CLARISSA
Child Labour Action Research Innovation in South & South Eastern Asia

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER 7

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF 400 LIFE STORIES FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING IN THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR IN NEPAL

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May 2024

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE PAPER

CLARISSA (Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia) is a large-scale research programme on the worst forms of child labour. It aims to identify, evidence, and promote effective multi-stakeholder action to tackle the drivers of the worst forms of child labour in selected supply chains in Nepal and Bangladesh.

This paper captures the perspectives of 400 children and young people working in the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) – mostly in the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu, Nepal – to aid understanding about WFCL and how it can be brought to an end. Underpinning this paper is a thematic qualitative analysis of 400 life stories collected in locations where there is a high prevalence of work in the adult entertainment sector. This paper includes rich detail from those life stories and uncovers the micro-level detail and nuance within themes. The objective of this qualitative analysis was to build a stronger knowledge base on pathways into child labour and children's lived experiences of child labour.

This analysis should be considered as a companion analysis to the participatory collective analysis carried out by children themselves: ***Life Stories From Kathmandu's Adult Entertainment Sector: Told and Analysed by Children and Young People***.

This paper contains material of a highly sensitive nature, including accounts of sexual, physical and mental abuse, and other forms of violence, as well as accounts of exploitative and hazardous working conditions, which may be triggering.

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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Suggested citation

Bhattarai, K. *et al*. (2024) *Qualitative Analysis of 400 Life Stories from Children and Young People Working in the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Nepal*, CLARISSA Research and Evidence Paper 7, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies,
DOI: 10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.004

ISBN: 978-1-80470-189-8
DOI: 10.19088/CLARISSA.2024.004

This paper has been funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, formerly the Department for International Development). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IDS or the UK government.

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AES adult entertainment sector

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

WFCL worst forms of child labour

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Key venues/terms used in the hospitality and adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu

Cabin/hostess restaurant or 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 are usually sold at inflated prices – waiting staff or hostesses may sit with customers and increase the table bill by ordering drinks. Staff often earn commission from the beverages sold at the table they are serving. There may be indirect sexual activity (e.g. flirting, touching, and kissing) or direct sexual activity.

Dai/bhai Literally meaning 'older brother' and 'younger brother' respectively, *dai* and *bhai* are commonly used to refer to male relatives, such as cousins, within an extended family. *Dai* and *bhai* are also used to describe a male friend, neighbour or acquaintance.

Dance bar Customers are entertained by dancers who perform to music and sit with customers to increase the amount of the drinks bill. Staff often earn commission from the beverages sold at the table they are serving. 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.

Didi/bahini Literally meaning 'older sister' and 'younger sister' respectively, *didi* and *bahini* are commonly used to refer to female relatives, such as cousins, within an extended family. *Didi* and *bahini* are also used to describe a female friend, neighbour or acquaintance.

Dohori A venue that offers traditional folk music and dancing. Most *dohoris* serve alcohol and food. Staff often earn commission from the beverages sold at the table they are serving. There is variation between *dohoris* – some offer a family environment, whereas others may have a sexually charged atmosphere. Although sexual services are not usually provided on the premises, arrangements may be made with waiting staff to 'go out' for more direct sexual activity after work hours.

Guest Customers are often described as 'guests' by employees working in the adult entertainment sector (AES) venues. Where the term 'guest' is used by a life storyteller, this has been included in quotes. Accompanying commentary uses the term 'customers'.

Guest houses Guest houses are small hotels. In AES locations, customers may use them to take a contact there for sex.

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

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

Party palace/banquet 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.

Uncle/aunt Commonly used to refer to an older neighbour, acquaintance or employer, as well as blood relatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the 400 children and young people from Kathmandu's adult entertainment sector who shared their life stories with us. This paper is a result of their contributions.

Particular thanks also go to the researchers who guided and documented the process of collecting the life stories, and other staff from Voice of Children, Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights, and Terre des Hommes, who provided support. We have also greatly benefited from the input of many organisations in Nepal that assisted with collecting the life stories.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN THIS PAPER

The words and phrases used by participants in this research have not been changed. This ensures that we accurately reflect the information and insights they provided. For example, where children use a phrase such as 'engaging in sex work', consortium members might describe this as 'child sexual exploitation', but we have not changed the wording. We wanted to listen to the children and young people and capture their observations accurately. However, partners in the Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) consortium do not condone any of the worst forms of child labour (WFCL).

In Nepal, the term 'adult entertainment sector' (AES) is used to describe a diverse range of businesses that include dance bars, 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*. 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 (which is considered to be one of the WFCL).

While we understand that AES is not necessarily a term used by child workers (or local businesses) to refer to the sector they work in, the term is commonly used by practitioners and researchers at the local level. In practice, when referring to the AES, this paper refers to cabin/hostess restaurants, dance bars, spa/massage parlours, *dohoris,* and *khaja ghars*.

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF CLARISSA'S EVIDENCE IN THIS REPORT

The Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) programme is committed to producing high-quality research, and to explaining the robustness and credibility of the methods that underpin the production of evidence. CLARISSA has developed criteria to assess the quality of its evidence along four dimensions: representativeness, triangulation, transparency, and new knowledge.

A summary of these dimensions is included in Table 1. A separate report describes the difference in a 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 assessment for each dimension (CLARISSA 2023). Nine researchers across two countries and five institutions gathered for one and a half hours to discuss the quality of evidence in this report in relation to the research design, process, insights, and analysis. Table 1 documents their assessments and the reasoning behind each assessment.

Table 1: Quality of evidence in this paper

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	Reasoning behind the assessment
Representativeness Representativeness covers the extent to which the experiences of those affected by the issue are central in the evidence that is presented. This includes how critical actors have participated in the different parts of the process that has generated the evidence (design, data gathering, analysis, presenting) and how the nuance of their experiences and perspectives is expressed in the evidence claims.				●		**CLARISSA researchers have assessed this report as 3.5 for representativeness.** The data sample included stories from more than 400 children and young people with different characteristics. Their stories are central to the thematic analysis. The evidence in the report clearly represents these different individuals' viewpoints through the use of multiple excerpts that sometimes contradict one another, thus highlighting a range of experiences. Although children were involved in some of the story collection, they were not involved in the design of the method, this analysis of the life stories, or validation of the results. CLARISSA researchers conducted the thematic coding and analysis.

Table 1: Quality of evidence in this paper (cont.)

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	Reasoning behind the assessment
Triangulation Triangulation helps ensure a degree of consistency and bias control. Given that all sources of evidence have some degree of bias, it is important that researchers have sought multiple perspectives from different stakeholders, corroboration across multiple data sources, and/or triangulation across different studies and tools to check for consistency of findings. • 'Multiple data sources' refers to the person(s) who provided the evidence. • 'Multiple lines of evidence' refers to different methods by which data is generated.			●			**CLARISSA researchers have assessed this report as 2.75 for triangulation.** Evidence was provided from multiple data sources (working children and young people from different neighbourhoods, sectors, and of different ages and genders) within one constituent group (child labourers). Since there are more than 400 children and young people in the sample, we can assume a high level of variation across the stories. This report does not include the perspectives of other stakeholders (such as business owners). The focus of this research was on children and young people who work, so it was important that a range of perspectives from the varied sub-groups was sought (the perspectives of other stakeholders are included in other CLARISSA publications). The evidence base was generated from a single line of evidence (life stories). The study did not invite children and young people to validate the qualitative analysis of the life stories. We have not graded triangulation as a 3 because although the stories represent a diverse group of children and young people who work, the analysis did not systematically compare differences across groups and therefore does not triangulate findings across these groups.
Transparency Transparency entails that we know as much as possible about where the evidence comes from, who collected it, and how it was collected. For this, some details should be provided on what the sources of data are, the methods used, results achieved, and any key limitations in the data or conclusions.					●	**CLARISSA researchers have assessed this report as 5 for transparency.** The methodology section provides detailed information on the sources of evidence and data collection method. The choices and adaptations that were made to the research design and data collection are also clearly explained. The 'Scope and limitations' section (2.3) outlines data limitations. The data is recoverable to CLARISSA team members. Direct quotes are used extensively throughout the paper to illustrate the findings, and these are attributed to individual and recoverable life stories. Example life stories have been included on the CLARISSA website.
NEPAL: New knowledge The methods that CLARISSA uses aim to uncover new insights and underlying patterns in the system. We aim to gather evidence on patterns that we, or other stakeholders, are aware of, but for which there is less evidence or which does not currently exist as 'common' knowledge in 'the field'.				●		**CLARISSA researchers have assessed this report as 4 for new knowledge.** There is significant new and substantive evidence on issues that are already known about in 'the field' of urban child labour in Nepal. The new evidence provides greater weight to existing evidence given the number of stories included in the analysis. There are some new insights into the dynamics of urban child labour that add nuance to existing evidence. Some patterns and issues have been highlighted that diverge from dominant narratives. For example, insights related to children's (constrained) agency as they transition into the AES and navigate workplaces differ from the dominant discourse framing children as passive victims of trafficking. However, overall, the evidence does not allow the issue of WFCL in the AES to be reframed or reconceptualised.

Source: Authors' own. Created using project data.

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE RESEARCH

This paper captures the perspectives of 400 children and young people[1] working in the worst forms of child labour (WFCL)[2] – mostly in the adult entertainment sector (AES) in Kathmandu, Nepal – to aid understanding about WFCL and how it can be brought to an end. Four hundred life stories were collected in locations where there is a high prevalence of work in the AES. More than half of the stories were collected from children and young people who were working directly in the AES in venues such as dance bars, *dohoris*, cabin restaurants, massage parlours, and *khaja ghars*. The paper also includes the perspectives of children and young people working outside of venues associated with the AES, but within AES neighbourhoods. The latter were engaged in various types of labour, including street vending, rag picking, or working in the transport sector.

Underpinning this paper is a thematic qualitative analysis that was carried out by researchers at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the country teams.[3] The life stories were coded using Dedoose software and then themes were collectively analysed by the research team. This has allowed us to draw out the rich detail of the narratives, uncovering more of the micro-level detail and nuance within themes. The objective of this qualitative analysis was to build a stronger knowledge base on pathways into child labour and on children and young people's lived experience of child labour.

Many of the themes in this paper are interrelated, with multidimensional causalities. For example, school dropout leads to work and work leads to school dropout; alcoholism can lead to poverty, but poverty can also lead to alcoholism; and so on. The analysis carried out surfaced the complexity of these causalities. Some themes are standalone, while others are integrated into bigger themes. For example, alcoholism and child marriage could be sections in their own right, but we have integrated them into other sections such as economic crisis and family violence to avoid repetition.

The stories provide a great deal of detail on aspects of the AES and the urban localities in which AES work is strongly prevalent – detail that is not widely available in current research. Although some findings will be known to researchers working on the AES in Nepal, others are new and offer deeper insight. Where evidence already exists, this study offers an authoritative corroboration and deepening of knowledge, (1) because of the high number of detailed stories on the AES in Nepal, and (2) because these were not elicited with leading questions but were the things that the storytellers wanted to say of their own volition. Our findings (section 3) include extensive excerpts from the life stories to show the range of children's experiences related to each theme, to allow children to express their perceptions and experiences in their own words, to show the different ways in which children experienced the same issues, and to underscore the weight of the empirical evidence produced through the collection of 400 children's life stories.[4]

1.2 OUTLINE OF THE PAPER

Section 2 outlines the research methodology and analytical design. Section 3 presents the findings of the study and is divided into four sub-sections: the drivers of WFCL; finding work and work transitions; experiences of WFCL; and children's perceptions of WFCL. Section 3 includes extensive quotes from the children's life stories, which makes this paper long. However, reading the paper in its entirety will enable readers to better understand the complexity and nuance of working children's experiences and comprehend how interconnected each aspect and

1 This refers here to young people aged 18–24 who have experience of working as a child in the adult entertainment sector.
2 As per the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999, article 3, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines WFCL as: (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.
3 In Nepal, Voice of Children hosts CLARISSA Nepal, in partnership with Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights and Terre des Hommes Nepal.
4 Each quote is followed by the unique number assigned to the life storyteller along with their sex, age and place of work at the time the life story was collected.

theme is in the lives of these children. Each section is framed by an introductory paragraph and a short conclusion, to help direct readers to the parts of the paper most useful to them.

The report concludes with section 4, which draws together the main conclusions from the exposition of children's voices laid out in section 3.

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Section 2:

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL DESIGN

2 METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL DESIGN

2.1 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

This work was carried out on a database of life stories collected from August 2020 to May 2021. Children were asked to tell a researcher or a peer the story of their life. Adult and child peer researchers used a prompt question that elicited the child to tell their story, rather than a series of predefined questions framed by a researcher's assumptions and pre-analysis. This approach encouraged the children to talk about the things that were important to them, rather than the things that professional research might be looking for. The vast majority (87.5 per cent) of the stories were collected by researchers, and 12.5 per cent were collected by children themselves following a training workshop. Stories were written up in Nepali. The Nepali transcripts were used in the week-long workshop that provided the basis for the collective analysis carried out by children. For the purposes of this analysis, stories were then translated into English. They were uploaded into Dedoose for analysis. Dedoose was selected because of its functionality to work collaboratively and across platforms (Mac and PC). A small team took a sample of stories and built an agreed set of deductive codes against which to analyse the data. Codes were tested through a pilot process to ensure that there was a collective understanding of the meaning of each code, and to ensure that all key issues were represented within the coding structure, while not having too many codes (which would make the analysis unwieldy and less meaningful). The small team then divided the stories and carried out a pilot coding exercise, the results of which were collectively assessed. Finally, the full sample was divided and between them the team then coded all the stories. Once coded, the themes and relationships that were most strongly represented in the data were selected for discussion in a whole team collective analysis.

During the collective analysis workshop, each participant received coded extracts focused on specific themes. They were tasked with three main objectives: (1) to identify elements that are new and surprising, and different from the prevailing community narratives; (2) to explore areas that can deepen our understanding of things we already know; and (3) to identify things that are useful to know for facilitating positive changes. The participants kept notes on these areas and then collectively discussed this in small groups. Later, these were discussed in the broader group, which helped draw out nuances related to the different issues.

This collective analysis underpinned the final write-up of the report, which was done by five people who took all the excerpts under each theme, and built out a comprehensive analysis, integrating the collective analysis into their writing. The final edited version was pulled together by IDS and was validated by the Nepal country team.

2.2 ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

Ensuring that children and young people 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 IDS' 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 provided by participants was treated as confidential and 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 were reported to the designated safeguarding focal person within 24 hours. Incidents were recorded using a safeguarding reporting form and all records were 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.

2.3 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

2.3.1 Methodological learning

The researchers and children involved in the life story collection had never used the method before. Although they all received training on the method and the team conducted piloting exercises that were reviewed by lead researchers, not all the stories conform entirely with the intended format. As discussed earlier, life stories are meant to capture what storytellers decide is important in their lives and in this way differ significantly from interviews based on structured or semi-structured questionnaires, which predetermine what themes respondents will address. Despite efforts to avoid question–answer formats, some of the stories are still structured this way, which will have introduced some bias to these stories.

2.3.2 Demographic disaggregation

Our analysis began thematically, aiming to present the intricate, diverse, and complex nature of children's experiences and perceptions within emergent themes. We specifically focused on exploring the nuances across children's narratives to highlight complexity and plural perspectives rather than only concentrating on or emphasising the predominant experiences and/or perspectives. However, in pursuing this objective, we were unable to conduct an exhaustive comparison across demographic categories. Initially, we chose not to sort quotes by demographics to focus our thematic analysis on highlighting differences rather than similarities. This approach, however, made it difficult to draw conclusions based on any single characteristic later in the analysis due to the storyteller's wide range of intersecting characteristics, much of which were not included in the demographic data and only accessible through a full read through of the story – such as household composition, migration status or level of family debt. Therefore, in our analysis we centre **what children say** in their narratives when possible. Nonetheless, when a child explicitly mentions a demographic characteristic, we acknowledge and reflect on it in our analysis.

For example, one of the more common demographic characteristics mentioned in the stories and the most accessible (due to it being binary) in our demographic data is gender. We recognise that boys and girls have different experiences because of their gender and we have attempted to represent this as clearly as possible in our analysis when gender is specifically evoked in the narratives. Similarly, where excerpts in a certain theme or of a specific experience within a theme are only represented by one gender, we also include this as part of our analysis.

Similarly, while there were differences in experience at different ages, this was difficult to disaggregate and code for, as many of the children's stories spanned ages from 9 to 18 years. We know the age of the storyteller at the time of the research, but not all of the experiences that they describe have ages ascribed to them. Within the narrative, the storyteller may say their age to describe a particular experience but often they do not. Consequently, we let the quotes speak for themselves regarding age.

2.3.3 Language and translation

All stories have been translated into English before being put into Dedoose and coded. This means that the analysis is on translated text rather than the original, which may have made some excerpts more vulnerable to misinterpretation. A word translated as 'harassed' might mean 'teased' in one circumstance and 'sexual abuse' in another. The translation 'tortured' can sometimes mean verbal abuse.

2.3.4 Scope

Just as with other qualitative data, it should be noted that a story is not an objective account of the child's life. It represents two things: what they wanted to tell us, and how they saw their history and what they saw as priorities on that day. They might have told a different story of their lives, prioritising different things, on a different day.

Furthermore, the iterative collective thematic coding process produced 85 parent codes and 58 child codes. It was not possible to analyse every set of excerpts and so we decided to analyse the themes that appeared in the greatest numbers of stories, with the recognition that some nuance might be lost. The size of the dataset and the number of themes also account for the length of this paper.

2.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS VERSUS CAUSAL ANALYSIS

This analysis should be considered as a companion analysis to the participatory collective analysis of the same stories carried out by children themselves (Hacker and Sharma 2022). These different analyses should be seen as complementary – each drawing out different forms of knowledge, in different ways, for different purposes. These two processes have used the same data but used different analytical methodologies and comprised a different analysis team. The children's analysis was primarily a causal analysis that identified factors in each of the stories and their causes and consequences. This allowed participants to see the interconnections between factors and to imagine where interventions could be made to change the dynamics that they saw. The objective of the children's participatory analysis was to understand the dynamics of the systems that impacted on them, to change those dynamics. The children's analysis was part of a longer process of establishing and informing children's action research groups based on the themes they identified as most important to them.

Section 3:

FINDINGS

3 FINDINGS

3.1 DRIVERS OF WFCL

This section looks at the drivers of WFCL, in particular, the underlying reasons behind children dropping out of school and entering work. Dropping out of school and entering work are interrelated; there is no linear, causal relationship between the two. Leaving school is a cause of child labour (when children leave school it is usual for them to seek work), and also a consequence of child labour (once a child starts work it is unlikely that he or she will be able to maintain their schooling).

This section explores the range of drivers depicted in the children and young people's life stories for leaving school and entering work. While it looks at each driver in turn, many of these causalities are interrelated rather than standalone, and should be seen as being in systemic relationship to each other. For example, poverty is both a cause and consequence of alcoholism, and family crises often have multiple causes and consequences.

Financial crises and poverty are central to many children's life stories. This section looks at how poverty leads to dropping out of school and entering work, and how factors such as family health problems exacerbate financial difficulties and trigger new financial crises. It then explores how issues related to family dynamics – family violence, parental separation, alcohol addiction – are related to financial problems and how they have both direct and indirect impacts on children's pathways into work. Finally, the section explores factors external to children's home life, such as education quality and the school environment, peer influence, and access to official documentation (such as citizenship certificates).

3.1.1 Poverty and debt

Many children said that their family struggled to meet basic needs such as having enough money for food, which pushed them to leave school:

> *My mom and dad didn't allow me to go to school as I had to work and pay our house rent.*
> (089, male, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *When there's no money to spend at home, I have to work.*
> (326, female, 10, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *My income was spent on food. Parents would ask us to do work for income.*
> (130, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

> *We didn't have a ration at home, so I left school.*
> (219, male, 14, transportation)

> *I would have studied if there was no burden of work and no difficulties managing food. We could only manage food by going to work to do farm labour.*
> (005, female, 25, *dohori*)

> *Due to poverty, and also we didn't have a proper house to live in, so my father told me to leave school*.
> (218, male, 15, street-connected/mobile child)

Poverty meant that some children were unable to attend school because their parents could not cover the costs of school fees and other essential educational resources:

> *I was out of school. I studied till grade 5 in a government school. My mother couldn't support me in my studies.*
> (356, female, 18, transportation)

> *I would not attend classes regularly as I don't have note copies* [notebooks] *at times and school fees were due, which makes the situation worse.*
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

> *I had to drop out of the first school as we couldn't pay fees… Talking about the financial condition of my family, we just had enough to eat.*
> (151, female, 20, spa/massage)

> *I was asked for an initial admission fee of 50,000 rupees. My father couldn't afford that much… I had to sacrifice all my goals.*
> (299, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *I did not get the scholarship and the tuition fee was very expensive. That's why I couldn't study.*
> (023, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Even if certain scholarships were provided, additional expenses were difficult to fulfil:

> *I received scholarships for health assistant in two or three different colleges, it wasn't a full scholarship*

> *but about 20–24 per cent scholarship support. I couldn't pay the fees so was not able to study.*
> (086, female, 22, spa/massage)

Children also shared that their family's financial problems led to parents discouraging them from attending school, which resulted in the discontinuation of their studies:

> *Dad used to tell me 'no need to go to study'. That is the reason I am not studying.*
> (158, female, 13, *khaja ghar*)

> *My father also used to tell me not to study. That was also one of the reasons for my school dropout.*
> (021, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

The indifference of some parents signified the lack of any parental influence to stay at school:

> *Mummy and daddy didn't say anything when I was young and went to work at that time.*
> (185, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *At home also when I said I won't study no one even forced or suggested me to continue my study, so I thought it is okay even if you don't study, nothing will happen as nobody cared about my education. So, I discontinued… I attended my 11th-grade exam but not grade 12.*
> (188, female, 20, dance bar/club)

Children of families living in poverty were often told by family members to earn instead of going to school, because their earnings were required to support the family:

> *We* [the storyteller and her brother] *both were deprived of education as we were sent to wash dishes at different places at an early age.*
> (085, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

> *Parents would ask us to do work for income. Our parents didn't make an effort to educate us. They would tell us 'no need to go to school'.*
> (130, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

There were also examples of children being forced to work by their parents or guardians. This ranged from being pressured to work, to being reprimanded for not earning enough.

> *'You have to come here* [at the brick kiln] *to earn', grandfather used to say to us, but then he didn't give anything to eat and give us trouble. We had to go to work in the brick kiln. We had to leave school to go there to work.*
> (283, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Storyteller 081 shared how she was mistreated by her mother who did not allow her to go to school (even taking away scholarship money provided to her) and forced her to find work despite her willingness to study (081, female, 20, *khaja ghar*). At the most extreme, storyteller 274 described how she was 'sold' into bonded labour aged six or seven, due to the financial difficulties that arose following her father's death and mother's subsequent alcohol consumption:

> *My mom sold me* [cries]*. I didn't know that she sold me. I went to work as I was told there was need of money, but I was never called back. My mom used to drink…*
> (274, female, 18, restaurant and hotel-based child)

While some children were encouraged or made to leave school to work, for many others leaving school was a choice they made themselves in response to their family's financial hardship:

> *We didn't have much money so how could I study? So I didn't want to study further.*
> (279, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *Looking at my family's financial status, I thought my family could not afford to send me to school. I started working at people's houses.*
> (031, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *I felt it is not good if I am unable to support my parents. Though I did not go to school, I used to carry books even at work.*
> (193, female, 21, dance bar)

> *My mother has asked me to go to school but I told my mother, I won't go and if I go to school, how will we eat and how will we live?*
> (390, male, 14, street-connected/mobile child)

Even if parents did not put any pressure on their children to earn, children often felt a significant degree of responsibility, and saw their earnings as necessary to support the household financially and/or repay debt:

> *Due to the financial situation of our family, I told my mother that I will not continue my study. So, I started working. With my earnings, I want to pay my family's debt by myself.*
> (031, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *Mom was having a financial crisis. There was no money for food and no one to look after us… Our condition was deplorable. In such a situation, it was not just a matter of studying, it was a matter of earning money.*
> (385, male, 18, street-based vendor/porter)

> *Most of us who come to work here come to sustain their household. The main motto behind working here is to take the responsibility and to do some work.*
> (164, female, 21, *dohori*)

More generally, parental decision-making around allowing or encouraging children to work could be complex. Even where (in most cases) financial demands necessitated that children work, this was not always without reservations. Storyteller 344 made the decision to work himself (aged seven) due to economic hardship, even though his family had tried to protect him from having to enter into employment (344, male, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child). This taking on of responsibility at a young age was not unusual:

> *Even though my family told me not to work, I had to work due to the household condition.*
> (199, female, 20, *dohori*)

Where parents did allow children to work, children described how parents could deploy various strategies to try to protect them – at times inducing fear or using the threat of punishment:

> *Many little girls are raped and killed. All these things are said by my mother. That's why I come back to the room between five and seven o'clock.*
> (326, female, 10, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *My father and mother told me to go if I wanted to, but they told me if I go anywhere else then they'll beat me. When I promised them that I won't go anywhere, and I am old enough to not get lost, then they allowed me.*
> (295, female, 14, domestic/household worker)

A less common stance was for parents to actively discourage their children from working and, in some cases, to punish them for entering employment:

> *Father had beaten me a couple of times because he didn't want me to go to work.*
> (299, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Where parents' reasons for not wanting their child to work were explained, reasons included that they wanted their child to study and (uncommonly) that there was no material need for them to work. Gendered social norms particular to certain communities also led to children being restricted from working; storyteller 295's parents allowed her to go to work a few times in catering when she was 13, but later stopped her working despite financial problems at home:

> *My father and mother did not let me go, thinking that they would get ashamed. In our terai* [south Nepal] *area, it is not considered good for a girl to work. The girls do the household chores, look after the kids. There is a saying that it is disgraceful to go out for work.*
> (295, female, 14, domestic/household worker)

The sections that follow look at causalities and consequences related to family poverty and how these contribute to children entering WFCL.

3.1.2 Family illness and death

Reports of family illness and health crises contributing to strained family finances were prevalent in the life stories. When illness strikes a family, there is usually no insurance to cover medical costs.[5] The economic conditions of many families worsen significantly because of the high cost of medical treatment and lost income. In Nepal, the costs of medical treatment are vastly disproportionate to earnings; according to the World Bank, average annual earnings are only 170,000 rupees (US$1,300).[6] Even the monthly minimum wage stipulated by the government, which amounts to 180,000 rupees per year, falls far short of what is often required to cover the costs of medical procedures or ongoing medical treatment. To cover medical expenses, families usually accumulate debt and/or resort to selling their property and other valuable assets. The life stories show how children were mobilised during times when illness led to financial hardship so that their earnings could be used to meet basic family needs, replace the sick family member's earnings, and/or help pay back debts incurred due to medical costs.

5 The introduction of the National Health Insurance Program by the Government of Nepal aimed to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure on health care. However, its implementation has been challenging, with low enrolment and high dropout rates. Initially piloted in 2016 in three districts, by 2022 enrolment in the scheme was less than 25 per cent across Nepal (Khanal *et al*. 2023).

6 **GDP per capita (current US$) - Nepal (World Bank)** (accessed November 2023).

Health-care costs

For many families, a sick family member resulted in the sale of assets (primarily land, but also valuable jewellery) to cover the high cost of health care and loss of income. Land was also sometimes sold in order to cover the debts that had to be taken on during health-related crises:

> *We sold all our lands of Surkhet for the treatment of my disabled brother*.
> (302, female, 11, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *When my grandfather was alive, we had one bigha* [local land measurement unit] *land in Bardiya. Later, after treating my grandmother's asthma, elder sister's tuberculosis, and when a kidney problem was seen in my father, all our money was finished on their treatments. Now we only have two kattha* [20 kattha = 1 bigha] *land remaining in Bardiya.*
> (332, male, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *When I was 12 years old, 100,000 rupees was spent for my treatment. We had to take a loan and sell our land. We took a loan from an uncle from my village. We took a loan of 80,000 rupees*.
> (016, female, 21, *dohori*)

Loss of assets can make families more vulnerable to financial crises in the long term; additional costs such as rent need to be covered, and food bought, because there is no longer the option to grow food for subsistence.

> *Our money was spent on treatment for our grandfather, and we sold our house. It has been five or six months that I have not paid rent to my landlord.*
> (107, female, 17, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *We had two houses when mom was ill. We had a lot of debt, so we had to sell one, and the other one got destroyed in the earthquake. So, our dad lives in someone else's home.*
> (139, female, 18, guest house)

A few of the stories described support being provided by friends and neighbours in the village:

> *The cancer had spread from father's throat to his cheek and there was a hole in his cheek. He had a lot of problems eating food and drinking water. Since we didn't have money, we collected donations from everyone in the village.*
> (078, female, 21, guest house)

But for most families, even this was insufficient to prevent a family becoming indebted. Sometimes land was sold to pay back loans, and sometimes loans were taken after the last assets had been sold. Loans were almost always taken at high interest and soon became extremely difficult to manage:

> *I was sad when my elder sister got sick… She was hospitalised and was kept in ICU* [intensive care unit] *for one or two months. During that time, we took loans from many people. Now we need to pay those debts in two months. At that time, we spent all the money we could. We took a loan for her treatment.*
> (277, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *My mother had an operation, so we had to take a loan. We have to repay that loan. It is 60,000* [rupees].
> (364, male, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *I don't know how much money has been spent on my sister's treatment so far, but I heard that it takes 700,000 rupees for her heart surgery… Now it's the time for paying our room rent, but I don't know how we will pay the rent this time. We are in debt, but I don't know how much we need to pay.*
> (310, female, 10, street-based child vendor/porter)

For medical emergencies and treatment for ongoing medical conditions, many life stories describe household finances as being depleted, and any income continually exhausted by the costs of medical care:

> *My dad was always sick due to tuberculosis too. The little money we had got spent at the time.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

> *All of my father's earnings were spent on my mother's treatment.*
> (187, male, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *But money started finishing and mum also got sick. We had to take her to the hospital. We finished all the money in hospital.*
> (283, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Because rural parts of Nepal do not have adequate health-care facilities to treat all types of illness, when a person falls seriously ill, often they will be taken to a city for treatment. Many families choose the capital, Kathmandu, because the hospitals have the best facilities. But travelling to Kathmandu or other urban centres can result in additional costs being incurred for accommodation and transport. The availability of more

extensive facilities in the city means that treatment costs also become higher, further compounding families' financial problems. Nevertheless, higher medical costs did not guarantee that treatments would be successful:

> *She didn't have much money at that time and came to Kathmandu by borrowing and selling gold. Even after coming to Kathmandu, the doctors didn't treat her properly.*
> (300, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *When I was in class 8, father was paralysed. For two years, father was taken to all the hospitals available in Kathmandu. Disease could not be diagnosed, and treatment was unsuccessful.*
> (045, female, 23, *dohori*)

Impact on children

There are various reasons why health crises require children to stop studying and/or go to work. The life stories show that children often began work because a parent was no longer able to do so due to ill health. Many children became the primary or sole earner for the household, with the role of provider shifting from parent to child when a parent was suffering from injury or sickness.

> *I wish I could study and didn't have to sell vegetables on the road. Again, I think sometimes my father is sick, that's why I have to sell vegetables on the road.*
> (330, female, 15, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *Dad couldn't work so I worked in a hotel.*
> (225, female, 19, construction site)

> *If mother wasn't sick, I wouldn't have had to work. Mother got sick, so I started working.*
> (357, male, 18, restaurant and hotel-based child)

Children could also take on the role of supporting family members in their work, or working part-time to contribute to supplementing the family's income if a family member was sick:

> *My mummy does the housework. Daddy has had a fever for a long time. He has not been taken to the hospital though. It was difficult for my daddy to work alone, so I went to help him.*
> (343, male, 19, transportation)

> *My mummy had health problems after giving birth to my little brother. My mummy also got sick. I worked in Kathmandu for ten days. I did a part-time job because I went to college. I went to work whenever they called me.*
> (207, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

But there were many examples where children not only played an essential role in supporting the household income, but were also responsible for covering the costs of medical treatment for sick family members:

> *Younger sister is a little sick at home. We had to admit her in the hospital once. We didn't have money so my elder brother and I had to work night and day.*
> (278, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *I had to spend money on my mother's many operations, medications and other expenses alone. The cloth packing work in garments* [sector] *paid more if I could pack more. I used to go and work early in the morning.*
> (075, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *Dad's condition is still the same. He keeps saying it's difficult to breathe and keeps coughing. I buy his medicines. I tell them to save money for his treatment as my earning is not enough. He has to keep taking medications.*
> (081, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

> *Buying medicines for 200 rupees is enough for 3–4 days. My work has sustained us until now. I don't know what will happen later.*
> (335, male, 15, restaurant and hotel-based child)

Burdened with debts incurred due to family health crises, some children also mentioned working specifically to repay loans:

> *I started working. With my earnings, I want to pay my family's debt by myself. Things started to become better after I started to work. I work as a cleaner and dishwasher at a khaja ghar.*
> (031, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

For children living in rural areas, health-induced financial crises could lead them to leave their families and migrate to Kathmandu to find work:

> *As my mother had to take her medications frequently, we were scarce on money and so I decided to look for a job in Kathmandu.*
> (004, female, 24, *dohori*)

> *Father used to stay home as he couldn't work. Father, he is no more now. He used to suffer from*

> *bouts of cough. As of now, mother is also weak and cannot work. That is why I came to Kathmandu for work. My didi* [elder sister] *brought me to Kathmandu, and she got me a job in a hotel.*
> (166, female, 15, *khaja ghar*)

There were examples where young children (under ten years old) were sent to work as domestic labourers in other people's households – a strategy that ensured the child's expenses would be covered while family members dealt with the health crisis and the resulting strains on the family's finances:

> *When I was around seven or eight years old, my mother fell sick. She had to go for surgery. So, we shifted to Kathmandu. I was taken to a* [ethnic group name] *house to do domestic work… After my mother's surgery, my elder sister looked after my mother. Due to our poor economic condition, it was difficult to look after everyone. So, my elder sister sent me to Pokhara to look after an elderly woman, on the condition that they would send me to school there.*
> (072, female, 22, guest house)

> *My father had come to Kathmandu. My father was earning money and mother was working at home. After my father suddenly fell ill with nerve issues, there was a problem at home and my sister was sent to Sindhupalchok and me to Kathmandu to work in someone else's house. I was put in someone else's house by my uncle* [father's brother].
> (211, male, 16, domestic/household worker)

As will be explored further in this paper, this can leave very young children in a vulnerable position because they are dependent on their workplaces to fulfil all their needs.

Additional burden of household work

The burden on children of sick parents or family members is not only the burden of paid work; often children must also take on the household chores and caregiving roles when a parent or guardian is unable to. For some children, the additional household chores resulted in them being unable to attend school, while for others, this burden was taken on in addition to their daily paid work. These responsibilities usually fell to girls, reflecting gendered roles within the home:

> *There was a lot of work on the farm. I could not complete my homework. We got to eat and go to school on time when mom was alive. My studies got affected after my mom's death, I could not study and did not get time, and I had to do household chores.*
> (161, female, 19, dance bar/club)

> *My mom passed away when I was eight years old. I had to do household chores during my childhood, so I could not study even if I wanted to.*
> (122, female, 24, *khaja ghar*)

> *I didn't have time* [to study] *because of my mother's illness.*
> (166, female, 15, *khaja ghar*)

> *My mother also has diabetes. She has to take large medicines daily. She has to buy medicines of 200 rupees at once. That medicine is enough for 3–4 days. I also cook the food myself. My mother cannot… I go to work only after completing all the household chores. I sleep at 7.00am or 8.00am.*
> (335, male, 15, restaurant and hotel-based child)

Children impacted by sickness

When children themselves were affected by an accident or became ill, this could make it physically challenging to attend school:

> *On a festival day in the village, both my hands were crushed by the vehicle. Since then, I have stopped going to school.*
> (037, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

Once a child has left school, they are unlikely to go back. In the above instance, once the child was not attending school, they tried to travel to Kathmandu to find work. In the following example, a sex-related illness and the debt incurred from treatment impacted a teenage girl's schooling and family relationships, and led to her seeking work:

> *I had sex with that boyfriend at that time. After a month, I started bleeding continuously* [from her genitals]. *And after that I told my sister-in-law about it. Sister-in-law took me to hospital. In my womb, a one-month-old baby was seen in the tube of the uterus… I was in the debt of 40,000 rupees for the operation and treatment. Then I didn't feel like studying. Also, I didn't want to stay at home. At that time, my second elder sister used to work and study in Kathmandu. I decided to go to Kathmandu. My father angrily asked me to pay a debt of 40,000 rupees. I had a debt, so I came to Kathmandu thinking I will get a job here.*
> (153, female, 25, spa/massage)

3.1.3 The effects of Covid-19 and associated lockdowns

The outbreak of Covid-19 in late 2019 led to the Nepal government announcing a nationwide lockdown in March 2020. All individuals were instructed to stay at home and all non-essential services – including educational institutions, and businesses related to the entertainment, hospitality and manufacturing sectors – were closed.

Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown impacted many children's education as schools were closed for almost one and a half years. Although schools provided classes online during the lockdowns, many children were unable to access these because they did not have a mobile device and/or internet connectivity. Despite these hurdles, some children returned to school once they were able to: 'We didn't have WiFi at home or money to buy mobile data. But school reopened after that, and I joined the school after that. I am studying in school these days' (060, male, 17, *khaja ghar*). However, many more children never went back to education again, because of the disruption lockdowns caused to their studies and/or the additional financial strain their families had incurred:

> *I was planning to join the school and was eager to complete the secondary education examination. But the lockdown shattered my entire plan. I did wish to continue my school during those days. But when I saw mother selling her tilari* [a typical gold ornament worn by married women] *for buying our school dresses and books, I was disheartened. Therefore, I left school after grade 8.*
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

> *I was studying in 6th standard before the lockdown. I have not been able to study since the lockdown.*
> (154, female, 17, *dohori*)

> *I was to upgrade to class 10 after passing my class exam in 9. But due to the lockdown, I left my studies and was pressurised from my home.*
> (019, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

> *My mother had passed away. After coming to* [Kathmandu], *my father remarried… Lockdown occurred and then I left the school.*
> (318, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child)

The impact of the societal-level crisis of Covid-19 (and the resulting lockdowns) was significant; while the disruption to children's education led to many children leaving school permanently, the financial crisis triggered by the pandemic was a direct driver of child labour for some children.

3.1.4 School environment and dropping out of school

Factors related to the school environment and children's experiences at school also contributed to children leaving education and entering work. Often, children were put off school because of punishment, harassment, stigmatisation, poor facilities, or simply bad teaching and an environment not conducive to learning. This sub-section also looks at instances where children combine education and employment, and why entering employment can then lead to children dropping out of school.

Punishment at school

Children frequently mentioned how teachers used verbal and physical punishments to try to correct students' behaviour:

> *I didn't like to do my homework and that's why my teachers used to shout at me.*
> (372, male, 15, transportation)

> *The miss* [female teacher] *used to beat. I used to do homework and if my handwriting was bad then they used to beat. Sirs also used to beat me and sometimes I used to have arguments with them.*
> (319, male, 15, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *Sir used to come and hit me on my study desk… That sir used to bully us, hit us even when we were studying and complain about our smoking habits to others. He also took us to the office and hit us.*
> (237, male, 17, transportation)

> *Teachers used to behave rudely. If we didn't do our homework, they would swear using 'mother' words. Though my brother used to complete the homework, the teacher used to beat him anyway. I have been beaten many times.*
> (345, male, 17, transportation)

They described how such punishments could be unprovoked – 'I have also been beaten by a teacher. She used to hit me with a scale like this [shows using hands]. Beat me just like that: I didn't do anything at that time' (340, male, 10, street-based child vendor/porter) – and cited these punishments as reasons for leaving school:

> *My teachers scolded and punished me by pulling my ears for not doing my homework. Then, I dropped out of school.*
> (246, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child)

> *The major reason for my school dropout was* [that] *my attendance was only 52 days a year… Later, after the teacher found out that we used to bunk the classes, the teacher used to beat us. After that, my motivation for going to school disappeared.*
> (018, male, 18, *dohori*)

As well as physical punishments, children said that verbal insults and disproportionate punishments for misbehaving at school led them to feel they did not want to be there:

> *One day the madam scolded me, saying 'is this your sasurali* [wife's home]?[7]*' I quit studies after giving my examination for grade 5.*
> (287, male, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *I started going to a new school, but I soon started disliking the teachers as they were too rude… My teachers used to give me severe punishments for bunking classes and not completing homework… Very soon, I started losing interest in going to school.*
> (331, male, 12, street-connected/mobile child)

Some children were expelled from school for misconduct, which included having romantic relationships within the school premises, or not paying attention to their studies. The life stories show that expulsion could lead to disinterest in school in the long term. Storyteller 236 described his experience:

> *One day I was expelled from the school. She said that keeping a student like me would tarnish the name of our school. I stopped my studies after that. I felt bored at school. I never found my school interesting*.
> (236, male, 14, transportation)

Humiliation and shame at school

Children described how being judged on their academic performance led them to feel angry and to lack motivation to attend school, particularly if their efforts to study seemed to go unnoticed:

> *Teacher told me that I couldn't study and I got so angry that I threw my bag and left my studies.*
> (358, male, 15, transportation)

> *I used to get angry when I saw my teacher, even though we studied she used to complain about us not studying to the school principal. That is the reason the five of us friends left school.*
> (173, male, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Shame was also related to being held back in lower grades compared to their age group, and feeling undermined by teacher's teasing:

> *I used to go to school as well as it was a teacher's home. I studied in first grade at the time. I had studied for a while when a didi came and said that I was too big* [grown-up] *to be studying in the first standard. I felt shy hearing that and quit going to school.*
> (154, female, 17, *dohori*)

> *I was a student of class 6 and dropped to class 3. That was embarrassing… The teacher that my brother and I had a fight with, started to tease me. When I told him not to tease me, instead he started to insult me. Then he called the guard. They tried to tie me up and beat me again. I threw a stone at them and ran away.*
> (345, male, 17, transportation)

Children were not only humiliated because of their academic performance but also if they were unable to pay their fees on time:

> *When ma'am in the college used to ask for fees in front of everyone, it was embarrassing. And I used to feel very sad hearing that frequently. I felt like I was treated differently. I couldn't pay the fees though I tried hard. I felt bad when they used to ask harshly and repeatedly.*
> (024, female, 19, *khaja ghar*)

> *My teachers also used to taunt me, saying my family don't pay the dues.*
> (051, female, 18, dance bar/club)

In addition to children facing physical and/or verbal punishment from teachers, there were examples where teasing and violence from peers resulted in children leaving school despite having an interest in studying:

7 *Sasurali* (wife's home) is a humiliating term because it suggests somewhere men go to eat, relax and enjoy, without any need to work. It is a place where a husband is afforded a high degree of respect and value.

> *While going to school, I love playing with friends the most. But when my friends beat me, I used to feel bad the most… I used to do all my homework – I love doing homework. I love studying English. But now everything is forgotten.*
> (340, male, 10, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *There was one senior who used to tease me, saying 'lambu'* [lanky]*. I punched him badly. Then I left going to school.*
> (316, male, 16, street-connected/mobile child)

> *School friends started to quarrel a lot and I used to be beaten up by classmates and seniors without my fault. All such incidents encouraged me to bunk classes regularly and roam around the streets.*
> (331, male, 12, street-connected/mobile child)

Storyteller 106 describes how peers reinforced the humiliation experienced by teachers, which led to her leaving school:

> *For not doing homework, the teacher used to yell at me, 'bad in studies, and knows nothing'. Then my friends started teasing me. I wanted to go to school, I wanted to study but I had to go to the same school, so I stopped going there.*
> (106, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

Boredom with school, and substance abuse

There were examples of adolescent boys leaving school because they found it difficult to fit into the school's environment and structure. This was particularly the case for children with substance abuse issues, who either left school because of the demands of their addiction or because they were punished for taking drugs or alcohol:

> *I was sponsored by some foreigners* [for education]… *Being a drug addict, I could not stay there and I escaped from there… Because I was helpless without drugs, and I could do nothing without drugs.*
> (374, male, 18, transportation)

> *I used to drink alcohol early in the morning and I would fall asleep on the bench in school. My mouth would also reek. My teacher scolded me one day and I did not feel like going to school.*
> (232, male, 14, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *I was studying in class 7 when I was 12 years old and I quit when I was in class 9. I was fond of smoking marijuana.*
> (205, male, 16, street-connected/mobile child)

Some children, including one nine-year-old boy, spoke of their desire to play and be with friends outside of school rather than being at school: 'I left school and started going to Thamel [the main centre for tourism and entertainment in Kathmandu]. There were a lot of friends there. I used to hang around there' (354, male, 9, street-connected/mobile child).

Some children were involved in drug-taking from a very young age (14 and under). But the life stories also show that while some children leave school due to substance abuse or addiction, for others, leaving school results in them becoming involved with drugs such as marijuana and dendrite (a solvent glue used for inhaling):

> *I studied in Kathmandu from LKG* [lower kindergarten] *to grade 2. I ran away because I didn't want to study. I started to run away and eat/smoke dendrite, cigarettes and marijuana.*
> (382, male, 14, street-connected/mobile child)

> *I ran away because I was bored of studying and, from there, I started smoking cigarettes. I started getting spoilt.*
> (380, male, 12, street-connected/mobile child)

While substance abuse affected young adolescent boys and their attendance at school, the following sub-section looks at how girls' ability to study is impacted by gendered norms related to their domestic role.

Gender-based discrimination

Girls' opportunities to study are still impacted by gender norms that prioritise their role in the home and prioritise the education of boys:

> *In our family, my parents did not send my sister and me to school. Only my younger brother was sent to school. I told my father that I would study but he did not send me to school. My friends used to go to school, but I used to stay at home and help my mother with her work, wash the dishes, look after the cows, cook the food and go to fetch water.*
> (079, female, 19, *khaja ghar*)

> *In our community, girls do not study much, only sons and daughters of rich parents study.*
> (295, female, 14, domestic/household worker)

> *My brother will be continuing his education, but I am told that I will not be allowed to continue my studies after passing 10th grade.*
> (264, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> [My] *mom fell down and* [was] *paralysed, then dad started drinking alcohol and mom also started drinking. Dad didn't give me money to study. It was only my elder sister and me. If we were sons, then perhaps, he would have given. After that I started working in my auntie's* [relationship not mentioned] *place.*
> (160, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

Storyteller 300's father became violent towards her mother for sending the daughter to school: 'In the village, if my mother sent me to school, my father would scold my mother and beat her. My brother was sent to boarding [private] school' (300, female, 18, domestic/household worker). But, while girls were often not actively restricted from going to school by their parents, the time required to carry out household chores made studying difficult in practice. For some girls, their parents pressured them to carry out tasks at home. This pressure to work in the home is clearly gendered; pressure could be felt by the eldest daughter:

> *I am the eldest daughter – all the responsibilities of the family came onto my shoulders. I had to cook food – my grandmother was old already. My younger sister used to cry about the little things we needed. It was not the right environment for studying at home, so I had to leave my study.*
> (001, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *There was a school near my house, my friends used to study but I couldn't go to study. There was no time for me to go to school. Mum used to go to work early in the morning. And I had to cook food, give grass to the animals. Also go to collect firewood and grass.*
> (293, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *My dad used to tell me that there would be no one to work at home if I went to school. He used to quarrel with the teachers when I was at school… I wasn't allowed to go to school despite my keen willingness, so I left school after I completed my fourth standard.*
> (139, female, 18, guest house)

> *My mother did not come to my school when my school called. She did not buy a copy or pencil. She did not care… When I tried studying, she used to shout at me and beat me for not washing dishes, doing house chores, and not looking after my brother and sister… And I didn't feel like going to school, so I left.*
> (291, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

Gendered norms became more strongly enforced and/or had more impact when an adult female family member fell sick or was no longer available to carry out household work. Daughters would be expected to take up the burden of this work, rather than the sons, who would still be able to attend school (see section 3.1.2, 'Family illness and death').

When resources were scarce, girls' education could be seen as a financial burden. There were examples where parents questioned the relevance of education for girls, particularly because limited labour opportunities for women made some parents sceptical of the value of sending girls to study:

> *Dad used to say, 'What was the point of teaching them till 12, they are all unemployed'. So, he used to tell others there was no point in sending a daughter to school.*
> (087, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *On parents' day, results day, my parents never came to school and used to shout by saying, 'What will happen if a girl studies?'*
> (294, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

Arranging marriages for their daughters was a strategy used by some parents to reduce the family's financial burden because the daughter would then live with her husband's family (see below).

Child marriage

Another key factor related to girls dropping out of school was child marriage. Child marriage continues to exist in Nepal, affecting girl children in particular. A survey conducted by Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics in 2019 found that nearly 8 per cent of female children and 1.5 per cent of male children were married under the age of 15 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2020). The life stories show that after marriage, it was unlikely that the child would continue education:

> *I was really very keen to study, they told me they did not have money and how were they supposed to educate me? They used to say they would feel more relieved if the daughters marry soon. Then, my mother and father got me married.*
> (146, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

When children who marry at a young age have children themselves, gendered norms could result in further restrictions. Storyteller 088 described how both the

burden of household responsibilities, but also judgements (by her in-laws) about her worth, restricted her ability to attend school:

> *During SLC* [School Leaving Certificate] *I was pregnant. My child was born. After that, 'Why send her to school? What else will she do now? What has her maiti* [girl's birth parents' home] *given us?' They used to tell me like that, 'Why should we send her to school?' After school, my friends used to study but I had to go to cut grass, clean animal dung or fetch water. That is why I didn't have time to study. That's why I could not study. I didn't have time to do homework, which is why I used to get scolded by the teachers as well. That's why I didn't continue to study.*
> (088, female, 25, *dohori*)

In both these instances, the storytellers had to begin work either to support their child and/or themselves as a result of the relationship with their spouse breaking down, accompanied by physical abuse (discussed further in section 3.1.7).

The difficulties of carrying on your education while working

As outlined above, varied factors contribute to children leaving school (which is then connected with children entering work). However, there are numerous examples of children continuing their studies while working or leaving school as a consequence of beginning work. For children that work as well as attend school, this often means extremely long working days with little rest, and disruptions to their schooling:

> *I go to work in the morning, bringing along my school dress. I prepare and cook food. I change my dress in the canteen and go to school at ten o'clock. I return from school in the afternoon and change my clothes before starting work again at five o'clock. I work in the canteen until nine o'clock.*
> (011, female, 14, *khaja ghar*)

> *When I have to go to work, I take leave from school. I go to school one day and the next day I don't.*
> (364, male, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child)

However, the amount of time and energy work requires can make it unfeasible to combine both:

> *I never liked doing homework and I also used to find it impossible to do homework after spending the tiring whole day at school and supporting my mother in her business.*
> (331, male, 12, street-connected/mobile child)

> *I worked in the house of our landlord where we were staying… there was no time to study. There was no time to study as I had to look after the child and wash the dishes 'til nine o'clock.*
> (046, female, 19, *dohori*)

Exploitative employers could also result in children being unable to fund their education. A child who worked in a cabin restaurant/bar described how she was forced to leave school because her employer did not pay her wages:

> *I didn't get any money from the place I worked. That's why things started getting worse. When I was in a private school, it cost me a lot of money, so I left school and started working slowly. I left my studies when I was at ninth grade.*
> (114, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

Children also shared that their earnings became more important for them, as they recognised the value of money, and this led them to lose interest in education and leave school:

> *Later, I didn't feel like continuing my reading and writing. Rather, I started enjoying going to work too as I used to get money and get the food I like and that was fun!*
> (290, male, 19, domestic/household worker)

> *As I kept working, I got less interested in going to school. So, I dropped out of school.*
> (028, male, 18, dance bar/club)

> *Later I started working, so I didn't appear for the exam. Thinking* [that] *working in Dohori Sanjh would pay off, I joined work.*
> (125, female, 22, *dohori*)

While they understood the importance of money, some were clear that education had become less important in their life: 'I did not know what I can do after my study. I thought it was just a waste of money and time' (044, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar).

3.1.5 Disrupted family relationships

The life stories include examples of children being abandoned, neglected, or abused, particularly after difficult life circumstances such as the death of a family

member or parental separation. Parents' separation, multiple marriages and remarriages often created a disruptive and unstable environment for children in the home. For some children, inability to adjust to the changed family dynamics was a driver for leaving education:

> *After my mother remarried, I did not pay much attention to my studies… I saw my mummy with another guy and then I lost my mind, and I stopped studying.*
> (135, female, 19, guest house)

> *My dad got married again and shifted to another place. My mom and I went to our home and our grandfather scolded my dad for bringing a new wife. I was studying in grade 10 when I didn't feel like continuing and started getting busy with the work, so left my studies.*
> (133, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar)

The loss of income that resulted from a parent leaving the family home could also be a factor in forcing children to leave school:

> *Since father married another woman, mother was in dire straits, we didn't have money so we couldn't get educated.*
> (100, female, 24, dance bar/club)

When parents remarried, some children felt unsupported by their step-parents, even if they had tried to adjust to the new family environment:

> *Then, my mom got remarried. I empathised with her and went along with her* [and my] *stepdad to India. My stepdad did not send me to school.*
> (155, female, 22, dance bar/club)

> *My stepmother told me not to go to school, so I left my study. When my father asked about it, she replied that I did not want to go to school.*
> (137, female, 20, dance bar/club)

> *I have been working in the hotel line since I was 13 years old. I came to Kathmandu and lived with my father before but later I rented a room with my friends with whom I work in the party palace. My stepmother stayed at home, she used to complain if I did not earn money by working.*
> (179, male, 20, dance bar/club)

Multiple marriages and separation of parents could also be accompanied by family violence, driving children to leave education and, in some cases, even leave their homes (explored further in the next sub-section, 'Family violence and abuse').

> *Daddy got married to his second wife and I was beaten up and ran away from home… My mother and father used to scold me… I used to work from morning to evening. I haven't studied.*
> (358, male, 15, transportation)

In disrupted family circumstances, children often became dependent on the care provided from their extended family members because parents were unavailable to provide support. However, this could leave children vulnerable to care being withdrawn once extended family members' circumstances changed, or to being at risk of abuse. There were examples where having to live with extended family members eventually led to children having to leave school or enter work:

> *When I was five or six years old my mother eloped, and my father started roaming around on his own. We stayed with our thulo buwa and thulo mummy* [uncle and aunt]… *With the available comfort and hardship, I completed my eighth grade… My elder sister* [uncle's daughter] *looked after me since my childhood and provided for my education. My elder sister eloped and got married and I planned to move to Kathmandu and left my education due to lack of money.*
> (043, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *I have been beaten a lot by grandfather. They wanted to separate me. Up in the mountains where yaks used to graze, there were 45–50 yaks. They used to be up during monsoon season and used to be down during other times. I had to graze them alone. Later I ran away from grandfather's place. I stayed in another house. I stayed there so that I didn't need to go to grandfather's house. I stayed there for two or three days and then I managed a public transport and came to Kathmandu. I didn't even stay at uncle's place and I started working in the vehicle*.
> (223, male, 19, transportation)

Alcohol use and disrupted family relations

Disrupted home environments were both a cause and consequence of alcohol abuse.

> *My father used to take alcohol on a daily basis, because of that my parents don't have decent relationship,* [they] *used to have regular quarrelling and fighting and their relationship was getting bitter.*
> (022, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

> *The two of them could not get along due to drinking alcohol and they used to quarrel over small things.*
> (152, female, 19, spa/massage)

> *After shifting from* [south Kathmandu] *to* [village in Kathmandu valley]*, daddy slowly started drinking alcohol in the company of his friends. It was good at the beginning but gradually my home deteriorated, and the economic situation also weakened.*
> (046, female, 19, *dohori*)

> *Sadness in my home means that my mother drinks too much alcohol and doesn't do any work at home. And it was difficult to find food and clothes at home.*
> (244, female, 15, domestic/household worker)

This in turn disrupted the family's economic stability. The life stories show this could be because the main earner was no longer able to work due to their alcoholism, or because most of their earnings were spent on alcohol rather than on household expenses. As a result, families found themselves facing poverty, debt and, in some instances, losing everything they had:

> *My dad doesn't work that much anymore. He drinks a lot. If he works, whatever he earns, he finishes in alcohol. Mom's money had to be used for everything. So, should we use it to eat food, or to pay rent money or what? Because of that our situation had got really poor. If dad didn't drink that much our situation wouldn't have been so poor.*
> (060, male, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *My father always used to get drunk. He is also in a better path after he married another wife. Then I went for work. There was no money in the house and that is why I worked for money.*
> (190, female, 18, dance bar/club)

In some instances, this pushed children into work from a very early age. Storyteller 046, who described above how her father's alcoholism led to financial problems, began work aged six:

> *I worked in the house of our landlord where we were staying. He had a small child and a shop. I was six years old, and lived there for five years. They had a grocery store. Tea and snacks were served. I had to get up at four o'clock in the morning. I used to get up and work. There was no time to study*.
> (046, female, 19, *dohori*)

Some parents relied on their children's earnings to support their addiction to alcohol, and some took their child's earnings without their consent:

> *On Saturdays, I go to work on the sand screening. They give me money for sand screening, but my parents drink alcohol from that money.*
> (244, female, 15, domestic/household worker)

> *I could not stay home even when I was ill. I had to go to work. But my dad never asked to rest as I was sick. I had to give him all the money I earned. I could never buy new clothes for myself. Dad used to take the money and get drunk. Sometimes he used to come home drunk and beat us.*
> (139, female, 18, guest house)

> *Father doesn't work and steals our earned money and spends it in drinking. Father has hit me and my brother so hard that it left fingerprints.*
> (113, female, 12, cabin restaurant/bar)

Financial problems at home caused by alcoholism also resulted in children being unable to attend school because there was no money for education and their earnings were needed to support the family:

> *Dad used to drink alcohol and didn't pay money. He did not pay money for exams and a similar thing happened to my sister. For how long will my mother manage the household by asking money from people? This is why I started working.*
> (350, male, 15, street-based child vendor/porter)

Where alcoholism and the financial problems it causes led to children fleeing the home (either with a parent or alone), they needed to support themselves and/or their families by entering work:

> *My father was very much addicted to alcohol. He started drinking heavily, not arriving home for three or four days. He even stopped bearing household expenses. He came to know about my mother's savings in the bank. He withdrew all the money from the bank and spent it on alcohol. After getting a loan, we had to keep our home as collateral. We lost our home due to lack of money and debt. Then we stayed in mamaghar* [maternal uncle's house]*. I told my mother that I will support her in household expenses, and we left our father.*
> (262, female, 13, domestic/household worker)

> *There was no food in my home. My father used to drink alcohol. We didn't even have money. I had the determination to work by myself, so I left my home to earn.*
> (308, male, 19, transportation)

3.1.6 Family violence and abuse

Family violence was another major factor that led children to seek work. In the life stories, family violence manifested in a range of ways across different relationship types – for example, between spouses, in parent–child relationships, between siblings and between extended family members (including adult–adult violence and adult–child violence). However, overwhelmingly, fathers were the main perpetrators of violence against children and their mothers. Family violence included an array of behaviours: verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, threatening behaviour, and neglect. Although some violent incidents were isolated, there were many examples of frequent and serious abuse and patterns of abuse that escalated over time.

There are many factors that contribute to family violence, and as we have seen above, often these are mutually reinforcing. Poverty can result in stress that leads to violence; debt can lead to alcoholism that leads to violence; violence can lead families to break up, which puts more pressure on families, which can lead to more violence, and so on. This sub-section outlines the key causes of family violence and how it impacts children's pathways into work.

Disrupted family relationships as a cause of violence

As we discussed in the previous sub-section, the children's life stories highlighted how tensions around relationships between family members could lead to violence. Some children felt that family resources were prioritised for biological rather than stepchildren, and the lack of love and attention they were given caused mistreatment and abuse:

> *My stepdad started hating me from the time my little sister was born. He started shouting at me and also told me that he wouldn't feed me.*
> (264, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *Our stepfather did not love us* [cries]. *My brother was a little grown up so he used to get beaten, and we used to be looked down upon, we didn't even get to eat.*
> (101, female, 24, *dohori*)

With increased tension between family members, violence could be perpetuated by the biological parent, to quell disputes between the step-parent and child:

> *When I used to raise my voice asking not to tease me, he used to complain to my mother. My mother always used to beat me* [child was crying while sharing that piece of information].
> (019, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

Additional romantic partnerships, whether within the household (multiple marriage) or outside the home (i.e. extramarital affairs) were also a source of conflict. In one family, the mother and children were physically abused by the father when the mother questioned why he brought another woman into their home:

> *My mother did not say anything during the initial days. But later she started questioning him. My father used to beat her and locked her in a room.*
> (071, female, 21, cabin restaurant/bar)

There were examples of children being drawn into conflicts between their parents, as the parent conducting the affair became resentful of their home life:

> *My father's behaviour towards us was also changing. He started getting irritated and kept on being angry with us for no reason* [due to an affair].
> (070, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

Becoming embroiled in the secrecy of extramarital affairs impacted children psychologically. Storyteller 070 described her anxiety at having to hide her father's affair from her mother. But it could also result in children being more vulnerable to violence:

> *One day while I was asleep, father came and smacked me with agulto* [half burnt firewood] *and warned me not to talk with elders around*.
> (076, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Extramarital affairs could also result in financial neglect as the partner conducting the affair withdrew support or left the relationship entirely. Withdrawal could be from a romantic partner, such as in this case:

> *He later started having an affair and he didn't use to give me any money and started beating me.*
> (014, female, 23, *dohori*)

Or from a parent:

> *After some time, my father left home and started living with that aunty. He completely stopped taking care of us.*
> (070, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

Concerns about sexual exclusivity, and perceived infidelity of women and girls, affected both the stability of relationships and, in some instances, led to severe physical and emotional abuse:

> *My father keeps blaming my mother's character. If she goes out for work, he shouts, saying she has gone with other men. If she stays back at home, he again accuses her, as if my mother was staying with other men. He would keep beating my mother here at home.*
> (310, female, 10, street-based child vendor/porter)

Long-term absence due to labour migration exacerbated distrust within relationships, particularly when suspicions were fuelled further by telephone reports from neighbours or family members. For example, storyteller 051's mother was accused by neighbours of having affairs because she returned late from collecting the father's reparation payments from the bank. After the father's return, the child stated: 'He beat my mum and beat us and kicked us out of the house' (051, female, 18, dance bar/club). Another storyteller described how her husband, who worked abroad, would each week 'give me a call and accuse me of going out with another guy'. Later, her brother-in-law complained about her to her husband, provoking his return. After being repeatedly beaten, she describes how 'he called my parents and told them to take my dead body away' (120, female, 23, *dohori*).

Distrust could relate to a spouse, but also to daughters. Storyteller 176 describes how her stepfather questioned her mother's, as well as her own, trustworthiness.

> *My stepfather always doubted everyone, he would doubt whenever I talked to anyone, and it was such that if I went out he would have doubts and even if I talked to someone as an elder brother and him being there he would still doubt. I had to wake up early in the morning and was not allowed to sleep until 11.00pm to 12.00am and had to study and keep the door ajar. If my mother spoke to anyone he would think negatively and make big issues out of small things and fight with her.*
> (176, female, 17, *dohori*)

Parents' hypervigilance regarding daughters' safety, and suspicion regarding their activities, points to the pressure families feel to meet societal expectations related to unmarried girls' purity and virtue. Storyteller 194 describes the narrow set of boundaries set by her family that she has to navigate, and the punishment received for stepping outside these boundaries:

> *At home, being a daughter, restrictions are, 'you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that'. Even if you talk with someone, they ask me why I talked, who he was. If someone sees you talking, they will go with bad mouth to my family, saying, 'I have seen your daughter talking to someone', and the family will shout at me and beat me…*
> (194, female, 18, *dohori*)

Once married, teenage girls felt pressure to stay within the marriage even if the husband was violent and abusive (discussed below).

The life stories also reflect how societal expectations of women and girls to provide their spouse with a sufficient dowry and male child are sources of resentment, which lead to conflict when unmet:

> *When I used to tell my husband to go to Kathmandu to earn more for our child's education, he used to say, 'Why should I go? I don't have to do as you say.' He used to always talk about dowry – 'What has your maiti* [maternal home] *given? What have your parents given?' My husband used to say to me. He used to get drunk and beat me.*
> (088, female, 25, *dohori*)

> *My dad also used to hate my mom for bearing so many daughters. He still beats her a lot*.
> (127, female, 22, *khaja ghar*)

> *My father started hating my mother because she gave one more daughter (me) to him… even though he didn't leave my mum he used to beat her after drinking alcohol.*
> (300, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

Alcohol- (and drug-) induced conflict and violence

Alcoholism and violence are strongly connected. Many of the children's life stories described how violence would occur following the consumption of alcohol. For a large number of children working in child labour, this type of violence was a part of their life:

> *My father used to drink alcohol and argue and quarrel in the village. He used to fight and beat my mother even though we moved here.*
> (177, female, 16, *dohori*)

> *My father used to beat my mother after drinking alcohol.*
> (053, female, 24, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *When he gets angry after drinking alcohol he beats my mother, me, and everyone else.*
> (243, female, 15, domestic/household worker)

> *My father used to beat my mother severely after drinking. She wouldn't be able to wake up.*
> (107, female, 17, cabin restaurant/bar)

Although this violence was predominantly perpetrated by the father (or stepfather), there were examples of other family members engaging in violent behaviours after drinking alcohol, including mothers – 'My mother used to hit me after drinking alcohol' (217, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child) – and siblings: 'My brother used to come and beat me and his wife after drinking alcohol' (300, female, 18, domestic/household worker).

Alcohol consumption by family members contributed to children experiencing indiscriminate, unprovoked and random violence, or receiving exaggerated punishments for perceived misbehaviour:

> *He used to beat our mother, beat us up for no mistake of ours. Father would get drunk and just beat us up.*
> (130, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

> *My father is good and loves us when he doesn't drink alcohol. But when he drinks, he scolds and shouts at us… If we spoil the housework, he beats us mercilessly. My sister and I got marks all over our body when he beat us in the village.*
> (242, male, 16, domestic/household worker)

> *He once beat me while I was sleeping at night*.
> (229, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Violence could be extreme, with disputes following alcohol consumption escalating quickly.

A range of stressors related to alcohol use were described, including financial pressures (discussed below) and stress related to the illness or death of a family member. Often, family relationships became unstable under this additional stressor, especially if combined with a financial crisis, and violence ensued:

> *My mum became ill when I was 14 years old. I was studying at that time. Mum used to work as a wage labourer then. Dad also used to carry loads. It was good then. After mum became ill, she couldn't stand my dad and used to beat him. She became mentally ill so she only used to love our brother, and didn't care about us.*
> (058, female, 24, spa/massage)

> *It cost about a lakh* [a lakh is 100,000 rupees] *to fix my arm, my dad was unable to repay the loan after selling land and gold, so he keeps scolding, saying 'I can't repay it' and drinks alcohol.*
> (371, male, 12, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *My father started drinking alcohol after my mother's death.*
> (209, male, 20, dance bar/club)

The way in which alcoholism put pressure on family resources (described in section 3.1.5) often led to violence. Storyteller 306's father tried to sexually exploit his mother and was jailed for cheating and borrowing money to fund his alcohol addiction (306, male, 19, transportation). The inability to fund an addiction could also result in physical abuse:

> *Father always pestered mother for money to buy his drinks. Mother had a small piece of jewellery and when she refused to give away the same, my father chased her brandishing a khurpa* [cutting tool].
> (184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar)

In some circumstances, pressure on finances led to a vicious circle. Alcohol would be consumed in response to financial or other stressors, which in turn put additional pressure on family finances, which led to more alcohol consumption and violence, and so on. Storyteller 104 described how it had become difficult for her family to arrange meals at home, which resulted in money being borrowed or goods bought on credit. Her father then became distant from the family and began physically abusing their mother after drinking alcohol. This exacerbated financial problems and led to increased levels of violence:

> *We ran out of money at home. My dad once came home drunk and snatched the golden chain mom was wearing. When he snatched that, the chain broke, and it cut my mom and she bled. When I got frightened and told my sister, she gave me 500 rupees and I bought some medicine with it and*

> *treated my mom. My dad sold my mom's gold chain just to drink alcohol*.
> (104, female, 18, guest house)

Children and their mothers were often most vulnerable to the impact of increased stressors on family life, such as health crises and financial difficulties, which were often accompanied by increased alcohol use:

> *Our dad used to treat us nice before our mom passed away due to illness when our younger sister was still a child. We were in debt from the loans we took for her treatment. He used to treat our younger sister well but used to beat us.*
> (139, female, 18, guest house)

Similarly, married (girl) children could experience abuse from their spouse. There were numerous life stories of teenage girls being married to spouses who abused alcohol and physically abused them. As a patrilocal culture, the fact that most children who marry will live with their husband's family can isolate them from natal family support. In addition, if the married girl was herself a mother, she had the additional burden of protecting her child or children:

> *He used to drink, loiter around and quarrel. One day he quarrelled a lot and bit a chunk out of me here* [shows her arm]*. I was sleeping with my son, and he came drunk and started quarrelling.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

Violence used as a punishment for bad behaviour

There were examples of violence being used by parents, guardians and siblings against children (boys in particular) for specific and targeted reasons – for example, in response to poor performance or non-attendance at school, smoking cigarettes or marijuana, or roaming around with friends who were considered to be a bad influence: 'I got scolded for consuming marijuana and roaming around aimlessly. I would fight with her [sister] and tell her that it was none of her business' (237, male, 17, transportation). This more targeted use of violence could also be severe: 'My mother used to shout when father was there, one time my father broke my right hand. My father had 100 rupees, he saved those 100 rupees and I stole it and he hit me' (254, male, 12, street-connected/mobile child).

Physical and verbal abuse that was a response to specific behaviour often took place in households where violence was already a component of family life. Some storytellers differentiated between indiscriminate violence experienced at home and violence that was a response to certain behaviours. It is interesting to note the language used in the following life stories, where violent punishments for specific behaviours were spoken about as acceptable compared with indiscriminate acts of violence:

> *My father used to beat my mother after drinking alcohol. I've only been beaten when I did something wrong.*
> (355, male, 15, street-connected/mobile child)

> *Father used to beat my mom when we were small, but now he cannot beat her because he also gets fear with us as we are grown up now. Father also used to beat me, and I deserved that as I used to bunk school and play. He used to tie me up and beat me with sisnu* [stinging nettles].
> (290, male, 19, domestic/household worker)

There were examples of cycles of violence escalating as the child's behaviour and corresponding punishments became increasingly extreme. For example, storyteller 345 detailed a violent home life where his father abused his mother and would beat him with wire. He recalled that one day, he beat the teacher at school in response to what he described as unfair punishment for fighting with other students ('It was getting too much, and we beat the teacher'). After eventually returning home, he was hung up and thrashed with stinging nettles by his father. He later hit his father with a pipe and was arrested by police (345, male, 17, transportation).

Factors that exacerbate violence

Having considered the factors that contribute to family violence, we now look at how violence escalates within families and the factors that exacerbate family members' exposure to violence. We also consider factors that make it more difficult for family members to mitigate the risk of experiencing abuse.

Attempts to protect family members

There were many examples of storytellers being exposed to violence when they attempted to protect family members from abuse or intervene in family disputes. Children and young people were often actively and directly involved in episodes of inter-partner violence (overwhelmingly violence perpetrated by the father against the mother). Violent episodes could escalate when the child tried to intervene, subjecting them to danger as anger was deflected from the parent to the child:

> *Then he suddenly came and beat my mother. When I went to ask him why he was beating my mother, he choked me. Then he took another knife and came to strike.*
> (214, female, 15, domestic/household worker)

Some children were aware that their involvement only made the violence worse, and in response, were forced to bear witness to the abuse without taking action: 'He would also beat us if we tried to interfere. Five of us used to watch from the corner and my mother would faint' (150, female, 16, cabin restaurant/bar). There were also examples where the physical abuse of the child could lead to conflict between parents, for example:

> *Father used to beat after drinking for no reason. When my mother saw my father beating me, mother would shout at my father and they would have a fight.*
> (372, male, 15, transportation)

Limited access to support

The accounts of life storytellers speak to a general normalisation of family violence. For women, and girls in particular, both a general societal acceptance of violence within the home and cultural norms related to remaining in marriages were barriers to requesting help. Storyteller 003 married at age 17 and suffered two and half years of abuse from her husband. She felt that she could not say anything about the abuse to her family. It was only after a particularly violent episode where she was severely beaten that she spoke with her family and was told to return home (003, female, 25, *dohori*). Another storyteller described how despite being beaten every day, she feared that her relatives would not condone her returning home. It was only when the physical abuse became 'too much' that she escaped to her mother's house. For others, familial support was not forthcoming and adherence to social norms was prioritised over daughters' safety. After returning to her husband's home following a six-month stay in hospital due to the severity of injuries her husband had inflicted on her (when she was approximately 14 years old), one storyteller described her parents' response:

> *…my parents came and told me that according to the tradition of the village, once a girl is taken, it is done. Whatever bad happened was now done. They said they can't take me with them and left me with him*.
> (127, female, 22, *khaja ghar*)

Where assistance was sought outside of the family, formal forms of support (primarily from the police service) were often ineffective:

> [The police] *came once, when my parents were fighting. They asked my father why they were fighting but did not say anything to my mother.*
> (310, female, 10, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *Then he beat me, there was blood everywhere. We then went to the nearby police station. He even followed us to the station, so we had to run away from him. The police told me that they cannot do anything there and told us to go to* [district headquarters] *for the complaint.*
> (088, female, 25, *dohori*)

One storyteller described her father's sense of impunity, despite causing severe injuries to his wife. Her father told hospital staff, who said he would be charged with murder if she died, that 'nothing would have happened and he would have escaped through his network [reach]' (115, female, 13, cabin restaurant/bar).

While there were examples where perpetrators of abuse were held to account, it seems that these were only in cases where the abuse was extreme and life-threatening. For example, the story recounted above, where the father tried to kill his family with a *khurpa* (cutting tool), led to action by the authorities and community: 'Thereafter, army men stationed in the locality [the area had no policemen then] were summoned, and the villagers, after much deliberation, banished my father from the village' (184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar). However, these cases were rare compared with the extensive incidents of domestic violence that went unreported.

Impacts of family violence

In addition to a broad range of physical injuries family members experienced, there were examples of the long-term physical and psychological impacts of abuse. Mothers who had been subjected to sustained periods of violence were particularly affected:

> *Mummy's health is not good. She has a problem in her waist and back because of my father's beating.*
> (306, male, 19, transportation)

> *People told me that she became like that because of the beatings from my father… she has become like a mad person*.
> (229, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Long-term sickness had repercussions for both the direct victims of abuse and other members of the family. As we have seen in section 3.1.2, on health, the loss of an adult earner's income due to violence-induced illness was a driver of child labour. Storyteller 177's mother developed a debilitating heart disease as a result of her father's physical abuse, which prevented her from working. As a result, storyteller 177 had to begin working in a party palace at nine years of age to support the family (177, female, 16, *dohori*).

Suffering from the effects of physical violence could itself become a trigger for further abuse. In one life story, cyclical patterns of violence were observed, with one storyteller's mother being subjected to further abuse from the grandfather after her illness put increased pressure on family finances:

> *We finished all the money in hospital. Half the money was spent by grandfather on alcohol. Grandfather started giving trouble and started beating again when we didn't have any money… When mum was sick, grandfather used to beat her as well and she collapsed.*
> (283, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Although there are challenges to fully articulating the impact of violence and abuse, the life stories provide some insights into the experience of living in a household where there are abusive relationships. There were examples of children living in fear and feeling helpless:

> *My bad moment was that my parents used to quarrel a lot, and once my dad bled severely from his mouth while he was quarrelling. It was a dangerous sight and I felt helpless and I cried during that moment… I felt very bad when returning home at seeing such sight after coming from work. I looked at my life and asked myself about the unprecedented things that happen.*
> (145, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

There were examples of children shutting down in response to abuse, having childhood memory loss or being unable to reflect on or be reminded of past events:

> *I didn't used to speak those days. Dad used to beat me if I spoke. If I told dad to not do anything, he would beat me*.
> (060, male, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *I don't remember my childhood. I have already forgotten*.
> (307, male, 14, transportation)

> *My husband used to beat me so much. I can't even think about it now*.
> (088, female, 25, *dohori*)

Another child reflected that she felt angered by her father's abusive behaviour: 'The feeling of his actions would not come into mind during that time but I would get angry nevertheless and think about why he had to drink alcohol and why he had to get into fights' (008, female, 18, dance bar/club).

As well as the impact of being a victim of violence, children were affected by having to passively observe violence and by the burden of protecting a parent:

> *My mom got wounded on the back yesterday as well when my dad tried to beat her. I sit with my mom and try to keep her away from dad when he comes home drunk.*
> (104, female, 18, guest house)

> *We used to intervene when he used to beat mum and we used to get beaten up as well, and I used to feel sad. The challenge in my life is I can't decide what to do where there are lots of problems. I am always stressed because of my parents' quarrels. I feel bad about that*.
> (084, female, 23, *khaja ghar*)

In some cases, storytellers' emotional pain and resignation was clearly articulated. One child spoke of the impact of his father's verbal abuse: 'Baba saw me on the road the next day and told me not to come back but to die on the road. I cried a lot while hearing that. I cried more from hearing what my father said than seeing my mother's dead body' (221, male, 17, transportation). For this child, his father's words were more harmful than the death of his mother.

Another storyteller who was severely abused by her husband revealed the despair abusive relationships had brought to her life:

> *I have drowned in tears all my life. If some good thing happens now because of God's will, so be it. If not, such will be my life. I never got any happiness earlier either, never got to see my parents happy. I am not happy now either.*
> (127, female, 22, *khaja ghar*)

Family violence as a driver of leaving school and entering child labour

As well as the psychological and physical scars experienced by children, family violence impacted their life trajectories in varied ways. For example, there were instances where children's schooling was disrupted or ended due to family violence. Children described multiple ways in which their studies were disrupted by violence, including turbulent home environments that were not conducive to studying, and physical injuries that made it difficult to attend school.

> *My father was stressed everyday due to money-related problems. He started drinking alcohol on a daily basis. My father started quarrelling and it had an effect on us during our childhood. We could not sleep properly due to the arguments. It also hampered our studies and I started working when I was in grade 8.*
> (145, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

Storyteller 229 describes how her father prevented her and her siblings from studying by using physical threats and punishment:

> *My father used to beat us daily for going to school. He used to tell us not to go to school. Our names were not registered at the school either. We asked our father to register our names, but he said not to go to school. Later, we stopped going to school.*
> (229, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Violent punishment could also act as a trigger for children to stop studying:

> *One day I did not go to school because I got sick, and my father beat me. After that, I quit going to school.*
> (232, male, 14, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *My parents used to blame me and beat me for my brother's mistakes. Once, when my parents were not at home, my brother made a mistake but still, my parents tied me with wire and beat me. I didn't go to school, and I started working as a conductor.*
> (345, male, 17, transportation)

The effects of violence could also be indirect: after one storyteller's mother escaped from their abusive household, the remaining children were unable to study due to the additional household chores they had to take on in their mother's absence:

> *My dad used to fight without any reason after getting drunk. There would be a lot of work at home, there were buffaloes, goats to look after. When dad used to quarrel with us, mum used to leave the house and we had to do all those tasks.*
> (055, female, 21, cabin restaurant/bar)

In addition, many children expressed that they did not want to be at home as it was an unsafe or overwhelming place for them.

> *I feel bad at home the most*.
> (345, male, 17, transportation)

> *I didn't like to stay at home because my father used to drink alcohol and keep fighting*.
> (012, female, 22, *dohori*)

> *I ran away as father used to beat me*.
> (054, female, 24, *dohori*)

> *My father used to beat me and say dirty words while he got drunk. My father and mother would fight all night. I had to look after the fowls and goats all by myself. I couldn't do it alone. And then I came to Kathmandu.*
> (208, male, 12, transportation)

Some children left the household where they or other family members were subjected to violence and abuse. They did this in a variety of ways: (1) with their mother (often escaping to their mother's maternal home); (2) by marrying early and living with their spouse's family; or (3) by leaving independently with the assistance of friends or relatives. For some children, leaving the family home was temporary and cyclical. Running away was followed by family reconciliation, but then punishment (usually physical abuse), which then resulted in them fleeing the home again.

> *Father used to beat me all the time and then I would run away from home. Because of me, father used to beat my mother. I used to run away, and mother used to come looking for me.*
> (398, male, 16, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *I used to run away as soon as I used to see him. He used to get angry seeing me running away and used to beat me more*.
> (261, male, 17, catering/party palace)

For these children, there was little opportunity to escape abuse at home, as running away only led to further episodes of abuse. For some children who have grown up

with family violence, entering child labour might seem (at least initially) like an improvement on the environment at home. There were examples where the workplace itself felt like a place of escape and relative safety:

> *I thought it was better to work in a hotel than to get beaten all the time. My father used to beat me all the time.*
> (369, female, 24, transportation)

> *The main reason I came to work from home* [to Kailali] *was that I was never given food, and was beaten.*
> (383, male, 14, transportation)

However, family violence was also a driver of child labour for children who stayed within their households. As described earlier, in families where the health impacts of abuse led to the loss of an adult earner, the child needed to take on this role to support the family. Within abusive households, earning money could also be an effective strategy to avoid violence while remaining within the familial home:

> *My father used to beat me and scold me. If I earned money and gave it at home, then my father would behave well.*
> (376, male, 22, street-connected/mobile child)

> *He* [partner] *used to love me when I earned money and gave it to him, otherwise, he used to beat me.*
> (378, female, 25, street-connected/mobile child)

There was evidence of children being implicated in intergenerational cycles of violence, with the experience of abuse carried over into new relationships; the spaces and actors were different, but the patterns of violence were similar. Intergenerational cycles became impossible to escape as the abuse experienced within one household continued within the confines of another: 'My father always beat us, so I didn't want to live like that and got married. But later my husband also started drinking and beat me just like my father. And I gave birth to a child' (366, female, 17, restaurant and hotel-based child).

The normalisation of violence by individuals who have experienced extreme abuse as children within their own families is arguably part of this. Storyteller 378, whose house was set fire to by her father while she was inside and describes herself as 'despised' by her stepfather, tells of the extreme abuse she experienced from her partner. She was asked by her friends, 'for how long will you be able to tolerate it all, for how long will you get the beatings' when they saw her unable to move her body due to the 'torture' she endured (378, female, 25, street-connected/mobile child). She later was physically abused and sexually exploited by a hotel owner who held her captive in her workplace. Fundamentally, a lack of safe spaces to escape from violence and a lack of options to mitigate risk within families (e.g. through the intervention of intermediaries) leads to extremely vulnerable children often escaping to workplaces where risk of violence continues or is exacerbated.

3.1.7 Migration

The life stories include both examples of children and young people who left their families and migrated to Kathmandu, and examples where children moved with their family to the capital. The accounts show that children predominantly moved from rural settings to urban centres (commonly to Kathmandu) due to financial crises experienced in rural Nepal, but as described earlier, familial illness, disrupted family relationships and family violence were also significant factors. In addition to these factors that 'pushed' children to the capital, some children migrated because of aspirations to further their studies.

Children migrating independently

Many children migrated independently to support their families who were struggling financially, making the decision themselves to leave school and travel to find work and earn:

> *Even though father keeps coming back and forth from India, he did not send money to my mother. Mother had to take care of schooling of my siblings as well. Seeing all this, I did not feel like studying anymore. I have studied up to class 8. Later, I started searching for work with my friends. When I was 15, I moved to Dadeldhura and started working as a labourer* [screening sand and carrying stones].
> (077, female, 18, dance bar/club)

> *Why should I stay home? Even if I have just a little money, I can buy clothes. How long should I torture mother? With that thought I came to Kathmandu.*
> (098, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

> *I had to work at someone else's house before as my dad would sometimes look after the house but sometimes didn't. That's why I could not go to school. So, I came to Kathmandu when I was 11 or 12 years old. I used to work in a hotel* [khaja ghar] *after I came to Kathmandu.*
> (139, female, 18, guest house)

> *Due to the weak economic condition of my family, I could not continue my study. Later, a friend came to visit, and she had gone to Kathmandu. Along with her, I came to Kathmandu and started living with her in the same room*.
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

Debt incurred due to the high costs of health care or education was a major cause of migration, as children travelled to urban areas like Kathmandu in order to generate income to repay loans, but also to access better medical treatments (see section 3.1.2, 'Family illness and death'):

> *My brother kept calling our cousin saying you could get work here. I had debts from my studies. But they wouldn't let me from my family, I somehow convinced my mom and came here. I was 17 years old then.*
> (050, female, 22, *dohori*)

Loans were also taken to fulfil obligations and expectations related to traditional norms. Storyteller 388's family took a loan to pay for his brother's marriage, but eventually he had to migrate to help with the financial burden:

> *Father and mother had taken a loan for my elder brother's marriage. Father said it was 50,000 rupees. It was supposed to be paid by my elder brother, but it has come under my father's responsibility now. The situation of my father and mother at home made me enter Kathmandu.*
> (388, male, 21, street-connected/mobile child)

Other reasons for migrating included aspirations to study:

> *I came to Kathmandu in the hope that I will get a chance to study. But I have to work more than study.*
> (228, male, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *I was about seven or eight years old when we went to Dhalkebar. After that mum and my younger sister stayed at home. I was sent to other people's houses in Dhalkebar. I was young but stayed there thinking that I could continue to study. Because of weak financial situation.*
> (234, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *I passed my SLC in 2072 Bikram Sambat (BS) and came to Kathmandu in 2073 BS. I stayed in a room along with some friends for a year. My scholarship was still running. That helped me to stay in Kathmandu. My economic status was low.*
> (170, male, 22, *dohori*)

While some children migrated in the hope that their education prospects would improve, this did not always materialise – for example, because of insufficient finances for education, or because employers were unsupportive (see also section 3.1.4):

> *I was about nine years old when I came to Kathmandu looking for good education, but I couldn't get a good education because of a lack of money… I couldn't work and study at the same time, so I had to quit studies in two years.*
> (282, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *I came to Kathmandu in a hope that there will be good facilities to study here. I live in someone else's house. The house owner* [aunt] *is supportive but her husband* [uncle] *scolds me in a loud voice if I make any mistakes.*
> (227, female, 15, domestic/household worker)

In some instances, their education prospects did not improve because the child had been made false promises:

> *I had come to Kathmandu with my aunt. She said she would send me to school. By aunt, I mean my mom's niece. She had a son so she brought me here so I could look after him and she would send me to school.*
> (051, female, 18, dance bar/club)

> *They used to give me a lot of work and didn't send me to school. So, I stayed at other people's houses working for one or two years without studying.*
> (234, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *While living with the family, I had to get up early in the morning, sweep, wash clothes, cook, do the dishes and bathe the kids. I had to work from 6.00am to 10.00pm. There were few moments when I could rest, but I was not sent, never went to school.*
> (184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar)

Children who migrate to urban centres without their families are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. There are life stories depicting how such children ended up in hazardous and exploitative work in various industries, including the construction industry (working in brick kilns), the carpet-weaving industry, the hospitality industry, and the AES. These children were often subjected to long working hours, low wages, and poor working conditions. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.

Children migrating with their families

There were also examples where rural families migrated together in response to challenging financial circumstances. The decision to migrate was often made by the main earner who migrated first, and was later joined by the rest of the family.

> *I came in between my studies and started working due to the family situation. The situation means not having personal expenses as well. It was also difficult to manage household expenses. Earning from one person was not enough. My father came here at first, later other family members joined.*
> (193, female, 21, dance bar)

Although most children migrated permanently with their family, where children migrated with their family seasonally or episodically, they mentioned never going to school, or leaving school because of their irregular attendance:

> *We lived in the village for six months and another six months in the jungle. That's how life went about, and we never went to school.*
> (169, female, 23, *khaja ghar*)

> *I used to be in the village at times and at times used to be in Kathmandu, thus was not regular so left the school.*
> (061, female, 23, guest house)

For others, shifting to a new location could lead to the discontinuation of education:

> *My dad suggested going to Kathmandu. I told him it was fine here and asked why we need to go. But still, he brought me here and I missed my school*.
> (239, male, 13, transportation)

Migration often failed to lead to better circumstances, and with increased expenses, some children needed to assist their family to cover living costs:

> *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 fare and expenses to come to Kathmandu. She took a loan of 5,000 Nepalese rupees, and we came to Kathmandu. We got off at Kalanki. Mother took a room in a lodge and then looked for a job. She took us to the temple to check if people are getting money by begging and saw beggars earning money. We* [all five family members] *also started begging.*
> (390, male, 14, street-connected/mobile child)

3.1.8 Citizenship and legal documentation

Not all the drivers of child labour derive *directly* from poverty or family violence. Other factors, such as the lack of access to documentation, loom large in the stories of children and young people. But these are also linked to limited financial resources and disrupted family relations. Legal documents such as birth registration and citizenship are critical components of an individual's legal identity and social inclusion. A birth registration document is a legal record of the child's birth, which ensures a child's identity is recognised by the government. It is essential for individuals to be able to verify their age and to access basic services such as education. Accessing formal work opportunities almost always requires that individuals can prove their citizenship (usually by showing a citizenship card). This sub-section explores the reasons why acquiring documentation can be a costly process, and the challenges some children face to obtaining it (particularly if financial resources are limited). It also looks at the reasons why children or their families may avoid acquiring formal documentation, such as child marriage.[8]

Consequences of not having legal documents

Not having legal documents is a cause of WFCL. The life stories indicated that not having a birth registration document was a barrier to accessing education:

> *The school in Kathmandu didn't admit us because we didn't have birth certificates.*
> (225, female, 19, construction site)

> *If mama* [maternal uncle] *brings my birth certificate from the village, I will study.*
> (219, male, 14, transportation)

> *I made my birth certificate when I was studying in class 7 in the village, but I didn't continue my studies then. I lost one year.*
> (234, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

8 The legal age of marriage in Nepal is 20 years for men and women, but as much as 37 per cent of women are married before the age of 18 (Human Rights Watch 2016).

Even when children can attend school, their lack of birth registration leads to missed opportunities, like scholarships, and participating in school events:

> *I was granted a German scholarship til grade 7. I was a good student and always secured top ten among 150 students. Despite being a good student, I had to withdraw from school because I did not have birth registration certificate during grade 8.*
> (180, male, 18, *dohori*)

> *I was unable to participate in quite a few events when I was in grade 5 and 8 because I did not have my birth certificate.*
> (052, female, 19, *dohori*)

Whereas a birth certificate is an important requirement for children's schooling (as the above quotes illustrate), having a citizenship certificate becomes increasingly important as individuals advance into the professional sector. Storytellers described how the lack of a birth registration document was a barrier to obtaining a citizenship certificate:

> *I have heard that without a birth certificate, a citizenship certificate cannot be obtained. It was not possible with my mum's citizenship certificate. I took mum to get a citizenship certificate, but they told her a birth certificate was required.*
> (283, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

Without a citizenship certificate, young people were often unable to receive a professional skill training certificate:

> *I am thinking of becoming a chef in the future. I will have to take a cook's training for that. Now I will go to my village for a citizenship certificate.*
> (362, male, 22, street-connected/mobile child)

> *If I could get a citizenship certificate and practice driving, then there is also a possibility of getting a driving licence.*
> (261, male, 17, catering/party palace)

> *It is said that one cannot get a certificate without citizenship… I was called to take certificates and was told that citizenship is needed to get a certificate.*
> (312, male, 17, street-based child vendor/porter)

Although access to training broadens the scope of work opportunities available, citizenship is also often required for employment in the skilled labour market.

> *I went to the training centre and learnt mobile repairing. I got a certificate also. Later, they asked me for citizenship* [certificate] *for the job.*
> (395, male, 19, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *I plan to get my citizenship and work in plumbing in the future… I have to earn a living and not having citizenship it's quite a strain. If I had citizenship, something would have happened.*
> (385, male, 18, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *I also got an opportunity for work, but they said that citizenship is needed.*
> (312, male, 17, street-based child vendor/porter)

There was also a perception that having a citizenship certificate was about more than being able to comply with legal requirements; it also conveyed trustworthiness to potential employers:

> *I came to Kathmandu with the tension of not having Nepal citizenship. We need a citizenship card for any job, otherwise they do not trust me… I want to be a driver. But I do not have citizenship. I look like a hooligan so people do not trust me.*
> (379, male, 23, street-connected/mobile child)

> *First thing in the future, I wish to have citizenship. No one trusts you without citizenship. Therefore, the first thing is citizenship.*
> (400, male, 18, street-based child vendor/porter)

If individuals wish to travel overseas and access opportunities abroad, they must have a passport, for which being able to prove citizenship is essential:

> *I think I will continue my work at the same place for some time, and later will go back home to make my citizenship card and passport, and will go abroad to work.*
> (025, female, 18, dance bar/club)

> *Guru* [karate teacher] *has said that he will send me to become lahure* [foreign army] *too… He has said that he will send me after getting my citizenship.*
> (211, male, 16, domestic/household worker)

Of course, having proof of citizenship does not guarantee access to opportunities, even if the range of potential job opportunities is widened:

> *I went home and stayed there for four years to get a citizenship certificate, hoping to get a good job,*

but I didn't get any job, and again I returned to Kathmandu.
(376, male, 22, street-connected/mobile child)

However, children and young people were very aware of the difference in employment opportunities between those with and without citizenship certificates. One storyteller described how: 'Those who do not have a citizenship certificate lift woods and hay, and those who have a citizenship certificate get proper work' (387, male, 17, transportation). Another child explains that individuals like her who are hoping to leave the AES and find alternative work are hampered by their lack of citizenship: 'I would like to leave such work and do another job, but I could not get a job. Even if you get it, you need the citizenship certificate' (171, female, 17, *dohori*). Other storytellers also felt that their options were limited to the AES without citizenship papers: 'Apart from *dohori*, nobody gives you any job opportunity. My citizenship is not made' (181, female, 21, *dohori*). This lack of choice leads some children to remain in abusive workplaces as they feel they do not have an alternative: 'There are still a lot of children going through abuse. A lot of them cannot work elsewhere because they don't have citizenship, and in other places they seek academic qualification' (096, female, 24, dance bar/club).

Some storytellers put so much emphasis on acquiring citizenship certification that they put off thinking of the future until this could be obtained, recognising that without it, many pathways would be unavailable to them: 'I don't think anything about what I will become later. I have thought to do this work. First, obtain my citizenship and then I will think about what to do' (386, male, 18, street-based child vendor/porter). For some children, this recognition came later, once they had experienced first-hand how opportunities could be limited:

In the outside world, it doesn't matter. When I used to live outside, I didn't care about the birth certificate or citizenship. I thought that it would be okay if I had food and lodging. But as you get older, those things become necessary. I found out after my dai-didi [elder brother and sisters, friends he made during rehab] *reminded me after coming here. I also came from there. In the past, I didn't remember that.*
(391, male, 14, restaurant and hotel-based child)

I didn't know birth registration certificate was necessary. Neither about citizenship certificate. That's how teenage was. I was feeling like I didn't need anyone. But I became mature as I dealt with things and my son was also growing up day by day.
(159, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar)

On the other hand, there were some children who did not feel the need to have these documents – or seemed resigned to not having them. For example, storyteller 396 felt that his situation meant they would not be able to keep their documents securely, which disincentivised them from going through the process:

I don't have my citizenship. What is the use of getting my citizenship? Even if I get citizenship, I can't keep it safe. My citizenship will be taken away by other[s].
(396, male, 17, street-connected/mobile child)

False documentation

Some families purposefully falsified citizenship certificates so that their children would have access to work normally prohibited to children. Storytellers did not specifically mention their perception of such practices but acknowledged that it enabled them to work overseas:

So, I went to Kuwait. I was 19 years old then. I had added some years to my original age in the citizenship certificate by four to five years. Therefore, I got this opportunity.
(134, female, 24, *dohori*)

I was 17 or 18 years old when going abroad. I had increased my age on my citizenship certificate to go abroad. I got a citizen certificate in the village itself. A citizenship certificate helped me get my passport. My citizenship certificate shows that I am 29 years old.
(119, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

When I was 16 or 17, my dad also said he would get my citizenship certificate and told me to go abroad as there was no one to earn or run the house.
(116, female, 24, *dohori*)

My father had increased my age by three years on my birth registration certificate.
(177, female, 16, *dohori*)

Some actively facilitated the process, even when it required bribing government officials.

They asked for money from my dad while making my citizenship card to increase my age and paid for my citizenship card.
(116, female, 24, *dohori*)

Children with falsified documents described how they were not questioned: 'I showed my birth registration certificate, and they believed me… According to my birth registration certificate, I am 19 years now. I have not faced any difficulties due to my age' (177, female, 16, *dohori*).

These stories show that although the lack of citizenship certificates is a barrier to children finding work, certificates are not a guaranteed mechanism for preventing child labour. Children with falsified citizenship certificates are vulnerable to entering harmful work. For example, one child who now works in a *dohori* was encouraged by her father to falsify her documents when she was 16 or 17 so that she could find work abroad. She explained that she did not know what she was signing up for:

> *There were a lot of girls to go abroad and work as housemaids. I didn't know if it was a company or home at the time. I only knew it was abroad. I didn't know good and bad.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

However, when she went to a country in the Gulf at the age of 17, she was treated horrendously:

> *In Kuwait, even if there was no work, they would make us wipe the doors. They would never appreciate, no matter how much you worked. They used to cuss at us in their language and treat us like animals… They would only give* [food] *if they could not finish the food. They would put us to work but not give any food. It was difficult, not like in your own country.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

Malpractice is difficult for government agencies and employers to detect. In addition, there are few incentives for employers not to take documents at face value. The ease with which legal documents can be falsified leads to the perpetuation of child labour because false documents wrongly legitimise children's work in sectors that require it.

The process of obtaining legal documentation

Getting citizenship can be an extensive and time-consuming process that can take months to complete, requiring multiple steps and official documents. Children who have migrated to Kathmandu have to travel back to their province of birth. Saving enough money to pay for travel and securing the time off necessary to process documents is a burden. For children dependent on daily wages in Kathmandu, it is difficult to leave work and travel home, especially when the family is in debt and dependent on children's income:

> *My dad does a menial job. So, everyone in my house depends on me. I bring home my salary every month… I need to go to my village to get my citizenship but cannot go there due to our family debt issues*.
> (031, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

Government departments that process citizenship claims are often overwhelmed and understaffed, leading to long wait times: 'I have also given the paper to the madam of the organisation for citizenship. Madam has said that there are 130 people like me she has to work for, it is government work, and it takes time' (385, male, 18, street-based child vendor/porter).

Where the cost of obtaining documentation becomes prohibitively expensive, children described paying the costs in instalments or finding alternative ways to generate income to cover the expense: 'I can find gold in the river. I saved money to make a citizenship certificate by selling gold' (387, male, 17, transportation).

When cases are complicated (discussed further below) and legal support is required, the process becomes extremely costly. Due to the importance of citizenship certificates, it is unsurprising that storytellers will go to great lengths to obtain official documentation. One young mother described the risks she took by remaining in an abusive household to obtain citizenship as she understood the serious consequences of not having legal documents:

> *My neighbours also used to tell me not to leave the house, as I would be in the wrong if I did so. They said to inform them if someone tried to abuse me. I just wanted to get my marriage and child's birth registration done as my mom's marriage was never registered. I was unable to participate in quite a few events when I was in grade 5 and 8 because I did not have my birth certificate. I remembered that and did not want the same for my child. I stayed there struggling as I felt the birth certificate was my child's right.*
> (052, female, 19, *dohori*)

Obstacles to getting documentation

Nepali citizenship is obtained by descent, by birth, or by virtue of being married to a Nepali citizen. Any child born at the time when his father or mother is a citizen of Nepal,

shall be a citizen of Nepal by descent (which therefore requires that parents have the relevant documents proving their own citizenship). The main obstacles children described that prevented them being able to prove they were eligible for citizenship through descent were:

- **losing contact or having a bad relationship with biological parent(s)**
- **parents not having their own identity documents**
- **death or illness of biological parent(s)**
- **parent's illegal (polygamy) marriage**
- **marriage before legal age.**

If children are not in contact with one of their parents, the other parent's documents can be used. However, some children do not have a good relationship with either of their parents:

> *If we talk about my family, I do not get along with my mother. There are some family problems. And I still do not have my birth registration certificate. So, I am thinking of trying to proceed for birth certificate after Tihar.*[9] *I don't know whether it can be done with my mother. So, I have to talk to my father about it.*
> (180, male, 18, *dohori*)

Children who have lost connection to both or either of their parents often find it challenging to find them for the purpose of obtaining relevant documentation:

> *I would like to make a citizenship certificate. For this, I must find the family.*
> (389, male, 22, street-connected/mobile child)

> *In search of my father, I went to a place in Dhading. It was a strange place for me. I asked my father's house. It was near. I met my granny, she was there. I did not know she was my grandmother. I went there after 19 years.*
> (379, male, 23, street-connected/mobile child)

> *I don't know where my father's home is. My mother's village is in Gorkha. After my elder sister was born, she was registered in the village as the last child* [of my parents]. *My birth certificate has not been made up until now… My mother does not say anything about my father.*
> (171, female, 17, *dohori*)

Although some children faced difficulties finding their parents, others were unable to make documents because their parents lacked their own identity documents:

> *Both my father and mother do not have citizenship. That's why it's a little difficult to get citizenship.*
> (385, male, 18, street-based child vendor/porter)

> *No one in my family has birth registration.*
> (313, male, 10, street-connected/mobile child)

> *My father is here, but has not received citizenship.*
> (052, female, 19, *dohori*)

> *My citizenship is not made. My parents also do not have citizenship. I don't even have a birth certificate.*
> (181, female, 21, *dohori*)

In some situations, the death or illness of parents forced children to find ways around the system – for example, through falsifying records:

> *Mom had epilepsy. She used to keep falling because of the disease and her brain became dull. She doesn't even know our name. When we went to make my citizenship certificate, she asked what my name was. She didn't even remember my birth date. She left us from a very young age, so I don't feel like talking to her that much.*
> (249, female, 17, construction site)

> *Because of no parents, it was very difficult to make the birth registration certificate. I made the birth certificate saying that my grandparents are my parents. Our grandparents are mum's parents.*
> (234, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

Other factors such as parents' alcoholism and carelessness also played a role in parents being unable to provide the relevant documents or information required:

> *Dad's mom didn't make my birth certificate, as my dad earns money and roams around drinking alcohol. That's why dad doesn't make it.*
> (386, male, 18 street-based child vendor/porter)

> *I got my birth certificate with the help of Aruna Madam* [name changed] *as my father didn't give his citizenship certificate. My father drinks alcohol and he didn't give his citizenship certificate.*
> (306, male, 19, transportation)

9 Tihar is a Hindu festival celebrated in Nepal and parts of India and is a three-day national holiday in Nepal.

> *After hearing my issue, my father told me, he had also lost his card and does not even have a photocopy.*
> (379, male, 23, street-connected/mobile child)

> *To be honest, no one knows our actual age. We just assume. Even my dad doesn't know. When we ask, he just says there was this festival going on, or that happening. I've put down my own age…*
> (081, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

Children whose parents have married multiple times without legally registering the marriages and/or divorces often faced complications in the process of obtaining citizenship:

> *The stepmother has obtained citizenship through my father's name so there would be a problem when we apply for our citizenship (as we are not her children).*
> (285, female, 16, domestic/household worker)

> *Due to the age gap between mother and stepfather, there is a problem with the marriage registration certificate.*
> (036, female, 19, *dohori*)

> *When I was in grade 8, I asked my father for my birth registration but he said that I am not his daughter so he wouldn't make my birth registration.*
> (229, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

In some families, step-parents could be supportive towards adoptive children even when biological parents were not:

> *I have heard a rumour that my mother who died did not give birth to me. My actual mother left me when I was 8 or 9 months old. And also, my father I have now is not my real father – he adopted me. His behaviour towards me might be rude because of it. When I was little, my actual mother left me with my father* [present father] *and used to visit every 1 or 2 weeks. But one day she suddenly stopped visiting. She didn't come for a month and never came back. I heard it in the neighbourhood. I have my birth registration under my present father's name.*
> (241, male, 15, domestic/household worker)

More generally, parents (and/or step-parents) could be reluctant to support their children to obtain citizenship because citizenship is linked to children having a legal right to their parents' property:

> *I have not had my citizenship certificate made, I need to go do that then get a passport, but dad does not agree to have my citizenship certificate made.*
> (177, female, 16, *dohori*)

> *My parents have no other children. If I own citizenship, I would be the only one to receive my father's property. Probably elder uncle is eyeing up his brother's property. I told my father that I don't need anything else, just get me citizenship, but he is reluctant to get it for me. He says there is a lengthy process to get my citizenship.*
> (400, male, 18, street-based child vendor/porter)

This dependence on parents and step-parents provides opportunities for parents to exploit and manipulate their children. Some parents/family members refused to support their children's attempts to obtain citizenship documentation (unless they might benefit):

> *She* [stepmother] *hides the papers and didn't make citizenship certificate.*
> (283, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *When I was in grade 8, I took the supervisor of the organisation to my maternal uncle's house for a birth registration certificate. There was no proper response from the maternal uncle's house. But after the completion of grade 10, the maternal uncle's house responded. He might have responded well knowing that I am going to Japan* [to work] *and can become a means for relatives to earn money.*
> (397, male, 17, street-connected/mobile child)

> *My mother and father told me to get an arranged marriage with a girl from my village and to leave this girl. Where is the happiness for a man to get married twice? My mother and father have called me for an arranged marriage. Even in this Dashain* [most important Hindu festival celebrated in Nepal], *mother and father have called me, they have asked to come home, and we will make citizenship certificate, and it will be good for them if there are the grandchildren with them.*
> (388, male, 21, street-connected/mobile child)

In other cases, children must pay for the information they require: 'I went to search for my father… Though later, after earning some money, I gave 15,000 rupees to my sister to know about my father' (379, male, 23, street-connected/mobile child).

Children who married below the legal age, particularly girls, could face legal repercussions when attempting to obtain citizenship for themselves or their child.

> *Earlier on, the village people, saying that my husband was about to leave for foreign employment, would ask me to have our marriage registered. But I was so small that I couldn't even acquire citizenship. The police would rather put me behind bars. He would tell me, he would return from abroad and register our marriage, I would be 18 years old by then. However, he never returned.* (054, female, 24, *dohori*)

When children who marry illegally then have children themselves, there is no way to prove that the husband is the child's father because paternity would normally be proved through a marriage registration document. The quote below demonstrates how obtaining official documentation can be further complicated when the husband is no longer present:

> *It has been three years since my husband left me… My husband also does not have a citizenship certificate… I had made the birth registration certification from my grandfather's names, but it was lost. That is why the citizenship certificate could not be made. It has been time to send my son to school but there is no citizenship certificate or birth registration certificate.*
> (149, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

Legal support is often required for these complex cases where the relevant individuals (parents or spouses) are unable or unwilling to provide support. This makes the process even more lengthy and costly. In a more extreme case, storyteller 159 resorted to moving to Kathmandu and undertaking sex work to secure citizenship certificates for herself and her son – a process complicated by the death of her husband and her early marriage:

> *There is no one to support me. My husband is dead. They didn't even make any birth registration document. His first wife came and said she didn't know anything. My son was growing up every day. I had to send him to school, but they asked for his birth registration certificate. Then I went home and gathered all the people in the community, but no one helped. They told me to file a case saying I had to get that for my son if no one else. I didn't have my citizenship certificate either. They used to ask for citizenship certificate everywhere to do everything… A lawyer asked me for 10,000 rupees and said he'd prepare a report. I told him I didn't have any money and I was barely making enough to eat. I told him I just had 5,000 and I would send him more once I earned. So, I gave him 4,000 rupees and kept 1,000 for the bus fare and came to Kathmandu with my son. I struggled a lot at that time as well… I smoked, I drank, I cut myself. I expressed my sorrow with the lawyer, and he understood. He wrote an application and filed my case. The people there said I was little so I can't get married and did not agree. They only registered my case after I told them about my struggle. I told the lawyer I didn't have money so I would go to Kathmandu to work and I will manage after I earn some money, then I came here. I earned some money through contact works.*[10] *After some time, I got a call from the court to come to Sindhuli. They made the documents required for me. I finally got my son's birth registration certificate and my citizenship certificate.* (159, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar)

These stories highlight the importance of legal documentation for gaining access to opportunities such as education, decent employment, land ownership, and travel. However, obstacles to registration and obtaining certificates prevent many children and young people from taking advantage of these benefits, leading to further marginalisation and cycles of social and political exclusion.

3.1.9 Drivers of WFCL: conclusion

Most children go to work because of a financial crisis in the family. Without their labour, the family will often be unable to survive. The financial contributions of children were significant and were used to cover rents, debt repayments, living costs and medical expenses. The biggest cause of family debt seems to be related to ill health. Story after story tells of a health crisis that led to a financial crisis. Sometimes children have to work because of debt incurred by medical expenses; sometimes it is because the adult income earners are no longer able to work. Children were aware of the problems facing their families and wanted to help. They exercised what little

10 'Contact works' refers to a type of sex work where an individual arranges meetings with contacts (e.g. via phone/online) to exchange sexual services.

agency they had in order to support their families. This is, of course, a limited form of agency, because they have few options. Nevertheless, to work and support their family rather than go to school was a decision that they often made themselves.

It is unsurprising that financial problems are often accompanied by disruption and violence at home. Children and mothers were often most vulnerable to the impact of increased stressors on family life, such as health crises and financial difficulties, which were often accompanied by increased alcohol use, typically by the father. The life stories reveal a widespread normalisation of violence whereby children have few options to mitigate their exposure to violence or to hold those perpetuating it to account. The prolonged abuse or neglect experienced by children in some families frequently drove or forced children away from the family home (either with or without other family members, such as their mother). But whether or not it was a direct cause of their decision to leave home, leave school or start work, it is significant that so many of these children are carrying the trauma of violence alongside everything else they have to manage.

Violence in itself is a driver of child labour, but also exacerbates children's risk of experiencing further violence. For example, where children have to escape violence at home by entering a workplace that they depend on for board, their lack of social and support networks and dependence on workplace relationships to meet all their needs makes them highly vulnerable. There are also examples where the normalisation of violence and a lack of alternatives leads to violence having to be accepted, both at work and in future relationships.

This sub-section has highlighted the limits of social support systems, including government-provided education, welfare, health and social care, and the lack of institutions or bodies able to intervene in disrupted and abusive situations in the home. Some children dealing with disrupted family relationships also have a related and additional bureaucratic burden to contend with due to constraints around obtaining citizenship and the resource-intensiveness (time, money, etc.) of the process. This leads to the most marginalised families continuing to be excluded from citizenship across generations.

While this section has focused on interconnected and underlying factors that drive child labour, the next section looks at those who influence and assist children on their pathways into leaving school and/or taking up work.

3.2 FINDING WORK AND WORK TRANSITIONS

In the first part of this section, we explore the people that influence children to leave school and take up work, and those that help broker the relationship between employees and employers. These individuals, who could be adults or children, are usually people who are familiar with a child's family, such as relatives, friends, or members of the same village. But there are also some examples where children (especially those migrating from rural areas to Kathmandu) are influenced by people previously unknown to them. As well as outlining these different types of 'intermediaries', this section looks at what the life stories reveal about the role these actors undertake in children's pathways into WFCL.

The second part of this section examines how children transition from one job to another and why. More specifically, it looks at how children transition into the AES and, within this, into roles that are sexually exploitative. The life stories show that children do a wide variety of jobs and move from sector to sector in pursuit of better pay or conditions. Once working in the AES, children tend to remain in the sector. This section looks at the reasons why, including the challenges of finding other types of work.

3.2.1 How children are introduced to workplaces

Friends as influencers

Peers are one of the strongest influences on young people. For many, their friends are the people they feel they can most rely on. A boy with a disrupted family background with a pattern of physical violence said, 'My friends asked me to come to Kathmandu and I said OK. Nobody tried to search me from my home, not even my mother. I used to steal here in Kathmandu. I was taught by my friends' (271, male, 15, street-connected/mobile child). Another child remarked, 'Then after coming to Kathmandu my sister-in-law started mistreating me, so I stayed with friends' (165, female, 23, cabin restaurant/bar). Often, peer pressure was stronger than the influence of the family:

> *I have told my family about my work but not what I do at work. My family doesn't know about my work. When I went to work, my family used to say, 'We haven't done anything less for you so why do you have to go for work?' My friends also used to work, they asked me to go, and that's why I started work.* (192, female, 17, dance bar/club)

Many children stated that they were encouraged by their friends to stop going to school:

> *I have left my studies. My friend's circle was like that. I was young and reckless and influenced by friends. There are also friends who do not study.*
> (197, male, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *I was studying in the village from the very beginning. Back at home, Salina* [friend] *and I were not even allowed to walk together. I left school because Salina left the school*.
> (022, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

In many cases, peer influence ultimately led to decreased motivation and academic decline, and to children then leaving school:

> *I used to like to hang out with my friends, bunk classes, and go to clubs… My study was going too bad. Later I didn't attend classes and I dropped out of college.*
> (289, female, 19, domestic/household worker)

> *I was a good student till grade 8. Then after making friends with bad company, in my teenage years, I spoiled my studies… Then I left my school… I turned from a good student to a bad one.*
> (018, male, 18, *dohori*)

When children feel disconnected from education, they are less likely to see the value in continuing their education and may opt to drop out altogether (see also section 3.1.4). Peer pressure can be strong enough to draw children away from circumstances that would be much better for them. This might be school, or it might be better work:

> *My sister tried to convince me for going to school. She also enrolled me in school. But I dropped out after a few days. I got similar friends as they also did not want to go to school, and we all bunked school.*
> (103, female, 17, dance bar/club)

> *I studied properly until grade 4 there* [school in Kathmandu]. *I left school and started getting spoiled by wandering in Sundhara with my friends*.
> (307, male, 14, transportation)

In the story below, a young boy who was working in a motorbike workshop describes how he was drawn away from good work by his friends:

> *My brother was working in that workshop, and he was trying to shift his work from there. I also worked there for four or five days. Then the workshop owners said to me, if my brother left this job, he will put me in my brother's position. That made me feel happy inside. When I work in that workshop, I feel happy because there is no need of doing work for whole days and I got rest time. In that job there is no need of serving outside for a long time. While working in this workshop, my friends frequently came and called me to go with them. At that time my father scolded my friends and threatened them not to meet with me again. After that incident, I left the workshop and went to the street. Then, I again met my friends and started to stay with them for about two weeks. Then, I again started to collect kawadi* [garbage] *with my friends, they used to cut house wire by using the blade and I used to burn the wire and sell it to kawadi and search some money after selling it and used to eat noodles from it. At night we went to sleep under the bridge.*
> (246, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child)

Sometimes the decision to leave school was neither the result of peer pressure nor the desire of the child themselves, but simply following pathways modelled by their friends.

> *Neither of my friends continued their study and I also decided to leave school after completing my second standard.*
> (203, male, 15, transportation)

> *I dropped out of school because of my friends. All of my friends were working, they wore beautiful clothes with the money they earned from work. Seeing that, I also wanted to go to work so that I can get beautiful clothes as well.*
> (174, female, 22, dance bar/club)

> *Seeing other daiharu* [older friends/peers] *doing jobs, made me also feel like doing that.*
> (013, female, 23, *dohori*)

Peers also show economic possibilities from a distance – so they are not involved in the decision-making, but they represent a possibility.

> *My friends from the village work at dance restaurants here in Kathmandu. They told me that we can earn money by working in a dance restaurant, so I came to Kathmandu alone to earn.*

> *After earning, I thought I would send money to my dad and mom for making their life easier.*
> (141, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

In the following case, the prohibitive cost of education resulted in the children falling into doing what their friends did:

> *I did not get the scholarship of the Medical Science Examination… and the tuition fee was very expensive. That's why I could not study. I worked as a part-time employee because my friends were also doing the same.*
> (023, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Children feel pressure to conform to the norms and expectations of their peer group and get involved in adopting similar behaviours. The influence of friends (and families, as we will see below) is not always benevolent. A common theme in the stories was children being drawn into alcohol and drug consumption through siblings and peers:

> *I learnt to smoke cigarettes and consume tablets. My brother taught me to do so. After five or six years, I started smoking. Neighbour brother* [a friend from the neighbourhood] *taught me to drink alcohol and smoke marijuana. Once I was intoxicated while smoking marijuana… I sniffed dendrite.*
> (358, male, 15, transportation)

> *I started hanging out with friends and I got to know a lot of friends. I started getting spoiled when I was 13 years old. I started smoking myself and gradually became addicted.*
> (029, female, 17, cabin restaurant/bar)

Children's desire to fit within their peers' circle can make them adopt risk-taking behaviours:

> *… a friend taught me to smoke, and then I started smoking six to seven times a day. I used to cough before but now I have started enjoying it. I ran away from home, dropped out of school, and started living on the streets.*
> (206, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child)

> *I didn't study much and left my education. I was not aware, I got into an addiction from peer pressure. I didn't know that one day I would get into addiction.*
> (182, male, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *A school friend taught me to eat Den* [dendrites]. *They were older than me.*
> (250, male, 12, street-connected/mobile child)

> *I used to go to school, and, on the way, I met my friends. They were a bit older than me, they used to like me and cared about me… I smoke with that money. As I grew up, I started to steal from people and smoke with that amount.*
> (240, male, 17, transportation)

And as described in section 3.1.4, substance abuse is related to leaving school.

Friends as intermediaries

Friends often know people who have work and make the introductions or recommendations:

> *My friend used to work as part-time staff here in Kathmandu. That is why I also worked. My friend knew landlord aunty. After my friends recommended me to her, I started working as a domestic labourer then.*
> (082, female, 20, guest house)

And children often explicitly ask their friends to look out for work for them:

> *Then I asked other friends to look for work for me. Through my friends, I got a job in a guest house washing dishes and cleaning rooms.*
> (078, female, 21, guest house)

There are a small number of stories that tell of how friends encouraged each other to work abroad:

> *My friends were from Patan. First, they got the offer of the job, and they took me with them, convincing me that I will earn money.*
> (182, male, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *We met there and became friends. We met in Calcutta, and they invited me to Bangalore with a plane ticket, so I went, and that happened.*
> (108, female, 24, dance bar)

But there are many more stories of friends encouraging migration to urban areas. Peers are a trigger and/or an enabler. They suggest the idea of leaving, and legitimise it, and make it easier to do (it is easier to migrate with a friend than alone).

> *I had many friends in my village. I had a friend aged 21 years. That friend told me, 'Let's go to*

> *Kathmandu, there is nothing here.' When I was 12 years old, I came to Kathmandu to wash dishes in a restaurant. At first, I stayed at my friend's relative's house.*
> (079, female, 19, *khaja ghar*)

> *We used to talk about going to Kathmandu, earning money and quit studying. We were both classmates and childhood friends. Her home and mine was an hour apart. I was 13 years old when I came to Kathmandu.*
> (162, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *I left school because Salina left the school. I was in grade 6 and Salina was in grade 2. We ran away and came to Kathmandu to work.*
> (022, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

Sometimes timely intervention from parents can stop children acting on peer influence.

> *I had a friend from my village. She went to Mustang for work at an early age. She stayed there for couple of years. I was ready to run away and join her for the work, but my family knew about it and said it has to stop.*
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

But even in cases of family intervention, peer influence can be strong enough to override it:

> *After that, Salina's elder sister didn't allow us to work at the canteen and she sent us back to the village. We again ran away and came to Kathmandu and worked in a hotel. But my sister didn't allow us to work, and she kept us in her room/apartment. We didn't stay there, and we chose to work in a hotel.*
> (022, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

'Friends' are not always genuine friends, but rather individuals seizing an opportunity to make some money. One girl who works in a cabin restaurant/bar recounted how she was brought into that type of work:

> *My friend asked me to go to work with her. Also, I told my friend to arrange a job for me. So, she did it and I started to do that job. That job was not a good one. Later, she took the money while making me work there. I wasn't paid. If we tried to leave the workplace, we were physically abused. They didn't allow me to even leave the job. They made excuses when I asked for money. We were told to get paid 10,000 rupees monthly, but they didn't pay us. I worked for three to four years and ran away from there… My father used to drink alcohol and the people from my area talked about me, so I ran away from home too. And got stuck in Kathmandu. Later my friend asked me if I want to work. She took a handsome amount of money. Later, Sahu* [male employer] *came and took us. Sahu had given her some money at that time as she was already paid earlier. They said commission but I didn't know what it was for. People say bad things about us.*
> (093, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

In this extreme case, the storyteller's friend contributed to, and profited from, her being trafficked: the owners of the cabin restaurant/bar where she worked controlled her movements with the threat of violence, and sexually exploited her over the course of several years. The owners were later given a two-year jail sentence after employees reported them to the police.

On a more positive note, friends are not only brokers, but are also co-workers and companions and a source of security and solidarity. Friends are often the factor that children describe in relation to the pleasure they experience in working (see also section 3.3):

> *I have also taught five or six friends to sell photos and water. They were also taught to sell and there will be lots of friends. It gets a lot of fun. It is joyous as well. Some sell in one place and some sell in another place. It is fun to sell. When there is no money, friends give loans. They don't give more than 300 rupees. I also give.*
> (352, female, 8, street-based vendor/porter)

> *I went to the restaurant to ask the salary and he told me it was 7,000 rupees. I did it because I thought I would be together with friends.*
> (008, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Given that so many children come from dysfunctional families, it is hardly surprising that they are so strongly influenced by their friends. But their friends are also young and may not have the experience to understand the implications of all their decisions.

Family as influencers and intermediaries

Families are also strong influencers. As we have seen in section 3.1, they may encourage, cajole, or in some instances force their children into work. Often, work starts in a relatively low-key way with the child accompanying the parent to work and helping out there:

> *My mum used to do household work. She used to take us sometimes and we used to help her in whatever way we could*.
> (277, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

> *I went with my mother to catering work when I was nine or ten years old. My mother also used to work there.*
> (349, male, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *My father was doing a painting job and needed people to work with him. I told my father that I would do it and father kept me.*
> (357, male, 18, restaurant and hotel-based child)

This might in effect be a form of childcare (there is nowhere else for the child to go while the adult is working), a way of teaching the child this type of work, a support to the adult's work, or an opportunity for the family to earn a little more. But, as discussed in section 3.1, children are also often sent away to work by relatives during times of family crisis:

> *We did not have enough land for production. That is why I came to Kathmandu when I turned 12 or 13 years old with my didi* [maternal aunt and uncle]. *I babysat my didi's child and worked in a brick factory. They gave me 1,500 rupees monthly. I worked there for six months, I used to work from 12 midnight to 1.00pm. My mother gave me some money.*
> (107, female, 17, cabin restaurant/bar)

Many children get work through their siblings who have already moved to Kathmandu and/or are working:

> *My sister works there. I only go when it gets hectic for her. The hotel is in Thamel. It is a kind of hotel where one needs to go to sleep with 'guests'.*
> (061, female, 23, guest house)

> *My didi* [elder sister] *was in Kathmandu. There was a landlord who brought her here when she was young when she came to Kathmandu. When didi was grown-up and came to the village, we could not even recognise her. Didi lived here for 12 years and came to the village at the age of 22. She may have come at the age of nine or ten in Kathmandu. When she came to Kathmandu, she brought me too.*
> (213, male, 15, domestic/household worker)

> *When my sister was 12 years old my mummy's brother brought her here. Mummy's brother had worked here before and later had gone to the village. He brought my sister here to work and later suggested bringing the younger siblings too.*
> (185, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Sometimes the jobs are a whole family affair:

> *My mother first took me to the Terai to my sister's place, my stepsister used to live in* [Nepal district]. *I stayed there for a day and stepsister left me in the hotel. Thereafter she used to send money to my home, but I am not aware of the amount. When didi brought me from* [Nepal district] *she told me we'll go and stay together. Another sister of mine also worked in the same hotel. I was assured a salary of 5,000 rupees. The third eldest sister of mine worked in the same hotel. I used to serve food. My sister got married about three years after I arrived. Then after three or four days, she even called our younger brother there. We had to work from five in the morning to seven in the evening. We had holidays during Dashain and Tihar. After my sister got married, the owner also called my younger brother. He is about 14 years old. It has been about five months since my brother took up the job*.
> (166, female, 15, *khaja ghar*)

These excerpts demonstrate that family plays a diverse role in children's entry into work. While some children are directly employed by family members, others are taken to work for others or join their family members in workplaces. Familial relationships can be supportive. But these relationships carry specific weight and are informed by social, cultural and religious norms that require children to respect their elders and follow the instructions of those more senior to them within the family structure (especially female children). The weight familial relationships carry and children's dependence on family social bonds can make it difficult for children to challenge family members' (including a spouse's) expectations that they begin or continue to work, even when conditions are exploitative:

> *I started working in their shops after my mother told me to. I washed dishes in the momo* [steamed dumpling] *shop of Mahakai for five months. I had to work from ten in the morning to eight in the evening. They used to give me momo to eat. I used to sleep at an aunt's house. They gave me no money though.*
> (361, male, 12, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *Bad things were happening there. I didn't know. Bad things meaning, we had to do sex with clients. It*

was not only a spa but there was massage as well, and bad things would happen there. My husband had known about that before. He could have told me before that. He sent me there because of money… When I told my husband that I don't like this work, he told me to work because we won't be able to make happiness without suffering.
(058, female, 24, spa/massage)

Other influencers and intermediaries

For some children, the influencers and intermediaries are neighbours or people known to them or their family (including members of their extended family). Children were often taken from their villages by an 'aunty' or 'uncle' who is known to the family but may not be a blood relative. This is often someone trying to help but can equally be someone whose intention is to deceive the child to be exploited or harmed.

An uncle from my neighbourhood in the village brought me here. He told me that it was his sister's house… I was only 12 years old then… I was afraid that someone might sell me.
(227, female, 15, domestic/household worker)

As my condition was not good at home, I thought it would be better if I go and work at other people's homes. I came to Kathmandu with the same 'aunty'. I started working there when I was very young.
(094, female, 13, guest house)

At the village, our financial situation got worse. I also felt bad. I thought my return was in vain. I thought I should have stayed outside. I was thinking like that when a person from the village came and promised to take me outside. That person took me to Janakpur [name of the district] *at someone's house to work.*
(234, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

There was a man in our village, and he took me. House owner is the one who came there. He used to come there to visit. He told one of my known sisters [female friends or acquaintances] *to search for a person who would work at his home. I was seven years old at that time.*
(048, female, 19, *khaja ghar*)

Later aama [a woman who was not a blood relation] *came from Kathmandu. She was looking for a person to look after a baby. Her father's house was in our village – half an hour's distance from our house* [in Chitwan district in the south of Nepal]. *Later, I came to Kathmandu with her.*
(229, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

I was 13 years old when I started work in Pokhara. I worked for two to three years in a hotel. My uncle took me with him. He used to work as a labourer. I asked him to search for a job for me as a domestic worker, but he put me in a hotel. I was paid 500 rupees per month. I was just a child then. I had a wish to eat and dress like others.
(005, female, 25, *dohori*)

Known intermediaries, such as relatives or friends, help legitimise decisions around beginning work for some parents, instilling a sense of trust in a potential workplace or employer:

There was a didi in my village who told me that there is a good job in Kathmandu, would I like to go? I asked my mother. Mother agreed because the person is also a neighbour whom she knew.
(078, female, 21, guest house)

After my father's friend found work for me, my father also told me to work. I started working when I was 11 years old.
(363, female, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child)

Yet, these relationships can also lead to a misplaced trust that draws children unknowingly into dangerous situations that they might otherwise have avoided:

Whatever happens, we get the money. We get half the money that client has paid. For massage, we get 25 per cent of the amount and for sex we get half the amount. I was brought into that place by mit-aama[11] *by trick, others are also brought here with deceit*.
(058, female, 24, spa/massage)

Job opportunities could also be local and brokered by people who are working in the neighbourhood:

11 In Nepal, *mit-aama* refers to the mother of a close friend described as a '*mit*'. A '*mit*' is a close friend with whom a ritualised ceremony is carried out, called a *miteri*, to sanctify the relationship. When two friends carry out a *miteri* ceremony, their friend's family members are then referred to using the prefix '*mit*'. Individuals refer to each other using the term '*mit*'. Therefore, '*mit-aama*' here means the mother of a child's *mit*.

> *There was a khaja ghar in front of our home and a dai working there told me about a job and asked me if I wanted to work but I had to work at night… That dai found a job for me at a restaurant.*
> (051, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Here, as for many stories, we can see how the storyteller started out in the *khaja ghar* but by the time she was telling her story, she was working in a dance bar.

Local work often means younger children: party palaces, which employ teams of employees on a per event basis, are a common starting point for children. Often, the employee (team leader) tasked with finding employees recruits children and young people from their neighbourhood:

> *I was 14 when I first started working there. Many people around my house worked at the party palace too. If the party palace needed more workers, I was called to work there. I worked as a waiter there. As I kept working, I got less interested in school.*
> (028, male, 18, dance bar/club)

> *I used to work at parties. I was ten years old when I did that work. My neighbour used to work there. I asked them if I could work there. My father also asked me to request them.*
> (343, male, 19, transportation)

Given some of the descriptions of abuses that occur in the party palaces, the younger age of children working there is significant because of age-related psychological and physical vulnerabilities, which exacerbate harm:

> *Later I worked in the party palace. They would also forcefully try to make me drink alcohol and other stuff while I was working at the party palace.*[12] *They should be happy with the people who come to work, but they used to touch us forcefully.*
> (177, female, 16, *dohori*)

As well as friends, family and known local people, there are a few other ways of entering work that are significant. Sometimes people were asked to work by people that they met:

> *I met a dai in the bus park. He used to wash vehicles in the bus park. I was told to buy the cleaning materials. I lived with the same dai and worked there for five months.*
> (217, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child)

> *One day while I was sleeping on the street a man woke me up. He asked me to work in his water tanker*.
> (231, male, 13, transportation)

In some cases, a child may migrate to a city without any prior knowledge or acquaintances, yet still receive multiple job offers from various individuals. Such incidents were uncommon in the stories, yet interesting to note:

> *To begin with, I didn't know anyone in Kathmandu, now I know everybody. Early on, I would get lost and fear someone might sell me off. Some friends would ask me to come weave carpets, some would ask me to work in restaurants. I would not come, 'people might sell me off'. 'I haven't even seen the place', I would say. But I arrived anyway*.
> (098, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

Sometimes those that are working in a *khaja ghar* or dance bar are offered other work by customers:

> *An uncle used to come into that restaurant and suggested that I work in a public bus service.*
> (365, female, 13, restaurant and hotel-based child)

> *A customer asked me if I wanted to work in another place as well. I said OK and then I got an evening job in a dohori.*
> (071, female, 21, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *I wandered around for two to three days. It was summertime. It was not so cold, and I felt a little bit easy to stay outside. I used to eat what was thrown away by others. That was seen by a sahu* [hotel owner] *there. He asked me if I wanted to work in a shop and he would pay 500 rupees per month.*
> (395, male, 19, restaurant and hotel-based child)

There were a few examples of people coming to the villages to ask for workers, but these seemed to be more specific to a few professions, such as brick-making and carpet-weaving:

> *People used to come to the village to recruit people to work in carrying bricks. I came here for the same reason.*
> (140, female, 15, guest house)

> *Owners of the carpet factory came there. People came to select every year. Money and bonuses were given there. They selected my elder sister.*

12 It is not clear whether the life storyteller is referring to her employers, co-workers or customers here.

> *I also wanted to go to work, but they said now you are small. They said that they would only take those above eight or ten years. Another man came. He knew my father. I said I will go to work with that man, and he said OK and took me to Dakshin Dhoka.*
> (381, male, 14, street-connected/mobile child)

> *There was a village lady from a village whom my friend introduced me to. She had opened a hotel and she said she would give me 8,000 to 9,000* [rupees] *and told me to stay and eat there. And so, I came back again.*
> (146, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

At the riskier end of the work spectrum, there were examples of brokers or 'pimps' intentionally engaging in the sexual exploitation of children, often taking large percentages of the payments for themselves. In the following extract, storyteller 025 describes how older female acquaintances she met in Kathmandu sexually exploited her for profit:

> *I came to know so many didis and they made me do bad work* [sex work]. *They used to manipulate me to do so. They took advantage of my weakness. At that time, I was working as a waitress in the café. They used to take me from the halfway point while coming back from work to guest houses and make me sleep with 'guests'. They used to call the 'guests' before and fix my price as well* [the storyteller would receive a certain percentage of the rate from this arrangement]. *I was helpless then because one of them was looking after my food and accommodation.*
> (025, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Those engaging in sex work initially have little idea of the commissions the broker is taking:

> *After that night, milaune dai* [pimp] *managed to find me a job at a khaja ghar. There I started to drink alcohol and chew tobacco. I used to drink and go with the client to spend* [the] *night. When the clients approached us directly, we used to send them to milaune dai. After negotiations with the client, milaune dai used to give us 1,000 rupees for daytime service and 1,500 to 2,500 rupees for night-time service. I got arrested twice. Both times milaune dai helped me get out from the lock-up. Milaune dai had nine to ten girls aged between 13 and 25 years in his contact. Later, I discovered he used to charge 5,000 rupees from the client and didn't even give us half the amount he charged to the clients.*
> (142, female, 22, *khaja ghar*)

There can be a more physically violent side to the brokers' role, although this seems to be rare in the stories:

> *The owner didn't beat me at work, the middleman used to beat me.*
> (285, female, 16, domestic/household worker)

The above examples reveal how some individuals purposefully brokered children into sexual exploitation. However, some of the people who broker children into these jobs do so with benevolent intent: they may have little idea what they are brokering the child into and the dangers that the child may face:

> *It was my first time in a café restaurant, so I didn't know anything. There were many ladies. I was young and there were other elder sisters. They were married women. I was the only 'girl' there, so all the 'guests' liked me and kept asking for me. They used to force me to eat things I didn't normally eat. They used to try to hold my hands and touch other sensitive parts. I only went there because I didn't have any other options. I had to come at ten in the morning and they would drop me at nine at night. My family had told me not to do such work, but I had lied and hadn't told them about my job. There was a sister who was a security guard. I had asked her to look for a job and she had sent me there, but she didn't know it was like that*.
> (087, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

The complex relationship between what seem to be normal eating establishments (e.g. a *khaja ghar*) and the sex industry obscures the hidden purposes of some of these workplaces and what become clear pathways for children's engagement in hazardous work once they start clearing and serving tables (discussed further in section 3.2.2).

3.2.2 Work transitions

Non-AES work as a starting point

There were many examples of children beginning work as domestic labourers, or working in construction, transportation, or childcare. They are often aged 12 or under when they start these jobs; some are eight years old or even younger:

> *My sister also ran away from home to work at a brick kiln when her friend said she would find a job for her. There she carried bricks for six months. After that her friend found her a job here and she started working here* [in a hotel in Kathmandu].
> (139, female, 18, guest house)

> *I came to Kathmandu with the help of my thulo aama* [aunt]*. She helped me to take a bus ride from my village to Kathmandu. She asked the bus driver to drop me at the location. It has been three to four years that I have lived here in Kathmandu. Initially, I babysat and after that, I started doing a sewing job. Later I started doing the cooking job*.
> (031, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

Many of these jobs are in the informal sector but there was also a prevalence of pre-teens beginning work in party palaces. Although party palaces are larger-scale venues in the formal sector, the nature of employment – where a team of workers are hired on a per event basis – enables children to work temporarily and flexibly, without permanently disrupting school or their household responsibilities. As described above, children were often very young when they started their work in party palaces:

> *I started working since I was ten years old. Work was really difficult. I had got work in a party palace. Since I started working from a young age, I didn't get the chance to study.*
> (278, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *Since I was 12 years old, I started working in a party palace. I had to wipe plates, arrange napkins, and wipe spoons. I also had to bring clean dishes from the washing place and pick up the used plates. Sometimes I also had to wash dishes. I used to get 200–300 rupees. I had to go there at six and seven in the morning and then come back at 10 or 11 in the evening.*
> (158, female, 13, *khaja ghar*)

Children moved between jobs frequently, sometimes because they were not paid enough or not paid at all, or because they experienced abuse at work:

> *I started a conductor job from micro bus in Sankhamul. I quit that job because they didn't pay my salary.*
> (345, male, 17, transportation)

> *The reason behind me leaving the previous job was the owner's behaviour. I used to get scolded all the time.*
> (228, male, 17, domestic/household worker)

Children also left their jobs because of work pressure and long hours:

> *Later, when I went to work at the garage, I was 12 years old. I had to work the lot and lift heavy stuff and the black stain would be all over and the work was difficult, and the owner was an Indian and it was difficult to understand him, and I got a lot of scolding, and he did not pay on time. He did not give me half of my money.*
> (287, male, 18, domestic/household worker)

Transitions between very different types of work could be frequent. This story shows how the storyteller undertook five different roles within three workplaces over the course of a few years:

> *When I was 10 or 11 years old, I worked in an office… There I had to clean the office and make tea… My salary was around 2,500 rupees. I worked from 10.00am to 9.00pm. I must have worked like this for seven or eight months. I had a dispute over my salary, and I left that job and I became unemployed. Similarly, when I was 12 and a half years old, I used to work in the canteen… I used to pick the plates at the beginning. After a while I got to know people and I started working as a kitchen helper. I used to cut vegetables and fishes. I worked as a labourer too. I used to carry heavy bricks there. I learned to plaster a wall a little… It's been three or four months since I started working in the vehicle. The salary is very low.*
> (306, male, 19, transportation)

Another pattern is that children tend to go back to old venues when things get difficult: 'After staying in the road for five or six days I went again from the brick kiln' (226, female, 14, domestic/household worker). Because there are so few work opportunities for many of these children, they end up going back to where they were, because they cannot find better alternatives, or transition to roles in the AES.

Reasons for transitioning into the AES

Some children transition into the AES because of difficult and/or exploitative conditions in other sectors. There are a few stories of girls who started off as labourers and found the work too physically tough, so graduated to AES venues. In one case, a girl went to work in a massage parlour because she was tired of hard labour: 'Later I came to work in the spa and massage centre. I did not feel like working for the first couple of months. The owner asked me to leave if I was not interested in the work. And

then I decided to work there because I was tired of working as a labourer' (153, female, 25, spa/massage). In another example, storyteller 118 transitions from washing dishes and house cleaning to working in a massage parlour because of exploitative and abusive working conditions:

> *My sister from the village found me a job. I came here and started washing dishes in the canteen. I used to work at that time, and I was paid 3,000 or 2,500 rupees. I was told that I only had to wash the dishes. I had to do everything from washing dishes, to washing clothes in the house of the owner of the hotel and cleaning the house. I was not even provided with a proper meal. I was physically abused too. Because of that I left that job and started working at another place.*
> (118, female, 23, spa/massage)

Others moved to the AES because they were previously in even more vulnerable situations on the streets (where they were constantly at risk of sexual harassment, assault and robbery) or in abusive situations at home. This makes their dependence on the accommodation that they get with some jobs in the AES even more important. For storyteller 058, taking work in the AES was simply a result of not being able to get work elsewhere:

> *There was no other work. I couldn't do other work because I was just married and was living in other people's house, there was not even a place for me to sleep then.*
> (058, female, 24, spa/massage)

For children arriving in Kathmandu from rural Nepal with very limited resources or contacts, finding work in *khaja ghars* or small guest houses in their place of arrival (e.g. the transport hub of Gongabu, where buses arrive from the districts) is one of few options available to them.

> *I left everything and picked a bus to Kathmandu from Dang, Tulsipur. I was dropped at the bus park here in Kathmandu. I was very unaware of this new city… I had only 200 rupees in my pocket at that time. I was too hungry* [feels sad] *and I saw a khaja ghar near the bus park. The owner of that khaja ghar was there and I asked her for some food as I was too hungry. I gave 100 rupees to that khaja ghar owner for the food. After that, she asked me if I was new to the place and knowing I had just arrived in the city she offered me a job at her place. I had to work 12 hours and sometimes I used to wake up early at 4.00am for the cleaning of the khaja ghar.*
> (069, female, 18, *khaja ghar*)

Cleaning, serving, and washing up were often the starting points in the working lives of these children, but in transport hubs such as Gongabu, where *khaja ghars* may be connected to the wider adult entertainment industry and the sex industry, it is not surprising that a proportion of the children arriving there end up working in roles related to this industry (discussed further below).

As discussed previously (see section 3.1), lack of skills, education, and citizenship certificates were factors that limited employment opportunities. But even if individuals did have qualifications and were educated, it could be difficult to find relevant work, or for work outside of the sector to cover living costs. For example, storyteller 017's wife, a teacher with a bachelor's degree, was working with him in a *dohori* (017, male, 24, *dohori*), and despite studying marketing, storyteller 086 was unable to find work that utilised these skills, and only found employment after her sister referred her to a massage parlour and spa (086, female, 22, spa/massage). Storytellers were aware that in a labour market with limited opportunities, compromises had to be made. For some, this meant de-prioritising their feelings about work and learning to tolerate the negative aspects of their workplaces:

> *It is bad. Initially I felt bad too. I thought it was not worth doing this job to sustain yourself. Then I thought I neither have skills, nor education, I have only studied until the ninth grade. I quit my studies in the middle, so I have to work here. I just ignore these days. There is no point in arguing with them. You may not even get the job you have, so you have to be tolerant. Sometimes the 'guests' try to be touchy, I feel bad when that happens*.
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

Finally, there were also some children who wanted to work in entertainment venues because they were interested in music or aspired to be singers or dancers. For example, some of the children were attracted by the *dohori* and liked the idea of being a dancer, or having a life that is much more colourful than the one that they experienced at home. This allure of this pathway is heightened by the potential to earn higher salaries:

> *They were looking for singers and I went to the dohori. I enjoyed six/seven hours of music, it made me happy and helped me forget my sorrow.*
> (147, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

> *I was always interested in dancing right from my childhood. I had a dream of becoming a heroine in movies. I was very quick in picking up dance moves.*

Since, I decided to get involved. For the first time I stepped into a dance bar, but I never knew anything about dance bars.
(099, female, 24, dance bar/club)

I finally got a job at a cultural centre with the support of my friend. Then, after working there for some time, my friend's boyfriend told me that I can earn more in the entertainment field. So I entered this field. I have no ideas about it, but I consider myself as an artist.
(073, female, 24, dance bar/club)

Transitions within the AES

Types of workplace and role are varied within the AES. Once someone had started working in the AES, there were examples where the risks and benefits of working in the different types of workplace were deliberated as decisions were made about where to work. For example, storyteller 017 described how the *dohori* felt safer and more open than smaller restaurants that have closed-off spaces where the sexual exploitation of children can take place:

Girls of 17–18 are found working there. That is the case in most restaurants. Even girls of 14–15 years of age. The reason to hire such young girls is because of the 'guests'. 100 per cent bad deeds are done in the restaurants. It only looks decent from the outside. On the inside every corner is partitioned. The dohori is open. Girls go out via contact in dohori. There are no separate rooms in a dohori. It is all homely there. There might be some with separate room doing bad deeds in some places. I won't deny that.
(017, male, 24, *dohori*)

The salaries are usually lower in workplaces where lower levels of intimacy with customers is required, so there are trade-offs between different venues:

Even though I worked very hard, I dropped out of college because I could not pay my college fees and house rent. My friend used to work in a dance bar. I also worked there in the beginning but I didn't feel comfortable, so I started working in a dohori. My friend also suffered a lot. She studied by working in a dance bar.
(175, female, 19, *dohori*)

While in many establishments young women and girls are not required to 'go out' with customers (i.e. engage in direct sexual activity), they are working in a sexually charged atmosphere, and the opportunity to earn substantially more is in front of them. This means that it is hard to avoid this work, particularly when any sort of financial crisis occurs. In certain contexts, engaging in the provision of direct sexual services can command significantly higher salaries:

There are also separate girls who do such work. Dancers also do such work. Their salaries are high. I have a friend who used to tell me to do such work because one can earn a lot of money. Their salary range is around 15,000–20,000 rupees. Such types of activity happen in same types of place everywhere.
(198, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Some girls and young women choose to move away from sexually exploitative workplaces when they become aware of abusive or exploitative conditions:

I've witnessed a friend of mine getting bashed up after she refused to entertain a customer. Apparently, the owner had already agreed to provide the girl as demanded by the client. I quit working after that. In fact, I escaped harrowing ordeals for I was clear that I could not afford to engage in hanky panky and spoil my future once and for all.
(184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar)

Some girls resort to providing direct sexual services when they are desperate and do not have alternatives:

No one looked after us or gave money when my daughter was ill, but the lady said she would give me money if I slept with some person. So I went. She gave me 2,000 rupees for sleeping with one person. I found that she had asked 4,000 rupees from the guy, but it was common practice to give half and keep half. After that, they called five people. Two people on a daily basis and gave us 1,000–1,500 rupees. They used to take us to different places.
(053, female, 24, cabin restaurant/bar)

I told my friend how she could do such work, but she told me that we had to do such work since we were not literate enough to do other work.
(066, female, 23, *dohori*)

There were also examples where both the ambiguity of the workplace and role, and the child's vulnerability, resulted in children being unaware of what they were getting into. A lot of stories talked about how things started out fine in their jobs and then gradually they were told to do work that they did not want to, or they were paid

less than they had been paid at first, or payment stopped entirely. In the following excerpt, a girl explains how she was drawn into smoking and alcohol consumption through what at first seemed a straightforward waitressing job:

> *Her sister-in-law used to work in an eatery that was looking for people… We weren't told anything at the beginning, they told us we only had to work as a waiter and our job was to take order and give it at the counter. I believed them and started working but it turned out to be something else. The salary was 8,000 rupees and we received tips. It was like this: if you sit with 'guests' and drink a bottle of wine you get 100 rupees. You got tips in similar manner from those who smoked. I had never smoked or consumed alcohol before.*
> (140, female, 15, guest house)

Transitions towards the more sexual end of the industry as a result of misinformation were common. These stories highlight the lack of knowledge children have about the nature of the AES, and their gradual realisation of what they are required to do:

> *They treated me well for the first few days* [in *khaja ghar*]*. But I later found out that we had to sit with 'guests'… It's not that bad, but it is uncomfortable when men touch your body.*
> (165, female, 23, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *It is written 'guest house' outside and there is a khaja ghar, upstairs there are rooms. I knew nothing about such in the beginning but later came to know about it. First day they let you do the good work. They let you serve snacks and talk with the 'guest' but later they tell you to do other stuff. Some people ask to eat snacks and not involve in physical activity. Some have to do the bad stuff.*
> (100, female, 24, dance bar/club)

> *As soon as I came to Kathmandu, I got a job in a canteen in the slum. In that place most of the 'guests' were male. My friend and I used to work together. There used to be some didis in that place. They used to sleep with the 'guests'… Those didis asked us if we were willing to earn money or not. We told them we don't want to earn money this way… Later we discovered that the hotel was for that purpose only. We regretted going to that hotel*.
> (022, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

The following story powerfully illustrates how girls can transition from cleaning and food preparation to being sexually exploited. Storyteller 085 worked in various jobs from the age of ten, including at party palaces, in catering and in a school canteen. After several years, she was referred by an 'uncle' to work in a *khaja ghar*:

> *He said it would be good to work there as I just needed to serve orders to customers, but later on he started asking me to go with customers who had enough money with them… Encountering this sort of situation, I said I will not work if I am treated in such a way. I used to get 10,000 salary per month working from 6.00am until 10.00pm. But that uncle said it's fine if you won't go. You can leave the job, we will get enough other girls to do this kind of work. After that I started working at the banquet again.*
> (085, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

Whereas this storyteller realised what was happening and was able to return to a previous workplace, others are unable to leave, especially if dependent on the accommodation associated with the workplace:

> *I got off here at bus park. I came here alone. I didn't know where to go or what to do. So, I was standing on the overhead bridge of bus park when a stranger came and asked if I wanted to work and I agreed. He took me to a khaja ghar to work. The work was to wash dishes, prepare lunch, so I thought I could easily do it, this I agreed. I worked as dishwasher and helper there for two days, but after two days the suhuni* [female owner] *of the khaja ghar told me I had to go away with 'guests'. When I asked her what that meant, she told me I had to go with 'guests' and had to sit, eat and sleep with them. After that I started staying with 'guests'. I used to work all day in the khaja ghar and used to stay with a 'guest' at night. Once the owner lady gave me 10,000 rupees and said I had to pay her back later. When I asked her about the payment for my work, she responded saying 'what had I done there?' When I asked her about the money for going away at night with 'guests', she said she didn't know anything about it. They didn't pay for my work at the khaja ghar.*
> (141, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

When this storyteller arrived in Kathmandu, she knew no one and therefore did not have a place to stay or any way to support herself. She agreed to work in the *khaja ghar* at first, because she believed she would only be cooking and washing up. While in the story it is unclear on how she became involved in providing sexual services to customers, she did so under the impression that she

would be paid for her work. Once her owner refused to pay her, she likely believed she had no way to seek redress, as prostitution is illegal in Nepal. By facilitating, encouraging, and profiting from her employee undertaking illegal work, the owner also created a situation in which this vulnerable young woman became more vulnerable and more susceptible to abuse.

Reasons to stay in the AES

The life stories show that once children have crossed the threshold into the AES it is difficult to cross back – partly because it would mean a substantial cut in salary.

> *My mother got paralysis some years back. If she had not, I had been thinking to quit this sector because now I have a good education as well. I was planning not to work at night as people around here also perceive this negatively. But my mother was then ill. As soon as I think of leaving the sector, many problems, one after another, come up.*
> (085, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

Often, the sector was compared to others with poorer working conditions. A range of more exacting alternatives to the AES were described, including engaging in exploitative work, remaining at home vulnerable to abuse, and being unable to work at all ('In the past, I stayed hungry, and without money. Now at least I don't have to stay hungry') (046, female, 19, *dohori*).

The higher earning potential and ability to top up salaries with commission and tips in the AES compared to other sectors was often cited as a reason for accepting adverse conditions, even though, in general, base salary rates were deemed low:

> *For other jobs we have to wait the whole month and get 7,000 rupees per month, and we can't wait the whole month. Here, we can earn 400–500 every day if nothing. Even if I can save 100 rupees a day, I can save 3,000 in a month, so I am fine in this sector. Because there is some money in it*.
> (047, female, 23, cabin restaurant/bar)

Working in the AES means that some workers have access to earning opportunities that allow them to meet these sorts of costs. The quote that follows gives an idea of the sorts of wages that children can earn in the AES – noting that both the salaries and the patterns of work are highly gendered, and that higher earnings may be dependent on engaging in more intimate forms of work:

> *Now there is not much difference between the wages of boys and girls. Either girls have to sell their body to earn more. We boys get enough from tips. The minimum salary is 2,000 rupees for anyone who comes to the dohori at the beginning. Only singers get paid up to 6,000 or 7,000. Compared to boys, female friends have earned more by selling their own bodies… The only difference is that boys get paid 500 rupees more than girls. It is up to you to earn more than your salary. Girls earn money from outside, that is, from customers.*
> (180, male, 18, *dohori*)

Nevertheless, it is important to note that covering personal and familial expenses in the capital is often still challenging, even if jobs in the AES offer better pay than other sectors: 'The apartment rent is 7,000 rupees. Sometimes I don't have so I take a loan from my friends. This morning only, I used all my tips money to buy medicine worth 5,000 rupees for my father and sent home' (164, female, 21, *dohori*).

While there is some fluidity across jobs once children enter the AES, it is harder for them to get out of the sector completely because of a lack of alternatives.

> *Many are brought by intermediaries saying that they would get them to work in hotels* [khaja ghars]*, in restaurants and dohori. The first few months are OK at work, but gradually they are trapped in hell. Many of my friends are also trapped in this work. Very few people are in this sector because of interest.*
> (200, male, 20, dance bar/club)

Often, workers would leave AES jobs in response to poor treatment and exploitative (including sexually exploitative) conditions, only for these types of conditions to be experienced again in new settings:

> *Then I went to Thamel because there they pay you more. I used to work from 6 to 12. I had to spend a lot of time in the dance bar and I told them I cannot do it. So, I left that place after doing only four or five days. They used to provide drop-off after work but not pick-up. Later, I returned to the same restaurant again. In the first month they paid 8,000 rupees as agreed, but the next month he did not pay the money on time and said he doesn't have the money.*
> (003, female, 25, *dohori*)

> *They used to only pay me 5,000 rupees as salary. That amount was not enough as I started living by myself. My rent itself was 3,500 rupees. Then a dai*

offered me a job saying I could work if I wanted to as that money was not sufficient for me. He said I only had to do what I was doing here. So, I thought if I had to dance no matter here or there and would receive double the salary, so why would I not work there? So I went, but I went because they said my salary would be 10,000 rupees. It was a dance bar… I went there. Dance bar is not like a dohori. We have to interact with 'guests' in a dance bar, the 'guests' aren't normally nice. They try to do things, 90 out of 100 come there with ill intentions. Some offer money asking to go with them, some try to touch and the owner kicks us out if we don't increase the sales [food/drinks]. *We have to sell anyhow, whether by sitting with them or chatting with them, we have to sell no matter what. If not, they withhold the salary. It was really bad working there. There is a separate corner in the dance bar. The 'guests' used to pinch our hands* [as a signal] *and we used to take them to cabins.* [In the cabin] *no one knows where the 'guest' touches you. Such a space is called special, and it costs additional 500 rupees to stay there. It leaves bruises so I quit there and worked in another restaurant. It was exactly the same there. I worked there for one and a half years.* (155, female, 22, dance bar/club)

Some children and young people try to get out of their difficult situations by setting up their own businesses, but this can be fraught with difficulties and often requires good contacts and/or protection:

After working in that Dohori Sanjh for seven months, we decided to do something on our own. Along with our second brother-in-law [second elder sister's husband] *we started a hotel. At first, brother-in-law used to manage everything in the hotel, but later on, when business started growing, we also started giving our time there. We ran a hotel in the house where we lived, but also police used to arrest us very often accusing that we employed girls in our hotel. Police started to give us a lot of trouble. Hence, we stopped running that hotel and sold the things… We went into loss. We had taken a loan from the village. It went in vain.* (144, female, 17, *dohori*)

Perhaps because my business was on the roadside, people used to touch me, pat on my back. So I looked for a cheap shutter [a room/space in houses for shops] *but it was riskier for me because guys would come in while trying to close it for the day and some would just refuse to leave. Some drunk people used to come and do as they wanted. I used to sleep there. One day some guys had come to eat in the evening and asked me to open up and said they would pay me to do things and no one would know. They even used to say it was no big deal and let them stay as they would marry me. Some used to threaten me, saying they would spread rumours about what I do there and make it difficult for me.* (081, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

3.2.3 Finding work and work transitions: conclusion

Most of the children who told their stories reported actively seeking work themselves. There were a small number of examples of intermediaries or brokers who come to rural villages explicitly to recruit, but most children begin work with the assistance of individuals with whom they had a prior relationship (whether this is based on familial, communal or friendship ties). Although trafficking exists, it was rarely recounted in the stories we collected.

When children begin work in Kathmandu they usually start washing dishes or some other lower-level job. They are often poorly paid or not paid at all and abused, so they seek better paid work, which often leads to work where they are sexually vulnerable (including being sexually harassed or sexually exploited). Sometimes they transition into the AES because the work in other sectors is so hard. Some children are drawn to entertainment venues, such as *dohoris*, because they could sing or dance, or because they liked the music. This entertainment world seems more interesting and colourful as well as offering the potential to earn more than cleaning and waiting tables (although this often means engaging with customers in ways that consitute sexual exploitation in order to earn tips and commission).

It is possible to infer that the youngest children are the most exploited because they do not know what to expect, they do not have networks and, in cases where they have arrived in Kathmandu alone, they are highly dependent on workplaces for accommodation and other basics. They are also less confident in being able to assert themselves to protect themselves. As they come into their mid-teens, they tend to have more choices, so frequently change jobs.

Leaving the AES completely is difficult because of the lack of opportunities that offer similar levels of remuneration. This can result in the acceptance of adverse working

conditions within a workplace, and/or frequent shifts between workplaces in the pursuit of improved conditions that often do not materialise. The following section explores in more detail the working conditions that children and young people experience and how they try to manage risk within their workplaces.

3.3 EXPERIENCES OF WFCL

Most often, storytellers' views related to work were mixed or negative. 'There were both dark and bright sides of my work' (012, female, 13, *dohori*). The dark side of the work included: abusive and exploitative employers and employment practices (e.g. long hours, lack of days off, late payment of salary, salary deductions, low salary); the physical demands of work (e.g. long hours standing in the workplace); disputes/bullying between co-workers; unsociable work hours that impacted sleep; and being required to drink alcohol. Salary deductions due to lateness or absence (for example, due to illness, or menstruation) were seen as overly stringent, and deductions for refusing to entertain customers were seen as unfair. Positive aspects of work included being able to earn, help cover household expenses, and financially support family members. More specifically, several storytellers working in *dohoris* mentioned the camaraderie between co-workers and being able to sing and dance. However, generally, positive aspects of work were framed in terms of the absence of negative conditions and exploitative practices: being paid on time, not being abused, and/or not experiencing discrimination from employers.

This section looks in more detail at how children experience their workplaces, including how their work life is impacted by employers, customers, and co-workers. It outlines the risks children face in the workplace, the strategies children and young people deploy to mitigate some of those risks, and how effective those strategies are in practice.

3.3.1 Children's experiences of their employers

Although not all employers are abusive and exploitative, most of the children spoke of negative employer behaviour in at least one of their workplaces. And although abuse differed in form and severity, its existence was pervasive. There were few examples of kind, helpful, or even fair employers. Negative employer behaviour ranged from the forceful sexual exploitation of employees, and keeping them imprisoned, to physical abuse (including beating or hitting). Non-physical abuse ranged from coercive manipulation to scolding and financial exploitation. Much of the negative behaviour of employers in the AES has been documented elsewhere and is not new information. For example, in Dank *et al.*'s (2019) survey of 600 workers from Kathmandu, 60 per cent of AES workers aged 14 and under and 66 per cent of 15–17-year-olds reported working in sexually exploitative environments. However, these stories contribute to our understanding of how employer behaviour is understood and experienced by children working in the AES.

Belittlement

While 'scolding' seems to be the least harmful negative employer behaviour that employees experience (compared to rape and imprisonment at the other end of the spectrum), the language used by employers indicates how they perceive the young women and girls that work for them. It is derogatory, belittling, and cruel. Women complained of being called derogatory names by their employers:

> *Main owner* [investor] *used to visit us once in a week. He is very rude. He uses offensive words to us such as 'prostitute'. He says it's only because of him we earn money. If we share this with our manager then the consequences would be… we will be treated badly, beaten up, deduct our salary…*
> (175, female, 19, *dohori*)

> *My friend was working, and while working, an expensive item was broken. He scolded. She was called maal*[13] *and verbally abused, and he told her in a condescending tone to come near and he would give the money.*
> (010, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Some employees felt that their employer's scolding was misplaced, such as this young woman who works in a *khaja ghar*: 'The one thing that I did not like about working there was they used to scold me when I used to make a mistake. One is supposed to teach when the other person doesn't know. That kind of behaviour is not there. Instead of helping to learn, they scold' (102, female, 21, *khaja ghar*). Others thought that scolding was acceptable, even if they did not like it: 'She used to scold me saying that

13 Derogatory term for prostitute in Nepal.

I didn't do the work well. Anyway, she used to treat me well. People do scold you when you don't do the work good' (282, female, 17, domestic/household worker) and 'sometimes I get scolded also when I messed up while working. In the beginning, the work was taught, but sometimes I made mistakes, as it is a job and mistakes happen. But I was happy to work' (276, female, 17, domestic/household worker).

The language used by employers to refer to the young women and girls that work for them, as well as the acceptance of the scolding that they endure, reveals the prevalence of toxic work environments built on the belittlement of employees to the extent that they believe it is acceptable to be shouted at when they make the smallest error.

Taking advantage of vulnerability

As described earlier, children migrating to Kathmandu arrive in the city with little knowledge and experience, and are easily taken advantage of:

> *If there was some innocent girl in my place, she would have been in a very miserable condition. In Nepal, innocent girls are targeted.*
> (056, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *It mostly happens to the ones who wash the utensils, ones who have just come from the village and people who have just started work. It is difficult to do the same to the ones that have been brought up in Kathmandu, as they get angry easily. They do it to people who have come from far-off places and don't understand the sense of things*.
> (197, male, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Although all employees are in subordinate positions compared to their employers, those from outside the urban centres are often more vulnerable. Employers are able to exploit children's vulnerability because the children who come to find work have no other options or cannot see the options that they might have. One girl explained that she feels she cannot get another form of employment and therefore stays at the *dohori* and continues to experience abuse:

> *While working as a waiter, the owner forced us to drink alcohol with the customer, smoke, sit close to them and talk as they wanted. He said to quit the job if we didn't want to do so. We had no other options than to work at such place, so it was our compulsion to work there. We would deny customers' offer to drink but the owner shouted, saying, 'Quit the job, I will get some other girls if not you.' So we thought to do as the customers wish rather than getting scolded from the owner and having no other options to get work.*
> (065, female, 17, *dohori*)

Given the disadvantaged backgrounds of many of the young women, their hope and desire for better opportunities is used against them by employers who promise certain employment benefits and yet never deliver. For example, one young woman was promised that she would be able to attend school:

> *I had also gone to work at a hotel in Chabahil with the view that they would provide for my education. But they did not provide for my education, and I had to wash the utensils. I had gone there as they said that I would go to school in the morning and wash utensils during the day. I worked there in the hotel for two to four months.*
> (190, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Another young woman was convinced to reject a scholarship by her employer, based on the lie that the employer would help her enrol later:

> *Luckily, I was selected, but auntie* [the mistress of the canteen] *convinced me not to take the opportunity. She said, 'You don't need to join, I will get you admitted to the same school later and also increase your salary.' I was convinced by her, and my salary was increased to 800 rupees per month. If I had not been convinced, and had taken up the opportunity, my future would have been much better. It was so tough to get selected and people used to rush to be admitted to that school.*
> (085, female, 21, *khaja ghar*)

Despite their vulnerability, these women recognised the importance of education to overcome their disadvantage. However, this desire for education and its opportunities was effectively used as leverage against them to maintain and/or increase their disadvantage (see also sections 3.1.4 and 3.1.8).

In extreme instances, vulnerable children are sexually exploited under duress and kept captive by employers. In the following excerpt, the child is vulnerable because they ran away from home without any support:

> *We don't know why Sahu* [business owner] *didn't pay us. At first, when we ran away from home, we didn't have shelter to eat and sleep. One bought*

> *and another sold, so after that, we had to stay under the Sahu and Sahuni's* [male and female business owners] *order. We were physically tortured if we didn't do our work… I was 13 or 14 years old when I worked at a cabin restaurant. I lived there too… We expected to get paid at least once a year but they didn't pay us… I said that I didn't want to stay there but she told me that she had bought me so she would not let us go.*
> (093, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

The mistreatment of employees in the AES is possible because they are entering the sector from an already highly vulnerable position compared with other young men and women of their age. This means they have less ability to recognise their treatment as abuse, and have fewer opportunities or knowledge of how to seek redress or employment elsewhere. Furthermore, the actions of some of the employers indicate that they are aware of their employees' vulnerability and desperation, and take advantage of this to drive profits or keep the young womenand girls in their employ. They hire young people on false pretences, saying that work duties entail one set of activities and then later demand that employees take up other, more difficult and dangerous duties. They also insist that employees perform certain activities, or they will have their pay deducted or be fired, knowing that their employees do not have other work opportunities. Even when employees do not start from a place of vulnerability, their experiences can traumatise them such that they end up accepting abusive workplaces:

> *I was taken to one of the restaurants in Thamel by the boy and girl in a motorcycle. I was just 16 years old then. I was chased by the boy and girl and was attacked by a stick on my back. There was a male owner in that hotel. The owner hit me in my face with his hand. I was scared and started to tremble. The boy and girl had left me there for 6,000 rupees. I was frightened from the hotel owner. The owner asked me to work at his restaurant. He fed me beaten rice, potatoes and choilla* [marinated meat]*. That* [day] *he kept me like that and after 5.00pm I came back home. I went to work by myself the next day. My father and mother had told me not to go. My father and mother had reported the girl and boy to the police, and they were arrested. They were sent to jail for three years. The owner phoned me. I did not for the first day but eventually went there when he called me, and I went there to work because I was scared… I am scared of the owner. Once, a customer one day had mistreated me. My thulo buwa* [uncle] *would drink alcohol in the house and scold me. After the incident where I was kidnapped, I have become a bit slow. I cannot focus on anything, and I always feel scared… I have a fear that someone would threaten my father and mother. I am scared of the restaurant owner.*
> (080, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar)

Kidnapping, an exploitive employer, and violence at home have combined in this girl's life to affect her ability to escape from a dangerous and abusive work environment. Instead, she has continued to return to the place of her trauma out of fear. Even when police became involved and her kidnappers were sentenced to jail, she still does not feel that she can fully escape.

Sexual harassment and abuse

Another way in which employers abuse their relative positions of power is through sexual harassment and abuse of their employees. This was spoken about across a range of venues, job positions, and ages. In one story, an owner even told a child that he would pay her extra:

> *I was 13 years old then and worked there in mornings and evenings. I quit that job after a year. I found that job by myself. There, the owner used to put hands on my chest and used to say that he would give me money*.
> (032, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

In this case, sexual harassment is treated as another transaction, rather than a form of employer abuse. Although the child can eventually leave the job, she endures the mistreatment for up to a year. The way in which some of the storytellers recount their experiences of sexual harassment by their employer suggests a lack of agency and, in some cases, a habituation to the abuse, explained as acceptable/expected of a man: 'Behaviour of the owner was also fishy. After all, he is a man' (065, female, 17, *dohori*).

In more serious cases, young women described being sexually assaulted by their employers: 'Owner aunty went to her parent's home and the owner uncle asked me to get the tea. When I took the tea, the owner uncle dragged me and closed the doors. Then he tore my clothes. That's why I left the work from that place. I worked there for nine or ten months' (118, female, 23, spa/massage). Another young woman who was held captive in a guest house explained that the female owner used to force her to have sex with her sons and physically abused her when she did not comply:

> *In a hotel in Pokhara, she had bigger sons. I had to sleep with the sons. They would hit if I disagreed. How I used my mind there was, I stole a female hotel owner's mobile and called the police. I couldn't brief about the house. I hid the mobile inside a sack. I was near a door so that I could escape. And then I called from there later, female supervisors of previous organisations came there. They caught me while I was trying to escape. There was a mother of a small child, a 12- or 13-year-old girl, and I. They caught just like that. Police caught the son, but the female hotel owner escaped. When I first entered that place, it looked like a house from outside and was a hotel, but I didn't know that it would be like this. And even after working there, I didn't get paid, she used to keep all the money. She collected everything, we didn't get any money and her sons were of the same kind. They used to consume marijuana and used to tell us to sit with her sons, if we disobeyed her, she used to beat girls. The sons were abusive and stubborn. The male and female hotel owners used to beat girls who disobeyed them. The police were not good either. They didn't listen and understand us. They used to say,' You work here and there', and abuse by saying 'randi'* [whore]*. And we didn't have a way to speak. Once the police see you in such a place, they take us in the same way. It happened once while living in Pokhara. In the case of drugs. I have been in other cases many times.*
> (378, female, 25, street-connected/mobile child)

Another storyteller recounted an instance of sexual exploitation:

> *He treated me well at first. I still say the owner there was a decent person. He took me shopping. I didn't have clothes or a place to stay. I didn't have a cell phone. I also wanted things and he provided them to me. Later, he told me one day, he used to consider me like his daughter. They do tell their friends that there is a new girl and then invite them. He called his friends. They used to charge 500 rupees as room charge there. And the rest, however much you could convince the 'guest' to give to you. They usually rent a flat for that purpose… They used to say they would pay me a salary of 5,000 rupees, but they never did. But the owner used to give me any amount I asked for when I needed it. He helped me a lot so I didn't say much about the salary. I had no specific timing because I stayed there. Sometimes I woke up at nine, sometimes at noon. I didn't used to say anything. I was a victim and used to cry all night.*
> (159, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar)

These stories highlight the different ways in which girls and young women are trafficked and/or sexually exploited, often when they have no method of escape or redress.

As described above, when girls and young women begin to work, they are not adequately (and most likely purposefully) briefed on their work duties. Employees are hired under the expectation that they will have to perform specific tasks and not others (see also section 3.2.2). However, over the course of their employment, they are coerced, told, or encouraged to act in ways that make them uncomfortable and expose them to risk, to which they eventually habituate. This young woman succinctly explained her experience:

> *Initially, the owner didn't say anything, he used to tell me that I could stay if I wanted or leave but no one would compel me. He didn't say anything for a few months, but later said I had to sit with them, or I would get lower salary, arguing that everyone else was doing it.*
> (051, female, 18, dance bar/club)

The insistence of employers that employees should please customers even if it makes them uncomfortable is explicitly built into the salary structure: 'If we don't eat and stay with the customers then we get no money. We only get 5,000 rupees' (075, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar). It is further encouraged as employees make more tips (commission) when they are able to sell more to customers:

> *We have to drink wine while working to increase business. The owners disagree if we deny, we can mix coke to wine instead. We need to drink as the customer needs to smell alcohol if they check. They* [owners] *serve it like that, mix coke to wine. We get 100 rupees as commission for each glass we drink. They charge 1,000 rupees per glass. It's expensive. I am not habituated to it yet.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

The last line of that excerpt demonstrates that this is something that employees feel they are supposed to get used to/learn how to do. Another young woman explained that drinking is a requirement at her workplace because it is part of the entertainment for which customers attend the venue:

> *So we have to drink there. The business doesn't work otherwise. That is how we provide entertainment, sitting and drinking together with them. We couldn't stay just like that, we had to go sit with them. The owner used to scold us if she saw us sitting separately, saying the 'guests' will go away. So we had to drink with them forcefully even though we felt like throwing up.*
> (087, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

In some instances, physical violence is used to punish employees who do not comply with customer and employer expectations: 'We had to eat whatever the "guest" ordered in the restaurant. When they order chow-mein, we have to eat chow-mein and when they order alcohol, we have to drink alcohol. Or else we are beaten by the "guest" and the owner' (163, female, 22, *khaja ghar*). This negative reinforcement between customers and employers was mentioned in multiple stories:

> *New customers used to get angry and complain to the owner. They say to the owner, 'What kind of people have you hired, they don't agree to do anything? They don't stay with us.'*
> (075, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *The bad ones try to touch you. I used to yell at such bad customers and leave, and the owner used to get angry. The owner would scold us, saying that the 'guests' are God.*
> (190, female, 18, dance bar)

These excerpts reveal the services that customers visiting these venues expect and demand. As employers' revenue is dependent on pleasing customers, the sexual exploitation of employees is central to turning a profit, as is the acceptance of their casual mistreatment. The prevalence of stories like these in the narratives shows that employer abuse is not only the result of the behaviour of a few individual employers, but instead the consequence of a system that relies on appeasing customers by allowing them to dominate and control young women and girls, including in ways that are sexually exploitative.

Positive behaviour

While the majority of storytellers shared details of the negative behaviour of their employers, a few also shared accounts of positive employer behaviour; however, these examples occurred much less frequently in the narratives. Employer practices that were viewed more positively by employees included protecting them from unwanted customer attention, as one storyteller noted: 'Owner treats me well. Owner shouts at the "guests" who misbehave [towards] us' (151, female, 20, spa/massage). Some owners even involve the police when their customers act inappropriately: 'When someone tried to beat us, our owner used to call the police and send them [away]' (012, female, 22, *dohori*). Counter to the prevailing rhetoric, there were also examples of owners in venues where sex takes place or is brokered, protecting their employees: 'In spa centre, owner herself brings us the condom. I have never got beaten by the "guests". When some ill-mannered "guests" come, owner scolds and takes them out' (153, female, 25, spa/massage). This was also true of a male owner: 'It is up to our interest. Some customers have bad habits. We go with personal contacts. I have no feelings. I just want to get my money smartly. If some "guests" misbehave [towards] me, I complain to the owner. He helps us then' (044, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar).

As the previous section showed, employers tend to value their customers' enjoyment over the wellbeing of their employees due to the client/service-oriented business model. Therefore, it is exceptional when employers put their employees before the customers. These positive relationships could be examples of how the AES might provide safe and decent work for more people in the future.

There were examples of employers providing support to their most vulnerable employees. For example, one employer provided zero interest loans to his employees when they did not have enough money, and provided them with food at work:

> *He used to pay my salary on time. Sometimes in two months. If I asked him for money when I needed it, he used to give it. We never knew how much or when but he used to give us 2,000 or 3,000* [rupees] *when we needed it. We mostly ate our food there and the earning was enough to send home. We had rice at home, and it was mostly salt and oil that we provide for in terms of expense.*
> (195, female, 20, *dohori*)

This employer was in sharp contrast to others who refused to pay employees on time, who paid less than they promised, or who lent money as a form of bondage.

For some employees, their employers and workplaces became surrogate homes and families, often allowing them to escape adverse circumstances where they came from.

That hotel was for food and accommodation. We used to address the owners as brother and sister, but our youngest sister used to call them mummy and daddy. They used to support us. Therefore, we all five siblings lived there.
(140, female, 15, guest house)

Later, my brother got me a job at a hotel. I stayed there nicely. Owner there used to treat me like her own son.
(375, male, 14, transportation)

The good thing about working there is, from a guard to a dishwasher, all are like a family. All are treated equal, no one talks bad or degrades others. The manager also says that we are all equal and asks us not to feel odd. Such behaviour is good there.
(194, female, 18, *dohori*)

We would go to school together at nine o'clock. The hotel owner did not give me money, he gave it to my brother. We ate at the hotel and slept at the hotel. We used to sleep in the house of the hotel owner. Like us, Pukar and Ramesh [names changed] *also worked in the hotel. Hotel owners used to love us. They never beat, scolded, or denied food to anyone. I left the hotel after lockdown.*
(318, male, 13, street-connected/mobile child)

These excerpts show the vital role employers play in the lives of some of the most disadvantaged children. For these storytellers, their employers provided everything for them, including a home and place to sleep, food, access to education (and school supplies), and even love.

However, as some of these stories suggest, there are still power imbalances and inequalities. As we have seen in many of the narratives, children still must work and sometimes are not paid for their work. In the following case, the employer uses the language of 'family' to make the young women stay and work in the guest house. Despite referring to her employer's brother as their own brother and the invitation to bring their younger siblings to live in the guest house, the two older sisters are emotionally manipulated into staying and working at the guest house rather than pursuing other employment opportunities. In this way, the boundaries between employer and employee are blurred and yet maintained to keep the young women subordinate.

My sister has been staying there since her childhood. She didn't even return home during the earthquake and stayed there loyally. So, they trust her and that is why they offered to look after our siblings. Since we consider her brother [the owner's brother] *as our own brother, he sometimes scolds us when we talk to random men. But when I used to tell them I want to learn tailoring skills and do some other job and not work there, they used to get mad, telling us, 'Who will look after your brother and sisters and send them to school?' So my sister stayed there. But when I said I wanted to work and learn tailoring, the owner lady said, I don't need to, and I can send my siblings to school only if I work. She said, 'Who will feed them and send them to school?' and I used to get mad. She used to take care of their lunch expenses, school dress, stationery and things like that, and we used to pay for their tuition fees and other school expenses.*
(139, female, 18, guest house)

3.3.2 Children's experiences of customers

This section looks at how children's work experience is impacted by the attitudes and behaviours of the customers they serve, and provides some insight into the profiles and preferences of those who frequent their workplaces.

Types of customer

There did not appear to be a specific type of individual who frequented these venues. There was a wide variety of ages, professions (policemen, businessmen, and army officers were specifically mentioned[14]), and nationalities, though most customers were from Nepal. However, almost every single customer described by the storytellers was a man, and incidents of negative behaviour almost always involved male customers. Very rarely did storytellers talk about female customers. Customers also tended to have much higher income than the employees, given the amount of money they were paying at venues – sometimes as much as an employee's monthly salary in one evening: 'People ate anything in between 100, 10,000 to 20,000 rupees. My monthly salary totalled 9,000 rupees' (105, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar). Another storyteller recounted, 'I only used to get salary initially, but later got more. I only had 6,000 rupees as a

14 One storyteller described how they recognise the policemen by their boots. They will change out of their work uniforms but won't change out of their standard issue boots (193, female, 21, dance bar/club).

salary… "Guests" come and ask if I am a virgin and offer 50,000, 100,000, 20,000, 10,000 rupees' (161, female, 19, dance bar). However, this was not always the case; a few storytellers mentioned customers having their belongings taken off them by security when they were unable to pay the bill (193, female, 21, dance bar/club; 111, female, 20, dance bar/club; 125, female, 22, *dohori*).

Just as there are many different types of men that go to AES venues, there is also a wide range of behaviour. Many of the storytellers said that their customers were good **and** bad, and there were nuances along the spectrum. While it is important to note that not all men who visit AES venues are perpetrators of abuse, many of them are, and almost every single storyteller mentioned negative behaviour directed at her/him from a customer. Storytellers also spoke of particularly disliking customers when they were drunk, indicating that they often experienced customers' behaviour switching from 'good' to 'bad' under the influence of alcohol, drugs, and other substances. There was also an overall perception that the worst behaviour of customers was due partly to their inebriation. Customers that began treating waitresses politely shifted their behaviour when drunk, becoming rude, vulgar, and aggressive. As one child working in a dance bar said, 'I dislike the things is that when people [are] drunk, they change into another personality' (103, female, 17, dance bar/club). Customer language also changes when they are drunk, becoming more abusive and vulgar, 'People used abusive language when they were drunk in *dohori*. Then, I didn't like that place' (012, female, 22, *dohori*). Another young woman working in a massage parlour also noted that drunk customers were some of the worst to deal with: 'It is unpleasant to see people coming here after drinking alcohol. *Sahuni didi* [owner] scolds them. The customers who come after drinking alcohol fights when getting massage and often shouts at us' (152, female, 19, spa/massage).

Although it is not surprising that customer behaviour deteriorates with the excessive consumption of alcohol due to alcohol's effects in decreasing inhibitions, it would be difficult to prevent these scenarios given the business model of many of these venues, in which profit is driven by the sale of alcohol. Employees' salaries are usually tied to their ability to sell alcohol to customers, and part of the sales depend on their willingness to sit and entertain customers while drinking with them: 'Owner kicks us out if we don't help increase the sales [sale means food/drinks]. We have to sell anyhow. Whether by sitting with them or chatting with them, we have to sell no matter what' (155, female, 22, dance bar/club). So, it would seem that drunken customers are unavoidable so long as these venues need to sell alcohol at high prices to maintain profits.

Mistreatment and abuse from customers

Customer behaviour varied widely across the AES, between different venues and within venues. Many of the storytellers stated that customers were both good and bad, describing a vast range of behaviour, from polite, respectful interactions and instances of aid and assistance, to horrific accounts of physical and sexual abuse perpetrated against employees. This behaviour could drastically influence how employees, and particularly children, felt about their workplaces. Although storytellers described negative customer behaviour, they also indicated that some of this behaviour was to be accepted in their line of work. They often connected customer behaviour to business models that depend on women and young girls having to entertain customers, more specifically, to the AES as a whole. A generalised social perception of AES venues and the people who work in them seemed to have great influence on how customers behaved. As one young woman put it: 'You can at least enjoy a dance in a dance bar, but the only entertainment in eateries are the girls. Now I know' (087, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar).

Behaviour described by employees ranged from (as previously mentioned) condescension and disrespect to extreme examples of physical attacks that left some employees in hospital (171, female, 17, *dohori*; 183, male, 21, cabin restaurant/bar) and sexual abuse (081, female, 20, *khaja ghar*; 117, female, 19, dance bar; 019, female, 16, *khaja ghar*). Much of the sexual abuse and sexual harassment experienced took place on a regular basis and was therefore not seen as exceptional by employees, many of whom had developed their own coping strategies for avoiding the worst manifestations of this behaviour (see section 3.3.4, 'Agency and risk mitigation').

Many AES customers assumed that all female workers were there to please them sexually and would become upset if waitresses did not want to participate. One storyteller said bluntly, 'Customers are free to do anything they wish, is the mentality in this field' (007, female, 23, dance bar). For example, 'I used to tell "guests", I don't like to be touched: they harshly reply, "Why are you working here…?", "Go, find another work". Some of them were bad. They would complain to the owner for not sitting with them' (106, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar). There were also often reported assumptions by customers that girls (from waitresses to dancers to

singers) were also engaged in sex for money. Because of this, customers often touched, groped, used vulgar language, or sexually accosted female employees, assuming that their advances were welcome:

> *I worked as a waiter in a dohori. The environment was similar there, we worked in the night, and we were looked down upon. Irrespective of our clothes, we were looked down upon. 'Guests' would ask us to go out with them*.
> (054, female, 24, *dohori*)

At the same time, the preference for young girls in particular was noted by some storytellers (reflecting gendered norms that prize male dominance and female 'purity'): 'Some even have said that if I was virgin or not and if I wanted to test it' (102, female, 21, *khaja ghar*); 'There are mandatorily one or two girls of age 15–16. Customers usually look for young ones. There are more customers where there are younger girls' (122, female, 24, *khaja ghar*); 'Father-like aged people come for romance with children. They enjoy with girls' (193, female, 21, dance bar); 'They said that I was young/small so they liked me. I used to refuse' (075, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar). Patriarchal attitudes were also observed in the way storytellers described how some customers wanted to offer advice, opportunities or escape routes to workers, despite frequenting such venues and continuing their interactions with adolescents: 'Some used to advise not to work there and would suggest it's not good for future' (111, female, 20, dance bar/club); 'He said that he will find me a job somewhere else if I wanted to work. He asked why I was working in that place' (075, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar).

For girls and young women who are sexually exploited in ways that involve the provision of direct sexual services, the abuse they were exposed to was amplified, though based on the same pretence, in which male customers declared that they could do anything they wanted, including causing physical pain and harm, because they had paid for it:

> *Some customers behaved well but some treated me badly and used to say **they paid the money***.
> (037, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *Sometimes the clients tell us that **we have paid so you have to do whatever we say**, some use bad words and swear at us. Some are understanding and understand that we do this work out of need, but most people who come are bad.*
> (058, female, 24, spa/massage)

Sexual and/or physical abuse is perpetrated by customers, employers, and occasionally by co-workers. Customer abuse ranges from unwanted touching and physical violence – to the extent that one storyteller had to stay in a hospital for two nights (171, female, 17, *dohori*) – to rape (159, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar; 188, female, 20, dance bar/club). Different venues and different roles within venues lead to varying degrees and types of interpersonal risk. The most extreme risks are experienced by those involved in the provision of direct sexual services. Risks include pain, injury, and being forced to perform activities they dislike:

> *They bite my breasts, cheeks, tongue, while having sex. At that time, I can barely breathe because of pain.*
> (122, female, 24, *khaja ghar*)

> *He didn't want to have sex and wanted to do it in the mouth, so I said I would only do it normally and not in the mouth, and he threatened to kill me.*
> (127, female, 22, *khaja ghar*)

> *Some of them don't listen even if I tell them not to do it and still use force. I met many people who only did it as they wish. Some are violent, some used to grab forcefully and some used extreme force.*
> (135, female, 19, guest house)

> *Once I was having difficulty on my lower abdomen, I can barely have sex now. Since I could not have sex with many people, it was quite difficult for me.*
> (159, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar)

Other girls and women are forced to have sex without protection, which leads to increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies: 'Once, a [ethnic group name] told that he would use the safety [condom], but when he went upstairs, he said he would not use it' (135, female, 19, guest house). In addition to these risks, storyteller 122 described how she carries the responsibility for her own medical treatment should she become ill or pregnant through her work: 'If he gives me 500 [rupees], I have to spend thousands for treatment' (122, female, 24, *khaja ghar*).

Staff are also at risk of sexual abuse due to false assumptions and prejudice about their work. Due to the association of spa and massage venues with the sex industry, storyteller 086, a massage therapist, deals with unwanted propositions from customers:

> *Obviously, the male 'guests' come with a negative sense because I am a female, and they are mostly males. Some would ask me to meet them outside*

> *and offer money… 'Guests' would come for sex, but I would say you can leave if you do not like what I have to say.*
> (086, female, 22, spa/massage)

Another massage therapist experienced the same prejudice:

> *During the massage, most of the boys would come for sex more than the massage and then they would touch my body's private part. Working in the massage centre was worse than the hotel… People would come after drinking alcohol and using foul language.*
> (118, female, 23, spa/massage)

A waitress at a cabin restaurant believed she was going out with a customer as a friend, only to find out he had other intentions:

> *Since he treated me as a friend, I accepted the offer. He took me to a guest house and asked me for sexual favours, started acting fresh. But I did not give in, so he started yelling at me. 'When you can make out with others why not me?' he said. As he continued to press me for sexual favours, I ran away in the pretext of going to the toilet.*
> (184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *They think these workers would agree on whatever they ask for and they ask our phone number, ask us how much money we want, they would pay and so on. If I oppose and request him not to think like that about me as I am not such type of girl.*
> (196, female, 18, *dohori*)

The chances of redress in response to abuse are minimal to non-existent. After being physically assaulted by a customer in the *dohori* where she worked, storyteller 171 was taken to the hospital. According to her, 'The police came but did not help me properly because I worked in a *dohori*' (171, female, 17, *dohori*). In conjunction with the failure to address abuse of staff, police are also sometimes the perpetrators of abuse. The mistreatment of employees by police personnel who visit the AES venues as customers sends a clear message to workers that they cannot expect their protection: 'Once there was a fight with the police. Once police had touched my friend's private parts and she didn't like that' (193, female, 21, dance bar). Storyteller 037 recognises her disadvantage clearly and explained her lack of trust in police explicitly: 'Even cops used to come. I got more scared. If police are like that, they won't look after me if anything happens tomorrow. They might say I am such type of girl, and this is how my life is, and I am the one doing such business so I can't blame others' (037, female, 17, *khaja ghar*). In this situation, it is unlikely that abuse will be reported to authorities.

'Good' behaviour by customers

Although the majority of customer behaviour was described as negative, there were also instances of customers providing support to the employees of AES venues. Instances of positive customer behaviour included tipping regularly (073, female, 24, dance bar/club; 045, female, 23, *dohori*), helping employees find better jobs (040, female, 24, *dohori*), giving employees additional bonuses over holidays (050, female, 22, *dohori*), and general camaraderie and friendship (188, female, 20, dance bar). Other customers treated employees with respect and the employees said that they appreciated when customers recognised that they were in their line of work out of necessity or obligation, and therefore did not take advantage of them. Some employees have even met their romantic partners through their work at AES venues. Inevitably, these cases were much less frequent than the cases of extreme abuse, and seem to be the outlier in terms of customer behaviour.

3.3.3 The nature of work and its impact

Although sexual advances are perhaps expected in these environments, what is perhaps more surprising is the extent of physical discomfort the storytellers experience due to their working responsibilities and work environment. At first glance, washing dishes and catering jobs appear to be less risky for children, but these stories demonstrate that standing for extended periods of time, and working unsociable hours and long shifts, also present risks to adolescents working in this industry. The storytellers spoke of pain in their legs, backs, and hands:

> *What I feel is difficult at work is a lot of pain in the legs while serving… sometimes you have to work so hard that you can't even move your hands. Sometimes* [I get] *back pains when kneeling down and you don't get enough sleep.*
> (299, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

> *It gets difficult while working. They scold you if they see you resting. They don't even allow us to sit on the couch. You have to keep standing from the time you come to work.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

> *When doing such work, my legs and back used to hurt a lot. While holding tray for long hours, my hand used to hurt.*
> (115, female, 13, cabin restaurant/bar)

Along with physically taxing work duties, storytellers also commented on the effect of the work schedule on their wellbeing. Two storytellers recounted missing meals because of their working schedule: 'I always ate dinner in the *dohori*, but used to miss my breakfast and lunch due to my working pattern' (138, female, 19, *dohori*); another said, 'It used to be two or three in the afternoon by the time we got to eat' (081, female, 20, *khaja ghar*). Work schedules also led to the risk of not getting enough quality sleep:

> *It became difficult to work in the dohori. Not even enough sleep for us as we have to talk to the customer till late night, which affects the body a lot*.
> (174, female, 22, dance bar/club)

> *We had to sleep during the day and work at night.*
> (146, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

> *It was difficult for us to fall asleep after returning from work. They used to give us food in the morning and evening, but didn't give any money. We could not sleep because of the tension.*
> (146, female, 25, *khaja ghar*)

Lack of sleep is not the only risk of working late. Storytellers also spoke of the fear they experienced returning home late at night: 'I used to be scared while returning home in the night as there used to be very few people on the road' (063, female, 14, *khaja ghar*); and 'I used to get afraid of returning from work late at night' (300, female, 18, domestic/household worker). Another storyteller stated that she was once followed home by customers: 'They wait for us till midnight. We run away when we see their vehicle approach… Once a guy followed me to my room [apartment]' (042, female, 23, dance bar/club).

As mentioned in the previous section, staff are often encouraged (and required in some cases) to drink alongside customers to drive alcohol and food sales. For many establishments, the alcohol sales are how they make money. The young women and girls have to drink with the customers and the customers pay the bill. The business model and staff incentives create environments in which employees alter their own behaviour:

> *People gradually lose their way in the dohori. I mean, most of them are nice, but some people develop bad habits. The more wine you drink there, the more commission you get, the more people and 'guests' you bring, the more they increase your salary.*
> (031, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

> *One glass of wine would get you 100 rupees. For the money, I drank four to five glasses in a day… I used to drink before too, but there it got habitual.*
> (100, female, 24, dance bar/club)

> *Girls also drink inside the bar for extra commission money, and later the same drinking habit develops as a routine and gets worse.*
> (188, female, 20, dance bar/club)

> *We had such hardships. While working as a waiter, owner forced to drink alcohol with the customer, smoke, sit close to them and talk as they wanted.*
> (065, female, 17, *dohori*)

> *The owner wanted us to hang out with 'guests'. We had to drink three juices in a day. If we ate and drank, it would increase their business.*
> (057, female, 18, *dohori*)

Previous quotes have demonstrated how this puts employees at greater risk of abuse, but in and of itself, excessive drinking also poses a risk to physical health:

> *Sometimes my sister used to return home almost unconscious as she used to get extra money for drinking with 'guests'.*
> (041, female, 23, dance bar/club)

> *The girls would have already known the tricks of handling such a situation so that they would not get drunk. They vomit using their fingers after drinking. Even though they are intoxicated from the inside, they look fresh from outside.*
> (174, female, 22, dance bar/club)

> *I drank three or four glasses of beer. I tried to leave him, but he didn't allow me. That night, I went to my brother's place. I was vomiting on the road. After reaching his room, I vomited on the bed sheet. So, my brother blew me on my cheek. He pushed me into the toilet, and I again started vomiting… The next morning, I felt uneasy in my eyes and also pain in my cheek. I also found blood clots in my mouth.*
> (103, female, 17, dance bar/club)

> *At one point, I was scolded for not drinking with the 'guest'. I drank a bottle of wine. All I remember is that I had vomited all night.*
> (118, female, 23, spa/massage)

Furthermore, given the young age of those working in the AES, the excessive consumption of alcohol is likely to be more damaging than if they were adults, with much scientific data evidencing the harmful effects of alcohol on developing brains.

3.3.4 Agency and risk mitigation

Although many risks exist within the AES, and these can increase with the time spent working in the sector, employees have developed methods for mitigating risk. Their strategies are varied and context-specific, but demonstrate creative coping mechanisms in a challenging environment. Some examples of avoiding unwanted attention in dance bars, clubs and *dohoris* include working as a dancer or singer on stage: 'I think singing work is a bit safer. They sit on the stage and sing. But the waiter's job is very difficult as there is mostly a fight. They also do harassment. It is difficult for the waiter' (174, female, 22, dance bar); asking older colleagues to serve particular customers (195, female, 20, *dohori*); going into a guarded changing room – though as the following quote shows, this is not a way to avoid all sexual harassment:

> *There is a changing room. Once we go there no one can enter without our permission. Outside of that room guards stay. The owner also supports us in this manner and says do whatever you like. In that sense only, the owner is good… The owner comes and sits with us and touches us. Sometimes his son will also be there, and they enjoy together having lots of girls around.*
> (193, female, 21, dance bar)

Whereas girls are protected by their employers in one scenario, they are abused by them in another.

To mitigate the risk of employees being stalked or harassed on their way home, some employers provide private transport: 'staff members are dropped to their respective homes. The former owner used to only drop me at bridge [near to house] but the current one drops me to my doorstep' (171, female, 17, *dohori*). One storyteller explained that once, when she was followed home by a customer, she decided to stay the night at a friend's house for added protection: 'Once a guy followed me to my room [apartment], so I went to my friend's place. We were in a taxi, and he was following us on his motorbike, so I went to my friend's place' (042, female, 23, dance bar/club).

Those most at risk are arguably those engaged in the provision of direct sexual services. Life stories included examples of extreme physical abuse and sex-related medical conditions. Multiple storytellers spoke of insisting that customers use condoms (although there is not always compliance), bringing their own high-quality condoms, putting condoms on customers themselves: 'They tell us not to allow customers to put it on as they can tear it at the top. Men don't care, you need to save yourself' (097, female, 19, spa/massage). One storyteller uses fear to motivate her clients to comply with condom-wearing practices: 'People have come denying to use condoms, but I told them I sleep with many people so they might get infected, and they put it on' (159, female, 22, cabin restaurant/bar). But another storyteller described how customers refused to wear condoms, which led to a reliance on emergency contraceptives, and was extremely detrimental to her sexual health:

> *They say they will use a condom but don't. They ejaculate inside. I took a pill* [emergency birth control pill] *two or three times. It itches, get swollen, drips mirky water. It gets better after taking medication and then starts to itch again. If he gives me 500* [rupees]*, I have to spend thousands for treatment.*
> (122, female, 24, *khaja ghar*)

Lastly, storytellers spoke about the different ways they mitigate risk of violence or abuse in their work. Storyteller 191 talked about learning to have clear boundaries on what type of work she will do and what she will not do: 'They also taught me how to do things, not to agree on everything and not to tolerate whatever they do. I didn't know it before, so I used to say nothing and let them do as they wanted to' (191, female, 18, dance bar/club). She also spoke about how she finds clients through known contacts:

> *You can find customers through linkages. First, you go with one and if he is happy with you, then he introduces you to his friend. He would have similar types of friends and we talk over the phone. They share our numbers and would tell us contact was given by a friend. That's how we meet, but it is scary. When you go to meet them in this manner, you sit at a distance and check if you know the person. I pick up the phone from distance and I confirm who picks up the phone at the other end. Then only go to meet them.*
> (191, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Storytellers described ways of managing customers, which could make work environments feel safer: 'Now, I am working by becoming stronger. I don't get scared anymore. I can answer to the people who misbehave with me' (120, female, 23, *dohori*); and 'I felt it was ok working in a dance bar… I didn't find anything particularly bad. But how you are seen and how you act depends on you' (148, female, 24, dance bar/club). Various strategies were deployed to facilitate better treatment by customers and employers, which included securing roles with less exposure to harassment (e.g. being a dancer rather than a waiter), becoming the owner's girlfriend to avoid being sent to sit with customers, and providing incorrect phone numbers to placate customers' demands. Having agency changes how the children see their work environment, and the extent to which they internalise themselves as victims.

Several life stories showed how young women and girls were able to exercise a degree of control over which customers they engaged with and how. Storyteller 007 felt that being a waiter was 'torture', but being a dancer allowed her to decide who to interact with: 'The request comes to call the dancing girl, but it is my choice whether to go or not. There is no compulsion. Nobody can touch you' (007, female, 23, dance bar/club). Advantages could be gained despite adverse work environments – for example, by fostering relationships with customers regarded as more respectful, while finding ways to avoid those who were inebriated/abrasive:

> *Some only came to look and not drink, some of them were nice. I used to give them my number. I still talk to some of them. I have even put bhaitika* [religious celebration of brother–sister bond] *to some of them. They have helped me a lot… most people are really bad. They say all kinds of things, offer money and ask to go with them. They say these things a lot, they are all drunkards. I don't go there at all and send someone else once they say things like that.*
> (050, female, 22, *dohori*)

However, the ability for an individual to utilise their agency depends on numerous factors, including the employee's role, employer and co-worker support, workplace environment, and an individual's capacity to assert themselves (which might be particularly limited for those who are marginalised/vulnerable and/or have past trauma and experience of abuse). Indeed, some storytellers articulated the extreme lack of agency they felt, and the impact of this. For example, storyteller 122, who had experienced suicidal thoughts, described how her ability to choose how to engage with customers was curtailed: 'Even in a room they turn the light on and ask to strip down completely. I have some dignity… I have to tolerate everything in hope of money. I am afraid customers might not pay if I show my anger' (122, female, 24, *khaja ghar*). Her experience shows how her lack of power relative to the customers is exacerbated by her reliance on the income from sexual interactions. As already described, there were also many examples of abuse becoming normalised for those working in the sector:

> *It is not easy to say what is bad or good working in this sector as I am habitual now, I don't see any challenges, and everything looks like normal to me. Use of slang language, rough word, hugs, kisses, bad touch to workers are considered normal activities inside the bar/restaurant*.
> (188, female, 20, dance bar/club)

And even if customer demands for more direct forms of sexual service could be managed, there was a widely held sense that a level of abuse and harassment had to be tolerated as part of the role:

> *You have to be strong in a place like that, you should not agree to guests' offer, and learn to stall them... There is nothing you feel good about working in a dance bar and dohori. But the bad thing is people teasing you, trying to hug and touch your chest, back, thighs. If we protest, they walk away. You have to tolerate.*
> (161, female, 19, dance bar/club)

Collective agency

Within venues with multiple employees, support from co-workers could make the negative aspects of some workplaces more tolerable: 'I used to ignore them when they used to tease me. We were two friends, so we used to ignore [them]' (132, female, 21, *khaja ghar*). Co-worker relationships might be important to make dissatisfactory working conditions tolerable, but poor practice could be challenged, and material improvements made, if employees were able to effectively organise. In response to poor working conditions and what was felt to be ineffective government oversight of the sector, storyteller 007's experience shows how employees exercised collective power via membership of a union:

> *Now we have our team, and all the waiters work in a team. If the owner did something wrong to one of the waiters, we all said we would quit our job.*

> *Now in my time, that kind of work is moving forward. That is the reason they cannot force us on work that much, otherwise it is very difficult. They used to pay salaries based on one's appearance, but now they are trying to figure out the increment for seniors. Maybe because many organisations working on the issue. Some improvements are happening, but many are still working under compulsion.*
> (007, female, 23, dance bar)

Conditions improved in the dance bar and new employment practices were introduced, such as salaries being paid according to seniority rather than appearance. Hopefully, practices such as these can show other business owners that another model, which respects employees' rights, is both possible and profitable.

However, this was an isolated example. A more common view was that staff felt unable to utilise collective agency and complain to employers about unfair practices, particularly because they, and their co-workers, feared losing their jobs:

> *At that moment, the boss abused us. I felt embarrassed at that time. I had to do the work due to compulsion. If I fight back, I will be alone there. My friends don't speak up during any discussion due to their compulsion*.
> (066, female, 23, *dohori*)

Storyteller 180 described how rigid hierarchies within the workplace also prevented dissent being voiced and led to a sense of helplessness:

> *The girls were tortured more than boys… If we were also in a higher post, like now, maybe we could have helped them but there was nothing we could do other than just watching.*
> (180, male, 18, *dohori*)

The ability to levy collective power that includes all employees within a venue is important given that individual agency can be all too easily undermined by employers and customers. Also, some individuals have limited capacity to assert themselves and manage customers (particularly those made vulnerable by challenging life circumstances). One individual's ability to manage customers may be to the detriment of their co-workers, who have less capacity to do so. For example, storyteller 050 described how she would send someone else to engage inebriated customers who asked directly for sex. There is some evidence that hierarchies within venues could reflect societal class hierarchies, with power differentials levied to gain advantage, as the next two examples demonstrate: 'Some girls become girlfriend of the owner and pressure the simpler girls. When you're close with the owner, you are free of any tension' (057, female, 18, *dohori*); and, 'I could not survive in the big quality establishment. Only those who can speak well, wear good clothes, carry oneself in certain standard can survive there' (099, female, 24, dance bar/club).

3.3.5 Experiences of WFCL: conclusion

Most children spoke of negative employer behaviour in at least one of their workplaces. This included exploitative labour practices, but verbal, physical, and sexual abuse as well as sexually exploitative practices were widespread. The mistreatment of employees is often made possible because children entering the sector are already highly vulnerable – that is, they are from disadvantaged backgrounds or have arrived from outside of Kathmandu and have limited skills/options. Employers may exploit this vulnerability, taking advantage to drive profits.

The life stories show that the business model of most dance bars is based on appeasing customers who have a sense of entitlement to women's and girl's bodies. Employers tend to value their customers' enjoyment over the wellbeing of their employees due to the client/service-oriented business model. In practice, this means children have to engage in sexually exploitative practices that are often a core part of profit-making. Additionally, other types of mistreatment, and physical and sexual abuse, go unaddressed in efforts to retain customers.

Storytellers described how they had ways of managing customers that had the potential to make work environments feel safer. However, the life stories show that the strategies deployed by employees to facilitate better treatment by customers and employers could easily be undermined. Also, various types of abuse and exploitation were often normalised and seen as an expected part of the role by those working in the AES.

For some children, their employers and workplaces became surrogate homes and families, often allowing them to escape adverse circumstances where they came from. The stories show the vital role some employers play as 'safety nets' in the lives of some of the most disadvantaged children. But the power imbalances between children and employers can be exploited, particularly given the highly dependent position of these children and their vulnerabilities, including their young

age, lack of connections, and (often) difficult prior life experiences.

More broadly, the physical toll of working in the AES is notable: standing for extended periods of time, and working unsociable hours and long shifts, present risks to children and adolescents working in this industry. Along with physically taxing work duties, storytellers also commented on the effects of the work schedule on their wellbeing – for example, missing meals, and limited sleep. The challenges children face working in the AES are not limited to the workplace, however. The next section explores the impact of working in a stigmatised industry, particularly in terms of how children and young people manage family relationships and navigate their way through the communities in which they live.

3.4 PERCEPTIONS OF WORKING IN THE AES

This section looks at how children and young people working in the AES describe being perceived by the various actors in their lives, including their families, members of the communities where they live, and customers in the venues where they work. It explores both the day-to-day impact of managing a stigmatised identity, as well as the discrimination and abuse that can result from being identified as a night industry or AES worker. This section also looks at how stigma affects the ways in which AES workers perceive themselves and others working and/or engaging in the sector.

3.4.1 Family perceptions of working in the AES

The AES is a stigmatised sector and family perceptions of work in the AES differed from those related to work for children and young people more generally. Storytellers working in the AES described how they tried to keep the nature of their employment hidden from their families because working in night venues was perceived negatively:

> *I have not told anyone about my work because this is how it is and people in the family think it's bad.*
> (177, female, 16, *dohori*)

Ways of keeping work secret included telling family members that they were employed in a non-stigmatised sector (e.g. in retail or construction) or remaining vague about the nature of their role (e.g. a waiter in a restaurant rather than a *dohori* or cabin restaurant). Living geographically distant from family members helped some storytellers hide the nature of their work, as parents could be provided with vague reassurances by phone when asked about their employment. Parents' lack of awareness could also prevent scrutiny:

> *My mother is a simple person and knew nothing of what went about. She is not even well versed with Nepali language.*
> (184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar)

Storytellers could go to great lengths to ensure their work remained hidden from their families. For example, storyteller 073 took her family members to a more reputable venue, paying the venue's manager to pretend she was an employee (073, female, 24, dance bar). Maintaining a secret life could be risky: extended family members or acquaintances could visit venues unsuspectingly, or police arrests would have to be navigated to prevent family members from finding out the type of work they were involved in.

Working in venues associated with the AES was kept hidden from family members for various reasons. The fear of being judged or subjected to character attacks was a key factor:

> *I can't tell my family because they might hate me.*
> (111, female, 20, dance bar/club)

> *We didn't let my father-in-law and mother-in-law know because they would feel very sad and judge me differently.*
> (175, female, 19, *dohori*)

Storytellers also feared being ostracised, severely reprimanded, or physically threatened by family members:[15]

> *I have not told anyone that I work in a dance bar, they take it in bad light and kick me out of home.*
> (161, female, 19, dance bar/club)

> *If my family comes to know that I work in a bar they will kill me.*
> (025, female, 18, dance bar/club)

15 Several storytellers described family members threatening to 'kill' them. This appears to be a figure of speech to describe fear of being physically or verbally reprimanded by family members.

> *I didn't tell them because they would beat me and shout at me if they found out.*
> (151, female, 20, spa/massage)

In addition to fearing repercussions to themselves, concerns were raised about how their families would be impacted – the family might feel ashamed themselves, or the revelation may lead to discord between family members:

> *I feel all my relations both at maternal home and in-laws will break up if anyone came to know that I work as a dancer in a dance restaurant.*
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

Fearing the consequences of being found out could result in anxiety being a part of everyday life. One storyteller revealed the sense of discomfort experienced having to live a duplicitous life:

> *Father is not aware of this and if he finds out, he will kill me and will not even allow me to come home. A sister from the village was working at the bar and my father was talking to me about someone's daughter dancing naked at the bar. What does he know? His daughter works in a bar.*
> (007, female, 23, dance bar/club)

In instances where family members did find out their child was involved AES work, some storytellers described being reprimanded or physically punished:

> *We worked in another hotel (khaja ghar). But my mother spotted me there. She beat me and took me with her.*
> (021, female, 16, *khaja ghar*)

> *My sister-in-law found out about my work and told my brother. He beat me badly and I left that work.*
> (005, female, 25, *dohori*)

Being berated for working in the AES could continue long term, and there were numerous examples where storytellers had been continuously insulted or shamed by family members for involvement in such work. Family relationships were also impacted. Storyteller 185 described how her 'family members were all crying when [they] found out' (185, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar). Another storyteller, whose overseas working husband discovered she worked in a *dohori* via his friend, was asked to give her son to her husband's family, as she was seen as unfit to look after him: 'Later, he called after three months and asked me to give our son to his brother and sister-in-law and to do whatever I would like to do' (196, female, 18, *dohori*).

Exposure meant some children were forced to leave work by family members:

> *I had to quit my job after my mom and dad threatened to break my leg* [laughs].
> (155, female, 22, dance bar/club)

> *She* [mother] *even came to see the place where I worked and insisted that I should stop working there and go back to the village to continue study.*
> (035, female, 17, dance bar/club)

However, some chose to continue working, either ignoring their families' criticism, convincing them that their role was not 'immoral' or deciding to continue hiding their involvement, despite the risk that family members may again find out. Despite facing condemnation, often they continued because they needed to support themselves and/or their household, and there were few alternatives:

> *Later, I went to work without listening to my sister and took the risk because it was difficult to survive.*
> (007, female, 23, dance bar/club)

> *Even then I continued working there. I had to work anyway. Tips were pretty good. I had gotten used to having some money at my disposal. One has to wait for a month to receive money if you work at any other place.*
> (053, female, 24, cabin restaurant/bar)

For married teenage girls and young women working in the AES, keeping their job secret from their spouse was often impossible. But the nature of their work – where income varies depending on commission and tips – and the stigma attached to the sector could lead to intense distrust accompanied by abuse:

> *He used to accuse me, saying I haven't earned fair money and beat me.*
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

> *I have left him because of his beating, addiction, and constant accusation of affair whenever I go to work.*
> (052, female, 19, *dohori*)

For one storyteller, her involvement in the sector led to violent hatred from her father. She was exposed to physical and verbal abuse to the extent that she became vulnerable to harm whatever she was doing:

> *I just need to go out from the house, he would use those swear words and ask if I had slept with some people and where did I go? That time, I got into a physical fight with dad. I had just come back after washing my clothes. He couldn't tolerate me working or just sleeping at home or staying at home and he would accuse me of sleeping with others if I went out.*
> (160, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

It is interesting to note that a far less common response from parents was to report the workplace to the relevant authorities. In the only example where parents reported venue owners (of a cabin restaurant) to the police, after finding out about their child's employment, the proprietors were reportedly jailed for three years (080, female, 18, cabin restaurant/bar).

3.4.2 Community perceptions of AES work

Children described how work in this sector was generally perceived by the community:

> *I won't say this is a good or bad sector but people's perception towards those who are working in this sector is bad. If someone is working in this sector, people will directly scrutinise and raise a question on them and say, 'Oh, he/she is working in such sector' and 'is not good'. The way we are scrutinised I don't want others to be scrutinised, that is why work in some other place, find other jobs.*
> (194, female, 18, *dohori*)

> *Everyone looks at you in a bad way when you go to work at night.*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

> *I work at dohori to become a part of society but the people from the outside consider that place bad.*
> (170, male, 22, *dohori*)

> *They say that we earn by sleeping with men. They say that I work in a restaurant, I am a spoiled girl.*
> (174, female, 22, dance bar/club)

> *People's bad perception regarding this line of work and us not able to talk freely almost made me about to leave this line of work.*
> (086, female, 22, spa/massage)

One storyteller described how girls' honour was seen as fragile and irreparable, and working in venues associated with the AES put this at risk:

> *But people and acquaintances would complain, daughters should not be allowed to work in hotels. One wrong decision of a girl will impact them a lifetime, they would say.*
> (130, female, 20, *khaja ghar*)

Children and young people working in the AES hid the nature of their profession from their community in order to prevent exposure to negative comments. Some storytellers created fictitious jobs to avoid scrutiny:

> *Generally, I say that I work at a hospital as a cleaner. I tell people that I have night duty there because if they know about my job, they will talk bad about me.*
> (033, female, 18, *dohori*)

> *I have told them* [neighbours] *that I have my own hotel, I haven't even revealed to them about the proper location of my working place. I have told them that I need to see after staff at hotel until 10.00pm and it takes time to wrap up, shut down and return to the room.*
> (073, female, 24, dance bar)

However, the association of night work in general with adult entertainment and the lack of economic opportunities for young women and girls made it difficult to allay suspicions; any appearance of making a decent living could immediately associate them with working in the AES.

> *People, especially aunties, do backbite in this settlement. If you start earning, they will talk, 'Oh she is earning, where is she working? Must be working in bar and clubs'.*
> (289, female, 19, domestic/household worker)

> *You just have to go out in nice clothes, then they start saying, 'Someone's daughter went to this kind of place, did this and that'.*
> (174, female, 22, dance bar/club)

Young women and girls were associated with the AES just by displaying a certain mode of acting, a certain look, or way of moving through their communities.

The impact of society's negative perceptions was often keenly felt. Restricted access to accommodation, inflated rental rates and/or eviction were realities faced by young women and girls working in the AES:

> *When I searched for a room, I did not find it and even if you find a room, the rent is unreasonable.*

> *That's why most of the dohori workers stay in hotels.*
> (007, female, 23, dance bar/club)

> *Given the societal outlook, people don't rent out rooms for you, when they know where you work, they look at you with a loaded perspective.*
> (100, female, 24, dance bar/club)

> *Even our landlord thinks we are spoiled because we are out in work during night-time also. Even our landlord evicted us from his home.*
> (175, female, 19, *dohori*)

Storytellers also described how people in their communities shamed them for returning late at night, or marked them out and ostracised them:

> *They* [society] *would question where I had been this late and ask whether I felt ashamed.*
> (176, female, 17, *dohori*)

> *People used to think bad of us, backbite us.*
> (051, female, 18, dance bar/club)

> *They tell others to not befriend me as they think I would be a bad company and spoil others.*
> (177, female, 16, *dohori*)

For one storyteller, this felt as if her community did not want her to exist: 'People don't even want to see my face' (118, female, 23, spa/massage). There was evidence of the psychological impact of community members' negative perceptions. One storyteller described her angry reaction to neighbours gossiping about her night work: 'I get hurt. I like to kill them all' (178, female, 17, *dohori*). But more commonly, a sense of paranoia and isolation was expressed:

> *During bedtime, I get paranoid thinking how people may react about my job as I return home at 1.00am.*
> (033, female, 18, *dohori*)

> *There are mostly well-off people who talk down on you and they backbite about you without taking your name but you are definite that it is aimed at you. It would get into my brain.*
> (176, female, 17, *dohori*)

Storyteller 176 also described her experience of depression after being criticised for returning home late at night after working in a party palace:

> *When I had gone to work a while ago due to the behaviour of the society I nearly went into depression. I did not feel like going out or talking to anyone, felt like crying when seeing people's faces and I wanted to lock the doors and stay in a dark room.*
> (176, female, 17, *dohori*)

But as noted earlier, these perceptions could be evaluated against the benefits of working in the AES:

> *When I worked there people looked at me in a negative way even though it is good for me. I do not care about the society and if I want to make my life from there you will find a lot of options. I can also go abroad from there*.
> (008, female, 18, dance bar/club)

> *Irrespective of our satisfaction working in a dohori, people tend to look at us in a negative light.*
> (126, female, 22, *dohori*)

3.4.3 Customers' perceptions of AES workers

Throughout the stories, young womenand girls gave their interpretations of customers' actions and behaviours. Many remarked that they felt that customers looked down on them, disrespected them, thought less of them, or did not view them with the same level of respect they would give a family member. In response to customers' unwanted propositions, they questioned (often directly, to their customer) how customers treated employees compared with how they treated their own sisters, wives and daughters:

> *When an unacceptable offer is made from a 'guest', I used to tell them directly not to say so as they too might have daughters and sisters of their own and just because someone works in a dance bar does not mean they do all that, and while not everyone may think the same, I wasn't like that. They used to apologise for asking.*
> (148, female, 24, dance bar/club)

> *I told him, 'People come to work here due to obligations, some work here out of choice and some due to lack of option, how can you view everyone the same way? Aren't we like your sisters and daughter? Aren't I? How could you say that to me? Don't you know how to talk to people', while crying*.
> (016, female, 21, *dohori*)

The young women and girls' indignation at the men's propositions is understandable, but it is more common for children to become resigned to the customers' perception of them:

They obviously look down on you in dohori.
(154, female, 17, *dohori*)

Since you worked in such a place, people looked down upon you. To be exact, the way they talked was different.
(169, female, 23, *khaja ghar*)

'Guests' look at us negatively. They want to make fun with us, try to touch our body part like boyfriend and girlfriend do with each other.
(092, female, 19, *dohori*)

The teaching profession I did in the village was well respected, but here they used to view women as objects and toys.
(096, female, 24, dance bar)

Customers' negative perceptions of the young women and girls who work in the AES probably account for some of their negative behaviour. A generalised social perception of AES venues and the people who work in these venues seemed to have great influence on how customers behaved.

3.4.4 Children's perceptions of working in the AES

While the previous sub-sections have looked at how children feel they are perceived by the varied actors within their lives (e.g. family members and neighbours), we now explore how managing this stigmatised identity affects how they see themselves and their co-workers.

Self-perception

There was evidence of an internalised shame amongst AES workers. For example:

No one says this is a good job, not even me. No matter what others do, no one accepts this in their home. That is why there is a problem. Society does not take it nicely either.
(191, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Even if you earn a little by doing good deeds, you will be satisfied, but if you earn a lot by doing bad deeds, you will not be satisfied.
(135, female, 19, guest house)

I asked myself how the earnings from such unwanted behaviour would support me in any way.
(065, female, 17, *dohori*)

When I continued working in our neighbourhood as well, people started gossiping and even saying things like I was drinking alcohol and was spending nights with boys. Anyway, by the time I reached grade 8, there was no one to support me and I had ruined myself and was walking around. There was no good environment at home.
(160, female, 17, *khaja ghar*)

I got spoiled later… I don't want to do the same job anymore. Instead, labour job is good even though it's less pay.
(198, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Stigma can contribute to children feeling trapped in the venues where they are working, but also to assessments of themselves that are influenced by narratives of AES workers as 'spoiled' or 'ruined'. The life stories show the emotional burden and self-blame that children and young people who work in the AES can take on from a young age. These narratives also influence perceptions of co-workers (see below).

Perceptions of co-workers in the AES

The types of sexual sexual exploitation that take place in different venues can be ambiguous. In some venues, particular employees were involved in arranging direct sexual services with customers. There were examples of this being facilitated by owners or by co-workers, such as 'bodyguards' (security staff). Numerous storytellers used various terms to differentiate between co-workers who provided direct sexual services or were seen as being involved in more sexualised roles than they would themselves. For example, they were felt to be: 'crossing the limit', 'showing off more than needed', 'taking the wrong path or dark path', or 'spoilt'. What constituted behaviour that 'crossed limits' varied, depending on the individual and the demands of the workplace. For example, storyteller 154, who worked in a *dohori*, felt it was individual employees' choice how to interact with customers and that it was unnecessary to be intimate with customers in any way:

It is all on you to be good or bad while working in such place. So many didis smoke hukkah in dohori, but I don't. The owner doesn't pay us to hold hands, eat with 'guests' and not do anything. Our job is to take orders and serve food, that's it.
(154, female, 17, *dohori*)

Whereas for storyteller 008, who works in a dance bar, arranging sex-related activities directly with customers constituted 'crossing the limit':

> *We have to work within our limits, but they cross the limit. The staff talk to the 'guest' and let them touch in different places and setting price for the night… More than the 'guests' the girls are like that*.
> (008, female, 18, dance bar/club)

Earning differentials within venues could present dilemmas, even if such activities were seen as transgressing lines of acceptability:

> *I'm still avoiding the bad things that happen there. Now that I am in that sector, I want to do the same job* [sex work]*, thinking that more money will come from there. My salary would have been coming here too. I didn't want to do that work* [sex work] *and I don't want to go even if I would have been paid so much money.*
> (185, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

Differing boundaries of acceptability around the provision of direct sexual services can lead to complex hierarchies within workplaces. For example, those who engage in providing sexual services may be perceived as having more relational power resulting from their greater earning power: 'She makes a lot of money as she dances and also stays with guests. She has a lot of money. I don't earn much and that is why she shouts at me' (019, female, 16, khaja ghar). But there was also an awareness of the risks associated with this type of work: 'The "guests" try to entice you and you end up ruining your life… You should just take your salary and collect tips if you receive them, but bad things are happening in the *dohori* (017, male, 24, *dohori*). And those seen as engaging in more directly sexual ways with customers were viewed by some co-workers as being responsible for the continued negative perceptions held of the sector by customers and/or society more generally. They perceived the actions of individual women and girls as causing the stigma that was indiscriminately applied to those working in night venues and the AES:

> *If one person chooses a wrong path, everyone in the industry is perceived negatively.*
> (012, female, 22, *dohori*)

> *People think everybody indulges in improper activities. Even if you're clean, because of your friends and acquaintances, you are clubbed up in a bracket.*
> (184, female, 20, cabin restaurant/bar)

> *People think about us in a negative way. Not all women are the same.*
> (171, female, 17, *dohori*)

One view was that the behaviour of a minority of employees within venues was seen to make all workers more susceptible to abuse from customers in the workplace:

> *One of us is like that. I tell them we all get a bad reputation because of one person… But we used to tell him that we only wanted them to not allow 'guests' to touch them and do things as everyone would think the same about us because of one person.*
> (177, female, 16, *dohori*)

Another view was that workers who engaged in more direct sexual activities did so because of their intense desire to earn, reflecting the higher earning potential of this type of engagement:

> *Many girls chase for money by doing anything. But I don't do that. I would rather do hard work. I know that now I have taken care of not only me but also my family.*
> (046, female, 19, *dohori*)

> *But whether you go bad or not depends on yourself. If you get greedy and leave your way, you might get spoiled too. If I am able to sustain myself, why would I take a dark path?*
> (116, female, 24, *dohori*)

There were several examples where storytellers were involved in preventing individuals perceived as providing direct sexual services from operating in their workplace, either by reporting them to the owner (who then dismissed them), or by reporting a customer who had been soliciting sex to the police. The customer in the latter example was fined by police and told to apologise to the employee. The storyteller remarked, 'The policeman also told me I did the right thing. They won't view all the staff the same way from now on' (016, female, 21, *dohori*).

There were also empathetic views, and a recognition that often young women and girls were compelled to engage in such activities. It was seen as an understandable response to difficult life circumstances:

> *Young girls who suffer are forced to come to maiti* [maternal home]. *And when maiti doesn't accept them, they will have to do anything to survive and to feed their kid. No matter if the work is bad, they will be ready to do that. They even get ready to do sex*

work. If his/her situation is like that, then we have no right to stop them.
(299, female, 17, domestic/household worker)

The owners themselves hire for some other work but the prostitution goes on. Some women are helpless, some have nothing, some are poor, it's very difficult for women.
(017, male, 24, *dohori*)

Response to society's perceptions of the AES

More generally, several storytellers highlighted the hypocrisy of gendered norms (both in life in general and within the AES) that shame women and girls, while ignoring men's deviant behaviour:

What a pity, even if the son makes dozens of mistakes, they are not blamed, but if a daughter commits a tiny mistake, she has to listen to lifelong blame.
(193, female, 21, dance bar)

The girls are doing that work as their profession, but it would be great if boys don't come to such places, isn't it? And people just say ruthless toward women: they only talk about women having affairs with someone else's husband. But society doesn't say anything to men.
(294, female, 18, domestic/household worker)

Ultimately, despite differences in how types of workers in the AES were viewed, there was a widespread awareness of the harms of working in a stigmatised industry. One view was that until society provides young women and girls with alternative employment opportunities, it was unfair to be shamed given their constrained agency and limited options. There were appeals to the government to provide opportunities before calling for them to stop working in the sector:

If the government arranges work, then such work [sex work] *does not happen. Some people work because they are uneducated and some work because of loan. If they arrange* [alternative] *work then it will be OK, if they tell us not to go with the customers.*
(010, female, 19, cabin restaurant/bar)

What I want to say here is either give appropriate job to people working in this sector or, if you cannot, then develop a good perception towards us… For many days we stayed hungry, yelling and screaming before starting this job.
(175, female, 19, *dohori*)

Some storytellers also expressed aspirations for the sector, and hoped that their work would be fulfilling and dignified in future:

If you look at it decently, it's a good place to work… If only the salary was as much as the government has determined. If only they didn't view us as bad. If only there were stricter rules for people to improve how they speak with others. I wonder when the people working there can feel like they can work there freely.
(016, female, 21, *dohori*)

But also, powerfully, the constrained agency of those working in the sector was contrasted with the agency of those frequenting it. Storyteller 193 highlights the hypocrisy that 'those who criticise our work outside the bar also come there to enjoy' (193, female, 21, dance bar/club). She describes how she bears witness to the transgressions of society, including those by people in positions of power:

Most of the 'guests' are army, police and businessmen. People who are prestigious are also there. We are a witness to their activities. They eat and drink lots, at last, they cannot even pay the bill and deposit their mobile or other valuables. The people of grandfather age, young and other people are there for recreation. Father-like aged people come for romance with children. They enjoy with girls. They come to drink, eat, touch here and there, enjoy, and leave.
(193, female, 21, dance bar/club)

The young woman compared this with her own circumstances – 'If your parents have nothing, cannot do anything for you, then we have to do something to survive' – and, in doing so, invites her audience to reflect on society's conception of which behaviours are considered shameful and deviant (193, female, 21, dance bar/club).

3.4.5 Perceptions of working in the AES: conclusion

Working in the AES often requires children and young people to have to live a duplicitous life; the nature of work means that jobs have to be kept hidden from families and the wider community. Where families did find out, children and young people could be shamed, ostracised, physically abused, and evicted. Those working in the AES were blamed for their involvement rather than the businesses that employed them. This

often led to internalised feelings of shame and a sense that those working in the sector had been 'spoiled' by such work. There is some awareness among AES workers that the way they are judged is unfair; that those (men) freely choosing to engage in sex for recreation escape judgment – even when this involves the sexual exploitation of children – while those (women and girls) who are compelled to work in the sector are shamed and stigmatised. The stories show both a normalisation and acceptance of being treated badly as well as an awareness or understanding of how things could be better.

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Section 4:

CONCLUSION

4 CONCLUSION

In this section, we draw together some of the key conclusions from this exposition of children's voices.

4.1 DRIVERS OF WFCL

The life stories show that many children were not just helping out or contributing to their families' finances, but were critical actors who were often relied on to keep their households going. Most children go to work because of a financial crisis in the family. Without their labour the family will often be unable to survive. The financial contributions of children were significant and used to cover rents, debt repayments, medical expenses, etc. Their agency in decision-making around working was notable; children were aware of the problems facing their families and wanted to help. They exercised what little agency they had in order to support their families. This is, of course, a limited form of agency, because they have few options. Nevertheless, to work and support their family rather than go to school was a decision that they often made themselves, which challenges dominant narratives of children being passively sent to work.

Multiple factors that drive children towards WFCL are depicted in the life stories and while this paper looked at each driver in turn, it also highlights how the causalities are inter-related rather than stand alone and should be seen as being in systemic relationship to each other; but a major cause of poverty and family debt seems to be related to ill-health. Story after story tells of a health crisis that led to a financial crisis, that could then result in disrupted relationships at home. Sometimes children have to work because of debt incurred by medical expenses, sometimes it is because the adult income earners are no longer able to work – in either circumstance, children were under pressure to earn enough to significantly contribute to the family's finances.

Stressful family circumstances, that include family health issues and financial crises, leads to violence, and this is often connected with alcohol use. Children are frequently either direct victims of abuse or witnesses to abuse within the household (e.g. violence against their mothers and siblings). Women and girls are particularly susceptible to violence perpetuated by men within their families (either spouses and/or fathers), and gendered norms can lead to violence when women and girls are perceived to act in ways that do not meet expectations of them. But gendered norms also result in women and girls having to stay in violent family situations even when the abuse is extreme. The domestic abuse that some teenage girls experienced after marriage and the difficulty in escaping these situations is notable. The lack of safe spaces that children can escape to is very evident, as is the limited role of intervening bodies outside of the family, even when violence is prolonged and extreme.

For some children, violence directly impacts their life trajectories. They have to leave home to escape violence, and this increases the risk of entering the WFCL, especially where children have to escape violence at home by entering a workplace that they depend on for board. Their lack of social and support networks and dependence on workplace relationships to meet all their needs makes them highly vulnerable. But, more generally, children are impacted by the trauma of violence, which they must continue to manage (along with everything else). It is an additional burden which they must carry alongside the work that they are doing.

4.2 FINDING WORK AND WORK TRANSITIONS

4.2.1 Influences and intermediaries

Most of the children who told their stories reported actively seeking work themselves. Influencers and intermediaries are most often family or close associates of the family. Families may encourage, cajole or even force their children into work. Often work starts in a relatively low-key way, for example, with the child accompanying the parent to work and helping out. Friends were also key influencers – showing economic possibilities from a distance and modelling pathways into work – but were also often directly involved in helping find work for their friends. Given that so many children come from dysfunctional families, it is hardly surprising that they are so strongly influenced by their peers. But their friends are also young and may not have the experience to understand the implications of all of their decisions.

Although trafficking exists, it is rarely recounted in the stories we collected. However, the life stories show how known intermediaries, such as relatives or friends, sometimes instilled a misplaced sense of trust in workplaces that were later found to be highly exploitative. This is often because the ambiguous and hidden nature of some venues associated with the AES means that the

nature of work can be obscured, at least initially. This is especially the case in venues such as *khaja ghars*, which are widespread in Kathmandu and where any involvement with the sex industry may not be clear at first. *Khaja ghars* may be simply small informal eating houses, but in areas associated with the AES, may also be bridges to the sex industry, or direct hosts of sexual services in rooms at the back of the premises. Many children begin work in these small-scale eateries, serving and washing up, often when they are very young – some are under 12 years old. Where these establishments are connected to the sex industry, this can lead to a gradual or forced familiarisation with roles that are sexually exploitative.

Children beginning work in party palaces are also particularly young - some as young as eight. Children often start work there because they are local, and the work is temporary and easily accessible from the home. These workplaces are very under-researched and need more scrutiny. As with *khaja ghars*, these venues might not seem obviously connected with AES, but they are clearly very much part of a complex system which supports and sustains it.

4.2.2 Work transitions

The life stories show the fluidity of the labour market – children move from sector to sector in search of better conditions and/or pay. Sometimes they transition into the AES because the work in other sectors is so hard. Some children have aspirations to sing or dance and are attracted to the world of entertainment venues which seems more interesting and colourful. There is also the potential to earn more than cleaning and waiting tables, and, as noted above, options to enter the formal sector are limited due to their age, lack of skills, education and citizenship certificates. However, better paid work in the AES is often associated with engaging in roles where they are sexually vulnerable (including being sexually harassed or exploited). There were examples where different roles and types of workplace were weighed up, and decisions made about the level of intimacy to engage in. These decisions were often structured by the constrained financial realities children and young people faced. But there were also examples of young people being hired on false pretences and being misled about what the work entails.

Within this ambiguous and obscured landscape, it is possible to infer that the youngest children are the most exploited because they do not know what to expect, they do not have networks and they are much more dependent. They are also less confident in being able to assert themselves to protect themselves. As they come into mid-teens, they tend to have more choices so often frequently change jobs, with more awareness of what to avoid.

Once a child or young person is working in the AES, it can be very hard to get out. Leaving the AES completely is difficult because of the lack of opportunities that offer similar levels of remuneration. This can result in the acceptance of adverse working conditions within a workplace, and/or frequent shifts between different workplaces in the pursuit of improved conditions that often do not materialise.

4.3 EXPERIENCES OF WFCL

4.3.1 Nature of the work

Most children spoke of negative employer behaviour in at least one of their workplaces (ranging from extreme physical abuse, to beating or hitting, coercive manipulation, scolding, and financial exploitation). Sexual abuse was another way in which employers abuse their relative positions of power. The mistreatment of employees is often made possible because children entering the sector are already highly vulnerable – for example, they are from disadvantaged backgrounds or have arrived from outside of Kathmandu and have limited skills and options. Employers may exploit this vulnerability, taking advantage to drive profits.

The business model of many AES venues is based on encouraging clients to pay for drinks at exorbitant prices. This leads to blurred lines between work and sexual exploitation, because sitting with and flirting with customers is what underpins this business model; children have to sit with customers, entertain them, and drink with them. Many of the children have to get drunk every night. In a state of drunkenness, they are much more likely to respond to sexual requests and be sexually exploited, including in ways that involve the provision of direct sexual services. This more or less forced drinking is an abuse in itself.

Employers tend to value their customers' enjoyment over the wellbeing of their employees due to the client/service-oriented business model. A widespread sense of entitlement to women's and girls' bodies means that, in order to appease customers, sexual exploitation becomes necessary for turning a profit. In addition, while alcohol sales are crucial to this business model, often customers'

behaviour becomes abusive (including sexually abusive) under the influence of alcohol. Not all men who visit AES venues are perpetrators of abuse, but many of them are. Their sense of entitlement to women's and girls' bodies means they assume that all female workers in those venues are there to please them sexually and become upset if the girls and women do not want to participate. According to some of the storytellers, some male customers felt they could do anything they wanted, including causing physical pain and harm, because they had paid for it. The chances of redress in response to abuse are minimal to non-existent.

The prevalence of stories of mistreatment and abuse in the narratives shows that it is not only the result of the behaviour of a few individual employers or customers, but instead the consequence of the way that establishments are set up, whereby they rely on the sexual exploitation of children and young people, and for varied forms of abuse to be ignored or go unpunished.

4.3.2 Agency and risk mitigation

Most of the children who told their stories reported actively seeking work themselves, exercising the limited agency they had in order to support their families. There were also many examples of children and young people exercising agency in workplaces even if those workplaces were systematically exploitative and abusive. For example, storytellers deployed various strategies to facilitate better treatment by customers and employers, including securing roles with less exposure to harassment (for example, being a dancer rather than a waiter), becoming the owner's girlfriend to avoid being sent to sit with customers, and providing incorrect phone numbers to placate customers' demands. Having agency changes how the children see their work environment, and the extent to which they internalise themselves as victims.

However, the life stories show that structural factors often undermine or make these strategies redundant: abuse and bad behaviour are normalised and seen as an expected part of the role; economic necessity requires a degree of intimacy in order to earn commission and tips; and employers often ignore, endorse, or even reinforce mistreatment. Ultimately, profit is prioritised over the wellbeing of children and young people working in the AES. Furthermore, workers who are younger and/or marginalised are often less able to utilise their agency and may even be disadvantaged by other workers who are better able to protect themselves in unsafe workplaces (for example, because they are sent by more experienced employees to sit with abusive customers). Utilising collective agency could be a strategy that helps to redress the highly imbalanced relations between workers, employers and customers. This could be a way to improve conditions for all workers, not only those who are able to exercise relatively more individual agency.

4.3.3 Wellbeing of children and young people working in the AES

In addition to unwanted sexual advances, what is perhaps more surprising is the extent of physical discomfort the storytellers experience due to their working responsibilities and work environment – standing for extended periods of time, working unsociable hours, and long shifts also present risks to adolescents working in this industry. Along with physically taxing work duties, storytellers also commented on the effects of the work schedule on their wellbeing – for example, missing meals and having very limited sleep. This is combined with expectations to drink alcohol during each shift in many workplaces. The risks of harm are further intensified because these are children and young people with developing and immature physiology. The physical demands of work in the AES are damaging to children and adolescents whose minds and bodies are still at a crucial stage of development.

4.3.4 Reliance on workplaces

For some employees, their employers and workplaces became surrogate homes and families, often allowing them to escape adverse circumstances where they came from. The stories show the vital role that some employers play in the lives of some of the most disadvantaged children and young people. For these storytellers, their employers provided everything, including a home and a place to sleep, food, access to education, and even love. But the power imbalances and inequalities remain, and children can be emotionally manipulated into staying and working in businesses rather than pursuing other employment opportunities. In this way, the boundaries between employer and employee are blurred and yet maintained to keep young people subordinate.

4.4 PERCEPTIONS OF THE AES

Young people working in the AES had to live duplicitous lives; the nature of their work meant they had to keep their jobs in the AES hidden from their families and the wider community. Where families did find out,

the individual involved could be shamed, ostracised, physically abused, and evicted. Those working in the AES were blamed for their involvement rather than the businesses employing them. This often led to feelings of internalised shame – and a sense that the individual had been 'spoiled' by working in the AES. There is some awareness among those who work in the AES that the way they are judged is unfair, reflecting society's hypocrisy – those (men) who freely choose to engage in sex for recreation – including when this constitutes the sexual exploitation of children – escape judgement while those (women and girls) who are compelled to work in the sector are shamed and stigmatised.

The stories show both a normalisation and acceptance of being treated badly as well as an awareness or understanding of how things could be better.

4.5 THE AES AND WFCL

Multiple factors intersect and result in children needing to work, and bringing a child out of child labour involves solving multiple problems at the same time. This points to the need to focus on the child and their family as opposed to any one issue that might contribute to familial crises. It is notable how there was little evidence of these factors being mitigated by government welfare support systems. Instead, limited intervention led to numerous factors compounding each other, and deepening financial crises and the disruption of family relationships. Children are then faced with the need to earn and often have a desire to support themselves and their families. At the same time, they are confronted by multiple constraints when entering the labour market – limited skills and education, limited labour market opportunities, restrictions due to their age, and lack of official documents. Entering the AES offers an opportunity within this constrained landscape – but one that is accompanied by risks and disadvantages.

One of the key messages of the CLARISSA programme is, when considering WFCL, how important it is to take into account all of the things that accompany child labour in the workplace. It is critical to see the lives of the children holistically. It is not just the work that they are doing that weighs heavily on their lives: girls are also doing the housework and possibly looking after siblings or even their own children; and some children are trying to continue their education at the same time as working. These responsibilities can make their 12-hour working days into 16 hours or more. They face sexual harassment so they are frightened; they may have little nutritious food to eat so they are also hungry; they are stigmatised so they feel shame; and they may have to navigate a complex home life that is punctuated by violence. For some, work is the place where they feel safest despite the abuse they experience there. For many, work is just the visible part of the iceberg of abuse. Effective responses to WFCL will focus on the lives of children in WFCL and their specific vulnerabilities, and not solely on the abusive and exploitative nature of their workplaces. This is particularly important given the gender make-up of those working in the AES – these are women and girls often already facing structural disadvantages and discrimination (which are then carried over into and/or amplified within their workplaces).

Finally, it is also important to note how little slack there is within this system to respond to societal stressors and shocks. Covid-19 had an impact as a driver of WFCL, but it also burdened many children and their families with additional debts when they were unable to work and/or had to cover additional medical costs. Even when children can earn in the AES, there is little resilience to cope with such crises. Further research is needed to understand the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on the AES and how this affects children's role within it.

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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.