

POLICY BRIEF

Sexual Violence against Girls Assessment

January, 2013

Background:

Studies on violence against married women are increasingly being conducted in Nepal. However, the evidence based research focusing on the sexual violence against adolescent girls, who generally are an easy victim of sexual violence, is conspicuously lacking in Nepal. This has hindered from getting an adequate understanding on the subject and, hence, on formulating effective policies and laws to curb sexual violence against the girls. An exploratory study of sexual violence among young girls conducted by Himalayan Human Rights Monitor (HimRights)/ Partnership for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict (PPCC) attempts to fill up this gap and establish baseline data for policy and program interventions.

The study follows the definition of sexual violence adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) which defines sexual violence as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”. Sexual violence against girls is associated with far reaching negative consequences upon the survivors as well as her family. Besides immediate physical harm, it may lead to psychological as well as mental problems with consequences like depression, fear, suicidal tendency and often irrevocable loss of dignity and self-esteem and may affect overall development. In 2009 government of Nepal enacted a law on domestic violence and punishment that emphasizes respect for the right of every person to live in a secure and dignified manner, prevention and control of violence occurring within the family or outside, making such violence punishable, and providing protection to the survivors of violence. But the law and support system are not enforced in practice.

Objectives:

The study aimed to identify the situation of sexual violence against girls of 13-18 age groups, mapping their understanding of sexual violence and explore the magnitude, pattern and impact of sexual violence.

Methodology:

The survey was carried out among 2000 girls aged 13-18 years in seven Terai districts of Nepal: Kanchanpur, Kailali, Banke, Bardia, Dang, Bara and Parsa. These districts were purposively selected as these districts were PPCC working districts. Sixty percent (n=1200) of the sample was covered from rural area while 40 percent (n=800) was covered from urban area. Cluster sampling method was used to select the respondent. A village and municipality wards with at least 200 households (HH) was considered a cluster and served as Primary Sampling Unit (PSU). A List of household in each ward was prepared and a total of 80 clusters (48 from rural and 32 from urban) were selected using Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) technique. Then 25 HH in each of the selected cluster were selected using systematic random sampling technique and one girl aged 13-18 years was interviewed from the selected HH. In addition 75 in-depth interviews (35 with district based stakeholders and 44 with girl survivors of violence) and 37 FGDs (7 with boys of 13-18 age group, 8 with out of school girls and 7 with in-school girls, 8 with community leaders and 7 with district based stakeholders) were conducted. The qualitative component of the study was used to complement and supplement the findings of the survey.

An ethical committee comprising of 3 members was formed before the initiation of the study. Participants involved in the study were fully informed about the nature of the study, research objectives and confidentiality of the data. Since the study was highly sensitive in nature utmost care was taken to avoid any negative impact to the girl respondents. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were strictly maintained. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

KEY FINDINGS

Prevalence of sexual violence among adolescent girls is high:

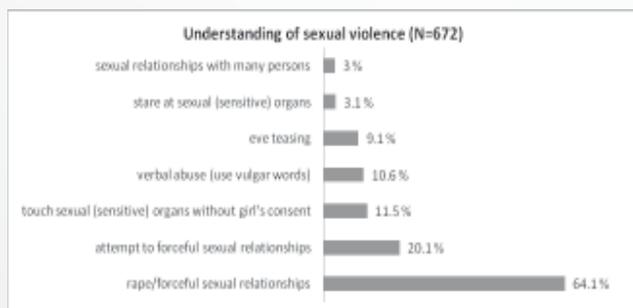
In contrast to existing evidence, this study revealed high level of prevalence of sexual violence against adolescent girls in Nepal. It shows one girl in ten (9.8 %) experiences sexual violence. This is more than double the rate (age 15-19) claimed by Nepal Demographic Health Survey 2011: 4.6 percent of an adolescent girls experience sexual violence. Multivariate analysis indicates some association between experience of violence and socio-economic backgrounds. Disadvantaged Janajatis' are most vulnerable (13.1%) than other caste/ethnicity experiencing sexual violence followed by Dalits (10.6%). Girls from 'non-Dalit Terai caste group' faced least sexual violence (5.2%). Respectively 9.1 percent and 9.2 of the girls from upper caste and relatively advantaged Janajatis faced sexual violence. Similarly, girls who belong to economically sound family background, girls who leave their homes to graze cattle or to work in the field and girls working for cash income, those who do not live with their parents, girls of higher age group and girls residing in urban areas are at higher risk of facing sexual violence than their other counterparts.

Large proportion of girls is unaware about sexual violence:

The result shows that two third of the girls were unaware about the sexual violence (66%) while one third of them have heard about it (34%). This finding further indicates that many of the girls of 13-18 age group are either unaware of the term 'sexual violence' or have accepted the different acts of violence as normal phenomenon. Some association between knowledge about sexual violence and basic characteristics is observed: for example, girls of higher age group, girls residing in urban areas, school going girls, level of education, girls from upper cast group, unmarried girls and girls with higher wealth quintiles have higher level of knowledge than their other counterparts.



Understanding of sexual violence is inadequate:



The girls of 13-18 years old mostly retain a narrow definition of sexual violence, understanding it mostly as forceful sexual contactor rape (64%) and attempt to forceful sexual relationship (20%). Relatively low proportions considered other acts like touching of girls' sexual organs without consent (11%) verbal abuse (11%) and eve teasing (9%) as sexual violence.

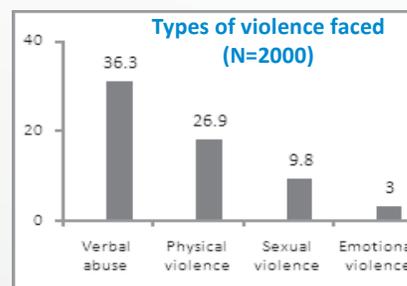
More boys than girls who participated in FGD sessions are more vocal and expressive on issues relating to sexual violence and identified eleven different acts of sexual violence. They are also aware that teasing girls, whistling and using abusive words are

"It (teasing girls, whistling and using abusive words) is a kind of joking or having fun with girls. So it should not be seriously taken. Besides, what is the use of being born a boy if we do not tease them" – A boy participating in FGD

the acts of sexual harassment. Some boys consider these are common practices and it is fun for them and do not realize its negative impact on the girls.

Girls face different types/acts of violence:

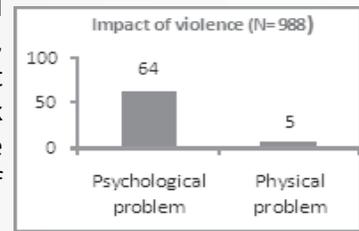
Girls who have faced sexual violence (9.8%) have faced different acts of violence which includes indecent touching, showing of vulgar pictures/movies, attempt to rape or have been raped. The other forms of violence faced are verbal abuse (36.3%) that include bad words, eve teased and being called names, physical violence (26.9%) like beating, shoving and hair pulling, and emotional violence (3%) like forced to get married at a young age and humiliated for being to certain casts.



Violence carries many consequences:

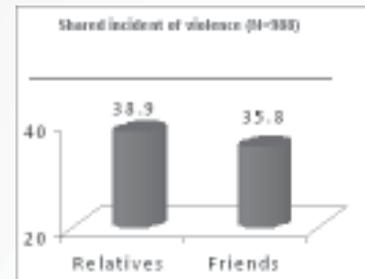
A large proportion of girls who have experienced violence have faced psychological problems (64%) that include fear, tension, quick temper, depression and few have even attempted suicide (2.1%). Five percent have sustained physical injuries like

scratch and cut marks, sustained injuries and have fractured body parts. Very few (2%) had faced social problem (people talked bad about them and made rude remarks), blamed, humiliated, looked down upon them and 0.6 percent faced RH related problems. The impact of violence is still looming large over the lives of survivors. They were depressed, did not talk much, were fidgeting, would cry or abruptly stop talking. Moreover many did not have anyone to support them and there is no immediate support system for the survivors of violence. Many survivors are displaced from their place of origin.



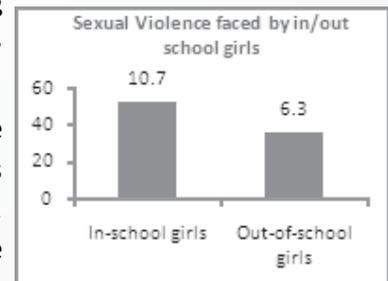
Friends and family members are the first point of contact to share sexual violence:

The result shows that survivors of violence hesitate to talk about their horrific experiences with anyone. However, 65.8 percent of the girls who have faced a violent situation share their experiences with someone. Those girls who have shared about the abuse are most likely to talk to their mothers/relatives (38.9%) friends (35.8%) and friends (1.9%). Though large proportion of girls share about their experiences with above mentioned persons, very few (0.9%) of the girls mentioned that they went to police, child clubs and paralegal committees to report the case for legal action.



Relatives, Friends and Teachers are among main perpetrators:

This research supports existing claim (NDHS 2011) that the perpetrators of sexual violence against girls/women are mainly familiar people, especially those who are close relatives of the survivors. It revealed that the adolescent girls mainly experiences sexual violence from their male friends (23%), school teachers (16%) school boys (16%), relatives and family members (8 %) and friends (7%). Other perpetrators of sexual violence reported are village boys, driver/conductor/rickshaw pullers, relatives/family members, neighbors and even boyfriends/lovers. School is among one of the most susceptible places for sexual violence against girls. One third of the girls reported that they were sexually abused at their school. This compels one to accept the most humiliating fact that the educational institutions which aimed at and is expected to, at least theoretically, teach desirable values and norms to the children are most unsafe place for the girls.



This fact supports another claim of the study that school-going girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence than out-of-school girls. While 10.7 percent of the school-going girls experienced sexual violence and the rate for the out-of-school girls is just 6.3 percent. Qualitative report complemented the survey findings that the school going girls are subjected to different forms of violence at the hands of male teachers:

“Teacher asked all of us to keep our hands up in the class. First he pulled down the skirt of one of the girl and then did the same with other girls but I held my skirts tightly and did not let it fall. Then he hit me on my back 2/3 times and then I was send out of the class” – 15 year old girl, Banke (IDI)

“He (teacher) called me and said if I wanted to pass the exam I had to go to a nearby mill to meet him. I denied and failed in the exam. My parents blame me for failing” – 17 year old girl, Banke (IDI)

Most victims do not report the cases legally/formally:

The result shows that most of the girls do not report the cases of sexual violence legally to police or court. Less than one percent of the survivors reported formally to the police. Nonetheless, 36 percent of girls (both who experienced and did not experience sexual violence) had reported that they should report the case formally to police to seek justice. Moreover, 23 percent of girls do not consider it necessary to share sexual violence experience with others or report about the incidence. Interestingly, some of the girls presumed that they had been subjected to such acts of violence because of their own fault

Social factors and cultural practices are the main reason behind not reporting cases of sexual violence. If such cases come out to public, there is fear of losing social respect and dignity. Moreover, victims are not easily accepted by the society. That is why rape cases are settled at family level at first and then at community level. There is bargaining for monetary compensation or some other properties. – Police, Bardia (IDI)

(15%) and some also thought it was normal (19%). Qualitative report complemented the survey findings of not reporting the cases.

Fear of getting exposed is the main barrier for none reporting:

Fear of getting exposed (36%), shyness (29%), fear of losing social dignity (25%), fear of non-acceptance by the family/community (23%), fear of retribution by the perpetrators (11%) prevent many survivors of violence and their family members from reporting such cases. Lack of awareness, lengthy legal provisions, low economic status, political pressure, lack of enabling environment and no support system are other factors that act as barrier for many for not reporting. The community people also play an important role in deciding the modus operandi of justice. In many cases they restrict the survivors to go to the police and decide the cases themselves.

Conclusion:

The study revealed a high prevalence of sexual violence among adolescent girls. The girls of all ages and from all socio-economic backgrounds are vulnerable to sexual violence. Eve teasing, whistling, calling names, dashing, touching, showing of obscene pictures, phone calls, fondling, attempted rape and rape are different forms of sexual violence faced by the girls. A culture of silence exists among majority of survivors of sexual violence and their family members due to the fear of stigmatization, ostracization, inaction by the state and a lack of support for survivors remain unreported or kept a secret. To end the sexual violence, it should be a major priority and need to be tackled by all and need to overcome the deep-rooted gender inequalities from the society. Ending sexual violence will allow girls to live safer, healthier and dignified lives and fulfill their right to freedom from violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Recommendations:

The findings of the study have some important policy/program implications:

- **Special focus for adolescent girls is needed while making policies regarding sexual violence**, as the prevalence of sexual violence among the girls is high.
- **Prepare and launch a massive campaign** to elevate awareness on sexual violence and motivate social and behavioral change.
- **Immediately create safe school environment** for girls, revise curriculum to include contents on sexual violence and legal provisions and procedures for seeking justice, introduce anti-sexual harassment policies in educational institutions, make aware and train teachers and students on sexual violence, promote gender equitable relationship, empower girls to speak up for themselves and assist the survivors.
- **Ensure maintenance of confidentiality of survivors by police and court.** Mechanisms should be introduced that the police, who handle the case in the first place (and who have the responsibility of investigation) and the court maintain the confidentiality during the process of prosecution. Likewise, mechanisms to improve attitude and behaviors of the service providers should also be strengthened. The court need effectively implement close hearing during trial.
- **Promote community-based efforts to protect girl's legal rights** by educating and encouraging behavioural and attitudinal change within families and communities
- **Support the capacity of local communities to influence changes** in attitudes and behavior in order to reduce violence against women and girls. Give sexual violence a major priority must be addressed by all, through many interventions, concrete actions and effective monitoring.

References:

1. *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011*
2. *WHO, world report on violence and health, 2002*



Himalayan Human Rights Monitors (HimRights)

G.P.O. Box 4690, Inar, Pulchowk, Lalitpur

Phone: 5555111, Fax: 5554880

Email: himrights@wlink.com.np

Website: www.himrights.org



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