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An Analysis of the Impact of Literacy on Women's Empowerment in Nepal

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS i

1. BACKGROUND 1

1.1. INTRODUCTION 1
1.2. LITERACY PROGRAMS 1
1.3. LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT 2
1.4. WHAT IS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT? 3
1.5. USAID/NEPAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE (SO3)–EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN 5
1.6. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY 6
1.7. QUESTIONS ADDRESSED 6

2. METHODOLOGY 6

2.1. SAMPLE SELECTION 8
2.1.1. Experimental Group Sample 8
2.1.2. Control Group Sample 9
2.2. DATA COLLECTION 10
2.3. CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS 10
2.3.1. Measurement Issues 10
2.3.2. Implementation of Sampling Plan 12
2.3.3. Selection Effect 12
2.3.4. Statistical Significance and Sample Size 12

3. FINDINGS 13

3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE 13
3.1.1. Distribution by District and Village Development Council (VDC) 13
3.1.2. Village Profiles by District 15
3.1.3. Literacy Course Providers and Sponsors 18
3.1.4. Caste/Ethnic Group 19
3.1.5. Religion 21
3.1.6. Family Occupation 22
3.1.7. Education/Training 22
3.2. USE AND RETENTION OF LITERACY SKILLS 27
3.2.1. Use of Reading Skills 27
3.2.2. Use of Writing Skills 30
3.2.3. Use of Math Skills 31
3.2.4. Retention of Literacy Skills 32
3.3 EMPOWERMENT INDICATORS 37
3.3.1. Collective Action for Social Change 37
3.3.2. Influence Over Household Decision-Making 58
3.3.3. Other Household/Family Decisions 75
3.3.4. Reproductive Decisions 83
3.3.5. Self Confidence and Self Respect 86
3.3.6. Identification of Role Models 87
3.1.7. Mobility 88
3.3.8. Children's Education 89
3.3.9. Vision of a Future 90
3.3.10. General Changes Since Taking Literacy Course/Last Year 92
3.4. SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS 96
3.4.1. Parsa District 96
3.4.2. Bardiya District 96
3.4.3. Makwanapur District 97
3.4.4. Tanahu District 98

4. COST EFFECTIVENESS FOR THE BASIC AND POST LITERACY COURSES **99**

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS **99**

5.1. USE AND RETENTION OF LITERACY SKILLS 100
5.1.1 Availability/Use of Reading Materials *100*
5.1.2 Retention of Literacy Skills *100*
5.2. INDICATORS OF EMPOWERMENT 100
5.2.1 Participation in Discussions/Participation in Protest or Campaign *102*
5.2.2. Political Awareness/Participation *102*
5.2.3. Participation in Non-Family Groups and Organizations *103*
5.2.4. Control Over Income/Ability to Earn a Living *103*
5.2.5. Household Decision-Making/Reproductive Decisions *104*
5.2.6. Self Confidence/Respect by Family and Community/Role Models *105*
5.2.7. Mobility *105*
5.2.8. Actions to Improve Children's Future *105*
5.2.9. Vision of a Future *106*
5.2.10. Changes Resulting from Literacy *106*
5.3. COST EFFECTIVENESS FOR THE BASIC AND POST-LITERACY COURSES 107
5.4. SUMMATION 107
5.5. A CAUTIONARY NOTE 108

6. REFERENCES **114**

D

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E

This study examined the impact on women's empowerment of two types of non-formal (literacy) education (NFE) programs – basic literacy (six month courses) and post-literacy (six months plus three months courses). Responses to a variety of indicators were compared to those of women in control villages who had not attended a NFE literacy course or primary school and were not literate. Additionally, it examined the comparative cost-efficiency of six-month basic literacy courses compared to six plus three-month post-literacy courses. Indicators of respondents' retention and use of literacy skills were examined as well as indicators of empowerment. The survey was conducted approximately one year after completion of the literacy courses, in order to ascertain the degree to which these courses had lasting effects on women who completed the courses.

Use and Retention of Literacy Skills

Availability/Use of Reading Materials

Availability of reading materials is often important to the continued development of literacy skills. In this study, about 2/3 of the literacy course participants indicated that books and newspapers were available in their villages. A significantly higher proportion of the treatment group participants said that books and newspapers were available in their villages than the proportion of respondents in the control villages. Most participants who completed the literacy courses (referred to here as 'completers') also indicated that they continued to read something (books, course materials, letters, correspondence and sign boards) after taking their courses. Additionally, most continued to write in the year following the course. Although for many, "writing something" consisted of little more than signing their names, a substantial number of women also continued to write exercises from their literacy course materials, helped their children with their homework and wrote their own and others' correspondence. The frequency with which they practiced their reading and writing ranged from every few months to several times a week. A few women continued to practice their newly acquired skills on a daily basis. No significant differences were observed between the basic and post-literacy course completers related to reading material use and availability.

The majority of literacy course participants also felt they could calculate math faster after having completed the literacy courses. Many indicated that they were able to use their math skills in the market, and that they felt less susceptible to being cheated. A higher proportion of post-literacy course completers (39%) gained enough confidence to teach others to read, write or do math than basic literacy course completers (30%).

Indicators	**Table No.**	**Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group** *p=.05	**Level % of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course** *p=.05	**% Positive Response or Mean Value**		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Available newspapers	A27	*.000	.163	83%	78%	64%
How often read before	A29		.681	10%	13%	
How often read after	A30	*.000	.873	90%	93%	5%
How often write before	A33		.513	10%	13%	
How often write after	A35	*.000	.789	95%	94%	4%

F

Retention of Literacy Skills

No significant differences were found between basic literacy and post-literacy course completers on any of the four components (reading, reading comprehension, writing and math) of the literacy test given at the conclusion of the interviews. However, because of the relatively short duration of the test, less than optimal testing conditions and the inexperience of interviewers in administering literacy tests, it would be risky to draw definitive conclusions about level of the course participants' literacy skills without further testing.

Indicators of Empowerment

Evidence from this study seems to demonstrate that despite initial differences on some of the control variables, significant changes in attitudes and behavior did occur after completion of the literacy course. Even though the treatment and control group may have had different starting points on some indicators, changes appear to be over and above what would have occurred if they had not taken the literacy courses. Since completing the literacy courses, respondents felt that they had made substantial positive changes (that were not similarly indicated by the control group) in the following areas:

- increased respect for opinions/family;
- increased respect for opinions/community;
- increased confidence in stating opinions to family members;
- increased confidence in stating opinions to community.

Indicators for which significant differences between the treatment and control group were evident both *before* and *after* the courses were:

- control over income;
- household decision making;
- discussions about things heard on radio;
- discussions about preventing men from drinking/beating wives;
- participation in activities to prevent men from drinking/beating wives;
- travel outside the village;
- children enrolled in school.

Indicators for which significant between the treatment and control group differences existed *after* but not *before* the courses were:

- participation in groups/organizations;
- discussion of things read;
- discussion of politics.

Among the indicators showing significant differences between the treatment and control group for which no *before* questions were asked were:

- know name of MP;
- know name of Prime Minister;
- think it possible for a woman to be on the VDC;
- think it possible for self to be on VDC.

Additionally, on some measures, significant differences existed between the *basic* and *post*-literacy course completers. These included:

- confidence in stating opinions to family and community members;
- discussion of politics (after but not before);
- participation in activities to prevent men from drinking (before and after);
- think it possible for self to be on VDC;
- confidence in taking bus increased over period;
- willingness to teach others how to read and write;
- participation in credit/loans (after but not before).

These indicators of empowerment are discussed individually below.

USAID's and the Government of Nepal's strategic objectives are inter-related in many ways. The outcome of a literacy program, for example, may have strong implications for the development of programs in areas such as agriculture and health. Programs that take advantage of already existing groups known to be highly motivated and interested in development are more likely to succeed than those in other areas. **Hence, initiating programs in agriculture/natural resource management or health/family planning in villages where literacy groups already exist would seem to be a cost-effective investment**.

Economic Security/Ability to Earn a Living

Some women join literacy programs primarily because the courses are seen as leading to greater skills which, in turn, result in greater income and economic benefits. However, this may be an unrealistic expectation as opportunities for new literates in rural areas are scarce. Frustration with the lack of opportunities was reflected frequently in comments made by community leaders and focus group participants. Some of the community leaders and former literacy course participants believed that more literacy classes were necessary before tangible economic benefits would result. Others stressed the need for **more extensive training in income-generating activities** and for greater opportunities for women to engage in money-making endeavors.

Literacy course completers in some villages cited examples of income generating activities that they had initiated as a direct result of taking the literacy courses, including growing and selling fruits and vegetables and raising and selling chickens and goats. While few had opened shops or started new businesses in the year since completing their courses, many now believed that becoming literate had placed the dream of doing so within the realm of possibility. Others who completed the courses had discovered **the benefits of participating in cooperative credit programs and in maintaining cash savings**. Only a few women (mainly post-literacy course completers) had actually taken out loans in the last year. Nevertheless, during focus group interviews, some participants articulated an increased awareness of the advantages of borrowing money for starting a businesses and a better understanding of what was required to take out a loan.

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Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Cash savings before	A54	*.022	.669	31%	29%	16%
Case savings after	A56	*.001	.145	39%	46%	17%
Calculate faster after	A38		.301	82%	85%	
Willing to teach others	A42		*.053	31%	39%	2%
How often felt cheated before	A43		.116	26%	34%	
How often felt cheated after	A44		.865	9%	8%	

Control Over Income

Married women in both the treatment and the control group reported greater control over household expenses than single women (especially those who were never married and residing with their parents). Although, a higher proportion of control group respondents stated that they had sole or joint control over household income, this is probably because almost all women in the control group were married, compared to about half in the treatment group. When marital status was controlled for, a greater proportion of those who had completed the literacy courses indicated sole or joint responsibility for keeping household expenses.

Household Decision-Making/Reproductive Decisions

Measurements of respondents' participation in household decisions included those related to: daily household expenses, social/religious rituals, clothing purchases, livestock purchases, obtaining medical treatment, agricultural production, and sending daughters to school.

On most household decision-making items, the largest proportion of respondents reported that their husbands made the decisions. Nonetheless, on all items measuring participation in household decision-making, significant differences existed between the treatment and control group respondents, both *before* and *after* the literacy courses/last year. When marital status was controlled for, these differences were still significant for married respondents. On all items, married respondents in the control group had less control over participation in decisions than in the treatment group. No significant differences were observed between the basic and post-literacy course completers on any of the decision-making items.

Additionally, respondents were asked questions concerning their control over reproductive decisions, including family size, child spacing, and use of birth control. **Significant differences were found between the treatment and control group regarding their participation in decisions about family size and child spacing but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers. Approximately 47% of the married women in the treatment group participated in such decisions either solely or jointly with their husbands, compared with 35% in the control group.**

Interestingly, when married respondents were asked how often they were consulted in decisions about child bearing *now* compared to the period *before* taking the literacy course or a year ago, a larger proportion of control group respondents thought that they had more say *now* than *before*. This could be a reflection of the fact control group respondents had a much lower level of involvement in decision-making to begin with than the treatment group.

Slight increases were observed in the proportion of respondents in the treatment group who used birth control *before* the literacy course compared to those who used it *after* that period. While many women in the control group reported an increase in their involvement in child birth decisions, their use of birth control decreased during the last year, rather than increased. Thus one might surmise that increased decision-making among women who are not literate may not result in decisions to have fewer children or more carefully planned families. However, there may be another explanation: perhaps this response is the result of the discussions held during the literacy classes, where women developed different understanding of phrases such as "participation in child birth decisions" than those who have had no literacy training. However, from the survey results it is not possible to determine whether such differential interpretations existed.

Indicators	**Table No.**	**Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group** *p=.05	**Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course** *p=.05	**% Positive Response or Mean Value**		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Family size *(married)*	A80	*.026	168	42%	52%	35%
Child *spacing (married)*	A81	*.040	.142	43%	52%	36%
Involvement in childbirth decisions (changed after) *(married)*	A82	*.001	.438	35%	34%	58%
Use birth control before *(married)*	A83	.176	.187	14%	19%	11%
Use birth control after *(married)*	A84	.137	.594	16%	20%	8%

Self Confidence/Respect by Family and Community/Role Models

Proponents often claim that as women become literate they begin to develop a more positive image of themselves and their role in society, as well as greater self confidence in dealing with problems facing their families and communities. The findings of the survey support this contention. **Statistically significant differences were found between the treatment and control group on all questions related to the extent to which respondents felt more confident in stating their opinions to their family and community and the degree to which family and community members now respect their opinions.** Of even greater importance to USAID in making programming decisions about the use of six-month versus nine-month literacy courses, **a significantly higher proportion of women who completed the post-literacy course than those completing just the basic literacy course felt they now had more confidence in expressing their opinions to their families and communities. For example, women's confidence in expressing opinions to their communities rose from 30% in women completing the six month basic literacy course, to 44% for the nine month course completers. Confidence among women in the control group was measured at only 4%.**

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Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Self-confidence/self respect:						
Respect for opinions/family	A85	*.000	.125	38%	42%	2%
Respect for opinions/community	A87	*.000	.258	29%	33%	2%
Confidence in stating opinions to family members	A89	*.000	*.015	38%	50%	4%
Confidence in stating opinions to community	A90	*.001	*.005	30%	44%	4%

Ability to Act Effectively in the Public Sphere/Participation in Protest or Campaign

A significantly higher proportion of the treatment group than the control group respondents reported participating in discussions about the following topics; things heard on the radio (*before* and *after* the courses); things read (*after*); politics, (*before* and *after*) and preventing men from beating their wives (*before* and *after*). Additionally, a significantly higher proportion of women completing the post-literacy courses participated in discussions about politics, though the percentage of women holding such discussions was low for both the basic and post-literacy course completers (13% compared with 23%), respectively. None of the control group respondents reported participation in discussions about politics.

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Identification of role models	A91	*.001	.108	39%	47%	24%
Discussions (cont'd)						
Preventing men from beating wives before *(married)*	A101	*.041	.411	41%	32%	17%
Preventing men from beating wives after *(married)*	A102	*.000	.977	53%	54%	18%

Political Awareness/Participation

Two items were used to measure political awareness and participation: participation in activities to prevent men from drinking and activities to prevent men from beating their wives. Although fewer

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(married)[1] women were willing to take part in activities to prevent men from drinking or beating their wives than to discuss such issues, a significantly higher proportion of treatment group respondents reported participation in such activities. Approximately 8% of treatment group completers compared to 6% of the control group became involved in anti-alcohol campaigns before the literacy courses/last year. After the literacy courses/last year, the figures had increased to 17% of the of treatment group, while they declined to 5% for the control group.

Similarly, a significantly higher proportion of literacy course completers were engaged in activities to prevent men from beating their wives than control group respondents (8% compared to 5% before the literacy courses/last year and 10% compared to 5% afterward).

Indicators	**Table No.**	**Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group** *p=.05	**Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course** *p=.05	**% Positive Response or Mean Value**		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Participation in public protest or political campaign:						
Participation in activities to prevent men from drinking before *(married)*	A103	*.050	*.022	9%	6%	6%
Participation in activities to prevent men from drinking after *(married)*	A104	*.003	*.031	14%	18%	5%
Participation in activities to prevent men/beating wives before *(married)*	A105	.090	*.053	10%	6%	5%
Participation in activities to prevent men/beating wives after *(married)*	A106	*.001	.068	12%	8%	5%

Knowledge of Name of Member of Parliament

Significant differences were observed between the number of treatment and control group respondents who could correctly provide the name of the Member of Parliament in their area. About 11% of the basic literacy course completers, 12% of the post-literacy course completers, and 3% of the control group could answer the question correctly.

Knowledge of Name of Prime Minister

About 19% of the basic literacy course completers, 15% of the post-literacy course completers, and 4% of the control group could correctly provide the Prime Minister's name.

[1] For questions concerning husbands' drinking and wife-beating, only married respondents were included in the analysis.

Belief That a Woman from the Village Can Be on the Village Development Council (VDC)

Approximately 2% of the participants from the basic literacy course, 10% from the post-literacy course and 3% from the control group indicated that a woman from their village had served on the Village Development Council (VDC). When the treatment group respondents were asked whether they thought it possible for a woman from their village to be on the VDC, **approximately 79% of the basic literacy course completers and 74% of the post-literacy course completers believed a woman could be elected to the VDC. These figures were significantly higher than the control group responses (56%).** Differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers were not significant. The most common reasons listed among those who did not think it was possible were: "women can't read or understand;" "they are afraid or too shy to speak;" and "they have too much domestic work."

When asked whether it was possible for a woman from the village to be on the VDC, some village leaders provided examples of women who had served. However, while many village leaders said it was possible, they then proceeded to provide reasons why they could not do so, including:

- The women don't have courage.
- They are not very active.
- Their work load does not allow them to enter politics.
- They are not well educated.

Others expressed the opinion that women could be on the VDC if they learned to read and write; if they obtained a better education; if men taught them about politics; or if they had the support from their husbands. One leader believed that if women could become educated, they could run the country. Others, however, thought it was not possible for women to be on the VDC because they were too shy and inexperienced.

Been Elected to VDC

Only three women in the study had been elected to the VDC, all of whom were post-literacy course completers. One had been elected prior to taking the literacy course and two after the course/last year.

Belief That Respondent Can Be on the Village Development Council (VDC) Herself

When asked whether they had thought it possible for themselves to be on the VDC *prior* to taking the literacy course/last year, only 2% of the basic literacy course completers and 3% of the post-literacy course completers had thought it possible (see Table). By comparison, ***after* taking the literacy courses 23% of the basic literacy course completers and 33% of the post-literacy course completers thought it possible to serve on the VDC themselves, compared to 3% of the control group.** This represents a significant difference between the treatment and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy course completers.

Served on a Committee Organized by the VDC

Only (5%) of the basic literacy course completers, six (3%) of the post-literacy course completers and one (1%) of the control group respondents had served on a committee organized by the VDC.

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Political awareness/participation:						
Know name of MP	A107	*.026	.642	11%	12%	3%
Know name of prime minister	A108	*.001	.317	19%	15%	4%
Women from village on VDC	A109	*.000	*.000	2%	10%	3%
Think it possible for woman to be on VDC before	A110	-	.475	14%	12%	-
Think it possible for woman to be on VDC now	A111	*.000	.321	79%	74%	56%
Been elected to VDC	A113	-	-	0%	3%	0
Think it possible for self to be on VDC before	·A115	-	-	3%	2%	-
Think it possible for self to be on VDC now	A116	*.000	*.045	23%	33%	3%
Served on committee organized by VDC	A117	.240	.484	5%	3%	1%

Participation in Non-Family Groups and Organizations

As women gather together for their literacy classes, they discuss the ideas contained in the literacy materials. These concepts begin to take hold in the participants' minds, and ownership becomes associated with the ideas they have been exposed to. Furthermore, many development experts feel that groups are a necessary pre-requisite for community development efforts. This study found that women's participation in formal groups and organizations, outside the literacy classes, is still relatively small. On the other hand, some increases in group membership after completing the literacy courses were in evidence. **Participation in groups was significantly higher among women who had completed the literacy courses, and especially among those who had completed the post-literacy courses. This suggests that the additional three months spent together with their fellow learners strengthened the bonds between group members and positively reinforced the notion of collective action. This, in turn, may have substantial benefits for long term development.**

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Participation in non-family groups/organizational meetings						
Participate in groups/ organizations before	A120	.339	.148	6%	3%	4%
Participate in groups/ organizations after	A122	*.000	.148	9%	20%	6%

Mobility

When asked about their travel outside the village, women in the treatment reported more frequent travel than women in the control group, both *before* and *after* completing the literacy courses/last year.

Significant differences occurred between the proportion of women in the basic literacy group (43%), post-literacy group (54%) and the control group (8%) who said they were more confident about taking the bus *after* taking the literacy courses/last year than *before*.

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Mobility:						
Travel outside village before	A124	*.009	.493	89%	87%	76%
Travel outside village after	A125	*.000	.564	91%	92%	76%
Take bus	A127	.860	.770	72%	74%	72%
Confidence in taking bus (increased over period)	A128	*.000	.076	43%	54%	8%

Actions to Improve Children's Future

Over the past few years, a considerable body of research has focused on the relationship between a mother's education and that of her children. **Several studies indicate that literate mothers may be more likely to send their children to school. Other studies suggest a relationship between a mother's literacy and children's performance in school.** Comings[2] hypothesizes that the positive effect of mothers' literacy on children's schooling in Nepal may arise, in part, from the process of "de-mystifying" education as mothers become literate. Additionally, as demonstrated earlier in the findings of this study, many of the literacy course completers also include their children's textbooks as their own reading materials sources. These behaviors send a message to children that their parents value their performance in school.

Comparison between the treatment and control group on involvement in their children's education, as well as in the proportion of women whose children were enrolled in school revealed significant differences. *After* the courses/last year, 75%, 71% and 48% of the basic, post and control groups, respectively, sometimes or often talked to their children about how well they were doing in school. This represented an overall increase of 24% in treatment group mothers talking to their children about progress.

The proportion of treatment group mothers who checked to make sure their children attended school increased by about 12% after completing the courses. ***After* the literacy courses/last year, approximately 72% of the basic literacy course completers, 65% of the post-literacy course**

[2] Personal correspondence cited in Cristine Smith's undated report, *The Impact of Women's Non-formal Literacy Acquisition on Children's Health and Schooling*. Boston: World Education.

completers and 47% of the control group respondents sometimes or often checked on their children's attendance.

***After* taking the literacy courses/last year, approximately 87% of the mothers among the basic literacy course completers and 91% completing the post-literacy course had children in school, compared with 67% of the control group.**

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Actions to improve children's future:						
Children in school before *(married with children)*	A129	.076	.502	77%	81%	65%
Children in school after	A130	*.000	.511	87%	91%	67%
Talk to children about their progress in school before *(married with children)*	A131	.241	.584	65%	67%	49%
Talk to children about their progress in school after *(married with children)*	A132	*.010	.599	75%	71%	48%
Check to be sure children attend school before *(married with children)*	A133	.203	.770	60%	54%	46%
Check to be sure children attend school after *(married with children)*	A134	*.000	.343	72%	65%	47%

Vision of a Future

In response to questions about what they would like to do in the future, many of the literacy course completers stressed activities related to furthering their own or their children's education. While few control group respondents envisioned getting more education for themselves, many hoped that their children would. Additionally, many treatment group respondents wanted to receive training in knitting and sewing, although these were not frequently stated felt needs of women in the control group. A substantial number of both treatment and control group respondents had no goal other than farming.

About 48% of the basic literacy course completers, 37% of post-literacy course completers[3], and 44% of the control group respondents who stated a goal or future need were doing something deemed appropriate to achieving it. Additionally, a few respondents (about 11%) were able to identify the steps that would need to be taken to make it happen, even though they had not initiated any action to accomplish it.

[3] The figure for the post-literacy course mothers is lower than either the basic literacy group or the control, perhaps because the goals of the post-literacy group became more concrete (See Section 3..3.15).

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Treatment & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Vision of a future: Taking action to achieve future goals	A136	-	-	48%	37%	44%

Changes Resulting from Literacy

Women's participation in decision-making is still relatively limited. Nevertheless, women are the primary caretakers of the family. Women bear responsibility for obtaining water, preparing food, maintaining the household and attending to their own and their children's health. Nepal has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world, with most deaths resulting from diseases caused by contaminated food and water. Women make decisions each day about nutritional content and methods of preparing food for their families, which can lead to substantial improvements in their family's well being. The participants of the literacy courses were asked (on the survey and in the focus groups) to identify changes that had taken place in their lives as a result of completing the literacy courses. In addition, to the respondents identifying the importance of knowing how to read and write, they also cited newly acquired knowledge related to health, nutrition and sanitation.

Comparison of Cost Effectiveness for the Basic and Post-Literacy Courses

It costs about $240 for 20 women to complete the basic six-month literacy course compared to a cost of about $360 for the nine-month post-literacy course. This does not include the cost of developing curriculum materials and paying literacy facilitators. Different costs and benefits are associated with each of the two approaches. While this study found few significant differences between the basic and the post-literacy course completers, determining which program is the most cost-effective is not clear-cut. Post-literacy course completers appear to have greater confidence in expressing their views to their family and community, are more willing to discuss politics and are more likely to teach others how to read, write and do math. Additionally, they were more inclined to initiate actions, such as participating in credit or loan programs, or anti-alcohol campaigns. A higher proportion of post-literacy completers also thought it possible for themselves to be on Village Development Council, and a greater percentage had children in school.

If the goal is to provide literacy to the largest number of women at the least cost, then the basic literacy course may be considered more cost effective. However, if the primary interest is in building leadership skills as well as literacy skills, then substantial benefits can result from providing literacy training for an additional three months. Participation in the post-literacy course reinforces learning and provides a forum for generating and consolidating ideas exchanged in the classroom. USAID/Nepal is pursuing a strategy that integrates its strategic objectives in agriculture, health and women's empowerment. The application of USAID and Government of Nepal resources could be maximized by carrying out interventions in areas where women's literacy programs have already been implemented. This is particularly true of post-literacy courses, since women who complete the classes are likely to be more highly motivated, have had a longer period of interaction and greater opportunity to strengthen relationships and build leadership skills.

Summation

Evidence in this study revealed that a year after completing the literacy courses, the majority of women had retained skills in reading, writing and mathematics and continued to use those skills in their daily lives. Literacy course completers, especially those who had completed the post-literacy courses, reported increased confidence in several areas, including stating their opinions to their families and in the community. For the first time women could conceive of the possibility that they or other women could actually be Village Development Council members. The survey also supports previous research findings that show a strong correlation between women's literacy and the level of interest and support for the education of a woman's own children. The women who completed the literacy course showed much greater concern for their children's education, with significant increases in the number of their children attending school. They also were more involved in reviewing their children's progress, and checking on their attendance. Participation in decisions about family size and child spacing also appears to have increased with approximately 47% of the married women in the treatment group participating in such decisions either solely or jointly with their husbands, compared with 35% in the control group.

Many development experts contend that groups are a necessary pre-requisite for community development efforts. As mentioned above, participation in groups was also higher among women who had completed the literacy courses, and especially among those who had completed the post-literacy courses. This suggests that the additional three months spent together with their fellow learners strengthened the bonds between group members and positively reinforced the notion of collective action.

USAID's and the Government of Nepal's strategic objectives in many ways form a nexus between agriculture and natural resource management, health and family planning and women's empowerment. Because most farmers in Nepal are women, the results from the literacy programs have a direct bearing on how quickly and effectively new agricultural/natural resource management technologies can be transferred and adopted in rural areas. A literate population of adult women is also vital to rapid transfer of preventive health skills and family planning practices. Thus, the successes and constraints associated with women's literacy programs have major bearing on the achievement of results in agriculture, natural resource management, health, family planning, children's education and local governance. Initiating programs in these sectors in villages where groups of literate and highly motivated women already exist may help maximize the return on the resources invested for results. Such synergism may be especially important given the frustration expressed by many of the women who completed the courses that they have not yet been able to translate their new skills into tangible economic benefits.

Finally, it is important to understand that changes associated with increased literacy are often manifested in ways that are not immediately apparent. Attitudinal change is often a gradual process, and it may not be realistic to expect major shifts in perceptions or behavior within the first year after becoming literate. Rather, it is more likely that as women begin to realize small successes over time, they will also experience greater control over their lives. These successes in turn, can be expected to give Nepali women increased confidence and foster their full participation as equals in the development process.

R

1. Background

1.1. Introduction

Nepal is a densely populated country, with about 20 million people living in an area of 147,181 square kilometers. Although the ratio of people to land is lower than countries such as Bangladesh, almost half of Nepal's land is unusable for agricultural purposes and only 30 per cent is currently under cultivation. With a per capita income of about $180, almost 70 per cent of the population lives in absolute poverty. Women are especially affected by both poverty and inequality. In such a complex society, with a multiplicity of religions, cultural traditions and family structures, one cannot easily generalize about the status of women. However, Subedi (1993) asserts that despite such variations "it can be stated without reservation that Nepali women from the communities high in the Himalayan region to those of the lowlands in the southern terai region are exploited and oppressed" (p. 1). This sentiment is also expressed by Acharya (1995), who articulates what many Nepali women keenly feel, stating that, "Poverty has a woman's face. We see, feel and experience this fact in our life every day" (p. 1).

The nation's literacy rate highlights the discrepancy between men's and women's educational opportunities. Though the literacy rate for men in 1991 was over 50%, it was only about 22% for women. By 1995/96 the literacy rate for women had risen to 28% but was still well below that of men. If sending a child to school is a burden for the family, either because of monetary costs or opportunity costs when a child cannot work at home, families choose to send boys rather than girls. Nonetheless, the formal education sector is unable to keep pace with demand, and the quality is poor; the result is a low participation rate of school-aged children in formal schooling and a high drop-out rate of those who do enter schools. In 1994, the net enrollment ratio was 67% (78% for boys and 55.6% for girls). The number of illiterate women is expected to increase through the end of the century. Actual literacy rates may be even lower, since these estimates were derived from information reported on the national census and projections based on assumptions about primary school attendance.

1.2. Literacy Programs

While the Government of Nepal continues to expand and improve its formal education system, it also recognizes the importance of providing a minimum basic education to all adults and children not served by the formal school system. Several approaches to adult literacy are now operating in Nepal. Although similar in many ways, these approaches can be distinguished by several characteristics: whether they are implemented by a governmental organization or by a non-governmental organization (NGO); whether they use a national literacy curriculum or a curriculum specifically for that program; or whether they operate for a period of six or nine months (Smith, Comings and Shrestha, undated). Governmental and quasi-governmental programs include those operated by the Ministry of Education (MOE), Basic Primary Education Program (BPEP), Production Credit for Rural Women program (PCRW) and Small Farmer Development Program (SFDP). International NGOs providing literacy programs in Nepal include: World Education, Inc. (WEI), Pact, and Save the Children Foundation (SCF). World Education assisted the MOE in developing the National Literacy Program, which uses two 144-page books entitled *Naya Goreto (The New Trail)*. SCF supports comprehensive community development in a specific geographic region during the Nepal monsoon. About 95% of all organizations use the national literacy curriculum.

The primary purpose of the literacy program is to provide participants with a usable level of reading, writing, and math skills. The courses teach a range of important information while providing opportunities to practice critical thinking and problem solving skills. Reading comprehension, as well as oral reading, are critical components of the curriculum. The objective is to help adults reach a 3rd or 4th grade literacy level, and develop their literacy skills to a point where they can retain and improve them over time with regular use. Most programs continue on a regular cycle each year until everyone able to participate has been provided an opportunity to do so. Classes of up to 30 generally meet for two to three hours a night, five to six nights a week. The materials used in Nepal combine several methods that have evolved over the years,

using Paulo Freire's (1968) keyword approach. Instructional materials usually consist of one or two books that gradually build from a few letters to full paragraphs. Additionally, most classes have a set of instructional aids, such as charts, word or syllable cards, and games, which allow the teacher to present and review content and enable students to practice skills. Reading materials are based on the concept that literacy should be developed in the context of practical skills and knowledge. Patterned after the work of Freire and his contemporaries, this approach emphasizes the development of critical thinking and encourages participants to engage in dialogue about issues related to empowerment and oppression as they learn to read and write (Comings, Smith and Shrestha, undated).

The National Literacy Program attempts to provide all women in Nepal with a basic education. In addition, a program that serves small groups of poor rural women in each village was initiated in 1991. This program, developed by World Education, employs an integrated health and literacy model that provided six months of basic instruction plus an additional three months of class time. During this three-month post-literacy course, adults use materials focusing on health and family planning developed under the Health Education and Adult Literacy (HEAL) project. Basic Primary Education Program (BPEP) also operates a nine-month program in which participants use a textbook entitled *Ghar Angan* or *Courtyard*, designed specifically for women, in conjunction with supplementary materials that included oral hydration and garden seed packages. The BPEP classes run for nine continuous months, while the World Education classes run for six months and then continue for three months after a break of three months during the monsoon (Smith, Comings and Shrestha, undated).

Since 1979 USAID/Nepal has supported non-formal literacy education through these projects in women's development, health and family planning, agriculture and natural resources management and provided direct assistance to national literacy program development. From 1981-84, these projects offered literacy classes through 1,989 centers to 47,977 Nepalese. Additionally, USAID supported the training of more than 300 literacy trainers and 804 literacy facilitators who, with funding from other sources, taught literacy classes at the community level.

USAID/Nepal currently supports a six-month basic literacy training program through its Basic Education Support (BES): Female Literacy Project. Initiated in 1994 as a means of providing basic literacy skills to more women than is possible when literacy is provided through extended development support projects, it includes ancillary and post-literacy activities. BES aims at increasing the rate of female literacy in Nepal by providing basic literacy training to 400,000 women and girls.[1] There are two main components to the BES Project: a training grant and a Ministry of Education grant. The training grant is the larger of the two. Implemented by Pact, it focuses on training of NGO trainers, supervision of facilitator training, and monitoring of class activities. World Education is working with district level governments to provide literacy education classes. USAID also sponsors the World Education, nine-month "Basic + Post literacy" training program which is much smaller and more topically focused than previous literacy efforts that were implemented as supplemental adjuncts to other development activities.

1.3. Literacy and Empowerment

According toWalker, Comings and Kahler (undated) literacy should be viewed in a much wider context than the mastery of written symbols. It is a part of a constellation of skills that enable people to cope with a constantly changing environment. They point out that literacy can empower individuals and communities in several ways. It gives access to new information, making knowledge more accessible as it is "demystified." Literacy also provides a means of expanding one's horizons, allowing a glimpse of the experiences of other times and places. It increases the range of learning sources and may lead to more favorable attitudes toward change, create higher aspirations and result in improvements in the reader's life. Furthermore, literacy is a source of *collective* empowerment, since literacy programs reach the poorest and most disadvantaged groups who have not been served by the formal education system. They provide "a forum for identifying felt needs, analyzing problems, and for discussing issues of mutual concern." They also expand channels of participation in community decision-making, raise aspirations and provide impetus for constructive action.

[1] While the original goal was to provide training for women, an impact goal of making women literate, as measured by passing an end-of-course test. The magnitude dropped slightly as a result.

1.4. What is Women's Empowerment?

Although there has been extensive discussion about the importance of empowering women, there is no universal agreement about its definition. A perusal of the literature reveals a full spectrum of interpretations of women's empowerment, and it has been defined operationally by different groups for different purposes. Hashemi and Schuler (1996) describe it as "the ability to make and carry out significant decisions affecting one's own life and the lives of others." Moulton (1996) sees parallels between empowerment and autonomy, citing Jejeebhoy's definition of autonomy as "the extent to which women have control over their own lives and the ability to obtain information and use it as the basis for making decisions about private concerns and those of intimates."

Stromquist (1993) maintains that empowerment is essentially a process encompassing two aspects: 1) taking *action* toward confronting and changing unequal power relations; and 2) *acquiring the capacity* (psychological readiness, social analysis, and organizational skills) needed to take action. She further contends that empowerment has both individual and collective dimensions. Group processes can be an important means of both helping women to develop the psychological readiness to take action and to conceptualize and initiate the steps required to make changes.

Bhasin (1992) purports that empowerment requires enabling women to discover knowledge for themselves–to develop analytical and inquiring minds. She further asserts that the initial contribution of literacy towards women's empowerment may be manifested simply in the development of self-confidence and self respect.

In Nepal, Pokhrel (1982) emphasized the need for empowering women through the process of achieving:

- legal equality;
- equality in participation; and
- equality in social attitudes and values.

Empowerment is a relatively unfamiliar concept for rural women in many cultures. A 1996 study carried out by USAID/Nepal to determine how rural women conceive of empowerment noted that no single word in Nepali includes the same connotations as the Western concept. The rough translation contains concepts such as being "socially powerful, well-regarded, and important in the community." To local women, empowerment encompasses a range of elements, from being able to meet basic needs (having enough to eat and clothes to wear) to much higher aspirations, such as being a leader or being able to speak with government officials. The women surveyed cited the following characteristics of empowerment:

- being literate, having knowledge, understanding issues, and sharing knowledge with others;
- being able to stand on your own legs, supporting yourself, having a job, and making choices;
- being able to help others, teach others, motivate others, help the village;
- not tolerating domination, especially men's domination;
- being able to move about freely;
- feeling confident, being articulate, feeling able to speak in public and with government officials;
- being a leader, getting along with others, maintaining good relationships within the village (USAID/Nepal, April 1996, p. 8).

Surprisingly, few women included being wealthy or owning land in their definitions of empowerment. Instead they mentioned actions that could help them with personal achievement (i.e., being literate and having job skills). The team concluded that women perceive an empowered woman to be one who is "able to go beyond her ascribed roles (wife, mother, daughter/daughter-in-law, or according to caste) in rural Nepali culture" (p. 10).

Shrestha (1994) contends that five aspects of women's empowerment are requisite for development to occur:

1. *Welfare* – equal concern with material welfare of women and children relative to men in such matters as food supply, income and medical care (as indicated by increased income, increased utilization of credit facilities and increased health facilities).

2. *Access* – equal access to factors of production: land, labor, credit, training, and all publicly available services and benefits.

3. *Conscientization* – acceptance of the idea that sexual and gender division of labor should be fair and agreeable to both sides and not involve the economic and political domination of one sex by the other.

4. *Participation* – involvement of men and women in the same proportion in decision-making as their composition in the community at large.

5. *Control* – participation of women in the decision making process to the extent that women have equal control over benefits and resources.

Others, such as Stromquist (1992), Hashemi and Schuler (1993), and program directors on the Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) have attempted to identify indicators of empowerment. The list below was developed from a composite of the such indicators from various authors. Not all indicators are relevant to the Nepali context, nor can they reasonably be expected to result from attaining literacy.

1. *Sense of economic security* – ownership of home, land or other productive assets; ability to produce enough food to last the year; ability to earn a living; possession of cash savings; participation in income generating activities; and participation in credit.

2. *Increased decision making power in the household* – related to income, health, and reproductive decisions. This includes, *inter alia:*

    a) ability to make small purchases used daily in food preparation for the family (kerosene, cooking oil, spices) or small personal items (hair oil, soap, glass bangles).

    b) ability to make large purchases, such as pots and pans, their own and children's clothing (especially if made without permission from husband or family).

    c) involvement in larger decisions, such as household repair, renovation, small animal production (especially if the money is earned by the woman).

    d) involvement in reproductive decisions (how many and when to have children.

3. *Self-confidence and self respect* – confidence about acting and communicating in family relationships and the community.

4. *Identification of role models* – ability to identify influential women in the community.

5. *Ability to act effectively in the public sphere* – manifested in participation in credit and microenterprise programs and increased control over income they earn.

6. *Participation in public protests and political campaigning* – campaigning for a political candidate; protesting (with others) a wife beating, a divorce or abandonment, or action of officials.

7. *Political awareness and participation* – ability to cite the name of a local government official, such as member of parliament or Prime Minister; knowing the significance of registering a marriage; knowing the law governing inheritance.

8. *Participation in non-family groups* – using solidarity groups as sources of information and support.

9. *Mobility* – ability to visit places such as a market, medical facility or places outside (especially without accompaniment).

10. *Children's education* – while not a direct indicator of women's empowerment, the ability to provide education for one's children can have a direct effect on the mother's economic security later in life.

11. *Vision of a future* – ability to conceptualize and plan for the future.

1.5. USAID/Nepal Strategic Objective (SO3)–Empowerment of Women

Alone among USAID missions worldwide, USAID/Nepal has identified increased women's empowerment as a strategic objective. The Mission determined that three components were key to empowerment for Nepali women: 1) women's participation for social action; 2) the degree of women's control over their income; and 3) the degree of women's control over household income. The critical interventions needed to achieve this objective are increased women's literacy, legal rights and advocacy, and economic participation, in conjunction with reproductive health offered through another USAID/Nepal strategic objective. Each intervention individually is clearly of significant value to Nepali women but it is the SO3 team's premise that altogether they create something much stronger: increased empowerment.

USAID/Nepal established this premise and components and corresponding indicators after considerable review of the literature (including much of the above material) in a consultative process with Nepali women, International Non-Governmental Organizations/Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs/NGOs) and other donors, beginning with the 1996 customer survey of hundreds of rural Nepali women. Findings from this survey indicated that women who organize and participate in these mobilizations rarely are influenced by their family's status and/or wealth in the community. Almost all had already participated in one or more of the SO3 interventions. Through advocacy formation in the form of legal rights training, women identify advocacy issues that interest them and receive training that teaches them how to carry out advocacy effectively. Reinforcement received from skills training and increased confidence resulting from literacy and economic participation makes it more likely that they will take action. By carefully interweaving these interventions so the targeted women receive all three components–literacy, legal rights and economic participation–one might expect such mobilizations for socioeconomic changes that directly result from empowerment to be more frequent.

Specific indicators to measure achievement of SO3 are:

1. collective actions for social change initiated by women in targeted areas;
2. women's influence over household decision-making in target areas:

    a) per cent of women who increase their influence over allocation of their own income and/or income-producing assets;
    b) per cent of women who increase their influence over household income and/or income-producing assets,
    c) per cent of women who increase their influence over the decision to keep their daughters in school.

A contract for collecting baseline data for USAID/Nepal's indicators was just awarded; data should be available by mid-1997 and the first follow-up survey is planned for early 1998.

1.6. Purpose of This Study

USAID is interested in determining the effects of literacy training of varying duration (six months compared to the six-month basic plus a three-month post-literacy course) on indicators of women's empowerment. The purpose of this research is to provide information for making decisions regarding the next generation of literacy interventions.

1.7. Questions Addressed

The primary research questions addressed were:

1. What has been the impact on women's empowerment of two types of non-formal (literacy) education programs–basic literacy (six month courses) and post-literacy (six months plus three months courses)–compared to those who have not attended a NFE literacy course or primary school and are not literate?

2. What is the comparative cost-efficiency of six-month basic literacy courses compared to six- plus three-month post-literacy courses?

While other interesting questions might be considered, it was not possible at this time to collect a sample large enough to provide meaningful analysis for other sub-populations, such as participants who completed less than six months literacy courses, adult vs. children participants, or varying impacts of the courses of differing duration in areas having substantial other donor activities, compared to those with no other interventions.

At the time this study began, USAID Nepal was still in the process of determining which indicators would be used to measure progress toward achieving the strategic objective related to increasing the empowerment of women. Consequently, this study examined a wider array of indicators than those ultimately selected by USAID (described above). This study included indicators related to following areas:

- influence over allocation of their own income and/or income-producing assets;
- influence over household income and/or income-producing assets,
- influence over the decision to keep their daughters in school.
- participation in credit and income generation programs;
- increased decision-making in the household, e.g., purchase of both small and large household items;
- increased self-confidence/self-respect;
- participation in non-family groups (e.g., user groups, information, or support groups);
- mobility and visibility in the community (as manifested by participation in advocacy or user groups, use of credit, travel to other vicinities using public transportation);
- participation in decisions about health and family planning (including use of contraceptives);
- beliefs about age at marriage;
- identification of role models;
- having a vision of a future and taking actions to achieve these goals.

2. Methodology

This research utilized a survey questionnaire, focus group discussions and a short literacy test designed to assess the level of current literacy. These included:

1. *One-on-one interviews* with participating Nepali women, using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the impact of literacy courses of varying duration on the empowerment of participating women. Each respondent was

asked to provide basic demographic data, such as age, number of children, caste membership, family structure, and household assets, as well as information about her use of literacy skills and any changes in her behavior since her attendance in the literacy class.

2. *Focus group discussions.* Two focus group sessions to discuss the impact of literacy on women's lives and the community were held in each Village District Council (VDC)[2] in the sample. One group consisted of approximately five to ten women who completed basic literacy courses and another group was comprised of five to ten women who completed post-literacy courses. While the discussions were informal (a formal questionnaire was not administered), to ensure consistency, a written set of questions was used to guide each discussion. These discussions were conducted by the Research Coordinator and the Team Leader/Supervisor for each of the two research teams. A total of 189 women took part in the focus group discussions, as follows:

   - Makwanpur District–55 participants;
   - Parsa District–43 participants;
   - Bardiya District–56 participants;
   - Tanahu District–35 participants.

   Participants' ages ranged from 12 to older than 50, with most in the 15-20 age range; 60% of the women were married. The primary occupation of most participants was agriculture and farming. All participants took their courses about a year ago or slightly less than a year ago.

3. *Interviews with two to four community leaders.* Interviews about local conditions and norms, other development programs and the impact of literacy on women's lives and on the community were conducted with two to four leaders in each VDC in the sample. A written interview schedule was used. Interviews were conducted by the Research Coordinator and the Team Leader/Supervisor for each of the two research teams. The design originally called for interviews with literacy course facilitators. However, upon arriving in the field, it was discovered that many of the facilitators were not the same ones who had been involved with the women in the survey. Additionally, many were unavailable at the time of the site visit. Consequently, facilitator interviews were dropped from the study.

4. *Interviews with expatriate development/community field workers from donors, international NGOs and other external observers.* These were conducted to determine the extent to which the same behaviors and attitudes existed in the research sites. Interviews were conducted by the Research Coordinator and the Team Leader/Supervisor for each of the two research teams.

5. *The administration of literacy tests* based on the regular *Naya Goreto.*

6. *An analysis of cost efficiency of the six month versus nine month courses* – An important component of this study was the assessment of the cost-efficiency associated with achieving differing impacts. This study collected relative unit cost data associated with achieving literacy (i.e., those who pass[3]) for the six month basic literacy course, compared to the three-month post-literacy course. Judgments about the relative value of various indicators of empowerment are subjective and must be viewed in relation to the Mission's own priorities.

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[2] A Village District Council is an administrative body consisting of one or more villages.

[3] Respondents interviewed in this study were literacy course completers. No information was provided as to whether they passed the literacy test at the conclusion of the literacy course.

2.1. Sample Selection

The research consisted of an experimental[4] and control group, comprised as follows:

Experimental group. (Sample size = 20 VDCs or wards x 20 participants per class = 400). This group consisted of women age 12 or older, who completed literacy training approximately one year ago. Respondents consisted of participants of both basic literacy training (six months) or post-literacy (six months plus three months)

Control group. (Sample size=4 VDCs x 25 non-participants=100). The control group consisted of women age 12 or older who had not attended a NFE literacy course or primary school.

2.1.1. Experimental Group Sample

Sample selection, to some extent, was dictated by the objectives and design of the study. Since a primary objective of the research was to determine whether differences exist between the basic and post-literacy courses with respect to impact on women's empowerment, it was necessary to limit the study to the seven districts in which (USAID-funded) post-literacy courses had been offered for a period of one year or longer. This number was narrowed to four districts for pragmatic reasons: namely, some districts offered too few post-literacy classes (e.g., only five post-literacy classes were provided in the Dhadin District) or there were many other donor activities operating in the district, thus confounding the ability to assess specific impacts.

Districts were also selected so that areas having a range of castes and ethnic groups, as well as variation in physical terrain, would be included. Villages with varying ranges of accessibility were included (i.e., from those reachable by main road to those reachable by up to one day's walk from the main road). Two hill districts (Makwanpur and Tanahu) and two terai districts (Parsa and Bardiya) were also included.

A number of factors limited the pool from which VDCs were selected. For inclusion in the sample, VDCs in which literacy courses were offered were required to meet the following criteria:

1. Classes ran for the duration of the course (i.e., did not prematurely close because of lack of participation by respondents or facilitators).

2. Courses were supported by World Education or Pact.

3. Courses were completed approximately one year ago (in a comparable time frame with three-month post-literacy courses offered in 1994/95).

In addition, the selection of VDCs was limited by the location of the post-literacy courses. For example, post-literacy courses are only offered in one VDC in Tanahu, (Bundipur) and in two VDCs in Bardiya. In Makwanpur, WEI and Pact both provide support for basic literacy courses. Additionally, WEI supports post-literacy courses in approximately 30 VDCs. In order to include participants of both types of programs, it was necessary to select VDC sites from among those where the programs were available.

In the initial sampling plan, sample selection was carried out in three phases:

1. Four districts were purposively selected from the hills and two from the terai (on the basis of criteria described below).

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[4] The experimental group refers to the participants who completed either the basic literacy courses or the post-literacy courses. Basic literacy course completers refer to those who *only* participated in the six-month literacy program; post-literacy course completers refer to those who completed a six-month basic literacy course, *plus* an additional three-month follow up course.

2. Approximately 20 VDCs or wards from four district were selected from locations in which Pact and WEI basic and post-literacy courses have been held.

3. Approximately 20 literacy class participants who completed the course were randomly selected from each VDC or ward. Completers were selected from a list of all participants in the selected VDC who completed their literacy course approximately one year ago. No information was available as to whether the women who completed their courses had passed the final examination. Because some lists were organized by age or examination grade, participants were selected by assigning a number to each participant on the list and randomly drawing a number from a box. One participant and two alternates from each ward or VDC in the sample were randomly selected in this way, and their names and locations were recorded on a respondent listing form. A total of approximately 200 basic literacy participants and 200 post-literacy participants were selected. Of those, approximately half participated in courses implemented by Pact and half in courses held by WEI.

2.1.2. Control Group Sample

Matched pairs of control and experimental groups were chosen from communities with similar characteristics, such as ethnicity, caste, village size, location, distance from road, etc. To assist in controlling for the effect of self-selection, participants in the control group villages were randomly selected from communities in which no literacy training programs were available. The objective of the interviews in the control group VDCs was to interview women who were at least 12 years of age who had not taken any literacy courses. Efforts were made to select VDCs for the control group sample in which no other literacy courses had been offered. However, it is possible that courses, unknown to the researchers, existed in the control group VDCs. The following procedures were used in selecting the control group sample.

1. Upon arriving in a control group VDC, the Research Coordinator and Team Leader/Supervisor met with the ward chairperson and other local officials in the ward from which the sample was selected. The purpose of the meetings was to inform officials about what they were doing and how long they would be in the area.

2. Forms provided for interviews with village leaders were used to record information about the physical layout, size and composition of the village, as well as about any literacy courses that had been offered in the community.

3. Once information was obtained about the village, researchers decided which areas would be included in the sample. Efforts were made to include a mix of ethnic groups (if the VDC was diverse) as well as different areas within the VDC. The research team was divided to cover different sections of the VDC or ward.

4. Enumerators randomly selected roads (or paths) in a given section of the VDC. On each road or path, households were randomly selected by visiting every third house. If the woman (age 12 or older) had attended a literacy course, a school, or Out of School Programme, she was not interviewed. The enumerator then skipped the next two houses and went to the third house. This process was repeated until a respondent who qualified (i.e., female age 12 or older who has not attended school, OSP or literacy courses) was identified. An interview was conducted with each respondent identified in this way until the enumerator interviewed the number of respondents assigned for that day.

5. At the end of each day, each enumerator submitted the completed questionnaires and reported to the Research Coordinator the number of interviews that had been completed, as well as the total number of households visited where a woman was not interviewed because she had attended school, OSP or a literacy course.

2.2. Data Collection

Two teams of seven enumerators, along with the coordinator for each team, collected data in two districts each. One enumerator served as the Team Leader/Supervisor for each team. She was responsible for organizing and leading focus groups, assisting with checking completed questionnaires and assigning call backs for questionnaires with incomplete information. Each coordinator and team leader also conducted interviews with local leaders. In addition, the help of a local woman was enlisted to assist with translations, and where necessary, to facilitate arranging interviews.

2.3. Constraints and Limitations

2.3.1. Measurement Issues

Identifying indicators of empowerment is not difficult. However, quantifying and interpreting women's responses to questions about such indicators within the local context is a much thornier issue. Hashemi and Schuler (1993) devised an eight point scale for rating women's empowerment (which is reflected in the list presented earlier). While helpful, many key measurement issues are not addressed by such a scale. For example, should women's empowerment in Nepal be measured against a relative or an absolute standard? How much weight should be placed on factors such as religion, ethnicity, and social circumstances? Abraham and Lal (1995), in a study of the impact of literacy on female empowerment in the Jaipur District of India, criticized impact evaluations that "use homogenized norms irrespective of specificities of social formations, historical settings, geographical dispersal, class case and gender" (p. 52).

Consider, for example, the empowerment indicator related to having "a vision of the future." Can we realistically expect literacy to have the same impact on the life of a Hindu or Moslem woman, who is taught from birth that her fate is pre-determined, as on the life of a woman for whom the concept of self-determination is perceived as being at least within the realm of possibility. Dor Bahadur Bista (1991) relates how the Hindu system, which is stratified and fatalistic, mandates that individuals engage in activities that are appropriate to their caste. Those who were fated to be workers must continue to work but cannot expect to necessarily receive any reward. Actions should be without goals, since the purpose to one's actions are known only to a supernatural being. Having "a vision of the future," may be a difficult characteristic to assess for many Nepali women.

Similarly, can the political participation of a woman from the Mehatar caste (which translates as "cleaning dirt") or sub-castes associated with agricultural production, such as Yadav, Mali, Amat, or Koree, be equated with that of a woman from the more highly regarded Brahmin caste. Jha, in a 1993 study on the terai community, points out that most political power in Nepal is in the hands of a particular ethnic group, and few people outside that group can expect to play a significant role. Thus, one's political participation, regardless of gender or literacy status may be largely determined by caste or ethnicity.

Should the lack of participation in groups designed to achieve such goals as "preventing men from drinking, gambling or wife-beating" be considered a failure to achieve empowerment in a village where the majority of women report that no such problems exist? In Rajasthan's study in India, for example, 94% of the respondents stated they did not face domestic violence at all. Modification of the question in an attempt to use less prejudicial or emotionally charged wording, (using the term "trouble at home") resulted in ambiguity in responses. Many respondents interpreted the question more broadly to mean "financial problems," and consequently the ability of the question to assess the extent of domestic violence was lost.

Do such problems mean that it is not possible to provide indicators of women's empowerment that have meaning in the Nepali context? No. However, addressing these problems requires that interpretation of such measures be steeped in description of the context in which they were taken. Consequently, questionnaire information is supplemented by details emerging from focus group discussions and information provided by village leaders and literacy facilitators and instructors, along with existing documentation about the local setting.

It is also important to note that the indicators included in this study are only a small sub-set of those needed to carry out a comprehensive assessment of women's empowerment. Indicators were derived from discussions with local professionals who have been involved in working with Nepali women for many years, as well as from information gleaned from the results of the USAID-funded customer services survey, in which rural women were asked to articulate their interpretation of what it means to be empowered and from the literature. Many other items might have been included as measures of each indicator. Similarly, due to the limited scope of this research, it was not possible to include items measuring other important indicators (e.g., legal awareness). The baseline and follow-up studies planned by USAID/Nepal in 1997 will include such indicators.

Several constraints common to survey research in general are applicable to the Nepal study. To allow quantification, questionnaires need to be relatively structured. It is usually advisable not to incorporate a large number of open-ended questions, in order to avoid ending up with an unwieldy and unanalyzable data set. This provides little opportunity for gathering the kind of detailed information leading to a comprehensive understanding of complex issues. Employing focus group discussions alleviates the problem somewhat, augmenting the findings with rich detail lacking in survey research. However, the focus group approach suffers from its own limitations–namely that random sampling is not utilized and the number of participants is usually small. Consequently, the results are not generalizable to a larger population. While focus groups provide useful information, there is no way of knowing whether the anecdotes emerging from the discussions are unique to the group under consideration or whether they represent behavior and attitudes found in other villages as well.

Other problems associated with survey research arise from the fact that most of the respondents (particularly in the control group), have had very little exposure to people from outside their village. The appearance of an unfamiliar researcher asking questions from a lengthy questionnaire can be intimidating, making it difficult to obtain honest responses to sensitive questions. Furthermore, it is deemed as inappropriate by many to interview women without the presence of other family members, and oftentimes, interviewing the respondent alone is not possible. Enumerators for the Nepal study were instructed to interview women without the presence of their husbands, if possible, but other female family member were present during some of the interviews. Similarly, many Nepali women are eager to please visitors, and with any survey research, there is a danger that respondents will say what they think interviewers want to hear.

Additionally, the information gleaned from surveys is only as good as the memory of the respondents answering the questions. No baseline date were available documenting participants' behavior and attitudes prior to taking the literacy courses. Thus the study had to rely on questions eliciting respondents' views about their actions and opinions *before* taking the literacy courses compared to *after* they completed the courses. This approach assumes that respondents can remember and are willing to reveal how they acted and felt a year ago. While most respondents appeared to have little difficulty in recalling such information, there is no way of gauging the accuracy of their recollections. Also, women who's behaviors have changed as a result of their experiences in the literacy courses may be reluctant to admit that they ever behaved differently.

Great care was taken to ensure that the interview instrument was translated in a way that conveyed the intended meaning of the questions,[5] and that the nuances were captured in the translation. Nevertheless, when a survey is developed in another language, there is always the possibility that misunderstandings will occur. When interviewing individuals who are illiterate or have low levels of literacy, it may be difficult to ensure that the respondent answered the same question that the interviewer thought she asked. Additionally, some research indicates that those who lack literacy skills may interpret verbal information differently that those who are literate. This happens, in part, because they are operating from a different frame of reference from those who are literate, and the information is being processed in "decontextualized" fashion.

[5] The survey instrument was translated by two different translators into Nepali and then translated back into English by the enumerators, who did not have access to the English version. Questions were discussed at great length during training and pre-testing, and numerous rounds of revisions were carried out, ensuring that the intent of the questions had been conveyed and that all enumerators understood the questions in the same way.

2.3.2. Implementation of Sampling Plan

Several problems related to the post-literacy group sample were encountered in implementing the sampling plan. Enumerators in the Tanahu District found that, while many of the individuals on the post-literacy course completers' lists had attended the basic literacy course, some had not participated in post-literacy courses. In fact, in some villages, participants reported that the post-literacy course never occurred. In other areas, the courses were unsupervised or facilitators appeared infrequently. Several facilitators reported that they had stopped teaching the courses because they had not been paid or the course materials had not been delivered.

In Makwanpur, enumerators traveled to the wards in Churiya Mai, Padam Pokhari, Ghadi and Budhichaur that had been selected and found that the post-literacy courses had occurred in only two of the nine wards visited. In each case, the facilitator and purported participants reported that courses had not taken place. When the Research Coordinator attempted to contact the NGO (Center for Education and Environmental Services) responsible for administering the courses in those areas, he was unavailable. The Research Coordinator obtained a second list of post-literacy course completers, all of whom were in Padam Pokhari. Because the number of participants on the list was small, it was necessary to interview all participants on the list. Additionally, during data analysis, it was discovered that nine of the 201 post-literacy course completers had received the three-month post-literacy course without having completed the initial six month basic literacy course. These participants were excluded from the analysis.

It is not clear what effect these problems had on the "randomness" of the sample or on the ultimate outcome of the research. Additionally, there is no way of knowing whether the post-literacy course completers sampled received the full three months of instruction, or assessing the quality of that instruction, compared with the basic literacy course, since that was not an objective of this study.

2.3.3. Selection Effect

It is difficult to determine whether previously exiting conditions caused some members of the target population to be more likely to participate in the literacy program than others. It is possible that women who volunteer to participate in literacy programs are more outgoing, more motivated or more confident to begin with than women who choose not to participate. For this reason, control group respondents were selected from villages in which no literacy courses were offered. However, this in itself presented certain problems, since these villages may be substantially different with respect to overall economic conditions, prevailing behaviors and attitudes of women in the community or other key factors. Hence, it is hard to ascertain, with absolute certainty, whether the behaviors exhibited by the participants in the literacy program directly resulted from taking the literacy classes.

2.3.4. Statistical Significance and Sample Size

This study attempted to discern whether behaviors and attitudes associated with women's empowerment differed between those who had undergone no literacy training, compared with those completing a six-month (basic) literacy course and those completing six months plus an additional three-month post-literacy course. For each indicator, we tested the hypothesis that no differences exist between the groups with respect to the variable under examination.

In attempting to draw inferences about the population based on a sample, researchers run the risk that incorrect conclusions will be reached. Two types of error can occur in testing the null hypothesis that no differences exist between the groups. A Type I error, (α error) occurs when the null hypothesis is rejected when in fact it is true. The α is also called the level of significance. A Type II error occurs when the null hypothesis is not rejected when in fact it is false. The selection of a level of significance is based on the risk that the researcher is willing to take that a Type I error will occur.

For this study, we selected a level of significance with $p = .05$. That is, we are about 95% confident that we have not rejected the hypothesis that no differences exist, when in fact, there are differences. Blalock (1972) advises using caution in interpreting the results of significance tests since it is possible to obtain rather misleading results even when a significance level as small as .001 is used. Significance tests tell us how likely a given set of sample results would be if certain assumptions about the population parameters were true. There are several factors that determine the likelihood that we shall be able to reject these assumptions. The number of cases is an important factor in determining how extreme the results must be before rejection is possible. With a small number of cases, extreme results (i.e., results that are not representative of the population) could occur frequently by chance alone. With a very large number of cases it is practically always possible to reject any false hypothesis one might set up, regardless of how far our hypothesized value may be from the true one. Statistical significance should not be confused with practical significance. Statistical significance can only tell us that certain sample differences would not occur very frequently by chance alone if there were no differences whatsoever in the population. It tells us nothing directly about the magnitude or importance of these differences.

In conducting this study, we utilized a sample size of approximately 500 respondents: 100 women who have had no literacy training in the control; 200 women who completed the basic literacy course; and 200 women who completed a basic literacy course plus the post-literacy course. While this was the largest sample that was possible given the resources available for the research, one must bear in mind that a much larger sample size would be required to draw definitive conclusions about relationships examined in this study.

3. Findings

3.1. Characteristics of the Sample

3.1.1. Distribution by District and Village Development Council (VDC)

Interviews were conducted in four districts and 22 Village Development Councils (VDCs) (18 experimental group VDCs and four control group VDCs). The sample was comprised of equal representation from each district. Ten different NGOs provided the literacy courses to experimental group respondents (see Tables 1 and 2). Half of these activities were sponsored by World Education International (WEI) and half by Pact, with funding from USAID (see Table 3).

Table 1: Experimental Group Respondents by Districts/VDCs

District/VDC	Basic Only		Post		Total Treatment	
	Number.	Col. %	Number.	Col. %	Number.	Col. %
Makwanpur						
Padam Pokhri	22	11.1	12	6.2	34	8.7
Churiyamai	0	0.0	11	5.7	11	2.8
Budhichaur	14	7.1	19	9.8	33	8.5
Hadikhola	13	6.6	0	0.0	13	3.3
Sub-Total	**49**	**24.8**	**42**	**21.7**	**91**	**23.3**
Tanahu						
Risti	10	5.1	0	0.0	10	2.6
Kyamin	11	5.5	0	0.0	11	2.8
Purkot	20	10.1	0	0.0	20	5.1
Bundipur	2	0.4	48	25.9	50	15.1
Name not given	9	4.5	0	0.0	9	2.6
Sub-Total	**52**	**25.6**	**48**	**25.9**	**100**	**23.4**
Parsa						
Sakuwa Parsauni	20	10.1	0	0.0	20	5.1
Dewabana	10	5.0	0	0.0	10	2.6
Maduban Matwail	20	10.1	0	0.0	20	5.1
Nirmal Basti	0	00	20	10.4	20	5.1
Mahadevpati	0	0.0	20	10.4	20	5.1
Subarnapur	0	0.0	10	5.2	10	2.6
Sub-Total	**50**	**25.2**	**50**	**26.0**	**100**	**25.6**
Bardiya						
Neulapur	16	7.6	8	4.1	24	5.9
Shivpur	6	3.0	32	16.6	38	9.7
Thakurdwara	1	0.5	8	4.1	9	2.3
Baniyabhar	25	12.6	3	1.6	28	7.1
Name not given	2	1.0	0	0.0	2	0.5
Sub-Total	**50**	**24.7**	**51**	**24.4**	**101**	**25.6**
Total	**201**		**191**		**392**	**100.0**

Percentages do not total due to rounding.

Table 2: Control Group VDCs by District

District/VDC	Number	Col. %
Makwanpur		
Churiya Mai, Ward 3	30	28.0
Tanahu		
Keshabthar	25	23.4
Parsa		
Bagaswari	**25**	**23.4**
Bardiya		
Suryapactwa & Magradi	**27**	**25.2**
Total	*107*	*100.0*

Percentages do not total due to rounding.

3.1.2. Village Profiles by District

Upon entering a village, Research Coordinators and supervisors interviewed village leaders to obtain information about the composition of the village from which the sample was drawn, as well as the types of problems villagers encountered and other information. The information was derived from the perceptions of village leaders and the observations of the researchers. Although a standard form was used to record interviews and observations, descriptions for some of the villages were incomplete. For example, information about economic conditions and land ownership were not consistently collected in all districts. The profiles below, aggregated by district, reflect the general conditions in the villages, not just of the participants of the study.

3.1.2.1. Parsa District

Interviews with community leaders were conducted in five villages in the Parsa District. All community leaders were male. Most villages were in the terai, with Tharu, Yadar, Kurmi, Girii and Shah (Teli) ethnic groups represented. One village was a settlement of mixed ethnic groups which had migrated from the hills about 30 years ago. At least two of the villages were connected by a dirt road, passable by vehicle in fair weather. Two of the villages were judged by the researchers as having average economic conditions and one Tharu village was deemed relatively well off. No information was provided about the economic status of the other villages.

Agriculture was the main occupation of most of the villages visited in the district. Some work or labor was undertaken on a wage basis. Primary crops grown included rice, wheat, mustard seed, linseed and maize. In some villages sugar cane, maize, tobacco, lentils or potatoes were also grown. The main livestock raised included cows, buffalo, goats, chickens, pigs (by the low castes) and ducks (in one village). Village leaders reported that traditional values were prevalent in all the villages. The highest classes offered by the nearest school were: 1) fifth grade (one village); 2) high schools (three villages).

The most common problems encountered by experimental villages in the district were lack of irrigation, electricity, and drinking water (e.g., ten hand pumps served 300 families). Other problems cited were poverty and lack of transportation, motorable roads, health posts and fuel wood. Two villages had no high school nearby, and one had no school of any type.

3.1.2.2. Bardiya District

Village leaders in eight villages in the Bardiya District were interviewed. Village populations ranged from about 375 to 2,500 people, with most of the villages in the 1,000–2,000 range. Three of the villages were comprised mostly of "hill-people," and the other five villages were predominantly Tharu (60%–75% of the village population) and Brahmin/Chhetri settlers from the hills (25%– 40%). In general, the hill-dwellers tended to be wealthier than the Tharu. Many of the Tharu villagers were poor and landless or owned only a small plot of land recently given to them by the government. In some of the villages 20%–25% owned only small plots consisting of about 10 Katha of land, while and in other villages as many as 90%–100% were in this category.

Most inhabitants in the villages were farmers. The main crops were mustard seed, maize, rice, wheat, and dhal. A few villagers also raised chickpeas and vegetables. Buffalo, cows, goats chickens, pigs, male buffalo and sheep were raised in most villages. Bulls were found in four villages and ducks were owned by villagers in two communities.

The leader in one village estimated that only about 40% of the people (equally divided between Tharu and hill settlers) were able to produce enough food to last the year, while in another village, it was estimated that about 60% could feed their families on the produce they grew. Many of those who owned land also worked other people's property, keeping 50% of the yield for themselves. Many were bonded laborers. In most villages incomes were supplemented by money from wages earned in the area or in India. However, employment opportunities in

most of the areas were extremely limited. Produce, poultry and livestock were sometimes sold at the nearby markets. In one village, the tourist industry provided much of the local income through labor at resorts and the sale of meat and produce.

Most of the villages had primary schools nearby, with enrollments ranging from about 250–350 students. One school was almost evenly divided between boys and girls (with slightly more girls), but most schools consisted of about two-thirds boys. One village had a secondary school in the ward with about 600 students, and one village was about a two hour's walk from the nearest high school. However, only about 10%–15% of the eligible children from the village actually attended the school. Another village had a secondary school with classes up to grade 7. In one village, the leader said that no Tharu had studied beyond the Intermediate Degree (I.A.), while "hill people" had continued on to complete their B.A. degrees. In still another village, two Tharus had passed the test for the Secondary Leaving Certificate, which was the highest any Tharu had attained in that village. However, several "hill people" had received B.A.s.

Problems encountered in the villages included disease and the lack of:

- clean drinking water;
- irrigation;
- access to passable roads, especially in the monsoon season;
- opportunities for employment;
- nearby markets;
- experience in handling money;
- land;
- educational facilities (particularly secondary schools);
- fuelwood;
- grazing land; and
- electricity.

3.1.2.3. Makwanapur District

Village leaders in six villages in Makwanapur District were interviewed. Most of the villages visited were predominantly (75%–90%) Tamang, with the remaining population comprised of Newar, Chhetri, Newar, Cheppong, Brahmins and Untouchables. However, one village was made up of about 85% Brahmins, 10% Tamangs, and 5% Rai and Cheppong. The main religion in most of the villages was Buddhist, with a few Hindu. There were also a few recent converts to Christianity and members of the Baha'i faith. Large land owners were rare. In one village, ten families owned no land at all and had to rely on day labor to survive. In a village near a well traveled road, no one owned much land and villagers relied heavily on day labor, while in a village further from a main road, about 90% of the inhabitants lived off the land and the remainder relied on day labor. In one village, leaders reported that no one owned a great deal, but everyone had some land, and in another, only one family was completely landless.

Most people in the villages in the Makwanapur District villages were farmers. When they ran out of food, they turned to day labor, working in factories or driving trucks. Others supplement their income by working in the local markets, raising livestock, selling milk, bamboo and other products. Principal crops grown were maize, millet, soybeans, wheat, mustard and buckwheat. Rice, vegetables, barley and sesame seeds were grown, to a lesser extent. The primary livestock raised were cows, buffalo, goats, and chickens. Male cows and pigs were raised in a two villages.

Classes in the nearest school went up to grade 5 in one village, grade 7 in one village, grade 8 in one village, and grade 10 in one village. One village leader reported that there were seven schools in the area. School enrollments ranged from about 150 to 550. Some of the schools consisted mostly of boys, and some were comprised equally of boys and girls. In a village that had a nearby high school (with 200 students) only one person had received a

national school leaving certificate during the past year. In another village, only two people finished high school, while in sill another, one person had a college degree and in one of the wealthier villages (comprised mostly of Brahmins) some people had attained a masters degree. In a village consisting mostly of Tamangs, it was reported that no women had attained higher than an eighth grade education.

The major problems faced by villagers were inadequate drinking water supplies and poor roads. During the monsoon season when the river overflows, three of the villages included in the study in this district were usually cut off. Four villages were without adequate drinking water supplies. The community leader in several villages indicated that limited access to vehicles made it difficult to transport goods to and from the market or to the clinic in case of illness. Several leaders cited poverty as the main problem: largely because of lack of seeds and irrigation, villagers could not produce enough to feed their families. Other problems mentioned included lack of electricity, fuelwood, and medical facilities. Women had to walk long distances and "steal wood from protected forests." Many people still went to traditional healers, and the one medical post available to one of the villages was located in someone's home because the village could not afford to build a medical facility. The number of schools and classrooms was also reported to be insufficient to meet local demand.

3.1.2.4. Tanahu District

Village leaders in six villages were interviewed. Most of the villages visited were comprised of mixed ethnic groups, including: Brahmin, Kesshatriya, Newar, Gerung and Magar. Also mentioned in several villages were Chhapa, Bhainskhava, Rumsi, lower caste groups (Kami and Damai) and upper caste groups (Yogi). Most of the villages were described as having an average economy; the economy in one village was depicted as "slowly recovering;" and another was described as "poor." One village in the study had once been the district headquarters but was now described as a "ghost town," and one was said to have a trading center in the village.

The primary occupation in the village was farming: the main crops were rice, wheat, maize and millet. Three villages also grew mustard seeds, and two grew oranges, potatoes and lentils. The main livestock were cows, buffalo, goats, chickens, and pigs. About 10-12 families were landless. No information was provided about the land owners in other villages. Most inhabitants were farmers or service men. One village leader reported that ex-military service men and perceived their families had moved into the area because of a private boarding school operated by foreigners.

Three villages were located within one to three kilometers from a secondary school, and two had only primary schools nearby.

Problems encountered in the villages included the lack of:

- clean drinking water;
- irrigation;
- access to passable roads;
- transportation;
- opportunities for employment;
- nearby markets;
- medical facilities;
- land;
- educational facilities (particularly secondary schools);
- schools;
- training on income generating activities; and
- electricity.

Leaders also mentioned insufficient awareness of development and the absence of a coherent development strategy. Drinking of alcohol was also considered a problem by one community leader.

3.1.3. Literacy Course Providers and Sponsors

Table 3 and 4 depict the distribution of literacy course providers by type of course and by sponsor (Pact or World Education).

Table 3: Distribution of NGO Literacy Course Providers by District

District/VDC	Basic Only		Post		Total Treatment	
	Number.	Col. %	Number.	Col. %	Number.	Col. %
Makwanpur:						
Center for Ed. & Environ. Serv. (CEES)	51	25.4	49	24.5	100	24.9
Sub-Total	**51**	**25.4**	**49**	**24.5**	**100**	**24.9**
Tanahu:						
Dairy Development Corp	20	10.0	0	0.0	20	5.0
Community Dev. & Res. Council (CDRC)	0	0.0	50	12.5	50	12.5
Nepal Women's Organization	10	5.0	0	0.0	10	2.5
Pulkot Social Service Org.	20	10.0	0	0.0	20	5.0
Sub-Total	**50**	**24. 9**	**50**	**24.9**	**100**	**24.9**
Parsa						
Jana Sewa Sajha Youth Club	20	10.0	0	0.0	20	5.0
Jana Kalyan Youth Club	10	5.0	0	0.0	10	2.5
Mount Everest Youth Club	20	10.0	0	0.0	20	5.0
Renaissance Society Nepal	0	0.0	50	24.9	50	12.5
Sub-Total	**50**	**24.9**	**50**	**24.9**	**100**	**24.9**
Bardiya						
Tharu Comm. Dev. Forum	50	24.9	51	25.5	101	25.2
Sub-Total	50	24.9	51	25.5	**100**	**24.9**
Total	**201**		**200**		**401**	

Percentages do not total due to rounding.

Table 4: Sponsors

Experimental Group		
District/VDC	**Basic Sponsor**	**Post Sponsor**
Makwanpur:		
Center for Education & Environmental Services (CEES)	Pact	WEI
Tanahu:		
Dairy Development Corp	WEI	
Community Dev. & Res. Council (CDRC)	WEI	WEI
Nepal Women's Org.	WEI	
Purkot Social Service Org (PSSO)	WEI	
Parsa:		
Jana Sewa Sajha Youth Club	Pact	
Jana Kalyan Youth Club	Pact	
Mount Everest Youth Club	Pact	
Renaissance Society Nepal	Pact	WEI
Bardiya:		
Tharu Comm. Dev. Forum	Pact	WEI

3.1.4. Caste/Ethnic Group

The survey sample was comprised of respondents from a wide range of castes and ethnic groups, including:

1) Brahmin
2) Chhetri
3) Newar
4) Tamang
5) Gurung
6) Magar
7) Yadav
8) Occupational/Dahlit
9) Rajput

As shown in Figure 1, the largest portion of respondents were from Tharu (36%) and Tamang (20%) castes (see Appendix A, Table A1). Although efforts were made to select control group villages that were similar in ethnic and religious composition to those in the experimental group, *individuals* within the control group were randomly selected; caste/ethnic affiliation was not a criterion considered in selection. Analysis of results revealed significant differences[6] in the case/ethnic groups between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy group.

[6] On items comprised of nominal level data (i.e., non-numeric data classified into categories), Chi Square tests were utilized to determine statistical significance. On items using interval level data, Analysis of Variance was used. As noted earlier, the level of significance was set at .05.

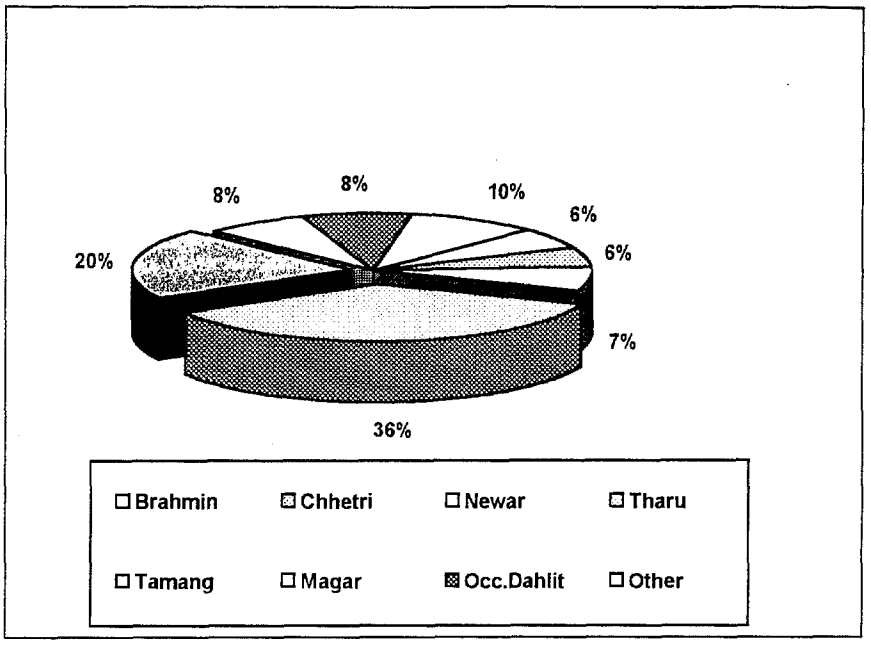

Figure 1: Caste/Ethnic Group Composition (Total)

As illustrated in Figure 2, the greatest differences were between the basic and the post-literacy course completers, with the control group bearing closest resemblance to the post-literacy group. For example, 43% of the basic literacy participants were Tharu and 11% were Brahmin, compared with 8% Tharu and 1% Brahmin in the post-literacy group; and 24% Tharu and 3% Brahmin in the control group. The highest concentration of Tamang were in the post-literacy group (24%), in comparison to 16% in the basic literacy group and 23% in the control group.

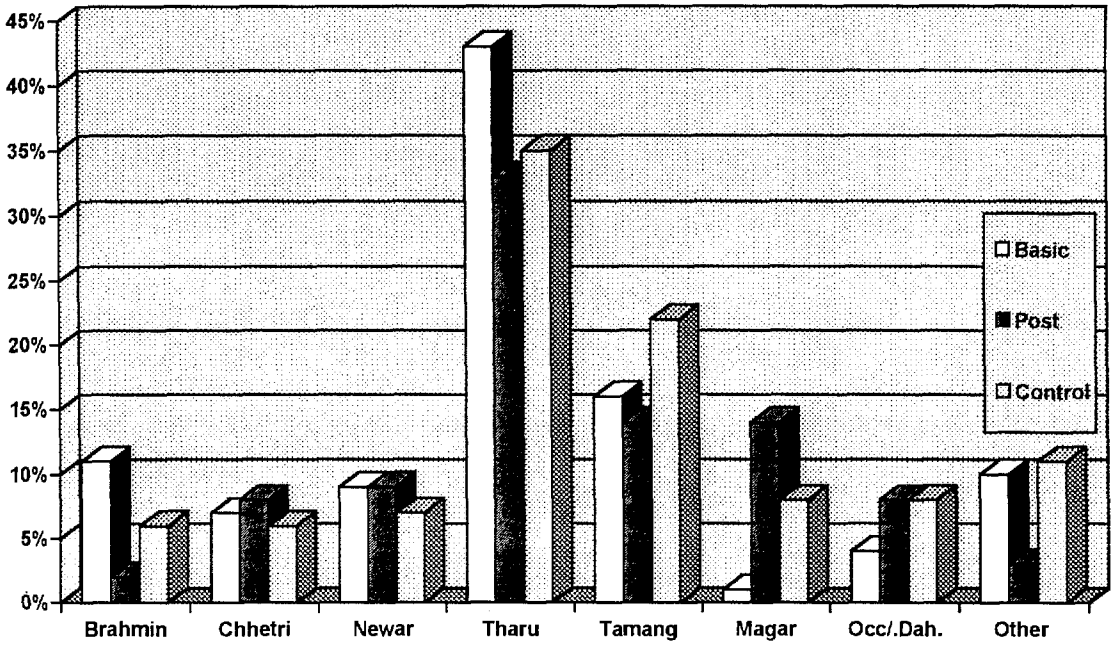

Figure 2: Caste/Ethnic Group Composition by Group

3.1.5. Religion

The most common religious affiliation among all three groups was Hindu (78%), followed by Buddhist (21%). Only six respondents (1.0%) were Christian and one (0.2%) was Muslim. A total of 84% of respondents who took the basic literacy course were Hindu, compared to 74% in the post-literacy course and 75% in the control group. Differences between the experimental and control group (primarily among the small proportion of non-Hindu respondents) were significant, as well as between the basic and post-literacy course completers. However, these differences are likely to have little effect, since most of the respondents from all three groups were Hindu (see Table A2 and Figures 3–4). The effects of religious affiliation on responses are examined in a later section of this study.

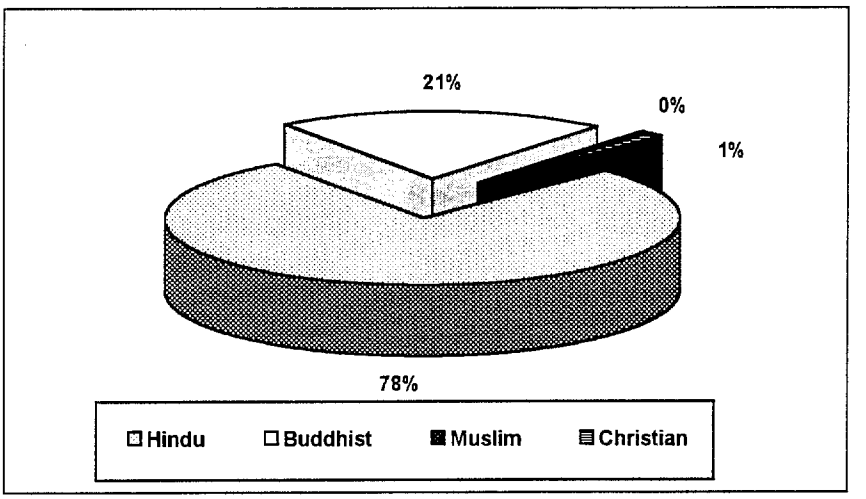

Figure 3: Religious Affiliation (Total)

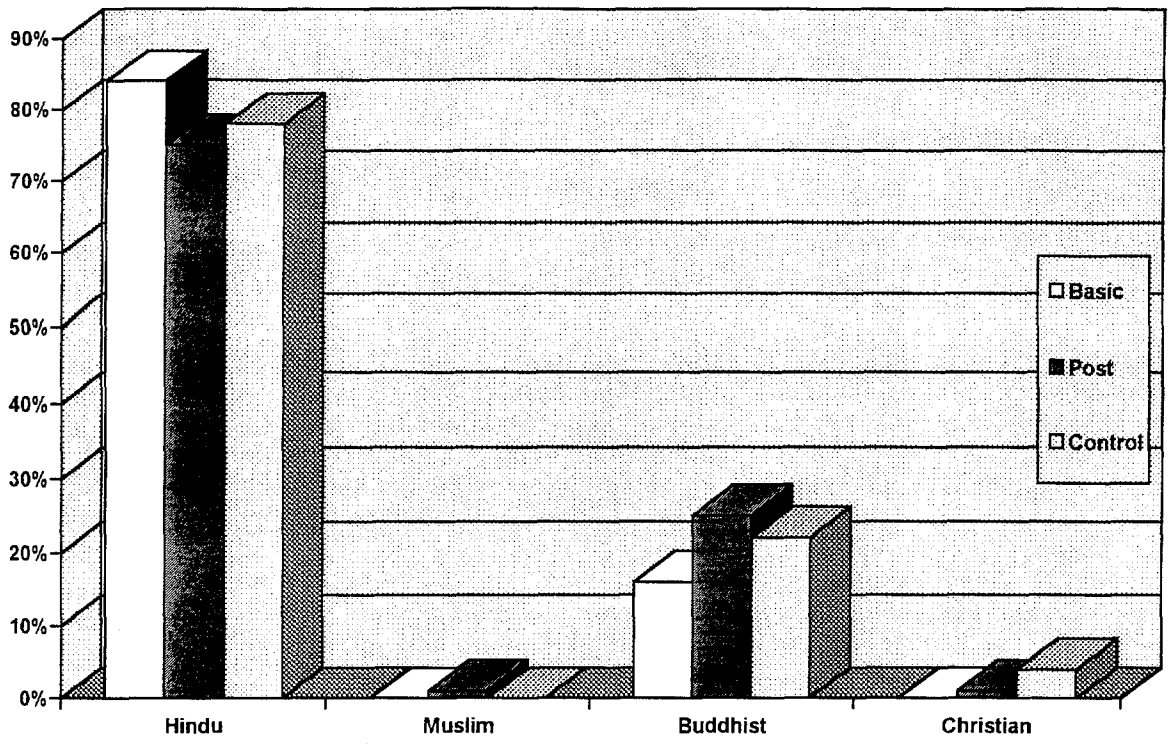

Figure 4: Religious Affiliation by Group

3.1.6. Family Occupation

Most of the respondents were farmers (92%), while approximately 3% had earnings from daily wages. Little variation existed among different groups in the sample; 95% of the respondents who took the basic literacy course, 91% of those who took post-literacy courses and 89% in the control group were farmers (see Table A3). Differences between the experimental and control group were significant, but there were no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers. However, since the greatest majority of respondents in all groups were farmers, such differences were not likely to have had a major effect on responses.

3.1.7. Education/Training

3.1.7.1. Formal Education

Significant differences existed between the educational levels of the literacy course completers and the control group: none of the control group respondents had attended school, while approximately 9% (17) of the basic literacy course completers, and 13% (24) of the post-literacy course completers had attended school before[7] taking the literacy course (see Table A4.1). However, no significant differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course completers. Examination of prior school attendance of literacy course completers by district for the experimental group, revealed significant differences between districts, with the greatest number of participants who had attended school in Tanahu (17) and Parsa (11) and the smallest number in Bardiya (4) and Makwanpur (9) (see Table A4.2). However, because of the small number of cases in each district, differences may be spurious.

[7] On many of the questions, respondents were asked about their attitudes or experiences before and after completing the literacy course. To measure changes for the control group respondents who attended no literacy courses, they were asked these questions with respect to the period before and after the last year, using the last Holi (religious holiday) as the indicator of the passage of one year.

Table A5 depicts the highest class level completed by those in the experimental group who had previously attended school. However, the completion levels were relatively low for all groups, and as shown, only about half of the literacy course completers who had attended school (23) had completed class 2 or above and seven of those had gone as far as class four or above.

Additionally, three of the basic literacy course completers and one participant from the control group went to school during the year following the literacy courses (see Tables A6–A7).

3.1.7.2. Training

About 6% (22) of literacy course completers received any type of training *before* attending their first literacy course. By comparison, only one control group respondent had attended any training before the last year. The number of cases was too small for statistically significant differences between groups to be meaningful. Little variation was observed between districts with regard to training. Six to seven respondents in each district had received some type of training, except in the Tanahu District, where only one participant had received any training (see Tables A8.1 and A8.2).

As shown on Table A9, of the 11 basic literacy course completers and 11 post-literacy course completers who had received training, the most prevalent training activities were:

- other literacy courses;
- income generating activities;
- community health/other health and nutrition; and
- livestock, and agricultural training.

The most commonly mentioned reasons for not participating in training were:

- no training was available;
- no time because of housework or farmwork;
- no need or no interest; and
- no one to keep the children (see Table A10).

After completing the last literacy course, a significantly higher proportion of post-literacy course completers (18%) than basic literacy course completers (5%) attended further training. Additionally, only 2% of the control group attended training during the last year, representing a significant difference between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy participants. Similar types of training were available as before the literacy course, and respondents offered about the same reasons for not participating in training (see Tables A11–A13).

Focus group participants' responses closely paralleled those of the survey respondents on questions concerning their education and training. Most cited a lack of opportunity for training as a key problem and expressed a desire for additional training that would help them to acquire more skills.

3.1.7.3. Age, Marital Status and Attitudes About Age of Marriage

Although Nepalese society is comprised of many cultures and sub-cultures, Hinduism is the most prevalent and the most influential in defining the role of women. Subedi (1993) notes that in Hindu culture, sons are viewed as protectors of, and providers for, the family, but daughters are considered the future property of another man. While sons are thought in Hindu culture to be able to open the gates of heaven for their parents by performing certain rituals after their death, daughters are not deemed to have such powers. She points out that in traditional

families, many parents believe that they will gain merit by giving their daughters in marriage before their first menstruation. Until about 50 years ago, a young girl resided with her parents only until she was about four or five years of age before she was sent to live with her husband's family. Even during that brief period, the parents considered her a burden of which they would soon be gratefully relieved. Subedi illustrates this point by quoting the following lines from Kaladassa's 4th century play:

> The daughter is a thing to give away
> For someone else she is kept
> What a relief to send her away today
> I'm light as a feather and free from debt.[8]

At the time women marry, they leave their family and the village where they grew up to become part of their husband's family. The support of social networks established during childhood and adolescence are suddenly gone. The newly married woman becomes part of an extended family in which her husband and his parents and often grandparents, make most of the decisions that affect her life. Few women are aware that laws exist guaranteeing specific legal rights for women. A married woman must negotiate her own rights within her husband's extended family. Often, her only increase in power comes when her son marries and she herself becomes a mother-in-law.

In the sample comprising this study, approximately 58% of all respondents were married and living with their husbands, 34% were never married, and 4% were married and living in their parents' house. However, as indicated, a significantly higher proportion of respondents in the control group (91%) were married and living with their husbands than in either of the two experimental groups (49% of basic literacy course completers and 50% of post-literacy course completers). See Table A14. This can largely be explained by the fact that participants in both basic and post-literacy courses were significantly younger than women in the control group sample, and one would expect a smaller proportion of women in the experimental group to be married. The average age of women in the control group was 33, compared with 24 for completers of each of the two types of literacy courses. Ages of respondents in all groups ranged from 12 to 72 (see Tables A15.1 and A15.2). The average age at the time of marriage was 17, with no significant differences between the age at marriage for any of the three groups (see Table A16 and A17).

Since the literacy course completers had only finished their courses the previous year, it is unlikely that the literacy courses would have an effect on an individual participant's marital status. However, in villages where literacy courses were regularly held over a period of several years, the literacy courses may have had a cumulative effect on overall *attitudes* among the women in the community concerning the appropriate age of marriage. This is further evidenced by the fact that women in the experimental groups cited older ages as ideal for marriage than did women in the control group, where there was little or no access to literacy programs.

The average age at which respondents in the control group thought women should marry was 18, compared to 20 for those who took the basic literacy course and 21 for those who took the basic and post-literacy course (refer to Table 15.1). A significant difference existed in the desired age of marriage between the experimental and control group but not between the two experimental groups (see Table A18). When religion and caste/ethnic group were controlled for, these relationships remained relatively unchanged.

The ideal marriage age most frequently cited by respondents from all groups was in the 19–20 range, with 32% of respondents believing that women should marry at that age. The most commonly mentioned reasons given for marrying at that age were: "so that they could get an education" (27%) and "to allow them to reach maturity before marriage" (25%). However, approximately 20% of all respondents thought women should marry at the age of 16 or younger. The main reasons provided for marrying young were tradition (39%) and prestige (32%).

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[8] Kaladassa's play "Abhigyanashakuntal," 4th century A.D., translated into English by Shambhu Prasad Dhungel.

The most frequently cited age group considered ideal for marriage was 17–18 for basic literacy course completers, 19-20 for post-literacy course completers, and 15-16 for the control group (see Table A19 and Figure 5). The most common reasons for a woman to marry at the age given by respondents are provided in Tables A21.1–A21.11.

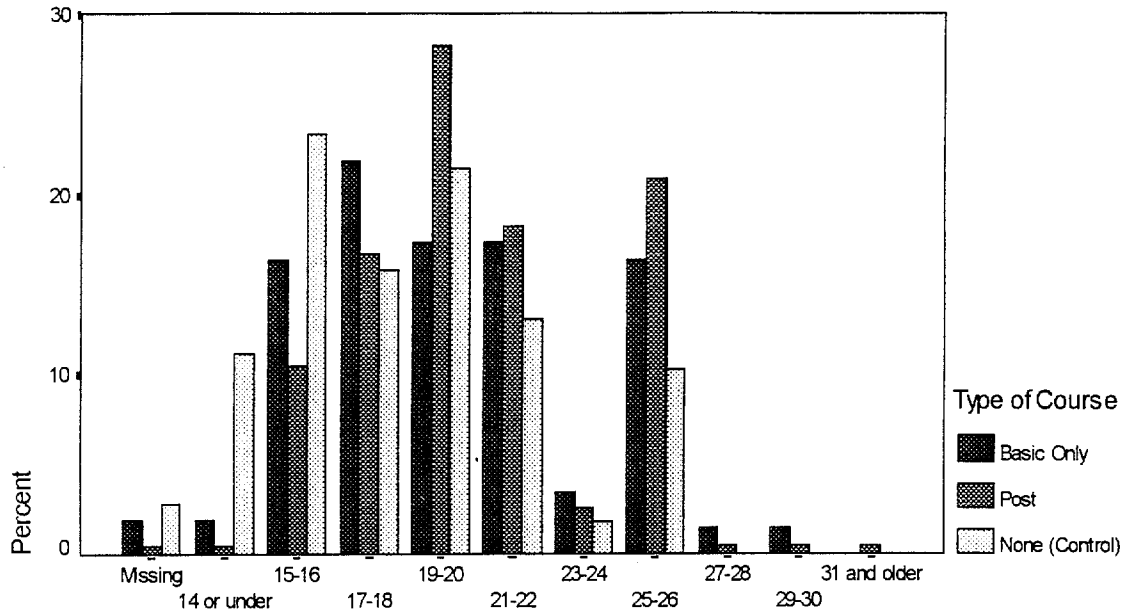

Figure 5: Ideal Marriage Age

Approximately, 70% of the respondents in the experimental group who completed only the basic literacy courses and 77% who completed the post-literacy courses indicated that their attitudes about the age at which a woman should marry had changed since they took the literacy courses (see Table A20). This compared with 30% in the control group who thought their attitudes had changed during the last year. The difference between the experimental and control group was significant.

Approximately 67% of the married respondents in the experimental group married at an age younger than the age they considered to be the ideal age for marriage, compared to 70% of the married women in the control group. Of the respondents who were not married, 9% in the experimental group and none of the three unmarried women in the control group were older than the age they considered ideal for marriage.

3.1.7.4. Number of Children in Household

Some studies have found the number of children in the household to be a predictor of girls' school dropout. In Nepal, as well as in other societies, girls often bear responsibility for caring for young children while their mothers work in the fields. This leads to frequent absenteeism and may eventually result in their dropping out of school altogether.

In this study, there were no significant differences between the basic, post and control groups in the mean number of respondents'[9] children living in the household. As noted earlier, participants had only completed the courses the year before, and one would not expect to see differences in childbearing patterns. The mean number of respondents' children was 2.71, 2.69, and 2.55 for the control, basic, and post groups respectively. There were, however, significant differences in the mean number of children of family members living in the household, with

[9] Unmarried respondents were excluded from this calculation, since none of the unmarried women reported having children.

2.87 children residing with the control group, 3.48 with respondents completing the basic literacy course, and 4.13 with respondents completing the post-literacy courses. One possible explanation for this difference is that respondents who had more extensive literacy training were to be more skilled or more financially able, and thus were given greater responsibility for caring for children of relatives (see Tables A22–A25).

3.1.7.5. Family Ownership of Animals

Some studies of empowerment define economic security in terms of ownership of home, land or other productive assets and cash savings. For a variety of reasons, this study made no attempts to assess respondents' property ownership. First, issues related to land ownership in Nepal are complex and are tied to caste, political affiliation and social status. Isolating the effects of the literacy program from these other factors would be extremely difficult. Second, few women own land or other major assets separately from their husbands or parents, and control over land would typically be limited by the powers of the husband or other male relatives.[10]

Ownership of animals was included as a measure of respondents' economic security because most families, regardless of caste or socioeconomic status, own some animals. The number of animals owned may provide a rough indicator of respondent's relative economic security. However, the usefulness of this data is limited, since the number of people residing in the household may be a major factor in determining how many animals are owned. One can easily see the difficulty in interpreting these data. For example, is a family of 12 which owns two buffalo and 24 chickens better off than a family of four which owns only one buffalo and six chickens? Nevertheless, knowledge of the overall pattern of ownership aggregated across families may provide a rough indication of whether basic diffeences exist.

The animals most commonly owned by all three groups (basic, post and control) were poultry (chickens, ducks and geese) followed by goats and sheep, cows and oxen. Fewer respondents owned male and female buffalo, pigs, horses and other pack animals. There were significant differences in the mean number of animals owned by the experimental and control groups in the following categories: female buffalo, goats and sheep, chickens and ducks. However, the direction of the differences was not consistent. For example, the most poultry animals were owned by post-literacy course completers, and the least by control group respondents. The most goats and sheep were

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[10] The complexity of Nepal's property rights laws is illustrated by excerpts from Subedi's (1993) discussion of the topic:

> An unmarried daughter thirty-five years and older is entitled to an equal share of parental property, but if she gets married after the age of 35 she must forfeit the property...[Prior to the sixth amendment of the civil code in 1975], a daughter was not entitled to inherit the parental property if husband, wife, son and son's son and other male relatives of the deceased were surviving. Now, a daughter is entitled to inherit in the absence of husband, wife, son or son's son. Other male relatives of the deceased cannot claim any right to property as long as the daughter of the deceased is surviving...
>
> In section 16, under the heading of "Partition of Property" of the civil code an unmarried daughter can acquire a share of her parent's property just as a son, but only after reaching the age of 35 years. After inheriting her share of property if she gets married or elopes her inherited property will be seized by the nearest coparcenter of the father's line after deducting her marriage expenses and dowry. The wife cannot live separately taking her share of property during the lifetime of her husband without his consent. The husband is liable to provide food and clothing to this wife and sons according to his income and prestige, but there is no legal provision in the code for a daughter, even for basic maintenance. In this way women are made dependent on men. A widow cannot claim for partition of property until she reaches the age of 30, until which time her husband's coparcenter gives her food and clothes according to his status and allows her to perform her religious duties...A woman inherits her share of property from the share of her husband...A woman can claim her right to property only as somebody's wife. She can neither possess any property independently, nor, in times of need, can her share of marriage property be separated and used by her. In the joint family the husband alone can be the inheritor of property and not his wife. A woman gets her share when she becomes a widow in the joint family. Meanwhile, she gets only what her husband gives her as long as she remains at home as his wife. If she stays separate from him she will receive her portion only with his consent...Under the existing legal system it is almost impossible for women to get their share of inheritance through a court of law as the property almost always goes to the "rightful heir"–the men. Thus women are forced to live under domination and do not dare to divorce their husbands even if they are tortured (pp. 113-114).

owned by control group respondents and the least by basic literacy course completers. Post-literacy course completers owned the most female buffalo, and the least were owned by basic literacy course completers (see Tables A26 and A27.1–A27.10).

3.1.7.6. Ability to Produce Enough Food

As noted earlier, a majority of families in rural areas earn their living from farming. Consequently, the ability to produce enough food to last throughout the year is a crude indicator of the family's overall economic situation. This measure is not without flaws, since about 10% of the respondents were dependent on wage earnings and a few did not produce their own food.

There were significant differences between the control and the experimental groups in the proportion of respondents who reported that they were able to produce enough food to last through the year. Differences between basic and post-literacy participants were also significant. Approximately 51% control group participants could produce enough food for the year, compared to 69% of basic literacy course completers and 59% of post-literacy course completers. When only farmers were included in the analysis, differences were still significant, both between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy course completers. (see Table A28.1–A28.2). On average the food produced by respondents lasted about six months (see Table A 29.1–A29.2).

3.1.7.7. Type of Housing.

Another crude indicator of socio-economic status was the type of housing in which respondents lived. While most respondents in all three groups resided in mud huts (60%), there were no significant differences between either the control and experimental group or between the two experimental groups with regard to housing construction. Approximately 62% of the basic literacy group, 55% of the post-literacy group and 65% of the control group resided in mud huts. The percentage living in stone houses was 20%, 24% and 18% for the basic, post and control groups respectively. Only a small percentage in each group lived in wooden or cement houses (see Table A30).

3.2. Use and Retention of Literacy Skills

3.2.1. Use of Reading Skills

3.2.1.1. Survey Results

Literacy experts (and common sense) tell us that unless literacy course participants have an opportunity to practice the skills they learned, they are in danger of losing those skills. The lack of accessible reading material can present major problems for women who want to continue using and improving their newly acquired abilities. Comings (1995) purports that, although some loss occurs, most adults continue to retain and improve their skills after completing their courses. However, he points out that new readers need access to simple and interesting materials, such as a newspapers, posters, and good stories to reinforce and build those skills.

Most respondents, both in the experimental and control group, indicated that books (60%) and newspapers (77%) were available in their village. While there were no major differences between basic and post-literacy participants regarding the availability of books, a significantly higher proportion of experimental group completers indicated that newspapers were available (63% of basic and 60% of post-literacy course completers) compared to 56% of control group respondents (see Tables A31–A32).

Approximately 83% of basic literacy course completers, 76% of post-literacy course completers, and 64% of the control group respondents indicated that newspapers were available in their villages. This represents a significant difference both between the experimental and control group and between the basic and post-literacy course completers.

Considerable variation was observed between districts regarding the availability of books other than *Naya Goreto*. Approximately 77% of the respondents in the Parsa District, compared with 61% in Makwanpur, 52% in Tanahu and 52% in Bardiya indicated that books were available. Additionally, there was variation from village to village within the various districts. In Tanahu, for example, 32% (16) of the respondents in Bundipur, compared with 91% (10) in Kyamin said that books were available. Regional variation, however, did not account for the differences between the experimental and control group. When district was controlled for, statistically significant differences between the experimental and control group were evidenced in all four districts.

Similarly, 92% of the respondents in Parsa, compared with 68% in Tanahu, 69% in Bardiya and 79% in Makwanpur indicated that newspapers were available and similar variation was found within villages. Differences between the experimental and control group were significant in all four districts.

When asked *what kinds of things* they were able to read *prior* to taking the first literacy courses 87% (89% of the basic literacy course completers and 85% of the post-literacy course completers) responded that they had been unable to read prior to taking the literacy courses. Approximately 9% of the participants read books, and 6% read family or community members' correspondence. A small number of participants also indicated that they read their children's or sibling's books or homework, shopping lists, product labels and religious materials (see Table A33).

When asked *how often* they read *prior* to taking the first literacy course, little difference existed between basic and post-literacy course completers' responses: 90% of basic course completers and 87% of post-literacy course completers said they "never read" or "could not read." About 5% indicated that they read something every few months, 2% read twice a year or less and 2% read something every day or more (see Table A34).

In response to queries about *how often* they read *after* completing the literacy courses, 9% (10% of basic course completers and 7% of post-literacy course completers) said they never read or could not read. About 33% indicated that they read something every few months, and 27% read something several times a week. Classes rumor six months. Differences between basic and post-literacy course completers were not significant. Approximately 95% of the control group respondents indicated that they could not read, and those who could read something every few months (one person) or twice a year or less (four people) see Table A35 and Figure 6.

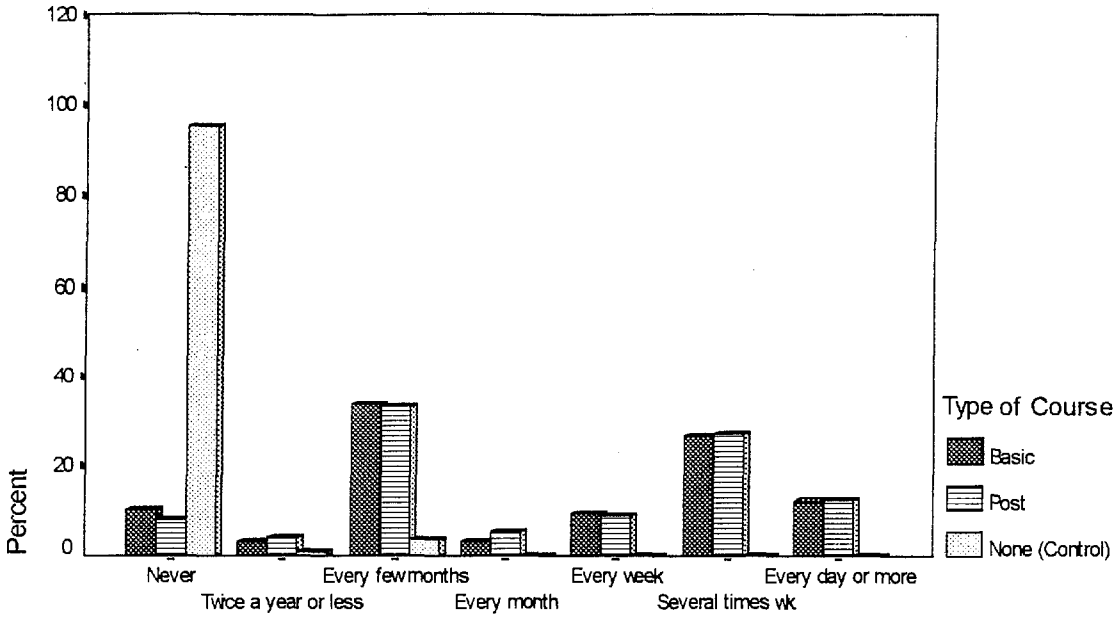


Figure 6: After-How Often Read

As shown in Table A36, materials read by participants *after* completing the literacy courses included, among other things:

- books (72%);
- sign boards (35%);
- course homework (33%);
- family or community members' correspondence (28%);
- product labels (21%);
- notices and posters (13%);
- shopping lists (9%);
- children's and sibling's books/homework (9%).

When respondents in the control group were queried about the *kinds of things* they read, only about 5% (five respondents) indicated that they read books or other materials. Approximately 9% of the literacy course completers (8% of basic literacy course completers and 10% of post-literacy course completers) indicated that they read nothing *after* completing the literacy courses.

The extent to which literacy course completers continued to read *after* the course was related to marital status. Of the single/never married respondents in the experimental group, 97% indicated that they continued to read after completing the course, compared with 86% of the married respondents who were living with their husbands. Of the 21 married respondents who were living with their parents, 19 (91%) continued to read, but only two of the six widowed/divorced participants continued reading.

However, there appeared to be no relationship between religious affiliation and the extent to which respondents continued to read. Approximately 91% of the Hindu literacy course completers and 93% of those who were Buddhists continued to read, as did the one Muslim participant and one of the two Christians completing the courses.

3.2.1.2. Focus Group Discussions

When focus group participants were asked about the availability of books, there was usually total agreement among group members as to whether or not they were available. Participants in eight out of nine villages in the Makwanpur District and in four out of six villages in the Bardiya District agreed that books were generally available. However, in four out of five villages in the Tanahu District and four out of six villages in the Parsa District, focus group participants indicated that no books were available. Similar responses were given by focus group participants concerning the availability of newspapers. It is not clear what accounts for the discrepancy in perceptions about the availability of these materials between focus group participants and survey respondents, especially in the Parsa District. Such disparities may simply be attributable to random variation associated with the small number of participants in the focus groups.

3.2.2. Use of Writing Skills

When asked *what kinds of things* they were able to write *prior* to taking the first literacy courses, 90% of the basic literacy course completers and 89% of the post-literacy course completers responded that they had been unable to write prior to the literacy courses. Approximately 10% of the literacy course completers were able to sign their names *before* taking the first literacy course, 2% helped their children with their homework, 3% wrote family or community members' correspondence, and 3% said they wrote homework of their own[11] (see Table A37[12]. Similarly, reporting *how often* they wrote *prior* to taking the first literacy course, 89% (90% of basic course completers and 87% of post-literacy course completers) said they never wrote anything or could not write (see Table A38. About 5% indicated that they wrote something every few months, 3% wrote twice a year or less and 2% several times a week. Differences between basic and post-literacy course completers were negligible with regard to this question.

After completing the literacy courses, participants practiced writing in the following ways:

- signing name–93%
- doing own homework from literacy or other courses–27%
- writing family or community members' correspondence–13%
- helping children and siblings with homework–10%
- writing songs–7%
- shopping lists–7%

Differences between basic and post-literacy course completers in the type of documents written were minor. In the control group, 94% of the participants had written nothing during the last year, and the remaining respondents (six people) indicated that they had only signed their names (see Table A39 and Figure 7).

[11] Four basic course completers and eight post-literacy course completers gave this response. This probably indicates that some respondents misinterpreted the question. Post-literacy course completers may have been referring to the homework they used during their basic literacy or may have thought the question being asked was about the period after completion of the literacy courses. However, it is impossible to determine respondents' intended meaning.

[12] Percentages represent the per cent of respondents who listed each response as one of their five choices. Percentages total to more than 100% because respondents could list more than one answer. This was true for all questions in which respondents could give more than one answer.

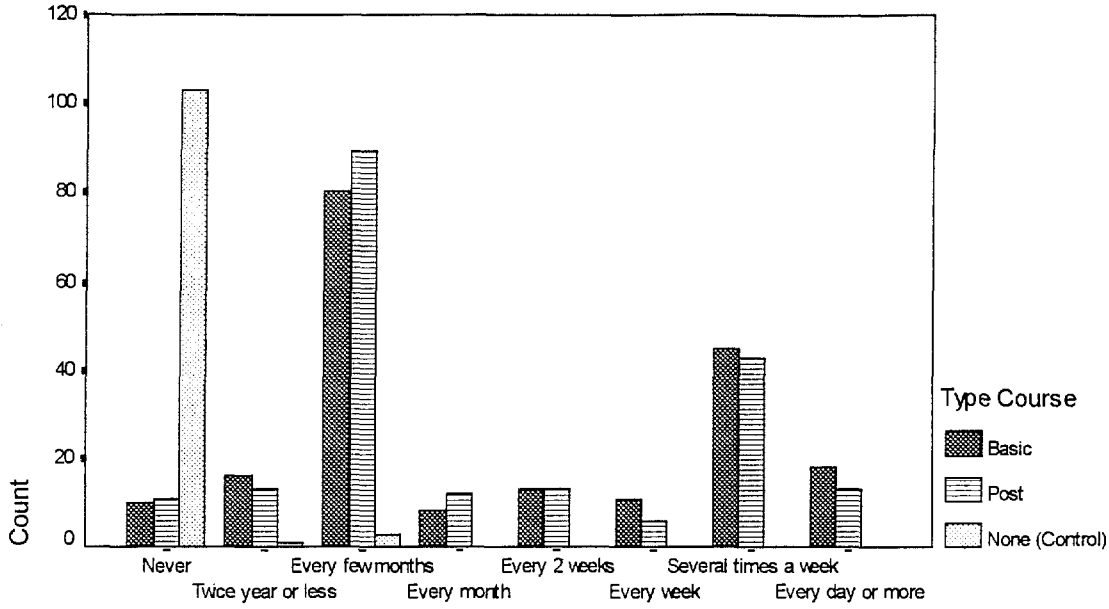


Figure 7: Since Course/Last Year How Often Write

Reporting *how often* they wrote *after* taking the first literacy course, 5% said they never wrote anything or could not write (see Table A40). About 42% indicated that they wrote something every few months, and 22% wrote several times a week. There were no major differences between basic and post-literacy course completers with regard to this question. However, differences between the experimental and control group were significant.

A relationship also existed between marital status and the extent to which participants continued to write after the course, with a significantly higher proportion of single/never married respondents (95%) continuing to write than those who were married and living with their husbands (61%). However, the relationship between marital status and frequency of writing was not as strong as the relationship between marital status and frequency of reading.

3.2.3. Use of Math Skills

Prior to taking the literacy course, 69% of the participants did math calculations in their minds, and 60% also used their fingers to do calculations. Approximately 5% did not do math calculations and 4% used paper to carry out calculations (see Table A41). Differences between the basic and post-literacy groups were small: a greater proportion of respondents reported that they did calculations on paper, *after* taking the literacy course, with 21% of the basic literacy participants and 32% of the post-literacy participants using this method. None of the control group reported using paper to do math calculations (see Table A42). Approximately 83% of participants felt that they were able to do calculations faster in their heads and on their fingers *after* having completed their literacy courses (see Table A43).

Before taking the literacy courses, 94% of the participants used math to make purchases at the market; 23% to collect pay for day labor; 11% to run businesses; and 10% to pay day laborers. There were no major differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers with regard to use of math (see Table A44). There was little change in this behavior *after* completing the literacy program, except for a slight increase in the proportion of completers using math to run a business (from 11% to 17%) and collecting pay for day labor (from 23% to 24%). Additionally, *after* taking the literacy courses, 96% of the participants used math to make purchases at the market and 11% to pay day laborers (see Table A45).

As shown on Table A46, participants who completed the post-literacy course were more inclined to teach others to read, write or do math than those completing only the basic course. Approximately 39% of the post-literacy participants reported that they had taught literacy skills to others, compared with 30% of those completing only the basic literacy course. The main recipients of the literacy tutoring were brothers and sons (26% of post and 21% of basic literacy participants) and sisters and daughters (25% of post and 15% of basic literacy participants). A few of the participants (10% of post and 6% of basic) taught other women in the family or community, but only four participants in either group (2%) were willing to teach adult male family members (see Table A47).

One indicator of the extent to which literacy course completers' confidence in their math skills changed *after* taking the courses is how often they feel cheated in the market. As shown on Table A48–A49, the proportion of literacy course completers who *never* felt cheated increased from 70% *before* the courses to 91% *after* the courses. There were no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers in this regard.

3.2.4. Retention of Literacy Skills

The importance of continuing to practice skills learned in the literacy courses is illustrated by the results of a short literacy test administered at the end of each interview. The test was comprised of four components: reading, reading comprehension, writing and mathematics. The testing procedure used for each component is described below.

- For the reading portion, participants were shown a card on which was written a short reading passage in large print. Participants were asked to read it aloud and interviewers then made a subjective judgment about the respondents' reading ability, placing them in categories of: 1) could not read at all; 2) could read only a little; 3) could read with difficulty; or 4) could read easily.

- For the reading comprehension portion, respondents were asked several simple questions about the content of the reading passage. They were given a score based on their ability to correctly answer the questions. Scores were classified as follows: 1) can't answer any; 2) can answer only a few; 3) can answer half; or 4) can answer easily.

- For the writing portion, participants were asked to write a sentence dictated by the interviewer, who then made a subjective judgment about the respondents' writing ability, placing them in categories of: 1) could not write at all; 2) could write only a little; 3) could write with difficulty; or 4) could write easily.

- The mathematics test was comprised of six simple addition and subtraction problems. Interviewers recorded the number of items the respondents answered correctly.

Several cautions should be noted when interpreting the results of these tests. First, tests were not intended to be comprehensive but rather were designed to provide a rough measure of respondents' abilities. Second, these tests were in no way comparable to the more comprehensive tests administered at the conclusion of the literacy courses. The tests were compiled by the professionals involved in the development and implementation of the literacy program. However, because of limitations on time available to carry out the study, no validation procedures were employed, apart from the series of pre-tests that were undertaken in conjunction with the pre-testing of the questionnaire. Furthermore, interviewers were not professional test administrators or literacy specialists. However, they did undergo extensive training on testing procedures, and each was observed and judged competent in their ability to rate respondents. Respondents' performance on the exam may also have been affected by the fact that the test was administered at the end of a long (45 minutes to an hour) interview, and respondents may have been tired or impatient to finish. Unlike tests given as part of the regular literacy courses, they were unfamiliar with the test administrators, and may have felt somewhat intimidated by the process. While these factors may have had little effect on the test results, they must, nevertheless be taken into account when considering the results.

All participants in the sample had completed their literacy courses approximately one year prior to the study. It was not surprising to find that the proportion who could not read or write at all on the literacy test closely matched

the proportion who reported that they had read or written nothing since the literacy course. Test results are discussed below.

3.2.4.1. Reading Test

Reading test results indicated that 10% of the literacy course completers could not read at all; 13% could read a only a little; 25% could read with difficulty and 53% could read easily (58% of post-literacy course completers and 49% of basic literacy course completers). Differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers were not significant (see Table A50). Results are graphically depicted in Figure 8.

As shown below, a higher per cent of post-literacy course completers were able to read easily than the basic literacy course completers. However, there were no significant differences between the performance of the two groups on the reading test.

	Basic	Post
Can read easily	49%	58%
Can read with difficulty	26%	23%
Can read only a little	13%	12%
Can't read at all	11%	7%

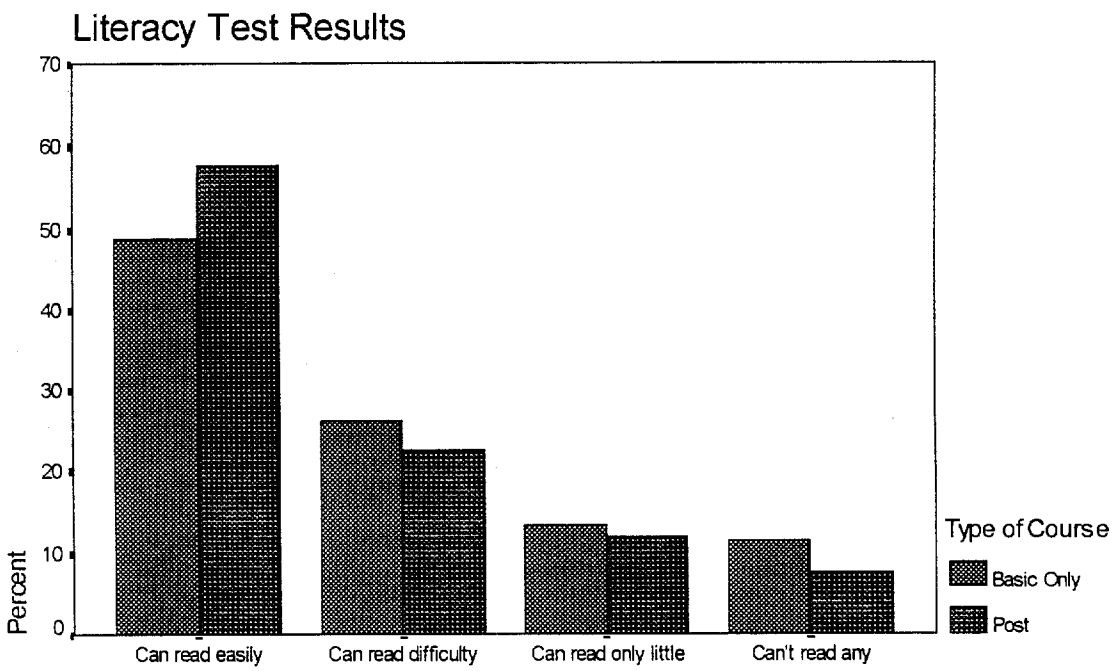


Figure 8: Reading

Similarly, there were no significant differences between respondents' performance on the reading test with regard to marital status, religious affiliation or ethnic group/caste. However, married participants living with parents, as

well as participants from the Rajput[13] and Magar castes performed slightly better than the others on the reading items. Hindu and Buddhist participants performed at about the same level.

3.2.4.2. Reading Comprehension Test

There were no significant differences between basic and post-literacy course completers on the reading comprehension test. Results are depicted below and in Figure 9.

	Basic	Post
Can answer easily	31%	31%
Can answer half	21%	20%
Can answer only a few	17%	22%
Can't answer any	31%	26%

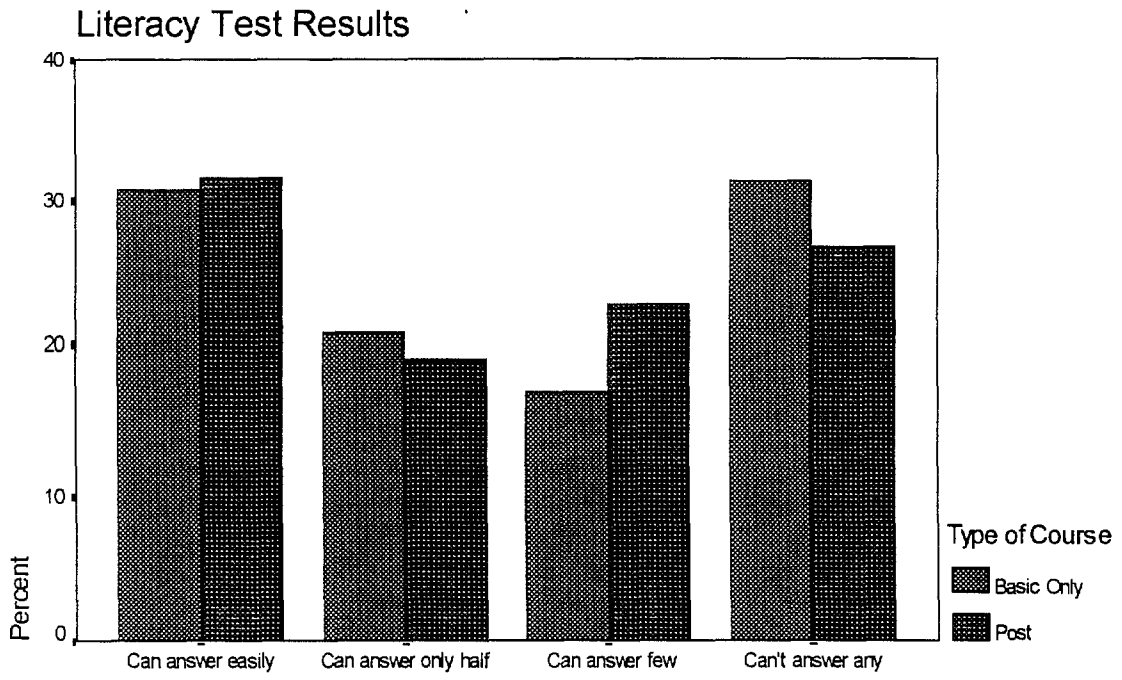


Figure 9: Reading Comprehension

As with the reading test, no significant differences existed between respondents' performance on the reading comprehension test with regard to marital status, religious affiliation or caste/ethnic group. The highest performers on this item were married respondents living with their husbands, as well as participants from the Rajput caste. Buddhist participants scored slightly higher than Hindu participants on this item (see Table A51).

[13] There were only four participants from the Rajput caste, making it difficult to make assertions regarding their performance relative to other castes.

3.2.4.3. Writing Test

On the writing test, 50% of the participants were judged as being able to write well, 19% could write with difficulty and 25% could write only a few words. Approximately 7% of the participants could not write anything. Differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers were not significant (see Table A52 and Figure 10).

	Basic	Post
Can write well	49%	52%
Can write with difficulty	18%	21%
Can write only a little	26%	23%
Can't write at all	8%	5%

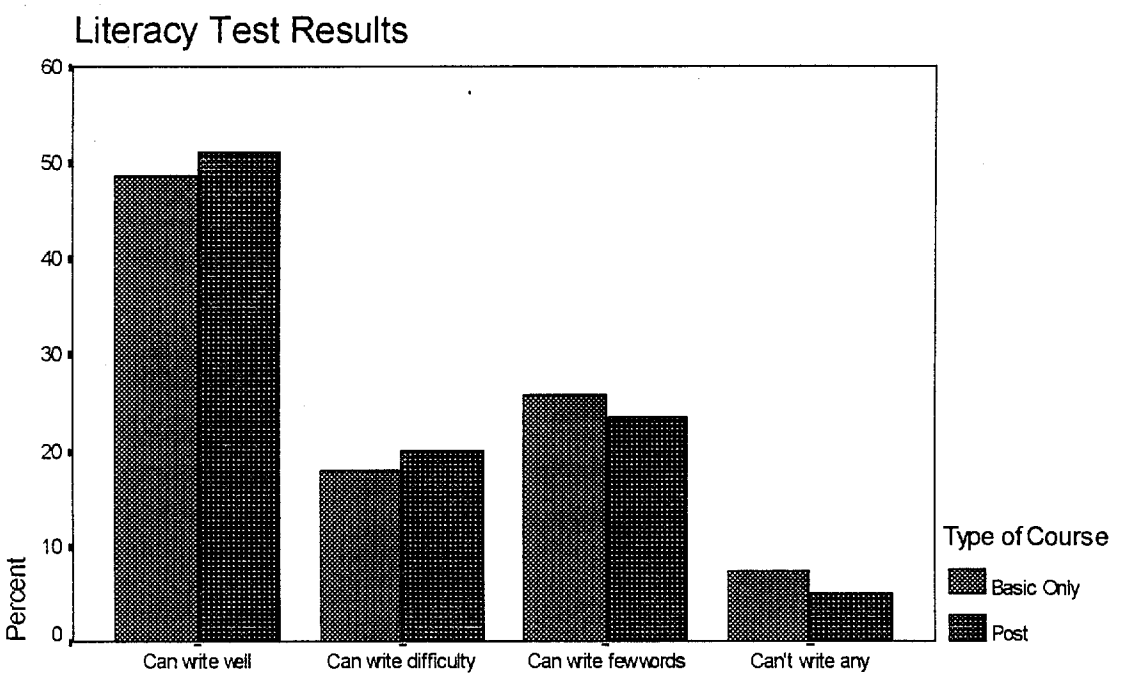


Figure 10: Writing

No significant differences existed between the married and unmarried participants, or between participants with various religious affiliations or caste/ethnic groups. The highest performers on the writing test were participants from the Rajput and Tamang castes; Buddhist participants scored higher than Hindu participants, and married participants living with their parents scored higher than the others.

3.2.4.4. Mathematics Test

Six mathematics items were included on the literacy test. Although the basic literacy group, on average, performed slightly better than the post-literacy group participants (with a mean score of 3.58 for the basic participants and 3.48 for the post-literacy course completers), there were no significant differences between the two groups. However, a greater variation existed in post-literacy course completers' scores, with a standard deviation of 1.67 for basic literacy participants compared with 1.83 for post-literacy course completers (see Tables A53.1–A53.2).

Additionally, a slightly higher percentage (32%) of post-literacy course completers scored five or higher than participants in the basic literacy course (30%) (see Table A54 and Figure 11).

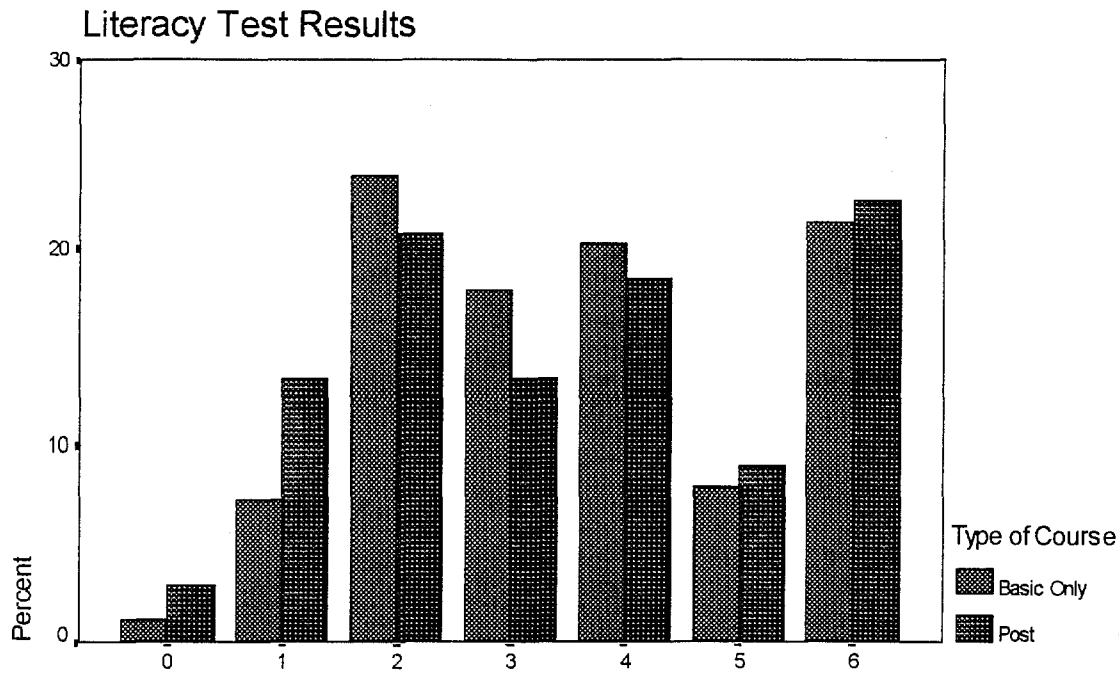


Figure 11: Mathematics

No significant differences existed between the married and unmarried participants: single and married participants did about the same, but the few widowed and divorced participants scored higher than the others. No significant differences existed between the various religious affiliations. However, Buddhist participants scored slightly higher than Hindu participants. Significant differences existed between the caste/ethnic groups on this item, with Rajput, Chhetri, and Brahmin scoring higher than the other castes.

Results of these tests are somewhat surprising. While post-literacy course completers scored slightly higher on three of the four components of the test than basic literacy course completers, differences were not statistically significant for any of the test components. These findings are inconsistent with earlier research (Smith, Comings, and Shrestha, undated), which found that when compared to literacy skills of Nepali primary school students, participants who finish the basic six-month course acquire skills equivalent to 1.5 years in school, and participants in the nine-month courses achieved literacy scores similar to students who have completed 3.5 years. Comings (1995) also cites other studies with similar findings. He contends that if instruction in an adult literacy class is provided for a time sufficient to gain solid literacy and numerically skills, possibly as many a 50 per cent will retain or improve their skills. He further asserts that adults can improve their reading skills and can ensure that comprehension, writing and numerically skills are retained (if not improved), through well-designed post-literacy programs. He concludes that, while such programs do not appear to be essential to retention of reading skills gained in adult literacy classes, they can build on the investment already made in basic literacy classes.

In this study, however, a fairly high proportion of both the basic and post-literacy course participants did well on the exam. For example, on the reading test 49% of the basic literacy course completers and 58% of the post-literacy course completers were able to read easily. Similarly, 49% of the basic literacy course completers and 52% of the post-literacy course completers were able to write easily. Results were somewhat lower for the reading comprehension and math portion of the exam. These results indicate that either the completers of both the basic and post-literacy classes have been relatively successful in retaining their literacy skills or the test (because of flaws

in tests, testing conditions or the limited experience of the test administrators) was unable to discriminate between good and poor readers and writers.

As discussed, earlier, determining the effect that the testing conditions, including factors such as the inexperience of interviewers who administered the tests in assessing literacy skills, and the relatively short length of the test may have had on respondent's performance was not possible. More extensive research and literacy testing, carried out under more rigorous conditions, are required to make this assessment.

3.3 Empowerment Indicators

As noted earlier, USAID Nepal's strategic objective related to increasing women's empowerment is measured by the following indicators:

1. collective actions for social change initiated by women in targeted areas;
2. women's influence over household decision-making in target areas:

    a) percent of women who increase their influence over allocation of their own income and/or income-producing assets;
    b) percent of women who increase their influence over household income and/or income-producing assets,
    c) percent of women who increase their influence over the decision to keep their daughters in school.

At the time this study began, USAID Nepal was still in the process of determining which indicators would be used to measure progress toward achieving the strategic objective related to increasing the empowerment of women. Consequently, this study examined a wider range of indicators than those ultimately selected by USAID. The discussion below first presents indicators related to components of USAID Nepal's strategic objective (SO3) for increasing the empowerment of women, followed by findings related to other aspects of empowerment included in the more broadly defined scope of this study.

3.3.1. Collective Action for Social Change

Nepali women are discouraged from taking part in public life, and women rarely participate in politics. Until fairly recently, for example, the idea that women had the right to intervene in any way to prevent their husbands from abusing them was unthinkable. A verse from a highly revered Hindu poem Ram Charit Manas,[14] epitomizes this attitude:

> Drums and idiots
> Outcasts, beasts
> And women are fit
> Only for beating.

In order for women to take action leading to improvements in their own circumstances or in the larger community, they must first be aware of the need for change and believe that their actions can result in such changes. One of the first steps women can take toward achieving this awareness is simply talking to others about issues of concern. Group discussions initiated during the literacy classes introduced participants to a process that often continued beyond the life of the course itself. This study queried respondents about three aspects of their involvement in social actions: 1) participation in discussions about topics related to theirs or others' lives; 2) participation in public protests or a political campaigns; 3) political awareness/participation; and 4) participation in non-family groups and organizations.

[14] Quoted in Pratwa Subedi, *Nepali Women Rising,* Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press, 1993, p. 5.

3.3.1.1 Participation in Discussions

To ascertain the extent to which respondents participated in discussions about key issues, they asked were how often they participated in discussions about the following:

1) things they heard on the radio;
2) things they read;
3) politics;
4) how to prevent men from drinking; and
5) how to prevent men from beating their wives.

Significant differences were found between the experimental and control group on questions concerning the frequency of discussions that took place before completing the literacy courses/last year on the items related to politics and things they heard on the radio. No significant differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course completers on responses to these questions.

On the items related to how often respondents participated in discussions about things heard on the radio (*before* the literacy course/last year), a much higher proportion of control group respondents than either of the experimental groups reported that they had no access to a radio. About 54% of the control group respondents reported that they did not have a radio, compared to 42% of the basic literacy course completers, and 29% of the post-literacy course completers. The most common response to the query about the frequency of discussions about things they heard on the radio was that such discussions took place every few months. Few women in any of the groups participated in discussions about politics, with none of the women in the control group, 8% of the basic literacy course completers and 13% of the post-literacy course completers reporting that they took part in discussions about politics (*before* the literacy course/last year).

On questions regarding participation in discussions that took place *after* completing the literacy courses/last year, significant differences were found between the experimental and control group on all five items. However, significant differences were found between the basic and post-literacy course completers only on the item concerning participation in political discussions. On this question, none of the control group, 12% of the basic literacy course completers, and 23% of the post-literacy course completers indicated that they participated in political discussions (*after* the literacy course/last year). For those who were involved in such discussions, most participated about twice a year or every few months.

The most dramatic differences between the experimental and control group were evidenced in questions concerning participation in discussions to stop men from drinking alcohol and from beating their wives *after* the literacy courses/last year. While less than two per cent of the married respondents in each of the experimental groups and less than one per cent in the control group did not think that problems related to drinking were applicable to their situation, *prior* to the literacy course/last year, only 18% of the control group married respondents stated that they participated in discussions to stop men from drinking, compared to 42% of the literacy course married participants. These figures reflect a substantial increase in the proportion of married women in the post-literacy courses who were involved in such discussions *before* the courses (37%) compared with *after* they took the course (59%). Changes were slightly less dramatic for *basic* literacy course married participants, with the proportion who reported taking part in such discussions increasing from 47% to 60%. No changes were reported among the married participants in the control group regarding their participation in such discussions *after* the last year. Differences between the experimental and control group were significant for both the period *before* and *after* the literacy course/last year. However, no significant differences were found between the basic and post-literacy course completers. The largest proportion of those in all of the groups who had such discussions participated every few months, several times a week or more, or every one to two weeks.

Less than two per cent of the respondents indicated that problems related to wife beating were not applicable to their situation either before or after the literacy course/last year. In the period *after* the literacy course/last year, 17% of the control group married respondents stated that they participated in discussions to stop men from beating their wives, compared to 53% of the married women in the basic literacy course, and 55% in the post-literacy course. This compared with 41% of married women in the basic literacy courses who were involved in such discussions *before* the course and 32% of the married women in the post-literacy course. The rate of participation in such discussions by women in the control group remained the same. Differences between the experimental and control group were significant for both the period *before* and *after* the literacy course/last year. However, no significant differences were found between the basic and post-literacy course completers. The largest proportion of those who had such discussion did so every few months, several times a week or more, or every one to two weeks.

Responses to these items are graphically depicted in Figures 12-21, and specific details of the crosstabulations are shown in Tables A55–A64.

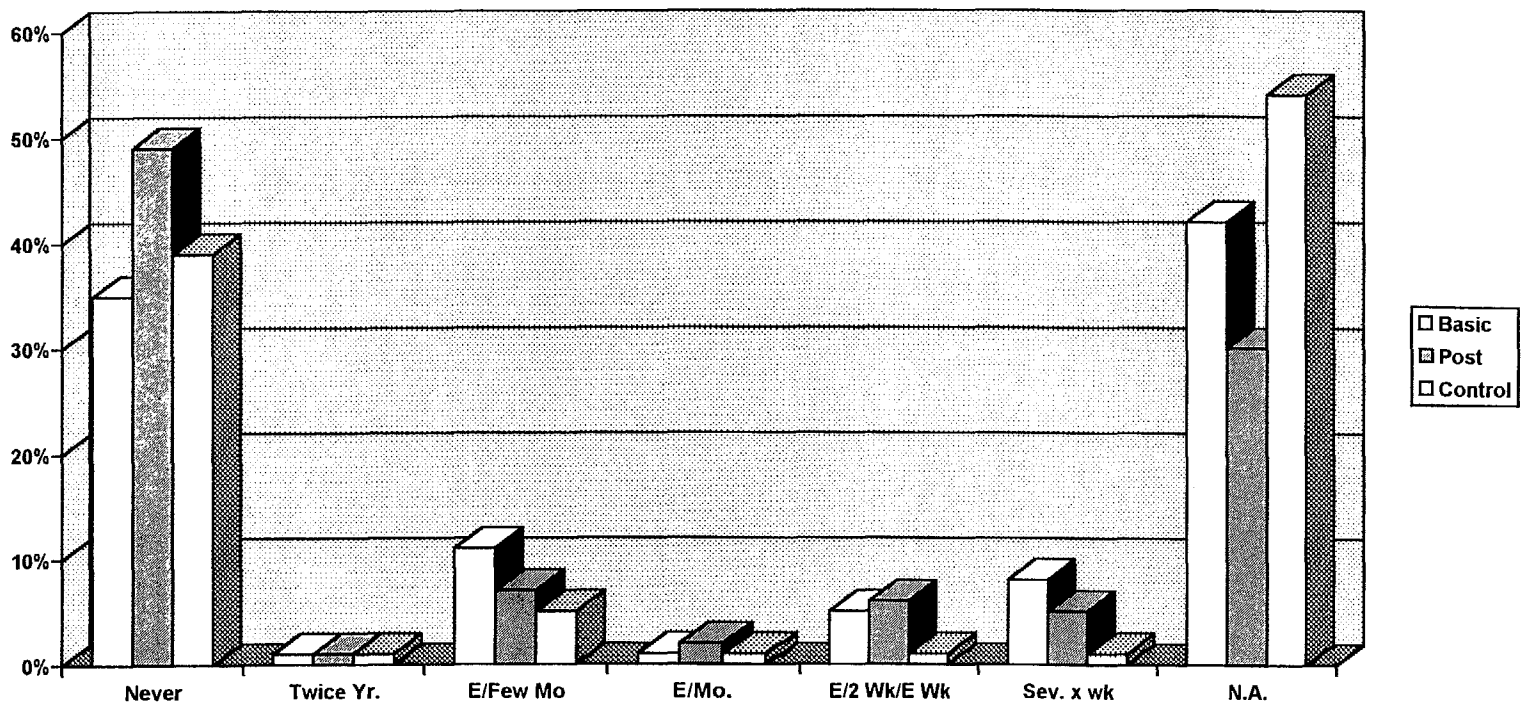


Figure 12: Before - How Often Discussed Things Heard on Radio

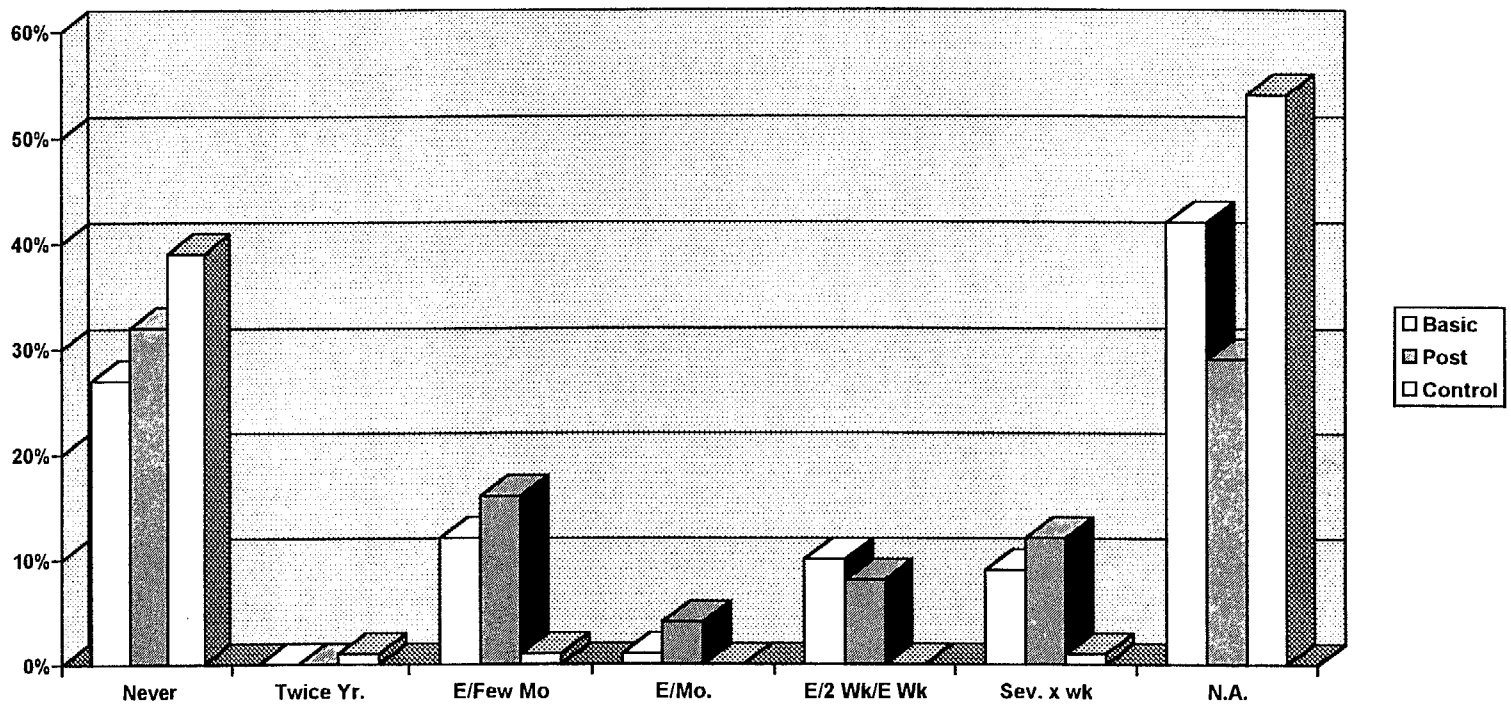


Figure 13: After - How Often Discussed Things Heard on Radio

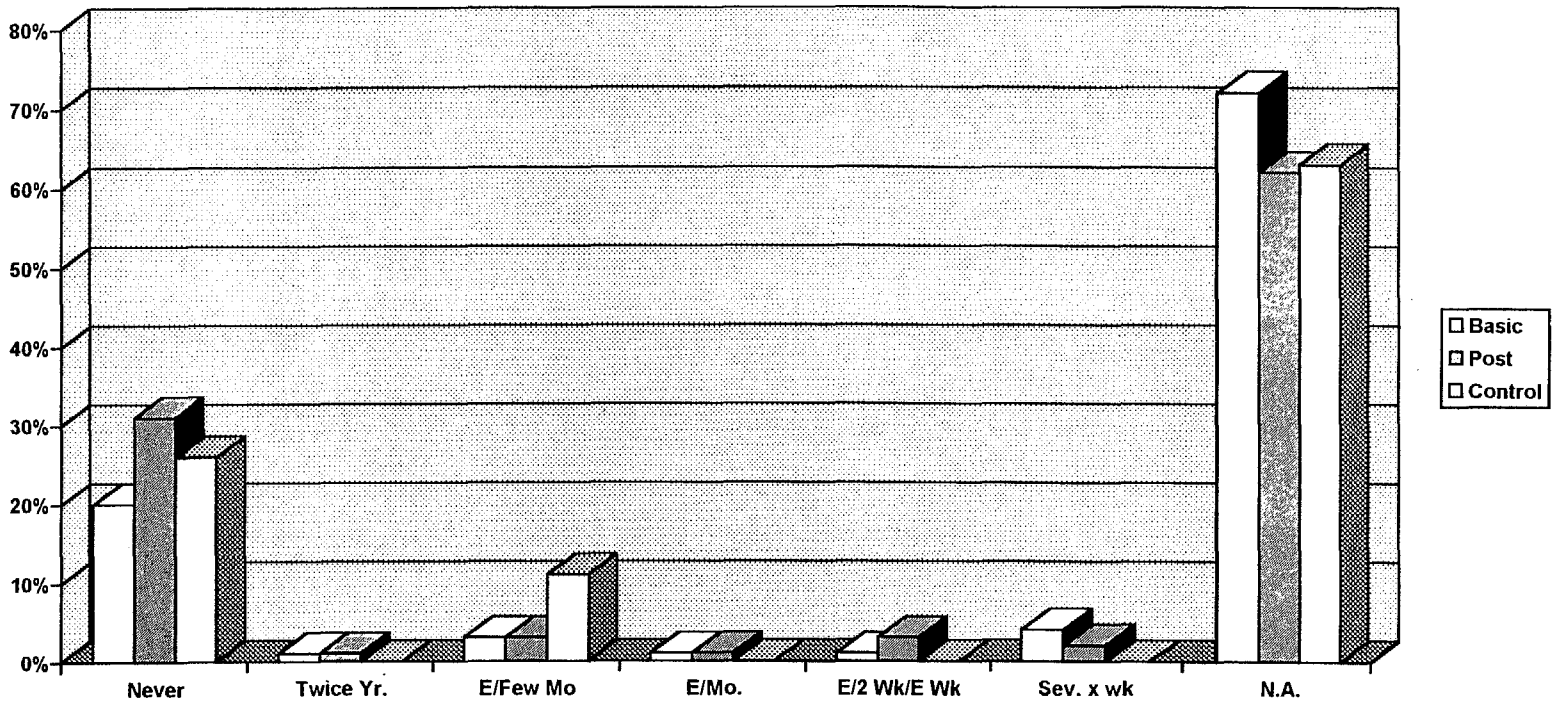


Figure 14: Before - How Often Discussed Things Read

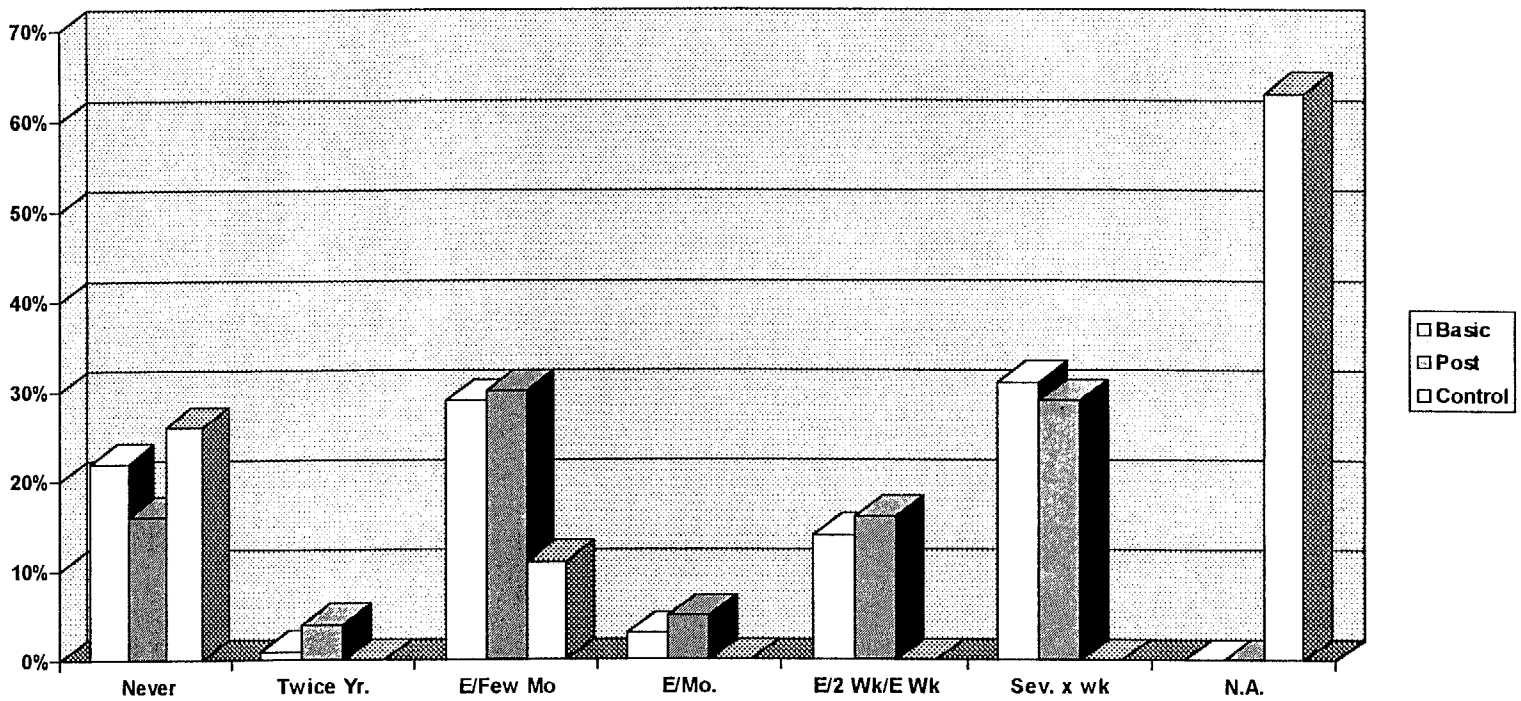


Figure 15: After - How Often Discussed Things Read

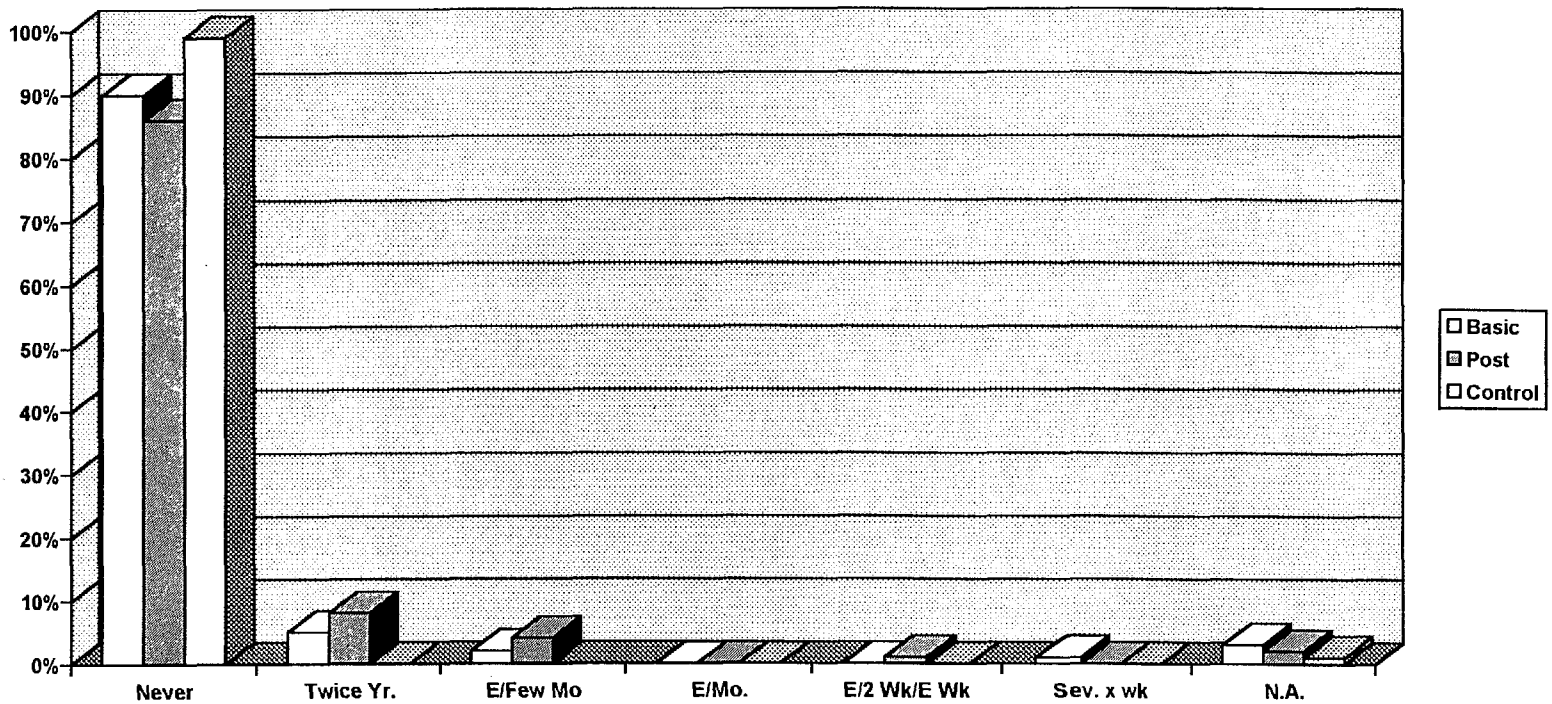


Figure 16: Before - How Often Discussed Politics

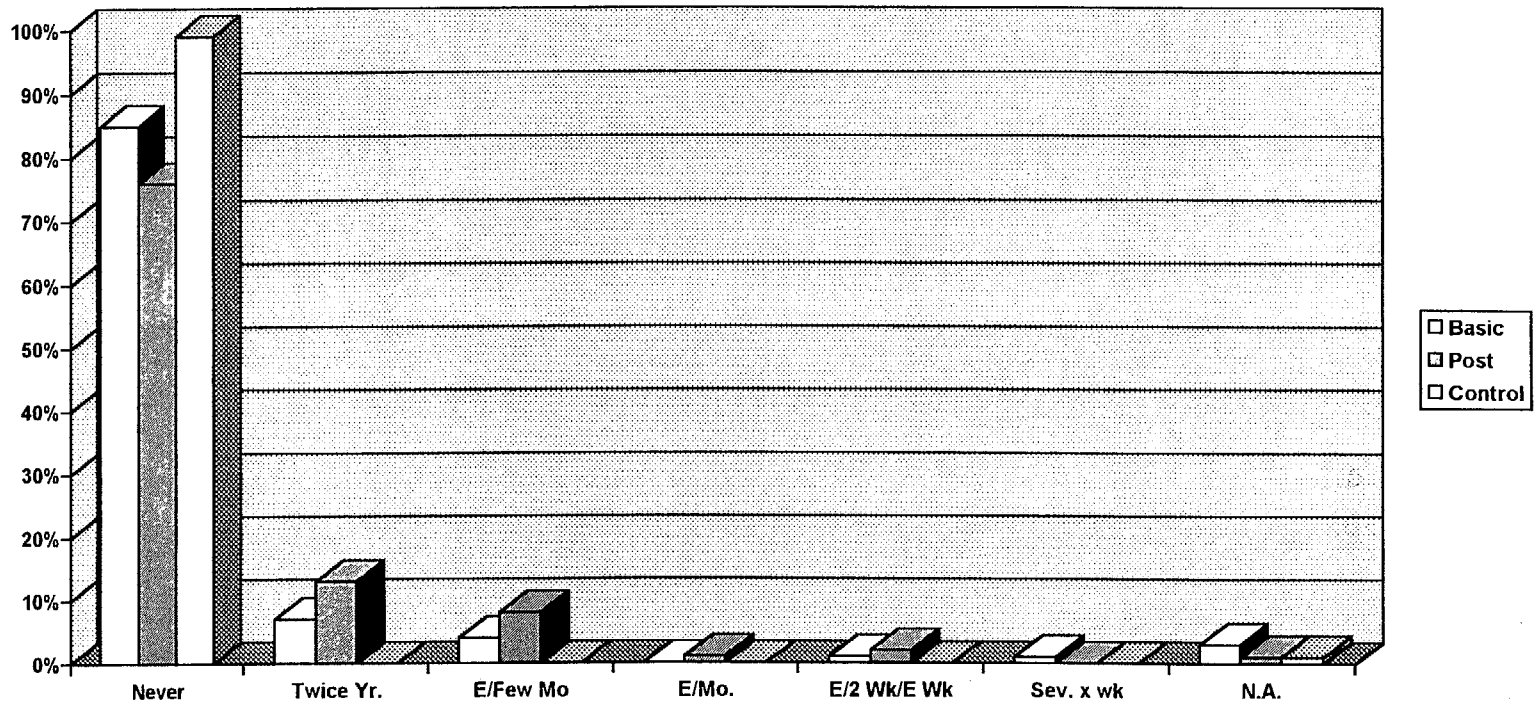


Figure 17: After - How Often Discussed Politics

Figure 18: Before - How Often Discussed How to Prevent Men from Drinking

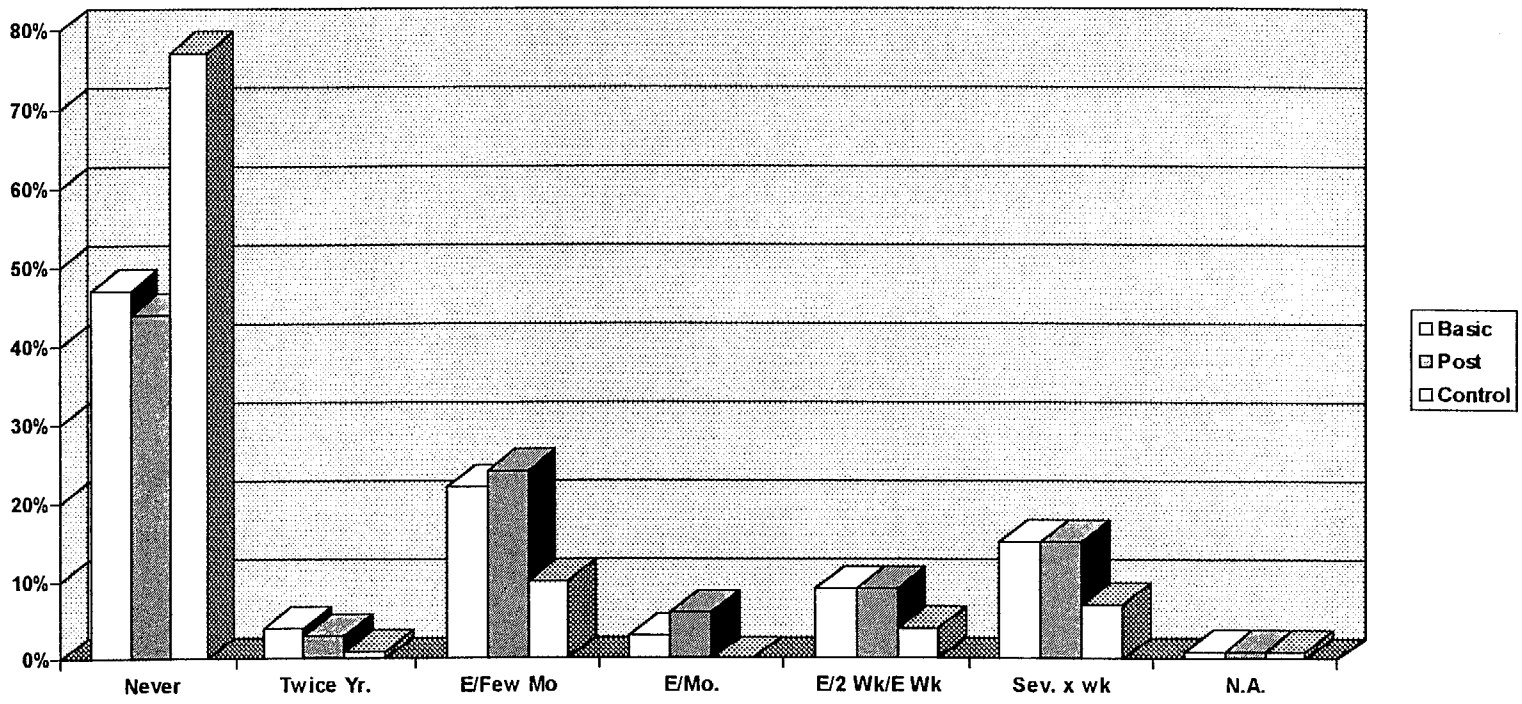


Figure 19: After - How Often Discussed How to Prevent Men from Drinking

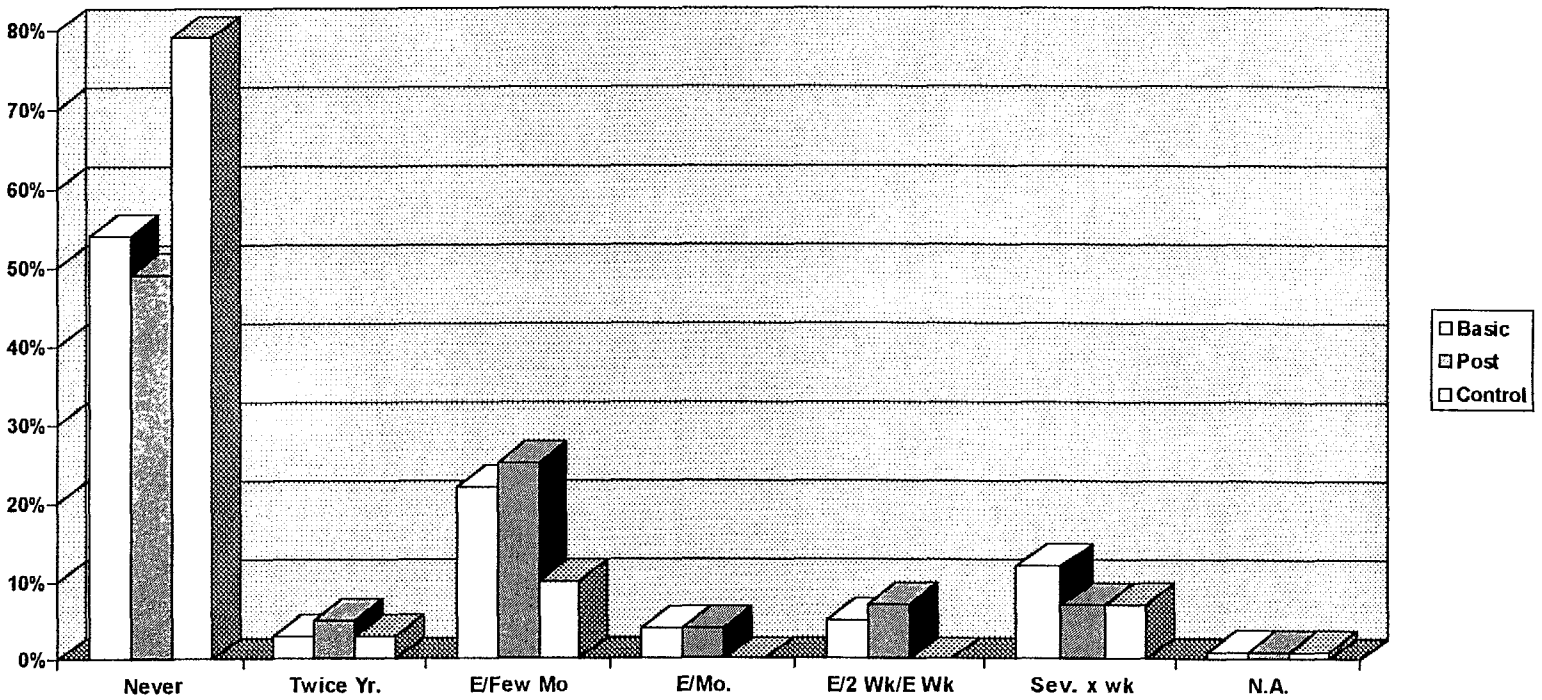


Figure 20: Before - How Often Discussed How to Prevent Men from Beating their Wives

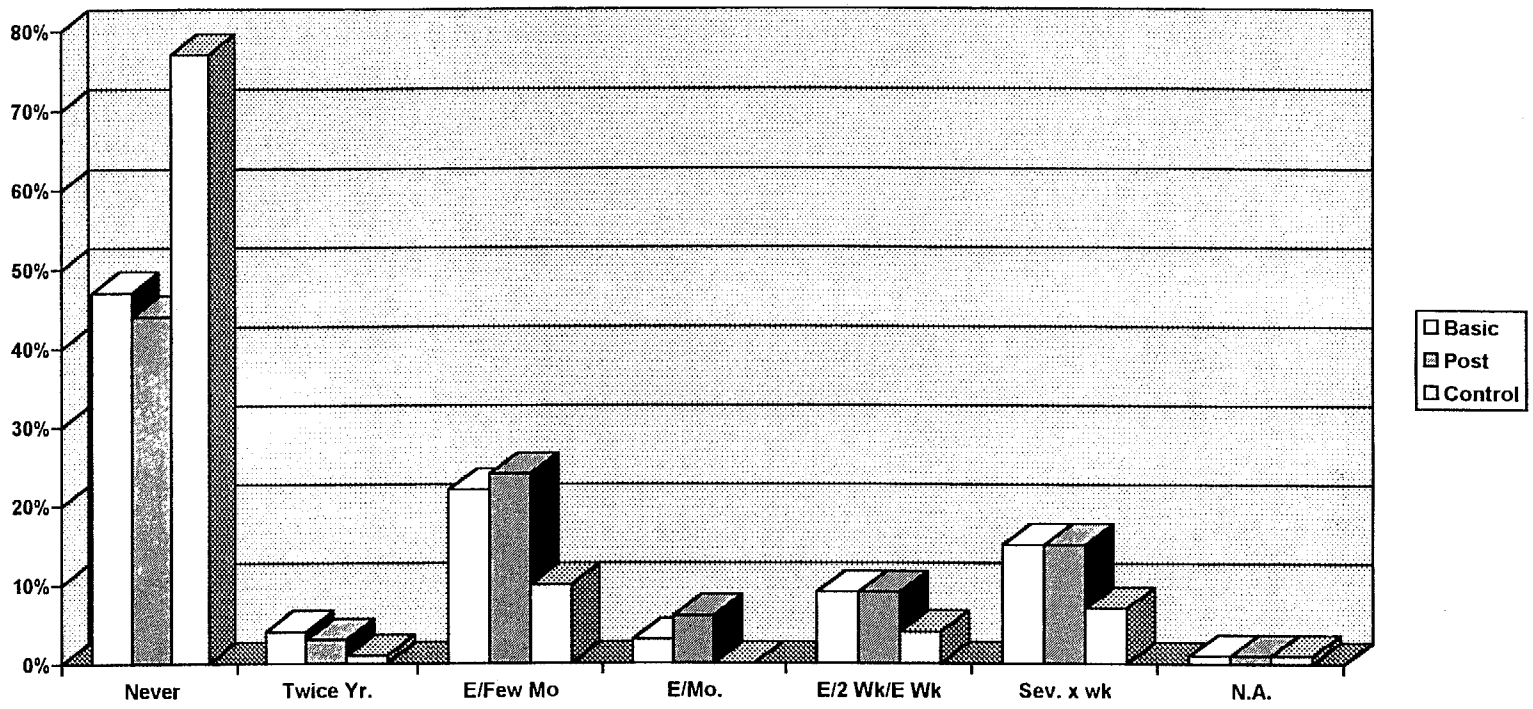


Figure 21 : After - How Often Discussed How to Prevent Men from Beating their Wives

3.3.1.2. Participation in Public Protest or Political Campaign

Two items related to women's participation in public protest were included in this survey: 1) participation in activities to stop men from drinking, and 2) participation in activities to stop men from beating their wives. These items represent only a small sampling of the questions that might be asked to ascertain women's participation in protests or campaign and were in no way intended to be a comprehensive assessment of respondents' political participation. However, these items provide a basic indication of respondents willingness to involve themselves in activities aimed at improving theirs and other women's safety and well being.

On the question concerning women's participation in activities to stop men from drinking alcohol *after* the literacy course, about 14% of the basic literacy course married participants, 18% of the post-literacy course married participants, and 5% of the control group married respondents indicated that they had participated in such activities. This represents an increase for the experimental group and no change for the control group during that period. Among the married respondents, approximately 9% of the basic literacy course completers, 1% of the post-literacy course completers, and 4% of the control group participants indicated that the question was not applicable to their situation (see Table A66). Differences were significant between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and literacy course completers.

Before the literacy course/last year, 9% of the married women in the basic literacy course completers, 6% in the post-literacy course completers, and 6% of the control group respondents had participated in such activities. Also of note, a larger percentage of respondents (primarily basic literacy course completers) indicated that this question was not applicable to their situation than in response to the earlier question concerning participation in discussions about the topic. Approximately 9% of the basic literacy course married participants, 1% of the post-literacy course married participants, and 3% of the control group married participants indicated that the question was not applicable (see Table A65). This represents a significant difference between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy course completers.

Similar responses were obtained to the question about participation in activities to prevent men from beating their wives. *Before* the literacy course/last year, 10% of the basic literacy course completers, 6% of the post-literacy course completers, and 5% of the control group respondents had participated in such activities. Approximately 7% of the basic literacy course completers, 1% of the post-literacy course completers, and 4% of the control group participants indicated that the question was not applicable to their situation (see Table A67).

When asked about their participation *after* the conclusion of the literacy course/last year in activities to stop men from beating their wives, about 12% of the basic literacy course married participants, 18% of the post-literacy course married participants, and 5% of the control group married respondents indicated that they had participated in such activities (see Table A68). Participation rates were higher after the literacy course than before for the literacy course completers and about the same for the control group, with 10%, 6% and 5% of the basic, post and control group married respondents respectively reporting that they had participated in such activities *prior* to the literacy course/last year. Approximately 6% of the basic literacy course completers, 1% of the post-literacy course completers, and 4% of the control group married participants felt that the question was not applicable to their situation. Clearly, the largest increase in participation occurred among the post-literacy course completers, with the proportion of married respondents who took part in activities to prevent men from beating their wives increasing from 6% to 18%. We assume that since respondents (or village leaders) did not report an increase in the incidence of wife-beating after the course, this response reflects a change in attitudes during that period.

Differences in responses between the experimental and control group *before* the literacy course/last year were not statistically significant. However, significant differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course completers (p=.053). *After* the literacy course/last year, significant differences existed between the experimental and control group but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers.

As mentioned above, a much greater proportion of women were willing to participate in discussions about preventing drinking of alcohol and wife beating than to participate in activities to actually stop men from engaging in such behavior. Additionally, more women felt that questions related to participation in *activities* to prevent men from drinking alcohol or beating their wives were not applicable to their situation (compared to those responding to the questions about their involvement in *discussions* about the topic). Several possible explanations for these differences are posited.

First, discussions about local problems may involve many people in the village, while activities to address those problems are more likely to be undertaken by the affected party. Many of the participants in discussions may have been friends or relatives of the abused person, rather than the actual spouse of an abuser. Second, discussing such problems and commiserating with the aggrieved party is often considered to be an appropriate activity and is a normal part of everyday life in most villages. However, interfering in another person's marital affairs is quite a different matter. Third, while some may be willing to discuss their own or someone else's problems with drinking or wife beating, many believe that the more overt act of participating in activities to prevent abuse to be improper or simply not in the realm of possibility, and therefore, not applicable to their own situation.

3.3.1.3. Political Awareness/Participation

Several measures of political awareness and participation were used, including:

1) knowledge of name of Member of Parliament;
2) knowledge of name of Prime Minister;
3) belief that a woman from the village can be on the Village Development Council (VDC);
4) being elected to a VDC;
5) serving on a committee organized by the VDC; and
6) belief that the respondent can be on the Village Development Council (VDC) herself.

Knowledge of Name of Member of Parliament

Significant differences were observed between the number of experimental and control group respondents who could correctly provide the name of the Member of Parliament in their area. However, no such differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course completers. About 11% of the basic literacy course completers, 12% of the post-literacy course completers, and 3% of the control group could answer the question correctly (see Table A69).

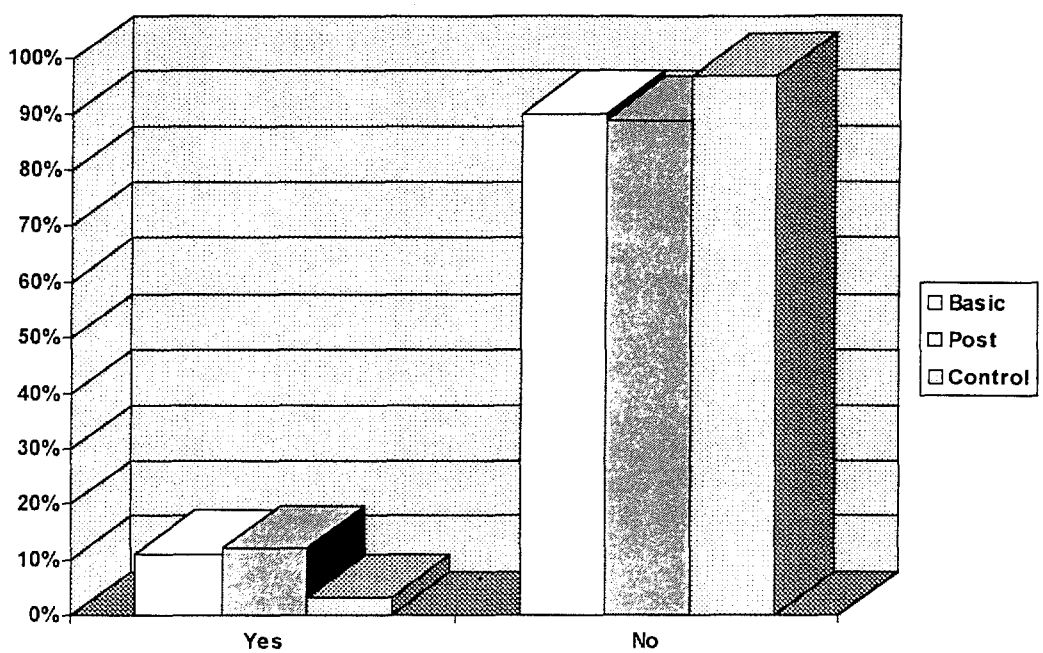


Figure 22: Know Name of Member of Parliament

Knowledge of Name of Prime Minister

Significant differences were found between the number of experimental and control group respondents who could correctly provide the name of the Prime Minister, but no significant differences were observed between the basic and post-literacy course completers. About 19% of the basic literacy course completers, 15% of the post-literacy course completers, and 4% of the control group could correctly provide the Prime Minister's name (see Table A70).

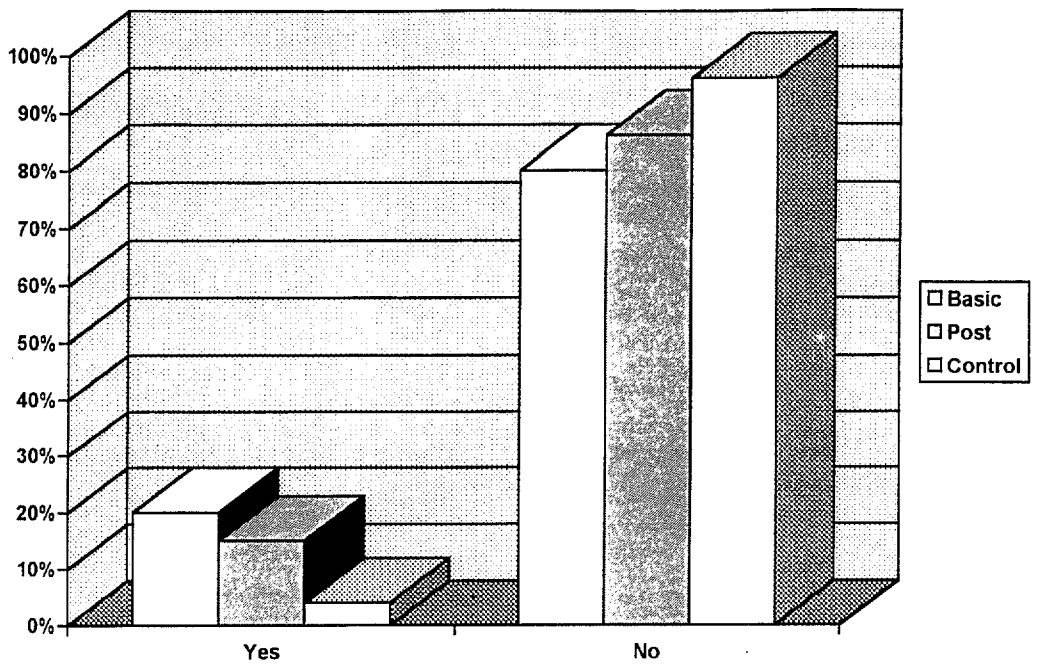


Figure 23: Know Name of Prime Minister

Belief That a Woman from the Village Can Be on the Village Development Council (VDC)

Survey Responses

Approximately 2% of the participants from the basic literacy course, 10% from the post-literacy course and 3% from the control group indicated that a woman from their village had served on the Village Development Council (VDC) (see Table A71). When the experimental group respondents were asked whether they had thought it was possible for a woman from their village to be on the VDC *before* taking the literacy course, 14% of the basic literacy course completers indicated that they had thought it possible, compared to 12% of the post-literacy course completers (see Table A72). However, a substantially higher portion of the literacy course completers thought it possible *after* their literacy courses. Upon completion of their courses, approximately 79% of the basic literacy course completers and 74% of the post-literacy course completers believed a woman could be elected to the VDC (see Table A73). These figures were significantly higher than the control group responses (56%). Differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers were not significant. The most common reasons listed among those who did not think it was possible were: "women can't read or understand;" "they are afraid or too shy to speak;" and "they have too much domestic work" (see Table A74).

Village Leader Interviews

When village leaders were asked about women's participation on the VDC or on committees organized by the VDC, several women were mentioned. One village leader reported that seven or eight women were on the VDC Advisory Committee (three Tharus and four from the hills; three had studied and the others could only write their names). Village leaders in two different communities noted women on the Advisory Council on Women's Issues or other committees dealing with women's issues. One village leader stated that no women were on the VDC, but a woman who grew up in India and is related to an important man from the VDC by marriage was a local official and very powerful during the pre-1990 panchayat period. However, she was described as completely different from

the women in the village, in that she was very elite and educated. Leaders in the Tanahu District claimed the greatest participation by women, with the following activities reported in different villages:

- None are on the VDC (6).
- A few are on VDC committees but not all are literate.
- Some are on the ward committee and the school committee; they were literate before participation.
- Some women are on the ward committee, but none are educated.
- None on the VDC but some on the different committees.
- Forest Committee (about 40% female, and all are literate).
- Forest Committee (about 75% female, but not all are literate).
- Forest Committee (majority are literate).
- Drinking Water Committee (about 60% female, with the majority literate).
- Drinking Water Committee (about 25% female, but not all are literate).
- Construction Committee (only a few members are female, and only a few are literate).

When asked whether it was possible for a woman from the village to be on the VDC, some village leaders provided examples of women who had served. However, many village leaders said that it was possible but proceeded to provide reasons why they could not do so, including:

- The women don't have courage.
- They are not very active.
- Their work load does not allow them to enter politics.
- They are not well educated.

Others expressed the opinion that women could be on the VDC if they learned to read and write; if they obtained a better education; if men taught them about politics; or if they had the support from their husbands. One leader believed that if women could become educated, they could run the country. Others, however, thought it was not possible for women to be on the VDC because they were too shy and inexperienced.

Been Elected to VDC

Only three women in the study had been elected to the VDC, all of whom were post-literacy course completers. One had been elected prior to taking the literacy course and two after the course/last year (see Tables A75–A76).

Belief That Respondent Can be on the Village Development Council (VDC) Herself

When asked whether they had thought it possible for themselves to be on the VDC *prior* to taking the literacy course/last year, only 2% of the basic literacy course completers and 3% of the post-literacy course completers had thought it possible (see Table 77). By comparison, *after* taking the literacy courses 23% of the basic literacy course completers and 33% of the post-literacy course completers thought it possible to serve on the VDC themselves, compared to 3% of the control group. This represents a significant difference between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy course completers (see Table A78).

Served on a Committee Organized by the VDC

Only nine (5%) of the basic literacy course completers, six (3%) of the post-literacy course completers and one (1%) of the control group respondents had served on a committee organized by the VDC. Of those, seven had served on a forest development/use committee, one on a development village committee, one on an ethnic group committee, one on a committee related to health issues and one on a committee to address women's issue. A total

of nine respondents participated *after*, three participated *before* and one participated *during* the course/last year (see Tables A79–A80).

3.3.1.4. Participation in Non-Family Groups/Organizational Meetings

Although some village women may be members of one or more groups, women in Nepal do not yet join groups in large numbers. However, a wide variation was observed in the types and functions of groups that are available to village women, ranging from those focused on health to savings and credit groups or forest user groups. Some are very small groups, while others are branches of national associations. Some groups are limited to women (mother's groups), while others (users groups) are comprised of both men and women. Some were initiated locally, while others were developed through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or outside entities.

Most existing groups have emerged as a result of the literacy classes or as savings and credit organizations. According to USAID's 1996 "customer service" survey team, these groups have a strong impact beyond their immediate effects by affording rural women with the opportunity for greater participation in decision-making and providing a means to gain increasing respect from the community. The team noted that women who participated in groups recognized their value, stating that 'if you spit alone, it dries up fast; if you spit as a group, it can be a river' (USAID/Nepal, 1996, p.10). The "customer service" survey team also concluded that group membership was frequently associated with greater income from some sort of entrepreneurial activity and surmised that membership was likely to lead to a greater voice in the management of household finances. They suggested that membership in groups would also lead to a greater voice in village affairs and decision-making, as women grew in confidence. Factors contributing to this confidence were a greater sense of strength through unity, as well as the acquisition of information and enhanced skills. They reported a number of instances in which women who had participated in one or more "SO3 interventions" became involved in group actions, such as closing alcohol shops or repairing the local school (USAID/Nepal, 1996).

One thrust of USAID intervention is the introduction of women to the concept and value of group action. Women's participation in groups is commonly cited in the literature and observed in Nepal to be associated with empowerment (Leve, 1996 and the USAID/Nepal customer survey, 1996) in a "positive reinforcement loop." As women are empowered they participate more often, more vocally, and in more kinds of women-initiated socioeconomic change actions. The reverse is also apparent, the more women participate the more likely they are to find the means to establish greater control over their own lives (USAID/Nepal, 1996).

An underlying premise of women's participation is that ultimately they will take action to resolve problems or overcome difficulties. Such participation may lead to tangible results, such as putting a new roof on the village school or to less tangible, but nevertheless important actions, such as organizing to close down an alcohol shop. Alcohol abuse by men and its consequent impact on the lives of their families is a growing problem. In this case, the important step for village women is not whether the shop is actually shut down, but that the women are empowered to mobilize to do so (USAID/Nepal, 1996).

Within the last year, reports have emerged of rural women mobilizing themselves for socioeconomic changes in their community. As noted earlier, it is expected that the interaction between the SO3 interventions in the areas of literacy, legal rights and economic participation will lead to more frequent changes resulting from women's empowerment. Again, according to the USAID "customer service" survey team, these inter-relationships may begin in a literacy class, where women are introduced to new messages about their status while they become literate. Women become more socially aware of their ability to change or influence their status or alter factors affecting their status. Their involvement in the course may be the first time they have actually participated in a group, which, in itself is self-actualizing.

Although the number of women in this study who participated in group activities was small, both the survey respondents and the focus group participants (who took the literacy courses) reported increases in participation in groups after the literacy courses. Findings are reported below.

Survey Responses

Before the literacy courses/last year, approximately 6% of the basic literacy course completers, 3% of the post-literacy course completers and 4% of the control group respondents participated in groups or organizational meetings. Differences between experimental and control group respondents or between the experimental groups were not significant. For those who did participate, organizations included mothers' groups, government organizations, user groups (women's and mixed gender groups), women's economic development/credit groups and NGOs. The frequency of meetings ranged from twice a month to once a year (see Tables A81–A82).

After the literacy courses/last year, participation in such groups increased for all groups (including a small increase for the control group). However, the most substantial increase was with the participants in the post-literacy courses. Approximately 9% of the basic literacy course completers, 20% of the post-literacy course completers, and 6% of the control group respondents participated in groups or organizational meetings. Differences between the experimental and control group and between the basic and post-literacy group were significant. Organizations in which they participated during this period included mothers' groups, government organizations, user groups (women's and mixed gender groups), women's economic development/credit groups and NGOs. The frequency of meetings ranged from every week to once a year (see Tables A83–A84).

Focus Group Discussions

Similarly, most of focus group participants indicated that they did not take part in organizations or groups before the literacy courses, but a few of the focus groups reported slightly higher incidences of participation afterwards. The groups in which they participated *prior* to the courses included a family planning organization (Makwanpur), a women's group formed by small farmers (Parsa), and a religious organization (Tanahu).

Among the groups in which literacy course completers were involved *after* the courses were:

- Makwanpur–women's groups to educate people about prostitution, and a support group for abused women which helps intervene in domestic disputes;
- Parsa–women's group formed by small farmers to save and collect money and to give loans; and
- Tanahu–a social service organization, a tree planting group, and a religious organization.

3.3.1.5. Participation in Solving Community Problems/Making Community Decisions

Village Leader Interviews

Anecdotal information provided by village leaders also revealed modest participation by literacy course completers in community actions and decisions. Although village leaders were not queried specifically about women's participation in groups or organizations, they were asked three questions related to women's participation in the community: 1) how much do women who took the literacy courses participate in activities to solve problems in the community now compared to before they took the course? 2) how much do women who took the literacy courses get involved to community decisions now compared to before they took the courses?, and 3) in what ways do they get involved?

While the responses varied from village to village, and some leaders believed that no changes had taken place, community leaders in many of the villages cited examples of increased involvement by women who had completed the literacy courses. Among the examples of increased women's involvement were: deciding what needs to be built or repaired in the community; fixing bridges and roads; planting and protecting trees; resolving inter-personal disputes; organizing anti-alcohol campaigns; establishing savings and credit mobilization campaigns; developing

income generating activities (sewing, livestock); establishing mother's groups; and becoming community health workers. Community leader responses are depicted by district, below.

Parsa District

Participation in solving community problems:

- The same as before (2).
- As before, they can't do anything.
- Nothing can be said about changes, as women in (Tharu) society are not involved in solving social problems.
- Mainly as before, but they now try to pursue their parents to solve the problem. Thus, they are indirectly participating. Usually, the women don't come out in front because of the culture.
- They motivate others to develop and solve problems.
- The women have a plan to plant trees along the boundary of their fields.

Involvement in community decisions:

- The same as before (4).
- At the family level, they now decide on what to spend money on and on whether to send children to school.

Bardiya District

Participation in solving community problems:

- No change in participation (3).
- They have helped fix roads and bridges (2).
- A few women have taken on public roles or begun to implement development programs. One has become a community health worker. Others have taken a leadership training course given by Grumeen Development Bank to establish savings and credit mobilization groups in the village.
- They are involved in political party organization and promotion and serve on the VDC Advisory Committee. Up to now, however, they have not focused especially on women's issues. They haven't organized women's groups. They have not participated in the district-wide anti-alcohol movement.
- On occasion, they do things in their homes and in the village with friends. For example, they build latrines, fix roads and paths, and keep things cleaner.
- There have been no organized groups established after the class.
- They teach other illiterate people to read and write.

Involvement in community decisions:

- No change in involvement (5).
- They have made decisions about what needs to be built and fixed.
- They have made a community-wide decision not to fight within the community.

Makwanpur District

Participation in solving community problems:

- No change in participation (4).

- Two or three have begun to participate.
- Some took the sewing class (given by VDC) and are now supplementing their incomes with sewing.
- No change in political participation.
- Two or three women took the course and during the class they realized that the jungle was being destroyed so they declared themselves "the keeper of the jungle." When people attempt to cut the trees and grass these women prevent them from doing it.

Involvement in community decisions:

- No change in involvement (3).
- Women are somewhat more involved. For example, if there are arguments between women, the women decide whose fault it is and make a decision about this.
- They are making decisions by themselves, such as to build a rest house. In this case, the women decided to build the house by themselves and constructed it alone. They have also decided to build temples and toilets, and they completed them by themselves.

Tanahu District

Participation in solving community problems:

- They participate more (3).
- They raise their voice against community problems but can't solve anything (2).
- They participate in women's groups.
- Very little. They are still dominated by men.
- They are not involved in social problems, as they are younger.
- The Women's Reformation organization looks into matters of women's community development.
- Women have fought to solve the drinking water problem.
- They try to produce crops, raise livestock, etc., but due to the unreliable market, they are not able to do anything.
- They are not able to participate in income-generating activities.
- They participate in the anti-alcohol movement. They don't prepare alcohol on a large scale anymore.
- A mothers' group was formed; there is greater social consciousness.
- Greater conservation of forests.

Involvement in community decisions:

- No change in involvement (3).
- They have a very small decision-making role, as they are not capable.
- Very little. They raise their voices but no-one hears or listens to them.
- Not much difference, but they defend social justice and get involved in decision-making regarding drinking water. They also contribute to the community through their labor.

3.3.2. Influence Over Household Decision-Making

3.3.2.1. Control Over Income

It is clear from this study, as well as from information obtained from a "customer survey" carried out by USAID, that women in Nepal want to be able to improve their own situation and that of their family. The "customer

survey" revealed a strong sense that "women know what is needed, or at least perceive that something else is needed." In order to attain it, however, empowerment (i.e., knowledge, respect, confidence and money) is required. Participants in the customer survey findings also delivered another message: for most Nepali women, control over the well being of a woman and her family rests primarily in the hands of others, usually the husband. Findings from this and other studies indicate that most Nepali women, particularly in rural areas, are concerned with increasing their incomes. Yet without some degree of control over the funds they earn individually (or the collective household earnings), they cannot affect the changes they want in their situation.

The literature supports the notion that being consulted and made part of the decision-making process on household economic matters is an important indicator of women's empowerment (Schuler and Hashemi 1993 on Bangladeshi women) and of women's status (Acharya and Beneath 1983 on Nepali women). This concept resonates significantly in the Nepali context, and a substantial amount of research on this issue has been carried out in Nepal. Acharya (1981) and Shtrii Shakti (1995) examined the extent to which women express disagreement with decisions made or play different roles in the process: an initiating or suggesting role; a consulting or advising role; or an implementing role. Other studies have looked at whether women make decisions about various economic matters independently, in collaboration with a spouse or other family member or not at The USAID/Nepal SO3 team concluded that an empowered woman will (jointly with her husband or whoever is head of the household) control the income she earns herself.[15] The results related to women's ability to control income are discussed in three sections. The first section deals with women's individual income, and the second relates to their control over household income. A third section describes findings concerning respondents' role in making decisions about sending their daughters to school.

Control Over Own Income

Women who have an independent source of cash income are more likely to resist mistreatment by their husband or other family members. In a study carried out in Bangladesh, Hashemi and Schuler (1993) found several examples in which a husband who had abandoned his wife came back to her when she started earning a cash income. They argue that although it might seem that these women would be better off without such husbands, nevertheless, given the realities of rural life, changes in this type of behavior (not abandoning or threatening to abandon the wife, returning to the abandoned wife, not perpetrating acts of violence against the wife) constitute an improvement in women's status. Similarly, during focus group discussions and village leaders' interviews carried out as part of the Nepal study, numerous stories were relayed about husbands who attached high value to their wife's new literacy skills because of the perception that their literacy had resulted in or would lead to increased income earning ability. The capacity to earn a cash income, regardless of how small, generates benefits that carry on into the future and cannot be permanently appropriated. Few women in Nepal hold wage earning jobs. Thus, three aspects of women's control over their own income and productive assets were examined: 1) participation in income generation activities; 2) participation in credit programs; and 3) cash savings.

Participation in Income Generating Activities

Prior to taking the literacy courses, few of the respondents in either the experimental or the control groups participated in income generating activities. Approximately 65% of the literacy group completers (with little variation between basic and post-literacy course completers) and 60% of the control group respondents indicated that they did nothing to earn money. Approximately 24% of basic literacy course completers, 19% of post-literacy course completers and 28% of control group participants earned daily wages; of the basic literacy course completers, post-literacy course completers and control group respondents, 11%, 15%, and 8% respectively, sold chickens and eggs or goats (see Tables A85–A86).

[15] Nancy Langworthy, USAID/Nepal personal correspondence.

After the literacy course, the proportion of respondents who did nothing to earn money declined to 61% for basic and 60% for post-literacy participants. However, it increased during the last year to 63% for control group respondents. Daily wage earnings stayed about the same for all three groups. The proportion of those earning money from the sale of chickens, eggs and goats increased from 10% to 14% for basic literacy course completers and from 15% to 23% for post-literacy course completers. For the control group, the proportion earning money from the sale of chickens, eggs and goats remained about the same. This is probably attributed to the literacy course curriculum that, in many places, emphasized income generating activities such as raising and selling poultry and small animals.

Participation in Credit

There were only slight differences in the number of respondents who obtained loans *before* taking the literacy course (or *before* the last year for the control group) compared with *after* the literacy course/last year. *Before* the previous year only 3% of respondents (six basic literacy course completers, seven post-literacy course completers and one control group respondent) had received loans. Additionally, *after* completing the literacy course three basic literacy course respondents, 13 post-literacy course completers and one control group respondent took out loans (see Tables A87–A88). The number of respondents participating in credit programs was too small to provide meaningful information about statistical significance between groups.

Cash Savings

A significantly higher proportion of respondents in the experimental group had cash savings (both *before* and *after* the literacy course) than in the control group. However, no significant differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course completers. Approximately 30% of the basic literacy course completers and 28% of the post-literacy course completers had cash savings *before* taking the literacy courses, compared to 16% of the control group who had cash savings in the previous year. The number of respondents who reported cash savings *after* the literacy courses (or at the time of the interview) showed an increase, with 39% of basic literacy course completers, 46% of post-literacy course completers and 17% of control group respondents reporting cash savings. Respondents in all three groups most frequently reported keeping their savings for about a month (see Tables A89–A90).

Control Over Household Income

Findings in earlier studies in Nepal (e.g., the 1981 Status of Women in Nepal Survey and the 1993 follow-up) indicate that while women may initiate household decisions, they seldom make the final decision, particularly those related to expenditures. Given the limited role of women in decision-making in Nepali culture, one would not expect to find a substantial number of women, particularly in rural areas, with sole decision-making authority. Thus, a woman who shares decision-making jointly with her husband (or parents) could be considered empowered.

As a measure of the extent to which literacy course completers had control over income compared to those in the control group, respondents were asked about their role in financial decisions both *before* and *after* completing the literacy course/last year. Indicators included: 1) who kept the money for household expenses; 2) who went to the local bazaar; 3) who made decisions about purchases (daily household expenditures, clothing purchases and livestock purchases).

On the question regarding who keeps household expenses, differences between experimental and control group participants were significant both *before* and *after* the literacy course but not in the direction one would expect. Changes between the *before* and *after* period were small, with the percentage of *all* women in the study having sole responsibility for keeping household expenses increasing slightly from about 14% to about 15% for the experimental group and increasing for the control group from 15% to 19% (see Tables A91–A92). Changes in the percentage of those having joint control with their husbands were also negligible, remaining at about 7% for the

experimental group and decreasing from 12% to 11% for the control group. There were no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers either *before* or *after* the course.

These findings are at first rather puzzling, and it is not immediately clear why a greater proportion of participants in the control group had sole or shared responsibility for keeping household expenses than those who took the literacy courses. On further examination, a possible explanation is that the differences were related to the marital status of the respondents, as a much higher proportion of the control group respondents were married. However, it is hard to make conclusive statements about these relationships, since there were only nine single women in the control group. The discussion which follows presents an analysis by marital status of respondents' role in keeping household finances.

The proportion of respondents having sole control over expenses increased (from the period *before* the literacy course to the period afterward) for *married* literacy course completers but not for those who were *single, widowed or divorced.* This was particularly true for completers of the post-literacy course in the experimental group. The proportion of married participants having sole control over expenses increased from 20% in the experimental group before the courses (19% for the basic literacy course completers and 22% for the post-literacy course completers) to 24% following the courses (21% for basic and 27% for post-literacy course completers). Married women having sole responsibility for decisions remained about the same for the control group at about 11%. The proportion of married respondents in both the experimental and control group having joint control with their husbands over household expenditures changed little from before experimental to the period afterwards.

For single, widowed or divorced literacy course completers, the proportion of women having sole control was much lower (about 5% for the experimental group before the course) and changed little *after* the course. There was a slight decrease (from six to five) occurred in the number of single respondents having sole control over expenses in the *before* and *after* period.

Hence, it appears that married women, in both the experimental and the control group, played a greater role in controlling household expenses than those who were single. This is probably because the "unmarried" category was largely comprised of women who were "single and never married," residing with their parents. Since almost all of the women in the control group were married, the proportion of respondents who solely or jointly controlled household expenditures would be expected to be much higher than for the younger women in the experimental group, of whom about half were single.

Responses to questions regarding who kept money for household expenses both *before* and *after* the literacy courses/last year are summarized for married and unmarried (single, widowed and divorced) respondents in Figures 24.–27. When examining these figures, please bear in mind that only nine control group respondents answering the question were single, widowed or divorced, and that percentages for numbers of that magnitude have little meaning.

Who Kept Money for Daily Household Expenses

Married Respondents

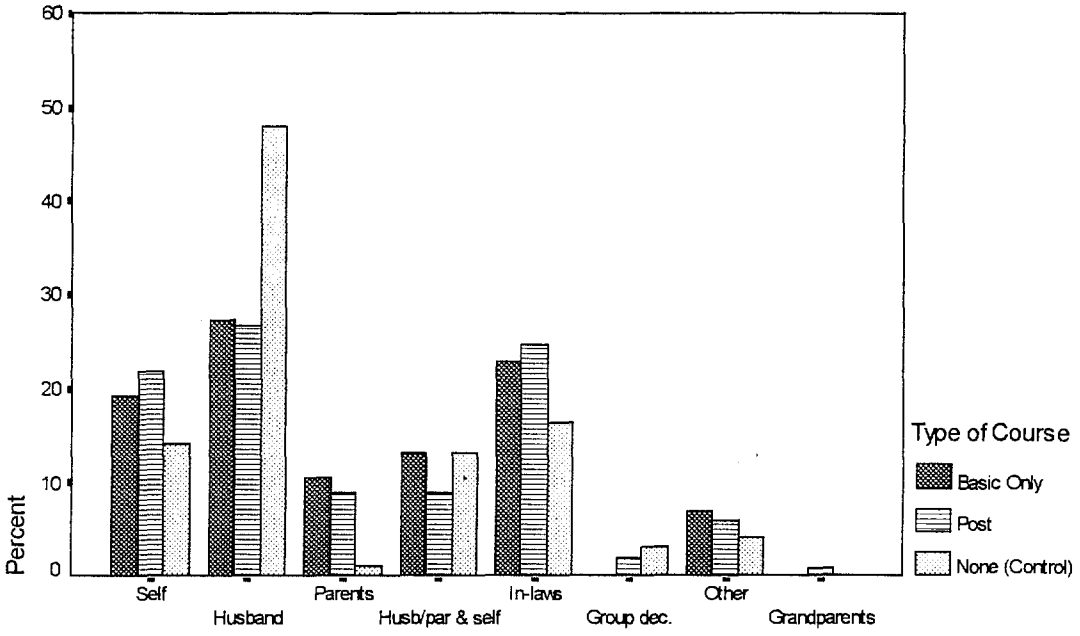


Figure 24: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-10; Control-98

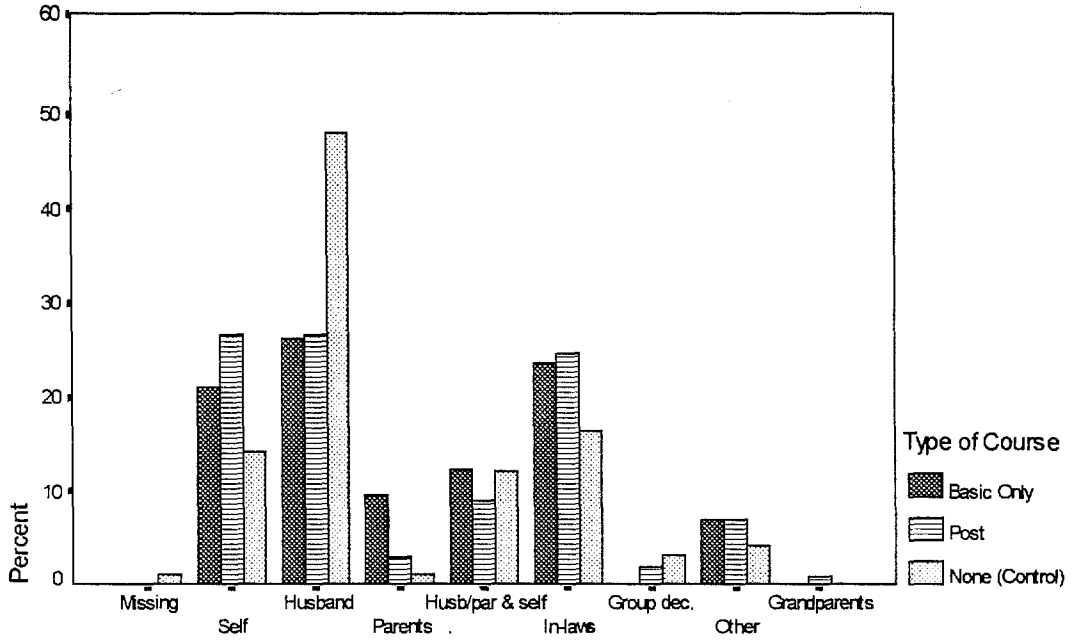


Figure 25: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-10; Control-98

Who Kept Money for Daily Household Expenses (continued)

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

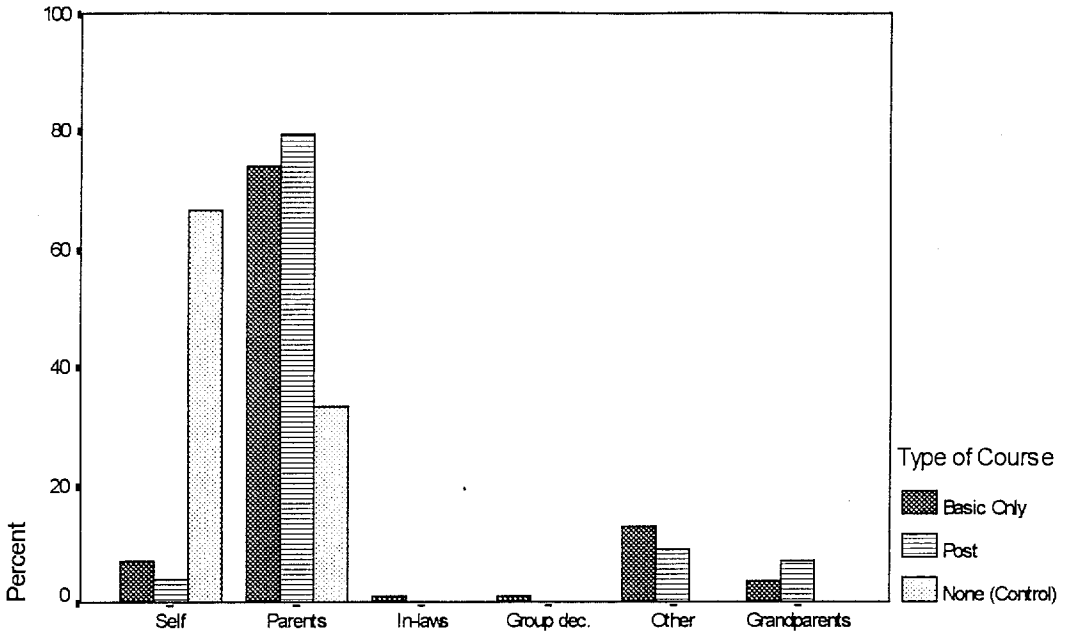


Figure 26: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-85; Post-98; Control-9

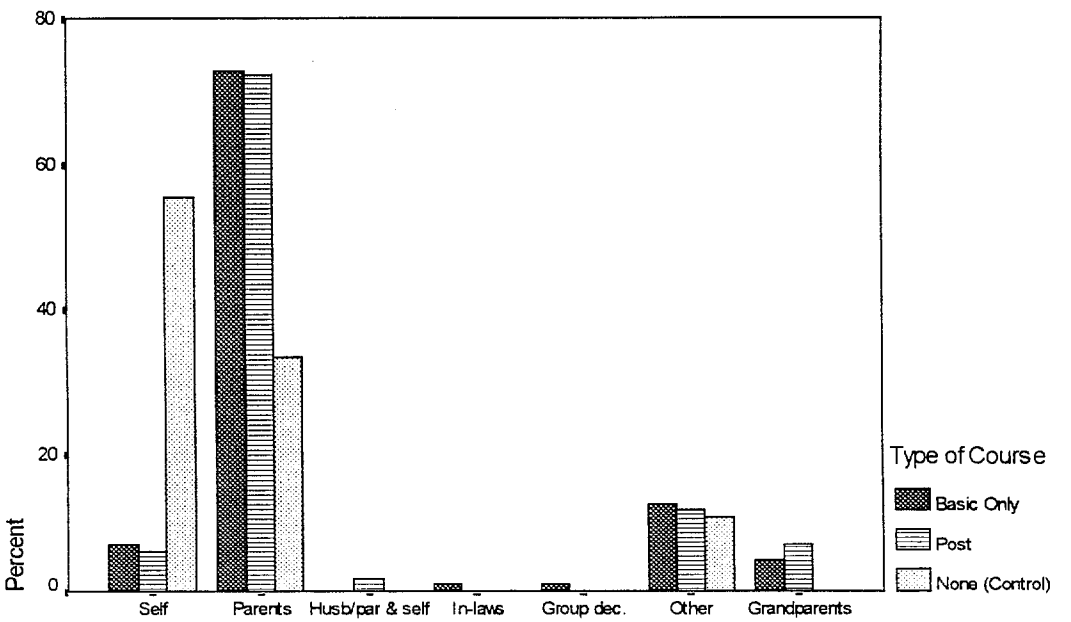


Figure 27: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-85; Post-98; Control-9

Who Went to Local Bazaar

In Nepal, the bazaar is considered the domain of males. Not only trips to the bazaar, but also decisions regarding what should be purchased there (daily food for the household) are usually left to the men. This is strongly confirmed in the findings of this study, which indicate that responsibility is primarily relegated to husbands and parents (fathers). However, when all responses were considered, without regard to the respondents' marital status, there were significant differences between experimental and control group responses concerning who went to the local bazaar to make purchases both *before* and *after* the literacy courses/last year. Nevertheless, differences between basic and post group responses were not significant either *before* or *after* the literacy course (see Table A93–A94). From the period *before* to the period *after* the courses, the per cent of basic literacy course completers who had sole responsibility for going to the local bazaar increased from 12% to 14%; the per cent of post-literacy course completers with sole responsibility increased from 14% to 17%; while the proportion declined from 19% to 18% for the control group during that period. Reflecting the change in sole decision making, the proportion of women sharing responsibility with their husbands or parents declined from 8% to 7% for basic literacy course completers and from 6% to 4% for post literacy course completers, while it remained the same for the control group.

As with the decisions about household expenses, the marital status of the respondent played a role in determining the extent to which respondents were allowed to go to the bazaar. It is likely that the higher percentage of women in the control group having shared or sole responsibility for going to the bazaar is a result of the higher proportion of married respondents in the control group. Figures 28–31 graphically depict this information by marital status category.

Who Went to Local Bazaar (continued)

Married Respondents

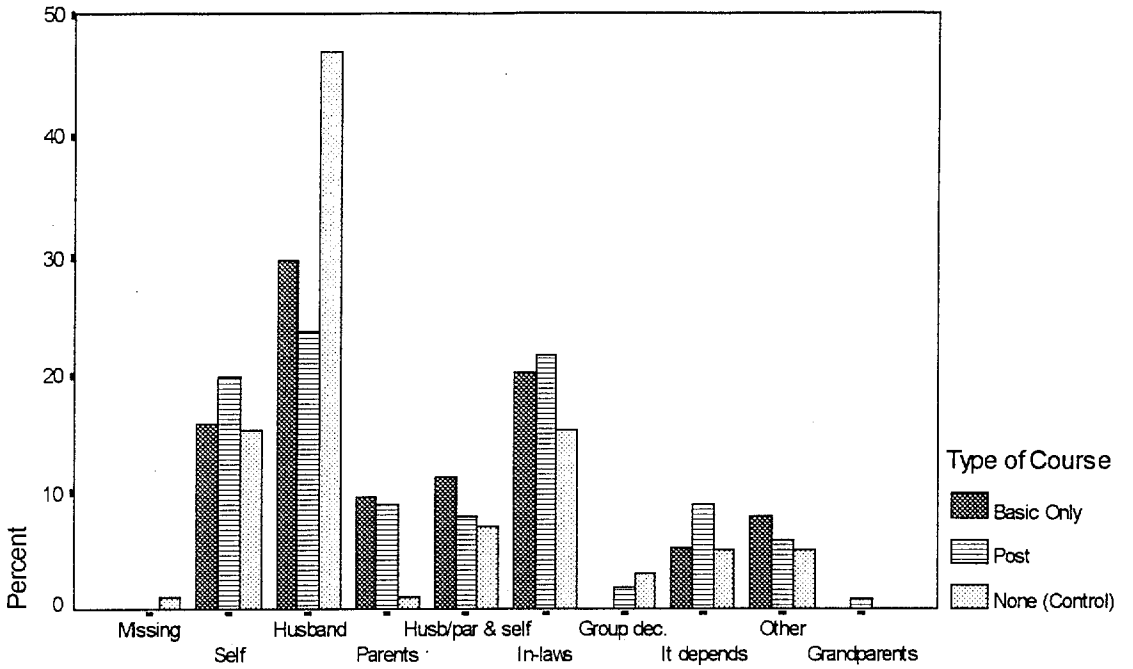


Figure 28: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-10; Control-98

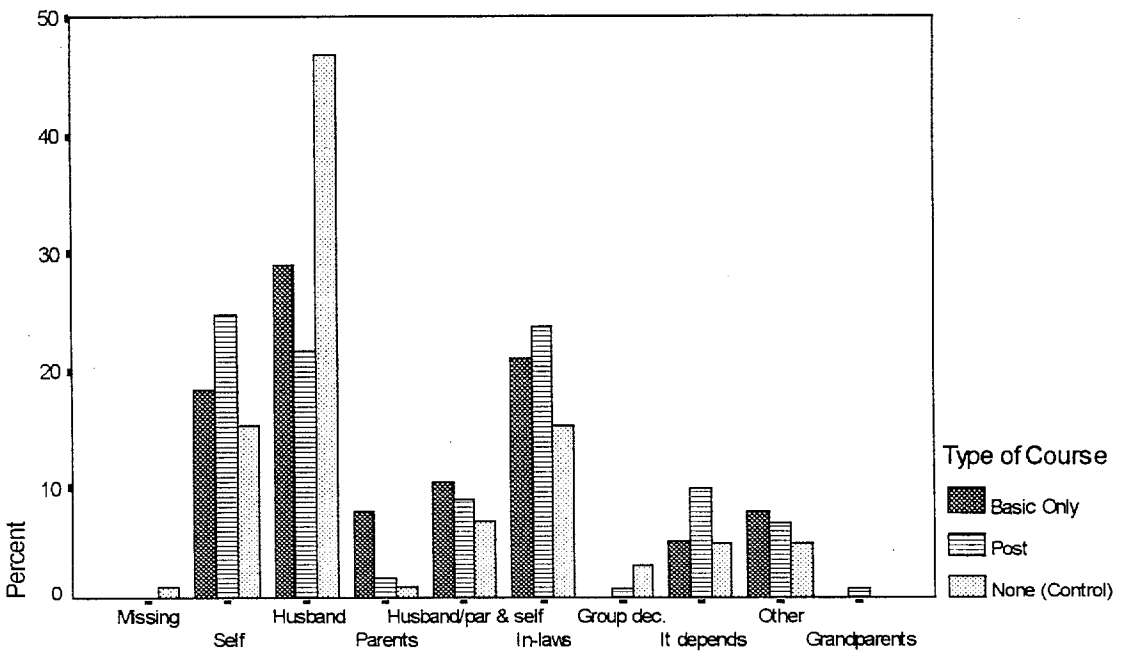


Figure 29: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-10; Control-98

Who Went to Local Bazaar (continued)

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

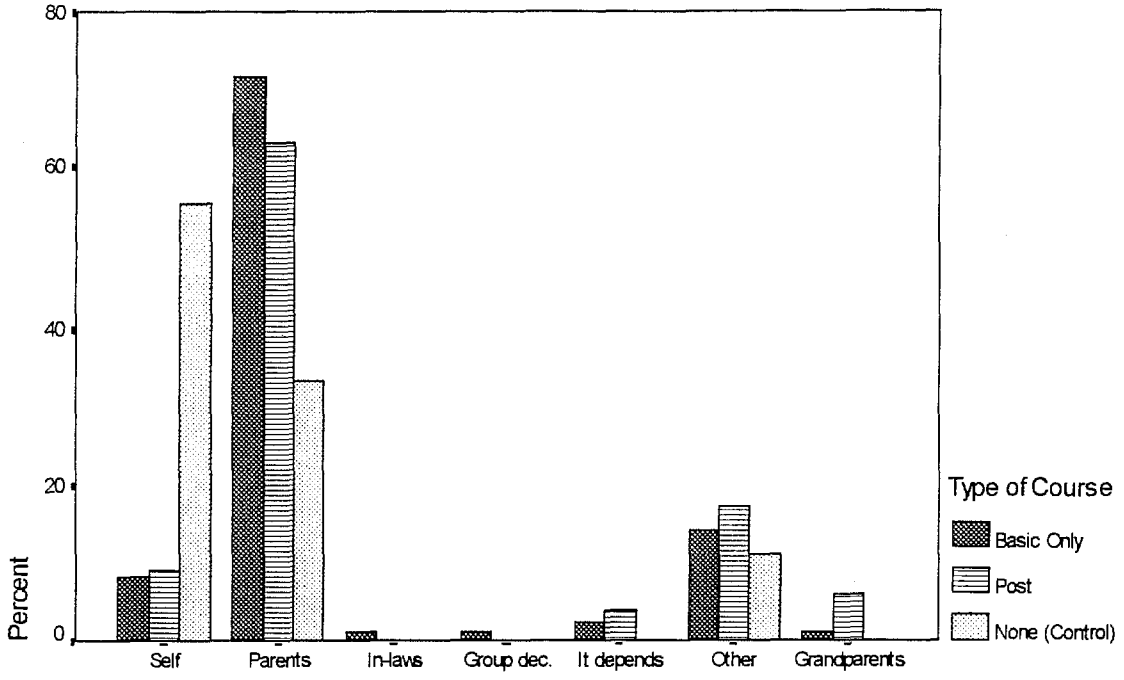


Figure 30: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

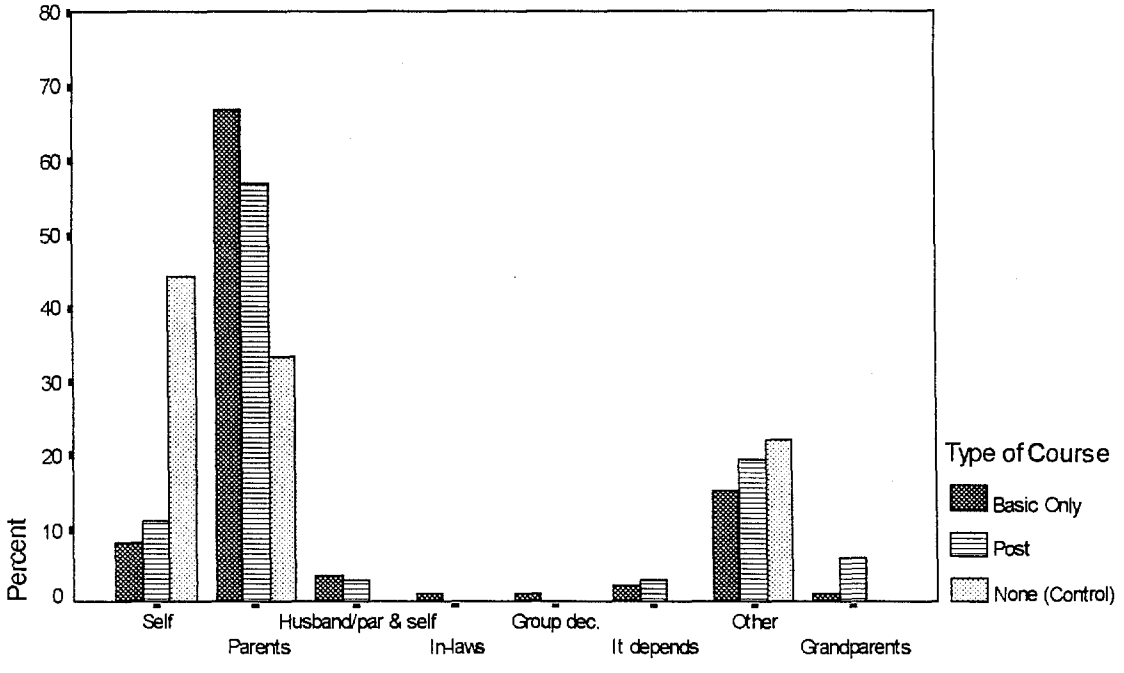


Figure 31: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

Decisions About Purchases

When marital status was not taken into account, significant differences were noted between experimental and control group respondents on all of the items related to decisions about purchases, both *before* and *after* taking the literacy courses/last year. On most items, the largest proportion of respondents reported that their husbands made the decisions. However, since a significantly higher proportion of married respondents existed in the control group than either of the two experimental groups, it was necessary to determine the extent to which marital status accounted for these differences.

When marital status was controlled for, differences between the experimental and control group were still significant for married respondents on all items. The number of unmarried respondents in the control group was too small to make meaningful comparisons among the different groups of single respondents. However, the main differences between experimental and control group responses for the items assessing financial decision-making appear to be related to the extent to which husbands (of the married respondents) took responsibility for decision-making. On all items, married respondents in the control group had less control over participation in decisions than in the experimental group. There were no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers on any of the decision-making items.

Generally, respondents reported few changes in decision-making authority between the *before* and *after* period. The responses to the decision-making questions are summarized below. For a full tabulation of responses on each item (see Tables A95–A100 in Appendix A).

Daily Household Expenditures

Married Respondents

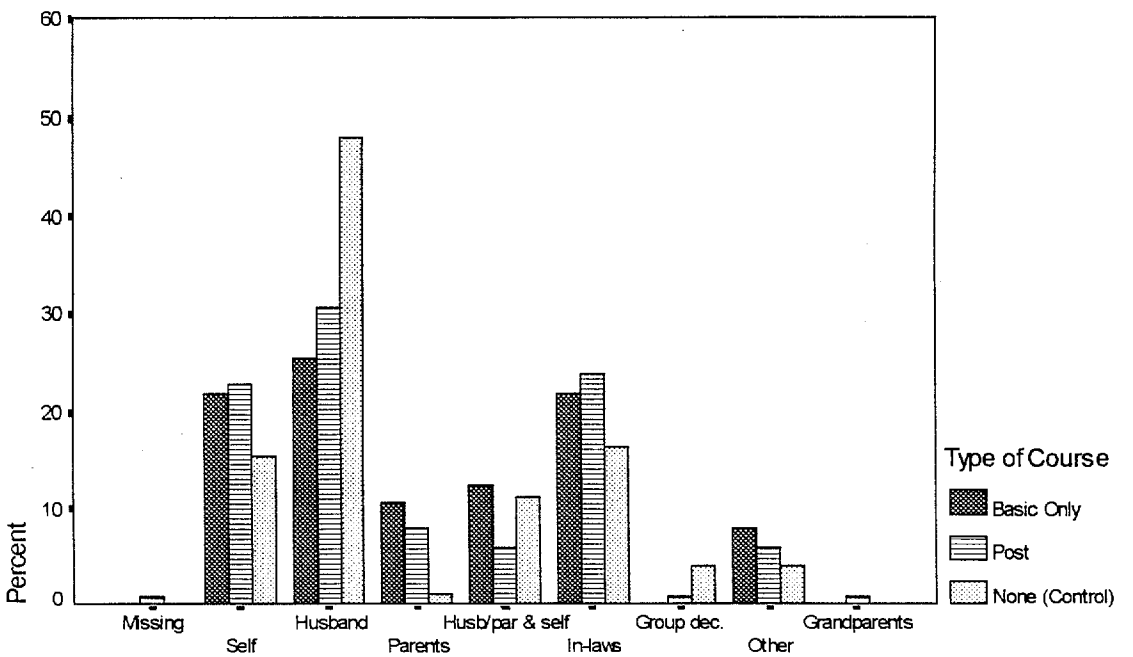


Figure 32: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Daily Household Expenditures (continued)

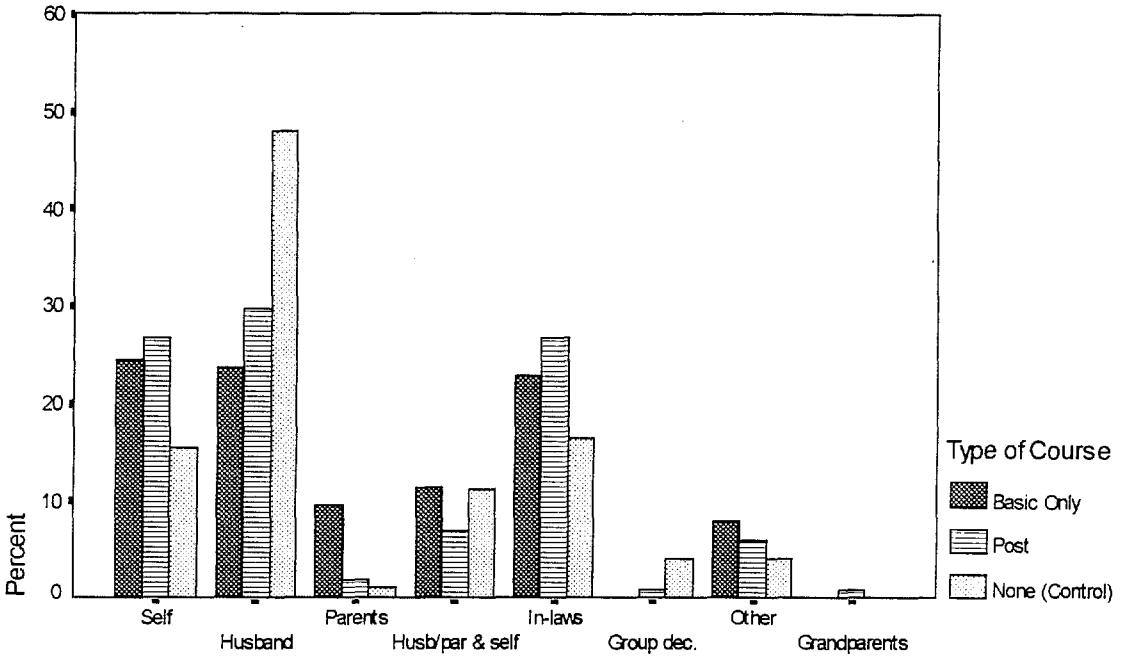


Figure 33: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Daily Household Expenditures (continued)

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

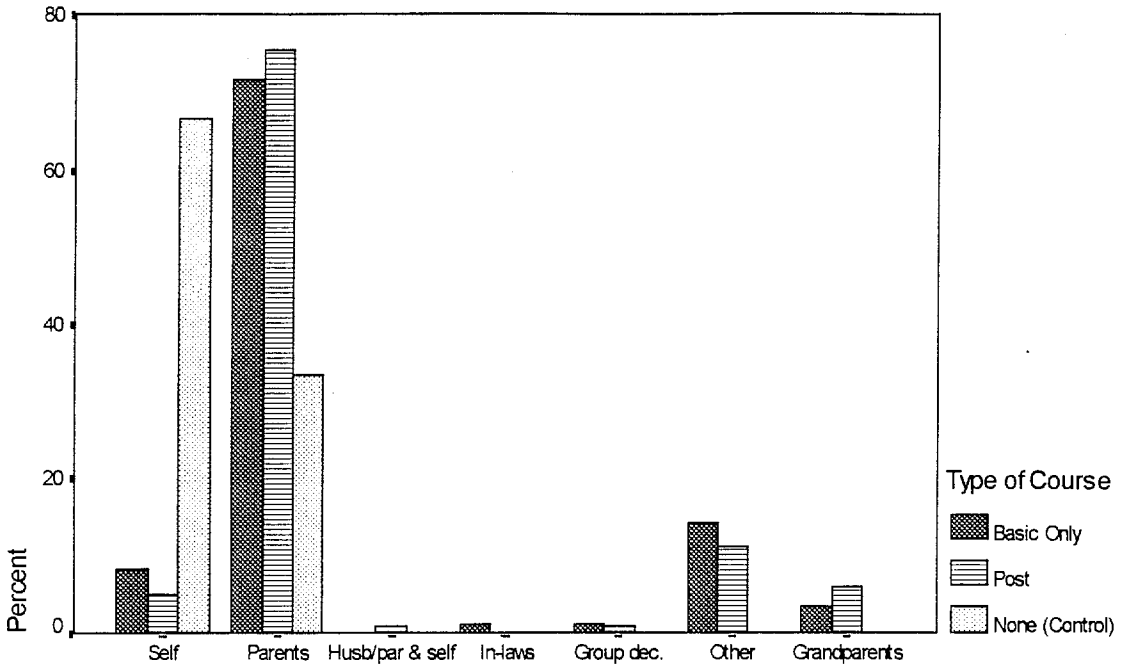


Figure 34: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

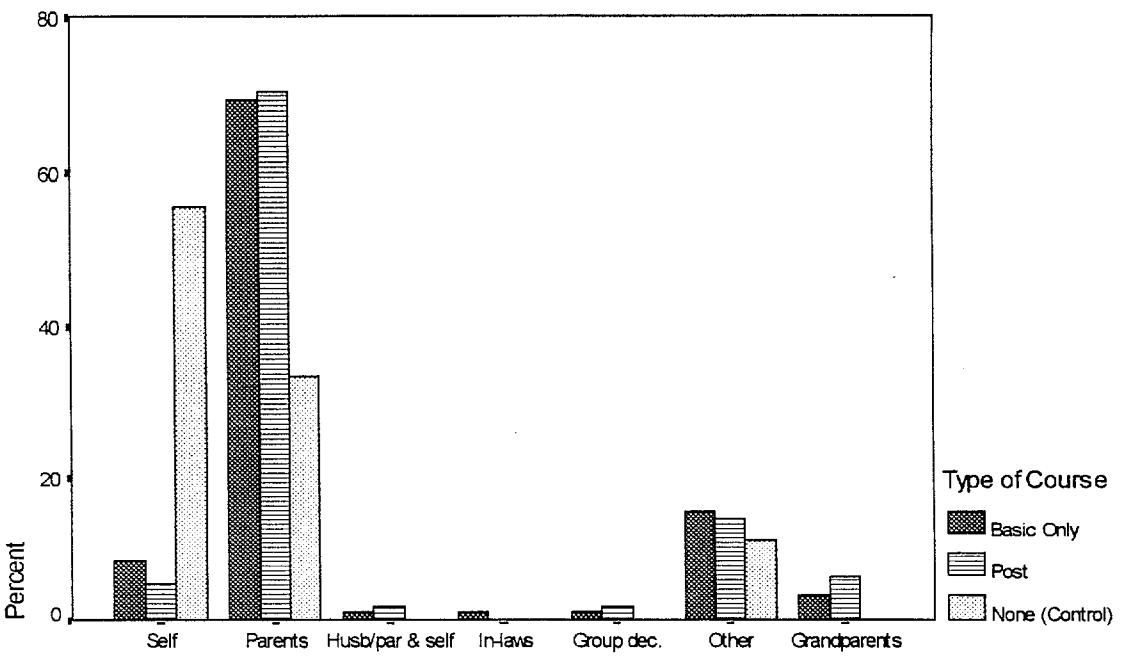


Figure 35: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

Clothing Purchases

Married Respondents

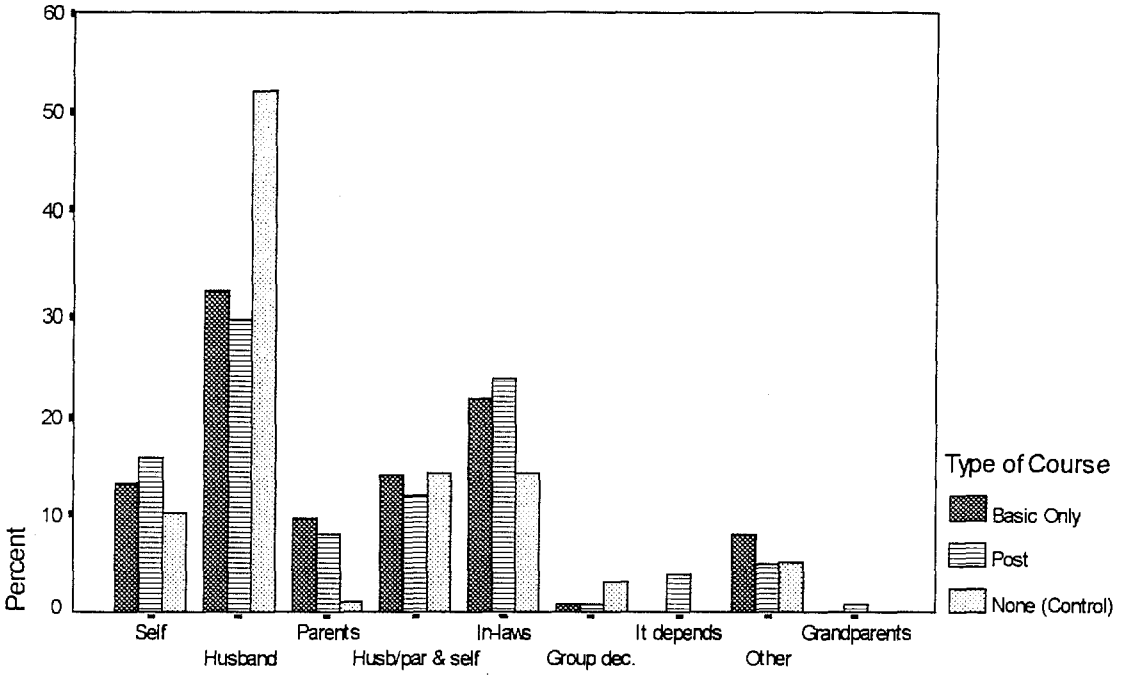
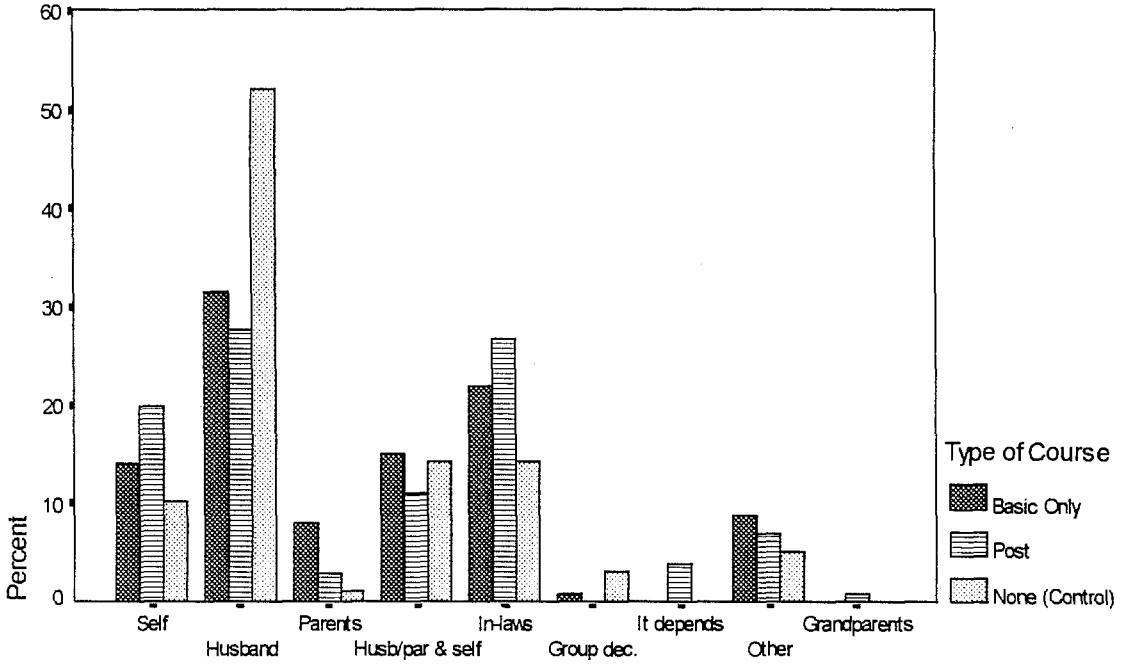


Figure 36: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98



N=

Figure 37: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Clothing Purchases (continued)

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

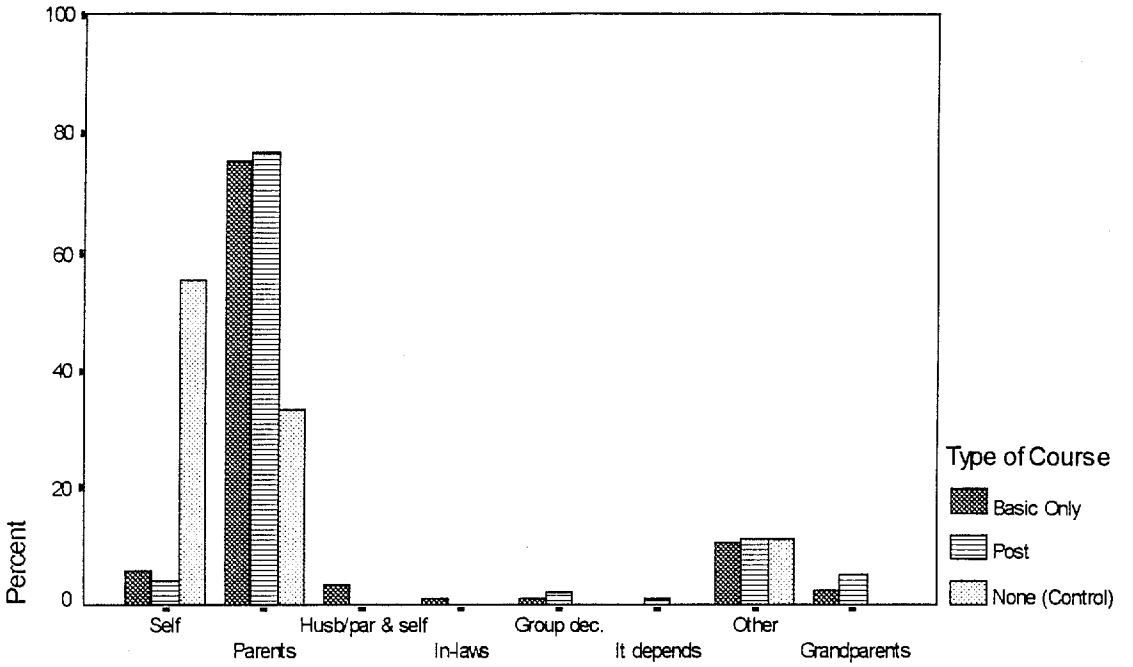


Figure 38: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

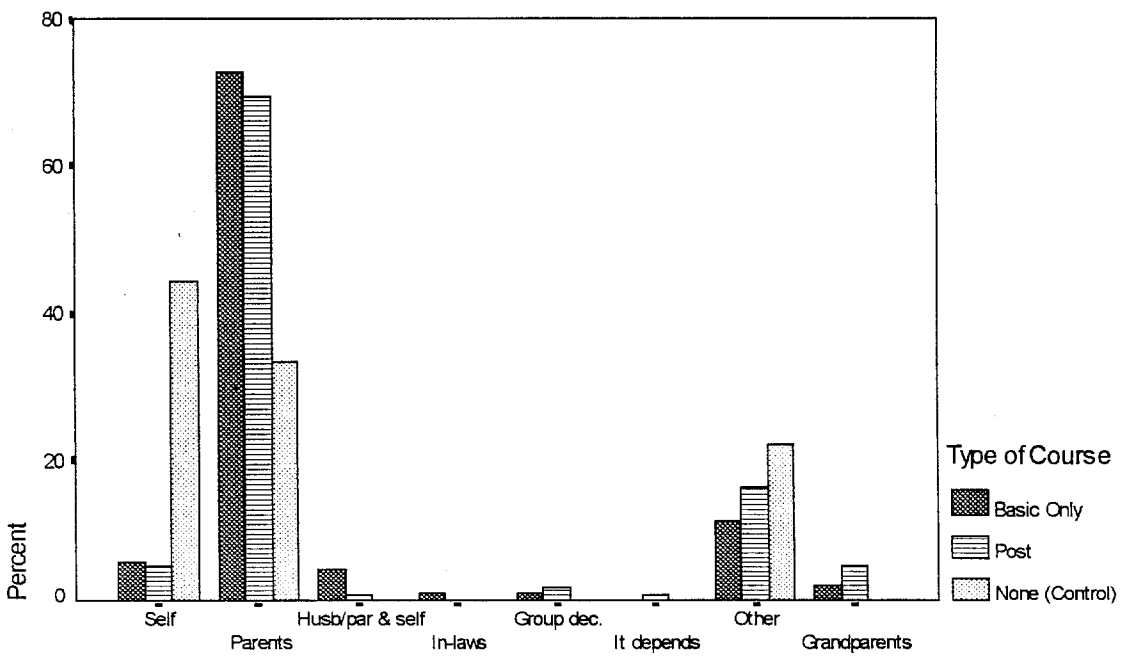


Figure 39: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

Livestock Purchases

Married Respondents

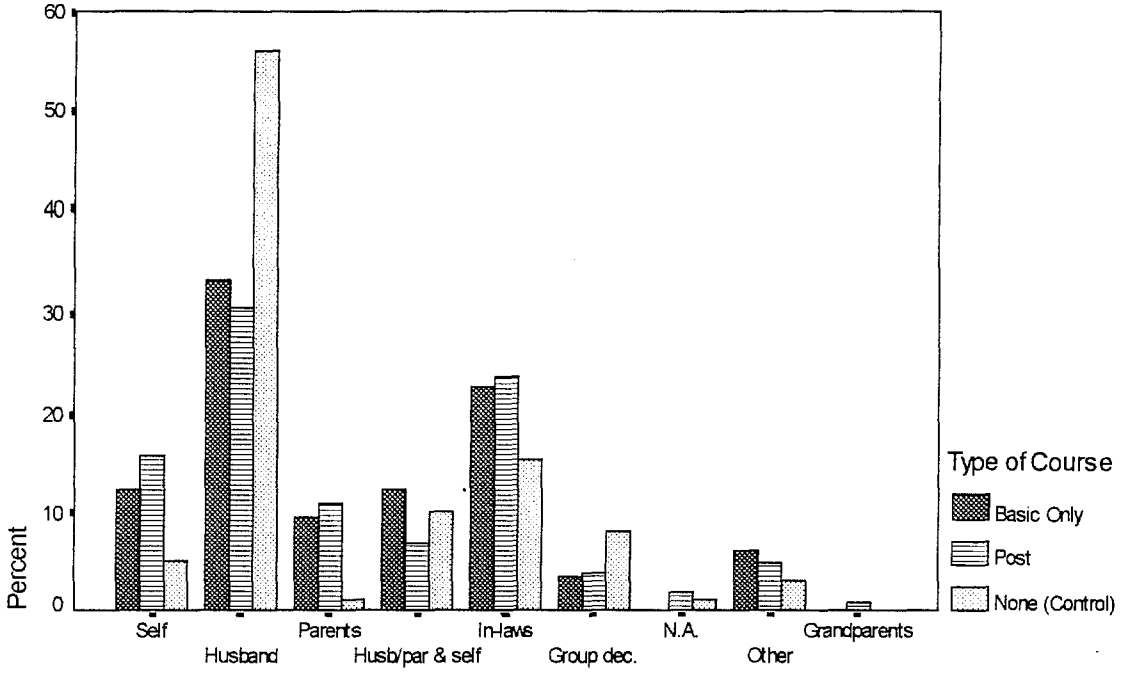


Figure 40: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

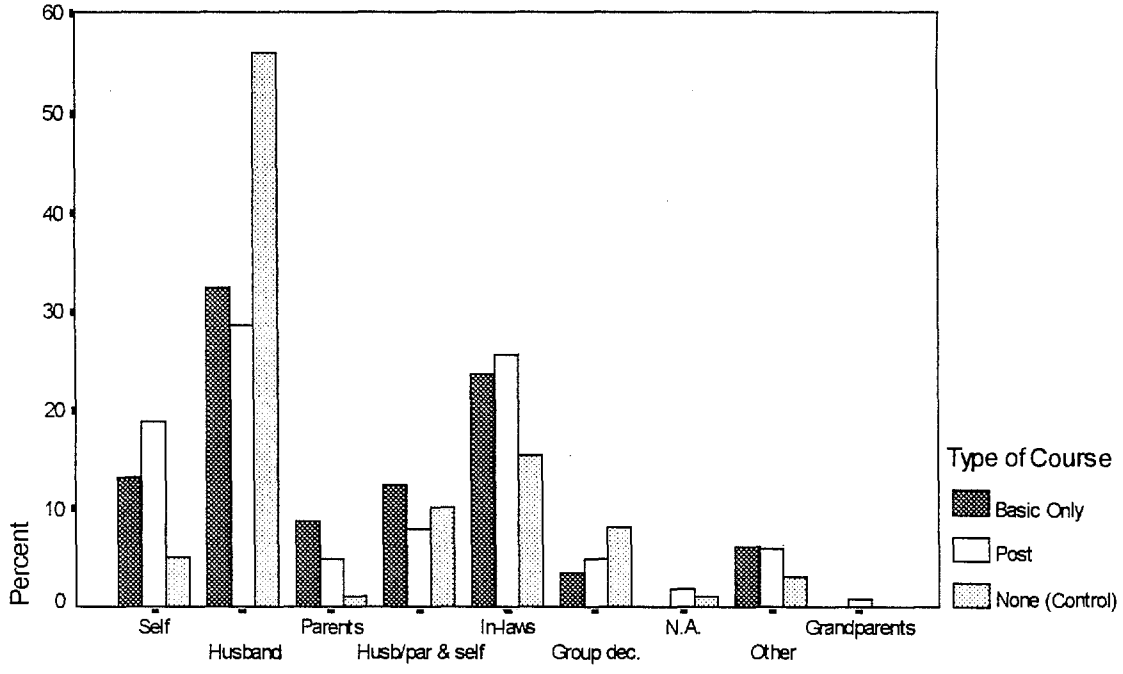


Figure 41: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Livestock Purchases (continued)

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

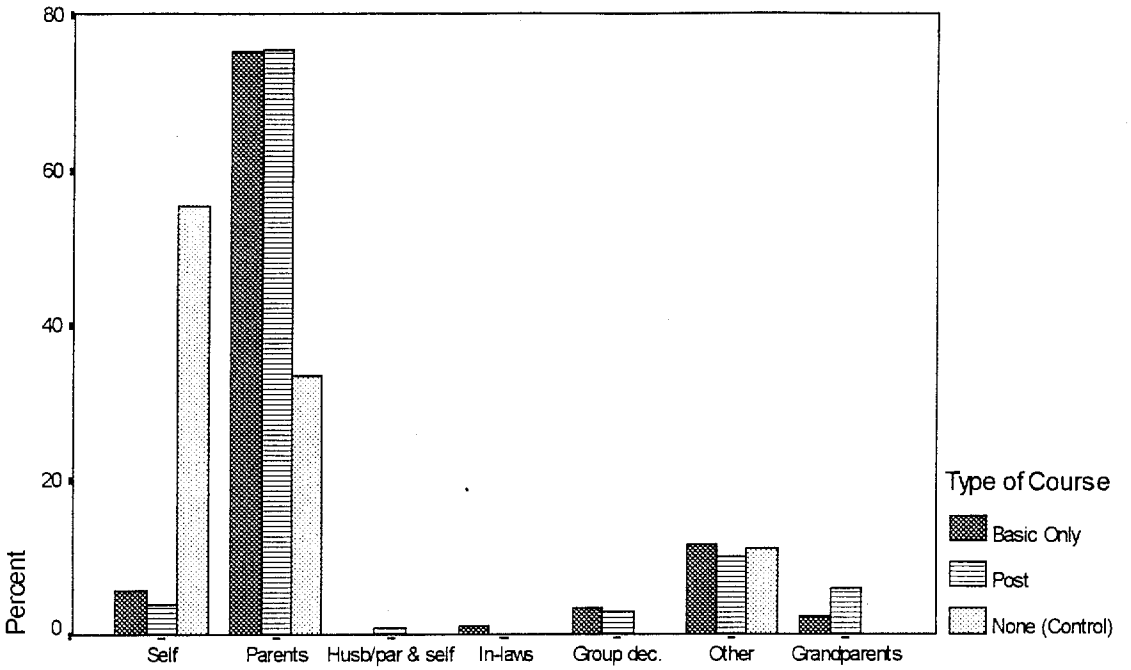


Figure 42: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

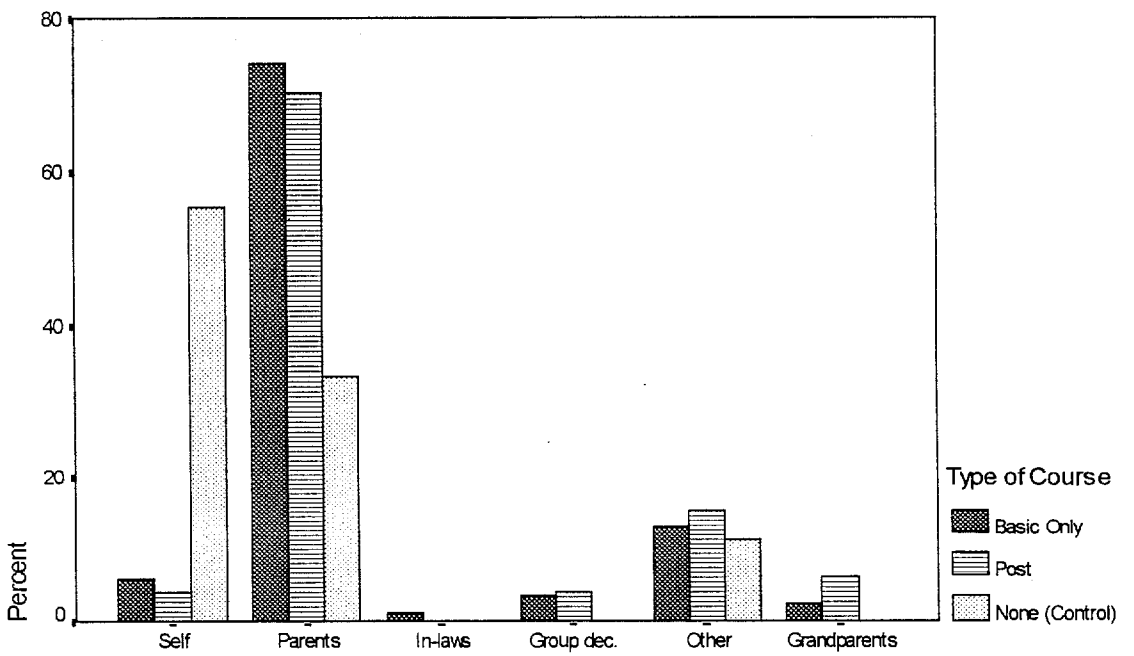


Figure 43: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

3.3.2.2. Sending Daughters to School

A significantly higher percentage of married respondents in the experimental group (37%) than in the control group (19%) were participated in decisions about sending their daughters to school. No significant differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course participants. However, a slightly higher proportion of post-literacy course participants than those who took only the basic courses participated in such decisions (both before and after the classes). See Tables A101 - A102.

Married Respondents

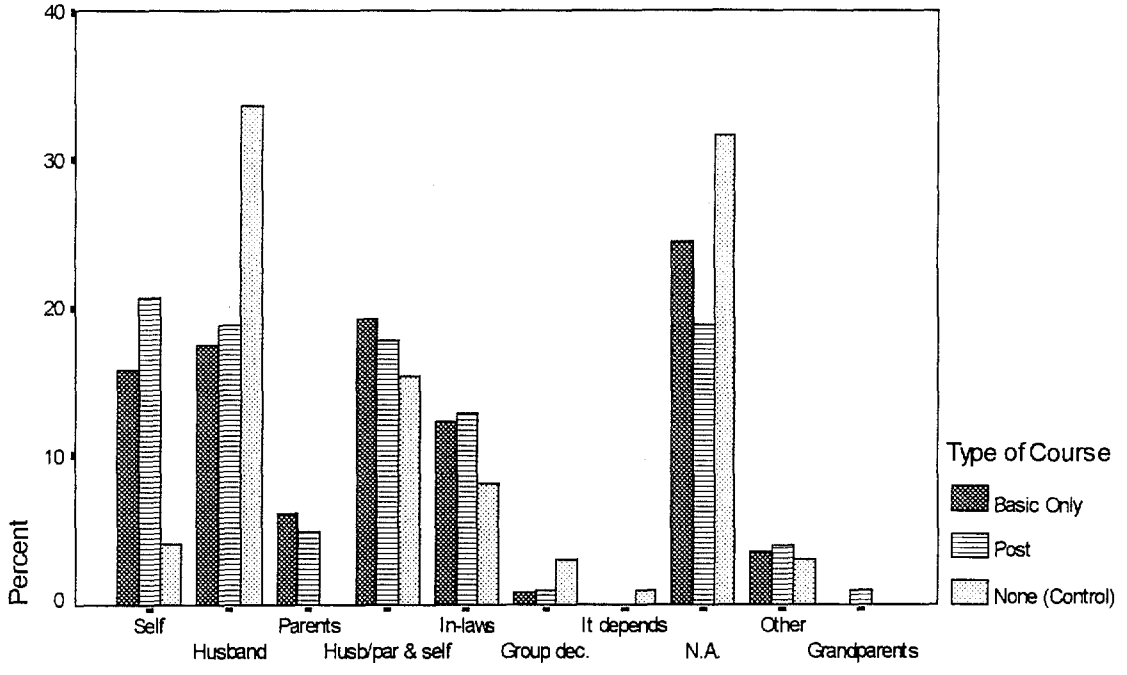


Figure 44: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Sending Daughters to School (continued)

Married Respondents

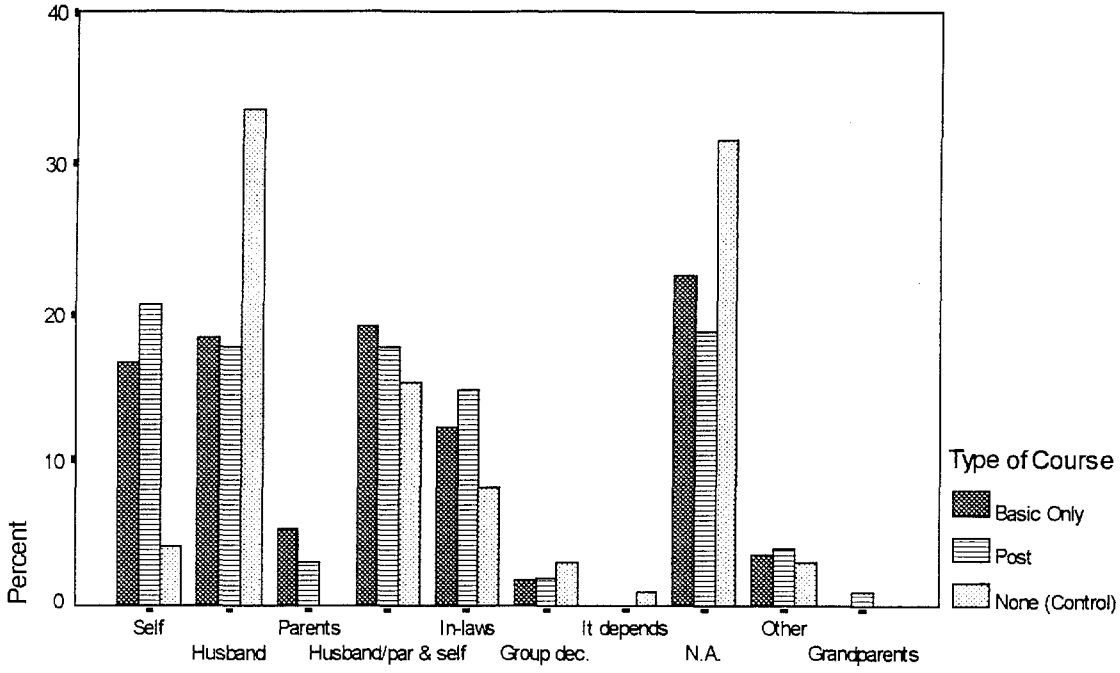


Figure 45: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

3.3.3. Other Household/Family Decisions

In addition to the indicators selected as measures of the Nepal Mission's strategic objective for improving women's empowerment, several other indicators of household decision-making were included in this study. These are respondents' participation in decision-making related to: 1) social/religious rituals; 2) agriculture; and 3) medical treatment for the family and 4) reproduction.

3.3.3.1 Social/Religious Rituals[16]

On the question concerning respondents' participation in decisions about social and religious rituals, significant differences existed between the experimental and control group, as well as between the basic and post-literacy course participants *before* the literacy course/last year. However, the proportion of respondents participating in such decisions was small for all three groups, with 22%, 24% and 27% of the basic, post- and control group respondents, respectively, participating either solely or jointly with their husbands/parents in such decisions. Because of a data entry problem no information was available about the per cent of literacy course participants who had input into such decisions after the courses (see Tables A103 - A104) .

[16] Information regarding respondents' decision making authority with regard to religious rituals *after* the literacy course was unavailable.

Social/Religious Rituals (continued)

Married Respondents

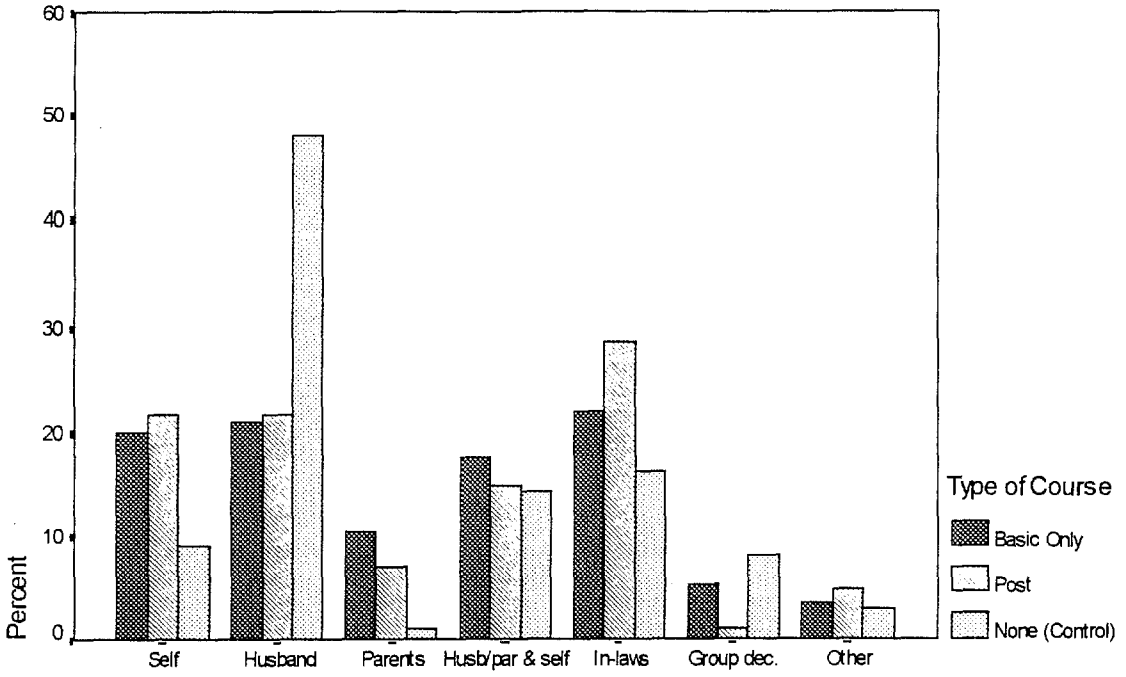


Figure 46: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

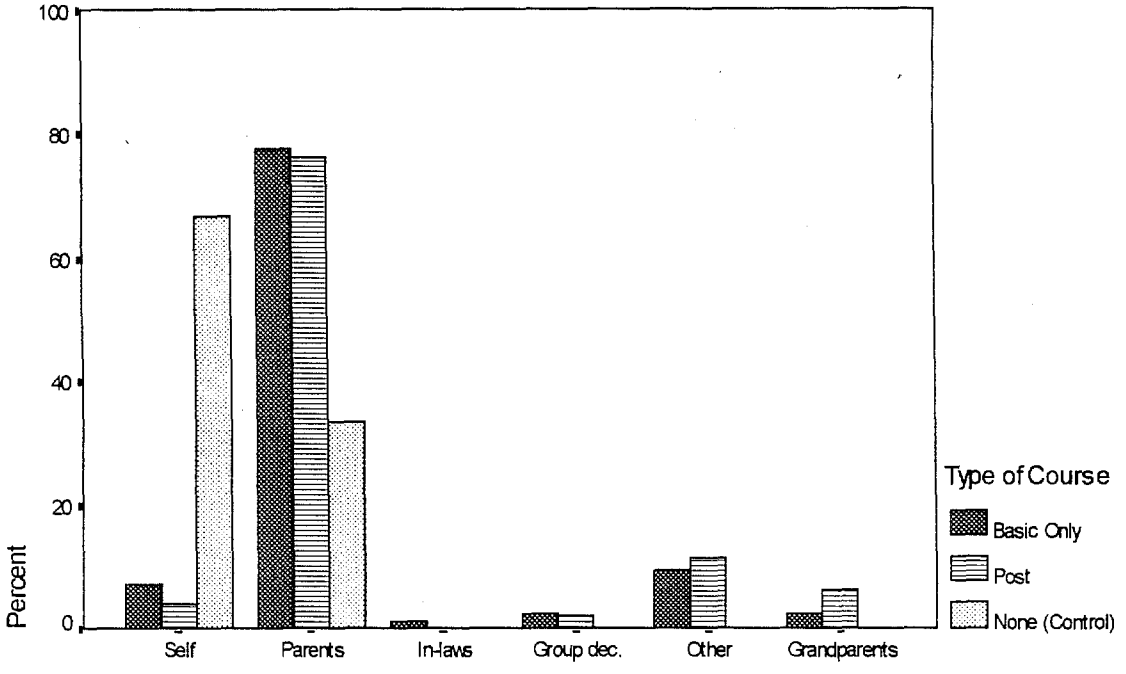


Figure 47: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

3.3.3.2. Medical Treatment

On the items related to medical treatment significant differences existed between the experimental and control group (both *before* and *after* the literacy courses/last year) but not between the basic and post-literacy course participants. Married respondents had a much greater role in decisions than single respondents (see Tables A105 - A106).

Married Respondents

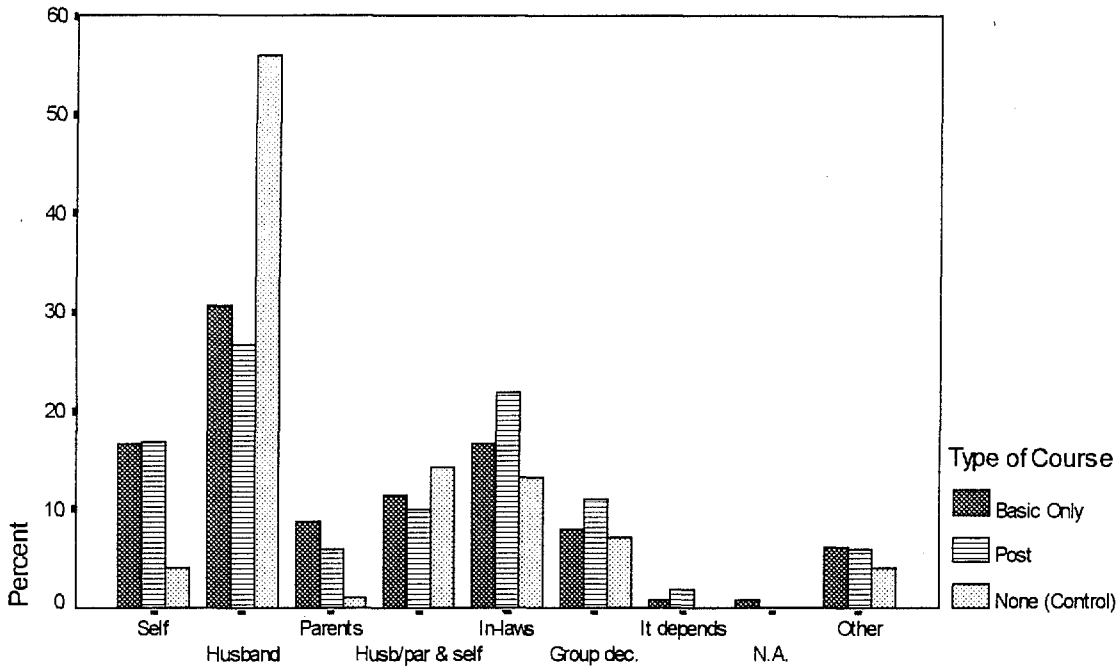


Figure 48: After Literacy Course/Last Year

N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Medical Treatment (continued)

Married Respondents

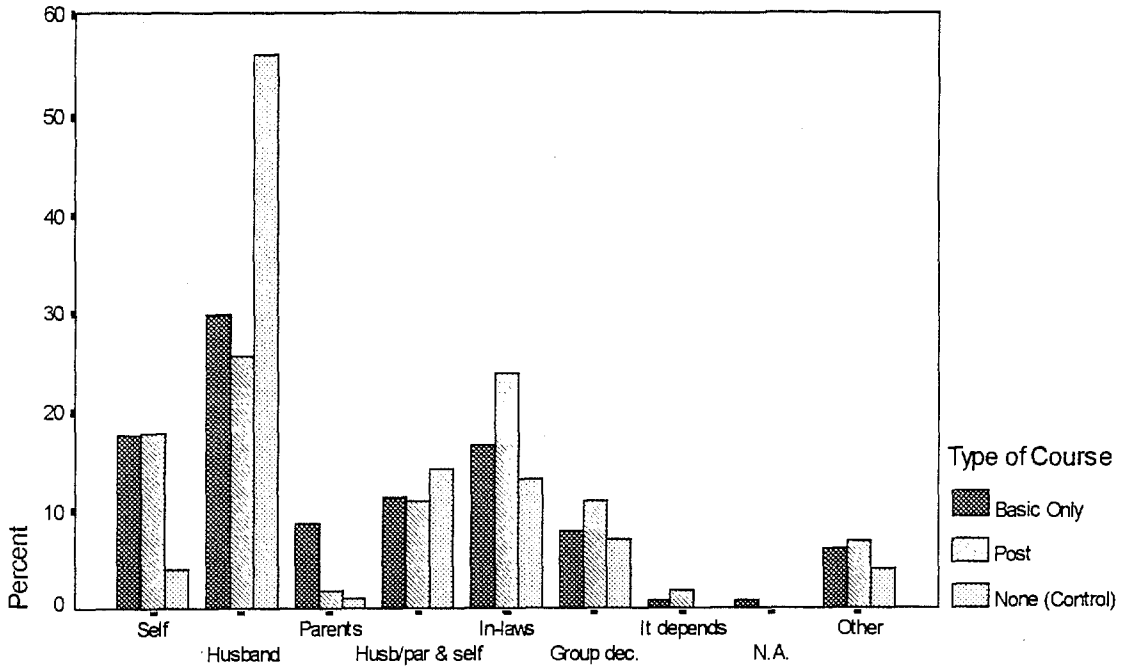


Figure 49: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

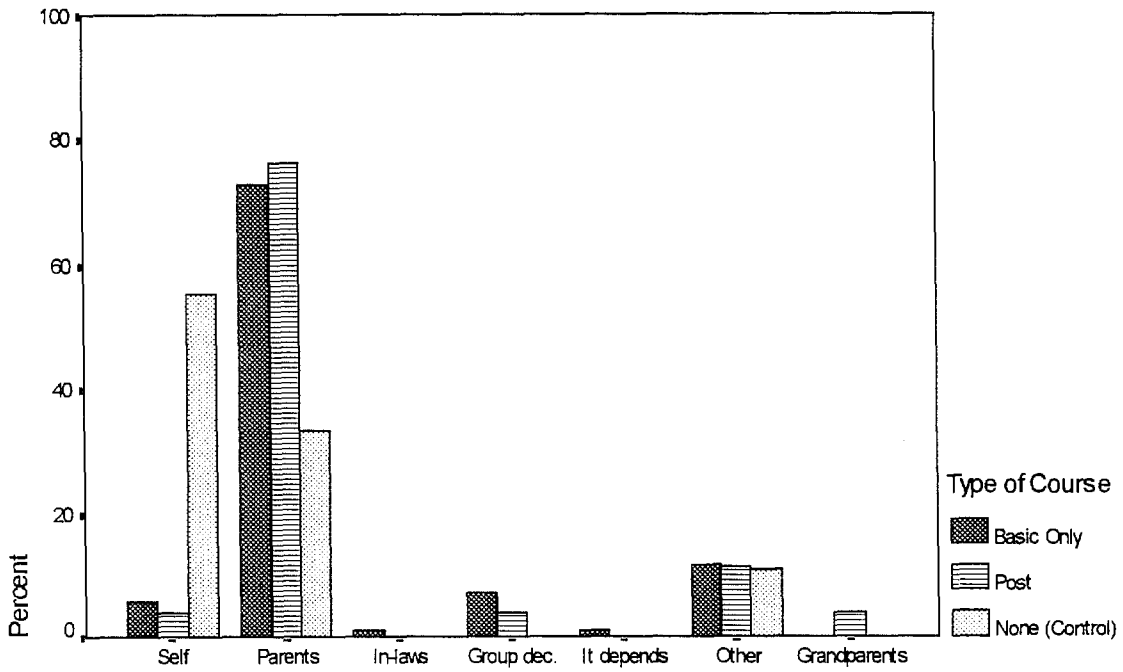


Figure 50: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

Medical Treatment

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents (continued)

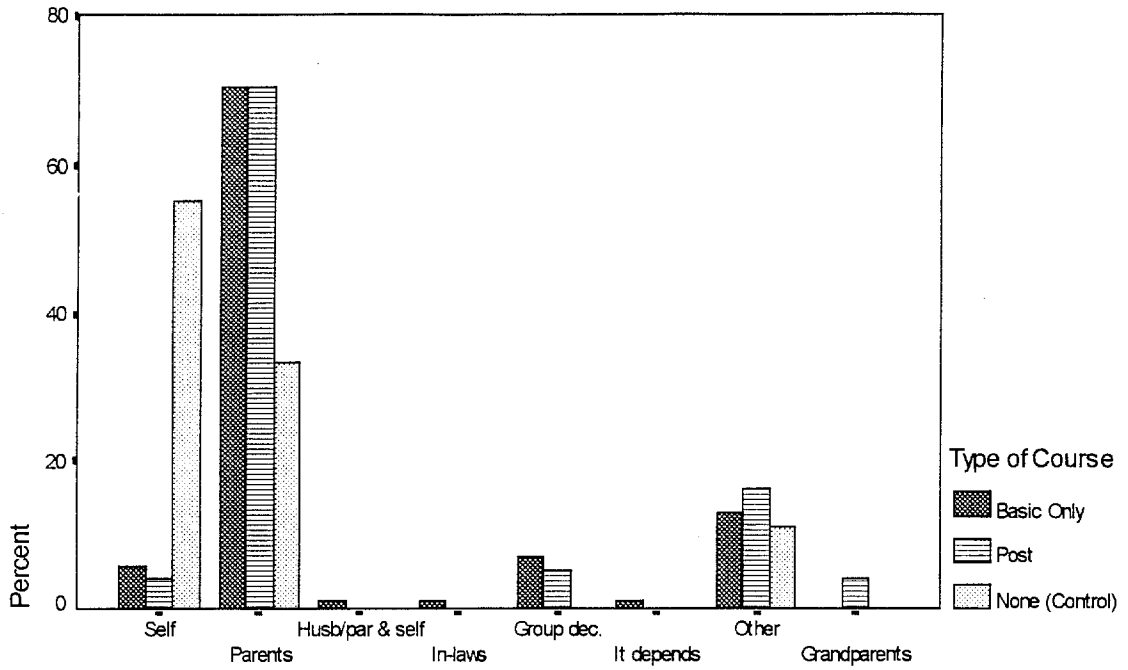


Figure 51: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

3.3.3.3. Agriculture

On the items related to agricultural decisions significant differences existed between the experimental and control group (both *before* and *after* the literacy courses/last year) but not between the basic and post-literacy course participants. Married respondents had a much greater role in decisions than single respondents (see Tables A107 - A108).

Married Respondents

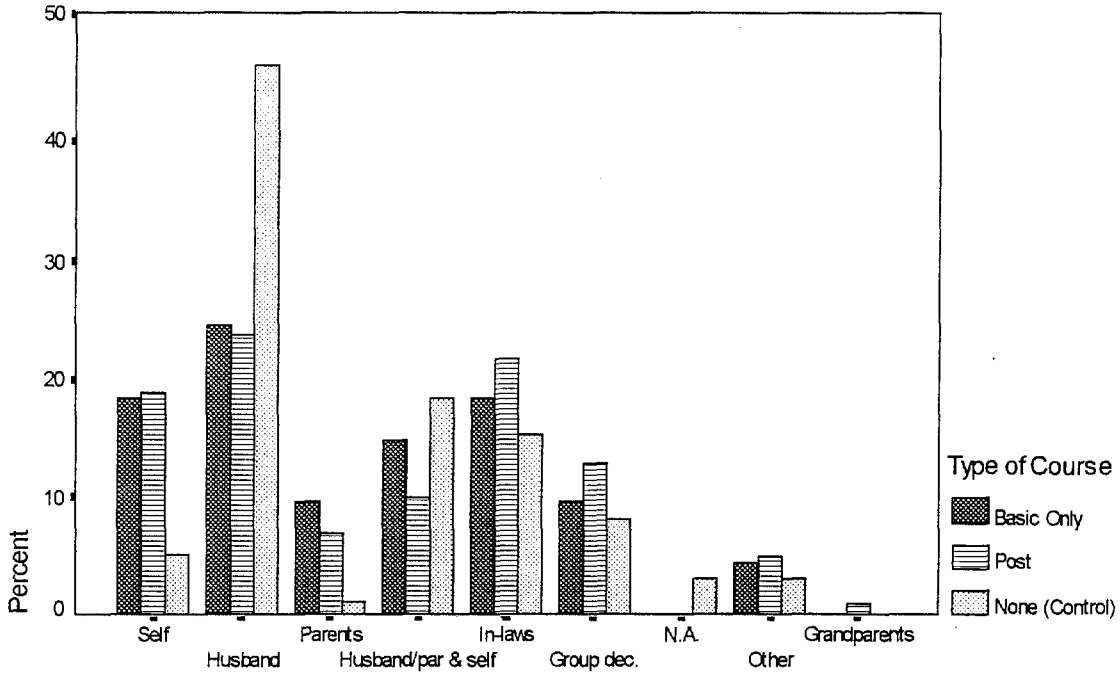


Figure 52: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Agriculture (continued)

Married Respondents

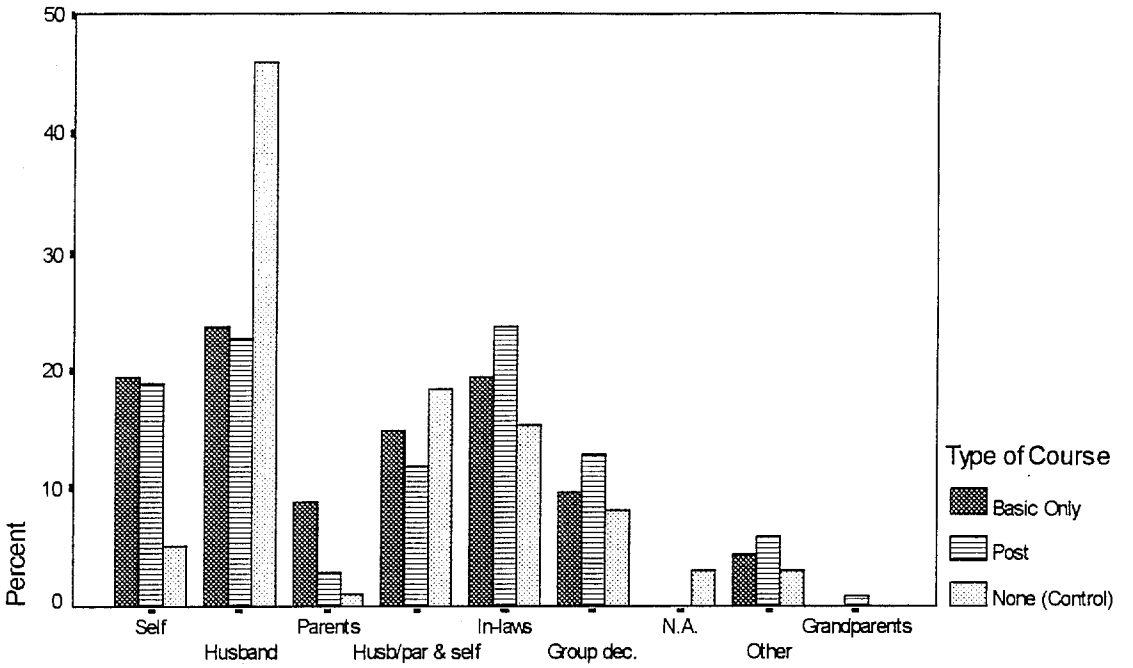


Figure 53: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-113; Post-100; Control-98

Agriculture (continued)

Single/Widowed/Divorced Respondents

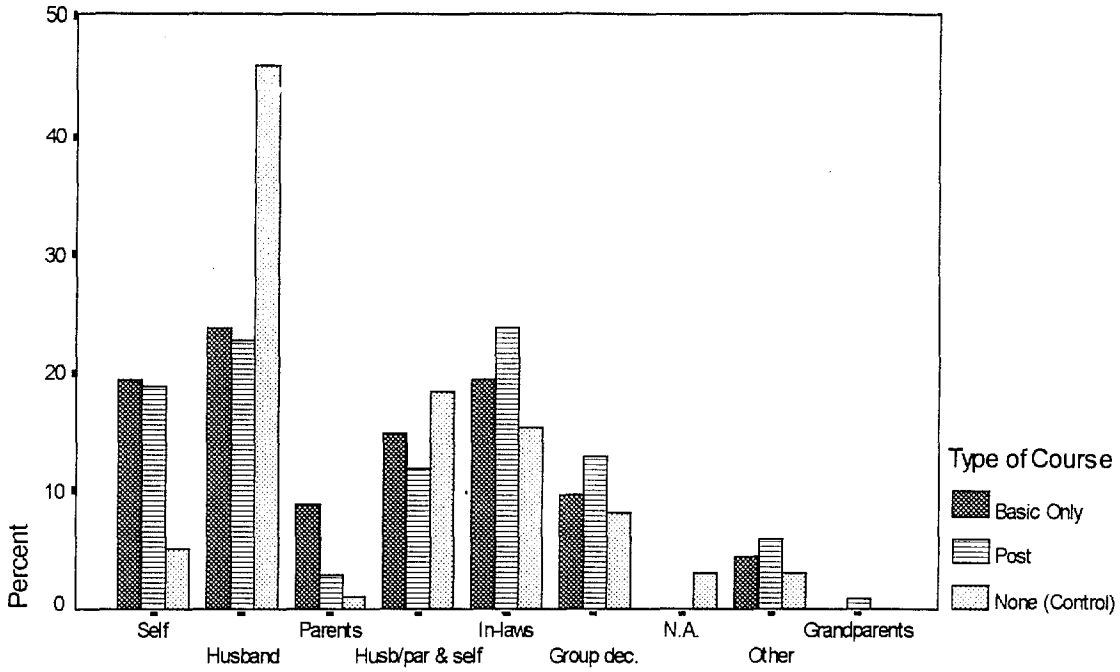


Figure 54: Before Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

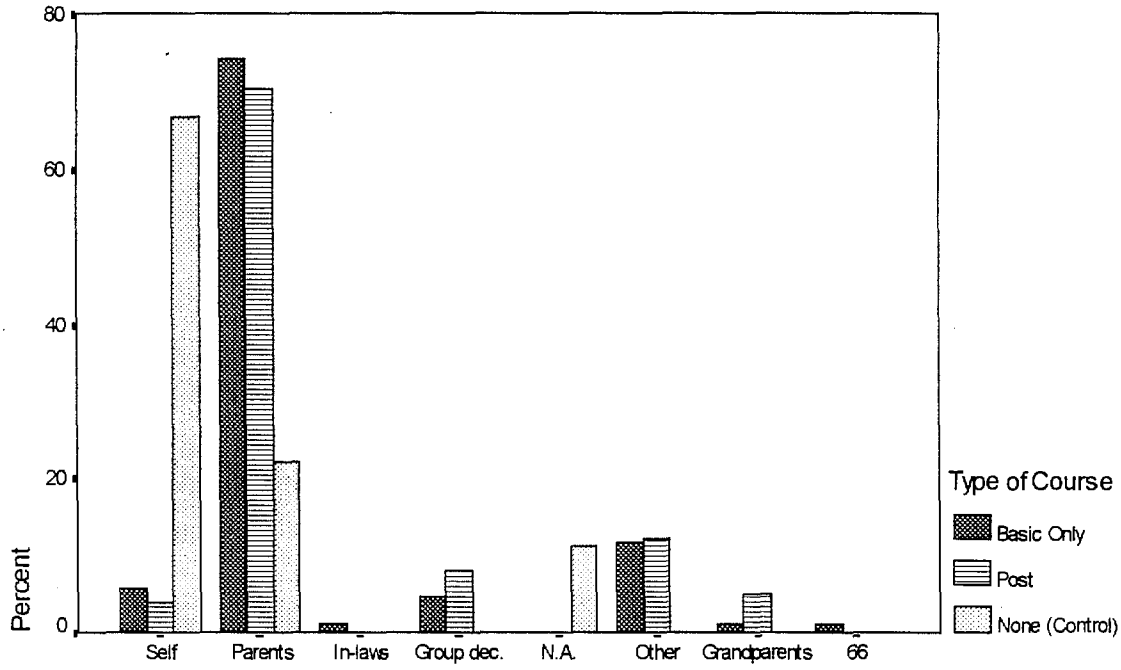


Figure 55: After Literacy Course/Last Year
N= Basic-86; Post-90; Control-9

3.3.4. Reproductive Decisions

Married respondents were also asked about their role in decisions related to family size and child spacing, as well as their perceptions of how often they were consulted about decisions concerning childbirth now compared to before the literacy courses (or a year ago). The results are depicted in Tables A109–A110 and summarized in Figures 56-57.

3.3.4.1. Family Size

In the control group, 30% of married respondents stated that decisions concerning how many children to have were not applicable to their situation or no one made the decision; 30% indicted that this decision was controlled by the husband; 30% reported that they made the decision in conjunction with their parents and/or husband; and only 6% made the decision alone.

This compares with 38% of the married basic literacy course completers who reported that decisions concerning family size were not applicable to their situation or no one made the decision; 19% indicted that this decision was made by the husband; 31% reported that they made the decision in conjunction with their parents and/or husband; and 11% made the decision alone. Similarly, among the post-literacy course completers, 30% of the married respondents stated that decisions concerning family size were not applicable or no one made the decision; 14% indicted that this decision was controlled by the husband; 36% reported that they made the decision in conjunction with the parents and/or husband; and 16% made the decision alone. Significant differences existed between responses of experimental and control group respondents but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers.

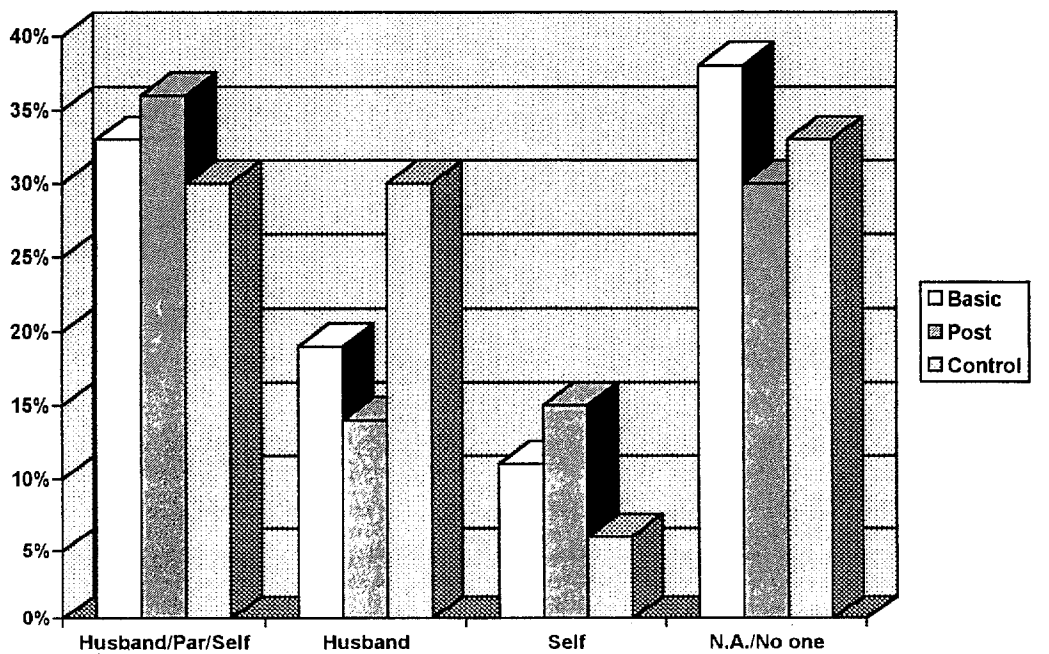


Figure 56: Decisions About Family Size

N=Basic-101; Post-100; Control-88

3.3.4.2. Child Spacing

In the control group, 30% of the respondents stated that decisions concerning when to have children were not applicable to their situation or no one made the decision; 30% indicted that this decision was controlled by the husband; 29% reported that they made the decision in conjunction with the parents and/or husband; and 6% made the decision alone.

By comparison, 39% of the basic literacy course completers reported that decisions concerning family size were not applicable or no one made the decision; 19% indicted that this decision was controlled by the husband; 36% reported that they made the decision in conjunction with the parents and/or husband; and 11% made the decision alone. Similarly, among the post-literacy course completers 29% of the respondents stated that decisions concerning family size were not applicable or no one made the decision; 16% indicted that this decision was made by the husband; 36% reported that they made the decision in conjunction with the parents and/or husband; and 16% made the decision alone.

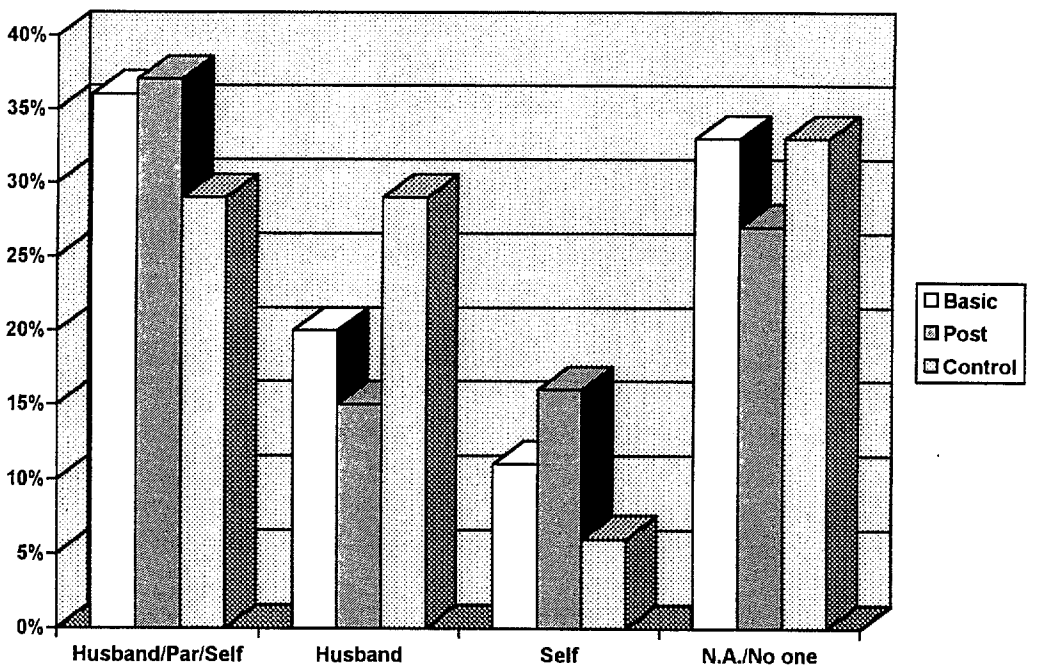


Figure 57: Decisions About Child Spacing

N=Basic-101; Post-97; Control-87

3.3.4.3. Changes in Participation in Childbirth Decisions

When married respondents were asked how often they were now consulted in decisions about child bearing compared to the period *before* taking the literacy course or a year ago, the greatest change was among control group respondents: 34% of the experimental group compared to 58% of the control group felt that they had more say now than *before*. One explanation is that the control group respondents had a much lower level of involvement in decision-making to begin with than the experimental group. It is also possible that the control group women had a different understanding of the meaning of phrases such as "participation in child birth decisions" than those who have had no literacy training.

Less than 1% of the experimental group (one person) and 1% of control group (one person) thought they had less say than *before*, but about 8% of basic literacy course completers, 14% of post-literacy course completers, and 14% of control group respondents indicated that they never had any say in childbirth matters. A total of 18% basic literacy course completers and 20% of post-literacy course completers compared to 2% of control group respondents reported no change in this regard. About 33% of all married respondents felt that this question did not apply to their situation. Significant differences existed between the experimental and control group, but there were no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers regarding this question.

No significant differences were found between the proportion of respondents in the experimental and control group who used birth control either *before* or *after* the literacy course/last year. Similarly, no significant differences existed between the basic and literacy course completers regarding birth control use. There were slight increases in the proportion of literacy course completers who used birth control *before* the literacy course/last year compared to those who used it *after* that period: in the basic literacy group, the proportion increased from 14% to 16%, while in the post-literacy group it increased from 19% to 20%. The figure declined from 11% to 8% for the control group (see Tables A111–A113).

As indicated in these tables and in the discussion above, even though many women in the control group reported an increase in their involvement in child birth decisions, their use of birth control decreased during the last year, rather than increased. This may indicate that increased decision making among women who are not literate may not result in decisions to have fewer children or more carefully planned families. Another possibility mentioned above is that the women who took the literacy courses, as a result of the discussions held during their classes, have a different understanding of the meaning of phrases such as "participation in child birth decisions" than those who received no literacy training. However, there is no way of knowing how these questions were interpreted by respondents.

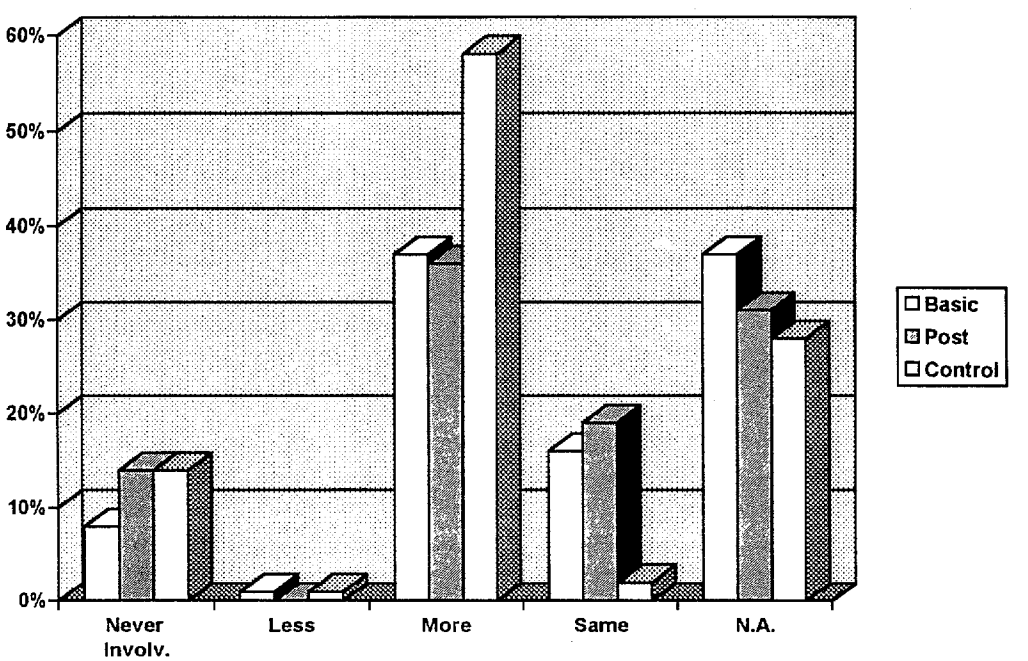


Figure 58: Involvement in Decisions About Child Birth
N=Basic-90; Post-93; Control-90

3.3.5. Self Confidence and Self Respect

Measuring intangible concepts such as self-esteem and empowerment is never an easy task. Attitudinal changes can range from something as subtle as a woman's feeling less inferior to her neighbors and friends, to taking an active leadership role in the community. Changes may come about in either self-perception, action, or both (Smith, 1995).

Two measures of self-confidence and self perception relate directly to an individual's view of herself in the family and community: 1) perceptions that one is respected by family and community; and 2) confidence in stating one's opinions to the family and community. These measures indicate the extent to which women feel comfortable in expressing their views and exerting influence in their family and in the larger community.

3.3.5.1. Respect for Opinions by Family

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to assess the extent to which family members' respect for their opinions had changed *after* having taken the literacy courses/last year. Only two respondents felt that their family's respect had declined. However, 38% of the basic literacy course completers and 42% of the post-literacy course completers believed they now had more respect. By comparison, only 2% of the control group (two respondents) felt that the respect of their families had increased in the last year, while 98% stated that there had been no change. This represents a significant difference between the control and experimental group but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers within the experimental group.

Of the 69 literacy course completers who expressed views about how their families' respect had changed, the most frequently cited difference was that "they were now consulted more often in decisions about household work." Approximately 93% of those responding to the question in the experimental group (about 17% of the 392 experimental group participants) and all four respondents answering the question in the control group gave this response. While participation in decisions about household work may be more closely linked with measures of household decision-making than self-confidence, it is discussed in this section because it was perceived by the respondents to be the primary indicator of their family's respect. Women who feel that they have the respect of their family and peers are likely to be more confident in expressing their opinions and more inclined to trust their own judgment when making decisions. A few respondents (four basic literacy course completers and six post-literacy course completers) felt that "they were now consulted more frequently about overall decision-making and family planning" (see Tables A114–A115).

When marital status was taken into account, there were no significant differences between the single and married respondents with regard to this question. As with the total group, the difference between the experimental and control group was significant for married respondents. The number of single control group respondents was too small to make that determination. When marital status was considered for the experimental group only, no significant differences were found. Among the married participants, 40% of the basic literacy course completers and 41% of the post-literacy course completers felt that they now had more respect by family members. Among the single/never married respondents, 35% of basic literacy course completers expressed this sentiment compared to 44% of post-literacy course completers. Similarly, no significant differences existed between the various religious or ethnic groups with respect to this question.

3.3.5.2. Respect for Opinions by Community Members

Similar, but not quite as striking, differences among the respondent groups existed in their perceptions about the community's respect for their opinions. Only one person (from the post-literacy course group) felt that her opinions garnered less respect than *before*, while 29% of the basic literacy course completers and 33% of the post-literacy course completers believed that their opinions now received more respect from community members than *before* the literacy courses or during the last year. Only 2% of the control group (2 respondents) felt that they now

had more respect in the community than in the previous year, while 98% felt that they had about the same amount of respect as *before*. Again, this represents a significant difference between the control and experimental group but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers within the experimental group. No significant differences existed with regard to this question for either marital status or religious affiliation.

Of those who expressed views about how respect for their opinions in the community differed *before* the course/last year, compared with *afterward*, the most frequently cited change was that they now participated more in community decisions. This sentiment was expressed by 47 (80%) of the respondents answering the question from the basic literacy course, 47 (66%) of the respondents answering the question from the post-literacy course; and all four respondents answering the question in the control group. Additionally 11 (19%) of the basic literacy course respondents and 22 (31%) of the post-literacy course respondents indicated that they now had greater ability to influence other members of the community to participate in village activities (see Tables A116–A117).

3.3.5.3. Confidence in Stating Opinion to Family Members

Significant differences were observed between the basic and post-literacy course completers, as well as between the literacy course completers and the control group, with respect to their confidence in stating their opinions in the *family*. Approximately 38% of the basic literacy course completers compared to 50% of the post-literacy course completers felt that they now had more confidence in stating their opinions in the *family* than *before* taking the courses. However, only 4% of the control group respondents felt that their confidence in this regard had increased during the last year (see Table A118). No significant differences existed with regard to this question for marital status or religious affiliation, or caste/ethnic group.

3.3.5.4. Confidence in Stating Opinion to Community Members

Approximately 30% of the basic literacy course completers compared to 44% of the post-literacy course completers stated that they now had more confidence in stating their opinions in the *community* than *before* taking the courses. Differences between the two experimental groups were significant. However, only 4% of the control group respondents felt that their confidence in expressing their opinions to *community* members had increased during the last year, which also represents a significant difference between the experimental and control group (see Table A119). No significant differences existed with regard to this question for either marital status or religious affiliation.

3.3.6. Identification of Role Models

One of the first steps in women's empowerment is often the ability to identify positive role models among other women in the village. The perception that women in the community can be influential often provides women with the encouragement needed to set goals for themselves and make improvements in their own lives. How women see themselves is often influenced by the way they and others see other women in the community. Consequently, the ability to identify influential women in the community was included as an indicator of empowerment.

There were significant differences between the experimental and the control group with regard to the identification of influential women in the village. Approximately 38% of basic literacy course completers, 47% of post-literacy course completers and 24% of control group respondents thought that there were influential women in the village. Differences between the basic and post-literacy groups were not significant. Similarly, no significant differences existed with respect to marital status or religious affiliation. However, there were significant differences among the various castes and ethnic groups: a higher proportion of Chhetri, Magar respondents were able to identify influential women in the village (around 60%) compared to about 25-40% of respondents from the other castes.

The most frequently cited reasons for women being considered influential included that they were: 1) "teachers/advisors;" 2) "educated and knowledgeable;" and 3) "able to speak easily." Less frequently mentioned reasons were: 1) "they were women who helped others;" 2) "they provided leadership or headed committees;" or 3) "they worked for community development" (see Tables A120–A121).

Few of the village leaders were able to identify women who were influential in the village. In one community, a woman who is a high school graduate and very active in the community was cited. She was described as "very respected, even by the men."

3.3.7. Mobility

When asked about their travel outside the village, it was found that women who had completed the literacy courses traveled out outside the village more frequently than women in the control group. In the period *prior* to the literacy courses/last year, significant differences existed between the experimental and control group but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers with regard to frequency of travel. Similarly, *after* the literacy course/last year, differences between the experimental and the control group were significant but no differences were found between the two experimental groups (basic and post-literacy course completers). The proportion of literacy course completers who never traveled outside their village declined slightly from 11% for the experimental in the period *before* the courses to 7% in the period *after* the courses. For the control group, the percentage of women who traveled outside the village remained at about 23%. Respondents in all three groups most often reported that they traveled outside the village every few months. The most frequently occurring reason for travel was to visit friends or relatives, to go on religious pilgrimages or to seek medical care (see Tables A122 – A124).

No significant differences were found between the basic and post-literacy course completers on the question concerning whether they ever took the bus. However, significant differences occurred between the proportion of women in the experimental group compared to those in the control group who said they were more confident about taking the bus after taking the literacy course/in the last year than before. Approximately 42% of the basic literacy course completers, 53% of the post-literacy course completers, and 24% of the control group respondents indicated that they were now more confident (see Tables A125 – A126)

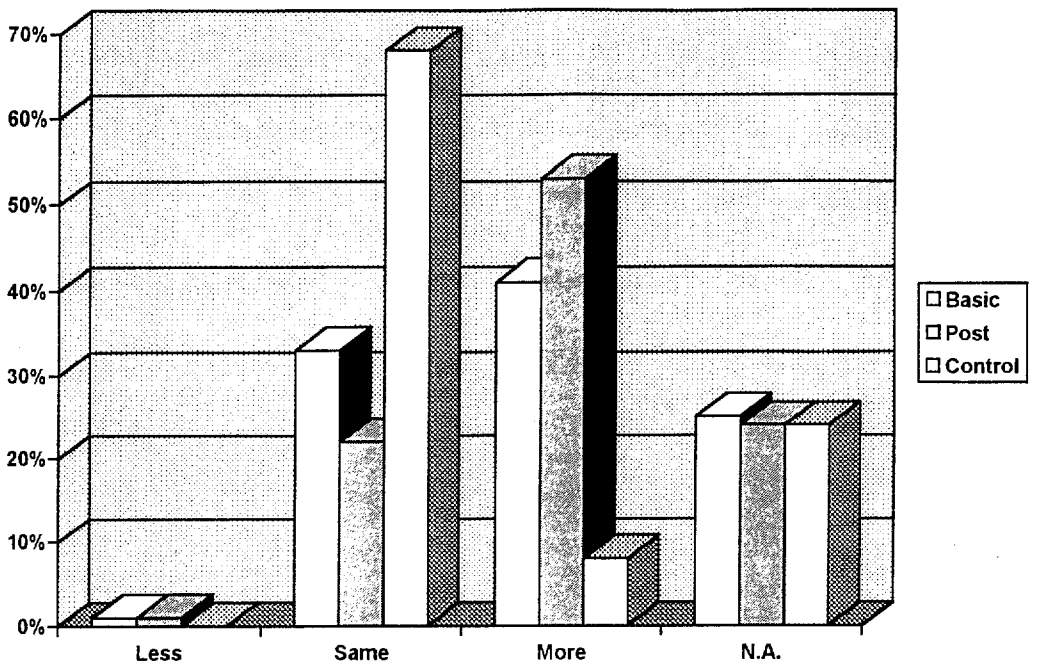


Figure 59: Confidence in Taking Bus

3.3.8. Children's Education

Over the past few years, a considerable body of research has focused on the relationship between the mother's education and that of her children. Levine (1980) summarized evidence from several empirical studies concluding that educated women interact with their children in different ways than from uneducated women. In a study of girls in rural Mexico, Levine found that mothers with more schooling were more verbally responsive to infant vocalizations and increasingly attentive to signs that toddlers were initiating conversation.

Several studies have provided evidence (Ballara, 1991; Shrestha and Smith, 1992; Smith, 1994) that literate mothers may be more likely to send their children to school. Other studies have suggested a relationship between the mother's literacy and children's performance in school (VanFossen and Stict, 1991). Comings (undated)[17] hypothesizes that the positive effect of mother's literacy on children's schooling in Nepal may arise, in part, from the process of "de-mystifying" education as mothers become literate. He explains that women who participate in literacy classes begin to feel more confident in asking simple questions about what their children learn in school or how well they are doing, and they may be better able to help their children with their homework. Claims that newly literate women help their children with their homework were documented in Brown (1990).[18] Additionally, as demonstrated earlier in the findings of this study, many of the literacy course completers also include their children's textbooks as their own reading materials sources. These behaviors send a message to children that their parents value their performance in school.

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[17] Personal correspondence cited in Christine Smith's undated report, *The Impact of Women's Non-formal Literacy Acquisition on Children's Health and Schooling*. Boston: World Education.

[18] *Preparing the Future–Women, Literacy and Development. The Impact of Female Literacy on Human Development and the Participation of Literacy Women in Change.* (sic) England: Action Aid Development Report No. 4, October 1990 cited in Smith's undated report, *The Impact of Women's Non-formal Literacy Acquisition on Children's Health and Schooling*, Boston: World Education.

Several measures were used to assess the impact of the literacy courses on the education of participants' children, including: 1) the proportion of respondents (who are mothers) with children enrolled in school before and after the literacy course; 2) the proportion who talk to their children about their progress in school; and 3) the proportion who check to make sure that their children attend school. Findings indicated no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers on any of the items. However, significant differences existed between the experimental and control group on both indicators of respondents' involvement in their children's education, as well as in the proportion of women whose children were enrolled in school. Furthermore, responses of literacy course completers reflect a substantial increase in their involvement in their children's education since completing the literacy course. Findings for these items are discussed below.

Prior to taking the literacy courses/last year, approximately 77% of the basic literacy course completers and 81% of post-literacy course completers who were mothers had children in school, compared with 65% of the control group. No significant differences between experimental and control groups or between basic and post-literacy course completers (see Table A127). *After* taking the literacy courses/last year, approximately 86% of the mothers among the basic literacy course completers and 91% completing the post-literacy course had children in school, compared with 67% of the control group. Differences between the experimental and control group were significant, but none were found between the two experimental groups (see Table A128).

No significant differences existed in how often respondents talked to their children about how well they were doing in school *before* the course/last year. About 65%, 67% and 49% of the mothers in the basic, post and control groups, respectively, sometimes or often talked to their children about their progress (see Table A129). Significant differences were found between experimental and control respondents with regard to this question *after* the course/last year, with about 75%, 71% and 48% of the basic, post and control groups, respectively, sometimes or often talked to their children about how well they were doing in school (see Table A130).

No significant differences were observed in how often respondents checked whether their children attended school regularly *before* the course/last year. About 60% of the basic literacy course completers and 54% of post-literacy course completers sometimes or often checked on their children's attendance, compared with 46% of the control group (see Table A131). However, significant differences existed in the extent to which experimental and control respondents checked whether their children attended school regularly *after* the course/last year. Approximately 72% of the basic literacy course completers, 65% of the post-literacy course completers and 47% of the control group respondents sometimes or often checked on their children's attendance (see Table A132).

3.3.9. Vision of a Future

3.3.9.1. Survey Responses

When asked what things they would like to do in the future, the most frequently cited response from the experimental group was "to be more educated," (22% of basic literacy course completers and 18% of post-literacy course completers). Only 12% of the control group gave this response. The most common answer from the control group was "to educate their children" (25%). This was also cited, to a lesser extent, by the experimental group, with 15% of the basic literacy course completers and 11% of the post-literacy course completers giving this response. One likely reason for the difference between the experimental and control group responses is that, as noted above, a much lower proportion of the control group respondents' children had ever been enrolled in school.

Another common response by the experimental group was to "get training in knitting and sewing," (18% for basic literacy course completers and 18% for post-literacy course completers). However, only 4% of the control group respondents mentioned this as something they would like to do in the future. About 12% of the control group respondents and 8% of experimental group participants said they would like to "do farming or household work" (see Table A133).

Respondents were also queried about what they were doing to make the goals they identified happen. Interviewers did not record every response but made a subjective judgment about whether an "appropriate response" had been provided. An "appropriate response" was defined as any action that was clearly linked to the stated goal or desire. For example, if the respondent said that she would like to "make more money," an appropriate response was any action that might lead to that result. "Raising chickens, looking for a job, getting more training, getting a better education, etc. could be classified as "an appropriate response" to that particular goal. An inappropriate response was any response that was unrelated to the stated goal or desire. For example, "hoping that money comes my way" would be considered an inappropriate response. Interviewers did not make judgments about the appropriateness of the goal or objective. Any goal stated by the respondent was considered appropriate, and therefore any action that would lead to its accomplishment was also deemed appropriate. Interviewer training included extensive simulated exercises to ensure that each person understood the definition of an "appropriate response," and that all interviewers classified responses in the same way.

About 48% of the basic literacy course completers, 37% of literacy course completers, and 44% of the control group respondents who answered the question were doing something appropriate. Additionally, 10%, 12% and 10% of the basic, post and control group respondents were able to identify the steps that would need to be taken to make it happen (see Table A134). Table A135.1 and A135.2 depicts whether or not respondents were doing something appropriate to achieve future goals (or desires) by stated goal. As shown, of the 230 women in the experimental group who were "doing something appropriate" their stated goals or desires for the future were:

- educate children – 34%;
- continue or begin farming – 19%;
- raise or sell animals – 11%;
- receive training in sewing and knitting – 10%;
- receive training (unspecified) – 10%.

Of the 52 women in the control group whose responses were deemed as appropriate to their goal, the following were specified as what they would "like to do in the future":

- educate children – 33%;
- continue or begin farming – 19%;
- raise children/ensure that children get married – 12%;
- raise or sell animals – 12%.

3.3.9.2. Focus Group Discussions

In the focus groups, many women indicated that they would like to take more literacy courses in the future. Many wanted to receive training in sewing, knitting and carpet weaving, or they would like to earn a better living through participation in income generating activities like raising animals or improving crops. Those who already participated in such activities indicated they would like to learn ways of improving their practices. Some wanted to open shops: one woman wanted to expand the shop she presently owned. Many indicated that they got the idea of raising animals and vegetables for income from their literacy course. One woman noted that she would like to expand her family's photo studio. Many of the focus group participants wanted to educate their children and younger siblings. They believed that if the children were educated "they could do anything and the money they earn would be enough." In another village some of the participants wanted to "continue their lives basically as their mothers had, but with more food."

In a control group village in Bardiya, many of the women in the focus group demonstrated a sense of hopelessness, saying:

> What can we do? We want to educate our daughters, but there is no one to stay in the house. We want to educate our children and give them better lives than ours, but we have no money and cannot do so.

In another control village, a woman stated: "I want my sons to grow up and get good shops, then bring home money and marry good wives, who will live with me and do all the housework so that my life will be easy." Another woman in the same village said that she wanted to educate her children so that they would not be like her and end up with the same life of suffering.

When queried about what they were doing to achieve their future goals, some focus group participants in the experimental group said that they were trying to study more, while others said they had informed members of the community that they wish to continue their studies or get additional training. Several women asked village leaders to arrange training in knitting and sewing, while other participants had gone directly to the local government agency they believed could help to start a program. One woman took out a loan to raise chickens. In another village, women said they were raising pigs and chickens to earn an income, adopting modern farming methods and educating their children. In one village, the women started a fund in which one woman put in one rupee every day to pay for training. One woman took a sewing and knitting course, which she now teaches to others.

Several women indicated that they had urged other families in the village to send their children to school. In one village, participants responded that: "The ones that want jobs haven't done anything about that, but they are thinking about how they can open shops. All of these women have started to farm vegetables. The ones that want additional training have done nothing."

Many considered taking the literacy course to be a step toward fulfilling these goals. In some villages, women replied that "no one was doing anything" to achieve their objectives. None of the focus group participants in the Parsa District were doing anything to achieve their goals.

Experimental group participants in all four districts who were doing nothing about their future goals were asked what actions they might take. Few had any ideas. Those who were able to come up with possible solutions suggested: 1) getting more training,; 2) informing the VDC chief; 3) making a formal request to the VDC or relevant agency for training; and 4) seeking jobs for their children. In a control village in Bardiya, women said that they were doing nothing to achieve the things they wanted in the future. They had decided against taking a loan, since the 35% interest rate was too high to pay back.

3.3.10. General Changes Since Taking Literacy Course/Last Year

3.3.10.1 Survey Responses

When asked what changes respondents had encountered in their lives after completing the literacy courses or during the last year, a wide range of responses were given. Responses may reflect the differing emphases of the content taught in the literacy courses by various NGOs across the districts. Many responses were focused on what participants had learned during the course, rather than how their lives had changed. Hence it is likely that where literacy course material focused more heavily on health and family planning issues or income generating activities, for example, participants more often mentioned changes in these areas. However, further study to examine course content in each of the villages included in the study would be required to determine if such an association exists. Responses are depicted more fully on Table A136. The most frequently occurring responses are cited below.

Learned importance of sanitation/cleanliness:	basic – 22%
	post – 20%
	control – 4%

Can read and write:	basic – 8% post – 12% control – 0%
Can read and write name:	basic – 9% post – 9% control – 7%
Learned importance of preserving food:	basic – 22% post – 24% control – 4%
Learned to plant trees/protect forests:	basic – 6% post – 6% control – 2%

3.3.10.2. Focus Group Discussions

Participants in the focus groups provided similar responses, with "learning about health and family planning" among the top changes mentioned. Health practices learned included:

- preparing nutritious food/eating green vegetables and fruit;
- growing their own vegetables;
- using family planning/value of smaller families;
- visiting the doctor when ill (rather than traditional healer);
- learning the dangers of smoking;
- giving Oral Rehydration Therapy;
- making certain to give the full dose of vaccination for young children;
- preventing mosquitoes (which cause diarrheal diseases) by not allowing water to stand;
- avoiding stale, dirty or fly-infested water; covering water/boiling water;
- avoiding dirty or fly-infested food;
- keeping the house and family clean;
- cleaning teeth, bathing, clipping nails; and
- the importance of using the toilet to prevent diseases.

In one village, focus group participants indicated that they had learned about the importance of cleanliness but did not think they had changed their behavior accordingly. The ability to sign their names was another important benefit of literacy identified by focus participants. When describing things they had learned to read, focus group participants mentioned reading:

- sign boards;
- names of buses;
- labels and quality on fertilizer packages/labels on products in bazaar; and
- letters.

Many of the focus group participants reported that they now knew about protecting the forest and that "cutting trees causes landslides." Others relayed stories about how they were now able to read their own letters, whereas before they had to rely on other people, which meant they no longer worried that the letter might disappear, the information might be used against them or they might be taken advantage of. One woman also noted that she could now sort papers and decide which were important and which should be discarded. Several woman mentioned that they could now teach their husbands or children to read, and they felt that they were better able to answer their children's questions. Many stated that they had learned the value of educating their children, and

indicated now that they realize the value of education, they want to study more. Some said that they considered the classes too short.

Some participants stated that they had learned a little bit of math and would like to learn more because this "keeps them from being cheated like they were before the literacy courses." Some indicated that they no longer get confused when doing accounts, whereas, before the course they found it difficult and confusing. One group said that they "now know that they don't have to give collateral for a loan, and if they do they will be cheated."

Focus group participants in many villages reported that they had learned that "women should not drink alcohol or gamble." One woman stated that she learned that "drinking and gambling leads to a miserable and troublesome life." Others said they had learned to try to prevent drinking and gambling. In two villages, focus group participants said that since taking the literacy course, they might now talk to strangers and ask questions like "where are you from?"[19]

A variety of income generating activities were cited as benefits resulting from the literacy course, including growing and selling fruits and vegetables, as well as raising and selling chickens and goats. Participants said they also learned that they could "raise animals and do income generating activities by taking loans from small farmers' organizations." Others contended that they learned to "form a habit of saving." One focus group participant said she learned that "enough profit can be made if modern type of farming is applied and cash crops are grown."

In one village focus group participants said they had learned "that women and men were equal and that women needed some free time to be healthy." In another village, focus group participants did not feel anything had changed after the literacy courses.

3.3.10.3. Community Leader Interviews

When community leaders asked what changes in attitude or behavior they had observed among the women who took the literacy course a wide range of responses were given. Comments are summarized by district. When statements were made by village leaders in more than one VDC, the number of leaders providing the response is indicated in parentheses.

Parsa District

- Changing attitudes toward literacy/increased interest in literacy (2).
- Can read and write letters (2).
- No change (community received one million rupees for a dam).
- Some decrease in shyness.
- Changes in manner (in the way they present themselves).
- They speak better.
- Better and cleaner food, keep house, utensils and street clean.
- Can speak better Nepali.
- Can advise family members.
- Educate their children.
- Are more polite and friendly.
- Form groups.

[19] However, the focus group facilitator in one of these village reported that many of the participants in that village seemed shy and unwilling to talk.

Bardiya District

- They can read and write (5).
- They can read and write letters for themselves and others (2).
- They can sign their names (2).
- They are more concerned with sanitation and with keeping the house, yard, children and themselves clean (4).
- They speak more freely and are less shy (2).
- They speak better Nepali (2).
- When others argue, they advise them to live peaceably and not to fight (2).
- They can keep household accounts.
- They speak more politely to people and are less quick to criticize other and their children.
- Those who studied in the six month course have undergone no change at all.
- Only if they continued studying would there be a change. The minimum length of time they would have to study to experience a change is two to three years.
- More benefits would result if they studied longer than six months. Little change can occur unless they study longer.
- They can tell what is good and what is bad moral behavior.
- They teach their children not to do bad things, for example, not to drink, smoke, fight.
- They prevent their families from giving girls in early marriage.
- Whey they buy things, they no longer get cheated. If someone tries to cheat them, it starts a fight.
- They know about training and want to be trained.

Makwanpur District

- They can sign their names (3).
- They can read and write (2).
- A few can write letters (2).
- They now all want to get trained in sewing.
- Can do subtraction and addition.
- They know a little bit more about sanitation and cleanliness.
- They send their children to school now.
- They are more confident and take more initiative.

Tanahu District

- They can read and write (2).
- Changes are positive but still invisible.
- They speak better and have good manners and discipline.
- They can speak more freely now.
- They understand things better.
- Their sense of community development is improved.
- They are interested in other reading materials.
- There is an attempt to solve community problems.
- The women have formed a women's reformation organization.
- They know new things.
- They feel the need for income-related training.
- They have launched anti-alcohol programs.
- They now feel that their children should be educated.
- Some changes are felt, but the knowledge they have is not applicable (like a fake flower attached to a real plant); it has not been helpful in finding a new job; it has not been helpful in income-generating activities.
- They got a loan from the Forest Development Committee but did not use the loan properly due to lack of education. So they are not able to solve the community's problems.

3.4. Support from Family and Community Members

Focus group participants and village leaders were asked how supportive family and community members had been when they attended the literacy classes. Support from family and community members varied from village to village. Focus group responses to this question are summarized by district in the following discussion.

3.4.1. Parsa District

3.4.1.1. Focus Group Discussions

In the Parsa District, all participants in one village reported receiving the full support of their families and community. In another village community members teased and made fun of the literacy course completers. Two people said that they now regretted getting educated. Four participants were referred to as "old ladies" by villagers and repeatedly taunted for "studying at an age suitable for educating children." In one village, focus group participants reported that community members were neither supportive nor opposed to their taking the literacy courses.

3.4.12. Community Leader Interviews

When community leaders were asked how the men in the community felt about women taking the literacy course, all of the leaders who answered the question stated that men had been supportive of the effort. Statements from community leaders included the following:

- Men felt good about it (2).
- Men reacted positively because they know that education is a good thing; and because the women can now read and write.
- Men treated them well.
- Men encouraged them to study.

3.4.2. Bardiya District

3.4.2.1. Focus Group Discussions

In the Bardiya District family members walked the women to and from class. Participants in one village reported that their parents were happy to see their daughters reading and writing their names. They also helped them finish their work so they could attend class and purchased pens and notebooks to take to class. In another village they encouraged the women to study "so they wouldn't be cheated and so that they could teach what they learned to other family members." In another village, the families "helped them to look after things" and said that "it was good for them to be able to stand on their own two feet." They believed that before the literacy courses, only men went to offices to earn money, but now it was possible for educated women to do this as well. They felt that becoming literate was important in case something happened to the husband. In one village focus group participants said that older family members all thought that "education was good" and they were glad that the participants were able to take advantage of opportunities they never had. They also helped with baby sitting when the mothers were in class. In another village all six participants felt that their families had been the strongest influence leading to their participation in the class. In yet another village, focus group discussants said that their

families had not been particularly supportive and that they weren't allowed to attend unless their work was completed; nor were they given money to buy paper and pencils.

In one of the villages, community members were supportive and urged the women to participate in the courses. They also pressured them to study, frequently reminding the participants of the importance of education. Community members said that "if they could read they would get better husbands and the community would develop." Focus group participants stated that "in the Tharu community, women were repressed and, hence there was a real need to come out and help the community." Three participants felt that community pressure had been a significant influence in their decision to take the class. Community members had told all unmarred girls to take the class, explaining that education was important. They also monitored their attendance. The women relayed that the community had supported them with "verbal encouragement and enthusiasm." The general sentiment of the group was that "the women of the village had been blind and now they that had a chance to learn, everyone felt they should take the chance."

In another village community members had been helpful, chasing away "drunks or bad people" who came near the literacy courses. Community members admonished the teacher to "teach them well and carefully." In a different village, the community offered no particular support.

3.4.2.2. Community Leader Interviews

All community leaders interviewed reported that the men in the village had been supportive of the classes. The following comments were recorded:

- Men were pleased because if women study, they can help support the men and the family (2).
- The men were happy because, now women do all the housework. If they studied, they could do the men's work too.
- They believed that after studying, women could do different types of work (i.e., more).
- They were pleased because the women can do math now, whereas they couldn't before. Also, they can read road signs so they can walk on the roads, which pleases the men.
- They were pleased and think that they should educate girls and boys now because, if they haven't studied, they are afraid to speak, but after studying, they speak a little.
- They told the women that if they studied, they could raise the children better and educate them more and run the house more easily.
- They felt good about it. They encouraged girls to study, and one local man was the teacher.
- They were pleased because they thought that their families would develop if women could read and write.
- They liked the fact that the homes were cleaner now.
- Men were happy because they have to go outside the village for work, and now the wives, mothers and daughters could read the letters they send home.

3.4.3. Makwanapur District

3.4.3.1. Focus Group Discussions

Three of the five focus group participants in one village in the Makwanapur District stated that their families strongly encouraged them to take the course–the other two said that "they did it on their own." In another village the families "were supportive and encouraged the girls." Family members walked them to and from most of the classes. In one village, focus group participants reported that the "families didn't stop them, and one husband even brought in lights at night so that the classes could go on." Others said that the families "were supportive and told the women to study, and to learn to recognize place names so that they could more easily travel outside the village," as well as "to become literate so that they would not be cheated and could speak better." Some in that

village said that family members would walk them to and from the classes and helped them finish work so they could attend class. In one village women were not supported, and their families criticized them but they continued anyway.

In the village where family members were not supportive, participants received encouragement from other members of the community, who made sure no one bothered them on their way to and from class. These women "were supported and not teased. Villagers did not say bad things about them while they attended classes at night." In another village community members were very supportive, saying that "studying wouldn't ruin the girl–if they were bad types, the study would bring it out but it wouldn't corrupt good girls." In one village, responses from community members were mixed: those who were educated encouraged the literacy course completers, while those who were not questioned the value of literacy classes for adults. When boys began to harass the girls in the course, villagers intervened, but that was the extent of their support. Another village was even less supportive and many said that if girls attended classes they would end up eloping with the teacher, as had happened in another ward in the VDC. In still another village, most women felt that they had little support but had attended on their own initiative.

3.4.3.2. Community Leader Interviews

Most of the community leaders in the Makwanpur District felt that the men were happy about the women's literacy courses. The following statements were recorded in interviews:

- They were pleased.
- They watched the children, helped with the housework, walked the women to class.
- The men were happy, and they felt more secure knowing that the women can read a little for themselves.
- Only a few men were unhappy about the classes because of a case nearby, where a facilitator eloped with a participant.
- The men were pleased and happy that the women can read and write their names and thus be a little more independent.
- They are pleased that the women are coming to understand things that before only men knew.
- The men were pleased. If men had not given them permission, the women could not have participated in the class. When drunks or others tried to disturb the class, men from the community scolded them and sent them away.

3.4.4. Tanahu District

3.4.4.1. Focus Group Discussions

All of the families of literacy course completers in three of the villages in Tanahu encouraged them to take classes. In other villages, some participants were discouraged by their families who questioned the benefit of "studying at an old age." In one village, two members of the group were discouraged by their families, while the others received full support. All participants in two villages also received encouragement from the community. In one village, community members initially disapproved but later began to provide encouragement. In some of the other villages, community members teased participating women. Others discouraged women, asking, "what will you do once educated, pretend to be a great person?" All participants in one village were discouraged by the community.

3.4.4.2. Community Leader Interviews

These mixed attitudes were also reflected by responses of community leaders who were asked about men's support, as indicated by the following quotes:

- On the whole, men felt positively about the courses (3).
- Most felt positively, but not all believed there was a need for a literacy program.
- Men felt the courses provided good motivation.
- Men felt that women would be more literate if additional literacy classes were available.
- Only a few disapproved because of traditional values.
- Low caste groups did not like it; since they were poor, literacy classes were not needed.
- Higher castes felt positively, even though such a small amount of education means nothing to them.

4. Cost Effectiveness for the Basic and Post Literacy Courses

The field cost associated with the literacy courses is about two dollars per passing participant per month,[20] which calculates to $12 per passing participant for the six-month basic literacy course and $18 per passing participant for the nine-month post-literacy course. Since each class is comprised of about 20 participants, the cost of the basic literacy course is approximately $240 compared to $360 for the post-literacy course.

Determining whether the cost of an additional three months is worth the investment is not straightforward. Each of the two approaches has different costs and different benefits. Oftentimes, it is not just the magnitude of the change but also the quality of the change that is important. This study found no evidence that significant differences existed between the basic and the post-literacy course completers on a number of indicators. However, on several key variables, post-literacy course completers have made significantly greater gains than those who only completed the six-month course. Post-literacy course completers appear to have greater confidence, as indicated by their willingness to express their opinions to their family and the community, to discuss politics and to teach others how to read, write and do math. Additionally, they were more inclined to initiate actions, participating in credit or loan programs or anti-alcohol campaigns. A higher proportion of post-literacy completers also thought it possible for themselves to be on Village Development Councils.

If the goal is to provide literacy to the largest number of women at the least cost, then the basic literacy course is probably the most efficient use of funding. However, if the primary interest is in building leadership skills, as well as literacy skills, then substantial benefits can result from providing literacy training for an additional three months. Participation in the post-literacy course reinforces learning, and provides a forum for generating and consolidating ideas exchanged in the classroom. USAID/Nepal is pursuing a strategy that integrates its strategic objectives in agriculture, health and women's empowerment. The application of USAID and Government of Nepal resources could be maximized by carrying out interventions in areas where women's literacy programs have already been implemented. This is particularly true of post-literacy courses, since women who complete the classes are likely to be more highly motivated, have had a longer period of interaction and greater opportunity to strengthen relationships and build leadership skills.

5. Summary and Conclusions

This study examined the impact on women's empowerment of two types of non-formal (literacy) education programs–basic literacy (six month courses) and post-literacy (six months plus three months courses). Responses to a variety of indicators were compared to those of women in control villages who had not attended a NFE literacy course or primary school and were not literate. Additionally, it examined the comparative cost-efficiency of six-month basic

[20] This includes the cost of materials provided to participants, training costs, supervisory time, and facilitators but not the initial cost of development the curriculum, fixed costs, overhead, NGO costs or staff time (personal correspondence with John Comings at World Education and David Walker at Pact).

literacy courses compared to six plus three-month post-literacy courses. Indicators comprising two major components were included in this analysis: 1) indicators of respondents' retention and use of literacy skills; and 2) indicators of empowerment.

5.1 Use and Retention of Literacy Skills

5.1.1 Availability/Use of Reading Materials

The availability of reading materials can be an important factor in the continued development of literacy skills. In this study, about two thirds of the literacy course participants indicated that books and newspapers were available in their villages. A significantly higher proportion of the experimental group participants said that books and newspapers were available in their villages than in the control villages, but no such differences existed between the basic and post-literacy course completers.

Most literacy course completers indicated that they continued to read something (books, course materials, letters, correspondence and sign boards) after completing their courses. In addition, most also continued to write in the year following the course. Although for many, "writing something" consisted of little more than signing their names, a substantial number of women also continued to write exercises from their literacy course materials, helped their children with their homework and wrote their own and others' correspondence. The frequency with which they practiced their reading and writing ranged from every few months to several times a week. A few women continued to practice their newly acquired skills on a daily basis.

Additionally, the majority of literacy course participants felt that they could now calculate math faster after having completed the literacy courses. Many indicated that they were able to use their math skills in the market, and found that they were less susceptible to being cheated than before they took the course. A higher proportion of post-literacy course completers (39%) had gained enough confidence to teach others to read, write or do math than basic literacy course completers (30%).

5.1.2 Retention of Literacy Skills

No significant differences were found between the basic and post-literacy course completers on any of the four components (reading, reading comprehension, writing and math) of the literacy test given at the conclusion of the interviews. However, because of the relatively short duration of the test, less than optimal testing conditions and the inexperience of interviewers in administering literacy tests, it would be risky to draw definitive conclusions about level of the course participants' literacy skills without further testing.

5.2. Indicators of Empowerment

A variety of indicators of women's empowerment were examined. Some of the items revealed significant differences between women who had completed the literacy program and those who had no such exposure. Bear in mind, however, that a much larger sample would be required to be able to assume with a high degree of certainty, that the differences (or the lack of such differences) were due to something other than chance alone. On many of the items, differences between the experimental and control group were significant on both the questions relating to respondents behavior *before* participation in the literacy courses and *after* completing the courses. This raises questions concerning the extent to which selection effect was a major factor contributing to those differences. For example, were the women who participated in the literacy courses more motivated and more predisposed toward ideas associated with empowerment to begin with? Did differences in educational background, age, marital status or greater access to resources (such as radios) also account for such differences?

Also, other reasons may exist for the differences in experimental and control group responses during the period *before* the literacy courses. For example, we might speculate that the participants, having undergone changes in attitudes resulting from becoming more literate, were reluctant to admit or could not accurately remember the extent to which they held attitudes or exhibited behaviors different than those which they currently hold. Another possible explanation might be that women in villages where literacy courses have existed for several years "learned" certain attitudes from other women in the village who took the literacy courses before them. That is, villages in which literacy courses are regularly held may develop certain cultures and attitudes not found in the villages where no such programs exist. Thus, information as to whether the literacy course completers possessed certain pre-dispositions prior to taking the literacy courses may be very useful to program planners, especially in light of USAID's interest in integrating its development activities in Nepal. USAID/Government of Nepal strategic objectives are inter-related in many ways. The outcome of a literacy program, for example, may have strong implications for the development of programs in areas such as agriculture and health. Programs that take advantage of already existing groups known to be highly motivated and interested in development are more likely to succeed than in other areas. Hence, initiating programs in agriculture or health in villages where literacy groups already exist would seem to be a cost-effective investment.

The fact that some women who took the literacy courses may have had pre-existing differences from those who had no opportunities to participate in such programs makes it difficult to ascertain the impact of their program on their lives. However, evidence from this study indicates that despite these initial differences, on some of the variables significant changes in attitudes and behavior did occur after completion of the literacy course. Even though the experimental and control group may have had different starting points on some indicators, changes appear to be over and above what would have occurred if they had not taken the literacy courses. Indicators for areas in which respondents felt that they had made substantial positive changes since completing the literacy courses (that were not similarly indicated by the control group) included:

- increased respect for opinions/family;
- increased respect for opinions/community;
- increased confidence in stating opinions to family members;
- increased confidence in stating opinions to community.

Indicators for which significant differences between the experimental and control group were evident both *before* and *after* the courses were:

- control over income (all items–see discussion below);
- household decision making (all items–see discussion below);
- discussions about things heard on radio;
- discussions about preventing men from drinking/beating wives;
- participation in activities to prevent men from drinking;
- travel outside the village;
- children enrolled in school.

Indicators for which significant differences existed between the experimental and control group *after* but not *before* the courses were:

- participation in groups and organizations;
- discussion of things read;
- discussion of politics.

Among the indicators showing significant differences between the experimental and control group for which no *before* questions were asked were:

- know name of MP;
- know name of Prime Minister;

- think it possible for a woman to be on the VDC;
- think it possible for self to be on VDC.

Additionally, on some measures, significant differences existed between the *basic* and *post*-literacy course completers, with a higher proportion of post-literacy course completers reporting empowering attitudes on the following:

- confidence in stating opinions to family and community members;
- discussion of politics (*after* but not *before*–note that per cent of participants in discussions was small for all groups);
- participation in activities to prevent men from drinking (*before* and *after*);
- think it possible for self to be on VDC;
- confidence in taking bus increased over period;
- willingness to teach others how to read and write;
- participation in credit/loans (*after* but not *before* note that per cent of participants in credit and loans was small for all groups).

Indicators of empowerment are discussed individually below and summarized in Table 5 following the discussion.

5.2.1 Participation in Discussions/Participation in Protest or Campaign

To gauge participation in activities in the public sphere, respondents were asked how often they participated in discussions about the following:

1) things they heard on the radio;
2) things they read;
3) politics;
4) how to prevent men from drinking; and
5) how to prevent men from beating their wives.

A significantly higher proportion of the experimental group than the control group respondents reported participating in discussions about the following topics: things heard on the radio (*before* and *after* the courses); things read (*after*); politics, (*before* and *after*) and preventing men from beating their wives (*before* and *after*). Additionally, a significantly higher proportion of women completing the post-literacy courses participated in discussions about politics, though the percentage of women holding such discussions was low for both the basic and post-literacy course completers (13% compared with 23%, respectively).

5.2.2. Political Awareness/Participation

Two items were used to measure political awareness and participation: participation in activities to prevent men from drinking and activities to prevent men from beating their wives. Although fewer women[21] were willing to take part in activities to prevent men from drinking or beating their wives than to discuss such issues, a significantly higher proportion of experimental group respondents reported participation in such activities. Approximately 8% of experimental group compared to 6% of the control group became involved in anti-alcohol campaigns before the literacy courses/last year. *After* the literacy courses/last year, the figures increased to 17% of the of experimental group, while the control group declined to 5%. Differences between basic and post-literacy course completers were also significant: before the courses a higher percentage of those in basic literacy courses (9%) participated in anti-drinking activities than in post-literacy courses (6%), but after the courses, post-literacy course completers evidenced greater participation (18%) compared with basic literacy course completers (14%).

[21] For questions concerning husbands' drinking and wife-beating, only married respondents were included in the analysis.

Similarly, a significantly higher proportion of literacy course completers were engaged in activities to prevent men from beating their wives than control group respondents (8% compared to 5% before the literacy courses/last year and 10% compared to 5% afterward). Significant differences also existed before the basic and post-literacy course completers (with the highest percentage of participation in the basic literacy course), but no significant differences existed after completion of the courses.

5.2.3. Participation in Non-Family Groups and Organizations

The practice of reading and writing is, of course, a primary way in which literacy skills are acquired and maintained. However, it is through classroom interaction that learning is reinforced and enhanced. As women gather together for their literacy classes, they discuss the ideas found in the literacy materials. These concepts begin to take hold in the participants' minds, and ownership becomes associated with the ideas to which they have been exposed. Furthermore, group formation and group cohesion derives from working together in a long-term learning experience and may form the foundation for further development work. Many development experts feel that groups are a necessary pre-requisite for community development efforts. In an earlier study, Smith (1995) hypothesized that participation in literacy courses, especially those connected to another development activity positively affects women's group formation. She cited anecdotal evidence gathered through interviews with Nepali women supporting this hypothesis and suggested that "women who participate in a short-term literacy course in their village, regardless of their knowledge and skill acquisition, form a bond through group formation which may change traditional support networks in the community (p. 19).

This study found that women's participation in formal groups and organizations, outside the literacy classes, is still relatively small. On the other hand, some increases in group membership after completing the literacy courses were in evidence. Increased participation was significantly higher among women who had completed the literacy courses and especially among those who had completed the post-literacy courses. This suggests that the additional three months spent together with their fellow learners strengthened the bonds between group members and positively reinforced the notion of collective action. This, in turn, may have substantial benefits for long term development.

5.2.4. Control Over Income/Ability to Earn a Living

Married women in both the experimental and the control group reported greater control over household expenses than single women (especially those who were never married and residing with their parents). Although a higher proportion of control group respondents indicated having sole or joint control over household income, this can largely be explained by the fact that almost all of the women in the control group were married, while only about half of the women in the experimental group were married. When marital status was controlled for, a greater proportion of those who had completed the literacy courses indicated sole or joint responsibility for keeping household expenses than in the control group.

Some women join literacy programs with the hope that it will result in economic benefits. Literacy is seen as leading to greater skills which, in turn, results in higher income. However, this may be an unrealistic expectation since opportunities for new literates in rural areas are scarce. Frustration with the lack of opportunities was reflected in many of the comments made by community leaders and focus group participants. Some expressed the view that more literacy classes were necessary before tangible economic benefits would result. Others stressed the need for more extensive training in income-generating activities and for greater opportunities for women to engage in money-making endeavors. Most of the respondents interviewed expressed concern over the lack of opportunities and emphasized their desire improve their families' economic situation.

Literacy course completers in some villages cited examples of income generating activities that they had initiated as a direct result of taking the literacy courses, including growing and selling fruits and vegetables and raising and selling chickens and goats. While few had opened shops or started new businesses in the year since they had completed their literacy courses, many now believed that becoming literate had placed the dream of doing so within the realm of possibility. Others who completed the courses had discovered the benefits of participating in credit programs and in maintaining cash savings. Only a few women (mainly post-literacy course completers) had actually taken out loans since completing their courses. Nevertheless, during focus group interviews, some participants articulated an increased awareness of the advantages of borrowing money for starting a businesses, a greater understanding of what was required to take out a loan and greater confidence that they would not be cheated. Additionally, some had learned about the potential for abuse by lenders who charged exorbitant interest rates.

5.2.5. Household Decision-Making/Reproductive Decisions

Several indicators were used to determine the extent of respondents' participation in household decisions, including those related to: daily household expenses, social/religious rituals, clothing purchases, livestock purchases, obtaining medical treatment, agricultural production, sending daughters to school.

On most household decision-making items, the largest proportion of respondents reported that their husbands made the decisions. Nonetheless, on all items measuring participation in household decision-making, significant differences existed between the experimental and control group respondents, both *before* and *after* the literacy courses/last year. When marital status was controlled for, these differences were still significant for married respondents. However, the number of unmarried respondents in the control group was too small to make meaningful comparisons among the different groups of single respondents. The main differences between experimental and control group responses to the items assessing decision-making appear to be related to the extent to which husbands (of the married respondents) took responsibility for decision-making. On all items, married respondents in the control group had less control over participation in decisions than in the experimental group. No significant differences were observed between the basic and post-literacy course completers on any of the decision-making items.

Additionally, respondents were asked questions concerning their control over reproductive decisions, including family size, child spacing, and use of birth control. Significant differences were found between the experimental and control group regarding their participation in decisions about family size and child spacing but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers. Approximately 47% of the married women in the experimental group participated in such decisions either solely or jointly with their husbands, compared with 35% of the married women in the control group.

Interestingly, when married respondents were asked how often they were now consulted in decisions about child bearing *now* compared to the period *before* taking the literacy course or a year ago, a larger proportion of control group respondents thought that they had more say *now* than *before*. This could be a reflection of the fact that control group respondents had at a much lower level of involvement in decision-making to begin with than the experimental group. However, it does not explain what led to their perception of increased decision-making.

No significant differences existed between the experimental and control group regarding the number of respondents who used birth control either *before* or *after* the literacy course/last year. Similarly, no significant differences were found between the basic and literacy course completers regarding birth control use. Slight increases were observed in the proportion of respondents in the experimental group who used birth control *before* the literacy course compared to those who used it *after* that period. While many women in the control group reported an increase in their involvement in child birth decisions, their use of birth control decreased during the last year, rather than increased. Thus one might surmise that increased decision-making among women who are not literate may not result in decisions to have fewer children or more carefully planned families. However, there

may be another explanation: perhaps this response is the result of the discussions held during the literacy classes, where women developed different understanding of phrases such as "participation in child birth decisions" than those who have had no literacy training. However, from the survey results it is not possible to determine whether such differential interpretations existed.

5.2.6. Self Confidence/Respect by Family and Community/Role Models

One benefit often touted by proponents of literacy programs is that as women become literate they begin to develop a more positive image of themselves and their role in society, as well as greater self confidence in dealing with problems facing their families and communities. Evidence from this study supports this contention: statistically significant differences were found between the experimental and control group on all questions related to the extent to which respondents felt more confident in stating their opinions to their family and community and the degree to which family and community members now respect their opinions. Similarly, a significantly higher proportion of women who completed the post-literacy course than those completing just the basic literacy course felt they now had more confidence in expressing their opinions to their families and communities. For example, women's confidence in expressing opinions to their communities rose from 30% in women completing the six-month basic literacy course, to 44% for the nine-month course completers. Confidence among women in the control group was measured at only 4%.

5.2.7. Mobility

When asked about their travel outside the village, women in the experimental group reported more frequent travel than women in the control group, both *before* and *after* completing the literacy courses/last year. Significant differences existed between the experimental and control group but not between the basic and post-literacy course completers. The percentage of literacy course completers who traveled outside their village increased slightly from period *before* to the period after the courses, but remained about the same for the control group.

No significant differences were found between the basic and post-literacy course completers on the question concerning whether they ever took the bus. However, significant differences occurred between the proportion of women in the experimental group compared to those in the control group who said they were more confident about taking the bus *after* taking the literacy course/in the last year than *before*.

5.2.8. Actions to Improve Children's Future

Several measures were used to assess the impact of the literacy courses on the education of participants' children, including: 1) the proportion of respondents (who are mothers) with children enrolled in school; 2) the proportion who talk to their children about their progress in school; and 3) the proportion who check to make sure that their children attend school. Findings indicated no significant differences between the basic and post-literacy course completers on any of the items. However, significant differences existed between the experimental and control group on both indicators of respondents involvement in their children's education, as well as in the proportion of women whose children were enrolled in school. Furthermore, responses of literacy course completers reflect a substantial increase in their involvement in their children's education since completing the literacy course. The proportion of mothers taking the literacy courses who talked to their children about their progress in school *after* the basic literacy course was 75% and 71% for the post literacy course, compared to 48% for the control group. This represented an overall increase in experimental group mothers talking to their children about progress of 24%.

The proportion of experimental group mothers who checked to see that their children attended school increased by about 12% after completing the courses. After the literacy courses, the experimental group mothers checking on their children's attendance was 69% compared to 47% for the control group. After taking the literacy course per

last year 87% of the mothers among the basic literacy course completers and 91% completing the post-literacy course had children in school, compared with 67% of the control group.

5.2.9. Vision of a Future

In response to questions about what they would like to do in the future, many of the literacy course completers stressed activities related to furthering their own or their children's education. While few control group respondents envisioned getting more education for themselves, many hoped that their children would obtain an education. Additionally, many experimental group respondents wanted to get training in knitting and sewing, although this was not a frequently stated felt need of women in the control group. A substantial number of both experimental and control group respondents had no goal other than farming.

About 48% of the basic literacy course completers, 37% of literacy course completers, and 44% of the control group respondents who stated a goal or future need were doing something deemed appropriate to achieving it. Additionally, a few respondents (about 11%) were able to identify the steps that would need to be taken to make it happen, even though they had not initiated any action to accomplish it. However, bear in mind that the goals cited by the women in the control group were more along the lines of their traditional role, which explains the higher percentage doing something appropriate to achieve them (see Table A134-A135).

5.2.10. Changes Resulting from Literacy

Women's participation in decision-making is still relatively limited. Nevertheless, women are the primary caretakers of the family and make decisions that affect their health and that of their children. Women bear responsibility for obtaining water, preparing food, maintaining the household and attending to their children's health. Nepal has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world, with most deaths resulting from diseases caused by contaminated food and water. Women make decisions each day about nutritional content and methods of preparing food for their families, which can lead to substantial improvements in their family's health and well being. The participants of the literacy courses were asked (on the survey and in the focus groups) to identify changes that had taken place in their lives as a result of completing the literacy courses. In addition to the respondents identifying the importance of knowing how to read and write, they also cited newly acquired knowledge related to health, nutrition and sanitation. Among the improvements mentioned were increased knowledge related to:

- preparing nutritious food/eating green vegetables and fruit;
- growing their own vegetables;
- preserving foods;
- planting and protecting trees;
- using family planning/value of smaller families;
- visiting the doctor when ill (rather than traditional healer);
- learning the dangers of smoking;
- giving Oral Rehydration Therapy;
- making certain to give the full dose of vaccination for young children;
- preventing mosquitoes (which cause diarrheal diseases) by not allowing water to stand;
- avoiding stale, dirty or fly-infested water; covering water/boiling water;
- avoiding dirty or fly-infested food;
- boiling water;
- keeping the house and family clean;
- cleaning teeth, bathing, clipping nails; and
- using the toilet to prevent diseases.

5.3. Cost Effectiveness for the Basic and Post-Literacy Courses

It costs about $240 for 20 women passing the basic six-month literacy course compared to a cost of about $360 for the nine-month post-literacy course. This includes the cost of materials provided to participants and supervisory time, the cost of facilitators but not fixed costs, overhead, NGO costs or the cost of developing curriculum materials. As stated earlier different costs and benefits are associated with each of the two approaches. While this study found few significant differences between the basic and the post-literacy course completers, determining which program is the most cost-effective is not a clear-cut. Post-literacy course completers appear to have greater confidence in their family and community relationships, are more willing to discuss politics and are more likely to teach others how to read, write and do math. They also participate more frequently in activities, such credit or loans programs or anti-alcohol campaign. A higher proportion of post-literacy completers also thought it possible for themselves to be on Village Development Council, and a greater percentage had children in school.

If the goal is to provide literacy to the largest number of women at the least cost, then the basic literacy course is probably the most efficient use of funding. However, if the primary interest is in building leadership skills, as well as literacy skills, then substantial benefits can result from providing literacy training for an additional three months. Participation in the post-literacy course reinforces learning, and provides a forum for generating and consolidating ideas exchanged in the classroom. USAID/Nepal is pursuing a strategy that integrates its strategic objectives in agriculture, health and women's empowerment. The application of USAID and Government of Nepal resources could be maximized by carrying out interventions in areas where women's literacy programs have already been implemented. This is particularly true of post-literacy courses, since women who complete the classes are likely to be more highly motivated, have had a longer period of interaction and greater opportunity to strengthen relationships and build leadership skills.

5.4. Summation

Evidence in this study revealed that a year after completing the literacy courses, the majority of women had retained skills in reading, writing and mathematics and continued to use those skills in their daily lives. Literacy course completers, especially those who had completed the post-literacy courses, reported increased confidence in several areas, including stating their opinions to their families and in the community. For the first time women could conceive of the possibility that they or other women could actually be Village Development Council members. The survey also supports previous research findings that show a strong correlation between women's literacy and the level of interest and support for the education of one's own children. The women who completed the literacy courses showed much greater concern for their children's education, with significant increases in the number of their children attending school. They also were more involved in reviewing their children's progress, and checking on their attendance. Participation in decisions about family size and child spacing also appears to have increased, with approximately 47% of the married women in the experimental group participating in such decisions either solely or jointly with their husbands, compared with 35% in the control group.

Many development experts contend that groups are a necessary pre-requisite for community development efforts. As mentioned above, participation in groups was also higher among women who had completed the literacy courses, and especially among those who had completed the post-literacy courses. This suggests that the additional three months spent together with their fellow learners strengthened the bonds between group members and positively reinforced the notion of collective action.

USAID's and the /Government of Nepal's strategic objectives in many ways form a nexus between agriculture, health and family planning and women's empowerment. Because most farmers in Nepal are women, the results from the literacy programs have a direct bearing on how quickly and effectively new agricultural technologies can be transferred and adopted in rural areas. A literate population of adult women is also vital to rapid transfer of

preventive health skills and family planning practices. Thus, the successes and constraints associated with women's literacy programs have a major bearing on the achievement of results in agriculture, health, family planning, children's education and local governance. Initiating programs in agriculture or health in villages where groups of literate and highly motivated women already exist may help maximize the return on the resources invested for results. Such synergism may be especially important given the frustration expressed by many of the women who completed the courses, that they have not yet been able to translate their new skills into tangible economic benefits.

Finally, it is important to understand that changes associated with increased literacy are often manifested in ways that are not immediately apparent. Changing attitudes is often a gradual process, and it may not be realistic to expect major shifts in perceptions or behavior within the first year after becoming literate. Rather, it is more likely that as women begin to realize small successes over time, they will also experience greater control over their lives. These successes in turn, can be expected to give Nepali women increased confidence and increasingly foster their participation as equals in the development process.

5.5. A Cautionary Note

Although these findings revealed many significant differences between groups, questions concerning the extent to which selection effect was a major factor contributing to the observed differences remain to be answered. For example, were the women who participated in the literacy courses more motivated and more predisposed toward ideas associated with empowerment to begin with? Did differences in educational background, age, marital status or greater access to resources (such as radios) also account for such differences?

Other reasons may exist for the differences in experimental and control group responses during the period *before* the literacy courses. For example, it is possible that participants, having undergone changes in attitudes resulting from becoming more literate, were reluctant to admit or could not accurately remember the extent to which they held attitudes or exhibited behaviors different than those which they currently hold. Another possibility is that women in villages where literacy courses had existed for several years "learned certain behaviors and attitudes from other women in the village who took the literacy courses before them. That is, villages in which literacy courses are regularly held may develop certain cultures and practices not found in the villages where no such programs exist. The fact that some women who took the literacy courses may have had pre-existing differences from those who had no opportunities to participate in such programs makes it difficult to ascertain the impact of their program on their lives. However, information as to whether the literacy course completers possessed certain pre-dispositions prior to taking the literacy courses may be very useful to program planners, especially in light of USAID's interest in integrating its development activities in Nepal.

Table 5: Summary of Indicators

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Experimental & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Background Variables						
Caste/ethnic group	A1	*.000	*.000			
Religion	A2	*.012	.106			
Family occupation (farming)	A3	*.035	.191	95%	91%	89%
Attended school before	A4	*.000	.178	9%	13%	0%
Attended school after	A6	-	-	1%	1%	1%
Training received before	A8	.140	.870	6%	6%	<1%
Training received after	A11	*.000	*.000	5%	18%	2%
Age	A15/ A16	*.000	.693	24	24	33
Marital status (married)	A14	*.000	.203	57%	53%	92%
Age of marriage	A17	.099	.055	16	17	16
Ideal marriage age	A18	*.000	.110	20	21	18
Attitudes about age of marriage (changed over period)	A20	*.000	.090	70%	78%	30%
Number of respondent's children in household	A22	.729	.579	2.66	2.55	2.71
Number of other family members' children in household	A25	*.000	.058	3.48	4.13	2.87
Ownership of animals:						
male buffalo (2 or more)	A27.3	*.041	.081	15%	24%	16%
female buffalo (2 or more)	A27.4	*.012	.403	30%	23%	13%
goats & sheep (3 or more)	A27.7	*.000	*.000	35%	49%	47%
poultry (4 or more)	A27.8	*.000	*.000	60%	62%	36%
Ability to produce enough food	A28	*.001	*.042	70%	58%	51%
Type of house (mud)	A30	.431	.529	62%	55%	65%
Use/Retention of Literacy Skills						
Available books	A31	*.000	.614	63%	60%	56%
Available newspapers	A32	*.000	.163	83%	78%	64%
How often read before	A34		.681	10%	13%	
How often read after	A35	*.000	.873	90%	93%	5%
How often write before	A38		.513	10%	13%	
How often write after	A40	*.000	.789	95%	94%	4%
Calculate faster after	A43		.301	82%	85%	
Willing to teach others	A46		*.053	31%	39%	2%
How often felt cheated before	A48		.116	26%	34%	
How often felt cheated after	A49		.865	9%	8%	

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Experimental & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Reading test score (read easily) (with difficulty)	A50		.229	49% 26%	58% 23%	
Reading comprehension test score (answer easily) (with difficulty)	A51		.414	31% 21%	33% 20%	
Writing test score (write easily) (with difficulty)	A52		.645	49% 18%	52% 21%	
Math test score (all 6 items correct) (5 items correct) (4 items correct)	A54		.583	22% 8% 20%	23% 9% 19%	
Empowerment Indicators						
Participation in discussions about:						
Things on radio before	A55	*.004	.105	34%	21%	7%
Things on radio after	A56	*.000	.099	32%	40%	7%
Things read before	A57	.383	.261	8%	8%	11%
Things read after	A58	*.000	.171	88%	84%	11%
Politics before	A59	.212	.158	8%	13%	0%
Politics after	A60	*.000	*.028	13%	23%	0%
Preventing men from drinking before *(married)*	A61	*.011	. 444	47%	37%	21%
Preventing men from drinking after *(married)*	A62	*.000	.955	60%	59%	19%
Preventing men from beating wives before *(married)*	A63	*.041	.411	41%	32%	17%
Preventing men from beating wives after *(married)*	A64	*.000	.977	53%	54%	18%
Participation in public protest or political campaign:						
Participation in activities to prevent men from drinking before *(married)*	A65	*.050	*.022	9%	6%	6%
Participation in activities to prevent men from drinking after *(married)*	A66	*.003	*.031	14%	18%	5%
Participation In activities to prevent men/beating wives before *(married)*	A67	.090	*.053	10%	6%	5%
Participation in activities to prevent men/beating wives after *(married)*	A68	*.001	.068	12%	8%	5%
Political awareness/participation:						
Know name of MP	A69	*.026	.642	11%	12%	3%

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Experimental & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Know name of prime minister	A70	*.001	.317	19%	15%	4%
Women from village on VDC	A71	*.000	*.000	2%	10%	3%
Think it possible for woman to be on VDC before	A72	-	.475	14%	12%	-
Think it possible for woman to be on VDC now	A73	*.000	.321	79%	74%	56%
Been elected to VDC	A75	-	-	0%	3%	0%
Think it possible for self to be on VDC before	A77	-	-	3%	2%	-
Think it possible for self to be on VDC now	A78	*.000	*.045	23%	33%	3%
Served on committee organized by VDC	A79	.240	.484	5%	3%	1%
Participation in non-family groups/organizational meetings						
Participate in groups/ organizations before	A82	.339	.148	6%	3%	4%
Participate in groups/ organizations after	A83	*.000	.148	9%	20%	6%
Control over income:						
Participation in credit/loans before	A87	.384	.707	3%	4%	1%
Participation in credit/loans after	A88	*.004	*.007	2%	7%	1%
Cash savings before	A89	*.022	.669	31%	29%	16%
Case savings after	A90	*.001	.145	39%	46%	17%
Control over income: (Self/Shared)[22]						
Keeps money for daily household expenses before	A91	*.000	.535	21%	18%	31%
Keeps money for daily household expenses after	A92	*.000	.860	22%	23%	29%
Goes to local bazaar before	A93	*.000	.434	19%	18%	26%
Goes to local bazaar after	A94	*.000	.588	22%	24%	25%
Household decision making: (Self/Shared)[23]						
Daily household expenses before	A95	*.000	.617	23%	19%	30%
Daily household expenses after	A96	*.000	.767	24%	22%	29%
Clothing purchases before	A97	*.000	.324	20%	17%	27%
Clothing purchases after	A98	*.000	.303	21%	28%	26%
Livestock purchases before	A99	*.000	.537	17%	15%	19%

[22] Chi Square value are computed across all categories of responses, but only the percentages of those who have sole or shared responsibility for decision-making are shown for these items. Percentages include both married and unmarried respondents.

[23] Chi Square value are computed across all categories of responses, but only the percentages of those who have sole or shared responsibility for decision-making are shown for these items. Percentages include both married and unmarried respondents.

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Experimental & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Livestock purchases after	A100	*.000	.582	17%	16%	19%
Sending daughters to school before *(married)*	A101	*.000	.936	35%	39%	19%
Sending daughters to school after *(married)*	A102	*.000	.929	36%	39%	19%
Social/religious rituals before	A103	*.000	.521	24%	22%	27%
Social/religious rituals after	A104	-	-	-	-	26%
Medical treatment before	A105	*.008	.666	18%	16%	22%
Medical treatmenal after	A106	*.010	.684	19%	17%	22%
Agriculture before	A107	*.000	.667	21%	17%	27%
Agriculture after	A108	*.000	.708	22%	18%	27%
Family size *(married)*	A109	*.026	.168	42%	52%	35%
Child *spacing (married)*	A110	*.040	.142	43%	52%	36%
Involvement in childbirth decisions (changed after) *(married)*	A111	*.001	.438	35%	34%	58%
Use birth control before *(married)*	A112	.176	.187	14%	19%	11%
Use birth control after *(married)*	A113	.137	.594	16%	20%	8%
Self-confidence/self respect:						
Respect for opinions/family	A114	*.000	.125	38%	42%	2%
Respect for opinions/community	A116	*.000	.258	29%	33%	2%
Confidence in stating opinions to family members	A118	*.000	*.015	38%	50%	4%
Confidence in stating opinions to community	A119	*.001	*.005	30%	44%	4%
Identification of role models	A120	*.001	.108	39%	47%	24%
Mobility:						
Travel outside village before	A122	*.009	.493	89%	87%	76%
Travel outside village after	A123	*.000	.564	91%	92%	76%
Take bus	A125	.860	.770	72%	74%	72%
Confidence in taking bus (increased over period)	A126	*.000	.076	43%	54%	8%
Actions to improve children's future:						
Children in school before *(married with children)*	A127	*.076	.502	77%	81%	65%
Children in school after	A128	*.000	.511	87%	91%	67%
Talk to children about their progress in school before *(married with children)*	A129	.241	.584	65%	67%	49%
Talk to children about their progress in school after *(married with children)*	A130	*.010	.599	75%	71%	48%

Indicators	Table No.	Level of Significance Experimental & Control Group *p=.05	Level of Significance Basic & Post-literacy Course *p=.05	% Positive Response or Mean Value		
				Basic	*Post*	*Control*
Check to be sure children attend school before *(married with children)*	A131	.203	.770	60%	54%	46%
Check to be sure children attend school after *(married with children)*	A132	*.000	.343	72%	65%	47%
Vision of a future: Taking action to achieve future goals	A134	-	-	48%	37%	44%

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