Witchcraft Accusation and Persecution of Women in Nepal



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Disclaimer:

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Sincerely,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this study and its report is to demonstrate the scope and complexity of witchcraft accusation and persecution (WAP) of women in Nepal, and to draw the attention of all key stakeholders, including academia, to the significant scale, severity and complexity of associated human rights violations committed against women in Nepal. The results of this study deepen the knowledge base and understanding, of the complex and multi-faceted circumstances that surround the issue of WAP in Nepal.

This research study was carried out in two stages. The first stage of fieldwork took place in Nepal between December 2012 and January 2013. The second stage of data collection was implemented in August 2018. The ongoing desk-based research was complemented by fieldwork and face-to-face interviews. During both the first and second stages of fieldwork in Nepal, the fieldwork team carried out semi-structured qualitative face-to-face interviews with various local stakeholders. 10 face-to-face interviews (6 individual and 4 group interviews) were carried out with 16 persons during a period of 2 weeks in 2012-2013. Additional 15 interviews with 22 persons (11 individual and 4 group interviews) were carried out during a period of 3 weeks in 2018. Hence, a total of 38 persons were interviewed during 17 individual and 8 group interviews.

The analysis of study results has revealed cultural, social and legal challenges that are often intertwined, inter-related and deeply-rooted in Nepali society, and thus affect the context, in which WAP happens.

The main recommendations for future development in this field in Nepal would be to first of all start prioritizing the issue of WAP on both national and international level. It is important to scale up the existing most effective grassroots practices, which work to eliminate WAP, and respect and foster human rights in the country. As for the potential reactive measures, it is crucial to first of all ensure the safety of WAP survivors, following their first-hand experience of it. This would include ensuring that complex support is available and accessible to WAP survivors in all parts of Nepal, by which they could be assisted to reach safety, then provided with all the necessary education and advice, as well as legal aid, psychosocial support, and be empowered to seek and access justice.

Not only financial and political support is needed from both the local government and international community to tackle this problem, but also more research is required into separate parts of the complex picture of the context, causes and consequences of WAP: the superstitious beliefs in witchcraft and related traditions and how these are changing in the 21st century; the role of the caste system in the context of WAP; changes in the role that traditional healers – Jahkri play and the potential for allying with them in the fight against WAP; the ways and practices of related law bypassing, developed by local communities; as well as the complex intersection between the field of mental health and WAP.

INTRODUCTION



Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

Nepali Human Rights and Justice Context

Nepal has been in a complex, governmental transitional phase, as a country, for a number of years. Hence, its rule of law and respective human rights situation, have both been undergoing a number of reforms and have been unstable (WOREC, 2018). The country's political transition and shifts in the whole political picture are ongoing, with plenty of challenges to address and overcome. Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2018) reports that:

> *...public differences between political parties and interest groups over power sharing underscored the country's deep, ongoing rifts, which had intensified with the 2015 constitution. Successive administrations stalled on delivering justice for atrocities committed during the decade-long civil war between government forces and insurgent Maoist forces. The slow pace of reconstruction efforts around the devastating 2015 earthquakes, mired by corruption, reinforced social and economic marginalization. Severe flooding during the monsoon season from June to August [2017] affected an estimated 1.7 million people, with 65,000 homes destroyed and 461,000 displaced.*

Nepal was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council for a three-year term in 2017, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the broader international community, were observed by Human Rights Watch to have been "largely silent on the transitional justice process, despite the country's refusal to bring its laws into compliance with Supreme Court and international law directives" (HRW, 2018).

Specifically, women and girls across Nepal face a number of different types of human rights violations and gender-based disadvantages. Nepal has the third highest rate of child marriage in Asia: 37% of girls are married before 18, and 10% by the age of 15 (HRW, 2018). Also, the practice of *chaupadi*, which pressures menstruating women and girls to leave their own homes and be confined in segregated sheds, is still widely prevalent. This practice was criminalized in 2017 following a number of publicly portrayed deaths of women and girls in menstrual sheds; however, the country's Supreme Court had already previously outlawed the practice in 2005, nevertheless, with little practical outcome on the ground (HRW, 2018). Gender-based violence against women is a severe issue in Nepal, where women often experience both public and domestic violence (Tiwari, 2015).

Violence against Women (VAW)

Tiwari (2015) states that violence against women has been documented to be widely prevalent in Nepal. Women face discrimination, social disadvantage and violence based on cultural, economic, religious and political traditions and beliefs: "violence and inhuman treatment, such as sexual assault, rape and naked parading serve as a social mechanism to maintain women's subordinate position in society" (Tiwari, 2015). As per the most recent available national statistical data, at least 25% of all Nepali women will experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lifetime, and a large number of such incidents tend to remain unreported (UN Women, 2018; The Himalayan Times, 2017).

According to Paudel (2007), it is widely acknowledged, including on the governmental level, that gender-based violence against women stems from the deeply-rooted patriarchal worldview, socially and culturally constructed '*norms*' and respective values in Nepali society. Women and girls are always vulnerable as they are not valued as equal human beings (INSEC, 2014). It leads to such common practices as torture and abuse of women for giving birth to daughters and not male babies, as well as trafficking of girls and rape (Paudel, 2007).

Nepali women experience gender-based violence not only from their intimate partners, as outlined above, but also from relatives and other people in their close environment. Apart from the physical and sexual abuse, one of the other main forms of violence that they experience is psychological violence, which is deemed to be such acts or omission that "damages the self-esteem, identity or development of the individual woman" (Paudel, 2007). Women of all ages experience this type of violence in Nepal, and according to Paudel (2007), the related acts of abuse may include not only humiliation and verbal threats but also accusations of being unable to give birth to a male baby, being unable to bring a good enough dowry, and accusations of practicing witchcraft.

Witchcraft Accusation and Persecution of Women (WAP)

Witchcraft accusation and persecution (WAP), more commonly known as 'witch-hunting', is an often overlooked but, nevertheless major social problem, in many societies across the Global South, including Nepal (Adinkrah and Adhikari, 2014). According to WHRIN (2014):

> *WAP can therefore be seen as a worldwide phenomenon claiming the lives and dignity of countless victims across many cultures, faiths and countries; in this sense it has no boundaries. Similarly, women in Nepal face the threat of being branded a witch and subsequently tortured or killed.*

In Nepal, witchcraft (Np. *boksipratha*) is believed to be practiced by witches (Np. *boksi*) and wizzards (Np. *bokso*), who possess mostly evil and destructive supernatural powers. These allegedly enable them to commit such atrocities as causing earthquakes, drought or floods, inflicting ill health and diseases on either humans or animals, causing epidemics, death, crop damage and more (Sah, 2007; Paudel, 2011; Adinkrah and Adhikari, 2014; WHRIN, 2014). According to Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014), the vast majority of persons, who experience WAP in Nepal, are female, whilst men may only very occasionally be accused of practicing witchcraft. WAP is more common in rural areas of the country, although urban areas are not free of occurrences either. These practices continue despite specific laws being in place since 2014, which prohibit allegations of witchcraft and criminalize WAP. Nevertheless, WAP is still common, and includes such inhuman treatment of women as forcing them to eat human excreta, beating them severely and even killing those accused of practicing witchcraft (INSEC, 2018).

Findings analyzed and discussed in this report are based on a comprehensive literature review and two stages of fieldwork carried out in Nepal in 2012-2013 and in 2018. It was a unique piece of qualitative research, completed in such a format for the first time in Nepal. Firstly, the overall and specific objectives of the study will be presented below. Then the methodology will be described and followed by a comprehensive presentation of the study results. The discussion and analysis of the results will be outlined, good practice examples described and challenges identified. Finally, the conclusion and recommendations will be drawn.

Overall Objective

The aim of this study is to draw the attention of all key stakeholders, including academia, to the significant scale, severity and complexity of human rights violations faced by women in Nepal due to witchcraft accusation and persecution (WAP).

Specific Objectives

(1) To collect information related to WAP in Nepal, in all of its complexity; (2) To assess and analyze the specifics of the local context, in which WAP happens in Nepal; (3) To identify good local practices, which address this complex social issue; (4) To produce recommendations for future development and scaling up of the related, most effective practices that respect and foster human rights in the country.

METHODOLOGY

This research study was carried out in two stages. The first stage of fieldwork took place in Nepal between December 2012 and January 2013. The second stage of data collection was implemented in August 2018. Both times, the same methodology was applied; it is described in more detail below.

Desk-Based research

An in depth continuous desk-based analysis of academic journals and articles, books, research reports, and authoritative websites was carried out by the author of this report, starting in 2012 and throughout to the end of 2018. Following the initial desk-based analysis of local key stakeholders, and with support provided by the *Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network* (UK), the very first contact was established with a local Nepali non-governmental organization (NGO) *PPR Nepal*, in 2012. This NGO provided invaluable assistance to the fieldwork team during the very first stages of implementation of this study. The fieldwork team consisted of the author of this report Ms. Ugnė Grigaitė and Mr. Joe Wood, documentary photographer.

Face-to-Face Interviews

During both the first and second stages of fieldwork in Nepal, the fieldwork team carried out semi-structured qualitative face-to-face interviews with various local stakeholders. 10 face-to-face interviews (6 individual and 4 group interviews) were carried out with 16 persons during a period of 2 weeks between December 2012 and January 2013. Additional 15 interviews with 22 persons (11 individual and 4 group interviews) were carried out during a period of 3 weeks in August 2018. Hence, a total of 38 persons were interviewed during 17 individual and 8 group interviews.

14 out of the 25 interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the author of this report; throughout all of the 25 interviews detailed notes were also taken by both members of the fieldwork team. Each interview lasted from approximately 30 mins to 2 hours in length. 10 out of 25 interviews required an interpreter to translate from English to Nepali and vice versa; such assistance was provided by either representatives of local NGOs or independent lawyers. The rest of the interviews were

Table 1. Outline of the characteristics of study participants during the 1st stage of fieldwork in Nepal.

	Stakeholder Group	Female	Male	Districts of Nepal			Total No. of Interviews
Individual Interviews	Survivors of WAP	2	0	Kathmandu			2
	Lawyers	0	2	Kathmandu; Makawanpur			2
	NGO Representatives	0	0	N/A			0
	Traditional Healers – *Jhakri*	1	1	Kathmandu; Makawanpur			2
	Local Community Members	0	0	N/A			0
	Government Representatives	0	0	N/A			0
	Total No. of persons interviewed individually:	3	3	***Total Districts (Indiv.):***	2	**Total Individual Interviews**	6
Group Interviews	Survivors of WAP	3	1	Makawanpur Dolakha			2
	Lawyers	0	0	N/A			0
	NGO Representatives	1	1	Makawanpur			1
	Traditional Healers – *Jhakri*	0	0	N/A			0
	Local Community Members	2	2	Makawanpur			1
	Government Representatives	0	0	N/A			0
	Total No. of persons interviewed in a group:	6	4	***Total Districts (Group):***	2	**Total Group Interviews**	4
Total No. of persons interviewed:		16		***Total Unique Districts :***	3	**Total No. of Interviews**	10

conducted solely in English. All interviews were only conducted after the informed consent had been obtained in a verbal form from the participants of the study. Strict confidentiality rules were followed during interviews and the collected data was completely anonymized. Moreover, sensitive interviewing skills and methods were applied due to the complex and sensitive nature of the research topic.

Interviewees came from 5 different districts of Nepal: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Makawanpur, Dolakha and Kaski. In total 14 women and 24 men were interviewed, the age of whom ranged between 22 to 68 years. The obvious gender imbalance between the numbers of interviewed women and men, unfortunately was affected by and reflects the still existent and prevalent very much patriarchal social structure of Nepal. For example, most of the lawyers, NGO representatives and traditional healers in Nepal are often male. Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of this study's topic, as well as significant societal stigma attached to it, there is a great lack of individuals, who would be readily available and willing to be interviewed for such a study. Hence, the method of *purposive sampling* was chosen in terms of finding the study participants: starting with the support of the local NGOs and lawyers, certain stakeholder groups were approached in order to invite individuals to part-take in the study. Moreover, the *snowball sample* technique was also naturally applied, as a result of the *purposive sampling*. Additionally, due to difficult geographical conditions and often complicated physical access to certain areas of the country, the *convenient sample* was the chosen sampling technique, due to the geographical locations where interviewees were based. For a more detailed description of the sample size, interviewees' personal characteristics, and outline of different stakeholder groups, please refer to Tables 1 and 2.

Data Analysis

Following the manual transcription of audio-recorded interviews and structuring of the data, which was recorded in the written interview notes, the author of this report organized the collected information in accordance with the study objectives. The specific data obtained through 25 individual and group interviews was assigned to relevant objectives, validated, and the links between the collected data and research objectives were analyzed. This report was written as a result of this analysis being integrated with the results of the desk-based research.

Table 2. Outline of the characteristics of study participants during the 2nd stage of fieldwork in Nepal

	Stakeholder Group	Female	Male	Districts of Nepal			Total No. of Interviews
Individual Interviews	Survivors of WAP	0	0	N/A			0
	Lawyers	0	1	Kathmandu			1
	NGO Representatives	2	2	Kathmandu; Kaski			4
	Traditional Healers – *Jhakri*	0	2	Kathmandu			2
	Local Community Members	1	3	Kathmandu; Lalitpur; Kaski			4
	Government Representatives	0	0	N/A			0
	Total No. of persons interviewed individually:	3	8	***Total Districts (Indiv.):***	3	**Total Individual Interviews**	11
Group Interviews	Survivors of WAP	0	0	N/A			0
	Lawyers	0	0	N/A			0
	NGO Representatives	0	8	Kathmandu; Kaski			3
	Traditional Healers – *Jhakri*	0	0	N/A			0
	Local Community Members	0	0	N/A			0
	Government Representatives	2	1	Kathmandu			1
	Total No. of persons interviewed in a group:	2	9	***Total Districts (Group):***	2	**Total Group Interviews**	4
Total No. of persons interviewed:		22		***Total Unique Districts :***	3	**Total No. of Interviews**	15

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Several main themes and challenges were echoed throughout most of the interviews by various different stakeholders during both stages of the fieldwork. These different topics and various challenges will be discussed in the following paragraphs under this section of the study report.

Beliefs in Witchcraft

First of all, a large part of Nepali population hold deeply-rooted, socially and culturally constructed beliefs in witchcraft, they also often carry out or undergo superstitious practices, rituals and follow related traditions.

It is important to note that belief in witchcraft in Nepal is not necessarily linked to or directly dependent on the religion or faith that people follow. Beliefs in witchcraft and practices of WAP have been evidenced to exist among people, regardless of their individual religion and/or faith. Nevertheless, according to the analysis of the study results, it may be assumed that religious people, especially those, who are practicing Hindus, may be slightly *more prone* to also believe in witchcraft. As one of the participants of the study explained: "When there is God – there is always a demon" (2018). Hence, the evil spirits or demon, in this case, are naturally equated to the belief of existence of *boksi*, or witches that allegedly cause trouble and adversities in life. According to Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014), Nepal is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, hence, truly complex society, which speaks over a hundred different languages across its more than 120 ethnic groups. Nevertheless, they note that despite this significant diversity in ethnicity as well as religious beliefs, the belief in witchcraft is universal across the country (Adinkrah and Adhikari, 2014).

The prevalence and survival of such beliefs to this day has been enabled and fostered by various social issues, such as poverty and lack of education. For example, a lack of awareness in the general public may be observed, especially among people living in more remote areas, of causes for certain phenomena in life, i.e. physical illness, mental health problems, disability, conditions influencing the quality of harvest, livestock illnesses and natural disasters. Belief in witchcraft can potentially be conceptualized as "an attempt by people to rationalize the misfortunes occurring in their life; it shapes perceptions and provides an answer when disaster strikes" (Schnoebelen, 2009). Behringer (2004) argues that "unexpected hardship or bad luck, sudden and incurable diseases, all can be accounted to the actions of evil people, to magical forces…the diagnosis of witchcraft opens up the possibility of combating the causes of



Mother and daughter – survivors of WAP. Image: © Joe Wood, 2013

hardship". Hence, the belief in witchcraft potentially provides an explanation for what would otherwise be unexplained and/or unbearable (WHRIN, 2014):

> *WAP tends to follow the patterns of tension and conflict in societies. The violence inflicted upon Nepali society by the Nepalese civil war from 1996 – 2006 has contributed to a breakdown of social networks, family ties, friendships bonds and support services. Destruction of the private infrastructures, which previously enabled limited access to health and education, and which supported food security and livelihoods, led to a displacement of people. In the face of this some of the gravest human rights abuses have occurred including the systematic use of murder, rape, torture and extortion. These 'social vacuums', where extreme poverty, lack of access to basic resources and services and violent abuses of basic human rights abound, provide a fertile breeding ground for WAP and act as a way of explaining life's misfortunes, thus maintaining the social order.*

Interviewee R (2013), described to the fieldwork team, how one day she cooked food for the whole of her neighbourhood and on the following morning all of them fell ill. She was then straight away accused of being a 'witch' by her own sister-in-law: since she had cooked for them, she must have poisoned them on purpose. From that day on R would get blamed, punished, tortured and humiliated for everybody's illnesses; be it some insignificant minor health problems, a major disease or even death.

One of the reasons, why such severe human rights abuses as WAP have been generally overlooked and still lack wider acknowledgement and addressing by the global community, non-governmental sector and UN agencies, is the perceived conflict between the freedom of religion or belief and the enjoyment of other human rights. However, such absolute rights as the right to be free from torture and the right to life, which are both affected by WAP, cannot be balanced against the rights of others under any circumstances: "In essence the freedom of religion and belief cannot be relied upon by Nepal to avoid its human rights obligations to protect against torture and murder; as well as its positive obligations to investigate such occurrences" (WHRIN, 2014).

Nevertheless, WAP in Nepal continues to exist without any major or comprehensive practical coordinated and inter-sectoral efforts to eliminate it from society. According to the Women and Children's Directive at Nepali Police, 43 cases were reported to the police in 2015, 28 cases registered in 2016, and 24 cases in 2017. On the other hand, INSEC (2018) documented 51 case in 2015, 34 cases in 2016 and 33 cases in 2017. The national statistics on the topic only scratch the very surface of this problem and does not represent the realistic scale, severity and complexity of this phenomenon. Several of this study's participants confirmed during interviews, that they claimed to hear about cases of WAP on a regular basis, sometimes even weekly, be it from media, other community members, relatives, the police or others. However, a large proportion of cases do not reach the police or the justice system. As one of the study's participants puts it: "This is the worst crime, worse than you know – trafficking, torture, other cases – because, if the whole society stand against the victims, then nobody can speak up to support them … it does not necessarily get published in the papers. Because often they are afraid, or the pressure in society is so that they cannot write those kind of news" (2018). Thus, it is a latent crime and it is difficult to assess the real scale of it. Additionally, it is difficult to know, whether the decreasing numbers of registered cases through the recent years are due to the decrease in actual WAP instances, or it is due to the decrease in active work by independent lawyers, international and local NGOs, which was observed to be significant, when compared this study's results from 2012 and 2018.

One of the interviewees recalled one of the most recent publicly known cases of WAP in 2018: "Recently there was a very serious case in the nearby district, one man died and two women were accused of being witches, because it was thought that the man died because of this … And what happened was the villagers went near the dead body, they cut the body and said that there was insects inside because of the black spell of the witch … The police case is ongoing for the two women, who were accused [to get justice], she has launched the complaint to the police and police are investigating the case." Hence, there are ongoing cases and some of them get resolved; however, this is only possible for those, who actively seek justice themselves, like in the case of these two women. Unfortunately, not everyone has the knowledge, resources and opportunity to do this and those cases require proactive work by someone from outside of the accused women's immediate surroundings. This is where in the past the work of NGOs and independent lawyers was invaluable and helped to address this major crime. One of the interviewees (2018) illustrated the severity of it as follows: "for example, the number of incidents of human trafficking victims in Nepal is very high … the number of witchcraft accusation and persecution is low comparatively with the trafficking BUT in the seriousness of the cases, the witchcraft cases are very high, violence is very high".

Social Issues, Vulnerability and Patriarchal 'Norms'

It has been widely evidenced by various studies and local statistics that the most vulnerable persons to experience WAP in Nepal are most likely to be women, especially those of older age, single or widowed, and living in poverty. Deeply-rooted patriarchal beliefs, socially constructed 'norms' and related structures in society determine the significant gap between female and male individuals, who get accused of being witches or wizards: the vast majority of WAP survivors or victims are women:

> *Women are primarily considered as possessing supernatural powers. Such belief contends that women, possessed by the power of witchcraft, are responsible for a wide-range of misfortune including the sudden death of people, family members or animals, the sudden loss of property or crops, miscarriages and other illnesses and misfortunes ... it is believed that they learn witchcraft from their mothers and it is passed on as a hereditary occupation. Secondly, in parallel with many parts of Africa, it is believed that the witchcraft can be passed to others via a mysterious, spiritual spell, which is given to others through food and/or drink. Whilst these beliefs may be most deeply held in the rural regions of Nepal, amongst community members with lower literacy levels, such beliefs are in general deeply engrained within society. Regardless of caste, levels of education or geographical locations, the majority of Nepalese people hold such beliefs to be true. (WHRIN, 2014)*

This was also backed by the interviewed study participants too, for example one of the interviewees explained it in these words: "Normally it happens ... our survey has found that a single woman is targeted the most. A single woman, especially a widow, something like that. They are being targeted, they are alleged as witches because they haven't got anyone you know to provide support, they live by themselves" (2018).

Persons, who lack in education, have been widely documented to be one of the most vulnerable groups to experience WAP: "illiterate persons are unlikely to know their ... human rights. Most cannot afford legal counsel to represent them in ... litigation against their accusers or to have other means to protect themselves in the face of abuse. They are therefore susceptible to witchcraft accusation and subsequent treatment" (Adinkrah and Adhikari, 2014). Additionally, there is a whole other proportion of WAP survivors, who are accused because of the still existent and widely prevalent *caste system* in Nepal; people born into the lowest caste, i.e. *Dalit*, often referred to as the '*untouchables*' in English, are the most vulnerable to experience WAP (Paudel, 2011). Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014) state that the accusers and perpetrators on the other hand, most often come from an upper caste, and with Nepal's long history of caste-based discrimination, this does not really come as a surprise.

All regions in Nepal are vulnerable to WAP and as one interviewee said: "Almost in every province it is. In provinces on a weekly basis, or maybe on a monthly basis, anyway frequently. There are a lot of news coming out regarding the witchcraft allegations. And the cases are very serious as well ... In some cases they feed them human excreta and then seriously beating them up and then like in some cases even beating to death" (2018). However, according to INSEC, even though WAP is annually documented to be happening across the whole country, the most severely affected area of Nepal is the Terai region – one of the poorest regions, with very high illiteracy levels and lack of healthcare services. In addition to all the above, most Dalits live in South Terai and they are often accused of witchcraft (Adinkrah and Adhikari, 2014).



A WAP survivor. Image: © Joe Wood, 2012



WAP survivors – a woman and her husband, who supported her through it. Image: © Joe Wood, 2013

The Role of Traditional Healers

A significant role in promoting belief in witchcraft and sometimes also the subsequent WAP is often played by the local traditional healers, or *Jhakri* in Nepali. [Disclaimer: The author of this report would like to stress that she does not automatically discredit *all* the *Jhakri* in Nepal, and totally acknowledges the significance, importance and value that these traditional healers bring to Nepali society; this study report only focuses on those *Jhakri*, who in fact contribute to human rights abuses and violence against women, which is a recognized crime under the national *Anti-Witch Hunt Law*, 2014 and *Nepali Criminal Code, as of 2018*].

Jhakri are highly trusted by most of Nepali society, and provide treatments and healing rituals to people across the country, in both rural areas, as well as cities: "… because Jhakris carry out their work openly and publicly, it is believed that they are male wizards, whose work is purely beneficial to society and they are therefore highly respected within society" (WHRIN, 2014). These healers provide a lot of positive support to Nepali communities, especially in remote areas, where conventional doctors, hospitals and treatments are inaccessible.

Jhakri also called *Shamans* not only work in remote areas, they are also active in cities. For example, there is an officially registered and highly trusted Association of Shamans in Kathmandu (Np. *Nepal Jhakri Sangh*). Currently there are around 200 members of this association, all in Kathmandu: "There is also *Janni*, *Median*, *Mata*, who are able to directly communicate with God, and people go to them for blessing, including the prime minister of Nepal and other politicians and celebrities. Also there are Jyotish – 'the know it all man' – these are the gifted fortune tellers" (Interviewee of the study, 2018). The same study participant goes on to explain the relationship between *Jhakri* and *Boksi* as follows: "When you have a shaman, there is always a witch too; when there is God – there is demon … Shamans fight witches but not in this realm, witches are not people – they have this fight in the parallel realm … The fight is not between the person who seeks healing and the witch – but between the shaman and the witch, all in the spiritual realm. The witch is not in a human form … The problem is when somebody is blamed, and sometimes it is even a 'mob game' – when villagers want property or something, they blame others as witches. But shamans do the healing rituals, they don't blame the witch" (2018).



Shoes of customers outside of a Jhakri's healing studio. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018



A Jhakri healing ritual. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

However, some *Jhakri* have been described by both literature and a number of interviewees of this study to often be the ones, who play a determining role in accusing women of witchcraft, and contribute to carrying out the subsequent torture, inhuman treatment and sometimes even killing of these women. According to Adinkrah and Adhikari (2014):

> *... doctors, physician assistants and other health-service personnel [in Nepal] are known to recommend families with sick relatives to seek "spiritual assistance" for their afflicted relatives, particularly those not responding well to treatment. In such instances, where a spiritual genesis is suspected, this often leads to accusations of witchcraft and violent mistreatment of a putative witch.*

Moreover, according to INSEC (2018) as well as a number of persons interviewed for this study, a part of Nepali society would naturally refrain from even approaching medical professionals or facilities and go straight to *Jhakri* for any medical advice: "there is a widespread belief in the powers of witchcraft amongst most rural communities in Nepal with village people heavily relying on their community 'witchdoctor' or Jhakri for medicinal help for all ailments" (Interviewee of the study, 2012). This might happen either due to lack of actual access to conventional medical services, or due to their personal beliefs and choices: "Jhakri in Nepali means 'a man who heals'/ 'healer' ... In cities more people go to hospitals and see doctors; illiterate people or people of faith tend to seek alternative healing. But some people also believe in both. It's psychological – if you believe it, the healing works" (Interviewee of the study, 2018). Hence, the significant and highly trusted authority that *Jhakri* tend to have in Nepali communities, as well as the affects and influence of their practices, may contribute to the related human rights abuses exercised by other society members in the name of *witch-hunt*.

INSEC (2018:2) documented a case in Western Nepal, where a young girl was beaten up recently because there was a *Jhakri*, who thought that she was possessed and that she was a witch: "...so everybody started beating her up ... In front of a huge public she was beaten ... The whole village didn't want to come out but one guy filmed it and uploaded it online. After that only it came to the wider public eye ... First of all, we thought that there was some sort of a play going on, like a drama but it was serious, everyone saw that video" (Interviewee of the study, 2018).

Back in 2012, one of the interviewed WAP survivors – Interviewee S – indicated the vital role that a *Jhakri* played in her own tragic story. A seemingly good relationship with her relatives one day suddenly turned a very sharp corner. S's cousin T had been unable to conceive for a long time, as a result of which she went to seek help from her uncle, who was a local *Jhakri*. He told T that her problems had been caused by somebody practicing witchcraft on her, therefore, the 'witch' or *Boksi* needed to be found and 'treated' first. All this resulted in interviewee S, as well as her two cousins being attacked by their own relatives and beaten up severely. Interviewee S then also had her eyes stabbed one by one.



A shop selling instruments and tools for Jhakri healing rituals. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

Another story, in which a Jhakri played a significant role was told to the fieldwork team by Interviewee Z (2013). Z has been experiencing physical and emotional abuse for over 12 years by her neighbours. The first accusation of practicing witchcraft was imposed upon her, when a neighbour of hers fell ill with something like TB. This neighbour's husband, who was also a *Jhakri*, believed that his wife's illness had been caused by a *Boksi*. He at first tried treating his wife jointly with another *Jhakri*, all in vain. They tried herbal remedies, sacrificing animals and reciting mantra but nothing helped the woman. Eventually, her husband accused Z to be a *Boksi*, who had supposedly caused his wife's misery and pain. When his wife died, he called the other *Jhakri* again and requested that he kills Z. Fortunately, this did not happen but instead years of intense emotional torture and social isolation followed.

Another interviewee of the study (2018) felt that more recently there was a turning point for the worst, since not only *Jhakri* now make witchcraft allegations against women but also the whole society. His argument to illustrate this was as follows: "...basically at the beginning the Jhakri alleged the victims as witches. But nowadays it is decreasing ... Nowadays, the whole society, people accuse the victims that they are witches. That is the dangerous turning point ... You know, people only focused on Jhakris, because only Jhakris used to allege to the victims as a witch, people think like that, and then the whole program only focused on Jhakri, you know awareness raising programs like this. And then the young generation also you know getting some kind of education. But whole society, if someone peoples allege, the whole society allege to the victims. If they blame to the woman, you know ... and then they can grab some property, the whole society can grab their property, so they can be accused then for some benefit. And pressure from the powerful people sometimes. If some people are powerful in society, and then those people ask the other people to support him. And then whole society only support the powerful people, not to the single women, accused victims".

Mental Health, Well-Being and Psychosocial Support

The study results show that the majority of issues, with which Nepali people tend to seek help and treatment from *Jhakri* are often mental health problems. Additionally, there is a significant lack of awareness and understanding of both mental health and well-being, as well as mental health problems in Nepal. There is also a lack of available and accessible psychosocial services and support across the country: "Probably around 80% of people come to shamans with psychological and mental health problems, such as fear, panic attacks, tight chest, depressed state, emotional breakdown, feeling heavy or down. Some also

come with physical pain or other problems" (Interviewee of the study, 2018). This was also very much observed during a couple of random healing sessions attended by the fieldwork team in 2018, where a people complained about panic attacks and tight chest, sought healing from depressed feelings, one of the persons had a serious emotional breakdown and received treatment for this, which appeared like a type of a long and deep hypnotic healing session.

The general situation with availability of responses and support to persons, who have mental health difficulties, was somewhat accelerated and expanded since the devastating earthquake in 2015. According to Chase et al. (2018):

> *...the post-earthquake response accelerated progress towards national mental health system building in the areas of governance, financing, human resources, information and research, service delivery, and medications ... Concerns remain that government ownership and financing will be insufficient to sustain services in affected districts and scale them up to non-affected districts.*

Such NGOs as Transcultural Psychosocial Organization – TPO Nepal, as well as the WHO Country Office contribute to the field and aim to prevent these most recent advances from decreasing and compromising the vision of a national mental health care system in Nepal (Lamsal and Gautam, 2018). Nevertheless, the results of the study show that such initiatives are mostly project-based and lack sustainable and more comprehensive input, as well as political will from the government.

With regards to this field's relation and relevance to the WAP context, it has been observed by the fieldwork team and reported by the participants of this study that this may be relevant to the complex picture of WAP in several different ways. WHRIN (2014) highlights that in general the majority of cases of WAP are related to various public health problems within communities, including public mental health challenges. This study shows that, first of all, there appears to be a clear connection in how people in Nepal often seek spiritual treatment for mental health problems from *Jhakri*, which often leads to a guess that an 'evil spell' must have been cast on them by a *Boksi* causing 'insanity' (Sah, 2007), who then needs to be found and 'punished'.

Secondly, persons, who have mental health problems, especially more severe conditions and/or intellectual disabilities, in some cases may be more vulnerable to being accused of being *Boksi* due to the common belief that it is an 'evil spirit' in the person, which causes the symptoms or disability (Interviewees of the study, 2013 and 2018). This is not at all surprising, since according to WHO (2018), existing health care facilities, including mental health care services, also hygiene, nutrition and sanitation in Nepal are of poor quality, also various health and social support services are often inaccessible, particularly in more remote areas (Devkota, 2005).

Finally, some of the study participants commented that following WAP in many cases the accused women may develop mental health problems themselves due to having been tortured and ostracized by their communities and society (Interviewee of the study, 2018). Another interviewee (2018) reflected on this issue in the following way: "first of all, they [survivors] need to be rescued and taken to a safe place, provided some psychosocial support, so that they feel safe, and then they can be encouraged to file a case against the perpetrators. Otherwise they are always in fear ... So we have to give them support. Those kind of programs are needed. So we have to increase support programs: legal support, psychosocial support, health support, we have to provide all that. All of these cases, you know, a dedicated lawyer can support them".

Disputes over Financial Matters

Another layer to the complex picture of the issue of WAP may be illustrated by those cases, where the belief in witchcraft by the majority is taken advantage of by the minority, who may not necessarily believe in *boksi* at all. In such cases the main reason for accusing someone of being a witch may purely be an act, via which financial gain is sought by an individual or a group of people. Such incidents may be a result of disputes over property, inheritance or other financial matters amongst families, relatives, neighbors or even friends:

> *There is evidence that in some communities ... in Nepal, witchcraft-related violence is a form of gender injustice used as a ploy by aggrieved men and their agents to deprive widows and other women of their succession rights and inheritance rights to property... existing research shows that male relatives use accusations of witchery, threats of violence and actual forms of violence to dispossess female family members of their legal or cultural rights to property and succession. (Adinkrah and Adhikari, 2014)*

WHRIN (2014) also talks about how WAP is often used as a way to victimize female relatives in order to deprive them of their property rights or simply settle a family dispute or personal vendetta: "Like other forms of violence against women and children, whilst there are general laws and codes criminalizing violence against the person, WAP is rarely reported, rarely prosecuted and if prosecuted, rarely are perpetrators punished" (WHRIN, 2014) Nevertheless, other interviewees of this study reported that this is not necessarily always the case, since sometimes it is a pure belief system that leads to WAP and sometimes it is used as a tool to profit by depriving women of their property but it depends on circumstances in each individual case.

Challenges within the Legal System

Study results also indicate that there is a whole separate pool of challenges related to the legal framework in Nepal with regard to WAP, especially its practical implementation on the ground. Even though the national Anti-Witch Hunting Law, which criminalizes WAP and all related practices that violate human rights, was adopted in 2014 and is a landmark law, the practical implementation of it is still very poor now at the end of 2018. One of the challenges is that people, especially those, who live in remote areas of Nepal, do not know about such a law and what it means: "...many people do not know that they can or that they have to go and launch a complaint, if they are accused of being a witch. They don't even know where to go. That's why it's getting bigger and bigger ... in many cases they don't know what court is, what police is, or what these institutions do ... So this is all maybe due to the lack of awareness, you could say, or not having proper education. There are also many social boundaries, you know. These are the reasons they are not coming out actually. Even in Tarai region they don't know how to seek support or that they can do that. Not necessarily in mountains or such remote areas" (Interviewee of the study, 2018).

Additionally, even those, who do know about it, for example, law enforcement and police officers, often choose to ignore instances of WAP and not even attempt to seek justice in such cases, due to their own deep and abundant beliefs in witchcraft and existence of *boksi*. Another reason for this inaction by the police and other legal professionals has been reported to be related to corruption and specifically bribes often paid by alleged perpetrators, which consequently take over the justice process.

Some initiatives are taking place in Nepal, which aim to inform society of the legal framework and the rule of law. For example, the Women's Foundation Nepal have compiled a booklet, in which they detailed all the new law amendments related to women's rights, including those related to the criminalization of WAP: „[the booklet] mentions all the laws that have recently changed, like equality of women, like we can get citizenship in the name of mother, equal participation, social security allowances, stop domestic violence, stop women and girls trafficking, stop violence at workplace, stop accusations of witchcraft practices, equal payment for both women and men, equal property right for both son and daughter, and child



Women from the local community read leaflets informing them of their rights. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

rights ... also convention of child rights“ (Interviewee of the study, 2018). However, as another participant of the study said: “Recently laws have been made against the witch-hunting in Nepal and if it is implemented, on the individual, society, state levels ... The consciousness of individuals, family, community and whole nation – if it changes, then that issue could be changed“ (Interviewee of the study, 2018).

Moreover, some of the study participants described that as the time goes by, since the adoption of the law that criminalized WAP, people are becoming more creative in their methods of how to ignore this law and bypass the criminal responsibility. For example, according to an interviewee (2018), a Christian community in one of the larger cities of Nepal has come up with a new ‘name’ for the evil, and started calling it ‘devil’ instead of a ‘witch’, in order to avoid the potential collision with the law, whilst continuing all the same practices related to WAP.

In addition to all the above, at the time of Stage 1 of this study back in 2012/2013 a landmark WAP case was brought to court by local lawyers and activists. It was the first time that WAP perpetrators were in fact punished and justice was achieved by the victim (Interviewee of the study, 2018). Around the time of that case, a lot of work was done in the field of WAP in seeking justice for other victims. NGOs together with lawyers were involved in taking pro-active steps in order to assist women accused of practicing witchcraft. However, in 2018 it may be observed that the situation is very much different and there is now a significant lack of dedicated human rights lawyers, who would be still willing to undertake new WAP cases. It was explained by interviewees of this study that this may have happened due to the lack of new funding for carrying out such work but also the real potential for negative repercussions and threats, which in previous years have been directed at such layers by the alleged perpetrators, as well as wider communities: “Basically, in Nepal most of the lawyers want to work with other cases, like business cases, companies and other types of criminal cases on behalf of the perpetrators, because it is easier, less chances to get threatened... It’s a simple thing, no risks ... So if a lawyer started to work against WAP and other violations, then they are likely to start receiving some problems. Like, for example, we received a lot of type of threats, many times” (Interviewee of the study, 2018).



A lawyer supporting WAP survivors to access justice. Image: © Joe Wood, 2013



A human rights lawyer in his office. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

Collaboration among Local NGOs and Activists

Another major challenge discovered by this study was the lack of collaboration and knowledge about each other's initiatives among local NGOs and activists. In a number of interviews, especially during the Stage 2 of the study implemented in 2018, the fieldwork team heard interviewees report that "There are no organizations, which specifically work with WAP issues"; "I think nobody. Because many main organizations work on women's rights issues in general but I think nobody have been working just on the specific issue of WAP"; "I don't think there is an organization specifically working with only witchcraft allegations or something like that you know"; etc.

When asked why might this be the case, interviewees responded by explaining that possibly due to the funding crisis, which is currently faced by many NGOs: "I think, I don't know exactly, but due to some I think limited support, limited funding … We have to research and document those cases throughout, we have to invest a lot of time and money. But many organizations you know have been facing some financial crisis. So maybe that's why these cases have not been receiving so much attention, cause you need a lot of time and financial support for this". In addition to this, another interviewee (2018) stated that: "Many organizations are facing a funding crisis at the moment. Two things why. The donor agencies you know turn away. They think that after the establishment of the peace process in Nepal, they are only thinking like politically, so after the start of the peace process in Nepal, they think that all of the issues are already settled down in Nepal so there is no need for more support. This is one thing, and another thing is regional, the government is you know very tight on NGOs, it controls NGOs. So if someone organizations receive some funding, it is very difficult you know to get approval by the government, especially for projects related to human rights".

However, this study's results show that there is at least one organization in Nepal, which works specifically on WAP issues only, and several other NGOs that have addressing of WAP related problems in society as one of their main priorities. Results of this study show that there is very little collaboration among these local initiatives across the country, which otherwise might be useful and could help achieve more effective and wider positive outcomes for both prevention and provision of support to survivors of WAP in Nepal.

Good Practice Examples

During the Stage 1 of this study back in 2012/2013, the fieldwork team met with a number of various NGOs, independent lawyers and activists, who supported survivors of WAP in many different ways: by providing them with free legal aid, emergency accommodation and other types of social support. During the Stage 2 of this study in 2018, it was a lot more difficult to find such initiatives taking place; however, a few good practice examples were observed and will be described in more detail herein.

Manchhe Boksi Hunna – National Awakening Academy Nepal (NAAN) is a non-governmental organization based near Pokhara, established in 2015 by Mr. Kobid Sharan Upadhyaya and his family. This NGO's name literally translates as "A Human Being can Never Become a Witch" and WAP is the main and only topic that the organization focuses its work on. NAAN has a lot of individual members, followers and sponsors across the country, they are known to certain government officials in the relevant ministry, as well as to national television, which sometimes broadcasts their awareness raising events. It is important to note that while their activities might be on television occasionally, their work is very much localized and the organization is not widely known though.

Main forms of their awareness raising activities about women's rights, negative consequences of WAP and injustice faced by those accused of practicing witchcraft are through poetry, songs, music videos, dance and theatre performances. Through such performances NAAN raise awareness of Jhakri and all other community members, about causes of certain phenomena in life, such as natural disasters or illness, as well as about the notion that all human beings are equal, are not witches and have fundamental human rights that are ought to be respected. The art-related forms of awareness raising are especially effective in Nepali society, where all forms of art, especially music, dance and theatre are so commonly enjoyed by most communities on a regular basis. The organization do not take any funding from the government, so that they cannot be accused of bribery, and fund everything through donations.

Additionally, in 2017 the organization's members funded the production of a feature length, awareness raising movie, called "AGNIDAHAN" (En. "The All-Consuming Fire"), which aims to fight against WAP and raise awareness about mental health problems, as well as ways to support people, who experience those, instead of engaging in WAP. NAAN has been screening this movie at privately organized community events across Nepal throughout 2018. These event and the movie itself have been received extremely well by various different communities and effective in raising awareness about the issues of WAP and related challenges.



A local NGO's awareness raising tactics include theatre and dance. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018



The lead actress during a premiere of the feature length, awareness raising movie. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018



A local NGO premiering their feature length, awareness raising, dramatical movie. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

Another local organization, which for a number of years has been doing some work on WAP cases in Nepal is INSEC – Informal Sector Service Centre. INSEC runs a now well established Human Rights-Dedicated Library in Kathmandu and develops annual Nepal Human Rights Yearbooks. As well as completing fieldwork and fact-finding missions on the cases of WAP: "...we complete field studies or fact-finding missions depending on the seriousness of the case of WAP. If it is a very severe case like killing or if it is a case of inhuman behaviour, then in such cases we do the fact-finding. But not in every case ... We usually provide support with regards to advocacy, we help survivors to access justice. In some cases we provide financial support to the victims, to pay the court fees and similar. We do not have lawyers, we work more like mediators, we help them reach the consultants, we refer them on, etc. Because in very remote place there are people, who are alleged of being witches but they have not got anybody to help them. They do not even know how to go and launch a complaint to the police. In such cases district representatives of INSEC will personally go to the victims and provide support to them. There are other organizations, who deal with WAP and our representatives would often take the survivor to those – we assist them. There are very few cases that they personally would come and ask for help – we have to go out ourselves and find them, find out, who is out there suffering from WAP. Another forms of violence against women they often come out and report on, but not the violence committed against them due to witchcraft allegation" (Interviewee of the study, 2018).

Moreover, during the study the fieldwork team discovered that Transcultural Psychosocial Organization – TPO Nepal organize and deliver specific trainings to Jhakri about mental health problems and psychosocial support that may be required by persons experiencing mental health difficulties. In these trainings Jhakri are trained to recognize mental health problems and related symptoms and then to refer people on to mental health services, psychological counselling, other psychosocial support or medical doctors.

Interviewees of the study (2018) also informed the fieldwork team about the National Women's Commission (NWC), which is a constitutional body that is mandated to work towards the protection and promotion of women's rights. The NWC also looks into the cases of gender based violence, and reports under the international human rights treaties and instruments, such as UPR and CEDAW. Being a constitutional body, the Women's Commissions reports are presented to the President. It used to report to the Ministry of Women but as of 2015 when the Constitution came into effect, it is now reporting about the overall situation of women directly to the President.

According to interviewees of the study (2018), a one-day hackathon was organized in 2013 by the National Women's Commission and Youth Groups. The participants,



INSEC Human Rights Library in Kathmandu. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

came up with the idea for the 24/7 helpline (telephone and online), for survivors of gender based violence, focused only on women and girls. It was then created but the Commission also provide support to boys under 16 years of age, because they say that, if the mother is affected by violence, then of course support should be provided to their the sons too. Under the national laws, if women or girls are affected by domestic violence, the survivors can go to four places: they can go to the National Women's Commission, they can report to the Police, they can also go to the local level judicial committees, or they may approach the court directly. According to interviewees of this study (2018), a lot of the time women prefer to approach the National Women's Commission, which provides free legal aid, psychosocial counseling and other needed support for survivors in order to then go to court.

On average the Commission used to have around 300 cases every year, but in August 2018 they already had 600 cases, received in the last 6 months alone. This is reportedly due to the launching of the Helpline. 37,249 calls were received in 6 months' time, with 84% of cases that have come to the Commission having been related to instances of domestic violence (Data by the National Women's Commission, 2018). However, even though there is a platform and potential for it, none of the received phone calls in these past 6 months were about cases of WAP.

Even though the National Women's Commission contributed significantly to the landmark anti-WAP law being drafted and adopted back in 2014, since the act came into effect, they are not pro-actively working on tackling WAP. Though whenever WAP cases arise, the Commission does often follow it up (Interviewee of the study, 2018).

With regards to other potential ways to support women in difficult situations, there are also crisis centres available in some parts of Nepal, where women may be accommodated for a maximum of 6 months at a time. Additionally, a Self-help Mobile Application was developed and launched by the NWC in 2018. With this Mobile App you can save the telephone numbers of five close friends and relatives, whom it will simultaneously contact with your exact whereabouts, at the press of a button, whenever the user feels threatened or in danger. Once you download this Mobile App, it can also work offline.



Helpline Unit at the National Women's Commission. Image: © Joe Wood, 2018

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study is to demonstrate the scope and complexity of WAP and draw the attention of all key stakeholders, including academia, to the significant scale, severity and complexity of human rights violations faced by women in Nepal due to WAP. In conclusion, the results of this study deepen the knowledgebase and understanding, of the complex background to the story surrounding WAP in Nepal. The analysis of study results has revealed in more detail the cultural, social and legal challenges that are often intertwined, inter-related and deeply-rooted in Nepali society, and thus greatly affect the context, in which WAP occurs.

The data collected during both stages of this study in 2012-2013 and then again in 2018, reveals the depth and complexity of beliefs systems in Nepal, which are not necessarily related to any specific religion. WAP is determined by deeply rooted and socially constructed beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural powers; moreover the role and authority of Jhakri in Nepali society sometimes still contributes to instances of WAP. Such beliefs are most common but not necessarily limited to people in poorer and less educated communities, especially among those, who lack awareness about causes of such phenomena as natural disasters, mental health problems, failure in achieving a plentiful harvest, and others. The most vulnerable group of Nepali society to be accused of practicing witchcraft and then experiencing severe persecution as a result, are women, especially widows, divorced and those living in poverty and/or belonging to a lower caste. Sometimes WAP is instigated as a result of financial disputes – perpetrators sometimes use WAP in order to deprive a women of her property or inheritance rights and similar.

Even though specific laws, which criminalize WAP and ensure opportunities for protection and access to justice for the survivors, have been in place on the national level in Nepal since 2014, their practical implementation has been extremely slow and problematic. There is currently a major lack of dedicated human rights lawyers in the country, who would be in a position and willing to undertake WAP cases. Additionally, local NGOs and activists have been unaware of each other's activities and not implementing any collaborative work in more recent years. This has partially been due to facing a funding crisis for the last few years, and hence, being less active in activities, which could have otherwise contributed to general awareness raising on the subject, prevention of WAP and support to the survivors of it.

Nevertheless, a number of good practice examples have been identified by this study. These address WAP in its complexity and contribute to development of Nepali society as a more just and human rights respecting country. Local NGOS use original and effective forms of activities for raising awareness on issues related to WAP. Some do so through completing fieldwork, producing research and fact-finding reports, others through organizing events, using poetry, song, dance, theatre and movies in order to reach out to local communities and communicate their message to them.

The main recommendations for future development in this field in Nepal would be to first of all start prioritizing the issue of WAP on both national and international level. It is important to scale up the existing most effective grassroots practices that fight against WAP and respect and foster human rights in the country. Local NGOs, activists and governmental agencies have developed a number of effective initiatives, as described in this report, and could be supported to ensure sustainability of those, as well as scale up their activities, in order to reach out to wider communities and address more individuals. This would pro-actively and significantly contribute to prevention of WAP.

As for the potential re-active measures, it is crucial to first of all ensure the safety of WAP survivors, following their experience of it. This would include ensuring that complex support is available and accessible to WAP survivors in all parts of Nepal, by which they could be assisted to reach safety, then provided with all necessary education and advice, as well as legal aid, psychosocial support, and be empowered to seek and access justice.

Not only financial and political support is needed from both the local government and international community to tackle this problem, but also more research is required into separate parts of the complex picture of the context, causes and consequences of WAP: the superstitious beliefs in witchcraft and related traditions and how these are changing in the 21st century; the role of the caste system in the context of WAP; changes in the role that Jahkri play and the potential for allying with these traditional healers in the fight against WAP; the ways and practices of related law bypassing, developed by local communities; as well as the intersection between the field of mental health and WAP.

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