational conflict between the MiLs and DiLs
- Problems of distrust and suspicion between husband and wife on the rise, especially when husband worked abroad
 - E.g., women’s access to cell phone cited as a sign of men losing control over their wives

“When he had gone to a place which is far from home, he tried to call me but my phone was busy—at such times he was also suspicious about me.” (Young married woman, IDI)

Young women's responses in cases of conflicts

- **Conflict between the wife and her in-laws were, in some cases, mediated by the husband/son by taking turns talking to both parties**

"My mother gave birth to me and my wife is my life-companion. I have to console both."
(Young married man, IDI)

- **Wives usually kept quiet and did not talk to their husbands after conflict occurred**
- **Some women reported their experiences of conflict to the community elders with the hope of seeking resolution**

"The wife can go and complain to other people in the village about what the husband did to her." (Male community leader, IDI)

- **In some instances, women sought emotional support from her natal home to resolve conflicts**

VAWG issues not discussed openly outside the households

- Only the unmarried teenager girls were more open to talk about violence occurring in their community rather than the mature men and women, who made only anecdotal references to the VAWG issues
- Public revelation of issues related to violence was closely associated with defaming the family's honour and dignity
- IPV was seen to be occurring as a result of alcohol abuse and gambling

"When they are drunk, they come and hit their wives, and they are all good when they are not drunk." (Young married woman, IDI)

- IPV in migrant households also arose due to financial matters

"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. "
(Older man, FGD)

Different forms of violence observed

- **Verbal abuse by husbands on their wives usually took place within the household, with a potential to turn into physical abuse**
- **Eve-teasing was noted as a common form of violence against unmarried teenage girls**

"When a girl walks alone, 2-4 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." (unmarried teenage girl in IDI)
- **Consequently, teenage girls particularly felt prone to abuse and harassment in the absence of their fathers or father figures**

Support mechanism for conflict and violence

- **Other than the district headquarter, there was no existence of service providers at the VDC level in both research areas**
- **Owing to lack of such formal institutions in the villages, resolution of conflict and violence was done through informal mechanisms, mainly made up of village elders or community leaders**

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

- The family is the most critical place to change gender norms
- Need for innovative tools to gather data on IPV or DV
- Need for interventions to build gender equitable, harmonious relations and less violent relations in intimate relationships and in family relationship
- Need for interventions to provide effective support mechanisms for abused women and girls
- Need for interventions to build women's economic power to reduce total dependence on their husbands' remittances, and increase their ability to contribute to the household economy
- All interventions must be locally owned and locally structured

Thank you

