



# Situation Analysis of the Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) and AES Workers in Pokhara

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Declaration: The research team received the approval letter from Pokhara Metropolitan City to conduct the study. Each participant gave informed consent before the study.



# Executive Summary

This report on the Situation Analysis of the Adult Entertainment Sector(AES) and its workers (girls and women) in Pokhara is a part of the Protection from Risk and Assisting Young Girls and Women in Accessing Social Services-(PRAYASS) project. Most of the studies related to AES are concentrated within Kathmandu Valley. Still, major cities like Pokhara where this sector is flourishing have only the least information, studies and facts regarding AES. This study has been conducted to understand emic voices and lived experiences, bring out policy messages and recommendations for AES workers in Pokhara who remain unheard of compared to their Kathmandu-based friends, and ultimately promote decent working standards for them. This research aimed to provide in-depth insights and knowledge by exploring the lived experiences and dynamics of girls and women working in the AES. The study examined the pathways leading to their involvement in the sector, the magnitude and severity of the abuse they encounter and the evolving nature of this sector. It also identified the implementation gaps and challenges while capturing the perspectives of key stakeholders. The goal of the research study was to investigate the situation of AES and its workers in Pokhara. A total of 92 individuals participated in one month of the study. The study employed a participatory approach based on the “nothing about us without us” principle to meet the objectives. Data collection included in-depth interviews (IDI)-16, focus group discussions (FGDs)-10 with AES workers and key-informant interviews (KIIs)-13 with business owners, Police, NGOs, journalists, OCMC to understand the current landscapes of AES in Pokhara.

The study findings highlight the fact that, unlike other employment sectors, AES lacks formal labour intermediaries, the recruitment process being informal often through personal connections which include friends, relatives, neighbours and sometimes even acquaintances or strangers who are well-established within the sector. The study unveiled multiple factors influencing girls and women to enter the sector and that entry is rarely due to a single factor. Economic hardships, and disturbed family backgrounds emerged as significant drivers creating a pathway which pushes girls into the sector. This research findings found the youngest girl employed in these establishments was aged 13 years with some initiating work even younger. Employing young and attractive girls in the workplace is often believed to attract more customers to the venue, which will help the owners make a profit. Social media plays a vital role in connecting with customers. Venues like Dohori and dance bar don't provide space for any sex work, but some girls shared the fact that the khaja ghar and spa massage cater the sex work. Dohori and the dance bar often serve as the meeting points for the workers and customers. The research uncovered the presence of flat-based sex work in Pokhara. After the cabin restaurant business was shut down, the owners started this flat-based sex work at private apartments. Girls and women working in AES recommended the organizations develop a programme to engage other family members, allowing them to contribute to the household economy and share economic burden more equitably. Guideline for the Control of Sexual Exploitation among Female Workers in Dance and Bar Restaurants and the Like Business(2008) aims to free the AES workers from any type of violence and exploitation to make it a dignified workplace, the study found that many AES establishments are not following it. The regulations require the submission of personal records for each worker, many establishments neglect these practices leading to unsafe working conditions.

Additionally, the implementation of guidelines is hindered by resource constraints, lack of expertise and an inactive District Monitoring and Action Committee. Most of the girls and women working in this sector are illiterate and from poor family backgrounds often making them reluctant to report cases of harassment at the workplace due to fear of loss of jobs. In addition, many of them do not have ideas about where to report the cases of harassment.

# Definition of terms and concepts used in the study

**The adult entertainment sector** is an establishment that includes Dohori, Dance bar, Spa massage centre, Khaja Ghar, Guesthouses, and Culture.

**Guest/customer/client/service seeker** are the words used for the individual who visits the adult entertainment sector for different purposes such as entertainment, massage therapy, and adult services.

**Staff member/service providers** are female employees working in the adult entertainment sector who provide services via warm hospitality, table service, dance, music, and massage therapy for the service seekers.

**Dohori** is an establishment where traditional duet folk songs and dances are performed to entertain the customers. Mostly dohori serves alcohol and food. Staff members often earn commission from the beverages and snack items sold at their serving table. There is variation between dohori—some offer a family environment, whereas others may have a sexually charged atmosphere.

**Dance bar** is an establishment where the workers dance to modern Nepali and Hindi songs to entertain the customers. Besides, the customers enjoy alcoholic beverages and snack items.

**Spa and massage center** is an establishment where a massage practitioner provides massage therapy to customers. These centres are charged with providing adult services in small private rooms.

**Khaja Ghar** is a small-scale eatery where food and alcohol are available at affordable prices. This centre is also alleged to offer adult services to customers. They may have employees who provide sexual services or be places where this can be arranged.

**Party palace** refers to the venue where events and celebrations like weddings, reception parties, and birthday parties are hosted.

**Guest houses** are small hotels that provide accommodation facilities to customers; in addition to that some may offer adult services as well.

**Culture** is a newly established concept in the adult entertainment sector, especially in hotels and restaurants to attract customers to the venue where the employees in traditional attire perform classical songs and dance.

**Sex work** is the term not limited to sexual activities especially physical intercourse between service providers and customers but also refers to various forms of direct and indirect sexual activities.

**Flat-based sex work** is an establishment where the owner runs adult services hiring a few girls. They contact the clients via social media and physical networks.

# Acronyms

AES	Adult entertainment sector
FGD	Focus group discussion
IDI	In-depth interview
KII	Key informant interview
PRAYASS Services	Protection from Risk and Assisting Young Girls and Women in Accessing Social
R4C	Right4Children
ILO	International Labour Organization
CDO	Chief District Officer

# Introduction

## Background

Protection from Risk and Assisting Young Girls and Women in Accessing Social Services- (PRAYASS) project is a 3-year project started in January 2023 to 2026 and works in nine underprivileged communities (3 communities each year) in Pokhara Metropolitan City. It aims to provide special care and protection services to children and young people, especially young girls who are at risk of abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. To achieve this goal, the project applies two strategic approaches: a. Preventive Approach and b. Rehabilitative Approach.

The Preventive Approach involves community-enabling activities which focus on children and youth, especially girls and young women. These activities include providing educational support to school-going girls, establishing and running early childhood development centres for children, remedial/ tuition classes for school-going girls and boys, career guidance sessions for high school girls, vocational training and job placements for unemployed youth, and awareness campaigns on various issues such as health, child rights, protection, legal awareness etc.

The Rehabilitative Approach works within the framework of the “SHE Centre”, with a focus on activities such as the rescue of under-aged girls working in AES, transitional care and family reintegration, counselling and soft skills, career guidance and alternative career options for under- aged girls and other women who want to exit the sector, networking with relevant stakeholders and influencing for policy change through advocacy.

## Situation of Adult Entertainment Sector (AES) in Nepal

In Nepal, adult entertainment sectors (AES) encompass a variety of businesses and venues including restaurants (cabin),dohori, dance bars, massage parlours, and khaja ghar. Despite its prevalence, there is no legal recognition/ definition of AES. Since the 1990s, with the increasing migration from rural areas to Kathmandu due to conflict, displacement, and poverty, the AES has become more prominent in Kathmandu (TFF, 2019). Most of the young girls from poor families with limited opportunities and family difficulties find themselves working in this sector.

Due to the lack of labour laws governing AES, the employees often work without a contract, have unfair pay systems and are subject to abuse, stigmatization, humiliation and exploitation (PPR Nepal, 2020).

A study conducted in 2010 estimated that between 11,000 to 13,000 girls and women were working in the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu (Frederick, 2010). Later in 2019, this number increased to over 50,000 AES workers (including minors under 18) directly involved in Kathmandu valley alone (Ghimire, Mainali, Samuels, & Lamichhane, 2021). The ILO (2021) estimates that Kathmandu (AES) employs around 30,000-40,000 women. Girls and women in this sector are particularly vulnerable to violence. Not all the establishments in the AES are involved in the commercial sale of sex, sexual activity, or commercial sexual exploitation, the sector has developed in response to increased demand for entertainment from a growing urban (particularly male) population that is engaging in a more consumer-based economy (Oosterhoff and Hacker 2020). However, the AES in Nepal is embedded in the sex work industry since it facilitates sex work in addition to providing other hospitality services. Research shows the changing structure of sexual services which has expanded in this sector and technology is being used to mediate the interaction between customers and employees (Ghimire, et al, 2020).

Venues such as dance bars and dohori which operate at night, there is an explicit more visible focus on female employees who must dance, sit and entertain the customers, and the evidence shows that girls are at high risk of sexual exploitation (Ghimire, et al, 2020 & ECPAT, 2020).

Similarly, some of them were forced to sleep in public places like under bridges, and in front of shops and did not get support from their family because of the stigma associated with their work (Ghimire, et.al, 2021). Due to its informal nature, the workers in this sector are prone to abuse and exploitation and often lack the power to speak up against violence. According to ECPAT International (2020), due to a lack of proper response, prevention and recovery mechanisms, violence remains unreported.

Most of the AES workers are young, a study found that fewer than half (45% out of 600 individuals) of the participants were under the age of 18. An overwhelming majority of the participants (98%) in the study choose to work in this sector voluntarily (Dank et al, 2019). Recent studies also indicate that due to their perceived attractiveness, many customers prefer younger girls (TFF, 2019). AES work often provides relatively higher earnings than other working sectors without requiring formal education. There is an informal recruitment process for the AES and many AES workers learn about job opportunities through neighbours, friends and relatives who are familiar with or have worked in these sectors (Oosterhoff, & Hacker, 2020; Dank et al, 2019)).

Despite existing legislation such as the Labour Act 2017, which prohibits child and forced labour, and the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act 2015, these laws do not specifically address informal employment (CARE, 2021). Effective implementation of these laws is a significant challenge, compounded by the informal and seasonal nature of employment (Basnyat, 2020; Dhakal, 2013). Nepal has not ratified the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190, which protects all workers in both formal and informal economies. As a result, informal workers fall outside protective labour frameworks and social protection schemes, making women and children particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation (Khadka et al., 2021).

### **Issues and Challenges Regarding AES Working Environment in Nepal**

The constitution of Nepal 2015 established a robust legal framework for addressing child rights and safeguarding children's welfare. Despite this, the violation of child rights in various forms is still a pervasive phenomenon in Nepal (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Nearly all youths under the age of 18 who were working in the AES are victims of the worst forms of child labour. They work long hours in extremely sexually exploitative conditions, frequently late at night (TFF, 2019). Similarly, a study conducted by the National Human Rights Commission in AES shows that 13 to 20 per cent of women and child workers in AES are at risk of human trafficking.

Moreover, a national report (2017/18) identified the high demand for young AES workers is responsible for spreading internal trafficking in Nepal (NHRC, 2019). In Nepal, sex work is illegal and often conflated with trafficking and consequently some of the voluntary AES workers legally move and are treated towards involuntary jobs despite their basic needs (Oosterhoff, & Hacker, 2020).

These entertainment sectors are mainly aimed at men as their customers whereas most of the workers are women and young girls. AES is an unregulated sector with long and irregular working hours, no contract, and inadequate wages, and girls join this sector with low formal education, no work experience and no legal documents. Girls and women are often hired based on verbal agreements leaving them vulnerable to exploitation leading to inappropriate sexual behaviours, and other hidden forms of abuse (Basnyat, 2020; Rana, 2020; Sylger, 2022; UNHR, 2022).

There is an increasing number of AES in the major urban cities, but the sector is still a risky sector and full of stigma. Pokhara is a major tourist town in the western region of Nepal and is also affected by urban social problems including a high number of child labour in various sectors such as domestic labour, rag pickers, hotel and restaurants, porters and street vendors. In Pokhara, during the six months, 150 children were found working in AES (CWISH, 2010). Likewise, estimates based on consultation show that 1000 to 1500 girls are involved in the entertainment sector (Right4Children, 2020). Most of the studies related to AES are concentrated within Kathmandu Valley but major cities like Pokhara have only the least information, studies and facts regarding AES. This study will be a milestone to address the needs and challenges faced by AES workers in Pokhara and will help to promote decent working standards for them.

## Objectives

The main aim of the research is to provide an in-depth situation analysis of the Adult Entertainment Sector and AES workers in Pokhara, focusing on key trends, challenges, opportunities, and regulatory frameworks. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To examine the current knowledge gaps regarding the situation of the adult entertainment sector and its workers by focusing on the magnitude, severity and challenges faced.
- To examine the existing prevention and response strategies implemented in Nepal and Pokhara and specifically to identify the measures to address the issues faced by the AES workers.
- To understand the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, including NGOs, government agencies, community leaders, and individuals working in the AES.

## Methodology

The focus of this research is to generate in-depth insights and enable the nuanced exploration of lived experiences and dynamics of the girls and women working in this sector. This includes understanding the pathways into AES, the magnitude and severity of the abuse faced and the changing nature of AES. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the gaps and challenges in their implementation and understand the perspectives of the key stakeholders. The goal of the research was to investigate the situation of AES and its workers in Pokhara.

## Sampling Procedure

A purposive and snowball sampling procedure was followed to capture the respondents, as randomized sampling is not possible. The research team identified initial participants in the study site, through referrals from Right4Children and other NGOs working in this sector and the initial participants played a crucial role in identifying and referring other participants for the study.

Through their networks, the other respondents were identified and diversified the participant pool. For this, local NGOs supported the Research team. A total of 92 individuals participated over one month in the study to understand the situation of AES workers in Pokhara, its pathways and challenges faced by both the workers and the owners and the changing nature of AES. All interviews were conducted in Nepali by experienced female researchers considering the sensitiveness of the sector. In this study, we have looked at girls and women in different venues (dance bars, dohori spa and massage parlours, small hotels, khaja ghar) and the stakeholders include representatives from likeminded NGOs, Nepal Police, Government representatives, journalists and representatives from the establishment associations who also are business owners.

## **Data Collection**

Given the nature of our objective, in-depth interview (IDI)-16, focus group discussions (FGDs)-10 with AES workers and key-informant interviews (KIIs)-13 with business owners, Police, NGOs, journalists, OCMC were conducted to understand the current landscapes of AES in Pokhara. The approach for this research work was based on the principle “nothing about us without us”. Participatory methods were applied to understand the “emic” voices and lived experiences and bring out policy messages and recommendations of AES workers in Pokhara who remain unheard compared to their Kathmandu-based friends. A mini workshop using participatory tools- river of life and body mapping was applied during IDI and FGD. The use of qualitative research as the primary method generates in-depth insights enabling exploration of the lived experiences of girls and women working in this sector.

## **Analysis and Writing**

All interviews (except three interviews) were digitally recorded, transcribed, and translated into English ensuring appropriate informed consent. The code book was prepared keeping in mind the domains of the study and themes of the study. These transcripts were coded in MAXQDA 24- an internationally approved high-quality software for qualitative data analysis by the core research team. Most interviews took approximately one hour at maximum. Key results from the qualitative data are presented against each theme.

## **Ethical Consideration**

The study paid attention to all necessary concerns regarding informants’ protection and research ethics. Participants involved in the study were fully informed about the study objectives and the confidentiality of the information and their full consent for participation in the study was obtained. Informed written consent was obtained from all the research participants (AES workers) and verbal consent was asked with the key informant prior to the administration of the interview guidelines.

The confidentiality of all participants enrolled in this study is fully protected. Any link between the respondent and his/her identifier was protected and nowhere disclosed in the report.

Ensuring the well-being of research participants, measures were taken to inform them fully of the potential risks and benefits associated with their involvement in the study. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity was a top priority. During the informed consent process, the reasons for the study, as well as the topics and questions that were to be asked during interviews or discussions, were briefly outlined. Participants had the right to decline participation and can withdraw from the interview at any time. To ensure the safety and comfort of participants, a safe space and appropriate time were arranged for the interview, with minimal disruption to their daily lives.

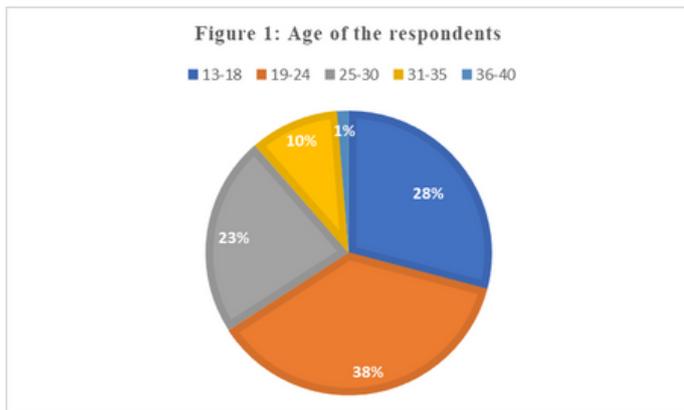
## **Study Limitations**

The following are the limitations of the study:

- The study site was purposefully selected to represent PRAYASS programme areas and hence does not reflect the entire province or cannot be generalized for the country’s context.
- The study sample failed to capture enough vulnerable populations which include transgender and people with disability due to time constraints and the social stigma that discourages them from disclosing their identities.

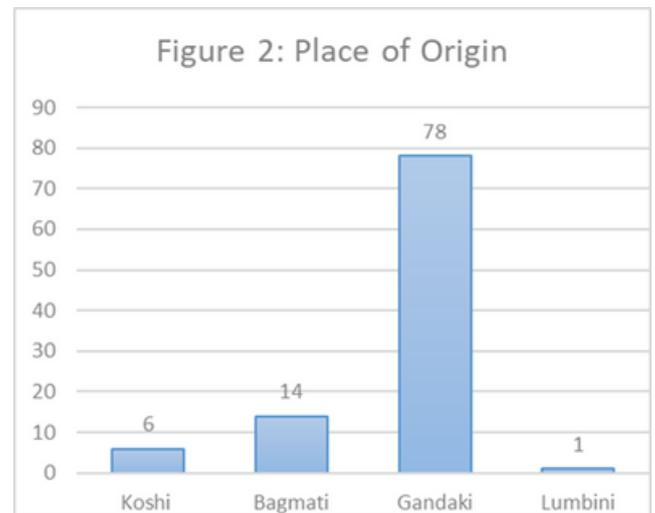
## Key Findings

A total of 79 female workers were interviewed in this study. This group of participants has been categorized based on age, education, ethnicity, place of origin, marital status, and workplace. The youngest participant in the study was 13 years while the eldest was 38 years. However, the recent Child Rights Act (2018) prohibits minors from entering or being used in adult entertainment venues. The girls seemed to enter this sector in their early teens. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of girls' population consisted of 19-24 age which accounted for 38% which indicates the fertile market for young girls and women in the AES sector followed by the 13-18 age groups which consisted of 28%. With the rise in age, there is a smaller number of women working in this sector since the sector demands young and appealing appearance women consisting of only 1% in the age group 36-40 years.

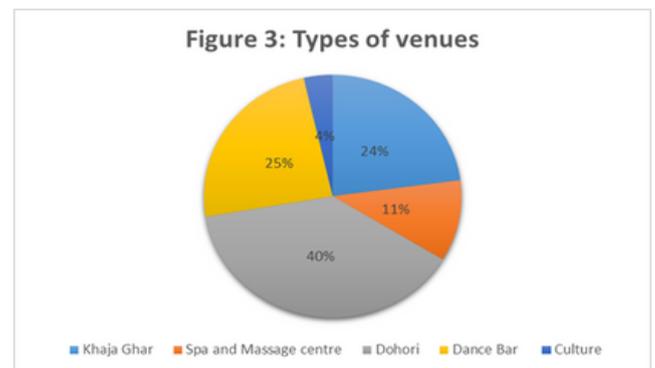


In terms of education, most of the participants had upper secondary education, which accounted for 43% followed by upper primary which accounted for 29%. The lower secondary education holder's portion was 25%. Only 3% of participants were holding primary education. Correspondingly, in terms of ethnicity, we observed the inclusive participation of the different ethnic groups of Nepal. However, the number varies, the majority of the participants were from the marginalized caste group of Nepal known as Dalit which consisted of almost half the population 47% of the total sample size. Similarly, the second largest population was represented by different ethnic groups such as Magar, Rai, Gurung, and Shrestha which accounted for 32%. Likewise, the third highest caste group was Chhetri which accounted for 11%. Compared to the other participants group the Brahmin participants were lower in number which consisted 10% of the total sample size.

In terms of the place of origin (Figure 2), the highest number of participants were from Gandaki province (78%) including the adjoining districts such as Kaski, Tanahun, Syangja, Baglung, Parbat, Myagdi, Gorkha, and Nawalparasi followed by Bagmati 14%. Similarly, 6% of participants represented the Koshi province and there were only 1% participants from the Lumbini province. In terms of marital status, the majority of the participants were unmarried, which consisted of 59%. Married participants were 36.71% and 3.80% of the participants were divorcees.



Regarding the workplace (Figure 3), the highest number of participants were from Dohori; the portion accounted for 40%. Similarly, 25 % of participants were from Dance bar employees followed by Khaja ghar at 24%. Spa and Massage centre employees represented 11% and only 4% of participants were from culture, which was the lowest portion compared to the other sectors.



## **Pokhara's AES**

Over a decade ago in Pokhara, there used to be a cabin restaurant partitioned by plywood creating small private 'cabins' where customers were entertained by the restaurant staff members. These cabins were adorned with green curtains (hariyo parda) and were concentrated on Jalpa Road, Baglung Bus Park and around Mustang Chowk in Pokhara. This was the central hub for young girls' employment as kitchen helpers and service providers. Alongside their regular duties, many were also involved in sex work within the cabin restaurants and guest houses often at the requests of customers and owners. Nepal Police initiated efforts to address the issue and were successful in curbing this activity around Baglung bus park. However, this intervention led to the sex work industry evolving into new forms of business. Today, flat-based sex work is thriving in Pokhara, with flats being rented in various parts of the city for short periods. As shared by the research participants, an estimated 150 workers worked in the cabin restaurant and after their closure, some of them transitioned into flat-based sex work as an alternative means of livelihood. As key informant stated:-

*Baglung Bus Park was once a hub for sex work, and there was a sense of shame associated with saying that you lived there. Sex work was openly conducted in the past, but this has shifted to a more discreet, flat-based model that now operates across Pokhara. While Pokhara may appear to be a beautiful city on the surface, there's a different reality hidden within. KII*

*When Baglung Bus Park was mentioned, people could easily guess the kinds of activities taking place there. After cleaning up the illegal operations in the area, those involved in such businesses have shifted to an underground network to continue these activities. KII*

*The adult entertainment sector in Pokhara is dynamic and fast-growing. The lakeside area of Pokhara has a high concentration of Dance bars and Spa & Massage centres which have emerged as the vibrant hub for entertainment and glamour. Most of the Dance bars and Spa & Massage centres are located on the first floor of the two-storey buildings with various other businesses such as pashmina, jewellery and bags. KII*

Lakeside is a tourist location, many domestic and international tourists come to visit. Likewise, Dohori and Khaja Ghar are two different establishments which are scattered in different parts of the city. However, it is predominantly located in commercial hubs which include Shrijana Chowk, Jalpa Road, Mahendra Pool, Chipledhunga and Baglung Buspark. Prithivi Chowk is a transportation hub and entry and exit of buses coming from everywhere in Nepal is the transit point. This is a vibrant area, and many touts offer services which also include girls for sex work. Recently, there is another establishment "Culture" has emerged -an affluent restaurant that provides this entertainment where young girls and boys perform dance performances in Nepali traditional songs and the same girls and boys shift to dohori and dance bar after they finish their duty by 10 p.m in this establishment. The dance bar and dohori open in the evening, however, the clients visit the venue quite late around 9 p.m. and operate till 1:00 a.m. The drop-off service is provided by most of the venues. In the case of Khaja ghar it operates till 9-10 p.m. The major challenge in the Khaja Ghar is the registration issue. The maximum number of the khaja ghar is not registered and it is very difficult to figure out the number of khaja ghar in Pokhara. Dohori has a reduction in number from 24-25 to around 18- 20 due to the impact of COVID-19 and there are around 15 dance bars in Pokhara. In the Lakeside area, there are around 135 Spa centres. Most of the Spa centres in Pokhara are in Lakeside, however, there are very few numbers that have been conducted in other areas in Pokhara.

The research findings suggest that there are few young girls and women found on the Fewa Lake foot track working as street-based sex workers, standing and bargaining with the customers. Regarding the support-providing agencies to the AES workers in Pokhara, various NGOs have been working for a long time for their well-being. They are conducting different types of work including rescue, emergency shelter, legal support, vocational training, and reintegration.

Kopila Nepal one of the active NGO in Pokhara that operates the emergency shelters been playing an important role in rescuing vulnerable AES workers whose data shows among the rescued girls three of them were found to be pregnant and were under 18 years old and delivered the child. This highlights the fact that there is a trend of an increase in the number of cases of girls being abused in the workplace within the AES.

### **COVID-19 and its impacts**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on AES businesses leading to financial struggles for the owners. The business was not running as smoothly as it was before, the pandemic making them very hard to sustain. It was difficult for the business owners to manage the monthly rent for their business venues and had a problem providing salaries for their staff members. The owners were in a financial crisis-neither could they change the business that they had been running for a long time and had made huge investments, nor were they able to run the business smoothly. Due to the impact of COVID-19, there was a decline in the number of venues. Similarly, the workers also went through a hard time as many of them lost their jobs. Some who were working did not receive their pay on time. Additionally, having complete dependency in this sector and no other skills led them to vulnerability. On the contrary employees from other sectors also entered this sector after losing their earlier jobs. Many of them entered this sector as a new platform for work opportunities and were obliged to work under unfavorable circumstances such as low salaries, long working hours, no paid leave, and different types of verbal and physical abuse.

### **Trajectories into AES**

Girls and women working in these establishments shared that they found the work in AES mostly through personal contacts which include friends, relatives, neighbouring brothers and sisters and in some cases strangers. There is no formal labour intermediaries found in AES like in any other jobs. Some of these informal intermediaries are already established in this sector. This study divided the intermediaries into two categories: Personal acquaintances and external recruiters.

*I met an acquainted brother who offered me work in this sector. The job description was that I had to work for 3 hours a day, and the venue would provide a one-time meal along with a dress.*

#### **IDI, Dohori**

*We didn't have any idea that there would be a dance bar where the girls could work and have never visited the venues before starting a job in Pokhara. I didn't know that there would be something like a dohori and dance bar for a place to work. I have my maiju (maternal aunty) who also worked in a dance bar helped me find this work.*

#### **FGD, Dance bar**

*A neighbouring brother requested me to sing at dohori and he was also in that field and said that I have good vocals, and I can sing in dohori. I was never in the dohori sector before I came to Pokhara.*

#### **IDI, Dohori**

The research found the majority of young girls were connected to their jobs in the AES through their friends at the same place they were working. However, it is also found that girls also enter AES without any mediation.

*Some girls have family responsibilities and look after their younger siblings, so they enter this work through friends who are already in this sector. Since there is no vacancy for this sector in the newspaper, they enter with the help of their friends.*

#### **FGD, Dance bar**

*Friends ask if we know how to dance and help us get a job. Mostly it is the friends who help to enter this sector. Sometimes, girls get lured by salary and false promises of building them as dancers, so they enter this sector.*

#### **FGD, Dance bar**

I worked at a Khaja Ghar near my home. I approached the owner on my own to get the job because we were very tight on money, and I needed to contribute financially to support our livelihood. **IDI, Khaja Ghar**

I was studying at a government school, and I had to pay 500 NPR for monthly fees. It was very difficult for my mother to arrange this amount. I was from a poor economic family background. A few months later, I left school and went to the hotel I was familiar with. I asked for a job, and they offered me work that is how I started working. **IDI, Khaja Ghar**

Young girls are found getting connected to jobs in this sector through external recruiters who are strangers standing in front of the venues in Lakeside where they approach young girls for employment opportunities with lucrative salaries and misleading job descriptions. They play the role of intermediaries and share with the girls about the availability of jobs with them which they can mediate.

In the Lakeside area, a stranger asks us if we want a job in the dance bar. Once I was asked what my rate was for one night in the Lakeside area and followed us. Such incidents happen usually during the nighttime. Such people say if we want a job then they can provide us with a job for one day referring to sex work.

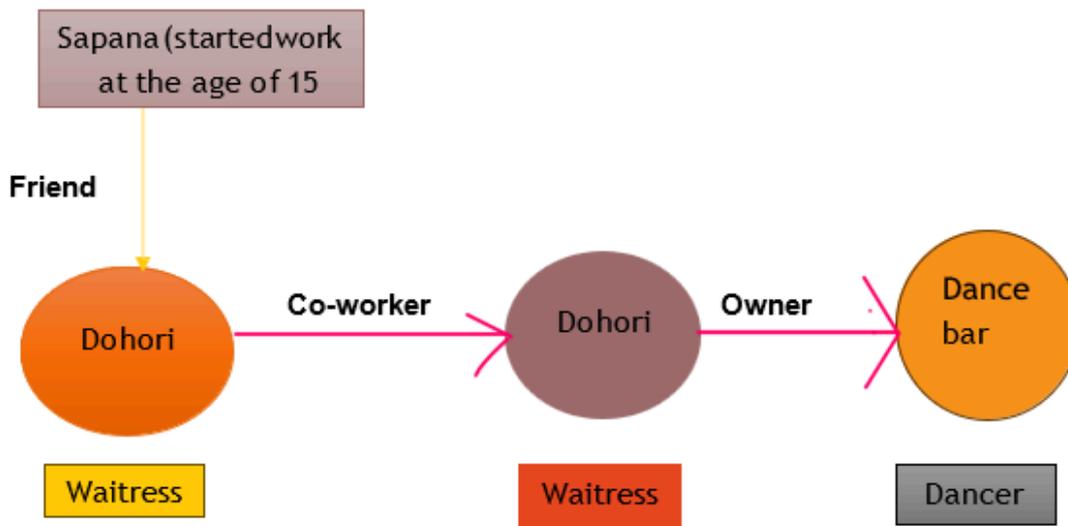
**FGD, Dance bar**

There are also incidents where the employers of these establishments themselves visit the venues as customers where they intend to look for potential employees for their venues.

The employers observe the active employees in the venues of other business owners. My current employer visited Dohori where I worked as a waiter. I worked there for 9 months. As he was seeking an active employee, he offered me a job and that is how I started working in a dance bar. **IDI, Dance bar**

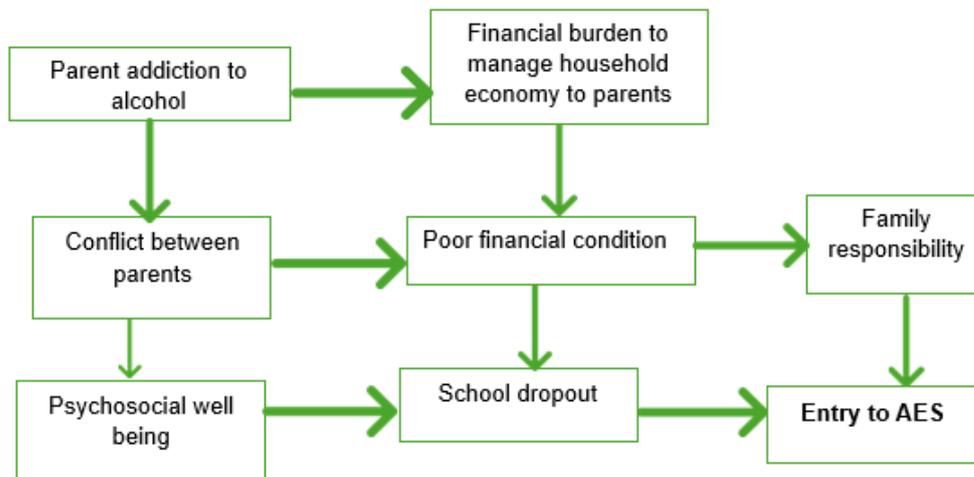
### AES' worker trajectory example

Figure 4: AES' worker trajectory example



## Interlinkages leading girls and women entering work

Figure 5: Interlinkages leading girls and women entering work



### Reasons to Enter AES

The study identified more than one reason for girls and women to enter this sector. Research demonstrates that women enter AES for various reasons: economic necessity and familial pressure from troubled backgrounds playing a significant role in finding this sector to be a relatively easier entry point for earning money. However, this research also uncovers the fact that various interconnected factors push girls into this sector to work and are not the only factor that contributes girls to entering the sector. For example, alcoholic parents bring conflict/ disputes in the family followed by the effects on the psychosocial well-being of the children leading them to drop out the school and enter this sector. The following Figure 2 illustrates how each factor influences and reinforces the others.

The research participants shared a range of reasons for being involved in the sector which are discussed below:

**Easy and quick money:** It has been found that girls and women primarily enter AES for financial purposes. They consider this sector an easy-to-earn money sector. The potential for higher income from tips and commissions and flexible working hours make this sector an attractive option for girls and women.

Another important reason for entering this sector is the opportunity to earn tips that exceed their basic salary. The girls working in the dance bar and dohori shared that their salary ranges from 5000 NPR to 15000 NPR depending on their experiences and performance levels. The newcomers have a comparatively lower salary than those who are working for an extended period in the same position.

*Employees prefer working in dance bars because the tips they receive often exceed their salaries, which helps cover daily expenses. The total earnings, including tips, can be more than 20,000 NPR, which reduces their reliance on just their salary.*

#### FGD, Dance bar

*This sector is where if you go to work, you can receive at least 200 or 300 NPR tips in a day at first. So people want to work there to get tips on a per-day basis.*

#### FGD, Dohori

*Those under 18-year-old girls who are rescued from the venues share that this sector is easy to enter and easy to make money. As the girls and women don't have to show their citizenship and birth certificate which disclose their legal age, it is easier to enter this sector. Mostly those with broken families, divorcees, separated those with low education are in this sector.*

#### KII

Girls and women working in this sector are from poor family backgrounds and need money. For this, they don't hesitate to keep a sexual relationship with the guest who visits the venues. They not only cite fun and enjoyment while accompanying the guests they also go for the money.

*Girls earn money by investing a few hours, so they come to work in this sector. Some girls earn 2000–5000 NPR per day during festival time. In another job, it takes several days to earn NPR 4000 whereas in this sector a girl can earn 4000 in a day.* **FGD, Dance bar**

*It is not easy to earn money anywhere. But the good thing is that you are not empty-handed here in this sector. You can collect the money you need daily. If you are in urgent need of money, it is not guaranteed that you will get 500 NPR or not if you work in another sector, but you can get more if you are working in the entertainment sector.*

**FGD, Dance bar**

The research found workers less attracted towards working in the formal sector. As stated by the key informant, individuals employed in the informal sector can earn between 25,000 and 30,000 NPR per month, or even higher whereas the formal sector pays less than the government- mandated minimum wage (17300 NPR) which is not sufficient to cover the needs of the family. So, this is another major factor for girls to work in the informal sector as they earn more than in the formal sector.

*Even though you help her find a job in the coffee house and she gets a payment of 12000 NPR, she won't be able to sustain herself since she has the responsibility for herself including her family. So, this is the main reason she doesn't want to work in the formal sector and return to the informal sector where she can earn more.* **KII**

### **Tips and commission**

Tips for services and commission on food and drinks are another major attraction which makes girls enter the sector. So, they are encouraged to sell food as much as possible.

*The dancers feel that the tips are given because their dance is liked by the guests. None of us regrets coming to work in this sector. By working here, we can look after our family. We are doing all this for our family.*

**FGD, Dance Bar**

*Some customers pay 10000 NPR per night. Some girls go with customers for sex work due to poor financial conditions whereas some go for fantasy. The salary in this sector is 9000 NPR per month but the customers become fond of music and dance, so they give tips to these workers which exceed their salary.*

**FGD, Dance bar**

### **Poor economic conditions and family responsibility**

In some cases, the young girls are the eldest child of the household and all the responsibility to look after the household economy and care of the siblings is on them. Some owners consider their economic condition and provide employment opportunities despite their young age. Likewise, some married women have household responsibilities such as educating children and managing household expenses while some are divorced and must bear the economic responsibilities on their own. Similarly, some unmarried girls might have a different situation in their home, some might have alcoholic and divorced parents who cannot work to earn money at that point they have to bear the household duties.

*We are from a village. We have agricultural land, but it is just enough for subsistence. Additional things we must buy from the market. My brother is younger than me and his education is my responsibility. He is 13 years old and is studying in the city. It is my responsibility to look after his education.*

**FGD, Dance bar**

*I started working there when I was 15. It was my first job, and I took it up to contribute financially. I think I worked there approximately for 5 to 6 months.*

**IDI, Khaja Ghar**

Some girls in this sector fulfil their interests, while others are compelled to work due to the dire economic conditions of their households. Due to the poor economic condition of the family and when there is no support structure from family members and they do not have sound academic qualifications, girls are compelled to enter this sector.

When there are no options for the girls then they enter this sector to meet their family needs. In many cases, They should allow the customers to touch them for the sake of money and feel bad after permitting. Mothers who are single and divorced are found providing sexual services to the customers to look after the expenses of their children.

*Since the other family members in her family don't have jobs, she is the only one who earns money. She thinks that she will be working in this sector and support her family. There are only a few who enjoy themselves in this sector. Most girls have a responsibility towards their families. After facing hurdles for not finding a job she then enters this sector. FGD, Dance Bar*

*The women, who are single or have divorced land in this sector for work, some have children they must take care of. They seek income and if someone offers them money some of them do not hesitate even to have a physical relationship. IDI, Dance Bar*

*Girls in this sector are always in a financial problem, if any customer comes and says to come with him and he will pay a certain amount of money, or she gives to touch her body then customers will pay her. So, for the money girls do sex work even though they are not interested in doing it. So, they feel guilty working in this sector.*

**FGD, Dance bar**

### **Dysfunctional family**

Many young girls working in this sector are from disrupted family backgrounds. Stressful family situations lead girls to leave home to seek employment in environments in AES where no documents are required to enter. Due to the negligence of parents, they drop out of the school and land in AES venues. Khaja Ghar is found to be the first place to work where their job responsibilities are to serve the food and wash the dishes. Along with this work, they also give company to the customers by sitting and eating with them. Separation of the parents and death of the parents is another reason they land in this sector. Domestic violence and extramarital affairs of husbands pushed women to make the decision to work in AES making it a last resort.

*He started having an extramarital affair after my delivery. I was shattered knowing this. He beat me severely then I left his home with my daughter. He tortured me a lot physically and mentally. Every time he would suspect my relationship with other boys and would blame me. He started beating me even in front of my parents. I was fed up with him and I entered the AES sector since then he completely ignored me. I thought it would be okay if he ignored me, and I would also find another partner in my life in the future. IDI, Dance bar*

*Women have children with their previous husbands and then divorce and remarry and have another child from their second husband. Such types of women are staying in Pokhara by saying my two and your two (mera dui timra dui) and some of them are working in the AES sector. Likewise, adolescent girls marry and stay in marriage for a short time (like one/two weeks) and get divorced. Such girls enter entertainment sectors like dance bars, spas, and cabins. KII*

### **Low job opportunities**

The lack of job opportunities in the job market and the low salary in the formal market push girls and women in this sector. Since there is no requirement for academic qualifications and any prior work experience, this sector is comparatively easy to enter.

*We do not get employment opportunities in the formal sector without completing formal education and in the private sector; we should have a network to find a job. So, in my view, most of the girls are obliged to work in this sector. IDI, Dohori*

*In other sectors businessowners ask for a high school certificate before providing a job but in the AES, we do not need to have an academic certificate to work in it. Moreover, it is not mandatory to have prior work experience to work in this sector. Freshers can join this sector and learn in the process of work. IDI, Dohori*

## Education

Young girls who have migrated from rural villages to Pokhara for further education are found working in this sector. To cover their college fees and living expenses they find this sector an idle place to work. Since the working hours are flexible and it is the night shift work, it best suits these young girls.

*Many of the girls working in this sector are 16, 17 years old and studying grade 11 and 12. They are from a village, and they don't have money to cover their fees. If they work from morning 8 am till evening, then they don't have time to study so they choose to work in this sector.*

### FGD, Mixed Group

In contrast, girls enter the sector after dropping out of school. Deprivation from education and learning skills has hindered them from getting other job opportunities. They also lack a professional network to get into the job market.

*We did not have higher education because of that I entered this sector for work, but new generations are also entering this sector despite academic degrees.* **FGD, Dance bar**

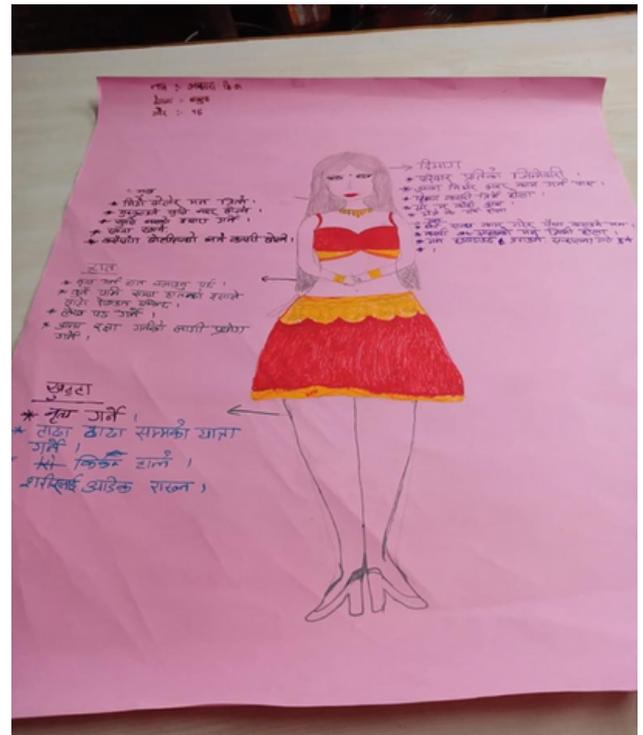
## Attraction towards the sector

Many of the girls in this sector are motivated to enter for career aspirations. They have a passion for singing and dancing and building careers in this field. So, not only to earn quick money, but girls also enter to establish themselves in this sector.

*All girls are not bad at working in dohori or dance bar. Some go there by their interest and for a bright future as a dancer or singer. These types of workers can work on a long-term basis. Those who want to get more money in a short period do not work on a long-term basis and there are many chances to do bad activities for more money.*

### IDI, Khaja Ghar

## Why the AES owners prefer underage girls at the workplace?



AES is an establishment which hires young and mostly underage workers to work as waiters, singers and dancers to entertain customers. This research found the youngest girl aged 13 years working in these establishments, initiated work younger than this age. The intensity of these girls is found more working in khaja ghar rather than in dance bars, dohori and clubs. This study found the three primary reasons for hiring underage girls: their attractiveness to clients, the lower wages they can offer to young girls and limited knowledge of child rights and protection among business owners.

From a commercial perspective, having young and attractive girls in the workplace is often believed to attract more guests to the venue, which will help the owners make a profit from this arrangement. Girls working in this sector enter voluntarily and the case is not the same as adult women. These young girls are often naive and inexperienced and are from rural villages and the owners take advantage of these young girls by sending them with the customers and taking money from them.

*The main concern of the owners to hire young girls is to attract more guests to his venue so he can run his business well. FGD, Dohori*

*Rita Didi (name changed) was 30 years old and was full-figured. None of the customers looked at her. Customers prefer young girls. Even a girl younger than me was hired.*

**IDI, Khaja Ghar**

Even the customers visit the venues only if there are beautiful young girls with whom they can take sexual advantage. The girl's duty in this venue is to sit and drink with the customers. The research participants shared that since the business primarily caters to male clients and operates late into the night, women are employed to attract these male customers. Girls who sell sex with customers are at risk of experiencing violence and negative health consequences, but they are unaware of it. Customer's preference for young girls and the girls wanting male clients who can invest in them creates a mutual benefit.

*The young workers perform risky activities as well such as getting them involved in sexual activities, overtime work, and seducing guests with their beauty. The workers are at risk of diseases that they are likely to suffer in the future if they do not care about it.*

**IDI, Khaja Ghar**

*Girls weren't taken to any guest house for sex work. There was an arrangement of the room. Since I was very young, I didn't have much idea. The owner was afraid I would tell the truth if something happened so the customer was not allowed to take me to any other places. Some customers were 16- 17, 20-21 years old and some were old ranging from 30 -35 years.*

**IDI, Khaja Ghar**

The business owners cultivate a mindset that if they hire a young girl then they can make them do the work on a lower salary. Since these girls are new to the job market and are inexperienced, they find difficulties in getting a job. So, the businessowners are taking advantage by paying them less. These young girls are also unaware of the labour laws and are not empowered to speak about their rights and are satisfied with the small amount. Furthermore, the study found that some owners personally visit the family in the village and lure them for the betterment of their future and recruit them.

*The owners themselves visit the family in the village and take the children to their venues for work, pay less to those children and send money to the parents in the village. Sometimes, payment is not made but food and lodging are provided to the children, both girls and boys. KII*

The owners want to make a profit by using young girls in this sector. Economically active employees work for certain hours with fixed salaries but for minors the owners make them work more hours and pay less. They become happy even with a small amount of money and it is beneficial for the business owners.

*Most of the guests in dohori, spa, dance bar, khaja ghar are male. The owner requests young girls to attract them so that they will visit the venues the next time. These girls are unaware of their exact salary and owners recruit them for less money. The owners need to pay more money if experienced and adult women are hired.*

**IDI, Khaja Ghar**

The study found critical gaps in addressing child labour within the development sector. As shared by the key informant, many owners of establishments like "khaja ghar" which are often run by female owners are vulnerable themselves and lack knowledge about child rights and protection leading them to hire underage girls out of sympathy without understanding legal and ethical standards. Even the development sector's initiatives regarding effectively engaging and educating these business owners about child labour laws and protective measures are not sufficient and lack coordination between the two parties. The development sector's tendency to view business owners negatively, instead of as potential partners, further exacerbates the issue. To address these gaps, there is a need for comprehensive education, better communication, and a collaborative approach that involves business owners in preventing and addressing child labour.

*Young girls come carrying the children and say they haven't eaten a meal for three days and need some job. So, the norm is that Nepali must support the people, and the owners give them the job of having sympathy with the girls. Meanwhile, these owners don't know child labour and get in trouble.*

**KII**

### ***Where are the risks and which is the riskiest venue?***

*Dohori since we must leave at night returning home after work is risky. The spa is also another risky place. Bad incidents are happening in both dohori and spa. Rather than dohori, it is a hotel where girls are at risk. Hotels here mean khaja ghar. They have the room and are doing the work of their own choice. FGD, Mixed Group*

A girl working in SPA and Massage Centre shared that the incidence of sexual exploitation can occur anywhere in either Spa or dance bar, or even in a hotel. Some owners have started a hotel business but inside the hotel, they are running a sex business. Because some AES venues provide sex services, the guests come to the venues and ask if they provide sex services or not, stating about the availability of such services in other SPA centres.

There are risks to some extent in all the venues to work in for the girls and women due to the sexual expectations of the customers. However, the evidence suggests that khaja ghar is the riskiest venue for girls and women to work. Most of the khaja ghar are unregistered and the customers ask about the availability of girls for sex: (“Yeha keti painxa ki paindaina vanera sodhxan”)-Is girl available here referring to sex work as cited by one of the research participants. The participant further added that there might be khaja ghars who are providing such services, so they are asking for such services.

*According to my experience, in a day around 2 to 3 of males come here (in khaja ghar) and ask about girls only. Some customers come for tea and ask about it.*

**FGD, Mixed Group**

*In Khaja Ghar, most of the guests are drivers and local people who come at night to drink alcohol. After drinking they want to touch workers and propose to them for sex. The girls are facing such types of risks in Khaja ghar.*

**IDI, Khaja Ghar**

*We have rescued two young girl children and still, there is a high probability of children being hired and facing abuse. Since this khaja ghar is not registered there is a high chance of girls facing abuse. Customers from different backgrounds come to the khaja ghar and drink tumba (local millet liquor), hookah and these girls must go close to the customers. KII*

In Pokhara there are two different types of khaja ghar in operation: one who is genuinely running the khaja ghar where the decent customers come for snacks whereas another one who operates sex work and plays the role of intermediary. The girls have contact with the guests and they come to the khaja ghar, there is a deal between customers and owners and the girls must be involved in sex work. As cited by one of the girls working in Khaja ghar, “Sahule malai yesto manxe chaiyo vanera vanxa guest sanga ani testo testo manxe contact garera bolaune ho k”. The owner forces girls to bring the guests and they have to invite the guests to the khaja ghar.

*In khaja ghar, I must do dishes, wash clothes, and even wash the undergarments of my owner. The owner was female, and her husband was dead. I must sit with the customers if they come to eat and drink. Even when I was sick, I was asked to sit with the customers. Even when I was in period I was forced to sit with the customers. I must give them company while they were having liquor. I was pressured by the owner to sell the beer and if I couldn't sell the beer, I was threatened that I would be fired from the job saying- “yo beer haru kataunchas ki kataunnas ha, natra yeha kaam garna nabas bhanthyo”- Meaning will you sell this beer or you are not allowed to work here.*

**Respondent:** *Din ma ta 20 30 jana aauthyo (20 to 30 guests come in a day)*

**Interviewer:** *Tyo ta khalalai ki sutna lai aauthyo?? (Did they come to eat snacks or to sleep (sex work)?)*

**Respondent:** *Ahh...Pahila ta khaja saja khancha ani khaja saja khaisake si uslai mann lageko hunch ani ta tespachi paisa saunilai bujhauncha ani tespachi liyera hidcha. (After having snacks, they have desire to have sex, so they pay money to the owner, and we have to go with the guests)*

*Sometimes I don't like sleeping with the customers and I used to threaten them. They used to scold me. Sometimes they used to ask me to do oral sex, and sometimes I denied it, I felt bad and used to get angry with the customers. IDI, Khaja Ghar*

Referring to the situation, most of them have been working in unregistered venues with no contract which means without fixed salaries, long working hours, no paid leave and no other social securities that hinder them from accessing legal support in case of injustice and violence.

Furthermore, they have been working in disguise form so they cannot reveal their identity in society openly leading to suffering from severe violence, but due to their status, they create obstacles to seeking support. Such a situation encourages the owner and clients to find this venue a fertile place to exploit the workers. In contrast, venues such as the dance bar, dohori, and Spa have business associations and are registered and operate within legal frameworks. These venues are often monitored and regulated by government authorities. Due to such kind of setting the business owners are alert about the potential consequences if they breach the rules and regulations which leads to less exploitation of the workers compared to the informal setting khaja ghar.

### **Khaja Ghar set up**

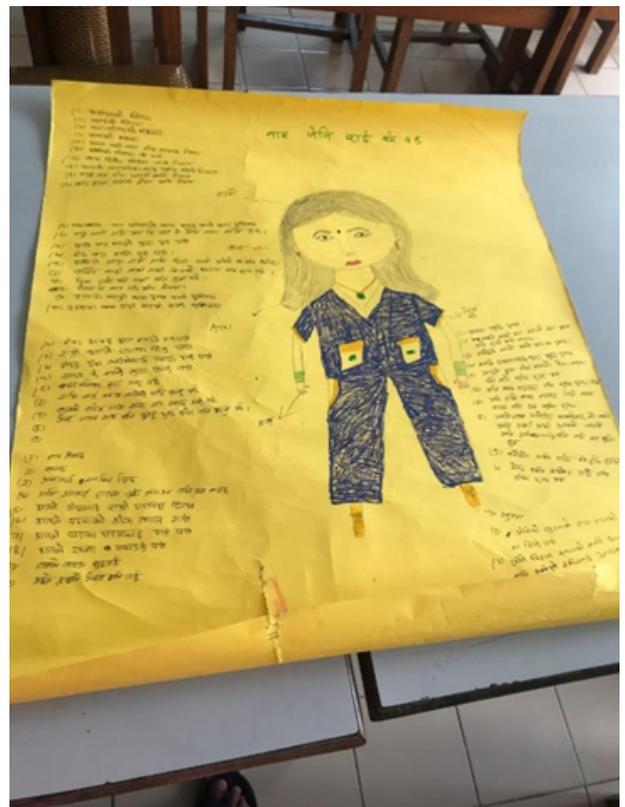
From outside the hotel/Khaja Ghar looks nice with no doubtful activities. But inside they keep girls, and the room is spacious with multiple rooms. They ring the girls and call them for this purpose and pretend to be their cousin sister. This kind of khaja ghar gives two kinds of services: either they send girls with the customers to other places, or they keep them in the same khaja ghar. In khaja ghar mostly the owners are female and conduct such business. Such business is happening in Jalpa Road. As shared by the respondent, one of khaja ghar has kept 10-12 girls and takes all the responsibility. They give them a two-timemeal service. But it is the customers who give them food to eat.

As shared by one of the participants who worked in the khaja ghar regarding the room set up: Girls and women have to give company to the customers and then at the request of the customers they are taken to the room for the sex. An alarm has been set up in the room designated for sex work. If the police, a new visitor, or anyone who hasn't been there for a while arrives and starts asking questions, the owner at the counter switches on the button and the alarm will start ringing which is set in the room, and the girls need to quickly move and hide in another room. She has to leave the room with the food and the customers.

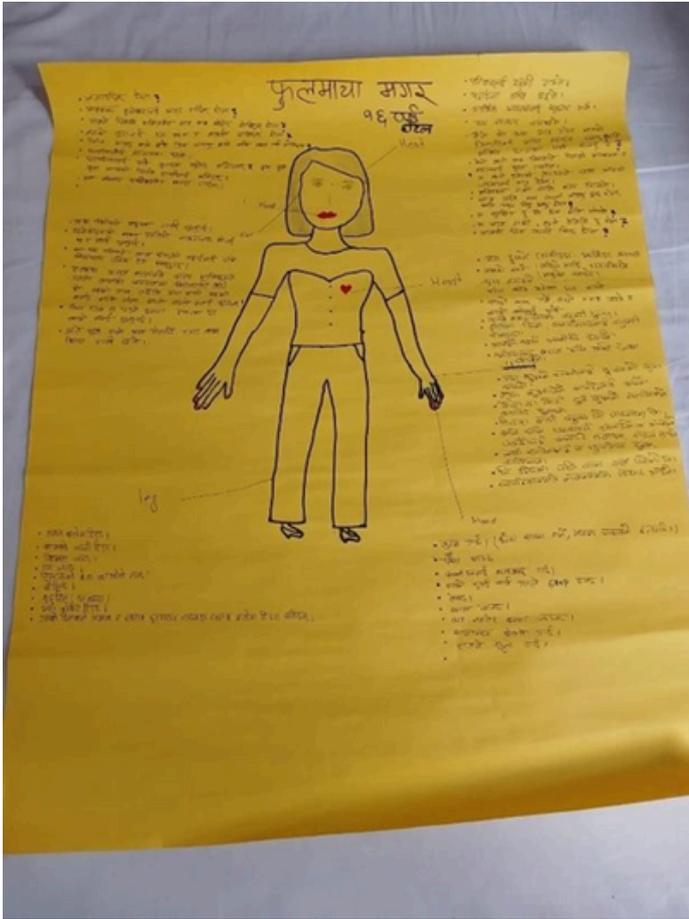
### **Box 1: The Reality of Young Women in Sex Work**

A 17-year-old khaja ghar worker from another establishment came to my Khaja ghar and she invited her boyfriend at my khaja ghar. When asked about her parents she said that her father had died, and her mother had eloped. So, she was doing this work (sex) to support her brother. The girl also had cigarettes and was sitting with her boyfriend. They took my khaja ghar as a meeting point and visited frequently. Once I dared to ask about her life. She shared that she worked in a khaja ghar where she is involved in sex work and the khaja ghar employs 10 -12 girls. The owners take 5000 to 10 thousand NPR from the customers, but the girls are paid only 1000 NPR and are also not paid on time. Her boyfriend also knew about her work but did not say anything. They two met on social media (Facebook) so they were not serious about their relationship. The boy also had a wife and children at home, and she was informed that the guy was using her.

*Source: Author's own*



**Jenny Rai, 19 years**



Fulmaya Magar, 16 years

### Khaja ghar owner as intermediaries

The research finding suggests that the customers come to the khaja ghar and ask if there is any female with whom they can talk and get entertained and ask if it is possible to call a girl (for sex). The age of such customers is 40 and above ask if there is some female in contact with the owners who can come and sit with them and have a beer with them. Likewise, even a female aged 40 years comes to the khaja ghar and asks if the customers at the khaja ghar ask for “aaimai” (adult women) to sit with them and eat and give their number to the owners. As shared by the Khaja ghar owner, tentatively she has kept around the phone number of 100 women who came into her khaja ghar and asked for this kind of facility. She further shared that she has not called any of these women for such a purpose and fears this work.

The research finding suggests that the customers come to the khaja ghar and ask if there is any female with whom they can talk and get entertained and ask if it is possible to call a girl (for sex). The age of such customers is 40 and above ask if there is some female in contact with the owners who can come and sit with them and have a beer with them. Likewise, even a female aged 40 years comes to the khaja ghar and asks if the customer sat the khaja ghar ask for “aaimai” (adult women) to sit with them and eat and give their number to the owners. As shared by the Khaja ghar owner, tentatively she has kept around the phone number of 100 women who came into her khaja ghar and asked for this kind of facility. She further shared that she has not called any of these women for such a purpose and fears this work.

*We have rescued girls from the flat-based sex work with the help of the District Police Office. Khaja ghar workers are the ones who work there. The khaja ghar is for name only. When you enter the khaja ghar you even don't see the gas stove. So, it is questionable what type of khaja ghar this is? In some khaja ghar there is only the board of the business but when you go inside for the khaja you don't see any khaja. Girls of 12 years are also found working in this sector. Somehow these venues relate to sex work. **KII***

As suggested by one of the key informants, since the history of this business is not so long, it is important to address issues of child labour and abuse within the sector. It has been noted that the party palace is another fertile sector which is attracting young girls for part-time work. There is a need for immediate intervention in this sector to prevent potential negative consequences.

## **An Overview of the changing nature of sex work and Young Girls and Women's involvement in sex work**

*Initially, sex workers were found in the road but now it is available at these venues. We can't declare that all venues (dance bar, dohori and khaja ghar) arrange the sex work but some venues arrange girls for the customers. KII*

Earlier, there was a popular image of the sex worker, an adult woman dressed in modern attire with bold makeup walking in the dark streets of the city. Children and adolescents were not included in the image of sex workers. But this is not so in the present day. There has been a shift in the discourse of sex work and trafficking. During a group discussion girls shared about the additional benefit of connecting with the customers through social media. This way modern technology has helped the oldest profession in the world more easier meaning fewer street sex-based workers are found. Also earlier, a pimp used to travel to rural areas to recruit young girls and women and then transport them to urban locations for involvement in sex work.

*Earlier the pimp used to go to the village and lure the innocent girls but these days the girls themselves come to the venue and are becoming the victim. And for this technology and social media are playing a major role in contacting customers. KII*

*Some girls share pictures with strangers in the hope of getting a job. Gradually, some girls start to be involved in commercial sex work due to the influence of Facebook friends. FGD, Khaja Ghar*

Venues like Dohori and dance bar don't provide space for any sex work, but some girls shared the fact that the khaja ghar and spa massage cater the sex work. Dohori and the dance bar are the meeting points for the workers and customers. As said by the girls, the earnings they made from these establishments are not enough. So sometimes they have to go with the customers. Young girls and women are employed as entertainers in AES where providing sexual services occurs supplementary to entertainment work.

*They hire girls around the age of 14 -17 years and through them, they are involved in other activities. We can't blame only customers. There is also the hand of owners. These girls have gone to work there but if their business doesn't run properly then these girls are involved in other activities (sex work). Especially Indian tourists come to look for young girls. We got this information from the taxi driver. These Indian tourists stay in cheap hotels and look for girls. It might be the demand of the customers. KII*

Sex work is noticeable to be rising in Pokhara and the most common places where sex workers are found include Khaja ghar, dance bars, dohoris and spa massage. Young girls, college-going girls and married women with children are involved in sex work for the sake of livelihood.

According to key informant, khaja Ghar is acting as a transit location, contacting a pool of young girls for sex work and then shifting to another place. In some khaja Ghar, they operate small tea shops and then at the back of the tea shop they conduct sex business. Though it is not legal to conduct sex business in Nepal, such practices show how sex industry mushrooming in Pokhara.

*Girls are sent to the hotels with guests to stay with them for one night for entertainment (sex work). The money is taken by the owners. Half is paid to the girl and half they take. FGD, Mixed Group*

*In many cases, the hotel owners themselves abuse these young girls and motivate them to engage in sex work and other cases the khaja ghar owners themselves are involved in such work. KII*

*Some women working in this sector have children and must do such (sex) work to bring up their children. Maximum women in dance bars are the mother of the child. FGD, Dance bar*

*Even college-going girls work as sex workers. They come from periphery districts and for the fees they do this work. KII*

*Once I was roaming in the city and found the young girls working at another khaja ghar who does the sex work. The khaja ghar was run by the son and the mother. The son used to bring the customers. KII*

*The research also found that flat-based sex work is also operating in Pokhara. However, the exact location of this work is difficult to figure out as this is a hidden business, but it has been shared by the research participants that it has been run by the owners who once conducted the cabin restaurant business at the Baglung Bus Park. After the cabin restaurant business was shut down, the owners started this flat-based sex work at private apartments. These apartments are based at the lakeside, Mahendra pool.*

*conduct sex work. KII*

## **Platforms to arrange clients for sex work**

The advent of the internet has significantly transformed the landscape of sex work. Many sex workers now operate online, using various platforms to connect with clients, negotiate services, and establish boundaries. This shift has provided some sex workers with a degree of autonomy and safety that may not have been possible in more traditional settings. Almost all the girls working in AES venues have smartphones with internet facilities (either Wi-Fi or Mobile data). Facebook and TikTok videos are the popular social media platforms that the girls working in these establishments use excessively. Many of the girls shared the importance of the internet in seeking opportunities to reach customers to invite them to their venues and eventually end up for sex work. They are found mostly using Facebook to get connected with the customers. Pressure is placed on the owner to ring the customers and invite them to the venues. The young girls have been led to believe that their employers have invested huge amounts of money in building their careers so they should also support them in running their businesses.

*After communicating over the phone call, either they meet in the daytime or are invited to the dohori. They spend 1 to 2 hours with the customers outside the workplace and then in the evening they come to work. FGD, Mixed Group*

During a group discussion girls shared the additional benefit of connecting with the customers through mobile phones. They shared that they could make a good amount of money if they agreed to go with the guests. With these technological advancements, they also have stories of getting in trouble. For example, they sometimes don't get paid as agreed and sometimes they are forced to take nude pictures, unprotected sex, have anal sex and sometimes burn by cigarettes and must drink alcohol.

*Due to the influence of social media, many girls fall into traps and get blackmailed. They share the nude pics and after they break up, they blackmail them, threatening that he will expose the pictures leading the girls to suicide.*

### **FGD, Mixed Group**

*Customers from abroad send messages to girls and ask for naked videos propose phone sex and tell the workers that they will pay the money after they get their salary, but they don't come in contact after getting the nude photos and videos. There are not any blackmail cases, but they are harassed online. KII*

Strangers send friend requests on social media they accept immediately and start to talk later the boys ask for pictures of private parts. Some send in excitement trusting the stranger, later the strangers use those pictures as weapons to torture them mentally and psychologically. Some girls share pictures with strangers in the hope of getting a job. Gradually, some girls start to be involved in commercial sex work due to the influence of Facebook friends

Girls also use the internet and mobile phones to get connected with their peers. The study also found that the girls who come to AES-based organization's office space to attend programme or any events organized by the organization have made such a platform to link peers with the clients, which is a critical issue. The programme and events are supposed to empower these girls, but they are found using this opportunity to connect their peers with potential clients exposing them to exploitation.

*Some girls accused their counterparts saying another girl has been involved with her boyfriend and some say that if one girl shows a disagreement on going with the man arranged by some other girl then the two don't speak with each other. Wherever they gather either at the programme meeting or at another setting they speak about this. KII*

### **Box 2: Sexual Abuse and Peer Dynamic**

A group of school-going girls stay at a friend's home when her father is at work for night duty and then in the morning, they leave for their work. These children are found to have contact with the male and were abused but these children who were just 14 years take it very easy. A group of 3 girl children and 6 to 7 boys stayed together in the same room and were found doing sexual activities when counselled after rescuing the children. It has been found that the children's biological mother had left her, and the stepmother didn't file a legal case. Once these children also made a kissing video and sent it to a social media Facebook group messenger and shared it with other friends. Mostly children from community schools are found making boyfriends at a very young age and then through friends they land in such activities and become the victims of abuse. They also have sexual activities in groups.

*Source: Author's own*

## **Perception of customers about the availability of girls for sex work in the venues**

According to the research participants, customers can significantly differ from one another and are divided into two categories, one category explores the venue with their curiosity and fantasy and these explorers belong to any age group and the next category is the purchasers who are regular clients and are familiar with the activities of the establishments and comes to build a sexual relationship with the female workers. The age of the customers coming to the establishment ranges from 25 to 50 years and above. Customers demand indirect sexual activity which includes kissing, touching and flirting and direct sexual activity includes intimate relationships in a private setting.

People come in the form of customers, and they watch the girls and build relationships and end in sex work. Purchasing sexual services from girls under 18 years old is illegal in Nepal and is a violation of child rights under Nepal's legislative framework. However, the study found that the girl had been involved in sex work at the age of 12 years and younger.

*Recently we rescued a street girl aged 12 years or younger. During counselling, it is found that the girl goes to 200 to 300 NPR for sex work. Some children are left by their parents in the street. **KII***

*A 14-year-old girl is abused multiple times. The girl was given emergency contraceptive pills to not let her conceive her. **KII***

The customer has a negative perception regarding the availability of girls for sex and are always commodified. During the discussion, it is shared by the girls that some girls and women working in this sector have been involved in sex work and because of this reason, the customers generalize all females placing them in the same box. Also, these venues have become meeting points for males and females where they come as customers and then have communication and go for a nightstand often making them more vulnerable. Surprisingly it is not only the male customer who comes to look for the girls, even the female guest comes to look for the male staff. As said by the respondents who are genuinely working in this sector, there might be a scary situation for the girls working in the AES if not monitored in time.

*There are some cases where female customers take away the male staff from the Dohori and Dance Bar. Once one lady had recently come back from a European country and she had come to Dohori to enjoy it. In the end, she took two boys with her. **FGD, Dance bar***

*The girls also sit, laugh and talk with the customers and they make a deal to go outside also. The role of the workers is to make the customers happy, and the customers also think that these girls are here to make them happy. If not regulated at the right time this will turn into a sex industry. Even the girls who have experience working in this sector can open such venues and more girls will come to work, and such venues will be expanded in many places. **FGD, Dance Bar***

The increase in such work has an effect of international businesses. For example, Thailand has become the major tourist destination country for Nepali where girls are easily available for sex. After seeing this culture, customers have developed a perception that girls are also available in these venues in Nepal. Making their perception about the availability of girls in khaja Ghar, dance bar, dohori, massage parlour, cabin restaurant and some owners providing such services customers come to seek this service. In addition, as shared by one of the businessowners, the reason behind this is the sensationalistic headlines being covered by the media houses regarding the availability of girls for sex work in these venues.

*It doesn't mean there won't be the guests who ask for girls for sex, and these are the guests who are in power and well off. They come here based on the news published in the newspaper. **KII***

The main intention of the customers is to select young and attractive girls rather than focusing on music and dance. They use explicit language and query if girls are available for sex work. In SPA and massage centres, the girls are lured with the extra money if the girls let them experience body-to-body contact and seek to initiate sexual activities. If these sectors are not regulated, then there is the risk of this sector evolving into a more dangerous and problematic scenario.

*I also did the hotel business where the customers would come and ask for the girls for physical relationships. Yes, I also had the same experience the guests would ask for the same thing. There were Indian clients at first, they asked for a snack menu and later they asked for girls as well. I replied to them we do not serve those girls then they went back without eating anything. **FGD, dance bar***

## **Problems faced by the AES Workers**

Women in the entertainment sector face a higher level of stigma and fear of rejection than those in other professions which leads them to distance themselves from family and exacerbate feelings of isolation and a sense of loneliness. In the workplace, they often face exploitative conditions, not creating healthy relationships with co-workers which hurt their mental health resulting in suicidal attempts in some cases. Most of our participants have concealed their workplace with their families. They have not shared the real work that they are doing but rather have twisted their workplace and duties. They have a fear that family and society will criticize them after knowing their reality.

*My family does not know about my work and sometimes I think about how I will handle the situation if one day they come to know about it. This is also one of the working sectors so people need to change their attitude, and the owner should create an acceptable working environment.*

### **FGD, Dohori**

In this sector, in some cases, romantic relationships between female employees and clients begin with initial happiness which doesn't last for long due to complex interpersonal and professional issues. The women being unable to leave the sector and the husband witnessing his wife interacting with the customers lead to disputes between the two resulting in divorces with short-lived marriage.

*Some workers may fall in love and marry later but for most of them, married life is not succeeded.* **FGD, Dance bar**

The community people judge girls negatively based on their workplace. Participants agree that since some girls are involved with guests for romance, it should not be generalized to all working women. The participants working in a dance bar shared that they should be presentable in front of the guests and must wear makeup but when ordinary people meet them on the way while going for the duty, they interpret them negatively as if they are commercial sex workers. Likewise, just because they work in the AES sector most of them must bear the nagging landlord and have skeptical eyes on them. They work the night shift and arrive late from work, and they are always suspicious of their character. Some of them do not find a rented room in the city due to their profession.

*Sometimes we feel that, if we leave that night's work and move to another profession in the daytime, it would be great to stay with children and family and community people also will not view us negatively.* **FGD, Dance bar**

*As shared by the participants representing Dohori and Dance bar sometimes, the guest requests the song, and if that song is not performed on the stage, then it is very difficult to bill customers and that leads to disputes. If the customer does not pay the bill and escapes from the venue, the manager makes the staff member who served the guests pay the bill later, the amount is deducted from her salary.*

*If the customers do not pay the bill, the owner replaces it in the name of that concerned worker, and we need to pay. Secondly, if any guest escapes without paying a bill, this also comes in our name. It is very difficult, some guests are clever and when I go to the toilet or engage in other work, they escape from there.* **FGD, Dohori & Dance bar**

Participants from our FGD shared their workplace challenges that they must arrive at the workplace on time if they are not on time the owner scolds them sometimes, and they deduct their salary as well. Moreover, they do not have flexibility regarding working hours and holidays. They should be available throughout the week. There is no weekend for them. The owner deducts their salary if they do not go to work because of their health condition. Furthermore, they never have paid leave. Similarly, in some venues, the owner does not provide a salary on time which leads to problems in arranging household expenses. Some workers manage their expenses by asking for money from their peers and some of them wait for their salaries postponing their shopping.

*We cannot rest even when we are sick. There is no unpaid leave system at our workplace. We must work throughout the week. We can take a leave, but we are not paid for that.* **FGD, Dohori**

As shared by the participant, people might think the workers in the AES are earning easy money. But in fact, it is hard to earn money. They shared the challenges they go through, and they work throughout the night risking their health. And some women having children shared it is painful to leave young children at home and go to work at night. The guests mix up beer in their juice and have to consume it forcefully in the hope of getting a commission from the owner.

Additionally, they go through physical harassment as well in some cases the guests pinch their thighs while dancing. A code of conduct has been developed; however, the clients cross the limit and harass the staff. Some staff members do not share that they are being abused because of fear of losing jobs and remain quiet about the injustice that they face with the clients.

*The girls face emotional and psychological challenges in this sector due to night shift work. Girls often feel sleep-deprived and pained by leaving their children unattended. They are also hurt by society's negative perceptions and prejudices.* **FGD-Mixed Group**

*Since our work ends at 9 PM, travelling back home can be problematic. We often encounter uncomfortable situations where people make inappropriate offers to give us a ride. Additionally, there is no available pick-up and drop-off service, which adds to the difficulties we face.* **IDI, Culture**

Similarly, another participant from the Khaja Ghar shared her experience working in this venue. She has duties at her workplace where she must take orders and serve the guests at the table. Sometimes the guests are drunk, mean time the waitress needs to ask them twice for the order sometimes she should go near them to confirm the order. Other guests consider her an easy-going lady and they might also take advantage of her.

*The most difficult part of working at this place was dealing with my anxieties about being judged by the people I served. The close interaction, especially when I had to serve food and engage with customers up close, was particularly stressful for me. I often worried about how customers would perceive me and how they might judge me about my status and condition.* **IDI, Khaja Ghar**

*People judge us based on our work and workplace but if we are on the right track their judgment does not matter. Some customers are mannerless and attempt to harass us. I always remain distant when some drunk customers try to communicate with me.* **IDI, Dohori**

When asked how they protect themselves when they face abuse, in response, they replied they made excuses saying that they must take the next order from the clients, or they need to go toilet. When the customers ask for the sex offer then they denied saying that they are married.

*When they touch us on our body and if we don't say anything to them then they take their hands to other parts of the body. They touch the breasts and back of the girl and we must make excuses saying I have to take orders, or I must go to the toilet.* **FGD, Khaja Ghar**

*She refused his proposal and again the guest was offered a lift to her home. Again, she declined the offer and stated that her husband was there to pick her up then only he stopped talking with her.* **FGD, dance bar**

### **Box 3: Challenges and Harassment Faced by Spa Workers**

A girl named Seema working in a Spa shared her experience dealing with customers. Generally, Nepali and Indian clients visit the massage parlour. Some guests asked about the available services in the centre, and one of the customers asked her what other facilities were available besides massage therapy. Indirectly, he asked whether the centre provides sex services or not. She found that he asked all the female employees of the centre about the same service. She was familiar with such kinds of customers because some other days other customers also ask the same questions to her. However, the problem is some guests attempt to harass the massage worker by touching their body without permission. She found differences between Nepali and Indian customers. The Indian customers ask about the services in the reception section if they do not find the service that they are seeking they go away after the inquiry. However, Nepali customers are so cunning they ask about sex and other services while providing them massage services.

She further explained it is very hard to convince customers that Spa centres are not meant to provide sexual activities. Interestingly, when the guests do not receive the desired services, they threaten them that they will call police officers to report about their business. Experiencing these kinds of customers, she feels desperate about her work and most of the time she feels like leaving her work. But she thinks about her family background, and economic condition and continues to work despite some unwelcoming guests.

**Source: Author's own**

## **Challenges faced by AES Business Owners**

Based on the interview with one of the representative business owners the media has portrayed this sector negatively. Media personalities are focused on drawing the attention of their audience so they can have more likes, comments, shares, and subscribers in their videos on YouTube, and that enables them to make a profit. All the AES sectors in Pokhara are not involved in illicit activities but some venues are conducting such activities in their business to make more money. Those entrepreneurs who have been conducting business ethically are facing challenges to sustain their enterprises. The reason behind this situation is that some newly established venues are involved in commercial sexual activities. The customers who are seeking such kinds of services are approaching those venues and they are also influencing their peers as well.

*Aside from spa owners, landlords, and lakeside residents, others believe that illegal activities are taking place in spa and massage centres. In my opinion, the reason people believe these activities are occurring is due to media hype surrounding the sector. **KII***

Based on the interview with our key informant, the development partners and business owners have communication gaps. The business owners consider them as development agents who introduce programmes in the name of addressing social issues and do not have sustainability in their initiatives. On the other hand, the development partners consider the business owner that they conduct business without proper follow-up of the rules and regulations. Moreover, they are also alleged that they only focus on profit neglecting the welfare of the girls and women working in this sector. Moving forward in collaboration considering each other partner would make them strong. In some cases, the organizations hardly provide an orientation to the entrepreneurs about the rules and regulations, child labour, and protection. Also, they lack sensitization and awareness.

Initiations are taken by the NGOs to bring the owners to the meeting, but in some cases, they do not attend the meeting. The business owners stated that they don't make the workers work for a long time and want to provide the workers with a contract paper, ready to pay the salary minimum wage rate set by the Nepal government but the workers themselves don't want it because they are earning more from the tips and commission than the salary.

Some venues are facing problems with monitoring when the organizations ask for the employee details with contract paper, they are not able to provide it as the workers themselves do not want to work under contract.

### ***Box 4: Spa Business Owner's Struggle with Industry Stigma and Decision to Seek Foreign Employment***

Ramala, Spa business owner shares the crisis that she is going through with her business. Earlier the business was going well, and she was thinking of continuing it for a long time but these days this sector is losing its reputation in society. People have negative perceptions towards this industry so she will not continue this business for a long time. In the past, this business had a good reputation but these days it is on a decreasing trend because of the ongoing commercial sex work inside the Spa centres. She is not generalizing about all the centres; however, some centres are providing such kinds of services to their clients and those individuals spread the rumour outside the world that the service providers offer them extra services including massage therapy. Following the rumours other clients also approach the venues to fulfil their desires. On the contrary, those venues that provide exclusive massage services are experiencing a decline in customers as the customers that directly ask for the extra services when the manager replies there are no such kind of services available after that they visit another Spa. Furthermore, the owners are facing backlash in society from neighbours, relatives, community people, and even immediate family members who also do not consider this business as a good sector to invest time and money. Some of them are tired of explaining the scenario inside their business. She does not see the future of this business and she has decided to go to South Korea for foreign employment with her husband.

***Source: Author's own***

According to a key informant, there is a monopoly of Gorkha Brewery in Pokhara where the industry wants all the Dohori centres to sell their products (beers), and all do not agree with the idea some are selling all kinds of brands that are available in the market. Generally, the industry nominates one of the representative owners from the AES to promote their market and assign the task of selling their product in their venues the individual receives some commission as well, but all the venues do not choose the same product. It leads to hostility among the establishment owners owing that all the owners do not participate in the association meeting. This is one of the factors that hinders the Dohori business owners from uniting together to implement the same kind of rules and regulations in their venues.

*All business owners should have a common commitment to run the business in a disciplined way. We all should contribute from our side to revive the traditional Dohori hubs. But I cannot guarantee that this effort will work to meet our objective. It is not impossible to bring change, but it demands continuous effort and time. **KII***

### **New dynamics of programmes**

*This work is for only young girls and after they reach a certain age of 35 or above, they have a feeling that they are not valued in this sector. So, they visit different organizations to get training. Many of them are depressed as they didn't learn all these skills on time. **KII***

Girls and women working in AES accepted the fact that they are not working in this sector forever for various reasons. Age and appealing appearance are the most important dimensions for longevity in this sector. When asked what kind of support programmes would help girls transition out of this sector the participants replied that the training in the textile sector such as tailoring classes, cutting, and stitching would help some interested beneficiaries. Similarly, some women want to start enterprises such as beauty parlours, and grocery shops they want business funds from supporting organizations. A few participants want to learn driving skills and want to drive microbus with pride as female drivers in public. Having worked in the AES business they fear whether society will respect them if they transfer to another profession.

*Tailoring classes, business funds, and driving skills programmes could help employees transition to other careers. However, past efforts have lacked proper guidance and facilitation. Employees hope for better quality training and societal acceptance in alternative careers.*

**FGD-Mixed Group**

Some school-going girls have been working in this sector to manage their education expenses. Some of the participants work the night shift and study in the day shift which has not only deteriorated their physical health but also hampered their studies. They do not have proper rest and due to this reason, they are unable to perform best in their studies.

They think that if the organizations provide education support with accommodation facilities free of cost to young AES girls, they may leave this sector because some are working here for study purposes. They can do part-time work in cosmetic shops, clothing stores, and at the office handling kitchen department.

*If organizations provide education services with accommodation facilities free of cost to young AES girls, they may leave AES because some are working here for study purposes. They can work in fancy shops and other shops and office handling kitchen departments such as preparing meals, snacks and tea for staff members.*

**FGD, Dohori & Dance bar**

Some participants stated that the organizations should introduce a holistic programme including other family members so that they too can contribute to the household economy. In some cases, a woman is taking the sole responsibility of the household economy as other family members remain unemployed. Programmes enhancing families' economic condition should be developed so that the economic responsibilities could be divided, and she would feel less economic burdens. Furthermore, she would have a choice whether to work for a long time within the same venue or shift to another venue. Some incidents have been seen where workers are obliged to work despite difficulties in the workplace such as domination of the employer, disputes with co-workers, and harassment by the clients. Similarly, they should provide suitable training to the beneficiaries. In the same way, once they provide skill training, they should help them with a budget to initiate a micro-enterprise. Subsidy loans and seed money would be helpful for us to start our small-scale business.

*Her husband is unemployed and stays idle, but his wife has employment in Dohori and besides that, she has training opportunities as well. In this situation, the institutions should provide employment opportunities to her husband.*

**FGD, Dohori**

The participant shared dissatisfaction towards the training system by some organizations being provided based on the age group. In her view, our age does not stop anyone from learning. The training should be provided to meet the interests of the workers and not simply imposed by the organizations. Likewise, rather than focusing on providing training to many beneficiaries, organizations should prioritize quality and provide comprehensive training to ensure that beneficiaries are well-prepared for job opportunities. The good part of the training by the organizations is that some of the participants who have received training from the organization are now capable of providing skill training for the newcomers and have established their small enterprises such as tailoring and beauty parlours. They have suggested that the organization should utilize their skill to deliver skill training to the freshers. This arrangement will help them with finances to manage the household expenses.

*We have taken beautician training, and we can provide training to new learners. The organization can hire us for it, but they have not done it yet.* **FGD, Dohori**

Participants are aware of the current job market and the skills they require to receive work opportunities. As shared by them nail art, parlour courses, and barista training are trending in the market as well as these skills have high demand in the job market so these skills could be useful if the organizations introduce them to the beneficiaries. The government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to introduce and implement the programme.

### **How can the sector be made dignified?**

Generally, people tend to perceive adult entertainment sectors as places where individuals engage in illicit activities. As shared by the participants in our focus group discussion, community people have a negative mindset towards this sector and must change their perception of it. We cannot deny that some girls and women working in AES establishments have built romantic relationships after their duties, but all the girls have not been involved in illicit activities.

Because of such circumstances, other guests generalize about the workers in this sector putting them into the same box.

*For children, this night-based business is not dignified. Children can do a part-time job but just in the cleaning and not being directly engaged with the customers. Part-time jobs are fine and when it's time for the customers to come they leave the venue. This can also be done under the concept of safe work and risky work. This will take time to understand the stakeholders, and this is one of the advocacy agendas.* **KII**

The major two documents to regulate and protect the rights of women and girls in the entertainment sector are “Guideline for the Control of Sexual Exploitation among Female Workers in Dance and Bar Restaurants and the Like Business, (2008)” and the Code of Conduct for the Night-time Entertainment Industry (2009)” (NHRC 2010).<sup>1</sup> The guideline aims to free the AES workers from any violence and exploitation to protect female workers and promote safe working conditions. Nepal's government has made it mandatory to follow the guidelines in the AES venues to make it a dignified workplace. However, when monitoring, many of the AES establishments are found not following the guidelines as shared by the key informant. Although the guideline demands employers prepare three copies of personal records of each worker mentioning their full name and place of origin, one copy should be kept by the employer and the remaining two copies should be submitted to the District Police Office and the Chief District Officer, but in practice this is not done. The majority of girls and women in the study have not submitted their personal information to the owners. The recruitment in these venues is done through informal intermediaries so the legal documents of the employer are hardly asked for by the employer, hindering efforts to ensure accountability, protection and transparency regarding employee information.

<sup>1</sup> The Guideline requires all businesses belonging to the entertainment sector to register in the District Administration Offices (DAO). Furthermore, the Guideline has prohibited sexual exploitation of workers and other forms of harassment. The Code of Conduct emphasizes the provision of identity card and a work contract, as well as declaring minimum wages for workers in the entertainment sector. To implement these regulations, a Monitoring and Action Committee (MAC) has been established by including representatives from various government offices such as: the Chief District Officer (CDO), police officers, officers from the Nepal Women's Commission, and the Women Welfare officer.

Only if this procedure was strictly followed would it not only protect the rights of employees but also provide accurate data on the person's involvement in this sector, thereby aiding in better policy formulation and enforcement.

The dance bars, dohori and SPA & Massage centres already have an association and have developed a code of conduct but in many establishments, they are not found being followed as said by the girls and women leading to unsafe working conditions, harassment and exploitation. Similarly, the need for the formulation of a workers' union is felt by women working in this sector to make this place organized and dignified so that the workers are informed about their rights and duties, which unites them together and enables them to bargain regarding their duties and responsibilities collectively.

According to key informants, the implementation part of the guidelines has been poor, particularly in monitoring and enforcement. There is a capacity gap at the local level. Due to insufficient resources, and a lack of expertise and personnel, it has become problematic to effectively enforce the regulations as shared by the key informant. The government's role in providing support to the victims is found to be minimal due to insufficient resources. As shared by the key informant, the budget allocation to the Social Development Division is less compared to the Physical Infrastructure Division. To address the issues of this sector, huge funding is needed to cover the expenses which include rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration to legal and medical services. However, NGOs in Pokhara (Shakti Samuha, OVN and Kopila Nepal) are playing a significant role from rescue to emergency shelter and family re-integration. The study also found the knowledge gap between employers and employees who are not fully aware of the specific provisions of the law and specifically employers are found to lack knowledge about child rights and child protection. There have been limited efforts to raise awareness among workers in the entertainment sector about their rights and how to report harassment.

Likewise, the District Monitoring and Action Committee has been formed which includes representatives from various government offices such as the Chief District Officer (CDO), police officers, officers from the Nepal Women's Commission, and the Women Welfare officer to oversee implementation efforts under the leadership of the Chief District Officer, but the committee remains inactive and not functioning well due to structural weaknesses within the system.

The insufficient coordination among the various government offices and members lacking skills in monitoring hinders the effectiveness of the committee. The key informant also shared the fact that the issue of the sector is not prioritized. While the directives call for complaint mechanisms, many of them do not have ideas about where to report the cases of harassment and law enforcement agencies are also found biased against the workers. Being illiterate and belonging to poor family backgrounds girls and women are reluctant to report harassment due to fear of losing their jobs and due to lack of safe spaces where women can report issues without fear of exposure.

In terms of the laws, a distinct law has not been introduced to this sector, however, labour law and child rights law are supporting this sector. The participant emphasizes mandatory legal management to avoid the exploitation of the AES workers. According to Nepal labour law, children below 18 years are not allowed to enter the entertainment sector. But people below that legal age are working in this sector. The key informant focused on contract paper, which should be mandatory, and the owners should provide contract paper to the employees. Similarly, they should provide a minimum wage rate set by the Nepal Government. The workplace should provide identity cards, uniforms, and paid leave. Furthermore, employers should keep the personal records of the employees with their legal documents such as citizenship and passport-size photos.

*The owners should prepare the contract paper, pay the basic salary, uniform, and identity card and while joining the work citizenship should be checked. Likewise, the leave facility should be provided for the workers. If a female worker is pregnant, she must leave the job. All these should be taken into consideration by the business owner and the government should regulate this. Then definitely this sector will be dignified. **KII***

## Discussion and Conclusion

The number of AES is growing, and the range of activities being offered is expanding relatively than it was two decades ago in Pokhara. The study found the pathways and choices made by the girls and women in this sector vary and are complex. Working in the AES is often not the first choice of these girls but due to the many circumstances they feel compelled to enter the sector. The girls enter the sector voluntarily because of poverty and no support structure from the family, which can be broadly categorized into economic necessity, familial pressures, socioeconomic challenges and inducements. The research found connecting various issues related to the participants' early lives and family situations, and these factors influenced their path ways into the AES and then in sex work. The financial contributions of children were significant for family survival whereas a (Ghimire et al, 2020) study found girls' involvement in this sector is to support their family and children. However, multiple factors drive them into the sector, highlighting the causalities are interrelated rather than stand-alone forming a systemic relationship (Bhattarai, K. et al., 2024). Family breakdowns, a lack of family support structure and a lack of good connections between couples lead women to sex work (J. Yoosefi Lebni et al., 2021). Among the AES venues, Khaja Ghar and Spa centres appeared to be the most vulnerable venues for girls since the young girls were hired to provide sexual services to the customers. The owners are found playing the role of intermediaries in arranging sexual services. The study found that minor girls and women visit the khaja ghar to find customers for sex work and adult women play the role of broker for 'low-income' customers, making arrangements between the clients and other individuals involved in the provision of sexual services (Bhujel et al. 2023).

Our study also found women providing their contact numbers to the owners asking if any customers seek women for sexual service. Likewise, in Spa and massage centres, the guests lure the girls with money if they allow for sexual services and some Spa and massage centres provide this service which compliments the (Bhattarai, k. et al, 2023) that the business relies on strategies that involve fostering a sexually charged environment and providing sexual services rather than just massage services. Except for a few dance bars, dohori and spa and massage centres, the system of asking for legal documents was not in practice from where their legal age is identified before hiring the staff.

The research found girls opting to work in this sector because of flexible hours, no restriction on certain educational qualifications, no prior job experience, and a network within the sector. Furthermore, the employees are retained in this sector due to tips and commissions, which are higher than their salary. The appealing appearance of girls and women was important to attract customers and increase sales. Therefore, young girls are being hired in establishments to make the customers happy and meanwhile, both the girls and customers build companionship leading to intimate relationships where the chances of girls being sexually exploited are high. From a feminist standpoint, Nepali society is a patriarchal social structure, the study shows how gender norms and attitudes of men dominate women and are likely to face violence and abuse (Heise, 1998). Dohori, Spa and Massage centres, and Dance bars have become the epitome of the sex industry for some owners, service providers, and service seekers where some owners are promoting sex work to grow their business. Some girls are being involved in commercial sex work to manage their household expenses and some service seekers are utilizing the opportunities in the name of recreational activities by offering money. This kind of penetration of social evil in this sector has affected badly the reputation of this sector. As a result, this sector is on the verge of losing its identity. (Niroula, 2017) also found that women working in AES when there are no other income- generating sources, are bound to engage in sex work for their livelihood. Women in this sector are mostly from rural areas and from poor family backgrounds where they are not treated equally as males, if they are treated equally in terms of social, economic and cultural atmosphere then there will be very few numbers of women obliged to sell their bodies. (CLARISSA, 2024) highlighted shortcomings in the training provided by non-profit organizations and the insufficient income from jobs related to the training. Since most of the girls working in this sector have to fulfil the family responsibilities to support their families, it is felt that family-level intervention programmes are essential to stop them from re-entering this sector. There is also a group of business owners who are committed to improving the sector. They are found with positive attitudes towards the workers and their welfare.

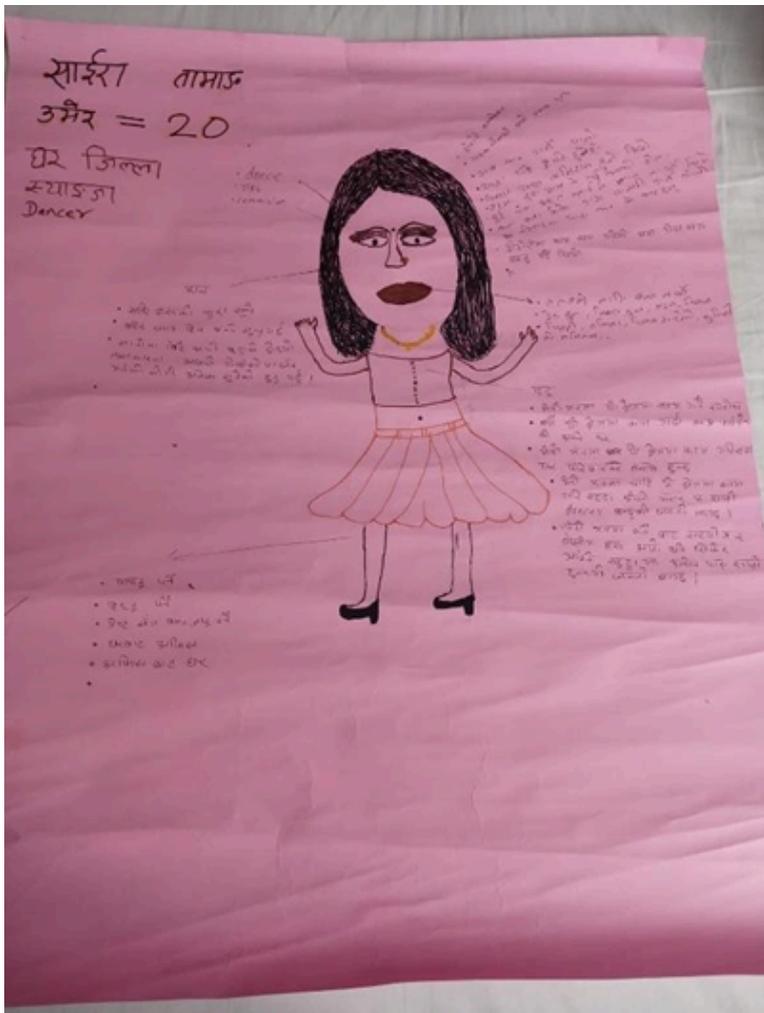
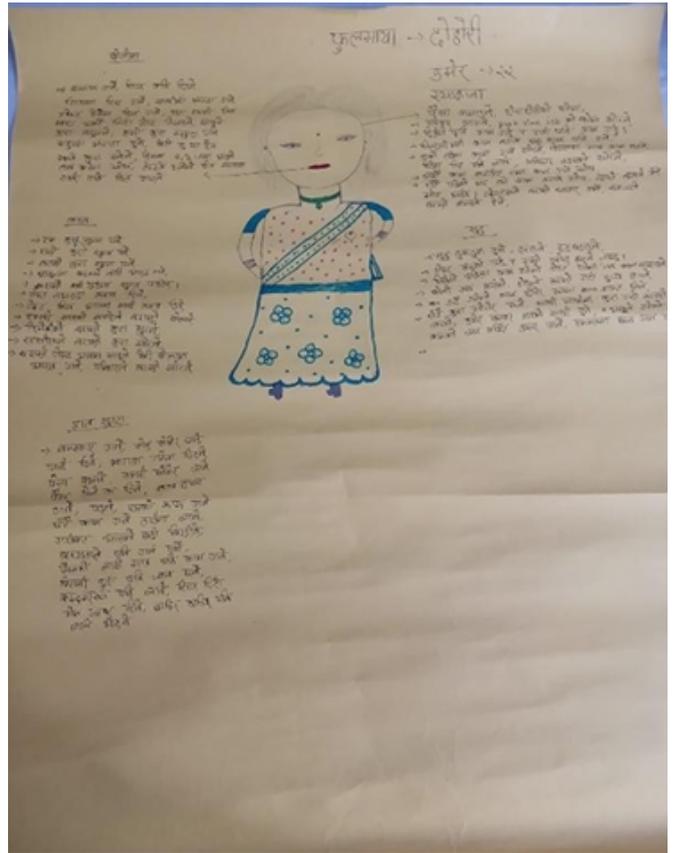
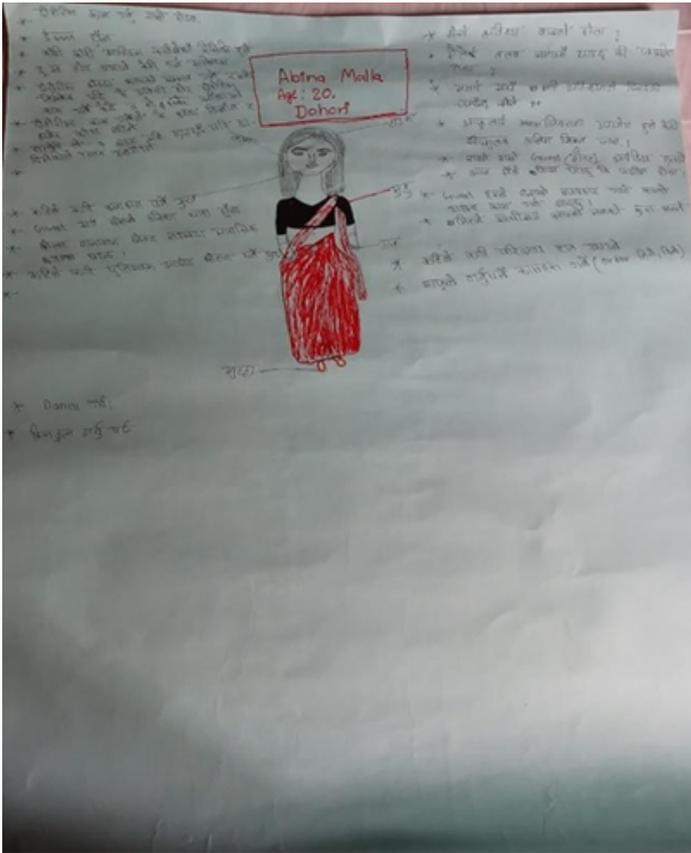
## Recommendations

- It is essential to implement enhanced regulatory supervision with compulsory business licensing, employee registration, and regular monitoring to ensure compliance with labour laws to address the vulnerabilities in establishments and make them a safe workplace.
- There is the issue of establishments making no checks when recruiting girls, it is essential to mandate comprehensive recruitment screening processes. This includes verifying the age and identity of all potential employees through official documentation, such as birth certificates or citizenship certificates, to ensure no minors are employed. Establishments should also be required to maintain detailed records of employee information and undergo periodic checks by local authorities and business associations to ensure compliance.
- Regular and open dialogue platforms between development organizations and establishment owners are essential, allowing both parties to share concerns, expectations and potential solutions. Development organizations should take the owners as important partners/stakeholders rather than being judgmental of them to improve the working conditions and protect vulnerable girls and women working in this sector. For this, training and orientation sessions for the establishment owners and staff, focusing on ethical recruitment practices, child rights, child protection laws, labour laws, and the legal consequences of exploitation before the start of the project are important to settle any confusion and disputes.
- It is important to create safe spaces and support networks where the girls and women working in AES can connect and share experiences to mitigate the impact of social isolation. AES-based organizations can facilitate peer support groups, counselling services, and social activities that foster a sense of belonging. Public awareness campaigns on a special day or occasion are helpful to reduce stigma and discrimination and encourage broader societal acceptance and inclusion of AES workers.
- Regular monitoring and rewards should be implemented by conducting regular audits through independent organizations or local authorities to ensure better adherence to the Code of Conduct developed by the Business Associations. Owners who follow the code of conduct could be rewarded with public recognition.
- Municipality can contribute by conducting regular inspections, enforcing labour laws, and assuring age restrictions and safety standards in existing government regulations. The Municipality should also collaborate with NGOs, community organizations, and law enforcement to detect violations, support ethical practices, and provide training to business owners and workers. Additionally, by maintaining accurate records, collecting data, running awareness campaigns, and establishing grievance mechanisms, the Municipality can create a transparent and accountable system that protects vulnerable workers and promotes compliance with existing regulations.
- Similarly, NGOs act as advocates in the enforcement of policies and regulations to protect vulnerable workers. It can act as an independent watchdog, documenting cases of exploitation or illegal practices and bringing them to the attention of authorities and can provide direct support services such as legal aid, psychological counselling, and safe spaces for victims. By collaborating with local authorities, the community, and other stakeholders, NGOs ensure that government regulations are implemented effectively and that those at risk are protected.
- To revitalize and strengthen the District Monitoring and Action Committee, properly staffed, well-equipped, and motivated should be ensured by defining its roles and responsibilities, particularly in monitoring compliance with government regulations related to AES. Regular meetings should be scheduled to discuss issues, share updates, and develop action plans. The committee should include a diverse set of stakeholders, including government officials, NGOs, community leaders, and representatives from the private sector, to ensure a multi-sectoral approach and conduct capacity-building workshops/training. Additionally, a system of accountability and reporting should be strengthened, with regular assessments of the committee's performance and impact.

## Annex 1: Demographic Table

Variables		Frequency	Per cent
Age (Year)	13-18	22	27.85
	19-24	30	37.97
	25-30	18	22.78
	31-35	8	10.13
	36-40	1	1.27
Education	Lower Primary	2	2.53
	Upper Primary	23	29.11
	Lower Secondary	20	25.32
	Upper Secondary	34	43.04
Ethnicity	Brahmin	8	10.13
	Chhetri	9	11.39
	Janajati	25	31.64
	Dalit	37	46.84
Place of origin (Province)	Koshi	5	6.33
	Bagmati	11	13.92
	Gandaki	62	78.48
	Lumbini	1	1.27
Marital status	Divorcee	3	3.8
	Married	29	36.71
	Unmarried	47	59.49
Workplace	Khaja Ghar	19	24.05
	Spa and Massage centre	9	11.39
	Dohori	32	40.51
	Dance Bar	20	25.32
	Culture	3	3.8

## Annex 2: Pictures



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