

HEALING THE MOTHER'S HEART

मातृ-हृदयको आरोग्यता



**Dedicated to the Journey
of all the Mothers.**

Healing the Mother's Heart

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Healing the Mother's Heart is an art and research project led by three artists who want to bring emotional and mental experiences of Nepali mothers to light. The project explores the experiences and challenges faced during pregnancy and post-pregnancy periods.

Women's mental health and well-being are often overlooked and dismissed in primary healthcare settings. In addition to that, the societal expectations for women to be exceptional mothers who can raise a newborn while balancing their family and work responsibilities place a huge burden during a vulnerable stage in their lives.

Our project aims to bring forward stories that highlight the emotional aspect of childbirth, its challenges, and the support that mothers might need throughout the process.

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Supported by



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our gratitude to the British Council for supporting this project through the Gender Grants 2023/24, which provided us with the resources and encouragement to explore these essential narratives.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the courageous mothers who bravely shared their stories and vulnerabilities. We also acknowledge the dedicated healthcare workers who assisted us in reaching diverse participants and offered invaluable insights that enriched our understanding of maternal mental health in the context of Nepal.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our mentor, Promina Shrestha, for her guidance and wisdom. A special thanks to Nasala Chitrakar for her meticulous writing, ensuring each story remained authentic. We are also grateful to Sita Mademba and Shranup Tandukar for their contributions as editors, enhancing this project with their expertise.

Healing the Mother's Heart is more than a publication; it is an invitation to acknowledge, respect, and support the mental and emotional journey of mothers everywhere.

FOREWORD

The stories shared here are the voices of women who have bravely talked about their experiences, challenges, and needs after childbirth. As creators of this project, we believe these stories are important to share, especially in a culture where mothers are expected to handle many roles with ease.

To make this project possible, we spoke with a diverse group of Nepali women who have experienced childbirth, along with professionals and representatives from community healthcare centers. These healthcare representatives connected us with women from different backgrounds and provided insights that helped us understand maternal mental health in Nepal. Their knowledge helped us better capture the complex emotions experienced by mothers during times of change.

Through art and storytelling, we aim to deeply and compassionately connect with mothers' experiences. We chose illustrations to reflect mothers' emotional journeys, creating a space for empathy and understanding. By sharing stories in a zine, we hope to reach mothers and their families and encourage open discussions about mental and emotional health.

These stories represent only a small part of the bigger picture and are not meant to apply to everyone's experiences.

Trigger Warning: This publication addresses sensitive topics, including physical abuse and suicide, which may be distressing for some readers.

This story unfolds in reverse, tracing the life of a young girl as she journeys back through her memories. We witness her transformation from a hopeful young woman to someone pushed to the edge.

“Silent River”

Illustration: Richene Singh



NEWS

14 November, 2021

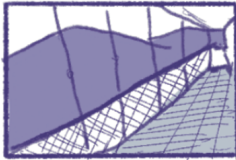
Mother and daughter missing after jumping into river

November 14, 2021,
Karnali Province

A woman and her one-year-old daughter went missing after reportedly jumping into XXX river.

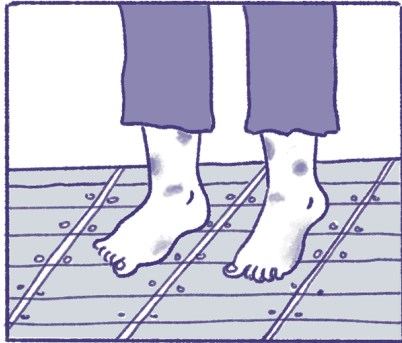
Two early morning walkers witnessed a young woman jump into the river with a child in her arms on Wednesday.

The local police department suspects the identity of the missing to be 25 years old and her daughter -



- who had been reported missing on Monday by their family

The local administration has deployed a search team. The local police are investigating the reason behind the incident.

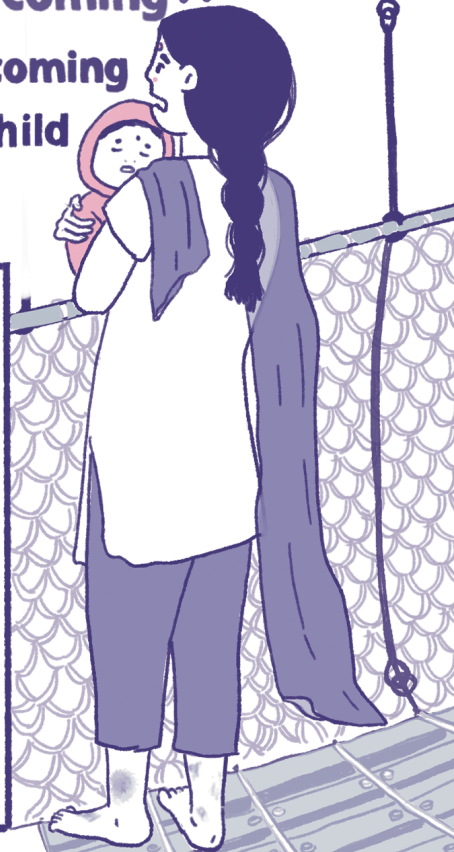


They're coming..

They're coming..

They're coming for my child

They will eat her They will eat her up They will eat my child up!



What a family she was married into -

- turned her insane!

Poor thing!

How unfortunate for their whole family!

Her old mother is stuck caring for her insane daughter's child.

They've taken her everywhere possible - shaman, *Maata ji*, church.

Her aunt was saying she beat the shaman up instead!

Once you've gone insane... not even the gods can help you!

What bad luck!

Aama has said she will send *bhai* to get me now that the baby is born.



Who will look after the house if you're gone?



I haven't seen them in two years.....



Stop making so much noise. Don't you want to keep the baby? Do you want to kill it like the ones you miscarried? Who knows if one of them was a son?

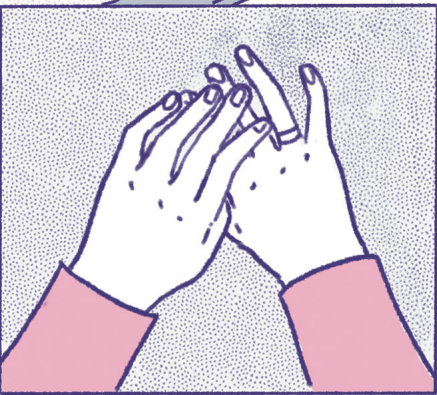
Did I do it on purpose? They would've survived if I could have gone to a good hospital. It is all because of you! Drinking and gambling! Beating me every chance you get! Bastard!

Yes yes, my queen. It's not like you've given birth to a prince that you deserve a royal treatment.

What did you say?!

**SHUT UP!
SHUT UP!**

Shut up, bastard!
I'll kill you!
I'll kill myself
and I'll kill
this child too!
Come!



Did you take my 500 note from under the mattress?

Your money is my money. Don't start arguing. Just because you got yourself a small job...

Don't tell me you've blown it off already...

What a mannerless woman to talk back to her own husband! I'll cut off your tongue!



What a daughter-in-law we've brought into our house. Can't keep her husband in check. Hasn't had a child in a year. **Useless!**



Can you come home early today? We're out of rations. Why don't you bring some rice, daal and sugar on your way back?



Didn't your family use to feed you? How is it that we have to buy food so often?

We wouldn't have to worry about expenses if you didn't drink and gamble away your earnings every evening.

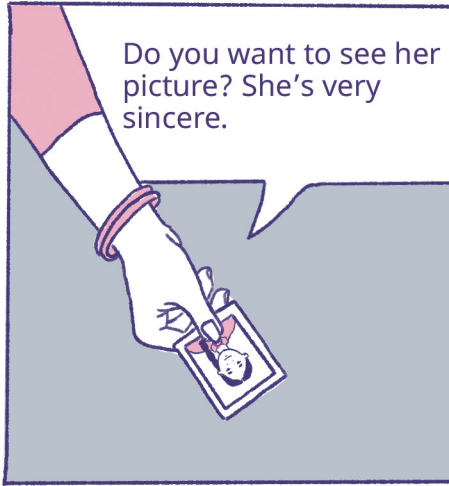
Shut up!



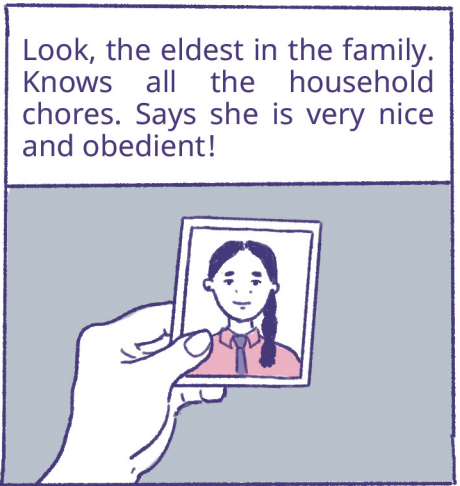
Bhauju! Your son is gambling away at the *chautari!*

What do I do with this donkey of a son?! He's going to gamble away everything we own!

Get him married. He will sort himself out once he marries. My sister-in-law said they wanted to marry off this girl from her neighborhood.



Do you want to see her picture? She's very sincere.

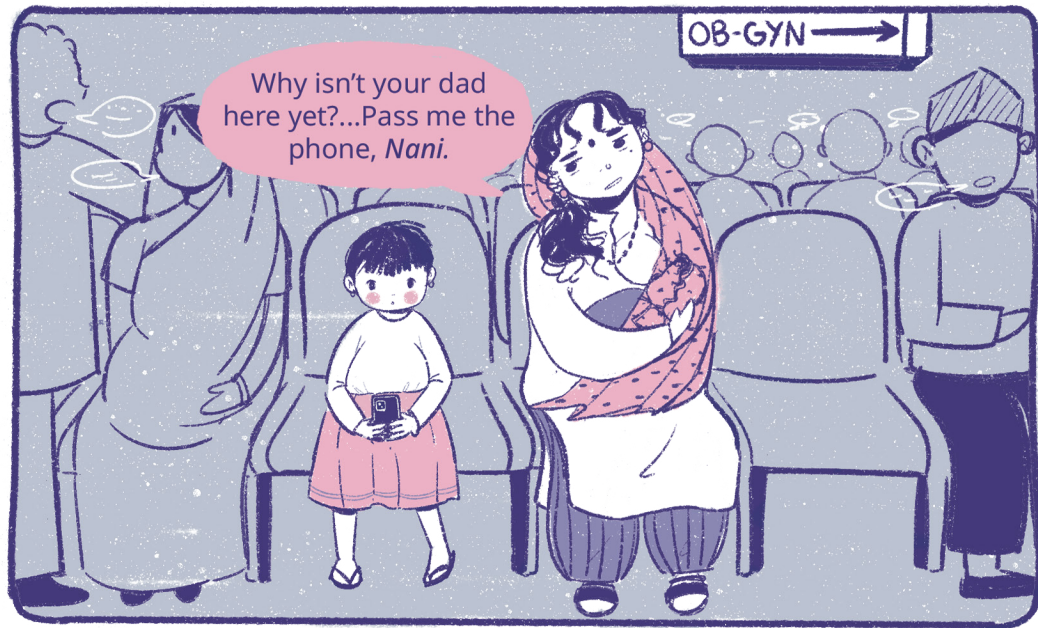


Look, the eldest in the family. Knows all the household chores. Says she is very nice and obedient!

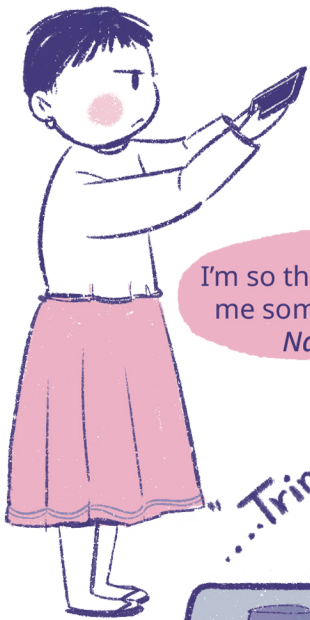
Purnima is an overwhelmed young mother balancing childcare and household responsibilities, often with minimal support. Juggling her energetic children and daily pressures, she finds herself battling feelings of anxiety and isolation.

“Breath of Courage”

Illustration: Alina Chhantel



Why isn't your dad here yet?...Pass me the phone, Nani.

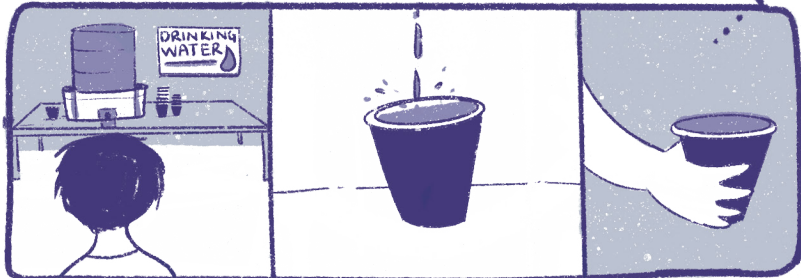


I'm so thirsty...Get me some water, Nani.

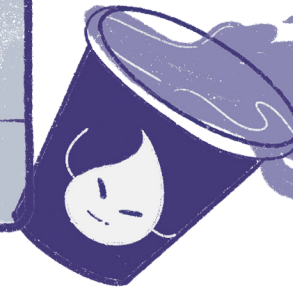
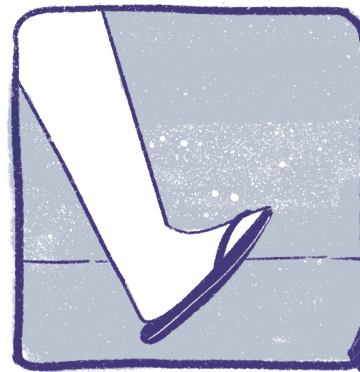


"Tringggg..."

[The number you have dialed is not available at the moment. Please try again later.]



"...Tringggg..."



Whose baby is this?

Oh no..She spilled water all over your clothes!

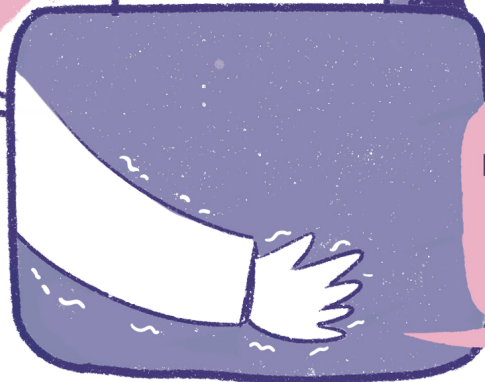
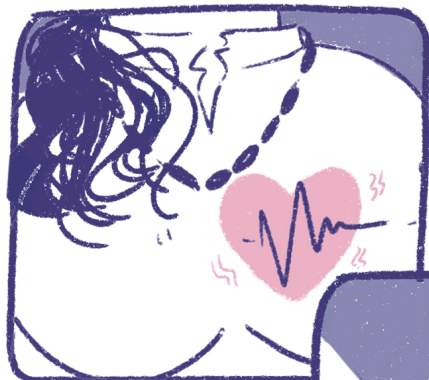
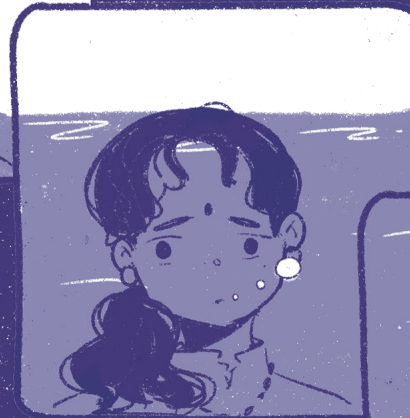
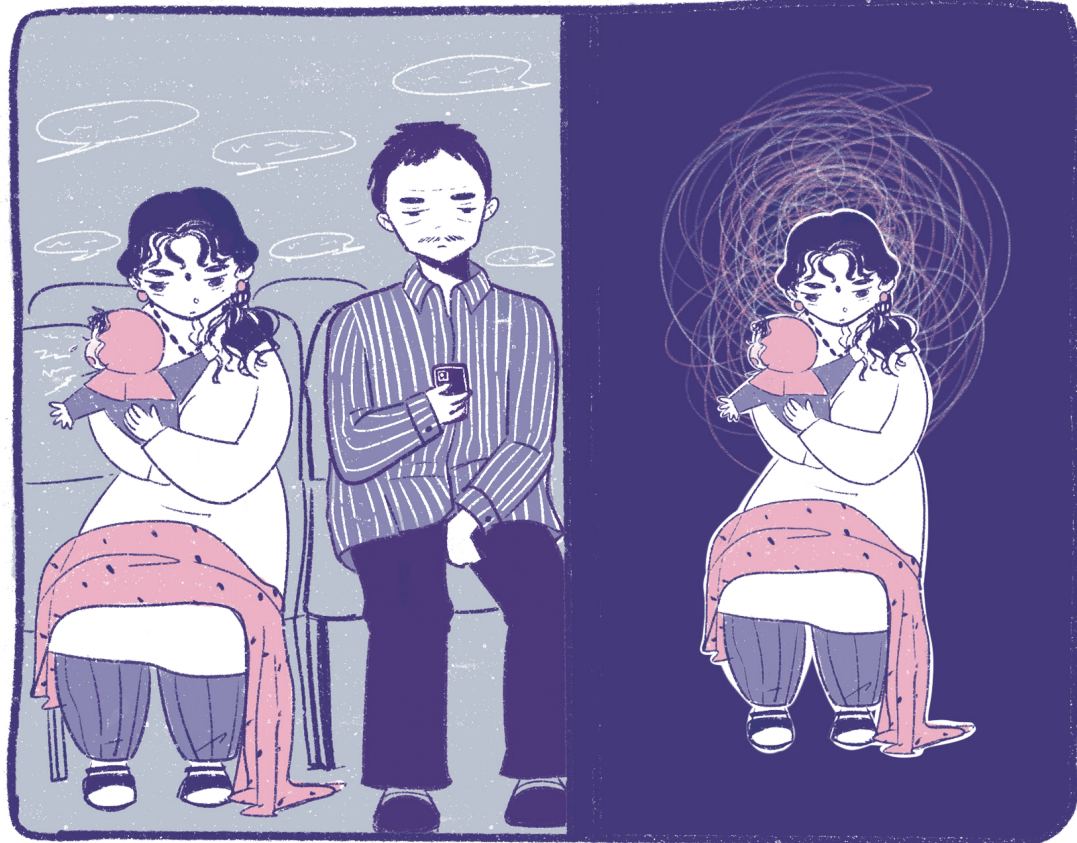
So-Sorry, Sister.

Better if you kept your eyes on your children and not on your phone.

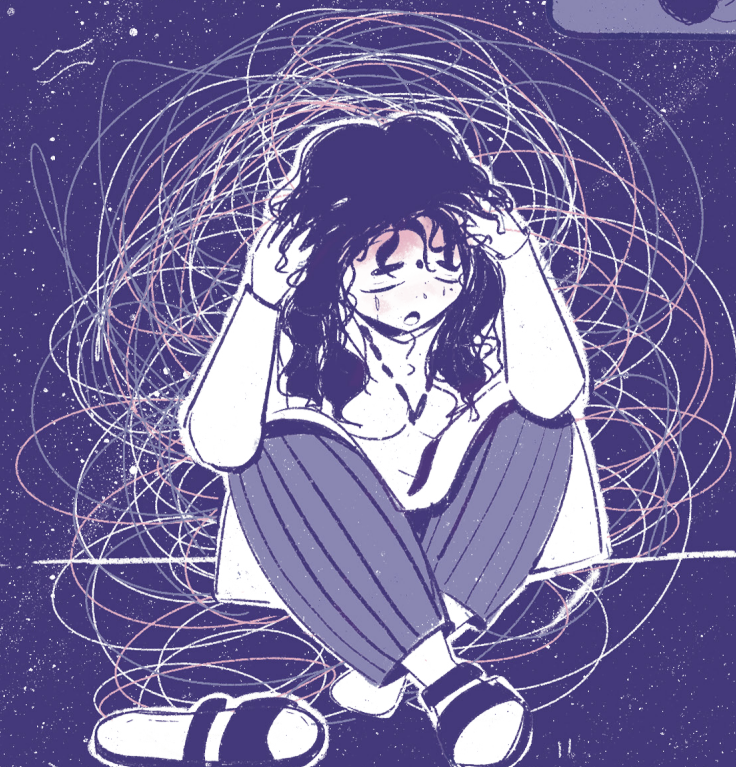
Did you come alone? Isn't anybody with you? You should keep the child near you.



What happened?



Pr...Pr-Prabin, take the babyyy....
I can't breathe!



Grab her, Nurse! Don't let her fall.

Gently, gently.

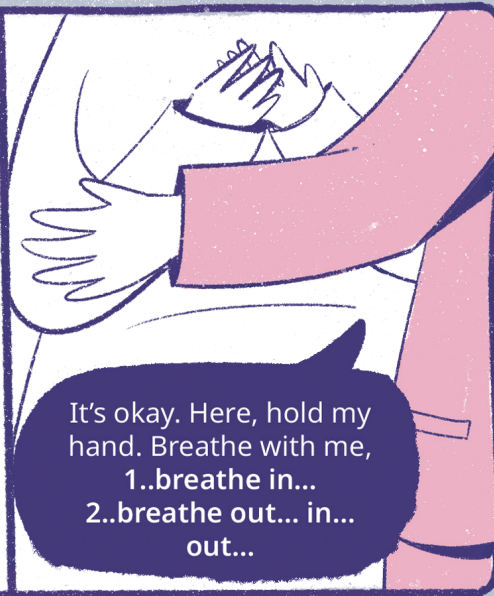
Please don't crowd here!

What is her name?

Pu-Purnima!

Purnima. Purnima. Purnima, look at me. Here, hold my hand. Gently, gently.

It's okay. Here, hold my hand. Breathe with me,
1..breathe in...
2..breathe out... in...
out...



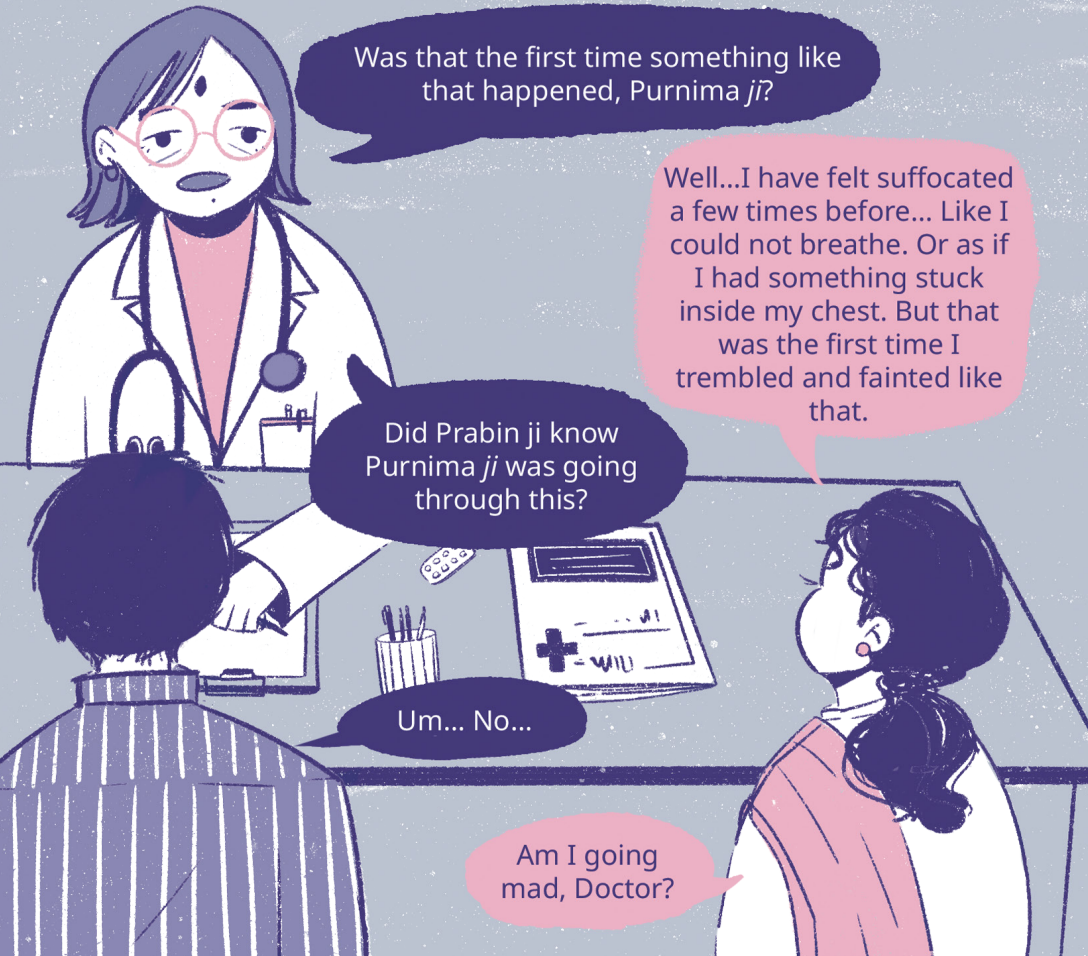
Was that the first time something like that happened, Purnima ji?

Well...I have felt suffocated a few times before... Like I could not breathe. Or as if I had something stuck inside my chest. But that was the first time I trembled and fainted like that.

Did Prabin ji know Purnima ji was going through this?

Um... No...

Am I going mad, Doctor?



No no. What happened to you the last time is called a panic attack. When a person can't shake off the feeling of fear or worry, no matter how much they try to or want to, we call that condition anxiety. If the anxiety stays for a long while, you could get a panic attack.

Feeling anxious and scared is pretty common in mothers during and after pregnancy. Fathers also go through this. Experiences and thoughts can get magnified in their intensity because of the hormones during this phase, so you experience anxiety, panic, or other symptoms.

I am recommending that Purnima ji gets a psychiatric consultation to make sure that you get appropriate help. They will explain more and tell you what steps to take next.

Husband ji needs to pay better attention!

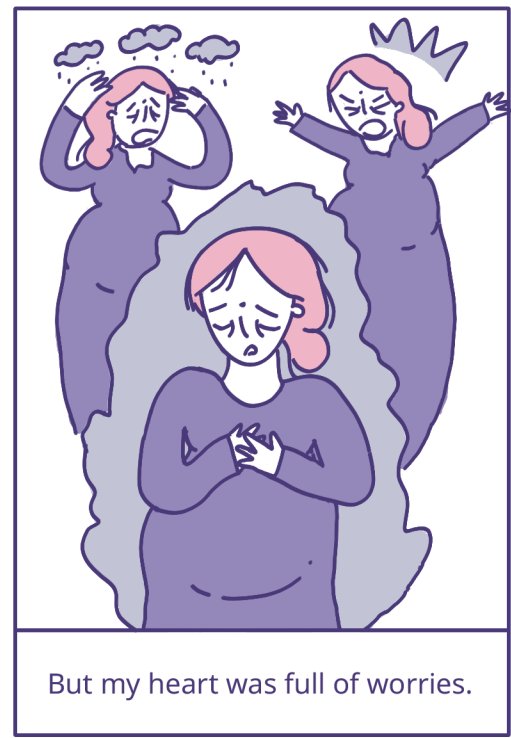
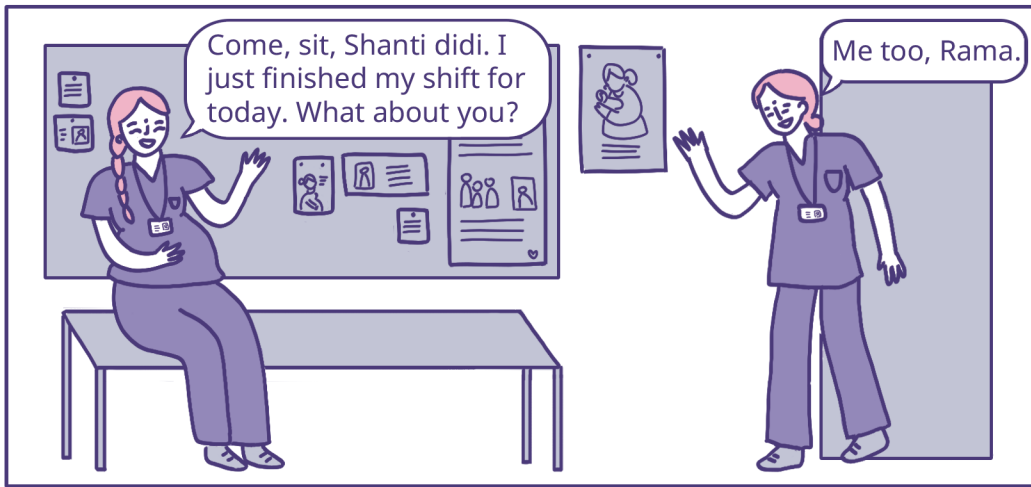
Yes, Doctor!



During a quiet break, Nurses Shanti and Rama share a heartfelt conversation about motherhood. As they reflect on the unseen challenges and the importance of support, they also reveal the resilience and strength that every mother carries.

“ Embrace ”

Illustration: Srijia Shrestha





I had to come back to work the first week after my eldest was born.



Thankfully, my aunt took care of him.



And another thing—once the baby is born, everybody only focuses on the baby.

So it is up to us mothers to take care of ourselves. We mothers find happiness in knowing that our child is doing well.
But we also have to be physically, mentally, and socially healthy to be able to look after our children. I realized this only much later.



Even as I worked, I missed him so much. I would feel unsettled and worry about what he would be doing.



I wanted somebody to ask me, "Are you really okay?"



I would have felt much lighter if I had someone to share about what I was going through.



I worried if I would not be able to take good care of my baby.

"Are you really okay?" Nobody ever asks this question in our society. Besides our physical health, we don't pay attention to our mental or emotional health. We don't even talk about it.
That is why it is difficult for us mothers to open up about our feelings and struggles.



We need support from our families. Pregnant women, new and experienced mothers, women who don't or can't have children, women who have experienced miscarriages, and everybody who is on the path of motherhood - all need support from our families.



Now I tell the mothers who come here for checkups to also pay attention to their mental and emotional wellbeing. I encourage them to get consultations, if needed.



Our worries and stress lessen when we are able to express ourselves.

We feel better mentally when we get reassurances such as: "You're not alone. We are with you."

The more we're supported by our partners and families, the easier it becomes for mothers to feel safe and openly express themselves.

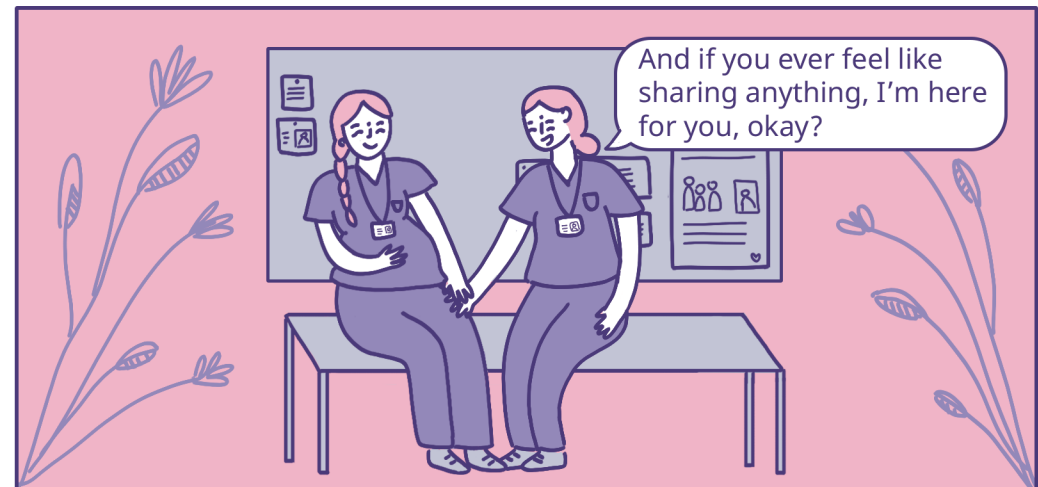


Your husband and parents-in-law take good care of you, Rama. If you're anxious or need to get consultations, don't hesitate to tell them. It is easier for them to support you if they know these things.

I can share my worries with my husband.

I am not alone.

My children and I have my family's support.



And if you ever feel like sharing anything, I'm here for you, okay?

About “Healing the Mother’s Heart” Team

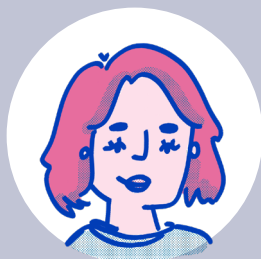
Alina Chhantel is a researcher and illustrator who has a background in social science and has conducted research related to gender issues. She is passionate about interdisciplinary works that include both research and visual narratives that highlight gender issues



Richene Singh is a professional artist specializing in visual arts, graphic design, and illustration across traditional and digital mediums. Her work explores culture, experiences, emotions, and storytelling, that blend design, mental health, and visual narrative elements.



Srija Shrestha is an artist and illustrator practicing creative storytelling through zines, comics, and printmaking engaging themes of mental health, and emotional well-being while also exploring personal stories of home, identity, and belonging through Nepali language and culture.



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📷 [healing.hearts.np](https://www.instagram.com/healing.hearts.np)

About British Council

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, fostering knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. Through our arts, education, and English programmes, we create opportunities for millions worldwide each year, operating across six continents and in over 100 countries, including Nepal since 1959. Our Culture Responds programme celebrates culture’s role in sustainable development, empowering communities to pursue development guided by their own values. The British Council has been a strong advocate for gender-related programmes and initiatives, actively supporting them and offering grants to promote creative actions that enrich cultural diversity.

In 2023, the Gender Grants supported 14 impactful projects across six provinces in Nepal, each employing artistic expression to spark dialogue around gender issues, build capacity, and promote inclusivity. By providing platforms for women, girls, non-binary individuals, men, and boys, these projects work towards a shared vision of a more equal world.

🌐 www.britishcouncil.org.np

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