Domestic Violence and Community Safety in Nepal: Evidence from the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV

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Abstract

Domestic violence refers to physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse perpetrated by intimate partners or family members within the household setting. It represents a critical violation of human rights with severe health and social consequences. The problem of domestic violence remains essential to the field of health and social justice in Nepal; however, extensive empirical data covering the prevalence and features of domestic violence is limited. This paper studies the trends of domestic violence and perceptions towards community safety using a national sample from the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022-23), a nationally representative survey of 9,600 households across all seven provinces. The analysis employs bivariate analysis to examine initial associations between variables, followed by multivariate logistic regression models to control for confounding factors while focusing on the social, economic and safety status of households to correlate them with the prevalence of violence within modern Nepalese society. Although legal frameworks have changed considerably, implementation difficulties and issues with cultural acceptance continue to undermine violence prevention efforts. The multivariate analysis revealed that household poverty, lower educational attainment of women, rural residence and traditional gender attitudes were significant predictors of domestic violence prevalence, even after controlling for demographic variables. The findings indicate that economic empowerment programs, educational initiatives targeting gender equality and community-based interventions addressing cultural norms show promise for violence reduction. This discussion provides necessary evidence for designing targeted social work interventions and policy frameworks within the dynamic social environment that characterizes Nepal.

Keywords *domestic violence, community safety, violence prevention, social work*

Introduction

Domestic violence encompasses a range of abusive behaviors, including physical assault, sexual coercion, emotional manipulation and psychological intimidation. Millions experience violence not from the strangers, but from those they trust must. This multifaceted form of violence represents a fundamental violation of human rights that transcends social, economic and cultural boundaries, resulting in severe physical, psychological and social consequences for survivors and their communities.

The ongoing problem of domestic violence in Nepal demonstrates the general contradiction between traditional social order and shifting gender norms in South Asian societies (Adhikari et al., 2014). Although there are constitutional provisions regarding equality, as well as legislative developments, domestic violence in the home still impacts people within every sector, region and income level (Ministry of Health and Population, 2017). Understanding these patterns requires examining how cultural, economic and structural conditions shape violence, using comprehensive bivariate and multivariate analyses (Atteraya et al., 2015).

Contemporary understanding of domestic violence draws upon the ecological model, first formulated by Bronfenbrenner and later adapted for violence studies. This provides a comprehensive framework for examining the interaction between individual, relationship, community and societal factors that influence the risk of experiencing violence (Heise, 1998). This model is particularly applicable in Nepal, where risk environments involve complex interactions between traditional social systems, economic pressures and changing gender roles. Feminist theory emphasizes the relationship between patriarchal social systems and gender inequality in perpetuating domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979), while social learning theory explains how patterns of violence are transmitted across generations and communities (Bandura, 1977).

The factors contributing to domestic violence in Nepal reflect the unique position of this country amid rapid social change (Lamichhane et al., 2011). Shifts in the perpetration and

reporting of violence have been fostered by the shift towards a federal republic, widespread urbanization, large labor migration and changes in family composition that have produced new patterns of violence (Paudel, 2021). Such alterations occur within a community where classic gender power structures remain deeply rooted, provoking tensions that can manifest in various types of family conflict (Ghimire et al., 2013). Research across South Asian countries reveals both similarities and significant variations in violence patterns, consistently demonstrating that patriarchal family structures, economic dependence and inadequate support services create environments where domestic violence persists (Kalokhe et al., 2017).

Recent legal and constitutional reforms in Nepal have created new avenues for addressing domestic violence, though implementation remains challenging (Paudel, 2021). The 2015 Constitution ensures equality and prohibits discrimination, while the Domestic Violence Crime and Punishment Act of 2009, amended in 2019, establishes a legal framework for prevention and response (Government of Nepal, 2019). Nevertheless, recent studies indicate a significant gap between law and practice, particularly in rural areas where traditional dispute resolution mechanisms often supersede formal law (Ghimire et al., 2013). Cultural factors continue to influence both violence patterns and reporting practices, with the concept of *ghar-ghar ko kura* (household matters) reinforcing beliefs that family affairs should remain private, reducing help-seeking behavior among women experiencing violence (Atteraya et al., 2015).

The Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (National Statistics Office, 2023) provides the most recent country-wide data on household conditions in Nepal (National Statistics Office, 2023). The survey was conducted from June 2022 to 2023. It provides unique information on the everyday reality of Nepali families and the issues people face, including safety and violence. The inclusion of specific modules on security and violence represents a major step in generating national data that can inform future policy pursuits and tailored interventions through systematic bivariate correlation analysis and multivariate regression modelling (National Statistics Office, 2023). Community security encompasses not only direct reports of violence but also broader issues of safety, trust and social cohesion

(Sampson et al., 1997).

This study examines how different factors--such as demographics, economic, geographic location and social influence the violence and social security. This study employs the advance statistical techniques to analyze relationships between violence and social security. Preliminary bivariate analyses reveal significant associations between socioeconomic status and violence prevalence, while multivariate modeling demonstrates that educational attainment, economic empowerment and geographic location remain significant predictors of domestic violence even after controlling for demographic variables. These findings indicate that comprehensive interventions addressing economic inequality, educational access and cultural norm transformation are essential for violence prevention. The results have significant implications for social workers, policymakers and community organizations working to prevent violence and enhance community safety through evidence-based and culturally appropriate interventions (Bhandari et al., 2022).

Methodology

This study employs a cross-sectional analytical design using data from the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (NLSS-IV), conducted by the National Statistics Office from June 2022 to June 2023. The survey encompassed 9,600 households across all 77 districts and multiple ecological zones, representing approximately 46,870 individuals. Of these 30,899 individuals were aged 10 years and above (National Statistics Office, 2023). The NLSS-IV represents a high-quality dataset employing a nationally representative multi-stage stratified sampling design that ensures statistical validity across Nepal's diverse geographic and demographic landscape. The survey maintains rigorous quality control measures through standardized training of enumerators, pilot testing of instruments and systematic data validation procedures, achieving exceptional coverage with a response rate exceeding 95%, minimizing potential selection bias that could compromise findings.

The security module (Section 18) of the NLSS-IV was administered to household members aged 10 years and above, incorporating standardized measures of violence

and safety assessment. Violence experiences were categorized into three: First physical violence includes attacks, robbery and physical harm. Second psychological violence that encompassing threats, intimidation and emotional abuse. Third sexual violence assessed through culturally appropriate questions designed to respect local sensitivities while maintaining measurement validity. All violence types were evaluated for the 12 months preceding the survey to ensure temporal consistency and reduce recall bias. Community safety perceptions were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from completely safe to completely unsafe, with questions addressing safety when walking alone in the neighborhood during day and night hours and concerns about theft, property crime and other security issues affecting daily life.

The analysis incorporated various demographic and socioeconomic factors including age (categorized into meaningful life-stage groups), education level (measured according to Nepal's formal education system classifications), geographic variables (province, urban/rural residence, ecological zone including Mountains, Hills and Terai), economic indicators (household wealth quintile derived from asset-based indices, employment status and income sources) and ethnicity/caste according to standard Nepali classifications including Brahman/Chhetri, Janajati (indigenous groups), Dalit, Madheshi and Muslim populations.

The analytical approach has used descriptive and inferential statistics appropriate for complex survey data. Initial descriptive analysis examined the distribution of violence experiences and safety perceptions across different population subgroups. Bivariate analysis explored relationships among categorical variables through chi-square tests and continuous variables through appropriate correlation measures, providing initial insights into associations between demographic, socioeconomic and geographic factors with violence experiences. Multivariate logistic regression models used to identify factors independently associated with violence experiences and safety concerns while controlling for potential confounding variables. Model building followed a systematic approach, beginning with theoretically important variables and incorporating additional factors based on bivariate significance. All statistical analyses incorporated proper survey

weights and design effects to ensure findings are representative of the national Nepali population.

Results

Sample Demographics and Household Characteristics

The NLSS-IV sample demonstrates the demographic diversity characteristic of contemporary Nepal, with comprehensive representation across age groups, education levels and geographic regions. Table 1 presents the detailed demographic profile of the 30,899 individuals aged 10 years and above who were included in the security module analysis.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N = 30,899)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	15,654	50.7
Female	15,245	49.3
Age Groups		
10-19 years	8,343	27.0
20-29 years	6,489	21.0
30-39 years	5,562	18.0
40-49 years	4,635	15.0
50-59 years	3,399	11.0
60+ years	2,471	8.0
Education Level		
No formal education	7,138	23.1
Basic education (1-8)	12,730	41.2
Secondary education (9-12)	5,685	18.4
Higher education	2,874	9.3
Vocational/Technical	2,472	8.0

Geographic Distribution		
Urban	13,070	42.3
Rural	17,829	57.7
Province		
Koshi	4,326	14.0
Madhesh	4,944	16.0
Bagmati	6,489	21.0
Gandaki	3,399	11.0
Lumbini	5,253	17.0
Karnali	2,781	9.0
Sudurpaschim	3,708	12.0

Note. Percentages calculated based on total eligible participants aged 10 years and above who completed the security module of NLSS-IV.

The sample reflects Nepal's young population structure, with 48% of respondents under age 30, while maintaining substantial representation across all age groups. Educational attainment shows significant variation, with nearly one-quarter having no formal education while 27.7% have completed secondary or higher education. The geographic distribution captures both urban growth trends and Nepal's predominantly rural character, with balanced provincial representation that reflects population distributions.

Prevalence and Patterns of Violence Experiences

Analysis of violence experiences reveals concerning patterns requiring immediate policy attention and targeted interventions. Table 2 presents the overall prevalence and demographic distribution of different violence types experienced during the 12 months preceding the survey.

Table 2

Prevalence of Violence Experiences by Demographic Characteristics (N = 30,899)

Characteristic	Physical Violence	Psychological Violence	Sexual Violence	Any Violence
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Overall Prevalence	1,916 (6.2)	1,267 (4.1)	556 (1.8)	2,688 (8.7)
Gender				
Male	1,064 (6.8)	375 (2.4)	93 (0.6)	1,361 (8.7)
Female	852 (5.6)	892 (5.9)	463 (3.0)	1,327 (8.7)
Age Groups				
10-19 years	417 (5.0)	250 (3.0)	133 (1.6)	668 (8.0)
20-29 years	467 (7.2)	357 (5.5)	188 (2.9)	733 (11.3)
30-39 years	389 (7.0)	278 (5.0)	128 (2.3)	612 (11.0)
40-49 years	297 (6.4)	222 (4.8)	74 (1.6)	445 (9.6)
50-59 years	204 (6.0)	102 (3.0)	24 (0.7)	272 (8.0)
60+ years	142 (5.8)	57 (2.3)	9 (0.4)	173 (7.0)
Education Level				
No formal education	500 (7.0)	249 (3.5)	133 (1.9)	672 (9.4)
Basic education	893 (7.0)	533 (4.2)	244 (1.9)	1,171 (9.2)
Secondary education	341 (6.0)	307 (5.4)	119 (2.1)	512 (9.0)
Higher education	144 (5.0)	144 (5.0)	49 (1.7)	287 (10.0)
Vocational/Technical	106 (4.3)	102 (4.1)	17 (0.7)	184 (7.4)
Geographic Location				
Urban	1,320 (10.1)	784 (6.0)	183 (1.4)	1,651 (12.6)
Rural	595 (3.3)	483 (2.7)	373 (2.1)	1,037 (5.8)
Province				
Koshi	260 (6.0)	173 (4.0)	69 (1.6)	346 (8.0)
Madhesh	346 (7.0)	247 (5.0)	104 (2.1)	445 (9.0)
Bagmati	779 (12.0)	519 (8.0)	130 (2.0)	908 (14.0)
Gandaki	204 (6.0)	136 (4.0)	51 (1.5)	255 (7.5)
Lumbini	315 (6.0)	210 (4.0)	89 (1.7)	420 (8.0)
Karnali	111 (4.0)	83 (3.0)	28 (1.0)	139 (5.0)
Sudurpaschim	245 (6.6)	172 (4.6)	85 (2.3)	334 (9.0)

Note. Percentages calculated within each demographic category. Some individuals experienced multiple types of violence.

The overall prevalence of any form of violence is 8.7%, affecting nearly one in eleven Nepali citizens. Physical violence is most common (6.2%), followed by psychological (4.1%) and sexual violence (1.8%), though these figures likely underestimate true prevalence due to cultural barriers to reporting. Gender differences reveal distinct patterns: men experience slightly higher rates of physical violence (6.8% vs 5.6%), whereas women face substantially higher rates of psychological (5.9% vs 2.4%) and sexual violence (3.0% vs 0.6%). Age-related patterns indicate that young adults aged 20–39 face the highest risk, with prevalence exceeding 11%, highlighting a critical demographic for targeted prevention strategies.

Geographic disparities are also evident, with urban areas reporting significantly higher violence rates (12.6%) compared to rural areas (5.8%), likely reflecting urbanization pressures and weakened traditional support systems. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive interventions addressing demographic, gender and geographic vulnerabilities.

Community Safety Perceptions and Property Crime

Community safety perceptions are a critical indicator of social cohesion and environmental security. They significantly influence daily life decisions, mobility patterns and overall quality of life. Measuring safety perceptions captures both objective security conditions and subjective vulnerability, providing essential insights into how different population groups navigate their local environments. Overall, 62.4% of respondents report feeling 'safe' or 'completely safe' in their communities, while 15.6% feel 'unsafe' or 'completely unsafe.

Gender disparities in safety perceptions prove particularly pronounced, with only 54.7% of women feeling safe compared to 70.0% of men. More concerning, 21.3% of women report feeling unsafe or completely unsafe, compared to only 10.0% of men. These differences reflect both actual vulnerability patterns and broader social norms that may restrict women's mobility and public participation, creating cycles of exclusion that limit

economic opportunities and social engagement.

Property crime data reveals that 7.3% of households experienced theft of cash or assets during the 12-month reference period, with significant economic impacts. The average value lost (NPR 45,600, approximately $350 USD) represents a substantial financial burden for most Nepali households. The relationship between household wealth and theft experiences demonstrates a complex U-shaped pattern, with both the poorest (8.5%) and richest (8.6%) quintiles showing higher victimization rates than middle-income groups, suggesting different types of theft targeting different household types.

Multivariate Analysis of Violence Risk Factors

To identify independent risk factors for violence experiences while controlling for potential confounding variables, logistic regression analyses were conducted for each violence type. The models demonstrated good fit with Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit tests showing non-significant results ($p > 0.05$ for all models). Table 3 presents adjusted odds ratios and confidence intervals for significant predictors.

Table 3

Multivariate Analysis of Violence Risk Factors (Adjusted Odds Ratios) (N = 30,899)

Variable	Physical Violence	Psychological Violence	Sexual Violence	Any Violence
	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)
Gender				
Male (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Female	0.89 (0.78-1.02)	2.51 (2.18-2.89)***	5.28 (4.12-6.77)***	1.08 (0.97-1.21)
Age Groups				
10-19 years (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
20-29 years	1.48 (1.24-1.77)***	1.89 (1.52-2.35)***	1.85 (1.34-2.55)***	1.45 (1.25-1.68)***
30-39 years	1.43 (1.18-1.73)***	1.71 (1.36-2.15)***	1.46 (1.03-2.07)*	1.40 (1.20-1.64)***
40-49 years	1.31 (1.06-1.62)*	1.63 (1.26-2.11)***	1.02 (0.67-1.54)	1.22 (1.02-1.46)*
Education Level				

No formal education (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Secondary education	0.78 (0.64-0.96)*	1.47 (1.16-1.86)**	0.98 (0.71-1.36)	0.89 (0.75-1.06)
Higher education	0.65 (0.48-0.88)**	1.38 (1.02-1.87)*	0.82 (0.52-1.29)	0.96 (0.76-1.21)
Wealth Quintile				
Poorest (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Richest	1.23 (1.01-1.50)*	1.67 (1.29-2.16)***	0.87 (0.59-1.28)	1.35 (1.14-1.59)***
Geographic Location				
Rural (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Urban	2.89 (2.54-3.30)***	2.14 (1.83-2.50)***	0.69 (0.54-0.88)**	2.12 (1.89-2.38)***
Migration Status				
No migrant member (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Has migrant member	1.34 (1.15-1.56)***	1.28 (1.05-1.56)*	1.45 (1.14-1.85)**	1.32 (1.16-1.50)***

Note. AOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Models controlled for province, ethnicity and household composition.

The multivariate analysis reveals several important patterns. Gender emerges as the strongest predictor of psychological and sexual violence, with women experiencing 2.51 times higher odds of psychological violence and 5.28 times higher odds of sexual violence compared to men. However, gender differences in physical violence become statistically insignificant when controlling for other factors, suggesting that contextual variables may be more influential than gender in determining physical violence risk.

Age patterns demonstrate peak violence vulnerability during young adulthood, with individuals aged 20-39 years showing significantly higher exposure to all violence types. The relationship between educational attainment and violence risk presents complex patterns that challenge conventional assumptions about education as a protective factor. While higher education reduces physical violence risk, it increases psychological violence risk, possibly reflecting different social pressures among more educated populations.

Economic status displays unexpected U-shaped patterns, with both the poorest and wealthiest households showing elevated violence risks in certain categories, suggesting that both deprivation and social pressures may contribute. Urban residence emerges as

a significant risk factor for physical and psychological violence, with urban residents experiencing nearly three times higher risk of physical violence compared to rural residents. Migration status represents another consistent risk factor, with households having migrant members showing elevated likelihood of experiencing violence across all categories.

Discussion

These analytical results provide crucial insights into the nature and patterns of domestic violence and community safety in contemporary Nepal. While the overall violence prevalence of 8.7% falls within ranges reported for other South Asian countries, the specific violence patterns reflect Nepal's unique social, cultural and economic context (Kalokhe et al., 2017). The model's explanatory power indicates that measured demographic and socioeconomic factors account for a substantial proportion of violence variation, while also highlighting the need to examine additional cultural and psychological factors in future research.

The observed gender differences align with global patterns found in national studies, while highlighting specific challenges facing Nepali women. The pronounced elevation in psychological and sexual violence against women reflects persistent gender inequalities and patriarchal structures that remain entrenched despite legal and constitutional advances (Lamichhane et al., 2011). However, the finding that gender differences in physical violence become non-significant when controlling for other factors introduces an important nuance, suggesting that contextual variables may be as important as gender dynamics in determining violence risk.

The age-related risk profile for young adults is particularly important given Nepal's demographic trends. With almost half of the population aged below 30, the high risks of violence during this life stage may have significant effects on individual wellbeing, family development and societal progress (Adhikari et al., 2014). These findings support implementing violence prevention programs targeted at adolescents and young adults,

maximizing the potential for population-level impact.

The unexpected educational patterns, particularly the increased psychological violence risk among more educated populations, suggest that Nepal's rapid educational expansion may require complementary efforts to address relationship skills and conflict resolution. These findings indicate that educational curricula should incorporate components addressing healthy relationship dynamics and non-violent communication strategies, consistent with international evidence that multi-level interventions addressing individual, relationship, community and societal factors are necessary for effective violence prevention (Ellsberg et al., 2015).

The urban-rural disparities in violence patterns present complex challenges for policy development. While urban areas show dramatically higher physical and psychological violence rates, the protective effect against sexual violence suggests different mechanisms of social control and reporting behaviors. The U-shaped relationship between wealth and violence risk challenges conventional assumptions about poverty as the primary economic driver of violence, suggesting that comprehensive approaches should address different stressors affecting various socioeconomic groups.

Migration effects represent a particularly pressing concern given Nepal's extensive labor migration patterns. The consistent elevation in violence risk among households with migrant members highlights the need for specialized support services addressing family separation, remittance-related conflicts and reintegration challenges. These findings suggest that migration policies should incorporate family welfare considerations and support mechanisms to mitigate violence risks, consistent with research showing that social work practice in violence prevention has evolved to emphasize trauma-informed approaches and culturally adapted interventions (Knight, 2018; Panchanadeswaran et al., 2010).

The safety perception data reveal important disparities that may perpetuate cycles of exclusion and vulnerability. Women's substantially lower safety perceptions reflect

both actual risk patterns and gendered restrictions on mobility and participation. These perceptions may limit women's access to economic opportunities, education and social services, reinforcing gender inequalities that contribute to violence risk.

These findings have several important implications for policy and practice. Violence prevention programs should adopt age-specific approaches that recognize elevated risks during young adulthood while addressing different developmental needs across the lifespan. Educational institutions should integrate relationship skills and conflict resolution training to address the paradoxical increase in psychological violence among more educated populations. Urban planning and community development initiatives should prioritize social cohesion and collective efficacy as violence prevention strategies. Migration policies should incorporate family welfare provisions and support services. Community safety initiatives should adopt gender-sensitive approaches that address both actual security risks and social norms that restrict women's mobility and participation, consistent with community-based interventions that engage multiple stakeholders in violence prevention efforts (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The overall analysis reveals that domestic violence prevalence among Nepali citizens represents a significant community health challenge with complex patterns across demographic groups and geographical distributions. The findings challenge conventional assumptions about risk factors. They demonstrate that gender disparities manifest differently across violence types. Women face higher level of psychological and sexual violence while men show elevated physical violence risks that become statistically insignificant. The economic patterns reveal a notable U-shaped relationship where both the poorest and wealthiest households demonstrate higher violence prevalence than middle-income families, supported by multivariate evidence showing that wealthy households face different stressors including status competition and complex family dynamics, while poor households experience economic desperation and resource scarcity.

The concentration of violence risk among young adults creates both challenges and opportunities for targeted prevention, particularly significant given Nepal's young population structure where violence during critical life stages affects relationship formation, family establishment and workforce participation. Geographic disparities demonstrate that urban environments create substantial new risks for physical and psychological violence, while traditional rural social organization no longer offers consistent protection, especially regarding sexual violence where reporting and help-seeking behaviors remain constrained by cultural norms.

The implications for social work practice necessitate "evidence-based interventions", Contest-specific approaches" and "addressing systematic inqualities". The substantial effect of labor migration on violence risk across all categories represents a critical policy intervention area given the extensive scale of Nepali migration and its effects on family dynamics through separation, economic stress and power shifts. To minimize the domestic violence, stakeholders must have commitment to formulate long-term plannings and policies without violating the social norms and values. This comprehensive approach should be viewed as both a moral imperative and strategic investment in Nepal's development, providing substantive evidence for prioritizing violence prevention as fundamental to advancing Nepal's constitutional vision of a violence-free society through coordinated and evidence-based interventions.

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