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In Search of the Household: Some Observations from the Western Hills of Nepal

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INTRODUCTION

Surveys are used by many disciplines to collect data on a wide range of topics. These data make up the basis for the majority of socioeconomic and agricultural reports produced in Nepal.[1] A perusal of these reports reveals that the 'household' is the important unit for data collection, analysis and planning. The reasons for the use of 'the household' for surveys can easily be explained: the 'list of households' is often the only list available as a sampling frame; the household is thought to be easily recognisable because the majority of people grew up and continue to reside on one; and the household is assumed to pool resources and act as a single decision-making unit. But what is a 'household'?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the variety of household groupings found in the comparatively small area of the Nepalese hills, 2000 square kilometres, covered by Lumle Agricultural Centre's Extension Command Area. The intention is to sound a cautionary note about taking the use of the 'household' as a unit of analysis for granted, not merely to add to the burgeoning literature seeking for a universal definition of the household. However, in order to set the discussion in context, it is to the question of definition that I turn briefly.

THE QUESTION OF DEFINITION

The term 'household' began to be used in a technical sense by anthropologists and historians in order to differentiate between family groups, based on kinship, and the actual groups of people residing together in ethnographic situations. 'Households' have been said to be 'fundamental social units', more widespread and cross-culturally comparable than many more frequently studied institutions (Netting et al., 1986:xxvi). It is not surprising, therefore, that the use of the term 'household' can lead to the belief that comparable 'household units' can be found in any culture or society one cares to study. Indeed, there has been much discussion of, and many attempts to arrive at, 'a' definition of the household.[2] But the growing literature from this debate on the 'household' provides ample evidence that there is nothing simple about this domestic unit or its definition.

Despite the stress on definition in much of the academic literature, many technical surveys and reports make no attempt to define the household unit or, when they do, provide a broad definition such as: 'a social unit defined by the sharing of the same abode or hearth' (Ellis, 1988:13). Even when care is taken to define the unit according to the social situation under investigation, an apparently comprehensive definition can still mask a multitude of differences within and between seemingly similar social groups, as in the Nepalese hills.

Some surveys and reports not only fail to define the unit but also demonstrate a lack of rigour with which the word is used. A common practice is to use it interchangeably with 'family'. This may not always matter as, for example, in a general discussion of resource use (Bell and Delobel, 1987, for example). But, ideally a distinction must be made because as Netting (1986:xx) points out, nonrelatives who live together, as well as servants and lodgers who cooperate in some common activities, are usually classified as household members, whereas non-resident kin may often be affiliated to another household unit. Such a situation is not uncommon in Nepal.

DESCRIBING THE NEPALESE HOUSEHOLD

Among the various surveys conducted in Nepal some have offered definitions of the household, two such definitions are as follows:[3]

> ... a combination of persons related or unrelated by blood, who share income, expenditure and also a common kitchen, apart from living under the general guardianship of the head of the household. The head of the household refers to the member of the household who is de facto responsible for managing the household and making household decisions.

> The household comprises the farmer and other members of the family, is both a consuming and producing unit, ... Households are often under the management of a single person, but sometimes operate collectively. Members normally live and sleep in the same place, share meals and divide household activities.

Other writers have chosen to describe a 'typical' Nepalese hill-farming household as in a recent report by UNICEF (1987:50). The 'typical household' is based upon a parent couple with their married sons and the latters nuclear families. Daughters usually leave their parental home on marriage. Cassels et al. (1987) provide household profiles of 'poor' and 'less poor' households in an attempt to indicate the diversity of household types found in their survey area. Attempts at definition and description of 'typical' households is not under contention as long as some account is made of the extent to which households may or may not differ from this picture. This caveat is justified from the data presented below.

The basis for the following discussion is data taken from a survey of farmer preferences for different maize varieties carried out among seventy nine households in the LAC ECA.[4] The local view of the household, gained during this survey, fits with the UNICEF description. When asked to list household membership the respondents named as members of the household those who did not, at that time, have an alternative place of abode in Nepal. Thus husbands, brothers and sons in the army or working away from the area were included in the figures along with resident labourers.

Having given some indication of the 'ideal' household as it is perceived in Nepal I shall now examine how in reality many households diverge from the 'ideal', using data from the maize survey as examples.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION IN THE MAIZE SURVEY DATA

A cross-section of households in a Nepalese village at a particular time would reveal a wide divergence from the 'typical' household described above. This is due to a number of factors, not least the developmental cycle through which domestic groups pass.[5] It is to this cycle that I first turn.

The Developmental Cycle of the Household

The data from the maize survey, presented in Figure 1, show the variation in size of household in the sample population with the largest household possessing twenty one members, the smallest two. This large variation suggests that we are looking at households at different stages of development. For example, in the four households below:

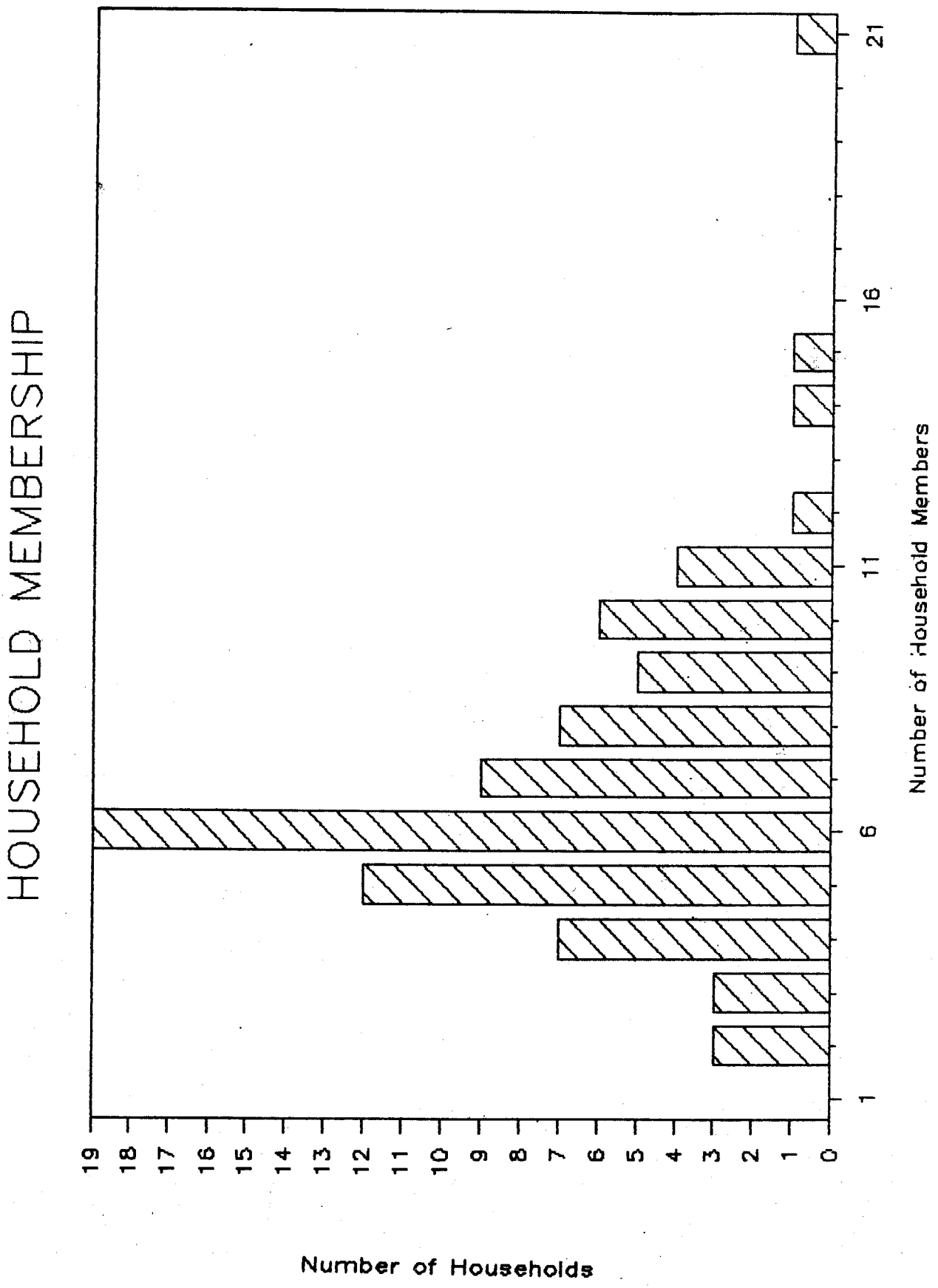
1. Mr. Subedi is 25 years old, his wife of 18 is the only other member of his household.

2. Mr. Gurung is 68, his household is made up of his 59 year old wife, two daughters of 27 and 9, four sons aged 34, 32, 25 and 12, a daughter-in-law of 30, a grand-daughter of 4 and two grandsons aged 4 and 3 months.

3. Mr. Gurung is 80 years old, his wife of 70 is the only other member of his household.

4. Mr. Gurung is 58, his household includes his 60 year old wife, 20 year old daughter and a worker, Mr. Dhana Petri Paudel who is 55.

Only case number two fits the picture of the 'typical household' given above. Cases one, three, and four appear as 'remnants' of the ideal extended household unit. Large households may split for a variety of reasons: intra-family discord or, perhaps, a shortage of land or resources to support large numbers; this will cause young married couples to break from the parental home as happened in case one. It is clear from the data collected that households with relatively large landholdings, or


HOUSEHOLD MEMBERSHIP
Number of Household Members
1
6
11
16
21
Number of Households
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

access to off-farm income, were most likely to support a large number of members. Indeed, twenty two of the twenty six households with more than eight members had access to non-farm income, usually in the form of an army pension or salary.[6] The household described in case two can be taken as an example: this household has twenty seven ropani[7] of land and an Indian Army pension of Rs. 650 a month. The average amount of land per household in the ECA is eight ropani.

Off-farm income can provide a resource base from which additional labour can be hired as in case four, a household with only one daughter and no sons. The daughter was earning a wage as a school teacher and her father was in receipt of an army pension.

The household in the sample with twenty one members has a small amount of land and serves to illustrate the importance of off-farm income as well as large landholdings in the maintenance of a large domestic group:

5. Mr. Nepali (a Sarki[8]) is 54 years old and spends the majority of his time working as a carpenter. He has six sons, aged 35, 32, 27, 20, and 12, two of these are in the Indian army, one works as a watchman in India and another works in a vehicle workshop in Pokhara. He has one daughter at home aged 7. The rest of his household is made up of four daughter-in-laws and eight grandchildren. He owns 7 hal[9] of khet land and 4 hal of bari land which the female members of the household manage.

These five cases are all taken from male-headed households. But twenty percent of the households surveyed were female-headed. These remnant households also diverge from the 'typical' case.

6. Mrs. Chapagain is 38 and a widow. Her household is made up of a daughter of 14 and two sons of 20 and 12.

7. Mrs. Pun is 33, her 37 year old husband is in the Indian Army. They have three sons of 13, 12, and 8. Her husband comes home on leave about every eighteen months so she is the household head at the present time.

Widowhood or temporary male migration for employment alter the composition of the household leaving a woman as temporary, or permanent, household head.

Three further cases can be taken to illustrate how households can differ from the 'typical' household. Two out of the households interviewed had married daughters in residence. In both cases the daughter's husband was in the Indian Army and the girl had returned to her natal home while her husband was away.

The third case is of a father providing free seed and labour to his daughter's separate household while her husband was in India. Thus the division between the two households was blurred through the sharing of resources.

Out of the seventy nine sample households only twenty eight fit the UNICEF 'typical' household. For six of the twenty eight a son was the de facto household head with the father still in residence. It is to the question of the definition of the household head that I next turn.

THE HOUSEHOLD HELD

The majority of surveys require a household head to be named who is usually treated as the key informant. Indeed, the first definition of the household quoted above described the household head as being responsible for managing the household and making decisions. The household head, in the Indo-Aryan patrilineal ideology, tends to be assumed to be the eldest male in the domestic group.10 But evidence shows that the headship may not always fall to the eldest male. A man whose children have all married may 'retire' from the position, turning it over to one of his sons. In these circumstances the man ceases to exercise the rights and duties of household head but continues to exercise those obligations appropriate to a father. Although kinship may be a factor in the ordering of household personnel the role of husband/father (and indeed wife/mother) can often be distinguished from that of household head.

The list of household heads recorded in the maize survey were those names taken from lists of LAC cooperator farmers, and where the household was not on the list the person was defined by the members themselves as their 'head'. Some cases serve to show the diversity of household heads in the sample population.

6. Mr. Chhetri is 30 years old. He is listed as his household's head. He is a primary school teacher. His household is made up of his 30 year old wife, 55 year old father, 50 old mother, 28 year old brother who is away in the Indian Army, 25 year old sister-in-law, 2 daughters aged 10 and 8, a son of 6 and two nephews aged 4 and 5.

7. Mr. Chapagain, the household head, is 53 years old. His household consists of his wife of 45, a daughter of 16, three sons aged 26, 19 and 13, a daughter-in-law of 24 and a 4 year old grandson.

8. Mr. Gurung is 56, he is the household head. His wife of 55, daughter of 18, a son of 37 who runs a shop, a son of 26 in the Indian Army, a son of 15 who is studying, a daughter-in-law of 37 and two granddaughters of 15 and 12 and a grandson of 11 make up his household.

The household head in cases seven and eight is the same age as the father of the household head in case six. They are all listed as engaging in agriculture as their main occupation. To be a school teacher is a respected position in village society, thus Mr. Chhetri in case six may be performing the household head role because of his education and presumed ability to deal with outside bodies such as agricultural centres.

9. Mrs. Pun is 60 years old and a widow. She heads a household made up of her two daughters aged 25 and 18 and her three sons aged 30, 27 and 21.

10. Mrs. Pun, a widow of 57, is her household's head. She has a 25 year old son working in Hong Kong. But she has a 16 year old daughter and two sons aged 30 and 21 at home.

11. Mr. Paudel is 27 and the household head. His 48 year old mother, a sister of 17, brothers of 22, 15, and 13, plus his wife of 26, two daughters aged 9 and 2 and a 9 month old son, make up his household.

The mothers in cases nine, ten, and eleven would all appear to be in a similar situation but two are designated household head, one is not. The fact that cases nine and ten are Tibeto-Burman households and case eleven is an Indo-Aryan household may be important.[11] Data collected in a small survey of female-headed households in the Brahmin (Indo-Aryan) village of Tapu confirm the view that certain characteristics of Brahmin female household heads may be defined:

Table 1
Household Composition of Female-Headed Brahmin Households in Tapu (October 1988)

No.	Age of Household Members				
	Woman Head	Husband	Daughters	Sons	Other
1.	24	29 Indian Army	8	3	m-i-l 63
2.	45	-	16, 9, 6	15	
3.	38	-	14	20, 11	
4.	33	33 India	5, 4	10	
5.	40	44 India	5	2	sister 32
6.	25	30 working elsewhere in Nepal	7, 2	4	
7.	32		13, 10		
8.	30	39 India	13	7, 4	m-i-l 60

All the women in this list are under forty, none has a child, and more particularly a son, over twenty. It may well be the case that as the sons grow older they will assume the household headship. An exception to this general rule could be seen in the following case:

12. Mrs. Chapagain (Indo-Aryan) is 50 years old. She has three sons aged 30, 25 and 16 the eldest of whom is working in India and a daughter-in-law aged 25.

However, this woman's husband had died only a month before the interview. One may suppose, on the evidence presented above, that one of the sons will become the household head in the near future.

An important group of female-headed households are those headed by women whose husbands are working away from home, in particular those who are in the Army or 'civil service' in India or Saudi Arabia.[12]

13. Mrs. Pun is 33, her 37 year old husband is in the Indian Army. She has three sons aged 13, 12 and 8.

14. Mrs. Pun is 23, her husband of 33 has been working in Saudi Arabia and he is now in Kathmandu looking for more work overseas. They have no children.

15. Mrs. Pun is 30, her 38 year old husband is working in Saudi Arabia. She heads the household made up of three daughters aged 12, 8, and 6 and her son aged 10, and her husband's 70 year old father and 65 year old mother.

These women may find themselves as *de facto* household head for more than ten years. The evidence from the maize survey showed that these particular women did not appear to be constrained in their decisions concerning the adoption of new technologies and the development of their farms while their husbands were absent, as has been thought by some commentators (Schroeder 1980: 45).

A final case illustrates how problematic the designation of household head can be.

16. Mr. Chapagain (aged 48) is a lawyer in a town near to his home village. He resides for the majority of the time in the town. His wife (aged 35) and children (three daughters aged 18, 13, 12 and two sons aged 16 and 4) reside in the village.

This household was interviewed in a household survey undertaken by a LAC economist in 1981. At that time Mr. Chapagain was listed as being the household head. This household was interviewed again, seven years later, as part of the maize survey, then Mr. Chapagain's wife was listed as the household head. The household's domestic arrangements had remained the same during the seven years. Mrs. Chapagain had been twentyeight

in 1981 an age clearly not unsuitable for household headship as indicated from the data above. The difference could result from a number of factors. Firstly, there has been a tendency for enumerators to look for male household heads, even when they are absent, and thus Mr. Chapagain would have been assumed to hold the position. Secondly, there is the influence of my own gender on the second survey result; the field assistant knew I was interested in interviewing female-headed households. However, Mrs. Chapagain did acknowledge the title of 'household head' since she was solely responsible for the day to day running of household affairs. There is, of course, no reason why the *de facto* household head should not change through the developmental cycle of the domestic group. This case serves as a cautionary tale against putting too much emphasis on looking for the household head.

To discuss 'the household' can also obscure variation within as well as among these units. Folbre (1986:5) criticises economists for '[t]reating the household as an individual by another name, they overlook the importance of conflict and inequality between household members.' It is to the general question of intra-household variation that the discussion now turns.

INTRA-HOUSEHOLD VARIATION

A number of writers, Jiggins (1984:160) and Ellis (1988:13) for example, note the body of data that exists on the structural difference in the economic position of men, women and children, across class and ethnic lines and the implications which this has for policy. There may be important differences in the economic relationships and responsibilities of and between people within the household, particularly between men and women. McKee (1986:191), for example notes differences which occur in responsibilities for day-to-day farm management; agricultural investment decisions; and choices about household consumption of agricultural commodities.

A case can be taken from the data gathered from the maize survey which reveal that women and men have different approaches to the assessment of the quality of maize varieties. This fact is borne out in the work of Ashby et al. (1987:5) on beans where they found that women had different criteria for choosing the variety to be grown. Women viewed a small grain type as desirable from the point of view of the subsistence and consumption objectives of the small farm. Men selected beans for size, with a view to marketability. This orientation is very similar to that found in the maize survey. Thus, it was found that varieties actually grown consisted of a compromise between the requirements of men and women.

In most communities throughout Nepal much of the agricultural work, particularly in the hills, and many of the cottage industries are carried out by women.[13] Acharya and Bennett (1979:63) in their study of the status of women in Nepal note that anthropological studies indicate that

the census reported activity rates for women are gross underestimations. Thus, the woman's role in various farm activities is important not only because of her key place in farming but also because many of the activities performed are her responsibility. Consequently, decisions regarding fodder collection or compost applications, for example, tend to be made by women rather than men. This was substantiated in the study by Acharya and Bennett, which showed that women made forty two percent of agricultural decisions alone, and twelve and a half percent with men (1982:61).

It is not surprising, therefore, that during the maize survey the most fruitful interviews were those in which a number of household members participated. Women and men tended to have precise knowledge on different areas of maize cultivation and processing. Indeed one woman interviewed with her thirteen year old son laughed as he corrected her figures on landholdings, but she knew the details of the amount of seed sown, and the growing and processing properties of the different varieties.

Shrestha et al. (1988) found in their study of women's participation in agricultural decision-making that while women may share in general agricultural production decision-making processes, men dominate the decisions made about participation in extension activities. Thus, it is not only the nature of the caste or ethnic group which may influence the organisation of the household, but the areas of involvement in decision-taking will vary according to the subject under consideration.

The extent to which women and children have a say in the decisions taken in male-dominated households will, however, vary between castes and ethnic groups.

THE INFLUENCE OF CASTE AND ETHNICITY ON HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

'Caste' refers to the occupational grouping of peoples brought to Nepal by Hindu immigrants from India in about the eleventh century. These were divided into high castes (Brahmins and Chhetris) and lower or occupational castes (Damai, Kami, and Sarki, for example). The hill ethnic groups (Tibeto-Burman groups such as Magar, Gurung, etc.) came under the new Indo-Aryan rulers but were never fully integrated into the caste system. Discrimination on the basis of caste has been formally outlawed by the Mulki Ain (National Code) of 1963. Although it is illegal as a basis for discrimination the caste system is still an important influence in Nepalese society as a number of commentators have shown.[14] Seddon (1987:149), for example, describes the way in which Gurungs, Magars, Limbus and Rais have received preferential treatment as regards recruitment into the Army, particularly the British Army, while Brahmins and Chhetris, traditionally higher castes, may be more highly regarded by employers. This picture is supported in the work of Smith (1986) for Bhojpur.

Intra- as well as inter-household differences may vary between castes and ethnic groups. It has often been reported that women of Tibeto-Burman origin (Gurungs and Magars, for example) tend to enjoy a more egalitarian relationship with men, and have a stronger tradition of female entrepreneurship than women in Indo-Aryan groups (Brahmins and the occupational castes). This assertion is supported in the work of Acharya and Bennett (1982). They classified communities on the basis of observations made about the work of men and women, and the extent to which women were limited to the household subsistence economy or were able to participate in the local market economy. They show that the Tibeto-Burman socio-cultural framework provides greater scope for female participation in the household decision-making process. In their analysis of factors affecting female decision-making they found that the image of the female sex and age at first marriage were significant. Thus women's participation in subsistence production, local market activities and employment outside the village all have a positive effect on women's decision-making role. Of all the variables employment outside the village was the most important, a condition most likely to be found in the Tibeto-Burman groups. Panter-Brick (1986:142) observed a difference in organisation and household composition between Kami and Tamang households in Salme which fitted with the picture drawn up by Acharya and Bennett. Panter-Brick's analysis contrasts women's experience of work and child-bearing among the Kami and Tamang households.

'Caste' may be related to 'class', as Seddon describes (1987:144-153), because of differential access to resources which reinforces inequalities. Bell and Delobel (1987) found that landholdings among the occupational castes were smaller and of inferior quality to those of the Gurungs in the village they studied. The tendency for occupational castes to live on the outskirts of settlements, often on marginal land, was also found in the maize survey (Seeley, 1988:3). Balogun (1987:2) describes the relatively low number of fodder trees taken by occupational castes from nurseries compared to the numbers taken by Magars and Gurungs; this he attributes to the lack of resources of the former groups. It stands to reason that certain groups, households with access to Army pensions for example, will be able to cope with adversity, and indeed support larger households than those dependent on the produce from a small amount of land. There is, as has been pointed out, a relationship between certain ethnic groups and army service.

The data from the maize survey do not appear to support this assertion by showing a significant difference between the groups. The distribution by caste and ethnic group of the sample population is shown in Table 2, the average household size by caste and ethnic group is shown in Table 3 (the distribution of castes and ethnic groups for the sampled panchayats is given in the appendix).

Table 2
No. of Households by Caste in Maize Survey Villages

Village/Group	Inod-Aryan						
	Brahmin	Kami	Damai	Chhetri	Gharti	Sunar	Sarki
Puranogaun	2						
Langdi		2	1				
Lespar							
Phalehalne							
Pokhare	2			1			
Tapu	7						
Sidhane	1	3					1
Kudbidanda					1	1	
Damdame							
Harpan	2						
Tamagi		1					
Bhadaure	1						
Total	15	6	1	1	1	1	1

Village/Group	Tibeto-Burman		
	Gurung	Magar	Newar
Puranogaun		11	
Langdi	4		
Lespar		13	
Phalehalen	5		
Pokhare			
Tapu			
Sidhane	5		
Kubdidanda	6		
Damdame	2		
Harpan			
Tamagi	3		
Bhadaure	3		1
Total	28	24	1

Table 3
Average Household Size, by Caste and Ethnic Group for the Maize Sample Households

Group	Average Household Size	No. in Sample
Indo-Aryan		
Brahmin	7.2	15
Chhetri	11	1
Gharti	6	1
Kami*	6	6
Damai*	6	1
Sarki*	21	1
Sunar*	15	1
Tibeto-Burman		
Gurung	6.6	28
Magar	6.1	24
Newar	7	1

*Occupational castes.

These averages, particularly for the first three groups hide a great variation in household sizes as Figure 1 revealed. Even so, the lack of variation between groups, and in particular the large households supported by the occupational castes, seems likely to be a product of a bias in the sample. The Sunar household, for example, ran a properous goldsmith business in Pokhara. The majority of sampled households had larger than average landholdings for the LAC ECA which suggests something about the nature of farmers who are likely to be obtaining improved varieties from LAC, rather than of the population as a whole (Seeley 1988:6). A number of factors are clearly at work which are hidden in the simple figures given above. Bell and Delobel (1987:23), for example, found that the occupational castes in the village they studied had slightly larger families and a larger potential labour supply than the Gurung households because of long term migratory employment among the Gurungs. This finding indicates again that the assumption that shortage of land will restrict household size to be incorrect.

It is obvious that the variations in household composition in Nepal described above will influence the data collected in 'household' surveys. It is worthwhile reflecting upon the particular areas in which care must be taken in data analysis and in the comparison of results from different households.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF HOUSEHOLD VARIATION FOR DATA COLLECTION

Caste and Ethnicity

The influence of caste and ethnicity, as described above, is not clearcut. Although caste and ethnic group affiliation may provide a useful indicator of the economic condition of households it will not necessarily provide a wholly reliable method of assessing the composition and resources of households identified merely by surname. Bell and Delobel (1987:27) note that 'just as there are a few Gurungs whose resource position seems more appropriate to the occupational caste status, a number of Damai and Kami farmers through outside employment were not stuck as landless labourers'.[15] Likewise, Cassels et al. (1987:11) found that it is misleading to classify households earning considerable amounts of grain and corn from their occupational services as poor because of their negligible land holdings. They found that some tailors and cobblers may be able to cope better with the low production of food from their own land than their landholding would suggest. It is impossible to predict with any confidence what the differences between the groups will be in any given situation. However, it is apparent that differences do occur, for a variety of reasons, and these must be determined and taken into account.

The Developmental Cycle

The developmental cycle of the domestic group presents a number of obstacles to the unwary data-collector. To begin with there is the problem of the 'invisible members'. Fricke (1986:18) in his study of Tamang village states that even when members are away from the village for extended periods they are expected to contribute wages to the common good of the 'cooking hearth' to which they belong.[16] Indeed, as Netting notes (1986:19) in some cases the most important members of a household are those who are not resident at all, simply because of the remittances they send back, yet they are the ones who can easily be missed in data collection.

Secondly, it is apparent from the above discussion that household composition affects the way in which a household organises resources. Chayanov's (1966) work on Russian farmers illustrates how agricultural decisions will be influenced by the composition of the household at the time when the decision must be made. A household will weigh up its needs against the labour required to fulfil them. Barlett (1980:145), using data from Costa Rica, shows how the age of the oldest male in the household influences the decision to take up a new technology. It stands to reason that if one factor, such as age, can influence household decision-taking, factors such as the number of teenage children available or the absence of a key adult will also have an important effect.

Panter-Brick (1986), in her work on Tamang and Kami households in Salme, describes cases of married Tamang women living with their natal family. The reason given was shortage of labour in their natal households. The endogamous nature of the majority of Tamang marriages in the village she studied meant that few women residing in the marital home were more than a few minutes from their natal home, and thus in a position to provide labour when needed. This was not true for the Kami women who were not only more confined to their own domestic space than the Tamangs because of differences in social organisation, but they had all married into the village from outside and thus could not visit their natal homes regularly. This illustrates, once more, the important influence of ethnic group.

Household Headship and Decision-Taking

Netting (1986:xxv) has commented that western demographers and economists have tended to presuppose a male household head and bread winner in the public domain with the woman as housewife occupied with consumption, reproduction and child care. The western concepts of 'housewife' and 'household head' have been adopted in Nepal, as in so many other developing countries, without reservation; they carry the western bias connoting only a limited domestic role for women. The data above, and indeed the data on household decision-making and organisation in Nepal in general, show such an assumption often to be incorrect. A search for a 'household head' wholly responsible for decision-making is, in the Nepalese context, misguided.

It was noted above that Schroeder (1980) found women heading households in the absence of their spouses to be restricted in the range of decisions that they can take. It can equally be argued that male household members rely on their wives and older children for assistance in decision-making. It is apparent that data collected from one member of a household may not be accurate in all areas simply because the farm enterprise is a shared experience and the knowledge of that farm is also shared. Indeed, decisions tend to emerge from households through negotiation, disagreement, conflict and bargaining. A household head may have the final word, out of respect for seniority and experience, but the decision about agricultural inputs, for example, will seldom be the result of her or his knowledge alone. The extent to which women and children have a say in the decisions taken in male-dominated households will, however, vary between castes and ethnic groups.

It will be apparent from the above discussion that to treat households as comparable undifferentiated wholes overlooks significant differences in their composition and behaviour.

FINDING THE HOUSEHOLD: AN APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

Although survey research is not always inappropriate when general quantitative data are required its value can be greatly enhanced by other

methods of data collection which provide qualitative data. The method which is particularly appropriate for household description is that of 'case studies'.[17] As Conlin (1981:58) notes 'an intensive study of a few families or individuals can give social researchers a much greater understanding of the processes which lie behind the statistics given by surveys'.

Cassels et al. (1987) utilised qualitative data from case studies to supplement the quantitative data gathered in their study of coping strategies of farmers in Eastern Nepal. Detailed information was collected from some of the sample households of different wealth and food deficit groups. In particular, households of varying sizes and with varying ratios of dependent and non-dependent household members and households that relied entirely on off-farm labour for survival, were compared with those who only depended on the availability of off-season work. These qualitative data were then used to clarify the quantitative data particularly when discrepancies occurred; for examples when a small landowning household supported a large number of members due to off-farm income. Extracts from the household profiles collected were then used to illustrate the final report rather than merely trying to produce an all embracing picture of a 'typical' household to cover the whole sample. A similar approach proved to be useful in a study of urban households in Lusaka (Zambia) (Seeley, 1987).

Case studies do, however, require a few staff to be trained in conducting indepth interviews rather than merely collecting quantitative data for a simple questionnaire. In the Cassels study some enumerators were trained to stimulate discussion with all household members and record all their responses on a range of topics. This approach places considerable responsibility on the individual enumerators and demands the skills more appropriate to anthropological investigation, based largely on observation and informal interviewing techniques, rather than those of a census taker. Such skills will not always be available. Nevertheless, five or six case studies included in a survey of fifty or sixty households will often be enough to give additional information on variations within the sample that the quantitative data may not explain. Hill (1986:82) supports this view by commenting on the value of distinguishing several household 'types' to overcome the problems of hiding household variation, even if this can only be achieved by using a bigger sample.

Even with limited staff valuable data can be gathered by recording a household member's life history, or the story of a land dispute. Old people, in particular, who may have the time to talk to someone they recognise as being interested in what they have to say are a valuable source of such information. The simple lesson is: no data are superfluous, all add up to a more rounded picture of the household.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to show that even within the Nepalese context of patrilineal kinship groups organised around the family the concept of the household can be little more than a flexible yardstick with which to measure social organisation. However, even if the yardstick is unreliable one cannot deny that selecting the household as a common focus for social and scientific research and analysis has practical and theoretical justification, households are 'the next biggest thing on a social map after the individual' (Hammel 1986:30).

The lesson should be to think carefully about the terms and definitions used in any survey or report and the categories they embrace, as well as the variation they hide. It is clear from the data presented above that statistics on households need to be treated with some caution. There are 14,000 households in the LAC ECA, it is worth reflecting upon the diversity that simple figure hides.

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NOTES

1. The reports published by the Centre for Economic Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University, the Socio-Economic and Research Extension Division of the Nepali Government, Ministry of Agriculture and, indeed, the technical reports of Lumle and Pakhribas Agricultural Centres in Nepal are cases in point.

2. See for example, Guyer (1981), Smith (1973), and Yanagisako (1979).

3. APROSC (1984:14) and Shrestha et al. (1988:9) respectively.

4. See, Seeley (1988).

5. The 'Development Cycle of Domestic Groups' was first described in detail in the work of Fortes and Goody (1958).

6. For the 48 households in the sample from four of the five sampled panchayats: Bajung, Deorali, Deopur and Keng, 35 percent of households had an off-farm income (Seeley, 1988:9). A panchayat is a political division usually covering a village and its surrounding area, or a collection of small villages.

7. One ropani is approximately 500 square metres.

8. Sarki is one of the occupational castes. The term 'occupational' comes from the traditional work practiced by Kamis, Damais and Sarkis: blacksmiths, tailors, and leatherworkers.

9. One hal is the amount of land which can be ploughed in a day. Khet land is irrigated land, bari land is rainfed land.

10. See, Pokhrel (1982:27) and Reejal (1979:107-8).

11. The implications of this division are discussed in more detail below.

12. 'Civil Service' is a general term which is used to describe all sorts of employment under taken in the host country. This employment usually takes the form of 'watchman' or 'security guard.'

13. This point has been made by a number of commentators see, for example, Bajracharya and Jansen (1988) and the papers presented at an IAAS/USAID workshop on 'Women in Farming' held at Rampur, Nepal, 4-7 October 1988.

14. See, for example, the studies on the status of women edited by Acharya and Bennett (1979).

15. Bell and Delobel report that when a statistical analysis was run on the survey data to determine socioeconomic groups for agricultural trial planning three Damai and two Gurung households (out of a total of seventy) crossed over the expected dividing line. The categorisation was based on landholding, land type, outside income and labour availability.

16. Fricke notes that the Tamang use 'the cooking hearth' to define the household. The members of a social group using one hearth when resident constitute, in the folk view, the 'household'. This Fricke adopted as his own definition.

17. This method is described in detail by Carter (1986).

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APPENDIX

The distribution of ethnic groups in the LAC ECA of the sampled panchayats as projected for 1988 is given below.

Ethnic Groups in the Sampled Panchayats

(Estimate of number of people)

Group	Keng	Bajung	Deorali	Deopur	Bhadaure
Brahmin	20	980	364	1325	1120
Chhetri	13	364	153	345	92
Magar	2364	19	599	3	18
Gurung		76	387	43	1628
Damai	25	316	261	39	79
Kami	30	199	208	26	582
Newar					18
Gharti					92
Jogi		363		103	
Thakuri	383			187	
Sarki	149		92	59	127
Total	2452	3175	2064	3135	3756