

Research Article

## Socio-cultural Status of Widows: A Case Study of Myanglung Municipality Ward No. 1 and 2 Tehrathum District

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### ABSTRACT

This study highlights the challenges faced by Nepalese widows and the need for greater support and understanding from society. The study was limited to Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2 within 30 widows of major religious group Buddhism and Hinduism. The negative perception of widows in Nepalese society makes it difficult for women, and the death of a husband brings about significant behavior changes in women, with many becoming aggressive and depressed. The study found that a significant percentage of Nepalese women become widows at a young age, with 73% of women marrying in or around their teenage years. Men tend to die sooner than women. The study used snowball sampling to reach the respondents, and the total sample size from different parts of Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2 was 30 respondents from Buddhist and Hindus for formal and informal talks with key informants and focus group discussions to perform qualitative research. The study also found that there is hardly any study and research carried out related to widowhood in the Nepalese context, and there were limited materials related to the socio-cultural status of widows available.

**Keywords:** widows system, social demography, caste, ethnicity, language, ageing, socioeconomic characteristics, gender status

## Introduction

According to the Census Report 2021, the population of Nepal has reached 29,192,480. The 12th National Population and Housing Census 2021 is part of an integrated national statistical system of Nepal and provides the benchmark for population count at national and sub-national levels at regular intervals of ten years (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2021). Out of the total population, women comprise 51.13 percent. However, the Nepalese society is male-dominated, and women are considered as household workers and child bearers (KC, A. & Bajracharya, K. ,2012). Women still remain confined to their traditionally prescribed and socially designed roles, lower status, and subordination to men within the patriarchal socio-cultural, economic, political, and legal framework (Paudel, Y. R., & Acharya, K. (2022). Women are oppressed due to male supremacy, which is based on cultural ideology and sexual hierarchy (Global Health 50/50. ,2022). In patrilineal families, marriage signifies a transfer of women from her natal group to that of her husband. The ceremony of "Kanyadan" where the daughter is handed over to the bridegroom by her father is an indicator of the inequality of status between bride-givers and bride-takers

Global Health 50/50. ,2022). Women are expected to adjust to their in-law's house after marriage and have very little or no say in decision-making (Global Health 50/50., 2022). Once a husband dies, a woman becomes a widow and is associated with misfortune and regarded as inauspicious. Widows are considered as ill women, and the family and society disrespect them (Nepal - World Bank Gender Data Portal., 2021).

Despite some progress on women's rights, work still needs to be done in Nepal to achieve gender equality. For instance, 32.8% of women aged 20-24 years old who were married or in a union before age 18 (Williams Institute - UCLA). Women in Nepal have lesser access to life opportunities and have limited or no

involvement in decision-making on important issues directly affecting their lives (Nepal - Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub. (2011).. One-third of women have no education, and 52% of women are involved in non-paid jobs. Women are less likely than men to have an account (Nepal - World Bank Gender Data Portal. (2021). Therefore, closing these gender data gaps is essential for achieving gender-related SDG commitments in Nepal

## Objectives of the Research

The main objective of the study is to highlight the widow system in two different religious (Hinduism and Buddhist) along with socio-psychological status in response to remarriage.

## Rational of the Study

The Nepalese society is a male-dominated society, where women are confined to traditional roles and experience lower status and subordination to men within the patriarchal socio-cultural, economic, political, and legal framework. This study aims to highlight the general situation of widows in Nepal and assess their socio-psychological status, particularly regarding remarriage. There is a lack of research on widowhood in the Nepalese context, and this study seeks to fill that gap. By understanding the challenges faced by widows, this study can contribute to the development of effective plans and programs to support them. The study area is Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2, and a qualitative research approach is used, including interviews with key informants and focus group discussions. The findings of this study can shed light on the relationship between social norms, values, and the condition of widows, and provide valuable insights for policymakers and researchers working on this issue.

## Methodology

The methodology used in the present study is purposive snowball sampling to reach to the respondents. Interview and observation were taken place during the study period.

### **Selection of the Study Area**

The Myanglung Municipality (Ward No.1 and 2: urban area) is selected for the study. The main purpose of the selection of this area is; it is place where different people from different class, caste, religion and age are found. The variation in rural and town areas reflects the different socio-cultural practices.

### **Research Design**

This study is a descriptive and explorative. Detailed information about subject matter are gathered and described analytically though the number is small. On the other hand, the study also aims to accumulate information of the activities for documentation in relation to socio-cultural status of widowhood in Buddhism and Hinduism. The study is more descriptive rather than statistical analysis.

### **Research Design**

Purposive sampling technique was applied for the study. Snowball sampling was also followed to reach to the respondents. The total sample size was 30 respondents from Buddhist and Hindus. Selection of the sample was taken from different cultural group of different age and caste from different parts of the Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2.

### **Sources of Data**

In this study, mainly two types of data are used as follows:

#### **Primary Source of Data**

The primary data were collected through the interview questionnaire by the study group. The formal and informal talks with key informants and focus group discussions among the respondents were also conducted.

#### **Secondary Source of Data**

The secondary data were obtained from different research reports, published and unpublished articles and books during the process of review of this report.

### **Selection of key informants**

To find out the ritual rules and regulation mentioned in dilemma, religious practices were also conducted with key informants.

### **Selection of the respondents**

The respondents were of people whose religion was either Hindu or Buddhism. It was also considered the caste, ethnicity etc. while taking the interview. Widowed women with children and without children were selected purposively to find out the different socio-cultural status among them. All respondents were from different parts of Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2.

### **Tools for Data Collection**

A set of questionnaires and interview guidelines were used as the main tools. In addition discussions with key informants were held to get in-depth knowledge of the widows' situation. Similarly, the focus group discussions were conducted.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

The prepared questionnaire was pre-tested for reliability and validity. The necessary corrections were made to fulfill mentioned objective. The interviews, taken from respondents, were based on questionnaire.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

The collected data were tabulated under different headings and sub headings. The data collected through various instruments and sources had been analyzed using both descriptive and statistical methods. Since the nature of the study was rather explorative and qualitative, the information has been analyzed by classifying them in different categories in tabular form also.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

This section comprises the information related to the general information such as caste/ethnic, marital life, education, family size and type, daily activities and movement.

### Age of Respondents

Among the respondents, 27 percent of women were of age 40-45, 20 percent were of 55 and above, 13 percent each were from age 45-50 and 50-55, 10 percent were of 30-35 years, 7 percent of women were from age groups 20-25 and 35-40 years and 3 percent from 25-30 age groups.

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age Group**

Age Group	Number	Percent
20-24	2	6.66
25-29	1	3.33
30-34	3	10.00
35-39	2	6.66
40-44	8	26.66
45-49	4	13.33
50-54	4	13.33
55 and above	6	20.00
Total	30	100.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

### Religion of Respondents

The study consisted of 30 respondents of whom 13 are Buddhist and 17 are Hindu. It means 43.3 percent of the total respondents belong to the Buddhism and 56.7 percent in Hinduism.

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Religion**

Religion	Number	Percent
Buddhist	13	43.3
Hindu	17	56.7
Total	30	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

### Caste of Respondents

The Brahmin/Chhetri and Newar constitute the majority (66.6%) of the population. The corresponding percent for Dalit and Tamang/Gurung were 23 and 10 respectively. Ninety (90) percent of respondents were

married in own caste and Ten (10) percent had inter-caste marriage. Eight three (83) percent of respondents had arranged marriage and only seventeen (17) percent had love marriage.

**Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Caste**

Religion	Number	Percent
Bramin/Chhetri	10	33.33
Newar	10	33.33
Dalit	7	23.33
Tamang/Gurung	3	10.00
Total	30	100.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

### Period of Living with Husband of the Respondents

When information was collected related to their married life, it varied. Three percent said that they had spent life together with husbands only for about a year whereas 7 percent lied in between 5-10 years. Ten percent respondents spent 1-4, 25-29 and 30-34 years. Thirteen percent spent 15-20 years. Seventeen percent spent 35 and more years. Maximum number of respondents became widow in between 10-14 year, which was 23 percent.

**Table 4: Period of living with Husband of the Respondents**

Year	Number	Percent
Less than 1	1	3.33
1-4	3	10.00
5-9	2	6.66
10-14	7	23.33
15-19	4	13.33
20-24	5	16.66
25-29	3	10.00
30-34	3	10.00
35 and above	2	6.66
Total	30	100.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

It showed that the children were not well grown up and after the death of husbands; a woman solely became responsible for their children. It also showed that the respondents enjoyed less than ten years of their married life only.

#### Age at Marriage of the Respondent

Seven percent respondents married below 10 years old. Other respondents' married at the age in between 10-15, 15-20, 20-25 and 25-30 and the percentage were 23, 43, 20 and 7 respectively. Seventy-three percent women had married in and around teenage. This can be ultimately interpreted as that the child marriage was prevailed in Nepalese context.

**Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age at Marriage**

Age	Number	Percent
Below 10	2	6.66
10-14	7	23.33
15-19	13	43.33
20-24	6	20.00
25-29	2	6.66
Total	30	100.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

#### Reasons of Husband's Death

Most of the men were died due to the sickness, i.e., 63 percent, 20 percent were died unexpectedly (Without any sickness and accident). Ten percent committed suicide and 7 percent were killed (Due to some personal conflict). The data showed the reasons of death of husbands' even though widows were made responsible for their husbands' death and took as ill omen.

**Table 6: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Husband's Death**

Age	Number	Percent
Killed	2	6.66
Suicide	3	10.00
Sickness	19	63.33
Unexpected	6	20.00
Total	30	100.00

#### Age of Becoming widow

Women in the teenage can't understand the meaning and importance of marriage. Three (3) percent respondents reported that they lost their husbands in teenage (i.e.10-15 year) and 10 percent respondents lost their husbands in the age between 20-25 years. Twenty-eight percent become widow at 35-40 years of age, twenty-three percent and 17 percent became widow at 25-30 and 30-35 years of age. Nineteen percent lost their husbands after 40 years.

The higher number lies in age group 35-40 and 25-30. Fifty-three percent respondents were below 35 years. It showed that the number of young widows is high. Once a husband dies, a woman lives a widowed life until her death. Thirty-three percent respondents were living 1-5 years of widowed lives whereas 13 percent were living 30 and above years. Ten percent were in first year, 7 percent in 11-15 and 21-25 years and 3 percent were in 16-20 years of period.

**Table 7: Percentage of Respondents by Age of Becoming Widow**

Year	Number	Percent
10-14	1	3.33
15-19	-	-
20-24	3	10.00
25-29	7	23.33
30-34	5	16.66
35-39	8	26.66
40-44	1	3.33
45-49	4	13.33
50 and above	1	3.33
Total	30	100.00

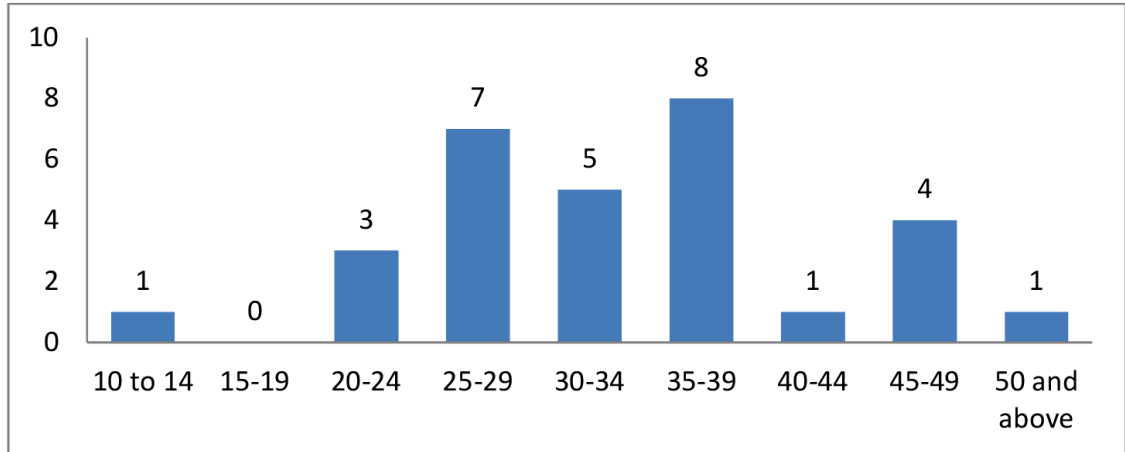


Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents by Age of Becoming Widow

**Number of children**

The following table shows that 30 percent respondents had 2 children, 27 percent had 1 child, 13 percent each had 3 and 4 children, 7 percent had 5 children and 10 percent had no child. Children having two or more than two children would be difficult to fulfill all demands needed.

**Table 8: Percentage of Respondents by Number of Children**

Children	Number	Percent
None	1	3.33
One	-	-
Two	3	10.00
Three	7	23.33
Four	5	16.66
Five	8	26.66
Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

**Education of Respondents**

Forty percent respondents were illiterate and around sixty percent were just literate. Only 20 percent and 13 percent respondents had secondary level and primary level education.

**Table 9: Percentage of Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education**

Children	Number	Percent
Illiterate	12	40.00
Literate	18	60.00
Primary	4	13.33
Secondary	6	20.00
S.E.E and Plus tow	4	13.33
Bachelor Degree	2	6.66
Master Degree	2	6.66
Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

There were only 13.33 percent respondents having SEE and Plus two education. Respondents having Bachelor and Master Degree were of 6.66 percent each. Without good education can merely get good working and earning opportunity and without good opportunities, women can't create a safe environment for children's future.

**Good Memories Spent with Husband**

Majority of the widows had memorable days with their husbands. Those were husband's love and care, helping and sharing, caring of children and roaming with husbands. It shows that all of these memories were missed in their lives with the pyre of their husbands and they were



missing these memories since that day and would be continued till the end of lives. Three percent respondents didn't remember the time because they didn't have such moments in their lives. Seventeen percent respondents said that they didn't have such good memories. During their married lives, they always got husbands' bits and slaps.

**Table 10: Percentage of Distribution of Respondents by memories spent with Husband (Multiple Choice Answers)**

Memories spent with husband	Number	Percent
Loving and Caring	11	36.67
Helping and Sharing	10	33.33
Roaming	4	13.33
Caring of Children	6	20.00
No good memory	5	16.67
Not remembered	1	3.33
Master Degree	2	6.66
Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

### Life without Husband

When asked about the present life, the respondents said that life was full of loneliness, sadness, boring, fearful and dominated by others. They were worried about the future of children because they were soled responsible of household activities. Some of them said that the life was not like life.

**Table 11: Distribution of Respondents by Feeling about Life (Multiple Choice Answers)**

Memories spent with husband	Number	Percent
Not like life	4	13.33
Loneliness	11	36.67
Worried about Child	5	16.67
Sole responsible of HH	6	20.00
Sadness	7	23.33
Boring	4	13.33
Fearness	1	3.33
Dominated by other	2	6.67

### Mental Torture

The forms of torture were using of bad words, forcing to leave home, various accusations, domination and misbehaved children. Most widows were Victims of bad words; some of them were forced to leave home.

**Table 12: Distribution of Respondents by Type of Torture Given (Multiple Choice Answers)**

Types of torture	Number	Percent
Forced to leave home	4	13.33
Used bad words	12	40.00
Accused	3	10.00
Misbehaved children	3	10.00
Loneliness and helpless	4	13.33
Dominated	4	13.33
No mental torture	5	16.67

Source: Field Survey, 2023

They were victims of different accusation. Family members and neighborhood misbehaved the children of widowed women; very few of them told that they were not fell any mental torture.

### Behaviour Changes

The respondents expressed that the death of husband brought some behaviour changes (Both Positive and Negative). Most of them become aggressive and depressed. Some of them avoided talking and stayed alone. At the same time respondents felt increases in self-confidence and matured.

**Table 13: Distribution of Respondents by Behaviour changes Experienced (Multiple Choice Answers)**

Change in Behaviour	Number	Percent
Avoid Talking to others	6	20.00
Stay alone	2	6.67
Aggressive and Depressed	12	40.00
Matured	9	30.00
Increase in self confidence	12	40.00
No change	4	13.33

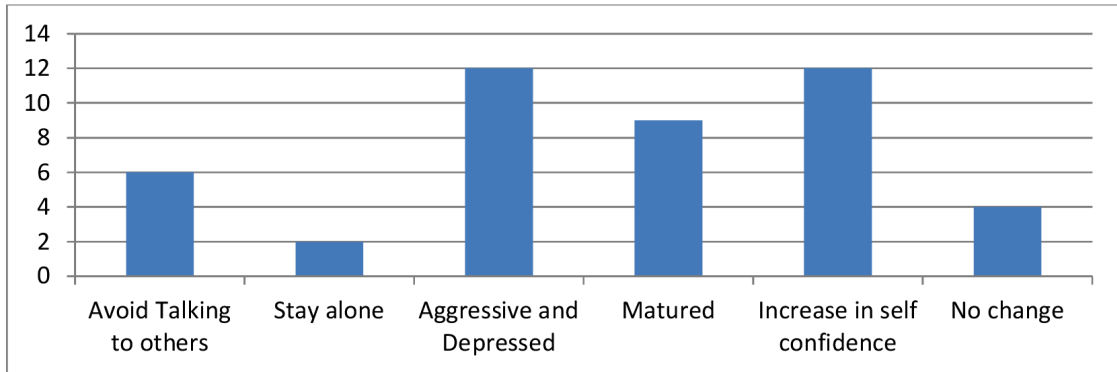


Figure 2: Respondents by Behaviour changes Experienced

### Types of Counseling

At the time of husband's death, many people provided counseling. Forty Percent said that the counseling was done in a traditional way that encouraged following widow rituals.

Table 14: Distribution of Respondents by Types of Counseling Provided

Types of Counseling	Number	Percent
Traditional	12	40.00
Empowering	11	36.66
Supportive	3	10.00
No counseling	4	13.33
Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Around 37 percent got counseling in empowering way which encouraged bringing changes in their life and motivated to live normal human life. Ten percent were counseled in a supportive way. But 13 percent respondents never got any kind of counseling.

### Counselors

Natal family members mainly made the Counseling. They were of course mother, sister and other members. In laws, neighbours and other outsiders also provided advice and suggestions to cope with the situation. But the respondents felt very hard to stop themselves and cried at the time of counseling. They could control and stay cool if they were alone.

Table 15: Distribution of Respondents by Types of Counselors (Multiple Choice Answers)

Types of Counselor	Number	Percent
Neighbors	9	30.00
Natal	15	50.00
In laws	7	23.33
Relatives	4	13.33
Self	2	6.67
Total	30	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

### Institutions Forcing to Follow Widow Rules

The contemporary widows were following the rules, which were made in ancestral time and obeyed as widow rules. They were doing so because the society taught and forced to do so.

Table 16: Distribution of Respondents by Institutions forcing to follow widow rules (Multiple Choice Answers)

Institution	Number	Percent
Family	13	43.33
Society	17	56.67
Religion	18	60.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Family was the other institute that forced to follow the line-by-line rules and regulation. It was also following in the name of religion. So,



all of the institutes and the members of the institutes should be prepared first to eradicate the widow-system.

### Perception towards Respondents after Being Widow

The social structure and the people's perception towards widows were still very negative. Women not only lived as widow of death husbands, but also tolerated negative perception.

**Table 17: Distribution of Respondents by perception towards respondents after being widows (Multiple Choice Answers)**

Perception	Number	Percent
Perceive me as a widow	4	13.33
Ill omen	5	16.67
Alone/Helpless	5	16.67
Dominated	12	40.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Mainly the widowed women were perceived as ill women and dominated may be because they were alone and helpless. They were always widow rather than women. This torture needs to keep out to make humanitarian society to live for widowed women.

Living as widow was not an easy task. It was very difficult in Hindu Society because of the negative perception, which was already mentioned in above whereas such perception was not found in Tibeto-Burman society. If we tried to find out their feeling being excluded as widow, they were hurt, tensed and some of they felt bad and uneasy to cope the situation. The social Values always forced to prove them alone, misfortune and they were always taught to hide themselves.

#### 3.18 Perception towards Re-marriage

Perception towards widow's re-marriage is the one of the concern of the study. All of

the respondents were not ready for second marriage. They were planning to live their remaining lives with and for their children. Those who didn't have child were also not ready for second marriage. They wanted to live single life doing something so as to survive them.

Among the respondents, 83 percent (table not shown) said that a widowed woman could marry but they put some options. One-third of the respondents said that the widow remarriage was not a problem if they didn't have child. Seventeen percent said that the marriage would be good if the man (who was going to marry a widowed woman) was good and 13 percent said if the women were young, they might remarry. Seventeen percent were against the widow remarriage.

The above data showed that widowed women were for the widow remarriage but they were not prepared to step up by themselves. Without initiation taken by widows themselves, such movement could never be possible.

#### Free in Mobility

Seventy percent women were free to come out from their households and 30 percent women (Table not shown) were confined in the household premises. It was because of being sole responsible for household management.

#### Involvement in Any Organization

Due to the less participation in different activities, the widowed women were unable to coordinate different organization. Only 43 percent respondents (table not shown) were involved in different organization. The above figure showed that 57 percent need more exposure and group support to overcome the situation.

### **Future plan**

Sixty percent respondents (Table not shown) had future plan of living with and for children. Twenty three percent said that they had planned to earn more and 17 percent said that they would continue life as usually.

### **Felling of Security**

Majority of the respondents (67%) felt secured whereas 33 percent were not feeling secured (table not shown). They were not secured by outsiders and relatives. Some of them were not secured having daughters only but not son.

### **Changing Society**

The society is changing in th is contrast machine and man are fusing resulting into decentralize society 5.0, where people to people connection would be diminishing in response to that of people to machine connection. Development and Management could be presented in decentralized data base of web3.0 using block chain technology. There is no other means of expressing emotions in the world that can be compared to mandalas, rather its use in our festivals, rituals, behavior, rituals or many activities from birth to death carries not only our emotions but also resolutions and visions, that is why mandalas are an essential use in education that can be also use in our social context. It is yet to analyses the possible social consequences of widows under society 5.0 (Bhagat, C., Mishra, A.K., & Aithal, P.S., 2022; Mishra, Sangeeta., 1997; A.K. Mishra, Nepal Ananda, P.S. Aithal, 2022; Ananda, N., Kobayashi, S., Mishra, A. K., & Aithal, P. S., 2023).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study found that a significant percentage of Nepalese women become widows at a young age, with 43% losing their husbands within 1-15 years of marriage. This places a heavy burden on women, who are left

to raise their children alone. Child marriage is also prevalent in Nepal, with 73% of women marrying in or around their teenage years. Men tend to die sooner than women, possibly due to bad habits and poor health, with 63% of men dying due to sickness. The negative perception of widows in Nepalese society makes it difficult for women to live as widows, with 73% living separately and enduring various forms of torture. The death of a husband brings about significant behavior changes in women, with many becoming aggressive and depressed. Counseling is provided to women after the death of their husbands, but it is often done in a traditional way that encourages following widow rituals. Overall, the study highlights the challenges faced by Nepalese widows and the need for greater support and understanding from society.

### **Recommendations**

It is realized that the socio-cultural factors are playing vital role in surviving widowhood. It's a time to discourage the negative practices. Based on the findings of this study, following recommendations are made. It is believed that these recommendations will help to discourage such negative practices.

- The widowed women were making responsible for themselves for their husband's death. It shows that women need to take out the blames. Which they were taking in their own side and needs to reach to the reality. They should realize that every human is mortal and fortune and misfortune don't work as reason for life and death of anyone.
- The child marriage should be discouraged.
- Once a husband died, a woman becomes alone. They need to involve in income generating activities to fulfill household demands.

- The education should be free for the children of widows and opportunities should be given to them first.
- Women should be empowered.
- Widows of Hindu and Newar Buddhist are forced to follow many rules and regulations, which are not in favor of them. So, such rules and regulations should be discouraged and everyone should be prepared for it.
- The negative practices in different cultures should be taken out and the positive practices should be highlighted.
- The parents and in-laws need to be empowered to make the step for widow's remarriage. The negative practices in the name of widows are not good for anyone.
- It is men who should be sensitized to the problems of the widow.
- The Government and legal policies have to change to suit (concerning the empowerment of widows). The Government and policy makers should be sensitized.
- Different studies should be done with different aspects to analyze the in-depth situation and condition of the widow women.

### Limitation of the Study

Limitations of the study are as follows:

- The study was limited to Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2 within 30 widows of major religious group Buddhism and Hinduism, so the result/outcome could not be generalized at the national level.
- The in-laws and other relatives of widows were present during the interview, which may have prevented the widows from speaking out freely.
- There is hardly any study and research carried out related to widowhood in the Nepalese context, and there were limited

materials related to the socio-cultural status of widows available.

- The study is an explorative type of study to assess the general situation of widows of Myanglung Municipality Ward No.1 and 2, and the number of participants is small.
- The study did not cover widows from other religious groups or regions in Nepal.

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