

HARMFUL PRACTICES IN NEPAL

REPORT ON COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS



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Community perception
survey conducted with :



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Introduction

Harmful practices can be defined as persistent behaviours that discriminate on the basis of sex, gender, age, caste/ethnicity, language, religion, amongst others. They leave women and people from excluded groups at risk of violence, poorer physical and psychological health, limited educational and economic outcomes, injuries, and even death. Notably, harmful practices are not isolated or random; they stem from deeply-rooted patriarchal, social, cultural and religious norms perpetuated throughout centuries that view women, as well as lower caste groups, as inferior.

Harmful practices are prevalent and often perceived as traditional and normal in the communities in which they are practiced, however, they prevent individuals and groups from reaching their full potential. Many are denied dignity and freedoms as a result of harmful practices. Based on the results of the 2017 Community Perception Survey, the UN Country Team (UNCT) recognized harmful practices as a serious barrier to development outcomes, particularly for women and girls. These practices hinder inclusive governance and political participation, economic development, education, agricultural development, health and more, and ultimately prevent the realization of the 2030 Agenda and the principle of Leaving No One Behind.

Therefore, the UNCT established the Harmful Practices Working Group (HPWG) in 2018 to support an informed, coordinated and coherent approach to addressing harmful practices across outcome areas of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2018-2022. It is recognized by the UNCT that addressing harmful practices requires a systematic, multi-sectoral, and multi-level approach which targets structural inequality and gender discriminatory social norms.

A number of harmful practices prevail in Nepal, however the HPWG selected caste-based discrimination, menstrual restrictions including chhaupadi, child marriage, dowry, and witchcraft accusations and persecution to be covered in a literature review¹ and this survey. These practices were highlighted by the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2018) as having serious negative impacts on women and girls in Nepal. This survey report aims to shed light on five of the prevailing harmful practices in Nepal and act as resource to understand these practices further. The survey findings provide data on the way in which these harmful practices are practiced in Province 2, Karnali Province and Sudurpaschim Province and highlights how they are deeply rooted in discriminatory social norms, often founded on religious beliefs and customs. It is evident from both the survey and literature review that more in-depth studies are required to strengthen our understanding on the ways in which we can promote social norm and transformative change in an effort to eliminate harmful practices.

¹ For this survey report, definitions from the UN literature review on Harmful Practices (2020) have been used to describe the various harmful practices.

Summary of findings

The survey shows that caste-based discrimination and belief in untouchability prevails, particularly in Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces. Notably, the majority of respondents irrespective of caste, stated that there is little caste-based discrimination in access to public service facilities such as police stations, health posts or government offices. However, 13 percent of Dalit respondents, who had not reported cases of discrimination that they had faced, had not done so because they felt they would not be believed by the police.

Menstrual restrictions are prevalent across the three Provinces covered in the survey, with more than 90 percent of respondents stating that female family members practice some form of restriction while menstruating. The survey confirms that chhaupadi is widely practiced in Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces with 52 percent of respondents stating that chhaupadi is practiced in their communities. The responses indicate that senior members of the core family have a decisive role in enforcing the continued practice of chhaupadi.

According to 56 percent of respondents, marriage between individuals under the age of 20 occurred in their communities. When asked why parents would marry their children young, the most common response was fear of elopement (90 percent). The responses did indicate a link between dowry and early marriage, with 20 percent indicating lower dowry payments as the motivation for marrying daughters early. While 60 percent of respondents believed that child marriage had a negative impact on the health of girls/women.

96 percent of respondents in Province 2 said that dowry is common in their communities as compared to approximately 1 percent in Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces. Dowry is seen to place a high economic burden on the families of the brides and the majority of respondents stated that dowry payments motivated families to marry their daughters at an early age.

Belief in witchcraft was highest amongst respondents in Province 2 with 17 percent of respondents in the Province indicating that they were aware of witchcraft accusations and persecution that had happened in their communities. Less than two percent of all respondents thought that victims/survivors of witchcraft accusations and persecution would report the incidents to the police.

Methodology

The Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project, referred to as the CFP, is an innovative community engagement project, initiated during the response to the Nepal Earthquake 2015, which uses statistically significant data collection to understand communities' perspectives and give them a voice in the decision-making process.

In 2017, the CFP carried out a community perception survey covering 1,800 households from the least developed areas of Nepal. The survey measured community perceptions around the thematic areas addressed in the UNDAF 2018-2022. The survey was designed to provide the UNCT with a better understanding of the perspectives of the communities it aims to serve through the UNDAF and to ensure that programming is responsive to the diverse needs of these communities.

The 2017 survey brought to light the prevalence of certain harmful practices and the sometimes drastic differences in practice between villages in close proximity to one another. For example, while in one village, the teachers banned girls from attending school during menstruation, in another village, the practice of isolating women during menstruation, which used to be common, had been all but eradicated over the past year. The survey highlighted how harmful practices are a serious barrier to equality in development outcomes, particularly for women and girls. The UNCT recognized the need to have a stronger understanding of harmful practices and their impacts on development.

In 2018, CFP received a grant from the UN Development Operation Coordination Office. The purpose of this grant was to understand community perceptions on harmful practices and how these practices impact development interventions.

This study has a total sample size of 4,000 households. The samples were collected from 16 districts of Province 2, Karnali Province and Sudhuraschim Province. 2,000 samples were

collected from eight districts of Province 2 and 2,000 sample were collected from eight districts Karnali and Sudhuraschim Provinces. The districts were randomly selected using Excel (random start). The districts were initially formed into clusters as per the Human Development Index (HDI).

- Cluster 1 consists of districts with HDI 0.455-0.499
- Cluster 2 consists of districts with HDI 0.401-0.449
- Cluster 3 consists of districts with HDI 0.364-0.400

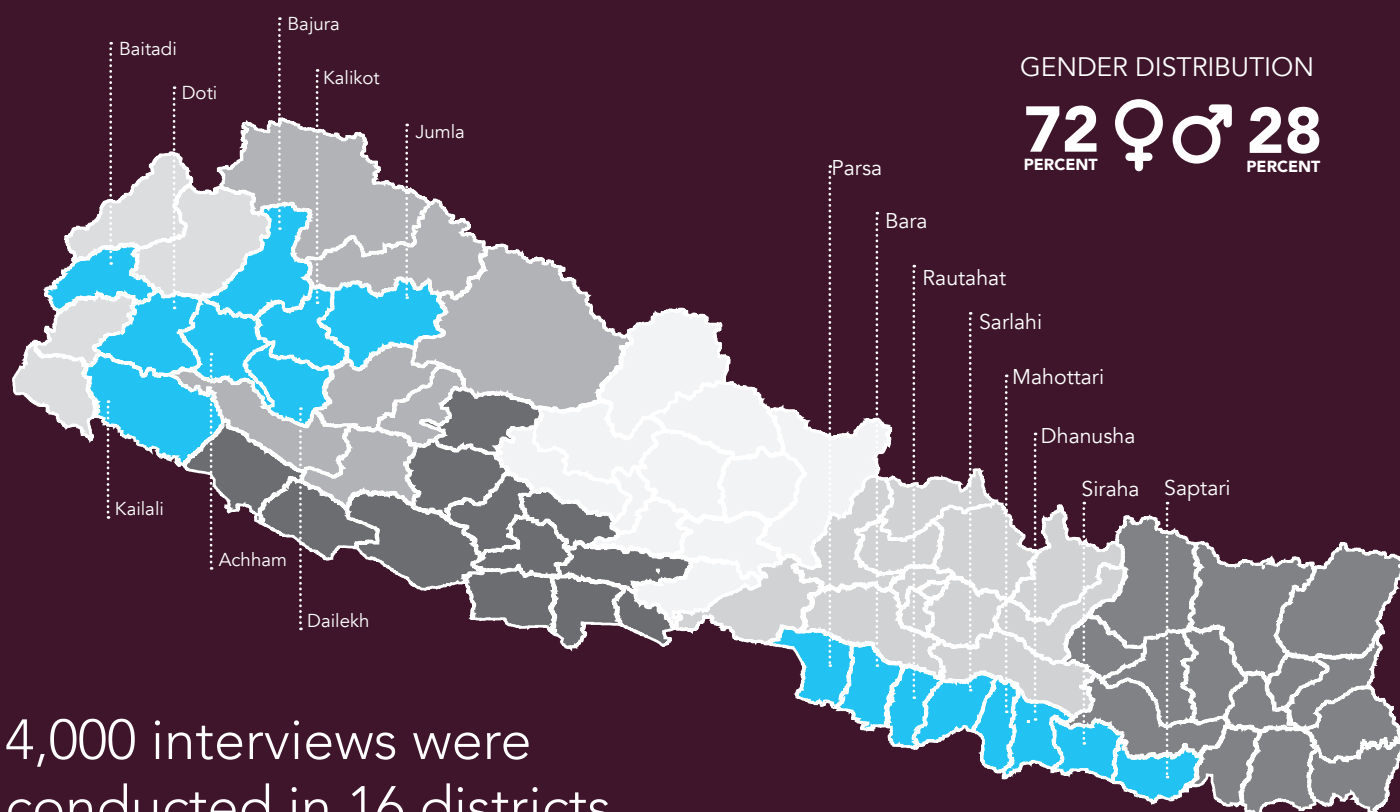
For the data collection, the population proportional to size sampling method was used. In each district, the ward level (a lowest level of administrative boundary) was identified as the primary sampling unit. The wards were randomly selected, and ten households were selected from each ward.

At the ward level, enumerators entered the community, identified a common spot (schools, health posts, water source), spun the spin at that spot, and walked in the direction it pointed to until they came to a house. At the first house they asked to conduct the survey. Once the first house was completed, they left the house, turned right, skipped the first house they encountered and then completed another survey at the second house. The process was repeated until 10 samples were obtained in the ward.

In each household, enumerators asked to interview a different family member in order to ensure a variety in demographics in the sample. Only household members above 15 years of age were considered eligible to participate. Given the sensitive and culturally embedded nature of harmful practices, the questionnaires and tools were guided by the findings of prior anthropological research on harmful practices and a pilot study was done to test the questionnaires and methodology before conducting the actual survey.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

72  28 
PERCENT PERCENT



4,000 interviews were conducted in 16 districts

Distribution by caste/ethnicity

Hill/Mountain Brahmin/Chhetri	30%
Hill/Mountain Dalit	13%
Hill/Mountain Janajati	3%
Muslim	5%
Terai Janajati	13%
Terai/Madhesi Brahman/Chhetri	2%
Terai/Madhesi Dalit	10%
Terai/Madhesi Other Caste	25%

Distribution by education

Bachelors and above	4%
Higher secondary (Grade 11-12)	8%
No education	50%
Primary level completed (Grade 1-5)	13%
Secondary level completed (Grade 6-9)	12%
Secondary Education Examination (SEE) (Grade 10)	13%

Distribution by age

15-24	23%
25-39	35%
40-54	26%
55+	17%

In your opinion, are there any customary practices* in your community?

Yes	95%
No	5%

What are the customary practices* which cause harm to some groups/people?

Caste-based discrimination	98%
Dowry	82%
Marriage under the age of 20	81%
Witchcraft accusations and persecution	78%
Chhaupadi	45%

* The term "harmful practice" was not used during data collection as the practices among certain communities are considered traditional but not harmful

DEFINITION

The caste system is a social stratification system based on perceived ritual impurity. Caste is hierarchical, persistent, hereditary, rooted in concepts of perceived ritual pollution and impurity, and it segregates society by putting restrictions individuals, such as on occupation and who one can marry. There are 125 reported caste/ethnic groups in Nepal, which can be classified into a few broad categories, those perceived as high caste Hindus (Brahman and Chhetri), other ethnic groups (Janajati) and low caste groups (Dalit).

The caste system affects everyday life for Nepalis in a variety of ways. Caste-based discrimination can take many different forms and affects nearly all aspects of life. Depending on one's caste, there are rules in terms of the food people can eat, the water sources/taps they can use, the places they can enter, who they can marry and the occupations they can have. Those most vulnerable to caste-based discrimination include those perceived as middle and low castes, especially Dalits, those living in areas of the country with the lowest HDI, and those living in the Terai and hills.

While caste-based discrimination continues to be widespread in Nepal, an accurate understanding of the scope of the issue is still unknown. The numbers available grossly underestimate the true prevalence of caste-based discrimination, as incidents often go unreported.

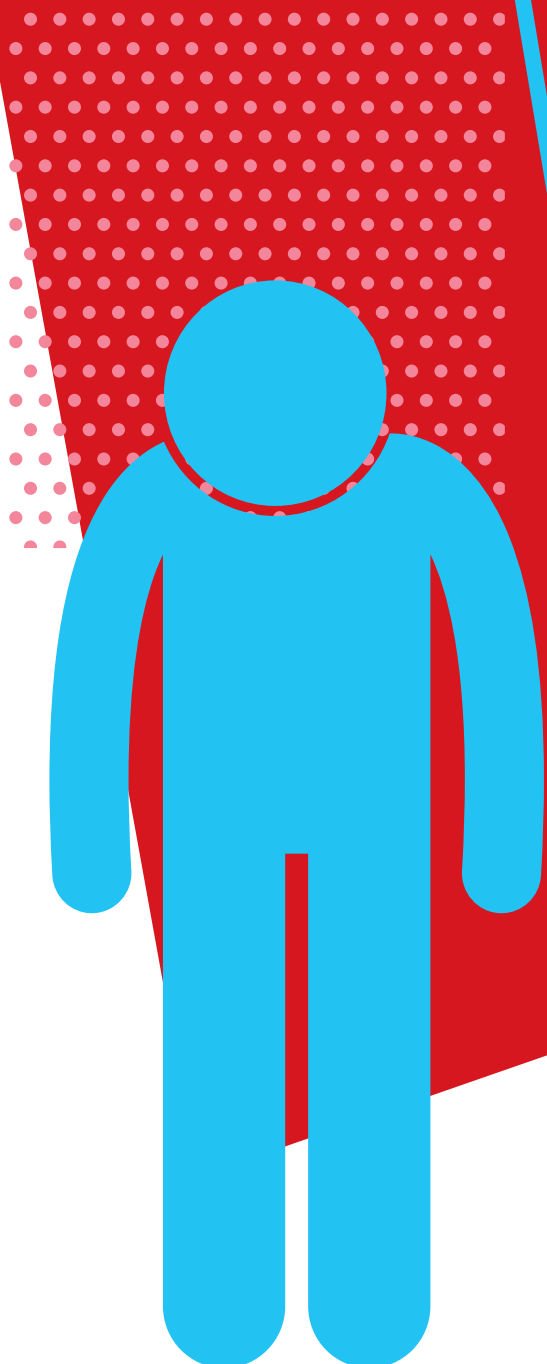
In 2018, the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act criminalized untouchability, exclusion, and restriction on the basis of caste and introduced a penalty of imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to 200,000 rupees (USD 2,000) for perpetrators.

"There should be no discrimination based on caste. However, our parents say that Dalit should be restricted from coming to our house. It's not just our parents, the whole community is doing this, so how can it be wrong?"

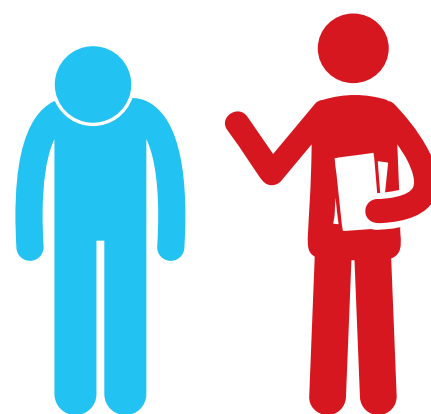
- Woman, Ganeshnath Charnath- 4, Dhanusha, Province 2

SECTION I

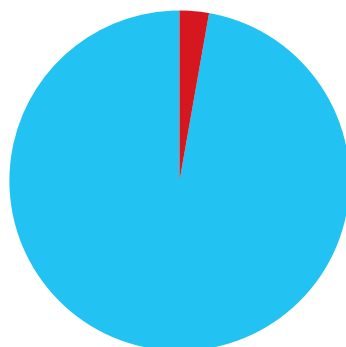
CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION



The survey highlighted how common caste-based discrimination is in Nepal, with 97 percent of respondents stating that discrimination based on caste occurred in their communities. A large proportion of respondents from those perceived as higher castes believed in untouchability and impurity. Nearly 50 percent of respondents stated that Dalits would not be allowed into the houses of non-Dalits in their communities, with the percentage being 54 in Karnali and Sudurpashchim Provinces and 46 in Province 2.

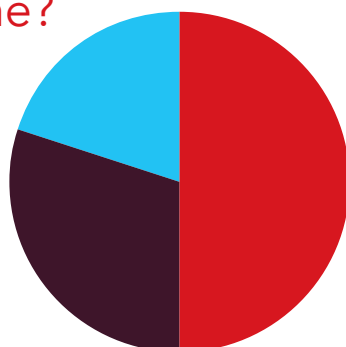


1. Is there caste-based discrimination in your community?



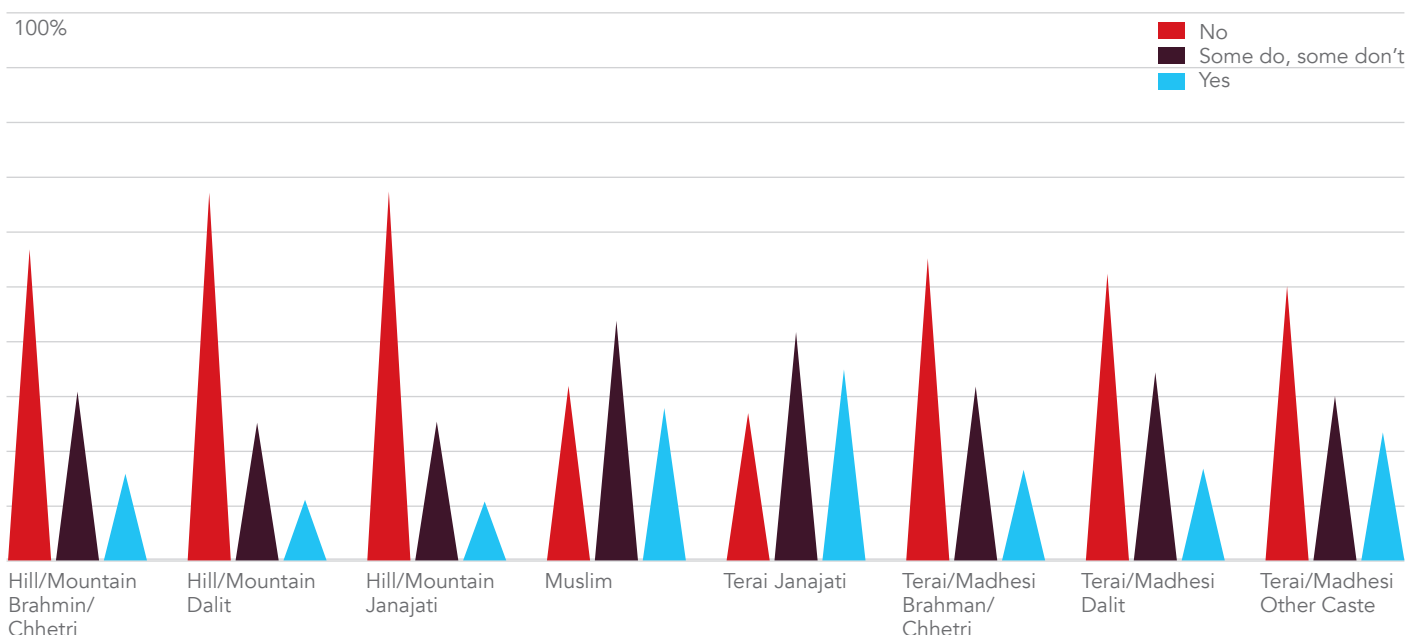
Yes (97%)
No (3%)

2. Do non-Dalit persons allow Dalit persons to enter their home?



No (50%)
Some do, some don't (31%)
Yes (20%)

2.1 Above responses disaggregated by caste and ethnicity



3. The experience of caste-based discrimination amongst Dalit respondents

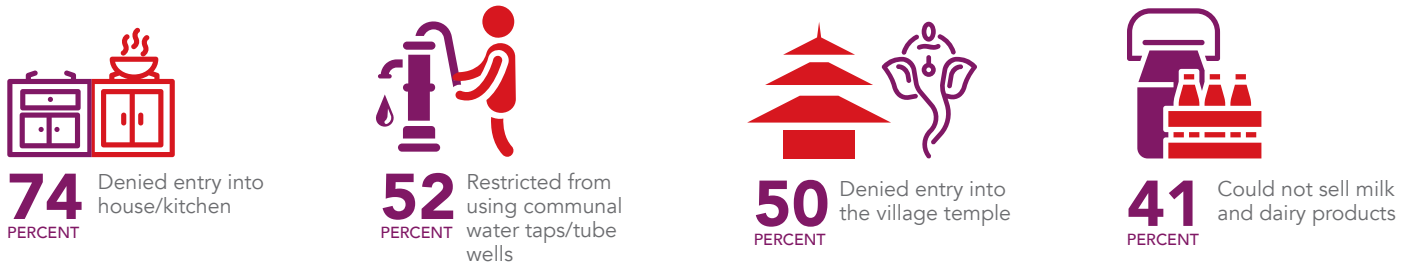
A total of 911 Dalit respondents took part in the survey and more than half of them (54 percent) reported to have experienced discrimination based on their caste within the last year. This included being denied entry into the house/kitchen of those perceived as higher caste families (74 percent), restricted from using communal water taps/tube wells (52 percent) and being denied entry into village temples (50 percent).

The majority of those who had experienced discrimination, stated that they had never filed a case in the ward office or police station against the alleged perpetrators. The lack of reporting was most commonly explained (70 percent) by not wanting to cause problems in the community in which they lived. However, it was significant that more than 23 percent stated that they did not know how to report the incident to the authorities.



54 PERCENT reported that they experienced caste based discrimination

3.1 What types of caste-based discrimination have you experienced?

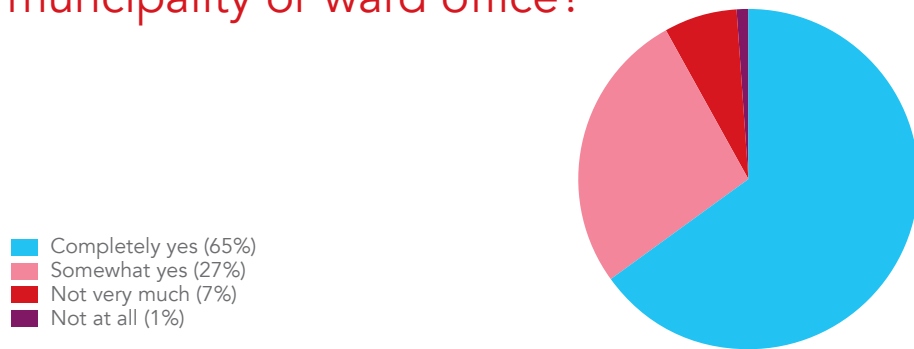


3.2 Why did you not file the case?

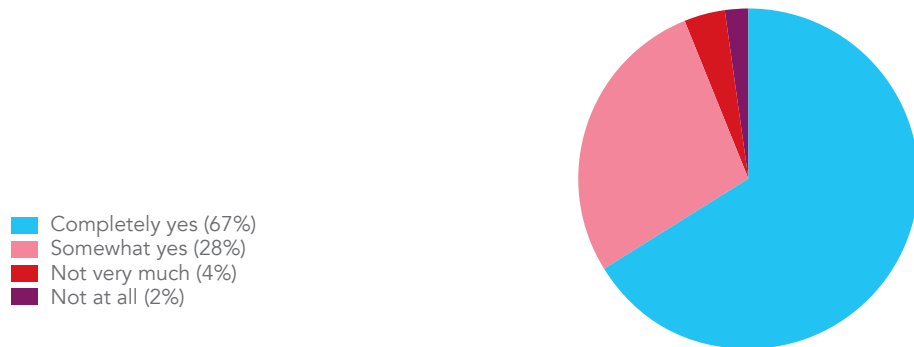


When all of the respondents were asked whether Dalit individuals have equal access to services in police stations, government health institutions and municipality or ward offices, the majority of respondents stated that there was no discrimination. It is interesting to note that there was no significant difference in responses disaggregated by caste. Above 90 percent Dalit respondents from Hill/mountain and Terai/madeshi stated that there are no form of discrimination in access to public facilities. However, considering that 13 percent of Dalit respondents who had faced discrimination had not reported the incidents, as they thought they would not be believed by the authorities, further probing into this question would be required.

4. Do you think Dalit and non-Dalit have equal access to services provided by municipality or ward office?



5. Do you think Dalit and non-Dalit have equal access to police stations?



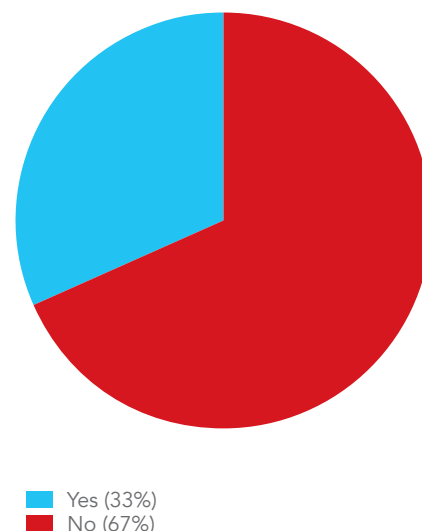
6. Do you think that the Dalit community have equal access to government health institutions?



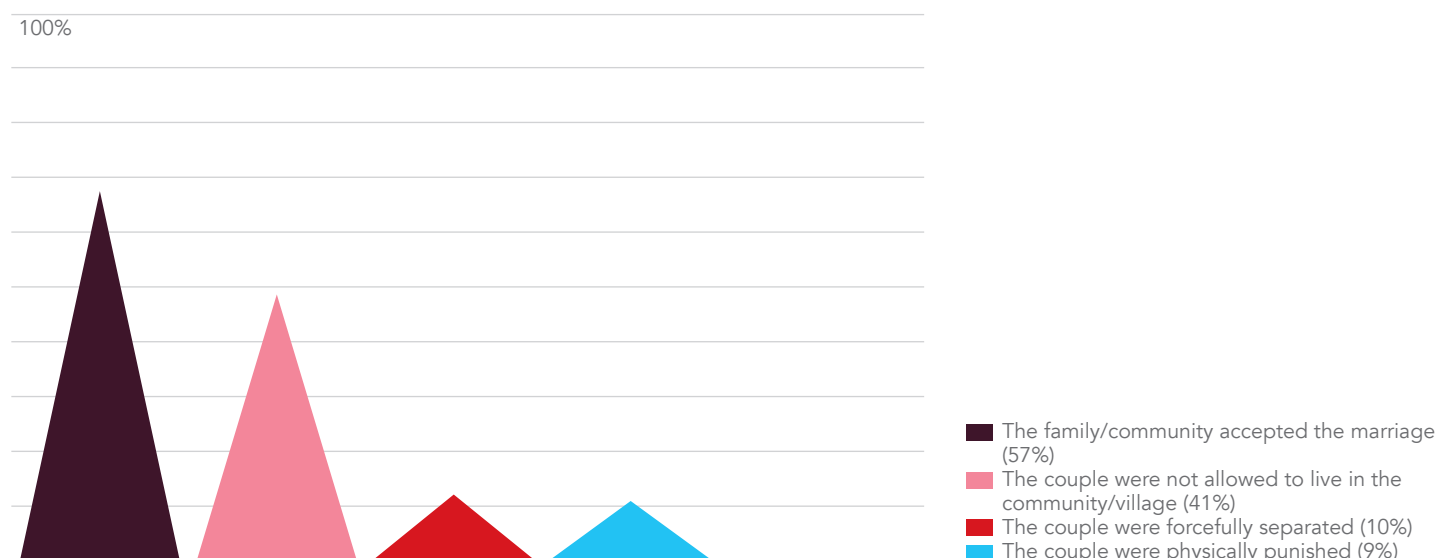
7. Do marriages between Dalit and non-Dalit individuals occur in your community?

The majority of respondents (67 percent) reported that inter-caste marriages between Dalit and non-Dalit individuals did not occur in their communities.

The focus groups discussions highlighted that although communities do not accept inter-caste couples immediately, families slowly come to accept the marriage. In the discussions participants explained that families often teach their children to not marry outside of their caste as they would be disowned. When asked how the couple had been treated in their communities, 41 percent stated that the couple had not been allowed to continue living the community/village, 10 percent stated that the couple was forcefully separated and nine percent stated that the couple had been punished physically.



7.1 How did the family and community react to the marriage?

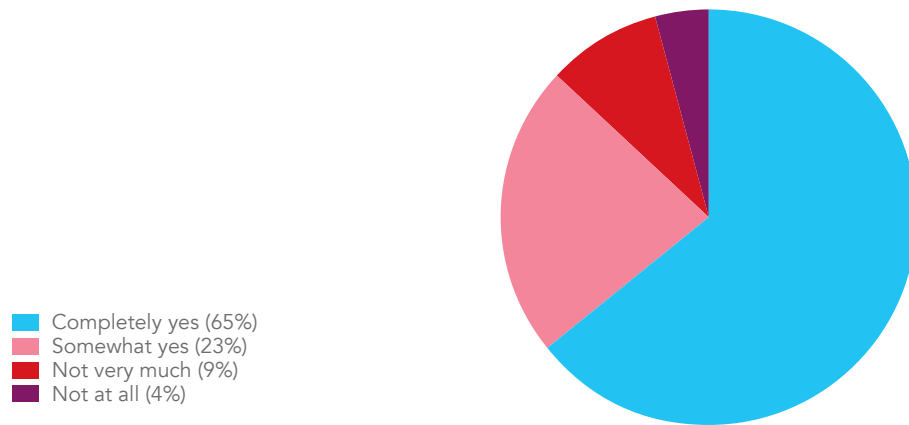


8. Have there been any cases of caste-related conflict between Dalits and non-Dalits in the last year?

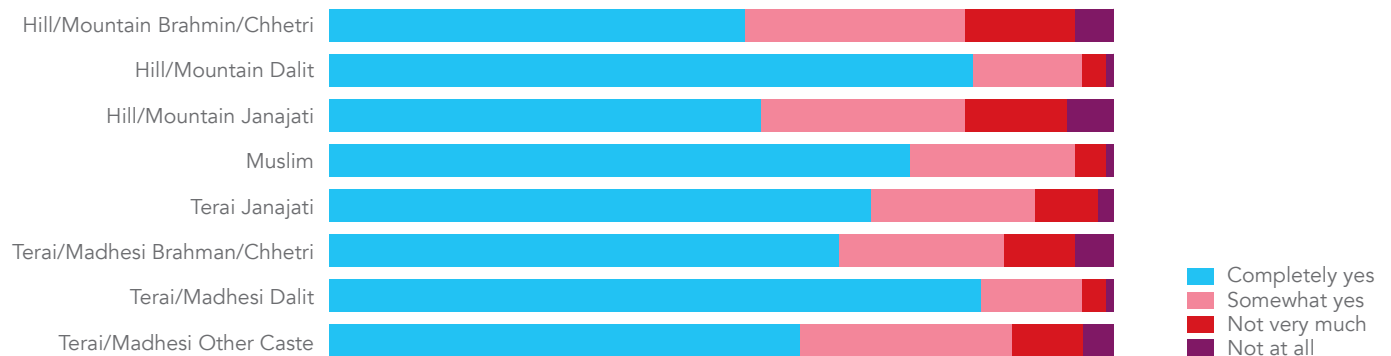
While the vast majority of respondents said that there had been no incidents of conflict between Dalit and non-Dalit community members, 18 percent stated that an incident had occurred in the last year. This was more common in Province 2 (20 percent). However, more Dalit respondents (22 percent of hill/Mountain Dalits and 24 percent of Terai/Madhese Dalits) stated that caste related conflict had occurred in the past year than Karnali and Sudhuraschim Province (14 percent).

9. Do you think that caste-based discrimination needs to be abolished?

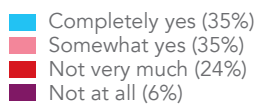
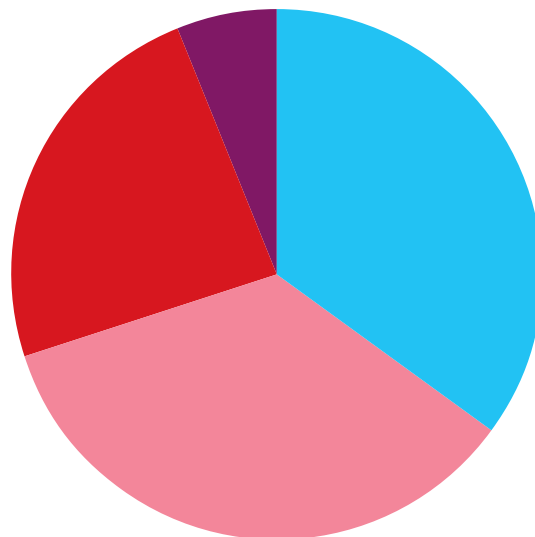
There are significant differences in the responses between castes when asked whether discrimination based on caste needs to be abolished. While 82 percent of Dalit respondents responded that they completely agree on the need to abolish discrimination, this was only 53 percent for those from high hill castes. Only 38 percent of Dalit respondents believed that the caste system can be abolished immediately (see question 10).



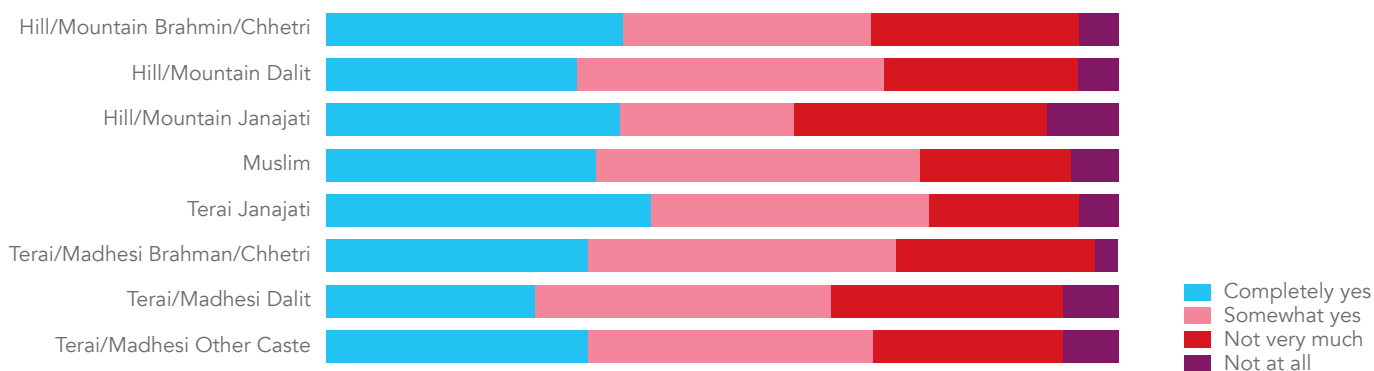
9.1 Above responses disaggregated by caste and ethnicity



10. Do you think that caste-based discrimination can be abolished?



10.1 Above responses disaggregated by caste and ethnicity



Enumerator taking interview.

DEFINITION

In Nepal, attitudes and beliefs about menstruation place restrictions on women and girls, as menstrual blood is seen as a source of pollution. Deeply rooted in culture and religion, these restrictions stem from an impurity sentiment that originates from the Hindu religion. Menstrual restrictions include being prevented from: touching other people and certain objects; entering the kitchen; entering holy spaces; attending religious functions; using communal water taps; and consuming dairy products.

Of the different forms of menstrual restrictions in Nepal, chhaupadi is the most extreme form. Chhaupadi (“chhau” (untouchable or unclean), and “padi” (being or becoming)), a form of menstrual exile practiced in Nepal, is a Hindu tradition where women and girls sleep in small huts (chhaugoth) or animal sheds during menstruation and immediately after child birth. The chhaugoth is often unhygienic, exposed, unsafe and lacking basic necessities. Those who practice chhaupadi are often Hindu, from high (Brahman, Chhetri) and low castes (Dalit), living in the hills or mountains, especially in mid or far-west Nepal.

The practice of menstrual restrictions, including chhaupadi, is seen as a violation of women’s human rights and has been criminalized in Nepal.

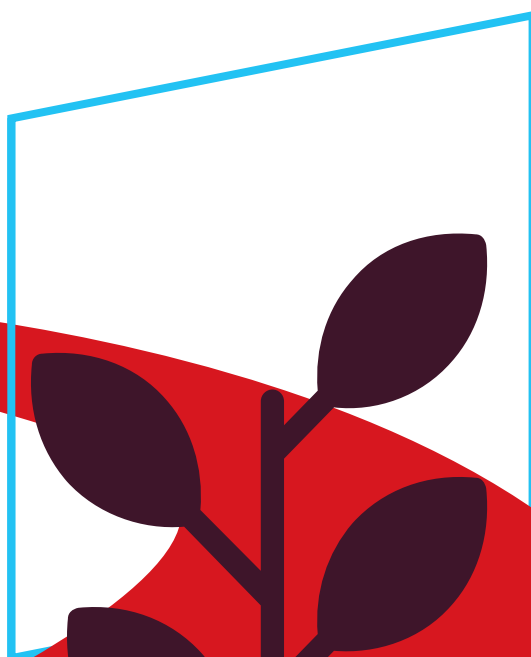
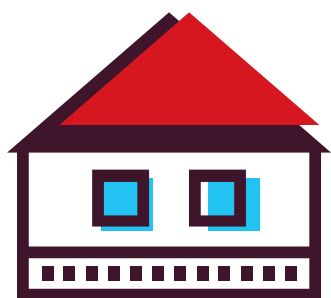
Chhaupadi has been illegal since 2005. In August 2017 (implemented 2018), the Nepal Parliament passed the Penal Code Act, criminalizing any form of discrimination, untouchability or inhuman treatment based on menstruation or following childbirth. The Code imposes a fine of 3,000 rupees (USD 30) or a three-month jail sentence for anyone forcing a woman or girl to follow the restrictions.

“I stay in shed for five days. I am not allowed to use the toilet, so I have to go to the river during period. ”

– Woman, Safebagar, Achham, Sudhur Paschim Province

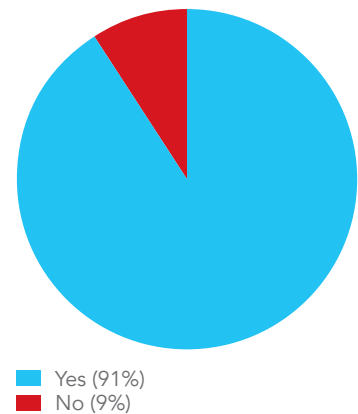
SECTION II

MENSTRUAL RESTRICTIONS, INCLUDING CHHAUPADI

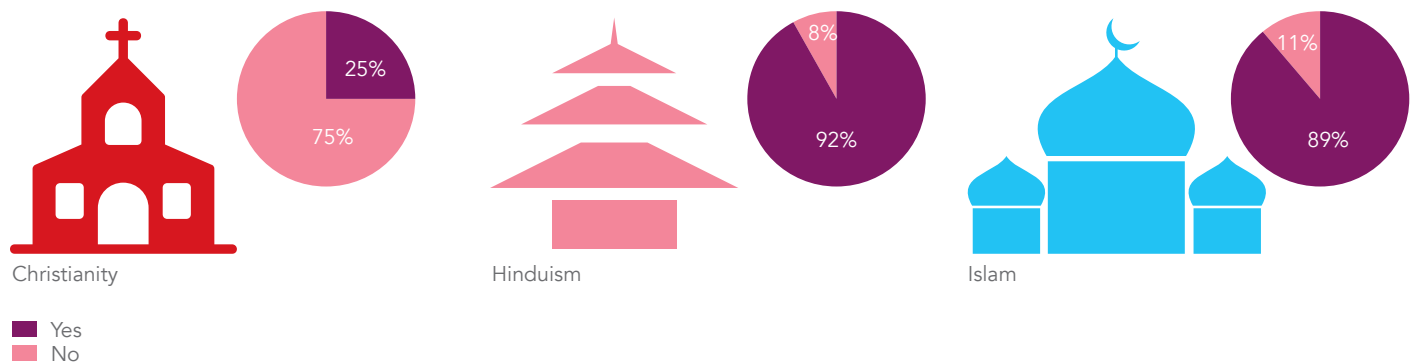


11. Are there any restrictions for female family members when they are menstruating?

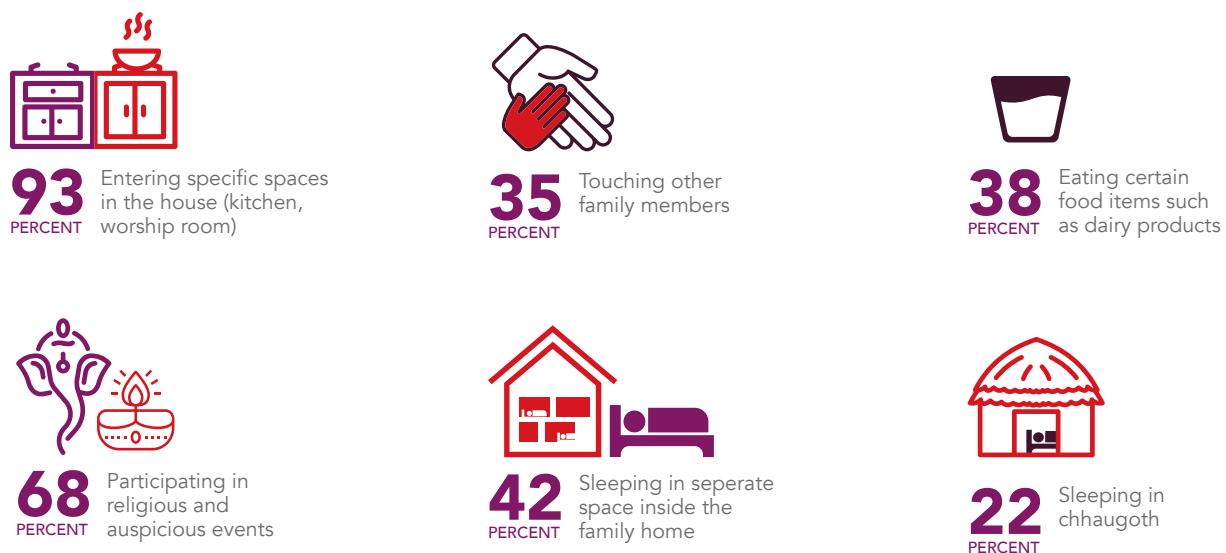
In most households (91 percent) across all 16 districts, some form of restriction was practiced by female family members during menstruation in most households (91 percent). On average these were continued for five days. Interestingly, menstrual restrictions were practiced across households irrespective of religion, with 25 percent and 89 percent of Christian and Muslim households practicing respectively. The most common form of restriction was denying entry into certain rooms in the household including the kitchen and worship rooms (93 percent), followed by not being allowed to participate in religious ceremonies (68 percent). Of those households in which restrictions were practiced, 42 percent required women/girls to sleep in a separate room within the home during menstruation, while 22 percent reported that women/girls slept in the chhaugoth.



11.1 Above responses disaggregated by religion



11.2 What are the restrictions enforced on girls/women during menstruation?



11.3 What are the reasons for observing such restrictions?

92
PERCENT
Conformity to traditional beliefs

21
PERCENT
Maintaining bodily hygiene

15
PERCENT
Avoiding possible calamities and misfortune to the family and/or community



83
PERCENT
Not to anger deities (religion)

16
PERCENT
Local traditional healer (dhami/jhakri) will get sick if the practice is not upheld ¹

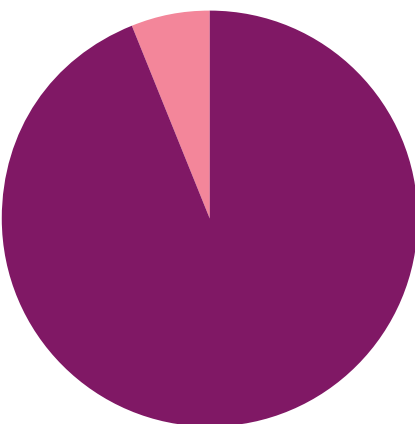
13
PERCENT
Social Pressure

12. Is chhaupadi practiced in your community?

Chhaupadi continues to be practiced in Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces, with 52 percent of respondents stating that chhaupadi was common in their communities.

A large majority of the respondents identified “religious beliefs” as the main reason for the practice continuing.

12.1 In your opinion, what are the reasons behind upholding the chhaupadi practice?



94
PERCENT
religious reasons

*“I take a longer route to school when I have my period because there is a temple on the way”
– Woman in Naumule, Dailekh, Karnali Province*

¹ Dhami/Jhakri are powerful actors in Nepali communities, especially when it comes to diagnosing illnesses and providing answers for understanding negative events in the lives community members.

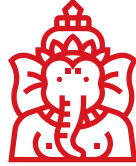
13. Do your family practice chhaupadi at home?

Of the 1,043 respondents who reported the practice of chhaupadi in their community, 80 percent reported the practice chhaupadi taking place within their families. Continued practice was explained by tradition (89 percent), fear of polluting local deities (84 percent), and community rules (61 percent).

13.1 Why is this practiced?



89 Traditional practice
PERCENT

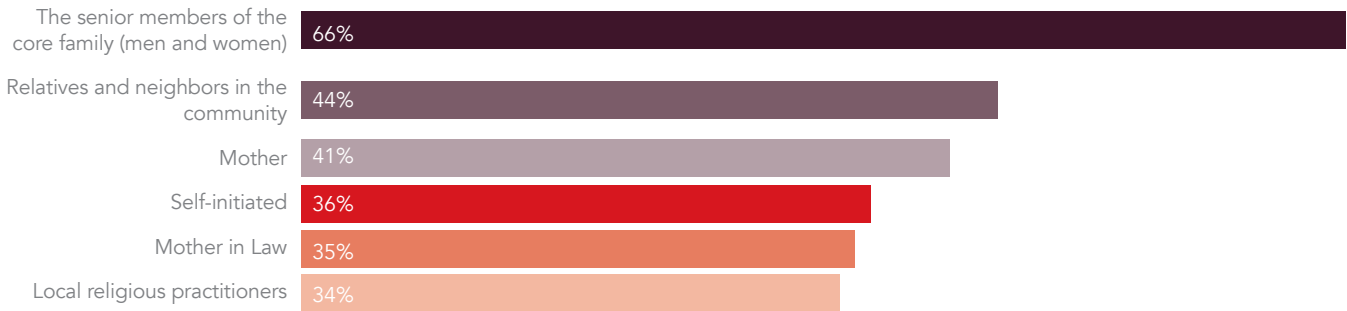


84 Fear of polluting deities
PERCENT



61 Community Rules
PERCENT

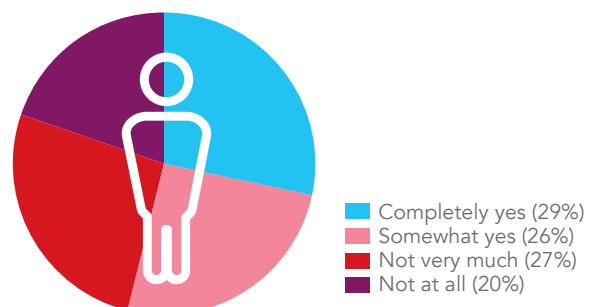
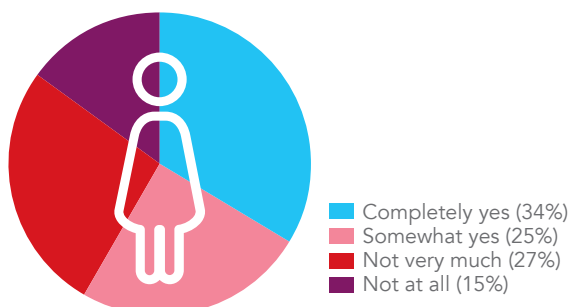
13.2 Who has the decisive role in enforcing chhaupadi?



13.3 What are the consequences of not following chhaupadi?

When asked of the possible consequences of not following chhaupadi, 45 percent of respondents reported that religious leaders/healers would fall ill and cause harm to their families, while 41 percent thought that the women's families would face ill fortune if women did not stay in the chhaugoth. Furthermore, 32 percent of respondents completely agreed that chhaupadi was a necessary practice, but 49 percent of respondent age 15-24 disagree with the statement. This may indicate that the practice is being questioned by the younger generation. This was more common response amongst women than men.

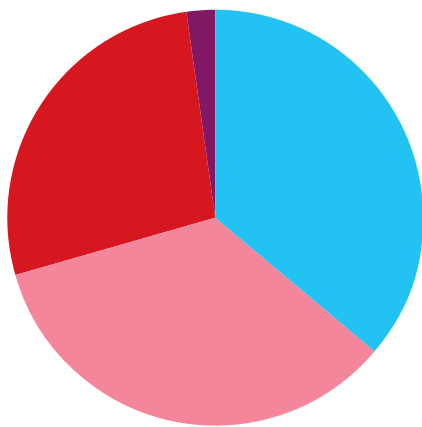
14. Do you think chhaupadi is a necessary customary practice?



15. Experiences of women practicing chhaupadi

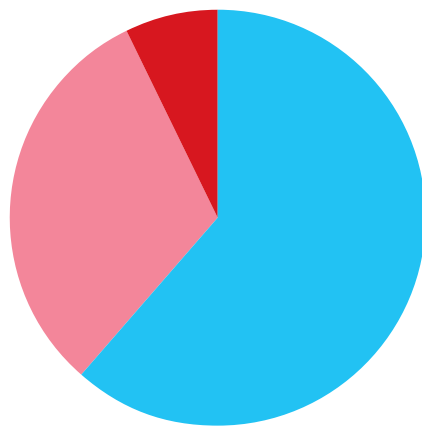
A total of 742 female respondents said that they practiced chhaupadi, with 35 percent of them stating that they worried about sleeping in the chhaugoth. Ten percent said they had become ill during the past year due to the poor conditions in the chhaugoth and of these 35 percent stated that they had not received any medical treatment while staying in the chhaugoth. More than half of these women (61 percent) said they had stayed in the chhaugoth after childbirth with their new-born and 17 percent had received different (no dairy products) or limited food while in the chhaugoth.

15.1 Do you worry when you have to live in the chhaugoth?



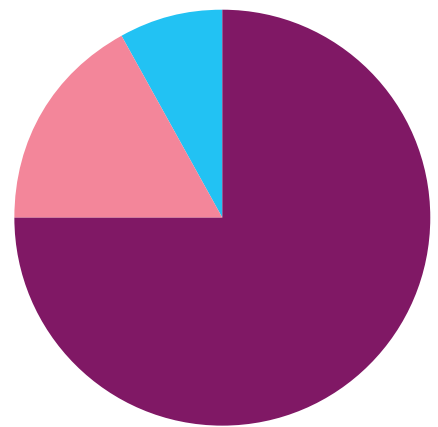
Always (27%)
Sometimes (36%)
Never (34%)
No answer (2%)

15.2 Do you bring your infant babies in the chhaugoth during your period?



Always (61%)
Sometimes (31%)
Never (7%)

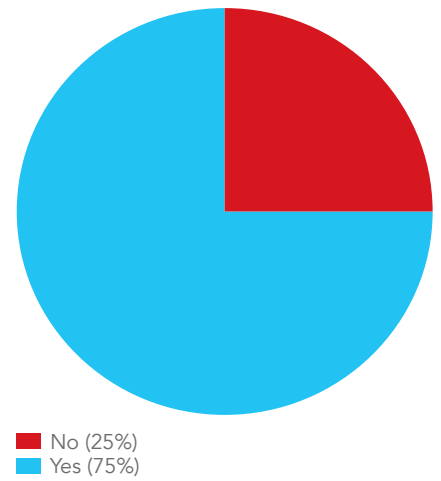
15.3 Do your family provide the same food they eat when you lived in the chhaugoth?



Yes (75%)
I get different or limited food (17%)
No answer (8%)

16. Do you know that chhaupadi is illegal?

75 percent of the respondent knew that chhaupadi has been criminalized in Nepal, indicating the deep rooted social norms that allow for the continuation of the practice despite it being prohibited by law. Most respondents had heard of the criminalization through the television/radio (69 percent), from female community health volunteers (48 percent) and from interaction programmes organized by NGOs (40 percent).



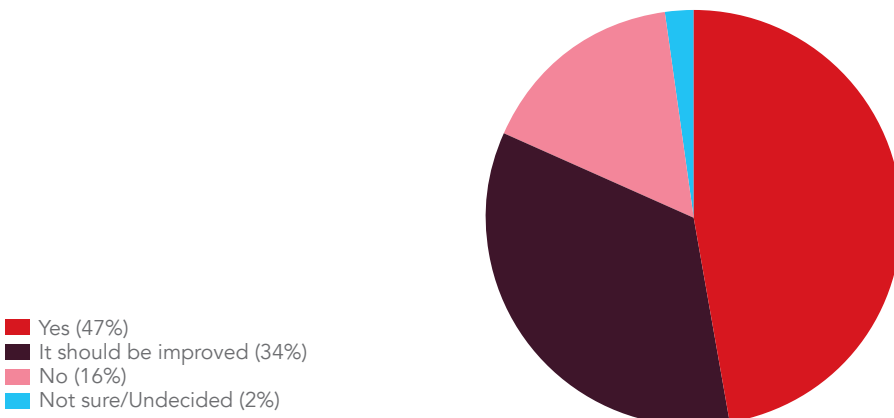
16.1 Main source of information



17. Do you think chhaupadi needs to be abolished?

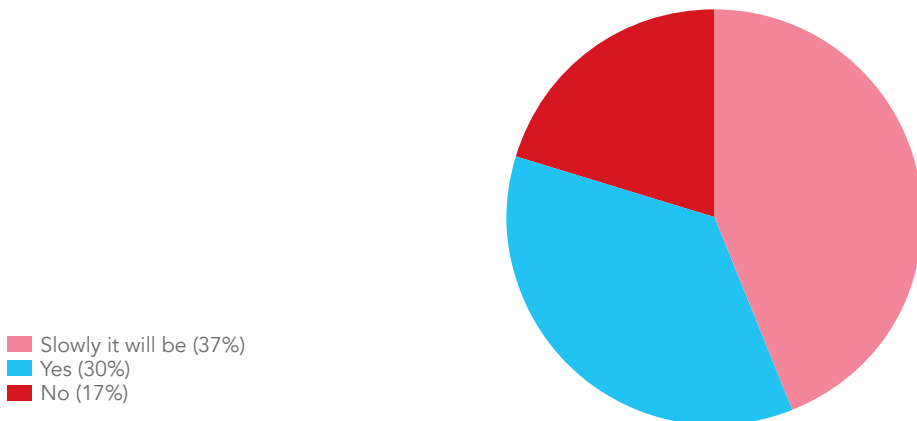
Of the 1,043 respondents who indicated that chhaupadi is practiced in their community, 47 percent stated that chhaupadi needs to be abolished of whom 71 percent of respondent were female, 37 percent were 15-24 and 36 percent were 25-39 years of age, whereas 34 percent responded that chhaugoths should be improved (proper ventilation, doors and cleanliness).

A total of 16 percent responded that chhaupadi does not need to be abolished, of whom 74 percent of respondents were female, 30 percent above 55, 12 percent from 15-24 years of age.



18. Do you think the practice of chhaupadi can be abolished?

When asked whether chhaupadi can be eliminated, 30 percent of respondents stated it could be. Interestingly, 37 percent of the respondents stated that they believe the practice will slowly be abolished.



Beyond Numbers

“When I got my first period at the age of 14, I decided not to tell anyone, fearing banishment from the house. I continued with my daily chores and also cooked dinner for my family. All of us ate together.

But as soon as my father finished his meal, he complained about feeling nauseated and ill. Unaware of what had happened, we took him to the nearest health post. The doctor could not diagnose his illness and sent us home without prescribing any medication.

Following the event, we visited a traditional healer (dhami/jhakri). After examining my father, the healer claimed that he had fallen sick because of eating food touched by someone menstruating. The healer chanted mantras and performed a religious act to cure my father. I was shocked to hear this and decided to check if his assertion was true. Months later, I got my period for the second time. Like before I carried on with my daily chores and was happy to see that nothing happened to my father.

During my third and fourth period I continued the experiment. Sadly, both times my father fell sick soon after he finished eating the food. We took him to the healer only to hear the same conclusion. According to him, an ancestral deity had cursed my father because he was eating food prepared by a menstruating woman. In my village, menstruation is considered highly impure. I still think it is mere superstition, but seeing my father affected changed by belief. From that time onward, I have been strictly following menstrual restrictions and practicing chhaupadi.”



DEFINITION

Generally, child marriage or early marriage is defined as a formal or informal union where one or both parties are under the age of 18. In the context of Nepal, however, the legal age for marriage is 20 years old for both girls and boys (Civil Code, 2017). In Nepal, child marriage can be arranged or forced. As well as families and communities arranging marriages for children, current evidence points to an increase in a particular type of child marriage, which is self-initiated marriage, or elopement.

Under the Penal Code (2017), any person involved in solemnizing a marriage between individuals under 20 can be punished by law with a sentence of up to three-years imprisonment and a fine of up to 30,000 rupees (300 USD), with more severe sentencing and fines the younger the child.

"I will encourage my younger brother to get married only after he is of the right age and is settled in his life."

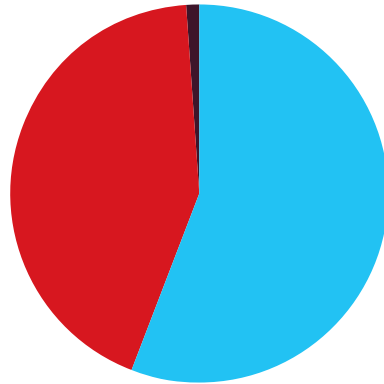
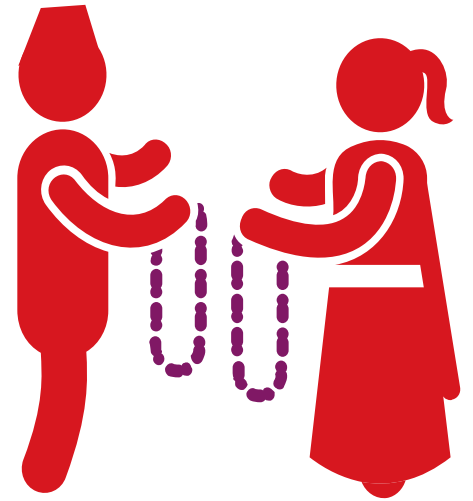
*- Hima gaunpalika,
Jumla, Karnali Province*

SECTION III

CHILD MARRIAGE

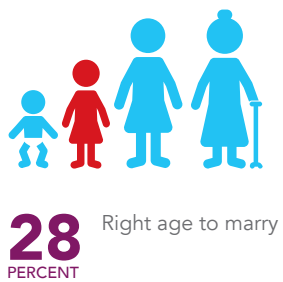


19. Do marriages between individuals under the age of 20 occur in your community?

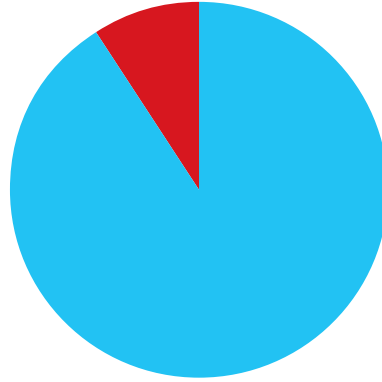


■ Yes (56%)
■ No (43%)
■ Don't know (1%)

19.1 Why do parents marry off their children at a young age?



20. Does elopement happen in your community?

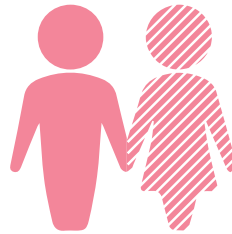


■ Yes (91%)
■ No (9%)

20.1 What do you think is the major reason for elopement?



87 Social media
PERCENT



69 Inter-caste marriage
PERCENT

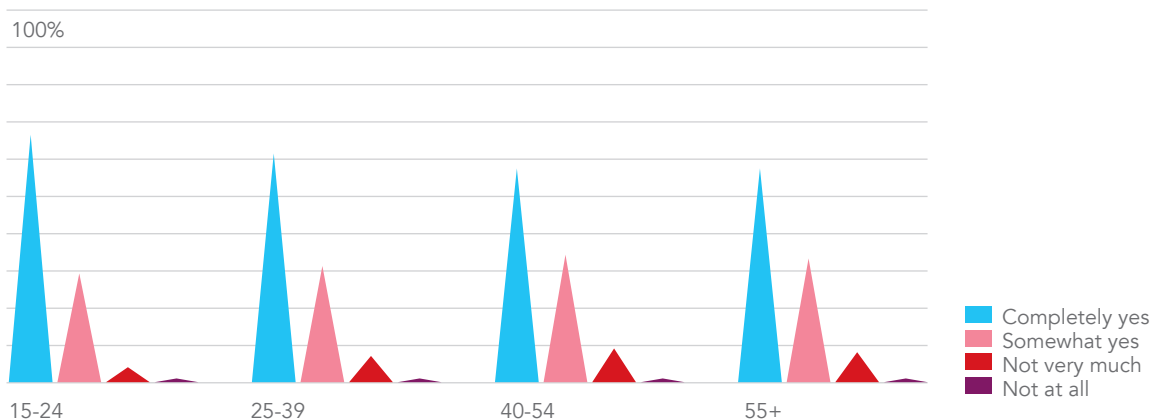


67 Absence of approval from parents
PERCENT

21. Do you think early marriage impacts the health of women and girls?

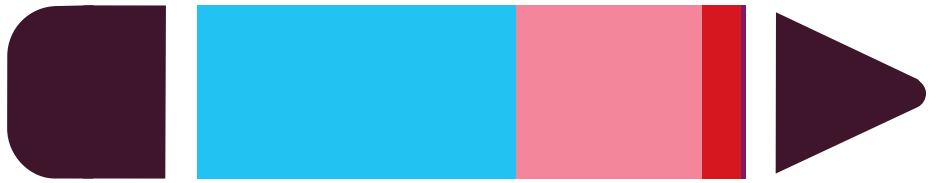
60 percent of the respondents completely agreed that women/ girls who marry at an early age will face health-related problems, in particular during pregnancy and childbirth.

21.1 Above responses disaggregated by age



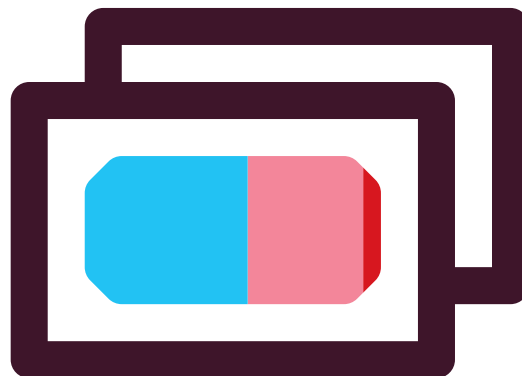
22. Do you think girls who marry at a young age are more likely to drop out of school?

Completely yes (58%)
Somewhat yes (34%)
Not very much (7%)
Not at all (1%)



23. Do you think girls who marry at a young age will be economically dependent on their husband?

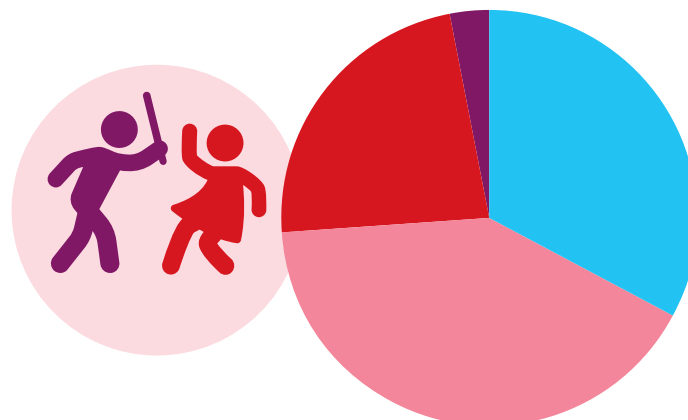
Completely yes (55%)
Somewhat yes (39%)
Not very much (6%)



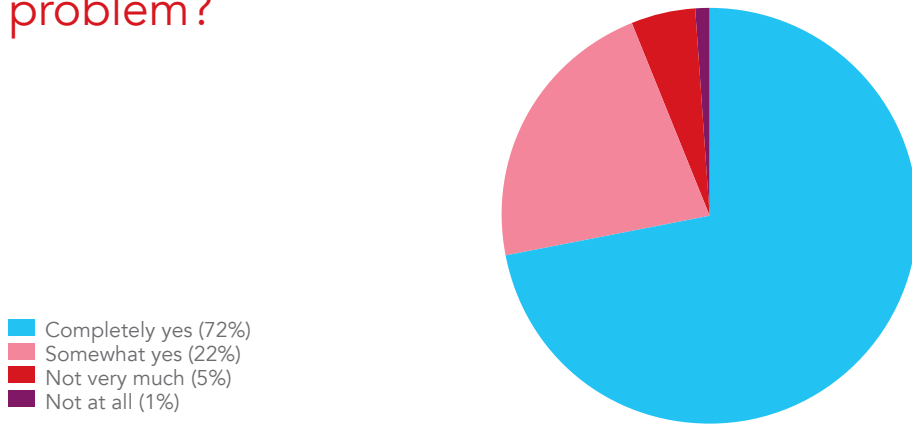
24. Do you think early marriage increases the likelihood of domestic violence and abuse?

Out of 4,000 respondents, 26 percent do not agree much or do not agree at all with the statement that girls who marry at young ages are more at the risk of domestic violence and abuses. More female respondents (76 percent) than male respondents (65 percent) agreed with the statement.

Completely yes (33%)
Somewhat yes (41%)
Not very much (23%)
Not at all (3%)

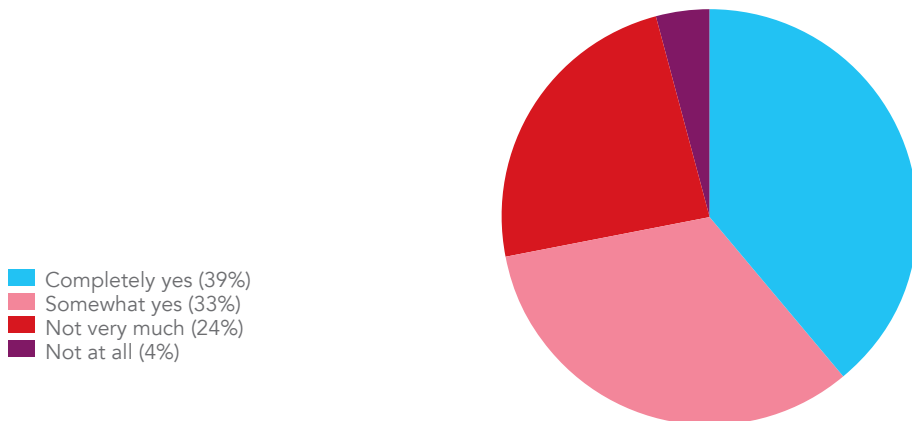


25. Do you think child marriage is a social problem?



26. Do you think child marriage can be stopped?

The majority of respondents (72 percent) agreed that child marriage can be stopped. Interestingly, only one third of the respondents believe that it can be stopped now.



Beyond Numbers

In her early teenage years, Seema Badi (name changed) eloped and married her now husband Ram Badi (name changed), who was two-classes senior to her in school. Her mother initially brought Seema back from Ram's house, asking her to focus on her education. To her mother's dismay, Seema left for the second time to be with her husband. Seema stated that she wanted to escape from poverty, discriminatory social norms and avoid being forcibly married to a stranger.

"My mother was giving birth every year, and I had to support her either by babysitting my siblings or doing the household chores. At school, I faced discrimination from my peers and my teachers for being a 'Badi³ girl'" lamented Seema. Recalling one of the incidents in school she said, "one day a big commotion took place in my class when I accidentally touched my classmate's tiffin box. My classmate belonged to the upper-caste, and for that reason only, my teacher scolded me in front of my peers. That very moment, I lost faith in our education system and I tore my books in front of my teacher and left the class. I never returned to the class again."

Seema is now 21 and a mother to an 8-year-old girl. Her husband is working in the Gulf to support the family and to pay for their daughter's education. She, however, stated that she could have achieved more had she listened to her mother and not eloped. Societal pressure was one of the factors that constrained her: "The rumor about me eloping with my boyfriend had already spread in the community. So, the only choice I had was to go back to the person I loved because no one would have accepted me as a wife later," shared Seema.



³ Badi is a hill Dalit community in Nepal



DEFINITION

Dowry (or dahej/tilak) is defined as the practice of a bride's family giving cash, property and/or other gifts to the bridegroom's family as a requirement for the marriage to their daughter.

Historically it was intended to provide newlyweds with security and support for meeting their basic needs, but over time the meaning and use of dowry gifts has changed. In Nepal today, dowry is a forced financial and/or material arrangement to be given by the parents of the bride to the parents of the groom as an essential condition of the marriage. Examples of dowry gifts include land, vehicles, gold, cash, jewelry, furniture, household items, electronics, clothes, and/or animals. The education and occupation of the groom and his parents are major determinants of the dowry demanded. Dowry has also been linked to perpetuating the practice of child marriage in Nepal, as younger girls require lower dowries.

Dowry is widely practiced in all districts of Province 2. Studies demonstrate that dowry is practiced among both Hindus and Muslims.

Illegal since the Social Practices Reform Act, 1976, provisions on dowry were strengthened with the 2017 Penal Code that states a three-year jail term and a 30,000 rupee fine (USD 300) for taking a dowry payment.

"Whoever demands or takes dowry will be punished from this year. We as representatives of the mothers' group have made this rule. Local government and police are also helping us to implement this rule."

*– Hima Gaunpalika -
Jumla, Karnali Province*

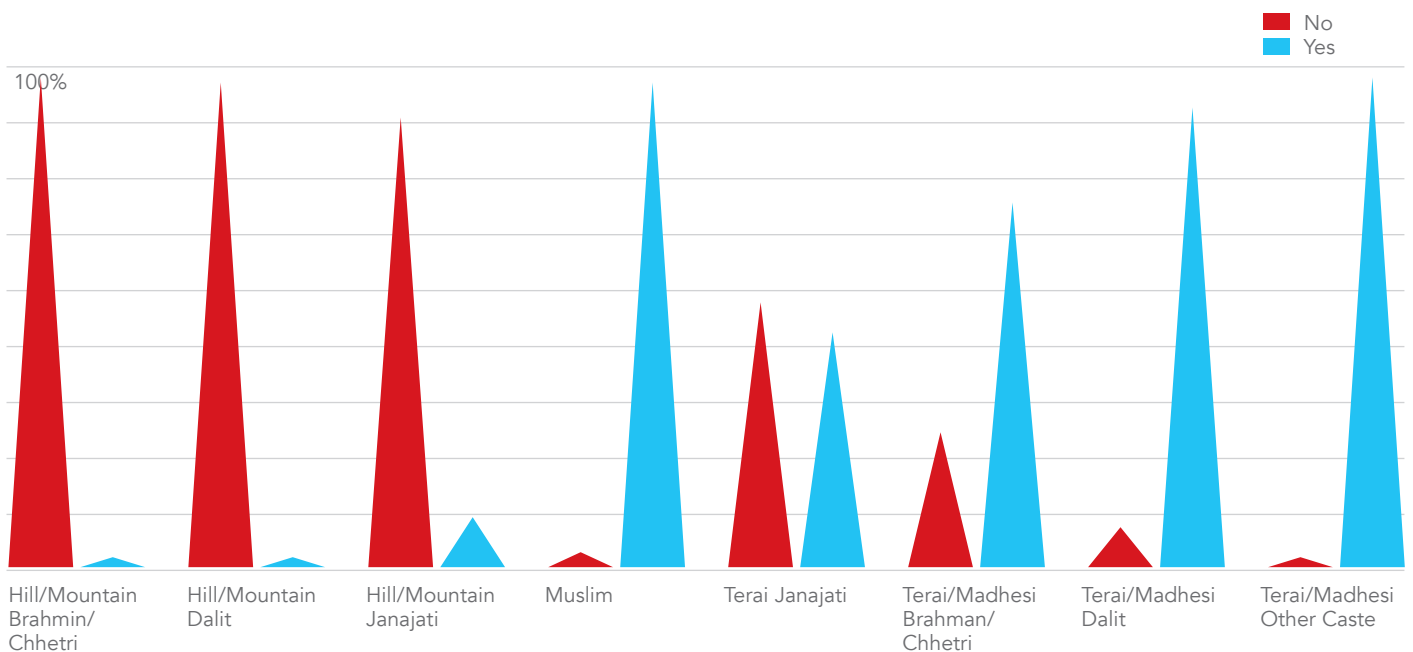
SECTION IV
DOWRY



27. Does the practice of dowry exist in this community?

Dowry is widely practiced in all districts of Province 2. 1,845 respondents (92 percent) of Province 2 reported that dowry exists in their area, compared to only 1.2 percent of respondents in Karnali and Sudhuraschim Provinces.

27.1 Above responses disaggregated by caste and ethnicity

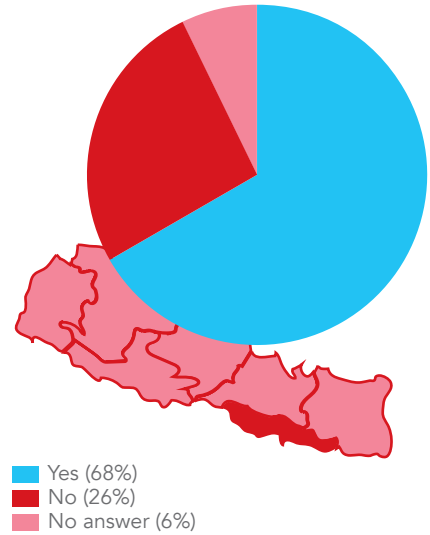


Enumerator interviewing the respondent.

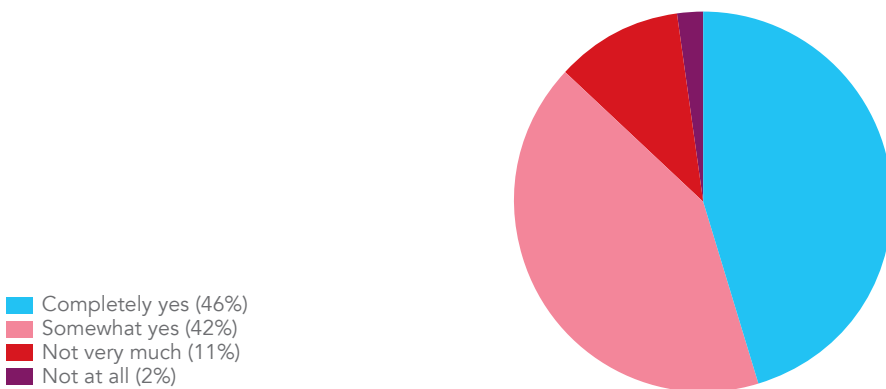
28. Has your family paid a dowry in cases of marriages of female family members?

In Province 2, from the 92 percent of respondents who said that dowry exists in their area, 68 percent also said that their own families were required to pay dowry. Their responses on the reasons for dowry demands and payments shows how this practice contributes to strengthening the perception of having a daughter as a burden. 82 percent of the respondents completely or somewhat agree that families use dowry to compensate for the bridegroom’s educational expenses. Hence, dahej/ tilak is considered as one kind of payment to the groom’s family for the symbolic and cultural capital of the husband, which are considered assets for his wife as well. Additional findings highlighted that families agree to pay dowry in the hope that their daughters marry a “good man” from a “good family”, with 90 percent of respondents completely or somewhat agreeing that families are willing to invest in a dowry to secure a good husband for their daughters

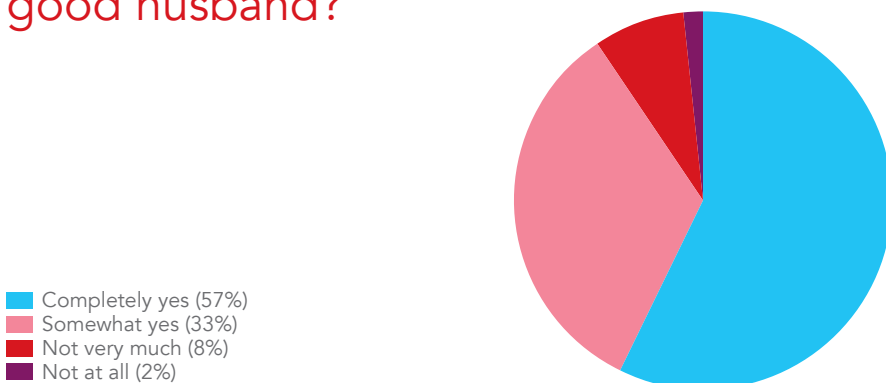
Province 2



29. Do you think the family of the bridegroom requires dowry in order to compensate for the costs of educating their son?



30. Does the family of the bride pay dowry in order to ensure their daughter gets a good husband?



31. The impact of dowry

The survey highlighted various impacts of dowry. Regarding the correlation between dowry and violence, a majority of the respondents (73 percent) completely or somewhat agreed that disputes related to dowry lead to violence against women. Moreover, 56 percent of respondents completely or somewhat agreed that people marry off their daughters at an early age due to the lower economic burden of dowry. Findings of the survey also confirm the relationship between the practice of dowry and lower education attainment for women as compared to men. Indeed, 64 percent of the respondents completely or somewhat agreed that this practice discouraged families from providing educational opportunities to their daughters. This is particularly in relation to higher education and professional fields, as these factor increase the price of dowry.

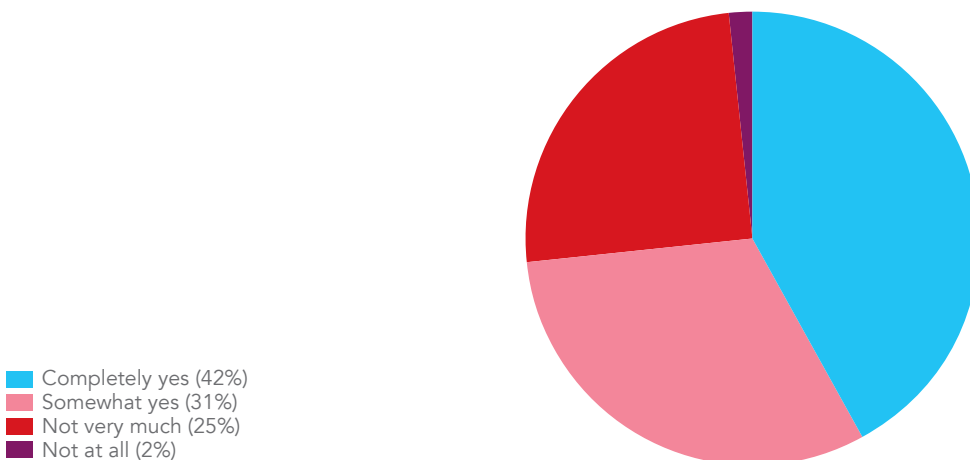
Findings also show that respondents were likely to associate the practice of gender-selective abortion with the economic burden of dowry. Only 48 percent of the respondents completely or somewhat agreed that families engage in gender-selective abortion because of burden of dowry, while 51 percent disagreed.

Despite the varying perceptions, dowry is considered a social problem affecting all groups. A majority of respondents (88 percent) completely agreed and 11 percent of them somewhat agreed that dowry needs to be abolished. However, only 70 percent of them completely or somewhat agreed that dowry can be abolished, which suggest the deep-rooted nature of the practice in society.

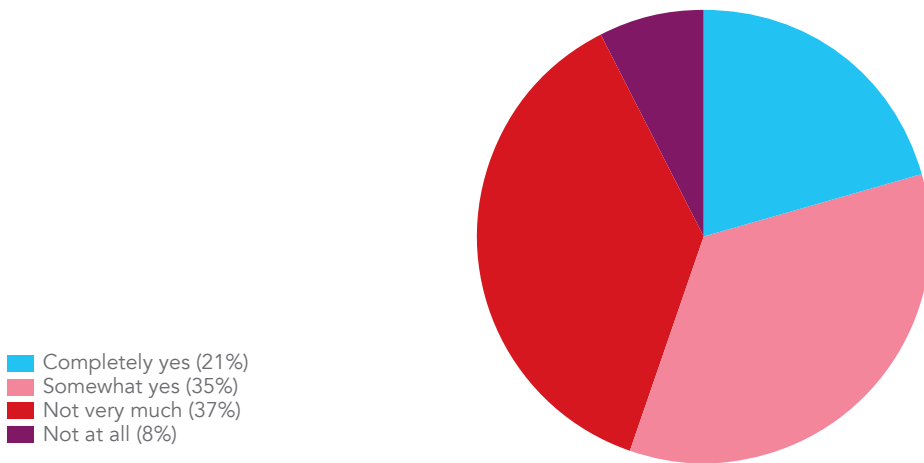
The majority of the respondents (70 percent) think that the practice of dowry is increasing because of weak implementation of the law.



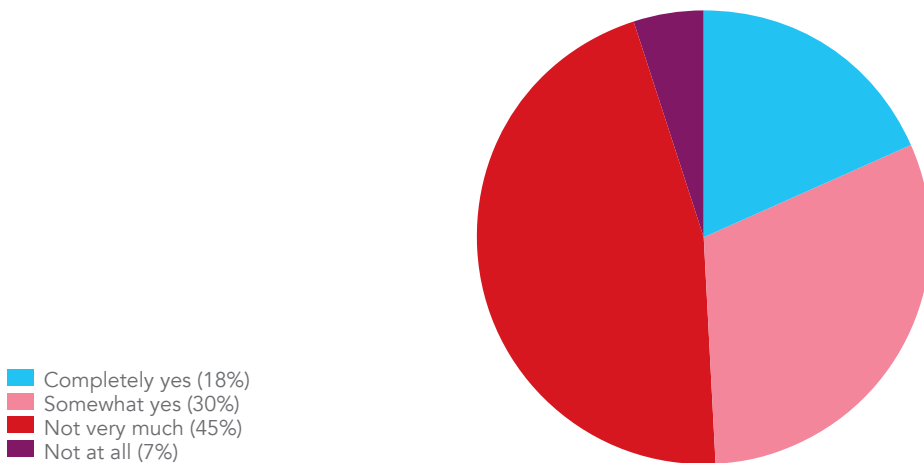
31.1. Do you think the practice of dowry leads to violence against women?



31.2 Do you think dowry causes families to marry off their daughters at an early age?



31.3 Do you think the economic burden of dowry increases selective abortion?



DEFINITION

Witchcraft (boksi pratha female: boksi, male: bokso) is generally defined as a person having alleged supernatural powers to control people or events by the use of magic. Belief in witchcraft exists among people, regardless of their individual religion or faith. Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution (WAP) refer to the human rights abuses caused by these beliefs. While men in Nepal can be accused of committing witchcraft, the vast majority of persons accused are women. Local traditional healers, called Dhami/Jhakri, have a significant role in WAP and in perpetuating a belief in witchcraft as they are thought to have the power to identify witches and conduct healing rituals. As there is a general belief that witches have the power to cause ill-fate or misfortune to others, including health issues and negative natural or social events, witchcraft accusations have been used as an attempt to rationalize misfortunes occurring in communities. Upon being accused of witchcraft, a person may face extreme forms of physical and psychosocial violence imposed by other members of the community members of their own family, and even the dhami/jhakri himself. In the most extreme cases, WAP leads to killing, including by being burned alive.

Recently, concerns have been raised on the use of WAP for financial gain, to seize property and land, and to exercise power and control over others. WAP has been criminalized since the introduction of the Witchcraft Accusation (Crime and Punishment) Act in 2015, and legal safeguards against the practice were strengthened by provisions in the new Penal Code (2017), with a jail sentence of up to five years, and a fine of up to 50,000 rupees (USD 500).

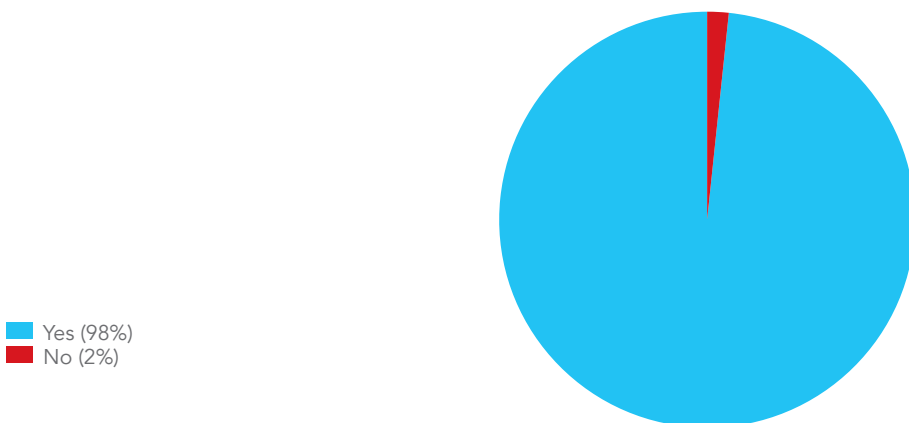
SECTION V

WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS AND PERSECUTION

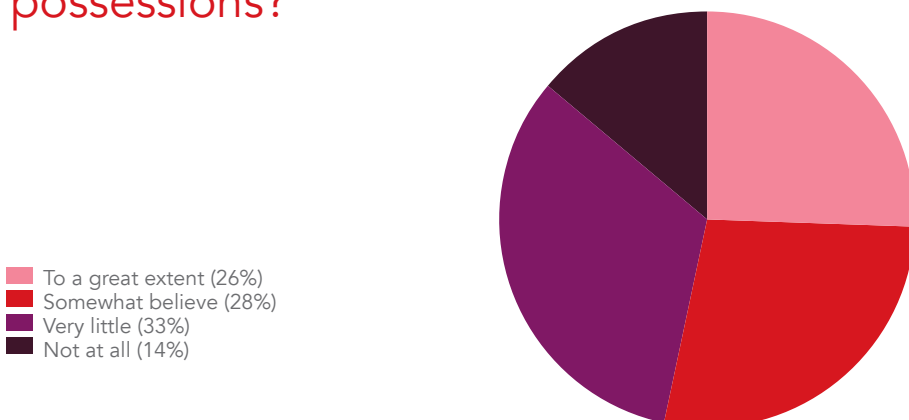


The survey started by asking questions related to belief in the existence of witchcraft and related powers, followed by questions related to witchcraft accusations and persecution. The majority of respondents indicated that people in their communities believe in ghosts, evil forces and spirits (98 percent). However, when asked about their individual beliefs only 26% stated the belief in evil force to a great extent.

32. Do people in your community believe in ghosts, evil forces or spirits?

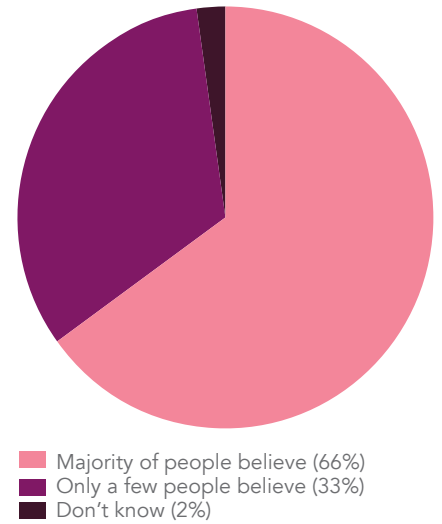


33. Do you believe in evil forces and spirit possessions?



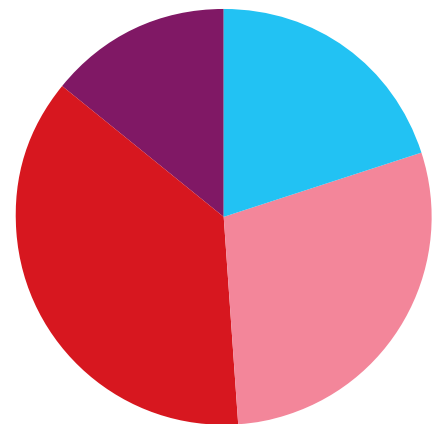
34. What share of the members of your community believe that evil forces cause illness or misfortune?

The belief in the existence of evil and spiritual forces also implies a belief that such forces can inflict or cause misfortune. The majority of the survey participants (66 percent) stated that people in their community believe evil forces can cause illness and misfortunes. Such beliefs exist among all social and religious groups. However, only 49 percent of respondents answered positively when directly asked if they themselves believe that spiritual forces can inflict or cause misfortunes. The survey findings show that there is a strong correlation between the belief that spiritual forces can inflict or cause misfortunes and the educational attainment of the respondents. The higher the educational level of the respondents, the lower the belief in the power of evil forces. While 25 percent of all respondents with no formal education said that they strongly believe that spiritual forces can cause sickness and misfortunes, only 4 percent of the respondents with higher education (BA level and above) share this view.

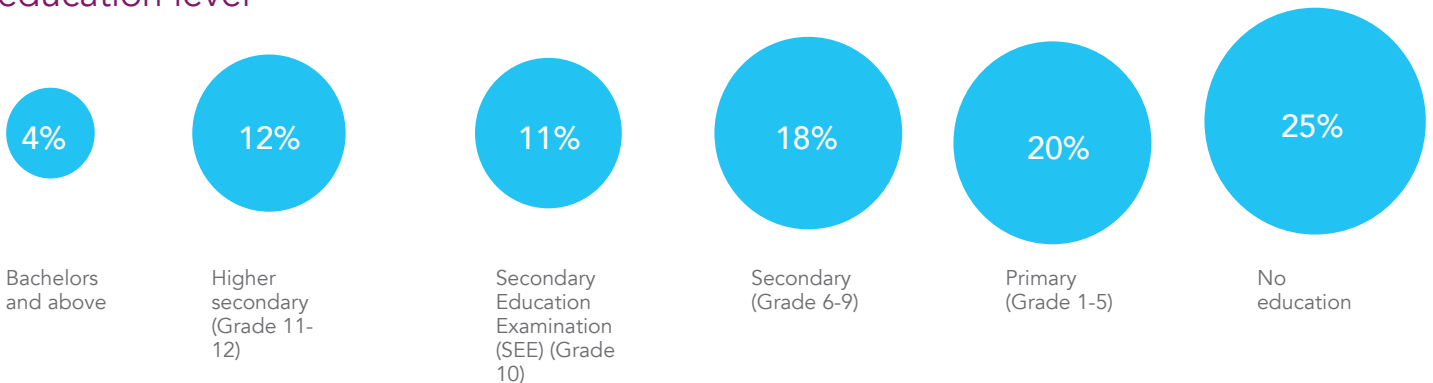


35. Do you believe that evil forces can cause illness or misfortune?

- Completely yes (20%)
- Somewhat yes (29%)
- Not very much (37%)
- Not at all (14%)



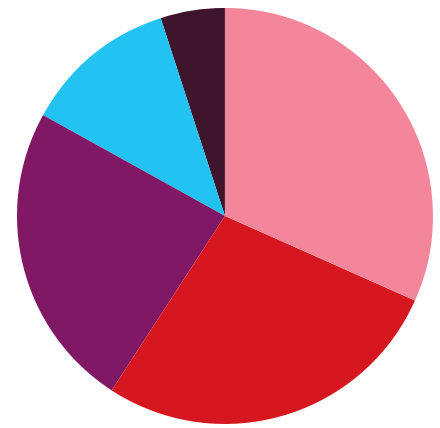
35.1 Above responses of completely yes disaggregated by education level



36. What share of the members of your community believe in witches and witchcraft?

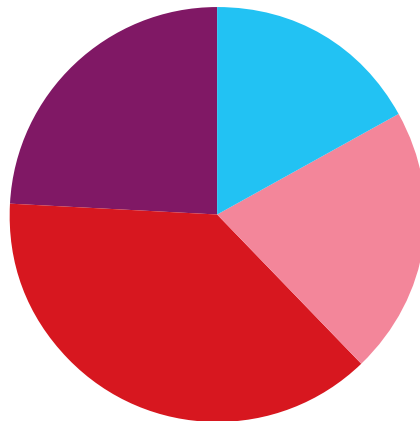
The survey findings on belief in witches/witchcraft show that the majority of the respondents upholds a belief in witches/witchcraft in their respective communities.

The survey findings also show that belief in witchcraft varies across the three Provinces, and between the social backgrounds of the respondents (in particular in terms of gender, educational status and caste/ethnicity). More female respondents (19 percent compared to 13 percent for male respondents) reported strong belief in witchcraft. More respondents in Province 2 (23 percent) believed in witchcraft, compared with only 11 percent in Karnali and Sudhuraschim Provinces.



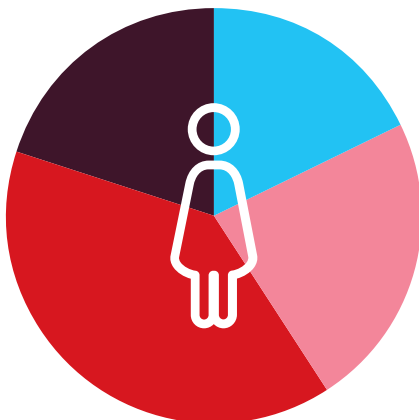
- Many people believe (32%)
- Some believe and some don't (28%)
- Majority people believe (24%)
- Only few people believe (12%)
- Don't know (5%)

37. Do you believe in witches/witchcraft?

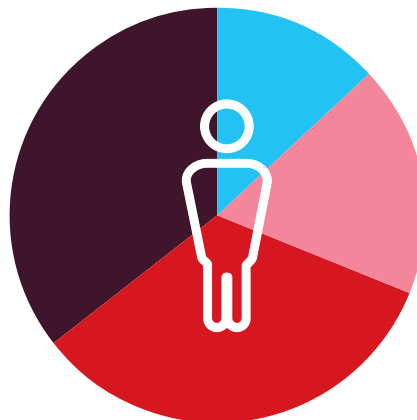


- Completely yes (17%)
- Somewhat yes (21%)
- Not very much (38%)
- Not at all (24%)

37.1 Above responses disaggregated by gender

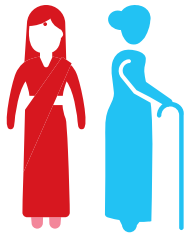


- Completely yes (18%)
- Somewhat yes (23%)
- Not very much (39%)
- Not at all (20%)



- Completely yes (13%)
- Somewhat yes (18%)
- Not very much (35%)
- Not at all (33%)

38. In your opinion, who are most likely to be accused of being a witch in a society?



40
PERCENT
Widows, single women, and older women



34
PERCENT
Poor women from excluded groups

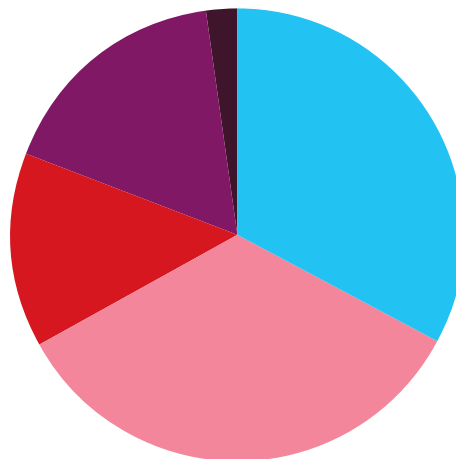


25
PERCENT
Men who practice exorcism



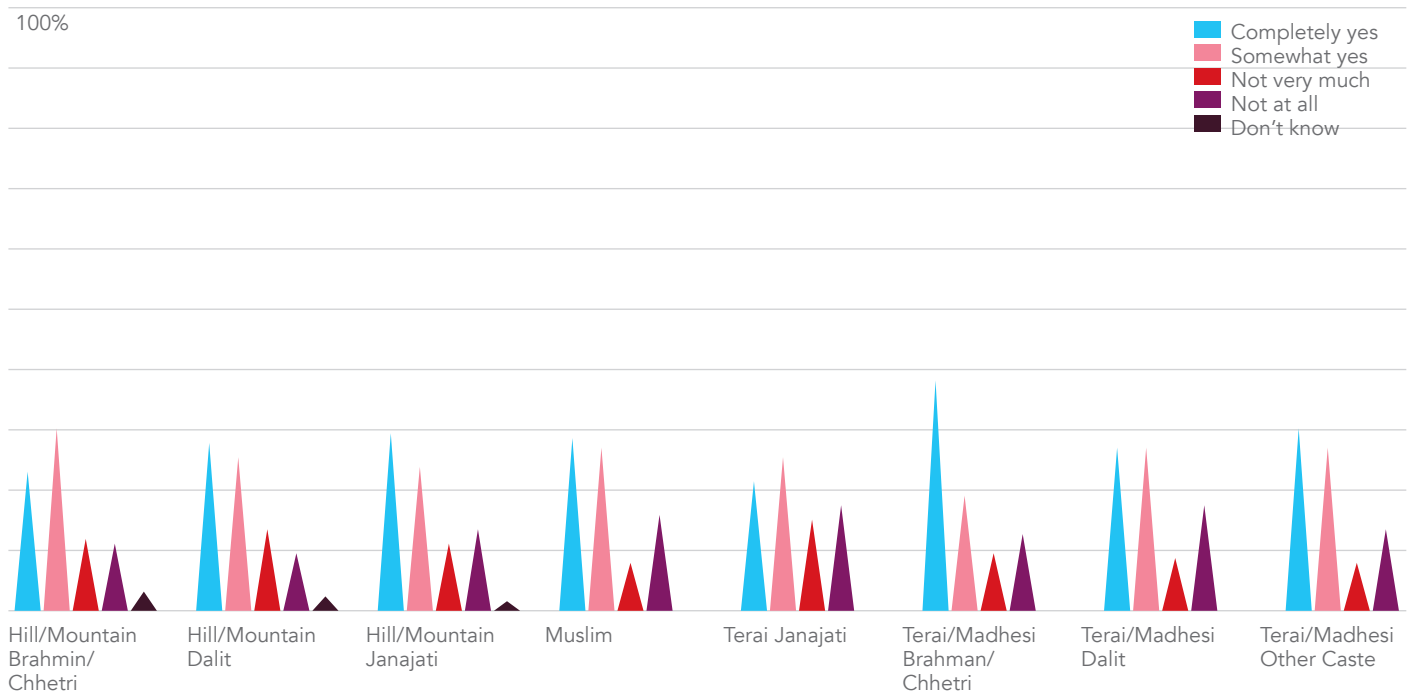
10
PERCENT
Men from poor families

39. Do you think women are more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men?



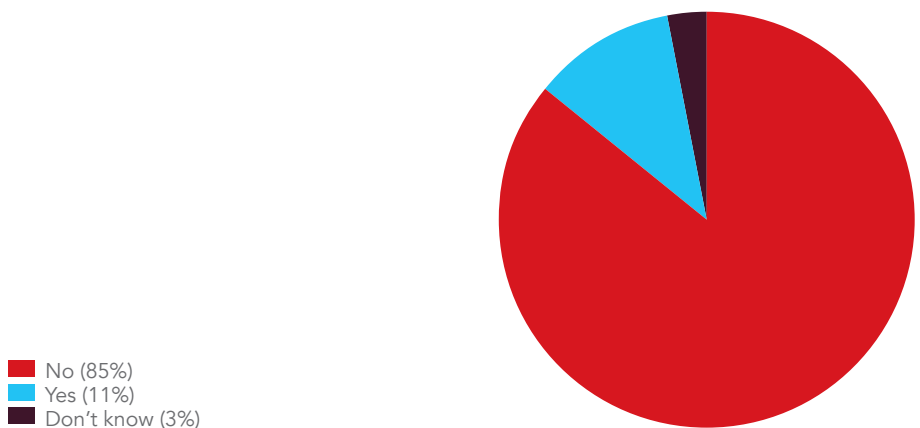
Completely yes (33%)
Somewhat yes (34%)
Not very much (14%)
Not at all (17%)
Do not know/refuse (2%)

39.1 Above responses disaggregated by caste and ethnicity



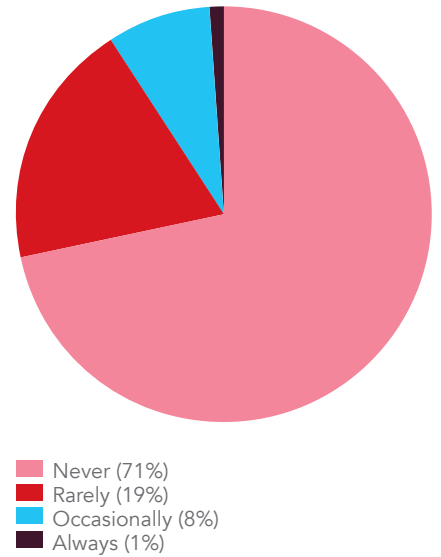
40. Has anyone in your community been accused or persecuted for witchcraft?

When questioned on the existence of incidents of witchcraft accusations and persecution in their community, a majority of respondents (85 percent) indicated that they had not heard or observed any such incidents, whereas 11 percent of respondents affirmed that there were incidents of witchcraft accusations in their communities. More respondents from Province 2 (17 percent) reported such incidents in their community than respondents from Karnali and Sudhuraschi Provinces. This is likely due to the fact that a larger proportion of the population believe in witchcraft in Province 2 as indicated above.



40.1 How often do community people or persons accused of witchcraft report the incidents to the police?

The majority of the survey respondents (71 percent) are of the opinion that incidents of witchcraft accusations and persecution are not reported to the police or to any other authority, by either the community or the accused person. Less than two percent of the respondents believing that such cases get reported to the local police station.



40.2 Reason for not reporting the incidents

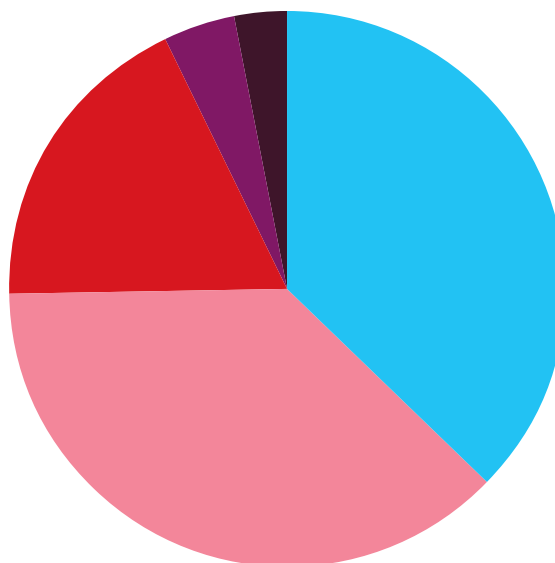


42 Lack of trust in police/authority
PERCENT



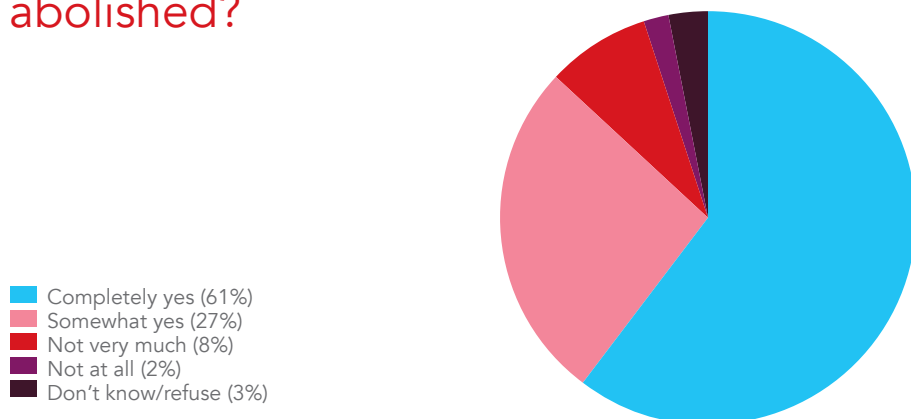
35 Not familiar with laws and provisions
PERCENT

41. Do you think those victims/survivors of witchcraft accusations and persecution suffer from social, psychological or economic problems?



Completely yes (37%)
Somewhat yes (37%)
Not very much (18%)
Not at all (4%)
Don't know/refuse (3%)

42. Do you think that witchcraft accusations and persecution should be abolished?



Beyond Numbers

In Kailali District, a girl from the seventh grade started behaving “erratically”. The girl was crying, shivering, laughing and throwing things around. Before the teachers could understand what was happening, similar behaviours was observed in other female students. The school management sought help from the local traditional healer also known as a dhami/jhakri. The healer claimed that the school was haunted by witches (boksi) targeting young school girls. When asked why the girls were not taken to the hospital, a teacher replied that “they were not ill but possessed. We can easily distinguish between someone being possessed or sick. A possessed person often shivers, runs and blabbers. That is what the students were doing.”

In order to ward off the supposed evil spirit, the school management arranged for a largescale Hindu prayer service to honor multiple deities (Mahayagya), only to realize that nothing changed in the behavior of the affected students. When asked about the perpetrator behind the incident, one of the teachers said, “we cannot pinpoint any individual and declare them as boksi, but we believe there is someone in the village who knows black magic and is deliberately harming the students.”

When asked about the consequences when someone is targeted by an evil spirit, the students, expressing a deep faith in the healers, shared that “if anyone feels possessed by boksi, they visit the dhami/jhankri.”

The students further added, “the dhami/jhankri have the power to identify witches and heal victims through a tantric act which sometimes involves animal sacrifices. Only then, people are healed and carry on with their normal lives.”





