

**A Summary Research Report**  
**On**  
**Knowledge and Experience on Sexual Abuse of Indigenous  
Women in Homestay Entrepreneurs in Nepal**

*Submitted to:*

International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)

*Submitted By:*

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Supported Organization



Consortium Organization



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This research was executed in consortium with Nepal Magar Mahila Sang Central Committee Nepal. I would like to thank for whole team of the Central Committee for working as a consortium partner.

This research was conducted on the two community based homestays of Nepal, eastern and western parts, IPs women and girls were accepted to take part in structured interview, Focused Group Discussion were conducted as well. Respective wards chairpersons provided the approval for this research work, homestay management committee provided the preliminary information for possible respondents. So, I would like to give sincere thanks to all of them who provided us their valuable time, cooperation and hospitality while doing field work.

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Ganga Thapa (Khasu)

Chairperson, MJN

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## Background

As an Indigenous women leader frequently visits many places of Nepal. In informal meetings at eastern and central part of Nepal parents of homestay owners shared the view saying that, "it has become very difficult to protect our daughters from the male guest". Similar type of problems also come to hear from the Tharu community of Chitwan homestay area.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly supporting similar issues representative from the Federation of Homestay Management Committee also expressed that, "this issues of girls protection at homestay has been raising since 16 years ago nearby urban area while starting homestay. This is the important issue."<sup>2</sup> This was the on hand reason to conduct this research that whether actually encountering such problem.

On the other hand research related to homestay in Nepal has primarily focused on the income generation, guest satisfaction and evaluation of homestay. For examples Bishowkarma (2015) has conducted research on tourist satisfaction through homestay in Nepal. According to him, "Amenities and Safety, Local Cuisine & Accommodation, Local Life style &Costumes and Cultural Performance has significant impact on tourist satisfaction" (pg. 52). Tharu (2023) conducted a rural tourism development taking a case study of Tharu community of Nepal. This study argues that homestay tourism has improved socio-economic status of Tharu community along with it enhanced Indigenous knowledge and skill of local products. It also ride of from being bonded labors and slums to some extent. Bhandari et. al. (2022) studied about socio-economic and cultural impact of homestay tourism at Sirubari village of Syagja district and they concluded that homestay tourism empowered local community and the homestay household increase up to twenty-three from seventeen within the period of five years.

Having short history of homestay tourism in Nepal research on sexual abuse in homestay might have not been an issue. Therefore, this research aimed at; to study prevalence of sexual abuse to Indigenous women and girls in Homestay entrepreneur by guest (male), assess their (host girls and women) knowledge and experiences of sexual abuse while running Homestay and identify the strategy to minimize or eliminate sexual abuse to Indigenous women and girl in homestay which can support for policy making as well advocacy level.

For the achievement of research objectives qualitative and quantitative approach was employed. As in quantitative approach assessment of knowledge and experienced on sexual abuse to IPs women and girls from the guest were done through structured interview. For the qualitative approach FGD, KII, informal discussion and observation were done. Free Prior Inform Consent (FPIC) was taken from stakeholders of Magar IPs.

This research is limited on Indigenous Magar women who were running homestay with their family. The selection of site was Eastern part (Dhankuta District) and Western part (Tanahun

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<sup>1</sup> Personal experiences of Ganga Khasu Magar at eastern and central Nepal. This is very serious concern of Indigenous communities who running homestay entrepreneurship at rural area of Nepal.

<sup>2</sup> This view was expressed by representative from Federation of Homestay Management Committee Nepal in research finding sharing meeting Kathmandu on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2024.

District) of Nepal (no name of homestay was disclosed because of ethical purpose). Overall the homestay which have been established and running more than one years were selected as a research site. Because within this period host might have experienced of significant guests behavior. The selected homestay were entirely running by Indigenous Magar community.

The sample size were considered 100 women of age group 19-60. Why the age limit was because under the age of 18 it is legally defined child in Nepal. This may be a separate issue of research and it was assumed that up to the age of 60 a women can experienced different form of sexual abuse. Non-random snowball sampling technique was used for selection of respondents.

Tools of research employed structured interview, focused group discussion, informal discussion and observation. Female researcher were assigned to take individual interview with female. And one event of focused discussion was done with male who were running homestay with their family. Two event of FGD was done with female. The field visit was done for almost 20 days on the month of February to March, 2024. Finding sharing meeting was done with the national and international organizations' stakeholders at Kathmandu and feedback also incorporated.

### **Knowledge on sexual abuse**

Assessing the knowledge of sexual abuse of respondents question were asked, as in chart-1 that can indicate the respondent's level of awareness on the sexual abuse.

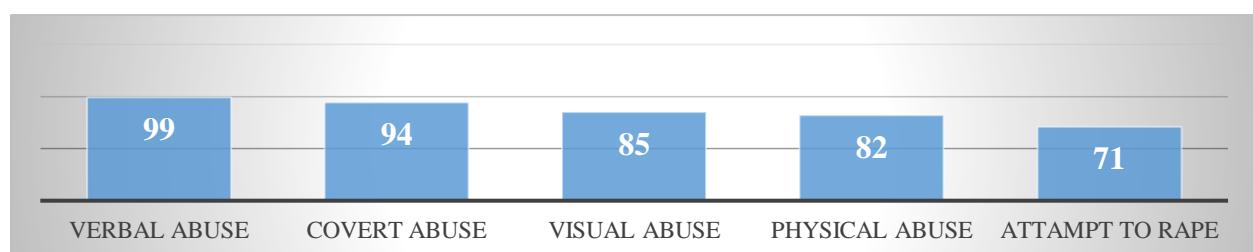
Chart: 1 Do you know what is sexual abuse mean?



*Source: Field Study, 2024.*

If 99% of respondents have knowledge on sexual abuse than what forms sexual abuse they were aware on. The forms of sexual abuse of respondents has presented in chart-2.

Chart 2: Forms of sexual abuse respondent aware (multiple answers).



*Source: Field Study, 2024.*

One respondent may have knowledge in all form of sexual abuse. This result might be effect of education of respondents that 58% of respondents were access to modern education and 42% were literate level.

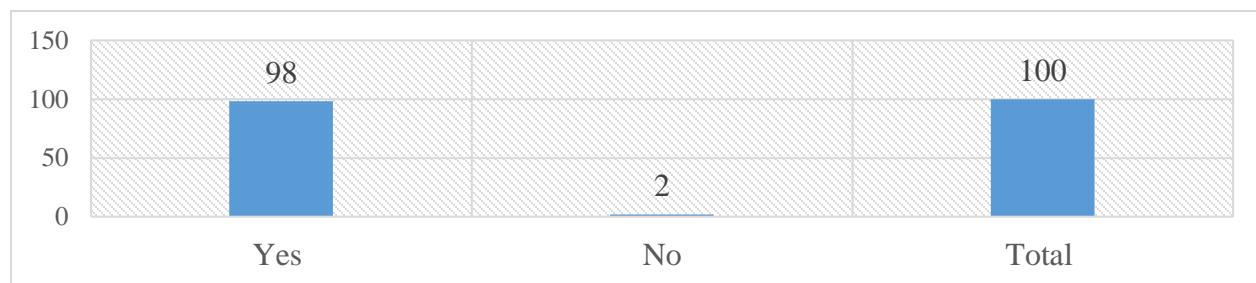
## Experiences

In linking with the knowledge respondents have subsequent question were asked about the experiences they have while running homestay business at rural setting or semi-rural settings.

### Verbal Sexual Abuse

For this research verbal sexual abuse include; sexual jokes, teasing about physical characteristics, graphic sexual descriptions, name calling, comments on physical development, unwanted romantic advances, and stalking with phone calls or other messages, etc.

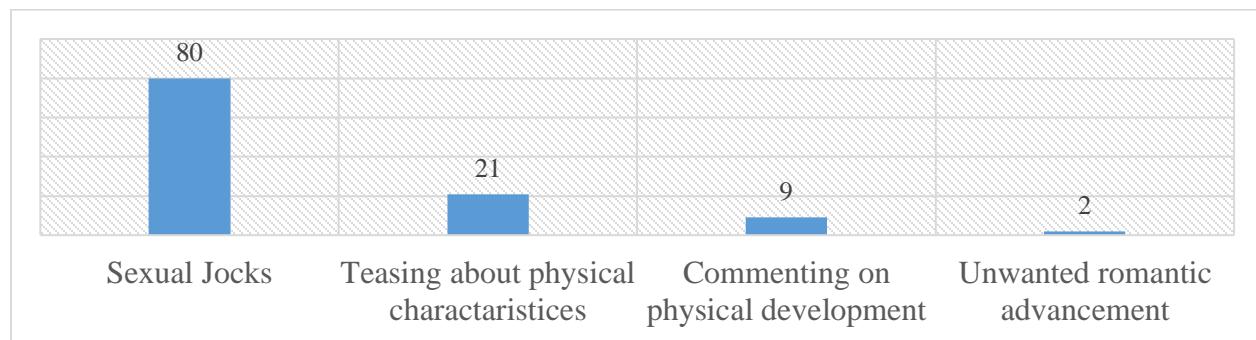
Chart 3: Do respondent experiences verbal sexual abuse from guest?



Source: Field Study, 2024.

If 98% respondents were experienced verbal sexual abuse than what forms of verbal sexual abuse experienced. The forms of verbal sexual abuse experienced has given in chart-4.

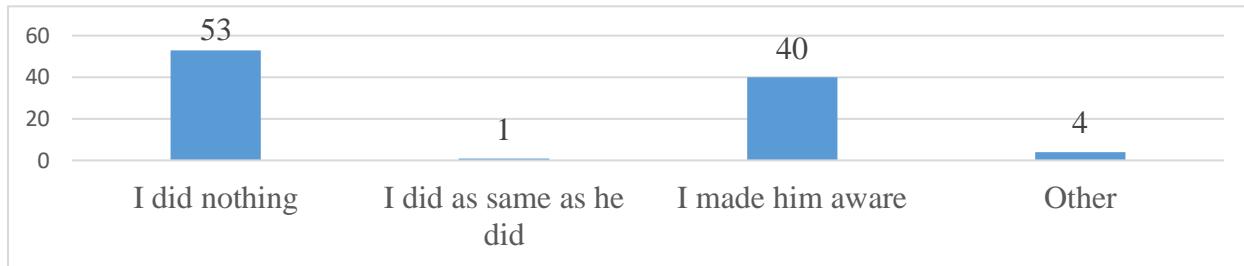
Chart 4: Form of verbal sexual abuse experienced (multiple answers 98)



Source: Field Study, 2024.

98 respondents were experienced verbal sexual abuse from the guest. Linking this fact the follow up question were asked that what reaction did the host women/girls while they faced verbal sexual abuse from the guest.

Chart 5: Response on verbal sexual abuse.

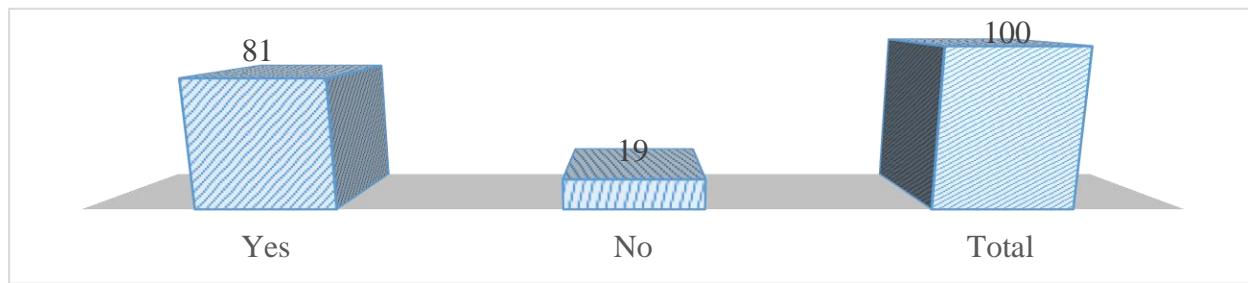


Source: Field Study, 2024.

### **Covert sexual abuse**

Covert sexual abuse can happen without your knowledge that includes being observed, followed, photographed, social media stalking (following), and sexual cyber-harassment. This form of abuse is characterized attempts by the perpetrator to get some form of sexual satisfaction from the victim without their knowledge.

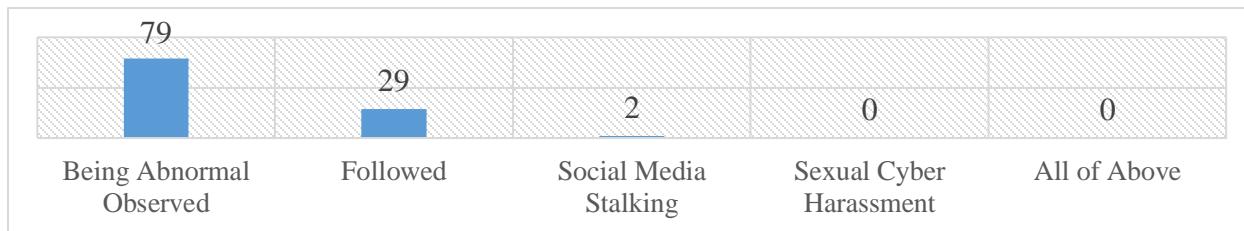
Chart 6: Did respondent experiences of covert sexual abuse from guest?



Source: Field Study, 2024.

Connecting with chart-6 the follow up question were asked to respondents that what forms of covert sexual abuse experienced from the guest.

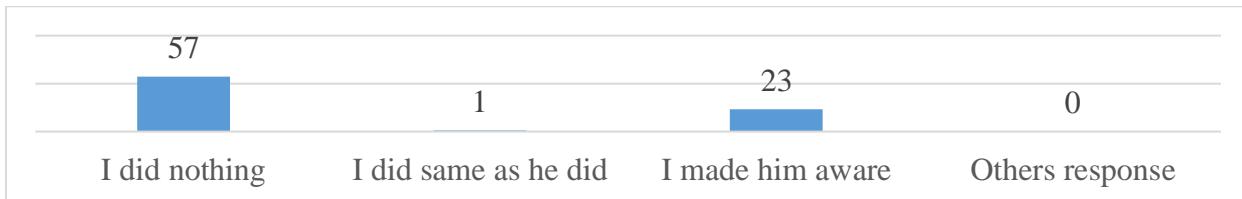
Chart 7. Forms of covert sexual abuse experiences (multiple answers).



Source: Field Study, 2024.

Respondents were asked that what kind of reaction the respondents did while experiencing covert abuse has given in chart-8.

Chart 8 Response on covert sexual abuse.

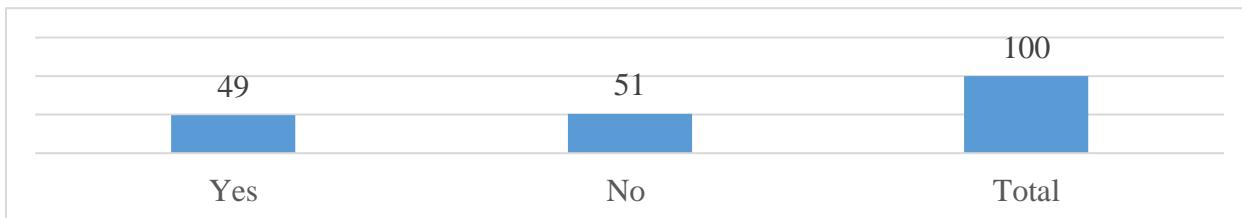


Source: Field Study, 2024.

### **Physical sexual abuse**

Physical sexual abuse includes as touching, fondling, physical restraint, cornering, tickling, kissing, enemas, intercourse, oral sex, licking, brushing up against, urinating on, invasion of privacy, stalking etc. Respondents' experienced physical sexual abuse from the guest has given in chart-9.

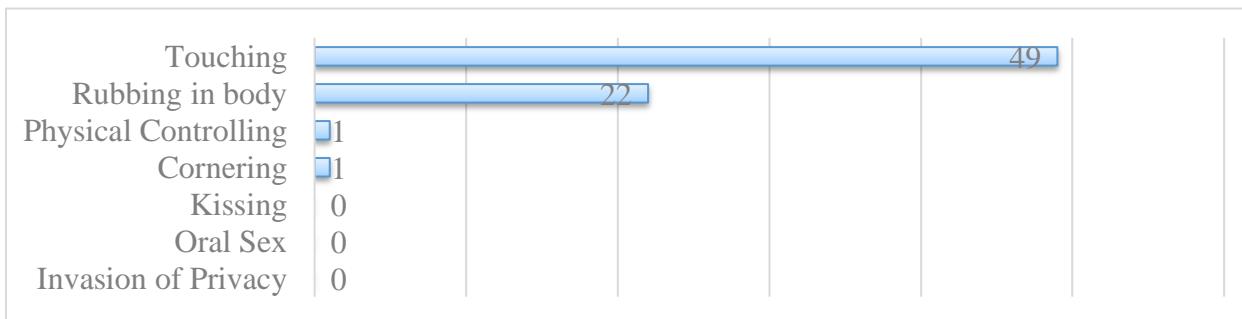
Chart 9: Did respondent experiences of physical sexual abuse?



Source: Field Study, 2024.

If experienced physical abuse from the guest than what forms of physical sexual abuse the respondents experienced was the follow up question of the research. The forms of physical abuse the respondents experienced has given in the chart-10.

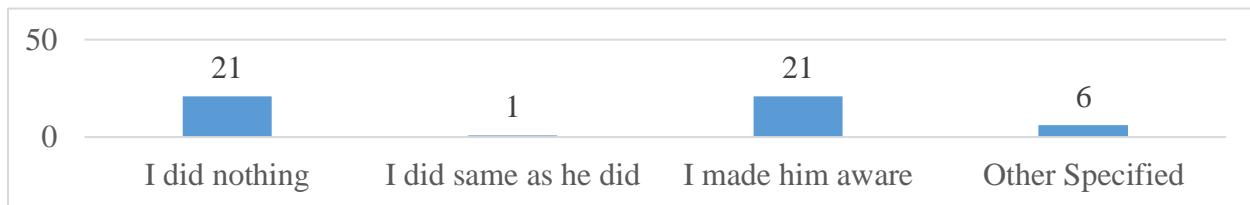
Chart 10: Forms of physical abuse experienced (multiple answers)



Source: Field Study, 2024.

As a respondent faced a physical abuse what reaction she did towards the male was a follow up question. Chart-11 illustrated the reaction respondent did after facing physical abuse.

Chart 11: Response of physical abuse.



Source: Field Study, 2024. (Note: here "others" means as be self-aware).

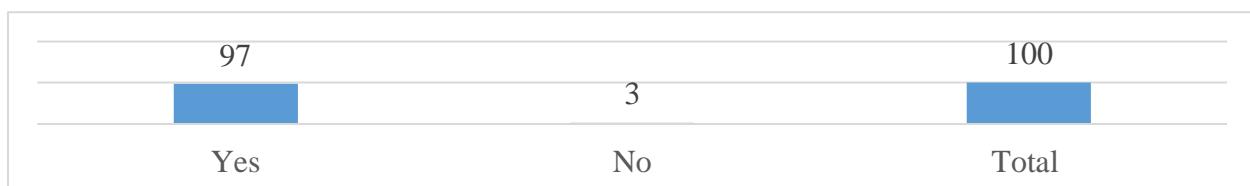
### Cultural program

Indigenous Magar community have different unique dances, like *Maruni*, *Singaru*, *Jhakri/Dhami*, *Kaunra*, *Hurraa*, *Ghanto*, *Sorathi* etc are unique dances performed by community. In such dances both male female equally participate to accomplish. The main features of such traditional dances are communally performed.

At eastern community homestay, usually performed *Hurra* dance in the evening time 6 to 8 pm at community building. If the guests wanted to see the *Dohori* song the mother group performs to it. The married women and girls also can participate in *Dohori* song and group dance. If the guests wanted to participate in both *Hurra* dance and *Dohori* song, they can easily participate it.<sup>3</sup>

At western homestay in *Kaunra* dance very young girls only participated but there were not allowed to participate in this dance to married women. Usually *Kaunra* dance perform at the evening time 8 to 10 pm. As well as they also perform the *Dohori* song with *Jhyamre* dance. Specially, the mother group perform it. The married women and unmarried girls can also participate in *Dohori* song and *Jhyamre* dance.<sup>4</sup> Linking with that question were asked the participation of the respondents in cultural program in given in chart-12.

Chart 12: Respondents participation of cultural program.



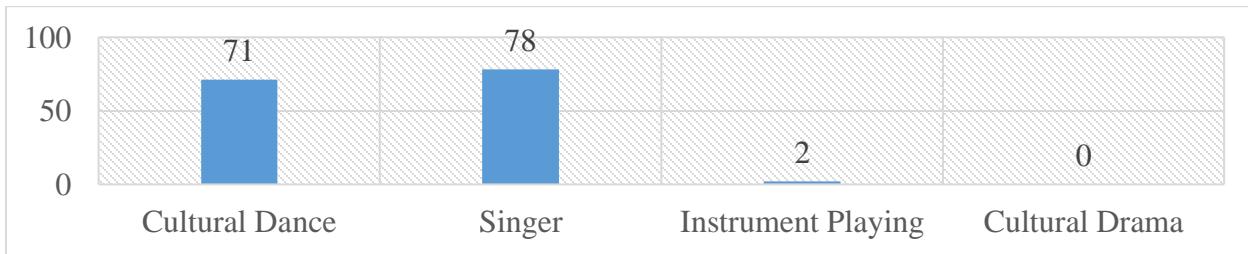
Source: Field Study, 2024.

If respondents participated in the cultural program what was the role they played in the program was a follow up question. In such program certain role was given to participants. The role played by respondents has given in chart-13.

<sup>3</sup> This information is based on the FGD with female at Eastern Homestay dated on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> This information is based on the FGD with female at Western Homestay, dated on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

Chart 13. Role playing in cultural program (multiple answers)



Source: Field Study, 2024.

Cultural program may perform at morning, day, evening and night. However, at rural society's livelihood has dependent on agriculture so that the cultural program generally performs at evening and night time. Like *Rodi* culture, singing and dancing both, traditionally performed at evening time. The time of cultural dance perform has given in chart-14.

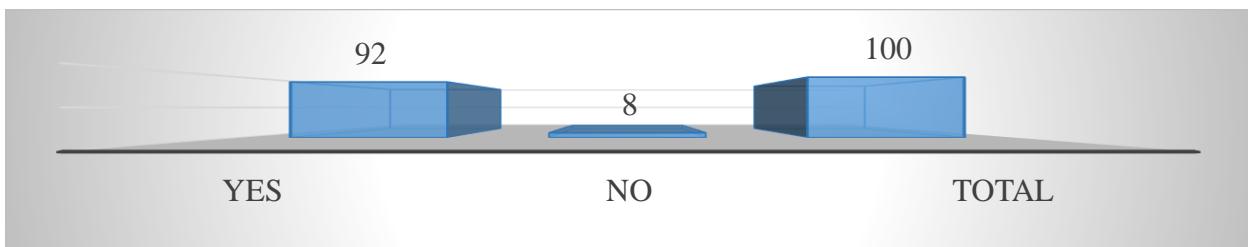
Chart 14: Time of cultural program performance.



Source: Field Study, 2024.

Cultural dance has been performed at evening/night time so, it was asked that whether female participants experienced sexual abuse from guest or not in cultural program. The respondents' experiences has given in chart-15.

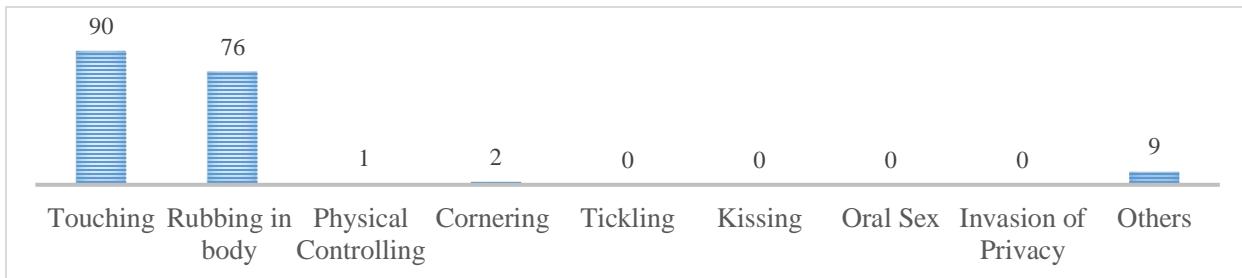
Chart 15: Do respondent experience of sexual abuse on cultural program?



Source: Field Study, 2024.

92 respondents experienced sexual abuse while performing cultural program. It was follow up the types of sexual abuse they experienced in performing cultural program. The forms of abuse has given in chart-16.

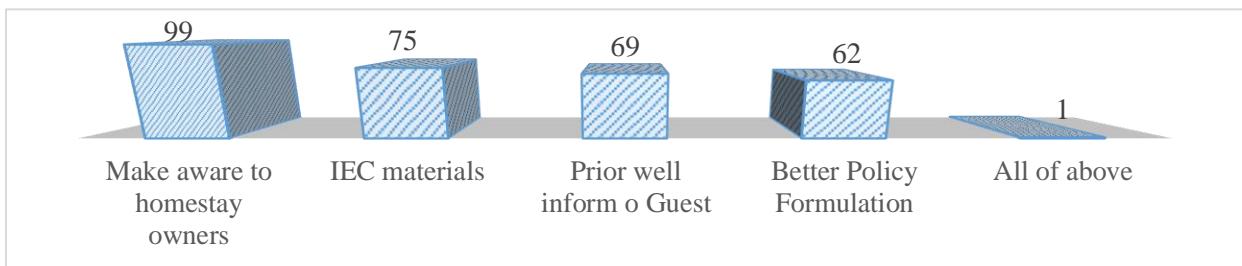
Chart 16: Forms of sexual abuse experienced in cultural program (multiple answers)



Source: Field Study, 2024.

Sexual abuse to women and girls has not confined in a limited spaces but can happen anytime, anywhere and to any women/girls. Though it cannot be completely eliminated from human society but can be minimized by different means. Some of the strategy to minimize categorized by respondent has illustrated, focusing on homestay, in chart-16.

Chart 17: Strategy to minimize sexual abuse prioritized by respondent (multiple answers).



Source: Field Study, 2024.

The chart-17 indicated that awareness to homestay owner was most important strategy to minimize the sexual abuse to Indigenous women and girls in homestay.

## Discussion

It has been argued and accepted that every women experience any form of sexual abuse in her life time in every societies. According to UN (2017) sexual abuse is defined as, "actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions" (p.5). Since this research has focused on the IPs women and girls who have been running homestay business. According to United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issue (2010), "indigenous women face multiple discrimination on the basis of sex, race/ethnicity, language, culture, religion and class. For instance, indigenous women in one country are called "third class citizens" because of their inferior status in relation to men and in relation to non-indigenous people" (P.3). Further it has argued that, "in some cases, they are treated as exotic, decorative, sexual objects and study-objects by media and the communications system (ibid p.3).

Gurung (2022) has presented a report on violence against Indigenous women and girls. This study specially focused on the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women and girls with

disability. According to this report, out of 210 respondent 87.62% of Indigenous women with and without disabilities reported subjected to violence and abuse. National Human Right Commission Report (2022) stated by taking reference of 2018 report as that "that 49 percent, a majority of trafficked women survivors are Indigenous nationalities, followed by Dalit at 15 percent. Madhesis account for 6 percent and other ethnicities constitute the remaining 29 percent. Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, and Madhesis are the most socially, politically, and economically marginalized and excluded communities in Nepal" (p.3).

Looking at the knowledge level highest number variable of this research as 99% respondents expressed having knowledge on sexual abuse (chart-1). Similarly, they were aware on the different form of sexual abuse. This may be the education level of respondents. 98% experienced verbal sexual abuse from the guest except remaining 2%. Among different form of verbal sexual abuse respondents expressed sexual jokes in highest numbers (chart-4). Generally sexual jokes take for granted in fictive kinship or with familiar social relation. In FGD it was expressed by participants that, "sometime, they do the sexual jocks, speak the vulgar word within each other and make a lot noise in home stay area and some of the guests tease to women and girls".<sup>5</sup>

81% experienced the covert sexual abuse (chart-5) and 79 experience of abnormal observed form of covert sexual abuse (chart-6). 49 experienced physical sexual abuse (chart-8). 49 experience unwanted touching (chart-9) in multiple answers. Physical sexual abuse is much risky in comparison to other form of abuse.

Important aspect of research was cultural program in the sense that the communal type of dances of IPs has been "stereotyped" by non-indigenous community. Further United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issue (2010) argued that, "they are treated as exotic, decorative, sexual objects and study-objects by media and the communications system" (p.3). *Rodi* of Magar and Gurung and *Dhannach* of Limbu IPs has been a unique communal cultural program. Stereotyped thinking may result the sexual abuse while performing such cultural program at homestay in the name of guest entertain and satisfaction.

In cultural program for guest entertainment data shows that out of 100, 97 respondents participated in such program. In multiple answers they played dual role as 71 dancing and 78 singing. 100% respondents said that the cultural program performed at evening time. While asking about experience of sexual abuse 92 respondents said "Yes". The form of abuse were unwanted touching 90 and rubbing 76 in multiple answers.

### ***Response on sexual abuse***

Respondents were asked about what they did while they experienced sexual abuse. In verbal sexual abuse 53 respondents "did nothing" and 40 "made them aware" not to repeat again. In covert abuse 57 "did nothing" and 23 "made them aware". In case of physical sexual abuse 21 "did nothing" and 23 "made them aware". The data indicated that majority of the respondents remain silent on

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<sup>5</sup> Information is based on the FGD discussion with female group 5<sup>th</sup> Feb., 2024 at Eastern part homestay.

abuse. It means they tolerate the sexual abuse from the guest. Verbal abuse sometime may be crude humor the respondents might have taken as humor.

Surprisingly social media harassment experience was almost nil in the time of wider access of digital means. It can be said that social media sexual harassment occur while male and female become closer in relation which would not have chances in homestay. In FGD it was expressed by participants that:

*Some guests being abnormal observe and also follow. Often the guests request to take photo with IPs women and girls but guest didn't these all thing without their consent. Some guests asked about their social network id but they did not give their id to the guest. The IPs women and girls don't have any type of experience on sexual cyber harassment yet.<sup>6</sup>*

Knowingly or unknowingly any sorts of unusual activities of guest is not tolerable from the host. Sexual abuse incident has related to the so-called social prestige for female in society. Female cannot response immediately because of personal and 'social prestige' set by patriarchal social structure. However, with increasing empowerment by different means (education, economic and social media) female have been responding the harmful activities targeted to them.

In a FGD with male at eastern part participants said that, "after drinking alcohol guest speak vulgar words without considering that they are in a family home". One of the participants in FGD expressed that a guest asked, "Can we get girls?" to his *Buhari* (son's wife). They expressed that sexual abuse might have happened in those home where most of the guest visited. Among the committee members they have been shared any difficulties faced in any homestay. But since a year sharing of difficulties has stopped.<sup>7</sup> In Western part homestay in an informal discussion with male, it was expressed that, "till now sexual abuse incidents did not happened directly to female. However, it may be unnoticed".<sup>8</sup> These are the male perspectives.

In FGD with female at eastern homestay also expressed similar view as sometime, the guest said that, "**can you find a girl to have fun with us**". Almost 3 years ago three male come with a girls and they fought within each other about that girl.<sup>9</sup> This information indicated that some of the, not all, guests' intention seems to have sexual entertainment at homestay. Such activities usually does at hotel business at urban area. It can argue that guest might not have familiar with the homestay culture.

Guest from diverse communities visited at homestay and all of them do not have similar view towards Indigenous women and girls because of innocent/shyness nature somebody may portray as sexually stereotype from non-indigenous community. Due to the marginality and powerlessness at state mainstream IPs women are even voiceless on their various forms of exploitation. They are

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<sup>6</sup> Information is based on the FGD discussion with female group 5<sup>th</sup> Feb., 2024 at Eastern part homestay.

<sup>7</sup> Information based on the FGD with male members at Eastern part homestay dated on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Information based on the interview with male at Eastern part homestay dated on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> This information is based on the FGD with female at Eastern Homestay, dated on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

not even much familiar on legal provision of state. However, women and girls of all community have been suppressed by patriarchy.

Historically Indigenous women and girls are raped, tortured, trafficked and slaved by those who encroached their territory and land. They not only control the land but controlled the Indigenous people too. The most vulnerable victim of the colonizer has been female of Indigenous people.

## **Conclusion**

Homestay entrepreneurs has been one of the mode of rural tourism in Nepal. Professionalism in this business has been gradually increasing or socializing towards. "Homestay helped to exposure of rural women and helped to change sanitation hygiene behavior of community. Local agricultural production and consumption also increased".<sup>10</sup> Allocation of income resources has transformed from big hotel at urban area to rural area after starting homestay tourism. It also help to revitalize and preserve community's traditional culture practices.

In spite of good positive impact of such business concern over the sexual abuse to women and girls has increased. Maintaining host guest relation is a complex issues at homestay. Because of emerging entrepreneurship host and guest are little familiar as host treat like a hotel in urban area. For example guest request to manage girls for hidden entertainment which is not culture of homestay. However such activities are not allowed legally and against of social morality.

Due to the modern education and to some extent digital means IPs women and girls seems aware on sexual abuse while running homestay. However, they have been experiencing the different forms of sexual abuse but not serious sexual violence like rape and torture at homestay by guest. There is no limited boundary of sexual abuse to women that can happen anywhere by anybody.

But concern of this research was in emerging homestay business IPs women and girls should have dignify business. They can forward business without any external hindrances because women and girl at home plays significant role and interact with host. In western part homestay it was found that in absent of male member homestay business was closed.<sup>11</sup>

Comparing to verbal and covert sexual abuse respondents experienced less number of physical sexual abuse. However, physical abuse is a serious one for further risk of rape and sexual violence. In cultural program guest may manipulate the host in the name of entertainment. Unwanted touching and rubbing hands in cultural program was experienced by respondents because cultural program managed at evening time.

An important issues was tolerance of sexual abuse by respondents. Such deep rooted culture of tolerance has been an outcome of a long historical root of patriarchy. However, gradually such culture is changing along with empowerment of women and girls. Due to multilayer of discrimination IPs women and girls are less empower in comparison to no-indigenous people.

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<sup>10</sup> Information based on the FGD with male members at Eastern part homestay dated on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Information based on the interview with male at Eastern part homestay dated on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

Sexual stereotyping narrative and mind set, generally from non-indigenous people, makes further vulnerable for sexual abuse, violence to IPs women and girls.

## **Recommendation**

- Respondents were aware on sexual abuse and also experienced on diverse form of abuse in homestay from the guest. But majority of the respondents were found tolerating sexual abuse and this culture of silence can be risk of further serious sexual violence. Therefore, respecting the voice of Indigenous women awareness program on response to sexual abuse is an essential recommendation for dignify business.
- Indigenous communities have own traditional dances, songs and dramas developed by their ancestors and transmitted from generation to generation to entertain for their own. Sometime non-Indigenous community assumes and narrates as sexually stereotype way in performing for guest entertainment. Such view/mindset and behavior has to change through IEC materials at homestay area.
- In a homestay area, while in field observation, it was not posted homestay rule or code of conduct to follow by the guest. It should make compulsory for each homestay. Because culture of homestay is different from that of hotel business.
- The code of conducted posted on each homestay also not found to make aware guest not to perform sexual abuse behavior. It mandatorily need to add such code of conduct.
- Stakeholders suggested to manage strong grievances hearing mechanism at the community level to address sexual abuse from guest.
- Government has been providing training to community homestay runner or those who were interested. While providing training to homestay runner a session is needed to include sexual abuse and its strategy to minimize would be beneficial.
- Homestay Operation Guideline (2067 BS) made provision of code of conduct in annex no 4 in which it is written in no. 4 that, "beware of doing any behavior (such as sexual activities), which is impermissible to the local socio-cultural values." this code of conduct is even written in English language and which is very limited in term of awareness raising.

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