

# Global Trends: Gender Equality & Women's Studies

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## Abstract

This study covers gender equality and women's studies in Kathmandu, Nepal. This study examines the socio-economic and cultural aspects that affect women's roles and rights and their historical, present, and future chances for gender equality. Kathmandu, Nepal's capital and largest city, is a key hub for understanding gender dynamics and gender equity policy. Nepali women have struggled with patriarchal standards, restricted education, healthcare, and economic possibilities. These challenges have been addressed by government and grassroots efforts in recent years. This analysis combines government papers, academic studies, and NGO publications to assess Kathmandu's gender equality progress and challenges.

Women's political engagement, economic empowerment, education, and health are priorities. The Gender Equality Act and leadership initiatives for women are also examined in the report. It also examines how cultural and social movements challenge gender stereotypes and promote women's rights. While women's access to education and healthcare has improved, economic engagement and political representation remain low. Gender equality requires ongoing activism, policy reform, and community engagement, according to the review. It also emphasises the need for more research on intersectional gender inequity, particularly marginalised communities in Kathmandu.

This comprehensive review adds to the literature on gender equality in Nepal and offers policymakers, activists, and researchers' insights and proposals for promoting equality.

**Keywords:** Gender equality; Nepali women; Economic; NGO

## Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment have emerged as pivotal areas of study and activism globally, with significant emphasis in developing nations like Nepal (Van Dongen et al., 2024). In the Kathmandu region, where traditional gender roles intersect with rapidly evolving socio-political landscapes, gender equality and women's studies have become crucial frameworks for addressing the disparities and barriers women face (Pradhan et al., 2018). This comprehensive review seeks to explore gender equality in Kathmandu, examining the intersection of cultural heritage, socio-economic challenges, and legislative progress that shape women's lives in this urban hub of Nepal.

Kathmandu, as the capital city, is not only the political and economic centre of Nepal but also a region where ancient traditions coexist with modern influences. The city's unique position has driven shifts in social norms, with growing movements advocating for gender equality and women's rights (Steinbauer, 2023). However, while there has been progress, there remain significant gaps, particularly in addressing deep-rooted patriarchy, systemic biases, and the socio-economic pressures that limit women's opportunities. The concept of gender equality in Kathmandu, therefore, must be viewed through a multidimensional lens that incorporates education, health, economic participation, political representation, and social acceptance of gender diversity. Women's studies as an academic field in Nepal has gained momentum, especially in Kathmandu, where universities and research institutions are increasingly incorporating gender studies

into their curricula. This academic attention is crucial in fostering awareness and understanding of the diverse challenges women encounter, as well as in developing local frameworks for addressing these issues. Gender-focused research in the Kathmandu region provides valuable insights into the specific hurdles faced by women in urban Nepali society, which are often distinct from those in rural areas due to differences in literacy rates, access to resources, and exposure to global ideas about gender (Hada, 2019). Despite these advances, however, there are numerous challenges that continue to hinder the realization of full gender equality in Kathmandu. Poverty, lack of access to quality education, insufficient healthcare facilities for women, and limited opportunities for political and economic participation are all factors that disproportionately affect women (Nepal Human Development Report 2004: Empowerment and Poverty Reduction, 2004). In many cases, women are further marginalized by cultural norms that uphold male dominance in both the public and private spheres. Although the Nepali constitution has enshrined equal rights for men and women, the translation of these rights into tangible changes remains slow. For instance, while more women are pursuing education and entering the workforce, they continue to face unequal pay, limited representation in decision-making roles, and instances of discrimination and harassment. This review also considers the significant influence of global movements for gender equality on local advocacy and policy changes in Kathmandu (Gonzalez et al., 2022). The proliferation of international human rights norms and global campaigns like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has created

momentum for gender equality initiatives in Nepal, inspiring local organizations to advocate for women's rights and providing models for implementing gender-sensitive policies (Cheong et al., 2023). These global frameworks have encouraged policymakers in Nepal to address gender inequality more proactively, particularly by targeting issues such as violence against women, reproductive rights, and economic empowerment (Sharma, 1997). However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often limited by the cultural and socio-political complexities specific to Nepal (Nepal Human Development Report, 1998). For instance, while Kathmandu's growing exposure to global perspectives on gender equality has fuelled progressive changes, traditional values still hold significant sway, particularly in family structures and societal expectations. This cultural conservatism can create resistance to policies that are perceived as Western or incompatible with local traditions. Additionally, the Kathmandu region faces the challenge of balancing gender equality initiatives with the needs of a highly diverse population that includes various ethnic and caste groups, each with its unique set of social norms and gender roles (Anker et al., 2012).

In recent years, research and advocacy efforts have increasingly highlighted the intersectionality of gender issues in Kathmandu, examining how factors such as caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic status influence women's experiences. Women from marginalized communities, for example, often encounter compounded discrimination that limits their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This understanding of intersectionality is essential for crafting inclusive and effective policies that address the specific needs of different groups within Kathmandu's female population (Chaudhary et al., 2022).

This comprehensive review aims to map out the progress and challenges in achieving gender equality in Kathmandu, with a focus on the role of academic research, legislative frameworks, and cultural influences. By examining the advancements in women's studies and gender equality initiatives, this review seeks to shed light on the areas that require further attention and propose recommendations for more impactful policies. Through an analysis of existing data, case studies, and policy evaluations, this study hopes to contribute to the discourse on gender equality in Nepal and provide a nuanced perspective on how Kathmandu can advance towards a more equitable society for all its citizens. (Nepal Living Standards Survey, 1995/96 and 2003/04: Analysis of Panel Households, 2006)

### Objective:

This study aims to:

- Examine socio-cultural, economic, and political factors influencing gender equality in Kathmandu.
- Evaluate progress and challenges in gender equity concerning education, healthcare, economic participation, and political representation.

- Assess the effectiveness of government policies, grassroots initiatives, and international advocacy in addressing gender disparities.
- Investigate intersectional gender inequality, especially concerning marginalized communities.
- Propose policy recommendations for more inclusive and impactful initiatives promoting gender equality (Betron et al., 2020).

## Theoretical Framework Grounding the Study in Feminist Theory

The study titled "A Comprehensive Review on Gender Equality and Women's Studies in Kathmandu Region of Nepal" can be grounded within feminist theory, particularly in the strands of liberal feminism, radical feminism, and intersectionality. Feminist theory offers a critical framework for analysing gender disparities, particularly in developing nations like Nepal, where patriarchal structures intersect with cultural, socio-economic, and political factors to influence women's roles and opportunities. In addition, intersectionality, a key concept in feminist theory, provides a lens to examine how overlapping identities such as caste, ethnicity, class, and gender combine to create unique forms of discrimination and disadvantage for women in Kathmandu.

### Feminist Theory and Gender Inequality in Kathmandu

Feminist theory in the context of Kathmandu helps to deconstruct the patriarchal norms and systems of power that perpetuate gender inequality. In Nepal, a deeply patriarchal society influenced by Hindu and Buddhist cultural traditions, gender roles have been historically rigid. These norms have restricted women's access to education, healthcare, political participation, and economic empowerment. Feminist scholars, such as Basnyat (2020), highlight how gender inequality is reinforced by both social structures and cultural ideologies that prioritize male authority in public and private spheres. Through the lens of feminist theory, the study critiques how legal frameworks, while promising gender equality, are often undermined by deeply ingrained societal attitudes and customs that continue to maintain gendered power imbalances.

### Radical Feminism: Analysing Deep Structural Issues

Radical feminism argues that gender oppression is rooted in the structure of society and that true equality can only be achieved by fundamentally altering the power dynamics between men and women (Basnyat, 2020). In Kathmandu, radical feminism provides a lens through which we can understand how economic systems, political structures, and cultural practices intersect to sustain patriarchy. Women in Kathmandu,



especially those from marginalized communities, are subjected to compounded forms of oppression. This includes not only gender discrimination but also caste-based and ethnic biases. The study provides an in-depth look into how these systemic issues affect women's socio-economic mobility, political representation, and overall social status.

### **Intersectionality: Addressing Multiple Layers of Discrimination**

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a critical framework within feminist theory that emphasizes how various forms of identity – such as caste, ethnicity, gender, and class – interact to produce unique forms of oppression. This is particularly relevant for women in Kathmandu, where Dalit, Janajati, and migrant women experience discrimination not only based on their gender but also due to their caste and socio-economic status. Poudyal et al. (2021) and other gender-focused scholars underscore that marginalized women face compounded discrimination that is often overlooked in traditional gender equality frameworks.

Kathmandu, as a microcosm of Nepal's diversity, presents a unique challenge in gender equality efforts. The study emphasizes the need for intersectional policies that address the specific challenges faced by these marginalized groups, such as access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and legal protection. Intersectionality, as a theory, helps contextualize the multifaceted nature of women's oppression in Kathmandu, urging policymakers to adopt inclusive and tailored approaches that account for the intersection of caste, ethnicity, gender, and class in shaping women's experiences (Cheong et al., 2023).

### **Theoretical Insights and Practical Implications for the Study**

By employing feminist theory, the review situates the study of gender equality in Kathmandu within a broader socio-political context, highlighting how deep-rooted gender disparities are not just the result of individual attitudes but of structural inequalities. Feminist theory allows the study to critique the patriarchal structures that maintain these disparities, while intersectionality provides a framework to examine how multiple identities and social categories contribute to women's unique experiences of oppression and discrimination.

This theoretical framework also provides a basis for policy recommendations, encouraging the need for gender-sensitive approaches that are cognizant of the diverse needs of women across different caste, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds in Kathmandu.

By integrating feminist theory with intersectionality, the study can push for gender equality initiatives that are more inclusive, holistic, and responsive to the real lived experiences of marginalized women.

## **Literature Review**

### **Recent Developments in Gender Studies**

Recent studies highlight Kathmandu's growing engagement in gender equality initiatives, with increased focus on education, digital literacy, and social reforms. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified gender inequalities, further reinforcing the need for targeted policies (Gurung et al., 2020).

### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory underscores the role of patriarchal norms in perpetuating gender inequality. Kathmandu's gender gap reflects systemic issues that restrict women's economic mobility, political participation, and social autonomy (Basnyat, 2020). Intersectionality highlights the compounded discrimination faced by marginalized groups, urging policymakers to adopt inclusive strategies.

### **Queer Theory**

Despite Nepal's legal recognition of the "third gender," Kathmandu's LGBTQ+ communities continue to experience social discrimination (Balayar & Mazur, 2022). Advocacy groups like the Blue Diamond Society play a key role in promoting equality.

### **Policy and Legal Frameworks**

Nepal's legislative progress, including the 2015 Constitution and CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), has strengthened gender equality efforts. However, weak enforcement mechanisms remain a significant barrier (Acharya, 1999) (Basnyat, 2020).

### **Emerging Trends in Gender Equality and Women's Studies in Kathmandu**

#### **Increasing Digital Literacy and Access to Technology for Women**

One of the most notable emerging trends in Kathmandu is the growing digital literacy and access to technology among women. Despite the barriers that still exist – such as economic constraints, safety concerns, and cultural norms – there has been a significant push towards digital inclusion. Programs like Women's Digital Literacy Programs are helping bridge the gender digital divide, empowering women with technological skills to enhance their economic participation and social engagement.

This trend is particularly significant in the context of Nepal's rapidly growing digital economy, where technology has become essential not only for education and communication but also for entrepreneurship and employment. The rise of online businesses, remote work opportunities, and social media activism have

allowed women in Kathmandu to create digital spaces for advocacy, community-building, and business ventures.

**Key Insight:** The trend of increasing digital literacy for women can create new opportunities for economic empowerment and social participation in Kathmandu, though barriers to access and digital safety concerns must still be addressed.

### Growth of Feminist and Intersectional Activism

The feminist movement in Kathmandu has gained significant momentum in recent years, with intersectional activism becoming an increasingly central focus. This trend reflects a growing understanding that gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing the overlapping inequalities that women face due to their caste, ethnicity, class, and rural/urban background. Feminist organizations in Kathmandu, such as WOREC (Women's Rehabilitation Centre) and FWLD (Forum for Women, Law and Development), are playing a pivotal role in advocating for more inclusive gender policies that take into account marginalized women's issues.

The rise of intersectional feminism has led to a greater focus on the experiences of Dalit, Janajati, and migrant women, whose struggles are often overlooked in mainstream gender equality frameworks. This trend is leading to grassroots movements that engage marginalized women directly in policy discussions and demand more inclusive legislation and programs (Deuba et al., 2024).

**Key Insight:** The growing influence of intersectional feminism in Kathmandu ensures that the voices of marginalized women are increasingly included in gender equality discussions, providing a more holistic and inclusive approach to addressing gender inequality (Betron et al., 2020).

### Expanding Gender-Responsive Governance and Legal Frameworks

Kathmandu has seen notable advancements in gender-responsive governance, with significant developments in both policy frameworks and legal reforms aimed at improving gender equality. The Nepali Constitution of 2015 and the Gender Equality Act have enshrined equal rights for men and women, and efforts are underway to strengthen gender-sensitive policies across sectors like healthcare, education, politics, and economics. One emerging trend is the increasing implementation of gender quotas in political representation, with 33% representation of women in local and national government bodies. This has led to increased political participation of women, although challenges such as patriarchal resistance and weak enforcement mechanisms persist.

Additionally, the rise of gender-sensitive laws addressing issues like gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence, and sexual harassment is contributing to an environment where women's rights are being increasingly acknowledged (Basnyat, 2020). However,

gaps in implementation and enforcement remain significant barriers (Betron et al., 2020).

**Key Insight:** The continued advancement of gender-responsive governance is essential for ensuring that legal protections for women in Kathmandu are translated into tangible benefits, but more attention is needed to improve enforcement and compliance.

### Empowerment through Education and Awareness Programs

Education continues to be one of the primary avenues through which gender equality in Kathmandu is being promoted. The trend of gender-focused education is gaining momentum, with more schools, universities, and non-governmental organizations integrating gender equality and women's studies into their curricula.

Programs that promote women's leadership, economic empowerment, and gender equality education in schools and universities are rapidly increasing. The Nepal Human Rights Commission, alongside local NGOs, is also working to raise awareness about gender issues and promote gender equality through community-based education programs.

Moreover, the emergence of digital platforms for gender education – such as online courses, webinars, and social media campaigns – has expanded the reach of gender education to a broader audience, especially the younger generation in Kathmandu. This trend has seen a rise in student-led activism, with youth groups demanding more equitable access to resources and opportunities.

**Key Insight:** The growing emphasis on gender-focused education is fostering a generation that is more aware of gender issues and more active in advocating for change, creating long-term potential for gender equality in Kathmandu.

### The Rise of Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning

As Kathmandu continues to urbanize rapidly, gender-sensitive urban planning has become an emerging trend. This refers to urban designs that cater to the specific needs of women and marginalized genders, such as ensuring safe public spaces, accessible transportation, and public facilities that consider women's roles as primary caregivers, workers, and community leaders.

One significant aspect of gender-sensitive urban planning in Kathmandu is addressing gender-based violence (GBV) through the design of safe public spaces. Initiatives aimed at reducing harassment in public transport, markets, and streets are increasingly being integrated into urban planning policies.

**Key Insight:** Gender-sensitive urban planning in Kathmandu is contributing to safer, more inclusive cities, ensuring that women and marginalized genders have equal access to public spaces and resources. However, this trend must be scaled up to include more holistic planning for marginalized groups.



## Research Methodology

### Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to explore gender equality and women's studies in Kathmandu, Nepal. The mixed-method approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors affecting gender equality in the Kathmandu region (Balayar & Mazur, 2022). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ensures both breadth and depth in the investigation, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the topic.

### Secondary Data Collection (Literature Review)

The first component of the research methodology involved an extensive literature review. Secondary data was gathered from a variety of academic studies, government reports, and publications by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to assess the current state of gender equality in Kathmandu. This review focused on both historical perspectives and recent developments in the fields of women's studies, gender equality policies, and feminist theory. The literature review informed the theoretical framework and provided the foundation for the analysis.

### Key Sources:

- Government reports like the Nepal Human Development Report and Nepal Living Standards Survey.
- Academic journal articles focused on gender equality, intersectionality, and feminist theory.
- Publications by NGOs and international organizations advocating for women's rights in Nepal.

### Primary Data Collection (Survey)

To complement the secondary data, primary data was collected through a survey administered to a sample population in Kathmandu. The survey was designed to assess public perceptions, personal experiences, and attitudes towards gender equality, gender-based violence, and women's empowerment in Kathmandu (Dahal et al., 2021).

### Survey Design:

- A structured questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was developed to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The survey was divided into four sections:
- General Awareness and Attitudes (familiarity with gender equality issues and perceptions of government progress)
- Personal Experiences and Observations (economic participation of women, safety concerns, and discrimination)
- Digital Inclusion and Technological Access (access to digital resources and barriers)

- Leadership and Education (opportunities for leadership roles and discussions on gender equality in educational settings)

### Sample Size and Demographics:

The survey was administered to 27 participants from diverse professional backgrounds, including students, teachers, professionals, and advocates. This purposive sample was selected to ensure a representation of individuals with varying levels of engagement with gender issues in Kathmandu.

### Survey Method:

The survey was conducted online to reach a broad and diverse sample of respondents. The participants were asked to rate their familiarity with gender equality issues, provide insights on gender-based violence, and assess the role of the government in promoting gender equality. Responses were collected in both quantitative (multiple-choice and Likert scale) and qualitative formats (open-ended questions).

### Data Analysis

#### Quantitative Data Analysis:

The quantitative data from the survey was analysed using basic descriptive statistics, including percentages, to provide an overview of the participants' responses. Key trends and patterns, such as the percentage of participants who believe in progress towards gender equality or the level of awareness of digital literacy programs, were highlighted.

#### Qualitative Data Analysis:

The qualitative responses were thematically analysed to identify recurring themes, such as discrimination based on caste and gender, digital inclusion barriers, and public perceptions of women's safety. These responses were categorized and analysed in the context of broader social norms and structures.

### Case Studies and Intersectional Analysis

In addition to the survey and secondary data, the research includes an intersectional analysis of gender inequality in Kathmandu, with a focus on marginalized communities, such as Dalit, Janajati, and migrant women. The study utilizes case studies from both local NGOs and international organizations to illustrate how caste, class, ethnicity, and rural-urban disparities impact women's experiences of gender inequality. The findings are examined through the lens of feminist theory and intersectionality to better understand the compounded forms of discrimination faced by these groups.

### Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring that all survey participants provided informed consent and were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation. The anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were maintained throughout the study. Ethical considerations

were particularly important in dealing with sensitive topics such as gender-based violence and discrimination, which required careful handling of personal data.

## Historical Context

Nepal's journey toward gender equality is deeply rooted in a history shaped by traditional customs, political shifts, and evolving cultural norms. For centuries, Nepali society operated within a patriarchal structure, where gender roles were stringently defined, and women's roles were primarily confined to domestic responsibilities (Studies in Nepali History and Society, 2005). This structure was especially pronounced in Kathmandu, a region influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, where religious doctrines often reinforced a gendered division of labour and hierarchy (Nepal et al., 2011). Despite these historical restrictions, the Kathmandu region has also been a centre for cultural exchange, trade, and later, social reform, which helped sow early seeds for gender equality movements and academic exploration of women's rights. Nepal's caste system, codified in the Muluki Ain (Civil Code) of 1854, further formalized gender and social hierarchies, with women's status often closely tied to their caste and familial role (The Status of Women in Nepal: Field studies. Volume 2, 1981). This code not only reinforced male dominance but also imposed stringent rules on women's property rights, mobility, and autonomy, creating systemic inequalities that persisted for generations (Acharya, 1981). Women were largely excluded from formal education, political life, and decision-making roles, limiting their opportunities for socio-economic advancement (Wilson et al., 2023). The Kathmandu Valley, as the political and cultural heart of Nepal, mirrored these nationwide patterns, though its exposure to traders, missionaries, and travellers occasionally opened windows to external ideas that questioned rigid gender roles.

The 1950s marked a significant turning point in Nepal's history, as the end of the Rana regime ushered in a period of political and social change. With the establishment of democracy, there was a newfound emphasis on rights and modernization, and Kathmandu, as the capital, became a focal point for these changes. Women began to gain access to education, though progress was slow and limited by socio-cultural expectations. The 1960s saw the rise of social reform movements that highlighted women's rights as part of broader developmental goals, laying the groundwork for gender equality advocacy in Kathmandu (Bhattachan and Mishra, 1997). During this time, Nepali women from elite backgrounds, often educated abroad, started participating in politics and civil society, advocating for issues like voting rights, education, and labour reform.

The 1990s marked another critical period in Nepal's history with the end of the Panchayat system and the introduction of a multiparty democracy. The Constitution of 1990 granted Nepali citizens equal rights regardless of gender, creating a legal framework for addressing gender inequality. In Kathmandu, women's organizations, NGOs,

and civil society groups emerged in response, focusing on issues like women's education, reproductive health, and economic empowerment (Khatiwada et al., 2020). International influences became more prominent as Nepal engaged with global organizations such as the United Nations, which promoted gender equality as part of their developmental agendas (Clark et al., 2020). Conferences like the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing inspired Nepali activists and policymakers to align local gender policies with global standards, catalysing further reforms in Kathmandu.

Academic interest in gender studies began to gain traction in Nepal around this period, with universities in Kathmandu incorporating women's studies into their curricula. Scholars started examining the socio-political barriers faced by Nepali women, and academic discourse began challenging traditional narratives about gender roles (Balayar and Mazur, 2022). The 2000s saw a proliferation of research on gender issues, with Kathmandu's academic institutions and NGOs collaborating to investigate topics such as domestic violence, gender-based discrimination, and economic empowerment (Dahal et al., 2021). Additionally, international funding and partnerships facilitated gender research, with a particular focus on how women's roles in Kathmandu were evolving in response to economic liberalization and urbanization.

The political instability of the early 2000s, marked by a decade-long Maoist insurgency, had a profound impact on gender dynamics in Kathmandu. The Maoist movement advocated for gender equality and included women in its ranks, challenging traditional patriarchal structures and highlighting the importance of women's participation in socio-political movements. This period also brought attention to issues like sexual violence, economic exploitation, and social marginalization, especially for women from marginalized communities (Upreti, 2002). With the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, Nepal entered a post-conflict era focused on rebuilding and social integration, further stimulating discussions on women's rights and gender equality (Kolås, 2017). The interim constitution of 2007 and the constitution of 2015 enshrined gender equality, granting women legal protections and promoting their participation in political and public spheres.

Kathmandu, as the hub of policymaking and civil society activism, played a central role in the formulation and advocacy of gender-sensitive policies during this period. Women's studies programs flourished, examining topics such as gendered violence, reproductive rights, and women's economic participation (Betron et al., 2020). Kathmandu-based NGOs, such as the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) and the Forum for Women, Law, and Development (FWLD), contributed significantly to the discourse, conducting research and advocating for policy changes. However, despite legal advancements, implementation of gender equality initiatives has faced challenges due to socio-cultural resistance, economic constraints, and the deeply



ingrained patriarchy that continues to influence family structures and social expectations (Harnay et al., 2024). In recent years, the Kathmandu region has experienced accelerated urbanization and modernization, which have contributed to shifting gender roles. The influx of young people from rural areas seeking education and employment has introduced a more diverse set of perspectives on gender and women's rights. Exposure to international media, increased literacy rates, and the growth of social media have all contributed to a growing awareness of gender issues among the younger generation in Kathmandu. This awareness has led to a surge in feminist movements and gender advocacy, with young activists calling for equal rights, legal reforms, and an end to gender-based violence (Solotaroff and Pande, 2014). Movements like the #MeToo campaign found resonance in Kathmandu, highlighting the prevalence of harassment and discrimination in workplaces and public spaces.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges and renewed focus on gender issues in Kathmandu, exposing the vulnerabilities women face in times of crisis. During the pandemic, cases of domestic violence reportedly increased, and many women faced economic hardships due to job losses and increased caregiving responsibilities. These challenges highlighted the need for robust social safety nets, gender-sensitive healthcare policies, and economic empowerment programs targeted at women (Gurung et al., 2019). The pandemic underscored the importance of addressing the intersecting factors that shape women's experiences, such as caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, which are essential areas of study within gender studies programs in Kathmandu.

The historical context of gender equality and women's studies in Kathmandu is thus a narrative of gradual transformation, marked by the resilience of Nepali women and the persistent efforts of gender advocates, academics, and policymakers. From the early days of social reform movements to contemporary feminist activism, Kathmandu has witnessed significant changes in gender dynamics, even as challenges remain. This comprehensive review aims to contextualize these developments within the broader historical landscape, examining how Kathmandu has evolved as a centre for gender equality discourse in Nepal and exploring the ways in which academic and advocacy efforts continue to shape the region's pursuit of an equitable society.

## Theoretical Frameworks

**Feminist Theory:** Feminist theory is central to women's studies, examining the structures of power that perpetuate gender inequalities. It includes various strands such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and ecofeminism, each offering unique insights into the causes and solutions to gender disparities. Feminist theory provides a critical lens through which to analyse

gender equality and women's studies in the Kathmandu region of Nepal, offering insights into the socio-cultural, economic, and political forces that shape women's lives and experiences. Feminist theory, particularly its emphasis on patriarchy, intersectionality, and agency, underscores the systematic nature of gender-based discrimination that has historically confined women to subordinate roles in Nepali society. In Kathmandu, feminist perspectives reveal how traditional gender roles, rooted in cultural and religious norms, have shaped institutional policies, social expectations, and personal identities in ways that perpetuate gender inequality. This theory illuminates not only the barriers women face but also their resistance, agency, and active role in challenging and reshaping these norms.

One of the fundamental contributions of feminist theory in Kathmandu is the application of \*intersectionality\* to understand the multiple, intersecting factors affecting women's lives. For instance, women from marginalized caste backgrounds often face compounded discrimination, which feminist theorists argue requires intersectional solutions addressing both caste and gender. Studies by organizations like the Forum for Women, Law, and Development (FWLD) highlight that Dalit and Janajati women in Kathmandu encounter distinct challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and political representation due to both caste-based and gender discrimination, supporting the feminist argument for an intersectional approach in policy-making (Poudyal et al., 2021).

Moreover, feminist theory's emphasis on \*patriarchal structures\* is evident in the analysis of legal reforms and social policies in Kathmandu. For example, while the Nepali constitution provides formal rights to women, these laws are often inadequately enforced, and societal norms continue to prioritize male authority in both public and private spheres. Feminist theorists argue that such legal advancements must be supported by transformative cultural change, as patriarchal attitudes deeply ingrained in Kathmandu's society still influence areas like property inheritance, marriage, and career opportunities (Basnyat, 2020). Research by Nepali sociologists such as Meena Acharya further demonstrates how deeply embedded patriarchal values continue to restrict women's socio-economic mobility.

Lastly, feminist theory's focus on \*agency\* underscores the ways in which Kathmandu's women are actively engaging in advocacy, education, and social reform. The rise of grassroots organizations, feminist activists, and youth-led movements for gender equality exemplifies women's agency, demonstrating their role not just as subjects of change but as architects of it. By engaging with feminist theory, this review highlights the complexity of gender equality in Kathmandu, illustrating that a comprehensive understanding of women's rights and empowerment in this region must address not only policy changes but also cultural transformation and individual agency (Koirala, 2022).

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a central framework in understanding gender equality and women's studies in the Kathmandu region, as it reveals the ways multiple, intersecting social identities – such as caste, ethnicity, class, and geographic background – shape women's experiences and challenges in unique ways. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality asserts that social identities are interdependent and that different forms of discrimination compound one another, leading to varied levels of privilege or oppression (Balayar & Mazur, 2022). In Kathmandu, this approach is essential for unpacking the distinct barriers that women from diverse backgrounds encounter, which often go unaddressed in broader gender equality initiatives.

In Kathmandu, caste remains a major determinant of social standing and access to resources, with women from marginalized castes, like the Dalit and Janajati groups, facing structural discrimination both because of their gender and their caste identity (Bennett, 1983). Studies by organizations like the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) show that Dalit women in Kathmandu suffer from disproportionately high rates of violence and limited access to healthcare and education, underscoring how caste and gender discrimination intersect to exacerbate their marginalization (Dahal et al., 2022). For example, Dalit women are often excluded from certain economic and social opportunities available to women from higher castes, limiting their upward mobility and perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion (Fund, 2003).

Ethnicity and geographic background also play crucial roles in shaping gender dynamics in Kathmandu. Women from indigenous and rural backgrounds, often migrating to Kathmandu for work, may lack social networks and face challenges assimilating into the urban workforce, where cultural biases affect their employment opportunities. This issue is particularly prevalent among Janajati women, who are frequently employed in low-wage, informal sectors without adequate labour protections, limiting their economic security and exposing them to exploitative practices (Pradhāna and Centre, 1993). Research by the Forum for Women, Law, and Development (FWLD) highlights that migrant women from rural areas are more vulnerable to discrimination and harassment due to their ethnic and geographic identities.

Intersectional approaches underscore the need for gender equality policies in Kathmandu that address these overlapping identities to achieve meaningful change. For instance, targeted support programs focusing on marginalized groups, legal protections against caste-based discrimination, and tailored economic opportunities for ethnic minorities could address these complex inequalities more effectively than one-size-fits-all gender policies. Thus, intersectionality provides critical insights for a comprehensive review of gender equality, emphasizing that Kathmandu's women's rights movement must account for the multiplicity of identities to foster true inclusivity and equity.

**Queer Theory:** This theory challenges the binary understanding of gender and sexuality, promoting a more fluid and inclusive perspective. It explores how societal norms around gender and sexuality are constructed and maintained.

Queer theory offers an essential perspective on gender equality and women's studies in Kathmandu by challenging rigid, binary understandings of gender and sexuality, which have long shaped societal norms and laws in Nepal. Originating as a critical theory that questions fixed categories of identity, queer theory advocates for recognizing and embracing fluid, non-normative identities. In Kathmandu, this approach highlights the limitations of traditional gender equality frameworks that often overlook the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, who face unique forms of discrimination and marginalization. While Nepal has made progressive strides, such as constitutionally recognizing "third gender" rights, queer theory reveals the ongoing struggles LGBTQ+ communities face within broader societal expectations and legal structures that continue to uphold heteronormativity.

Kathmandu, as a relatively progressive urban centre, has witnessed a growing LGBTQ+ movement, particularly through advocacy by groups like the Blue Diamond Society (BDS), which works to advance rights and visibility for sexual and gender minorities. However, queer theory reveals that legal recognition alone does not equate to social acceptance. For instance, while Nepal is one of the few countries in South Asia to legally recognize non-binary gender identities, queer people in Kathmandu often still face stigma, discrimination, and economic exclusion. Transgender individuals, especially, encounter barriers in accessing employment, healthcare, and public services, as societal attitudes have not fully aligned with the legal advancements made in recent years.

Queer theory also challenges Kathmandu's existing frameworks for gender equality, which often fail to address the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Gender equality initiatives in Kathmandu typically focus on women's empowerment, viewing gender through a binary lens that does not account for non-binary, transgender, or queer identities. This exclusion often leaves LGBTQ+ individuals without support within feminist and women's organizations, as these frameworks are not yet fully inclusive of diverse gender experiences. Studies conducted by Nepali scholars and BDS reveal that LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those assigned female at birth, experience layered forms of oppression due to both their non-normative identities and the patriarchal values embedded in Nepali society. In conclusion, queer theory's focus on identity fluidity and anti-normativity underscores the need for Kathmandu's gender equality discourse to expand beyond binary notions of gender. This inclusive approach could support more comprehensive policies and social programs, fostering an environment where all gender identities are acknowledged and supported. Queer theory thus provides valuable insights into creating a



holistic approach to gender equality that embraces the full spectrum of identities within Kathmandu's diverse and evolving social landscape.

## Current Trends in Gender Equality

**Economic Participation and Leadership:** Despite progress, significant gaps remain in women's economic participation and leadership roles. Research focuses on barriers such as the gender pay gap, lack of childcare support, and underrepresentation in STEM fields and executive positions (World Economic Forum) (World Bank).

Current trends in gender equality in Kathmandu reflect both progress and persistent challenges, particularly regarding women's economic participation and leadership roles. In recent years, Kathmandu has seen an increase in women entering the workforce, driven by urbanization, education, and evolving social norms (Clark et al., 2020). Women in Kathmandu are increasingly visible in various economic sectors, from technology and entrepreneurship to hospitality and retail (Shrestha et al., 2024). However, women's participation remains concentrated in low-wage, informal jobs, limiting their economic empowerment and perpetuating gender wage gaps. Studies by organizations like the Nepalese Women's Chamber of Commerce show that despite legal provisions for equal pay, women often receive lower wages than men for similar roles, largely due to persistent societal biases and limited opportunities for skill development (Acharya, 1994).

Leadership in the corporate and public sectors is another area where gender equality remains a work in progress. While the constitution mandates women's representation in government, translating this into meaningful leadership positions has been slow. Women hold about 33% of seats in Nepal's federal and provincial parliaments, yet high-level decision-making roles remain male-dominated. In Kathmandu, a few women have risen to prominent positions in politics and business, serving as role models and challenging traditional stereotypes about women's roles (Nelson et al. 1994). However, structural barriers, such as limited access to mentorship, capital, and networks, hinder many women from reaching senior leadership positions.

The private sector in Kathmandu is increasingly recognizing the value of gender diversity, with several companies promoting women's leadership development and flexible work policies to support female employees (Managing Resources in a Nepalese Village: Changing Dynamics of Gender, Caste and Ethnicity, Case Study, 1997). Non-governmental organizations and initiatives like the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Program are also working to empower women with skills and financial resources, aiming to reduce economic dependency and promote business ownership among women.

Despite these advancements, achieving gender equality in economic participation and leadership requires sustained

efforts to dismantle structural inequalities and address cultural perceptions about women's roles. Kathmandu's progress in gender equality, while notable, highlights the need for continued advocacy, targeted support, and systemic changes to create a truly inclusive environment where women can thrive in all sectors of the economy (Environment Assessment of Nepal: Emerging Issues and Challenges, 2006).

**Gender-Based Violence:** Addressing gender-based violence remains a critical area of focus. Studies highlight the prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence against women, alongside the social, economic, and health impacts of such violence (Deuba et al., 2024). In Kathmandu, current trends in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) reveal a complex mix of progress and ongoing challenges. Awareness and activism around GBV have grown significantly, with local organizations, government initiatives, and international partnerships working to combat violence against women and marginalized genders (Manandhar and Bhattachan, 2001). Kathmandu, as Nepal's capital, has become a hub for activism and policy reform, partly due to the visibility of GBV cases in the media and on social platforms. Campaigns such as #MeTooNepal and the high-profile coverage of domestic violence and harassment cases have sparked public discourse, leading to greater awareness of the issue and encouraging survivors to come forward (Willey-Sthapit et al., 2024).

Legal advancements have supported these shifts, as Nepal's constitution and subsequent laws criminalize domestic violence, marital rape, and sexual harassment. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in Kathmandu's lower-income and densely populated areas, where police responses are often slow, and social stigmas discourage survivors from seeking help (Village Development Programme Through Social Mobilization: The Progress-- , Achievements, Effects, and Impacts, 1999). Despite legal protections, many women and girls in Kathmandu still face GBV in both public and private spaces, from harassment in public transport to domestic abuse. NGOs such as Maiti Nepal and Saathi have played a critical role in providing safe havens, legal support, and counselling for survivors, as well as advocating for better enforcement of anti-GBV laws (Lewis and Kanji, 2009).

A significant trend in Kathmandu is the rise in digital platforms and apps that facilitate reporting and accessing resources for GBV survivors (Clark et al., 2020). Mobile applications, helplines, and virtual counselling services have emerged to help survivors report incidents anonymously, reducing some of the barriers linked to social stigma and fear of retaliation (Pathak and Adhikari, 1997). Educational programs in schools and community centres also seek to dismantle harmful gender norms by addressing GBV's root causes, fostering attitudes that promote respect and equality among young people (Deuba et al., 2024).

However, deep-seated cultural norms that justify or downplay GBV continue to impede progress. While Kathmandu is witnessing growing advocacy, the city still requires comprehensive reforms in law enforcement, public awareness, and support systems to build a safe, inclusive environment for all genders (Shai et al., 2020). This evolving landscape indicates a positive shift but also underscores the necessity for sustained, multi-layered approaches to address gender-based violence effectively.

**Digital Inclusion:** The digital gender divide is an emerging area of concern. Women are often underrepresented in technology sectors and face barriers to accessing digital tools and education. This has implications for economic opportunities and empowerment in an increasingly digital world (European Institute for Gender Equality) (Inamdar et al. 2023). Digital inclusion is emerging as a crucial dimension of gender equality in Kathmandu, as access to technology becomes increasingly essential for education, employment, and social participation. Kathmandu's digital landscape has expanded rapidly, with higher rates of internet and mobile phone access than rural areas, making it a focal point for initiatives aimed at bridging the gender digital divide (Shrestha et al., 2023). However, women in Kathmandu still face significant challenges in accessing and utilizing digital resources compared to men. Traditional gender norms, safety concerns, and economic constraints limit many women's engagement with technology, impacting their opportunities for personal and professional growth in a tech-driven world. According to recent studies, while mobile phone ownership among women has grown, their access to advanced digital skills and internet literacy remains limited, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods and among older women.

Efforts to address these gaps are underway, with various NGOs, government bodies, and private organizations implementing digital literacy programs targeted specifically at women and girls. Initiatives like the \*Women's Digital Literacy Program\* and \*Girls in Tech Nepal\* offer training on basic and advanced digital skills, including internet safety, coding, and online business management, aiming to empower women to access job markets, entrepreneurship, and e-learning opportunities. Additionally, Kathmandu's rising tech industry is gradually opening up to gender diversity, with women gaining visibility in fields such as software development, digital marketing, and e-commerce (Branch, 1988). Several tech companies in Kathmandu are now focusing on creating more inclusive workplaces and hiring practices, aiming to increase female representation in the industry.

Digital platforms are also playing a transformative role in women's social and political engagement. Social media and online forums provide a space for women to advocate for their rights, discuss gender equality, and organize grassroots movements. Kathmandu's online communities have fostered solidarity and visibility for gender issues, helping to amplify women's voices and connect them to resources.

Despite these advancements, achieving gender parity in digital access and skill-building requires sustained effort. Programs must address economic barriers, cultural perceptions, and digital safety issues that discourage women from fully embracing technology. As digital inclusion continues to evolve in Kathmandu, a more inclusive approach will be vital to ensuring that women and all marginalized groups can participate fully in Nepal's growing digital economy (Shrestha, 2001).

## Policy and Advocacy

**Legislation and International Agreements:** Various international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), provide frameworks for promoting gender equality. National policies and legislation also play a crucial role in addressing gender disparities.

Policy and advocacy efforts in Kathmandu regarding gender equality have seen significant influence from both national legislation and international agreements (Dahal et al., 2022). Nepal has progressively advanced legal frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, particularly through its 2015 Constitution, which enshrines equal rights for women and mandates protections against gender-based discrimination (Acharya, 1999). This includes provisions for women's representation in the federal and provincial legislatures, aiming for at least 33% female participation, and recognizing the rights of marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ+ community, through "third gender" recognition. Despite these legal strides, policy implementation remains inconsistent, often hindered by cultural norms and gaps in enforcement, highlighting the importance of continuous advocacy (Deuba et al., 2024).

International agreements have played a pivotal role in shaping Nepal's gender equality policies. Nepal is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other key treaties, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize gender equality as a global priority (Acharya, 2000). These agreements have provided frameworks that guide national policy, especially in areas like education, healthcare, and economic empowerment for women. For example, CEDAW's recommendations have influenced Nepal's anti-discrimination laws and efforts to address gender-based violence, with Nepal periodically reporting on its progress to the United Nations. Kathmandu's vibrant civil society plays a vital advocacy role, particularly through NGOs like Saathi, Maiti Nepal, and the Blue Diamond Society, which support policy change, raise awareness, and advocate for more effective implementation of laws. These organizations often collaborate with government agencies and international partners, conducting campaigns that address issues like domestic violence, economic inclusion, and digital literacy for women (Willey-Sthapit et al., 2023). Recent



advocacy efforts have focused on eliminating the barriers that prevent women from fully benefiting from legislative protections, including the underreporting of gender-based violence and limited access to justice for marginalized groups.

Despite these advancements, a gap remains between policy and practice. Advocacy groups continue to push for reforms that would ensure effective implementation of gender equality policies in Kathmandu, emphasizing the need for stronger accountability, better-funded support services, and community education to shift societal norms. International support and local advocacy are crucial in bridging this gap, fostering a policy environment that not only enacts gender-equitable legislation but also ensures it impacts women's lives in meaningful ways (Hamal and Huijsmans, 2021).

**Grassroots Movements and Advocacy:** Grassroots movements have been instrumental in driving change. These include campaigns for reproductive rights, anti-violence initiatives, and movements like #MeToo, which highlight systemic issues and call for accountability and reform.

In Kathmandu, grassroots movements and advocacy play a critical role in advancing gender equality and influencing policy changes. These movements, often spearheaded by local women's organizations and community-based groups, are essential in raising awareness about gender issues, challenging societal norms, and mobilizing support for legislative reforms. Grassroots organizations, such as Maiti Nepal and the Women's Empowerment Network, engage directly with communities to address gender-based violence, economic disparities, and educational access, fostering a culture of solidarity and empowerment among women. These organizations not only provide vital support services, including shelter and counselling for survivors of violence, but also conduct outreach programs aimed at educating communities about women's rights and gender equality.

The effectiveness of these grassroots movements is evident in their ability to galvanize public support and generate dialogue around gender issues. For instance, campaigns led by organizations like the Blue Diamond Society have successfully raised awareness about the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, contributing to broader conversations about inclusion and diversity within gender equality frameworks (Shrestha, 1999). Through street protests, social media campaigns, and public forums, these movements create platforms for marginalized voices, advocating for their rights and demanding accountability from policymakers.

Moreover, grassroots advocacy has been instrumental in influencing local and national policies. By documenting cases of discrimination and gender-based violence, grassroots organizations provide essential data and narratives that inform policy discussions and reforms. Their on-the-ground experiences allow them to identify gaps in existing legislation and highlight the need for

stronger protections and support systems for women. For example, advocacy efforts have led to increased attention on issues like maternal health, domestic violence, and access to education, prompting policymakers to consider these issues in their agendas.

The collaboration between grassroots movements and formal advocacy networks amplifies their impact. Joint efforts with national NGOs and international organizations often lead to more substantial advocacy campaigns, as they combine local knowledge with broader resources and visibility. This partnership can also facilitate access to funding and technical support, enhancing the capacity of grassroots organizations to effect change. Despite the progress made through grassroots advocacy, challenges remain. Resistance from traditional power structures, persistent cultural stigmas, and limited access to resources can hinder the effectiveness of these movements. Nevertheless, grassroots advocacy continues to be a vital force in Kathmandu, driving the agenda for gender equality and ensuring that the voices of women and marginalized communities are heard and prioritized in policy discussions.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** This strategy involves integrating gender perspectives into all levels of policy-making and practice. It aims to ensure that gender equality is considered in all aspects of governance and societal development (European Institute for Gender Equality).

Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a pivotal approach in Kathmandu's policy and advocacy landscape aimed at promoting gender equality and addressing the systemic inequalities faced by women and marginalized groups (Women and the Management of Energy, Forests, and Other Resources, 1990). This strategy involves integrating gender perspectives into all stages of policy-making, program design, and implementation across various sectors, including health, education, economic development, and governance. The Government of Nepal has recognized gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy to fulfill its commitments under international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Cheong et al., 2023).

In Kathmandu, gender mainstreaming initiatives seek to ensure that women's voices and needs are reflected in public policies. For instance, the National Women's Commission has been instrumental in advocating for gender-responsive policies by conducting gender analysis in various sectors (Āyoga, 1992). These analyses help identify barriers that prevent women from fully participating in economic and social life and inform the development of policies that address these gaps. This approach has led to the formulation of targeted policies, such as those aimed at increasing women's representation in local governance and ensuring access to education and health services (Dahal et al., 2022).

Grassroots movements and local organizations play a crucial role in advocating for gender mainstreaming by raising awareness and providing evidence of gender disparities at the community level. By collecting data on issues like gender-based violence, economic inequality, and access to education, these organizations create a compelling case for policymakers to prioritize gender issues in their agendas. Their advocacy efforts often include lobbying for the inclusion of gender indicators in policy frameworks, which help monitor progress and accountability.

Despite the advancements in gender mainstreaming, challenges persist. Implementation often falls short due to a lack of political will, insufficient resources, and inadequate training for government officials on gender-sensitive approaches (Children & Women of Nepal: A Situation Analysis, 1996). Additionally, deeply ingrained cultural norms can hinder the effective application of gender mainstreaming strategies. Advocacy groups continue to push for stronger commitment from policymakers to ensure that gender considerations are not merely an afterthought but a fundamental aspect of all policy initiatives.

In conclusion, gender mainstreaming in Kathmandu represents a comprehensive strategy to promote gender equality and empower women. By integrating gender perspectives into policymaking, local organizations and advocacy groups are driving meaningful change, although sustained efforts are necessary to overcome existing barriers and ensure that gender equality is achieved in practice, not just in theory.

## Case Studies

**Nordic Countries:** Often cited as leaders in gender equality, Nordic countries have implemented comprehensive policies that promote work-life balance, parental leave, and gender quotas in leadership positions.

The Nordic countries, often lauded for their progressive approaches to gender equality, provide a compelling case study for examining best practices that could inform efforts in Kathmandu, Nepal. Nations such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark have established comprehensive frameworks that promote gender equality across various sectors, serving as models for countries striving to enhance their gender policies and advocacy strategies.

One of the key elements of the Nordic model is the integration of gender equality into all aspects of public policy, which parallels the gender mainstreaming efforts being advocated in Kathmandu. In the Nordic countries, gender equality is viewed as a fundamental human right, and this perspective is embedded in national legislation, including robust labour laws, parental leave policies, and anti-discrimination measures. For instance, Sweden's parental leave policy, which provides extensive paid leave for both mothers and fathers, has not only supported women's participation in the workforce but has also

encouraged men to take an active role in childcare (Sattaur, 1993). This kind of policy could inspire similar initiatives in Nepal, where traditional gender roles often limit women's economic participation (Balayar & Mazur, 2022). Additionally, the Nordic countries emphasize the importance of education in promoting gender equality. The high level of investment in education and the promotion of gender-sensitive curricula have been instrumental in shaping attitudes towards gender roles from an early age. In Kathmandu, where educational access is improving but remains unequal, adopting gender-sensitive educational policies could help challenge societal norms and empower future generations.

The Nordic model also highlights the significance of strong civil society engagement in advocating for gender equality. Grassroots movements and women's organizations in these countries play a vital role in holding governments accountable and ensuring that gender policies are effectively implemented. In Kathmandu, the collaboration between local NGOs and international organizations can enhance advocacy efforts, drawing lessons from Nordic civil society's successful strategies in lobbying for legislative changes and social awareness.

Moreover, the Nordic countries demonstrate a commitment to addressing intersectionality within gender equality efforts, recognizing that factors such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status significantly impact individuals' experiences. This nuanced understanding can inform policies in Kathmandu, where various intersecting identities contribute to diverse experiences of inequality. Advocacy for inclusivity in gender policies could ensure that marginalized groups in Nepal, including ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals, receive the attention and resources they need.

Despite the successes of the Nordic countries, challenges persist, including the need for ongoing efforts to combat gender-based violence and promote equal representation in leadership roles. These issues resonate in Kathmandu as well, where gender-based violence remains a significant concern, and women's representation in decision-making positions is still limited.

In conclusion, the experiences of the Nordic countries offer valuable insights for advancing gender equality and women's studies in the Kathmandu region of Nepal. By adopting best practices from the Nordic model – such as comprehensive gender policies, educational initiatives, strong civil society engagement, and an intersectional approach – Nepal can enhance its efforts to achieve gender equality and empower women, ultimately contributing to a more just and equitable society.

**Developing Nations:** In contrast, many developing nations face significant challenges in achieving gender equality. Issues such as access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities are critical areas of focus. Examining gender equality through the lens of developing nations provides critical insights that can inform the discourse in Kathmandu,



Nepal. Many developing nations face similar socio-economic challenges and cultural norms that hinder gender equality, yet they also demonstrate innovative approaches and resilience in addressing these issues. This case study draws on the experiences of several developing countries, highlighting strategies and lessons that could be relevant for Nepal's pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment.

One key example is Bangladesh, which has made notable strides in women's empowerment through targeted policies and programs. The introduction of microfinance initiatives, such as those by the Grameen Bank, has significantly empowered women by providing them with financial resources to start small businesses and improve their economic standing. This approach has not only increased women's participation in the economy but has also contributed to shifts in social norms, as women gain recognition as economic contributors (Hamal & Huijsmans, 2021). In Kathmandu, similar microfinance programs could be explored to enhance women's economic participation, especially in rural areas where access to financial services remains limited (Malla, 1989).

Additionally, the education sector in developing nations like Rwanda illustrates the impact of gender-sensitive policies. Post-genocide, Rwanda implemented comprehensive reforms to promote gender equality, resulting in the highest percentage of women in parliament worldwide (R. P. Shrestha et al., 2023). By prioritizing girls' education and creating policies that support women in leadership roles, Rwanda has set an example of how legislative frameworks can drive social change. Nepal, with its ongoing challenges in educational access for girls, can learn from Rwanda's commitment to gender parity in education and governance, emphasizing the need for policies that encourage girls to pursue higher education and leadership positions.

Another relevant case is Kenya, where grassroots movements and civil society organizations have played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights and gender equality (Dhungel, 2001). Initiatives like the "Women's Empowerment Program" have focused on addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's health and economic rights (Betron et al., 2020).

This model demonstrates the power of community engagement and activism, underscoring the importance of local organizations in pushing for policy changes (Chaudhary et al., 2022). In Kathmandu, strengthening the collaboration between grassroots movements and national advocacy efforts can enhance the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives, ensuring that local voices are heard in the policy-making process.

Moreover, the challenges faced by developing nations, such as economic inequality, cultural barriers, and limited access to healthcare, resonate in Kathmandu. Many women in developing countries experience multiple forms of discrimination, which often intersect with factors like poverty and rural-urban divides (Bank, 1991). Nepal can adopt an intersectional approach similar to those being promoted in countries like South Africa, where policies are designed to address the unique experiences of women from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

However, it is essential to recognize the complexities and contextual differences between developing nations. While successful strategies can provide inspiration, it is crucial for Kathmandu to adapt these approaches to its unique cultural and social landscape (Programme, 2002). Local contexts, historical backgrounds, and existing power structures must inform any policy or program designed to promote gender equality.

In conclusion, studying the experiences of developing nations reveals valuable lessons for advancing gender equality and women's studies in the Kathmandu region of Nepal. By learning from successful strategies in economic empowerment, education, grassroots activism, and intersectional policy-making, Nepal can develop a more comprehensive and effective approach to addressing gender inequality, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

## Primary Research Work

Below is a 15-question survey designed to assess perceptions and experiences related to gender equality and women's studies in the Kathmandu region of Nepal. The questionnaire has been assessed by Dr. Debaroti Sarkar (Phd in Mass Communication and Tourism from Agartala University, India) through mail dated 12/06/2024. The survey aims to capture insights into awareness, attitudes, and personal experiences related to gender equality, gender-based violence, economic participation, leadership, digital inclusion, and cultural norms.

The questions are structured to gather quantitative and qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive review of the current state of gender equality in Kathmandu. This study is conducted online and to the mass who are somehow in relation with Kathmandu, Nepal. The results of the survey are represented in charts and in graphical representations. At the end, a personalised review and feedback is also shared which can be considered as author's self-findings.

## Survey Questionnaire:

### Section A: General Awareness and Attitudes

1. How familiar are you with gender equality issues in Kathmandu, Nepal?

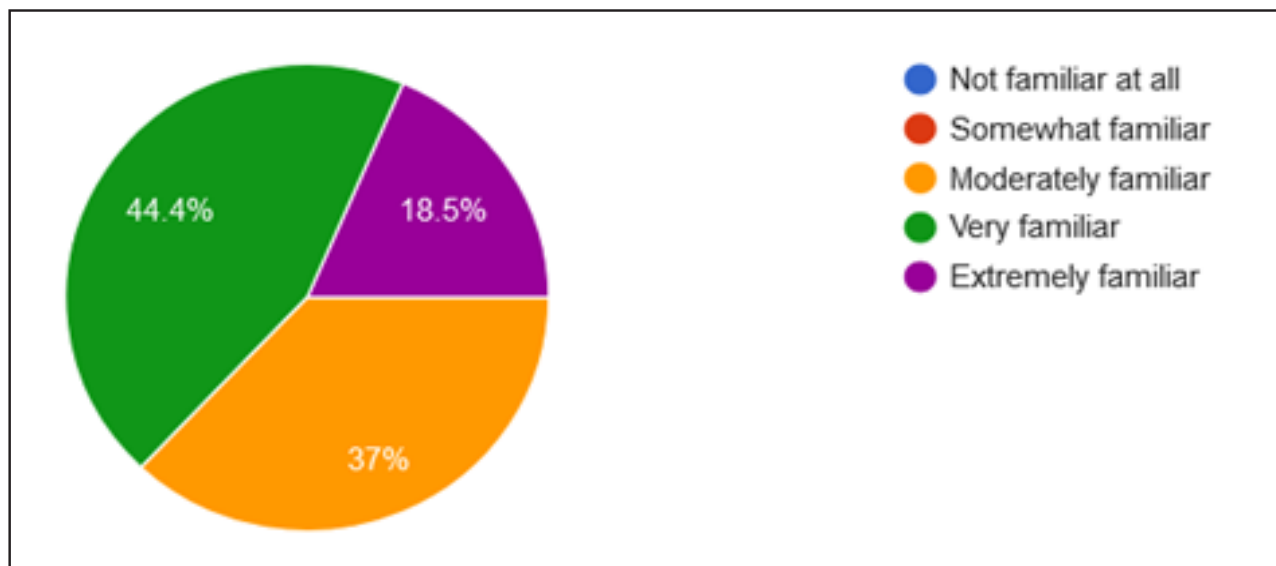


Fig: 1

2. Do you believe that significant progress has been made towards gender equality in recent years in Kathmandu?

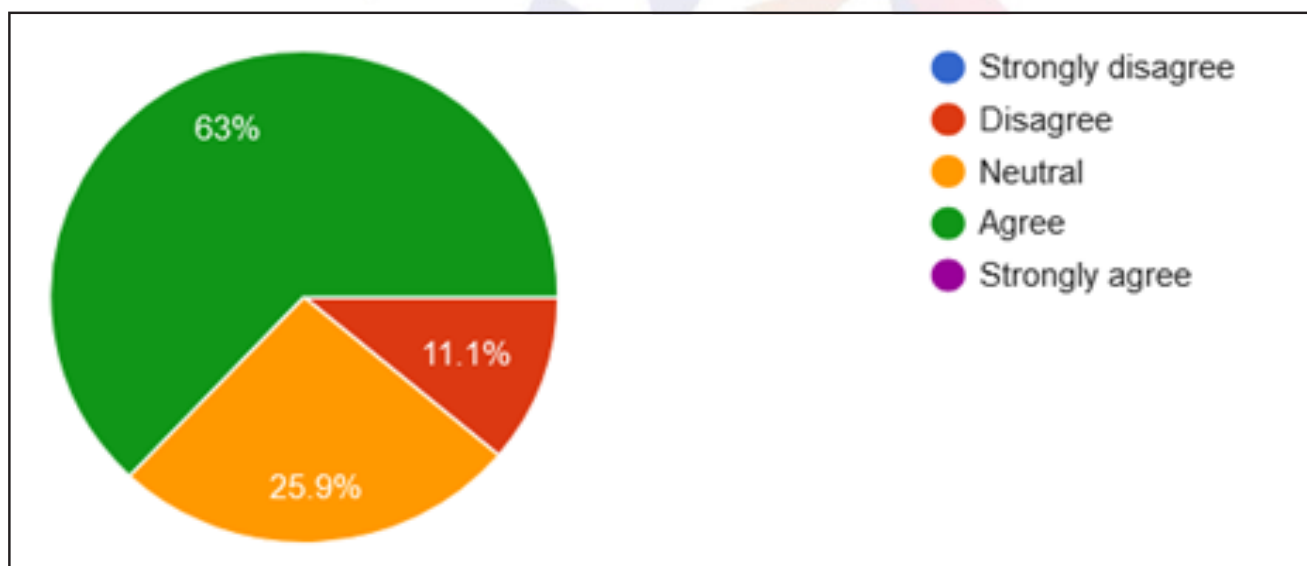


Fig: 2

3. Which of the following areas do you believe require the most attention to improve gender equality? (Select up to two)

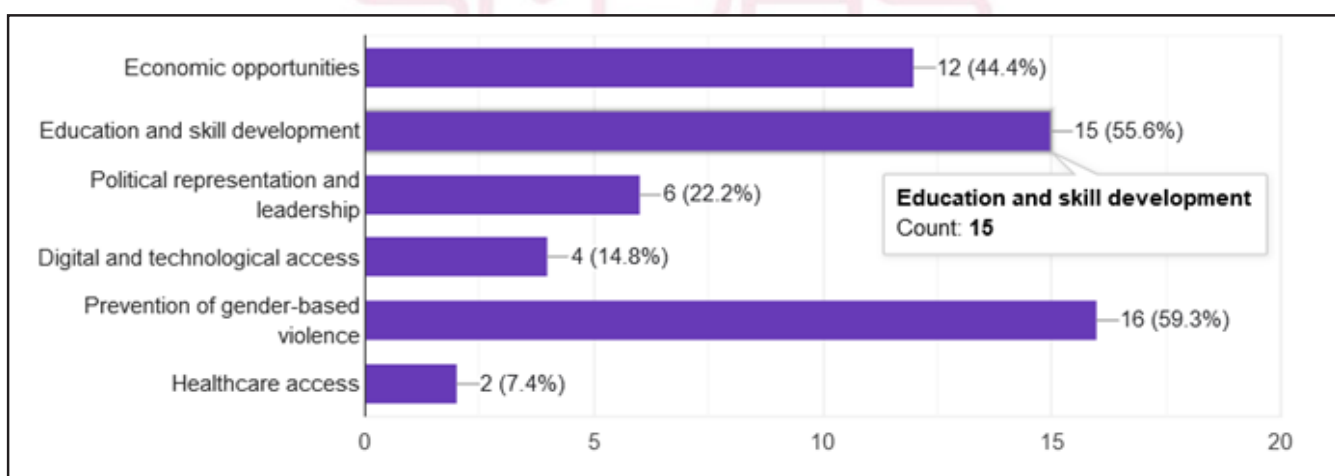


Fig: 3



4. How would you rate the role of the government in advancing gender equality in Kathmandu?

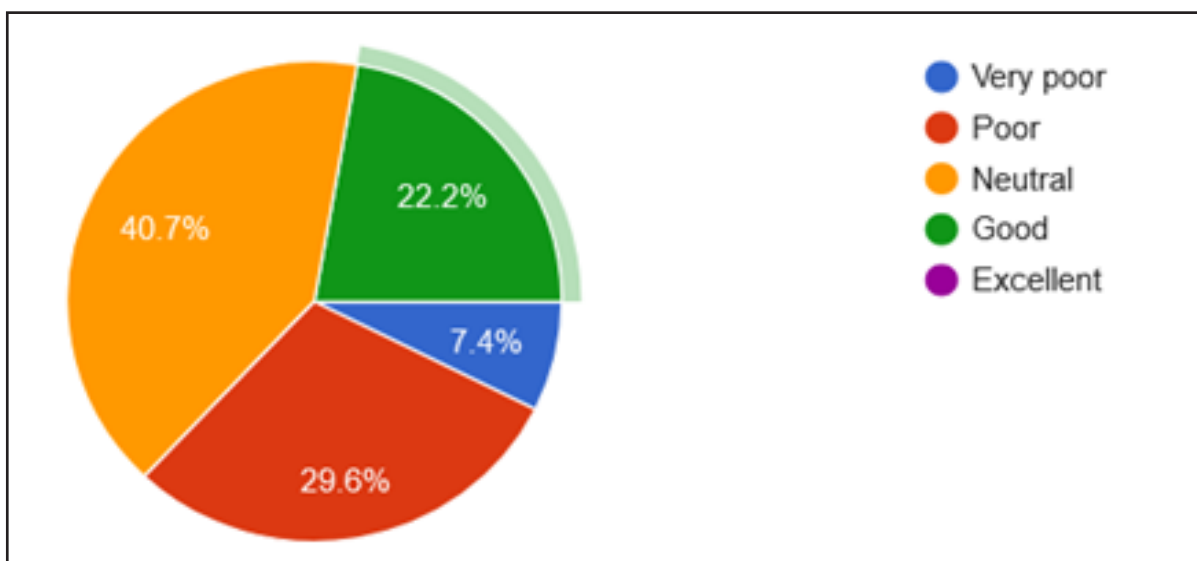


Fig: 4

### Section B: Personal Experience and Observations

5. Have you observed any changes in the economic participation of women in Kathmandu over the last five years?

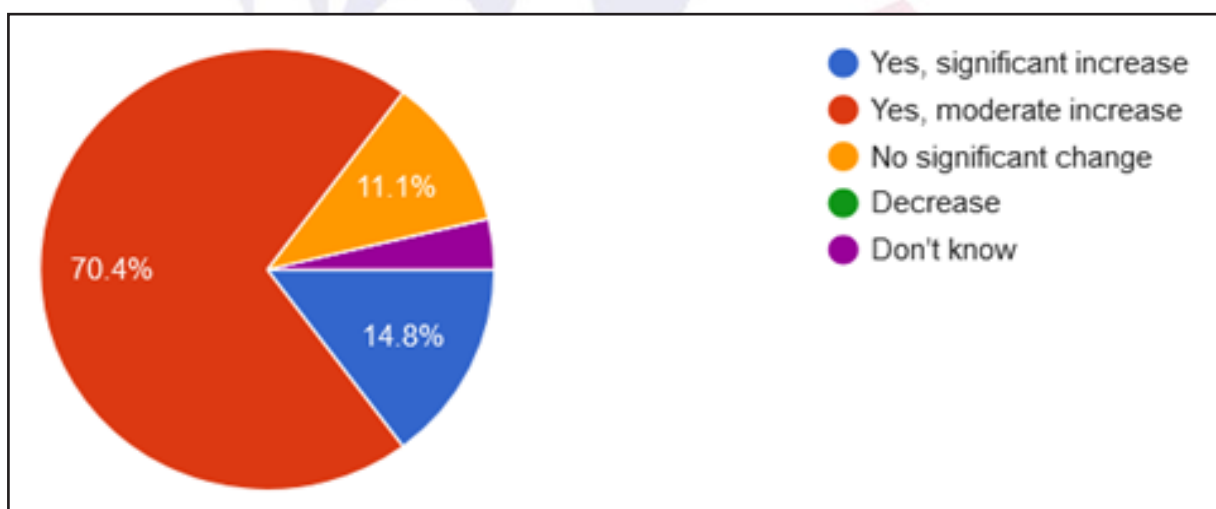


Fig: 5

6. Do you know of any organizations or programs that support women's leadership and participation in Kathmandu?

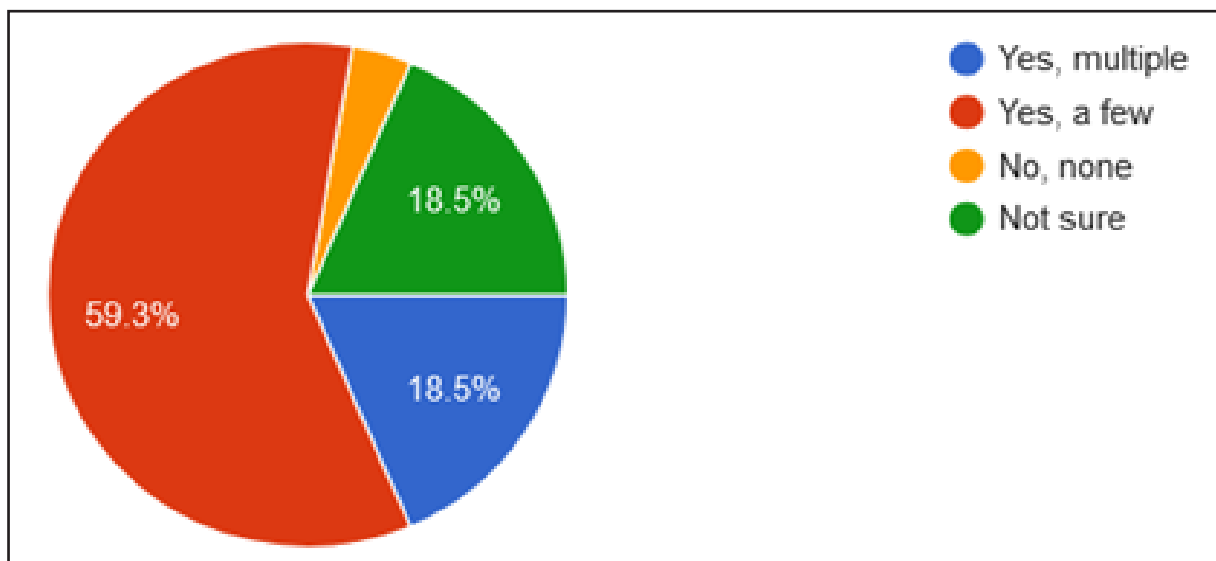


Fig: 6

7. How safe do you believe Kathmandu is for women and marginalized genders in terms of gender-based violence?

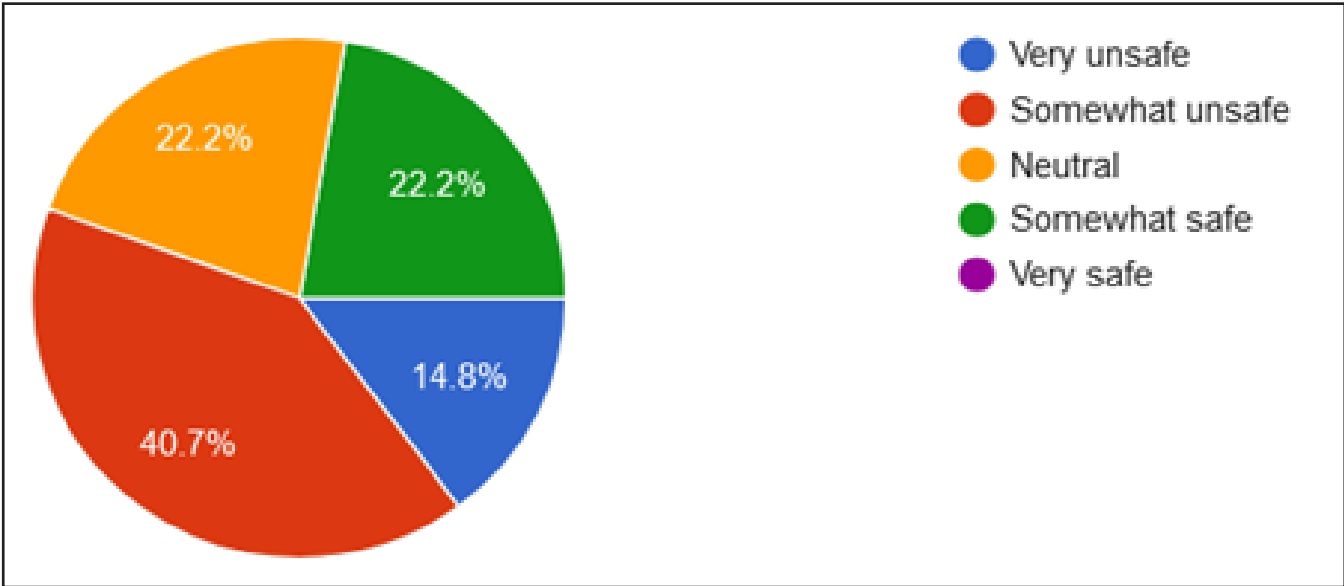


Fig: 7

8. Have you or someone you know experienced discrimination based on gender, caste, or ethnicity in Kathmandu?

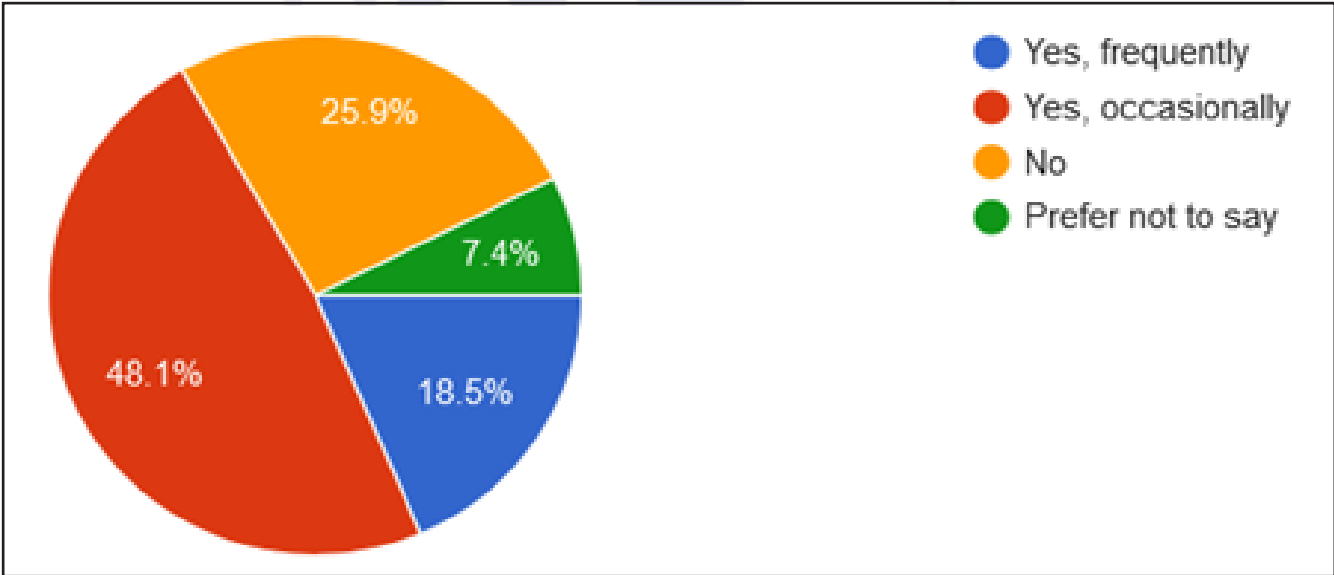


Fig: 8

9. Which form of discrimination do you believe is most prominent for women in Kathmandu?

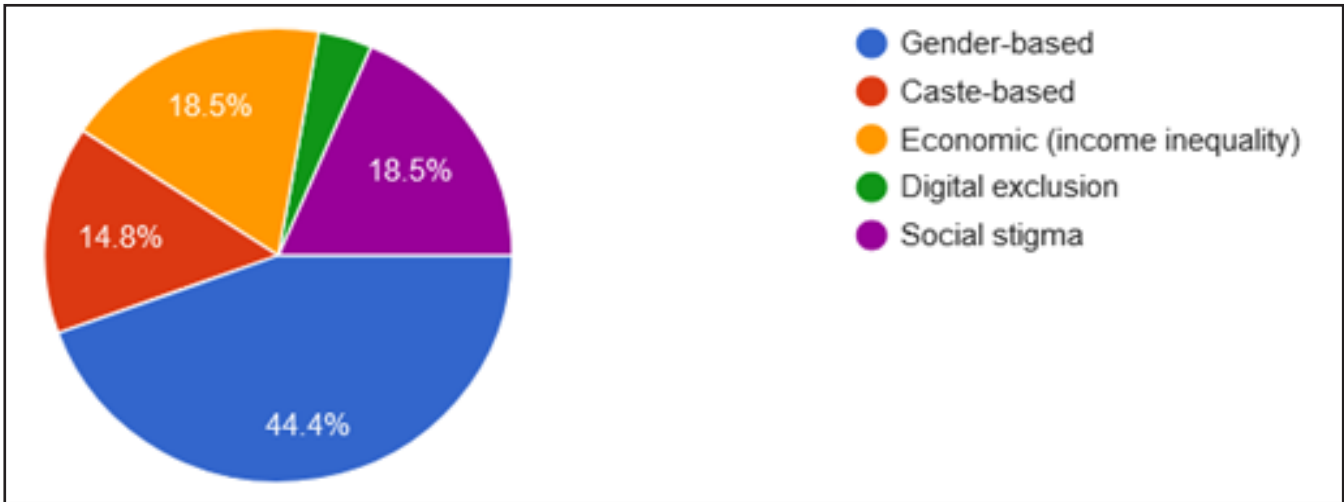


Fig: 9



### Section C: Digital Inclusion and Technological Access

10. Do you believe women in Kathmandu have equal access to digital resources (internet, mobile devices, computers) compared to men?

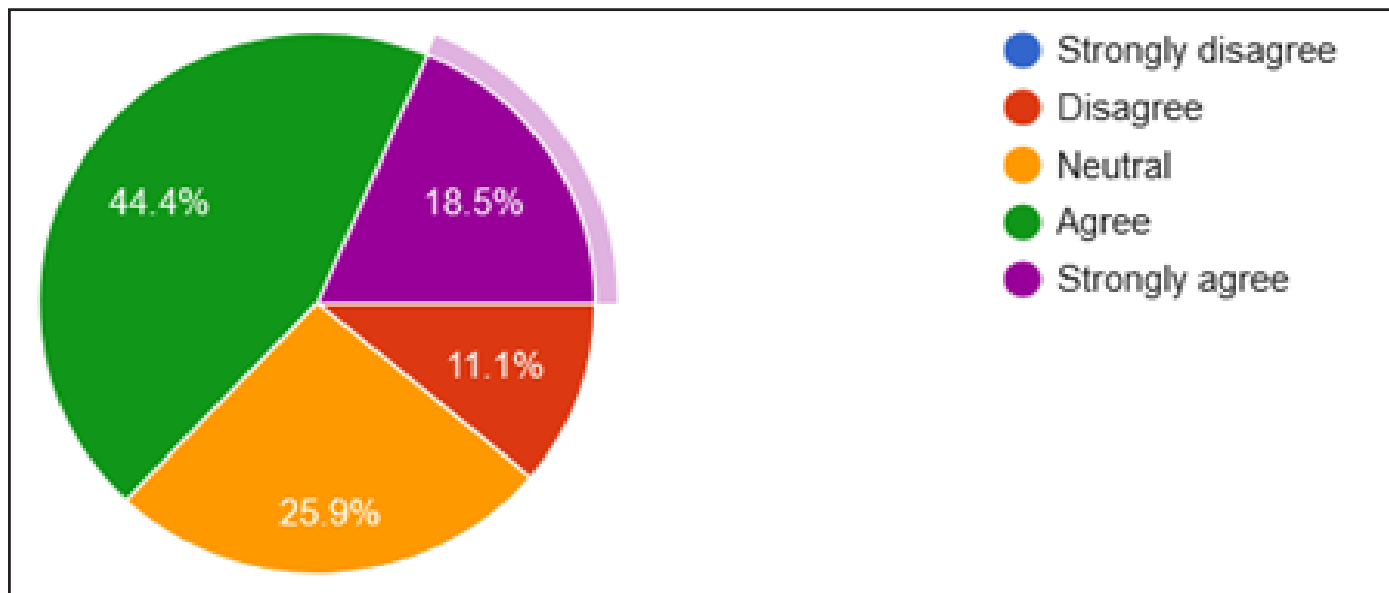


Fig: 10

11. In your opinion, what is the most significant barrier to digital access for women in Kathmandu?

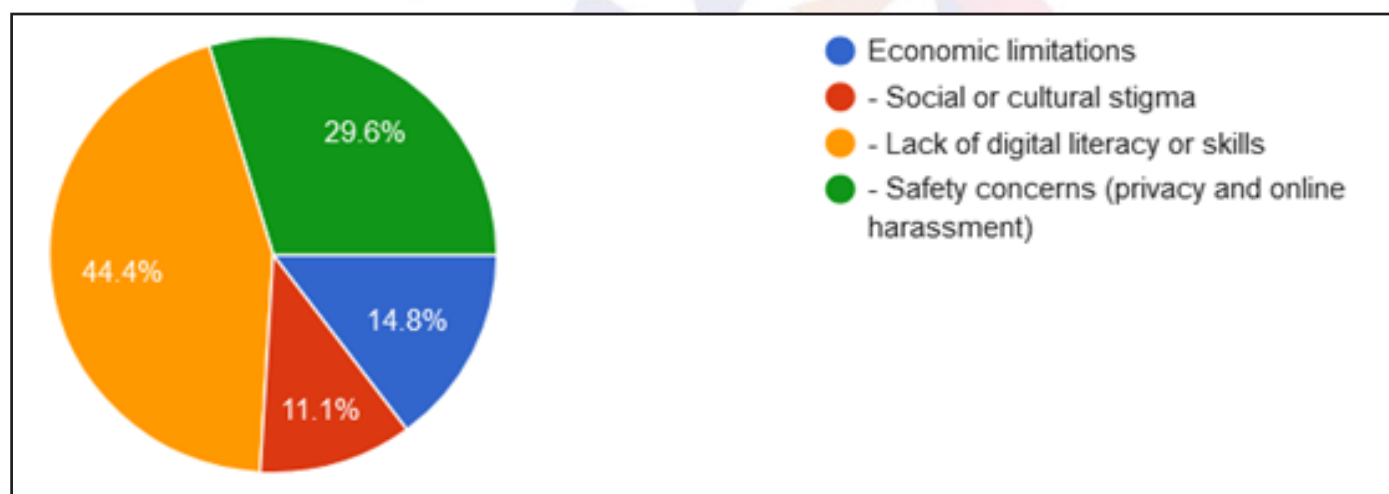


Fig: 11

12. Have you participated in or are aware of any digital literacy programs in Kathmandu aimed at supporting women?

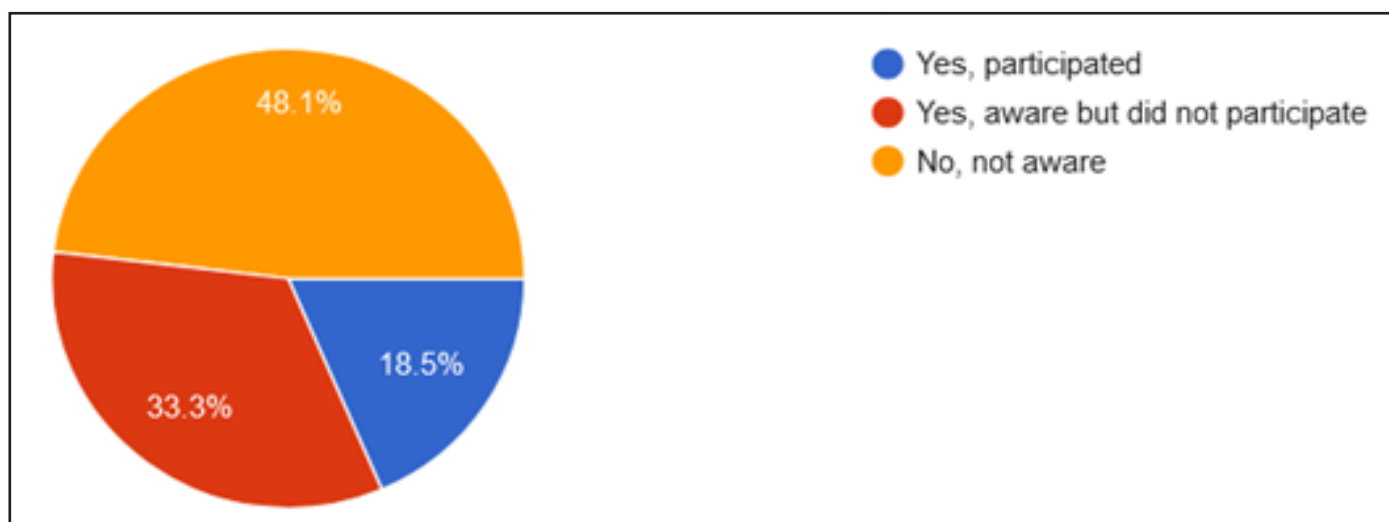


Fig: 12

Section D: Perceptions of Gender Equality in Leadership and Education

13. Do you think there are sufficient opportunities for women to attain leadership roles in Kathmandu’s political and business sectors?

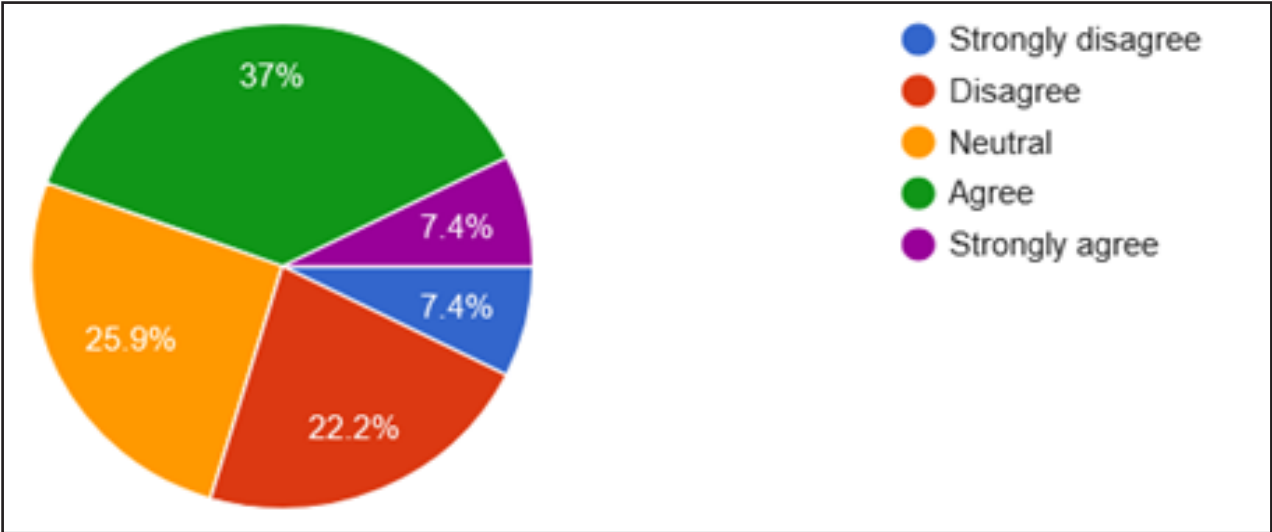


Fig: 13

14. How often are gender equality topics discussed in educational settings (schools, colleges, universities) in Kathmandu?

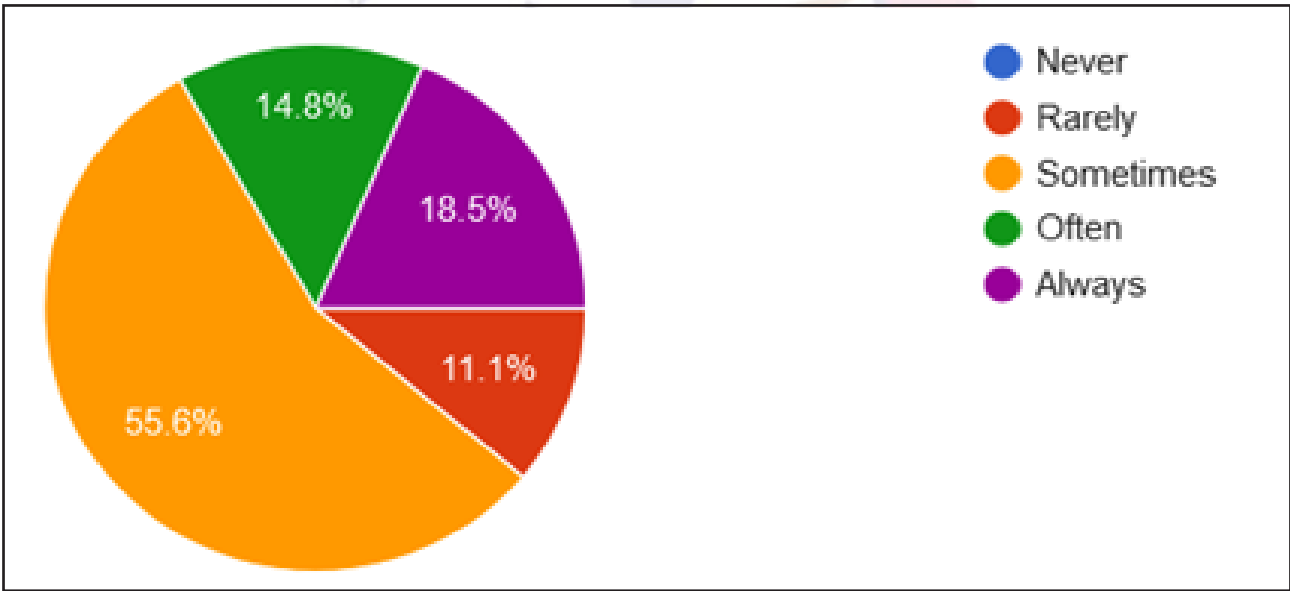


Fig: 14

15. What actions do you believe are most needed to achieve gender equality in Kathmandu?

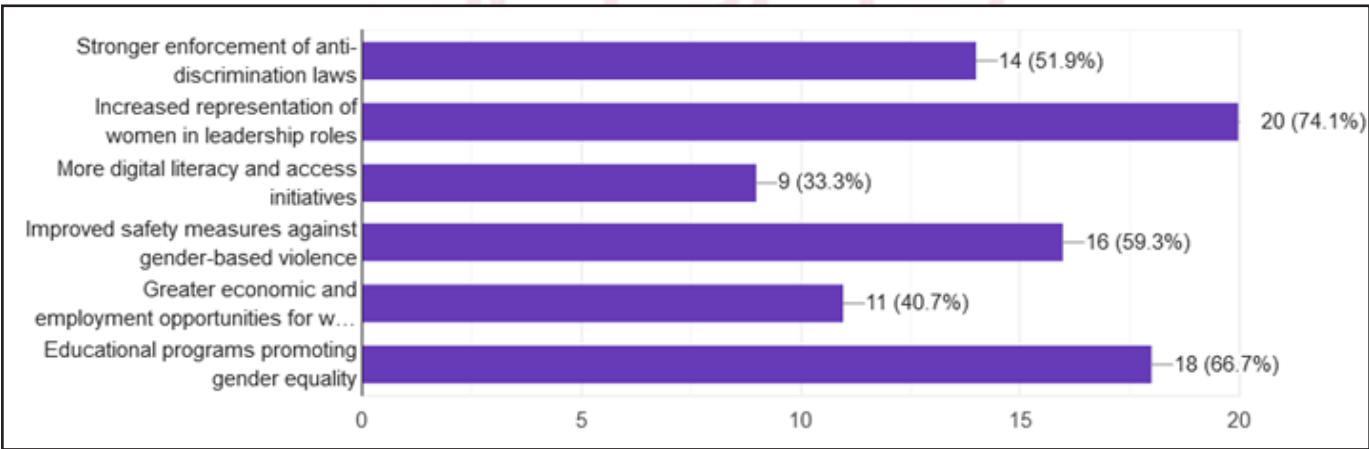


Fig: 15



(Select up to three)

The survey participator's detail is given below:

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## Data Collection and Survey results

### Awareness and Attitudes

- 44.4% of participants reported being very familiar with gender equality issues.
- 65% acknowledged progress in gender equality, while 11.1% disagreed.
- Key concerns include gender-based violence (59.3%) and education gaps (55.6%).

### Personal Experiences

- 70.4% believed there had been moderate growth in women's economic participation.
- 59.3% were aware of organizations supporting women's leadership.

- 40.7% considered Kathmandu "somewhat unsafe" for women and marginalized groups.

### Digital Inclusion

- 18.5% believed women in Kathmandu have equal access to digital resources.
- Lack of digital literacy (44.4%) was identified as the primary barrier to digital inclusion.

### Leadership and Education

- 55.6% noted that gender equality is "sometimes" discussed in educational institutions.
- 74.1% supported increasing women's leadership roles in politics and business.

## Research Work Findings & Analysis

The survey conducted on the topic 'Gender Equality and Women's Studies in Kathmandu, Nepal', provides valuable insights through the various responses. All the questions in the survey are based on the personal understanding and experiences of people. The survey is divided into four sections, A, B, C, D respectively. Section A, Fig 1 shows the 'general awareness and attitude' aspect. In this, majority of people (44.4%) are very familiar with gender equality issues in Kathmandu, which suggests that this is a prevailing problem. 65% of the participants agree that significant progress has been made towards gender equality in recent years in Kathmandu, while 11.1% disagree that, there has been any progress whatsoever (Section A, Fig 2). In Section A, Fig 3, there is not much gap in two options i.e., 'Prevention of gender-based violence' (59.3%) and 'Education and skill development' (55.6%), these are the areas they believe require the most attention to improve gender equality; while, very few participants (7.4%) believe that there should be improvement in 'Healthcare facilities. The role of the government in advancing gender equality in Kathmandu is 'neutral' according to majority (40.7%) of the participants and it is 'good' according to 22.2% in Section A, Fig 4. This may mean that the government has not taken enough measures to improve gender inequality issues in Kathmandu.

Section B contains questions based on "Personal experiences and observations". In Section B, Fig 5, a large percentage of participants (70.4%) believe that there has been a moderate increase in the economic participation of women in Kathmandu over the last five years; while very few participants (14.8%) believe that there has been significant increase. Some have also chosen the option 'don't know' which means there is lack of information among people. 59.3% of the participants are aware of a few organizations or programs that support women's leadership and participation in Kathmandu (Section B, Fig 6). In Section B, Fig 7, 14.8% of the participants consider Kathmandu to be very unsafe for women and marginalised communities in terms of gender - based violence, 40.7% say that it is somewhat unsafe, while no response says 'very safe'. This means there is still a long way to go to ensure complete safety of women and marginalised communities and finally put an end to this kind of violence/abuse. 48.1% of the participants have "occasionally" known or experienced discrimination based on gender, caste, or ethnicity in Kathmandu, and 7.4% prefer not to say anything, in Section B, Fig 8. This shows that, there is still a stigma attached to openly talking or seeking help against discrimination, abuse, or violence, in Kathmandu. 44.4% of the participants believe that gender - based discrimination is the most prominent form of discrimination amongst women in Kathmandu, while 14.8% believe it is caste - based discrimination predominantly for women, in Section B, Fig 9. Section C focuses on "Digital inclusion and technological access". 18.5% participants strongly agree to the fact that, women in Kathmandu have equal

access to digital resources (internet, mobile devices, computers) compared to men, while 11.1% disagree to this in Section C, Fig 10. This shows that technological accesses may not have reached some remote areas, but if they did, women are being deprived of their share of these facilities. In Section C, Fig 11, 44.4% of the participants believe that lack of digital literacy or skills is the most significant barrier to digital access for women in Kathmandu, 29.6% believe that it's due to safety concerns (privacy and online harassment), 14.8% think that it's economic limitations and, 11.1% think that it's social or cultural stigma. Most of the participants (48.1%) are not aware of any digital literacy programs in Kathmandu aimed at supporting women, whereas 18.5% have participated in these programs, in Section C, Fig 12.

Section D shows 'Perceptions of Gender Equality in Leadership and Education'. Fig 13 shows that 37% participants agree that there are sufficient opportunities for women to attain leadership roles in Kathmandu's political and business sectors. 55.6% think that gender equality topics are "sometimes" discussed in educational settings (schools, colleges, universities) in Kathmandu while, 11.1% say that it is rarely discussed. 74.1% participants believe that there should be increased representation of women in leadership roles, to achieve gender equality in Kathmandu.

Analysing the data gained through the survey, the overall graph leans towards people wanting an equal distribution of resources, facilities, equal cerebral opportunities and inclusivity amongst the society. There are many difficulties faced by women and marginalised communities, and the overall inclination is towards providing them with digital literacy, economic stability, jobs, and encouraging everyone to learn about gender equality, especially in educational institutions. Gender and caste - based discrimination is very much prevalent in Kathmandu, which gives rise to domestic violence and abuse – like social evils (Chaudhary et al., 2022). This can be gradually eliminated by raising awareness regarding this kind of discrimination.

The results highlight significant gaps in gender equality efforts despite recent advancements. Gender-based discrimination, economic disparity, and digital exclusion remain prominent challenges. Participants emphasized the need for improved education initiatives, safer public spaces, and stronger advocacy for marginalized communities.

## Intersectionality of Gender, Caste, Class, Ethnicity, and Rural/Urban Disparities

The findings from this study highlight the complex interplay between gender, caste, class, ethnicity, and rural/urban disparities, which shape the lived experiences of women in Kathmandu. Understanding how these factors intersect is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of gender inequality in this context. Below, we examine how each of these dimensions impacts women's access to resources, opportunities, and their ability to participate fully in societal and economic life (Clark et al., 2020).



### **Caste and Gender:**

In Kathmandu, caste-based discrimination continues to significantly influence women's experiences. As Dalit women face compounded oppression due to their caste and gender, they encounter multiple layers of discrimination that limit their access to resources such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. According to the survey findings, 48.1% of participants acknowledged the existence of caste-based discrimination for women in Kathmandu, with Dalit and other marginalized caste women often bearing the brunt of both gender and caste-based prejudice.

The intersection of caste and gender manifests most visibly in employment opportunities, where Dalit women are typically relegated to low-wage, informal sectors. They often experience segregation in workspaces, face harassment and exclusion from leadership positions, and lack access to critical social networks that could help them advance. These forms of discrimination limit Dalit women's economic mobility and their ability to engage in decision-making roles in both family and community (Hamal & Huijsmans, 2021).

### **Class and Gender:**

Class also plays a significant role in shaping women's opportunities in Kathmandu. Women from low-income backgrounds face significant barriers when it comes to accessing education and healthcare, as they often cannot afford school fees or medical expenses. The survey results indicate that 55.6% of participants believe that education gaps remain a significant barrier to gender equality in Kathmandu.

The gap in access to resources between upper-class women and women from lower socio-economic strata is particularly concerning. While women from wealthier families are more likely to pursue higher education and gain employment in professional sectors, women from lower-income families often remain confined to informal labor or domestic work, thus limiting their economic and social mobility. Class disparities also intersect with gender-based violence, as low-income women are often more vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual harassment due to their financial dependence on male family members or employers.

### **Ethnicity and Gender:**

Ethnic identity plays a critical role in shaping women's experiences in Kathmandu, particularly for indigenous women (Janajati) who face both gender and ethnic discrimination. The survey revealed that 40.7% of respondents consider cultural barriers to be a major form of discrimination faced by women in Kathmandu. Janajati women are often marginalized not only by their gender but also by their ethnic identity, which limits their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Women from ethnically marginalized communities also face cultural stereotypes and social exclusion, which impact their ability to participate fully in the urban

economy and political life. The intersectionality of gender and ethnicity creates compounded barriers, especially in employment and representation in decision-making roles. These women often lack the social capital and networks required to overcome these barriers, resulting in lower levels of economic empowerment and political participation (Inamdar et al., 2023).

### **Rural-Urban Disparities:**

Kathmandu, as the capital city, has seen a significant influx of migrants from rural areas seeking better educational and employment opportunities. However, rural-to-urban migration brings its own set of challenges for rural women, who often struggle to adapt to urban life due to lack of skills, language barriers, and cultural dislocation. The survey found that 59.3% of participants believe that economic participation in Kathmandu has increased for women, but this progress is not necessarily equitably distributed (Hamal & Huijsmans, 2021).

Rural women face unique challenges in Kathmandu, as they often find themselves in low-paying, informal jobs, and they lack access to formal employment opportunities due to their limited educational background and lack of professional networks. In contrast, women born in urban settings tend to have better access to educational institutions, employment opportunities, and social services. This urban-rural divide significantly contributes to the gender gap in economic participation and leadership representation (Cheong et al., 2023).

### **Compounded Inequality for Marginalized Women:**

The intersection of caste, class, ethnicity, and rural-urban status creates a situation in which some women experience compounded inequalities that limit their access to resources, reinforce traditional gender roles, and marginalize their voices in public spaces. For example, Dalit women from rural backgrounds who belong to indigenous ethnic groups face particularly challenging circumstances. They are often excluded from formal labor markets, education, and healthcare and are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and economic dependency.

The intersectional framework underscores the need for policy reforms that address the unique needs of these women and ensure inclusive development strategies. While mainstream gender equality policies in Kathmandu have made strides, they often fail to consider the specific challenges faced by marginalized women. For example, policies that focus solely on gender or economic empowerment without considering caste, class, and ethnic backgrounds may fail to address the root causes of inequality faced by these women.

### **Recommendations for Intersectional Policy Development:**

Given the complex nature of gender inequality in Kathmandu, policies and interventions should be intersectional in nature, acknowledging the multiple,

intersecting identities and challenges that women face (Betron et al., 2020). The study recommends:

- **Targeted Support Programs** for marginalized groups, especially Dalit, Janajati, and rural women, that focus on education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.
- **Culturally Sensitive Policies** that take into account ethnic and caste-based discrimination and promote inclusive education, employment, and leadership opportunities for marginalized communities.
- **Intersectional Data Collection** in gender-focused research to ensure that gender inequalities are analysed alongside class, caste, ethnicity, and rural/urban divides.
- **Grassroots Empowerment** initiatives that involve marginalized women in the policy-making process and amplify their voices in discussions around gender equality.

## Recommendation

1. **Education and Awareness:** Schools and universities should actively integrate gender equality education into their curricula.
2. **Digital Literacy Programs:** Expanding initiatives like the Women's Digital Literacy Program will improve women's technological access.
3. **Economic Empowerment:** Microfinance programs targeting women can enhance their economic stability.
4. **Stronger POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) Policies:** Establishing stricter workplace safety frameworks can ensure better protection.
5. **Inclusive Policy Development:** Advocacy groups should collaborate with policymakers to implement data-driven, intersectional strategies for marginalized groups.
6. **Enhanced Law Enforcement:** Ensuring proper enforcement of anti-violence and anti-discrimination laws is crucial for protecting vulnerable communities.

While Kathmandu has made progress in promoting gender equality, systemic issues such as patriarchal norms, limited access to education, and digital disparities require immediate attention.

By adopting comprehensive, inclusive policies and strengthening advocacy networks, Kathmandu can continue advancing towards a more equitable society.

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