



RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER 4

LIFE STORIES FROM KATHMANDU'S ADULT ENTERTAINMENT SECTOR: TOLD AND ANALYSED BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER

Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) has a participatory and child-centred approach that supports children to gather evidence, analyse it themselves and generate solutions to the problems they identify. The life story collection and collective analysis processes supported children and young people involved in the worst forms of child labour in Kathmandu to share and analyse their life stories.

Four hundred life stories were collected and then analysed by children and young people engaged in and affected by the worst forms of child labour, including those who had previously been life storytellers and/or life story collectors. The data was collectively analysed using causal mapping, resulting in children's life stories becoming the evidence base for revealing the macro-level system dynamics that drive the worst forms of child labour.

This paper is a record of the children and young people's analysis of the life stories and the key themes they identified, which formed the basis of a series of eight child-led Participatory Action Research groups based in Kathmandu.

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Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) is a consortium of organisations committed to building a participatory evidence base and generating innovative solutions to the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh and Nepal.

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ACRONYMS

AES adult entertainment sector

CLARISSA Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia

NGO non-governmental organisation

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

This report includes participatory research findings from the ground that will aid understanding about how we can end the worst forms of child labour. The words and phrases used by research participants have not been changed; this ensures that we accurately reflect the information and insights provided by participants. For example, where participants use a phrase such as 'engaging in sex work', with reference to children, consortium members might describe this as 'sexual exploitation', but we have not changed this wording. CLARISSA consortium partners do not condone any of the worst forms of child labour.

In Nepal, the term adult entertainment sector (AES) is used to describe a diverse range of businesses that include cabin/hostess restaurants, dance bars, spa/massage parlours, and folk-dance bars (known as *dohoris*). The term has been further expanded to include establishments from the wider hospitality industry (including the food and beverage sector) such as *khaja ghars*, which are small-scale snack shops.

Within some venues associated with the AES, the commercial sale of sex and the sexual exploitation of children is known to take place. However, our research with business owners and child workers has helped us appreciate the varied nature of the work that is undertaken in venues associated with this sector. It is important to note that not all establishments typically associated with the AES are involved in the commercial sale of sex, sexual activity, or the commercial sexual exploitation of children (considered one of the worst forms of child labour).

While we understand that AES is not necessarily a term used by business owners and child workers to refer to the sector they work in, the term is widely used by practitioners and researchers at the local level. In practice, when referring to the children and young people working in the AES, this research is referring to those working in cabin/hostess restaurants, dance bars, spa/massage parlours, *dohoris* and *khaja ghars*.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Key venues in the adult entertainment sector and adult entertainment sector neighbourhoods

Cabin restaurant/bar A small restaurant or bar with partitions that create small private 'cabins' for customers to be entertained in private by waiting staff. Food and drinks may be sold at inflated prices; waiting staff or hostesses may sit with guests and increase the table bill by ordering drinks. There may be indirect sexual activity (e.g. flirting, touching and kissing) or direct sexual activity.

Dance bar Customers are entertained by dancers who perform to music; waiting staff sit with customers to increase the amount of the drinks bill. There may be indirect sexual activity (e.g. flirting, touching and kissing). Customers may arrange to 'go out' (outside the venue) with dance bar employees for more direct sexual activity. Dance bars are generally more expensive than cabin restaurants and attract a more affluent clientele.

Dohori A venue that offers traditional folk music and dance. Most *dohoris* serve alcohol and food. There is variation between *dohoris* – some offer a family environment, whereas others may have a sexually charged atmosphere. While sexual services are not

usually provided on the premises, arrangements may be made with waiting staff to meet for sex after work hours.

Khaja ghar/hotel The terms *khaja ghar* (snack shops) and hotel are used interchangeably. Both describe a small-scale eatery where food and alcohol are available. *Khaja ghars* are ubiquitous in Kathmandu in adult entertainment sector areas. They may have employees who provide sexual services or be places where this can be arranged.

Guesthouses Guesthouses are small hotels. In adult entertainment sector locations, customers may use them to take a contact there for sex.

Massage parlour In adult entertainment sector locations, massage parlours may have employees who provide sexual services in addition to massage therapy in small private rooms.

Party palace Usually, a large venue that caters for events such as weddings and ceremonies. Party palaces hire catering and waiting staff on a per event basis by liaising with a 'team leader' (usually a more senior member of the catering/waiting staff team) who procures a team of staff.

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Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) is a consortium of organisations committed to building a strong evidence base and generating innovative solutions to the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh and Nepal.^{1 2 3}

CLARISSA has a participatory and child-centred approach that supports children to gather evidence, analyse it themselves and generate solutions to the problems they identify (Burns, Apgar and Raw 2021). Life story collection and collective analysis processes support children and young people involved in the worst forms of child labour in Kathmandu to share and analyse their life stories. The collective analysis of the life stories enables children and young people to identify themes for a child-led Participatory Action Research process. The approach is based on the principle that children need to be meaningfully involved to effectively shift the (often hidden) patterns that drive the worst forms of child labour.

By engaging children who have experience of the worst forms of child labour in all stages of the analysis and intervention, the child participants' own rich experiences and views can inform the analysis. They are able to probe and contest the data from multiple perspectives, allowing the collective analysis to become a robust foundation from which relevant, effective and sustainable solutions can be identified (*ibid.*). Furthermore, involvement allows the child participants to draw meaning from the evidence gathered, building ownership of both the data and, eventually, the actions they will go on to pursue (Burns 2021). This paper focuses on the findings that emerged from the collective analysis undertaken by children and young people. It is a record of *their* analysis of children's life stories.

1.1 LIFE STORY COLLECTION AND COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS

In Nepal, the term adult entertainment sector (AES) is used to describe a diverse range of businesses that include cabin/hostess restaurants, dance bars, spa/ massage parlours, and folk-dance bars (known as *dohoris*), and has been further expanded to include establishments from the wider hospitality industry such as *khaja ghars* (snack shops).⁴ The commercial sexual exploitation of children, one of the worst forms of child labour, is known to take place in venues associated with the AES. However, treating the sector as homogenous is inaccurate: not all venues associated with the AES are involved in the commercial sexual exploitation of children (nor with the commercial sale of sex or sexual activity) (Oosterhoff and Hacker 2020). Between August 2020 and May 2021, 400 life stories were collected from children and young people (aged 8–25 years old) in the worst forms of child labour in Kathmandu, Nepal. Of the 400 life stories, 200 were collected from children and young people working in venues related to the AES; and 200 from children and young people engaged in work outside of venues associated with the AES, but within AES neighbourhoods. These 'neighbourhood' children and young people were engaged in various types of labour, such as street vending, begging or working in the transport sector.⁵ Children were asked to share their life stories of how they came to be involved in the worst forms of child labour and the conditions in which they were working.

The 400 life stories were collectively analysed by 61 children and young people (aged 14–22) in a series of four workshops that took place between August and October 2021.⁶ The children and young people participating in the collective analysis workshops were life storytellers, life story collectors, and some children and young people who were new to the programme.

1 **International Labour Organization Convention 182** details what comprises the worst forms of child labour (accessed 19 August 2022).

2 Action Research is a programming modality that combines evidence gathering and learning from action. It is designed to enable diverse groups to meet over a period of time to consider evidence and generate theories of change about interventions; plan and programme innovative solutions; test solutions in real time; and then evaluate them. In this way, Action Research groups act as engines of new innovation. These cycles of action and reflection continue until a robust model of action is developed, trialled and can be scaled (Burns *et al.* 2021).

3 CLARISSA is a civil society consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies – the world's leading global research organisation for development studies – together with Terre des Hommes, ChildHope UK, and the Consortium for Street Children. In Nepal, ChildHope UK and Voice of Children host CLARISSA Nepal, in partnership with Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights and Terre des Hommes Nepal.

4 See **Glossary of terms** for full descriptions of AES venues.

5 This group of children and young people are referred to using the shorthand 'neighbourhood' children in this paper, because of their connection to the neighbourhoods of the AES clusters that were the focus of the life story collection exercise.

6 Eighteen children and young people participated in each collective analysis workshop. This was a total of 61 different children, with 11 children participating in more than one workshop.

The child participants were a mix of boys and girls (see **Section 2.1**) and represented a range of children who were affected by the worst forms of child labour. To avoid re-traumatisation and/or breach of confidentiality, children who had told their life stories were never in the same workshop that was analysing their own life story. To ensure this, the first two workshops focused on the life stories of children working in the AES and were analysed by children who were associated with other forms of child labour within AES neighbourhoods, or were living in these neighbourhoods. The third and fourth workshops looked at the life stories of children working in other forms of child labour in AES neighbourhoods, and were analysed primarily by children working in the AES.⁷

Children collectively analysed the data using causal mapping (see **Section 2.2**), resulting in children's life stories becoming the evidence base for revealing the macro-level system dynamics that drive the worst forms of child labour. Children then identified core themes (or leverage points) for intervention in the 'system'. The core themes formed the basis of a series of eight child-led Participatory Action Research groups based in Kathmandu, which began in January 2022 and will continue for between 12 and 14 months.

1.2 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Section 1 provides an overview of the programme and rationale for using participatory, child-led processes. Section 2 details the life story collection and collective analysis processes, the participants involved and key ethical and safeguarding considerations.

Section 3 looks at the findings that emerged from the children's collective analysis. The findings first look at the analysis of the life stories of children and young people associated with the AES (workshops 1 and 2). They then focus on children and young people engaged in other forms of child labour, such as domestic work and street vending (workshops 3 and 4). This section includes:

- **Sections of the causal maps created by child participants during the workshops that reveal key system dynamics.**⁸
- **Tables outlining the main analytical categories or themes created by child participants during the workshops.**
- **Excerpts from children's life stories that aim to illustrate and contextualise the key systemic patterns identified by child participants during the collective analysis.**⁹ **The names of all the child storytellers have been changed to protect their identities.**¹⁰
- **Key points from the child participants' debates and discussions as they analysed the evidence, to show how meanings emerged, and to add further depth and nuance to the findings. For direct quotations, the gender and age of participants are provided as (F19) for female, 19 years old.**¹¹

Where the authors felt the need to add explanation or context to child participants' findings, these reflections have been included as footnotes, separate from the main text and participants' analysis.

Section 4 looks at the eight Action Research groups that were formed following the collective analysis workshops, outlining the themes each group focused on and the rationale for their area of focus.

Section 5 summarises the key areas where the authors felt that further explanation or context was required to interpret the findings and/or where they felt further research was required to better understand the drivers of the worst forms of child labour.

This paper uses the terms 'life storyteller' to describe the children and young people who provided their life stories; and 'child participant' to describe the children and young people who participated in the four collective analysis workshops.¹²

7 This also helped to reduce the risk of child participants identifying peers in the stories.

8 Sections of the 'big system maps' (**Section 2**) are included with the key causal chains related to the specific issue being discussed. These are digital recreations of sections of the big system maps that were created on paper by the children and young people while participating in the collective analysis workshops. The digital maps do not include all the factors related to the causal chain, but reflect the most important linkages related to the particular factor or issue highlighted. In the maps included in the report, the thickness of the arrows reflects the number of times this linkage was identified in the stories being analysed during the relevant workshop. Arrows show the direction of causality. Lines show where issues are connected only (with no specific direction of causality).

9 The full versions of these life stories can be accessed via the **CLARISSA website**. The authors of this paper selected stories they felt best represented the key systemic patterns and linkages between factors identified by child participants during the collective analysis.

10 Excerpts from life stories are included in boxes.

11 Long direct quotations from child participants are indented and italicised.

12 Throughout the paper 'child' or 'children' has been used as shorthand to refer to children *and* young people involved in the collective analysis process.

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Section 2:

**LIFE STORY COLLECTION
AND COLLECTIVE
ANALYSIS PROCESSES**

2 LIFE STORY COLLECTION AND COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS PROCESSES

This section outlines the life story collection and collective analysis processes that went on to inform the design of eight child-led Action Research groups. It looks at the rationale and main features of each stage, and key ethical and safeguarding considerations.

2.1 LIFE STORY COLLECTION

The life stories method was used because it reveals the pathways, transitions and relationships between different aspects of children's lives that explain why things happen. This method avoids the fragmentation that can occur from asking specific questions pre-framed by researchers. It also allows children to relate the things that are most important to them, rather than what researchers decide is important to know about (Burns 2021).

Life stories were collected by children and young people, and adult researchers: 50 by children and young people; and 350 by adult researchers. Children were included as life story collectors to deepen the participatory nature of the process and because there are often higher levels of trust when peers collect data from each other (Burns *et al.* 2021). However, both adult and child story collectors were used because of two key considerations: first, the impact of collecting stories on the children themselves; and second, whether children would be able to openly share sensitive information (e.g. experiences of sexual abuse) with other children.

2.2 IDENTIFYING CENTRES OF ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

Before the life story collection process began, CLARISSA undertook a 'hotspot' mapping exercise, which identified five main clusters of adult entertainment in Kathmandu (Table 1). Hotspot analysis is a spatial analysis and mapping technique used to identify the clustering of

Table 1: AES clusters in Kathmandu

AES hub	Cluster
Transportation hub	1
Centre for entertainment and main location for glamorous venues (e.g. dance bars and clubs)	2
Close to airport and other destinations*	3
Entry/exit point from Kathmandu valley	4
Small-scale AES hub	5

* Not included in life story collection.
Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

spatial phenomena. In this instance, a 'hotspot' refers to an area where activities related to the AES are more concentrated, and there is a higher probability of finding the worst forms of child labour. The hotspots were identified using several methods including a literature review and information gathering from key stakeholders. Factors such as the level of movement of people into an area, level of vehicle movements into and out of an area, and the number of venues associated with the AES within an area were taken into account when identifying the main AES hotspots within Kathmandu.

Life stories were collected from children working in four of the five hotspots, which were described as 'clusters' in the CLARISSA programme.¹³ The four clusters where life stories were collected covered a range of geographical locations that represented the different types of hubs for adult entertainment, as shown in Table 1.

¹³ Stories were not collected from children in cluster 3 because the cluster shared similar AES dynamics to clusters 4 and 5, and was also located close by to these two clusters. Focusing on fewer clusters during the life story collection phase had several benefits. First, because the Action Research groups would go on to be based in the clusters where the life stories were collected, focusing on four clusters meant the Action Research groups would be less dispersed and resources could be more focused on the four clusters selected (two Action Research groups per cluster). Second, collecting a higher number of stories from each cluster meant that it would be easier for patterns specific to each geographical location to emerge and be observed.

2.3 COLLECTING LIFE STORIES

For the adult-led life story collection, storytellers were identified by working with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that were operating in the AES and/or AES neighbourhoods. For the child-led life story collection, the 50 stories were collected by 22 child life story collectors who had previously been engaged in the project as life storytellers. Life storytellers were identified by the child story collectors themselves (by contacting their friends or relatives involved in the worst forms of child labour) or via CLARISSA staff who provided support in contacting children in the worst forms of child labour. Where children collected life stories, they did so in pairs, one child facilitating the storyteller and another child documenting the life story. A mentor from the CLARISSA staff was assigned to each pair for mentoring, coaching and support. Similarly, adult story collectors also worked in pairs, with one collector documenting the process, and the other facilitating the life storyteller (Apgar *et al.* 2022).

A total of 400 life stories were collected between August 2020 and May 2021 from children in the worst forms of child labour. Two hundred life stories were collected from children and young people (aged 8–25 years old) working in venues related to the AES, including dance bars, *dohoris*, cabin restaurants, hotels/*khaja ghars* and spa/massage parlours. Children and young people involved in these venues were working or had worked as waiting staff, dancers, singers, dishwashers, cleaners and hostesses. In addition, 200 life stories were collected from children and young people engaged in work outside of venues associated with the AES, but within the AES neighbourhoods of clusters 2 and 5.

In cluster 2, the focus was on children and young people who were working in restaurants and hotels/*khaja ghars*; connected to the street (e.g. engaging in rag picking, begging, street vending and portering); and/or involved in the transport industry (e.g. as bus conductors or cleaners). In cluster 5, the focus was on children and young people working in domestic child labour, construction work, and in party palaces as dishwashers or waiting staff. While these children were not employed by AES venues directly, they may have had linkages with the sector. For example, in addition to working at a transport hub, some children may also earn commission by connecting customers to AES venues nearby.

As outlined in Table 2, a higher proportion of life stories were collected from girls working in AES venues, than boys, and a higher number of life stories were collected

Table 2: Life storytellers from the AES and AES neighbourhoods

Life story	Male	Female
Children and young people from the AES	20	180
Children and young people from AES neighbourhoods	136	64

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

from boys connected to the AES neighbourhoods. This reflects the gender split within these different environments. Venues related to the AES employ a higher number of girls than boys, whereas boys are more likely to be engaged in other types of labour in these neighbourhoods, such as rag picking, street vending, and working in the transportation sector.

2.4 LIFE STORY COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS WORKSHOPS

Between August and October 2021, the 400 life stories from the life story collection process were collectively analysed in a series of four workshops. Each workshop was seven days in length and involved 18 children and young people (aged between 14 and 22). The participants were life storytellers, life story collectors and new participants who had not previously been involved in CLARISSA but were also engaged in the worst forms of child labour.

2.4.1 Collective analysis processes

At the start of each workshop, introductory sessions were conducted to brief participants about the processes involved in the collective analysis and how to think in terms of causes and consequences. Following these introductory sessions, participants began the collective analysis, which is outlined below.

2.4.2 Analysing life stories and developing mini-system maps

Working in six groups of three, each trio of child participants was given approximately 15 life stories to analyse. A facilitator was assigned to each trio to support them in analysing the life stories, and a documenter

Table 3: Overview of children and young people participating in the collective analysis workshops

Workshop	No. of participants			Age		Returning participants*	Type of workshop participant	Type of life stories analysed
	Total	M	F	14–17	18–22			
1	18	11	7	14	4	–	Neighbourhoods	AES
2	18	10	8	17	1	2	Neighbourhoods	AES
3	18	2	16	5	13	2	AES	Neighbourhoods
4	18	7	11	9	9	7	AES and neighbourhoods	Neighbourhoods

* From the second workshop onwards, at least two participants who had taken part in a previous workshop returned to take part in another workshop. This aimed to build trust between facilitators and participants: the returning participants helped to explain the process to their peers and facilitators felt this peer-to-peer learning was valuable. Returning participants were carefully briefed to encourage them to support their peers, encouraging wider participation.

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

was assigned to observe and document the process. The method of analysis involved identifying critical 'factors' and understanding how they causally related to each other. A factor might be an event (e.g. Covid-19, lockdown), a circumstance (e.g. being in a state of poverty), or an emotion (e.g. anger, depression) that had causes and consequences. For each story, a mini-system map was created on flip chart paper that included the critical factors, and arrows and lines to show how these factors related to each other (Figure 1). Arrows between factors represented a causal relationship (i.e. one factor was the cause of another factor), whereas a line between factors showed that two factors were connected, but there was no clear or direct causal relationship.

2.4.3 Clustering of key themes

As the child participants were analysing the life stories, they were asked to identify two key themes per story. The theme and unique code for the relevant story were noted on a sticky note (one for each story). Child participants then created analytical categories by clustering sticky notes into groups of similar issues onto a large wall chart (Figure 1). This gave a sense of the key themes from the life stories.

2.4.4 Big system maps

The next stage involved the child participants integrating the mini-system maps into a very large map (one per

workshop). The large map – known as a big system map – was around 2 x 6 metres in length, and covered one whole wall of the workshop room. This map allowed dominant patterns and system dynamics to be observed across a much larger number of life stories (100 life stories per workshop). Child participants thickened connecting lines in proportion to the number of times this linkage had been repeated in the stories. This involved them checking back through the mini-system maps to see how many times a certain link came up. The number of times the connecting lines were thickened was written next to each line.

2.4.5 Action Research theme identification

In the final session of each workshop, child participants were given time to reflect on the big system map and prioritise the themes they felt were most important to focus on. In later workshops, a facilitator took the role of 'devil's advocate' with each group, asking them why they had chosen particular themes and the reasons the group felt they were a priority. This process informed the design of a series of eight Action Research groups, which are outlined in [Section 4](#).

Following each collective analysis process, plenary sessions were held with participants to allow the meanings and findings that emerged to be reflected on, debated and contested.

Figure 1: Overview of life story collection and collective analysis processes



2.4.6 Ethics and safeguarding

Ensuring that children could participate in the research without harm (intended or unintended) was crucial. The study was conducted in compliance with all human rights and ethical standards developed by the CLARISSA programme, as per the Institute of Development Studies ethical protocol. Risk assessments were carried out to identify risks of harm to participants that might occur before, during or after participating in the research. It was important that children understood that consent to take part was voluntary, and they were informed from the outset that they were able to withdraw from the research at any stage. The risk of harm with regard to the life story collection and collective analysis (e.g. risk of trauma from telling their life story or hearing the stories of others) was discussed with children as part of the consent process. Consent was obtained from both the child and their parent or guardian (which could include a representative

from an organisation the child was in contact with). All information participants provided was confidential and is kept securely in password-protected computer files, or in dedicated and secured cabinets within the Voice of Children office.

Where there were safeguarding concerns (e.g. where children reported abuse or trauma, or where this was suspected), these concerns were reported to the designated safeguarding focal person within 24 hours. Incidents were recorded using a safeguarding reporting form and all records kept securely. The principle of 'do no harm' guided the reporting of and response to safeguarding incidents. What was in the best interests of the child informed how allegations of abuse and harm were reported and responded to. Responses therefore varied on a case-by-case basis. Counsellors were available to provide support where appropriate.

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Section 3:

FINDINGS

3 FINDINGS

3.1 CHILDREN FROM THE AES

The first two collective analysis workshops focused on the life stories of children working in the AES. These life stories were analysed by children who were associated with other forms of child labour within the AES neighbourhoods or were living in these neighbourhoods.

3.1.1 Reasons for being engaged in worst forms of child labour

The big system maps allowed the child participants to identify key patterns that characterise children's pathways into child labour and their experiences within and beyond working in the AES. The big system maps they created showed the links between different issues related to the storytellers' early lives and family situations, and how these impacted their pathways to becoming involved in child labour and the AES.

Key for figures 2–9

Unless otherwise stated, the thickness of the arrows reflects the number of times this linkage was identified in the life stories being analysed during the relevant workshop. Arrows show the direction of causality. Lines show where issues are connected with no specific direction of causality.

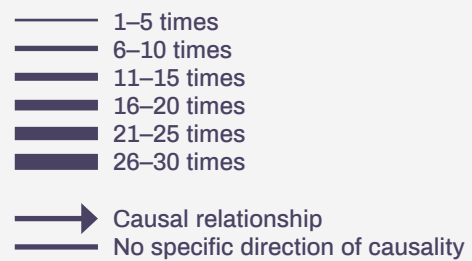
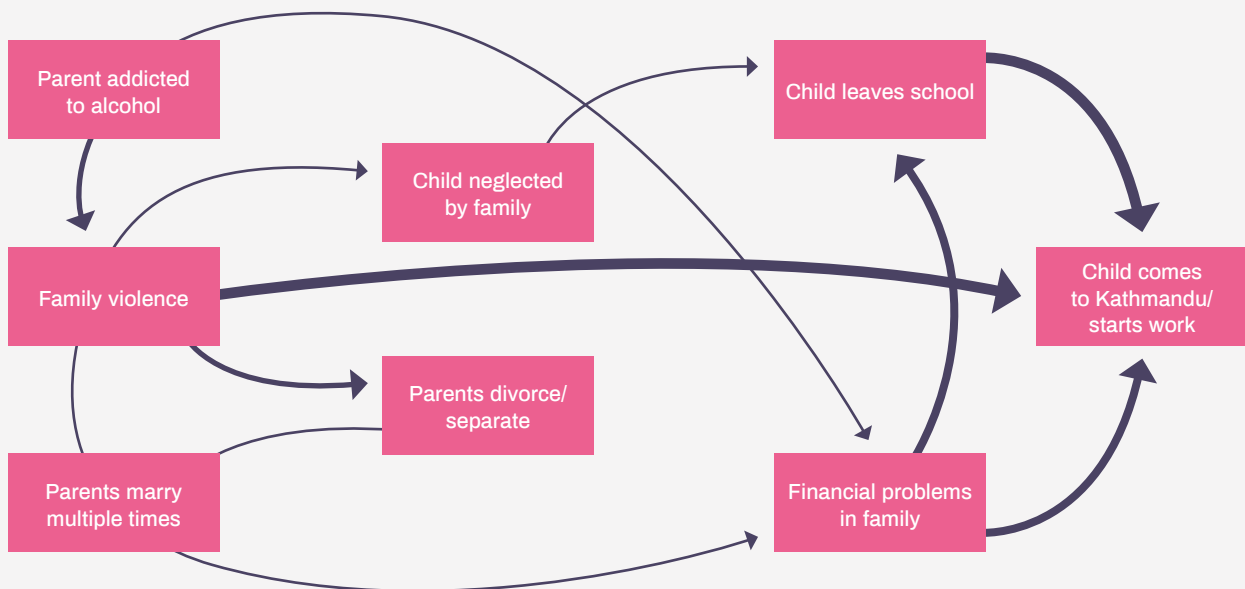


Figure 2: Family finances and family relations (workshop 2)



Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha.

Table 4: Family finances and family relations

Cluster heading	Frequency*	
	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Poor economic condition of the family	26	39
Family debt**	12	–
Family/domestic violence (e.g. physical abuse by parent or step-parent to child, beating by father, verbal abuse by mother, intimate partner abuse)	15	18
Polygamy/multiple marriage of parents (i.e. second marriage of father/mother following divorce or separation, or additional marriages)	12	11
Family issues/negligence (e.g. parents living separately, neglected by father or by stepmother, lack of proper supervision and direction to children from parents)	15	8
Parental addiction (to alcohol)	6	10

* Frequency refers to the number of issues grouped within the particular cluster during the clustering exercise.

** In workshop 2, children chose to include issues related to 'Family debt' within the 'Poor economic condition of the family' category.

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

3.1.2 Family financial problems and disruption within the family

One of the most prevalent linkages the child participants recorded on the big system maps was between financial problems in the family and the child entering Kathmandu and/or beginning work there.¹⁴ The clustering exercise showed how important the child participants felt this issue was in the life stories: in both workshops analysing life stories from the AES, 'poor economic condition of the family' was the most frequently identified issue (26 times in the first workshop and 39 in the second). The big system maps revealed some of the causes and consequences of these financial problems.

Figure 2, taken from the second narrative analysis workshop, shows the chains of causality that can lead to financial problems and the child entering Kathmandu and/or beginning work. For example, parental addiction to alcohol could lead to both family violence and financial problems in the family. Family violence was linked to parents marrying multiple times and led to parents

divorcing/separating and the child being neglected by their family. Parents marrying multiple times led to financial problems in the family. Financial problems in the family were strongly linked to the child coming to Kathmandu and/or starting work, or leaving school (discussed further below). Family violence was directly linked with the child entering the capital or beginning work.¹⁵

How frequently the child participants felt these issues were key to the life stories can be seen from the clustering exercises in these workshops.

During the collective analysis sessions, the child participants noted the prevalence and importance of a family's financial situation in the life stories. Only one child participant noted that they felt the failure to implement laws (both national and international) around child labour was an important issue (M16). Most of the child participants felt that the family's financial issues were key: 'No children would work if their economic status was good' (F16); 'Children had to work because their families' economic condition was weak' (F17).

14 In Nepal, many children migrate to Kathmandu (particularly from rural districts) for work purposes. In some life stories, children left their village and entered Kathmandu to work. In other life stories, children were already living in Kathmandu with their families (often having migrated as a family) when they began working.

15 It should be noted that causes of families' financial problems were often not explicitly stated. In a later workshop (workshop 3), child participants commented on this (see [Section 3.2](#)).

The child participants cited debt and the death of family members as specific aspects or causes of financial problems. Children were also struck by issues related to family violence, neglect and disruption. One child noted that she had begun to see patterns of economic problems, multiple marriages and (later) workplace harassment, and how these led to problems (F15). Some were surprised by the unfairness or lack of care the life storytellers had experienced within the family. The child participants relayed examples from the life stories,

including: how a family had discriminated between the son and the daughter (i.e. preferential treatment had been given to the son); how a mother had failed to save her dying child; and the failure of family members to arrange citizenship papers for their children. The child participants also remarked on the impact of parents' addiction on the finances of the family and its connection to family violence. One child participant noted: 'I think parents' addiction should be worked on because that has caused family violence, pushing children to start working' (F17).

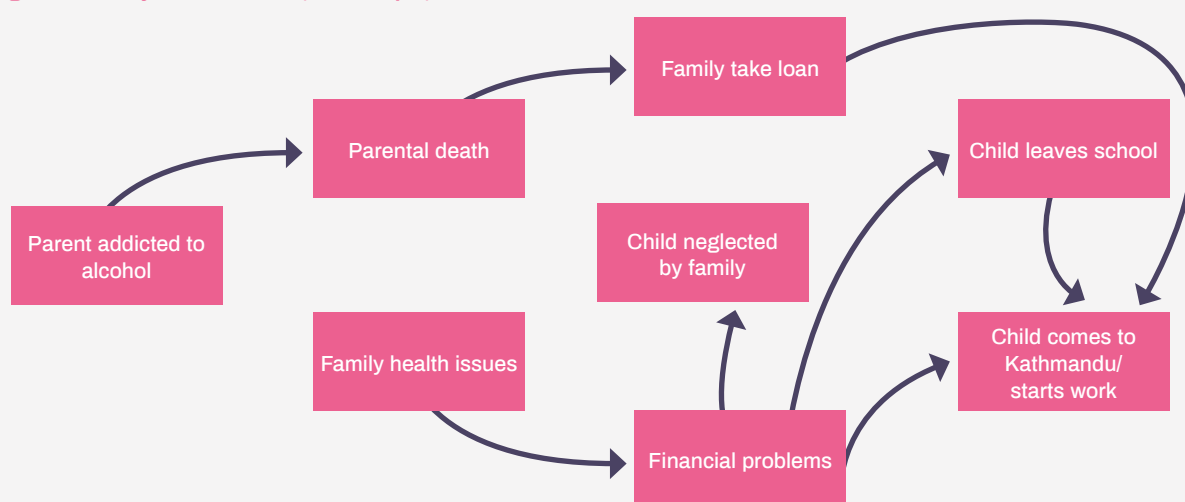
Box 1: Ramala's story

Ramala's story illustrates the effects of a disrupted home life. Ramala's father died when she was seven months old. Her mother remarried, but Ramala had a difficult relationship with her stepfather and was cared for by her grandmother. When her grandmother died and she had to move back to live with her stepfather, her home life became difficult. She describes her decision to leave her home district for Kathmandu:

My stepfather always hated me. He used to scold me and never loved me. He only loved his son. I didn't want to live with them because of his behaviour. I studied at stepfather's up to seventh grade. My stepfather used to drink. I had to work a lot in my stepfather's house. I used to wash dishes, clothes, clean the house and look after my younger brother. My parents were farmers and struggled a lot. One day I ran away from [Eastern district of Nepal] and came to Kathmandu. I thought life would be easier in Kathmandu. I stayed with my big brother, his wife and son near [Kathmandu] in a rented room."

* All names used in the report have been changed.
Source: [Ramala's life story](#).

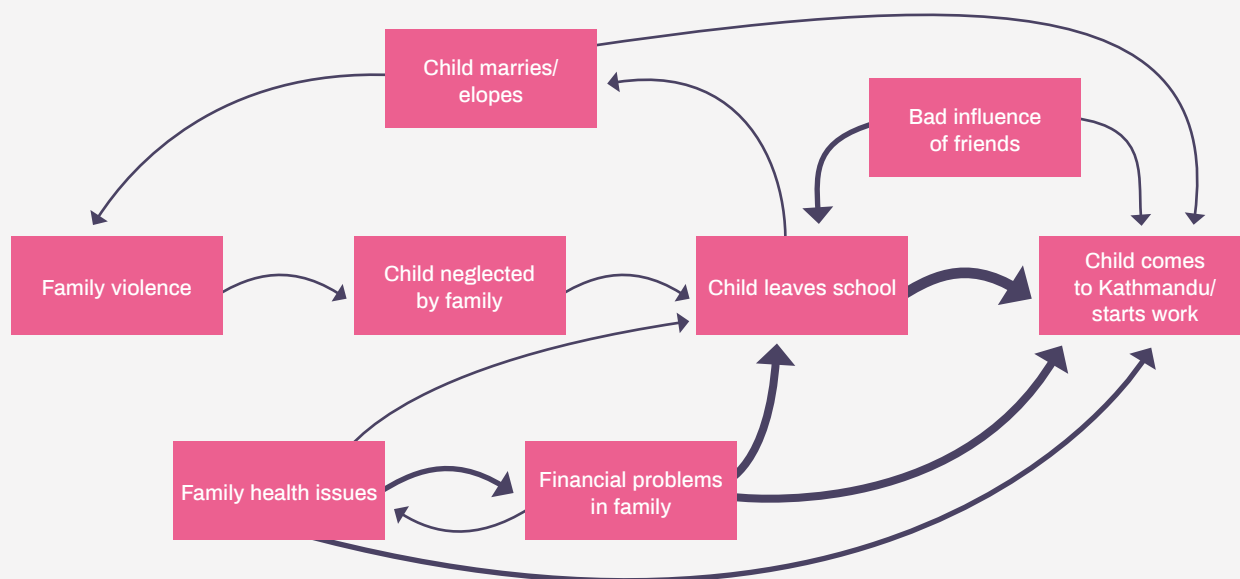
Figure 3: Family health issues (workshop 1)



Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha.

Note: See [Key for figures 2–9](#) on page 19. In workshop 1, child participants did not record the number of linkages between factors in full. As a result, in this figure the arrows show only the direction of causality, not the number of times this linkage was identified in the life stories.

Figure 4: Causes and effects of health issues and leaving school (workshop 2)



Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha.
Note: See **Key for figures 2–9** on page 19.

3.1.3 Family health issues

Child participants also identified that family health issues and the death of a parent also led to family financial problems and to children coming to Kathmandu and/or beginning work. During the clustering exercise, children felt that family health issues were the most important issue in 18 life stories across the two workshops.¹⁶

Figure 3 from the first workshop shows the links between health issues, the death of parents and financial problems (including the family taking a loan). This then led to the child (life storyteller) either leaving school or coming to Kathmandu and/or beginning work there. In the first workshop, child participants recorded that parental addiction to alcohol was a cause of parental death.

Table 5: Family health problems, child marriage and education-related issues

Cluster heading	Frequency*	
	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Family health problems	8	10
Child marriage	7	14
Education-related issues/leaving school	12	13
Negative peer influence/bad company	9	13

* Frequency refers to the number of issues grouped within the particular cluster during the clustering exercise.
Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

¹⁶ The number of times children identified health issues as a key issue during the clustering exercise seems relatively low compared to issues around family disruption and family financial problems. Health issues were prevalent in life stories, but during the clustering exercise children tended to identify the *consequence* of these issues (e.g. family financial problems) as the key issue to be categorised, rather than the *cause*.

In the second workshop, child participants recorded that family health issues were both a cause and consequence of financial problems (Figure 4).

For the children in the life stories, the outcomes were the same: the child either left school or came to Kathmandu and/or began work.

3.1.4 Reasons for and impacts of leaving school

While Simran was able to continue her schooling, the big system maps that the child participants developed show that health issues and financial problems led to many

life storytellers being unable to go to school (Figures 3 and 4). In workshop 2, child participants recorded that the neglect of the child by their family (a consequence of family violence) and the bad influence of friends were also factors that led children to leave school (Figure 4).

In both workshops, child marriage – where the child either married early with their family's consent or eloped without their consent or knowledge – was a consequence of the child leaving school.¹⁷ Leaving school was, then, strongly connected with the child coming to Kathmandu and/or entering work. Table 5 shows how many times these issues were selected as one of the most important elements in the life stories during the clustering process.

Box 2: Simran's story

Continued cycles of ill health and financial problems are evident in 14-year-old Simran's story. Originally from a rural western district of Nepal, Simran migrated to Kathmandu with her family, but multiple health issues had left the family indebted and meant Simran had to start earning a living when she was 12:

We came to Kathmandu when I was six, after my mother had to sell land to pay for medical treatment for heart disease. I have a sister and three brothers. All three of my brothers were born after we moved to Kathmandu and have serious health problems. My parents have spent a lot of money on their treatment. My father works with carpets, and he also has foot problems which mean he can't work long hours. My mother's heart is swollen, and blood comes out of her mouth. Her treatment has already cost up to 300,000 rupees [USD3,000] and the doctor has told that she has to have an operation. My family pays for these treatments with loans taken from people, which have to be repaid with interest, but so far we have not been able to repay...

Everyone at home is ill and my siblings are young, so I have to do all the work at home as well. I enjoyed the village very much because I had my own house, far field and close friends. I have some rich friends. Sometimes I think if my parents were a little rich, maybe I would also spend time enjoying and playing with my friends. If my parents were in good health, I would not have to work. I worry about my siblings' future. There is so much to pay back, and my siblings need schooling.

After beginning work on the streets selling water and balloons, Simran's uncle found her work in a *khaja ghar* when she was 13 years old. She described how she goes to work before and after school, taking her school dress to work with her in her bag. She starts studying after 11pm at night, and then studies again when she gets up at 3am or 4am.

Source: [Simran's life story](#).

17 There may have been a small number (less than 3) instances of child marriage being the cause of leaving school, but this was not the dominant pathway recorded by children on the big system map in either workshop.

When reflecting on the emerging findings, the child participants felt that child marriage was an important issue, and noted its connection with leaving school and child labour; in the second workshop, child participants noted

its connection to family violence. One child said that child marriage (arranged or agreed by parents) and eloping for marriage (arranged by the child themselves, usually without parental consent) are two very different things.¹⁸

Box 3: Jyoti's story

Jyoti's life story shows the negative feedback loop between financial problems at home and family health issues, and how these impact on children's ability to continue school. Jyoti describes how her mother's mental health issues caused the 'whole family to fall apart'. A lot of money was spent on her treatment, but eventually they could not afford to follow her doctor's advice and admit her to hospital. Her condition continued to deteriorate. The disruption led to Jyoti leaving school, and then to her eloping:

When I was in class eight, mum became ill, and this left her disabled. Dad used to carry loads as a wage labourer and couldn't pay our school fees, so I left school. My younger sister studied up to class ten and went to India. The whole family got torn apart. At that time my mum was mentally ill and we had no money. My elder brother also was into bad habits; he became aloof. After that I got married.

Jyoti was 17 when she eloped with her husband. Her mother had died, and her father and sister went to work in India. After getting married, her husband took her to work at a massage parlour:

So, I went there, and one guest selected me. Bad things were happening there, I didn't know. Bad things, meaning I had to have sex with the clients. It was not only a spa, but there was massage as well and so bad things would happen there. My husband had known about that before I started working; he could have told me, but he sent me there because of money. I felt very awkward in the beginning.

Source: [Jyoti's life story](#).

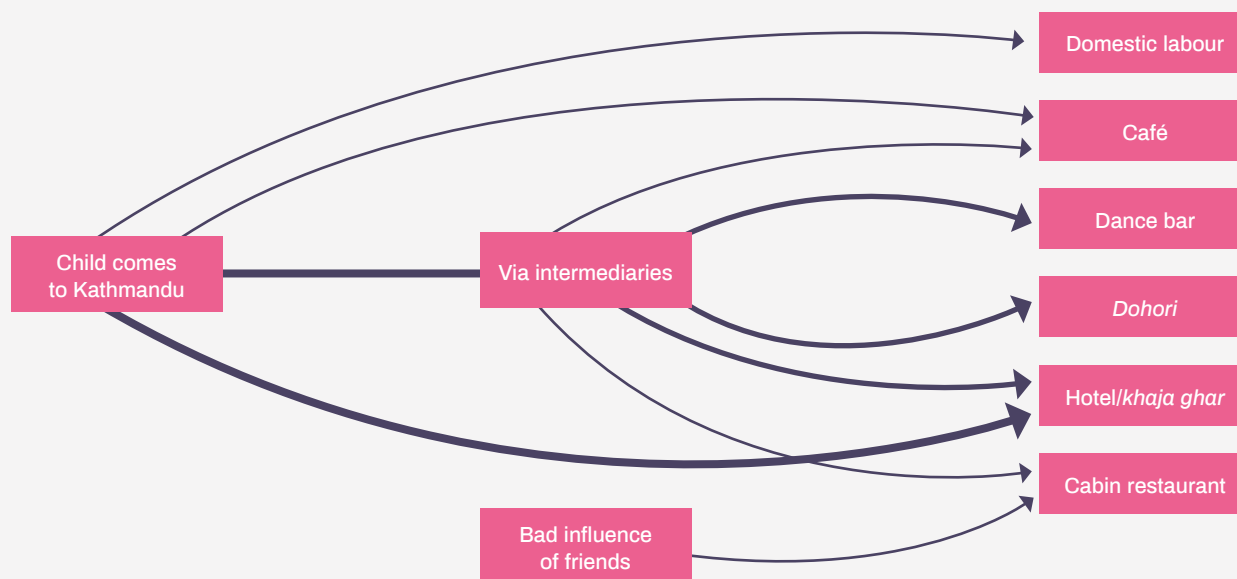
Table 6: The role of unknown intermediaries

Cluster heading	Frequency*	
	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Getting a job via an unknown person/stranger/intermediary	5	1

* Frequency refers to the number of issues grouped within the particular cluster during the clustering exercise.
Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

18 The child participants did not differentiate between the two categories related to child marriage on the big system map, so it is not possible to see the different pathways of children whose marriage was arranged by their parents and children who eloped without their parents' consent.

Figure 5: The role of intermediaries and where children begin work (workshop 2)



Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha.
Note: See **Key for figures 2–9** on page 19.

3.2 EXPERIENCES OF WORKING IN THE AES

3.2.1 How and where children begin work in Kathmandu

The big system maps that the child participants developed showed that children began work in a range of different venues. Some children began employment in jobs that were unrelated to the AES or the hospitality industry: domestic labour (workshop 2), factory work and daily wage labour (workshop 1). Figure 5 from the second workshop, shows that hotels/*khaja ghars* were the most frequently recorded type of venue where children began work.

In some life stories, intermediaries were mentioned as part of the pathway to work in the capital. In the first workshop, where different types of intermediaries were distinguished between, entering Kathmandu via a *didi*/*sister*' (a term commonly used to mean a female acquaintance, relative or friend) led to the life storyteller working in the following venues: party palace; factory; restaurant; and guesthouse. Friends also helped with finding work in a restaurant. Meeting an unknown person (i.e. a person not previously known by the child) led to starting work in a *dohori*.

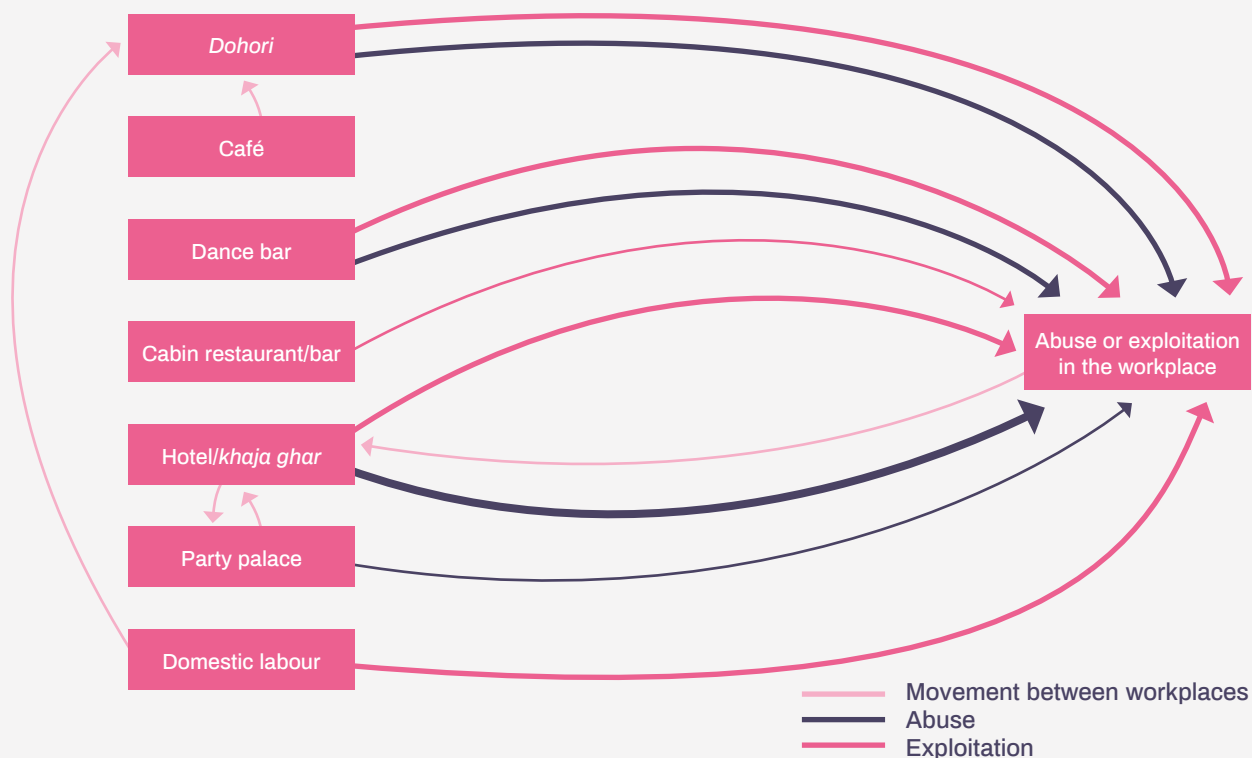
The level of involvement of intermediaries and friends in finding work can be seen in Figure 5. *Dohoris*, dance bars, hotels/*khaja ghars*, cafés and cabin restaurants/bars were entered via an intermediary or the bad influence of friends. The children's analysis in the second workshop did not distinguish between different types of intermediaries, which means these intermediaries could include individuals known to the child's relatives, friends or neighbours or, alternatively, brokers or other individuals who were not known to them.

Unknown intermediaries, in particular, emerged as a theme during the clustering exercise in both workshops 1 and 2, but it was a relative outlier.

During plenary discussions in the second workshop, participants highlighted the role of intermediaries; one child noted the role of intermediaries in children entering high-risk employment in particular (e.g. employment in AES venues), while another child reflected on the role of intermediaries and the incidence of workplace abuse (F14). Some participants felt this was a difficult area of intervention because usually children had needed intermediaries' help to find employment.¹⁹

19 While it is clear that the child participants felt that the role of intermediaries was important, further research needs to be undertaken to interrogate the different types of intermediaries involved (e.g. those known and not known to children entering the AES), and the impacts different types of intermediaries might have on children's pathways.

Figure 6: Abuse, exploitation and movement between venues in the AES (workshop 2)



Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha.
Note: See **Key for figures 2–9** on page 19.

3.2.2 Movement between different types of work within and outside the AES

On the big system maps, the child participants recorded how children working in the AES moved between different venues and/or types of work. This included moving from working outside the AES to working in venues associated with the AES; for example, working in domestic labour could lead to working in a *dohori* (Figure 6). Party palace work, which is often seasonal and temporary (staff are employed on a per event basis) was also linked to other types of employment such as restaurant work and hotel/*khaja ghar* work. In workshop 1, there was movement in both directions between hotel/*khaja ghars* and *dohoris*, and from restaurants to dance bars, *dohoris* and guesthouse work.

3.2.3 Abuse and exploitation in the workplace

During the clustering process, child participants categorised issues related to exploitation and abuse separately. Issues related to conditions of work, such as

not being paid their salary, insufficient salary, not being allowed days off, being forced to sit with guests and working long hours, were included in the exploitation category. Where the storyteller had been caused harm, either physically, sexually or verbally, child participants clustered these issues together as abuse. In the first workshop, child participants chose to separate sexual abuse from physical and verbal abuse, whereas in the second workshop, the different types of abuse were all included in one category (or cluster) (Table 7).

On the big system maps, child participants recorded how abuse and exploitation were linked to working in different types of venues (Figure 6). In the second workshop's big system map, children recorded a total of 31 instances of workplace abuse²⁰ across the different types of venues and 29 instances of workplace exploitation. In particular, dance bars, *dohoris* and hotels/*khaja ghars* had a high number of linkages to abuse and exploitation. In the second workshop, the abuse recorded in dance bars included both (a) physical and mental abuse, and (b) sexual abuse.

20 In the second workshop, participants chose not to distinguish between different types of abuse (sexual, physical, verbal).

Table 7: Exploitation and abuse in the workplace

Cluster heading	Frequency*	
	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Sexual, physical and/or verbal abuse	28**	25
Labour exploitation (including not being paid their salary, insufficient salary, not being allowed days off, being forced to sit with guests, and working long hours)	10	13

* Frequency refers to the number of issues grouped within the particular cluster during the clustering exercise.

** In workshop 1, sexual abuse was categorised separately from physical and verbal abuse. In this workshop, sexual abuse was identified as a key issue 11 times, while physical and verbal abuse was identified as a key issue 17 times.

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

Table 7 shows how many times children identified abuse and exploitation as key issues in the life stories during the clustering process.

During the plenary discussions, several child participants noted abuse experienced in hotels/*khaja gars* in particular.²¹ The life stories reveal the range of abusive

and exploitative practices that result from children engaging in child labour in the AES.

Abuse was also connected to workplaces that were not directly related to the AES. For example, there were instances of abuse linked to guesthouses party palaces and work in domestic labour.

Box 4: Simran's story cont.

Fourteen-year-old Simran, who began working at a *khaja ghar* after illness among her family members left them indebted (see Box 2), describes the sexual harassment she experiences working at the *khaja ghar*:

Sometimes, the owner yells and customers also say bad words, so it feels bad. I am comfortable to work with auntie, but when she is not around it feels uncomfortable to work with the owner. One time I felt really bad while washing the dishes – a drunkard came and asked me, 'Do you want to go?' [colloquial term for having sex].

Simran works around eight hours per day and is paid only 10 per cent of Nepal's minimum wage, 1,500 rupees (US\$15) per month (her salary of 2,500–3,000 rupees was reduced following the Covid-19 lockdown).

Source: [Simran's life story](#).

21 Discussion of abuse and exploitation was fairly limited in the workshops, possibly because of the sensitive nature of the subject areas.

Box 5: Kalpana's story

Meanwhile, Kalpana's story shows that in addition to the harassment experienced at work from customers, harassment and bullying also come from employers. Kalpana was ten when she began work at a *khaja ghar*:

I had to serve the customers alcohol and meat. Many of them asked me to 'go' with them [colloquial term for having sex]. They would say to keep it a secret from sahuni [female employer] and that they would come and pick me up at such and such a time, take me to a club and then a guesthouse and drop me off early in the morning.

The owner used to touch me. I don't remember how old I was, but auntie had gone out and I was in the kitchen, and he came in and held me from behind. I turned and asked him what he was doing. He said nothing would happen, as it was not like he slept with me. I told auntie [female employer] what he did, but he denied it and we quarrelled. Then they started to mistreat me. They added to my workload. They used to make me wash even the clean dishes, send me late to sleep, ask me to go with guests, make me stand for a long time. If I sat down, they used to shout at me and they used to swear at me in front of others. They used to tease me about my body as it changed during adolescence.

Source: [Kalpana's life story](#).

Box 6: Ramala's story cont.

Returning to Ramala's story, before working in a *dohori*, Ramala's friend found her a job in a guesthouse where she would clean, wash dishes and wait tables. On one occasion, after another member of staff left unexpectedly, the guesthouse owner severely beat Ramala, leaving her head swollen and badly bruised. She left that workplace and joined a *dohori*. At the *dohori*, the long hours working standing up led Ramala to faint due to low blood pressure and this led to her suffering with long-term back pain. She used her savings and help from friends to get an MRI scan to try to find the cause of the pain. The results were normal, but Ramala describes how she was hurt by the rumours the *dohori* owner spread to colleagues suggesting that she may have taken drugs or alcohol. Ramala returned home when the *dohori* closed due to the lockdown. After returning to Kathmandu, she began a beauty parlour course. She hopes to open a beauty parlour one day.

Source: [Ramala's life story](#).

3.2.4 Experiences beyond the AES and Covid-19

Similar to Ramala's story, the experience of abuse and exploitation led some children to leave their jobs or change their employment. Beyond their involvement in the AES, for some children, working in a venue led them to become engaged with NGOs that were offering trainings (e.g. skill-based trainings for future employment

opportunities). In both workshops, child participants recorded several linkages between the child leaving work and trainings, and then between trainings and starting a business. For example, in the second workshop, there were 11 instances where working in a *dohori*, dance bar or hotel/*khaja ghar* then led to being involved with an NGO. This was then connected to being involved in NGO trainings (six linkages) and opening a business (five linkages).

Box 7: Sarita's story

Sarita, who works as a singer at a *dohori* and is studying in the first year of a bachelor's degree, describes in her life story how she became involved with an NGO during lockdown:

I want to be a good singer in future but I don't want to spend my entire life in a dohori. I want to launch my album and perform at events. But we have to invest a lot for an album. I have been receiving offers for a group album, but still, it is difficult to invest. Now I am taking beautician training with [an NGO]. I came into contact with them during my spare time in lockdown. It is always good to learn something; that is the reason why I came here. I don't have any plans to run a beauty parlour in the future.

Source: [Sarita's life story](#).

The Covid-19 lockdown(s) impacted children's pathways, but the effects were diverse and fragmented.²² As Ramala's story shows, lockdowns disrupted work in various venues and consequences included returning to the home village; shifting to different types of employment such as security work; or becoming involved in an NGO and its trainings.

During discussions, child participants felt that there were positive pathways that could be observed on the big system maps and highlighted the role of NGOs and trainings. However, the limitations of these trainings were also noted: 'Trainings are given by the organisations but they don't have money to open a shop so children again go to work' (F14); 'Trainings given by the organisations are not professional and sustainable; that is why children again land in child labour' (M17).

Child participants also discussed the pathway of children being reunited with family or finding work outside of the AES. Child participants were surprised by how infrequently children returned to their home/family after starting work in the AES. Child participants reflected on the weak connection on the big system map between the life storyteller working in the AES and them returning to their home village. This was contrasted with 'all the works in Kathmandu' (i.e. the large number of linkages showing children entering Kathmandu to work) (M16).

3.3 CHILDREN WORKING IN OTHER FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT IN AES NEIGHBOURHOODS

The third and fourth workshops looked at the life stories of children working in other forms of child labour in AES neighbourhoods (including working in the transport industry, domestic child labour, construction work or street-connected work) and were analysed primarily by children working in the AES.

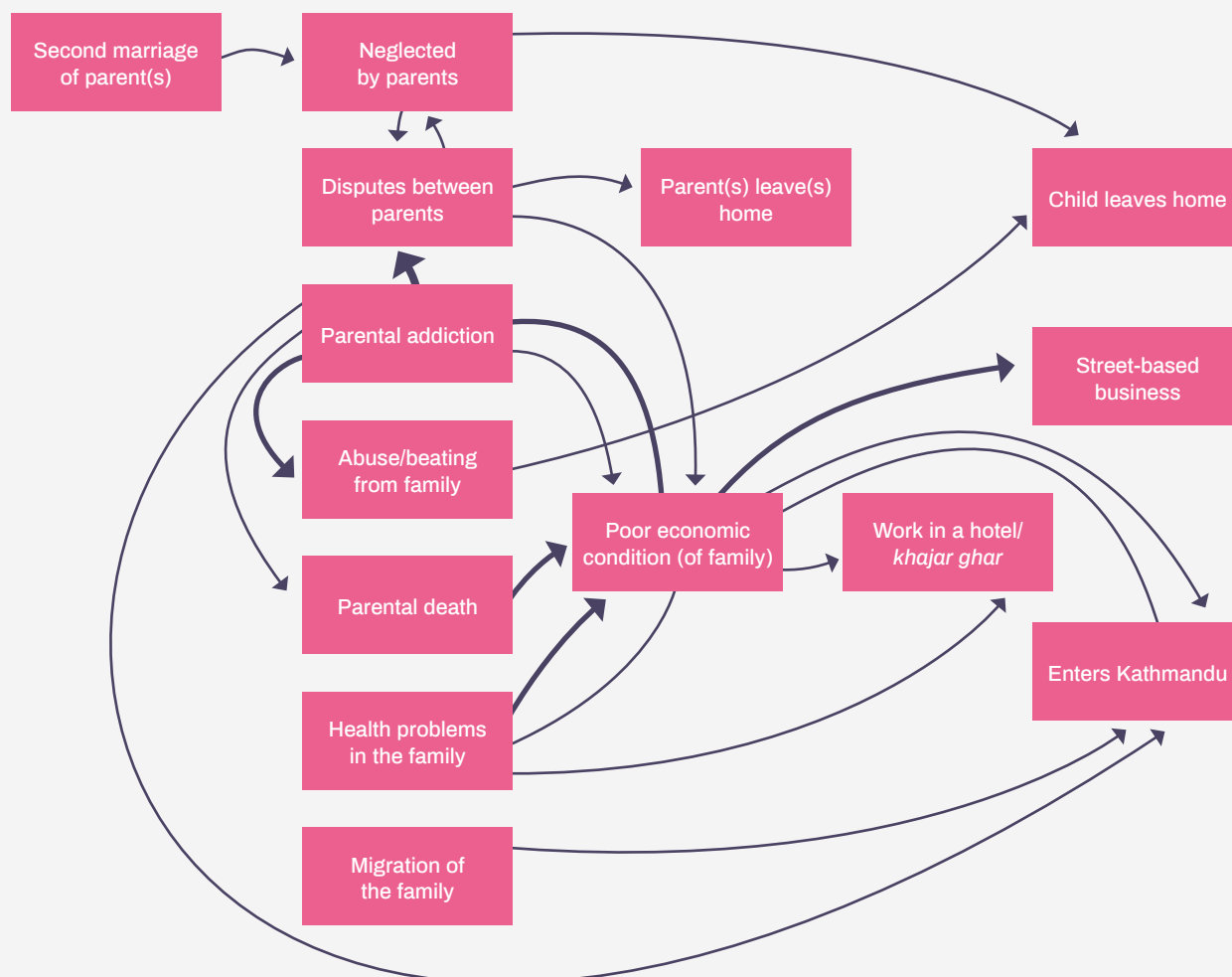
3.3.1 Reasons for being engaged in child labour

Children engaged in other forms of child labour in AES neighbourhoods had very similar pathways to entering Kathmandu and/or starting work. Figure 7 shows that the connections between a family's poor economic condition and a disrupted and/or violent home life were also present. In the workshops analysing these life stories, the child participants separated family disputes from violence or abuse, but in both cases they were strongly linked to parents' addiction/substance abuse. As with the AES life stories, child participants found linkages in the life stories between the storytellers experiencing abuse and neglect from their family, and leaving home.

Child participants explored issues related to the poor economic condition of the family from the children's life

22 The connections between Covid-19/lockdowns and other factors on the big system maps were very varied. In addition, the timing of the interviews (during the pandemic) meant that reflections on the medium-/longer-term impacts of Covid-19 were not always included in the stories. It is also worth noting that the timing of the life story collection meant that children who returned to their home village due to the pandemic would not have been available for interview in Kathmandu. These three factors suggest that further research is required in order to gain a fuller understanding of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children working in the AES.

Figure 7: Reasons for engaging in child labour (workshop 4)*



* From 'Child leaves home' and 'enters Kathmandu', the pathway continued to living on the street or being influenced by peers. Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha. Note: See **Key for figures 2–9** on page 19.

stories. One child noted the role of loans as a cause of families' poor economic condition, because families are unable to pay back loans and interest payments (M20). Child participants noted that often the causes of poor economic condition in the life stories were sickness and loans, but that in many life stories the reasons for financial difficulties were not made explicit. Reflecting on the reasons for the poor economic condition of families in the life stories, one child hypothesised that the storytellers' families might have inherited financial problems. Another thought that financial problems might be caused by lack of land ownership, which meant families did not have their own land to work on.²³

Child participants also discussed the impact of a family's poor economic condition. They saw issues such as fighting in families due to a lack of money, being sold by relatives into domestic labour, and the (financial) inability to send children to school as key consequences of a family's poor economic condition (discussed further below). Overall, poor economic condition was noted as a dominant factor in pushing children into child labour.

Child participants discussed at length parents' relationships with their children and the care they provided. In particular, they highlighted parents' failure to arrange official documents for their children (e.g. birth certificates and/or citizenship cards) and neglect by their

23 These were the child participants' reflections on the possible reasons for financial problems, rather than being based on evidence from the stories.

Table 8: Family finances and family relations

Cluster heading	Frequency*	
	Workshop 3	Workshop 4
Poor economic condition (of family)	30	32
Irresponsible family/neglected by parents (including parents' divorce, parents' addiction/substance abuse, gender discrimination in the home)	29	25
Family dispute	15	11
Abuse from family/beating**	–	12
Multiple marriage of parents	11	14
Health issues/problems in family	7	8

* Frequency refers to the number of issues grouped within the particular cluster during the clustering exercise.

** In workshop 3, abuse by family members was included in the 'Irresponsible family/neglected by parents' or 'Family dispute' categories. Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

parents or step-parents. Child participants explained that the life stories included issues around parents not understanding children's feelings, not showing or giving love and care, and not meeting children's material needs.

Child participants noted that parents' second marriages were a key factor. One child explained that a second marriage was important because it 'led to the physical and psychological abuse of children by the step-parent' (F16). Addiction was also cited as a cause of family problems, both because it disrupted family life and because it negatively impacted on the family's financial situation. 'Family addiction is the major factor which has led to the situation of carelessness and a quarrelsome environment in the family and children dropping out of school. So, it is the leading factor in my view' (F17).

The frequency of issues related to the family and family finances are included in Table 8.

3.3.2 Peer influence, addiction and living on the street

Child participants found that peer influence was an important factor in the life stories of children working in other forms of child labour. In particular, Figure 8

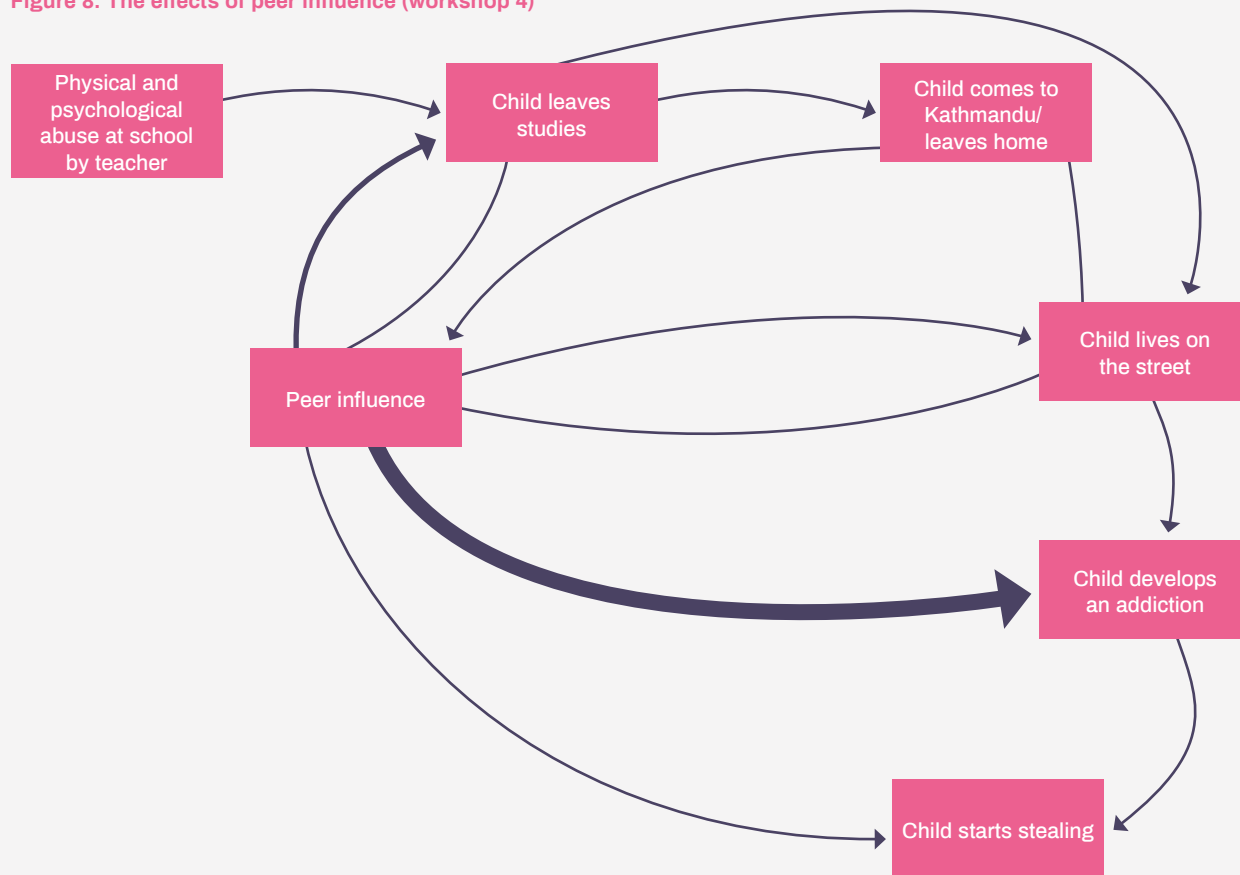
shows the linkage between peer influence and the child developing an addiction.

In the life stories, the substances children describe themselves as becoming addicted to included cigarettes, dendrites (glue), and marijuana. Peer influence also led to children living on the street, stealing, and (in workshop 3) working in the transport sector. The relationship between peer influence and entering Kathmandu varies: in workshop 3, there was a linkage between peer influence and the child then coming to Kathmandu; however, in workshop 4, the child coming to Kathmandu led to them being influenced by their peers (Figure 8).

On the big system maps the child participants developed, children's schooling was not as strongly connected to poor economic condition as it had been for the life storytellers working in AES venues.²⁴ For the life storytellers from AES neighbourhoods in other forms of employment, the linkage between the influence of peers and leaving studies/education was more significant. Physical and psychological abuse at school by teachers also led to children leaving their studies. In workshop 3, there was also a significant causal link between leaving school and addiction problems for children (in addition to the link between peer influence and addiction).

24 This may be because the connection between peer influence and leaving school was emphasised, rather than poor economic condition in both the life stories and during the collective analysis. Further research is required to understand why the poor economic condition of families featured less significantly in life stories from children in other forms of employment compared to life stories from children from AES venues.

Figure 8: The effects of peer influence (workshop 4)



Source: Authors' own. Created using original designs from Gopal Shrestha.
Note: See **Key for figures 2–9** on page 19.

Child participants had extended debates around the issue of peer influence and how it related to children's experiences in the family. Child participants were initially struck by the centrality of peer influence:

I understood how one event could lead to so many changes in someone's life and how the influence of friends can be very vital in life.
(F18)

While the influence of peers was one of the first issues highlighted when children reflected on the map, they also began making connections between peer influence and storytellers' family circumstances. Piecing together causal chains of factors, child participants noted pathways that made the storytellers vulnerable to the influence of their peers:

It's the family's poor economic condition that leads to their arrival in Kathmandu from where it leads to substance abuse and child labour, which is an important phenomenon.
(F15)

Due to poor economic condition and multiple marriage of parents a child comes to the streets and engages in substance abuse and addiction due to the bad influence of friends.

(F22)

Initially, child participants focused on 'push' factors related to the family that physically or materially led the life storytellers to the streets, where they were then influenced by peers. However, in workshop 4 in particular, the discussion became more nuanced as the child participants reflected on the psychological and emotional impact of disrupted family relations, and how this impacted children's ability to make decisions in their best interest. After discussing various family-related issues that impact children both physically and psychologically – such as second marriages, family separation, parents' alcohol abuse and family violence – several child participants noted that being cared for and looked after were central to children's development and life choices:

In my opinion, the neglect of the parents towards their children matters a lot to the upbringing of a child. Even if his or her father is an alcoholic or they are not economically sound, if they take care of their children, then surely their children would grow up well and take the right decision for their life. But children who are not cared for by their families go through illness and lack of support that leads them to become school dropouts. Moreover, because of the bad influence [of friends] and environment, they are involved in unethical activities even if the family is wealthy.

(F19)

I believe that friends cannot always be bad and [I] do not give priority to peer influence; instead, I choose the lack of family care as a major factor, which is the core issue that has led the child to leave home and end up on the street.

(M16)

The link between education and peer influence was also highlighted. One child participant felt that if children are well educated, they are able to discern whether the role of their friends is good or bad (F20).

3.3.3 The dynamics of child labour

The lives of children in street situations, such as Kapil, were often in flux, as they moved between different types of work and different types of living situation. For example, Kapil sometimes lived at home and sometimes on the street. He worked in a motorcycle workshop and then left to be with his friends once more. Other pathways included working in the transport industry; for example, working as a bus conductor or cleaner, or in small restaurants such as hotels/*khaja ghars*. Working in the transport sector was connected to not being paid on time and being rescued by the police department's National Centre for Children at Risk (Police 104).²⁵ Similar to the life stories of children associated with the AES, the life stories of children in other forms of child labour linked working in hotels/*khaja ghars* to physical and verbal abuse and labour exploitation in the workplace.

3.3.4 The role of police and 'helping' organisations

The big system map child participants developed shows that substance abuse, living or begging on the street, and stealing led to being rescued by Police 104 or being arrested by the police (see Figure 9).²⁶ This was

Table 9: Peer influence, addiction and leaving school

Cluster heading	Frequency*	
	Workshop 3	Workshop 4
Negative peer influence (includes substance abuse due to peer influence)	32	23
Child developed an addiction	0**	7
Child discontinued/left studies	14	13
Teachers' physical and psychological abuse of children at school	0	3

* Frequency refers to the number of issues grouped within the particular cluster during the clustering exercise.

** In workshop 3, substance abuse due to the influence of peers was included in the 'Negative peer influence' category, not as a separate category (as it was in workshop 4).

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

25 The police department's National Centre for Children at Risk is known as 'Police 104' because of the helpline number (104) that can be dialled to access this service.

26 Some life storytellers described being 'rescued' by Police 104, while others used the terms 'taken' or 'caught'. Child participants chose to use the term 'rescued by Police 104' while creating the big system map.

then linked to children being taken to a rehabilitation organisation or to a non-profit 'helping' organisation.²⁷

Being involved with a helping organisation led to various outcomes: there were five instances where this led to involvement in trainings provided by these organisations; five instances of children returning home; and six instances of children running away from the organisation.

Receiving trainings from the organisation (NGO) was also linked to the child not having a birth certificate in three instances. This is because, despite these trainings from organisations, children were often unable to go on to access formal types of employment or government services because they lacked the official documents – such as a birth certificate or citizenship card – required by employers or administrative bodies. Child participants discussed this issue at length (see below).

Box 8: Kapil's story

In Kapil's story, several factors contributed to him leaving school, which then led him to become involved with a group of friends from the neighbourhood. Kapil lived in Kathmandu with his family. He studied until he was ten years old, but then started to hide in bushes during school hours and return home at the end of the day. Kapil found homework difficult to complete and did not like to go to school because his teachers scolded and punished him by pulling his ears. By the age of 11 he had dropped out of school. Soon after, Kapil's mother left the family home. Although he and his brother were cared for by his aunt (who they moved in with) and his father, Kapil did not return to school. He describes how a friendship with children living on the street then developed:

However, I did not go to school. Instead, I went outside of the house where I met some boys who later became my friends. Those all were street children so they live in the streets. I spent my whole days with these street friends and returned home in the night. Sometimes, they came to my aunt's home and called me to go out with them. At that time, we went to Swoyambhu, forests, and also swimming, roaming around bus parks. These friends have bad habits like smoking, consuming dendrites, hashish, and doing chhada chhada [anti-social activities], stealing, and vandalism. So, auntie scolds me for making friends and roaming around with them. But I enjoyed myself.

Although Kapil's father found work for his son at a motorcycle workshop, his friends visited the workshop and continuously tried to persuade him to go out with them. After Kapil's father threatened his friends and shouted at him, Kapil left the job and went to live on the street. With friends, he would steal metal from houses and sell it to make money to buy noodles. He describes how pressure from friends led to addiction:

In that week, these friends pressurised me to smoke and take dendrites. They explained that they felt sweet while taking dendrites. First, I refused their proposals but due to their extreme pressure, I started smoking and consuming dendrite. While taking dendrite I felt something vibrate in my mind, had vertigo, and my legs went numb. Overall, I felt outstanding pleasure while consuming dendrite. I also started using vulgar words while talking with them. Gradually, these peers influenced me to develop bad habits.

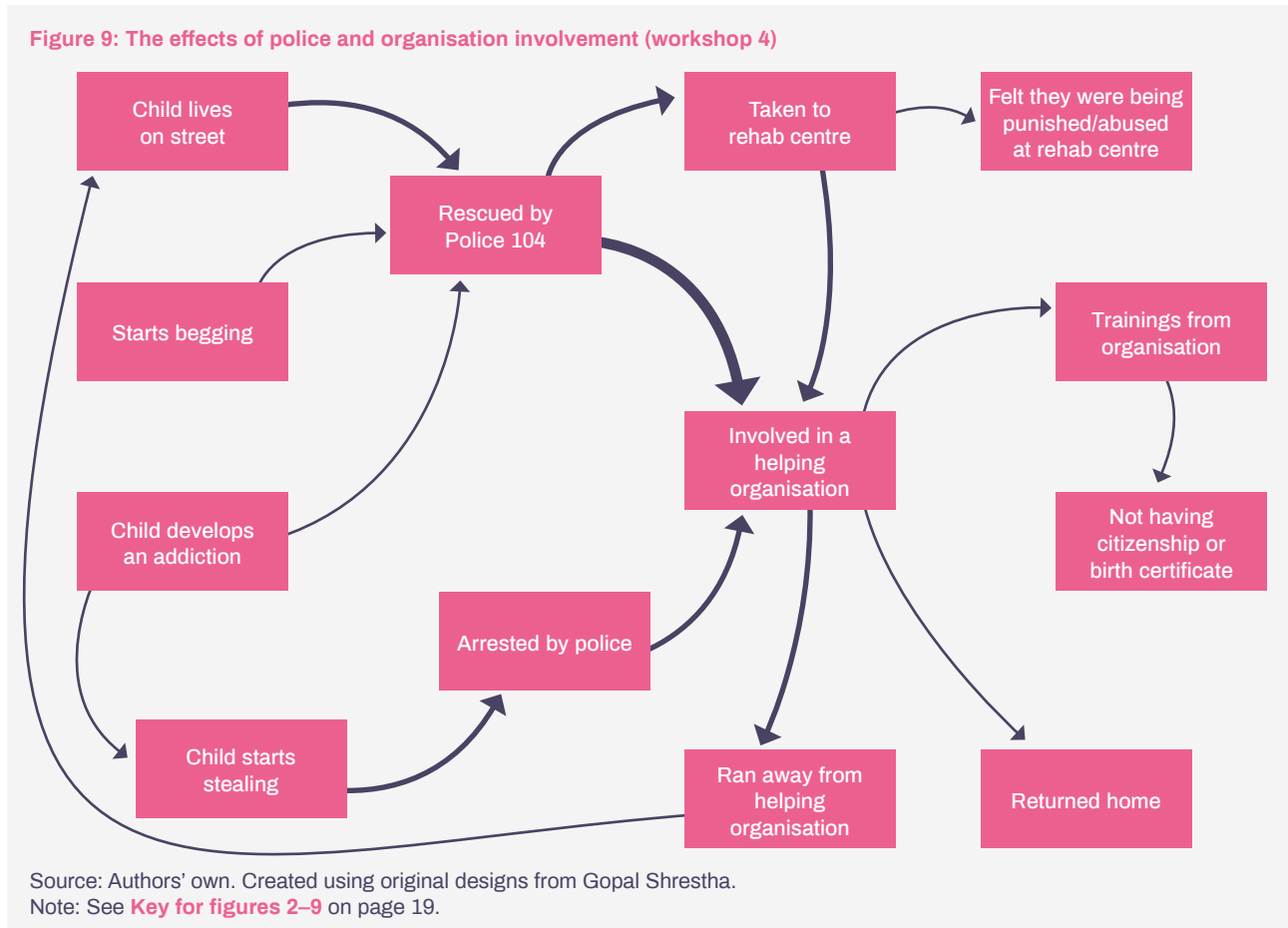
Source: **Kapil's life story**.

²⁷ A rehabilitation organisation deals primarily with substance abuse. Services are provided on a residential basis and a treatment programme usually lasts between 3–12 months. Following treatment, children and young people may be transferred to an NGO (or 'helping organisation') that provides services such as skill-based trainings, career advice, counselling and education courses. These organisations provide shelter to children and young people and may also attempt to reintegrate children with their families.

Child participants recorded on the big system map that being sent to a rehabilitation organisation primarily led to becoming involved in a helping organisation. However, there was also a link to feeling punished or abused (by the organisation).

The child participants were struck by the abuse experienced by the children at the hands of authority figures, as well as the level of involvement of police in the lives of the children. Although abuse at a rehabilitation organisation was identified as an outlying issue in the

Figure 9: The effects of police and organisation involvement (workshop 4)



Box 9: Sunil's story

Life stories such as Sunil's show the varied and fluid lives of children living on the street. Sunil began to live in one of Kathmandu's bus parks when he was seven years old after becoming separated from his family when they migrated to work. Sunil describes how he worked in hotels/*khaja ghars*, at the bus park, on trucks, in a brick kiln and in a carpet factory. Periods of employment could be short – just a few days – and, in between, Sunil would 'roam around' various AES centres:

I also met a friend who was like me. He and I used to roam around Thamel where there were more spoiled boys who were consuming dendrite. Foreigners and other people used to come. I used to ask for money from foreigners and cheat them. We used to steal money from foreigners and hit the glass of people's houses and had fun with friends.

Source: **Sunil's life story**.

clustering exercise, there were lengthy discussions around this type of abuse at both workshops. Child participants expressed surprise and confusion:

There were many stories where people have faced harassment in the organisation that had rescued them... so is that good?
(F17)

I was shocked to find that there is abuse and harassment at different service organisations. The main thing for the organisation is to protect

[the children]. But hearing the stories where they are abused and harassed at the organisations is shocking. So, is this kind of behaviour from an organisation good or bad?
(F18)

In the fourth workshop, the child participants discussed the chain of issues in the feedback loop that led to children being taken into organisations and then returning to the street. Some felt that the mistreatment of the life storytellers by organisations contributed to this feedback loop:

Box 10: Kapil's story cont.

Kapil's life story illustrates the feedback loop that the participants observed on the big system map. Kapil described how he was arrested by police, first for stealing and then for living on the streets. Although he returned home after first being arrested and held in custody, he soon became bored watching TV at home all day and returned to sleeping on the streets again. After the second arrest, he was taken to a helping organisation. He describes the shelter as being good, with games to play, but he ran away a few days later:

I stayed there for 1–2 days and ran away. I was afraid as one of the male staff had told me that they would send me to another place [organisation]. I met my friend who I had fought with earlier and started surfing in the street and went home. One night Kumar [uncle, name changed] caught me and took me to my home.

Kapil's uncle Kumar then took him to another shelter where he is currently residing.

Source: **Kapil's life story.**

Box 11: Sunil's story cont.

Sunil had a different experience. Although he was currently living at an organisation where he described his life as 'happy in one way', he also talked about the mistreatment experienced in a previous rehabilitation organisation:

I was taken to an organisation. I thought it would be a place I could live together with other children. When I arrived, I found they kept older kids there and they used to beat. I stayed there for four and a half months. If I made a small mistake, then they used to beat me. If I used vulgar words, then they would scold and punish me. It was like a rehabilitation centre. They used to scold and beat a lot. They used to take us outside only once or twice in a week. There was nothing to see there in the underground-like place. I used to think, 'When will I get to go home, when will I get to visit my family, when will I get to see the outside world?'

Source: **Sunil's life story.**

It was seen that even in an organisation, children have faced abuse and exploitation that led to children escaping and ending up again on the street. Therefore, the factor – abuse at organisation – must be focused on and the action needed to stop such maltreatment inside organisation should be done.
(F19)

However, one participant argued that not every organisation goes against child protection, and that they should avoid generalising and blaming organisations, especially as these organisations have been established for the protection of children's rights (F18). Other factors contributing to the feedback loop were discussed. One child participant argued that there are some boundaries

Box 12: Ravi's story

In 14-year-old Ravi's life story, he describes the poverty he experienced after his father died, which led to the family travelling to Kathmandu:

I remember the day when my father passed away, we only ate rice with soup made from a single potato and water. Later, my mother asked others about bus fares and expenses to come to Kathmandu. She took a loan of 5,000 Indian rupees [USD60], and we came to Kathmandu. We got off at the major transport hub of Kathmandu. Mother took a room in a lodge and then looked for a job. She took us to the temple to check if people were getting money by begging and saw beggars earning money. We (all five family members) also started begging and people coming to temple started giving money to us as well. We collected money from there for our survival.

Later Ravi invested 500 rupees [USD5] from begging to begin a street-based business selling flags and cigarettes. He was able to save enough money to support himself during lockdown.

Source: **Ravi's life story.**

Box 13: Romani's story

Unlike Ravi, who had not experienced harassment on the streets, 11-year-old Romani who has been working as a street vendor selling balloons and water since she was nine, has faced numerous forms of harassment and abuse. In her life story, Romani says, 'if the municipality catches us while selling water, they snatch away the water and take it to their homes; it has happened to me a lot'. She has not been caught by the police because a local *dai* (older friend/acquaintance) she is close with tells them not to take her away. Romani explains more about the different people she comes into contact with while working on the streets, and describes the abuse she faces:

There are boys aged 13 or 14 years old who beat me and take away my money. Once a boy took my bag with 100 rupees and the pictures then ran away and never came back. Manik dai [name changed] told me that if he sees him around, he will beat him and send him to [Police] 104. The vendors of bird food envy us and scold us so I moved to a different place nearby. The auntie from the balloon and rocket factory where I work is very good but the uncle shouts and scolds me. In the factory I have to pay 120 rupees per balloon to the uncle. I get a profit of 30 rupees. Many people take pictures with the balloon and pay me 20/30 rupees. I sell around three/four balloons in a day.

Source: **Romani's life story.**

Box 14: Maya's story

Maya came to Kathmandu when she was 12 years old. She describes her family as having a normal economic status. She was one of five sisters. Her father was working abroad when her uncle took her from the village to work in his neighbour's house in Kathmandu. She describes how she felt when she was first taken to her uncle's neighbour's house:

I was very afraid that someone might sell me at the beginning. I used to cry at night because I missed my home.

In the home where she works, she is responsible for preparing most meals and cleaning the house. The aunt and uncle she works for (her employers) allow her to go to school, but studying at home is not encouraged, even though she had been promised an education. She feels that her schooling is affected because of the high workload in their home and her inability to study there. She does not receive a salary for the work she does, only her bus fare to visit home once per year during festival time is paid for.

The uncle who she works for has beaten and hit her: 'he hits me for my small mistakes'. Once he hit her for wearing the kitchen slippers outside. At the end of her story, Maya describes how the uncle has begun to sexually harass her:

Sometimes when nobody is home, uncle comes to the kitchen only half dressed or just wearing underwear. My room is visible from the uncle and aunt's room so sometimes he watches me from his room. Sometimes he does not zip his pants. Sometimes he also touches me inappropriately. I have not talked about it to others yet. That's why I fear uncle and keep my distance from him.

Source: [Maya's life story](#).

that are extremely difficult to overcome, which nullify any gains the individual may have made by being involved in an organisation:

The issue of not having citizenship has been recorded in few numbers, but I believe it is the major issue to think about and act on. We have found storytellers restricted from grabbing many work opportunities because of a lack of citizenship; so, it is an essential issue to raise. Even among us, we have taken many trainings and gained skills but it is worthless without a citizenship certificate to get into the skilled job market.
(M16)

Child participants saw issues related to a lack of legal documents – citizenship cards and birth certificates, in particular – as important because they limited children's access to school and government services, and formal types of employment.

In addition, one participant noted that when children return to their families, they can have an unhealthy

relationship with family members and/or may suffer mistreatment within the family. As a result, they end up back with their friend circles on the streets and become involved in substance abuse (M20). The same participant also noted that the environment of the family is very different from helping organisations.

3.3.5 Street-based vendors

The child participants found that starting a street-based business selling water, balloons and other items on the street was strongly linked with the poor economic condition of the family. Working as a street vendor was, then, associated with both a fear of the police and physical and verbal abuse.

Child participants in the third and fourth workshops noted harassment and discrimination from government administrations such as municipalities as an important issue. One child participant asked facilitators directly why the authorities harassed street vendors who tried to earn a small amount of money.

3.3.6 Children working in a domestic setting

Child participants recorded a different pathway for children engaged as domestic workers on the big system maps. Arrangements to begin domestic work were usually made by relatives. Working in their employers' homes, there was a strong causal link between exploitation (13 linkages) and verbal and physical abuse in the workplace (three linkages). Working in domestic settings was linked to the life storyteller coming to Kathmandu

(13 linkages), because in most instances their work in a domestic setting took place in the capital.

Discussion around the experiences of domestic workers was fairly limited during the workshops.²⁸

Several participants noted the role of relatives acting as mediators. One participant was surprised by the role of families in this, finding it both 'shocking and disturbing'. They felt that the harassment and abuse experienced by the life storytellers go on to impact their whole lives (F17).

28 This might be because there were fewer stories from children working in domestic child labour compared to children engaged in street-based work, or living on the streets.

Section 4:

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION
RESEARCH GROUP
FORMATION**

4 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH GROUP FORMATION

4.1 IDENTIFYING CAUSAL CHAINS DURING THE COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS WORKSHOPS

At the end of each workshop, the child participants were given time to reflect on the big system map and discuss the key connections and dynamics they could observe. Several children began noting the causal chains they could see within the big system map and reflected on their ability to see the system as a whole:

The big system map shows what problem leads to what. For example, poor economic condition of the family leads children to work; that leads to them getting abused at their workplace; and then they leave their job and get support from an NGO.
(M18)

The end result is like a map of many people in a single frame, leading to similar circumstances through different causes.
(F22)

The main issues are seen from the big system map and we realise how situations, events and experiences are similar across many lives... I can see many incidents of different people's lives. By looking at the big map I can also understand the different backgrounds and experiences of people.
(F17)

The big system map can be reflected on as like how the human body's nervous system associates with one another major factors like poor economic condition, school drop-out, ending up on the street, working at a hotel.
(M19)

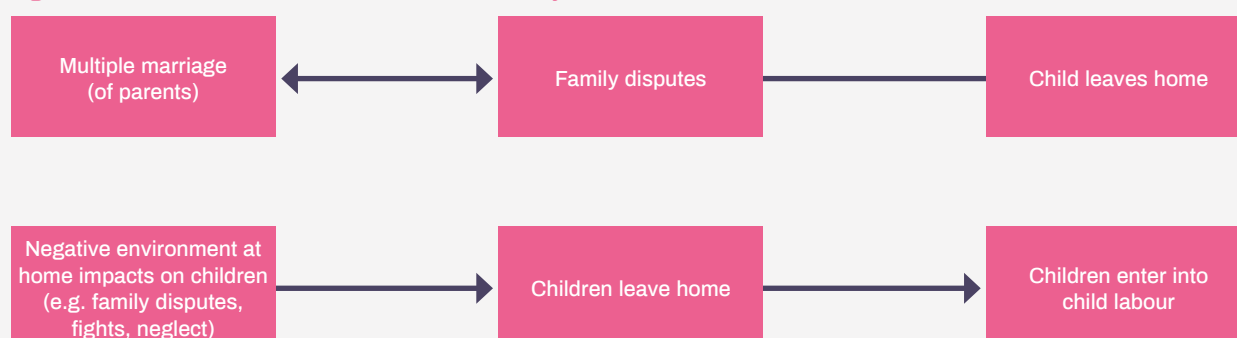
From seeing the system, the children and young people participating began to reflect on the issues that require change, and what the Action Research groups would go on to focus on:

It is a kind of filtration process, first we worked on the mini-system map with one story and now all 100 stories are here, but by filtration, we have brought major factors and highlighted them in this map so that we can do the needed action in future.
(M18)

It was confusing at first but gradually, going through the process, we identified the problems and later we separated the actual issues. From all these processes, I understood that we can reduce child labour if we can work on the identified issues.
(F19)

In the final session of the workshops, participants then discussed the chains of factors or themes they felt were most important. These chains could focus on different parts of the big system map. For example, the chains of issues outlined in Figure 10 focus on issues within the family.

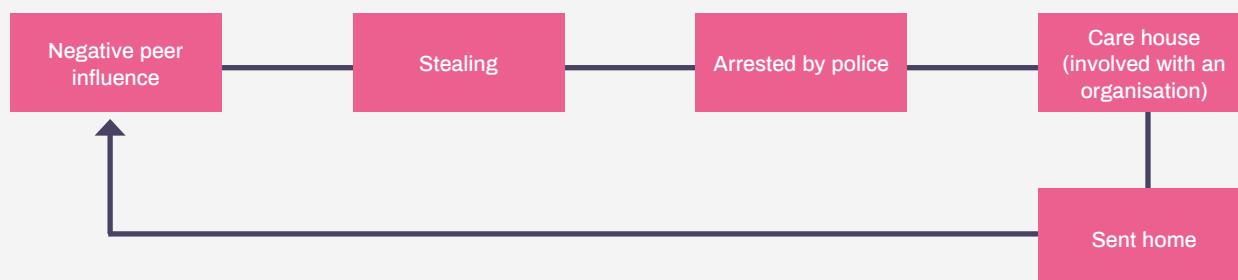
Figure 10: Chains of factors identified related to family relations



Source: Authors' own.

Note: In this figure the arrows show only the direction of causality, not the number of times this linkage was identified in the life stories.

Figure 11: Chains of factors identified related to children living on the streets



Source: Authors' own.

Note: In this figure the arrows show only the direction of causality, not the number of times this linkage was identified in the life stories.

The chain of factors feedback loop in Figure 11 describes the experience of children living on the streets.

The child participants debated which themes to prioritise and take forward as the focus of eight Action Research groups. In each workshop, two or three themes were prioritised at the end of the session. In total, participants selected nine themes.

4.2 FINALISING THEMES FOR THE ACTION RESEARCH GROUPS

Following the collective analysis workshops, two validation sessions were held: one with children from the

AES and one with children from AES neighbourhoods. In these workshops, the participants reflected on and validated the nine themes prioritised during the collective analysis workshops. This was important because the child participants had been analysing the life stories of children with child labour experiences different to their own (i.e. participants working in the AES had analysed the life stories of children working in other forms of child labour and vice versa). Eight themes were selected and taken forward to become the focus of eight Action Research groups, as outlined in Table 10. The themes were allocated to the different geographical clusters based on what was most relevant to each particular cluster.

Figure 12: Child participants during an Action Research group meeting



Source: CLARISSA Nepal.

Table 10: Action Research group themes

Themes	Type
Children have to discontinue their study [education] due to the poor economic condition [of the family] resulting from the family spending money on their addictions	AES
Children have to become involved in the worst forms of child labour due to the poor economic condition of their family	AES
Children re-enter worst forms of child labour even after participating in trainings and skills-orientated programmes provided by NGOs	AES
Children enter into the AES (e.g. dance, <i>dohori</i> , cabin restaurant, etc.) through friends, relatives, known/unknown persons and face labour exploitation and sexual abuse	AES
State of homelessness [i.e. living on the street] and neglect from family results in being deprived of access to birth and citizenship certificates, and other facilities provided by the government	Neighbourhood
Debts/loans and disability of family members leads to poor economic condition and discontinuation of study [education]	Neighbourhood
Discontinuation of school due to homelessness and family neglect and falling into substance abuse because of the negative influence of their peers	Neighbourhood
[Family members'] lack of awareness and family conflict result in exploitation and abuse at the workplace	Neighbourhood

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

During the process of deciding on the themes for the Action Research groups, there was less focus on the complexity and nuance of the chains of issues identified during the collective analysis process, as participants concentrated on the key issue that they felt should be the theme of the Action Research group. For example, the focus of one group became the specific factor 'education', even though the initial chain of issues had included a more complex set of interlinked factors relating to the causes and effects of discontinuing education. During the formation of the Action Research groups, part of the facilitators' role was to reacquaint participants with the original chains of factors, and focus on the causalities and relationships between these factors (rather than one or two key factors within the chain).

4.2.1 Action Research group formation

Eight Participatory Action Research groups (four related to the AES and four related to AES neighbourhoods) were formed. The Action Research groups include 12–18 children and young people in each group. Groups are

made up of participants from the life story collection stage, participants from the collective analysis stage and additional children living or working in the relevant cluster. Meetings, which are held twice per month in a venue within each cluster (local to the participants), are attended by the child participants, a facilitator and a documenter to ensure there is a full written record of each session.

The meetings began in early 2022 and will continue for 12–14 months. After an extensive trust-building stage, the eight Action Research groups are in the process of reflecting on the key issues and formulating theories of change. These child-led groups will not be short-term engagements but medium- to long-term processes: children will be involved in the groups for up to 14 months. During this time, children will be supported to generate theories of change about interventions, plan and programme innovative solutions, test the solutions in real time and evaluate them. In this way, the Action Research groups become engines of innovation, developing robust models of action that can eventually be scaled (Burns *et al.* 2021).

Section 5:

DISCUSSION

5 DISCUSSION

Throughout this paper, the authors' reflections have been included in footnotes to add context and explanation to some of the findings. This section draws together these reflections, and highlights key areas for further research.

Firstly, finding a balance between factors being detailed enough to relay sufficient meaning and generic enough to be relatable to multiple stories was at times a challenge for child participants. Some of the terms children used for factors were very broad: for example, in the second workshop the factor 'intermediaries' did not differentiate between intermediaries that were known to life storytellers, such as a family member, relative or friend, and those whose life storytellers had not previously known, such as brokers/agents. As a result, further research is required to interrogate the different types of intermediaries who influence children (e.g. those known and not known to children entering the AES) and the different impacts different types of intermediaries might have on children's pathways.

Discussions around factors that related to sensitive or taboo subjects could be limited during workshop plenary sessions. There was less discussion of sexual abuse and its impacts, for example, possibly because the child participants felt that it was difficult to talk openly about this topic. In addition, discussion related to particular groups of storytellers could be limited as child participants understandably focused on the most significant causal chains depicted on the big system maps. For example, during workshop 3 the experiences of children working in domestic settings were not explored in depth during the plenary discussions, and children instead talked at length about issues related to storytellers engaged in street-related work, such as peer influence and addiction. Children working in a domestic setting had very specific trajectories and vulnerabilities, which would be valuable to explore further.

Factors' causes and consequences were not always outlined clearly in children's life stories. In particular, broad issues such as the poor economic condition of the family were frequently included in life stories, but

storytellers did not always explore in detail the reasons for the financial problems (possibly because these are an accepted aspect of the storytellers' lived experience). This was noted by child participants in workshop 3, who reflected that causes for financial problems could be missing from the life stories, and hypothesised that structural reasons for poverty such as a lack of land ownership might also have impacted families' financial circumstances.

Both the life story collection and collective analysis workshops took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The timing of the life story collection between August 2020 and May 2021 means that reflection on the medium- and longer-term impacts of the pandemic was not included in the life stories. It is also worth noting that the timing of the life story collection meant that children who returned to their home village for a significant period due to the pandemic may not have been available for interviews in Kathmandu. These children might therefore be under-represented in the sample of 400 life stories. The connections between Covid-19/lockdown and other factors on the big system maps were very varied and so there were few dominant pathways related to the pandemic recorded by child participants on the big system maps. As a result, discussions around Covid-19 were perhaps more limited than expected, given the timing of the workshops.

Forthcoming CLARISSA research will continue to develop understanding of the worst forms of child labour in Nepal. Further inquiry includes the ongoing cycles of Action Research in the child-led Action Research groups; a researcher-led qualitative analysis of the same 400 life stories (and a comparative analysis of the two approaches); geo-spatial mapping to explore neighbourhood dynamics within key AES centres; and child-led research on Covid-19 through the eyes of children and other topics related to the worst forms of child labour. Multiple and parallel Action Research groups will be linked to form a sophisticated architecture for adaptive learning and management (Burns *et al.* 2021). Children will continue to be at the centre of this process.

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CLARISSA works by co-developing with stakeholders practical options for children to avoid engagement in the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh and Nepal.

The participatory processes which underpin the programme are designed to generate innovation from the ground which can sustainably improve the lives of children and their families.

The programme's outputs are similarly co-designed and collaboratively produced to enhance local ownership of the knowledge, and to ensure that our research uptake and engagement strategy is rooted in the direct experience of the people most affected on the ground.