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**Child Marriage in Chepang Community of Ichachhakamana Rural Municipality,
Chitawan, Nepal**

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Abstract

This article examines the issue of child marriage within the Chepang community of Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality in Chitawan. The research employed primary and secondary data, applying quantitative and qualitative analytical methods. The legal framework in Nepal prohibits marriage for individuals under the age of 20. However, a significant majority, exceeding 90 per cent, of the surveyed individuals were found to have entered into marriage before reaching this age limit. Key contributors to child marriage identified in the study include poverty, insufficient awareness, and the influence of older individuals. The occurrence of child marriage presents considerable risks during the adolescent years, a time when individuals often become increasingly curious about sexual health and relationships. Therefore, awareness campaigns should focus primarily on this demographic. To effectively address the challenge of child marriage, it is vital to emphasize educational and awareness programs. Furthermore, the strict enforcement of existing laws is essential in the pursuit of eliminating child marriage.

Keywords: Child-marriage, awareness, law enforcement, Chepang, culture

Introduction

The 2021 census indicates that Nepal's total population is 29.16 million, with females accounting for 51.1 per cent and males for 48.9 per cent. Nepal is characterized as a multi-ethnic nation, home to 125 distinct ethnic groups. Among these, Chhetri represents 16.45 percent, Hill-Brahmin 11.29 percent, Magar 6.9 percent, Tharu 6.2 percent, Tamang 5.62 percent, Bishwokarma 5.04 percent, Muslim 4.86 percent, Newar 4.6 percent, Yadav 4.21 percent, an Rai 2.2 percent, while the remaining ethnicities each constitute less than 2 percent of the population (Nepal Statistics Office, 2021).

The Chepang ethnic group comprises a population of 84,364 individuals, representing 0.29 percent of Nepal's overall population. Within this group, there are 42,758 males and 41,606 females, according to the National Statistical Office (NSO) data from 2021. A significant majority, totaling 77,914 individuals or 92.35 percent of the Chepang population, reside in Bagmati Province. Specifically, 95.7 percent of Chepang individuals are concentrated in Chitawan, Makwanpur, Dhading, and Gorkha districts. The distribution within these districts is as follows: 35,637 individuals (42.24 percent) live in Chitawan, 23,650 (28.03 percent) in Makwanpur, 17,160 (20.34 percent) in Dhading, and 4,268 (5.06 percent) in Gorkha, as reported by the NSO in 2021. The remaining Chepang/Praja community members are spread across various other districts.

Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality

Ichchhakamana is a singular rural municipality within the local governance framework of Chitwan district. In addition to Ichchhakamana, the district comprises one metropolitan city and five municipalities (CBS, 2017). This rural municipality was established by merging the former Village Development Committees of Chandibhanjyang, Dahakhani, Darechowk, and Kaule. Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality spans an area of 166.73 square kilometers (CBS, 2017) and has a population of 27,643, representing 3.84 percent of the total population of Chitawan District (Nepal Statistics Office, 2021). The literacy rate in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality stands at

74.2 percent (Nepal Statistics Office, 2021).

Chepang

Chepang, also known as Praja, is one of the 125 ethnic groups in Nepal. In terms of population, the Chepang community ranks 44th nationally and 8th within the Chitawan district. The total number of Chepang individuals in Chitawan is 35,637, with 10,338 residing in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality, accounting for 29 percent of the Chepang population in the district (Nepal Statistics Office, 2021).

Review of Literature

Child marriage is generally defined as the practice of marrying individuals below the legal age established by a country. Each nation stipulates its own minimum marriage age, and in Nepal, this age is explicitly set at 20 years (Nepal Law Commission, 2017). Consequently, any marriage occurring before this age is deemed illegal in Nepal. Article 39 (4) of the Nepalese Constitution explicitly states that no child shall be subjected to child marriage (Secretariat of Constitution Assembly, 2015). Child marriage has received enormous attention in the human rights and international development fields. The practice reflects and reinforces fundamental social patterns of gender and age discrimination, predominantly against girls (Care Nepal, 2016).

Child marriage is a serious human rights crisis and one of the most pressing development concerns in the world today (SAARC, 2016). Child marriage is a human rights crisis occurring on an alarming scale in South Asia. South Asia accounts for almost half of all child marriages that occur globally. In South Asia, 46 percent of women between ages 20-24 are reported to have been married before age 18—in 2010; this translates to 24.4 million women in the region. Estimates project that from 2010 to 2030, 130 million more girls in the region will be married (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2013).

According to the 2021 Census, approximately 6.85 million youths in Nepal have entered into marriage before age 20, with 0.17 million of these cases occurring in the Chitawan District

(Nepal Statistics Office, 2021). According to a Nepal Demographic and Health Survey report, women marry earlier than men in Nepal. The median age at first marriage is 18.3 years among women and 22.3 years among men (Ministry of Health and Population, 2022). Twelve percent of women were first married by age 15, as compared with 1 percent of men. Forty-seven percent of women aged 25–49 were first married by age 18, while the corresponding figure among men is only 14 percent. The median age at first marriage has increased over time, from 16.2 years in 1996 to 17.9 years in 2016 and 18.3 years in 2022 among women and from 20.1 years in 2001 to 21.7 years in 2016 and 22.3 years in 2022 among men (Ministry of Health and Population, 2022). Likewise, a study in Korak VDC in Chitwan showed that the average marriage in Chepang females was 15.48 years, and the mean of the first child born was 16.95 years (Lopchan, 2016).

Child marriage is prevalent in South Asia, as it is estimated there are 285 million child brides. At present, 59 percent of women aged 20–24 in Bangladesh are married under the age of 18, 40 percent in Nepal, and 27 percent in India. Child marriage is regarded as one of the harmful traditional practices existing in Nepal since time immemorial (Women’s Rehabilitation Center, 2020).

In 2014, Nepal organized the inaugural regional meeting of representatives from SAARC member countries and significant stakeholders, concentrating on leveraging legal frameworks to enhance accountability in the fight against child marriage (Baral, 2019). This initiative aimed to fortify national legislation and address the reproductive health requirements of married girls. Additionally, during the first Girl Summit held in London in August 2014, the Nepalese government committed to the eradication of child marriage (Report on Girl Summit 2014 on Ending FGM and Child, Early and Forced Marriage, 2014). Furthermore, the Sixteenth Plan (2024/25-2028/29) identifies child marriage as a significant challenge that requires urgent attention (NPC, 2024). Nepal aims to eliminate child marriage by 2030, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals. The government has implemented a national strategy to eradicate child marriage, and it is classified as a crime under Nepalese law, with legal penalties for offenders. Nevertheless, enforcing existing

laws and commitments remains inadequate, resulting in minimal advancement in this area.

Objective of the Study

The legal framework in Nepal stipulates that the minimum age for marriage is set at 20 years (Nepal Law Commission, 2017). However, a significant number of young individuals in Nepal, particularly within the Chepang community, are entering into marriage before reaching this age. According to a recent study, 45 to 86 percent of Chepang girls in Makwanpur usually get married between the ages of 12 and 15 years (Silwal, 2024). While numerous socio-economic factors may contribute to this trend, there has yet to be a comprehensive study specifically addressing the circumstances of the Chepang community of Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality.

The primary aim of this research is to assess the prevalence of child marriage among Chepang girls in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality and to examine and analyze the associated challenges it presents. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to child marriage within this specific community, including cultural, economic, and social influences that may perpetuate the practice. Additionally, it will investigate the motivations behind child marriage, including parental attitudes, community norms, and the perceived benefits or pressures that lead families to marry off their daughters at a young age. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on child marriage in Nepal and inform policy recommendations that can help protect vulnerable populations, empower girls, and promote gender equality in the region.

Research Methods

This research employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies as well as descriptive and analytical methods. It utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data is derived from reports published by the National Statistics Office (NSO), profiles of Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality, Chitawan district, and other pertinent publications.

Primary data was gathered through the administration of semi-structured questionnaires, with a total of 35 respondents of the age group of 15 to 45 years, including five women from each ward of Ichchhakamana Municipality. The selection of respondents was made randomly. Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and three case studies were also carried out.

Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held independently in Ward 1 and Ward 6. Each FGD comprised 6 to 8 participants who had not taken part in the questionnaire interviews. It is important to note that the respondents involved in the case studies were not participants in either the FGDs or the questionnaire interviews. The FGDs and case Studies were conducted using separate checklists.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered have been compiled and displayed in aggregate form, including tables that present numerical values and percentages and visual representations such as pie charts and bar graphs, accompanied by a brief description. Similarly, the qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions (FGDs) underwent a process of coding and decoding prior to analysis. Additionally, the names of participants involved in the case studies have been altered, and other details have been presented as relayed during the interviews. Consent was obtained from all respondents, ensuring that the data and information they provided would be presented in aggregate form, and I assured them that their information would not be utilized for personal gain.

Analysis and Interpretation

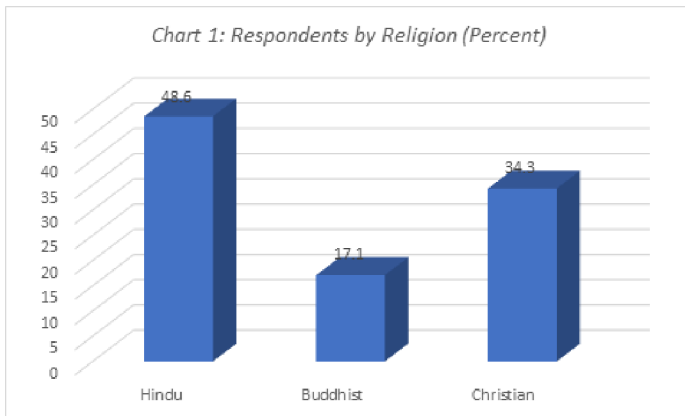
This section has outlined the social status of the respondent women, encompassing aspects such as education, health, marital status, and religion. It also includes their economic status, including profession and employment, alongside their level of social participation.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Nepali society is characterized by its diversity. As per the 2021 Census, the religious composition of the Nepalese population is as follows: 81.19 percent identify as Hindu, 8.21 percent

as Buddhist, 4.39 percent as Muslim, 3.17 percent as Kiratist, and 1.76 percent as Christian, with the remainder belonging to other faiths (Nepal Statistics Office, 2021). Within this municipality, 62.8 percent of households identify as Hindu, 24.9 percent as Buddhist, and 12.3 percent as Christian (Nepal Statistics Office, 2021).

Among the respondents, 48.6 percent were Hindu, 34.3 percent were Christian and 17.1 percent were Buddhist.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Sixty percent of the respondents reside in joint families, while forty percent belong to nuclear families. Similarly, 88.6 percent of the households are headed by males, with the remaining 11.4 percent being headed by females.

Table 1

Types of Family and Head of Household

On the basis of Family Type

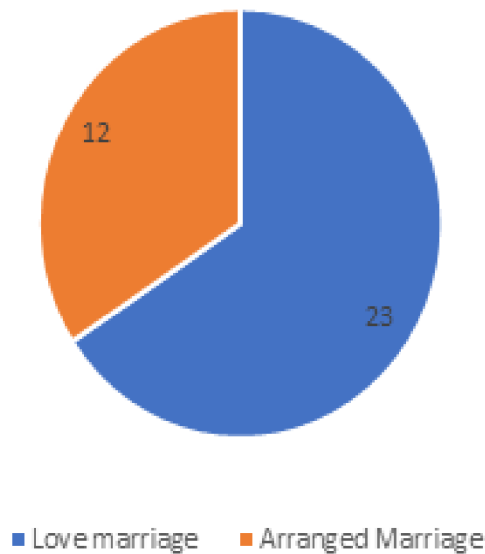
Based on the Head of Household's Gender

Types of Family	Number	Percent	Household Head	Number	Percent
Nuclear	14	40	Female	4	11.4
Joint	21	60	Male	31	88.6
Total	35	100	Total	35	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Around two-thirds of the participants reported having entered into love marriages, while the remainder indicated that they had experienced arranged marriages.

Chart 2: Types of Marriage of the respondents (Number)



Source: Field Survey, 2023

The legal framework in Nepal prohibits marriage for individuals under the age of 20. However, a significant majority, exceeding 90 percent, of the surveyed individuals were found to have entered into marriage before reaching this age limit. Among the 35 respondents, 14.3 percent were married before the age of 14, 65.7 percent were married between the ages of 15 and 17, 11.4 percent were married between the ages of 18 and 20, and only 8.6 percent were married at the age of 20 or older.

Table 2*Age of first Marriage of the respondents*

SN	Age Group (Years)	Number	Percent
1	12-14	5	14.3
2	15-17	23	65.7
3	18-20	4	11.4
4	Above 20 years	3	8.6
Total		35	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The age at which males first marry is generally higher than that of females. It has been observed that females may enter into marriage before age 15, whereas no males are reported to have married at this age. Approximately 43 percent of the respondents indicated that their husbands married between the ages of 20 and 24 years. Table 5 illustrates the age of males at their first marriage.

Table 3*Age of first marriage of respondents' husbands*

SN	Age group (years)	Number	percent
1	15-19	12	34.3
2	20-24	15	42.9
3	25-29	8	22.8
Total		35	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Eight of the 35 individuals surveyed were found to be illiterate, while the others had received some form of formal education. Inquiries were made regarding the continuation of their education following marriage. Twenty-four respondents indicated that they were unable to pursue their studies after getting married, whereas the remaining three managed to continue their education for a few years post-marriage.

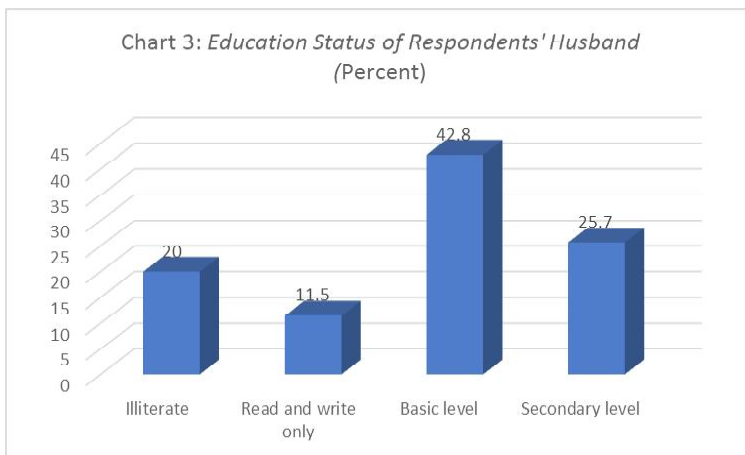
Table 4

Continuation of Study

SN	Education status	Number	percent
1	Illiterate	8	22.9
2	Continuation of study even after marriage	3	8.6
3	Discontinuity of study after marriage	24	68.5
Total		35	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Inquiries were made regarding the educational background of the respondents’ husbands. Of those surveyed, 42.8 percent had attained a basic level of education, 25.7 percent had completed secondary education, 11.5 percent could read and write, and the remaining 20 percent were classified as illiterate.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Among the participants, 22 women indicated that they experience typical disagreements but have not encountered domestic violence. These disagreements may include common issues such as differing opinions, misunderstandings, or conflicts over daily responsibilities. However,

these women clarified that despite these typical conflicts, they have not encountered any form of domestic violence in their homes.

In contrast, seven respondents reported experiencing domestic violence, specifically from their husbands. This indicates a troubling reality for these women, as domestic violence can take many forms, including physical, emotional, or psychological abuse. Additionally, the remaining six participants stated that they have not faced any form of violence in their households.

Economic Status of the Respondents

Similar to most households in rural Nepal, the predominant occupation of the residents of Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality is agriculture. Among the surveyed households, 11 rely primarily on agriculture for their income, nine depend on labor work, and the others engage in various other occupations. In total, 20 respondents are involved in agricultural activities, nine operate small businesses, five are employed on a daily wage basis, and one holds an office position.

Regarding their spouses, 11 are engaged in daily wage labor, seven work in agriculture, and the remainder are involved in different occupations.

Table 5

Main Source of Family Income and their Profession

Profession	The main source of family income	Wife's occupation	Husband's occupation
Agriculture	11	20	7
Labor work	9	5	11
Small business	5	9	4
Foreign Employment	3	-	3

Petty Construction	2		2
Tourism	2		2
Driving	2		2
Office job	1	1	1
Total	35	35	32

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Access to finance

A notable disparity exists regarding land ownership among the participants in the study. Specifically, nine individuals do not possess any land at all, indicating a lack of personal property in this regard. In contrast, only one respondent has land registered in her own name, highlighting the limited number of women or individuals who have secured personal ownership of land. Furthermore, the situation for the remaining 25 individuals is somewhat different; they have land registered under the ownership of their husbands.

In terms of financial resources, the data reveals that 19 respondents do not have a bank account or any account with cooperatives. This lack of access to formal financial institutions may limit their ability to save, invest, or secure loans, significantly affecting their economic empowerment. Conversely, the remaining 16 individuals do possess accounts with cooperatives, indicating that they have some level of access to financial services, which could provide them with opportunities for savings, credit, and participation in collective economic activities.

These findings illustrate a complex landscape of land ownership and financial access among the participants, with significant implications for their economic status and empowerment.

Among the participants, 15 indicated that they delivered their child in a hospital, while 11 reported giving birth at home. Additionally, four participants had their first child in a hospital but opted for a home birth for their second child. The remaining five participants do not have any children.

Most respondents reported that they had their first child before age 20. Notably, 35 percent of these individuals also had their second child while still under the age of 20. Table 9 illustrates respondents’ ages when they had their first and second children.

Table 6

Age of respondents having first and second children

Age group	First Child	percent	Second Child	percent
Below 20 years	24	80	7	35
20-25 years	4	13.3	10	50
Above 25 years	2	6.7	3	15
No second child			5	
No child	5		10	
Total	35	100	35	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

A gap of approximately five years between the births of two children is generally considered optimal. A shorter interval may pose risks to both the mother and the child. However, research indicates that over 70 percent of respondents have had two children within a span of less than five years.

Table 7

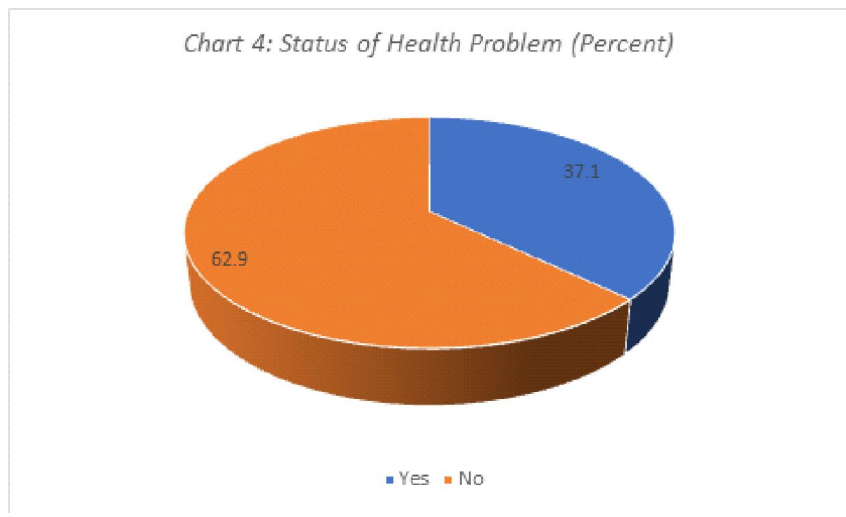
Gap of first and second child

SN	Gap years	Number	percent
1	1	2	10
2	2	6	30
3	3	4	20
4	4	2	10
5	5 years and above	6	30

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Among the total respondents, 51.4 percent indicated that they had not utilized any form of contraception. At the same time, the remainder reported using methods such as implants, Depo-Provera, female sterilization, pills, etc.

Inquiries were made regarding health issues following marriage. Among the participants, 22 indicated that they do not experience any health problems, whereas 13 reported encountering health issues such as white vaginal discharge, ovarian torsion, and anxiety.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Social Dynamic (participation) of Women

Access to financial resources, property rights, and involvement in decision-making processes serve as key indicators of women’s empowerment (Longwe, 1995). However, an assessment of property rights and financial access reveals that the status of women in Ichchhakamana is relatively weak. Inquiries were made regarding women’s participation in social activities. Among the respondents, 15 women were identified as active members of community-based organizations, including mothers’ groups, women’s groups, and Dalit women’s groups, while the remaining 20 were not affiliated with such organizations. Those women engaged in community-based organizations demonstrated active participation in various social initiatives, such as advocacy on social issues,

sanitation efforts in public areas, and awareness programs. Conversely, women who were not part of these organizations exhibited a lack of involvement in advocacy and social activities. Additionally, only four out of the 35 respondents reported involvement in local political party units, while the others expressed a lack of interest in political engagement.

Focus Group Discussions

Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the women of Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality to gather their insights regarding child marriage among Chepang girls. The key themes of their perspectives can be summarized as follows:

1. Social and cultural factors
2. Economic challenges and poverty
3. Insufficient awareness and education

Chepangs have a longstanding tradition of marriages between the sons of brothers and the daughters of sisters. Typically, these unions occur at a young age, as there is a prevailing belief that delaying marriage may lead to the possibility of marrying outside the family. This sense of urgency has contributed to the trend of early marriages within their community.

FGD participants indicated that poverty significantly contributes to early marriage and the interruption of educational pursuits. They articulated that economic constraints compel them to prioritize earning a livelihood over continuing their education, as securing food is deemed more essential than academic advancement. Furthermore, due to financial hardships, parents often express greater approval for their children who contribute to the family income, even at a young age, rather than pursuing their studies. Participants conveyed feelings of shame regarding child marriage and the occurrence of childbirth at a very young age; however, they indicated that they were unaware that marrying at a young age is illegal. They noted that while some NGOs have organized awareness programs against child marriage in urban areas, these initiatives have not effectively reached the intended audience.

In this village, children begin their education in grade one at the age of 8 to 9. Typically,

female students experience the onset of menstruation around the ages of 11 or 12. Following the onset of menstruation, many girls refrain from attending school, and a number of them enter into marriage by the age of 13 or 14. Subsequently, nearly all of these girls cease their education after marriage.

Many participants expressed their regret over their inability to pursue further education due to early marriage. A recurring sentiment among them was that had they continued their studies, they would have had improved job prospects. Manish remarked, “I married at a young age, and my education was interrupted by household responsibilities. I feel a sense of regret when I observe my friends working in offices.” Nearly all participants in the focus group discussion concurred with Manish’s perspective.

Nearly all participants indicated that their marriages were influenced by curiosity about sexual relationships during their adolescence. They expressed that they were unable to contemplate their futures at that stage. Additionally, they noted that their older peers had also married at a young age, prompting them to follow suit. A lack of guidance was available to them, leading to a perception of limited options. In recent years, the advent of mobile phones and social media platforms like Facebook has facilitated connections, which has led to the development of romantic relationships and early marriages. The same conclusion was made by a report that stated that the practice of forced marriage is decreasing while self-initiative marriages are increasing (Women’s Rehabilitation Center, 2020).

At the age of 14, she entered into marriage, and by the age of 20, she had three children. With no source of income and lacking skills for employment, she found that household responsibilities do not provide financial support. This situation of scarcity results in disturbances and unrest within the family. In such conflicts, women often find themselves as the primary victims, as noted by one of the participants in the focus group discussion. Her remarks encapsulate the broader narrative and repercussions of child marriage, leading us to conclude that domestic violence is a significant

consequence of child marriage.

Poverty is a significant contributor to the prevalence of child marriage. One participant recounted his commitment to purchasing gold jewelry, assuring that there would be no issues regarding food and housing. Persuaded by his promises, she agreed to marry a man who was already married. However, her husband was unable to provide the promised gold ornaments, and they faced difficulties even in securing basic food supplies. This illustrates that in the pursuit of a better life, many young girls enter into marriage at an early age.

Some participants in the focus group discussions expressed the view that child marriage is not a significant issue; rather, the challenge lies in life management. They noted that young couples often lack the knowledge and skills to manage their lives and families effectively. Problems tend to arise when families do not provide adequate support. Conversely, if young couples are supported by their families and do not have children at an early age, child marriage may not pose a substantial concern.

They reported that early pregnancy and childbirth at a young age have led to various health issues, including ovarian torsion and abnormal vaginal discharge. Additionally, they indicated that giving birth at an early age has resulted in low birth weight and inadequate growth of the child. It has been observed that issues such as child marriage, polygamy, and domestic violence have become inseparable aspects of their lives. They expressed skepticism regarding the possibility of a life devoid of these challenges.

Case Studies

In this section, three case studies are presented. Three women who married young and three women married with husbands of second marriage were chosen. Various dimensions of their lives are presented.

Sushma Chepang: I married at 14, and it was a love marriage. He had his first wife in his home. I entered into matrimony at the age of 14, and it was a love marriage. At that time, my husband

already had a first wife residing in our home. A year after our marriage, I gave birth to my daughter. Tragically, my husband passed away from tuberculosis just a year later. Society cast blame upon me, attributing his death to my presence. This led to a period of deep depression, although my friends provided support, reassuring me that it was merely a matter of chance. Two years later, my husband's co-wife also succumbed to tuberculosis.

My father faced physical challenges, and my mother remarried, leaving him behind. He encouraged me to pursue my education, but I had little interest in studying. With dreams of a joyful life filled with good food, a comfortable home, and beautiful jewelry, I married at a young age, yet those aspirations remained unfulfilled. Despite my husband's affection, I found myself a widow within two years of our marriage. Confronted with the harsh realities of life, I chose to remarry after another two years, even though my new husband did not align with my preferences.

It has been seven years since my second marriage, during which I have also had to contend with a co-wife. Our relationship is often fraught with conflict, and I do not enjoy a harmonious connection with my husband. I am the mother of two sons, and my husband has threatened to evict me from our home if I do not relinquish custody of them. However, my love for my children prevents me from leaving either my home or my husband.

My children are unable to attend school due to the perilous route that involves navigating a steep hill. My husband, who frequently consumes alcohol, often traverses this dangerous path, which raises my concerns about the possibility of an accident. Should he suffer a fatal incident, I fear that society would hold me responsible for his misfortune.

I married at a young age, and my first marriage ended in failure; unfortunately, my second marriage has not proven to be any more successful. I regret not heeding my father's advice to pursue my education, as it might have made my life easier. However, it is too late for such considerations, and I find myself with only regrets.

Savita Chepang: Savita Chepang, a 30-year-old woman, resides in Ward 4 of Ichchhakamana

Rural Municipality. She is the mother of three children, aged 14, 10, and 4 years. Savita entered into marriage at the age of 14 with her partner; however, her marital experience was fraught with difficulties. Her husband struggled with alcoholism, leading to frequent incidents of domestic violence. Despite her efforts to endure the situation, the severity of the violence compelled her to seek a divorce. Currently, her daughter lives with her.

At the age of 18, she ended her marriage. A year later, she entered into a new marriage, but her mother-in-law disapproved of her. For a couple of years, they lived in Chitawan. With her second husband, she has two sons, and they have since returned to their village. Her current husband does not drink alcohol, and they are of similar age. The municipality employs him while she operates a small shop. However, she struggles to keep accurate records of her business. She was in the first grade during her first marriage and had responsibilities for her younger siblings. Her parents preferred her to work rather than pursue her education.

Now, she regrets not continuing her studies, believing that had she done so, she could manage her shop's accounts effectively. Her children attend school and assist her in the shop. Unfortunately, her daughter discontinued her education after the sixth grade, which has caused her distress. Despite her efforts to persuade her daughter to continue her studies, she could not compel her.

Through her experiences, she has understood that marrying at a young age was an unwise decision, as it disrupted her education. She questions what one can achieve in life without an education. Although she regrets her early marriage, she recognizes that she cannot alter her past. Instead, she is determined to guide her children to avoid making the same mistakes and to support their educational pursuits.

Saru Chepang: Saru entered into marriage at the age of 14 to a boy who was 15 years old. By the time she was 16, she had given birth to her first child. Her mother-in-law expressed dissatisfaction with her for not providing any dowry. Additionally, her husband, who struggled with alcoholism, subjected her to physical abuse. As a result, she endured a challenging life as a consequence of her

early marriage.

She went back to her mother's house, leaving her son behind. She was not permitted to take her child with her. The villagers convened to determine the fate of her child, ultimately deciding that the boy would remain with his father. A few months later, my husband remarried a different woman, and I entered into a marriage with a relatively affluent but older man. I had hoped for a happier life. However, it seemed impossible for someone as unfortunate as I. He began to accuse me of being a woman of poor character and subjected me to physical abuse, even during my pregnancy. Both physical and psychological torment have become a constant presence in my life. I have been unable to report this to the authorities due to threats made against me. He has warned that if I contact the police, he would serve only six months in prison and then proceed to kill me upon his release.

Considering that both of us are divorced and share similar challenges, I made the decision to marry. However, life has turned into a nightmare. Who can I hold responsible? This is the result of marrying at a young age. I only completed my education up to the fifth grade. My parents were financially struggling, which prevented me from pursuing further studies, and now I find myself confronting these difficulties.

Conclusion

(a) Factors of Child marriage: The factors contributing to child marriage in Nepal are multifaceted. A report (UNICEF, 2017) indicates that poverty, the diminished status of daughters, and limited educational opportunities are significant influences. Additionally, the caste system and patriarchal societal norms also contribute to this issue. Furthermore, there is a growing trend of adolescents selecting their own partners, with some opting to elope. The focus group discussion highlighted that poverty significantly contributes to child marriage. Financial constraints often lead parents to prioritize work over education, causing children, especially girls, to marry early in hopes of securing resources like food and clothing. Additionally, a lack of awareness about the consequences of

early marriage, such as health risks from early childbirth and limited dowry negotiation opportunities, results in parental indifference towards their children's early marriages.

In summary, poverty, lack of awareness, insufficient education, and the demonstration effect are significant contributors to child marriage. Additionally, the inadequate enforcement of existing laws also plays a role in perpetuating this issue. The same findings were also presented in the Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC) report. According to this report, the underlying factors contributing to child marriage are deeply connected to the systemic inequalities associated with poverty, caste, class, and gender norms. These issues are compounded by discrimination, insufficient parental guidance, and the prevalence of violence and abuse, including sexual abuse within the family. Additionally, the harmful tradition of child marriage, the rising incidence of such practices, and the effectiveness of the legal system in addressing these matters are influenced by various aspects, including the age, education, family occupation of the girls, and the status of the prospective groom (Women's Rehabilitation Center, 2020).

(b) Consequences of Child Marriage: Child marriage disrupts educational attainment, leading to limited employment opportunities and, consequently, poor economic conditions. This situation results in inadequate access to nutritious food and clothing for children and diminished prospects for their future. Such circumstances perpetuate a cycle of poverty. Furthermore, early marriage often leads to early childbirth, which significantly increases the risk of health complications for both the mother and the child. Potential health issues associated with early childbirth include vaginal discharge, ovarian torsion, physical weakness, and in severe cases, maternal mortality. Young mothers may find it exceedingly challenging to care for their children and manage household responsibilities, which can foster disappointment within the home and potentially lead to domestic violence.

The participants of a study (Seta, 2023) concurred that early pregnancies are prevalent and that complications often arise due to the young age of the mothers. A majority of the participants

acknowledged that young brides tend to discontinue their education upon marriage or pregnancy. This situation hindered their independence and diminished their capacity to make informed health-related choices. Furthermore, the practice was viewed as detrimental to mental health, with some individuals expressing concerns that it heightened the risk of experiencing violence.

In summary, the repercussions of marrying at a young age include a high likelihood of educational discontinuation, limited job prospects, increased chances of divorce, entrapment in a cycle of poverty, and heightened risks to women's health. A report concluded that child marriage has resulted in severe consequences, significantly influencing individuals' life paths, with only a few exceptions. The effects can be summarized as interruptions in education for both boys and girls, health issues ranging from general physical health concerns to sexual and reproductive health challenges, early pregnancies, and the involvement of adolescents in household responsibilities and unpaid caregiving. Additionally, many are compelled to take on unskilled, temporary, and low-paying jobs, which heightens the risk of violence against girls from their husbands and in-laws (Women's Rehabilitation Center, 2020). This situation contributes to increased mental stress and, in some instances, may even lead to suicide. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of legal protections regarding marital and spousal relationships, such as marriage registration and citizenship rights, as well as inadequate legal safeguards for dependents, including the lack of birth registration certificates.

Suggestions for Minimization of Child Marriage

Addressing child marriage requires a collective effort from all stakeholders. Local authorities must collaborate with organizations to enforce laws and raise awareness, which is essential for reducing child marriage rates.

Current programs primarily assist those already married young, but it's crucial to target awareness campaigns at girls aged 10 to 18 to delay marriage. Educating them about child marriage, domestic violence, polygamy, and human trafficking can significantly help. Regular advocacy and

inclusion of child marriage education in school curricula are necessary for effective change. Awareness efforts should also involve parents, empowering them to educate their children. Additionally, programs and legal resources must be accessible to all, including those in rural areas.

Poverty levels are the highest in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality compared to other municipalities in Chitawan district. This poverty significantly hinders access to education, leading to a lack of awareness among the population. The absence of education fosters various social issues, such as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of awareness, which are interconnected. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to combat child marriage.

The government of Nepal should officially acknowledge child marriage as a violation of fundamental rights. It is imperative for the government to initiate programs aimed at raising awareness and advocating for solutions to the underlying causes of child marriages. The state should implement targeted initiatives for adolescents that focus on ensuring educational continuity, reducing the school dropout rate among girls, promoting reproductive and sexual health education, and providing skills training to enhance the employability of young people in the current job market.

Legislation should prioritize public awareness, child development, and adolescent sexual and reproductive health care. Special rights for victims of child marriage must be legally recognized, including social rehabilitation measures and protections for married adolescents. Victims should have access to legal remedies for rights violations.

Additionally, the socio-economic rights of married adolescents should be safeguarded through educational and employment programs. Awareness initiatives should be integrated into school curricula and extracurricular activities, including information centers, educational fairs, competitions on child marriage and gender-based violence, street performances, and youth clubs. Advocacy should focus on promoting adolescent rights, reforming child marriage legislation, and fostering collaboration with government bodies, human rights commissions, women's commissions, regional organizations, and international agencies. This cooperative approach will strengthen efforts

to eliminate child marriage in Nepal.

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Authors' Contribution

SW has contributed to conception of the study, design of the study, data collection and final approval of the version of the manuscript. CA contributed to data collection, analysis of data, interpretation of data, and final approval of the version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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