Samsad Journal, June 2026, Vol. -3, Issue -1, No. -3, P. 236-254

https://
www.parliament.gov.np
ISSN: 3059-9555

Ethnicity and Housing Status in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between ethnicity and housing status in Nepal, focusing on household occupancy status and roofing materials as an indicators of social and economic inequality. It utilizes national-level survey data from the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS-IV-2022/23), which includes 46,870 individuals from 9,600 households of Nepal. The findings show significant disparities in housing conditions across caste and ethnic groups. While a majority of households (78.4%) live exclusively in their own dwellings, this rate varies notably by ethnic group: Hill Dalits and Madhesh/Tarai Dalits show higher exclusive occupancy, while Hill Caste group's exhibit more shared living arrangements. Similarly, the type of roofing material used-ranging from durable materials like concrete and galvanized iron to traditional thatch-also differs significantly across ethnic lines. Dalit communities, particularly in the Madhesh/Tarai region, are more likely to reside in homes with low-cost, less durable roofing, reflecting deeper structural inequalities. Statistical analysis using Chi-square tests confirms that these differences are not random but strongly associated with ethnicity ($p < 0.001$). These patterns underscore the role of broader

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socio-economic, cultural, and geographic factors-including access to resources, urbanization, and marginalization-in shaping housing conditions.

Keywords**:** *Ethnicity, housing status, occupancy status, roof materials*

1. Ethnicity

Before examining the relationship between ethnicity and housing status, it is important to talk about how individuals' and households' diverse socio-economic backgrounds influence their access to opportunities and resources. In the context of race and gender inequalities, Mintz and Krymkowski (2010) observe that workplace authority has long been recognized as a key dimension of social stratification. As Smith and Elliott (2002) note, authority often functions as a central mechanism for maintaining racial and gender disparities.

Research consistently shows that authority in the workplace is unevenly distributed along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender—with significant consequences. Regardless of how authority is defined, numerous studies have found that, even after controlling for various relevant factors, white individuals are more likely than minorities to hold positions of authority (Kluegel 1978; McGuire and Reskin 1993; Smith 1997, 1999; Wilson 1997; Smith 2001; Elliott and Smith 2004). Similarly, men are more likely than women to exercise authority (Wolf and Fligstein 1979a; Jaffee 1989; Jacobs 1992; Reskin and Roos 1992; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Huffman 1995). The economic implications of these disparities have been well documented (Kluegel 1978; Parcel and Mueller 1983; Smith 1997; Wilson 1997, as cited in Mintz and Krymkowski, 2010). However, this kind of study remains to be done in the context of Nepal.

Over the past few decades, occupational segregation by gender, race, and ethnicity has declined in categories typically associated with high levels of authority. For example, in 1970, women comprised only 16 percent of managerial positions, but by 2000, this figure had increased to 39 percent. For African Americans, representation rose from 2.5 percent to 6.9 percent, and for Hispanics, from 0.7 percent to 6 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, 2001). Based on these demographic shifts, one might expect a parallel increase in authority attainment among women and minorities. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. Research indicates that up until the 1990s, the gender gap in authority persisted (Jacobs 1992; Reskin and Roos 1992), and the racial gap among men actually widened (Smith 1999, as cited in Mintz and Krymkowski, 2010). The nature of family, household and housing status may therefore differ across various social categories of people.

Theodos, Coulton, and Pitingolo (2015) examined housing unit turnover to understand the micro-level processes underlying change in concentrated neighborhood poverty. A multilevel conceptual framework was adopted to examine whether the poverty status of newcomers differs from that of the out-movers they replace. At the household level, it was hypothesized that the likelihood of a newcomer household being poor is related to the characteristics of its previous occupants. Occupant concordance on socioeconomic traits may be due to the role that social networks play in the housing search (Krysan, 2008), or through signs that prospective occupants pick up about the race/ethnicity of prior occupants to determine whether the unit is right for them (Hipp 2012). We expect that the poverty status of housing units' occupants is sticky, with a high frequency of poor households replacing poor households that leave. Concordance on race and ethnicity is also expected to be high, and

given economic inequality between groups, it will be an additional contributor to the stickiness of poverty (Theodos, Coulton, and Pitingolo, 2015). Beyond race and ethnicity, housing status differs by different backgrounds, including economic class.

2. Housing Status

Developing effective solutions to address homelessness requires a clear understanding of its root causes. Historically, debates around the causes, effects, and potential solutions to homelessness have focused on the distinction between individual-level causes-often attributed to personal deficiencies or behavioral problems-and structural-level causes, such as the lack of affordable housing, inadequate income, and insufficient access to essential human services.

One of the most fundamental demographic characteristics of a household is its size, defined by the number of members it comprises. Determining household membership, however, can be complicated by the presence of visitors or temporarily absent members. Evidence from industrialized societies indicates a steady decline not only in the number of children per household but also in the number of adults (Bongaarts, 2001, as cited in Mberu, 2007). In his study, Mberu (2007) highlights the growing use of household asset indices as reliable proxies for evaluating economic well-being. Despite debates over the merits of different statistical approaches, household assets have generally been found to best reflect a family's long-term command over economic resources, patterns of consumption, and overall welfare (Deaton, 1992; Filmer & Pritchett, 1999, 2001; Hao, 1996). This method offers a practical alternative in contexts where collecting accurate income and consumption data is notoriously difficult,

especially in developing countries (Hentschel & Lanjouw, 1996; Montgomery & Hewett, 2005). The asset index broadens the definition of poverty beyond income alone, a measure often deemed too narrow for capturing poverty in such settings (Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2003).

Montgomery et al. (2000) further note that in developing contexts, household income often derives from multiple, variable sources that can fluctuate significantly over time. As a result, a single year's income may not accurately represent long-term economic status or the conditions under which important demographic decisions are made (Mberu, 2007).

Mberu (2007) also examines demographic and socioeconomic predictors of household living conditions, controlling for several key variables known to influence family wealth (Hao, 1996). These include education, age, ['and the number of dependent children, housing tenure, and the geographic location of the household. Education, in particular, is emphasized in neoclassical growth theory as a primary driver of human capital formation and a crucial factor in economic development and poverty reduction. In developing countries, a large proportion of the poor are self-employed and excluded from the formal wage economy due to insufficient human capital (Becker, 1981). In Nigeria, access to education—though uneven between men and women—remains a critical determinant of both formal employment and improved living conditions (Mberu, 2007).

The concepts of household and family are further clarified by Singh (2003), who notes that while "household" is a broad term encompassing various living arrangements, not all households can be classified as families. A household may consist of a single individual or a group of unrelated people, whereas a family typically comprises individuals connected by ties of marriage, blood, or

adoption. According to Marshall (1998), a nuclear family consists of spouses and their dependent children. The term "stem family," based on a definition by F. LePlay and adapted by Caldwell et al. (1984), refers to two married couples from successive generations, typically where the older couple is the parents of the younger husband. In the Indian context, this closely resembles the extended family. Lastly, the joint family, as defined by Karve (1965, cited in Singh, 2003), consists of individuals living under one roof, sharing meals from a common kitchen, holding joint property, participating in family rituals, and being united by kinship ties.

3. Ethnicity and Housing Status

Williams and Sternthal (2010) emphasize that sociological research aiming to understand the persistent racial disparities in health outcomes has sought to clarify the concept of "race." Sociology has long examined how social structure and stratification shape health outcomes. Social structure refers to enduring patterns of social life that influence individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Evidence suggests substantial racial differences in life expectancy at age 25, but even more pronounced disparities emerge within each racial group when stratified by educational attainment. This indicates that racial health disparities cannot be fully explained by socioeconomic status (SES) alone, as residual differences persist across all levels of education. These findings highlight the concept of "double jeopardy"—the compounded disadvantage experienced by individuals from marginalized racial groups who face health risks linked both to their racial status and to low SES (Ferraro and Farmer, 1996, as cited in Williams and Sternthal, 2010).

Further sociological inquiry has illuminated the ways in which race-related factors contribute to health inequalities. This body of work has identified numerous mechanisms through which racism both initiates and sustains health disparities (Williams and Mohammed, 2009). Drawing from broader sociological literature, racism is conceptualized as a multilevel phenomenon that includes institutional and individual discrimination, racial prejudice, stereotyping, and internalized racism (Feagin and McKinney, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Massey and Denton, 1993, as cited in Williams and Sternthal, 2010).

Even in the United States, where formal legal protections have existed for decades, racial disparities persist in critical domains such as housing. Farley (2005) observes that more than thirty years after the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act of 1968—which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in the sale or rental of housing—racial residential segregation remains a persistent feature of American life. Although levels of segregation have modestly declined since the law's enactment, several troubling patterns persist: (1) African Americans continue to experience much higher levels of segregation than other racial and ethnic minority groups (Logan, 2001; Massey and Denton, 1993); (2) the smallest declines in Black-white segregation have occurred in metropolitan areas with large African American populations—specifically, those where African Americans comprise at least 10% of the total population (Logan, 2001); and (3) in these areas, the current level of segregation, as measured by the index of dissimilarity (Taeuber and Taeuber, 1965), remains closer to the extreme of segregation than to integration (Logan, 2001), with less progress seen than in areas with smaller Black populations (Glaeser and Vigdor, 2001, as cited in Farley, 2005). Inequalities of various

kinds can be found in all societies, including Nepal. The pace of modern development is increasing day by day. With this process, new forms of inequalities are also emerging in different aspects of social life, including housing status. In this context, it is important to look at the status of housing across ethnic groups of Nepal from a sociological perspective.

4. Objectives

The objectives of this study are centered on understanding the intersection of ethnicity, housing quality, and structural inequality in Nepal. Firstly, the study aims to examine the relationship between caste and ethnic identity and household occupancy status, focusing on the patterns of exclusive versus shared living arrangements across different social groups. Secondly, it seeks to analyze the disparities in housing quality, using roofing materials as a key indicator, to highlight the extent of inequality among ethnic groups. In particular, the study will assess how marginalized communities, such as Dalits and religious or linguistic minorities, are more likely to reside in dwellings with low-quality roofing materials. Thirdly, the research intends to explore the broader structural, cultural, and economic factors that shape both living arrangements and housing quality. Factors such as family structure, access to housing markets, urbanization trends, and historical marginalization will be considered to provide a holistic understanding of housing inequality. Finally, the study aims to assess the implications of these housing disparities for policy design, with an emphasis on promoting inclusive and equitable access to durable and dignified housing for all communities, especially the most disadvantaged. Specific research objectives are as follows:

The study aims to examine the relationship between caste and ethnic identity and household occupancy status in Nepal. It also seeks to analyze the disparities in housing quality among different caste and ethnic groups, using roofing material as a key indicator. Furthermore, the research investigates the structural, cultural, and economic factors that shape household living arrangements and housing quality across the country. Finally, it assesses the implications of these housing disparities for policy design, with a particular focus on promoting equitable access to quality housing for marginalized communities.

5. Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design using nationally representative data from the fourth round of the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS-IV, 2022/23), conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO), Government of Nepal. The dataset provides comprehensive information on household characteristics, including demographic, economic, and housing-related variables, enabling a robust analysis of housing patterns across caste and ethnic groups.

Descriptive statistical techniques are applied to summarize and present the general distribution of household occupancy status and roofing material usage across different caste and ethnic categories. To examine the association between caste/ethnic identity and housing characteristics, cross-tabulation analysis is performed, and Chi-square tests of independence are used to determine the statistical significance of observed differences. These methods allow for the identification of disparities in housing quality and living arrangements among various social groups.

Finally, the study analyzes the spatial and categorical distribution of housing types across ethnic groups to provide a comprehensive overview of housing inequalities in Nepal. The results are interpreted in light of socio-economic and cultural factors, offering insights relevant for evidence-based housing policy formulation.

6. Ethnicity and Housing Status in Nepal

As emphasized by Williams and Sternthal (2010), sociological research demonstrates that race and socioeconomic status (SES) intersect in complex ways to influence health outcomes. There is an ongoing debate over whether policy interventions should adopt race-specific or universal approaches when addressing the needs of vulnerable social groups. However, empirical evidence showing persistent racial disparities at every level of SES supports the case for race-specific strategies aimed at improving outcomes for disadvantaged racial communities.

The research reviewed by Williams and Sternthal (2010) underscores that both the historical legacies and the ongoing realities of racism significantly impact health. In particular, without sustained efforts to confront institutional forms of racism—such as residential segregation—meaningful reductions in racial health disparities are unlikely. Therefore, increased research and policy focus is essential to develop and implement interventions that address racism at both individual and institutional levels.

For example, policy measures at the state or federal level that expand the availability of safe, stable, low-income and mixed-income housing, or increase funding for Section 8 housing vouchers, could improve access to high-opportunity neighborhoods. Additionally, stronger enforcement of housing and

financial regulations could combat predatory lending and discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect minority and underserved communities (Williams and Sternthal, 2010).

The crosstabulation presented in Table 1 shows the relationship between caste/ethnic group and whether the dwelling unit is occupied by the household only in Nepal. The percentages indicate how common it is for households of different caste/ethnic groups to live alone in their housing unit versus sharing with others (such as another household).

Table 1

Occupancy Status of Households in Nepal by Ethnicity

Caste/Ethnic Group	% Living in Own Dwelling (Yes)	% Sharing Dwelling (No)	Total
Hill Caste	75.8	24.2	100.00
Madhesh/Tarai Caste	78.2	21.8	100.00
Mountain/Hill Janajati	77.3	22.7	100.00
Tarai Janajati	79.7	20.3	100.00
Hill Dalit	84.6	15.4	100.00
Madhesh/Tarai Dalit	84.4	15.6	100.00
Religious/Linguistic Groups	78.3	21.7	100.00
Others & Not stated	91.9	8.1	100.00

Nepal	**78.4**	**21.6**	**100.00**

*Source***:** Computed from NLSS IV-2022/23 Data Set

The distribution of occupancy status of households in Nepal shows the highest exclusive occupancy. As shown in Table 1"Others & Not Stated" group has the highest proportion of households living alone in their dwelling units (91.9%). Among the main ethnic categories, Hill Dalits (84.6%) and Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (84.4%) have the highest rates of exclusive household occupancy.

The lowest exclusive occupancy status is found in some ethnic groups. Hill Caste group has the lowest proportion living exclusively in their own dwelling (75.8%), meaning they are more likely to share housing with another household (24.2%). The general trend shows that around 78.4% of all households across caste/ethnic groups live in a dwelling occupied only by their household. Only 21.6% of households live in shared dwellings.

The results shown in Table 1 indicate some possible implications. Dalit groups—both Hill and Madhesh/Tarai-may have smaller family sizes or more fragmented housing patterns, possibly due to social exclusion, which might lead to more nuclear-style housing despite lower economic status. The Hill Caste group's higher rate of shared dwellings could be associated with extended family living, urban migration, or housing shortages in certain areas. The "Others & Not stated" category's unusually high rate (91.9%) might indicate anomalies in data reporting or represent specific, less-populated communities with more individual dwelling arrangements.

From the Chi-square test results, we can interpret the findings in a clear and complete way. The Statistical Significance reflected in the Pearson Chi-square

value is 170,073.984 with 7 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is .000, which means $p < 0.001$ shows the significant association between ethnicity and occupancy status of households. This is highly statistically significant, well below the conventional threshold of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant association between caste/ethnic group and household dwelling occupancy (whether a household lives alone in its dwelling or shares it with others).

The ethnicity or caste background influences household living arrangements in Nepal. The variation in the crosstab (e.g., 75.8% for Hill Caste vs. 84.6% for Hill Dalits) is not due to chance. This reflects underlying structural, cultural, or economic differences between caste/ethnic groups-such as housing affordability, social norms about joint families, urban vs. rural residence patterns, social segregation or marginalization, and so on.

The Chi-square test strongly supports the conclusion that caste/ethnic group is associated with whether households occupy dwellings exclusively or share them in Nepal. This has important social and policy implications, especially in the context of housing equity, caste-based disparities, and urban planning.

Table 2

Ethnicity and Material Roof of House Made of in Nepal

Ethnicity	GIS	CC	ST	TIL	SS	WP	ME	OTH	Total
Hill Caste	36.8	44.4	1.6	2.9	13.0	.3	1.0	.0	100.0
Madhesh/Tarai Caste	17.0	50.3	5.4	26.3	.6	.4	.0	.1	100.0
Mountain/Hill Janajati	51.5	36.5	3.6	3.0	3.9	.2	1.2	.1	100.0
Tarai Janajati	38.0	35.3	1.9	24.6	.1				100.0

Hill Dalit	55.6	22.7	3.7	3.6	12.6	.0	1.8	.0	100.0
Madhesh/Tarai Dalit	35.7	25.4	12.7	25.8	.0			.4	100.0
Religions/Linguistic group	22.5	53.4	3.4	18.4	.6		1.5	.2	100.0
Others & Not stated	20.5	58.1			14.2			7.2	100.0
Nepal	**39.0**	**39.6**	**3.5**	**10.5**	**6.3**	**.2**	**.8**	**.1**	**100.0**

Source: Computed from the NLSS IV-2022/23 Data set

Note: GIS: Galvanized Iron Sheet, CC: Concrete/Cement, ST: Straw/Thatch, TIL: Tiles, SS: Stone/Slate, WP: Wood Planks, ME: Mud/Earth, OTH: Others.

Table 2 shows the relationship between caste/ethnic groups in Nepal and the main materials used for roofing their homes. The results reflect interesting points. Among Hill Caste most (81.2%) use galvanized iron sheets (36.8%) or concrete/cement (44.4%). Use of traditional materials like stone/slate (13%) still exists. Within Madhesh/Tarai Caste predominantly use concrete/cement (50.3%), followed by tiles (26.3%), showing modernization in housing. Among Mountain/Hill Janajati majority use galvanized iron sheets (51.5%), while 36.5% use concrete/cement, with modest use of thatch and slate. Within Tarai Janajati, use is split between galvanized iron (38.0%), concrete (35.3%), and a significant portion still uses tiles (24.6%).

Hill Dalits rely heavily on galvanized iron sheets (55.6%), with 12.6% using stone/slate, suggesting limited access to concrete housing. Madhesh/Tarai Dalit mostly use galvanized iron (35.7%), concrete (25.4%), and thatch (12.7%), with 25.8% still using tiles. Among Religious/Linguistic Groups over half (53.4%) use concrete/cement, with some still using tiles (18.4%) and galvanized sheets (22.5%). In Others/Not stated groups dominated by concrete

(58.1%) and galvanized iron (20.5%), with some use of stone/slate (14.2%) and 'Other' (7.2%).

Overall trend shows that concrete and galvanized iron are the most common roofing materials across all caste/ethnic groups, though marginalized groups like Dalits and Janajatis show more use of traditional or less durable materials.

The Chi-Square test results you provided are related to the association between ethnicity and roofing material (likely from the table you shared earlier). Here's a breakdown and interpretation of each statistic. Pearson Chi-Square value: 8,293,002.064, DF (degrees of freedom): 49, Asymp. Sig. (p-value): .000, tests check whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables — in this case, ethnicity and type of roofing material. Since the p-value is .000 (< 0.05), the result is highly statistically significant. This rejects the null hypothesis of independence, meaning there is a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and the type of roofing material used.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of household occupancy status in Nepal reveals a significant variation across caste and ethnic groups, with the majority of households (78.4%) living exclusively in their own dwellings. Notably, Hill Dalits and Madhesh/Tarai Dalits exhibit the highest rates of exclusive occupancy, while Hill Caste groups show the lowest, indicating a greater tendency toward shared living arrangements. These differences are not random but statistically significant, as confirmed by the Chi-square test ($p < 0.001$), highlighting a strong association between ethnicity and household occupancy. The findings suggest that household living arrangements in Nepal are influenced by

complex structural, cultural, and socio-economic factors, such as family structure, housing access, urbanization, and social marginalization.

The analysis of roofing materials used by households across different ethnic groups in Nepal reveals significant disparities that reflect underlying socioeconomic and geographic variations. While galvanized iron sheets and concrete/cement roofs are the most common roofing types nationally, their distribution varies markedly by ethnicity. Hill Caste and Mountain/Hill Janajati groups predominantly use galvanized iron sheets, whereas Madhesh/Tarai Castes and religious/linguistic minorities show higher reliance on concrete and tiles. Dalit groups, particularly those in the Madhesh/Tarai, show relatively higher use of traditional and low-cost materials like thatch, indicating persistent inequalities in housing quality.

The Chi-square tests confirm that the association between ethnicity and type of roofing material is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8,293,002.064$, $df = 49$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing that roofing choices are not random but are shaped by ethnic, economic, and regional factors. These findings highlight the need for inclusive housing policies that address structural inequalities and promote access to durable housing for marginalized communities across Nepal.

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