

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS REGARDING THEIR  
IRREGULARITIES IN SCHOOL : A CASE STUDY OF CHITLANG

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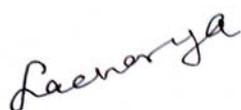
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## AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Pabita Shahi* for the degree of *Master in Education in Sustainable Development* presented on 16 July 2024 entitled *Exploring the Experiences of Girls regarding their Irregularities in School: A Case Study of Chitlang*.

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In Nepal, the reach of education to people and children is increasing, and progress has also been made at the government level. However, many children, especially girls in rural, semi-urban, and even in urban areas compared to boys, still cannot go to school because of various reasons. This study attempts to explore the real experiences of girls regarding their irregularity in school in their own words and discover the reasons why girls have less attendance at school and how they experience their irregularity, even in a semi-urban area.

This study is guided by two designed research questions, which are as follows:

1. How do the girl-students experience their school irregularity?
2. How do the girls describe the reasons for irregular school attendance?

This study applied qualitative method and case study approach to gather in-depth information through open-ended questions from the participants as a source of data collection.

Theoretically, the study encompasses an intersectionality lens to explain the various reasons that lead to the girls' irregularities. These include socioeconomic aspects like poverty, employment, seasonal migration, etc.; cultural aspects like early marriage, parents' and teachers' attitudes, gender discrimination, etc.; biological

aspects like menstruation, sickness, etc.; and physical aspects like lack of clean toilets, lack of water, lack of awareness, etc.

The main findings of this study reveal that irregularities of girls at school have caused them to experience discouragement and even feel like dropping out of school because of continuous failure in exams, lack of support from teachers and parents, and bullying from friends. This study also found out that those girls in semi-urban areas are still discriminated, less supported, and confined to household chores. Thus, this study concludes that these reasons might lead to more dropouts and even to the incompleteness of primary education of such girls in the near future.

Therefore, this study suggests some relevant policy implications for the concerned institutions, the educational authorities, and the government to include investments in bettering school facilities, safety precautions, transportation options, as well as awareness campaigns challenging gender stereotypes and highlighting the importance of girls' education in all regions of Nepal.

The conclusion of this study also recommends that teachers, parents, and the school department should be concerned for the better education of the children.

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I understand that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.

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16 July 2024

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my late father, Mr. Ratna Bahadur Shahi, whose belief, trust, and support towards me during this journey until his last memory enriched and motivated me to complete this work.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB: Asian Development Bank

AIR: American Institute of Research

GESI: Gender and Social Inclusion

GoN: Government of Nepal

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

MOE: The Ministry of Education

MoEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

NIRT: National Institute for Research and Training

NPC: National Planning Commission

SSDP: School Sector Development Plan

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant role in numerous aspects of human existence, and it is essential for achieving gender equality, eliminating poverty, providing opportunities for individuals to enhance their lives and health, advocating for themselves, and stimulating participation in society. Female education has been highlighted as more crucial for a nation's growth than education in general (McMichael, 2004). It is acknowledged that educating girls generates high societal and development benefits for individuals, society, and the nation. Sincere efforts have been made by governments, organizations, and institutions worldwide to increase equal access to education for girls and boys.

However, girls continue to have poorer educational attainment than boys in many nations, particularly at the secondary level, due to unequal educational access and bias in gender terms, which remain a major problem locally, nationally, and internationally. The latest data from UNESCO (2023) shows that 132 million girls worldwide do not have access to schools. Furthermore, 129 million girls are out of school worldwide, including 32 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67 million of upper-secondary school age. According to World Development Bank data from 2016, 89.3% of girls finish primary school, but only 77.1% complete lower secondary education. The situation is significantly worse in low-income nations, with less than 65% of girls completing primary school and only 34.4% completing secondary school (UNICEF, 2022).

Due to low access to education among girls in the world, they are more likely to marry or have children early, leading to poor health outcomes for themselves and their children, and become the victims of violence. Similarly, they are disempowered in the decision-making process and deprived of their fundamental rights, leading to higher rates of poverty and lower well-being among women. Additionally, the lack of education to girls can lead to substantial losses in human capital, wealth, and population management.

Therefore, it is important to educate girls by increasing their access to education because an educated female within a family or a society could lead to an enhancement in the social status of that family, society, and the nation (Le Vine et al.,

2001; Slaughter et al., 2002). Wooden et al. (2018) have also highlighted the positive impact of girls' education on socioeconomic factors, including increased income and occupational benefits in families and communities. Similarly, an educated girl can lead a healthy life with a higher life expectancy because of her better knowledge of low fertility and infant rates (Kim, 2016). Finally, better education opportunities lead to the access of the quality and basic services they rely on gradually improving the quality of their country's institutions and leaders.

Thus, the improvement in girls' education and equal access to education for girls is not only the right thing to do but also a crucial way for countries to enhance their development potential and the personal development of the girls in a male-dominated society like Nepal.

### **Overview of Girls Education in Nepal**

According to the Government of Nepal, the National Planning Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (GON, NPC and UNDP, 2011), there has been an improvement in girls' education in Nepal since 2011 when the CEDAW called out for attention to how deeply-rooted stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes are present in Nepalese society, contributing to gender inequality, high dropout rates of girls, and unequal access to education for girls. The committee's report on Nepal's execution of CEDAW highlighted the necessity of better laws and regulations for women where girls' education was prioritized.

Currently, about 69.4 % of girls are attending primary, secondary, and higher secondary school (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2021). Girls are now viewed as being equally active as boys than before, pursuing higher education and better careers. Girls appear to be equally involved in decision-making activities in all aspects of life, from social to economic to political. There has also been a significant and positive improvement in parents' attitudes toward sending their daughters to school every day.

Many parents, including mine, are now more conscious of providing education to their daughters for the better future of their daughters, family, and society because in the former days, daughters' education was not given much importance in comparison to that of sons'; instead, they were made to be involved in household chores and agricultural activities. In my own family, my grandparents were also conservative and they did not let their daughter (my aunt) go to school; she was even forced to marry early, whereas my father and uncle could study at least up to the secondary level. But now the situation has been gradually improving as most of the

girls in my home and from my village are engaging in different professions. Some are even studying at higher levels in colleges and universities, including myself. Most of the parents are now sending their daughters to school daily so that they do not miss out on anything important.

From the policy level, the Government of Nepal (GoN) is also working to reduce gender inequality in education by making an effort to increase the engagement of girls and their regularity at school in an inclusive way through various programs and scholarship possibilities for the marginalized, differently abled, Dalit, and indigent, etc. and also through assessment of academic performance, etc. (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Similarly, various policies for the assessment of women's rights to education have been accomplished. GoN prepared the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) for the period July 2016 to July 2023 to continue its efforts in ensuring equitable access to quality education for all (National Network for Beijing-Review Nepal, 2019). It has also established an inclusive education policy, pledging to offer universal access to high-quality education and to promote the values of inclusion in the educational system (Shahi, 2022).

The Education Act of Nepal 2075 has emphasized that the community schools offer free elementary education, and the GoN provides free books to children whose parents cannot afford education and the materials required (Nepal Law Commission, 2018). The law further specifies free education for the indigents from Dalit and tribal communities in community schools. Similarly, it has also instructed the ward offices to recommend the names of such students to the concerned education committee of the places and the colleges to inquire about the student's financial situation during the admissions process (Pokhrel et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the Act has formulated a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy, 2021, in order to make schools more gender and Dalit-responsive to provide a favorable atmosphere for girls and other children who face multiple exclusions to attend school (Amin et al., 2010). Local governments are instructed to provide special care to girls, with sanitary facilities and personal safety, and address harassment and bullying behaviors. In addition, schools are also required to provide basic sanitary amenities, such as clean toilets, water facilities, and girl's changing rooms. This act has also established norms and standards to guarantee that all schools

provide a child-friendly learning environment that caters to the diverse requirements of students.

The GESI Policy focuses on achieving gender equity in educational access, participation, continuation, and inclusion. It also includes provisions to address deeply rooted issues hampering the education of children, especially that of girls, and to emphasize targeted actions to be put into practice in monitoring and evaluating education, which involves district-level equity profiling, context analysis against equity dimensions, and target setting against national equity criteria (Ibid, 2020).

Nepal is putting effort from the government and policy level for the betterment of education and the equal participation of students in schools, however, many children, especially girls, are still backward in accessing education and many girls are still unable to attend schools regularly. The major reason for girls' lower attendance in school and lower access to education is gender discrimination that still exists in several communities in Nepal to varying extents. Similarly, the socio-economic, cultural, and geographic conditions, menstruation, and lack of physical facilities in schools are also contributing to the high dropout rates and irregularities of girls in school.

Normality of gender discrimination seems to exist in both so-called high and low caste families. This has normalized the parents wanting their sons to pursue higher education while discriminating against their daughters (CARE, 2015). Girls are dominated and discriminated against from the moment they are born, even by their own parents. They are taught to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of the family and household, and are forced into early marriage which directly hamper their education leading to weak attainment of their desires and even dropout from schools.

Furthermore, poor economic conditions also deprive many girls of access to education, and are irregular in school. Poverty compels parents to migrate from one place to another for better job opportunities. So, girls are given the role of either working in the crop field or taking on the responsibility of household chores; as a result, they are unable to attend school regularly.

Similarly, the impact of geography continues to create more obstacles among girls in their education. Girls menstruate monthly, and lack of physical facilities in school, insecurity, a long distance from home to school and the burden of work at home discourage them from attending schools regularly. Not only during the

menstruation cycle but on other days as well, several obstacles hinder their education, which might result in failing in exams and leading to dropouts (Mahat, 2019).

Thus, socio-cultural and economic conditions result in gender discrimination leading to less involvement of girls in school, while geography, insecurity, migration, and menstruation problems are also the major factors hampering girls' education. The irregularity and dropout rates among girls are mostly seen at the secondary level of education, especially in Grades 9 and 10 because girls are forced to fulfil their gender roles and also menstruate at this age. Some parents are unable to afford their education when they reach to higher level. Due to such reasons, girls are unable to focus on their studies, and as a result, they fail exams. Due to these reasons, thousands of Nepalese girls especially around the age of 11 to 16 years drop out of school each year to work and assist their families (Adhikari, 2013).

The Constitution of Nepal has declared Nepal as a federal state dividing the country into seven provinces; however, it does not have customized education plans for each province, particularly for girls. A single national strategy is insufficient to solve the difficulties that each province faces in accessing education (ADB, 2016). Many areas of Nepal are still ignored and unexplored about the situation of the girls and their education, school attendance, and irregularity. In that context, exploring their own real experiences regarding lack of access to education is way behind. Moreover, in some regions, girls seem to be irregular and backward in accessing better education despite the abundance of good schools, easy transportation, and geographical situation.

One of the nearby semi-urban areas, Chitlang is only 28 km away from Kathmandu and it is among the famous tourist destinations of Nepal where many domestic as well as international tourists constantly visit. However, this place is also ignored in terms of exploration of the situation of girls and their access to education. The girls in this place are irregular in school and are seen to be working in fields, and restaurants most of the time despite being the nearest place to the capital city.

So, the concerned education department must focus on the improvement of girls' education in every part of Nepal by exploring the issues that prevent girls from attending schools regularly. In-depth research should be done by studying their experiences and categorizing and prioritizing each place and area for the exploration of the situation of girls. With the same view, this study is conducted in Chitlang to explore the reasons behind girls' irregularities in schools from their own experiences,

and the results obtained from it will be valuable resources in taking serious concern about educating girls and recommending improvements to girls' education in Nepal prioritizing each province and areas.

### **Problem Statement**

Improvement in girls' education and their attendance in schools receive prioritized attention worldwide, especially in developing countries; however, Nepal's situation does not seem to have improved much (UNESCO, 2015). Girls are less educated and their regularity in school is comparatively lower as compared to that of boys because of gender discrimination, poverty, menstruation, and migration in the communities of Nepal. Girls who attend school, especially in rural areas, need to struggle hard while trying to balance their work and study. So, it becomes difficult for them to attend school regularly (NIRT&AIR, 2017).

Similarly, there seems a research gap in describing the real experiences of girls that hamper their education and their low access to school. Also, their feeling of being compelled to be irregular in school is also found to be unexplored in Nepal. In addition, some places like Chitlang are found to be ignored and neglected in terms of exploring the status of girls, their education, and their school attendance despite this place being one of the nearest areas to the capital city, Kathmandu, and a famous tourist destination for educational and recreational purpose.

Thus, the central aim of my study is to explore the experiences of girls from Chitlang regarding their school irregularities in school in their own words. The real experiences directly from the girls could provide in-depth information regarding the issue. Simultaneously, this could demand need-based recommendations for girls' education and also for better policy implications highlighting the specific areas and regions for the improvement of girls' education and their access to schools.

For this purpose, my study can be a valuable resource for understanding how the girls experience the phenomenon of their school irregularity, why they are irregular, and what the reasons behind their weak attainment at school are in their own words. This study also assists other researchers in attracting and working on similar issues in the future.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The main purpose of this research is to understand the experience of girls from Chitlang regarding their irregularities in school and explore the reasons behind them.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the girl students experience their irregularity to school?
2. How do the girls describe the reasons behind irregular school attendance?

### **Significance of the Study**

Girls in Nepal are discriminated against from birth by their parents because of socio-cultural beliefs of patriarchal society. Apart from that, they sacrifice several important aspects of life, one of which is education. Education is considered a fundamental human rights that is essential to every human being. However, in many rural areas and a few urban and semi-urban areas of Nepal, girls are still behind in school in comparison to boys.

Girls in several regions of Nepal face difficulty in attending schools regularly because of traditional beliefs that prioritize boys' education and take girls as means of marriage or household chores. Girls are sometimes forced to quit school because of challenging geography and insecurity as well. Thus, the focus of this research on girls' education and girls' less involvement in school contains information about the situation of Nepalese girls in a semi-urban area from Chitlang. It discusses various issues, such as gender discrimination, caste, social classes, and insecurity, among girls that are hampering their education. I hope that this study will inspire other researchers to investigate educational issues in other vulnerable districts, places of urban and semi-urban areas like Chitlang, and rural areas of Nepal.

Similarly, I believe that this research will help in educating and raising awareness among girls about their educational rights and may change the attitudes of parents across the country regarding female education. It would also benefit the girls to dream big and assist the local community in creating possibilities. This study may raise concerns and help the government and other relevant educational ministries realize the problems in girls' education and encourage them to take action to improve girls' education in Nepal, including semi-urban areas too while focusing on both rural and urban areas, with plenty of opportunities and security for girls.

### **Chapter Summary**

Despite the formulation of numerous Acts, policies, and plans regarding girls' education, Nepal is still behind in implementing such Acts and policies in various areas. Due to several factors, including geography, cultural barriers, economic status, and gender discrimination, girls are still under-represented in school as compared to boys.

There are still numerous girls in rural areas who rarely attend school and a few in urban areas who drop out. Many studies have also been conducted to address the reasons for girls' lower attendance rates and have revealed significant advancements in the education of girls. However, semi-urban areas of Nepal like Chitlangseem to be ignored in terms of research and educational policy implementation. Nepal is still behind in monitoring and evaluating the status of inclusive quality education among the genders in almost all areas of Nepal. If such issues continue to exist and never diminish then there will be no achievable quality education and gender equality, and the number of children, especially girls, with dropout rates will only increase.

So, this study aims to explore the reasons behind girls' irregularities in school and their experiences. In addition, this study is guided by intersectionality theory to gather various in-depth information and reasons for girls' irregularities in school. In a similar vein, other researchers studying girls' education may find this study useful as a reference, and it may also raise important issues regarding the government's need to improve the status of girls' education through policy formulation.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I reviewed a variety of literature that are relevant to my research topic. This chapter starts with the status of girls and their education in Nepal, which explains how girls are still backward in education despite the efforts of the government's laws, Acts, and policies. Similarly, it also highlights the status of girls in rural areas regarding education and how they have been experiencing difficulties and obstacles in attending school regularly caused by various reasons. In addition, this chapter also explains the importance of educating girls and the importance of girl's education in Nepal. I have applied intersectionality theory to understand and explore the reasons behind girls' lower attendance in school from their own experiences, which are also the findings of this study. This chapter ends with the research gap.

#### **Education Access and School Attendance of Girls in Nepal**

Sustainable development goal 5 talks about gender equality, and goal 4 ensures that all genders have access to a high-quality education that is free, equal, and accessible, and additionally talks about ensuring equal access to all ranges of education (Gupta, 2019). In the context of Nepal, the level of education has improved, as the majority of young people now have significantly more education and educational options than their parents did. Additionally, it seems that more girls are enrolling in school at somewhat higher rates now than they were in the past (World Bank, 2012).

The Government of Nepal developed the School Sector Development Plan (2016–2023) and National Education Policy 2076 to provide equal access to quality education. Similarly, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) pledges to uphold non-exclusion and non-discrimination in access to educational possibilities within society (NCEN, 2016). In addition, it ensures that everyone has access to education, regardless of their background, caste, gender, religion, or culture (Gandharba&Gaire, 2021).

Nepal has also emphasized an integrated equity agenda in school education, focusing on meaningful access, engagement, and valuable results for both girls and boys (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2022). The strategy has also highlighted eight

equality dimensions in education that are gender, socioeconomic status, geography, nutrition and health status, disability, caste and ethnicity, and children from disadvantaged families (Dwiyanti&Jati, 2019). In terms of gender equality and women's empowerment, the proportion of females in primary schools has significantly increased since the 1990s, achieving the 2015 MDG target (Ibid, 2017).

However, children are still not engaged in educational institutions at an equal rate in many areas of Nepal, as girls are still undereducated and unable to complete their basic and secondary education due to poor socio-economic conditions of the family, while others are unable to attend school regularly due to their parents' gender biased mindset of making them involved more in household chores and also due to geography difficulties and lack of school facilities during menstruations (Khatri, 2022). Some girls are still experiencing gender discrimination from their own parents, who send them to community schools and sons to private English medium boarding institutions.

According to the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) results of 2019, it was revealed that 118,807 girls were enrolled in community schools and 56,751 boys were enrolled in private institutions. Private schools are considered to be more advanced or better in educational and skill development than community schools (SEE Examinee Girls Higher in Community Schools, 2019). In addition, parents who cannot afford to send all of their children to school also choose to send their sons to private schools, which has led to gender inequality between girls and boys in education (Joshi, 2016).

Similarly, UNESCO (2004) explored that economically disadvantaged students are neglected and frequently discriminated against, and even schools continue to exclude the kids from underprivileged areas, communities, and classes. Among those underprivileged student groups, girls are more discriminated against based on their family status as well as on their academic performances as compared to boys, and due to such reasons, they get discouraged and become absent or even drop out of school, which can have major consequences for a girl's incomplete education (Dhungana, 2019). Furthermore, girls are linked to domestic poverty or social pressure, which may force them to marry early and leave education (Boyden et al., 2019).

Likewise, female education is not seen as a priority in many parts of Nepal; instead, girls are prioritized to be involved in household chores, cultural

responsibility, and family responsibility, and are forced to get married early (Gyawali, 2006). The persistent poverty, male dominance, and compared preference for sons over daughters in Nepal have significantly impacted the education of girls throughout (Poudel, 2019). MOH and ERA (2017) showed that the percentage of girls marrying before their 18th birthday is declining, however, among 37% of girls in Nepal, 10% of the girls still marry before they reach the age of 18, and 10% marry before they reach the age of 15 (WENR, 2018).

Devkota and Bagale (2015) claim that schools remain plagued by high dropout rates, with girls still being more likely to leave school earlier than boys. The dropout rate mostly comes from marginalized families or female students who live afar from school and have uncertainty in geography when attending school. Another empirical study was performed by Dahal (2012) where he stipulates that girl's education in Nepal lags behind as the majority of girls have been out of school because education for girls is considered pointless in some areas. Similar to this, girls may experience discrimination at school because of their academic performance. As a result, they lose interest in going to school regularly when they experience humiliation from teachers and harassment from male classmates. So, they drop out of school (IRIN, 2010).

An ethnographic study by Levine (2006) showed that gender, cultural prejudice, and poverty prevented a majority of girls from going to school regularly, regardless of their academic talent. They are forced to engage in domestic work or to enter early arranged marriages because the majority of parents view their daughter's education as a poor investment in a patriarchal society of Nepal. Parents think that their sons stay with them, so they believe that their son will contribute to the household economy, whereas investment in the education of their daughter will benefit and transfer her educational contribution to her husband's family. Therefore, girls are forced to marry early and even forced to drop out.

In the context of rural and remote areas of Nepal, marginalized or socially excluded groups, especially girls, are still facing challenges and difficulties to even get primary education (Rai et al., 2017). The prevailing socio-cultural belief leads to gender discrimination, where girls whether from the so-called high or low caste or from high or low class are expected to help with domestic tasks or to take on the responsibilities of the family from a very young age while sons are sent to pursue education. Even if the parents cannot afford the school's fees, transportation, and

educational materials for their children, they prioritize their sons to be educated for the better future of the family (No et al., 2020).

Some people still believe that a girl is to be married and sent to her husband's house while a son is to be the future pillar of income generation which is why sending girls to school regularly is considered unnecessary and wasteful in some rural societies (LUKUBA, 2015). Due to such beliefs, people are still giving their sons more preference to complete their higher studies while directly hampering their daughters, making it hard for them to complete secondary-level education in rural regions (Rajbanshi, 2022).

Furthermore, girls are experiencing terrifying situations during menstruation due to some deeply rooted cultural beliefs, which directly impact their education. I have had experiences in my hometown, Humla, where menstruation is taken as a terrific sin if any girl does anything beyond the cultural ideals because cultural and social norms are strictly followed, believed in, and practiced. When females menstruate, they are not allowed to enter their house or touch anything; they are made to stay outside the cold balcony of the house but have to work anyhow in fields, which makes them weak. Due to the same reason, they hardly go to school during menstruation period. Besides, if their school is far away, it is way harder for them to attend school.

The harsh geography, especially in the rural hill and mountain regions of Nepal, makes students walk long hours to attend school (Graner, 1998). Distance from home to school also directly hampers the regularities of girls, especially during menstruation, this might result in failing exams and poor performance in school. Several reasons like lack of transportation facilities, sanitary facilities like pads, and other facilities like rest rooms, medicines, clean toilets, etc. hamper the education of girls. Therefore, whenever girls have their period, where there is difficult geography or lack of transportation facilities, and when school lacks in providing sanitary and health facilities, they become absent or have a lower chance of being regular in school.

A study conducted by Gupta (2019) in Madhesh Pradesh demonstrated that the authorities have developed and executed a variety of programs, strategies, and initiatives for girls' schooling. However, education for girls is burdened with various challenges and gender gaps. The socio-economic, traditional cultural behavior and societal principles such as involving daughters in household chores and offering sons higher education by their parents result in the exclusion of girls from school even

though they have a strong desire to complete high school. Similar to the situation of Madhesh, many parts of Nepal also follow the same kind of belief towards girls, where girls are discriminated against and less favored in education than boys and are dominated even in a high-magnificence family because of the notion of thinking of sons as precious.

As per the results of my research, girls living in semi-urban areas of Nepal also have challenges when it comes to regularly attending school. This is because a number of them were forced to marry young because of their parents' low income, and once they were married, they had to fulfil the expectations of being daughters-in-law, which include being more involved in the household than in school. A number of them are deprived of their education because their parents move frequently in search of better employment prospects, leaving them in charge of the house while they are away.

In addition, lack of physical facilities like clean toilets, safety pads, restrooms, and medicines during periods is also one of the reasons many girls have less attendance in school, while lack of health facilities also hampers their regular education when they get sick. Thus, girls with no education have fewer choices, which increases their vulnerability to abuse and hinders their capacity to fight abusive environments, and girls who lack access to high-quality education frequently have fewer economic options, which creates more vulnerability (Dhakal, 2018). These sorts of obstacles have been prevailing in Nepal; and the government remains inactive and still lags behind in providing girls' education at an identical level (UNESCO, 2023).

Therefore, the analysis of the overall literature and the findings of my study reveal that quality education is tough to achieve in Nepal because the situation of girls' education in Nepal is still poor in rural, semi-urban, and few urban areas. The factors that continue to prevent girls from accessing education and hinder their school regularities include deeply rooted cultural norms, gender inequalities, financial and economic obstacles, geographic disparities, and menstruation, despite the government's commendable efforts and many development initiatives that promote inclusive policies and enhance school infrastructure. So, the poor situation of girls regarding their education highlights the necessity for continued efforts from educational institutions and the government to reduce the obstacles to advancing equitable educational opportunities for all girls in Nepal. The Government of Nepal should make efforts to address these concerns, which include not only improving

access to school but also challenging cultural norms, raising community awareness about the value of girls' education, empowering them to break the pattern of victimization, and supporting economic progress.

### **Reasons behind Girl's Week Attainment in School**

Girls' less access to education, weak attainment in schools, irregularities, and higher dropout rate are influenced and caused by various reasons. The major aspects include gender discrimination in education, castes, classes, geography, and menstruation which impact the girl's lower access to education. Meanwhile, the economic status of the family such as poverty, income, and migration also hampers their weak attainment in schools.

### **Gender Discrimination**

Nepal is a country characterized by slow economic growth, poverty, and the prevalence of a male-dominated society. Stash and Hannum (2001) mentioned that in Nepal, gender is the most powerful determinant, which has set the roles and responsibilities to follow. They claim that in some areas of Nepal, a girl's and a boy's education is also influenced by their gender. Nepalese society is steeped in socio-cultural beliefs and practices that cause gender discrimination, which oppresses females. They are bound to follow cultural responsibility and accept roles to fulfil household chores such as cooking and washing. Similarly, they are discarded from pursuing higher education and forced to get married, whereas boys are not made to be involved in household chores nor are they forced to get married as early as girls; instead, they are sent to school regularly and supported to pursue higher education (Neupane, 2019).

Maharjan (2022) stated that the preference for a son over a daughter in education is still there in a well-known family with better earnings facilities. Girls are viewed as objects of marriage and household duties. Some parents of a girl remain behind in spending resources for their daughters' education, which has enormously produced a barrier to completing their education and attending school regularly. According to Baral (2017), girls' school attendance is lower and the dropout rate is higher in the far and mid-western districts like Darchula, Baitadi, Bajhang, Bajura, Humla, Mugu, and Kalikot, etc., which have very low ranges of development.

Some districts from the eastern region, such as Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Sindhupalchok, Siraha, and Saptari, also have excessive disparities in girls' access to education. Gender equality is notably difficult, and the involvement of girls in

education in such areas is severely limited because of the discrimination between girls and boys while favoring boys in the opportunities of higher education (Ibid, 2017). In addition, gender discrimination not only hampers the education of girls but also discourages women's and girls' participation in decision-making at different platforms of society, family, and policymaking sectors (Neupane, 2009).

So, gender discrimination is one of the most significant reasons for girls' weak attainment in school. It frequently limits educational prospects for girls, preventing them from continuing their education in an equitable manner like boys. This prevailing gender discrimination creates discriminatory practices in society such as early marriage, gender-based violence, gender inequalities, low income, unequal pay, less representation in the decision-making process, and dropping out of school, which encourages boys or men's education while having a disproportionate impact on girls' access to education and creating their weak attainment and irregularity in school (Balatchanderane, 2007).

The Constitution of Nepal ensures equal rights for men and women. In addition, several programs and policies work to advance women's empowerment and gender equality (Phuyal, 2018). However, implementing these policies effectively and changing deeply rooted societal norms are ongoing challenges in Nepal. So, it is crucial to get work done and to progress Nepalese society to attain true gender equality. Thus, to properly address this issue, a holistic strategy, policy reforms, community participation, and other efforts should be implemented to reduce and eradicate gender stereotypes in education.

### **Castes**

The caste system is a fundamental social problem which is still prevailing in some parts of Nepal. In Nepal, discrimination against the so-called lower caste and untouchables is considered to be eradicated in the country. However, there is still an occurrence of caste discrimination involving untouchability and humiliating the so-called lower castes in some rural parts of Nepal. This caste system additionally discriminates against the Janajati, or indigenous peoples, developing barriers to their children's education (CERID, 2005).

The so-called lower caste people are extra humiliated by some societies, and some people never hesitate to discriminate to be considered lower caste (Dalit) in public locations if they observe them interrupting and trying to go beyond Hindu norms and values (International Labour Office in Nepal, 2005). Moreover, people hire

or choose an employee from their caste or a higher caste in the personal sector. Even though the authorities have prioritized the governmental task possibilities for lower caste people for equal participation in every zone and reduction of caste discrimination (Rajak, 2015).

Shields and Rappleye (2008) observed that gaps in the education system are mostly linked to gender inequality and caste system prejudices. This caste system obstacle has an exceptional impact on the education of girls, leading to gender discrimination among the castes. Likewise, girls in marginalized and so-called lower-caste societies suffer not only as members of marginalized groups or castes but also as so-called lower-caste girls (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007). Moreover, within such group as well, there is discrimination among genders as most of the parents do not let their daughters attend school, which is deeply rooted in society, and they avoid the girls from being knowledgeable and educated.

Furthermore, economic imbalances and inequitable distribution of resources based on caste itself discriminate against the so-called lower caste people. This results in limited access to resources and hampers their children's education, and among them, girls are further deprived of many opportunities. In such cases, their access to education is way harder. This caste discrimination leads to gender discrimination within their castes, dominating women and girls to be limited in so many opportunities where lack of access to school and education for girls can take the form of unfair chances, societal prejudices, and other obstacles (Khanal, 2018). So, if gender inequality and caste consequently pose significant barriers to the education of girls in Nepal and remain the same, then efforts to achieve gender equality in the field of education would be difficult.

### **Economic Situation (Poverty, Income, Migration)**

The poor economic situation is another factor that has prevented girls from achieving education in a least-developed country like Nepal. Education expands with industrialization and urbanization, as does the increase in resources to obtain higher education as per the increase in skills and content in education, and these types of increased resource conditions restrict girls and discourage their parents from investing in their daughters' education (Buchman, 2000). Further, the poor economic situation of the family declines girls' school enrolment and also makes them irregular in school, which, as a result, puts them in the greater obstacle of getting married at an early age.

The findings of a study performed by Wier and Charge (2019) on “Identifying out paths to successful higher education for girls in the Solukhumbu district of Nepal” reveal that economic support from family in education helps to engage and encourage children to do better, and when parents are poor and cannot support their education, then their children lag. This proves that the education of the children is deeply affected by economic problems in the family.

Basnet (2013) mentioned that many parents treat their sons and daughters equally in their family and want to give education to their children, but due to poverty, they are struggling even to live. It is difficult for them to manage school uniforms, school fees, and institutional materials. This proves that the economic situation of the family also disturbs the education of the children. He also reveals that some families in Nepal are weak in income status but they, anyhow, manage to provide education to their sons by working hard. However, the daughters are made to work so that they can help in providing the sons with better education facilities.

In addition, girls are made to compromise their education for their brothers’ betterment. Even if they are going to school, they either have to be irregular in class or even drop out, which hampers their education due to poor economic conditions. Wagle (2012) finds that the daughters are made to become more involved in agriculture/household chores and provide support in the family business to improve the economic situation of the family and also to educate their sons for the betterment of the family in the future. This concludes that the economic situation of the family discriminates against the girls and makes it difficult for the girls to attend school regularly, and sometimes they even have to dropout, being continuously absent from school.

Furthermore, migration is also one of the aspects hampering the education of children in Nepal especially leading to the girl’s weak attainment in school. Poor economic conditions compel some parents to migrate from one place to another for better facilities and during their absence at home all the responsibilities of caring for the home are given to girls, and sometimes they also have to migrate to another place with their family. As a result, girls’ involvement in education at school becomes less, which might result in poor performance in school. Thus, migration also affects girls’ education and weak attainment in school.

## **Geography and Menstruation**

Geography is another major problem that impacts the enrolment of children's education, especially among girls in most of the rural regions of Nepal. In some areas, there are no private schools. In most of the remote areas, even if there are schools, there are only public schools, usually situated far away. So, to attend primary and secondary education, they have to travel long distances to attend schools in rural areas (Awasthi, 2019). In remote regions, like Humla and Dolpa, children have to work on their farmland to help their families and walk 3 to 4 hours to attend school. Due to difficult topography, Humla is still not accessible through roadways, and students there are struggling more than in other districts to get an education.

Due to all these problems of geography, girls are more impacted than boys because girls are already discriminated against by gender in a traditional society as they have to work in the field, complete household chores, and then only be allowed to go to school (Tuladhar, 2004). And if their school is far away, they have to reach there by walking long hours, which makes them miss out on the classes and sometimes be irregular too. These reasons have discouraged girls from attending school regularly, whose impact has been seen in their school performances, causing them to fail exams. As a result, they dropout of school.

While illustrating geography, there is another problem that is connected to the girl's weak attainment in school, and that is menstruation. Management of menstrual hygiene has not been well explored in many Nepalese societies, as menstrual practices are still surrounded by socio-cultural restrictions and taboos, resulting in unfavorable health outcomes for girls (Bhusal, 2020).

Research by Oster and Thornton (2009) on "Menstruation and Education in Nepal" found that girls face biological and physical challenges like cramps and fatigue during their menstruation. In addition, limited access to safety pads, clean bathrooms, clean water, and repeatedly utilizing the same clothes for more than 3–4 hours that need to be changed or cleaned timely can make schoolgirls uncomfortable during their menstruation. These issues have hampered their school attendance and performance in education.

Similarly, they also illustrate that by tolerating menstrual aches, some girls prefer to go to school by applying sanitary cups and pads in urban areas. Still due to the lack of clean sanitation facilities at school, they feel uncomfortable, unhygienic, and insecure, which leads them to have difficulties concentrating on their studies, so they

prefer to be absent. In the case of rural areas, the issues and pains are the same as for urban girls, but situations are difficult for rural girls to attend school regularly because there are already drawbacks of not having access to safety pads and clean bathroom facilities, and at the same time, bounded socio-cultural norms force them to finish the work at home first and then only be allowed to go to school by walking long hours even during menstruation, which is more traumatizing.

Mukherjee et al. (2020) illustrated that girls are already emotionally vulnerable to society's rules regarding menstruation, and further, they get extra physical and mental distractions due to dirty toilets and a lack of water, and geography adds more burden in accessing better education in harsh topographical rural regions. So, geography and menstruation directly impact girls and their education making it difficult for them to perform better in school. In such cases as well, they could get discouraged and quit school by themselves. Therefore, in comparison to that of boys, girls face more difficulty in rural and geographically deprived areas of Nepal, which is a drawback to the development of quality education and gender equality.

### **Summary of the Section**

Gender discrimination is a significant issue in Nepal, which limits the access of girls to education. This discrimination is rooted in socio-cultural beliefs and practices, which oppress girls and women more. Girls are often discouraged and discriminated against from pursuing higher education and forced to marry while boys are encouraged to attend school regularly and pursue higher education even in Nepalese societies.

Similarly, the poor economic condition of the family also discourages the children from accessing education and attending school regularly because their parents cannot afford the fees and school materials. However, some parents manage to send their sons to school whereas daughters are made to be involved in household chores and agriculture. In addition, girls are made to compromise their education to support their brothers which results in weak attainment, irregular school, and increased dropouts in school. Furthermore, geographical aspects, such as long walking distances from home to school and lack of physical facilities at school, exacerbate the education of girls making them irregular in school and hampering their school performance.

Thus, girls in Nepal are facing various challenges in attending school regularly, due to poor economic status, gender discrimination, caste discrimination,

migration, geography, menstruation, and lack of physical facilities in school. Therefore, concerned educational institutions should pay attention to improving female education and support them in attending schools regularly. Further, the Government of Nepal should also make an effort to reduce gender discrimination that discriminates against girls having easy access to education.

### **Importance of Girl's Education in Nepal**

According to the World Bank (2012), girls' education aims to achieve social and economic abilities as well as to develop life skills necessary for reshaping ways of life in response to a changing environment. Without education, there is no growth of community, society, or nation (Gautam et al., 2003). The best pathway for human development lies in educating girls and women (Ibid, 2001). Enrolling girls in education can make them independent and empowered, contributing to the development of the nation, as emphasized by the 1991 international literacy slogan "Let's educate women, let us educate a nation".

In the context of Nepal, our multi-ethnic and cultural beliefs have encouraged discrimination between genders, where girls are regarded as submissive by society in lots of ways. Girls are forced to marry young, which makes them suffer from child marriage and early pregnancy, and their lives remain limited to household chores and family responsibilities, due to which they hardly get to complete primary or secondary school (FWLD, 2006). Poor economic conditions of families also discourage parents from educating their daughters, and even if they plan to give education by working hard, they prioritize the sons to be more eligible to get an education.

According to my study, travel distances, a lack of transportation, a lack of female teachers, an unsafe school environment, and a lack of sanitary facilities and menstrual hygiene management hinder girls' access to education in Nepal. These factors, especially when it comes to their lower academic attainment and high dropout rates, are particularly problematic for girls living in rural and geographically harsh regions. To make matters worse, girls who have no access to education are more vulnerable to exploitation, such as child labor, early marriages, trafficking, and gender-based violence (Ahuja&Kalpana, 2021).

Evans and Carvalho (2022) state that a lack of education deprives girls of their basic rights, resulting in increased poverty with reduced levels of human capital wealth per person, especially in low-income countries with increased population growth rates like Nepal. They also reveal that girls without education are more likely to marry

early or to have children early, before they may be physically and emotionally ready to become wives and mothers. This may affect their health and that of their children because mothers at a very young age, younger than 18 years, are vulnerable to the risk of maternal death, and the child has a risk of being malnourished or even dying. Other risks for girls and women associated with a lack of education include an increased fertility rate, intimate partner violence, and a lack of decision-making ability in the household (CBS & UNICEF, 2014).

Therefore, girl's education is crucial in Nepal, as it helps to promote gender equality, especially in a country bounded by patriarchal and cultural beliefs. Educating girls can help break the cycle of poverty, improve health and well-being, reduce gender-based violence, and enable active participation in social and political spheres as educated girls are more aware of their rights. So, they advocate for their rights by reducing the challenges of gender norms and contributing to a more inclusive society. They also actively participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the development of their communities, bringing diversity and effective governance (Navarro & Medir, 2016).

Adhikari (2013) proposed a qualitative study that illustrated that it is necessary to educate girls because it offers knowledge and teaches good lessons to be an excellent character and ensure an excellent destiny. She stated that if a boy is educated, then he is knowledgeable, but if a girl is educated, then an entire family is educated. Another study "Gender disparities in non-formal education in Afghanistan" by Kavazanjian (2010), stated that education for girls has ways-accomplishing implications for development for people, families, and nations.

According to Karam (2015), educated mothers are less likely to discourage their daughters from going to school or to support their sons' preferences only. Families with educated mothers are more likely to have children who have equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender than those with mothers who were deprived of education. It clarifies that if a girl or woman in the family is educated, then there are high chances of family and children being more educated to avoid the discrimination stigma among the genders in all the opportunities.

According to Cipollone et al. (2014), educational opportunity for women is a vital option for overcoming gender barriers to women's political engagement, which include advances in literacy, skill-building, and professions, as well as existing societal norms. Drèze and Murthi (2001) mentioned in their article that educating

girls, thereby delaying marriage, might lead to marital and fertility aspirations. They also stated that educated girls can increase their family income and are a major determinant of aspirations in their several life domains, which seems to become even more significant as girls grow older.

Thus, it is important to ensure quality and accessible female education, and to create educational and training opportunities for female dropouts and married girls. Similarly, educating girls in Nepal will first help in eliminating gender discrimination, early child marriage, early childbearing, and gender-based violence in society. Similarly, girls would not have to become the victims of household chores and norms. They will be independent enough to make their own decisions and support their family financially. Educating girls in Nepal will also help reduce socio-economic barriers of the family, society, and the nation.

So, investing resources in female education is essential for individual empowerment, society advancement, and achieving sustainable development as they become agents of change, addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges and contributing to the nation's overall progress (A.D. S & Humanities, 2021). Hence, a country like Nepal needs to ensure that all girls have access to school and acquire foundational cognitive and socio-emotional skills while in school.

### **Theoretical Review**

Since my study focuses on exploring girls' experiences regarding their irregularities in school, it is necessary to understand the deeply rooted reasons and the prevailing problems that make girls weak in attainment at school. This study highlights the importance of understanding how girls experience when they become irregular in school and what aspects cause them to be irregular in school, in their own words. Thus, to shape my research, my study is more aligned with intersectionality theory to view girls' irregularities in schools.

Intersectionality theory is a conceptual framework for understanding how a person, group of people, or society is affected by discrimination and disadvantages. It considers people's overlapping identities and experiences to truly understand the difficulties and challenges of preconceived notions they experience (Crenshaw, 2017). It reflects all the different aspects that determine a girl's irregularity in school. This theory is important for this study because it provides theoretical explanations for how diverse participants of specific groups (such as girls) experience the issues differently

based on their ethnicity, gender identity, class, and other social locations (Atewologun, 2022).

So, in this study, intersectionality theory helps to explain that girls' irregularity in school is caused by not just one but multiple reasons, such as gender discrimination, family income, geography, and migration. In this case, each girl may have experienced irregularity in different ways. This theory identifies that girls are experiencing more irregularities in school than boys in the same society. These reasons for irregularity and girls' experiences establish the importance of inclusive school education for all. This theory gives ideas and knowledge regarding how girls have been marginalized, what are the reasons behind their victimization, and what type of school they require to achieve gender equality and quality education.

Thus, an intersectionality lens has shaped my research to explain how girls face obstacles to their education. Not just gender inequality but also caste, economic status, geography, and migration are equally important for explaining the girls' poor academic performance as well as lower attendance in Nepal.

### **Research Gaps of the Study**

While reviewing various literature and research studies about girls' education and their irregularities in school, I observed that many research studies lacked identification and exploration of how girls are experiencing irregularities in school and how such irregularities lead to obstacles in their lives. Similarly, such researches also lack in bringing girl's own, real experiences of having weak attainment in school. In addition, semi-urban areas are found to be ignored by many researchers while exploring the status of girls, their attendance, and their school performances, which need to be addressed and monitored with equal importance.

Shields and Rappleye(2008) mentioned that gaps in the education system are mostly linked to gender inequality and caste system prejudices. However, their research study has not answered how gender inequality and the caste system discourage girls and women from enrolling in education as well as from other opportunities. Similarly, aspects such as migration, menstruation, physical school facilities, and geography are also driving factors that hamper girls' education. However, the researchers seem to lack interest in exploring such linkages and aspects.

Many research studies have been done regarding girls' poor enrolment in education in rural areas and few in urban areas by exploring the causes and factors in Nepal, but those studies lack in evaluating and analyzing how such issues faced by

girls from one place differ from another place. So, in such a case, if any new researcher is planning to conduct a study regarding girls' education, then they may face problems taking references or citing a statement, idea, or concept to compare, explore, and discuss their research. Even though the government has made efforts to educate girls by formulating laws, Acts, policies, and strategies, they are mostly limited to papers; there are still gaps in implementing and monitoring such policies, Acts, and strategies from the grassroots level to the upper level.

Therefore, this research is conducted to explore the irregularity of girls from semi-urban areas of Nepal, which is mostly found to be ignored in almost all reviewed literature and research articles. Thus, my study has not just explored the reasons that lead to girls' weak attainment in school but also addressed how girls are experiencing school irregularities in semi-urban areas, which are found to be missing in other research studies based on girls' access to education.

Similarly, this study's conclusion and findings are illustrated based on the real experiences of girls, and it is an alarming study to make the government concerned about monitoring and evaluating all the areas without ignoring any place while exploring the status of girls and their education. This study has also added value as a source of reference for new researchers who may conduct a study on a similar topic regarding girls' weak attainment in school in the future to analyze the issues on a deeper level.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework intends to explore and figure out the key reasons for the low attendance of female students in Nepal. So, I drew a conceptual framework that can ensure girls have equal access to school by understanding the issues of low school attendance as a priority. The study shows two types of reasons, primary and secondary, because of which girls have less attendance in school and lower access to education.

Primary reasons include socio-economic factors (gender discrimination and stereotypes, family expectation, family income, early marriage, and pregnancy), school-related factors (distance from school, lack of transportation, safety concerns, and quality education), which are the major reasons that limit girls' enrolment in school and are also the driving factors that lead to secondary factors. Secondary factors include parents' attitudes, teachers-students' interactions, peer relationships, health, and well-being, which make girls irregular in school. So, the

cause for the irregularity of girls in school arises from the prevailing primary factors that cause secondary factors. The conceptual framework for the explanation of girls' irregularities in school is presented below:

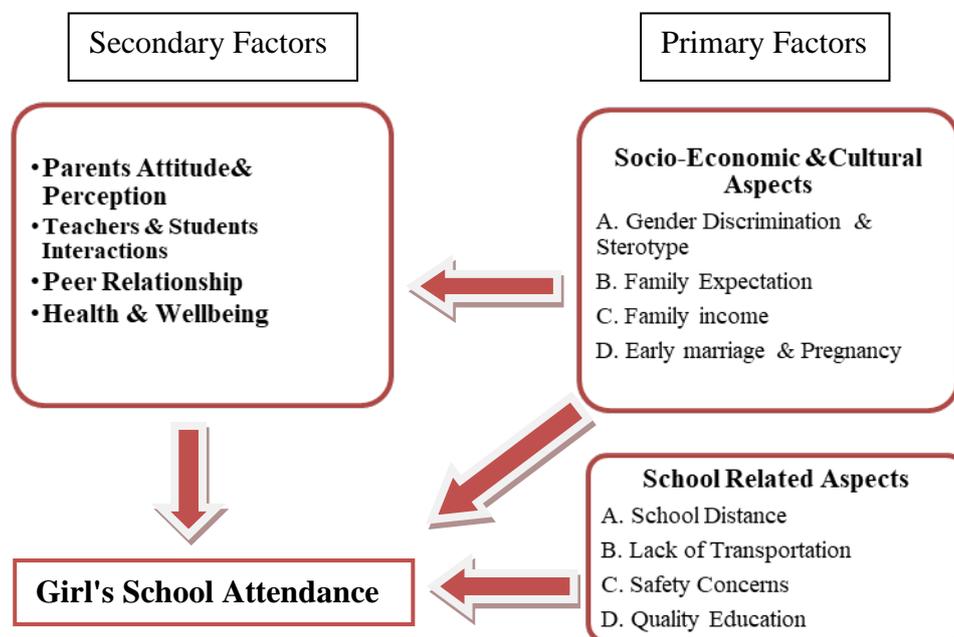


Figure: Conceptual Framework showing Primary and Secondary Factors that cause Irregularity of Female Students in Nepal.

### Chapter Summary

The implications of educational policy, Acts, and strategies are formulated and are progressing in Nepal. However, girls are still behind in attending school regularly. In Nepal, gender discrimination is still prevailing, which discriminates against girls by impacting their education as compared to boys. Caste discrimination is said to have been reduced in schools. However, discrimination is still being observed when parents give more opportunities and priority to boys in attending schools.

Similarly, economic situation, poverty, and migration hamper children education. The impact has been felt more by the girls because they are considered to take on roles and responsibilities, to manage and support the family, due to which they miss school and fall behind in attending school regularly. At the same time, geography also poses a struggle to the people, mostly the girls from mountains and hilly regions because they have to attend school by walking long hours after finishing their work in the fields, which impacts their school performances and attendance at

school. In addition, lack of physical facilities, teacher's attitudes, and lack of safe and clean toilets also hamper the education of girls, impacting their regularity in schools even in terai regions as well. These factors affect the girls even more during their menstruation period.

So, if such issues continuously remain, then there are fewer chances for the improvement of girls' education and gender equality, which indirectly impacts the wellbeing and economic growth of people and the nation because if women are educated, then it is believed that the whole family will be educated (Kim, 2016). Therefore, education for women and girls has a transforming influence on communities and economies aside from personal growth.

Hence, educating girls benefits societies tremendously, resulting in decreased maternal and infant mortality rates, enhanced family health, and increased economic production. Furthermore, educated women are more likely to participate in social and communal development, thereby promoting positive change. Thus, gender equality in education is an investment in the well-being and development of a society as a whole.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the methodological approaches used to conduct this research in accordance with the research questions outlined in Chapter I. The methodology serves as a guide on how to conduct research and move forward with the study. This chapter begins with the research paradigm, which describes the approach that this research is inclined toward and is appropriate to carry out this study in depth with the perspective of the participants on the issues of girls' irregularities in school, as my research applied the qualitative research method. Similarly, this chapter consists of research design, which explains the summary of research procedures, including data collection, process and site selection, and information about the participants. This chapter also includes a brief description of how the participants were chosen, how the study site was selected, and how the data were collected and analyzed to find the answer to each research question.

#### **Research Approach: Interpretive Paradigm**

My study is inclined toward the qualitative research approach as it focuses on exploring the subjective perspective and real experiences of the participants instead of quantifying data to find out the reason for the girl's irregularity in school.

The reality and knowledge of culturally and historically situated individuals based on their lived experiences and understandings are characterized by the interpretative paradigm (Ryan, 2018). This approach is adapted from an individual's experience through interactions. It is concerned with identifying how people describe their own experiences, "how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Abdullah Kamal, 2019).

So, I also wanted to explore the experiences of girls' irregularities in school through the personal perspective of the participants, which can only be achieved by the interpretive paradigm as it permits me to grasp the deep feelings of my informants. I interacted with the participants and had in-depth interviews to bring out their views through their experience regarding their irregularities in schools for more interpretation.

### **Research Design: Case Study**

The qualitative approach lies in its capacity to closely examine people's genuine lives within their settings. It examines how people behave, think, and experience the world at different periods and explains how they construct their worlds and give meaning to their lives. The interviewer can learn more about the person being interviewed and gather in-depth information by getting to know them better. As a result, I applied a case study, which is adequate for my study's goal and allowed me to explore students' experiences.

Case studies are widely used in concept creation, which involves the investigation of yet-unexplored phenomena (Gammelgaard, 2017). Case-based research should be judged not only on its outcomes but also on its entire research technique, which must be evident to the audience first and foremost (Ibid., 2017).

A case study is used to understand and gather a deeper level of in-depth knowledge about specific subjects. Thus, researchers gather information and data in a variety of ways, including field observation in the community, in-depth interviews to obtain their experiences and uses of checklists, and open-ended questionnaires to analyze the true and real data (Buchanan, 1981).

In a case study, researchers do not spend a prolonged period in a social group to gather data (Trimmer & Wood, 2016). However, they gain a deeper understanding of knowledge and experience of specific issues to illuminate different aspects of research problems. So does my study, which did not take a long time to gather data, but illustrated the deeper level of knowledge in understanding and exploring the experiences of girls regarding their lower attainment in school.

Case studies are tailored to the case and research questions, and published case studies show a wide range of study designs (Hyett et al., 2014). A case study is defined by an interest in individual cases rather than the methods of inquiry used. The choice of approaches is guided by case intuition and research, drawing on naturally occurring knowledge sources like people and interactions observed in the physical environment (Ibid, 2014).

I have chosen a case study as the research design for my study. Case study helps in shaping my study in a more coherent and clearer form. My research is based on the girls' experiences regarding their irregularities in school. So, the experience of girls and the reasons for their irregularity in school depend upon different aspects and realities of society, which affect the behavior and thoughts of individuals within that

community. Thus, a case study helps to bring together all relevant aspects to provide a complete picture of the subject, such as the girl's irregularities as possible (Joshi, 2016).

My focus was on the school girls of Chitlang. I took in-depth interviews guided by open-ended questions, which helped me to get the deep experience and feelings of my participants. The case study helped me to learn how the different factors have affected the behaviour and thoughts of the individual girls in the community regarding their less presence in the school. It also helped me to interpret and analyze the data and information collected from the field through their experiences. For this process, I referred to all the data that I collected from the field by writing notes, clicking pictures, recording videos, and interviewing the participants.

After that, I made notes by identifying connections, similarities, or contrastive points to analyze the data. I selected those aspects and understandings which could support my research purposes and help to obtain the desired research results. And finally, I constructed or compared my results and discussions and then interpreted the gaps in girls that lead them to be irregular in school.

I found case study as a suitable approach to explore the participants' personal experiences that supported my study in explaining the deeper information. It helped me to know the depth of understanding and feelings of participant girls and to gain insight into girls' perceptions regarding their less irregularity in school.

### **Research Site Selection**

My research was carried out in Chitlang, a village in Thaha Municipality, Makwanpur district of Nepal. The first reason I chose Chitlang as my research area is that I have always wanted to research and understand or know about the status of girls in Nepal. I was aware about the condition of girls in rural areas as I have lived such experience myself in my school days. Such girls are still backward in education and unaware about their rights. So, I felt Chitlang could be the perfect research field to satisfy my curiosity and understand about the status of girls in schools at places where the facilities and development of education could be easily accessed.

Secondly, Chitlang is a semi-urban area, near the capital city and is one of the most visited areas by domestic and international tourists. Many high schools and vocational institutions have been established in this area, but when I visited Chitlang

for travel purposes for the first time, I was shocked to see many girls working in the agricultural field and some in restaurants as cleaners. This made me more concerned about the reasons that the girls from such places weren't attending school, despite the fact that they lived in one of the most popular tourist destinations which is just 28 km away from Kathmandu. So, I felt choosing Chitlang as my study area could give me a clear picture of the reason why the girls even in semi-urban areas weren't going to school.

And third reason is that when I searched about this place and the background of education of girls, I didn't find a particular article that mentioned them and the educational status of Chitlang. This place seemed to be neglected and unexplored regarding educational research or articles that describe the experiences of girls being irregular and the reasons that make them less participatory in school. These reasons influenced me to choose Chitlang as my study's site selection area.

In this village, there is a higher secondary school named Shree MahadevMadhyamikVidyalaya (name changed), where students from different villages of the districts as well as from other districts such as Dhading, Narayanghat, and Chitwan come to study. Also, there is a college of agricultural and veterinary science where students from different provinces come to study.

The main festivals of Chitlang are Dashain and Tihar. Chitlang is famous for its natural and cultural attractions as a destination for many domestic as well as international tourists. The major attractions of this village are Chandragiri, SaathDhara, Ashoka Chaitya, SwochachhandaVairab temple, a cheese factory, an organic village resort, and homestays. There are about 20 big hotels and 10 homestays in this village. It also has three cooperative financial houses and one health post. People of Chitlang export vegetables and potatoes to other different parts of districts like Hetauda and other big cities like Kathmandu, Narayangadh, Pokhara, Birgunj, and also to India.

Therefore, I have chosen Chitlang as my research site because I was always keen to know and understand the status of girls, school, and mostly the attendance of girls at school in this village. I had seen many young girls not attending school during my first visit here. So, I thought this could be a better place to research and explore about the girls' situations and their status of attendance at school. Hence, my knowledge and understanding assisted me in doing research, and I also hope my

research shall add value to some girls from semi-urban areas, even though I don't belong to the community and also the region, or area.

### **Selection of the Research Participants**

A relatively small study population, was chosen and evaluated to learn more about the total population from which it was selected. It is the process of choosing a small group as the representative of the entire population (Adhikari et al., 2013).

My research is based on the experiences of the girls. So, the desired participants were important in my research. My participants were the girls from Chitlang village ward number 9. The reason for choosing ward number 9 is because most of the girls in this ward are found to be absent and irregular when I got the information about their school attendance from the school authority. My research topic is aligned in exploring the experiences of girls and the reason for their irregularities at school which allow me to choose this particular ward to justify my research conclusion.

I chose five participants for the interview. Among them were the girls aged 15 to 16 years, studying in Grades 8 and 9, with less attendance and mostly irregular in school. The reason for choosing the girls from grades 8 and 9 but not from grade 10 is because, as researchers, it is our ethics not to hamper any groups or subgroups of the study area. If I had taken the girls as participants from Grade 10, then it might have hampered their preparation for SEE. Researchers should be considerate of other people's time and priorities (Hubert, 2012). Therefore, I chose the girls' participants purposefully to explore the participants' real experiences and the factors representing their views that lead to their irregularity in school.

Similarly, I chose those girls as participants based on their castes since my research followed intersectionality theory, to study and link the various reasons for the girl's irregularity in school based on their castes.

I also preferred the information from the vice-principal but he is not a participant in my research. The reason for obtaining information from him was that he is a local teacher at the same school and also a local permanent resident of Chitlang village. So, he was expected to have knowledge and information about the girls' situations at home and school that make them irregular in school.

### **Brief Introduction of the Cases**

All the selected participants were from Chitlang village of Thaha Municipality in Makwanpur district. They were more irregular than others in schools, and they

belonged to different intersectional ethnic caste groups like Brahmin, Chhetri, Newars, and Tamangs, who are inhabitants of Chitlang. My selected participants were the students from Grades 8 and 9; some were married and others were not. This study consists of four cases that are also referred to as participants in this research.

**Case I, Ganga (name changed):** She is a 16-year-old girl from a Tamang family. She studies in class 9. She is married, and her husband is a driver. Her parents are farmers, and her husband is also from a middle-class farmer's family. Her husband and in-laws support her in education, but she is unable to attend school during working seasons because her in-laws are old and have low economic access and her husband has to go outside the valley to earn. She is scared of failing again in exams and repeating the class with younger ones.

**Case II, Puja (name changed):** She is a 16-year-old girl from a Brahmin family. Her family was poor, so she got married early, at the age of 15, in the hope of getting a better education in her in-laws' family, but after marriage, her responsibility increased. Her in-laws are from a middle-class family with a farmer's background. Her husband is also a student in Grade 10. She is a brilliant student in school, but she mostly gets less attendance in school due to her domestic chores. Her in-laws are also not supportive of letting her pursue education; therefore, she is scared of failing exams and dropping out of school.

**Case III, Kamala (name changed):** She is a 16-year-old girl studying in Grade 9. She is from a Chhetri family. Her parents are farmers and shopkeepers. She has a health problem and she needs to go to hospital monthly, which makes her irregular in school. Her parents are caring and supportive of her education. She is scared of failing the exam.

**Case IV, Ashmita (name changed):** She is a 15-year-old girl from a Newar family. She is in Grade 9. She is average in her education. Her parents do business and have to travel from one place to another; sometimes they are out for months. So, she has to look after the house and her siblings, which makes her low attendance in school. However, her parents are supportive of her education, but priority is always given to her brothers more than to her.

### **Data Collection Tools and Process**

Data collection is the process of obtaining information from people's words and experiences, pictures, and observations to better understand their mindsets, actions, beliefs, and motivations within a specific environment (Gill et al., 2008). In

this study, the data was collected through interaction and in-depth interviews where open-ended questions were applied and guided by a qualitative design (**Annex I**) that was derived from the experience of the participants. This helped me to explore in-depth information and knowledge about local issues that are problematic for girls' irregularities. Before collecting the data, I researched and gathered the required information and knowledge about my research topic, study area, research design, and research methodology. Then I prepared interviews through open-ended questions to understand the experiences of participants from different possible angles. After that, I traveled to my study area, Chitlang, which is located at Thaha Municipality in Makwanpur district. The first thing I did after I reached my study area was contact the school administration of Chitlang and meet with school authorities, the principal, the vice-principal, and the teachers of Shree Mahadev Madhymic Vidhyala. Then I got the school's attendance record and the list and contact information of female participants who were highly absent from school in a fiscal year.

After that, I planned to visit the participants in their houses by obtaining consent from their families, and the purposefully selected participants based on their ethnicity and their absence record in school were interviewed. Before the interview, a proper rapport was built with the participants because trust and understanding are the foundations of effective conversation for researchers to have a positive connection with their participants. So, the researcher must develop a good rapport with the participants to have a good relationship, which results in collecting better or more valid information and data access for the researcher due to the confidence and the understanding established (Zakaria & Mustamal, 2012).

They were asked if they were comfortable with the time and if they preferred some other area or time. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the interview. They were also told that they could refuse to answer any questions or refuse to participate in the research even after the interview was over. In this way, verbal informed consent was obtained before the interview began.

After this, all the interviews were conducted in the participant's respective houses at the time chosen by them. Face-to-face interviews were recorded on tape. Permission was sought before the recording started. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Nepali language; however, there were a few English words and phrases mixed in with the prepared questions and participant responses. This was

done to ensure the conversational nature of the interview, which helped maximize the participants' comfort.

Additionally, interviews' open-ended questions were asked again since doing so allows researchers to assess the reliability of the responses by asking the same question several times with slight variations (Kvale, 1996). In this situation, I was able to determine the saturation of the data as well as the consistency of the responses to my study questions. To complete the information gap or obtain the necessary data, I also had to ask certain cross-questions, which further enhanced the likelihood that my study would be valid and reliable.

The different experiences of the girls, as well as the issues raised by the girls during this first response, were then followed up on. I moved on to the next topic once a specific issue had been thoroughly investigated. The next issue of school irregularities was determined by the flow of the interview rather than the order specified in the interview guidelines. Once all of the topics had been covered, I requested a final review, and the interview was concluded.

All of the interviews took place between mid-February and the end of May 2022. During the fieldwork, I followed up with the participants who had chosen to respond to each step of the data collection procedures. Interview time took between one and two hours. The entire interview was recorded and documented with their permission. If you plan to document the interview, you must first obtain the permission of the individual being interviewed. It is best to get this consent recorded on your recording device during the opening exchange of the interview (ASU, 2014). I also asked for consent to translate and transcribe the data into English.

Throughout the interview, I reflected on and summarized the methods used so that I could fully understand what the participant was attempting to communicate and share one-on-one details about their experience. This is how the data was collected.

### **In-depth Interview**

To explore subjective data such as the experiences and perceptions of girls in this qualitative research, in-depth interviews were conducted, guided by the open-ended questions listed in **Annex I**. In-depth interviews following open-ended questions is an accurate and best way to gather relevant, detailed information and experiences. Similarly, an in-depth interview produces information in the form of emotions, sensitive stories, true reality, and the experiences of the participants. I employed this method since it allowed me to investigate and comprehend a person's

behavior and emotions. I had the chance to dig deeply into the uniqueness of the girls' opinions and sentiments regarding their academic experiences.

### **Ethical Issue**

My study was carried out by following the American Psychological Association's (APA) rules for ethical issues after receiving consent from the Department of Development Education at Kathmandu University. The consent of parents and school administration is mandatory in this study because almost all participants are under the age of 18 years, and their consent is considered invalid. Thus, before beginning in-depth interviews, I obtained permission from their guardians and the school administration to respect their right to autonomy. Considering that informed consent is one of the fundamental components of conducting research in an ethically sound manner, people have a right to know that they are being studied, what the study aims to accomplish, and what is expected of them as participants (Butz, 2008). They also have the freedom to refuse to be investigated, which assists in respecting the participants' right to autonomy.

They were also asked about their comfort level and preference for the setting before the interview. Their informed consent was recorded in audio. The participants received an explanation of the study's objectives and available interview questions. Additionally, they were informed that they had the right to leave the study at any point before it was released. Both throughout the interview and when managing the data, the participants' confidentiality was upheld.

In the conduct of a study involving participants, confidentiality and privacy are overlapping concerns (Udo-Akang, 2013). Certain types of information are more private than others, and some might even be harmful to people. So, my study took the privacy of its participants seriously. As the participants in this study were not to be harmed or disrespected, and to respect their privacy, fake or pseudo names have been used to transcribe data.

Individuals who appeared throughout the research were respected and treated equally. Girls' participants were fairly and equally treated during the conduct of the research. My study has tried to prevent plagiarism and has given credit to the works of original authors.

My study has prevented possible risks of physical, psychological, social, economic, and legal harm. I was also aware of discriminatory language or terms against gender, racial or ethnic group, disability, or aging. In research, it is crucial to

prevent discrimination against colleagues, students, and participants based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other variables unrelated to their scientific ability and integrity to respect their autonomy (Dash, 2017).

I have followed the Kathmandu University ethical rules for research under ethical principles to preserve the dignity and rights of the study participants and avoid any harm to them. In the conduct of research, various professional organizations, government agencies, and universities have created specific codes, norms, and policies relevant to research ethics. Thus, to make my fieldwork ethical, I took such initiatives.

### **Trustworthy and Quality of the Study**

The quality, accuracy, and trustworthiness of the study depend upon the researcher's quality. An important aspect of the qualitative method is that the data is collected through the relationship between the researcher and the informants. Therefore, it is impossible to conduct interviews through another researcher as different researchers get different stories from the same informant and this does not mean that one story is more true than the other. The same event and experiences may be presented in different ways. Hence, the informant may agree about the facts of the story but may not necessarily agree about the interpretation.

In accordance with this, I strongly hope that my study has carried out the trustworthy and quality findings because as a researcher, I tried to bring the real stories and even collected the real experiences which I have interpreted well and the data obtained are real. Further, I went to the research territory two times and gathered precise and in-depth experiences in different ways both times in order to check whether the obtained information is trustworthy or not. This demonstrates that my study has maintained its quality and it is trustworthy to give credit. So, I was very careful in the process while applying the qualitative standardized open-ended in-depth interviews to analyze the problem. Thus, my study reflects the quality findings.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Girl's irregularities in school are highly impacted by socio-economic, cultural, biological, and physical factors. My study's findings and conclusion are focused on the same. My study is conducted in Chitlang, where there is only one government school. I have chosen only ward no. 9 and four female participants to collect the experiences of their school irregularity, due to which the findings and result of my study might be irrelevant or insufficient while explaining the reasons behind the girls'

irregularity in school from different parts of Nepal and the experiences of girls in other parts. So, to make this study relevant, realistic, and in-depth, the experiences were purposefully obtained from different ethnic groups of female participants, where the information gathered is case studies that are intersectional, which can match and relate the same experiences of almost all the girls belonging to different classes, castes, groups, and societies in Nepal, even though the study was relatively small.

In addition, the findings of this study also give a similar picture and relatable experiences of girls from other semi-urban regions of the country when it comes to the situation of girls' education, attendance, and school regularity.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is cleaning, transforming, and modeling data to discover important information for corporate decision-making, as well as extracting meaningful information from data and deciding based on it (Guru, 2021). Since my study is qualitative, I should not require an appropriate technique to produce the findings as quantitative research.

So, to analyze the data obtained from in-depth interviews from participation, first of all, I referred to my field notes, recordings, and videos. Then I acquired the data, categorized and coded it into "theme" and "sub-theme," and analyzed it to make sense of it (Glase, 2017). In addition, after summarizing the data, they were evaluated and explained in English. I then transcribed and described the data collected from all the participants, and thematized it according to the theory used in my study to support the research questions. The transcription of data determines how the study subject is depicted and establishes what knowledge or information is important and relevant and what is not (McMullin, 2023).

To protect the participants' confidentiality, pseudo-names were used while transcribing the data. The transcription was also independently coded to ensure consistency. This research has also maintained credibility by citing the source of the researcher and the referred articles necessary for the study. Similarly, appropriate information was gathered from the participants for the case studies with appropriate concern for transparency and avoiding biases.

In addition, this study also upholds trustworthiness by properly and clearly describing the objectives, methodology, and findings from the first-hand primary data collected through participants' own experiences rather than copying. Informed consent and data privacy were respected when analyzing and transcribing the data.

Thus, these approaches protect the research's integrity and trustworthiness, allowing it to stand as a reliable contribution to research (Amin et al., 2020).

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter basically presents two ideas regarding the girls' experiences of their irregularity in schools. First, the girls' experiences reasoning their irregularity in schools have been presented in different themes and sub-themes. Second, the reasons for girls' irregularities to schools are analyzed and interpreted based on their life experiences

#### **Experiences of Girls in their School Irregularity**

In Nepal, access to education for girls is progressing as about 69.4% of the girls at present is involved in education as compared to the last 10 years CBS, 2011 data which was 57.4%. Many children have been observed going school regularly and completing their secondary and high school education. The number of girls and boys in schools is equal while reviewing many published articles and national reports in Nepal. However, irregular students are still in significant numbers due to various reasons. Most of the irregular students are found to be girls. While interviewing the female students of Shree Mahadev Madhyamik Vidyalaya in Chitlang to share their experiences regarding their irregularity, the participants shared that they like to go to school regularly, but they must accept their fate. The participant's irregularity in schools and their experiences regarding the same are illustrated below.

#### **Fear of Failing Exams**

*"I have failed the exam due to continuous irregularity in schools. Not attending classes, lectures, and chapters are hard to cover. Subjects like Mathematics and Science are really hard to understand and cover. I regret not attending the class, but it's also my responsibility, and I have to work in the crop field. I still have a fear of failing the final exam because I have not attended many classes,"* Ganga shared.

Irregularity in schools has impacted girls' education. Ganga said that she was absent from many classes during the season of work in the agricultural field and missed many chapters of important compulsory subjects like Mathematics and Science, due to which she failed. She also mentioned that she regretted not attending the classes but also added that she is married and has more responsibility as a daughter-in-law at home too. And it has been identified that girls were irregular

because they had equal responsibility at home as daughters-in-law. They missed out on school due to the pressure of work at home. As a result, they could not do better in school and had to face failure. Many girls are still irregular in school due to similar reasons; they share that they fear failing exams.

Just like Ganga, Puja also had something similar to share.

Puja said, *“Most of the time, I missed out on school in the months of June, July, October, and November, as these are the working seasons. Even though there used to be males in the house, I had to do all the planting and gardening in the crop field. I had a kind of fear before, even now, because I have missed so many chapters that are difficult to cover, and I'm not able to give that much time to my studies as well. Both my mother-in-law and father-in-law are not worried about my studies; instead, they tell me that” it won't hamper your studies if you don't attend school one day. These things have always made me fear; what if I fail?”*

Marriage doubles the responsibility of a girl as a daughter and a daughter-in-law. Also, female students also need to manage their work and study. Puja added that if in-laws are not supportive, married girls have fewer chances of going to school regularly. She shares her experiences of not getting support from her in-laws regarding regularity in school. She also mentioned that her in-laws discriminated against her individually with male members in the house, as they were allowed to go to school, but she had to work in the field. She also said that she had no time to manage both her studies and work together. She always feared failing. Like her, many girls have experienced similar kinds of issues and have been facing a fear of failing exams due to irregularities in schools.

*“I have an eye problem, and I often get sick time to time. There is no hospital here in Chitlang, so I go to Kathmandu or Hetauda for treatment. Skipping school from time to time means missing a lot of studies, and there is a possibility of failure. So, I am afraid of failing,”* Kamala mentioned.

Adding to the irregularity in schools, some girls mentioned that illness was another reason. Many girls become absent due to the lack of medical, health, and hospital facilities nearby. So, they have to travel to the nearby city area for treatment, and as a result, they miss out on school so many times that they have more chances of failing. Kamala said that she doesn't like to become irregular in school, but due to her eye problem, she has to travel to either Kathmandu or Hetauda for better treatment. Due to such a situation, she mentioned that she is worried about her studies.

### **Demotivated by Friends, Family, or Teachers**

As girls, there are already many burdens of responsibility, and at the same time, they have to face the obstacles of a so-called conservative society. In the case of regularity in education society, parents, teachers, and friends play a vital role. However, it sometimes becomes the opposite in the reference to Nepal.

Many parents, school friends, and even teachers demotivate many girls. Sometimes girls themselves feel anxiety and restlessness due to the negative impacts and experiences of people, society, parents, and friends. Friends tease them due to the repetition of the same class; teachers do not support covering the missed-out courses and even hesitate to help when something is difficult to understand; instead, they are demotivated, insulted in front of friends, and even scolded. Parents think girls are only meant for marriage, so it is unnecessary to educate girls. Therefore, they do not worry when their daughters miss classes.

*“My parents are very serious about my studies. I was sent to school regularly, but due to business, they go away from home from time to time. So, I have to take leaves from school to look after the house and work. My studies are going well, but sometimes my friends make fun of me because I don't understand the homeworks from the missed classes properly. That is why I don't even want to go to school,”* Ashmita shared.

Some parents are supportive and even encourage their daughters to study. However, some girls mentioned that they do not go to school due to the business of their parents. And girls who became absent mostly in school were unable to do the assignments properly. Instead of helping their students, the teachers teased them as if they were poor in their studies, and even their friends mocked them. These things demotivate some girls and even make them reluctant to go to school.

*“I have failed a couple of times because I did not understand the lessons of the book well. I even get afraid to ask my teachers to support me because I get scared of getting scolded by them for not being in the class while they were teaching. Now I even feel too old and ashamed of repeating the same class many times with my siblings. Sometimes other classmates also make fun of me; that is why I even don't want to go to school sometimes,”* said Ganga.

Sometimes increased age and continuous failure demotivate girls due to their irregularities in school. In such cases, some teachers scold students for being absent and even hesitate to answer the already taught course repeatedly. This ignorance of teachers and continuous teasing from friends have made girls ashamed of themselves

for repeating the same classes, making them feel discouraged and ashamed to go to school.

*“I sometimes get scared of my age because if I fail continuously, my age will go on increasing, and I have to study with my brothers and sisters, which I never wanted to happen. Sometimes I can't complete my homework on time and my teachers and friends tease me for not doing it properly. So, I have been demotivated many times,”* shared Puja.

Due to the unsupportive nature of teachers and friends, many girls felt the fear of their increasing age as well as repeating the same classes with the younger ones. Puja said that she even struggled in doing the assignment. She also mentioned that when she asked for the help of teachers and friends, all they gave was a negative response, which made her demotivated and feel negative about herself.

### **Fear of Dropout from School**

*“Because of the heavy work at home, the thought of dropping out of school sometimes comes to my mind after constantly failing in class. My family supports me in my studies, but I can't focus on my studies like before. Nowadays, I have lost concentration in my studies, which makes me more anxious. Sometimes I also think that it would be better to drop out of school than to fail with the increasing age,”* Ganga shared.

Irregularities in school have caused numerous girls to fail exams and repeat the same class. So, they even think of dropping out of school. Ganga shared that even though her family was supportive, she felt the pressure of working at home, which made her less interested and concentrated on her studies. She also mentioned that she even felt like dropping out of school.

*“There is no time to study and to do the homework when there is so much work to be done in the agricultural field and at home. I go to work in agricultural fields every day in June, July, October, and November. I tried hard to read and understand as much as I could. However, if I fail, I will be forced to drop out of school. My mother-in-law will not let me go to school. My husband is just studying in 10th grade, and he can't do anything even if his mother says something,”* Puja mentioned.

Many girls have already felt the pressure of working at home during working months like June, July, October, and November, and in-laws also put pressure on them, due to which they cannot do better in school and even lose interest in their studies. Puja mentioned that if she fails the exam, then her in-laws will not let her go

to school anymore. So, she shared that the only thing she will do is drop out of school quietly. Numerous girls also feel that it is better to dropout of school than repeat the same class.

### **Fear of Early Marriage**

Early marriage was like a stereotype in Nepal. Daughters were seen as a means of marriage. So, it was like a ritual. But currently, numerous aspects force girls to get married early. Sometimes it is the economic condition of the family; sometimes it is family pressure; sometimes it is a matter of irregularities in school and failure. It is an imitation culture that if a girl does not do better in her studies, she is forced to dropout of school and get married. Sometimes, even if girls are doing better and want to study higher, they have to get married early because of their economic conditions. So, they always had a fear of early marriage, as commented by Kamala and Ashmita. *“Because of my illness, I have become irregular in school. On top of that, I miss out on many important classes. My study is good, and my parents also send me to school, but if I keep missing school like this, it won't take long for me to fail. Unfortunately, if I fail, my family will get me married,”* said Kamala.

Many factors lead to early marriage and that directly hamper the education of girls. Illness is one of the factors that make them irregular. Continuous and serious sickness cannot be cured in two or three days; it may take months or years to be cured. In many places, there are no good hospitals, so people have to travel from one place to another for better treatment. Due to sickness, many students become irregular and absent from school, which has a greater impact on education. Many of them fail and have to repeat the class.

In the case of girls, sickness makes them irregular hampering their education. And if they have poor performance and failing records in school, then the parents forcefully do their daughter's marriage at a young age. Kamala adds that she was also irregular in school due to her sickness, but she has been doing well in her studies. However, she fears that anything could happen; she might fail too. If she becomes more irregular in school and fails, then she is sure that her parents will make her marry. Therefore, unmarried girls who have health problems also get irregular in school due to sickness and failure. If they fail, then they have to get married. Here, they have a fair chance of getting married early.

*“My father and mother support me to go to school, but because of their business, they have to go here and there, so I have to take leaves from school to take care of home.”*

*Even during the season of work in the field, I don't go to school. So, I am very afraid of what I will do if I fail. My studies are so far good; I haven't failed till now, but if I fail, I might get married. If I always skip school like this, then it won't take long to fail,"* shared Ashmita.

Some parents have been very supportive of their daughters' education, but still, they are compelled not to let them go to school due to various conditions at home, like business, work, and so on. When parents are busy with other stuff, like business, then the major responsibility to look after the house is given to their daughters. So, many girls become irregular in school due to their responsibility as daughters to work in the field and to look after the house in the absence of their parents.

Adding to this statement, Ashmita responded that she had been irregular in school when her parents had gone from one place to another for business, and she said that she stayed at home to look after the house. She said that she felt so scared of failing due to the irregularities in schools. She also said that she was good in her studies, and was even performing well in her studies, but she was unsure whether her studies would continue or not if she missed out on school every day. On the other hand, she is more scared of early marriage because if she fails, then her parents will do her marriage. So, due to the responsibilities as a daughter, many girls are scared of failure and even more scared of getting married.

### **Feelings of Discrimination**

Discrimination between girls and boys regarding education has been reduced in Nepal; however, there is still discrimination in society regarding work. Daughters have to be absent during work seasons, but sons are sent to school. Sometimes girls feel discriminated against due to biological factors. During periods, some of them feel weak and restless and feel less concentrated in school. So, they become absent from school, and it makes them discriminated against in every way. Ganga and Ashmita provide this statement.

*"There is no discrimination between sons and daughters regarding education like before, but when there is work at home and someone gets sick, I always have to take a leave from school, but my brothers don't have to be absent. They are allowed to go to school even during the working season. So, I feel bad at that time. Even now, I feel that there is still discrimination between sons and daughters in my own family,"* Ashmita shared.

Discrimination between sons and daughters regarding education seems to have decreased upon listening to many girls' and people's views and also looking at the scenario of today's generation. However, in many places, even in the city area or in other parts of Nepal, discrimination is seen in many things, like when it comes to work and responsibility. Still, in the nearest places to Kathmandu, there seems to be discrimination between sons and daughters, where girls are made to work in the agricultural field and look after cattle, like cows and goats.

Ashmita added that she felt discrimination from her parents, though they are supportive regarding her education. She said that her parents never told her brothers to help her with the work, and her brother never got irregular in school. She shared that her parents never told her to go to school when she felt like going to school during work. She said her parents never thought that her education was as important as that of her brothers. She felt disheartened when she saw her parents discriminating on education and work between her and her brothers.

*“Even if people say that sons and daughters are equal in terms of equality, during Asar, Shrawan, Kartik, and Mangsir, there would be only daughters and daughters-in-law in the field. There is no compulsion for the sons to work in the field, and no one tells them to work by skipping school. When I told my family that I also wanted to go to school, they said that if I don't go to work in the field, who will?”* Ganga shared.

There is still discrimination between sons and daughters in many places, whether it is in the city or rural areas, even in their own families. Ganga mentioned that in the working season, daughters and daughters-in-law have to be present in the field more than in the schools, but there is no obligation for sons to be present in the field. Nobody tells their boys to help their parents, and even their parents don't tell them to do anything. If they say that they treat their children equally regardless of their genders, both of their sons and daughters should have equal access to schools.

Ganga also added that she once asked her in-laws if she could go to school even during the working season, but her in-laws didn't allow her to go to school. Instead, they told her that who would work if she didn't work in the field. And she felt helpless hearing such words as she could do nothing but work. So, she had to miss school every month.

#### **Wish to have Health Facilities.**

*“School is missed out because of lots of work, but if the school had a sanitary pad, medicine, clean clothes, water, beds, a restroom, and classes related to menstruation,*

*it would have been better to study. It would have been easier for us to have classes; we would have been able to focus better on studies, and many girls would have attended school regularly,”* shared Kamala.

Work is one of the major reasons that girls have been irregular in school, while there are other reasons too, like sickness, family pressure, responsibility, business of parents, etc. Besides those, there is a lack of health services in schools, health knowledge, and other development and structural facilities. According to Kamala, girls typically experience irregular schooling during their menstrual cycle.

Some of them already have health issues during menstruation, so they are unable to go to school, while others don't go to school due to bad management of the school. For example, girls were never taught about menstruation hygiene, and they were never provided any medicines or pads by the school. Besides, there is no restroom assigned for girls either. Many girls are irregular in school due to poor management of toilets, like no clean water, no handwash or soap, and no sanitizer. They can only wish to be regular in school with proper rights to health facilities. *“I bleed very heavily during my period. There are no 1–2-hour rest classes in the school, there is no medicine, there is no facility to provide sanitary pads, the toilets are also dirty, and sometimes the water dries up. That's why I don't go to school much when I'm on my period. Therefore, many schools would have been regular if they had the facility of necessary health-related materials,”* Ashmita mentioned.

Many girls become irregular in school during menstruation because most of them face difficulties due to heavy bleeding and cramps, as shared by Kamala. Like her, Ashmita also mentioned that she bleeds heavily and has a backache during menstruation. Although she wanted to go to school regularly, due to the unavailability of sanitary pads in schools in urgent cases, dirty toilets, and the unavailability of water, she never went to school during her period. Therefore, many schools would have been regular if they had the facility of necessary health-related materials.

### **Reasons for Girl's Irregularity**

There are various aspects, such as socio-economic, cultural, biological, and physical aspects, that influence a girl's irregularity and weak attainment in schools. These aspects have made them experience failure in exams, discouragement in attending school regularly, and discontinuity in their study. Girls face gender discrimination along with the roles and responsibilities to complete.

### **Socio-Economic Aspects**

Socio-economic aspects are the major reasons for the children's weak attainment in school. Again, girls are highly vulnerable which makes them irregular in school. In the context of Chitlang, a semi-urban area of Nepal, girls face irregularity in school due to various socio-economic aspects such as occupation or income of the family, poverty, and seasonal migration. The experiences of girls and their reasons for weak attainment are illustrated below.

#### ***Occupation/Income***

*"In today's generation, everything is expensive, and it is very difficult to live. Therefore, my husband goes to work to make a living. There is no one to work in the field. My father-in-law and mother-in-law are farmers, but they are very old and cannot work like before. Therefore, I have to take leave and be irregular in school to help them with the agricultural work. I usually get irregular hours during the working season, like Asar, Shrawan, Kartik, and Mangsir,"* Ganga illustrated.

As Ganga mentioned, the occupation and income of the house determine the standard of living. And in today's generation, everything is expensive. So, one needs to work hard to earn a living. People have different ways of earning income; some do jobs, and some are engaged in agriculture. Those girls, whose family's income depends on agriculture, were found to be more irregular in schools during the working seasons, like in Asar, Shrawan, Kartik, and Mangsir.

Ganga also mentioned that her husband goes to other places to work for aliving, and her parents-in-law are very old. She told that her husband's income was not enough to make a living. So, she goes to work in agricultural field and helps her in-laws. Thus, her responsibilities make her irregular in school.

*"My parents have to travel to different places for business, and I look after the house when they are not home. They have to earn for food and our expenses too. So, I get irregular in school. Sometimes, there is a lot of work at home, therefore, I don't go to school, and instead, I work on the farm."* Kamala responded.

Many girls become irregular in school due to the business and occupation of their parents. The task of looking after the house is mostly given to daughters in their absence. Sometimes they become irregular due to works at home as well. Kamala shared that her parents have a business, so they travel to different places to meet the expenses of their living. Therefore, she stays at home to look after the house and to work in the agricultural field.

### **Poverty**

Ganga said, *"I have many brothers and sisters; my parents could not support all of our sibling's education and livelihood. We were poor, so I eloped. I was absent from school for more than a month at that time. Now also I get irregular in school to work in the agricultural field being the only daughter-in-law."*

Poverty is also the major reason that many students are irregular in school. Some of them are so poor that they cannot fulfil the needs of their children and their education. Some of them only depend on agriculture for their livelihood. So, they hardly send their children to school, especially their daughters, because girls are mostly made to be involved in work rather than in education. And also, there are numerous cases where grown-up school girls elope in the hope of a better life in their husband's house.

But instead of having a better life in the husband's house, they become more irregular in school because of the increased responsibility as a daughter-in-law if they marry in low-income home. Adding on to this statement, Ganga mentioned her parents were too poor to fulfil the needs of her and her siblings. So, she had to be irregular in school to work on farm to help her parents. She also shared that, to decrease the burden for her parents, she eloped and got married at a very young age.

She had hoped for a better life after marriage, but she has become more irregular in school than before because she is the only daughter-in-law in the family, and her husband's income is insufficient for their living. Therefore, she is irregular in school to help her in-laws at work.

*"I eloped when I was studying in class 8. My parents were struggling to run the house and provide for the education of my siblings. We barely had enough to eat. Here in my husband's house, there is also not a well-earner in the house, and the house condition is not that good. My husband is also young, and he studies with me. So, we earn and eat by working in the fields to support our family. Therefore, my school is irregular."* Puja shared.

Due to poor economic condition, numerous people are struggling to make a living. Some people have difficulties sending their children to school and paying their fees, whereas some people send their children to school, but not regularly. Similarly, it is found that the poor economic conditions of families have made a huge number of girls irregular in school in rural areas because they are made to involve themselves in the agricultural field to earn their living.

Girls are forced to marry early by their parents, thinking about their daughter's better future, because of the difficulties in managing each child's life in the family. Even girls elope with the hope of having a better life and to pursuing a better education in their husband's houses. They wish to go to school regularly, but most of them get more responsibility, and get even more irregular in school after marriage. Covering this statement about how girls are irregular in school because of poverty, Puja also has similar kinds of experiences that lead her to be irregular in school.

She mentioned that she got married when she was in the eighth grade. Her parents were struggling to make a living, as they barely had enough to eat. She was irregular in school as she helped her parents with farming. She shared that she became more irregular in school after marriage because there was no one in her family to earn, and their only way of living was agricultural production. Therefore, she became more irregular in school due to the poverty and low income of the house.

### ***Seasonal Migration***

Ashmita said, *“Although we are permanent residents of Chitlang and we live there, sometimes I also travel to other places to help with the business of my dad and mom during the season of growing green vegetables. We go to other places, do business, and live there for a certain period of time. At that time, I become absent from school for even 1-2 months.”*

Few of the girls become irregular in school due to their migration from one place to another along with their parents for business and for a better way of employment and income for a certain period of time during the profit-earning season. Ashmita shared that she traveled from one place to another with her parents for business purposes. Her parents sell vegetables in different places. So, to help her parents in business, she travels from one place to another and becomes irregular in school. Sometimes she becomes absent for weeks and even 2–3 months to sell vegetables for a better income for the house.

### **Cultural Aspects**

Many girls of Nepal are bound to the roles and responsibilities influenced by the cultural aspects that lead to gender discrimination in family, school, and society of Nepal. This causes the girls to have weak attainment and performance in studies. Similarly, girls have to be the victims of early marriage and early pregnancy making them weak and backward in accessing school. The cultural aspects that make girls irregular in schools of Chitlang are explained below:

### ***Early Marriage***

*“In our place, the practice of getting married at a young age has decreased, but some families make their daughters marry at a young age even at present, while some elope while studying. The reason for this is poor financial condition of the families. Some parents think their daughters are only meant to be married one day, they say that it is better to do their marriage instead of educating them. Sometimes, children are made to marry when they fail in school. It is also a prevailing culture that if a good marriage proposal comes from a well-settled family with good financial conditions, then parents accept the marriage proposal and do their daughter's marriage at a very young age as possible. I also ran away while I was studying and got married at a young age. My father and mother were very old and they could not even work. They were not even able to pay for our school's education. Our family earned by working in the fields. That's why I got married at an early age. Even here in my husband's house, I am the only daughter-in-law, so I have to go to the farm to work. Therefore, I become irregular more often,”* Puja mentioned.

The practice of early marriage has been reduced in Nepal; however, many parents forcefully get their daughters married at a young age, and some girls marry themselves by eloping. People or parents think their daughter's life will be set and there will be a better life when they marry a well-earned family. So, they accept the proposal happily and get their daughters married out of the belief that daughters are meant to marry. And when girls wanted to take their education forward, it was found that they were given more pressure as a daughter-in-law of the house. Thus, instead of wishing to have a better education and regular school, they have to be more irregular in school after marriage. Similarly, so many girls elope due to the struggling life of their parents, thinking that they will have an easy and better life and will get a chance to go to school regularly.

However, they will have to face the burden of working as a daughter-in-law in the house after marriage. Therefore, they become absent or irregular at school. Puja mentioned that she got married early without knowing anything about family. Her husband's family is not well-settled, and they are too poor to let her go to school every day. So, to earn a living, she becomes irregular in school to help her in-laws. Thus, early marriage also leads to irregularities in school.

*“I fell in love with my husband and got married at a young age. At my home, before I got married, I used to miss school a little bit, but nowadays, after my marriage, I have*

*become more and more irregular. As a daughter-in-law, no matter what, I have to work. My in-laws have become old, so I work on the farm by myself. If I don't do it now, it will be difficult for me later. That's why my school is irregular."* Ganga shared.

Like Puja, Ganga has a similar kind of case, as she eloped at a young age. She told that she used to miss school before her marriage during the working season, but after marriage, she had to look after the house and work in the agriculture field for food. She has to work because if she doesn't work in the field now, then more pressure will come later. So, she is more irregular in school due to early marriage.

### ***Responsibility***

*"I am only the daughter-in-law of my family; I have to take on many responsibilities at home as a daughter-in-law because of my in-laws' old ages. Sometimes they get sick, and sometimes my husband gets sick. So, I get irregular in school,"* Puja answered.

From history, there has been a different responsibility set out for the daughters in Nepal. They are considered to be involved in household chores; they are made to work in agricultural fields; and they are also meant for marriage rather than providing them with education. They are taught household activities from a young age. And when daughters get married, they even have more responsibilities as a daughter-in-law. As a daughter-in-law, they have to look after the house and agricultural field, and they also have to care for their in-laws and make them happy. If they want to further their studies, they can hardly manage everything. Therefore, they sometimes miss school due to the burden of responsibility.

Puja responded that her in-laws are old, they get sick, and they cannot work in the agricultural field and look after the house properly. Her husband also gets sick sometimes. So, she has been irregular in school due to such issues. Being a daughter-in-law she has to look after her in-laws, look after the house, and work in fields.

*"I have a brother and a sister, but I am the one who does all the work in the house. When mom and dad leave for business in other places, I have to look after the house and take care of everything. Sometimes I even do the work myself, like cutting grass and firewood. Other people in the community also encourage that such work should be done by daughters. Along with grass and firewood, work like composting in the field also has to be done by myself. So, I find it hard to manage the time to go to school. Therefore, home responsibilities are also the reason why my school is irregular,"* stated Kamala.

Daughters are given all the responsibilities in the absence of their parents, even though there are sons in the house. With such responsibility, it is very difficult to manage time to go to school for many girls. Even if they manage to go to school, they cannot go regularly. Kamala mentioned that she was given the responsibility to look after the house when her parents left for business. She does all the work at home, whereas her brothers go to school. Due to lots of work, she is unable to go to school regularly.

***Attitude of the Parents/Discrimination/Attitude of the Teacher***

*“Although my family is very supportive and concerned about my studies, I keep getting sick from time to time, so I become irregular in school. I have seen so many times that some of my friends' families don't let their daughters go to school during work. I have heard them saying to their daughters that daughters should learn to work rather than go to school. So, instead of motivating their daughter, they say it's better to leave school altogether. Family has a big role in whether or not to send their daughters to school. The attitude of the family is what makes many school girls irregular.”* Ashmita shared.

Although most of the parents are supportive in educating their daughters and sending them to school, many families in Nepal are still conservative in this case. They don't allow their daughters to go to school during working seasons in the agricultural field. After lots of irregularities in school, if they fail once, then girls are forced to leave school instead of motivating them and encouraging their daughters to study. Therefore, the parents' attitudes also decide whether to educate their daughters and send them to school regularly or not.

Ashmita has a similar statement, as she has seen many parents not allowing their daughters to attend school regularly. She also heard them telling their daughter to learn household chores and field work. She mentioned that the attitude of the parents also led many girls to be irregular in school.

*“Nobody worries much about my studies at home, only my husband's education matters at home. Nobody really cares whether I go to school or not, whether I pass or fail. Also, sometimes when I try to go to school during the working season, my mother-in-law says, “Nothing will happen if you don't get to school.” So, I have to obey them after I got married in this house. If I disobey what is said, then I will be scolded. That's why I am irregular in school,”* Puja said.

Some parents don't care about the study of their daughter or daughter-in-law, they don't worry whether she passes or fails. If they have to worry about anything, it is their sons. There is not much discrimination like before. However, some families still discriminate between sons and daughters and even between daughters and daughter-in-law.

Puja mentioned that her mother-in-law and father-in-law discriminate between her and their son (her husband) regarding education and work. She said that nobody at home cared about her studies, whether she passed or failed. She was yelled at when she tried to go to school regularly. They scolded her, "Nothing will happen if you don't go to school one day." That is why she has been irregular in school. Gender discrimination is also the reason for the irregularities among girls.

*"I mostly help my mother and father in their works at home and in the farm, but my brother and sister never help them. My mom and dad are very worried about my education, but they tell me not to go to school during work. But they don't say anything to my brother and sister. I have often felt discrimination from my own family. I even go to other places to help my mom and dad on business, but they don't allow my brothers to go with them. Therefore, helping my parents in their work on the one hand, and discrimination between me and my brother, on the other hand, lead to my irregularities in school"* Kamala shared.

There is already a responsibility for children to help and support their parents in their work, but parents only make their daughters to help them in work, and not to their sons. Sons are freely allowed to go to school regularly, but not the daughters. Therefore, gender discrimination is also a root cause that has made girls irregular in school.

Kamala mentioned that her parents told her to help them in their business, but never to her brother. He is allowed to go to school regularly, but she is made to work, to help in their business, and to work on a farm. She said that she felt this type of discrimination in her own house. She mentioned that she was irregular due to the discrimination as well.

*"Sometimes I cannot do a lot of homework without going to school without properly understanding it. Even the teacher does not teach missed classes again and again. When we asked the teacher about incomprehensible questions, instead of helping out, they insulted us in front of our friends by teasing out our rage, sometimes by our continuous repetition of the same classes. I missed out on important classes because*

*of work, but I also don't like to go to school due to the teacher's teasing habits.*"Ganga mentioned.

Attitude and teasing habits of the teacher also determine the irregularity of girls in school. In rural areas, girls have to manage their studies, work, and home together. Therefore, they miss out on many lessons, and the teachers are not always the same (who teach repeatedly when there is confusion), as they don't repeat the lessons again and again. When girls try to ask the teacher about confusing assignments, they tease them by bringing up age matters.

Moreover, some even scold girls for not attending the class when they ask questions from already taught chapters. Thus, many girls, when they feel uncomfortable and harassed by teachers, become irregular in school. Ganga supported the statement by sharing that she has been teased by her teacher for the same reason mentioned above, mentioning her age and repeating the same classes in front of other friends. Similarly, she was also scolded when she asked questions to her teacher. She has been irregular in school due to such reasons as well.

### **Biological Aspects**

*"I often become irregular during my menstruation cycle. My stomach and backbone hurt. I can't even walk or sit straight. I bleed heavily, which makes me embarrassed, and I cannot concentrate on my studies. Sometimes I cannot even concentrate on my studies because of heavy stomach ache. So, I think it as my obligation to be absent or irregular. I even get irregular when I get sick,"* Kamala mentioned.

Menstruation is one of the factors that lead to irregularities in school. Most of the girls face difficulties during menstruation. Some girls bleed heavily, and some also have stomach and back pain. As a result, they cannot properly concentrate on their studies when they attend school during menstruation. Therefore, most girls get irregular in school during period.

Kamala also agrees on this point, as she has the same problem as mentioned in the statement. She gets heavy cramps during menstruation. She had tried to attend school so many times, but lack of concentration on her studies and mood swings made her irregular in school.

*"I bleed heavily, and there are no health services in our school. Sometimes there would be no water in the toilets, and the toilets would not be clean. So, I don't like to go to school, and I always have a problem with mood swings, and I also cannot*

*concentrate properly in class. Therefore, I get absent from school during my periods most of the time," said Ashmita.*

Like Kamala, Ashmita also has the same problem, as she bleeds heavily and gets mood swings during period. As a result, she cannot concentrate in school. She mentioned that there are no facilities for health services in her school; sometimes there is no water in the toilets, and the toilets are also not clean. So, she does not want to go to school during periods. It shows that the biological factor of menstruation and the lack of health services in school make girls irregular in school.

*"I have a backbone problem, and my stomach hurts during my periods. I cannot even walk properly; it is like a sickness for me. I regularly become absent for three days in my periods every month, besides work and responsibility. I can't even sit straight and study. So, I become irregular," said Ganga.*

Menstruation is like a sickness for many girls, as they cannot even walk or do anything due to heavy bleeding, stomach ache, backache, and so on. Therefore, many girls become irregular in school. Ganga mentioned that her stomach hurts so much during her periods that she cannot even walk properly as it is like a sickness for her. She said that besides work and responsibility, she also gets irregular in school due to her periods.

### **Physical Aspects**

*"Sometimes I even don't like to go to school during my menstruation because toilets are not clean and there isn't the availability of hand wash and soap. We girls during menstruation have to change our pads from time to time, and if we see such dirty toilets, we get irritated and angry at the school department but cannot do anything by ourselves," Ganga shared.*

Many girls remain irregular in school due to the condition of the toilets and the unhygienic environment in school during their menstruation time. Girls need to change their pads from time to time, so there is a need for toilets to be clean, and there should also be the availability of clean water and handwash or soap. Thus, the lack of clean toilets, water, and handwash, and the unmanaged condition of an unhygienic environment in school compel many girls to be irregular in school. Ganga mentioned that girls get irritated and have been angry at the school department, but they cannot do anything themselves.

Adding to the above case mentioned by Ganga, Puja, Kamala, and Ashmita shared, *"There is a lack of awareness regarding health education in schools as well. If all*

*students were aware of health education like menstruation, then many girls would have been regular in school. There would be no oddity in attending school. There would be no hesitation in a girl's mind regarding menstruation. if the boys had also supported the girls, there would be no teasing or bullying environment. There would be a healthy environment and learning opportunities. Due to lack of such health education, girls become irregular in schools.”*

Education related to menstruation is really important in the form of awareness, as both girls and boys need to be aware of menstrual hygiene. If awareness and knowledge regarding menstruation hygiene is provided by the school, then many girls would be regular in school. There would be no odd and shy environment in school; boys would not tease girls. Therefore, this lack of health knowledge and awareness is also the reason many girls are still irregular in school.

## **CHAPTER: V**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The female participants of Chitlang mostly belonged to agricultural and low socio-economic backgrounds where their parents, in-laws, and spouses were involved in low-earning activities such as driving, agriculture, and running small businesses. Due to such a situation, parents were unable to afford their children's education such as school fees, school materials, and other required materials for the livelihood. So, to enhance their income, the girls were forced to be involved in agricultural activities and household chores, and some of them had to migrate seasonally to support their parents' businesses which affected their education by making them irregular in school resulting in their poor performance in study.

The research conducted by Shahidul and Karim (2015), has similar discussions as parents with lower socioeconomic status are unable to afford the costs of their daughters' education. So, the situation of dropout and less access to education and enrolment is seen more among girls than boys belonging to poor families, who often force girls to leave school and to help their families in household and agricultural work (HRW, 2016). The seasonal work migration patterns are also pushed by poverty and a lack of employment prospects that hamper the regular attendance of girls (Daly et al., 2020). Thus, these socio-economic factors such as poverty and low family income force the girls to get married young to a wealthy family so that their daughters might get a better life and education in the husband's house rather than living in a poor family. Many parents permit their sons to attend school while forcing their daughters to support their parent's business for income generation (Pokharel, 2015).

According to the findings of my research, cultural practices were also the reasons for the girls' lower access to education and less attainment in school in Chitlang. The various cultural aspects such as gender discrimination, early marriage, responsibility, and the attitude of the parents or teachers had affected the education of girls, which made them irregular in school. Girls were compelled to take on the responsibility of all household chores and take care of home, business, and agricultural work rather than pursuing education, whereas sons were sent to school rather than engaging them in work. Similarly, gender discrimination forced the girls of

Chitlang to get married by their parents at a very young age. Some of them got married themselves at a very young age by eloping, which made them absent for many days from school. At the same time, their responsibility increased when they became daughters-in-law. Due to such responsibilities and roles, they got more pressure, and as a result, they had poor performances in school, which led them to failure in exams and repetition in the same classes. They also faced bullying from their friends and teachers for repeating the same class instead of helping or encouraging them to perform better. Their teachers also scolded them for not being able to do the assignment properly. Due to such cultural aspects, girls choose to be irregular in school.

Like the experiences of girls from Chitlang, a similar discussion is given by Langer et al (2019) that women and girls in Nepal are expected to undertake more household chores, including more physically demanding tasks like cooking, washing, gathering firewood, working in the field, and taking care of the children, while men are offered more possibilities for education and employment by their families. Similarly, many conservative parents in today's generation still do not want to invest in their daughters' education because they believe that sons are the ones who inherit the family name and enhance the family prestige. They accept that involving their daughters in household tasks and teaching them how to take responsibility would be better for the whole family than continuing their education (A.S.D. & Humanities, 2021).

Furthermore, Shahidul & Karim (2015) stated that some teachers frequently favor boys over girls in terms of academic ability and accomplishment because they think boys are academically superior to girls; therefore, they frequently scold girls in the classroom without even paying attention to their language. Thus, sometimes the classmates and teachers act uncomfortably toward them, so, the girls choose to leave or be irregular in school (Sri & Bhandari, 2022). These cultural and religious obligations in society and families still make it difficult for girls to complete their education because they are not valued in their own families (Namalefe, 2020).

The findings of my study also showed that biological aspects like menstruation and sickness had also hampered the regularity of girls in the school of Chitlang. Girls were irregular in school and never liked to go to school during the menstruation cycle because they could not concentrate properly in class due to heavy bleeding, stomach pain, backbone pain, mood swings, and an uncomfortable environment in school.

Meanwhile, a lack of proper toilets, clean water, and medicine facilities at the school department demotivated them to attend the school. Similarly, general sickness also discouraged the girls from attending school regularly because there was no availability of medicines and health posts near the school. So, they preferred to become absent during their periods and general sickness.

Pant (2010) also discussed that many girls remain absent and miss out on essential courses and classes during their periods because of the lack of sanitary facilities, medicine, clean toilets, clean water, etc., and the insufficient number of female teachers at school. Additionally, general sickness also leads to the girls' lower attendance at school. It is also said that comparatively girls become more ill than boys, which significantly impacts girls' academic levels (Sharma & Adhikari, 2022).

Girls were also irregular in school due to the lack of physical facilities such as proper toilets, clean water, restrooms, medicines, and sanitary facilities as well as due to lack of proper knowledge and awareness about menstruation, health, and safety. Similar to my study's findings, the lack of health classes like prior knowledge and awareness about menstruation for both girls and boys, and the teachers also make them irregular in school because girls experience a variety of emotions during their menstrual discharge, including fear, embarrassment, and guilt (Khanal, 2019). Furthermore, Bajracharya & Baniya (2022) show that the lack of toilets, water facilities, and health services, such as hospitals and medicines, also make many girls irregular in school.

To sum up the discussions, I used the concept of intersectionality theory to explain and conclude that girls in a community have their own reality-based experience and reasons that affect their education and attendance at school. The study concluded that there is no single reason that affects the education of girls, but there are multiple cultural, religious, socio-economic, biological, and physical aspects, which are linked to each other hindering the girl's lower access to the school of Chitlang.

Similarly, to reflect the above discussion, McCall (2005) shows that intersectionality theory is used to address the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society, which explains that categories of inequality interplay to result in social distribution. My study also claims that the main structure of domination is gender inequality intersecting with poverty, income, class, roles responsibility, and discrimination with unequal gender relations and power

imbalances limiting girls' school attainment (Crenshaw, 2017). In addition, the girl's irregularity cannot be explained only through the specific socio-economic and cultural aspects but the aspects I have addressed such as biological and physical are also often critical in shaping the young girls' experiences regarding their school irregularities in the Chitlang context.

The study also exhibits that the intersections of gender discrimination, poverty, income, responsibility, roles, attitude, menstruation, etc. highlight the multiple grounds that lead to gender inequality considering the irregularity of girls. The study has outlined that perceptions of gendered society restrict girls from getting proper education discussing the persistence of gender gaps and indicating how the combined effects of cultural, socio-economic, biological, and physical aspects reduce the education opportunities for girls.

The section as a whole discusses and presents that socio-economic, biological, cultural, and physical aspects are overlapping with each other and are linked to different levels of society. Therefore, I focused on the intersectionality theory to explain and highlight how various aspects contributed to gender inequality among girls impacting their education, making them irregular, lowering their access to school as well as making them to even dropout of school.

During the intervention of my study, schoolgirls of Chitlang were very frustrated and worried about being irregular in school. However, they knew the importance of education in their lives. They were very positive and eager to see the improvement of girl's education and their equal access to education as well as their regularity in school in coming future. Thus, to lead education toward sustainability, there is a need to look at the entire set of problems and deal with the issue holistically, considering the society.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Encouraging girls' education is essential for creating gender equality and sustaining long-term community growth. So, this study explores the irregularities of girls in Chitlang. It presents the root causes and obstacles regarding their irregular attendance. The findings will add to current information about girls' education and inform targeted authorities to promote school attendance and educational achievement for girls in Chitlang. It also emphasizes the status of girls in Nepal, even though it was focused on a particular area for the study.

While reflecting on my research, I realized that there is not only one or two reasons like gender-based discrimination, class discrimination, or caste discrimination, that hinder the irregularity of girls in school, but there are multiple reasons that make them irregular in school, like poverty, income, seasonal migration, early marriage, menstruation, lack of health facilities, etc. There might be other reasons in other parts of Nepal as well. So, my study also uses intersectionality theory to explore not only one reason but multiple reasons that hinder girls' attendance in school.

The study reveals that girls were frustrated by their continuous irregularities in school. They have experienced failing in exams and some of them still fear failing and dropping out of school because of continuous irregularity in school. Many girls were demotivated and discouraged by the discrimination from their own families regarding education and work, while some of them faced the consequences of early marriage. Many girls were teased and bullied by their friends and teachers because of the repetition of the same classes and growing age. Most of them also had difficulties during menstruation.

However, girls are positive and determined to attend school regularly, even when facing numerous problems. They could manage school and take responsibility at home. This proves that though women and girls are behind in education and opportunities, they are very strong and determined.

Thus, the study's conclusions can guide focused interventions and policy suggestions meant to address the obstacles that girls' education in Nepal faces. These could include investments in bettering school facilities, safety precautions, and transportation options, as well as awareness campaigns challenging gender stereotypes and highlighting the importance of girls' education.

My study's main aim is to explore the irregularity of girls in Chitlang, and I only selected female participants in my research. However, during the process of in-depth interviews with girls, I observed and found that boys are also irregular in school in Chitlang. So, this study recommends other researchers to look at the reasons for boys' irregularity in school.

Similarly, I think it is not only parents, teachers, or schools who increase the quality of education and the regularity of girls in school but it is also the responsibility of the government and the relevant institutions of education to monitor and analyze the status of education through the experiences of girls and boys.

Awareness programs should be conducted at a mass level. Teachers should be provided with adequate training. Similarly, girls should be educated in terms of a healthy and safe life along with academic education. The government should make strategies so that inclusive and fair quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 are achieved. The foremost thing a country like Nepal should do is implement good governance and then try to fulfill basic human development facilities such as education. Essentially, this study recommends increasing the attendance of girls in school.

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**ANNEX I**  
**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GIRLS**

**A. Building Rapport**

Greetings, introducing myself, providing an overview of the interview's goal, and obtaining consent and agreement from them.

**B. The Girls' Background**

Name:

Age

Class:

Number of siblings and their education:

Are you married or unmarried?

Occupations of your parents

**C. Open-ended Questions**

Do you know about the situation of girls students or your friends in schools in this area?

Do they go to school regularly?

What is the reason behind their irregularity in school? Have they shared with you sometimes?

Where do you live?

How many members are there in your family?

What does your husband do?

What is his education?

What is the reaction of your parents/husband regarding your school and education?

Do they support you?

Do you also go to school regularly?

If not, what are the reasons behind your irregularity in school?

Under what conditions do you become irregular in school?

How do you manage to study?

What is the attitude of your teachers when you cannot do the assignments for the experiences of your missed chapter?

Do they support you and what about your friends?

Have you failed the exam because of your absence and irregularities in school?

Do your parents motivate you to do your exam better next time?

How positive is your community regarding educating daughters?

Do you worry about your future?

What are your future goals? Where do you want to see yourself in the next five years?

What are the experiences of being irregular in school?

What challenges do you face regarding school irregularities?

What do you think can be done to make all girls regular in school?

Do you have any recommendations or comments?