

Exploring the nature and reasons associated with sexual violence within marriage among young couples in Nepal

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Introduction

Sexual violence within or outside marriage is both a public health problem and a violation of human rights. It has a profound emotional, psychological, social, physical and health consequences both immediately and many years after the assaults (WHO, 2002). Forced sex is associated with a range of gynaecological and reproductive health problems, including HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancy, vaginal bleeding or infection, fibroids, decreased sexual desire, genital irritation, pain during intercourse, chronic pelvic pain and urinary tract infections (Zierler et al., 1991; Garcia-Morneo et al., 2000; Maman et al., 2000, Watts et al., 2004). Studies show association between sexual violence and low use of contraception. Moreover, sexual violence occurs across continents and cultures. For example, over 50 population-based surveys found that approximately 10-50 per cent of women around the world reported having been physically assaulted at some point in their lives (Heise, et. al., 1999). Similarly, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) study conducted in 13 developing countries has shown 5-15% of young females experienced forced or coerced sex (WHO, 2001). Studies that have explored sexual violence have found that sexual abuse is present in approximately one-third to half the cases of physical abuse by an intimate partner (Heise, et. al., 1999).

Information from developing countries on the factors underlying sexual violence within marriage is sparse. The limited evidence available from South Asia, however, identifies several factors that appear to be associated with such experiences among young women. Early and arranged marriage in which the young bride scarcely knows her husband-to-be and has had little say in choice of spouse, clearly condition the extent to which the bride can exercise choice in sexual- or any other matter - in her marital home. The lack of information on sexual matters that women so frequently describe to characterise their early marital experiences also compromises their ability to negotiate sex. The lack of alternative support systems also clearly increases the vulnerability of young married women in a coercive situation. The most pervasive underlying factor is female submissiveness and male entitlement to forced sex within marriage (Santhya et. al., 2005).

Context

Nepal is a patriarchal family structure country; where most women have relatively less or no power on whom and when to marry, whether or not to have sexual relations, and when to bear children. Traditionally boys and girls are married at a young age in Nepal; this applies particularly to girls who marry shortly after puberty, or sometimes even before. Despite laws stipulating the legal age at marriage which is 18 years both for men and women with the consent of guardians, and 20 years without the consent of guardians, early marriage continues to be the norm in many ethnic groups. On average men marry about three years later than women (DHS, 2001). As a consequence, for the majority of Nepalese young people especially for women, sexual activity commences at an early age. Unlike in most other countries, the onset of sexual activity occurs largely within the context of marriage, is consistent with the strong emphasis placed on female “purity” and chastity, and is sanctioned by family elders. In fact, like in India, there are strong pressures on women to prove their fertility as soon as possible after marriage; social acceptance and economic security in her

marital home are established largely through fertility, and particularly through the birth of a son (Jejeebhoy, 1998).

In Nepal, one in six young women aged 15-19 years has already had at least one child. The country has diverse culture, traditions, and language and a large majority of the population live in joint family structure. Nepal has more than 100 castes/ethnic groups, the Brahmin/Chhetri is the most socio-economically advantaged. More than 86% of its population follow the Hindu religion (DHS, 2001). Young married women lack decision-making authority in matters related to sex and sexuality. Contraceptive and family size decisions are mainly taken by the husband alone or in conjunction with elder members of his family. It is very difficult for young women to say 'no' to their husbands. Communication between a young women and her husband on matters related to sexuality is rare. Nepalese women are culturally expected to say 'no' to sexual propositions even when they are willing and men generally see no problem in exercising some force when pressing for sex. Sex education in the school and counselling services related to sex and sexuality are still the matter of taboo and debatable issue and far from reaching the needy people.

As in many societies, it is believed that sexual violence within marriage exists in Nepal but it has never been scientifically studied and documented and has received little attention from researchers, policy makers and programme designers. There are only two previous small-scale population-based studies conducted in Nepal that document non-consensual sexual experiences reported by young women. First, a small study conducted by Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) with 60 women in the Udayapur and Kathmandu districts of Nepal, 50 per cent of women were found to have experienced non-consensual sex in marriage. This study found that many married women experience sexual violence from the day of their wedding (WOREC, 2002). Another study conducted among young female factory workers in Nepal showed that one in ten reported sexual coercion (Puri et al., 2007). However, the small scale and other methodological limitations of these studies preclude generalisation of the findings. These studies have indicated that sexual violence exists in Nepal, however, very little is known about the extent of coercion, its causes and contexts in which this occurs.

Unit 2006 Nepal law did not recognise sexual violence within marriage. Very recently the Government of Nepal has recognised the problem of sexual violence within marriage and made a law that acknowledges forced sex by a husband to his wife as a form of marital rape and have made provision of punishment of sentence to jail for three to six months depending on the type of sexual violence (Government of Nepal, 2007). In practice, however, the law is rarely enforced, and society tends to blame rather than support the victim, which discourages reporting. In addition, a large majority of Nepalese women are still unaware of its existence.

This article examines the extent of and factors associated with sexual violence within marriage in Nepal. No previous study has been undertaken on this topic in Nepal among young couples and thus the results represent a first step toward unfolding the problem of sexual violence within marriage in the country.

Data and Method of Analysis

Information for this paper is come from a study entitled "Exploring the nature of sexual coercion among young married women in Nepal" carried out by Centre for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities (CREHPA) in 2006. The study was qualitative in nature. The study was carried out in two district covering two major ethnicities (Tharu and Brahmin/Chhetri) representation terai and hill region of the country. Dang district was selected for Tharu and Tanahu for Brahmin/Chhetri. These districts were selected purposively after consulting with the national level stakeholders. After selecting districts, a list of Village Development Committees (VDCs)/municipalities having major concentration of selected ethnic population was prepared with the help of key informants in the district headquarters. One VDC/ municipality per district was selected. Two clusters (group of wards) in each VDC/municipality having major concentration of selected ethnic community was selected randomly.

Data collection began with administering a brief screening questionnaire to the head of the household to identify eligible respondents (15-24 years married women) and married men aged 15-27 years. A total of 387 households were covered in order to screen for eligible respondents. During the household screening process, all the eligible young married men and women were identified, and the free-listing was conducted with those respondents who were available and consented to participate in the study. A total of 65 free listing with married men and women (39 married women and 36 married men) were conducted. Only one respondent either men or women from each household was interviewed to avoid household clustering of responses. Additionally, 30 community leaders were also covered in the free listing exercise. The selection of community leaders were done in a participatory way. First of all, the researchers asked 5-6 different people of the community to name around ten people in their community whom they consider to be knowledgeable about the community welfare. Those names obtaining highest scores were considered as the key informants. However, some of the community leaders holding position in the village (village chairperson, teacher etc) and community level health service providers (health assistants, village health workers, female community health volunteers, traditional birth attendants) were selected purposively to adequately represent different sectors if they do fall in the community leader's pool. The free listing exercise was conducted individually to protect the privacy and confidentiality of respondents and to improve the quality of the data.

Altogether 6 Causal Flow Analysis (CFA) sessions with young married men and women (separately), and community leaders were organised. The participants for CFA were selected based on age, sex, occupation, education and ethnicity of the participants.

In total 26 in-depth case histories (15 women and 11 men) were carried out. Participants for in-depth case histories were selected purposively from those who had reported sexual violence during the free listing exercise. In the case histories, nature, reasons and circumstances of sexual violence from their partner were explored in much greater detail. Respondents of in-depth case histories were requested not to disclose any questions or

responses from her/his interviews with their neighbours or spouses. A detailed topic guideline was prepared for case histories.

A team of four research assistants (RAs) collected the data (2 male and 2 females). The RAs were Nepalese, university graduates, and experienced in conducting research on sensitive topics. They were given a one-week intensive training on qualitative research methods particularly on free listing, key informant interviews, causal flow analysis and in-depth interview techniques. Interviews were conducted at a convenient location for the respondent, usually outside their homes. Each free listing exercise and community leaders interviews took about 45 minutes to one hour. However, CFA took about two to three hours. The case histories lasted about two to three hours and several visits were made to complete one case history. All case histories were tape-recorded. During the field study, first two authors visited the study site and supervised the RAs to assure interview quality and respondents privacy. Nearly all respondents understood Nepali language and interviews were conducted in this language. None of the respondents selected for the study refused to give an interview. However, the research team had to spend a considerable amount of time to build rapport with the participants by repeatedly visiting the respondents, and talking about other family and health and issues, schooling of children, asking about their culture and festivals before asking the core questions. In addition, interviewers spoke local dialect, tried to be very friendly, respected their culture and views and provided information they would like to know helped to build good rapport with the participants.

The core protocol and research instruments were reviewed and approved by the Nepal Health Research Council (the government's ethical clearance body) and Scientific and Ethical Review Group (SERG) of the UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) and WHO's Ethical Review Committee (ERC). Participants involved in case histories as well as in other research tools were fully informed about the nature of the study, research objectives and confidentiality of the data. Participants' full verbal consent was obtained regarding their participation in the study. The RAs provided information about organizations that deals with sexual violence and conflicts within marriage to all study participants. Confidentiality of information was ensured by removing personal identifiers from field notes. Respondents were protected in fullest extent possible against any possible adverse repercussions of the study.

The free listing data were analysed by using the computer software ANTHROPAC and percentage, average rank and smith salience are reported. The average rank refers to how early in the listing each person, on average, mentioned a particular response. Therefore, the term that has lowest rank indicates that the term was mentioned by most respondents first (Borgatti, 1996). 'Smith's Salience' is a variable that takes the frequency of mention, and then weights that frequency by the average rank (Borgatti, 1996). That means that if two items had equal numbers of mention then an item would still have higher salience if it was mentioned earlier in respondent's lists.

The case histories, key informant interviews and information obtained from CFA were analysed using thematic analysis techniques, a strategy for eliciting the key emerging themes

from text based data. First, all textual data were transcribed from audio-tape and translated into English. After reviewing the transcripts, the major themes and concepts were identified. The main themes that emerged from the data were developed into codes for organizing and analysing subsequent interviews/discussions. Two researchers developed an initial code book independently based on early interviews/discussion. Similarity and dissimilarity between two researchers in assigning the codes in early interviews/discussion were checked by a third researcher who resolved the discrepancies before coding the remaining interviews. Modifications in the code book were made in cases where the existing codes were not adequate and were used in analysing subsequent interviews/discussion. In the next step, all the interviews were coded and linked with the background characteristics of respondents. Once the transcripts were coded, relevant quotations that illustrated emerging themes were integrated with the background characteristics of the respondents in a single report. From these reports, the ranges of views expressed within themes were explored, as well as the relationship(s) between themes. Finally, the relevant quotations were extracted and interpretation was carried out.

Findings

Characteristics of the study participants

Table 1 presents the selected socio-demographic characteristics of young married men and women covered in the free listing exercise. Over half of the young married men were between 25-27 years and had at least one living child. Majority of the men had secondary or higher level of education. Most of the men were involved in agriculture. In contrast to men, about three-quarters of women were between the age of 20 and 24 years. Most women were housewives and had no independent cash income. Most of the women had love marriage and had one child. Most of their husbands were literate and involved in labour work followed by small business, service and driver respectively. The case histories were sub-sample of free listing exercise; therefore, their characteristics were very similar than those with the free listing participants.

Table 1 about here

Young married men and who participated in the CFAs have similar characteristics with those covered in the free listing exercise. Generally key informants who participated in the CFA were of higher level of education. The community leaders were involved in various occupations - business, teaching, health work, social work including the staff of non-governmental organisations and the members of mother's groups.

Nature and ever-experience of sexual violence: Results from Free listing

Although free listing data does not aim to serve as the extent of sexual violence among the study population, this could only indicate the scale of the problem. The free listing data suggests there is high prevalence of sexual violence within marriage among the study population. For example, about half of the married women and about a fifth of men reported ever experienced sexual violence within marriage before the survey.

A higher percentage of women from Tharu ethnicity community reported they had experienced forced sex than the Brahmin/Chhetri community. Women with low level of education were more vulnerable to experience sexual violence. Comparatively, a higher percentage of women who married before the age of 20 years than after 20 years reported of experiencing sexual violence. Mothers of one child were more prone to experience forced sex than the women having two or more children. The women whose husbands had attained secondary or above level of education were more vulnerable to sexual coercion than those whose husbands were illiterate or had attained primary education. Similarly, higher percentage of men from Tharu community reported they had forced their wives to have sex. Men who married at an early age (before the age of 20 years) reported that they had forced their wives to have sex compared to men who married after the age of 20. In contrast, men who had more children (2 or more) reported forcing their wives to have sex.

Table 2 about here

Causes of sexual coercion: Results from free listing

Free listings participants listed 53 different causes (50 from key informants, 33 young married men and 53 young married women) of sexual coercion within marriage. The top ten reasons for sexual coercion are shown in Table 1. 'Lack of education', 'alcohol use' 'women's inability to negotiate with their husbands', 'traditional norms and cultural values', 'patriarchal society', 'lack of women autonomy', 'compulsion of wife to fulfil the desire of husband' and 'lack cash income of women' were the frequently mentioned reasons of sexual coercion within marriage. According to the average rank, lack of education and use of alcohol were the causes cited first by majority of the respondents. Among the 9 key informants and 9 young married men who mentioned alcohol use, all of them mentioned it first as the reason for sexual coercion. Among the 6 young married women who mentioned compulsion for women to stay in their husband's home as one of the reasons for coercion, all of them mentioned this reason first in their list. Smith's salience shows that that the number of respondents who mentioned lack of education and use of alcohol had high percent and was mentioned first by most of the respondents

Table 3 about here

Causes of sexual coercion: results from CFA and in-depth case histories

Figure 1 shows the factors associated with sexual coercion within marriage using the casual flow analyses and case histories as a basis. Due to small number of CFA and case histories conducted and being a qualitative nature of the data, these factors are regarded as being indicative only. As shown in Figure 1, understanding the risk factors of sexual coercion is complex and complicated due to the multiple forms and contexts in which it occurs. Therefore, it is difficult to identify a single factor as the most important one. However, in analysing the data for factors are associated with sexual coercion, four major themes emerged. They were:

- Socio-economic factors
- Traditional and gender norms
- Family and legal support, and
- Other individual characteristics

Socio-economic factors

Poverty, unemployment and lack of education along with the traditional socio-cultural norms and values are the major socio-economic factors that lead to the sexual violence within marriage. These contextual factors have a direct effect on the individual level factors that causes sexual violence. The individual level factor includes lack of money to have sex with other, lack of other means of entertainment, unequal economic status of the family of husband and wife, economic dependency of wife on husband, different educational level of couple as a result of the socio cultural practice of education, lack of individual awareness that affects individual's thinking and understanding power and lack of sex education etc. The contextual factors as well as the individual factor have a major role to play in the level of sexual coercion.

Poor and have no other means of entertainment

The CFA participants felt that the low economic status and lack of employment are two of the reasons for sexual violence within marriage. Participants believed that poverty leads to lack of access to various types of entertainment and men consider their wife as a means of entertainment and as a result leads to sexual coercion. Similarly, participants thought that unemployment leads to depression and this is a risk factor for sexual violence. The following two excerpts from the case histories are typical examples:

"I want love, affection and care from him but he considers me as a means of entertainment. He doesn't know how I feel after he forced me for sex. He never tries to know; I feel tired of work and get sickness sometimes".

-ID 8, 21 years, Women, Tharu, non-formal education, housewife

"Husband considers his wife as means of entertainment. He doesn't listen to his wife, he doesn't try to understand her, and that is a reason sexual coercion occurs"

-ID 13, 26 years, Men, Tharu, 10 years of schooling, agriculture

Women are economically dependent on husband

Both CFA and case histories revealed that economic dependency of women on husband was another determinant of sexual violence within marriage. In a situation where husbands know economic inability not only of his wife but also her parent's family can increase the chance of sexual violence. For example, the following excerpts from the case histories and CFA illustrate this even more.

"Because he (husband) knows I can do nothing against him. I am also from a poor family and my parents also cannot punish him. Since I am living in his earning he might think that it is his rights to have sex whenever he wants... May be he thinks that whatever trouble he gives, I cannot leave him and cannot leave his house and it is true. Once a woman gets married, she has to live with her husband for her whole life. She cannot run away.."

-ID 5, 19 years, Women, Tharu, non-formal education, housewife

"A job-holder man may coerce his wife for sex, telling her that she doesn't have to do anything, and she is privileged to live on her husband's income so she should give sex in return".

-CFA with women, Brahmin/Chhetri community

Lack of education and awareness

Most of the CFA participants perceived that lack of education leads to lack of awareness about sexual health issues and this could result in sexual violence within marriage. Some of the CFA participants mentioned:

"Since women are not given knowledge on such matters (sexual coercion), they are not mentally prepared that they have to have sex with their husbands once they get married. Because of this, sexual coercion may take place...As sex education is not included in our curriculum, there is lack of awareness and hence it has indirect impact on sexual violence...Wife is not able to distinguish sexual violence from normal sexual behaviour, because of lack of awareness. Right now we became aware and we are able to distinguish what is appropriate sexual relation and what is inappropriate sexual relation, after discussing about it. Before participating in this discussion, we ourselves were thinking that all kinds of sexual relation between husband and wife are normal sexual behaviour. In reality, sexual violence is happening from us as well.

-CFA with community leaders, Brahmin/Chhetri community

Figure 1 is about here

Traditional and gender norms

Age and type of marriage

The CFA participants pointed out that the traditional or cultural norms regarding age and types of marriage are often underlying factors of sexual violence within marriage. Participants said that the Nepali tradition of child/adolescent marriage, forced or arranged marriage and practice of polyandry/polygamy leads to lack of understanding between wife and husbands and thus result in the risk of experiencing sexual violence and coercion. Respondents cited that girls are often married at a younger age than boys where they are still physically and mentally immature and hence they lack the ability to make decisions regarding sex and sexuality (According to Nepal DHS 2006, the median age at marriage was 17.2 years for women and 20.2 years for men). This cause was also frequently reported in the case histories with women as well. This is reflected by the following comments of CFA participants and case histories respondents.

“Child marriage, and marriage at teenage could be causes of sexual violence”.

- P7/P2/P3, CFA with community leaders, Brahmin/Chhetri community

“I got married at the age of 14 years. I did not know anything about sex before my marriage. So when I had sex for the first time my husband convinced me to have sex although I did not want to. But he did it (sex) forcefully and I bled and screamed and cried but he did not stop. I was also totally unaware even when he ejaculated”.

-ID 13, 22 years, women, Brahmin/Chhetri, 8 years of schooling

In addition, participants reinforced that most marriage in Nepal are arranged by the parents and couples do not date before marriage. As a consequence, opposite sex interaction is limited. Furthermore, participants believed that honour and shame are associated with unmarried women’s sexuality, where the burden of preventing the family’s reputation lies on their shoulders. Therefore, couples especially women are not able to express their sexual desire or communicate their feelings with their husbands even after marriage. Therefore, sexual violence occurs within marriage. This point was highlighted by participants in the CFA among Brahmin/Chhetri community:

“...But in case of arranged marriage, the couple will not have understood each others feeling before their marriage, so sexual violence may occur. It takes a long time to get familiar with the wife in the case of arranged marriage...”

-P1, P4, P5, CFA with women, Brahmin/Chhetri community

In contrast to Brahmin/Chhetri ethnic group, young married women from the Tharu community have expressed that love marriage is one of the cause of sexual violence within marriage in their community. They mentioned that among couples who have *bhaagi biwaha* (Love Marriage), the groom’s family dominate the bride as she could not bring any dowry

and she also does not receive have any support from her maternal family if she experiences any problems because her marriage was not decided/approved by the parents. One of the participants said:

“If they elope (bhaagi), then there will be more sexual violence. He (her husband and his family) will say that 'you came by yourself'. Since in bhaagi biwaha (love marriage) there is no dowry given to such woman, he will sexually exploit her”.

-P4, P5, CFA with women, Tharu community

Divergent gender roles

Besides traditional attitudes, study participants believed that other factors which might encourage sexual violence within marriage are divergent gender roles, which dictate that men are expected to be initiative and aggressive in sexual matters and women are expected to be bashful, coy and submissive. Both CFA and case histories participants thought that men have been encouraged to enjoy their sexuality and take active roles in courtship interaction and are socialised to define their ‘manhood’ in terms of the frequency of their sexual activity.

“Our society is a male dominating society, so women cannot express their views openly, while men can express their views. That’s why sexual violence happens against women in marriage. If a woman expresses her sexual desires to her husband, then she would be considered indecent, and this attitude still exists in our society. ...Hindu culture and tradition has also created difficulty in this matter. Although there is effect of western indecent culture as well, the conservative tradition that is still prevailing in our society can be a major cause. Even we ourselves talk maliciously about those women who initiate sex with their husbands”.

-P1 and P3, CFA, CL, Brahmin/Chhetri community

"He thinks that a wife should be ready for her husband at any time. If I don't agree with him then he starts fighting and quarrelling. He threatens me saying, "don't you agree to sleep with me, I can marry five more women like you!". He also shouts at me saying, "why don't you agree with me? Do you have a boyfriend? Don't you enjoy sex with me? What's wrong with you?" Being a man, he shows his superiority. He considers me nothing more than his wife who should always fulfil his sexual desire".

-ID 13, 22 years, women, Brahmin/Chhetri, 8 years of schooling, housewife,

“..In this community women are considered as less or not intelligent, ignorant, dull. Men think that women cannot do anything. They think they have married women just to fulfill their sexual desire and to cook food for them. They never take their wives outside home. You have also seen women in our community are very innocent. They are always scared of their husbands. They never take any steps against their husbands' wish...”

-ID 5, 19 years, women, Tharu, Non-formal education, housewife

Not able to give birth to a son

Gender-based discriminations against women are not uncommon in Nepal. Sons are very highly prized because they continue the family name, are deemed crucial to perform funeral rituals and are expected to provide support in old age. Participants believed that son preference and patrilineal social structure has contributed in increasing sexual violence within marriage. While stressing the value of son, one of the participant said “*jasko bhaisi usko ban, jasko chhora usko dhan*’ (those who have buffalos owns the jungle, and those who have sons have money). They explained that even if a couple has achieved their desired number of children but either the husband or the wife desires a son while his/her spouse don’t have such desire, then non-consensual sex between couples could occur.

"..Some men sexually exploit their wives if she is not able to give birth to a son....There are men who demand for son, and make their wife undergo pregnancy number of times with the hope that it would be a son.....Some men threaten their wives that they would remarry as their first wife cannot give birth to a son...People don't take their daughters as their sons. So husbands force their wives for sex to have son, even though they already have achieved desired number of children".

(P1, P4, P5, CFA with women, Brahmin/Chhetri community)

Family and legal support

Lack of support system compels women to tolerate more, making them more prone to sexual violence

Lack of legal, social and family support to women was also identified as reasons for sexual violence. Participants mentioned that the state (government) is not providing adequate legal protection to the victims and the community views that sexual coercion within marriage as a private issue and see their involvement as inappropriate. Moreover, participants mentioned that few organisations working preventing sexual coercion are not reaching to the needy people. Participants also believed that those women who do not get support from their maternal family are more vulnerable to sexual violence form their husband.

".... Another major cause could be at the government level. If government pays less attention to the women's rights, or women rights are not strong enough, or there is lack in the implementation of women's rights, then it could be a cause for sexual violence..... Even if there is women's right, it's only on papers and it has not been put into practice..".

-P3, P4, P7, CFA with men, B/C community

"..I am completely dependent upon him for money. I also eloped with him so my parents do not care about me. My parents and relatives also do not support me. If I share about it with someone in this village, it will be a big issue. Even if I share it with someone and go against, how can I face him? He also does it because he is a

man and physically much stronger than me. I also can't go against him, he knows it. I cannot share it with anyone and ask for support...

-ID 6, 23Years, women, Tharu, Non-formal education, housewife

Do not know where to go and social shame

The CFA and case histories revealed that lack of knowledge about where to go and who could be contacted for support and type of support available to them in case of sexual coercion further elevated the risk of sexual violence. It was also found that women fear sharing such experiences with anyone to maintain their social prestige in the community.

No! Never! Why should go to others? It is a problem of husband and wife so how can I make it such a big issue? I think, it happens between any husband and wife so I don't think I should go to anyone else. Also it is not a matter that I share it with any person. But it is a matter of shame to go to someone else for support on this issue. What will my family and villagers think about me if I share this problem with others. My husband will hate me if I do something like this.

-ID4, 19 years, Women, Non-formal education, housewife

Other individual factors

Use of alcohol

All the CFA participants unanimously agreed that use of alcohol is one the major factor of sexual violence within marriage. Case histories revealed that women were more prone to risk of sexual attack when their male partner is under the influence of alcohol. This was more frequently mentioned by the Tharu than the Brahmin/Chhetri community.

“...He drinks alcohol and when he drinks alcohol, he has more desire for sex. I am a woman and gave birth to my child but men don't have to do these things. I have less desire for sex after my son was born. But it did not make any difference in his sexual desire. I want love, affection and care from him but he considers me as a means of entertainment. He doesn't know how I feel after he forced me for sex. He never tries to know; I feel tired of work and get sickness sometimes. He never considers that he should not force me when I am tired or sick.

-ID 8, 21 years, women, Tharu, non-formal education, housewife

This was also corroborated by the men in the case histories and participants from the CFA.

When I attend any feast or dance programs, it is natural that I take some amount of alcohol, and I return home late and my wife starts shouting. In such situation, she doesn't let me have sex with her, but I have desire, so we fight. She doesn't want to give it, and I want to have it, so on that issue, we have fight. And I manage to have sex with her. So when I hold her hands firmly she, being a woman, cant' do anything, and then I have sex with her.

-ID 6, 22 years, Men, Tharu, 6 years of schooling, labourer

Sterilised husbands can not satisfy their wife

Fears about male sterilisation such vasectomy would weaken men, would affect their ability to work and in turn affect the family's income and loss of sex drive or loose their manhood are not new findings. Interestingly, in-depth case histories with men revealed that vasectomy can lead to sexual coercion to men. They believed sterilized men are not able to satisfy their spouse's sexual desire which in turn leads to coercive sex from his female partner.

“...:If a husband undergoes sterilization, he may not be able to sexually satisfy his wife and he may face sexual violence...”

-P4, CFA with men Brahmin/Chhetri community

Surprisingly, the CFA with young married men from Brahmin/Chhetri community showed that the different types of condom available in the market can lead to sexual coercion to women. For instance, they mentioned that the husbands desire to test different types of condoms in different ways also leads to sexual coercion to their wives.

“...There are different types of condom available in the market. One may want to test the new brand of condom and he might take it home and immediately try it with his wife. In order to gain new experience by the husband, she may face sexual violence..”

- P3/P4/P7/P1, CFA with men , Brahmin/Chhetri community

Will throw out from home and marry another girl

The CFA revealed that many women need to submit to unwanted sexual acts due to manipulation in the form of threat, emotional psychological or physical abuse from their husbands. Participants thought that there is no way for married women except accepting what their husbands say, otherwise, she may have to leave the house and/or face co-wife.

"She will be afraid. She will be worried thinking what if her husband leaves her, or what if her husband beats her if she doesn't agree to his wishes. She will be worried that if she doesn't agree to his wishes in the beginning, she may have to face more violent form of sexual coercion. So that's why woman gives in....."Yes, she may not be able to deny sex to her husband, even if she wants to. This is because, if she denies, she fears that her husband may bring second wife. Many times, husband threatens his wife too, so she would be compelled to accept...He (the husband) says, 'I'll get thousands of girls like you' (Ta jasto hazaar paauchhu)

-P1,P5, P4, CFA with women, Brahmin/Chhetri community

Case histories with women suggest women's fear from husbands to be beaten and getting co-wife, they continue to suffer from sexual coercion. Women who experienced sexual coercion reported that if a wife do not submits, her husband will hit her, leave her and even threatens her to find 'another woman', or punish her in some other way. For example, a 19 years housewife with non-formal education from Tharu community said:

"He also beats me and threatens me saying, "ta garna dinna bhane arko lyauchhu"(if you do not allow me for sex then I will marry with another girl). He also says, "I can marry five more women". I am so scared that he might visit other girls so I should sleep with him even though I don't have desire for sex.

-ID 5, 19 years, women, Tharu, non-formal education, housewife

Inability of women to communicate and lack of mutual understandings

The CFA also suggests that inability to women to communicate effectively their problems and misunderstandings with their husbands also a cause of sexual coercion with marriage. Case histories also revealed that lack of self esteem and inability to communicate effectively made married women vulnerable to sexual coercion. For example, a husband said:

"... because of our patriarchal society and lack of awareness, women do not express their sexual desire and men have to force them. Expression of sexual desire by women in our society is not culturally accepted....."

-ID 11, 27 years, Men, Brahmin/Chhetri, Bachelor's degree education, agriculture

Discussion and conclusions

This study is the first of its kind in Nepal that explored the nature and reasons of sexual violence within marriage among young couples. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, sexual violence particularly within marriage is difficult to research. This is perhaps one most important reason why sexual violence has received relatively little attention from researchers in Nepal. We believe that our finding begins to address a paucity of information on reasons of sexual violence within marriage in Nepal.

Although this study was not designed to assess the prevalence of sexual violence within marriage, our free listing result clearly suggests that it is not uncommon among young couples in Nepal. The prevalence of sexual violence may vary according to the definition used, however, we found that as much as half of women and about one fifth of men reported experienced of sexual violence before the study. There is no consensus between the researchers in the definition of sexual violence including non-consensual sex within marriage, which makes it difficult to compare the prevalence of sexual violence across and also within countries. However, this prevalence is quite high when compared with its neighbouring countries India, and Bangladesh (Jejeebhoy et. al. 2003; Santhya et al., 2005; Khan et. al. 2002). In light of established negative impacts of sexual violence on health and life, it is high time for Nepal to further assess the extent of problem and design an appropriate intervention to prevent such behaviours and provide care and support to the victims.

Understanding the underlying reasons for sexual violence within marriage are complex and complicated due to the multiple forms and contexts in which it occurs. For many couples, multiple factors-alongside, and within, their socio-economic and cultural contexts contributed to experience sexual violence and coercion. Therefore, it is difficult to single out the main underlying reasons for sexual violence. However, this exploratory study revealed

that young women's lack of autonomy, high economic dependency of women, male entitlement to force sex, lack of education and knowledge of the sexual life, marriage practices, fear of co-wife and social shame, lack of family and legal support to women, lack of self esteem, and use of alcohol were the main factors that aggravate the sexual violence within marriage among young couples. These findings are corroborated with the previous studies conducted in other South Asian and the Middle East countries. This study confirmed that the perpetration of forced sex against women by their husbands is reinforced by unbalanced gender norms. By tradition, women are expected to be unassertive, modest, and ignorant about sexual matters, submissive and dependent on men and to sacrifice for their welfare. In contrast, men are thought to be aggressive, dominating and to exercise authority over women. Therefore, transformation in gender relations that would allow young married men and women to communicate each other easily and to relate each other on more equal footing is required. Social transformation of this nature will be difficult and demands sustained commitment at all levels of society and the cooperation of gatekeepers in each setting.

This study demonstrates that not only traditional and gender norms play a vital role in sexual violence within marriage but also lack of education and knowledge of sexual life and self esteem of women. Many Nepalese men and women get married at an early age and have only a vague or no knowledge of the sexual life into which they are entering. As a result, young women's initial experiences are commonly shocking and painful. Therefore, the first, immediate and perhaps the most important measure would be to introduce family life education through different channels and forums to prepare young boys and girls for married life. Such education should address gender issues, particularly violence and sexual coercion. At the same time there is a need to change the attitudes of communities and families regarding the gender and reproductive roles of women and their rights.

The study revealed that not only economic dependency of women on their husband's income but also low economic status of their parents and powerlessness and inability to provide economic support exacerbated sexual violence within marriage. Men take advantage of being bread winner for the family and see no problem of forcing sex on their wives. Therefore, increasing women's economic status through involving them in saving-credit programmes successful in other contexts should be scaled up in Nepal.

The relationship between alcohol use and sexual violence is not new. Several studies from developing countries have reported that alcohol plays a significant precipitating role in sexual violence (Hoffman et al. 1994, Nelson et al. 1996; Parish et al. 2004; Koenig et al. 2003; Koenig et al. 2004; Rao, 1997). This study also demonstrated that alcohol use is linked with sexual violence. Therefore, any campaign against alcohol use should also cover the issue of sexual violence including others.

Generally it is believed that only women in Nepal are prone to sexual violence within marriage. However, this study suggests that married men also experienced sexual violence from their partners. Seven out of 36 men covered in this study reported experience of sexual violence in different forms and contexts. The results are from a relatively small sample and, therefore, one should be careful not to over-generalise from this exploratory pilot study.

This study suggests some surprising findings which need to be discussed. First, there is a misconception about male sterilisation. Study participant believed that sterilised men can not satisfy the sexual desire of their wives, resulted in coercive sex from his partner. Second, different types of condom available in the market also aggravate the sexual coercion. It is because men would like to test these condoms in different ways with their wives. Third, strong sex preference and pressure to produce a male child is not a new phenomenon in Nepal, however, this study revealed that sex preference also exacerbating the sexual violence. Fourth, women married to men with secondary or higher education are more at risk of coercive sex than those married to men with no or primary education. These findings require further investigation.

Given newness of the topic and the scarcity of national data with which to compare results, our analysis should be regarded as exploratory and the findings as suggestive. Moreover, the data were collected from relatively small sample using qualitative research methods. Therefore, one should be careful not to over-generalise from this study. Nevertheless, given the fact that coercive sexual experiences are likely to be underreported, the relatively high prevalence of these experiences suggested in this study is cause for serious concern and underscores the need for young couple's responsive initiatives to enable them to avoid such experiences and prepare them to cope with them. It should valuable to conduct a well designed quantitative survey to understand the scale and determinants of the problem to inform policy decision and health intervention.

Table 1. Selected socio-demographic characteristics of young married men and women covered in the free listing exercise

Background Characteristics	Young married men		Young married women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Current age						
15-19	5	13.9	9	23.1	14	18.7
20-24	9	25.0	29	74.4	38	50.7
25-27	22	61.1	1	2.6	23	30.7
Caste/Ethnicity						
Tharu	19	52.8	20	51.3	39	52.0
Brahmin/Chhetri	17	47.2	19	48.7	36	48.0
Level of education						
Illiterate	-	-	6	15.4	6	8.0
Primary and Non formal education	3	8.3	1	2.6	4	5.3
Secondary (6-10)	13	36.2	9	23.1	22	29.4
SLC pass or above	20	55.6	23	58.9	43	57.3
Age at marriage in years						
Less than 18	13	36.1	27	69.2	40	53.3
18 or above	23	63.9	12	30.8	35	46.7
Number of living children						
None	8	22.2	8	20.5	16	21.3
One	18	50.0	13	33.3	31	41.3
Two	9	25.0	16	41.0	25	33.3
Three or more	1	2.8	2	5.1	3	4.0
Main occupation						
Housewife	-	-	28	71.8	28	37.3
Agriculture	22	61.1	4	10.3	26	34.7
Business/petty business	8	22.2	5	12.9	13	17.3
Services	5	13.9	1	2.6	6	8.0
Labourer	1	2.8	1	2.6	2	2.7
Total	36	100.0	39	100.0	75	100.0

Table 2. Nature of and ever experience of sexual violence among young married men and women

Type of experiences	Women (N=39)	Men (N=36)
Bad moments	71.8 (28)	22.2 (8)
Quarrelling/verbal abuse	12.8 (5)	22.2 (8)
Beating from husband	10.3 (4)	-
Unwanted physical touch	53.8 (21)	19.4 (7)
Ever experience of forced sex from their spouse	48.7 (19)	19.4 (7)
Ever forced wife/husband to have sex	2.6 (1)	19.4 (7)

* Number within the parenthesis indicates the number of respondents.

Table: 3 Perceived causes of sexual violence within marriage: Result from free listing

Key informants (N=30)				
Causes	Frequency	Percent	Average rank	Smith's salience
Lack of education	14	45	3.286	0.284
Alcohol use	9	29	2.222	0.236
Women's inability to negotiate	8	26	3.250	0.156
Traditional and cultural norms/ values	7	23	3.429	0.130
Compulsion to fulfil the husband's desire	7	23	2.571	0.143
Lack of independence	7	23	6.429	0.065
Poverty	6	19	5.333	0.082
Patriarchal society	6	19	2.333	0.144
Women's powerlessness	6	19	4.333	0.101
Lack of mutual understanding	6	19	2.833	0.155
Young married men (N=36)				
Lack of education	10	28	1.600	0.229
Alcohol use	9	25	1.444	0.213
High sexual desire of husband	8	22	1.750	0.174
Lack of independence	7	19	2.000	0.144
Patriarchal society	7	19	2.286	0.118
Fear of husband	6	17	1.667	0.132
Manhood	6	17	2.667	0.097
Compulsion to make husband happy	5	14	2.800	0.065
Lack of inter-spousal communication	4	11	2.250	0.072
Fear of having co-wife	4	11	2.000	0.083
Young married women (N=39)				
Lack of education	20	50	3.000	0.335
Alcohol use	16	40	3.188	0.249
Women inability to negotiate	14	35	3.429	0.223
No income of women	12	30	4.750	0.136
Patriarchal society	11	28	3.273	0.184
Husband being inconsiderate	6	15	2.500	0.112
Compulsion for women to stay in husband's home	6	15	2.000	0.123
Extramarital affair	6	15	2.333	0.100
Manhood	5	13	5.400	0.059
Fear of having co-wife	5	13	3.400	0.091

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Figure 1. Factors associated with sexual coercion and its effects within marriage: Results from CFA

Contextual & Community Factors

- Socio-economic factor**
 - Poor economic status/poverty
 - Socio-cultural norms/value
 - Employment status
 - Educational status
 - Lack of awareness
 - Lack of sex education
- Traditional norms and values**
 - Tradition of early marriage
 - Different married practices
 - Forced marriage
 - Arranged marriage
 - Dowry system
- Gender inequality and norms/gender description**
 - Patriarchal society/Hindu religion/men dominant society
 - Lower status of women and economic dependency
 - Son preference
 - High tolerant level of women
- Lack of support system**
 - Family
 - Legal protection

Individual/Household and interpersonal

- Individual level factors**
 - Age at marriage
 - Use of condom and vasectomy
 - Use of alcohol
 - Fear from husband
 - Lack of individual awareness
 - Inability of women to communicate their problems
 - Lack of mutual understandings between couples
- Other factors**
 - High economic dependence on husband
 - Unequal background between couple
 - Lack of other means of entertainment
 - Low decision making power of women

S E X U A L C O E R C I O N

Effects

- Family effects**
 - Bad relationship in family
 - Bad relationship within couple
 - Daily quarrel
 - Divorced
 - Lack of understanding
- Effects on child**
 - Helplessness and insecurity
 - Effects on physical development
 - Psychological torture
 - Effects on newborn baby
 - Lack of food and care
- Economic effects**
 - Lack of economic growth
 - Poor economic status
 - High expenses
- Health effects**
 - General negative health effects
 - Weakness
 - Physical injury
 - Mental torture
 - Murder
 - Suicide
 - Mental collapse
 - Loss of thinking power
 - Reproductive health effects
 - Vaginal infection
 - Uterus infection
 - Transmission of STIs/HIV/AIDS
 - Unwanted pregnancy
 - Unsafe abortion
 - Unwanted child
 - Deaths

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