

# (Un)Acceptability of Violence

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Theme: Gender-Based Violence | Location: Nepal

## BACKGROUND

Heifer Nepal began implementing the *Strengthening Smallholder Enterprises of Livestock Value Chain (SLVC)* program in 2012 to empower women and improve their lives. By focusing on families and communities, using Heifer's Values-Based Holistic Community Development (VBHCD) approach, the program laid emphasis on limiting gender-based violence (GBV) by modeling behavioral change and inspiring personal transformation.

This brief is part of a series of concise research summaries derived from a more comprehensive assessment of Heifer's program intervention in Nepal.

## METHODOLOGY

The impact study (November 2021 – May 2023) employed a mixed sampling methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative study involved 251 respondents, of which, 176 were women and 75 were their male family members. All respondents resided in Heifer Nepal's program intervention districts. The qualitative study involved 10 focus group discussions and key informant interviews with project stakeholders. In addition to primary data, the researchers used the nationally representative Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) database of Nepal, Bangladesh, and India, to further corroborate findings.



**Primary Finding:** Heifer's systemic approach to empowerment of women through their environment and engagement with multiple stakeholders has shown significant reductions in the acceptability of violence against women.

**Keywords:** Women's Agency, Violence, Nepal, Women's Empowerment

## Rationale

This brief focuses on Heifer's longstanding *Smallholder Livestock Value Chain (SLVC)* program's impact on perceptions and experiences of violence. Gender-based violence (GBV), defined by the United Nations as any act causing harm or suffering to individuals based on their gender, is a violation of basic human rights. It can have severe negative health and demographic consequences, making it a critical aspect of SLVC's programming.

## Impact

SLVC focuses on both economic and gender empowerment. The program, including gender sensitivity trainings and fostering of self-worth among women, considerably reduced the acceptability of GBV in target communities.

Quantitative results showed remarkable achievement with 2% women from Heifer households believing violence against a wife is justified as compared to 25% reporting acceptability in Nepal DHS. Qualitative discussions with women in Heifer interventions areas further highlighted changes in incidences of violence against women in the community. At a discussion in Surkhet, a district in Karnali Province of Nepal, comments from women included the following:

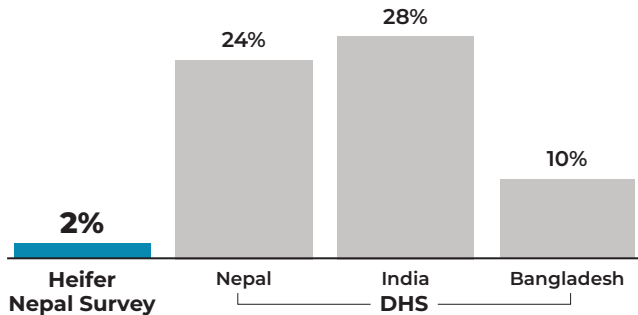
**"Violence is a talked-about subject. Reporting [it] is also done. Violence cases are mostly seen in the Dalit community [lowest caste of the traditional caste system], but the incidences are decreasing. Some men used to beat their wives and drink alcohol but now it's very rare."**

## Experience of Violence

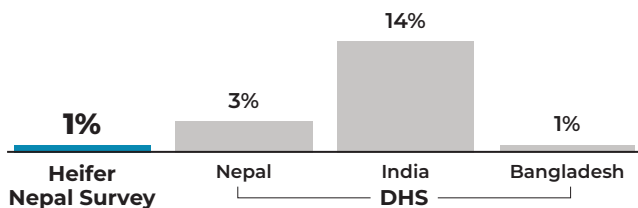
Although there is a dearth of rigorous evaluations of interventions that focus on reduction in GBV, global estimates indicate that 30 percent of all women will experience physical or sexual violence from their partners during their lifetime. Figures further increase to 48 percent in the context of Nepal, which measures actual experiences of GBV among Nepalese women. In Nepal, researchers cite the prevalence of patriarchal social norms and gender inequality as root causes for GBV. The DHS finds that 24 percent of women in Nepal believe husbands are justified in hitting their wives if they neglect children (Figure 1a), comparable to 28 percent in India and 10 percent in Bangladesh. However, just 2 percent of women who are Heifer Nepal project participants believe this. A similar comparison can be seen in Figure 1b for acceptability of GBV against women for burning food, with reduced acceptability among Heifer project participants at 1 percent, compared to 3 percent overall in Nepal and 14 percent in India.

**Figure 1: Percentage of women who think husband is justified in hitting his wife if she:**

### 1a. Neglects children



### 1b. Burns food



Source: Heifer Nepal Survey, DHS Nepal, Bangladesh, India

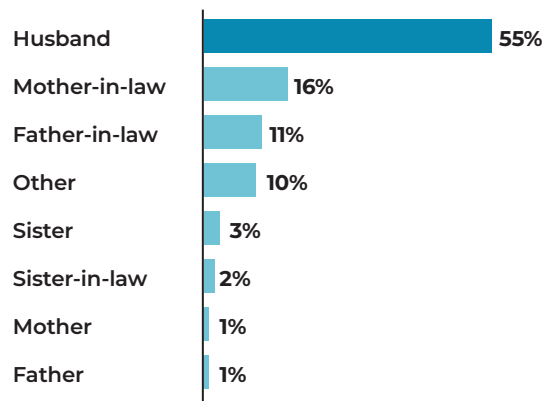
Both qualitative and quantitative findings highlight the change in perceptions of gender roles and the development of an enabling environment for women, consequently affecting the acceptability of GBV in target communities in Nepal. Violence against women and girls often goes underreported. However, given the all-round empowerment experienced by women in the Heifer Nepal SLVC program, the low reporting of violence in their communities compared.

## Enabling Environment

Women in the SLVC target communities lacked autonomy and decision-making abilities in life decisions about themselves and their children. However, as shown in figure 2.1, qualitative studies revealed that, as benefits of the program became evident with time, women started feeling more supported by their family members to engage in program interventions.

It also fostered a positive change in their intra-household relationships, which have a direct bearing on experiences of violence in the household. Figure 2 shows the husband's role in helping women participants join the Heifer program, highlighting that men started recognizing — and appreciating — the valuable contributions of their wives, elevating women's status within the household.

**Figure 2: Who in the family helped women to join the Heifer program**



Source: Heifer Nepal FGD transcripts

## Conclusion

Heifer Nepal's intervention has made significant strides in changing societal perceptions on GBV. The program's success is particularly noteworthy in changing societal perceptions regarding domestic violence. Most notably, in the context of neglecting children, the program achieved remarkable results, with only 2 percent of women believing that violence against a wife is justified while figures for Nepal and India DHS data were close to 25 percent, as seen in Fig. 1.1 and 1.2 above. These outcomes indicate that the Heifer SLVC program in Nepal successfully challenged patriarchal beliefs and fostered a more supportive and equal environment — a trendsetter in the region.