Gender Pay Gap in the Construction Industry: Evidence from Morang District, Nepal

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Abstract

The issue of gender-based wage differentials in the construction industry has profound historical roots tracing back to early human societies where labor was divided by gender. This long-standing division has evolved but persisted, evident in today's global workforce, including in sectors like construction, where such disparities are noticeable. The study focuses on measuring and analyzing these gender-based wage differentials within Sundarharaincha-12, Morang in Nepal, employing a quantitative research design. The methodology involves structured questionnaires aimed at capturing data from 50 sample sizes of construction workers on wages, job roles, educational background, and personal demographics to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to wage disparities. Despite legal mandates for equal pay, significant disparities persist, with women earning approximately 16% less than their male counterparts for similar work. The findings underscore a significant gender-based wage gap, with women predominantly in lower-wage roles and virtually absent from higher-paying positions like masonry or contracting. The

study recommends that Enforce policies that guarantee equal pay for equal work, irrespective of gender, particularly in labor-intensive roles and offer training and education, especially for women, to help them qualify for higher-paying roles such as masons or contractors. By addressing these issues, there is potential not only to enhance gender equality but also to improve the overall productivity and efficiency of the construction sector in developing regions like Nepal.

Keywords: Gender-based, wages differentials, construction industry, wage survey, Male and female construction worker

Introduction

Gender based wage differentials have deep historical roots, extending from hunting and gathering societies to agricultural civilization. In early human societies labor was typically divided along gender lines men and women. There has been a difference between men and women on the basis of gender. Even at the present modern era social, professional and wages distinction is deeply rooted and exists in different parts of the world. Gender-based wage differentials refer to the gaps in earnings between male and female workers performing similar tasks or roles within a specific industry or occupation.

In general, "construction work" refers to the manual labor-intensive processes involved in creating, modifying, maintaining, or dismantling buildings, infrastructure and facilities. It includes a broad variety of jobs and pursuits executed by different experts and laborers in the construction sector. "Construction work" means the construction of a building, road, bridge, canal, tunnel, internal or inter-state waterway, railway, construction work or construction of a power station, telecommunication, telephone or telegraphic structure and similar other structure, and this term also includes installation of any machine, tool or equipment in that structure.

"Construction labor" means a labor who is engaged in the construction work (Government of Nepal 2017). This is one of the biggest sectors in terms of job creation but the wages differentials have been well-documented, raising questions about the factors contributing to their existence and their implications for workers and firms in the construction sector.

Women are most often designated as "helpers" whose work is assumed to be unskilled. Whereas men's designation and pay rate change over time as they acquire experience (Kanel, 2021), women continue to be classified as helpers even when carrying out tasks considered skilled. According to the latest Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS-III), women earn on average 16% less than men per month in construction (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019) While equal pay is mandated in the 2015 Constitution (Government of Nepal, 2015), it is very rarely implemented. The daily rate has increased in recent years for both men and women, with a boom in construction, but workers note that it has not kept pace with inflation. In addition to being socially unfair, the way men and women are treated differently in the workplace wastes human resources and hurt the economy.

Every developing country is facing the problem of gender-based wage differentials. It is observed that women are getting low wages as compared to men due to their low level of education, less productivity, lack of technical skills and so on (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Although it is widely recognized that increasing women's education levels has a positive impact on quality of life including higher income, economic growth and improving child health (Dollar & Gatti, 1991; Barro, 2001; Schultz, 2002) they still tend to receive less education compared with men in many developing regions.

In Nepal like many other developing countries, the construction industry stands as a significant contributor to economic growth and development. However, within

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this sector, gender-based wage differentials continue to exist. Despite efforts towards gender equality in various spheres, the construction workforce remains predominantly male, with women often facing barriers to entry and advancement, as well as unequal pay practices.

The research problem focuses on the persistent wage disparity between male and female construction workers in Sundarharaincha Ward No. 12, Morang, despite legal mandates for equal pay. Women in the construction sector often earn significantly less than men for similar work, primarily due to occupational segregation, limited access to skill development, and societal biases that confine them to lower-paying roles. This wage gap not only affects women's financial stability but also perpetuates broader economic inequalities. Understanding the extent and causes of this disparity is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions to promote gender equality in the construction industry.

Like many other sectors, the general problem of construction sector shows notable gender wage difference. Despite performing similar tasks, female workers often receive lower wages compared to their male counterpart. When men and women are paid differently for the same work, it creates unfairness between genders. This wage gap not only makes it harder for women to achieve financial stability but also keeps economic inequalities in place. Various researches indicate that women often earn significantly less than men for similar work, with wage variation noted across various region including India and Nepal. A Central Bureau of Statistics report has brought to light wide disparity between male and female workers in Nepal - women earn 29.45 per cent less than their male counterparts on an average, even if the level of education among both the genders is the same. Despite equal work hour, men typically receive higher pay, reflecting broader systemic issues of gender discrimination within the construction industry (Dhungana, 2019).

The study aims to measure the extent of gender-based wage differential among construction worker. Gender-based wage differentials within the construction industry present a significant challenge to achieving gender equality and economic justice. Despite efforts to promote inclusive practices, disparities persist, impacting the livelihoods of individuals and the overall socio-economic landscape of the region. The research problem lies in understanding the underlying factors contributing to these wage differentials and figuring out effective strategies to address them.

This study attempted to explain what is the extent of gender-based wage differentials in the construction industry.

The study is based upon the results of a survey conducted among 50 construction workers in Nepal, specially focusing in Sundarharaincha Municipality ward No. 12. The study is limited to one locality and may not be applicable to other regions. The sample size is relatively small, which may affect the power of statistical tests. The study focuses primarily on worker perspective and may not thoroughly analyze the enforcement or impact of labor laws and polices related to wage equality.

Gender-based wage disparities have deep historical roots, originating from early human societies where labor was divided along gender lines. Although this division has evolved, significant wage gaps persist, particularly in the construction sector (Manesh, 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2019). Women have traditionally been confined to roles perceived as "helpers," leading to lower wages and limited recognition for skilled labor performed alongside men. As highlighted by Kanel (2021), women who engage in skilled tasks are often misclassified as unskilled laborers, further perpetuating wage disparities (Denk & Nikolic, 2020).

Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) provides empirical data showing that, on average, women earn 16% less than men in construction roles. This disparity is further reinforced by the underrepresentation of women in higher-paying positions such as

masonry and contracting. For instance, local reports indicate that women masons earn approximately Rs. 550 per day, while male masons can earn up to Rs. 1,500 for performing similar tasks—highlighting the stark contrast in pay despite equal skill levels.

Human Capital Theory as proposed by Marginson (2017) offers a framework to understand wage disparities based on differences in education, training, and experience. It emphasizes the economic value of investing in human development and predicts labor market outcomes such as wages and employment. However, this theory does not directly address the gender-specific challenges prevalent in the construction sector.

On the other hand, Wage Discrimination Theory, as discussed by Becker (1957) and Bergmann (1986), examines wage differences arising from gender, race, ethnicity, and other sociocultural factors. It provides a broader framework for analyzing wage disparities and is particularly relevant in studying gender-based pay gaps in sectors like construction. However, it often lacks an in-depth focus on sector-specific dynamics.

Devi (2018) in her study identifies the dual burden faced by women who must manage both employment—often in difficult or violent conditions—and household responsibilities. The study attributes the lack of education and family income as the primary drivers pushing women into unorganized sectors like construction. Moreover, most of these women lack social security and access to healthcare. While the study sheds light on crucial issues, it lacks detailed data to quantify the extent of these burdens.

Saikia & Shome (2023) argue that delayed implementation of gender-sensitive regulations has intensified gender-based discrimination at the workplace. Women in construction face numerous challenges, including unsanitary conditions, unequal pay,

limited facilities, and being relegated to secondary roles. Although this study presents a comprehensive overview of gender-based workplace challenges, it would benefit from more empirical data to substantiate its claims.

Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) estimates that 111,000 women are employed in construction, with 93% in informal jobs. This reflects a growing female presence in the sector—up from 0.7% in 2008 to 4.2% of all women employed by 2019. Despite these increases, men continue to dominate in both labor and contractor roles. While this data provides insight into female participation, it does not extensively analyze gender-based wage discrimination.

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) and the Government of Nepal (2017) set minimum wage standards (Rs. 17,300) and prohibit discrimination based on gender, religion, caste, and other attributes. However, enforcement in the construction sector, especially informal and unorganized worksites, remains weak. Although these frameworks are intended to promote equality, they have not ensured the fundamental right to safe and fair working conditions.

Both Kanel (2021) and Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) provide empirical evidence of gender-based wage disparities in Nepal's construction sector. Kanel (2021) emphasizes the misclassification of skilled female workers, while Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) provides wage comparison statistics and broader labor force trends. The theoretical contributions of Human Capital Theory and Wage Discrimination Theory help contextualize these disparities but lack a specific focus on construction.

Studies by Devi (2018); Saikia & Shome (2023) bring forward the dual burden and workplace challenges experienced by women in construction. They emphasize sociocultural and regulatory issues, though limited by a lack of quantitative data. Legal

and institutional analyses from ILO and national labor acts reveal gaps between policy and practice in ensuring fair treatment and pay equity.

Despite the valuable insights provided by the existing literature, several gaps remain. Most studies discuss general patterns of wage discrimination, with limited focus on the specific gender-based wage differences within the construction sector. Notably, no existing research has been identified on gender-based wage differentials in the construction industry in Sundarharaincha-12, Morang. This presents a critical gap that the present study aims to address.

Figure 1

Wage difference between male and female
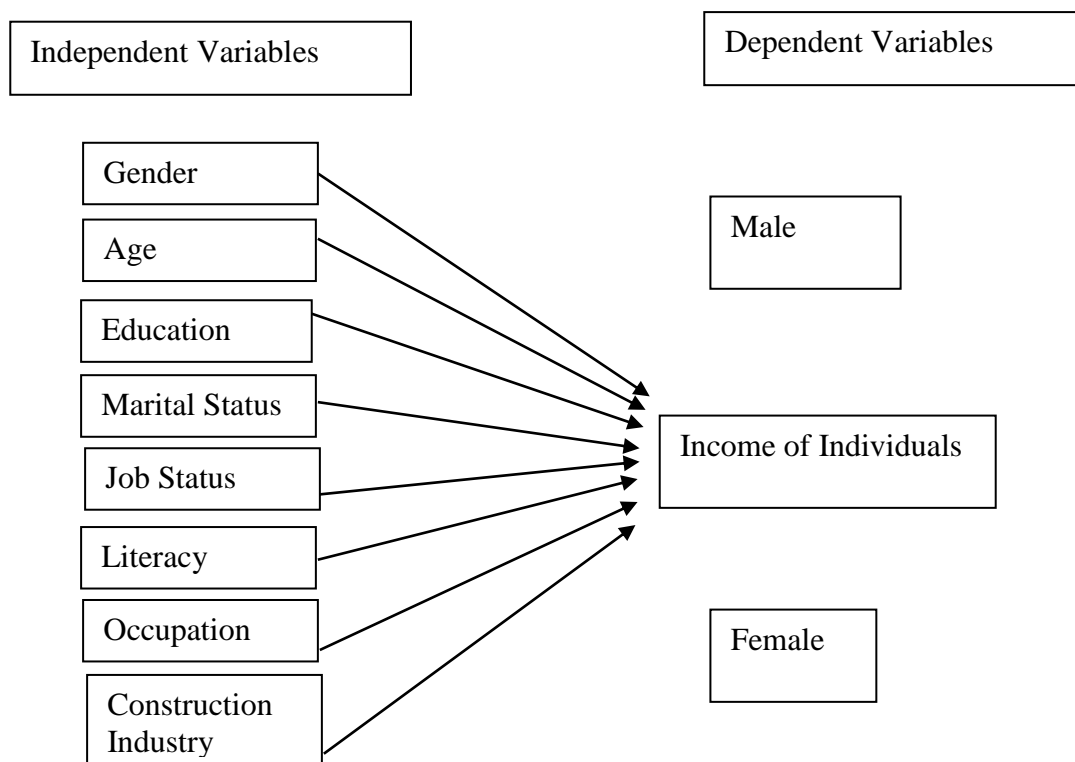
The conceptual framework of this study examines the relationship between income levels (dependent variable) and a set of independent variables including gender,

age, education, marital status, job status, literacy, occupation, and the construction industry context. The primary focus is to explore how these socio-demographic and occupational factors influence the earnings of individuals, particularly highlighting gender-based wage differences among male and female construction workers. Variables such as education and literacy are expected to enhance income opportunities, while job status and occupation may determine wage levels based on employment type and skill level. This framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to income disparities within the construction sector.

Methods and Materials

The study employs a quantitative research design aiming to collect and analyze numerical data to examine gender-based wage differences among construction workers. The study utilized a purposive sampling method, selecting respondents based on specific criteria such as gender, occupation, and involvement in informal construction work. The goal was to ensure equal representation of male and female laborers, allowing for a direct and meaningful comparison of their wages.

The research was conducted in Sundarharaincha-12, Morang, Nepal, as it is a rapidly developing area with increasing construction and industrial activities, making it a suitable and timely site to study gender-based wage differences in the construction sector. This ward has seen a significant rise in informal construction projects, offering easy access to laborers working without formal contracts conditions where wage discrimination is often more prevalent. Other wards within the municipality were not selected due to lower construction intensity, limited access to informal worksites, and challenges in achieving gender balance among respondents.

Data for the study was collected through structured questionnaires administered to the respondents. The questionnaire was carefully designed to gather comprehensive information on several key areas, including demographic details such as age, education

level, and years of experience. It also collected data on wage rates, both hourly and annually, along with information related to job position and working hours. In addition, the questionnaire explored respondents' views on the prospects of wage increases and promotion opportunities, as well as their perceptions of wage fairness within the workplace.

This study is exploratory in nature and seeks to examine gender-based wage disparities among construction workers in informal settings. A sample size of 50 respondents was chosen. It was thought that a smaller but balanced sample would be adequate for making preliminary conclusions because it was difficult to reach an officially registered population in the informal sector and there was no official data on the overall number of construction workers in the region.

The collected data was analyzed by using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Basic statistical tools such as mean, median and percentages were used to summarize and compare the wages of male and female construction workers. These techniques helped to identify average earnings, typical wage levels, and the overall distribution of income, supporting a clear understanding of gender-based wage differences.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected through structured questionnaires from construction workers. The results are systematically organized into tables and interpreted to identify significant trends and patterns, with a particular focus on gender-based disparities within the construction sector. Key variables analyzed include age, educational attainment, work experience, wage levels, job positions, and workplace conditions. The analysis further examines respondents' perceptions of wage fairness and satisfaction with current compensation. Special attention is given to the differential experiences of male and female workers,

particularly in terms of income and occupational roles. Each table is accompanied by a detailed interpretation to provide clarity and contextual understanding of the findings.

Table 1

Demographic and Working Environment of Workers

Variables		Male	Female
Count			
Age	20-29	2	6
	30-39	11	9
	40-49	8	8
	50 and above	3	3
Marital Status	Married	24	26
Education	Illiterate	8	16
	Basic Education	14	10
	SEE	2	0
Years of Experience	0-5	2	9
	6-10	13	12
	Above 10	9	5
Work Place	Field	24	2

Source: Field Survey, 2080

This table provides demographic, educational, and workplace data broken down by gender in the construction sector in Sundarharaincha-12, Morang, Nepal. It categorizes the workforce by age, marital status, education level, years of experience, and workplace location.

Age Distribution: The majority of men are between 30 and 49 years old, with no males under 20. There are 2 males aged 20-29, 11 males aged 30-39, and 8 males

aged 40-49. Women tend to be slightly younger, with 6 females aged 20-29, 9 females aged 30-39, and 8 females aged 40-49. Both genders are similarly distributed in terms of age, with a notable number of females in the younger age group (20-29) compared to males.

Marital Status: All the male and female workers are married. There are no unmarried workers in this sample for either gender, which could reflect the social or cultural context in the region.

Education: 8 men are illiterate, 14 have basic education, and 2 have completed Secondary Education Examination (SEE). No men have university-level education.16 women are illiterate, 10 have basic education, and none have SEE or university education.

A larger proportion of women are illiterate (16) compared to men (8), and women have no representation in higher education levels (SEE or above). This difference in education levels could contribute to gender-based wage disparities, as men may be more qualified for skilled positions due to their higher levels of education.

Years of Experience: Most men have 6-10 years of experience (13), followed by more than 10 years (9). Only 2 have 0-5 years of experience. A greater number of women have less experience, with 9 women having 0-5 years of experience, 12 with 6-10 years, and only 5 with more than 10 years of experience. Women tend to have less experience compared to men, with more women in the 0–5-year range. This could affect wage levels, as those with more experience tend to earn more, potentially contributing to wage gaps between genders.

Workplace Location: All 24 males work in the field, with no males in office roles. Similarly, all 26 females also work in the field, with no women in office: Both genders are solely represented in field work, which might involve manual labor, but

the specific types of field work (skilled vs. unskilled) could influence wage differences.

The data suggest that women are generally less educated and less experienced compared to men. This could potentially lead to women being offered lower-paying or unskilled jobs in construction, which could result in a gender-based wage disparity. Since both men and women are employed in fieldwork, it's possible that the type of tasks performed by each gender differs, which could contribute to wage differences. Men may be assigned more physically demanding or skilled roles, while women may be doing lighter, less technical work.

Table 2

Classification of Job Position and Hourly Wages by Gender

			Job Position/Title							
			Labor		Mason		Contractor		Total	
Hourly Wages/Salary			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 100	Gender	Male	8	25					8	25
		Female	24	75					24	75
Total			32	100					32	100
100-200	Gender	Male	8	80	3	100	3	100	14	87.5
		Female	2	20	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	12.5
Total			10	100	3	100	3	100	16	100
More than 200	Gender	Male	1	100	1	100			2	100
		Female	0	0.0	0	0.0			0	0.0
Total			1	100	1	100			2	100
Total	Gender	Male	17	39.5	4	100	3	100	24	48
		Female	26	60.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	26	52
	Total		43	100	4	100	3	100	50	100

Source: Field Survey, 2080

This table is a cross-tabulation of distribution of hourly wages among males and females across three job positions: Laborer, Mason, and Contractor. It provides insights into gender-based wage differences by analyzing the distribution of male and female workers across different wage categories and job roles (labor, mason, and contractor).

Eight males (25%) and twenty-four females (75%) are in the lowest wage category (less than 100NPR/hour). Thirty-two workers (100%) earn less than 100 NPR/hour, with females dominating this category. A large proportion of females are paid the lowest wages, showing that women are overrepresented in low-wage positions compared to men. This indicates a potential wage disparity, where women might be confined to lower-paying roles or receive lower wages for the same work.

Eight males (80%) in labor positions, three males (100%) in mason positions, and three males (100%) in contractor positions fall into the wage category (100-200 NPR/hour). Only two females (20%) are in labor positions in this wage range, with no women working as masons or contractors. Sixteen workers earn between 100 and 200 NPR/hour, with men representing the overwhelming majority (87.5%). Men dominate the higher wage category, especially in skilled positions such as masons and contractors. This suggests that men are more likely to be placed in higher-paying, skilled roles, while women remain underrepresented in these jobs.

Only one male in labor and one male in a mason position earn more than 200 NPR/hour. No females are in the wage category (more than 200 NPR/hour). Only two workers are in the highest wage category, and both are male. There is a complete absence of women in the highest-paying category, reinforcing the gender wage gap. Men are more likely to access the best-paying roles in the construction industry.

Labor roles have a significant number of both men and women, but more women (26 or 60.5%) are laborers compared to men (17 or 39.5%). This suggests that women are primarily concentrated in lower-skilled, lower-paid positions. All 4

masons are male (100%), which shows that this skilled position is exclusively filled by men in this context. All 3 contractors are male (100%), indicating that managerial or supervisory positions are also exclusively male-dominated. There is a clear gender discrimination in job roles. Women are concentrated in lower-wage, less-skilled labor roles, while men occupy all the skilled (mason) and supervisory (contractor) positions, which are better compensated.

Even though the workforce is relatively balanced in terms of gender representation (48% male, 52% female), there is a significant gender-based wage gap. Men dominate the higher-paying roles and wage categories, while women are concentrated in lower-wage positions.

Women make up 75% of workers earning less than 100 NPR/hour. This highlights the pay gap where women are overrepresented in the lowest-paying jobs. All workers earning more than 100 NPR/hour in skilled roles (mason and contractor) are men. This shows a gender bias in assigning or accessing higher-skilled, better-paid jobs. Women are completely absent from the wage category above 200 NPR/hour. This suggests that women are not given access to higher-paying opportunities, reinforcing the gender wage gap in the construction sector in this region.

Table 3

Factors that contribute to the Gender- Based Wage Differences

	Frequency	Percent
Difference in educational background and Training	14	28.0
Lack of negational skills among women	6	12.0
Gender stereotypes and biases	0	60.0
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey, 2080

This table highlights the factors contributing to gender-based wage differences in the construction works in Sundarharaincha-12, Morang, Nepal. It lists three key factors along with their frequency and percentage based on a sample size of 50 respondents.

Fourteen respondents (28%) identified differences in educational and background and training as a contributing factor. Educational disparities between men and women are a significant factor in wage differences. As seen in previous tables, women tend to have lower education levels, which limits their access to higher-paying, skilled positions like masons and contractors. Men with better education or training are more likely to qualify for higher-wage roles, while women remain in lower-wage, less-skilled positions. This aligns with the 28% of respondents who believe that differences in education and training contribute to the gender wage gap.

Six respondents (12%) highlighted lack of negotiation skills among women as another contributing factor. Some women may lack negotiation skills or confidence to demand higher wages or seek better positions. In male-dominated industries like construction, women may be less likely to negotiate for better pay, which could contribute to their concentration in lower-wage roles. Although this factor is noted by a smaller proportion of respondents (12%), it still plays a role in wage disparities.

Thirty respondents (60%) identified gender stereotypes and biases as the primary factor. Gender stereotypes and biases are considered the most significant factor, accounting for 60% of responses. In the construction industry, traditional views may perceive men as more capable in skilled or physically demanding roles, pushing women into lower-paid, less-skilled jobs regardless of their ability. Cultural biases and societal expectations about gender roles can limit women's opportunities for advancement and contribute to wage inequality. This aligns with the gender exclusion observed in the previous tables, where men dominate higher-paying positions.28% of

the respondents believe education is the key issue. 12% add that negotiation skills are a factor, bringing the total cumulative percentage to 40%. 60% point to gender stereotypes and biases, which, when combined with other factors, account for 100% of the perceived causes of gender wage differences.

Table 4

Perception of Gender- Based Wage difference

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	4	8.0
Neutral	4	8.0
Agree	35	70.0
Strongly Agree	7	14.0
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey, 2080

This table presents the distribution of responses regarding gender-based wage differences in the construction works of Sundarharaincha-12, Morang, Nepal. It shows how participants perceive the existence of wage disparities between men and women in this industry, with a sample size of 50 respondents.

A small proportion of respondents (8%) do not believe that there are gender-based wage differences in the construction industry. These individuals may feel that wages are fair or equitable between men and women or may not have observed significant disparities. Another 8% of respondents are neutral on the issue. This could indicate a lack of strong opinion or sufficient knowledge to agree or disagree about wage differences. They may not be aware of the full scope of wage disparities or have mixed views. The majority of respondents (70%) agree that gender-based wage differences exist. This suggests that the perception of wage inequality between men

and women is widely acknowledged by most of the workers or people involved in the construction sector. They recognize that women are often paid less than men or are restricted to lower-paying positions. An additional 14% strongly agree that gender-based wage differences are present.

The table shows a clear consensus that gender-based wage differences are perceived as a significant issue in the construction industry. With 84% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing, the data indicates that the majority of people involved believe there are disparities in pay between men and women. Only a small minority of respondents (16%) are either neutral or disagree with this view, further emphasizing the prevalent recognition of wage inequality in the sector.

Table 5

Worker Satisfaction with Current Wages and Benefits

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	4	8.0
Neutral	4	8.0
Agree	35	70.0
Strongly Agree	7	14.0
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey, 2080

This table provides data on the level of satisfaction with current wages and benefits among construction workers. It reflects the workers' overall attitudes toward their compensation.

A significant portion (30%) of respondents is dissatisfied with their current wages and benefits. These workers likely feel that their compensation is inadequate, possibly due to low pay or insufficient benefits, which could be linked to the gender-

based wage disparities observed earlier, especially among female workers. A small percentage (8%) is neutral, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This group may feel that their wages and benefits are average or may not have strong opinions on the matter. The majority (62%) of respondents' report being satisfied with their wages and benefits. These individuals may feel that their compensation meets their expectations or is fair given their work. This suggests that, despite the observed wage disparities, most workers are content with their earnings and benefits.

The findings of this study reveal significant gender-based wage disparities within the construction industry. Data indicate that female workers are disproportionately represented in low-wage, unskilled labor roles, while men predominantly occupy higher-paying skilled and supervisory positions, such as masons and contractors. This pattern mirrors broader global and national trends, where structural inequalities and entrenched gender norms perpetuate occupational segregation and wage gaps (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Denk & Nikolic, 2020). The following discussion explores the key factors contributing to these disparities namely, human capital deficiencies, workplace discrimination, legal enforcement challenges, and socioeconomic constraints and examines their implications for policy and future research.

Educational attainment and work experience emerged as key factors contributing to these wage differentials. A majority of female respondents were either illiterate or had only basic education, whereas male participants demonstrated higher educational achievement. According to Human Capital Theory, wage differences can largely be attributed to variations in education, training, and accumulated work experience (Marginson, 2017). In the context of this study, most female respondents had limited or no formal education, significantly restricting their opportunities for career advancement in the construction sector. In contrast, male participants were more

likely to have completed basic or vocational education, enabling them to qualify for better-paying skilled jobs. These findings suggest that limited access to formal education and vocational training restricts women's upward mobility within the construction sector. Similar conclusions were drawn by Devi (2018), who noted that inadequate education and financial pressures at the household level often push women into informal and low-paid labor.

However, education alone does not fully explain the persistence of wage inequality. Structural and cultural barriers also play a critical role in reinforcing gender-based occupational segregation. Gender-based discrimination and workplace biases appear to be significant contributors to wage disparities. Sixty percent of respondents identified gender stereotypes and prejudices as major causes of wage differences. This aligns with Wage Discrimination Theory, initially proposed by Becker (1957) and later expanded by Bergmann (1986), which posits that wage gaps often stem from institutional and social discrimination rather than purely economic considerations.

A notable example of such discrimination is the misclassification of women's labor. Despite performing skilled tasks, women are frequently labeled as "helpers" or assistants, thereby excluded from higher-paying job classifications. Kanel (2021) observed similar patterns in Nepal, where women's contributions to skilled construction work are often unrecognized, resulting in lower wages and limited career advancement opportunities. Additionally, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) show that women in the construction sector earn approximately 16% less than their male counterparts, even when working under similar conditions. These statistics corroborate the study's findings and underscore the systemic undervaluation of women's labor.

Perception data further highlight the extent of gender-based wage disparities. A substantial majority (84%) of respondents acknowledged the existence of gender-based wage differences. However, 62% of participants expressed satisfaction with their

current wages and benefits. This apparent contradiction may reflect the normalization of inequality or a lack of awareness regarding labor rights among female workers. Dhungana (2019) similarly found that many workers in Nepal accept wage disparities due to deep-rooted social conditioning and the absence of viable employment alternatives.

Despite legal provisions mandating equal pay—such as Article 18 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and Section 3 of the Labour Act (Government of Nepal, 2017)—enforcement remains weak, particularly in the informal sectors where many women are employed. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) emphasizes the importance of eliminating workplace discrimination, yet ineffective institutional oversight continues to allow wage disparities to persist. Saikia and Shome (2023) argue that delays in implementing gender-sensitive labor policies exacerbate workplace inequities and disproportionately affect women. For instance, while anti-discrimination laws exist on paper, enforcement mechanisms are often absent or poorly resourced, especially in rural areas and informal settings. Furthermore, there is a lack of targeted programs aimed at improving women's access to skilled training, certification, and job placement in the construction industry.

To bridge this gap, policymakers must prioritize the development of inclusive labor regulations and ensure robust implementation through regular monitoring and accountability frameworks. Strengthening labor inspectorates and promoting partnerships between government agencies, employers' associations, and civil society organizations could enhance compliance and support vulnerable workers.

Moreover, female workers in the construction industry face a dual burden: they must perform physically demanding jobs while also managing domestic responsibilities. Access to social protection, health services, and childcare facilities remains minimal.

Barro (2001) and Schultz (2002) have highlighted that enhancing women's access to education and economic opportunities significantly contributes to both economic growth and social development. However, in many developing contexts including Nepal gender disparities in education and labor market participation remain deeply entrenched due to patriarchal norms and lack of institutional support. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes providing childcare facilities at worksites, offering flexible working hours, and expanding access to health insurance and maternity leave. Such measures would not only improve women's well-being but also increase their labor force retention and productivity.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the persistent gender-based wage differentials in the construction industry in Sundarharaincha-12, revealing that women face substantial barriers to achieving equitable pay. Despite the constitutional mandate for equal pay, numerous factors contribute to ongoing disparities, such as lower educational attainment, lack of access to skilled positions, and societal biases that limit opportunities for women.

The data reflects a critical societal issue where, although a segment of the workforce recognizes wage disparities, the entrenched perceptions and systemic barriers have not been adequately addressed. As such, gender inequality remains pervasive within the construction sector, influencing economic growth and societal equity.

To tackle gender-based wage disparities within the construction field requires a comprehensive strategy involving strict enforcement of equal pay legislation together with skill development initiatives for women and awareness programs that confront hiring discrimination. Closing the wage gap between male and female construction workers creates economic justice for women while simultaneously enhancing industry

productivity and efficiency. The sector's support for equal opportunities and fair wages will enable broader economic development and social advancement in Nepal.

The implications of these findings are significant for policy-makers, industry stakeholders, and advocates for gender equality. First, there is an urgent need for education and vocational training programs tailored to women in construction, allowing for skill development and qualification for higher-paying roles. Second, enforcement of existing labor laws that mandate equal pay for equal work must be prioritized, ensuring compliance across all levels of the industry.

Organizations should also focus on creating an inclusive workplace culture that actively challenges gender stereotypes and biases. Training programs should not only target women but also engage male counterparts to foster awareness and respectful collaboration on the job site.

Ultimately, addressing gender-based wage differentials in the construction industry can enhance not only the economic empowerment of women but also contribute to the overall productivity and efficiency of the sector. As developing regions like Nepal strive for economic growth, promoting fairness and equality in pay practices will be crucial for sustainable development and social justice.

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