

Gender Based Violence in Bhutanese Refugee Camps in Nepal : A Study of Beldangi Refugee Camp

Anne Mary Gurung¹

¹ Former Research Scholar

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies and Management, Sikkim University, Gangtok, annemary245@gmail.com

Abstract: Gender based Violence (GBV) has been the experience of women worldwide and is a universal reality that has existed in all societies and human settlements regardless of class, income, culture, or educational attainment. It is today recognized as a major issue on the international human rights agenda and has been defined as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender and sex. Globally, the refugees experience the full spectrum of gender-based violence throughout their refugee life. Hundreds and thousands of Southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin or the Lhotshampas were forced to flee Bhutan at the beginning of the 1990s, as a result of the ethnic cleansing campaign of the monarchical government of Bhutan. Over 108,000 refugees had initially settled in the seven refugee camps spread over the districts of Jhapa and Morang in the southeastern part of Nepal. Women were a part of the refugee population who sought protection in Nepal and so refugee women who are living in the makeshift camps in Nepal for more than three decades confront not only the hardship of refugee life in the camps but also face the injustice of gender based violence, as they have reported rape, sexual assault, polygamy, trafficking and domestic violence. Hence, the paper looks into the causes, types and impacts of gender based violence in the Beldangi Bhutanese refugee camps of Nepal.

Keywords: Gender Based Violence, Violence against women, Bhutanese Refugees, Refugee Women

Article History: Received: 07th May, 2024, Revised: 21st May, 2024, Accepted: 28th May, 2024, Published: 1st June, 2024

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender based Violence (GBV) has been the experience of women worldwide and is a universal reality that has existed in all societies and human settlements regardless of class, income, culture, or educational attainment (Amnesty International, 2005). It is today recognized as a major issue on the international human rights agenda and has been defined as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender and sex (UNHCR, 2020). It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty (Varia, 2003). Therefore, it may be physical, psychological, sexual or socio economic in nature (UNHCR, 2020). The 'United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women' (1993) offered the first official definition of violence against women or gender based violence as "Any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (UN, 1993).

Gender based violence can manifest as rape, sexual assault, physical assault, forced marriage, denial of resources, opportunities or services as well as psychological or emotional abuse. Some common forms of gender based violence include, intimate partner violence, so called honor related crimes, female genital mutilation and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation including sexual slavery, domestic servitude and servile forms of

marriage (UNHCR, 2020). Its consequences are devastating and have lifelong repercussions for its survivors and it can even lead to death (UNHCR, 2020). Globally, the refugees experience the full spectrum of gender-based violence throughout their refugee life. While, acknowledging that some male refugees experience gender based violence research indicates that most female refugees experience some form of it (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2018). Therefore according to Morrison, Ellsberg and Bott, although both men and women can be victims as well as perpetrators of violence, women are at much greater risk of gender based violence at different stages in their lives (Morrison, Ellsberg, & Bott, 2004). Hence, female refugees experience gender-based violence in a slightly different way. When a refugee uproots her family to flee persecution, her entire frame of reference is altered and the social structure that she knew turns out to be only a thing of the past. Changes in access to services, community support, resources and security diminish the capacity of the refugees to feel empowered (Ganeshpanchan, 2005). The setting in which a refugee lives often a refugee camp, forces a woman to rely on others in a way that makes her increasingly vulnerable to violence (Miller, 2012). Refugee camps are often too densely populated, holding numbers of people far too large, for a far too long time (Laxminrayan & Griek, 2015). In such settings, feelings of frustration and being in limbo can give way to violence particularly when freedom of movement and the right to work are also limited (Laxminrayan & Griek, 2015). In such situations women are especially vulnerable with high rates of

violence against women reported in many camp settings around the world (Laxminrayan & Griek, 2015).

The Lhotshampas:

The Lhotshampas are the descendants of Nepalese migrants that settled in southern Bhutan in the late 1890s. They are known as 'Lhotshampas', which means 'people from the south' (Bhowmik, 2012). They are of Nepali origin and speak the Nepali language. It is important to note that like in Nepal, there are several communities within the ethnic Nepali community of southern Bhutan and while it may appear that the Lhotshampas are a homogeneous Hindu community, in reality they are quite diverse, and include those who speak Tibeto- Burman languages and practice Buddhism as well as a few who practice Christianity (Vartak, 2008). Over the years the Lhotshampas prospered in Bhutan and became high-ranking government officials and educators. According to the 1988 census of Bhutan, they made up to 45 percent of the total population of Bhutan (IOM, 2008). In the 1990s, Bhutan expelled the Lhotshampas in one fell swoop to preserve its unique national identity and more than 30 years on, thousands remain in camps in Nepal (Morch, 2016). About 108,000 Lhotshampas fled from Bhutan and found refuge in Nepal in seven refugee camps (Banki, Ghimire, & Khanal, 2019). Women form almost 50 percent of the Bhutanese refugee community in Nepal (Vartak, 2008) and they continue to be subjected to various forms of torture and suppression in the refugee camps. Many women have become the victims of local toughs and authorities working in the refugee camps and the harassment of women within the family are no less (Acharya, 2000). As a result, gender based violence is rife in the camps of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal (Lundstrom, 2009). Therefore pushing a solution forward for Bhutanese refugee women and their problems with their active and informed participation is required.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the causes of gender based violence in the Beldangi refugee camp Nepal.
2. To find out the types of gender based violence in the Beldangi refugee camp Nepal.
3. To find out the consequences and impact of gender based violence on the Bhutanese refugee women of Beldangi Refugee Camp Nepal.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study depends on both the primary and secondary sources of data collection for the fulfillment of its objectives. The present study is a qualitative and descriptive research. The primary source of data collection is the field study method. The data was collected through purposive sampling. The present study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule for the personal interviews and the face-to-face interviews that were conducted. The area of study,

for the research that was conducted was the Bhutanese refugee camp of Beldangi, in the Jhapa district of Nepal. This camp was selected by the present study as the study area because, since the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees which began in the years 2006 to 2007, the camp populations decreased, therefore the Nepalese Government consolidated the original seven camps into two camps. Three camps of Timai, Goldhap and Khudunabari have been closed and three Beldangi camps (i.e. Beldangi I, Beldangi II, and Beldangi II Extension) have now been collectively named as 'Beldangi' (though all the camps remain) and the Sanishare camp remains (CDC, 2021).

As of 2019 only an estimated 6,500 Bhutanese refugees remain in Nepal. Over 90 percent of the initial Bhutanese refugee population has now left for third country resettlement. Out of the 6,500 Bhutanese refugees, 5,000 are living in Beldangi camp in Jhapa. 5 percent of the 5000 refugees that is 250 respondents were taken out of which 125 were male and 125 were female respondents. Therefore the sample size of the present study was 250 depending on the purposive sampling.

Table 1: Population Data, of Bhutanese Refugee Camp Beldangi 2019 Censure provided by the Camp Management Committee

S No	Population	Number	Percentage
1	Registered population	4,470	78.3
2	CA/ASR/New Entry (Census Absentee/ Asylum Seeker/ New Entry)	842	14.7
3	Missing	300	5.2
4	NOC/ IOC (Nepalese Origin Citizen/ Indian Origin Citizen)	19	0.4
5	Bhutan Jail	37	0.7
6	Nepal Jail	37	0.7
	Total Population	5704	100

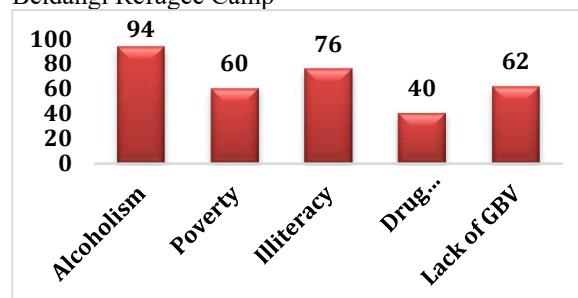
Source: Camp Management Committee Beldangi Jhapa Nepal. Field Work 2022- 2023

Table 2: Causes of Gender based violence in Beldangi Refugee Camp

S No	Causes of GBV	Percentage of Response
1	Alcoholism	94
2	Poverty	60
3	Illiteracy	76
4	Drug Addiction	40
5	Lack of Awareness about GBV	62

Source: Field Work, Beldangi Camp, Jhapa, Nepal 2022- 2023

Figure 1: Causes of Gender Based Violence in Beldangi Refugee Camp



Original Research Article

Open Access

The respondents were asked to state their opinion regarding the main causes of gender-based violence in Beldangi refugee camp and it is found that 94% of respondents stated alcoholism is the main cause of gender-based violence, 60% said it is due to poverty, 76% said it is caused by illiteracy of the people, 40% said that drug addiction is the cause and 62% mentioned that lack of awareness is the main cause of gender-based violence in the refugee camp.

Table 3: Types of Gender based violence the respondents know of

Types of Violence	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Physical Violence and Torcher	47	37.6	52	41.6	99	39.6
Domestic Violence	27	21.6	33	26.4	60	24
Sexual Violence and Rape	20	16	24	19.2	44	17.6
Emotional Violence	13	10.4	4	3.2	17	6.8
Total	125	100	125	100	250	100

Source: Field Work, Beldangi Camp, Jhapa, Nepal 2022- 2023

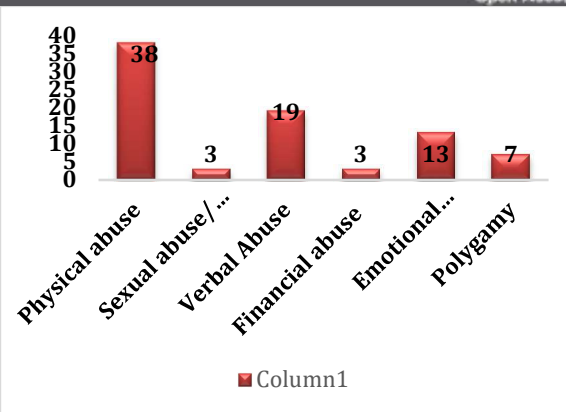
In the present study, gender-based violence has been categorized into 4 types, namely, physical violence and torcher, domestic violence, sexual violence and rape and emotional violence. 85.6% of male and 90.4% of female respondents have the knowledge and understanding of different types of violence that are occurring in families and society within the camp. 37.6% of male respondents and 41.6% of female respondents said that they know about and are aware of physical violence and torcher, 21.6% of male and 26.4% of female respondents are aware of domestic violence, 16% of male and 19.2% of female respondents are aware about sexual violence and rape. The percentage of emotional violence that the male and female respondents know of is 13% and 4% respectively. Except for emotional violence, female respondents knew much about the aforesaid types of violence than the male respondents.

Table 4: Types of Gender based violence experienced by the respondents in Beldangi Refugee camp

Gender based Violence	Male	Female	Total
Physical abuse	4	34	38
Sexual abuse/ rape	0	3	3
Marital rape	0	0	0
Verbal Abuse	3	16	19
Financial abuse	1	2	3
Trafficking	0	0	0
Emotional Abuse	2	11	13
Polygamy	1	6	7
Total	11	72	83

Source: Field Work, Beldangi Camp, Jhapa, Nepal 2022- 2023

Figure 2: Types of Gender based violence experienced by the respondents in Beldangi Refugee camp



The respondents had experienced different types of violence namely physical abuse, sexual abuse/rape, marital rape, verbal abuse, financial abuse, trafficking, emotional, and polygamy (Table 4.6). Out of 250 respondents, 83 (11 male and 72 female) respondents had experienced different types of violence in their life in the camp. 34 female and 4 male respondents had said that they are prone to physical abuse, 3 female respondents had faced sexual abuse or rape, there is an absence of marital abuse in both the gender, 16 female and 3 male respondents had experienced verbal abuse, 2 female and 1 male respondent reported financial abuse, there is no human trafficking, 11 female and 2 male respondents had to face emotional abuse and 6 female and 1 male respondents had experienced polygamy. This shows that the female members of the refugee camp are more prone to different kinds of violence than males.

Table 5: Impacts of gender-based violence on the Bhutanese refugee women of Beldangi:

Sexual Violence	Depression	Unwanted Pregnancy	Physical Injury	Suicidal Tendency
Male	78	3	42	1
Female	92	7	8	11
Total	170 (68%)	10 (4%)	50 (20%)	12 (5%)
Psychological Violence	Depression	Anxiety	PTSD	Suicidal Tendency
Male	81	6	7	31
Female	104	6	8	7
Total	185 (74%)	12 (5%)	15 (6%)	38 (15%)
Physical Violence	Small Injuries	Fractures	Death	Severe Injuries
Male	16	26	56	27
Female	59	34	24	8
Total	75 (30%)	60 (24%)	80 (32%)	35 (14%)

Source: Field Work, Beldangi Camp, Jhapa, Nepal 2022- 2023

The table reflects the impact of different types of gender based violence namely, sexual violence, physiological violence and physical violence on the respondents of Beldangi Bhutanese refugee camp. Under sexual violence, 68% of the respondents (78 male and 92 female) mentioned that women are having the problems of depression, 4% of respondents (3 male and 7 female) stated that women had to face the problem of unwanted pregnancy, 20% of the respondents (42 male and 8 female) said that women had suffered physical injuries and 5% of the respondents (1 male and 11 female) revealed that women have suicidal tendency due to sexual violence. Similarly, as far as physiological violence is concerned, 74% of respondents (81 male and 104 female) mentioned women are having the problems of depression, 5% of respondents (6 male and 6 female) stated that women had to face the problem of anxiety, 15% of the respondents (7 male and 8 female) said that women had suffered PTSD and 38% of the respondents (31 male and 7 female) revealed that women have suicidal tendency.

The study revealed that 30% of respondents (16 male and 59 female) mentioned that women are having the problems of small injuries, 24% of respondents (26 male and 34 female) stated that women had to face the problem of fractures, 32% of the respondents (56 male and 24 female) said that women had death and 14% of the respondents (27 male and 8 female) revealed that women had severe injuries due to physical violence.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION

- Work to change attitudes, or questioning gender roles and stereotypes that make gender-based violence acceptable in society. This can be done through organising campaigns, training, peer to peer education, or by including gender equality in all aspects of education.
- Providing accessible information about what gender-based violence is, about its different forms, possible remedies and existing support measures. This might include producing leaflets or websites, working on social media campaigns, creating TV spots, or making information available in youth centers, old age centers in the camp and schools in the camp.
- Training professionals to be able to identify, address and respond to gender-based violence. This might include providing training for teachers, youth workers, social workers, trainers, the police, health care providers etc.
- Gender-based violence is rarely discussed and data at a local or regional level is often not available, or is incomplete. Many victims choose not to report incidents, and certain forms of violence i.e., verbal abuse may not be punishable by law. Therefore, it is

very important that the extent of the problem is made clear.

CONCLUSION

The Gender-based violence thus is a phenomenon which is deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies and communities in the world. It is to be noted that Gender-based violence is directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men can fall prey to gender-based violence but mostly the majority of the victims are women and girls. When studying the camp of Beldangi it was found that gender-based violence was prevalent in the refugee camp although the respondents who experienced it were less in number and percentage. Therefore proper measures should be taken to mitigate it

References:

- [1] Amnesty International. (2005). *It's in our hands: Stop Violence against Women*. London: Amnesty International Publications.
- [2] UNHCR. (2020). *UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender based Violence*. UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency.
- [3] Varia, N. (2003). *Trapped by Inequality: Bhutanese Refugee Women in Nepal*. Human Rights Watch.
- [4] UN. (1993 йил 20-December). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. United Nations Proclamation by General Assembly Resolution 48/104. Geneva: United Nations.
- [5] Pittaway, E., & Bartolomei, L. (2018). *Enhancing the Protection of Women and girls through the Global Compact on Refugees*. *Forced Migration Review*, 77-79.
- [6] Morrisson, A., Ellsberg, M., & Bott, S. (2004 йил October). *Addressing Gender Based Violence in the Latin American and Caribbean Region: A Critical Review of Interventions*. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3438.
- [7] Ganeshpanchan, Z. (2005). *Domestic and Gender based violence among Refugees and Internally displaced Women*. Retrieved from Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies
- [8] Miller, L. (2012). *The Irony of Refuge: Gender Based Violence against Female Refugees in Africa*. Human Rights and Human Welfare.
- [9] Laxminrayan, M., & Griek, I. (2015 йил October). *A Case Study Of Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: Can Conflict Resolution reduce fear in Crime Victims?* Working Paper 12. The Hague Institute for Global Justice.
- [10] Bhowmik, S. (2012 йил 2-August). *Role of Nepal in Protection of Bhutanese Refugees*. From SSRN: <http://www.ssrn.com>
- [11] IOM, D. (2008). *Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: A Tool for Settlement Workers and Sponsors*. From PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada: <http://www.peianc.com>

- [11] Vartak, M. (2008). *Memory and Migration: Bhutanese Refugee Women and Oral Histories of Self and Nation*. New Delhi: WISCOMP, Foundation for Universal Responsibility of his Holiness the Dalai Lama.
- [12] Morch, M. (2016 йил 21-Septemeber). *Bhutan's Dark Secret: The Lhotshampa Expulsion*. Retrieved 2021 йил 8-April from The Diplomat: <http://www.thediplomat.com>
- [13] Banki, S., Ghimire, B., & Khanal, H. (2019). *Displaced But not Disempowered: Bhutanese Refugees and Grassroots Activism*. The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs. Jstor , 37-56.
- [14] Acharya, J. (2000). *Refugee Women of Bhutan*. *Refugee Watch: A South Asian Journal on Forced Migration* (10), 13.
- [15] Lundstrom, J. (2009). *Bhutan: Resettlement in the Netherlands: Interviews with Bhutanese Refugees*. The Netherlands : Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) .
- [16] CDC. (2021 йил 10-March). *Bhutanese Refugee Health Profile*. Retrieved 2021 йил 9-June from Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov>