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Causes and consequences of child marriage among the ethnics of Nepal: A Comparative case study of Chepang and Tamang ethnics of Makwanpur district

Bhim Prasad Timalsina and Uma Kant Silwal

Supervisor, Visiting Professor, Sikkim Professional University, Sikkim, India.

Abstract

Child marriage in Nepal is considered a vital issue within the ethnic communities. This is caused due to various issues in the global and Nepalese context. This case study is designed to explain the causes consequences of child marriage among the Chepang and Tamang communities in Makwanpur district. The study is designed with mixed method approach, and purposive sample is selected to analyze this study. A sample of some 400 HHs from the 3 Municipalities of Makwanpur was taken into considerations and analysis were done through various research techniques.

Study elaborated that a lack of education and traditional approach are the major consequences of Child Marriage in the study area. Within the comparative analysis, both communities recorded perform early marriage at the age of 13 to 15 years due to the lack of education, elope as a traditional practices and digital equipment helped to connect young's couples to connected and marriage takes places. Mobile connectivity played a useful role in networking among couples. A policy review on the age of marriage is highly suggested, various health and cultural consequences recorded may be a challenge in the days ahead.

Keyword: Child Marriage; Ethnics; Chepang; Tamang; Education

1. Introduction

Age at marriage has been rising in several countries in Asia in recent decades, although there exist differences in the pace of change among the countries (Smith, 1980). In Nepal, a gradual transition towards higher age at marriage seems to be under way. An application of Hajnal's (1953) technique to estimate mean age at marriage shows that the female age at marriage increased from 15.2 years in 1961 to 16.7 in 1971, indicating an increase of 1.5 years over the 10-year period (Banister & Thapa, 1981, p. 44). Application of another approach suggested by van de Walle (1968) confirms this increase during the intercensal decade (Goldman et al., 1979, p. 19; Thapa, 1989).

Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming a child bride. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls globally have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data show that over the next decade, 100 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides, according to pre-COVID-19 projections. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls are now at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic and measures to stop its spread (UNICEF, COVID 19: a threat to progress against child marriage, 2021). UNICEF Nepal reports that the economic pressure from the pandemic and containment measures are pushing adolescents to seek their own marriage and home, due to a combination of boredom, an increase in violence in the home, and their search for new opportunities because they are out of school and do not expect to go back. Further, UNICEF reports that there has been an increase in families disguising human trafficking as child marriage

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* Corresponding author: Bhim Prasad Timalsina

to earn money to survive; as the economic situation deteriorates, families can be more easily enticed to marry off their daughters for small exchanges of gifts and cash (UNICEF, 2021).

Nepal was already affected by humanitarian crises before the COVID-19 pandemic, after the earthquake that severely affected thousands of people and more than 800,000 homes in 2015. According to the Global Programme-commissioned study 'Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia', in earthquake affected communities in Nepal (Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha districts) child marriage prevalence is moderate. In both districts, the proportion of children married before age 18 was higher for girls than boys: 3 per cent among men aged 20–24 and 9 per cent among women in Sindhupalchowk district; and 5 per cent among men aged 20–24 and 7 per cent among women in Dolakha district (UNICEF & UNFPA, Nepal Country Profile 2020, 2020).

One of the kinds of marriage which existed for millions of years is child marriage. Both boys and girls were married; girls were married before menstruation cycle, at the young age of 5, 6 years. Majapuriya, Indra (2007, p. 221) has written about ancient marriage of Hindus. Child marriage was an institution sanctioned by ancient Hindu laws and assiduously practiced by their followers. The main reason was the superstition prevalent in the medieval period about 'Ritu', the first few days immediately after the menstruation cycle. —According to strict moral laws to ensure 'copulation' in the first 'Ritu' it was binding on a man to get his daughter married before she reached puberty. Sage/king Manu has written that if a girl remained unmarried after reaching puberty, the father had failed in his duty towards her. Parashar, a law specialist and sage said that the parents or guardians of a girl in whose house a girl reached puberty before marriage would definitely go to hell. These warnings by sages had their effect upon the credulous mind of the people. Child marriage became a fashion and even the marriage of infants was common (Majapuriya, 2007).‖ Gautam Dharma Sutra mentions the opportunity is given to select groom by the bride herself if she is not married for three times after menstruation cycle. The text argues —Marriage‖ is as a religious process performed by the virgin girl during her very young age, but should be only after completion of the ˍBrahmacharya'stage. It has also mentioned the age of the bride should be smaller than the groom.

UNIFEM & WHF (2008) writes basically, Smirtis and Puranas have fallowed child marriage. The Smiriti Grantha has allowed daughters to be married at any year before menstruation whereas Brahma Purana has mentioned that after 4 years of age daughters can be married at any time. But in the Great epic like Mahabharat and Ramayan, there were evident recorded girls married till 16 years of age. The text mentions that in Mahanirwan Tantra there is discussion about society (UNIFEM & WHF, 2007) (Kafle, 2016).

Chepang is an indigenous ethnic group of Nepal with almost 90 percent of its population living below the poverty line. According to a recent study conducted by the District Public Health Office, 45 to 86 percent of Chepang girls usually get married between the ages of 12 and 15 in Makwanpur. Though Nepal outlawed child marriage in 1963, the practice is still rampant in Chepang communities of Kakada, Bharta, Sarikhet, Kalikatar, Khairang and Dandakharka, among other rural areas (Bista, 2019)A study by Chhetri and Silwal (2018) also stated that Chepang are indigenous residing in the north-western part of Makwanpur district. Poverty is one of the serious concerns among the Chepang, agroforestry plantation is the best practice to implement on the community through various farm practice. Lack of education, awareness and poor availability of food, income opportunity are constraints and limited within Chepang and this may be a cause of child marriage. During field executions early marriage was noticed in primary data collections, a detail study is required (Chhetri & Silwal, 2018).

A review by Chetry et al (2018) highlights that the most of the Chepang normally can survive only for 5-6 months from the maize and millet they produced from own. For the rest of the year, they must depend on food gathered from the wild, which is as important as agriculture, as well as by fishing, hunting and wages earned as laborers (Bastakoti et al., 2008; Chetry et al., 2018).

Various district report of DCC and LG; s also elaborating that Chepang and Tamang have a similar livelihood and domestic strategies and other ethnics are still practicing child marriage within community due to various reason such as education lack and traditional culture. Some another reason could be exit need a study for this.

Review by Chetry and Silwal (2015) shows that some Chepang-64% , Tamang-36 % HHs are illiterate ,(None of the Chepang and 100 % Tamang did up to Primary level education, and finally 50 % Chepang and Tamang both did study up to matriculation; data draw that educational qualification of Chepang is not as much of than Tamang communities (Chetry & Silwal, 2015).

Hence based on various literature review, a comparative analysis-based objective was set to analysed the cause of child marriage within the two ethnics of same settlement in the study area.

2. Methods

A cross sectional study was planned to check the prime objective of the study which was set as to analysis the reason of child marriage within two ethnics such as Chepang and Tamang community within north-western area of Makwanpur district.

Raksirang, Manahari, Kailash RM were purposively selected for this study as majority of Chepang and Tamang are more in the areas in Makwanpur district.Some 400 HHs were taken for this study and 200 HHs of Chepang and 200 HHs of Tmanangs taken randomly for this study.

A HHs questions were prepared and tested for the quality questions and the findings of the pilot study were further help to finalized the questions. Since, this article was prepared for the publication of Doctor of Philosophy level of study hence, pilot was done in some 10 HHs of Manahari RM (Map-1)
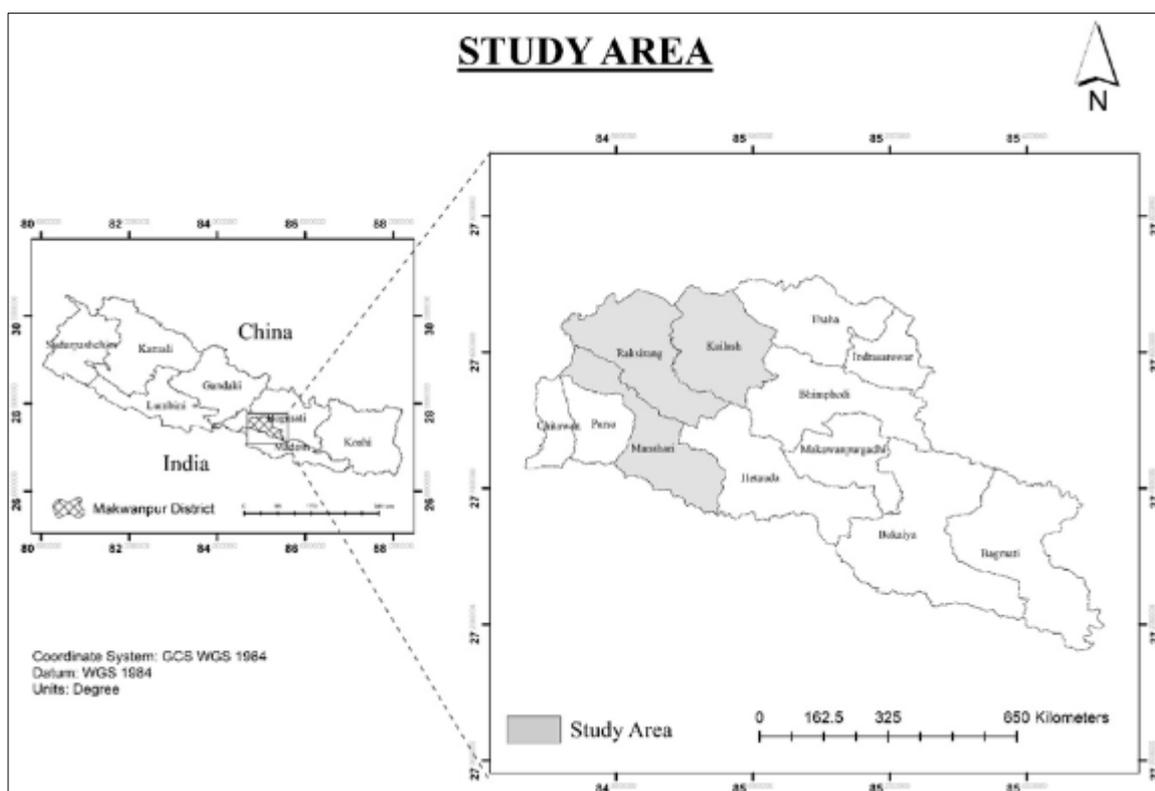
Figure 1 Study area of Makwanpur district within Bagamati Province

3. Results

In this section, various findings of data from the Qualitative and Quantitative methods will be write here in details that will show the trend of the study are from the different perspectives.

The analysis will be based on the caste and region wise to better understand the situation from the both lenses.

Within the surveyed communities, table-1 clearing a picture that Majority of Illiteracy is high on Chaepng community (23.8 %) compared to the Tamang Communities (19.3 %). Whereas, the basic levels of education stand nearly 22 % for Chepang and 25 % in Tamang communities. This clarify that the majority of populations ae still below minimum education level.

Annex-1 also illustrating that 28 % peoples are illiterate if Raksirnag within the surveyed respondents. The basic level of education stands 47 % for the all 3 Palika means the average education level is basic level means people completed or reached up to standard eight.

Both tables are exploring the hidden and silent fact that the level of educations are low in the families of both communities, the young people often go to the school and completed up to 8 standard and they are bound to tide in a domestic responsibility or to tide in a marriage relationship as earlier responsibility.

Table 1 Highest education degree obtained in a family

			Highest education degree obtained in a family					Total
			Illiterate	Literate	Basic Level	Secondary level	University Level	
What is the respondent caste?	Chepang	Count	95	15	88	4	1	203
		% of Total	23.8%	3.8%	22.0%	1.0%	0.3%	50.8%
	Tamang	Count	77	18	100	2	0	197
		% of Total	19.3%	4.5%	25.0%	0.5%	0.0%	49.3%
Total		Count	172	33	188	6	1	400
		% of Total	43.0%	8.3%	47.0%	1.5%	0.3%	100.0%

(Source of table: field survey data, 2023)

Table 2 Decision on economic matters

			Decision on economic matters-1								Total
			Father in laws	Mother in laws	Husband	Respondent self	Grandfather	Grandmother	Mother	Father	
What is the respondent caste?	Chepang	Count	19	93	11	3	2	3	47	25	203
		% f Total	4.8%	23.3%	2.8%	0.8%	0.5%	0.8%	11.8%	6.3%	50.8%
	Tamang	Count	14	84	5	12	2	3	27	50	197
		% of Total	3.5%	21.0%	1.3%	3.0%	0.5%	0.8%	6.8%	12.5%	49.3%
Total		Count	33	177	16	15	4	6	74	75	400
		% of Total	8.3%	44.3%	4.0%	3.8%	1.0%	1.5%	18.5%	18.8%	100.0%

(Source of table: field survey data, 2023)

Without any doubt, from the marriage girls perspectives, MIL-Mother in Laws playing a vital role in th economic decision in surveyed communities. Some 23,3 % in Chepang and 21.3 % in Tamang stood in this option. The young husband and other relatives playing aless role on the economic decisions. Here, economic decision means sole decision for buying, purchasing, investment, food security and Livelihood management.

Annex-2 also stands as 44.3 % MIL took decisions on the economic matters in the Surveyed houses, that means the oldest person took a decision on the economic related activities that means the old age peoples always do favour in implementation of custom and culture which always deal with ethnic traditions and values. Early marriage is also a primary cause of such sharing of powers in houses because economic deals with food security and Livelihood related activities means land, property and many other things which lead the status of the people.

Table 3 Number of Android Mobiles on home

			No of Android Mobile						Total
			0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**More than 4**	
What is the respondent caste?	Chepang	Count	126	71	1	1	1	3	203
		% of Total	31.5%	17.8%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%	50.8%
	Tamang	Count	99	90	2	0	3	3	197
		% of Total	24.8%	22.5%	.5%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	49.3%
Total		Count	225	161	3	1	4	6	400
		% of Total	56.3%	40.3%	0.8%	0.3%	1.0%	1.5%	100.0%

(Source of table: field survey data, 2023)

In this section, a normal mobile and android mobile is keeping in highlight that android has many features of social platform through internet access which can increase the connectivity of the people. Table-3 shows that the 56.3 % have no access to Android phone, whereas the tend of keeping at least one is 40.3 % means the trend of keeping advance mobile is increasing. Tamang majority is little up in at least 1 functional mobile compared to the Chepang.

Annex-3 also showing that 56.3 % does not hold advance mobile whereas some 40.3 % have a functional android which has a high chances of social networking system.

Qualitative Analysis through FGD reflects that

Mobile and social networking among the young couples is higher within Tamang and Chapeng Communities, sharing of own social identities and personal number are high in the area as local teachers and NGO staffs also says the similar fact which reflected through FGD participants.

Table 4 Normal age of Male and Female

			Normal age of marriage of male							Total
			below 13 years	**14 yrs**	**15 yrs**	**16 yrs**	**17 yrs**	**18 yrs**	**20 yrs**	
What is the respondent caste?	Chepang	Count	29	42	105	8	15	3	1	203
		% of Total	7.3%	10.5%	26.3%	2.0%	3.8%	0.8%	0.3%	50.8%
	Tamang	Count	45	50	63	13	15	10	1	197
		% of Total	11.3%	12.5%	15.8%	3.3%	3.8%	2.5%	0.3%	49.3%
Total		Count	74	92	168	21	30	13	2	400
		% of Total	18.5%	23.0%	42.0%	5.3%	7.5%	3.3%	0.5%	100.0%
			Normal age of marriage of female							Total
			below 13 years	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	18 yrs	20 yrs	
	Chepang	Count	30	90	72	2	7	1	1	203

What is the respondent caste?		% of Total	7.5%	22.5%	18.0%	.5%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%	50.8%
	Tamang	Count	45	75	67	2	6	2	0	197
		% of Total	11.3%	18.8%	16.8%	.5%	1.5%	.5%	0.0%	49.3%
Total		Count	75	165	139	4	13	3	1	400
		% of Total	18.8%	41.3%	34.8%	1.0%	3.3%	0.8%	0.3%	100.0%

(Source of table: field survey data, 2023)

Table-4, shows that the normal age of marriage boy is 15 years as some 42 % respondents have said and 18.5 % respondents do marriage in less than 13 years old.

In case of Girls the trend showing that majority of marriage is during 14 years of age as 41.3 % opted the same and 18.8 % people do marriage while less than 13 years of age. Annex-4 have the similar data while talk on Palika level status.

For the overall trend of Male Chepang majority is higher compared to the Tamang majority as Chepang and Tamang are residing in same community but the social-Cultural practices are much different for them.

Table 5 Is mobile is prime reason of young couple connectivity?

			Mobile		Total
			Yes	No	
What is the respondent caste?	Chepang	Count	168	35	203
		% of Total	42.0%	8.8%	50.8%
	Tamang	Count	176	21	197
		% of Total	44.0%	5.3%	49.3%
Total		Count	344	56	400
		% of Total	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%

(Source of table: field survey data, 2023)

Some 86 % respondents agreed that Mobile connection make easy for the social connections within Male and Female partners. This mobile connectivity later became the bet way to exchange and share there all information's. This also cause a prime reason of elope or make a decision of next meeting within male and Female. Hence the mobile connectivity played a vital role on the cause of early marriage.

Annex-4 also have the similar data as the trend of Raksirang Palika is higher than Manahari followed by Kailash Palika as the mobile connectivity and transmission lines are well connected to each within Raksirang and Manahari area, whereas in the Kailash is far away and less access in mobile connectivity are the primary causes.

FGD and KII participants also stated that each young people are connected with Mobile, and social networking. Facebook, and Tik-tok are very common to exchange within the friend circle and this medium make people more closed and to choose partner through it.

4. Conclusion

Primary analysis revealed that the majority of respondents are illiterate on ground, Chepang illiteracy is higher than Tamang. Literacy level is minimal. In both communities, Mother in laws in houses playing a lead role on the decision of economic matters, rigidity of cultural implementation seems high, as early marriage, elope is a part of culture for the ethnics. Modern technology of mobile uplifted the social networking within the young people and social networking and affair within couples seems high as a primary reason of early marriage. The majority of population doing marriage less than 13 to up to 15 years which is not a right age of marriage as per law as well as not best from the health perspectives.

Recommendations

Awareness and education-based program is essential for all types of people. Intention towards higher education is found limited in the study area as a reason lack of knowledge and policy related activities found limited in the areas hence development agencies need to increase their education program that must aware the knowledge of ethnics in relation to the law, social and health issues of the young people in the present and future, this awareness may restrict and brough a change on the knowledge of the Chepang and Tamang. Policy review for the marriage age is also a big question in the Nepalese society, hence this is suggested to do a immediate review and amend the age.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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Appendix

Annex-1 Higher educational degree in home, Palika wise

			Highest education degree obtained in a family					Total
			Illiterate	Literate	Basic Level	Secondary level	University Level	
Name of Palika-LG's?	Manahari	Count	53	5	69	5	1	133
		% of Total	13.3%	1.3%	17.3%	1.3%	.3%	33.3%
	Raksirang	Count	112	21	85	1	0	219
		% of Total	28.0%	5.3%	21.3%	.3%	0.0%	54.8%
	Kailash	Count	7	7	34	0	0	48
		% of Total	1.8%	1.8%	8.5%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%
Total		Count	172	33	188	6	1	400
		% of Total	43.0%	8.3%	47.0%	1.5%	.3%	100.0%

Annex-2 Decision on economic matters

			Decision on economic matters-1								Total
			Father in laws	Mother in laws	Husband	Respondent self	Grandfather	Grandmother	Mother	Father	
Name of Palika-LG's?	Manahari	Count	2	63	7	9	4	5	11	32	133
		% of Total	.5%	15.8%	1.8%	2.3%	1.0%	1.3%	2.8%	8.0%	33.3%
	Raksirang	Count	7	99	9	6	0	1	57	40	219
		% of Total	1.8%	24.8%	2.3%	1.5%	0.0%	.3%	14.3%	10.0%	54.8%
	Kailash	Count	24	15	0	0	0	0	6	3	48
		% of Total	6.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	.8%	12.0%
Total		Count	33	177	16	15	4	6	74	75	400
		% of Total	8.3%	44.3%	4.0%	3.8%	1.0%	1.5%	18.5%	18.8%	100.0%

Annex-3, Number of android Mobiles

			No of Android Mobile						Total
			0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**More than 4**	
Name of Palika-LG's?	Manahari	Count	71	61	0	0	0	1	133
		% of Total	17.8%	15.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.3%	33.3%
	Raksirang	Count	128	85	1	1	3	1	219
		% of Total	32.0%	21.3%	.3%	.3%	.8%	.3%	54.8%
	Kailash	Count	26	15	2	0	1	4	48
		% of Total	6.5%	3.8%	.5%	0.0%	.3%	1.0%	12.0%
Total		Count	225	161	3	1	4	6	400
		% of Total	56.3%	40.3%	.8%	.3%	1.0%	1.5%	100.0%

Annex-4 Normal age of marriage of male

			Normal age of marriage of male							Total
			below 13 years	**14 yrs**	**15 yrs**	**16 yrs**	**17 yrs**	**18 yrs**	**20 yrs**	
Name of Palika-LG's?	Manahari	Count	40	24	21	13	23	11	1	133
		% of Total	10.0%	6.0%	5.3%	3.3%	5.8%	2.8%	.3%	33.3%
	Raksirang	Count	33	67	101	8	7	2	1	219
		% of Total	8.3%	16.8%	25.3%	2.0%	1.8%	.5%	.3%	54.8%
	Kailash	Count	1	1	46	0	0	0	0	48
		% of Total	.3%	.3%	11.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%
Total		Count	74	92	168	21	30	13	2	400
		% of Total	18.5%	23.0%	42.0%	5.3%	7.5%	3.3%	.5%	100.0%
			Normal age of marriage of female							Total
			below 13 years	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	18 yrs	20 yrs	
Name of Palika-LG's?	Manahari	Count	41	46	36	1	7	1	1	133
		% of Total	10.3%	11.5%	9.0%	.3%	1.8%	.3%	.3%	33.3%
	Raksirang	Count	33	105	70	3	6	2	0	219
		% of Total	8.3%	26.3%	17.5%	.8%	1.5%	.5%	0.0%	54.8%
	Kailash	Count	1	14	33	0	0	0	0	48
		% of Total	.3%	3.5%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%

Total	Count	75	165	139	4	13	3	1	400
	% of Total	18.8%	41.3%	34.8%	1.0%	3.3%	.8%	.3%	100.0%

Annex-5, Is mobile prime for connectivity, Palika wise status

			Mobile		Total
			Yes	**No**	
Name of Palika-LG's?	Manahari	Count	111	22	133
		% of Total	27.8%	5.5%	33.3%
	Raksirang	Count	191	28	219
		% of Total	47.8%	7.0%	54.8%
	Kailash	Count	42	6	48
		% of Total	10.5%	1.5%	12.0%
Total		Count	344	56	400
		% of Total	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%