

Report

# Understanding intimate partner violence in Nepal through a male lens

Anita Ghimire and Fiona Samuels

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A longer version of this report, 'Understanding intimate partner violence in Nepal: Prevalence, drivers and challenges' is available online at [odi.org/vawg-southasia](http://odi.org/vawg-southasia) along with other outputs from this research project.

**Overseas Development Institute**

203 Blackfriars Road  
London SE1 8NJ

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300  
Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399  
E-mail: [info@odi.org.uk](mailto:info@odi.org.uk)

[www.odi.org](http://www.odi.org)  
[www.odi.org/facebook](http://www.odi.org/facebook)  
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# Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a major public health and human rights issue in Nepal, and is rooted in a wider context of high gender inequality. Nepal ranks 108<sup>th</sup> out of 152 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, and while there is no global index for IPV, data from Nepal's most recent (2011) Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) shows that 33% of women aged 15-49 who have ever been married report that they have experienced IPV, while 17% have experienced it in the past 12 months (Ministry of Health and Population [MoHP] Nepal, New ERA, and ICF International, 2012).

IPV is an emerging area of research in Nepal, with most studies (e.g., Atteraya et al., 2015; Dalal et al. 2014; Tuladhar et al., 2013) using DHS data to analyse its scope and trends, rather than conducting IPV-specific national surveys. Other studies have focused on small geographical areas, and rarely distinguish between the very different perspectives and experiences of men and women. While there is ample thematic evidence on areas such as sexual violence by intimate partners (see, for example, Adhikari and Tamang, 2010), there is a lack of evidence on the factors that perpetuate IPV, on the impact of intervention programmes on men, or that reflect both male and female perspectives.

This short report aims to fill that knowledge gap, drawing on primary qualitative research in 2016 that provides unique insights on the multi-level influences – including household-level power imbalances and community level norms that devalue women and girls – which shape the attitudes and behaviour of boys and men around IPV. The findings discussed in this short report are part of a broader regional study of the perpetration of IPV by men and boys across South Asia, being conducted in Bangladesh and Pakistan in addition to Nepal. The definition of IPV used in this study is set out in Box 1.

## Objectives of the research

Given the knowledge gaps on the dynamics of IPV as they relate to male perpetrators, including attitudinal, programmatic and policy issues, this study has three objectives.

1. To understand the multi-level drivers of male perpetration of IPV in Nepal, including the relative importance of conservative gender norms.
2. To investigate how broader political economy dynamics shape the attitudes, behaviours and service provision related to IPV.

### Box 1. The definition of IPV and its conceptualisation in Nepal

Following the WHO (2012) definition, intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. Examples include acts of physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating, and sexual violence (including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion). Emotional (psychological) abuse includes insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation, threats of harm and threats to take away children. Controlling behaviours include isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting their access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

The concept of IPV is relatively new in Nepali society, and there is no word used to describe it in the Nepali language. It is largely understood and treated as domestic violence (*gharelu hinsa*) or as violence against women (*mahila hinsa*) by the law, service providers and the public. These two Nepali phrases are used interchangeably and people also refer to various forms of IPV such as beatings, polygamy, extramarital affairs, neglect, emotional violence and verbal abuse when they use those terms.

3. To determine the types of policy and programming that exist to tackle male perpetration of IPV, and the associated implications for policy and practice to strengthen responses to IPV.

To address these objectives, this short report first provides an overview of the conceptual framework that is applied across all three focus countries in South Asia, followed by a methodology section setting out the study sites, the programmes reviewed, and the tools and instruments used. Following an overview of existing evidence on the patterning and prevalence of IPV in Nepal, the short report then discusses the individual, household and community level influences that shape experiences of IPV among both perpetrators and survivors. We then discuss formal and informal responses before we conclude with a discussion of the policy and programming implications emerging from our findings.

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# 1. Conceptual framework

The starting point of our conceptual framework builds on an integrated ecological model (see e.g. Heise, 1998, 2011; Fulu and Miedema, 2015) that emphasises the interaction of factors at the individual, family/relationship, community and society/culture levels and the ways in which they help to perpetuate IPV (see Figure 1). Our framework positions individual adolescent boys and young men at the centre, together with factors that shape their well-being, such as substance abuse, childhood experiences of abuse, social relationships and the extent to which they are gendered, their current psychosocial status, and their ability to resist dominant social norms around gender.

These individuals are then located in the households that shape the behaviours, attitudes and trajectories of young men. Key household characteristics include its economic status and education levels, as well as gendered and generational intra-household dynamics. Next, we emphasise the role of community social and cultural norms in shaping individual male experiences (including norms around marriage, sexuality, education, the gendered division of labour, the type of behaviour that should be punished or rewarded, and income-generation opportunities for men and women) (e.g. Marcus, 2014; Mackie et al., 2012; Bicchieri, 2015).

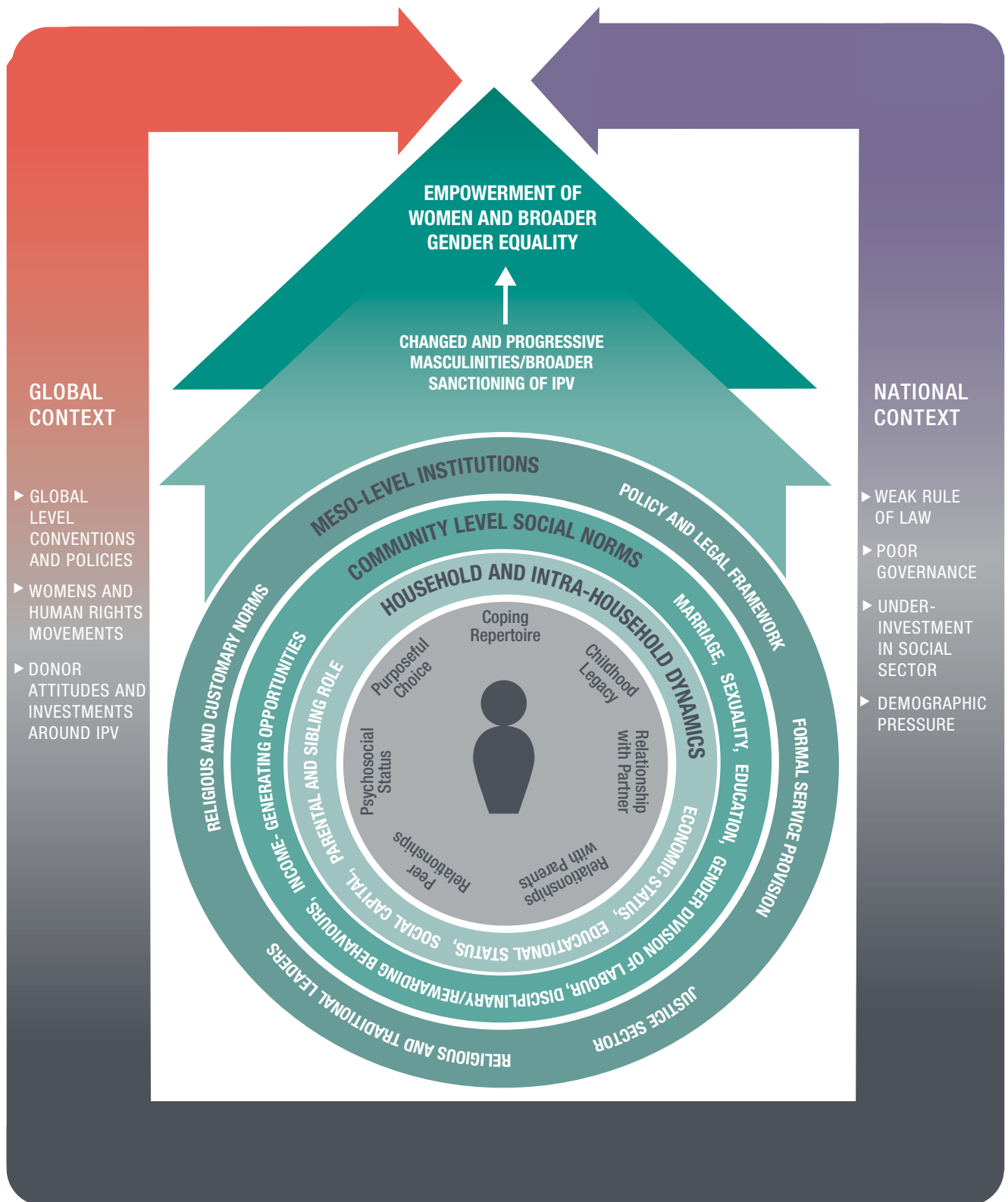
Less well conceptualised in the literature, and where this project aims to make a significant contribution, is the role of meso-level institutions as these are vital intermediaries for the channelling of national-level resources and

standards to address IPV (True, 2012; Denney and Domingo, 2013). Our framework includes both formal and customary institutions. The formal spectrum includes legal provisions around divorce, child custody, property inheritance, sanctions around IPV and gender-based violence (GBV) and service provision, such as shelters and counselling. It also includes the justice sector, including the application of legal provisions by the courts; police stations and legal aid; legal protection and family mediation. On the customary end of the spectrum it is also important to consider the role of religious and customary norms as well as religious and traditional leaders who are often the first port of call for the resolution of local conflicts.

All of these domains are situated within broader macro-level contexts. Variables at national level include weak rule of law, poor governance, under-investment in the social sector, and under-resourced responses to demographic pressures (Hickey et al., 2015). At the global level, international rights conventions, women's and human rights movements that champion action against GBV and IPV can be influential (True, 2012; Roberts and Waylen, 1998).

Our conceptual framework envisages that by effectively tackling the multi-level risk factors underpinning IPV presented above important changes could be achieved including imposing broader sanctions against IPV, fostering progressive masculinities and ultimately a society where there are gender equitable norms and behaviours.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework – seeing IPV through an ecological and institutional lens in fragile-state contexts**



Source: ODI, 2016.

# 2. Methodology

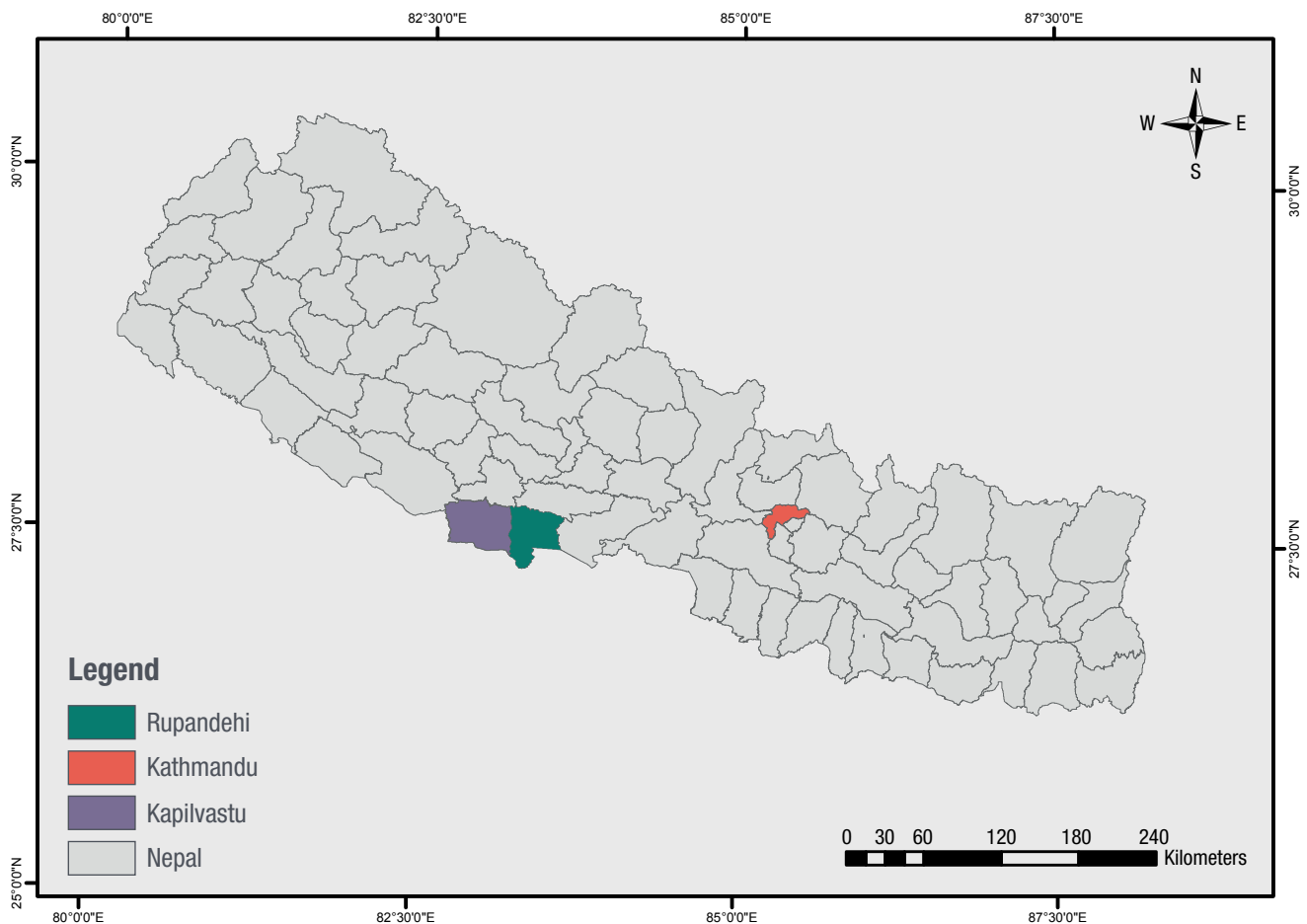
The primary qualitative research data underpinning this short report were collected in 2016 from two main project sites – the districts of Rupandehi and Kapilvastu – with some additional interviews carried out in Kathmandu to gain an understanding of the nature of IPV in urban areas (see Figure 2 and Box 2). There were four main criteria for the selection of the two districts:

- they are among the districts with the highest levels of GBV in Nepal, according to national police records
- both districts have programmes with components that focus on men and address issues of GBV and IPV
- they are among the few districts in Nepal with programmes run by both the Government and an NGO (CARE) that focus on men and on adolescent boys and girls

- they have a diverse range of people from different ethnic groups.

A range of qualitative tools was used to collect data on IPV, including in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) with both girls and boys and programme beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, intergenerational trios (IGTs) with men and women and case studies with survivors. These interviews focused on understanding the gender norms that underpin IPV prevalence and its forms, changes in perceptions over time and the extent and quality of services available locally. In addition, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with programme implementers at district and village level, police officers, the judiciary and local leaders to understand the overall scenario of IPV in the districts, the response

Figure 2: Map of Nepal showing study sites



Source: Authors



mechanisms and legal and policy frameworks, as well challenges in service provision (see Table 1).

Village development committees (VDCs) for the study and participants were selected on the basis of consultation with the national and district level officers of CARE and the Women and Child Development Department (WCDD) and their social mobilisers, who implement the trainings. Once the VDCs and the beneficiaries were identified, purposive sampling was used to select individual respondents, taking care to include a diverse range of beneficiaries spanning different age groups and different levels of social and educational status that might influence the IPV situation.

In addition to qualitative interviews, the project also collected secondary data from five-year records of the national police repository, which includes data from all 75 of Nepal's districts on various forms of GBV, based on the cases reported to the police.

The larger project also conducted secondary quantitative analysis on the DHS 2007 data to leverage the data that exist and further the understanding of individual- and community-level determinants of men's attitudes about IPV<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1: Total number of interviews by study site**

Instrument	Rupandehi	Kapilvastu	Kathmandu	Total
Key informant interviews (KIs)	11	11	7	29
Focus group discussions (FGDs)	7	6		13
In-depth interviews (IDIs) (boys / men)	15	20		35
In-depth interviews (IDIs) (IPV survivors)	4	3	2	9
Intergenerational trios (IGTs)	4	4		8
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>95</b>

## Box 2. Description of study sites and programmes

### Study sites

Rupandehi district lies in Nepal's western plain. The district has a total population of 880,196 (female 50.9%). The main religious groups are Hindus (86.24%), Buddhists (4.61%), and Muslims (8.23%). The literacy rate is 69.8%, which is slightly higher than the national average of 65.9% (CBS and NPC, 2012). However, of the total literate population, only 44.59% of women are literate compared to 55.40% of men. The district's economically active population totals 332,951 of those aged 10 or over, of whom 60.2% are male and only 39.8% female. Early marriage among women and polygamy among men are prevalent. According to national data (MPRC, 2013), 0.72% of males are married by the age of 10, compared to 2.78% of females. Similarly, only 50.63% of men are married by the age of 19, compared to 77.41% of women. Our fieldwork in Rupandehi district was carried out in Harnaiya and Dayanagar VDC and Butwal Municipality where there were government-conducted trainings for couples on GBV.

Kapilvastu district also lies in the western plain. According to national census data from 2011, the district has a total population of 571,936 (female 50.1%). The ethnic composition of the population consists of indigenous groups (17%), Dalits (13%), Brahmins (11%) and Chhetris (4%). The main religious groups are Hindus (80.62%), Muslims (18.16%) and Buddhists (0.87%). The average literacy rate is 54.9%, falling to only 44.96% for females (CBS and NPC, 2012). Only 31.78% of women are economically active, compared

to 63.62% of men. Early marriage is prevalent among women in Kapilvastu, with 0.75% of them having married below the age of 10, while 79.8% married by the age of 19. Our fieldwork in Kapilvastu was carried out in Somdi, Gotihawa VDC in the first year and Banskot VDC in the second year, where CARE Nepal has implemented the Tipping Point programme and the Government has conducted a training programme for couples.

### Case-study programmes

Two intervention programmes were selected for review because they included activities and training programmes targeting men on GBV issues:

- The Government of Nepal's programme Laingik Hinsha Nibaranna Purus Sahakarm iPrabardan Talim (Training on Promotion of Male Co-workers in Gender-based Violence Alleviation)
- CARE Nepal's Tipping Point programme

The government programme has focused on married men and women who were above adolescent age, while the CARE programme has focused on unmarried adolescent boys and girls. The government programme ran for seven days, with course content delivered by social mobilisers from the Women and Child Development Department (WCDD) and guest lecturers from the local district, while the CARE programme was a nine-month course using a peer-to-peer education model, with boys and girls from adolescent groups selected and trained as peer educators to teach a 16-module course (based on the UNICEF Rupantaran programme).

<sup>1</sup> For further details see Roof et al., forthcoming

# 3. Patterning of IPV

Despite remarkable progress on gender equity in Nepal, where gender rights have been promoted since the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1991, national-level data from various sources show that many Nepali women are still victims of IPV. According to the DHS 2011 (MoHP, New ERA, ICF International, 2012), 84% of perpetrators in cases of domestic violence are husbands. The same report also found that one-third of married women in Nepal experience domestic violence from their spouse. Other data collected by the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (2012) in rural districts show that the prevalence estimates of IPV ranged from 30% to 81%, depending on the district and type of IPV assessed. Similarly, Lamichhane et al., (2011) found that more than half of young married women (51.9%) reported having ever experienced some type of violence from their husbands.

Studies also show mixed results on the prevalence of different forms of IPV. Some studies (e.g. Government of Nepal, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, 2012) show that emotional violence (40.4%) is the most common form, followed by physical violence (26.8%), sexual violence (15.3%) and economic abuse/violence (8%). Similar trends were also reported by Saathi and UNFPA (2009). Their analysis of male perpetration of IPV found that 93% of women had been exposed to mental and emotional torture, 82% were beaten, and 64% reported polygamy. Other studies, such as the DHS 2011 (MoHP, New ERA, ICF International, 2012) and police records show that physical violence is more common.

Our study finds that the most common forms of IPV are physical, including beating, hair pulling, strangling, forced eviction from home, deprivation of food, shelter and basic needs, sexual assault and marital rape. While some forms of emotional violence, such as suspicion of infidelity, verbal abuse and psychological torture are widespread, are less evident. However, other forms of emotional violence, such as extramarital affairs and polygamy are growing among the younger generation. Similarly the control of women's mobility and social interaction, sexual coercion, acid attacks and cyber bullying are all emerging forms of IPV, particularly among adolescents.

In terms of the nature of IPV survivors, Nepal is a heterogeneous society where people are divided on the basis of religion, caste and ethnicity as well as socio-economic class. Our study finds that the prevalence and

## Box 3. A survivor's story

Sabin\*, who comes from a poor family, was married to a wealthy man from Kapilvastu, Western Nepal. He met her at a cousin's wedding and pursued her relentlessly until she agreed to marry him. His parents, however, were very unhappy with the marriage and began to taunt Sabin for her poor background as soon as she moved into her husband's home. At first, he supported her, but once she gave birth to their first child, he abandoned her at her parents' house and began chasing other women. Religious leaders intervened and forced him to take her back, which made him very angry. He began denying her food, beating her and raping her. When she became pregnant again, he abandoned her at her parents' house for a second time. Sabin went back to him yet again, and the abuse continued. After eight years, the village religious committee agreed that she had tolerated the abuse long enough and allowed her to file for divorce. Her husband, however, refused to hand over the paperwork she needed to finalise the divorce (her citizenship and marriage certificates and her children's birth certificates), leading the Chief District Officer to imprison him to force his hand. In the end, Sabin's divorce went through and her husband is now engaged to be married to another woman.

\*All names throughout this report have been changed to protect privacy

Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

nature of IPV differs across all of these groupings, as well as by geographical origin.

In general, women from rural areas and from communities with stringent social norms, such as the Madheshi people of the plain (Terai) and Muslim communities, are more likely to face physical violence from their partners than those from hilly areas and those from indigenous caste and ethnic groups where women are more educated and social norms are less stringent. Women who are unemployed, illiterate, or from ethnic and religious groups with stringent gender norms face both physical and psychological violence from their partners, while literate and working women from urban areas may be less likely to face physical violence but more likely to experience psychological violence. Similar findings come from SAHAVAGI et al. (2015), which reports that women employed for cash were more likely (28.3%) to face IPV than those who were unemployed or not employed for

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cash. Having categorised the victims roughly by class, caste and geographic region, the study also finds some women within the same groups who are more likely to face IPV than others:

*‘Yes (there are women who are more likely to face violence than others). Women who only have daughters, women who are not beautiful to look at, illiterate women, women from poor families who cannot bring dowry, women who are not very exposed.’*

*(FGD with adolescent girls, Rupandehi)*

Studies to date have focused only on married women or partners living together, and have not looked at unmarried adolescents who are in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. This study finds that unmarried adolescent girls are being made more vulnerable to IPV by the growing trend of dating relationships. Adolescent respondents (both male and female), as well as key informants, reported that having boyfriends/girlfriends is becoming more common, but that boys inflict physical violence on their girlfriends (slapping, hitting, sexual coercion) as well as emotional violence (restricting their mobility and social interaction, harassing them with suspicions of infidelity, blackmailing them and inflicting cyber bullying). Such violence is seen as increasingly common, particularly when girls refuse to have a sexual relationship with their boyfriends:

*‘Boys usually pressure the girls to have a physical relation ... They usually say (to their girlfriends), “If you truly love me, you need to have physical relation with me...” and girls are forced into that to prove their love.’*

*(IDI with adolescent boy, Rupandehi)*

Young girls who become pregnant out of wedlock and are abandoned by their boyfriends were also found to be resorting to suicide. A growing number of suicides, particularly among the high-caste and indigenous groups

living in hilly areas in Rupandehi, have therefore been reported:

*‘Yes, it [suicide] is growing here. What happens is that the girls fall in love and get pregnant. Boys like to have girlfriends, but when it comes to marrying, they do not marry the girls because they think if she is fine with having a boyfriend and having sex before marriage then she is a spoilt girl. They marry someone their parents have chosen. Now this pregnant girl has no other way than to commit suicide.’*

*(FGD with adolescent girls, Rupandehi)*

Regarding the perpetrators of IPV, the study finds that instances of wife-beating by elderly and alcoholic men are decreasing, however this still remains the most common form of IPV and is more prevalent among those from the Madheshi and Muslim groups. IPV is also decreasing among younger men and literate youths, who consider it shameful to beat a wife. Young men, however, are most likely to have extramarital affairs, force abortion on their partners, control their mobility and social interactions, subject them to verbal abuse and be involved in polygamous relationships. Adolescent boys and unmarried men are more likely to perpetrate sexual coercion, carry out acid attacks as a result of suspicion and jealousy and victimise their girlfriends over the phone and through social media.

The study also finds mixed tendencies among migrant men who have returned home, some of them with progressive views while others (having been exposed to pornography) are reported to abuse their wives by asking them to perform demeaning sexual acts. Migrant men were also found to be suspicious of their wives while away, often threatening them and sending their family members to control them. While intervention programmes targeted men who are the most likely to perpetuate IPV, we did not find significant changes in the attitudes towards IPV among beneficiary men – a signal that it remains deeply entrenched and widely accepted.

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# 4. Multi-level influences that shape IPV risks

IPV emerges from the complex interplay of multiple interacting factors at the individual, family and community levels. Drawing on our conceptual framework, we follow this ecological framing in presenting our findings.

## 4.1. Individual-level risk factors

Our findings show that men's consumption of alcohol, their age and their education are all individual risk factors to some extent, as is witnessing or being exposed to IPV during childhood. In general, boys were accustomed to being beaten as a form of correction (in school and at home), and tended to accept beating by a guardian as normal behaviour – an attitude that they carried into adulthood. Beating their wives was, therefore, seen as acceptable and even expected behaviour.

Boys' negative attitudes towards their female peers were also a potential driver of IPV at individual level. Adolescent boys often talked about girls being 'spoilt', not obeying their parents and keeping things hidden from them. Boys and men also resented the perceived greed of women and girls in wanting to be taken out and given gifts, and wanting relationships with boys or men in better-paid jobs. Given that the impressions young boys absorb as they grow up are likely to shape their IPV behaviour once married, boys may start to feel that such behaviour by girlfriends justifies violence:

*'The girls of nowadays are a spoilt bunch. I want to become a right person; I ask my mother while taking important decisions. She will help me to know what is right and what is wrong and I act after that. Girls do not do that. They don't obey their parents, in fact, they hide things from them.'*

*(IDI with an adolescent boy programme beneficiary, Rupandehi)*

## 4.2. Household-level risk factors

Regarding family risk factors, we find that polygamy, arranged and early marriage, lack of women's economic independence and poor relationships with in-laws are the main risk factors that influence IPV.

Though we found no direct evidence, our study suggests that fathers having multiple wives could influence whether boys perpetrate IPV when they get older. Boys whose fathers had another wife appeared to be more concerned about and protective of their mothers. In such cases, boys reported that it was their responsibility on reaching adulthood to keep their mother happy, as their mother had struggled to bring them up on her own. These boys were found to have negative attitudes towards girls of their own age, seeing them as 'not wanting to do household chores', or 'lacking family values of caring' and as a result they did not want to have girlfriends. In addition, their strong desire to make their mother happy was incompatible with having a girlfriend who might divide their attention and resources. While such attitudes might be immaterial when boys are not in a relationship, it might influence their behaviour when they are.

Arranged and early marriage was found to be another risk factor for IPV, including when a father makes the decisions on behalf of a boy about the age of marriage and the girl he is supposed to marry, and when that decision is forced upon both the girl and the boy:

*'No (talking of his marriage). It was arranged... When I was married at a small age, I didn't know the meaning of marriage though I was enjoying the ceremonies. My father had forced me to marry his friend's daughter at a very early age though I was not willing to do so. He had threatened me that he wouldn't pay my school fees if I didn't marry her and so I had no option left...'*

*(IDI with a male programme beneficiary, Rupandehi)*

Boys who have married young tend to continue their education and become exposed to a wider world and modern attitudes after marriage, while their wives cease their education and become more or less secluded in the household. This creates a gap between spouses that exacerbates their incompatibility, with tensions building up and leading to husbands inflicting violence on their wives and/or having extramarital affairs.

In some instances, boys were married early because of family needs. When a mother dies young, for example, another woman is needed to take care of the house, leading a son to marry early. According to study respondents,

this has sometimes left boys feeling frustrated with their marriages when they become adults and taking that frustration out on their partners through violence, including polygamy and extramarital affairs.

Our findings also confirm that a woman's socio-economic dependence on her husband and his family is one of the main household-level risk factors for IPV, applying to women of all castes and ethnic groups. Women's lack of economic independence means that the difficulties they face without a husband's financial support outweigh the violence they experience from a husband. As a result, wives rarely report IPV. Their situation was captured by one of our key (male) informants:

*'We have our gender roles influencing such violence. Females are not economically empowered also because they are deprived of education. If she is economically empowered, she would never tolerate violence because it does not become necessary for her to do so. But in a typical situation, women are the ones who work for the whole day – like, if there is a buffalo, she would bring fodder and take care of the shed. She would milk it but the husband would go to sell the milk and take the money. With the money he drinks alcohol, and in the evening, he comes home drunk and starts beating his wife. It is the wife who suffers from all sides.'*

(KII with male, Kapilvastu)

We also found that parents-in-law and sisters-in-law are key drivers of IPV as they complain to their sons/brothers that their wives are lazy, disobedient, not bringing enough dowry to the household, and so on. Young men take their responsibility towards their parents and unmarried siblings very seriously and assume that the main duty of their wife is to serve the in-laws and make their life comfortable. Because of strongly held social norms around a 'son's responsibility' towards his parents and siblings, sons often side with their mothers or sisters without verifying what they say with their wives and then inflict violence on their wives. A key informant described the relationship between marriage and violence using fingers as a metaphor:

*'A married son is like the middle finger. There is an index finger, his mother on one side and the ring finger, his wife on the other side. There is a constant conflict between the index finger and the ring finger to have the man listen to them. If the middle finger leans towards the index finger, i.e. if he listens to the mother, he will perpetrate IPV on the wife. If the middle finger leans towards the ring finger, i.e. if he listens to the wife, he will perpetrate violence on the mother.'*

(KII with male, Kapilvastu)

### 4.3. Community and social levels

Social norms around masculinity, femininity, male guardianship of women and polygamy have a strong influence on behaviour and choices in Nepal, and a strong bearing on IPV. Men are accorded a superior social status and the inferior status of women goes largely unquestioned. Domestic violence is also generally accepted as a means of controlling women and/or correcting the behaviour of a wife or girlfriend. Norms around masculinity expect that an ideal husband provides well for his parents, wife and children, but he does not need to listen to his wife and can control her if she is not 'moving on the right path'. An ideal wife, however, is expected to be submissive to the husband and serve his family, taking care of the children, cooking food, washing clothes for the whole family and keeping the house clean. She is not to complain about her hardships or her in-laws, and she is not to speak to men who are not part of the household. There are even some communities where women are not allowed to go beyond their porch until they have several children. One young beneficiary presented a typical scenario:

*'I have never been out of the house or talked to the neighbours. The only time I talk to anyone except the people in my own house is when I meet the daughter-in-law of that house (her nearest neighbour) while going to fetch water at the nearby pump. But I can't talk or spend much time with her there as my mother-in-law will scold me' [She had been married for three years and had never walked around the village – a situation verified by other unmarried adolescent girls from that village].*

(IDIs with female programme beneficiaries, Kapilvastu)

A woman who defies these norms is thought to be a 'spoiled woman', and someone who is out of her husband's control. The husband in such cases is seen as not being 'manly' enough to control her, paving the way for violence as a means of regaining that control:

*'If she does not understand even after the husband explains to her, the man has to beat his wife.'*

(IDI with male non-beneficiary, Kapilvastu)

Such attitudes prevail even with programme beneficiaries, as one man remarked:

*'I tell her not to go to the fields and she goes out there. So, when she does not obey me like that, I sometimes beat her.'*

(IDI with male programme beneficiary, Rupandehi)

The study finds that another aspect of masculinity that is directly linked to IPV is a deep need for respect. Both

men and women expect a wife to respect her husband unreservedly, and even the slightest hint of disrespect is seen as a trigger for violence. Case studies of survivors show that men felt disrespected when food was not tasty and not ready on time, when the bed was not made and when clothes were not washed. Husbands do not help their wives with such chores, since it is believed that a man who does so will lose control over his wife and lose respect.

*'He says, 'I am your husband. You should make the food ready and stand with a pot of water for washing my hands when I come home from work'. If the food is not ready or if I am busy and not able to stand with water to wash his hand, that becomes a reason for getting beaten up by him. When he wants to sleep, the bed should be made beforehand. Otherwise he will say, 'why is the bed not ready?' and will again beat me.'*

*(Case study with IPV survivor, Kapilvastu)*

The study finds that notions around guardianship, that have their origins in religion, reinforce the superiority of men in their relationships with women. This plays out in three ways. First, it confirms a man as superior in knowledge and outlook and, if he beats a woman, it is for her benefit: 'a man knows better what is good for the wife than the wife herself'. Second, it establishes a man as the provider, making his violence acceptable while making his wife economically dependent on him by denying her access to family property or means of income. Third, the patriarchal system often means that a woman needs a man to access services. Important legal documents, such as marriage and citizenship certificates, which are mandatory when using facilities like banks, enrolling children in school and obtaining social grants and voting rights, are only possible when the man consents to putting his name to them. In addition, a woman's social acceptance and respect hinges on having a husband. The man is seen as the social guardian of his wife, and his IPV perpetuation is accepted.

Such notions around male superiority mean that social norms run counter to laws and programmes that aim to promote gender equality, and also reduce IPV. Men and boys who had been engaged in programmes and tried to help their wives with household chores, particularly cooking, faced a backlash and were ridiculed by others in the community, who referred to them as '*Bhandari*', meaning 'cook'. Similarly, men who speak on behalf of a wife's equality are called '*meheru*', meaning 'the servant of the wife'. This made it difficult for men to talk about gender equality and against IPV in their society.

The study finds other local practices in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu that are risk factors for IPV, including the *Gauna* marriage system, which is common among Tharu communities. Such marriages take place when children are between the ages of eight and fourteen. While girls

are not sent to live with their in-laws until middle- to late-adolescence, they tend to be removed from school soon after their marriage to learn the skills they will need as wives and mothers. Boys, however, usually stay in school—where many meet girls who become more important to them than the wives they have not seen since their childhood wedding ceremonies. Because boys and their families are fined up to NRS 200,000 (about \$200) if they do not 'complete' their *Gauna* marriages and accept their wives into the household, young wives often find themselves living with husbands who can barely tolerate their presence and who berate and inflict violence on them for interfering with their relationships with their girlfriends (see Box 5).

*'Yes, I liked one girl..... But since I was already married, I could never propose to her... Our culture never encouraged us to fall in love after marriage. So, I never dared to propose to her. Even though I am not happy with my marriage, I couldn't ask her to marry me.....'*

*(IDI with male programme beneficiary, Rupandehi)*

#### **Box 4. A case of a Gauna marriage and IPV**

Shiva is 19-years-old and came to live with her husband three years ago. She had only seen her husband once – during the marriage ceremony when she was 12 – and the marriage was arranged by her father, who was friendly with her father-in-law. When she came to her husband's house at the age of 16, she felt that her husband did not love her; he would not talk to her or only responded with monosyllabic answers if she wanted to chat. He did not take her to market or fairs like other newly married husbands. She was sad about his lack of interest, but did not have any concrete complaints and her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law loved her. A friend told her that her husband was having an affair with another girl at his school. He denied this, but her growing suspicions led to arguments. He finally admitted it was true: he was in love with someone else and had no interest in Shiva. He had only brought her to his house because he was afraid of being fined for failing to complete their *gauna* marriage. Their relationship then descended into fights and verbal abuse. A year ago he went to Saudi Arabia, and while he calls his girlfriend, he never calls Shiva. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law still love her and have asked her to be patient, as the girlfriend is marrying another boy in a few months. Shiva sees this as a ray of hope, but is not sure if her husband will ever love her, even after that.

*Source: Fieldwork, 2016.*

In Tharu communities, marrying the wife of a deceased brother is another common practice that can lead to IPV. When a man's brother dies, another brother (usually a younger one) is allowed to marry the widow. This is especially encouraged if the deceased brother had children, as in this way they will be provided for. Even if there is no formal marriage, a sexual relationship between the younger brother and the widow is seen as acceptable:

*'We find that the system of marrying a brother's widow is another reason for Tharu women facing violence. A younger brother is encouraged to marry the widow of the elder brother even if he already has a wife. The idea behind it is to keep the household property from being given to the widow. And this leads to the first wife having to face violence from the in-laws and the husband.'*

*(KII with government representative, Kapilvastu)*

Another custom that can lead to IPV is a woman staying at her parental home during pregnancy and for some time after childbirth. This custom, which is fairly common in the Muslim community, can enable her husband to have an affair or marry another woman. The husband in such a case does not come to take his wife and new child home, as is the tradition. If she goes home by herself, she may be thrown out or face violence.



A Focus Group Discussion with a community in Nepal © NISER 2016

# 5. Policy landscape shaping IPV responses

In Nepal, issues of gender-based violence (GBV) and IPV are addressed under the broader national framework of gender empowerment and human rights. Most of the policies and programmes of government bodies and donors are aligned to this framework. Several laws and policies address GBV, including the Gender Equality Act (2006), which includes clauses that specifically address the previous gaps in laws pertaining to GBV and IPV. For example, the Act makes it compulsory for the perpetrator of rape to compensate the victim for mental, as well as physical, harm. Similarly, the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act 2012 recognises, for the first time, domestic violence as a crime punishable by law (see Table 2 for relevant legislation). Nepal is also a signatory to 23 treaties and international human-rights instruments that deal with or mention GBV.

There is, however, a long way to go to address GBV. According to key informants, these laws often provide cursory remedies, contain loopholes or, most importantly, fail to address the underlying social norms and values that drive GBV and IPV. They also pointed out that, in Nepali society, where people typically live in a joint family or are influenced by parents in their daily relationships with their spouse, there can be multiple perpetrators of IPV within the household. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether an act of abuse constitutes IPV or domestic violence unless there is a detailed investigation of what happened, as illustrated by this quote:

*‘The families also get involved indirectly. The reason why a husband beats his wife could be because his mother complained about her to him every day, saying she is unable to do the household work properly or she doesn’t work hard enough. Usually the man is out of the house the whole day to earn. He comes back from work tired and then at home he hears his mother ranting about his wife every day. When the man hears it every day, he believes his mother is speaking the truth and in anger beats the wife. So now tell me, in such cases, are the husbands the only perpetrator?’*

(KII with member of GBV committee, Kapilvastu)

**Table 2. Legal provisions of relevance for IPV**

Categories of national laws against gender violence	Effort undertaken to address GBV over the years
1. Constitutional provisions	1. Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2053 BS*
2. Legal provisions	1. Police act, 2012 BS 2. Libel and Slander Act, 2033 BS 3. Country Code, 2020 BS 4. Crime and Punishment Act, 2027 BS 5. Social Practices (Reform) Act, 2033 BS 6. Children Act, 2048 BS 7. Labour Act, 2048 BS 8. Local Self Governance Act, 2055 BS 9. National Women Commission Act, 2063 BS 10. National Women commission Rules, 2063 BS
3. Special laws	1. Human Trafficking and Transportation (control) Act, 2064 BS 2. Human Trafficking and Transportation (control) Regulation, 2065 BS 3. Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2066 BS 4. Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act, 2067 BS 5. Gender Violence Elimination Fund (Operation) Rules, 2067 BS 6. Gender Equality Act, 2006
4. Procedural provisions	1. Various provisions of the Country Code, 2020 BS 2. Appellate Court Regulation, 2048 BS 3. State Cases Act, 2049 BS 4. Supreme Court Regulation, 2049 BS 5. District Court Regulation, 2052 BS 6. The Procedural Guidelines for Protecting the Privacy of the Parties in the Proceedings of Special Types of Cases, 2064 BS

Source: Compiled by authors from different sources, 2016.

\* Refers to the Nepal calendar, i.e. the Bikram Samvat calendar



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# 6. Responses to IPV

## 6.1. Institutional mechanisms to respond to IPV

A number of institutional mechanisms can be described as operating at three levels: national, district and ward (see Figure 3).

At national level, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW) is the main player and IPV falls under its Gender Empowerment agenda. The Ministry's gender violence control section deals directly with GBV and domestic violence, with IPV largely addressed under those areas. The section develops plans, policies and programmes related to GBV, which are then approved by the Ministry and the Cabinet. The programmes are sent for implementation to the government's line agencies at the district and local village levels, which include courts, police, land reform and land revenue offices, district administration offices, women and children development offices, VDCs and village-level civic committees. The section also has shelter homes in all 75 of Nepal's districts where victims can stay for 45 days while they seek redress, and funding mechanisms to support them in accessing legal and medical services. Through its district-level offices, MoWCSW has also established several local groups such as the gender-based violence monitoring group to raise awareness against GBV and make it easier for women to report cases of violence.

The justice sector is another key player, with IPV falling under the sector's work to address GBV. The strategy is to make it easy for women, who are treated as a disadvantaged group, to get access to justice. The sector provides free legal services for women and is increasing the number of female staff members.

The third major player is the police. For police forces, addressing IPV is part of providing security for citizens and maintaining the rule of law. For the most part, women come to the police with reports of domestic violence, which includes IPV. The police have special provisions for women, particularly the female police desk known as the 'female cell' where female police officers help women who

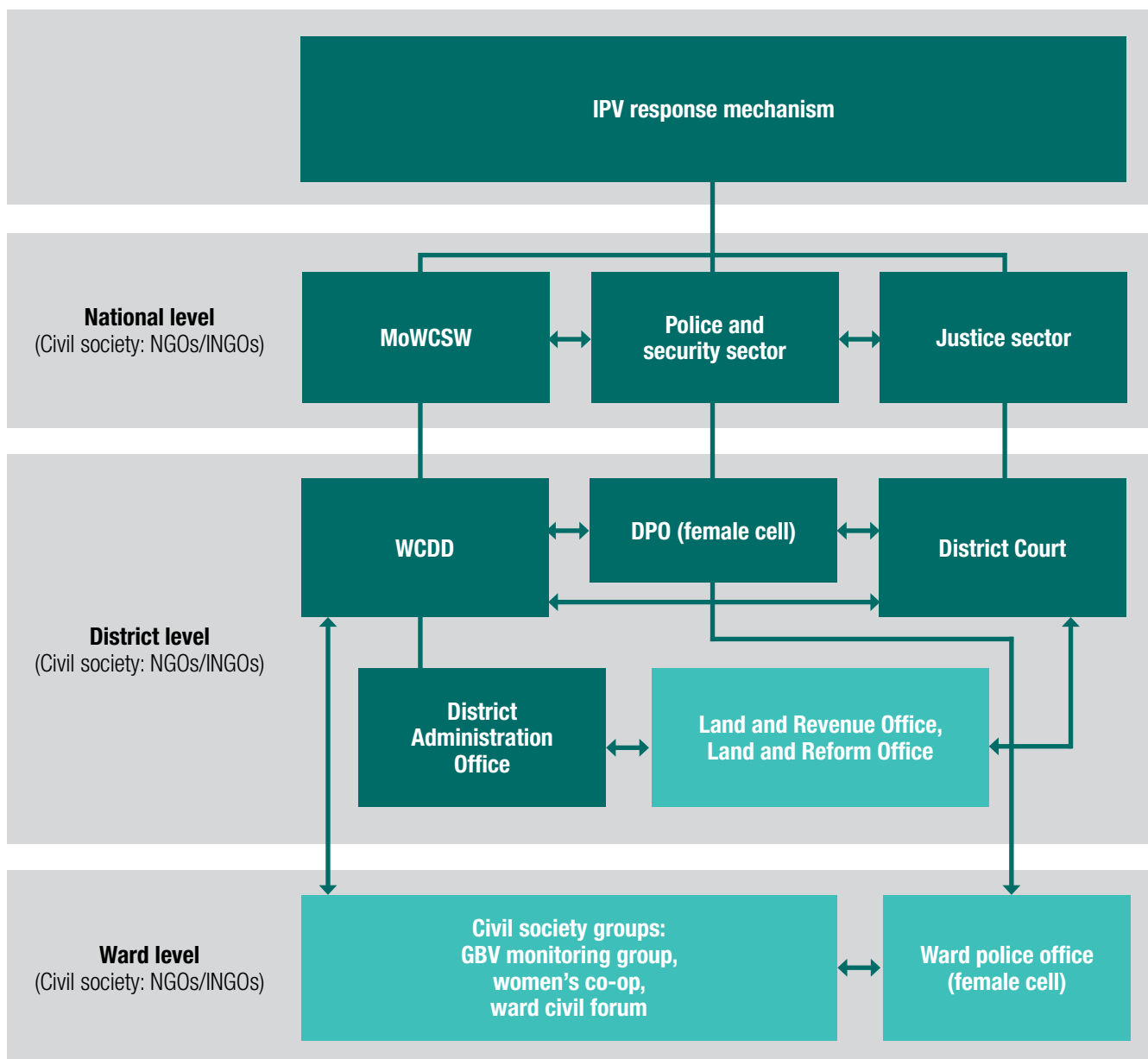
come to file cases of IPV. They have similar desks in each of the wards and VDCs.

## 6.2. Pathways to justice for survivors

Figure 4 shows the trajectory that women follow to access justice, using the institutional mechanisms and structures outlined in Section 6.1. This is based on analysis of our data from key informant interviews and case studies of survivors.

The first step usually starts with the victim talking to someone trustworthy about the incidence of IPV, and it is through that person that the incident is reported to the local police or to social mobilisers or other members of the local GBV monitoring committee. If a woman needs economic support, the social mobilisers take her to the local women's development office. In some cases, the local-level committees mentioned above also mediate the case and if they succeed, the case does not go beyond the village. Depending on the nature of the case, the Women and Children Development Department (WCDD) – the line agency of the MoWCSW – counsels the survivor and perpetrator separately or refers the case to the court or the police for necessary action. At the same time, they help the survivor gather the required documents, such as citizenship, marriage or land certificates. If the survivor wants to go to court, they refer the case to the government legal advisor who then takes up the case. Several mediation efforts in the courts are carried out by government-appointed mediators and are offered free to the survivor. If these fail, the processes of sharing out property or obtaining a divorce are carried out in line with the wishes of the survivor. In the case of divorce, the WCDD and the legal advisor of the court provide support to the survivor until the verdict of the court is implemented.

**Figure 3: Response mechanisms for intimate partner violence**



Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

### 6.3. Challenges in the response environment

While a system is in place to protect women from IPV, both IPV survivors and IPV service providers face a number of challenges.

#### 6.3.1. Challenges faced by victims

Deeply entrenched discriminatory gender norms, coupled with the gender roles ascribed to women and men, make it difficult for people to conceptualise IPV as a problem (or a problem that men need to address) and to discuss it openly. The social learning that takes place in childhood around family values is strong, and prioritises the needs of the family over the needs of the individual. Children are taught to over-ride personal interests in favour of family interests and welfare. There are also pressures on adult men in terms of their responsibilities to their wives and children and (perhaps even more strongly) to their parents and unmarried siblings. For a married man, the needs of the broader family often dominate his relationship with his wife.

Linked to this, under-reporting of IPV is a characteristic across all study sites, with women only going to the police, local civic structures or other services when IPV becomes severe. Social stigma is one of the biggest barriers to reporting IPV. Unmarried girls, in particular, will not report IPV because of the stigma associated with having a partner before marriage.

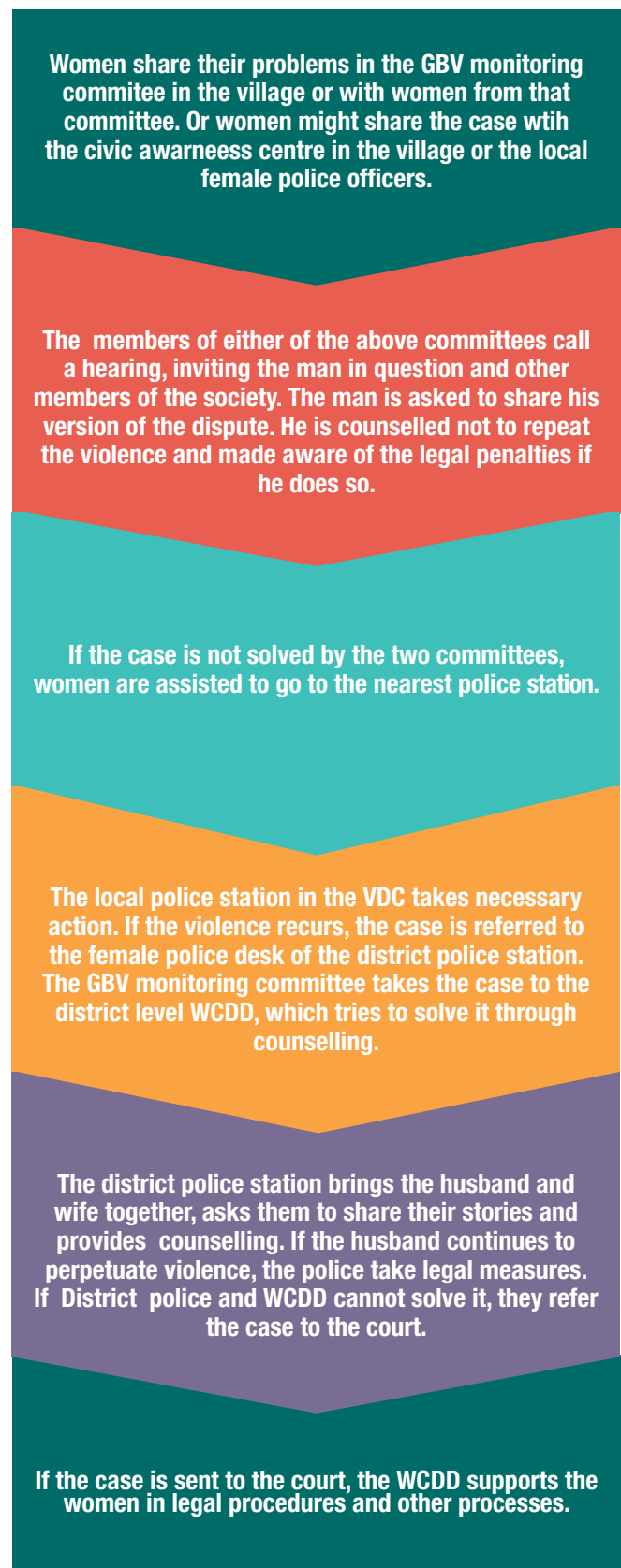
*'No, even if their boyfriends do something to them, the girls cannot share it with anyone. If they tell their mother and father, they will throw them out of the house or marry them off with another man. They are also unable to share it with their friends because if they do, the friends will talk badly about them behind their back and vilify them. So, they just keep it within themselves. Some girls even commit suicide when things become intolerable.'*

*(FGD with adolescent girls, Rupandehi)*

There is also stigma around defaming the family name by bringing such an issue into the public domain. There is also the fear of the consequences of reporting, ranging from the fear of being killed by their spouse (a fear that is found particularly among wealthier women), to fear of being thrown out of the house with no means of survival for themselves and their children.

Inaccessible legal and bureaucratic systems also limit reporting, with women finding it difficult to approach government institutions and to carry out the necessary procedures, often in relation to divorce and property discussions. This was largely because all the brokers who manage negotiations around property are men. If the woman has a supportive brother or father, they can assist, but women who do not have supportive male

Figure 4: Trajectory to justice for survivors of intimate partner violence



Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

family members are among the most disadvantaged and distressed. All survivors who reported IPV to the police or pursued their case through court were only able to do so because of the help they received from male members of their family or from men outside the family, such as neighbours.

### 6.3.2. Challenges in service delivery

The three main national bodies that deal directly with GBV (the MoWCSW, the justice sector and the police) face common challenges that hinder their effective delivery of services. Lack of coordination is a key challenge. Each body has its own separate strategy to address IPV and there is no coordination among them, or between them and other government bodies or NGOs (national and international) working in the sector. Various sections within different ministries are funded by international donors working to achieve similar aims. The MoWCSW, for example, has several sections (including the gender violence control section and gender mainstreaming section) that develop gender empowerment strategies, but similar strategies are also developed by a gender mainstreaming section within the Prime Minister's Office. And although all ministries have a designated gender focal point, they do not communicate or coordinate with each other.

Lack of resources is another problem, with key informants commenting that IPV receives limited funding nationally because it is regarded as a 'women's issue'. This lack of funding translates into patchy implementation, with

short-term and irregular activities that undermine attempts at coordination.

An additional challenge is the different approaches taken by various bodies to tackling IPV. Reflecting the approach of the Government, the MoWCSW maintains that promoting women's economic empowerment is the best way to address the root causes of violence, while donors tend to focus on awareness-raising and training. Another serious challenge within the government sector is the lack of a gendered perspective in ministries beyond the MoWCSW.

Lack of interest and participation by male officers for programmes related to GBV is another challenge. When there is no ownership by male officials and politicians – given that bureaucracy and politics are both highly male dominated – it is difficult for women's agendas, such as IPV, to be heard.

Outcomes are limited as a result of such weaknesses. Awareness-raising activities that focus on men have not been able to make a substantial impact on 'sticky' norms around IPV. Changes are seen in superficial areas, such as men helping with household chores and women gaining greater knowledge about local support structures. But there have been no fundamental changes in practices and perceptions around gender equality and gender justice. IPV is still prevalent and unacknowledged as a human-rights violation. Men – even those who are programme beneficiaries – still mete out IPV as a corrective behaviour and women still justify IPV.



The Rupantaran Facilitator Training on Gender Based Violence booklet produced by UNICEF © NISER 2016

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# 7. Conclusions and recommendations

Gender norms are important drivers of male perpetration of IPV. While gender norms themselves are underlying causes of IPV, they also tend to suppress and discourage discussion and reporting on this issue. The study finds that discriminatory gender norms, as well as practices particular to some ethnic or religious groups such as the *Gauna* system amongst the Tharu community, foster IPV. These norms and practices are intertwined and act in multi-directional ways, with some of them perpetuating IPV directly by, for example, reinforcing the superiority of men, while others do so indirectly by disempowering women, denying their rights to education and mobility.

There is strong social pressure on both men and women to abide by these norms. A man who cannot make his wife submissive is regarded as a failed man. A man who speaks up on behalf of his wife is seen as her servant. Punishment by the husband as a corrective measure when the wife does not abide by social norms is both accepted and expected. Adolescent boys still grow up with a deeply entrenched notion that they will not have to listen to their wives and this has changed little, despite trainings. The number of men who advocate changes, such as helping their wives with household chores, is still too small to generate any significant change in the community. In addition, as many men migrate to India for seasonal labour, there is little they can do about people's attitudes to IPV, as they are mostly absent. We also found that migrants return with high expectations of their wives, and when the wives are unable to fulfil those expectations, they are subjected to physical and mental torture.

The study finds that some forms of IPV, such as marital rape, are not even acknowledged as such. While traditional forms of IPV such as wife-beating are decreasing, new forms of IPV, such as extramarital affairs and violence between unmarried adolescent partners, are emerging and have not yet been talked about openly as a result of stigma. Service providers have not been able to touch upon these forms of IPV, even though they have severe consequences, including suicide among young girls.

As a result of programming and awareness-raising activities, forms of IPV that are explicit and publicly visible, such as beatings, are beginning to be reported. Others, such as marital rape, violence rooted in suspicions of infidelity and violence related to extramarital affairs still go unreported. The present system is not efficient enough

to deal with cases of IPV where it is difficult to show physical evidence or to address the class- and caste-specific barriers that hinder reporting.

One of the biggest barriers to addressing IPV in Nepal is the lack of understanding of IPV as an issue that is separate to domestic violence. The notion of maintaining stability and respect for the family and the family name is so deeply internalised that it is never questioned. Until people are willing to accept different notions of family welfare and to reconsider the gendered roles assigned to men and women, separating the relationship between a couple from relationships between that couple and the rest of the family, it will be extremely difficult to address IPV, particularly at local level.

A number of recommendations for government, donors, NGOs and civil society have emerged from our research.

## 7.1. Government

- Improve coordination between gender focal points, in different ministries/departments, establishing formal and regular communication channels between these focal points and with the police and courts, given that they are directly involved in service delivery to survivors of IPV at the national level.
- Monitor successes and challenges in implementing existing strategies more closely before developing new strategies, to ensure that new directions are informed by lessons emerging from past or ongoing programmes.
- Prioritise the retention of qualified staff and the sharing of institutional learning, perhaps by providing incentives for legal advisors and other cadres who currently work on a voluntary basis. Monitoring and evaluation of gender-related service outcomes should be strengthened and officials at local and national levels who perform well in achieving those outcomes should be rewarded and recognised. To avoid losing institutional knowledge when civil servants are transferred to different departments, focal points in the MoWCSW should set up robust knowledge-management systems and ensure appropriate handover to successors.
- Improve the design and targeting of economic empowerment programmes. While such activities can address the root causes of IPV, women's economic

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empowerment programmes in their present form limit participants to gendered activities that do not yield much income. Skills and training for such programmes should be designed on the basis of a study of market needs and should not reinforce women's limited opportunities to earn an income.

- Provide sufficient resources. Programmes need to be sufficiently resourced and response mechanisms adequately staffed to ensure wider coverage and maximise positive outcomes for women who experience GBV or IPV.

## 7.2. Donors and NGOs (national and international)

- Avoid duplication of effort and the creation of parallel structures. Better coordination should also ensure better outreach and coverage. Rather than create parallel structures, donors should build on existing structures when developing new programmes.
- Ensure exit strategies that promote sustainability. Programmes tend to phase out after a short period of time largely because of lack of funding, as such sustainability plans should be built in from the outset to ensure that communities can continue activities on their own when the programme ends. While this also applies to government programmes, it presents more of a challenge for NGOs and donors.
- Weave a gender perspective into all programmes. While GBV-focused programmes often explicitly aim to change social norms, other programmes such as those on livelihoods and infrastructure often lack a gender perspective.

- Engage men as 'champions' to combat IPV. Engaged senior officials and local leaders should be targeted to become 'champions' on this issue. While this model has been used extensively to address discriminatory gender norms, it has not been used directly to address IPV.
- Work with all stakeholders and service providers. As well as working directly with men of all ages, programmes should work with men and women as couples, with in-laws, with community and religious leaders, with members of the media, and with officials of the courts and police service.

## 7.3. Local civil society groups and organisations

- Encourage men and women to take part in activities and discussions together. Rather than usually dividing beneficiaries into same-sex groups, programmes should stress that IPV must be addressed not just by women but also by men and all institutions in society, and find ways to engage men meaningfully in issues that affect women.
- Target unmarried young people as well as married couples. At present, awareness-raising activities target married couples only. As having a girlfriend/boyfriend is becoming more common, GBV and IPV programmes should also target unmarried young people, particularly as girls find themselves becoming exposed to new forms of violence, such as sexual coercion and abuse related to social media.
- Ensure that women know how to report IPV. Greater efforts are needed at community level to ensure that women know how to report IPV and are aware of the support services available to them.

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**Overseas Development Institute**  
203 Blackfriars Road  
London SE1 8NJ  
Tel +44 (0) 20 7922 0300  
Fax +44 (0) 20 7922 0399

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