



**A STUDY ON  
THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF MEN'S MIGRATION ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SARLAHI,  
SAPTARI AND DHANUSHA DISTRICT**

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## Abbreviations

CoO	Country of Origin
CoD	Country of Destination
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IDI	In-depth Interview
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SaMi	Safer Migration Project

## 1. Introduction

An analysis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development shows that migration has the potential to directly affect eleven SDG goals: Out of 17 goals, eleven have indicators that are related to migration (ODI, 2018). The sheer number of people that are on the move today makes it an important aspect of present day human characteristics. According to IOM (2015), one in seven people today are either international or internal migrants. Among 232 million international migrants, 105 million (45 percent) are international labour migrants. Significant portions of these labour migrants are from developing countries and take up foreign employment in more developed countries. According to IOM (2014), migrants from developing economies contributed to an estimated 40 percent of labour force growth in advanced economies. Hence, migration is one of the major global agenda of the century.

However, ever since discussion on migration and development nexus came to the forefront in 2001 (when IOM commissioned its first study on the migration development nexus), it has become a hugely contested issue. While one side of the migration debate advocates for the positive effects of migration in the forms of tangible and intangible remittances (such as better financial conditions and increase in awareness, knowledge and skills), the other side underlines the adverse effects of migration.

Social costs on the community and families left behind can constitute an important adverse effect of migration if measures to address it are not taken in a timely manner. While this is an increasingly important subject that development partners face in their everyday work with the community, the SDG goals have yet to touch upon explicitly. Social costs often remain overshadowed by remittances benefits and social cost on families does not appear strongly in the migration management debate. While men and women migrate mainly for the wellbeing of their families, global and regional forums have failed to address this link between the migrant's welfare and the wellbeing of the migrant's family in the country of origin (CoO). One of the reasons for this is the lack of data and research on this phenomenon.

The study of the relationship between changes in the mode of production and gender roles is not new. Scholars as far as Marx and Davis have shown the change in family roles and responsibilities brought about by the shift of agrarian society to a capitalist mode of production. Several scholars today have written about the impact of migration on gender roles. While the discourse on the impact of migration on personal and national development has garnered a reasonable amount of attention, the same is lacking when it comes to the analysis of the impact on those who are left-behind and how it affects development.

In Nepal, a large scale migration of men (and increasingly women) to the countries of the Gulf (GCC), Malaysia, Japan and Korea for contractual labour, has made migration a new normality. Hence, it is high time to understand the relation between migration, overall wellbeing of the left behinds and how it affects development. Furthermore, due to the lack of better opportunities in Nepal, increased social networks and financial capital from first migration, , people are able to afford better destinations and the migration cycle gets perpetuated: Men often end up either renewing their contract or migrating to a different country that is perceived to give better outcomes if they are not satisfied with conditions back home (Ghimire and Maharjan, 2014).

Due to rules and regulations in the countries of destination (CoD), family reunion or resettlement abroad is almost not possible for Nepalis, thus leaving families to live in a "trans-nationally split" (Rahman, 2009, pp 11) situation. This often results in the extended absence of migrant workers from the lives of their spouses and children, which in turn affects the left behinds as well as the migrant.

There is mixed evidence from in and outside Nepal on the impact of men's absence (due labour migration) on the wife left-behind. Some studies (Menjívar and Agadjanian, 2007; Boehm, 2008; Radel and Schmook, 2009; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2004) show that men's migration can lead to the expansion of the women's horizon as well increase their autonomy and decision-making power. However, other studies (McEvoy 2008) point to the negative outcomes such as a work overburden, high divorce rates, and decrease in social support, high stress and low fertility. These studies show that in the absence of men, the household authority shifts to other extended male family members and are taken over again by the husband upon his return.

Other studies in this area point to the fact that added responsibilities for women due to men's migration actually do not change discriminatory gender norms as "neither the nature nor the scope of these tasks challenges the deeply entrenched gender inequality" (Menjívar and Agadjanian, 2007, p. 1260) and that in some settings it is rather reinforced as extended family members and society may have greater control over resident wives upon their husbands' migration (Desai and Banerji 2008). These studies claim that as a consequence the power of control moves beyond private relationship to the out-of-private sphere and become more abusive for the left-behind. It is therefore important to understand what implication migration has on the lives of the wives in terms of the gender roles and responsibilities, social norms and the power of control that surround them.

The interest for this research stems from the Safer Migration Project (SAMI)<sup>1</sup>'s and Save the Children's<sup>2</sup> practical work in the field which points to a critical need to understand the above discussed issues related to the wellbeing of left behind wives and children.

### 1.1 SaMi's and Save the Children's' field experience about migration in the study sites

SaMi and Save the Children's work with migrants and their families indicates that transnational labour migration in Nepal has come with significant social costs affecting families, mostly women and children. The separation of family members may lead to various challenges such as estrangement in husband-wife relationships, family disputes over resource control, and reputation damage of the wife who is left behind, violence on women left behind and lack of parental care and support for children.

### 1.2 Women's dilemma

Most of the Nepali men migrate to Malaysia and the GCC Countries to work in low-skilled, low-paid and unprotected jobs. In the absence of their husbands, wives have to take on additional responsibilities including household economic activities (e.g. agriculture work and small trades). Women also have to take care of children, the sick and elderly. Furthermore, women who work outside the house or move in public spaces to carry out duties that was usually done by men, they often suspected of being "loose" by their relatives and neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup>SaMI is a bilateral initiative between the Government of Nepal and the Government of Switzerland and aims at enhancing the protection of migrants and their families while improving the work conditions for migrants abroad.

<sup>2</sup>Save the Children has been operating in Nepal since 1976. They currently work with over 100 partners (including the Government of Nepal) in 63 districts of Nepal in the areas of Childs Rights Governance, Child Protection, Education, Health and Nutrition, Livelihoods, HIV and AIDS and Humanitarian Response. Their programs are guided by the National Plan of Action for Children and the UN Millennium Development Goals and their own vision for all children to attain the right to survival, protection, development and participation.



SaMi organized Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with 125 groups (in total 2,353 participants) in 2016. These FGDs highlighted negative preconceived ideas towards women migrants and women left behind. Almost all participants believed that migrant women have been sexually exploited in the CoDs. Women left behind were often accused of squandering money, having extra-marital affairs and not taking care of their house and children. Such discriminatory practices and preconceived notions make it difficult for women to live a dignified life. While economic independency is understood to be critical in women leading a dignified life, this does not happen for women migrants due to social stigma on female migration and women

Such harmful norms and negative perceptions are deeply rooted in society but also spread by media stories in Nepal when they are in-sensitive. In 2015, SaMi conducted a three-month media monitoring assessment at the national level. The findings showed that some media had broadcasted stories which blamed women of remarrying through elopement or squandering their husbands' remittance. In this sense, the media contributed to spread a partial and patriarchal view of these women.

As a result, women migrants and women left behind face anxiety, depression and high levels of reputational/social stigma. They may also face harassment and discrimination, for instance higher loans. In addition, they may have to cope with situations where the husband is unable to earn or is stuck in a difficult situation in the CoD. Thus, SaMi seeks to better understand the causes and effects of migration on the women left behind.

### 1.3 Sami's and Save the Children's experience after working with children left behind

When parents migrate and children are left behind, they may face multiple problems in their upbringing despite the possible benefits of remittance investment in their education, health care and day-to-day commodities. The absence of the parent may have important psychological implications and negative impacts on their personal development. In the worst cases, children may even be neglected or exposed to violence and exploitation as a result of the parent's absence or changed family arrangements.

. Children rely on their parents for support at every stage of their development. Migration causes important changes within the household and family dynamics. For instance, when a mother migrates, only a small percentage of men become the primary caregiver and the job of parenting normally falls to the grandparents or other relatives who might not be able to substitute the mother. SaMi and Save the Children have already sensed declining school attendance and performance of the children of migrant households in their respective working districts and think this might be due to parent's migration.

Migration of a family member can lead to benefits but the changes in household dynamics can also make spouse s vulnerable to a variety of new challenges. Left behind members need to find new ways of organizing household tasks including land cultivation, re-define economic strategies to use or save the additional amount of money received, and be prepared to deal with injuries or the death of the migrant member. Left alone, a wife becomes the head of the household and may need to get familiar with various new activities, which have repercussions on the time and the quality care she can give to children.

## 2. Research parameters

The section below presents the objectives of the research and the questions it focuses on.

### 2.1 Research objective and focus area

The present study focuses on the social cost of migration and tries to understand negative impact that migration has on left-behind household members of migrants. The objective of this study is to identify the impact of migration on the wellbeing of left behind wife and children. The areas of exploration are given in section below. The study aims at creating a more in-depth understanding of social implications of labour migration on wives of migrants and on children of migrants to:

- a) Inform programming of SaMi, Save the Children and other organizations working with families of migrants and
- b) Inform the public discourse and policy making on migration and development from a gender norms perspective.

The study will explore the following: Implications of men's migration on family structure, intra household relationships and communication, gender roles, autonomy and participation in social activities, psycho-social wellbeing experienced by left-behind women.

- Psychological and social implications of father's migration on children which includes impact of remittances in children's health, education and nutrition; impacts in social expectations/roles, experience and aspirations of adolescent girls and boys.

The study explores the impact of migration on the following:

1. General information on migration background in the three district (Sarlahi, Saptari and Dhanusha)
2. Changes in the family structure (from extended to nuclear; second marriages of women or men), reasons and its impact on wife and children of migrant
3. Relationship and communication patterns between spouse and with in-laws,
4. Changes in workload, its implications for women, and support structures
5. Impact on gender ideals/ gendered norms and its implications on women and children left behind: Whether/how gender ideals are reinforced/ become flexible for left behind women? What are the implications of these changes on women and children?
6. Social and political engagement: change in women's participation in groups and community decisions, changes in access to local service centers, and civic and political engagement of migrant's wives.

Implications on children's roles and responsibilities:

- How migration of father (or mothers?) changes the social roles and social image within households, amongst their peers and in the community?
- How does it vary across gender, age and caste groups?
- What are the implications of this change on children?
- Impact of father's migration on child labour, care work, academic achievement, drop-out and career aspirations?

## 2.2 Research methodology

The study uses a mixed methodology, combining a participatory qualitative approach, a quantitative household survey and desk review.

### 2.2.1 Study type

**Quantitative study:** A household survey was carried out with wives of migrants from 1,000 migrant households in the SaMi intervention districts Saptari and Dhanusha. Sites within the districts were selected based on discussion with SaMi. Purposive sampling strategy was used. Respondents were SaMi beneficiaries and wives of migrants who had gone to Gulf countries and Malaysia for work. Local social mobilizers from SaMi helped us to reach out to the respondents.

**Qualitative study:** The qualitative leg of the work used participatory tools. Details of the tools used, including types and number of respondents for each tool are attached to the study (Annex-1). In depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with wives of migrants, care takers of left behind children and left behind children themselves. FGDs were conducted with groups of left behind women and left behind children. The FGD tools with women consisted of body mapping exercises, path of aspirations, mapping of source and use of money exercise and vignettes. With the children, it consisted of body mapping, path of aspirations and mapping of social networking. In depth interview were conducted separately with boys and girls. Special consideration was given to ensure the representativeness of age, class, ethnic groups, destination and period of absence in each of the tools.

Besides this, the study also undertook key informant interviews with relevant local stakeholders such as lawyers, members of women's groups, police, local male and female political leaders and programme implementers among others. All ethical protocols including consent taking from respondents and their guardians for recording and taking pictures and making interviews anonymous were followed.

### 2.2.2 Research sites

The research was conducted in Sarlahi, Saptari and Dhanusha districts, which are working areas of SaMi and Save the Children (SC hereafter). The study was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted of formative qualitative (only) study in Sarlahi district. Sarlahi was chosen as it has a high rate of male migration but is also ethnically diverse thus allowing us to engage with respondents both from Hilly and Terai origins and different ethnic groups of Terai and Hills. Study in Saptari and Dhanusha districts was done in the second phase based on the result of the first phase which showed us the need to have more in-depth study on the population of Terai origin where some results of migration were different. The two districts were selected based on the first formative study, which showed that impacts on children and women strongly varied along ethnic lines. Saptari and Dhanusha were chosen as there is a dearth of information from the households of Terai origin - even though out-migration from some of the Terai districts such as Saptari and Dhanusha ranks amongst the highest in the country. Saptari and Dhanusha both have a majority of Terai origin population, with similar socio-demographic and economic features.

The research was conducted in two VDCs of Sarlahi district namely Kalinjor VDC (now Kalinjor ward 12 under Iswarpur Municipality) and Shankarpur VDC. Shankarpur has majority of Terai origin population while Kalinjor has a larger population of hilly origin. In Saptari district, the study was carried out in Rajbiraj, Kanchanroop and Swambhunath (urban municipalities) and Koiladi and Rupani (rural municipalities). In Dhanusha, study was conducted in Janakpur sub-metro, Mithila, Chireswarnath,

Nagarain (urban municipalities) and Laxmaniya rural municipality (rural municipality) were selected for the study.

Communities having concentrated population of diverse ethnic groups were purposely selected based on information from SaMi volunteers and secondary data from SaMi. Annex 2, Annex 3 and Annex 4 provides a summary of the demographic information of the study districts.

### 2.2.3 Limitations of the study

A generalisation of the study's findings should be avoided due to the limited geographic coverage of the study. Further, the study has mainly focused on the perspective of women, with majority of respondents being female except for the male key informants, adolescent boys in children's group and some returnee men in Saptari. Hence, there is only limited male perspective in the findings.

## 3. Research Findings

The following sections summarize the findings of the study in the selected districts.

### 3.1 General information

Profile of the left behind women respondents Annex 5, presents the demographic information of the female respondents interviewed in the survey. As can be seen from the table, the highest percentage of respondents were from age group 25-35 (50.95%) followed by those below age 25 years (29.33%) in Saptari and Dhanusha while the age of left-behind women was between 19-40 in Sarlahi. Largely, men were found to go for foreign employment as soon as they get married and remain in foreign employment till the end of their working age, (around 45 years of age). Only few (0.8%) men are in foreign employment after the age of 45, usually the ones who have worked in the same company earlier and have experienced multiple renewals of their contracts by the same company. They are also the most likely to have extended absence from home. The survey shows that high caste people of both Terai and hill origin and women are least likely to migrate. Aspiration for income diversification comes out as the main driver of migration in all the study districts and foreign employment comes as the strongest source of livelihoods and main source of income (40.34% of the respondents). The ranking of income sources from the qualitative study also aligns with the findings of the survey data as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Primary sources of income**

S.N	Sources of income	Priority ranking
1	Remittance	*
2	Agricultural farming	**
3	Agricultural labour	***
4	Livestock farming	****
5	Expenses given from maternal home(as gifts)	*****
6	Livestock farming	*****
7	Son's job	*****
8	Women's self-employment at home (tailoring, agriculture and petty trade)	*****

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Foreign employment is the main occupation in all the three districts: more common in Saptari (47.6%) than Dhanusha (33.07%) as per the survey data. Work in the family farm, petty trade and daily wage in non-agriculture (26.63%) were common livelihoods men had prior to migration. Wage labour in agriculture least common: only 0.1% of men were engaged daily wage labour in agriculture prior to migration. This might be because as migration theories point out- these people did not have enough resources to fund migration. Having said that, unemployment also came as a strong driver of migration in all the three places: 45.75% of respondents said they migrated due to unemployment. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of migrant men in Saptari and Dhanusha where we did the survey.

**Table 2: Demographic information of male migrants from Saptari and Dhanusha<sup>3</sup>**

Particulars	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total Percent
<b>Age of the migrant</b>			
Below 25 years	3.4	0.0	1.7
25-35	41.4	32.26	36.84
35-45	40.0	47.49	43.84
45 and above	15.2	20.24	17.72
<b>Marital status<sup>4</sup></b>			
First marriage	97.0	95.2	96.2
Second marriage	2.6	3.5	3.5
Third marriage	0.4	0.3	0.3
<b>Recurrence of foreign employment</b>			
First time	36.8	30.66	33.73
Second time or more	63.2	69.34	66.27
<b>Occupational status of husband before migration</b>			
Family farm	33.2	37.07	35.14
Daily wages in agriculture	12.6	14.43	13.51
Daily wages in non-agriculture	22.6	30.66	26.63
Family business	26.6	9.02	17.82
Farming (own)	0.2	0.0	0.1
Regular jobs in non-agriculture sector (except government jobs)	2.0	3.81	2.9
Employment in government office	1.0	0.4	0.7
<b>Reasons for migration</b>			
Unemployment	38.8	52.71	45.75
To earn more	57.2	38.08	47.65
Family dispute	0.2	1.4	0.8
Family pressure	2.8	3.41	3.1
Visa sponsored from friends and family living abroad	0.0	0.8	0.4
Influenced by friends and family(but not visa sponsored)	0.6	2.2	1.4
Others	0.4	1.4	.9

<sup>3</sup> Since the survey was not done in Sarlahi, we do not have quantitative data from Sarlahi. We have only given qualitative data from Sarlahi.

<sup>4</sup> Since we interviewed wives of migrants we do not have single men who have migrated. However, in all the districts, single men also migrate for work.

Cost of migration (NRP) <sup>5</sup>			
<50'000	2.8	6.41	4.6
50'000-99'999	13.0	13.83	13.41
>100'000	84.2	79.76	81.98
Loan taken for migration			
Yes	88.0	90.98	89.49
No	12.0	9.02	10.51
Taken loan from			
Bank	7.5	9.91	8.72
Finance institution other than bank	0.0	0.88	0.45
Saving groups	1.36	6.39	3.91
Family	5.91	1.32	3.58
Friends	3.64	2.2	2.91
Neighbours	34.77	51.76	43.4
Landlord or employee	45.0	26.21	35.46
Others	1.82	1.32	1.57

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Despite opportunities for labour work opening in new destinations such as Cyprus, Maldives, Korea and Japan, migrants from the survey districts largely go to GCC countries and Malaysia. The study also finds remigration to be common: in Saptari and Dhanusha, 66.27% of men have migrated for foreign employment more than once and in some cases up to 7 times.

The expectation from migration were common across the three districts: saving money to make a better house and buy land, enrolling the children in a good school (private English medium) and having money for dowry for daughter's marriage (in case of Madeshi community). On asking children about their perception of what motivates their father to migrate, they also perceived marrying off of sisters, building a house and investing in better education to be a major concern that pushes their fathers into foreign employment as shown below:

*"We did not have a house (own) to stay. Our father built a house after he went to work abroad. We are four sisters and two brothers. He had to send us to school. Parents have to marry all the daughters. It will take lot of money. So, father went to work abroad. He came home during elder sister's marriage and returned again."* - **IDI with left behind children (Girl), Saptari**

<sup>5</sup> Cost includes fees for coming to Kathmandu or district headquarters, passport fees, fees for health-check up for health certificate, police report and money they pay to brokers and recruitment agencies for processing migration.





Both the qualitative and quantitative study indicates that the cost of migration ranges from 90'000 rupees to 2 Lakhs and is largely borrowed (90% loans) from neighbours and landlords. The costs include passport, visa, air ticket and the agent charge. Households used local agents within their networks for the migration process.

### 3.2 Evidence of impacts on family structure after migration and its implications for women

While there are widespread concerns regarding impact of migration in rearrangement of living amongst family: mostly fear of wives of migrant moving out to live separately in urban areas leaving behind old-aged parents to take care of themselves, this was not common: 70% of households did not see any change in living arrangements in Saptari and Dhanusha. 55.8% of respondents in Saptari and 56.51% of respondents in Dhanusha lived in joint households currently. Out of those who were living in joint family, 30.1% in Saptari and 29.3% in Dhanusha started living in nuclear families after migration of the husband. In Sarlahi district however, change in living arrangement amongst migrant households is more common: 62% of respondents informed us that they separated from their in-laws a few years after their husband's migration.

However, while migration is understood to be the driver of change in living arrangement, this is just a face value judgement. Unequal power relations and feeling of injustice are inherent in relationship between daughter-in-laws and other member of the men's family and migration merely pushes this to the front. A wife living separately from the in-laws after migration of husband is merely manifestation of dissatisfaction over gendered and otherwise unequal intra-household power-relations. Hence, it would have been inevitable in other situations as well. Migration can only be one of the many possible triggers for family members to resist subordination and control.

**Table 4: Status of family structures**

Particulars	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total Percent
Joint family	55.8	56.51	56.16
Nuclear family	43.49	43.84	43.84

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Reasons and patterns for living separately vary by ethnicity. In case of household of hilly origin, where living in nuclear households after migration of husband is more common, issues of control, primarily over remittances expenditure and feeling of discrimination and maltreatment by in-laws in absence of the husbands stands out to be the main reason for wives wanting to live separately. Respondents shared that the in-laws treated them unfairly, giving them difficult work and were resentful towards them in absence of husband and they did not have a say in how the remittance was spent. There were particular expenses that irked the wives: buying joint property, not spending on quality education and health of children (of migrant), expenses in house-building and no pocket money for daily expenses of the wives. However, in all situations, it was the husband who made the final decision of the wife moving away from the main household.

*"Yes, I was not happy. My father-in-law always wants to buy land and build house. I want to send my son to good school and save some money. My husband's money is now spent on joint property. It will be divided later on. The brothers who stay here do not give money to the father-in-law. So only our money is used to buy land now and the brothers will take it later. So, I thought it is better to separate and go our own ways. I told this several times to my husband and later he agreed". - IDI with woman left behind, Sarlahi*

The feeling of injustice however flows both ways: interviews with elderly men in Sarlahi showed that they feel humiliated when the remittances are sent to the wife. They shared that they feel disrespected by their own son when they have to depend on the daughter-in-law for money. There were cases where parents have left the house to live separately due to feeling of humiliation.

*“Well most of the times, it’s due to financial issues. At the time of going to abroad, the parents find the money to send their son. But later, when he sends money in the name of his wife, they feel angry about it.” – KII, Sarlahi*

In the Madhesi community in Saptari and Dhanusha, the main reason for living separately is largely the death of parents. Death of parents leads to division of ancestral property if the brothers are married and they prefer to stay separately once they have their share of property. When parents are around, wives of migrants rarely stay in nuclear families and remittances are rarely sent to them. In the Muslim community, families rarely move out of joint households. When the father of the family is absent, other senior male take the role of the absent migrant including all household decisions and remittances are sent to him.

The patterns of living separately are different as well: In Saptari and Dhanusha, among the Muslim and the Madhesi respondents, when they separated, women only had separate kitchen and bedroom but continued to live within the same courtyard and did not take their property share. This also means that they continued to do the family and agriculture work together with the larger family and remittances are largely sent to the household head and not to the wife of the migrant.

Among the hilly respondents, women lived in a different community after they separated, and did not work on the common family farm. Remittances are sent to her instead of the parents in these households if they were sent to the parents earlier.

There are mixed perceptions around living in joint and nuclear family after the migration of husband. Those who have continued living see both benefits and challenges while for those who decided to stay separately, challenges outweighed the benefits. Respondents who shared they had problems in living in joint households after the migration of the husband felt that having to depend on the in-laws for daily expenses, violence, discrimination and unjust division of workload, requiring permission from both the husband and the in-laws for going out of house to markets or visiting natal homes, having to give details for even small personal expenses to in-laws, suspicion, gossip and eavesdropping (on phone conversation) in husband wife conversations made life difficult for them.

Relentless scrutiny over social interaction, spreading false rumours in the community and poisoning the ear of the migrant husband, deprivation, domestic and sexual violence come out strongly amongst wives who live in joint households.

Sexual violence was surprisingly very high in Dhanusha and Saptari. The study also finds that women cannot speak about sexual violence meted out to them and continue to stay in joint households after facing sexual violence from family members. Key informants in Dhanusha and Saptari were of the opinion that domestic and sexual violence are widespread among the migrant households but do not get reported due to a number of reasons including dependency on in-laws, lack of trust from husband, fear of losing support from husband, lack of support structure and fear of bringing disgrace to the household's name and fame.

*"Some women submit to sexual coercion of one male head of the family so she does not have to face violence from other men in the family or other kind of violence. Such is the state here" KII, Dhanusha*

We asked respondents if they think they would share sexual violence from family members to their husband if they had to face one: None of them were confident. Even when they would like to separate, women often feel that they cannot say this to their husbands as husbands might suspect them of infidelity and luring men in absence of the husband or think their bodies have been used by others and reject them.

Our analysis of discussions we had with such women and key informants, including men, finds that there are several reasons linking up with each other to make a disabling environment for women to discuss freely with their husbands about such violence and ask for living separately. First, in such communities men and women marry early and marriages are largely (94.99% in our sample) arranged by parents. Men would have either returned for marriage or tend to migrate immediately after marriage if they do not have a satisfactory job. Hence, there is no time for the couple to build trust in each other for husbands to believe such serious allegations on family from a wife who considered an outsider in the family compared to parents. Second, as brothers (to sisters and daughter-in-laws of households) and male members in the community, men have grown up internalising and being pressured to uphold guardianship role which largely supports discriminatory gender norms as a way of protecting women: for example men are expected to control and see to it that women in the family uphold gender norms and do not "go haywire". They believe that women should be protected but also guarded strictly against any actions that transcend gender norms so as to keep the family honour in the community intact. Third, as they have lived more with the parents than with their wife and have been brought up with a strong sense of responsibility of son to ageing parents and owing what they have to their parents, there is almost a sense of devotion to parents which outweighs trust in the wives.

Amidst disposition and social factors in the home community we mentioned in the paragraph above, the few returnee men we talked to also share their circumstances in the destination that leads to suspicion and uncertainty: that news of elopement, extramarital affairs of migrant's wives, and extravagant spending by wives are discussed regularly among migrant men who live together abroad and makes them strongly attuned to any possible slip of conduct of wives. Such men shared that social media and phone calls with friends back home are the main sources of information about such matters. They also observe migrant men and women having extra-marital affairs while in the CoD. Hence, they tend to be more suspicious of wives and other men in general. Moreover, they think that the wives are not smart enough to understand when a man has bad intentions, so she needs to be protected from such outsider men. Hence, they choose to keep the wife in joint family under the guardianship of their parents.

*"Yes, we talk about women's bad behaviour among our friends in Qatar. We say friend, what to do, we are here, so and so's wife eloped with another man so he is going home. Y's wife spends a lot of money and he does not know where his wife is spending their money, so he feels tense. We hear about it when we call our friends in the village or when we surf in Facebook. We are more suspicious when we migrate"*  
**- IDI, returnee migrant, Saptari**

Separation was found to take place generally after 2-3 years after the first migration. Key informants were of the opinion that this time lapse helps build trust of the migrant with the wife while the family also has paid off their debt by this time.

However, there were few respondents also saw benefits of living together. Such respondents feel that if there is harmony and help among the family members in the joint family then it is better living in the joint family as work burden tends to be shared and children get better guardianship.

Though we did not conduct surveys with children, we asked them about their choice of joint and nuclear family. Irrespective of whether they were living in joint or nuclear families, all children preferred to live in a joint family. They believed that they get more love and care from each other in a joint family and the extended family members can support them in absence of their father.

*“I like to live in a joint family. If we live in joint family then, all will help each other in trouble. Workload will also be divided. Sometimes, small disputes happen but it is not big issue.”- IDI with left behind children (Boy), Saptari*

### 3.3 Relationship and communication

There are mixed responses around the impact of husband's migration on women's relationship in the household. Table 5 shows perception of women on the impact of migration on their relationship with their husband, in-laws and neighbours coming from the survey.

**Table 5: Relationship of women left behind with husband, in-laws and neighbours**

Responses	With husband			With in-laws			With neighbours		
	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total
Improved	57.8	35.67	46.75	28.0	21.64	24.82	10.0	12.83	11.41
Decreased	2.6	1.4	2.0	8.6	9.22	8.91	8.4	6.01	7.21
Same as earlier	39.6	62.93	51.25	63.4	69.14	66.27	81.6	81.16	81.38

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

#### 3.3.1 Relationship of women left behind with husband

From the quantitative data it is found that more than half (51.25%) of women said that there is no changes in the relationship between the couple after the migration of their husband whereas 46.7% of women told that their relationship has improved and only few women (2.0%) said that their relationship has become bad after the migration.

The study finds that social media has made communication cheaper and bridged communication gaps between migrants and their family members. In Dhanusha and Sarlahi, 85.39% of the couples communicate more than once a day while in Sarlahi, it was 80%. A few women from the Madhesi community communicate once a week citing that their husbands are not earning well in the destinations so cannot afford to call more often.

A problem with communication was that it was largely the husband who initiated the call. Women would give calls only when they had urgent matters to share often due to cost issues and uncertainty about working hours of husband in the destination, which they think keeps changing. This often meant that wives neglected their own urge to communicate with the husbands. Furthermore, in case of some women living in joint family, the husband had to first speak with the parents before speaking to the wife and there was no place for private conversation. All of our respondents had used mobile phone before their husband went abroad but none of the respondents had used video calling service before. We also found that they learned to use it from their husband or their children.

The fact, 46.7% of women see improvement in the relationship with their husband and 52.03% perceive that this improvement is brought about by the remittances sent by the husband and women taking care of the in-laws and doing household work (20% each) shows the importance of financial stability in a



good husband wife relationship. This also shows the importance of complying with gendered work division in maintaining a harmonious relationship between couples. Men are expected to earn and women to do care work and household work in the study communities as elsewhere in Nepal (Ghimire and Samuels, 2014). The fact that men earn more when they migrate and keep wives in joint families to do the care work aligns with such traditional expectations and hence contributes to prevent tensions in relationships.

A few women also indicated the lesser disputes and decreased violence (e.g. not having drunk husband in the house) by the husband as the reasons for improvement in the relationship between the couple after the migration of husbands. This comes out more strongly in Dhanusha than Saptari and Sarlahi.

Likewise, when asked about the reasons for the worsening of the relationship between the couple, women responded that not sending remittance by husband in time (30%), communication gap between the couple (20%), husbands believing in rumours about wife that community and family members tell the them (10%) and suspicion by husband (5%) were a major cause of relationship going bad between couples.

Discussions with the wives (in the focus groups and IDIs) shows that younger men tend to listen to their mothers and fathers more often, but older men tend to also listen to wives if the parents complained too much. Young women are of the opinion that the parents have a great role to play in creating disputes between the couples especially in case of newly married migrants.

*"Yes (parents create problems). They are always complaining that we do not work, walk around, are lazy etc. We work all day but they will tell our husbands that we do not obey them and do not take care of them. Our husbands first listen to them. Only when we tell them the whole story, they will understand. Sometimes we do not know what our in-laws have told them. In such time they are angry with us".-IDI with woman left behind, Saptari*

Disputes between husband and wife in case of nuclear family are usually about the use of money. In some cases, husbands ask details of the expenses and become angry when the wife is unable to give them details of smaller day-to-day expenses. Women feel that they are poor at keeping records related to here they spend small amounts on. But when it accumulates, smaller amounts sum up to become a significant amount of money and lead to problems with husband. After attending SaMi programmes, some women have started keeping accounts of day to day expenses to cope with the situation and have found it effective.

*"Previously, I would spend and not keep records of what I spent. I felt I spend 200 rupees here, 500 there and they are all for children or for the household. But when my husband asks about the month's expenses, I realise, these small sums end up to be a big amount. I have no idea where I spent so much money. Then he asks and I become angry that he suspects me. This leads to fights. Now a days, I keep details of even 1 rupee and there is no fight anymore".-IDI with woman left behind, Saptari*

In all cases, women didn't share everything with their husbands due to distance and cost issues. We found mixed feelings in women regarding sharing their worries. Some women talked about their hardships while others did not. These women feared that by sharing these worries such as their own stress, sickness or sickness of children they will be giving unnecessary stress to their husband. This often meant that they took the burden themselves.



*“She (an imaginary wife of migrant they created for body mapping exercise) only shares good things with her husband and won’t share things with him that may get him worried” – Mini workshop with left behind wife, Sarlahi*

In turn, women also know that their, husband too wouldn’t share much about his worries as well.

*“He does not tell me that he is having a hard time but he does tell me that his work is hard” –IDI with woman left behind, Sarlahi*

Despite frequent communications and video chats, women felt that it was not the same face to face talk. Delays in phone calls by husband is the most common factor for anxiety as shared by women and women felt it repeatedly due to changing work shifts of husbands. When husbands do not call back, they are always assuming the worst such as death or accident of the husband. Due to frequent news around migrant’s death, accident and fear of husband's accident or death are always at the back of their mind and is one of the most significant stress factor. Hence, regular communication is an important way to ensure that left behind women are less stressed.

*“There is a huge difference in staying together and staying apart. I used to know everything he was feeling when he was here but now we only can talk through phone so he always tells me that everything is okay. But who knows he might not be feeling well and having a hard time” – IDI with woman left behind, Sarlahi*

Key informants, particularly those who work on violence against women such as legal officers and members of district, have largely found that left behind wives cannot share cases of sexual violence if the perpetrator is a family member such as sibling or father of the migrant. When they have shared, men do not believe their wives and instead blame her for enticing them. When they have to address cases of sexual violence in such situations, key informants have to call the husbands several times and tell them the wife's story. They are of the opinion that such cases come out in their attention only when the wives have faced extreme form of public violence (such as being beaten up outside the house in broad daylight). Hence, such issue of lack of trust from husband becomes a big cause of psychosocial distress for the left behind women.

### 3.3.2 Relationship of women left behind with in-laws

While the survey data (Table 5) shows largely that relationships between migrant's wife and their in-laws do not change after migration, the qualitative study found that in-laws behave badly after the migration of husband. This difference might be due to the following facts: 1. In the qualitative study, there is better rapport building between the respondents and the researcher, 2. questions were asked in groups and 3. The kind of tools we used (such as body maps) meant that they did not necessarily have to say that they had faced abused or was discord in their own houses if they chose not to.

Interestingly, some respondents felt that migration also improved relationship between the wives of migrants and in-laws. The most common reason (33.47%) was in-laws feeling happier when they get steady flow of money and treat the wives well due to fear that the earning son will separate or stop sending money if they do not treat her well. The second common reason was childcare support: for 24.19% of the left behind wives, the fact that they get support from in-laws in guardianship of the children has led to improvement in relationships. Taking care of elderly in-laws (19.35%) and staying at home and doing household chores (18.15%) i.e. following the ideal gender norms were seen as other factors that have helped in forging stronger relationship with in-laws after migration of the husband.

For those, who spoke about worsening of relationship with in-laws, 25.84% said that dissatisfaction with in-laws was related to the distribution of household chores; mean behaviours after husband's migration followed by dissatisfaction over who receives the remittances (21.35%) giving false information about the wife to the migrant (20.22%).

In nuclear family, remittances are normally sent to the wife and she handles all the household expenses. In joint families, remittances are most likely sent in the name of in-laws who handle all the household expenses. We found that women from Muslim and middle class families, women living in joint families and newly-weds are economically more deprived even when the husband sends remittances. First they are not allowed to take paid work and second remittances are sent to the in-laws who do not give her money for regular expenses. They were found to depend on their maternal homes for their regular expenses such as recharge cards and their children's school tiffin or travel.

### 3.3.3 Relationship of women with the neighbours

There is mixed evidence around the changes in the relationship with neighbours after migration of husbands. As with the earlier cases, quantitative data shows that relationships do not change or change for better while in qualitative study, there are mixed evidences. We think the difference is due to 1. methods used for data collection and 2 when women refer to neighbours in the survey, they refer to immediate next door neighbour but in case of qualitative study, we were asking women to refer to the larger community beyond immediate next door neighbours.

81.38% of survey respondents said that their relationship with their neighbour remained unchanged while 11.41% felt it had become better. For those who felt it was better, they perceived that mutual help (56.14%), remittances which helped them to support each other in financial need (20.18%) were the two main reasons. 7.21% of women said that the relationship has decreased after the husband's migration. Different forms of violence by neighbours came as the main reason: 59.72% of women felt backbiting was the main reason for degrading relationship with their neighbours, followed by anger over gossiping (19.44%) and violence (shouting and quarrelling, verbal and sexual harassment, land encroachment, leaving cattle in their crops, (12.5%).

*"Yes, we have had fights. Now that my husband is not around, they shift their boundary towards our land. I told them to put the fences where they were earlier, but they do not listen. So, I have to fight".*

**- IDI with woman left behind, Saptari**

While this does not come up strongly in the survey, sexual violence by neighbours comes up strongly in FGDs, key informants interviews such as from lawyers, police and local social mobilizers who help women fight legal cases. Key informants are of the opinion that women are very less likely to talk about sexual violence from neighbours due to fear of being blamed as impure and then ostracized by the husband and blaming for enticing men by the in-laws and community. In the survey, neighbours come as the fourth most frequent perpetrators of violence. We will discuss this in the violence section later.

## 3.4 Changing Gender Roles

While there is evidence from global and Nepali literature about changing gender roles as an impact of migration of men, this did not come out strongly in both the study sites. The study finds that in ethnic groups where traditionally women were not discriminated, there is a scope for accepting new roles of women due to migration of husband but in cases where ethnic groups traditionally restrict women's roles inside the household, migration of husband has not brought change. Gender norms in Nepal vary

along ethnic lines and are more stringent in case of Madhesi and Muslim households than in the case of the Pahadi households and indigenous groups (Samuels and Ghimire, 2014). Since both the study sites have a larger share of Madhesi and Muslim population, gender norms are very stringent and gender roles strongly internalised. There are strong ideals around "good women", and women appearing in public spaces and interacting with outsider men is seen not only as a stigma for the women but also a stigma and challenge to masculinity for other men of the same household. Role changes are discouraged in joint families as this inevitably means women moving to public spaces where there is a high likelihood of interacting with outsider men. As a consequence, joint families make sure women remain in the house while other men in the migrant household take up the role of the migrant man.

### 3.4.1 Workload and support structures

Irrespective of their family status, 82.48% of women perceived an increase in workload. Women find parenting of children, managing household farms and construction of house as the three heaviest load added to them due to migration of husbands, workload for women increases more in nuclear families.

**Table 6: Reasons for the increase in the workload and stress faced**

Variables	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total
<b>Reasons for the increase in the workload</b>			
School of children	43.02	69.71	55.1
Construction and maintenance of house	12.86	7.51	10.44
Agriculture	18.18	8.85	13.96
Fodder and forage collection	4.21	4.29	4.25
Shopping	8.2	2.68	5.7
Take care parents in laws	9.09	4.02	6.8
Other	4.43	2.95	3.76
<b>Stressful works in women's perception</b>			
Hiring and dealing with labours	47.00	58.52	52.75
Negotiating with shopkeepers	46.20	62.73	54.45
Controlling children	62.60	85.17	73.87
Taking care of children's education	77.60	83.57	80.58
Participation in community work	51.00	54.11	52.55
Participation in extended family ceremonies	50.20	56.51	53.35
Collecting remittances	51.80	69.34	60.56
Dealing with money lenders	49.20	64.73	56.96
Maintaining relationship with neighbours	50.00	56.31	53.15
Care work for children and elderly	70.60	72.34	71.47
Visiting markets	59.40	61.92	60.66
Taking care of livestock	61.00	57.72	59.36

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

However, it is not the amount of work, but the stress of doing things that they had not done before was the major challenge to women. The majority of respondents found controlling children and taking care of the education of children stressful due to their own low literacy: as children climb grades, the courses become harder and mothers are unable to deal with that. Similarly, controlling of children who in absence of a male guardian do not obey the mothers was perceived as another stressful work.

*"When children know that the fathers come home even if it is at night, they are afraid. They will think that if they do not obey me or behave well, I will complain about it to him when he comes back. He will thrash them. But when they know that he is away and will not come home immediately, they ignore me. They don't obey me. They are not afraid of anyone now. It is very difficult to control them". - IDI with woman left behind, Saptari*

The third stressful work perceived by women was taking care of sick children and elderly. They felt that when husbands are around, it is the husbands who deal with illness in the family and decide the best course of action. Since they have to deal with this now, they are stressed when family members fall sick. This is largely in the case when there is no male guardian in the house as in cases of nuclear family and when only female in-laws are around. Collecting remittances (60.56%) and visiting markets (60.66%) were other tasks that women found stressful. Discussions from focus groups showed that it was not the difficulty of the work itself, but fear and stress of the backlash they face when they appear frequently in public space.

*"I have to go to the market to buy things. Since we are constructing a house, I need to go there more frequently. I need to change my clothes as I cannot go to the market with dirty clothes. I need to deal with the man in the hardware shops. Everyone is watchful- why is she wearing nice clothes? Why is she going to the market again and again? Why is she talking to the same male again and again? What is happening? her husband is working hard abroad and she is getting spoilt!. This is what people gossip about. So on one hand I have to do such work on the other, there is a constant stress from such people". - IDI with woman left behind, Dhanusha*

The most common support structures that women living in nuclear family use to cope with added work are: maternal family members, extended family members, children and paid labours. Despite the fear of backlash, women who live in nuclear families also shared taking help from male community members for emergency situations especially during health problems of children. However, though necessary, women find it difficult.

*"Of course they (family members) help. But the thing is that while we can easily ask for help without husband, there is hesitation with in-laws."- Body-mapping with left behind women, Dhanusha*

### 3.4.2 Impact of men's migration on women's autonomy

Evidence shows that husband's migration does not bring a significant change in women's autonomy, but does bring a positive change in women's self-confidence.

Women need permission from the husband and in-laws and largely from both for going out of the house, taking paid or unpaid work as well as social participation such as in political rally or in women's group. Farther the distance to travel, the stricter is the need for permission and young women and newly married women living in joint households has less autonomy for movement than others. A large majority of women (74.89%) obey restrictions while 13.24% shared that they are able to convince the husband and in-laws if they strongly feel the need. 10% of respondents in the survey also shared that they would not heed to restrictions and go to places they would want to go. Fear of backlash from in-laws and disputes with husband is the main reason women choose to obey such restrictions and ask for permission.

Key informants, both male and female, pointed that men's insecurity regarding their wives being insincere to them increases once he migrates. Women would have often heard about men keeping

wives in destination and are fearful about it. However, while the husband places restrictions if he is insecure, the wife is not able to take any such steps.

*“Recently, I asked one of the migrant’s wife to come with me to participate in a meeting. She said her husband has restricted her from going anywhere. If she doesn’t listen to him, then things will get difficult for her later on. So, there is such fear amongst left-behind women even though their husbands are far away” –KII, Sarlahi*

**Table 7: Autonomy of wives after husband's migration**

Variables	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total Percent
Husband's permission for women to work			
Paid job	28.2	47.49	37.84
Unpaid job	1.6	4.81	3.2
Both	70.2	47.7	58.96
Permission required/asked (?) from husband			
Going market	72.40	60.92	66.67
Going maternal home	94.20	93.99	94.09
Going community meetings	78.60	83.37	80.98
Going to visit friends	73.00	71.74	72.37
Going to political rally	86.60	77.35	81.98
Attending social functions (wedding, fare, teej)	88.60	80.56	84.58
Participating in women’s group	93.00	81.36	87.19
Permission needed/asked from in-laws			
Going market	68.20	72.55	70.37
Going maternal home	79.60	77.96	78.78
Going community meetings	64.80	70.34	67.57
Going to visit friends	61.40	66.33	63.86
Going to community level political gatherings	74.60	68.94	71.77
Participating in women's group meeting	73.60	71.64	72.47
Allow to go out (i.e. positive response)			
Yes	24.4	19.44	21.92
No	75.6	80.56	78.08
If no, what do you do?			
Won’t go	75.41	74.23	74.89
Convince them	9.84	17.53	13.24
Ask but take own decision in the end	12.3	8.25	10.5
Go secretly so as not to offend in-laws	2.46	0.0	1.37

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

However when it is for visiting local government offices, women felt that they now visit government offices much more than when their husbands were around: frequency increases from 24.12% (before husband's migration) to 62.66% (after husband's migration). This difference in case of government office might be because women usually visit local governments for birth certificates, allowances etc. where it is compulsory to have one parent present.

### 3.4.3 Impact of men's migration on women's participation in public sphere

Women's participation in the public sphere is fairly limited and does not change meaningfully after the husband's migration. As shared earlier, usually the father-in-law or the eldest male present in the household represents the household in community meetings and in political engagements and when they live in nuclear households, women largely do not attend such meetings unless there is a fine.

**Table 8: Impact of men's migration on women's participation**

Variables <sup>7</sup>	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total Percent
Participation in community activities after husband migration from the family			
Father-in-law	38.0	39.68	38.84
Mother-in-law	9.8	7.82	8.81
Brother/sister-in-law	1.0	5.61	3.3
Myself	47.8	39.68	43.74
Others	3.4	7.21	5.31
Membership in any community groups after husband's migration			
Yes	39.2	43.29	41.24
No	60.8	56.71	58.76
Types of community organization involved ( when involved after husband's migration)			
Mother's group	63.78	62.96	63.35
Saving and credit cooperation	27.04	28.7	27.91
Agricultural group	2.04	2.31	2.18
Health group	0.51	0.0	0.24
Other	6.63	6.02	6.31
Involvement in political committee after husband's migration			
Yes	9.8	19.44	14.61
No	90.20	80.56	85.39
Whose advice they take to cast vote after husband's migration			
Husband	68.80	55.91	62.36
Self	12.20	20.04	16.12
In-laws	16.80	21.84	19.32
Children	0.80	1.60	1.20
Friends	0.20	0.00	0.10
Maternal relatives	0.20	0.40	0.30
Neighbours	1.0	0.20	0.60
Male leaders talk with (after husband's migration)			
Myself	54.2	49.7	51.95
In-laws	39.0	41.28	40.14
Children	6.0	8.02	7.01
Don't come to house	0.8	1.0	0.9
Female leaders talk with			
Myself	61.6	56.91	59.26
In-laws	32.8	37.47	35.14
Children	4.8	4.21	4.5

<sup>7</sup> All variables for after husband's migration



Don't come to our house	0.8	1.4	1.1
<b>Changes after husband's migration</b>			
Increased confidence to handle household emergencies	55.6	65.13	60.36
Increased confidence to make decisions	35.0	22.24	28.63
Improved public speaking	5.0	7.21	6.11
Increased community participation	2.4	1.2	1.8
Left paid work	1.0	2.61	1.8
Left unpaid work ( e.g. Parma) for neighbours	1.0	1.6	1.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

In Saptari and Dhanusha, more than half of the women (58.76%) interviewed were not involved in any groups and those that were involved were participated only in women's group or in local savings groups which only have women. There is very less participation of women in political groups and this does not change with the migration of men. Women obey their husband's advice in casting vote.

**Table 9: Feelings/Changes after the husband's migration**

<b>Feelings/Changes after the husband's migration</b>	<b>Saptari</b>	<b>Dhanusha</b>	<b>Total Percent</b>
I am more engaged (physically) in community work after my husband's migration (e.g. digging road, canal, dams, etc)	7.60	10.02	8.81
I talk to more people in my community after my husband's migration	49.60	40.48	45.05
I attend more community functions (social functions) after my husband's migration	57.00	22.85	39.94
I am more confident about talking to the outsider after my husband's migration	73.00	43.49	58.26
I have more information about my children's education status after my husband's migration	69.40	46.09	57.76
I participate more in decision making about joint family affairs after my husband's migration	54.20	35.47	44.84
My in laws consult me more about their HH decision after my husband's migration	54.40	35.47	44.94
I make more decision about myself after my husband's migration	49.20	41.88	45.55
I have more information about community matters	40.00	22.24	31.13
I go to market more often	48.60	47.70	48.15
I have more information about banking system	31.20	20.84	26.03

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

As shown in Table 9, even when civic engagement does not change outstandingly for women, they felt changes in themselves after the husband's migration. Some of the most significant changes that women felt in themselves were increased confidence in talking with outsiders (58.26%), being better informed about children's education, more communication with community members (45.05%), going to market more often (48.15%) and more decision-making about themselves (45.55%). Women see these changes as positive and shared they are happy about it.

### 3.5 Psychological wellbeing and violence faced by women left behind

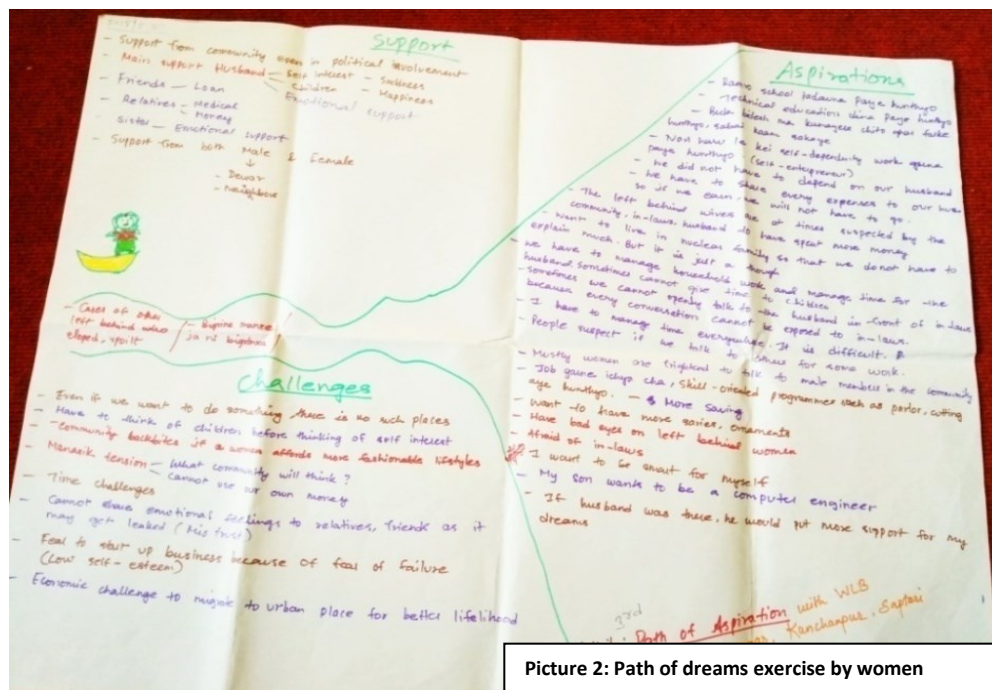
While a very low percentage of women shared they have faced abuses themselves, 81.65% of women feel that violence increases after husband's migration. Table 12 shows women's perception on abuse in Dhanusha and Saptari.

**Table 10: Abuses and support structures**

Particulars	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total Percent
<b>Increment in abuse faced by women after husband's migration</b>			
Yes	94.77	64.04	81.65
No	5.23	35.96	18.35
<b>Sharing of abuses</b>			
Yes	56.8	36.27	46.55
No	43.2	63.7	53.45
<b>Whom they confide in</b>			
Husband	79.23	66.67	74.26
Maternal home	10.56	21.51	14.89
Parents in laws	2.82	1.61	2.34
Brother in law	0.35	0.0	0.21
Sister in law	0.35	0.54	0.43
Neighbour	5.28	2.15	4.04
Friends	0.7	5.38	2.55
Others	0.35	0.54	0.43
None	0.35	1.61	0.85
<b>Do women face additional problems after husband's migration?</b>			
Yes	76.0	48.3	62.16
No	24.0	51.7	37.84
<b>Types of problem faced by women</b>			
Lack of family's support	31.72	38.12	34.30
Lack of money	21.75	41.7	29.78
Society doubting character	2.42	2.24	2.35
Abuses from other men	1.51	0.45	1.08
Abuses from family member	2.42	2.24	2.35
Restriction on mobility	1.81	0.45	1.26
Lack of husband support	4.23	6.73	5.23
Mental stress	18.43	1.79	11.73
Loneliness	15.71	6.28	11.91

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Lack of family support in work, economic problems, constant worry about husband's condition abroad, anxiety and feeling of being overwhelmed and lonely were some of the psychosocial challenges that women faced due to migration of their husband. 5.23 % women also stressed lack of support from their husband after his migration and 2.35 % women faced abuse from family member while 1.08% faced abuse from other men. While it came out significantly in the qualitative study, the research team anticipated that women would be less willing to talk about violence in the survey which had also been cautioned by key informants. Hence, there are much more cases of abuses than is reported in the study.



Picture 2: Path of dreams exercise by women

As shown in the exercise above, women face emotional and physical violence. While physical violence comes out less in survey, in the participatory exercise done with both women and children, such issues came up very strongly. Abuses include sexual harassment in the form of indecent comments and inappropriate advances from men, bluff calls and forced sexual relationships. This came out more strongly in Dhanusha and Saptari than in Sarlahi. The reason might be because women from the hilly community who form the majority of respondents in Sarlahi are better able to retaliate, seek support and report about such cases.

Regarding perpetrators, male members in the family (father-in-law and elder brother in law), extended family members (e.g. male cousins of husband) were the most common perpetrators in sexual violence. Male community members were the second most common perpetrators.

*"Women mostly face sexual violence in the family. While they don't publicly talk about the violence, they have shared their problem with us. Men marry at a young age and after marrying they go for foreign employment and wife who are young and do not have support face sexual violence from her father in law and elder brother-in-law". KII, Saptari*

Key informants had many evidences of women not being able to share about sexual violence that they faced from their immediate and extended family members. They also talked about the women submitting themselves to sexual violence to a strong male family member so that they do not get harassed by other men and men justifying sexual violence saying that male family members have sexual

relationships with migrants wife to protect the household name from tarnishing as in doing so women do not have to seek outsider men for their sexual needs.

*"There is a common belief among older men here that the young wives of migrants have sexual needs and if it is not satisfied inside the household, she might go to outsider men and damage household reputation. They do not see it as violence and justify such violent behaviour" KII, Saptari*

We found that sexual violence in the family was reported only when household members publicly beat up the women in false charges if she does not succumb to sexual advances by family men. In such cases, usually female social workers and police are involved and the actual story comes out as shown in the box below:

#### **Box 1: Sexual violence by family members**

Gita's father in law used several ways to force her into establishing physical relationship with her after her husband went to Saudi Arabia. She had secondary education and knew there were legal ways to fight against it. However, she did not want to take this course, as she was not sure if the husband would support her. She kept on resisting his attempts even when he was persistent and used the grandchildren as a way to force her. As time went by, the father in law started spreading rumours that Gita was not a woman of good character and had been having illicit relationships with men when her husband was away and so they community should keep an eye on her.

One day, her father in law deliberately put a man into her house at night through a small window in the kitchen of her thatched house, and called neighbours to sit as evidence of her bad character. Gita was asleep did not know how the man was inside her house. She also found that she had been locked from outside with the man. She tried to understand what had happened but could not. The man had run away as soon as people started coming. No one was able to see the face of the man.

The villagers who had already heard the rumours did not believe her and tied her to a tree, beat her up mercilessly with hot tongs, and tore her clothes. Her husband was informed of her infidelity and he refused to believe Gita and instead believed the father. The case went to the police when the GBV watch-group in the village were suspicious and wanted to give Gita a chance to tell her story. The case could not be solved that day so Gita was kept in the police station. Gita had no one, not even her husband to support her while the next day the father in law brought the whole village to speak on his side. However, the watch-group along with the police investigated and probed on the case for three days. Through children they found out the father in laws plot. After finding out the truth, the husband came back, supported her, and arranged her to stay separately.

Now she has her own shop and lives happily. When the court wanted her to file a case to sentence her father in law, she said "he is my husband's father and I forgive him for this time. I will report it myself if he does anything next time".

Source: Fieldwork, Dhanusha

In general, communities believe that women tend to elope or have extramarital affairs after the husband's migration. However, we did not find enough evidence of such case to show this was common. There were total three cases where women had extramarital affairs and could have been the case even when the husband had not migrated. But stories were extrapolated and it spread in different forms all over the district, false narratives are made and established.

Women rarely reveal or access any support in case of physical and emotional violence. Reasons for women not coming in the public include fear of being ostracised by husband and maternal family, loss of safety networks after having migrated to the husband's community, belief that community people would rather support the family members, as well as the social, economic and political influence of the husband's family which makes justice inaccessible to the women. There is also a dependency relationship: the women will have to return to the same home and stay with the in-laws after reporting such cases respectively seeking support. Hence, they do not complain about such abuses. Uneducated and unaware women as well as women who live in nuclear family are more likely to face such violence than others.

Apart from this, we also asked women about their worries and aspirations. Worries about loans, health and welfare of husband and children, about daughter's marriage and their own safety were the most pressing worries for women. Regarding aspirations, improving the quality of houses (e.g. from thatched to concrete), entrepreneurship, adding assets such as land and jewellery were the main aspirations of women left behind.

#### Box 2: Common worries and fears

Worries and fears of left behind women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About the loan</li> <li>• About the health of husband and children</li> <li>• Fear of violence as information about many rape cases circulate</li> <li>• About arranging money for daughter marriage</li> <li>• About bearing the expenses on education of children</li> <li>• Workload and possible hardship</li> <li>• Husband's work in foreign employment</li> <li>• Insecurity when husband will return back from foreign employment</li> </ul>

#### Box 3: Common aspirations

Dreams of left behind women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete house</li> <li>• Doing some business</li> <li>• Buying piece of land</li> <li>• Sending children to good school</li> <li>• Bringing up children in good environment</li> <li>• Buying ornaments</li> <li>• Living beautiful and happy life</li> <li>• Children's career aspiration</li> </ul>

Source; Fieldwork, 2018

### 3.6 Impacts on children

The Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (2016) data shows that one-third (34%) of the Nepali population is under age 15, which means that children below 15 years of age make a significant population of Nepali households. Hence, it is important to look at the impact of a father's migration on children. The following section presents the implications of a father's migration on children. The section first gives a brief profile of the children followed by information on the implications on education, health and violence faced by children. While it is important, we did not look at households that have migrant mothers and hence have no information about the implications of mother's migration on children even when we think this is a crucial issue.

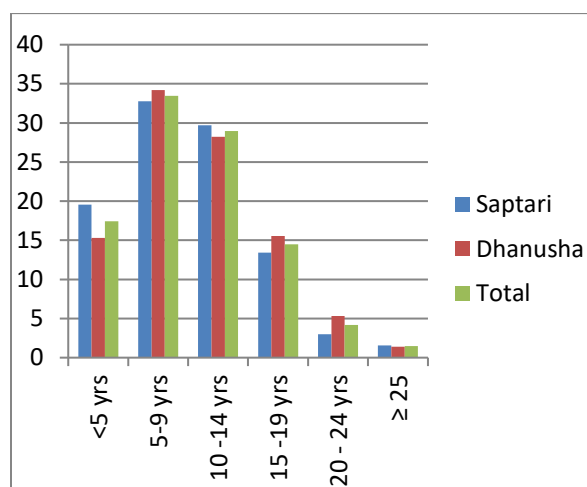
#### 3.6.1 Profile of left behind children

As shown in figure 1 and 2, among the survey respondents (quantitative survey wasn't done in Sarlahi), a large number of women had children between 5-9 years followed by those between 10-14 years of

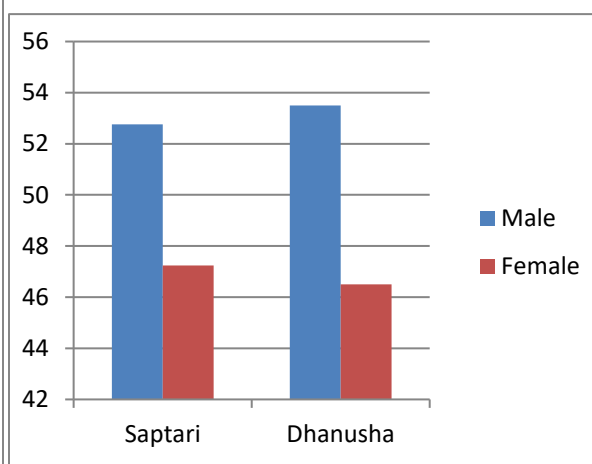
age. Surprisingly, there were more boys than girls. Given that there is a strong son preference in both districts, this high difference between male and female children is worth further examining.

Caretaker interviews reveal that when infant, fathers are mostly absent from the lives of children. Hence it is the mother who takes the main responsibility for children at that stage. Due to multiple migration and long periods of absence, many children meet their father only sporadically. There were children who had first seen their father face to face when they were over three years old.

**Figure 2: Age of the children left behind**



**Figure 2: Sex of children left behind**



Source: Fieldwork, 2019

### 3.6.2 Evidence of the impacts on education

Overall school enrolment seems to be high in both the districts. Survey data shows that 83.22% of the children above 6 years are attending school, more in Saptari (85.32%) than in Dhanusha (81.24%). 3.99% have not been admitted to school due to young age and lack of ECD classes. National data shows that province 2 has the lowest literacy rate in Nepal, while the percentages of women and men with more than a secondary education is the lowest in Province 2 (3% and 8%, respectively) as well. Given the low literacy rate of the parent generation, spending on children's education is significant and encouraging.

As discussed in section 3.1, the wish to provide better education to children was a strong driver of migration for the survey respondents. This resonates with their remittance expenditure patterns and aspirations of mothers. Investment in education came up as the third priority expenses of remittances in the remittance use exercise (See Table 3 and Picture 1). Mothers shared that they were able to afford better schools, educational materials and clear dues on time. This had helped children to study better. There is also a significant investment in private tuition for children. Such tuition fees are more expensive than regular school fees: school fees ranged from 500 -800Rs per month on average while some mothers pay up to 2500 Rs a month for private tuition. Private tuitions are seen as an important way to make children better in education. Mothers were of the opinion that it was only after getting remittances that children started getting regular private tuitions.



Despite the increase in aspirations related to children's higher education, survey data shows that 5.77% of children from migrant households have dropped out of education. It also shows that the migration of fathers have a negative impact on the educational aspirations of some children: Some of our respondents thought that instead of going for high education and being unsure of jobs, they would like to take foreign employment and share the responsibility of the father and help ease his burden. This came up particularly strongly among boys of Madhesi origin which had financial burdens at home.

Qualitative data showed that the feeling of discrimination between son and daughter in educational investment, repeated failure in exams, peer pressure and wishes to take up local available paid labour were the main reasons for drop out.

We asked mothers about their perceptions of the educational performance of their children. 16.9% shared that the education performance has improved significantly while 44.02% of mothers were of the opinion that educational performance has improved fairly after the father's migration. They thought that such positive changes were a result of children's better access to educational material (77.13%), better schools (76.54%), they afforded school uniforms, cleared dues on time (76.18%) and afforded tuition (75.61%). Other factors were the increase in teacher's positive attitude towards migrant's children (68.48%), increase in children's aspiration for higher education and career (66.42%), in children's confidence (coming perhaps from being able to pay fees in time, having quality educational materials, school-dress etc.) at school (66.01%) and on parent's confidence for children's education (65.19%). 97% of the mothers perceived that remittances from the father's migration were the reason they were able to significantly improve investment in children's education.

Having said that, investments are unequal and mother's aspirations are different for sons and daughters. While mothers aspired their sons to take up higher education, they rather would invest in the marriage of the daughters than in higher and quality education as shown by quote below:

*Interviewer: How much have you planned for their study?*

*Respondent: I will teach my son as much as he can. But I will teach my daughter only till SEE.*

*Interviewer: What will you do if she wants to study more?*

*Respondent: I will have to get her married. People start backbiting us and looking negatively at us if we do not marry our daughters off in time.*

*Interviewer: At what age, daughters get married here?*

*Respondent: Girls start to marry after they reach sixteen".-IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Saptari*

Apart from remittances, fathers also sent electronic devices like mobiles, laptops, television, computers to children. The proper use of laptops, mobiles and computers has facilitated their study.

*Respondent: We are able to afford better education for them due to remittance. Life is better." – IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Saptari*

Boys showed high aspirations for education and were confident of the parent's support. However, in the case of girls, they shared that at one point in secondary education, they would have to succumb to pressure of marriage.

*"I want to be a doctor though I don't know the process yet. I will study further if only my father supports me. My father has inspired me to have this dream. He tells me to study well; he will finance my education to become a doctor even if he has to sell his property. "-IDI with left behind children (Boy), Saptari*



Picture 3: Norms are difficult for us: Body mapping exercise with children left -behind

### 3.6.3 Evidence of the impacts on health

Access to health facility is largely determined by the availability of health services nearby and the capacity of family to purchase health services when it is not free. The DHS shows that 49% of households in Nepal are within 30 minutes of a government health facility. This shows that physical distance to access health facility is becoming less of a barrier for most households. In three of the districts, we looked at expenditure patterns in health and women's perception of the implications of husband's earning on the investment in health needs of children.

An analysis of expenditure patterns related to remittances shows that health is another priority expense. Women would take loans for the healthcare of children when remittances are delayed but would seek immediate services.

In Sarlahi we found that depending on their income families spend an average of NRS 22,250 (217.16 USD) to NRS 26,250 (256.20 USD) per year on treatment of children except on general vaccination. Huge variation in expenditure occurred if households had children with chronic illness or major accident. In absence of chronic illness, households reported spending around 40percent of their remittances on children's healthcare. For some family, the need to regularly spend on children's health was a reason for migration as shown below:

*"The income from daily and farming was just enough for us to live, but it got difficult when one got sick. Treatment sometimes costs a lot and just some 100-200Rs is not enough. At such times having remittances is a huge help. We decided to migrate due to that."* – **IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Sarlahi**

Similar to that of education, as shown in Table 8, 97.9% of women feel that there has been a positive impact of a husband's migration regarding the investment in the health of children. However, we do not have evidence on whether children are healthier.

**Table 11: Effect of husband's current earning on children's health**

Impact of remittance on children's health	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total Percent
Positive effect	99.8	95.99	97.9
Negative affect	0	0.4	0.2
No effect at all	0.2	3.61	1.9
<b>Particulars of positive effect</b>			
Access to better health facility	82.36	90.20	86.21
Access to better food	83.97	88.12	86.00
Access to loan for treatment during sick	73.55	89.79	81.51
Improvement in sanitation and hygiene	75.55	88.75	82.02

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Wives of migrants and caretakers perceived that improvement in health was brought about by investment in access to better health facility, better food, availability of loans for treatment and improvement in sanitation and hygiene. As shown in Table 8, this has led to significant improvement in all the four indicators mentioned above.

Improved access to loans comes out strongly when talking about the improvement in the health of children. Most of the women felt that they easily get the loan for treatment when they fall sick as people now trust that they can repay loans from husband's remittances.

*"We had problems borrowing money from landlords earlier. If our children had big health problems and we needed more money, they would not give us. I think they had fear that we would not be able to pay them back? However, now since my husband's migration, they are ready to give us money. I borrowed NRS 30,000 for taking my son to the hospital when he broke his leg". IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Saptari*

Mothers in most households shared that they had better access to quality food like poultry, fish and dairy products and were able to consume them more than once a week.

*"Interviewer: Have food habits and food choices changed after husband's migration? How is the children's diet? It is same as before or different?"*

*Respondent: Diet has improved compared to before. I cook different types of vegetables nowadays. I also provide them meat, fish and eggs. Before, it was difficult to feed them such foods."– IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Saptari*

They also shared about being able to afford clothing for children and keep them neat and clean and take care of their hygiene.

However, for nuclear families, if men are not able to earn from migration, it leads to potentially negative impacts in health investment and nutritional intake. We also found some households facing this condition in the qualitative study.

*"Interviewer: Is there any changes in diet of children after the father's migration?"*

*Respondent: They used to get meats, eggs, etc. three times in a week when we were living as a joint family. But now, I can hardly give them meat once a week or once in two weeks. I give them nutritious*

*food when my husband sends money. He is not earning much and we have started to live in nuclear families. Our in-laws do not help us anymore now.”-IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Saptari*

In both Saptari and Dhanusha, women who have chosen to start living in nuclear families are still less mobile than men. They do not go to the market regularly due to restriction in mobility. In such cases, children felt that they were eating meat regularly only when they lived in joint family.

*“We used to eat fruits, meat and other healthy foods more when we were in joint family than now. Mother brings meat for us sometimes but it is not as frequent as when father was here.”-IDI with left behind children (Girl), Saptari*

### 3.6.4 Violence against children

The DHS shows that 11.0% of women of age between 15-19 years have experienced violence at some point in life. Though we do not have accurate data on violence upon children, children themselves perceived that violence is huge if the father is absent when they are growing up..

Children shared that they face maltreatment from neighbours, relatives and extended family members. They were of the opinion that neighbours and peers humiliated them regarding the absence of their father. Physical threats came from fights in neighbourhood, mostly over cattle, agricultural issues, and public water or around small children who might do some small mischief in the neighbourhood. This was more common in the Madhesi community. Boys here feel that absence of father makes them vulnerable when there is a fight with the neighbours. Boys feel that neighbours tend to intimidate their family members in absence of an elderly male and they are unable to defend the family. For older adolescent boys from the Madhesi community, it was an occasion when they missed their father the most.

Apart from this, older siblings who take upon the care responsibility after both the parents migrate, feel insecure for their younger siblings. They felt unable to defend the younger siblings when neighbours scold them for no reasons. They were of the opinion that had their parents been present, neighbours would be less able to scold their siblings.

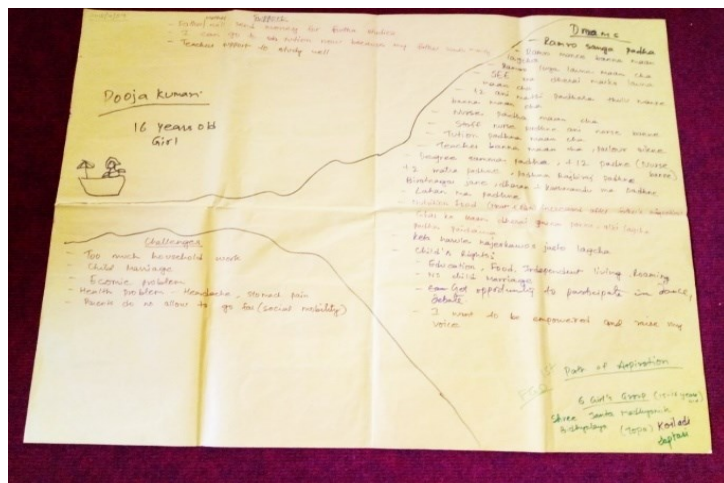
*“People in neighbourhoods sometimes discriminate and misbehave with us due to absence of father. They say that your father is not with you and scold us. If father was here, we might not have to hear those things. All the things would be good in family.”- IDI with left behind children (Girl), Saptari*

For some families, which do not get regular remittances, teasing by peers is a problem for children. There is a widespread view that migrant's children have more pocket money and peers expect them to be extravagant. When families are not able to provide for extra expenditures (such as for school picnics and birthday parties), when the father is unable to send money, children shared facing abuses from peers.

*“My friends discriminate me saying that your father has migrated for labour work, and you say you do not have enough money for occasions or picnic. My father works in a garage there. He is able to send money only in every 3-4 months. Those friends have their parents living with them and tease us. I just listen to them and do not reply back as it does not bother me.” - IDI with left behind children (Boy), Saptari*

In school, children felt underestimated and not treated equally, when their mother or other guardians did not visit school and father was not available.

Discrimination at home persists for girls as shown by the following diagram. They feel a restriction in mobility which they think hampers their education and learning prospectus.



Picture 4: Father will take care of it all: Path of dreams exercise by children

We also found negative perceptions of the community and children themselves towards children of migrants. Boys from migrant households were more likely to be suspected of drug abuse. There is a widespread understanding that due to availability of pocket money and lack of the controlling male figure, mid and older adolescent boys in such households were likely to take drugs. Community members and some participant girls themselves thought that girls from migrant family are more likely to have boyfriends than other girls.

*"Interviewer: Is there any changes in boys and girls after their father has migrated?"*

*Respondent: Yes, boys get spoilt. They smoke, drink alcohol and use marijuana, drugs like injections. Mostly, they fall into bad habits after father's migration. Girls are also spoilt. Girls have boyfriends and run away with boys. Such people do not listen to their mother at home."* -IDI with left behind children (Girl), Dhanusha

Emotional violence in the form of intimidation, humiliation, derogative statements and mocking were common. While children from non-migrant households are also likely to face emotional violence, we found that left-behind children are particularly taunted for the increase in family income often linking it to possibility of them spending on fashion. Mid and older adolescent boys who are interested in becoming fashionable are insulted as being spoilt due to remittances money and linking them to drug abuse. Besides this, boys faced emotional violence in the form of rejection from their friends. They shared that this was mostly in the form of isolation; telling them not to join their company or walk around with them when they have less pocket money or are less fashionable. Similarly we found that girls are more likely to face insults and derogative statements after the migration of the parents.

### 3.6.5 Workload and stress on children

As shown above in section 3.4.3, children are the second most important source of help in nuclear family and have to bear a considerable increase in workload after the migration of their father. Boys in nuclear Madhesi families are the hardest hit by a father's migration. They not only need to take up additional physical work but also responsibilities of managing household like adults; some were found to be taking family decisions in as young as 12 years old. Since women in such households do not interact



with outsider men, boys take the responsibility of dealing with community members and neighbours representing the father. They need to deal with money lenders when they cannot pay debts on time and resolve disputes over land borders or cattle. Hence, they are constantly stressed about family management issues, overwhelmed, stressed about father's condition in the destination and miss their classes. They were very likely to drop out of education to earn for family if the migration of father failed. In Pahadi houses, women took up the work while boys were not found worried about such issues. Girls in all cases were found handling the kitchen work and household chores.

Work burden led to children being absent from school classes during agricultural seasons for boys and when the mother was sick for girls. It also contributed to time poverty among older adolescent boys where they had less time for school works.

*“Interviewer: Do they have to leave school sometime? Do they complain you?”*

*Respondent: Yes, sometimes they have to leave the school when there is more workload. They complain when they have to leave school because of work but there is no solution. They also think that if their father was here, their study would not be hampered.”-IDI with caretaker of left behind children, Saptari*

### 3.6.6 Alcoholism and drug abuse

In all the three study districts, key informants perceive that there is an increase in drug abuse among children. Interviews with caretakers and with key informants reveal that mid and older adolescent sons from migrant households are among the most vulnerable towards such substance abuse. Boys themselves admitted that they feel peer pressure to try smoking and take drugs and alcohol and that it is difficult to avoid peer pressure.

*"If we don't obey them, we will be alone. They will say oh look, here comes an unspoilt boy. We are all; spoilt and humiliate us like that. So we resist for a few days. But they are our friends, we do not have new friends and hence give up and start taking alcohol, beetle nuts and smoke". - IDI with left behind children(Boy), Dhanusha*

This was more common among the people of hilly origin and most prominent amongst the indigenous hilly population.

*“In the other village this is very common. The most prone are ones whose parents have migrated and sons of Indian army. 100 out of 100 of boys with migrant parents there take drugs there. It is a Tamang village and they learn from their alcoholic fathers.” - Mini workshop with left behind children (Boys), Sarlahi*

Due to an increased alcoholism and drug abuse problem in Saptari, a rehabilitation centre has been established. However, it seems to be inadequate given the number of cases that are rising.

Older adolescent boys and key informants who participated in the interview said that drug abuse was high among boys especially in hill community where either of the parents has migrated. They are of the opinion that when the father migrates, there is less control on the mobility and peer interaction of sons and children have regular and higher amount of pocket money. This leads to them falling under peer pressure and eventually into alcoholism and drugs. They are of the opinion that with the father around, mobility and peer interaction gets less and as families can just afford to live well, there is less pocket money. This checks chances of boys getting into habit of alcohol and drug abuse. Respondents are of the



opinion that families living with grandparents or in joint family with other male guardians are less likely to get into such harmful behaviours.

*“When fathers are not around, I am also free, my friend is also free. It is easy. Fathers are stricter and they control us. There is a rule in the house when he is around. Come home before ten. Where are you going? Why are you walking around with this boy? Mothers, they love and just try to make us understand things. So boys can deny them and chose to stay for late night merrymaking, drink alcohol and use drugs”. – Mini workshop with left behind children (Boys), Sarlahi*

Another negative impact of migration, particularly when both parents do not live with children is the loss of care-givers. This happened in nuclear families where father migrated abroad and mothers migrate internally to nearby cities for work. Families where children lived without parents shared that the elder children in the household who were merely 16-17 years were taking care of their smaller siblings. Care-work in such case is largely left to the eldest daughter. They often needed outsider's help to take younger siblings to hospitals when they were sick. This was a cause of huge stress to the girls themselves apart from the possibility of the sick person not getting proper treatment on time.

*“When my brother gets sick, I get stressed out. I have to take care of him and take him for treatment. My cousin sister also helps her during such times but I really miss my parent’s presence at such times.” - Mini workshop with left behind children (Girls), Sarlahi*

Table 12 shows perception of the mothers about negative impact of father's migration on children.

**Table 12: Mothers perception about negative impact of a father's migration on children**

Particulars	Saptari	Dhanusha	Total
Less control on children	30.6	45.49	38.04
Increased acceptance of peer pressure	10.0	20.24	15.11
Loneliness	7.2	31.46	19.32
Drug abuse	7.0	6.8	6.9
Irregularity at school	17.2	37.87	27.52
School dropout	15.4	14.63	15.01
Roaming around	11.4	19.84	15.61
Misbehave by neighbours	5.8	7.82	6.80
Misbehave by relatives	6.8	6.21	6.50
Suspicion of "being spoilt" by relative, neighbours, community (eg girls eloping, boys into drugs and fashion)	3.8	3.61	3.70
Disobedience	20.2	26.65	23.42
Child labour	6.4	5.01	5.71
Increase workload	17.6	7.61	12.61
Increase mental stress	12.2	7.81	10.01
Alcoholic	6.2	2.80	4.50
Fights	10.8	16.83	13.81
Over use of social media and television	15	21.44	18.22
Less aspiration for higher education	9.6	12.42	11.01
Harassment by boys (to girls)	2.8	3.20	3.00
Stigmatization by community	3.2	2.80	3.00
Missing father's love/care	46.4	48.69	47.55

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

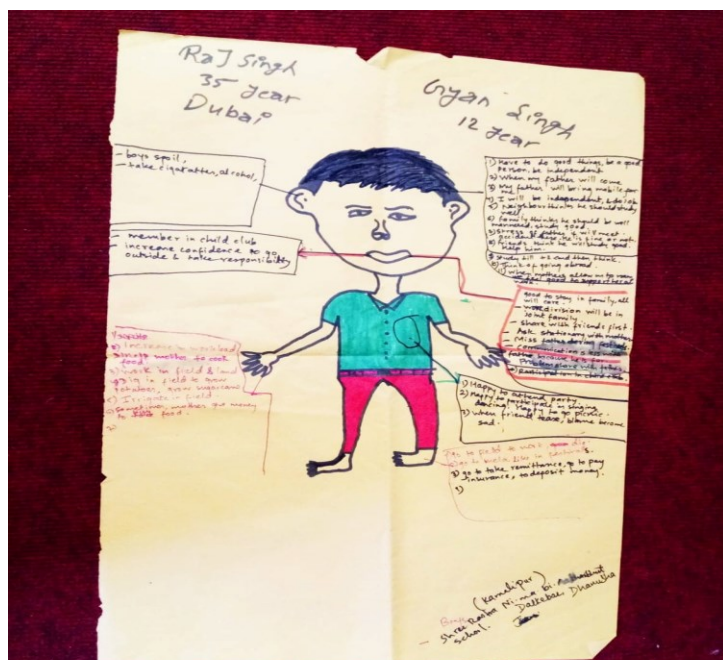
Caretakers and key informants are of the opinion that when the father comes home once a week or each night, children are more likely to have fear and do not fall into bad habits. However, since they know that the father is not going to be physically present in the house for quite some time, it is easy for them to give in to peer pressure. Since their friends also know that the migrant children have less surveillance from parents, it is easy to persuade them. They also think that once children grow up, mothers who are already overburdened with household and other responsibilities are not able to influence and closely monitor their children. Since adolescence is a time of giving more importance to friends than family members, absence of father means that there is no restriction and control and children succumb to bad peer influence, which might lead to the habit of smoking and drug abuse.

*“Most of the parents migrate in order to be able to ensure better education opportunities for their children but I have seen cases of drug addiction among those children whose father have migrated for foreign employment. Children tend to disobey their mother in absence of their father and mothers are also not able to give time to their children as they are busy after the migration of her husband. This might be the reason that they have engaged in various misbehaviour including substance abuse.”*

**-KII, Dhanusha**

### 3.6.7 Loneliness and longing

The study finds that children left behind lack emotional support and face difficulties overcoming parental separation. Caretakers find that after the migration of the father, children become stubborn irritable and short tempered and sometimes show signs of loneliness and longing for the father. They felt that children feel the stress of the mothers and are constantly worried about the health and wellbeing of the absent fathers. This anxiety is strong when the father is absent and has an impact on children's behaviour. The fact that children worry about their father and are anxious about his absence came strongly in in-depth interviews and body mapping exercise with children themselves as shown below:



Picture 5: Norms affect boys as well: Body mapping exercise by children

Children shared that they are constantly worried that the father will have some kind of accident in the CoD and about his hard work.

Due to family needs, migrants renew their contracts and keep extending their stays in foreign employment. This leads to long term absence of fathers from the lives of children and uncertainty of support for children. Children understand the economic importance of a father's migration, but missed other forms of support. The fact that they were "sad" due to father's absence and missed communication with him came out repeatedly in different exercises.

*"Sometimes, I feel sad that my father is away from us. It would be better if he would be with us. Communication was more when he was here."* - **IDI with left behind children (Girl), Saptari**

## 4. Conclusion

The study finds that migration of men has helped to improve the economic condition of migrant's households. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind the social implications of migration of men on the family left behind. While in certain cases, migration and more in particular remittances have played a major role in keeping the good relationship between wife and husband and with in-laws, workload and stress of women has increased after the husband's migration and more so for women who live in nuclear families. While migration of husbands provides a scope for wives to come to the public sphere, the study did not find any significant change in women's autonomy in the study sites. However, there is a growing perception by women that their self-confidence, awareness and self-efficacy have increased due to this opening of avenues for broader interaction with society.

With the shifting of responsibility of husband to the women's shoulders, women have evolved and are managing both household and community affairs. However, such benefits are enjoyed by the women where gender norms are less restrictive such as in the hilly indigenous communities. Whilst in contexts where gender norms are stringent for women and girls, there is less opportunity for women's empowerment to gain from migration. Further, migration of men can lead to changes in the household structures when women and migrants themselves perceive economic injustice (such as wives not getting money remittances for their daily expenses, expenses of children). The study finds that migrant wives are more prone to violence such as sexual harassment, indecent comments and bluff calls and are also blamed for misusing the remittances, engaging in extramarital affairs and eloping with other man. However, no overall/very little evidence was found by the study to prove these blames. Fear of rape among all age of women was prevalent in the research site.

Migration of father has had mixed impacts on children. With regards to children's education and health, remittances have had potentially positive effects. Children got opportunity to study in good school with access on the educational materials but found gender discrimination in investment for sons and daughters and reinforcing harmful traditions such as early marriage of girl child and dowry system. Similarly, after the migration, children are provided with better diet and better health facility and there is easy access to loans for health emergency. However, father's migration has also the negative impacts on children due to the lack of a strong father figure in the children's life, like negative behavioural change, alcoholism and drug abuse while a higher probability of suffering from depression was found among the children.

## 5. Recommendations

The study has developed recommendations in the following 5 main areas:

1. Agenda setting and structural change
2. Ensuring frequent and better communication on the social costs of migration
3. Topping up on existing programs
4. Norm change interventions focused on migrants
5. Further evidence gathering

The recommendations target government actors as well as development partners, civil society etc. and are grouped accordingly. However, the inherent understanding is that there has to be close collaboration between government (local state and central) as well as I/NGOs and donors to achieve better outcomes.

### **For Civil society to take lead**

GBV is inherent in the society and happens to women from both migrant and non-migrant family. However, migration of men brings it to the fore in migrant households. In order to stop physical and psycho-social violence on women and children, civil society should play active role to end gender discriminatory behaviours and harmful traditional practices in the first place. Since they essentially live in the same community, they have the strongest position to lead on this.

Use existing civil society groups such as GBV monitoring groups, ward citizen forums, citizen awareness centres, child welfare boards, Village Child Protection Committees, teachers and local police to create awareness on violence against women and children left behind

Mobilise existing civil society groups mentioned above to spread message about taking pre-decision making orientation. Use such groups in spreading message around safe migration for men and sensitize aspiring migrants to the social cost of migration.

Use the above mentioned civil society groups for counselling aspiring migrants to discuss the impacts migration might have on spousal relationships and relationships with children and how they will manage it.

Civil society should sensitize women on GBV and encourage left behind wives to speak out if they face violence and inform them about existing support services and referral mechanisms (such as safe houses, OCMCs, etc..

### **For the government to take lead:**

The government can use its strong presence in the Global and regional migration forums such as Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) at the global level and in the SAARC, Abu Dhabi Dialogue and Colombo process at the regional level to lobby for including psychosocial impacts on migrants and left behind family members as an agenda in the migration-development discourse.

MoLFE should use its partnership with INGOs working on migration to raise awareness about psychosocial impacts of migration.

MoLE should seek co-ordination of CoD to deal with social cost of migration. For example, One of the ways to deal with social cost is providing migrants more opportunities to visit home than they are currently doing. Government of the destination country can support this by making it mandatory for the employers to give holidays and fund travels.

Consequence of high cost and fraudulence by brokers reverberates beyond migrants and elderly to cause stress to mid and older adolescents. Data from this study shows that reducing migration cost has link with children's wellbeing. State should decentralize recruitment companies and make services accessible, easily affordable and in local language. This is particularly urgent for Madhesi population who make up the highest number of Nepali migrants but seem to be spending disproportionately large sum for migration to the same destination. They need to specifically target. This is also an area where SaMi could work with private sector.

One of the chief reasons of stress to women and estrangement between migrants and children is lack of communication and return visits of husband/father. Since there are poorer migrants who communicate less with their families to save money, plans should include subsidising calls particularly for destinations where poorer migrants go- such as Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Selective targeting of communication subsidies for ethnic groups and households under debt needs to be made.

State should use its Diasporas and migrant networks to facilitate reaching out to migrants who are out of contact. Currently, other stakeholders such as SaMi and Prabasi Nepali Co-ordination Committee (PNCC) are helping to find out migrants who have lost contact with their families with limited resource and network.

Keep quotas for children of migrant household in the technical and vocational trainings (such as from CTEVT, Technical schools, cottage industry) and take it parallel with formal education system. Start with ethnic and poverty targeting such as with children from Madhesi households who are in debt. Include compulsory trainings on communication between spouse in existing information centres and make provisions to train both husband and wife together in Pre-Departure Orientations

FEB to include modules on post-migration relationship handling and stress management in the existing compulsory orientation trainings .

Women and girls empowerment programme and GBV programmes from the Ministry of Women Children and Senior Citizen should include tailored sessions that take into account issues of migration.

The government should make use of existing local social groups and boards such as village child protection committees (VCPCs), Child Welfare Board (CWB), Ward Citizen Forum, Citizen Awareness Centres etc. to monitor and fight drug abuse among adolescents.

Use existing community forums like Civic Awareness Centre, Ward Citizen Forum, User's groups to sensitize community about psychosocial violence created by narratives around elopement and suspicion

on women and girls. Address social norms and try to build-up a more supportive environment for women and children left behind through interactions with communities challenging existing behavioural patterns and social norms.

For many local governments, migration and its impact will become an important development agenda. While the numbers seem comparatively larger in top districts of migrant's origin in eastern plain and eastern hills, the percentage of people migrating for work against the actual working age population is growing by a huge ratio in districts of the mid-west hills and Karnali region. Hence, provincial and local government should start planning how to optimise migration benefits and how to address negative impacts of migration. Addressing psychological and social impacts of migration has to be understood as a part of social security programme and social security funds should be used for investing in addressing negative impacts of programmes.

**For international community, donors and I/NGOs, including Save the Children and SaMi:**

Pre-decision making trainings that targets both the aspiring migrants and their family members are important to ensure migration is well thought out and safe. The SaMi from SDC and Work in Freedom from ILO are one of the best examples of programmes that help an aspiring person think and plan well for migration. This in turn helps to reduce unsafe migration. The government should take ownership of such programme and implement them in all the districts and particularly where literacy is low, people rely on informal sources of information and where there is high migration.

Negative psychosocial impacts on left behind are common problems of sending countries of South and South East Asia and not of Nepal alone. Hence, it has to be a global and regional agenda. Donors like IOM, ILO and SDC (headquarters) should use their strong presence in global and regional migration forums to raise awareness on the importance of including psychosocial wellbeing of migrants and the left behind family members. They already contribute extensively through funding and technical expertise in such forums and hence can influence dialogues more than individual countries. These forums are more effective than individual sending countries alone also because they engage with the destination countries. Destination countries can have important role to play in addressing psychosocial needs of migrants and families by providing better and safer environment to migrant workers.

Use Save the Children's network at the global, regional and national level to include issues of psychosocial impact to migrant and left behinds in sustainable development agenda.

Use Save the Children's link with other international bodies working on children to lobby for a specific focus on left-behind children and adolescents specifically to address harmful norms that are reinforced by migration such as early marriage and dowry.

UNICEF (ADAP), PLAN International, UNFPA (on reproductive health), CARE Nepal, World Vision and DOWCD (Kishori-adolescent girls) have programs on life skill and life management for adolescents. SaMi and Save the Children could work together with some of them to run targeted sessions for adolescents from migrant households.



SaMi and Save the Children can add modules on effective communication between migrant and their spouse in their current program for migrant's families. This could also include teaching women how to handle mobile phones, video chats etc.

In the existing migrant resource centres, SaMi could run sessions for aspiring migrants where they teach husband and wife (together) about distance relationships including how to handle accusations, suspicions etc. and stress management

Develop information booklet that gives information on approximate cost by countries. Translate them in local language and make it available locally such as in migrant resource centres but also in public places and local government offices such as ward office, health-post, local co-operatives and agriculture offices where general public go to access different services. In migrant dense areas make regular public display of such information- e.g. through electronic hoarding boards placed in markets.

Extend the number of existing information centres to village level (physical presence) and scale up family counselling sessions. This can be done in co-ordination and resource sharing basis with the government.

Develop targeted programs for left behind adolescents to address drug abuse, smoking and alcoholism- e.g. through peer to peer education sessions in the existing child and youth clubs.

On already existing education, health and protection services, Save the Children and SaMi could work together and add modules/programs on relationship counselling, run investigation centres for migrant and left behind to get correct information and mediate cases of accusations

The Women and Children Development Office already runs awareness trainings on gender discrimination and harmful practices to couples and in-laws (such as "sasuhari", "Sama Jodi"). SaMi and Save the Children could work with them to extend targeted trainings that address issues of migrants household and for aspiring migrants.

Include modules on communication (between spouses) for prospective migrants in existing information centres and make provisions to train both husband and wife together.

Existing children programs run by Save the Children can use role models to communicate about available careers opportunities and background preparation to influence left-behind children to continue higher education, get necessary information and aspire for careers.

The significant amount of remittance money spent on children's healthcare, can be saved by practicing basic health and hygiene, create awareness about preventive health measures such as taking deworming tablets, maintaining health and sanitation and minimizing junk food use. This can be added in the existing SaMi's counselling programs targeted to migrant households. Save's existing program with mothers such as Suahara, Pahal can also have targeted sessions for spouses of migrants.

SaMi and Save the Children volunteers can work with local community health service centres to raise awareness about mental and psychosocial health.

Create awareness around the benefits of psychosocial counselling to left-behind families so that they do not shy away from taking these services.

Mobilize community leaders to sensitize households and community about domestic, economic and psycho-social violence on left behinds women. Organizations such as MoWCSW, UNICEF and UNFPA are already using them to work on advocating for norm change and SaMi could work with them to focus on issues of migrant household.

Use 'local religious leaders and religious leader's networks to create awareness about harmful gender norms. Link with existing UNICEF and government of Nepal's program, which uses religious leaders for norm change to run focused programs on migrants and left behind households. The study shows that adolescents want to pursue a career but have no preliminary information that helps them plan for future. Well-known senior role models from different vocations (such as business persons, entrepreneurs, officials) could be used for giving such information in the form of guest lecturer in school and local clubs. This will guide/influence left behind children to continue higher education, aspire for careers as well as have background information to get there.

Psycho-social impact on migrant men and women themselves is less understood for Nepali migrants and can be a reason for harmful/unjust behaviours on the spouse back home. Hence it is necessary to understand psycho-social impacts of migration on migrants. A focused research on psychological condition of migrants is necessary.

Focused study on psychosocial impact on men whose spouse has migrated is necessary. Our fieldwork in Sarlahi shows that while migration of women is on the rise, men left behind have been facing psychosocial problems even more strongly with some resorting to suicide or running away from home. A thorough study on the impacts on left behind men should be done.

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## Annex

### Annex-1: Research design and tools

S.N	Tools <sup>8</sup>	Sarlahi	Dhanusha	Saptari
1	Body mapping of women	6	8	8
2	Path of aspiration of women	6	8	8
3	Vignettes	6	8	8
4	Source and use exercise	6	8	8
5	Mini workshop with the left behind children	6	8	8
6	In depth interview with left behind woman	8	12	12
7	In depth interview with care taker of children	6	10	10
8	In depth interview with children	8	8	8
9	Key informant interview	8	8	12
10	In depth interview with returnee men	-	-	6
11	Household Survey	-	500	500

### Annex-2 Demographic information of Dhanusha district

Particulars	Dhanusha	Janakpur sub-metro	Mithila Mun.	Chhireswarnath Mun.	Nagarain Urban Mun.	Laxmaniya Rural Mun.
Total population	754,777	162172	45,164	41,793	35,583	28,251
Total percent male population	50.15%	51.96%	50.87%	50.58%	50.16%	51.04%
Total percent female population	49.84%	48.04%	49.13%	49.42%	49.84%	48.96%
Avg. H.H size	5.46	5.10	5.51	5.47	5.78	NA
Total number of household	138249	30,589	8229	7775	6365	4995
Percentage of Labour migrant	5.16%					
Absent population	60,400					
Male absent population	59,570					
Female absent population	815					
Literacy rate (percent)	50.4 %					
Major language	Maithali 86% Nepali 4% Magahi 3% Urdu 2%					

<sup>8</sup> Except for KII and IDI all group exercise consisted of 5-8 participants.

Major ethnic groups	Yadav 17% Musalman 8% Kewat 6% Teli 5%					
Major religious groups	Hindu 89.35% Buddhism 1.49% Muslim 8.36%					

Source: Compiled by authors from different sources

### Annex-3 Demographic information of Saptari district

Particulars	Saptari	Rajbiraj Mun.	Kanchanroop Urban Mun.	Sambhunath Urban Mun.	Rupani Rural Mun.	Koiladi Rural Mun.
Total population	639,284	68,396	53,288	35,213	26,387	4,723
Total percent male population	49.093%	51.31%	48.70%	47.64%	48.60%	51.32%
Total percent female population	50.90%	47.84%	51.3%	52.36%	51.4%	48.68%
Avg. H.H size	5.28	4.87	5.12	NA	NA	5.40
Total number of household	121098	13,350	10192	6764	5012	874
Percentage of Labour migrant	3.06%					
Absent population	26,433					
Male absent population	25,676					
Female absent population	752					
Literacy rate (percent)	54.5%					
Major ethnic groups	Yadav 16% Tharu 12% Muslim 9% Teli 7% Musahar 6%					
Major religious groups	Hindu 85.73% Buddhism 4.68% Muslim 8.92% Kirat 0.06%					

Source: Compiled by authors from different sources



#### Annex-4 Demographic information of the research area

Particulars	Sarlahi district	Kalinjor VDC	Shankharpur VDC
Total population	769,729	5,388	8740
Total percent male population	50.64percent	2,694 (50percent)	4,285 (49.03percent)
Total percent female population	49.36percent	2,694 (50percent)	4,455 (50.97percent)
Avg. H.H size	5.79 percent	NA	NA
Total number of household	139,980	991	1,671
percent of HH having at least one migrant	NA	203 (20.5 percent of total household)	333 (19.9percent of total household)
Absent population	21, 401 (2.78 percent of total population)	256 (4.7percent of total population)	430 (4.9percent of total population)
Male absent population	19, 747 (92.27percent)	225 (87.89percent)	378 (87.9percent)
Female absent population	1,654 (7.73percent)	31 (12.1percent)	52 (12.09percent)
Literacy rate (percent)	46.3 percent	NA	NA
Major ethnic groups	15.51percent Yadav, 7.93percentKoiri, 7.89percent Muslim, 5.37percentTeli, 5.17 percentTamang, 3.72 Chettri	NA	NA

Source: Compiled by authors from different sources

#### Annex-5: Demographic information of women

Variables	Saptari (N=500) Percent	Dhanusha (N=499) Percent	Total Percent
Age of the women			
Below 25 years	30.4	28.26	29.33
25-35	50.4	51.5	50.95
35-45	18.4	19.44	18.92
45 and above	0.8	0.8	0.8
Caste/ Ethnicity			
Hill Brahmin/Chhetri	0.4	3.61	2.0
Terai Brahmin/Chhetri	0.6	5.01	2.8
Hill Janjati/Indigenous group	1.0	1.0	1.0
TeraiJanjati	6.4	14.43	10.41
Hill Dalit	1.0	0.8	0.9
Terai Dalit	38.6	28.06	33.33
Terai middle castes	46.8	41.88	44.34
Educational status of women			
Illiterate	52.8	47.29	50.05
Can only do signature	25.8	27.25	26.53

Primary level	11.2	11.02	11.11
Secondary level	5.8	8.02	6.91
SLC	3.4	4.01	3.7
Intermediate	0.8	1.6	1.2
Bachelor and above	0.2	0.8	0.5
Religion			
Muslim	27.6	24.65	26.13
Hindu	71.4	74.55	72.97
Buddhist	0.6	0.8	0.7
Christian	0.2	0.0	0.1
Others	0.2	0.0	0.1
Occupational status of women			
Own agricultural work	49.6	29.46	39.54
Daily wages in agriculture	17.2	12.42	14.81
Daily wages in non-agriculture	18.4	2.81	10.61
Own business	3.4	5.01	4.2
Employment in agriculture	0.0	0.2	0.1
Employment in non-agriculture	0.6	0.4	0.5
Employment in government	0.4	0.4	0.4
Work in house care with wage	1.0	16.23	8.61
Unemployment	9.4	33.07	21.22
Main occupation of the household			
Own agriculture	32.8	40.08	36.44
Daily wages in agriculture	13.2	7.41	10.31
Daily wages in non-agriculture	3.4	9.22	6.31
Own business	2.8	3.41	3.1
Employment in agriculture	0.0	1.2	0.6
Employment in government	0.0	0.2	0.1
Work in house care with wage	0.0	2.61	1.3
Foreign employment	47.6	33.07	40.34
Household size	5.77	5.72	5.74

Source: Compiled by authors from different sources