

## **Gender Differences at Household Level in Pokhara Metropolitan, Kaski**

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### **Abstract**

Nepalese society is now becoming more egalitarian for men and women, but various forms of gender differences and inequalities still exist, hindering women to properly exercise their rights and freedoms to live a full and happy life. Many such studies were conducted in the past in Nepal, however progress on the matter remains to be understood as various facets of globalization and national level efforts have been influencing existing gender-based differences in the society. This study aims to explore the gender differences in household decision-making in an urban area of Nepal, examining the roles of male and female in decision making of various household issues. Employing a mixed-methods approach, it has triangulated quantitative data gathered through structured questionnaires with qualitative insights obtained from few case studies. The sample consists of 380 households with either male or female heads, and their respective partners or eldest male members from Pokhara-5 along with two qualitative case studies.

It was found men still have greater decision-making power or freedom regarding aspects like working outside home, house and land ownership, and performing daily household activities like caring children or elderly, washing, cooking, and cleaning along with in financial decision making, except in government job. Women have unequal share of responsibilities to perform those activities. To promote gender equality at household level, existing policy provisions need to be continued with increased commitment from all stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Household decision making, gender differences, gender inequality, gender power relations,

### **Introduction**

As families are the basic units of a society, gender-based differences are most significantly expressed in a household setting. Society has been constructed in a way that traditional and cultural norms shape gender roles in societies, and these are expressed in households whereby men and women are not given equal roles to play in the household (Wood, 2019). Traditionally, women were assigned primary responsibility for household chores, while men went to work to take care of the family (Kalabamu, 2005; Stier &

Mandel, 2009). Understanding the process of decision-making within the household is crucial as it gives insight into the different types of inequalities taking place within households. Analyzing decision-making within-household is mostly discussed by economists (Himmelweit et al., 2013). For example, a woman that is allowed to make decisions is more likely to go to school or work outside the home if she wishes so. Then, contributing to the household income makes women more able to participate in decision-making processes (Bernasek &

Bajtelsmit, 2002; Malhotra & Mather, 1997). Evidence also suggests that changes in intra-household decision-making power favoring women are an important source of improvements in child welfare, showing that it is the bargaining power and not necessarily the economic contribution of the woman what drives this relationship (Park, 2011).

Such differences are seen everywhere in the world. In a study in Tanzania, researchers mentioned that despite attempts from the government to educate both men and women on the topic, gender authority and roles at the household in the country remain unchanged (Lusasi & Waseba, 2020). Similarly, many decisions made at household level influence the welfare of the individual living in the household as well as their communities. A study from Nepal found out that women were involved more in household management and family well-being related activities than men (Devkota, Rauniyar, & Parker, 1999). In patriarchal society women do not have power for making decision about one's private concern and those of own intimates. Another study from Nepal found that Nepalese women are behind men in many areas, such as educational attainment, participation in decision making and health service utilization (Adhikari, 2011). Given fact that Nepalese society is heavily derived from the Hindu system of beliefs emphasizing patrilineal descent and a patrilocal residence system, in several cases people restrain themselves from implementing certain aspects of these laws and don't accept equal role, status and right for women (Singh & Gupta, 2013), though the Constitution of Nepal 2015 preserves equal rights for men and women and guaranteed some more progressive rights like rights to lineage and equal ancestral property rights to women. In the historical scenario of Nepal gender roles, spaces and stereotypes

of the 'public' male breadwinner (provider) and 'private' female care-giver are espoused even under changing situations. This is due to recognition of women's household work as unpaid work and even if a woman works outside home, she has to offer her labor in the low salaried jobs under extreme economic stress and poverty (Rustagi, 2016).

The role played by women in the care sector, predominantly their reproductive work, bearing, rearing, nurturing children and household maintenance are activities that fall outside the national accounting systems. (Rustagi, 2016). Another study found that men have higher decision-making power than women in Nepalese households and identified cultural and social factors that contribute to gender differences in decision-making power (Dhakal, 2016). In this context, Acharya and Bennett many years ago concluded that economic factor affects role in decision making both directly and indirectly. They also stated that if a woman has higher economic participation and consequently greater decision making power (Acharya & Bennett, 1983). In recent period, gender and development practitioners and social movement activists are looking at disparities that exist in male and female rights, responsibilities, access to and control over resources and voice in the household (UNICEF 2023).

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Nepal falls in 96th rank out of 146 countries, 30.8 percent out of 100 percent is needed to achieve gender parity (World Economic Forum, 2022). The Constitution of Nepal 2015 and the Fifteenth Plan of Nepal (2019/20-2023/2024) highlighted Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) as a priority agenda. Also, Shrestha investigated women's decision-making power in household resource allocation in Nepal and found that women have limited decision-making power in this area due to

cultural and social factors (Shrestha, 2019).

### **Data and Methods**

This study has adopted a mixed research method and followed stratified random sampling after purposively determining ward number 5 of Pokhara Metropolitan City as the sampling site. This particular ward was selected as it is a mix of both residential and business area and is old settlement with migrant people from many nearby districts, thus having both traditional and modern gender norms. According to Ward Profile, the total number of households was 5973. A sample size of 190 was determined at 7% margin of error and 5% level of significance. There were thirty streets or areas in the Ward, each of them considered as a strata. So, out of those thirty streets, five streets named Dharmastali Marg, Firke Pool, Lovely Dada, Malepatan and Shivalya Marg were chosen purposively. To address the research questions, two samples from each household were collected consisting one male and one female member. If the household head was male, wife of that male or eldest female in that family and vice versa was chosen. The minimum age of the respondent was 18 years.

As a mixed method study based on primary data, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address the research questions. A semi-structured questionnaire with face-to-face interview technique was used for quantitative data, which was supplemented by two case studies focusing on the qualitative aspects. To ensure validity, the selected questionnaire was extracted from other scholars who studied the similar area and senior professors were consulted. For reliability, pretesting of the questionnaire was conducted to twenty households of Siddhartha Chock area of another ward, i.e. Ward Number 4, and necessary

corrections were made. Verbal consent from respondents and participants before commencing interview was taken.

### **Results**

#### **Socio-Demographic Features of the Respondents**

Under the socio-demographic features of respondents, ethnicity, marital status, education, religion, family structure, household head, income and related occupation has been described. Table 1 shows that Brahmin is the predominant caste (77.1 %) and almost all of the respondents were married (89.2%). In case of education status, largest group of respondents had SLC education (35.3%) followed by bachelors and intermediate level education. Nearly 96 percent respondents follow Hinduism and more than two third respondents were in nuclear family (67.9). One feature of gender differences is household head, for which 71.8 percent males were reported as household head, and the ratio of female household head was 22.1 percent. A few respondents (6.1%) preferred to report 'both' couples as the household head. Almost all (90.8%) respondents have at least one child. Regarding income earning, 73.7 percent respondents mentioned themselves as involved in some type of income generating activities, which is quite above the average. As men and women respondents are 50-50 percent, it shows at least 23.7 percent women are earning from some type of activities. Out of that 73.7 percent earners, majority (52.5%) had some kind of business, followed by private sector service (24.3%). Meanwhile, nearly 8 percent respondents were getting income from agriculture sector.

**Table 1***Socio-demographic Features of the Respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity	Brahmin	293	77.1
	Chhetri	22	5.8
	Aadibasi/Janjati	45	11.8
	Dalit	4	1.1
	Madeshi	8	2.1
	Muslim	8	2.1
Marital Status	Married	339	89.2
	Unmarried	11	2.9
	Divorced	3	0.8
	Widowed	27	7.1
Education	Illiterate	26	6.8
	Literate	11	2.9
	Primary level	11	2.9
	Secondary	30	7.9
	SLC	134	35.3
	Intermediate	65	17.1
	Bachelors	68	17.9
	Masters	35	9.2
Religion	Hindu	364	95.8
	Buddhist	8	2.1
	Muslim	8	2.1
Family Structure	Nuclear	258	67.9
	Joint	82	21.6
	Extended	40	10.5
Household Head	Male	273	71.8
	Female	84	22.1
	Both	23	6.1
Have child	Yes	345	90.8
	No	35	9.2
Income	Yes	280	73.7
	No	100	26.3
Major Occupation	Agriculture/Livestock	22	7.9
	Service Private	68	24.3
	Government Service	19	6.8
	Business	147	52.5
	Wage Earnings	21	7.5
	Others	3	1.1

### Gender wise Household Decision Making

Table 2 consists of four types of household decisions and the role of male and female in each decision with 'both' category if the respondents reported that they made the decision jointly with their spouse or male family member. For decision for medical treatment, 57.4 percent male reported that they decide where to bring their family members for any kind of treatment, and joint decision's ratio was 28.2 percent. Only 14.5 female reported that they made such decisions by themselves. As Nepali society is culturally vibrant, decision to either attend or organize social event or ceremony is another measures of gender differences within household setting. So, for this, nearly half of the male (46.3%) reported they themselves made such decision, whereas female's such ratio was mere half of that of the male (24.2%). However, joint decision from both remains significant (29.5%). Two other household decisions are related to children. In case of decision to decide number of children to have, most of the respondents reported that they took such decisions jointly with their spouse (83.9%), and on selecting the school of children, it was known that mostly male in the household decide the school to admit their children (59.6%).

Table 2

#### *Gender wise Household Decision Making*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Decision for medical treatment	Male	218	57.4
	Female	55	14.5
	Both	107	28.2
Decision to attend/organize any social ceremonies	Male	176	46.3
	Female	92	24.2
	Both	112	29.5

Decision to determine number of Children to give birth	Male	49	13.6
	Female	9	2.5
	Both	302	83.9
Decision on selecting school for children	Male	215	59.7
	Female	56	15.6
	Both	89	24.7

#### Participant 1: Male Participant, 45 years old, Shivalya Marg

"I am a business man and my wife is also a business woman. I don't hold a higher academic status but my wife do have. As a businessman, I am very busy, so my wife also look after our business. But when it comes to decision making, I make all the household decisions, but I don't go and buy any product. It is all done by my wife. We until now don't have any children. I think decision regarding children should be made by both. Coming to the household chores, it's all done by my wife as we do not have any helper. In every household, status does not matter as long as there is respect for each other."

#### Participant 2: Female Participant, 40 years old, Darmasthali

"I am a business woman having a small business of this grocery shop. Yes I am married. I am living with my second husband and three children. I left my first husband as he used to torture me a lot. I never had support when we were together. Everything I did for him was worthless. Before this business I used to work in a bank as a support staff. He used to suspect every activity of mine while I used to go for work. He did not use to give a penny to us. One day my previous husband told us to

leave the house, I was left with nothing but with three children. He did not give even a single rupees for his children and myself. We were forced to move out of his house because of his unusual behavior. I could not inherit the home and any property since it was not in my name. All the money and saving which I kept for my children was taken by my husband. We were homeless. I had to work from zero level and had faced different difficulties. Then, I got married to my current husband. Now I am happy and have my own decision regarding my living and I believe should be given equal opportunities to achieve gender equality”.

In this way we can see that qualitative findings were also in consistency with the quantitative ones. The first qualitative case mentioned above shows men often practice dominance in household decision making even though his wife is highly educated than himself. Instead of having higher level of education, she has to rely on her husband. It shows getting more education than one's husband do not always get the better economic opportunities and decision making freedom. Instead, in most cases, higher educational attainment does not relieve them of their domestic responsibilities in the home. In this case, husband do not contribute to carrying out various tasks within the household because he believes it is not his duty as he is busy in business. This makes it difficult for women to juggle all the household chores. Similarly, another case is related to

a 40-year-old woman, who got remarried after abandoned by her first husband with their three children without any alimony. She had faced physical as well as mental torture from her first husband, especially for her job outside home. She was not able to exercise the property inheritance right guaranteed by the current legal system of Nepal. Though, her life now normalized, this case shows women's vulnerable position in the Nepali society.

### **Gender Differences in Selected Socio-Economic Areas**

Gender differences are often expressed in various familial level socio-economic areas. A few significant areas in this context like education, working outside home, occupation, and house and land ownership have been considered to observe gender differences at household level. In case of education, women's educational status is more concentrated towards the lower level education, up to the SLC level, whereas male's education outnumbered that of women at higher level, particularly from intermediate level. Moreover, out of total illiterate respondents, only 7.7 percent were male and all the remaining 92.3 percent were female. However, though gap exists in educational attainment, such gap is not very big as there seem low differences between graduate and postgraduate level education from men and women. It shows our society is getting towards more gender equal one in educational attainment.

**Table 3:***Gender Differences in Selected Socio-Economic Areas*

Variable	Category	Gender		Total (%)
		Male (%)	Female (%)	
Education	Illiterate	2(7.7)	24(92.3)	26(6.8)
	Literate	0	11(100)	11(2.9)
	Primary level	3(27.3)	8(72.4)	11(2.9)
	Secondary level	14(46.7)	16(53.3)	30(7.9)
	SLC	63(47)	71(53)	134(35.3)
	Intermediate	55(84.6) 1	0(15.4)	65(17.1)
	Graduate	35(51.5)	33(48.5)	68(17.9)
	Masters	20(57.1)	15(42.9)	35(9.2)
Work outside home	Yes	174(62.1)	106(37.9)	280(73.7)
	No	16(16)	84(84)	100(26.3)
Occupation	Agriculture/Livestock	11(50)	11(50)	22(7.9)
	Job Private	50(73.5)	18(26.5)	68(24.3)
	Job Government	6(31.6)	13(68.4)	19(6.8)
	Business	95(64.6)	52(35.4)	147(52.5)
	Wage Earnings	10(47.6)	11(52.4)	21(7.5)
	Others	2(66.7)	1(33.3)	3(1.1)
House Ownership	Yes	117(71.8)	46(28.2)	163(42.9)
	No	73(33.6)	144(66.4)	217(57.1)
land Ownership	Yes	132(55)	108(45)	240(63.2)
	No	58(41.4)	82(58.6)	140(36.8)

*Source: Field Survey (2023)*



Likewise, women often face socio-cultural as well as practical hurdles to work outside home in Nepali society. Out of the respondents who were working outside home, majority were men (62.1%) and the respondents who were not working outside home, overwhelming majority were women (84%). Furthermore, the occupational status suggested that both men and women are equally engaged in agriculture, but in case of private and government job, stark difference has been observed. Out of respondents who were engaged in private job, men's ratio nearly three fourth, whereas women's ration is one fourth, and in case of government job, which is considered prestigious in Nepali society, women's ratio is about two third (68.4%) , whereas male are nearly one third (31.6%). Business was the occupation where highest number of respondents were engaged in (52.5%), where men's engagement was 64.6 percent and women's was 35.4 percent. Regarding house and land ownership, land ownership seems more equal (55 percent men, 45 percent women) than house ownership (71.8 percent men, 28.2 percent women).

### **Gender Differences in Daily Household Activities**

The household activities performed by men and women often have typical patterns reflecting gender differences within household setting. To understand this matter, men and women's engagement in household activities like caring child and disable members, cooking, cleaning and washing activities were taken into account, which is shown in Table 4. In case of caring children and disable members, women's responses are more towards all time and mostly, whereas men's responses are more towards sometimes and never, which shows that women primarily performs this task. Similarly, for cooking activity, women's have much greater responses towards all

time and mostly responses, whereas men's responses are more towards sometimes and never. Likewise, for house cleaning activity, women's far greater responses are towards all time and mostly, whereas men's responses are more in sometime and never category. Lastly, in case of washing clothes and dishes, women's responses are towards all time and mostly, and men's responses are towards sometimes and never. So, for those five types of daily household activities, women have far higher level of engagement than men's, from which we can conclude that there exists gender difference, with women having overburden, in the performance of daily household activities.



Table 4  
*Gender Differences in Selected Socio-Economic Areas*

Variable	Category	Gender		Total (%)
		Male(n=190)	Female(n=190)	
Care children and disable member	All time	16(24.2)	50(75.8)	66(17.4)
	Mostly	58(46)	68(54)	126(33.2)
	Sometimes	86(59.3)	59(40.7)	145(38.2)
	Never	30(69.8)	13(30.2)	43(11.3)
Cook for family	All time	12(13.3)	78(86.7)	90(23.7)
	Mostly	21(28.8)	52(71.2)	73(19.2)
	Sometimes	126(76.8)	52(29.2)	178(46.8)
	Never	31(79.5)	8(20.5)	39(10.3)
Cleaning the house	All time	0(0)	34(100)	34(8.9)
	Mostly	47(39.2)	3(60.8)	120(31.6)
	Sometimes	66(54.5)	55(45.5)	121(31.8)
	Never	77(73.3)	28(26.7)	105(27.6)
Wash clothes	All time	2(5.9)	32(94.1)	34(8.9)
	Mostly	38(34.5)	72(65.5)	110(28.9)
	Sometimes	72(57.6)	53(42.4)	125(32.9)
	Never	78(70.3)	33(29.7)	111(29.2)
Wash dishes	All time	0(0)	49(100)	49(12.9)
	Mostly	36(47.4)	40(52.6)	76(20.0)
	Sometimes	65(51.2)	62(48.8)	127(33.4)
	Never	89(69.5)	39(30.5)	128(33.7)

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

### Association between gender and income related variables

Under this section chi-square test has been observed between differences in gender and income related variables, which is shown in the Table 5.

Table 5

*Association between gender and income related variables*

VariableCategory		Gender		Total (%)	p-value
		Male (%)	Female (%)		
Total authority to mobilize personal income					
income	Yes	166(63.4)	96(36.6)	262(68.9)	0.000
	No	24(20.3)	94(79.7)	118(31.1)	
Know the total income of the family					
family	Yes	116(55)	95(45)	211(55.5)	0.039
	No	74(43.8)	95(56.2)	169(44.5)	
Personnel saving					
saving	Yes	159(52.0)	147(48)	306(80.5)	0.120
	No	31(41.9)	43(58.1)	74(19.5)	
Buy food products by own decision					
own decision	Yes	144(46.5)	166(53.5)	310(81.6)	0.004

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Out of total respondent, 68.9 percent have total authority to mobilize their income, among them more than 60 percent male and less than 40 percent female have the authority to mobilize their income. On the other hand, 31.1 percent don't have authority to mobilize their income, among them majority of them were female by 79.7 percent. Similarly, 55.5 percent of total respondent know the total income of the family, among them 45 percent were women. Likewise, for the personnel saving, majority of them have saving with 80.5 percent out of which more than 50 percent of saving was done by male. Further less than 20 percent don't have any personnel saving, among them nearly 60 percent were women. The p-value shows that gender or being male or female is associated with total authority to mobilize personal income, knowledge towards total income of the family, and authority to buy food products by personal decisions, as they are less than the level of significance value ( $p < 0.05$ ). It suggests

male have higher authority than female in those income related household decision making cases, reflecting gender the existence of gender differences.

### Discussion

This study has shown the existing gender differences in the household decision making in a growing city of Nepal. Though Nepali society is becoming more egalitarian, still many forms of gender differences exist, reflecting women's subordinate position within household settings. In case of the role each gender plays in household decision making, men remain the primary decision maker, and in many cases joint decision making also exists. These results are aligned with some other studies as well. Many studies like Upreti (2023), Khanal (2019), and Devkota et al. (1999) found similar household decision making pattern have less significant roles of women in Nepal. However, as this study finds existing gender differences at household decision making, it does not align with some other studies. For example, Acharya (2024) reported comparatively equal gender role in household decision making in a study conducted in Kavre district. Likewise, in case of household energy decision making, Shrestha et al. (2020) found women's active participation in such decisions. A few studies concluded in similar way cited men's migration as the reason behind increased role of women in household decision making rather than society growing more gender equal (Rajkarnikar, 2020). This study stresses need of continued efforts towards the implementation of gender equality and women empowerment related policy and programmatic interventions in Nepalese society.

### Conclusion

This study has explored the gender differences in household decision making,

specifically the role of male and female in such decisions. It has applied a mixed research method and followed stratified random sampling after purposively determining ward number 5 of Pokhara Metropolitan City as the sampling site. Though confined within a ward, the lowest administrative units in Nepal's governance system, of a metropolitan city, and essentially based on quantitative data, findings showed there exists gender-based differences in the roles of male and female in household decision making in many household decisions including the financial ones. Household level decisions like heading the household, decision related to medical treatment, social events, etc are normally male dominated. Qualitative findings were also in consistency with the quantitative ones. However, in case of planning a baby, joint decision is nearly universal with very negligible solo role of women. Similarly, women education is comparatively concentrated towards lower or middle level, however, men's education is concentrated towards higher or university level. One issue outperformed by women is having government job, which is prestigious in Nepali society. Men have greater decision-making power or freedom regarding aspects like working outside home, house and land ownership, and performing daily household activities like caring children or elderly, washing, cooking, and cleaning. Women have unequal share of responsibilities to perform those activities. Likewise, financial decision making has also similar pattern with men exercising more power than women.

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