

Child Marriage and Its Consequences in the Chepang Community of Makawanpur, Nepal

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Abstract

The Chepang represent one of Nepal's most marginalized indigenous groups, mainly living in the distant hilly areas of Makwanpur, Chitwan, Dhading, and Gorkha districts. Even with social and economic shifts, child marriage continues to be a prevalent custom in numerous Chepang households. Early marriage is largely influenced by poverty, limited educational achievement, and conventional socio-cultural beliefs. Child marriage negatively impacts the education, health, and general welfare of Chepang children, especially girls, restricting their future prospects and growth. The primary aim of this research is to examine the reasons and effects of child marriage within the Chepang indigenous group in Ward No. 8 Dhirang tole of Raksirang Rural Municipality, Makwanpur District. This research took place in Ward No. 8 (Dhirang) of Raksirang Rural Municipality, Makwanpur District, to investigate the factors affecting and outcomes of child marriage within the Chepang community. A qualitative descriptive research design was used, and primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with twenty purposely chosen Chepang households, along with supplementary secondary sources. The gathered data were examined through descriptive and thematic methods to determine the key causes, trends, and effects of child marriage in the research area. The research results indicate that child marriage continues to be common within the Chepang community, even with legal prohibitions and awareness initiatives. Early marriage was found to be primarily caused by poverty, insufficient education, traditional cultural beliefs, and pressure from family. Child marriage has led to school abandonment, early pregnancies, health issues, and financial reliance among young girls. The research highlights the importance of education, awareness initiatives, economic empowerment, and strong law enforcement to eradicate child marriage. Child marriage in the Chepang community persists in obstructing the educational, health, and socio-economic progress of children, especially girls. The research indicates the necessity for focused awareness initiatives, enhanced educational opportunities, and more robust enforcement of child safety legislation.

Keywords: *Chrpang community, traditional norms, child marriage, cultural practices, poverty.*

Introduction

The Chepang, an indigenous group in Nepal, suffer from widespread poverty, with around 90% living below the poverty line. Despite Nepal outlawing child marriage in 1963, between 45% and 86% of Chepang girls typically marry between the ages of 12 and 15 in Makwanpur. This practice persists in Chepang communities like Kaakada, Bharta, Sarikhet, Kalikatar, Khairang, and Dandakharka, among others. (Bista, 2018) Underscore that the Chepang primarily reside in the north-western part of Makwanpur district. Poverty remains a significant issue among them,

leading to limited education, awareness, and income opportunities, which may contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Implementing agroforestry plantation practices could address some of these challenges, but further research is necessary to fully understand the underlying causes and implications of early marriage among the Chepang (Chhetri & Silwal, 2018).

The Chepang represent one of Nepal's most underprivileged indigenous communities and fall into the 'highly marginalized' category according to various socio-economic indicators, including population size, literacy rates, housing types, land ownership, occupations, and access to advanced

education (Budhathoki, 2024). Yet, no longer a wandering tribe, the Chepangs have mainly retained their distinct tribal identity by upholding their traditional knowledge system and persistently practicing animism. The language they refer to as Chyo-bang (with Chyo meaning hilltop and Bang stone) is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is closely linked to the languages of the Raute and Raji, two other marginalized (endangered) communities in Nepal. The Chepang community comprises approximately 50,000 individuals (0.23% of Nepal's population) and is primarily found in the districts of Chitwan (40%), Makwanpur (29%), Dhading (20%), and Gorkha (5%), with most residing in huts constructed from tree branches. The latest Nepal Living Standard Survey indicates that nearly 90 percent of Chepangs reside below the poverty threshold, with an annual per capita income of approximately 6,000 Nepali rupees (Bista, 1965).

Panta (1979). Due to the absence of arable land, the writers resided in the forest and consumed kandamuls. These days, it is rare to find Githa and Bhyakur in the bush. The Chepang, therefore, spend days and nights either working in the villages for meager pay or living with either left *githa* or *a bhyakur*. They may suffer from malnutrition for ten or twelve days. When they were hungry, they took out a loan on land from a moneylender. When they borrow land, they want to keep it forever. If the landowners are unable to return the land, some of them remain in the moneylenders' residence in the interest of the capital (Budhathoki, 2025). When Chepangs farm on their little plot of land on a steep hill, they are unable to produce and grow.

Chepang's present issues stem from a generalized marginalization and discrimination based on socioeconomic status, culture, and politics, which has led to poor access to jobs, services, and education. The Chepangs' traditional way of life has been severely strained by a number of factors, including a high rate of illiteracy, a lack of protective laws, land title rules, and regulations to guarantee traditional and alternative livelihood choices, and the inadequate execution of pertinent legislation. Many stakeholders, including Chepangs, have stated that in order to generate money, it is necessary to establish economically and environmentally sound activities. These activities should concentrate on growing into new markets and filling unmet needs. For instance, boosting youth employment locally and supporting small companies (UN, 2012).

The Chepang are one of the indigenous communities of central Nepal, traditionally residing in the rugged and remote middle-hill regions. Historically, their livelihood was primarily based on hunting, gathering wild foods, fishing, and practicing horticulture. Because of their dependence on forest resources, they did not require extensive areas of flat and fertile agricultural land. Over time, however, as the Chepang gradually adopted a more settled way of life, the need for permanent agricultural production increased. To meet their food requirements, they began cultivating cereals, millet, maize, and lentils. Due to the steep slopes, fragile terrain, and low agricultural productivity of the land they inhabited, conventional farming methods were often unsuitable. Consequently, the Chepang developed and practiced shifting cultivation, locally known as *khoriya* farming, which allowed them to utilize forested hill slopes for crop production. This agricultural practice became an important adaptation strategy to their challenging environmental conditions (Sharma, 2011).

In the study of Chepangs' Struggle for Survival: Views from Makwanpur and Chitwan Districts it was stated that the remoteness of Chepang settlements is regarded as one of the main reasons behind these low literacy rates. Most Chepang villages have only a primary school, and students need to travel three to five hours every day, usually over sloped and difficult terrain, to attend secondary level schools. Based on the literature reviewed, it was widely reported that Chepangs live in a state of chronic food deficiency and have been facing severe starvation every year. Only one percent of the Chepangs have cereal food surplus, and about 60% of the families have food that does not last more than six months (NCA, 2004). For the rest of the time, they eat the wild food items namely hunting wild animals, birds, fruits, yams, nettles and tubers. The serious shortage appears primarily due to small land holdings and low yield of marginal unproductive land (Gurung, 1995).

Research Gap

Although previous studies have documented the prevalence of child marriage among the Chepang community and identified factors such as poverty, low educational attainment, traditional beliefs, and social exclusion, there remains a significant research gap regarding the contemporary dynamics of this practice. Existing literature has largely focused on the general socioeconomic conditions of the Chepang and the prevalence of early marriage, but limited attention

has been given to how changing social conditions, media exposure, information technology, and evolving marriage patterns influence child marriage today. Furthermore, few studies have explored the lived experiences of Chepang families and the specific consequences of child marriage on education, health, and socio-economic well-being at the local level. In particular, there is a lack of qualitative research examining the causes and impacts of child marriage in Raksirang Rural Municipality of Makwanpur District. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth understanding of the factors and consequences associated with child marriage among the Chepang community.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the causes and consequences of child marriage among the Chepang indigenous community in Ward No. 8 Dhirang tole of Raksirang Rural Municipality, Makwanpur District.

Research Significance

The significance of this study lies in its focus on understanding child marriage and its consequences within the Chepang community of Makawanpur, Nepal. This indigenous group has long faced socio-economic marginalization, limited access to education, and deep-rooted traditional practices that contribute to early marriage. The study is important because it highlights the social, economic, educational, and health impacts of child marriage on young girls and the wider community. It provides empirical evidence that can support policymakers, local governments, and non-governmental organizations in designing effective intervention programs. Furthermore, the research contributes to the existing literature on indigenous communities and gender-based issues in Nepal, filling a gap in localized studies on the Chepang population. It also raises awareness among community members about the harmful consequences of child marriage and encourages behavioral and cultural change. Ultimately, the study aims to support the promotion of girls' rights, education, and overall social development in rural Nepal and empowerment outcomes overall.

Limitation of the Study

This research study was carried out under the following delimitations:

1. The study focuses only on selected Chepang settlements in Raxirang Rural Municipal

Ward No. 8, Dhirang tole, Makawanpur District, so results may not apply everywhere. Information is based on self-reports, which may include bias or incomplete responses.

2. The research is confined to the specific objectives and methodological framework defined for this study, which limits the scope of analysis and interpretation.

Literature Review

Child marriage has a greater impact on the life course of women due to the health implications of pregnancy and dropping out of school. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2011), child marriages are 'driven by deep-seated social and religious views' and are a 'violation of human and child rights'. This research intends to understand the perceptions and attitudes of women in Nepal regarding the impact of child marriage on health. A dearth of qualitative studies currently explores the effect of child marriage on health in Nepal, particularly the health-seeking behaviours of child brides. Understanding women's views is paramount to improving policies, both to prevent the incidence of child marriage in the first place and to deal with the health consequences of those already affected.

There are three main types of early or child marriage in Ethiopia: *Promissory marriage*, whereby a verbal promise is made at infancy or even childbirth by the parents to have their children get married. *Child marriage*, in which children under the age of 10. *Adolescent marriage*, which involves girls aged between 10 and 15. In most cases, the child bride is taken to her in-laws immediately after the wedding; in other cases, the parents agree that the girl stays with her parents until she is mature enough to live with her husband. In general, most of these children were married to older men, which presents a serious communication problem, which is essential for a happy and successful marriage (Types of Marriage, Rodgers, 2012).

Gynecol (2009) said that although they happen all across the world, weddings involving children under the age of 18 are more common in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Child marriage is a violation of human rights that has an immediate impact on girls' health, education, psychological well-being, and their children's health (as mentioned in Nour, 2009). I saw that after marriage, girls stopped attending school. They experience depression, have had STIs, and have an effect on maternal mortality. Their children are

more likely to be born prematurely, which increases the risk of neonatal or infant mortality. Child marriage often happens to those under the age of eighteen. It has an impact on a child's education in addition to their health. Even so, it also raises the psychological risk of depression. Consequently,

Child marriage is defined as 'a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18', and although both genders experience the phenomenon, it is evident that girls are disproportionately affected. Approximately 12 million girls are married during childhood each year, particularly in South Asia. The literature suggests that child marriages are commonly instigated by poverty, a lack of education, and societal views, amongst various other factors. Unfortunately, the consequences of child marriage for the girls involved are both vast and severe. Existing research demonstrates that child marriages increase the incidence of early pregnancies, maternal mortality, school dropout rates, and the risk of violence (Budhathoki, 2023).

Nepal has been classed as one of the world's least developed countries and has a population of approximately 30 million residents. Child marriages are particularly problematic in Nepal, affecting 33% of girls before the age of 18 and 8% of girls before the age of 15. The practice is predominantly witnessed in rural areas, where 83% of the population resides, and many of the causes and consequences are consistent with the reasons mentioned above. Although Nepal's legal age for marriage is 20 (or 18 with parental consent), the law is hardly implemented or adhered to. Nepal's government has devised a 'National Strategy to end child marriage by 2030'. The strategy consists of 6 components, including the need to 'educate' and 'empower' girls, 'implement laws and policies', 'engage' men and communities, and 'strengthen and provide services' to MOE. (2014).

The Chepangs are deeply involved in early marriages; children between 14 and 15 are marrying with their parents' consent. Due to early marriage, they miss the opportunity to concentrate on their education, significantly impacting their physical and mental well-being. At the age when children require their parents and friends for play, they are instead sent to another person's home and expected to complete chores. From a young age, girls are having children, which poses risks to the health of both the mother and the infant (UNRCHC, 2012). Child marriage deprives girls of education and frequently exposes them to a cycle of discrimination, domestic violence, and

abuse. However, this is not universally applicable; some Chepang hold the view that eliminating child marriage requires strong collaboration among government sectors related to health, education, poverty, and culture, while also prioritizing basic education (Budhathoki & Upadhyay, 2026).

Nepal is a multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious country with diverse customs and traditions. Marriage is an important social institution, and its practices vary among different communities and regions. Various forms of marriage are recognized and practiced in Nepal based on cultural values, religious beliefs, and personal preferences. Common types of marriage include arranged marriage, where families play a central role in selecting partners; love marriage, based on mutual affection and individual choice; and court marriage, which is legally registered through government procedures. In addition, several indigenous and ethnic communities follow their own traditional marriage customs and rituals. Thus, Nepal exhibits a rich diversity of marriage practices. The types of marriage prevalent in Nepal are as follows.

Arranged marriage

Hindus in Nepal have a strong tradition of arranged marriages since they consider marriages to be formed in heaven. When their child reaches marriageable age, the parents search for the bridegroom through friends or family; these individuals are known as "Lami" in Nepali. Following the groom's or bride's search, the parents will visit priests or astrologers for advice and confirmation of whether the couple is a match. The star signs of the bride and groom are matched for this reason. Every aspect of the wedding planning involves the intermediary, or lami, who serves as a messenger for both families.

Love marriage

Nowadays, arranged marriages are becoming more and more common in Nepal because the younger generation chooses their own life partner. If both sets of parents approve, the wedding is planned in accordance with the arranged marriage; if not, one family leaves the other and marries themselves to start a new family. Later, the parents call the other family to return because they are unable to leave their children alone for an extended period of time. In this case, they accept whatever mistake the children made because, in their eyes, they will always be children.

Court marriage

Court marriage is a legally recognized form of marriage in which a couple registers their union through the appropriate government authority. When two individuals mutually agree to marry and their parents or families also support their decision, they may choose to formalize their relationship through a court marriage. This process involves obtaining a legal marriage certificate, which serves as official proof of the union. Court marriage is becoming increasingly popular in Nepal because it is simple, legally secure, and ensures the rights of both partners. It is often preferred by couples seeking a formal and legally valid marriage procedure.

Polyandry system in Nepal

The polyandrous marriage system is also practiced by the inhabitants of Nepal's northwest, in regions like Humla, Dolpo, and Mustang. Additionally, the high Himalayan area that borders Tibet is home to the Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid people. Bhote (Tibetan) people are the broad term used to describe the people who speak Tibetan in certain regions. Certain factors contribute to the polyandry custom in these communities, including the fact that it helps the family stay together and maintain its properties while also enabling them to adapt effectively to the hard ecological and climatic conditions. If all of the brothers in the family are married to different people, the farming land is small, and the produce is quite low in relation to the labor involved in growing it (Budhathoki, 2025).

Status of Child Marriage in Chepang Community

The Constitution of Nepal designates marriage involving individuals under 20 years of age as child marriage, stipulating that those who facilitate such marriages will face three years of imprisonment and a fine of 75,000 rupees. According to Jhavindra Gyawali, district program coordinator of Ciwin Child Helpline, despite the legal provisions, including the non-registration of child marriages and associated fines, effectively curbing child marriages remains a significant challenge in the region. Local authorities are working towards declaring their jurisdictions as child-friendly areas. Data collected over the past four years with assistance from the Sabin Helpline reveals the following statistics on child marriage incidents: 24 cases in the fiscal year 2075-076, 62 cases in 2076-077, 48 cases in 2077-2078, and 45 cases by the end of Chaitra in 2078-079. For the

fiscal year 2080-2082, it was noted that within the Chepang community, decisions regarding child marriage were often facilitated through social media platforms like Facebook, Messenger, and phone conversations. Many children reported that their decisions to marry were influenced by casual conversations and friendships. Psychologists indicate that preventing child marriage is particularly challenging, as many children fall in love without their parents' awareness (Ciwin Helpline Makawanpur 2026).

Main Factors of Child Marriage in the Chepang Community

The Chepang community, an indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in the hilly regions of central Nepal, is characterized by its distinct cultural practices, linguistic heritage, and traditional lifestyle. Despite their rich cultural identity, the Chepang people often face significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare facilities. These challenges are compounded by their geographical isolation and marginalization from mainstream development efforts. Child marriage is a deeply rooted practice within the Chepang community, influenced by a combination of socio-cultural norms, economic factors, and limited access to education. The prevalence of child marriage in this community can be attributed to several key factors:

Purity

Girls' physical purity, often rooted in cultural and religious beliefs, is sometimes emphasized as crucial, leading to practices such as child marriage, which are particularly prevalent in certain regions. This emphasis can severely impact girls' academic opportunities, as early marriages often interrupt their education, limiting their prospects and personal development. While preserving purity is seen as a virtue, it can also perpetuate gender inequality by prioritizing traditional roles over education and personal growth, thus hindering the potential for girls to contribute fully to their communities and societies. Promoting education and delaying marriage are essential steps in ensuring girls have the freedom to pursue their aspirations and achieve their full potential.

Poverty and Economic Insecurity

Poverty is one of the major factors contributing to the prevalence of child marriage among the Chepang community. Many Chepang households experience persistent economic hardship, limited income opportunities, and food insecurity, which

influence family decisions regarding marriage. In such circumstances, parents may perceive early marriage as a practical strategy to reduce the financial burden of supporting a daughter. By marrying a girl at a young age, the responsibility for her care, education, and daily expenses is transferred to her husband's family. Furthermore, poverty often restricts access to education, increasing the likelihood of early marriage. Families with limited resources may prioritize immediate economic survival over the long-term well-being and development of their daughters. As a result, child marriage becomes a coping mechanism for economically disadvantaged households. Therefore, addressing poverty and improving livelihood opportunities are essential steps toward reducing the incidence of child marriage within the Chepang community.

Lack of Educational Opportunities

In the Chepang community, the lack of educational opportunities is a significant driver of child marriage, as limited access to schools and educational resources, coupled with economic hardships, compels families to prioritize immediate economic survival over long-term educational investments for their daughters. Geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and traditional gender roles further exacerbate this issue, leading to high dropout rates among Chepang girls and reinforcing the perception that marriage is a more viable and culturally acceptable option. Consequently, these educational barriers perpetuate a cycle of poverty and early marriage, hindering the personal and socio-economic development of Chepang girls and their broader community (Field survey, 2026).

Traditional Norms and Cultural Practices

Traditional norms and practices significantly contribute to the persistence of child marriage in the Chepang community, where cultural customs and social expectations perpetuate the practice. In this indigenous group, deeply entrenched beliefs prioritize early marriage as a means of securing social alliances and maintaining family honor. These norms are often rooted in historical contexts where early marriage was essential for social and economic stability. The community's adherence to patriarchal values further reinforces the perception that a girl's primary role is that of a wife and mother, thus diminishing the value placed on her education and personal development. Social pressures and fear of stigma drive families to marry off their daughters at a young age, viewing it as a way to ensure their daughters' protection and

uphold familial reputation. These traditional practices create a cyclical pattern that continues to normalize and sustain child marriage, despite its detrimental impact on the health, education, and overall well-being of Chepang girls (Field survey, 2026).

Lack of Awareness

Child marriage among the Chepang community reflects a complex interplay of cultural traditions, socio-economic factors, and a lack of awareness about its detrimental effects on children, especially girls. The Chepang, an indigenous group in the study area, historically practiced early marriages as a way to ensure economic stability and social protection for girls. However, these marriages often disrupt girls' education and personal development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality within the community. Despite efforts by NGOs and governmental initiatives to raise awareness and enforce legal prohibitions, deep-rooted cultural beliefs and remote geographical locations pose challenges in eradicating this practice entirely. Addressing child marriage among the Chepang requires a holistic approach that includes community engagement, education on human rights, and sustainable economic opportunities for families, empowering them to make informed choices that prioritize children's well-being and development over traditional norms (Field survey, 2026).

Consequences of Child Marriage

In the context of the study area, the Chepang community, child marriage carries significant consequences that impact various aspects of individuals' lives and community dynamics:

Educational Disruption and Constraints

Child marriage has a profound negative impact on the educational attainment of girls within the Chepang community. Girls who marry at an early age are often compelled to leave school and assume household and marital responsibilities, resulting in the discontinuation of their formal education. This limits their opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop practical skills, and build social networks essential for personal and professional development. The loss of educational opportunities reduces their future employment prospects and economic independence. Moreover, educational disruption reinforces existing patterns of poverty and gender inequality within the community. Without adequate education, young women face greater challenges in making informed decisions and participating actively in social and

economic activities. Consequently, child marriage hinders individual advancement and restricts the broader development and empowerment of the Chepang community (Field survey, 2026).

Health Implications for Adolescent Brides

Young brides within the Chepang community face significant health challenges, primarily associated with early pregnancy and childbirth. Due to their physical immaturity and limited access to adequate healthcare services, they are highly vulnerable to pregnancy-related complications. These complications include obstetric fistula, excessive bleeding, maternal mortality, and increased risk of neonatal deaths. The situation reflects the intersection of early marriage, poverty, and limited health awareness in the community. It highlights the urgent need for targeted reproductive health education and accessible maternal healthcare services. Strengthening community awareness programs and improving healthcare infrastructure can significantly reduce these risks and ensure safer motherhood for young Chepang women while also promoting overall reproductive health and long-term well-being within the community through sustained policy and social support interventions at the local level (Field survey, 2026)

Economic Dependence and Impact on Livelihoods

Child marriage contributes significantly to economic dependency among young brides in the Chepang community. Girls who are married at an early age are often deprived of essential education, life skills, and opportunities required for meaningful participation in income-generating activities. Consequently, they become financially dependent on their husbands and extended families, which reinforces existing cycles of poverty and limits their economic autonomy and decision-making power. This dependency also reduces their ability to engage in entrepreneurship, wage employment, or skill-based work, further deepening their vulnerability. To address these challenges, targeted interventions are necessary, particularly those that promote continued education, vocational training, and tailored economic empowerment programs designed for young married girls. Such initiatives can help break intergenerational poverty and support greater self-reliance among women in the community (Field survey, 2026).

Social and Psychological Consequences

Child marriage has profound social and psychological consequences for young brides in the Chepang community. Married during a critical stage of physical, emotional, and social development, many girls are compelled to leave their families, friends, and familiar environments, resulting in feelings of isolation and loneliness. Early marriage often limits their educational opportunities, personal growth, and participation in community life, reducing their ability to make independent decisions. Furthermore, young brides are more vulnerable to domestic violence, exploitation, and unequal power relations within the household. The psychological effects may include anxiety, depression, stress, low self-esteem, and emotional trauma, which can negatively influence their overall well-being and future prospects. These challenges also hinder their social integration and development as active members of society. Addressing child marriage requires comprehensive interventions, including psychosocial counseling, community awareness programs, educational support, and effective legal measures to safeguard the rights, dignity, and well-being of young girls (Field survey, 2026).

Intersection of Culture, Tradition, and Legal Frameworks

The practice of child marriage among the Chepang community is deeply rooted in cultural norms, traditions, and socio-economic factors. Viewed as a means to enhance social status, ensure economic stability, and uphold family honor, early marriage reflects broader societal attitudes towards gender roles and responsibilities. Despite legal prohibitions and international human rights standards, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in remote areas where awareness of legal protections may be lacking. Addressing these intertwined factors necessitates a comprehensive approach involving community leaders, religious authorities, policymakers, and civil society organizations to challenge harmful norms, promote gender equality, and strengthen legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding children from early marriage (Field survey, 2026).

Research Methods and Materials

This study was conducted in Ward No. 8 (Dhirang tole) of Raksirang Rural Municipality, Makwanpur District, to examine the factors influencing and consequences of child marriage among the Chepang community. A descriptive research design was employed to explore the issue

within its socio-cultural context. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and utilized purposive sampling to select respondents with relevant knowledge and experiences related to child marriage practices. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with members of twenty Chepang households, while secondary data were obtained from books, academic journals, government reports, and other relevant publications. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive and thematic techniques to identify key patterns, themes, and issues associated with child marriage. Data collection was carried out during the first week of May 2026 in the selected study area.

Result Analysis

The Chepang community, primarily residing in the Mahabharat range of Nepal's hilly regions, has historically faced numerous socio-economic and educational challenges. One of the major concerns within this indigenous group is the persistence of child marriage, which is closely linked to low educational attainment, poverty, and strong adherence to traditional customs and beliefs. According to Pratap Bista (2019), the educational status of the Chepang people remains relatively low due to limited awareness and the continued influence of orthodox cultural practices. Although the incidence of child marriage has declined compared to previous generations, it continues to be a significant social issue. Traditional practices such as widow remarriage remain common, while marriage patterns have gradually shifted from arranged marriages toward love marriages, largely influenced by media exposure and increased interaction with the outside world. The elderly respondents in many households recalled a time when marriages were primarily arranged by parents and relatives. This transition in marital practices reflects broader social changes occurring within the Chepang community, which was historically characterized by a semi-nomadic lifestyle, deep-rooted superstitions, and conservative social norms. Despite these changes, child marriage remains embedded in the social structure of many villages, affecting the overall development and well-being of young people.

Research conducted by Adhikari (2003) revealed that many Magi Chepang individuals marry between the ages of 13 and 18, demonstrating the continued prevalence of early marriage. Although Nepalese law establishes 20 years as the legal age of marriage, violations remain common in remote settlements. Early

marriage often results in emotional immaturity, family conflict, health complications, interrupted education, and economic instability. Historically, family pressure and customs such as pre-arranged marriages contributed significantly to the practice. While parental coercion has decreased in recent years, self-initiated elopements among adolescents have become more common, often creating new social and economic challenges. Nour (2009) further highlights that child marriage contributes to high school dropout rates, particularly among students between grades one and eight. The growing influence of information technology and social media has also facilitated early romantic relationships, increasing the likelihood of premature marriages. To address this issue effectively, comprehensive awareness programs, school-based education on the consequences of child marriage, stronger enforcement of existing laws, and community-level initiatives promoting education and marriage after the age of 20 are essential. Such combined efforts can contribute significantly to reducing child marriage and improving the future prospects of the Chepang community.

Conclusion

The Chepang community is one of Nepal's most marginalized indigenous groups, primarily residing in the remote foothills and hilly regions of the country. Historically dependent on hunting, gathering, and semi-nomadic livelihoods, the Chepang have only recently become integrated into settled agricultural society. Despite social and economic changes, child marriage continues to persist within many Chepang settlements, particularly in rural areas of Makwanpur District. While child marriage was once common among various ethnic and caste groups across Nepal, many communities have gradually abandoned the practice due to increased education, urbanization, and legal awareness. However, among the Chepang, the continuation of child marriage is influenced by poverty, limited educational opportunities, deeply rooted cultural traditions, gender norms, and weak implementation of legal provisions. In many cases, families perceive early marriage as a means of securing social acceptance and reducing economic burdens.

The consequences of child marriage in the Chepang community are far-reaching and affect individuals, families, and society as a whole. Educationally, early marriage often forces girls to discontinue their schooling, reducing their future opportunities and reinforcing cycles of poverty and

dependency. Health consequences are equally severe, as young brides face increased risks of early pregnancy, maternal health complications, and childbirth-related problems due to physical and emotional immaturity. Economically, child marriage limits women's participation in income-generating activities, making them financially dependent on their husbands and families. Socially, it restricts girls' freedom, isolates them from peers, and increases their vulnerability to domestic violence and psychological stress. Furthermore, the practice reinforces traditional gender inequalities and slows social progress within the community. Therefore, eliminating child marriage requires a comprehensive approach that includes improving access to education, raising community awareness, promoting gender equality, creating economic opportunities for families, and strengthening the enforcement of laws protecting children's rights. Through collective efforts, a healthier and more prosperous future for Chepang girls can be achieved.

Recommendation

1. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed.
2. Implement regular awareness campaigns in Chepang communities to educate people about the negative impacts of early marriage on health, education, and social development.
3. Ensure free and quality education for Chepang children, along with scholarships and support programs to reduce school dropout rates, especially among girls.
4. Strictly enforce laws against child marriage and improve access to reproductive health services and counseling in rural areas like Raxirang Rural Municipality.

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