

“Comparative Study of Socio-economic Conditions of Craftsmen in Kathmandu Valley after Earthquake 2015”



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In the whole month of July and first two weeks of August 2017, we met many craftsmen in Kathmandu Valley (3 districts viz. Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur) who enthusiastically participated in our interviews and also helped us to enter the local areas where craftsmen reside. We would like to offer our special thanks to the craftsmen around the valley who gave their valuable time and effort to participate in our research work. We are also thankful towards the local people of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur who warmly welcomed us for the queries we had regarding whereabouts of the craftsmen and directions.

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Sincerely from

Alisha, Ashmita, Bedana, Bijayata and Dipasa

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is renowned for its art, architecture, carvings and monuments, which owned 10 of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. On 25th of April 2015, Nepal was shaken by the massive earthquake of 7.8 Richter scale with its epicenter only 77 km away from the capital, Kathmandu. The capital along with many districts of Nepal confronted numerous aftershocks which affected the whole nation with great loss of infrastructures and hampered the economy. Amidst the aggravation, Nepal lost many of its culturally and historically significant monuments that exemplified Nepal's artistic beauty. Most of those monuments were renovated and preserved after the massive 1934 earthquake of 8.1 Richter.

Over the years, local craftsmen have played a major role in restoring and reconstructing the artistic monuments during various kinds of disasters. Often when talks about preserving cultural heritage comes up, we fail to realize that it's the craftsmen that we should preserve rather than the monument itself as they are the ones who are preserving the skeleton of the nation. If those skills which preserve skeletons of the nation are taken away, the whole nation collapses.

After the series of earthquake, the high held historic monuments fell, directly affecting the socio-economic conditions of people maintaining and preserving those monuments. To understand the impacts of earthquake on livelihoods of craftsmen residing in the Kathmandu Valley two years after, when the restoration began, we wanted to conduct a research on the socio-economic aspects of craftsmen who would be taking part in restoration process after the earthquake.

ABSTRACT

The project we carried out was titled “Comparative study of the socio-economic conditions of craftsmen in Kathmandu Valley after 2015 earthquake” which highlighted the status of craftsmen of Kathmandu Valley. Between the month of July and August, we carried out the investigation in Kathmandu Valley which included the major destination for Nepalese architecture and crafts. The main aim of this project was to explore the importance of craftsmen in the restoration and reconstruction process along with the effects of the Earthquake in their own socio-economic lives. With this research project we wanted to compare the socio-economic condition of craftsmen before and after the earthquake. We obtained both quantitative and qualitative data through face-to- face interviews.

After the study, we got the result that the socioeconomic condition of the craftsmen declined after earthquake 2015. Despite of increase in demand of the work, their condition worsened because of the financial crisis which involved many other factors than earthquake itself. The other factors contributing to the mourning are politics in the restoration projects, Nepal blockade by India and crisis of manpower in the field.

PROPOSAL

We initiated 6 months (July 2017- December 2017) long research project in the crafts and sculpture sector of Nepal to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of craftsmen and possible rise of their work demand after 2015 Earthquake. We interviewed 26 participants from three districts of Kathmandu Valley from which we wanted to thoroughly understand the impact of the earthquake on their work demand. Our main motive was to prepare a report from the own perspective and experiences of craftsmen, that represents their genuine socio-economic condition. In addition, we also wanted to highlight their significant architectural skills which need to be preserved in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviews, participant observation and surveys were used to collect information from participants. The methodologies of our research project are briefly stated below:

Participant Observation: We visited areas of Kathmandu Valley where sculpture carving was widely practiced. Potential participants were observed who could take part in our research project without disturbing their work.

Gaining access and recruitment: The participants were approached through snowball sampling technique and random sampling method. Recruitment was done after participant observation. In order to acquire the voluntary informed consent of research participants, we gave a brief summary about our research project verbally. The participant information sheet was also

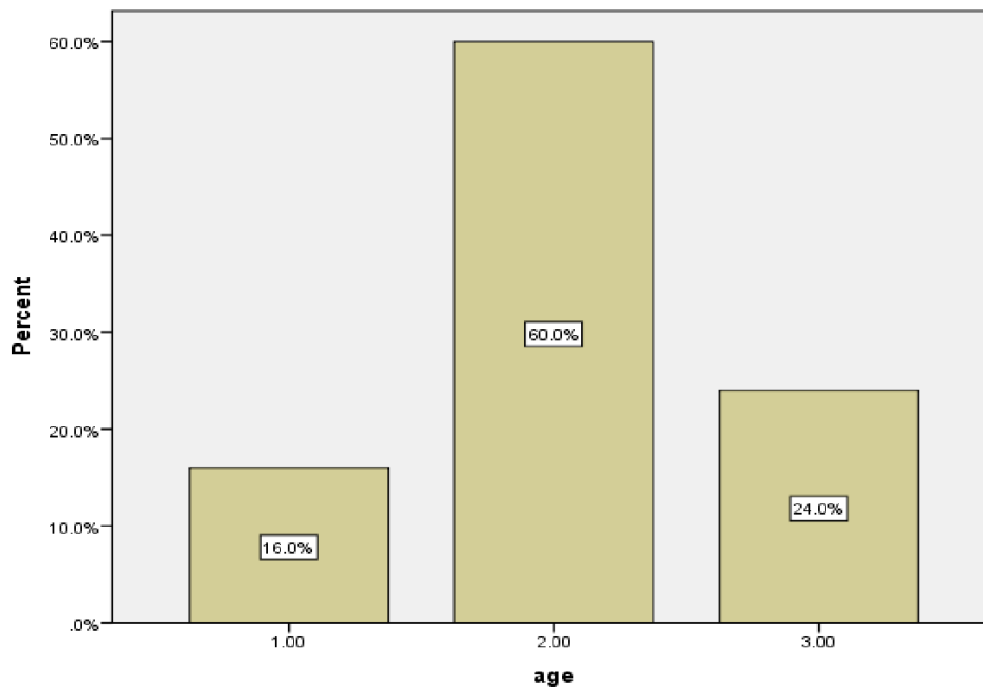
provided where the main objective of the research, institutional information, their choice of participation, confidentiality regarding their participation, and further use of the information of the research study were clearly explained. The total number of participants interviewed for the research, regardless of their age and gender, from the three districts was 26. Thus, with the consent from the participants, the research interview was conducted.

In-depth interviews: The face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted using both open and close ended questions on the basis of the set questionnaire approved by AUW IRB. The questionnaire included demographic information like age, sex, education along with questions related to economic condition of their business and households, number of employees and involvement of family members in the business, change in the social acceptance of their profession, and the perceived number of clients in their business before and after the earthquake. Follow up questions were also added to make the conversation smooth. Interviews were videotaped and the photographs of the participants and their carvings were taken with consent for further references.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Despite a large number of people being approached, total of 26 enthusiastic participants were interviewed. Most of them belonged to the middle class and lower middle class. 3 out of 26 participants (11.5%) were women while others were men.

1. Age of the Participants



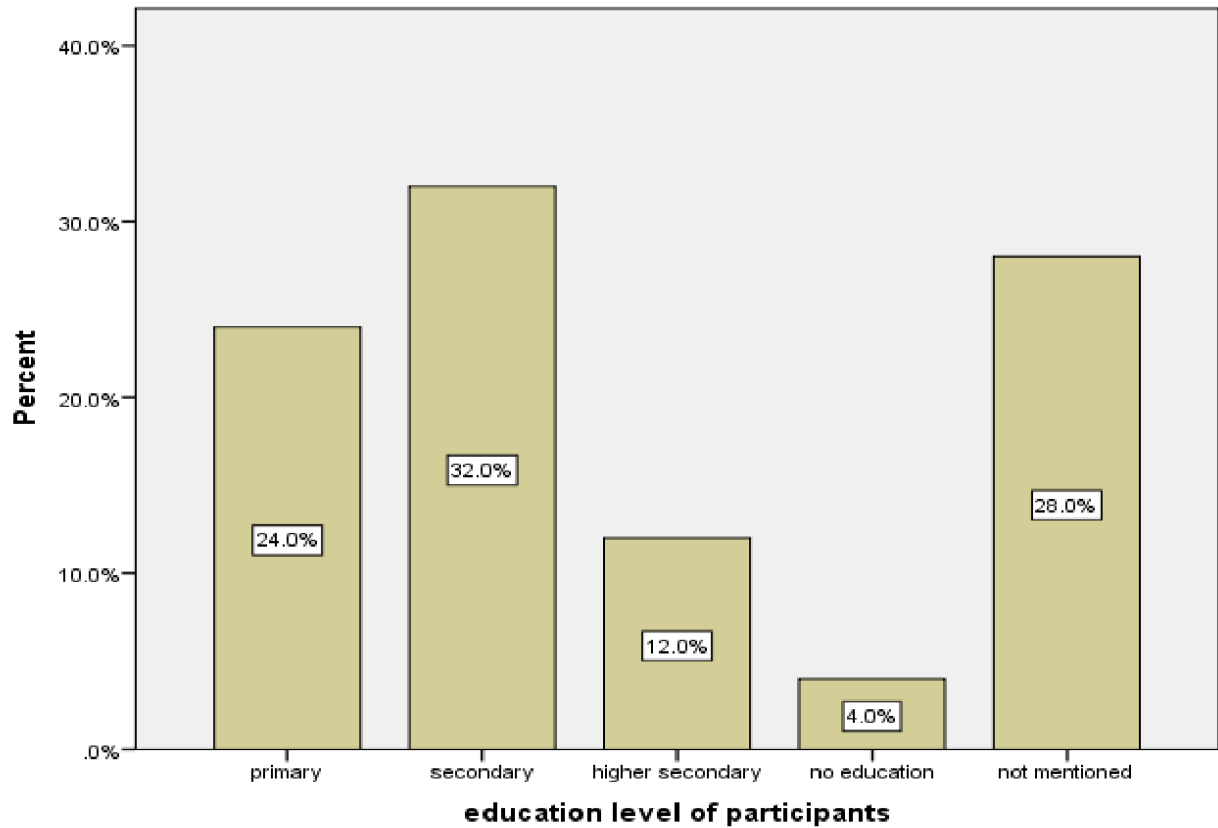
Group 1: 16-30yrs

Group 2: 31-45yrs

Group 3: above 45yrs

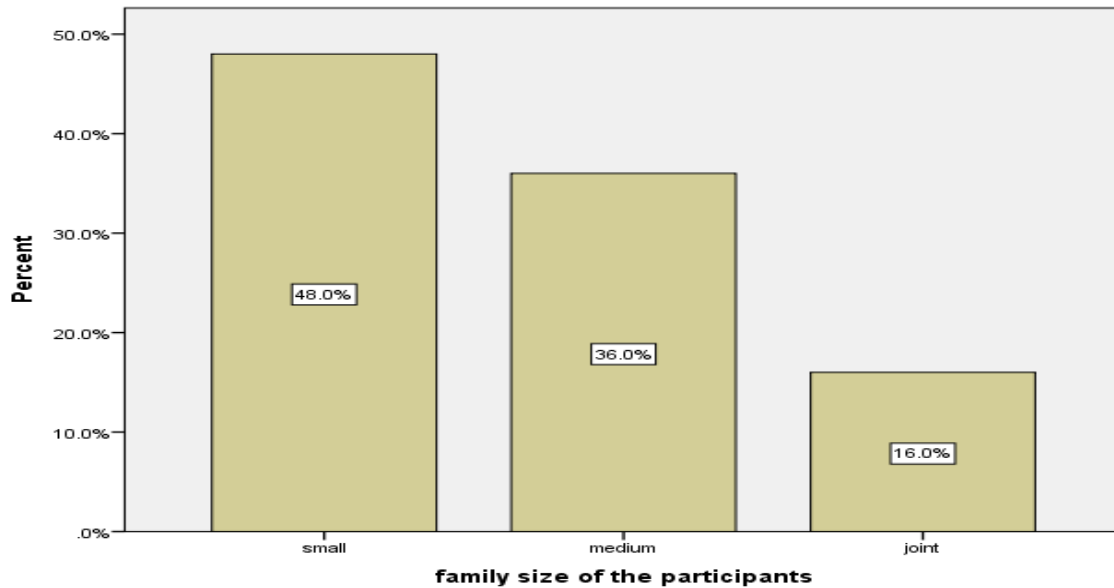
Among 26 participants, 60% of them (16 participants) belong to the age group of 31-45 years where as 24% are above 45years and only 16% belong to age group of 16-30 years.

2. Educational Level



Education level of participants was asked to analyze their academic status which could reflect their socio-economic position. Among 26 participants, 32% of them (8 participants) had completed secondary education while 28% of participants didn't reveal their education level. Among those, 24% of participants had completed primary schooling, 12% of participants had completed higher secondary school and 4% had no formal educational background.

3. Family Size



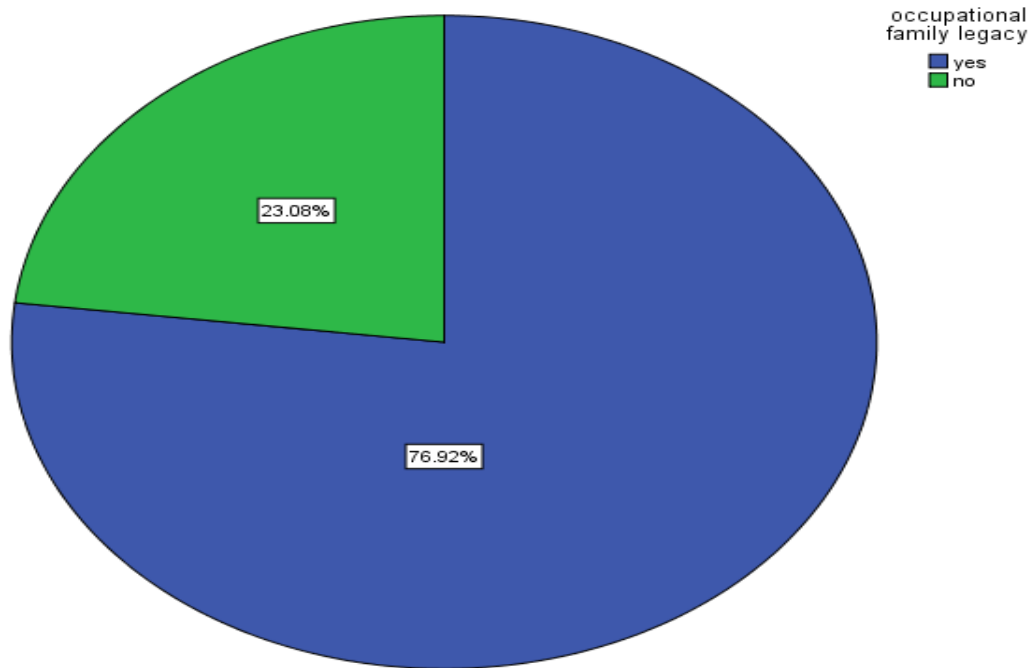
Small= <4 members

Medium= 5-8 members

Joint = >8 members

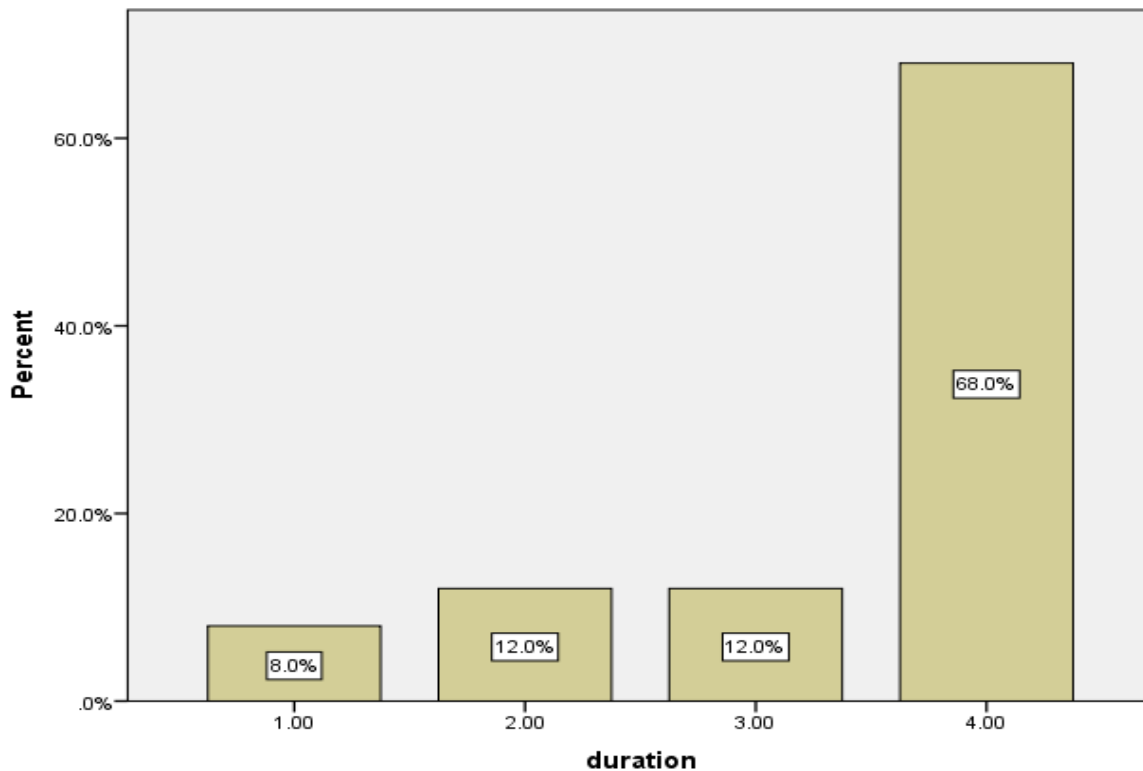
Family size is one of the important variables to determine the socio-economic condition of participants. In the study, 48% of participants (12 participants) had small family size with less than 4 family members whereas 36% (9 participants) had medium family size with 5-8 family members. And it was found that 16% of participants had joint family of more than 8 family members.

4. Occupational Family Legacy



Over the past decades, the occupation of crafting is passed from one generation to other as an heirloom in Nepal. Among 26 participants, about 46.92% (20 participants) responded continuation of their occupational family legacy, however, 23.08% (6participants) have chosen this occupation out of interest without any family legacy.

5. Period of involvement in occupation



1= < 1 year

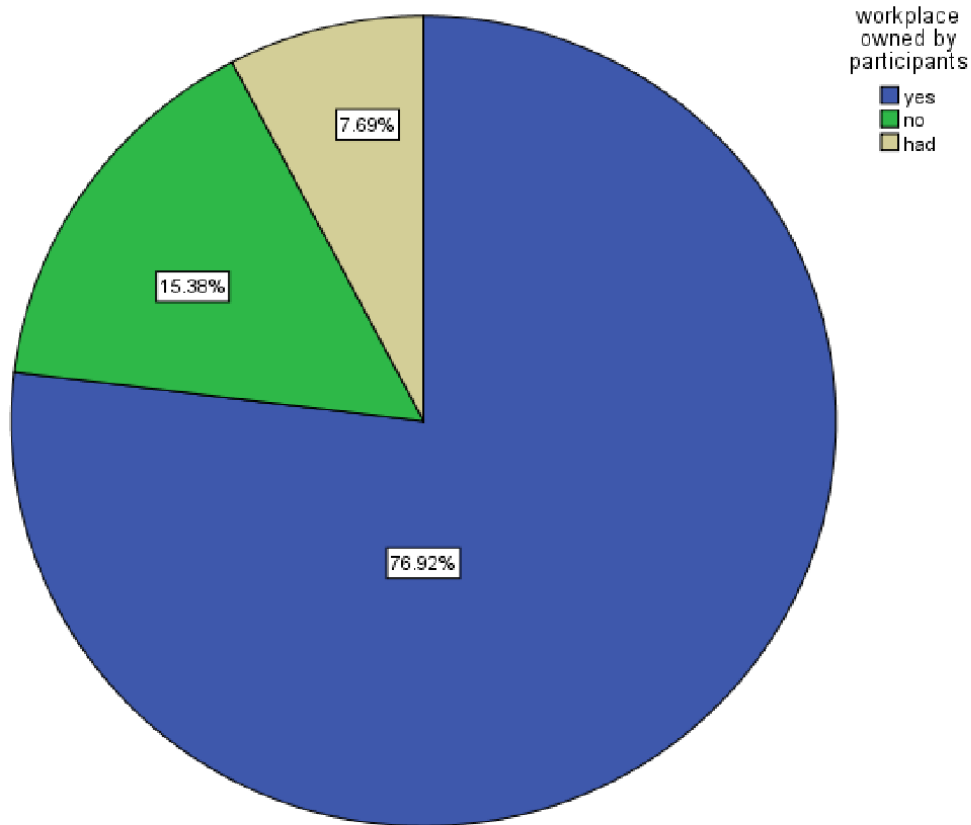
2= 2-10 years

3= 11-20 years

4= 21 years and above

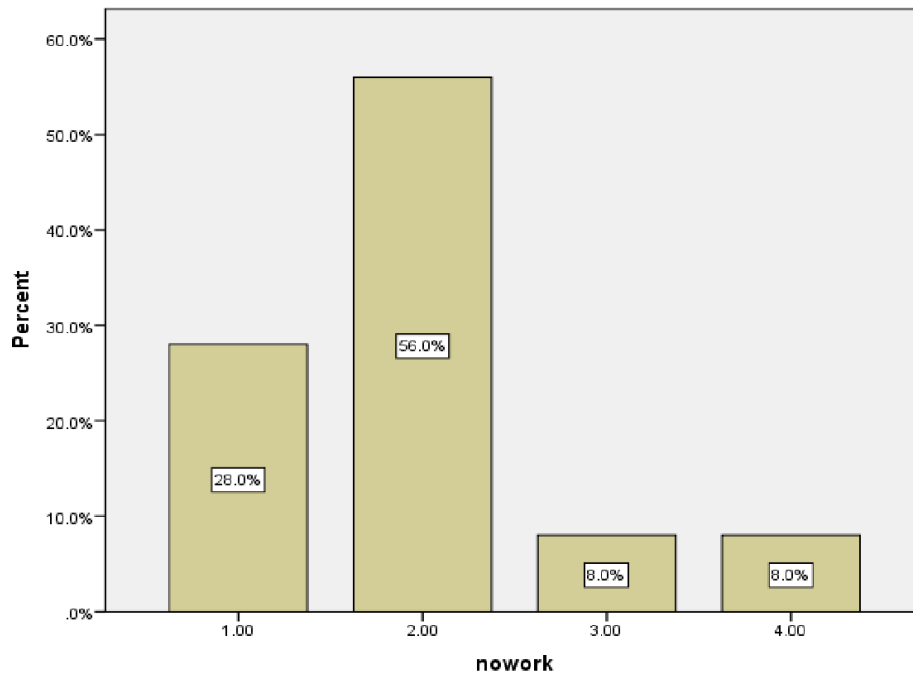
Among 26 participants, 68% of participants responded their involvement in this occupation for more than 21 years and 12% of participants were involved for 11-20 years. 12% of participants stated their involvement in this occupation ranged between 2-10 years. Only 8% of participants were involved in this occupation for less than one year.

6. Workplace



Among 26 participants, 76.92% of participants informed that they owned workplace where they work as self-employed businessman. However, 15.36% of participants responded of not owing any workplace rather working on other's firm or under project. 7.69% of participants informed that they had workplace before the earthquake 2015 but now they work in other's factories.

7. Duration of 'No work' after the earthquake



Among 26 participants, 56% of participants informed that they could not work for 1-6 months after the earthquake. 28% of participants said they continued their work right after the earthquake whereas 8% of participants reported their work to have been paused for about 7-12 months after the earthquake. Only 8% of participants informed of having no work for more than 13 months.

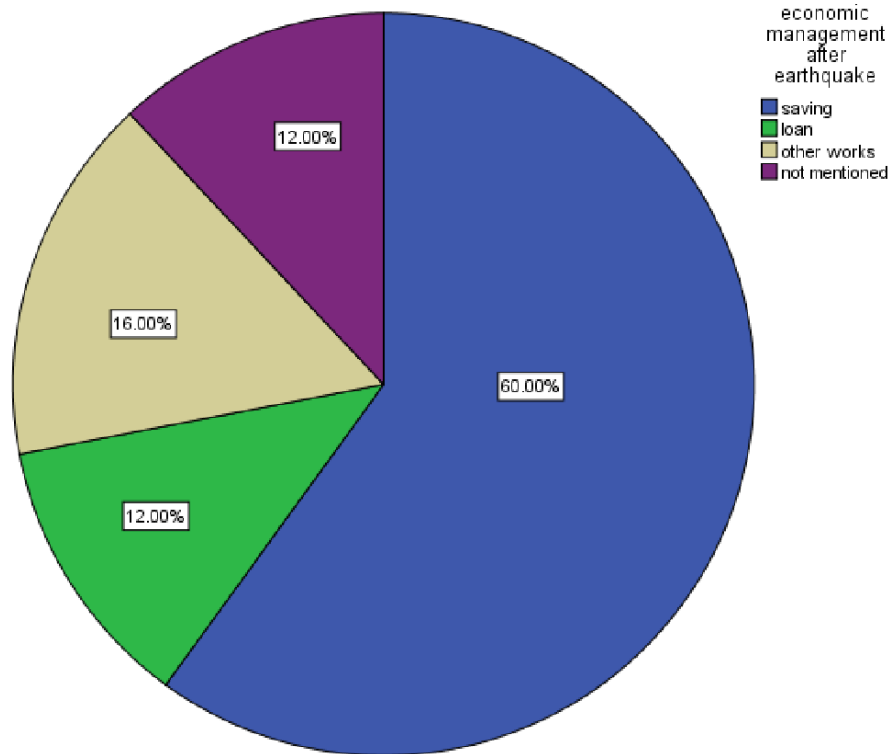
1= no pause

2= 1-6 months

3= 7-12 months

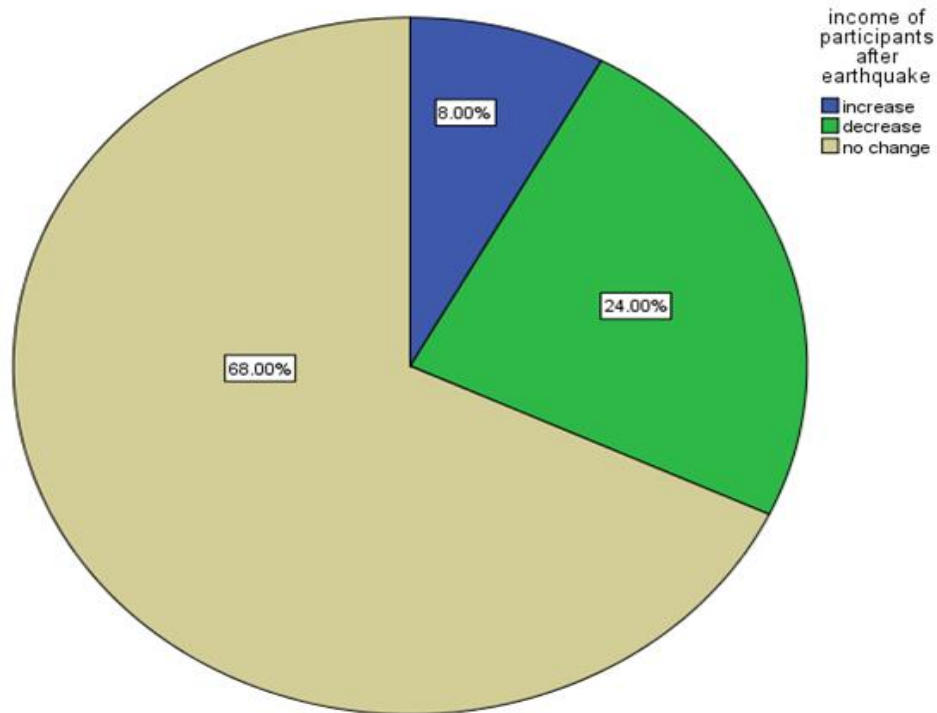
4= above 13 months

8. Economic management after earthquake



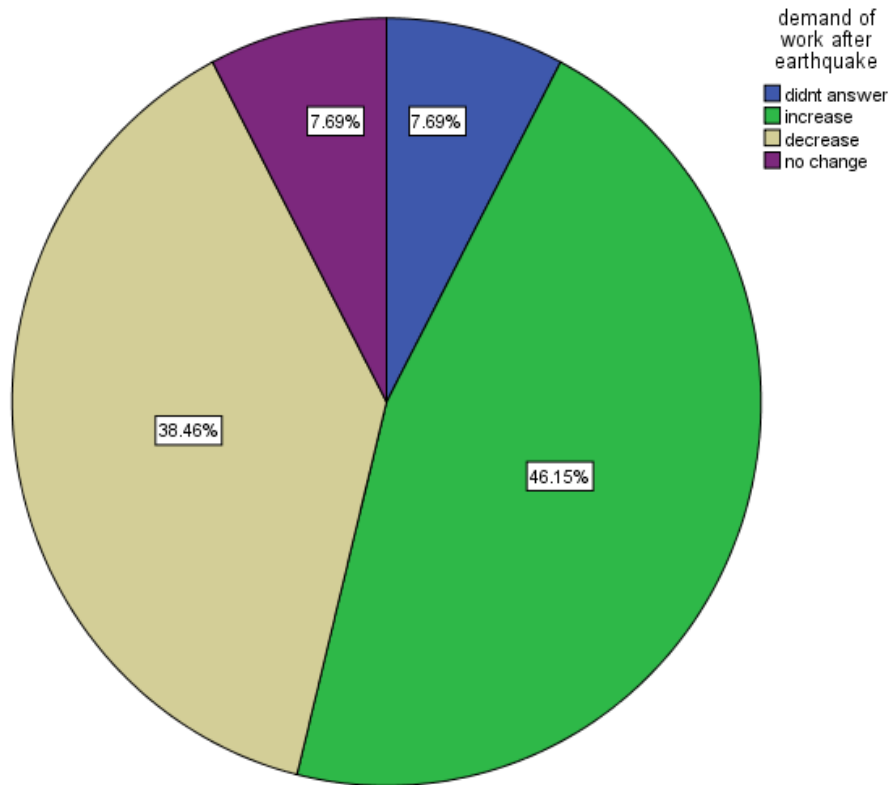
Economic management after earthquake is an important variable to understand the socio-economic status of participants where they responded about their income and economic management during the emergency period. Among 26 participants, 12% participants did not respond to the question regarding the economic management after earthquake. Among responded participants, 60% of them informed that they were able to manage their daily expenses from their saving. 16% of participants informed that they worked right after earthquake to manage the economy of family. 12% of participants responded that they needed loans to maintain financial stability after earthquake.

9. Changes in Income



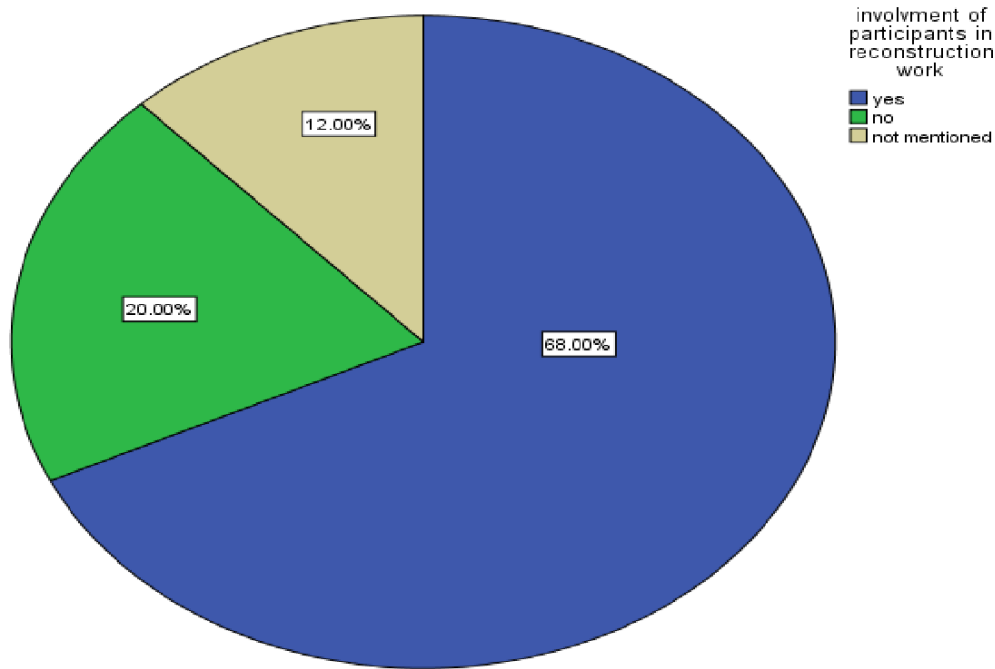
Regarding the changes in income after earthquake, 68% of participants from 26 total participants reported no change in their income. 24% of participants answered their income has decreased whereas 8% of participants reported the increment of their income after the earthquake.

10. Demand of Work



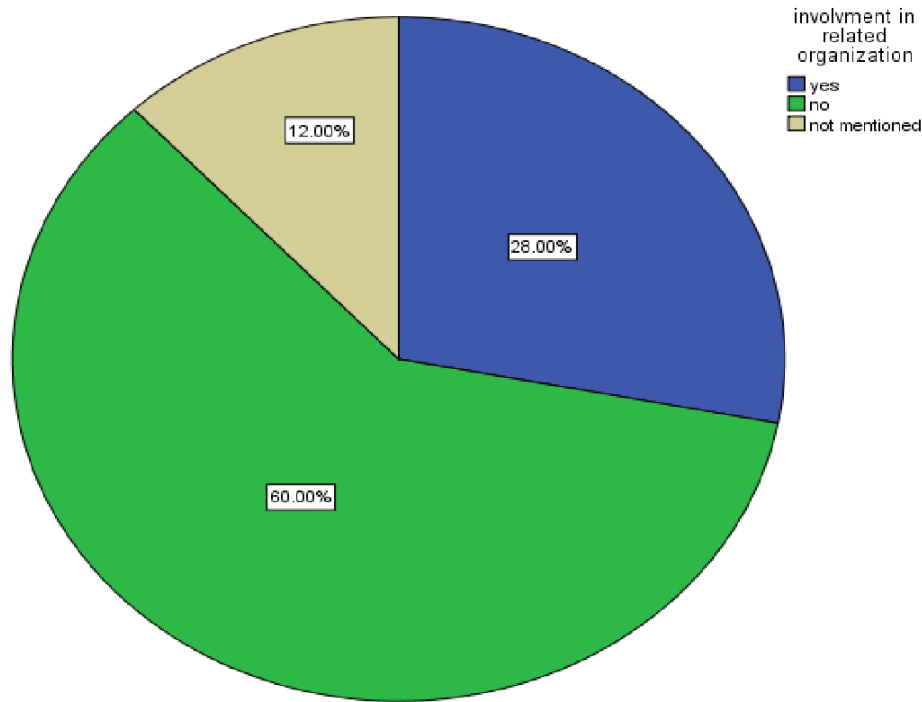
Among 26 participants, 7.69% of participants didn't answer to the question. 46.15% of participants said that there is increase in the demand of work after earthquake while 38.46% of participants reported that there is decrease in the demand of work after earthquake. In addition, 7.69% of participants answered of no change in work demand after the earthquake.

11. Involvement of participants in reconstruction



The involvement of participants in reconstruction is an important variable which connects their changes in demand of work and income. Among 26 participants, 12% of participants didn't respond to the question or not mentioned during interview. 68% of participants responded their involvement in reconstruction works under different projects run by governments and non-governmental bodies. 20% of participants answered of no involvement in any reconstruction works.

12. Involvement in related organization



The work demand and contribution in reconstruction is influenced by the involvement of participants in related organization. 12% of participants did not mention their involvement in related organization. 28% of participants informed their involvement in such organizations whereas 60% of participants were not involved in any of related organization.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

- Many craftsmen went abroad in search of better source of income when the work was paused after the earthquake.
- Advancement of technology has made the lives of craftsmen easier over the years
- Foreigners come to Nepal to learn crafting and take lessons from local craftsmen for months.
- Politics and Nepotism involved in the reconstruction and restoration projects is delaying the restoration process.
- Nepal blockade by India made the lives more difficult than the earthquake itself.
- Local market flourished than international. Goods were bought by Nepalese people rather than exported.

DISCUSSION

Total of 26 people were interviewed, voluntarily and with consent, for this project among all the other people approached during the process. Distinct gender gap was seen as only 3 out of 26 participants were female. The average age of the subjects is 45years having involved in the crafting sector for over 20years. This clearly shows the less involvement of youth in this sector. Most of the subjects belonged to middle and lower-middle income families and the highest level of education obtained was secondary level education. Most of them mentioned that they had joined the craft sector at a very young age hence, they couldn't complete their further education. As mentioned by the participants, they got involved in carving sector as a part of family legacy. It was found that people from one of the ethnic communities in Nepal, Newari, are mostly involved in wood, stone and metal carving.

Fortunately, none of the subjects faced human loss during Earthquake 2015 but most of their houses were damaged. Craftsmen's mental health was also affected by Earthquake 2015 along with their financial condition. When asked, they informed us that most of them couldn't work for few months because they were disturbed psychologically and also the workplaces were ruined. As per information given by the participants, there had been a pause of at least 1-6months in their work which affected their economic status. On an average, savings and loans helped the participants sustain their livelihood during the phase of no work. Even though majority of the participants faced no drastic income change after earthquake, significant number (24%) of the participants mentioned decrease in their income. It was divulged during the interview that due to the decrease in the flow of tourist after Earthquake 2015, their businesses declined. Other factors mentioned by the participants were: not being able to work, many workers left for abroad due to no work, less trade etc.

With the loss of many culturally significant sites, the demand of the work for the craftsmen increased (46.15% of participants said that there is increase in the demand of work after earthquake). Out of 26 participants 68% of participants revealed about their involvement in reconstruction works under different projects run by government and non-governmental bodies. It was saddening to learn about the nepotism involved in the craft sector where craftsmen got opportunities based on their connections rather than their skills. We were informed by the participants that even though there is high demand of work they are not being able to work because people of higher authority tend to give jobs to their near and dear ones. The participants also expressed their frustrations regarding lack of raw materials and when the concerns are expressed there is no response from the government side. It has been difficult for them to work despite investing lots of energy, time and money.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it was an enlightening project as we got to hear the first-hand information about socio economic condition of the craftsmen from the craftsmen themselves. Despite the increase in demand of the work, their condition worsened because of the financial crisis which involved many other factors than earthquake itself. The other factors contributing to the mourning are politics in the restoration projects, Nepal blockade by India and crisis of manpower in the field. Even though it was disheartening to find out that the economic condition of the craftsmen had declined in general but at the same time it was interesting learning about the rise of local customers. The rise of local costumers indicated the elevation in respect given to the craftsmen and their contribution for reconstruction process. The craftsmen haven't completely acquired the socio-economic status they deserve however, they status is increasing slowly. One important thing that remains constant is that when we talk about preserving cultural heritage, we need to understand that it's the craftsmen that we should preserve rather than the monument itself as they are the ones who are preserving the skeleton of the nation.

LIMITATIONS

- Due to lack of knowledge of local language, we could not interact with most of the people and we could not get access to the local places too.
- The questionnaire hasd to be modified according to the demand of the situation as participants preferred sharing their stories more than answering our questions.
- As researches were from different parts of the Kathmandu Valley, meeting and working together was more time consuming and tiring.



THANK YOU