

Do numbers tell the real story of gender based violence in Nepal?



A recent online survey carried out by [Code for Nepal](#), with over thousand female respondents, presented a staggering figure: 98% women said they have experienced some form of harassment on streets. This clearly indicates an alarming situation of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Nepal writes **Sudeep Uprety**.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee defines Gender Based Violence (GBV) as an umbrella term for any harmful act perpetrated against a person's will based on socially ascribed differences between males and females. As per the guidelines, instances of GBV include acts conducted in public or private settings that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. As per [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) estimates, one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime. There is growing global concern given the grave consequences of GBV, as seen in the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) that seeks to address gender equality across the world, especially in developing countries.



The fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) that seeks to address gender equality across the world, especially in developing countries. Image credit: [JessicaBlueElephants](#). CC0 Creative Commons

According to [Nepal Monitor](#), during the years 2015 and 2016, there were altogether 1,770 GBV cases reported. Among them, most were related to rape/attempted rape (894), abuse (527), domestic violence (354) and trafficking (201). In terms of the regional variation, most cases were reported from central (586) and eastern (518) development regions. Likewise, If we look at the district-wise reporting of GBV cases, most cases were reported from Kathmandu (153), followed by Saptari, Kaski, Siraha, Banke, Ilam, Chitwan, Dang, Kanchanpur, Makwanpur, Udaypur and Morang districts. As per these cases reported, GBV incidents have resulted in 79 killings, of which 59 were female. Likewise, there were 54 injuries (46 of them were women) and 242 rape/attempted rape cases (187 of them below the age of 25).

Likewise, the '[National Report on Trafficking in Persons 2015/16](#)' by National Human Rights Commission reports that there were 352 victims (95% women) in 212 cases of human trafficking that were registered by the Nepal Police that fiscal year. The Commission report suggests that actual number of trafficking cases is much higher (more than 23,000) during fiscal year 2015-16. According to estimates, there are 6,100 trafficked persons (60% female), 1,300 victims of trafficking (98% female) and 3,900 missing (70% female). The report also shows 15% increase in number of domestic violence cases reported in the 14 highly affected districts.

Another study carried out by [United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#) in 2012 showed that 27% female respondents had experienced physical violence while 15% women had experienced sexual violence at some time in their lives. Almost half of the women (48%) shared that they had experienced violence at some point of time in their lives.



Almost half of the women (48%) shared that they had experienced violence at some point of time in their lives. Image credit: [Helene/Flickr](#) CC0 Creative Commons

Nepal has made considerable achievements in combating GBV at both policy and implementation level. There are systems, infrastructures and legal provisions in place that particularly addressing gender issues at the local level under the federal set up. In terms of donor prioritising, there are terms like 'GESI integration', 'gender mainstreaming', 'gender and intersectionality' and 'leave no one behind' have become buzz words. Likewise, various advocacy and behaviour change interventions are carried out to sensitise the general public and specific target population about alarming consequences of GBV. The media is also playing a helping hand in terms of covering GBV-related stories (read for instance, *Republica* op-ed, '[Re-examining gender based violence](#)' and *The Kathmandu Post* editorial, [#beboldforchange](#)) to draw the attention of relevant authorities. Still, GBV remains a pertinent problem in Nepal, with rising number of GBV cases.

GBV as a form of structural violence

Policy makers and gender specialists need to realise that GBV could just be the 'tip of the iceberg' of the existing problem. There is a need to move beyond the discourse that relies on problematic assumption that equates women with [weakness and vulnerability](#). Furthermore, recent studies on GBV mapping and [intimate partner violence](#) as well as experiences of practitioners such as [doctors](#) and counsellors, [police officers](#) and [women rights activists](#) indicate many 'hidden' GBV cases that go unreported, often considered as 'family affairs'.

There are existing socio-cultural norms, expectations and the associated stigma surrounding marriage and [dowry system](#), [masculinities](#) and [son preference](#). Furthermore, exposure to modern communication technologies such as '[cyber VAWG](#)', and incidents of [GBV during disasters](#) have added up vulnerabilities for women and girls in many ways.

Johan Galtung talks of 'structural violence' in his seminal work [Violence, Peace and Peace Research](#). GBV can thus be associated as a form of structural violence relating to Galtung's proposition that violence (in this case against women) is structural in nature. Due to unequal power relations between individuals or groups, violence is rooted in the social structures of society, thereby exploiting the structurally oppressed.



Due to unequal power relations between individuals or groups, violence is rooted in the social structures of society, thereby exploiting the structurally oppressed. Nepali women in a field. *Image credit: [JudaM/Flickr](#) CC0 Creative Commons*

While various studies (particularly quantitative surveys) have been conducted to understand the prevalence and nature of GBV, there is greater need to explore the context behind the numbers. Use of iterative [qualitative](#) or [participatory research](#) approaches will help exploring rich, first-hand narratives of target groups, thereby drawing a broader perspective. Initially targeting the ‘hot spots’ – geographical regions and communities with alarming GBV incidents as study sites (also extracting information from various sub-groups disaggregated by age, ethnicity and other socio-demographic features) would help in drawing key findings for policy and programme recommendations.

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