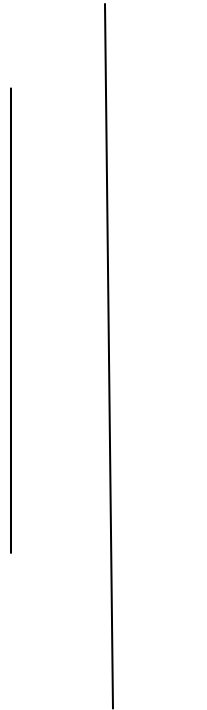


Second wave of COVID-19 and its impact on LGBTIQ community

An online survey report

July 2021



E-Survey Conducted by:

Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities, Nepal

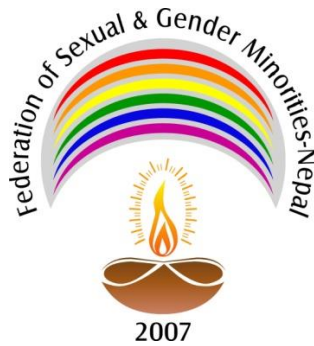


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Introduction

Currently, the world is suffering from different waves of Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 epidemic has caused many social, economic, psychological and other health related problems for different groups of the world's population. Many countries around the world have called for extreme measures such as, lockdowns and shutdowns, to tackle covid-19 after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 infection as a global pandemic. In this situation, Nepal also had a hard time in the first and second phase in 2020 and 2021 respectively, due to many restrictions caused during the pandemic. The first and second wave of Covid-19 and phase-wise restrictive measures have affected many Nepalis of various economic, social and health situations, living inside as well as outside the country, including people who identify themselves as LGBTIQ community members.

In this context, the Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities Nepal (FSGMN), an organization that has been working with LGBTIQ community in Nepal for a long time, in collaboration with Women Fund Asia, conducted an online survey on the status of LGBTIQ community in Nepal after and during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this survey might help FSGMN to promote policy reforms and create an LGBTIQ friendly environment for the benefit of the LGBTIQ community in government, non-governmental and other supporting organizations.

This survey was conducted by adhering to the directive issued by the Government of Nepal to keep social distance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Objective

The main objective of this survey was to understand the current situation of the LGBTIQ communities living under restrictive measures applied due to the pandemic. This survey tries to understand the economic and psychosocial situation of the LGBTIQ community members across the country during and after the second wave of covid-19 in Nepal.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted among 242 people who identify themselves as LGBTIQ across Nepal using an online survey platform called "surveyMonkey". Survey link was created in surveyMonkey platform and was sent to the community members that were within the network of FSGMN.

Informed consent was used for data collection so that the participants could freely decide on their participation in the survey. Similarly, participants who were above 18 years of age were only eligible to participate in this online survey. Data was collected between 10 July 2021 and 16 July 2021. The data presented are descriptive in nature.

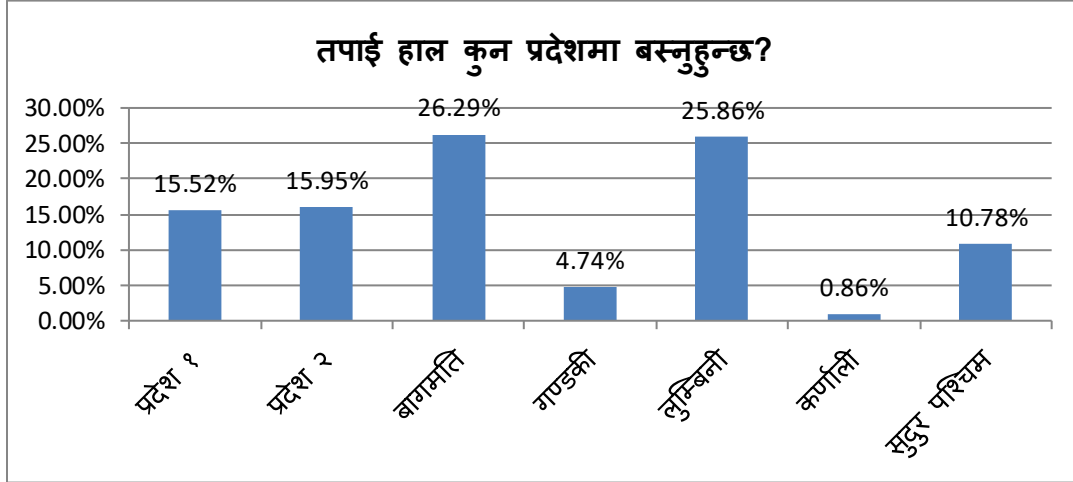
Limitations

This survey was conducted among the LGBTIQ participants who were within the network of FSGMN. Therefore, it cannot be generalized among all the people who identify themselves as LGBTIQ in Nepal.

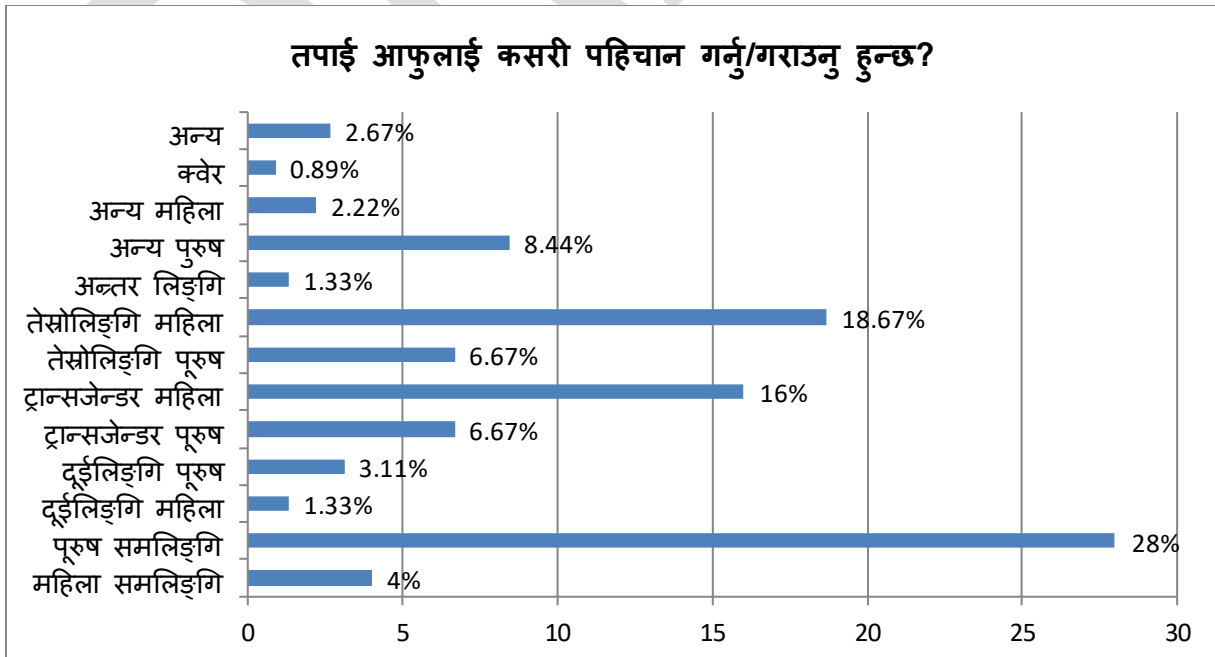
Results

This section provides the findings of the survey.

Demographic information

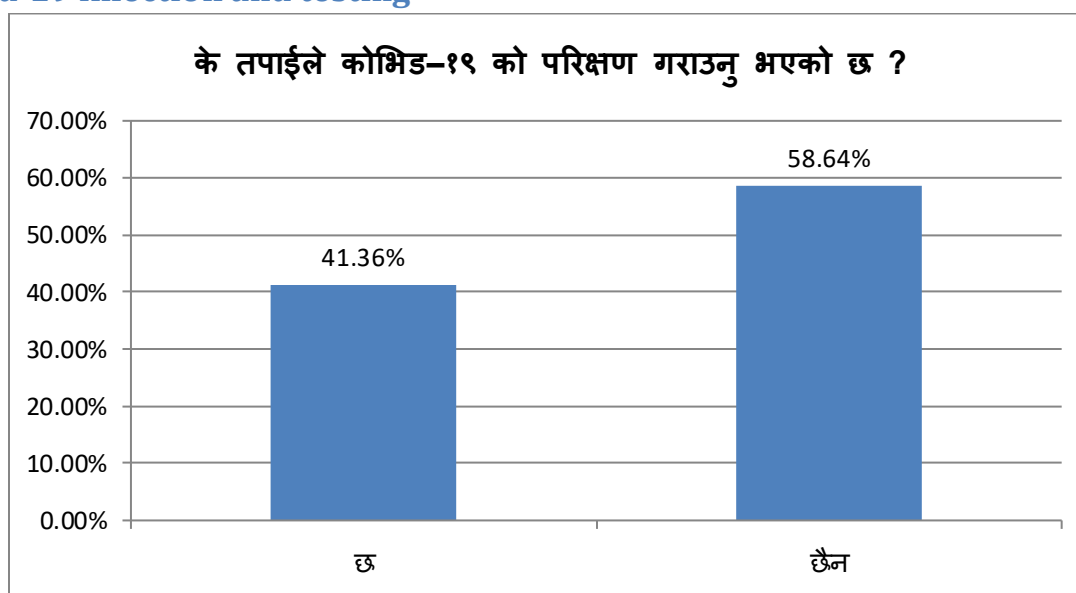


Among those who participated in the survey, the highest numbers of them reside in Bagmati Province (26.29%). The second highest percentile of the participants was from Lumbini Province with 25.86%. While the survey was conducted in all the provinces, the lowest percentile of the participants was from Karnali province where the participation was less than 1%.

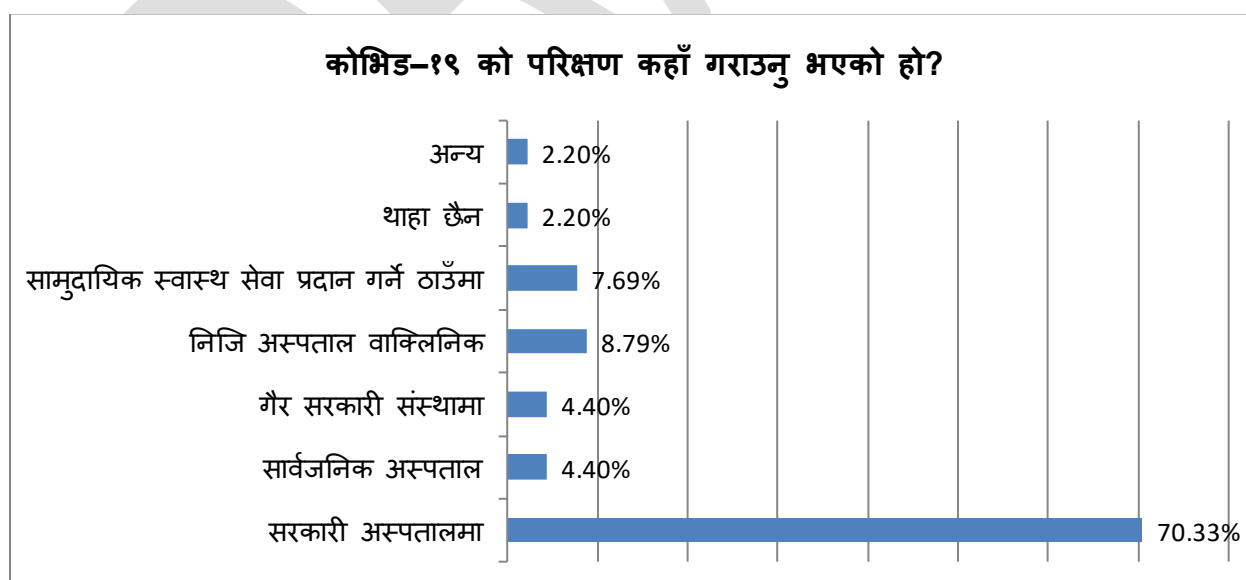


The participants were asked to identify their gender and sexual orientations. The above chart shows that maximum numbers of participants were homosexual men (28%). Other bigger proportion of participation was from third gender women who were 18.67% and trans-women who comprised of 16% of the survey participants. Similarly, 8.44% identified themselves as “other male” and 6.67% identified themselves as transgender male and same percentage (6.67%) of the people identified themselves as third gender male.

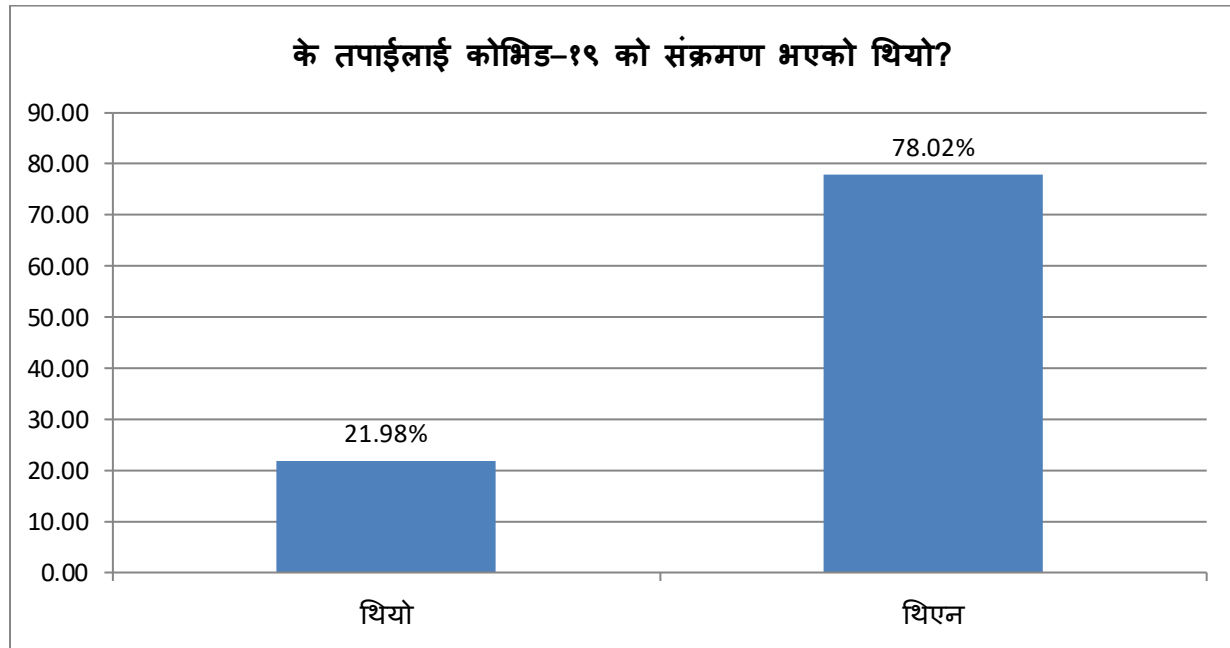
Covid-19 infection and testing



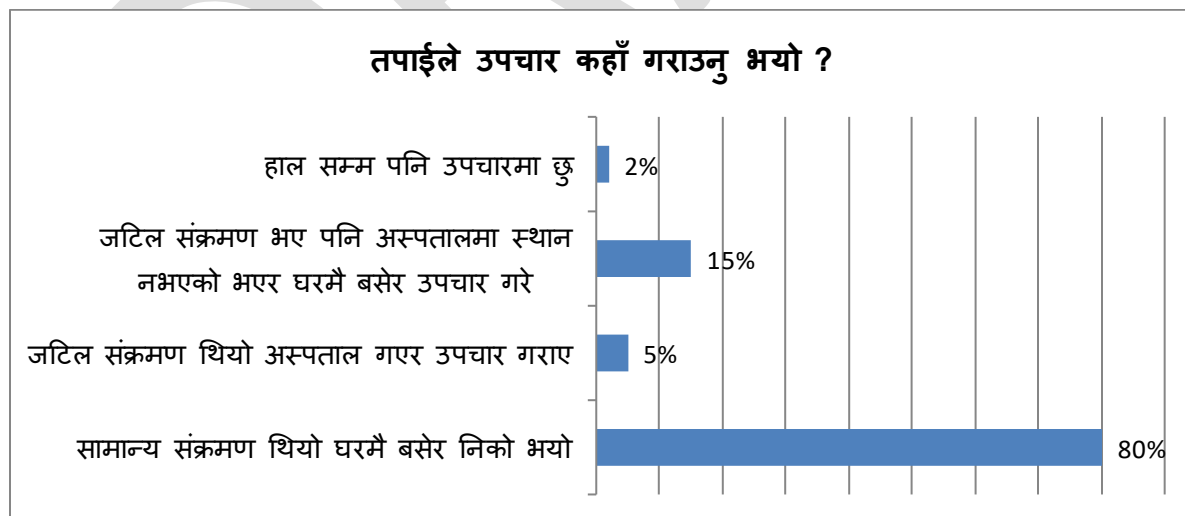
Among all the participants who participated in the survey 58.64% of them reported of not have tested for COVID whereas almost 42% of the participants confirmed having done COVID-19 test.



Those participants who confirmed having done COVID test were asked about the place where they did the test. The participants informed that 70.33% of them did their testing in a government hospital. Almost 9% of them also tested in a private hospital, and 2.20% of participants stated that they didn't know the place that they did their testing. Of those respondents who indicated "others" said that they did the testing with private individuals.

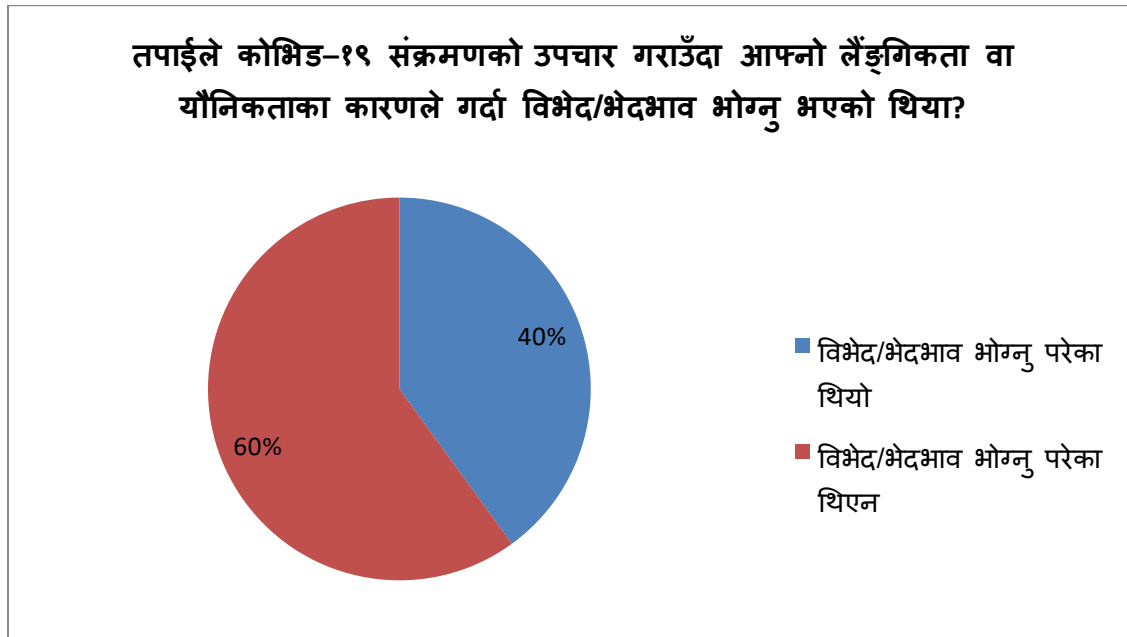


Among the participants who confirmed having done COVID test, 78.02% of them stated that they didn't have COVID infection whereas rest of the population (21.98%) confirmed having tested positive from COVID-19.



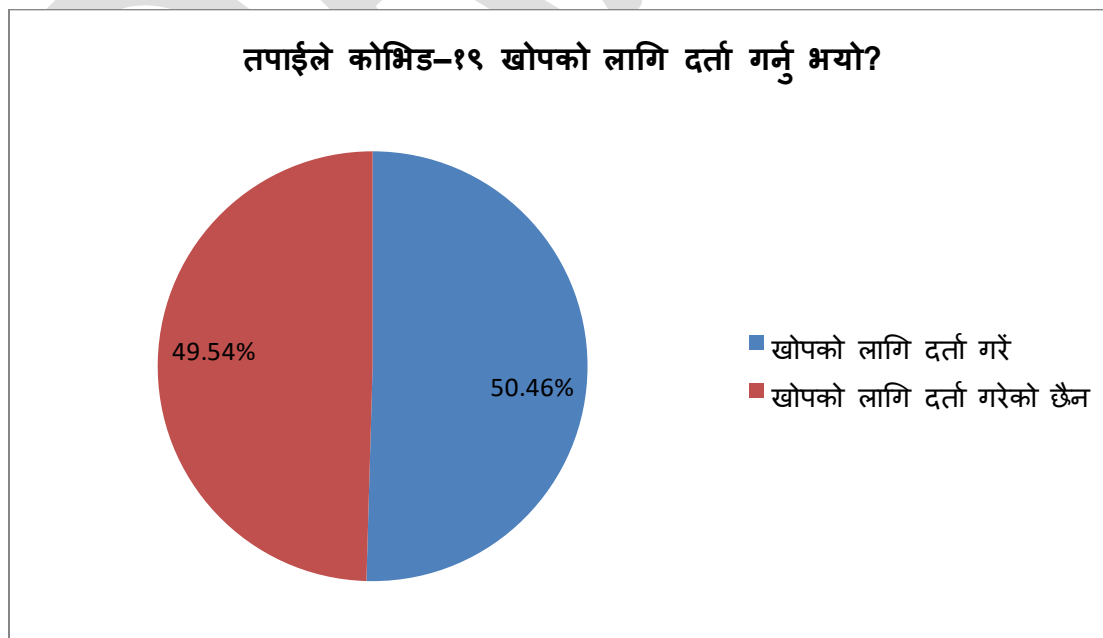
Those participants who stated that they had tested positive for COVID-19 were asked about where they did the treatment and 80% of them stated that their infection was moderate so they cured themselves at home. Notably, 15% of participants stated that even if their infection was severe, because the

hospitals were not nearby, they treated themselves at home. Importantly, 2% respondents said that they were currently being treated and, 5% respondents stated that they had to go to the hospital for treatment as their infection was severe.

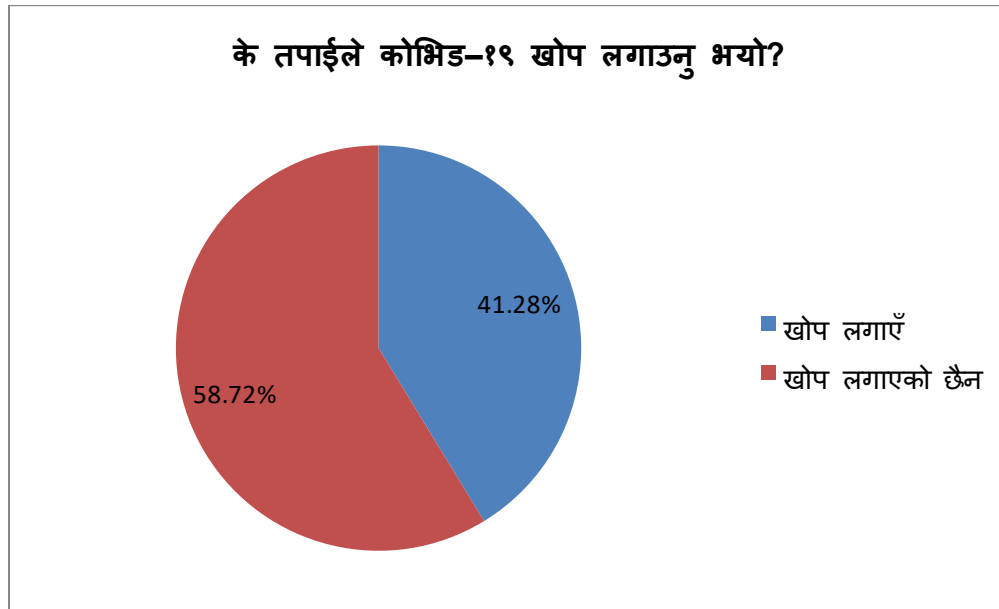


The participating respondents who tested positive for COVID-19 were asked if they had to face discrimination while accessing treatment against COVID due to their gender or sexual identity and 40% of them confirmed having faced discrimination while 60% respondents stated that they didn't have to face any discrimination.

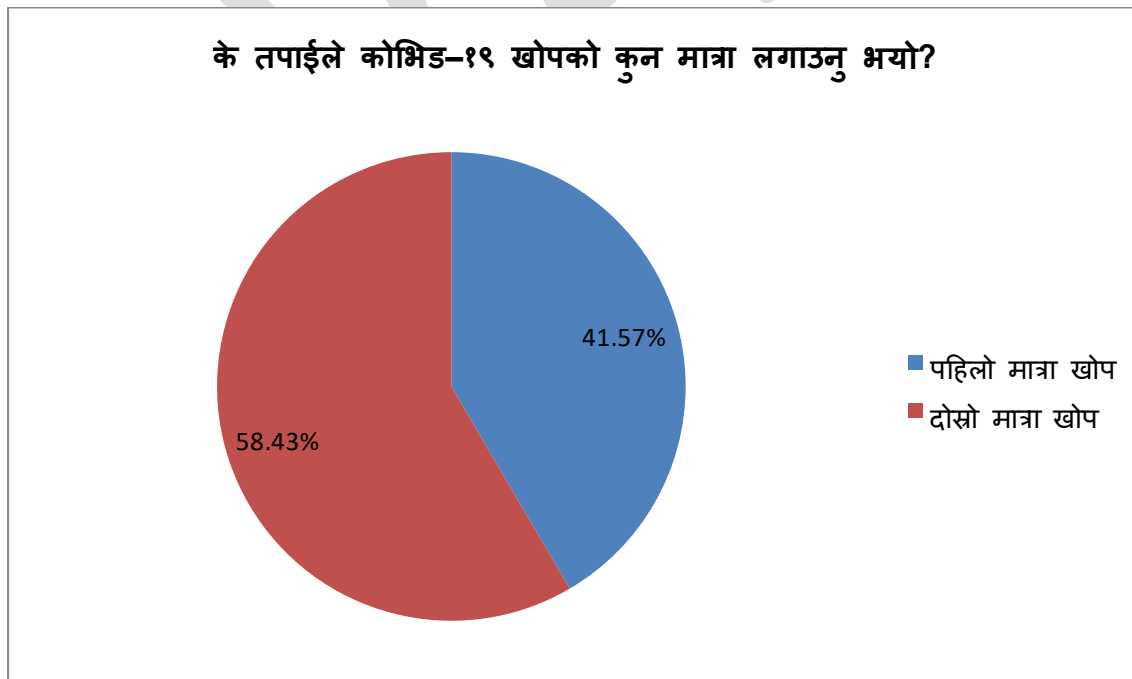
Vaccination



All the participants of the survey were asked if they had registered for the vaccine for COVID 19. Almost half of the participants said that they had registered for the vaccine whereas half of them answered that they had not registered yet.

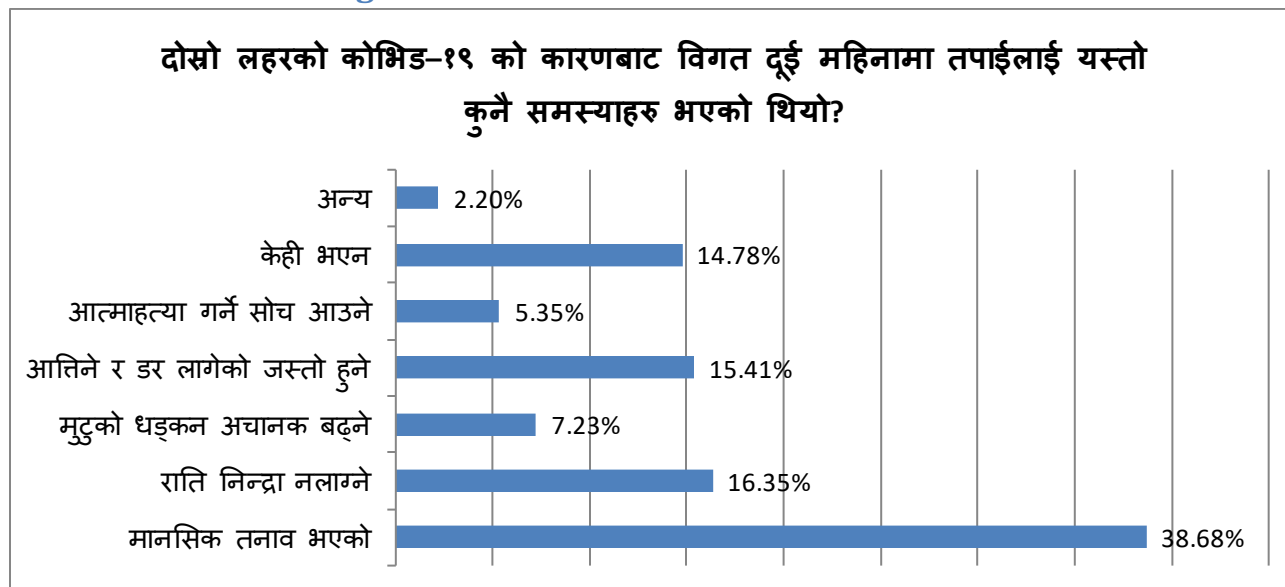


All the participants were asked if they had got vaccinated for COVID-19 and 41.28% of them confirmed having got vaccine whereas remaining participants stated that they had not got any vaccine till the time of survey.



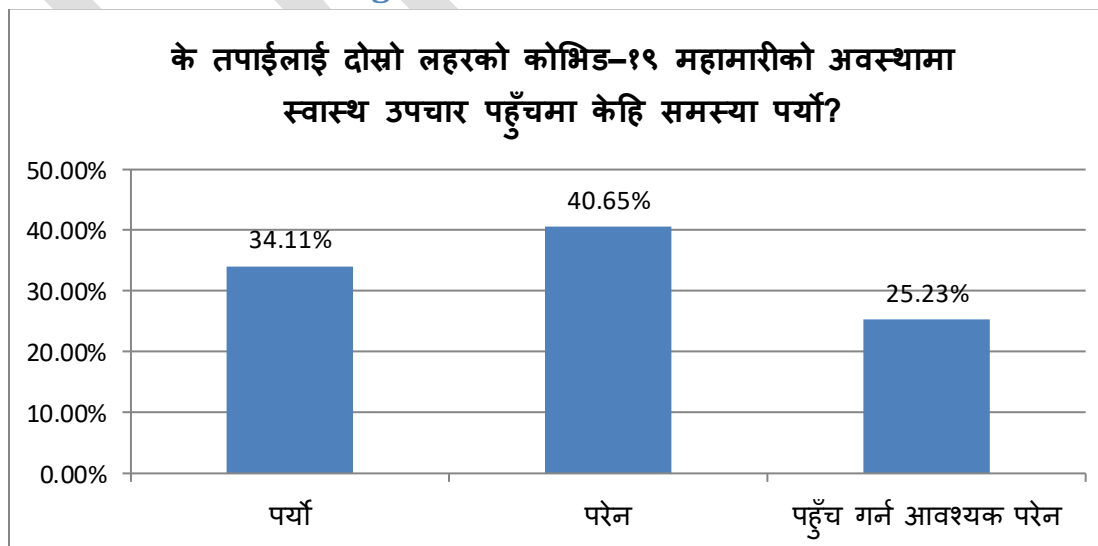
The participants who had confirmed getting vaccine for COVID 19 were inquired if they had got either first dose or both doses of vaccine. Among them, almost 59% of them had already got both doses of vaccine while 41.57% of them had only one dose of the vaccine at the time of survey.

Problems faced during and after the second wave

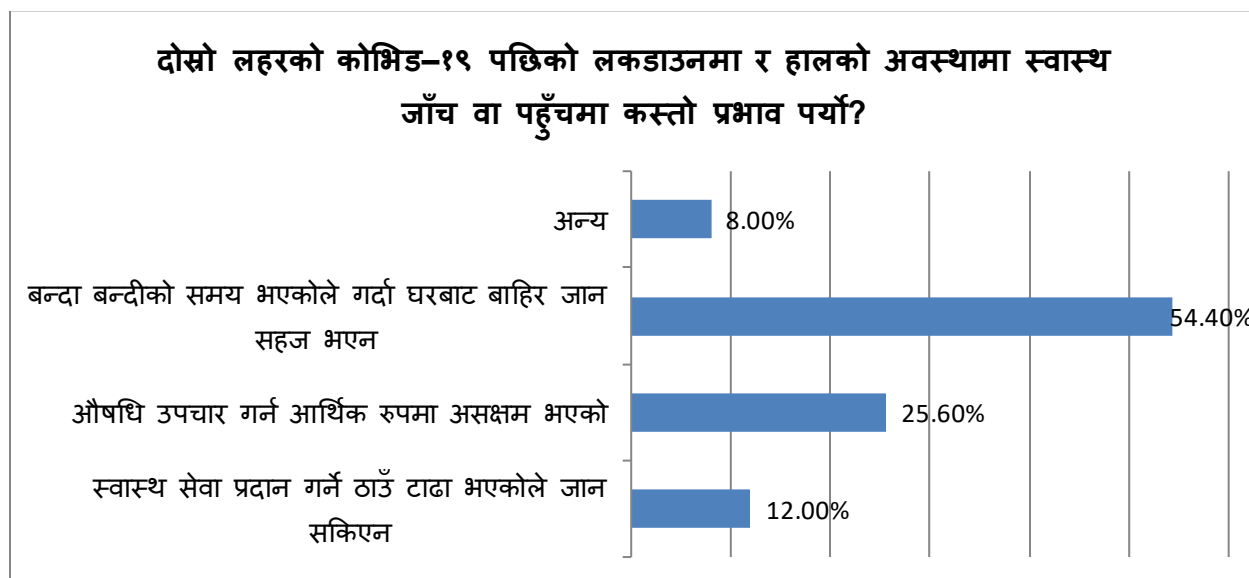


The survey asked the participants if they faced any issues during the second wave of pandemic in the last two months. Among the responses the highest response was for mental stress which was 38.68%. Likewise, 16.35% of the responses also stated having problems of sleeplessness during night time and 15.41% of the response was for anxiety and fear. Importantly, 5.35% of the response also included thoughts of committing suicide. Among the 2.20% “other” responses ‘fear’, and ‘family problems’ were indicated.

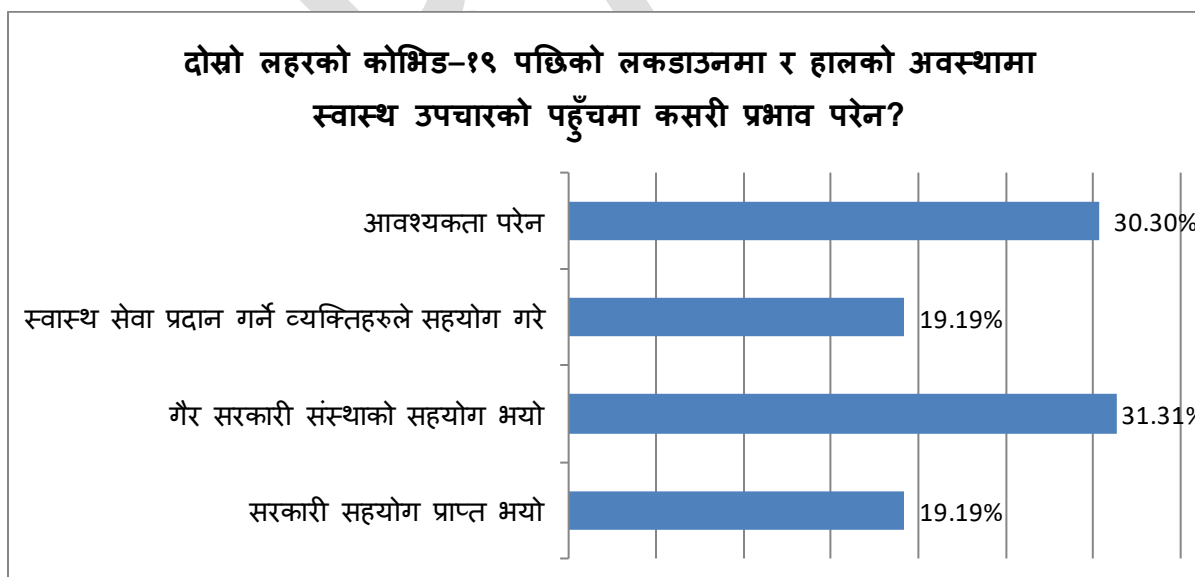
Access to health care during second wave



The respondents of the survey were asked if they faced any problems while accessing health care or treatment during second wave of COVID-19. The above chart shows that 25.23% of them didn't have to access any health care, 34.11% of them faced some issues while 40.65% of them didn't have to face any challenges.



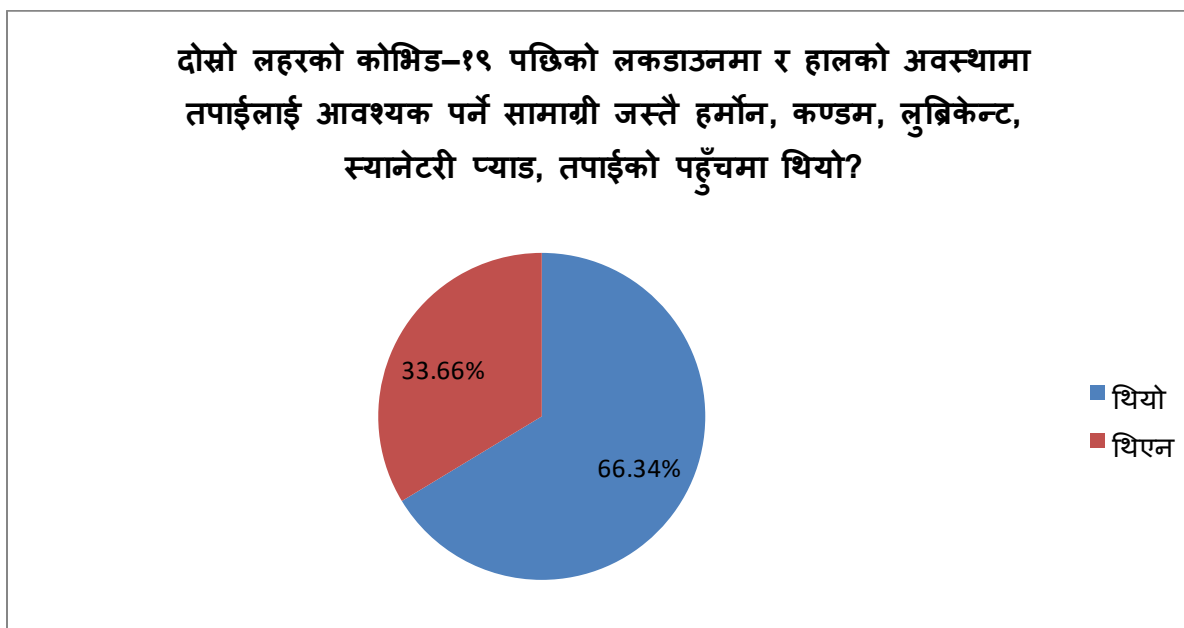
The participants who had to access health care remarked that the most prominent issue that they had to face during the second wave of COVID-19 was not being able to go out of the house to access health care because of lockdown (54.40%). Almost 26% of the response was also financial constraints to buy medicine or to access health care.



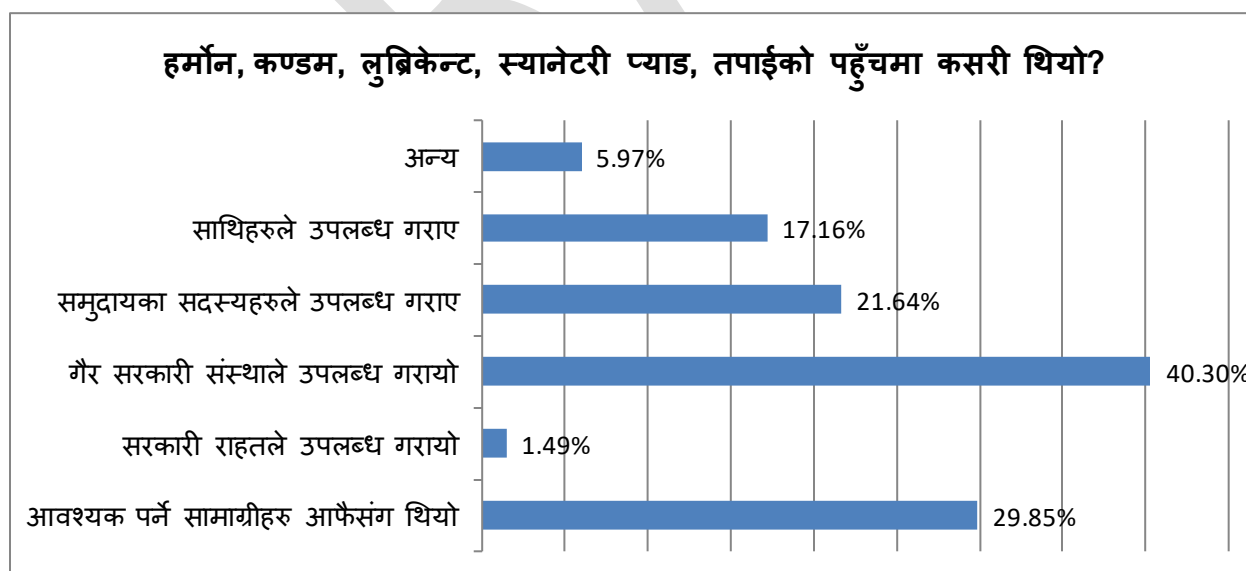
The participants in the above chart confirmed that the reasons that didn't affect their access to their health care were due to non government organizations support which was 31.31% of the total response.

The chart also shows that they also got support from health care workers (19.19%) and government help (19.19%). Likewise, 30.30% of the respondents indicated treatment was not required to them.

Access to resources



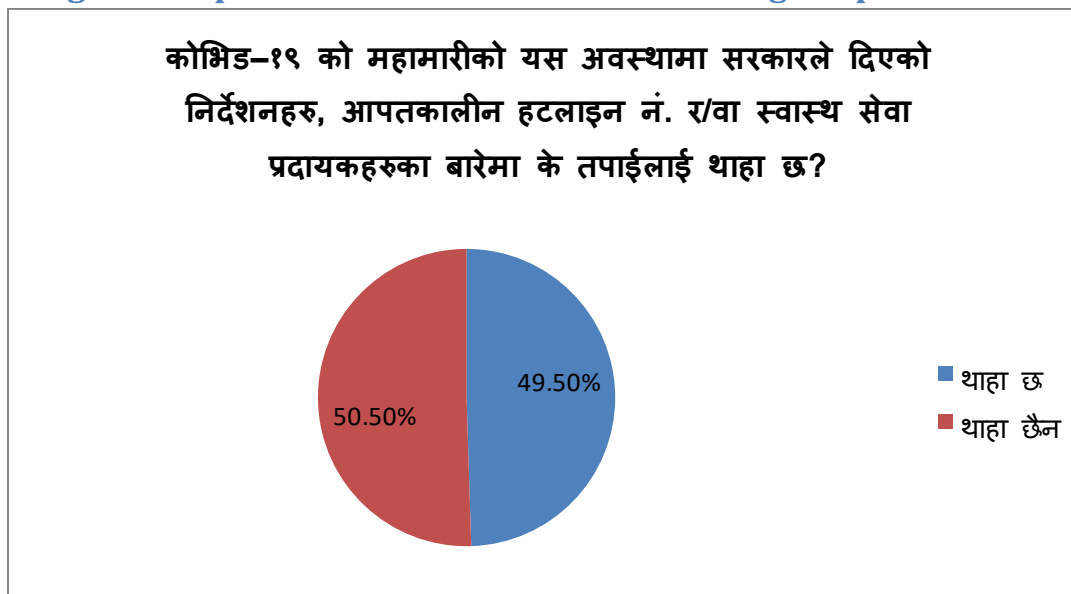
The participants of the survey were asked if they had access to necessary materials such as hormones, condoms, lubricants, sanitary pads during the second wave COVID 19 lockdown. Almost 67% of the participants confirmed that they had access to those materials and the remaining participants stated that they didn't have access to those materials.



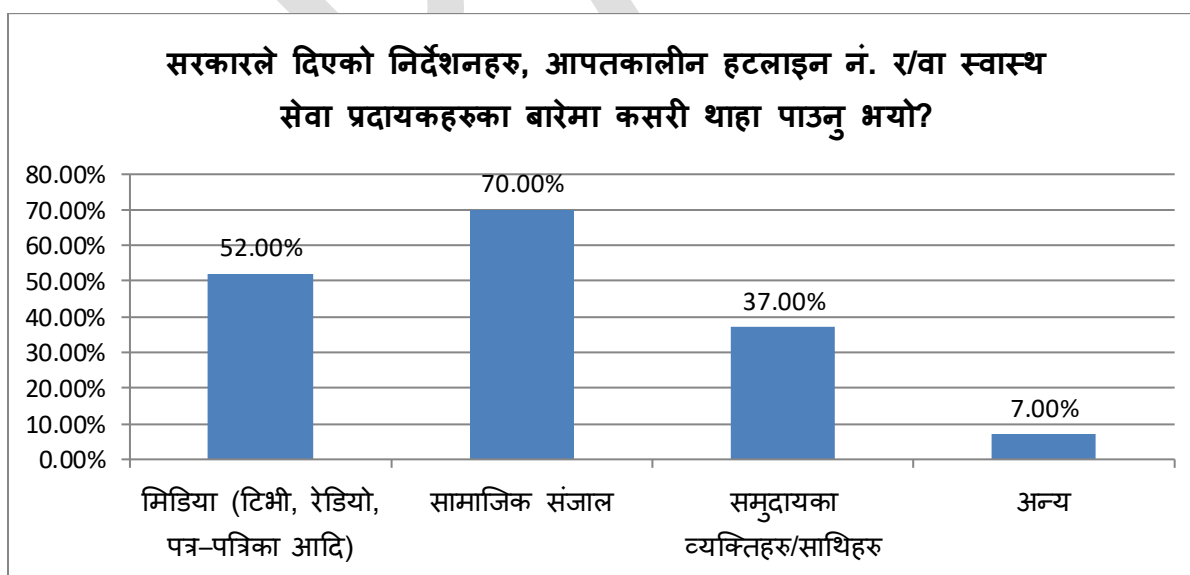
The participants who confirmed having access to require materials such as hormones, condoms, lubricants, sanitary pad were asked how they had access to those materials and 40.30% of them stated that non-governmental organization made it available for them. Almost 30% of them stated that they

had those materials with them and less than 2% of them stated that they got those materials through relief package from government. Among those who indicated “other” (5.97%) stated that they bought these things from the market themselves.

Knowledge about public health care measures during the pandemic

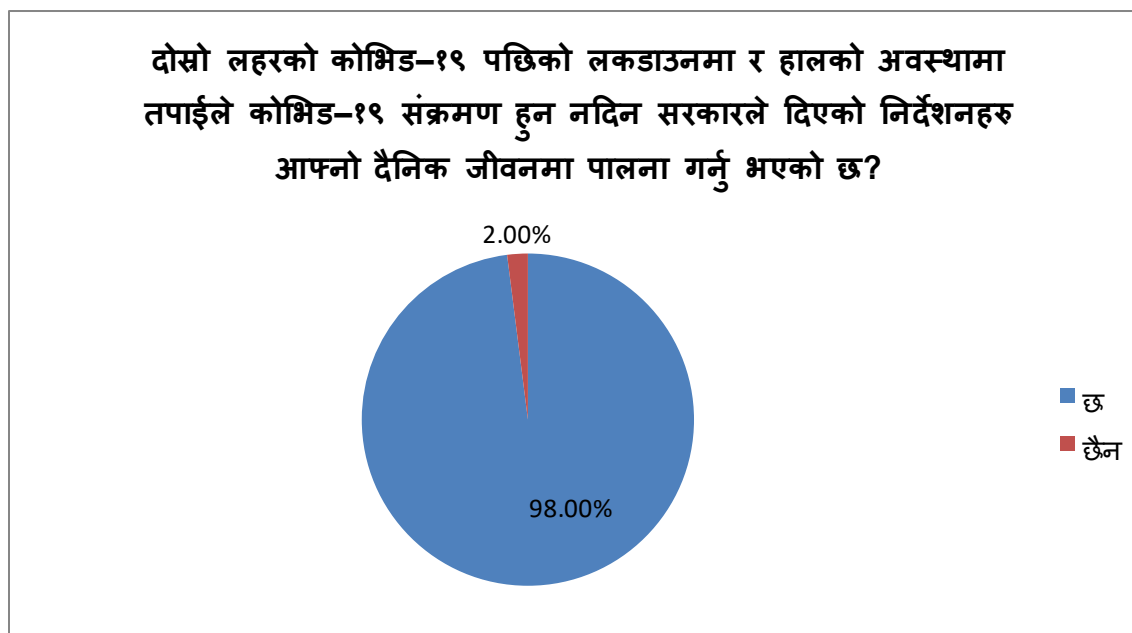


The survey participants were asked if they were aware of the emergency hotline numbers, government guidelines and health care services provided by government during COVID 19 pandemic. The response was almost 50% of them had information while other 50% didn't have such information.

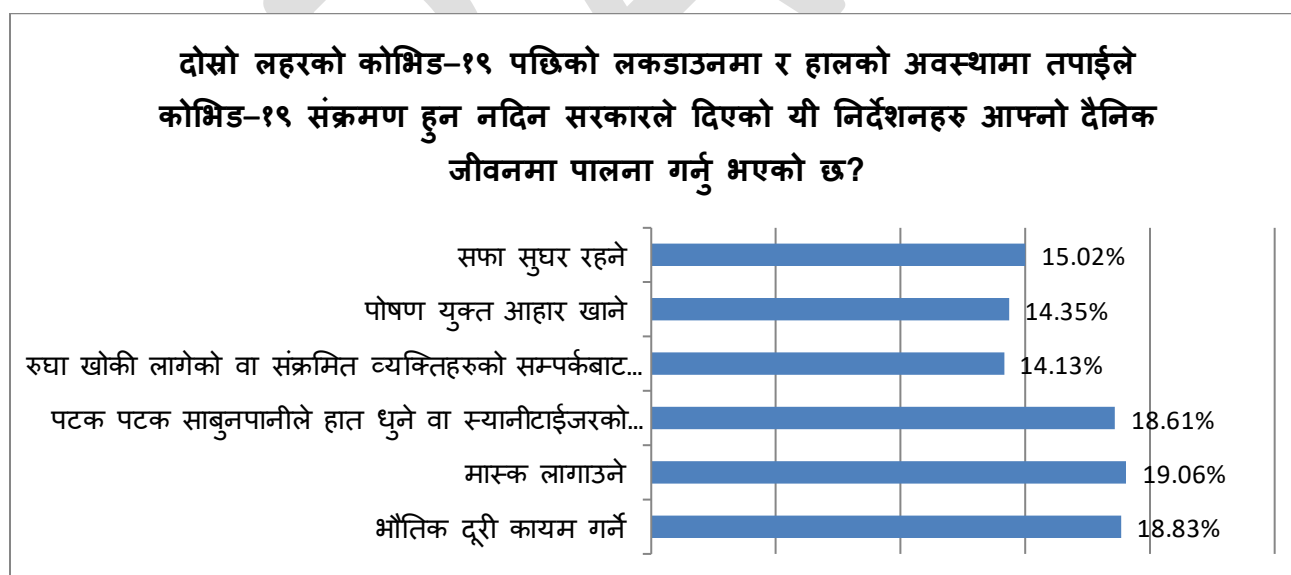


The participants who stated that they had information regarding emergency numbers and other guidelines were asked how they got that information. The above chart shows that maximum number of response which covers 70% of them got their information from social network. They also got

information from media such as TV, radio and also from friends and community members/friends. Their response percentile was 52 and 37 respectively.

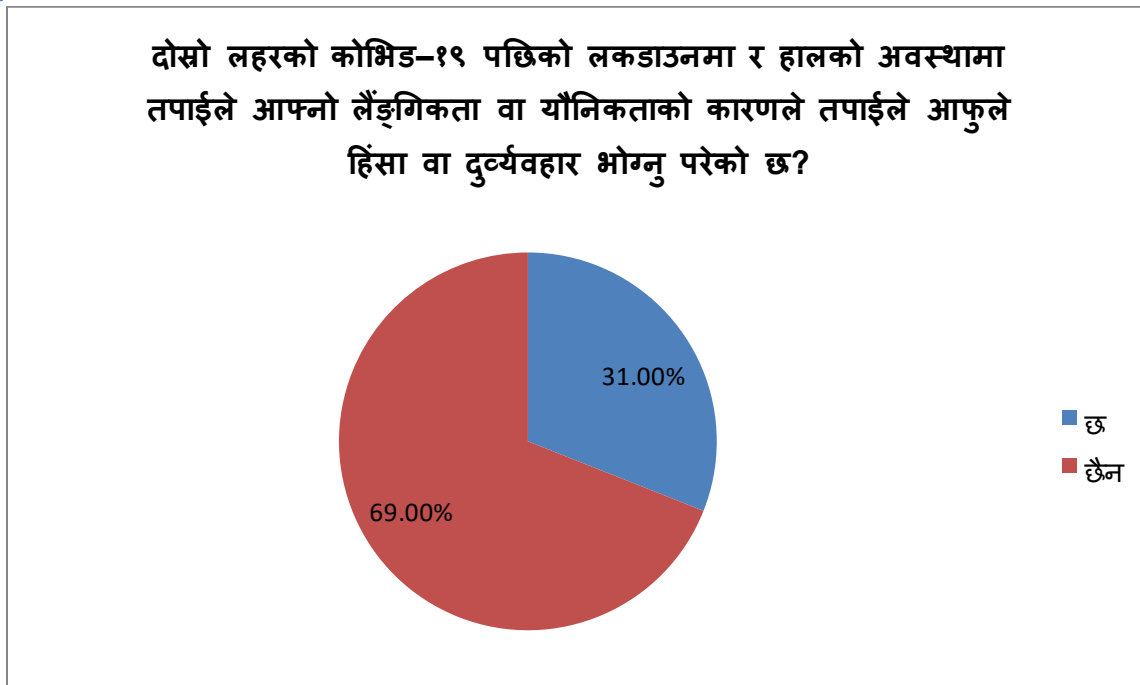


The participants were asked if they were following the guidelines provided by government to ensure they were not infected from COVID-19. Only 2% of the participants stated they had not been following those rules whereas 98% of them confirmed having following those guidelines.

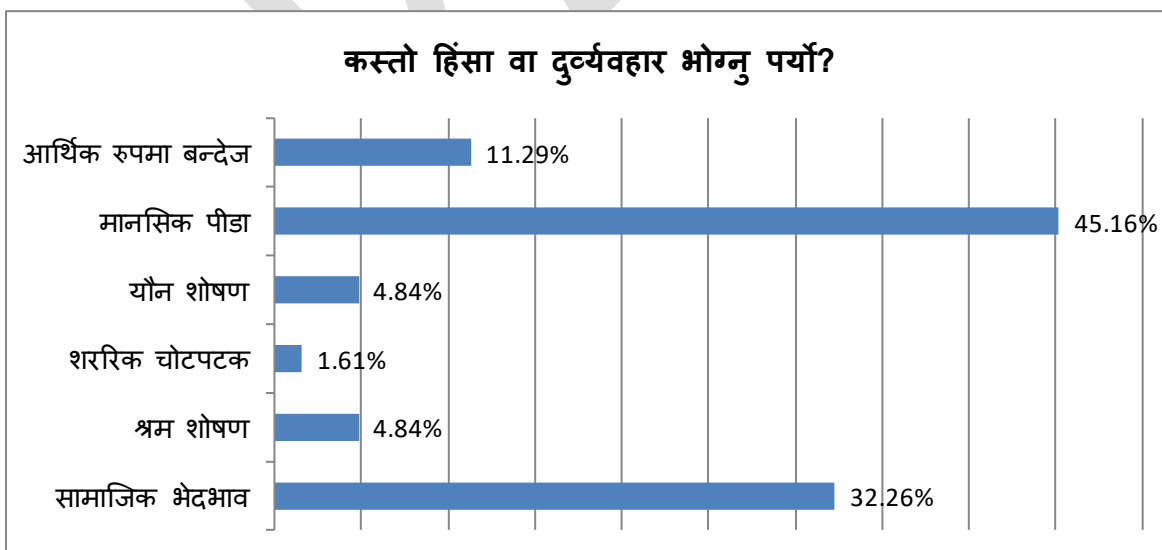


The participants were asked to choose the guidelines that they had been following to ensure they were not infected by COVID-19 virus during and after the second wave lockdown. The guidelines that the respondents chose were wearing masks (19.06%), washing hands with soap or using sanitizer (18.61%), social distancing (18.83%), cleanliness (15.02%), eating healthy diet (14.35%), and avoiding people with covid-19 symptoms (14.13%).

Experience of violence

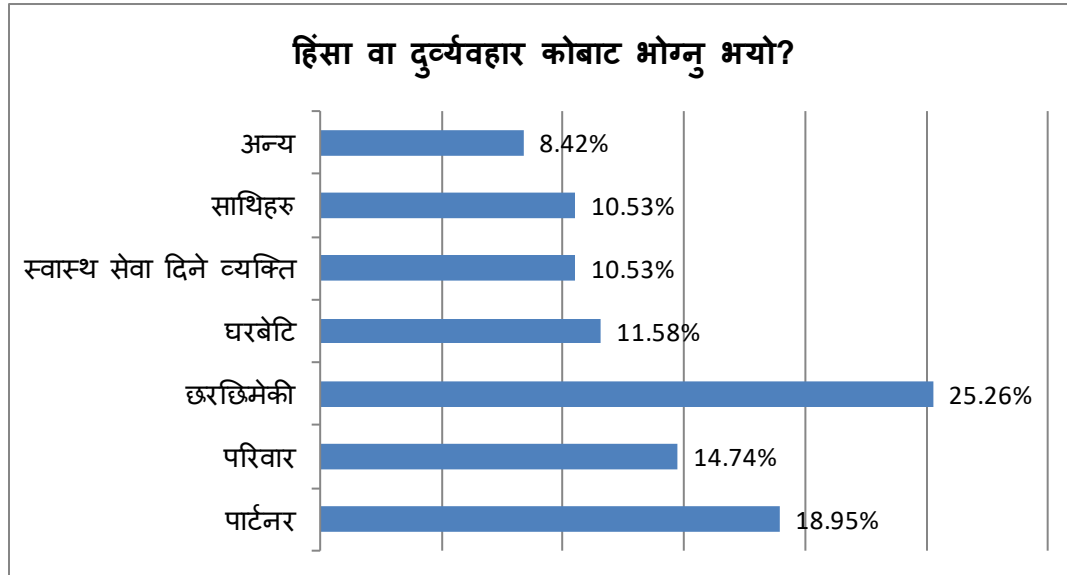


The participants participating in the survey were asked if they had been facing any violence or abuse during and after the second wave of COVID 19 lockdown because of their sexual and gender identity. 69% of them stated that they didn't have to face such situation whereas 31% of them stated that they faced violence.

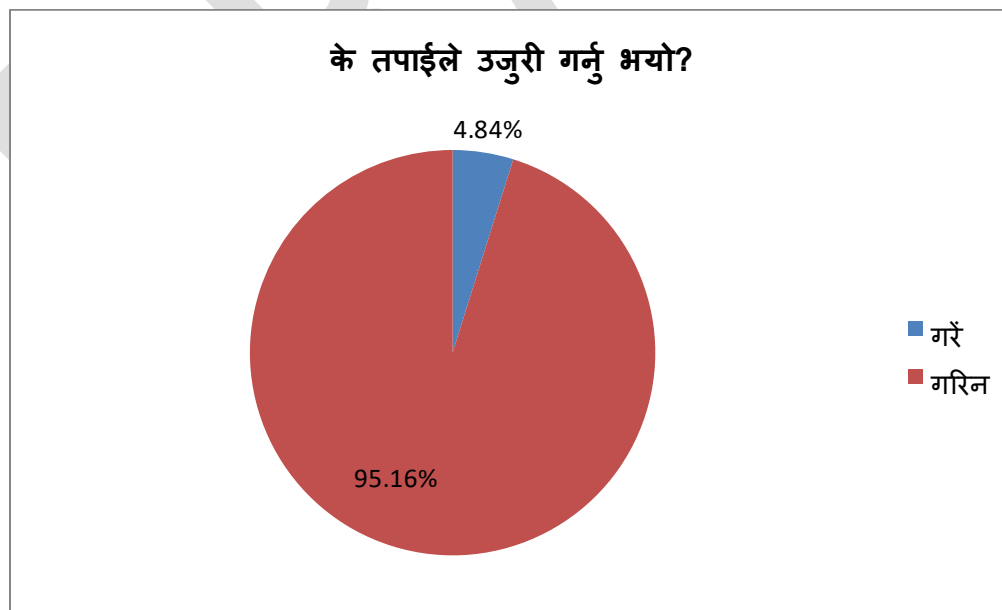


Those participants who stated that they faced violence and exploitation were asked to categorize the form of violence they faced. Almost 45% of them stated having faced mental/emotional violence. Almost 32% of them confirmed having faced social discrimination. Around 5% of the participants

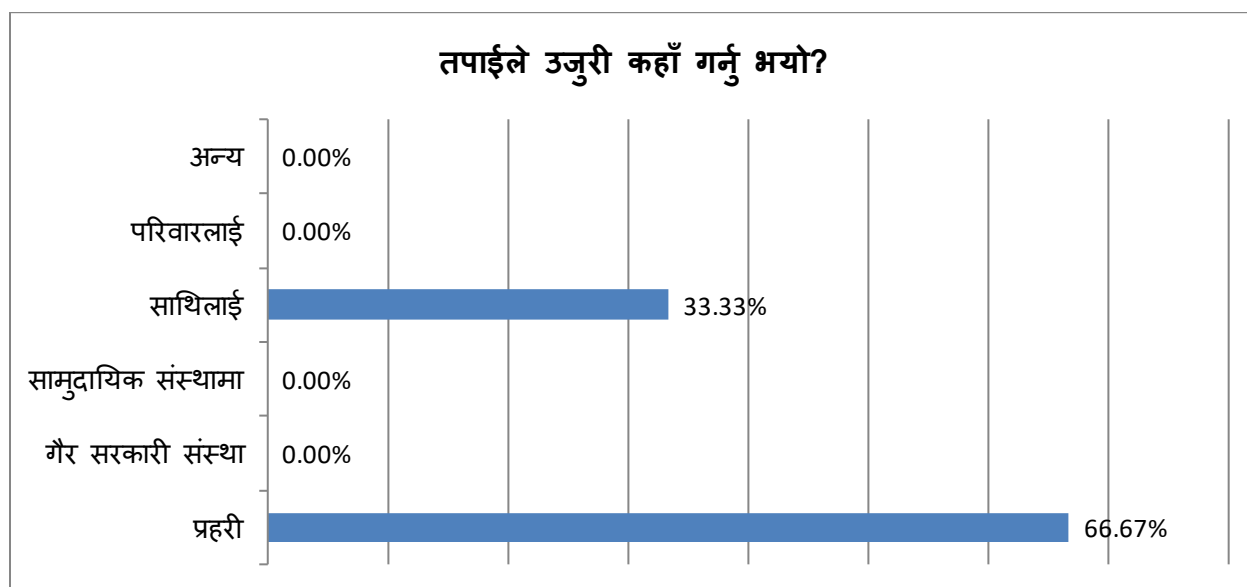
confirmed having faced sexual exploitation. Same number of participants also confirmed having faced labor exploitation.



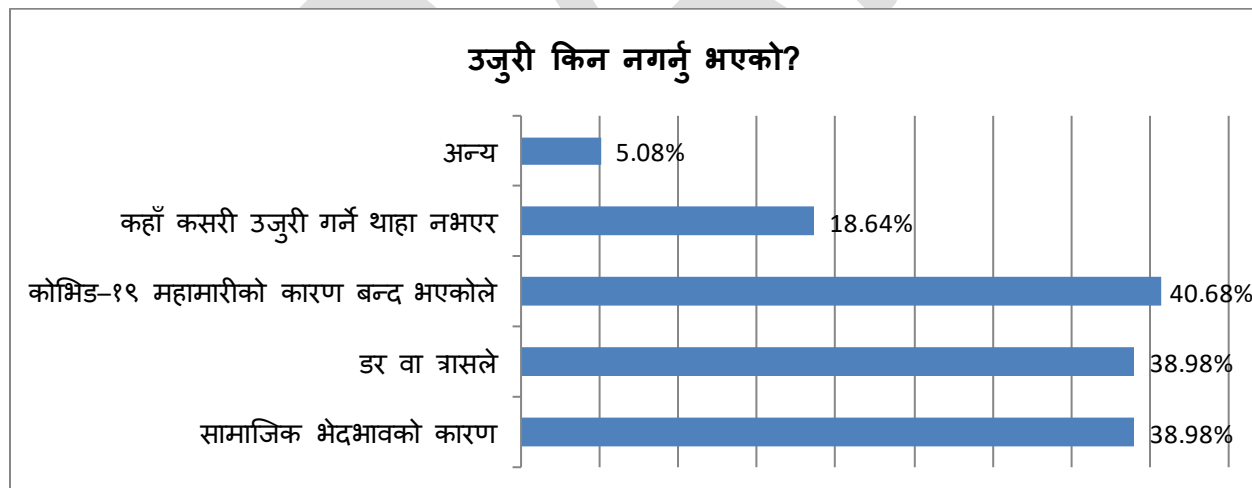
The participants who survived violence were asked their relationship with their perpetrators. The highest response was for the neighbors (25.26%). The participants also confirmed having faced violence from families (14.74) and their partners (18.95%) respectively. Similarly, 10.53% of response also indicated that the survivors faced violence from health care providers and friends (10.53%). Of the 8.42% responses that indicate “others” were from ‘police’, ‘boss’, ‘in social media’ and ‘almost everyone’.



The participants who confirmed of being survivors of violence were asked if they made any complaints about the violence they experienced. Almost 96% of them confirmed that they never made any complaints and only 4% of them made complaints.

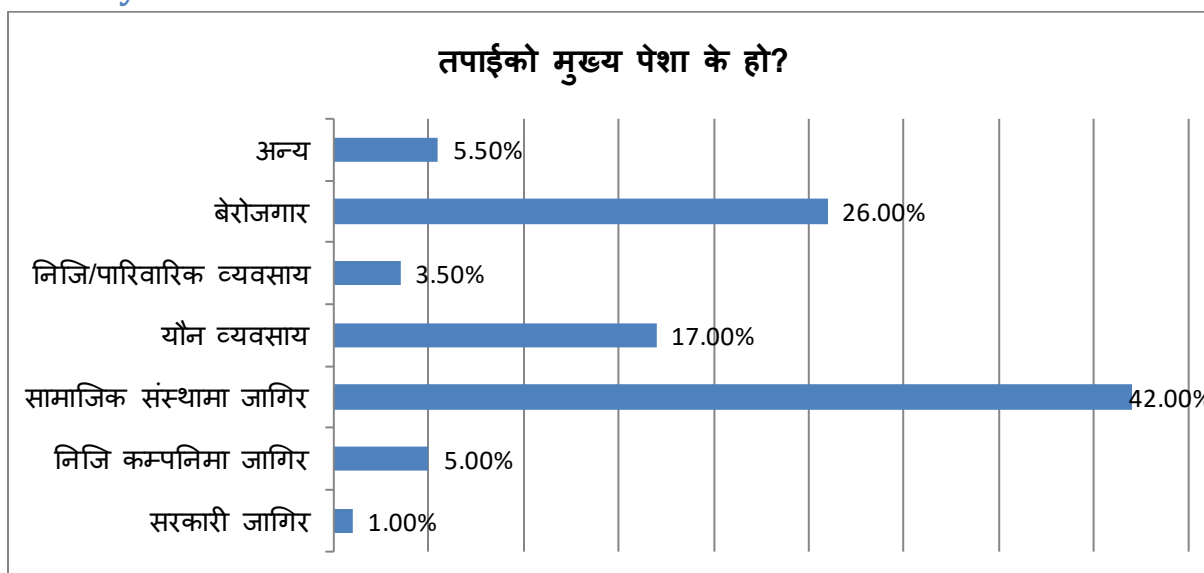


Those participants who confirmed having made complaints for the violence they survived reported that 66.67% of them made complaints to the police and 33.33% of them made complaints to their friends.

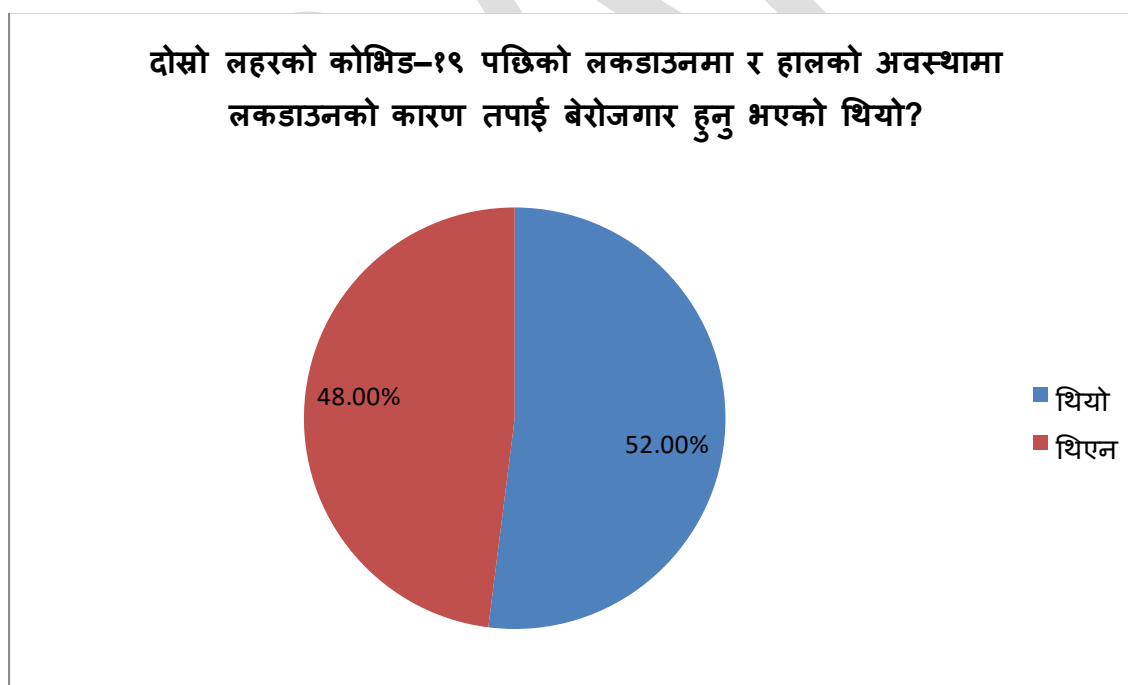


Those participants who confirmed having made no complaints for the violence they survived reported that the lockdown due to COVID-19 prevented them from making complaints. The response was recorded to be the highest percentage among other response with 41%. Other responses that got highlighted with almost 39% were fear and social discrimination. Of those who responded “others” indicated that they succumbed to the violence.

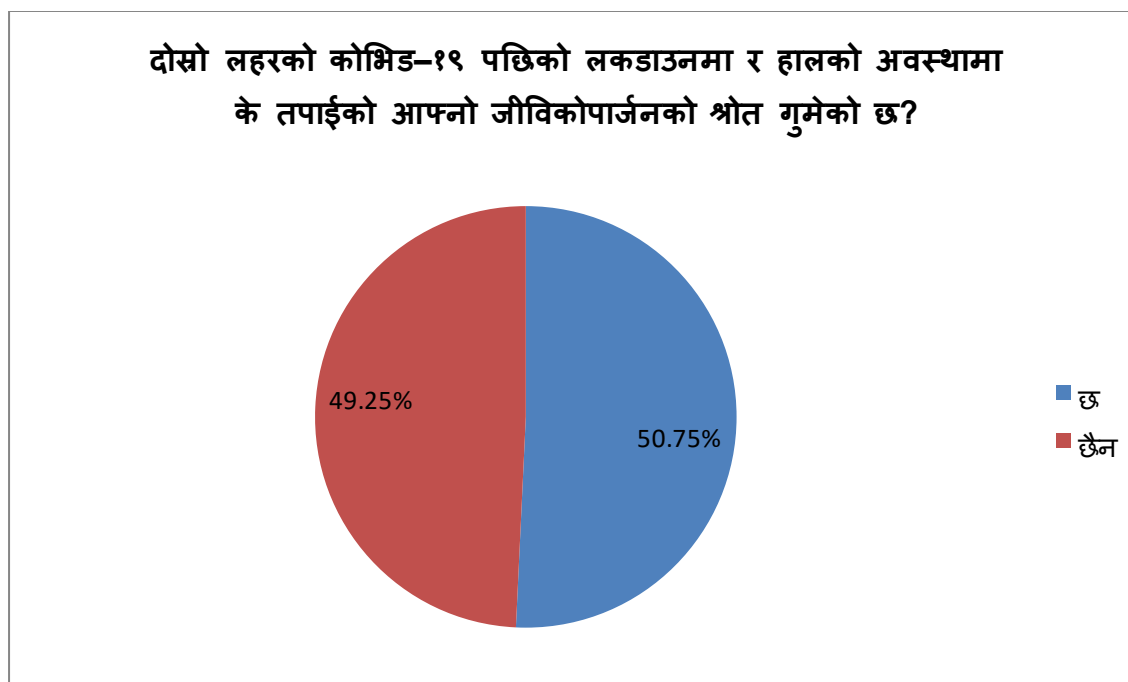
Economy and Livelihood



The participating respondents of the survey were asked about their main occupation where 42% of them responded being an employee of social organization, 26% of them also stated that they were unemployed at the time of the survey, and 17% of the participants also confirmed that sex work was their main occupation.



The survey asked the participants if they were unemployed after and during the lockdown due to second wave of COVID-19 where 52% of them confirmed it to be true and other 48% stated such was not the situation.



The survey asked the participants if they lost the source of their livelihood because after and during the lockdown due to second wave of COVID-19 where almost 51% of them confirmed it to be true and other 49% stated that they didn't have to lose their source of livelihood during and after second wave of COVID 19.

Discussion

This survey was conducted among the participants who are within the network of FSGMN. Although, the survey was able to cover participants from all the provinces in Nepal, participation from Karnali Province was seen very low. Therefore, strengthening LGBTIQ network in Karnali Province is needed and efforts should be put by all the concerned stakeholders to accommodate more LGBTIQ people from that region.

Majority of the respondents of this survey were either working in community based organizations, working as sex workers, or unemployed during the time of the survey. In this context, the fact that this survey results show that more than half of the total respondents indicated that they have lost their jobs and sources of livelihood during the second wave of covid-19 pandemic in Nepal have cause and effect in their socio-economic and health problems. More than 50 percent of the respondents who answered that they faced problems during the second lockdown indicated that restrictions have been stricter this time as they were not able to go outside their homes to access health care during this period. This might have an impact on the mental health of the people, especially LGBTIQ people who are in need of many other healthcare requirements. The impact on mental health of the respondents during the second wave restriction is seen in the survey results as more than half of the responses indicated that they have faced mental health problems during the second wave of covid-19. Even those respondents who have answered that they have faced violence during the second wave of covid-19, most responses indicate psychological violence. Therefore, it is seen that greater attention should be focused on addressing

mental health issues of people from the LGBTIQ community, especially considering the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of this survey show that more than half of the respondents have not tested for covid-19 and almost half of the total respondents have not registered themselves for vaccination. Thus, raising awareness about the importance of testing and registering for vaccination is seen required as people from LGBTIQ community may already have many physical as well as mental health issues to deal with.

In terms of knowledge about public health measures during this period, much work needs to be done to raise awareness of LGBTIQ community as 50 percent of the respondents of this survey answered that they do not have information about the emergency hotline numbers and other public health safety measures during the pandemic, although most respondents follow safety measures during this pandemic. Of those respondents who have access to this information mainly get news from social networking sites and social media. Therefore, access to important and relevant information seems to be missing out for most LGBTIQ respondents of this e-survey. Similarly, much work is needed in terms of providing services to those who faced violence during and after the second wave of covid-19 pandemic. The support system of LGBTIQ people in such situation seems to be friends and largely the police. Therefore, building good relationship with the police is necessary. Also, empowering the people as well as police towards being LGBTIQ friendly is another challenge in Nepal which needs to be improved.

Conclusion

People around the world are facing difficult times because of the COVID-19 pandemic and people who identify themselves as LGBTIQ are with no exception, facing much more difficulties. LGBTIQ community need special care as they already face many socio-economic and health related problems. The series of strict lockdowns have brought even more complications to the already existing problems that LGBTIQ people have been facing. Stigma, discrimination and violence, and especially mental health issues have been escalated during the lockdown measures applied by the government to curb COVID-19 infections. The survey shows that during these times, loss of employment and health related problems, access to healthcare and access to required materials such as hormones, lubricants, condoms etc should be perceived as important factors to consider by the relevant stakeholders. The lockdown measures have also escalated other health related issues apart from being infected with COVID-19 virus. Although the infection rate and severity in health problems caused by COVID-19 does not seem to be at an alarming level, the underlying health issues, especially mental health, and economic impact are impacted at higher level among LGBTIQ community, as shown by the survey results. Similarly the survey also shows that access to information regarding important public health measures and guidelines are not effectively distributed among the LGBTIQ community members to fight against the pandemic. Creating awareness about testing and vaccination is yet another major challenge during these times. Applying severe measures such as lockdowns and shutdowns are definitely not the only option to fight against COVID-19 virus. It only affects the people and the community with many underlying socio-economic and health problems, especially mental health. Finally, this survey results only give us an overview of the many underlying issues that will manifest in the days to come.