

The gendered experiences of adolescent girls working in the adult entertainment sector in Nepal

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Acronyms

3 Cs	Capabilities, change strategies and contexts
AES	Adult entertainment sector
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CS	Case study
CSW	Commercial sex work
DIC	Drop-in centre
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
IDI	In-depth interview
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
3 Cs	Capabilities, change strategies and contexts
AES	Adult entertainment sector
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CS	Case study
CSW	Commercial sex work
DIC	Drop-in centre
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
IDI	In-depth interview
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
LH	Life history
MANK	Mahila Atma Nirbharta Kendra
MPRC	Mega Publication and Research Centre
NCASC	National Centre for AIDS and STD Control
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NISER	Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research
SGD	Small group discussion
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

This report on the gendered experiences of adolescent girls working in the adult entertainment sector (AES) is one of a series of publications presenting the findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme's three-year study in Nepal. While existing studies look at the issues of violence and harmful practices such as child labour in the AES, there is a dearth of information about how the industry is changing (such as in mediation activities, customer–client relationships and the location of services in establishment based/non-establishment based venues) as well as the gendered experiences of girls in these circumstances. The study aimed to fill this knowledge gap by using a gender and social norms lens to examine the context of girls' lives before they enter the AES, the factors that influence girls' entry into the AES, and the emerging activities and avenues of the AES in Nepal.

The findings are of relevance to the current debates on modern slavery and trafficking (see Plant, 2015; Chuang, 2015) in the following three ways: 1) the study unpacks the role of systemic discriminatory practices driven by norms and values to push girls in the AES where girls are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation; 2) it highlights the relevance of responding to these root causes in preventing modern slavery and trafficking and discusses how contemporary globalisation gives rise to new forms of abuse and exploitation; and 3) it highlights the importance of bringing various contextual and common sense definitions of 'exploitation' (Plant, 2015, pp1) into the modern slavery debate and strengthening them through a wider legal definition of 'exploitation'.

Methodology

The study was conducted in four districts of Nepal: Sindhupalchowk (as a place of origin); Kathmandu, Jhapa and Sunsari (as destinations for work in the AES); Delhi, India (for the cross-border AES) and two border points on the Nepal–India border in Jhapa. It uses data from in-depth qualitative interviews with 286 participants obtained through in-depth and life history interviews (40 and 9, respectively), case studies (3), focus groups discussions (28) and key informant interviews (45).

Main findings

The study findings highlight that the contours of AES work have changed with the increased use of technology. The study found that while public AES venues such as hotels and dance bars have not been completely displaced, there has been a proliferation of more private venues such as private residences and rented boarding houses, and an increase in work being arranged through personal and phone contacts. This has led to a substantial increase in commercial sex work as a part of the AES. Most adolescent boys and girls engaged in the AES are internal migrants from rural areas and only some were engaged in other paid jobs prior to landing in this sector. Common jobs include working as labourers on construction sites and salespeople in small shops. Most adolescents had migrated for higher studies or for work and the AES was their first job.

Factors that pull adolescents into the sector include peer influence, personal aspirations (such as to become a singer), the appeal of less strenuous work (compared to working in construction, for example), flexible working hours and because entering into the AES does not require higher education, prior experience, references or social networks. Girls and boys are largely introduced to the AES by their peers, family members, relatives, employers or brokers. Internet-based mediation has also opened up opportunities for girls to upload their pictures onto CSW websites and be approached by clients directly. However, this was a new method and not very common.

The study also underscores important gender dynamics. Girls are more likely than boys to enter into the AES and particularly into commercial sex work (CSW) due to discriminatory gender norms around girls' access to household assets/parental property, the lack of parental investment in girls' education and career, the restricted mobility of girls, and discriminatory norms around marriage and choice of partners. Other gendered factors include polygamy, domestic violence and family discrimination.

Girls largely work as front-of-house staff and interact with clients of the AES, while boys are employed as cooks, managers, supervisors for singing and dancing groups and security guards. Customers are largely male and vary by AES venue and the type of sex workers they can afford.

Salaries for girls working in establishments are lower (they vary between USD 50 and 70 per month) and are irregular (sometimes paid only once every two or three months) and so girls largely depend on commission and tips (USD 100–150 per day or 10–25% of what customers buy). Boys receive fewer tips but their salaries are paid more regularly. Salaries for boys also increase with age and experience, but diminish for girls as they grow older and are less in demand (decreasing markedly after their mid-20s). The career span for girls in the AES is very short.

Some common challenges for girls and boys in the AES are the burden of labour and lack of contracts, job security and holidays. For girls, there are additional challenges related to their sexuality which include having to wear revealing dresses against their will and to endure harassment by clients, employers, male colleagues, landlords, drivers and their intimate partners. They are also at risk of being sold by partners and harassed by clients even when not at work. Since girls are stigmatised for working in the AES, they are also more likely to face emotional and gender-based violence for alleged involvement in CSW and have more difficulty reintegrating into society if they wish to leave the AES. Drinking alcohol and smoking with clients is a regular part of girls' work in the AES, frequently pushing girls into addiction within a short time of entering the AES.

Policy and programming implications

- Current NGO programmes are reactive in nature, ie, they only respond to girls' challenges in the AES

and do not work to minimise their entry into the AES or CSW in the first place. Proactive measures that work to increase adolescent, family and community awareness of the link between gender discrimination and the likelihood of girls entering risky jobs such as in the AES/CSW should be put in place.

- Facilitating access to information about vocational trainings and extending existing livelihoods and life skills programmes to support and encourage adolescent girls and young women in entrepreneurial activities in the origin villages through schools and once they enter urban areas should be a part of the preventive measures for ending trafficking and modern slavery.
- The government should help break gender barriers in the labour market by encouraging girls and parents, and incentivising employees and the private sector.
- In general, migrant girls are more likely to enter into the AES and CSW. The government should make information about vocational trainings easily available and support/encourage girls in entrepreneurial activities.
- Girls not working from establishments are likely to be left out of interventions as current interventions are largely establishment-based. Programmes should move beyond venue-based interventions to reach out to girls who are engaged in CSW in the AES through mobile phones and social media.
- The government should also monitor pornographic websites and the production of pornographic TV channels and programmes.



Introduction

Adolescence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the period of life spanning the ages between 10 and 19 years, (WHO, 1999). Adolescents today make up 16% of the world's population and more than half of all adolescents (340 million) live in Asia (UNICEF, 2019). Physical impacts aside, adolescence is also a period when girls and boys start to encounter gendered norms in their socio-cultural environments. In countries of South Asia, social norms start to become more rigid for girls as they enter and proceed through their adolescent years. Instead of opening the world, norms around purity, chastity and honour put restrictions on their mobility and social interaction and shrink their world. Girls are often prey to harmful practices such as early marriage, school dropout and underinvestment in education, and gender-based violence – factors that limit girls' potential and have negative repercussions throughout their adult life.

Opportunities available to adolescents to build their capabilities for transition to a successful adulthood often vary and are undermined by poverty, lack of adolescent-friendly policies, geographical access and gender norms among other things (UNICEF, 2011; Harper et al., 2018). Factors such as poverty, gender discrimination and geographical access however start to show their effects already during adolescence. For adolescents in low- and middle-income countries this has often meant that they face high vulnerabilities in general (Viner et al., 2015; Harper et al., 2018; Bakrania et al., 2018). Adolescents who work in the AES in Nepal are among such groups. This report explores the realities of adolescents working in the AES in Nepal, in which they are vulnerable to physical, economic and sexual exploitation. This sector presents a big challenge globally to meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8 and 5 on decent work, protection of labour rights and promotion of a safe and secure working environment.

While existing studies (Kshetri et al., 2018; Dank et al., 2019) examine the pull and push factors that often result in adolescents working in this sector, they rarely analyse the underlying social norms that may drive and influence such life trajectories. Without understanding these underlying social norms, it is likely that interventions targeting such vulnerable groups will remain ineffective or have only a

limited effect, as they do not tackle the root causes of such behaviours. It will also be difficult to help the adolescents who work in this sector to realise their full potential as adults.

The objective of this particular study in Nepal is to understand the lives of adolescents in the AES:

1. Why do adolescents enter and remain in the AES? What is the role of gendered norms in landing girls in the AES?
2. What do girls' lives look like in the AES and how are their experiences gendered?

This study also contributes to understanding how to meet the targets of SDGs 5 and 8 in Nepal.

Background

The AES in Nepal emerged in the liberal economic policy era, after the 1990s, during which the country also became increasingly urbanised (Kshetri et al., 2018). The industry was once confined to small thatched eateries along the east-west highway of Nepal, with very low investment and catering primarily to drivers. It has now expanded to many urban centres and represents a multimillion-dollar industry with large investments. These come in the form of hotels, transportation (such as vehicle services for clients) and other infrastructure. The AES caters to clients from many walks of life and is now made up of a complex web of venues, including restaurants, massage parlours, dance bars and guesthouses. Section 2 details these venues and the opportunities for sex work within them.

Commercial sex work (CSW) is illegal in Nepal and not all the AES venues provide sex services. Other activities are also carried out in the AES that are not directly sex work-related, including dance and singing shows, massage and therapy, accommodation, food services and parties, among others. However, in many of the AES venues, CSW is often an implicit part of the business or an initial link for girls to enter into CSW. No data exist on the share of the AES venues that provide such services and those involved in the AES who can be considered sex workers. As Section 2 shows, CSW also now occurs outside establishment-based the AES, or with weak or periodic linkages to such establishment-based the AES.

However, the AES in Nepal has arguably become more closely related to the sex work industry as it increasingly facilitates sex work in addition to providing other services. This report explores CSW but also other aspects of the AES in Nepal. When we are discussing situations that involve CSW, we make this explicit. All other discussions are about the AES more broadly.

As is also seen globally (UNICEF, n.d.), the AES in Nepal is an arena that survives based largely on the exploitation of women and children but also, perhaps more recently, of boys. Estimates differ as to the number of people involved in the AES, and the number of children among these. A number of studies are focused on finding out the proportion of minors in the AES, perhaps because most of them are carried out using the lens of trafficking and child labour.

In a study in Kathmandu in 2010 (Fredrik et al., 2010), 65% of respondents engaged in sex work in the AES were aged 15–17; a more recent study that explored the prevalence of minors¹ in the AES in Kathmandu found that, of its sample of 600 respondents below 21 years, 17% were minors and 62% of other respondents had started working in the AES before the age of 18 (Dank et al., 2019). A study by CWIN and ECPAT Luxembourg (2015) estimated that the various venues that make up the AES employed over 11,000 women and girls, of whom approximately 50% were minors, or below the age of 16. Fredrik et al. (2010) also estimated venue-specific numbers and found that 6,000–7,000 girls and women worked in cabin restaurants, 3,000–4,000 in dance bars and about 9,000 in the *dohari* restaurants², with an equal number in massage parlours. All studies show that, with the expansion of the AES, the number of people (as well as children) working in the sector in Nepal is increasing. However, as noted above, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how many of those mentioned above are involved in CSW, as other kinds of work are also carried out within the AES.

Adolescents also make up a significant proportion of the population trafficked across the border into India to take part in the AES there: around 5,000–15,000 women and girls are trafficked to India annually for CSW in the AES and another 600–2,000 children to work in circuses – another AES venue in India – 90% of whom are girls (Maharjan and Thapa, 2017).

The continuous efforts of the government of Nepal, donors and international and national non-governmental

organisations (INGOs and NGOs) have led to important improvements related to the protection of these vulnerable groups. Laws against child labour, the use of minors, trafficking and violation of labour codes have been used as entry points to try to stem this industry, as Nepal does not recognise CSW. Some INGOs now claim that some important achievements have been made that have helped challenge the structures that promote trafficking and smuggling of minors into the AES – a very difficult task for advocating agencies (see The Freedom Fund, 2018).

Legislation that is meaningful for those working in the AES, such as the Child Rights and Victim Protection Acts, was passed in 2018. In the past, women and girls found to be engaging in CSW in hotels, snack corners (primary entry points for minors) and other establishments would be penalised while the owners would not; now, as a result of continuous lobbying, there is a prison term and a fine for establishment owners who run CSW operations. Similarly, the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act of 2007 is under revision. It is expected that it will be better able in the future to cope with the ever-changing contours of trafficking and smuggling and to align with the Palermo Protocol³, and will contain important provisions related to prevention, protection and support to vulnerable populations.

Those who work in the AES do not represent a homogenous group; they have differing needs, circumstances, life histories and aspirations. One variable is age. Adolescents make up a large share of those involved in the AES in Nepal but there is no adolescent-focused study on the AES, so we know relatively little about this population group. This study aims to contribute to filling in this gap in understanding in three ways.

First, drawing on a multi-year study using participatory tools such as life histories; focus group discussions (FGDs) looking at community norms and changes over time in the place of origin; and case studies of girls, including those who have left the sector, this study captures the changing dynamics of the AES and adds in-depth knowledge on the lived realities of boys and girls who work in this sector. We hope this will provide better information on the adolescents who are more likely to enter this sector; why and how they do so; the emerging trends in adolescents' involvement in the AES; and how the lived realities and aspirations of adolescents fare. Moreover, the study provides evidence

1 According to the Nepal Citizenship Act 1963, minors are below 16 years of age.

2 See the 'Findings on adolescents in the AES' section for an explanation of *dohari* restaurants.

3 The UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and Its Protocols.

from beyond the Kathmandu Valley, which has been the focus of most prior studies.

Second, by looking at villages of origin, and social norms and values therein, this study has been able to explore the underlying drivers that push girls and boys into the AES. Previous studies have not looked at such dimensions, including entrenched gender norms in both villages of origin and the AES itself.

Third, we look at the prospects for continued education and learning for adolescents working in this sector, given that this is potentially a way out of the industry. We also explore how opportunities for learning and education are gendered and if/how existing programmes provide activities for girls and boys working in this sector. Previous studies have not looked at education and learning prospects for such population groups.

We look at source villages, national AES destinations (Kathmandu, Jhapa and Sunsari) and cross-border linkages (see accompanying [brief](#) on migration in the AES). This is also something not covered in previous formal studies.

Conceptual framing and methodology

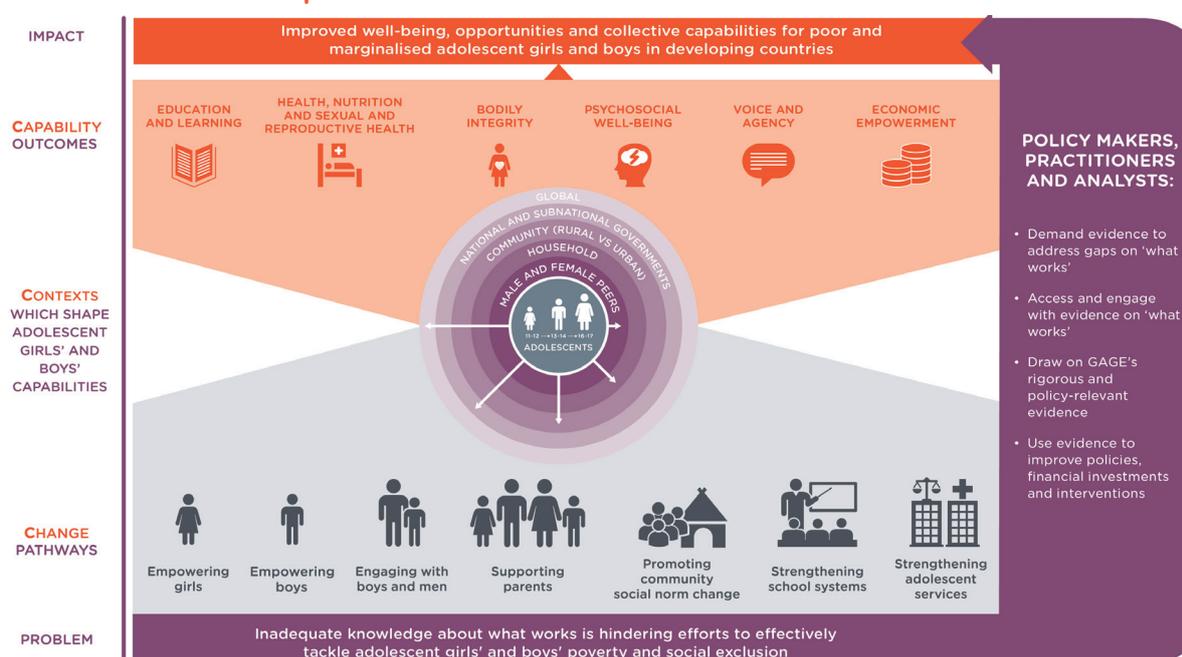
The study follows the GAGE conceptual framework (Figure 1) to frame its questions and findings. GAGE's conceptual framework takes the 3Cs – capabilities, contexts and change strategies – as building blocks to understand what works to support adolescent development and empowerment. The first block, 'capabilities', explores

the different capitals that are seen as important for individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. Six key capability domains are identified that make up these capitals: education and learning; bodily integrity (including freedom from sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage); physical and reproductive health and nutrition; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. This study takes the capability domain as a cross-cutting theme and focuses on showing how gendered contexts affect girls' life trajectories.

The second block, 'context', refers to the family, household, community, state and global contexts in which the lives of adolescents are situated and that influence capability outcomes for adolescents. The third block is 'change strategies'; this concept acknowledges that contextual realities can be mediated through a range of change strategies for positive outcomes in the capabilities of adolescents. Change strategies can include factors such as empowering individual adolescents, supporting parents, engaging with men and boys, sensitising community leaders, enhancing adolescent-responsive services and addressing system-level deficits.

By exploring how girls end up in the adult entertainment sector (AES), their gendered experiences and what kind of discrimination shapes these experiences in the context of AES, the study tries to understand how such gender-discriminatory norms and practices interact with other forms of social disadvantage to shape adolescent development trajectories.

Figure 1: The GAGE conceptual framework



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

Research methods and sample size

The report is based on two years of fieldwork between 2018 and 2020. We used qualitative and participatory methods, including semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with adolescent girls and boys working in AES, employers and key informants with in-depth knowledge on AES both in Nepal and in India. The study also used life history (LH) interviews and case studies (CS) to understand how girls and boys end up in AES, what vulnerabilities they face, the impact on education and psychosocial well-being, the working environment and future employment prospectus, and opportunities to return to their communities through rehabilitation programmes.

In addition, we carried out analyses of 10 interventions in Nepal to understand what works to enable a better adulthood for girls and boys working in AES. Some findings from these are added here; details will also be added to the second thematic report that is to follow. Key informant interviews (KIs), case studies (CS) and desk-based report and programme reviews were carried out for this purpose. We also observed two borders and carried out KIs at checkpoints that are either known or are emerging as on trafficking routes to AES in India and abroad.

During the first year of fieldwork, we understood from our evidence that the AES landscape is changing rapidly, with technology, mainly phones, social media and the internet, playing an increasingly important role. We thus asked questions on use of technology in the second year in Kathmandu but also in Jhapa and Sunsari, our new study districts for the second year. We also conducted an online study of different websites and followed groups on popular social media sites. These sites and groups were chosen based on KIs and interviews with girls and boys and included Facebook, imo and media channels.

For Facebook, we created an ID for a 20-year-old girl (Facebook has a policy that restricts minors below 18 from opening an account and asks for parents' consent), using a random animated female profile picture to try to attract boys/men. There were very few requests so we dropped the activity after a few months.

KIs revealed that Messenger and imo were the two most popular apps among adolescents and women to link to clients for commercial sex work (CSW). We first followed 12 groups on imo and then joined six groups we thought had potential for CSW linkages. We regularly observed conversations throughout the study period.

We also followed a media channel, Phulchowki Media, on Facebook and YouTube. We focused on a show called Masti Talk Time, on which, according to key informants, the host paid struggling actors and models to take part in interviews using scripts given to them by the host. Most of those interviewed were young women and adolescent girls and questions were pornographic in nature (adult interviews). Among other things, young women and girls were made to talk in an exaggerated manner about the number of people they had had sex with, their experiences of sex with people of different ethnic groups and nationalities, etc. We also analysed the viewership and their comments. This helped us understand CSW in AES, new forms of technology in AES and the trajectories adolescent and young women may have to take when they migrate from rural to urban areas. We then also followed YouTube channels of some of the interviewees who had claimed that they were taking part in CSW. On 21 March 2019, the government arrested the proprietor of Phulchowki Media, the programme host and a model participating in the talk programme, and the channel was blocked. We stopped our observation after that. The channel of the model we were following was also blocked.

Given that AES work takes place in different locations in Nepal, we looked at girls and boys working in different venues (dance bars, dohari restaurants, massage parlours, discos, guesthouses) as well as freelance home- or street-based sex workers.

A total of 211 respondents were interviewed over a span of two years. Of these, 146 (116 female and 30 male) were participants from the AES; the others comprised local people, adolescent girls and boys in the community of origin, and key informants. When selecting respondents, we gave special consideration to age, ethnicity and area of origin, to capture diverse views and experiences in different work environments. A total of 26 FGDs, 2 short group discussions (SGD), 42 KIs, 9 LHs, 3 CS and 40 IDIs were conducted. Respondents included adolescent boys and girls going to school as well as those who had dropped out; girls and boys working in different AES locations; and those self-identifying as commercial sex workers. A group of parents of adolescents in Sindhupalchowk, the origin district, were interviewed. For more information about the research sites and tools used to carry out the research, please see the annex at the end of this report.

Findings on adolescents in the AES

This section presents the main findings of the study. Section 2.1 describes the AES in detail, highlighting its emerging forms. Section 2.2 looks at the work adolescents are involved in prior to entering the sector and the pull and push factors that were found to have landed adolescents in the AES. Section 2.3 describes how entry into the AES is mediated. Section 2.4 covers the life of girls and boys in the AES, highlighting their earning and challenges as well as gendered experiences. Section 2.5 discusses education and learning prospects in the AES and how these are gendered.

The AES in Nepal: some emerging trends

This study finds that the AES has been changing its form in recent years, with regard to (i) the venues and mediation (i.e. how girls and boys meet/come into contact with customers); (ii) the prevalence of CSW within the AES; and (iii) the increasing strictness of rules and monitoring of activities related to the AES by the government and other organisations.

The AES can be divided into three broad types of establishment (or lack of), according to our findings:

1. public establishment-based (in venues such as hotels, often alongside CSW)
2. private establishment-based (in private houses, including homes, where CSW is the main form of entertainment) and
3. non-establishment-based (where dealings between the client and the service provider occurs through personal contacts or social networks. The change in laws regarding trafficking and exploitation, as well as stricter monitoring activities by the government and NGOs, appears to have pushed the AES from establishment-based to more personal contact-based work. We also found that, while the AES is largely associated with CSW, not all the AES venues conduct CSW – but they may serve as a place to connect clients and service providers. Even those establishments that fall in the same category do not

necessarily work as CSW sites – for example not all guesthouses conduct CSW. We also found that the different categories sometimes overlap, largely based on arrangements between the people involved.

Public establishment-based

Cabin restaurants

Cabin restaurants are restaurants where the dining area is divided into smaller closed cubicles for privacy. They also sell alcohol and snacks. According to respondents, girls are supposed to carry out waitress services and also sit and eat with the guests, as well as providing sexual services if a client asks for this. The restaurant owner takes the money and gives the girls and boys a regular salary. According to our respondents, here girls are young, ranging from young adolescents to those aged 20–21 years.

Dance bars

According to key informants, dance bars were initially established as restaurants showcasing cultural Nepali dance along with food and beverages. In their present form, they offer all kinds of Bollywood dances and music. Boys and girls dance while customers eat, sit and watch. The establishments usually attract male clients, who visit for entertainment and for social or sexual interaction. Female dancers are required to join the customers to entertain them, and to order and eat with them if the customers so request. Female waitresses also sit and eat with the clients. Sexual activities do not take place inside these bars but may be arranged between an employer and a client, or between a girl and a client directly. According to respondents, girls working in dance bars range from mid adolescence to early twenties in range.

Dohari restaurants

Dohari means ‘duet’ in Nepali. In *dohari* restaurants, unlike in dance bars, male clients and female singers sing opposite each other, usually flirting in the form of song. *Doharis* may be composed spontaneously, or singers may sing those

of other singers and/or from videos. The restaurants also provide food and beverages and may also be called *dohari ghar*, meaning *dohari* house, or *rodhi ghar* (which is where *doharis* were traditionally carried out in villages among some ethnic groups). CSW does not happen inside *dohari* restaurants but clients, either by themselves or through the owners, arrange to meet girls outside and take them to rented hotels, guesthouses or other venues.

There is a geographic dimension in *dohari*. According to key informants, it is mainly girls from the eastern hills, such as Nuwakot, Dhading and Sindhupalchowk, and the western hills, such as Salyan, Achham, Pokhara and Baglung, who come to work in these restaurants because these areas are famous for *dohari* singing.

While not popular earlier, according to key informants, *doharis* are becoming more common in Jhapa, where it is more explicit that people go for sex and not for the duets.

Mostly, girls are aged between 15 and 30 – that is, they may be older than in other forms of the AES. According to key informants as well as girls working in *doharis*, the entry age is young: owners provide jobs to girls aged 18–19; if they are able to attract clients, they keep them until they are around 30. Clients include small businessmen from the western part of Nepal, *gurkhas* and ex-*gurkhas* and high-ranking police and army officers.

Massage parlours

Massage parlours are common in Kathmandu and less common in the other study sites. According to respondents, many of them chiefly provide sexual services to male clients. Both the clients and the employers understand that sexual services are expected and sold upon the request of the client. Unlike in dance bars and *doharis*, sexual services are provided in the venue and are arranged by the employer. According to participants, clients can select girls directly as girls working in the parlours know that the job requires giving sexual services. Girls either receive a regular salary or a commission (usually less than 50%) for the number of clients they serve. Here, too, the age of girls is slightly older, ranging from older adolescents to adult women.

Snack corners (*khaja ghars*)

These are small eateries that provide snacks and alcohol as well as non-alcoholic drinks. Clients can come here for normal snacks but according to key informants, these locations are also frequented by clients seeking sexual services, often with separate rooms at the back for CSW. These venues are widely known for exploiting minors, in other work as well as CSW; it is mostly young adolescents who are engaged in child labour and CSW here. While it was impossible to ascertain through a qualitative study what proportion of snack corners carry out CSW, according to



Ratnapark area in Kathmandu, a site where street-based sex workers negotiate with their clients © NISER

respondents a large number of those in Kathmandu Valley, Jhapa and Sunsari as well as along the highway offer sex work. The clients largely comprise lower-class labourers working in transportation, such as drivers, mechanics, conductors, garage workers and other menial workers.

Guesthouses

Guesthouses, like ordinary hotels, provide lodging and food. However, in Nepal, in areas where CSW is prevalent, they also provide rooms for clients and sex workers from dance bars and *doharis* and those engaged in CSW on the street. This was found to be common in all the three study sites. Besides this, some guesthouses keep resident girls to offer sexual services or provide residential facilities for girls working in cabin restaurants, dance bars or *doharis* so they can carry out additional CSW for the owner of the guesthouse after. In the latter type of arrangement, the guesthouse owner takes money from the client and gives a percentage to the girl; the owner may keep all the money in exchange for providing free accommodation and food.

CSW houses

While these do not show up in earlier literature, this study found that CSW establishments are now emerging, as is the case in countries where CSW is legal. According to respondents, there are such houses in Kathmandu Valley but they may also be found in Jhapa and Sunsari. Unlike other venues, where there is food and entertainment, these buildings offer only CSW. The owner is often an elderly woman who keeps girls and runs the establishment like a boarding house; she may rent or own the house. The girls are provided with food and board and space to work. The income is divided between the owner and the women. We could not find out what share each person takes, or how this is negotiated. Client meetings are arranged by the owner or by the girls themselves. Since these establishments are private, girls stay as tenants or in a hostel-type arrangement, and are not forced into CSW. Such houses are not distinguishable from other private houses in Kathmandu.

Party venues

Party venues also do not emerge in earlier research but our study found that those that cater to marriages and other functions also fit within establishment-based the AES. Functions, catering and music are their main purpose but they also may provide CSW, either through their own

employees or through mediation. Our study found that it was usually girls from poorer backgrounds, whose mother or a close female relative had come to work in the venue as a dishwasher or cook's assistant, who were more likely to be used for CSW here. We also found that girls were very young; our respondents from party venues were as young as 12 years of age. According to respondents, the manager/owner of the venue tells the girls to sit and eat with clients and to 'go' with them. We did not hear of girls being paid for CSW in these venues, perhaps because they are too young to negotiate or because there is an arrangement between the above-mentioned guardian and the venue owner; the girls were not aware of any financial arrangements.

Private establishment-based

Private establishment-based locations differ from the above in the nature of the relationship between the client and the girl. Here, clients are few, are chosen by the girl and come to her house. Unlike many of the public establishment-based AES venues, these establishments provide only CSW. The girls arrange the client meetings themselves, usually from a small pool of contact-based clients rather than as walk-ins, as in the case of public establishments. Girls usually meet these clients through social media, or through networks of peers who work in the same sector. Private establishment-based AES functions through two main avenues.

Home-based CSW

In this type of arrangement, a group of girls rent a flat together and engage in CSW there. The girls may or may not live there. In some cases, girls rent a whole flat for themselves without sharing and use the place as their residence and for sex work. The girls also spend time in other non-AES locations (such as beauty parlours), working part time and carrying out CSW in the flat. Here, the girls themselves negotiate with clients and do not go out and pay for hotels. Unlike in the case of street-based sex workers, here the clients pay the room charge.

Client-arranged boarding: the 'sugar daddy' phenomenon

According to key informants, this form of the AES is becoming common in Jhapa and Sunsari among girls and boys who come from rural areas within the district or from adjoining hilly districts to study – in upper secondary and tertiary education – or to work in the urban centres of Jhapa

and Sunsari. Key informants said this may also occur in Kathmandu but we did not come across this phenomenon among our study respondents there. This may be because Kathmandu is a large city and relationships between fellow tenants or neighbours are not so close, which makes such activities easier to hide. In towns/smaller cities like Jhapa and Sunsari, fellow tenants or neighbours are more likely to have closer relationships and observe each other's lives.

This is also a common arrangement for girls who go to India for seasonal CSW and also among boys engaged in CSW. We did not find evidence of boys being engaged in cross-border sex work in these types of arrangements. For girls, the study found that those who return do not go to their home village but stay in Kathmandu. In both cases (girls who have sugar daddies in Nepal and those in India), the clients are men, slightly older and well settled, with a family and children of their own and a good salary. Such clients pay for accommodation, food, education (if the girl is studying) and other daily expenses such as mobile phones, internet and recharge cards, and expect sexual services in return. The girl is expected to provide sexual services only for the client. We did not find boys to interview, but, according to our key informants, for boys too the clients are older and economically stable, provide all the facilities mentioned above and expect exclusive sexual services. The main intention here is CSW, though girls and boys may also be taken travelling, as companions.

In the case of internal migrant girls who have come to study, clients are usually local men who are from the area where the girls study or rent rooms, or men from their home villages who know them already. In the case of girls who do cross-border sex work, the men are clients in the AES venues where girls have worked previously, or they are men that the girls meet through friends working in AES venues.

Non-establishment-based

Street-based

Besides the establishments described above, there are also certain locations on the streets of the study cities where clients can find girls providing sexual services. After negotiating in the street, the clients and the girl go to hotels or guesthouses as mentioned above. These are the most common forms of CSW for older women (in their late 20s and above).

On-call CSW

According to key informants, this form of adult entertainment has become more common since the government introduced penalties for owners of dance bars, *doharis* and similar venues if girls were found to be engaged in CSW. This has changed establishment-based CSW to more informal on-call CSW. This change can be seen significantly in Jhapa and Sunsari. In Jhapa, for example, the government is now more vigilant and, for the past two years, venue owners have been only introducing clients and girls and not offering CSW in the venue or keeping full-time employees to engage in CSW. In Kathmandu, we found that this freelance CSW was more common among adolescents, and more among unmarried ones (*doharis*, street-based sex work and massage parlours are more common for married adolescents and adult women) and those who have basic education.

This new model is based on phone calls and the use of social media. There are two different types of arrangements but these often overlap. In one type, walk-in clients look for a service in the hotels, guesthouses, bars, etc. mentioned above. Girls are in contact with the owners of such establishments, who can call them based on the demand of the walk-in client. Here, the girl or the client pays for use of the room and/or the mediation costs. Besides this, there are mediators who collect pictures from aspiring girls or run websites where girls can put up their pictures and connect the girl and the client based on demand of the client. In other, more private, arrangements, girls have a handful of clients who call them for services. They may also have other occupations, such as in the AES venues, beauty parlours, casinos, big hotels or modelling, or be students. In both cases, while girls may be expected to eat, drink and travel with their client, CSW is the main intention. According to key informants and male respondents, female clients also use such arrangements.

For female clients, the other form of the AES involves hiring boys to deliver sex toys for CSW. According to key informants, female clients who use sex toys usually do not go to buy them themselves, as a result of stigma around their use by females, and rather order them by phone or online. They then also hire the boys for sexual services if the boys are available.

Work prior to the AES, and push and pull factors

Responses regarding work prior to the AES were mixed. Girls in early and middle adolescence, and unmarried girls with little education and who are recent migrants, usually enter the AES as their first job. Girls who have been in the city for some time, who may have been married and have children, may have tried other jobs first, such as domestic work or working in the construction sector or on farms. Older adolescents and young adults and those who have been through secondary education may also have tried other jobs first, such as working in cooperatives, marketing, selling in clothes shops, domestic work, teaching dance and working in NGOs. Two of our respondents had started working in the AES after returning from foreign employment as housemaids. Some girls also work in other sectors during the day (cleaning, at a department store, at a human resource company, in a clothing store) and then work in the AES at night. Before entering the sector, some girls had worked in party banquet/catering services as dishwashers and cleaners in the mornings and evenings; they may continue to do this: *'I used to work as a labourer in construction. One sister asked me to work in this sector. I am currently suffering from a hernia and should not carry be carrying heavy loads. So, thinking of that, I decided to work here.'* (FGD, girls working in massage parlour, Kathmandu.)

Reasons for entering the AES

The study finds that there are both push and pull factors at play in leading girls and boys into the AES. The main push factors are the need for cash, deprivation, aspirations and family disintegration. The pull factors are peer influence, easy availability of jobs and the fact that no professional or academic qualification or experience is necessary and that access to these jobs is mediated by social networks. Below we describe each of these in detail.

Push factors

Deprivation/poverty

This push factor is the most common among first-generation migrants: girls who have come to urban centres for education or work. Girls who come to urban centres for education and find that their parents are not able to support their lives in urban areas enter this sector to make extra income to meet their daily needs. For adolescents, there is pressure to be included in the peer circle; to be able

to do this they need more income, and one relatively easy way to obtain it is through entering the AES. Others entered the AES in order to add to their parents' earnings. When girls first come to the city, they usually first take shelter with friends or extended family members; without the means to live, they end up turning to the AES for work.

Discriminatory norms, loss of support structure and family disintegration

Discriminatory norms faced largely by girls are another push factor. Such norms include less investment in girls' education than boys'; restrictions on girls' mobility and social interactions; shame, stigmatisation and loss of family honour if girls engage in romantic relationships; and early marriage, often with no choice in partner. Additionally, girls do not have access to family property like boys do. It is easier for boys to ask for family investment in their education and/or starting a business. Except for a few girls who had come from Kathmandu itself or had been sent to study, none had such support from their family.

All of these factors were found to push girls into entering the AES, as did loss of support structures and family disintegration, often as a result of polygamy by the father. Having an alcoholic father or spouse was found to affect girls more than boys.

Additionally, the study found that social norms around marriage and partner choice made girls more vulnerable to entering the AES. For married girls, especially those who had married early and/or through eloping, problems with the husband emerged after they were married, and there were accounts of these married girls being abandoned by their husbands. The husband either already had a wife (and did not tell the girl about it) or left the girl after a child was born.

When girls have problems after an elopement, maternal parents and in-laws largely do not support them. This is because a girl who has eloped against the custom of 'arranged marriage' is stigmatised in the community. This stigmatisation often leads respondents to move away. Thus, elopement, if it fails, separates girls from both their maternal community and the community of the in-laws, and also deprives them of social, financial and emotional support. Since they have no education or skills and have to take care of themselves and any children they may have, many girls chose to enter the AES and, if required, to engage in CSW. Meanwhile, elopement by boys is more accepted and they do not lose family or community

support if they take part in it. Hence, boys are less likely to choose the AES in such cases.

Another consequence of being uneducated, stigmatised for eloping and without support is that girls cannot undergo a legal procedure to claim their rightful share of property from the boy's family. They also have to care for any children, as when children are young they remain with the mother, wherever she goes. Hence, girls have to take care (both financially and otherwise) of the children by themselves. This is another push factor for girls to start working in the AES.

Restrictions on mobility and social interaction for adolescent girls are another underlying push factor. Restrictions mean girls do not have a large network from which to obtain information, and therefore make important life decisions based on limited information or even misinformation. For example, girls who had eloped had known the husband-to-be for only a few months and had limited information before elopement. They did not know the boy's family or job and had trusted what the boy had told them without independently verifying the information. Except for a few who had talked about their affairs with close friends, girls had largely not discussed their decisions

around marriage or migration with anyone. Some girls had married because they had taken an oath 'kasam kharu' to obey their friends and believed not keeping it would invite harm in life:

My friend asked me, will you take an oath and say you will do what I say. I said yes. Then she said I should marry the boy. The boy had been pursuing me for some days but I did not know him. I said I don't want to marry the boy. But she [the friend] said I had already given her an oath and that not agreeing would bring bad omen in my life. So, I married him.

(IDI, girl working in massage parlour, Kathmandu.)

It was only after getting married that girls had discovered, for example, that the boy had a wife and children back home or was a drug addict, violent or jobless.

After we eloped, we stayed in Sindhupalchowk bazar for a month. Then he took me to his home in the village. I found that he already had a wife and a son in his village home. He left me there and went to his job in the city (bus driver). The in-laws and his first wife would not keep me with them. So, I had nowhere to go. I came to Kathmandu to live with friends from my village and entered this sector.

(IDI, girl working in massage parlour, Kathmandu.)

Cases were similar for girls who had met their boyfriends after they entered the AES.

Pushed into the AES - by parents, guardians or boyfriends/husbands

Except in the party venue industry, we did not find girls or boys who had been influenced/sent by parents to work in the AES. However, respondents from the community of origin in Sindhupalchowk, shared that this was possible there in the form of brokers tricking parents by taking advantage of their poverty and lack of awareness and convincing them to send their daughters to work in urban areas. Such brokers tell parents that their daughters will be given good jobs and good lives and can send regular earnings home to support the family. They do not, however, pay the parents. In such cases, girls are brought into establishment-based venues. However, perhaps because of increased surveillance and awareness in the districts of origin, we did not find girls who had gone through such a process.

In party venues and in the case of street-based sex work, we found that parents who are themselves involved in the



Adolescent girl in Sindhupalchowk © Fiona Samuels

AES first take their children to AES venues for other non-sex work; these children later engage in all aspects of AES-related work, including CSW, especially girls. We did not find evidence of boys engaging in CSW from party venues.

In other cases, girls who have come to urban areas to study or work, or because of the failure of their marriage, are lured into this work by local guardians with whom they are staying. Such guardians are usually women or men who have prior connections to the AES (e.g. working in the AES, running establishments), and encourage the girls to work in the sector.

While very few girls said they had personally been coerced by their partner, or indeed that they had a partner, they shared many stories of friends being forced by a boyfriend or husband to participate in the AES. Key informants also noted that this was very common in Kathmandu, where girls need a male guardian to pay their rent. They also noted that girls working in the AES face peer pressure to have a boyfriend. These boyfriends usually work in the same sector and are often involved in substance abuse. Once they start living together, boyfriends and husbands force/coerce girls to join the sector/carry out CSW to earn money for the family; they may even act as brokers or run establishments themselves. In cases where boyfriends/husbands are not from the AES, they are often clients who know the AES well. They may drop girls off near the AES venues such as massage parlours, telling them to find a job there, under a prior secret agreement with the owner.

Some girls and boys who had left their rural homes to come to urban areas had been unable to bear the nagging (about poverty) and scolding by parents; without any form of support, they had entered the AES with the help of friends.

Pull factors

Peer influence and personal aspirations/circumstances

This was an important pull factor for adolescent girls and was common in Jhapa and Kathmandu. Girls were either called into the sector by close friends or partners or were inspired by the lives of their friends who worked in the AES. Such girls are not necessarily from poor and/or unsupportive families; they are unmarried and in general do not face conditions that force them to look for a job or

enter the AES. However, they do have friends who work in the sector and want to be with them.

My parents are able to take care of me well. We have big houses in Kalanki [Kathmandu] and both my parents have good jobs. But my friend from school started working in a dance bar and she called me to work there as well. It was fun so I went. Then she came to Jhapa and started working here. She called me. So, I came with her. Now we live together. My parents send me money when I need it.

(IDI, girl engaged in freelance CSW, Jhapa.)

Additionally, for girls who worked primarily in dohari and dance bars, singing and dancing had been their passion since childhood. They stated that they had come to Kathmandu and other urban centres to fulfil this wish and were inspired to join the AES. They also shared that they wanted to become more experienced and go to India or abroad in the future to work in the same sector: *'From a very young age, I used to sing and host shows in schools. Now I'm looking after myself and my parents don't have to support me financially. So I'm happy. I didn't have any coercion to work here, it was all because I have this interest.'* (SGD, girls working in doharis, Kathmandu.)

The study found that girls who had joined the sector as younger adolescents had not explored alternatives or had continued working in the AES as they were unable to find any other kind of job that could meet all their requirements. *'I started working since I was very young and knew about money, so I couldn't shift to another sector.'* (IDI, girl engaged in street-based CSW, Kathmandu.)

Income and flexible timing

Some girls had been pulled in because they found this job easier – or they were told this job would be easier – than other, more strenuous, jobs. Similarly, they were told that such work would also give them more income than other jobs could.

This work [CSW] has both aspects. On one hand, how difficult is it selling our body? How many times we have cried. That only I know. On the other hand, instead of doing hard labour for a whole day for \$5, it is better to give 30 minutes time for \$10–\$15. So, it is easy and difficult at the same time.

(FGD, girls engaged in street-based CSW, Sunsari.)

For others, particularly those engaging in CSW in non-establishment settings, the daily/regular cash is the pull factor.

If I work in construction, I have to carry loads for 30 days to get a salary. I have a child, she needs milk and lunch for school every morning. My landlord will not keep me if I don't pay rent on time. This job gives me money daily. So I took this job.

(IDI, girl engaged in freelance CSW, Kathmandu.)

Some respondents with a family or children to look after had decided to join the AES because of the flexible working hours. In establishments, the job usually starts at 2pm, so girls can spend their mornings with their family or going to school/college. The latter is becoming increasingly common, not because girls have started education but because a greater number of educated girls are joining the AES. Girls may also use the free time to take part in training or other part-time work. This is not possible in other jobs with their qualifications and experience.

No need for prior experience and qualifications

This is the biggest pull factor according to girls, boys and key informants. A girl's capacity to attract and retain clients is the most sought-after characteristic. According to employers and the girls we interviewed, owners need assurance that the workers will help run the business and make it boom. According to girls working in the sector, they were asked only if they could dance or sing. Generally, inside Kathmandu, there is high demand for young girls, so a 'good' face and a young body is enough to land a job in the AES: *'The other day my employer told us: "I need either a good face or someone who can bring more guests."* (FGD, girls working in dance bar, Kathmandu.)

For dancers, employers may also check whether their moves attract customers but do not look for any other qualifications. It is easy for a girl or woman to find work as a dancer and singer if she can show she has some skills. Many respondents working in the AES already have friends or family members working in the sector and so learn these skills easily. For other positions in the AES, no special training is required. Once married (with marriage often occurring between people working in the AES), or as they get older, women are given positions such as waitresses, cleaners, cooks, etc. For those who work freelance, none of the above applies. In Jhapa, some establishments also recruit older

girls/women (in their late 20s and above) for CSW, based on client demand. This was not the case in Kathmandu.

The recruitment process for boys in the AES appears to be a bit different. According to respondents, boys are ideally required to have passed Grade 10 and to submit their certificate and their citizenship documents. This may be because they do different kinds of jobs (managers, cashiers, guards or waiters), and, while they are expected to look smart, their appearance and age are not a priority issue for employers. Some boys reported having to have a short interview before getting a job. While girls can go straight into venues either as waitresses or dancers, most boys enter as dishwashers and, after some years of experience, may be promoted to waiters. We did not find evidence of the AES venue owners forcing boys into CSW. Male respondents shared that, while clients may make contact with them, owners of establishments do not get involved in the work.

No need for reference/social or political connections

According to the employer we interviewed, and girls and boys working in the AES, many people work in the AES because it is easy to enter this sector. Respondents believed that, for people who do not come from the city, work in the AES is easy to obtain as it does not require strong social or political connections – as is often necessary for people with low/no qualifications. For adolescents, as mentioned above, it is sufficient for their peers who work in the AES to refer them to the employer. The employer interviewed also said there was high turnover of staff in the sector – presumably because employers do not give a regular salary and workers are always in search of better conditions. As such, employers are always short of staff, which means there is continuous demand for workers in the sector. Additionally, there appears to be no discrimination on the basis of caste: *'It is very hard to find a job if we don't have networks with people. People used to discriminate against us on the basis of caste. In the AES this is not needed and people don't look at caste.'* (FGD, girls working in a dohari, Kathmandu.)

Perks and incentives

For girls working in establishment-based AES venues, tips and commissions are better than in other jobs and represent an important incentive to work in the sector. Girls get tips for dancing and bringing food, and there is

commission on the food and drinks girls sell when they eat with customers. Commissions are standard – for example 15% for alcoholic drinks, 10 rupees for soft drinks.

According to male respondents, the AES is also attractive because they get a place to stay and two meals a day for free. This means they do not need to spend on rent and food, and end up saving money. In fact, many boys had entered the AES on coming to Kathmandu simply because they did not need to pay rent and food if they worked in such venues. Girls do not stay in the venues (except in the case of guesthouses) but get an evening meal and drop-off service after they complete the duties.

Intermediaries linking girls to the AES

As mentioned above, first entry by girls into the AES is largely mediated through friend/peer groups, boyfriends and husbands who may work as brokers and through relatives or neighbours, for both establishment-based and non-establishment-based the AES. Friends are also the main connecting source for boys in the AES, for those working in both CSW and non-CSW-related occupations. Friends already working in the AES mediate entry for other boys and girls: *'Some may have entered through friends. They do not get jobs easily so if a friend is already working in a dance bar, he persuades others to join the work. Peer influence is found everywhere.'* (FGD, boys working in the AES (mixed sectors), Kathmandu.)

As also mentioned, some girls have boyfriends from the same place they are working, and later some of these boys may open or initiate their own activities in the AES. This may include opening establishment-based the AES (eg, a man opening a cabin restaurant) but also setting up social media sites and/or running online CSW, which is becoming more common: *'My friend met her partner when we were working in khaja ghar. She then married him. He worked in the same place and later he opened his own khaja ghar and now makes her do the work from his own shop.'* (IDI, girl previously working in snack corner.)

However, we also found that some girls had entered the AES without mediation. This generally occurs in non-establishment-based the AES, such as in on-call the AES and in street-based CSW: *'Once I was standing in Ratnapark and I heard a girl and a boy negotiating about sex services. After that, I observed in the same place for a few days. Then I went back to my village, told my friend and*

came back to work here with my friend.' (IDI, girl engaged in street-based CSW, Kathmandu.)

According to key informants, self-mediated relationships also occur in cases of deals between boys who sell sex toys and their female clients, who are often older.

Key informants reported that the traditional method, of a broker going to the village to convince girls or their parents, happens less now. It is now usually people from the village, peers, neighbours or relatives who mediate entry into the AES using social media or phone calls and chats. Unlike previously, when girls were brought from rural areas into the AES, it is now more common for girls to already be in the city for other purposes (e.g. study, work, training) and then to enter or be recruited into the AES. According to key informants, in recent years, when brokers have been involved, they have recruited girls from schools and colleges in the cities rather than going to the villages.

In other cases, neighbours recruit girls and boys from where they are renting accommodation, or girls are recruited directly from their village by phone or through their own relatives in the sector.

CSW and the AES represent a largely stigmatised sector, which is a source of shame for girls and boys. Girls are likely to be ostracised in the community of origin, and their family name tarnished. For boys, the AES (people largely do not think of this as including CSW in the case of boys) is not families' preferred sector, and parents are reluctant, but it is also not as big a source of stigma as it is for girls. Evidence is mixed around the level of information that girls in particular receive about the work to help them decide whether to join the sector.

For example, many respondents from a massage parlour shared that they had entered thinking they had to give massages and found out that the job involved sex work three or four days into the work:

I had given birth to a baby 24 days before and my husband had left me when I was three months' pregnant. I was doing labour work till the last day before childbirth but had no money after I stopped working. My co-tenant saw my condition and she proposed to take me to a massage parlour for job. I went and started the work the next day... after a few days, I knew it was not massage but we had to sleep with customers. I had no other job and a child to look after. So I agreed.

IDI, girl working in massage parlour, Kathmandu

Girl respondents in guesthouses were not told they would be participating in sex work and would later be forced into it: *'I was told I had to help with arranging the rooms and bed, but later I understood it was sex work. I tried to run away but was caught. Then the employer told me he would tell about the work to my family.'* (ID1, girl working in massage parlour, Kathmandu.)

In dance bars and *doharis*, girls were told they would have to make guests happy. Some girls had been told by peers that this meant sitting and eating with clients, watching pornography with clients and enduring flirty behaviour, including hugging, touching and groping. In dance bars and *doharis*, sex work is not explicit; some girls said that their employer would help the client make contact with them but they (the girls) could decide what they wanted to do. In other cases, girls were indirectly forced and told they had to make clients happy and therefore needed to fulfil the demands of the client. Some girls also felt that it was their duty to make sure the employers had good business, so they were willing to do as the employers expected.

In the case of non-establishment-based the AES, respondents shared that, when mediated by friends, they had been told that they would have to make the guest happy, such as by flirting with them and eating, and that the main task included CSW.

Women who used to work in the AES and who are now in their late 30s or above and can no longer get clients represent another type of mediator. In this study, it was found that such women often own boarding houses and lure girls on different pretexts and later try to make them work as sex workers when the girls have no other means of supporting themselves. Through regular contact with villages of origin, such mediators obtain information about girls leaving the villages to come to towns or Kathmandu for work. Unlike previously, they do not need to go to the villages personally or use someone else to go to the village to attract girls; instead, they use phones or social media to get in touch. Once a girl is in Kathmandu or another urban area, the mediator first reaches out through mutual connections, such as people from the same village or relatives, on the pretext of helping her, and then later forces the girl into CSW and earns a commission from the girl's clients:

If they get information through their networks in the village that girls are coming from the villages to look for jobs or study, they start keeping in touch with them through the local village network. Once girls arrive and

are looking for job, they show help. For example, they may give shelter in their own home for a few days or pretend to look for jobs for them. They may also give some loan money. Later they mediate the girls to enter into CSW.

(K11, Kathmandu)

For girls who are already in the city, these women try to make friends or offer help and later push them into the AES: *'They first give shelter in their home and slowly introduce them to food and drinks and entertainment with clients. Slowly they will introduce the girls to the clients and help the client woo the girl and later send her for CSW with the clients.'* (K11, Jhapa).

Additionally, as discussed earlier, these mediators also run boarding house-type establishments and give food and shelter to the girls and arrange clients. Older women mediating younger girls also appear to work in the non-establishment-based AES:

Interviewer: 'How does your friend come into contact with clients?'

Respondent: 'She is in contact with older women working in this sector. They are also married. I know one of them who is married and has a child. They do not let their husbands know about their work. And they share the payment given by clients with the older women.'

Interviewer: 'Who pays for the hotel charge?'

Respondent: 'The client pays for the hotel.'

Interviewer: 'How do such women contact clients?'

Respondent: 'They have been working in this sector for a long time. They will have regular clients too. People contact their mobiles and call them. Then, they go to meet people.'

(ID1, girl working in a cabin restaurant, Sunsari.)

In the past few years, with the government starting to penalise establishments, cabin restaurant, hotel and guesthouse owners have been keeping the phone numbers of girls who work in CSW, instead of employing them as full-time workers. When clients approach them, they call the girls and help them meet the clients. The mediator then either rents a room to the client or takes commission from the girl. This, according to key informants, has become very common in Jhapa but also happens in Kathmandu, as shown below. This is helping to make CSW in the AES more informal; girls who wish to stay away from people who might know them from other walks of life (e.g. coming

from the same district, peers from college etc.) use this form of mediation.

They are originally from Sindhupalchowk and Ramechhap and are living in Kathmandu in a rented room. They can't work freely there thinking that someone from their village can meet them at any time because if this happened it would be very problematic for them. The hotel owners keep their numbers and if there is a demand from client, they will call the girls and link her to the client.

(KII, Jhapa)

The study found that the growing informality in the sector is an important basis of inter-district and cross-border networking in the AES. Clients often demand 'fresh faces' (according to key informants), and hotel owners involved in mediation have networks in the main CSW districts, such as Siliguri and Darjeeling in India; Jhapa, Itahari and Dharan in the east of Nepal; Pokhara; and Kathmandu. They often call girls they know who participate in CSW and relocate them. Once girls have been in one place for a few weeks and have a good chance of earning money, they invite their friends and arrange work for them.

For example, girls working in the AES in Kathmandu might meet a hotel owner when he is visiting Kathmandu as a client. A connection is established and the hotel owner keeps in touch with the girls, calling them when his own clients start wanting new faces. Girls then move from Kathmandu to Jhapa telling their families that they want to do some business (e.g. buying goods such as sugar and tea from India). They stay in Jhapa for a month or two, work in CSW for the client, earn good money and then return to Kathmandu. During these times, the girls often do not spend money on food and lodging, with the hotel owner bearing these costs and instead taking commission from girls and clients. This helps the girls to save money.

Social media is also becoming a common form of establishing contacts in such cases.

Interviewer: 'How do they have link with the hotels in this area?'

Respondent: 'So far, I have heard that the hotel owners start their business here and they discuss how to appoint the girls. They themselves visit the hotels in Kathmandu as clients and ask girls for their contact information.'

Later they contact them and seduce them offering good money to come work at their place. They buy plane tickets for them and through that, the girls come here. I had asked the hotel owner how he started this business, he told me the story in detail. This was the trend earlier. But now they find the girls through Facebook, imo where they can get their contact information. There is a difference between then and now.'

(KII, Jhapa)

The same network works for cross-border the AES between Jhapa and West Bengal and Bihar states of India. In particular, West Bengal and Jhapa have people of the same caste and ethnicity, which facilitates the exchange of people and information. People from both sides of the border have investments in hotels, apartments, brothels and transportation,⁴ and Nepali girls are moved around using the same methods described above. Details of the cross-border and international AES can be found in the accompanying [brief](#) on migration in the sector.

Life in the entertainment sector

Customers

According to respondents, customers vary by establishment and by the form of the AES venue. Here, we explore several broad categories of customers. The study found that almost anyone could enter any kind of AES venue for entertainment, including those without any interest in CSW. All these venues also cater for meetings between friends and family, ceremonies and simple entertainment, offering food, singing and dancing. However, as we have seen, some are also known for CSW.

In massage parlours, which are largely found only in the Kathmandu Valley, according to girls, customers are largely police and army officers, and a few government officials. In other forms of the AES, male customers are usually bureaucrats, medical personnel, higher-ranking police and army officers, small businessmen and people working in the service sector.

Female customers in the AES are still a minority and found mostly in *dohari* restaurants and clubs – and to a much lesser extent in dance bars (where the customers are 90% male and 10% female according to our respondents).

⁴ In Nepal, the transportation sector has traditionally been and is still a large client base for CSW. It is also a necessary player in the AES to shuffle girls and clients, in this case across the border.

Female clients include businesswomen, women working in NGOs and housewives.

Nepali migrants who are going abroad the next day for foreign employment, or those returning from abroad, are often clients of guesthouses, *dohari* or dance bars that also sell/arrange CSW. People returning from Gulf countries go to *dohari* restaurants and dance bars around the bus station areas (Gongabu, Kathmandu), while people of high status, such as businessmen, are found in Durbarmarg, Thamel and Sundhara.

In street-based CSW in Ratnapark and Jhapa, according to respondents, customers are usually drivers, army and police officers, as well as daily wage labourers, such as porters. Here, while there are LGBTQ clients, we did not find evidence of female clients.

Customers are for the most part people with regular earnings, aged between 30 and 60 and married. According to key informants, a young male is unlikely to be a client as he will not be able to afford payment; young men are usually be boyfriends who stay with the girls.

According to respondents, there are also seasonal trends followed by some ethnic groups. Most of the Madhesi clients (clients of Terai origin) come during the festival time (Chhat) and during the month of Shrawan (July–August). This also applies to clients coming from India.

Girls working in the establishment-based AES shared that most male clients want a different woman each time;

as such, except in the case of sugar daddies, regular clients are not likely. There were only a few examples from massage parlours of men choosing the same girl. In phone-based and online CSW, girls have a smaller circle of clients, so clients are more regular.

When asked if interactions in the establishment-based AES could become regular or whether girls could develop personal relationships with clients, girls working in massage parlours and guesthouses said that, for fear of being exposed and later exploited, they would rather not engage in conversations with clients and therefore did not ask personal questions (e.g. about clients' home district, profession, etc.). They obtain this information only if clients volunteer it or if there is a fight (reported mostly in the case of street-based sex work and *doharis*), when clients might try to threaten the broker and the girls by telling them about their profession and connections. However, in dance bars and *doharis*, it is more common for girls to have regular clients: employers ask girls to call them if they need customers and so girls keep close contact with the clients here.

Female clients who seek CSW in the AES often feel more comfortable with the same person, according to respondents. Only a few cases were reported of female clients trying new boys each time. In these cases, wealthy clients usually target good-looking middle-class boys from within their own circle. They are also not regular CSW



Adolescents in school in Sindhupalchowk © NISER

clients, and may not deliberately target those working in the AES.

Girls who work in the non-establishment-based AES also choose their clients and noted that, while they used to be cheated, most of them were now aware of the risks either from their own experiences or from hearing about those of friends and mentors, and as such have learnt to take precautions: *'First, I get the money then I get ready for work. Once I was cheated by a guy, he took me to his room but he didn't give me a reasonable price for my time.'* (IDI, girl engaged in freelance CSW, Kathmandu.)

Some girls shared that a coping strategy they use is to go out with richer men who do not have problems with money and avoid poor clients where the risk of non-payment is higher.

Interviewer: 'Who were the clients?'

Respondent: 'They were businessmen, who have plenty of money. I don't go with simple guys and they also select girls who are neat and tidy.'

(IDI, girl engaged in freelance CSW, Jhapa.)

In the case of establishment-based work or broker mediation, payment is arranged in advance so that the clients cannot default. Payment is made to the brokers, who pay the agreed rate to the girls while keeping a commission for themselves. This means that girls do not have to negotiate the price with the clients. In some cases, such as in guesthouses and dance bars, payment is made as a monthly salary and not on a per client basis.

Earnings, tips and commission

According to girls and women working in dance bars and *doharis*, their salary ranges from US\$50 to US\$70 per month depending on the experience, performance and establishment. In massage parlours, where the girls know what the customers pay, girls get US\$3 out of the total US\$12 per client: *'We get US\$3 (300 Nepali rupees) per hour. Actually the rate is US\$12 (1,200 Nepali rupees) per hour but the owner takes US\$9 (900 Nepali rupees).'* (FGD, girls working in a massage parlour, Kathmandu.)

Besides a salary, girls and boys in dance bars also receive tips and commission. Sometimes they can get between US\$60 and US\$150 as tips in a day. Salaries are not equal among the staff, and differ on the basis of tasks. Some respondents also said they were paid based on a percentage basis: those in dance bars said that they received 25% of the amount the customers paid for their food.

Unlike boys, girls and adolescents reported not getting their salaries on time; employers usually say that there are no earnings and so delay paying the salaries of those who cannot negotiate. Female respondents felt that employers are usually fearful that boys might throw tantrums and so pay them on time. The research finds that this is also due to the difference in the positions and perceptions of them that boys and girls hold in the AES; jobs that boys do in the AES such as bouncers and guards, head singers and managers are not stigmatised, which gives them greater confidence to negotiate. Dancers, singers and sex workers are important in the running of the AES venues but are stigmatised for girls. Girls are not aware of their rights, they do not have confidence in their own importance and are wary of being shaming or gossiped about, thus lack the confidence to negotiate with employers. Girls' salaries in general are meagre (6,000–15,000 Nepali rupees) depending on the venue, paid only once every two to three months). This is the reason tips and commission are so important. Life in Kathmandu, Jhapa and Sunsari is expensive, and salaries in the sector are low. Especially in *khaja ghars*, cabin restaurants and guesthouses, boys and girls may earn only US\$30 in a month. The salary is also inadequate for girls working in other venues such as dance bars and *doharis*, and out of this they also have to pay for food and accommodation. Boys who are given accommodation and food in their venues are able to save a large part of their salaries. In all cases, tips and commission are critical and when business is slow this has an impact on earnings. Workers do not get paid if business is slow, and boys tend to rely on savings while girls rely more on tips and commissions from clients.

There is also a large difference in earnings between males and females working in this sector. Generally, girls earn more than boys with the same qualifications and for the same work: for example, in dance bars, male dancers are paid less than female dancers with the same experience. When there is no system of dividing commissions and tips between all staff (which tends to be the case in guesthouses, snack corners, etc.), girls earn more commission than boys. However, this is for the establishment-based AES and does not apply to places where there is no singing and dancing.

In order to receive commission, female waitresses have to sit with the guests and take orders. The girls get commission for food and drinks ordered by the guests – for example US\$1 for each glass of wine. The more food

the guests order, the more commission the workers get. According to study respondents, it is not easy to convince guests to have more food and drink; guests are more likely to engage in sexual harassment such as molestation and groping than to order more.

Waitresses in dance bars and *doharis* whose duty is only to serve the food may not get tips. It is usually those girls the clients call down from the stage or who are walking around and sit and entertain the guests who get the tips.

Interviewer: Beside salary do you get anything?

Respondent: I get tips.

Interviewer: How do you get tips?

Respondent: They throw tips at the stage when they like our performance.

Interviewer: How much do you get in a day when you distribute the tips?

Respondent: Sometimes 1,000 or 2,000 Nepali rupees and sometimes only 200 or 300 Nepali rupees.

(LH, girl working in dohari, Kathmandu)

Different patterns regarding the giving of tips were observed. Those who come back from foreign employment, as well as Indian clients, are the most likely to give tips. Respondents shared that people living in Kathmandu varied: those of Madhesi or Gurkha soldiers and their families are more likely to give better tips than people who are native to Kathmandu. Some guests ask girls if they have to give tips to the employer or to the girls directly. For *dohari* singers, if guests call them directly and give them a tip, then it will be for the singers to keep, but if the tip is placed on the stage then it will have to be distributed equally among all present.

In establishments such as dance bars and *doharis*, there are rules to make sure all staff get tips; in such cases, at the end of the night, the tips are divided equally. However, guests may also give tips or commission to the boss, who then chooses whether to distribute the amount.

In CSW where girls are not employed in establishments, the rate depends on the time they spend with the client, but this can also vary. For example, girls in Itahari take around US\$10 to US\$15 for a short duration – about 30 minutes – but charge more if they spend the night, ranging from US\$80 to US\$150. Respondents said that Indian clients usually paid more than Nepali clients: Nepali clients pay US\$50–60 per night while Indian clients are willing to pay

as much as US\$100. The rate also starts to decrease as the girls get older.

Interviewer: What is the difference between then and now regarding earning?

Respondent: Earlier I used to earn more than now as I was young and attractive at that time.

(IDI, girl engaged in freelance CSW, Itahari.)

For boys within the sector, the rate appears to increase with age for the work they carry out in the AES (although this is not the case for CSW). After a certain number of years of experience, boys start bargaining with the owner; if they do not come to an agreement then they look for another job. They also tend to learn skills along the way, either in the job itself or separately through training, which helps them obtain promotion in their work. This does not apply to girls.

Paid leave does not exist in the AES. If a person takes leave, including sick leave, their salary is reduced.

Challenges facing girls and boys working in the AES

For work in the AES that does not involve CSW, the biggest challenge for both girls and boys is the burden of labour: employers, who can never guarantee a profit, tend to hire too few employees and give no holidays; therefore, there is too much work for too few workers.

Work in the AES entails erratic hours – work often starts at around 1pm and continues beyond 1am. While employees are often dropped off near their homes by their employers, this is done by a single vehicle that carries several passengers, each with a different destination. For some, this means they get back home at around 4am. Only boys who work in the AES get accommodation; girls do not, probably because there are many boys in AES venues and girls would need separate spaces to be safe, which are not available.

Other challenges involve not having formal work documents and running the risk of being fired at any time. Girls have to wear uncomfortable dresses and endure bad behaviour from clients (including sexual harassment) but also pressure from employers in the form of scolding and insults (and sometimes threats and beatings). For boys, female clients can be persuasive but employers do not force them to do anything against the boys' wishes and leave it up to them to decide.

Female respondents said that clients normally believe that those involved in the AES are all sex workers. Thus, family

members, friends and landlords mistreat them when they learn about their work. As a result, they hide their profession, saying they work in clothing stores or other sectors.

Interviewer: And what other difficulties do the girls face working in this sector?

Respondent 1: Girls do not tell their family that they are working in this sector, nor their landlords. They do not take this job as a normal profession. Actually, this sector is not that bad, but people take it in a wrong way.

Interviewer: What would the landlord say if they found out? Don't they talk bad about you?

Respondent 5: For sure the landlord will talk badly about you. If they get their rent on time then they won't say much, otherwise they say, "This girl's character is not good, she works at night."

(FGD, girls working in dance bars, Kathmandu.)

While it is also difficult for boys working in this sector to talk to their parents about their job, they do not hide their profession as much as girls do. This is because, while girls working in this sector are often automatically associated with engaging in sex work, this is not the case for boys. As most boys working in this sector continue their studies, their parents merely tell them to leave the job after completing high school and look for another job.

Girls who engage in CSW face the hardest challenges: they are at high risk of suffering violence from customers, family and landlords owing to the stigma attached to late-night work and sex work. The most common form of violence described by the girls is being forced to sit and talk with customers and to endure extreme forms of sexual harassment. Employers, drivers and landlords also exploit the girls. Employers threaten girls to make them obey clients' demands and force them to wear dresses they are not comfortable in. In addition, while health issues were beyond the scope of the study, according to key informants, girls also face the risk of life-threatening diseases and health problems such as HIV/AIDS and multiple abortions⁵.

As AES work takes place at night, girls have to work late, and many people try to take advantage of this. Girls not only face physical risks and violence but also have psychosocial problems such as constant fear, depression, anxiety and loneliness. Key informants also spoke of girls

cutting their wrists, self-harming or attempting suicide, thus demonstrating the acuteness of these problems. This does not appear to be so much the case for boys, though limitations in time and resources did not allow for further exploration of these issues among boys.

When CSW is a part of the work in an AES establishment, girls said that employers were always suspicious of them. For example, when they take sick leave, employers suspect them of doing business with clients they had met through the establishment and harass them or use drivers to monitor them. This can become extreme, and lead to girls being tracked on their mobile phones even when they are not at work. Several respondents, both girls and boys, and key informants also noted that girls who get off at the last stop when returning home run the risk of being raped by the driver and hence have mixed views on the safety of this 'service' provided to them as a part of their work.

Interviewer: What do you say, is the drop-off vehicle always safe for you?

Respondent: There was a sister working with us in the past. She was dropped off by our owner's car every day. At that time, she was the last person to get off the car every day. We heard that one day she was exploited by the driver on the way when she was the only one left in the car. This also happens if a girl is very simple and can't speak up.

Interviewer: Don't you complain if something like that happens?

Respondent: Yes, you can. You can complain to the owner. But, they won't listen to us. It is of no use.

(FGD, girls working in dance bars, Kathmandu.)

There are also cases of guests/clients not paying and girls having to persuade them to do so. Some clients threaten to take the girls to the police or have them arrested; others threaten to physically harm them. In such cases, girls usually cannot do anything and have to remain unpaid. Among respondents who engage in CSW in the street, being robbed by clients is common.

Besides this, there are other forms of violence. For example, if girls in dance bars and *doharis* do not agree to a physical relationship, a guest may put alcohol in their juice and try to get them drunk: *'Our employer tells that to increase the number of guests we have to wear Western*

⁵ While there is no data on sexually transmitted infections for people working in the AES in general, for CSW the HIV prevalence rate among sex workers is 5.1% (male, female and transgender) and 32% for clients of sex workers (NCASC. National HIV estimates, 2018). Available at www.ncasc.gov.np/WAD2018/FACTSHEET-2018-FINAL/Factsheet-2018-final.pdf.

dresses. They also say this when the affluent guests are coming.' (FGD, girls working in dance bars, Kathmandu.)

For girls working in massage parlours, guests sometimes ask for their money back saying they are not satisfied with the service. Girls are forced to please them and engage in sexual activities they do not like to do, such as unsafe sex.

As previously mentioned, boyfriends and drivers are some of the main perpetrators of exploitation, violence and harassment against the girls. Drivers usually have the dual task of driving the girls home and monitoring them; as such, if the girls do not give in to any demands (including providing sexual services) they may threaten to expose them. Some girls said that drivers tracked those engaged in CSW with GPS installed on their mobile phones day and night; they could go to anywhere except to work and home. Employers may also give drivers permission to mete out physical punishment in case the girls violate these rules.

Extremely exploitative relationships were found to exist between girls and their partners (though this needs to be explored further among boys). Girls are exploited physically, emotionally and financially. Many girls said they had to hand over their income to their boyfriends or husbands. If they are working together, the partner will keep an eye on the commission and tips the girl earns and take them away. The partner may also threaten to expose the girl to her family and community members if she does not meet his demands, and in general treats her with little dignity and respect. While the girls themselves did not say they faced physical violence from partners, all respondents could give anecdotes of violence perpetrated by friends' partners. This shows that intimate partner violence is prevalent. This information was triangulated by key informants who provide legal help to the girls:

No girls come to us saying they have faced violence with clients. It is all either their boyfriends or husbands. They have a huge control over the lives of the girls working

in the AES and know all the risks if the girl is exposed. They use this to their benefit. They arrange the clients to go to them and force them to sell themselves and take the money, they thrash the girls and threaten to kill them or family members. The men in their lives are usually drug addicts or those who do not have stable work and usually work as brokers in the AES.

(KII, Kathmandu.)

Similarly, while girls did not say that their boyfriends mediated their sex work, they could give many examples of friends' boyfriends or husbands either opening establishments or arranging for their friends to engage in sex work by phone or social media. Respondents shared that girls received threats (e.g. to expose their work and photographs) and faced physical violence from husbands or boyfriends if they did not agree to the arrangement. According to key informants who provide psychosocial counselling and legal services, boyfriends negotiate the conditions (when, where, how long, how much, etc.) and the types of service the girls are required to provide. Key informants indicated that this is where there exists large potential for violence both from intimate partners and from clients. In such cases, partners also keep the money, with transactions often carried out directly between the client and the partner. According to key informants, girls seek legal help when the situation becomes unbearable or when partners start threatening to harm their families.

Many respondents also had misinformation about life in the AES outside Nepal. This is given either by brokers, employers or girls who have returned from abroad, work in Nepal or are seasonal international migrants in the AES. There was, for instance, a common misconception that girls are taken from Nepal to Middle Eastern countries where male and female interaction is illegal in public. See the accompanying [brief](#) on migration in the AES for more details.

Conclusion and way forward

The adult entertainment sector in Nepal is made up of a complex web of venues and methods, which includes *dohari* restaurants, massage parlours, dance bars, guesthouses and, more recently, sugar daddies and sex toy delivery men. Many women, girls, men and boys are involved in this sector, for a range of purposes. This study has found that, while women and girls are often involved in this sector to earn quick money, to fulfil their desires to become dancers or singers or to get away from their husbands and families, some are involved to provide for their family and children. Men and boys, on the other hand, see the sector as a way to build their bartending and management skills, and to earn pocket money. Women and girls typically are lured into the AES through their friends or adult women who have previously been involved in the sector.

Those working in the AES are vulnerable not only to violence and abuse but also to life-threatening diseases. Among other things, those working in the AES should be aware of their rights in the workplace and assured of their safety and security with their clients and bosses. Those who are not aware of the risks involved in working in the AES should be made aware of the costs and threats that come with being involved in this sector. Relevant government departments need to raise awareness, working in close collaboration with NGOs as well as members of the community.

Stricter sanctions for those violating the rights of their workers need to be put in place, as well as redressal mechanisms, for those most vulnerable and those experiencing the most abuse working in this sector. Additionally, it is critical to raise awareness and work on changing discriminatory norms at all levels (within families, households and communities) that disempower girls and place them at higher risk of violence often in their older adolescence and their adult and married life. Such norms not only place adolescent girls at higher risk of entering the AES but also trap them in the sector, where they often experience multiple forms of violence in their personal and work lives.

Use of media and social media plays an essential part in raising awareness of the risks associated with being involved in the sector. Such platforms could also be used to

encourage younger girls to pursue their education instead of being lured into working in the AES.

Some key informants also felt that better monitoring of venues would bring down the number of girls and boys working in the AES. However, our findings suggest that since the AES is evolving now from formal establishment-based venues to more informal network- and social media-based mediation, physical monitoring, though useful, is not sufficient.

Documentation and evidence are crucial to raise awareness of the plight of workers in this sector. While this study represents a contribution to this evidence base, gaps remain. Gaps exist in terms of both quantitative data that show the prevalence of the AES work and qualitative data on the reasons behind changes in trends, such as increases or decreases in the numbers of clients, employers, girls and boys working in the AES, etc. Findings could be used to inform policy and programmes.

Many key informants from NGOs said that, given the need for long-term commitment and resources, reintegration was challenging for them as well as the government. They were of the opinion that current resources were insufficient to bring any meaningful changes to the lives of the girls.

The research suggests the following actions could be taken to improve policy and programming:

1. **Create awareness-raising programmes as preventive measures:** Current NGO programmes are reactive in nature, ie, they only respond to girls' challenges in the AES and do not work to minimise their entry into the AES or CSW in the first place. Programmes should raise awareness among parents, girls and boys on the harmful effects of discriminating against girls in the family. Increase programmes that build girls' agency and self-confidence to fight family discrimination and those that make families aware of discrimination. This should include raising parental awareness on the implications of ostracising girls for choosing life-partners, early marriage, stigmatisation of opposite sex interaction and lack of investment in girls' education and entrepreneurship, which all have harmful repercussions for girls in the long run.

2. **Scale up vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes for girls:** Scale up and extend existing vocational and technical and livelihoods and life skills programmes to support and encourage adolescent girls and young women in entrepreneurial activities as a preventive measure to end trafficking and modern slavery. In the origin villages, this should be done as a compulsory part of secondary school education. In the urban areas where girls come to work and study, these can be done through higher secondary schools, drop-in centres, and through social mobilisers that work with vulnerable girls in urban areas.
3. **Make information more easily available:** Rural-urban migrant girls, married adolescents denounced by their parents and those with children, girls unable to go back to their villages of origin due to various reasons, girls who do not have parental support such as due to polygamy and girls from women-headed households where the mother does not having a stable income are more likely than others to take risky jobs or enter into the AES or CSW. The government could liaise with high schools, drop-in centres, social mobilisers and peer networks of girls to widely disseminate information about vocational trainings in urban areas. Currently there are no mechanisms for migrants to access information once they migrate to urban areas.
4. **Extend outreach programmes that use digital technology:** Support programmes that are using innovative methods to move beyond venue-based interventions to reach out to girls who are engaged in CSW in the AES through mobile phones and social media; the government should also monitor pornographic websites and the production of pornographic TV channels and programmes.
5. **Encourage breaking gender barriers in the labour market:** This can be done by providing incentives for employers (such as tax reductions) who employ girls in non-traditional jobs. Similarly parents and girls themselves should be encouraged to enrol girls in skill centres and prepare them to work in sectors that are male dominated, including less risky jobs in the AES such as cooks and managers.

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Annex: methodology and context

Table 1: Research tools

No.	Tool	Respondents
1	FGD	Adolescent girls School-going girls (Sindhupalchowk) College-going boys (Sindhupalchowk) Girls who had dropped out of school (Sindhupalchowk) Adult men (Sindhupalchowk) Mothers of adolescent girls (Sindhupalchowk) Commercial sex workers non-establishment Girls/boys working in dance bars Girls working in massage parlours Girls/boys working in guesthouses/hotels Girls/boys working in dohari/rodhi ghar Boys working in lounge bars/pubs/dance clubs Boys working in cafes/restaurants Girls working in cabin restaurants (khaja ghar/bhansa ghar)
2	SGD	Girls working in dohari Boys who had dropped out of school
3	LH	Girls working in dohari Girl working in dance bar Commercial sex worker (non-establishment) Girl working in massage parlour Rape survivors staying in a shelter home Girl staying in shelter home
4	CS	Rehabilitated girl
5	IDI	Girls working in dohari Girls working in dance bar Commercial sex workers (non-establishment) Girls working in massage parlour Girl working in cafe/khaja ghar Rehabilitated girls with own business (beauty parlours/grocery shops) Boy working in night club
6	KII	IDI with KII

Note: SGDs, unlike FGDs, comprised only three or four people, and were used when respondents could not be assembled at one time and in one venue.

Table 2: Study sample and respondents

Tool	Total by tool	Kathmandu	Sindhupalchowk	Jhapa and Sunsari
FGD	26	11	10	5
Adolescent girls		-	1	-
School-going girls		-	1	-
Girls who had dropped out of school		-	1	-
College-going boys		-	1	-
Adult men		-	1	-
Mothers of adolescent girls		-	1	-
Commercial sex workers		-	1	5
Girls working in hotels/guest-houses		1	-	-
Girls working in dance bars		1	1	-
Girls working in massage parlours		-	1	-
Girls working in <i>dohari/rodhi ghar</i>		3	1	-
Girls working in <i>khaja ghar/bhansa ghar</i>		1	-	-
Boys working in dance bars		1	-	-
Boys working in dohari		1	-	-
Boys working in dance clubs		1	-	-
Boys working in lounge bar/pubs		1	-	-
Boys working in cabin restaurants		1	-	-
SGD	2	1	1	
Boys who had dropped out of school		-	1	-
Girls working in <i>dohari</i>		1	-	-
LH interview	9	6	3	
Girls working in dohari		2	-	-
Girl working in dance bar		1	-	-
Commercial sex worker (freelance)		1	-	-
Girl working in massage parlour		1	-	-
Girls staying at rehabilitation centres		-	3	-
Girl working in a party palace		1	-	-
CS	3	1	2	
KII including one with employer	45	32	8	5
IDI	40	21		19
Girls working in <i>dohari</i>		2	-	-
Girls working in dance bar		4	-	-
Commercial sex workers		6	-	19
Girls working in massage parlour		3	-	-
Girl working in cafe		1	-	-
Girl working in <i>khaja ghar</i>		1	-	-
Rehabilitated girls with own business (beauty parlours/grocery shops)		3	-	-
Boy working in night club		1	-	-

Study sites

The study followed the migration trajectory of girls and boys and looked at place of origin, internal destination in Nepal, cross-border destination in Delhi and border checkpoints that are known for international and cross-border smuggling of girls. In each of these places, we identified ourselves, shared our research objectives and questions and obtained help from local police, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and worked with girls and boys and teachers in local schools, among others.

Based on Klls, Sindhupalchowk a hill district in the east of Kathmandu with a long history of trafficking and human smuggling, was chosen as the place of origin. In addition to discussing issues related to trafficking with non-migrants, returnees and key informants, we also carried out CS with girls who were seeking rehabilitation in Sindhupalchowk. Kathmandu, Jhapa and Morang were chosen as sites of those involved in the AES within Nepal. These are a few of the urban sites that have seen a boom in activities and also have different forms of AES engagement. A few Klls were carried out in Delhi to understand the situation of Nepali girls and boys working in the AES in India, and two border points in Jhapa were observed during the study. Klls were also carried out with local focal persons from Sindhupalchowk and national stakeholders such as directors, coordinators and outreach workers of NGOs working for women and adolescent girls and boys working in the AES.

Kathmandu district

Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city, is a hub for in-migration of girls and boys from all the 14 districts of the country and is known to have a high prevalence of people working in the AES and in CSW. It also has various types of AES establishment as well as other, non-establishment, CSW. Particular areas famous for the AES in Kathmandu are Thamel, Gangabu, Koteshwor, Buspark and Ratnapark.

Kathmandu has a diverse pool of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Not only those from outside the city but also those native to the area, such as the Newars, are found to be working in the AES. However, it is more common to find those from districts neighbouring Kathmandu.

Many organisations support AES workers – this study interviewed approximately 26 – in life skills, health, shelter and food, livelihoods, and psychosocial counselling and rehabilitation, among others. The design of the research and fieldwork questions was discussed with these NGOs before primary data collection started.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2011), 27,585 adolescents out of the total of 367,853 adolescents in Kathmandu are economically active. Of these, 67.93% are male and 32.17% are female. However, according to key informants, the CBS data are not representative of the actual adolescent working population: they may exclude particular segments of the adolescent population that work in the AES. Moreover, we learnt from our initial Klls that employers often hide young adolescents from anti-child labour raids by the government and NGOs; commercial sex workers are also not included as their work is illegal.

Table 3: General information on the study sites

Particulars	Kathmandu	Sindhupalchowk	Sunsari
Total population	1,744,240	287,818	763,487
Adolescent population (10–19)	367,853 (53.91% male; 46.09% female)	71,039 (48.71% male; 51.29% female)	177,473 (50.35% male; 49.65% female)
Sex ratio	109.84	92.58	94.6
Literacy ratio	86%	59.59%	62.88
Life expectancy (years)		69	68.33

Source: CBS Nepal district profiles of Kathmandu (2018), Sindhupalchowk (2018) and Sunsari (2017)

Sindhupalchowk district

Sindhupalchowk lies about 90km north-east of Kathmandu and has a long history as an origin district for cross-border trafficking and trafficking of people to work in brick kilns, carpet factories and CSW in Kathmandu Valley. No data exist on the internal migration of adolescents into Kathmandu from Sindhupalchowk but frequent bus connections mean it is easy for adolescents to do so.

According to the 2011 Census, of the population of 287,818 in the district, the majority comprise Tamang (34.25%), Chettri (18.23%) and Brahmin (10.33%) followed by Kami, Sanyasi, Sherpa, Majhi, Damai, Magar, Thami and Helmo. Meanwhile, 25.4% of the population lives below the poverty line, the same as the national figure, according to the 2011 Census (latest available data). Adolescents leaving education to work is common. The school enrolment rate for boys and girls is 45.17% and 46.09%, respectively,⁶ which falls drastically to 3.94% for boys and 3.95% for girls by high school (11th standard) (CBS, 2011).⁷

Other social and cultural factors that make certain groups from Sindhupalchowk more vulnerable to taking risky jobs include its long history and networks of work-related migration to Kathmandu; the fact that it is a district of origin for brokers also involved in AES; similarly, its status as a place of origin of Nepali brothel owners or managers now based in Delhi; a long history of trafficking to India and into AES in Nepal; and its high prevalence of early marriage, polygamy and alcoholism, which render (mainly) girls vulnerable and at risk of exploitation, which also leads them to look for ways out, including through the AES (Rana, 1991; Kara, 2008; Rajbhandari, 2012).

In Sindhupalchowk, we selected Chautara municipality, which is the district capital and houses a rehabilitation centre and the main government offices, with key informants of interest. Based on references of key informants and given limited time and resources, we selected Melamchi municipality, which was relevant to our study but also accessible. In Melamchi, we worked with a local NGO Mahila Atma Nirbharta Kendra (MANK) Nepal to obtain access to respondents from groups where people were likely to have family members working in the AES in Kathmandu and India.

⁶ The national adjusted net school enrolment rate is 94.86 (male 96.194 and female 93.418) in 2017 according to the World Bank, in data derived from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/nepal/education-statistics>.

⁷ The net enrolment rate in 11th Standard is 22, 22.4 for girls and 21.6 for boys (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017).

Sunsari and Jhapa districts

Sunsari and Jhapa districts lie in Province 1 of Nepal and in the Terai belt (lowland) that borders India in the south. The main reason we selected these two districts was evidence from newspapers that they are growing hubs for CSW and corridors for cross-border and international smuggling, and as a result of suggestions by key informants on the importance of looking into particular areas in these districts. For example, in February 2019, the NGO Maiti Nepal rescued 130 girls being smuggled over the Jhapa border. They were to be taken to India and then to Myanmar by land and then to be flown to African countries such as Kenya and South Africa to work as dancers in the AES.

The short distance (13km) to Bangladesh and the land route to Myanmar make Jhapa an important transit route for traffickers. Moreover, Jhapa is connected directly to two Indian states, Bengal and Bihar. It takes 10 minutes by rickshaw to reach Galgaliya train station in India, which has cheap and regular train connections to areas with a high density of brothels in both Bengal and Bihar. It takes only a few hours, at around US\$1, to get from Galgaliya to Mujafarfur in Bihar, which is renowned for Nepali girls trafficked to work in CSW. From the same station, a 10-minute train ride, costing US\$0.21, can take a girl to Siliguri in Bengal state. Siliguri can also be reached by car (1 hour). It is an onward 507km journey from there by train to Kolkata, which is known for prostitution. Delhi is also only an overnight ride from Jhapa and costs US\$3. Trains are frequent. Jhapa is thus a very cheap and less risky (open border, no need for documents and daily mobility of a significant number of workers and others each way) place of transit. Hence, it is also a common route taken by traffickers, or girls using brokers to help them reach the AES in India (smuggling). Jhapa also attracts both Indian girls into CSW in Nepal and Indian clients who come for Nepali girls but also for tourism and shopping.

Jhapa was also important in helping us to obtain access to girls from the Madheshi (plains origin) and Muslim communities who work in CSW, whom we could not find in Kathmandu. Out of the 10 respondents in Jhapa, 2 were Muslim and 2 were Madheshi. Jhapa is also a common destination for girls from the rural areas of the eastern hills who come to study and work.

For the past two decades, Sunsari district has witnessed large-scale urbanisation, with an annual urban growth rate of 3.46% (MPRC, 2018). It is one of the top 10 migrant-sending districts of Nepal, and high

remittance levels have led to significant investment in the services sector, resulting in a proliferation of hotels, bars, restaurants, discos and dance bars. They have also led to an increase in internal and cross-border tourism and a changed socioeconomic and cultural context, including a rise in non-agricultural work and a culture of partying and visiting bars, restaurants and guesthouses. Sunsari is also famous for CSW; however, in the past, this occurred in small thatched hotels and in local liquor shops (*bhatti pasals*), and those involved catered mostly to truck-drivers driving along the east-west highway.

This study was conducted in one of the sub-metropolitan cities, Itahari, which lies on this highway and next to Biratnagar, one of the biggest gateway cities to India. Data show that economic dependency within households in the city decreased from 87.41% in 1991 to 67.43% in 2011 (MPRC, 2018). Key informants suggested that a reason for this was the increased involvement of adolescents in the workforce. The open border has also made Itahari a popular destination for Indian traders seeking commercial sex workers in Nepal. We interviewed young girls involved in CSW who were either trafficked from nearby rural villages into prostitution or willingly entered the AES as a way of generating a high income. Apart from establishment-

based CSW, Itahari is also famous for personal contact-based CSW mediated by phone.

Data collection and analysis

Except where respondents were not comfortable with it (one interview), all interviews were recorded. All interviews were in Nepali and transcribed/translated into English by the researchers who conducted the fieldwork as well as by two research assistants under their supervision. The researchers coded and analysed transcribed data using Maxqda. Codes were developed in consultation with the ODI team lead and shared with the wider fieldwork team for discussion.

Ethics

The study was conducted in partnership with three NGOs who work in this sector: Rakhsya Nepal, Biswas Nepal and the Women Workers' Protection Union. To ensure respondents felt protected and were comfortable to answer the questions, they were identified through referrals from these NGOs. The NGOs were careful to select girls who were willing to talk and who had not been traumatised in any way by their experiences. This may have influenced findings: the research team may have spoken to the less

Figure 2: Study sites



Source: adapted from mapchart.net.

shy and more vocal of potential respondents. However, once a set of respondents had been identified, snowball sampling was used to reach out to others not in contact with the above-mentioned organisations. This was to help us ensure diversity in the sample (those who are exposed to programmes and those who are not/do not want to be).

For those reached through NGOs, the latter appointed a focal person who explained the objectives of the research and the potential questions and then sought a first level of consent for us. However, before each interview, we again asked for respondents' consent. If the respondent agreed to the interview, they were called in. In most cases, the interview venue was the NGO office or a hotel selected together with the respondent, or another venue that the respondent suggested. For CS, we also visited the girl's working and living space. We ensured that staff from the NGOs that helped us with the study were not present during the interviews or discussions, to allow the girls and boys to be free to respond and not influence the direction of the discussions and interviews.

The Institutional Review Board of the Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER) also reviewed the study protocol, as did the three NGO partners. All other ethical protocols, on the purpose of the research, confidentiality and anonymity, storage/use of information and use of pictures, were shared with respondents prior to interview. The final reports from the research will be shared with the three NGO partners; however, no raw data or information that could identify the girls and boys involved in AES in any way will be shared.

For safeguarding purposes and to report any violence, a respondent safeguarding protocol and measures were put in place, in accordance with NISER requirements. This involved designating a focal person (the team leader) to whom the researchers had to report any safeguarding issues. The focal person would then report issues to one of the three partner NGOs (as per contract Rakshya Nepal in the first year and Women Workers' Protection Union in the second), who would then act.

Respondents were told at the start of the interview that they were free not to talk about anything they did not want to and could leave the interview anytime they wanted. It was agreed among researchers during training that we did not want details that they did not want to share or we found difficult to hear, for example about sexual acts and relationships they were not comfortable to expose. Similarly, we abandoned pornographic video searches and stopped looking at pornographic materials and comments on interviews online when researchers started to feel uncomfortable.

Limitations

It was difficult to find adolescent girls, particularly in Kathmandu. Hence we had to increase the age of respondents up to the age of 25 for IDIs and FGDs and up to 27 for CS (such as for international migration in the AES). In FGDs and IDIs, we took respondents who had started working in the AES when they were adolescents.

Among adolescents, we tried to look for young, mid- and older adolescents; we were able to reach only a few young adolescent girls.

While we interviewed adolescent boys who worked in the AES, we could not find boys engaged in CSW. Thus, when we speak about boys' engagement in CSW, the information comes from boys who knew of it or from key informants who had worked with such boys.

We could not interview an adequate number of employers. We used our contacts but they were not willing to talk. In the end, we carried out only one KII with an employer.

We could not locate some establishments that are emerging as new sites for AES, such as boarding houses. We know the area, and would have liked to obtain entry into the houses for observation, but, despite trying to find contacts, this was not possible.



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About GAGE

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Front cover: Focus group discussion with adolescent girls in Sindhupalchowk © Fiona Samuels/GAGE 2020