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Ethnicity, Clothing Availability, and Rural-Urban Disparities in Nepal

Tika Ram Gautam[1] Ram Raj Pokharel[2] & Bishnu Prasad Khanal[3]

[1]Associate Professor & Former Head of Central Department of Sociology, Former Coordinator of Central Department of Social Work, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (Nepal) E-mail:<tika.gautam@cdso.tu.edu.np>

[2]Assistant Professor of Sociology and Former Coordinator of the Central Department of Social Work, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (Nepal) E-mail:<ram.pokharel240@gmail.com>

[3]Associatet Professor, Central Department of History, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (Nepal)

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between ethnicity, adequacy of clothing, and rural–urban disparities in Nepal using nationally representative data from the Nepal Living Standards Survey-IV (2022/23), covering 46,870 individuals across 9,600 households. Adequacy of clothing is used as a proxy for basic material well-being. The analysis highlights how location of residence and ethnicity intersect to shape material deprivation. Households in Kathmandu report the lowest overall inadequacy (9.8%), yet Hill Dalits remain disproportionately disadvantaged, indicating the persistence of social hierarchies even in urban centers. Other urban areas show higher deprivation among Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (46.4%), followed by religious/linguistic minorities (29.7%), suggesting that urbanization alone does not reduce social inequality. Rural areas experience the highest deprivation (27%), particularly among marginalized groups such as Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (56.5%). Chi-square tests confirm that these differences are highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$), demonstrating a strong association between ethnicity, location of residence, and adequacy of clothing. The study concludes that material inequality in Nepal is shaped by both the rural–urban divide and ethnic background, underscoring the need for inclusive policies to address overlapping disadvantages.

Keywords

Ethnicity, Clothing facility, material well-being, Rural-urban location, Nepal.

Research Foundation International, New Delhi
(Affiliated to UNO)
Editorial Office : D-59, Shastri Nagar, Meerut - 250 004 (INDIA)
Ph. : 0121-2763765, +91-9997771669, +91-9219658788

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1. Introduction

Nepal is a country marked by social diversity and inequalities of different forms shaped by geography, location of residence, ethnicity, and availability of goods and services. Despite policy commitments to poverty reduction and social inclusion, disparities in access to basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter still remain widespread. The rural-urban divide continues to influence household well-being, with rural areas experiencing higher deprivation, while ethnic background further exacerbate vulnerability among marginalized groups such as Dalits, Janajatis, and minority communities. Clothing adequacy, though a basic and often overlooked dimension of material welfare, serves as a critical indicator of household poverty and social inequality. Yet, limited research has systematically examined how ethnicity and location intersect to shape such deprivation in Nepal. This paper addresses this gap by analyzing the patterns of clothing adequacy across ethnic groups in Kathmandu, other urban centers, and rural Nepal, thereby contributing to broader debates on social inequality and development within and beyond Nepal.

Ethnicity, a highly debatable issue in Nepal, is a socio-historically constructed phenomenon in a particular historical context. The debate surrounding the issue gained currency, particularly after the political changes of 1990 and more after 2006, which provided various platforms for people to be organized and demand various rights, as is argued by Mishra, Wimmer and others. Concurrent to these claims of ethnicity and demands for rights, there have emerged various ethnicities like, Janajati, Madhesi, Dalit, Pahadiya, Brahman Samaj, and Chhetri Samaj in Nepal (As cited by Gautam, 2013).

Andersen and Hansen (2012) highlight conceptual diversity, identifying a key division between two understandings of cultural capital. The narrow view links cultural capital primarily to high culture, while the broader perspective includes general linguistic and cognitive skills, habits, and forms of knowledge. They argue that symbolic or formal aspects of students' performance, as opposed to purely technical skills, are valued differently in different educational

settings. Building on Bourdieu's writings, they explore the implications of this distinction.

Miller (2005) highlighted several democratic values relevant to fashion, including freedom of expression, equality, solidarity, respect, and citizen action. Clothing, in this sense, can be seen as an outward expression of democratic culture. Alison Lurie, in The Language of Clothes, famously described fashion as a form of free speech-an essential privilege of a free society. Even in ancient Athens, while democracy was not directly equated with individual rights, there was an acknowledgment of personal freedom in matters of expression, including dress. Pericles, for instance, praised the Athenian spirit of tolerance in everyday life, which could be extended to choices of clothing. At the same time, Plato used clothing as a metaphor to critique democracy, likening it to a multicolored cloak that dazzles with variety but risks undermining communal bonds. He cautioned that while democratic openness and diversity may appear beautiful, unchecked individualism could weaken the foundations of collective life. Thus, throughout history, fashion has been intertwined with the idea of democratic freedom-celebrated for its vitality yet also viewed with suspicion for its potential to fragment society.

Andersen and Hansen (2012), drawing on Bourdieu, argue that the culture of the dominant classes functions as a legitimate form of culture that individuals can acquire to different degrees. Students who are exposed to such cultural forms from an early age are more likely to succeed academically, since they already possess the valued knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Research that has sought to test the validity of cultural capital theory, however, does not represent a unified tradition, as it employs varying definitions and approaches.

To test these ideas, Andersen and Hansen (2012) analyze a data set covering five full cohorts of Norwegian compulsory school leavers, with three cohorts tracked further into secondary education. The dataset includes detailed records of school performance, and the researchers apply a class scheme designed to capture Bourdieu's key distinctions between class positions. Their findings largely support Bourdieu's arguments about the links between class and culture. Specifically, they observe that school performance differs both across class hierarchies and within class factions, that class inequalities tend to widen as students' progress through education, and that such inequalities manifest differently in written versus oral examinations. This indicates that inequality among people is shaped by multiple factors such as social, cultural, political, and so on.

Miller (2005) argued that democratic political relationships are essential for enabling collective action and strengthening citizens' power. Fashion, he suggested, plays a subtle but important role in shaping how citizens perceive one another, which in turn influences their political bonds. Thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Wilson Carey McWilliams emphasized that common action in democracy requires ties of friendship among citizens (As cited by Miler, 2005). To understand political relationships more clearly, it may help to consider their opposite-separation, alienation, and competition for material possessions. Political relationships can be both active and potential. In active relationships, citizens come together through campaigns or civic activities that bring them into direct contact. In potential relationships, people are connected through shared values, history, and experiences-even when they do not personally know each other. However, if deep divisions of wealth and status cause citizens to see themselves as belonging to separate worlds, the possibility of common action may seem remote. In such cases, even clothing can serve as a reminder of shared identity, reducing isolation and reinforcing solidarity (Miller, 2005). The availability and adequacy of clothing therefore differ by different political and social dimensions, including ethnicity and location of residence.

Mishra (2010; 2070 VS), Pandey (2010), Gautam (2013), and Nakarmi (2021) have emphasized the structural dimension of inequality in the context of Nepal. The macro structure at the state level and micro level at the individual and household level play an important role in shaping access to health and education opportunities. Nakarmi (2021) discusses the Newar community, where socioeconomic background significantly affects their access to opportunities and resources. In the line of inequality and change, Pokharel (2023) argues that due to contact with the members of the community with different languages, religions, and cultures, the migrants appear to have learned and brought in new ideas on modern consumption cultures, such as food, dress, education, and health. At the micro level, access to educational opportunity of various kind including education, health, food, clothing, housing and so on differs by the ethnic background of the individual as well (Gautam, 2017), which is one of the reasons for inequality in the context of Nepal.

Based on NLSS-IV (2022/23), the NSO (2024) indicates that 18.5 percent of respondents provided self-reported assessments on the adequacy of key consumption categories-housing, clothing, health-care, children's education, and income-across Nepal's regions and

socioeconomic groups. Overall, most respondents rated their consumption as "fair" in all categories except income, where 50.5 percent reported it as inadequate. For every category except schooling, at least 20 percent of respondents reported their consumption as less than adequate. As expected, the share of people reporting inadequacy increased from the richest to the poorest quintiles, while those reporting "fair" consumption increased in the opposite direction, from poorest to richest (NSO, 2024). The report also provides further breakdowns by province, analytical domains, urban and rural areas, consumption quintiles, poverty status, and ethnicity, which is still unexplored in relation to adequacy of consumption.

2. Objectives

The general objective of this paper is to examine the adequacy of clothing by ethnicity across rural and urban contexts in Nepal. Specifically, it seeks to identify the extent of inequality among different social groups and to assess how these disparities vary between Kathmandu, other urban areas, and rural Nepal. A further objective is to determine whether the observed differences are statistically significant by applying a Chi-Square test of independence, thereby establishing whether clothing inadequacy is systematically associated with ethnic background and location of residence. More broadly, the study aims to highlight the intersection of rural-urban location and ethnicity in shaping household well-being in terms of clothing facility in Nepal.

3. Methods and Materials

3·1 Data Source and Sampling

This paper is based on data available from the Nepal Living Standards Survey-IV (NLSS 2022/23), which provides nationally representative data on household living conditions. The analysis covers a total of 46,870 individuals and 9600 households, distributed across Kathmandu, other urban areas, and rural Nepal. The survey employs a stratified sampling method to ensure representation of different geographic regions, caste/ethnic groups, and socio-economic categories. Therefore, the NLSS data set is regarded as high-quality data in the context of Nepal and beyond. In this paper, the key indicator used is the adequacy of clothing at the household level, categorized as adequate or less than adequate. Ethnic and caste groups were classified into standard categories (defined in the NLSS-IV). They are Hill Caste, Madhesh/Tarai Caste, Janajati groups, Dalits, and others, following the official NLSS framework.

3·2 Analytical Approach

To explore the availability of clothing facilities among households, descriptive statistics are compared in terms of the percentage of households with less than adequate clothing across ethnic/caste groups and locations (Kathmandu, other urban, and rural Nepal). Descriptive statistics used capture the magnitude of deprivation or inequality within and between groups. To highlight inequalities, comparisons were made not only across regions but also within ethnic groups. Differences between Hill Castes and Hill Dalits, or between Madhesh/Tarai Caste and Madhesh/Tarai Dalits, were examined to capture how social structure shapes household inequality differently in urban and rural contexts. The results are presented in tabular form, showing both disaggregated and aggregated patterns.

3·3 Statistical Test of Association

To assess whether the observed differences were statistically significant, a Chi-Square test of independence was conducted separately for Kathmandu, other urban areas, rural Nepal, and the total sample. The test examined the association between ethnicity and adequacy of clothing, yielding Chi-Square values across all locations. The test results were confirmed through the test to decide whether household clothing adequacy is significantly shaped by both location of residence (rural-urban divide) and ethnicity, reinforcing the importance of examining material adequacy and deprivation through an intersectional lens.

4. Clothing and its Dynamics

The importance of clothing has been discussed by different scholars in different ways, focusing on various aspects of clothes. Hillman (2013) explains that feminist advocacy for freedom of choice in dress played a central role in reshaping American society's acceptance of women's fashion. Influenced by the women's movement, many women fought for the right to wear pantsuits and miniskirts in workplaces and schools. By the 1970s, these previously controversial styles became increasingly accepted in such institutions, marking a visible change in cultural norms. It indicates how social and cultural norms and values.

At the same time, feminist politics of self-presentation provoked skepticism and resistance. Critics feared that by challenging traditional dress codes, the feminist movement aimed to erase the distinctions between men and women. Antifeminist figures,

particularly Phyllis Schlafly and opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment (as mentioned by Hilman, 2013), seized on women's adoption of "unfeminine" clothing to argue that feminists sought to dismantle gender differences altogether. Mainstream media reinforced this perception by focusing heavily on the hair and clothing styles of feminist activists. Journalists often ridiculed them as "ugly" and "unfeminine", leading some Americans to believe that feminists, by rejecting traditional appearances, intended to undermine both womanhood and gender difference itself (Hillman, 2013).

Laudal (2010) notes that the international clothing business has been described in various ways, such as a "buyer-driven commodity chain" (Gereffi, 1999, as cited in Laudal, 2010) or through the lens of "lean manufacturing" (Abernathy, 2004; Abernathy *et al.*, 1999, as mentioned in Laudal, 2010). Other analyses rely heavily on descriptive economic data (e.g., Baden, 2002; Gaarder, 2004; ILO, 2005; Nordâs, 2004; OECD, 2004, as cited in Laudal, 2010). However, Laudal points out that no prior publication has specifically characterized the global clothing industry to examine corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Drawing on multiple studies of the sector, Laudal (2010) identifies six common features of the international clothing business that directly relate to CSR potential by interacting with various risk factors (Laudal, 2010). These are: (1) production that is highly labour-intensive and based on traditional technologies, (2) significant differences in overall cost levels between sourcing and recipient regions, (3) a buyer- dominated market structure, (4) short deadlines and unpredictable ordering procedures, (5) limited transparency, and (6) barriers to effective communication. These categories and explanations are made more from an economic perspective. Clothing and its adequacy are more social constructions associated with several social categories, including ethnicity and location of residence.

According to Tokatli and Kizilgün (2004), since 1984, Erak Clothing, a Turkish contractor, has produced jeans as a full-package manufacturer for international brands like Calvin Klein, Guess, and Esprit. After launching its own brand, Mavi Jeans, in 1991, the company began evolving into an original brand-name manufacturer and retailer. Today, Mavi Jeans are available at over 3,000 retail locations worldwide, including department stores such as Nordstrom, Macy's, and Bloomingdale's, as well as in five directly operated flagship stores in Vancouver, New York, Frankfurt, Berlin, and Montreal. The authors highlight the remarkable journey of Erak Clothing's transformation from a contract manufacturer to a global brand-name producer and

retailer. They examine how a peripheral manufacturer achieved a high-value-added competitive edge by integrating into global networks of production, consumption, and information within the buyer-driven clothing industry, where the largest retailers, brand marketers, and factory-less manufacturers hold dominant power. This case illustrates that individual firms can exercise a degree of independent action and exploit vulnerabilities in power structures through strategic initiatives (Tokatli & Kizilgün, 2004).

Wintemute (2014), in the context of European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), contends that religious clothing or symbols typically fall into Category 1, where an individual's expression of their faith causes no direct harm to others, requires little or no cost, disruption, or inconvenience to accommodate, and neither the expression nor the accommodation inflicts indirect harm on others. A neutral rule banning all religious clothing or symbols-or any deviations from a prescribed uniform-is usually considered indirect discrimination based on religion (contrary to Article 14 in conjunction with Article 9 ECHR) against those denied accommodation. According to cases like Thlimmenos, individuals in this situation are treated differently from others subject to the rule, or, as in DH v Czech Republic, can demonstrate the rule's disproportionate effect on their religious minority. When there is no substantial harm, cost, or disruption to others, refusing accommodation cannot be justified. Providing accommodation ensures that individuals are not forced to choose between observing their religious dress or symbols and accessing employment or educational opportunities. The argument that one could avoid the need for accommodation by leaving and seeking opportunities elsewhere is irrelevant, as later recognized by the ECtHR in Eweida and Others (Wintemute, 2014). The author then applies a harm analysis to the examples of religious clothing or symbols and religiously motivated refusals to serve others, recently considered by the European Court of Human Rights in Eweida and Others v United Kingdom.

Gupta (2012) argues that the Swadeshi (own country-national) movement, in many ways, marked the first controlled entry of women into the political public sphere. This disrupted the traditional separation between private and public spaces, challenging established gendered boundaries, while simultaneously representing women as both motherland and mother-goddess. The movement's symbols and language carried other gendered connotations as well. This essay examines one significant aspect of this phenomenon by focusing on

the impact of Swadeshi on women's fashion in the colonial United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh), where Hindu nationalists and caste ideologues appropriated Swadeshi rhetoric to shape the dress of predominantly middle- and upper-class Hindu women and men. Writers in the vernacular made universalizing claims about women's clothing in relation to Swadeshi habits and enterprises, influencing sartorial morality, modern bourgeois values such as thrift, caricatures of Western women, and Hindu revivalism. However, some Dalits were excluded from this discourse, showing little concern for Swadeshi clothing norms and, in some ways, subverting them. The essay thus explores the contradictory gendered meanings embedded in Swadeshi clothing, reinforcing Sumit Sarkar's central argument that the history of Swadeshi cannot be reduced solely to anti-colonial nationalism; internal social struggles were equally important (Sarkar, 2010, as cited in Gupta, 2012).

Bishop, Gruys, and Evans (2018) note that feminist scholars have long criticized the fashion industry's promotion of ultra-thin beauty standards as detrimental to women. Drawing on three qualitative studies of women's clothing retailers-covering bras, plus-size apparel, and bridal wear-the authors shift attention from glamorized media images to the everyday reality of clothing size standards, exploring how women experience, interpret, and navigate these standards in daily life. They describe clothing size standards as "floating signifiers" due to their inconsistency across and within brands and the ways women engage in identity and body work around them. The findings suggest that the instability of these unregulated standards allows some women-especially those near the boundaries of size categories-to present themselves as conforming to body ideals and gain some associated psychological, social, and material benefits. Yet, while individuals may gain by distancing themselves from stigmatized sizes, this dynamic makes body acceptance fragile and reinforces hierarchies among women based on body size and shape.

Sun (2016) observes that scholars have largely overlooked the impact of Maoist forces, particularly the influence of Maoism on everyday clothing practices during the Cultural Revolution. The author argues that, despite the era being characterized by homogenization and austerity, people's daily dress served as a form of resistance and self-expression. Clothing choices during this period reflected individuals' motivations, social class, gender, and regional identity, whether deliberately or unintentionally. Drawing on oral histories from 65 individuals who lived through the Cultural

Revolution, along with numerous photographs from the era, Sun traces the historical origins of fashion in Guangdong province from the late 1970s to the 1980s. In doing so, the study engages with theories of socialist state discipline, everyday cultural resistance, individualism, and the nature of resistance under Mao's regime.

Pager and Shepherd (2008) note that ongoing racial inequalities in employment, housing, and other social domains have renewed interest in understanding the role of discrimination. Unlike the pre-civil rights era, when racial prejudice and discrimination were overt, contemporary discrimination is subtler and harder to detect, creating challenges for social scientific measurement and conceptualization. This article reviews existing research on inequality and discrimination, with a focus on different social disparities in employment, housing, credit markets, and consumer interactions. The authors examine individual, organizational, and structural mechanisms that may drive modern forms of inequality and discrimination. The review aims to orient readers to central debates in the study of inequality and discrimination, and provide a framework for future research in this critical area.

5. Ethnicity, Clothing Facility, and Inequality in Nepal

As Alegi (2008) notes, few countries take beauty pageants as seriously as South Africa, a sentiment highlighted by The New York Times on the eve of the nation's first democratic elections. The country's enthusiasm for pageants dates back to the 1920s and 1930s and cuts across racial, class, and cultural boundaries. Interest in non-commercial beauty contests shows that the fascination extends well beyond mainstream competitions like Miss South Africa. It examines the history of the Spring Queen beauty festival in Cape Town's clothing industry-a vibrant expression of black working-class female culture that began in 1980. Josie Arendse, a former garment worker and shop steward, recalled the festival as "really exciting… just for the fun of it." By centering the experiences of women who endured apartheid-era racism and earned the lowest wages in the clothing sector, the article argues that factory women deliberately transformed a seemingly ordinary, patriarchal beauty pageant into a space for cultural expression, self-empowerment, and trade union solidarity. Clothing, beyond its functional role, constitutes an essential aspect of cultural expression, social identity, and human dignity, and is recognized as a fundamental human right to which every individual should have access. Nevertheless, evidence from Nepal indicates that a segment of the population continues to experience inadequate access to clothing (Table-1).

Table-1: Ethnicity and Adequacy of Clothing across Rural-Urban Locations in Nepal (N=46870/9600)

Ethnicity	Percentage of Households with Less than Adequate			Total
	Kathmandu	Urban Nepal	Rural Nepal	
Hill Caste	6.8	12.3	20.1	13.5
Madhesh/ Tarai Caste	9.5	23.5	24.9	23.5
Mountain/ Hill Janajati	10.4	16.7	25.3	18.3
Tarai Janajati	15.2	24.1	29.4	25.2
Hill Dalit	33.9	25.5	32.7	28.4
Madhesh/ Tarai Dalit	–	46.4	56.5	49.3
Religions/ Linguistic group	–	29.7	43.1	32.4
Others & Not stated	–	10.8	26.7	18.6
Total	**9.8**	**20.3**	**27.0**	**21.1**
Chi-Square value	33039.877	174311.830	89559.652	294861.274
Degree of freedom	12	14	14	14
-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Computed from NLSS-IV (2022/23) Data Set (Results are weighted)

In Kathmandu, the percentage of households reporting less than adequate clothing is relatively lower across most ethnic groups compared to other areas. Hill Caste households fare the best, with only 6.8% experiencing inadequacy. By contrast, Hill Dalits face the highest deprivation at 33.9%, highlighting significant internal inequality within the city. Other marginalized groups, such as Tarai Janajatis (15.2%) and Mountain/Hill Janajatis (10.4%), also experience notable disadvantages compared to Hill Castes. Overall, Kathmandu demonstrates lower inequality and deprivation levels than other regions, but ethnic disparities remain sharp, particularly between Dalits and higher-caste groups.

Outside Kathmandu, but within other urban areas, deprivation levels increase considerably across all ethnicities. Hill Castes record 12.3% inadequacy, which is nearly double their rate in Kathmandu.

Madhesh/Tarai Castes (23.5%), Mountain/Hill Janajatis (16.7%), and Tarai Janajatis (24.1%) all experience much higher clothing inadequacy, reflecting weaker urban infrastructure and opportunities compared to the capital. The most disadvantaged groups are the Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (46.4%) and Hill Dalits (25.5%), pointing to entrenched caste-based inequalities. Religious/linguistic minorities also face notable challenges, with 29.7% inadequacy. This suggests that while urbanization outside Kathmandu does provide some benefits, social inequalities are reproduced strongly in these settings.

In rural areas, deprivation is most severe and widespread. Overall, 27% of households experience clothing inadequacy, which is significantly higher than in both Kathmandu (9.8%) and other urban areas (20.3%). Ethnic and caste gaps are also more pronounced. Hill Castes, who remain relatively advantaged, still show 20.1% inadequacy, while Mountain/Hill Janajatis (25.3%) and Tarai Janajatis (29.4%) experience even higher rates. The greatest disadvantages are borne by Dalits, with 32.7% of Hill Dalits and an even higher 56.5% of Madhesh/Tarai Dalits lacking adequate clothing. Religious and linguistic minorities also show high deprivation (43.1%), reinforcing the rural-urban divide as well as internal inequalities among communities.

Across Nepal, the total percentage of households with inadequate clothing is 21.1%, but the distribution is highly unequal by both location and ethnicity. Kathmandu demonstrates the lowest deprivation but sharp caste-based inequality, with Dalits disproportionately disadvantaged. Other urban areas exhibit higher overall inadequacy than the capital, showing that not all urban settings guarantee better living conditions. Rural Nepal reflects the deepest deprivation, where both caste and ethnic marginalization are most severe, particularly for Madhesh/Tarai Dalits. The chi-square tests confirm that these variations are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating a strong association between ethnicity, location of residence, and clothing adequacy. This underscores how both structural (rural-urban divide) and social (caste/ethnicity) inequalities intersect to shape material deprivation, including the availability of clothing facilities in Nepal.

The Chi-Square test results for Kathmandu, other urban areas, and rural Nepal show extremely high Chi-Square values (33,039.877; 174,311.830; and 89,559.652, respectively), all with p-values of 0.000, indicating that the observed differences in clothing adequacy across ethnic groups are highly statistically significant. This means that the

variation in inequality and deprivation is not random but strongly associated with both ethnicity and location of residence. The large Chi-Square values, especially in other urban and rural Nepal, suggest greater heterogeneity in deprivation patterns across groups in these contexts compared to Kathmandu. In short, the test confirms that ethnicity and caste divisions are systematically linked to material deprivation, and this relationship is magnified outside the capital city.

6. Discussion

The findings from Kathmandu indicate that overall clothing inadequacy is relatively low compared to other regions of Nepal, yet internal inequalities remain pronounced, particularly along caste lines. Hill Caste households report the lowest deprivation (6.8%), whereas Hill Dalits face the highest (33.9%), highlighting persistent disparities even within a comparatively advantaged urban setting. These patterns resonate with broader scholarship on social stratification in South Asia, where caste and ethnicity have historically shaped access to resources and social mobility (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Gupta, 2012). The relatively lower deprivation in Kathmandu may reflect better urban infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to markets, consistent with Tokatli and Kizilgün's (2004) observations on the advantages conferred by integration into global and urban networks. However, the enduring disadvantage of Dalits within the capital underscores how structural benefits do not automatically mitigate deeply entrenched social hierarchies.

In other urban areas, clothing inadequacy rises sharply across all ethnic groups, indicating that urbanization outside the capital does not guarantee equitable living conditions. Hill Castes' inadequacy nearly doubles compared to Kathmandu, while marginalized groups such as Madhesh/Tarai Dalits experience extreme deprivation (46.4%). This pattern illustrates how urban inequality is mediated not just by location but by social identity, reflecting a form of indirect discrimination where systemic disadvantages persist despite proximity to urban resources (Wintemute, 2014). Moreover, the high deprivation among religious and linguistic minorities (29.7%) aligns with findings in the fashion and identity literature, where marginalized groups often face compounded barriers to accessing material goods, including culturally appropriate clothing (Bishop, Gruys, & Evans, 2018; Sun, 2016). These results suggest that urban advantages are unevenly distributed, and social hierarchies can amplify material deprivation in non-capital urban centers.

Rural Nepal demonstrates the most severe and widespread clothing inadequacy, with 27% of households overall affected and extreme disparities among Dalits and ethnic minorities. Madhesh/ Tarai Dalits experience the highest deprivation (56.5%), while other marginalized groups, including Mountain/Hill Janajatis and religious/linguistic minorities, also face elevated inadequacy. The Chi-Square analyses confirm that these differences are highly statistically significant, emphasizing the systematic link between ethnicity, caste, and material deprivation. These findings reflect the compounded effects of geographic isolation, limited market access, and entrenched social hierarchies, mirroring the historical patterns observed in studies of social marginalization and everyday life practices (Alegi, 2008; Gupta, 2012; Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Overall, the results illustrate the intersection of structural and social inequalities in shaping material deprivation across Nepal, reinforcing the importance of addressing both location-based and identity-based disparities in policy interventions.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of clothing adequacy across Nepal reveals substantial inequalities shaped by both the location of residence or households and social identity. Kathmandu exhibits the lowest overall deprivation (9.8%), yet caste-based disparities remain pronounced, with Hill Dalits disproportionately affected compared to Hill Castes. This highlights that even in urban centers with better infrastructure and opportunities, structural advantages do not automatically eliminate social hierarchies. The findings align with prior research emphasizing how historical, cultural, and social factors, such as caste and ethnicity, continue to mediate access to material resources (Gupta, 2012; Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Other urban areas show significantly higher levels of deprivation, with Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (46.4%) and religious/linguistic minorities (29.7%) among the most disadvantaged. The disparities suggest that urbanization alone does not resolve inequalities; instead, social and caste hierarchies persist in shaping material access. The results echo literature on how marginalized groups navigate structural and social barriers, where proximity to urban resources may benefit some groups while leaving others behind (Wintemute, 2014; Bishop, Gruys, & Evans, 2018). These patterns underscore the interaction between social identity and urban development in determining everyday life outcomes, including clothing adequacy.

Rural Nepal demonstrates the highest levels of clothing inadequacy overall (27%), with the most severe deprivation experienced by Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (56.5%) and other marginalized ethnic groups. The Chi-square tests for Kathmandu (33,039.877), other urban areas (174,311.830), and rural areas (89,559.652), all with p-values of 0.000, confirm that these variations are highly statistically significant. This indicates that the observed differences in clothing adequacy are not random but strongly associated with both ethnicity and location, highlighting the intersection of structural and social inequalities. Overall, the paper emphasizes the need for policy interventions that address both geographic disparities and entrenched caste and ethnic hierarchies to ensure equitable access to basic material resources across Nepal.

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