



EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
INCOME, EMPOWERMENT AND RESILIENCE OF WOMEN WORKING
IN NEPAL'S INFORMAL ENTERTAINMENT AND SEX INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This research explored whether earning an income by working in sex and informal entertainment industry can be an empowering experience for women, and if it enables them to build resilience to violence. One of the main aims of the study was to generate evidence to inform a DFID funded South Asia study on Women, Work and Violence, which sought to understand if approaches to women's economic empowerment (WEE) can simultaneously tackle violence. The thesis is based qualitative research using in-depth interviews with twenty-one women and two focus groups comprised of seven and eight women. The research contextualised theories of empowerment and power in relation to the participants and their experiences, and it examined how the participants make critical choices for survival, how they use income to gain decision making power in their domestic sphere, and how they challenge various expressions of patriarchy and the social norms that disempower women.

The research went on to unpack how the women concerned build resilience to past traumas resulting from factors such as conflict, displacement, child marriage and intimate partner violence (IPV). It provided insights into the critical role that peer networks play in devising coping strategies to tackle incidents of regular violence that underpin their profession. The research proposed a framework that shows that in peer networks, women build their own communities, which then act as a protective shield; resilience is a manifestation of the interactions between them combined with their own inner strength. The study found that income has a positive impact as it engenders a sense of freedom, voice and agency otherwise denied by the oppressive patriarchal structures. Violence and exploitation at work remain severe in the absence of any laws to protect them, but the activism of women's peer networks, led by women who formerly worked in this sector and identified as 'positive deviants' in this research), has generated momentum in addressing some of the issues faced by this group. Local women's networks remain critically important in the context of violence against women and girls working in the sex and informal entertainment sector in Nepal. As such, these organisations offer unique entry points for policy design, implementation and evaluation of programmes aimed at bringing transformation.

DECLARATION

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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DISSEMINATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CLS	Community Legal Service
CoID	Commission of Inquiry on the Disappearances
COYOTE	Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics
CPN-Maoist	Maoist Communist Party of Nepal
CSW	Commercial Sex Workers
DFID	Department for International Development
DOE	Degrees of Empowerment
ECP	English Collective of Prostitutes
FCSW	Female Commercial Sex Workers
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GWP	General Welfare Pratisthan
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HDR	Human Development Report
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Viruses
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Viruses/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICTJ	International Centre for Transitional Justice
IDPs	Internally Displaced Peoples
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
INR	Indian Rupee
IRP	Interim Relief Programme
JMMS	Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh
NDHS	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPA	Royal Nepal Army
NR	Nepalese Rupee
NSWP	Network of Sex Workers Projects
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

SPA	Seven-Party Alliance
SWAN	Society for Women Awareness in Nepal
TADA	Terrorist and Disruptive Activities
Tdh	Terre des Hommes
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TJ	Transitional Justice
TJRA	Transitional Justice Reference Archive
TMER	Transconceptual Model of Empowerment and Resilience
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIN	United Nations Mission in Nepal
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollars
VAMP	Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WATCH	Women Acting Together for Change
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WHO	World Health Organisation
WNU	Women's Network for Unity

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1. INTRODUCTION

By exploring whether or not earning an income by engaging with the sex and entertainment industry can lead to empowerment and tackle the violence that underpins this kind of work, this thesis seeks to make an original contribution to existing scholarship that considers women's bodies, bodily labour and commodification. The study, based on twenty-one interviews and two focus groups of seven and eight women respectively, provides qualitative insights into these research themes. It explores the complex relationship between the income generation of women who work in sex and informal entertainment industry, how it alters their intra-household power dynamics and helps them take ownership of their lives by renegotiating their family relationships. It also evaluates the nature of their work, including its location, constraints and the challenges it presents, and explores the unique socio-cultural factors that compelled women to join the sex and informal entertainment industry.

I present a nuanced analysis of empowerment and dis-empowerment by examining various concepts; whilst accepting that these notions are slippery and polyvocal, I adapt and apply them to this study. Among the most unique and significant aspects of the lives of the women who contributed to my study is that the majority were caught up in the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, which had lasted a decade and had had a devastating impact on their lives, arguably driving them into the work they now do. Numerous studies that focus on the Maoist conflict have underlined that there was a lack of documentation regarding the sexual violence perpetuated by the rebel army. As such, this research contributes to addressing this critical gap by evidencing the sexual violence and rape committed by the Maoist forces during the ten-year insurgency.

The study also attempts to generate new knowledge by exploring the factors that enable women who work in this sector to build and express resilience. I argue that resilience is engendered through a combination of two factors: inner strength, such as confidence and self-esteem (described as assets), and external support that comes from women's collectives (known as peer networks). In light of these findings, I propose a model that reveals the vital role of peer networks in creating a protective lens that enables the women working in this sector to reconstruct their relationship with the world outside of their community, including wider society and clients. The model demonstrates that peer networks remain instrumental in creating a shared coping mechanism, as the support they gain through it clearly represents a critical dimension of strengthening their resilience to violence.

Another significant contribution of this study is to add to and inform the growing literature on 'positive deviancy'. Positive deviancy, in this instance, refers to those individuals whose voices have become significant in advocating for the rights and justice of women working in the sex and entertainment sector in Nepal. This study sought to identify such actors, and in doing so stands out because, to my knowledge, no existing research has attempted to apply positive deviancy theory to women working in the sex and entertainment industry in Nepal or elsewhere. I propose a model that takes into account the factors that can help in identifying positive deviants; those who can advocate and influence policies that promote employment rights, human rights and citizenship of women working in the sex and entertainment industry in Nepal.

1.1 Addressing the Gaps: The strategic need to study the relationship between violence and empowerment

Comprehensive definitions of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) generally include elements of economic activity (such as sufficient economic and personal resources to be economically productive), power and agency (the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources) (Kabeer, 2001). Though it represents only one aspect of overall empowerment, in addition to the obvious economic gains WEE has the potential to balance gender inequities and gender norms. Whilst programmatic frameworks generally recognise that in order to achieve economic empowerment women need skills, capacities and resources, only a few programmes acknowledge the importance of transforming the normative environment, which includes reshaping gender norms and ensuring women's right to earn a fair wage and live free from violence. Whilst a number of studies have explored the extent to which money in the hands of women can lead to empowerment, this has rarely been addressed in respect to the women who engage in the sex and entertainment industry using their body as a primary 'resource' to earn an income, and doing so without labour rights and while constantly exposed to risk (Baltiwala, 2013; Busza, 2004; Murthy & Seshu, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2006; Overs, 2013). This is primarily because sex work is illegal in many countries, meaning women who work in this sector do so in secrecy and have limited access to legal recourse should they face exploitation, violence or rape while working. Moreover, social stigma and gender inequality also combine to make them a 'hard-to-reach' group. (Onyeneho, 2009 as cited in Moret, 2014).

In Nepal (as well as many other countries) issues of women's empowerment are not taken seriously by the government. For example, there is no law in Nepal relating to acts of sexual harassment at work against female employees working in places like dance bars, cabin restaurants (where customers are served by waitresses in tiny individual rooms), or massage parlours, which

are referred to here as the 'informal entertainment industry' (Thapa, 2018). In the larger context, it has been difficult even for liberal feminist movements to view women in the sex and entertainment industry as going about doing their daily business of earning a livelihood by providing sexual services for money. Sex work is often seen as an expression of pain and misery and it has been argued that in the context of patriarchy it represents the worst form of exploitative sexual behaviour (Weitzer, 2010).

Murthy and Seshu (2013) argue that though many sex workers may have a sad story to tell, several tenets of patriarchy are also challenged within sex work, not least because women's decisions making power is significantly increased at home giving them a sense of control and independence that would otherwise be denied. They point out while there is a large body of writing on sexuality, labour and trafficking, there is comparatively little on sex *as* work or the business of sex. Murthy and Seshu go on to stress that there is a greater need to understand sex work from the perspective of sex workers themselves in order to gain deeper insights into whether earning an income can be empowering experience or not. They also point out that even liberal feminists who advocate for the liberation of women from restrictive sexual mores have generally not addressed commercial sexual transactions. However, women who are engaged in informal entertainment present a different picture: they increasingly question the paradigms of empowerment and oppression and argue that such constructions and debates are theoretical and do not address their real concerns. Theories of this kind also have a tendency to undermine understandings of the agency, choice and consent of those working in this sector. They define the business of sex as a transaction of multiple sexual partnerships within a commercial framework and contend that it can exist devoid of emotion, such as love or of guilt (Seshu and Murthy, 2013, p. 23; Hahn and Holzscheiter, 2013).

Studies that have documented the voices of women working in this sector have shown that, owing to a variety of reasons, many women engage in informal entertainment out of choice. This is contrary to the dominant discourse which presumes that women in this industry are victims of human trafficking (see Chapter Three). Whilst economic compulsion remains the root cause, in many countries (as discussed later in the literature review) economic policies were designed to promote an informal sex industry in order to attract tourists. In the South Asian context, women in this sector complain that there are far more serious issues that need to be addressed, such as recognition of their basic human rights and particularly their right to earn a livelihood without experiencing violence. Studies from India (including this study) have found that spaces where sex work is practised are highly abusive. There is systematic police violence, petty criminal gang harassment, abusive money lenders who charge compound interest from the women, and

business owners who ruthlessly use the system for monetary gain (Seshu & Murthy, 2013, p. 16). It is therefore essential to understand how women working in this sector respond to such abuse. What are the factors (if any) that help them to be resilient?

The questions guiding my research are as follows:

1. What are the social, cultural and political factors that lead women to work in Nepal's sex and informal entertainment sector?
2. What difference does income make in the lives of women working in the informal entertainment sector?
3. What does empowerment mean for the women working in this sector?
4. How do women in this sector build their resilience in order to cope with trauma and daily violence?
5. How significant is the role of positive deviants?
6. What is the overall role of peer networks in addressing the violence that women face?
7. How important are local women's organisations in supporting and driving change for women in this sector?

By addressing the above empirical questions, this study explores the relationship between earning an independent income, empowerment, resilience, and the significance of peer organisations and networks of women who work in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Kathmandu, Nepal. I investigated the various socio-cultural and political factors that compel women to migrate and to join the sex and informal industry, placing themselves in a highly vulnerable situation. I found that many factors, and particularly political armed conflict, disproportionately affect women, especially in societies where they are already subjugated and oppressed due to gender norms and patriarchal structures.

The study tested different models of empowerment in the context of the participants studied and found that income from the sex and entertainment industry is critical for the participants as it gives them decision-making powers and allows them to take control of their income and make strategic choices pertaining to their future aspirations - these factors put them on the path toward empowerment. Resilience emerges when their inner attributes intersect with external resources provided through peer networks. In such networks the participants found support and camaraderie which gave them the confidence to assert their rights and even to confront violence. This thesis reframes the sex and informal entertainment industry by moving beyond a victimisation framework but does so without downplaying the extent of violence women in this industry experience. In the final chapter, I attempt to build a counter-narrative that challenges dominant discourses which label sex workers as a subaltern category, devoid of agency and outside the bounds of acceptable moral behaviour. In particular, I reflect on how the women

struggle with their own ambiguity regarding their profession but find ways to remain positive about their future.

1.2 Origins of the Study: Researcher engagement with issues of violence against women and economic empowerment of women in South Asia

In the summer of 2012, I was recruited by the BBC World Service as a researcher and producer for a newly commissioned documentary on human trafficking. The documentary investigated how girls from eastern states of India were trafficked and sold for marriages in Haryana and Punjab, more prosperous northern regions that faced shortages of women due to skewed sex ratio resulting from female foeticide and infanticide. The documentary is titled: *India's lost girls*. Just when the documentary was aired worldwide on the BBC, there was another incident that made global headlines: a 23-year-old female student was brutally gang raped in a moving bus in south Delhi. The incident outraged India's civil society and thousands took to the streets to protest against a growing number of rape cases and other violence against women (VAW). These protests following the tragic incident were historically significant because they forced the government to make wide ranging amendments to the country's criminal law in order to deal sternly with sexual assault cases. Following this, there was a sudden surge in reporting and analysis of incidents of rape and VAW in India, especially by the international media. Many such reports were written by foreign journalists and stories revealed an incoherent narrative and inaccurate portrayal of rape in India (Bradley, Sahariah & Siddiqui, 2016). Many international journalists who flew into India to mine stories of VAW demonstrated a lack of understanding of the complexity and diversity of India's culture and value system.

The BBC documentary and the Delhi rape case inadvertently steered me toward reporting extensively on issues concerning gender-based violence across the South Asian region. In the next five years, I wrote numerous stories on human trafficking, VAWG and WEE. These stories were based on in-depth research and were featured in media outlets including *The Guardian (UK)*, *The BBC*, *The Dutch Public Broadcasting*, *The Huffington Post*, *Women and Girls Hub: NewsDeeply*, and *The World Economic Forum*. Along with Professor Tamsin Bradley of the University of Portsmouth, UK, I co-authored a British Academy of Researchers funded study titled, *A Critical Reading of Western Newspaper Narratives of Rape in India and their Implications for Feminist Activism (2016)*. In this paper, which is based on a comparative analysis of Western and Indian newspapers, we argued that there is a stark contrast between feminist academics, activists and the international print press when it comes to depicting the realities of VAW in India. There is no denying that VAWG in India is an urgent issue (Bradley & Pallikadavath, 2013; Chacko 2003; Srinivasan 2005 as cited in Bradley,

Sahariah & Siddiqui, 2016), but rape in India prior to December 2012 was barely reported in the international press (Bradley, Sahariah & Siddiqui, 2016).

My work was noticed by international agencies and donors that worked on women's issues and I was contacted by FreeSet, an international organisation that worked to create alternative livelihoods for women working in Sonagachi, India's largest red-light district. I visited Sonagachi a number of times and interacted with sex workers to learn about their lives and aspirations. I later met members of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee - a large national network representing two-thousand sex workers and their children. The organisation has been campaigning on issues such as inclusion of sex work in the Ministry of Labour, protection of labour and human rights of sex workers, and the recognition of the self-regulatory boards of sex workers in the interest of stepping up the fight against trafficking and for improving the quality of life of sex workers (Kotiswaran, 2011). My interactions made me realise that the sex and adult entertainment industry is an integral aspect of any economy and is a part of the vast informal labour sector. It is predominantly occupied by women workers but remains unprotected by legislation relating to wages or labour despite its substantial contribution to the economy (Rajan, 2011). My early field visits were informative and provided me with insights into the wider livelihood and social issues facing the women working in this industry. I realised that there was scope to look more deeply into lives of women working in this sector in order to document from the perspective of the workers what empowerment means to them, what their aspirations are and how they tackle the issues of stigma, violence and abuse that underpin their work. I identified a need to better understand new gender dynamics within the domestic and work spaces of women who are engaged in this industry.

In 2016, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned a comparative research across three countries; Pakistan, Nepal and Myanmar on Women, Work and Violence to investigate how approaches to WEE can tackle violence at the same time. The project was a part of a wider portfolio of research on VAWG in South Asia. The key objective was to understand the complex two-way relationship between VAW and WEE. The project was commissioned against the backdrop of a shift whereby significant resources in the developing world had been directed toward enhancing the financial independence of women in the belief that women who earn their own income will have control over how to spend it and will be given more leverage in decision-making at the household level. This, in turn, will empower women to take control over other aspects of their lives, including building resilience to violence. Unfortunately, however, this has not been the case (see Chapter Five). Part of the reason why is that income in the hands of women can also lead to a potential backlash: the transgression of

traditional gender norms (through employment and/or earning, for example) may actually lead to increased oppression at home and even to violent ‘backlash’ that seeks to redress the power balance (Goetz & Sen Gupta, 1996). As such, the objective of the DFID research was to establish how approaches to WEE can also tackle violence.

The aims of the DFID South Asia project were:

1. To understand how normative violence in specific societies shaped women’s economic engagement patterns and to ascertain how best to address this.
2. To uncover the complex ways in which earning or generating an income shapes/alters (both positively and negatively) the forms of violence that women experience, and how it affects their levels of vulnerability.
3. To unpack and describe how approaches to enhancing women’s economic activity can support prevention of, protection from and responses to VAW.

The overall impact objective was to generate new research that offers clear policy and programme direction on how WEE can be used as a vehicle to reduce and mitigate VAW.

I worked as a research assistant for this project and carried out the scoping study in Nepal (see Appendix 4) and Myanmar. The purpose of the scoping work (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) was to map in detail the demographics of the field sites through identifying key gatekeepers and the potential risks of the research (such as participants who may be distressed by it), and to gain insight into the enabling environment in terms of the community organisations who may be able to support the research (in facilitating interviews, for example). This phase also focussed on gathering more detail on key organisations and programmes that exist and identifying gaps in provision. From discussions with DFID, United Nations (UN) agencies and the government it emerged that no prior study had been conducted into the relationship between violence and the income of women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Nepal.

1.3 Thamel, Kathmandu: Overview of the sex and informal entertainment industry

Research has demonstrated that the majority of women in the sex and informal entertainment industry report experiences of physical and sexual violence. One study of 854 people in nine countries found that 63% had been raped since entering prostitution, suggesting that violence is a routine rather than exceptional event (Alvarez et al., 2003). Violence and abuse are not confined to specific settings or types of sex work - almost a quarter (23.3%) of exotic dancers, and over two thirds (66.7%) of women engaging in sex work in U.S. drug houses reported sexual violence, while one in five (21%) women working on the street, in their own homes or as escorts had been raped more than ten times (Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). A UK study across three cities

found almost half of women in street prostitution and over a quarter of those in indoor prostitution had experienced violence in the last six months (Barnard, Church, Hart & Henderson, 2001). Qualitative analysis of women's accounts of prostitution show parallels with their experiences of sexual violence in terms of their sense of violation and the disruption of their relationship with the body (Coy, 2009).

Thousands of women work in massage parlours and dance bars which often act as a conduit for sex work in Thamel, a vibrant business centre chosen as the primary fieldsite for this study. It is hugely popular with tourists and locals alike in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. Though there are no official figures available on the number of women working in what is largely regarded as 'informal entertainment' in Nepal, a 2009 study by Terre des Hommes (Tdh) estimated that 11,000 to 13,000 girls and women were in the industry in the Kathmandu valley alone. The actual figure is believed to be much higher across Nepal. In 2005, an ILO study based on a sample of two-hundred workers found that approximately 16.5% were below the age of eighteen, and a 2004 Action Aid study found that 37% of cabin restaurant workers had had to engage in some sort of sexual activity. A 2013 Nepal Human Rights Commission (NHRC) found that four in five workers reported that they had joined the industry through friends, and the study indicated that 73% of these women reported being verbally abused by customers, while 60% had experienced physical abuse.

Research and reporting on human trafficking in the Nepalese context has predominantly focused on external trafficking from Nepal, which was labelled a 'source country' by the U.S. Department of State (2012) in its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. Much of this trafficking, according to the report, involves persons from rural villages being transported across borders, primarily to India and, increasingly in recent years, the Gulf states. However, there is some indication that there is now a much higher proportion of trafficking internally, particularly to the capital, Kathmandu. However, none of the women interviewed for this study reported having been direct victims of human trafficking. The rise of internal trafficking of women and girls is reflected in the 2014 TIP Report, with Nepal being re-categorized as "a source, transit, and destination country."

Though some reports do cover internal trafficking in Nepal, specifically to and within Kathmandu, their scope is limited. The information that does exist suggests that there is a large entertainment sector involving commercial sexual activity and varying degrees of exploitation, including trafficking. Of the reports that do exist, several point to the recent, rapid growth of Kathmandu's entertainment sector, which is partially attributed to urbanization and the

liberalization of Nepal's economy, which has been impetus for the increase in internal trafficking within Nepal. Activists on the ground refute such claims, asserting that conflating the issues of human trafficking with the wider issues of women working in this sector can be problematic and self-defeating. They argue that it undermines their efforts to deal with issues of violence, empowerment and protection of the rights of women working in this sector. They claim that excessive focus on human trafficking means that the problems of the women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry gets sidestepped and systematically ignored by both the government and donors. Also, it is observed that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) mapped for this study have been actively involved in preventing underage girls from joining the sector. In Chapter Eight, I discuss how Raksha Nepal, one of the NGOs discussed in this study has been conducting workshops in villages to make the communities aware of the dangers of being trapped in Kathmandu's sex and informal entertainment sector (Free Slaves, 2015).

Responding to the surge of women working in this sector and reports of severe exploitation and trafficking, the Supreme Court of Nepal issued procedural guidelines in 2008 (Forum for Protection of Public Interest, 2009) giving protection against economic and sexual exploitation of women and girls in the entertainment sector in a bid to curb sexual harassment. Recently, a Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) during its observations on the sixth periodic report of Nepal expressed serious concern for non-implementation of guidelines and noted that women in the informal entertainment sector continue to face extreme violence and abuse from clients and law enforcement bodies. CEDAW has directed the Government of Nepal to formulate a comprehensive policy, legislative and regulatory framework that ensures monitoring and legal protection from exploitation of women who engage in prostitution and to ensure that they are not prosecuted for engaging in such activities (Thapa, 2018).

In the literature review (Chapter Two, Section 4) I look closely at how sex workers in Nepal have historically been perceived in relation to the normative expectations of women in Nepalese society and I discuss the social and economic factors that have resulted in the explosion of the informal entertainment industry in the Thamel area. Caviglia (2017) notes that sex work has often been connected with specific areas in Kathmandu. Thamel in particular is popular with tourists as it offers convenient and affordable accommodation to backpackers and those interested in adventurous trekking tours in the surrounding Himalayas. The network of dense alleys that characterises the area is dotted with thousands of small and medium size hotels, hostels, businesses, cafes and bars. In these places, there is a convergence of lifestyles and fashion between the foreigners and the upper-class locals. As Caviglia (2017) points out, such locations seek to

create a cosmopolitan environment, connecting to the Western world with similar ways of life. Thamel's density is unprecedented anywhere else in the city, and it is here that the dance bars, massage parlours and other venues offering other such services thrive, employing thousands of women and girls from all over Nepal. These places are notorious for providing sexual services under the glitzy banner of 'dance bars', 'hotels' and 'massage parlours'. Researchers acquainted with the area have described it as a gated area where people of all walks of life, irrespective of their background, can freely move around with anonymity in this overcharged commercialised context (Caviglia, 2017; Liechty, 2005; Marimoto, 2015).

1.4 Methodology: Qualitative Research

Among the general assumptions regarding women working in the informal entertainment industry or sex work is that they come from a poor economic background, are victims of human trafficking or have been coerced to join the sector for reasons beyond their control. Such beliefs are limited and limiting with regard to conducting research. There is a need to employ sensitizing concepts to explore and better understand the backgrounds of individuals and how these have led to the current situation of the participants in my research. Qualitative methods are useful tools to study the knowledge and practices of participants. It is critical to understand how they normalise their work and to analyse interactions and the ways of dealing with violence. As suggested by Flick (2014, p. 16) qualitative research takes into account the view points and experiences of the participants because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them. Qualitative research is frequently used in feminist studies in order to open up space for women's voices and needs in general.

1.5 Scoping Work

For the purpose of this study extensive scoping work was undertaken during the initial phase of the research (see Appendix 4). The objective of the scoping work was to scan the external environment in order to see first-hand the ground realities relating to WEE and VAWG in Nepal. Accordingly, a list of key stake holder organisations was mapped. The mapped organisations were divided into two broad categories in order to gain institutional perspectives and actor perspectives. The institutional perspectives refer to suppliers of services, or those who are duty bearers for addressing issues such as children's and women's protection, poverty reduction, WEE and VAWG. These include the Government of Nepal, UN agencies, donors, industry associations, and consulting organisations. The actor perspectives include those of individual women and girls, their associations (such as unions and financial or business cooperatives) and NGOs that work with them. The institutions that were interviewed in Nepal made several

statements relating to policies, norms and institutions or the legal, official and social policy environment, of which many are related to institutional initiatives or needs.

Since the women in the entertainment industry are a 'hard-to-reach' social group, the scoping work enabled me to select originations that were suitable for the study. The key challenge was how to get access to the women working in the sector and to ensure that the research could be conducted in a safe and secure environment. Whilst government agencies, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and NGOs provided valuable information about the type of VAWG and WEE projects that were already in place, it was, however, clear that there were no research initiatives in place to explore the how WEE can also potential tackle violence in relation to women who work in Nepal's informal entertainment industry.

Accordingly, four well known NGOs working in the informal entertainment sector, Raksha Nepal, Biswas Nepal, Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh (JMMS) and Society for Women Awareness in Nepal (SWAN) were contacted. During the scoping work, I visited all four organisations and held conversations with members of their staff. I also attended a meeting of union members. The exercise familiarised me with the general policy and legal enabling environment vis-à-vis women in the informal entertainment sector and the day-to-day challenges the face. For example, all four organisations emphasised that there are no laws in place to deal with crimes related to VAWG in the informal entertainment sector, which they attributed to the industry being seen as synonymous with sex work, which is not recognized by the Nepal government.

According to Raksha Nepal, among the women that they work with, approximately 57% are victims of conflict, and others have also experienced domestic violence, sexual violence and caste discrimination. The four organisations also stressed that since sex work is illegal, police officers are known to extract money from the owners of massage parlours, dance bars and other establishments in the informal entertainment industry. The points raised and documented during the scoping process were complemented by intense observation, and together these were instrumental in formulating the research questions as it gave some indication of what participants might reveal during the actual interview process. Accordingly, these issues were raised with individual participants as well as with focus groups.

1.6 Access to Participants

While considering the question of access to the participants, it was important to work out how to secure the collaboration of potential participants of the study and ensure that participants are willing to share their life experiences in a manner that leads to reliable data (Flick, 2015, p. 158). During the scoping work, I had informal discussions with Menuka Thapa, the founder of Raksha

Nepal, Shova Dangol of SWAN, Bijaya Dhakal of JMMS, Tara Bhandari and Balakumari Ale of Biswas Nepal. I was also able to meet a few women who benefited from their work. The dialogue was immensely helpful as it helped to clarify for me the intention of my research and also examine their work. This contributed to familiarising myself with the underlying problems and challenges that women face in the industry. The process also served as a trust building exercise as the organisations showed keen interest in the project and felt that there was a need to analyse and document the outcome of the work they were doing.

Whilst all four organisations mentioned above are documented in this study, Raksha Nepal was selected as a primary route through which to access the women who work in the sex and informal entertainment sector. The decision was mainly based various factors including the strategic location and expertise of the organisation and the scale of its outreach work. The organisation has over time established a union, an adult women's school, a shelter for children and a credit and scheme. These multiple branches offered a framework through which to study how they contribute to the empowerment process of women in the sector. It was also strictly mandated by the DFID ethics committee and the University of Portsmouth that sampling of the participants must be done with the help of local organisations who are active in the field.

Due to the subjective and qualitative nature of the interviews, it was necessary for a proper mechanism to be put in place to deal with safety and security of the participants and the researcher. I also recognised at an early stage that interviewing those who are already in touch with or active within the organisation might result in participants showing bias in favour of the organisation they are connected when responding to questions. To minimise such risks, I requested that Raksha Nepal reach out to women who were not directly associated with them, though this did not entirely avoid the limitation. Also, all the participants responded differently to the questions asked, and the overall sample (including the focus group) consisted of women who were not directly associated with Raksha Nepal, but were, nonetheless, aware of the organisation's activities. The number of interviewees was limited to twenty-one participants due to the complexity and sensitivity of the subject. It was also difficult to request that women participate in a study where the average time of the interview was going to be at least an hour. It was agreed by the DFID officials that interviews should be stopped once a saturation point had been reached, i.e. that the answers of the participants were becoming similar or identical ones that had been given in previous interviews.

The main advantage of seeking Raksha Nepal's help was that they had an office right in the heart of Thamel, where most of the women work. This made their presence highly visible and the field

workers of the organisation had developed good rapport with the women and girls working in the sector as they regularly interacted with them irrespective of their affiliation to the organisation. They organised their union meetings in the area fortnightly and ran an adult literacy programme that was designed for them but was also open to others. Due to their strong network, Raksha Nepal was in a position to explain the research to participants and invite them for an interview. The location for the interviews was chosen strategically as the women could easily come along to the office before, in-between, or after work. Raksha Nepal also provided a secure space for the interviews and a female interpreter who was well versed in Nepali and English and worked as a program officer with the organisation. The potential participants were already familiar with the staff members of Raksha Nepal, which was an asset as it meant that the interviews could be conducted in a space that was safe for the participants.

1.7 Description of Interviewees

The background of each participant in terms of age, caste, religion and marital status was not known until the time the interview was conducted. The ages of the participants varied from nineteen to fifty-one, though the majority of the participants were between aged between twenty and twenty-eight. Fifteen of the twenty-one participants had experienced child marriage and had become mothers before the age of eighteen and were no longer living with their husbands, though legally they were not divorced. There were three widows in the sample. None of the participants had had access to good education, with only one participant having attended high school, though she had also eventually dropped-out. Child marriage and the Maoist conflict (as explained in Chapter Three and Chapter Four) were the main reasons for not attending school. It was also found that women of all castes and religions, but particularly Hindus and Buddhists, had found their way into the informal entertainment sector. All women shared experiences of suffering and of poor economic conditions; these were the common denominators among all the participants. Table 1. (see page 14) provides the age, age of marriage, number of children, caste, and level of education for the twenty-one participants, as well as whether or not they lived with their husband at the time of interview.

1.8 Research Framework

The research was framed by a number of linked themes, which in turn helped me to generate interview questions. The themes were intended to help participants present their views in the framework of the question.

Participant No.	Age	Child Marriage	Age of Marriage	Children	Religion	Caste	Participant's Education	Living with Husband
1	41	Yes	14	Three children aged 22, 19 and 15	Hindu	Brahmin; father was a priest, enjoyed social status	High school (Class X)	No, separated
2	30	Yes	17	One daughter 10 years old	Hindu	Low caste; Pariwar	No education	No, separated
3	20	Yes	15	Has one 5-year-old boy	Buddhist	Tamang	No education	No, died in an earthquake
4	28	Yes	17	Has a 7-year-old son	Hindu	Low caste; Participant had inter-caste marriage	Primary school	Yes
5	27	No	20	Has a 7-year-old daughter	Born Hindu; practising Christianity for 6 months	Low caste; Participant had inter-caste marriage	High school	Yes
6	23	Not married	–	–	Hindu	Upper caste; Chettri	No education	–
7	33	No	21	3 children: 1 son and 2 daughters; age not available	Hindu; Drawn to Christianity via Korean missionaries	Low caste; Dalit	Primary school	Husband married twice. Mostly lives with his second wife
8	48	Yes	14	4 children. 3 daughters (25, 19, 10) son (17)	Hindu	Upper caste; Chettri	No education	Dead
9	28	Yes	14	One daughter; aged 6	Hindu	Upper caste; Brahmin; Participant had inter-caste marriage; Husband was from lower caste.	Partly attended school; had support by the family	No
10	19	Not married	–	–	Buddhist	–	Primary school; could not pass high school; keen to study.	No

11	45	Yes	14	Has three boys first child when she was 15	Hindu	Gurung	No education	Husband passed away
12	25	Yes	16	Has an 8-year-old boy	Hindu	Tamang	Primary school	No
13	32	Yes	15	Has three daughters (aged 15, 14, 11) and one son (8)	Born Hindu Brahmin, But was influenced by the Korean missionary to turn to Christianity for peace	Brahmin	Attended high school but not completed	No
14	40	Yes	17	Has 6 children (eldest 21, youngest 12)	Born Hindu; practising Christianity	Low caste; Dalit; Perihar	No education	No, separated
15	33	Yes	16	Four daughters (aged 14, 12, 9, 7 respectively)	Hindu	Low Caste, Dalit	No education	No, separated
16	23	Yes	13	Two daughters. Four and eight years old respectively	Buddhist; Says parents are asking her to convert into Christianity	Lama	No education	No
17	33	Yes	15	2 sons aged 17 and 12 respectively	Hindu	Upper caste; Chettri	High school	No
18	51	Yes	11	6 children, four sons and two daughters	Hindu	Upper caste; Chettri	No education	No
19	32	Yes	13	Has two children (aged 16, 12)	Hindu	Upper caste; Brahmin;	No education	No
20	37	No	19	One daughter aged 14 years old	Buddhist	Gurung	No education	Yes
21	31	No	26	One son four years old	Hindu	Upper caste; Chettri	Attended high school	No

Table 1. Characteristics of the twenty-one participants.

1.8.1 Early life and migration:

Rural to urban migration as well as cross border migration is on the rise in Nepal. The study sought to capture the impact this has on women working in the informal entertainment sector and their early vulnerabilities to violence. This broad line of enquiry underpinned the following narrower questions: Do women working in this sector feel they have been more or less vulnerable following their move from village home into a city? Is income the primary motivation for migration? Did they explore other income generating activities following migration or before joining the informal entertainment sector? This section was useful to develop an understanding of the beliefs, values, social frameworks and practical conditions that had shaped the participants' early experiences of violence and whether that had contributed to economic engagement in the sector. Chapter Three and Four provide in-depth intersectional analyses of various relevant sociocultural, economic and political factors relating to these questions.

1.8.2 How earning an income affects relationships within the home:

Much of the existing literature relating to intra-household bargaining suggests that earning an income increases a woman's bargaining and decision-making powers at home, but others have suggested that the outcome of increased income is context specific. This is explained in detail in the context of the participants of this study in Chapter Five. Accordingly, the key questions were: Do women have control over income? How do they spend the money? Does earning an income make women feel confident? And, if they are married, does earning an income introduce tensions due to challenging traditional gender norms and power relations?

1.8.3 Intersectional features:

Questions were also asked that explored how women working in the informal entertainment sector are more or less vulnerable to particular forms of violence and how this may or may not link to income levels and earning activities. The research sought to identify whether social norms in any way created situations where violence in women's personal lives was normalised (discussed in Chapter Four). Specific questions were also asked in order to ascertain whether some groups (such as partners, police, clients, or business owners) sanction particular forms of violence and not others. Questions included: Do women exercise resilience to violence and, if so, in what ways are they able to do this? What is the role of peer networks (discussed in Chapter Six and Chapter Eight) in promoting the well-being of women working in this sector? Does it help them to draw on resources or display greater agency to ensure protection and responsiveness to violence?

1.8.4 Nature, type and conditions of work:

Questions were also asked that sought to gain in-depth information pertaining to the work histories of participants. The questions that underpinned this part of the interview were: If they have always worked in the informal entertainment sector, how willing or unwilling were they to talk about it? If they have not, what other jobs had they been engaged in? Why did they leave those jobs to join the informal entertainment industry? What were the main drivers? Does access to women's collective action (peer networks) through cooperatives and unions, support services and other networks have a significant impact on determining both how empowered a woman feels to exert decision-making power and how vulnerable to violence she feels?

1.8.5 Aspirations for the future:

Finally, questions were asked regarding the personal aspirations of participants, which included discussing their willingness to stand up against violence, the importance of education, community attitudes and what changes can make a difference to their lives. The aim of these questions was to understand the outlook of participants towards life and if they have optimism despite the daily challenges that they encounter.

1.9 Ethical Considerations & Safety Concerns

Since this research followed a qualitative methodology, which included interviews and focus group discussions, important safety measures were followed to protect participants. Accordingly, World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines (WHO, 2001, p. 11) with additions from the University of Portsmouth Ethics Advisor were strictly adhered to during the research, and participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected to ensure both their safety and data quality. Special steps were also taken to ensure that the interviews were conducted in a safe place. At each interview, my identity card was presented, and the purpose of the project was explained in detail. I told participants how I came into contact with Raksha Nepal and other organisations, who had essentially acted as gate keepers. It was made clear to the participants that they would not gain any direct benefit from the research, but it might help to improve the lives of women.

The principles of confidentiality were repeatedly explained: the participants were told that their names will not be used and that the recordings will be deleted after the research work is completed and transcribed. It was also explained to them that it will not be possible to make any changes once the interview is complete and transcribed. They were specifically told that they could terminate the discussion at any time they wish, particularly in the event of any distress. It

was confirmed with the participant that they were happy to proceed, and consent was sought in the presence of a woman interpreter. Before the start of the interview, the participants were asked if they would like to have someone else present for the interview. As indicated above, all the interviews were conducted in presence of a female interpreter, who also worked as a programme officer with Raksha Nepal. Additionally, three interviews and both focus groups were monitored by DFID officials.

1.10 Interview Process

As a journalist, I have significant experience of conducting long and in-depth interviews for research-based stories on women's and girls' issues. One of the key techniques as a male a journalist and researcher working on these themes is to demonstrate care, respect and a helpful attitude towards the participants. In this process, the awareness of the cultural context is important as it helps in developing informal conversation, which is also an essential part of gaining the confidence of the participant. It is important for the interviewer to be vigilant, to pose the questions in a proper tone, and to maintain a clear local focus when discussing themes such as what characterises the safety problems of women working in the informal entertainment industry. Depending on how well the participant comprehends, a question may need to be further deconstructed. For example, "you know, you go to work every day and sometimes there are situations where there are untoward and even violent incidents. Can you please tell me about such situations and how you dealt with them?". This style of interviewing is discussed by Flick (2014) with reference to Rubin and Rubin:

[T]heir term 'responsive interview' for illustrating the interviewer's helpful attitude for successfully doing interviews in general.

Responsive interviewing is defined as a style of qualitative interviewing. It emphasises the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation. The tone of questioning is basically friendly and gentle, with little confrontation. The pattern of questioning is flexible; questions evolve in response to what the interviewees have just said, and new questions are designed to tap the knowledge and experience of each interviewee.

(Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 37 as cited in Flick, 2014, p. 208)

Throughout the process of the interview, the aim was to develop a full picture from the point of view of the participant, rather than simply get answers to the questions. So, the interviews began by asking questions regarding the participant's background. I then moved toward more specific questions relating to whether and how the interviewee earns money, and how the money is managed in the family. Here, I was seeking material that provided in-depth and detailed insights.

Some of the questions that were asked included: “What work do you do?”, “Have you always earned an income in the same way?”, and “How important is that you earn an income?”.

In most instances, women were direct in their response and said they worked in the informal entertainment industry, but others whilst describing their struggles did mention that they worked as street-based sex workers to support their family. Whilst asking specific personal questions related to experiences of harm and violence, the ethical guidelines were once again adhered to, and as such the participants were reminded that they could choose not to answer if they prefer, and that they could stop if they feel uncomfortable. Probes into interviewees’ answers were used as an instrument to draw out more depth and detail. Since the questions were prepared beforehand, effective interventions were used like “Could you please tell me more about what you just mentioned?”, or “What do you think are the main triggers?”. Sometimes probing was done more indirectly, by asking questions like “What in your view are the most common forms of harm that women in your profession experience?”, with a follow up question based on the participants answer, such as “Did you personally experience such violence?”, or “How did you handle it?”. The senior DFID Nepal officials who monitored the quality of the interviews expressed satisfaction regarding the manner in which they were conducted as well as the type of questions that were asked.

1.11 Focus Group

According to Patton (2002, p. 383 as cited in Flick, 2014, p. 243) “[a] focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic”. Patton adds that when studying opinions and attitudes of such subjects, it is important to use the dynamism of focus group discussion as it is a “highly efficient qualitative data collection technique, which provides some quality controls on data collection” (Flick, 2014, p. 243) The purpose of the focus groups for this study was to test the data more widely through the explicit use of group interaction in order to gain more insight into what can be done to improve the overall situation of women and girls who work in the informal entertainment sector. For the purpose of this research two focus groups with eight participants and seven participants respectively were conducted. The first focus group discussion was led by a senior DFID official alongside the researcher, and in the second the DFID official was an observer. This was primarily done for the purposes of quality control and in order to facilitate the discussions in a local language. It was decided that formal direction was necessary to explain the agenda of the discussion to a diverse group of participants. Also, having a senior woman development specialist was seen as necessary for steering the discussions towards a more deepening of specific topics and parts as listed below. It also encouraged confidence among the

participants that they could discuss the issues raised more openly. As moderators, we were successful in creating an open space for the discussion to keep moving.

Nonetheless, there were number of practical challenges. For example, some participants were more vocal and more dominant whilst others refrained from entering into the discussion. It was somewhat difficult to steer the conversation in a manner that allowed all participants to engage during the first focus group discussion. Another limitation was documenting the data in a way that allowed for the identification of individual speakers and differentiation between statements made by those who spoke simultaneously. For ease of documentation, the transcription of the data was done by a locally contracted researcher. The second focus group was slightly more structured because it was easier to predict the challenges that might arise, and greater efforts were made to ensure everyone's participation. For example, older women with years of experience and who have had close association with local organisations tend to have a better understanding of certain issues like what could be done to make the union stronger, while participants who were not members of the union did not necessarily have an opinion. Also, again due to the sensitivity of the topic, it was not possible to screen the participants beforehand. One of the issues that came up during the main interviews was that of acquiring citizenship of children whose mothers were separated. Surprisingly, the participants of focus group did not reflect similar concerns.

Questions that were included in the focus group were about the following:

- Work and interventions: The focus was also to gather more information on the organisations and associations they are part of. The discussion was also used to inform how impact and uptake for research like this can be designed.
- Membership of unions: The objective was to be informed what inputs or resources do they think would help the union to be stronger in reflecting their needs and positively influence employers.
- Violence at home: Apart from understanding the general forms of violence that they experience, some options were explored which may relate to research uptake and knowledge products (educational material, posters with key messages, support networks for those addicted to alcohol etc.)
- Earning and society: Questions were asked about what could make a difference to their lives. Questions were also asked if they are aware of their constitutional rights and to explore if there is a need to communicate more in different languages around the existing rights of women.
- Single mothers and citizenship: Questions were framed to explore the challenges in acquiring citizenship if they are single mothers and also if they are working in the informal entertainment industry. Are they aware of their rights as citizens?
- Migration and health: The focus was also on how this information could be improved and made more relevant. Questions on access, availability and usage were asked and what improvements are needed.

1.12 Thematic Coding & Content Analysis

I adopted what Braun and Clarke's "concept of thematic analysis that involves searching across the data set... to find patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86 as cited in Flick, 2014, p. 421). After familiarising myself with the data, I used colour coding to generate themes. The data was subsequently organised under six broad themes:

1. Basic information.
2. Reasons for migration and joining entertainment industry.
3. Nature and level of violence.
4. Cultural norms resulting in violence.
5. Experiences of earning an income and membership of organisations, critical perspectives.

1.13 Chapter Structure

Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two I present the context of the global sex and informal entertainment industry. I introduce the key theoretical debates underlining the business of sex work, and then discuss the political economy of sex work and present an overview of the scale of and recent trends within the global sex and informal entertainment industry. I explore the socio-economic factors that contribute to attracting millions of women and girls to work in this sector, particularly in developing economies. I go on to discuss the various dimensions of sex work in order to examine the notions of empowerment, labour and violence inherent in the industry. The chapter also considers existing empirical data and other available evidence to analyse the extent to which the sex and informal entertainment industry fuels human trafficking. I then proceed to provide a broad overview of the history and emergence of sex work and informal entertainment in Kathmandu. I explain how local community discourses frame sex work and the wider informal entertainment industry in Nepal as distinct categories and point out how development aid projects affect understandings of the sex work category (Caviglia, 2017).

In Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I analyse the key factors that contributed to participants making the decision to move to the capital, Kathmandu, and eventually join the sex and informal entertainment industry. In essence, these two chapters look at the lives of participants before they joined the informal entertainment sector. Chapter Four in particular discusses the impact of the ten-year Maoist conflict (1996-2006) on the lives of participants. During the interviews, I found that one third of the participants' lives had been shattered during the insurgency that gripped Nepal. The chapter provides evidence of some of the worst forms of violence that were perpetrated by the rebel forces. The chapter is significant because, as the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) report *The Impact of Nepal's Conflict on Women* (Sharma & Young, 2010) underlined, information pertaining to sexual violence against women and girls during the armed

conflict in Nepal is scarce and scattered. The chapter demonstrates how the lack of transitional justice mechanisms have failed the marginalised women who have been severely affected by the conflict. They faced severe stigmatisation that, couple with a lack of monetary compensation or rehabilitation programmes, meant that they were left to fend for themselves. Many found their way into the sex and informal entertainment industry as means to meet their survival needs.

Chapter Five seeks to develop an understanding of the beliefs, values, social frameworks and practical conditions that shaped violence in the early lives of the participants. A combination of various factors including child marriage, dowry, notions of honour, alcoholism and intimate partner violence (IPV) intersect in ways that lead to abuse under different circumstances. These early experiences of violence have left scars of deep trauma in the lives of the women who were interviewed for this study. In many cases they were abandoned by their abusing partners. For some of the participants, these circumstances also influenced their decision to join the informal entertainment industry to meet their survival needs. In this chapter, I adapted Heise's social ecological framework (Heise, 2011) to analyse the data. The framework affirms that VAW is caused by one or a combination of many factors; such violence can be attributed to genetics or personal history or can be situational. The framework is useful as it provides a structure within which to analyse the complex interplay of probabilistic factors that work at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and in turn locates these levels within broader cultural frameworks that can help explain the underlying reasons for the violence experienced by the participants.

In Chapter Six, I introduce the various theories of empowerment and concepts of power. I discuss these in relation to women's income, their degree of autonomy, and ability to make choices. It has been argued that women's economic engagement refers to participation in activities that generate an income. However, economic activity does not equate to empowerment.

Empowerment is a holistic concept, denoting a process in which an individual is able to access resources and build power and agency. Typically, it means increasing decision-making power, building self-efficacy and self-esteem, gaining control of assets, and generating positive outcomes (Kabeer, 2003). Studies on women's economic empowerment have not looked in detail at what empowerment *means* for those working in the sex and entertainment industry. Thus, many questions - What are their resources? How do they exercise choice and express agency? How can their empowerment be measured? - remain unanswered. In this chapter, I apply the concepts of empowerment and power and discuss them in relation to the participants in order to contribute addressing some of these questions. I argue that the participants use their bodies as a resource and, as they earn an income from it, they are able to gain a certain degree of autonomy with

regard to decision-making processes in respect to their own lives. I propose a model as a measure of empowerment for the participants based on the examples discussed in the chapter.

Building upon the discussions of the previous chapter, Chapter Seven discusses how the women who participated in this study demonstrate resilience against the various forms of violence that underpin their profession. Resilience means the ability of an individual to withstand, challenge and overturn the power structures that shape choices, opportunities and wellbeing. In this chapter, I document the various frameworks on resilience and examine how the question of resilience of sex workers has been explored by other studies. The chapter captures the depth of trauma the participants have experienced and presents a comprehensive analysis of how peer networks help women to further strengthen and facilitate the characteristics of their resilience. Based on this analysis, I propose my own framework to demonstrate how resilience leads to an empowering process for participants. The framework illustrates how women working in the informal entertainment sector collectively create a model in the form of a peer network which serves as a protective lens, and through that lens they reconstruct their relationship with the outer world.

Chapter Eight introduces the concept of ‘positive deviancy’, which is described as:

a social inquiry which is based on the premise that in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviour and strategies enable them to find better solutions to the same problems facing their peers.

(van de Fliert, Freidman & Herington &, 2017)

In this chapter, I look at the lives of five women Menuka Thapa of Raksha Nepal; Bijaya Dhakal of Jagariti Mahila Maha Sangh; Tara Bhandari and Balkumari Ale of Biswas Nepal; and Shova Dangol of (SWAN), whose extraordinary initiatives have had a transformative impact on the lives of other women working in this sector. I propose a framework in which the four women above can be described as ‘positive deviants’ in order to identify the factors that play a significant role in their becoming champions of change, which in turn has positive consequences for other members of the community.

The final chapter details the role of peer networks in the context of the broad range of services that they offer by way of creating institutions such as credit and saving schemes, shelter homes for children, and a union. I consider what these services mean for women who work in the sex and informal entertainment sector, as well as what strength they derive from it. I use the culture-centred approach to address these questions (Basu, 2011 & 2017; Basu & Dutta, 2008). In the culture-centred approach, the narrative of the cultural participants (in this case the women

working in the sex and informal entertainment industry) are used to reconstitute discourses that contextualises the cultural meanings and structures of their living conditions. These discourses challenge the dominant mainstream perception that marginalised communities, including sex workers, are incapable of making informed choices on matters pertaining to their lives. The chapter also examines the role of the union of sex workers at the global level, including the services it provides to the women who work in the sex and informal entertainment sector in Kathmandu. To conclude, I summarise the findings, identify the remaining gaps in research, and propose a number of policy recommendations.

2. WOMEN WORKING IN THE SEX & INFORMAL ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY: A REVIEW OF THE GLOBAL LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the scale and the complexities of the global sex and entertainment industry. It explores the various theoretical and conceptual debates around sex work, ranging from the view that sex work is an activity oriented around economics to the view that it is a purely exploitative form of work. The chapter then goes on to examine the political economy of the sex and informal entertainment industry in order to establish the global dynamics in relation to this sector. In doing so, it informs the reader of the numerous social, political and economic factors that structure and sustain the global growth of the industry and analyses the diverse factors that motivate many thousands of women and girls around the world to work in this sector. These issues are vital to this study as they allow for the experiences of the participants to be compared and contrasted with those that have been documented elsewhere. Against this backdrop, the chapter also provides background and context to the emergence of the entertainment industry in Nepal. It identifies the gaps in research, particularly in relation to what empowerment means and how violence is dealt with by women who are engaged in the sex and informal entertainment sector in Nepal.

This chapter begins by discussing the key debates around sex work by considering the arguments proposed by the oppressive and empowerment paradigms. The narrative that supports the oppressive paradigm - the view that sex work is denigrating to the women's dignity and bodily integrity - is in contrast to the empowering model, which views sex work from the perspective of labour and argues that the transactional nature of the work allows women to detach their sexuality and have control over her client's emotions and demands.

Following this I discuss the global political economy of sex work by examining its various dimensions and how it is shaped by the forces of globalisation, capitalism and, more recently, digital technology. The section also considers the economics of sex and the entertainment industry at the global level and what violence means for the women working in this sector. The question of whether sex work can be empowering for women is addressed with reference to examples from the studies reviewed.

In the next part of the chapter I look at the emerging debates that consider sex work through a human trafficking lens. I examine various studies that are based on empirical data in order to analyse the extent to which the sex and informal entertainment industry fuels human trafficking. Studies from Nepal are specifically cited to demonstrate how, when narratives on human trafficking are used to frame them, policies and interventions to control sex work can be far from effective.

In the latter part of the chapter I discuss existing projects that have been sought to enhance the economic empowerment of sex workers. Interventions or programmes that are designed in collaboration with sex workers communities are more likely to succeed when compared to externally imposed 'top-down' approaches. To understand this at the local level, I look more closely at the origin and growth of the sex and informal entertainment industry in Kathmandu, and how sex workers as a category have been historically framed in Nepal. Here, I discuss the severe stigmatisation and discrimination faced by sex workers, which is compounded by HIV/AIDS narratives that tend to single out sex workers as a high-risk group that needs to be controlled. I examine Caviglia's work on sex work in Nepal (2017), in which the author argues that such approaches undermine the rationality of women who work in the sector.

To conclude, I summarise the key points raised in the chapter and outline the gaps that I have sought to address in this study. I argue that whilst there is a consensus that violence is inherent in the sex and informal entertainment industry, there is, nonetheless, a need to consider the industry itself in the broader social, economic and cultural context. I point out how this thesis stands out when compared to other major studies involving sex workers in Nepal; while other studies have looked at the societal creation of sex workers as a category, this thesis instead considers questions of empowerment and power relations by deconstructing the narratives of the participants and applying the various theoretical frameworks of empowerment and resilience.

2.2 The Global Sex Work Debate

Theories on sex work in the Euro-American context have broadly examined sex work from the perspective of two paradigms: the empowerment paradigm and the oppressive paradigm (Weitzer, 2009). The proponents of the oppressive paradigm emphasise that sex work is a typical expression of patriarchy and unequal gender relations. From this perspective, exploitation, subjugation and violence are intrinsic to and ineradicable from sex work (Dworkin, 1993; Jeffreys, 1997; MacKinnon, 1993). This builds upon a large body of work on prostitution in the 20th century that perceived the sex industry and its allied activities as deviant, criminal, and negative for society (Pérez-y- Pérez, 2003, p. 13). However, the scope of study of the sex

industry, as this study demonstrates, is no longer restricted to brothels alone. Sex work includes exotic dancing, prostitution and other exchanges of sex for money, which sometimes occur in massage parlours and through escort services. Studying exotic dancing as a form of sex work is important because it not only makes up a large and lucrative part of the sex industry, but it is also increasing in its scope, particularly in Nepal where this study is conducted (Estébanez, Fitch & Nájera, 1993). Fortunato (1973 as cited in Bryant & Palmer, 1975) describes massage parlours as places 'where anything goes' and states that they offer wide a repertoire of sexual services for an appropriate fee.

Conversely, proponents of the empowerment paradigm emphasise that sex work is a form of labour whereby a woman detaches herself from her sexuality and offers her services purely on a commercial basis. The argument states that in doing so, she has the power to contain her emotions. Dudash (1997 as cited in Perez-y-Perez, 2003, p. 25) for example, argues that working in the sex industry can be empowering for women in that they acquire a sense of being in control of their own bodies and are thus able to deal more effectively with the harassment associated with sex work. This point is significant in this research because participants were specifically asked if they see the business of sex in itself as an empowering process, if they have control over their bodies and situations, and what mechanisms they resort to deal with harassment and violence at work.

It is important to acknowledge that both the empowerment and oppressive paradigms discussed above are based on examinations of the sex industry in the developed world where remuneration from such work is reasonable and where there are adequate mechanisms in place for ensuring the safety and security of women engaged in various kinds of informal entertainment and sex work. Critics of such studies say contemporary Euro-American feminist debates on prostitution simply lack reference to 'the basic concepts of class and social relations of production' that lie at the heart of why women work in the sex industry (Aguiler, 2000 as cited in O'Connell Davidson 2002, p. 93). Certainly, questions regarding sex work that preoccupy many Euro-American feminists can at times seem irrelevant in the developing world where many women are pushed into or forced to join the sex and informal entertainment industry due to poverty, survival needs, conflict and various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination that are deeply rooted in the social fabric of societies around the world. Doezama and Kempadoo (1998) have described the Euro-American perspective as the 'canon' in prostitution studies, remarking that:

little research or theorizing to date is, for example, grounded in the lives, experiences, definitions and perspectives of Third World people in sex work, allowing western categories and subjects to be privileged in the international discourse on sex work.

(as cited in Wardlow, 2004, p. 1018)

More recently, however, a number of studies have emerged from the developing world, particularly from South Asia, that have move beyond the traditional debates outlined above (Murthy & Seshu, 2013). Such studies have been predominately focussed on the economic, political and theoretical impact of sex work.

Sex workers' organisations often argue that the victimisation and stigmatisation narratives that abolitionist resort to invariably depict all sex work as a crime against women, rather than recognising that sex work is *work* first, and then, in specific cases, should be denounced as criminal exploitation. These groups, including the NGOs referred to in this study, do not contest that women who work in this sector might be compelled to 'sell sex' due to economic hardship, or lack of alternatives. Rather, they are critical of the lack of inclusion of sex workers' opinions, views and experiences within decision-making and policy-making processes. In this research, I look at the role of women who have been championing for the rights of sex and informal entertainment in industry in Nepal. For this reason, I examine their work by applying the positive deviance framework, which, as noted, underpins one of the research questions for this study. Through their activism, positive deviants are altering their marginal speaking position vis-à-vis powerful international NGOs through the overpowering characterisation of victimisation (Hahn & Holzscheiter, 2013, p. 513).

2.3 The Sex & Informal Entertainment Industry in Asia: An Overview of the Scale and the Recent Trends

This section gives an overview of the most significant socio-economic factors that contribute to the ongoing surge of growth in the sex and informal entertainment industry in developing economies, which is one of the research questions of this study. The growth of the sex industry in certain Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand is rooted in the history of the Vietnam War and the Cold War, during which local women were increasingly used to serve the US military personnel. However, in this review, I do not provide a detailed historical account, but instead focus on how in recent times the commodification of women's bodies has been driven by neo-liberal market forces that have translated into a greater demand for sex work and informal entertainment in developing economies. This trend is visible in Nepal (discussed in more detail in the following chapter) where sex work remains illegal, but the government

recognises the informal entertainment industry. Questions arise regarding why this is the case, particularly whether it is due to government's inability to create decent jobs in the economy, or the government turning a blind eye to the issues of this sector because powerful and politically connected stakeholders run the industry. Throughout the course of this research, the participants stressed that the lack of decent jobs coupled with factors like illiteracy and inability to learn new skills leaves them with no choice but to stick with the informal entertainment industry. The sections below look at examples from other Asian countries and discuss why being engaged in the sex and informal entertainment sector remains a viable option despite the undercurrents of violence and associated issues of stigma and discrimination that women face on a regular basis.

Globalisation has resulted in the proliferation of the sex industry in urban spaces in the form of strip/lap dancing clubs, sex tours and in some areas licenced parlours, with the anodyne epithet of 'adult entertainment' (Jeffreys, 2009). Literature that examines the growth of sex industry in the context of globalisation point out that in many fast-growing economies, the proliferation of the sex and informal entertainment industry is linked with high economic growth, which has created a new class of people with disposable incomes that increasingly look for leisure and erotic entertainment (Hakim, 2015; Smith, 2011; Wilson, 2004). However, economic growth has also been inequitable; it has resulted in large scale internal migration forcing young women and girls to larger cities where they find employment in the new symbols of growth like dance bars, pubs, malls, massage parlours. In Chapter Four and Chapter Five I examine the factors that created the circumstances for the participants of this study to migrate to Kathmandu and eventually join the sex and entertainment industry.

Sex work, which is seen as one of the most dramatic parts of adult entertainment, is increasingly interrelated with the global economy and has attracted tens of thousands of women and girls from around the world to work in the industry. In part, this is attributed to a huge increase in tourism, but young women are also recruited into sex work through migration, often under the conditions of virtual enslavement (Jeffreys, 2009). The sex industry took root and flourished under the aegis of globalization much before the internet era. For example, Lim's study (1998) examining the economic and social basis of prostitution in South Asia (which was incorporated into an International Labour Organisation [ILO] report) illustrated the sheer size and role of the sex and informal entertainment industry in the South Asian economies. The study documented that in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand the sex sector accounted for between 2% and 14% of the GDP. Beyond the women directly engaged in this sector, tens of millions relied on the industry for their livelihood, thereby raising an array of different issues relating to basic

human rights, morality, employment, gender discrimination and criminality. The growth of this sector provided local government authorities with substantial revenue in the form of bribes and corruption in areas where prostitution thrived illegally, and from licensing fees and taxes where it was legal, as well as from the hotels, bars, restaurants and game rooms that flourished alongside the sex work and informal entertainment. It is precisely for these reasons that it has been extremely challenging for governments to separate moral and economic regulations of the sex industry.

The flow of cash and capital creates a distinct identity for women in the wider adult entertainment industry in different domains (Hoang, 2014). Commenting on how female bodies have increasingly become part of the global trade equation, Smith (2011, pp. 532-533) remarks that Penttinen (2008) observed that:

globalization requires and produces both 'a specific kind of woman that is the embodiment of a stereotypical sex object' - that of the erotic and exotic other - and a specific kind of consumer - that of 'the masculine subject that is positioned as the one who consumes, who gazes and who is entertained and served' (2008: 523). As a commodity in the global capitalist market, the body of a woman working in the entertainment sector is not only a terrain upon which the male client can project his desires but is also a site upon which globalization itself is inscribed (2008: 75).

(Penttinen as cited in Smith, 2011, pp. 532-533)

We see echoes of such argument in Hoang's (2014) study on Vietnam's sex workers that highlight the relationship between transitional economies and commodification of women's body in the context of the country's political economy. The study shows that sex workers have a dual role, embodying different economic necessities. On one hand are the women who serve a niche market for the local affluent class and carry pan-Asian notions of beauty. These women are a symbol of Vietnam's modernising economy. They cater to Ho Chi Minh City's (HCMC) high-end niche market and play a role in helping wealthy, elite Vietnamese businessmen attract foreign direct investment (FDI) from Asian investors. The sexualised image of feminine beauty that these women project is deliberately tailored to convey Vietnam's new position as an emerging economic player on the global landscape. On the other hand, are women and girls, who appeal to the racial desires of Western clients by deliberately conjuring up an image of a third-world women in need. The author points out that:

altering their skin colour [to make it darker] strategy these women adopted to racialize their bodies in a way that would exaggerate their appearance as poor women in a Third World country.

(Hoang, 2011, p. 16)

The study is important because it shows how sex work operates in the market economy by aligning itself to the shifting configurations of the global economy. Hoang also highlights that:

HCMC's sex industry was shaped by broader economic forces such as rapid local development and the growth of 'frontier markets' [that became] enmeshed in the international political economy. For Vietnamese workers, satisfying the needs of their Asian clientele helped cement growing status of the region. In striving towards new pan-Asian and global beauty ideals, which were both distinctly non-Western, women embodied the increasing recognition of previously marginalized countries in the global arena.

(Hoang, 2011, p. 20)

Hakim (2015), commenting on how the sex industry is becoming increasingly pervasive and stronger by going digital, disagrees with the views expressed by pressure groups consider the industry as something that normalises VAW. He states that such arguments are 'outdated' (2015, p. 339) in the context of Western countries. He criticises research that draws conclusions after merely focusing on street-based sex workers, treating them as a typical group as they are easier to study (Weitzer, 2005; Brooks-Gordon, 2006 as cited in Hakim, 2015). Hakim goes on to state that street-based sex workers represent no more than 10% of the industry as most of the trade has now moved indoors, becoming invisible to researchers and the general public. He also disagrees with the notion that all migrants who involved in sex work are 'trafficked' and acknowledges that there could be more than one reason why people might choose to join the sex industry. This observation is echoed in this research as none of the participants had directly been entrapped in the business of sex through human trafficking routes.

Factors like globalisation, modernity and capitalism played a pivotal role in changing citizens' identities, subjectivities, communities, and relationships especially in the Global South (Wilson, 2004, p. 8). While poverty is often cited as a most common reason for women to enter the sex industry, Sandy (2009) who examined the motives of women joining the sex industry in Cambodia cautions that such interpretation can sometimes be too simplistic, noting that flexible working hours, potential higher monetary benefits in contrast to other alternatives within the socioeconomic environment are also reasons why women choose to go down that path. The findings of this study support these observations.

2.4 Violence in Sex Work

One of the overarching questions of this study relates to how approaches to women's economic empowerment can simultaneously tackle violence. It is well known that the sex and informal entertainment industry is characterised by extreme violence, but it is not clear how the women who work in this sector *perceive* this violence, or whether their notions of violence differ from those who look at the industry from the outside. This study seeks to better understand how women in this industry build their resilience. For example, the participants of this study acknowledge and describe the levels of violence that they face at work, but they also maintain that with the help of peer networks they have found ways to build resilience in order to cope with violence. In this section, I discuss how other studies have addressed the issues of violence that are inherent in the sex and informal entertainment sector.

Ditmore (2014a, 2014b) while examining the lives of women engaged in the informal sex industry in Cambodia states that they suffer varied and extreme violence. Interestingly, however, she stops short of calling the industry violent as women engaged in the industry do not want it to be abolished. Instead, they demand better working conditions free from harassment, violence and exploitation by pimps, businesses, police and other actors. Despite limited choices of alternate employment and their marginalization and exclusion, many sex workers interviewed by Ditmore work to uphold culturally valued social obligations such as paying off debts and supporting their families. Studies based on rigorous social science research suggest that workers in the sex sector have high self-esteem and self-confidence and have also found that no correlation exists between erotic entertainment and local violence against women, and even that the supply of such services actually reduces VAW (Hakim, 201; Jenkins, 2009). Based the studies cited above, it seems clear that the global sex industry is largely shaped by specific cultural, political and economic conditions. The section on sex work in Nepal discusses how 'sex work' is constructed as a category, and the succeeding chapters go on to explore the myriad motives and reasons for why some of the participants chose to enter and remain in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Kathmandu. The world of this industry is complex and there are a wide range of interests and power dynamics that operationalise it. The women who work in sex and informal entertainment are merely the most visible actors of the industry. Skeldon (2000) whose research looks at market development and trafficking as a business points out to that the 'woman as victim' interpretation favoured by feminist and NGO representatives might not be always true, noting that:

the industry is divided into many sub-sectors, each catering to different markets, each with their own geography, price structure and organization. Those who have studied the

various sectors are virtually unanimous in their assessment that most women entered the sex industry voluntarily.

(Skeldon, 2000, p. 18)

It is reported in Skeldon's study that only 13.5% of the women in brothels and 7.5% in massage parlours in Thailand were introduced by agents or middlemen, thus debunking the assumption that trafficking and sex industry are tightly linked, an issue discussed in detail in the next section. Most of the girls entered the sector through a person they have known and tend to come from provinces that have lower economic development and with no other options for alternative work. This raises the question: do girls enter the profession despite the risks of abuse because they believe that being with people from the same community with a shared history of migration in a faraway place could provide an extra layer of protection to deal with the abuse and violence?

This suggests a rather different account of the circumstances in which, and by whom, sex workers are most likely to be abused (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015, p. 249). It is often highlighted by those working in the industry that it is the social and legal structures created to address the matter that lead to secrecy. Non-reporting results in impunity for the offenders and the subsequent perpetuation of violence, and abuse by the police, authorities and organisations involved in the 'clean ups' and the 'raid and rescue' operations are often of greater concern than violence from clients. In line with these observations, violence perpetrated by police is a recurring theme that emerged in this study. In her study in Vietnam, Binh (2006 as cited in Bradley & Szablewska, 2015, p. 249) concluded that sexual exploitation most often takes place not in venues "established for prostitution [but rather in] "nightclubs, bars, beer halls, and other entertainment venues". Also, in most of Southeast Asia and South Asia, victims of trafficking are often labelled as criminals and there is insufficient state support for them. Sex workers tend to be treated as dirty women who lack morality, thereby attracting abuse and neglect from the people in authority. As has been reported in other countries, stigmatisation of the profession along with blaming sex workers for their choice of occupation (often with disregard for the underlying structural and socio-economic factors) leads to further marginalisation and discrimination. This is used by state officials to justify police brutality which, in turn, promotes further violence and abuse of these women. As such, Bradley & Szablewska (2015, p. 249) argue that not only is there a lack of knowledge of the causes leading to prostitution and the diversity of motivations for why women decide to enter the industry, but there is also insufficient information regarding the diversity of sex work services. Both require further research before decisions on sex work and how it should be regulated can be taken.

2.5 Questioning the Human Trafficking Narrative

Sex workers' rights organisations around the world strongly oppose the dominant discourse on human trafficking; that most women working in the sex and informal entertainment sector are victims of human trafficking, which is mainly upheld by abolitionists. They allege that such views are often exaggerated and, in the process, hamper the prospects of improving the economic empowerment, citizenship rights and well-being of women working in this sector and their children. The stigma and discrimination that most women in this sector face occurs at three levels: (i) the economic level due lack of work opportunities, (ii) the social level due to stigma and inability to access legal rights and (iii) the physical level due vulnerability to violence at the hands of pimps, partners, and clients (Ngo et al., 2007 as cited in Moret, 2014, p. 9).

It is widely believed by those working in this sector - and strongly indicated by participants of this research - that efforts should be made to ensure that women engaged in these sectors are empowered enough to address such issues. This research explores these issues in the context of the role of peer networks in Nepal. However, below I cite examples of why conflating human trafficking with sex work is problematic before moving on to review some of the interventions aimed at improving the economic empowerment of sex and informal entertainment workers. However, this research in no way suggests that trafficking of women in the sex industry does not take place. Rather, it points out sex workers organisations can be strong partners in combating human trafficking, and in the chapter of positive deviancy (Chapter Six), I illustrate this with reference to one NGO, Raksha Nepal, which is using methods identified as positive deviancy to prevent human trafficking of underage girls into the informal entertainment industry.

The Global Network of Sex Workers Projects (NSWP) point out in *Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment. Regional Report: Asia and Pacific* (NSWP, 2014a) that in the last two decades it has gradually become apparent that actual victims of coercive practices like human trafficking are far fewer than thought. Asian Sex Workers' organisations like EMPOWER, APNSW and others state that the 'rescue and rehabilitation' approach championed by abolitionists and radical feminists obliterate the political economy of sex work (NSWP, 2014a, p. 9). Whilst human trafficking is not the focus of this study, in the following paragraphs I briefly discuss why looking at the sex and entertainment industry through the human trafficking lens can be problematic. The arguments made here are important as they allow us to make comparisons between economic empowerment programmes for sex workers (discussed in the next section) and those NGO project that conflate sex work with trafficking and whose rescue programmes tend to have their basis in morality rather than in human rights.

Worldwide, it has been assumed that trafficking for sexual exploitation accounts for 58% of all trafficking cases (UNODC, 2012). In the EU, 62 percent victims of trafficking have been identified as victims of sexual exploitation (EUROSTAT, 2013). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2010), there are around 140,000 victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and up to one in seven persons engaged in prostitution in Europe have been trafficked. Other sources suggest that 70-90 percent of women in prostitution have been forced into prostitution by criminal groups (Mason, Novo Canto, Schulze & Skalin, 2014, p. 16).

However, the figures such as those cited above have been contested by Weitzer (2011), who asserts that precise claims about actual profits and the actual number of women who have entered the sex trade through trafficking would require robust evidence that does not exist. Weitzer also criticises international agencies, NGOs, and those who toe the abolitionist line, particularly for inflating the extent of trafficking by linking it with prostitution and the sex industry rather than analysing it within the wider issues of migration and economic need. She debunks the assumption that prostitution aids trafficking of women and girls and suggests that the data supporting the theory cannot not be substantiated due to three fundamental problems:

- (1) the clandestine nature of trafficking (which makes it difficult to obtain data);
- (2) the lack of a solid baseline from which changes over time can be measured; and
- (3) possible market saturation, especially for sexual commerce.

She further asserts that numbers are exaggerated and reproduced in the media with the intention of causing alarm, shocking the world and convincing governments to commit greater resources to fighting prostitution, to funding rescue operations and to enhancing penalties against traffickers and clients. Weitzer further questions the authenticity of the data that NGOs formulate for advocacy, which she claims is not based on sound research. In a review of over one-hundred academic journal articles, Weitzer found that the claims of government agencies (especially those of the U.S.) and global organizations (such as the UN) were treated as evidence, even though most of these agencies had failed to reveal their data sources or methods. The most quoted source was the annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* by the U.S. State Department, and very few of the academic articles were based on independently collected data (Weitzer, 2011, p. 1034).

In reference to the link between sex work and human trafficking from the context of transitional justice, Bradley and Szablewska (2015) argue that counter human trafficking policies that conflate trafficking in human beings (THB) with sex work are counterproductive and have not yielded the

desired results. As studies conducted in relation to other domains of human behaviour show, the more viable strategies should look at how to make practices safer - in this case, migration or sex work - rather than prohibit them entirely. Prohibition is highly unrealistic and also denies people the right to use their bodies as they wish, even if such practices might be perceived as harmful or as carrying significant risks (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015, p. 271).

Taking Cambodia and Myanmar as examples, Bradley and Szablewska (2015) illustrate why state responses might be detrimental to achieving the aims of preventing trafficking and can potentially disempower women in general. Both the countries have had terrible histories of internal conflict, which has triggered mass displacement of people. Women and girls in particular have been disproportionately affected due to various features of the social contexts; not least because it is women who take responsibility to support their families. In a post-conflict situation, they find themselves in a socio-economic climate that does not readily allow them to work outside low-paid traditionally female roles. Low paid jobs in South Asian countries, like those of the garment industry, are often poorly paid with long working hours and poor working conditions, which often leads women towards more lucrative employment in the sex industry. This was also observed in the data collected for this thesis; women have abandoned jobs in carpet factories due to exploitation, poor working conditions and low wages.

Gurung (2014) examines cases of Nepali girls and women who were trafficked and sold into Indian brothels and illustrates how trafficking of girls and women has occurred at the intersections of larger structural conditions and other micro level factors. By applying gender, intersectional, and globalization/transnational perspectives, Gurung analysed the processes and conditions under which sex trafficking occurred and how women were forced into prostitution. The study found that sex trafficking and the sex trade industry is structured by intersectional features including race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and citizenship status. In Chapter Four, I explain how these factors intersect and operate simultaneously in the lives of the participants and how this creates an interlocking system of oppression and exploitation. In the chapter on Maoist conflict, I also discuss how transitional justice (TJ) was denied to women following the peace agreement between the warring parties. Bradley and Szablewska (2014) argue that THB happens globally but note that it is especially pervasive in transitional societies, and some of its forms are more typical in, or even unique to, societies emerging from conflict. Thus, policy responses, actions and any counter-measures to human trafficking should not be introduced hastily without first properly evaluating their potential long-term consequences and impact on gender and social justice more broadly.

2.6 Economic Empowerment of Sex Workers

After discussing how discourses and measures to combat human trafficking can sometimes hinder programmes that promote women's overall empowerment, I now look at programmes initiated by sex workers' organisations in order to address the issues of economic empowerment and violence in different countries, which is one of the core research question for this study. The risks that women in the sex and informal entertainment industry face globally emerge due to various factors that include social marginalisation, violence and poor health. These overlapping and mutually reinforcing factors have been shown to restrict their ability to improve their living and working conditions and to achieve economic security. Furthermore, sex workers - like other people working in informal economies - commonly report a lack of access to bank accounts, saving schemes, loans and legal forms of credit, insurance, pensions, and other basic employment benefits. Stigma and discrimination exacerbate economic disempowerment by restricting sex workers' access to financial services. This further compromises their ability to manage and plan their finances and futures, including career development (NSWP, 2014a).

To address these issues, the NSWP (2014b) conducted the aforementioned studies across countries in Asia-Pacific and Africa to test how economic empowerment of sex workers can be achieved. It examined programmes that have been initiated in various countries to help sex workers manage their income effectively, build resilience and take steps to counter violence at work. These studies looked at variables including incomes, savings options and comparisons with other occupations as well as 'rehabilitation' programmes. The case studies below illustrate how interventions designed with the help of women who work in the sex and informal entertainment industry can help enable them to manage their income effectively, invest in assets creation, and address wider issues of stigma, discrimination and violence.

The Usha Cooperative in Kolkata India was set up to create banking and credit opportunities for sex workers as they found it increasingly difficult to open bank account since did not have access to formal banking institutions. It collects deposits regularly from its sex worker members thus providing them a safe venue for saving their hard-earned income. In addition to basic banking, Usha runs a microcredit programme for sex workers; creates alternative jobs for out-of-work or retired sex workers; and engages in social marketing of condoms and other consumables. Its business ventures include organic farming, pisciculture (fish farming) to protect biodiversity, and eco-friendly event management services.

Usha is the largest sex worker-run financial institution in Asia, and it has one of the best recovery rates of financial institutions in the state of West Bengal (>90%) with an annual turnover of USD

2.7 million and capital assets valued at more than USD one million. It currently has a membership of 16,228 sex workers and around 4 to 5,000 members receive loans each year. The initiative is seen as a successful example of community mobilization that encouraged collectivization to bring about structural change (Moret, 2014). One of the immediate benefits of the Usha programme is that large numbers of sex workers are able to regularly save significant portions of their income. They are also able to secure loans at lower interest rates without any onerous conditions. In the past, women in their position had had to depend on unscrupulous money lenders who often exploited them and even subjected them to violence. The data provided by Usha (as cited in NSWpb, 2014, p. 12) states that thousands of sex workers have taken loans of varying sizes for diverse purposes, ranging from purchasing land or other real estate assets to financing the education of their children or for health care. A number of women from Raksha Nepal - an organisation mapped for this study - have visited the Usha Co-operative in Kolkata and have had first-hand experience of how they run the financial institutions they have set up. Now, Raksha Nepal have adopted a similar initiative. They have set up a saving and credit scheme in Thamel, Kathmandu which has brought a number of benefits to women and girls working in this sector. The project is discussed in more detail in the later chapters.

In Cambodia, the Women's Network for Unity (WNU), a sex work collective working to improve the lives of sex workers by introducing social inclusion programmes. This includes interventions aimed at the educating the children of sex workers based in Phnom Penh. Additionally, it has set up Community Legal Service (CLS) in late 2011 - the first legal aid service for sex workers in the world - so that sex workers have access to legal recourse. The sex worker-led economic empowerment programmes not only improved sex workers' access to social and legal services, but also had an impact on other marginalised communities, including the urban poor, people living with HIV, and slum communities. The present study shows that similar programmes are being extended to women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Kathmandu, albeit on a much smaller scale. The participants expressed that their children's safety and education is their biggest concern, and Raksha Nepal, the NGO mapped for this study, has been providing care services to the children of women working in Kathmandu's informal entertainment sector and ensuring they attend a mainstream school.

Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP) in Sanchi in India created an environment for sex workers so that they can earn their income with dignity and at the same time deal with the wide range of violence and harassment often perpetuated by clients and the police. The women described being routinely abused and beaten by police and clients and facing further harassment during the raid

and rescue efforts carried out by police and by anti-human trafficking groups. VAMP initiated confidence building measures with the local police so that they can work jointly to help identify underage sex workers who have been trafficked. Such actions helped in minimising collateral damage experienced in brothel areas after a typical 'trafficking' raid. VAMP further established conflict resolution committees at every site to act as a dispute redress mechanism among sex workers. We see a similar pattern of activities undertaken by the NGOs mapped for this study. The above case studies are useful examples of how locally initiated programmes led by sex workers collectives can prove to be an important strategy in improving sex workers' living and working conditions, and at the same time can contribute to addressing the issues of violence in their wider social ecosystem. The Usha case study shows that women can gain considerable agency and exercise greater decision-making power over their income, while the Cambodian example demonstrates their capacity to plan for the future - both for themselves and their dependents - and to confront the social problems of accessing justice or tackling stigma and discrimination. VAMP is excellent example of establishing a common identity among women in sex work with the ultimate aim of empowering them to assert their rights. This approach was established in order to equip women to protect themselves from HIV, violence, and various forms of discrimination.

As mentioned above, the NSWP reports strongly indicates that approaches that are informed by a thorough assessment of sex workers needs are best-placed to identify the appropriate strategies for implementing economic empowerment programmes. The report argues that rather than encouraging women to leave sex work, the focus should be on building sex workers' skills to be able to make the right choices for themselves. This view was also echoed in the data collected for this research; none of the NGOs included in the study force women to leave the profession. Furthermore, peer networks are seen to help women to build resilience to violence by empowering them to negotiate for safe sex practices with their clients. Conversely, economic empowerment programmes that do not meaningfully engage sex workers in the development stages of interventions often fail. Such approaches lack built-in mechanisms to sustain alternative income generating activities for sex workers. For example, vocational courses for sex workers would not yield any results if there are no alternative jobs available in the economy. Another factor is that sex workers might face further stigma and become more marginalized when they are reintegrated into a community. The rehabilitation programmes, therefore, must take into account how stigma and discrimination could affect other income-generating activities that women who are or have been sex workers seek to undertake.

2.7 The Sex & Informal Entertainment Industry in Nepal

Having discussed the factors that shape global entertainment industry and the problematic discourse that links human trafficking and sex work, especially in the context of Nepal, I now look more closely at the evolution of the informal entertainment industry in Kathmandu where the primary research for study was conducted. I also present an overview of how sex workers and women in the informal entertainment industry have traditionally been viewed in Nepal as well as the wider debates around the issue in the country.

A report by Tdh (Aguettant, Basnyat & Fredrick, 2010), a Swiss Agency that works for the prevention of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in the entertainment in Nepal, points out that not all women working in this sector work as sex workers, but they do work under conditions in which they are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse in order to please the customers so that they can buy food and drink. However, those who sell sex directly often do so under compulsion and coercion from the employer or the customer. A 2002 study by NGO Shakti Samua shows that “73% of the respondents stated that they ‘performed additional’ duties due to force from the employer or the customer” (as cited in Aguettant, Basnyat & Fredrick, 2010, p. 24). Activists interviewed for this research say that the situation has not changed. The number of female commercial sex workers (FCSW) in the country has also been increasing (Furber, Lubben & Newell, 2002), with estimates ranging from 25,000 to 34,000 (World Bank, 2010). However, due to unreliable data sources and discrepancies regarding the definition of commercial sex workers (CSW), the actual number of FCSWs in Nepal is difficult to ascertain (Furber, Lubben & Newell, 2002). Those interviewed for this study suggest that it is likely that the true number of women working in this sector is severely underestimated.

In Nepal, sex workers and all women engaged in the adult entertainment industry are extremely marginalised, looked down upon and are severed from mainstream society. Economic opportunities for women are highly constrained, and sex workers are routinely prosecuted under the guise of public order offenses (Kaufman, Harman, Menger & Shrestha, 2016). They are viewed as a group that do not conform or under conform to normative expectations of the society (Heckert & Heckert, 2002, p. 456). Furthermore, dominant discourses in Nepal (as discussed in the section above) have linked the sex industry and prostitution to human trafficking and the HIV epidemic leading to added stigma. Women working in the industry are, therefore, perceived as category that is infected and hence needs to be controlled. (Laurie, 2009; Poudel & Carryer, 2000; Silverman, 2007 as cited in Basnyat, 2014). In the section on human trafficking and sex work, I argued that that there is very little evidence to prove that the sex industry fuels human

trafficking. With this in mind, I now discuss why defining sex work through the HIV/AIDS lens and the associated normative expectations can be problematic in the development context.

The perception of the normative expectations of women in Nepalese society is greatly influenced by *Muluki Ain* - the legal and cultural national code constituted in 1954 but reinforced by the 1962 constitution of Nepal that characterised Nepal as a Hindu state for the first time:

which ranked the entire population along caste lines. The code ranked Hindu high-caste Bahun and Chettri (Brahman and Ksatriya) at the top, in the middle were Tibeto-Burman 'tribes' (now self-identifying as Janajati or Adivasi Janajati such as Gurungs, Rais, Sherpa, etc.) and the 'untouchable' castes (today's Dalits) at the bottom.

(Tamang, 2009, p. 64)

The codes overlooked and as such compressed the diversity of social practices and customs of various ethnic groups into one homogenous identity. This in effect had gendered implications (Tamang, 2009).

Tamang (2002, p. 65) points out that Nepal's heterogeneous population have historically structured gendered relations in multiple ways, giving examples of Hindu high-caste women (including Madhesi women) who are confined to domestic spaces, including the Thakali women who are known for entrepreneurial abilities and Limbu women are free to divorce and remarry as widows. Tamang also observes that *Muluki Ain* cut across this diversity and strongly reinforced patriarchal norms, promoting a homogenous gendered structure. It stipulated that a woman's legal, social and cultural identity shaped her husbands and family, and the foremost duty of women is to look after their household affairs and rearing of children (Tamang, 2002 & 2009).

Muluki Ain also disapproves of sensual or exotic behaviour involving the female body and has characterised dance and music as debasing professions (Pike, 2002, p. 32 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 79). Moreover, the general perception held with regard to women in the informal entertainment industry is associated with sexual promiscuity and moral decadence. They are seen as women who lack modesty which is against the norms and bodily conditioning of an honourable woman (Shresthova, 2008 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 79). The 'othering' of women in the informal entertainment sector as deviant (in the negative sense) has historically been even more pronounced when viewed through the caste lens. In Nepal, sex work in general is seen as a way of life for certain disenfranchised groups, especially the lower caste. The notion of class and racial superiority amongst the Brahmins (the upper caste) is so pronounced that they view people of lower castes as being synonymous with 'backwardness and poverty', and this sense of inequality is reflected in gender relations (Srivastava 2007 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 80).

Though women are seen as subordinate to men, the ideals of 'Hindu Womanhood' (Shresthova 2008 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 80) see women's bodies and actions as determinants of the *izzat* (honour) and sanctity of the entire clan (Pokharel & Sharma, 2016). So, an ideal moral woman in the Nepalese upper caste (Brahmanical) social structure is one whose sexuality is a prerogative of men and the primary function of sexuality is purely for the purpose of reproduction. These virtues are a benchmark of being a good dutiful woman which distinguishes her from other social ranks and other abject women (Pike, 1999 & 2002 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 81). This can be described as a 'negatively deviant woman' because sex work and other forms of informal entertainment associated with women's bodies is seen as deviance and danger and belonging to the women of lower castes (Pike, 1999 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 79). However, the notion that deviant behaviour is a characteristic of women belonging to the lower caste is illusionary. This study has found that women of all castes find their way into the informal entertainment sector, and all women (regardless of caste) shared common experiences of suffering and poor economic conditions.

The narrative around combating HIV/AIDS has identified sex workers as a category with many 'risks' and as 'target groups' to be acted upon, which has resulted in further abuse and marginalisation of the group (Pike, 2002 as cited in Caviglia, 2017). The interventions aimed at HIV/AIDS funded by foreign donors have tended to focus on changing the community behaviour of sex workers by giving high priority to promoting the use of condoms. USAID in principle condones commercial sex work, and recipients of its fund are expected to ensure that the members of its staff refrain from engaging in any form of sex work. Caviglia (2017) in her book *Sex work in Nepal* criticises such global health intervention narratives that hinge upon behaviour change model. She argues that such narratives are informed by colonial attitude that see a particular social group as needing to be liberated by modern science and knowledge, which in turn frames dominant discourses that categorise subaltern women as devoid of agency. Such discourses overlook at the critical livelihood and economic issues that keep women in the informal entertainment industry at the first place. Caviglia (2017) situates her argument in the theoretical discourses that challenge the idea that traditional knowledge and beliefs of the society that are unscientific and subaltern and need to be transformed with 'modern' forms of knowledge thought to be necessary for the 'attainment of inevitable progress' (Petersen & Lupton as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 59). According to Caviglia, development projects in Nepal and the knowledge mainly promoted by the international development agencies are largely governed by this legacy. They assume that to be able to improve the lives of women in the industry, the main focus of their work must be on raising awareness (Pigg, 2001 as cited in Caviglia, 2017).

Liechty (2005) situates the emergence of the informal entertainment industry by drawing a relation between sex and food in Nepal's social context. The author describes the cabin restaurants in the Thamel area of Kathmandu that "service the carnal appetites - culinary and sexual - of a middle-class male clientele" and documents how Kathmandu emerged as a hub for prostitution and male entertainment in the early 1990s (Liechty, 2005, p. 17). Part of this transition was fuelled by the expansion of consumer practices brought about by growing global trade which brought with it significant changes in the local economy and social texture. This was coupled with a steady growth of tourism and the carpet industry which created thousands of new jobs (Liechty, 1998 & 2003 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 13).

In more recent years, the remittance economy that transfers funds to Nepal from the millions of Nepalese workers worldwide has created a new middle-class which has caused a significant shift in the socio-cultural makeup of the country. Against this backdrop, Kathmandu became the consumption hub and the nation's centre of popular culture. Liechty argues that the evolution of new market forces transcended the barriers of caste and class that firmly dictated the social relations for centuries. The 'restaurants of dance' were potent symbols of a new culture in Kathmandu and a breeding ground where food and women were equally commodified in the private space that restaurants offered. Liechty's study (2005) is significant as it analyses the local and structural factors in relation to redefining gender relations and the emergence of an informal entertainment industry. It considers how gender relations change as transactions and sex move increasingly from the private, domestic sphere to the commercial sphere. In this market domain, however, gender hierarchy was reinforced as women became the objects of male control by justifying the availability of her services. Liechty also notes that cultural practices surrounding food and sexuality are among the most fascinating elements of this emerging middle-class culture because traditional notions of food consumption and sexual behaviour dictated by socio-religious practices undergo a profound shift away from the realm of caste and kin relations into the public culture of the marketplace and class relations. The new zones of entertainment become a hotspot where bodies lose their caste-based moral meanings and become anonymous parts of a 'free market' of commercial exchange. And in this context, the women who are part of the informal entertainment industry use the market economy as the basis for autonomy by selling sexual services.

Commenting on how 'sex work' in Nepal can be seen as a social and analytical category, Caviglia (2017) examines how sex workers negotiate their identity in an urban space where they are detached from their immediate communities and social norms that undermine the lives of women

in Nepal. The women working in this sector in Kathmandu offer different opportunities for anonymity and possibilities for a different kind of freedom (Kristvik, 2002, p. 114). Using ethnographic study, Caviglia deconstructs the sex workers category against the backdrop of global influences and how they come into conflict with local urban surroundings and points to the contradictions therein. Though sex workers are judged harshly by the media and social commentators, Caviglia also points to various contradictions in Nepalese societies that are constructed and upheld to keep women in a subordinated role and where male dependency largely affects women's subsistence. The author also critiques the labelling of sex workers as a category of women who are victims and deviant, describing it as an 'othering' strategy that occurs along the caste-gender nexus and constitutes a discursive and tangible tool to reaffirm subjugation and further marginalization of sex workers. The author investigates the social lives of women working in the entertainment industry in order to examine how they attach meaning to their work and the various relationships they form with men. Many see it as a labour condition in the context of neoliberalism (Cheng & Kim, 2014 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 172).

Some women simply see sex work as an option to make a living and justify the suitability of their profession in various ways in the face of widespread stigmatisation. Caviglia questions the notions of moral value usually linked with intimate relations, which in Nepal and in a wider South Asian context are usually defined by material exchanges (such as dowry) that generate a 'continuum of sexual-economic' exchange and engender asymmetrical relations (Tablet, 2004 as cited in Caviglia, 2017). For example, Kathmandu's original inhabitants, Newars, see marriage as a contractual 'affair between wife-takers' marked by a large number of exchange rituals (Gutschow & Michales, 2012 as cited in Caviglia, 2017, p. 147). The point the author is making is that in a culture where women's identities, voices, and agency are often subject to limits imposed by patriarchy, sex workers are aware of the value of their sexuality and body, and that expressing this value also involves a form of exchange. Whether sex is a commodity or not depends on the context. For example, it can be a gift in marriage, a symbol of emotion in a love marriage, or simply a commodity in the context of sex work. As Kristvik (2002, p. 261) argues, for Nepali women economic independence can pave the way out of the debilitating bondage of patriarchy and abusive marriage, which this study supports. For many, entering sex work is one of the very few chances they might have to earn their own money and thus live an independent life in which they can exercise their agency.

2.8 Conclusion

To summarise, the review of the literature presented in this section questions the extent to which sex work can be treated as violence which many theorists, as discussed above, have grappled with over time. While there is a consensus that violence is inherent in sex work and that it commodifies a woman's body by bringing them to the marketplace to be exploited by men, there is a greater need to look at the sex industry and its allied activities like (dance bars, exotic dancing, escorts and cabin restaurant) from a broader social, economic and political perspective. The domestic legal approaches to commercial sex work worldwide differ, ranging from criminalising, decriminalising, or legalising, to many countries leaving this area unregulated entirely by not designating sex work as either legal or illegal.

Ideological positions are often informed by empirical data, which in these circumstances are not necessarily conclusive, making the debate even more fragmented (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015, p. 247). Bridging these opposing views, as discussed earlier, will always encounter major difficulties and, even more importantly, this issue is further complicated by the fact that there is no single common factor that could be identified that explains *why* women enter the industry. Equally, there is also no singular response to addressing it. The numerous empirical studies examining the routes that lead women into the sex industry show the diversity of motivations as well as the diversity of means by which women enter the profession. It is, therefore, rather the combination of various socio-economic and cultural factors that affect decision-making and these differ between countries, regions and even individuals (Bradley & Szablewska, 2015, p. 246).

As indicated, most studies on sex work in Nepal have been examined in the context of human trafficking, but two ethnographic studies in particular - Kristvik (2002) and Caviglia (2017) - have provided detailed documentation of the lives of women in sex work in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Both studies show how women who work in the informal entertainment sector negotiate their space and identity in the sex market amidst the violence that underpins the industry. The narratives of women's experience and dealing with various challenges is similar to what has been documented here in my study. The difference, however, is in the approach and objective. While Caviglia (2017) and Kristvik (2002) both use ethnography and participatory approaches to analyse how women construct their social space and enact various relationships and strategies for survival in their daily lives, this study - at one level by documenting the early lives of the participants - analyses how social norms, cultural beliefs and political factors interact to create situations that leave women with no other choice but to enter the sex industry. In doing so, this thesis examines the issues of transitional justice in Nepal and evidences how internal conflict in has affected the

lives of women who work in this sector. The findings presented in later chapters are important because they demonstrate that the transitional justice sector should consider the rights of sex workers in transitional societies as being integral to women's empowerment and associated development issues.

Whilst Caviglia's study (2017) discusses the societal creation of sex workers as a category, this study looks deeper into the questions of empowerment and power relations by deconstructing the narratives of the participants and applying various theoretical frameworks on empowerment and resilience. Applying Kabeer's empowerment theory, which emphasise the ability to make choices and the capacity for self-determination, this study analyses how the participants exercise choice based upon their personal circumstances and use income to regain control over their lives. The study also considers the factors that allow women to frame their survival strategies, and, in doing so, it explores the pathways through which women working in the informal entertainment industry in Nepal build resilience. The aim is to bridge the gap by documenting the experiences of women working more broadly in the sex and informal entertainment industry while also looking more specifically at questions of livelihood, the importance of income, the ability to show resilience, express agency, and enact strategies to negotiate social power structures. This contributes to the creation of a counter narratives that challenges dominant discourses that categorise sex workers as a subaltern group, devoid of agency.

3. THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF NEPAL'S MAOIST CONFLICT ON WOMEN

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter (and also in Chapter Five), I compare and contrast the experiences of my participants and identify the key factors that influenced their decisions to move to Kathmandu valley and eventually join the informal sex and entertainment industry. Among the most significant findings that emerged from the interviews conducted with the women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Kathmandu is how the ten-year long Maoist conflict (1996-2006), led by the Maoist forces known as People's Liberation Army (PLA) against government forces, had devastating consequences on their early lives. From the sample of twenty-one women interviewed for the purpose of this research, one third were directly affected by the conflict; four women confirmed that they were abducted, sexually abused, raped and used as child soldiers during the conflict. Others, who had migrated to Kathmandu when they were very young said that the conflict was the main cause of them leaving their villages as school children were regularly abducted by the PLA and were coerced to join various ranks in their forces. Recruited girls were used as combatants, scouts, spies, porters, cooks and as 'cultural troops' (people who propagate the Maoist ideologies through music and culture).

Studies that have looked into the Maoist conflict in Nepal have dealt with the wide-ranging gendered implications of the conflict. They have acknowledged that sexual violence and horrifying atrocities were inflicted on women, and their bodies were used as 'tools of war' both by the government forces and the rebels with impunity (Aryal, 2016, p. 177). An in-depth report from the ICTJ, *Across the Lines, The Impact of Nepal's Conflict on Women* (Sharma & Young, 2010), found that information about sexual violence against women and girls during the armed conflict in Nepal is scarce and scattered. It stressed that while other conflict-related human rights violations, such as enforced disappearances, killings and torture, were widely reported and systematically documented, the issue of sexual violence has been ignored by international organisations as well as national institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission. It is believed that factors such as cultural stigmatisation, insecurity and fear of retaliation from the warring parties discouraged reporting of sexual violence during the conflict. The silence around sexual violence meant that the issue is under-researched and overlooked, which has left most victims and survivors without the necessary psychosocial support, medical assistance and legal recourse (Sharma & Young, 2010, p. 45).

This chapter is based on interviews conducted with the participants who were working in the sex and informal entertainment industry at the time of interview but had also experienced sexual abuse and rape by the Maoist forces during the armed conflict. The analysis of their interviews contributes to a body of work that researches cases of sexual abuse of women by the Maoist forces during the ten-year armed conflict. Though it is a small sample, it nonetheless helps to uncover some of the critical underlying issues with respect to VAW during conflict by the rebel forces, which is not fully documented and remains under researched. A line of questioning that underpins this chapter is how women who have experienced deep trauma and violence owing to the conflict move forward in their lives and whether their engagement with the informal entertainment industry has exacerbated their trauma. The chapter seeks to investigate whether their past experiences of violence make them more resilient to the challenges that they face in a profession that is characterised by unpleasant experiences including violence, and what enables them to move on?

In the section that follows this introduction, I present a background of the ten-year conflict between the PLA and government forces. Here, the political and social factors that eventually culminated in a civil conflict between the warring factions are discussed. The next section explores the impact of the conflict on women and girls by examining the gendered narratives used by the Maoist forces in order to attract women and girls to join the rank and file of their army. Whilst Maoist propaganda inspired some women, Maoist forces also systematically abducted girls from schools and coerced them to do a variety of jobs. Following this, evidence is provided that describes some of the examples of rape and violence inflicted on women by the Maoist forces. During the conflict, both the government forces and the PLA targeted women of the families that were alleged to be sympathisers of the opposing group. The evidence provided are important as they demonstrate that there is a contradiction between the wider claims made by Maoists regarding gender equality and the reality of their ruthless treatment of women. The chapter then goes on to explore the cumbersome process of justice and the various measures set up by the government following transition, which were all but ineffective in delivering justice to women. In the conclusion, I summarise the main findings of the chapter and argue that a range of interlocking factors must be considered when analysing the long-term gendered implications of the conflict. It is clear from the interviews and the analysis of them that a lack of political will and political instability are major causes of denying the women and girls who were sexually abused during the conflict access to justice and rehabilitation.

3.2 The Maoist Conflict (1996-2006)

The ten-year long Maoist insurgency that gripped Nepal is believed to have displaced 200,000 people and killed 13,000 people (OHCHR report as cited in Bhusal, 2016; Manchanda, 2004; Shakya, 2011; Valente, 2011). It began in February 1996 when the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist) declared a 'People's War' against the government for its inability to address a wide range of social, economic and political issues. The Maoists believed that the ruling class in Kathmandu, including the monarchy and the government are corrupt, were elitist and feudal and that only a revolutionary armed struggle could put in place a genuine democratic republic to represent the poor and the peasants (Bhusal, 2016; Sijapati & Thapa, 2005 as cited in Shakya, 2011). In the early years of the conflict, the Maoist movement that initially started in the 1990s was repressed by the state through armed police operations including Operation Romeo in 1995 and KiloSera II in 1998 (Thapa & Sijapati, 2005 as cited in Bhusal, 2016).

Despite this, the Maoists were able to establish themselves in the mid-west region of Nepal, especially in the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Jajarkot and Sindhuli. In the late 1990s, they rapidly expanded their radical movement throughout the country (Shakya, 2011), and by 2001, controlled twenty-two of the seventy-five districts. These districts were underdeveloped, hard to reach and were extremely poor (Bhusal, 2016, p. 137). The Maoist forces attacked government officials and establishments, burned down police stations and paralysed the machinery of the state, leading to an all-out war with the then Royal Nepal Army (NPA). The government responded by declaring a state of emergency, which resulted in the suspension of a host of civil rights. The CPN (Maoist) was then declared a terrorist organisation, and it was during this period that draconian laws including the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (TADA) were passed, affording government forces sweeping powers to detain and interrogate anyone suspected of involvement in the conflict.

In February 2005, ex-King Gyanendra reinstated monarchical power through a royal coup, and the main political parties subsequently came together to agitate against the takeover in a Seven-Party Alliance (SPA). This alliance-initiated negotiations with the CPN (Maoist) and a Twelve-point Memorandum of Understanding was drafted, in which an agreement was made to fight against the monarchic autocratic rule. In April 2006, Jana Andolan II successfully removed the King and reinstated the House of Representatives. The SPA and the Maoists reached a historic six-point agreement on November 8, 2006 and signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement on November 21, 2006, and finally an Agreement on Monitoring of Arms and Armies on November 28, 2006. On April 10, 2008, during the Constituent Assembly election, the CPN (Maoist) won more seats than any other party, leading to the formation of a coalition government (Bhusal,

2016; Sharma & Young, 2010; Shakya, 2011). However, as a result of the preceding conflict, as many as 200,000 people were estimated to have fled their rural homes, seeking work abroad or migrating to Nepali cities as internally displaced peoples (IDPs).

3.3 State Actors & Sexual Violence the During the Conflict

A study by the Advocacy Forum of Nepal and the ICTJ in sixteen districts across the country in 2009 that investigated the impact of the armed conflict on women found that the perpetration of sexual violence including rape was widespread and was committed by both sides: government forces and the Maoist forces (Bhusal, 2016). The report, which was based on interviews with women from marginalised groups, found that majority of the alleged preparators were state actors or the security personnel appointed by the state. Of the 128 cases of sexual violence that were recorded, 73% were found to have been perpetrated by state security personnel. Among them, more than half (56%) involved multiple perpetrators including incidences whereby women were raped by the security forces and then by Maoists when they came for interrogation. The armed police force and the state army were accused in many of the allegations of torture, which included blindfolding and handcuffing people for weeks and months without any trail. An Amnesty International (2003) report stated that state actors (which includes the police and the army) resorted to unacceptable methods of torture including rape, electric shocks and mock executions, both on men and women. Most of these crimes were committed during search operations and interrogations by state forces (UNOHCHR, 2012, p. 158), but there were also numerous opportunistic violations (Pokhrel & Sharma, 2016, p. 106). There were a significant number of women combatants among the rebels (UNOHCHR, 2012, p. 153), and those arrested were subjected to rape, threats of rape, torture and other forms of sexual abuse by the security forces. The 2012 OHRCHR report even acknowledges the possibility of 'implicit consent' for rape by higher ranks of security forces.

As discussed in Chapter Four, elements of patriarchy are deeply entrenched in Nepal and much of the collective and cultural identity among communities is woven around women's sexuality. As such, women and girls who have been victimised through sexual violence are considered not only to have lost their honour but also to bring shame to entire community (UNOHCHR, 2012 as cited in Bhusal, 2016, p. 141). Bhusal (2016, p. 142) argued that women and girls were particularly targeted for rape and sexual violence for the purpose of inflicting shame on the family or to show disrespect toward the male members. The atrocities committed against women by the security forces, Bhusal adds, indicates that even sympathisers or those affiliated with the opposing groups were not spared. Women who were not themselves rebels were targeted by the security

forces because their husbands or family members had joined the Maoist forces (AF and ICTJ 2010 as cited in Bhusal, 2016). The majority of reports of sexual violence against women and girls was thought to have happened in Maoist strongholds or near army barracks, but Bhusal's research found reports of cases within all tribes, castes and religions, and especially in the rural areas and against women of the marginalised groups. This is because the Maoists had sympathisers in the rural areas and in communities that were marginalised - geographically, economically or socially - as most Maoist combatants were recruited from the villages (the Maoists' indoctrination programmes targeted at women and girls in the rural areas are discussed in the next section). Pokhrel and Sharma (2016) state that there was virtually no reporting of cases of rape and sexual violence that took place during the war owing in part to sociocultural and economic constraints, but they women were also silenced by the culture of impunity (last section of this chapter discusses this in more detail). Despite the many cases documented by human rights organisations, only one case of conflict related rape case has been heard in court since the end of the conflict. It was initially unsuccessful and later was taken to the UN Human Rights Committee, following which a member of state personnel was found guilty of rape and subsequently prosecuted (Bhusal, 2016).

Apart from search and interrogation operations, there were many other reported cases of rape, sexual violence and torture that were perpetrated by security personnel against women in detention (Bhusal, 2016, p. 145). It is alleged that the perpetrators were often shielded by their high-ranking officers, who were party to the crime. During the conflict, security forces had the power to detain anyone suspected of being a threat to national security or believed to be a Maoist sympathiser. Testimonies of victims and witness reveal that a number of women and girls who were detained were treated brutally and many were even disappeared (Sharma & Young, 2010, p. 52).

3.4 Maoist Propaganda & the Gendered Implications of the Conflict

The Maoist conflict in Nepal was not just a rebellion against the state, it was characterised as a people's movement to bring about a social revolution. The Maoists believed that an agrarian revolution would not be possible without the participation of women. In order to attract women to join the armed movement, the Maoists ran a calculated campaign and recruitment drive. In their propaganda, they espoused the virtues of women's liberation and equality of opportunity with their ranks, and they promised social reformation programmes to tackle issues including domestic violence, alcohol, gambling, sexual violence and exploitation (Sharma & Young, 2010; Manchanda, 2004; Prasain & Sharma, 2004 as cited in Ariño, 2008).

Manchanda (2004) discusses an article by Hilsa Yami, a central committee member and head of the Women's Department of Communist Party of Nepal. In the article published in a local newspaper, *Kanitpur*, Yami explained that the party recruited women as "women make up the biggest segment of the population in the downtrodden communities". She added, "since women have suffered class and sexual oppression, they have double the capacity to revolt". Manchanda goes on to note that:

When the People's War was initiated in 1996, the CPN (M) leadership made it mandatory to include two women in every unit of 9 to 11 members, especially in the fighting ranks. In the Maoist strongholds, every third guerrilla was a woman. In the new districts where the Maoist influence was spreading, every tenth combatant was a woman.

(Manchanda, 2004, p. 241)

Furthermore, during the course of the armed conflict there was speculation that the proportion of women combatants was as high as 40-50% of the total (Manchanda, 2004). However, the final figures offered by UNMIN after the process of verifying the Maoist combatants, revealed a much lower proportion. According to the UN, of the PLA was made up of 19,602 of which approximately 20% of the combatants, 3,846, were women (Ariño, 2008).

Aryal (2016) cited an interview with Amrita Thapa, another woman member who joined the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist), during the early days when the 'People's War' was still taking shape. She said that the party pledged to bring about a revolution around four social issues: gender, class, ethnicity and religion. It was seen as a progressive movement that would liberate women from the bondage of domestic servitude. Thapa said, "the old system has suffocated women so much that they wanted to fight for their rights, there was a feeling of revenge, and the way they wanted to fight back was through bullets" (Aryal, 2016, p. 181). Though Thapa and others like her joined the rebellion voluntarily, research into the Maoist programme for women has indicated that there was also coerced recruitment of women and girls. Many of those who joined the PLA were illiterate and below fifteen years old (Manchanda, 2004).

Shakya (2011) documented how schools became recruitment centres and a battleground for both sides of the warring parties, whereby school children were indoctrinated through cultural programmes. Children were mobilized by the Maoists to create student unions in schools to influence their peers and toward their ideology and to motivate them to be a part of the insurgency. School mobilization was very effective because it focussed on social justice and equal rights without discrimination on the basis of caste or gender. In addition, the propaganda material was designed to ignite revolutionary zeal, including through stories of the heroic sacrifices made by women guerrilla leaders (Gautam et al, 2001 as cited in Manchanda, 2004). Shakya (2011, p.

560) noted that “recruitment speeches were so moving and powerful that many joined the PLA as they deeply felt they are contributing to social justice”. One of the girls from *Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh*, the Maoist women’s organization, from Doti commented, “I was fascinated by the Maoists ideology. I was in ninth grade when I left to become a whole timer in the Maoist party” (Shakya, 2011, p. 560).

In large parts of rural Nepal, girls were married off by their parents upon reaching puberty, to a man not always one of the girl’s choice. Most often, it would be an older man because it meant paying a lesser dowry. For the parents, marrying their daughter means unburdening themselves of a huge social responsibility. So, one reason why the Maoist recruitment drive had an impressionable effect on teenage girls was because joining the Maoist forces in the forest was akin to acquiring a new social identity: it signalled a break with social traditions. In that context, Leve (2007) argues that most girls in rural Nepal undergo a major life change during adolescence. It invariably involves leaving their parental home for a place where they will live under the orders of others and will endure hardships and suffering. From the point of view of the would-be-girl-soldier, the main difference may be that the Maoist option involved a higher degree of physical danger, but also greater opportunities for fun.

There were a number of factors that enabled the Maoist insurgents to recruit girls and women in big numbers. The conflict saw men temporarily leaving villages in large numbers to Kathmandu and neighbouring India for work and or fleeing for their safety. It resulted in widespread mortality and there was increase in family separation rates. It was not common for the entire family to move as women were often required to remain behind to look after land (Adhikari & Seddon, 2003 as cited in Menon & Rodgers, 2013, p. 52). A study by the World Bank (2004) (as cited in Menon & Rodgers, 2013) indicated that the absence of husbands and their income led to a dramatic increase in women’s household and farm work. Pettigrew and Shneiderman (2004) noted that the conflict created insecurity and disturbed the social structure; migration of men meant that family ties were broken. Women were forced to come out of their houses and fill the non-traditional roles including tending to agricultural lands. The Maoists moved to exploit the situation and engaged in mass mobilisation by selling an ideology of hope and resurrection. Many women joined the Maoist forces believing that they would be given blanket protection in the event of an unforeseen disaster, and from violence from men who return home drunk. The Maoists’ anti-alcoholic campaign struck a chord with women and is among the most noted aspects of women’s participation in Maoist associated action.

Hisila Yami, a Maoist leader, pointed out that the role played by women in the domestic sphere meant they were much more effective in mobilising masses: they facilitated the access to other members of the family (Ariño, 2008). They introduced a decree instructing every family to send at least one child for their movement. Media reports suggested that many families sent their daughters rather than sons as girls were seen as more disposable than boys, thus reinforcing the special status of the male child in the Nepali social context (Manchanda, 2004, p. 246). However, the drive to forcibly abduct and recruit children from schools compelled many school girls to migrate to Kathmandu. This not only disrupted their studies, but also often forced them to take up exploitative jobs in the city. My research indicates that many such girls struggled because without any skills they could not find a proper job. They worked as domestic maids or in construction jobs that were abusive, laborious and exploitative. Many women joined the sex and informal entertainment industry because there was scope for earning more and with a relative degree of freedom and flexibility in working hours. Some women ended up marrying men who physically abused them and committed other forms of IPV and even abandoned them when they were pregnant (discussed further in Chapter Five). For women in such circumstances, the sex and informal entertainment industry seemed like a viable option for survival. Three participants in this study said they had fled their villages for fear of being abducted from school or because the environment in the village was tense.

Participant 2 (age 30, low caste, married but living separately, has one daughter) said she was the fifth of six daughters in the family. She was seventeen years old when the Maoist insurgency had crippled the village economy. There was no food to eat and her father was violent towards everyone. He was an alcoholic. She said “My neighbours told me that in the city I can get good job, good food, and good clothes. So, I thought I will be able to help my mother.” When she arrived in the Kathmandu, she worked as a maid in a family of eight members. “I worked from five in the morning to midnight. I used to live in their house. They used to give me food and no salary,”. She added that the family treated her badly and often beat her up. She was later fired because they discovered that she belonged to a lower caste.

Participant 4 (age 28, low caste, married, has one seven-year-old child) said she migrated to the city when she was fourteen years old as Maoists were recruiting children from the school. She said:

I did not feel safe and came to live in Kathmandu. I had no intention to go to the city and work but was afraid of being abducted by the Maoist. They were coming and writing down names. We feared they would take us away.

After coming to the city, she lived with her uncle and worked as a domestic maid. She later joined a massage parlour. She stated that she had 'no intention to work.' Likewise, Participant 19 (age 32, upper caste, married but not living with husband, has two children) came to Kathmandu when she was just nine-years-old because there were chances of her getting abducted by the Maoist forces. Shakya (2011) observed that many children were forced into the Maoist insurgency as there was a recruitment policy of 'one house, one person' observed by the PLA. Many were abducted directly from schools. Various respondents and human rights organizations reported that between one-hundred and two-hundred students from each school were abducted at a time (Human Rights Report, 2008 as cited in Shakya, 2011).

The UN has defined child soldiers as:

boys and girls under the age of 18, who are enlisted either voluntarily or forcibly in an armed force (government armed forces or armed groups) regardless of the role they play (combatants, scouts, spies, servants, sex slaves).

(Shakya, 2011, p. 559)

Direct participation in hostilities or the use of a weapon by the child is not a determining factor. Girls used as sex slaves or subjected to forced marriages within an armed force are also considered to be child soldiers. When applying this definition to the context of Nepal and the Maoist conflict it is clear that children were used and made into soldiers against their will. My data reveals a number of cases that confirm that children were routinely abducted by the Maoists, used as child soldiers and, in extreme cases, sexually abused and raped. For example, Participant 3 (age 20, caste Tamang [ethnic], widow, has one daughter) says:

I was taken by the Maoist when I was six years old. They said that I have to avenge my father's death. I was in the entertainment wing (advocacy) and our job was to influence people with Maoist ideology. I was the dancer. I also used to carry guns and ammunition. I was made to kill a lot of people. Every time they came across someone, they would say he is your father's killer so shoot him. I am not sure how many people I killed. We would walk for days sometimes in the forest sometimes without food. There were over one-hundred women and girls.

When I returned home after the peace agreement was signed between the rebels and the Government in 2006. I wasn't accepted by the society. I was ostracised. They thought I was a rebel. There were families in the village that had a member either in police or in the army who were killed. They blamed me for that. I couldn't have lived in the village. My step mother mistreated me and said I should stay away from house. I suffered a lot in life.

The interviews confirmed the claims made by other studies that children were routinely used as soldiers. Bhusal (2016, p. 141) explains that one reason why girls like Participant 3 were not accepted back into the society is because they were no longer considered honourable as their

sexuality is assumed to have compromised if she has been away from her community with the armed militia. As mentioned above, in the Nepalese context a girl's honour is viewed as a delicate asset and must be preserved at any cost, and if she is victimised the honour of the entire family or the village is at stake. This notion of honour or *izzat* revolves around a women's sexuality and occupies a pivotal place in Nepalese society, so much so that its defilement is seen as an affront to her husband's honour (Pokhrel & Sharma, 2016).

The stigmatisation caused by rape was well known by the Maoist forces; their actions were deliberate and were intended to prevent girls from returning home. In this context, rape can be seen as a weapon of war. Hisila Yami reinforced this view in an interview in 1997: while affirming the party's trust in women combatants she said:

women returning [home] is not a ready option. Sons will be welcomed back with open arms, but for the daughters, can there be a return? When they become guerrillas, the women set themselves free from patriarchal bonds. How can they go back?

(as cited in Pettigrew & Shneiderman, 2004)

Pettigrew and Shneiderman also noted that women returning home from the conflict were also shunned because of possible reprisals and harassment of family members by the state forces that their presence might bring.

The patriarchal system was ever-present, even within the ranks of the PLA, and there were reported tensions among the male and female comrades as recalled by Comrade Parvati, the pseudonym of a writer who identified herself as a Central Committee Member and Head of the Women's Department of CPN (Maoist). Pettigrew and Shneiderman (2004) state that observed that:

male leadership relegates women's issues to women rather than taking them up as central issues, neglects to implement programmes developed by the women's mass front, are unnecessarily overprotective of female cadres, and resort to traditional division of labour by monopolising "... mental work and relegating women to everyday drudgery work". Married women who show promise are discouraged from taking up positions that would take them away from their husbands. Women active in the Maoist movement frequently experience marginalisation when they have children and "... many bright aspiring communist women are at risk of being lost in oblivion, even after getting married to the comrades of their choice".

(Pettigrew & Shneiderman, 2004, p. 25)

As mentioned above, one of the major findings of this study has been to document cases of the sexual violence committed by the Maoist forces. Doing so is important because earlier studies have acknowledged that evidence of sexual violence committed by the PLA is scarce

(UNOHCHR, 2012). The Transitional Justice Reference Archive (TJRA), a database of approximately 30,000 documents and cases sourced from the National Human Rights Commission and OHCHR's monitoring work in Nepal since May 2005, indicates that most atrocities against women were committed by the security forces. Of over 100 cases catalogued only twelve list PLA personnel as the alleged perpetrators (TJRC as cited in Aryal, 2016, p. 175). However, Nepalese human rights groups have asserted that though stories of sexual violence committed by the Maoist forces were widespread, the cases were not documented and remain anecdotes (Aryal, 2016, p. 176).

3.5 The PLA's Violent Contradictions

As summarised in the introduction to this chapter, studies looking into the gendered implications of the Maoist conflict have highlighted that the role of women in the conflict marked a move away from traditional gendered roles. As the conflict progressed, women increasingly took on various responsibilities within the rank and file of the Maoist army. The Maoists ran parallel courts and punished men for abusing their wives in the areas controlled by them. They also ran campaigns on alcoholism, which was thought to be one of the major causes of domestic violence. The feeling of rapid justice engendered a sense of security amongst women and contributed to the reduction of violence within families. Within the rank and file of the Maoist army a strict code of conduct was enforced which seemed to offer protection to female combatants from untoward incidents and any offences against women combatants were dealt with firmly. However, both the PLA and the state forces also dealt brutally with anyone suspected of being a spy or whose family member was in the army or in the rebel forces (Thapa, 2016, p. 208).

The following cases illustrate that there was a pattern of sexual violence committed against women by the PLA. These statements studies are very similar to the documented cases of violence against women committed by the security forces.

Participant 7 (age 33, lower caste, has three children, married but not living with husband) was just fourteen years old when she was abducted by Maoists and kept hostage for three months before she managed to escape, "I was abducted by the Maoists and taken to Jungle. I was abducted because my brother was in the army", she said. When asked "Did you face sexual harassment?", she responded "Yes, I wasn't raped. I was harassed both physically and mentally." In response to the interviewer's question "What was their expectation from you?" she recounted the following:

We were trained to kill people from the army. We also had to carry ammunition as we moved from one village to another. Because my brother was in the army, I was given a gun and bullets to kill army personnel, but I didn't know how to use them. I was very young. Once during the clash, I lied down on the ground, but a bullet hit my leg. I was

bleeding and was in a terrible pain, but I still had to trudge along. They simply gave me a pain killer. As a part of the training, I was made to lie on the ground. They would then chop off a branch from a tree which would fall my stomach like a thud. We were told this would help build confidence and provide strength to fight the army.

When asked “How did you escape?”, she continued:

I ran from the village and reached the highway and then took lift in a lorry. There was another girl who was being repeatedly raped. They told me that it was my turn. After hearing this I was very scared and decided to run away. I spent the night in some cattle shed and, in the morning, I managed to get to a bus stop. I didn't have money, so I requested the bus conductor to help me. I had to sleep with the bus driver for the favour.

Participant 14 (age 40, has six children, low caste, Hindu but practices Christianity, married) was abducted by Maoist forces when her youngest daughter was just one month old. She was accused of being a spy. She was asked “What did they do with you?”, and responded:

I was taken in the jungle. I was tortured, stoned and beaten badly and made to do a lot of work. When the baby cried, they put mud in her mouth and took her away in a cave or something. I fainted several times. They used to give me food once in 2-3 days. I was sexually abused. I was hanged to a tree and raped repeatedly. Had I not run I wouldn't have been alive.

The interviewer asked, “How old were you then?”, and she said “I was 28 years old. It was in the year 2004 when the conflict was at its peak.” And when asked “How did you run away?”, she showed the bullet marks on her body and said:

I tried to run away several times, but I didn't want to leave my baby behind. I was badly injured but one day I got an opportunity to run. We came across a village and I was asked to share a room in somebody's house as I had a baby and that would not raise police suspicion. I spotted an opportunity there to run away when that man had gone to the toilet.

It was pitch dark. I ran through the jungle as taking the road was dangerous. In the jungle, I came across a cave and I stayed there for three days hiding. Under the cave down below in the ditch there was a wild animal, [...] so, I couldn't move. I was breast feeding. On the third day, I met some villagers who came to the jungle to collect woods. I was very weak. My face was bruised. When they saw me with the baby, they gave me some food and helped me get out of the jungle and took me to the village bus stand. There I met a woman [described as a friend], who helped me and took care of me. She sold ten kilograms of millets and gave me the money to buy a bus ticket.

When I got home the family refused to accept me. They said I ran away with another man and brought shame to the family. I decided to leave along with my children. My husband supported me. We managed to go to another village where we worked for a month to earn the bus fare and then come to Kathmandu.

The above cases demonstrate that sexual violence was committed by the Maoist forces, especially against those who were forcibly abducted, suspected of being a spy, or a close relative of someone

serving the state army or police. This also shows that notions of gender justice within the rank and file was selective. There seems to have been wide scale abuse of women and girls, perhaps throughout, but certainly at the lower levels. Despite the fact that female combatants made up 20% of the PLA, they were unable to stop the violence. Subodh Pyakurel, a human rights activist, argues that greater participation of women in the Maoist forces did not ensure that all women fighters were safe (Aryal, 2016). Women at the top levels were powerless to protect women at in the lower echelons. A 2012 report by the Office of the High Commission of Human Rights (OHCHR) on Nepal stated that children below the age of eighteen were particularly vulnerable, and one-third of the victims of sexual violence were children, many under the age of fifteen (UNOHCHR, 2012, p. 172 as cited in Aryal, 2016, p. 189).

Adding to the evidence presented in the above statements, Participant 9 (age 28, has two children, upper caste, married but separated) said:

When I was around 12-13 years old, I was raped by my teacher. I was blamed by the community as the teacher was a powerful man and enjoyed a higher status in the society. The Maoists, instead, punished me. They took me away and I was kept in captivity for three months. They abused me verbally and even tried to rape me.

After three months, I couldn't take it. The place was around twenty kilometres from the district headquarters. I followed the light of the passing vehicles and walked through the night and arrived at the district headquarters. After that I went home but they came after me. I ran away from there to Kathmandu.

The case studies in this chapter contribute to a body of 'scattered' work that confirms that sexual violence was committed at a large scale by Maoist forces as well as by the security forces. The impact of the conflict on women was devastating. Whilst during the course of the conflict the Maoists tried to bring about social reforms by taking measures such as allowing remarriage of widows or breaking taboos around menstruation, such initiatives were not sustained and were abandoned soon after the conflict (Ariño, 2008; Geiser, 2005; Manchanda, 2004). And despite any attempts to address gender inequality, the conflict killed thousands of women, made many widows, and left many more to face extreme social stigmatisation.

Manchanda (2004) argues that conflict related displacement often marginalises women further. In the case of Nepal, as mentioned above, there is a greater possibility of women being treated as outcasts for stepping beyond the boundaries of the patriarchal social order. In the post-conflict context, the status of a woman as a 'victim' devoid of agency and incapable of representing herself plays into the state system that is dominated by patriarchy. Under such scenarios, "women are largely seen as non-subjects, enjoying at best secondary citizenship" (Manchanda, 2004, p. 4179). Thus, women were affected by the conflict in ways that are different to their male

counterparts because of their subordinate position in the pre-conflict society. Bunch (as cited in Aguirre & Pietropaoli, 2008, p. 51) stresses that armed conflict causes additional violations to women's lives, but that these are linked to gender-based violence and abuse of women in 'normal' patriarchal life.

3.6 The Impact of Trauma

In Nepal, the trauma of conflict is still fresh and there is a renewed call for addressing the issue of sexual violence committed by the warring parties. Bhusal (2016, p. 157) identifies the following bottle necks in Nepal's justice system as primary reasons why women who were caught up in the conflict often refuse to come out and talk about sex violence:

- Social stigma and shame, as highlighted above, is a major cause. In general, rape victims do not speak out about their case because of social pressure (ICTJ, 2010, p. 81)
- The worst affected areas of conflict are the ones that has an illiterate and extremely poor population. Women, like the ones mentioned above, are not aware of how to access justice. There is no mechanism to educate women about their legal rights or provide legal assistance.
- There is a lack of security and a potential threat of backlash as a number of top leaders in the Maoist forces now occupy positions of power. In fact, one of main Maoist leader went to become the prime minster. One study found that there is a fear amongst victims that registering cases against the perpetrators, especially, those in the police or army would be futile as police would not proceed with such investigations and they (complainants) would be labelled as Maoists (WOREC, 2006, p. 2 as cited in Thapa, 2016, p. 240)
- Despite Supreme Court Guidelines for maintaining confidentiality of cases related to violence against women, there are no proper laws to hide the identity of a victim of sexual violence. In traditional patriarchal society, the breach of women's confidentiality with regard to their sexuality can have an enormous negative fall out, and dealing with it can take a serious psychological, emotional, social and physical toll. Such issues lead to further stigmatisation and there is a tendency to blame the victim for her ills. Cases of this kind are widely covered by the local media (Danker, Taylor & Youssef, 2011 as cited in Bhusal, 2016, p. 159)
- The definition of rape in Nepali law that existed during the conflict was narrow in its scope (*Muluki Ain*, Chapter 14). The code refers to sexual intercourse instead of rape. This type of language creates an understanding that there must be evidence of force and

signs of struggle to prove non-consent (Pokhrel & Sharma, 2016,114). However, the government has amended the existing law in order to broaden the definition of rape.

Nepal's peace agreement mandated the government to provide relief packages when the compensation-based Interim Relief Programme (IRP) for conflict victims was announced. The measures included NR 100,000 for the nearest kin of those who had been killed or reported missing during the conflict. An additional NR 25,000 was offered to the widows or wives of those killed or reported missing, and there were scholarships for their children. However, the guidelines excluded victims of sexual violence and rape (Thapa, 2016, p. 233). According to Aryal (2016, p. 200) experts have said that the government has never tried to investigate charges of sexual violence and rape, nor has there been proper documentation of sex crimes during the war.

After years of failed post-conflict talks between all stakeholders to investigate the gross violations of human rights, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Inquiry on the Disappearances (CoID) were formed through the CoID TRC Act by Nepal's parliament on 25 April 2014. Though Section 2 (j) of the TRC recognises rape and sexual violence as a 'serious violation of human rights' (Sharma & Pokhrel, 2016; Thapa, 2016, p. 224,), Section 26 of the Act gives power to the commission to mediate between victims and perpetrators even in the case of rape. Thapa (2016, p. 224) notes that this is in contravention of Article 11 of UN Resolution 1325 to end impunity by abolishing amnesty in cases related to sexual violence and Article 4 of UN Resolution 1820, which urges members to not to use blanket amnesty as a tool of reconciliation to shield the perpetrators of sexual violence during conflict as such acts amount to crimes against humanity.

In 2015 broad amendments were made to the definition of rape to expand its scope. The statute of limitations on reporting of rape cases has been extended from thirty-five days to 180 days in the new law. The Act to Amend Laws to End Gender Violence and Ensure Gender Equality 2072, has also increased the punishment for cases related to domestic and sexual violence. The law has broadened the definition of rape to include "penile penetration of orifices" and "non-penile penetration of vaginas." The new Act has also made marital rape a non-bailable crime, increased maximum prison terms to five years, and has increased the maximum penalty for acid attack from three to eight years imprisonment.

Studies in Nepal have identified specific but wide -ranging reasons for driving GBV including women's legal subordination, economic dependency, cultural obligation, social position, and their lack of autonomy, education and knowledge of sexuality, along with men's perceived

entitlement to sex, early marriages, the dearth of family and legal support for women and husbands' use of alcohol (Sharma & Tamang, 2016). When the Maoists began their insurgency movement, one of their objectives was to initiate a social revolution that could transform the structure of the society by emancipating women from their subservient roles. As explained above some measures to that end were taken, such as running a parallel court to address issues of domestic violence, though these measures were more "rooted in aspiration than in reality" (Sharma & Young, 2010, p. 23), and they were unsuccessful in bringing about a sustainable social reform that could strengthen the position of women in the society. In some ways, it had an adverse effect on women who had become part of the movement as they were often stigmatised and were not accepted back into their families. Furthermore, despite the enormous contribution made by women during the conflict, they were systematically kept out of the peace building process as observed by UN Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), Ian Martin, who stated that:

at all the political negotiating tables I have seen in Nepal during the peace process, not once have I seen a woman at the table. So far in the peace process, decisions are being made by men for women [...]

(Martin, 2007 as cited in Ariño, 2008, p. 10)

Amnesty International in 2007 noted that during the course of the negotiations, neither the SPA nor the Maoists included any women in their negotiating teams (Ariño, 2008, p. 10).

3.7 Conclusion

The above analysis shows that the social cost of the Maoist conflict for women was enormous and the temporary moves towards increased gender equality that took place as a result of the conflict did not materialise into substantive changes to the law and policy of the successive governments. There are also other interlocking factors that must be considered when analysing the long-term implications of the conflict. The fact that women contributed in various capacities to the social movement as well as the armed conflict disrupted the prevalent discourse that regarded Hindu Nepali women as weak and powerless. Yet when the conflict ended, most women had to go back to their families and communities and found themselves immersed once again in a social system and patriarchal order that they had sought to break away from. This chapter demonstrates that a lack of political will and political instability has resulted in the denial of justice for women who were affected by the conflict or were victims of sexual abuse. Their cases have not even been properly documented.

The women whose interviews are referred to above have evidently been underserved by the mechanisms that have been set up to compensate people who were victimised through sexual violence. This may be because most of these women were very young and/or illiterate at the time the crimes took place, and therefore had no route through which to seek legal support. The conflict in Nepal has highlighted that gender inequalities remain a major issue in the country. However, though conflict exacerbated many of the difficulties faced by women, it also provided them with possibility of redefining their status. The women who served at the lower ranks of the Maoist army were detached from the peace-building process, and transitional justice programmes should be designed to consider such changes. The interviews also illustrate how women were used as instruments of violence and coercion by the Maoists forces. The Maoists had the sympathy and the support of women as some of their political demands were seen as legitimate attempts to improve social justice. These included inheritance rights for women, abolishing exploitation based on caste and ethnicity, special protections for orphans, disabled persons and the elderly, and the provision of employment opportunities for all, as well as forgiving rural agricultural debt, redistributing land “to the tiller” and other more familiar Marxist policies (Karki & Seddon, 2003 as cited in Leve, 2007). Their firebrand advocacy promised to bring about lasting prosperity based on equality and justice, free from gender discrimination, and it caught the imagination of the youth. Many joined in the hope that by being part of the armed struggle they could forge a new social identity.

However, when the peace agreement was signed between the government and the Maoists, many of the top commanders in the Maoist forces came to occupy powerful positions in the police and the army, and they abandoned the objectives of the movement, which was to reframe social, gender and economic relations. As shown above, women who had paid a heavy price to support the Maoists during the conflict were simply abandoned to their fate. Many of these women had forfeited their childhood or had been violently tormented and raped by Maoist forces, and when they returned to their communities, they were not accepted by their families. Their return to normal life has never been easy. They have had multiple experiences of violence and betrayal that did not end with the conflict, some have been subjected to further exploitation and violence by men they trusted and even married as the next chapter will demonstrate. It was clear during the process of the interviews that the pain and trauma inflicted by the Maoists had left deep scars that remain fresh in their minds. This raises the question of how these women deal with this trauma in their daily lives, particularly in the absence of justice. It is also unclear whether their violent past makes them stronger or more resilient when confronting the abuse and violence that underpins the sex and informal entertainment industry. I explore these questions using various frameworks

of empowerment and resilience (see Chapter Five and Chapter Six) in order to better understand how women develop their survival strategies and reconstruct new relationships amidst the chaos and uncertainty of their lives.

4. SOCIAL NORMS, MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the ten-year Maoist conflict and its implications for violence against women (VAW) in Nepal. The conflict triggered the migration of women from their villages to the safety of urban areas, particularly the capital, Kathmandu. It also showed that many women and girls were abducted by the Maoist forces and that sexual abuse and rape was perpetuated by both the warring parties during the conflict. In order to examine the relationship between income and violence against women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry, it is imperative to understand the background of each woman participant and to analyse their situation against key variables including child marriage, IPV, education-level and caste, all of which have had an impact on their lives in various ways. The interviews found that one or a combination of these factors has had severe consequences on the lives of the interviewees and contributed to their decision to migrate to Kathmandu. Upon migrating, the women found themselves in precarious situations that eventually created circumstances forcing them to enter the sex and informal entertainment industry.

This study conducted twenty-one qualitative interviews with two focus groups of eight and seven women respectively. Out of the twenty-one interviewees, fifteen women were found to have married before the age of eighteen, three married between ages eighteen to twenty-one, two were unmarried, and only one woman married after twenty-one at the age of twenty-six. The data shows that child marriage has been a key contributing factor. As such, this chapter looks into how child marriage and IPV left deep trauma in the lives of women who were interviewed for this study. Examining these factors is important because, as later chapters reveal, violence experienced through marriage at a young age is in many cases responsible for pushing women into the sex industry. However, their early experiences of violence also led to the creation of coping mechanisms for dealing with violence in the work place. Coping mechanisms refers to the ability of participants to show resilience and manage external and internal stress by finding ways to deal with them. In the context of this study, it also means the manifestation of inner strength to negotiate their way through the risks and violence that characterise the sex and informal entertainment industry. For some participants, their experience of violence at a young age made them strong and even more determined to see off potential violence: they have experienced worse, and so they are less afraid of potentially being hurt worse if they resist. They asserted that

their choice to join the sex and informal entertainment industry was made in extreme situations: it was needed for survival.

Based on the interviews of the participants, the common causes of violence and the factors influencing them were identified. Social norms around child marriage, dowry and intimate partner violence were found to be the main causes of suffering among the interviewees. This chapter provides an overview of the societal beliefs and norms that promote child marriage and sustain dowry practises in Nepal, how these issues play out differently amongst ethnically diverse peoples, and how the two factors intersect to create situations for violence that are enacted and perpetuated in varied ways against the participants of this study. The section on IPV further documents the consequences of child marriage for the women, for which I also draw upon data from other studies (including Aryal, 2007; Pandey, 2017; UNFPA, 2012) that discuss how and why women who marry young are more likely to encounter IPV. The chapter goes on to explain how economics, notions of masculinity, and social structures interact to normalise and even justify IPV, making it the primary cause of personal trauma and violence in the lives of almost all participants. This, in turn, played a critical role in influencing their decision to join the informal entertainment sector. The later sections of this chapter discuss how alcoholism also contributes to domestic violence. In the analysis section, I use the Social Ecological model (Heise, 1998) for conceptualising the causes of violence, which affirms that VAW is often the result of a constellation of factors at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels. In the conclusion, I outline the key findings of the chapter and ask if experiences of violence in early life make women more resilient in the face of the challenges that underpin the sex and informal entertainment industry which is then discussed further Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

4.2 Child Marriage & Dowry

According to a recent Human Rights Watch (HRW) report (2016), Nepal has the third highest rate of child marriage in Asia after Bangladesh and India. The study points out that 37% of Nepali women between ages twenty and twenty-four were married by the age of eighteen, and 10% were married by age fifteen (Pandey, 2017). According to Nepal's 2011 national census, approximately 75% of the married women who were surveyed were married before their twentieth birthday, and over 100,000 girls were given away in marriage before the age of ten (National Population and Housing Census, 2011 as cited in Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2016).

In another recent study, Pandey (2017) analysed a sample of 9,783 women between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine from the 2011 *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey* (NDHS) and found that,

on an average, Nepalese women were married at the age of seventeen and gave birth to their first child before the age of twenty. Nearly one in three women were married before their sixteenth birthday and 78% of women were married before the age of twenty - Nepal's legal marriage age. The same study noted that nearly half of the women (48%) had no formal education (Pandey, 2017, p. 243).

According to the reports of a number of key donors, in Nepal it is social and cultural values surrounding women's sexuality, dowry and patriarchy that remain the key drivers for early marriage (Human Rights Watch, 2016; UNFPA 2016). This is compounded by ineffective implementation of the existing legal provisions that ban child marriages, as well as barriers to accessing legal remedies (UNFPA, 2016). Furthermore, in Nepal's context (and in South Asia more generally), cultural norms put a high value on women's virginity before marriage as this constitutes a sign of purity. There is an underlying belief that delaying the marriage of a girl could increase the cost of dowry and also increase the chances of premarital sex which would then bring shame and dishonour to the family (Raj, 2010; Warner, 2004 as cited in Pandey, 2017).

Nepal is a diverse society with over sixty ethnic groups differentiated by language, dialect, religion and region of residence (Thapa & Misra, 2004). Studies on child marriage have indicated that the customs and culture of marriage vary across ethnic groups and regions and, as such, the prevalence of child marriage varies significantly among Nepal's many ethnicities, religions and caste groups. A HRW (2016) study, for example, found that among the disadvantaged Dalit caste, the rate of marriage before the age of nineteen is 87% in Nepal's Terai region, and 65% in the hills region. Rates of child marriage are also higher among people who have spent fewer years in education, and among Muslims and Hindus when compared to Buddhists and Christians. Pandey's study (2017), which examined marriage and caste dynamics, found that high caste Madhesi women (a community inhabiting the Terai plains region of Nepal with strong cultural links to the bordering Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) were 51% more likely to marry before the age of sixteen than high caste Hindu women of other communities in Nepal. Low caste Hindu women were 45% more likely to marry before sixteen years of age compared to other low caste communities in the country (Pandey 2017, p. 245). In another study, Aryal (2006) found that variables such as education, caste, socio-economic status, year-of-birth cohort and age at menarche were significant determinants of female age at first marriage in Nepal. The age of marriage varied significantly across communities based on societal and cultural factors.

Child marriage can have severe physical and psychological health implications for an adolescent girl, which can include serious pregnancy-related issues such as miscarriage or maternal mortality

(Fisher et al., 2011 as cited in Aryal, 2006). Women and girls subjected to child marriage are likely to face slavery-like practices including servile marriages, sexual slavery, child servitude, child trafficking, and forced labour. For example, a fifty-one-year-old participant (Participant 18) in this study was a mother of six and was married at the age of eleven. She is Chettri (higher caste) and her husband, who worked in the police, was twenty-seven at the time of marriage. She no longer lives with her husband. The following is an excerpt from her interview:

Interviewer:

“Why did you get married when you were so young?”

Participant 18:

“My grandparents believed that it is good to marry off daughters before their menstruation.”

Interviewer:

“What age did you become pregnant for the first time?”

Participant 18:

“I was pregnant for the first time when I was thirteen, but it was a miscarriage.”

Interviewer:

“Why aren’t you living with your husband?”

Participant 18: “He married another woman, when the youngest child was six months old. I raised all the children on my own.”

Interviewer:

“Did your husband treat you properly?”

Participant 18:

“No because I didn’t bring any dowry. My in-laws used to beat me. My husband used to come once a year during the festival (October – November).”

The participant later moved to Kathmandu but faced further harassment. Her husband refused to look after her and she had no place to sleep. She suspected that her husband worked as a ‘pimp’ for men looking to find prostitutes. Her husband had lost his job and later she became a sex worker in order to feed her children.

Another example from my data, is Participant 13, a thirty-two-year-old Brahmin woman (upper caste) who was married at the age of fifteen to a man of the same caste who was twelve years older. The following is an excerpt from her interview:

Participant 13:

“I was forced to marry by my parents because of dowry. We were from a very poor family. A delayed marriage would have meant more dowry.”

Interviewer:
“Did you pay dowry?”

Participant 13:
“No not in my case. He was a lot older to me. This was his second marriage. He said he would not take dowry, so my parents married me off. He had land, so they thought it was a great offer.” The participant moved to Kathmandu five years after marriage. My husband remarried, sold all the property and abandoned me. I wasn’t aware that he had sold everything. I was pregnant with the fourth child. I had one friend who was working in a dance bar in Kathmandu. She asked me to come. It was important for me to look for a job so that I could feed my children.”

Closely connected to the issue of child marriage is the economics of dowry, which is the primary motivating factor for parents to marry-off their daughters at a young age. This study (as shown in the examples above) found that some of the participants were married at a young age to much older men, some of whom were already divorced, because that meant the parents had to pay little to no dowry. In such cases, the young age of the girl compensated for the lack of marital gift-giving. To put this in context, it is important to consider the problem of dowry in South Asia and Nepal before moving on to discuss the consequences of child marriage in the lives of the participants

Researchers have struggled to provide a precise definition for dowry because it has undergone a distinct transformation over time, and can mean different practices of marital gift-giving (Bradley, Subramaniam & Tomalin, 2009, p. 1) but like child marriage, dowry in South Asia have been identified as oppressive practice (Unnithan- Kumar, 2005 as cited in Bradley, Subramaniam & Tomalin, 2009). It is seen as an oppressive practice because it became so institutionalised and embedded in some South Asian cultural systems that families of bridegrooms started extorting astronomical material gift and cash from the bride’s family. Though the practice in itself is not violent - it was traditionally seen as an inheritance women would receive on the death of their husband as they lacked inheritance rights that were equal to those of men - there has been significant documentation of dowry-related abuse of women. In India, dowry was outlawed in 1961 through the enactment of the Dowry Prohibition Act, but it continues to be the centre of negotiations between the two families in the process of arranged marriages. Incidents have been reported in which the families of girls have faced dowry-related harassment resulting in ‘dowry-death’ or ‘bride-burning’ (Bradley, Subramaniam & Tomalin, 2009).

Similarly, in Nepal dowry is a common practice, particularly in the country’s Terai region which shares an unregulated border with the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Terai region comprises 46% of Nepal’s population (Karki, 2014). This is despite the practice of paying dowry being illegal in Nepal with penalties of up to NR 10,000 (USD 100) and prison sentences of up to

three years. Additionally, A 2015 Act to amend a number of laws in Nepal in order to promote gender equality and end gender-based violence stipulates that any psychological abuse of women, including asking for dowry, or humiliating, physical torturing and shunning women for not providing a dowry is a punishable offence (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 28). Yet dowry remains common in Terai, and the high price of dowries has significantly contributed to gender-based violence in the region.

The economic basis of dowry is associated with the inheritance system. As in India, the practice of dowry in Nepal came into existence in order to give women economic and financial security after their marriage. The 2007 Interim Constitution stated that sons and daughters are equally entitled to ancestral property, but the demand for larger dowries remains due to “the general rise in prices and the current obsession with gold and silver, the prices of which are rising almost every day” (Karki, 2014, p. 21). A 2016 Human Rights Report found that in recent years:

sporadic incidents of killing or attempted killing of brides over dowry disputes, despite efforts to eradicate the practice. Activists claimed that in Dhanusa district, for example, the cost of a dowry had increased over the past several years from the cost of a cow (NRs 25,000 or \$250) to between NRs 400,000 and NRs two million (\$4,000 to \$20,000), demanded in cash. In some cases, as part of a pre-dowry agreement, the bride's family will pay the tuition fee for the bridegroom to pursue academic study. Activists reported that many men left the country to work abroad to earn money to pay for family members' dowries, which left the men's wives more vulnerable to abuse.

(Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 29)

Human Right Watch (2016) notes that dowry is just one of the factors that influence child marriage in Nepal, but culturally, girls are often seen as a ‘burden’ and as someone who is destined to move to someone else’s family after marriage, meaning investment in her education is not considered necessary. This perception means families often give preference to the needs of boys over those of girls. Sometimes, abject poverty and social circumstances also compel girls to marry young.

The cases of the two participants in the study discussed above (Participant 18: age fifty-one, upper caste, married at the age of fifteen, lives independently, and Participant 13: age thirty-two, upper caste, married at the age of eleven, married but lives separately) illustrate the helplessness of poor families that have an obligation to marry-off their daughters. It is important, however, that the girl must be married within the same caste, especially, if she is a Brahmin (upper caste). Though poverty remains an underlying factor for deprivation, it nonetheless interacts with the values and cultural norms that construct the social hierarchy in Nepalese society (and wider Hindu society in India). The social structure recognises Brahmins as superior and as being situated

at the top of the hierarchy. The differentiation between Brahmins and lower castes at the social level is the principle through which the 'pollution and purity ideology' operates (Ortner & Whiteheld, 1981, as cited in Cameron, 1998). This is based upon the belief that Brahmins as a superior caste must not dilute their pure status by marrying men or women from a lower caste. Social norms dictate that purity of caste and sex (a woman is considered to be pure) must be strictly preserved and protected and, as such, it is important for upper caste women to marry a man of the same caste. However, a 2014 UNDP study, looking at masculinities and GBV in Nepal suggests that lower education groups and lower economic classes (not castes) hold more traditional views regarding masculinities including polygamy. This is supported by evidence in this research which found that husbands routinely abandon their wives or marry multiple times. The UNDP study also found that:

People from the 15-20 and above 50 age groups hold stronger beliefs in the traditional notions of masculinities and homophobia. Caste and ethnicity do not appear to impact perceptions of masculinities.

(UNDP, 2014, p. 10)

Returning to my participants, in both the cases mentioned above, the economics of dowry played an important role in their parents' decision to marry-off their daughters early. Their virginity (purity) and young age were the two factors that were seen as compensation for lack of dowry in a marriage to a man who was far older. One of the participants was married to a man who had already married once, the reason for which was that she would not have to pay any dowry. But despite this, once married she was ill-treated by her in-laws for not bringing enough dowry. The other participant never had any decision-making power within her marriage and was later abandoned by her husband who sold off all his property. This shows how GBV can manifest in many forms, and that laws alone cannot bring about a significant change. Instead, improving the lives of women requires a long-term transformation of social and masculine norms.

4.3 Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Women marrying at an early age is also associated with IPV victimization (Atteraya, Gnawali & Song, 2014), and GBV remains a pervasive global challenge. At least 35% of women worldwide have experienced non-partner sexual violence or physical and/or sexual IPV. South Asia has the highest regional prevalence, with at least 43% of women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their partners. The most common form of VAW is abuse by an intimate partner, which has profound consequences for the health and well-being of women, families and communities, and also for development outcomes globally. Preventing violence

requires understanding its root causes and situational triggers, and it is recognised that VAWG is largely a manifestation of unequal gender relations and the imbalance of power between men and women (Aryal, 2007).

In Nepal, which ranks 108 out of 152 countries on the HDR Gender Inequality Index, IPV has become a major public and human rights issue (Ghimire & Samuels, 2017). A 2017 study based on the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) shows that 33% of married women aged 15-49 have experienced IPV and seventeen percent have experienced IPV in the past twelve months (Ghimire & Samuels, 2017, p. 5). Another study looking at the consequences of sexual violence within marriage among young girls between ages fifteen and twenty-four in two districts in Nepal (Dang and Tanahu) found that nearly 50% of women had experienced forced sex in their marriage (Puri et al., 2011 as cited in Pandey, 2014). A larger study carried out in four districts of Nepal (Dolkha, Sindupalchowk, Dang and Kapilvastu) that interviewed 1,296 married women aged fifteen to twenty-five years found that 46% had experienced sexual abuse and twenty-five percent physical abuse from their husbands (Dulal, Lamichhane, Puri & Taman, 2011).

Consistent with the above data, the data collected for this research suggests that most married girls suffered severe IPV at the hands of their husbands. This is significant because it shows that the consequences of domestic violence and IPV can be far reaching, as many respondents for this study ended up joining the sex and informal entertainment industry as a result of violence at home and abandonment by their husbands, many of whom were addicted to alcohol. Studies that looked into child marriage and IPV are often based on small samples scattered across specific regions. One objective of this research, as indicated earlier, is to determine the factors that have contributed to creating the circumstances that lead women to work in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Nepal. The women interviewed for this research represent a cross section of caste, ethnicity, and region, and they represent various different age groups.

No study, to my knowledge, has explored the nature and patterns of IPV faced by women who work in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Nepal. Studies in the South Asian context (see e.g., Aryal, 2007; Ghimire & Samuels, 2017) have shown that there is a link between IPV and early marriage. Two studies (one from Nepal and one from India) show that girls married below the age of eighteen were at higher risk of experiencing IPV compared to those who marry later (Atteraya, Gnawali & Song, 2014; Hokama, Jimba, Oshiro & Poudyal, 2011).

The interview conducted with Participant 1 (age 41, has three children, upper caste, married but not living with husband) shows that IPV can occur because of a number of factors ranging from

deeply rooted social and cultural norms that legitimises patriarchy, to male dominance and notions of honour (*izzat*).

I was married in April 1990 when I was 14 years old and was studying in standard ten [high school]. I come from a Brahmin family. My father is a priest and commands a lot of respect in the society. My husband approached my father for my hand in marriage. He was very reluctant for a number of reasons: I was too young, going to school; we are Brahmins (upper caste) and the boy was alcoholic and was known to have a bad character. He pressurised my father and threatened to kidnap me or marry me forcefully. My father married me off taking into consideration his and family's reputation and honour.

The above example shows that different factors influence social behaviour and creates circumstances for families to marry their daughters off at a young age because the need to uphold the honour of the family outweighs other consideration, including the education of the girl child. Cameron (1998) in *On the Age of the Auspicious* argues that honour as a social concept is articulated through various structures and girls in the family, in particular, are seen as the flag bearers of the family's honour. In her study with the Bhalara community in western Nepal, she found that the notion of *izzat* has a strong association with the women in the family, pointing out that the *izzat* is not necessarily behaviour but is a "nexus of ideas separated from behaviour" (Cameron, 1998, p. 137). There is a widely prevalent view, as mentioned above, that a person's sexual conduct can greatly damage the reputation of the family and community. In Nepal (and in other parts of South Asia) upholding honour is the responsibility of both the woman and the household, which serves to maintain caste hierarchies (Joshi, 2001; Laurie, Poudel, Richardson & Townsend, 2016).

Participant 1 added that:

my husband started beating me weeks after our marriage. It became more frequent and severe, sometimes he would trash me with a table, as days passed. He would usually beat me when he is drunk. No one came -including my husband's parents, his four brothers and two sisters - ever came forward to protect me. [...] I was still studying. I would wake up at dawn and cook food for the entire family. In our culture, the daughter-in-law is not expected to eat food before serving the husband's parents, so I used to go to school on an empty stomach. If I ate, my in-laws wouldn't. They expected me to do all household work and were not at all happy that I was leaving for school every morning. Eight months into the marriage, my husband's parents asked me and my husband to leave the house due to frequent beatings that they witnessed and tensions thereof.

The participant while pregnant with her first child continued to endure violence. She recalled:

my husband kicked me very hard and beat me ruthlessly. I came to know that day that he remarried someone else. So, after a few days when the time of delivery came, I was all alone in the hospital. In the Kathmandu Maternity Hospital, known as Prasuti Griha, Thapathali, I gave birth to a dead child. The doctors suspected that the baby succumbed when my husband kicked me in my stomach.

Despite this incident, the participant remained in the marriage. Her husband returned and asked for forgiveness, but the violence soon resumed. She gave birth to a second son, again in the absence of her husband who had left home and did not return for five years. When asked why she became pregnant again and did not separate from her husband she said:

The *izzat* of my father and my in-laws were important. My father is still a respected man in the community; divorce or separation is not accepted. I had nowhere to go. My husband still had four unmarried brothers and two sisters. The presence of elder daughter-in-law is very important for any social functions so the family's *izzat* was tied with me. Plus, if my children had to study, they needed a father. Otherwise their life would be doomed. In school, they ask for the father's name.

The above example is illustrative of a common trend in South Asian societies in which a married woman is expected to do all the household work in her husband's family home, and the parents and sisters of her husband sometimes become the key drivers of IPV or, as in the above example they become silent observers. They complain to their sons and brothers that their wives are lazy, disobedient, not bringing enough dowry to the household, and so on (Ghimire & Samuels, 2017).

Social norms around masculinity, femininity, male guardianship of women and polygamy have a strong influence on the behaviour and choices of men in Nepal, as well as on IPV (Ghimire & Samuels, 2017). There is a social acceptance of domestic violence and it is sometimes seen as a man's right to control women. It is also largely accepted that a woman must be subservient and submissive in marital relationships. Moreover, low status and women's lack of decision-making power, lack of access to resources and information and shame related to speaking out about certain abuses can put women at further risk of experiencing violence.

GBV is a broad term, and it is often used to refer to any form of VAWG, though the factors and circumstances under which women or girls may face violence can be strikingly different. Heise (2011) argues that such broad description of the terms underscore what each of the abuses had in common: namely it's grounding in the fundamental devaluation of women and girls. It makes more sense to look at the specific nature of violence rather than to address the full spectrum of violence captured under the acronym VAWG (Heise, 2011, p. 2). Studies have cited different factors that contribute to why men perpetuate VAWG, but there is no evidence to show links between different forms of violence (Basile & Hall, 2011). In the context of Nepal, Ghimire and Samuels (2017) note that the perception of what constitutes IPV varies according to the age groups of boys and their exposure to information and communication technology. While wife-beating is still very common among old men, extra-marital affair, polygamy, sexual coercion, controlling mobility and social interactions, crimes such as acid attacks due to suspicion and

jealously, and cyber bullying were identified as new forms of violence based on a study done in two districts.

Ghimire and Samuels (2017) analysed the broad reasons to explain why in context of Nepal men and boys who marry child brides, or who themselves marry young, tend to be more likely to commit IPV against the women and girls they marry. They argue that because while girls after marriage might have to give up on their studies, boys may still attend school. While at school they meet other girls, who tend to become more important to them than their wives. Also, in some cases, arranged marriages take place between boys and girls who are both very young, and they do not see each other after their childhood wedding ceremonies. But because of social obligations, the boy has to accept the girl into the family or could be fined up to NR 200,000 (USD 200) if they do not 'complete' their *Gauna* marriages and fulfil their social obligations. In such cases, tensions arise as young women and girls often find themselves living with husbands who can barely tolerate their presence and who berate them and inflict violence on them for interfering with their relationships with other women. Men who migrate to other cities or countries also tend to be more violent with their wives because, according to Ghimire and Samuels, they get used to a whole new lifestyle which influences their attitude. Exposure to modern attitudes can then lead to conflict as their wives remain within the confines of the household and are not exposed to these different practices. This creates incompatibility between them, leading to tensions that result in husbands inflicting violence on their wives, having extra-marital affairs or simply abandoning them (Ghimire & Samuels, 2017).

Participant 2 (age 30, has one child, low caste, married but not living with husband), who married at the age of twenty-six, was abandoned by her husband. She told me that she was three months pregnant when her husband went to Qatar for work and said, "He kept in touch for a few months and then stopped all connections [...] he had come to Nepal but never met my son." In some instances, boys were married early because of family needs. When a mother dies young, for example, another woman is needed to take care of the house, leading a son to be married early. This has sometimes left boys feeling frustrated with their marriages. When they become adults, they take that frustration out on their wives in the form of violence, and also resort to polygamy and extra-marital affairs.

Participant 17 (age 33, has two children, high caste, not living with husband) was married to a twenty-year-old man when she was just fifteen years old. She now works in the informal entertainment industry. They moved to the city when her father-in-law passed away and then the problems began. The following is an excerpt from the interview conducted with her:

Participant 17:

“We had an ancestral house in Kathmandu. The bad days started after my father-in-law’s death. My husband was the only son and he became astray after his death. He refused to take care and would disappear for days.”

Interviewer:

“Was your husband supportive of your work?”

Participant 17:

“No never. He didn’t care. I had to look after my children, educate them and feed them so I had no other choice.”

Interviewer:

“Does your husband work?”

Participant 17:

“Yes, he worked as a contractor.”

Interviewer:

“Did he contribute to the household income?”

Participant 17:

“Never, he used to entertain himself with other women and blow up the money.”

Participant 2 (age 30, has one child, low caste, not living with husband) says she migrated to Kathmandu because of poverty and the Maoist conflict. Her parents have six daughters and her father was alcoholic. She said “He [her father] never earned, there was no food to eat and my father used to beat my mother and all of us.” When she moved to the city, she took up a job in a massage parlour where she met her future husband. The following is an excerpt from her interview:

Interviewer:

“How did you meet your husband?”

Participant 2:

“He used to come there as a customer. He encouraged me to leave the job and promised to marry me. I too wanted to get out of the profession.”

Interviewer:

“How long were you married?”

Participant 2:

“There was a problem with caste. He left me when I was pregnant... I was five months pregnant. I was married for about two years. He was fine, but when he realised my caste, he tortured me mentally.”

Studies indicate that at the household level, the risk factors for IPV against married women across all castes and classes tend to be higher if the she is economically dependent on her husband and his family. Women’s lack of economic independence means that the difficulties they face without a

husband's financial support outweigh the violence they experience from a husband (Ghimire & Samuels, 2017). But it has also been observed that women who are employed were also vulnerable to violence and were 28% more likely to face IPV than those who were unemployed (Ghimire & Samuels: 2017; Dulal, Lamichhane, Puri & Tamang, 2011). My research found that among the participants cases of IPV was prevalent for women who had migrated to Kathmandu before marriage and were earning an income. A number of participants disclosed that they were subjected to extreme violence as their husbands forcibly sought to take away their earnings and refused to work themselves. For example, Participant 5 (age 27, has one daughter, upper caste, married) had migrated to Kathmandu because of disruption in her village during the Maoist conflict. She worked as a dishwasher in a hotel and then at a construction site before marrying a man of her choice when she was just twenty years old. It was an inter-caste marriage, and soon after marrying she quit her job and stayed at home to raise their daughter who was born within a year of their marriage. After four years there was some tension, and her "...husband wasn't giving money and daughter had to go to school." The following is taken from the interview conducted with her:

Interviewer:

"What triggered behaviour change in your husband?"

Participant 5:

"I suspect he was having another affair."

Interviewer:

"Did he beat you?"

Participant 5:

"Yes, it was quite regular usually at night."

Participant 5 first found a job in a furniture shop but eventually joined a massage because "The pay [in the furniture shop] was very less, and I had to manage all the expenses including my daughter's school fees. My husband was not at all contributing". She added that domestic violence is responsible for pushing out of home.

It is one of the major causes. It is very expensive to live in Kathmandu and if the husband is not working, it is difficult to survive after paying all the bills and fees for children's education. All the responsibilities fall on women. On top of that there is domestic violence, so women have to fend for themselves and have to take jobs for survival.

Similarly, Participant 9 (age 28, has one daughter, upper caste Brahmin, not living with husband) gave examples of the extreme nature of violence she had faced at the hands of her husband. She was sixteen years old when she married a man who was ten years older. She worked in a cabin

restaurant and her husband was a frequent customer. In the interview, she described the violence she had experienced:

Interviewer:

“You are separated from your husband; can I ask what happened to the relationship?”

Participant 9: “

He was already married which I didn't know. He was alright for a year. He said I never have to work in a cabin bar. I still had to earn, and he used to take away everything. I was pregnant, and my first baby died. I was never taken to his house. Also, it was an inter-caste marriage. I was a Brahmin and he was a *janajati* [lower caste].”

Interviewer:

“What other violence did you face at home?”

Participant 9:

“I suffered so much that I can't even explain. He used to lock me up and go away for days and he would beat me up. I went without food for a number of days.”

Interviewer:

“Did you have control over the money you earned?”

Participant 9:

“No, my husband took away everything.”

Interviewer:

“When did you actually separate?”

Participant 9:

“My husband had never taken me to the in-law's house. I discovered he had another wife and had two children. Once he was very violent after I gave birth. I was frequently beaten up. I even used to faint. Sometimes he wouldn't come back home. Once I and the baby were without food and I went out looking for him and found out that he had another wife.”

It is evident from the above examples that early child marriage and violence within marriage triggered by factors like alcohol, extra-marital affairs, abandonment of wives and polygamy are among the main causes of the extreme violence faced by the women interviewed for this study.

4.4 Alcohol & Domestic Violence

Several studies from developing countries report alcohol use as a significant precipitating factor in domestic violence (Puri & Tamang, 2011). Participant 4 (age 28, has one child, low caste, married) described her husband as an alcoholic and said that he beats her regularly. She has no control over her sexuality, and her husband was not present at the time of child birth. She says that her husband has changed his attitude towards her since he discovered she worked in a massage parlour. When asked “Do you have any control over the money you earn?”, Participant 4

responded “I practically ran the house and gave him money whenever he asked for it. He would spend the money drinking.”

A community-based cross-sectional study of 905 participants including urban poor in Kathmandu (225 participants) where this study is based and the general population of Nepal (680 participants). It found an IPV prevalence of 33.8 % among the urban poor compared with 19.9 % among the general population of the country (Hokama, Jimba, Oshiro, Poudel, & Poudyal, 2011, p. 2081). The study found that the husband’s level of alcohol consumption and lower socio-economic status were correlated with IPV in both the urban poor and within the general population at large. Risk factors for IPV in the general population were early marriage and the husband’s lower level of education.

Pandey (2014) points out that the husbands’ characteristics are important predictors of IPV and refers to studies that have consistently linked alcohol consumption by husbands to IPV (Abbey, 2011; Abbey et al., 2009 as cited in Pandey, 2014), noting that excessive alcohol consumption reduces inhibitions and clouds judgment. George and Stoner (2000) have argued that violence perpetration is pre-meditated and that men are more likely to act violently when drunk only because they think that they will be forgiven for their violent behaviour. Studies also suggest that poverty and the stress that comes with it are key contributors to domestic violence (Pandey 2014). A study of 6,700 married men in five districts of northern India found that 18% to 45% percent of them had abused their wives and that the latter’s family wealth and the former’s education served as protective factors against sexual violence (Martin et al., 1999 as cited in Pandey 2014). Other studies also document that a husband’s higher level of education serves as a protective factor against violence (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008). Pandey’s own study (2014) which is based on Nepal’s 2011 *Demographic Survey Data* analysed variables such as property ownership, education level, age difference between husbands and wives, and years in marriage, alongside relationship variables including husband’s excessive control over wife, humiliation in front of others, and autonomy of household decisions. The study concluded that those who consumed excessive alcohol were 74% more likely to commit sexual violence on their wives than women whose husbands did not consume excessive alcohol, while husbands having secondary education or higher-education served as a protective factor against physical and sexual violence against the women they were married to. In terms of other indicators, the study reinforced the results of existing research that reported that child marriage was still a norm in Nepal and that 59% of Nepali women were married before the age of eighteen, and this group was most vulnerable to sexual violence.

4.5 Analysis

In this section, I analyse the key factors that contributed to violence against the participants of this study before they joined the sex and informal entertainment industry. I apply Heise's (1998) ecological model, which is used to analyse IPV, the most common form of VAW. It states that efforts to tackle VAWG require a clear understanding of the causes before undertaking any design or evaluation of programmes that aim to reduce such violence. The ecological model provides a platform for conceptualising the causes of violence as probabilistic rather than deterministic (Gupta and Samuels, 2007, p. 32). It affirms that VAW is the result of one or a combination of many factors. As outlined above, much of the violence against the participants of this study emerged at following levels

1. Individual Level: the main causes are wife's age at the time of marriage, which in most cases the girls were below the marriageable age; difference in age between husband and wife, husband's poor education-levels, alcohol consumption;
2. Relationship Level: factors include husband's control and humiliation of wife, wife's lack of voice in relationship,
3. Community Level: prevalence of crime and violence in community;
4. Societal Level: norms supporting men's dominance over women and accepting violence as means to resolve conflicts

(Heise, 1998; Pandey, 2014)

The ecological model method is appropriate in the context of examining Nepal's sex and informal entertainment industry as studies on human trafficking (as discussed in Chapter Two) have indicated that many women describe situations that compel them to enter the sex trade, either voluntarily or by force or deception, because of ubiquitous social inequalities and dire economic circumstances (Gurung, 2014). Many women reported having migrated to Kathmandu from rural areas to escape conflict, poverty, domestic violence and other family-related stressors in their communities and the sex work provided the only means to financially support themselves and their families (Harman, Kaufman, Menger, & Shrestha, 2016). Heise's (2011) revised conceptual framework of IPV identifies that childhood violence, social attitudes like acceptance of wife beating, low social support and economic factors such as women's employment, increase women's risk of violence. Other factors like social norms, gender order, and cultural factors, can increase the likelihood of men perpetuating IPV.

Since this study only interviewed women who were engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry, analysis of factors that trigger men to commit violence is based on secondary data. Nonetheless, it is clear that at the individual level, child marriage was the most significant risk factor for experiencing violence. In this study, 71% of women interviewed

married before the age of fifteen, and 85% of women were married below twenty-one years of age. Only one participant was older (twenty-six years old) when she married, and she too was abandoned by her husband after he went abroad for work. Studies have shown that child marriage can adversely affect girls in a number of ways as it reduces their ability to make informed decisions and to have control over their sexual and reproductive rights and increases the risk of forced sex leading to early pregnancy and pregnancy related complications (Pandey, 2017).

In the data set of this study, the women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry who married below the age of fifteen had all done so through arranged marriages. It was the interplay of social level factors like the caste of the girl, notions of linking male honour to women's bodily purity, co-relation between adolescent age and dowry and poverty that influenced their parents' decision to marry their daughters at a very early age. However, for the girls who were economically engaged after migration to Kathmandu and had married a partner of their choice, they did so based on factors including falling in love, the assurance of a better life by their partners, or feeling of sense of security. Though these women were economically active, the nature of their work exposed them to exploitative and vulnerable situations and some of them experienced intense violence during the Maoist conflict.

Against this backdrop of trauma, it is natural to be attracted to men or boys who might provide emotional comfort. In a review of essay that considers the kinship ties of prostitution, Stinchcombe (1994) states that it is difficult for women working in the sex industry to experience conjugal love. This is mainly because of a lack of commitment of the man and his kinship group to possible children. In this industry, it is very common for men to pretend to love a commercial sex worker, but in reality, most men are unprepared to make kinship commitments. The rituals of sex work are those characteristics of low commitment 'entertainment' or commerce in experiences: 'fun,' recreational drugs and alcohol, night life, sexually significant theatre (Stinchcombe, 1994, p. 856). The indulgence that some men shower upon women in the sex and informal entertainment industry are often temporary; as clients they are aware of the steady supply of new faces that enter the industry as the older ones retire at a certain age. Lack of commitment implies exploitation when compared to kinship claims. Men who frequent sex and informal entertainment spaces are aware of the vulnerability of women who work there: they are often perceived as women who have no shame or honour and therefore have no claim to rights in kinship ties.

The other key factor is the woman's level of education. None of the participants or their partners in the study completed high school. Research in 18 of the 20 countries with the highest rates of

child marriage has shown that a girl's level of education is the strongest predictor of her age of marriage (ICRW, 2016 as cited in Human Rights Watch, 2016). Around the world, girls with more education are less likely to marry as children; for example, girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children than girls with little or no education. Studies have shown that education of both girls and husband could serve as potent protective factor against domestic violence (Pandey, 2014; Puri, Shah, & Tamang, 2011; UNFPA, 2016). Other studies have noted that the effect of women's education on their experience of physical violence is mixed; in some studies, educated women were less likely to experience physical violence (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008; Agarwal & Panda, 2005), whereas in other studies this relationship was not significant (Dulal, Lamichhane, Puri & Tamang, 2011). In Nepal, however, political factors like the ten-year long Maoist conflict deprived a large number of girls in rural areas of a school education. This is because schools (as pointed out in the previous chapter) became a focal point for promoting the Maoist ideology and recruiting young girls. The participants in this study said that they were forced to discontinue their studies and move to Kathmandu. Other factors that hampered their access to education are poverty, migration and early marriage. Some participants suggested that better education was the main factor that could have made a huge difference to their lives.

For example, Participant 3 (age 20, has one child, Buddhist [Tamang], widow) was abducted by Maoist forces and now works in a massage parlour. She said that "My life would have been better if I had basic education. If there as was no war I would probably be studying in a university." Likewise, Participant 8 (age 48, has four children, upper caste, widow) says her lack of basic education was a hindrance in getting a job in a hospital. She later worked in spa that was a conduit for sex work. The forty-eight-year-old widow and mother of four children said that social and cultural norms put women at a disadvantage adding that "In the village, no one sends their daughter to school because they think she eventually will go to someone else's house. They think it is a waste of money. It is the society that stops women from realising her full potential"

Pandey (2014) notes that tendency of husbands to control the behaviour wives or to humiliate them in front of others were strong signs of co-occurrence of physical or sexual abuse (Pandey, 2014, p. 815). This finding is consistent with other studies that have reported that men who were jealous and mistrusted their wives were more likely to be violent against them (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006 as cited in Pandey, 2014, p. 815). Pandey identifies humiliation as one of the strongest predictors of both physical and sexual violence. Her study documented that husbands who humiliate their wives are also likely to subject them to physical (70%) and sexual violence (46%).

Moreover, of the women who reported spousal control, 44% and 28% were also physically and sexually abused, respectively.

Spousal control and humiliation of their partners were reported by the participants of this study. However, one of the limitations of the study is that male partners or husbands of the women were not interviewed because most of the women who had experienced severe levels of violence were no longer living with the husband. Since qualitative methods were used to record women's experiences of violence, the respondents provided descriptions of the patterns of violence under varied circumstances. Some of the patterns of violence that were described are as follows:

- It was normal for men to beat their wives.
- It was common for husbands to abandon their wives, even at the advanced stages of pregnancy.
- Husbands indulged in polygamy and promiscuous behaviour.
- Husbands stopped any form of contact with their wives, especially after going abroad.
- Husbands quit their job and often resorted to violence to extort more money.
- Sex was seen as an entitlement.
- There is an imbalance of power.
- There are accounts of husbands exercising control over wives, including extreme humiliation.
- Husbands were mostly addicted to alcohol.

Regarding how much control women have over the money they earn, Participant 16 (age 51, has six children, upper caste [Chettri], married but not living with husband) who worked in a cabin restaurant said "My husband used to take away the money. He used to beat me up. He used to bring other women and made them pregnant and he asked me money for abortion." None of the husbands of the participants were well educated and were themselves very young. Their behaviour was characterised by notions of masculinity that entitled them to power and privilege over women. Also, there was a loss of kinship ties because, like the women, most of their husbands had migrated to cities due to economic circumstances which absolved them from marital responsibilities.

In addition to the reasons behind violence listed above, the participants for this study are employed in professions that make them particularly vulnerable, and some of the women met their husband at work. Such marriages are governed by a fragile trust as men might continue to frequent places where sex work and informal entertainment is conducted and meet other women engaged in sex work. Thus, the men are also conscious of the status of their wives as women who work or have worked in the sex and entertainment industry; they probably do not take them seriously. The other factor is that since both men and women lead vulnerable lives and poverty

remains the most pressing issue, it is unclear whether protective factors - such as wealth, women's education, employment, property ownership and autonomy in intra-household decisions as identified by other studies (see Babu & Kar, 2010; Acharya, Koenig & Stephenson, 2006; Dulal, Lamichhane, Puri & Tamang, 2011; Maitra, Marinshaw, Martin, & Tsui, 1999; Panda & Agarwal, 2005) - can act to minimise the risk of physical and sexual violence in the context of the urban poor, especially in the ecosystem of the highly exploitative and high-risk sex and informal entertainment industry.

A study in Nairobi, Kenya (Ngugi et al.) explored why some women enter into commercial sex work while other women in the same socio-economic environment do not. To address this question respondent driven sampling principles were adopted to recruit and collect data for 161 female sex workers and 159 women from the same age group who never engaged in commercial sex in Kibera, a large informal settlement in Nairobi. The study indicated that basic kinship measures, including number of family members seen during adolescence and at present, not having a male guardian while growing up, and earlier times of ending relationships with both male and female guardians were associated with commercial sex work in Kibera. It also showed that not having a male guardian during childhood, low educational attainment and seeing only a small number of family members during adolescence were all significant predictors of entering sex work. By far the most important predictor of entering sex work was not having any male guardian, such as a father, uncle, or older brother, during childhood. Results are interpreted in light of the historic pattern of sub-Saharan African child fostering and their relevance for young women in Kibera.

In the context of Nepal, however, as this chapter (and Chapter Five) show, joining the sex and informal entertainment industry happens for multiple reasons. Participants' kinship ties were often disrupted owing to political factors, including by abduction by the Maoist which often led to not being accepted by their own family members following their return as they felt that the honour of the family had been compromised. But loss of kinship ties was never the sole reason for joining the sex industry. The participants were not asked about how they felt about losing their kinship ties, which is one of the limitations of the study. However, the detachment from their immediate communities meant that they did not have to worry about shame and honour when deciding to join the sex and informal entertainment industry. However, the participants were asked if life was better after migration, and responses were mixed. Some participants responded positively, including Participant 5 who said "yes, it is better after years of struggle. I am earning good income and there are better opportunities for children.", while another participant who lost her husband said life was better in village as long her husband was alive.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter (and also in the previous Chapter on the Maoist conflict), I have examined the combination of factors that resulted in trauma and violence in the early lives of the participants of this research. From the data collected from the participants in this study, it is clear that none of the participants were victims of human trafficking as presumed by the dominant discourses on the sex and informal entertainment industry (as discussed in Chapter Two), but their decisions to enter the sector were driven by factors that are embedded in the social, cultural and patriarchal norms which have been instrumental in reinforcing the subordinated status of women and normalising violence against them. Added to this are political factors, including the failure of the government to facilitate transitional justice to the already marginalised women and girls who were directly affected by the ten-year Maoist conflict. Analysing the background of each participant and understanding the early experiences of violence are critical steps toward understanding if and how their past experiences contribute to developing the strength and the resilience to deal with traumatic challenges and physical abuse that they encounter on a regular basis when they work in the informal entertainment industry. In the chapters that follow, I focus on empowerment and resilience in order to reveal whether the participants perceive their life to be better now than in their past, and whether they feel their work liberates them from the shackles of deeply entrenched social norms and values that dilute their agency, potential and identity. I also consider their aspirations for the future, and whether they feel empowered to achieve them.

5. WOMEN & EMPOWERMENT IN NEPAL'S SEX AND INFORMAL ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that the participants of my research have undergone a dramatic shift in the day-to-day structures of their lives, during which they have moved from conventional family units toward new, all-women, peer networks. I argue that earning an income, even within an industry that is as abusive as the sex and informal entertainment sector, represents a transformative moment for the women. In part, this is because they have been able to leave behind violent husbands and destructive family and community contexts. Income has enabled them to take control of their lives and build resilience to their past traumas while connecting with other women who share a similar background in order to challenge the ongoing violence they live with. Income, then, has enabled them to gain a greater degree of agency.

The term 'agency' refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (Kabeer, 1999). However, income alone has not empowered the participants. There are other factors at play, and the support of peer networks - association of women working in the informal entertainment sector - appears to be the most significant. The organisations reviewed and mapped for this research were set up by women who had previously worked in the sector (discussed in Chapter Seven on 'Positive Deviancy'). And through these organisations, they have been able to mobilise other women and girls working in the sector, offering them vital support to build resilience to cope with the violence, stigma and discrimination that characterises their daily lives (see also Chapter Six). In this chapter, I look at the concepts of empowerment, autonomy and power and examine how they play out in the lives of the participants and how they gain voice and agency. These concepts discussed are applied in this chapter as well as in Chapter Six, which discusses how women build their resilience to violence. I revisit these concepts once again in Chapter Eight where I further illustrate how the various branches of peer network organisations help women to campaign for work-related rights.

This chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I discuss the meaning of the term empowerment and the different theories on empowerment proposed by various scholars. These theories at the different conditions and trajectories through which an individual might be able to make choices for their growth and development. It is argued that for true empowerment to take place an individual must have access to certain resources and be in a requisite enabling environment to be able to make decisions and choices and realise their goals. I use various

concepts of empowerment to unpack and contextualise how my participants exercise choice, gain decision-making capabilities, and take control over their income, thereby expressing their agency. Following this I go on to address the concept of power and how it relates to theories of empowerment. The process of empowerment entails a power struggle, and for women in particular it involves challenging and confronting barriers at every step. Such barriers impede their decision-making capabilities and economic potential at the individual, social, community and political level. Power in the context of empowerment has a number of dimensions: it refers to autonomy over making decisions (power to), control over personal decisions (power over), individual characteristics - self-esteem, confidence and resilience - (power within) and ability to collectively assert one's position and rights by being part of a community or group (power with). Understanding the concept of power is particularly important to this study as it reveals how the participants continuously gain and redefine power relations at various stages of their lives, which plays a pivotal role in the process of empowerment.

The chapter then explores the relationship between autonomy and empowerment by drawing on various examples to show that the conception of women's autonomy is context-specific. There are numerous social and patriarchal factors that come into play that might afford a degree of autonomy to a woman in certain areas but might deny her freedom in others. The discussion in this section points out that for empowerment to take root, a woman needs to be autonomous in more than one sphere of her life. The examples cited in the section show that it is not usually the case. In contrast, this study indicates that the women in the sex and informal entertainment sector, despite their deviant and marginalised status, enjoy autonomy over the household sphere when they earn an income, as well as a degree of mobility since they are not necessarily tied to the social structures that underpin the lives of ordinary women. That is to say, that if women earn an income, they can express a greater degree of autonomy in other areas, such as the household.

Building upon the discussion above, I then consider relationship between agency, power and income. In this section, I discuss the importance of addressing the structural inequalities, including in relation to social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, and customs). The examples discussed in this section suggest that income alone does not necessarily always empower a woman or give her decision-making power. A host of factors like social and gender norms, cultural behaviour, and (lack of) ownership of resources can prevent women from expressing agency. Thus, there must also be a move toward capacity building of local organisations which should be led by the women of the community. This is a pertinent discussion because on the one hand it allows for an analysis of the importance of income on the lives of the participants, and on the

other (as shown in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight) it illustrates how women challenge structural inequalities by becoming part of the local organisations led by women of their community.

Later in the chapter I apply the data collect to illustrate how the participants of the study gained and now express their agency. I analyse case studies to see how the different concepts of power and agency play out in the lives of the participants. The section focusses in particular on how the positive role of income in their lives enables them to express agency at the individual and household level. In the conclusion, I summarise the concepts discussed in this chapter in relation to the case studies of the participants. I illustrate this with the help of a diagram how my participants exercise choice and make use of available resources in order to move forward in their lives. I point out how the concepts of power are enacted as women begin to take control of their lives and gain decision making capabilities. The concepts of empowerment and power are discussed further in the next chapter, where I explain how the participants exhibit resilience and what factors enable them to do so.

5.2 The Meaning of Empowerment

This section critically reflects on what empowerment might mean and what it might look like for the women who participated in my study. The terms empowerment and agency have been assigned various meanings, but definitions are typically linked to an individual's growth and development. Empowerment is widely seen as a process where people have the freedom to act and the ability to make choices, which in turn leads to an outcome (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2006; Datta & Kornberg, 2002; Kabeer, 2002). Kabeer (1999) sees resources as preconditions that facilitate the processes that expand a woman's agency or ability to make choices that determine 'outcomes' that have direct implications for their welfare (Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

Boender, Malhotra and Schuler (2002) noted that resources in empowerment theory can also be treated as catalysts for empowerment or conditions under which empowerment is likely to occur. They argue that it may be more useful to think of resources as 'enabling factors'; as potentially critical inputs to foster an empowerment process, rather than as part of empowerment itself (2002, p. 8). Chen and Mahmud (1995) identify that there is more than one causal pathway through which resources are translated into agency. They argue that meaningful expression of agency can take place when it is reflected in four broad areas: material (changes in access to and control over material resources), perceptual (changes in levels of knowledge, skills, and awareness of wider environment), relational (changes in self-perception on the part of the woman

plus changes in the perception of the woman by others), and cognitive (changes in contractual agreements and bargaining power in various types of relationships).

Empowerment is seen both as a process and an outcome. The approach to empowerment, however, is divided. Some (including Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra 2002) look at it as purely a process as described above, like the ability to act freely and make choices, but also a means through which previously excluded groups participate in the design, management and evaluation of development activities. This can happen through affirmative action or through the system of reservation in jobs such as in the case of disadvantaged castes in India and in Nepal. Some stress that the transformative approach that relies on participation alone is meaningless unless there is an outcome. This means that the activism for the rights of marginalised groups is not enough; it must be action oriented, so that they can actually reap economic and social benefits. Such an emphasis on outcomes leads to a focus on economic enhancement and increasing access to economic resources. This can be facilitated through a robust mechanism of distribution of wealth and welfare benefits especially targeted at the poor (Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton, 2009, p. 5).

Becker and Mahmud (2012) point out that for women in particular, resources define the trajectory of the empowerment process. They argue that the access to and control over material, human and social resources that a woman acquires through interaction with multitudes of domains in her life (such as the family, the market and the community) provides conditions that could either support or hinder her growth. Such outcomes such as marriage, living arrangements, household wealth, and characteristics of influential family members, play a significant role in determining a woman's life situation, which in turn shapes the opportunities and choices available to her.

Whilst both empowerment and agency might be seen as necessary if a person is to live a free life, these intrinsic values are linked to an individual's capacity to make choices based on the circumstances and resources at hand. Agency, therefore, is considered an important end in itself seen as the freedom to be able to achieve whatever the individual thinks he or she values (Sen, 1985, p. 206 as cited in Samman & Santos, 2009). This concept based on Sen's capability approach (Sen, 1985a) that emphasises that by expanding the capacity of the poor and the marginalised, they can achieve a better state of life.

This approach has been instrumental in designing development policies aimed at poverty reduction and have been incorporated by the *Human Development Report* (HDR) (World Bank, 2001) as well as the *Voices of the Poor* study (cited in Narayan, 2000). It has been endorsed by other researchers to develop a conceptual framework for understanding empowerment (Samman &

Santos, 2009). They define empowerment as the capacity of an individual or group to make effective choices and transform them into actions. However, the process of transforming choices into action is seen as an interaction between two building blocks: agency and opportunity structure.

According to the literature, a person's ability to exercise agency depends on a number of tangible and intangible resources including control and ownership of individual assets (such as land, housing, livestock, savings) human capabilities (such as good health and education), social factors (such as social belonging, a sense of identity, leadership relations), psychological (self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to imagine and aspire for a better future), and by people's collective assets and capabilities, such as voice, organization, representation and identity (Samman & Santos, 2009). The opportunity structure broadly refers to the institutional, social, and political context made up of formal and informal rules which in turn creates the environment which enables actors to operate and translate their choices into action (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). Agency and opportunity structure are hypothesized to associate with the degree of empowerment a person or group experiences. Degrees of empowerment (DOE) can be measured by assessing:

- (1) whether a person has the opportunity to make a choice, (2) whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose, and (3) once the choice is made, whether it brings the desired outcome

(Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 7)

In their study, Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) point out that the relationship between empowerment and development outcomes is based on anecdotal evidence that suggest an instrumental purpose of empowering people. They contend that robust data that demonstrates a clear association between empowerment and development outcomes are hard to find as most data are based on intermediary indicators of empowerment, and hence the association remains a hypothesis. They call for more empirical studies to establish the causal links between development outcomes and investing in empowerment (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 6). In their framework of measuring empowerment, the authors look at the indicators of agency (in terms of the capacity to make meaningful choices) in the context of asset endowments. The assets can be psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, or human. But whilst human assets such as skills and literacy can be directly measured, it is difficult to quantify psychological assets (such as the capacity to envision) or social assets (such as social capital). However, any of these assets or a combination of them can potentially help actors to determine choice. In the chapter on resilience (Chapter Six), this study looks at how psychological assets in particular interact with resources to create agency.

Simultaneously Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) state that opportunity structure can be measured by analysing the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions. Opportunity structure can sometimes, therefore, be measured by studying specific laws and how they are implemented or have an impact on the wider community. To this end, the authors propose a mixed method that uses secondary information on legislation and primary research into the impact of those laws. However, Alsop and Heinsohn note that measuring assets and opportunity structure provide intermediary indicators of empowerment and suggest that direct measures of empowerment can be made by assessing:

1. Whether an opportunity to make a choice exists (existence of choice).
2. Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose (use of choice).
3. Whether the choice resulted in the desired result (achievement of choice).

In addition to agency and opportunity structure as a means through which to frame an analysis of empowerments, Alsop and Heinsohn conceptualize three domains and levels that essentially span the lives of all individuals. The domains and levels are conceptualized in such a way to rationalize complexities in the measurement of empowerment. This is necessary because an actor may be empowered in one particular domain but might not feel the same level of empowerment when there is variation of the environment. The authors illustrate this through an example of an Indian woman who may experience a form of empowerment when she is trying to exercise choice over domestic resources within the household, but she may also struggle to access a loan. her experiences will greatly depend on from where she is operating. It could be either from her home, village or a nearby city (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 11).

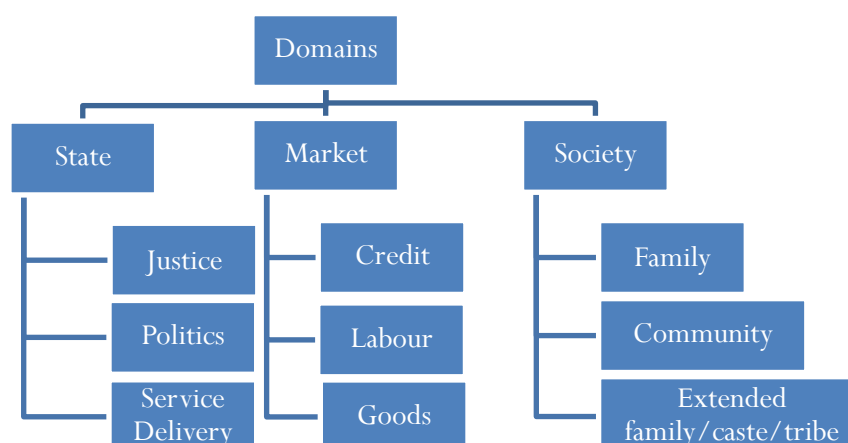


Figure 1: The domain structure as proposed by Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005.

The above diagram shows the various factors that interact with a person's life and how at each domain they might present a different level or experience of empowerment. Alsop & Heinsohn stress that there should not be any prior assumption regarding how empowerment in any single domain or sub-domain relates to empowerment. This is because the degree of empowerment in one sub-domain may well correlate with a similar degree of empowerment in another domain. For example, an individual who is severely disempowered in one domain, say, the market, may also be simultaneously disempowered in another domain. Equal market opportunity might be denied to this person, and relations with the state might be repressive or exploitative (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 12).

The domain and sub-domains are further experienced at different levels: macro, intermediary, and local.

- The local level comprises the immediate vicinity of a person's everyday life. This is likely to be the level of an area contiguous with their residence.
- The intermediary level will comprise a vicinity which is familiar but is not encroached upon on a daily basis. This is likely to be the level between the residential and national level.
- The macro level will comprise a vicinity which is the furthest away from the individual. This is likely to be the national level

For ease of analysis, a level is defined as an administrative boundary. These levels are common in most countries.

(Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 13)

In Nepal, the macro level could correspond to the national, the intermediary to the administrative boundaries of a state and the local to the jurisdiction of a district/village development committee (VDC).

A few studies (Malhotra, 2002) have pointed out that a certain degree of empowerment at one level does not necessarily reflect the same degree of empowerment at other levels. Research demonstrates that individuals or communities empowered at the local level are not necessarily empowered at the intermediary or macro level. So, from the above conceptualisation, it is clear that empowerment can be assessed at different domains of a person's life (the state, the market, society) and at different levels (macro, intermediary and local). Each domain can be divided into sub-domains, which will indicate where and in what areas of their lives the actors are empowered. At the intersection of the domains and levels, people can experience different degrees of empowerment, addressing the issues of whether and to what extent a person is empowered. Two clusters of interdependent factors associate with the different degrees of

empowerment on an individual or group experiences- the agency of the actor and the opportunity structure within which that actor operates. Analysis of agency and opportunity structure helps explain why an actor is empowered to one degree or another.

The above framework is highly relevant when examining the different degrees of empowerment of the participants in this study. In the following sections and chapters, I critically explore how the participants of my study express choice, show resilience and make use of informal opportunity structures presented through the peer networks. The data suggests that peer networks set up by women leaders, described as positive deviants in this study (see Chapter Seven) due to their uncommon behaviour and strategies, enable them to find better solutions to the same problems faced by their peers. They create an enabling environment that helps other actors to realise their potential, which in turn allows them to optimise the use of the resources available. The study will analyse how the various domains and levels in which they operate contribute to their empowerment or offer them some opportunities for growth.

5.3 Power in the Context of Empowerment

A number of authors look at empowerment as an enhancement of power in the sense that the individual should have control over his or her destiny or the ability to make effective changes, even when such changes are opposed by a certain group (Oakley, 2001 as cited in Alkire & Ibrahim, 2007). Uphoff (2005 as cited in Alkire & Ibrahim, 2007, p. 384) talks about 'power resources', arguing that power can be effective only when resources (material, social, human and institutional) are made available for the poor and the marginalised. Oakley (2001) differentiates between two types of power: in one, the poor gain power and become empowered without altering the power dynamics, whilst in the other, the gains made by the poor inevitably result in the reduction of power by others. Understanding power in the context of empowerment is important because the process of empowerment involves tackling barriers that are created by the way in which power relations shape choices, opportunities and well-being. Various debates about the concept and operation of power have resulted in a variety of interpretations of empowerment (Nussbaum, 2011). Rowlands (1998) categorises four types of power relations to stress the difference between:

'power over' (ability to influence and coerce), 'power to' (ability to organise and change existing hierarchies), 'power with' (power from collective action) and 'power within' (power from individual consciousness)

(Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton, 2009, p. 6).

Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz and Scrutton (2009) state that ‘power over’ emphasises the need for economic and political participation without changing the status quo, which means that the dominant position of the powerful is maintained. This resonates with the one-dimensional view of the power proposed by Dhal (1961 as cited in Leder, 2016, p. 5) where the powerless are conscious and openly display their opinions, yet:

do not have influence. In this regard, the feminist approach emphasises that empowerment is not about replacing one form of power with another; they do not want a ‘bigger piece of the cake but a different cake’, and the increased choice (or ‘cake’) that power brings should not reproduce social inequalities or restrict the rights of others.

(Kabeer, 2001a as cited in Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton, 2009, p. 6)

‘Power with’ means strengthening the power of others (collective power), in the process of gaining power for oneself. It also means gaining power through collective association which is highly relevant to this study as the subsequent chapter on resilience, peer networks and positive deviance show that participants of the study express greater level of agency and collective power when they unite and associate with a group. The other two dimensions of power are ‘power to’, which is about access to decision-making, and ‘power within’, which is linked to building self-esteem. “The process of acquiring such power must start with the individual and requires a change in their own perceptions about their rights, capacities and potential” (Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton, 2009, p. 7). Alkire and Ibrahim (2007) emphasised that ‘power to’ should be further weighed with ‘autonomy’ as an effective indicator of empowerment as it also assesses the respondent’s own values, motivations and self-esteem. The authors argued that autonomy captures the ‘positionally objective’ (2007, p. 393) perception of the respondent meaning how a person understands the meaning of empowerment in regard to the social norms and other external constraints vis-à-vis a particular situation.

Alkire and Ibrahim (2007) also draw on Rowlands (1998) typology of power as suitable indicators for measuring empowerment and agency in individual and household surveys. They identified four dimensions of power as: power over (control over personal decisions), power to (autonomy and household decision making), power with (changing aspects in one’s life) and power from within (changing aspects in one’s life at community level). They argue that since empowerment is a process, the poor and the marginalised should be able to gain agency and empowerment across all stages of their lives. Leder (2016, with reference to Rowlands, 1998; Kabeer, 1999) explored the link between women’s empowerment and resilience and stated a relational view should be linked to a processual perspective that sees empowerment as a link between resources, agency and achievements. It means that for empowerment to happen power must flow from the

individual to the household and then to the community. Resources are seen as a catalyst in the process that is seen as a pre-condition to agency, and achievements are the well-being outcome. This process can also be seen as cyclic, as well-being outcomes influencing resources as well as agency (Leder, 2016, p. 7).

5.4 Autonomy & Empowerment

Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton (2009) further explain the various dimensions of the ‘power with’ effect through the ‘CapDev Butterfly’ framework that emphasises that for meaningful empowerment to happen, positive effect should accrue to individuals, to the group and to organisations, as well as to networks and systems. For example, the authors suggest that a poor woman, may not be able to participate in ‘collective’ empowerment activities before they are able to tackle the power dynamics at the household level that constrain them. For many, however, collective organisation is seen as an essential element of empowerment.

Oakley stresses the importance of ‘apex-organisation building’, where networks and alliances are able to connect vertically to enable lobbying for marginalised groups at higher levels, and in so doing can bring about the ‘institutionalisation’ of legally based rights.

(Oakley, 2001 as cited in Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton, 2009, p. 6)

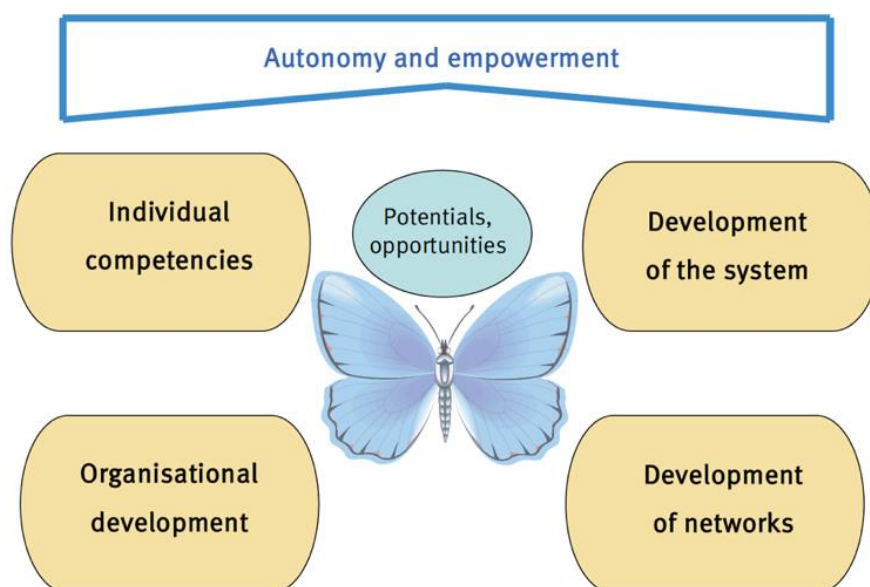


Figure 2. ‘CapDev Butterfly’ framework (Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton, 2009, p. 7).

Becker, Mahmud and Shah (2012) explored autonomy by looking at women's perception and attitudes by adopting Jejeebhoy's (2002) model that looked at the co-relation between determinants (demographic status, economic status, social status and media exposure) and dimensions of women's empowerment (self-esteem, control, decision making and mobility). The study examined the empowerment of 3500 women in Bangladesh and found that a woman's period of schooling is significantly associated with one of two self-esteem indicators and with freedom of mobility. The authors pointed out that:

it is quite possible for there to be an increase in a woman's value to herself and the household (self-worth and role in decision-making) without a commensurate increase in her personal autonomy and independence vis-à-vis men (freedom of mobility and access to cash).

(Beker, Mahmud & Shah, 2012, pp. 11-12)

The authors argue that the primary reason for this could be that "women's attitudes about wives' status relative to husbands are determined more by general attitudes prevailing in the community than by their own household circumstances" (Beker, Mahmud & Shah, 2012, p. 11). The discussion in this section points out that for empowerment to happen a woman should be able to be autonomous in more than one sphere of her life.

5.5 Agency, Power & Income

Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton (2009) argue that at the root of these different categorisations of power is the debate about whether change is brought about or constrained by forces beyond peoples' control (social structures such as class or religion) or through individual and collective action (agency). As indicated above, the term 'agency' refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. The term 'structure' covers the rules and social forces (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity and customs) that limit or influence the opportunities that determine the actions of individuals. From the empirical case studies mentioned above, it is clear that despite income and other qualifications, empowerment might not be visible in all aspects of women's life. A woman may feel empowered at the individual or household level, but at the same level of empowerment might not get translated to the market place or the community.

The examples above raise a pertinent question that researchers have grappled with regarding whether agency and structure are complementary and dynamic forces, or if they operate separately and at different levels to determine an individual's empowerment process. In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the need for an explicit consideration of structural

inequalities that affect entire social groups rather than a focus only on individual characteristics. It is this focus that is often combined with a rights-based approach. The operational implications of these different approaches are outlined in the table below:

Type of Power Relation	An 'Agency' Approach to Empowerment	Transforming 'Structures' for Empowerment
Power Over: the ability to coerce and influence the actions and thoughts of the powerless	Changes in power relations within households and communities and at the macro level, e.g. increased role in decision making and bargaining power	Respect equal rights of others, challenge to inequality and unfair privileges
Power To: the capacity to act, to organise and change existing hierarchies	Increased skills, access and control over income and resources, and access to markets and networks	Increased skills and resources to challenge injustice and inequality faced by others
Power With: increased power from collective action, social mobilisation and alliance building	Organisation of the less powerful to enhance abilities to change power relations Increased participation of the less powerful	Supportive organisation of those with power to challenge injustice, inequality, discrimination and stigma
Power from Within: increased individual consciousness, self-dignity and awareness	Increased confidence and awareness of choices and rights; widened aspirations and ability to transform aspiration into action	Changes in attitudes and stereotypes; commitment to change

Table 2. Objectives from an Agency and a Structural Perspective (adapted from Mayoux, 2003).

However, interventions aimed at promoting empowerment of women and girls at the grassroots level have tended to centre on enhancing income through microcredit programmes. It has been argued that these projects often ignore structural issues, and this can lead to an assumption that access to income automatically leads to increased choice and, therefore, to empowerment, which is not necessarily the case. The examination of various case studies below further questions the assumption that improving women's access to income-earning opportunities will automatically increase their decision-making powers in both the household and the public sphere, simply because they have greater economic autonomy.

It must be emphasised here that though the examples below relate to the household setting, they are relevant here because it allows the importance of income in the lives of the participants to be analysed. But because of their unique position as deviant from the norm due their profession and background, and as single mothers, the participants have far more leverage over all aspects of decision-making. Due to their position (though marginalised) the women who participated in this study have a degree of independence. While they are severely stigmatised by the community, they are also less restricted in their mobility by social structures. This is because they are detached from their immediate communities and earn a living in a more heterogeneous context in the urban district of Thamel where the identities of caste, religion and community can become blurred (Liechty, 2005). Some of the barriers that they face, such discrimination in market places,

are not necessarily due to stigmatisation, but instead are common in the experience of all women. However, as later chapters will demonstrate the participants remain undeterred by community attitudes towards them and show resilience on many fronts.

A number of studies in the 1990s (e.g., Hashemi, Riley, & Schuler, 1996; Jejeebhoy 2000; Kishor 2000; Hashemi & Schuler. 1999) have used 'decision-making within household' as a key domain to ascertain a women's agency and empowerment. These studies were set in a variety of different contexts and yielded mixed results. In general, they tend to show that agency and empowerment are difficult to measure as they have multifaceted dimensions. As discussed, a woman might enjoy relative empowerment in one domain but that might not translate into other domains of her life. Hence, different indicators show different results depending on the socio-cultural context that defines the position of women in a given society. For example, Hashemi, Riley and Schuler's (1996) study in Bangladesh that looked at women's empowerment used eight indicators such as mobility, economic security, the ability to make small purchases, ability to make larger purposes, involvement in major household decisions, relative freedom from domination within the family, political and legal awareness and involvement in political campaigning and protests. The study found that involvement of credit program made a difference in women's overall level of empowerment.

Another widely quoted study by Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) that looked into credit programmes in Bangladesh contested the claims that credit or loans to women automatically enhance her decision-making power within the family or even give her control over the money she borrows. The authors argued that high demand for loans and propensity to repay cannot be construed as signs of empowerment and control. Whilst credit is an important tool for women's economic empowerment, for households where the loan amount is diverted for other purposes and controlled by male relatives it might not empower women at all. Women who transfer their loan to their husband might enjoy relatively higher status, but the context matters. There have been instances where woman's delay or inability to access loans resulted in tensions and violence within the household. The study showed that fewer women had full control over the money they borrowed whilst most had no idea how the loan money was being spent. Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996, p. 53) indicated that a range of other factors like gender division of labour, gender divisions around control of economic activities and cash proceeds and the consequent gendered differences in consumption patterns affect the way credit is used.

In light of the above studies, it is clear that money in the hands of women (either through income or credit) does not necessarily lead to empowerment. A host of factors like social and gender

norms, cultural behaviour, lack of ownership of resources can prevent women from expressing agency. Thus, capacity building of local organisations led by women of the community is a critical part of ensuring that access to economic resources translates to empowerment. In this study, the chapter on ‘positive deviance’ (Chapter Seven) shows that organisations led *by* members of the community can work more effectively for the interest *of* that community. Having an empowered person who is one of them can prevent the interests of the community being overridden by more affluent and more powerful members of society who claim to represent the interests of the group, which would perpetuate existing power structures and limiting the capabilities of the poor and/or marginalised.

Leder (2016) points out that qualitative studies conducted by Rao (2014), Neupane & Zwarteveen (1996), Joshi (2014) and Guerin et al. (2013) challenge and ultimately discredit the assumptions that economic empowerment will lead to overall empowerment or that the participation in decision-making processes will automatically empower women. Such studies, Leder notes, provide a more nuanced understanding of factors influencing and mediating empowerment. Such an understanding is further related to other concepts in gender and development research, such as Kandiyoti’s (1988) ‘patriarchal bargains’ and Sen’s (2014) ‘cooperative conflicts’ (Leder, 2016, p. 3). However, Bird, Luttrell, Quiroz & Scrutton (2009, p. 10) caution that fulfilling immediate needs may be a necessary first step toward enabling other forms of empowerment and, as such “care should also be taken not to overemphasise the separation between structure and agency and that attention should be paid to a combination and a sequencing of both forms of approach”.

In the section below, I apply the concept of empowerment and power and the relationship with income in the context of the study participants. I do so in order to analyse how extremely marginalised women who work in the sex and informal entertainment sector exercise choice to fulfil their needs and aspirations and to better the structures they challenge while expressing agency. An important question that this section seeks to contribute to answering is what does ‘empowerment’ mean for to the participants?

5.6 Gaining & Expressing Agency

All women who participated in this study asserted that earning an income and the ability to have control over it has had significant positive impact on their lives. Though the women admit that their engagement with the sex and informal entertainment industry is characterised by stigma, abuse and violence, they feel that their association with the industry has enabled them to establish new ties with other women and groups and that they have been able to draw upon the resources

found in each other. As discussed in the previous sections, Kabeer (1999) defines agency as the process by which an individual is able to define one's goal and act on them. One's goal here refers to the context under which an individual takes certain actions and uses the outcome of those actions to shape their strategic needs and objectives. Kabeer says that the manner in which people perceive their needs and interests, is largely shaped by individual histories and everyday realities. Individual past experiences in turn create situations or 'vantage points' that become the platform on which an individual operates the agency dimension in making certain choices pertaining to their lives. In this study, individual circumstances of the respondents were found to create situations that result in their choice of a highly vulnerable profession in sex work and informal entertainment.

Though the women interviewed in this study have experienced multiple levels of violence in their personal lives, in most cases their decision to enter the industry was not always the first choice. Some of the women had worked as domestic maids, in factories and in construction sites before eventually migrating to the sex and informal entertainment industry, often because the income is relatively higher which enabled them to cater for their daily expenses and to provide for their children. Most women categorically stated that their children's education and well-being is the main thing they live for. The table below illustrates some of the key reasons participants chose to enter into sex work and informal entertainment.

Participant	Reasons for Joining the Sex and Informal Entertainment Industry
Participant 1: Age 41, three children, upper caste (Brahmin).	"My husband was very violent and later abandoned me. Other jobs were not profitable. I used to cycle twenty kilometres to sell vegetables, but the business never picked up. Children were starving; they couldn't go to school. I was struggling to make ends meet. Then a friend told me about sex work. Purely out of desperation I worked as a contract sex worker for a year and I'm not ashamed of it. I couldn't let my children starve. After one year, I saved enough to start another business. I used to import clothes from the Indian border and sell them in Kathmandu. I made around 15,000 rupees. After that I occasionally worked as a contract sex worker."
Participant 2: Age 30, one child, lower caste (Dalit), separated.	"I worked as a servant in family of eight. I worked from 5am to 12pm. I used to live with the family. They gave me food but no salary. They used to beat me up. I was treated badly. Then one day they came to know about my caste and fired me. When I used to go buy vegetables for the family, I used to meet a lady who always wore good clothes. One day, she asked me where I worked. That lady worked in the Thamel. She said to me that I am young and can get better jobs. Through her I joined a massage parlour. First few days they asked me to do cleaning work. One day they asked me to massage the customers. Then they told me that I cannot earn money by massaging alone but need to go beyond that".
Participant 5: Age 27, one child,	"I needed money to run the house and educate my daughter. I am not educated. I cannot get a job where I can earn rupees 15,000-20,000. It is very expensive to live in Kathmandu especially when your husband does not do anything. On top of

born high caste Hindu but practices Christianity, married but not living with husband.	that there is domestic violence, so women must fend for themselves and must take up jobs for survival [...] I worked as a domestic maid and at a construction site. Those jobs didn't pay much, and it was physically tasking. I couldn't go back to work as a labourer as I was weak after the child birth. I asked around and I joined a massage parlour initially as a cleaner. Later, I realized that my nature of job was different. For the sake of money, I joined mainstream sex work."
Participant 6: Age 23, upper caste, not married.	"After coming from abroad, I came to Kathmandu looking for a job. My family situation was bad, my mom was very ill. Since I am not educated, I couldn't find a job either in the city or in my village, eventually I joined a dance bar. I was introduced [to this sector] by my friends, who said I could be earning more that way and would be able to look after the family. I was forced to work as a sex worker as I had no alternative. I have breast cancer and I couldn't find other jobs"
Participant 15: Age 28, has three children, lower caste, lives with her husband.	"Earlier I worked as a maid and in the carpet factory. The work was physically challenging. It was dusty. It was difficult to breathe, and a lot of people had TB. Compared to that, sex work is better."
Participant 17: Age 23, has two children, married but lives alone.	"The bad days started after the death of my father-in-law. My husband became astray and refused to take care of the family. I was initially working in a beauty parlour of a hotel but was never really doing any work of a beautician. I was asked to clean [the premises]. Later I joined the entertainment industry purely to earn money as I being exploited anyways"

Table 3. Reasons for women joining the informal entertainment industry.

The above descriptions show how the lives of participants were constrained by factors that were not under their control, but for them the sex and informal entertainment industry presented itself as a choice that was seen as necessary for survival. Working in this sector, might not be a preferred choice, but it enables them to earn an income and provide for their families. From the perspective of Sen's capability approach, the participants of the study use their body as a resource to convert the opportunities provided by the market into a living. Their actions can be seen as 'basic functioning', which Sen describes as a subset of all capabilities that a person is capable of achieving. However, 'functioning' refers to the choices made based on realistic terms of what is available. They refer to the freedom to do some basic things that are necessary for survival and to avoid or escape poverty. The relevance of basic capabilities is "not so much in ranking living standards, but in deciding on a cut-off point for the purpose of assessing poverty and deprivation" (Sen, 1987, p. 109). Hence, while the notion of capabilities refers to a very broad range, basic capabilities refer to the freedom to do those things that are necessary to keep oneself out of poverty.

As described above, obtaining a full understanding of agency requires considering its manifestations in different domains and levels of life (Samman & Santos, 2009, p. 67). 'Levels' here refers to the societal structures in which a person is embedded. For a woman engaged in the

sex and informal entertainment industry, she is an economic actor and her domain of operation is the market, which is one area that significantly spans her life (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2006 as cited in Samman & Santos, 2009, p. 6).

In the section above, I have discussed the domains and how various factors in each domain interacts with a person's lives and thereby presenting a different level or experience of empowerment. In the context of women in the informal entertainment industry, it is the market that provides them space for both economic activity and social interactions, thereby giving them a degree of autonomy in that domain. They are also a unique group as opposed to the general population of women in Nepal as once they become part of the sex and informal entertainment sector their identity becomes intertwined with and is shaped by the dynamics of urbanization and the constantly evolving economic realities that characterise Thamel, the business centre, where they work and even form their own communities. This point has been discussed in the literature review in the context of sex work in Nepal (see Chapter Two).

In this context, the market offers an informal opportunity to make a choice to be a part of an apparently thriving industry, which assures a decent income despite undercurrents of violence and harassment. The participants in the study expressed that despite the negative image is associated with their profession, at the individual level, they have been able to create a new identity for themselves as the income they earn from this activity gives them a degree of autonomy. They can make decisions pertaining to their lives, which when seen through the concept of power, can be seen as 'power over' (Alkire & Ibrahim, 2007). Domains or dimensions are the multiple areas of life in which a person may exercise agency such as decisions on how to spend money, deciding whether to participate in the labour market or not and, if so, in which type of job (Samman & Santos, 2009, p. 6). The informal entertainment sector provides a micro-environment in which the participants are able to redefine their identities as single women in control of decision-making and free from the control of other family members. They consistently maintain that it is income alone, irrespective of the source, that has given them the power and voice to reject their oppressive and abusive past.

All participants clearly stated that their children's future is their most important priority and that they are willing to invest in their education and welfare. Participant 9 (age 28, has one child, upper caste Brahmin, not living with husband), for example, stated, "I don't have any desires. I want my children to grow up well and be happy in their lives. I would look at their success as a benefit of my struggles and I would be contented." She justifies her work and says it was the best choice she could make in order to provide for her family. "Yes, I work in the entertainment

industry, but I am also an independent woman and do not have to beg.” Participant 5 asserted that they have a right to earn a living and questioned what has been done by the government to provide alternative skills or employment to them:

Yes, I am earning money by giving pleasure. Yes, I get abused, exploited but those who question me I want to say - Can you help? Can government help? Has anyone ever helped? If government can give a job, I will quit. I too don't want to do this job.

In this study, the participants expressed agency on number of fronts. Through their income they harbour hope for a better future. One of the immediate benefits of having an income is their ability to take control over the household decision-making and divert their resources for supporting their children and, in some cases, their extended family. For many women, it is the first time they have been able exercise agency in this manner, and with time, they have learnt the skills to enhance their bargaining power at their place of work. They see earning and income as an empowering process as opposed to the servitude of domestic maids or the physical exploitation of construction work. Wilson (2004) makes a similar point (which has been explained in Chapter Two) arguing that many women who are working in this sector do not see their work as exploitative as it provides an employment situation that allows for more flexible transactions and ongoing negotiations.

However, the participants of this study do contend that the sex and informal entertainment industry is exploitative in nature, but also argue that women can stand up to it and find ways to deal with it. They also find support through peer networks (see Chapter Eight). Other forms of work, including selling vegetables at market places, make women equally vulnerable to risks and harassment from police and male competitors and the participants assert that informal market places remain unfavourable domains for women to operate within. The case study below illustrates many of the findings discussed above.

5.6.1 Case Study 1

Participant 8 (age 48, has three children, upper caste, widow) worked in a spa that also acted as a conduit for sex work for fifteen years after the death of her husband. “I was young and had four children to look after”, she says. After migrating to Kathmandu as a child she worked as a domestic maid where she was mistreated. She fled and after getting married at the age of fourteen and worked in a carpet factory. During the interview she said:

First, I worked in a carpet factory. I only worked there just for a month. I was only fourteen and it was a very difficult job. I learnt how to make the yarn for the carpet on a spinning wheel. Then I had a chest problem; there was dust everywhere, even in food

and water. I earned sixty rupees for five kilograms of spun wool for which I worked day and night.

After that I had to work in a place where I had to collect sand from a river bank. It was illegally done. I had to carry the sand to the place of construction. It was hard labour, and I worked there for five years. I earned around five hundred rupees. I did it on my own. I sneaked in and collected sand and smuggled it. The job was not sustainable and physically challenging. It was too tough. Sometimes I used to go deep in marshy land and there was a fear of police. My friends told me that if I work in the entertainment industry I could earn much more, and it will not be a physically demanding work. They said I could also earn tips. After that I joined the entertainment sector in spa centre but was earning through sex work.

The participant then came in contact with the NGO Raksha Nepal while she was looking for support to leave the industry. Raksha Nepal provided shelter for her children. She said:

This is the forum where I can socialise and learn new things like the way I am speaking with you. Here, there are people from a similar profession. [...] I left it [informal entertainment industry] because I felt stigmatised by the society. Though I raised my children from the income I earned by working as a sex worker, I never earned respect. Now I am relaxed as children are educated which was my dream. Now I earn for myself.

The participant now works a vegetable seller; she claims that the level of harassment that she faces while selling vegetables is equally bad:

While selling the vegetables, I face a lot of harassment from police. They extort money from us. Sometimes they become violent and throw away the vegetables as you are not allowed to sell on the road. They also took me to the custody once. So, I feel that I should change my job.

When asked is the level of violence same, less or more as compared to the entertainment industry? She says:

there is not much difference, but the violence is of a different kind. There they [authorities] abused us and said why don't you do other jobs. While selling vegetables the municipality and the police shoos us away. It's still a violence.

She adds:

It is not safe as most of the vegetables vendor are women. When it rains, we get wet and men look on us. We cannot stay long, especially, in the evening. Vegetables rot due to rain and we suffer losses. Government hasn't provided us a safe place to sell vegetables.

When asked if the levels of violence had increased for her or other women at her place of work she replied:

A lot depends on the women but in the entertainment industry it is still the same. Violence will always be there. It is about improving the safety at work place which hasn't happened.

In this study, questions were asked about income generation in order to ascertain how income enables the participants to gain autonomy over decision making. Questions were also asked regarding how income is spent and if there are tensions with family members as a result of earning an income. There were other specific questions about the importance of income in their lives and the attitude of the community towards a woman (in general) earning an income. The answers were subjective in nature and the perspectives of the women varied, but all of them affirmed that income was a positive force in their lives. The women also demonstrated autonomy over decisions and choice, which is seen as an important indicator of agency (Alkire & Ibrahim, 2007, p. 389).

Participants said that income is one significant factor that enabled them to make strategic life choices including the decision to escape from highly abusive and violent marriages. It gave them the confidence to lead their lives on their own terms without the presence of a husband or other men in their lives. Though they continue to face violence at work, they have created a coping mechanism by organizing in groups that enable them stand up collectively against extreme violence. All the respondents said that their income was mostly spent on meeting basic needs like food, medicine, house rent and their children's school fees. Eleven of the women stated that they have been able to realise the dream of educating their children. Participant 1 said, "I am able to earn and feed my children. Earlier many a times my children have gone without food for days. This has certainly changed."

Alkire and Ibrahim (2007) using Rowland's typology (1998) has defined the phenomenon of control over personal decisions as 'power over' and exercise of autonomy as 'power to.' All the participants claim that they have total control over decisions regarding how they spend their money. However, this degree of autonomy was denied to them whenever they were in a relationship with a man either through marriage or otherwise. But now, as independent women, they do not face any social constraint on this, even from outside the household. Their association with peer groups (as discussed later) further encourages them to assert their autonomy in all aspects of their lives. 'Power to' relates to the domain specific autonomy. Alkire and Ibrahim argue that the ability to make decisions does not really mean that the women enjoy autonomy. Rather, 'Power to' as an indicator questions the extent to which a person feels their actions in each domain are motivated by a fear of punishment or a hope for reward. It then asks the extent to which the same action was motivated by desire to avoid shame or to gain praise. Finally, it asks the extent to which actions were motivated by their consonance with the respondent's interests and values (Alkire & Ibrahim, 2007, p. 392).

When considered in the context of the above proposed indicators, it appears that the decisions of my participants were not driven by any reward, but instead were motivated by concern about the well-being of themselves and of their children. The fear/reward component also does not apply as the households are run solely by women who are mostly single mothers. The shame/praise component remains irrelevant in this context, but it becomes abundantly clear that they are their hopes for a better life which keeps them motivated. The 'power with' and 'power to' components, however, resonate with the case study below. I refer here to the same example cited in Chapter Three which showed how social norms can contribute to domestic violence. I do so in order to elaborate further on the experience of Participant 1 after she migrated to Kathmandu, giving examples of her personal struggles and how she tackled them.

5.6.2 Case Study 2

Participant 1, (age 41, has three children, upper caste [Brahmin], separated) gave the following account of her experience:

I was married in April 1990; I was fourteen years old and was studying in standard ten. I come from a Brahmin family. My father is a priest and commands a lot of respect. My husband approached my father and said he wanted to marry me. He was reluctant for a number of reasons. I was too young and still going to school. We were upper caste and the boy was known to be of bad character, but he put pressure on my father and threatened to kidnap me. My father married me off taking into consideration his family reputation and prestige (*izzat*). My husband started beating me only weeks after our marriage. It became more frequent and severe. He would usually beat me up when drunk. No one came to protect me including my husband's parents, four brothers and two sisters. I was still studying. I would wake up at dawn and cook food for the entire family. In our culture the daughter-in-law is not expected to eat food before serving her husband's family, so I used to go to school without breakfast. If I would eat, my in-laws would not.

My in-laws expected me to do all the housework and were not happy with my going to school. Eight months into our married life my in-laws asked my husband and me to leave the house because they no longer wanted to witness his beatings. We moved to Kathmandu in December 1990 where we didn't know anyone except a cousin. We stayed in a *dharmsala* [guest house] and then my cousin found a place on the outskirts of the city near the airport. My husband had no money, so the cousin paid the rent. Meanwhile, I became pregnant and at the very advanced stage of my pregnancy my husband kicked me very hard and beat me ruthlessly. I came to know that day that he remarried someone else. I later gave birth to a stillborn.

The doctors thought the child died because of the violence I suffered. I had to restart my life. I started working in a candy factory. My job was to wrap candies. I earned forty rupees a day and rented a room for twelve hundred rupees. I lived like this for three years until I was seventeen. Then my husband returned one day and pleaded for us to live together again. He was sorry for what he did and promised he would be a good man. I became pregnant again and gave birth to a baby boy in 1994. The beatings resumed in

June 1995. I was sent home to be with my in-laws and help with the farming. In 2001, my husband returned, and I became pregnant again.

I stayed with him because of the *izzat* of my father and in-laws. I had nowhere to go and I thought life would be harder for my children without a father. Poverty, though, hit hard, so I returned to Kathmandu in search of work. I stayed with my sister-in-law, but she didn't give us any food. I used to cycle two kilometres a day selling vegetables, but business was bad. Then a friend told me about sex work. Purely out of desperation I worked as a contract sex worker for a year and I am not ashamed of it. I couldn't let my children starve. I made three thousand rupees a day and slept with at least three men every day. Some customers were violent: they would beat me and not pay. Police harassment was huge. After one year I had earned enough to start a new business. I used to import clothes from the Indian border and sell them. I made around fifteen thousand rupees a year. I did occasional contract sex work and lived like this for about five years.

In 2009, a friend told me about Raksha Nepal and their cooperative. The chairperson asked about my life and then introduced me to the savings scheme. I took out a loan and opened my own restaurant bar in Thamel. The business did well, and I paid off my loan and then opened another guest house. Today, I employ seven women. My children are doing well. The eldest is studying engineering, the second son management and my daughter is in school and wants to be a lawyer.

In the context of this study, the decision to enter the sex and informal entertainment industry can be seen as a strategic life choice since it is taken against a set of extreme circumstances that they found themselves in. It is strategic because their individual stories talk about dispossession and betrayal (abandoned by husbands, fired by employers) coupled with a desperate need to find an alternative source of income. For some women, income was desperately needed to provide for children who remain exposed to high levels of risk regarding their health. Thus, the income that they earned enabled them to have a degree of autonomy and power. For example, the ability to spend and look after their children can be seen as a transformative power which has come from their income.

One of the immediate benefits that emerge from earning an income is that the women feel largely confident whilst the education and well-being of their children remain their main priority. This sense of empowerment can be seen by what Kabeer describes as a 'shift in consciousness', where the women have not only been able to take control of their lives, but they have been able to overturn dominant masculine and patriarchal norms that has kept them or other women in a situation of subordination. Kabeer (1999:440) also argues that for emergence of a critical consciousness, there has to be an alternative option and it is through this option people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it. The table below shows how some of the participants responded when asked about the importance of income in their lives.

Participant	Importance of Income
Participant 1: Age 41, has three children, belongs to upper caste (Brahmin), not living with husband	“Income is everything. Today if I am alive and if my children are going to school it is because of earning an income. I suffered when I had no income. I had no say (voice) in anything. Now I am independent and a confident person. If you have no income even your children don’t become yours. Today, if my children wish to have a fruit, I can buy for them. Earlier I didn’t have money to buy clothes, now I can afford clothes for myself and my children. I can go to my village whenever I feel like. I stay in a rented house. Income helps me pay the rent. I don’t have to worry about my landlord throwing me out.”
Participant 2: Age 30, has one child, belongs to lower caste, not living with husband	“I feel very confident I have the capacity to win in life under any circumstances. My daughter doesn’t know about my work but one day when she will ask, I will not shy away from telling the truth. I am proud to be standing on my own feet. If I don’t tell the truth now, someone else will tell her.”
Participant 4: Age 28, has one child, belongs to lower caste, married	“Income makes me feel confident. I can provide good education to my son. I can take up any challenge. For me husband is needed purely for child’s sake [...] when he grows up and understands a bit, I can think of separating”
Participant 6: Age 23, lower caste unmarried.	“Income has made me very confident. Had I not worked, my family would have married me off and there is no guarantee that I would be happy. Now I am twenty-three, not married. Though in this profession, I am contributing in changing peoples’ lives [she also works as outreach worker advocating the use of condoms]. I might not be educated. I am self-dependent. I wish I was educated but I thank my parents for giving me the opportunity to earn for myself.”
Participant 9: Age 28, one child, belongs to upper caste, not living with husband.	“It is important for me to earn an income so that my child can have a good and decent life. I don’t want her to get into this profession at all”
Participant 12: Age 25, has one child, upper caste, widow	“Husband passed away so as a single mom and a sole bread earner it is very important for me to earn.”

Table 4. Importance of Income to Participants.

5.7 Conclusion

Literature on empowerment has stressed that empowerment as a concept cannot happen unless women themselves are conscious of their subordinated position and take steps to challenge it (Malhotra, 2002). Stromquist (1993 as cited in Malhotra, 2002) for example, says that it involves women’s understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves understanding the self and the need to make choices that may go against cultural and social expectations. In this study, the women who participated use the opportunities provided by the sex and informal entertainment industry as a

vehicle to move forward in life. Given the lack of jobs and of individual skills, they realised that it was the best option available to meet their daily needs. They see that the prospect of a better life lies in investing in their children's education as they see their future aspirations as being tied to the well-being of their children. The women demonstrated strength by breaking away from abusive and oppressive relationships and in exercising a choice to enter the sex and informal entertainment sector. Some of the participants then made a further choice to send their children to school, thereby taking advantage of the opportunity structure, which they themselves could not benefit from. In Nepal, there are state schools where rules do not prohibit girls from enrolling, so the participants confronted what Alsop and Heinsohn (2005, p. 7) describe as "traditional notions of an informal—social—element of the opportunity structure" that prevented girls from realising their own potential. Participant 8 echoed that education could have made a difference in her life:

In villages, no one sends daughter to school because they think she eventually will go to someone else's house. They thought it was a waste of money. It is the society that stops women from realising her full potential.

In the section above on 'The Meaning of Empowerment', I discuss one of the ways to measure degrees of empowerment: assessing how a person seizes opportunity to make a choice and then makes use of it to achieve a desired outcome. Kabeer's (1999) theory of empowerment is underpinned by the ability to make first order decisions that result in desired outcomes, and incorporates three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Empowerment is conceptualized as a process of change whereby one moves from disempowerment to empowerment, which is achieved by expanding people's ability to make first order decisions that result in desired outcomes. Kabeer (1999), however, does not provide a concrete operationalization of these three dimensions (Leder, 2015, p. 7). Furthermore, none of the empowerment literature reviewed discusses how the concepts of empowerment and power, as discussed, can be applied in the context of women who are engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry globally. The indicators of agency as suggested by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) are asset-based, which can be psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, or human. The participants of this study certainly possess the ability to envision (i.e., psychological assets) and as the two case studies reflect, they make use of the informal opportunity structure offered by peer networks to enhance their lives, and the remaining chapters will discuss in detail how such opportunities are optimised. However, based on the concepts and examples discussed, I propose the following model as a measure of empowerment for the participants of this study:

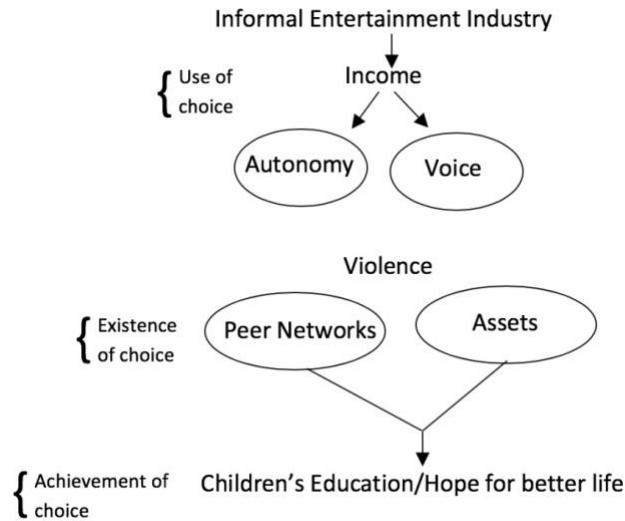


Figure 3. ‘The Use-Existence-Achievement Model of Choice’ Proposed model to measure empowerment of the participants.

From the two case studies above, we see that women make use of choice by enlisting the help of peer networks (existence of choice). In the first case study the participant made use of a peer network and the NGO Raksha Nepal to learn new skills, build community relationships and secure a safe place for her children (making use of choice) and then she left the sex and informal entertainment industry after her children were educated and moved into another profession (achievement of choice). In the second case study, the participant has access to a credit scheme run by NGO Raksha Nepal (existence of choice), she uses the credit scheme to take loan (use of choice) and was finally able to set up her own business (achievement of choice).

As illustrated in the diagram, the informal entertainment industry is seen as a choice that the participants undertake for survival (as described in Sen’s 1987 capability approach). It is part of a transformative process, whereby the body becomes the resource for earning an income, which, in turn, provides a degree of autonomy and agency over household decisions as well as those pertaining to personal lives. In the context of this chapter, the participants experience both ‘power over’ and ‘power to’. The case studies show that the participants use peer networks and individual assets to strengthen their voice and agency and in order to use it to achieve their immediate goals. The violence component, however, remains constant. In this chapter, the focus has been on income and how it enables the participants to gain autonomy within the personal sphere while operating in the market domain. In the next chapter, I examine how the participants demonstrate resilience and experience - ‘power within’ and ‘power with’ - in their empowerment process.

6. RESILIENCE OF WOMEN IN NEPAL'S SEX AND INFORMAL ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the various theories around empowerment and demonstrated how my participants gained and expressed agency. As noted in the literature showed, the term empowerment is complex and has multiple interpretations, and its meaning depends on the socio-economic context of the individual. Since it is a process, it is also largely dependent on the perspective and the willingness of an individual to set goals and achieve them. The process of achieving women's empowerment in particular is closely linked with other crucial factors such as power relations and autonomy in decision-making, which in turn has a direct bearing on an individual's ability to make choices and translate those choices into a desired outcome. The process, thus, is dependent on socio-economic, cultural and political factors, and also the extent to which these factors facilitate an enabling environment for women to realise their individual potential, or conversely impede the process of their growth by creating social and economic barriers.

Embedded in the concept of empowerment is resilience of an individual to withstand, challenge and overturn the power structures that shape choices, opportunities and wellbeing. The participants in my research took a strategic decision to step out of the cycle of poverty and subjugation by joining the sex and informal entertainment industry as a last resort to earn an income. The decision, though risky, has been empowering in the sense that for the first time they became able to take control of their lives at the personal and the household levels. Undoubtedly, however, the process of negotiating through this part of their life journey and coping with extremely vulnerable situations also requires a degree of resilience. That said, the link between empowerment and other relevant concepts such as resilience remains unexplored (see e.g., Leder, 2016). For this reason, in this chapter I examine the various concepts of resilience and explore how it links with women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry. I discuss how the participants of this research show resilience both by exhibiting inner strength and through the help of peer networks that play a critical role in redefining their lives. Additionally, I discuss the concepts of power addressed in the previous chapter and show how the participants experience 'power with' and 'power within' in ways that aid the process of their empowerment. I begin by discussing the various models of resilience but focus particularly on how the concept of resilience has been examined in the context of women in the sex and informal entertainment

sector. Following this, I describe the methodology used for navigating how the participants in the study exhibit resilience at various stages of their lives. I explain how the questions were framed in order to capture the issues of migration, experiences of earning an income, job histories, and experiences of violence in their personal lives and at work. Examining life journeys is important here because building resilience is an on-going process involving multiple linked components, such that a focus on any piece requires an understanding of the whole (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013).

This study has included participants who work in different contexts within the wider domain of sex and informal entertainment. Thus, next section of the chapter discusses the experiences of women working in three different contexts: this includes three participants, one who works in a dance bar, another who works a massage parlour and, finally, a street-based sex worker. These accounts illustrate the degree of shared trauma and suffering that the participants have experienced in their personal lives and continue to face at work. It shows how the participants demonstrate resilience in different contexts when dealing with everyday stressors.

Following this, I present a comprehensive analysis of how peer networks help women to further strengthen and facilitate their resilient characteristics. The section indicates some of the reasons why women join peer networks, the benefits that they derive from such associations and how this translates into resilience. In section five, I draw upon the concepts of power discussed in the previous chapter. I propose a framework (illustrated in Figure 5 on p. 126) of how women working in the informal entertainment sector collectively create a model in the form of peer networks. This serves as a protective lens, and through that lens they reconstruct their relationship with the outer world. I demonstrate that peer networks play a transformative role in the lives of women. They experience 'power within' through the various support programmes and counselling they receive, and they develop 'power with' other members of their community which in turn helps them to build greater resilience.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I argue that empowerment and resilience are both ongoing processes and that there is no fixed parameter to measure what has been described By Leder (2016) as a fluid concept. However, the resilience that women demonstrate in their lives are hard won first order changes in the process of gaining empowerment. The participants have come a long way in adapting to their circumstances but are determined to move on. The forms of resilience women demonstrate represent incremental steps toward empowerment, but the participants still need a radical second order change in power dynamics that is aimed at providing them with economic and social justice.

6.2 The Concepts & Frameworks of Resilience

Like empowerment, resilience is a complex concept; it is a context specific and highly dynamic process (Allison, Armitage, Béné, Charles & Johnson, 2012) and many indicators and dimensions are required to represent it (Brock & Carpenter, 2004 as cited in Allison, Armitage, Béné, Charles & Johnson 2012, p. 6).

Brodsky and Cattaneo (2013) use the 'Transconceptual Model of Empowerment and Resilience' (TMER) to argue that both empowerment and resilience are iterative processes whereby people who are in a disadvantaged situation take action to change their situation. They state that to be resilient the agent must have the power to adapt, withstand and resist. However, the actions that a person resorts to in order to alter their life situation depends on the context and the resources available. In underlining the difference between resilience and empowerment, the authors define resilience as an internal process, whereas empowerment is enacted socially; it is aimed at external change to relationships, situations, power dynamics or context.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature focussing on psychological resilience, and the scope of such studies is expanding to incorporate the voices of marginalised groups and populations that have been affected by issues such as migration. Carabine, Graber & Pichon (2015, p. 5) have defined psychological resilience as a "dynamic psychosocial process through which individuals exposed to sustained adversity or potentially traumatic events experience positive psychological adaptation over time". They stress that "resilience is not a box to tick; it is an ongoing process of meaning-making and growth in which the only reliable constant is the mutually dependent capacity of the individual and their environment for change" (Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015, p. 8). The environment for change refers to complex interaction of multiple mechanisms ranging from personal relationships, cultures to economies and neurobiology in which an individual is embedded. Resilience, therefore, means identifying such mechanisms that drive change and understanding their relationships so that an individual can negotiate ways to respond to adversity immediately and over time (Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015).

Such studies state that for resilience to occur there must be a challenge to overcome, and studies on psychological resilience seek to identify and understand processes of strength, abuse, prolonged conflict or in the context of this research the ability of the participants to psychologically withstand past traumas and violence which is a part and parcel of their lives. Numerous studies see resilience as a dynamic process that varies over time and is dependent on life context (Best, Garmezy & Masten, 1990; Luthar & Zigler, 1991 as cited in Holroyd, Tang,

Wong, & Yuen 2014). It can also be considered as a part of development that can be enhanced rather than a static trait that a person either does or does not possess (Baldwin et al., 1993; Born, Jackson, & Jacob, 1997). In the context of women in the sex and informal entertainment industry, widely referred as sex workers (Holroyd, Tang, Wong & Yuen 2014), various researchers have used the positive psychology and resilience framework to better understand how sex workers cope with work related stress and violence that often characterises their work. Positive psychology focuses on positive aspects such as strengths and virtues of an individual to capture the full spectrum of human experiences (Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Mann, 2001; Wood & Tarrrier, 2010 as cited in Holroyd, Tang, Wong, & Yuen, 2014).

Holroyd, Tang, Wong and Yuen (2014) found that sex workers in their study suffer from a high degree of the trauma, stigma and psychological distress and experience high levels of emotional burnout (Vanwesenbeeck, 2005), which is consistent with this study. Lau, Ho, Tsui, Wong and Yang (2010) found that 53.9% of female sex workers had probable depression, while another study by Gorry, Reilly and Roen (2010) found that that sex workers tend to have negative views about themselves and are overcome by sense of guilt and shame when work-related thoughts come to their mind (Wong et al., 2008). There are other occupational risk factors like uncertainty about business, competition for clients, exposure to verbal abuse, physical violence and risks of being raped or robbed by clients (Holroyd, Wong, Gray, & Ling, 2008 as cited in Holroyd, Tang, Wong & Yuen, 2014), all of which make the business of sex psychologically distressing and can drastically contribute to lowering self-esteem and confidence of the workers. The participants of this study shared similar experiences and this chapter will discuss in detail how they go about building resilience to such situations.

In the context of Hong Kong, Holroyd, Tang, Wong and Yuen (2014) studied resilience by identifying everyday challenges female sex workers encountered and how these affected their psychological functioning. The authors:

asked open-ended questions drawn from the literature on positive psychology, resilience, and the model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The questions were in the following domains: the impacts of working in the sex industry, self-assessed psychological health, social relationships, sexual health practices, and coping strategies used

(Holroyd, Tang, Wong, & Yuen, 2014, p. 1234)

The authors then used grounded theory (a methodological tool for qualitative data analysis and theoretical sampling process based upon categories developed from ongoing data analysis) to

analyse the transcripts and subsequently from the analysis of interviews with sex workers, four main themes emerged:

1. the challenges,
2. the emotional journey as a sex worker,
3. the resilience processes and
4. coping with challenges as a reflection of resilience.

(Holroyd, Tang, Wong, & Yuen, 2014, p. 1235)

In terms of challenges, the study found that most sex workers found it emotionally difficult to see themselves as part of the sex industry. It took them time to adjust to their work environment as they “experienced a number of difficult situations such as threats to their physical health, violence and public stigma. These stressors led to self-reported fear, sadness, loneliness, and anger” (Holroyd, Tang, Wong, & Yuen, 2014, p. 1238). They also reported facing abuse and stigma from their clients and police. Though they felt angry and hurt by these negative factors, they found ways to deal with it by internalising and considering it as a part of their work, thereby showing inner strength.

In the above-mentioned study, the participants demonstrated resilience by drawing on their inner strength and through exhibiting optimism, self-belief, and determination and expressing agency at various levels. These factors allowed the participants to neutralise their negative emotions and keep themselves in a different frame of mind when they find themselves with an abusive client or caught in an unsafe situation. This is, however, not easy as a woman’s sense of self can be subsumed under her sex worker role, impacting negatively on her psychological well-being (Coy, 2009; Gorry, Reilly & Roen, 2010; Sanders, 2004). To overcome the challenges that they face in their daily lives, the sex workers tend to adopt a range of strategies such as standing up for their rights, regulating their emotions by themselves, accepting their responsibilities and limitations to overcome stressors and associated mood disturbances. Based on the above findings, Holroyd, Tang, Wong and Yuen (2014) conclude that strength-based intervention is a crucial part of enhancing the psychological health of sex workers because resilience, in this context, is manifested through a process in which individuals use their internal resources for adjustment while interacting with the environment. They argue that by using the strengths-based approach to intervention, women in sex work will be encouraged to develop greater self-efficacy and self-esteem as well as independence.

My research found that peer networks (discussed in detail in the later sections) play a crucial role in the development of a number of strength-based interventions that are aimed at boosting resilience assets such as the self-esteem, dignity, and positivity of the women working in the sex and informal entertainment sector. These strengths often act as coping mechanism against adversities or violence, which they experience on a regular basis.

Burnes, Long and Schept (2012) are critical of using a resilience-based lens to study the negative aspects of sex work (i.e. 'sex work pathology') but leave out strengths and resilience factors, such as the ability to seek and receive emotional assistance and having autonomy in decision-making (O'Neill, 2010 as cited in Burnes, Long and Schept, 2012). The researchers argue that engaging in sex work does not mean that they are mentally incompetent or cannot do other jobs; such conceptions of sex workers can further exacerbate existing issues as they are then labelled as mentally unsuitable and/or morally deviant. It also creates adversarial relationships between sex workers and legal bodies, mandating that sex work should be illegal because of its perceived detriment to and deviance within society. Burnes, Long and Schept point to resilience-based research studies investigating sex work, the Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT, 2005), which conducted a study of seventeen workers to understand their functioning and coping. The participants in that study recognise the value of taking regular breaks, going for a walk, personal religious beliefs, and engaging in leisure activities outside of work to help them cope with the stigma and isolation of their work environments (SWEAT, 2005 as cited in Burnes, Long & Schept, 2012, p. 138). A number of participants in my research had embraced Christianity which had been introduced to them by "missionaries". They asserted that they have found spiritual comfort and mental peace by associating themselves with faith-based activities like visiting church service.

For example, researchers have documented that resilience factors such as positive emotions are directly linked with the ability to recover from stressful life events (Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004). Psychologists using a strength-based model use a collectivist, community-based perspective, which means that the concerned community (in this case the women in the sex and informal entertainment industry) collectively create a model, which then serves as a protective lens through which they reconstruct their relationship with the outer world. I will illustrate this point later in this chapter while discussing the importance of peer network in the lives of the participants studied.

One of the frameworks that I will be using to analyse the resilience of the participants is the protective model of resilience suggested by Fergus and Zimmerman (2005). Discussing how

promotive factors can help reduce risk, Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) prescribe three models of resilience: compensatory, protective, and challenge. Promotive factors here refer to inner qualities like self-esteem, optimism, self-belief, and determination, which helps in expressing agency at various levels.

The models (see Table 5. for a summary of the salient features of each) have been described in the context of studying adolescents. I borrow the concept to outline how protective factors influence outcomes for the participants of this study.

Compensatory	Protective	Challenge
<p>The compensatory model is defined when a promotive factor counteracts or operates in the opposite direction to a risk factor. A compensatory model therefore involves a direct effect of a promotive factor on an outcome. For example, youth living in poverty, are more likely to commit violent behaviour than youth not living in poverty, but adult monitoring of behaviour may help compensate for the negative effects of poverty.</p>	<p>In the protective factor model, assets or resources moderate or reduce the effects of a risk on a negative outcome. For example, parental support reducing the effect of poverty on violent behaviour.</p>	<p>In this model, the association between a risk factor and an outcome is curvilinear. This suggests that exposure to low levels and high levels of a risk factor are associated with negative outcomes, but moderate levels of the risk are related to less negative (or less positive) outcomes. For example, repeated exposure to moderate levels of risk prepares adolescents to better handle stressors in the future.</p>

Table 5. Models of Resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2015, p. 200)

The above framework emphasises that resilience can reduce risk factors through protective factors that operate on two levels: assets and resources. Assets are the positive factors that reside within the individual, such as competence, coping skills, and self-efficacy, whilst resources are positive factors that help individual overcome risk, but they are external to the individual. Though Fergus and Zimmerman used the framework in the context of adolescents, it can be modified (as explained later) to understand how the participants of this study exhibit resilience. It is clear from the previous chapters that the participants do show tremendous resilience during the childhood/adolescent years to cope with traumatic experiences by relying on their inner strength. As discussed in the sections below, peer networks become their ‘resource’ for facilitating protective mechanisms to deal with the daily violence encountered in their work and beyond.

6.3 Assessing Resilience

In comparison to the studies described above that look at the resilience of sex workers purely in respect of the challenges that characterise their work, my research documents the journey of the participants into the sex and informal entertainment industry from their early lives (as discussed

in Chapter Two, Chapter Three and Chapter Four). This allows me to look at how the participants exhibit resilience under different circumstances. The research shows that “resilience may be differentially affected in different stages of their lives by entrenched patterns of coping, physiological stress responses and other social relationships” (Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015, p. 5).

It has been argued that prior adversity might give individuals the strength to cope with later traumas as they develop resources, relationships and effective coping skills. Resilience research makes it clear that change and adaptation is always possible. The participants were asked questions about their reasons for migration, the memories of which run deep among them. This is important because participants show a great degree of resilience in their ability to cope with the dramatic changes in their circumstances. They state that since they have experienced terrible things early in life, the past experience gives them the strength to cope with the challenges they face both at work and at personal level. Questions were also asked regarding their personal lives, particularly the age of marriage, if they were still married and, if not, what happened to the relationship. Since, most participants interviewed for this study are single women, the nature of these questions allowed women to talk about the violence they have suffered at the hands of their husbands or partners, which in most cases resulted in separation. It is deduced from their responses that their decision to join the sex and informal entertainment industry was in itself an act of resilience; they accept their limitations as women with little or no resources or skills necessary to earn a decent livelihood or raise up their children (Holroyd, Tang, Wong & Yuen, 2014). Literature on resilience points out that to move forward, irrespective of the risk involved, for the sake of survival and in doing so changing the status quo of suffering and adversity is an act of resilience (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013).

Questions also addressed two more areas: personal safety of the participants in relation to their income generating activities, and experiences harm and violence. These questions insights into the specific nature of violence the participants face. Participants were asked about the type of violence, about perpetrators and the support they sought during the time of distress. It was found that the women face systematic harassment from law enforcement agencies, especially the police. Discussing the emotional journey of the participants as sex workers in turn allowed them to discuss coping strategies and what enables them to show resilience in order to tackle oppressive situations.

In terms of documenting the resilience of women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry, this study has interviewed range of women working both as street-based sex workers or

operating from indoor centres like cabin restaurants, *dhori* or massage parlours. Burnes, Long and Schept (2012) have argued that the location and organisation aspects of sex work have critical implications for understanding the psychology of sex work in terms of how the workers cope with the work environment and the embedded work-related violence that underpins the profession. They recommend that researchers focusing on resilience of sex workers need to include the entire gamut of sex workers in their research rather than focusing solely on the participants who are most convenient or accessible in order to understand how location can help to nurture strengths of women in the wider informal entertainment sector and protect them from job-related stress and hazards (2015, p.139). Notably, the locations, as a determinant of the environment and organizational facets of sex work, have been explored by limited studies conducted in the Western countries. This study has drawn participants who work or worked as street-based sex workers, and women working in massage parlours, cabin restaurants, *dhori* or dance bars. The two focus groups conducted, were comprised of women of varied age groups working in different forms of the sex and informal entertainment industry. The study illustrates in detail how resilience factors are enhanced through the ability to seek help through peer networks. This is intended to address the gap between how external resilience factors (such as availability of social support, or ability to ask for help) affect women in this industry. A resilience-based lens highlights that little is known about why individuals tend to enter sex work and that there many possible reasons for an individual to make this choice.

The responses of the participants help to weave together context-specific resilient processes (Canvin et al., 2009 as cited in Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015), which further enables the researcher to look at different intersections where women have been able to cope with extremely challenging situations by exhibiting inner strength. Documenting context-specific resilience processes is useful as it shows that resilient qualities develop over time and that “constellations of strengths and protective processes that are particularly adaptive in the face of a given risk” (Graber et al., 2015, p. 13). For example, association with NGOs helps the participants to develop resilience through the protective mechanism that such organisations put in place. It also acts as a reminder that violence and abuse are pervasive across the social ecological spectrum and is not limited to sex work alone; it impacts the lives of all women. The participants of my study assert this point when they explain that, whilst they may be at the margins of the society, they feel in general that violence against women is a common phenomenon. For example, number of participants said that they face harassment in public transport, which they say is experienced by all women. Participant 7 (age 33, has two children, upper caste, separated) says that

patriarchy is one of the main causes why women suffer. [...] violence is everywhere at home or at office and women of all backgrounds experience it. I think any act that humiliates a person is violence. Beating and hurling abuses are some common forms of harm for most women in Nepal.

6.4 Resilience in the Face of Trauma

All the participants described negative experiences associated with work, which they said often takes a toll on their psychological health. Almost all participants also referred to being confronted by daily abuse, stigma and harassment at the hands of police, on public transport and by the community at large. These experiences create emotional trauma, as there is always a fear of being spotted by a client. Below are the accounts of three women who work in a dance bar, massage parlour and as a street-based worker respectively.

Participant 9 (age 28, has one child, upper caste [Brahmin], not living with husband), who works in a dance bar describes her predicament:

I am expected to drink with the customers and entertain them. My job is to entice the customers and make them consume alcohol. I need to keep them engaged and even let them touch me. I am paid a commission based on a number of drinks that a customer purchased. That is how we make money. Let me tell you, in our profession apart from sex, there is all other sorts of physical harassment.

The other problem is that we can't work without fear of police. Also, as a woman I face a lot of harassment while traveling in a bus. There is some sort of daily harassment like someone trying to pinch me or touch me. I do resist but then what else can you do. Police helps women who are empowered and powerful. They only harass women who are working in this sector.

Her experiences are echoed by Participant 16 (age 23, has two children, Buddhist [Lama], married but not living with husband) who says:

There is uncertainty about payment. We are forced to drink alcohol and if we don't drink, we are treated badly. And then men humiliate you. They call you by [bad names] and feel that they can do whatever they want.

Another woman, who works in a massage parlour, says:

I faced a lot of violence: physical, sexual and verbal. A big percentage of customers look for sex. It is a part of the package. Since prostitution is illegal it is provided in massage parlours.

Participant 14 (age 40, has three children, lower caste, husband living abroad), who was abducted, tortured and raped by the Maoist forces and now works as a street-based sex worker says police harassment is high for those who operate from the street.

Many men who are from the police come in plain clothes and take my services but later they refuse to pay saying that they are policemen. Since we operate from an open space,

police harassment is a major problem. If we do not listen to them, they even take us into custody.

She adds that for the street-based sex workers the level of violence from clients can be as high as three to four times a week. “Sometimes people lock us inside a room and leave without paying. They beat us, abuse us”, she says. Her past trauma of being raped as a child still flashes in her mind and her experiences of daily violence has left her as a “broken person.” She says it is having an adverse psychological effect on her. “My mind is always disturbed; I tend to forget things; I am often depressed.” But despite her sufferings, she is proud of the fact that she makes her own living and feels confident. “Yes, I am happy that I am not dependent on others. At the end of day, I earn it without begging.”

Some of the women who participates described how the community lets them down when violence occurs. “It is our character that is questioned” says Participant 9, whose landlord attempted to rape her. Some also mentioned that it is difficult to get a house on rent if they are single mothers. Participant 6 (age 23, not married) reacts sharply to general attitude of the community:

They straightway question our character and it is women in the family that are wary about letting homes to single women. [...] the women who are in this profession are never respected. They are abused, stigmatised and oppressed and these factors even drive many girls to commit suicide, as there is not much support for them. The society has failed them. People think women, who are in this sector, are weak and that they will never raise their voice hence they can control and intimidate them.

Despite the odds, women demonstrate considerable inner strength and resilience when dealing with their daily suffering. Their resilience manifests in two ways: one is through the protective mechanism that is built around them through the peer networks (discussed in the next section), the other is strength-based resilience that they draw from within, referred to as ‘assets’ by Fergus and Zimmerman (2005).

Participant 7 (age 33, has three children, Dalit [lower caste], married but not living with husband) says that resilience comes from understanding one’s strength and harbouring hopes for the future.

Women face violence and get exploited because they are poor, not educated and not aware of their rights [...] There were times when my children went to bed without food, but income has changed things.

When asked more specifically about what equality means for her, she says, “man is born out of women. Women should and can do what men can do, I don’t see any difference.” She adds that her hope for a better future for her daughter keeps her going, “I will make sure her life is better.”

When asked what can make the biggest difference in her life, she says, “if I can get a good job it will be good.”

Their hopes for a good future make women resilient and give them the strength to move on. In the emotional journeys of the participants as sex workers we see how women exhibit their personal strength (assets). In the next section, I discuss how the resilience of the participants is further enhanced through peer networks.

6.5 The Role of Peer Networks in Building Resilience

In this study, it is noted that the high level of violence itself has given the women engaged in the informal entertainment industry a new language and lens through which they are able to view their realities and beyond. Their inner transformation and sense of confidence is boosted not just through their income alone, but also through membership to organisations and groups that allow the women to come together and provide solidarity to one another, both at personal level and also to collectively raise their grievances against issues like police harassment. This phenomenon when seen from the perspective of Rowlands typology of power (1997) (as discussed in Chapter Five) is called ‘power with’ which means the power to change an aspect of one’s life. The majority of the women in this study mentioned that they are part of the autonomous organisation Raksha Nepal, an NGO that works with the women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry in the Thamel area.

Raksha Nepal provides the critical peer support that enables women to build resilience to violence. Its mission is to empower the women working in dance bars, cabin restaurants, *dohori* restaurants and massage parlours. It rescues minor girls, those under the age of eighteen, from brothels and massage parlours and brings them to their shelter. They provide psychosocial counselling as well as healing through yoga and meditation to women and girls who have suffered trauma. It also provides legal support and skills development courses in organic farming, driving, massage therapy and housekeeping for those seeking an alternative employment. It runs a shelter for children of sex workers and ensures that such children go to a proper school.

Raksha Nepal’s skill development programme is also open to street-based and brothel-based sex workers who might want to learn new skills in order to change their profession. Its chairperson, Menuka Thapa, says:

since money is the biggest source of empowerment for women, so from the very beginning, I taught women to save money. In 2008, we set up a credit and saving co-operative with the savings of sex workers.

Many of the former sex workers have started their own businesses with the support of this scheme. In 2015, it formed a union of women working in the informal entertainment industry. Through the union, the organisation tries to protect the rights of women engaged in sex work and those employed in massage parlours, duet restaurants (which feature live music shows), dance bars and cabin restaurants (where customers are served by waitresses in tiny individual rooms) (discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight).

The individual and focus group interviews found that women draw on the resources found in each other, and this in turn gives women the much-needed confidence to cope with the enormous challenges both at personal level and at the place of work. Many of the outreach workers that volunteer for or work in an organisation like Raksha Nepal are themselves engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry. They in turn become outreach workers; their transformation and confidence then become motivating factors for other women to join the peer networks.

Table 6. (below) illustrates the level of varied levels of support that women have received from a peer network like Raksha Nepal. In terms of psychological resilience theory, the support that is generated by organisations can be analysed in terms of a protective mechanism that can help an individual to respond effectively to adverse situations (Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015). However, it must be noted that when analysing resilience, the term ‘mechanism’ is used to emphasise the point that resilience is a process and that no single factor, however powerful, on its own can bring about a defining and adaptive outcome (Graber et al., 2015). As shown in the table below, Raksha Nepal facilitates external intervention that is designed to reduce the impact of risk, reduce or break negative chain reactions, strengthen confidence levels and open up new opportunities (Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015). In the topology of mechanisms of the resilience process, Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) see peer networks like Raksha Nepal as external resources that help in strengthening the inner strength (assets) of the members, thereby enabling the participants to be resilient in different capacities.

Participant	Reasons for joining peer network	Benefits/Resources	Resilience
Participant 2: Age 30, has one child, lower caste, separated.	<p>“I learnt about Raskha Nepal from a field worker. I then met Menuka Thapa and told her that I need help to educate my daughter. She advised me to admit her in the Raksha shelter home.</p> <p>I also became associated with Raksha as there was high level of violence in the entertainment industry and I needed support to deal with it”</p>	<p>“I under took vocational trainings and learnt stitching and tailoring for nine months. I then took a loan of 1,50,000 rupees and started my own tailoring business and employed two girls. I earned around 15,000 per month. I am now paying back the loan.”</p>	<p>“I have the capacity to win in life under any circumstance. My daughter doesn’t know about my work, but I will not shy away from telling the truth. I am proud to be standing on my own feet. If I don't tell the truth, someone else will tell her, but I am very confident women now.”</p>
Participant 3: Age 20, has one child, Buddhist, widow.	<p>“I joined as an outreach worker.”</p>	<p>“The violence I faced in the hands of Maoists and then whilst working in the entertainment industry took a toll on my life. Raksha Nepal provided me psychological therapy and it has given me a lot of hope to live.”</p>	<p>“I am beginning to look at the life in a positive way. I am learning tailoring, so I hope to open a shop one day.”</p>
Participant 5: Age 27, has one child, Hindu (practices Christianity), married.	<p>“I came to know about Raksha from a friend at work. I was looking for support to exit the profession. I came here and asked for advice.”</p>	<p>“I went to Raksha’s school where I learnt to write and read Nepali language. I participated in leadership programme which helped me to be empowered. The credit and saving schemes are really helpful. It helped me to buy a piece of land. My daughter stays in Raksha’s shelter home. This is the forum where I can socialise and learn new things like the way I am speaking with you. “</p>	<p>“I learnt not to be silent and demand my rights. I help other women who are in trouble and teach them about how to protect themselves from the health risks by using condoms.”</p>

Participant 8: Age 48, has four children, upper caste, widow.	“I came to know about Raksha Nepal through word of mouth. I came with my friend. I met an employee here, I spent around one hour to learn what Raksha does.”	“I liked that women could talk about their problems. I took up sewing as a part of skill development programme. For the first time in life I acquired a skill and I really enjoyed sitting behind the sewing machine.”	“Though my association I have learnt that literacy and early marriage are the main cause of women’s problem. I have learnt not be suppressed by men.”
Participant 6: Age 23, not married.	“I am associated with three organisations Raksha Nepal, FADE Nepal and JMMS. They taught me how to move forward in life.”	“Peer networks gives us a voice to talk openly about our problems. I learnt about the importance of using condoms; they tell about all health risks and teach us where to go, where to seek support, they tell us not to go to the client’s house etc”	“Earlier I was afraid of everything around me: the police, society, people. But now things are different. You see I can speak confidently. People might abuse me but that is momentary, but I know that I am standing on my feet. I am not begging. I don’t care what society thinks of me. Society is made by us. Society does not provide me food or shelter.”
Participant 9: Age 28, has one child, upper caste, married but not living with husband.	“I joined it hoping that collectively we will able to secure a better future for our children.”	“I voluntarily work as an outreach worker and meet women who are working in the sector. I tell them about our work. During meetings, we organise ourselves into groups, discuss our problems and look for solutions to our problem.”	“I am confident that my future will be better than my past. I am connected with an organisation like Raksha Nepal that has done much more than what my family could have done. There have been days when I went without food, I hope I will never have to see such days. I have learnt to live with dignity.”
Participant 17: Age 33, has two children, lower caste, abandoned by husband.	“I came to know about Raksha Nepal from my friend. She told me about the support and counselling that Raksha Nepal could provide.”	“Meeting Raksha Nepal was transformative. I took beautician courses, which was specifically helpful as most of it was work-oriented training. I was later able to start my own beauty parlour.”	“I have attended workshops on gender, leadership and entrepreneurship. As a woman, I am committed to help women and want to employ women from this sector in my parlour.”

Table 6. The levels of support that women have received from a peer network.

The resilience of the participant is further realised when they are backed by resources provided by the peer network. It must be emphasised that the participants in this study already had attributes including endurance, fighting spirit or the ability to withstand stigma, poverty and discrimination; these are some of the many assets that helped these women to overcome adversity as adolescents. Resilience models stress the importance of the ecological context, and that external factors like peer networks, in addition to the above-mentioned attributes, may help women to respond more

effective to social, health and occupational risks (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The social support that Raksha Nepal provides to the women and girls working in the informal entertainment industry is persistently identified in resilience literature as:

a protective mechanism because mentoring relationships, supportive friends and trust that women find amongst peers promote resilience in the face of neglect, abuse, low socioeconomic status and other challenges

(Carabine, Graber & Pichon, 2015)

So, in the context of the participants of this study, I argue that their resilience can be seen through the lens of a protective model, as in this model the assets or resources play a role in moderating or reducing the effects of a risk on a negative outcome.

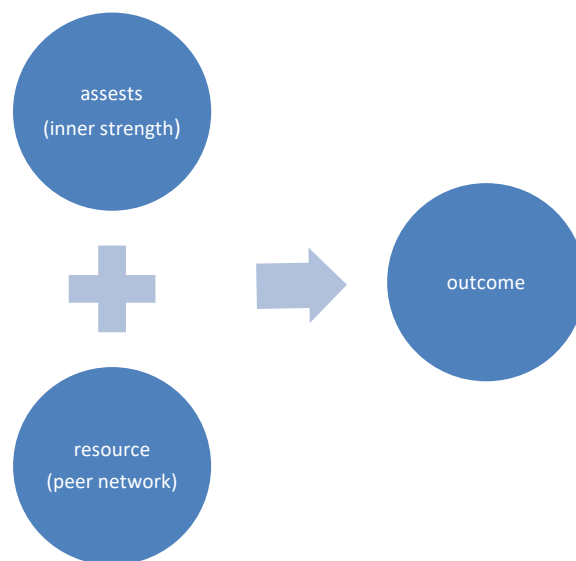


Figure 4. Proposed 'Protective Model' in the context of this study.

6.6 Linking Resilience with Power & Agency

Leder (2016) notes that perspectives on empowerment vary considerably as it is viewed as a “highly contextualized, multi-dimensional process”, so it is important to understand subjectivities and the respective influencing factors in specific contexts, as well as how they interlink (Leder, 2016, p. 3). So, taking Kabeer’s definition into account - which underlines the relationship of material, social and human resources, the decision-making process, and well-being outcomes - it is imperative to examine which dimensions of empowerment influenced resilience to bring about a transformative change in the lives of the participants (Kabeer, 2016, p. 6).

In this study, as discussed in the previous chapter, the participants were seen to exhibit a considerable degree of autonomy and to gain decision-making capabilities within the household structure by virtue of earning an income. However, it is not simply that autonomy arising from

income that makes them resilient. Rather, it is the peer network that plays a significant role in accentuating psychological assets of the participants such as self-esteem, self-confidence, and the ability to imagine and aspire for a better future by providing collective support through initiatives such as skill development training, socio-psychological support and access to credit and saving schemes. Hence, based on the discussions outlined in the study, I propose the following model to demonstrate how resilience led to an empowering process for my participants.

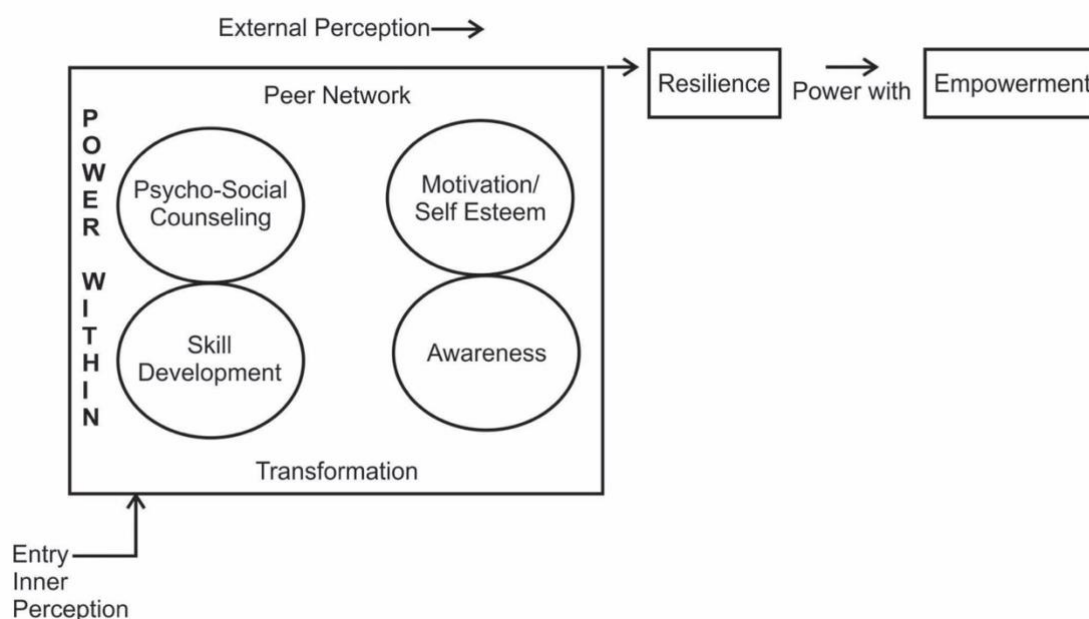


Figure 5. Proposed model of how peer network helps in building resilience.

Looking at the how resilience and well-being interacts from the social ecology perspective, Allison, Armitage, Béné, Charles and Johnson (2012) argue that the well-being of an individual does not depend solely on income, but it is instead an outcome and a process dependent on three other dimensions: material, relational and subjective (Sen, 1999; Gough et al., 2007). The three dimensions are particularly useful in understanding ways in which the different facets of a 'life well lived' come together (Allison, Armitage, Béné, Charles & Johnson, 2012, p. 4).

In the context of this study, the only material dimension that drives the participants is income, which acts as a first condition for choice. Their income comes through the exercise of choice in entering the sex and informal entertainment industry, which can be seen as a strategic choice. It is also strategic because, due to lack of alternate skills and poor economic growth in Nepal, decent jobs were hard to come by. The 2015 earthquake that killed 8,000 people affected a further 5.6 million workers. Millions of people sought employment abroad, continuing Nepal's growing reliance on remittances for growth. As mentioned in the previous chapter, joining the informal

entertainment industry was not necessarily the first choice of the participants, but other alternatives like jobs in the construction sector or being a domestic maid were even more exploitative. However as discussed above, some of participants have exercised choice once again to learn new skills through peer networks with the view of leaving the sex and informal entertainment sector in the near future. It shows that they are capable of making hard decisions and looking at alternative livelihood. As participant 21 said, “spa training [provided by Raksha Nepal] has helped. It built my confidence and I can get job even if I go abroad”.

The women who participate in the study also made the choice to become a part of the peer networks, which act an informal opportunity structure. Those organisations like Raksha Nepal provide resources (existence of choice) that allows the participants to make use of the resource (use of choice) for their well-being. As indicated in the last chapter, Chen and Mahmud (1995) identify that there is more than one causal pathway - material, cognitive, perceptual, relational - through which resources are translated into agency, which is similar to what Allison, Armitage, Béné, Charles and Johnson (2012) suggest. But these pathways can be experienced not only by the women themselves, but also by other agents or actors in their lives (Chen & Mahmud, 1995, p. 8). Relational changes here mean relationship building which we see is forged through the participants' association with peer networks. The support that they derive from their peers helps them to increase their bargaining power, both with clients and with partners. They attain cognitive capacities by acquiring new skills through various training programmes. Permanent changes occur when they become more aware of their rights as women and assert that they are self-reliant as single women. In this study it is evident that women experience material gain when they have access to and control over income. We see cognitive changes in levels of knowledge by learning new skills and awareness of the wider environment, which in turn adds to their self-esteem and brings about perceptual changes. Perceptual changes are both internal and external, and they happen as women begin to value themselves and their identity differently. The participants also demonstrate a subjective dimension of well-being when amidst fears they harbour hope for a better future and aspirations (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

In this context, we see the existence of two dimensions of power: the relational changes, such as being associated with peer networks, is ‘power with’ (Rowlands, 1997; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2005) which results in increased power from collective action, social mobilisation and alliance building in the form of unions (discussed in Chapter Eight). The perceptual changes help bring forth ‘power from within’ (Rowlands, 1997; Alkire & Ibrahim, 2005) that strengthens the self-esteem, confidence and bargaining power of the participants especially with regard to clients,

which in turn influences their perception and attitudes towards their adaptive capacities and, therefore, their resilience.

6.7 Conclusion

In the Transconceptual Model of Empowerment and Resilience (TMER) model the resilience that the women who participate in this study demonstrate is described as part of the first order changes, which are 'hard-won changes.' These changes have a decisive impact on the lives of the individuals concerned. They are hard-won because the participants overcome great deal of struggle including violence at work and home, work related stressors such as not getting paid, harassment from the police and other law enforcement agencies and the overall stigma held by the community at large. They are first order changes because the participants show an awareness of a desire to change or improve their lives (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013) whilst the peer networks give them the momentum to translate their desire into some sort of action and, in the process, the women acquire strength to be more resilient. Whilst the first order changes are seen as goals aimed towards adapting to, withstanding or resisting on-going problems and challenges through adopting a set of strategies, they might not necessarily change the status quo or the power differentials that are embedded in the eco-system that supports the social injustices. The participants have, however, created their own coping mechanisms and have learnt to deal with their daily challenges more effectively. The TMER model argues that for a true empowerment to take place there has to be a radical second order change in relation to power dynamics and it must have a long-term transformative effect. In the context of the study, I have demonstrated that there is a considerable change in the power dynamics and that the participants are able to experience both 'power within' and 'power with.' The benefits that they have derived from their associations have been significantly transformative, and we see that they make use of available resources (both internal and external) to adapt to vulnerable situations and withstand trauma and violence. They remain optimistic and make efforts to improve their lives by learning new skills or investing in the future.

This study establishes that resilience, like empowerment, is an iterative and interactive process and its progress is not linear but spiral, which fits with observations made by other authors in relation to women working in different sectors (see e.g., Sarason, 1978 as cited in Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013). In this chapter and Chapter Five, the relational and processual perspectives on resilience have been unpacked by drawing on Rowland's conceptualisations of power. This chapter shows how 'power within' and 'power with' manifests in the lives of women, thereby contributing to the resilience-building process. I propose a framework that shows that in peer

networks women build their own community, which then acts a protective lens: through this lens the women manage their external perceptions. The suggested model indicates, through the life experiences of my participants, that resilience is a product of inner strength (assets) and outer support (resources provided by peer networks). It is also a process, but is one that has no single starting point. It involves multiple linked components and, as such, there has to be an understanding of the priorities and values of the persons or communities who are seeking empowerment. For example, peer networks have in-depth knowledge and understandings of the problems faced by the women in their community, and are aware that resilience at times needs to be facilitated (as the peer network does in this context). In the next chapter I look at how these peer networks came into being. It is the effort of a small number of women who decide to act differently in response to daily challenges that women face, acting as champions of change: they are positive deviants in the sector.

7. POSITIVE DEVIANCY AMONG NEPAL'S SEX AND INFORMAL ENTERTAINMENT WORKERS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the lives of four women, applying positive deviance theory to their life situations to argue that these women should be seen as good examples of positive deviants. Each of these participants have previously been a part of the sex and informal entertainment industry. They have used their enterprising skills and leadership abilities not just to exit the profession but also to set up organisations that work to alleviate the sufferings of women working in this sector. Today, they have gained prominence at the national level for successfully representing the voice of women and girls in the sex and informal entertainment sector which, otherwise, was never represented. I make this argument by analysing the life trajectories and by examining their inherent attributable qualities and strengths that result in them acting in certain ways.

The organisations they have established play an instrumental role in executing campaigns and programmes funded by international donor agencies in the areas of HIV prevention, use of condoms, vocational training, health and safety awareness, and the prevention of trafficking of girl children into the Nepal's sex and informal entertainment industry. They have also federated into national networks. They have formed unions, successfully launched saving and credit schemes (as mentioned in Chapter Six) and have campaigned with the government to demand better working conditions for the women working in this sector. I apply a positive deviance strategy to examine how these women use their empowered status to work as experts in tackling various issues, and how their approaches converge in different ways to tackle a wide range of issues confronted by the women in the sex and informal entertainment industry in Nepal- both socially and politically.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the emergence of positive deviance strategy as a concept and how it come to be increasingly accepted in various practical, theoretical and disciplinary research domains. I argue that since the application of positive deviance strategy is seen to bring about an exceptionally high level of transformative results, it is now being afforded importance by donors within the international development industry. Following this, I examine the existing literature to demonstrate how positive deviance strategy has been used in tackling social problems such as human trafficking in Indonesia and Nepal. The case studies mentioned in this section show that the application of a positive deviance strategy varies depending on context and communities.

The chapter then goes on to document the lives of women who are projected as good examples of positive deviance in the context of Nepal's sex and informal entertainment industry. In this section, I analyse the life trajectories of four women in order to identify the key attributes and skills that contribute to them becoming 'positive deviants'. I deconstruct the case studies of the four women discussed in order to broadly define the key common factors and the attributable qualities that contribute to these particular women taking on this role. In doing so, I propose a framework that demonstrates how positive deviance qualities are enacted and applied in context of women in the sex and informal entertainment industry. The later part of the chapter discusses how the four organisations demonstrate positive deviance strategy by adopting a broader framework in relation to issue such as HIV/AIDS, migration and VAW. I argue that adopting such frameworks helps them in two ways: firstly, this can deflect criticism from their work which is viewed as something that promotes the interests of sex work; secondly, the women who volunteer for these organisations tend to earn acceptance in society, though they might still be engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry. In the concluding section, I note how the actions of positive deviants have facilitated three processes: social mobilisation, information gathering, and behavioural change, which I then go on to discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

7.2 Positive Deviancy Unpacked

The term positive deviance is used as a practical strategy to identify people who succeed against difficult circumstances. It is a method of social inquiry grounded on the premise that in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviour and strategies enable them to find better solutions to the same problems facing their peers. These individuals then lead by example and act as a 'champion' for change (Herington & van de Fliert, 2018, p. 666)

In the last few decades, positive deviance has emerged as a useful concept in understanding the nature of and potential solutions to complex social problems (Herington & van de Fliert, 2018). The term positive deviance has emerged from the concept of deviance, which has been used to analyse attributes of individuals (Kohlborn, Kummer, Mertens & Recker, 2016). However, for years, the studies on deviance have predominantly focused on negative forms of deviance.

Negative deviance is described as behaviours or conditions that do not conform to acceptable social rules, therefore eliciting negative evaluations of a social group (Heckert & Heckert, 2002). In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in positive deviance (see e.g., Dodge, 1985; Heckert & Heckert 2002; Shoenberger, Heckert & Heckert, 2012). Heckert and Heckert

(2002) noted that positive deviance has emerged as a concept within the substantive literature of deviance. Ben-Yehuda (1990) called the concept, a significant strategy in opening “new and exciting theoretical and empirical windows for research” (as cited in Heckert & Heckert 2002, p. 455). Bradley, Subramaniam and Tomalin (2009) contend that the term positive deviance can be broadly defined into two categories: a theoretical concept and a practical strategy. The theoretical application has its roots in the discipline of sociology and has been used to describe a voluntary behaviour of an individual or group that deviates from the norm (Spreitzer & Sonenshein 2004 as cited in Herington & van de Fliert, 2017). When used in theoretical sense, positive deviance can be used to understand why positive deviance occurs and the circumstances under which it occurs. In the practical context, positive deviance is now used for interdisciplinary research relating to fields such as nutrition criminology, education and development and organizational scholarship (Kohlborn, Kummer Mertens & Recker, 2016). In these applications, positive deviance has been defined as a practical strategy to identify and promote exceptionally high performance in a problematic domain of interest (Bradley et al. 2009 as cited in Herington van de Fliert, 2017: 664).

When compared to other problem-based means of social enquiry, the focus of positive deviance strategy is to look at successful exceptions and to understand the factors that contribute to their success. Fliert and Herington (2017) argue that the steps involved in the positive deviance strategy require defining the problem and determining desirable outcomes. It also means discovering individuals or groups who either through their intrinsic behaviour like leadership qualities, determination, persuasive power, or ability to stay motivated or through training or specific interventions are able to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. Positive deviance strategy in the context of development studies means identifying the behavioural factors that drive such individuals. This key understanding is now being given high priority by major funders including DFID, UNICEF and Oxfam (Andrews, 2013; Green, 2018; UNICEF, 2012).

7.3 Applying Positive Deviancy

Positive deviance strategy is about studying a wide-ranging problem. I have focussed on human trafficking because it is closely related to wider problems faced by women working in the informal entertainment sector.

Durá and Singhal (2009) used the positive deviance approach to reduce trafficking of girls in Indonesia. The strategy was based on the premise that in every community there are individuals whose uncommon practices or behaviours enable them to find better solutions to problems than their neighbours with access to the same resources. In this case, positive deviance strategy was

applied in villages of East Java, where girls were systematically being trafficked. The purpose was to identify families that had, despite their poverty, found ways to keep their daughters at home. The importance of locating such families was to identify the methods and the practices of such families, which can be emulated and woven into the intervention programmes to combat trafficking of girls. The positive deviance process involves the foregrounding of such families, who had already been successful. Herington and van de Fliert (2017) argue that such methods force society to reflect on the prevailing views of what is considered customary or normal practice and enables consideration of alternative practices. In other words, as Durkheim's argument (1895) suggested, all social change begins with some form of deviance (Herington & van de Fliert, 2017, p. 665).

In the study above, positive deviance strategy was boosted through multiple communication processes, which included organising a workshop and asking the participants the general problems of the community (defined as dialogic introduction to PD). From the discussion, it was clear what the main problem of the village was that many girls from poor families leave the community and go to work outside and end up in the sex industry. To tackle the problem, it was important to learn from the families that were successful in keeping their girls at home despite the fact that other poor families were letting girls to go to far off places to work (Durá & Singhal, 2009, p. 7).

The authors underline that due to the PD mapping exercise:

the community members began to take ownership of the 'silent' problem of missing girls, posing questions such as, 'why do girls leave the village, why not boys?' Realising that although an answer like 'they make money more easily' was a simple one, they probed further: 'but why? Where do they work?' And further: 'at a bar. What is a bar for you? A discotheque? Or perhaps a place where sex is bought and sold?' Through the detailed house-by-house, street-by-street, village-level mapping, the community was able to identify the specific issues faced by vulnerable girls.

(2008, p. 9)

Accordingly, girls were identified as positive deviants based on a stipulated criterion that she had to be poor, under eighteen and had made a conscious decision not to work in the sex industry despite an opportunity to do so. Two years after the PD project got underway, the village recorded dramatic progress in their efforts to combat child trafficking to such an extent that no new girls had entered sex work. Twenty averted attempts at girl trafficking were documented and a mechanism was put in place to ensure that travel documents were verified (Durá & Singhal, 2009).

Similarly, in Nepal, positive deviance was experimented with in the anti-trafficking context in 2002 by the Nuwakot District Development Committee with technical support from Save the

Children US (Victoria, 2002 as cited in Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015). Though the project could not be completed due to disruptions by Maoist insurgent groups, it used a Positive Deviance Inquiry (PDI) to identify PD strategies to inform an overarching programme response. The core principles of the PD approach were then used to inform research methodology and research questions. Apart from political problems, the researchers faced resistance from the local communities who were not willing to acknowledge the problems of human trafficking. However, the project focussed on drawing from the core principles of positive deviation, rather than fully implementing a PD project. It was learnt that “the social, cultural or political environment may not always be conducive to implementing a PD approach [...] both because of resistance to the issue, or as in this case, because of security concerns” (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015, p. 14). Evaluating the above study shows that the PD initiative works when the community owns the problem and looks for an organic solution from within (Buscell, 2004; Dorsey, 2000). This dynamic creates a new space for the role of an expert.

7.4 Mapping the Organisations Studied

For the purpose of this study, scoping work was conducted to map the organisations that work with the women in the sex and informal entertainment industry in the local area. The four organisations are:

1. Raksha Nepal: a humanitarian organization that has been working for sexually exploited girls, women and their children since its establishment in 2004 (the scope of its work and extent of its work have been introduced in the previous chapter).
2. Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh (JMMS): Nepal’s first federation of female sex workers currently engaged in reducing vulnerability to and the impact of HIV amongst sex workers.
3. Society for Women Awareness in Nepal (SWAN): a group of female sex workers whose aim is to create awareness around sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. It also addresses the issues of sexual exploitation, domestic violence, creating economic opportunities, capacity building skills and human rights awareness.
4. Biswas Nepal: committed to working against violence, injustice and exploitation of workers who are engaged in the adult entertainment industry. It has been working through advocacy on unifying and empowering workers by providing various forms of support.

These organisations were considered as they are specifically led by women, who themselves worked in the sex and informal entertainment industry. In-depth interviews were conducted to

understand the factors that enabled them to move out of the sector and set up NGOs that work for the welfare and protection of the rights of women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry in different capacities.

The leaders of these organisations - Menuka Thapa of Raksha Nepal, Bijaya Dhakal of JMMS, Sobha Dangal of SWAN, and Tara Bhandari and Balkumari Ale from Biswas Nepal - as a result of their unique position and experiences have a first-hand understanding of the complex problems and challenges that women in this sector face. This helps them to efficiently relate to, connect with and mobilise women who work in this sector. The leadership of these women is increasingly recognised by all stakeholders and they have become leading voices of women working in this sector.

7.4.1 Case Study 1: Bijaya Dhakal of Jagariti Mahila Maha Sangh

Bijaya Dhakal, aged forty-two, is the president of JMMS. She worked as sex worker after her husband's sudden death. She was then eighteen years old and was pregnant with her second child. For a while, Dhakal worked in a garment factory, but income was never enough to feed her extended family. In 2002, the General Welfare Pratisthan (GWP), an implementing NGO, came to her village to promote safe sex, condom use, and risk reduction strategies amongst sex workers. They started looking for someone from the sex workers' community who could motivate others. Dhakal says:

They talked about the diseases and general health problems that women like us can face and how we can take precautions. The counsellor asked me a lot of questions about my life and I ended up disclosing a lot of information.

The association with the NGO helped her to understand the importance of collective voice and she realised that if they worked in a group, they had better negotiating power and could protect one another.

In those days talking about HIV was a stigma and no one knew anything about it. So, the focus was on sex workers and they came up with a strategy of group formation to attract more sex workers.

The women were given an incentive of fifty rupees to attend meetings. They would spend twenty rupees for travelling and were encouraged to save thirty rupees, and through this a number of groups were formed in villages.

Dhakal started taking an active interest in training and advocacy programmes. She began mobilising women and telling them about things like HIV prevention and how to protect themselves. She recalled:

For the first time I understood the meaning of the term peer educator, and I wanted to be one. Becoming a peer educator was helpful because it gave me the freedom of mobility. As a young widow, my every single move was under scrutiny by the society but now I could move around more freely, and I felt there was chance to make a difference to the lives of women like me. In many ways, I felt empowered.

She was recruited by GWP for her leadership:

I was selected because I was very vocal and could motivate others. I would easily say that I am a sex worker, which no one would dare to say in villages even today. I was made to believe that work is work and there is no harm in doing sex work. I learnt that if you hide your identity you don't get your rights.

Earlier I had no bargaining power with clients, doing sex work was tough as it was difficult to go out, but as we organised ourselves into a group, our bargaining power increased and there was a sense of security.

Dhakai started creating awareness amongst sex workers of the measures they should take whilst with clients, including using condoms, keeping the mobile numbers of their clients, taking money before hand, reducing dependence on one's client, not drinking too much or wearing any expensive jewellery.

Dhakai moved to Kathmandu in 2006 during the peak of Maoist insurgency and started mobilising sex workers in the city. She says that she was very clear of what she wanted to do. It was not possible to ask women to give up sex work, but it was possible to ensure that they do it safely. So, with some funding and help from another organisation called Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH), she formed an informal organisation with seven other members.

Dhakai says that besides her leadership qualities, her perseverance, experience and determination kept her motivated. JMMS, which was formed in 2011, is now a federation of twenty-seven NGOs working in twenty-one districts, all led by sex workers. One of their key strategies is to shed the stigma attached to sex workers and make them socially acceptable. Since sex work is banned in Nepal, they officially position themselves as an organisation promoting the rights and voices of marginalised women and orphan girls, but their main target group is sex workers who are the members of the federation.

Dhakai emphasises that women who work as sex workers have to internalise the fact that they are not perceived as good women in the eyes of society but associating with an organisation helps counteract this because it enhances their image in society. They earn respect because they are more visible due to their participation in campaigns such as those against VAW. So, other women come to them for help when they encounter problems. This leads to a greater degree of social acceptance. She points out that this social acceptance in turn gives them negotiating power with

their clients. A woman is in a position to find less abusive clients and earn more, which makes her more economically empowered. Dhakal states that:

Due to economic realities of Nepal, it is not practical to tell a woman to stop sex work because she has to feed her family, but when she is educated, made aware of risks and is a part of a network seen to be doing social work it has a positive impact.

7.4.2 Case Study 2: Tara Bhandari and Balkumari Ale of Biswas Nepal

Tara Bhandari is President of Biswas Nepal and Balkumari Ale is the executive director. They once worked together in a cabin restaurant. They had come to Kathmandu after finishing their higher secondary school to peruse their studies further. Since they came from poorer families, they joined the sex and informal entertainment industry to meet their living expenses and save money to pay their tuition fees. Both had joined a trade union, and through it they came in contact with a well-known organisation called Maiti Nepal, known for its work in preventing human trafficking. Along with a group of twenty-three other women, they attended a ten-day life skill training programme, known ‘non-formal life education training’ that was organised by Maiti Nepal.

The training programme was a defining moment of their lives. They said that:

they spoke to us very politely and were always very patient with us. They always supported us, which really touched us. Since we came from poor families our lives were full of hardships. Whilst working in Kathmandu, we kept ourselves confined to cabin restaurants where we worked and lived. We did not get any opportunity for exposure. We never really experienced love and respect. And so, the training session was good. We felt important and got lot of affection and love for the first time.

They taught us about our identity; about things like “who am I?” It was about recognising our strength and our capabilities. At that point of time, we were low in confidence. When we looked at ourselves, we felt totally hopeless like degraded human beings, but the training gave us some hope. We began to think in a more positive way and believed that we too have skills like the ability to work as waitresses. The whole idea was to motivate us and to make us realise our potential. They taught us about positive thinking.

And it had a great impact in their lives, Ale said:

we felt as if we were reborn. Earlier we were so ashamed of our work that we lead almost a secretive life. The society looked down upon us. But after the training we felt motivated. Without that opportunity, we have no idea where we would be today. We were educated until class 12 so we had the desire to do something. We needed an opportunity but didn’t have one. We also learnt things like problem solving, decision making, creative thinking, empathy, sympathy and stress management.

Balkumari and Ale started imparting basic education and life skill trainings that they had received to other women working in bars and cabin restaurants. They said that in those days 75% of

women working in this sector were illiterate. They taught them how to write their name and address and provided them with some elementary training. Since they themselves were working in the restaurant, it was a challenge to go about their jobs. The girls would often remain very frustrated about their work, so it was important to motivate them. Bhandari said:

We told them about the importance of education and the need to demand things like fair wages and fixed number of working hours. We tried to work on their self- confidence.

Seeing their motivation and hard work, Maiti Nepal encouraged them to start their own organisation in 2010 and offered them the seed money of INR 25,000. Looking back on that time. Bhandari went on to add:

We did not know what to do with the money initially as we did not have any support. We had no office. We used to organise meetings on roads and the seed money wasn't used. Then after a few months, Maiti Nepal called us and gave us INR 1, 50,000 and with that money we were able to rent a room where we started legal counselling for girls who needed help.

Soon after, they received a big international grant based on proposal to rescue underage girls from the sector and to make provisions for the education.

They say the grant was a game changer and since then, there has been no looking back. Their organisation has grown in strength, now employing twenty staff members and receiving funds from three donors to work on protection and advocacy and the prevention of child trafficking and entrapment in the adult entertainment industry. The organisation today is part of the National Coordination for Controlling Human Trafficking in Nepal. It runs two savings and credit groups that have 135 members, and it manages two drop-in centres and an adolescent centre. They also run a trade union group that has sixty members.

Ale and Bhandari maintain that their personal stories have been a source of inspiration for many women. Since they themselves worked in the sector, they are able to relate to women and girls who now work in the sex and informal entertainment industry. They provide them with individual counselling and motivation and help them to cope with depression. They also offer financial assistance to women who want to start their own businesses. Bhandari said:

It is about making them aware about their rights. Girls never come out openly to tell that they are working in the entertainment industry. So, we tell them not to be ashamed about their jobs. If there are some serious problems like someone not getting paid or being exploited at work, then we collectively raise our voice to take action and this has helped a lot in building confidence in us.

Being a woman led organisation, run by people who themselves had previously worked in the sector, Biswas Nepal has a good reputation among its three major donors. Bhandari concluded that:

We see ourselves as activists and we are happy. We speak about our life positively and think positively. We now work in five districts and people look up to us and respect us. In villages they tell us to help with jobs for their children in Kathmandu. We are seen as role models. There is a positive influence.

7.4.3 Case Study 3: Menuka Thapa of Raksha Nepal

Menuka Thapa is the Chairperson of Raksha Nepal. Since its inception in 2004, the NGO has worked to protect women and young girls working in the 'informal entertainment sector' from trafficking and sexual violence

Menuka Thapa lost her father in an accident while she was still in her mother's womb. She was the youngest of nine siblings, all girls. Her father's family wanted a boy, and soon after her birth, her mother and sisters were thrown out of the house. Thapa's in-laws saw her as a bad omen and blamed her for the untimely death of her father. Despite very limited resources, Thapa's mother was determined to give her an education. But when she was in high school, her mother died. As a result, in 1999, at the age of sixteen, she had to give up her studies and move to Kathmandu to earn a living.

Thapa knocked on the doors of charities for help, but there was little they could do as her problems did not fall under their mandates: she was not a victim of sexual abuse or trafficking. She took a part-time job as a singer in a restaurant. It was while working there that she witnessed first-hand, the exploitation of girls and women working in dance bars and restaurants. She said:

They were forced to have sex with the customers by the owners of the restaurants. The girls went for days without getting paid but could not raise their voice against their employers for fear of losing their job.

Horrified by what she saw, Thapa rounded up a group of women and girls who worked there and encouraged them to speak up for their rights. She says this helped them feel more confident in firmly saying no to advances from the customers and owners, they also demanded their full wages. Hearing about her initiative, girls from different dance bars, restaurants and massage parlours in Kathmandu began contacting her.

Realizing that she had hit a nerve, Thapa started the NGO Raksha Nepal ('Protect Nepal') in 2004. By then, she was out of the restaurant industry, and had the goal of empowering women working in the sex and informal entertainment sector. Over the past thirteen years, she says her

charity has helped 1,623 women and girls escape from sexual exploitation in brothels, massage parlours, so-called 'duet restaurants' and 'cabin restaurants'.

Raksha Nepal rescues minors, girls under the age of eighteen, from brothels and massage parlours and brings them to their shelter, where they are first given psychosocial counselling as well as healing through yoga and meditation. They are then offered legal support and skill development courses in organic farming, driving, massage therapy and housekeeping. Thapa ensures that their children go to a proper school.

In 2015, Raksha Nepal formed a union of women working in the informal entertainment industry. Thapa says that:

Through the union, we are trying to protect the rights of women engaged in sex work and those employed in massage parlours, duet restaurants, dance bars and cabins.

Society thinks women who are working in this sector are untouchables and doomed to live a miserable life, that they can never change. So, I give my example and tell them that we stand by you and ask them what they want. Most women would say that they want to change their profession and do not want to be in this sector.

I am committed to their cause. I see myself as the voice of voiceless women. They see me as a role model. We are very dedicated because everyone in Raksha Nepal is from the informal entertainment industry, so we understand their pain.

7.4.4 Case Study 4: Shova Dangol of Society for Women Awareness in Nepal (SWAN)

Shova Dangol, is twenty-seven years old and is the President of SWAN. She grew up in Kathmandu and started working in the sex and informal entertainment industry. She began by working in bars and restaurants when she was fifteen years old. The industry was booming in those days, and it was easier to make quick money, she says. Seeing her friends and neighbours who were working in the sector, she too was attracted. It was only after working for many years that she realised that she too was tagged as a female sex worker and was seen as a deviant by the society.

A group of women from an organisation called General Welfare Pratisthan (GWP), an implementing agency, started visiting them in bars. They talked to the girls about their health and safety, HIV/AIDS and the importance of using condoms.

Dangol attended a workshop and was immediately interested. She says:

In the two days' workshop, I made friends, the organisers treated us with a lot of affection. I learnt about peer network and about the importance of using condoms. Fifteen years back, not many people knew about condoms and HIV. These trainings were

life changing because we understood a lot of things. They were intense. While working in the restaurant, we did not have any knowledge and neither did we know about the existence of such organisations.

My job was to reach out to women and girls who were at the high risk. They would work in places like dance bar, cabin restaurant et cetera. I also worked there and was one of them, so our first task was to reach out to women and girls who were in the sector. It was always easier for me to reach out to women rather than someone who is an outsider.

Dangol then worked as peer worker for four years. She recalls:

They used to just give us travel cost. So, I started distributing condoms and take women for treatment. I attended training programmes like advocacy for change, leadership training, capacity building and also went to Kolkata in India to meet other sex workers. These things made a huge difference. In India, I saw there is unity among sex workers and felt that we needed to have that sort of unity in Nepal. I felt that there was need for an organisation that could unite women working in this sector.

Dangol's activism and leadership qualities were spotted by a number of people. She was popular amongst women and girls working in this sector. She believed that people who are not part of the informal entertainment industry could never really help the women and girls working in this sector. She says:

Even where I was working as a peer worker I was always stigmatised and bullied. I talked about it with the director of the parent organisation that provided me all the training. I wanted to raise my voice. One day they asked us what else can be done to motivate us. No one raised their hands. I said that we are at risk. We have been lucky to understand few things. So, I told them I wanted to help my community. I wanted to start my own organisation. I had it in me and that was the beginning.

She was then invited by USAID, who further trained her as per their guidelines and also granted her a fund of NR 600,000 to begin with. Apart from HIV prevention work, Dangol's organisation, SWAN, also teaches women and girls working in sector to stand up and build their confidence and survival strategies.

When asked about the importance of organisation like hers, she says that women and girls trust her because she talks to them frankly:

I tell them that I am one of you. I tell them about my story and motivate them to openly discuss their problems with me. I never tell them to quit because that is not a practical advice. I would tell them not to be ashamed of their work. There are no jobs in Nepal, as the economy is not developed. So, I counsel them and teach them things like how to maximise their earning by taking adequate precautions.

7.5 Pathways to Positive Deviance: Applying a Framework

The case studies of the four women above show how their pathways into positive deviance began with HIV/AIDS interventions between 2000 and 2005. One of the steps involved in PD strategy

is to design behaviour change activities to encourage community adoption of the new behaviours and observe people in order to discover uncommon behaviours or enabling factors that could explain the intended outcome (Dearden, Marsh, Schroeder, Sternin & Sternin, 2004). Sternin (2002) views PD as a new paradigm for addressing pressing development problems of the world. He argues that positive deviance inquiry (PDI) lies at the heart of the PD approach, which has been alluded to in the human trafficking examples described above. The PD approach is the tool that helps in identifying individuals or groups that have a set of unique behavioural traits or beliefs that enable the positive deviant members of the community to outperform or find better solutions to problems than their neighbours.

Though the PD approach has mainly been used in the field of nutrition, it can also be widely used in programme design where the focus has been on social or behavioural change with regard to current practices. It needs to be facilitated by individuals who exhibit the desired qualities required for change, and they differ vastly from the other members of the communities. Sternin (2002, p. 59) argues that it is important to note that PD is most appropriately utilised where the problem to be addressed is a widespread norm and those exhibiting the desired qualities are in minority. The PD paradigm, as proposed by Sternin (2002), supports the four women discussed above being designated as good examples of positive deviance. These women not only exhibit exceptional qualities that differ from other women who are engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry in various capacities, but have now taken a lead as experts in tackling the wide-ranging problems of the members of the community. These steps can inform interventions aimed at women in the informal industry.

Based on the case studies of the women described above, the table below (Table 7.) shows the unique qualities that I have broadly identified as the exceptional factors that contributed to their success. Accordingly, I created four labels: trigger moments, determination/perseverance, organisational capacity and motivation. All four women demonstrated exceptional behaviour in terms of their ability to learn and then become agents of change by partnering with the communities of women working in the informal entertainment sector. Table 7. shows that each woman had unique qualities that made their behaviour exceptional when compared to other women of the community. Their process of self-discovery began when presented with opportunities by the interventions (trigger moments) that they all encountered during their teenage years.

Name	Trigger moment	Determination /perseverance	Organisational capacity	Motivation
Vijaya Dhakal	Her association with the NGO was the defining moment as it helped her to discover her potential.	Following counselling sessions, she spoke openly about her identity as a sex worker and in the process connected with other sex workers in their village.	Set up JMMS which is now a federation of twenty-seven NGOs all run by sex workers. She now serves as a role model for other women and girls	Says, “I have had a lot of opportunities and exposure. I have attended so many training sessions when I was young and all that helped me to stand out. But I worry about young girls and I feel that I must help them and that motivates me.”
Tara Bhandari and Balkumari Ale	Life skills training offered by Maiti Nepal. “We felt as if we were reborn. Earlier we were so ashamed of our work.”	Inspired other women to be motivated and know about their rights. When given an opportunity persevered hard to organise meetings on the streets.	Started NGO Biswas Nepal that works for the welfare of women working in cabin restaurants and bars. Receives funds from five donors.	Ale and Bhandari maintain that their personal stories have been sources of inspiration for many women. They are committed to help women from being exploited at work.
Menuka Thapa	Coming to the city and seeing the suffering of women and girls working in the industry. Was able to raise her voice.	Was determined to help others and struggled hard to set up her own NGO.	Manages NGO Raksha Nepal and shelter home for children of sex workers. Involved in advocacy, prevention, rescue, rehabilitation and general welfare of women working in the entertainment industry.	The ability to help the children of sex workers and see them growing up in a secured environment. “I feel motivated when I see the women and children smile. I have dedicated my life in helping the women working in this sector.”
Shova Dangol	Workshop organised by NGO changed her perspective.	Was outspoken and realised the importance of collective action through training, research and exposure programmes.	Set up and manages NGO SWAN that work on HIV/AIDS and offers other counselling services to sex workers.	She says she was determined to help the members of her community. “I wanted to start my own. I had it in me and that was the beginning.”

Table 7. Unique Qualities and Exceptional Factors of Positive Deviants

Kohlborn, Kummer, Mertens & Recker (2016) provide another framework to study positive deviance in relation to organisational behaviour. However, the framework can be applied here to further illustrate the positive deviance of the four women discussed above. The authors state, that positive deviance can be observed in outcome (achieving things differently), behaviour (doing things differently) or both (doing things differently and thereby achieving different things). Positive deviance, then, needs to be explored to examine the possible determinants (factors that trigger positive deviant behaviour) and consequences (any positive effect of positive deviant behaviour, on peers, the group/community or on society).

In the context of the four women referred to in this study, positive deviance can be described as a person who is exposed to violence and exploitation and is vulnerable to high-risk diseases (such as HIV/AIDS) by engaging in a high-risk profession (like sex work) but changes her trajectory with the help of interventions aimed at raising awareness of high-risk behaviour. The awareness campaigns serve as a platform for their deviance and they become the agents of change (new expert actors) and work for the mitigation of risk factors within their community. Hence, I propose the following framework to analyse positive deviance in respect to this study:

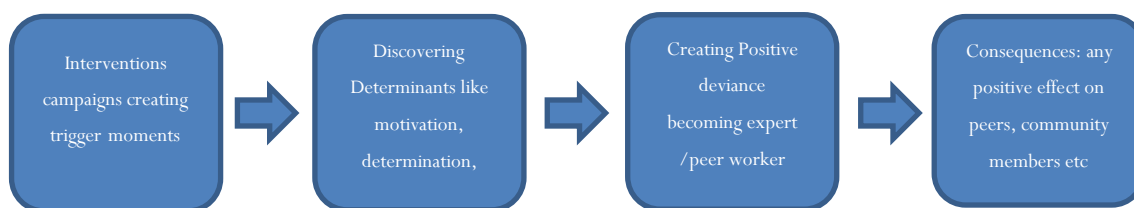


Figure 6: Proposed framework in respect to the four women discussed above derived from the framework for the study of positive deviance (Kohlborn, Kummer, Mertens & Recker, 2016)

So, based on the case studies described above, their determination/perseverance, organisational capacity and motivation become the determinants of interest: that is to say, they are the factors that triggered positive behaviour which has had consequences for other women and girls working in the sector. As indicated above, the women were determined to make changes in their lives and demonstrated a great deal of perseverance, tenacity and vision to sustain the early campaigns that they became part of. They assumed leadership roles and later started their own organisations with the help of established NGOs in Kathmandu.

The initiatives undertaken by them now encompass a wide range of areas like working on HIV/AIDS, rescue and rehabilitation, counselling, skill development, and advocacy for change of policy for formal recognition of women's rights in this sector. They also make efforts to stop young girls from migrating to Kathmandu by educating them about the risks and challenges. The unique point here is that all four organisations are run by and employ women and girls who have

worked in this sector and they themselves have become the agents of change, thereby enhancing the agency of the community members and making them more resilient and empowered. This represents a turning point in the campaign for women's rights in the sex and informal entertainment industry as well for other issues like trafficking and migration of young girls to the city.

7.6 Applying the Positive Deviance Strategy

It must be noted here the positive deviance strategy here differs from the strategies used to tackle the problems of human trafficking where community means a target group who are the general people living in a village that has been source of the problem. In the context of this study, the 'community' refers to the women who are working in the informal entertainment sector that includes sex workers (both street-based and those working in small establishments like brothels and cabin restaurants) and women working in dance bars and massage parlours. The organisations mentioned above may not be adopting the PD strategy consciously, but few parts of their work can be analysed through the PD framework.

Let's consider the work of Raksha Nepal whose primary focus in the words of its chairperson Menuka Thapa is to "help women escape abuse in the Nepal's entertainment industry". It has been doing a range of work towards that cause like helping women learn vocation courses, providing shelter to the children of women working in the sector, providing legal aid and psycho-socio counselling but one of their recently launched initiative is to prevent girls from getting into sex industry at the first place. This resonates with PD strategy used in reducing human trafficking cases at the source level (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015). Menuka says:

we are now running workshops in 12 districts in Nepal. We invite parents and tell them that they should be aware of what their daughters are doing in the city, and the risks they might be exposed to. We seek their support to help stop the migration of girls to the cities by creating work opportunities in the villages, especially in agriculture or animal husbandry.

We have formed groups of outreach workers and employ rehabilitated girls to convince other girls in the villages not be lured by agents and middle men who promise jobs and good life in the city. We use radio, brochures and individual counselling to reach out. Our radio program, 'Voice of Raksha', is aired twice a week and has been a very effective medium to reach out to girls in remote areas. After every program, we get calls from girls across the country who are in dangerous situations, but we don't always have the resources to help them. This is where we feel bad about, especially after raising their hopes. We need more resources, funds and support from the government to help women trapped in sex work.

From the above example it can be seen Raksha Nepal's strategy, when deconstructed can be aligned with PD strategy experimented to tackle the problems of human trafficking at source level. The PD strategy in the context of Indonesia as outlined above involved mapping the patterns of disappearance and then working with the community to check that girls do not go missing. It meant identifying families whose daughters did not go missing as positive deviants and then using their examples coupled with a coherent strategy to control trafficking of girls. The reason I have emphasised human trafficking as an example is because trafficking of girls is interlinked with the issues of young girls getting lured into the informal entertainment industry Nepal's context, as claimed by most stakeholders and donors, but as discussed in chapter Two this might not really be the case. As argued above, the application of positive deviancy strategy is context specific and it involves a range of measures. In the context of the positive deviants discussed in this chapter, the scale of their organisation's work goes beyond the immediate scope of just the women working in the informal sector. Raksha Nepal's wider role is also to stop underage girls from becoming sex worker or get entrapped into entertainment industry. So, Menuka Thapa, the founder of Raksha has taken initiatives that involve working with the village community to problematise the issue of girls' unplanned migration to cities.

PD is a potentially useful framework for working with a community over time. At the same time tackling the complex issues of women engaged in the informal entertainment industry involves adjusting with the PD approach (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015). Since the objectives of the organisations vary despite a consensus that there is a systematic exploitation of women in the sector. Organisations mapped for this study are somehow ambiguous when asked to state their position against sex work. Whilst Raksha Nepal and Biswas Nepal categorically state they are against prostitution, they mentioned that they do not force any one to leave sex work. They also agree that women engaged in other forms of the informal entertainment industry are indirectly involved in paid sex (the issue has been alluded to in chapter Two). It must also be noted that the socio – economic vulnerability of women and girls can be so deeply entrenched that getting involved in this sector represents the only alternative. This underlines the variety of mechanisms that are needed to address the wide range of interlinking problems of the women working in this sector and that one singular approach to prevention alone will not be effective in all cases.

JMMS and SWAN have been working under the more general and less sensitive framework of HIV/AIDS, though their primary aim is to work for the sex workers. Shanti Tewari, the technical officer of JMMS says:

we never use the term sex workers in our organisation's constitution. We use words like 'marginalised group', 'backward class', 'orphan girls', but in reality, most of the girls are

sex workers otherwise it becomes very difficult to register the organisation since sex work is banned in Nepal.

JMMS as indicated above is a federation of twenty- seven NGOs working in 21 districts, all lead by sex workers. At the central level, it helps the federation in capacity building but at the grassroots level the members - all of them sex workers - are engaged in advocacy work related to violence against women, gender equality and raising awareness about HIV/AIDS which is a part of the USAID funded linkages programme. Likewise, SWAN uses HIV/AIDS umbrella to reach out to the wider community of sex workers.

Brunovskis and Surtees (2015) argue that using a broader framework has several advantages. A broader framework facilitates more openness to the issue, particularly in a community where quitting the profession is not always an option due to economic reasons. Narratives like working to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS for the marginalised group are perceived as relevant for the wider general community and institutions rather than focus solely on sex work, which is banned in Nepal and are not supported by major donors like USAID. This is especially critical, as the informal entertainment industry in Nepal is perceived in the context of trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, with less focus on and knowledge about why the entertainment industry remains attractive and cannot be suddenly eliminated.

Further, members who work as outreach workers have the ability to penetrate deep within the community and identify girls who are likely to migrate and potentially join the informal entertainment sector or become victims of human trafficking. It allows them to talk through the risks involved in migration, the dangers entailed in this sector and the measures they need to adopt in order to protect themselves. Since they are more visible because of their wide range of advocacy work on AIDS prevention etc., they earn a level of trust and confidence amongst the women in the community. "Many of the sex workers are now community leaders, and when other women face violence, they consult them," says Bijaya Dhakal. She further underlines that being associated with an NGO helps a sex worker because it gives them a sense of identity and self-confidence. Addressing the issues of sex workers within a HIV/AIDS approach also offsets the potential for stigmatisation of these women and those seeking help. Furthermore, as indicated by Brunovskis and Surtees (2015) using this sort of PD approach helps young women to foresee the pitfalls of migration and (in the context of this study) joining the sector, which can help to avoid exploitation and abuse.

7.7 Conclusion

It is noted from the above-mentioned case studies and the work of the organisations that the four positive deviants lead is - their actions and initiatives meet the principles of positive deviance as suggested by Brunovskis and Surtees (2015). All the four women are experts in their own way and are best placed to solve the problems of women and girls working in the sector. Their projects are funded by international donor agencies. When asked if the donors trust them, Tara Bhandari of Biswas Nepal says:

they trust us because we work hard, we are women and have been a part of the informal entertainment sector. We feel good and feel motivated when people see us working for an organisation and doing good work. Yes, we speak about our life; we speak positively and think positively. We give priority to women working in the sector. We have a high regard for their dignity and believe that all women should be treated with respect.

PD is based on respect for the community, its members, its culture and focuses on interactive engagement and capacity building, which is evident in the process (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015, p. 9).

There is a great deal of community organisation as indicated above. These organisations are totally run by women who have been a part of the community. It is them who work as mobilisers and outreach workers. They demonstrate successful behaviour and strategies. All individuals or groups who are part of the problem are also part of the solution and hence the PD process involves all parties who are affected by the problem (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015, p. 9). The actions of these women have facilitated three processes: social mobilisation, information gathering and behaviour change (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2015, p. 9).

We see social mobilisation around the issues of the recognition of the labour rights of the women engaged in the informal entertainment sector, registration of business entities that give employment to them and in general, standing up against violence, unfair treatment by the employers or clients and respond to police atrocities. The community is motivated by the fact that there are those within the community (positive deviants) that are doing something right and that a solution to the problem already exists in the community.

Information gathering is done to identify women and girls who need help or want to be rescued. As discussed, this is being done in numerous ways, but Raksha Nepal's radio programme is helping them reach out to wider population across the country.

Finally, there is a considerable evidence of behaviour change taking place in the community through the mobilisation of PD strategies. Women have access to credit and saving schemes, are better informed about HIV/AIDS epidemic and have even taken up other entrepreneurial work

with the support of NGOs. In the next chapter, I explain how the initiatives taken up by the positive deviants described above have resulted in creating strong peer networks and how women use the forums set up by them. These factors help in facilitating behaviour change, which is most pronounced in their ability to speak collectively against violence and for their rights.

8. PEER NETWORKS & CAPACITY BUILDING

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the wider role of peer networks in creating an alternative resistance narrative to the hegemonic discourse that labels sex workers as subaltern and as a stigmatised community, devoid of dignity and incapable of expressing agency. Subaltern in this context refers to the marginalised and poor communities like sex workers whose voices are absent from discourse formation that informs policies that might directly impact their lives. Their voices remain absent because they are deemed incapable of making worthwhile contributions to the prevailing discourse (Beverly, 2004 as cited in Basu, 2011, p. 392). The dominant discourses are usually framed by people external to the environment of the subaltern community. Such discourses subsume the locally constructed cultural meaning that the 'subaltern' community attach to their daily needs and living conditions. To discuss how alternative resistance to such narratives takes place, I use the culture-centred approach (Basu, 2011 & 2017; Basu & Dutta, 2008) which has been used to study how sex workers in Kolkata, India, challenge the hegemonic discourse and the structures that constrain their lives. In the culture-centric approach (which is explained in detail below) the narratives of the cultural participants (in this case the women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry) are used to reconstitute discourses that contextualises the cultural meanings and structures of their living conditions. The studies by Basu and Dutta (2008), and Basu (2011 & 2017) show that sex worker communities strategize their own tactical responses to the violence that characterises their work. They demonstrate serious concerns for their own health and their children's futures, contrary to the belief that they possess no agency and have no understanding about the importance of good health and education.

Peer network movements like the ones examined in this chapter create a chain of volunteers from the community to spread health messages to other women who work in this sector. Doing so undermines the need of an external 'expert' as proposed by the dominant discourses. It needs to be appreciated that though these women might not be leaders, as such, their deviancy allows them to draw another positive identity; that of a social-worker. Out of this deviance a number of organised activities and forums have emerged including unions, adult literacy schools and credit and saving schemes. These are managed by the members and are designed to support the specific needs of the women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry. This is significant because peer networks that are managed and run by someone who has formerly been in the

profession provides a more nuanced understanding of how these women interpret their own lives, as well as their health needs; their insecurities; the areas in which they need more support and how they choose to advocate for themselves and their rights when both the social and political space is occupied by men who are hostile to their interests (Kempadoo, 2001 as cited in Lalini, 2014). In this chapter I explore how the networks examined for this study directly contribute to a knowledge production process that is allowing women in the informal entertainment industry to resolutely express their voice and agency at both personal and social levels.

In the first section that follows the introduction to this chapter, I provide a brief overview of themes discussed throughout the study in the specific context of peer networks. The purpose of this section is to identify how the peer networks relate to the earlier chapters on empowerment, resilience and positive deviancy. I then examine the literature on how the culture-centric approach has been applied in the context of sex workers. This shows how marginalised group like sex workers use the approach to constitute their own autonomous discourses pertaining to their lives. Using these discourses, they develop their own forms of resistance to violence and find ways to access to their health needs. I apply the culture-centric approach in the context of the lives of the participants to demonstrate how they create their own autonomous voices and resistance.

In the concluding section, I highlight why the contextual understanding of violence against women peer that is provided by networks is so important. I point out that, peer networks help to end the isolation of sex workers, raise their consciousness of their rights and provide them with the voice to claim these rights. Above all, it affords the women dignity, even more so than income, which is demonstrated throughout the chapter.

8.2 Summarising Themes in the Context of Peer Networks

In the chapter on resilience (Chapter Six), I discussed the role of peer networks in creating a protective mechanism, which functions to help women working in the entertainment sector to cope with the ongoing abuse they suffer. The critical support of local organisations such as Raksha Nepal provides helps the participants in two ways: it gives them further confidence in manifesting their inner strength ('power within'), and further supports them externally by providing psycho-social counselling and making them a part of the wider community of women working in the informal entertainment industry ('power with'). This is significant because it allows the women to come out of isolation and forge new forms of social relationships and see themselves as a part of community. Peer networks in the context of resilience play a transformative role in realising

'power with' as women become aware of their own potential and gain self-esteem: it provides the pathways towards empowerment through building resilience.

One of the obvious benefits of women coming together and discussing their issues is that together the women are more critical of the injustices and violence committed against them and willing to stand up against it. They are no longer passive recipients of violence but are instead active campaigners for women rights. Most of them are still professionally engaged in the sex and informal entertainment sector but have a stronger negotiating power vis-à-vis their clients, as well as the business owners and law enforcement agencies that exploit them. This power comes from sharing a collective voice and developing a greater understanding of social and political factors that weaken women's position in society, leaving them susceptible to violence. Peer networks, though, are essentially a work in progress, and as stated in the beginning of this chapter the women are united in their deviancy which they have made positive by enhancing their voice and agency by seeking new learning skills and engaging in community dialogues.

For example, Participant 2 (age 30, has one child, lower caste Hindu, not living with husband) talks about the importance of learning new skills, which have been facilitated by the peer network, Raksha Nepal, which she is a part of. She says:

Without education it is not possible to find any sort of jobs. Uneducated people like us have no scope to get jobs. Such programmes to an extent help us to explore for other jobs. The training programme was over all good.

In the chapter on positive deviance (Chapter Seven), I discussed the emergence of leaders who, despite the odds being stacked against them, stood up to tackle some of the issues facing their respective communities. Through their uncommon behaviour and strategies, they strove to find better solutions to some of the problems facing their peers. This chapter explores the multiple ways in which the autonomous organisations that these women have set up make a difference to the lives of their peers.

The peer networks are the outcome of the personal endeavours and perseverance of women who have become examples of positive deviants. During the interviews and discussions, it was noted that some of the women are also part of a wider network and are linked with more than one NGO, each of which functions as autonomous organisations. For example, Raksha Nepal and three other organisations mentioned in the previous chapters are all members of the Campaign for Right Alliance. It must be noted here that the levels of networking that women in this sector engage with seems to be higher than women in other sectors, such as women in the construction sector, the garment industry or other low-skill jobs that employ large numbers of women. This is

partially because such industries tend to be scattered and operate on the capitalist principles of supply and demand. Most of these women are migrants, and for this reason they cannot be mobilised. Even in the garment factories, where unions might exist, men lead them, and the interests of women are seldom voiced. In contrast, the deviant nature of the work of the women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry, as well as the extremity of abuse they suffer, is more prominently visible in public domain. Additionally, the women who work in this industry tend to break away from the social structures of a family life and are detached from their communities. They lead an independent life, which gives them the freedom to unite and speak up for themselves, thus privileging them over women who are also subaltern but are not considered deviant. It is their utilisation of all available capital that means they are able to cope and to push for a better future.

8.3 The Culture-centric Approach

Basu and Dutta (2008) and Basu (2011 & 2017) applied the culture-centric approach to health communication to study how sex worker collectives create communication structures to enhance their agency and develop resistance to prescriptive socially dominant discourses that underscore the lives of marginalised women. This approach is relevant in the context of examining the work of peer networks because they create an alternative organically emerging voice that tackles issues like HIV, condom use and other risk factors, including violence, that have a direct or indirect impact on their health, security and safety. Basu has positioned the culture-centric approach within the research context of subaltern studies (Guha, 1988) in order to acknowledge that the voices of the marginalised are resistant to the dominant discourses that typically treat groups like sex workers as *objects* of campaigns in much of the international and development communication work (Basu & Dutta, 2008, p. 108). Subaltern theory notes that to be 'subaltern' is not a static condition. It states that a person who occupies the marginalised position gradually comprehends and internalises the structures that are designed to keep them in perpetual dispossession and subordination and in doing so becomes more able to formulate ways to resist those structures through "collaboration and resistance" (Bhadra, 1997 as cited in Basu, 2017). Basu (2017) points out that resistance is enacted through a communication process which can:

be theorised along a spectrum that could include challenges to the dominant discursive constructions, the ownership of agency in determining community-relevant solutions, the mobilization of resources to create alternative communicative frameworks, structural resources and the overt confrontational practices that seek to challenge and fight violence that is imposed on subaltern spaces

(Pal & Dutta, 2008 as cited in Basu & Dutta, 2017, p. 28)

In the next section of this chapter, I will illustrate how these characteristics appeared in the context of the participants of this study. But first I will discuss how culture-centric approaches have been applied in the context of sex workers in studies in India and one study in Nepal.

Based on interviews with thirty-eight women in a red-light district in Kolkata, India, Dutta (2011) demonstrates how sex workers express what the author terms “autonomous subaltern rationality” to meet their health needs. Dutta argues that as opposed to the dominant view that portrays sex workers as people who are not concerned about their health, the sex workers demonstrate significant awareness of health and extract the best out of the available resources to cater to their health needs and those of their children. However, the author also points out that for a sex worker in Kolkata, this might not mean visiting a doctor, but instead choosing local or alternative treatments. This is described as a ‘polymorphic approach’, which means locally evolved community-based practices that are based on traditional knowledge or known remedies to common diseases. This approach is seen as critical in the context of resource deprivation as it offers multiple pathways through which to harness all available resources to help cultural participants achieve their desired health-related goals (Dutta, 2011, p. 398). Basu and Dutta (2008) analysed participant narratives in two sex worker communities in Kolkata. Their research points to the variety of ways in which members of a marginalised culture find opportunities to voice concerns and work towards empowerment and change. The study observed that forming a peer network was the first step towards addressing the wide range of issues that are confronted in the lives of sex workers. Their peer networks encouraged them to use condoms and to go for regular health check-ups, and it also instilled trust in the community by providing a common platform from which sex workers could launch and sustain their unified struggle against exploitation.

Basu (2017), in another study:

based on 12 weeks of field study in a sex worker community in India, foregrounds how sex workers communicatively frame and enact resistance and hence formulate insurgent texts, along a continuum—from overt violence to covert negotiation on issues such as condom and alcohol use.

(Basu, 2017, p. 1507)

The author calls it insurgent and resistive because they go against the dominant notion that the subaltern cannot speak, and in the context of sex workers, they are deemed as submissive and inclined to engage in unprotected and risky sexual practices for monetary benefits, thereby spreading HIV/AIDS. The author engaged in open-ended dialogue on issues such as

how meanings on health and HIV/AIDS are made and shared, negotiation practices related to illness, practices related to sex work and HIV/AIDS, communicative framing of relationships with colleagues, children, lovers/partners, clients, and the influence of NGOs such as New Light on addressing issues on health in the community.

(Basu, 2017, p. 1510)

As a community, sex workers worry considerably about health and the issue is a central part of their overall strategy of resistance to violence from clients. For example, the study cited above shows that not using condom is non-negotiable and as a group they get together to tackle with difficult and violent clients who might force them against using condom. Similarly, as noted in this study, managing alcohol use becomes a strategy to resist attempts by the clients to get sex workers inebriated and violate them by disregarding their concerns about HIV/AIDS and engaging in unsafe sex. These examples show that sex workers collectively are capable of expressing agency by enacting localised discourse in their own space.

Basnyat (2014) documents the accounts of sex workers in Kathmandu, who describe their work as their *pasha*, meaning 'profession'. The study is based on thirty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews that were conducted with street-based female sex workers. The women contend that that they have found ways to overcome stigma by accepting what they do and that their profession as a sex worker is tied to their primary identities as caretakers of their children and providers for the family, which is the top priority for them. They negotiate their marginalised spaces by articulating that they have learnt to cope with stigma, abuse and danger. Basnyat notes that:

This everyday agency involved women locating, negotiating and enacting their choices within structures of limitations, transforming these into the possibilities that enable the women to earn a living, provide for their family and save a little for the future.

Their lived experiences illustrate the need to move away from traditional, top-down, linear behaviour-change health campaigns to reconstitute health interventions within a participatory bottom-up approach that includes the voices of participants and is situated within their own context and needs.

(Basnyat, 2014, pp. 1040 & 1047)

8.4 Applying a Culture-centric Approach to Analysis of Peer Networks

The peer networks examined for this study help women in the sex and informal entertainment industry to create their own autonomous voice and agency for resistance, and this section addresses how they do so. The 'structures', in this context, refers to problems faced at the micro, meso and national levels, which can include a lack of job opportunities, harassment by law enforcement agencies, lack of access to education and healthcare, as well as the social problems

faced by the participants such as violence, oppression, patriarchy and a lack of access to the basic needs of life (Basu, Jana, Newman, & Rotheram-Borus, 2004; Jenkins, 2000; Karim, Karim, Soldan & Zondi, 1995). As Basu and Dutta note;

Agency is enacted in its interaction with the structures at these different levels and embodies a variety of communicative actions and processes that challenge, navigate, and attempt to change these structures that constrain the lives of subaltern participants.

(Basu & Dutta, 2008, p. 108)

Therefore, the collectives that women form, gives them the space to come up with alternative pathways for their well-being based on what they perceive to be good for them rather than what outsiders think is good for them.

8.4.1 Health Discourse

Narratives emerge more strongly through interactions and dialogues in the space provided by the peer networks through a formation of collectives. As all participants contend, the single biggest benefit of such association is that they have a space in which they can freely discuss problems and even find solutions, and it gives them the strength to support each other. The participants say that health communication messages are more effectively received if they are discussed and communicated by peers, rather than being delivered through structured interventions designed by outsiders. Karim, Karim, Soldan and Zondi (1995) argue that in the context of sex workers, due to their marginalised status, the women have limited access to basic resources and information, they cannot negotiate alone for safer sex practices. However, their association with peer networks can make a difference.

My research found that since women and girls are part of multiple peer networks, there is often a flow and sharing of information amongst them and across these spaces, allowing them to organise into a collective unit. For example, Participant 6 (age 23, upper caste Hindu, not married) discussed the use of condoms, which she has learnt about from her association with another peer network (JMMS, discussed in the previous chapter). She shares the vital information in informal gatherings when the members of Raksha Nepal meet:

They tell us about condoms, they tell about all health risks and teach us where to go, where to seek support, they tell us not to go to the client's house etc. I share this information with my peers.

This study, as indicated in the introduction, conducted two focus group interviews. These were designed to more broadly validate the responses of the individual participants and to understand

what participants think should be done to improve the lives of the women working in the sector. Accordingly, the questions were interrogative in nature in order to initiate a discussion, while the researcher simply remained an observer in the process. Thus, when questions were asked about access to health information and treatment, the women said that from time to time they go to free health camps run by another NGO 'STEP Nepal', as well as those provided by SWAN (mentioned in the chapter on positive deviance). Peers who work as volunteers then circulate the information. For health advocacy and awareness, Shova Dangol of SWAN provide insights into how the health programmes are relayed to the women. They work on awareness campaigns, which are run by former sex workers. Dangol said:

We distribute brochures. Based on our own experience, we know how to identify girls who work as a sex worker. We ask them to visit the clinics and once they have visited, we also ask for feedback and they tell them to spread the message. Our job is to link them with treatment centres, so they know it exists and they can access it without hesitation. Lots of girls go with their clients. In such a situation it is important to make the girls aware about how to protect themselves and remain safe. Girls, nowadays, take adequate precaution and due to extensive awareness, less girls are becoming pregnant due to sex work.

But it is not just about the precautions that the women take against contracting HIV/AIDS. Participants in the focus group also mentioned that their greater awareness of health facilities have enabled them to access government hospitals during child birth, for example. As a community, women in the entertainment industry are well informed of their own health needs and this marks a structural shift in the communication process. The peer networks have mobilised to deconstruct and reframe the health communication discourse in a manner that women can relate to and can adopt willingly, albeit through the external support of international agencies. So, the top down approach which has been problematised in the studies mentioned above has become more localised, and subaltern groups like sex workers are more able to access basic health programmes from and within their marginalised space.

8.4.2 Setting Up Self-serving Mechanisms

Raksha Nepal demonstrates a greater understanding of the cultural factors and socio-cultural capabilities of the women that they are dealing with. Menuka Thapa says that interventions to economically empower women in the sex and informal entertainment sector, such as skill development, are not prescriptive but are designed in consultation with the women who want it. Accordingly, its training programme includes non-conventional courses like driving lessons and certified spa training. The certificates from these courses help women to become professionally

qualified, but they also help them to avoid police harassment. As Participant 7 (age 33, has three children, lower caste, living separately) puts it:

professional spa training has enabled me to get certificate and earn more. Now when police comes, I show them the certificate that proves that I am a professional therapist and helps me to avoid getting arrested. Earlier, I couldn't speak with anyone. But after associating with peers, I feel much confident. I feel good as we provide moral support to each other.

For many women, their ability to keep their children in the Raksha shelter home has given peace of mind by enabling them to be kept out of harm's way. This, they say, allows them to concentrate on other things, like learning a new skill for alternative employment.

The participants in the research attach great importance to education. Their children's education is of paramount importance because they hope that, if their children do well, their misery and suffering will not go in vain. Contrary to mainstream discourse, the participants clearly understand that good education is a pathway to a good job and a good life. As Participant 19 (age 32, has two children, upper caste, not living with husband) puts it, "I don't have any desires. If my children grow up well and are happy, that would be my biggest benefit". To that end, Raksha Nepal has been running a shelter home for the children of women working in this sector, and its Chairperson ensures that all children go to school. However, some mothers have appealed to admit their children to the shelter, but due to limited resources the organisation can take on only a set number of children. In addition, Raksha Nepal has set up a school for adult women (mostly those working in the sex and informal entertainment sector) to enable them to learn basic literacy skills on weekends, and women of all age groups are attending it in very high numbers.

Participant 1 (age 41, has three children, upper caste Hindu, not living with husband) says:

If I was educated well and had not married early then I wouldn't have suffered the same fate. I never had the chance to study but now I am learning whatever I can and it's helpful. I at least know how to sign my name.

The adult literacy programme that women are accessing by attending the school, gives them privilege over women from mainstream society who might not have the same opportunity or have agency to exercise such choices. As such, the dominant discourse that characterises the women in the sex and informal entertainment industry with depravity and ineptitude is fundamentally challenged by women expressing their agency to exercise their choice and add cultural meaning to opportunities that they were previously denied.

The credit and saving schemes set up by Raksha Nepal provide another example of how subaltern communities can bypass mainstream financial institutions that deny them access because of their

marginalised status and sometimes due to a lack of proof of a permanent address. Women who are part of the saving and credit schemes said that they could never have opened a formal bank account because of insufficient identity papers. The banks also require them to maintain a minimum savings balance, which the women might not be able to do. The credit and saving schemes give loans at 10% interest, which is easily accessible. Since it is mostly made up of women working in the entertainment sector, the background of each woman and their addresses are known, and hence it minimises the chances of default.

The Chairperson of the credit and saving scheme, Menuka Thapa says:

In 2004, I met a number of women who were facing violence. They were earning but their income was not enough to support their families. So, I came up with the idea because we thought if we could pool our savings it could be a lot of money. I cannot help everyone, but everyone can help someone. The women frequently worried about their children's future. I told them that if they save fifty rupees a day, they can gradually save enough to do something in a few years and that can be used to pay for children's education. We took ten rupees from every woman to start with, and in four years, it became 8,50,000 rupees, and that served as a collateral to open the credit and savings.

Raksha Nepal's credit and saving scheme is a network of four-thousand women, most of whom use are women engaged in the sex and informal entertainment sector. The women came together to form micro finance groups made up of twenty to twenty-five women. Each group has a treasurer and a chairperson who are elected based on their skills and leadership abilities. In the beginning, the groups are oriented with the system and how it functions. The women are taught the advantages of the credit and savings schemes and how they can access loans. Then they are given a passbook and are taught how to maintain it. The groups meet once a month and collect the savings. The loan is given to a woman who needs it the most and that decision is based on consensus.

Some of the women said that the saving and credit schemes offer a platform where women can discuss their personal problems, too, and can take advice from each other on how to deal with them. There is a sense of solidarity and friendship. They stress that they are able to relate to each other's problems as they tend to have face similar issues and can empathise with each other's struggles. One member ¹ who worked in the informal entertainment sector and now runs her own corner grocery shop said

¹ The participant was a part of a separate discussion group and was not a part of sample or the focus group.

I have been a member for ten years. On an average I saved two-hundred rupees a day. I took out a loan of 50,000 rupees two years back and invested it in a tea shop and now I have expanded it to a grocery shop. The tea shop has enabled me to stand on my own feet. Due to my age, I could no longer work in the informal entertainment sector. My son and other members of the family refused to take care of me. If this system didn't exist, my life would have been more difficult.

Another forty-six year-old ² woman said:

I have been a part of the women's co-operative for six years and saved five-hundred rupees a month. I took a loan of one lakh rupees and set up my own spa business. It is my main source of income, which helps me to send my children to school. If I work for someone else, the pay would be less, and I could have never saved enough. Now I spend, save and am able to send children to school. Because of Raksha Nepal, I was able to get some training on business management skills by attending the Raksha Women's School.

The above examples demonstrate the ability of the women in the sex and informal entertainment sector in Kathmandu to devise mechanisms that cater to their specific needs and also show their ability to create parallel subaltern discourses that are not represented in the mainstream narratives.

8.4.3 Solidarity & Agency

For most of the participants, "it is the process of communication that demonstrates an opportunity to enact agency" (Basu & Dutta, 2008). The women who participated not only begin to question social structures, but they have strong opinions about strengthening existing programmes. This phenomenon, as described in Chapter Five, is referred to as 'power from within' (Rowlands, 1997). Their discussions and the views they express shed light on complex issues at the micro level that often create barriers to operating freely in a market environment. Communication allows these issues to be discussed and helps in shaping the agenda. For example, Participant 1 (age 41, has three children, upper caste, lives separately) who runs a restaurant but formerly worked in the sex and informal entertainment industry says that the government needs to do more to make markets safer for women and to sensitise the police on gender issues.

I employ seven women, due to which I face constant harassment from the police. They ask me what the women are doing in the restaurant. If you work in the restaurant that doesn't mean you are a woman of bad character. I have been taken away by the police a number of times for no reason. Police should be there to protect us not harass us.

² The participant was a part of a separate discussion group and was not a part of sample or the focus group.

Raising one's voice against police atrocities is now an important campaign area, not just for Raksha Nepal but for also for other NGOs discussed in this study.

The women interviewed have hope and expectations for a better future. Their ability to express their opinions demonstrates a sense of awareness, much of which is gained through interactions with peers. Some women expressed the view that the government should do more to create economic opportunities for the less privileged like them. Participant 7 (age 33, has three children, low caste, sometimes lives with husband), for example, said; "The government should provide monetary support to those who want to learn new professional skills," whilst Participant 3 (age 20, has one child, Buddhist, widow) said:

my message to the government is to help the victims of the earthquake. There are so many women. Some are disabled, some are old, some have no homes. If the government helps, they don't have to come to the city.

Platforms like those provided by Raksha Nepal allow women to come together and to deliberate on these issues. The bonds that they develop enable them to build trust and organize as a collective in order to articulate the critical issues faced by the community as described above. They then collectively stand to respond to issues like police harassment or dealing with exploitative customers (Basu & Dutta, 2008). Participant 9 (age 28, has one child, upper caste, lives separately) said that those who commit crimes against women should be hanged:

people should treat women engaged in the entertainment with respect. All work should be accorded dignity. I think government should hang rapists, that will serve as a deterrent. Men who commit violence against women should be shamed in the media, that might also help to reduce crime against women.

In this context, Basu and Dutta (2008) in their study argue that the power to communicate become the motivating tool which enables them to come together to engage in a unified struggle against exploitation. Thus, concepts of community participation are related to agency, as it gives them the voice to question the social structures that undermine their lives and that of other women. They learn to "optimise the available resources, and at the same time extract a share of those resources, of which they have traditionally been deprived" (Basu & Dutta, 2008). The participants have become aware of their rights and understand that being women does not mean that they have to be subservient to the homogenous masculine power. All participants said that they are willing to stand up if any other women, in the profession or otherwise, are seen to be facing violence. This phenomenon is referred to as 'power with'.

Table 8. (below) shows that whilst sharing their experiences and offering solidarity, the women come to think of themselves as people who share something in common. Such experiences give the women the strength to develop strategies to cope with violence at work. The process triggers a ‘shift in consciousness’ that Cornwall (2016) describes as one of the first steps towards empowerment. The agency that the women gain through the supportive network helps them to create a platform for social change in a marginalised space. They question the normative beliefs and institutional barriers that sustain inequality and keep them in a subordinated position. There is a new-found confidence and a determination to emerge out of the pre-determined social construct, of women perceived as weak and dependent: the participants outright reject such limitations on the basis gender.

This table provides the responses given by some of the participants when asked if they would stand up if they see other women facing violence.

Participant 14. Age 40, has three children, lower caste, married.	“I am willing to help women who face violence and even fight or die for younger girls who are in the same profession and are helpless”
Participant 3. Age 20, has one child, Buddhist, widow.	“Yes, sometimes when the owner forces my colleagues to work even when they are ill, I go and protest to protect my colleagues”
Participant 16. age 23, has one child, Buddhist, living separately.	“yes, will help other women. I am in this profession not by choice. I have been forced by my circumstances and I feel other women are in a similar situation too.”
Participant 13. Age 32, has four children, lower caste, not living with husband.	“Yes, I have learnt about self-defence and I want to teach other girls so that they can protect themselves”
Participant 4. Age 28, has one child, lower caste, married.	“Yes, I will protest if I see any woman being harassed(adds) violence at home is higher than at work place. “Many women work here (massage parlours) because of violence at home”

Table 8. Willingness to Stand Up Against Violence

The measures that peer networks like Raksha Nepal have taken to bolster this level of confidence and self-belief is highly significant. Researchers (see e.g., Mehra, 1997; Sen, 1993) have argued that a woman is said to be on the path to true empowerment when they take control of the process of change rather than act merely as its recipients. To that effect, the peer networks described in this study are significant actors in facilitating ‘bottom-up’ rather than ‘top-down’ approaches to development (Baden & Oxaal, 1997; Narayan, 2000; Rowlands 1995). We see from the above examples that the respondents not only demonstrate both ‘power within’ and

'power with' (Rowlands, 1997), but also that they gain an understanding of the structures that constrain them. Thus, the benefits derived from their association with peer networks have had a transformative effect in their lives.

8.5 Dealing with Violence: the Role of the Union

Politically, Raksha Nepal as a peer network has been actively campaigning for the rights of women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry. They have been lobbying with the government to formally recognise the sector and work closely with committees that have been formed by the government to come up with directives to regulate the industry. This is significant because they have otherwise limited or no access to the policy platforms and civil society organizations that determine their fate through the regulation and implementation of policies. This is once again the manifestation of 'power with' in regard to political and legal capabilities and the union. Below, I present a brief review of the emergence of the union of sex workers around the world.

The global movement for the recognition of the rights of sex workers began in parts of Europe and North America in the late 1970s. This was mainly in response to increasing level of violence, harassments and oppression of women who were engaged in the business of sex. In late 1970s, a sex worker protest event was held in Lyon, France. This was soon followed by the emergence of the first prostitutes' rights collective, Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), in San Francisco, California. The two events garnered international attention for the conditions faced by sex workers (Jenness, 1993, p. 42; Mathieu, 2001, p. 54). Around the same time that sex worker's groups started emerging in Canada. These were small, loosely affiliated, groups that individual sex workers at the local level formed to promote their rights internationally by denouncing criminalisation, stigmatisation, harassment, and violence directed at people who work in the sex industry (Brock, 1998). The first national organisation 'Better End All Vicious Erotic Repression' (the name chosen for its acronym: BEAVER), which emerged in Toronto, Ontario, in 1977 with the mandate to "Legitimize the female sex, decriminalize prostitution" (Brock, 1998, p. 41).

The first international conference for sex workers was held in Amsterdam in 1985, where the attendants produced the World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights (Pheterson, 1989). These events ushered in a new period of activism for sex workers and taken together are seen as a historic milestone for the international movement of sex workers' rights. Despite the growing momentum to recognise the rights of sex workers globally, there has been opposition to such

movements, mainly due to socio-cultural, religious and political factors. For example, sex workers do not have autonomous organizations in many Eastern European countries, and the struggle for sex workers' rights is organized mainly either through gay and lesbian organizations, health projects, or anti-trafficking groups (Graford, 2014). Even in countries where the sex industry is regulated, the basic human rights of sex workers are routinely violated. This has been further aggravated by the issues of increased illegal migration into Europe and human trafficking. There is a growing trend to see all migrant women who work with sex as victims of organised crime. There is also a growing recognition that in the developing world, sex workers are part of the informal economy where women in general constitute a big part of overall labour force. The women working in the informal economy receive irregular and unpredictable return on their labour and work under highly exploitative conditions. Whilst the income may, to a degree, empower women and help in enhancing their self-worth and in negotiating important aspects of their life, it does little to enhance their legal status as citizens who can enjoy equal rights as women, as workers, or as human beings. It has also not promoted their organised capacity to struggle for the recognition and realisation of their rights (Kabeer, Milward & Sisarshan, 2013, p. 2).

Gall (2006; 2007; 2009; 2010) has noted that the unionisation of sex workers has been a slow and fragile process as, for the most part, sex workers are not employed. The author points out that sex workers often have no contracts of employment and do not work together in large numbers. Instead, they often work alone and do not have a fixed place of work. In other words, the characteristics of sex workers' places of work are not like those of other workplaces (such as factories) where unionization has been relatively easy. Further to that, in many parts of the world sex workers themselves resist the idea of unions as it carries with it the risk of being identified as a sex worker, rather than as a businesswoman who is engaged in the profession to earn a living and gain access to a better life *through* sex work. Some even aspire to become operators of brothels, saunas and the like. Consequently, their 'right to do business' as entrepreneurs and their view of themselves as individuals does not sit well with collectivist principles of unionization.

Among sex workers, commentators and social scientists, the sex work discourse has now been sufficiently established and accepted, and one of the significant issues emanating from it concerns the representation of sex workers' interests at work (Gall, 2014). Gall (2014), argues that the context of studying any form of sex workers collective self-organisation differs from other forms of labour in the sense that sex work (in this case as part of the sex and informal entertainment industry) is not regulated by the state in the same way as other work; but at the same time, it

tends to be heavily regulated through criminal codes and hostile public policies that are rooted in value systems that view it as a form of deviancy and as a social problem.

For the purpose of this study, I looked at the Workers' Protection Union, which was formed in 2015 as an independent arm of Raksha Nepal. The rationale behind creating a union was to help women working in the informal entertainment sector to realise their emancipatory potential so that they are not sexually exploited and there is a greater recognition of their work, which is not to be confused with sex work. I met with some of the members of the union on two occasions, once in December 2015 and then in April 2018. The membership of the union has grown in strength from around 3,500 members in 2015 to 7,800 active members as of April 2018. There is a nominal fee of INR105 for general members and INR1000 for a lifetime membership. It also brings up the question of whether creating a union leads to the formalisation of NGOs as advocacy groups. It notable that all members of Raksha Nepal are invariably also members of the union. So, by creating a union and a credit and saving body, which acts as a bubble, do NGOs like Raksha Nepal contribute by giving the status of a formalised 'industry' to informal entertainment in Nepal?

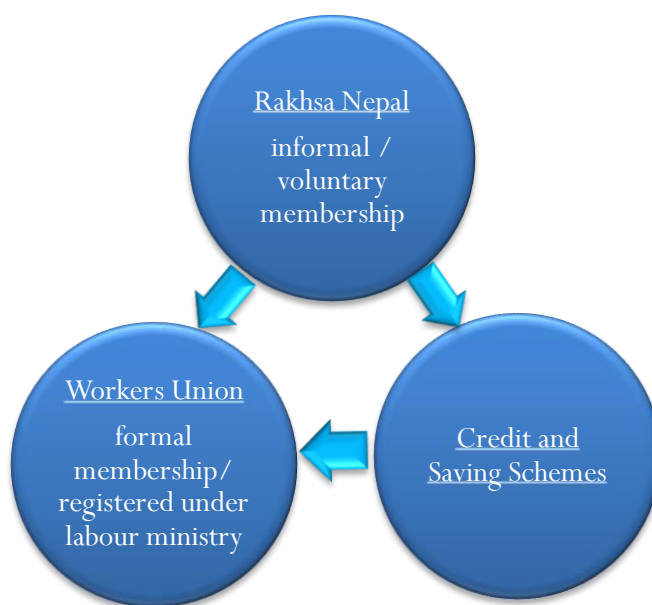


Figure 7. Structure of Raksha Nepal

The union has fourteen board members who are elected through a voting system. It is registered with the Ministry of Labour and is also working in collaboration with other organisations with similar objectives in eastern Nepal. The constitution of the union (translated from Nepali) outlines that its main objective is to campaign for the recognition of the informal entertainment

sector like any other profession so that those who are working in the sector are treated with dignity. In line with this it has the following objectives:

- The union will represent all other organisations working in this sector.
- To ensure economic empowerment of all its members.
- To make the members aware of their rights through workshops.
- To raise voice against and to end coercive sexual exploitation.
- Providing skill training for alternative jobs.
- Initiatives for creating employment opportunities.
- Networking with national and international organisations.
- Advocacy for formulating laws for the entertainment sector (fixed working hours and minimum wage).
- Partnerships with other organisations for implementing the programmes.
- To raise voice against violence against women.

Since its inception, the union has been campaigning on a number of issues. One of its key campaign objectives is that women working in this sector should be treated with dignity; they should have a minimum monthly wage of NR 8000 and the working should be limited to eight hours a day.

When asked about their most successful campaigns, its President, Sabina Limbu, cites an example in which the union secured the release of women owners of the massage parlours who were detained by the police and their businesses shut down, whilst no such measures were taken against the businesses owned by their male counterparts. The women came together and protested outside the police station against such arbitrary arrests; “A number of our members worked in such parlours, so we felt that they cannot lose their jobs because of such arbitrary gendered action by the police.”

Campaigning against police atrocities has been one of the primary concerns for the union. One member says:

Earlier we were afraid of the police as they would conduct raids, detain us and even harassed us. We were the scapegoats but now as the union has grown in strength, we are becoming more vocal and the relationship with the police has somewhat improved. Now they tend to cooperate with us if they come to know that we are a part of the union. This has been one of our biggest achievement.

The other successful campaign was to secure the wages of forty women from the owner of a *dhori* restaurant who had not paid wages for six months. The union collectively protested and compelled the owner to pay up. These actions are small but significant. As Gall (2014) notes, there is often a conflict of interest between the operators of sex work and the sex workers, and

the interests of sex workers are not represented by the operators. As such, the sex workers (in this case women in the informal entertainment sector) need to represent their requirements independently through other means. In such situations collective organisation can be helpful. Since the owners of businesses of the informal entertainment industry are powerful and influential, it is often difficult to stand up against them but by coming together the women are able to enhance their bargaining power.

The union, like its parent organisation Raksha Nepal, has also been responding to calls of women in distress, including those suffering from domestic violence or IPV. Whilst this might not necessarily be the job of the union, as such, the strategy is adopted as means to reach out to the maximum number of women so that the membership can be increased. The union is not just campaigning for labour rights and economic rights, but also civil, political and human rights of the women engaged in the sector. In the Nepalese context, this is exemplary as even some of the big international collectives like COYOTE in the United States, the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), and the Red Thread in the Netherlands initially concentrated on civil, political, and human rights rather than economic rights and labour rights (Gall, 2014).

Menuka Thapa explained that:

The reason we help women in distress is to show solidarity with them. This helps us to increase our membership. It is about rapport building. The women who are in this sector are not educated. It is a way of convincing them, so they can be attracted towards the union. We have problems with funding, and we rely on membership fees to run our day-to-day affairs. But we also have a shared value and that is to raise voice against any form of violence against women and girls.

The unionisation of informal entertainment workers occupies a unique position in the sense that its activities go beyond just campaigning for the rights and interest of the workers as in the case of general unions. Firstly, there is an emphasis on the phrase 'informal entertainment sector' and caution is exercised so as not to be seen as a collective that represents sex workers. This is because sex work is not legal in Nepal and is considered to be morally deviant, thus resulting in stigmatisation. There is a risk that it could reinforce the criminalisation of, and hostile public policies toward, the members (Gall, 2014). Secondly, the union is made up of women who work in established businesses with signboards to show it as a 'massage parlour', though they admit that there is a systematic sex work that happens through the conduit of massage parlours. In this context, Menuka Thapa explains:

We have two objectives. At one level we are working with the government to make the environment safer for the women working in this sector. At another level, we help women who no longer want to be a part of the industry or work as a sex worker. The Supreme Court of Nepal has asked the government to promulgate law for the women working in this industry. The government has not taken any action, but we are campaigning, so it is important that we have more members. We want to engage with the workers, governments and the employers to make them aware of their rights. Those who want to come out we will help them. But we do not want to force anyone.

Thapa says that as an organisation, the union is against forced prostitution, but also believes that if someone is engaged in prostitution, they should be open about it. She says that in Nepal street-based prostitutes are those who are no longer granted access to entertainment establishments as they become old or are not considered good looking. So, they eventually end up being on the street.

The union, by positioning itself as a collective that campaigns for the labour rights of women engaged in the informal entertainment sector, rather than as a union of sex workers, strategically deflects any criticism or the antagonism of the society at large. In fact, the president of the union says that it is a collective of women who are vulnerable, and therefore it also operates as a self-help group. For example, one member, who is a single mother of three children, has been a member of the union for over four years. She says that before becoming a member she was very weak and lacked the courage to speak out:

I always thought, as a woman we have to be subservient to men but when my husband passed away, I had to look after my children, so I joined the entertainment industry and worked in massage parlour. [...] As a single woman, I had to face a lot of harassment. The society too looked down at me [...] I had to educate my children and look after them. There was no place where I would be treated with respect. I needed support and the union was the place for me. Here I learnt a lot from the company of other women, who too work in a similar profession. The union has made me strong and taught me to be confident and bold. I have taken courses on legal awareness and had exposure trips to India. If men are single, they have no problem, they have all the rights, but if a woman is single, she is almost treated as an outcast. If you are a woman then it is a problem. I wanted to change this. The union taught me to be strong and I feel really nice and confident.

In this context, Gall (2014) argues that the culture and politics of collectivism are not necessarily seen as being in contradiction to or incompatible with individualism, for the former can support the right to exercise the latter. Subsequently, the utility of collective interest (representation of workers' union in this case) is all the more salient because sex work, as indicated above, remains regulated by the state through criminalisation. This is not true for most other forms of work, and many segments of society this industry as a form of social and moral deviancy (Gall, 2014).

8.6 Conclusion

Macro secondary quantitative research conducted by Htun and Weldon (2012) argues that autonomous women's organisation that are working to end violence are critically important. They list three reasons why women's autonomous organisations are so important. Firstly, "women organising as women generate social knowledge about women's position as a group in society" (Htun & Weldon, 2012, p. 553). The specific contextual understanding of violence that emerges from these groupings is part of the critical mass needed to direct action toward the relevant entry points in order to bring about transformation. These entry points cannot be assumed to be the same for all groupings, even within the same cultural context. Secondly, ending VAW requires a shift in the unequal gender structures underpinning societies across the globe. This restructuring will not happen within pre-existing political institutions or political parties where the 'gender issue' may struggle to make it onto the agenda in any sustained way. All too often, as Htun and Weldon (2012) point out, VAW is marginalised in public debate. Autonomous organisations that are focused on and committed to ending VAW are the only realistic hope. Thirdly, women's organisations represent safe spaces within which women are able to vent their frustration regarding their marginalisation and seek support to strategize collectively or individually. Organisations that rest within state structures do not represent 'safety' as they fall within the institutional eyes and ears of the government, which women rightly do not always feel serves to protect and support them.

From the interviews of the participants, as discussed throughout this research, it is evident that the work of peer network organisations is vital for women and it has an incredibly important empowering impact. The informal entertainment sector, however, does not represent a safe space for women. That said by organising together some obstacles could be overcome. Resilience to violence at work is navigated through peer networks and supportive local organisations. Ending the violence that the sex and informal entertainment workers suffer at the hands of their clients is more challenging, so engagement with organisations that are free to act against violence and are unconstrained by differing and conflicting political agendas is critical.

A number of women asserted that they are not ashamed of what they do, and this sense of empowerment and resilience comes from the collectivism. The peer networks help them develop the ability to challenge powerful people and deep-seated social norms, which evolve from the changes in self-perception as the starting point (Murthy & Seshu, 2013, p. 244). According to Participant 17 most of buyers of their service "are men in power like police, or the army and they are not ashamed of using their service, why should I be."

Kabeer, Milward and Sudarshan's (2013) moving collection of narratives of women organising women workers in the informal economy shows violence faced by women in stigmatised jobs—rag pickers, domestic workers, sex workers. The common themes that emerged from the narratives of organising informal women workers echoes the findings of this research which are:

- the power of collectivisation in ending isolation of sex workers
- confronting their exploitation and stigmatisation
- the significance of collective critical analysis in changing women workers' consciousness of their right to have rights
- the capacity to exercise voice to claim those rights
- the role played by the organizations and individuals who accompanied and supported the process of organising.

In addition to their income what really helped to reassert their identity as independent women is their coming together as organised, informal groups and associations. The women in this study are associated with NGOs, which provides them the platform to unite and draw solidarity and strength from each other. The autonomous organisations, which are supported by donors, enable them to learn new skills and give them access to saving and credit schemes. They also offer shelter to their children and support their education. The association of peer networks is significant because it allows women to tackle the issue of their dignity more than their income (Kabeer, Milward & Sudarshan, 2013). As women come together around more practical concerns of their daily lives, their collective identity starts to grow and strengthen, they tend to take up wider social and political issues. We see in this study that women are now voicing their concerns about police atrocities and a number of women have expressed their views regarding safety in the work place, including the need to formalise the informal entertainment industry.

These peer networks also erase the multiple and intersecting inequalities of caste and religion. It was observed throughout the study (as discussed in Chapter Five) that women of all castes found their way into the informal entertainment sector; all participants shared common tales of suffering and poor economic conditions, making it a common denominator among the women in this research. The peer networks promote further integration amongst them by uniting them in speaking up for a common cause and also counselling them to deal with their own personal trauma and distress. The women are given scope for growth and learning, irrespective of their backgrounds. The leadership of women, especially in the credit and saving schemes or in the union, is not challenged by women from other castes. They begin to respect each other, and identities of caste or religion are diluted in the process. In the wider cosmopolitan environment of Thamel (as noted in Chapter Three) where these women operate, market forces play a role in

redefining identities as fissiparous issues of caste and religion lose their meaning (Liechty, 2005). Peer networks, in general, respond to the needs of any women who experience violence, irrespective of their social background. Also, in the context of four positive deviants described in the previous chapter, it was noted that all four women come from different castes. Vijaya Dhakal is a high caste Hindu whilst Menuka Thapa is a Buddhist, and Shova Dongal and Balkumari Ale belong to the lower castes. All of these women now play a prominent role in public life advocating for the cause of the women they represent. They speak up for the rights of all women which has given them a shared identity and a set of common goals.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

The questions that shaped this research and that this study seeks to answer were identified as being significant by stakeholders (including DFID, the UN and government agencies) during a scoping period between January and March 2016. During this time I was part of a team that undertook a scoping exercise for a DFID funded South Asia project on Women, Work and Violence, which explored how approaches to WEE can also tackle violence. It was conducted across three countries (Pakistan, Myanmar and Nepal), and my role included conducting field work in two of them: Myanmar and Nepal. The aim of the fieldwork was to reach a better understanding of the experiences of different groups of women in relation to income generation and VAW. Developing a clearer perspective on women's experiences and voices was evidently necessary, particularly in the light of their under-representation in the wider public discourse on empowerment and violence.

The scoping work revealed that a significant research gap existed with regard to issues of income and the empowerment of women working in sex and informal entertainment sector in Nepal. Whilst impressive work was being done by NGOs run by women who worked in this sector (identified as positive deviants in this research in Chapter Seven), no study in Nepal had explored the significant role that peer networks were playing in empowering women and combating violence. Furthermore, whilst examining the literature on sex work it became evident that a large proportion of it approached the issue of sex work from the empowerment and oppressive paradigms (as discussed in Chapter Two) rather than looking at the *business* of sex work. Such studies have not analysed the broader debates of violence within families or migration, which oftentimes acts as the trigger or cause behind a woman's decision to work in the sex and informal entertainment sector. In particular, such studies do not consider income as an independent variable and driver behind women's decision to work in this industry. Studies on women's economic empowerment reveal that income is seen as a way to not only survive physically but also a means through which to enhance one's voice and agency in domestic and personal spheres (World Bank, 2014). A critical question that has largely remained unanswered in the context of sex and informal entertainment work in the developing world is to what extent earning an income through this sector can be described as empowering?

9.2 Addressing the Research Questions

Based on the gaps identified during the scoping work, the following research questions were framed:

1. What are the social, cultural and political factors that lead women to work in Nepal's sex and informal entertainment sector?
2. What difference does income make in the lives of women working in the informal entertainment sector?
3. What does empowerment mean for the women working in this sector?
4. How do women in this sector build their resilience in order to cope with trauma and daily violence?
5. How significant is the role of positive deviants?
6. What is the overall role of peer networks in addressing the violence that women face?
7. How important are local women's organisations in supporting and driving change for women in this sector?

These questions were developed in order to provide space for considering the full spectrum of participant experiences and how they deal with different facets of their lives. To better understand this, the research analysed the lives of the participants in two parts: life before and after migration to Kathmandu (as discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four), where this study was conducted. The primary purpose of the first of these was to understand the social, cultural and political factors that lead women to work in Nepal's sex and informal entertainment sector. The participants were asked about when they first migrated to Kathmandu and under what circumstances. They were then asked to explain how their lives changed immediately after their migration and what were the initial struggles. The section was useful because it identified and contextualised the key factors that eventually drove the participants of the study to enter the highly vulnerable sex and informal entertainment industry, and it provided a nuanced understanding of their motivations and personal circumstances prior to doing so.

Whilst it is widely perceived that poverty and a lack of economic opportunity are the main reasons for many women entering the highly vulnerable sex and informal entertainment industry, this study has found credible evidence that, in addition to those factors, armed political conflicts (like the Maoist conflict described in Chapter Four) can have far reaching consequences for poorer women who get caught up in such conflict and even find themselves on the frontlines. In many ways, this study shows that it is not economic factors alone, but different constellations of factors and pathways, rooted in social, cultural and patriarchal norms, that can converge to create situations where women find themselves exposed to different forms of violence, which in turn can push women to join the sex and informal entertainment industry. A large number of

participants divulged that they had faced high-levels violence within their families, which had compelled them to leave home and look for jobs purely for the sake of survival. From the data presented in this study a complex picture emerges, illustrating the many dimensions that need to be in place in order to push for greater gender equality. The normalisation of violence remains deeply rooted, including in daily experiences of IPV. Past traumatic experiences of abuse drove many of the women who participated in the study out of rural areas and into Kathmandu's growing sex and informal entertainment sector.

This study explored how and where income can feed into a process of positive change, which is which is a vital component of constructing a holistic and workable approach to ending violence perpetrated against women who work in the sex and informal entertainment industry. The second part of this thesis (Chapter Five, Six, Seven and Eight) looked at the lives of the participants after they joined the sex and informal entertainment sector. Subsequently, the focus of the questions was on the relevance of earning an income and if it had an empowering effect on their lives. The questions included: What constitutes violence at work and how do the participants respond to it? What are the ways in which they exhibit resilience to past trauma and daily violence, and what allows them to be positive about their future? And What measures do they think should be taken in order to improve their working conditions so that they can earn an income with dignity?

Central to my theoretical inquiry was an exploration into what agency, resilience and empowerment actually mean in the lives of women who work in a sector that is seen as a harmful and vulnerable environment for women. This study thus presented detailed insights into the complex and often contradictory experiences of both violence and earning an income for women working in Nepal's sex and informal entertainment sector. In particular it explored if income allows women to build greater resilience to various forms of violence and whether they feel more empowered to exercise agency around issues ranging from how to spend their money to challenging the abuses that they and their peers suffer.

Kabeer (2003) defined empowerment in terms of having agency to make choices and be able to negotiate a better life, challenging injustice when it occurs. Access to sufficient recourses are a key component of this, but it is also dependent on an environment that is supportive and respects the need for positive working conditions and fair wages. Empowerment, then, can be seen in terms of positive actions that are enabled by strong agency and resource capacity. We know that economic engagement alone is not a magic bullet; in fact, it can sometimes have a disempowering effects (Kabeer, 2012). For example, the market discriminates in wage rates and hiring practices,

with women only being able to access unskilled and low paid work (Anker et al., 2003). This is part of the reality of the working environments of the women I spoke with who have been pushed into an unregulated and marginal sector, the existence of which the authorities would often rather not acknowledge. This is ironic given that state actors such as the police and politicians are often the primary clients.

A key question explored in this research was why women are drawn to this sector and whether they are still able to exercise agency and control of decision making? What enables them to build resilience? The analysis of the interviews revealed the pivotal role that peer networks play in helping build the resilience of the participants by providing them with resource capacities such as social networks, vocational training courses, or psycho-social counselling. In particular, this study found that local women's organisations and/or mobilisers who are trained to end violence are critical in bridging the gap between income and increased resilience to violence. The picture is, of course, nonlinear; women record many forms of violence (according to global definitions) whilst not always regarding them as such. The study further revealed the importance of peer networks and specialist support organisations that, alongside income, contribute to women feeling more empowered to lead autonomous lives.

9.3 Key Findings

The research sought to understand the social, cultural and political factors that lead women to work in Nepal's sex and informal entertainment sector. One of the most significant findings in relation to this, as discussed in Chapter Three, was the impact that the ten-year Maoist insurgency had on the participants of this study. The study found that one third of the participants were directly affected by the Maoist conflict. As noted, numerous studies examining the impact of the Maoist conflict have pointed out that information relating to sexual violence against women and girls during the armed conflict in Nepal is scarce and scattered. Moreover, there is no documented evidence of the Maoist forces using women as instruments of war and National institutions, such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nepal, have been criticised for ignoring issues of sexual violence committed by the Maoist forces (Sharma & Young, 2010, p. 45). But this thesis has documented evidence of sexual abuses committed by members of Maoist forces during the conflict. Many of the women who participated in this research and who work in the informal entertainment industry have had no recourse to justice or access to poorly managed government rehabilitation programmes. The chapter also outlined the causes for lapses

in the transitional justice mechanisms set up by the Government of Nepal, particularly in relation to identifying victims and delivering justice.

Chapter Four of this study established that many of the women who participated in the research were pushed into or forced to join the informal sex and entertainment industry due to factors such as child marriage and high levels of IPV. In reference to research questions two and three, Chapter Five examined the role of income in the empowering process of the participants. I examined various concepts of empowerment (including Boender, Malhotra, & Schuler, 2002; Chen & Mahmud, 1995; Kabeer, 1999) and then used the concepts to unpack and contextualise how my participants exercise choice, gain decision making abilities, and take control of their income and in doing so express agency. I drew upon Rowlands' (1997; 1998) concepts of power, and I used case studies to illustrate how the participants of my research exhibit autonomy over household decisions-making (power to) and control over personal decisions (power over). I argued that although Kabeer (1999) conceptualizes empowerment as a process of change from disempowerment to empowerment by expanding people's ability to make first order decisions that result in desired outcomes, this does not provide a clear explanation of the operationalization of these three dimensions (Leder, 2015, p. 7). Further, the empowerment literature reviewed does not discuss how concepts of empowerment and power can be applied in the context of women who are engaged in the sex and informal entertainment industry around the world. I contributed to filling this knowledge gap by proposing a model as a measure of empowerment for the participants of this study. In the model, I explained that working in the sex and informal entertainment industry is a choice that the participants undertake for survival. Their journey is that of a transformative process. The case studies showed that the participants use peer networks (i.e., existence of choice) to strengthen their voice and agency and they then use this to achieve their immediate goals (i.e., achievement of choice), and yet the violence component remains constant.

With reference to research question four, Chapter Six examines how the participants of this study build resilience in order to deal with trauma and daily violence. To answer this question, I provided a nuanced analysis of factors influencing and mediating resilience in the lives of women working in the sex and informal entertainment sector, which to my knowledge has not been addressed by other studies, though some studies have explored the link between WEE and resilience in the wider context of wellbeing, agriculture, irrigation management, poverty and climate change (Allison, Armitage, Bené, Charles & Johnson, 2012; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Sultan, 2015). I discussed two models that inform the literature on the sex and informal

entertainment industry and resilience. Based on the analysis of studies dealing with the issues of psychological resilience of sex workers (see e.g., Holroyd, Tang, Wong & Yuen , 2014), and in response to research question six I explored how external resources like peer networks can play an interventionalist role in building resilience of women working in the sex and informal entertainment sector (building power within). In doing so, I applied concepts from the protective framework, which has previously been used to study the psychological resilience of adolescents. I contextualised it in the to my research, arguing that the model can be used to study the resilience of women in the sex and informal entertainment sector where there is a resource available in the form of external support.

Chapter Seven dealt with research question five by focusing on the role of positive deviants. I applied positive deviancy theories to case studies of four women who have set up their own NGOs. These women have been advocating for the rights of other women and girls working in the sex and informal entertainment industry. I tracked their personal endeavours that have contributed to developing mechanisms that help women build resilience to trauma, helping them rebuild their lives and respond to injustice and violence. I broadly defined the key attributable qualities that contribute to making these women positive deviants. In doing so, I proposed a framework that demonstrates how positive deviance qualities are enacted and applied in the context of women in the sex and informal entertainment industry. The initiatives undertaken by them encompass a range of areas. These include working on HIV/AIDS, rescue and rehabilitation, counselling, skill development, and advocacy for change of policy for formal recognition of rights women in the sector, as well as making efforts to stop young girls from migrating to Kathmandu by educating them about the risks and challenges. The unique point of departure here is that all four organisations are run by and employ women and girls who have worked in the sector and who have themselves become the agents of change. The chapter is important because it illustrates how positive deviance strategy brings about exceptional, high level and transformative results. For this reason, positive deviancy is now being accorded importance by donors within the international development industry, including DFID. But no other study to the best of my knowledge has applied positive deviancy in the context of the sex and informal entertainment industry in Nepal.

Chapter Eight provided further insight into research questions six and seven by considering the role of peer networks in building capacity. By using the culture-centric approach, I contested that hegemonic discourses designate sex workers as a subaltern and stigmatised community, devoid of dignity and incapable of expressing agency. I argued that sex worker communities develop their

own strategic responses to the violence that underpins their work and in doing so create their own autonomous voice and mode of resistance. The research showed that their association with a labour union in particular has provided a sense of solidarity and has boosted confidence levels, thereby enhancing their negotiating power with the clients (insisting in using condoms or refusing to succumb to sexual coercion, for example) and business owners (such as demanding pay and rights). In the conclusion to the chapter, I argued that peer networks remain critically important in understanding the context of VAWG in the sex and informal entertainment sector in Nepal. They also offer a unique entry point for policy design and implementation and for evaluation of programmes that are aimed at bringing about transformations.

9.4 Limitations & Gaps

This study has argued that income generation is a positive force in the lives of the women who participated in the research as it has enabled them to take control of their lives, build resilience to their past trauma and connect with other women who share similar backgrounds in order to challenge the ongoing violence that they face. It has also allowed them to bring about a dramatic shift in the day to day structures of their lives, moving from conventional family units into new all-women peer networks. In part, this is because they have been able to leave behind violent husbands and destructive family and community contexts, and they have been able to take control of decision-making. However, the study does not document the views of the men who might have been the perpetrators of violence or the perspectives of the families they have left behind. Nor has it interviewed the clients or customers of the women who participated. Documenting these voices is imperative if we seek further insights into how to combat the rigid gender norms and harmful perspectives that encourage men to engage in high risk behaviour and that grant them the power to abuse and dictate the terms of sex. Such studies could inform how to better engage with men and boys to combat violence, rape and human trafficking in the sex and informal entertainment industry.

This study also explored how women build resilience and respond to trauma. It illustrated the ways in which the participants have gained awareness of the injustices that are embedded in the social power structures, as well as identifying how gendered practices within a particular cultural context are reproduced. During the course of the research, I noticed that the issue of psychological trauma of women working in this sector represented a gap in the existing literature. This research noted that the women who participated have undergone deep trauma as children, but as questions of this research were not originally designed to explore such trauma, its impact

on the mental or physical wellbeing of the participants has only been touched upon. Though it was not the objective of the study, it is worth noting that Karuna Konwar, a psychologist who has been providing psycho-social therapy to some of the women at Raksha Nepal, pointed out that women who have gone through suffering tend to be hopeful about their future when they become part of peer networks because they experience a sense of bonding and care. The support they find in each other helps them to become more resilient. She added that the deep scars left behind by past trauma take time to heal, and sometimes can even be exacerbated by additional violent experiences. The lack of focussed research into this issue remains. Konwar also cautions that raising one's voice or fighting for one's rights are not necessarily signs of having healed past trauma: sometimes it can also be a sign that trauma, which tends to resurface when they are on their own, remains. Additionally, further methodological work is needed to develop indicators to evaluate resiliency. In this study, I have demonstrated that the participants have been able to exhibit resilience when they have received external support from peer networks, but questions still remain regarding how, and indeed if, such resiliency can be sustained in the future in the absence of leaders who are identified as positive deviants, like Menuka Thapa .

This research on one union (run by Raksha Nepal), but during the research it was learnt that other NGOs are gradually setting up independent unions. Further research is needed to learn about their affiliations and their capacity for political advocacy. There is also a need for evaluation and impact studies of the various interventions mentioned in this study. Future research also needs to focus on empirical evidence as at the moment there is a lack of disaggregated data, particularly with regard to GBV, human trafficking, the exploitation of prostitution and employment. This prevents the effective assessment of planned or existing policies and programmes that seek to ensure the protection of women's human rights.

9.5 Recommendations

In Chapter Five, I argued that transformative change cannot truly take place if social structures limit the opportunities of individuals. Numerous studies have shown that for women, empowerment in terms of income and other qualifications might not touch other aspects of a woman's life (Becker, Mahmud & Shah, 2012; Goetz & Sen Gupta, 1996; Hashemi, Riley & Schuler, 1996; Hashemi & Schuler, 1999; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Kishor, 2000;). A woman might feel empowered at the individual or household level, but this might not translate to the market place or the community level. Though these first order changes are meaningful gains that can contribute to resilience and may help develop concepts of power, they also require a radical

second order change in relation to power dynamics in order to bring about economic and social justice. This can only be achieved by addressing structural barriers (as discussed in Chapter Five) such as transformation of social attitudes, and legislation. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has recently reviewed the sixth periodic report on Nepal (November 2018) and has expressed concern that the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act punishes women in prostitution rather than punishing exploitation in prostitution. There is an absence of regulation of work in and monitoring of the entertainment and hospitality service sector, and a lack of reporting of harassment and violence against women in prostitution perpetrated by law enforcement officers. The report recommended that Government of Nepal:

1. to formulate a comprehensive policy, legislative and regulatory framework that ensures monitoring and legal protection from exploitation of women who engage in prostitution and ensure that they are not prosecuted for engaging in such activities.
2. investigate, prosecute and punish law enforcement officers for the harassment and extortion of women in prostitution, and ensure that victims are provided with gender-sensitive protection and support.
3. Strengthen exit programmes for women who wish to leave prostitution.

(Thapa, 2018)

In addition to the above, this research proposes the following recommendations:

- The Government of Nepal needs to guarantee that women and girls who have been victims of the armed conflict have access to interim relief and full and effective reparations, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and guarantees of non-recurrence.
- This study found that social and cultural values surrounding women's sexuality, dowry, and patriarchy remain the key drivers for early marriage (Human Rights Watch, 2016; UNFPA 2016). This is compounded by the ineffective implementation of existing legal provisions that ban child marriage and by barriers to accessing justice (UNFPA 2016). In line with the CEDAW recommendations (Thapa, 2018), the Government of Nepal needs to ensure that marriage registration is mandatory, and that child marriages are null and void.
- None of the participants in the study or their partners had completed high school. Research in eighteen of the twenty countries with the highest rates of child marriage has shown that a girl's level of education is the strongest predictor of her age of marriage (ICRW, 2016 as cited in Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Government of Nepal, therefore, needs to take further

action to promote and reinforce equality and inclusion in education by enhancing support systems, scholarships and incentives for girls from poor households and remote areas, lower castes, indigenous background, and religious and linguistic minorities, as well as for girls with disabilities.

- Significant resources must be made available to NGOs in order to offer psycho-social counselling and to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of women and girls who have been victims of abuse, rape, and human trafficking. This area has been severely overlooked by international donors and has not even been considered by the government. The NGOs mapped in this study have asserted that due to limited funding they cannot afford to pay for the services of psychiatrists on a regular basis. Currently, the NGOs lack the means for taking a medical or scientific approach to helping women build their resilience.
- Resources need to be made available for increasing the capacity of shelter homes for the children of women working in the sex and informal entertainment industry. The initiatives of Raksha Nepal (which are supported by international donors) is a model worth emulating. Through these projects, Menuka Thapa, the chairperson of the NGO, has been able to ensure that the children go to a regular school. There are a very few shelter homes that offer such levels of protection and care. More funding needs to be made available to build many more care homes like these, and interventions must be designed to ensure access to quality education for children of women engaged in this sector.
- There is scope for developing the hospitality industry in Nepal in a professional manner. Nepal is popular with international mountaineers and trekkers and there is a demand for massage, spa and other forms of ayurvedic treatment. The government could make efforts develop the industry, which has the potential to create jobs and add value to the economy. Currently, the businesses offering entertainment and hospitality services including massage and spa services are not registered. There is no statutory body, and because of this some are registered under the Ministry of Labour, others under the Ministry of Tourism and some under the Department of Cottage and Small Industries. Such a confusing system leads to manipulation and laws being inconsistently enforced.
- The government must regulate the minimum wage and working hours for those working in this sector. It must create an environment in which women and girls engaged in this sector can work with dignity. The industry should be recognised as a formal service sector so that it falls under the remit of labour laws. The workers would then be able to access social protection schemes. This has been the primary demand of most women and girls working in this sector.

- Though women like Menuka Thapa, Shova Dangol, Bijaya Dhakal, Tara Bhandari and Balakumari Ale (identified as positive deviants in Chapter Seven) are doing outstanding and inspiring work, they lack the necessary skills and ideas to expand the capacities of their organisations to meet future challenges. For example, the leaders of such organisations broadly talk about labour rights but have little knowledge of what it really means or how to strategize political communication, advocacy and lobbying. There is a risk that their work and leadership qualities may be exploited by local political parties. It is, therefore, necessary to train them and their employees on management and communication skills. It is also important to train union leaders and build their capacities so that they can raise funds and can clearly define their objectives.
- Appropriate strategies for meaningful engagement of sex workers should be identified at the earliest opportunity. Such strategies will help programme planners to establish the needs of sex workers in terms of their objectives for participating, and to manage their expectations once they are involved in the programme. Meaningful engagement can contribute to effective capacity-building with sex workers and can contribute to the overall success of these programmes.
- On a national level, communication and collaboration with financial institutions should be explored in order to promote the development of initiatives to improve financial literacy of participants. While this approach contributes to the economic empowerment of sex workers, it also helps to increase sex workers' access to financial services. Furthermore, financial institutions should ensure that they do not discriminate against sex workers who want to access financial services.
- US International Aid polices since 2003 require that NGOs denounce prostitution if they wish to be eligible for funding. This means that in Nepal the organisations that are engaged in sex-workers empowerment and campaigns for better conditions are seen as inappropriate partners for USAID anti-trafficking grants or contracts (Kempadoo, 2016). In Chapter Seven of this study, it was found that this type of policy could have an adverse effect on promoting WEE and on efforts to tackle the issues of violence perpetrated against women and girls who work in vulnerable professions. This is also self-defeating in the global fight against HIV/AIDS as sex workers are systematically denied access to and participation in intervention programmes. It also does not help efforts to combat human trafficking as the owners of adult entertainment businesses run a sophisticated chain in order to ensure that there is a constant supply of girls to feed the growing demands of the industry, and this in turn leads to trafficking. Future policies

must not marginalise sex workers by separating them from those working in the informal entertainment industry and more resources needs to be directed towards WEE programmes.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Interview 1

Date: Saturday, 27 May 2016 1300-1500

Location: near Lazimpat, Kathmandu

All the guidelines were strictly followed.

The interviewee was briefed about the project in great detail in Nepali and Hindi languages through a female interpreter and the interviewer.

The interpreter also acted as a gatekeeper.

The interview was conducted in a spacious office room of a Kathmandu based NGO, Raksha Nepal.

There was a female interpreter present.

The interviewee consented to the interview saying that she has no problem if it serves a greater cause. She said:

I am willing to die (go any extent) if the issue is for the protection safety and security of women. I don't want any women in the world to suffer or be in a situation like me. It is a curse. I'm not afraid or ashamed of anything. Even you if disclose my identity and take my photograph. I don't care.

Background and Household information (as applicable).

What age are you?

41

Are you currently married or living with a partner?

Married but not living with husband [explained below]

What age were you married?

14

Do you have children?

Yes, three children. 2 boys and 1 daughter

Boys are 22 and 19 years old respectively, and the daughter is 15 years old.

Where do you live?

Kathmandu, living in an urban community in a rented house. Neighbourhood is mixed lower- and middle-class families. There are also small businesses in the area

Have you always lived there? (if not, where did you originally come from originally?)

No have lived in various localities in Kathmandu but is originally from Biratnagar (Eastern Nepal)

Do you identify with a particular religion?

Hinduism

Do you identify with a particular caste/ethnicity?

Brahmin (upper caste)

What level of education have you completed?

High school (standard 10)

What level of education has your husband completed?

He studied law (though not sure)

Who (apart from you) earns money in your household?

No one other than me

Have you migrated from elsewhere? If so from where and when did you?

Migrated from Biratnagar (eastern Nepal). First time migrated to Kathmandu in December 1990 (eight months after marriage) just at the age of 14. (please find the story in detail below)

How many of your family migrated?

First time migration with husband is December 1990

Is life better after migration? Why/how?

After years of great struggle life is much better now. I am earning a good income and there are better opportunities for children

Can I ask what happened to the relationship (with you husband)?

Please note she answers many questions while answering this. This section narrates her story, but answers are broken down in the later sections (income generation, life histories etc) to

correspond with the questions in the field work guide. Some analysis and all observations are listed at the end section.

I was married in April 1990 when I was 14 years old and was studying in standard 10. I come from a Brahmin family. My father is a priest and command a lot of respect in the society. My husband had proposed marrying me to my father. He was very reluctant for a number of reasons: I was too young, going to school; we were Brahmins (upper caste) and the boy was alcoholic and was known to have bad character. He pressurised my father and threatened to kidnap me or marry me forcefully.

My father married me off taking in consideration his and family reputation and prestige (Izzat meaning prestige is a recurring theme in her story underlining the need for safeguarding the izzat of the man, who is also the head of the family here).

My husband beating me weeks after our marriage. It became more frequent and severe (sometimes he would trash me with a table) as days passed. He would usually beat me when he is drunk. No one came (including my husband's parents, his 4 brothers and 2 sisters) ever came forward to protect me.

I was still studying. I would wake up at dawn and cook food for the entire family. In our culture the daughter –in –law is not expected to eat food before serving the husband's parents, so I used to go to school empty stomach. If I would eat, my in-laws wouldn't. (observation: social norms)

My in- laws expected me to do household work and was not at all happy that I was leaving for school every morning. Eight months into the marriage, my –in –laws asked me and my husband to leave the house due to frequent beatings that they witnessed and tensions thereof.

Whilst I was studying in school, my husband was also studying in college). He wasn't earning but we made money by selling rice from our fields.

We moved to Kathmandu in December 1990 (8 months after marriage). We didn't know anyone in the city except a cousin. We stayed in a dharmasala (a religious rest house for four days and then my husband's cousin found a place in the outskirts of the city near the airport. My husband had no money, so the cousin paid the rent. Ration and some money still came from the in-laws.

Meanwhile, I became pregnant and at a very advanced stage of my pregnancy, my husband kicked me very hard and beat me ruthlessly. I came to know that day that he remarried someone else. So, after a few days when the time of delivery came, I was all alone in the hospital. But in the Kathmandu Maternity Hopital, Prasuti Griha, Thapathali, I gave birth to a dead child. The doctors suspected that the baby succumbed when my husband kicked me on my stomach.

My sister-in –law had come when I was released from the hospital. I had to restart my life, this time without my husband. I started working in a candy factory. My job was to wrap candies. I used to earn Rs. 40 a day. I rent a room for Rs. 1200 a month.

I spent 3 (mid 1993) years that way. I was 17. My husband returned one day and pleaded that we live together. He apologised for what he did and promised that he would be a good man.

I was pregnant again and gave birth to a baby boy in September 1994 at the Tealing Hospital, Maharjgang.

Please note the participant was referring to the Nepali calendar. The interpreter had Nepali to English calendar, so the months are near accurate while years are accurate.

Why did you become pregnant again with the same man?

I did this because I was helpless. I was alone. I was just 18 and struggling. In those days I wasn't aware of any NGOs etc to help. Considering my family's Izzat (prestige) I accepted him.

The beatings resumed and in June 1995, I was sent back to my in-laws.

Husband didn't accompany me. I had no idea what he was doing in Kathmandu. I went back home and helped in farming.

After 10 months, in May 1996, my husband returned and made me pregnant.

She says saying living with in-laws she again had no choice. In their community they normally have more children plus she had no income so didn't have voice.

My husband disappeared again. My in-laws said he had an urgent call from work. I accepted it. In February 1997 Second child was born without my husband on my side.

I went to the hospital with a two and half year-old son. In-laws didn't come along. They came to see the baby later.

By then the property of my father –in- law was divided so we had a separate house and a patch of land for farming.

I didn't see my husband for 5 years. He didn't even come to see his second son.

In January 2001, husband returned. He gave me Rs. 5000 and said he got a good job in the city to be able to take good care of the family and urged me to move to Kathmandu. I refused to move and then he left again.

I realised was pregnant for the third time. I tried to abort but was unsuccessful. Family was against it.

Asked again the cause of repeated acceptance of husband and pregnancy She says:

the ijat of my father and my in-laws was important. My father was known in the community and divorce or separation is not accepted. I had nowhere to go. My husband still had 4 unmarried brothers and 2 sisters. The presence of elder daughter in –law in very important for any social function so the family's izzat was tied with me. Plus, if my

children had to study, they needed a father. Otherwise their life would be doomed. In school they ask father's name.

Income generation:

Poverty was hitting hard, and children were almost starving. I came to Kathmandu and stayed with my sister, but she didn't even give us any food (neither to my children). My brother-in-law arranged some money and I started selling vegetables.

I used to cycle from Kaliknati to Nepal talk covering a distance of 20 kms with 150 kg of vegetables. I didn't see my husband.

The business never picked up. Children were starving and they couldn't go to school. I was struggling to make ends meet.

Then a friend told me about sex work. Purely out of desperation I worked as a contact sex worker for a year and I'm not ashamed of it. I couldn't let my children starve.

I made 3000 a day and slept with 3 men. Some customers were violent. They abused me, some didn't give me money, insulted me, hit me and so on.

Police harassment was huge.

After one year, I saved enough to start another business. I used to import clothes from the Indian border and sold them in Kathmandu. I made around Rs 15000. I still occasionally worked as a contact sex worker. I did for 5 years.

In 2009, a friend told me about Raksha Nepal and their cooperative. The chairperson of Raksha Nepal, Menuka Thapa enquired about my life and then introduced me to the saving and credit scheme. I soon took a loan of Rs 7 lacs and opened my own restaurant near Thamel in Kathmandu. The business did well. I then paid off my loan and then brought a small guest house.

Today I employ 7 women and next week going to buy another guest house. This time I will take loan from the bank.

Today my children are doing well. The eldest son is studying engineering; the second son is studying management and daughter is in school and wants to become a lawyer.

Questions on details on Income generation (as applicable)

What work do you do?

Work as entrepreneur (run a restaurant and a guest house)

How much money do you earn per month?

1.5 lacs after all expenses

Have you always earned income in the same way?

No.

Has it increased/decreased over time, or is it likely to increase in future? Please give details.

Ever since I have started running my own business. It has definitely increased because I run my business carefully. With time I have become more experienced and am in the process of expanding the business. I run a guest house and going to buy another one by next week. So hopefully there will be an increase in the future income.

Are you happy with you work? How are the facilities?

Yes, I love my job and provide good working conditions to my 7 women employees.

Would you change anything and if so what?

All is fine at the moment

How important it is that you earn an income?

Income is everything. Today if I am alive and if my children are going to school it is because of income, Earlier I had no income and look how much I suffered. I had no say (voice) in anything. Now I am independent and a confident person. If you have no income even your children don't become yours. Today if my children desire to have a fruit, I can buy for them. Earlier I didn't have money to buy clothes, now I can afford clothes for myself and my children. I can go to my village whenever I feel like. I stay in a rented house. Income gives me the security to pay the rent. I don't have to worry about my landlord.

Given a choice would you rather not have to work?

No, I will always work

What is your income mainly spent on?

On children's education, on rent and also on medicines but big chunk on education

Who decides?

As a sole earner I decide

How does your family feel about earning an income?

Now that I earn reasonably well, they respect me. This was not the case earlier when I got married but it is changing.

Do you feel any tensions with family members as a result of earning an income?

No, I look after my children and live with them

Rank how supportive your family are towards you earning an income (1-5)

5, very supportive

if you experience tensions linked to your income generation how do you cope?

I discuss with other women in the union I am member of, plus take counselling from the members of the cooperative.

Do you send some of your income pre migration home?

No

Are you a member of any group/association/organisation?

(i) Workers' Protection Union in Thamel

(ii) Rakha co-operative

Why did you join?

There are over 5000 women in the union. It helps us to discuss our problem and find solution. Co-operative helps in saving

What kinds of support would you find useful?

Support from the government will be useful. I employ 7 women and because of which I face constant harassment from the police. They always ask what women are doing in the restaurant. If you work in a restaurant doesn't mean you are a bad woman. I have been taken by police a number of times for no reasons. Police should be there to protect us not harass us.

Community Attitudes

Since it is an urban city area, most questions are not relevant to this interviewee and some has already been answered above.

How does the wider community feel about you earning an income?

I really don't care what community thinks. Where was the community when was starving and my children were almost dying? No one came forward to help me. For me the community is my children. if my children are happy am happy. I don't care about what others think. When you have money people respect you otherwise they don't care.

Is it unusual for women to earn an income?

No. but it is difficult for women to have control over it in villages

Has this always been the case?

Yes

Rate how supportive you feel the community are towards women earning an income? Give a number from 1-5 (5 very unsupportive).

Not everyone is bad. Good people support but it is how much control you have over the money.

Do you experience any tensions from anyone outside of your family as a result of earning an income? If so why? What do they do/say?

No

Feeling Safe/Unsafe

Give details about why you feel safe/unsafe?

By and large I feel safe, but the harassment of police and competitors make the environment very unsafe. Police needs commission and always finds fault with something or the other. Since mine is all women business, police harassment is higher.

If you feel unsafe, what is it specifically that makes you unsafe? (e.g. other people's attitudes? Location of the work/income activity? Nature of the income activity? Distance and mode of travel to work/timings/lack of toilet/water facilities etc.?)

It is the attitude of businesses around which are mainly run by men

Is there any support you can access?

Support of the workers' union

Do you think feeling safe (at home, outside and at work) makes you more or less productive at work, or does it make no difference? (For example, have you ever had to take days off because you felt uncomfortable or afraid for any reason?)

Good working environment makes us manage our work well. It reduces unnecessary tensions.

Experiencing Harm

Have you ever experienced any form of physical or sexual harm?

Yes

Please tell me what happened. And when/where did it happen?

Mentioned in her story above

Who was/were the perpetrator(s)?

Husband, customers (while in sex trade)

What do you feel triggered the violence?

Alcohol and male attitude (patriarchy)

Do you feel that the violence might have been related to your work (i.e. did you experience violence outside the household because you were traveling to work? Did your husband/mother-in-law (etc.) become violent because they felt you were neglecting domestic responsibilities by going to work?)

No. but when I was studying in school, they wanted me to focus on work.

Did you talk to anyone about it? If so who, and if not, what stopped you?

No. The notion of family izzat and in those days I didn't know about any help and support system.

Who do you turn to for support/advice in such situations?

No one

Did you file a complaint? Where/to who? If not, why?

Yes. When I came back to Kathmandu, I met my husband on a road in 2004 He tried to beat me. I filed a police complaint at Balaju Police station, but no action was taken. Police do not take it seriously if you complain against your husband.

How frequently do you experience harm?

It was frequent.

Has it got worse over time? Or was it isolated to one period?

Worse, Yes

Have you ever experienced other forms of harm (e.g. psychological, emotional)?

Yes,

If so, what was it? When did it happen?

Explained in the story above

Who was the perpetrator?

Husband/police

How common do you think it is for women to experience forms of harm (physical and psychological)? (For example – psychological harm may include bullying, having her earnings taken against her will etc.)

It is very common

What in your view are the most common forms of harm women experience? (e.g. harassment at home or at work? On a bus etc.)

Harassment at work

What do you feel are the main triggers?

Illiteracy, alcohol, child marriage, lack of skills, lack of voice for women

Have levels of violence increased (for you, and/or for other women you know)?

For me no, but for some women it has increased.

If yes, why do you think this is?

It is because of male dominated society, where they think women are just objects

Do you think earning an income makes you more or less likely to experience harm? Please give details.

Income changes everything. You feel strong and confident to take decisions for your life. I have been able to bring up 3 children purely on my own. Women doesn't have social security or authority to take decisions. Women have to tolerate a lot of injustice. Women needs skills and education.

Do you think that since earning an income you feel more or less confident? (scale of 1-5 5 being unconfident

More confident

If you feel more confident as a result of earning an income has it resulted in changes in how you think about other aspects of your life (e.g. stronger views about the role of women and how they should be treated)? Please give details.

I feel that my children should be properly educated especially my daughter. She should never suffer. Education can make all the difference. It gives women a voice and ability to make decisions which is good for them.

As a result of earning an income are you more or less likely to challenge violence that you or your friends experience?

Yes, we already do. I also work with NGO and actively participate in the activities of union and co-operative. I go to villages and take about skill development.

Does/did your mother work? Do you think your mother had different experiences?

Yes, she worked, and my father treated her well.

Do you think your daughter(s) will have different experiences?

Yes of course, she is studying to be a lawyer and work for women right

What change would make the biggest difference to your life? Give details?

Education. If I was educated well and had not married early, then I wouldn't have suffered the same fate.

How do you see the future?

Quite positive. If my children stand on their own feet and do well, I will be very happy!

APPENDIX 2. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Women Work and Violence

Introduce the project and explain what you have done so far. Go through following; explain what they will be asked and the discussion you would like to have with the. Make it clear that no woman is under obligation to speak and if they feel uncomfortable at any point they can leave. All data is anonymised, and their informed consent is needed before the group discussion can begin. Outline how the data will be used and ask them if they would like you to return to share the findings.

Work and interventions

1. What is the most common forms of harm you and/or other women experience at work?
2. Can you please tell us about challenges outside work? For example: public transport, do you feel safe travelling to work and home again?
3. What specific intervention can help to improve your working conditions? For example, in my research so far many of my participants said that work in massages parlours, cabins restaurants should have working conditions, others feel they are so unsafe they should be shut down. What do you think?
4. Order interventions according to the most urgent to the least.
5. Has memberships to association/organisation helped? And how?
6. Has membership made you feel more confident? Are you more or less likely to talk about bad experiences at work or at home?
7. If you are happy to bring problems to the association what kind do you talk about most?
8. Do you think you would benefit from more training? And if so in what?
9. Should informal entertainment industry legally recognised? Would this offer workers more protection?

If they are a member of the union

10. By forming this union has it made your stronger? Has your condition improved? Are you able to speak in one voice?
11. To what extent have you been able to force the employers for better working conditions

12. What inputs or resources would help the Union be stronger in reflecting their needs and positively influence employers?

Violence in the Home

13. What are the main forms of violence women suffer at home and from whom? What do you think are main triggers?

14. In my research so far, alcohol seems to be a major cause of violence and economic inactivity of men. How many of you have suffered because of this? Do you think there is any way to reduce it?

15. Do you feel violence against women is seen as normal? Or, if that about more, could it be challenged?

16. To what extent do women not talk about violence because of efforts to protect family honour?

Earning and society

17. How do you prioritise your expenses?

18. How does it feel to earn money?

19. Is there anything that might have made a big difference in your early lives?

20. Would you want your children to be educated and why? (boys and girls)

21. Do you think your children are in a better position than you were at their age? Why?

22. Is marriage a positive arrangement for women? Or does it bring problems? If so what?

23. Nepal's constitution seems to support the rights of women, are you aware of it? Do you feel the government supports your rights to a safe and to make choices for your life and your children?

24. Does earning an income improve the status of a woman in her family and the community?

Single mothers and citizenship

25. Does not having a husband make you feel more vulnerable? Less secure? If so how? (e.g. is it harder to access government resources)

26. Do you have citizenship? If not, what are the challenges in getting a citizenship for yourself and your children? What impact does not having citizenship have for and on your life?

27. Are there interventions that might support you? Are they aware of organisations that can help re getting citizenship?

28. How supportive responsive are the police to the problems women face? Would having more female police officers be helpful?

Migration

29. Did you want to move to the city? If not, why?

30. Do you think it would be better for women and girls not to migrate? If so why and what would need to happen to halt migration?

Health

31. Are you educated/aware about health issues?

32. If yes how do access health information?

33. Do you suffer from health problems? If yes are you able to access treatment?

APPENDIX 3. NEPAL SCOPING WORK REPORT FOR THE WEE-VAWG PROJECT.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 2016

Overview

The violence against women in Nepal should be seen as a cross –cutting issue because it needs to be seen from the social norms perspective like existing patriarchal values that takes violence against women as a commonly accepted phenomenon.

It was observed that that types of interventions are needed:

Economic empowerment- livelihood issues/access to services (health, legal, financial)

Voice + agency

mainly done by ministry of women and industry + NGOs

Organising women groups, capacity building, co-operatives, advocacy groups, strengthen the ability to participate

Gender unequal policies

Intervention is required to revise/create equal or favourable policies for women

Violence due to lack of equality in the policies, for e.g. citizenship

Gender based violence applies to all of the above to increase the bargaining power of women, social capital and voice. Nepal has taken measures to correct the inequalities in the adopted constitution.

Some issues in terms of inheritance of citizenship, but empowering initiatives have been taken in the area of reproductive health. For example, doctors don't need male permission to treat/operate a woman.

The constitution now guarantees 33% representation at the work place which is seen as a positive factor

From the government point of view, a lot of thrust is being given to women empowerment in line with the article 14 of CEDAW through women and child development ministry and a proper structure have been put in place.

The focus is on the rural area with the primary focus to create regular work opportunities for women which includes personality development/developing agency and capacity.

There is an understanding that the gender gaps due to social norms is huge and there is a need to create alternatives livelihood opportunities for women

People/organisations contacted during scoping Work

Organization	Type	People	Are you interested to know about how VAWG affects women at work place?
ILO	Donor	Prakash Sharma Mainly working on migration issues	Yes
UNICEF	Donor	Namaste Lal Shrestha, Anu Paudyal Gautam, Deepak Shrestha two major programmes: Para Legal programme in 15 districts. Girl +You child friendly local empowerment programme	Yes
UNDP	Donor	Hema Devi Khadka and Binda Magar Host of projects related to livelihood, empowerment, climate and renewal energy. Micro –enterprise development programme is their flagship project	Yes
UNPF	Donor	Sudha Pant & Kristine Blokhuis involved in health intervention projects, creating awareness about health, legal and police aid	Yes
MEDEP	Government	Ramji Prasad Nepune/UNDP Micro- entrepreneurship development programme, running successfully for 17 years, now in the fifth phase, willing to incorporate VAWG component	Yes
Department of Women & Children	Government	Keshab Prasad Regmi, Mohan Mersini Explained various projects. Please refer to page 5.	Yes
FWEAN & FNCCI	Private Sector	Rita Bhandari and others It's federation of women entrepreneurs with its own co-operative where every member is a buyer	Yes
Nepal Planning Commission	Government	Bimala Rai Paudyal Was a member of the NPC recently. Says there is a need to strengthen the existing structures and programmes.	

Rakhsa Nepal	NGO	Menuka Thapa Works with the victim of human trafficking and women in the informal entertainment industry.	Yes
Unnati Nepal	NGO	Bishnu Khatati Works in three areas: information, engagement and creating work opportunities for mothers	Yes
HERD	NGO	Sushil C Baral Designed project for UNFPA/GBV. Working with WHO & govt. to synthesise evidence and review the govt. health programme on adolescent health	Yes
Freelance consultant	Consultant	Archana Tamang Nepali A long experience of working on women issues in Nepal	Yes
Rehabilitated victim of trafficking		Munna A powerful story of a girl who faced extreme violence and now empowered	
Co-operatives		Laxmi Mahajan Interesting stories of elderly women who are beginning to be literate now- they have strong positive opinions on patriarchy and empowerment	
Woman Entrepreneurs		Laxmi Shapkota A woman who bravely fought against all odds, exemplifies how violence is socially rooted	Yes
Union of women working in the informal entertainment industry		Women trying to fight for their rights and better work conditions. It's a first Union of this kind.	Yes
Woman engaged in the informal entertainment industry		Soya Kharka Came to Kathmandu 6 months back after the earthquake. She lost her parents; now being severely exploited in a dance bar	Yes
JMMS		Vijaya Dhakal	Yes
SWAN		Sobha Dongal	Yes
Biswas Nepal		Balkumari Ale and Tara Bhandari	Yes

- One million Women are beneficiaries of the women development programme. Nepal as a population of 30 million and 51% are women
- There are 3100 Village Development Committee and 217 Municipalities
- **Women's Group:** At the grass route levels across the 75 districts women groups (WG) have been formed. GBV programmes are here through neighbour interventions
- **Ward Level Council:** The women groups are connected to Ward Level committee (WLC) where saving, business and credit programmes are developed. It is known as Business Group. All women groups are members. So, if a woman faces violence the issues addressed through neighbourhood interventions.
- **Village Development Council:** The WLC are connected to Village Development Council (VDC), where co-operatives are formed. Marketing and financial support are provided. There are 3157 VDCs in Nepal.
- District Offices: VDC are connected to District offices – every district has one (Weak in human resources and capacity). All awareness programmes are through district offices
- **District Offices** are seen over seen by Department of Women and child
- There are 1600 women –cooperatives at the Village Development council. 1 million women are involved. The Co-operatives are the basis of programme implementation.
- 1500 million Nepali rupees have been earmarked for various projects: 14 million is for Women entrepreneurship development programme; 20 million gender violence elimination programmes. 1100 million is for the earthquake relief work in 14 districts.

Gaps

- WEE programmes seldom tackle VAWG.
- There is a lack of financial literacy amongst women – how to invest the money, invest in children's education.
- There is need for market development and marketing of commodities produced by the women.
- Most programmes fail as they are not institutionalised.

- They are not connected with livelihood assets/markets.
- They are not connected with government system and policies.
- Barriers on research and GBV tackling studies (as said by UNPF).
- Barriers on young peoples' Sexual reproductive health.
- Cost of inaction to confront social norms has huge economic impact.
- There is a huge capacity gaps at the local level structure.
- There is overlapping of projects at the UN and other NGO leading to duplication of work.
- Ratio of women doctors and police officers abysmally poor
- Lawyers, police and the judiciary need to be sensitised on gender issues.
- Legal support to women needs to strengthen.
- Police are corrupt and regularly harass women employed in the informal entertainment industry.
- Donors need to directly attack the government programme i.e strengthen government's delivery capacity. Structures are good but lack capacity (as observed by the former member of the Nepal Planning Commission).
- Greater need to train and prepare for potential threats for safer migration for women.
- Women often suffer violence at her new place of work due to exposure to new environment. There is a need to train women to manage threat.
- Capacity of district women's office need to be strengthened. They are in the front line of the implementation work.
- Need to package in a strategic way how to address the interconnected women empowerment issues with VAWG (UNDP)
- Need to critically review the the failures of WEE and VAWG projects.
- Need to create professional entity – WEE linkages with the private sector.
- Harmful cultural practises contribute in a big way to VAWG. They are primarily

- preference for male child
- early marriage
- lack of responsibility of husbands/brothers
- social acceptance of domestic violence
- civil war in the past left behind many scars in the society making women particularly vulnerable
 - Absence of Village Developing Council secretaries paralysing local work

Recommendations

UNDP's flagship Micro Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP)

UNDP's poverty reduction initiative is a one of the major programme pillars in UNDP Nepal.

In Nepal UNDPs poverty reduction programmes are connected with the government priorities like the five-year plan, interim plan and the constitutional plans.

There are two approaches of UNDP:

Upstream approach: supporting Nepal government in national planning, evaluation and framework for macro- policy planning and sectorial ministries. Also helping the government in evidence-based planning by utilising statistics.

Downstream approach: livelihood initiatives, micro-level initiatives so that a lot of jobs are created, and local development takes place.

Micro Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP) is the Nepal government's flexi-programme started in 1998. UNDP piloted it its first phase and now it is run by the government and it is in its fourth phase.

MEDEP is going on for 17 years and is aimed creating jobs in rural areas for women. 70% of the beneficiaries are women and socially excluded groups like the Dalits and janajatis. It is a poverty alleviation programme. It is running in its fourth phase. Each phase has 5 years' tenure.

The programme creates businesses based on available local resources and skills. The target population is people below poverty line as mandated the Nepal Government and the focus is women as most men go abroad for work.

75000 plus micro enterprises have been created. The 4th phase is important because the Government of Nepal realises that the importance of this model of enterprise development.

The government has adopted MEDEP as a national programme and has been replicated in the name of Micro Enterprise Development programme for poverty alleviation (MEDPA).

The government has committed one billion Nepali rupees and UNDP is working with the government. The focus now is to help government so that this scheme can be implemented in the entire country,

The government has a five-year strategy paper (2013-18) to implement this programme and it has reached 64 districts out of 75 districts.

It is being implemented by the ministry of industry. The ministry has district offices in all the districts. The ministry of Industry works through two departments

- Department of Small and Cottage industries (DSCI)
- Cottage and small industries development board (CSDB)

In the next five years, 8% of the total budget will be allocated by the local government. It is first of its kind in Nepal.

A new system called basket mechanism or a micro enterprise -development fund (MEDF) is being created. It will be based with the District Development Committee. The elected chairperson will be in charge of the fund and he will be supported by the representatives of various ministries.

So, whoever wants to contribute the basket mechanism will have space for all. It is being rolled out in 8 districts and will touch 25 districts by 2016.

Strategy

MEDEP takes a sustainable approach, delivering entrepreneurs a package of services in a sequential order to establish enterprises. The foundation of the enterprise model that MEDEP promotes is based on a strategic approach connecting local resources to potential beneficiaries' interests giving them access to local and national markets. The innovative initiative has opened a new debate in development and private sectors regarding the efficacy of micro-enterprises to promote local economies, utilise natural resources and create employment opportunities in partnership with the private sector. MEDEP selects working districts based on poverty mapping

criteria like Human development Index, women empowerment Index and looks for possible synergy with projects and programmes. MEDEP’s intervention is focused on the intersection of three broad areas



MEDEP Intervention Area

This approach also analyses the demographic situation of the Village development council. To determine the population density of Dalits, ethnic minorities, differently –abled people, single mother, conflict affected families and other vulnerable groups. This survey report is shared among the members of the District Enterprise Development Committee (DEDC) chaired by District Development Committee (DDC) Chairperson. Then the DEDC approves the recommendations and findings of this study for the implementation of MEDEP in a district



The table above shows that the programme is cohesive and address some of the gaps left by other projects like market development and poor supply chain.

UNDP recognizes

- Standalone programmes if not connected with economic programmes or packages it will not work.
- For the benefit of Nepal, it is important to critically review the failures of livelihood/empowerment programmes.
- Most programmes fail as it is not institutionalised.
- They are not connected with livelihood assets/markets.
- They are not connected with government system and policies.
- MEDEP is a woman empowerment programme; economic empowerment is a vehicle
- It is a transformation or a shift from traditional jobs to modern jobs through exposure.
- MEDEP has been exceptionally successful but there is need to scale up.
- NEED to assist 2nd and 3rd generation of micro-entrepreneurship. There must be access to credit.
- Micro credit is good for trading but where people are living in difficult places, they need longer term enterprises.
- There is need for market infrastructure.
- Ministry of Industry is promoting empowerment/entrepreneurship; Ministry of women is focussed on social welfare
- There is a push for synergy between the ministries and local governments.
- Government of Nepal doesn't want tiny programmes but a synergy of various women-oriented programmes.
- VAWG can be an important component of the evaluation programme
- At National Level UNDP supported the government in developing micro-enterprise development programme It is a 5-year strategy paper until 2018 but is likely to be extended until 2022.
- The document recognises the exclusion agenda primarily gender and region linked with income equality.

- UNDP is hand holding the government – so it is a trusted partner
- At national level government allocated \$14 million for five years.
- At the national level there is a programme steering committee.
- Preparing SWAP approach, UNDP provides technical support.
- From the government's perspective, bilateral programmes involve risk due to security factors, with the UNDP involvement risk factor gets minimised drastically. Through UNDP it is easier to bring international knowledge at district level. This modality is effective and offers donors space for additional monitoring.