

*This paper was presented for the International Conference on Gross National Happiness on GNH, held in Paro, Bhutan from 4-6 November 2015*

## **Gender Differences in Gross National Happiness in Bhutan: Analysis of GNH Surveys**

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### **Abstract**

At a moment when market-oriented, techno-centric and consumption-led approaches prevail in response to otherwise complex socio-cultural and political-economic realities, innovative concepts from Bhutan present an alternative bearing on equitable, sustainable and holistic development. Elaborated in 1972 by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the 4<sup>th</sup> King of Bhutan, GNH is encoded in Bhutan's constitution, the driving philosophy its development process (Ura et al., in press; Thinley, 2005), and is gaining momentum as an alternative development approach globally (SNDP, 2013). While GNH has been studied from several angles – social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, philosophical, spiritual, psychological, etc. – there has been little discussion regarding gender differences. Recognizing this as a critical gap, this study seeks to better understand gender differences in Bhutan. It does so through the disaggregation and analysis of the GNH nationwide survey data, domains and indicators by gender, triangulation of the findings with secondary data, and their contextualization within contemporary debates of gender and development. We believe that such an exercise is critical, given the disconnects that exist between perceptions of gender 'neutrality', 'equality' based on women's relatively strong position in Bhutan, and the GNH data, which demonstrate striking differences and statistically significant findings between and among women and men. Such an analysis is also timely, given the Royal Government of Bhutan's efforts to pro-actively address gender issues that crosscut the GNH domains and shape changing gender relations, culture and society. The findings highlight important innovations in the GNH approach that deepen and widen gender

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analyses, while also indicating gaps in gender research, policy-making and action required towards wellbeing.

**Key words:** GNH, Bhutan, development, wellbeing, gender, equality.



*When we decompose the GNH index by gender we see that men are happier than women. 49% of men are happy, while only one third of women are happy, a result that is both striking and statistically significant (Ura et al., 2012a:58).*

## **Introduction**

At a moment when market-oriented, techno-centric and consumption-led approaches prevail in response to otherwise complex socio-cultural and political-economic realities, innovative concepts from Bhutan present an alternative bearing on equitable, sustainable and holistic development. Gross National Happiness (GNH) is an innovative philosophy and concept that counters the problematic dominance of gross domestic product (GDP) within development. A reflexive, deliberate, and middle-path approach to development, it has been the backbone of development research, policy and living practice of the Royal Government of Bhutan since the 1970s (Ura et al., 2015, 2012a, 2012b; Thinley 2012).

Elaborated in 1972 by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the 4<sup>th</sup> King of Bhutan, GNH is encoded in Bhutan's constitution and the driving philosophy its development process (Ura et al., in press; Thinley, 2005). It is also gaining momentum as an alternative development approach globally (SNDP, 2013), especially in light of critical debates that point to the numerous failures, negative unintended effects and disconnects of development (Mosse, 2005; Agrawal, 1996; Ferguson, 1994). Similarly, GNH provides a much-needed antidote to the narrow framing of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) which excludes culture but shapes much of dominant development efforts in the post-2015 development era. Most notably, GNH is reinforced by growing and compelling evidence that people's wellbeing and happiness does not depend only on income, consumption and growth at all costs (Stiglitz et al., 2009; Piketty, 2014). Hence, there is a fundamental disconnect between GDP and wellbeing (Brooks, 2013). GNH addresses this issue through its multi-dimensional nature, which distinguishes it from simplistic measures of subjective wellbeing, its holistic conceptualization of human development, and its usefulness to policy makers (ibid.). For GNH, economic growth is not an end in

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itself but a means for holistic development, given that it balances economic needs, with emotional, spiritual, cultural, ecological, political and social needs.

While GNH has been studied and operationalized from several angles – social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, philosophical, spiritual, psychological, etc. – there has been little discussion regarding gender differences. Recognizing this as a critical gap, this study seeks to better understand gender differences in Bhutan. It does so through the disaggregation and analysis of the GNH nationwide survey data, domains and indicators by gender, triangulation of the findings with secondary data, and their contextualization within contemporary debates of gender and development. We believe that such an exercise is critical, given the disconnects that exist between perceptions of gender ‘neutrality’, ‘equality’ based on women’s relatively strong position in Bhutan, and the GNH data, which demonstrate striking differences and statistically significant findings between and among women and men. Such an analysis is also timely, given the Royal Government of Bhutan’s efforts to pro-actively address gender issues that crosscut the GNH domains and shape changing gender relations, culture and society. The findings indicate important innovations in the GNH approach that deepen and widen gender analysis, while also highlighting gaps in gender research, policy-making and action required towards wellbeing.

This paper is a condensed version of a forthcoming CBS monograph that analyzes both the 2010 and 2015 GNH survey findings from a gender analytical perspective (Verma and Ura, forthcoming). The initial findings from the 2010 survey were first presented at the Bhutan+10 Gender and Sustainable Development Conference (Verma and Ura, 2012) followed by the International GNH Conference: From Philosophy to Praxis and Policy (Verma and Ura, 2015). At the time of writing, the 2015 GNH findings were in the process of being analyzed, hence this paper contains partial analysis from the recent survey in 2015, but focuses primarily on the 2010 findings. The paper begins by elaborating GNH conceptually from the lens of gender, and framing it within key dimensions of gender analysis. This is followed by the analysis of the overall GNH findings from the 2010 and 2015 GNH survey findings, as well as more specific analysis of gender differences in the GNH domains and indicators from the 2010 GNH survey. The paper concludes by reflecting on the findings and suggesting recommendations for action-oriented development, policy-making, gender analysis and future research beyond 2015.

### **Theoretical Framing: GNH and Gender Analysis**

The theoretical framework for this study brings together the central tenets of GNH with key concepts from critical gender analysis, the anthropology of development, and feminist political ecology. These are brought together to inform and shape the analysis of the data in terms of gender differences in GNH. We begin by reviewing the seven manifestations of GNH (Verma, forthcoming, in press), before comparing, contrasting and highlighting the convergence of GNH with key elements of gender analysis.

### ***The Seven Manifestations of Gross National Happiness***

GNH is many things at once. It is a moral concept, as well as guiding principles for holistic development, a development conceptual framework, an index of measurement, policy and project screening tools, individual practice and global influence (Verma, 2016, 2015, in press, forthcoming). Given this multiplicity of meanings and practice, it is useful to briefly overview each in turn, before elaborating how it cross-cuts with gender analysis.

First, GNH is a moral concept that establishes the foundational influence for its other manifestations. Although a secular moral concept that has influenced and been adapted in different countries around the world, it is implicitly anchored by Buddhist principles (Verma, 2016, forthcoming; Givel, 2015; Wangmo and Valk, 2012; Tashi, 2004). Its holistic nature integrates core moral elements of Buddhism. Its middle-path approach reflects Buddhist principles of avoiding extremes and maintaining a balanced view (GNHC, 1999). Hence, GNH balances economic needs with spiritual and emotional needs, maximizes wellbeing with minimizing suffering, and nuances outer happiness with inner happiness and material wellbeing with non-material wellbeing. It emphasizes interdependence and inter-connectedness of all phenomena through its multi-dimensional nature and equal weighting of all its nine domains, which are themselves inspired by Buddhism (Wangmo and Valk, 2012). Buddhist engagement with happiness is at the core of GNH. Happiness, in this sense, is distinct from “fleeting, pleasurable and ‘feel good’ moods so often associated with the term [happiness]... we know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only by serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds” (Thinley, 2012). GNH strives for deeper, more meaningful and long-term attainment of happiness, rather than temporary forms. It focuses on inner-contentment, peace and non-attachment, rather than material comfort and fleeting pleasures alone. Collective happiness, concern and service for others, and harmony with nature and all sentient beings, distinctly sets GNH apart from mainstream notions of development normally concerned with an individualistic and material sense of happiness and narrowly defined notions of progress. In Bhutan, the main goal of development is the collective happiness of people, whereby happiness reflects the creation, support and provision of enabling conditions by the State, wherein people are able to pursue wellbeing and attain happiness in sustainable and balanced ways (Ura et al., 2012a; Ura, 2009). While the State has an important role in providing such enabling conditions, individuals also have a responsibility towards the attainment of both individual and collective happiness, as well as inner and outer conditions for happiness.

Second, GNH is a set of guiding principles for holistic development. GNH is founded on Bhutan’s innovative thinking on development. It dates back to the unification of the country in 1729, where the legal code by Zhabdrung Rimpoche declared “if the Government cannot create happiness (*dekid*) for its people, there is no purpose for the

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Government to exist” (Ura et al., 2012a). Defined in 1961 by the 3rd King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, it is upheld as a middle path between culture and modernization, and is meant to counter the strong homogenizing effects of globalization (Ura, 2005). In 1968, he further elaborated, “there would be no point in developing our country if our people are to suffer. After all the objective of development is to make the people prosperous and happy” (Priesner, 1999). Based on these important historical foundations, Gross National Happiness was meaningfully elaborated as a central guiding principle by the 4th King of Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in response to a growing concern over problematic GDP metrics commonly used to guide development. He declared Bhutan’s policy to achieve economic self-reliance, prosperity and happiness for its people through GNH, which was understood as being more important than GDP and thus, economic and techno-centric growth. Following this legacy, the 5th King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, declared that the essence of the philosophy of GNH centred on peace, security and happiness; without them “we have nothing” (RGoB, 2008). He further elaborated that GNH is development with values (Ura et al., in press).

Third, GNH as a development conceptual framework is based on the elaboration of four pillars that shapes development thinking and practice in Bhutan. The four pillars include i) the preservation of culture, ii) environmental conservation, iii) equitable and sustainable socio-economic development, and iv) good governance. Holistic development cannot be achieved by any of the pillars on their own, and therefore they are given equal weight and considered holistically together. Such an approach differs from sectoral approaches that predominantly dominate development, which despite discourses that claim otherwise, focus on economic-centric principles of GDP and technical interventions. Most notably, the GNH conceptual framework is considerably more robust and progressive than other dominant conceptual frameworks in development, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the Human Development Index (HDI), all of which exclude culture. The inclusion of culture not only sets GNH apart from other development conceptual frameworks, but also gives it equal weight with other domains. Thin et al. suggest, “this in itself is considered a good practice, in contrast to way culture is sometimes marginalized in numerous development frameworks, organizations and discourses” (2013:18). The current tendency in development is to advantage market-oriented, economic-centred and techno-centric discourses and practices, while disadvantaging, devaluing and rendering invisible cultural aspects of development, societies and life-as-lived (ibid.).

GNH is further elaborated in its conceptualization in a fourth area that is operationalized as an index of measurement. The GNH index periodically measures levels of happiness and wellbeing in Bhutan approximately every five years. The index is made up of nine domains, rooted in the four pillars, which are aggregated to assess happiness at the national level. The nine domains of GNH as elaborated in figure 1 include 33 indicators that inform the GNH questionnaire: i) health (4 indicators), ii) education (4 indicators),

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iii) living standards (3 indicators), iv) ecological diversity and resilience (4 indicators), v) good governance (4 indicators), vi) cultural diversity and resilience (4 indicators), vii) time use (2 indicators), viii) psychological wellbeing (4 indicators), and ix) community vitality (4 indicators). The 9 domains are equally weighted while the 33 clustered indicators are relatively equally weighted but with more weight allocated indicators considered more reliable (see Ura et al., 2012a, 2012b for a detailed discussion). Once aggregated, people are deemed to be happy if they achieve sufficiency in two-thirds of the indicators, and deeply happy if they achieve it in 77 %; whereas those who are unhappy achieve sufficiency in fewer than half, and more than half but less than two-thirds respectively (Ura et al., 2012a).



**Figure 1: Nine Domains of GNH (source: CBS)**

Fifth, GNH is translated into objectives that provide strategic direction to Bhutan's long-term development (GNHC, 2011a). The four pillars give tangible expression to the central tenets of GNH, and "they also embody the guiding principles that have been identified as being of decisive importance in ensuring our future independence, sovereignty and security" (ibid.:12). The four pillars have been operationalized into policy and practice in the Royal Government of Bhutan's 10th and 11th five-year plans. The GNH Index is attuned to policy-making as it reflects changes over time in response to public action and policy priorities, to reflect strengthening or deterioration in the social, cultural and environmental fabric (Ura et al., 2012a). The Index measures progress over time, by region and social groups, and is therefore relevant in assessing current as well as future happiness and wellbeing. GNH indicators are useful tools for accountability and good governance, as they can enable citizens to evaluate and hold accountable their leaders, by assessing whether the targets shown in the indicators are being fulfilled (Ura et al., in press). They can also assist in building a common national vision as well as planning around them. For example, the GNH policy and project

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screening tools, based on the GNH indicators, contribute to policy coherence of government programmes and projects with GNH principles. They are being used by government agencies such as the GNHC (Gross National Happiness Commission) to determine whether policies and projects are aligned with GNH. For instance, GNH policy screening tools were used to assess the National Youth Policy, the National Forest Policy and National Human Resource Development Policy, resulting in the evaluation that it was GNH-favourable and within the GNH screening tool threshold (GNHC, 2011b). They systematically assessed the possibility of Bhutan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), resulting in the conclusion that the new policy was not GNH favourable (ibid.).

Given that wellbeing and happiness are both the responsibility of the state and the individual, a sixth area where GNH influences development is its translation into individual practice. While the State's central concern with happiness plays an important key role in ensuring enabling conditions for the realization of wellbeing, happiness and enlightenment, it is also important to note the responsibility of individual citizens as active participants in the process. Hence, the individual nonetheless plays an active role in their achievement. This role entails understanding the central tenets of GNH, as elaborated above, and putting into practice in everyday life the behaviours, attitudes and practices that are central to achieving happiness and wellbeing, both individually and collectively. In Bhutan, the central monastic body plays an important enabling role in this process. New NGOs such as the GNH Centre also help individuals and in particular, foreign tourists, in understanding and practicing GNH.

The seventh manifestation of GNH centres on its global influence. While most efforts to deepen and implement GNH are focused within Bhutan, there have also been notable efforts in contributing to and influencing international dialogues on wider concerns of development. GNH is considered one viable and living alternative to mainstream development, and hence, not only provides an alternative lens for conceptualizing development, but also important lessons for the implementation of an alternative vision (Verma, 2015). Over the years, CBS has been at the heart of several scholarly and research efforts share findings of GNH on the international stage, through its ambitious publications goals (including the Journal of Bhutan Studies, Conference Proceedings, Monographs, etc.) and holding of periodic international conferences on GNH. Most notably, major strides have been made by the Royal Government of Bhutan through a two-year project spear-headed by the Secretariat for the New Development Paradigm (SNDP). Set up in June 2012, the initiative proposed a new development paradigm based on the principles of Gross National Happiness. The Secretariat is supported by an International Expert Working Group (IEWG), composed of distinguished scholars from around the world working on various aspects of happiness, wellbeing and development. The initiative worked towards the translation of GNH into a secular development framework ("The New Development Paradigm") and the elaboration of specific suggestions for policy objectives and strategies that are relevant beyond Bhutan. Major

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activities include the resolution 65/309 on *Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach* submitted by the Royal Government of Bhutan and unanimously passed by the United Nations General Assembly on August 25, 2011 (UNGA, 2011), organization of a High Level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness at U.N. Headquarters in New York in April 2012, the meeting of the IEWG in January 2013, and the publication of key reports submitted to the United Nations on a New Development Paradigm (SNDP, 2013; RGoB, 2012).

### ***Convergences and Disconnects of Gender and GNH***

The above discussion provides a brief overview of GNH through its seven manifestations. While the study and operationalization of GNH has yielded valuable insights on multiple dimensions of development, there has been limited analysis from a gender perspective. This paper hopes to address this urgent gap in the analysis of GNH. In order to enable a systematic gendered analysis of GNH, the central concern of this paper, we highlight the convergence of GNH and gender analysis, as well as areas of disconnect that require attention. Given that gender analysis often takes different forms depending on the types of tools or conceptual frameworks that are adopted<sup>2</sup>, it is useful to briefly overview the foundations and specific theoretical framing of gender analysis used for this paper.

Rather than being singular or static, gender analysis has evolved from simplistic approaches situated in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>3</sup> that focused on women, to more complex approaches centred on gender power relations over time. Emanating from earlier approaches commonly referred to as “gender mainstreaming”, such efforts have yielded weak results, failures and important lessons (Cornwall et al., 2007). Nonetheless, problematic out-dated approaches continue to be used in many development contexts, due to problematic conceptualization, resources, commitment, traction, championing and in many contexts, resistance to deeper and meaningful gender transformative change (Verma and Blaikie; Cornwall et al., 2007). In this context, the need for “business as *unusual*” approaches such as gender analysis that have the potential for action-oriented gender transformative change, as we elaborate below, has never been more pressing or important (Verma, 2013).

Gender analysis, broadly defined, is the systematic examination of power and social relations between and among women and men in varied socio-cultural contexts over time, focusing on differences in access to resources, multiple roles, workloads, representation, voice, agency and status (ibid.). The conceptual framework used in this

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<sup>2</sup> Several conceptual tools, have been conventionally used for the analysis of gender in development by various organizations, including the Harvard Analytical Framework, Moser Framework, Gender Analysis Matrix, Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis Framework, Women’s Empowerment Framework, etc.; this paper engages in what is termed the “social relations” framework (see March et al., 1999).

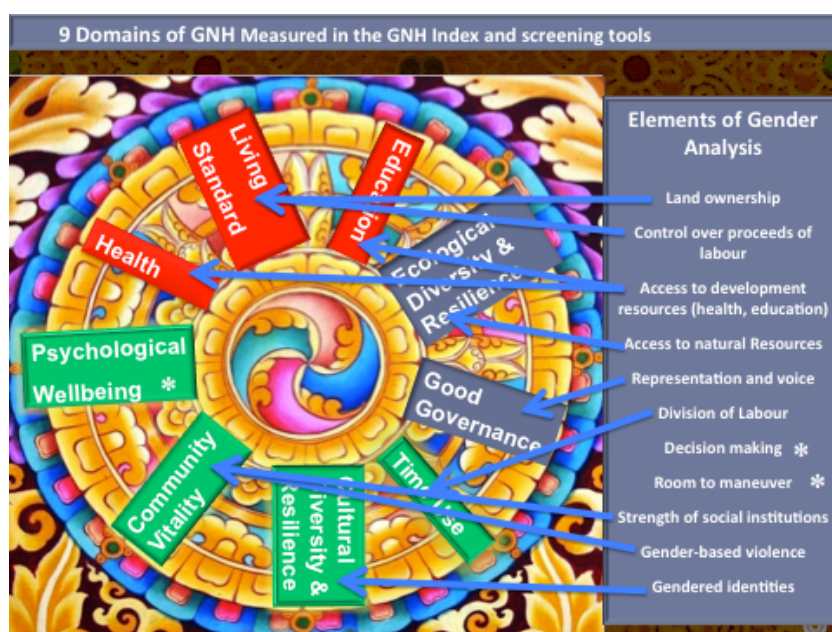
<sup>3</sup> In general, conceptual frameworks have evolved from positivist, largely ineffective and weak approaches encapsulated in Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches from the 1970s to the 1980s (see Sweetnam, 2012; Leach, 2007; Rathgeber, 2005; Parpart and Marchand, 1995).



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paper is founded in feminist political ecology and is concerned with analysis within households, communities (Nightingale, 2003) and between individuals, including their roles in shaping gendered identities and differences. In such a post-structural framing, gender cross-cuts with multiple domains of difference such as class, marital status, age, life-cycle positioning, occupation, location, etc. (Nightingale 2006; Mackenzie 1995; Verma 2001). It problematizes the conceptualization of women and men as flat and closed homogenous categories, and instead emphasizes the lived experiences and the diversity and multiple identities of women and men that are fluid and change over time (Verma and Khadka, in press).

Moving beyond from out-dated gender “mainstreaming” approaches, gender transformative change goes beyond identifying and exploring the symptoms of gender equality, and addresses socially constructed norms, attitudes, and relations of power that underlie them (Verma, 2013). It is committed to rigorous gender analysis, organizational change, capacity and institutional strengthening, and ensuring gender positive impact through meaningful participation of women and men in leadership, policy and decision-making processes and institutions. (ibid.). Gender analysis, as elaborated within such a framework, considers several important mutually supportive elements. As outlined on the right-side of figure 2 below, these include gendered dimensions of access to development resources, access to development resources and services, land ownership, control over the proceeds of labour, division of labour, decision-making, room to maneuver, strength of social institutions, gender based violence, gendered identities, and representation and voice.



**Figure 2: Juxtaposition of GNH Domains and Key Elements of Gender Analysis**

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The juxtaposition of GNH with gender analysis illustrates that GNH contains within it several key elements that are also important for gender analysis. To begin with, the conceptual framework of GNH includes a pillar that focuses explicitly on the equitable nature of sustainable socio-economic development. The focus on equity is well-aligned with the central tenets of gender analysis. Gender analysis is congruent with many of the GNH domains. For instance, gender-disaggregated time use highlights the gender division of labour and in particular, women's uncounted, invisible and undervalued work in reproductive, productive, community and care spheres (Kabeer, 1994). This invisibility has been pointed out by many eminent feminists as a missing but important dimension in national systems of accounts (Waring and Steinem, 1989). Many gender indices around the world fail to take into account time use, including the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), and UNDP's Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII)<sup>4</sup>. Time use is one of the innovative domains of GNH, thereby demonstrating its progressive nature. Other congruences include land ownership and control over the proceeds of labour with GNH's living standards domain; access to development resources with GNH's education and health domains; access to natural resources with GNH's ecological diversity and resilience; representation and voice with GNH's good governance domain; strength of social institutions and gender-based violence with GNH's community vitality; gendered identities with GNH's cultural diversity and resilience. Given that gender is a cross-cutting issue across all domains and indicators, GNH illustrates its in-built ability to measure gender inequalities through gender disaggregated data collected in the national surveys.

There are also exist some disconnects between the two conceptual frameworks. For example, GNH lacks elements such as decision-making and room to maneuver that are important to gender analysis in understanding intra-household dynamics. Conversely, the inclusion of psychological wellbeing in GNH is an element that is commonly missing from gender analysis, but needs to be considered as the discussion of key GNH findings below demonstrate. These issues also point to methodological gaps that can be attributed to the heavy reliance of surveys in the case of GNH. Gender analysis that focuses primarily on statistical data provides important data on the breadth of gender issues between women and men at the national level, but tends to lack rich depth of data that is the hallmark of gender analysis through qualitative and ethnographic methods. Such methods are often used in scholarly and academic work to understand gender

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<sup>4</sup> GII measures gender equality in three areas of human development including reproductive health, empowerment and economic status; GDI measures gender disparities three basic dimensions of human development including health, knowledge and living standards using the same component indicators as in the HDI; the SIGI index measures five dimensions of discriminatory social institutions that affect women's lives: discriminatory family code, restricted physical integrity, son bias, restricted resources and assets, and restricted civil liberties; and the GGGI measures gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria.

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power relations (sometimes in tandem with quantitative data, to ensure both breadth and depth of understanding), the richness of women's and men's everyday lived experiences, and in particular gender struggles, negotiations and resistances at multiple levels and scales, from the individual to the household, community and nation.

### **Gender Differences in Overall GNH Findings**

Overall findings refer to nationally aggregated levels of happiness, as captured by the GNH index. When we compare overall gender differences in the GNH index in 2010 and 2015, some important findings emerge. In 2010, the national GNH survey resulted in a GNH index of 0.743. In terms of gender, the GNH index was 0.704 for women compared to 0.783 for men, thereby demonstrating a difference of 0.079 (approximately an 11.2% difference). In 2015, the national GNH survey resulted in a GNH index of 0.756, a slight improvement from 2010. In terms of gender, the 2015 GNH index was 0.730 for women and 0.793 for men. The difference between women and men was 0.063 (approximately a 8.6% difference). Hence, the gender gap closed by only 2.6%.

In 2010, 41% of people in Bhutan were happy and in 2015, 43.4% of people in Bhutan were happy (as stated earlier, people are deemed to be happy if they achieve sufficiency in two-thirds of the indicators)<sup>5</sup>. In comparing the decomposition of the GNH index by gender in 2010 and 2015, we note that men were happier than women in both survey years. In 2010, 49% of men were happy, while only 33% of women were happy, "a result that is both striking and statistically significant" (Ura et al., 2012a:58). In 2015, 51% of men were happy, compared to 39% of women. This is a significant gender gap. During this time period, while men's happiness increased by 2%, women's happiness increased by 6%. Overall, women's GNH increased faster than men's 2010-2015, reducing the gap in gender differences in happiness somewhat during this period. However, men continue to be happier than women in both survey years, which points to persistent gender inequalities.

The existence of persistent gender inequalities in happiness over the five-year period is an important overall finding of the GNH surveys. It is significant because it challenges earlier discourses of gender "neutrality" (that no gender issues exist) or of gender "equality" in Bhutan (the existence equality between women and men in terms of their value, treatment, opportunities and benefits in society) (Verma and Ura, forthcoming; CEDAW, 2009a; Crins, 2008). Whether it is a gender revolution that is needed, or a gender evolution (Verma and Gurung, in press), it is clear that gender inequalities must be urgently addressed. In this regard, the shift from the earlier position articulated above, to one of growing recognition and action by the Royal Government of Bhutan through its various Ministries and Commissions as well as by civil society organizations, has been rapid. Policy shifts, gender responsive action and accelerated research on

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<sup>5</sup> When comparing happiness, the GNH survey considers different levels of happiness as follows: people who are deeply happy (77% to 100%), people who are extensively happy (66% to 76%), people who are narrowly happy (50% to 65%) and people who are unhappy (0% to 49%).

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gender issues have made great strides in a short period of time. One important example is the recent Cabinet of Bhutan's endorsement of six months of paid maternity leave along with six months of flexi-time for women in the civil service, who represent 34.4% of a total of 26,699 civil servants (Pokhrel, 2015). Another example is the parliament of Bhutan's passing of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Parliament of Bhutan, 2013), an important step in addressing the growing number of registered gender-based violence cases in Bhutan (Wangmo, 2013; RENEW, 2007). Many other examples exist and are coming into force as the Royal Government of Bhutan becomes increasingly aware, cognizant and committed to addressing gender inequalities that have been highlighted through national and international research and dialogue over time (CEDAW, 2009a, 2009b). In this regard, the GNH survey plays an important role in providing statistically relevant and significant data towards this goal. In contributing towards this aim, the Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH research included a panel at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on GNH in November 2015 on gender issues, where this paper was also presented (CBS, 2015). Gender differences in GNH are further unpacked below through detailed analysis of the various GNH domains and indicators. It is important to note that while this paper stressed gender, some of the graphs presented below from the 2010 survey are articulated in terms of sex (i.e. biological differences) as signified by male and female differences. This is an issue we discuss further below.

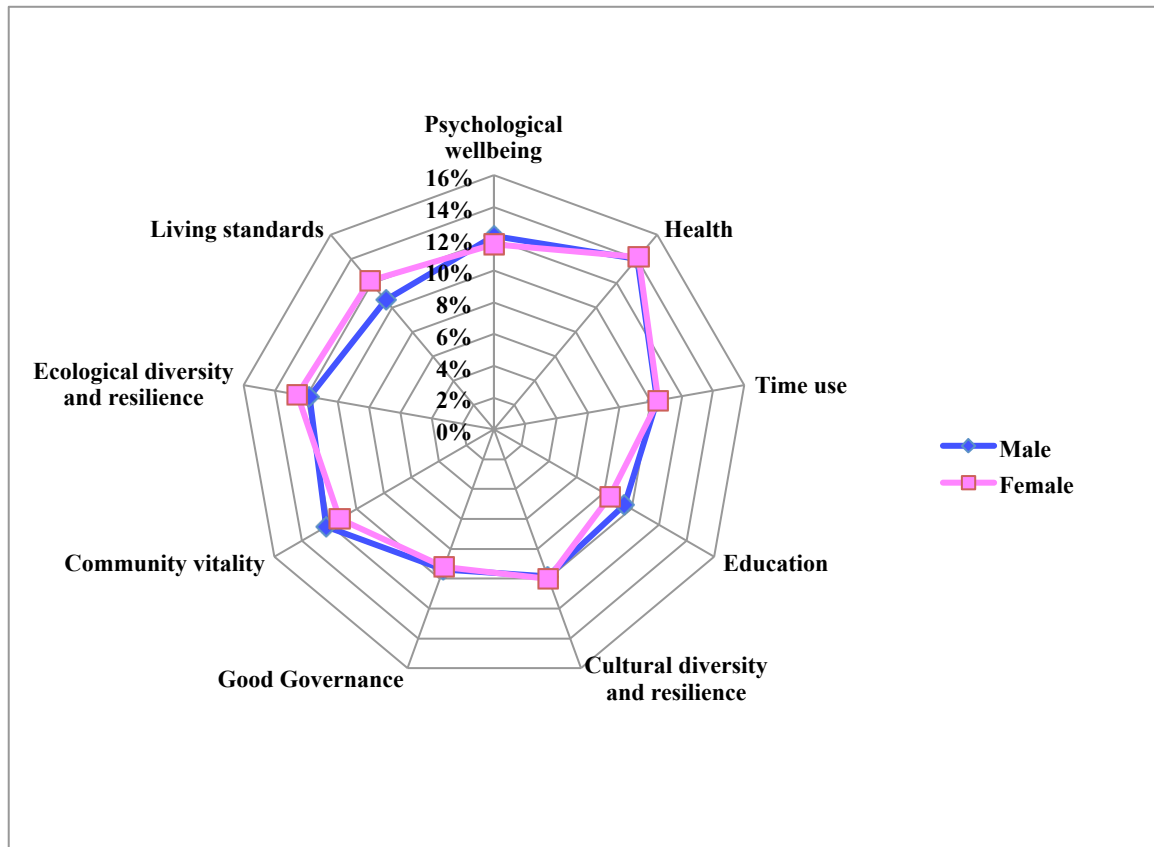
### **Gender Differences by GNH Domains and Indicators**

When the GNH data is further disaggregated by the nine domains elaborated earlier, more detailed information about gender differences emerges. In this paper, we focus our analysis of gender differences in the GNH domains and indicators in the 2010 survey (for a more comprehensive discussion that includes both the 2010 and the 2015 surveys, refer to Verma and Ura, forthcoming)<sup>6</sup>. As illustrated in figure 3, gender differences are greater in certain domains: where men seem to be fair better in domains such as education, psychological wellbeing and community vitality, the opposite is true for domains such as living standards and ecological diversity and resilience, where women seem to do better. At this level of aggregation, there are less significant differences in domains such as time use, health and good governance.

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<sup>6</sup> The forthcoming monograph by CBS will analyze findings of domains and indicators from both GNH surveys and provide comparative analysis over time.

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**Figure 3: Gender differences in the GNH domains (Source: CBS, 2010)**

When the GNH data is further disaggregated by the 33 clustered indicators, as defined earlier, more fine-grained differences and detailed patterns by gender emerge. Figure 4 highlights these differences in each of the 33 indicators, demonstrating that men achieve greater happiness in 18 indicators, women achieve greater happiness in 13 indicators, and 2 indicators remain more or less neutral. Some gender differences are significant (negative emotions, work time, sleep time, political participation, etc.), while others are less significant (family, assets, cultural participation, etc.).

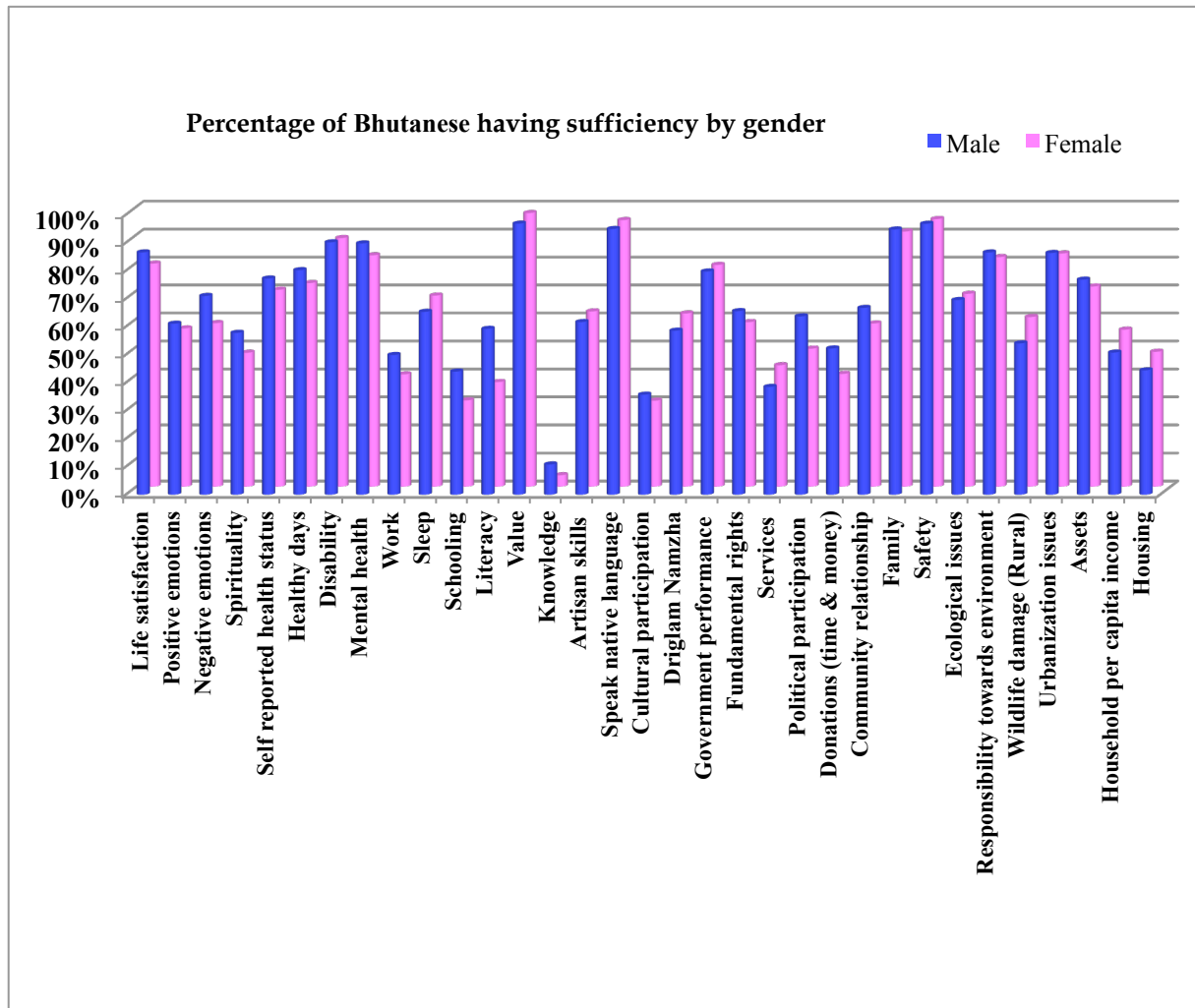
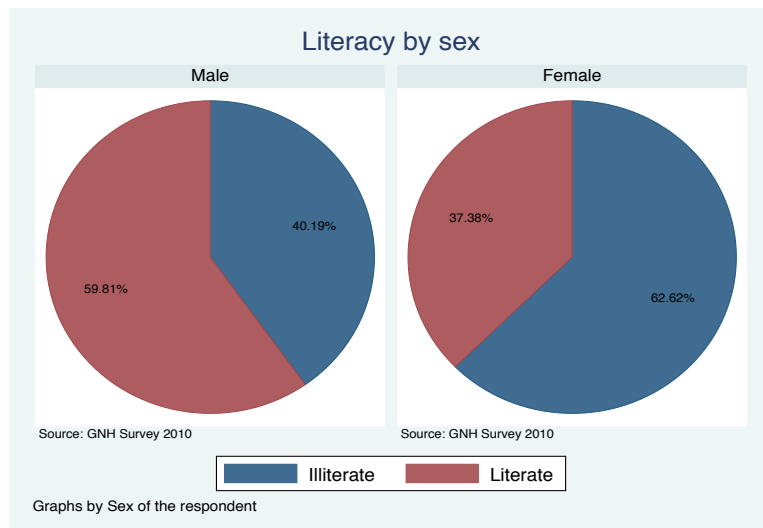


Figure 4: Gender Differences in the GNH Indicators (Source: CBS, 2010)

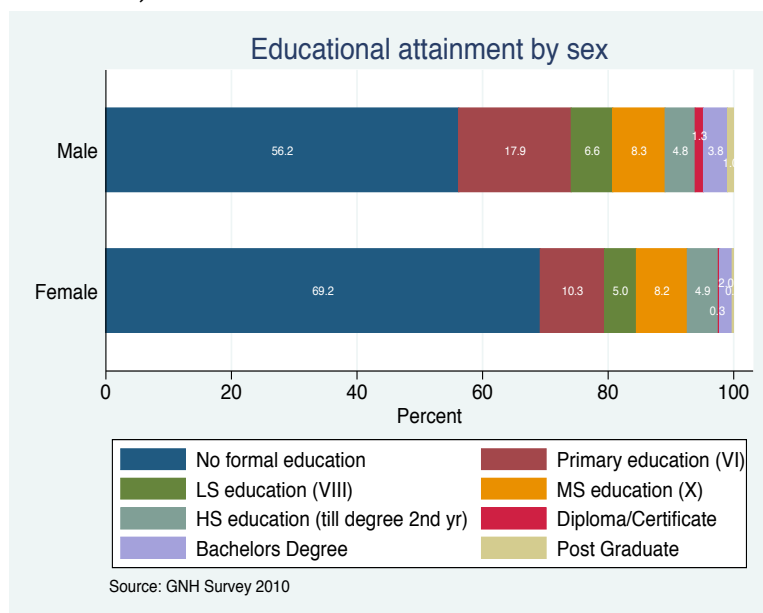
Below, we present the analysis differentiated by the nine GNH domains, and focus on a sampling of selected indicators where gender differences are significant or raise challenging research and policy questions. We begin with the domains that are considered more conventional and appear in other international indices of gender and development (i.e. education, health, governance, living standards), before turning to innovative domains for the analysis of gender differences (i.e. ecological diversity and resilience, community vitality, time use, cultural diversity and resilience) and that expand the field in innovative ways (i.e. psychological wellbeing).

The domain of **education** encompasses four indicators including schooling, literacy, value and knowledge. Differences in literacy by gender indicate 62.82% illiteracy for women and 40.19% for men, as illustrated in figure 5. Studies by the National Statistics Bureau and the Royal Government of Bhutan further indicate that literacy is lower for women in all levels of education (i.e. overall, youth, adult) (NSB, 2010; CEDAW, 2009).



**Figure 5: Literacy by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

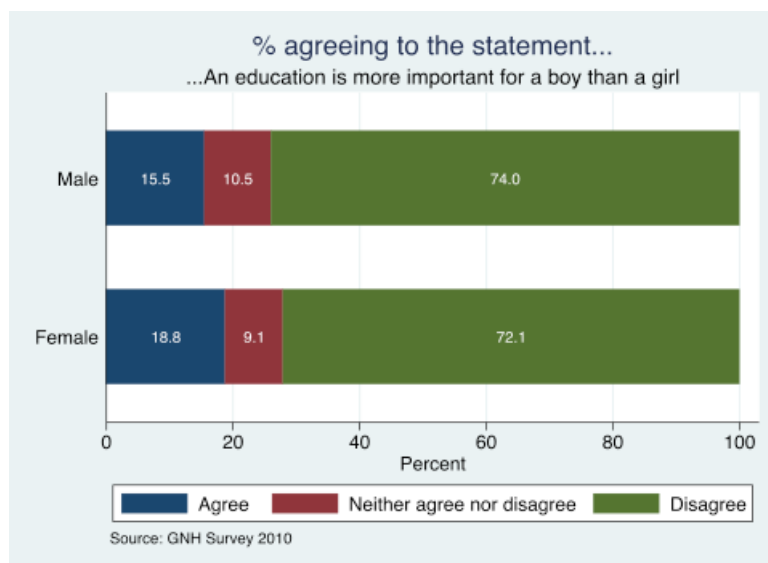
The indicator of schooling or educational attainment demonstrates that women have lower attainment than men across all levels of education from primary to post-graduate, as illustrated in figure 6. The one area where women outnumber men is no formal education, which indicates that more women lack access to education than men.



**Figure 6: Educational Attainment by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Both sets of indicators highlight that women are disadvantaged when it comes to education across all levels. The differentials are greater, however, in the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. This points to greater gender differences at the tertiary level, with higher drop-out and lower retention rates for women, as supported by studies carried out by the GNHC and the Royal Government of Bhutan (GNHC, 2001; CEDAW, 2009a, 2003). It is useful to note that Bhutan has two different systems of education: formal education for laypeople, and monastic education (an area that the GNH survey does not include). Given that Buddhism, as guided by the central monastic body,

influences Bhutan in many aspects of life, it is worth considering gender differences within this sector. Gender differences within monastic education are more significant, with 98.33% of boys and men enrolled, and 1.67% of girls and women enrolled (MoE, 2010; GNHC, 2010). Such differences require more in-depth study in the future. Upcoming research might also consider gender differences in language skills, as non-formal education aims to achieve literacy in *dzongkha* of the entire population (RGoB, 2003). Another important area for research is gender-biased attitudes and norms that affect education. In this regard, an important question in the 2010 survey focused on gender-based attitudes, as illustrated in figure 7.



**Figure 7: Gendered Attitudes Towards Education (Source: CBS, 2010)**

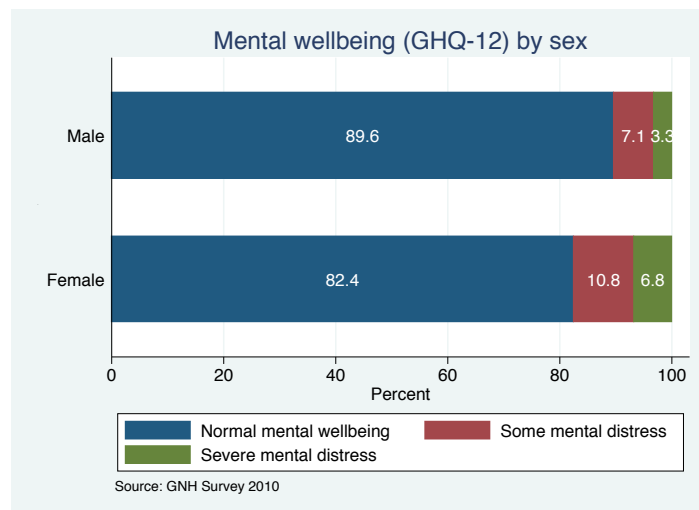
The responses to the question “an education is important for a boy than a girl” indicates that gender biases that advantage boys clearly exist, where interestingly, women seem to uphold such biases slightly more than men (18.8% women versus 15.5% men agree to the statement that an education is important for a boy than a girl). Future research will need to qualify these biases, as well as focus on the various factors, experiences and reasons why women drop out of tertiary education, and the effect this has on other domains and indicators.

The second GNH domain of **health** considers four indicators that include mental health, self-supported health status, healthy days and long-term disability; these were investigated in the 2010 GNH Survey Questionnaire by 38 questions (CBS, 2010). We look closely at the first two, as well as an additional question regarding gender access to health facilities. Figure 8 illustrates differences in mental wellbeing by gender. While the overall levels of normal mental wellbeing are high (89.6% for men and 82.45% for women), the ratio of women to men in areas of some and severe mental distress indicate some worrying trends. Given that mental wellbeing is an area where overall levels have decreased from 2010 and 2015, further research in this area will be important. For



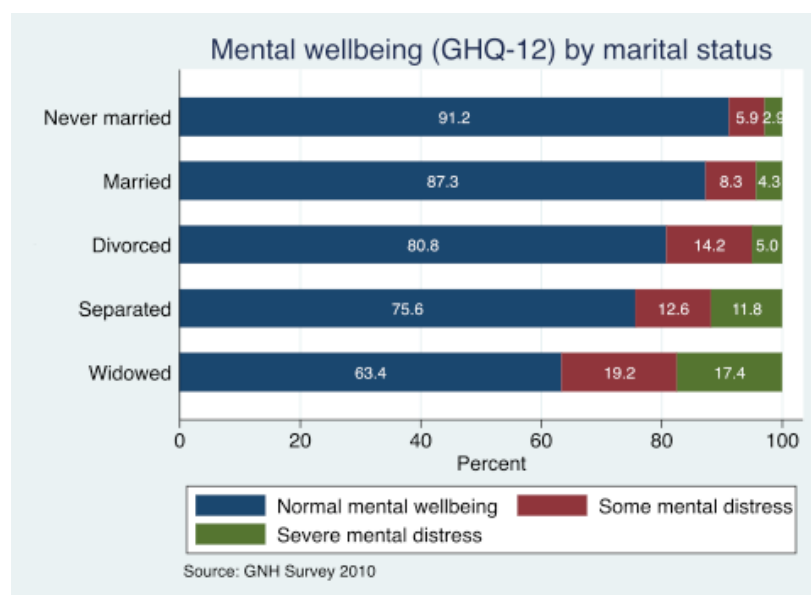
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instance, the women to men ratios for “some mental distress” and “severe mental distress” experienced are approximately 3:2 and 2:1 respectively. These indicate significant gender differences.



**Figure 8: Mental Wellbeing by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

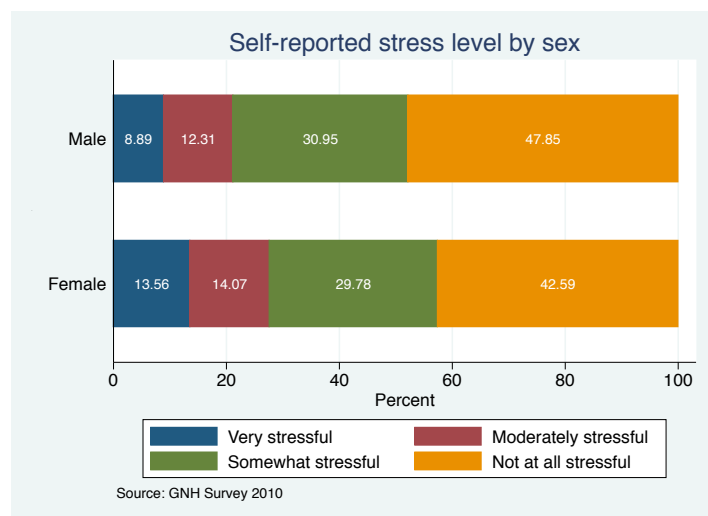
When mental wellbeing is analyzed by marital status, another important area of gender analysis, we find that severe mental stress is suffered most by those who are separated or widowed, among categories that include those who have never been married, are married, divorced, separated or widowed. Overall, 11.8% of those who are separated, 17.4% of the widowed, 5% of the divorced, 4.3% of married and 2.9% of never married populations experienced severe mental distress. The tendency of those who are separated, widowed, and divorced to experience both severe and some mental distress raises concerns about these sectors of the population that need to be explored further.



**Figure 9: Mental Wellbeing by Marital Status (Source: CBS, 2010)**

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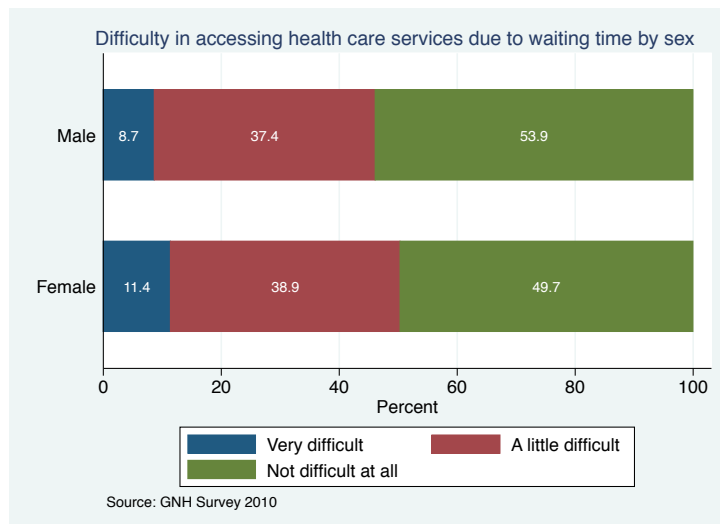
When we analyze self-reported stress levels by gender, women experience very stressful and moderate stressful lives more than men (13.56% vs. 8.89% and 14.07% vs. 12.31% respectively).



**Figure 10: Self-Reported Stress by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

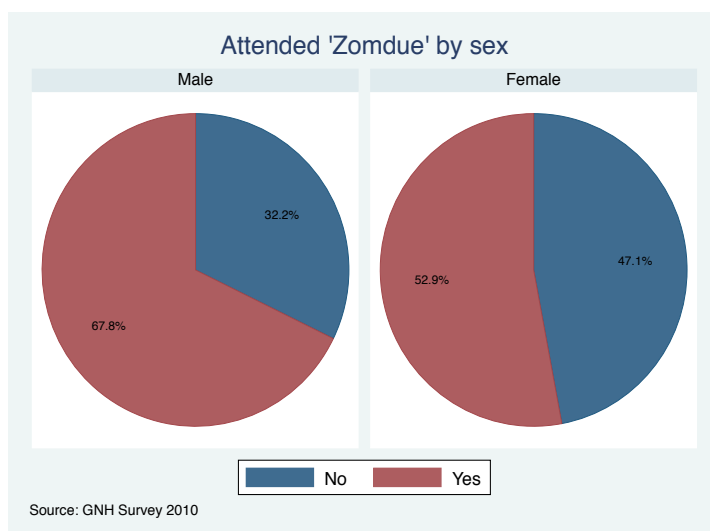
Several factors can be attributed to higher levels of stress in women, including their disadvantaged position in terms of time-use, governance, psychological wellbeing, culture, as well as other issues related to health, such as alcohol abuse and gender-based violence, which are discussed below. Albeit the existence of universal health care in terms of modern and traditional medicine in Bhutan, gender differences are further compounded by access to health care services based on waiting time. As detailed in figure 11 below which show that women report 11.4% very difficulty and 38.9% little difficulty, while men report 8.7% very difficulty and 37.4% little difficulty in accessing health care. The category of high difficulty (very difficult) requires attention by health care officials in the future, including the need for gender-specific health services and infrastructure in the future, based on the lack of a mammogram facilities and early detection centres, adequate maternity wards, geriatric services and sanitation facilities for women, and in particular, adolescent girls attending school (Tarayana Foundation, 2009).

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**Figure 11: Difficulty in Accessing Health Care Services by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

The domain of **governance** is measured using the indicators of political participation, political freedom, government performance and service delivery. When the indicator of political participation at the local level (attendance in *zomdue*, or community meetings) is analyzed by gender, the data indicates that women attend 52.9% whereas men attend 67.8% of the time (see figure 12).

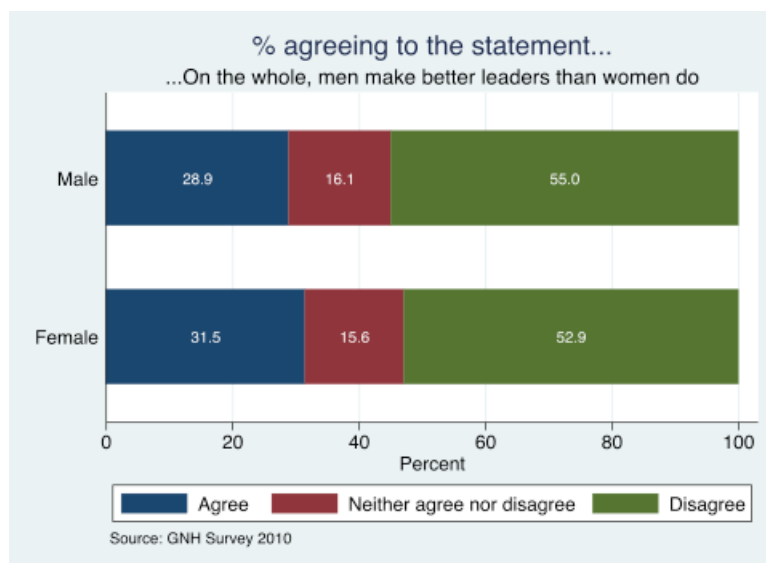


**Figure 12: Attendance in Zomdue by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Other studies shed light to the types of meetings women and men participate in, and the quality of participation in terms of leadership roles. For instance, when women participate in local meetings, their participation is often associated with minor work, hearing public messages, collecting contributions for community festivals, etc. (Yangden, 2009). On the other hand, men’s participation in such meetings is associated with the discussion and decision-making of more substantial issues (ibid.). Hence, there is a distinct power differential in terms of the quality of gendered participation at this level.

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This finding supports that of other studies indicating a high degree of under-representation of women in elected positions in local governance institutions. For instance, in 2010, low levels of representation and near invisibility of women's leadership is captured by data that indicates 4% of women in GYT (village level), 2.5% at DYT (district levels) and only one woman out 205 *gups* (village mayors) (Tshomo et al., 2010). In order to address these gaps in the future, both women's practical as well as strategic needs will require urgent attention. The controversial nature of debates on affirmative action in Bhutan - that are otherwise operationalized in neighbouring countries such as Nepal, India and Bangladesh - point to some degree of resistance and stigmas regarding women's leadership by both women and men to gender transformative change. The GNH data further provides important information about gendered stigmas through its question regarding agreement to the statement "on the whole, men make better leaders than women do", as illustrated in figure 13 (CBS, 2010). The 2010 survey results, indicating that 31.5% of women and 28.9% of men agree to this statement, highlights the existence of gender-biased socio-cultural attitudes which hinder women's participation in governance and leadership roles. Future research needs to deepen understanding of such attitudes and stigmas through in-depth qualitative research.

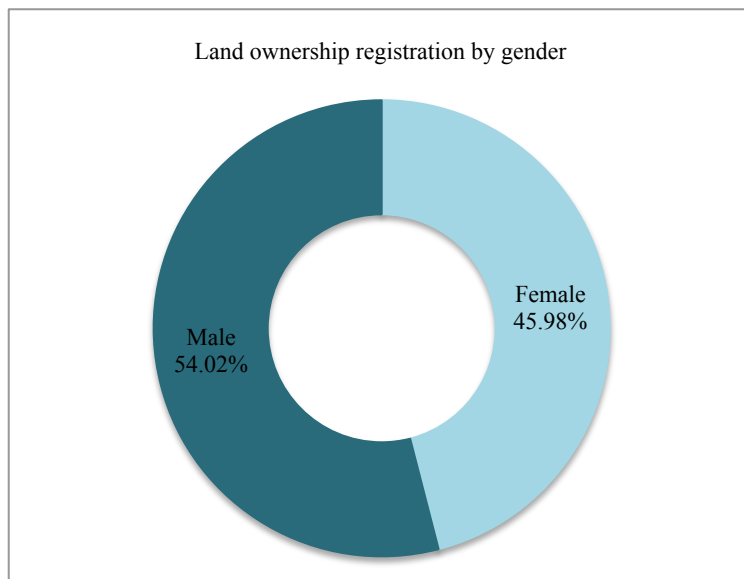


**Figure 13: Gendered Attitudes Towards Leadership (Source: CBS, 2010)**

The GNH domain of *living standards* includes assets, housing and household income. We focus on the indicator, assets, and in particular, land ownership, as well as data from other studies regarding position level within the civil service. When gender differences in land ownership by registration are analyzed, the GNH data indicates that both women and men have strong positions in terms of land ownership. Figure 14 illustrates that 54.02% of men and 45.98% of women report land ownership registration. These findings are significant, indicating that women in Bhutan enjoy a very strong position in terms of land ownership. This position is stronger than other developing countries such

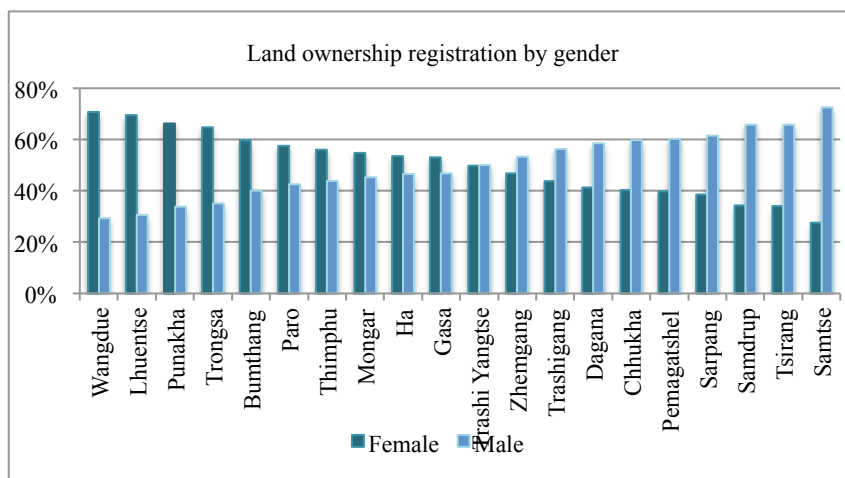
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as Chile, Ecuador and Panama, where women’s land holdings are considered the highest (i.e. land holdings exceed 25 per cent) (FAO, 2011)<sup>7</sup>.



**Figure 14: Gender Differences in Land Ownership Registration by Gender**

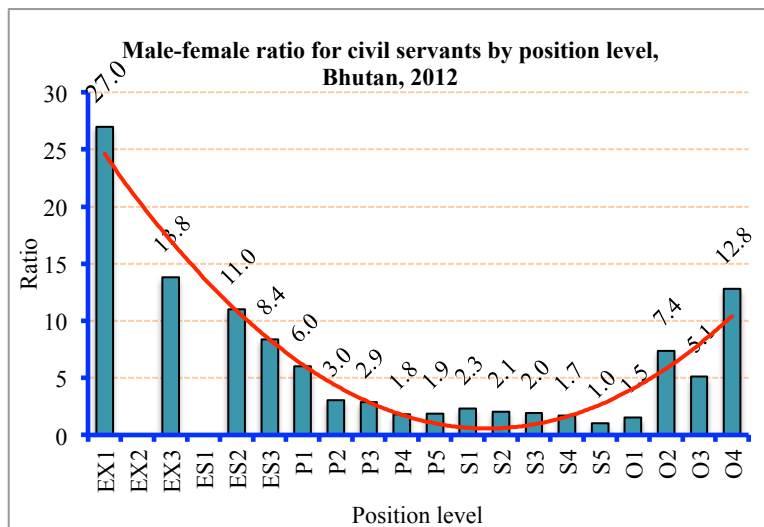
This strong position of women in relation to men is related to the fact that Bhutan is characterized by both matrilineal and patrilineal communities. Hence, ownership by gender also varies sub-regionally by *dzongkhags* (or districts), as highlighted by figure 15 below. Future research will need to address gendered land ownership within a context of rapid cultural change, where matrilineal land inheritance sometimes disadvantages women in Bhutan (Pain and Pema, 2004), and whereby matrilineal relations may be weakening in the face of gender-biased globalization, media and development (Verma and Banda, 2011). It may also want to explore with more detail different elements of ownership in pastoral areas where livestock, rather than land, plays an important role in defining gender relations.



<sup>7</sup> According to the FAO, women’s share in agricultural land holdings in Southern and South-Eastern Asia is approximately 12 per cent (2011).

**Figure 15: Land Ownership Registration by Gender and Dzongkhag (District)**

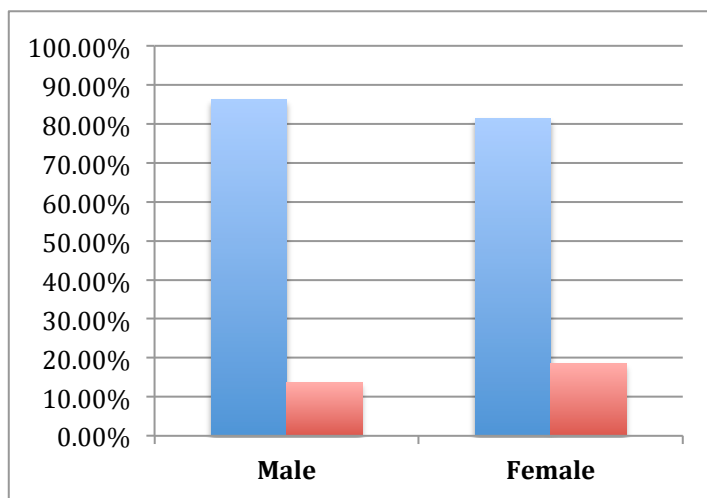
In Bhutan, one of the most aspired sectors for formal employment is the Royal Civil Service, which currently provides both status and security to a workforce of 26,699 civil servants (Pokhrel, 2015). However, there exist significant gender differences when the sector is examined by position level, which are invariably linked to power and decision-making. Figure 16 illustrates graphically data from the GNH Commission, whereby women are poorly represented in “EX” and “ES” positions (executive and executive service respectively), normally regarded as well-remunerated and high status positions with notable responsibilities and leadership (i.e. for every one EX1 women, there are 27 EX1 men). While there is greater parity in “P” and “S” positions (professional and service positions respectively) disparities exist in “O” positions (operations), normally typified by occupations such as drivers, cleaners, maintenance staff, etc. This suggests a “sandwich” effect, where men occupy most positions at the executive and operations levels. Of concern are gender differences in executive positions, which carry higher status, decision-making and remuneration in the civil service. This suggests the existence of a glass ceiling, an invisible barrier that restricts women from obtaining higher-level positions in institutions may also exist in other sector as well. This will require in-depth research in the future both in regards to the civil service, private sectors and other institutions, which can take the form of a gender audit (a participatory process identifying gender challenges and ways to overcome them within organizations), and/or qualitative research to deepen the GNH survey.



**Figure 16: Gender Ratios by Position Level in the Royal Civil Service (Source: GNH Commission, 2012)**

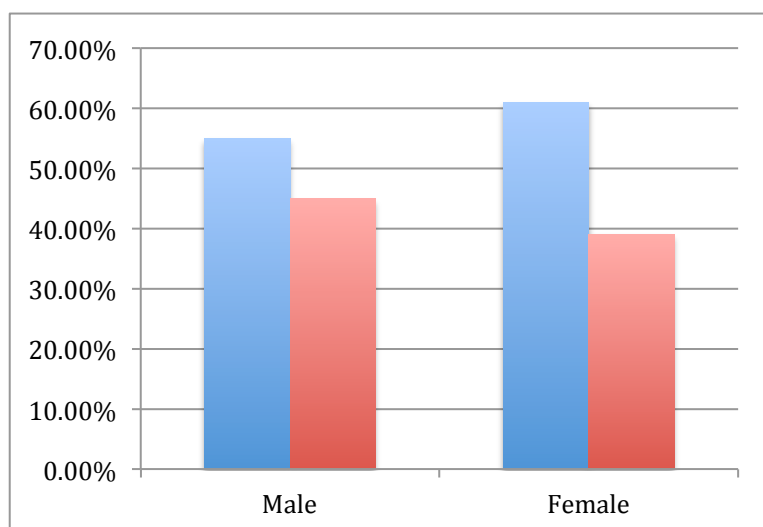
The domain of *ecological diversity and resilience* is composed of four indicators including ecological issues, responsibility towards the environment, wildlife damage in rural contexts and urbanization issues. When we examine gender differences in

responsibility towards the environment and wildlife damages, some variations by gender emerge.



**Figure 17: Responsibility Towards the Environment by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

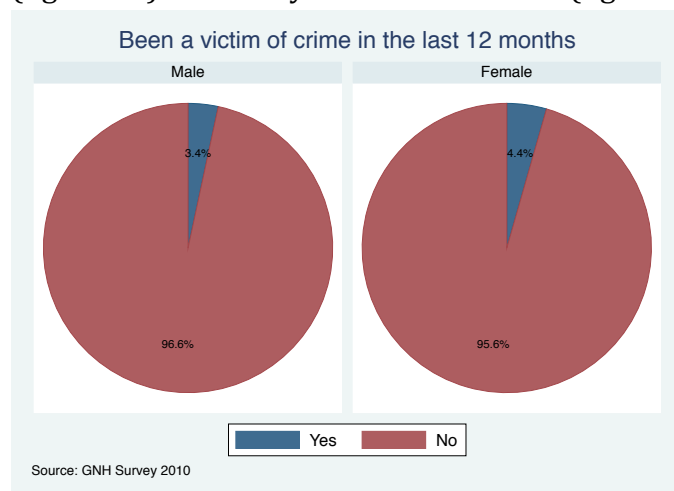
Figure 17 illustrates that 86.33% of men and 81.47% of women feel responsibility toward the environment, whereas 13.67% of men and 18.53% of women do not. This indicates approximately a 5% difference in both possibilities, whereby men feel a greater responsibility towards the environment. This finding supports the findings in the time use domain further below, where men indicate greater time spent than women on agriculture, forestry and livestock activities, which normally requires substantial engagement with natural resources and local environments. However, women's engagement in household maintenance where they spend a disproportionate amount of time also requires management of natural resources and local environments, such as the collection of water, firewood, food, etc.



**Figure 18: Experience of Wildlife Damage by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Figure 18 indicates that women have greater experience to wildlife damage than men, whereby 60.91% of women and 55.04% of men reported such experiences. This may be attributed to damage caused by wildlife to household gardens or water collection points where women may play a greater role, in addition to their roles in agriculture and/or pastoralism. In agricultural contexts, women play an important role in transplanting rice, fodder collection, household water management, etc. (ADB, 2014). In pastoral contexts, indigenous grazing rights for cattle and yak, elaborate management schemes for sharing and access to pastures, and rotating herds between different households exist which promote socio-cultural relations, cooperation, reciprocity and civic virtue in remote areas of Bhutan (Leaming, 2004). Within these contexts, women play an important role in terms of managing animal products such as milk, cheese, meat, yak hair, skin and wool, etc. and play a central role in trade with villages in the lowlands (Dey and Gyelthshen, 2010). However, limited information is available regarding the extent to which extension services are made available to women, which constitutes a gap in research in this domain, as well as knowledge in terms of education (ADB, 2014).

The indicator of **community vitality** is composed of four indicators, including social support, community relationships, family and victim of crime. When analyzing the last indicator, we analyze the reporting of being a victim of crime in the past 12 months (figure 19) and safety from human harm (figure 20).



**Figure 19: Victims of Crime by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

While there are few respondents who reported being a victim crime, with men reporting 3.4% and women reporting 4.4%, there are greater number of respondents who report being rarely safe, with women reporting 24.8% and men reporting 13.6%. Moreover, 21.1% of men compared to 29.2% reported being usually safe, and 65.3% of men and 46% of women reporting always being safe.

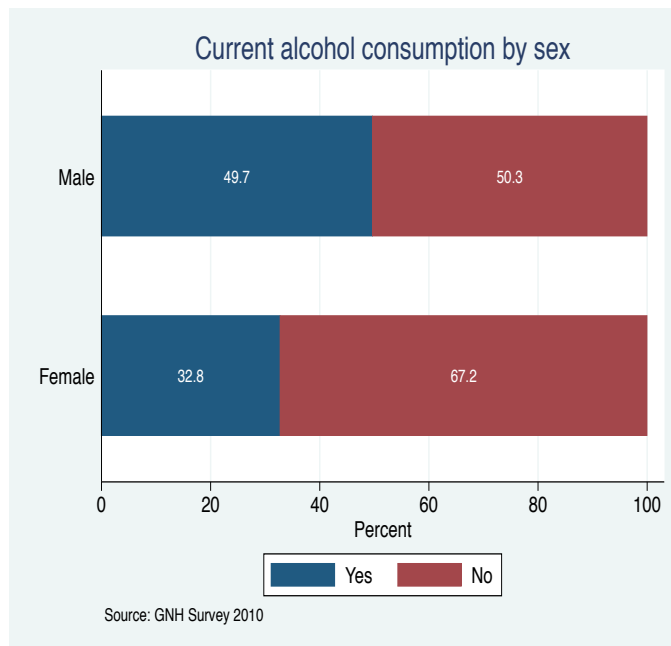




**Figure 20: Safety from Human Harm by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

These results point to the fact that women are less safe, and to differences between what might be perceived as a “crime” and safety from human harm. The possibility that this dimension of the GNH survey may be under-reported may reflect wider beliefs that safety from human harm or domestic violence is identified with physical abuse, and not psychological or sexual abuse (RGoB, 2003). Another factor may be that such crimes are often considered “private issues” or “family matters”, with many women not reporting violence due to societal norms that promote a culture of silence, or because they are not aware of their rights, or that it is a “crime” under law (NCWC, 2010; RENEW, 2007; RGoB, 2003). Other studies suggest that factors that contribute to crime and lack of safety may be associated to both forms of emotional and physical violence including alcohol abuse, extra-marital affairs, financial matters (i.e. money matters or a thrifty partner), disputes over children, jealousy, a high social life, and “missed mobile calls” from either known or unknown numbers perceived as a form of ragging (NCWC, 2010; RENEW, 2007; RGoB, 2003). For instance, the GNH survey looks at gender differences in alcohol consumption<sup>8</sup> (figure 21), and indicates alcohol consumption levels of 49.7% for men and 32.8% for women.

<sup>8</sup> The indicator of alcohol consumption is investigated under the health domain in the GNH Survey and Index.



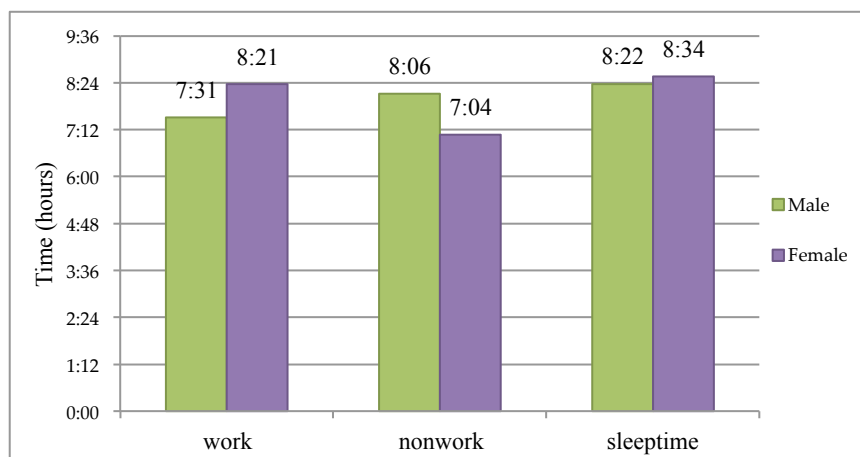
**Figure 21: Current Alcohol Consumption by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Other studies suggest that rates of alcohol consumption may be more pronounced with a direct relationship to gender-based violence. A survey undertaken by RENEW, for instance, indicates that 92% of both women and men reported that excessive drinking causes violence, and moreover, the problem might be more serious in rural areas, with approximately 45% of verbal conflicts resulting from alcohol abuse (2007). While the GNH survey looks at the links of alcohol consumption within the domain of health, future research will need to explore relations with community vitality. While much of the discussion here has been on the indicator of victim of crime, gender differences in social support, community relationships and family are important for an in-depth understanding of gender relations. This will require in-depth qualitative research in the future, given the sensitive nature of these issues.

The domain of *time use* investigates two indicators including of sleeping and working hours.

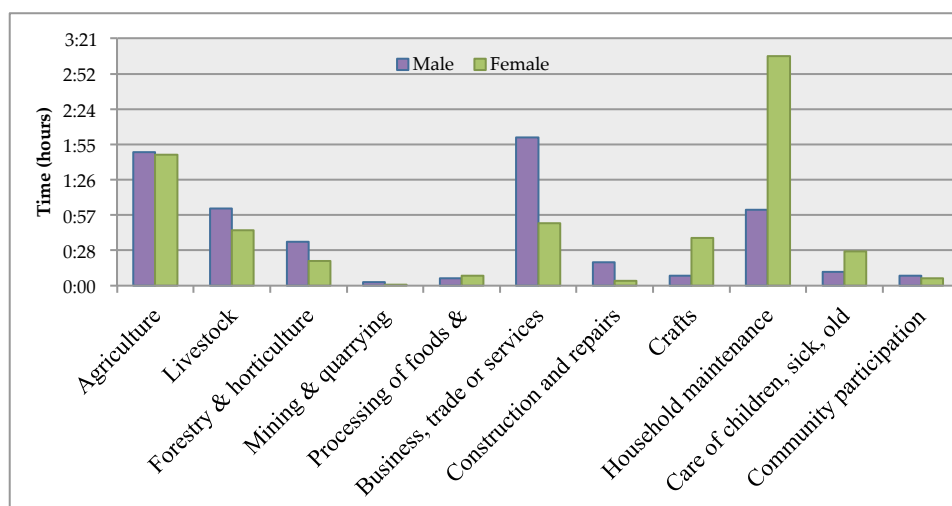
In the GNH survey, hours of work, non-work and sleep time were disaggregated by gender. The result, as illustrated in figure 22, indicates that regardless of location (i.e. urban or rural, towns or villages), women work longer than men, averaging 8 hours 21 minutes in a day whereas, men on average only work for 7 hours 31 minutes. In terms of non-work or leisure time, men enjoy approximately eight hours of leisure, as compared to women who only enjoy approximately seven hours. The overall allocation of work time is longer for women, where work includes household, productive, income generation and community work (Kabeer, 1994).

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**Figure 22: Gender Differences in Work, Non-Work and Sleep Time (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Similar findings emerge when time spent in different occupations and type of work is compared by gender, whereby women expend greater time and work, compared to men, regardless of occupation, with two exceptions discussed below (figure 23). As per figure 23 below, the greatest gender differences occur in household maintenance work, care of family members and producing crafts where women spend disproportionate time. On the other hand, livestock rearing, forestry and business and trade are activities where men spend a disproportionate amount of time. While men also expend time in cooking, care of family members, their contributions are shorter in time expended; the reverse is true for women engaging in work related livestock, forestry/horticulture and business/trade.



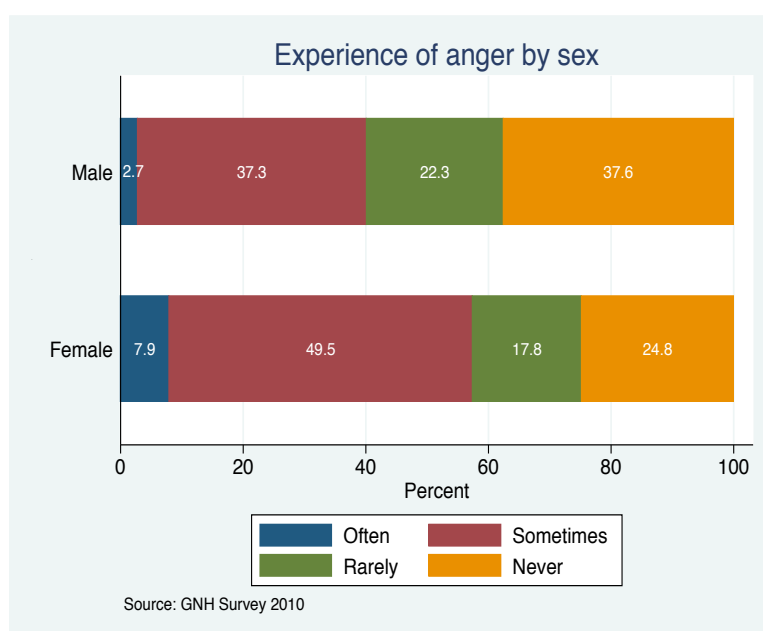
**Figure 23: Gender Difference by Occupation and Type of Work (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Gender differences in time use significantly contributes in overall gender differences in GNH, as well as influence other domains. For instance, in terms of household work, girls

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take on more domestic work than boys, which influences to low access to formal education (GNHC, 2001). Pregnant women continue to carry out demanding physical work late into their pregnancies, resuming work almost immediately after delivery, which contributes to lower health levels as well as to the gender time-use imbalance (ibid.). Furthermore, women carry out a disproportionate amount of “voluntary” labour, such as community work to repair roads (ADB, 2014), which further adds to their multiple labour burdens. Gender differences in time use and working time have implications on the quality of jobs women are able to get, in addition to perceptions about gender roles and the way their triple occupations tend to discriminate against them (RGoB et al., 2013). Greater research is required under this domain, where very few systematic studies are available, with the exception of studies that tend to focus on agriculture as the major economic and productive activity (GNHC, 2001). Future research is required to analyze pastoral work and activities, as well as what is normally perceived as women’s “invisible” work of household, reproductive and community work. When women’s multiple occupations are taken into account, policy-making may also want to review whether paid maternity leave and day care are adequate, and ensure that new laws coming into effect (discussed earlier) must apply to all sectors, from civil service to private entities.

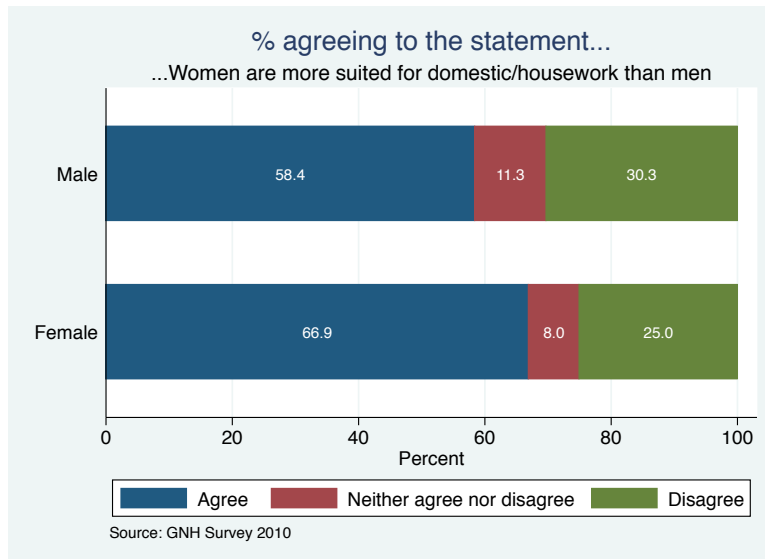
The domain of **psychological wellbeing** is composed of 3 indicators including life satisfaction, emotional balance (positive and negative emotions) and spirituality. When we analyze the second indicator by gender, we specifically focus on negative emotions, which include anger, fear, worry, selfishness and jealousy. As figure 24 demonstrates, when asked how often people felt angry in the past few weeks, 2.7% of men reported that they felt angry often and 37.3% sometimes, when compared to 7.9% of women and 49.5% who felt angry often and sometimes respectively. Hence, the fact that women experienced anger often three times more than men is highly significant.



**Figure 24: Experience of Anger by Gender (Source: CBS, 2010)**

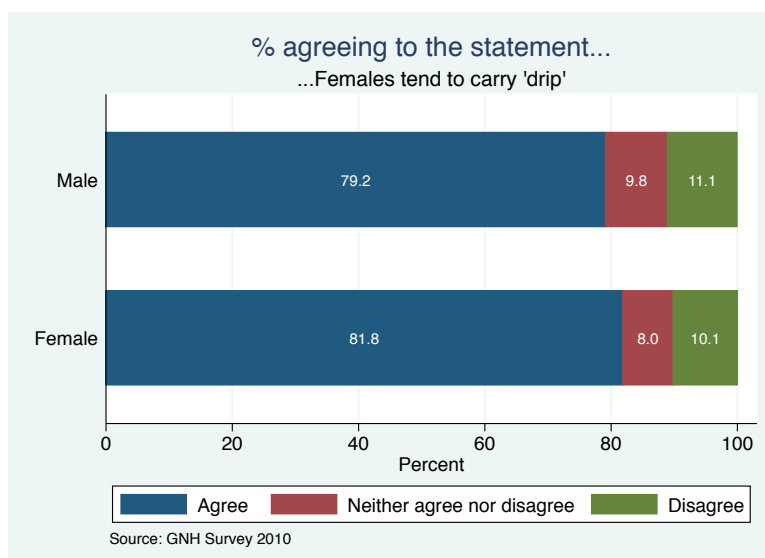
Although the question regarding mental wellbeing was discussed under the domain for health (figure 9), it is worth noting again that those who are widowed, separated and divorced experience greater levels of severe and some mental distress than those who are married or single. Conversely, those who experience normal wellbeing tend to be never married or married. Although requiring further research, possible reasons for the correlation between failed and curtailed marriages and severe to some mental distress are likely related to emotional upheaval, context specific social stigmas, concerns and/or increased workloads and childcare, loss of land and property, etc., and these need to be investigated in terms of gender. Furthermore, psychological wellbeing shapes happiness in several other domains. The GNH survey identifies links between anger and greater unhealthy days and less leisure time (and hence, less time for spiritual practices and meditation which can calm the mind and diminish anger). Other studies suggest gender linkages between anger and fear affecting health and overall wellbeing (Wangmo and Valk, 2012), and lower happiness levels in women and lower satisfaction with financial status (Zangmo, 2008). Of all the domains, psychological wellbeing is the least researched. Similarly, it is also under-researched from a gender perspective (Ura et al., in press), with limited secondary data available, and thus, will require particular research attention in the future.

The domain of ***cultural diversity and resilience*** encompasses four indicators of artisanal skills, proficiency in native language, cultural participation and *driglam namzha* (the way of harmony based on Buddhist principles of respect and compassion for all sentient beings, or Bhutanese norms in regards to socio-cultural conduct pertaining to etiquette, dress, behaviour, conventions in formal settings, etc.). When examining the last indicator, responses to four survey questions regarding core cultural values highlight different forms of gender cultural attitudes and biases. We have earlier discussed gender differences in attitudes towards education (i.e. the first question relating to whether education is more important for boys than girls captured in figure 7), as well as gendered attitudes towards leadership (i.e. the second question as to whether men make better leaders than women as captured in figure 13). We now analyze the third question related to gender attitudes towards domestic/household work (figure 23), and the fourth question of gender attitudes towards the issue of whether women carry *drip* (impurities or pollution) (figure 24), where significant gender differences emerge.



**Figure 25: Gender Attitudes Towards Domestic/Housework (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Figure 25 illustrates that 58.4% of men and 66.9% of women agree to the statement “women are more suited for domestic/housework than men”, while the inverse is true in terms of 30.3% of men and 25.0% of women disagreeing to the same statement. Surprisingly, women indicate a greater bias in terms of upholding stereotypes regarding this gender division of labour. Other studies confirm that women are regarded and themselves perceive their roles as being tied to the household and care work, as well as being “physically weaker and sexually more vulnerable” which negatively influences their access to formal education, employment and other opportunities (Yangden, 2009:106; RGoB, 2003:5).



**Figure 26: Gendered Attitudes Towards Drip (Source: CBS, 2010)**

Although gender differences in the statement “women tend to carry ‘drip’” are not big (figure 26), the fact that overall 79.2% of men and 81.8% of women believe this to be true is revealing. These last two survey question results reveal a great deal about the

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relation between cultural beliefs that underlie the gender division of labour relegating multiple occupations to women (household work, care work, income generation, and natural resource management especially in rural areas), and social stigmas that attribute women as being polluted or impure. Commonly held cultural stigmas influence religious beliefs and practices such as *kerab gu* (the difference of nine rebirths between women and men) and restrictions on women from entering the *goenkhang* (the inner sanctum of a Buddhist temple). Although no Buddhist manuscripts and texts claim the biological inferiority of women (Crins, 2008), cultural norms and stigmas influence the practice of Vajrayana Buddhism in Bhutan that uphold the belief in men's superior status to women (NCWC, 2008). A recent survey further highlights these trends, whereby 65% of women pray to be reborn as men in their next life, 43% of respondents consider women inferior to men, and 35% of families considers women less capable than men (NCWC, 2008). Such cultural beliefs further influence gender biases that advantage men in terms of first being served food, sitting order, cultural rites, public speaking, higher status in society (ibid.), as well as decision-making, political participation, and educational and employment opportunities. When highly revered cultural norms of conduct, normally seen as "gender neutral", regarding duty and obligation within social interactions and gender relations are seen to be violated, the repercussions for women are more severe and society is less forgiving towards women than men (NCWC, 2008). For instance, there are double-standards and greater societal expectations for women uphold the value of loyalty and fidelity than men (ibid.). What these findings indicate is the urgent need for further research in the domain of culture, but which requires ethnographic and qualitative research over longer periods of time to understand changes over time. While the GNH survey in 2010 included several questions on gender attitudes and stigmas, the 2015 survey did not. It is imperative that the next GNH survey re-introduces these omitted questions, as well as deepens and expands them to include questions regarding the inter-related gendered experiences of discrimination, mobility, decision-making, agency and room to maneuver.

### **Conclusion: Reflections and Recommendations**

The greatest strength of the GNH survey is its holistic nature. As discussed earlier, it is more progressive than other development indicators around the world. Its focus on happiness and wellbeing sets it apart from narrow development indicators that either focus on economic-centric 'progress' or on a limited number of conventional domains. In GNH, all domains are held in equal weight and are recognized as being inter-connected, thereby enabling an analysis of the complexity of gender experiences. Through the disaggregation of its domains and indicators, the GNH survey illustrates the breadth of gender issues and differences in Bhutan. Furthermore, the statistical representation and significance of the surveys highlights the importance of the findings over time. The data speaks volumes about gender relations in Bhutan.

The GNH surveys demonstrate that gender gaps in happiness have closed somewhat between 2010 and 2015. As we analyze the 2015 findings in comparison to the 2010

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findings in fine-grained detail, of importance will be the examination of significant gains and losses, and the exploration of factors that have contributed to them (Verma and Ura, forthcoming). Overall, men continue to be happier than women in Bhutan. This is of great concern. The most urgent work needed is the analysis of where gender differences have widened over time, and to investigate the reasons that contribute to this gender gap (ibid.). For instance, of the 2010 GNH survey findings we have elaborated, where gender differences are greatest is negative emotions, work, leisure time, schooling, literacy, political participation, safety from human harm and wildlife damage, all to the disadvantage of women. Where there is greater equality is assets, and more specifically land tenure. In this regard, Bhutan demonstrates greater equality than other developing countries (FAO, 2011), as well as developed ones. Although excluded from the 2015 survey questions, critical questions centering on gender-biased cultural attitudes and stigmas related to education, political leadership, household work, and whether women carry drip (*impurities*), reveal a great deal about cultural beliefs. These questions are central to understanding gender relations, and need to be included in the next survey, as well as expanded to include questions regarding gendered experiences of discrimination, agency, mobility, decision-making and room to maneuver. The GNH survey also needs to be strengthened conceptually to consistently consider differences in gender, that is, between socio-cultural categories of women and men, rather than sex, which are considered biological differences between male and female (throughout this paper, differences in sex have been illustrated in the figures from CBS, but should indicate gender). Most importantly, while the GNH survey demonstrates the breadth of gender issues, there are gaps in understanding of the explanatory factors that result in those differences. In this regard, ethnographic and qualitative research is imperative in the future, to nuance and deepen the GNH findings. This is especially the case for indicators where more sensitive issues are explored, such as negative emotions, safety from human harm, and political participation.

The GNH survey aggregates findings across the country and illustrates that socio-cultural perceptions that disadvantage women exist. This is important because women's status varies greatly according to cultural context within the country (RGoB, 2003). For instance, women in the northern and eastern regions of the country enjoy greater freedom and status compared to those in southern Bhutan where gender and caste plays a major role in determining status (ibid.). An important factor shaping gender relations is marriage, and in Bhutan, many forms of marriage exist, including polygamy, polyandry, as well as matrilineal, patrilineal, patrilocal and matrilineal contexts, which vary according to region within the country. Such differences play an important role in shaping marital and gender relations, as well as related issues such as the gender division of labour, ownership of land, etc. In Bhutan, relations of trust, reciprocity, knowledge, cooperation and (Lemming, 2004) are not only at the heart of social institutions but also gender relations characterized by negotiation, exchange, access to resources, identity, status and most importantly, contestation and resistance as the basis for change. Hence, future research will need to further explore these dimensions as



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important avenues for negotiating resources that meet women's and men's needs, support their livelihoods and create room for them to maneuver (Verma, 2001). Such investigations are best explored through ethnographic and qualitative research in relation to the GNH survey.

While gender differences in GNH continue to persist in Bhutan, great strides made recently include research undertaken by the Royal Government of Bhutan, NCWC, GNHC, NSB, MoE, NEC, RENEW, Tarayana Foundation, CEDAW, etc. Progress has been rapid and responsive, as Bhutan has recently adopted gender transformative measures such as the domestic violence bill, the expansion of maternity leave for women, and notions of equality in its statutory laws and the constitution. However, there is still the need for greater work as Bhutan works towards gender equality. For instance, the recent maternity leave bill needs to include the nation as a whole, rather than the civil service alone, in terms of a law that applies to all working citizens across all sectors, including paternity leave for men. Affirmative action, as mentioned earlier, provokes heated debates and resistance in Bhutan, indicating that research on gendered cultural attitudes discussed above are a priority area in the near future. It will be important to strengthen gender transformative change that includes gender analysis research, actionable policies, gender positive impact, organizational change, and capacity and institutional strengthening. Hence, not only is gender transformative research and changes in policies required, but also initiatives that strengthen women's leadership, professional capacities, scholarship opportunities, award recognition, and create positive role models for young girls and women. Here, the focus is on women, as long as gender power relations disadvantage them in terms of development and happiness.

As the expanding literature on gender issues in Bhutan indicates, there has been a tendency of research to focus on "women's issues", rather than gender or the power relations that underlie them. On the other hand, while much of broader gender analysis tends to focus on practical and/or strategic needs of women and men, few studies consider wellbeing and happiness or spiritual needs (Verma and Ura, forthcoming). With some notable gaps between the two fields of study discussed earlier, conceptual framings that bring together the study of gender and development with happiness and wellbeing are scarce. In the context of Bhutan, they are both scarce as well as limited in scope and conceptualization (ibid.). In the conceptual framework of this study, we consider the way development, gender, happiness and wellbeing are mutually constituted (ibid.).

We also note the potential avenues, and critical need to expand gender analysis within the context of development. As discussed earlier, GNH expands gender analysis to include issues of wellbeing and happiness in innovative ways. In doing so, it expands gender analysis beyond the duality of practical and strategic needs and interests, to highly pertinent and important dimensions of life: wellbeing and spiritual-cultural needs. Such needs and interests take into account the importance of gender social

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relations and institutions for wellbeing and happiness. They also pay discerning attention to psychological wellbeing. The domains of community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, time use (and more specifically, leisure time and work/life balance) and psychological wellbeing are the most under-studied dimensions of GNH (Ura et al., in press), and therefore, require greatest attention and resources in future research. For if happiness is not only based on material wealth and individual pleasure, but also the inner state of the mind, as the GNH philosophy is predicated upon, then policy-making needs to focus attention to its holistic nature, including spiritual practices and development services that cultivate generosity, ethics, meditation, patience, wisdom (Wangmo and Valk, 2012), and ultimately, equanimity, compassion and loving-kindness in gender relations.



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