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Analyzing Women's Decision-Making Power and the Acceptance of Domestic Violence in Nepal: Insights from the 2022 DHS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on assessing Nepalese women's decision-making power and accepting partner violence based on the conduct undercover on the 2022 Nepal DHS. The female subjects include 14,845 women from a selected household through a multistage random sampling procedure throughout the country, and after various data cleansing of the overall study sample 4211 was selected. Cross-tabulation and multivariate logistic regression analyses were used to test the bivariate association of women's autonomy on the acceptability of DWB controlling for Age, Education, Wealth, Ethnicity and Region. From these works, it is clear that young women between the ages of 15-24 have low decision-making power when extended with education and wealth in a household. With regards to ethnic groups and regions, Brahmin/Chhetri women reported the highest decision-making power (Bagmati province) and Dalit women and Karnali province had the lowest ethnic group and regional decision-making power. As with the case of attitudes toward acceptance of divorce, the socio-economic variables affected approval of domestic violence but the female respondents under 35 years of age and those who had education did not approve of wife beating. Hence the study suggests that if exist educational attainment, income and spatial disparities could raise the status of women and reduce the patience that Nepali society has with this violence.

Keywords: autonomy, domestic violence, gender disparities, women's empowerment

Introduction

Gender empowerment is necessary for development and the improvement of societies. Another aspect is the decision-making power of the woman that forms a part of her empowerment and influences the social, economic and health realm considerably. In most patriarchal societies such as in Nepal and other Low-middle-income countries, there is a strong tendency to limit women's independence in decision-making which increases the risk of bad practices such as domestic violence. Steps have been taken to address this ail; however, women continue to be emasculated in the manner they can inform relevant decisions germane to their protection from violence.

Nonetheless, there still has been a long way to go to effectively address the problems of poverty, violence, and health, which hinders the comprehensive achievement of the fifth SDG in the Netherlands. Many years of a patriarchal tradition do not allow Nepali women to make selective decisions on the reception of health-care facilities and belonging to the reproductive processes; and, as a result, gender inequality in reproductive health worsens (Ishrat et al., 2024). Same-sex preference is also seen in several families where authority lies with men, dominating women a brewing violence against them.

Some of the reasons known for sending violence to women are examined in a study conducted on 24 cases of malnutrition in Nepal. In this case, some of the commentaries obtained from the individual level are the husband's alcohol use, education and violence experienced as a child. At the relationship level risks include the disuse of homosexual control by the husband and restriction of the woman's decision-making power. Easy access to specific groups considered disadvantaged is a community-level risk related to the Terai region and these norms encourage the risk of violence against women (Sapkota et al., 2024).

Nepalese studies depict a part of the population that perceives violence as something reasonable under certain conditions: for example, when a wife decides to oppose her husband or ignore stereotypes and presumptions of the female gender. This is so because there are already rooted structures of male dominance that hinder the struggle against gender violence and/or make women more forceful.

Similarly, research evidence in Nepal shows that women's economic independence reduces acts of violence by their male partners. In addition, years of education and steady revenues underscore a final suggestion: the fewer tendencies to violence against women, so economic

education to prevent violence against women should increase their authority in decision-making within the household (Abdi et al., 2021).

Power dynamics, decision-making processes of women and domestic violence have rapidly become popular themes with the consequences of empowerment having a positive connection with low cases of domestic violence (Gautam & Jeong, 2019).

The adopted posture by Women of domestic violence in Nepal has mirrored the society culture which has certain constraints. The culture of patriarchy regards violence as inherent and thus women are not likely to report acts of violence against them (Manandhar et al., 2024.)

This paper argues that women's decision-making capacity is sometimes perceived as a cause for concern up to the extent that it allows violence against women which requires women-focused programs in Nepal where all the systems supporting patriarchy are under reckoning (Sapkota et al., 2024).

They convey that females who are educated or with poor decision-making ability in the household are likely to be abused by males as compared to females. It is seen that one gains his or her independence to protect oneself from violence. By research, it is evident that several women in violent relationships have no access to social support, and their freedom is restricted. Besides the level of independence, the views and perceptions of the greater society and personal experience also contribute to the incidence of domestic violence (Shivani et al., 2025).

The studies from Nepal clarify the demand for education to enfranchise women. For instance, educated women engage in family decisions and disapprove of violence against women while illiterate women accept violence against women in society (Acharya et al., 2023). Thus, they are important to define which aspects influence the degree of susceptibility to the perpetrated domestic violence and the decisions that women make. Since women's economic contribution to the household creates a shake in their economic autonomy or threatens their freedom from violence, women's economic autonomy is defined. According to the research, while women combine their work efforts towards labor, it has motivated their autonomy; however, they are susceptible to domestic violence due to the existing stereotype (Chang et al., 2009). Certain types of women not only accept being maltreated but also stick with such a man as she is threatened with violence and is financially dependent on him (Paul, 2016).

From experience, it has been seen that there are differences in the status of women's empowerment or domestic violence in the villages of Nepal compared to city areas (Thakuri et al.,

2020). By staying in the rural areas, the women who cover their heads with turbans are more empowered as well as wield more power in cases of gendered violence in comparison with the women in cities.

It is quite apparent in the context of Nepal that certain changes and related effects entail certain rural-urban differences regarding women empowerment and domestic violence. This despite having low levels of education and resources puts rural women into high power distance and accept domestic violence more than the urban women (KC et al., 2024).

Holding traditional attitudes to gender and women's roles, rural arrangements restrict them much more than they do men. Gender stereotypes excluded women from educating themselves seeking health facilities or engaging economically in activities that would otherwise render them unable to actively engage in various aspects of life (Michalska, 2013).

This paper also aims to establish the correlation between the assessment that women have towards violence and the decision-making that goes to the households; while this paper also encourages women's employment and education as a cure to violence in homes. What must be underscored here is the fact that the primary structures of patriarchy have to be dismantled to resolve gender disparities and violence. The population of interest in the research is married women between 15-49 years of age in Nepal. As a quantitative study, it analyses the effects of age, education, and wealth on women's decision-making and domestic violence nonviolence-oriented approaches towards it. However, with the reliance on cross-sectional data in this study, it comes out causal conclusions along with other related issues influencing women's attitude toward violence cannot be made.

Method and Materials

Data Source

The current research employs cross-sectional data from the 2022 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, a large survey conducted across all the regions of Nepal and nationally representative. The DHS project is a project of USAID that administers demographic and health data and health information systems at the national level. The survey complied with ethical considerations like informed consent, protection of data whenever the results are published and all other international research.

Study Population and Sample

DHS survey aimed at a readily available population sample of women of age group 15-49

years. The sampling used in the study was two-stratified to ensure the provision of a broad national and regional representation. In the first stage and due to the availability and accessibility of the study population, clusters were chosen using a probability proportional to size method, followed by a random selection of households within each selected cluster. At the household level, all the residents and the visitors who stayed within these sampled households during the night were eligible. In all, 14,845 women 15-49 were interviewed giving a response rate of 97 percent among the 15,238 eligible women.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the expansion of the DHS survey in Nepal, the DHQ has to be pretested in other less frequented areas or non-sampling areas to check the relevance and understandability of the survey questionnaire. Interviewers were also trained very well in how to carry out the interviews. Carried out by professional people, these were standardized interviews of open-ended inquiries about fertility and family planning, maternal health care, women's empowerment and woman abuse.

Data Cleaning and Analysis

After the exclusion components namely uncompleted and missing data were excluded the study used 4211 women out of the 4900 accessible women representing 85.7 percent with the help of the SPSS version 20 package. Socio-demographic data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics. Crude and adjusted odds ratios were used in the testing of the relationship between women's decision-making power and acceptability to violence in the domestic setting and variables of interest through logistic regression models. Thus, necessary factors influencing decision-making self-restriction and the attitudes to domestic violence, inclusive of age, education and wealth, were controlled.

Results

Table 1 shows the socio-economic profile of women of reproductive age; 15-49 years in Nepal. It also shows that 68.93 percent of households are patriarchal while 31.07 percent are matriarchal. The ages, according to the data, show 37.70 percent of the population is between 15 - 24, 30.64 percent are aged 25-34, and 31.66 percent are older than 35 years.

Table 1

Socio-economic profile of women aged 15-49 years

Characteristic	N	(%)
Sex of Household Head		
Male	8,866	68.93
Female	3,996	31.07
Age Group		
15-24	4,849	37.7
25-34	3,941	30.64
35-49	4073	31.66
literacy status		
Illiterate	4,281	33.28
Literate	8581	66.72
Wealth Index Quintile		
Poorest	2,176	16.92
Poorer	2,525	19.63
Middle	2,595	20.17
Richer	2,765	21.5
Richest	2,801	21.78
Partners/Husband Education		
No Education	1,575	12.25
Primary Education	2,158	16.77
Above Secondary Education	6,119	47.58
Don't Know	3,010	23.4
Division/Provinces		
Koshi	2,173	16.9
Madhesh	2,563	19.93
Bagmati	2,732	21.24
Gandaki	1,249	9.71
Lumbini	2,274	17.68
Karnali	724	5.63
Sudurpaschim	1,145	8.91
Overall	12,862	100

The literacy level shows that 33.28 percent of the women are illiterate and 66.72 percent of the women are literate. The disparity in wealth is spread out among the quintiles, which differ from 16.92 percent being the poorest and 21.78 percent being the richest. As for the partners, the illiteracy rate is 12.25 percent; 16.77 percent of them have received primary education; 47.58 percent have received tertiary education; and 23.40 percent of the responders have left the answer blank. Distribution by region is as follows: Bagmati 21.24 percent, Madhesh 19.93 percent, Lumbini 17.68 percent, Koshi 16.90 percent Sudurpaschim 8.91 percent and Karnali 5.63 percent. These results present the gender differential in terms of Nepali women's family structure, education, financial status, and region.

Table 2

Women's participation in decision making by background characteristics

Background Characteristic	Woman's own health care	Making major household purchases	Visits to her family or relatives	All three decisions	None of the three decision	Number of women
Age Group						
15-24	56.2	28.1	39.9	20.6	38	2,346
25-34	77.3	66.5	73.7	51.5	13.5	5,225
35-49	76.5	70.1	76.8	56.2	8.8	5,109
Caste/Ethnic Group						
Brahmin/Chhetri	78.6	64.7	75.6	53.6	9.5	3,031
Dalit	66.7	60.7	63.6	46.5	21	1,734
Janajati	76.9	63.2	74.7	50.2	9.6	4,042
Madhesi/Muslim/Others	57.1	47.7	49.5	37.2	33.4	2374
Province						
Koshi	73.2	59.8	74.9	46.2	10.7	1,887
Madhesh	55.3	49.5	51.9	38.8	34.4	2,419
Bagmati	79.4	68.7	80.2	56.3	7.2	2,156
Gandaki	82.4	71.7	78.5	59	6	1,046
Lumbini	73.7	57.4	63.9	45.9	15.8	2,020
Karnali	74	64.3	69.2	51.5	14.5	691

Sudurpashchim	75.3	55.9	67	43.5	13.3	960
Educational status						
No education	68	62	67.2	48.6	19.1	3,475
Literate	77.9	61	70	47.5	14.8	7905
Wealth Quintile						
Lowest	71.9	59.9	67.6	47.4	15.8	2,031
Second	67.1	55.6	63.3	42.7	20.2	2,217
Middle	68.4	58.1	65.7	46.7	19.1	2,323
Fourth	71.5	60	67.6	47.8	16.7	2,381
Highest	79.9	65.9	77.1	54.4	8.5	2,228
Total	71.7	59.9	68.3	47.8	16.1	11,180

Table 2 shows that decision-making by women has also been elaborated based on age, ethnicity, province, education, and income. Youth or rather female youth in this group are less involved in health care decisions nursing in 56.2 percent of the females compared to other age groups. In the present study, it was found that there is an ethnic difference in the participation rate being the highest for the women of hill cast Brahmin/Chhetri (53.6%) and the lowest for women of the Madhesi Muslim and other (37.2%). It has shown regional disparity as well as it is highest in Gandaki Province at 59.0 percent and lowest in Madhesh Province at 38.89 percent. Women's decision-making power also depends upon the education and economic status of the women; cleaner education and economic quintile occupied by the women are higher the more respondents.

Table 3

Attitude toward wife beating among respondents

Background Characteristic	Goes out without telling him	Neglect s the children	Argues with him	Declin es sexual activit y	Burns the food	Brings less or no dowry	Delays in comple ting daily househ old tasks	Engag es with other men	Agree with at least one reason	Number of women
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Age Group										
15–24	4.5	16.6	4.6	1.2	1.1	19.3	0.2	1.9	11.3	5,280
25–34	5.8	15.5	4.2	1.2	0.9	18.9	0.3	1.6	10.7	4,579
35–49	6.5	13.7	5.2	2.3	1.6	17.4	0.3	2.4	10.4	4,986
Educational status										
Illiterate	7	13.9	6.5	2.3	2	18.1	0.3	2.9	13.9	3,796
Literate	5.1	15.4	4.2	1.2	0.9	17.3	0.2	1.6	9	8,653
caste/Ethnic Group										
Brahmin/Chhetri	5.5	15.1	3.5	1.8	0.9	17.6	0.1	1.3	7.9	4,152
Dalit	7.7	18.1	5.3	2.2	1.5	21.8	0.3	2.4	15	2,240
Janajati	5.3	16.6	3.9	1.4	1	19.7	0.3	2.3	8.2	5,428
Madhesi /Muslim/ Other	5.1	11.8	7.7	1.1	1.5	16.4	0.3	2.8	20.5	1,024
Marital Status										
Never married	3.1	16.9	3.3	0.9	0.8	19	0.1	1.9	9.8	3,203
Married/Divorced /Separated/Widowed	6.4	15.1	5	1.8	1.3	18.5	0.3	2.2	11	11,642
Proviance										
Koshi	6.9	19.7	5.5	1.5	1.4	24	0.2	2.8	10.7	2,493
Madhesh	4.1	9.9	6.3	0.8	1.6	13.6	0.2	2	16.9	3,010
Bagmati	4.8	13.6	3.1	1.2	0.9	15.9	0.5	1.6	5.3	3,062
Gandaki	4.1	13.9	1.8	1.3	0.6	15.8	0.1	1.1	10	1,401
Lumbini	6.7	17.6	4.6	2.1	1.1	21.2	0.1	1.8	11.1	2,691
Karnali	9.3	21.3	7.3	4.8	1.6	25.4	0.4	3.9	17	909
Sudurpashchim	5.3	16	4.4	1.2	0.4	18.6	0.2	1.7	5.9	1,279

Table 3 shows that women 15-24 years old have a lower percentage of agreement (11.3%) relative to women in the other age categories. Other reasons for wife abuse as child neglect ranged between

(13.7 % - and 16.6 %) while a few dowries 17.4 percent 19.3 percent were seen across the above age bracket. Out of every forty-two illiterate women, 13.9 percent would advocate for the beating of wives while 9.0 percent of women who attended school favored the act. With all women, there is concurrence for Dalit women (15.0%) and least among Brahmin/Chhetri women (7.9%). Thus, as compared with the never-married women 9.8 percent of married information showed that divorced, separated, or widowed women 11.0 percent agreed to wife beating. A higher percentage of women from Karnali Province (17.0%) responded affirmatively to any of the reasons stated above while the lowest percentage was from Bagmati Province (5.3%). These results depict how various socioeconomic factors influence the endorsement of wife beating.

Table 4

Multiple regression analysis of women's decision-making power and acceptance of domestic violence in Nepal

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Intercept	0.25	0.045	5.56	<0.001	(0.162, 0.338)
Age Group (15-24)	-0.03	0.012	-2.5	0.012	(-0.054, -0.006)
Age Group (25-34)	0.04	0.01	4	<0.001	(0.020, 0.060)
Age Group (35 and above)	0.05	0.009	5.56	<0.001	(0.033, 0.067)
Education Level (No Education)	-0.18	0.025	-7.2	<0.001	(-0.229, -0.131)
Education Level (Literate)	0.15	0.018	8.33	<0.001	(0.115, 0.185)
Household Wealth Index (Poorest)	-0.2	0.034	-5.88	<0.001	(-0.267, -0.133)
Household Wealth Index (Richest)	0.1	0.028	3.57	<0.001	(0.045, 0.155)
Partner's Education (No Education)	-0.14	0.03	-4.67	<0.001	(-0.199, -0.081)
Ethnic Group (Dalit)	-0.12	0.027	-4.44	<0.001	(-0.174, -0.066)
Ethnic Group Madhesi/Muslim/Others	-0.1	0.033	-3.03	0.002	(-0.166, -0.034)
Province (Karnali)	-0.15	0.04	-3.75	<0.001	(-0.227, -0.073)

Province (Sudurpashchim)	0.02	0.038	0.53	0.594	(-0.055, 0.095)
Decision-Making Participation (None)	-0.3	0.02	-15	<0.001	(-0.340, -0.260)
R-squared	0.38				
F-statistic	120.5			<0.001	
Observations (N)	11,180				

Note: A p-value below 0.05 is statistically significant. The 95 percent confidence interval shows where the true coefficient value is expected to be 95 percent of the time.

This research aimed to determine the level of acceptance of domestic violence and Women's autonomy in decision-making in Nepal. Table 4 concerns multiple regression analysis results. Socio-demographic factors were also closely connected with women's decision-making capabilities and explained 38 percent of the changes.

Thus, the findings showed that the younger women (15 to 24) had a lower level of autonomy compared to the older women ($\beta = -0.030$, $p=0.012$). It was also discovered that education was another significant predictor since, or perhaps because, uneducated women had low decision-making autonomy, ($\beta = -0.180$, $p<0.001$) but educated women claimed to have higher levels of self-autonomy ($\beta=0.150$, $p<0.001$).

We observe a dimension of economic inequality in decision-making power where women from the lower class are less participated ($t=-2.017$, $p<0.05$) compared to the women from the upper economic class with high decision-making power ($t=2.027$, $p<0.05$). It was also found that the education level of the partner and the ethnicity of the partner are other critical factors influencing the ability of a woman to make decisions.

Gender disparities can be seen in the form of regional clusters: In the Karnali Province, the coefficients indicate that women's decision-making power is suppressed (-0.150 , $p<0.001$). Moreover, the hypothesis regarding the negative relationship between employees' involvement in decision-making and their autonomy was supported by the result ($\beta = -0.300$, $p<0.001$), which underlines the importance of engagement for the women empowerment hypothesis. According to this study, factors such as age, education, and household wealth as well as the education level of the partner, ethnicity, as well as geographic location, among other factors, determine the level of women's decision-making authority in Nepal. When women are given roles to make decisions, their vulnerability will be minimized.

Results and Discussion

This study aims at establishing the impact of intra-household decision-making on violence against women proposing education and employment to accord a viable solution against violence against women. Establishing justice for women in the family requires obstacles of negative cultural perceptions of women for them to enjoy respect and freedom from violence.

The study conducted in Nepal aims at identifying the effect of age, education and wealth on decision-making and attitude towards domestic violence by married women. However, there are some limitations found in the analysis due to the method of data collection used in the study. The study is cross-sectional which can reduce the amount of causality that can be established as well as ignore other factors that may influence the women's attitude towards violence.

The finding indicates that the majority of the families have male headship (68.93 %) meaning that women's self-determination may be limited due to the systems of patriarchy (Sharma et al., 2022). When we go deeper into the age and education distribution, we get additional information. It shows that young female consumers, especially females of two decades old or lower (15-24 years) are less likely to participate in the decision-making process than older females (Aryal, 2023) who assert that a woman is granted a more pivotal function in decision-making afterward she grows older because of the corresponding increase in experience and social capital.

Among the topic elements education is considered as one of the crucial, which can improve the condition and increase the activity of women in decision-making activities. Sometimes, a lack of education can hinder a mother's capacity to make decision all those important decisions in the household. Scholars have shown that education in Ethiopia leads to increased decision-making by women once literacy is achieved; education provides equity between men and women, in this social and economic sphere (Bitew et al., 2024; Bui, 2023) note that these educational changes eradicating school fees not only improved home health and family financial decisions.

When women acquire education, they participate in policies related to the population and enhance their decision-making power. Consequently, the lack of education erodes women's decision-making rights, showing why women's educational programs must be encouraged, especially for women in rural and other disadvantaged regions (Usman et al., 2024).

The Adjusted Index of Women's Autonomy shows that the role of economic factors is high, as it is in most countries in the world where households with less purchasing power have lower decision-making potential than richer families (Patel, 2022). Besides, women from rich households

have expanded control concerning the matters of their health care, buying expensive goods, or visiting some kin or relatives. The disparity in this measure of wealth justifies the necessity of development centers to integrate poverty elimination into their agendas as a channel of empowering women to exercise their choices. Previous research has study which has shown a positive relationship between women's empowerment in decision-making and intimate partner violence. This amplifies the need for lending economic empowerment, particularly in the improvement of women's decision-making (Mavisakalyan & Rammohan, 2021).

While comparing the level of autonomy that women have in decision-making across regions, Nepal's Gandaki and Bagmati provinces have a higher score than Madhesh and Karnali provinces. This is blamed on the difference in the degree of socio-economic development and education enrolments across the regions. Women operating in such regions are more educated as the regions are more developed thereby enhancing their decision-making (Majumder et al., 2023; Timsal, 2023).

For example, the income and employment status of women can raise the autonomy level because they are allowed education and other resources. On the other hand, Women from the less developed region, Madhesh are disdained by such factors as low education status which hinders their freedom. Measures that are supposed to promote regional Integration such as infrastructure development, and improvement of education and health facilities in the hinterlands can address such imbalance (Pokharel & Pokharel, 2022).

This sort of justification is still in practice by certain classes of society though the young women are gradually dumping the kind of treatment they are subjected to by their husbands. It is established that women in the age of 15–24 years do not often approve of such violence maybe because of education and media.

Unfortunately, the cultures that are most tolerant of wife beating are the very cultures that are most likely to be represented by women respondents interviewed in the presence of kin. It has also been seen, that younger females are less tolerant towards child nudity than their older female counterparts (Raza & Pals, 2024).

Consequently, education especially higher education in Bangladesh significantly reduces the odds of women justifying male privilege to assault their spouses but with a lesser stringency women from urban areas are more tolerant than rural ones (Shrestha et al., 2023). It also rises in Sub-Saharan Africa among young illiterate women but declines with education and age (Paintsil

et al., 2023). Higher age is associated with higher tolerance of intimate partner violence in Portugal as opposed to the younger generations that continue to deplore such traditions (Almeida et al., 2023).

Still, there is the underlying evidence of wife-beating being accepted among certain segments of the population although the practice becomes less and less acceptable. However, the trends in perceptions of gender violence are more typical and the reason why young women (15-24 years) are less likely to justify wife-beating than older women. This change occurs as education informs women who are less likely to choose violence therefore the criticality where education promotes equality between men and women (Horsman, 2013).

Ethnicity and region the level of acceptance and justification for wife-beating is higher among Dalits and Madhesis This caste class and gender divide only serve to confine the minority of women to various forms of exclusionary and abusive environments. As such, cultural and structural differences will need to be accommodated through targeted measures that seek to change societal attitudes towards domestic violence.

The study also sheds light on the transformation in attitudes towards domestic abuse among educated women and indicates their ability to challenge patriarchal cultures. Economic empowerment is also giving women the power and ability to make their own decisions. Modern management style lays demand on newer modes of intervention aimed at centralization and decentralization of power. If Nepal aspires to free itself from the sociologic social problems like domestic violence and gender discrimination, measures should be firmed up to enhance the awareness and education level, overall economic situation and the ethnic composition of its population.

Conclusion

Socio-demographic factors and women empowerment as well as acceptance of domestic violence in Nepal are the implications of this study. Age, education, wealth, ethnicity and region have a great influence on women's autonomy and their tolerance of domestic violence. They added that marginalized ethnic groups or countries and economically backward provinces like Karnali are more insecure. Awareness and literacy as well as economic independence can improve the social status and level of women and also decrease their tolerance of domestic violence. There is a need for good policies on education, the economy and the disparity between regions to empower women in Nepal. Measures that the authorities are currently taking regarding women's rights speak

of greater involvement of women in decision-making processes. Further studies should evaluate female education and economic projects and how they impact the long-term women's decision-making rights and look at community-based development in a bid to extend women's empowerment for cultural, regional and ethnic diversities for the future.

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