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# Migration Planning Among Female Prospective Labour Migrants from Nepal: A Comparison of First-Time and Repeat-Migrants

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## ABSTRACT

As international female labour migration has increased, so too have efforts to prevent the exploitation of labour migrants. However, evidence to underpin prevention efforts remains limited, with little known about labour migrants' migration planning processes. Using data from a survey of female prospective labour migrants from Nepal, this article compares socio-demographics and migration-planning processes between first-time and repeat-migrants. We identified several factors which might increase repeat-migrants' vulnerability to exploitation during the migration process, or obstruct their engagement in pre-migration interventions: more rapid migration planning than first-time migrants; lower involvement in community groups; and a perception that they already have the knowledge they need. Only one-third of repeat-migrants planned to go to the same destination and 42 per cent to work in the same sector as previously. With repeat-migration a common livelihoods strategy, it is crucial that interventions are guided by evidence on the needs of both first-time- and repeat-migrants.

## BACKGROUND

For millions of people in Asia, and indeed globally, labour migration is a key livelihood strategy. In contrast to earlier decades, this migration is often temporary, and many people migrate multiple times during their working lives (International Labour Organization, 2010). A flexible means of addressing labour surpluses and shortages across countries, temporary labour migration also allows migrants to take advantage of employment opportunities abroad, whilst maintaining traditions, families and citizenship in their countries of origin (GFMD, 2007; Vertovec, 2007; Wickramasekara & Abella, 2003).

Recent decades, however, have seen growing recognition among the international community of the nature and scale of exploitation experienced by some migrant workers. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 16 million migrants worldwide were working in situations of forced labour in 2016 – victims of human trafficking or otherwise coerced to work through, for example, violence, intimidation, confiscation of identity papers or debt accumulation (International Labour Organization, 2017). Alongside mounting evidence on the extent and consequences of such exploitation – including long-lasting physical and mental health problems (Kiss et al., 2015;

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Ottisova et al., 2016; Tsutsumi et al., 2008), and in some cases even death – efforts to strengthen responses to human trafficking and forced labour have intensified (Foot et al. 2015).

As labour migration has increased overall, so too has female labour migration. Women now account for almost half of emigrants from the Asia-Pacific region (United Nations, 2013). Working predominantly in the domestic, hospitality, health, care, garment and entertainment sectors, they face specific types of risks, and suffer a disproportionate burden of exploitation (UN Women, 2013). The ILO estimates women and girls to make up 58 per cent of the victims of forced labour worldwide, and highlights their additional vulnerability to particular forms of exploitation such as sexual exploitation (International Labour Organization, 2017). Policies and programmes to prevent trafficking and forced labour among women and girls therefore deserve special attention.

Some efforts to prevent trafficking aim to discourage women from migrating altogether by raising awareness of the risks involved (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). Several countries, such as Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines have even imposed legislation to ban younger women from migrating, or to proscribe certain destinations or work sectors for female migrants (International Labour Organization, 2015; Sijapati, 2015; UN Women, 2013). However, there is now a growing realization that “push factors” such as economic necessity, natural disasters, political or family violence, and a desire to see the world, often outweigh migration-related fears or restrictions. Many community programmes have thus shifted their emphasis towards empowering women to migrate “safely” (Zimmerman et al., 2015).

To date, there remains little evidence about which structural constraints, individual and group factors put women at risk of adverse migration outcomes and what actions individuals and groups can take to protect themselves in diverse migration contexts (Zimmerman et al., 2015). At a similarly basic level, we also lack solid understanding of how prospective migrants plan their migrations – their migration-related knowledge, who they seek information from, and who helps them plan their journey and arrange employment. Where repeat migration is common, this is compounded by limited information about how migration planning may differ between repeat- and first-time migrants. At present, programmes acknowledge the importance of returnee migrants as a way to reach and share experiences with prospective migrants (Siddiqui et al., 2008) – through, for example, the establishment of migrant networks or returnee-led activities – but little consideration is given to the information needs and migration planning processes of repeat-migrants themselves. Although there is an implicit assumption that repeat migrants “know more”, have more extensive networks and are better prepared for their impending migration, there remains a dearth of quantitative research to support this view or inform how returnees’ knowledge and experiences can be positively integrated into safe migration programmes.

Indeed, evidence suggests that repeat-migrants are at significant risk of exploitation. Recent work among Nepali male returnees found that 65 per cent of those who had migrated more than once had experienced forced labour during their most recent migration (Mak, 2017). Risks of re-trafficking among previously trafficked persons have also been recognized (Jobe, 2010; Kelly, 2002; Sen & Nair, 2004), with a range of factors implicated in their increased vulnerability. These include lack of access to employment in communities of origin, prior migration-related debts, subsequent rejection by family/community, and continuing control by their past traffickers (Jobe, 2010).

We use data from a cross-sectional survey of female prospective labour migrants, conducted in three districts in Nepal, to compare prospective first-time and prospective repeat-migrants. We examine how these two groups differ with respect to socio-demographic and household characteristics, as well as migration-related knowledge, information-seeking, sources of influence, and planning. The survey forms part of the South Asia Work in Freedom Transnational Evaluation, a programme of research to inform and assess the community intervention component of the ILO’s “Work in Freedom” (WiF) intervention to minimise women’s vulnerability to labour trafficking in South Asia and the Middle East.

## METHODS

### Study setting

In Nepal, labour migration is highly prevalent. Approximately half a million permits to work abroad were issued by the government in 2014/15 (Government of Nepal/GoN, 2016), and remittances now comprise over 30 per cent of Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank, 2016). A considerable proportion of the migration is repeat-migration. Approximately one third of the labour permits issued are labour permit renewals (GoN, 2016), and more than half of returnee migrants surveyed in the Nepal Migration Survey 2009 reported that they were at least somewhat likely to migrate again in the next 12 months (World Bank, 2011).

While men represent the vast majority (over 95%) of labour migrants from Nepal, labour migration among women is increasing rapidly. Over 21 thousand women were documented as legally emigrating for work in 2014/15 (GoN, 2016), but actual numbers are likely to be much higher, as many women migrate through irregular channels, and thus are not captured in official statistics (Ghimire, et al., 2010; Amnesty International, 2011; Sijapati & Nair, 2014). Furthermore, these statistics do not capture migration to India, the top destination for female migrant workers from Nepal (World Bank, 2011), since labour permits are not required for migration between these two countries.

Aside from India, common destinations for female labour migrants from Nepal include the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Malaysia, Kuwait and Qatar (GoN, 2016). There, they mainly work in hotels, catering, domestic work and caregiving, manufacturing, and health and medical services (World Bank, 2011).

Most female migrants now use the services of a recruitment agency (commonly referred to as 'manpower agency') to obtain their employment abroad (in contrast to pre-2012 when the majority arranged their migration on an individual basis). In 2014/15, 78 per cent of female labour migrants who migrated through official channels obtained their labour permit through a recruitment agency (GoN, 2016). Although the Foreign Employment Act of 1985 made it compulsory for recruitment agencies to be registered (re-stipulated in the 2007 Act), in an attempt to facilitate the regulation of foreign employment, it is estimated that a large number are unlicensed and operating illegally (Gurung, 2004; Sijapati & Limbu, 2017). Furthermore, some recruitment agencies use subagents or brokers (Dalals), who are unregulated and paid on commission, to recruit potential labourers. Prospective migrants pay these brokers a fee to cover manpower agency fees and migration costs, and to make all their pre-departure arrangements (including obtaining and handling all the required documents). Misconduct among brokers, both those working for registered manpower agencies and those operating illegally on their own, is commonplace – with many overcharging prospective migrants, failing to provide them with key information, or giving them misleading information about the migration process or the terms and conditions of their employment abroad (Gurung, 2004; Amnesty International, 2017; Paoletti et al., 2014).

Female labour migrants from Nepal also face structural constraints. Female labour migration can be a sensitive and stigmatising subject in Nepal, commonly perceived as linked to sex work. Due to concerns about sexual and other forms of exploitation experienced by some Nepali migrant women, an "age ban" was put in place from 2012 to try and prevent women under the age of 30 from migrating to the Arab States for domestic work. In 2014 the ban was extended to apply to all women, regardless of age, and to cover migration to any country for low skilled work (International Labour Organization, 2015). Our survey was conducted while this "total ban" was in place. In 2015 the ban was relaxed (then temporarily reinstated following the April 2015 earthquake, and lifted again in 2016) so that women 24 years of age and older could legally migrate for domestic work to certain countries in the Arab States and South East Asia. Such bans have proved

controversial, with many arguing that, rather than protecting women, they leave women with little choice but to migrate through irregular, higher risk channels (International Labour Organization, 2015; Paoletti et al., 2014).

The community-based WiF intervention is being delivered in five districts in Nepal and aims to prevent labour trafficking through an empowerment and information strategy designed to enhance women's autonomy and promote "safe migration" practices and migrant workers' rights ("SWiFT," 2017). The intervention districts were identified by ILO-Nepal as having high levels of female labour migration. The evaluation was conducted in three of the five districts (Morang, Chitwan and Rupandehi, with the other two excluded for logistical reasons). The three research districts are located in the southern plain of Nepal and together, as commercial and industrial hubs, contribute significantly to the national GDP (GoN & UNDP, 2014). Chitwan and Morang are among the top-ten origin districts for female labour migrants from Nepal (GoN, 2016).

### Survey and sampling design

As part of the evaluation research we conducted a survey of prospective migrants. This aimed to explore prospective migrants' background and characteristics, their knowledge and perceptions about various aspects of labour recruitment and migration, their sources of migration-related information, and their migration-planning and decisions. The survey was conducted at the end of the first phase of the intervention (for sampling purposes), but prior to the two-day pre-decision-making training (on the pros and cons of labour migration) targeted towards prospective migrants. Within each study district, the survey was conducted in 6 Village Development Committees (VDC) (the smaller administrative unit).

During the first phase of the intervention – comprising activities such as street drama, community information sessions, visits to local women's groups and house to house visits – a list of potential prospective migrants was drawn up by the WiF implementing partners (local non-governmental organisations tasked with implementing the intervention). Peer educators and social mobilisers recorded contact details of women interested in getting more information about labour migration. From this list, all eligible women (those aged 15-49) were invited by a member of the research team to participate in the prospective migrants survey. We used this sampling frame because we had previous research experience of female migration being underreported in Nepal (Mak & Abramsky, 2015), and surmised that local organisations would succeed in eliciting greater disclosure of women's migration intentions than researchers would.

The questionnaire was developed by the research team at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and Social Science Baha (Nepal), adapting from previous questionnaires on the subject developed by LSHTM, supplemented with literature reviews and consultations with ILO and other experts. It was administered by trained fieldworkers in the respondent's home, using electronic data collection software. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their participation in the survey. The study received ethical approval from institutional review boards at LSHTM and the Nepal Health Research Council, and adhered to the *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women* (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003).

### Statistical methods

Data cleaning and analysis were performed in Stata/SE. We restricted the analysis to women who reported an estimated time-frame in which they intended to migrate, as we expected time till intended departure to be strongly related to the indicators of interest.

Chi-squared tests were used to examine whether socio-demographic characteristics, and migration knowledge and planning differed between repeat- and first-time-migrants. Crude associations

between prior migration status and the knowledge and planning indicators were further estimated using logistic regression for binary outcomes and multinomial logistic regression for nominal outcomes. Adjusted odds ratios controlled for district, time till proposed departure and age. We did not control for sociodemographic characteristics (such as education) that might differ between repeat- and first-time-migrants and also influence migration knowledge and behaviours, because we wanted to capture real-life differences in migration knowledge and planning between the two groups (partly due to differing underlying characteristics).

## RESULTS

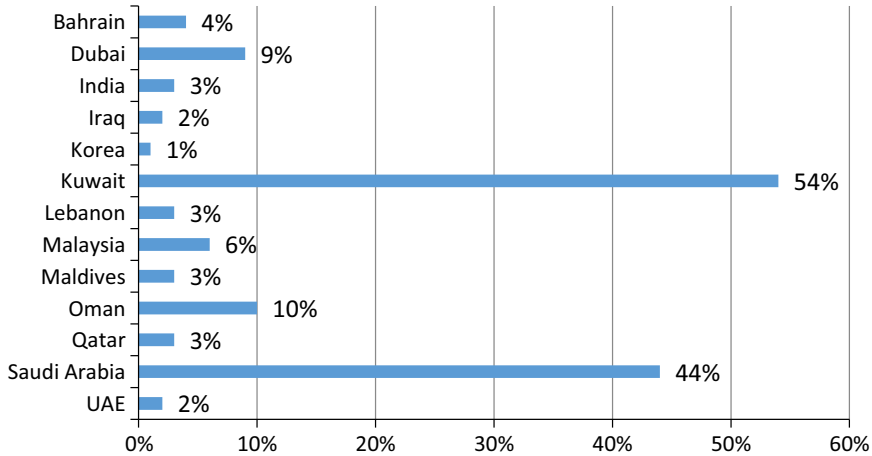
673 prospective migrants were identified by the implementing partners in the study VDCs, of whom 584 were eligible for inclusion in the survey. Of these, researchers (accompanied by peer educators) managed to locate 348 women (60%), and 340 agreed to participate in the survey (98% response rate). 267 of the respondents reported an estimated time-frame in which they intended to migrate. Of these, 51 per cent came from Rupandehi, 30 per cent from Morang and 19 per cent from Chitwan.

Forty per cent reported having migrated outside of Nepal for work in the past, and of these, 50 per cent had done so more than once (Table 1). Previous destinations commonly reported included Kuwait (54%), Saudi Arabia (44%), Oman (10%) and Dubai (9%) (Figure 1a). The large majority (81%) reported having done domestic work while abroad (Figure 1b).

TABLE 1  
PAST MIGRATION(S) OF PROSPECTIVE MIGRANTS, AND PROSPECTIVE MIGRATION DETAILS  
AMONG PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS

		Prospective first time migrants n=161 (60% of sample)	Prospective repeat migrants n=106 (40% of sample)	Chi-squared p-value
How many times migrated abroad (among those who have ever migrated abroad)	Once	–	53 (50%)	–
	Twice	–	40 (38%)	
	Three+	–	14 (12%)	
When plan to migrate	Within 30 days	17 (11%)	19 (18%)	<0.001
	1-3 months	21 (13%)	33 (31%)	
	>3-6 months	20 (12%)	17 (16%)	
	6-12 months	48 (30%)	23 (21%)	
	>12 months	55 (34%)	14 (13%)	
Paid work experience in the sector they plan to work in (among those reporting specific planned sector)		19/122 (16%)	52/94 (55%)	<0.001
Planning to work in same sector as a previous migration (among repeat-migrants)	–		45/106 (42%)	–
Planning to go to the same country as on a previous migration (among repeat migrants)	–		35/106 (33%)	–

FIGURE 1A  
 DESTINATIONS OUTSIDE OF NEPAL THAT RESPONDENT HAS EVER MIGRATED TO (AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE EVER MIGRATED) (N=106)



### Characteristics of prospective repeat- and first-time-migrants

#### Demographics

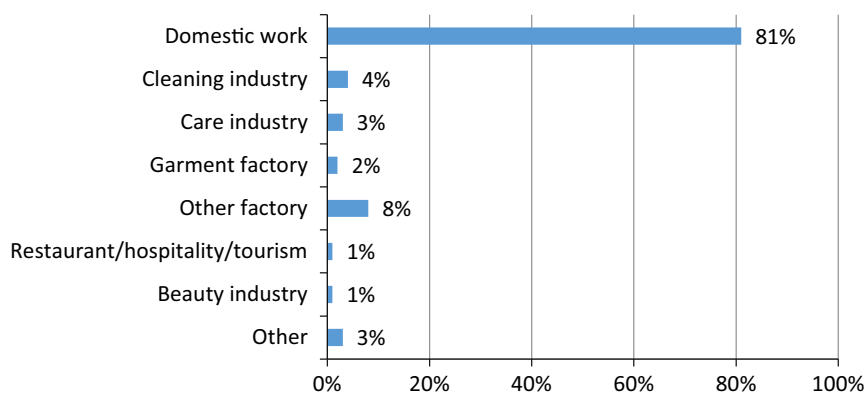
Table 2 compares individual- and household-level characteristics of prospective repeat- and first-time-migrants. Not surprisingly, repeat-migrants were on average slightly older than first-time migrants (57% of repeat-migrants versus 41% of first-time migrants were  $\geq 30$  years of age). They were also more likely than first-time migrants to be from Adivasi/Janajati groups (i.e. indigenous people) (42% versus 26%), and less likely to be from the so called “upper caste” Brahman/Chhetree groups (29% versus 49%). Roughly a quarter of both repeat and first-time migrants were Dalit (previously considered “untouchable”). The vast majority (88%) came from Nepali-speaking households, with most speaking more than one language. On average, repeat migrants spoke more languages than first-time migrants (75% versus 45% speaking three or more languages).

Repeat-migrants had lower education and literacy levels than first-time migrants, with fewer having attended secondary/higher education and a higher percentage reporting that they couldn’t read (21% versus 11%).

Most prospective migrants (both repeat- and first-time) had been married (87%), and of these over 90 per cent had biological children. However, repeat-migrants were more likely than first-timers to be separated, divorced or widowed (22% versus 8%). Almost half of all prospective migrants who were currently married, reported that their husbands were currently living and working elsewhere.

There were also important socioeconomic differences between repeat- and first-time migrants. Repeat-migrants were less likely to be currently employed (in wage- or self-employment) than first-time migrants (46% versus 62%). However, they contributed to a slightly higher proportion of household expenses (not statistically significant). They were also more likely than first-time migrants to own land or a house in their own name (32% versus 19%), though no more likely to have productive assets (27% versus 32%) or cash savings (47% versus 56%).

FIGURE 1B  
SECTOR RESPONDENT HAS WORKED IN DURING PREVIOUS MIGRATION(S) (N=106)



### Social participation

Participation in community groups was lower among repeat-migrants than among first-time migrants. They were much less likely to be a member of any community group (35% versus 66%), including microfinance groups and women's groups. Among those aware of programmes promoting local employment through training (such as tailor, beautician or agricultural training), repeat-migrants were slightly less likely than first-time migrants to attend such programmes (31% versus 46%).

### Experiences of family violence

Repeat-migrants were more likely than first-time migrants to report ever having experienced any type of violence (emotional, physical or sexual) from a family member (38% of repeat-migrants versus 22% of first-time-migrants). For both first-time and repeat-migrants, their husbands were the most common perpetrators of the violence (reported by 73% of those experiencing violence), with in-laws also commonly cited as perpetrators (reported by 29%).

### Household characteristics

A high proportion of all respondents (91%) reported that someone in their household had migrated outside Nepal for work. Main sources of household income were similar for repeat- and first-time migrants, most commonly remittances (43%), self-employment in agriculture (39%), and wage based work in non-agriculture (34%). Just under half of households had more than one source of income, while 16% reported remittances as their sole source of income.

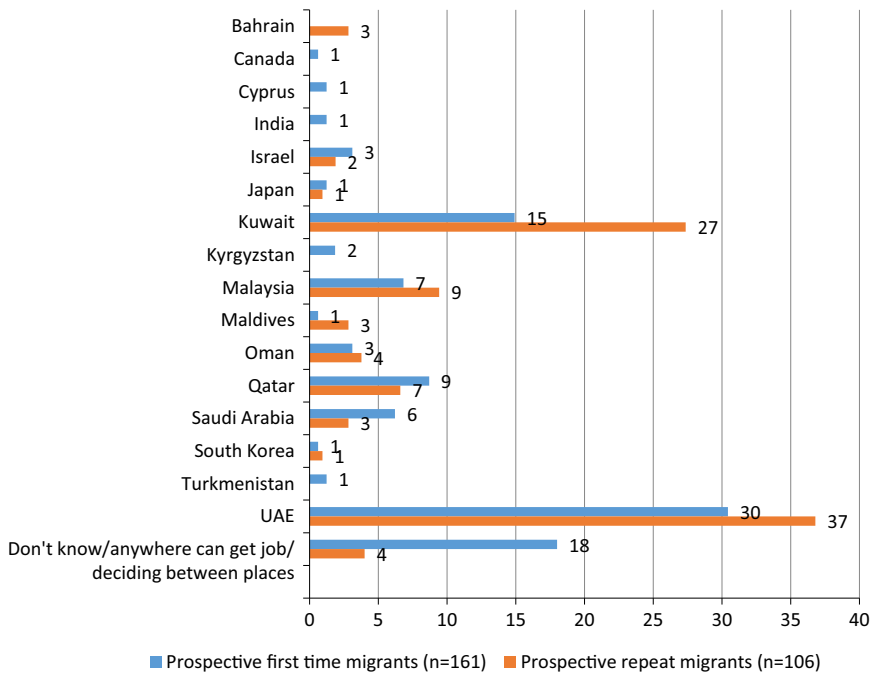
Repeat- and first-time migrants were equally likely to report that anyone in their household had a financial investment such as cash savings, a small business, or property (30%). Repeat-migrants were slightly less likely to report that any household member had outstanding debts (61% versus 72%, not statistically significant).

### Prospective migration details

The time-frame to intended migration was wide, with 14 per cent planning to leave within a month of the survey, but just over a quarter reporting that they didn't intend to leave for over a year



FIGURE 2A  
 DESTINATION RESPONDENT IS PLANNING TO MIGRATE TO FOR WORK, COMPARING PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS (N=267), CHI-SQUARED P-VALUE=0.009



(Table 1). Repeat-migrants were more likely than first-time migrants to be leaving more imminently (almost half of repeat-migrants, versus just under a quarter of first-timers planning to leave within three months of the survey).

The most common prospective destinations reported by both first-time and repeat-migrants were UAE (30% and 17% respectively), Kuwait (15% and 27% respectively), Qatar (9% and 7% respectively) and Malaysia (7% and 9% respectively) (Figure 2a). Women commonly planned to work in domestic work (41% of repeat migrants; 25% of first-timers), cleaning (21% of repeat migrants; 11% of first-timers), and non-garment factories (17% of repeat migrants and first-timers) (Figure 2b).

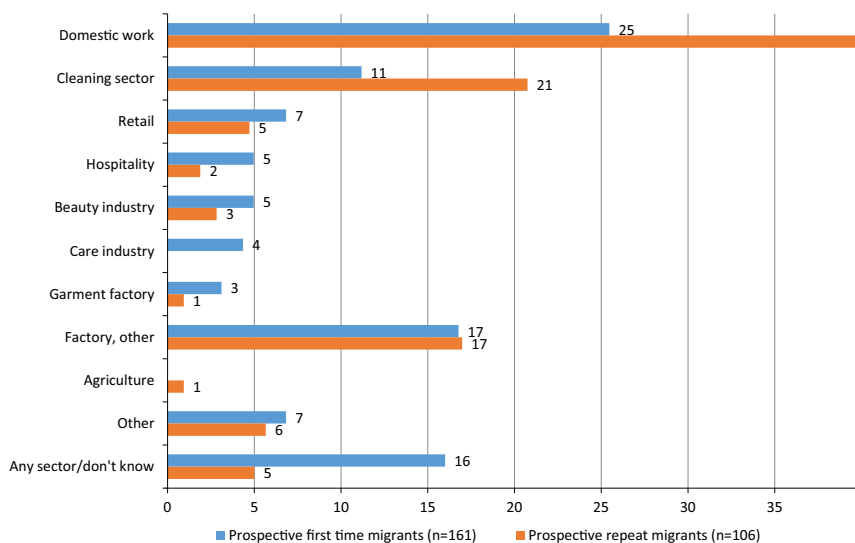
Repeat migrants were much less likely than first-time migrants to report not knowing where they would go or being prepared to go anywhere they could get a job (4% versus 18%), or not knowing which sector they would work in or that they would work in any sector in which they could get a job (5% versus 16%). Fifty-five per cent of repeat migrants versus only 16 per cent of first-time migrants reported having paid-work experience in the sector they planned to work in.

Interestingly, among repeat-migrants, only 33 per cent were planning to go to a country they had been to on a previous migration, and 42 per cent to work in the same sector as on a previous migration (see Table 1).

**Pre-departure knowledge and information**

While repeat migrants were more likely than first-time migrants to know some of the documents required to migrate legally, this type of knowledge was limited among all (Table 3). While almost

FIGURE 2B  
SECTOR RESPONDENT PLANS TO WORK IN AT DESTINATION, COMPARING PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS (N=267), CHI-SQUARED P-VALUE=0.004



all cited a passport as necessary, far fewer knew they needed a work visa (50% repeat-migrants, 35% first-time migrants) or medical clearance (58% repeat-migrants, 27% first-time migrants). Only 16 per cent of repeat-migrants and 9 per cent of first-time migrants knew of the need to attend pre-departure training (and obtain a certificate) before migrating, and even fewer cited a work contract as necessary.

Many prospective migrants were unaware of training options available to them before leaving Nepal. Only 16 per cent of first-time migrants and 20 per cent of repeat migrants were aware of the two-day pre-departure orientation training (compulsory since 2007 for all prospective migrants). Similarly low numbers were aware of vocational training options, and less than one-third (of first-time or repeat-migrants) were aware of language/cultural training they could take.

## People involved in migration planning

### Use of agents/brokers/manpower companies

A similar proportion (approximately three-quarters) of repeat- and first-time migrants had contacted or planned to contact a broker, recruitment agent or manpower company (Table 4). Among those who had already contacted one, repeat-migrants were no more likely than first-time migrants to report that they knew them to be licensed (18% versus 24%). Ways in which repeat- and first-time migrants had found/planned to find the broker/agent/manpower company were also similar, with just over half saying they were referred or recommended by someone they knew. Approximately one-fifth said the broker/agent was a friend, family member or acquaintance. Only 12 per cent of repeat-migrants said that they had used the broker/agent/manpower company before on a previous migration, meaning most repeat-migrants were planning to use one with whom they had no prior experience. Just over half said they knew of no brokers/agents in the area, while a further 18 per cent only knew of one.

TABLE 2  
INDIVIDUAL- AND HOUSEHOLD-LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS OF PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS

	Prospective first time migrants (n=161)	Prospective repeat migrants (n=106)	Chi-squared p-value	
<b>Individual-level characteristics</b>				
<i>Age</i>	<30 years 30+ years	90 (59%) 65 (41%)	45 (43%) 60 (57%)	0.010
<i>Caste social group</i>	Adivasi/Janajati Brahman/ Chhetree	42 (26%) 79 (49%)	44 (42%) 31 (29%)	0.010
<i>Main language of household is Nepali</i>	Dalit Other	36 (22%) 4 (2%)	28 (26%) 3 (3%)	0.969
<i>Number of languages spoken</i>	1 2 3 or more	29 (18%) 60 (37%) 72 (45%)	2 (2%) 24 (23%) 80 (75%)	<0.001
<i>Reading ability</i>	Cannot read Can read with difficulty Can read fluently	17 (11%) 27 (17%) 117 (73%)	22 (21%) 24 (23%) 60 (57%)	0.017
<i>Highest level of education attended</i>	None/informal Some/completed primary Some secondary (not completed) Passed SCL or higher	22 (14%) 29 (18%) 73 (45%) 37 (23%)	27 (25%) 38 (36%) 36 (34%) 5 (5%)	<0.001
<i>Marital status</i>	Unmarried Married Separated/ Divorced/ Widowed	21 (13%) 127 (79%) 13 (8%)	14 (13%) 69 (65%) 23 (22%)	0.005
<i>Husband currently working elsewhere (among currently married)</i>		54/126 (43%)	32/66 (48%)	0.456
<i>Has biological children (among ever married)</i>		131/140 (94%)	83/91 (91%)	0.502
<i>Currently wage-/self-employed</i>		99 (62%)	48 (46%)	0.012
<i>Proportion of household expenses respondent contributes to</i>	All or most Half Some but less than half None	20 (13%) 25 (16%) 45 (28%) 70 (44%)	21 (20%) 20 (19%) 29 (27%) 35 (33%)	0.200
<i>Respondent owns land or house in own name</i>		31 (19%)	33 (32%)	0.022
<i>Respondent owns productive assets</i>		51 (32%)	29 (27%)	0.394
<i>Respondent has cash savings</i>		90 (56%)	50 (47%)	0.162

TABLE 2  
(CONTINUED)

		Prospective first time migrants (n=161)	Prospective repeat migrants (n=106)	Chi-squared p-value
<i>Membership of any community group</i>		106 (66%)	37 (35%)	<0.001
	Microfinance group	75 (47%)	27 (25%)	0.001
	Women's group	49 (30%)	20 (19%)	0.035
<i>Aware of any programmes promoting local employment</i>		93 (58%)	54 (51%)	0.273
<i>Attends any programme promoting local employment (among those aware of them)</i>		43/93 (46%)	17/54 (31%)	0.079
<i>Ever experienced violence by a family member</i>	Emotional	34 (21%)	38 (36%)	0.008
	Physical	20 (12%)	25 (24%)	0.017
	Sexual	8 (5%)	8 (8%)	0.385
	Physical and/or sexual	22 (14%)	25 (24%)	0.037
	Physical/ sexual/ emotional	35 (22%)	40 (38%)	0.004
<b>Household characteristics</b>				
<i>Household size</i>	1-4	90 (56%)	49 (46%)	0.041
	5-6	54 (34%)	35 (33%)	
	7-16	16 (10%)	22 (21%)	
<i>Main sources of household income (not mutually exclusive)</i>	Self-employed agriculture	63 (39%)	40 (38%)	0.819
	Self-employed non-agriculture	38 (24%)	16 (15%)	0.090
	Waged agriculture	19 (12%)	7 (7%)	0.161
	Waged non-agriculture	51 (32%)	40 (38%)	0.307
	Remittances	71 (44%)	45 (42%)	0.791
<i>Household has more than one source of income</i>		77 (48%)	46 (43%)	0.477
<i>Remittances are only source of household income</i>		22 (14%)	20 (19%)	0.253
<i>Household has any financial investment</i>		49 (31%)	31 (29%)	0.810
<i>Any household member has outstanding debts</i>		114 (72%)	65 (61%)	0.065
<i>Any household member has migrated outside of Nepal for work</i>		143 (89%)	100 (94%)	0.123

### Other people involved in migration planning

Repeat- and first-time migrants were equally likely to cite immediate family as having influenced how they planned to migrate, most commonly husbands (48%) but also often siblings and parents

TABLE 3  
PRE-DEPARTURE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION AMONG PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS

		First time migrants (n=161)	Repeat migrants (n=106)	Crude odds ratio* (95%CI)	Adjusted odds ratio* (95%CI)
<i>Knowledge that document required in order to legally migrate outside of Nepal for work</i>	Passport	151 (94%)	101 (95%)	1.34 (0.44 - 4.03)	1.50 (0.42 - 5.34)
	Labour permit	70 (43%)	65 (61%)	2.06 (1.25 - 3.40)	1.92 (1.11 - 3.32)
	Work visa	56 (35%)	53 (50%)	1.88 (1.14 - 3.09)	1.67 (0.97 - 2.89)
	Work contract	10 (6%)	11 (10%)	1.75 (0.72 - 4.27)	1.58 (0.58 - 4.34)
	Pre-departure training certificate	15 (9%)	17 (16%)	1.86 (0.88 - 3.91)	1.87 (0.82 - 4.22)
	Medical clearance	44 (27%)	62 (58%)	3.75 (2.23 - 6.30)	3.35 (1.91 - 5.88)
	Life insurance	24 (15%)	27 (25%)	1.95 (1.05 - 3.61)	1.85 (0.95 - 3.61)
	Proof of payment of welfare fund	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	–	–
	Police report	21 (13%)	37 (35%)	3.57 (1.95 - 6.57)	2.69 (1.39 - 5.24)
	Recruitment agency receipt	4 (2%)	3 (3%)	1.14 (0.25 - 5.21)	–
<i>Aware of training options available to take before leaving Nepal<sup>‡</sup></i>	Skills for work you plan to do	31 (19%)	19 (18%)	0.92 (0.49 - 1.72)	1.12 (0.56 - 2.24)
	Language/cultural information	44 (27%)	33 (31%)	1.20 (0.70 - 2.06)	1.22 (0.68 - 2.19)
	2 day pre-departure orientation	26 (16%)	21 (20%)	1.28 (0.68 - 2.42)	1.11 (0.55 - 2.24)
	21 day domestic worker training	12 (7%)	9 (8%)	1.15 (1.47 - 2.84)	1.09 (0.41 - 2.91)
	None	80 (50%)	50 (47%)	0.90 (0.55 - 1.48)	1.00 (0.58 - 1.72)

\*Odds ratio (OR) calculated using binary logistic regression. Adjusted OR controls for age, district and time till intended departure. <sup>‡</sup>Only trainings respondents are most commonly aware of (>5%) are listed.

(Table 4). Both were also equally likely to report that an agent or broker had influenced their plans (17%). However, repeat-migrants were less likely than first-time migrants to have been influenced by in-laws (8% versus 21%), neighbours (11% versus 22%), friends (20% versus 38%), or other returnees (18% versus 33%).

About half of all prospective migrants made their migration plans with the help of others. Of these, roughly one-third reported that their husbands had helped them plan and a small percentage said a friend had helped. Repeat migrants were almost twice as likely as first-time migrants to say that a broker/agent/manpower company had helped them (44% versus 25%). Approximately half of the prospective migrants said they planned to migrate with others, commonly family, friends, community members or 'other migrants'.

### Sources of information about migration

When asked about the main person they would seek advice from about different aspects of migration (jobs, costs, documents and travel), repeat migrants were more likely than first-time migrants to say that they would ask a broker, agent or manpower company (Table 5). Conversely, first-time migrants were more likely than repeat-migrants to say they would ask migrant family, friends or

TABLE 4  
PEOPLE INVOLVED IN MIGRATION PLANNING AMONG PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS

	Prospective first time migrants	Prospective repeat migrants	Crude odds ratio (95%CI)	Adjusted odds ratio (95%CI)
<i>Have been in contact with/ plan to contact a broker/agent/ manpower company</i>	118/161 (73%)	82/106 (77%)	1.25 (0.70 - 2.21)	0.93 (0.48 - 1.80)
<i>Broker/agent/manpower company is licensed (vs. not licensed or respondent doesn't know) (among those who have already contacted one)</i>	10/38 (26%)	8/38 (21%)	0.75 (0.26 - 2.16)	0.55 (0.15 - 1.99)
<i>How found/plan to find a broker/ agent/manpower company (among those using/planning to use one) (not mutually exclusive)</i>	<i>n=118</i>	<i>n=82</i>		
Referred/recommended	66 (56%)	42 (51%)	0.83 (0.47 - 1.46)	0.80 (0.43 - 1.48)
They are a friend/family/ acquaintance	24 (20%)	15 (18%)	0.88 (0.43 - 1.80)	0.88 (0.39 - 1.97)
Media	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	0.71 (0.13 - 3.98)	-
I had used them before in previous migration	0 (0%)	10 (12%)	-	-
They approached me	4 (3%)	3 (4%)	1.08 (0.24 - 4.97)	-
I researched different ones	7 (6%)	4 (5%)	0.81 (0.23 - 2.87)	-
Other	7 (6%)	4 (5%)	0.81 (0.23 - 2.87)	0.58 (0.14 - 2.32)
Don't know	13 (11%)	5 (6%)	0.52 (0.18 - 1.53)	-
<i>Who referred broker/agent/ manpower company?</i>	<i>n=62</i>	<i>n=40</i>		
Non-migrant family	7 (11%)	1 (3%)		
Returned migrant family	16 (26%)	15 (38%)		
Non-migrant friend/ community member	5 (8%)	2 (5%)		
Returned migrant friend/community member	31 (50%)	19 (48%)		
Local NGO	1 (2%)	0 (0%)		
Other	2 (3%)	3 (8%)		
<i>Plan to visit (have visited) broker/agent/ manpower company in person (among those using/planning to use one, and leaving within the next 12 months)</i>	28/83 (34%)	17/74 (23%)	1.71 (0.84 - 3.46)	2.19 (1.00 - 4.79)
<i>Number of brokers/agents you know of in your area</i>	<i>n=161</i>	<i>n=106</i>		
None	94 (58%)	56 (53%)	-	-
One	26 (16%)	21 (20%)	1.25 (0.76 - 2.05)	1.02 (0.59 - 1.75)
More than one	41 (25%)	29 (27%)		
<i>Ever visited a migrant information centre</i>	19 (12%)	9 (8%)	0.67 (0.29 - 1.55)	0.59 (0.23 - 1.48)

TABLE 4  
(CONTINUED)

	Prospective first time migrants	Prospective repeat migrants	Crude odds ratio (95%CI)	Adjusted odds ratio (95%CI)
<i>People at least somewhat influencing how you plan to migrate</i>				
Father	18/144 (13%)	18/98 (18%)	1.58 (0.77 - 3.21)	1.61 (0.72 - 3.58)
Mother	26/150 (17%)	15/100 (15%)	0.84 (0.42 - 1.68)	0.99 (0.46 - 2.14)
Husband	63/131 (48%)	37/86 (43%)	0.82 (0.47 - 1.41)	0.80 (0.44 - 1.45)
Brother	27/157 (17%)	15/105 (14%)	0.80 (0.40 - 1.59)	0.74 (0.35 - 1.56)
Sister	32/149 (21%)	21/105 (20%)	0.91 (0.49 - 1.70)	0.76 (0.39 - 1.51)
In-laws	27/128 (21%)	6/77 (8%)	0.32 (0.12 - 0.81)	0.34 (0.13 - 0.90)
Other family	40/157 (25%)	20/105 (19%)	0.69 (0.38 - 1.26)	0.61 (0.32 - 1.19)
Neighbour	34/158 (22%)	11/104 (11%)	0.43 (0.21 - 0.90)	0.32 (0.15 - 0.72)
Friends	60/160 (38%)	21/104 (20%)	0.42 (0.24 - 0.75)	0.35 (0.19 - 0.67)
Agent/broker	25/144 (17%)	17/97 (18%)	1.01 (0.51 - 1.99)	0.81 (0.38 - 1.74)
Returnee	53/159 (33%)	19/104 (18%)	0.45 (0.25 - 0.81)	0.34 (0.17 - 0.67)
<i>Made plans alone (versus with others)</i>	72/160 (45%)	54/106 (51%)	1.27 (0.78 - 2.08)	1.52 (0.88 - 2.62)
Husband helped	28/88 (32%)	20/52 (38%)	1.34 (0.65 - 2.74)	1.29 (0.55 - 3.02)
Friend helped	9/88 (10%)	3/52 (6%)	0.54 (0.14 - 2.08)	0.24 (0.05 - 1.09)
Family helped	13/88 (15%)	14/52 (27%)	2.38 (1.15 - 4.94)	2.08 (0.89 - 4.83)
Broker/agent/ manpower company helped	22/88 (25%)	23/52 (44%)	2.13 (0.91 - 4.97)	-
<i>Plan to migrate with someone else</i>	55/106 (52%)	40/91 (44%)	0.73 (0.41 - 1.28)	0.56 (0.29 - 1.05)
Family	16/55 (29%)	7/40 (18%)	0.52 (0.19 - 1.41)	0.57 (0.19 - 1.73)
Friend(s)	23/55 (42%)	16/40 (40%)	0.93 (0.40 - 2.12)	0.99 (0.40 - 2.44)
Community member(s)	13/55 (24%)	5/40 (13%)	0.46 (0.15 - 1.42)	0.47 (0.14 - 1.56)
Other migrants	10/55 (18%)	12/40 (30%)	1.93 (0.74 - 5.05)	1.57 (0.53 - 4.63)

\*Odds ratio (OR) calculated using binary logistic regression. Adjusted OR controls for age, district and time till intended departure.

TABLE 5  
SOURCES OF INFORMATION AMONG PROSPECTIVE REPEAT- AND FIRST-TIME-MIGRANTS

	Prospective first time migrants (n=161)	Prospective repeat migrants (n=106)	Crude odds ratio* (95%CI)	Adjusted odds ratio* (95%CI)
<i>Main person you would ask about how to find a job outside of Nepal</i>				
Migrant family/friends/ community members	75 (47%)	23 (22%)	(ref)	(ref)
Broker/agent/manpower company	57 (35%)	74 (70%)	4.23 (2.37 - 7.57)	4.45 (2.35 - 8.41)

TABLE 5  
(CONTINUED)

	Prospective first time migrants (n=161)	Prospective repeat migrants (n=106)	Crude odds ratio* (95%CI)	Adjusted odds ratio* (95%CI)
Non-migrant family/friends/community members	16 (10%)	1 (1%)	0.20 (0.03 – 1.62)	0.23 (0.03 – 2.02)
Other/Don't know	13 (8%)	8 (8%)	2.01 (0.74 – 5.44)	2.40 (0.81 – 7.14)
<i>Main person you would ask about how much it costs to migrate</i>				
Migrant family/friends/community members	54 (34%)	20 (19%)	(ref)	(ref)
Broker/agent/manpower company	87 (54%)	77 (73%)	2.39 (1.31 – 4.34)	2.43 (1.27 – 4.62)
Non-migrant family/friends/community members	10 (6%)	2 (2%)	0.54 (0.11 – 2.68)	0.91 (0.17 – 4.84)
Other/Don't know	10 (6%)	7 (7%)	1.89 (0.63 – 5.64)	2.17 (0.67 – 7.04)
<i>Main person you would ask about documents needed to migrate</i>				
Migrant family/friends/community members	57 (35%)	17 (16%)	(ref)	(ref)
Broker/agent/manpower company	77 (48%)	80 (75%)	3.48 (1.86 – 6.51)	3.52 (1.80 – 6.89)
Non-migrant family/friends/community members	13 (8%)	2 (2%)	0.52 (0.11 – 2.51)	0.64 (0.12 – 3.34)
Other/Don't know	14 (9%)	7 (7%)	1.68 (0.58 – 4.82)	1.71 (0.55 – 5.30)
<i>Main person you would ask about how to travel to destination country</i>				
Migrant family/friends/community members	57 (35%)	20 (19%)	(ref)	(ref)
Broker/agent/manpower company	73 (45%)	72 (68%)	2.81 (1.54 – 5.15)	2.84 (1.46 – 5.50)
Non-migrant family/friends/community members	14 (9%)	1 (1%)	0.20 (0.03 – 1.65)	0.24 (0.03 – 2.07)
Other/Don't know	17 (11%)	13 (12%)	2.18 (0.90 – 5.27)	2.02 (0.79 – 5.19)

\*Odds ratio (OR) calculated using multinomial logistic regression. Adjusted OR controls for age, district and time till intended departure.

community members. Very few prospective migrants, whether first-time or repeat migrants, had ever visited a migrant information centre (12% versus 8%).

## DISCUSSION

Amidst increasing donor investments in community-based programming to help female prospective labour migrants reduce their risks of exploitation and abuse (Dottridge, 2014), evidence on migration planning processes among prospective migrant populations remains limited. There is also scant



research into how migration processes differ between different groups of migrants, and notably between repeat- and first-time migrants. Although evidence highlights significant risks of trafficking and forced labour among repeat migrants (Jobe, 2010), there remains a common implicit assumption that experienced migrants will have the knowledge and networks to better prepare for their subsequent migrations (Siddiqui et al., 2008). More generally, programmes often seem to consider migrants as a homogenous group with uniform motivations and needs. This analysis reveals important differences and similarities between repeat- and first-time migrants that challenge these notions and have important implications for programmes promoting safe migration among Nepali women.

First, 40 per cent of the prospective migrants surveyed had migrated at least once in the past, in line with other estimates of repeat-migration from Nepal (World Bank, 2011; GoN, 2016). While repeat-migrants were slightly better informed than first-time migrants, their knowledge about legal requirements relating to migration was nevertheless limited, as was their awareness of pre-departure training opportunities including the compulsory pre-departure orientation training. Furthermore, many lacked direct experience of their proposed destination and the sector they planned to work in, with most planning to go to countries or work sectors different from those of their previous migrations.,

Although the common programme assumption that knowledge contributes to safer migration has not been empirically tested, and should be the subject of future research (Zimmerman et al., 2015), these low levels of knowledge about official migration procedures among both first-time and repeat-migrants merit further discussion. First, lack of knowledge is probably in large part due to the fact that most prospective migrants use brokers to make their pre-departure arrangements, and often they are not kept informed of the stages involved, nor of where else they can acquire information or training. However, it should also be interpreted within the context of Nepal's fast changing policies relating to female migration. Since 1997, more than ten different bans have been variously imposed, placing age-related and total restrictions on migration to specific destinations and work sectors (Ghimire et al., 2010; International Labour Organization, 2015). The changing policy landscape is difficult for even experienced migrants to navigate, and, as NGOs have highlighted, may increase their vulnerability to deceptive practices by recruitment agents (International Labour Organization, 2015).

Our results, while highlighting the different information gaps among repeat-migrants, also suggest that programmes might struggle to engage them through their usual community outreach strategies. Despite having economic means (on average repeat-migrants contributed more to household expenses than first time migrants, and a third of them owned a house or land), they appeared less economically and socially engaged with their communities. They were less likely than first time migrants to be currently employed, or to participate in community groups and training programmes. They were also less educated, less literate, more likely to be separated/divorced/widowed, and more likely to have experienced violence by a family member, with repeat migrants slightly more disadvantaged than the provincial averages with respect to these factors (Ministry of Health, Nepal, 2016). These very factors which could impede programme engagement, could also (though data is lacking) exacerbate risk of exploitation during the migration process (Jobe, 2010).

Our results also suggest that either repeat-migrants on average spend less time planning their migration, or a higher proportion of them only came to the attention of the programme when their proposed departure was more imminent. If this pattern reflects a real difference in planning times between repeat- and first-time migrants, programmes would have a narrower window in which to make contact with some repeat-migrants, posing a challenge to identify them before their plans are finalized.

Furthermore, repeat-migrants may feel that they already have all of the information and knowledge that they need to migrate again. For example, repeat-migrants were less likely than first-time migrants to report that friends, neighbours or other returnees had influenced how they planned to migrate. Programmes should thus be cautious in assuming that peer-led activities, or other forms of information and training, will be as appealing to repeat-migrants as they might be for first-time

migrants. Programmes should also tailor their content to maximize their appeal and relevance to repeat-migrants, for example by integrating components that address common related life experiences such as family violence.

Our data suggest that, in place of peer-influence, repeat-migrants depend heavily on agents, brokers and manpower companies for information. Though few used a broker they had used before, and few knew whether or not the broker was licensed, repeat migrants were more likely to cite them as their main source of information on different aspects of migration, such as jobs, travel and migration documents. This may leave them particularly vulnerable to problems often associated with brokers, such as being defrauded of money or provided with misinformation (Gurung, 2004; Paoletti et al., 2014). While many NGOs and policymakers advocate the development of an alternate system through which migrant workers can identify jobs abroad and navigate the pre-departure requirements without the need for a broker, most accept that brokers will be widely used until such a time as a tried and tested alternative is implemented (Taylor-Nicholson et al., 2014). In the short term, prospective migrants, including repeat migrants, would benefit from measures that: 1) encourage accountability and professionalism among agents, for example by developing a government system to register agents, holding manpower companies accountable for the use of unregistered agents, and streamlining the way in which complaints cases against agents are dealt with; 2) help migrants acquire migration related information and vet brokers and manpower companies; and 3) ultimately reduce the need for agents, for example by decentralising labour migration services, expanding the role of local government agencies in handling pre-departure steps, and strengthening migrant resource centres (Sijapati & Nair, 2014; Taylor-Nicholson et al., 2014).

The fact that most repeat-migrants were planning to use a broker they hadn't used before is also worthy of further research. This may in part reflect the nationwide rising trend for women to use recruitment agencies rather than to migrate on an individual basis (especially since the 2015 Government Directive which placed restrictions on women migrating for domestic work on an individual basis) (GoN, 2016), and may also arise because some agencies working on the basis of employer preferences may specifically target women in the 25-35 year age range who have prior overseas and domestic work experience (Jones, 2015). However, it could also be the case that repeat migrants are choosing not to use brokers with whom they have had prior bad experiences. In this way, repeat-migrants might assist programmes in identifying unscrupulous recruitment agents, or ranking manpower agencies (an initiative considered by civil society groups and donors in Nepal).

Our findings also raise questions about the format of migrant peer counselling and other returnee-led activities in safe-migration programming (GoN, 2012; Siddiqui et al., 2008). Repeat migrants' shared social background with other prospective migrants and their familiarity with the reality of migration processes may facilitate the delivery of interventions aiming to promote "safe migration". They may also be able to offer invaluable advice on, for example, life away from home, work-related skills, the benefits of knowing some words in the local language, tips about local customs and culture, and the process of returning home. Additionally, their different motivations, circumstances, destinations and labour experiences may mould their perceptions about what knowledge is important and how to avoid risks related to trafficking and exploitation, and this diversity of experience and perceptions should be harnessed by programmes. However, our data would suggest that gaps in returnees' own knowledge about *official* migration requirements should be addressed by interventions if they are to be best placed to help inform prospective migrants.

Although this study yields important findings, it has several limitations. First, our sampling frame was drawn up by local WiF peer educators who listed women in the community expressing an interest in migrating. With no oversight by the research team, list quality probably varied between study sites, and our sample may not be representative of all prospective migrants in the study communities. For a start, India, the top destination for female migrant workers from Nepal (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014), was reported as the intended destination by only 1 per cent of

respondents. It appears that women intending to migrate to India did not self-identify as prospective *international* migrants – the study districts border India, and an open door policy exists between the two countries – and were thereby excluded from our sampling frame. Also, given that female migration is the subject of legal restrictions and stigma, others were probably excluded from our sampling frame because they were unwilling to disclose their migration intentions. Although not representative of all prospective migrants, however, our sample *is* representative of women targeted by the WiF intervention. Furthermore, we focus on comparing repeat- and first-time migrants, rather than on describing prospective migrant populations per se.

Selection bias may also arise from the large proportion of eligible women who could not be located during the fieldwork period, some of whom may have migrated between the time the lists were drawn up and the fieldwork commenced. Repeat migrants, who appear to spend less time planning, may have been disproportionately excluded from the survey on this basis.

Another limitation is that the prospective migrants we surveyed were at various stages of the planning process. Some indicators therefore represent *intended* actions on the part of some respondents, and *actual* actions on the part of others. We have attempted to control for this by adjusting the analysis for time until intended departure.

It is also important to note that migration behaviours differ from community to community (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Tucker et al., 2013) and these findings cannot be generalised to other regions of Nepal, nor outside of Nepal. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that heterogeneity exists *within* prospective migrant populations, and point to a need for research in other settings to explore how the needs of repeat migrants may differ from those of first time migrants.

Despite its limitations, this is one of few studies on labour migration that compares awareness, information needs and migration planning processes between first-time and repeat-migrants. With safe migration, the rights of migrant workers, and the eradication of forced labour and human trafficking all being targets of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2016), these findings are timely in their capacity to guide migration programming assumptions, content and delivery.

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