



(UN)ACCEPTABILITY OF VIOLENCE

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Theme: Violence | Location: Nepal

Idea: Women's empowerment models that target not only women but their environment and other stakeholders around them address systemic issues like attitudes towards violence against women

Key words: Violence, Nepal, Women Empowerment

Background

Heifer Nepal began to implement the Strengthening Smallholder Enterprises of Livestock Value Chain. (SLVC) program in 2012 to empower women and improve their livelihoods. By focusing on families and communities, the program aimed to address gender-based violence and its impact. Heifer's Values-Based Holistic Community Development Approach was conveyed to recipients in 12 Cornerstone Trainings carried out during the intervention.

This brief is part of a series of concise research summaries derived from a more comprehensive assessment of Heifer's program intervention in Nepal. Its findings on experiences of violence are condensed here to facilitate the intervention's replication, improve understanding, and foster effective communication on the intervention's success and the lessons learned from it.

Methodology

The impact study employed a mixed sampling method, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative study involved 251 respondents, 176 of whom were female beneficiaries and 75 of whom were some of their male family members. All were from districts where Heifer Nepal had program interventions. The qualitative study involved 10 focus group discussions, as well as key informant interviews with project stakeholders. Secondary data from the nationally representative Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) database of Nepal, Bangladesh, and India were used to corroborate the findings.

The study analyzed indicators of women's empowerment across demographic variables, particularly the experience of violence. Comparative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and its results presented through tables and graphs for clarity. This brief focuses on the results for experience of violence.



Rationale

The brief focuses on the program's impact on perceptions and experiences of violence. Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights; the United Nations defines it as any act causing harm or suffering to individuals based on their gender. Understanding the program's effect on violence is crucial, considering the negative health and demographic consequences associated with gender-based violence.

Support from Family

Prior to the intervention, these women lived in a patriarchal society where key decisions regarding their lives were made by male family members, such as their fathers, husbands, and fathers-in-law. Moreover, senior female family members, particularly mothers-in-law, held a significant amount of power over younger women in the household, limiting their autonomy and decision-making abilities concerning their own lives and those of their children.

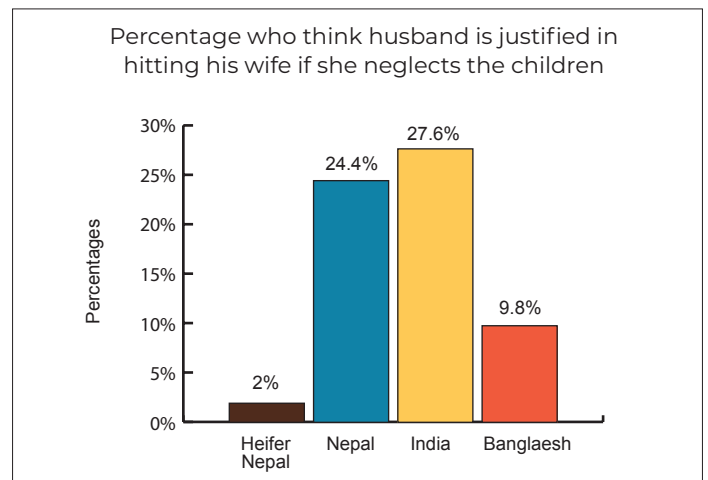
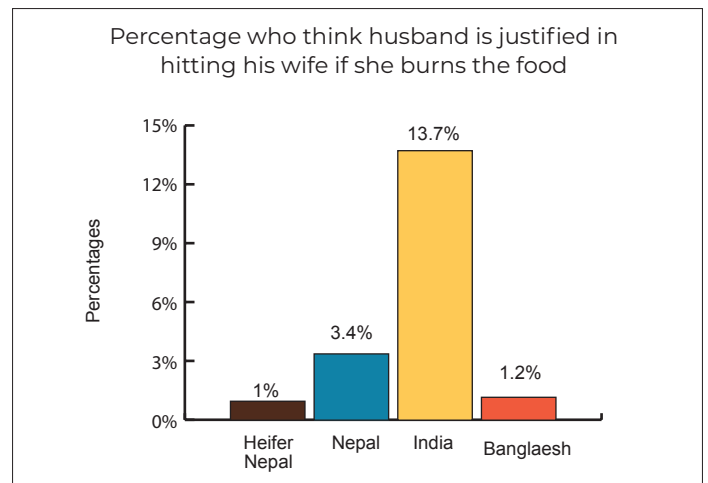
A qualitative study revealed initial resistance from mothers-in-law towards women participating in the program. Nonetheless, as the benefits of the program became evident, many older women experienced a change of perspective and began to support their daughters-in-law. This shift was instrumental in creating a more supportive and enabling environment.

The intervention also fostered positive changes in intra-household gender relations. As the program progressed, men started recognizing—and appreciating—the valuable contributions their wives were making. This elevated the status of women within their households and enhanced their decision-making powers and autonomy.

Ultimately, family support proved instrumental in reducing the experiences of violence faced by these women, with evidence of this presented in the next section.

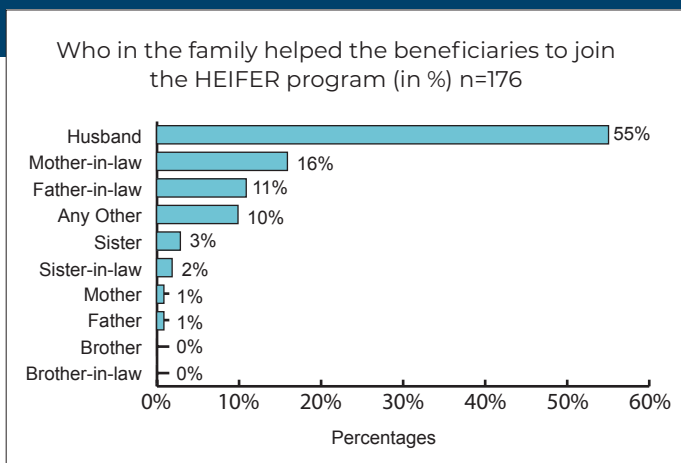
Experience of Violence

Violence against women and domestic violence are scourges in society, oftentimes deeply engrained within communities. In Nepal, violence remains prevalent, often rooted in alcoholism or lack of education, and, also, in disempowerment. Heifer Nepal's SLVC program intervention—which engages both men and women in economic activities, runs gender sensitivity trainings, and fosters self-worth—has considerably reduced the acceptability of violence.



Oxfam India surveys have reported widespread violence against women in selected states in India, with both men and women endorsing its use. In a 2019 study, it found that 33% of men and women believed that hitting women was justifiable for failing to care for children; 53.4% believed it justifiable to harshly criticize women for doing so.

Although violence against women and girls often goes underreported, given the all-round empowerment experienced by women in the Heifer Nepal SLVC program, the low reporting of violence in their communities is likely to be realistic.



Challenges

There are new challenges related to violence, such as the harassment of young girls, emanating from drug abuse by young boys and men. At a discussion in Surkhet, a district in Karnali Province of Nepal, women said:

“Violence is a talked-about subject. Reporting [it] is also done. Cases are mostly seen in the Dalit community, but the number of incidents is decreasing. Some men used to beat their wives and drink alcohol but now it’s very rare. The community is quite safe, but who knows what happens next?” And: “Nowadays young boys of ages 13 or 14 years do drugs and tease our girls on the way to school. They are walking on wrong way.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Heifer intervention in Nepal has made significant strides in addressing perceptions and experiences of violence, particularly gender-based violence. The program’s success is particularly noteworthy in changing societal perceptions regarding domestic violence. In the case of burning food, only 1% women among Heifer beneficiaries believed that the husband is justified in hitting his wife if she burns the food as compared to 3.4%, 13.7% and 1.2% women in Nepal, India and Bangladesh, respectively, as per DHS. This shift in perception demonstrates the program’s effectiveness in changing attitudes towards domestic violence. Similarly, in the context of neglecting children, the program achieved remarkable results, with only 2% of women believing that violence against a wife is justified while figures for Nepal and India DHS data were close to 25%.

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.



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