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Same-sex Sexualities, Gender Variance, Economy and Livelihood in Nepal: Exclusions, Subjectivity and Development

Daniel Coyle and Paul Boyce

February 2015

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Executive summary

This case study explores the relationship between socioeconomic opportunity and exclusion in relation to minority gender and sexualities in Nepal. The study, a component of a wider programme on Sexuality, Poverty and Law supported by the Department for International Development (DFID) and undertaken at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), aims to advance empirically grounded insights and recommendations to address the socioeconomic conditions of sexuality and gender minority peoples, in respect of varied aspects of life experience, subjectivity, self-identity and livelihood. Based on fieldwork conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, between November 2013 and June 2014 the case study recounts experiences of socioeconomic marginalisation *and* opportunity as encountered and created by people who experience themselves as being different from socially normative conventions of sexuality and gender; in respect of the present research this has specifically entailed focusing on the experiences of transgender people and people who practise same-sex sexualities (and in respect of an understanding that such genders and sexualities are experienced differently by different people and do not represent uniform or singular categorisations). Many of the people who participated in the research evidence a multifaceted array of livelihood strategies as being connected to sexuality and gender difference. Some of these strategies were found to have been taken forward in the context of community-based support projects (for example, associated with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for sexual and gender minorities) while others were conceived as independent life choices, or experienced as arising out of lack of choice or economic opportunity. In each of these often interconnected circumstances, the relationship between sexuality, gender, economy and livelihood emerges as complex and ambivalent.

The present case study demonstrates that it is not viable to proceed from a singular analytical premise that sexual and gender minority peoples, however defined, self-identified (or indeed not self-identified), are always excluded from socioeconomic opportunities purely on grounds of sexual and gender difference. In Nepal, many people seek to hide same-sexual desire and relationships or gender-variant practices, usually with great difficulty within socially conservative environments. Hence, while findings from the research might support a correlation between stigma and socioeconomic exclusion, the economic effects of living in terms of sexual or gender minority experience are far from straightforward or are a linear result of targeted discrimination against self-identified sexual and gender minority individuals, although such instances also occur. The case study explores this complexity in order to achieve a nuanced understanding of these concerns as they pertain to wider potential synergies in livelihood policy and programming, sexual rights actions, education, awareness-raising initiatives, and community-based support for sexual and gender minority persons.

By way of wider background, it is notable that correlations between same-sex sexualities, transgender experience and economic disadvantage are increasingly explored in a range of international contexts, especially with regard to sexual rights and development practices. Given that the causes of economic hardship are multifaceted in any context, its relationship to gender and sexuality is necessarily intricate. Robert Chambers, for instance, has proposed a range of material and social causes of economic deprivation, stressing, for example, how social norms can effect economic exclusion for those who do not conform to social norms (Chambers 2005).[1] Adaptation of Chambers' model has highlighted how people of minority gender or sexuality experience might be economically disadvantaged by heteronormativity, for example by being excluded from kinship and the economic security that family relationships may afford, and by discrimination in or exclusion from work (*ibid*.). Similarly, Kathryn Rankin's (2004 and 2010) work in Nepal has highlighted how 'free' markets are inherently embedded within complex and changing formations of cultural politics that are rooted within sociocultural value systems and hierarchies, which are by nature patriarchal

[1] See Cornwall and Jolly (2006).

and heteronormative. Rankin's work has explored this point in relation to gender and 'economies of practice' in order to illuminate how markets and culture are 'mutually embedded' and impact individuals', families' and communities' socioeconomic livelihoods (Rankin 2010). In this respect, both globally and locally there is a growing body of research to suggest that a person's livelihood opportunities and political economies are shaped by both their personal experiences of sexuality and gender and the social contexts in which they are rooted.

In the context of the present study these issues were particularly evident in sexual and gender minority people's early-age experiences in their families and schools. Our own research and that of others has shown that many sexual and gender minority peoples may suffer from discrimination in school, potentially leading to an early exit from, or poor performance within, education (UNDP and USAID 2014: 38; UNDP and Williams Institute 2014: 53; see also UNESCO 2012). This is especially salient in respect of the present research where a number of respondents have indicated that poor performance in school (related to stigma or a felt sense of 'being different') has had an impact on economic opportunity throughout their life-course. School was also a pivotal point in many participants' lives as the arena in which they first began to experience their gender and sexuality as different or marginalised from socially acceptable forms of gender and sexuality, as embodied and expressed by their peers, for example. Many times these early experiences of sexuality and gender as incongruent of social norms shaped participants' livelihood strategies – encouraging them to drop out of school, move to cities, participate in remittance economies, distance themselves from their families' support and (hetero)normative expectations, and so on.

Running counter to such observations, gender and sexual difference might also offer economic opportunities. The present research found that freedom from conventional familial and social expectations can offer openings for economic adaptability, perhaps unfettered by obligations to provide for either natal or marital family. This is not to idealise minority sexuality and gender experiences and their relationship to political economy, nor to minimise the potential trauma that might result from social exclusion and isolation from natal communities. It is also not to say that many gender and sexual minority people may not also marry heterosexually, sometimes willingly or possibly out of pressure or desire to conform to social norms – something that has been especially witnessed globally and commonly found in South Asia (see, for example, Boyce 2014; UNDP and USAID 2014: 43–45). It is important to stress, therefore, that sexual and gender difference may not be related to socioeconomic abjection or exclusion only. Indeed, some opportunities for income may be positively correlated with gender and sexual difference, for example work in community-based organisations and NGOs for sexual and gender minority persons, as well as other private sector industries where a presentation of self in terms of 'sexual or gendered difference' may have economic value or social capital. For example, one gay-identified informant in the present research reported that he originally considered pursuing a career as a hairdresser because that is where he thought gay men could or should work – a thought heavily influenced by both a lack of any other options and role models (Interview with Suresh December 2013). This points to ways in which economic life-ways and sexual subjectivity can be recursive, as people come to intimate understandings of their sexuality in relation to how a sense of same-sex desire (in this instance) may be related to projected (mis)understandings of livelihood options and ways of being-in-the-world predicted on such desires.

Varying circumstances and socioeconomic livelihoods in respect of gender and sexual difference are evident in contemporary Nepal, where over the past 15 years or so significant advances have been made in terms of legal recognition of sexual rights, while many issues pertaining to the marginalisation of sexual and gender minority peoples persist. Indeed, these underlying prejudices have recently surfaced anew at the level of governance. Arbitrary arrests of transgender women and gender-nonconforming men have increased on the grounds of 'public indecency'; sexual and gender minority parliamentary candidates had their candidacies revoked by major political parties immediately prior to the November 2013 election; and recently a new draft of the criminal code supported by international donors and written by Nepal's Ministry of Law and Justice originally included provision for the criminalisation of any 'unnatural' sex (non-penile vaginal sexual intercourse) with up to a year of incarceration and a 20,000 rupee (US$200) fine – this bill is due to be submitted to parliament for debate in late January 2015 (Draft Civil and Criminal Code, personal correspondence from Bharat Shrestha). These proposals run counter to the progressive legislation concerning sexual and gender minorities passed by the Supreme Court of Nepal in 2007 (see Boyce and Coyle 2013) and have been met by the concerted activism of queer; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and sexual rights organisations from within Nepal and beyond. In these troubling circumstances, sexual rights and recognition exist alongside a difficult relationship to the state and legislature, and uncertain outcomes in respect of economic opportunity and exclusion for sexual and gender minorities.

Moreover, the wider Nepali economy is one where economic opportunity and exclusion, prosperity and abjection exist side by side. Lack of employment and educational opportunities are ubiquitous experiences for many Nepali, especially youth and people from lower socioeconomic classes, who increasingly travel abroad to work in low-paid employment, primarily as unskilled labourers in domestic, service and construction industries. Nepal's remittance economy is now one of the largest in the world; it is estimated that over 25 per cent of Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP) is comprised of remittances (World Bank 2011). Remittances and work within tourism and development sectors have helped to expand the Nepali middle class, mostly in the Kathmandu Valley, but such developments are mainly limited to Nepali with the pre-existing capital to invest and take advantage of the narrow opportunities for economic advancement that are taking shape within the country (see Liechty 2002 for more information on the emergence of Nepal's middle class, associated values, and the formation of 'class' identities). That being said, the large-scale migration of Nepali men and women has led to a rapid influx of new ideas and generated significant social anxieties and debates surrounding the implications such livelihoods have on cultures, communities and families.

In the context of globalising political economies and work patterns, the relationship between sexual and gendered subjectivities, economies, sexual expression, and rights is especially complex: 'While there is no universal (e.g. United Nations-recognised) declaration on sexuality and rights, the field of sexual rights has emerged as an increasingly important configuration since the 1990s, linking work on sexuality, health and feminism to legal praxis and activism for sexual and gender minorities' (Boyce 2014). Against this background, globally, sexual rights have been associated with neo-liberal global economic expansion because changing modes of economic opportunity and employment have considerably affected traditional forms of economy and lifestyles around the world. The resulting social changes may provide new options for young people to leave their natal homes and communities in search of economic opportunities in cities in Nepal, India, or overseas, but such opportunities may not always deliver what they appear to promise.

For example, in Nepal, work in remittance economies has become a rite of passage for young people, especially young men, who may find remittance as an opportunity to provide for their families and live outside of their families' and communities' social expectations with concomitant exposure to new ideas and values in other places (for instance regarding

sexuality). While remittance work available to Nepali is often exploitative and low paying, it has had a profound effect on family dynamics and economies and has allowed for the creation and assertion of new forms of individualism that challenge traditional norms and values. Work and education abroad have become avenues through which individual identities, lifestyles and desires that might otherwise be in conflict with more communal social values can be experienced and inform new 'intimate aspirations,' even as these may be formed in circumstances of economic restraint. These avenues are not exclusive to sexual and gender minority experience, and many heterosexual women and men make use of these opportunities to delay marriage and navigate between traditional social expectations and more modern desires for more individually centred lives and life-choices (Boyce and Coyle 2013; Maycock *et al.* 2014; Interview with Mira Mishra December 2012).

These kinds of socioeconomic changes have been associated with the emergence of queer social spaces and 'LGBT identities' in Nepal particularly because such ways of experiencing the world in terms of sexual self-identity are often correlated to new forms of individualism that emerge through economic transitions and consumerism. Moreover, the influence of globalising media, social networks (e.g. Facebook) and, especially, gay media platforms are important as performative arenas in which sexual and gender identities may be seen, acted on, and rehearsed as aspects of self-presentation – perhaps tailored to expression through the perceived exigencies of these media. Both Planet Romeo and Grindr, for example, are popular online cruising platforms or 'apps' that permit and facilitate new forms of self-presentation and socio-sexual networking among same-sex desiring people (most often men, given the focus of these platforms) in the Kathmandu Valley – something that has only become possible with the emerging and expanding affordability of smart phones beyond the middle classes. Moreover, the impact of HIV in Nepal in the 1990s catalysed new forms of social activism around sexuality, with activism on transgender and male-to-male sexualities and sexual risks in Nepal becoming recognised internationally. This in turn has engendered and influenced wider social spaces (especially, but not only, within the Kathmandu Valley) wherein same-sex desires and transgender experiences have come to be increasingly understood and taken up by people as a basis for self-identity, these being associated with varying forms of transnationally located discourse and practice, as well as with local and regional modes of activism and sociosexual life.

Against the background of these concerns, the present report seeks to offer a perspective on the changing socioeconomic contexts and work opportunities in Nepal as experienced by sexual and gender minority persons – both those who self-identify in these terms (for example as lesbian, gay or in other regionally specific terms such as *meti*), as well as those who experience and practise same-sex desire without necessarily making explicit identity claims. The report particularly seeks to focus on subtle and underlying causes and markers of socioeconomic exclusion in the lives of such people. Exclusion on the basis of sexuality and gender may not always be characterised by poverty, in that economic opportunities and inventiveness may exist in complex ways alongside socioeconomic marginalisation when people seek out various forms of sustainable livelihoods. However, these opportunities do not necessarily mitigate the reality of economic exclusion and may indeed mark some of the more pervasive and insidious social attitudes that prevail alongside employment or prosperity for sexual and gender minority persons. Moreover, we also recognise that economic exclusion on grounds of sexual and/or gender difference may not be extricable from other factors that may affect economic opportunity, such as gender (especially as this impacts work opportunities for girls and women), caste, socioeconomic class and so on. Such variables combine in people's lives and, taken together, can be viewed in terms of their negative and positive impacts on education, livelihood, healthcare and socioeconomic status.

Given the complexity indicated, this report proposes a multifaceted, intersectional and intersectorial approach to analysis of socioeconomic exclusion in the lives of sexual and gender minority peoples, in Nepal and beyond, and especially as related to recommendations for development policy and practice. Our main recommendations are:

- The systemic and underlying factors that contribute to the socioeconomic marginalisation and poverty of sexual and gender minorities should be addressed through interventions that seek to raise awareness, address gender and sexuality-based discrimination and harassment, and promote more inclusive school and work environments. Within this context, schools are vital sites for intervention, as they hold the key towards preventing discrimination that might lead to early dropout from education, and the opportunity for developing positive attitudes towards sexual and gender difference, as well as creating positive associations with masculinity and femininity that eschew violence and discrimination.
- The poverty and poor socioeconomic conditions in which many sexual and gender minority peoples live should be addressed through holistic initiatives that extend beyond skills training; instead, new interventions should address the wider range of factors that perpetuate poverty through the provision of counselling services, capital, career counselling, internships, and workplace sexual harassment and discrimination.
- Initiatives addressing discrimination and socioeconomic marginalisation should be mainstreamed within pre-existing development projects; this can be accomplished by proactively recruiting self-identifying sexual and gender minority staff and ensuring programmes include and are sensitive to the specific factors that affect sexual and gender minority experiences.
- Specifically within the context of Nepal, avenues for people of sexual and gender minority experience to receive formal recognition and certification of their education, skills and qualifications is imperative for chances to obtain employment. Thus, for example, skills training schemes for sexual and gender minority peoples associated with NGOs or community-based organisations ought to be supported by formally recognised certificates or qualifications. This is especially so in a context where people feel explicitly excluded from economic opportunity because of their sexuality or gendered difference.
- More research and rigorous evaluation of interventions are needed in order to inform effective programming. This includes research on effective awareness strategies, widespread perceptions of sexual and gender minorities, additional research on sexual and gender minorities' family dynamics, experiences of education, and effective employment strategies.

Introduction

Nepal is a country where there has been significant legal reform over the past decade that affirms the rights of sexual and gender minority citizens.[2] However, the wider social context is largely conservative and many gender-variant and same-sex desiring individuals may be directly and indirectly predisposed to marginalised livelihoods because of social exclusion, lack of inclusive economic opportunities, and prejudice suffered in educational and employment contexts, among other causal and contributing factors. This report will explore both the direct and overt social exclusion and employment discrimination against individuals who may not conform to mainstream sexual and gender norms in Nepal and the many ways in which their lives and livelihoods may be shaped by their socioeconomic insecurity. This is notwithstanding a recognition that marginal genders and/or sexualities may correlate to economic opportunities in some scenarios in Nepal – e.g. in the context of possibilities for employment in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for sexual and gender minorities, specific opportunities in some formal and informal employment sectors (e.g. beauty parlours and sex work) and in terms of perhaps not being obligated to send remittances or support extended family networks in cases of those who might be estranged from kinship networks on the basis of their gender or sexual orientation. Such 'opportunities', however, for the most part arise in contexts of abjection – a feeling that a person's choices in life are constrained by a personal experience of sexuality or gender that is unacceptable within Nepali society. For example, in an interview conducted for the present research, a gay-identified man who plans to move away from Nepal to escape marriage pressure was not displeased with his life trajectory; he asked: 'What other choices do I have?' in respect of the possibility that he could live and work as an openly gay man in Nepal. Yet even where such a livelihood strategy may appear to be linked to a forward-looking aspiration to prospects for livelihood and freedom for sexual self-expression 'elsewhere', it can also be associated with exclusion as much as opportunity. For many people in Nepal, work and employment abroad offers significant economic opportunities, as is evident in the country's large remittance economy. However, even while many sexual and gender minorities aspire to work and live abroad in more tolerant countries, usually Australia or America, or in Western Europe, the reality is that obtaining a visa to these countries is difficult and unlikely for many Nepali because of the requirements. The many sexual and gender minority individuals who lack the necessary qualifications are faced with a difficult decision; some inevitably seek and take employment in low-paying, unskilled jobs in the Middle East, India or Southeast Asia where they are removed from social and family pressures but subsequently exposed to the risks related to unskilled migrant work. Those who remain in Nepal usually face the difficulty of balancing society's and their family's pressure to conform to heteronormative and gender-normative social conventions with their own sexualities and gender identities. For people like Raju, who is afraid to disclose his attraction to men, this entails resisting enormous social pressure to marry and means that he is unable to rely on or request his families' support in pursuing his ambition to continue his education and seek further training. Instead, his employment options are limited to subsisting independently from his family and community on unskilled labour alone – a position with little security or potential for growth (Interview with Raju December 2013).

Against the background of such complexity, we contend that addressing the underlying attitudes driving the social marginalisation of some sexual and gender minority peoples is the most effective and sustainable means through which to address the economic exclusion that many sexual and gender minorities experience. Addressing stigma and gender discrimination in educational settings, proactive policies for equity in workplaces, and more informed and meaningful discussion in media and news surrounding a wide range of issues related to sexuality and gender difference, are imperative to generating successful and meaningful

[2] For a longer discussion of the legal context of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal, see Boyce and Coyle (2013).

livelihood strategies for sexual and gender minority peoples. We contend that such an approach can address wider aspects of structural inequality and should not be restricted within funding and programmes for sexual and gender minority people only – although such independent funding streams and programming are also important and necessary. Nonetheless, intersectional and intersectorial approaches can address discrimination and exclusion on the basis of gender and sexuality more broadly; meaning that, in a context such as Nepal, interventions should be based on integrated approaches that seek to address and transform normative and prejudicial attitudes toward gender and sexuality, for example via strategies that address the discrimination women, girls, boys and men potentially face as a result of patriarchy, social and caste hierarchies, and heteronormative social values. Beyond providing better value for money, such approaches are likely to be more effective than focusing on mutually exclusive targeted income-generation schemes for sexual and gender minorities, women, girls and children. The present research, and other research into livelihood schemes for 'trafficking victims', for example, suggest that exclusively targeted approaches typically yield quite narrow and unsustainable effects in terms of livelihood for gender and sexual minority peoples and often reinforce gendered and sexual stereotypes (Richardson, Poudel and Laurie 2009).

Often experiences of marginalisation begin at early ages when individuals may begin to develop an understanding that their sense of sexuality or gender is somehow different from the social expectations that are placed upon them. Experiences of 'being different', in whatever terms and however somebody may experience this, are complex and personal, and do not only pertain to gender and sexuality. Indeed, the experience of feeling like an outsider or marginal, for whatever reason, can be one in which a sense of gender or sexual difference takes shape as an aspect of self-understanding, not simply or necessarily causing marginalisation but arising intimately as an aspect of dissimilarity, for example from the conventional expectations of family life. In such contexts, beyond the direct socioeconomic marginalisation and discrimination that sexual and gender minority peoples may experience, many of the livelihood choices made by such people may, from an early age, be shaped by a need to reconcile their sense of sexuality or gender identity with the stigmatisation, discrimination and potential socioeconomic exclusion they may face if they are perceived, or found, to deviate from social norms or assert a sexual and gender identity that directly challenges heteronormativity. Indeed, facing, or potentially facing, social and economic marginalisation is typically intrinsic to how sexual and gendered difference may be experienced, known or felt *to be different* – stigmatisation that is confirmed throughout a person's life by social and economic exclusions within the family, neighbourhood, school or workplace, etc. This is evidenced, for example, in a recent anthology of personal narratives written by variously identified sexual and gender minority people in Nepal, where many of the stories focused on a central tension between social and economic exclusion and acceptance as intrinsic to the experience of gender and sexual difference – whether in terms of support within the individuals' families or within different places of work (Frisbie 2014).

Conceptualising sexual and gender minority experiences in Nepal is complicated by the reality in which same-sex sexual desires may be lived. Other research in Nepal and India has discussed how same-sex sexual subjectivities and intimacies may not necessarily take place outside the purview of what may look like heteronormativity, and may be performed as implicit aspects of intimacy, querying but not necessarily overtly countering apparently hetero- modes of kinship and community (see Boyce and Pant 2001; Boyce and Khanna 2011; Tamang 2003; Boyce and Coyle 2013; Boyce 2014). Hence, for the purposes of this report, sexual and gender minority people are understood to be individuals with same-sex sexualities and/or gendered experiences that are experienced as incompatible or at odds with heteronormativity but which may or may not necessarily be linked to claims to overtly same-sex sexual identities. To this extent, while some respondents spoke of their sexualities and genders in terms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, *meti* or other local sexual and gender-variant identities, we seek to be sensitive to an understanding that same-sex desires

and gender-variant understandings of self are not always reducible to culturally explicit and socially evident claims to identities, or fixed across entire lifespans (Boyce and Pant 2001; Boyce and Coyle 2013). This point is important given that the basis and experience of discrimination may often be predicated on an individual's nonconformity, as perceived and responded to by others, as opposed to someone's explicit and public identification as a sexual or gender minority. This is directly evident in participants' early-age experiences of harassment and abuse at school on the basis of gender nonconformity before they had come to self-identify their gender or sexuality as different from those around them.

As development agencies in Nepal and internationally have begun to incorporate sexual and gender minorities as 'target populations' within livelihood and poverty alleviation programmes, it is necessary for donors, development practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders to have an understanding of the socioeconomic dynamics that shape the contexts in which sexual and gender minority peoples make difficult decisions about how best to negotiate their sexualities, genders and desires alongside social pressures to conform. While socioeconomic marginalisation and poverty are not unique or exclusive to sexual and gender minority experience in Nepal, the means through which same-sex desiring and transgender peoples experience marginalisation is, in many respects, socially and culturally specific even as their lives are experienced in respect of national and regional diversities pertaining to caste, gender, ethnicity and economic class. Development practitioners need to keep these diverse sociocultural dynamics in mind and adopt an intersectional approach to sexual and gender diversity and marginalisation, given that these issues are presented and experienced by a diverse population that may not be uniformly composed of people who self-identify, publicly or otherwise, within any given transgender or sexually subjective framework. Livelihood interventions therefore are challenged with empowering people and addressing a broader context of socioeconomic marginalisation factors without necessarily requiring individuals to identify within a certain sexual-gender frame and in ways that do not reinforce sexual or gender stereotypes.

Against this background the present report offers an overview of Nepal's economic situation with respect to the rapid process of urbanisation and socioeconomic transformation that is presently occurring in the country. The importance of families to educational and employment opportunities in Nepal for sexual and gender minorities is examined with respect to the tensions between (heteronormative) social pressures to marry and same-sex sexual desire and gender variance. Because education has a tremendous impact on a person's future access to information, resources and employment, early-age experiences of school and education are explored as a key component driving poverty among sexual and gender minorities, including the effect that bullying has on education dropout rates among sexual and gender minority youth. The different forms of discrimination and marginalisation that also directly impact the socioeconomic status of sexual and gender minority peoples may be indirectly shaped by such experiences. The report concludes with a discussion of the implications this analysis has for development practitioners, donors and other stakeholders and makes recommendations for ways to productively address sexuality and gender difference and economic marginalisation.

Methodology

The findings of this report are based in wider, ongoing research conducted by the authors and research partners in Nepal since November 2012, much of which engaged with sexual and gender minority people's concerns surrounding livelihood, economy, legal reform and social pressure in Nepal, and which, for example, informed a previous research project and report on sexuality, development and the law in Nepal, published by IDS in 2013. Continuing out of this foundational work, the present study has been informed by a broadly ethnographic methodological approach, where everyday interactions, both within networks of, and in relation to, individual sexual and gender minority peoples, have facilitated an ongoing engagement in the lives and life-worlds of research participants. The co-author Daniel Coyle lives and works within the social milieu of sexual and gender minority people in Kathmandu as a resident of the city and as someone involved in relevant support work and activism. This enabled interviews and interactions with key informants to arise out of everyday social contact and, specifically, the present report derives from discussions and interactions with gender and sexual minority peoples in the Kathmandu Valley region of Nepal between November 2013 and June 2014. In respect of the present study the research was supported by visits to Kathmandu by the second co-author, Paul Boyce, for the purpose of co-facilitating discussion groups and interviews and developing research themes and analysis. This work has also been informed by both co-authors' ongoing work with 'Creative Nepal', a project aimed at promoting creative expression by sexual and gender minority peoples, including collaborative photographic work (which arose out of the prior research project on Sexuality, Poverty and Law – Boyce and Coyle 2013), and the production of *Pride Climbing Higher*, an anthology of life narratives written by sexual and gender minority people in Nepal focusing on various moments in their lives – often focused on early-age experiences of education, exclusion and marginal livelihood.[3]

Against this background, the present study derives more specifically from a series of in-depth open-ended interviews undertaken with variously identified and non-self-identified sexual and gender minority peoples living and working in the Kathmandu Valley region. A total of ten in-depth interviews were conducted, alongside the more informal discussions with a wider range of participants.[4] Each of these semi-structured interviews lasted for approximately an hour and a half and sought to explore dimensions of political economy, upbringing, gender and sexuality within the participants' lives. The aim of this methodological design was to allow for narratives to surface that went beyond accounts of sexuality and livelihood alone, but rather sought to explore people's experiences as related to the contextual and subjective complexity of their socioeconomic circumstances. This mode of interaction was informed by a broadly 'psychosocial' research approach (Clarke and Hogget 2009); one that paid attention to the minutiae of people's everyday life-worlds, and the day-to-day 'microagressions' that respondents might face in respect of gender and sexual difference (Wing Sue 2010). We sought to allow emotional responses to issues to surface within the research, as a way to get beyond methodological approaches that typically account for gender and sexual minority experience through the description of cultural labels and forms of sexual expression only. The present research sought to gather some contextually detailed narratives from respondents, as a way to ground the study in in-depth accounts of life experiences.

The participants were selected on the basis of different life histories, professional experiences, identities, age, and caste and class backgrounds. The interviews explored individuals' life histories with particular respect to their current socioeconomic status, employment, education, and family history in order to explore the dynamics between subjects' sexualities and gender experience and their current socioeconomic circumstances.

[3] See www.creative-nepal.com for more information.
[4] Interviews were conducted with Raju (age 24); Rajani (age 28); Prem (age 29); Sushila (age 21); Sunita (age 26); Hridaya (age 27); Bimala (age 25); Karuna (age 41); Shiva (age 27); and Surya (age 25).

Some identifying details and names of participants are altered in the present report, in order to respect confidentiality.

Participants and interviewees were made aware of the aims and objectives of the present study and informed consent was obtained orally, based on discussions about the project. This had the advantage that terms of consent could be explored in a specific fashion with each participant, responding to individual queries, rather than the terms of consent being predetermined. Oral consent also did not presume literacy among participants, and importantly did not require informants to give their name/signature to a document about a project on sexual and gender minority experience, which, given concerns regarding confidentiality, was not welcome by participants.

The research participants all live in Kathmandu though many of them had grown up outside Kathmandu Valley and some of them still spend significant time outside Kathmandu in their family homes. While the majority of Nepali people live in rural areas, this paper in particular focused on the experiences of urban sexual and gender minorities because of the issues in identifying suitable subjects to interview in rural areas, and because migration towards urban centres was also a key feature of sexual and gender minorities who had experienced different forms of socioeconomic discrimination from their families and communities. It should also be noted that Nepal is undergoing a rapid process of urbanisation and that many people across different parts of Nepal are migrating towards urban centres and abroad for education, employment, and greater access to goods and services. However, this is not to suggest that all or even the majority of sexual and gender minorities migrate to urban areas. In the present research, urban-based informants typically described rural areas as particularly difficult for sexual and gender minority people, because of lower levels of awareness surrounding sexual and gender-variant subjectivities and fewer opportunities for anonymity. It is important to recognise, however, that such narratives come largely from sexual and gender minorities who did leave rural areas because of their experience, and there is a lack of research and data from more sexual and gender minorities living in rural areas (for example, those engaged in agricultural sectors) – something future research will hopefully explore.

Some respondents were engaged in activism and HIV/AIDS outreach work with Blue Diamond Society (BDS – Nepal's largest NGO run by and for sexual and gender minorities) or Mitini, an organisation for female-bodied sexual and gender minorities. Blue Diamond Society was founded in 2001; it primarily conducts HIV/AIDS outreach work but is also engaged in national and local-level legal activism and awareness-raising activities. Mitini, principally run by lesbian and bisexual women and transgender men, was formed in 2005 in order to advocate on behalf of sexual and gender minority, female-bodied women. Interviews with organising members of Mitini and BDS were conducted in respect of the present research project, as a means of adding contextual background and depth to the issues at hand, as seen from the viewpoint of key social activists in the field of sexual and gender minority rights and wellbeing in Nepal.

Seven key informant interviews with representatives from relevant donor agencies, NGOs, and stakeholders in Kathmandu/Nepal were also conducted. These included interviews with representatives from DFID, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Norwegian Embassy, all of which donors are currently investing in and supporting work with gender and sexual minority people in Nepal, and who are explicitly interested in exploring new strategies for ongoing programme development. Interviews with these representatives explored issues concerning policy and programming interests and strategies, perceptions of opportunities and threats regarding work on sexual and gender minority peoples livelihoods in Nepal, and wider issues concerning the conceptualisation of sexual and gender minority rights and activism in Nepal and beyond, and the (potential) relationship between local and international organisations in supporting economic wellbeing for sexual and gender minority people in this context.[5]

[5] Interviews with Karuna Onta (DFID), Lena Hasle (Norwegian Embassy), Kristin Del Ray (USAID), and Bharat Shrestha.

1 Poverty and socioeconomic transformation in Nepal

Economic hardship is an everyday experience for many people in Nepal and is a central concern in many people's lives regardless of their sexuality or gender. Excluding Afghanistan, Nepal's human development index is the lowest in South Asia and ranks 157 out of 186 countries globally according to the 2013 index (UNDP 2013). Poverty has declined significantly in Nepal over the past two decades; in 1995, 42 per cent of the population was below the national poverty line whereas in 2009 the number of people living in poverty had fallen to 25 per cent (UN Nepal 2011: 8). Despite this improvement, poverty and socioeconomic marginalisation are a persistent reality for many different groups in Nepal. Women, people of low caste, disabled people and many different ethnic groups face particular forms of discrimination and may experience limited access to public services on top of historical social and political marginalisation. Contemporary inequality between social groups in Nepal continues and recent studies suggest that socioeconomic discrimination of marginalised groups is entrenched and has yet to significantly change (*ibid*.).

Eighty per cent of Nepal's 26.5 million people live in rural areas and agriculture provides 70 per cent of people's livelihoods nationally, but the agricultural sector is largely inefficient and only accounts for a little over a third of Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP) (CIA 2014). While there have been significant improvements in people's access to education (World Bank 2014: 7), this has yet to have a positive impact on youth unemployment and the estimated unemployment and underemployment rate in Nepal is 46 per cent (CIA 2014). Recent research into people's security has revealed that unemployment and poverty are perceived to be the greatest source of insecurity in people's lives (Gordon *et al.* 2011: 12) and many people believe unemployment and poverty have led to a perceived increase in criminal activities and theft (Shah and Onslow 2013: IX). As a result of this, many families and younger Nepali are migrating to urban areas of Nepal either because they find agricultural work undesirable or insufficient to support themselves – leading to a rapid process of urbanisation even while Nepal remains relatively rural. The lack of domestic growth and high rates of unemployment mean that many young people seek work abroad in migrant economies, which is now thought to exceed 25 per cent of the national economy (World Bank 2014: 2). Over two million Nepali are estimated to be working abroad, around 7.5 per cent of the population, and 56 per cent of households in 2011 were found to be receiving remittance money (Central Bureau of Statistics 2011: 78). Most of the remittance money is not invested in economically productive activity but rather is spent on consumption of imported goods, fuelling a large trade deficit, and on the repayment of debt (World Bank 2014: 70).

In many respects, the remittance economy has been a leading factor in a wider and longer process of socioeconomic transformation in terms of consumption of foreign goods and media. Mark Liechty's ethnographic work *Suitably Modern* (2002) explored at length the importance of 'class' and the consumption of 'modern'[6] goods that are associated with upwardly mobile lifestyles as a salient feature in people's lives in contemporary Nepal – mostly, but not only, among the emerging middle class in the urban areas of the Kathmandu Valley – a process which began in the early 1990s and continues to this day. A pertinent finding of this work is that many Nepali experience socioeconomic modernity as aspirational, but also unobtainable in some part due to the reality of Nepal's economy and social mobility being so constrained (Liechty 2002). Aspirational images and desires may persist in this

[6] We use 'modern' in this sense to refer to goods, practices and lifestyles associated with global capitalism not traditionally found or produced in Nepal. See Liechty 'Selective Exclusion: Foreigners, Foreign Goods, and Foreignness in Modern Nepali History' in *Out Here in Kathmandu* (2010) for a discussion of foreign goods in Nepal and their historical relationship to power and status.

context (for example through advertising), but the economic capacity to meet these is restricted for most people. Nepal's tremendously high trade deficit (US$3.74bn) and the amount of income spent on foreign goods is perhaps evidence that consumerism is increasingly tied into the performance and assertion of social status, something that is historically and contemporarily associated with the consumption of foreign goods (eKantipur August 2014). Many people's growing desire to be perceived as 'middle class' (perhaps most especially within the Kathmandu Valley) has led to widespread changes in attitudes and social perceptions towards employment, despite a wider economic reality in which so-called 'modern employment' is scarce and out of most people's reach. Within the context of Nepal, 'modern employment' has a long history in the status that accompanied *jagir*, or salaried positions within the government. Such positions were valued because of their associated salaries and pensions without the need for menial or physical labour and because of the contacts and power such positions provided. More contemporarily, work in the government, NGO offices, and the private sector is considered to be prestigious and highly valued for similar reasons even if such positions are not necessarily economically lucrative.

Regardless of the economic reality and limited opportunities in these positions, the desire for 'modern lives' and 'modern employment' is persistent and plays a crucial role in shaping people's orientations toward work. Participatory discussion groups undertaken in December 2012 with sexual and gender minority peoples in the Kathmandu Valley (conducted for a parallel research project) included an exploration of themes surrounding society's conceptions of low status work, such as street labourers and shop owners, and the general assertion that Nepali society was highly preoccupied and judgemental of a person's occupation – a key theme in relation to the experience many sexual and gender minorities face regarding employment. Alongside these discussions, participants stressed that they lacked employment and sustainable income and that dignity and acceptance in economic terms was central to acceptance in terms of sexuality and gender difference.

2 Sexuality and socioeconomic marginalisation

In an interview conducted for the present study, Bhadri Pun, a transgender-identified activist described the state of sexual and gender minority people in Nepal as she saw it: 'We are in an economic crisis. How can we fight for our rights with empty stomachs?' Because of the larger context of Nepal's economy, understanding the linkages between sexual and gender orientation and political economy in Nepal is difficult. Because many Nepali face limited economic and educational opportunities and because inequalities and discrimination on the basis of caste and gender continue within the economy, society and state, it is problematic to assume that a person's political-economic situation may be a direct result of their sexual and gender orientation alone. There are many instances where people's economic circumstances have been negatively affected as a direct result of their gender variance or sexuality, but often these are not necessarily the direct result of explicit employment or education discrimination that actively selects against sexual and gender minorities. Rather, considering the larger economic context, many times the political-economic realities of sexual and gender minority peoples are shaped by family dynamics and a fairly narrow set of spaces that exist in which to enact sexual or gender variance. Socioeconomic spaces and opportunities explicitly associated with sexual and gendered difference that do exist are most often outside conventional social moralities, such as sex work, and therefore vulnerable to different forms of harassment or discrimination. Individuals who are openly identified as sexual and gender minorities are much more likely to experience discrimination in all arenas of their life including employment, but the psychological and emotional impact of maintaining secrecy, oftentimes with the fear of serious repercussions, should also be considered in respect of the many people who enact same-sex sexualities and gender-variant identities in secrecy or anonymity. For example, even though one research informant, Shiva, a gay-identified man who grew up in a village of Eastern Nepal, was able to live as a gay-identified man in Kathmandu in some secrecy, he recounts his guilt and feelings of powerlessness in dealing with an abuser whom he was reliant on because he was unable to share or even articulate his same-sex sexuality: 'I was completely trapped. I feel so much regret now when I imagine his face… When you're too innocent and too shy you just want to keep quiet' (Frisbie 2014: 147).

To complicate this, there are also a large number of individuals who do not necessarily experience an explicit conflict between same-sex sexual desire or gender variance and their larger social context. This might be in part because heterosexuality and gender segregation in Nepal allow for homoeroticism and same-sex sexual experiences.[7] For example, during the course of the present research several men who have sexual relationships with other men reported that they do not necessarily feel that their same-sex sexual experiences were in conflict with social expectations to get married to a woman, have children, and fulfil conventional male gender roles. While these individuals may not be publicly identified as a sexual or gender 'other' within their larger social contexts, it is important to situate same-sex sexuality and gender variance within such larger communal contexts and for development practitioners to avoid simplistic conflations between sexual identification and sexual practice, given the ambiguous correlation between these in people's lived experiences. Interestingly, it seems that social spaces that might allow for the expression of same-sex desire while performing heteronormative gender roles may be shrinking in Nepal as a result of a growing awareness surrounding different sexual and gender subjectivities, such as lesbian, gay, and trans or third-gender identities, through media and political discourse. Colleagues and informants have noted that, particularly in the city, fewer men are seen holding hands and displaying same-sex affection physically, in part, it is thought, because such behaviour is

[7] See Tamang (2003) for a longer discussion of this.

increasingly associated with being non-heterosexual. This is another attribute of the correlation between sexuality and socioeconomic modernity, as urbanisation, changing social values and so on, create new forms of recognition for people of same-sex sexuality, some of which may be welcome but some of which may disrupt tacit and implicit modes of same-sex intimacy.

Due to the fact that state structures in Nepal are often unable to support an individual's access to quality education and employment, families and extended social networks play a key role in most people's ability to attain education, invest in family businesses, secure employment in Nepal or abroad, or generally sustain a viable livelihood. Families therefore are key economic units that have a huge impact on a person's ability to attain any degree of economic security or education. A family's ability to support their children or extended family members largely depends on their own socioeconomic situation, and a family's wealth will likely translate into more opportunity and support for their children and other family members. While the importance of families in securing educational and employment opportunities is a reality worldwide, this reality is perhaps especially prevalent in Nepal due to the lack of opportunities, capital and support for individuals outside of kinship and communal networks and the fact that Nepali society and economy is to this day largely configured and reliant on extended families and their economies throughout individuals' lives. As one informant noted: 'In Nepal, everything starts with the family. We are a society that's close to our families' (Frisbie 2014: 148), a point confirmed by several respondents from different class backgrounds, who also strongly reported that you can only get a job through social networks or through a bribe – not necessarily through merit or qualifications. This prevailing social situation runs counter to middle-class aspirational ideologies, predicated on social mobility and other opportunities for economic advancement or even basic livelihood. Overall, the combination of economic aspiration and a lack of opportunity has helped drive the growth of the remittance economy, as people seek economic opportunities elsewhere, outside of established socioeconomic hierarchies.

Reliance on family resources and support often comes at the cost of conforming to families' expectations surrounding marriage, gender and sexuality. Conformity to heteronormative pressure is reinforced both internally within the family and externally by people's wider social networks, and often any nonconformity, especially for women, is seen as a reflection of the families' *ijat*, a term that has often been translated as 'honour or respectability' (see Liechty 2010: 307–342; Rankin 2010). However, *ijat* and social honour are often understood and enforced through individuals', in particular women's, adherence to normative and patriarchal expectations surrounding caste, gender and, perhaps most importantly, sexuality. If men or women challenge these social expectations, the repercussions are often experienced and perceived as a reflection of the entire family's *ijat* as opposed to being confined to the individual. Consequently, public nonconformity in terms of gender or sexuality often have socioeconomic implications for families, who may consequently force, pressure or even abuse nonconforming family members into conventionality (Sharma 2012). The linkage between an individual's nonconformity and a family's *ijat* or honour is important in order to understanding how families with 'higher status,' either through their caste affiliation or socioeconomic situation, may experience a relatively greater pressure to ensure orthodox social norms since they may experience a relatively greater stake in maintaining their status (*ibid*.: 8).

Yet, as has been witnessed elsewhere in the world, the cultural spaces within which possibilities for gender-variant and same-sex sexual identities or self-expressions have taken shape have been linked to the weakening of kinship-based economic structures. The emergence of social and geographic mobility, attendant forms of individual life-making and so on as associated with the growth of capitalist economies in nineteenth century Europe and North America, for example, have been seen to create the historical conditions under which modern homosexualities emerged (D'Emilio 1983). Similar circumstances have been

linked to the emergence of contemporary same-sex sexual identities, queer life-worlds and so on in the context of contemporary socioeconomic globalisation, often in non-Western countries. In part, this trend is observable in Nepal in that the period within which the country's small but growing middle class has emerged over the past two decades has been synchronous with an era in which more people have been living apart from families abroad or in a city, and the time frame within which LGBT activism and legal recognition of same-sex sexual rights has occurred. All of these aspects have been intimately associated with new forms of recognition for individualism amidst a background of enduring cultural conservatism and economic restraint. Within these changing social circumstances, people who do not conform to their families' set of social expectations in terms of gender and/or sexuality may face being 'cut off' and excluded both financially from a family's housing, inheritance and business and also socially from their kin and wider community. On the other hand, the wider sociocultural possibilities in which sexual and gender minority identities and subjectivities are emerging in different forms of self-identity lie predominantly outside tightly bound conventional communities and kinship.

The prevalence and extent of familial discrimination in Nepal is hard to determine,[8] due to a lack of research into sexual and gender minorities' relationships with their families; however, the majority of informants either expected or had experienced severe repercussions from their families upon disclosure of non-normative gender or sexuality. Determining exclusion and discrimination within families is further made difficult, because the circumstances of prejudice may not only arise from staking claims to sexual identities that take shape outside of the conventional values of kinship but also exist in subtle ways within the conventional expectations of family and community. This may not be just an aspect of secrecy but a reflection of the fluidity of sexual and gender categories and traditions discussed earlier, which permit different forms of same-sex intimacies and gender-variant relationships. However, the impact that familial discrimination has on sexual and gender minorities was discussed as a central issue in a recent countrywide 'Being LGBT in Asia' conference of Nepal's leading sexual and gender minority rights activists and organisations; the summary report highlights the impact that marriage pressure and social status has within sexual and gender minorities' family networks (UNDP and USAID 2014: 43–46).

For example, in respect of the present research, for Sita, a self-identified lesbian woman, violence and harassment from her family led her and her partner to attempt suicide. However, what is interesting about Sita's situation is that her experience of rejection from her family was not based on the assertion of a lesbian identity *per se* but the result of her refusal to obey the wishes of her father: 'One day my father chose a husband for me. I didn't have the language for it yet, but I told him that I'm not like that' (Frisbie 2014: 39). While her prior proximity to a gender-nonconforming woman was commented on by her father, it was the assertion of individualistic desires that ran counter to her father and family's wishes that led to her eventual elopement with her lover. Within this context, it is possible to see how discrimination often occurs before the assertion of a 'self-identity' and as a result of the rejection of heteronormative, patriarchal and collective social values. It is more likely that women and girls suffer from discrimination within their families as women's chastity and adherence to conservative gender roles is considered to be a key signifier of a family's honour (Coyle, Shrestha and Thapa 2014). These forms of discrimination are not necessarily exclusively experienced by sexual and gender minority peoples; many heterosexual people experience familial and communal exclusion and discrimination for their failure to conform to their families' expectations. Considering that a recent study discovered more than 25 per cent of child marriages in Nepal are the result of young boys and girls under the age of 18 eloping and marrying their chosen partner against their parents' wishes (Plan Nepal, Save the Children, and World Vision International Nepal 2012), Sita's experience occurred within a wider context where boys and girls are increasingly rejecting their families' expectations on

[8] This being said, there are frequent media reports and accounts of family discrimination and several research studies that explore violence and discrimination of marginalised women across South Asia; see also CREA (2011).

the basis of romantic desire (Frisbie 2014: 37–42). Within the wider social context, we can begin to see that the discrimination which sexual and gender minority people face may not necessarily be due to the belief that such sexualities are immoral but because they run counter to communal kinship systems.

Because of the importance of family networks, both economically and emotionally, and because of the potentially disastrous consequences of being excluded from such support, most sexual and gender minority people in Nepal seek to find ways to mitigate the inherent tensions between their nonconformity to sexual and gender norms and their families' expectations – often through secrecy. However, for people who are gender nonconforming this can be difficult because it often means an entirely different expression of gender in- and outside of their family's circle, something that is often psychologically difficult and, for many, irreconcilable. In recent years, there is a trend towards delayed marriage in Nepal and both heterosexuals and sexual and gender minority peoples alike adopt different strategies and arguments to deal with marital pressure from their families (Ministry of Health and Population 2012; Field notes December 2012). Nonetheless, for almost all participants in the present study, the pressure to marry was pervasive and often characterised their relationship with their families. Conflict surrounding marriage was the primary reason that informants had been excluded, cut off or distanced from their family (Field notes June 2014). Other studies produced similar findings: in a 2005 survey, 92 per cent of more than 80 surveyed self-identified sexual and gender minority people in Nepal were heterosexually married and 72 per cent were married because of the pressure they had received from their families (Pant 2005: 10–11). Other studies have found that marriage or the pressure to marry from families, was not only experienced as an inescapable inevitability, but also identified as the most difficult social expectation that sexual and gender minorities experience – most likely because it has the largest implications for the fulfilment of sexual desire and gender performance (Sharma 2012: 11).

Many sexual and gender minority people, especially from older generations when marriage occurred much earlier, manage same-sex or gender-variant lives and identities while they are married. Yet, we found that younger Nepali in the present study increasingly go to great lengths to avoid marriage even at the risk of social exclusion from their families and communities (Field notes June 2013). As discussed, it is important to remember that there have always been spaces for sexual and gender minority experience within Nepali society though it is important to consider how these spaces are considerably different than the more contemporary spaces that have developed in urban and semi-urban settings. Partially as a process of urbanisation and partially as a result of the activism taking place, new spaces are arguably being created in society as new lifestyles and identities find acceptance in certain urban environments where new communities can be formed within the anonymity of larger urban and online spaces. But growing awareness and recognition in these terms can run counter to other more occluded social and cultural standpoints for non-explicitly self-identified sexual and gender minorities. While these spaces exist and are often sought out because they provide a way for sexual and gender minorities to enact their desires, they are often situated within social peripheries that are inherently more prone to abuse, discrimination and poverty. For example, cruising zones (areas where men seeking to meet and have sex with other men) are in public places, such as bus parks, parks, and large temples, which are often sites where men risk being arrested and paying subsequent bail charges, being abused or assaulted by the police or other men, or having their possessions stolen; the largest cruising zone in Nepal, Ratna Park, was described as 'a dirty, polluted, run-down park in the centre of Kathmandu' by one informant (Frisbie 2014: 143). Many people avoid these spaces due to fears of being 'outed' or, in the case of women, because of their highly restricted access to public spaces.

In parallel with the issues involved in enacting sexual lives and experiences in distinct public spaces, respondents also described the need to perform aspects of same-sex sexuality or

gender variance without necessarily openly or directly rejecting the normative social expectations of their family and community. Usually, this was achieved by creating distance from the rest of their family and living apart, sometimes under the guise of needing to continue their education or for employment, which often requires migrating to city spaces. Most of the sexual and gender minority people who took part in this case study were highly aware of the implications of receiving their families' support in such circumstances even as they sought financial independence as a way to mitigate or insulate themselves from the pressure to marry that they expected to eventually receive. People's life circumstances thus typically evinced complex strategies, often balanced between enduring connections to family (even if fractured) alongside aspirations to eventually 'break away' from normative family expectations (Field notes June 2013; Raju case study; Sushila case study; Suresh case study). In these circumstances sexuality and gender difference were most intimately associated with economies, as the freedom to choose sexual or gender self-expression were directly experienced in relation to the individual's degree of economic independence from kin networks. Conversely, being in a position to contribute economically to the family (for example through remittances sent home) was also a way in which respondents could gain a certain kind of status within families and acquire a capacity to resist normative expectation to marry and so on.

When sexual and gender minority people are presented with a choice between pursuing emotional or psychological fulfilment to the detriment of their economic wellbeing, they engage in a difficult balancing act, where either option exposes them to a range of problems. Most of the respondents in the present study had found ways to resolve or balance this tension within their lives in a variety of ways, some through secrecy, others through migration. A few were privileged enough in their background and families to be able to obtain good employment on their own terms but should be seen as exceptions to the general experience of sexual and gender minorities. Despite the strategies that individuals undertook, the socioeconomic context in the lives of many sexual and gender minority peoples was evidently in some ways shaped by the experience of being pushed, through pressure to conform, out of family and social networks that might otherwise have been pivotal in creating a sustainable livelihood. This often emerged in parallel with feeling pulled or encouraged towards spaces and avenues that permitted nonconformity, even though this may have come at a greater economic cost to the individual and might not provide financial stability. This point is crucial to understanding the way in which same-sex sexual desires or gender variance expose individuals to a range of challenges that predispose sexual and gender minority peoples toward economic fragility or even poverty. It is also important to see people's decision to leave their families or act in ways that might seem at times counter to their economic interests and wellbeing as informed and rational choices that stem from a desire for avenues and spaces for nonconformity but also possibly nonconfrontation with heteronormative social frameworks. Given that many sexual and gender nonconforming individuals are therefore likely to fall outside of and experience marginalisation within kinship and family networks that are central to obtaining employment and education, they may face a greater predisposition towards poverty, lack of services and lack of access to basic state, private and NGO services, including many livelihood interventions that seek to address poverty within the very 'target' communities that sexual and gender minorities might find themselves potentially removed from.

3 Experiences of school and access to education

When discussing the issue of poverty among sexual and gender minority peoples, Monica Jha, the Blue Diamond Society's executive director, commented: 'It all begins in school.' Indeed, there is strong global and national evidence that education significantly reduces poverty along with numerous health and social benefits. According to a report on poverty trends in Nepal:

> Differences in educational attainment of heads of households are reflected in dramatically different poverty rates... Households with illiterate heads had a 42 per cent poverty rate in 2003/04, which is the highest rate among all education groups. The poverty rate progressively declines as the level of education attainment by a household head increases. Having attended primary school brings down the probability of being in poverty to 28 per cent; having attended secondary school brings it down to 23 percent; and having attended high secondary school brings it down to 8.4 per cent in 2003/04.
> (Central Bureau of Statistics 2005: 16–17)

Nepal's 2014 Human Development Report also found that districts making rapid strides in literacy and education also had rapidly improved Human Development Index scores, remittance earnings and tourism, demonstrating education's positive effect on a range of social and economic factors (Government of Nepal and Nepal Planning Commission 2014). Education also greatly impacts a person's access to state and private resources, as well as their resilience towards and ability to respond to different forms of discrimination and violence. While Nepal's education system suffers from many problems, especially in rural areas, a person's access to education has a tremendous impact on their future livelihoods. For example, students in Nepal undergo ten years of primary and secondary education before they take a national exam in order to receive a School Leaving Certificate (SLC) that is mandatory for occupation in the government, higher education, and formal employment. When a student leaves school for any reason before receiving their certificate, it becomes significantly more difficult for them ever to return to education because of national testing schedules and limited options for adult certification – every year a rash of suicides among students and families occurs across Nepal when results are posted and many students fail (My Republica 2014). Many students' access to education is directly related to whether or not their parents can afford to send their child to school, either because of the costs associated with private education, which is preferred to the public system, or in terms of whether the family requires their child's labour. Education and a lack of access to quality education is often articulated by marginalised groups as a key factor perpetuating poverty, and many respondents in the present research in some ways linked their socioeconomic status to their educational backgrounds.

Because of harassment and abuse within school, because their family's support may be contingent on heteronormative social expectations, or because of a lack of inclusiveness within school environments, many sexual and gender minority people are disproportionately likely to have less access to education. While there has been a positive push by local activists and donor organisations for sexual and gender minorities to be included in scholarship programmes and other affirmative action employment initiatives, much of the discrimination that occurs at early ages against those who are sexually or gender variant occurs at a time when children often do not explicitly self-identify as a sexual or gender minority. Educational settings are frequently the context in which young people's sense of gender and sexuality begins to emerge and take shape. This is typically a more self-conscious process for those who feel themselves to be somehow different from their peers

and, in these terms, school may be a place where feelings of sexual or gender dissimilarity may be felt acutely. School is frequently a place where difference is seized on, often reflected back negatively by peers, and in such circumstances it is through these kinds of negative 'reflections back' that people might begin to form a sense of their sexuality or gender as different or marginal. Many of our informants had their first same-sex experiences with either fellow students or teachers from school, and their experience was often articulated outside of identity frameworks and sexual subjectivities – often as something that they lacked language for at the time. This has significant implications for interventions seeking to create more inclusive school environments and address abuse and harassment in schools, since the terms within which such issues are addressed must pay attention to ambiguity of experience.

Overall, people whose gender presentation did not conform to social expectations reported higher levels of teasing and bullying by their peers throughout school, as non-normative expressions of gender might be visible and hence attract negative attention. However, almost everyone we spoke to, whether or not self-identified as gender variant or transgender, both from private and public schools, had stories of bullying on the basis of caste, ethnicity, or gender performance – one person even went so far as to describe the bullying in his school as form of 'torture' (Field notes and all interviews December 2013). Another study found that while all of the self-identified sexual and gender minority children in the study had a strong desire to continue their education, they all had experienced some form of threat, bullying or teasing from peers or teachers (Sharma 2012: 12). Bullying often ranged from verbal to physical harassment and toilets were often spaces in which gender-variant people were bullied. Sunita now identifies as a transgender woman and shared her experience of being gender variant in school at a young age:

> *When I got to Class 7 I started to feel little bad that the boys make fun of me, calling me '*chakka*' or '*hijada*' just because of the way I walked and my voice was also different. So I felt very shy that time I couldn't even share my feelings with friends, so I would just go home and cry. Because of all these things I didn't felt like going to school either… Till Class 5 I used the boys' toilet, but when I started to change I felt shy because the boys would try to see my genitals. I would feel very weird. From then on I never used the gents' toilet in school. I used to sit with boys in front bench and they would pinch my breast or ass – you know, things like that. Sometime they would call me their girlfriend. In some way it was fun at times, but sometimes they would just tease me in the street and slap my ass in public. It was very embarrassing and because of it I didn't feel like going to school.*
> (Interview with Sunita November 2013)

It's important to note here that Sunita's experience occurred at a time when she did not understand her marginalisation within the context of identity-based discrimination, and that these experiences occurred *before* her self-identification as a transgender woman and were important in the construction of that self-identity. Her experiences therefore ought not necessarily to be interpreted as discrimination targeted at transgender-identified or presenting individuals *per se* or nor should it be assumed that self-identifying and presenting as transgender caused the bullying she was subject to. Rather bullying became one of the ways in which Sunita came to experience herself as set apart from her peers, and within this sense of difference her understanding of herself as transgender began to consolidate at a young age.

The lack of secure toilet facilities seems to be a significant problem and has been identified in other research as being sites for the abuse of women and girls; in the present research, toilets in particular were spaces where effeminate boys were abused (*ibid*.). Most individuals who stayed in school past Class 10 and attended college reported fewer experiences of bullying and harassment because of the larger class sizes and anonymity such spaces

provided for individuals who did not conform to sexual and gender norms; this is significant in that the emergence into spaces of anonymity was seen to allow for same-sex and gender-variant subjectivities to more readily take shape and become articulated as such (Interview with Raju, Sunita and Hridaya December 2013). For students from rural communities, attending school past Class 10 often involves moving into urban areas where there are more opportunities for higher education. Urban environments are often perceived and experienced as having greater social anonymity and freedom from social pressures to conform (Interview with Sunita and Raju December 2013). In this sense, boarding school and higher-level education were key spaces in which their sexualities and gender identities were explored, and began to take the form of a self-identified sexual and gender minority experience among our respondents. This is a key point for development practitioners and policymakers because while access to higher-level education is a key issue for sexual and gender minority individuals, interventions that seek to prevent or address discrimination and harassment are also needed in primary education settings. Yet, while it is clear from the present research that colleges and boarding facilities are spaces where sexuality, including same-sex sexuality, is often consensually explored, at many times schools are also sites where sexual abuse and rape occur (UNICEF and CEWIN 2006: 19).

Many respondents reflected that despite it being a part of the curriculum, they could not recall classes that addressed sexual health and reproduction, and until 2013 the topics of same-sex sexuality and gender variance were not included in the official curriculum. Work by Stacy Leigh Pigg on the early HIV/AIDS epidemic and awareness programming in Nepal highlights the 'discomfort' experienced by many of the original HIV/AIDS outreach workers and more contemporary studies on sex education in schools found that in many cases sexual health classes were not being taught because teachers felt awkward discussing sex with students (Pigg 2010; Pokharel, Kulczycki and Shakya 2006). While the failure to teach these classes no doubt affects the entire student population, it may particularly affect young sexual and gender minority people who may be at a higher risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease through unprotected anal sex, whether this is forced or otherwise. At the same time, girls and young women are deprived of information about menstruation, reproduction, HIV, sexual health and their rights, which also has adverse long-term impacts on their socioeconomic status beyond their overall health and wellbeing.

It is interesting to note that while schools are frequently spaces where bullying occurs and also commonly spaces where romances, sex and sexual abuse happen, none of the participants reflected upon how schools intervened to prevent or address these dimensions of school life. Most respondents reported that their teachers did not bully or harass them on the basis of their gender performance; however, other research conducted in the *terai* region of Nepal found that teachers did attempt to reform gender-variant students through bullying, teasing and physical abuse (Plan Nepal, Save the Children and World Vision International Nepal 2012). Findings of the present research should be considered within the larger dynamics of urban and rural areas; rural areas are perhaps more likely to have stricter and more conservative values regarding gender roles and performance. A few of our participants who were educated in rural villages did report more experiences of teasing and bullying on the basis of their gender behaviour. This said, teachers were also not identified as persons to whom students could speak to about bullying, and there have been many cases elsewhere where students have been harassed by teachers because of their gender nonconformity (Sharma 2012: 12). A UNICEF study on child abuse in Nepal found that 13 per cent of child abuse occurred within schools (UNICEF and CEWIN 2006: 19). Throughout the present study, we have heard many stories of men's early sexual experiences that occurred with a male teacher from their school, and while such situations were not necessarily experienced or described as traumatic by the student, they did occur between a minor and a person in authority and hence constitute statutory rape (Field notes June 2013; Interview with Suresh December 2013; Interview with Raju December 2013; Frisbie 2014). For example, while one respondent's first same-sex relationship with his teacher was experienced as pleasurable,

fun, and later became a fantasy, he was initially full of fear, guilt, and regret: ‘but when I finished I thought, “Oh my god what did I do?” I started to cry… I couldn’t sleep the whole night. I was paranoid that he would tell my friends and parents.’ This reaction also reveals the potential for the abuse of children and their vulnerability to blackmail and extortion, another common experience of sexual and gender minorities who often experience blackmail by their sexual partners.

Bullying in school was not necessarily the only reason for a person’s decision to drop out early. Several research participants reported that they had dropped out of school because they lacked interest in studying, partially because they perceived school itself as boring, even though their parents encouraged them to continue their studies (Interview with Rajani and Prem December 2013). However, school environments were clearly a factor in some people’s decisions to drop out early. Sushila said that she felt that while the teachers were not responsible for her bullying, they did not create an ‘environment’ where she felt comfortable studying: ‘You can say that it was my decision [to drop out] because the environment was not good and I didn’t want to go anymore.’ In this instance, the bullying and teasing Sushila faced discouraged her from pursuing her studies even though it was not the sole factor in her decision. Rather, while Sushila faced going to school where she was bullied on a daily basis, she was also presented with the option of dropping out of school and living independently as a transgender woman. Hence a combination of family and school environments that were not accepting of gender variance were significant in leading Sushila to choose a transgender self-identity, even though this clearly had longer-term socioeconomic consequences. Her decision is an example of the ways in which socioeconomic contexts might both ‘push’ sexual and gender minorities away from pursuing certain fields of study and employment while simultaneously ‘pulling’ them into spaces that allow for sexual and gender-variant lives but that also exist on a social periphery that is inevitably more prone to socioeconomic hardship and abuse. Sushila, for example, is now faced with a situation where she is unable to apply for formal employment because she lacks the SLC qualification required for many positions of employment.

4 Economic discrimination and marginalisation in workplaces

As mentioned previously, in the context of Nepal it is often difficult and problematic to suggest that same-sex sexuality or gender variance always directly results in poverty or socioeconomic marginalisation as an inevitable outcome, even while there may be a significant correlation with diminished economic opportunity. However, there are significant challenges and vulnerabilities that sexual and gender minority people face as a direct result of their nonconformity. Most of the marginalisation people face in this respect is a result of in some way publicly failing to conform to social norms regarding sexuality and gender.

These challenges are perhaps most evident in cases where a person's nonconformity to social norms is identifiable by other people within society. Gender-variant people in particular are often targeted and face a wide range of discrimination because their gender performance is visible and recognisable as variant. As a result, many transgender people in Nepal have reported instances where they have lost work when their employer discovered they were gender nonconforming (Oli and Onta 2012; Singh *et al.* 2012) and have been sexually abused or harassed by employers (Interview with Sunita December 2013) or by people in their workplace (Interview with Raju December 2013). Similarly, other gender-variant people have reported struggling to find places to rent and live (Interview with Rajani and Prem December 2013), and believing that if they apply for a job they would not be hired because of their gender variance. As one informant noted: 'When we go for the job they don't know that we are *metis*…[9] they hire us, but once they know about us they fire us from the job' (Wilson *et al.* 2011).

Structurally, it is very hard to obtain a loan through a bank in Nepal, and many people who self-identify and present as transgender often lack identification records that reflect their gender identity and presentation and believe that banks would discriminate against them because of ambiguity with regard to gender presentation and documentation (Interview with Sushila December 2013). While as of 2012 there has been some reform in Nepal that legally allows for sexual and gender minority people to obtain citizenship identification with third-gender identities, many local governments have refused to let people re-register as a third-gender citizen based on a bureaucratic loophole that does not mandate the government to reissue third-gender identification to people who have already been issued a citizenship ID. As recently as March 2014, the government also stated that it was ready to begin issuing passports that also allowed for a third-gender category.

Many third gender-identified sexual and gender minorities are concerned that obtaining a third-gender passport may prevent them from obtaining work visas in countries abroad – an important option for sexual and gender minorities if they are unable to find work in Nepal either because of their identity or because of general unemployment. Sushila, a transgender woman, went abroad to work as a domestic worker as a man because she said that she felt it was 'illegal' to be transgender there and dressed as a man for her own 'security', not necessarily because of lack of gender-reflective identification. This point is significant in considering how legal activism and reform is contingent on the economic realities of sexual and gender minorities' lives, which may prevent them from staking legal or social claims considering the risks posed to their economic livelihoods.

Formal bank loans in Nepal have high interest rates and frequently require several co-signers and collateral in the form of valuable property, something that again is unlikely due to the family dynamics of many sexual and gender minority peoples, having often been effectively disinherited or refused family support. For example, Raju, a gay-identified man,

[9] A local identity for transgender women.

said that he was unable to get a loan because no one would give him one: 'It's not even about being gay. People won't just give you a loan – it's not in our culture. If you find someone like that, you are really lucky.' However, while Raju understands his lack of access to capital is related to wider economic issues in Nepal, he is also his family's only son and faces a 'suffocating' pressure to marry now that he is 26, and shared that he was unwilling to ask his family for money because he needed to be independent or not rely on them – and hence feel obliged to acquiesce to heteronormative familial marriage expectations (Interview with Raju December 2013).

Because of the central importance that families and community networks play in mobilising capital, education and employment, sexual and gender minorities have a significantly reduced range of options when trying to establish themselves outside of their natal networks; in the present research, only respondents who were living in secrecy with respect to gender or sexual difference were able to mobilise capital from their families and social networks. As a result, many sexual and gender minorities seek work in the migrant economy because, while an initial investment is sometimes required by manpower agencies that broker between remittance workers and employers, most Nepali migrant work is unskilled and is a socially permissible means for people to travel and live separate from their families and natal networks. The reluctance of sexual and gender minorities to rely on their families' support because of the conditions such proximity or reliance might entail is evidenced by the fact that none of the informants who were open with their families about their sexuality or gender identity were currently receiving financial support from their family, even while some of these people may have been on relatively good terms with their family. Equally, even if sexual and gender minority people have a strong relationship with their family, regardless of the secrecy surrounding their genders or sexualities, their families may not necessarily be able to provide them with a loan, given the wider context of poverty and lack of access to capital in Nepal.

Due to the economic hardship that many sexual and gender minority people live in, they may also be unable to rely on each other for capital investment because of the inherent risks involved in doing business in Nepal or working abroad, regardless of whether or not a person is openly identified as sexually or gender variant. Indeed, the larger conservative social context and discrimination that people face have significant implications for businesses run by sexual and gender minority people. Sushila discussed at length the difficulty she faces in trying to start her own business if she were hypothetically to receive a loan:

> *If I take a loan, then I will need to open my salon somewhere busy. Right? On the other hand, if people like us [transgender] open a shop, then the boys will try to come [inappropriately] close and then what will society think and say about the business? If in this place boys hang out and people will think what is really going on at this place? So what I'm trying to say is because of all these things they will never give us a chance… Customers will not come, and if the customers don't come how will we pay our loan back? Ok, so let's not just talk about just a salon, even if we open a grocery store the boys will come there too and start teasing and arguing with us, so how will we run our shop? Who is going to come in that kind of environment?*
> (Interview with Sushila December 2013)

Hence, the wider social 'environment' and dynamics of life and work have tremendous implications for the viability of entrepreneurial initiatives even after access to capital issues has been addressed. This reality perhaps is compounded for women who seek to do business without a man's support: research into sexual harassment of women in Nepal reveals that regardless of their actual circumstances women are often always believed to be at fault when they experience harassment at work or in public (Liechty 2010; Coyle *et al.* 2014). Indeed, the perceived social 'acceptability' and reputation of any business in Nepal is crucial to its economic viability and this reality is perhaps enhanced in rural and semi-urban

spaces where social networks and communities are smaller and more likely to be patron-client oriented.

It is important to realise that the aforementioned issues do not exclusively affect gender and sexuality variant peoples; anyone who is in some way perceived to be nonconforming to social expectations is at risk of being targeted for discrimination, abuse and marginalisation. In particular, women in Nepal bear tremendous pressure to maintain and uphold families' *ijat* or honour, focused on adherence to social expectations surrounding gender expression and sexual chastity (Rankin 2010; Tamang 2003). This is evident in the experience of two lesbian-identified informants, Rajani and Prem, who after starting their own business and finding a place to live, moved to a location to hide from Rajani's abusive husband and his family. Rajani filed for divorce after her husband and his family abused her upon discovery of her relationship with Prem. During this time, her own and her husband's family had her committed to a psychiatric institution, had her undergo exorcism by shamans, had both Rajani and Prem arrested for various periods through the families' connections to the police, and finally had them detained by Maiti Nepal, an internationally renowned and funded anti-trafficking organisation, on the basis that Rajani had been trafficked by her partner. With Mitini Nepal's support, Rajani and Prem were able to take the case to the Supreme Court of Nepal in 2012 and secure a decision supporting Rajani's right to live with whomever she chooses and leave her husband on the basis of her sexual orientation.

After the court ruling, the two left Kathmandu in part because they feared reprisal. The two women tried to open their own café in a nearby town but as two women living together without either male family members or husbands they faced a range of discrimination and abuses by police and men from the area. Initially, they had difficulty finding a place to rent since there is a social conception that women who work or are unmarried are morally and sexually deviant or promiscuous (see Coyle 2014 and Liechty 2010). According to Prem: 'It's hard to find a room. People don't accept that we stay together – they get suspicious about two women living alone. If we said we are lesbians, they wouldn't accept it either' (Interview with Rajani and Prem December 2013). Eventually, Rajani and Prem were able to establish a financially viable café but suffered from sexual harassment by men who assumed that they were prostitutes because they weren't originally from the community and were unmarried:

> *We used to sell tea, dumplings, cold drinks, and noodles… But just two women opening their own café? We kept it open till 9 selling beer and other drinks – it wasn't safe though. Our room wasn't very secure – anyone could break into it. When men saw us alone in the shop they would threaten us – They would pound on the door at two o'clock in the morning and tell us to open up.*
> (*ibid.*)

One day their café was broken into and all their savings were stolen. Even though the police apprehended the perpetrator, the money was never returned. Rajani and Prem's case is interesting because it highlights how economic marginalisation, sexuality and gender are products of gender nonconformity that affect all women in ways that are not necessarily unique to gender-variant or same-sex sexualities. The discrimination that they suffered derived from their 'failure' to conform to heteronormative and patriarchal expectations regarding women in Nepali society, not necessarily a result of identifying as lesbian women *per se*. Given the relatively low levels of awareness surrounding same-sex sexualities and livelihoods, it seems that there is significant overlap between the discrimination and harassment female-bodied sexual and gender minorities and women in general face since other people are not necessarily likely to make the distinction between the two – only that gender roles and sexual norms have been transgressed.

Equally, men who may in some way be gender variant or effeminate, or who self-identify as a sexual or gender minority subjectivity, can also be subject to discrimination and abuse in workplaces. Even individuals who come from privileged backgrounds and do not experience

economic hardship are still potentially threatened by the conservative sociocultural context wherein their sexuality or gender presentation can be used against them for various reasons. Several interviews with same-sex desiring men revealed that not all sexual and gender minority people necessarily feel that their sexuality has limited or prevented them from obtaining successful employment, but that this did not mean that their sexual orientation and gender identity did not threaten their livelihood. Hridaya, a well-educated gay-identified man who works in the fashion industry, felt that because the fashion and entertainment industry had so many sexual and gender minority people working in it, both internationally and in Nepal, it was in many ways more open and accepting of openly nonheterosexually identified individuals. He said that he was rather comfortable being open to many people in his life and had not experienced explicit discrimination in his workplace. Despite his understanding of his context as inherently more meritocratic, liberal and tolerant towards sexual and gender minorities, Hridaya experienced a situation where his gender performance and sexual orientation were used by colleagues as a way to discredit his work: 'There was this one man I used to regard as my elder brother. I always looked up to him and trusted him so much to tell him I was gay [when] he asked me.' However, after learning of Hridaya's sexuality his colleague and friend went to his business partner and disclosed Hridaya's sexuality: 'He was trying to brainwash him… telling him I am a gay person and that my business partner should not have any business with me in Nepal because I am gay and that it would ruin his reputation.' Interestingly, Hridaya felt his colleague's attempt to slander him was not necessarily due to homophobia on his colleagues part but a desire to 'get ahead' by using his sexual orientation as a way to stigmatise him and distance his potential business partners. Hridaya's experience highlights how even individuals from privileged backgrounds with established careers are vulnerable to blackmail and marginalisation because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, while Hridaya's career may have been put in jeopardy because of his sexuality, he is likely to be able to respond to the challenges he faces because his education and socioeconomic background made him resilient and capable of responding to discrimination in employment and in other areas of his life.

5 Secrecy and sex work

The vast majority of sexual and gender minority people spoken to in the course of the present research reported maintaining some level of secrecy from different groups within their lives. Often, sexual and gender minority people in Nepal may go to great lengths in order to not be identified as being gender variant or having same-sex sexual desire. It is not uncommon for individuals to lead lives with different names, contact numbers and mannerisms whereby they may be able to signify their sexuality or gender to certain individuals while remaining hidden to others. For example, many of our informants reported using pseudonyms when meeting other people also attracted to the same sex. As well as secrecy this was also seen to allow plausible deniability in case someone attempted to reveal or disclose their identity to others, something considerably more difficult if people lack any accurate details about someone else. This is so commonplace among men attracted to other men that many have said that speaking with us was the first time they had ever shared stories in person or recounted their feelings about other men directly.

It is important to realise that while spaces for secrecy may allow people a level of freedom of expression from social pressure, they also permit abuse, discrimination and harassment to go unaddressed. A story from a recent anthology of case studies written by sexual and gender minority people in Nepal reveals that secrecy can often become 'a trap' in which people are unable to speak out against their own abuse and the abuse of others, and instead many people of minority gender and sexualities may feel compelled to suffer their abuses within the same secrecy in which they play out their sexual orientation or gender identity (Frisbie 2014; Field notes December 2013). For example, Shiva's earlier story (see p.15) is one in which he was reliant on his abuser for the housing he was provided with in exchange for performing minor domestic labour. Beyond feeling trapped within the abusive relationship, Shiva was unable to seek help, warn any other people that his abuser also met with, or seek help from his family or friends, because he was unable to break the secrecy of their relationship: 'Why didn't I do anything? At that age, people should know everything about their sexual orientation so that abusive individuals cannot take advantage of their situation. Younger people need to be more aware of themselves and their sexualities' (Frisbie 2014: 147).

Abuse was often reported to involve blackmailing individuals into sexual acts, but also often involves extorting money from them in exchange for secrecy. In Rajani and Prem's instance, the thief who stole their money also stole their camera that contained pictures that suggested a romantic relationship between them. Upon seeing the pictures, the thief sought to use the photos to further extort money from them, threatening to reveal their relationship by posting the pictures on Facebook and other websites. While Rajani and Prem were relatively unaffected by such threats, since their relationship, unknown to their blackmailer, had already been publicly disclosed, the case highlights not only the frequency with which sexuality can be used as a tool for extortion, but the new ways in which technology is increasingly involved in exploitation. For example, one informant's former partner used pictures he had taken of him on his mobile phone to extort sex and money from him. This has also been found to be the case for women across Nepal, who are increasingly subject to harassment over mobile phones and the internet (Coyle *et al.* 2014). To this extent, the research has revealed that many sexual and gender minority people desire to remain hidden even from other same-sex desiring people in their own social worlds due to the potential for being 'outed' and the pervasiveness of extortion and blackmail, this being experienced sometimes from other sexual and gender minority people (Field notes June 2013). For example, numerous discussions online through websites for men seeking same-sex relationships revealed that many men were hesitant to reveal personal information because it could be used by other men on the website to slander, blackmail or pressure them for sex and money (*ibid*.). Even while such technologies and socioeconomic transformations create

new opportunities and spaces for the anonymous expression and exploration of sexual interest, they are by no means necessarily safe environments.

Given the challenges many sexual and gender minority people face in respect to finding employment and finding financial support outside of their family networks within Nepal's economy, it is perhaps unsurprising that many respondents reported that, at some time in their lives, they had performed sex work or in some way participated in an exchange of services or goods for sex – whether they choose to do so openly or secretly. Recent research has suggested that the commodification of sexuality in Nepal is not something necessarily found predominantly within same-sex or gender-variant relationships. A study by Regmi *et al.* (2010) found that the exchange of goods and expectation of financial benefits was commonly associated with the culture of dating in Nepal, which has only become popular in the last two decades in Nepal. Interestingly, Regmi's study found that both men and women exchanged gifts, food, drinks, and/or money in exchange for sexual pleasure. A separate study by Simkhada *et al.* (2010) found that many male trekking guides received payments for having sexual relationships with female foreigners trekking in Nepal; further suggesting that the commodification of sexual relationships may be a common practice in Nepal.

Selling sex often exposes a person to range of challenges, such as sexual abuse, health risks, financial pressure, and stigma along with a range of opportunities for economic gain. Respondents in the present research shared varied stories of the abuses they had experienced as sex workers. Another in-depth qualitative study of 14 self-identifying *metis* (a local subjectivity employed by ostensibly biologically male-bodied people who identify and present themselves as women), found that all had engaged in sex work at some point in their lives (Wilson *et al.* 2011). While the present study revealed that some sexual and gender minority people felt economically forced to sell sex and found the experience traumatic and humiliating (Interview with Sunita December 2013), other respondents understood sex work as a mundane necessity for survival (Interview with Sushila December 2013). For example, Simran, a transgender woman, was studying abroad in Cyprus when her family cut off support after she explained why she did not want to return home to marry a woman her family had found for her; 'Because I had no other choice, I had to sell myself… for 100 euro. I went with an old man. After I had come home, I felt so guilty that I wanted to commit suicide'. (Frisbie 2014: 56). However, Simran's experience is not necessarily indicative of everyone's experience of sex work: for others, selling sex may even be desirable and part of preforming a sexual or gender minority identity (Interview with Raju December 2013) through an economic means (Interview with Suresh December 2013).

Sex work exists within a complicated political and social milieu for sexual and gender minority people in Nepal.[10] Faced with the public discrimination, harassment and social exclusion discussed earlier, sex work is often a space for sexual and gender minorities on the periphery of society to express sexually variant identities and same-sex sexualities. In this context, the difficulty of living as a sex worker and being able to more freely explore and articulate same-sex sexual desires and gender-variant identities may be preferable to being abused for not being able to conform to a set of social expectations. Other research has suggested that sex work also provides sexual and gender minority people, in particular transgender women, with validation of their sexuality through the act of being desired (Wilson *et al.* 2011). Seira Tamang's work (2003) on transgender women in Nepal has highlighted how homoeroticism and restrictions around women's sexuality help to create peripheral spaces for the enactment of gender variance and same-sex sexuality within heteronormative frameworks. Considering this, in respect of informants who described sex work as something that they no longer needed to do, but continue to do for 'fun' (Interview with Raju December 2013), it seems that sex work is often a space whereby sexual and gender minorities, in

[10] Sex work is illegal but takes place in many parts of Kathmandu and Nepal.

particular male-bodied people, can find validation, support and pleasure, even while acknowledging the inherent difficulties and socioeconomic hardships that sex work involves.

While many informants articulated that they were unable to make a sustainable life out of their earnings as a sex worker, there were people who have been able to find empowerment in this situation. Suresh's case presents an example whereby he was able to find economic empowerment through his sexuality and education and mitigate the future pressure to marry that he anticipates he will face from his family when he gets older. Upon returning from boarding school in Darjeeling, Suresh wanted to start working but was unable to find employment because he lacked a university degree at the time, and didn't have the necessary contacts to obtain one otherwise. Despite coming from a wealthy family background and not necessarily needing to work, Suresh sought the independence that employment could provide, so he was able to gather a small amount of money to pay for training as a masseur with an established spa in Kathmandu – something he felt he had to hide from his family because of the association between massage parlours and sex work. Despite being hired by the spa after his training and having several dedicated customers, Suresh quit his job to work as a freelancer because he could make significantly more money. From there he began to market his services as a masseur and eventually as a sex worker through gay dating websites and applications to tourists and expatriates. Suresh estimates that he makes around US$800 a month during tourist seasons and within a year and a half had saved over US$6,400.

While Suresh is not representative of all sex workers in Nepal, his case highlights how sex work is not inherently abusive. Suresh's anticipation of the marriage pressure and desire to generate savings as a way to prepare for the social exclusion from his family he may one day face for refusing to marry, again demonstrates a high degree of foresight and preparation – something he also applies to his sex work. Suresh is continuing his education while he works and hopes to obtain a job in the formal sector as soon as he graduates so that he can begin to develop a career; partially because he realises that sex work is not necessarily a sustainable form of employment for older people. To this effect he has sought to professionalise his sex work by hiring a personal trainer, marketing himself differently, and educating himself on the risks of sexually transmitted diseases. Equally interesting is that Suresh hasn't experienced sex work as traumatic or degrading – he said the worst part of his job was how tired he sometimes was between school and work. While his situation is in many ways different from people who resort to or feel forced into sex work because of employment discrimination or social exclusion, it highlights that the aspects and problems associated with sex work may lie in the criminalisation of sex work, lack of other economic opportunities, lack of support for sex workers who are abused, and skill training for sex workers, as opposed to anything inherent in the work itself.

6 Migration

Migration is another example of how conservative social contexts encourage sexual and gender minority people to find livelihoods in spaces where they can enact sexualities and identities that are otherwise unavailable to them but are marginal to wider Nepali society. While some people are able to secure better forms of employment or study in foreign universities with the support of their parents, the reality is that most migrant work in Nepal carries with it inherent risks; something that has been a subject of a growing debate, social anxiety and concern in Nepali and international media in recent years. Most migrant work is for unskilled or low-skilled workers and only made economically feasible considering the relatively high rates of unemployment and low cost of living in Nepal. Obtaining work in the migrant economy, or enrolment in a foreign university, often requires people to go through 'manpower' agencies which act as recruiters and charge incredibly large sums of money, often while deceiving applicants about the type of work that they will be performing and how much money they will receive in salary or payment – in the worst cases many manpower brokers are scammers with no actual work to offer (Amnesty International 2011). Much of the work available for Nepali migrants is in India (40 per cent), Gulf Countries in the Middle East (38 per cent), and Malaysia (11.5 per cent), according to the World Bank (World Bank 2011). Nepali migrant workers have few or no political rights in these contexts, and suffer from unsafe working conditions that are often described as slavery and human trafficking. Many migrant workers may have their passports taken from them and others experience physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their employers, especially those working as domestic labourers (Amnesty International 2011). Usually migrant workers will spend years at a time working abroad with little or no leave before being able to return home. This is partially due to the high initial investment to obtain migrant work, which often takes longer than a year to pay off.

The domestic unemployment rate and the Nepali economy's reliance on remittances from migrant workers means that participation in the remittance economy or studying abroad have become an everyday reality for many Nepali families. The present study and other recent research on masculinity in Nepal have revealed that many people even consider remittance work a 'rite of passage' whereby young men are increasingly travelling abroad in order to provide for their families (Maycock *et al.* 2014). Other families increasingly live apart in different locations for work or school, which has allowed for greater individual freedom and perhaps the exploration of alternative forms of sexual desire, gender presentation, and lifestyle. Migrant work or any livelihood outside of Nepal therefore might provide sexual and gender minorities with a space in which to remove themselves from the immediate pressure for marriage, which they can offset by playing a positive role in the family's economy and social status through remittances. Considering that many families are in some way reliant on remittances from someone working in the migrant economy, in this space sexual and gender minorities and others are able to transition from being reliant on their family for support into a position where they are financially independent or their family may be reliant on them for support. Participation in migrant work seems to be a broader strategy used by sexual and gender minorities and other Nepali youth to delay marriage and as a way to enjoy relatively greater liberty and freedom by being away from social pressure.

While migration may be a common strategy to escape social pressure for many Nepali, it is perhaps understandable how migration carries with it greater challenges and difficulties that predispose people towards certain forms of socioeconomic marginalisation. Migrant work becomes a necessary state of existence and in Nepal's context is not usually accompanied with job security, good employment, or opportunity for growth or work in other sectors – especially if the work is being conducted illegally. Even though many Nepali choose to be or end up as illegal workers, this is not necessarily because they fear socioeconomic discrimination or marginalisation in Nepal or because the decision to return to Nepal is

perceived to be at odds with their sexuality or gender identity. For the vast majority of people we encountered in our field research, leaving Nepal was synonymous with the desire to live a more open and empowered life, and all of our case studies with the exception of Rajani and Prem had an experience or desire to work or study abroad.

However, migrant economies and access to migration are not open equally to all people. Until 2010 the Nepali government had imposed a ban on women seeking to work in Gulf countries because of the risk of 'sexual abuse and harassment' (BBC News Asia 2012). In 2012, the government reinstated the ban for women under 30 citing similar reasons, revealing the larger social anxieties surrounding women's sexualities within the larger social context of rapid socioeconomic changes in Nepal. Women also experience great difficulty in acquiring citizenship documents without a husband or male family member's help even though this is no longer a legal requirement. In addition, political parties recently reached a consensus that women will not be able to pass their citizenship rights onto their children (Shrestha 2014). Despite these challenges, women are now more able to participate in migrant economies and it is estimated that roughly a third of migrant workers are women, but they also face greater risk of sexual and physical abuse because employment opportunities often involve domestic work in people's homes (Amnesty International 2011: 66). Transgender and other gender-variant people have similar issues obtaining both passports and citizenship identification that reflect their gender identity even though the 2007 Supreme Court ruling provided them the legal right to identification based on self-identification of their gender identity. While it seems that the government has taken steps to implement these rulings, the vast majority of people with gender-variant identities are excluded from migrant economies because of employment discrimination or lack of adequate identification. Transgender people therefore are often forced to travel according to their sex-assigned gender – an experience often described as uncomfortable and difficult.

Overall, migrant work, along with sex work and many other unskilled employment opportunities were often articulated as ways to survive and 'make ends meet' even while people experienced various levels of freedom and empowerment within them; in the worst case scenarios, many Nepali migrant workers are abused, underpaid, and suffer horrendous conditions when they are abroad (*ibid*.). In this respect, it is important to consider how overcoming the stigma and poverty experienced by many sexual and gender minorities relies on not only obtaining a well-paid job but helping individuals attain a sense of empowerment to effect meaningful change in their lives and social contexts.

7 Conclusion: Implications for policies and programmes

The socioeconomic marginalisation of sexual and gender minority peoples in Nepal and elsewhere raises new challenges for development practitioners, stakeholders and donors – namely over the focus of interventions, imagined 'target populations,' content and modality of interventions, and the overall position of such programmes within development frameworks and funding streams. Given that sexual and gender minority peoples may not ascribe to 'self-identification' in explicit terms and are found across the entire range of ethnic, caste and class backgrounds, numerous problems present themselves over how to reach sexual and gender minorities without requiring or reinforcing certain subjective categories and forms of social visibility. Other questions arise when considering how to develop programmes for a population that has different aspirations, educational backgrounds, socioeconomic status, social and family support, and experiences of marginalisation. Additionally, it is important to consider how future interventions will be positioned within the larger context and framework of development work; e.g. will such programmes be established as independent funding streams or should they be incorporated into existing livelihood interventions?

Perhaps the first thing to consider for interventions is how to reach sexual and gender minority people in ways that neither reinforce nor require people to identify within certain assumed sexual or gendered subject categories. Development interventions need to be sensitive to people's sexual and gender subjectivities and understand how a person's identification may have played a role in their experience of marginalisation. However, programmes that reiterate or require self-identification within identity categories present inherent problems. Interventions explicitly designed for 'LGBT' people, for example, may subtly reinforce an understanding of sexual and gender minority issues within this framework. These carry the risk of reinforcing what may be experienced as external, Western and, in part biomedical, frameworks of sexuality and gender, which may or may not be available or meaningful to many same-sex desiring and gender-nonconforming peoples.

Similarly, the use of apparently 'local terms' for gender and sexual difference can alter the meaning of such terminologies, if they are employed in a way that is assumed to be locally intelligible and an *obvious* identity category. Stacy Leigh Pigg's work on language used to talk about sex and sexuality in HIV prevention in Nepal has stressed, for example, ways in which Nepali does not offer terms for talking about sexuality, health, and the body in ways that are readily commensurable with 'Western' frames of reference. She observed that where Nepali terms were used in the context of HIV prevention work the language sounded strange and unfamiliar to those working in community-based health-promotion projects; Nepali for sure, but in a linguistic register that was unfamiliar and alien (Pigg 2001).

This problem is echoed in ways in which a focus on 'local' terms for same-sex desiring and/or transgender subjects have been used in research, health and development and interventions in ways that may appear to be locally sensitive, but which compound stereotypes. For example, the ubiquitous use of the epithet *kothi* in HIV prevention work in India (as an apparently culturally located term for a same-sex desiring feminine subject who is otherwise male-bodied) has been critically explored as a term that has been reified in this context. As such, a culturally derived term such as *kothi* can be seen to have shifted in linguistic emphasis, to give the impression of being a culturally determined role with regular and predictable associated sexual practices (e.g. being passive in anal sex, and hence at risk of HIV infection in cases of unprotected intercourse). In this way models of identity and sexual performativity have been abstracted from more culturally complex understandings, and have come to lack nuance as terms for the description of *actual* sexual life-worlds and variable sexual practices (Boyce 2007; Khanna 2009).

Although less well developed in the literature on sexuality and HIV prevention, a similar critique has been made of the use of the term *meti* in Nepal, as potentially promoting a stereotyped view of a sexual subject, associated with particular kinds of anally receptive sexual risk practices. This use of the term *meti* in HIV and development in this context can be seen to have emphasised cultural stereotype over and above attention to the 'real' complexities of sexual and gendered subjectivity and sexual risk (Boyce and Pant 2001). This is not to say that *meti* is not a term used as a self-identity by people, but to stress a dissonance between the popular use of this term (and the varied sexual life-worlds and subjective experiences that it may encompass) as contrasted to the use of the term as an extant category for static designation for a sexual subject, with presumed sexual (risk) behaviours and so on.

Arising out of this critique it has become apparent that the employment of 'local terminologies' for sexuality in health and development work must be taken forward with sufficient attention to ways in which sexual subject categories are constructed *through* social interventions, and do not simply exist in the world untouched or unmodulated by development discourse and practice. Such processes of modulation take shape, in part, via exigencies for the categorisation of sexual subjects that occur within epidemiological registers (in the case of HIV) and the intervention of the state and international agencies in targeting sexual and gender minority subjects for health promotion and development work, for example in the case of targeted livelihood interventions. Even where such interventions take a progressive view and seek to work with people sensitively and supportively it is important to think in more complex terms about the fluidity and variability of sexual lives and life-worlds, over and above the reductive employment of cultural terms for sexuality.

Against this background, previous work in Nepal on sexual and gender minority rights has argued that while activism, law and social perceptions may often conceive of sexual and gender subjectivities as 'natural,' static and mutually exclusive, it is important for researchers and development practitioners to understand how sexual subjectivities are socially constructed and fluid (see Boyce and Coyle 2013). Providing funding streams to specific identity categories may well encourage individuals to identify within those frameworks, while excluding others who may experience socioeconomic marginalisation on the basis of sexuality and/or gender but feel that such self-identification is simply not resonant with their own sense of subjectivity. Given the wider context of a lack of socioeconomic opportunities in Nepal and the potential desperation people find themselves in if they are cut off from their natal networks, it is easy to see how funding streams for particular subjectivities are likely to encourage individuals to identify in ways that have the greatest social capital. This further reiterates the need for programmes to target, understand and support individuals on their *actual* experiences of socioeconomic marginalisation as a result of their sexuality or gender variance, which can and will include individuals who experience marginalisation on the basis of their self-identification, but which may include a range of more ambiguous and ambivalent experiences also. This approach will allow development interventions to address the issues of socioeconomic marginalisation without interfering in, or assuming the parameters of, people's identification, or politicising or reifying certain forms of identity over others; a point that has been a central concern for many sexual and gender minority activists in developing countries worldwide and evident in debates surrounding aid conditionality.

During the course of the present research some stakeholders raised concerns about whether programmes that allow people access to certain resources, such as capital or training, based on a person's marginal sexual or gendered self-identification or feeling may be abused by people who are otherwise not sexual or gender minorities. This point was raised by both international donors and local NGOs – a point of concern being that it was impossible to determine someone's eligibility for such programmes without asking a range of intrusive questions, predicated on the idea of a coherently identifiable gendered or sexual subject as opposed to the more ambiguous qualities we have proposed taking account of. This may be

a real concern, and yet, considering the wider social conservatism that Nepali sexual and gender minority people live in and the aforementioned experiences of socioeconomic marginalisation, the incentives for taking part in programmes that require some form of self-identification in terms of sexual or gender minority status may be quite weak, given the potential perceived risk involved. This observation, however, also points to issues in attracting sexual and gender minority participants to such programmes, since many such people, as noted, may have an investment in secrecy or ambiguity. In consideration of these difficulties it is important to consider that actions seeking to address socioeconomic marginalisation and sexual and gender minority experience need to especially focus on two key issues: (1) the actual conditions of poverty that sexual and gender minorities experience as a result of the gender or sexuality, and (2) the underlying causes that create the contexts where sexual and gender minorities may be disproportionately more likely to experience economic hardship or poverty.

The latter is perhaps far more significant in terms of preventing the abuse, violence and discrimination that systemically creates the conditions of poverty for sexual and gender minorities, as well as many women, girls and other social groups. Additionally, programmes that seek to improve sexual and gender minorities' livelihoods are unlikely to be a success if nothing is done to address the wider social contexts and underlying values in which markets and economic opportunities are rooted; this is resonant with our respondent Sushila's point that opening and running a successful beauty shop is very much dependent on whether or not clients will accept and patronise a shop run by a transgender woman. For these reasons, programmes that promote dialogue and raise awareness of sexual and gender minorities are crucial in terms of addressing wider prejudicial attitudes.

Thorough research on rhetoric surrounding sexual and gender peoples has yet to be conducted in Nepal. Comparative research into sexual and gender minority activism in rural America with strong kinship networks suggests that rural activists often deploy different strategies to assert their rights, by claiming and asserting ties to their community and local politicians through their kinship networks, as opposed to more typically urban strategies of activism that are reliant on large demonstrations of self-identified sexual and gender minorities – something that Nepal lacks (Gray 2009). A similar strategy has already been observed in some ways in Nepal through the assertion of 'traditional' subjective identities for sexual and gender minorities, traditions that involved gender-variant performances, and the articulation of sexuality and gender often through the appropriation of modes of dress by sexual and gender minority peoples that give clear signals to affiliation with ethnic or caste groups in Nepal (many of which have strongly identifiable textile traditions, for example). These modes of presentation have taken place at lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Pride Parades in Nepal, for example, as a performative mode of signalling gender-variant and same-sex sexualities as Nepali, not simply modes of identification imported from the West (Boyce and Coyle 2013). Given the larger social critique that sexual and gender minorities were 'brought into Nepal', 'as an aspect of modernity' it has therefore been important to some activists and others to adopt explicitly locally sensitive and context-specific logics and symbols in the assertion of sexual and gender minority rights, a strategy that is important in the wider international field of work on sexuality and poverty.

Programmes also need to address the systemic causes of socioeconomic marginalisation and exclusion of sexual gender minorities. Integrated approaches within existing programmes that address gender discrimination might increase overall impact while addressing underlying issues of social inclusion and marginalisation. For example, there are new programmes being developed within the field of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention in Nepal, based on gender-transformative approaches that encourage young boys, girls, men and women to critically reflect on gender norms and roles within their lives and communities (Temin and Levine 2009) and how these values potentially promote or fail to acknowledge different forms

of violence, discrimination, and abuse. There is a growing body of evidence that engaging boys and men in programmes aimed at transforming gender stereotypes and reducing violence against women and girls is critical to their effectiveness (Ricardo, Eads and Barker 2012; Greig and Edström 2012; IPPF 2010). Much of this work is a result of more recently internationally established best practices that highlight the value and importance of investing in girls and women across different sectors of development (Austrian and Ghati 2010).

Against this background, and reflecting on the empirical work for the present report, our respondents Rajani's and Prem's experiences of marginalisation were not necessarily, in their view, a result of being self-identified lesbian women but as a result of violating hegemonic sexual and gender norms. Also recall that many sexual and gender minorities experience harassment and discrimination based on their gender variance or feelings of 'difference' at early ages, usually before they self-identify or have a language for their sexual and gender difference: 'I didn't have the language for it yet, but I told him I am not like that' (Frisbie 2014: 39). Hence, programmes that address bullying and harassment on the basis of caste, gender or sexual orientation *together* in school for boys and girls are likely to help build children's resilience towards future instances of discrimination, abuse and violence, prevent future instances of violence, and potentially lead to the creation and implementation of proactive school and/or workplace policies that address violence and discrimination when it does occur. Integrated approaches such as this are likely to be more effective at addressing the underlying causes of sexual and gender minority experience and socioeconomic marginalisation and discrimination, which are in many ways similar and interconnected with the norms, values and practices that also underlie violence against women and girls. However, more research is needed into programme development and practices in order to determine how best to include sexual and gender minorities' issues in locally sensitive and context-specific ways.

With regard to addressing the context of poverty and economic hardship that many sexual and gender minorities experience, the case studies from which this research derives demonstrate that it is difficult to make simplistic assumptions about a person's socioeconomic status or marginalisation predicated on their sexuality or gender. Equally important to consider are the ways in which marginalisation is likely to occur differently for sexual and gender minority people and that wider social conservatism plays a large role in shaping people's family dynamics and ability to obtain work and education. In this respect, programmes that seek to address poverty or livelihood should be holistic with respect to individuals' lives and not solely based on skill training initiatives. Other research has highlighted how skill training programmes for the rehabilitation of 'trafficked women' often reinforced sets of gender norms surrounding women's role in the domestic sphere without focusing on the pragmatic realities in which women may experience social stigma and livelihood challenges (Richardson *et al.* 2009). It is important therefore that livelihood programmes that address the result of social marginalisation are not based on a series of skill-based trainings that reinforce stereotypes of certain populations, such as programmes where transgender women are collectively trained as beauticians or transgender men are trained as drivers – both of which have been livelihood intervention models used to address sexual and gender minorities' marginalisation in the past in Nepal, and which have evidenced equivocal long-term outcomes. This is not to suggest that these may not be desirable careers for some individuals, but livelihood programmes should not segregate populations within certain industries, based on gendered and sexual stereotypes alone.

Instead, programmes ought to adopt a holistic approach to livelihood and poverty in ways that encourage and support people to find empowerment within their chosen contexts instead of ones that have been selected for them. This means that programmes need to go beyond different packages of skill training for sexual and gender minorities and instead engage individuals more directly through processes whereby people are empowered to make their own decisions regarding their lives and social contexts. Sexual and gender minority peoples

come from different educational and social backgrounds and do not share uniform opinions about their life and earnings; this report has shown how some individuals desire different career options but lack the resources and support to do so while others may desire support within their current lives and livelihood strategies. This means that programmes should not seek to 'remove' people from sex work or prevent migration or other livelihood strategies, for example, but instead give individuals greater and more diverse options for employment while providing more support regarding their current situation.

These approaches should be supplemented with options for basic entrepreneurial skills, numeracy, literacy and business development classes that also teach people how to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace, other forms of employment discrimination, and access to capital for entrepreneurial activities. Here, financial incentives and support for companies and NGOs to sensitise their staff and recruit interns or employees in different sectors can be crucial towards helping formalise the skill sets of otherwise excluded sexual and gender minority peoples, and developing their qualifications for work and employment. Such programmes will probably need to include programmes that build people's 'soft skills,' such as communication and teamwork, given the reality of their histories and experiences of marginalisation and abuse. To this effect, programmes that provide long-term counselling services to abuse victims are also important in addressing the trauma many individuals have experienced as a result of their gender identity or sexual orientation, something that is likely to substantially affect a person's mental and physical health. Counselling services could potentially extend their work to include families of sexual and gender minorities in an attempt to preserve kinship networks and people's family ties. Within the context of education, donors should seek to support avenues whereby sexual and gender minorities, as well as other marginalised groups, can receive official recognition and certification for skills and education that may have been acquired informally but lack documentation – this is of particular importance to people who dropped out of school early and are unable to find employment even though they possess the necessary qualifications. Additionally, reserving funds for educational scholarships for and grants concerning sexual and gender minority issues are important to advance these issues within relevant institutions. This approach clearly moves beyond the scope of focusing exclusively on a person's skill set but because socioeconomic marginalisation of sexual and gender minority peoples arises out of wider social dynamics of marginalisation, it is necessary to include approaches that build people's self-efficacy and abilities to address the underlying reasons why their lives and choices were confined initially.

In many ways, the framework for the types of programmes and initiatives proposed here already exist in Nepal and in many international contexts, for example through existing work in schools, livelihood schemes and so on. Yet, most often issues of sexual and gender difference are not addressed within such work. It is therefore important to consider the larger funding and development milieu in which new interventions that address sexual and gender minority issues might be situated, not only as stand-alone but also as integrated programmes. While there has been a tendency to create and silo separate funding streams and programmes for different marginalised groups, such as women, *dalits* or ethnic minorities in Nepal (as elsewhere), existing programmes and interventions regarding employment, human rights and social exclusion might productively incorporate sexual and gender minority people and issues in ways that promote collaborative approaches between different social groups. This would help to address the inherent heteronormative assumptions that underlie many existing development interventions, such as poverty alleviation or livelihood programmes that address normative ideas of family as units for intervention, or sexual and gender based violence programmes that ignore male-to-male sexual abuse and victimisation. This is not to suggest that independent funding streams for sexual and gender minority programmes are not important or needed in resolving the issues highlighted in this report, but to stress that developing such programmes in synergy with existing funding streams might both deepen and widen a development response to sexual and gender minority experience and socioeconomic marginalisation.

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