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# Gender Discrimination: Women Perspective

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## **Gender Discrimination: Women perspectives**

Samidha Pokharel<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The study documents the perception of women in discrimination in various aspects in a male dominated society. The study was designed as a descriptive study based on sample survey. The total of 200 women was selected randomly for this study. The study findings show that there is a discrimination against women in various aspects. Women are aware of discrimination in the societal and household levels. They perceive more discrimination in the societal level comparing to household level. Married women perceive more discrimination in mobility, property, occupation, and education. Similarly, unmarried women perceive more discrimination in mobility and way of behaving. They consider gender and customary practices as major factors responsible for discrimination.

### **Introduction**

Literally, the meaning of discrimination is an unfavorable treatment to anyone based on sex, race and so on. It is considered as an obstacle for the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Discrimination is recognized as a form of inequality and issue for women around the world. It affects the capacity of women to participate freely and fully in society and in turn brings psychological harmful consequences. Half of the population of the world consists of women, whose large portion is still discriminated in different phase of life directly or indirectly, though there are some differences in each country, religion, society or ethnicity.

Gender discrimination in the world can be seen in different religions, countries and communities. As indicated by Waltke, ancient Jewish prayed every morning saying “Thank you lord that I was not born a woman; Christian boys are taken to the special room of the church but the girls are not during the name giving ceremony; women are not supposed to be priest or father in temples and church. The situation of the gender discrimination has been worsened with the development of science and technology as it

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predicts the sex of a fetus before it turns to a baby. In 1978 and 1983, seventy eight thousand of fetuses were aborted in Mumbai, as they were known as female fetus (Bastola, 2007).

As a male dominated society, Nepal is not an exceptional in discriminating women. Discrimination against women in Nepal is related to the traditional culture and deeply rooted in the society; that establishes the hierarchical relationship between male and female. Discrimination has been a cultural tradition that is accepted by women and applied by men as social value. Nepal is a religious and male dominated society where women are considered as secondary to men. Preference of son birth is more common almost in every community. Gender based discrimination in different forms starts right after the birth and it continues through out the life cycle. There is popular saying in Nepali “*Chhora pae khasi, chhori pae farsi*” which literally meaning a delivered women will get goat and pumpkin to eat if she give birth of boy and daughter, respectively. There are different sets of behaviors for boys and girls to perform. Such discrimination has helped to establish the hierarchical relationship between men and women in the society and also helped to create many rigid gender norms that restrict women’s opportunities and stifle their development in the private and public sphere.

Scholars have reported different types of discrimination against women and it is different according to ethnicity. Brahmin and Chhetri are considered most vulnerable group as they often practice early age marriage. The girls from Brahmin and chhetri families are forced to get marry at early age without their consent (Luitel, 1992). Similarly, women are not allowed to move and talk freely which sometime turns into violent. It was reported that woman was beaten and also put a paste of chilly powder and garlic inside her vagina for speaking with two boys (The Kathmandu Post, 2007). Adhikari (2007) also reported that newly married brides do not eat meal as they want since they are not supposed to move in a day time if they eat as they want they might have to go outside for defecate and men will see their face.

Educational discrimination between men and women is also seen in Nepal. Adult literacy and average schooling years of women in Nepal is very low comparing to men (HMG/N, 2002). People often think that there is no need of education for girls. Pandey (2006) reported that more women's (40%) against men's (30%) attitude

toward the need of education for girls is negative that resulted higher percentage of boys (50%) got the opportunity to study in boarding school against the girls (10%). Women in some communities, especially madheshi still think that girls need to spend time for household chores after marriage and do not prefer to send girl child for higher education. Some women in madheshi community got the opportunity for higher education and job as well but they could not continue it after marriage since there was pressure from the husband and mother-in-law to quit the job as they need to move and interact with different people (Mandal, 2007).

Discrimination in decision making for family, property right in the form of less expense in education, food and health care for girl child than boys is old practice in rural areas of Nepal (Bhadra 2002). Women in rural area are considered as relatively uneducated and rarely involved in formal meetings and planning phase. Women are discriminated to make decisions in formal meetings and also to involve in political participation due to illiteracy (Pandey, 2006). Women are excluded in planning and decision making process of the community forestry due to lack of education and awareness (Shrestha 2004). Besides education, workloads also make women less available in attending meetings. Household responsibilities make women less available for the extra meeting or social events where information is exchanged (Bhattarai, 2006).

The main purpose of the paper is to document the perceived discrimination practices in Nepali male dominated society. Moreover, the study attempts to see the differences in the perception of married and unmarried women in the discrimination and also explain the factors responsible for it in various aspects.

### **Study Sites, Survey and Data Collection Methods**

The study was undertaken in Ichangu Narayan VDC of Kathmandu district. The VDC is located between Shyombhu Nath temple and Nagarjun forest. The total area of the VDC is 4,469 *ropanies*<sup>2</sup>. The total population of the VDC is 7,516 with diverse ethnic group such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Tamang, Newar, Putuwar, and Nagarkoti. Over three-fourths of the total population is literate in the VDC.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ropani* is local unit for measuring land in the mid-hills of Nepal (one *ropani* = 0.052 ha)

The study is designed as descriptive study based on sample survey. The main purpose of the study is to document the existing discrimination practices in Nepali male dominated society as perceived by women and also identify the factors responsible for discrimination. Women were categorized into two categories: married and unmarried. An interview schedule was conducted with the total of 200 women who were selected randomly (100 from each category). The women with the age of 17 years or older were considered as respondent for this study.

A set of close-ended questionnaire was developed as an instrument for this study. The questionnaire consists of two parts. First part consists of general information such as age, caste, and education and the second part contains about practice of discrimination. The questionnaire was administrated by visiting house to house. In some cases, more than one interview was also conducted separately at the same household where the criteria for the respondents were met.

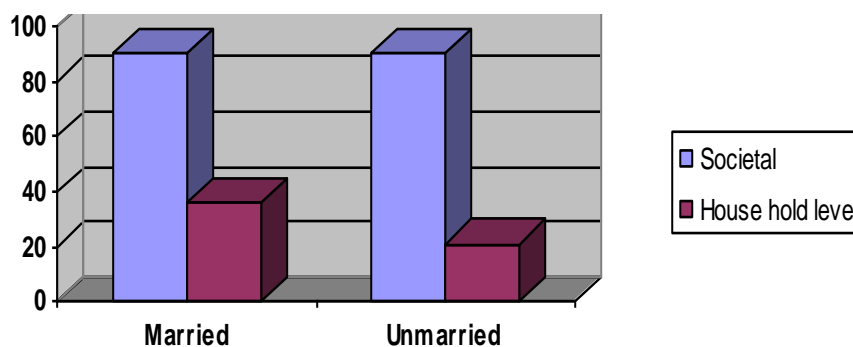
## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

The breakdown of the survey population was 50 per cent married and 50 per cent unmarried since women's status in terms of marriage changes their role to perform also changes. Ethnically, one-half of the survey population was Brahmin and the remaining (50%) was Tamang. The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 73 years with an average age of 28.46 ( $\pm$  11.98). Over one-fifths (23.5%) of the survey population were illiterate, 4.5 per cent literate, and 72 per cent received formal education. Among the respondents who received formal education, over one-half (53%) attended high school and higher secondary level, followed by bachelor level and above (27%) and up to class eight (20%). Regarding occupation, about one-half (45.5%) of the respondents were housewife, followed by students (39.5%), job holders (6.5%), wage labors and maid (3.5%), and the remaining (5%) was engaged in other occupation.

### **Perception of discrimination**

In order to make the respondents to understand the meaning of discrimination, it was explained as "any type of restriction that might be in the name of teaching, love or protection". Such explanation helped the respondents to understand the meaning of discrimination and responded the questionnaire accordingly. Respondents were simply asked if they have felt or heard the discrimination practices in the society. Overwhelmingly (90%), the respondents were aware of the prevalent societal discrimination and responded it as yes. When the perception of discrimination assessed based on the marital status, both categories of the respondent perceived equally the societal discrimination whereas their perception of discrimination at the household level varies (Figure 1). Over one-third (36%) of married and over one-fifth (21%) of unmarried respondents felt the discrimination at the household level, respectively. It shows that the married women perceived the discrimination relatively more at the household level comparing to unmarried women. It is logical in a Nepali culture that married women feel more discrimination at home comparing to unmarried women since woman requires performing more gender based works once she gets married. Similarly, as daughter in-law she gets different treatments such as she cannot take meal until she serves meal to all family members.

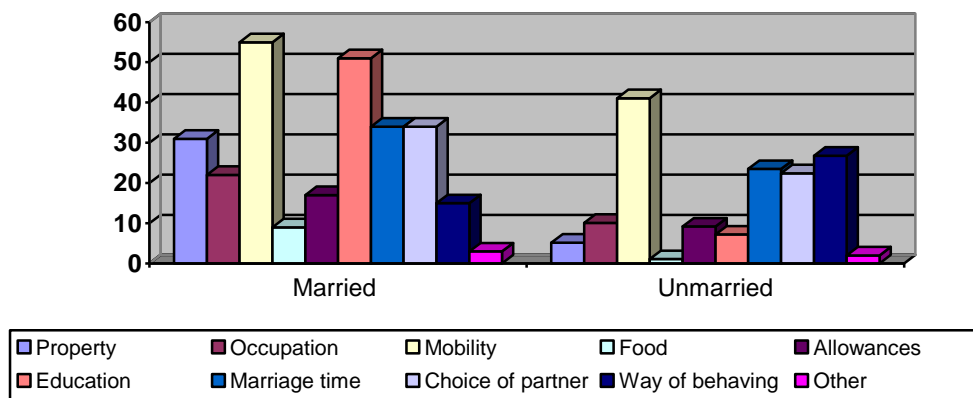


**Figure 1 Awareness of the respondents towards discrimination**

When asked for what they feel discrimination at household level, about one-half (47.5%) of the respondent expressed that they feel discrimination in mobility. They also expressed that they feel discrimination in education (29%), marriage time (29%), choice of partner (28%), and way of behavior (21%). When compare between married and

unmarried, it appears that married women feel more discrimination in education, property, occupation, food, marriage time and choice of partner (Figure 2). Married women generally are busy with household chores and do not get time to study. Similarly, only son inherits the parental properties in a Nepali culture as a result, men are found to be owner of the property rather than women. There is a practice in Nepali society that daughter-in-law should take meal after serving meal to all family members which means she should eat the left over food. In a Nepali society, there is practices of arrange marriage; girl rarely gets opportunity to chose life partner and marriage time. Such possible reason made married women to feel more discrimination in education, property, food, marriage time and choice of partner.

Similarly, unmarried women feel more discrimination in the way of behaving comparing to married women. One possible reason could be that elder married women fully accept the gender role defined by the society due to lack of opportunity available for them in education and communication as well. There is an increasing trend sending girl to school that facilitates in getting delay marriage allowing them to stay longer time at parental home. Once the girls are exposed to education they compare the treatment or behavior offered by the parents to them and their brothers. There is a tradition to behave the girls differently than the boys. Generally, boys get favor from the parents than the girls. Such practice may have made unmarried women to feel more discrimination in the way of behaving.



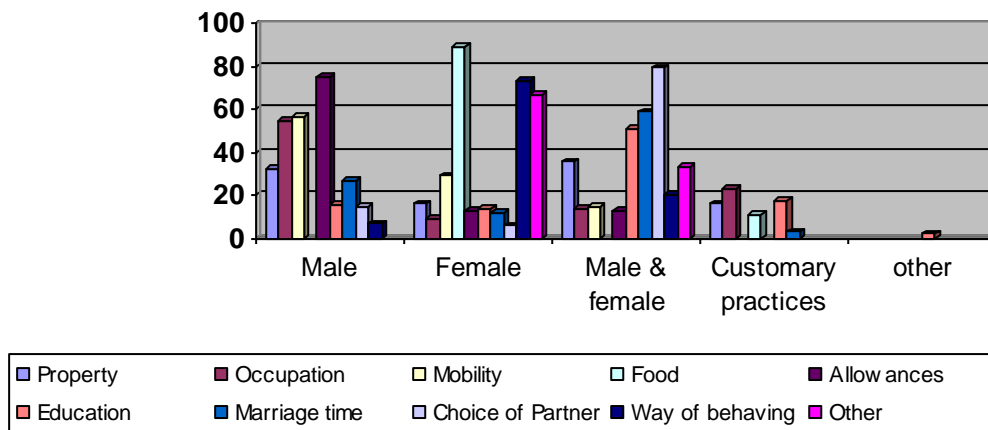
**Figure 2 Discrimination felt at home in various aspects**

The figure 2 shows that the majority of married and unmarried women feel discrimination at home in mobility. It was interesting to note that one of the unmarried women mentioned during the interview that discrimination in mobility has affected her education as she is not allowed to go neither far nor in evening time although the parents are positive in her education. She further mentioned that such restriction is not applicable to her brothers. The respondents indicated that they feel discrimination in quality education as well since the parents send girls to school or college similar to boys but pay the additional expenses only for the brothers if it is required for extra educational activities. Similarly, it was also mentioned that the girls are not allowed to choose the subjects that are costly and also required to go far from home. It was remarkable to note that a couple of respondents felt discrimination in interaction with boys. They said that they are not allowed to interact with boys alone. The married women felt discrimination more in marriage time and choice of partner comparing to unmarried women.

### **Responsible factors for discrimination**

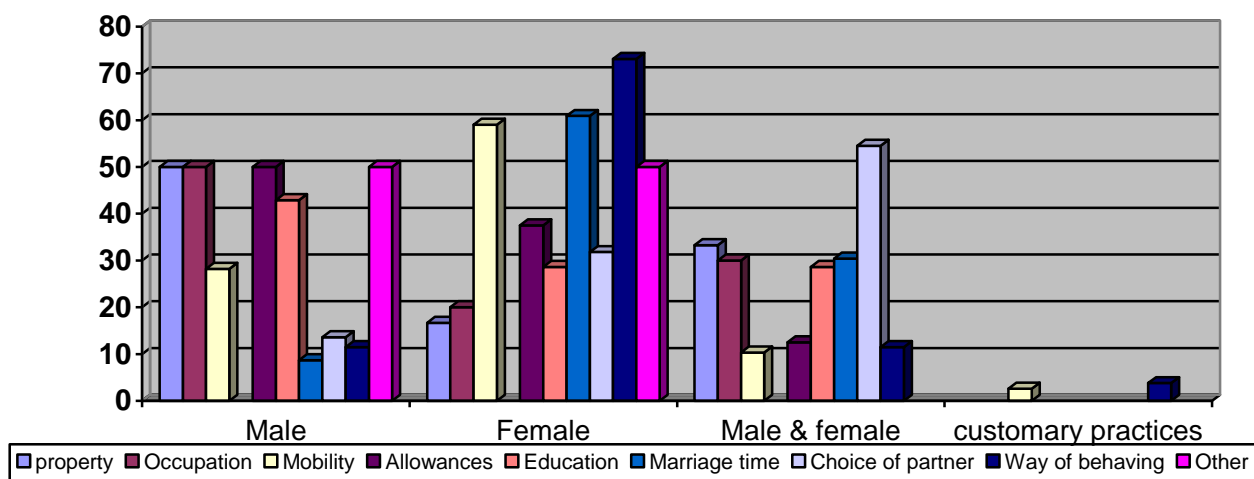
The study analyzes the perceived factors responsible for discrimination. The study considers gender and customary practices as main factors responsible for discrimination. The discrimination in various aspects was analyzed along with the perceived responsible factors (Figure 3). Over one-half (53%) of the respondent indicated that mobility is one of the aspects they feel discrimination and considers male as responsible for it. As a male dominated society, males often considered themselves as superior than women and put restriction to women. Generally, women are not allowed to move freely in the name of protection. There is also a tendency of males as husband they want women as wife to stay at home and offer their services for them. During the interview, one of the respondents indicated that her husband does not allowed her to move freely since he is older than her and thinks she may leave him if he allows her to move freely. Two-thirds of the respondents consider male as responsible for discrimination in education. They also consider male as responsible for discrimination in property, occupation, and allowances.





**Figure 3 Responsible factors for discrimination as perceived by married women**

Married women consider male as responsible for discrimination in allowances, occupation, mobility and property (Figure 3). They further consider male, particularly father-in-law and husband responsible for discrimination when they were asked about the marital home. The figure 3 also shows that over two-third of the married women considers women, particularly mother-in-law responsible for discrimination in food (89%), way of behaving (73%) and others such as interaction with boys (67%). Similarly, married women consider both male and female responsible for discrimination in choice of partner, marriage time, and education. A few of married women also consider customary practice as responsible for discrimination in occupation, education, and property (Figure 3).



**Figure 4 Responsible factors for discrimination as perceived by unmarried women**

The figure 4 shows that the factors responsible for discrimination as perceived by unmarried women. The unmarried women consider male and female are main responsible for discrimination. A very few unmarried women consider customary practices as responsible factor for discrimination. One-half of the survey population of unmarried women feels male as responsible for discrimination in property, occupation and allowances. Similarly, they feel women as responsible for discrimination in way of behavior (73%), marriage time (61%), and mobility (59%). Over one-half (54.5%) of the unmarried women think both male and female is equally responsible for discrimination in choice of partner.

## **Conclusions**

The study findings show that societal discrimination exists in male dominated society. Women are aware of discrimination practices at home and society as well. They perceive more discrimination practices at the societal level comparing to household level. Societal discriminations are often highlighted by media and it becomes an issue for debate at the national level. The debates are often discussed even in an informal chat when they meet each other. Such informal chat facilitates to disseminate the issues widely in rural areas making women relatively more aware of societal discrimination. Similarly, there is a tendency of women to perceive the things culturally at the household level and do not consider the restriction as discrimination.

The study revealed different types of discrimination practices at the household level. Women perceive discrimination in various aspects such as property, education, and mobility. The study findings suggest that the perception of discrimination varies between married and unmarried women. The married women feel more discrimination in property, occupation and education comparing to unmarried women. It is believed that property, occupation, and education help an individual to become an independent in a society. Women feel more discrimination in property, occupation and education since lacking of such things makes them dependent in the society. Most of both married and unmarried women feel the discrimination in mobility, as there is a culture of not allowing women to move freely in the name of protection.

Women consider gender and customary practices are main factors responsible for discrimination. They perceive different members of the family such as father, husband, and mother in-law are responsible for discrimination. To some extent women themselves were found to be responsible for discrimination as they perceive the things culturally and perform it accordingly accepting the gender based responsibilities without considering it as discrimination.

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