

Gender Based Violence in Bhutanese Refugee Camps in Nepal: An Empirical Study from the Sanischar Refugee Camp

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Abstract: *Gender based Violence (GBV) has been the experience of women worldwide and is a universal reality that has existed in all societies and human settlements regardless of class, income, culture, or educational attainment. It is today recognized as a major issue on the international human rights agenda and has been defined as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender and sex. Globally, the refugees experience the full spectrum of gender - based violence throughout their refugee life. Hundreds and thousands of Southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin or the Lhotshampas were forced to flee Bhutan at the beginning of the 1990s, as a result of the ethnic cleansing campaign of the monarchical government of Bhutan. Over 108, 000 refugees had initially settled in the seven refugee camps spread over the districts of Jhapa and Morang in the southeastern part of Nepal. Women were a part of the refugee population who sought protection in Nepal and so refugee women who are living in the makeshift camps in Nepal for more than three decades confront not only the hardship of refugee life in the camps but also face the injustice of gender based violence, as they have reported rape, sexual assault, polygamy, trafficking and domestic violence. Hence, the paper looks into the causes, types and impacts of gender based violence in the Sanischar Bhutanese refugee camps of Nepal.*

Keywords: Gender Based Violence, Violence against women, Bhutanese Refugees, Refugee Women

1. Introduction

Violence against women and girls is a fundamental violation of human rights. It exists in every country of the world, affects every segment of the society and is prevalent among all age groups (Hadi, 2017). Everyday women throughout the world are confronted with multiple forms of violence including sexual violence by family members, strangers and state agents, domestic violence including spousal murder and being burned, disfigured with acid, beaten and threatened, ritual honor killings and custodial abuse and torture (Hadi, 2017). Gender based violence is an umbrella term that has not been universally defined. A narrow interpretation confines the term to meaning rape and related sexual assault. More commonly, the term has been used to cover a spectrum of violence involving a gendered element such as domestic violence, human trafficking, and harmful traditional practices, (Such as female genital mutilation and both early and forced marriage) as well as other forms of physical and emotional abuse (Hynes & Cardozo, 2000). Gender based violence is a pervasive social and public health issue that leads to major, emotional, physical and social harm. It is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “Any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in that relationship”. Abuse of power against women and children is central to gender-based violence and types of harm include psychological abuse, physical aggression, forced sexual contact or other threatening or intimidating or controlling behaviors (McLindon, Fiolet, & Hegarty, 2021). It includes a host of harmful behaviors that are directed at women and girls because of their sex including wife abuse, sexual assault, dowry related murder, marital rape, selective malnourishment of female children, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, and sexual abuse of female children. Specifically, violence against women includes any act of verbal or physical force, coercion or life-threatening

deprivation, directed at an individual woman or girl that causes physical or psychological harm; humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and that perpetuates female subordination (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottmoeller, 2002).

The Refugee phenomenon is as old as time and as recent as today. The Bible tells of the exodus out of Egypt to the Promised Land, the daily press in headlines and the weekly news magazines in vivid colors portray the flight of people from natural or manmade disasters around the world, in Central America, Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Today, one may point almost anywhere on a spinning globe and put a finger on a refugee situation (Huyck & Bouvier, 1983). Gender based violence is part of the hard realities of being a refugee. This obtains from loss of power and a lack of control over assets, social networks and process, which increases vulnerability. This is even worse when the cause of flight is violent conflict. Loss of assertiveness in times of adversity means that refugees are limited in their actions and choices for their advantage. These circumstances require adequate responses from the protection agencies, yet these actors are sometimes limited in their operational capacity which lead to high levels of gender based violence in refugee camps (Kwiringira, Mutabazi, Mugumya, Kaweesi, Munube, & Rujumba, 2018). Reports of violence are common in camps for refugees and displaced populations, especially among women and girls. Single/ Unmarried women and girls or adolescents, and newly arriving female refugees have been shown to be particularly at the risk of violence (Hossain, 2018). The Lhotshampas of Bhutan are also the part of the millions that have fled their homeland seeking refuge and a new life in host societies the world over. Bhutan often tops the list of happiest places to live in and is a model of harmony in a hyper capitalized world. However in the face of all this supposed harmony, Bhutan hides a very dark history. It is the world's biggest creator of refugees by per capita as the

country expelled the Lhotshampa, an ethnic group with its origins in Nepal in 1990s, which made up one sixth of the Bhutan's population, to preserve its unique national identity (Morch, 2016). The Lhotshampa people are an ethnic minority in Bhutan who are of Nepalese descent and have lived in Bhutan since the 1600s. They are indigenous to the southern parts of Bhutan (Kimutai, 2017). Lhotshampa, which means "southern borderlanders" in dzongkha, began to be used by the Bhutanese state in the second half of the twentieth century to refer to the population of Nepali origin in the south of the country (Nelson & Stam, 2021). Tens of thousands of people had fled human rights abuses in Bhutan or were forcibly deported by 1992. Before they crossed the border into India, the Bhutanese government forced many to sign "voluntary migration certificates," thus surrendering their rights to Bhutanese citizenship under the nationality laws. Initially, refugees fled over land to West Bengal and Assam in India (Dhakal & Strawn, 1994). However, harassment from the Indian police forced them to move on to Nepal. The refugees settled on the banks of the Mai River in southeastern Nepal, where they endured unsanitary living conditions, disease, and inadequate supplies. International NGOs began operations to aid the Bhutanese refugees, and in 1991, the government of Nepal and UNHCR established refugee camps. By mid - 1994, approximately eighty - six thousand refugees resided in the camps (Varia, 2003). Women were a part of the refugee population who sought protection in Nepal and so refugee women who are living in the makeshift camps in Nepal for more than three decades confront not only the hardship of refugee life in the camps but also face the injustice of gender-based violence, as they have reported rape, sexual assault, polygamy, trafficking and domestic violence. As instances of gender-based violence as well as other forms of violence emerge due to particular conditions in the refugee institutions and situations, it was important to analyze these underlying currents. Hence, there was a need to look into the causes, types and impacts of gender-based violence in the Bhutanese refugee camps of Nepal.

2. Objectives of the Research

- To find out the causes of gender-based violence in the Sanischare refugee camp Nepal.

- To find out the types of gender-based violence in the Sanischare refugee camp Nepal.
- To find out the consequences and impact of gender-based violence on the Bhutanese refugee women of Sanischare Refugee Camp Nepal.

3. Methodology

The present study depends on both the primary and secondary sources of data collection for the fulfillment of its objectives. The present study is a qualitative and descriptive research. The primary source of data collection is the field study method. The data was collected through purposive sampling. The present study made use of a semi - structured interview schedule for the personal interviews and the face - to - face interviews that were conducted. The area of study, for the research that was conducted was the Bhutanese refugee camp of Beldangi, in the Jhapa district of Nepal. This camp was selected by the present study as the study area because, since the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees which began in the years 2006 to 2007, the camp populations decreased, therefore the Nepalese Government consolidated the original seven camps into two camps. Three camps of Timai, Goldhap and Khudunabari have been closed and three Beldangi camps (i. e. Beldangi I, Beldangi II, and Beldangi II Extension) have now been collectively named as 'Beldangi' (though all the camps remain) and the Sanischare camp remains (CDC, 2021).

As of 2019 only an estimated 6, 500 Bhutanese refugees remain in Nepal. Over 90 percent of the initial Bhutanese refugee population has now left for third country resettlement. Out of the 6, 500 Bhutanese refugees, 1500 are living in Sanischare camp in Jhapa. 5 percent of the 1500 refugees that is 75 respondents were taken out of which 37 were male and 38 were female respondents. Therefore the sample size of the present study was 75 depending on the purposive sampling.

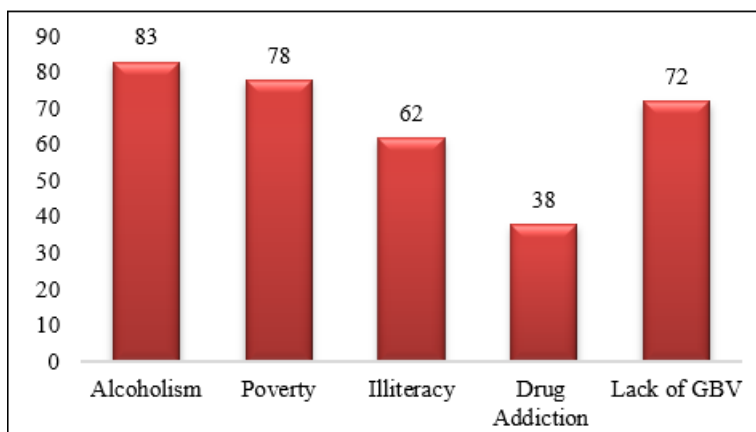
Population Data, of Bhutanese Refugee Camp Sanischare, 2019 Censure provided by the Camp Management Committee

S. no	Population	No.	Total Percentage
1	Registered population	12, 40	81.4
2	CA/ASR/New Entry (Census Absentee/ Asylum Seeker/ New Entry)	215	14.1
3	Missing	13	0.8
4	NOC/ IOC (Nepalese Origin Citizen/ Indian Origin Citizen)	22	1.4
5	Bhutan Jail	18	1.4
6	Nepal Jail	15	0.9
	Total Population	1523	100

Source: Camp Management Committee Sanischare Morang Nepal. Field Work 2022 – 2023

1) Causes of Gender based Violence in Sanischare Camp:

Causes of GBV	% of response
Alcoholism	83.00
Poverty	78.00
Illiteracy	62.00
Drug Addiction	38.00
Lack of Awareness about GBV	72.00



Source: Field Work, Sanischare Camp, Morang, Nepal 2022 - 2023

The respondents were asked to state their opinion regarding the main causes of gender - based violence in Sanischare camp and it is found that 83% of respondents stated alcoholism is the main cause of gender - based violence, 78% said it is due to poverty, 62% said it is caused by illiteracy of people, 38% said drug addiction and 72%

mentioned that lack of awareness is the main cause of gender - based violence in the camp.

2) Types of Gender based violence the respondents know of:

Types of Violence	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Physical Violence and Torcher	9	32.14	15	42.86	24	38.10
Domestic Violence	9	32.14	12	34.29	20	31.75
Sexual Violence and Rape	6	21.43	6	17.14	12	19.05
Emotional Violence	5	17.86	2	5.71	7	11.11
Total	28	100.00	35	100.00	63	100.00

Source: Field Work, Sanischare Camp, Morang, Nepal 2022 - 2023

The above table shows the types of gender - based violence that the respondents know. In the present study, gender - based violence has been categorised into 4 types, namely, physical violence and torcher, domestic violence, sexual violence and rape and emotional violence. 75.68% of males and 92.11% of females have the knowledge and understanding of different types of violence that are occurring in families and society (Table 4.22). 32.14% of males and 42.86% of females said that they know the physical violence and torcher, 32.14% of males and 34.29% of females are aware of domestic violence, 21.43% of males and 17.14% of females hear sexual violence and rape. The percentage of emotional violence that the males and females know is 17.86% and 5.71% respectively. Except for emotional violence, female members know much about aforesaid types of violence than males.

3) Types of Gender based Violence the Respondents experienced:

Gender Violence	Male	Female	Total
Physical abuse	8	17	25
Sexual abuse/ rape	0	1	1
Marital rape	0	0	0
Verbal Abuse	2	1	3
Financial abuse	1	0	1
Trafficking	0	0	0
Emotional Abuse	2	2	4
Polygamy	1	1	2
Total	14	22	36

Source: Field Work, Sanischare Camp, Morang, Nepal 2022 - 2023

The respondents had experienced different types of violence namely physical abuse, sexual abuse/rape, marital rape, verbal abuse, financial abuse, trafficking, emotional, and polygamy. Out of 75 respondents, 36 (14 males and 22 females) respondents had experienced different types of violence in their life in the camp. 8 males and 17 females said that they are prone to physical abuse, 1 female had faced sexual abuse or rape, there is an absence of marital abuse in both the gender, 2 females and 1 male had experienced verbal abuse, 1 male reported financial abuse, there is no human trafficking, 2 each male and female had to face emotional abuse and 1 each male and female had experienced polygamy. Female members are more prone to different violence than males.

4) Impacts of Gender Based Violence in the Sanischare Camp:

Sexual Violence	Depression	Unwanted Pregnancy	Physical Injury	Suicidal Tendency
Male	20	4	7	2
Female	28	2	6	1
Total	48 (64%)	6 (8%)	13 (18%)	3 (4%)
Psychological Violence	Depression	Anxiety	PTSD	Suicidal Tendency
Male	21	7	2	7
Female	22	9	4	3
Total	43 (58%)	16 (21%)	6 (8%)	10 (13%)
Physical Violence	Small Injuries	Fractures	Death	Severe Injuries
Male	16	9	5	7
Female	20	7	7	4
Total	36 (48%)	16 (22%)	12 (16%)	11 (14%)

Source: Field Work, Sanischare Camp, Morang, Nepal 2022 - 2023

The above reflects the impact of different types of gender - based violence namely, sexual violence, physiological violence and physical violence on the respondents of Sanischare Bhutanese refugee camp. Under sexual violence, 64% of the respondents (20 male and 28 female) mentioned that women are having the problems of depression, 8% of respondents (4 males and 2 female) stated that women had to face the problem of unwanted pregnancy, 18% of the respondents (7 male and 6 female) said that women had suffered physical injuries and 4% of the respondents (2 male and 1 female) revealed that women have suicidal tendency due to sexual violence.

Similarly, as far as physiological violence is concerned, 58% of respondents (21 male and 22 female) mentioned women are having the problems of depression, 21% of respondents (7 male and 9 female) stated that women had to face the problem of anxiety, 8% of the respondents (2 male and 4 female) said that women had suffered PTSD and 13% of the respondents (7 male and 3 female) revealed that women have suicidal tendency.

The study revealed that 48% of respondents (16 male and 20 female) mentioned women are having the problems of small injuries, 22% of respondents (9 male and 7 female) stated that women had to face the problem of fractures, 16% of the respondents (5 male and 7 female) said that women had death and 14% of the respondents (7 male and 4 female) revealed that women had severe injuries due to physical violence.

4. Strategies for Prevention

- To remove or reduce gender - based violence the respondents of the camp believed that increasing women's access to income and productive resources help in combating gender - based violence. For that it is also important to engage men and boys towards awareness about gender - based violence.
- The respondents of the camp felt that women should be given different opportunities to earn and to engage them in employments to reduce gender - based violence. By educating the women and men in the camp it can be removed and levels of poverty should be reduced or it should be eliminated completely.
- Use of Alcohol and drugs should also be reduced in the camp.
- Furthering of gender equality and human rights education for everyone should be there.

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