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## School Expansion and Reductions in Intimate Partner Violence in Nepal

Based on the peer-reviewed publication Ghimire, Axinn, and Smith-Greenaway 2015 in *Social Science Research*<sup>1</sup>

A recent study conducted in the Chitwan Valley of Nepal shows that living closer to a school during childhood lowers married women's likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>1</sup> Exposure to schools during childhood shapes a child's long-term expectations, such as gender-based equality, independence, and what constitutes appropriate behavior. Through education, males become less likely to inflict violence, while females become less tolerant of intimate partner violence.

Furthermore, the spread of schools influences the likelihood of going to school. Parents are more comfortable sending their children to nearby schools due to better safety and lower cost. Attending school

also informs perspectives and expectations on appropriate behavior and interactions between the genders. This policy brief describes the value of school expansion for lowering incidents of intimate partner violence.

“Research shows that exposure to educational institutions during childhood shapes individuals’ long-term personality characteristics independent of their own educational experiences.”

- Drs. Ghimire, Axinn, and Smith-Greenaway<sup>1</sup>

### Research Context

- One third of ever-married Nepali women aged 15 to 49 have been victims of emotional, physical, and/or sexual violence perpetrated by their partner.<sup>2</sup>
- Nepal is a predominantly patriarchal society. Women's objectification is thought to make IPV more acceptable.<sup>1</sup>
- Factors which put Nepali women at especially high risk of IPV include low educational status of both women and her husband, no control over resources, accused of being a witch, and bringing less dowry than expected at the time of marriage.<sup>3</sup>
- Women who experience IPV not only face the risk of physical health problems, but also mental health consequences, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorders.<sup>4</sup>

### Data Source

This policy brief is based on a peer-reviewed publication<sup>1</sup> that analyzes data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) — a comprehensive mixed method panel study of individuals, families, and communities in the Chitwan Valley of Nepal. The Chitwan Valley Family Study investigates the relationships between changing social contexts, environmental factors, land use, and population processes. CVFS data include individual interviews with full life histories for more than 10,000 individuals; tracking and interviews with all migrants; household assets, income, production, and consumption; continuous measurement of community change; more than 20 years of demographic event registry; and data linking human and natural systems.

# Findings: Proximity to a School for Both Men and Women Reduces Women's Likelihood of Intimate Partner Violence in Marriage

A recent study conducted in the Western Chitwan Valley of Nepal shows that men and women who lived within a one-hour walk of a school during childhood lowers the likelihood of perpetrating or being the victim of intimate partner violence.<sup>1</sup> According to the study, women who lived within a one-hour walking distance from their school during childhood were 25% less likely of experiencing intimate partner violence in their marriage. The effect on husbands is even greater. Specifically, women whose husbands lived within a one-hour walking distance from their school during childhood were 28% less likely to experience domestic violence.

## Exposure to Schools during Childhood Shapes a Child's Long-term Expectations

Research shows that regardless of the person's individual educational experiences, exposure to school during childhood shapes their long-term expectations.<sup>5</sup> Those who live close to school are more likely to be exposed to gender neutral settings and ideas including egalitarianism.<sup>6</sup> These experiences may influence their adoption of new values of gender equality and independence, and also have future expectations for gender-based interactions. Males become less likely to perpetrate violence, and females are less tolerant of it which leads them to choose partners who are less likely to inflict violence on them.

As noted above, the protective effect of living closer to school is even greater for men than for women—husbands who lived within a one-hour walk of a school were less likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence on their wives. The effect may also be intergenerational, as men and women who were exposed to schools in their early life may choose to reside near similar schools later in their life, which would influence their children's community educational context.



## Spread of Schools Influences Likelihood of Going to School

Parents tend to send their children to nearby schools. While some families in rural Nepal do send their children to distant schools, the majority of them cannot afford the costs. Distance to school is important, especially for girls. With the school in the local neighborhood, parents feel more comfortable and at ease in sending their children to school.<sup>7</sup> Going to school then alters perspectives and expectations on what constitutes appropriate behavior, as discussed previously.

Recently, there have been growing efforts from the government to make education more available and accessible. However, children in the rural mountain regions and Terai Dalits, such as the Musahar, Dom and Dusadh still do not have easy access to school, especially lower secondary and secondary schools.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in some mid- and far-Western districts in the Terai region, school environments are not girl-friendly, such as lack of separate toilets for girls.<sup>8</sup> This discourages female school attendance. Children from the poorest families, street children and children who are seasonal or occasional laborers are also not enrolled.<sup>8</sup>

## Intimate Partner Violence Includes

- Physical acts of violence within the family including sexual coercion by the husband; physical threats
- Psychological abuse
- Controlling actions such as enforcing physical isolation and/or controlling access to information and services

Source: World Health Organization<sup>9</sup>

# Policy Implications

## Improved Access to Education for Children in Remote Mountain Areas

Despite government efforts to improve access to education, children in rural mountain areas still do not have easy access to education, especially the lower secondary and secondary schools. More efforts should be targeted in these areas so children can continue education beyond primary school.

## Initiatives to Encourage Girls' School Attendance

Girls are discouraged from going to school due to social and cultural reasons. Cash-transfer programs can encourage families to send their daughters to school. In Malawi's Zomba Cash Transfer program for example, daughters and their parents receive \$15 per month if they attend school regularly. More female teachers should be trained and hired to make it comfortable for girls to attend school. In some areas of the Terai region, girls are discouraged from going to school due to poor school environments. Separate toilets for girls and boys should be built, and is an accommodation that facilitates higher school attendance of female children. Bicycles should also be provided or subsidized for girls in disadvantaged regions to ensure a safer commute for them to and from school.

## Basic Education Should be Provided for Disadvantaged and Working Children

Children from the poorest families and/or marginalized castes drop out of school in order to work. Given such opportunity costs that exists for these families, programs that provide basic education while acknowledging the working status of children should be encouraged. One model which Nepal could adopt for example, is the Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) project that is run by UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh. Children spend about two hours per day learning basic literacy and numerical skills, and knowledge about life skills, health and their rights. In this model, they can simultaneously earn a wage to support their family and continue to learn.

## Conclusion

Exposure to schools during childhood shapes a child's long-term expectations and experiences. Education for both men and women lowers a woman's risk of intimate partner violence in marriage. Improved access to schools for marginalized children and more girl-friendly school environments are needed.

## Effects of Education on Women's and Men's Attitudes towards IPV

### Effects on Women

Girls are exposed to Western ideologies of gender equality, independence and interpersonal relationships based on mutual consent. This lowers their tolerance of IPV and increases their expectations of the marital relationship and marital dynamics. The effects of education on women and their future experiences of IPV is not independent of their husband's education. Education protects women from a violent marriage by increasing their likelihood of choosing a more educated spouse who is less likely to engage in IPV. Additionally, educated women can also gain greater economic independence as they gain new skills and credentials from education.<sup>2</sup> Greater autonomy and self-sufficiency enables women to leave a violent household.

### Effects on Men

The effect of education on men is even greater. Women whose husbands have 12 or more years of education are 73% less likely to experience IPV.<sup>2</sup> This finding reveals the importance of husband's education as a principal pathway to reduce a woman's exposure to IPV.

### Intergenerational Effects

Daughters of more highly educated parents are less likely to experience IPV. Women whose parents both attended school were about 60% less likely to experience IPV compared to those whose parents did not attend school. Thus, more educated parents are likely to have lower tolerance of their daughters' exposure to IPV, higher expectations of their daughters' future marital relationship and similarly, lower tolerance of their sons perpetuating such behavior.



Photo: Loritta Chan

# Footnotes and References

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